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**BUT WHERE WILL THEY BUILD THEIR NEST?**  
**LIBERALISM AND COMMUNITARIAN RESISTANCE**  
**IN AMERICAN CINEMATIC PORTRAYALS OF JEWISH-GENTILE ROMANCES**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Department of Religion and Culture in the Faculty of the Arts

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

Wilfrid Laurier University

2010

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**FOR MY SON, DECLAN**

WHO MADE THIS DISSERTATION MUCH HARDER TO WRITE,  
BUT WHO MADE IT MEAN SO MUCH MORE.

WITH MUCH LOVE.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes approximately fifty American films that feature predominantly heterosexual interfaith/intercultural romantic, sexual or marital relations between Jewish and Gentile protagonists. It asks what political or social ideals can be illustrated by these portrayals, and how these films can be taken cumulatively to explore trends in modern life. The author places liberalism at the heart of the mainstream Hollywood discourse on intermarriage, and shows how films that run counter to the expectations of liberal romances may reflect communitarian critiques of liberal tenets.

The issue of intermarriage is contextualized with a discussion of the endogamous tradition in Judaism, and by an exploration of American liberalism. Tools used to read the films include genre theory, representational discourses and Thomas Wartenberg's narrative theory of the unlikely couple in film (1999) as a mode of social critique. Main political philosophy theorists engaged include Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor. Some of the key films explored are *Keeping the Faith* (2000), the 1927 and 1980 versions of *The Jazz Singer*, and *Crossing Delancey* (1988).

This dissertation does not argue that these films are made with explicitly liberal or communitarian goals, but that they are evocative of the efforts of Americans to contend with modern issues. While close reading of the films themselves was the main goal and method of the work, the author makes suggestions for ways in which future work can examine the impact of these films on the Jewish community, especially in terms of gender relations.

Drawing on scholarship of the Jewish image in film, this work builds on previous knowledge in the fields of Jewish cultural studies and film studies by giving extensive attention to the intimate relations between Jews and Gentiles. By addressing not only the Hollywood "happy ending" but also the negative outcomes, this work advances new ways of seeing resistance to universalizing tendencies in romance and a critique of the historically dominant liberal ideology in American film. iii, 328 pages.

**KEY TERMS:** COMMUNITARIANISM; CULTURAL STUDIES; ENDOGAMY; EXOGAMY; FILM STUDIES; GENDER STUDIES; HOLLYWOOD; INTERMARRIAGE; JEWISH STUDIES; JEWS IN FILM; JUDAISM; LIBERALISM; MODERNITY; REPRESENTATION OF DIFFERENCE; ROMANCE; SEXUALITY

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*If I am not for myself, who will be for me, yet if I am only for myself, then what am I?*

- Hillel, *Pirke Avot*

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- H.A.P. (2010)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> ... ..	1
<b>1. The Bird and the Fish:</b> <i>An Overview of Jewish-Gentile Romance in Judaism and America</i> ...	47
<b>2. Love Conquers All?</b> <i>Romance as Genre and Jews as Exceptions</i> ... ..	92
<b>3. Loving the Neighbours:</b> <i>Liberalism and Positive Jewish-Gentile Romances</i> ... ..	124
<b>4. Brooklyn is Not Expanding:</b> <i>Negative Interfaith Romances and Communitarian Critiques of Liberalism</i> ... ..	207
<b>Conclusions:</b> <i>Happy Endings</i> ... ..	273
Filmography ... ..	304
Works Cited ... ..	311



## Introduction

*As the good book says 'Each shall seek his own kind.' In other words a bird may love a fish but where would they build a home together?*

- Tevye, *Fiddler on the Roof*, 1971

My research evolved out of an interest in how film functions within contemporary society in terms of Jewish representation and identity construction in North America (cf. Hall 1990), building upon the works of Patricia Erens (1984), Lester Friedman (1982; 1987) and Omer Bartov (2005), who have produced essential studies on the image of the Jew in film. Nearly all scholars looking at Jews in film have noted the frequency of Jewish/Gentile romance in film since the early silent films and continuing to the present, but none have fully fleshed out what such a strong trend might mean. In this work, I examine a number of films, most of them from the past forty years, to show recurring attitudes in American cinema express either positive or negative attitudes towards Jewish-Gentile romance.

When film started as an American pastime, it was seen as a low class medium and mostly appealed to immigrants and the working class (Cook 1996). In its infancy, the cinema emphasized staying in one's place and showed people coming to no good end by marrying or fraternizing outside one's ethnic group, often involving death by a mysterious fever, or ruination in general (Friedman 1982). However, by the 1920s and 1930s, the medium had saturated all class levels, igniting the period known as its "classical age," the time during which the most significant American myths had settled into a classical liberal Hollywood ideology, the constructions of which are still employed in movies today, either directly or in postmodern inversion. Part of this classical Hollywood ideology was liberal in nature, including a commitment to personal

individuality and a critique of class hierarchies. In the 1930s, Hollywood promoted a vision of America in which one can (and must) rise to their own individual, personal levels of success and romance, and that this romance and self-transformation was more important than any responsibilities of birth or loyalties to ethnicity. America began to take on a new multicultural face, particularly as the home front mentality of the 1940s took prominence (Friedman 1982). Films promoting intercultural relations seemed to argue that it was progress to mix across lines, and intermarriage was shown as more “American” than traditional endogamy. This development is interesting in light of the history of Jewish identity and settlement, as the majority of Jewish filmmakers and audiences of the 1930s-40s were second or third generations, and Hollywood product seemed to be providing an ideological structure supporting assimilation, thereby pacifying their possible guilt over their increasing homogenization. This need fulfillment is in contrast to the silent pictures of their parents’ generations, during which films were made that reflected the first generation’s need for assurance that the traditional ways they had known would survive by natural consequences punishing transgressors. By the 1940s, however, films by and for Jews were much more comfortable focusing on the possibilities of America, rather than the hazards of Americanization, a trend which has since flourished. As we shall see in chapter two and throughout this dissertation, this established Hollywood ideology, in which heterosexual coupling and marriage are promoted but individualist social democracy is endorsed (Wartenberg 1999), is no longer the only voice in films depicting Jewish-Gentile romance.

When I began this study, I believed that the significant numbers of films featuring intimate relations between Jews and Gentiles would support the classical Hollywood liberalism of its golden age, during which films tended to promote intermarriage. But after re-viewing many films made since the 1960s and considering them more closely, I realized many of them were actually portraying interfaith romance in negative or cautionary ways. Joseph Greenblum (1995)<sup>1</sup> has asserted that the early assimilationist trends in romances between Jews and Gentiles are no longer the promoted ideal in American film, but he does not fully explore ideologies that could explain or describe the recent trend of films showing negative outcomes. I became interested in the various meanings to be drawn out of how these romances develop and end within the narratives. In this dissertation, I read both positive and negative portrayals of Jewish-Gentile romance through the lenses of liberal and communitarian ideals as means to highlight in the variety of individual filmic standpoints those recurrent messages in common across my selected sample. While these films are not themselves either wholly liberal or communitarian, I argue that they might be cautiously read as illustrations of these trends, or, at least, that an awareness of the ideal forms of “liberalism” and “communitarianism” can be used to illuminate the tensions of modernity being played out in these films. The makers of these films are not putting forth political texts, but they may be tapping into various desires within paying audiences, to whom evocations of liberal and communitarian answers to the problems of modern life might appeal. I see the cinema not as a mirror that simply reflects or expresses Jewish experience, but is, rather, a place in which historical and contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> While Greenblum’s work was influential and useful, his article “Does Hollywood Still Glorify Jewish Intermarriage? The Case of *The Jazz Singer*,” is quite particular in its scope of inquiry and, being published in 1995, is now considerably out of date.

meanings are sorted, digested and rejected/appropriated in order to assist Jews in forming a meaningful identity as both Jews and Americans (cf. Hall 1990; Gershenson 2008). Films, if viewed as texts produced for the consumption of communities, are “locations in which to air, and contest, often troubling dialogues that are difficult to broach in everyday conversation,” and, as such, can be mined for the sentiments and experiences of the communities affected by its discussion (Bronner 2008: 4). It is to this end that I use liberal and communitarian visions of society to interpret the tensions being played out in these intermarriage films.

This dissertation has three practical aims. First, I have sought to address the gap that I have noted in works exploring Jewish portrayals in film by offering a descriptive survey of how Hollywood films deal with romance between Jews and Gentiles. For this reason, in chapter two I have collected a brief history of early cinematic views on Jewish/Gentile couplehood in which I focus primarily on pre-Civil Rights American film in order to give an adequate historical background to the analysis of the films found throughout the majority of this work, which are generally more recent. My secondary goal with this dissertation was to explain the representation of Jewish difference and assimilation in America found in the narratives of these films, by asking how such films present the challenges and/or rewards of mixed-matches. In chapter two, I also give an introduction to romance as a genre in order to acknowledge the elements in these films that are matters of convention and which point to meaningful departures, particularly the transgressive nature of romance failure. My third main goal in this study was to categorize the narrative strategies I have noted into typologies according to the recurring themes and events to bring clarity to the variety in the films I have selected,

which accounts for my decision to cover a range of films rather than focus tightly on a few for very close textual analysis.

In the process of isolating significant narrative elements and establishing my typologies, the separation of “liberal films” and “communitarian films” (or, more precisely, films for which I found liberal or communitarian interpretative frameworks useful) became an essential step, as this allowed me to give the narrative typologies comparative meaning. In chapters three (liberalism) and four (communitarianism), I interpret and describe the main shared strategies found within these films according to the main characteristics of the two ideal types. This organization allows us to access the diverse narratives for the purpose of analysis. The use of political theory is to enhance our understanding of the way these films might be reflecting the modern pull between the *Gemeinschaft* of “traditional” or communal life and the *Gesellschaft* that comes with a modern society encompassing disaggregated populations of separate individuals. Without considering the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* elements, one might expect the use of conservatism as an interpretive dichotomy against liberalism, instead of communitarianism, but I have avoided aligning communitarianism with conservatism, as these are not synonyms despite occasionally sharing similar goals. In chapter one, I do provide a review of intermarriage as a religious issue in Judaism and in Jewish conservative traditions to show the reader some reasons why intermarriage debates arise in the Jewish community, but my analysis throughout this dissertation shows that the tension seen in these films are not merely a pull between secularism and religious conservatism, but rather exhibit a weighing of autonomy versus received meaning and communal interaction.

In this introduction, I will briefly account for my methodology, and explore my foundational understanding of the two categories of liberalism and communitarianism and how these trends can help us read film portrayals of Jewish-Gentile romance. First, however, I will give a brief survey of the meaning and function of “the Jew” in art in order to illuminate my analysis of Jewish representations in the films I interpret through the subsequent chapters, especially in terms of Jewish sexuality, a topic relevant to the issue of Jewish-Gentile romance. Because I focus on film narrative and not ethnography, it is representation and not identity that rests at the core of my analysis, and my interpretation gains much of its momentum from describing how Jewish characters are meaningful to a film’s view on intermarriage.

### **A Pound of Flesh: The Intertextual Inheritance of the Jewish Image**

My research is rooted in the perspective that a film does not stand alone, nor is it created in a vacuum. The cultural matrix of the film is important in its analysis, but when dealing with significant tropic images, such as Jewish representations, the matrix cannot be limited to a single moment in production. Film draws upon art and thought from many places and times, and one popular local belief can easily be mixed with other local beliefs. Hence, an investigation of intermarriage in American film is not entirely free from tropes established by Shakespeare’s Shylock or the infamous mentalist Svengali of du Maurier’s popular novel *Trilby* (1894). In this understanding I follow Omer Bartov’s assertion that the creation of portrayals and themes is

...a process whereby certain cinematic types and images are constantly informed by each other, creating a type of treasure house or arsenal of representations that can be drawn upon irrespective of the ideological or

artistic predilections of the filmmaker and the social, political, or cultural context in which the film is made (Bartov 2005: x).

For this reason, the first task in my introduction is to explore the ways in which representations of the Jew in art are employed to create meaning.

The Jewish image has been subject to much research,<sup>2</sup> and, while I cannot give more than the barest brushstrokes, careful reading and viewing supports Bartov's claim that there is an intertextual collection of Jewish representations that intertwines the history of the Jew in art and media, stemming from very early portrayals to current film (2005).<sup>3</sup> The films I analyze are the opus of a single filmmaker or group of producers, but were selected based on the idea that the Jew as a collectively created entity has dimensions that go beyond the individual work of art. In this view, the art/media Jew becomes a *pastiche* of the work of multiple collaborators over time and through changing religio-political climates. Certainly, as times change the image has not remained static, and each artist and filmmaker makes modifications befitting their times and needs. Nevertheless, the Jewish character in art maintains a surprisingly stable core which can be traced from at least the Middle Ages, if not earlier, and into the Enlightenment/Reformation and the modern era (Abramson 1996; Bartov 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> For further reading in this area, I suggest: Bartov (2005); Friedman (1982; 1987); Boyarin (1997); Altman (1971); Gilman (1991, 1996); Rentschler (1996); Trachtenberg (1943); Zurawik (2003); Schiff (1982); and Rosenberg (1960).

<sup>3</sup> In his analysis of the Nazi-era anti-Semitic film, *Jew Süß* (1940), Bartov (2005) delineates eight characteristics of the Jewish image which continue to play roles in Jewish portrayals today. First, that Jews have the ability to blend seamlessly with Gentile society outwardly, but that they will always maintain an eternal Jewishness. Second, that the Jew will always remain a "homeless cosmopolitan" (13). Third, that the Jewish male is hypersexual and boundless in his desire for Gentile women, which threatens to taint Christian bloodlines. Fourth, that the Jewish concern always comes down to the gaining of unproductive wealth, even while the Jew refuses to contribute. Fifth, that while the Jew might very nearly appear more intelligent than Gentiles, it is really a matter of being "more cunning" (13). Sixth, that the Jew is inherently damned or unlucky. Seventh, that Jews bring their own troubles upon themselves for their traditional and essential ill-will towards Christians. Finally, eighth, that the Jews will always, despite their desire to ingratiate themselves into mainstream society, maintain a clannish community that is bound not only by their malevolence, but also by their desire to control the world.

Digging through the roots and shoots of these representational conventions<sup>4</sup> is a fascinating business, but I will confine myself to the broadest of contours to help in the reading of the films presented in this work.

That the Jew has presented significant issues for the neatness of sexuality, gender and class categorizations is fairly consistent throughout all phases of representation (i.e. Gilman 1993; Abramson 1996; Davison 2002), and has important implications for the portrayal of intermarriage in Hollywood. The artistic and popular imaginings of Jewish-Gentile coupling, complicated by the stereotypes of Jewish gender construction, must lie at the core of romantic films dealing with Jewish-Gentile pairings. As these matters are the most pertinent to my larger project, I will limit my discussion of the development of the Jewish image to the representation of Jewish sexuality and gender, and how this relates to their integration with mainstream society.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> There are several major distinctive phases of post-Biblical historical Jewish representation, all of which, despite having particular historical contexts, maintain some influence on media today as they move into the realm of stereotypical tropes. One strain, which may appear to be now defunct but which haunts the artistic image of the Jew, is that of the Medieval Church's connection between Jews and the satanic mysteries, including erotic communion with demons, ritual bloodletting and witchcraft. A second position, which largely replaced the Medieval superstitious reading of the Jewish presence in common secularized usage, grew from the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent capitalist restructuring of society, during which the Jew went from overtly represented as demonic consort to being demonized as part of a worldwide conspiracy presenting a financial and economic threat to Christian society (Abramson 1996). Closely following this, the next strain of Jewish conceptualization is the ways in which Jews became associated with modernity itself, particularly as degenerative and poisoning factors in the fall of traditional European values and structures (Rosenberg 1960; Berman 1998), which can be easily observed in American literature and media in the past hundred years as Jews are cast in the roles of Fifth Columnists and morally deficient leaders of Hollywood and other counter-culture movements (cf. Detweiler 1996). A more common strain today represents Jews as somehow special, whether through a predilection for neurosis or through the possession of a particular genius (Gilman 1996), particularly for comedy (Altman 1971), or through an ineffable belief that being an "ethnic" Jew is more interesting or desirable than the "default" of white Anglo-Protestant culture (cf. Birkner 2005). While such images may at first appear affectionate or even philosemitic, they are essentially modern retreads of older ideas of the uncanny and mystical Jew (cf. Levenson 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Also useful are the categories of characterization set forth by Bartov (2005), perpetrator, victim, hero and anti-hero, which are all crucial categories for understanding the representation of Jews from literature to film.



The Jewish sexual image as it has developed through art, literature and theatre has not been confined to the portrayal of the sex act itself, but is a matter of the Jew as a force in the imagination of mainstream Christian society, and is a tapestry of various imagery, including the portrayal of Jewish bodies, and, most especially, of gender identity itself (Dijkstra 1986; Abramson 1996; Pellegrini 1997; Davison 2002). It is therefore useful to discuss the portrayal of the Jews as a construction of Jewish masculinity and of Jewish femininity as distinct categories, as well as two sides of the same construct – the Jewish male is constructed by the imagining of the Jewish female, and vice versa.<sup>6</sup> This contrast is most prevalent when discussing the image of Jews as failing to meet Western gender norms. The Jewish man, by virtue of his circumcision – viewed by some European cultures as a symbolic castration – is a mark of compromised masculinity in comparison with European male ideals, such as, for example, the popular belief in Tudor England that Jewish males menstruated (Katz 1999).<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the Jewish woman has been invented as one who, contrary to nature, possesses those characteristics most identified with males in Western culture, including aggressive sexuality, alluring charisma and the ability to manage and to lead. These binary images are observable with the naked eye in even very recent portrayals of Jews, as well as those produced by Jews (particularly males), themselves. This gender ambiguity has a long history in stage craft, as seen by the phenomenon of the female Shylock in British theatre, during which it became fashionable for female actors to embody the role of Shakespeare's most famous wronged Jewish father (Garber 2003). In current American cinema, however, while male Jews might be less brawny or physically confident than

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<sup>6</sup> Additionally, both are also imagined through the construction of their Gentile counterparts.

<sup>7</sup> As we shall see later in this dissertation, this compromised Jewish masculinity is still a current issue in American portrayals of Jewish men. (See also Boyarin 1997.)

non-Jews, they do tend to appear more or less conventionally masculine. Nevertheless, Jewish gender shock is maintained through non-physical characterizations, including homoerotic comedy and situations of vulnerability. Meanwhile, cinematic Jewish females have taken on a vicious existence as predators, stalking the defenceless male Jew into marriage, and then, once in power over their prey, becoming punishing task masters (Prell 1996, 1999). These portrayals are not merely isolated instances, but have long histories in art and literature continuing into American cinema (Bartov 2005).

The portrayal of Jewish sexuality remains one of the prime ways in which Jewish characters are set apart as different from mainstream societal norms. One of the defining characteristics of the Jew throughout Western art is separateness, whether this isolation is defined by more moderate ideas of the Jewish uniqueness or by anti-Semitic beliefs about the eternally wandering Jew who will never rest due to his cursed existence and must therefore live as a parasite on more wholesome cultures.<sup>8</sup> The Jewish image is a complex construct complicated by the breadth of Jewish history and culture, and the expansiveness of multiple geographical locations and nationalities (Gershenson 2008). Problematically, a history of persecution, fetishization and modernization has also made Jewishness a category fraught with ambivalence for both Jews and Gentiles, characterized by “a simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from a person or an object or a wanting of both a thing and its opposite” (Gershenson 2008: 176). As a result of this ambivalence, the Jew is a liminal construct that is neither fully within nor fully without the mainstream, a status reflected in the multifaceted outcomes seen in their cinematic romances with Gentiles. The Jew is never totally a part of the

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<sup>8</sup> See the edited volume by Dundes and Hasan-Rokem, *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend* (1986).

normative culture, even if he helps create or support it, and is, therefore, a prime means by which to evaluate it. In early depictions, the Jew is separated from Christian society by laws or prejudices that subjugate him. In later depictions, particularly after World War II, the Jew becomes defined by separateness not only from the mainstream, but also from his or her own Jewishness itself (Schiff 1982). Perhaps reflecting the Jewish community's own struggle with the meaning of modernity, the Jew, as we shall see through the symbolic use of romance as a battle ground, has seemingly turned inward (cf. Vogel 1966; Schiff 1982; Meyer 1989). The student of the Jewish subject must consider how the symbolic function of the Jew in narratives of modernization and alienation can cause the Jewish voice to lose all particularity through the relegation of the Jew to metaphor and, therefore, dehumanization, as the Jew becomes seen as "a central symbol and an essential myth of the whole Western world" (Schiff 1982: 152).

Nevertheless, the emphasis on intermarriage and the sexual/romantic path to integration has seemingly shifted from the alienation of the Jews to exploring whether the Jews are compatible with Gentile life. In American film, the influence of the popular melting pot myth is particularly salient, as we shall see. This hope that Jewish separateness might be overcome by intermarriage with Gentiles is highlighted by a well known quote from the 1908 play by Jewish author Israel Zangwill, from which the now infamous term for American assimilationist designs, "The Melting Pot," comes. Spoken by a young Jewish man who abandons ancestral hatreds and marries the Gentile daughter of the Russian soldier who was responsible for the devastating pogrom in his home village, it brings out the hopes of early Jewish settlers that the new land would allow for new opportunities:

America is God's Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand, good folk, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to - these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians - into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American! (Quoted in Eck 2001: 55)

### **Using Political Trends to Investigate Meaning in Film**

It is problematic to use political or philosophical ideals when reading film, as one is tempted to overstate the connection between theory and art, and to say that the films assert political positions when it is often the position of the viewer or interpreter that defines the values read in the work. The method of film study I have employed in this research does not privilege the intent of the filmmaker, as this would have required the exclusion of all films for which extensive memoir or interview material did not exist. Instead, this dissertation is a close reading of the narratives of the selected films, as well as a consideration of the symbolic use of *mise-en-scène* and cinema craft when relevant.

In this method, I describe the films, but I also interpret what I see, much the same way that an ethnographer describes and interprets ritual. I follow Max Weber's concept from 1914, the "ideal type":

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those onesidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct... (2002: 211)

In this method, the privilege is, I fear, mine as interpreter, as I do not aim to prove the exaggerated and disaggregated forms of political thought are deliberately present in

these films, but to show how my understanding of these two modern paths to meaningful lives can be used to illuminate a significant trend in film, that of competing positive and negative narrative representations of Jewish-Gentile romance. There are three levels to reading texts within the cultural studies approach to film studies that I find useful in this study. These modes of reading depend on the stance of the analyst towards the encoded meaning of the film (the meanings that are embedded for the audience to decode). These three methods are the “dominant readings,” or those interpretations that rely on the clear intent of the films, “oppositional readings,” which is the practice of critiquing the ideological standpoints of the films, and, third, “negotiated readings,” through which the spectator finds a middle ground between the dominant and oppositional meanings (Benshoff and Griffin 2004). In this structure, I find myself negotiating my understanding of the film, during which I describe the dominant reading, but I often follow this with a critique of these positions according to the use of political ideal types to seek a larger social trend of which these films might be a part. The intended effect here is not an impressionistic reading of a series of individual works, but, rather, an attempt to place a selected range of films into a social matrix that includes the modern tension between individualism and collectivity. This task is done through reflective, negotiated readings in which the surface messages of the films are appreciated but are also mined for their evocation of ethos found in either liberal or communitarian ideologies. Using liberalism and communitarianism as ideal types, or as abstract ideas to which I compare the films I view in order to bring them into some systematic meaning, this work seeks to shed light on the way the cinema represents Jews and their relation to Gentile society, and provide commentary on political trends

through the emphasis of those narrative characteristics evoking liberal or communitarian views of modern life.

This employment of ideal types rather than filmmaker intent meant that I did not select films based on the identity of the filmmakers, as I did not include or exclude films based on the Jewishness of the directors, etc. The auteur theory – that there is an identifiable author in the case of some films, in which the director is assumed to be the driving force (Sarris 1979) – is generally difficult to apply to current popular cinema, which typically has many stages of development and a number of creators, not the least of which is the screenwriter (Kipen 2006). It would make little sense to ignore films about Jews just because the director was not Jewish. To understand this, one may consider the obvious example of *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), which was directed by the non-Jewish Norman Jewison but has since become one of the most influential portrayals of the Jewish struggles with modernity. Excluding films based on the ethnicity of the director was not a useful option for my study. Basing assumptions on what the “author” meant, as opposed to what the film itself says, when the authorship is unclear is also problematic. However, in a number of cases, such as sections dealing with Woody Allen or Nora Ephron, I have mentioned the Jewishness of writers and directors who are known to have an extremely high level of control over their product, as long as it was of use for my analysis and there was sufficient interview or biographical material available on the filmmaker.

The main criteria I used for film selection was, instead, the presence of Jewish characters and the depth of deliberation over the romance seen in each film. Most of the films I cover in this work are ones in which the Jewishness of one of the lovers was

overtly stated, though I have covered some in which the identification was more obscure, such as via the use of typically Jewish last names (cf. Himmelfarb et al 1983) or of accepted Jewish performative elements.<sup>9</sup> However, when the case was the latter, I point this out and state my reasons for including the film. The presence of a Jewish character was largely my defining criteria, and I generally have focused on films in which the romance was one of the main plot points. There was an abundance of materials to choose from that exhibited some form of Jewish-Gentile romance, so I was able to narrow my list primarily to films focusing on differences between the lovers.<sup>10</sup>

### **Democracy Over All: Liberal Americanism in Hollywood**

For the foundational myths of America, the intermingling of immigrant populations in the melting pot has taken on a pivotal role in American identity building.

As Emerson wrote in 1845,

In this continent – asylum of all nations – the energy of Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Cossacks, and all the European tribes, – of the Africans, and of the Polynesians, – will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting-pot of the Dark Ages. (Quoted in Glazer 1993: 125)

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<sup>9</sup> See H. Bial, 2005. *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press).

<sup>10</sup> In many cases, the films analyzed here were brought to my attention by sources, such as the films noted by Lester D. Friedman (1982; 1987), and by the use of filmographies, such as that compiled by Stuart Fox in 1976, however this assistance was limited by the publication dates of these sources. Others were found through combing Jewish filmography sites, such as JewishFilm.com, or online archives, such as The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive. Online library collections were also very helpful in compiling my initial lists, particularly the Berkeley collections ([www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/imagesjews.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/imagesjews.html)). Additional time was spent throughout the course of this study searching through popular databases, such as the Internet Movie Database, as well as DVD sellers, such as Amazon. Because I wanted to focus on more recent films, I also kept a close eye on new film advertising campaigns through show business media, such as *Variety*, and film review sites, as well as browsing new and second hand DVD and VHS stores. Finally, I cannot discount the role of my own nearly twenty years of personal interest in the portrayals of Jews in American film, which informed much of my early investigations.

The vision in this liberalism that transcends ethnic origin is that the old hierarchies and identities would no longer be an issue in the promised land of America. In fact, the ideals of American democracy, despite claims of an authentic American lifestyle made by subsequent isolationists or conservatives, describe the American essence as being one of universality. There is no single requirement for birth language or nationality in order to claim the identity of “American.” Rather, a political worldview is the only prerequisite, and this is a liberal democratic understanding of universal rights and individualism (Gleason 1980). These values of American individualism and liberal democracy are exhibited in the majority of films from Hollywood over the last century, especially those telling positive interfaith romance narratives. Romance is an ideal vehicle for liberalism in that it uses sympathetic couples as a way for audiences to test and evaluate traditional hierarchies and outmoded values, and it does this by pitting the often incongruent couple against unjust opposition (Wartenberg 1999). This opposition, most often in the form of older members of traditional communities, allows audiences to reject undemocratic, unenlightened views and put themselves in the fantasy position of the younger and more attractive protagonists, thereby allowing them to internalize the liberal ideals represented by unconventional matches.

Yet Jewish-Gentile romances can never fully escape the identity implications of European social structures by virtue of the stage conventions inherited by American art and the post-Enlightenment foundations of American society. While the desire of Jewish characters to find romance with Gentile lovers is consistent with the liberal democratic view of romance without ancestral borders, these representations also betray old, European Jewish self-images. For Jewish characters, the consistent rejection of



Jewish mates in favour of Gentile fantasies is the culmination of many generations of negotiating Jewishness in the pre- and post-Enlightenment world. Hannah Arendt (1946) coined the useful term “privileged Jews” to express the internal disruption in Jewish self-understanding and community that derived from the increased tolerance shown to them by the Christian kings of Europe prior to the Emancipation. Citing several examples of “exceptional Jews” (4) who rose above the despicable image of their race, Arendt roots much of Jewish self-identity in the modern world in the European practice of bestowing a few select Jews with privilege over their co-religionists. In other words, when Gentile upper class Europeans expressed (or acted upon) the belief that Jews as a race were wretched but that certain exceptional Jews were exempt from this condemnation, this practice was internalized by the Jews themselves. Wealthy or exceptionally talented Jews were, historically, afforded rights first among the Jews of Western Europe, leaving the poor, average or unpromoted Jews to languish in the ghettos, thus creating a hierarchical class structure amongst the Jews. Despite the ways in which the lower class Jews did, in a sense, benefit from having Jewish voices speak within the upper echelons of the ruling class, this situation also placed some Jews in the role of subjects to be overseen by the higher class of Jews. The favour of the Christian rulers made those higher Jews begin to adapt their beliefs to those of the court, to the point where they did believe they were truly exceptional over the lower ranking Jews (Arendt 1946). Many of the privileged Jews advocated on behalf of their oppressed co-religionists, but the continued emphasis they placed on the squalor and degradation of their “race” also served to highlight their own superiority. In a sense, the higher ranking Jews needed the Jews *en masse* to remain degraded, or to sink even

lower still, to protect their own status from the mistrust of Christian rulers and guilds, as the image of general Jewish powerlessness prevented the bitterness the Gentile higher classes might feel against a rising Jewish middle class (Arendt 1946). While these good relations with Christian rulers were mainly economic, and not social, the privileged Jews were also separated from Jews of lower rank. These barriers did drop as the nation state continued to equalize and assimilate their Jewish subjects during the Enlightenment, but Arendt's conclusion is that the class warfare imposed upon the Jewish community by selecting a class of exceptional Jews has had a lasting impact upon Jewish identity. Within each Jew there co-exists both the pariah and the *parvenu*, and from this anxiety grows a lasting tension. In the modern age, Arendt argues, Jews feel uneasy unless they can assure themselves that they are themselves "exceptions" to the general character of "other Jews" (1946: 5).

While Arendt's work came at a particularly problematic time for scholars attempting to fathom the disaster in Europe and how Jews were constructed as a group ready for the slaughter, her theories still hold a great deal of consistency in Jewish self-perceptions (cf. Prell 1999; Fishman 2004) and especially when viewed through examples of coteremporary romantic cinema. In nearly all films dealing with the subject of interfaith romance in ways that uphold liberal views of difference and autonomy, the Jewish protagonist is offered the chance to fall in love with another Jew, and in nearly all examples the Jew rejects the Jewish potential mate in favour of a Gentile suitor. The rejection of these Jewish mates as unattractive romantic options is often a point for comedic relief due to the extreme nature of their negative portrayals. In most of these cases, the Jewish protagonist is portrayed as an exceptional modern individual in

contrast with the lowly or vulgar Jews surrounding him or her. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine that Jewish viewers, struggling with the desire to be seen as exceptions to the stereotypes they have internalized about their fellow Jews, represented in the crassness of the rejected mates and in the vulgar clannishness of the protagonist's older relatives who promote endogamy, will be eager to sympathize more deeply with the Jew escaping the lowly group and seeking the path of the privileged Jew who is worthy of inclusion in the upper class of society. The means of this "ascent," these films suggest, are Gentile lovers who can help the Jew overcome his or her ancestral squalor (or neuroses) by saving them from the Jews who seek to bind them to a base community.

This promotion of exogamy is tied to the liberal, post-Enlightenment emphasis on the individual and the primacy of personal talent and desire over loyalties and status of birth, which remains a cornerstone of liberal Hollywood film, especially when intermingled with the American reliance on the melting pot model of integration in which intergroup marriage will lead to a new "American" race, standing apart from Old World ethnicities (cf. Eck 2001). The continuing belief that America is a land in which people can forget Old World prejudices and divisions supports the modern liberal view that secularization is the way of the future. The connection in liberal ideology between religious traditions and illiberal practices is a recurring theme in Hollywood film, and a popular means by which liberal films support and promote the correctness of intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles is to present the marginalization of religious differences as essential to democratic multiculturalism, and to make appeals to diversity over prejudice, portraying traditional endogamy ideals as anti-modern and bigoted (cf.

Shulevitz 2000). Such films are not exactly promoting the assimilation of either partner, but are, in fact, suggesting that assimilation is not necessary because religious difference is merely relative and is no obstacle to the merging of ideologies that comes with marriage. These films carry this pluralistic message out to the conclusion that intermarriage, and the new cross-cultural kinship ties the practice creates, is the way of modernity and the natural road of progress in North America.

Diversity is an essential ideal in modern liberalism, as it dwells at the core of not only constitutional religious freedom, which is foundational to America's self-understanding as a land of refuge, but is also key to the quest for individualism and personal self-fulfillment that is such a large part of modern life. Famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass, opposing the American exclusion of Chinese immigrants, spoke of America as a land of great potential, where "men [*sic*] of every shade and religious opinion" could come together to form a strong "composite nation," and one in which the differences need not be melted away but be embraced as a strength (quoted in Eck 2001: 57). The diverse cultures would co-exist, he claimed, as long as tolerance was the theme of the day. The state would flourish, as each citizen, despite their differences, would be bonded together through their equal commitment to the civil laws of the land and the vision of America. The prosperity and peace they found in their new land would invigorate them with the national spirit and loyal patriotism. What Douglass was speaking of, his "composite" image of America, is that which we now describe as cultural and religious pluralism, a major cornerstone of liberalism (Eck 2001). With culture and faith being privatized personal choices, combined with public civil obedience and participation, liberalism promotes democracies as places that tolerate

difference without compromising the unity of the state.<sup>11</sup> It is the hope of post-Enlightenment liberal society that the personal quest for subjective truth, combined with the encouragement of the privatization of such urges, will promote pluralism by ensuring that American values of tolerance and relativism prevail in the public sphere, and perhaps also flourish, through the encouragement of individual choice and romantic freedom, in the homes and bedrooms of contemporary Americans.

This ideal of pluralism as an extension of the liberal American project is reflected in Hollywood's image of intermarriage, which is often seen as a mode of modernizing the families and communities of those who are daring enough to take such a bold step towards autonomy. A popular aspect of the liberal cinematic exploration of intermarriage represents dissenting parents as over-bearing, tyrannical opponents to the matches made between Jews and Gentiles. Part of this parental discontent derives from the filmmakers' need to import a common threat to the couple in order to gain the viewers' sympathy. An ideological understanding of intergenerational conflict in cinema finds several key purposes beyond the dramatic, however. It may serve to exorcize any discomfort that the audience members themselves may have with the interfaith/intercultural romance. The presence of these opposing characters allows the filmmakers to explore issues of assimilation desire/fears, including prejudice,

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<sup>11</sup> As Diana Eck (2001) points out, "pluralism is the language not just of difference but of engagement, involvement and participation" (69). Indeed, Taylor (2003) supports the idea that pluralism, in which people can live out their own cultural heritage, promotes more civic interaction than does assimilation, which appears to breed apathy and self-centeredness. However, pluralism as a liberal ideal does not equal the emphasis on traditional identities called for by some communitarian critics of liberalism; by making cultural association purely voluntary and mostly a matter of material culture, liberal democracy still demands that the citizen's prime loyalty be to the so-called culturally neutral state (which is closer to the "public Protestantism" described by Albanese 1999), and that the ideals of Americanism take a deep seat within the individual (Gerstle 1993). The innovation of America was that citizenship did not require any specific linguistic, religious or cultural prerequisites, but to become a true American was to absorb the universalist ideological mandate of the nation, as "...the United States defined itself as a nation by commitment to the principles of liberty, equality, and government on the basis of consent, and the nationality of its people derived from their identification with those principles" (Gleason 1980: 31).

misunderstanding, feelings of inferiority/superiority, collective memory and guilt, and generational conflict. The Jewish parents and family who oppose such intermarriages are often portrayed as unforgivably old fashioned and, therefore, as rightful objects of ridicule from “more progressive” people. The Gentile parents and family who oppose intermarriage are often seen as racists, and serve to expose ideologies which liberalism says must be weeded out of a free society. The overarching ideology of these films is that intermarriage is a wholesome and natural outcome of the American Dream, and that all “good people” accept it, while only ridiculous, outmoded, bigoted, and/or misguided people oppose it. By these means the films are able to attack apparent clannish traditionalism, as well as anti-Semitism and general bigotry, including Jewish chauvinism, which is often what the Jewish position against intermarriage is ultimately reduced to in such films.

Perhaps the most popular example of a man struggling with the passing of time and the rebellion of his children must be Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971). Tevye (Topol), the Papa, pitches an unsuccessful battle against the changing times. His first daughter arranges a match for herself with a young Jewish friend of the family, which is the first stage of defiance – the weakening of arranged matches agreed to by the father of the house. The second daughter marries a secular (Communist) Jew, which signifies the loss of a geographical and traditional centre for the family as she is forced to resettle from their *shtetl* to Siberia. The third daughter, the one that not even Tevye’s cheerful spirit can easily condone, marries a non-Jew, which sounds the final death-knell to Tevye’s Old World ways.<sup>12</sup> The themes in Tevye’s struggle are common enough: Placed

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<sup>12</sup> This story also comes with obscured reservations about progress, however. Each marriage comes with a specific act of destruction for the Jewish community of Anetevka with increasing severity. The first

in a time which has become almost a nostalgic mythic past for Jews in America, it gives a space for the exploration of what the Jews have lost in their modernization, even though the general viewing public may not be consciously aware that there is more loss than gain for this family. The degradation of parental control, the destruction of old kinship ties and the downgrading of the importance of religion in Jewish identity and life are all illustrated in this film. Alongside this, however, the rebellious marriages also serve to bring Tevye into modernity. Tevye begins his story with an exaltation of tradition only to end up in the New World with modern ideas. Through the increasingly rebellious marital choices of his daughters, Tevye is modernized with new ways to consider love and the role of romance in marriage. After the marriage of his first daughter, for example, Tevye discovers a shocking desire to know if his wife of twenty years loves him, a consideration previously unimportant in Jewish marriage conventions (Wolitz 1988).

The romantic 1971 version stands in stark contrast with the 1939 non-musical Yiddish feature, *Tevye*, made by Maurice Schwartz. The rural, quaint settings and old world Russian *shtetl* life displayed in the film were far removed from the modern environs of the Yiddish-speaking first and second generation Jewish Americans who made *Tevye* one of the highest-grossing Yiddish films ever made, making the over all tone somewhat nostalgic. Yet it is also saturated by bitterness over the loss of past generations, the exile Jews faced, and the foreseen decline of Yiddish culture in America (Wolitz 1988; cf, Sandrow 1996). Unlike the Tevye of 1971, who grudgingly offers some peacemaking with his daughter despite her insistence on maintaining her

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daughter's wedding is disrupted by a pogrom, but the third daughter's elopement precedes a complete dispersion of the Jews from their Russian home to America – a land which would certainly not represent a reconstitution of traditional Jewish unity (Friedman 1982; cf. Wolitz 1988).

marriage to a Gentile, the 1939 dairyman (Schwartz) does not have to make such a leap, but instead must decide whether the daughter, who has parted from her forbidden husband, should be re-accepted into their community as a divorcee. She pleads with her father:

I thought that what I believed was more beautiful and better than that which you believe. But it has become clear that your old faith is truer and deeper. The wide open world where I was deceived is strange and bad. It threw me into the cold. I want to come home.

While in the original Tevye stories, Sholem Aleykhem could write no satisfactory answer to the wayward daughter's question, in the 1939 feature Schwarz gives the only answer the assimilating Jewish audiences of pre-War America, who so wanted to believe that things could change and yet stay the same (Friedman 1982), longed to hear. "I am a father with a heart," he relents as he accepts her contrition and her return, even while knowing he is rejecting his religious duty to banish her for her transgression (Wolitz 1988). Unlike Hollywood, the East coast Yiddish film industry had no easy answers for its audiences (Hoberman 1991). By 1971, Tevye had been updated, along with his audience, to such an extent that his daughter did not have to denounce her love in order for him to find forgiveness in his father's heart. The updated version, however, also seems to forget that the earlier version of Tevye had likewise refused to migrate to America, seeing nothing for him and his values in the false "Golden Land." By 1971, Tevye's values had become much more compatible with those of America (Wolitz 1988).

As suggested by the romantic options in *Fiddler on the Roof*, in some ways love is a consumer commodity in recent modern life – a range of choices that broadens with time. The plethora of partnering choices such films promote as available is in keeping



with the ideals of liberalism, as the view of adulthood as a marketplace full of lifestyle options is a common theme of the current West. In the place of traditional supernatural beliefs and organized ethics, some liberals seem to hold an ideal “good life” as their highest value, and it is against this standard that life choices are evaluated (Moore 1991; Taylor 2003). In this view, liberalism is rooted in freedom of choice and liberty of action, and, therefore, is a precondition of happiness in the modern world (Raz 1986). Will Kymlicka (1989) contends that the good life is only possible when morals are deeply rooted within the rational motivation of the individual, and this can only be achieved when ethics and behaviours are freely adopted by the individual out of personal choice, and not through coercion. Coercion, he explains, is antithetical to the personal fulfillment sought in liberal society, and a good life led in sound moral judgment and in the pursuit of happiness can only be lived if the individual is presented with adequate choice. Further, liberalism itself is required for a good life to flourish, as only liberalism has managed to open up the wide range of personal choice we enjoy. Liberalism does not value autonomy without some idea of order and justice, however, so liberal societies are able to provide the individual with freedom in terms of education, parenting, intimate relationships, employment, encouraging individual talent, and pleasure only through fostering autonomy within the boundaries of objective, unobtrusive legal restraints (Raz 1986; Kymlicka 1989). Rational societies recognize that what humans judge to be morally right will change over time, so liberalism demands an objective and open stance towards change.

In this way, multiculturalism serves as a way for people to exercise the revisability of their values by examining those of other people (Kymlicka 1989).

According to Anthony Giddens (1991) the project of the self (and, therefore, autonomy) is a reflexive process that is assisted by the modern world. In agreement with Kymlicka's assertions, Giddens notes that contemporary society not only offers people more contact with difference, but also contact with people who think they themselves are different – that is, people who once considered themselves mainstream now experience the gaze of others in a new way. People are called upon to explain their cultures and beliefs to others, as well as to defend them – not only to others, but also to themselves as their viewpoints are increasingly broadened and challenged by everyday encounters with the other. In liberalism, diversity is not just a matter of tolerance, but one of utility, and the multicultural marketplace offers people a chance to expand their views and to constantly revise their identities. The allowances liberalism makes for voluntary communities beyond the nation state are useful towards the good life by offering people cultural options and new ways of life to adopt and adapt in order to attain the comfort and satisfaction modern people seek.

However, liberalism can only make allowances for diverse minority cultures within reason (Kymlicka 1989). Just as personal autonomy must have some restrictions for the good of the state, so too must minority cultures exist under liberal values of justice. Multiple cultural identities and their accoutrements are only valuable as personal choices when they foster individualism and personal freedoms. Otherwise, they become intolerable in liberal societies. Liberal values should have primacy for citizens of liberal democracies, as liberal ideals, laws and prohibitions exist only to uphold autonomy. The autonomy of the individual allows him or her to have all reasonable cultural options beyond that agreement (Kymlicka 1989).

Through exploring cinematic positions on intermarriage, we can see how Hollywood romances uphold the values of diversity in cultural choice as well as personal autonomy. In modern life, according to liberal standards, one may certainly be a Jew, as this provides others with “growth experiences” and gives the Jew the satisfaction of a cultural identity. However, the Jew must accept the liberal ideals of individualism and choice in all areas of adult life, because to do otherwise would make the choice to be Jewish unacceptable even though liberal life is presented as being completely driven by choice. Therefore, traditional modes of endogamy, insofar as they strip the right of choice away from those who live under those regulations, cannot be a socially acceptable aspect of Jewishness carried into modern liberal societies (cf. Vogel 1966). Intermarriage is the ultimate extension of liberalism, then, as it expresses choice, freedom and autonomy in intimate action. Seen in this light, intermarriage narratives are more than romantic entertainment, in that romantic film sustains a liberal ideal of diversity and personalism as progress and as keys to American promise. The films I will cover in chapter three illustrate the vision of America as an exceptional nation in its quest to make the many peoples into the one nation.

### **Post-Modern Times: Communitarianism**

One of the major problems with liberalism is that it often entails an emphasis on universalism and a denigration of the particular, in which the Jewish person must publicly present him or herself as a basic human, first – thereby laying claim to all of the generic rights and freedoms due to him – even while maintaining a private, compartmentalized Jewishness at home (Levinas 1990). Liberalism seeks to establish universal human rights for all citizens under a secular state. It does not, classically,

afford different rights for different communities or allow for flexibility in the civil engagement with groups, as liberalism is an ideology of the individual (Vogel 1966). Further, these universal human rights must be meted out by authorities who hold that all people have the same basic needs and desires, and that, despite the “dressings” of particular cultural affiliation, all humans are the same in the ways that “really matter” (Taylor 2003). While flawed in many ways, Sartre’s compelling study *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1995 [1946]) does suggest ways in which such a universalization can harm the soul. For Sartre, as an existentialist, life could not be universal – life experience, the essence of the being, is in the particular, not in the broad universalisms. This position is the basis for his construction of the two categories of Jews. The Authentic Jew, who lives as both a Jew and a citizen and asserts his or her rights as both, has no desire to be abstracted into the universal, but, rather, embraces his or her particularity as cherished elements of his or her true self. Conversely, the Inauthentic Jew is obsessed with the universal, striving towards relativist values and a concept of the universal nature of humanity, as if such a thing exists, and as a result he or she, according to Sartre, lives a hollow, shallow life as an assimilated person, void of any meaning or identity that is not imposed on him or her by others (Sartre 1995; Schor 1999). Sartre does not lay the total blame for this on the Jews themselves, but also on the liberal Gentile mainstream, whose institutional tolerance for individuals seems designed to destroy traditional communal ties and identity. For Sartre, this belief in the basic rights of the individual shows the way in which the Jew is both embraced and abused in modern society, as the liberal asserts the Jew’s rights as a human, even as he “annihilates him as a Jew” (Sartre 1995: 56).

To step into this breach, answering Sartre's call for existential authenticity and the insistence on particularities while combining it with a rather un-Sartre-like group affinity (Walzer 1995), are the forms of protest against devoted liberal individualism and universalism that some scholars have termed communitarianism, which emphasizes the role that shared experience plays in moral development, personal identity and growth (Walzer 1977). There are many resulting forms of communitarian ideology, ranging from political involvement to lifestyles which better reflect the ethic of community. Amitai Etzioni (1994), a sociologist of communitarian practice, defines his communitarianism as "a social movement aiming at shoring up the moral, social and political environment ... part renewal of social bonds, part reform of public life" (245), claiming that individualism cannot be the lone basis for society, as humans are meant to have community ties to foster ethical standards and moral development (cf. Durkheim 1996 [1912]). The unregulated greed and self-centredness of untempered individualism is destructive to the social unity people require (Etzioni 1994). In this, Etzioni is in agreement with Michael Walzer (1984), who calls individualism a "bad sociology" (315), because it fails to attend to the deep, cohesive social bonds that affect the lives of individuals. For communitarians, liberal society forces people to separate their lives into several isolated spheres (Walzer 1984), which tend to create ambiguity in morals and standards of behaviours as lifestyles become increasingly relativist and disconnected from communal mores (Klapp 1969; Taylor 2003). Seeking to promote individual freedom, these liberal ideals cause people to lose their grasp on social webbing and cause an atomization that is contrary to the nature of humanity, which "is to fill a set of roles, each of which has its own point and purpose" (MacIntyre 1984: 59). The

disconnection of people from the shared communal values of traditional societies leads to feelings of cynicism and discomfort, as it creates, according to Walzer (1983), a situation similar to that of peoples living under tyrants or in bondage – experiences which are all characterized by the anxiety of being subjugated to people who “do not inhabit a world of shared meanings” (250n).

Walzer (1990) explains there are two, yet seemingly contradictory, ways in which communitarians attack liberalism. Communitarians, those who feel that the deracination and abstraction of modern humans is essentially destructive to people who require a sense of community to feel like whole and functioning creatures, see the failure of liberalism as occurring in one of two ways. In one mode of thought, communitarian critics assume that liberalism actually functions according to its ideals and that the self-determination and individualism of liberal rhetoric accurately portrays modern life. In this critique, advocates of communitarianism point out that complete separation of people from their society, as well as from each other, jeopardizes human happiness by making them isolated shells, and also disintegrates the foundations of morality and culture by dissolving the ethical, legal and social structures that make humans human (Walzer 1990). Individualism, if taken to the extreme, makes everything in life relative, destroying the naturalized moral compass we have come to expect tradition to provide for us (Klapp 1969; Taylor 2003).

Conversely, the second common communitarian critique of liberalism is that liberalism is an ideal that can never actually describe the realities of human life, and therefore leaves humans unsatisfied and disillusioned when it fails to fulfill its promise. Humans, these critics argue, are inherently communitarian, whether they outwardly

promote liberalism or not (Walzer 1990). The liberal ideal of a *sui generis* society is faulty because groups are always the result of traditions or historical dialectical conversations of one means or another, and the liberal ideal merely obscures this foundational genealogy. Further, this obscuring of foundational myths promotes the hegemonic power structure by hiding the subliminal control that one group (mainly white, anglo-Protestants) has over the liberal society in which other groups must live (Walzer 1990). Finally, communitarians feel that the fact that we are all subconsciously communitarian, perhaps by biological design, creates a good deal of guilt and frustration when we are not able to overcome barriers between groups or communities – the liberal ideal has taught us that tolerance and diversity should create unity, especially within the same nation state, yet we see this unity consistently fail in everyday practical application (Walzer 1990). While communitarians generally do not devalue diversity and tolerance as contemporary goals, they tell us we must, rather than promoting seamless unity, push for a compromise which embraces the urge towards community, as opposed to merely proclaiming it dead. In this conceptualization of the modern nation state, society is in actuality a Hobbesian web of “market friendships,” which do not fully penetrate the communitarian-based intimate circles in which people voluntarily live their private lives. Nevertheless, the liberal ideal propagated in education and media seeks to deny or hide this reality (Walzer 1990).

Walzer (1990) also suggests that both of these critiques, that which accuses liberalism of being accurate and the other that accuses it of being inaccurate, are partially correct, and sets forth a middle ground. Of the first form of critique, Walzer agrees that there is a certain isolation and hyper-individualism that is central to life in

liberal society. The four chief types of mobility (geographic, social, marital and political) may serve to liberate individuals from tradition, but they also spread a feeling of uprootedness in modern life. We live further away from our hometowns than previous generations did and we can spend our lives in many different locations. We are proudly upwardly mobile, and our birth supposedly does not control our destination. We are free to marry and divorce and to choose our mates freely. We join, support and abandon political parties and movements according to our changing attitudes over a lifespan. We are a people of movement, with which comes gain in some areas, but also negative and possibly irrevocable loss.<sup>13</sup> It is true that we moderns enjoy the mobility of liberalism and see the exercise of these rights as the epitome of freedom, yet we are not encouraged to count the cost of such freedom, even though fragmented families and broken ties litter our personal pasts. While the culture around us represents such motilities as personal adventures, the impact on modern life is often dissatisfying. In the second form of communitarian critique, that which claims humans are essentially communal beings and, therefore, can never be truly liberal, is also true to a certain extent for Walzer (1990) as we are certainly social and the culmination of generations of history and tradition. However, Walzer (1990) points out that, while this may be true, it ultimately proves nothing – we are the culmination of history, but the liberal tradition teaches us to question the validity and relevance of that history, so we are all, to some extent, self-created individuals as we can pick and choose which traditions to follow. In

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<sup>13</sup> This movement, and, to use Woody Allen's brilliant term, the "chronic dissatisfaction" that comes with the urge to constantly seek new positions and places, was the theme of Tony Kushner's lauded masterpiece *Angels in America* and the HBO miniseries made in 2003, in which heaven has been destroyed by the mobility of mankind, as if the paths of humanity's physical and ideological progress leave karmic contrails that destroy the fabric of the universe – much the same way as our scientific advances in hairspray and refrigeration have destroyed the ozone.



fact, Walzer's third critique of liberalism is that it denies its own traditions, and is a continually self-subverting ideology, so it is hard to believe that any tradition can really survive its onslaught – even liberalism, itself.

The communitarian critique of liberalism seems to hinge on the distinction between the *Gesellschaft* (the modern, faceless social system) and the *Gemeinschaft* (the imagined closeness of small, premodern societies), which can lead liberals to dismiss communitarianism as a naïve form of nostalgia, longing for a time and condition that is either impractical for the modern age, or one that never really existed in the first place (Newman and de Zoysa 1997). Other liberal concerns about communitarianism include the popular misconception that all communitarians are reactionary conservatives who pose a threat to the individual freedoms that the North American founders and later civil rights movements fought so hard to achieve (Neal and Paris 1990). However, while this might be the case with some people who would fall under the communitarian epistemology, especially in terms of the “family values” theocratic ideals and nationalistic groups, one need remember that there are many different permutations of communitarian thought. Political communitarianism can provide a “radical center” alternative for people who feel the “left” has abandoned traditional community ties and compassion in favour of social justice through control and dissension, and that the “right” is far too invested in preserving the status quo, so as to not disturb commercial interests (Wallis 1995). Social communitarianism, when voluntary and welcoming, can be an effective motivator for social collaboration and grassroots revitalization movements (Etzioni 1996; Newman and de Zoysa 1997). It is not to be forgotten that communitarianism is itself a liberal vein of thought insofar as

critics of liberalism are, themselves, applying liberal dissention when they question the institutions of liberal society (Walzer 1990), which is now, ironically, the orthodoxy in North America.

Finally, I must clarify that the minority supporters of communitarian ethics in America would not really benefit from an actual return to pre-liberal social structures, even if such a thing were possible. Rather than hope for a complete reversion to premodern societal ideals, it is my sense that communitarianism is better defended on the grounds of a moderate improvement on the blind-spots within liberal ideology, and in continuing to interrogate liberal values for their substantive results in contemporary life and the quest for meaning in the lives of individuals, families and communities. That is, communitarians can make a space for not only asking whether people are adequately connected in current society, but also whether we are making the “right sort” of connections (Neal and Paris 1990) and, always, being ready to ask the “whys” of societal change – preventing the malaise of change for the sake of change, and not change for the good of humanity. In short, communitarianism can stand for what Beitz (1997) calls “social liberalism,” or “fairness to societies (or peoples),” as opposed to “cosmopolitan liberalism,” which is “fairness to persons” (515), especially when dealing with issues of commerce, program spending and distributive justice. Communitarianism can also be seen in the switch from liberalism to that of progressivism of the social democrats as a way to stall what progressives saw the ethical and communal drift of classical atomized liberalism without impeding needed social reform (Kloppenber 1986).

For this study, the import of the critique of liberalism offered by communitarianism is that the two positions seem to be competing for control over the creation of the individual self. While liberals seem to be speaking from the idea that there is an essential, self-determining, almost pre-social individual, communitarians remind us that there might be no such thing. Since the original liberal ideals include self-determined, natural ethics and positions, it suggests that, if given freedom, the individual can achieve true independence (Walzer 1990). Communitarian outlooks tell us that no one can be entirely free from their social matrix, because even their very quests for self-determination are defined by their birth traditions and subsequent socialization. Liberals hold the position that the individual has the right to question and discard the traditions they have inherited – a value communitarians cannot deny as they themselves are questioning the liberal tradition into which they have been born (Walzer 1990). In liberal visions, the self is a creation based on critical subversion and selection/rejection of traditional values, and is expressed through the voluntary associations the individual pursues (Walzer 1990; Taylor 2003). The idea of voluntary association, which has been promoted by the increased forms of mobility in liberal society and is the life's blood of self-invention as our associations are both the means of that invention as well as how we exercise it, is why communitarianism is not a replacement for liberalism. Rather, it is a quest to temper the intense personalism within liberal thought (cf. Walzer 1990; Etzioni 1996).

It is out of this grey area that the films I examine tap into the communitarian critique of liberalism and succeed in problematizing the freedoms cherished in liberal mythology. These films stem from the context of modernity in which liberal ideology

tells us we are free to define ourselves and guaranteed the right to voluntary association, but also seem to contain some awareness of the flaws in the liberal system that crop up from the insolubility of involuntary links many of our forbearers brought here, even if they were seeking to escape them. The growing revision of liberal ideals of romance can be illustrated by the film *Two Lovers* (2008), in which Joaquin Phoenix plays a young Jewish man who has been devastated by the loss of his Jewish fiancée, who he has been forced to give up when they both tested positive as carriers of the Tay-Sachs gene. During his recovery from this loss, he is presented with two options – a stable and affectionate Jewish woman (Vinessa Shaw) of whom his parents and community approve, and an exciting, yet unreliable and flighty, Gentile artist (Gwyneth Paltrow). Just forty years ago this film would have inevitably rejected the familiar Jewish woman for the sake of the beautiful and chaotic *shikse*, but in *Two Lovers* the Jewish man ends up disillusioned by the Gentile object of his lust and accepts the solace and family he craves in the arms of his Jewish, community-sanctioned choice. While this is not a truly “happy ending,” it is a safe and healing one that refutes the ideal in which passion is the prime purpose of partnering.

### **Woody Allen, *Zelig* and the Ambiguous American Jew**

In 1991, Eric Lax produced one of the most significant biographies yet on the American filmmaker Woody Allen, the man in Manhattan, who began as Allan Konigsberg the child in Brooklyn. Interesting in its status as having been approved by a notoriously private artist (Friedman and Desser 1993), the book is nevertheless not without controversy, and it perhaps remembered best for its claim that:

And he is a Jew, as people are quick to point out and as if it mattered more than it does. Freud wrote, "I am a Jew, and it always seemed to me not only shameful but downright senseless to deny it," meaning at least in part that he was a Jew because everybody reminded him he was a Jew. Woody does not deny it either, and everybody reminds him he is a Jew, but his Jewishness as an artist is more a result of external identification than it is a source of his humor. He uses Jewish references that are specific, not generic. They may have been the signposts in his neighborhood, but under different circumstances of birth they could have just as easily been those of a lower-middle-class Irish Catholic in Boston who saw prettier women and a more interesting life across the river and set out to get there. (Lax 1991:165)

Lester Friedman has written that he rejects this explanation as a figment of the assimilationist attitude which insists upon whitewashing Jewish experience as not specific or distinct in the melting pot of America. Further, and more persuasively, he claims that this assertion is just plain wrong in light of Allen's films and writings, which clearly express a Jewish nature and quest (Friedman & Desser 1993).

But on what basis should Woody Allen be "claimed" as a Jew, even in contradiction to his own self-description? He is not religious, does not attend synagogue, and has seemingly rejected the notion that his "true" home is anywhere but New York. Allen has specifically denounced the ideas that the Jews are rendered special by their "chosen" status or that they have more responsibility towards their fellow Jews than the rest of humanity.<sup>14</sup> Further, he claims to have found no personal connection with the traditions. Lax quotes Allen as saying, rather unequivocally:

"I was unmoved by the synagogue, I was not interested in the *Seder*, I was not interested in Hebrew school, I was not interested in being Jewish. It just didn't mean a thing to me. I was not ashamed of it or proud of it. It was a nonfactor to me." (Allen in Lax 1993:40)

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<sup>14</sup> Topics such as empathy and the universality of human suffering are treated significantly in his films, specifically *Stardust Memories* (1980) and *Deconstructing Harry* (1997).

The real life Allen, it seems, goes quite far in disowning the Jewishness that others see in him, declaring that there are enough divisions between humans without creating “artificial ones” (quoted in Freidman and Desser 1993: 40).

Yet, significantly, Allen then goes on to qualify one refutation of Judaism by saying, “I certainly had no interest in being Catholic or *any of the other Gentile religions*,” though he makes it clear that they were of no more or less a waste of time than was Judaism in his estimation (Allen in Lax 1993:41; emphasis added). The use of the term “Gentile” in the midst of a rejection of Jewishness is interesting and makes for a compelling dimension to the consideration of Woody’s Jewish identity. Perhaps Allen is just unwittingly expressing the Jewish-tinged experience of having been raised in the tradition without currently self-identifying as Jewish, as Lax has claimed. It has been noted that Jews in America see Allen as being Jewish primarily because they want him to be – after all, Allen is talented, famous and powerful, and he could be a matter of pride for Jews, allowing the Jewish community to express their ideals and boundaries (cf. Bial 2005; Pearse 2008a). Allen, the loser who ends up winning (or at least surviving) through smarts and humour could be seen as a metaphor for the Jews in their entirety (Friedman and Desser 1993). Nevertheless, his use of the term Gentile serves to place his identity in some form of Jewishness, even if unwillingly. The major point that Allen and “Jews” like him illustrate is that there is clearly more than religion or even self-identification present in the modern idea of the Jew, and that Jewish identity is an ambiguous category in constant flux (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993).

Yet, despite the ambiguity in Allen’s personal status, there is no denying that Woody Allen is perhaps the single most important creator of the Jewish image in film

today, and that his legacy of more than the forty years in film has made an indelible mark on the representation of Jews that cannot be avoided in any discussion of American Jewish representation (cf. Friedman 1982). In a sense, his work is the transformation from the physical stereotypes of the Victorian stage to the un-religious, de-ghettoized, thoroughly modernized, yet unmistakably Jewish figure in modern comedy. His *nebbish* image – “white” (i.e. Ashkenazi), middle class, weak, seemingly-educated, neurosis-riddled male smart aleck with a preoccupation with his own physical, mental and social well-being, as established throughout a long list of his films – is something of a gold standard in American Jewish image (Bial 2005). He is also one of the most thoughtful commentators on the role of the American Jew as an ambiguous American, characterized by an ambivalent relationship with the mainstream.

“The only questions of real interest,” Allen has been quoted as saying, “are the ultimate questions, otherwise who cares about anything else?” (Lax 1991: 183). Yet, for Allen, these ultimate questions rest less in the Talmud than on the analyst’s couch, and his work can be seen as part of what Andrew Heinze (2001) deems the Jewish role in creating American pop-psychology. Because of the significant contributions of early-twentieth century Jewish physicians, Heinze considers crediting mainstream Protestants with the creation of the modern American understanding of the self and of identity erroneous. For Heinze, it was, in fact, Western Jews who “created much of the American lexicon of the self in the twentieth century” (951). Doing so was part of the Jewish quest for acceptance in American life, particularly in their discussions of human universality in opposition to the belief in inherent differences in ethnic or racial others. Yet, at the same time, Jewish equivalents to W.E.B. Du Bois were also thinking of the

“convolution of assimilation” (Heinze 2001: 978), in which the Jewish mind was tormented by the conflict within him between the desire to embrace America and the ancestral fear of Christians (Heinze 2001). This was not a calm melting pot, but one constantly seething with ambivalences and complicated emotions. It is this ambivalence that has characterized Woody Allen’s work, especially through the image of the Jewish experience in America (the *nebbish* trope) that he has given to cinema as his enduring legacy. Allens’s *nebbish* character presents the Jewish American as a liminal entity who is both assimilated yet inassimilable – both American yet not quite. This ambiguity is partially because, like his *nebbish* Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall* (1979) and as Sartre (1946) recognized, he knows that the Gentile gaze makes him a Jew despite himself. As such, Allen is as concerned with the practicality of assimilation and integration into an unaccepting mainstream as he is attracted by it, as symbolized by his trials and tribulations in the pursuit of alluring yet punishing Gentile muses.

The idea of the ambivalent recurrence of attraction and rejection is a constant in the Jewish pursuit of American life is salient in several of Allen’s films, but it is dealt with most particularly in one. In *Zelig* (1983), a fake documentary (or “mockumentary”) Allen explores the fictional story of the “chameleon man” of the 1930s, Leonard Zelig (Allen), who has the amazing ability (and sad psychological need) to assume the form, appearance and tastes of whoever he is around. In mock interviews that blur the line between reality and fiction, real Jewish scholars and authors describe the fake Leonard Zelig as a metaphor for the assimilationist attitudes among the Jewish community of the era, as if his psychosis is a shared urge. The presence of these on-screen analysts archly spouting their authoritative opinions might indicate that Allen was trying to mock this



interpretation, but there is no real way to reject this reading completely. In fact, it is extremely plausible to see Leonard's reported popularity in America as symptomatic of the faith that generation put into the melting pot model of assimilation, as well as the way in which he fulfilled immigrant-American fantasies of abandoning past selves for re-invented identities (Feldstein 1985; Freidman and Desser 1993; Johnston 2007). What else can one think about a Jew who is so terrified of anti-Semites that he turns into a Nazi involuntarily?

Leonard Zelig's habit of transformation and concealment is both a personal and ethnic one – it is true that it was first triggered when he was embarrassed to admit that he had not read *Moby Dick*, which reveals an anxiety about his personal intelligence and education, but Zelig is also able to change into African-Americans, Native Americans and even WASPs with sufficient contact. To emphasize the enormity of this feat, Allen has the narrator quip that, "The Ku Klux Klan, who saw Zelig as a Jew that could turn himself into a Negro and an Indian, saw him as a triple threat." Allen is making no bones about the racial mimicry of Zelig, a fictional contemporary to the infamously black-faced Al Jolson (cf. Rogin 1996; Johnston 2007). Because assimilated American Jews represented in film are seen as a twilight people between minority and majority and seem to stand for nothing, they can ultimately stand in for everything, and their lack of substance, due to assimilation, leaves them as the "free floating ethnic signifier" (Desser 1991:391) whenever any generic "other" is required (Johnston 2007). Furthermore, Allen makes it clear that Zelig's disorder originated with, instead of being merely triggered by, both personal and ethnic concerns. Zelig, who was tormented by anti-Semites as a child, is justified in fearing for his personal safety as a

Jew, and Allen legitimates this fear completely by reminding us of the rise of the Nazis and the notice that the ominous KKK takes of the small, helpless Zelig. On the personal side, Zelig's disorder was also caused by a dysfunctional family lead by unhappily married parents – these two sides of Zelig, the Jewish and the personal, which can never really be parted, come together in the very funny, yet also fairly pathetic, line, “As a boy, Leonard Zelig is frequently bullied by anti-Semites. His parents, who never take his part and blame him for everything, side with the anti-Semites.” Therefore, Allen recognizes the lure and function of assimilation, as well as the enormous role that positive familial or community support plays in counteracting assimilationist urges. For Allen and his Zelig, the chameleon psychosis is a totalizing disorder involving all aspects of life as both cause and arena for assimilation. For Allen, inauthenticity is, at its core, the form/result/cause of fascism (Detmer 2004). Zelig's story does not end when he wanders into Nazi Germany, but with his heroic escape back to America (in a biplane, flying backwards and upside down, in a total reversal of Lindbergh's achievement) and his subsequent marriage to his dedicated Gentile psychiatrist, Eudora.

The marriage between Zelig and his Gentile saviour/doctor Eudora is significant because in one interpretation it is an image of a functional intermarriage, as one in which the Jew must gain control over his own personality, celebrity and representation (which is another major theme in this film, as the public and his family all fight over who can sell Zelig's image). The story of *Zelig*, seen in this light, can mean that “healthy” Americanization, including successful integration into the mainstream and even romance with Gentiles, may actually allow Jews to retain integrity of the self in a more sustainable way by reducing their alienation anxiety, thereby eliminating the out-

dated idea that they must hide their Jewishness altogether in order to survive or thrive in America (Liebman 1970; Sarna 1999; Eisen 1983). Yet, Zelig's "cure" is somewhat problematic. It is true that the film shows the self-made Leonard asserting his own tastes in the end, which indicates a quest for personal authenticity, but one can also argue that the "cured" Zelig is just as conformist as he was as a chameleon. He might not change easily any more, but he has, in effect, assimilated to Eudora's world, one in which "Be your own man," is, ironically, an orthodox commandment (Johnston 2007). Instead of switching back and forth between creeds and nationalities, Zelig has frozen into a single form – that of the white, integrated, individualist liberal American. He can no longer align himself with oppressed "racial" others (i.e. African-Americans, Chinese or Native Americans) as he is now firmly "white," as proven by his marriage to an upper class WASP female. In this way, Zelig is a metaphor for the Jewish experience during his lifetime (cf. Brodtkin 1999). The character's early years were spent responding to his endangered outsider status by masquerading in various ways, until sometime in the personalist twenties he froze as a bland and universalized white American. Yet, underneath, there is still some suspicion that the masquerade continues (Johnston 2007).

Woody Allen, a Groucho Marx disciple of sorts, would likely be familiar with this joke that the elder comic told in his later years as he experienced a return to Judaism:

"A Jew and a hunchback were passing a temple, and the Jew said, 'I used to be a Jew.' And the hunchback said, 'I used to be a hunchback.'"(Quoted in Chandler 1979: 132)

Marx, in his usual manner of making social commentary in short quips, seems to express the meaning of both Allen and of *Zelig* – in many ways Jewishness is not

always something you can easily disown. Nor is it something that is consistently expressed in obvious or “traditional” ways.

It is in this way that *Zelig* (and Woody Allen himself) sets the tone for the research that follows, insofar as the Jewish character remains both assimilated yet ambiguous in representation. This dissertation is not a work on the identity of “real life Jews,” as such, as it focuses primarily on the struggles of fictional Jews to reconcile with Gentile lovers, the many trials these couples go through, and the various negative or positive outcomes of these problematic matches. Yet these images have enduring relevance to modern Jewish life (Fishman 2000, 2004). I personally know the significance of media in Jewish self-construction. As a child born to a mixed partnership and raised in rural Canada, without major Jewish influences in my immediate community, the fact that I am firm in my Jewish identity today owes as much to Seinfeld and Spielberg as it does to the synagogue – perhaps more. Before I moved to more cosmopolitan surroundings, American media representations were my primary connection to the Jewish community, though a problematic connection in many ways. However, though I myself am now married to a partner who is not Jewish, I am stronger in my Jewish cultural identity than is my own mother and am actively raising a Jewish child, so perhaps one cannot argue with results even if my influences have been, at times, more Streisand than Hillel.

In this sense, I feel Woody Allen’s ambivalence as if it has been my own, because his celluloid explorations are, particularly for isolated or unaffiliated Jews, a form of communal myth or testimony (Friedman and Desser 1993). Allen’s “ultimate question” regarding the price or practicality of Jewish integration is a common feature

in many of the films I examine, and one that, I believe, is an issue that Jewish generations and Jewish individuals must continually re-examine for themselves. The cinema is of particular interest to those studying Jews, a highly media-savvy community who have established their own film festivals as part of their secondary institutional completeness, and this is particularly so for those growing numbers of unaffiliated Jews who may attend movies more often than they do synagogue. While liberal Jewish religious institutions seek to reinvent Judaism as a universal faith that has no fixed, ethnic character (Furman 1987), it seems that film representations of the ethnic (and non-religious) Jew continues to thrive, offering a history-bound, material image of the Ashkenazi secular Jew as if in an attempt to remind us all that Jews are still distinct. Perhaps this is a way to have the cake of integration and eat it, too, by remaining unique yet integrated – ambivalent throughout. As this dissertation shows, this maintenance of difference remains a theme in intermarriage narratives where, regardless of whether the couple succeeds or not, the difference between Jew and Gentile is generally portrayed as being much greater than is often expressed in “real life” modern interaction.

## **Conclusion**

In the following work, I outline some key ways in which Hollywood romantic cinema both reflects and contributes to the debate over Jewish-Gentile intermarriage in America. In chapter one, I give an overview of intermarriage as a religious and cultural issue for Jews in order to establish why romance/marriage between Jews and Gentiles is seen as a vital topic for consideration. In chapter two, I explain romance as a film genre and how repeated generic elements produce a modern myth for audiences in America.

This discussion is in order to show how the instances of romantic failure between Jews and Gentiles in American film are a marked departure from generic conventions, and, therefore, suggests some larger meaning. In chapter three, I use Thomas Wartenberg's (1999) theory of unlikely couples to show how liberal films criticize traditional illiberal hierarchies that stand in the way of the individual pursuit of happiness, and how these films support the romantic perspective by their narrative strategies for bringing dissimilar Jewish-Gentile couples together. I also illustrate how such films reflect the position of Jews as Americans. Liberalism is not the only ideology applicable to American film representations of Jewish-Gentile romance, however, and in chapter four I show how communitarian resistance to liberal personalism may be used to understand negative views of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage observed in the past few decades in Hollywood. Throughout these chapters, I attempt to contextualize my readings by also viewing examples of films concerning the nature of Jewish-Jewish romance in film, to give a comparative dimension to my analysis of interfaith romance portrayals. My conclusion reviews the significance of these trends and urges that my work be used in the study of audience reception of these films in order to explore further how Jews in America are not only acted upon, but are acting through and are invested in modernity and the results of the representations discussed in this introduction.

## Chapter 1

### **The Bird and the Fish: An Overview of Jewish-Gentile Intermarriage**

*You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.*

- Numbers 15.39 (NIV translation)

*We are in the act of trying out — and failing miserably at it — one of the most pathological experiments that a civilized society has ever imagined, namely, the basing of marriage, which is lasting, upon romance which is a passing fancy.*

- Denis de Rougemont (quoted in Lerner 1979: 124)

The enduring image for Jewish-Gentile intermarriage in America is that of the “traditional” parent rending his garment,<sup>1</sup> as if mourning a child who has not physically died but nevertheless is perceived as lost because he or she has married outside the community. A good deal of this popular image of the Jewish reaction (or, some would say, over-reaction) to intermarriage comes to us from repeated screen representations of intermarriage presented as a rupture to traditional Jewish familial relationships. Yet, is this still the way Jews see intermarriage? Why is intermarriage still one of the most controversial and absorbing topics facing Jews, and Jewish film?

In order to understand how intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles is portrayed and understood in American film, and the meanings of these portrayals, it is first useful to understand the traditional stance of Judaism towards intermarriage, and

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<sup>1</sup> The Jewish tradition of rending the garment over the heart to mourn the death of a close relative (“*kriah*”) comes from biblical stories in which patriarchs expressed grief through the tearing of their clothes (Gen 37.34; II Sam 1.11; Job 1.20).

how this has developed over time.<sup>2</sup> One must look at the history of the issue, as well as contemporary Jewish views of mixed marriage. This chapter is a short overview of intermarriage, in which I will briefly outline the salient points in Judaism, from ancient literature to the reactions and adaptations of the modern streams, and then review some recent sociological and ethnographic data of American Jews to outline contemporary attitudes and beliefs about Jewish marriage with Gentiles for both religious and non-religious Jews. I will then present views on the challenges of intermarriage, as well as address concerns about the children of intermarriage. This chapter is primarily a religious history, and, therefore, it may seem disconnected from the largely secular image of Jewishness as seen in the films I discuss in this dissertation. There are, however, issues rooted in Judaism surrounding cultural and historical understandings of Jewishness and pertaining to Jewish attitudes towards intermarriage even in the absence of any traditionally religious concerns.<sup>3</sup> My goal in this chapter is to show why some Jews still see intermarriage as a problem, and what the current significance is of Jewish-Gentile interfaith relationships.

### **A Holy Nation: Exogamy and Endogamy in Jewish Law and Custom**

The concept of the Jews as a chosen people, special to God and under the binding covenant of Israel (Deuteronomy 7.7-8; 14.2), grew with the ancient belief that the Jews are a nation of priests who must maintain a purity level consistent with such a

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<sup>2</sup> While Jewish thought concerning issues of Jewish-Gentile relations more generally are relevant to the consideration of attitudes towards Jewish-Gentile intermarriage, I primarily confine my discussion in this chapter to Jewish regulations on sexual, romantic or marital relations with non-Jews.

<sup>3</sup> One significant example of the submerged influence of religious discourse in secular Jewish understanding is the sexual and social image of the Gentile female as forbidden for Jewish males (cf. Jaher 1983).



status (Exodus 19.5-6). This purity concern has been interpreted as requiring Jews to keep themselves apart from the *goyim*, the nations that surround them, in order to keep the commandments prescribed in the oral and written Torahs. It is this foundational myth of Jewish distinctiveness that colours all ancient laws pertaining to Jewish-Gentile sexual and marital relations, and which still hovers over intermarriage debates. However, the regulation of intercultural sexuality and coupling have always adapted to the political and social needs of the Jewish community in their fluid context (cf. Cohen 1983).

It would be incorrect to say that the Hebrew Bible is unequivocally anti-intermarriage. In fact, most of the Jewish prohibition of intermarriage was solidified after the biblical era. Specifically, the Torah prohibits intermarriage only with the seven nations of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7.1-4), and makes no distinct universal bans against Jews taking partners from other groups. Despite this ambiguity, Deuteronomy 7.1-4, the more oft-cited of two major biblical proof texts<sup>4</sup> used in later Jewish discussion of intermarriage, inspired later rabbis to read into the Torah a universal prohibition. In Deuteronomy 7, after listing the seven powerful tribes of Canaan that the Israelites must destroy without mercy or treaty in order to take power in the land promised to them, Moses says God commanded him to declare:

Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons, and do not take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and will quickly destroy you... For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7.3-4, 6; NIV).

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<sup>4</sup> The other being Leviticus 18.21: "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Moloch, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD."

This text – being part of God’s command to wipe out the nations of Canaan, which were more powerful and more populous than the minority Israelites – has a political specificity, and gives no overt indication that this prohibition extends to all Gentiles.<sup>5</sup> In fact, there are several instances of intermarriage and mixed liaisons recorded in early Jewish texts – those of Esau (Genesis 26.34; 28.6-9), Judah (Genesis 38.2),<sup>6</sup> Joseph (Genesis 41.45), Moses (Exodus 2.21), David (2 Samuel 3.3), Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11.3), and Ahab (1 Kings 16.31) – most of which give no narrative importance to the spouse’s nationality, except as historical description (Cohen 1984; Knoppers 2001; Lange 2008a). Of the early biblical heroes who intermarried, only Solomon was condemned, though mostly for marrying women from these same seven forbidden nations (Cohen 1984). Only a few others had negative consequences of their mating with non-Jews, such as Abraham, who, in order to maintain order in his home, was forced to disinherit and send into exile his son Ishmael (Genesis 21.8-21), born to his wife’s Egyptian maid Hagar (Genesis 16). Samson stands out as being openly rebuked by his contemporaries for his intermarriage, as the bible records his parents asking whether there were no Israelites he could have married that he had to find a bride among the “uncircumcised Philistines” (Judges 14.3), which does serve to show that some ancient Israelites did disapprove of intermarriage even in the absence of direct Mosaic laws against the practice (Cohen 1983, 1984).

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<sup>5</sup> This rule was not strictly adhered to, even within the narrow scope of its literal meaning, however. In Judges 3.5-8, the Israelites lived amongst the forbidden nations, marrying them and arranging marriage for their offspring with them, and, as a result, they did indeed start worshiping foreign gods. God turned his back on the Israelites in anger, and sold them into the service of the king Cushan-rishatham for eight years as punishment for their betrayal and disobedience. 1 Kings 11.1-5, likewise, describes how Solomon’s unlawful marriages to women from the forbidden nations caused him to sin and turn away from God (cf. Cohen 1984).

<sup>6</sup> See Knoppers (2001) for a study of Judah’s lineage and its significance to Jewish views of the Other during the Persian era as seen in the genealogies of the Torah and Chronicles.

Early biblical texts generally reflect an Iron Age Israelite comfort with intermarriage amongst the polytheistic tribes of the area (Lange 2008a), suggesting that there was no universal application of the Canaanite restrictions during that time. This comfort appears true even for males, which Shaye Cohen (1983) compellingly argues shows that the later tradition of matrilineal Jewish descent was not yet in place.<sup>7</sup> In fact, many of the exilic (538 – 323 BCE) and early post-exilic biblical prophets, such as the writers of Isaiah (2.2-4; 14.1; 45.14; 56.3, 6-8; 60.1-6, 10; 66.18-23), Haggai (2.7) and Zechariah (2.14-15; 5.1-4; 8.20-23), seemed to have great faith that the foreign nations would eventually come to God themselves, accept his laws, recognize the Jews as a holy nation, and contribute great wealth to the Temple's rebirth.<sup>8</sup> The biblical narratives are likewise casual about intermarriage. Perhaps the most famous instance of intermarriage in the Hebrew scriptures is to be found in the book of Ruth, a positive story of an intermarriage between an Israelite man and his devoted Moabite woman, and an ancestor to King David.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the lack of specific Torah prohibition and an early history of embracing the alien, the Canaanite lines from Deuteronomy and the cryptic prohibition of child sacrifice to Moloch (rendered esoteric by its placement amongst sexual purity laws instead of prohibitions against magic or idol worshipping) of Leviticus 18.21 would go on to inspire many post-Torah regulations over sexual and marital contact between Jews and Gentiles, in combination with a wealth of literature not included in the canon of

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<sup>7</sup> In traditional Judaism, Jewish lineage is inherited via the mother, and not the father (cf. Kiddushin 68b).

<sup>8</sup> These texts are dated to the time in which Jews were being re-established in the land by the Persians, so it is probable that the historical conditions inspired positive feelings towards Gentiles (Fried 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Armin Lange (2008a) does note that the postexilic book's effort to explain how the Moabite woman became the wife of an Israelite (1.1-5) suggests that intermarriage was not a common practice of the time (circa 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE).

scriptures. It was not until well after the 587 BCE destruction of the original Temple and the dispersal of the Jews into foreign captivity – in the Hellenistic period (332 – ca. 152 BCE), when the Jews found themselves in a defensive battle against foreign Greek influences – that the Jews had to formulate concrete regulations against all intermarriage or sexual contact between Jews and Gentiles (Cohen 1983; Fried 2007; cf. Lange 2008a/b).

The new found fervour in these periods for unilateral endogamy was attributed to the leaders of the Jewish reestablishment in Jerusalem, Nehemiah and Ezra,<sup>10</sup> under whom the foreign nations were increasingly portrayed as objects of fear (i.e. Ezra 3.3; 4.103), rather than as brethren or as possible sources for God’s glorification. It was during this period that marriage to Gentiles came to be viewed as a crime against the Torah. When Nehemiah, for example, heard of Judeans who had married women from Ashdod, and that they had fathered with these women children who could not even speak Judean, Nehemiah records that he cursed these men, had them flogged, and pulled out their hair (Nehemiah 13.23-25).<sup>11</sup> Pointing to Solomon, he warned that not even great kings, blessed by God, could be protected from the corrupting influences of foreign women (Nehemiah 13.26; Cohen 1984). However, Nehemiah’s prohibition against intermarriage was evidently not enough to end the practice, as Ezra had to reiterate and strengthen the laws when he came to power under the next Persian king. Ezra did not leave the obedience of the Judeans up to their individual consciences, as evidenced by his famous three-day gathering in Jerusalem for the definitive expulsion

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<sup>10</sup> These books appear to have been redacted after the fall of the Persians to the Greeks under Alexander the Great, and date to the early Hellenistic period (Fried 2007; Lange 2008a).

<sup>11</sup> Fried (2007) points out that flogging and having the hair torn out was a form of corporal punishment under the Achaemenid Empire, placing Nehemiah’s actions not in a fit of anger, but into the context of punishing a legal transgression.

of the foreign wives, in which every Judean man was to publicly divorce his alien wife, and banish her and “her” children from Israel.<sup>12</sup> Any man who did not show up in Jerusalem for the expulsion deadline or who refused to turn out his wife and children did so under pain of banishment and total confiscation of his property (Ezra 10.7-8).<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, there was a great preoccupation with the dangers of intermarriage in pre-Maccabean literature not included in the Bible that might help explain the sudden shift towards mandatory endogamy in Jewish custom. It is not possible for me to discuss all of the works touching on this subject here,<sup>14</sup> but a survey of ancient Jewish tradition on intermarriage is not complete without a mention of the mid-second century BCE book of Jubilees, chapter 30, which seems a significant tie between the specific prohibitions of the Torah and later universal condemnations of intermarriage. This text is the earliest existent record of the interpretation of Mosaic Law against marriage with the seven Canaanite nations as applying to all Gentiles, and is likely the tradition that was drawn upon by later anti-Hellenistic groups such as the Maccabees and the community at Qumran. Jubilees has a particular preoccupation with the strange story recorded in Genesis 34, in which Simon and Levi, the sons of Jacob, upon hearing that their sister Dinah has been raped by the Gentile men of Shechem, trick the men into becoming circumcised and then slaughter them while they recuperated. In the Genesis account, Jacob denounces their actions as causing trouble with the Gentile nations around them, but the father’s condemnation is not the final word as the young men retort, “Were we to allow our sister to be used as their prostitute?” With that question

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<sup>12</sup> Ezra phrases this to reflect his belief that the children belonged to the mother, not to the Judean fathers.

<sup>13</sup> For an interesting connection between Ezra’s expulsion of foreign wives and similar Athenian actions taken just prior to Ezra’s decree, see Fried (2007).

<sup>14</sup> See Armin Lange’s extensive study on intermarriage texts in this period, 2008a/b.

hanging, without response, the Genesis account closes. The community of Jubilees seemed to have strong sympathy for the brothers, seeing their act as one of purification and protection of their community from foreign influences. During the discussion of this story, the author of Jubilees 30 launches into a diatribe about the dangers of intermarriage, taking as his inspiration the Leviticus 18.21 prohibition against sacrificing one's offspring to Moloch:

<sup>7</sup>And if there is any man who wishes in Israel to give his daughter or his sister to any man who is of the seed of the Gentiles he shall surely die, and they shall stone him with stones, for he hath wrought shame in Israel; and they shall burn the woman with fire, because she has dishonored the name of the house of her father, and she shall be rooted out of Israel. <sup>8</sup>And let not an adulteress and no uncleanness be found in Israel throughout all the days of the generations of the earth; for Israel is holy unto the Lord, and every man who hath defiled (it) shall surely die: they shall stone him with stones. <sup>9</sup>For thus has it been ordained and written in the heavenly tablets regarding all the seed of Israel: he that defileth (it) shall surely die, and he shall be stoned with stones. <sup>10</sup>And to this law there is no limit of days, nor any atonement: but the man who has defiled his daughter shall be rooted out from the midst of Israel, because he has given of his seed to Moloch, and wrought impiously so as to defile it. <sup>11</sup>And do thou, Moses, command the children of Israel and exhort them not to give their daughters to the Gentiles, and not to take for their sons any of the daughters of the Gentiles, for this is an abomination before the Lord. <sup>12</sup>For this reason I have written for thee in the words of the Law all the deeds of the Shechemites, which they wrought against Dinah, and how the sons of Jacob spake, saying: "We shall not give our daughter to a man who is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us." <sup>13</sup>And it is a reproach to Israel, to those who give, and to those who take the daughters of the Gentiles; for this is unclean and abominable to Israel. <sup>14</sup>And Israel will not be free from this uncleanness if it hath a wife of the daughters of the Gentiles, or hath given any of its daughters to a man who is of any of the Gentiles. <sup>15</sup>For there will be plague upon plague, and curse upon curse, and every judgment and plague and curse will come (upon him): if he do this thing, or hide his eyes from those who commit uncleanness, or those who defile the sanctuary of the Lord, or those who profane His holy name, (then) will the whole nation together be judged for all the uncleanness and profanation of this (man) (Jubilees 30.7-15, Charles translation, 1917).

We can see in Jubilees the fervent desire to rewrite into the Torah what they felt was a need to protect Israel from Gentile infiltration, and did so by way of a metaphorical interpretation of Leviticus 18.21 applied to Deuteronomy 7.4.

Genesis 34 is not the only biblical narrative used in later interpretation of intermarriage law. Flavius Josephus, classical Latin Jewish historian of the first century CE, cites the dramatic tale told in Numbers 25 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.134-8, 145-9), in which the Israelites were indulging in sexual sins with Moabite women and practicing Baal of Peor worship as a result, so Moses was ordered to put to death the leaders of the sinful people as a punishment. The hero of this story is Phineas, the grandson of Aaron and a popular figure in Hellenistic literature, who set aside his pity while the others balked, and executed the doomed men on the spot. The fact that God rewards Phineas and his descendants (the Levites) with eternal priesthood did not go unnoticed by the thinkers of the time – Josephus wrote that Numbers 25 shows how correct Deuteronomy 7 is when it says that foreign lovers will turn one to idol worship, as well as illustrates the wrath that God has against all intimate interfaith contact (Cohen 1983).

Early Jewish literature shows that, while Iron Age Jewish communities had a tradition of embracing the alien and were accepting of intercultural marriages, the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods saw an increase in xenophobic sentiment, leading to the universalization of Mosaic prohibitions against marriage to the seven nations of Canaan (Fried 2007). Lange (2008b) notes that the increase in the emphasis placed on endogamy may have stemmed from post-exilic attempts to reject pre-exilic behaviours that they saw as culminating in the Babylonian exile, an emphasis that led to the rise of

the increasingly dogmatic and conservative religious elite (cf. Ezra 9.7, 10-12). Earlier comfort with intermarriage and intercultural sexual contact was reframed as the Israelites having misunderstood God's words to Moses. Ezra sought to rectify this misinterpretation by revealing the root cause of Israel's punishment, and by making the intermarriage law universal, thereby reversing ancient ideas of compassion and cooperation with surrounding Gentiles or resident aliens (i.e. Leviticus 19.33-34).

It is probable that the differing views on intermarriage reflect the changing needs of the Jews to prevent pagan influences on cultic Judaism, as well as to protect and preserve a minority culture under the domination of foreign masters (Cohen 1983; Knoppers 2001; Lange 2008b). Nevertheless, the prohibitions were consistently rooted in Mosaic tradition and drew heavily upon the priestly purity laws (Lange 2008b), thereby relying on a firmer understanding of the entire Jewish people as a segregated holy nation of priests (the holy seed), which served to both purify cultic worship as well as place boundaries around Jewish identity by putting Gentiles in a position of ritually and morally impure defilements (Klawans 1997, 1998; Lange 2008b).

By the time Jews began to establish the rabbinic form of Judaism following the fall of the second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish prohibition of intermarriage with all nationalities of Gentiles seems to have become common. The Israelite religion of the Bible, and therefore the Judaism that grew out of later interpretations of this history, has a long tradition of seeing Gentiles as sources of impurity, and many of the early rabbis may have seen any contact with Gentile women, even from birth, as problematic for Jewish men (Klawans 1995). The Talmudic rabbis were not themselves much affected by intermarriage, and their concern was primarily over sexual contact with Gentiles



(“acts of Zimri,” so named after the rebel in Numbers 25), as opposed to marriage, because it was seen to be much greater threat as it was more common (Cohen 1983).<sup>15</sup>

The prohibition of intermarriage found in early Judaism was generally upheld by the authorities of the middle and early modern periods in Europe. Rashi (1040-1105), the preeminent Talmud commentator (Telushkin 1991), upheld the Hasmonean tradition of extending Deuteronomy 7.3-4 to all Gentiles, noting, as others had before him, that all Gentiles were capable of leading Jews away from God, making the spirit of the Torah applicable universally, even though the letter might be more specific (Hayes 2002). Maimonides (1135-1204), one of the founders of modern Judaism (Fox 1990), was particularly clear on his belief that the Torah forbade Jewish intermarriage by delineating a common thread through the Mosaic Laws, which, for him, added up to a Jewish sanctity that required abstention from sexual and marital relations with non-Jews.<sup>16</sup> We can see this interpretation reiterated in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century code, the *Shulchan Aruch* of Joseph Karo, which became the standard code of Orthodox Judaism in the west (Telushkin 1991), in which Karo explains that the dietary laws prevent Jews from sharing meals with idolaters to prevent intermarriage (*Yoreh Deah* 112, paragraph 1). We can see that in the Middle Ages the prohibition of intermarriage was not only upheld based upon ancient sources, but, perhaps reflecting the legal and social concerns

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<sup>15</sup> This ruling could also be a matter of terminology, as B.Yebamot 76a reads that Gentiles (specifically idol worshippers) were not able to “marry” as such, because only Jews could have valid marriages – non-Jews could only have couplings or mates. Thus, it was not even possible for Gentiles and Jews to marry, unless the Gentile converted to Judaism (Cohen 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Maimonides wrote as if the Torah had a unifying image of Jewish separation which bound sexual, social and dietary regulations – “... the Omnipresent One has sanctified and separated us from the heathens, namely in matters of forbidden unions and forbidden foods” (quoted in Nirenberg 1998:134). While Maimonides wrote that the sages were correct in extending the Torah prohibition beyond the seven nations of Canaan because all Gentiles may inspire idolatry (ben Rafael 2002), he felt the meaning of the laws went further to prohibit all sexual contact with Gentiles, as any sexual relationship might lead to intermarriage. In order to promote the abhorrence of sex with Gentile women, he also explained that they are essentially impure, and should be considered as if they were in a constant state of menstruation (Nirenberg 1998).

of Jewish leaders in the era, also came to define and explain Judaism's even more central tenets, such as the dietary restrictions.

The authority of the rabbis was transformed with the Enlightenment and its accompanying "Emancipation" of the Jews of Europe in the 1700 and 1800s, during which Jewish leaders and thinkers attempted to struggle with the question of distinct identity and practices in the new permissive environment. The history, meaning and thought of emancipated Europe is a vast topic, but we shall consider one event of particular interest for the study of how it changed religious views of intermarriage – the bizarre historical case of Napoleon's revived Sanhedrin of 1806, through which he wished to enact the imposition of the state over the Jews, as over all people in France as individual citizens. This desire was in keeping with the 1791 declaration of the French National Assembly member Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre, that "To the Jews as individuals, all rights. To the Jews as a people, no rights" (quoted in Telushkin 1991: 227). To this end, Napoleon called to order the Grand Sanhedrin, which only met once, with an eye to extract the promise of the Jewish leaders (the so-called "Jewish notables") of France that Jews could and would be loyal modern citizens under the Emperor. Napoleon had twelve questions to put to the group, the answers of which would decide whether the Jews could become true Frenchmen or remain unemancipated. As he told the group, "The wish of His Majesty is that you should be Frenchmen; it remains with you to accept the proffered title, without forgetting that to prove unworthy of it would be renouncing it altogether" (quoted in Sorkin 1997:212). Understanding the potentials of equality, the Jewish lay and religious leaders were able to answer all twelve questions in ways that proved them "worthy" of French citizenship,

showing that Jews were able and willing to engage their fellow French citizens in honourable, sociable and legal ways, and that Jewish Law would not present any major difficulty to French civil or criminal courts. There was one question, however, to which the Jewish illuminati were not able to give full compliance to the liberal government; while they agreed that the marriage between a Christian and a Jew was legally binding insofar as the government saw it that way, they admitted that it was prohibited by their religion, and could not be performed or sanctioned by a rabbi or a synagogue. Nevertheless, citizenship rights were won, and Napoleon was satisfied with the Jewish level of willingness to co-operate as individuals with the state (Telushkin 1991; Graetz 1996; cf. Sorkin 1997). As an important addendum to this, in 1844 the forerunners of the Reform movement in Europe<sup>17</sup> convened the Rabbinic Conference of Brunswick in Lower Saxony in Germany, where they adopted the findings of the Grand Sanhedrin as a model of liberal Jewish life in Emancipated nations. But they did make one amendment to the Sanhedrin's answers to Napoleon. The conference found that Jews could, indeed, marry any members of monotheistic faiths, as long as the national laws allowed the couple to raise the resulting offspring as Jewish and the spouse agreed to honour this arrangement (Eisen 1999).

Into this debate came the resurgence of traditional Judaism in the form of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, and what others have termed his "neo-Orthodoxy," as found in his influential 1836 text, *The Nineteen Letters*. In 1851, Hirsch led a group of Orthodox anti-reformist Jews in forming their own congregation in Frankfurt am Main, and this is

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<sup>17</sup> The Reform movement is considered as an ongoing process of re-evaluating traditional beliefs and practices and continuing to respond to the demands of modern life and ideas. The main beliefs of the Reform movement focus on ethical or moral concerns, rather than ritual practice, and stem from the foundational concerns of liberalism, including the belief in universalism and the practice of rational critique of religion (cf. Kaplan 2001).

often considered to be the beginning of the Orthodox movement. Hirsch's position on modernity – that Jews should hold firm to the traditions as established in the Torah while participating, as Jews, in the modern world only insofar as this participation is in keeping with their Jewish ethics and practices – remains a foundation of Orthodox Judaism. Several times, Hirsch refers to the “mission” of the Jews:

Such a mission imposed upon this people another duty, the duty of separation, of ethical and spiritual separateness. It could not join in the doings of the other peoples lest it descend to their level and perish in the abyss of their worship of wealth and pleasure. It must remain alone and do its work and live its life as a separate entity until, refined and purified by Israel's teachings and Israel's example, humanity as a whole might turn to God and acknowledge Him as the sole Creator and Ruler. Once that is attained, Israel's mission will have been accomplished. (1988: 55)

Hirsch established an updated Torah-based policy for intermarriage that has avoided relying heavily on the rabbinic concern over idolaters, a concern that had largely become antiquated or metaphorical by the 1800s – a situation which the reformist rabbis had used to give Jews leave to intermarry with monotheistic people. By focusing on what he considered the mission of Israel, which was a reminder of the covenant that still needed to be kept, Hirsch argues that seeking only pleasure and self-advancement was an abandonment of the communal responsibilities of Israel, including preserving the traditions for their children (and having children to preserve the tradition) until such time as they are returned to the land which was promised to the Jews. In the meantime, the Law would protect the Jews from themselves, and allow the continued ritual, ethical and moral improvement of the Jews in their exile.

With the conflict between reformers and modern conservatives like Hirsch, we see the seeds of the sectarian variety that still informs the intermarriage debate. The main branches of Judaism in America are Reform, Conservative and Orthodox, with a

wide range of beliefs amongst the Jews represented in these groups. Modern Reform leaders tend to accept interfaith families due to their desire for a modernized, relevant religion that no longer places the Talmud at the centre of their faith and practice, but responds to what they feel are the current realities of Jewish lives (Greenwood 1998). The position of synagogues affiliated with the Conservative movement – an American-born branch of Judaism that seeks a middle ground between progressive and orthodox forms of Jewish observance – is that Jewish-Gentile intermarriage is forbidden, as well as undesirable. As such, the efforts of Conservative leadership in terms of interfaith coupling are placed primarily in prevention (LCCJ 1995).<sup>18</sup> In recent Orthodoxy,<sup>19</sup> some rabbis felt it was better to allow the non-Jewish partner to convert in the Orthodox manner than to forfeit them to Reform or no Judaism at all, but many Orthodox leaders declared it impossible to accept intermarried people as doing so would dilute the propriety of their practice (Ellenson 1985). Not even for the sake of the Jewish partner or their children could Orthodoxy accept marriage-minded converts, due to the suspicion that their interest is insincere, and nor could they accept mixed couples. Many maintain the stance that conversion for the sake of marriage is forbidden in Judaism, as well as being no favour to the Gentile who is insincerely taking on such a responsibility (Shemtov n.d.; c.f. Gittelsohn 1983). Most Orthodox groups focus their efforts on preventing intermarriage, providing social opportunities for Jewish young people to

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<sup>18</sup> Conservative Judaism refers to the Jewish denomination that places itself between Reform and Orthodox denominations on the spectrum of ritual and ideological conservatism. Conservative Judaism, while establishing organizations and holding a general uniformity, has a great deal of variety in the ways in which congregations worship and believe (cf. Wertheimer 2002).

<sup>19</sup> There are various forms of Orthodoxy today, ranging from the so-called “ultra-Orthodox” (Hasidic or *Haredi*) Jews to the Neo-Orthodox (also known as “Modern Orthodox”), which represents the majority of Orthodox Jews today. The main reason that Orthodox Jews could not join their co-religionists in reforming Judaism is because they consider the Torah divine in nature and authorship. Therefore, Orthodox Jews are expected to follow all 613 commandments of the Torah (cf. Jacobs 1995; Cohn-Sherbok 1996).

mingle, and sponsoring educational programs geared towards convincing Jews to embrace inmarriage over the temptations of intermarriage (Shemtov n.d.).

Beyond these official policies on interfaith marriage within modern Jewish streams, however, there is the much less easily defined opinion of the “Jewish community,” which we will explore in the next section. Affiliation with Jewish organizations, particularly synagogues within the main streams of Judaism, has been pinpointed as one of the major factors in decisions by Jews involving assimilation, intermarriage and the Jewish education of their children (Cohen 1998, 2006), but even liberal streams are experiencing difficulty in trying to attract the growing number of unaffiliated Jews and maintain their influence even in the lives of modern affiliated Jews (Cohen 2006). Responses of the religious elite are becoming less influential on American Jews, who are becoming less dependent on inherited roles and received meaning, and more involved in creating moral boundaries for themselves based on their own experiences and needs (Shapiro 2005). Jews, especially the large numbers of unaffiliated Jews, no longer appeal to religious authority as they once did. Now they create a personal Judaism in which they make choices as individuals and do not focus on the “traditional” or historical authenticity of their ethical decisions (Cohen and Eisen 2000), including their selection of potential mates.

The variety in Jewish opinion on intermarriage in both official and non-elite decisions should not surprise anyone familiar with the Jewish tradition of interpretation, especially in the past few centuries when the already vibrant Jewish practice of debate and recording polysemy (cf. Fraade 2007) was combined with the democratization of knowledge and freedom of choice found in modernity. Given that the Torah statutes

lack directness, giving no single and indisputable way to view Jewish-Gentile intermarriage, the Jews have had to rely on rabbinical, philosophical and personal understandings of Law in this area, which has left much room for differing interpretations that reflect the needs and sentiments of the times. Many Jewish opinions on the subject agree that even such a personal activity as choosing intimate relations has immense implications for the whole Jewish community, and, therefore, deserves consideration by every Jewish generation.

### **By the Rivers of Babylon: Intermarriage and the Jewish Experience in America**

Perhaps no recent Jewish community has had as much impact on the creation of the Jewish image than that of America, with the possible exception of the modern State of Israel. From the small numbers of Jews present in the United States in 1654 until the present day, Jews have been both affecting of and affected by America and American values.

The first Jews in North America came with the colonial powers, working as ship labourers or as trades people or merchants.<sup>20</sup> In the late 1600s and 1700s, affluent and traditional Sephardic Jews dominated Jewish life in America, and had grown to more than 2,000 Jews by the time of the American Revolution, joined by small, but wealthy, groups of British Jews who co-existed with the established Sephardic families. The second wave of Jewish emigration to America in the 18th and 19th centuries was comprised of German Jews from the wealthier trades and professions, as well as

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<sup>20</sup> The first fully settled communities were Sephardic Jews of Spanish or Portuguese decent, who came to America via the Dutch or British colonial expansion, especially from Brazil and Amsterdam where so many had settled to avoid the Spanish Inquisition. The first such Jewish community was comprised of twenty-three Jews who came to New Amsterdam (later New York) in 1654 (Wenger 2007).

smaller-scale entrepreneurs dreaming of success in the New World.<sup>21</sup> These Jews settled in the largest centres of the time, such as New York and Boston, but also followed their fellow German-speaking groups to those areas famous for German heritage, such as Cincinnati, Ohio, and Pennsylvania (cf. Albanese 1999; Wenger 2007).<sup>22</sup>

The third wave of Jewish emigration to North America was the influx of poor, religiously orthodox Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe in the late 1800s. Between 1881 and 1924, over two million Jews entered the United States from tsarist Russia alone. Fleeing persecution, these Jews came with very few possessions and little formal education, and, though often from rural backgrounds, they tended to flock to the urban Jewish districts, particularly in New York City, Chicago, Toronto, and Montreal. This new glut of Yiddish-speaking Orthodox Jews found themselves incongruent with the more established, affluent and assimilated Jewish communities of the earlier waves of emigration, so they gathered in their own *schuls* and community organizations, leading to a greater number of Jewish charitable organizations, especially those to help newcomers. Further, these Jews would become highly politicized, helping to start trade unions and workers' associations to improve the horrid conditions they often endured in urban sweat shops of the New World (Sanders 1988; Joselit 1996; Albanese 1999; Wenger 2007). The onset of World War II and the Holocaust in Europe did not see an

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<sup>21</sup> These German-speaking, integrated Jews of Enlightenment Europe embraced modern European lifestyles, including contemporary fashions and secular education, and these practices allowed them to flourish in mainstream businesses.

<sup>22</sup> In America's colonial period the Jewish population was relatively small, with only 1300 to 1500 people by 1790 (Pencak 2002). At this time, there were but three options open to most young Jews – import a bride or groom from Europe, remain chaste or marry outside the Jewish community, as the local Jewish community was starting to become too close, relationally, to produce viable mates. While those rich enough did seek partners in the European marriage market, and many did remain unmarried, the number of Jews marrying Christians sharply increased in this era, with the intermarriage rate climbing to as high as 10 or 15 percent. After the immigration boom from Russia, however, intermarriage numbers fell dramatically, as there was certainly no shortage of Jewish mates in the New World at the time, and the eastern Jews who came in the late 1800s and early 1900s were not as able to mingle in the Gentile world as their British, Sephardic and upper class German co-religionists (Wenger 2007).



increase in Jewish emigration to America, as the general anti-Semitic atmosphere in America, and the resulting quotas on immigration, subsequently limited Jewish emigration during the time Jews most needed a safe haven (cf. Sanders 1988).

In post-war America the economic boom, combined with the GI Bill, led to the massive Jewish migration out of the urban centres and into the suburbs across America (away from the east coast), as popular anti-Semitism deflated and allowed further access to success for Jews in North America (Heilman 1995; Moore 1996; Diamond 2000; Brodtkin 1999). While Jewish emigration is often seen as a thing of the past, Jewish newcomers continue to arrive, not only from Russia, but from the Middle East, Africa and Asia (cf. Sanders 1988). This diasporic geographical and cultural diversity continues to broaden and refresh the Jewish presence in North America, changing ideas and traditions within the Jewish communities of America and abroad. Judaism, as a religion, has had to adapt. While it has long since been managing as a religion in diaspora, never before has it had to deal with such a mingling of global Jewish cultures. Conversion, inclusion, exclusion, ritual, identity and the role of Israel have all been affected by nearly four centuries of Jewish activity in the New World.

Throughout the Jewish presence in the New World intermarriage was a significant issue for Jewish families, often greeted with fear and hostility. When a young Jewish man interviewed by Roy Baber in 1937 brought his non-Jewish wife home to his parents hoping to bring about a reconciliation with his outraged conservative family, they turned the couple out of the house, telling the girl, “You are responsible for the death of our son!” (Baber 1937:713) Though now a rather infamous practice with vague evidence, the Jews during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were reported as

mourning children who entered into mixed marriages as if they were dead (Baber 1937; Lawler 1992; Joselit 1996; Eisenberg 2004), sitting *shiva* (the ritual mourning period) for them, saying the *kaddish* prayer, and even, reportedly, burying coffins full of earth in their place. While such practices are no longer common, such sentiment has become a dominant image in films representing parental dismay over intermarriage. The sight of Laurence Olivier in *The Jazz Singer* (1980) playing the distraught Jewish father of a son who had moved in with a Gentile girlfriend as he rends his coat over his heart and says “I *haff* no son!” has become something of an iconic representation of Jewish over-reaction to the loss of a child to intermarriage or interfaith romance. This image does seem to be based in actual practice of first generation American Jewish immigrants, and occasionally continues to come up, as seen by the interesting property case heard before the Illinois Northern District Court in September 2008, *Taylor v. Feinberg* (no. 1:2008cv05588), in which an intermarried descendent filed suit against the estate of Max and Erla Feinberg, who had stipulated in their will that

A descendent of mine other than a child of mine who marries outside the Jewish faith (unless the spouse of such descendent has converted or converts within one year of the marriage to the Jewish faith) and his or her descendents shall be deemed to be deceased for all purposes of this instrument as of the date of such marriage (quoted in Hirschfield 2009, n.p.).

The court deemed the instructions, which have become known as “the Jewish clause,” were invalid, as it conflicted with the state’s policy of non-discrimination. The court also found that such clauses, if allowed to stand, would limit the individual’s right to freedom of choice in regards to marriage partner, thereby interfering with the individual’s constitutional right to the pursuit of happiness (Hirschfield 2009).

Despite the image of parental objections that linger in the popular imagination, shifts in individualism and sexual liberation have had enormous effects on the freedom of the individual to choose. During the Civil Rights era the baby boom generation of Jews made significant changes to American society, as well as to the Jewish community. Spurred, in part, by the surprising election of the first Catholic president, religious minority populations were energized in the 1960s, and the popular culture, political activism and changes in sexual attitudes led to a revolution of individualism over conformity, as the last vestiges of Cold War repression were targeted by young people who had grown up watching the McCarthy trials. The making of sexuality and intimate identities public in the late 1960s, the renewed interest in projecting multiple ethnic identities over the drive towards assimilation, and the rise of Jewish feminism are all trends of the 1960s and 1970s that have changed the way American Jews have conceptualized intermarriage.

Prior to the 1960s, intermarriage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was fairly uncommon, but in the 1970s and after the rate has been climbing. Egon Mayer (1985) describes the change of this era as the culmination of a transformation of marriage in America. Among the traditional Jews of the Old World marriage was a way to live up to the communal responsibility to procreate and preserve the community (i.e. to go forth and multiply), but post-WWII generations have reformulated marriage as a means of expressing individual romantic desires. When the goal of marriage was the creation of Jewish children, the taboo against intermarriage was firm, but when the goal of marriage changed to the desire for fulfilling sexual and romantic relations, modern Jews required the freedom of choice evident in the post-1960s generations (Lazerwitz et al 1998).

Further, the freedom of sexual, romantic and marital choice made such decisions part of one's individual creation of the self, perhaps inspiring generations to make choices expressly contrary to their elders' wishes, as a way to illustrate their liberation. Choice of mate was no longer a matter of community utility, but of personality.

There was a sudden opening of sexuality experienced in the generations after the 1950s, particularly in the fetishization of Gentile females as seen in the writings of male Jewish-American authors of the era such as Philip Roth. While parents feared the Gentile female, or *shikse*, as a symbol of the temptations their sons would face in the world, their sons seemed to figure her obsessively in their art (Jaher 1983). What was once a symbol of all that was dangerous and unattainable in American life was now becoming sexually accessible through the progress of promiscuity in mainstream society. The sexual experimentation of the decade may have manifested itself in intercultural encounters as a way to explore new boundaries, as well as to express a new post-Holocaust view of success and Jewish masculinity.

However, it is likely that more pragmatic environmental conditions of Jewish life after World War II played a greater role in the increased intermarriage of those decades. Other factors in the rise of intermarriage rates likely include the move of increasingly prosperous Jewish families to non-urban and more integrated locations (Brodkin 1999; Diamond 2000), as well as the availability of secular education. For a twenty year old man who had been raised in the suburbs of Baltimore or New Haven, familiar with commonplace interaction with Gentiles and the perception of equality, the fears and conservatism of his parents, who had been raised in an all-Jewish

neighbourhood in New York City, were completely foreign. Such situations repeatedly played out in the generations since WWII, and, as Alan Dershowitz (1997) says,

It always amuses me to hear expressions of *surprise* from parents who have chosen to live in non-Jewish neighborhoods, to send their children to non-Jewish high schools and camps, to have mostly non-Jewish friends, and to minimize Jewish observances, when their children marry non-Jews. (Emphasis in original; 173)

All of these factors certainly had a large impact on recent generations, as is reflected in statistics of popular opinions from the American Jewish community, which continues to embrace intermarriage in increasing numbers. While the rate of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage in America stayed around 2% for the period of 1900 to 1920 (Zeder 2005), between 1984 and 1989 the intermarriage rate was roughly half of adult American Jews who marry (Fishman 2004; Phillips 2005).<sup>23</sup> In the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), 33% of all male respondents and 29% of all females were married to non-Jews, with the percentages being higher in the younger bracket than in the over 50 years range.<sup>24</sup> The 2000-01 NJPS also showed that the offspring of intermarried couples were, as adults, much more prone to marry outside of the Jewish community (Fishman 2004). In sum, we have now reached the point where more Jews marry Gentiles than other Jews, a trend which is not likely to reverse.

The attitudes of Jewish Americans reflect the fact that intermarriage is now common, with more Jews being accepting of the practice than before, even while some tension remains. The 2000 American Jewish Committee's (AJC) Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion reported that half of those surveyed would not be "pained" to

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<sup>23</sup> Depending on the definitions used, the number could have been as low as 43% or as high as 52% (Fishman 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Of Jews 25-49 years of age, 40% of males and 40% of females were married to Gentiles, with 27% of males, and 19% of females in the over-50 range (NJPS 2000-01).

discover their child was planning on marrying a Gentile, and half of the Jews surveyed believed it was racist to oppose intermarriage. While 12% of the AJC survey respondents did say they strongly opposed intermarriage, more of those asked (16%) actually said they felt intermarriage was a positive phenomenon. These surveys might reflect a decrease in the perceived role of religious tradition in defining Jewish communal boundaries, as nearly 70% of AJC respondents felt that the conversion of the Gentile partner – traditionally the only response to intermarriage other than rejecting it altogether – was not the most desirable solution to the religious difference (Eden 2000, n.p.; Fishman 2004). In contrast to this apparent move away from conservative ideas about intermarriage, however, 70% of those surveyed by the AJC in 2000 still thought it was the Jewish community’s “obligation to urge Jews to marry other Jews,” despite the fact that 80% felt that intermarriage is inevitable, which suggests the respondents felt that the encouragement of endogamy was something of a lost cause. The *Forward* (Eden 2000) quotes David Singer, head of AJC’s research department, as believing that consistency is not always to be expected from people’s opinions, but that the survey does show a marked overall tendency amongst American Jews to accept the reality of intermarriage, and a willingness to make accommodations for it. The 2000 AJC survey was, it seems, the last year the committee surveyed American Jews about their opinion on intermarriage, as the issues of Israel and political controversies seemed to take higher priority ([www.ajc.org](http://www.ajc.org)).

### **The Issue of Intermarriage for Non-Religious Jews**

There is a question about intermarriage and the representation of a traditional Jewish community has always been problematic for me. Why, in *Fiddler on the Roof*, did Tevye protest more over one of his daughters marrying a local Russian Orthodox farmer than he did over his other daughter marrying a Communist from Kiev, who, though educated in Judaism as a child, had forsaken religion for a political ideology that was inherently anti-religion? What was it about the fact that Perchik was “born Jewish” while Fyedka was not that made marrying the latter a more sinful act than the former? Was not the end result the same – would not both young families be outside the traditions of Judaism? Other film examples I will cover in subsequent chapters, such as Woody Allen’s “Oedipus Wrecks” (1989), display parents or family members who object to romances between Jews and Gentiles though they seemingly have no strong religious identity. These paradoxical concerns problematize the centrality of religion to the intermarriage debate for Jews. Clearly, there is more than religion occurring in these stories.

Thus, it is not advisable to limit a discussion of intermarriage to just Judaism. Within liberal Jewish religious organizations, there has been a recent trend towards de-emphasizing the cultural or ethnic dimension of Jewish practice, in favour of more universal, Protestant-like faith and moral values, as opposed to the daily habits of particularist Jewish communities.<sup>25</sup> However, when a Jew who has no religious leanings

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<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Sarna (1995) claims that the declining role of “traditional” Jewish cultural practice or lifestyle is having a strange effect in synagogues, as Jewish groups shift the focus from cultural/ethnic traditions to purely religious tenets in an effort to be more inclusive to observers and to converts. This trend, he argues, is counter-productive, as the decreasing emphasis on traditional Jewish cultural habits is making Judaism less lasting for converts, and he fears that continuing this practice will lead to a number of one-generation Jews, whose children do not carry on with the adopted faith of their parent. Frida Kerner Furman (1987) has also shown that modern attempts within liberal Judaism to universalize Judaism away from the particular, sacred understanding of Jewish life has been related to the demystification of Jewish religious identity. Likewise, this demystification of identity must affect non-religious Jews even further.

wishes to express his or her heritage/identity, is it often to these very culture-bound sources of community affiliations that the secular Jew will appeal (cf. Heilman 1995). One of the wonders of American life is that one can be a member of a group traditionally considered an ethnoreligious group without an affiliation to a religious stream or a personal connection to a faith. Yet, it would be a mistake to undervalue these connections of heritage simply because they lack religious devotion. In this section, I will discuss other ways of understanding Jewishness, aside from religion, in which I will root the definition of Jewishness in ethnic identity, particularly through shared historical or cultural solidarity, despite liberal attempts to universalize the Jewish experience. First, however, I will discuss several problematic ways in which Jewishness has been defined outside the connection with religious faith. Currently, the most common modern definition of a Jew is to be found in religious affiliation, as this avoids uncomfortable links with the recent past, particularly the genocidal mandate of the Nazis – it is far easier in liberal society, in which “race” is known to be a social construction and not a biological fact, to identify people by their beliefs or testimonies than by their “blood.” While more comfortable, this designation is clearly not adequate to describe a community that is not equally committed to Judaism across the spectrum of membership (Heilman 1995).

Zionists often appeal to the concept of “nation,” through which all people with a shared origin in Israel can claim a spot in the community, often regardless of religious

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This loss of sacred identity has forced Jews to find their own ideas of Jewishness, though often with the help of Jewish institutions who are mindful of the need to keep the identity strong despite this new lack of fixed cultural character. This process is also seen within intermarried families attempting to make Judaism a religion and not a birthright, so as to avoid upsetting the child or partner by excluding non-Jews from the discussion (Dashefsky 2008). Parents might not be passing down Judaism, or Jewishness, in a way that will stick with their mixed-heritage children, in part because they have left out the folkways that once encased the teachings of Judaism.



identity. The understanding of the Jews as a nation supports Zionist claims to the Jewish ancestral homeland, as well as allowed Jews prior to 1946 and the creation of the current State of Israel to reject notions of the landless (and therefore powerless or homeless) Jew (Gordis 1966). Yet, since the creation of the State of Israel, and its “Law of Return,” we can see how legal jurisprudence can fall short of the modern ideal of secular government. The Law’s definition for what gives a person the ability to claim sanctuary in the Jewish state is “a person born of a Jewish mother or how has become converted to Judaism, and who is not a member of another religion” (quoted in Rabinowitz 1997:294). Thus, Zionism in the official form espoused by the Israeli government, has failed in some respects to offer a way of viewing Jewish communal boundaries without religion. While they have made allowances for ancestral lineage, even this is rooted in the Orthodox religious view that Jewish descent is matrilineal (Cohn-Sherbok 1996). In many conceptions, the idea of Jews as a single nation must ultimately rely on the acceptance of the bible as history, as biblical times were the last era in which the Jews were collected in a single region. Though the significance of Israel as the locus of Jewish origin is not often disputed, many concepts of Jewishness are still tied to aspects of sacred legend far more religious in nature than provenance, such as the meaning of being present at the revelation at Sinai and the setting aside of the Jews as a holy people through the covenant. Clearly, such concepts give us no relief from the use of religion in understanding Jewish membership boundaries. Yet, history without religion, such as more scientific scholarly modes of defining peoplehood, such as language groupings or cultural practices, also do not work for a group as diverse as

the Jews, having had multiple locations of historical development in the past 3000 – 2000 years (Gordis 1966).

Instead, understanding Jewish membership markers for non-religious Jews resides in understanding Jewishness as an ethnic identity, which is neither definable by legal statute nor verifiable through ritual tradition. Rather, as Frederick Barth (1969) noted, group boundaries are often expressed through things such as biology or religious tradition only because they appear more firm compared to ethnic identities, which are notoriously hard to pin down. As we saw with Woody Allen in the introduction, ethnic identity is not a standard, fixed thing, through which a person lives consistently, nor is it something that can be easily erased by transitory ideology or through interaction with other ethnic groups. In fact, for Barth, ethnic identity is something that is often defined and maintained through contact with other people, either those who one recognizes as a member of one's group or outsiders, and can become portable through migration. Ethnic identity, essentially, is a way of organizing experience. Through it, we each organize boundaries and identities, as well the history of ourselves and our families (Barth 1969). In using this concept of ethnicity, I also find the narrative theory of the self useful. That is, despite modern understandings of the self as composed of a series of individual choices, humans often consider/understand/construct the events of our life to be parts of one long narrative, and many of us see the beginning of this story reaching back before we are born, and not ending with our immediate death (McIntyre 1984; McAdams 1997). As such, ethnic identity helps us organize our life story in relation to those of others, as well as helps us understand ourselves and our behaviours/values (Barth 1969).

This is not to say that Barth (1969) is advocating a completely free form understanding of ethnicity. Though ethnic boundaries are flexible and permeable, this flexibility may make it even more essential to have some identifiable core of custom that members can enact for their identity. For non-religious Jews, this core may be found in cultural product or home-based practice and regular habits that do not constitute religious rituals (cf. Ravvin 2005) but are close descendents of the *minhag* (“customs”) of one of the main Jewish cultural groups (predominantly Ashkenazi/European or Sephardic/ Spanish, in America). For Barth (1969), the core characteristics of an ethnic group aren’t necessarily religious, but must be based on a strong perception of cultural difference, must contain some feeling that these cultural differences are more or less standard within the group, and have some stability. For non-religious Jews, aspects of Jewish cultural heritage, though influenced by the changing locations and conditions of their history, may seem to meet these criteria. Certain foods, for example, or specific ways of understanding charity or empathy, for some, would seem to provide a feeling of group togetherness that has transcended place and ritual.

Himmelfarb et al (1983: 252) established a useful breakdown of Jewish attitudes and activities in which Jewishness, or feelings of Jewish identity and solidarity, can be measured without relying strictly on religious faith. For their study, Jewish characteristics were broken down into seven criteria:

1. Devotional (level of observance)
2. Associational (organizational participation)
3. Fraternal (community or informal connections with other Jews)
4. Ideological (particularly support for the State of Israel)

5. Intellectual (knowledge of Jewish history or literature)
6. Esthetic (the enjoyment of Jewish art or media)
7. Affectional (attitudes and emotions regarding the Jews as a people)

Thus, this system allows scholars of Jewish ethnic practice to move away from privileging the opinions of religious or affiliated Jews, and allows for more aspects than faith alone as modes of Jewish self-expression.<sup>26</sup> This criteria structure is of particular interest in the study of recent Jewish representations in Hollywood cinema, as the majority of the Jewish characters looked at in this work are not identifiable according to their faith or religious attendance, but, rather, through the enacting of distinct Jewish behaviours, cultural practices or historical preoccupations, as we will see.

The question now is how this non-religious Jewish membership understanding relates to intermarriage. In 1998, a *LA Times* poll completed in concert with *Yedioth Ahronoth*, a major Israeli newspaper, showed that the more religiously involved a Jew was in terms of affiliation and regularity of official participation, and the less liberal their Jewish affiliation was the less likely the Jewish respondent was to answer favourably to questions of intermarriage (Pinkerton 1998). That is, the less specifically religious a Jew was the more likely they would be to accept a non-Jewish spouse or daughter- or son-in-law. Intermarried Jews were also recorded as resting less of their total personal identity in their Jewish heritage than non-intermarried Jews, who were predominantly religiously affiliated (Pinkerton 1998). These are hardly surprising findings and are supported by surveys cited earlier in this chapter. Because the numbers of unaffiliated or secular Jews seem to be rising (Heilman 1995; Pinkerton 1998; Cohen

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<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, in the 1983 study, the more individualized the participation the more common the answer, making the enjoyment of Jewish art and media the most common characteristic of Jewish identity (Himmelfarb et al 1983).

and Eisen 2000), it is improbable that the numbers of intermarriages will decline any time soon.

Yet, the 1998 survey does not give a picture of a Jewish decline in all aspects (Pinkerton 1998). While fewer Jews believe in God, well over half of the intermarried Jews were transmitting some form of Jewish culture to their children, and 70% of Jews surveyed in the 1998 poll were still concerned about anti-Semitism, even in the United States where they believed Jews were safer than ever before, which suggests a strong concern for the Jews as a minority community. Even more interesting given the decline in official Jewish participation levels, while a mere 37% of Jews over 36 years of age in 1998 stated that they felt the Jews should remain a distinct group, 49% of all respondents under the age of 36 expressed a desire to remain culturally distinct. More than half of those under the age of 29 favoured distinct cultural identity over assimilation, at 57% (Pinkerton 1998). These numbers, though informal, give some interesting clues as to the ways in which a largely non-religious Jewish American population perceive their group boundaries and expression. While they may not see intermarriage or religious affiliation as central to their identity, more and more Jews may be focusing on cultural product for a sense of solidarity with other Jews, in accordance with Barth's assertion that groups living amongst other ethnic groups need to feel a stable distinctiveness in order to maintain their identity boundaries (1969). While this does not result in many non-religious Jews expressing a concern over intermarriage (Pinkerton 1998), it might account for some of the increased representation of Jewish-Gentile difference in intermarriage film over the past few decades, insofar as paying

audiences might be more receptive to films reinforcing the image of the Jew as distinct, even as religious identity is in decline.

While it has been argued that liberal society lacks a defining moral core to which members can appeal in order to create a stable and meaningful identity and ethical position (Taylor 2003; cf. Klapp 1969), history/culture and shared experience may have become that core for secular Jews. This ethnic dimension of Jewish identity, as expressed through cultural “folkways” rather than through the maintenance of a faith-based understanding of membership, is likely to be of more importance for non-religious Jews who rely on familial socialization for their connection with their Jewish identity (cf. Sarna 1995; Heilman 1995).<sup>27</sup> Religious or not, Jewishness is often connected with a recurring awareness of history or of culture, even if on a consumerist level, such as a preference for certain foods, enjoying art/literature they see as Jewish, or through that of various performative/behavioural stereotypes or values (cf. Himmelfarb et al 1983; Heilman 1995; Pinkerton 1998; Cohen and Eisen 2000; Ravvin 2005; Bial 2005).

This nebulous non-religious, cultural/ethnic Jewish identity is the most apparent form of Jewishness in the film analyses that follows. Very little consideration for the transmission of tradition is evident in the film Jews who seek romance outside their

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<sup>27</sup> As a side note, this shared Jewish history has many problems for global Jewish solidarity, as the popular image of Jewish shared history and culture in American media is often found in the minority, yet higher-profile, Ashkenazi stream of Jewishness, from Eastern or Western Europe. Without the shared concerns of faith and a sacred identity reaching back further than the Russian pogroms and the Holocaust, the very unity of the Jewish community across the spectrum of experience may be in even further peril than it already is. That is, if the significant shared experience of the Holocaust is a foundational marker of Jewish identity, what does one do to make connections with Jews outside this experience, such as Ethiopian, Iranian or Yemenite Jews? The hegemony of Ashkenazi Jewish expression in the media image of the American Jew is a continuing problem in the face of growing Jewish diversity, and can only get worse as the community boundaries get decreasingly demystified while the Jews still require some means by which to define themselves (cf. Buber 1950; Mol 1976).

community. Instead, as we will see in subsequent chapters, in such films Jewishness is most often visible through the obstacles such a difference and historical legacy presents for the Jewish-Gentile couples' ability to understand each other. Perhaps expressing a concern for the practicality of intermarriage some of the films we shall look at, such as Woody Allen's influential *Annie Hall*, presents a society in which Jews are free (or even encouraged) to choose a mate outside their birth community, but one in which Jewish difference, or distinctiveness, is a surprisingly obstinate obstacle to the sustainability of Jewish-Gentile couplings.

### **Is Intermarriage Still an Issue?**

Jewish leaders and commentators have opinions along a spectrum from optimistic to pessimistic about the meanings of intermarriage in America. To many, Jewish-Gentile intermarriage seems to be a natural progression of the Jewish journey into modernity, as if "America's promises are dramatically symbolized and fulfilled by marriage across boundaries..." (Fishman 2004:1). In many liberal eyes, intermarriage is a way to weed xenophobia out of the Jewish community as the introduction of respected Gentile members to a family lowers ancient barriers (Sheldon 1991; Fishman 2004). Such interpretations choose to see intermarriage not as sign of assimilation, but as a testimony to the unprecedented freedom and tolerance enjoyed in America. Others point to the possibility that intermarriage may actually be the saving grace for Jews in America, as Jewish birthrates are low and emigration has dwindled, so the influx of Gentiles to the community can literally double the number of Jewish communities (Fein 1971; cf. Fishman 2004). Taking into account that the percentage of Jews converting to

Christianity due to intermarriage is significantly lower now than it was a hundred years ago, this optimism might be well placed, but only if, as Fishman (2004) counters, the Gentile partners convert and their children are raised with strong Jewish identities.

So, if American Jews are becoming increasingly comfortable with intermarriage, and more and more Jews are intermarrying, why still discuss intermarriage? While arguments against intermarriage are often stigmatized as antiquated and repressive, there are numerous Jews in America still concerned about the rising rates of exogamy. Some claim that, instead of into Christianity, Jews are now falling into religious and cultural apathy with intermarriage, and some “regard mixed marriage as symptomatic of a cultural malaise that may weaken American Jewish vitality” (Fishman 2004:8). There are a number of themes raised by Jewish leaders and conservatives to express their disapproval of intermarriage. For the sake of brevity, I will discuss only three possible negative views of intermarriage: first, that the romantic pursuit of happiness is a mirage, second, that the children born to intermarriage – despite the ways in which intermarried Jews claim to be maintaining their identity – will not sustain a Jewish heritage, and, third, that intermarriage is a form of assimilation over time that represents an extermination of the Jews in a silent Final Solution fuelled by love instead of hate (cf. Zeder 2005).

### *Chronic Dissatisfaction: The Stability of Interfaith Marriage*

It is a fairly popular consensus among sociologists and family psychologists that endogamous marriages are less likely to end in divorce than are intermarriages, and that marital dissatisfaction increases for couples in the “opposites attract” category



(Bumpass and Sweet 1972; Lazerwitz 1981; Gleckman and Streicher 1990; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993; Eaton 1994; Sussman and Alexander 1999; Chinitz and Brown 2001; Fishman 2004). Also, despite what Hollywood would have us believe, romantic marriages that cross barriers also tend to score low on marital happiness and satisfaction ratings (Mayer and Sheingold 1979; Glenn 1982; Sherkat 2004). The statistics and numbers vary in different studies, but Sylvia Barack Fishman's conclusion from the 2000-01 NJPS and American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) of 2001 indicates that the marriages of intermarried couples are "three times more likely to end in divorce as families in which both parents share the same faith" (2004:44). The 2000-01 AJS reported that, for whatever reason, the divorce rate for intermarried couples was at 50%, while the divorce rate for endogamous couples may be as low as 20% (Chinitz and Brown 2001).

This is not to say, however, that divorce is inevitable in intermarried families or that they are especially troubled. Chinitz and Brown (2001) agreed that more religious disagreement in the household does make for more conflict, which does contribute to greater instability, but they also note that inmarriage does not guarantee marital satisfaction, either, and remind us that even partners of the same faith can have disagreements over deeply held religious views. Indeed, their studies indicate that the actual affiliation of the marriage partners has less to do with marriage stability than the level of agreement on Jewish subjects, which cannot be predicted based on religious category alone. Others point out that religious differences do not have to harm the relationship, as long as communication between the two remains respectful and a meaningful dialogue is allowed to flourish in the family (cf. Gottman 1999; Eaton

2004). Marital success may be less about difference than the way the partners relate to one another. For some couples, religion is what John Gottman (1999) terms a “perpetual problem” – or a recurring issue that remains a bone of contention between the couple that fades and crops up regularly. However, he also points out that most couples have these. For Gottman, it is the communication, not the difference, which needs changing.

Of course, most couples would say that they realized this when they got married (cf. Strauber 1998; Fishman 2004), so why are so few managing to get past their problems? Part of this might be found in the construction of romance itself in modern life. Andrew Cherlin (2004) has described the ways in which marriage has changed since WWII, including the increased valuation of happiness and emotional satisfaction in marriage over the traditional values of function and community, which coincides with the rise and dominance of individualism in American society. Thus, “love matches” came to imaginative power in the 1950s, surpassing more traditional views of marriage partner selection. Cohen and Eisen (2000) describe how the “sovereign self” is now in charge of personal and spiritual matters leading to a personalist ethos in which the individual is “focused on the self and its fulfillment, rather than directed outward to the group” (36). More than just mere narcissism, this trend is actually a result of people replacing community with voluntary associations, particularly those with lovers or partners, as a forum of identity construction. Instead of seeking stability within the community, people now seek lasting self-designed communing with a romantic partner. As a result, the trend in popular culture of idealizing the self and the partner in personal romantic vision leads to a crisis when dealing with the more mundane realities of a marriage. Marriages become places in which we must balance our contrary desires for

thrilling passion with that of familiarity and acceptance, which is a balance that might be impossible to strike for some couples (Goldbart and Wallen 1990).

Naturally, this condition is not confined to Jewish/Gentile couples, but those who have taken such a step away from community ideals and traditional conformity may be more prone to take a personalist position that limits the amount of time they are willing to work on a relationship that is not as satisfying as their personal ideal. Having replaced community consensus with the sovereign self, the act of resisting divorce and preserving the functionality of marriage beyond personal happiness no longer has the power over these couples as it did over their grandparents. It is important to note that the divorce rate for intermarried couples is about the same as the national average in the United States, and that the divorce rate for endogamous couples just happens to be well below the national average (Chinitz and Brown 2001). However, ARIS 2001 showed that all mixed marriages – even those between people belonging to different branches of Christianity – were more likely to end in divorce, so the data and theory does seem to indicate that there is a good deal of stability present in community-sanctioned inmarriage that is lacking in self-directed intermarriage for love (Fishman 2004).

*The Holy Seed: The Children Born to Interfaith Marriage.*

The obligation to raise their children as Jews may be one of the most sacred adult responsibilities in Judaism (Deuteronomy 6.6-7). A largely home-based and family-centered religion, post-Temple Judaism has always had an intense interest in the production, education and raising of Jewish children. The issue of intermarriage is intimately connected with this traditional concern. Aside from issues of assimilation,

the basic statistical fact of the low birthrate amongst Jews in America is cause to predict lower Jewish population numbers as time passes, and the fact that the birthrate for intermarried Jews may be even lower than for endogamous Jewish couples makes the increasing rate of intermarriage even more significant in considering the Jewish future in America (Schneider 1989; cf. Dershowitz 1997; cf. Lazerwitz et al 1998). Even if these couples all raise their offspring as Jews, they are still having fewer children, and more intermarried couple homes will result in fewer and fewer children born to the American Jewish community every year. Perhaps one of the greatest issues in the intermarriage debate, however, is the Jewishness of the subsequent generations and the correct way to bring up the children of such matches has been a matter of much discussion (Dershowitz 1997; Fishman 2004).

There are no clear answers to be found in statistical data on this issue. Not surprisingly, 97% of endogamous Jewish couples responding to the 2000 NJPS reported rearing their children exclusively in the Jewish faith. In contrast, it also recorded that fewer than half of intermarried couples reported that Judaism was the only religion in which their children were being raised, as some intermarried couples opt to raise their children in the faiths of both parents (Fishman 2004). A more recent study of intermarriage done by Arnold Dashefsky (2008), however, found that the majority of intermarried Jews wanted to raise their children exclusively Jewish, feeling that dual religious systems present in the home would be confusing for the children. With the 20% who did report that both religions had a role in their home, they tended to focus on the commonalities between the religions.<sup>28</sup> The work of Dashefsky and his researchers showed that 72% of the survey group reported raising their children as Jews, and that

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<sup>28</sup> Only 8% responded that their children were being raised as Christians.

intermarried couples tended to be more observant at home than the national sample. Intermarried parents were also more likely than average to make a particular effort to raise their children with Jewish elements, such as choosing Jewish stories to read to their children more often over secular books. They also found that, for Jews, the decision to intermarry was rarely taken lightly, and child rearing was an important issue that they considered and discussed while deciding to marry their Gentile spouse.

Community concerns expressed over the next generations of Jews remaining Jewish cannot be assuaged solely by efforts on the part of intermarried couples to introduce the religion to their children, as the long term effects of such an upbringing must also be considered. Will these children be Jewish as adults, and what of their children? The 2000-2001 NJPS found that the offspring of intermarried couples were much more prone to marrying non-Jews (Fishman 2004), and the percentage of such offspring grows every year. Therefore, every generation creates a new “potential dropout cohort” of young Jews who will simply not retain their weakened ties to Judaism (Frideres 1973:155). Over half of the NJPS respondents born after 1982 were the product of intermarriage, representing more than 1,300 people (Phillips 2005). Of those offspring of intermarriages between the ages of 25 and 49 years of age, 79% were married to Gentiles and 61% say they do not identify as Jews. Fifty-three percent of the offspring of mixed couples between the ages of 25 and 49 say they are not raising their children as Jews.

Jews who have married Gentiles have several options regarding child rearing – they can choose not to have children, they can raise their children as Jews, they can raise them in the religion of their partner, they can raise them in a third option (such as

New Age, cf. Rose 2001), raise them in both religions, or raise them in no religion in a secular home. Within these options, there are so many big and little decisions to be made. Will the sons get circumcised, and will the children celebrate a bar/bat mitzvah? What holidays will be observed, and how does one negotiate those decisions not only with the partner, but with extended family (Horowitz 1999)? Further, the Jewish partner must be prepared, if they have decided to raise the child within Judaism, to be the authority in that area (Sheldon 1991; Fishman 2004).

Most studies no longer assert overwhelmingly grave concerns over the health and well-being of children in mixed families. There have been studies who argued that intermarried homes are essentially dysfunctional (Hoge and Ferry 1981), or that they negatively affected children psychologically (cf. Yogev and Jamshi 1983). One observer (Zanden 1963) claimed that the ambiguity in the child's divided loyalties created an ambivalent and disquieted mind in the child, leading to temperamental moodiness and irrational behaviour issues. It is also the case that many people in both the Gentile and Jewish communities feel that mixed marriages are hard on children (Frideres 1973; Gittelsohn 1983; Yogev and Jamshi 1983; Kosmin and Lachman 1993). Several studies, however, have found no basis to the idea that the offspring of mixed couples are in significant mental or physical distress (Frideres 1973; Yogev and Jamshi 1983), aside from some concerns over possible identity issues as the child moves into adolescence (Friederes 1973). In contrast, other studies suggest that children will adapt with ease to whatever is presented as normal in their homes, as they are much less concerned with interfaith identities than are the adults around them (cf. Fishman 2004;

Dashefsky 2008), and can grow into healthy adults who feel free to acknowledge their heritage in constructive and positive ways (Spickard 1992).

Nevertheless, the well-being of these children can still be a concern for the Jewish community in ways other than their immediate health. Most studies and surveys agree that couples facing intermarriage should, and normally do, take the time to discuss how they will raise the children (Eaton 1994; Dashefsky 2008; cf. Fishman 2004). Despite this care, many studies show that concerns over the religion of the children are a cause of great tension in interfaith marriages (Bumpass and Sweet 1972; Mayer and Sheingold 1979; Glenn 1982; Lawler 1992; Eaton 1994; Strauber 1998; Fishman 2004; Dashefsky 2008), despite the fact that many couples report talking extensively about religious difference in raising their children before getting married and before becoming parents (Fishman 2004; Dashefsky 2008). The reason these talks seem to fail to resolve this tension is, as Michael Lawler (1992:184) so correctly identifies, a matter of “hypothetical” versus “real” children. Hypothetically, a Gentile in the excitement of new love, and willing to make pacts with his or her intended Jewish bride or groom, may agree to raising the resulting children completely Jewish, without any incursions from the Gentile’s Christian background, but can he or she be truly ready for what this entails? Seeing the bonds of heritage grow between your spouse and child, of which you are not a part, developing unfamiliar worry over how anti-Semitism may affect your own child, not enjoying holidays with them that were special to you as a child, feeling disenfranchised from your child’s spiritual growth, explaining to your own parents again and again as to why your child cannot have a Christmas tree or an Easter egg hunt, disagreeing with your spouse over such matters – these are all aspects of reality

that cannot be adequately understood at the hypothetical level, and there is no telling when or to what extent the Gentile partner may experience bitterness or remorse over the agreement the pair made (Glenn 1982; Strauber 1998; Fishman 2004; Dashefsky 2008). Thus, agreements made by a young couple about the religious upbringing of a child is likely to be constantly re-evaluated and negotiated, even if, as some couples have done, it has been put in writing (Strauber 1998).<sup>29</sup>

### *Intermarriage: The Silent Holocaust?*

Behind the Jewish concern over intermarriage is the worry that each generation is becoming less dedicated to preserving the Jewish community, and the fear that the destruction that once came at the hands of Gentile oppressors out of hatred is now coming out of love and acceptance, and that Jews themselves are complicit in the possible extinction. If some projections are accurate, and there will only be 1,000,000 to 10,000 Jews left in America by 2076 (Bergman 1977; Dershowitz 1997), this will not be because of large-scale policies against the Jews, but through the very tolerance that turns the Jewish community into Jewish individuals (Dershowitz 1997). A portion of the Jewish leadership and religious elite continue to present intermarriage as a form of non-violent Final Solution, evoking the memory of the Holocaust as a way to promote the importance of Jewish survival and identity to their increasingly liberal and Americanized communities (cf. Novick 2000).

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<sup>29</sup> Jocelyn Strauber (1998) has produced a compelling article on the dangers of intermarital divorce when it comes to agreements over religious upbringing in America. Courts in America cannot take religious affiliation into account during custody hearings, and generally refuse to arbitrate or uphold custody conflicts over religious upbringing agreements, as the American constitution forbids governmental interference in religious matters. Thus, with the common occurrence of divorce, intermarried (and then *interdivorced*) Jewish parents might be finding less and less traction in their desire to raise Jewish children, which seems to constitute a further concern over future Jewish generations.



Ephraim Buchwald, founding-director of the National Jewish Outreach Program, an independent organization created to spread Jewish revival through education and cultural experiences, has been a major populariser of the term “silent Holocaust” for what he sees as the quiet, yet efficient, eradication of the Jewish people in modern times through apathy, mislaid goals and assimilation, as well as a general lack of useful and rigorous Jewish education amongst the unaffiliated and non-observant Jews in the West. Of the recent crisis that he sees, he has said:

There is a Holocaust taking place in America right now. We can't hear it, because there are no barking dogs; we can't see it because there are no goose-stepping Nazi soldiers and no concentration camps; we can't smell it because there are no gas chambers. But the net result is exactly the same. (Buchwald 1992: n.p.)

The comparison made between the Nazi atrocities with the liberal ideal of personal freedom may offend liberal Jews, but this argument does succeed in evoking the sense of urgency conservative Jews feel about the changes the community has undergone in recent years. By failing to transmit Jewish knowledge and identity to subsequent generations, more liberal Jews may be guilty of breaking Emile Fackenheim's now famous 614th commandment that the Jews are never to hand Hitler a posthumous victory. Fackenheim (1978) acknowledged that at no time in history was it as easy for a Jew to not be a Jew, but it is precisely for that reason that Jews must be tenacious in their grasp on Jewish identity and culture, for at no time in history were the small details of life so crucial to Jewish survival as a group. By calling on this ritualized secular opinion, the accusation of “completing Hitler's work” lies behind the warning of the silent Holocaust, which taps into the deeply engrained Jewish tradition of *zakhor* – the

obligation to remember.<sup>30</sup> With the emphasis placed on Holocaust remembrance in even secular Jewish movements, the warning strikes a critical note for a call to action – Jews say “Never Again,” referring to the responsibility to prevent another Hitler, and predictions of a silent Holocaust are designed to remind Jews that loss and invisibility are current threats with consequences similar to Auschwitz.

The charge of the silent Holocaust, aside from carrying significant guilt, mines the Jewish will to remember and act. Even while it may be the cruellest tactic, it may yet be the most effective rhetoric in preventing loss through assimilation, if not in terms of preventing intermarriage than perhaps in reminding Jewish parents that their obligation to raise Jewish children goes beyond their choice of spouse (cf. Sheldon 1991). By creating an image of every Jew being actively engaged in preventing the reoccurrence of the most significant act of annihilation the Jews have experienced in recent history, modern self-appointed protectors of the “Jewish tradition” put each Jew considering intermarriage into the place of either victim or liberator – or even, possibly, perpetrator.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have briefly delineated some of the key issues salient in the development of religious Jewish views on intermarriage according to a sampling of religious literature and authorities over time, as well as described the Jewish experience

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<sup>30</sup> As in other areas, *zakhor* is one place in which even secular Jewish ideals are rooted in the religion of their ancestors – ancient Jews were not commanded to celebrate their holidays, or even to observe them, but to remember them, and in that remembrance make them sanctified. *Zakhor* is not merely a desire or requirement to memorialize, it is an acknowledgement that rituals and memorials themselves do not merely preserve a static record, but inspire lived, visceral response from those looking upon the memorial, a response that re-creates memory every time the viewer remembers, and one that inspires action (Plate 2002).

in America and the current Jewish-American community's response to increasing numbers of intermarried Jews. I have also discussed how intermarriage relates to non-religious Jews. This overview serves to contextualize the following discussion of intermarriage in American film, particularly in the way that many themes in communitarian resistance to liberalism appear to echo the assertions of conservative Jewish leaders from Ezra to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and beyond.

Aside from the influence of religious tradition and of family, there is yet another environmental factor in the continued conversation over intermarriage for Jews in America, and that is the cinema, which will be the focus of this dissertation. One cannot understand the intermarriage debate in America without investigating the ways in which this has played out on screens across the continent, any more than one can understand the cinematic portrayals of intermarriage without investigating the historical and religious aspects of the dilemma that I have presented in this work. In my next chapter, I turn from religious studies to film studies, so that we can look at the other major tradition foundational to film representations of Jewish/Gentile intermarriage narratives – that of the romantic genre tradition in Hollywood film.

## Chapter 2

### **Love Conquers All?: Romance as Genre and Jews as Exceptions**

*They spoil every romance by trying to make it last forever.*  
- Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Romantic films may appear to be mere entertainment that allows audiences to rest from “real life” and take a break from more serious, so-called “message films” (Hampton 2004; McDonald 2007). The surface appearance of simplicity and ideological neutrality might be part of the reason why romantic films garner less academic attention than films with a more serious image in terms of their marketing, critical attention and prestige (McDonald 2007). In addition, the way some critics further demean these films by propagating the misconception that they are inaccessible to men, and are, therefore, strictly “women’s films,” helps limit their stature (McDonald 2007), despite the fact that the myths of love and romance fostered in these films pervade the lives of all genders.

In his article on the state of “True Romance” films, media critic Howard Hampton (2004) expressed many of the worst interpretations of romantic comedies. Calling them “date bait” or “D-movies” (standing for “date movies,” but also containing a less-than-subtle value judgement), he asserts that romantic comedies do nothing more than produce good feelings and provide some escapism for audiences who like them. His major criteria for disregarding romances as important are that they are “programmatically and uninspired,” (31) as well as untrue to the realities of modern life, stating:

In essence, the Date Movie testifies to the unshakable belief that our platonic ideals and chthonic nature can be reconciled in the wink of a demure eye, that chemistry and gravity are the same thing: the benevolent force conquering all obstacles of class/status, physical appearance (within

reason), politics (you know what they say about strange bedfellows), geography, even (or especially) IQ. (Hampton 2004: 31)

Hampton seems to miss the power he bestows on romantic comedies in this description. He is correct in pointing out that many romantic comedies contain repeated elements, such as the central “declaration-of-love-and-contrition” (31) that brings the film’s resolution, as well as the standard “flashforward reassurance that the two will live happily ever after” (31), but he fails to recognize the import of these repeated generic conventions (cf. Lyden 2003). Hampton defeats his own negation of romantic comedies through the very insult he aims against them. Because he feels the beliefs and myths underlying these films are untrue, he neglects the role date movies have in instilling and reaffirming such magical notions as “true love” and “fated coupling” (Krutnik 1990). Hampton’s description of date movies as a smorgasbord of generic elements might have been meant as a critique, but actually points to their method of delivering meaning – audiences pick and choose the elements which resonate most with their own needs and desires, but the parts represent a whole.

At the very least, such films serve to uphold an ideology of consumerist romance and an emphasis on heterosexual love and marriage as signs of maturity (Krutnik 1990; Negra 2006; McDonald 2007), but wrapped in this basic set of ideals is a host of ideological positions on the state of the world and human nature. As scholars have shown with their examinations of jokes and fairy tales (cf. von Franz 1995), the appearance of universality does not absolve a film from its ideological meaning, no matter how entertaining they might be. Like fairy tales, romantic films are replete with archetypes and messages. Further, the construction of these films as pure entertainment, and the genre’s disarming reputation, may make them even more effective as delivery

systems for Hollywood's ideology of romance, because people are vulnerable when they seek relaxation and escape. If one problematizes the familiar genre, we begin to see it as a trove of meaning (McDonald 2007).

It is the message and meaning in these seemingly shallow films that I will discuss, and this chapter explores the resonance and standards of the romantic genre, as well as exposes temporal and societal concerns behind trends in romantic films. I will then consider how the presence of Jewish characters in these films can change the meaning and transgress some of Hollywood's most sacred myths.

### **Love and Romance as Categories of Imagination**

Romantic love, also known as *eros* (as well as Venus, cf. Lewis 1960), after the Greek god of male love and the act of falling in love, has many faces and meanings. It has the modern connotation of an exclusive, intimate relationship between two individuals, who, through this love, long for the unity and desire of an eternal monogamous partnership (Fromm 2006 [1956]). Infused with passion, magnetism and desire above rationality, romantic love has a tempestuous nature, though it is often the more tender aspects which are the focus of contemporary celebrations of love. This prioritizing of love's more tranquil dimensions is necessary because the idea that erotic love is sweeping, intense and passionate is inherently in contradiction with the belief that it is also enduring and eternal – the insistence that love is built through and on desire seems to refute the emphasis we also place on monogamy as the ideal situation (Wexman 1993). This dissonance between passion and stability lies at the heart of how romance has been constructed in the modern imagination.

Some form of emotion corresponding to what we call love is to be found in nearly every culture on earth (Giddens 1992). Love and romance, however, while having the appearance of natural phenomena, are, in fact, culturally constructed and their characters are highly dependent on their socio-historical contexts (Campbell 1988). Romance as we know it is a product of the modern age with more roots in medieval European art than in the biological need to reproduce. Writers in the 11<sup>th</sup> century continued to portray love as an offspring of lust, and a form of sinful madness (Lewis 1936; Giddens 1992), mainly because marriage was a product of family needs and social concerns, and love, as an irrational and unpredictable force, was seen as selfish and dangerous (Campbell 1988). Nevertheless, the portrayal of love as without rational boundaries and blind to obstacles gave birth to a way of perceiving and representing love that continues into the current era. While the medieval writers saw it as dangerous at best, it is now lauded as heroic in its bravery and liberalism. This transformation was gradual. By Shakespeare's time, writers were attempting to recreate romance as a partner to, instead of an enemy of, the sacrament of marriage in order to redeem it as a virtuous human emotion, even if the results were often fatal. Once the emotion of love was linked with domesticity, thereby upholding traditional goals, it became a subject worthy of positive literary exploration on a wider scale, and this is when the fledgling genre started to emerge (Belsey 1985). By the 1700s, romantic love was a major force in popular art, but the genre had changed from semi-cautionary tales of passion run amok to the intimate stories of couples and their quest to find and perfect their love-based union, a goal made possible by the post-Enlightenment creation of the autonomous individual. It was in this modern European imagination that the mental and

emotional aspects of love had taken the place of lust and youthful chemistry. Of course, passion could not be dismissed, so passion continued to be subordinated to the purer ideals of romance, such as eternal love and fidelity (Giddens 1992).

While contexts matter to the particular shape and texture of romantic narratives, they do not override the importance of the genre's status as "an artistic tradition which embodies a very specific and relatively unchanged view of love, sexuality and marriage, a view which was already being put into circulation four hundred years ago" (Evans and Deleyto 1998: 3). Romantic works, insofar as they stem from a common imagination, constitute a tradition unto themselves spanning from Jane Austen to Nat King Cole, all the way to *Pretty Woman* (1990) and *The Notebook* (2004). Relying heavily on the tripartite story convention of Eros and Psyche from Greek myth, in which the lovers meet, separate to go through trials as individuals, and reunite as stronger heroes worthy of eternal love, free of their immature sensuality and ready for the demands of True Love (Accardo 2002; cf. Eisman 1995; cf. Sabine 2008), these stories share a common nature. Their shared ideology, *Omnia vincit Amor*, stemming from the aforementioned modern ethos, assure their partnership in a tradition spanning across contexts and variety in authorship. Part of what makes romances since the 1700s so particularly modern is that their focus on intimate life narratives illustrates the ways in which romantic relationships are now employed in the creation of self and self-hood, as opposed to pre-modern understandings of marriage as social and familial projects. Paradoxically, the union that solves the question of human isolation presented by erotic love has been tied in with the narcissistic quest for selfhood, with the acknowledgment that "love defines us" (Kramer 2006: ix). The liminal spaces created by the anxious



initial stages of romance allow for transformative vulnerability and transitional experiences in which identities are forged, changed and re-constituted (Foucault 1981). Therefore the consumption of various representations of romantic love narratives, in which the audience can witness and interpret repeated trials in a lab-like setting constitute explorations of new identities and possibilities. Narratives focusing on lovers finding partners from different walks of life allow for the characters to grow and expand their worlds, with the modern goal of the trial for love being self-knowledge and the creation of a “new self.” Only after this creation of the self is achieved and celebrated can eternal love be consummated in these narratives (Evans and Deleyto 1998; Henderson 1978).

Modern (or postmodern) individuals, however, may no longer exclusively depend on finding eternal love in their own lives, but, rather, tend towards seeking what Anthony Giddens (1992) calls “confluent love,” which is active and flexible, and replaces the ideals of happily ever after with a practical understanding of contingent circumstances. It focuses not on the idea that there is a single True Love for every individual, but, rather, that humans have a whole world of special relationships around them. It emphasizes the mature give-and-take relations between two equals, and may or may not include a dedication to exclusivity. The relationship is not based on duty or commitment, but, instead, on the realization that the relationship ought to continue only as long as it is mutually beneficial and desirable. Despite this state of affairs, romantic works of art still insist on asserting “the eternal, unchanging nature of romantic love, and to gloss over those aspects from the surrounding culture which threaten it” (Evans and Deleyto 1998: 1-2). Therefore, these works of art embrace liberal ideals of social

progress, including more and more tolerant attitudes towards sex and romance, even while they continue to work towards preserving a nostalgic yearning for a perceived stable past. It is in this way that romantic films are generally seen as conservative works of art as they supply a stable continuity to people seemingly adrift amongst the “confluent” relations of the modern world.

### **Romances and Romantic Comedies as Genre(s)**

In terms of marketing and popular understandings, romantic-comedies and romantic dramas (often also called melodramas) are considered separate genres. Generally speaking, romantic melodramas are romances that are not guaranteed to end happily, as they focus on suffering and attempt to preserve an emotional realism. Most romantic melodramas dedicate substantial attention to the emotional travails of the female lead, who may or may not end up with her lover at the end, but who will have gained strength of character and undergone important personal growth during the process (Lyden 2003). Conversely, romantic comedies (also known as rom-coms) usually have a much higher chance of producing a happy ending – almost without fail in mainstream, traditional rom-coms. While they still have a tendency to focus on the female lead, there is a more even consideration of both characters and their development. As their name suggests, romantic comedies tend to use the universal foibles of romantic love as a launching pad for comedy. Further, rom-coms tend to be more conventional and true to generic form, while romantic dramas or melodramas have more freedom of form, and can often explore more subversive ideas (Lyden 2003).

Because of all of these trends and characteristics, these two forms of film are identified as separate genres. However, for the purpose of this study, I have brought them together under the unifying category of “romantic cinema” – those films focusing on intimate relationships, either comedic or dramatic. I am not the first to combine the different forms of romance, and there is some evidence to suggest that the two are actually parts of the same whole, with the forms waxing and waning in tandem. When romantic dramas are in decline, romantic comedies take up the slack. Dowd and Pallotta (2000), for instance, argue that they both play for much the same audience and fulfill similar roles in the cinema. This merging is certainly not to say that one can dissolve the generic differences or ignore conventional forms. It merely acknowledges the artificiality of generic labels, and allows us to look at films that are more similar than dissimilar. No two films, even of the same genre, will follow the exact same formula in exactly the same way, and most genre films will have some element influenced by other genres (Lyden 2003). The intertextuality and creativity of filmmaking goes unappreciated when genre theory is too heavily followed.<sup>1</sup> There have also been cases of classic romantic melodramas being re-made as romantic comedies, such as the tearjerker *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940) re-appearing as the modernized romantic comedy *You’ve Got Mail* (1998). While the converse is less common, some romantic comedies have been reinvented as more melodramatic versions, particularly with the lighter *The Bishop’s Wife* (1947) becoming the more weepy and self-important *The Preacher’s Wife* (1996). Further, romances are some of the most referential of films, and the myths and symbols surrounding love and romance in American cinema can be

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<sup>1</sup> For example, one of the most quintessential American romantic-comedies, *Annie Hall* (1977), is also one of the most poignant and non-formulaic.

better observed if we look at the grander tableau of romantic cinema. The presence of the romantic melodrama *An Affair to Remember* (1957) as the foundation for the romance in the comedy *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), as well as the explicit references to the melodrama *Casablanca* (1942) that create the comedic romance in *The Goodbye Girl* (1977), are among countless examples of Hollywood's obsessive reuse of classic films, and show us that these two genres are permanently intertwined. A look at Jewishness in intermarriage films can be best served by mining both comedies and melodramas for a more complete picture. Romantic comedy audiences are intertextual and romantic films constitute a tradition of films constructing a larger myth of love in the American mindset (Evans and Deleyto 1998; Neale and Krutnik 1990; McDonald 2007).

Films reflect and critique the times in which they were made, but they still maintain a generic family resemblance. The different time periods of American cinema resulted in different subgenres of romantic comedy, though the characteristics are fluid (Evans and Deleyto 1998; McDonald 2007). The classic romantic comedy developed in the "Screwball" era (1934-1942). Characterized by playful antics and underplayed sexuality, these films spark with chemistry between the two, often warring, partners, and they always end happily. These films, with their wit and class conscious sparring, were designed to cover the realities of a grim Depression, but they could not outlive World War II, and they declined in 1942. This dry spell would not last for long, however, as the impending sexual revolution once again made audiences yearn for romantic comedies in the 1950s. Only this time, they were increasingly sexual, leading scholars to label them "Sex Comedies," as they focused on the male pursuit of free sex

and the female battle to remain pure (Krutnik 1990; McDonald 2007). But with the true sexual revolution in the 1960s, as well as the total abandonment of the Production Code that kept explicit sex out of movies in America, these “virgin fortress” comedies were largely outdated in the late 1960s. By 1967, when *The Graduate* was released, romantic comedies were into a whole new field of exploring open sexuality, some of which had previously been considered deviant. The new era of “Radical Romantic Comedies” in the late 1960s and 1970s was characterized by its frank sexuality, rebellious ideals and a lack of certainty regarding the “happy ending,” once a staple of romantic comedy. Comedy and drama began to meld in a way that advanced the rise of the romantic comedy (with bittersweet drama added in) and saw the decline of romantic melodramas. Further, these comedies tended to focus on the male lead, to the point where one critic declared romantic comedy dead because it had abandoned its core audience of females (Henderson 1978). Heavily investing in postmodern critiques of its own past, these films also became preoccupied with the myths of romance in America, as can be seen vividly in Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall*, perhaps the most definitive radical romantic comedy of this era. However, this introspective navel gazing was not to last, as the excesses of the 1970s gave way to the economic crisis and resurgence of conservatism of the 1980s. This Neo-Traditional era attempted to revive the subtle sexuality and playfulness, as well as to rehabilitate the true love myth and the happy ending, of the Screwball era. Nevertheless, one cannot put a genie back into the bottle completely, and leftover scepticism from the 1970s, as well as the HIV/AIDS crisis of the late 1980s, brings us to current film, where “Neo-Traditional” rom-coms still roll in theatres, but seem to have a sense of their own exhaustion and silliness in light of the modern

situation. After the 1980s, audiences seek in romantic comedies a touch of the sweet, simple romance they believe people had in the 1930s. The idea of love and passion is still present, but sex is more overt, couples are portrayed as less perfect, and the subject of marriage is dropped (McDonald 2007). Throughout these periods, the genre has maintained some continuity, even though the presentation and values seemed to change, and the ideology of current romantic films has a genealogy weaving through the whole tradition of films since the 1930s, and spanning all these eras.

Following the Civil Rights and equity movements of the 1960s, romance has had to alter a bit from its roots, but it has not toppled. The emphasis in mainstream romantic comedies remains the discovery of one's monogamous, heterosexual, fated partner, despite the obstacles that lie in the way. Even though marriage is no longer considered romantic and most romantic comedies do not actually culminate in an onscreen wedding, the audience is trained to believe that this is what will happen after the end credits, and that the couple will beat the odds and make it (Wexman 1993). The basic premise of these films is that a single woman in her thirties must get married and that single men in their thirties and forties are not only targets for matrimony, but are abominations to capitalist society. Single women are "wastes," and single men are freeloaders who are failing in their roles (Negra 2006). Romantic comedies, having established the evils of singledom, provide the prescriptive cure – romance, passion, monogamy, marriage. They package marriage not as a legal or religious state, but, rather, as a matter of personal growth in which marriage is a sign of maturity and stability. Yet they don't want to scare people away from marriage by emphasizing maturity in a nation preoccupied by youth, so romantic comedies also sell the myth of

lasting passion and romance (Neale and Krutnik 1990; Evans and Deleyto 1998; Wexman 1993). While the radical comedy *Annie Hall* had the moral that “love fades,” neo-traditional romantic comedies suggest that, when you are with the “Right Person,” passion is evergreen (Ascione 2004).

Having explored the tools of meaning making within romantic films in general, I will now show how Jewish characters have become both frequent and disruptive in romantic American cinema.

### **An Overview of Jews in Romantic Film: Intermarriage as Trend and Subgenre**

Intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles has been a significant preoccupation in American films since the early silent days. Alongside comedies, romances provided the most stories for early studios producing films at a breakneck speed. Stories of love were appealing to the immigrant populations who made up the majority of early motion picture audiences. These films often focused on the opposition to the match by traditional parents, but generally resolved happily with love conquering all. Occasionally, the Jewish parents were successful in splitting the lovers apart, but often with tragic results, such as the 1915 film *The Faith of Her Fathers*, in which a rabbi’s daughter (Cleo Madison) falls in love with a young Christian (Joe King), but abandons this love at the urging of her father (Murdock MacQuarrie), who recounts the sufferings of her ancestors as incentive for loyalty. The heroine dies shortly thereafter of a broken heart (Friedman 1982). While a few films, such as *The Barrier of Faith* (1915), delve into the less savoury aspects of intermarriage (such as the evils of alcoholism, erroneously felt to be a “Gentile problem” unknown to Jewish families), these films

were very few in number compared to those which showed intermarriage in a positive light – as the ultimate way to belong in America. Marriage was the best way to accept and be accepted, it seems (Erens 1984; Friedman 1982; Greenblum 1995).

In general, it is likely that these films provided a way for Jewish immigrants to sort through their own conflicting feelings about interacting with their non-Jewish neighbours (Friedman 1982). Interestingly, the predominant trend in silent Jewish-Gentile romances was not between Jews and established high class Gentiles, but between Jews and another struggling and highly stigmatized immigrant group – the Irish. Irish-Jewish romances were so popular they almost constitute a subgenre of their own. While there were also many films featuring Jewish and Irish immigrants who become friends or who start businesses together, the popular favourite was the Jewish-Irish love story, usually between the children of families living close to each other in the tenements. These films are interesting because some of them, such as *Private Izzy Murphy* (1926), depict the once *de rigueur* geographical divisions in urban America with certain neighbourhoods being known as Jewish neighbourhoods and others as Irish Catholic, and so forth, while others show the tenements as melting pots in which families of differing ethnic backgrounds live side by side. In any case, almost all the films do highlight the prejudice and dislike both sides felt for the other and nearly all of them seem to suggest intermarriage as the solution to this prejudice (Friedman 1982).

The very first motion picture recorded with a soundtrack,<sup>2</sup> *The Jazz Singer* (1927), told the tale of a cantor's son, Jakie Rabinowitz (Al Jolson), who defies his stern

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<sup>2</sup> Often erroneously described as a talkie, *The Jazz Singer* was essentially a silent film with recorded songs.



father (Warner Oland) to pursue the secular stage.<sup>3</sup> He also desires a pretty Gentile dancer, Mary Dale (May McAvoy), whose love offers him access to the world of entertainment. Though his loving mother (Eugenie Besserer), noting that Jakie changed his name to Jack Robins for the stage, hopefully suggests that Jack's lover might also be a Jew in disguise, we know this is wishful thinking. The fact that she is Gentile is revealed when the two women finally meet. Mary and Jack's mother barely interact with each other, and the gulf between the two women is palpable. One, the long-suffering immigrant woman who represents Jack's past, and the other, a bright beauty in glittering costume, who represents his future – the gateway to all the social advancement his traditionalist father would deny him (Greenblum 1995). Through his union with Mary, the myth of love without obstacles – and therefore the myth of perfect integration – is complete, leaving Jack's old fashioned father to die, his mother to

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<sup>3</sup> The 1937 Yiddish film, *The Cantor's Son*, which J. Hoberman called "the anti-Jazz Singer" (1991: 262), can be compared to the 1927 film to highlight the pro-assimilationist tendencies of the Al Jolson classic. The Yiddish musical drama was made in Pennsylvania as the Yiddish film industry was largely an East coast business, and starred Yiddish matinee idol (and cantor) Moshe Oysher (1907 – 1958) as a wayward Jewish immigrant to New York City with a golden voice, Saul Reichman. Migrating to the city from his native Poland, Saul becomes disillusioned with the promise of America when he gets a job cleaning floors at a nightclub. But, in a plot echoing the common devices of Hollywood, Saul is discovered as a great singing talent and soon becomes a sensation. Then, however, in an inversion of *The Jazz Singer*, Saul finds the delights of the popular stage unfulfilling, and the young singer returns to his traditional roots as a cantor, leaving America and reuniting with his parents and the girl he had left behind. The illusion of America, and the world of entertainment, had been a momentary diversion, but the cantor comes home to the things that gave his life real meaning – tradition, community and a Jewish marriage. Thus, while the 1927 English proto-talkie gives the impression that the young Jew has no choice but to grasp at advancement, the Yiddish drama gives an alternate choice to its predominantly first and second generation American Jewish audiences: you can opt out of the illusion and return to the substance you left behind. As is intimated by the title of his history of Yiddish film, *Bridge of Light*, Hoberman (1991) discusses Yiddish film as an "ongoing family quarrel" (9) in which the Jews of pre-WWII America weighed the choices each had to make in negotiating his or her identity in a largely liberal New World, highlighting the ongoing debate between secular and more devote Jews (cf. Heilman 1995). Like those of the very early silent pictures involving this Jewish dilemma, characters in Yiddish films seem to have been free to reject the extreme changes of America, or to have been subject to tragedy and remorse if they did not resist Gentile pressures (such as in *Tevye*). Meanwhile, by the late period of Yiddish film mainstream films in English had turned almost exclusively to promoting integration and "making it" in America at any cost (Friedman 1982), and Yiddish film became an increasingly faint voice of the Jewish-American immigrant past that would be all but extinct by the 1950s (Sandrow 1996).

accept the situation, and Jack himself to perform, rather infamously now, hidden behind his blackface masquerade.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the Jewish nature and ghetto setting of *The Jazz Singer*, by the dawn of the talkies motion pictures were no longer theatre for immigrants and the urban poor, but had become big business among the middle class, as well (Cook 1996). Lowbrow nickelodeons gave way to the movie palaces of the 1920s and the cinemas of the 1930s, and recent immigrants were no longer the target audience of Hollywood product. The new professionalism and economics of movie production, combined with the ethical Production Code that came with middle class morality, made for far less freedom in film subject matter. The 1930s saw movie studios sinking large investments into “Depression-proof” films that would attract wide audiences looking to escape the grim economic situation at home (Cook 1996). Ironically, at a time when many of the studio heads, as well as some of the top-grossing stars, were Jewish, as well as a decade that saw the rise of Hitler and the issue of anti-Semitism coming to a full steam worldwide, Hollywood fell silent on the subject of Jews, and the word was curiously absent from most films (Friedman 1982). The closest thing to a Jewish-Gentile romance in the 1930s was Groucho Marx’s repeated onscreen attempts to woo established society matrons for personal gain, and that was far from a detailed exploration of the topic. Perhaps because Jewish studio heads were becoming nervous about the gathering moral storm directed at Hollywood, which would later manifest itself as the Red Scare of the 1950s, or because they themselves were in the midst of divorcing their old, Jewish first wives and finding

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<sup>4</sup> For an excellent look at the meaning of Jack/Jakie’s blackface, see Michael Rogin, “Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds his Voice,” *Critical Inquiry* 18.3 (1992): 417-53. I shall return to this important story throughout my analysis of intermarriage in film, as it remains one of the most essential classics on the subject.

themselves younger, Gentile ladies (i.e. Jack Warner, Sam Goldwyn), the studios had no time or inclination to explore the evils or benefits of intermarriage. Instead, they were too busy making glossy myths about Real America and her indomitable spirit – a “Real America” made out of the awestruck, glittery images dancing in the heads of mostly immigrant Jewish studio bosses (Gabler 1989).

In the 1940s, however, the war effort at home made it necessary and desirable to dust off the old assimilationist myths of the silent pictures. “Team effort” was Hollywood’s watchword, and motion pictures turned towards promoting the liberal ideal of intermarriage as a means of embracing the (white) minorities of America (Erens 1984). One of the films most notable for its naïve social democratic stance is the 1947 prestige piece *Gentleman’s Agreement*, in which a Gentile reporter, played by Hollywood’s moral hero Gregory Peck, pretends to be Jewish in order to produce a fresh look at social anti-Semitism in the United States. Encouraged by one of the few Gentile studio heads of the time, Darryl F. Zanuck at Fox, and directed by non-Jew Elia Kazan, the picture was a personal testimony to the evils of genteel intolerance – made by these two non-Jewish men who reportedly were often mistaken for Jews and could relate to the main character, and written by Jewish-American Moss Hart. At the time, the film was praised as a forceful and moving attempt at making anti-Semitism unacceptable in America, and, courageous for its time as the House Un-American Activities Committee was starting to rise, it does succeed in establishing anti-Jewish prejudice as a Gentile problem, as opposed to a Jewish one (Friedman 1982).

The problem with *Gentleman’s Agreement* is that the picture displays no rational argument for why the Jews remain Jewish, as seen by the inability of the Jewish

characters themselves to account for their Jewishness. One, an old Jewish scientist (Sam Jaffe), makes it a matter of stubbornness in the face of persecution; another, a Jewish secretary passing as Gentile (June Havoc), makes it a matter of unsightly habits; and another, the reporter's best friend (John Garfield), reduces the essence of being Jewish to knowing the pain and anger of seeing your kids picked on by anti-Semitic bullies. In a way, these explanations of Jewish identity negate the picture's goal of addressing Gentile prejudice against Jews by implying that the Jews are defined by anti-Semitism and could just as easily dissipate this hatred by ceasing to be Jewish. Peck's character illustrates this lack of depth by listing his qualifications for playing Jewish as having dark hair and dark eyes and the last name Green. None of the Jews in this picture are shown as maintaining any deep feelings about their traditions or as religious in any sense, even though Green relies on religion alone to teach tolerance for the Jews to his child (Dean Stockwell), explaining that Jews are just like any other American, they just go to a different kind of church (Friedman 1982). The liberal intent of the film relies on a universalist view of Gentile and Jewish Americans as having no difference,<sup>5</sup> a view which downgrades the importance of distinct religious practices and cultural heritage in favour of a united American citizenry.

The influence of this home front liberalism continued in the early 1950s, and in the post-War period the intermarriage rate amongst Jews was climbing fast enough to cause some Jewish leaders concern (cf. Massarick and Chenkin 1973). By the late 1950s, increasing numbers of Jewish families had accepted the reality of their

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<sup>5</sup> The imagined protean ability of the Jew to appear the same as the Gentile mainstream, which once made them so sinister to European Christians (Bartov 2005), made them especially useful for the liberal Hollywood cinema of the post-War (pre-McCarthy) era, as a "safer" minority group through which film could explore ideas of tolerance. Jewish invisibility made them an easier testing ground for integration than African-Americans, whose difference is more overt and less easy to ignore.

integration and welcomed non-Jewish in-laws. Even though some parents were not thrilled by the increase of mixed marriage, they were learning to adapt to it, and the films of the late 1950s reflected this perceived need for Jews to learn to accept intermarriage as a modern way of life (Friedman 1982). Nevertheless, these films were not entirely without sympathy for traditionalist parents dealing with intermarriage, and it was at this time that the role reversal changed. While earlier films often depicted the Jew as the aggressor in intermarriage, the films of the late 1950s showed the Gentile, particularly the female, as preying on Jewish males, who were now reinvented as sensitive outsiders who appealed to Gentile females' desire for partners who could understand their needs, rather than just use and abuse them (Friedman 1982). It was this emotionally driven, intellectual image of the Jewish male as desirable in new, often platonic, ways that led to the rise of less classically appealing "ethnic" leading men such as Dustin Hoffman, Elliot Gould, George Segal and Woody Allen in the 1960s, and either presaged, or derived from, the rise of egalitarian ethnic identity movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

The most significant intermarriage film of the 1960s was most likely Otto Preminger's spectacle *Exodus* (1960), primarily because it foreshadows the new ethnic identity movements of the later 1960s. In the 1960s and 1970s, Jews started to speak for themselves. After the discomfort of the McCarthy era gave way to the freedom movements in the 1960s, and after the conservative, aggressively assimilated Jewish studio heads from the 1920s retired, Jews became visible in America on the screen and behind it. Jews were suddenly uncomfortable (and vocal) about Hollywood white-washing. In *Exodus*, we can see the start of this pull between the denial and the

celebration of difference. British Palestine-born Jew Ari ben Canaan (Paul Newman) is working for the creation of a Jewish state, mostly out of his determination that the Holocaust made the state necessary but also due to his own family's roots in Palestine. In the middle of this fight for freedom, an unlikely romance develops between the Jewish Ari and a Gentile widow, Mrs. Freemont (Eva Marie Saint), a blonde American Protestant woman. As they travel to his home in the Jezreel Valley, Ari accuses the Gentile object of his desire of not understanding what Israel means to the Jews and what having ancient roots means to a community ravaged by recent atrocity, effectively alienating her from his Jewishness. Because it is something that causes tension between them, and because she does not like being separated from her lover by his Jewish experience, Mrs. Freemont attempts to negate Ari's Jewishness, refusing to hear how important his ethnic and religious identity is to him, and she declares that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. In this way, she can be taken as a symbol for Hollywood itself as she presents precisely the doctrine that liberal Hollywood once valued. However, in the nascent individualism movement of the 1960s, a character like Ari cannot accept this denial of his pride. What would have once seemed like a tolerant and liberal sentiment is now taken an insult, and Ari responds: "Don't you believe it: People *are* different; people *like* to be different; they *have a right to be different*." In the end, however, despite this assertion of the new Jewish pride, Mrs. Freemont has the last word in this scene. Grasping him close, she reiterates her doctrine, "You're wrong. There is no difference."<sup>6</sup> The subtext to her embrace of him is that she is female and he

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<sup>6</sup> This is, in part, due to the secularized Protestant understanding of religious faith as a universalizing process (i.e. Galatians 3.28; Yong-Bock 1998). In contrast, Judaism has long been a religious lifestyle of particularity (as we saw in chapter 1), and, likewise, Jewishness today is still rooted in details of

is male, and no religion or culture can be more natural than the sexual chemistry that is bringing them together, and as he submits to her passion, one can almost believe he has acquiesced. In the end, however, the only way Ari and Mrs. Freemont make their relationship work is for Mrs. Freemont to shoulder some of the fight for Israel and stand with the Jews, and in some ways stand as a Jew, herself. The ethnically empowered and proud Ari could not have it any other way – his character could not possibly move with her to America and assimilate to suburban Gentile life. No longer could intermarriage be simply a means to assimilation, as Jewish self-expression had become vocal in Hollywood.

In the early 1970s, with much of the social prejudice against Jewish-Gentile relationships seemingly gone, representations of romances between young Jews and Gentiles focused on the personal conflicts with parochial parents over their life choices such as in *Made for Each Other* (1971), with happiness still possible if the lovers ignore their parents and forge their own way in life. One of the most central intermarriage films of the 1970s is *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972), a poignant look at modern disillusionment and dissatisfaction. The film opens with the warm, Jewish, family wedding of Lennie (Charles Grodin) to Lila (Jeannie Berlin), during which the new couple are cheered and embraced by friends and family. Soon, the young Jewish couple is off to Miami to honeymoon, where things start to fall apart. As soon as wedding moves into marriage, Len becomes restless. His new wife, eager and excited to have this stable relationship, praises the life they will have together for the next “forty or fifty years,” a phrase which terrifies Len, who sees all hope for adventure destroyed with one

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belonging and difference. The difficulty for the couple in *Exodus* is partially one of this difference in understanding.

ceremony. Meanwhile, Len meets Kelly (Cybill Shepherd), the pretty blond WASP daughter of a millionaire. Sporty and breezy compared to Lila (who is sunburned and miserable), Kelly is Len's dream of romance. Kelly is the golden Gentile goddess, the *shikse* that Jewish men have been trained to desire by decades of Hollywood films (cf. Jaher 1983). Deciding that his marriage to Lila was a mistake leading to the grave, Len leaves his Jewish wife and pursues Kelly back to her family in Minnesota, dressed only in his holiday clothes – both physically and mentally unprepared for the unfamiliar climate of the Gentile Midwest, which is only a beginning to the ways in which he doesn't belong there. Yet, still undaunted, he vies for the love of Nordic Kelly with single-minded dedication, even though she maintains a strict control over their romantic and sexual contact, and gives him nothing more than her appearance to fuel his obsession. He refuses a bribe offered by Kelly's father (Eddie Albert), who is desperate to get rid of this interloper, and, in the end, Len prevails and wins Kelly in marriage. There is another wedding, but this one is formal and impersonal. Len is not embraced at his second wedding, and ends the film sitting alone without friends, family or company. The final moments of this film dwell, with its silent loneliness, on all Len has sacrificed, and it is plausible that the filmmakers (and likely Len, as well) believe it to be far too high a price (Friedman 1982).

It is this step towards interrogating the desirability of mixed marriages that has defined the radical Jewish intermarriage films since the 1970s. Co-existing with this trend are liberal pictures which still trivialize Jewish difference, disregard Jewish traditions and/or promote older assimilationist ideals, trends which were particularly noticeable in the 1980s (Friedman 1987). These films are in contrast with films that



increasingly resist earlier assimilation desires and the reduction of Jewish difference to unimportant parental “church” membership, which was also a dominant theme in the late 1980s and continuing into the 1990s (Greenblum 1995). It is true that cinema in general has been increasingly open to portraying more fully developed characters and more realistic complexities of life, but compared to how romances featuring Gentile/Gentile relationships deal with obstacles in an almost entirely positive manner, it is significant how many films featuring a mixed couple now end in ways other than *Happily Ever After* over the past twenty years.<sup>7</sup> While early films tended to glorify Jewish/Gentile intermarriage even though it was still comparatively rare in “real life,” American film now seems prepared to question whether this trend is in the best interest of Jews now that intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles is a commonplace occurrence with half of American Jews marrying non-Jews (Greenblum 1995; Fishman 2004). It is the development of Jewish-Gentile romances from the 1970s to the present decade which will occupy the remainder of this work.

### **Jewish-Gentile Intermarriage Films as Social Critique**

Hollywood intermarriage films once seemed to glorify intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles (Friedman 1982; Erens 1984; Greenblum 1995), but whether motion pictures continue to do so is subject to rightful inquiry (Greenblum 1995). In fact, while many films continue to emphasize the romantic desire between members of the

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<sup>7</sup> For example, we have seen films in which Gentile couples overcome class difference (*Love Story*, 1970), skin colour (*Something New*, 2006), and genetic incompatibility (*The Invention of Lying*, 2009). There are ones in which conservatives and liberals find love (*Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, 2004), and even ones in which vampires and mortals are able to move past their conflicting lifestyles (*Twilight*, 2008). Compared to these, it is interesting how romances featuring Jews and Gentiles are increasingly portraying the couples’ failure to find common ground (i.e. *Flannel Pajamas*, 2006).

differing communities in accordance with the values of the liberal society (Wartenberg 1999), a closer look reveals an underlying warning about the obstacles standing against such relationships. The surface of a film might assert a liberal, egalitarian ideal, but the foundational myths might have a less obvious conservative message. Take, for example, the popular children's animated feature *The Fox and the Hound* (1981). While the hunting dog and the fox are shown as childhood friends, which might suggest it is a liberal picture teaching values of tolerance and diversity, their divergent lives as adults (one being the hunter and the other being the prey) show their relationship to be ultimately doomed. On the one hand, audience feels joy in the purity of their love and experiences sadness over the incongruent failure of their relationship which reinforces liberal ideals. On the other hand, however, the reality that their friendship cannot be continued contains a less obvious conservative message. Just because a fox and a hound can look beyond societal roles as children, that does not mean they will always have the luxury of doing so. The hound will eventually take his role as "man's best friend," while the fox will find a life with another fox. In this criticism, liberal ideology, while shown as sympathetic and admirable, cannot defeat the ways of the world, and conservative values are naturalized and asserted in the end. This film is one example of the surface and foundational value tensions in seemingly progressive Hollywood product.

When one considers the films that have been identified as promoting intermarriage, we can see that Hollywood does not always assert that romance between Jews and Gentiles is facile. *The Jazz Singer* (1927), while showing how intermarriage can be beneficial, also demonstrates how it can destroy the Jewish family – the positive image on the surface obscures a warning, which, though secondary in importance to the

benefits of integration, does illustrate the obstacles that will need to be overcome by the couple. Nevertheless, despite the damage seen in these films, the couple ultimately triumphs, and the Jewish Jack recovers easily from the loss of his father, who was a mere sacrifice demanded as the price for the American Dream. What we see in films of the past few decades, however, is that love cannot conquer all obstacles and damages, and that the price of mixed relationships might be too high for the Jewish community to continue paying. It is as if the “nervous” quality discerned by Frank Krutnik (1990) in post-World War II romantic comedies cannot allow a total disregard of cultural difference any longer, even in so-called escapist film. It is particularly noteworthy that Krutnik (1990) came up with the term “nervous” as it applies to romantic comedy from the ultimate nervous intermarriage comedy of the past generation, *Annie Hall*.

In analysing the ways in which films approach intermarriage, Greenblum (1995) establishes a three-tiered heuristic device to assess the ideology behind the representations of the romances. First, one must assess the extent to which a film idealizes or merely accepts Jewish/Gentile romance – to this I would also add, does it reject it? The possibility of the film deciding that Jews and Gentiles, as with the fox and the hound, cannot obtain “happily ever after” is an increasingly popular option in current films. Sometimes the relationship ends with the Jew and Gentile ending up as platonic friends (*Norma Rae*, 1979), or fond memories of lost love that just couldn’t last (*Prime*, 2005). Perhaps the attraction is not strong or reciprocated well enough to bridge the gap between worlds (*A Stranger Among Us*, 1992), or the Jewish partner rejects the Gentile suitor once he or she realizes they do not live up to expectations (*Crossing Delancey*, 1988). Sometimes, the Gentile rejects the Jew, when it is discovered that they

cannot or will not change their manners or essential qualities (*Annie Hall*). Occasionally, the relationship is cast as a simple passing phase, with the solid endogamous relationship being reasserted in the end (*A Walk on the Moon*, 1999). Other times, the relationship that turns to marriage, driven by a magical belief in the myth of romance and passion as irresistible forces, is revealed to be completely unsalvageable when the dream of a love that conquers all is dissolved (*The Way We Were*, 1973). Even in films where the interfaith relationship results in a lasting arrangement, only some still idealize the romance – others still have a subtle warning about mixed relations. Some work only by showing the Jew having a personality overhaul that removes his or her stereotypically Jewish characteristics<sup>8</sup> (*Along Came Polly*, 2004), while others (*Keeping the Faith*, 2000) can only be tolerable if the Gentile converts to become Jewish. Even those who remain true to the airy and uncontroversial atmosphere of popular romance can only do so by completely ignoring the fact that the lovers are entering a mixed marriage by misrepresenting the controversy as one of class (*Dirty Dancing*, 1987).

Secondly, in determining how a film views intermarriage, one must ask if the film shows Jewish ties as unimportant, outmoded or even undesirable. While early films such as in the first *The Jazz Singer* (1927) largely showed Jewish ties (as symbolized through the home and parents) as ancient prejudices to transcend, modern films have shifted their views. Some films have actually started to be sensitive to the concerns of Jewish parents about mixed marriages (*Prime*). Recently, Jewish ties are free to be matters of fiery and passionate ideological stances (*Exodus*), sentimental keepsakes alive with emotion (*Torch Song Trilogy*, 1988), or as obligations that are willingly chosen rather than enforced (*The Jazz Singer*, 1980). Many films have moved away

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<sup>8</sup> Which will be explored in chapter 3.

from the idea that Jewishness is an external pressure, and, ironically in keeping with the modern emphasis on individuality, have begun to accept the fact that some Jews are Jewish by choice as well as though their religious lifestyle (*A Stranger Among Us*). Further, rather than being an old fashioned albatross around the necks of Jews, some films show how Jewish identity can actually be a source of determination (*Chariots of Fire*, UK, 1981). As opposed to older films which cannot imagine any explanation for holding on to Jewish heritage (*Gentleman's Agreement*), films over the past thirty or forty years allow characters to be self-satisfied in their Jewishness (*Norma Rae*).

The final question Greenblum (1995) asks these films is whether or not the film suggests that intermarriage with a Gentile is a way to gain secular, mainstream success for the Jew in America, or as a reward for assimilation. This was likely a prime motivator in early Hollywood intermarriage films. In recent decades, films might still suggest that Gentile partners are the yellow brick road to the American Dream (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, 1974), but the Jews more often now find the resulting success flawed (*Goodfellas*, 1990). Some Jews, who start out seeing golden Gentiles as the boon of assimilation, discover upon closer inspection that the promise of their carefree sensuality and romance does not play out (*The Heartbreak Kid*). Even more important, films now show Jews as gaining and maintaining their own success (*The Prince of Tides*, 1991), which might even outpace the success of their Gentile partners (*A Star is Born*, 1976).

Associated with success, there is a rising preoccupation with health, both physical and mental, and the difference between “health” and “appearance of health.” In *Annie Hall*, Allen’s character, Alvy Singer, a New York comedian, has gone to the mid-

west to meet the parents of his Gentile lover, Annie (Diane Keaton), for Easter. In this segment, comically, we see the imagined reality of the tensions between a New York Jewish family who are open and vulgar about their health and anatomy, and a mid-western, upper-class, Protestant family, that, from the outside appears well-adjusted and “All American” and “healthy.” Yet, the WASP son (Christopher Walken) is suicidal and only Alvy, the son of hypochondriac Jews, sees this. He addresses the idea that his family is not what the American ideal dictates, but he also notes that even ideal families may hide insanity just below the surface. Again, the appearance of the American ideal slips.

This shift in attitude is significant, but of course has not been total. Many films still show Gentile mates as the lesser of two evils when the choice is between a sexy, yet problematic Gentile and an unattractive, unsatisfying or abusive Jew, such as is seen in *Keeping the Faith* and *A Price Above Rubies* (1998). There are also still films that promote the liberal image of intermarriage and stick to earlier ideas of familial interference and the disregard for religious difference (*Mrs Delafield Wants to Marry*, 1986; *Minnie and Mosvowitz*, 1971; *Bugsy*, 1991; etc.). I will try to point out the useful examples as they provide relevant insights into the issues presented, but it is curious as to why, when some surveys tell us that more than half of America’s Jews marry outside the community (Fishman 2004), Hollywood is opening itself to the variety of outcomes in mixed marriage, and how intermarriage films involving Jews challenge the dominant myths of Gentile romantic cinema and call into question the ideology of post-Enlightenment liberalism.

### ***Crossing Delancey: How the Portrayal of Jews Challenges Ideals of Romance***

*Crossing Delancey* is light and sweet. On the surface, it seems a modern comedy of dating and biological clocks in the 1980s. The film focuses on Izzy (Amy Irving), a successful independent woman working within the cosmopolitan literary circles of Manhattan. She has as friends a good mixture of old high school friends and work pals, she has a come-and-go sexual relationship with an ex-hippy (John Bedford Lloyd), and she has her Bubbe (Reizl Bozyk), an elderly Jewish woman from some undetermined “Old Country” living on the lower East Side, with whom she has a loving and warm bond. Her parents are not largely present in the film, as they have moved to Florida, but she seems to have affectionate ties with them, as well. Izzy has a strong social web, even if it is lacking in permanent male companionship. Izzy does not, she says, close her mind to the possibilities of romance and marriage, but, she declares to her Bubbe, she is not holding her breath. Yet, there is a man Izzy desires – a European-born poet (Jeroen Krabbé) who feeds Izzy’s romantic imagination with his passionate writing, dashing appearance and smooth voice. The other side of this *panache* is, of course, that he is the least likely man in the world to be dependable and committed to the type of relationship Izzy’s Bubbe recommends for her. Bubbe’s solution is completely out of step with Izzy’s modern life when Bubbe hires a *shadchen* – a matchmaker. Suddenly, the Old Country is intruding on Izzy’s carefully controlled life, as she is forced to meet Sam Posner (Peter Riegert), a kind and warm Jewish man who makes and sells pickles in his late father’s shop on the lower East Side. Izzy feels she must resist this meddling in order to maintain her independence, though Sam’s folksy and romantic ways appeal to her despite herself. Again and again she draws Sam closer and then drives him away,

as the two elements of her life (the Jewish side and the modern side) try to find a détente across Delancey, the street which traditionally separates the two worlds of Manhattan Island. Sam realizes Izzy's dilemma, and he alternates between frustration and patience. He gives her an outlandish Stetson, telling her it might be time to try new things.<sup>9</sup> His version of romance is not a series of meaningless words, but of loving actions. Nevertheless, Izzy makes one last attempt to rid herself of her heritage by standing Sam up to have a rendezvous with her poet, only to realize once and for all that his pretence is lacking the heart and soul she truly deserves. Running to her Bubbe's apartment, hoping Sam has not given up on her, she is finally ready to embrace her East Side half. Sam, the *schmuck* (as he calls himself), has waited for her, and the audience can only assume they will live happily ever after.

The film is delightfully charming, and the audience has known from the beginning of Sam and Izzy's relationship whom she should (and eventually would) choose. Yet, there is a deeper level of truth to this picture that makes it a central film for understanding Jewish intermarriage in America. Director Joan Micklin-Silver and the writers of *Crossing Delancey* even tell us to look deeper. At lunch, with a bit too much wine, Izzy swoons over her poet, "The thing I love about your work is the ... deceptive accessibility." His poetry appears simple, but there are undercurrents she waits anxiously for. So, too, do we with this film. The juxtaposition of the two main romantic options presented to Izzy place them into almost cosmic opposition. One, a poet, creating concepts and sounds, continental and carefree, is as far from Izzy's past as one can get, and she finds his allure as attractive as all of the pleasures of modern life. The

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<sup>9</sup> The selection of the Stetson as a "new thing" is significant, as it is a very old brand name and an old style of hat. What Sam means here is "new to Izzy." This juxtaposition of an old style hat as a new fashion for Izzy parallels the old style of endogamy being new to the liberated Izzy.



other, a pickle maker, Izzy watches with disgust as he digs his hands in briny barrels of his product while old Jewish men gossip and sample at his grimy second-generation lower East Side shop. While urban North American life is often portrayed as rootless, Sam is all about roots, just as he is all about physical production and being truthful to himself as a Jew and a member of his community. Sam is a modern man who runs a business, but he is also one who goes to *schul* (Jewish prayer gatherings) and seems to prefer to meet and marry a Jewish woman. For him, life in America is integrated in a way that it has never been for Izzy, who has tried to escape the lower East Side rather than understand it. To Izzy, her poet represents the excitement and freshness her Bubbe's community lacks. Even as she wears Sam's Stetson proudly, she cannot give up her romantic dreams, and fails to see the happiness Sam can offer.

The Stetson itself provides a clever referential clue to the problem when Izzy, confident enough on her birthday to wear the outdated and *outré* big brown hat, approaches her place of work, and her colleagues snicker, "Well, if it isn't the return of Annie Hall." In truth, the Stetson is strikingly similar to the one made famous by Diane Keaton in Woody Allen's classic *Annie Hall*, the story of the ultimate and unattainable Gentile fantasy woman for Allen's *nebbish* Alvy Singer. In this offhand remark, we see the underpinning to this modern fable of the quest for love – Annie Hall is warning Izzy that the façade of Gentile pleasure and excitement does not always provide true and lasting joy. Izzy is a female Alvy in that she is running after a golden haired outsider who will offer her more unfulfilled yearnings than real substance, while at the same time her wearing of the Annie Hall-like Stetson seems to suggest that she, under Sam's

tender gaze, is a Jewish woman reclaiming her rightful place as the object of Jewish male desire.

## **Conclusion**

Now that Jewish intermarriage films are free to question the value and practicality of mixed relationships, films like *Crossing Delancey* suggest some ways that classic romantic comedy ideals simply don't add up. While the film does assert the benefits of heterosexual marriage, it also calls into question the social democratic ideal of love being without particular heritage. In this film more than any other, Sam doesn't "just happen to be" Jewish – he *is* Jewish, because the film is denying the democratic stances of universality and liberalism. Not to say that this film is politically conservative, necessarily, nor that it longs for a reversal of emancipation, but that it, and films like it displaying obstacles in Jewish/Gentile love, may represent a modern critique of liberalism – one in which a form of Jewish communitarianism asserts a Jewish particularity overturning liberal claims of human universality. Such defiance of traditional romantic narrative conventions are, on one hand, embracing the ideas of "confluent relationships" that are already becoming the norm in contemporary life, but they are displaying the trend on film at a much higher rate than movies featuring two Gentile lovers. They are also showing evidence of not denying all hope of monogamy, but, rather, questioning the possibility of long term relationships based on older liberal ideals of assimilation or white-washing multiculturalism based on an ideal of universality. As will be discussed later in this work, this tension may be a reflection of the modern process of the construction of the self, which is largely done through the

intimate relations one has, and of the contest over whether the authentic self lies in autonomy or in communal identity. The claims of liberal personalism and communitarian critiques of liberalism, as illustrated in the film analyses which follow, comprise the main concern of this dissertation.

## Chapter 3

### **Loving the Neighbours: Liberalism and Positive Jewish-Gentile Romances**

*Nothing makes you more tolerant of a neighbor's noisy party than being there.*

- Franklin P. Jones (quoted in Frothingham 2002: 11)

Interfaith romance may be the dominant image of Jewish romance in Hollywood. Surveying American films featuring the romantic exploits of Jews, it is striking how rarely a romance between two Jews is offered. Typically, if two Jews are depicted as married, they are either the parents of the Jewish protagonist, comedy relief characters or couples providing storylines through their conflict, unhappiness or divorce. In this way, many Hollywood films would suggest that Jews who marry other Jews are either old or ridiculous, and often unhappy. Further, these couples are almost always shown in contrast with the typically more handsome, witty, sympathetic, young, hip and dynamic central characters who are overwhelmingly engaged in interfaith relationships.

Using Thomas Wartenberg's theory of the "unlikely couple" (1999), I will show how Jewish-Gentile romantic narratives reflecting a liberal ethos function as social criticism. In this chapter, I explore several film examples of five different methods, or narrative strategies (Wartenberg 1999),<sup>1</sup> Hollywood employs to portray the successful

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the term narrative strategies in the way Wartenberg (1999) appears to (specifically page 8) – referring to the ways that authors manage to contrive happy endings from stories constructed out of plot and character friction. Narrative strategies are those ways in which authors, after spending the first half of the work setting up various obstacles for their protagonists, strive to resolve the conflict for a satisfying climax. At its most simple level, narrative strategies are the plots, characterizations, dialogue and atmosphere that authors use to advance their stories. However, the term has also grown to include the ideological, allegorical and imagery devices employed to deliver foundational messages, as well as the underlying assumptions made by the authors (Rainwater and Scheick 1985), and this meaning is also present in my use of the term. I use a literary term with cognizance of the difficulties in employing literary study in the study of film (cf. Bluestone 1979). However, the definite narrative dimensions in the

union between Jewish and Gentile romantic protagonists. The strategic plot devices, explanations or recurrent solutions that I will discuss are, briefly,

- i. the refusal to address the topic of difference by rendering the Jewish subject invisible or downplaying the Jewish aspect of the narrative by submerging it under other concerns,
- ii. the “rescuing” of Jews from their oppressive and foreign religious community via romantic love as a path to freedom,
- iii. the social and psychological assimilation of the Jewish subject into mainstream American society,
- iv. the Judaizing of the non-Jewish lover through bonding with a Jewish mate,
- v. and an appeal to the power of love as a generic solution to pain, and to sex as an act of personal growth, which makes personal experience more important than collective identity.

After exploring these strategies, I will then employ the theories of synthesis and coalescence to explain how these films view the Jewish role in America and how this works with intermarriage in these films. Throughout, I will briefly discuss a few broad strokes of liberalism which are pertinent to positive Hollywood portrayals of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage.

### *Onward Liberal Soldiers: The “Unlikely Couple” Romance as Ideology*

Film scholar Thomas Wartenberg (1999) offers a useful explanation for the ways that films involving mixed couples employ and bolster liberal ideology. For Wartenberg, film “can be a locus for reflection on the sorts of issues that have

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films I deal with in this project makes this much less risky – while they are not novels, they maintain a cinematic narrativity that is relevant to narrative study, and the challenge becomes one of embracing the visual and auditory dimensions of film narrative when employing literary concepts (cf. Scholes 1979). Thus, in my discussion of the narrative strategies I also identify aspects of sound, performance and photography when compelling. I focus, for the most part, on ideology, as my analysis follows the theory that narrative reveals sociological or ideological evidence (cf. Franzosi 1998; Fishman 2000; 2004).

traditionally been the domain of philosophy” (xv), and, as such, are valuable texts through which social structures are both maintained and criticized. Looking at film narratives displaying couples of various mixed identities (particularly class and race), Wartenberg has described what he calls the genre of “unlikely couple films” (xv), in which two people of divergent backgrounds whose desire to couple “transgress a social norm regulating appropriate partnering choice” (xvi). In these films, he identifies two key opposing viewpoints – one is the social perspective that deems the unlikely couple subversive, incompatible or even immoral, which is in contrast to the second, the romantic perspective – perhaps the dominant view in Hollywood – which reveals the ways in which the unlikely couple is actually extremely likely insofar as individual needs and love outrank the outdated or impersonal conventions that oppose the match. Thus, these narratives express and capture the tension between romantic notions and the social norms that romance is often forced to violate. While tragedy for dramatic purposes is always acknowledged as a possible outcome of the couple’s adventures, the film’s ability to bring the story to a romantically satisfying end not only gives hope that romance does and will conquer all, but also seeks to destabilize the social hierarchies presented in the film as obstacles to the union. The couples in these films, therefore, are not merely simple characters in a story, but in fact display a microcosm of greater social conflicts. Through their defined categorization, and their ultimate abandonment of limitations defined by birth or status, these couples become narrative figures that enable the audience to vicariously experience both the oppression by and the relinquishing of traditional categories, thus allowing them to see the unnatural construction of such categories in the first place. Such films work on the liberal assumption that “only in a

society in which their position in a social hierarchy assigns individuals their human worth would a couple be deemed inappropriate simply because it violated such principles of social ordering” (Wartenberg 1999: 7). The makers of these films feel compelled to refute the validity of this social ordering by “criticizing restrictive romantic norm” (Wartenberg 1999: 7).

According to Wartenberg, the two main narrative elements by which this criticism is achieved are, first, the use of the couple as a sympathetic locus of romance’s triumph over adversity, and, second, persuasive modes of displaying the factors that make the couple unlikely to begin with. Even though unlikely couple films set out to criticize traditional and oppressive social ordering, they still must avoid anarchy, and it is to this end that the portrayal of these couples as totally socially chaotic is avoided. In order to resolve the narrative conflict in a satisfactory way for the audience – which generally involves both the fracture of social norms and the eventual reconstruction of other, competing social norms – the film must provide narrative strategies for solving the problems faced by the couple. If the social perspective is upheld, the romance is allowed to fail, even though these films still must acknowledge the modern obsession with romance by explaining how the relationship was not really enduring love, but, rather, an infatuation, lust or passing moods (i.e. *Jungle Fever*, 1991). We will be turning to these negative results more in a subsequent chapter on various critiques of liberalism. In this chapter, I will explore how narrative strategies supporting the romantic perspective function in American film. When the romantic perspective rules a film, the love relationship is allowed to win over the obstacles thrown in their path, even while attempting to resolve or erase the difference by the end of the film. Generally,

these resolutions employ specific representations of the differing characters and identities, as well as the evolution of the characters from one state to another through the course of transformative love, in order to bring them both into a more equal and compatible union. For example, in films portraying socio-economic status barriers to the coupling, the film must ultimately end with the two lovers becoming equal, with either the poor lover being elevated to wealthy, or the wealthy lover being demoted to lowly economic status. That is, the two divergent romantic partners cannot remain divergent in a satisfying, mainstream romance, but must be forced into some common space in which traditional and antique social orders either no longer apply or are no longer breached.

I see Wartenberg's theory as highly applicable to the ways that Jewish-Gentile intermarriage film functions. In liberal films that promote the romantic perspective, opposition to the Jewish-Gentile match is conquered, making way for an environment in which the Jew and the Gentile lover are unimpeded in their pursuit of personal romantic happiness.

### **Love, it's the New Style: Liberal Strategies in Positive Jewish-Gentile Romance**

Differing narrative strategies often depend on differing models of Jewish integration, as well as divergent ways to conceptualize or represent Jewish difference. I will discuss five different narrative strategies Hollywood employs to portray the triumph of romance over the social perspective, and how these films utilize them in order to resolve identity tension between the Jew and the Gentile so as to present a satisfying conclusion for the audience. The main motifs discussed are the trend to obscure Jewish difference entirely, the belief that Jewish tradition is an oppressive



burden that Jews willingly escape through romance, portraying interfaith romance as a method for removing Jewish difference through the transformation of the Jewish lover, the occasional portrayal of the Gentile becoming more like their Jewish lover, and, finally, by advancing the ideal that existential qualities are more important than inherited identities.

*i. The Invisible Jew: Obscuring Difference*

In the 2008 film *Rachel Getting Married*, a Jewish-in-name-only family, the Buchmans, experiences a wedding in which the seemingly Jewish bride (Rosemarie DeWitt) marries an African-American groom (Tunde Adebimpe) in a Hawaiian/Hindu ceremony with Latin, Japanese and Afro-Caribbean touches, surrounded by friends and family of every shade and ethnicity – in fact, the only Jewish note in the film, aside from the names, is their use of the Jewish salute “*l’chaim*” while cutting the cake. In this film, the supposedly Jewish family has completely merged into upper middle class WASP society, leaving them just as vulnerable to cultural consumerism and exoticism as their liberal white neighbours. There is no discussion of the family’s Jewish heritage, and it has been excluded from this celebration in favour of fashions having little to do with the cultures of either the bride or the groom. They are indistinguishable former-white-ethnics with no ethnicity of their own and must purchase the so-considered exotic heritage of others. While the racial and class tolerance of the family is admirable, the ceremony itself lacks the emotional depth which might have been inspired by a less neo-colonial wedding, and one that draws from the actual heritages of the lovers. This trend of obscuring Jewishness is found in a number of films. In *The Wedding Singer* (1998), Adam Sandler’s titular performer, Robbie Hart, sings in Hebrew at Bar

Mitzvahs with ease, but we never see what Judaism means to him. *Something's Gotta Give* (2003) gives Diane Keaton's playwright, Erica Barry, a seemingly Jewish ex-husband and a sister who claims to have served in the Israeli army, but with no more detail given as to Erica's own Jewish loyalties. It would be a case of an elephant in the cinematic room, except for the suspicion that the filmmakers do not ascribe that much importance to the issue of Jewishness.

This failure to address directly the Jewishness of one of the lovers in an unlikely couple is one of the popular narrative strategies used by liberal intermarriage films. By marginalizing the Jewish element to last names or minor cultural elements, and never actually making reference to the deeper meaning of Jewish identity or heritage, the makers of such films either consider the matter of no modern importance or hope that the audience will fail to see all aspects of the couples' differences. This lack begs the question as to why, exactly, the filmmakers have supplied one character with even minor Jewish elements. One can suggest that this is to add some descriptive colour to a character about whom not much else is known. The modern desire to be "unique" has led to the degradation of ethnic backgrounds to the nearly-inconsequential status of product choice or personality quirks (cf. Johnson 2008). It could also be that recent films are mirroring the way in which white ethnicity is perceived, and that Jewish identity is considered merely symbolic (Gans 1979), that it is completely voluntary (Cohen and Eisen 2000), or that self-identifying is just a matter of labels without any of the traditional consequences (Lieberson 1986; Alba 1990; Gans 1992; Lieberson and Waters 1993; cf. Glenn 2002).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These aspects tend to be the predominant modern view of Jewish identity, despite the fact that Jewish "outing" still occurs by audiences no matter how little a person identifies with their Jewish heritage

On a more symbolic level, the Jewishness of one partner, although muted enough to allay audience fears over their compatibility, may be constructed as a mere metaphor for the distance between individuals. That is, in order to communicate the gulf that stands between two protagonists at the beginning of the film, and the enormity of the task the couple faces in bridging that gap, the natural boundaries between strangers in modern life is rendered symbolically in the historical separation between Jews and Gentiles. Instead of historical ethnic boundaries, the modern demands of individualism in current American life have rendered every person divided from others, and Jewishness can be one symbolic mode for expressing this predicament.

The stage dressing of Jewishness as a superficial character trait also has a role in the narrative strategy used to explain the success of the interfaith romance. Because Jews have a reputation in America for being more socially liberal than other white groups (Litt 1961; Glaser 1997; cf. Fishman 2000), it could be that such films are using Jewishness as a way of explaining how the unlikely couple came to be and why it has a chance of survival. As theorist Homi Bhabha (1996) points out, the subaltern group, or a group that has, through oppression, served to help the mainstream construct its identity – a state in which the Jews have arguably existed (cf. Gran 2004) – is “also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power” (Bhabha 1996: 210). Thus, the subversive element within the Jews makes them exceptional subjects for unlikely couple narratives. In this light, Jewish characters subvert traditional mainstream hierarchies, which have been created in direct opposition to them, and thus

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(Glenn 2002) and the number of studies that have refuted the foretold decline in the significance of Jewish identity (i.e. Winter 1996; Kivisto and Nefzger 1993).

can do so more easily than non-Jews, even in romances directly prohibited by the conservative tenets of their own Judaism.

In order for the liberalism of romance to be activated there must be present a major element of unlikelihood that threatens the success of the romance. Many of the films that seek to obscure all meaningful references to the Jewishness of one of the partners still present themselves as unlikely couple narratives, even while ignoring religio-cultural differences as a factor. Diversionary differences – in other words differences that are not Jewishness despite the minor presence of Jewish identity – are, instead, often presented in the form of another, more socially acceptable, form of secular, modern unlikelihood – specifically, class, race and personality.

Perhaps the most popular example of a film which emphasizes a class difference while self-consciously submerging the Jewish-Gentile tension is *Dirty Dancing*. Taking place in the Catskill Mountains, this light popcorn fare tells the story of Francis “Baby” Houseman (Jennifer Grey), the youngest daughter of an upper-middle class doctor on the last family vacation before she enters an appropriate university. Despite being quite vocally liberal and socially aware, Baby is far from a rebel. She seems to have never once caused her parents any inconvenience. Of course, that trend changes through the course of the film, during which she falls in love with the resort’s rebellious dance instructor, Johnny Castle (Patrick Swayze), a low-class ne’er-do-well who is seen as trash by all of the upstanding people of the resort – even those who use him for sexual adventure for the summer. Johnny’s lower class positioning is well established by his role as a physical plaything of the wealthy Jewish ladies at the resort, and echoes in the filmmaking style, which reverses Laura Mulvey’s (1989) theory that in traditional

filmmaking the camera stands in for the gaze of the idealized male audience upon a series of objectified females. In *Dirty Dancing*, the low class Johnny is further marginalized as an objectified male object dangled for the viewing pleasure of a presumed female audience (Bergstein 2007; cf. Hansen 1986), which serves to highlight his vulnerable and dehumanized economic and social status. Only Baby, with her liberal views and kind heart, stops to see him as something other than a body that dances, and sees greater potential behind the troublemaking exterior.

While some critics have argued there is no justification in reading *Dirty Dancing* as a Jewish story (Herwald 2001), the placement of the resort, Kellerman's (which is highly reminiscent of the famous Jewish resort Grossinger's) in the so-called "Jewish Alps" of upstate New York at the end of the Jewish bungalow resort era (1920s-60s) is quite suggestive (cf. Richman 2003; Brown 2004). The fact that the Jewish resort industry was waning, and the location in which Jewish families placed their hope for Jewish teens to mingle with prospective Jewish mates was coming to an end, makes this film, with its inter-class and interfaith romance, extra poignant. It is hard not to agree with film critic Roger Ebert (1987), who writes:

The movie makes some kind of a half-hearted attempt to rip off "West Side Story" by making the girl Jewish and the boy Italian - or Irish, I forget ... It doesn't much matter, since the movie itself never, ever uses the word "Jewish" or says out loud what obviously is the main point of the plot: the family's opposition to a Gentile boyfriend of low social status. I guess people who care about such things are supposed to be able to read between the lines, and the great unwashed masses of American moviegoers are condemned to think the old man doesn't like Swayze's dirty dancing. (n.p.)

While not downplaying the role of class in the film, it seems far-fetched that the Housemans make no mention of Johnny not being Jewish given their enthusiasm for

marrying Baby off to Kellerman's grandson, who has no major recommendation aside from the money he will inherit and the fact that he seems to be Jewish. Thus, the film seeks to allay fears in the audience that the romance is ultimately doomed by reducing the social distinctions between the couple to just one – class or rank of birth, which is supposedly insignificant in capitalist, individualistic America, where one's monetary worth is, according to myth, purely a matter of one's personal work ethic and ingenuity. With the love of a good woman behind him, the story assures us that Johnny can put his low class behind him. The religio-cultural difference, however, might be considerably harder to surmount, so the film sets it aside.

Another major difference that has been used by some films to obscure the reality of Jewish-Gentile romance, though less often, is that of race. One example of a seemingly-Jewish lover falling into a romance with someone from a different racial category is *Corrina, Corrina* (1994), which stars African-American actress Whoopi Goldberg as the titular housemaid and Italian-American actor Ray Liotta as her employer, the recently widowed Manny Singer. There is, again, very little upon which to base a Jewish identification on Manny, with the major exception of his mother. A first generation American, Mrs. Singer (Erica Yohn) is small, worn and busy, with a heavy accent (that might be Russian, but is more generally "Old Country") and a host of worries about her only son. Her role, it seems, is to oppose the match in the most stereotypical way possible – by citing the old saying, "A bird can love a fish, but where will they build their nest?" Mrs. Singer's concerns about Manny romancing an African-American maid seems narrowly confined to race, as she advocates, instead, his hollow romance with an upper-middle class seemingly-WASP widow (Wendy Crewson) as an

alternative. Interestingly, Manny's romance with Corrina makes a lot more sense than with the WASP suburbanite – being a second generation Jewish man may lay behind the greater issues of his subaltern status, but his new identity as a widower has destroyed all of his known boundaries, and thrust him into a new position of standing outside the social circles he once knew as he realizes he no longer understands them. The employment of a vague Jewish identity in Manny possibly stems from the sociological image of Jewish Americans as historically more open to racial equality in the United States (Glaser 1997), despite the fact that Jews, like Manny's mother, in America have been no more successful at ridding their community of anti-black racism than any other group (Lerner and West 1996; Azoulay 1997; Brodtkin 1999). On a narrative level, the use of race makes the obstacles faced by the couple more steep than a Jewish-Gentile issue might appear to the average moviegoer who may believe that Jews are just another variety of white. Race, however, allows the story to explore the personal growth and perspective transformation that comes with mourning a great loss on an individual level. Older relatives, such as Mrs. Singer and Corrina's conservative black sister (Jennifer Lewis), wish to maintain the traditional social hierarchies that separate blacks from whites, but they are displayed as objects of outmoded prejudice. The mutual vulnerability of a bereaved Jewish man and a black woman barred from mainstream society make the couple a perfect fit, despite surface differences.

The third major narrative strategy for downplaying the problems between a Jewish and Gentile lover in a film that obscures Jewishness is to submerge the friction beneath that of gender, personality and disposition, which is well illustrated by the popular and influential romantic comedy *When Harry Met Sally...*(1989). As with the

other examples, there is little proof that this film even involves a Jew and a Gentile. However, Harry Burns, as played by Jewish actor Billy Crystal, can be interpreted as a Jewish character not only because of his name, but also by the humour and performative elements Crystal brings to the role (cf. Altman 1971; cf. Bial 2005), and by writer Nora Ephron's admission that the character was based on the real life situation of Jewish director Rob Reiner (Ephron 2000). Sally Albright, on the other hand, as played by Meg Ryan, is read as Gentile by her own performance and star persona,<sup>3</sup> but also by the telling detail that she believes companies do not produce Sunday "days of the week" underpants out of respect for God (suggesting a Christian background). The fact that Ephron privately, if not overtly, conceived of Harry and Sally as Jewish and Gentile is also revealed by her explanation that

Harry was originally conceived, in my mind anyway, as a Christian and Sally as a Jew....When Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan got involved, that was obviously not going to work, so everyone's last names were changed. (Quoted in Solomon 2009.)

Added to this is the theory that *When Harry Met Sally...* is neo-traditional romantic comedy's attempt to remake and reclaim the anti-romantic story of *Annie Hall* for the 1980s (Krutnik 1998), which makes reading Harry as Jewish and Sally as a Gentile in the finished product rather fitting. This difference is never mentioned in the film, and one gets the sense that the universal liberal politics of the 1980s would have somehow found this vulgar as the atmosphere of that decade worked against the ethnically liberated ethos of the 1970s and *Annie Hall* (Isaacs 1978; Friedman 1982). Instead, Harry and Sally are kept apart by a popular cinematic conflict – that of the war of the sexes and the differences between men and women. Ironically, in a society and genre

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<sup>3</sup> A persona is an actor's image as a star that is built through several roles, as well as including elements of his or her own personality (Giannetti 1990).



that seeks to publicly legitimate only heterosexual matches, romantic comedies seem to suggest that relationships between men and women are fundamentally problematic at the core due to the deep emotional rifts that exist between the two genders (Krutnik 1990). While Sally seeks stability and long term affection, Harry appears to value only coital pleasure and variety – this, according to the characters prior to their unification, makes any sort of relations between the two impossible.

Nevertheless, Ephron's theory of romantic comedy reveals that, for her, any difference can make a movie Jewish or not without any direct references to Jewish identity, according to the source of the conflict. Ephron, who is an accomplished and well known screenwriter, and one of the major progenitors of the neo-traditional era of romantic comedy (cf. Krutnik 1998), explains,

I always say there's two traditions of romantic comedy: there's the Jewish tradition, and the Christian tradition, if you will. In the Christian tradition, there is a genuine obstacle. In what you would have to say [is] the sort of Jewish tradition, pioneered by Woody Allen, the basic obstacle is the neurosis of the male character. (Ephron interview 2000)

Therefore, according to Ephron, her romantic comedies are in essence Jewish as long as – as in the case of Harry and Sally – the only thing keeping the pair from happiness is psychological differences. This understanding shows that the employment of a vaguely Jewish male and an apparently Gentile woman in *When Harry Met Sally...* submerges the possible Jewish/Gentile cultural differences under the more conventional concerns of the battle of the sexes, which are seemingly easier to accept. The public humiliation and transformation of the male lead, followed by his declaration of reformation, is all the redress this battle requires to bring a romantic comedy to a successful end (Hampton 2004; McDonald 2007). The Jewish/Gentile cultural issue might require more

significant work on the part of both lovers to solve if it had been more important in the film or to the characters.

Therefore, we can see that one popular way for liberal films to promote Jewish-Gentile interfaith romance is to obscure the Jewish identity. On the one hand, this may stem from a disbelief in the realities of Jewish difference in contemporary America, and to marginalize concerns over family or religious differences as trivial compared to the larger issues of class, race and gender. On the other hand, this obscuring of Jewish difference, one can argue, also appears to help filmmakers avoid delving into a problem that is perhaps older and often much less simple.

ii. *Losing the “Oriental Tendency”: Jews Being Liberated from Judaism*

In a handful of liberal films, there persists a troubling view of Judaism as a burden, one from which the Jews seeking intermarriage are fleeing. In some of these narratives, the portrayal of traditional Jewish culture takes on the turn-of-the-last-century claims that traditional Judaism is a foreign, restrictive entity that oppresses its members. This was often couched in language of the hideous and inappropriate “Orientalism” of traditional Jewish customs, which was seen as an embarrassment and a threat to more liberal-minded Jews. The ultimate values of the modern age were seeping into the ideals of liberal Judaism, and traditional Jews were considered guilty of the two most grievous transgressions of modern Western life at the time: the failure to assimilate, and opposition to progress (Brown 1972). Finally, the debate over the importance of progress over tradition, or law, was a divide that could no longer be

supported by the Jewish community. In 1894, Oswald John Simon wrote of traditional religious Jews,

The persistent effort on the part of the Rabbinical Jew to preserve every element of Orientalism, in utter disregard of the transformation in his own temperament, and its complete unfitness for Oriental methods, is a point upon which no compromise is possible. (267)

Further, Simon writes that such an attachment to the foreign ways of distant Hebrew ancestors only serves to alienate otherwise conscientious Jews who desire a communion with the spirit of the religion but who cannot condone the antiquated ways of traditionalist Jewish congregations. He admits that traditional worship might appear quaint and picturesque to outsiders, but that the attempt to prevent the Jewish entrance into the modern age is “doomed to failure” (268). Simon (1894) warns that while the spiritual beliefs of the community might remain the same, the mode of expression cannot stay frozen in oriental garb.

The temperament of a human being must necessarily vary when he is living as a pariah in a foreign land, afflicted by persecution, and when he is a free citizen of a State where there is no persecution. There is an unspeakable difference between the conditions of enforced separateness and those of political assimilation. The habit of life is transformed, the individual temperament is changed. To allege that the religious symbols suited to one condition are equally appropriate for another that is totally different is to attempt to do in words what cannot be done in reason. (268)

Therefore, according to Simon (1894), traditional Judaism is not only “Oriental,” but an unreasonable attempt to keep Judaism and Jewish customs safe from the passage of time despite the comforts offered by rationality and democratic assimilation. Simon’s loyalties are firmly entrenched in the modern liberal West, and his conceptualization of liberal Jews as distinct from the supposedly anti-modern traditional Jews takes on a very dichotomized feel, as seen in his assertion that “A change not less than that which

distinguishes the Oriental from the Occidental is the aim of that reform which I would advocate..." (268), though his optimism that his more "Rabbinical" brethren will come around to his progressive views is dim.

This view of traditional Judaism, especially that of the *Ostjuden* (meaning "eastern Jews") of Poland and Russia who were flooding into the UK and America during this time and causing great embarrassment to the established Jewish circles by their poverty, foreignness and attachment to pre-modern ideals, required Jews to change in order to better fit their new, post-Enlightenment nations. One of the founders of liberal Judaism in the UK (Langton 2002), C.G. Montefiore expressed a clear warning to the traditional Jews:

In an oriental country Judaism might rightly have a purely oriental setting. In the free countries of the West the oriental setting needed modification and change. Occidental Judaism required an occidental framework. (Montefiore 1904: 380)

Following such contemporaries as Simon, Montefiore also persisted in the notion that the traditional *Ostjuden* were a people mired in the past, neglecting the centuries of Jewish development in Eastern Europe that had actually taken place since the Diaspora by describing what he sees as the failings of these foreign and misguided Jews:

The watchwords of Liberal Judaism were progress and development. That which was right and good and true for the Jews of A.D. 500 or 1000, or even 1700, was not necessarily right and good and true for the Jews of to-day. That which had maintained Judaism for a thousand years might be strangling it to-day. (380)

By expressing such views on the traditional lives led by these embarrassing Eastern Jews, Montefiore and Simon, and others, were perpetuating in liberal circles the idea that such Jews must assimilate or perish as there was no room for them in modern democracy, while seeking to establish themselves as in opposition to the foreign,

oriental interlopers. Relying on the work of post-Spinoza scholars, these new reformers sought to bring Judaism into the Enlightenment by employing textual criticism and claiming there was an authentic kernel of spiritual faith within Judaism that was being smothered by dogmatic anti-modern lifestyle trappings (Messer 1986).

The view of traditional Judaism as maintaining a dark and sinister Oriental character has a history in liberalism, which is still felt in the cinema. This Orientalist portrayal of ancient Jewish roots and culture as foreign, anti-modern and threatening is not simply a product of anti-Semitic Gentile filmmakers. It can be tied to Hannah Arendt's theory that "the privileged Jew," one whose wealth or talents have allowed them to rise above the masse of Jews, will always seek to reaffirm that they are above the stereotypes applied to "other Jews" (1946). Jewish filmmakers and audiences may be returning to negative views of seemingly illiberal Jewish cultures as a way to distance themselves from elements within their own ethnoreligious group that make them uncomfortable.<sup>4</sup>

A prime filmic example of the liberal orientalist view of traditional Jewish groups is the 1998 Miramax feature *A Price Above Rubies*, in which Israeli-born<sup>5</sup> writer/director Boaz Yakin presents New York's ultra-Orthodox Jewish community as a fundamentalist world of brutal oppression, religious sterility and violent misogyny.

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<sup>4</sup> This, of course, is not to discount the possibility that Jewish filmmakers are also trying to provide social critique of traditional Jewish culture from within as a way to promote reform of the communities portrayed. However, it would be hard to imagine a film in America and in English whose primary audience is comprised of traditional Jews, and the question remains as to what the filmmaker might be trying to gain by exhibiting negative views of religious Jews for what may be a predominantly Gentile movie-going consumer market.

<sup>5</sup> It is useful to briefly note the tensions that exist between secular Israelis and some ultra-Orthodox Israelis (or *Haredi*), which might be a factor in Yakin's anti-Orthodox position. Part of the disagreement between the *Haredi* and secular Israelis may stem from, among other issues, the frequent friction between secular Israelis' typically liberal lifestyle and the vocal *Haredi* disapproval of prohibited or un-Jewish activities in the Holy Land, such as recent protests against movie theatres that open on the Sabbath and the use of cars during commanded days of rest, etc. See Shilhav 1993.

Sonia Horowitz (Renée Zellweger) is the sexually unsatisfied and suffocated wife of an ineffectual Yeshiva student (Glenn Fitzgerald), who is righteous but weak and overzealous in his devotion to his charismatic leader. In order to support their child, Sonia has taken a job with her brother-in-law (Christopher Eccleston) in his jewellery business. During the course of this work, she is repeatedly raped by the brother-in-law, who is not only chauvinistic but resentful towards his younger brother-in-law because of the adoration the community has put on him as a scholar. The older brother-in-law, who is more pragmatically inclined, is believed to be of lesser value because he has entered business instead of religious study. Thus religion has rendered the woman miserable, the scholarly brother symbolically impotent and the older brother barbaric with jealousy by being shut out of the religious elite.<sup>6</sup> Turning furtively to the women in her community in her desperate unhappiness, Sonia is shunned, as the systematic oppression of women has gone so deep that women even participate in the victimization of one other. Finally, being “exposed” as an adulterer (because she did not struggle “enough”) and a wanton woman, Sonia is thrust from her community. Her eventual solace rests in the new individuality and freedom she gains through the passionate sexual embrace of a Puerto Rican ethnically Catholic/secular artist (Allen Payne), as well as the maternal welcome she receives from the man’s beneficent mother (Teodorina Bello). Sonia finds in this non-Jewish family the romance, sexual fulfillment, excitement, freedom and fellowship of which she was deprived within the Jewish community. But this rebellion against the restraints of fundamentalist society is made at an almost unthinkable price – Sonia is forced to abandon all parental rights,

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<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps mirroring the Genesis (chapter 4) legend of Cain murdering Abel because his sacrifice is less acceptable than that of his pious brother, with rape of the wife taking the place of fratricide.

giving her child over to her husband's family in exchange for a divorce. As she walks away, perhaps never to see her child again, the film offers us no room to doubt the rightness of her actions. Life within such an oppressive community was not survivable for the free spirit burning within this young woman, a spirit which could only be liberated through the sexual and spiritual coupling with her Gentile lover and soul mate, thus promoting the idea that a woman's right to control her destiny, regardless of her other obligations, is more important than her religion, and more vital to her than even her responsibility as a mother.

The Jews in this film act shamefully and look menacing, so much so that Sonia is made distinct by them not only by her beliefs and actions but also by her appearance; one almost forgets that she, too, is supposedly Jewish – the character comes off as a stranger lost amongst the foreign monsters of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community and the viewer is put into her place as an unwitting victim of her strange, Oriental violators. Her eventual self-liberation through interfaith love is meant to be experienced viscerally by the viewer, and we are meant to have no compassion for the Jews she is right to reject. Perhaps we should not even consider, one can surmise, the Jewish child she leaves behind to the mercy of this soulless cult. Their world is one of silent and drab torture, in which the inmates are void of mercy for one another. In contrast, the world of the Puerto Ricans she enters is full of colour and light – in this world, the fires of compassion, family, freedom and individual enterprise burn brightly. This, along with the impression of stepping from the anti-modern to the present, leaves the audience in little doubt as to which is the “real America” and which is the stubborn rejecter of liberal progress.

The employment of gender equality issues and the vulnerability of women has long since been a battleground for the liberal critique of traditional religious cultures (cf. Mahmood 2005). Multiculturalism is often viewed as an opponent of feminism, and vice versa, in terms of the role of women and their oppression, even though the feminist critique of traditional lifestyles often errs in removing the religious agency of minority women in these world cultures (Volpp 2001; Mahmood 2005). While at times feminist concerns for the treatment of women in different cultures are useful and proper, one should not ignore the fact that they do have many political agendas behind them.<sup>7</sup> These concerns are a major part of the way the West defines and dominates subordinate cultures (Mohanty 1988), as liberals share unease that gender equality is something only protected in liberal democracies and is under constant threat in traditional cultures. An essay on the role of patriarchal belief systems in the perpetuation of gender inequality by Lise Fortier (1975) shows an example of one liberal feminist view of the roots of gender oppression. Because virtually all societies have been patriarchies, most societies must keep their attachment to antiquated notions of femininity and gender roles, and in order to legitimate this patriarchy these societies must create taboos and psychological disdain for women, often using religion as a main tool of oppression (Fortier 1975). According to Fortier, the main function of religion is to maintain traditional hierarchies. Female sexuality, physical form and societal roles are all connected in that the woman's lack of a penis is connected with her lack of power, menstruation is connected with the image of the female as impure or dirty, and the mysteries of the female orgasm and reproductive ability are connected with superstitious fear of female empowerment. In

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the treatment of women has been a key rhetorical weapon in the recent "War on Terror," and has been a significant factor in the negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in recent popular cultural products (Shaheen 2003).



traditional societies, the over-reproduction of children is due to the emphasis that men place on producing healthy male children, the only progeny of true value. Without the desire for an heir, Fortier asserts, “few women would not be satisfied with two children,” (280) as the physical trials of pregnancy and childbirth make having more than two children seem illogical from the female’s point of view. It is true that most civilized societies, even religious ones, have laws against rape, but these laws, Fortier explains, are merely a matter of protecting male property (his wife and her reproductive abilities/product). In this view, rape trials are actually less about the crime against the woman than they are about deciding how much the woman participated in this violation of the male property by investigating which of her behaviours might have contributed to her rape or failed to prevent it. All of these attitudes are observed in *A Price Above Rubies*, which shows traditional Jewish life being one of servitude and involuntary/enforced reproduction for women, and one which promotes the total systemic presence of male dominance over their objectified and subjugated females.

It is true that misogyny, spousal abuse and other forms of violence against women is an issue more serious than is often admitted in Orthodox Jewish families and communities, and one that it is often linked to patriarchal attitudes (Cwik 1995; Devoe, Borges and Conroy 2002). The lives of women compelled by their religion to comply with ancient rules may be ones of unfulfilled personal longing and secretiveness (Winston 2004). Harrowing tales of escapes made by young women from the “stifling domain” of ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities make for good media, and a recent article in the *Toronto Star* told of one Israeli “yotze” (a woman who has fled the *Haredi*

community) and her choice of freedom over a life in which she must live according to patriarchal rules that would order her

... to submit to an arranged marriage at a young age; to bear as many as a dozen children, while working to support those huge families as their husbands pursue long studies of the scriptures; to cover their hair with a wig or other form of headdress; and to deny the dictates of their own true selves, while obeying their rabbis at every turn. (Ross 2009, n.p.)

Many women who have left similar communities speak of the extreme lack of choice and personal control, claiming that the roles of wife and mother are the only ones open to females in traditional Judaism (Schwartz 2004; Ross 2009). In some cases, the religious and spiritual excitement which might prove to compensate young men for their strict lifestyles is even barred to women, who are prohibited from official higher learning and much of the ritual (Davidman 2004). In the end, according to some reports, there is nothing to reward unbelieving Orthodox women for their obedient lifestyles, and they become part of the legion of refugees from religious communities. Because the education of young women often reflects this ideological gender role inequality, there have been organizations established to help those fleeing the world of Orthodoxy to transition into the contemporary world where the options can be overwhelming (Schwartz 2004; Davidman 2004). Malkie Schwartz, who had escaped her Lubavitch parents' household with the help of her grandmother so that she could study in a secular university – something that would have been forbidden to her had she remained with her father – is one such woman, who now runs an organization to help refugees from New York's Hassidic community find a life outside the cloistered religious network. Of her group, Footsteps, she writes that it is decidedly not anti-religious, but that it is founded on “the fundamental principle that... [it is] the right of the individual to choose

his or her own way of life” (Schwartz 2004: 13). In light of these accounts, liberal concerns over the rights of women in Orthodox Jewish families and communities are both justified and compassionate, bringing the liberal ideals of freedom and equality to those suffocating under theocratic male dominance.

Such negative understandings of the religiously observant life should not be taken as the only possible impression of Jewish Orthodoxy’s view of women. Recent sociological studies of Orthodox Jewish women, particularly those who are the opposite of the “*yotzim*” – the “*baalei teshuvah*,” or returnees – give us reason to suggest the portrayal of oppression and male dominance is not the entirety of the community’s gender environment. That modern women return to Orthodox Judaism is something of a paradox in a post-feminist world, acknowledges sociologist Lynn Davidman (1991). These women have made the choice to leave a world of liberal egalitarian ideology for the sake of what is often considered an oppressive and anti-modern life. Davidman found that a number of women returning to Orthodoxy were successful, self-assured women, which might surprise people with notions of the “type” of women within Orthodox Judaism. Davidman’s later work admitted that in some cases Hasidism does have a strongly essentialist notion of womanhood, reducing it to a reproductive function, and that, other than producing children, men should not have anything to do with women (2004). However, the women in Davidman’s 1991 study found that rather than degrading their role as females, Orthodox Judaism affirmed their value as women and as mothers, which is something they found lacking in secular life – a modern prejudice they claimed shunned women for wanting to fulfill their reproductive roles as much or more than they wanted to hold on to economic or social ambitions. The totality

of Orthodox spirituality also gave their entire lives meaning, which they felt was absent in contemporary liberal Jewish circles (Davidman 1991; Kaufman 1991). This interpretation of gender role assignment suggests that the traditional gender barriers are not always perceived as pejorative within an Orthodox community, as they are often interpreted by so-called modern critics observing from the outside. Within that cultural context, they are perceived to make sense, and for those who have chosen to adopt it the religious life is rewarding.

Yet this cultural context remains unacknowledged by many representations of Orthodox life. Instead, liberal Jewish reformers insist that there is a non-gender-biased spiritual core to Judaism that has been obscured by the attempt to freeze and maintain a Judaism from a patriarchal time period, negating the religious freedom of the Orthodox for the sake of liberal beliefs. It is a paradox that liberalism, which calls for tolerance of minorities, is somewhat stymied when it comes to dealing with religiously illiberal beliefs. This dilemma is highlighted by the plight of women escaping Orthodoxy to the promise of personal freedom in secular society. The liberal desire for gender equality across all cultural lines is framed not as cultural interference, for that would not be acceptable to liberal sensibilities, but as a “cultural transformation” through which liberals hope to naturally promote progress in strict Jewish culture (Smolin 1995: 158). Portrayals of the Oriental and foreign brutality of the anti-modern Jewish community in *A Price Above Rubies* is one way that Hollywood illustrates the liberal ideology of assimilation, or at least personal freedom, through interfaith romance.

This is not to say, however, that the image of how secular Jews treat women and other vulnerable family members always constitutes an example of tolerance and

compassionate societal norms. In contrast with *A Price Above Rubies'* Sonia, who leaves her community for the sake of her spirit and the love of a non-Jew, Carl Reiner's *Where's Poppa?* (1970) shows the attempts of a secular Jewish man, Gordon Hocheiser (George Segal), to abandon his elderly Jewish mother (Ruth Gordon), who is suffering from dementia. Having attained his law degree, and finally found the beautiful Gentile woman of his dreams, Louise Callan (Trish Van Devere), Gordon is determined to rid himself forever of the albatross around his neck – his diminutive mother who will not cease her daydreams of her Vaudevillian, Eastside youth. Gordon is caught between two thoughts of personal importance; on one hand, he promised his dying father that he would always take care of his mother, yet, on the other, he fears that his mother's eccentric and unabashedly low-class ways will scare away his lovely, all-American sweetheart, who may be his one chance to escape the insanity of his birth life in favour of the modern orderliness he desires. Because of her symbolic clutter (from hoarding memorabilia from decades of her Jewish life) and her distortion of time between her present and her childhood, Mrs. Hocheiser represents the burden felt by numerous Jews in their desire for assimilation (cf. Prell 1999). Gordon's promise to his father, being symbolic of his ancestral loyalty, can no longer be upheld, because at some point his embarrassment over being tied to such an outcast, untidy and foreign entity will force him to abandon the burden or cease his upward climb in American society. *Where's Poppa?*, placed in its historical context of the young baby-boom generation of educated Jews dealing with the increasing age and infirmity of their pre-war first or second generation, lower-class parents, represents an unsavoury venting of bile against bearing the weight of mothers who are not socially acceptable, which is a burden that is not

enjoyable to young professionals who feel themselves too American to deal with the burden of these female loci of traditional culture (Friedman 1982). In keeping with Philip Roth's contemporary explorations of Jewish American masculinity under the thumb of Jewish mothers (Prell 1996), Gordon cannot fulfill his individuality until he liberates himself from his duty to his dead father and his emasculating mother. The film ends with him happily dropping his demented mother off at a rest home and making good his escape with the girl of his dreams.

Taken in relation to the oppressed Orthodox female of *A Price Above Rubies*, *Where's Poppa?* shows us a liberal Jewish male who also abandons his community, in the form of his elders, in an attempt to grasp the solace of a better life outside of his Jewish family. We can see the trend in liberal Hollywood's treatment of intermarriage to assert interfaith romance as an escape route for Jews seeking access to America's freedom and personal choice, whether it is a literal community one is desirous of leaving or the shadow of humiliation only a few generations away. In other words, Gentile lovers are the doors through which Jews can rid themselves of the outmoded and foreign baggage of their anachronistic culture, and the problem of intermarriage is resolved through the narrative strategy of making traditional Jewish life or culture appear unbearable.

iii. *Hiding Behind a Mask: Intermarriage as Facilitating Jewish Assimilation*

Briefly, assimilation is the process through which groups and people not originally of a nation become culturally homogenized with the mainstream group of the host nation (Gans 1997; Alexander 2001). In the liberal nation state, some mode of

incorporation – that is, the process of bringing new citizens into an alignment with the national ideals of the founders and leaders – is required. There is, however, great variety in the manner of this incorporation, and is by no means limited to official governmental policy, but is often a process that occurs through the participation of the minorities seeking integration. Assimilation is one of the oldest of the modern modes of bringing newcomers into a society, and is a process in which “...members of primordially denigrated groups are allowed, and often encouraged, to “pass” into public life” (Alexander 2001: 203). This process is completed through “separating persons from qualities” (Alexander 2001: 243), in that it is achieved not merely through extending legal rights to the minority, but focuses on the construction of a public identity. In assimilation, a transformation must occur in which the stigmatized minority sheds the undesirable original identity through a “purification” process that allows people to drop their distinct qualities, because in such systems, individuals from minority groups are accepted but communal qualities are not. From the point of view of the ruling or mainstream community, assimilation is essential and provides a civilizing education to the minority, which is vital before allowing them access to the rights and privileges of citizenship. As a result of this educated transformation, these minorities are encouraged to assert different, more acceptable, qualities in public. Assimilation is one of the oldest modes of incorporation because it appears to be the most natural reaction to difference for a liberal nation state – it achieves incorporation without challenging established modes of civil life. In this scheme, “foreign” behaviours remain foreign, and the newcomers themselves change to shed this foreignness. This mode is distinct from less harsh modes of integration such as hyphenation or multiculturalism in that it works

upon the minority. Multiculturalism, in contrast, works on the mainstream group by encouraging them to broaden their cultural horizon, and thereby democratize their definition of who is an ideal citizen (Alexander 2001). In assimilation, it is the responsibility of the minority to adapt to the dominant culture already established in their new nation, even if this changes or annihilates the cultures of their homeland.

As Nathan Glazer (1993) correctly points out, the word assimilation itself has become something of a curse word in contemporary society, as multicultural governments and organizations attempt to distance themselves from the assimilationist policies of the past by appearing “post-assimilation.” Yet Glazer also reminds us that “...assimilation in the United States is not dependent on public ideology, on school curricula, on public approbation; factors in social and economic and cultural life foster it, and it proceeds apace” (1993: 134). Liberal film shows us how media representations of ethnic groups can encourage private assimilation, even while governments outwardly abandon official group assimilationist aspirations, or at least obscure its role in their public rhetoric.

Indeed, even while diversity is a common cause within liberal circles, one of the major narrative strategies employed by Hollywood to make intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles appear not only feasible but also desirable is to promote the Gentile partner as a means to assimilate the Jewish self to American values. As opposed to the previous section, this strategy is not about helping Jews escape the oppressive and oriental Jewish religious community, but about helping them get past the neuroses within themselves that are the result of a Jewish familial upbringing (Fishman 2004). While the public image might be that the Jews are already assimilated to American ways of life, it



is seems that Hollywood does not believe this assimilation has been complete, and has resorted to some very old ideas of Jewish difference. One of the primary aspects of Jewish difference in Hollywood intermarriage romances is that of mental state and emotional nature, as was noted above by Nora Ephron and rooted partially in the works of Woody Allen. In short, Hollywood films portray the American Jew as mentally and emotional fragile, or neurotic, almost by nature, and this representation shows no sign of waning.

The idea of Jewish neurosis is an old stereotype which seems to have taken particular root in the American image of Eastern European Jews and rose in prominence with the racial and epidemiological sciences at the turn of the last century. In 1886, the German physician Rudolph Virchow concluded that Jewish children were medically indistinguishable from Gentile children (Konner 2009), yet this was certainly not the final word on Jewish race and physicality. In the 1880s through the First World War era, the discovery and study of Tay-Sachs disease, specifically its predominance amongst Ashkenazi Jewish populations, gave power to the members of the medical and scientific community who wished to define Jews as a distinct racial group, with the physical illness giving what appeared to be rational proof. Feeding into American nativism of the time and the increasingly heated debate about allowing the entrance of non-Protestant immigrants (Higham 1992), the issue of Tay-Sachs became a platform for anti-Jewish genetic science, with doctors explaining the Jewish proclivity towards the brain illness by pointing to the stereotype of Jewish nervousness and anxiety, citing a belief that hereditary Jewish neurosis made them more prone to disease of the nerves and brain. While many doctors, especially Jewish ones, argued that the Jewish

appearance of nervousness was most likely caused by a history of persecution and deprivation in their homelands, those who were concerned that Jewish immigration was bringing “tainted blood” into the country countered by showing how these immigrants “continued to display their nervous tendencies in America where they were free from persecution,” which, to them, was proof that that the Jews were not only a distinct racial group, but an inferior one (Reuter 2006: 311). Also basing their theories for the origins of Tay-Sachs on the belief that Jews had the clannish habit of inbreeding, these doctors not only used the disease as proof of Jewish racial inferiority, but also as an illustration of the Jewish inability to assimilate into acceptable American behaviours. Infants stricken with Tay-Sachs usually died within a year of birth, taking on an evocative image of a people under a curse and without a future. Allowing such foreign bodies into America, therefore, was seen as inviting in an unnecessary drain on the American health care system but without the benefit of gaining productive new Americans, as the Jews were simply not willing to rid themselves of their antiquated prejudices and behaviours, and their illnesses and neurosis were the product of these unhealthy habits (Reuter 2006).

In a 1903 issue of *The New York Medical Journal*, a physician by the name of C.E. Atwood opined that Jews were inherently unsuited to the fast-paced life in America, especially in urban areas, because their neurosis, habitual sickness and generally weak physiques made them ill-equipped to cope with the stress. In 1905, J.H. McKee called the Jews “a race in which the neuropathic factor is prominent” (28). In 1918, Dr Isador Coriat, a public health specialist from Baltimore, wrote an extensive description of Jewish racial inferiority and systematic, hereditary Jewish idiocy. Coriat

did acknowledge the long term effects of persecution in Russia as the basis of Jewish mental problems, but also cited their weak brains and delicate psychology as the root of their reported proclivity towards over-emotionalism, hyper-sensitivity, diseased adrenal glands, ineffectual nervous systems, and their statistical likelihood of producing weak offspring. According to Coriat, the typical Jewish nervous disorder was characterized by a racing heart, gastro-intestinal disturbances, flushing/sweating skin, physical unsteadiness and habitual fatigue. Many doctors also wrote that Jews were also more prone to diabetes, syphilis, tuberculosis, physical deformities and body odour (Konner 2009). The Jewish mind and body was seen as transgressing the American value placed on vitality, health and productivity by portraying Jews as weak and ill by nature. The image of an ancient, twisted people whose bloodlines were rotting and degenerating was, in a manner of speaking, a replacement of the Christian myth of Jewish blood libel, but dressed in modern, scientific language and, therefore, more acceptable to contemporary liberal circles. The failure of Jewish bloodlines was often blamed on the antiquated Jewish (and un-American) practice of strict endogamy, and this perception grew even while, ironically, the fear burgeoned that Jewish weakness would be spread through healthy American populations and that racial mixing would lead to the degeneration of the originally strong and healthy American people (Stepan 1985; Singerman 1986; Higham 1992; Paul 1995; Reuter 2006). Both of these contradictory concerns and stereotypes about Jews, even though illogical when taken together, still haunt Jewish portrayals in film.

There is, perhaps, no better example of the nervous Jewish male caricatures currently present than the roles created for and performed by the comedian, actor and

filmmaker Ben Stiller; this reliance on Jewish neurosis as a means of characterization is especially visible in some of his most successful vehicles *Meet the Parents* (2000), its sequel *Meet the Fockers* (2004), *There's Something About Mary* (1998) and *Along Came Polly* (2004). Stiller's character or persona is often completely unlikable, though pitiable, with a constantly questioned manhood and a mind and body which refuse to work in harmony. He is seen as tense, frustrated, high-strung, and angry, as he is harassed by everything from his own zippers to cuddly pets. In *Meet the Parents*, he is thrown up against the Wild West masculinity of his prospective father-in-law Jack Byrnes (Robert De Niro), whose semblance of normalcy hides deeply held secrets about his work for the CIA. Jack's assumptions revolving around the sexuality, masculinity and ethics of Stiller's character, a male nurse by the unsubtle name of Gaylord Focker, are the foundation for a set of increasingly horrific misunderstandings and mishaps. In the sequel, *Meet the Fockers*, Gaylord's free-spirited hippie Jewish parents Bernie and Roz, played with vitality by Dustin Hoffman and Barbra Streisand, are cast in stark opposition to Jack's mainstream, Cold War era ethics of no-nonsense conformity, leaving the kooky Jews in a position of likable outsiders in contrast to the emotional constipation of the De Niro's tough guy. *There's Something About Mary* was Stiller's breakout performance, which established him in the role of the *nebbish* (the nerdy weakling similar to that made famous by Woody Allen) for the new century (Bronski 2004). In this film, he plays a man, Ted, who has been obsessed with the girl that got away, Mary (Cameron Diaz), since their disastrous aborted attempt to attend the prom together. Stiller continues this formula and character with what I consider the pinnacle of his persona, *Along Came Polly*, in which Stiller's character, Rueben, suffers the

infidelity of his Jewish wife (Debra Messing) on their honeymoon, only to reinvent his life with an old high school crush, Polly (Jennifer Aniston). In *Meet the Parents* and *Meet the Fockers*, Stiller's most complex and transformative relationship is with his father-in-law, but in the *Mary* and *Polly* films, it is through the pursuit and consummation of romance with carefree and spirited women that his character is reformed. Yet the similarity is significant that in all four of these Ben Stiller vehicles, it is a strong Gentile figure who is the catalyst that shepherds him from an outwardly meek, frustrated and small man with a plethora of mental and nervous issues (mostly created by his upbringing amongst interesting yet bizarre Jews) into a fully-developed, comfortable human. Nowhere is this more salient than in *Along Came Polly*, so we shall consider this film in more depth as an example of how this narrative strategy presents romantic love (particularly interfaith love) as a means to a personal change akin to assimilation.

In *Along Came Polly*, Reuben Feffer (Stiller), a clingy and weak insurance risk assessor, is introduced to the audience at his wedding; he obsesses over the safety of the waxed floors and other hazards at the reception hall, but, in a bit of a gender reversal, he is thrilled to be getting married, because, as is repeated throughout the film, marriage has been his goal since childhood – all Reuben ever wanted to do is get married. This desire is perhaps to be expected since Reuben is constantly aware of every present or remote danger, because to him marriage is the ultimate safe position. This understanding of marriage has been ingrained by the example set for him by his Jewish parents. While theirs is not a particularly happy or romantic relationship (his mother is domineering and ridiculous, while his father has not spoken more than a few words in

decades), it has lasted, and shows no signs of crumbling. Reuben is not seeking a romantic, passionate relationship, but rather a stable, safe and dependable union, placing him in the stereotypically female position right from the beginning of the film. The object of his desire for anchoring is Lisa Kramer, a Jewish real estate agent. Safety, to Reuben, is a Jewish woman who might not be overly romantic, but one who is reliable. Yet from the marketing of this film as a romantic comedy, the audience is correct in assuming the marriage will be disrupted. Within the first half hour, Reuben is stripped of all illusions of security in his capture and binding of Lisa when he finds her having sex with her French nudist scuba instructor (Hank Azaria). Typical of the *schlemiel*-type character,<sup>8</sup> Reuben had bowed out of the scuba diving session due to a weak stomach, and had gone back to set up a placidly romantic meal for Lisa. Reuben's complacency was so deep that his only concern in sending his new bride off with a strange, naked man was that she be safe while diving. In the end, the Frenchman's bodily and sexual freedom and confidence was too attractive for Lisa to resist in contrast with Jewish Reuben's effeminate modesty and eager domestication.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The *schlemiel* is the ultimate chump, who is not only unlucky but randomly victimized by even things that should be safe. See Bial 2005: 86 -106.

<sup>9</sup> The sexual and bodily humiliations of Ben Stiller's films are extensive. In *There's Something About Mary*, not only does Stiller's character suffer a symbolic castration of his dignity by getting his penis caught in his zipper on prom night, he inadvertently desacrillizes Mary, the object of his pathetic desires, with his own ejaculate (which she mistakes for hair gel) making his sexuality both diminished for himself and tainting for others, particularly women, and emphasizing the profane (as opposed to purifying) impact of physical love. The humiliation and vulnerability of Stiller's character in *There's Something About Mary* regarding his penis is significant in terms of the way it subverts traditional masculinity's idea of the penis as strong and sacred. The link between the injured penis and Judaism in Stiller's persona is reinforced by the humiliation he endures in *Meet the Fockers* when his mother not only displays his relic foreskin to his horrified new in-laws, but then, during his attempt to end the embarrassment, drops it into the molten fondue, as if symbolizing a second circumcision (Buchbinder 2008). As seen in the introduction, the Jewish male body and sexuality problematize gender roles, and this is not confined to Ben Stiller. In *Anger Management* (2003), Adam Sandler's mild mannered character, David Buznik, is constantly humiliated by a rival with larger genitalia, while remembering the horrors of his traumatic childhood experience of having his shorts pulled down by a neighbourhood bully at the moment of his first kiss, thereby permanently linking insecurities about his unimpressive penis size with romantic activities in his mind. In this film, this bodily sexual humiliation is also combined with repeated assaults

It is at this point, after a broken and ineffective Reuben is forced to accept being rescued by Lisa's new lover and returns to his house, job and life that the romantic comedy begins. It is here, as well, that the Gentiles Reuben encounters begin to rise in prominence in his transformation from ungainly, frightened and unhappy Jewish *schlemiel* to confident, strong and satisfied American male. There are two non-Jewish characters who impress upon Reuben the unhealthiness of his refusal to take risks – the first is a hyper-masculine Australian businessman, Leland Van Lew (Bryan Brown), whom Reuben is assessing for insurance purposes, and the second is the titular Polly, a beautiful, free-spirited adventuress with whom he falls in love, as improbable as their romance may seem at the beginning (Bronski 2004). Through the heroic Leland, Reuben learns a form of masculine charm stemming from a brave acceptance that risk is part of any rewarding behaviour, and that real men do not live in fear of danger, but embrace the eventuality of death by placing their confidence in their own bodily strength and emotional stamina – that it is the role of men to live as if they have the strength to survive everything until the inevitable moment they indeed meet death. Leland's function as a role model for Reuben places him in opposition with his narrative antithesis, Reuben's old fashioned Jewish boss, Stan Indursky (Alec Baldwin), a vulgar, tactless and materialistic man of very little heroism. Over the course of the

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on his heterosexual boundaries, via his therapist Buddy (Jack Nicholson), representing so-called strong masculine identity, who forces him to spoon in the nude, frequently causes situations in which David's face will be parallel with male body parts, and challenges him to compromise his ideals of proper male behaviour by first placing him in an uncomfortable situation with a transvestite prostitute and then commanding him to make rude sexual advances towards a strange woman in a bar, an event which acts as a cathartic explosion of his sexual identity issues, symbolically expressed in the vulgar phrase he is forced to repeat, "I'm about to explode in my pants." While one should not press these trends too far, it is not unreasonable to suggest that these narratives of irrational harassment function as a means to exorcise male assimilation and immigration anxiety – mere generations ago, the forefathers of these characters were struggling to exist in a world completely foreign to them, and these comedies express the impotent sensations of living in a world that appears hostile, degrading and threatening at all turns, and one in which new economies and technologies effectively destroys traditional masculinity and their confidence in their male roles. See Salkin (2000) and Boyarin (1997) for views on the history of Jewish masculinity.

film, Reuben sides not with the base monetary concerns of Stan and his insurance company, but with Leland and his manly virtues, and, thereby, symbolically with bourgeois ideals of heterosexual norms.

This masculine overhaul of Reuben coincides with his simultaneous attraction and aversion to Polly, who is the diametric opposite of Lisa. While Lisa had all the appearance of safety, shallow conformity and dependability, Polly has no signs of responsibility whatsoever. Polly cannot keep appointments, she feels a constant wanderlust to keep moving, and, unlike Lisa and her perfect arrangements of pillows, Polly's home is a whirlwind of idiosyncratic clutter. On their first date, the well-travelled Polly takes Reuben, whose last international travel cost him his wife, to a Moroccan restaurant, which, of course, interferes with his irritable bowel syndrome. During the resulting excruciatingly long and disgusting defecation sequence, Reuben soils a hand towel that had been embroidered by Polly's grandmother – thus, her desire for gustatory exoticism is elementally rejected by his neurotic body, causing one of the few things she has sentimentally cherished from her past to be excrementally destroyed.<sup>10</sup> One can go into greater detail about the repulsive and/or uncomfortable aspects of Reuben's life prior to consummation with Polly, but it is enough to say that this film presents Reuben's Jewish social circle through the lens of several unfavorable stereotypes, while pairing them with much more positive Gentile alternatives.

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<sup>10</sup> A major aspect of particularly Stiller's, but also Adam Sandler's work is a major trend of humiliation and a theme of constant harassment of the protagonist by the people, objects and systems around them. While this is not new to film comedy, as a very rudimentary look at Chaplin's Little Tramp films (1916-1940) illustrates, it has become increasingly violent, discomforting and sexuality demeaning in the recent subgenre of "college humour" antics, of which Stiller and Sandler can be seen as nearly progenitive figures. In these films, the protagonists rarely have any satisfying recourse against their tormentors, which typically results in the diminished masculinities and comedic rage that both stars have made integral to their on-screen personas. Such films, which combine bawdy humour with romantic comedy, have been called "gross out" romantic comedies, or "Hollywood lowbrow," and seek to appeal to both male and female audiences by splicing the two forms of entertainment (Bonila 2005; McDonald 2007).



In the end, even after Lisa comes back to him hoping for reconciliation, Reuben has adopted the ways of the more heroic, romantic and liberated Gentiles around him. He puts his recommendation behind Leland, he accepts Polly's happy ways (as shown by his newfound willingness to eat peanuts off the grimy New York City streets), and finally receives his reward, which is both marriage and romance. Even his father blesses his escape from his Jewish circle,<sup>11</sup> stating in more words than he's said in years:

It's not about what happened in the past, or what you think might happen in the future. It's about the ride, for Christ's sake.<sup>12</sup> There is no point in going through all this crap, if you are not going to enjoy the ride. And you know what... when you least expect, something great might come along. Something better than you even planned for.

The failure of his marriage to Lisa and the triumph of his coupling with Polly imply a belief that it was wrong of Reuben to seek dependability as the main value in marriage, and to neglect spontaneity, sexual passion and romance as the prime goals of American adulthood. *Along Came Polly* punishes Reuben for seeking what traditional Jewish society taught was important in marriage (security, mutual benefit, child rearing and nesting), and rewards him when he finally gives in to the notion that romance is the modern expectation in relationships, no matter how volatile love pairings can be. In the final scene of the film, Reuben's transformation into a liberated human being is illustrated by his ability to walk a beach in the nude – his masculinity is no longer in question, so he is no longer intimidated by the genitalia of other males, and must no longer hide his own body (Bronski 2004).

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<sup>11</sup> He is particularly escaping the influence of his overbearing Jewish mother who has compromised his masculinity by rendering him too precious to exist in the real world and taught him to cling to her duplicate, Lisa. (See Hyman 1995 for a discussion of the rejection of the Jewish mother and assimilation.)

<sup>12</sup> A particularly interesting use of language here.

It is not that Stiller plays the recycled Jewish male tropes in these films that make them significant, but that the narrative strategy his films employ lack any affection for Jewish culture or attempts at subverting the image of the effeminate or crippled Jewish male. His portrayal of the Jewish male comes across more as a disquieting cry for help in the way his

... relentless portrayal of Reuben as not just a schlemiel, but as an arch-neurotic, hypochondriacal, diseased, emotional mess, all of which seems directly related to his Jewishness. We've seen these depictions before, from Eddie Cantor in "Whoopie!" through Jerry Lewis in everything, to Woody Allen in most of his films. But there is a major difference here. In "Whoopie!" and "Annie Hall," the heroes' neuroses and bodily infirmities are defining characteristics, but they are also essential to their charm. In "Along Came Polly," Stiller's bodily malfunctions are not charming (although they are put to comic use) but are instead symptomatic of deep emotional and psychological problems. Cantor and Allen were always proud of being who they were (and even used their quirky infirmities to their advantage), but Stiller seems to want and need to become someone else, to be "cured." (Bronski 2004: n.p.)

Jewishness, thus, is aligned with ill health, and Reuben seeks to cure himself of the stereotypical Jewish flaws that make him unlovable through becoming what the Gentiles he admires value and would wish him to be. Through the replacement of the Jewish social web he had in the beginning of the film with more exciting, liberated Gentiles, Reuben has healed himself from his Jewish neuroses. At the beginning of the film, his compromised masculinity prevented him from enjoying the fruits of modernity. Thus, Reuben's newfound ability to finally walk naked on the beach confirms for the audience a major narrative lesson: being freed from marriage to his Jewish woman, his loyalties to his low-bred Jewish boss and the domination of his suffocating Jewish mother (and, thereby, his Jewish neuroses), Reuben has been re-created as a more whole and natural man by having sexual, emotional and romantic

relations with his new Gentile lover/saviour. The dissonance of their relationship is healed by having Reuben's problematic Jewishness "cured," mirroring old ideas of promoting Americanization amongst the Jews as a solution to their difference.

iv. *Your God is My God: Assimilating Gentiles to Judaism (Judaizing America)*<sup>13</sup>

Alternatively, there are a few films which offer the narrative strategy of the Judaizing of the Gentile lover instead of the assimilation of the Jewish partner. While rare, these films follow the same form of narrative solution as the previous section by suggesting that the differences between the lovers can only be solved by one transforming themselves to suit the other. These films, such as *Exodus* (1960),<sup>14</sup> stem

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<sup>13</sup> I have not addressed Jewish conversion to Christianity as a narrative strategy, mostly because the ramifications of this outcome are a bit more complex than I have the space for in this chapter, but also because this is not a major trend in film, particularly in Hollywood product. Only two recent English-language films of some popularity come to mind that involve Jews who have converted to Christianity having romantic relations with Gentiles, *Sunshine* (1999) and *Shadowlands* (1993), the former being filmmaker István Szabó's presentation of his Jewish family's history in Hungary over several generations, while the latter is the historical retelling of theologian and author C.S. Lewis' marriage to Jewish-Christian poet Joy Davidman Gresham. However, in both of these films, the conversion to Christianity actually took place before the romance. Further, neither is American-made. For a brief discussion of Jewish conversion to Christianity for the sake of marriage as seen in the HBO sitcom "Curb Your Enthusiasm," see H. Pearse, "The Larry David Opus: Outing the Jewish Male," *Jewish Quarterly* No. 211 (Autumn 2008): 4-9, specifically page 8.

<sup>14</sup> In *Exodus*, Jewishness is shown to be a serious obligation as the film deals with the creation of the modern state of Israel, and with the passion the Jews fighting for a homeland feel about their people and the need for a home in light of the Holocaust. It follows the adventures of Ari ben Canaan (Paul Newman), a strong and handsome *Sabra* (a Jew born in the Holy Land), who clashes with a Presbyterian American widow, Kitty Freemont (Eva Saint Marie) who has decided to adopt a pretty, blond Jewish girl who has survived the Holocaust in hiding. To Kitty, there can be no greater gift than to remove the girl, Karen, from Israel to the pleasant American home she will provide, where she can forget her troubled past and live a normal American life, free of the passionate concerns of blood and nation. Yet, to Ari, this is a crime – every single Jewish child, he asserts, has the right and the desire to be Jewish, even if it hurts. For Ari, Jewishness is not something to be forgotten, escaped or cured. The way that Kitty dismisses Ari's political designs begins to unravel their mutual attraction. However, after participating as a nurse in the wars to protect the refugee *kibbutz* and suffering the loss of Karen to the cause, Kitty ends up siding with Ari, walking off with him, a rifle over her shoulder, to an uncertain but committed fate (Friedman 1982). Her transformation from airy American Christian to Jewish freedom fighter was a matter of political engagement, stemming from her realization that a refusal to assimilate is not mere stubbornness, but comes from an honest desire to live one's life with authenticity. Once Mrs. Freemont lets go of the plastic fantastic vision of shallow happiness she had come to value, and accepts the challenge of Ari's life

from the post-World War II multicultural movement in that they express the desire and right of minority groups to maintain their identity, but they also follow old liberal notions of Jewishness by asserting Jewish identity as a matter of religion or cultural aspects, rather than heritage or upbringing, via making the conversion of the non-Jewish partner as simple as the basic desire to follow the Jewish partner.

One such film exhibiting the possibility of the Gentile partner becoming Judaized is *Keeping the Faith* (2000), starring Ben Stiller and directed by co-star Edward Norton. In this narrative, Stiller plays Jake Schram, a rabbi of a Conservative synagogue in New York City and the best friend of his childhood, Brian Finn (Norton), who became a Catholic priest. Wisely, the film acknowledges the old jokes involving a “priest and a rabbi...” while attempting to portray their lifelong bond with humour, warmth and sincerity. In the beginning of the film, the young men are dedicated to their respective religions and their congregations, living as modern and devoted emissaries of their respective faiths. That is, until their childhood friend, Anna Riley (Jenna Elfman), moves back to New York. Throwing romance and fun into the lives of the two friends, Anna “scampers like she’s wearing bells on her toes” (Schwarzbaum 2000: n.p.) and captivates the two men. Problematically, both fall in love with her. She, however, only falls for Jake, threatening to ruin all friendships. One of the major points of the film is that Anna, a high powered business executive, lives a life filled only with work, ambition and corporate advancement, seemingly echoing the emptiness of current life void of spirituality in contrast with the spirituality of the two men. At one point, pleading with Brian for help in her misery after Jake has dumped her: “Am I really

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by standing with the Jews, she is no longer an unacceptable mate for him, and the differences between them are no longer present.

shallow?” she asks. Indeed, the film does give Anna’s life little meaning, and this is certainly highlighted in comparison with Jake and Brian’s commitment to their faiths and leadership roles, and it is plausible to understand Anna’s attraction to Jake as stemming from her admiration for his life outside the business world. Yet when Jake explains to Anna that her suspicions that he is hiding their relationship from his family, friends (including Brian) and congregants is correct because the fact that she is not Jewish “is a very big problem for [him],” Anna cannot accept his trepidation. Jake has good reason to worry about what a relationship with Anna will force him to give up – his mother (Anne Bancroft) cut off contact with his older brother when he married a Catholic woman, and his congregation is swayed by some very powerful, more religiously and socially conservative members, making his position as the junior and untenured rabbi precarious. Yet, for Anna, the matter is simple – echoing the ideology and stance of classical Hollywood romance, her position is that if Jake truly loved her, the loyalties of religion, the obligations of his rabbinate and the objections of his family would mean nothing to him, and he would, as she says, “fight for me.” It is the 21<sup>st</sup> century she reminds him, when such things should no longer override the priorities of love and personal happiness. Jake, who understands that he cannot artificially divide himself from his family, congregation and tradition, asks what the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to do with their problem. His community is one which, in his eyes, can be updated in their spiritual practices, such as introducing guided meditation to congregational worship, but one in which the essentials, such as the obligation of endogamy, remain intact and timeless. Anna cannot understand why anything besides their love would be more

important to him than their relationship, and he can think of no alternative but to break off the relationship that seemingly has no future.

Nevertheless, in true romantic comedy style, the couple finds life apart unbearable. Jake runs back to Anna after taking a stand for love by confessing all to his congregation, and he humiliates himself publicly at her office building, which, in filmic language, stands to reassure the audience that his devotion will stand all further tests (Hampton 2004), and also proves to Anna that she is his highest priority and they reunite. Yet, as a further surprise ending, we subsequently discover that Anna had been working with the loveable senior rabbi (Eli Wallach) at Jake's synagogue by taking conversion classes! Thus, everyone is satisfied – Anna has her proof that nothing is more important to him than she is, and Jake is able to father children who will be ritually Jewish and gets to keep his job with less conflict. The audience is comforted that Jake's family will be happy with Anna's conversion, while the time honoured Hollywood tradition of romance is also upheld and “the truly devout (i.e., loving) man is the one willing to overturn deeply held principles and responsibilities for the sake of romance” (Schwarzbaum 2000: n.p.).

*Keeping the Faith*, however, has an additional narrative strategy for allaying any concerns in the audience over the interfaith coupling, one which is regrettably common. It makes sure that all but one of the Jewish women Jake encounters is some combination of hideous, inane, annoying or old. Certainly, they all share one common trait: both they and their mothers are obsessively eager to marry, and a single young rabbi is treated like bait. Referring to the legion of Jewish mothers of his congregation with single, marriageable daughters as the “*kosher nostra*,” Jake spends a lot of his time avoiding

blind dates and introductions to ugly daughter after ugly daughter. Jake must marry, the film establishes, as there has never been a single senior rabbi at his synagogue,<sup>15</sup> and it begins to look as if he will have to settle on the lesser of the evils presented to him. One of the few Jewish women given more of a role than a mere homely prop is Jake's blind-date-from-hell, Ali Decker (Lisa Edelstein), a dim, high maintenance exercise fanatic who is loud and obnoxious, as well as pushy, unkind and vulgar. She is head-to-toe the stereotypical Jewish American Princess ("JAP") of literature and film. Sponsored by "daddy," and completely devoid of humour or sexual attractiveness, she is lively Anna's antithesis, and fills Riv-Ellen Prell's (1996) description of the female Jewish caricature perfectly:

She simultaneously lacks sexual desire and lavishes attention on beautifying herself. She attends to the needs of no one else, expending great energy on herself instead. The popularly constructed Jewish [princess] performs no domestic labor and gives no sexual pleasure. Rather, her body is a surface to decorate, its adornment financed by the sweat of others. (1996: 75)

Having been presented with such an unattractive image of the American Jewish woman, the audience's hesitation over Jake's exogamy must be greatly relieved. There is no possibility in this film that Jake could be happy with the Jewish women tossed at him, with the single possible exception of one, Rachel Rose (Rena Sofer), who is a beautiful, intelligent and ambitious foreign correspondent – yet, despite her beauty, there is no chemistry exhibited with Jake, and she seems almost too intelligent and mature for Jake's life. At the end of the film, we see Rachel once more, introducing her shocked mother to her new African-American (presumably non-Jewish in light of the intended

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<sup>15</sup> This is not an invention of the filmmakers to provide conflict. In most streams of Judaism, heterosexual marriage and reproduction are seen as fundamental responsibilities of Jewish adults, and even more so for rabbis as examples to the community (see Broyde 2005). Further, in many synagogues, the wives of rabbis provide essential services to the community, even if on a volunteer basis, which would make a single rabbi less appealing (Schwartz 2006).

gag) boyfriend – it seems that Rachel, as well, was too “un-Jewish” (i.e. lovely, smart and sophisticated) to settle for a Jewish mate.

The symbolism of the Gentile woman taking on the Jewishness of her mate is significant in these films. Women are mere objects of contested identity in *Keeping the Faith*. The women Jake encounters present to Jake choices of identity, be they vulgar, ambitious or Gentile. As for Anna, not only is she solely a means of identity construction (with no real identity of her own, which is half-heartedly covered up by loading her with cinematic “spunk” but no real personality), she is also a battleground between these religious men and modernity, as evidenced not only by her forbidden sexual temptation, but also by her secular, shallow lifestyle contrasted against their own lives, which are dedicated to something “higher” than money, acquisitions and cell phones. The outcome of her conversion is presented as some sort of triumph of the spiritual life over the consumerist, even though Jake’s willingness to burn all bridges to satisfy Anna’s romantic demands disowns this triumph in the end.

Despite the frequency of negative portrayals of Jewish women in films, some do have their own male Gentile conquests. There are several examples of Jewish women Judaizing non-Jewish men through romantic relationships. Interestingly, this bringing of the Gentile man into Jewishness is hardly ever through the religious aspects of Jewishness, but always through the use of particular modes of Jewish femininity employed by comic Jewish actresses in the creation of their screen personas. In films such as Barbra Streisand’s *What’s Up Doc?* (1972), and Fran Drescher’s *The Beautician and the Beast* (1997), the way that Jewish women Judaize Gentile men is by introducing beloved chaos into their lives, in keeping with the “zany” image of Jewish womanhood



in popular culture. Barbra Streisand and Fran Drescher may be two of the contemporary era's most recognizably Jewish comediennes. Streisand's look and powerful screen presence redefined acceptable boundaries on cinematic female virtues and beauty (Friedman 1982), and Fran Drescher, while classically pretty, created a space in which (specifically urban and New York) Jewish forms of humour and stereotypical personality quirks were affectionately broadcast to a wider audience, and she recreated aspects once considered unattractive in the "JAP" image into an off-beat form of charm (Brook 2000). That Drescher's sweeping popularity on television in the 1990s, which led to this one starring film role, was only possible due to the work of Streisand is highly probable, and, as one critic termed it, her persona is largely "Streisand-does-Mae West" (Millman 1993: A5). Barbra Streisand, who needs little introduction due to her dominance of both stage, screen and recording sales throughout much of the last forty years, developed her screen persona as a strong Jewish woman, unabashedly not conforming to fashionable ideas of physical beauty, through a surprisingly small number of films in light of her filmic impact and reputation. While her sexual image stemmed from self-confidence and a natural grace, Drescher's is more aggressively staged through dress and action, and constitutes an attempt to re-sexualize the Jewish woman on screen (Brook 2000).

Streisand stands out amongst her contemporaries as being one of the only actresses who plays overtly Jewish characters almost exclusively, and of her contemporaries, this was more common with male actors. Streisand was one of the first of the few female stars who have been able to bring a strong ethnically Jewish presence to the screen without compromising her dramatic impact or sexuality (Friedman 1982).

In *What's Up Doc?*, Streisand plays Judy Maxwell, a character who is not described as Jewish, but who is read as Jewish through her character traits as well as Streisand's reputation and performance, as well as the traits of her on-screen father (Liam Dunn). Working with Ryan O'Neal, with whom she made two pictures during her early film career, Streisand plays the wacky *femme fatale* to his straight man. Dr. Howard Bannister is an upstanding musicologist attending a conference with his aggressively proper and ambitious fiancée, Eunice (Madeline Kahn), in San Francisco in an attempt to win a prestigious and lucrative research grant that would allow him to continue his work investigating the origins of primitive music through charting the tones of various igneous stones. Even though his field involves the arts, he has managed to drain it of life and excitement through his symbolic interest in rocks. Streisand, on the other hand, has attended dozens of colleges and programs on her father's money, but has yet to complete anything due to her essentially flighty nature. Their meeting not only disrupts his trip and plans, but creates a permanent rupture in his life, as their resulting adventure initially loses him the grant, permanently separates him his fiancée, and breaks down his vision of his life and goals.<sup>16</sup>

Like most romantic comedies of opposites, it is not immediately clear why Judy and Howard get over their initial antagonism, except for the mutual attraction, but the two are repeatedly brought together against Howard's will by an improbable mix up of several red plaid bags (her suitcase, his igneous rock collection, another containing stolen jewels, and yet another holding secret government documents). Yet, as the film

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<sup>16</sup> Marketed as a modern answer to screwball comedies of the 1930s, most notably the classic Cary Grant/Katherine Hepburn vehicle *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), in which a flighty heiress destroys and then reconstitutes the straight-laced life of a palaeontologist (who is also seeking a grant for his work), *What's Up Doc?* is a more overtly sexual and diverse madcap Hollywood romp for the 1970s (McDonald 2007).

progresses, Judy's abilities to survive and her charming use of subterfuge and natural intelligence win Howard over, despite, as he says, her unfortunate habit of wreaking "havoc and chaos everywhere (she) goes," which often appears intentional. Her desire to subvert common mainstream ambitions and measurements of success by offering a personal and internal view of authentic happiness that defies standards of conformity makes Judy a sexual force of nature more akin to Pan than the stereotypes of Jewish femininity seen throughout literature and film (cf. Bial 2005). Judy exists in a narcissistic bubble in which she does live off the labours of others (namely, her father), but, at the same time, she overturns the image of the "JAP" in that she does not see her lover/mate as a slave to her consumerist avarice (cf. Prell 1996, 1999; Brook 2000), but, rather, a partner in the caper of life – the ultimate goal of which is not social or economic status, but happiness. In *What's Up Doc?*, the Jewish woman is the free spirit who calls Howard away from the soulless pursuit of funding, achievement and propriety, bringing into his life a dose of the Jewish social/gender subversion made famous by Woody Allen and his predecessor Groucho Marx (cf. Goldberg 1979).

This portrayal of Jewish women as a force of nature and of chaos has its roots in older traditions of representing Jewish femininity. In fact, it may represent a remerging of the first generation image of the industrious *Yiddishe Mamma* ("Jewish mother") with its negative inversion the "JAP", mixed with the Jewish comedy conventions established by such foundational diasporic Jewish heroes as the Marx Brothers, as well as the female singer-comediennes of radio and television, such as Fanny Brice and Lucille Ball. The beloved *Yiddishe Mamma* of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a trope deeply rooted in the first and second generations of

American Jews – her hyper-industrious body, capable of super-human feats of domestic and economic survival and care, was a locus of deep security, pride and affection. Her ceaseless vigour, unending vitality and willingness to suffer and endure for the sake of her family were the subject of legend and admiration. Her role in the home was, according to Jewish myth, the prime factor in the survival of the family, and her “exceptionally active body” (Prell 1996:75) was matched only by her moral stamina and her loving soul. As assimilationist desires turned the subsequent generations away from the Jewish home and tradition, however, the Jewish mother took on a much more suffocating and demanding negative image, primarily through the works of male Jewish authors in the 1950s and 1960s, specifically Philip Roth. This reframing of Jewish womanhood, combined with the adoption of suburban American lifestyle, lead to the vicious inversion of the Jewish wife, the “JAP” – the Mamma’s lazy, demanding, asexual, unattractive and grasping granddaughter. Unlike the active Mamma, the “JAP”’s body was merely a thing of decoration and a means for her acquisition of material goods, and not a fount of comfort, care or productivity as the Jews of previous generations had seen the female Jewish body (Prell 1996, 1999; Brook 2000).

In the screen personas of both Streisand and Drescher, we see the combination of the two representations, particularly, as we shall see, in the works of the latter. While both women live in self-centered worlds, take care in their appearance and seemingly do not live by their own physical labour, in keeping with the “JAP” image, they are hardly lazy – both are, in fact, perpetually in frenetic motion – and use their bodies in their quest to mold and care for the people around them in their own ways. Further, their sexual attractiveness makes both women stand out from the male-constructed “JAP” of

yore, and these new personas are ones in which the physicality and reproductive powers of the Mamma are transmogrified into desirability and lustiness (Brook 2000).

In terms of Fran Drescher's working class screen persona, she may not even qualify as a "JAP", as hers is a lower class character of working class roots – as Vincent Brook (2000) describes her, she is a "a wanna-be Jewish princess, a "JAP" *manqué*," at best (294). In *The Beautician and the Beast*, Drescher plays Joy Miller, a beauty school instructor who has been mistaken by the staff of a tyrannical Eastern European dictator (Timothy Dalton) as one of the best teachers in America, and is hired as the governess to the dictator's children. By being so far out of the realm of his expectations, and bringing her liberal-democratic, American "*joie de vivre*" (literally "joy of life," a line from the theme song from her sitcom), Joy brings colour, humanity and freedom to first his children, then to his subjects, and then to the dictator himself – a transformative experience that renders the beast into the prince charming one expects. In romantic comedy fashion, even though there is no logical reason the two should have been able overcome their differences and initial animosity, the two unite in a truly Cinderella finish, in which he takes her away from the vulgar working class Jewish circle of her birth, and she liberates him from his cold misanthropy.<sup>17</sup> Her character, that of a

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<sup>17</sup> Wartenberg (1999) points out that Cinderella narratives do not actually condemn the social class hierarchy, even though they might appear to do so by exalting the emotional or practical knowledge of lower classes and thereby critiquing the notion that higher socio-economic status stems from (or results in) better quality of people. In fact, as we see with *The Beautician and the Beast*, the ascension of the lower class lover to the economic status of the higher class partner reinforces classical notions of good lower class people being rewarded by promotion to the wealthier class. Most Cinderella narratives in recent years contend that both partners have something to escape – often poverty or crass surroundings in the case of the lower class partner, and loneliness or other internal discontent for the higher class. The positive resolution of this conflict results in the lower class partner being rescued from the oppression and/or dissatisfaction of poverty or labour. It also shows how the higher class lover is reformed by his or her unlikely romantic interest, who makes critical judgments of the way that wealth has been attained and can use their romantic sway to convince the upper-class lover to change their economic vocation towards the "good" instead of the heartless or evil. In this way, capitalism and the class system are not the points of social critique in these films, but, rather, it is the fact that the upper class has all the money and the

“...colorful ethnic servant [who] breathes life into an uptight, whitebread household” (Millman 1993: A5), is basically the same character Drescher played on CBS’s sitcom “The Nanny” (1993-1999), and the film follows a very similar plotline – in both, the aristocratic, wealthy, Gentile widower falls in love with the big-haired, zany, Jewish nanny/governess who has taught him the joys of having fun with his children instead of raising them completely under the weight of austere responsibility.

Obviously, in light of the numerous ironic references the characters make to the famous story of the Von Trapp family, these stories are consciously something of a Judaized version of *The Sound of Music*, with Maria’s sweet young Catholic nun in Nazi-occupied Austria replaced by a brash, predatory and urban Jewish-American make-up artist/hair stylist. Referencing classic films or fairytales, especially *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, seems to be a recurring trend in Drescher’s works, and is achieved in part by establishing Drescher’s stories in both “The Nanny” and *Beautician and the Beast* as fairytale-like, but with modern subversive elements. In both, the use of animated title sequences has a significant effect on their meaning, as employing cartoon segments to open the television show or film establishes Drescher as a character from the realm of fantasy, or the “phantasmatic,” in which time and reality are suspended. When considered in this light, the animated frames can allow Drescher to salvage a familiar form of Jewish womanhood that is cartoonish, anachronistic and unrealistic. Vincent Brook (2000), in his study on Drescher, suggested that sitcoms may employ such stereotypes affectionately in recent times, because while Jewish producers now

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lower classes all the heart. Such films seek to rectify this imbalance by combining the compassion of the lower classes with the resources of the wealthy. In American class-relations films, it is almost always the lower classes who are spiritually good (honest, decent, simple) and the higher classes who are morally void (manipulative, spiritually dead, lacking in empathy) despite their formal education.

feel more comfortable expressing an ethnic (Ashkenazi) Jewish voice, no such thing still exists in a reified unity, as deep Jewish-American identity was traded as the price for equality and Americanization. In order to represent overtly Jewish characters in broad sitcoms and comedy films, they resort to using outmoded images of Jewishness from a time and place (especially from theatre) that no longer exist in reality. Brook sees these images as no longer necessarily containing anti-Semitic barbs, and contends that the use of fantasy helps carry this illusory expression of identity.<sup>18</sup> Prell (1999), however, warns us that no matter how humorous such images may seem, they can both signal and spread negative impacts, and are never neutral.<sup>19</sup> For Prell,

The images' appeal lies in the very fact of their exaggerations, the larger-than-life quality that enables them to express something compelling about reality... they simplify the complexity of real-life relationships, reducing them to single images that are nevertheless familiar. (1999: 4)

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<sup>18</sup> In *Beautician and the Beast*, which is already tied to the realm of fairytales by the title, the animated Drescher begins the film placed in the medieval context of middle European tales of romance, namely Sleeping Beauty. Though the story opens with, "Once upon a time...", Drescher's nature will not allow the story to proceed so delicately; the handsome, blond cartoon prince wakes her with a kiss, but she refuses to marry him – making her escape, hastily explaining she's not ready for that kind of commitment, Drescher remains a hip American woman, subverting the sweet damsel of the fairytales, and preparing the audience for the message that romance is not only for the docile. Instead of the innocent, sweet damsel, in this telling the loud-mouthed, sexualized woman wins the prize of romance, marriage and happiness (Brook 2000). Drescher's refusal to marry Prince Charming may seem like an odd opening stance, however, considering her eagerness to matrimonially secure her boss in "The Nanny," and the obsession most on-screen Jewish women have with getting married (cf. Prell 1999). The message in the animated sequence of *Beautician and the Beast*, however, establishes Joy as different from what one would expect her to be. The sequence does make a pragmatic point about fairytale romances, however – had the relationship been in reality, Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming did not know each other well enough to marry by most of our standards. Thus, Joy is shrewd enough to wait for whoever proves to be Mr. Right, rather than the first Prince Charming who pops up – for Joy, it takes more than a kiss to prove a man's worth. This humorous disruption in viewer expectations of the fairytale prepares us for the ways in which Joy will upset not only the order of her boss's household but also her mother's desire to see her wed; it also foreshadows the ways in which she will demand her dictator suitor transform and prove himself for her affections by establishing herself as not easy to impress, influence or intimidate. In terms of the way in which she uses her warm human emotion to wake him up from his cold and ordered existence, Joy herself is Prince Charming in this film, waking the Sleeping Dictator to the needs of his children and his people through her warm, Jewish nature.

<sup>19</sup> Using ethnographic research on the ways gender constructs Jewish identity in America, and the way the Jewish immigrant experience has been embodied in sex stereotypes, Prell (1999) shows how such images discourage Jews from seeking out other Jewish mates – in a sense, negative filmic representations have made Jewish females unappealing to Jewish men, and vice versa.

The criticism that Drescher, in particular, has done injury to the female Jewish image in America has certainly been made (Antler 1998), even though Drescher herself denies that her screen persona stereotypes female Jews (Brook 2000). I read these films as not entirely harmful, but rather as a part of the growing voice of Jewish difference in recent decades. Drescher and Streisand may have relied on specific, gendered Jewish stereotypes in order to create their screen images, but through their use of sexuality and positive qualities they subvert as many of the negative stereotypes as they support, while replacing them with updated ideas of Jewish ethnicity.

Streisand and Drescher are also both part of the Judaification of American popular culture in recent years, including an inundation of Yiddish slang words, the increasing popularity of celebrity Kabbalah centres, Jewish characters brought out in the open in film and television, and the increased presence of Jewish material culture (i.e. kosher foods, etc.) in American consumer markets. Through the heavy saturation of Jewish-American cultural aspects, writers, performers and products, Jews no longer have to hide their Jewish subject matter behind encoded universalism (Pearse 2008a). Distinct identity is the new trend in art, and “American culture seems to be telling ethnic Americans that to be ethnic is to be more, not less American” (Fishman 1996: n.p.), even while the media conveys the American right to remove themselves from traditional obligations. Drescher and her contemporaries (Jerry Seinfeld, Paul Reiser, Richard Lewis, etc.) in the 1990s white-ethnic revival were major contributors to the reversal of the ethnically bland 1980s with its “...Reaganist myth of a color-blind society in which difference was denied and race was no longer a problem...” (Brook 2000: 298). While it is true that most Jewish characters are shown as comfortably



Americanized, the reliance of these characters on Jewish folk wisdom and cultural distinctiveness promotes the rethinking of the ways in which Jewish assimilation had been previously conceived – that is, their screen presence encourages viewers to ask whether the Jews are as assimilated as one would have believed.

v. *Following the Bliss: Love and Sex Heal all Wounds*

A fifth and considerably more popular narrative strategy for ensuring the success of interfaith romance in liberal film is the way in which love and sexual liberation are presented as both the rewards and the means of social-democratic exogamy, placing personal existential needs over community regulations in the most intimate of ways. Two films useful in the exploration of this topic are the television film *Miss Rose White* (1992), and the romantic melodrama *White Palace* (1990).

The Hallmark Hall of Fame film *Miss Rose White* is the story of a young woman known as Rose White (Kyra Sedgwick) taking her first independent steps in 1940s New York City. The war is over, she is finding personal rewards in her promising career as a buyer in a department store, and she has a light romance with a clerk at her store, Dan McKay (D.B. Sweeney). Every week, however, she makes a pilgrimage to her secret life, where she is known as Rayzel Weiss and celebrates the Sabbath with her Polish-Jewish family. Yet, even in this, Rose is happy. She has secretly changed her public name for professional reasons, but she has a healthy relationship with her family, even despite shocking them all by moving across town by herself. When we first meet Rose, she is a fully American young woman, with everything going for her. That is, until she is forced to face the dark side of her family's history when her older sister, Lusía,

thought long dead, arrives from Europe, and we learn that Rayzel's mother and sister had been left in Poland to suffer at the hands of the Nazis, while she and her father had traveled to America alone. Her mother did not survive and Lusia is now a battered, frail and tormented concentration camp survivor, and hers is exactly the opposite of the bright life Rose enjoys in New York.<sup>20</sup> The sudden existence of her sister forces her to face the past she has struggled to not only hide from her friends and co-workers, but also to bury away in her own mind. Soon, unwanted memories assail her, and her identity, which had previously seemed so carefree, is now in crisis.

There are two major themes of this film of interest for us. The first is the way the sacrifices and glories of America are a constant in the film, and, second, the film's simplistic view of love as a cure to pain and the haunting shadow of history. The wonders of America are constantly extolled in *Miss Rose White*. In keeping with the immigrant optimism of the early twentieth century, America is seen as a country in which you can be whatever you want to be, as long as you are willing to work at it. Certainly, this does come at a price, as seen in Rose's name change, as well as the sacrifice her boss, a tough yet caring woman born in Ireland, relates when she confesses to cutting her family out of her life in order to escape the embarrassment of her non-American roots. Nevertheless, as long as family, heritage and religion are kept at the personal level of one traditional dinner a week, America is also seen as a place where people can keep their private distinctiveness as well as enjoy a full economic and social life, as assimilation does not have to be complete, insofar as it does not require Rose to give up her antiquated family members.

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<sup>20</sup> The metaphorical uses of these sisters for the Jewish-American struggle to come to terms with their own comfort during the Holocaust in light of the suffering of European Jews is one probable meaning behind the original play.

The second major aspect of this film is that love is the answer to identity crisis and family pain. Lusia, who has been carrying the deep painful secret of her disrupted marriage, is reunited with the husband she thought was dead, and the family starts to come together again. Witnessing their love, Rose begins to feel the independent and shallow life she had been leading before Lusia came is no longer enough for her, and she turns to Dan, the man with whom she had enjoyed dancing, but with whom she had never been able to establish any real bond because she had hidden her heritage and history from him. Only after she realizes she must be honest does Rose reveal herself to be a Polish-born Jew. Unsurprisingly, in true romantic style, he accepts the fact that she is Jewish and loves her anyway. Her love with Dan offers her both career success (by way of a new found confidence), as well as the strength she needs to make a reconciliation with her father, who has basically disowned her for changing her name.

Yet, the film cheats the viewer on this point – Rose does not bring Dan to the Seder meal that reunites her with her family. Her family welcomes her back into their fold, but the viewer knows they are still unaware of her probable marriage to the Gentile Dan. In the final frame, where a portrait of the happy family is frozen with the words “The Beginning” (as opposed to “The End”) appear, and we are meant to find it a happy ending – Rose will have love and her family both, the film suggests. However this is an overly simplistic gloss, as there is no telling how Dan, though willing in the first blush of love to accept Rose as a Jew, will truly react to having a Jewish wedding, or a Jewish child, and a Jewish life. Further, it is erroneous, I believe, to have confidence that Mr. Weiss, who was willing to disown his daughter for changing her name to the non-Jewish “White,” will accept a Gentile son-in-law. The film ends on a cheerful note in

order to make the audience believe that love and honesty has allowed her to make peace with her Jewish identity, and thereby her family, and that Rose will live happily ever after with Dan, even though there is no attempt to resolve the obvious obstacles left unexplored. The film tells us that love is all that is required – it can wash away shame, guilt, historical horrors, family grief, and emotional crisis – as if the filmmakers are hoping we will not wonder about what happens after the credits roll.

In Luis Mandoki's *White Palace*, however, it is not so much love as unbridled sex through which the Jewish protagonist frees himself of the stifling ancestral bonds and becomes his own, liberated person. The film, a sexual melodrama starring James Spader as Max Baron, a 27-year-old Jewish yuppie, and Susan Sarandon, as a 43-year-old lapsed-Catholic waitress named Nora Baker who steals his heart almost against his will, centers around forbidden passion and the healing power of sexual liberation from social restraints. The night of his best friend's bachelor party, Max, an emotionally closed-off young advertising executive still recovering from the accidental death of his beloved wife, meets a troubled and sexually open older woman who grieves the loss of her son. Because Max is so saturated with the ideals of his wealthy social circle, he initially cannot fathom a relationship with a slovenly Gentile who works in a fast food restaurant, has no respect for classical forms of culture, and who spends more on beer than on her wardrobe. Yet it is the very unlikeliness of their coupling,<sup>21</sup> and the film's liberal message of unexpected similarities, that brings Nora and Max their redemption.

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<sup>21</sup> Wartenberg (1999) roots their surface incompatibility in their ages and, most of all, their classes, and claims their religious differences are reduced to mere symptoms or extensions of their class differences. I do not feel that is the case, nor do I feel that the film dismisses this as a significant problem facing the couple. While neither is overly religious, Max comes from a social circle in which endogamy is the naturally accepted norm in a closely-knit upper middle class Jewish community. His friends never attempt to foist non-Jewish women on him, yet are constantly trying to interest him in elegant young Jewish women. While the class differences are clearly the more emphasized, I cannot agree that the

While Nora seems to live in complete isolation, Max is being strangled by his clannish and clingy community of emotionally dominating, socially controlling and stultifying upwardly mobile Jews. At first, Max attempts to hide his relationship with Nora from his friends and family, but Nora will not accept this forever. She knows he is embarrassed by her, and challenges him to prove he is not by taking her along to the large Thanksgiving gathering at the Horowitz home. To his circle, who had long desired him to pair up with an appropriate mate and leave his widower's grief behind, the fact that he is dating again is wonderful, but the fact that he brings such an inappropriate lover to a community gathering comes as a great shock. As shown by the way that Max's married friend, Larry, expresses an unsubtle sexual interest in Nora, the audience gets the message that sexual relations with someone of Nora's standing might be acceptable, but, as we see from the reactions of the women in the gathering, it is not acceptable to bring her out of the bedroom and into the parlour. Women like Nora are acceptable outlets for sowing wild oats, but are not worthy of monogamy or respect. In this, Nora is akin to one of the only other non-Jewish woman who has significant screen time in *White Palace*,<sup>22</sup> the stripper at his friend's bachelor party. Low class Gentile women are somehow indecent to parade in front of the cultured eyes of their upper class Jewish women. This is not merely a matter of sexual taboo, however, but an issue of social control. As Wartenberg (1999) so correctly identifies, by bringing her among his family and friends, Max's transgressive "emotional investment in his relationship with

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cultural differences are insignificant to the narrative – especially since most of the social differences between Max and Nora rely on commonly held stereotypes of wealthy Jewish behaviours and ideals.

<sup>22</sup> This is with the possible exception of Max's boss, Rosemary (Kathy Bates), who is not clearly defined, culturally. In any case, she has certainly gained acceptable levels of empowerment which place her closer to Max and his group than to Nora, leaving her out of the pure/impure dichotomy inherent in the wives and lovers in the film. The other non-Jewish female character of importance is Nora's counter-culture sister. Of these three or four Gentile females in this film, only Nora and the stripper are sexualized.

Nora challenges the clan's right to define what is appropriate to its members" (92). One of the major themes of the film, which is actually verbalized by Max during his transformative awakening later in the film, is that one cannot base judgments of compatibility on appearances alone – true passion and mating of the souls can be unexpected and are private. Max points out several examples of so-called appropriate Jewish marriages that had been enthusiastically sanctioned by the community but which are now in tatters, showing that the traditional methods of the clan for making matches is faulty, as their snap judgments based on superficial criteria are unfounded. Love matches cannot be a matter of consensus among one's social circle.

The way in which Nora liberates Max from his social group is exactly what he needs to prevent the spreading emotional death he had been experiencing since the loss of his wife, Jane. This is seen symbolically through the opposing styles in which Max and Nora choose to live. While Max is obsessively clean, requiring constant order in his home, Nora is exactly the opposite, almost demanding squalor. At first, this appears to be an extension of their respective class ideals, in which the Jews are elegant and tasteful (making this film somewhat of an oddity in Hollywood cinema), and Gentiles are low-bred and chaotic. Yet, through the course of the film, as Max begins to loosen his pathological need for control over his environment and Nora begins to make increasing effort with her appearance and the hygiene of her home, we begin to realize that the differences in their living conditions have come from much more than social status, but are symptoms of the pain they were experiencing. Wartenberg (1999) argues that this revelation serves to show how appearances of contrast may actually hide deeper similarities. While Max's need for neatness stems from his need for control over

his environment after the random accidental death of his wife, Nora's filth stems from her need to punish herself, and show outwardly her inner emotional revulsion after what we eventually find out was the suicide of her 14-year-old son, Charlie. While one lover endeavours to promote an appearance of perfection to hide his inner turmoil, the other has released all hope and pleasure, but what seems like a difference is actually more significantly a deep compatibility. As Wartenberg concludes "... this apparent incompatibility reveals a source of deep existential connection" (94) through their mutual loss and pain; pain which their respective social circles are unable to understand or appreciate. In this way the film seems to promote a liberal belief that existential states of being and needs grown from personal experience require an individualist stance, and seeks to dispel traditional notions of cultural sameness as being more important than universal human emotion. The film declares that communal romantic and sexual ethics dissolve in the face of personal experience and individual choice, and this is the film's major critique of existing social hierarchies.

This control/chaos dichotomy also manifests itself in their respective sexual ethos – while Nora embraces transitory sexual pleasure, which is also a way to disrespect herself, Max has taken on a personal vow of celibacy, which acts as a rejection of mess and chaos, as well as serving as a means to protect himself from further emotional loss. To a certain extent, both are living up to the pigeon holes into which their respective communities have placed them. To the young Jewish women who pursue him, Max is an ideal mate, a wealthy Jewish man with gainful employment, and to the men who hang around her in the working class bars she patronizes, Nora is a sexually available, lonely and uncomplicated floozy (Wartenberg 1999). Yet both

privately resist – Max’s celibacy flies in the face of his community’s emphasis on heterosexual marriage, and Nora’s experiences belie her surface appearance of simplicity. Thus, the two need each other to free themselves from their community roles, as only they can see each other’s true selves. They both achieve freedom through what is initially a wild one-night sexual encounter, but what turns into a life-long passionate relationship based on mutual attraction and orgasmic liberation.

Nevertheless, the ending of this film is not entirely satisfying. In the end, after he realizes his social circle is hollow, Max gives up his job, home, and life, and moves to New York City to win Nora back and make her his family.<sup>23</sup> He has transformed, and his former social values and beliefs are abandoned. He becomes, in essence, a voided shadow of Nora and her ways, as he takes on a life according to her standards and ideals, leaving his beautiful loft in favour of a tenement room overlooking some dumpsters, and giving up his beloved opera (the only thing he ever expressed passion for before meeting Nora) in favour of her Oakridge Boys.<sup>24</sup> Max gives up all beauty from his life, as well as the fruits of his labour, to return to the struggle of first generation Jews, yet we are not encouraged to see this as a communitarian revolution of Jewish experience, but, rather, as a liberal narrative strategy designed to resolve the class tensions between the couple. In *White Palace*, “Prince Charming gets to have his Cinderella not by bringing her to his castle, but by relocating to her hovel,” Wartenberg

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<sup>23</sup> This is an important recurring theme in this film. Nora, after her estranged sister departs, asks Max if he is her family, to which he answers yes. Thus, in this film, as in many liberal circles, family is not a matter of birth but of choice, and of shared experience. The basic classical definition of family “stresses common ancestry in the strictly biological sense, as literal descent from maternal or parental sources. But the concept of family is usually ‘spiritualized,’ so that it includes merely social groups, comprising persons of the same nationality or beliefs” (Burke 1969: 29). Yet in *White Palace*, even these voluntary collectives are challenged by the notion that radical individualism requires all associations to be revisable.

<sup>24</sup> There is a suggestion that he has quit advertizing to return to teaching, with a hint that this is what he has always longed to do but lacked the courage, but this is so vague one gets the idea that it was a ploy on the part of the script writers to ameliorate the sacrificial totalizing transformation Max undergoes.



(1999: 102) quips, and sees in this ending a problematic message that, because Max's mother was working class, the story asserts that it is useless to try to rise above the class of one's birth.

Wartenberg seems to miss the significance of Max's physical relocation in his discussion of his class decline, which perhaps is because he discounts the importance of Jewish community in the film. While Max certainly is returning to the poverty of his predecessors, he is doing so by being completely removed from his Jewish circle, including his mother. Despite the popular culture identification of Jews with New York City, this move for Max is no return, but an exile. Nora, whom Wartenberg compares with Max's lower-class mother (Renee Taylor), is not calling Max back to his roots, but is calling him away from them. Her last line in the film, amidst giggles as he symbolically ruts with her on a deli table in front of an artificially applauding audience of customers, is "How's your mother?" The line is meant to be mildly humorous given the sexual situation they are in, but reminds the audience that his mother, a widow with no other children, is likely devastated that her beloved son has uprooted himself and chosen Nora over his community. But, as the scene fades to the sounds of clapping and laughter, we are clearly not supposed to linger too long on the heartbreak of those he has left behind. In true romantic genre style, we are not meant to follow the couple after the fade (McDonald 2007) and are asked to let go of any reservations we might have over their "happily ever after" ending. In fact, the genre has taught us, through repeated experiences of the same basic narrative pattern, not to consider what happens after the credits, by telling us that whatever real life consequences might be, these do not prevent cinematic romance from ending happily (Shumway 2003).

Why are sex, love and romance so central to American film views of identity and liberation? This question delves into the role that sex plays in modernity, secularization and American views of adult selfhood, which is a much larger topic than we can deal with in this analysis. Briefly, however, we can say that these films exemplify popular liberal ideas of sex and freedom of self-determination (Evans and Deleyto 1998). In modern times, sexual behaviours and ideologies have become perhaps the most powerful tools in our collection of, as Foucault (1988) has called them, technologies of the self, in terms of how we construct our sexuality and gender identities, and this is often defined against the gender notions of our ancestors. In modernity, erotic relationships are perceived as being transitional spaces in which identities are constructed, recreated and negotiated (Foucault 1981). The intimacy and transgressive power of sexual and/or romantic relationships make them central events in the establishment of our individualism, and liberal culture places increasing importance on romantic choices as an aspect of personal freedom and as key locations “of self-exploration and self-discovery” (Taylor 2003: 45). Charles Taylor (2003) notes that the dependence on others in chosen interpersonal relationships is an acknowledgement that we still require the recognition of others in order to know ourselves. Despite the heavy emphasis modern people place on autonomy, this desire belies the liberal idea that the self is a purely self-driven creation, and shows that democratic societies have replaced traditional guides of social values, in the forms of community and kin-groups, with the power of lovers.

Theologians have explored ways in which religion and sexuality are complimentary, and, when combined effectively, can even lead to a more complete

spiritual transformation of believers despite the misconception of some that religion stands contrary to the body (Feldmeier 2007). Because modern churches are a vocal force in the romantic and sexual habits of their congregants and of the nations at large, their perceived desire for control of what is now considered personal behaviour is a major transgression of liberal ideas of selfhood and autonomy. In fact, proponents of the secularization theory often point to the friction between post-1960s privatized sexuality and church attempts to enforce sexual ethics on their parishioners as one of the central reasons why organized religion appears to be losing ground in the lives of westerners. In short, modern people will not accept any external force attempting to control what they consider to be an essentially private and internal aspect of themselves (Woodhead 2007; May 2008). As a result, aggressive sexual independence has become a popular mode of defining the self and empowering the individual against traditional structures of repression. Being one of the main *loci* of personal control, sexual behaviours and attitudes are a logical extension of contemporary individualism and self-expression. Thus, films such as *White Palace* are come from a liberal position that teaches modern Westerners that:

Getting in touch with one's authentic self and freeing one's emotional life from the chains and restrictions that "the establishment" would place upon it necessarily involved expressing one's sexuality in a free and "authentic" manner. (Woodhead 2007: 240)

In *White Palace*, the establishment in question is Max's upper class Jewish circle, and the chains this liberal film seeks to break are the hierarchical and communal enforcement of social and religious endogamy. Only through all-consuming and transformative sexual passion can Max, and indeed Norma, create and assert their existentially authentic selves.

## **The Golden Land: Coalescent American-Jews become Jewish Americans**

Finally, liberal films also ameliorate the problem of intermarriage by presenting Jewish difference as simply another form of American life, and suggesting that Jewish values are American values by aligning Jewish values with liberal ideologies of justice, choice and autonomy. While this mode of narrative resolution is visible in most of the other films I have presented, I believe it is advisable to draw out the particulars of this method, which I ground in liberal theories of coalescence and synthesis.

The phenomenon Jonathon Sarna (1999) calls “the cult of synthesis” within American Jewish circles is very useful for understanding the role of Jews in America, and has been ongoing since the Enlightenment. Coming from the Hegelian thesis/antithesis/synthesis triad, which describes the ways in which people begin with a position, come into conflict with opposing positions and then resolve the conflict by finding the commonalities between the two positions, this is a very appropriate term for the ways in which Jewish communities have attempted to reconcile their religion with their role as American citizens. Sarna uses “the cult of synthesis” to explore “...the belief that Judaism and Americanism reinforce one another,” and how this vision of

...the two traditions converging on a common path... encapsulates a central theme in American Jewish culture... [which] reflects an ongoing effort on the part of American Jews to interweave their ‘Judaism’ with their ‘Americanism’ in an attempt to fashion for themselves a unified ‘synthetic’ whole. (52)

Through creating a synthesis, Jews seek to make a life for themselves in America, to explain why Jews have a right to be in America, to express their patriotism, to foster a feeling of belonging, and to decrease their deep seated insecurity in America. This

synthesis played itself out in everyday American Jewish life, through the crafts and home life in early America, and via the new emphasis placed on the four major holidays of the Jewish year in America – Passover (Spring), 4th of July (Summer), Thanksgiving (Fall) and Hanukkah (Winter), two of which are civic holidays, and one of which is only a minor, non-biblical festival. Jews were willing and determined to enact their citizenship through their religious activities, and vice versa.<sup>25</sup> While Jews had the option of compartmentalizing their lives, and being public Americans and private Jews, synthesis was considered to be a vast improvement. This way, Jews could show their appreciation for America through their own distinct cultural avenues (Sarna 1999).

Synthesis seeks assurance and acceptance, but it is not merely another way of explaining assimilation. It does change the Jewish community, but is also a subversive attempt to negotiate agency in the democracy and redefine America, as well. Early synthesis proponents sought not only to re-imagine Judaism, but also to re-tell the story of America through the filter of Jewish experience – to highlight what they saw as the Jewish contribution to America, and, thus, to subvert the view that the United States is essentially a Christian country. The roots of American public Protestantism, they pointed out, lie within Jewish ethical and religious traditions, making the American social and justice systems Jewishly imprinted, particularly via the “10 Commandments.” By adapting Jewish life to America, and by reiterating the Jewish significance to American life, these Jews endeavoured to create a safe haven for Jews

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<sup>25</sup> The Jews threw themselves into the spirit of these holidays, putting their Judaism and Americanism into action. Early American *hagaddahs* were emblazoned with American flags, patriotic songs became hymns in worship services, the popular belief amongst Jews that Thanksgiving was originally a Jewish holiday spread, and specific prayers and sermons were written in celebration of Independence Day, with Washington adorned with Maccabean imagery, or even aligned with Moses, “With the spangled banner of liberty in one hand, and the law of Horeb in the other...” (19th century *hazan* Sabato Morais quoted in Sarna 1999: 56).

free of the persecution they knew in previous lands. This discussion of Jewish worth, and the promise in America of peaceful acceptance, did indeed make many Jews feel American and Jewish identities were perfectly compatible.<sup>26</sup> By emphasizing the Hebrew contribution to American society, the length of Jewish history in America, and the patriotism of Jewish communities, early Jewish leaders, like those of other immigrant groups, sought to create an impression that not only did the Jews fit in well in America, but that America could not have even happened – or at the least would not be the same – without the Jews (Sarna 1999).

While many Jews might see this desire for acceptance as grasping and embarrassing (Sarna 1999), there is nothing inherently incorrect with the attempt to reconcile Judaism with civic responsibility. In fact the Talmud is often quite specific about the Jewish duty to be cheerful and respectful citizens of the ruling nation (cf. Wolitz 1988), and about the rabbinical adage that “*dina d’malchuta dina*” – “the law of the land is law” (*Bava Batra* 54b). Many leaders and scholars have argued that Judaism and American values are highly compatible (Eisen 1983), and some have even argued that “... the better an American one is, the better Jew one is” (Liebman 1970: 68). But attempts at synthesis go much further than simply asserting that Jews are able to live as Jews under American law. They are, in effect, also saying that Jews have partial ownership of these values and laws, and, therefore, have the power to enact, change and create Americanism without hiding their Jewishness. This assertion represents a major departure from Jewish subjugation experienced in previous homes and might explain

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in terms of the strong early Jewish identification with Christopher Columbus, the first immigrant in their eyes, the Jews were adding to the myth of American promise. Columbus was a symbol of the opportunity to be found in the New World, and became illustrative of the brave, progressive and innovative thought and action represented by immigrants (Sarna 1999).

why early synthesis attempts often imagined America as the new Holy Land (Sarna 1999).

Sarna (1999) notes that synthesis was a phase primarily confined to the early generations of Jews in America, particularly the post-Revolutionary era. Today, he writes, the process has been “transformed and internalized” (74) and exists as what Sylvia Barack Fishman (1996; 2000) terms “coalescence.” Now being comfortable citizens of America, Jews have internalized American values to the point where they no longer have to express Jewish ideas through American imagery, or vice versa, but have come to believe that American values and Jewish ethics are one and the same. As conscious displays of patriotism became *passé*, especially after the 1960s, conscious Jewish efforts to appear American evolved into an unconscious expression of coalesced values, through which American liberal values came to be perceived as fundamentally akin to Jewish tenets. In selecting identities and ethical view points, American Jews, or Jewish-Americans, turn to the texts of American society and Jewish tradition at the same time, to the point where the two become not side by side, but one and the same. In the process of synthesis, the Jews were cognizant of the two traditions as being similar but different entities, but in coalescence the Jews feel they are the two sides of the same coin. Deemphasizing the parts of Jewish tradition that make integration more difficult, such as many of the Talmudic regulations, many liberal American Jews now believe that the values of secular education, freedom of choice and egalitarian views of America’s democracy are fundamental elements of “true” Judaism. Rather than presenting Judaism as a religion of prohibitions and obedience, Americanized images such as rebellion and dissension are brought to the fore in Jewish views of their

tradition. In keeping with post-Enlightenment views of natural religion, many liberal Jews now focus on God and general morality rather than laws and restrictions as such communal regulations and religious disciplines are not in keeping with American liberal freedom, and, as such, are now deemed human additions to the original kernel of Jewish truth. Therefore, the Americanization of the Jews in ways other than mere assimilation have taken root, and permit modern events like intermarriage to appear not as religious transgressions but as an enactment of the American right to freedom and the pursuit of happiness, allowing Jews to embrace secular ethics and social diversity as integral to their Jewish liberalism without conflict with inconvenient Jewish textual traditions (Fishman 2000).

Perhaps the best film to use in highlighting the process of coalescence is the 1980 version of *The Jazz Singer*. A loose, modernized remake of the 1927 landmark film starring Al Jolson, it is also useful for illustrating the difference between coalescence/synthesis and assimilation. Both films are excellent examples of Jewish views on intermarriage, as well as the symbolic value of Gentile women in the lives and Americanization of Jewish men.<sup>27</sup> The plots of both movies are of course very similar. The 1927 version has Jakie Rabinowitz (Jolson) being forced out of the house by his over bearing, Orthodox cantor father because he prefers singing jazz tunes in saloons to carrying on the family tradition as the next Cantor Rabinowitz. The majority of the earlier film is about how Jakie becomes Jack Robins, a famous vaudeville and Broadway tenor, and the love of the Gentile woman who helps him move past the

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<sup>27</sup> There was also a 1952 version, *The Jazz Singer*, starring Danny Thomas as Jerry Goldberg. However, intermarriage is not a theme in this version, so I have not included this film in my work. The film is now out of print, but users at the IMDB site for the film quote Jerry's love interest Judy (Peggy Lee) as saying "I haven't been to a *Seder* since I left home," indicating she might also be an assimilated Jew.



intransigent traditions and attitudes of his father to follow the American Dream. Meanwhile, the 1980 version stars pop star Neil Diamond as a young cantor, Yussel, who works and lives with his elderly father (Lawrence Olivier) but who dreams of selling the songs he writes, primarily to express his soul but also to earn enough money for himself and his Jewish wife, Rivka (Catlin Adams), to move into their own place and start a family. His journey from Yussel Rabinovitch to Jesse Robin has much more emphasis placed on “finding oneself” than the 1927 version, and is made more problematic by how his subsequent recording success requires him to divorce his wife in favour of a tough music industry woman, Molly (Lucie Arnaz), who is not a Jew.<sup>28</sup> But the basic dilemma remains the same in both films – should these men embrace the ancient traditions of their community and the expectations of their conservative fathers and deny the yearning in their own hearts for success and self-expression in the modern music industry? The solution to their problem comes in the same form – a liberal Gentile woman who offers them an alternative path to love and success than that available within their families or communities. In both films the American Dream is presented as an industry of talent, risk-taking and the possibility of extreme wealth and fortune. And the road to riches comes in the guise of a non-Jewish woman. In both versions, the historical option of remaining Jewish and marginalized is also symbolized by a woman – Jesse’s Jewish wife, and Jakie’s Jewish mother, two impoverished, simple and anxious women who fail to see beyond their own aprons, and must be abandoned if the men will escape their restrictive fathers and fulfill their romantic and artistic destinies (cf. Prell 1999). Both women are happy to remain where they are, geographically and culturally, and the message in the films is that only the daring can

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<sup>28</sup> In the 1927 original, the protagonist was unmarried when he left the Jewish community.

bring modern innovation, and the weak must be left behind.<sup>29</sup> Both of these stories are narratives of progress and the triumph of personal destiny over restrictive community expectations. Both are also, in a very literal sense, tales of secularization as the cantors take their vocal talents out of the synagogue and into the public sphere, and their enforced traditional lives of external conformity are converted into secular lives for the sake of authenticity and individualism (cf. Taylor 1989, 2003). While the fathers assert the belief that God gave humans voices for his service, the two young performers announce a new secular faith in the purpose and significance of popular entertainment – their music is as important to the lives of their audiences as is that of the cantor to the congregation, a notion that must appear as profoundly blasphemous to the Orthodox fathers.

Yet the modes of change make the two films fundamentally different from one another, and reflect the changing times between the 1920s and the 1980s in terms of Jewish self-identity. In the original film, assimilation was the key to success in America, and the Gentile woman represented the ultimate expression of Jakie's transformation into Jack. There was no returning for him, as seen by the complete breakdown of his relationship with his father, but also through the symbolic use of Jolson's signature blackface, which obscured his true identity for his cheering audiences (Rogin 1992).<sup>30</sup> In contrast, in the 1980 film Jesse's eventual reconciliation with his

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<sup>29</sup> This also includes Molly's father, who longed to be a pianist but who was too fearful to pursue this passion and settled for work as a sound technician instead.

<sup>30</sup> Because the 1927 version has aged very badly and lost a great degree of its fame due to the controversy surrounding Jolson's often misunderstood use of blackface and the minstrel tradition (see Rogin 1992 and 1996 for an in-depth and illuminating discussion of this), the 1980 version appears very self-conscious of its connection to what has been since labelled a racist film by many. Not only are racial sensitivity levels higher, as one would expect after 60 years of development, but the film overtly addresses audience memories of the tainted original. In one scene, after Jesse is talked into performing one of his songs with his oldest and best friend, Bubba (Franklyn Ajaye), a young African-American man, Jesse does indeed

father establishes his renewed and transformed relationship with his tradition as an unbreakable sense of connection, even though he has taken on a totally American life. The birth of Jesse's son, who is the means of the reunion with his father, tells the audience that the Jewish line will continue, which is assured by the child having the last name Rabinovitch instead of Robins, as well as the Hebrew name Chaim ("life"). At the same time, Jesse's foot in the world of modern entertainment is also represented in the baby's first and middle names – Charlie Parker, so named after the famous African-American jazz musician. The significance of the name Charlie Parker Rabinovitch

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appear in blackface. Bubba leads a pop-R&B group "Four Brothers," which is scheduled to perform for an agent at what they call a "black club" when they suddenly find themselves short their fourth member; realizing his friend could lose his big break by cancelling, and that he is the only other person who knows the lyrics, Jesse agrees to fill in on main vocals and guitar. Unbeknownst to him, this "black club" is not a place to welcome white performers onto their stage, and he must disguise himself as African-American - which, of course, results in a light-hearted brawl (which would likely be called a race riot in any context other than the silver screen), landing Jesse and the three other band members in jail. This comedic nod to the blackface tradition is not meant to be a profound message on race relations, but is a tweak on the nose of Jolson and his image. The inversion of the times is interesting - the boards of Broadway demanded whites in blackface because actual African-Americans were barred from major roles in the 1920s, yet, in the 1980s, "whites" like Jesse must blacken their faces to be welcomed on the stage of the "black clubs." In both situations, however, the blackface serves to remind the audience of the long and prosperous Jewish and African-American partnership in the entertainment industry, particularly in the jazz and popular music areas, with both movies expressing elements of the Jewish male desire to be as free of social and communal restraint as black men seem to be in their eyes.

The 1980 version of *Jazz Singer* is not a piece about race, but it does hold the liberal values one would expect from the 1980s. Jesse and Bubba are as close as brothers, and neither is uncomfortable with the difference in race or religion, and they both treat these things as casual conversation, at most. Even Jesse's father, a conservative in almost everything else, does not show the slightest evidence of anti-black racism or reservations over Jesse being friends with non-Jewish (or non-white) males. It is only non-Jewish women and romantic entanglements with them that the cantor abhors. The film does not go into depth about the complex relationship between the Jews and black Americans (cf. Lerner and West 1996), but prefers to apply its universal message of individual merit to the Jews and blacks equally. There is only one moment where the complexity of the issue crops up, even though it is only given one line - after bailing out the four chagrined musicians, Jesse's father looks at his son with his shoe-polished face and says, "What? Being a Jew is not difficult enough?"

The issue between African-Americans and Jews is literally a matter of black and white - while the Jews are white in terms of their position of acceptance and privilege in America, as well as in their invisibility, Jews themselves tend to balk at the description, understanding that it is no neutral descriptor, and feeling that it goes against their highly racialized and troubled history (Levine-Rasky 2008). To many African-Americans, however, who have a history of violent abuse and oppression in America and who don't have the ability to choose between blackness or invisibility, Jewish attempts to deny the white label appears as a failure to accept their own role in the oppressive hierarchies of race and class in America. (cf. Goldenberg 2003; Lerner and West 1996) Thus, taken in this light, Jesse's father's question is a much more profound one than the film lets on - with that line, he cuts to an issue for which there is no simple answer, a surprising element in an otherwise simplistic view of American universality.

affirms the film's message of peaceful coexistence between modern and traditional life in America, and that, today, "...American success and Judaism are not mutually exclusive..." (Friedman 1982: 307). Jesse is not assimilated.

Rather, Jesse has found a comfortable means to coalesce his Jewish heritage with his secular life, as seen in the symbolic use of colours in this film. Throughout *Jazz Singer* (1980), blue is the colour of rock and roll, while white stands for Judaism, because when the cantors perform for their congregation they wear white, but while Jesse performs for his pop audience he dresses in flashy blue.<sup>31</sup> But in the final two musical numbers, one religious and the other secular, Jesse embraces the wholeness of his two sides, as seen through the harmonious reunion of the two colours. When he sings the Yom Kippur *Kol Nidre* prayer in place of his ill father, he wears the traditional white caftan, but dons a blue, spangled *yarmulke*, showing that Jesse is still "rock and roll" even at worship. In the final musical number, a come-back concert that we know will launch him into super stardom, he is adorned in a shiny, bright blue shirt, but with a scarf around his neck of pure white as if it were a *tallit* (prayer shawl), showing he has now integrated his roots into his life of music. The staging of these two performances promote a "... meaningful union between the past and the present, of the traditional and the new..." and shows how doing so makes Jesse a better man (Friedman 1982: 311). As the lasers create an abstract Star of David pattern behind him, Jesse sings of America and the new life open to all people to be found there, grasping the joy and triumph of his performance in a single thrust of his arm. It is on a freeze-frame of this Statue of

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<sup>31</sup> When Rivka, who has come to LA to tell Jesse he must choose between rock and their marriage, she comments on his costuming, and this takes on more meaning than mere fashion – Rivka realizes, in a way Jesse is not yet able to see, that they no longer belong to the same world. Yet, when Molly experiments with Judaism as a way to connect intimately with Jesse, she wears a white head scarf.

Liberty-like pose that the film closes, confirming the message of individualism and authenticity, but within the context of American freedom of religion and heritage.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the 1980 version of *Jazz Singer* employs ideas of coalescence and synthesis to show how intermarriage is a positive option for Jews who seek more authentic lives. Instead of intermarriage being a mode of assimilation for the Jew, it can be but a part of the transformation of the individual in his or her search for self and it can be reconceptualised as a result of the Jewish confidence and comfort in America, the land of freedom for all. Further, Judaism itself can be reinvented as a faith of progressive and liberal people, once the fearfulness of conservative Jews can be overcome. While Jesse's father maintains the ghetto mentality of, "You can't change what has always been. You have to know what you are and where you came from," Jesse teaches him that, "If you don't know where you come from, how do you know where you are going?" Jesse's question gives respect to heritage, but his emphasis is on mobility – for him, America is also a part of where he has come from, as well as where he is headed, as seen in his climatic song, "America":

Far  
We've been travelling far  
Without a home  
But not without a star

Free  
Only want to be free  
We huddle close  
Hang on to a dream

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<sup>32</sup> Jesse's transformation comes through deep personal exploration; when his wife tells him that their life together is not compatible with his new career, he at first loves and then leaves Molly, and wanders the "real" America (that is, the stretch of heartland between LA and New York, which is clearly advanced here as something more authentic than the two coasts). His months of depravation, using his guitar to earn his food and depending on truckers for rides, weather Jesse and purge him of the self-doubt his life as an urban Jewish immigrant has taught him, emerging with more resolve and wisdom, as symbolized by his mature and prophetic beard. His time spent making intimate connections with the country create a new Jesse who is able to sing of America with a new sense of belonging and propriety.

On the boats and on the planes  
They're coming to America  
Never looking back again  
They're coming to America

### **It Seems Like Old Times: The Jewish-Jewish Couple in Liberal Film**

Compared to the number of films in which Jewish-Gentile romance is portrayed as advisable steps towards long term happiness, we have comparatively very few films in which Jews court and successfully marry other Jews. Many of those that do fall under my description of communitarian sensibilities (dealt with in the next chapter) in that the Jewish-Jewish relationships are often sought out of disillusionment with the Gentile possibility, such as in *Two Lovers*. In terms of liberal films in which Jews successfully maintain fulfilling relationships with other Jews, there are only a handful that satisfies the liberal notions of personal happiness and free will.

Some of those, such as the 1968 Barbra Streisand musical biopic of real life Jewish comedienne Fanny Brice, *Funny Girl* (and the sequel *Funny Lady*, 1975), feature historical situations in which the person being memorialized themselves were married to Jews. Similarly, there are several biblical epics in which technically Jewish (or Israelite) characters meet and marry Jewish (or Israelite) mates, such as Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 classic, *The Ten Commandments*.<sup>33</sup> While such films do portray sustainable interfaith couplings, I will not discuss them here due to the lack of filmmaker freedom in the recorded details of their subjects. Some liberal films do portray deep personal

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<sup>33</sup> Yet, even in this epic of the life of Moses and the Exodus, DeMille added the sensual subplot of Moses' (Charlton Heston) decision between the lovely Egyptian princess (Anne Baxter) and his plainer and more stable monotheistic Midian bride Sephora (Yvonne De Carlo). While Sephora herself, by virtue of her Midian heritage, is a problematic example of an appropriate mate for Moses, the 1956 film clearly establishes her as a daughter of a priest of the Hebrew God, and as a monotheist.

connections between two Jews that seem to be romantic and passionate in nature, such as the love between Yentl and Avigdor (Barbra Streisand and Mandy Patinkin) in *Yentl* (1983), and between Judy Gopnik and Sy Ableman (Sari Lennick and Fred Melamed) in *A Serious Man* (2009). Yet in *Yentl* the romance ends when the titular character must leave the oppressive gender constraints of Jewish Europe for modern America, and in *A Serious Man* the relationship is cut short by the death of Sy. Further, the comedy *Private Benjamin* (1980), in which a confused “JAP” Judy Benjamin (Goldie Hawn) enters the military after the death of her Jewish husband (Al Brooks) on their honeymoon, features a liberal romance between two Jews – Judy and a handsome NATO employee, Henri (Armand Assante). Henri, to Judy’s delight, turns out to be a French Jew, and in him she initially seems to find the best of both worlds (exotic romance and interfaith stability), suggesting that it is not Jewishness that works against romance but the boredom and stagnation that comes from familiarity within the Jewish American community. However, despite the early sparks between Henri and Judy, this romance ultimately fails. Due to the tragic or negative ends of these films, these do not constitute adequate examples of functional Jewish-Jewish couplings in liberal film, despite their sensual nature.

Of relatively recent films, there are two featuring Jewish-Jewish relationships that do seem to very closely mirror more typical romantic films involving nonspecific or interfaith couples. The first is *Mr. Saturday Night* (1992), in which Billy Crystal (who also directed) plays an obnoxious yet gifted Jewish comic Buddy Young, a character based on numerous Borscht Belt<sup>34</sup> comedians who rose to fame in the late Vaudeville

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<sup>34</sup> A common term (likely a take on the “Bible Belt,” substituting the stereotypical Russian-Jewish beetroot soup for the bible) particularly referring to the Catskills mountain resorts of upstate New York

and Catskills holiday resort eras (circa 1920 – 1970). In *Mr Saturday Night*, Buddy Young, who has risen from the New York tenements to success through comedy, reviews his life from his old age, part of which revolves around the deep, fulfilling love he has shared with his Jewish wife Elaine (Julie Warner). Flashbacks in the film show the two meeting, courting and creating a sustainable life together, despite the challenges presented by Buddy’s abrasive personality. In rather liberal terms, the relationship is rooted in what seems to be a *coupe de foudre* – a “thunder bolt” or love at first sight – which effectively categorizes the romance as a personalist tale of intimate connection, rather than a communal action of marital responsibility. In fact, Elaine’s parents are somewhat disappointed in her choice of a comic as a husband, even if he is Jewish. Yet while Elaine and Buddy did not take particular care to fall in love only with another Jew the setting of this film raises an interesting point for consideration in the predominantly Jewish patronage of such resorts. Phil Brown (2003), a historian and memoirist of the Catskill era, notes that the decline of the Jewish Borscht Belt holiday camps was in part aided by the increase of intermarriage in Jewish families. However, the reverse condition must also be considered – that the decline of *de facto* Jewish-only vacation destinations very likely also led to the increase of intermarriage as young Jews more commonly enjoyed casual contact with Gentiles (cf. Dershowitz 1997). *Mr. Saturday Night* serves to highlight the recreational institutional completeness of the American Jewish community during this period, in which Jewish young people were able to

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that were frequented by the second generation Jewish families of New York from WWI until the 1960s. The term also sometimes includes the Jewish vacation destinations as far north as Quebec and south to the Poconos of Pennsylvania. Jewish entertainers would travel in circuits around these hotels, bungalow communities and resorts presenting a Jewish American form of stand up comedy as found in the work of Shecky Green, Sid Caesar, Jackie Mason, Allen Sherman, and Henny Youngman, etc. Yiddish/Jewish comedian and singer Mickey Katz, one of the last entertainers to rely on Yiddish content, was a staple in the Catskills, which retained its Yiddish roots even after the era of widespread Yiddish use had ended elsewhere in America (Grey, Katz and Coons 1977).



experience personal passion with other young Jews simply due to regular socialization. Nevertheless, Elaine and Buddy constitutes one of the most successful Jewish couplings in recent films, which also happens to be fairly typical of Hollywood romance as their relationship began in a very liberal, romantic way.

Another film in which two Jewish characters succeed is the mature romance *The Cemetery Club* (1993), in which a Jewish widow (Ellen Burstyn) meets and falls in love with a Jewish widower (Danny Aiello) at the Jewish cemetery where their respective spouses share a “neighbourhood” (which in a way also signifies the role of institutional completeness in Jewish-Jewish relationships). While her fellow Jewish widows (Olympia Dukakis and Dianne Ladd) protest the relationship, largely due to their fear that the triad will change dynamics, the couple conquer the odds against them, and we are left convinced that their passion and love will sustain them through their golden years.<sup>35</sup> In both *Mr. Saturday Night* and *The Cemetery Club*, we see that, as is typical in romantic Hollywood film, the couple must still face some adversity in order for the plot to advance (cf. McDonald 2007). In the former, it is Buddy’s aggressive nature (and, to a lesser degree, the desires of her parents), and in the latter it is the disapproval of the widow’s friends.<sup>36</sup> Further in *Crossing Delancey*, a film we looked at in chapter two,

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<sup>35</sup> The film’s subplot involving the ridicule of another Jewish widow’s nonsensical pursuit of Gentile husbands may also give the main romance a communitarian aspect (as discussed in the following chapter) which may compromise its liberal status, but the criticism of the socially conservative widows, and the couple’s triumph over this adversity, clearly places it in a personalist position towards happiness in love.

<sup>36</sup> *Goodbye, Columbus* (1969) also features an obstacle for dramatic purposes, in which a Jewish-Jewish relationship is stymied by a stiff hierarchy not based on ethnoreligious difference but on economic classism and, arguably, on assimilation/integration levels (Friedman 1982). The two lovers come from families who would normally be considered part of the same community but are actually shown to be worlds apart. When the Jewish and poor Neil Klugman (Richard Benjamin) meets and begins a romance with the lovely and rich “JAP,” Brenda (Ali McGraw), it too is something of love (or lust) at first sight. For Neil, Brenda’s smooth, upscale charms are obsessively attractive in contrast with the more ethnically overt ways of the aunt with whom he lives, and for Brenda Neil’s lower class manners and background make him an exotic souvenir of the community her own successful father (Jack Klugman) left behind. Pampered and modern, Brenda’s life is nothing like Neil’s existence as an underpaid library clerk living

the root of the Jewish-Jewish couple's adversity is actually Jewishness itself, in which the similarity of the couple's backgrounds, insofar as it runs counter to Izzy's romantic ideals, makes them an "unlikely couple" according to the liberal standards of Izzy's world.

Finally, the most common way in which a seemingly happy and functional Jewish relationship is displayed in movies today is by way of couples who are already married when the film begins. While the majority of pre-existing married Jewish couples are shown as unhappy or ridiculous as a foil for the Jewish protagonist in his or her search for romance outside the community, there are a number of couples even in otherwise liberal films who show characteristics of marital happiness despite being married within their own heritage community. In *Meet the Fockers* the hyper-liberal titular parents (Barbra Streisand and Dustin Hoffman) are both sexualized and almost ridiculously happy, though their new age ways seem to have given their son (Ben Stiller) very little reason to likewise marry within the community. In *Keeping Up With the Steins* (2006), the more conservative parents (Jami Gertz and Jeremy Piven) are an attractive, supportive and functional couple, who are religiously affiliated and seem to be fostering a sense of Jewish solidarity in their pre-teen son (Daryl Sabara), but who are also successful and modern people. Even in the largely anti-Hasidic film *A Price*

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with his unassimilated aunt in the Bronx. His romance with Brenda prevents Neil from being happy in his second generation tenement world, yet his low class roots prevent Brenda from being able to form a serious commitment to him, due to her parents' objection to such a low class son-in-law. Both are technically Jewish, yet shared Jewishness is not enough to reconcile their class differences, as their Jewishness does not supersede their social status. Or, rather, their Jewishness is lived through their class identities, examples being the way Neil's Jewish heritage manifests through his aunt's ghetto cookery, and the home-based familial care that Brenda's father lavishes on his children in the form of material wealth. In the end, the class difference is not something the couple can triumph over. Because this romance ends negatively, it is not a prime example of a positive portrayal of Jewish-Jewish romance in liberal film, but its placement of class, rather than religious identity, at the heart of the couples' dilemma makes it an interesting example of a Jewish-Jewish romance as an unlikely couple.

*Above Rubies* the venerable *rebbe* of the community and his wife (John Randolph and Kim Hunter) appear to have a deeply loving and sympathetic relationship, though it takes contact with the rebellious Sonia (Renée Zellweger) to reignite a sexual passion long since dissipated.

Therefore, it is impossible to say that modern, liberal film is completely void of personalist love, passion or romance between Jewish adults, as these examples show. The material point, however, is that these portrayals are very small in number compared with the overwhelming occurrences of Jewish-Gentile romances (Friedman 1982), with the majority of Jewish-Jewish couples, such as the parents in *Along Came Polly* and the yuppie foils in *White Palace*, being less than ideal by modern, liberal standards, which values personal passion and intimate satisfaction over community sanction in choosing a mate.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explored five ways in which Hollywood films featuring positive interfaith romances between Jews and Gentiles portray options for resolving cultural differences. Films can ignore Jewishness as a difference, characterize the Jewish community as something from which Jews must be rescued, suggest the Jewish individual transform mentally and emotionally through a romantic encounter with a Gentile, allow for Gentile partners to align themselves with their Jewish mate, and/or show how sex and love are ultimate goals in America, placing romance above inherited community in importance. In these ways, films train the audience to accept the happy endings these films give to the mixed couples they feature.

The common thread among most of the narrative strategies in this chapter is the belief that liberal exogamy represents a significant progression for the individual, either from the so-called “old fashioned” ideals of traditional cultures, such as that of religious Judaism and of conservative white Protestant American ideals, or from repressive personal or communal elements. A large part of this belief seems to be tied to the myth of America as a land of freedom in contrast to the burdened lands of origin, in which old prejudices, mental states and hierarchies are replaced by the liberal virtues of freedom, independence and individualism. The “storied pomp” of the Old World referred to by Emma Lazarus in her immortal poem dedicated to the Statue of Liberty falls by the wayside against the endless possibilities and reinvention of the self of the rootless New.

The ways in which films deal with the incongruent backgrounds of interfaith couples and bring them to a satisfactory conclusion (that is, their narrative strategies) can either predominantly uphold the rules of conservative society or they can take the romantic perspective – specifically, the foundational view that love does conquer all (Wartenberg 1999). When understood in terms of American self-conception, the fact that the romantic perspective seems to be the dominant result of such American films is to be expected, as individualism – the belief that a person’s success, failure and identity rests solely in their own desire, hard work and self-reliance – is the dominant and most consistent aspect of American cultural and political ideology (Bobo 1991). As Richard White (1995) has observed, the tension between the individuality that colours American mythology and the pull towards community, as required by the dangers of colonial life and the demands of an emerging nation state, has had an effect on American culture for

a long time, especially since the westward expansion in which both the communal effort of Manifest Destiny and the roguish image of the outlaw as ultimate free man vied for space in the American self-image. These themes, along with the necessities of capitalism and the role of the entrepreneur, have created the American certainty in the “inevitability of progress” (Keller 2003: 47). This belief in progress has combined with both the belief in a corporate American identity as well as the autonomy of the individual, creating an image of a land unique amongst nations, and one separated from old roots by courage, freedom and the personal pursuit of happiness. This myth has established America as the land of both opportunity (through freedom) and modernity. While there is a great deal more variety in the personal ideologies of American citizens than can be presented in this overview, it is evident that these aspects of the American mythos are dominant in many of the liberal films discussed in this chapter.

Among the ideological positions inherent in liberal films is the belief that tradition and old world cultures are antiquated and barbaric in contrast to the diversity and relativity of religious difference (or indifference) that these films see in American culture. The ways in which the love of unlikely couples serve to reform the parents, friends and social circles inhabited by the lovers – often focusing on the direct refutation of erroneous (i.e. non-liberal) ideals of the closed communities and the transformation of objection into enlightenment – illustrates the way these films see interfaith coupling as a way to promote liberal ideals among the undemocratic people around them. The abandoned or rejected ideals are replaced by a simplistic and generic belief that, as the Beatles asserted, “love is all you need,” and pleasure (or sexual gratification) is an important personal goal of significance to individual independence

and happiness, as well as the means by which lovers can escape oppressive hierarchies and make their own life. At times these films do acknowledge that the social and geographical mobility of modernity does have the potential to destroy old Jewish ways of life. But they also seem to believe that this loss is for the best due to their common ideal that secularism and individuality are the basic means of freedom, tolerance and modernization, as well as, in some cases, safety.

In the next chapter, I use communitarian critiques of these liberal ideologies to explore interfaith romance narratives with negative outcomes. I show how some of these films, particularly since the 1970s, portray interfaith romances as warnings against what some might deem the dangers of modernity, assimilation and extreme individualism. While liberalism remains the dominant ideology of Hollywood, there is reason to believe the critical communitarian voice is growing stronger in American cinema.

## Chapter 4

### **Brooklyn is Not Expanding: Negative Interfaith Romances and Communitarian Critiques of Liberalism**

*To the extent that the liberal Enlightenment has urged the abolition of particular providence, it will always be at odds with Judaism.*

- Steven B. Smith (2006:42)

Having explored representations of the Jewish integration into American life and the ways liberalism can help us understand positive intermarriage films, as well as the narrative strategies these films employ to bring a happy resolution to mixed couples, we now come to a different approach to viewing intermarriage in American film – the communitarian critique of liberal ideals of multicultural intermingling. Communitarianism can be used to analyze how films with negative outcomes problematize the liberal ideals of marrying or loving outside one’s group, by arguably portraying such romances as less desirable, successful or healthy than previously promoted in liberal Hollywood. In this chapter, I use communitarianism as an ideal form to explore the meaning of failed Jewish-Gentile romance in recent decades.

In my analysis, I identify obstacles used to explain the relationship failures in negative outcome films that seem to illustrate many aspects of the communitarian critique, categorized according to the six stumbling blocks to Jewish-Gentile intermarital bliss as assessed by filmmakers:

- i. The problem of assimilation and its effects on Jewish selfhood.
- ii. Religious differences as a valid obstacle to interfaith romance.
- iii. The reality of family objections.
- iv. The presence of hidden social barriers to an equal partnership.
- v. The problem of distinct histories.
- vi. Internal differences between Jews and Gentiles that cannot be reconciled.

Finally, using the literary criticism concept of *Bildungsroman* (“coming of age” novels), I will explore the prominent idea in Hollywood film that Jewish-Gentile relationships are mere flings, and are never really intended for the long term, reflecting the feeling that Jews might experiment in their youths but that endogamy is the ultimate goal of Jewish life. I will then conclude by investigating, in light of these examples, whether interfaith romance is still promoted in Hollywood.

### **The Trouble(s) With Intermarriage**

The films in this chapter portray relationships between Jews and Gentiles that may take on the outward appearance of conventional Hollywood romances at first but ultimately fail to come to fruition or eventually fall apart. Many of these films are romantic comedies, which makes it hard to ignore their willingness to have the romance succumb to barriers, as seen in chapter two. I have identified six common stumbling blocks for such failed relationships in film. Some involve warnings against assimilation, symbolized and enacted through intermarriage, as inherently destructive to the Jewish “soul,” and others explore the religious issues involved with exogamy, and acknowledge the validity of family objections. Some root the negative outcome in the failure of liberal society to adequately obliterate social barriers (despite encouraging intermarriage on a theoretical level), in the emotional and mental traps posed by historical rivalries and inequality, and/or in the existential and conceptual differences, stereotypical or not, that arise between Jewish and the Gentile lovers.

#### *i. The Destruction of the Jewish Soul: Direct Anti-Assimilation in Film*



It is problematic to associate intermarriage with assimilation too closely in American Jewish life, when Jewish-Gentile couples in real life are managing to negotiate Jewishness in a number of interesting ways (Fishman 2004). Nevertheless, when represented in film, interfaith intimacy takes on a symbolic function which often addresses the idea that intermarriage and assimilation are interdependent conditions. Fishman (2004) suggests that creative authors have a value for scholars of the social sciences in that they often seem “to be prescient, because they are free to describe social phenomena before they become statistically measurable” (101), and can explore cutting edge lifestyles before they become major enough trends to catch the eyes of scholars (Fishman 2000). It is in this regard, she notes, that films and novels have had such an important role in the Jewish consideration of intermarriage. In light of recent increases in Jewish openness to intermarriage, we must now wonder why intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles is still a preoccupation for American film, when more Jews are marrying outside the faith than inside (Fishman 2004). As it cannot be a case of these artists predicting an interesting new trend, perhaps it has become a matter of more symbolic concerns. In intermarriage films the pursuit and winning of a Gentile was once seen as a metaphor for the Jewish pursuit of the American Dream, or of America herself, but now, since the Jews have apparently successfully made their place in America, the metaphor is not really about pursuing the American Dream, but, rather, part of a continuing reassessment of Americanization and of the compromises Jews have faced for the sake of their spot in the mainstream. That is, Jewish-Gentile intermarriage in film raises further questions about the process of assimilation over the past generations, and asks the viewer to consider Jewish differences as well as their

right to equality. In a land where over 80% of the population is Christian and less than 3% are Jewish, intermarriage can indeed be seen as the threat of assimilation. But a story of intermarriage as a microscopic, individual-level event into which can be read the macroscopic, community-wide marriage between Jews and America is perhaps closer to the deeper meaning of such films.

There are films that do not raise the question as to whether marriage between Jews and Gentiles can be successful, but do ask whether or not they are welcome. Films addressing to the problems of assimilation through intermarriage suggest that marriages between Jews and Gentiles can be, in fact, all too successful. One of the prime examples of these films on an individual level is the original *The Heartbreak Kid*, directed by Elaine May, which we have already briefly discussed in chapter two. In this film, Len Cantrow (Charles Grodin) abandons his unexciting but dedicated Jewish wife for the golden Gentile Kelly (Cybill Shepherd), only to find in the end that the Gentile fantasy has a cold, demeaning quality to it, and that he is left as an outsider despite having attained his prize. If taken on a broader level, the last shots of Len at his wedding to Kelly, in which he is alone, miserable and silent, in contrast to the scene of his Jewish first wedding, which was bursting with life and family vitality, can be read as a warning to the Jewish-American community – chasing entrance to the American mainstream at the expense of one's Jewish heritage might win you the marriage certificate, but it is likely to lose you a family. Likewise, the American-made film based on the Canadian novel by Mordechai Richler, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* appears as a similar warning about selling one's (Jewish) soul. In it a young Jewish man, Duddy (Richard Dreyfus), who is told by his pious grandfather that a man without land is worthless,

takes this lesson literally and cheats his way to the top in real estate. He bilks investment money out of former friends, and, in the process, alienates his grandfather who considers him a worthless scam artist. Duddy's moral and emotional impetus transfers from his grandfather to the Gentile Yvette (Micheline Lanctôt) as he fights his way to the top in business. In the end, he even loses her as well, as he learns his cutthroat business too effectively. In the final shots, he can be seen running back and forth across the screen, aimlessly – he has land, and the room to run, but he is without direction (Friedman 1982). Without his grandfather, and even without the Gentile he prized over his heritage, Duddy has no real path; he has no family, and no Gentile. He has only the business success he wanted, for which he sold his soul. It is no coincidence that both of these pictures were released in the 1970s, when Jewish interaction with the mainstream was complete after the suburban move and economic boom of the post-War era (Brodkin 1999), yet a time when Jews also started to assert a more vocal ethnic voice in America through an increase in Jewish organizations and associations. Jews were embracing American life, but were reconsidering old ideas about the value of assimilation (Tumin 1969; Goldstein 1974; Friedman 1982).

Some films prefer to explore the themes of intermarriage and assimilation on a much grander scale than the intimate, singular life. One film in particular manages to illustrate quite eloquently, if unsubtly, the dangers of assimilation to the Jews. Ralph Bakshi, director of the infamous x-rated animated feature *Fritz the Cat* (1972), was also the creator of the much less well known film *American Pop* (1981), a feature film created in Bakshi's signature surreal rotoscope animation style, in which the drawing is

done over the real life figures of actors.<sup>1</sup> The film opens with the oppression of the Jews of Russia by the Cossacks, and quickly focuses on the plight and destiny of one Jewish family which is meant as a symbol for the Jewish struggle in America. Orthodox and poor, this family seems to represent the essential stereotype of the Old World *Ostjude* family. When his father is killed, ten-year-old Zalmie, armed with nothing but his meagre personal belongings and his father's watch, sets forth into the world of the strangers. He ends up, as many Russian Jews did at the turn of the last century, in New York with his mother, who is soon after killed in a sweatshop fire. Zalmie then is a lone Jew cut away from his roots, sent to wander. He sets about making his way in the American Dream, becoming one of the many Jews drawn to the variety stage of the time period and he quickly adapts to his new homeland. Soon, he marries a Gentile dancing girl, and eventually gives up the stage and his dreams of music in favour of owning a club, which leads to an involvement with organized crime. He has a son, Bennie, who he hopes will be a great pianist, but after a hit-gone-wrong kills his wife, Zalmie marries Bennie to the Italian daughter of an allied mob boss. The father, stricken by the loss of his wife, as well as the loss of his dreams and heritage, tells Bennie, "If you won't live my dreams, then live my life." These are the final words of advice from the last Old World member of the family, and they contain a warning – family suffering continues in a cycle until one member can rise above it. Trapped in organized crime, Zalmie, who erroneously failed to hand down his Jewish heritage to Bennie, has elected that secular music will be Bennie's inheritance, and if he does not accept it he too will be doomed to the "family business."

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<sup>1</sup> This may just have been Bakshi's typical style, but the half-"real"/half-animated (or "false") quality of the film gives it an extra layer of meaning, and complements the story's themes of lost identity and the resulting sickness of the soul.

Instead, World War II erupts, and Bennie is killed in action in France. His own son, Tony, is born as a stranger to his father, and remains in his mother's Catholic family. Tony, as well, is inexplicably drawn to music, and feels the urge to move away from his mother, as well as his Gentile stepfather. The fact that he does not truly fit with his maternal family can be seen on his bedroom wall – where someone, presumably his mother, has placed a cross, he has inverted it. The upside down cross is a signpost marking the irrevocable division between Tony and his Gentile family, whether he knows the reasons or not. Certainly, being Jewish has no significance to him, but he is filled with an angst created by never having known his father, and, therefore, missing half of his own history. Finally, he breaks with this charade and heads West to find his fortune in music. Passing through Kansas, a symbol of the conservative “real American heartland”, he finds a lovely young blonde woman who would have loved him and with whom he could have stayed, but, still, he presses on towards the fame and freedom he craves – the postmodern gold rush that aims for LA. Finally, Tony does find a modicum of success as a song writer for a psychedelic rock band, but falls prey to the excesses of the California music scene in the 1960s. Heroin and any number of other intoxicants steal his focus, and he no longer cares about music and “making it,” but only about his next fix. Years later, Pete,<sup>2</sup> the illegitimate son Tony fathered from the blonde waitress in Kansas, tracks him down, but Tony is now a broken down drug pusher, and has little to offer the boy. Pete knows Tony is his father, and Tony sees that Pete is his son, but

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<sup>2</sup> The choice in names here are clear indications of the subsequent Americanization of the family. Zalmie, the Russian-born patriarch, is the last with a truly Old World name. Bennie, however, at least has an anglicized Jewish name, while his son, Tony, has an Italian name, though it is at least a so-called “white ethnic” name. By the time Pete's generation comes along, however, the family is fully assimilated, as denoted by the seemingly average middle-American name, which is both indistinct and Christian. Ironically, Peter, meaning “rock,” is the son without foundations, and without a name reflecting his true, rich heritage.

neither can really acknowledge this aloud. There is no family feeling left in either of them any more, even if the physical bodies remain. Instead, Pete and Tony become two of the walking wounded, making a pair bond for survival in LA. Pete is Tony's apprentice, running cocaine to more successful musicians. On one such drug run, Pete is overheard singing a song, and, in typical movie style, he is discovered and finally gains the fame and fortune his father (and great-grandfather) had desired. But his father is lost to him, dead by an intentional overdose, and is remembered only by the old watch he has left for Pete – the watch Zalmie carried from Russia, but the story of which has been long since lost. Having the strength and determination, Pete manages to keep his focus on the music and can access the American Dream that for so long eluded his family. But at what price fame? As he walks down the street in New York at the end of the film, Pete's ear catches the strains of Orthodox Jews at prayer, and he stops to listen, mesmerized by the exotic, yet compelling, sounds. Something in him yearns for that sound, but he cannot recognize this yearning. There is no conscious trace of Jewish tradition and belonging left in him and it can never return. There is no history or community left to him, only fame, money, and his own lonely concerns.

There are two modes of American Dream chased in this film: the secular music industry (with the various crimes that come with it), and Gentile women, the first a stage dancer, the second a mob princess, and the third a Midwest waitress met on the road to LA. Jewish women fade from the scene in the very first generation. The primary sin of the fathers was choosing secular music as the family heritage over Judaism, which remains alive yet forgotten in the symbol of an old family watch. But their secondary sin was depositing and abandoning their seed with non-Jewish mothers, thus

leaving the seed of Israel in alien soil and allowing it to be lost to the nation, to the detriment of the line. Like the watch they pass down, the family has lost its context, and, therefore, its meaning. Intermarriage is the result of abandoning traditional Jewish life, and generational assimilation is the result of the intermarriage. The decision of the filmmakers to place secular music and Gentile women at the heart of assimilation seems to be a direct comment on the liberal Hollywood film tradition as seen in *The Jazz Singer* (1927). Films such as this and others (i.e. *Who is Harry Kellerman and Why is He Saying Those Terrible Things About Me?*, 1971) that focus on the loss of Jewish identity (and self-respect) through success in the arts reflect the perception that media and entertainment are industries in which Jews can find success, yet are ones in which they can easily lose their souls. What seemed in the 1920s to be a goal of the Jewish migration to America seems to Bakshi, himself a Jewish childhood immigrant from Russia (Greco 1981), a fool's errand leading to a situation in which Jews lose more than they gain. Bakshi, by virtue of his controversial *Fritz the Cat*, is known as something of a radical filmmaker, but what we see in *American Pop* is an almost conservative critique of old liberal ideas of assimilation. This view of fame is that the threat of deracination is always behind every pot of gold in America, and is evocative of communitarian concerns over liberalism's trend of isolating the individual. As Bakshi said of his film, after eighty years in America this family "won a platinum record and lost their souls" (Greco 1981: 20; Friedman 1982).

While most of the films I analyze are not quite so overt with their messages, this film stands out as an excellent illustration of communitarian concerns, especially in the eighty year scope of the film. By examining four generations of Jews in America, this

film can expand on the theme of assimilation and intermarriage as a domino effect. *American Pop* shows how some films offer direct exhortations against assimilation, but there are many other forms of obstacles explored in American film that call in to question earlier liberal myths about assimilation and unity in America.

*ii. Choosing Choseness: Religious Obstacles*

Ironically, despite the persistent liberal idea that religion is the main distinguishing factor between Jews and non-Jews, religious difference may be one of the most rarely explored obstacles to Jewish-Gentile relationships in American film. It is true, of course, that Hollywood in general has had a long-standing reluctance to show particular religion, as opposed to “values.” Since the 1990s, however, this trend has seen some reversal (Norden 1992). Nevertheless, the fact remains that for the majority of American Jews, shared historical events such as the creation of State of Israel and the Holocaust, might be much more meaningful aspects of their identity as Jews than is Judaism (Friedman and Desser 1993). While Jewish identity is bolstered in America by religious rituals, such as circumcisions and bar/bat mitzvahs, and by religious holidays, such as Passover, such formal religious expressions do not determine contemporary Jewish identities alone. Judaism scholar Jacob Neusner put it best when he wryly observed that “American Judaism has persisted although the Jews have largely ignored it” (1981: 34). Therefore, specifically religious objections to intermarriage have diminished, and, although Judaism’s authorities still have much to say about the challenges of interfaith romance and marriage, American film does not offer a great deal on the subject of Judaism. In fact, there are only a handful of narrative films



released in North America in the past few decades that actually deal with Judaism openly, as opposed to those which deal with Jews themselves.<sup>3</sup> Those films that do address this issue often deal with religious difference in two ways. They either present a post-Enlightenment idea that all religions are fundamentally the same,<sup>4</sup> and particularities are mere window dressings on the “true” faith of the soul,<sup>5</sup> or to suggest that accommodation is as simple as making a token gesture of a shallow conversion.

There is one film I will discuss, however, that has openly staked out a claim for the validity of religious devotion within Hollywood’s romantic cinema, and it comes from a most unlikely source – an otherwise sub par and formulaic crime piece starring Melanie Griffith and Eric Thal, *A Stranger Among Us*. Some film critics will point out that this was Buena Vista’s attempt at retreading the far superior *Witness* (1985), except with Hasidic Jews instead of the Amish (i.e. Kauffmann 1992), but there is much about this film that is not entirely disposable. In particular, it has at its helm one of the finest mainstream Jewish-American directors, Sydney Lumet,<sup>6</sup> and a cinematographer, the Polish-born Andrezej Bartkowiak, who so lovingly films the Hasidic scenes that the *tableaux* alone make the film a worthwhile experience.

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<sup>3</sup> One film that addresses religious difference is the popular romantic comedy *Keeping the Faith* (2000), starring Ben Stiller and Jenna Elfman, which has been dealt with in the previous chapter due to its view that religious objections can be overcome through the simple conversion of the Gentile lover to Judaism. When their romance begins Anna, the Gentile business woman, has no clue why Jake, a rabbi, would consider her religious affiliation important, even though the reasons should be clear to anyone, and she seems to treat it as something he should “get over,” as if it is a perverse fetish rather than a deeply felt conviction. Her eventual conversion, which she has planned as a surprise for him as if it were a birthday cake rather than a life-altering decision, fails to have any meaning as it is clear she is going through the motions to make Jake assent to marry her – her liberal ideals, à la Hollywood, are such that she seems to feel that if he will be silly enough to cling to this prerequisite for love’s triumph, then she will give up her own beliefs, as if one ideal is as good as any other.

<sup>4</sup> For example, *Brooklyn Babylon* (2001).

<sup>5</sup> For example, *Mrs. Delafield Wants to Marry* (TVM, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> While he also triumphed with the brilliant *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) and the alluringly offbeat *The Wiz* (1978), Sydney Lumet is also the unabashedly Jewish director of such important and controversial films as *The Pawnbroker* (1964) and *Daniel* (1983).

This film is one of the few commercial film explorations of Hasidism in America, and the director uses the Gentile police officers, who know next to nothing about the isolated community, as a stand in for the audience who can be assumed is equally uneducated about the ultra-Orthodox culture. While the Hasidim are tenderly captured in an anachronistic, yet timeless, home life, they are also shown in their role as the life-blood of the 47<sup>th</sup> Street New York diamond industry. The very first lines in the film are in Hebrew, establishing the religious and traditional dominance of the film, yet we also see the Jews participating, as proud and visible Jews, in modernity rather than hiding from it. Unlike another commercial film dealing with the Hasidim of New York I have explored, *A Price Above Rubies*, in *A Stranger Among Us* the Jews are treated with sensitivity and respect, and are shown in some historical context as “real people,” insofar as any character is realistic in a crime thriller. In fact, Lumet seems to hold their commitment in high regard – while life outside is seen as rootless and violent, this is in contrast to the warmth and fellowship offered within the Hasidic group. The very urban setting itself brings out the contrast – graffiti tagged brick walls and dirty streets are contrasted with clean, luminous, book-lined Jewish homes. The Jewish communal group is imagined as an oasis of health and civilization compared to the depravation (and depravity) of the drifting modern world outside of it (Friedman and Desser 1993). Community, which the Hasidim understand intimately, has been lost on the outside, and the Gentile interlopers cannot help but be appreciative of what the Hasidim gain in exchange for the relative loss of freedoms. Secular life holds the threats of betrayal, depression and addiction, while the Hasidim suffer only slightly, and willingly, for their Law – their sacrifices, such as having to decline offers of Gentile dessert treats, are

slight compared to what they enjoy. The film is not lax in showing us why the Hasidim do not regret their places.

The story features a hardboiled female cop in New York City who must figure out what happened to the sweet-natured son of two Hasidic diamond merchants. Figuring it is an “inside job,” Detective Emily Eden (Griffith) decides it is imperative to go undercover and live among this closed group. She is hosted by the *rebbe* (Lee Richardson) and, of course, his handsome, young son and heir, Ariel (Thal). The crime story is relatively unimportant as it is the love story that is the main vehicle for the drama in *A Stranger Among Us*. The title, while alluding to the deadly secret carried by one of the members of the community, also signifies that it is Eden and her relationship with Ariel and his father that is to be our prime concern as the viewer.<sup>7</sup> While Ariel is physically beautiful, the real romance stems from the way in which Ariel’s intelligence and quiet perceptiveness draws Eden to him, as his manner is the complete opposite of the vulgar come-ons of the secular men around her, particularly from a non-religious assimilated Jew, Levine (Jon Pankow). Why Ariel is attracted to Eden is much less clear, despite Melanie Griffith’s obvious physical qualities, yet Ariel’s sister might point out one factor in Eden’s allure when she compares the modern detective to the female warriors of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is seemingly the attractive power of a capable woman that lies at the root of his desire, especially compounded with the exotic qualities of a woman from the outside, with all the erotic implications of that status.

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<sup>7</sup> The title also recalls the Jewish obligation to be kind to strangers, (cf. Leviticus 19.33-34), which surrounds not only Eden’s interactions with the *rebbe*, but also the means by which the killer gains access to the charitable community, which makes the portrayal of Hasidim quite unusual for the level of friendliness which with they are imbued.

Thus, in a form of gender inversion, it is Ariel's gentle spirit and deep soul that attracts Eden to him while it is her strength and animal roughness that draws Ariel to her.

Friedman and Desser (1993) point out a major contradiction in the film. By holding the peaceful and intelligent Ariel up as a romantic object of desire, Lumet is promoting mental and emotional acuity as more sexy than the lusty hyper-masculinity of the men outside the community. Yet in the end, the fact that this is a mainstream crime drama requires that this gender compromise be offset for the viewer. Pacifism and wit must take a backseat to the need for a man in America to be able to use violence when it is required, and the film's formulaic climax has Ariel use a firearm with unrealistic skill to save Eden's life (Friedman and Desser 1993). Still, this violent climax does have a significance other than fulfilling the obligation for male gunplay. Ariel, being a devoted Jew and the next *rebbe* of the community, simply cannot walk away from his obligations for the lust of a Gentile woman. Like the *éclair* she offers him that he cannot eat, Eden is tempting, perhaps, but she is an empty pleasure compared to the deeper partnership he will find with his arranged bride, the daughter of a French *rebbe* who he believes is his *besheret* (his soul mate). Ariel's belief in the *besheret*, or other half, stands opposed to the idea of the attraction of opposites – one's partner in life should be the missing part of you, not your antithesis. His contact with Eden brings about his violence, and, even though it is permitted in Judaism to kill to protect innocent human life (b. Sanhedrin 74a), she has harmed him in his soul for this act. Her world has intruded on his contemplation far too much, and the shooting is the cathartic eruption of this collision. While he can admire her and have warm memories of her, he cannot ever bond with her or become one with her. In this way, the act of

shooting the aggressor to save Eden is a violent substitution for the sexual climax the two can never share, as well as a warning that, while two opposites can attract, that fact alone does not mean they should merge. It is this acceptance of the realities of attraction, but the reminder that we are not obligated to follow through on attraction, and that communal responsibility come with great rewards, that makes this film resonate with many communitarian critiques of liberal aims. There is something bigger than lust, or even love, and that is the connections between members of this religious community based on mutual support and shared values, and one which is highly distinctive and irreducible to universalized ethics.

*iii. I Haff No Son!: The Reality of Family Objections*

Part of Hollywood's liberal tradition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in regards to intermarriage was to contend that parents with an objection to the relationship were either racist anti-Semites or Jewish chauvinists who refused to modernize. In these films, dissenting family members are held up as examples of ignorance, prejudice and irrationality – three deadly sins in post-Enlightenment culture. In more recent years, there has either been a continuation of that image, or, even more common, we have seen the decline of familial objections altogether in American film (*Along Came Polly*, for example). The 1980 remake of *The Jazz Singer* is, primarily, a story of a man dealing with the traditions of his father, as was the 1927 version. The later version does, however, give more of a voice to the elderly cantor who longs to see his son follow in his footsteps, and it also dares to show the fatherly love that also lies behind the concern, something glossed over in the original film. Still, the newer version follows the

original by asserting the liberal ideals of romance over tradition, and the father, instead of dying in the end, is still forced to accept his son's interfaith re-marriage along with his choice of a pop career over his religious one. Such films once showed the older generation as backward and unable to see the wonders that America has to offer, but allowing the parent to see the light is the new Hollywood way of dispelling their objections. Nevertheless, there have been more films recently that take the family's concerns over interfaith romance seriously. Some even show the serious consequences of intermarriage on multiple generations of Jews in America, such as *The Angel Levine* (1970), in which an old Jewish man (Zero Mostel) lives in despair and poverty due, in part, to his estrangement from his intermarried daughter. While the film suggests that it is the father's irrational prejudiced views that keep him from making peace with his daughter, and it encourages the liberal values of tolerance and personal growth, these facts do not sugar-coat the misery of the older generation left behind by the younger Jews who have left the community for the sake of a Gentile lover or spouse.

The short film, "Oedipus Wrecks," Woody Allen's contribution to the tripartite *New York Stories* (1989), is a particularly interesting piece through the communitarian ideal, even though Woody Allen seems unhappy about the nature of communal life. The short starts out with Sheldon Mills, a *nebbish* lawyer, who has become distraught over the destructive role his mother plays in his life. His mother's regular efforts to embarrass him have sent him to an analyst, but to no avail. Desperately, he longs for her to disappear, even having secret hopes for her death. The audience gets some indication of why he would have such dreadful ideas when we meet his mother, a diminutive wrecking ball of a woman, who seems to be as disappointed in, and critical of, her son

as she is pathologically boastful of him. According to his mother, Sheldon was a beautiful child, and is a sensitive, successful man, who also happens to be a lousy son who is ashamed of her, and changed his name from Millstein for no good reason. Finally, Sheldon cannot wait any longer – he must bring his Gentile fiancée, Lisa (Mia Farrow) home to meet his mother, even though he knows it will end in disaster. Upon meeting Lisa, his mother produces the family photo album and begins to systematically humiliate him. As soon as Lisa, who has children from a previous relationship, leaves the room, his mother starts in on him about his impending marriage, “What do you need with a blonde with three children? What are you, an astronaut?”

Dismissing his mother’s distress over his loss of Jewishness, now culminating in a mixed marriage, Sheldon and Lisa take his mother and Lisa’s three children to a magic show in order to jumpstart the family bonding, at which Mrs. Millstein is chosen as the volunteer for a sword trick, and is placed in the Chinese Box. Suddenly, Sheldon gets his wish – his mother disappears, for real! At first, Sheldon is filled with concern and dismay, and goes through a mournful period trying everything to find his lost mother, until, one day, he discovers he is a better person without her hovering over him. Finally, he is the man he always wished to be – relaxed, happy and sexual without any inhibitions. “I feel like a new man,” he crows to his therapist. “It’s like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders” – the allusion of Millstein/millstone becomes clear. Guiltily, he calls off the private investigators he had searching for his mysteriously missing mother, and he attempts to move on with his life with Lisa.

Then, suddenly, the impossible and fantastic strikes, and his mother not only turns up, but is, somehow, one hundred feet tall and plastered across the New York sky

above him, becoming a media sensation as she criticizes him loudly and discusses his life with strangers. Where she was once just wrecking his emotional life, her famous presence in the New York landscape starts to destroy his personal and professional life, as well. Finally, Lisa has had enough of Mrs. Millstein calling her “strange foreign names” (in Yiddish) to the news crews and feels the humiliation that Sheldon knows, complaining that it is fine for Sheldon but that she’s “not used to this sort of thing.” Finally, at the end of his rope, Sheldon contemplates suicide and his therapist, seeing that it is time for desperate measures, sends him to a friend, Treva (Julie Kavner), who is trained in the occult as a “spiritualist.” For three weeks, the incredulous Sheldon tries every *faux* foreign ritual Treva can produce from her charlatan’s repertoire. Finally, Treva admits that she had never made an occult ritual work despite very much wanting to believe in it – she stayed in business, she explains, because “people flock to it – their lives are just so empty.” To save him from showing his humiliated face in a public restaurant, Treva cooks Sheldon a chicken dinner to apologize for not being able to get his hundred foot mother out of the New York sky. While they eat, Sheldon feels more and more relaxed with Treva, a demonstrative Jewish woman who loves to feed him and obsess over how thin he looks. Eventually, both of them realizing their growing attraction is inappropriate, Sheldon returns home to Lisa, weighted down with plates full of leftovers courtesy of Treva. Instead of Lisa, however, he finds only a note from her, explaining how his mother’s humiliation has finally made the relationship impossible for her to continue, and that she had simply fallen out of love with him. Dejected, Sheldon picks up a drumstick from the leftovers, unattractive and homely, and



a look of recognition comes over him – Treva, while not as romantic as Lisa, would care for him and accept him, despite his mother.

Rushing out to his mother with his new fiancée, Sheldon proudly introduces his new, Jewish bride-to-be, and his mother finally smiles in relaxed happiness. “Fine,” she says, “now I will come down.” She disappears and shows up a minute later, normal sized, walking out onto the balcony to join Sheldon and Treva. The family is reconciled and all are happy, until, to Sheldon’s horror, Treva asks his mother if she has any baby photos of her son. The smile falls from Sheldon’s face as he realizes what he has done. This is where the short film ends, leaving the audience understanding the joke of the vignette’s title. We are not led to believe, though, that his choice of Treva is any worse than his marriage to Lisa would have been. Now that the secret of his real name has been revealed to the world, Sheldon has a new position of authenticity. Now that he, who was ashamed of everything Jewish, has embraced a Jewish wife and made some peace with his Jewish mother, it is likely that this marriage will last, even if it may not be as exciting as marriage to a pretty, polite Gentile (who abandoned him when things got rough) might have been. In this short, food is seen as a form of love, and Treva had sent him home with his arms full of it. In contrast, Lisa “fell out of love” with Sheldon, showing that while romantic love has limits and fades, the bonds of traditional matrimony, as simple and homey as that chicken dinner, are a more lasting union, justifying his mother’s warnings from the beginning.

Another film, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1986), in which the young Jewish protagonist’s aunt (Judith Ivey) begins a flirtation with an Irish-American man from across the street (James Handy) the protagonist’s mother (Blythe Danner) being

ridiculed by everyone in the family for her vocal objections to the match. His mother warned her sister that the man was a drunk, which everyone dismissed as bigotry until he is indeed parted from the aunt forever by a serious drunk driving accident. In a movie with seemingly otherwise democratic views, the reinforcement of the drunk Irish stereotype is odd – the legitimating of the mother’s intuition, however, is interesting, and seems to suggest that we should not be so quick to dismiss the fretting of traditional mothers when they warn us about talking to strangers. The film *Prime* (2006), in particular, also appears to explore the ways in which the objections of family might appear incongruous in liberal America, but may actually be rooted in a reasonable concern about the welfare of both the Jewish and non-Jewish participant.

*Prime* focuses on the ill-advised yet passionate love affair between a 23-year-old Jewish would-be painter David Bloomberg (Bryan Greenberg) and the 37-year-old Rafi Gardet, played by Uma Thurman. Unbeknownst to either of them, the young man’s mother Lisa (Meryl Streep, as an unlikely yet oddly likeable Jewish mother) is also Rafi’s therapist. The psychiatrist, who we see encouraging Rafi to embrace a temporary romance with a younger man as a way to rejuvenate after a bitter divorce, does not seem as tolerant when advising her son against becoming involved with an older Gentile woman. Speaking from a position of emotion from her role as a mother, yet also as an educated therapist, she advises her son that relationships outside one’s faith are more of a challenge than he really should take on at such a young age. While the audience may be prone to see her position as hypocritical given her conflicting advice to her patient, one cannot help but be sympathetic to her situation – her patient is a grown woman, while the young man is her son. Further making her a sympathetic character is her own

rational attempts to address the awkward situation – humorously visiting her own therapist to try to deal with it all – with an earnest desire to do the right thing. She is also shown having a distinct absence of the clichéd “those people” or “the other kind” attitudes towards Gentiles so often placed in the mouth of Jewish mothers in intermarriage films. She is actually seen as slightly, though affectionately, derisive of the attitudes her own grandparents had of such couplings. In the end, she does attempt to swallow her own misgivings and give the couple the benefit of the doubt, even though the relationship does ultimately fail, though partially due to the age difference.

While prejudice is not embraced, this and films like it, acknowledge that the familial support of endogamy might actually be born out of wisdom and rational observation. It suggests that not all parental objection is to be brushed aside as the ravings of pre-modern bigots. In *Prime*, Streep’s character is both educated and liberated – in fact, her ways of reasoning, in their reliance on academic evidence and logical argument, are fundamentally post-Enlightenment modes of discourse. She opens up a space for parents who are both liberal as well as passionately community oriented, which, previously, had been shown as seemingly impossible in interfaith romance films.

#### *iv. Imperfect Tolerance: Hidden Social Barriers*

Similar to the communitarian critique that asserts that liberalism is a failure because it does not describe reality, but is merely an ideal (Walzer 1990), there are several films which point to intolerance as a real stumbling block to Jewish and Gentile romance. On the surface, perhaps, liberalism promotes tolerance and unity of the diverse, but these films show that this is not an ideal that Jews will find lived out in the

people around them. Often, this intolerance stems from family objections, either Jewish or non-Jewish, but it also speaks less about family unity and more to the basic belief that people support “their own kind,” while harbouring suspicions about the other. This hidden intolerance beneath the façade of liberal idealism was perfectly highlighted by the classic film, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* (1967), which focuses on one upper class white American family on the night their daughter has brought home her new, African-American fiancé (Sidney Poitier). Candidly, the parents (Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy) lay open an issue films continue to play out – they raised their daughter with liberal ideals, and taught her there was nothing real that made black citizens inferior to white citizens in America, but when their beloved child puts these ideals into intimate practice their liberal ideals fall apart in the face of a black son-in-law. At the same time, the black fiancé’s parents (Beah Richards and Roy Glenn) are going through a similar struggle, as the son they raised to see himself as equal to whites is now taking their teachings too much to heart, and is, in their view, turning his back on traditional black family life. Their ideals, in other words, cannot stand up to reality, and the newer generation then disturbs them by not seeing the difference between their well-meaning liberal rhetoric and the practical limitations that remain unspoken. While this film explores an interracial relationship, not a Jewish/Gentile one, it still provides an accessible illustration of the communitarian critique that liberalism fails to live up to reality. There is a difference between the politically correct rhetoric that people speak and the deeply foundational communitarian feelings in which they actually believe, which occasionally are manifested in hidden intolerance within mainstream society.

An example of a film in which Jews and Gentiles cannot manage to maintain a relationship due to remaining anti-Semitism in the surrounding culture is *School Ties* (1992). In this film, we see a young, handsome and Jewish David Green (Brendon Fraser) riding a football scholarship in the 1950s to an upscale prep school in New England, a “gateway to Harvard,” and the *alma mater* of several US presidents, St. Matthew’s, where the façade of civility and justice masks an unjust core of prejudice. David is from a working class single parent family in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where he grew up with his sister and his father amongst lower or working class friends. That he is skilled in football seems to his struggling friends and family a ticket to a better life, so he is encouraged by those around him (including St. Matthew’s coach who hails from a similar working class background) to make the best of things when this opportunity knocks. Yet we get an idea that things might not be so easy for David when his coach drops him off at his new dorm. “Play your cards close to your vest,” the coach tells him, “Don’t tell people any more than they need to know.”

David is, of course, concerned that the upper class kids and he might not have much in common, but one doesn’t yet get the sense that he is too worried about fitting in. Being from the tough town of Scranton, he does not lack confidence, even in the face of open anti-Semitism. He is used to the overt anti-Semitism of his hometown, where when a tough guy calls you a “sheeny bastard” you best him in a physical fight and you feel better. He is unprepared for the more genteel forms of anti-Semitism he is about to face, which start his first night in the dorm when he hears a new friend explain how he got his new Hi-Fi stereo at such a good price because he “Jewed down” the dealer. Ironically, the Jewish boy from a poor family must hear slurs about the presumed

Jewish flair with money from a room full of wealthy Protestant schoolboys. Understanding the atmosphere at the school, David has two choices – fight, and blow his chance at Harvard, or keep silent and “pass.” Having been told that these young men represent the best of America, and wishing to escape the poverty of his roots and please his father, David complies, and this is communicated as he removes his Star of David necklace before his shower and hides it in his “Cur-Aid” bandage box. The symbolism is unsubtle – David is “curing” the thing that appears to be standing in his way on the path to success. Here, he can play pretend, and fit in even if there must always be a part of him that remains hidden away. For a time, this scheme works. His charm, brains, athletic skill and good looks make him popular among the students, and affords him an acceptable level of success in school. His strength of character and sense of justice establish him as a leader among the boys.

The crisis point, which has been foreshadowed all along, comes when he becomes the object of jealousy of one of the young men, Dillon (Matt Damon), who is driven to extremes by the pressures of living up to his high-bred family legacy, and who is in a non-reciprocated infatuation with a friend of his family, Sally (Amy Locane). Sally, a lovely, demure and appropriately blonde teenaged beauty who attends St. Matthew’s sister school is immediately drawn to David, seeing in him the qualities that one finds in teen film idols of the time, toughness, passion and independence, but which she finds lacking in the pampered boys who have surrounded her all her life, namely in Dillon. From the beginning of their romance it is David’s very difference, his almost exotic foreignness, which appeals to Sally. Sally’s appeal for David is considerably less esoteric, as she appears to be what every boy in the 1950s was trained to consider

perfection, and the two begin to fall in love. The problem is that Sally chalks up David's difference to his lower class roots, but is horrified when she learns, through the jealous Dillon (who heard it from an adult alumnus), that the school's star quarterback and her new suitor is really Jewish. So insular is her world that she never expected to see a Jewish boy in the exclusive school, though she protests against David's claim that she is ignorant by citing the Jewish boys she has seen from a distance. Her shock, ultimately, is that she has fallen in love with a Jew without being able to tell he was Jewish, which goes against the ideals of breeding-will-out that her social set stand by. Still, it is evident that Sally's dismay at the shock does not destroy all of her attraction to David. Rather, it is the jeers and taunts from the other girls of her class that ultimately drive her and David apart – "What's it like to kiss a Jew? Does his nose get in the way?" Her friends have pinpointed the sexual insecurity in Sally, and this is a cruel barb she cannot bring herself to ignore. Even while longing for David, she defends her prejudiced friends by placing the guilt on David, accusing him of hiding this traumatic secret from her on purpose. Sally can only see the damage done to her social standing and reputation, angrily berating David for what he put her through. David, ultimately, was too different for Sally to be able to embrace in her social situation, and this is the end of their relationship. One can say this breakup is partially by choice, as Sally was too weak to resist public opinion, but the film shows us that the cultural climate was fundamentally unfriendly to Jewish-Gentile love, and the romance was doomed from the moment David felt obligated to pass as non-Jewish. Even as Sally can only see what she has suffered, David rightly points out to her that the lie had not been to her, but to

himself, and to his ancestors. Passing for the sake of popularity and a girlfriend had damaged only himself.

Because *School Ties* is set in the 1950s, the audience may get the impression that it is disconnected from the 1990s when it was made.<sup>8</sup> The placement of the film in the recent past may give the impression that the Jews may have had issues in pre-contemporary America, while allowing audiences to believe that contemporary Jews do not have such problems, but this disconnect is simply an illusion. All films, no matter what era they portray, speak to their own time – otherwise, there would be little value in them for the audiences who patronize them (Bartov 2005). By placing this story of anti-Semitism in the not-so-distant past, the filmmakers may critique the culture of exclusion which continues to abound, while using the time setting as a subterfuge to disarm the audience and allow them to embrace the message. Current audiences can watch the film and congratulate themselves on living in more enlightened, liberal times, but they may also pick up lessons about empathy for excluded minorities in the process. The broader reality of Jewish life in America remains that passing is still an attractive and possible option, and genteel forms of anti-Semitism still exist, especially when anti-Semites feel safe from “judgemental” Jewish ears.

A more complex filmic exploration of how liberalism’s failure to defeat intolerance can be found in the controversial film *The Believer* (2001). This film presents a very different way in which cultural anti-Semitism can destroy a relationship between a Jew and a Gentile. The anti-hero of the story, Danny Balint (Ryan Gosling), is not initially revealed to be a Jew, as he is first seen as a racist skinhead plaguing the

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<sup>8</sup> The way that the film is placed in the 1950s is interesting, as it continues the nostalgic idea of the Jew as an inherently historical mythic figure (cf. Friedman 1982).



streets. It is not until after we have become thoroughly disgusted by his hateful ideas that we are let into Danny's darkest secret – Danny is Jewish. Danny is filled with anti-Semitic self-hatred. He claims that Jewish weakness and deconstructive tendencies make the world hate them, yet their perverse natures also make them crave this hatred, as their embracing of anti-Semitism is the only thing that keeps them Jewish and vital. While other skinheads denounce the Holocaust as rumour, Danny angrily points out that if one truly hates Jews, should one not celebrate the millions killed, for is not Holocaust denial actually denying Nazi efficacy? Instead, Danny blames not the killers, but the victims who did nothing, in his eyes, to save themselves. The horrors of anti-Semitism and the violence directed at the Jews over centuries obsess Danny, but also force him into a crisis of masculinity. How does a young man live up to the ideals of strength and virility in America while carrying the baggage of the effeminate victim? Danny's solution is to identify with the murderer, not the murdered.

In the midst of this mental and emotional crisis, Danny's passion attracts Carla, the young mistress of the racist ideology with whom Danny's group affiliates. Lost and clinging to the racist group not out of intellectual affinity but from loneliness and confusion, Carla (Summer Phoenix) is fragile and without foundations, and she recognizes in Danny the fire and strength she herself lacks. She seeks to be whatever he is, to believe whatever he believes. Slowly, Danny begins to teach her about Judaism and Jews, without telling her he is Jewish. "Know your enemy," he explains to anyone who wonders how a skinhead is so knowledgeable in Hebrew and Jewish law. Yet, the pull towards Judaism is strong for Carla, who sees it as the antithesis of what she is – communitarian and ancient – and she becomes a force for Judaism in Danny's life,

which he ultimately must reject. Neither Nazis nor Jews can satisfy Danny, as he comes to believe both sides are just playing, and no one can be as serious about anything as he is. Eventually, he sets a bomb at a local synagogue only to save the Jews from it, destroying himself in the process, and, in the end, he becomes both the murderer and the murdered, the way he was always heading. Dead by his own explosive device on Yom Kippur, Danny sacrifices his own young male vitality to atone for the sins he felt the community was guilty of – the sin of weakness, perhaps, and the sin of being hated, certainly. While Yosefa Loshitzky (2005) claims the Jewish ambivalence in what he calls post-Holocaust film is caused by the fact that “the diasporic post-Holocaust Jew is unable to redeem the shame inflicted on the Holocaust Jew by the possessors of absolute power” (142), Danny desires to do so or die trying in order to put an end to his pain.

In this story, it is not external anti-Semitic opinions which tear Danny and Carla apart, but, more tragically, the way cultural anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic events have penetrated the Jewish psyche. Danny is an extreme character, but under his outrageous behaviour, which was inspired by a true story, lays the turmoil of Jewish life in America. Assimilation has made the Jew long for full entry into the American mainstream, but the failure of liberalism to stamp out environmental anti-Semitism makes some Jews feel unwanted, even as official policy tells them barriers no longer exist for them. As a consequence, while covert Jewish stereotyping sinks into the Jewish self-image, the Jewish-Gentile couple will be forever buffeted by anti-Semitism, even if this evil is a mere echo that the Jewish partner carries within themselves. While other, less-privileged minorities seemingly have taken the Jewish place as oppressed

peoples and now draw liberal sympathy, the Jew is left remembering more overt forms of anti-Semitism while at the same time experiencing the feeling that they are not quite as accepted and welcomed as the politically correct liberal façade would have them believe (Boyarin 1992). In films like *The Believer*, the Jewish belief that anti-Semitism persists and that the image of the victimized Jew taints themselves forever is often sufficient to strangle any romance between a Jew and a Gentile before it can ever find its own existence.

v. *Cossacks and Swap Meets: The Problem of History*

ALVY: I love what you're wearing.

ANNIE: Aw, yeah? Well, this [tie] was a present from my Grammy Hall.

ALVY: Grammy? You call your grandmother "grammy"?

ANNIE: Yeah.

ALVY: What did you do, grow up in a Norman Rockwell painting?

ANNIE: Well, you know... What about your grandmother?

ALVY: Well, my grandmother didn't give gifts. She was too busy being raped by Cossacks.

This dialogue from Woody Allen's masterpiece *Annie Hall*, aside from employing his essential Jewish wit by juxtaposing the horrors of history with the comedy of the mundane (Friedman and Desser 1993), encapsulates the issue of history that has risen as an obstacle between Jewish and Gentile couples in recent film, of which Allen is one of the masters. His *Annie Hall* sets the standard for, and often defines, the trend of interfaith romance between Jews and Gentiles in American cinema since the 1970s – there are not many of them which do not owe at least some of their structure to him, as some directly make reference to it and others slyly borrow from it. In it, Alvy Singer, a comedian and "real New York Jew" according to Annie, falls in love with the perfect

*shikse*, his Gentile Dream Girl, and this movie is the jumbled re-telling of their love story and its eventual decline and fading out.

What happened? Why did the romance fail? These are the framing questions Alvy asks, even though the scenes we witness from his memory make the failure of the relationship seem fairly inevitable. One of these reasons is the complete disconnect between Alvy's historically informed worldview and Annie's simplistic nature. Where Annie is trapped in a 1950s style universe in which everything is "neat," and life consists of limitless personal growth, tennis lessons and swap meets, Alvy does not allow himself such relaxation. Aside from his personal history of overt family dysfunction, Alvy is preoccupied with history – sometimes with the great biographies and events, such as the Kennedy assassination, but also of what history *does* to people along the way, such as how he and the people he knows would stand up to torture by the Gestapo. With a nervousness stemming from his personalization of the Cossack and Nazi menaces of history, Alvy continues to see anti-Semitism around every corner, a paranoia which is likely behind his problem with authority as well as many of the traits in him that Annie hates, such as his desire to avoid adventure and to surround himself with familiar people and things. Certainly, his obsession with death and with movies exploring the Holocaust are most likely rooted in his "people's" collective trauma, of which he has made himself heir and keeper. Meanwhile, Annie can have bouts of giggles while telling the story of how relatives have died in her recent memory. Therefore, the differences in family history and community experiences are not just conversation points for Alvy and Annie, but are integral parts of their personalities and play a significant role in their breakup.

This idea that Jewish suffering in history has led to Jewish neurosis is certainly not unique to Woody Allen (cf. Konner 2009), but it is one of the concerns that characterize his films. Another film in which this generational post-traumatic nervousness is explicitly found in is his *Anything Else* (2003), in which Allen plays the off-kilter mentor to a protagonist who is a cinematic version of the young Woody Allen, who is involved in a dysfunctional relationship with a high strung Gentile woman. Drama develops and tragedy strikes out of Allen's obsession with firearms and home protection in light of the people in the world who want "to make us into a lampshade." In another brief example, his Kafkaesque *Shadows and Fog* (1991) shows Allen alone and confused in the darkened streets of some fanciful, mythic town filled with allegorical figures, and devoid of realism where he starts out trying to help catch a killer but ends up being accused of the murders himself, which seems to be a metaphor for the hazy and labyrinthine struggle for justice by Jews in Gentile lands – they do not know of what they have been now accused, even as they attempt to be good citizens despite their instinct to stay out of view. Around and around Allen wanders the strange streets, running into his Gentile Dream Girl, who he helps and encourages, only to lose her in the end. Allen's character is simply unable to free himself from the fog of being an outsider in the streets of a town he did not design. There are numerous other examples in the Allen opus that one could refer to, so strong is the trend.

One of the greatest examples of how historical scars and concerns can destroy a love affair between a Jew and a Gentile is the harrowing romantic drama *Sophie's Choice* (1983). This rather long character study, based on the novel by William Styron, tells of a naïve young Southern man witnessing the post-War interfaith

romance/obsession between a Polish Gentile Auschwitz survivor, Sophie (Meryl Streep) and the American Jewish man, Nathan (Kevin Kline), who saves her from starvation and illness as a new refugee in New York City after liberation. Since World War II, film seems to have had an increased fascination with the interfaith couple during the Holocaust (Baron 2005), but this is one of the only well known examinations of their lives shortly after the War had ended, and offers the interesting switch of Gentile as victim/survivor. Disturbingly, while Sophie is understandably damaged by her experiences, Nathan becomes a “vengeful, Old Testament [God]” (Simon 1983:61), and, driven by his paranoid schizophrenia, Nathan immerses himself in the emerging details from the camps, oscillating between waves of guilt for not having suffered and died in Europe himself and being a perpetrator of further cruelty to one real survivor, Sophie. The fact that Sophie is not Jewish infuriates Nathan. While he led a relatively secure life in America and “missed out” on the pain of Jews in Europe, this Gentile woman had somehow been sanctified in his eyes by the crucible of Auschwitz. He was even, presumably for mental health reasons, barred from having the power of serving in the US Army against the Nazis. As a reaction, Nathan demonizes and brutalizes Sophie for the choices she had to make to survive, such as forging a relationship with Nazi Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz (1940-43), in order to save her last remaining child. He also will never let her forgive herself for having been born to an anti-Semitic father, and demands to know how much anti-Semitism within herself helped preserve her life while millions of Jews perished. She did not deserve the “privilege” of the suffering that she endured and he was denied, according to Nathan’s twisted understanding, and it is clear that he has no true understanding of what she went

through. His psychosis takes on a singular goal: to destroy them both as offerings to the enormity of the Holocaust – Sophie for being the “wrong” victim, and himself for “escaping” victimization altogether, out of an emasculated and deranged anger over not having the ability “to reverse history, undo the atrocity, or transport oneself into a time or a place not even accessible to the wildest imagination” (Bartov 2005: 75).

At the crux of this story is a particular understanding of Jewish identity after the War that says that part of being Jewish is being a victim (Bartov 2005). Without that victimization, the psychopathic Nathan feels that he has lost his place in the community, and sees Sophie’s experience as usurping his position. Sophie accepts his abuse out of her depressive need to be punished for the loss of her children, to feel something (even pain), and to duplicate some contact with her domineering father. Perhaps she is even sacrificing herself not just for what she feels she committed against her children, but to the Jews her father sentenced to death. For the mad Nathan, by having a relationship with Sophie, by living with her, beating her, and copulating with her, Nathan is attempting to master her, and assume her identity and experience. The sadomasochistic violence gets worse, leading to their eventual suicide pact, because Nathan cannot, no matter how much he demands, steal that history from her. Nathan is a singular zone of contradiction – he desires a Gentile woman, who is both blond and simple, yet her history belies the old myths about the purity and uncomplicated pleasure of Gentile femininity. He presents himself to her as a caring rescuer only to prove himself a brutal victimizer, and he lives through his professed horror and obsession over the sufferings of the Holocaust’s victims, yet he ends the life of the only survivor with whom he has ever connected (Bartov 2005).

While one hesitates to use the mentally ill Nathan as an example of Jewish manhood, this film presents a particular vision of historical conflict between the Jewish and Gentile lover. The two are never alone, naked – they always bring their history with them. While this can be said for all couples, when the lovers are a Jew and a Gentile the history goes beyond the personal and enters the realm of global. The Jews, as repositories for an ancient story, can never be represented as themselves with a recent beginning as they are forever defined as a deeply historical people who carry the scars of their people's past into interfaith couplings, so much so that when the Jew fails to be victimized appropriately, his identity dissolves and he cannot function.

The further humiliation of this film is that the story is not simply one of a mentally ill Jew and his Polish lover, but of how their dysfunctions and passions are trotted out as if on stage for the personal growth of an immature American Protestant boy (Peter MacNicol), for this is also a story about diaspora and shifting places. The Polish refugee and the migrant young Southern writer, Stingo, are there to heal or grow, while the Jew, the only one native to the area of New York, is not allowed to feel at rest there because he has been robbed of any healthy sense of his own place and self. This displacement is at the heart of his obsession with Sophie, who represents a place and a time to which he desires entrance, and causes his eventual suicide. He was not victimized enough to feel his Jewish identity, so he must victimize himself. The self-satisfied "real American," Stingo, can only watch and marvel at the foreign couple's dramatics which he, in turn, can never really understand.

*vi. Never the 'Twain Shall Meet: Internal Differences*



Tied to the historical differences between Jews and Gentiles is the perceived ineffable “something” that holds the two groups apart. The conceptual and internal differences between Jews and Gentiles are a much more nebulous thing than the previous obstacles, and can often be a much less comfortable thing to discuss. It is important to make the distinction between the representations of the Jews that I outline, and any claims on an essentialized Jewish character “in real life.” While not being anti-Semitic, films illustrating an irrevocable difference between Jews and Gentiles are often guilty of essentializing the Jewish experience and character in America, and often tap into, or re-appropriate, old stereotypes about Jews. Blending ideas of historical and religious (or ethical) differences, these films appear to agree with allo-Semitic ideas of the Jew in which Jews are neither specifically inferior nor superior to Gentiles, but, rather, are exceptionally different or alien, and, for various reasons, will never completely mesh with the mainstream world around them (Bauman 1998). They may even be defined by this separateness (Schiff 1982). An excellent example of representing Jewish difference as a significant discord with American life comes from the HBO comedy television series, “Curb Your Enthusiasm” (2000-2009), created by the overtly Jewish and neurotic Larry David:

...Season five ends with the revelation that David’s character was born to gentile parents, and only adopted by Jews... Before David’s Jewish identity is questioned, the soundtrack is colourful and almost klezmatic – after he discovers his gentile roots, it becomes “All-American” and folkish. The [sweater]-clad, gentile Larry David becomes calm, socially smooth and bland, at peace with the world. His serenity is short-lived, as the adoption story turns out to be a case of mistaken identity. The trauma of realizing he is Jewish after all provokes an extended flashback of all the insults and confrontations of the past five seasons. (Pearse 2008b: 8)

The image of the Jew as being essentially different – the ultimate fish out of water – is common in American media representations and is even more significant in interfaith romance narratives. In at least two films, *Fritz the Cat* and *Bee Movie* (2007), Jewish difference is even symbolically rendered in divergent cartoon species, so significant is the belief in the existence of that difference. These films seem to say that the Jews will always see the world as Jews, and this fact will play out in actions, thoughts and opinions which will always serve as a wedge between themselves and the Gentile objects of their desire.

One of the common ways that Jews are shown to be essentially different from their Gentile lovers is in their hyper-sensitivity to danger and historical lessons of persecution, such as we see in the works of Woody Allen. While in *Annie Hall*, Alvy sees anti-Semitism in everyone he meets, in *Stardust Memories* his character gives into a pathological gloom stemming from a constant, raw realization that, every second of every day, someone is tortured, starves or suffers in some dreadful way. This oft-represented and claustrophobic sensitivity to the potential dangers of the outside world is poignantly described by the youngest son of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in his memoir:

Although at six I was too young to comprehend the world beyond the Bachs' house, my neighborhood, and school, I knew that there was something dangerous "out there," lurking near enough to strike again, that was somehow involved in taking my parents away. A dark cloud of generalized anxiety hovered at the edge of my consciousness – a sense that something about my family was terribly wrong and that my circumstances might get even worse. Most of the time, when I ignored or forgot about the upheavals of my life, I felt reasonably safe with the Bachs, and not too bad. But "we" (whoever that was) were under attack from whatever was out there, and I wanted to keep a low profile, beneath the notice of any enemies. (Meeropol 2003:2)

While Robert Meeropol (né Rosenberg) is of course speaking specifically about the arrest, trial and June 19, 1953 execution of his Jewish-American Communist parents as saboteurs and spies for the former Soviet Union, the level of consciousness he expresses is consistent with the representations of the acute sense of otherness expressed by Jews in many films. As we have seen, Jewish males in particular are often shown as having heightened sensitivity, making them more desirable to Gentile women than their Gentile counterparts (Friedman 1982). The other side of this is that Jewish hyper-sensitivity and humanism born of ancestral sufferings is often brought into awkward conflict with the carefree or determinedly sunny dispositions of their golden Gentile lovers. This is particularly salient in *Annie Hall*, where Alvy tries to instil in Annie a darker understanding of human life by forcing books about death on her and taking her to Holocaust documentaries, while she would much rather smoke marijuana and hang out with friendly people and chat. Alvy's grim outlook is a part of their eventual breakup, and one which is, by virtue of Alvy's obsession with anti-Semitism, rooted in his Jewish consciousness.

Likewise, in the romance *The Way We Were* (1973), Katie, the young Jewish Communist campus demonstrator, eventually pushes her lover, Hubble Gardiner (Robert Redford), away with her passionate desire to reform the world when all he wants is to enjoy himself and find a comfortable place in which to make a living. Hubble, who in his carefree blond vigour is essentially a male Annie Hall, is the complete antithesis to Katie, who, as played by Barbra Streisand, is uptight, passionately committed and, to say the least, a bit odd looking. During the late 1930s, Katie and Hubble meet on their upstate New York college campus, where he is

intrigued by her strident opposition to Franco and her criticisms of nearly everything he and his friends stand for, while she masks her physical attraction for him by a deep bitterness over how easily the world falls at the feet of he and his caste. Bright and ambitious, Katie must work for everything she gains, while, blessed and lazy, Hubble is served the makings of a perfect life without even asking. The film jumps ahead to the 1940s, as Hubble is a Navy P.R. man and Katie a writer on a radio show when the two meet again in a club. Always the ambitious worker, Katie sets her sights on Hubble and steadily wears him down, illustrating the worst stereotypes of Jewish female pushiness and grasping. In the 1950s, they move to Los Angeles, where Hubble has sold out his writing talent for a cushy job cranking out scripts for Hollywood, and Katie's ire is continually raised by the decadence and political vapidness she sees around her. At an emotional low point for Katie, another Communist Jewish woman from New York points out the palm trees to her as their kin, explaining how they were not native to California, either, and are just as out of place. Eventually, spurred by Katie's protests against the McCarthy House Un-American Activities Committee witch hunts, Hubble finally makes good on his decade-old threat to leave her in favour of a less complicated life elsewhere. They part, in sadness for what might have been, the day she gives birth to their daughter, whom he sees just once. The film ends in a brief scene in the 1960s, as Hubble, who is now successful and happily married to the sort of woman for whom he was always meant, runs into Katie who is pestering strangers with "Ban the Bomb" flyers in front of New York Plaza, back where she belongs. She informs him that their daughter is well, but Hubble refuses to visit her – he seems to prefer leaving the past as purely past. Katie, who no longer falsely irons the Jewish curl from her hair, is now

married to a Jewish man who is evidently more of a match for her than Hubble ever was, as she now radiates with a satisfaction and maturity she never showed with Hubble. As they catch up, they both drip with sadness over the failure of their marriage, even though they both recognize that, while it was a learning experience, the relationship had always been doomed. They part, likely never to run into each other again, and we are left with the strains of Streisand's pop hit mourning the "memories of the way we were."

The reason she and Hubble were doomed as a couple is largely because Katie's hyper-sensitivity spilled over into their personal life. Katie was so desperate to make Hubble want her, and pursued him with a goal-oriented mindset, that her ambitious and anxious approach to romance was unnerving for Hubble. For the couple, the very things they desire in each other, her "integrity and passion and commitment," and his "grace and charm and vivacity," comprise the same reasons they were ultimately incompatible (Gelmis 1973/74: 108). In both *Annie Hall* and *The Way We Were*, the intense tendencies of the Jewish lovers eventually drive away their more casual Gentile beloveds.<sup>9</sup>

Occasionally, the difference is one of a mystical nature, as in the various film versions of George du Maurier's novel, *Trilby*. In the 1931 film version, John Barrymore plays the *maestro* Svengali, a Polish-Jewish musician living in Paris, who enthralls his young, blonde singing student, Trilby, by his charismatic power of

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<sup>9</sup> The laid-back attitudes of the non-Jewish partner may prevent the conscientious Jewish partner from being able to understand the Gentile lover and their social circle, as in the youth oriented film *Reality Bites* (1994), in which a Jewish man (Ben Stiller) fails in his attempt to woo a slacker Gentile filmmaker (Winona Ryder) because he cannot live up to their high standards of disengagement from all of the things he stands for – ambition, work, physical symbols of success – things his first and second generation American forbearers would have seen as essential aspects of chasing the American Dream. His Jewish quest for security and respect lead to a complete disconnect from their spoiled lifestyle of non-striving.

hypnosis. In the end, after touring the world, the young Gentile woman is saved from the clutches of the demonic Svengali by her stalwart British protectors, and the *maestro* dies of a broken heart caused by the pain of the severed connection. Yet Svengali's death is one of some pathos, as he only wanted to be loved in return by his Galatia, even though he realized that he could only possess her through mind control. Sweet, blonde innocents are not meant to give their hearts freely to swarthy foreign mesmerists, especially not at the turn of the last century where a fear of Jewish cultural infiltration seemingly led to this metaphor of mental control (Pick 1994, 1998, 2000; Gracombe 2003). Likewise, in an updated take on a similar theme, the interfaith married couple in *Bee Season* (2005)<sup>10</sup> faces destruction as the unprepared Gentile encounters the mystical powers of the Jewish lover. Here, the mystical power is that of the Kabbalah, representing how such esoteric knowledge acts as a flame that can singe the wings of the Gentile who gets too close. The main story focuses on a father Saul (Richard Gere), a religious studies professor specializing in Jewish mysticism, preparing his beloved daughter for the national spelling bee, while, in the subplots, the rest of his family falls apart. His wife, Miriam, has a terrible secret – stemming from the loss of her parents when she was a child, she has become obsessed with a certain aspect of Kabbalistic teachings. According to some retellings, evil was introduced into the world when the vessels holding the holy light (*sephirah*) used in the Creation shattered under the enormity of their burden (an event known as the *shevirah*), casting shards (*kliptot*) of the vessels far and wide, trapping bits of this holy light (*Etz Chaim*, Heichal A"K, anaf 2.; Gersh 1996). In Jewish mysticism, things born of destruction, rather than creation, have

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<sup>10</sup> Based on Myla Goldberg's *Bee Season: A Novel* (Anchor, 2001). Note that in the novel, Miriam is a Jewish-American, while in the film the character was changed to a French-Catholic convert to Judaism to allow the French actress Juliette Binoche to speak naturally.

an evil power, and some strains teach that the duty of the Jew is to work towards freeing the light from their prisons through “mending works,” *tikkun* (Gersh 1996). In *Bee Season*, the Jewish-by-birth husband understands the power and control of Jewish mystical knowledge, and he employs it to mentor his daughter as she works towards finding herself. In contrast, the Gentile-born Miriam, holding onto her childhood grief, attempts to assimilate knowledge that seems too dangerous for her to handle and is driven mad by the implications of the teachings. Falling into kleptomania and delusion, she begins gathering any and all small shiny objects she can get her hands on, like a religiously crazed myna bird, in an attempt to heal the irreparable loss she has suffered and to deal with the mystical power her Jewish husband and daughter can control but that she cannot.

Other films, however, show how the Jewish emotional sensitivity or desires can be disappointed in the quest for love with a Gentile who, at first, may have seemed uncomplicated and desirable, but end up failing to meet their needs. For example, when the Jewish Karen (Lorraine Bracco) marries the Irish-American mobster Henry (Ray Liotta) in *Goodfellas* (1990), it is his unpredictability and strength that initially attract her to him. While the Jewish men she knows just seem to talk and think, Henry exudes the traditional American masculinity of a primarily physical person, and Karen finds this exciting enough for her to ignore her mother’s warnings. However, she soon finds that what seemed like charm holds no real sense of humour and what was once exciting in a boyfriend is a frustrating and hurtful lack of regard for family in a husband. Similarly, in the comedy *Spanglish* (2004), Adam Sandler plays John Clasky, a successful and emotionally vulnerable chef whose gustatory creations have afforded

him and his family a grand home and financial security. His Gentile wife Deb (Téa Leoni), however, is unable to calm herself and enjoy life. In constant motion and ambitious for upward mobility, Deb cannot find satisfaction in family and home life the way John can, and her consumerism becomes so acute that she starts to apply it to her daughter, as well. Envious of their housekeeper's pretty, thin daughter, Deb begins to torment her own daughter, Bernice, about her weight, despite the fact that, as a bright, funny and mature young woman, Bernice should be a child any mother would be pleased with. This conflict over surface beauty and the façade of perfection Deb demands makes John realize that not only did he sacrifice a great deal of his own well-being and spiritual contentment when he married Deb, he also laid their children in the way of her steamroller insensitivity. Deb cannot appreciate her Jewish daughter, thereby alienating her husband and bringing the family into crisis. The crux of this film lies in the message that family and community are what endure, while success has its drawbacks, "assimilation is expensive," and physical beauty lacks importance.

In these obstacles to Jewish-Gentile love, we see a new view that Jews and Gentiles might be too incompatible, either by nature or by choice, to triumph over adversity as a couple. In this reassertion of Jewish difference, the foundational beliefs of liberalism are challenged and the implication of these negative outcomes is that Jews are better off remaining within their own community rather than chasing modern dreams of romance in the faulty hope that it will be able to conquer all difference. The characteristics shared by the films I analyze make communitarianism a useful interpretive framework to describe the ambivalence seen in these motion pictures.



### **Sowing (Jewish) Wild Oats: The Jewish-Gentile Relationship as a “Fling”**

A final way in which films problematize the Jewish-Gentile romance actually seems to claim that none of the above obstacles really matter. According to several films, the Jewish-Gentile romance is never designed to last in the first place, and is, in actuality, a part of the modern exploration of sexuality that is a natural part of maturing as a person. The presumptive moral of these stories is that Jews play with non-Jews, but they eventually will leave them when they “grow up.” Of course, these films were only really possible after the sexual revolution in film allowing more frank explorations of sex on screen, but are also more prevalent in contemporary films as the definition of “youth” is stretched, and adolescent issues carry over into the twenties and thirties. Seeing Gentiles as sex objects<sup>11</sup> and adventures of self-exploration seemingly has no age barriers<sup>12</sup> for Jews in interfaith romance films. I will present three examples of films suggesting that adult Jewish/Gentile relationships are mere flings, *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001), *Miami Rhapsody* (1995) and *A Walk on the Moon* (1999), which all tell stories of Jewish women using Gentiles for their personal growth, while placing no investment in the longevity of the respective romances.

In *Kissing Jessica Stein*, the Jewish Jessica (Jennifer Westfeldt) faces being the last person in her family who has not married, and the loneliness of being a single woman in her thirties prompts her to, as a friend challenges her, be more open to new possibilities. Dating frantically in the search for Mr. Right, she finds that her ideals can simply not be met by the men who surround her, and the old chestnut about all good

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<sup>11</sup> This can also go the other way, as seen in the maturation of Annie Hall by her romance with Alvy.

<sup>12</sup> In one such film, for example, *Keeping Up With the Steins*, the young male protagonist’s elderly Jewish grandfather enjoys a fling with a much younger Gentile hippy only to eventually reconcile with his long-estranged Jewish wife.

men being either married or gay seems to be true. Finally, a co-worker reads her an ad from the paper, featuring a quote from Jessica's favourite writer, Rainer Maria Rilke, and she is intrigued. The only trouble with the ad is that it is in the "Women Seeking Women" section. Deciding it is time to pursue all options, Jessica answers it, beginning a relationship with a free-spirited, female gallery manager who is not Jewish (Heather Juergensen). The relationship is as awkward as one can imagine a Lesbian romance being between a bi-curious Gentile and a heterosexual Jewish neurotic. Yet, the couple becomes dedicated to making it work, eventually revealing the romance to Jessica's family and moving in together. However, as time passes, Helen, the only one with legitimate homosexual tendencies, decides she wants someone who actually desires her back, and she leaves Jessica, who does not understand why people place such an emphasis on sex. She was happy living in a loving relationship with her best friend. The homosexual fling, however, was more beneficial for Jessica than for Helen. Jessica expanded her horizons and let go of many of the obstacles that were keeping her from finding happiness. Having released so many of her preconceived notions of perfection, the end of the film leaves us happy that she and Helen have remained best friends – platonic ones – while Jessica seems to be on her way to finding a permanent relationship with her brother's old college roommate, a spontaneous male Jewish writer with whom she could never have been happy before Helen helped her see the possibilities in life.

*Miami Rhapsody* is an attempt to be the female-centred version of the far-superior *Annie Hall* (cf. Bowman 1995) and is one of several films evoking Woody Allen's famous film as a way to present Jewish life stories. While in *Annie Hall* the

Gentile woman was using the urban Jewish man as a means to self transformation, *Miami Rhapsody* illustrates the trend in Jewish-Gentile romance films that suggests that Gentiles are useful as a way for Jews to break out from their traditional ruts and reinvent themselves. In the film, the Jews in question are a mother (improbably played by one of Woody Allen's *shikse* muses, Mia Farrow) and a daughter (Sarah Jessica Parker) who both form infatuations with the Cuban male nurse (Antonio Banderas) who looks after the family matriarch, a mute Holocaust survivor. For the mother, the Cuban Antonio represents not only a way to get revenge on her philandering Jewish husband, but is also a means for her to rediscover her femininity, and to feel sexy and free again. For her daughter, Antonio presents options before she succumbs to a dull marital fate of her own. Yet, in the end, after the affair has lost its appeal, the mother returns to her husband, with whom she now shares a renewed romance that has partially borrowed passion from the used and discarded Gentile lover. The daughter also leaves Antonio, but she has gained more than passion from him. She also leaves her staid romance with the apparent "Mr. Right," with whom she never would have been happy for the long term. Flirting with the Gentile gave these Jewish women a stronger sense of themselves, and the flings allowed them to recharge their batteries to face their future stable lives. It is entirely unclear, however, what Antonio gained from the relationships, if anything.

In *A Walk on the Moon*, Pearl (Diane Lane), a prematurely middle-aged Jewish wife of a Jewish television repairman, Marty (Liev Schreiber), takes her children and her mother-in-law (Tovah Feldshuh) to the Catskills to escape the New York City summer heat amidst the social upheaval of 1969. The tradition of the Jewish summer "grass widows" of the Borsht Belt in the Catskill mountain resorts (1920-1970s), with

their stereotypical *mah jong* tournaments and foxtrot lessons (Richman 2003), is coming to an end, as teenagers turn to sex and drugs and men travel to the moon, and the Yiddish immigrant culture that made the Catskills into “the Jewish Alps” becomes a faint memory. This film, which has as its theme change and those who are frustrated at being left behind, captures a time when wives and mothers were old at 30, and romance was not a necessary part of marriage (Corliss 1999). Pearl, feeling as if her best years are behind her and being taken for granted by her stable, yet dull, husband, is mere miles away from the revolutionary Woodstock, yet feels light-years away from the transformative power the free love movement offers. In the family, that summer also sees the menarche of Pearl’s fourteen year old daughter, whose conception forced her into marriage and made it impossible for Marty to attend college. The rebelliousness and newfound womanhood of her daughter serves to remind Pearl of the liberties she was denied in her own youth. In the beginning, Pearl can only harbour her growing restlessness inside, until the solid, familiar summer community is ruptured by the intrusion of a new face – the new Gentile “blouse man,” Walker Jerome (Viggo Mortenson) who has bought out a woman’s clothing peddling route that includes the resort. Liberated, itinerant and carefree, Walker is an intensely male physical presence in the campground dominated by women, and Pearl finds herself susceptible to his self-awareness, sexual charms and, most of all, to his freedom. Pearl begins a torrid affair with him, enjoying her body in ways she had assumed were closed off to her. Eventually, this affair culminates in an emotionally crushing event in which she and Walker crash Woodstock, only to be spotted by her daughter who, unbeknownst to her, has done the same.

Her secret out, even to her husband, Pearl must choose between trying to save her marriage with her dependable, kind husband, or taking the chance that Walker's lustful and spontaneous affair will have any kind of lasting power. What Richard Corliss (1999: 90) calls a "coming-of-middle-age" tale, *A Walk on the Moon* shows Pearl attempting to deal with her lost youth, as well as her feelings of resentment towards her family for limiting her freedom, while trying to come to some sort of comfortable maturity with which she can live for the next forty or fifty years. In the end, she decides to stay with Marty, eschewing the sexual freedom Walker might have to offer, and it is suggested by the ending of the film that Pearl will, instead, bring the sexual revolution to her husband, who is remarkably forgiving. The affair, it seems, has rid Pearl of her restlessness, and, having been exposed before her husband as far more adventurous and needy than she had appeared, she is now free to exchange an open dialogue with him.

*A Walk on the Moon* upholds conservative marital ideals and shows aspects of the community preservation concern of communitarianism, even while it also seems to suggest that flings with Gentiles are a form of marital aid for bored Jewish married couples. The fact that Marty does not divorce Pearl is stunning in the face of her infidelity, except if we interpret it as meaning that the virtually dehumanized "blouse man" does not matter, really – he is not actually a part of their world, and her passing attraction to him is more of a brief hobby than anything that could ever disrupt the family in the long run. In many films showing Gentiles as flings for young Jews, we see a specific role assigned to non-Jews in the Jewish coming-of-age tale that often gives very little consideration to the feelings of the Gentile object of desire.

The genre of bildungsroman could be described as a prime form of literature for Jewish-American expression, especially in the 1970s (Rosenberg 1981), and this carries over into film (Bartley 2007). A term from literary studies, a bildungsroman is a story of the protagonist's journey from childhood or youth to the self-awareness of young adulthood or maturity, and comes from the German for "novel of education" (Jost 1974) or coming-of-age tale. Typically, character growth comes from "going through painful rites of passage, by performing heroic feats or passing tests with the help of mentors, by surviving symbolic descents into hell, and finally by reaching a new level of consciousness" (Klein 1992: 22).<sup>13</sup> The tendency towards personal freedom is a natural occurrence in such works, as the form grew during the Enlightenment alongside the concept of the individual as the center of society.<sup>14</sup>

In its original form, the genre had only a limited shelf life, and by 1820 the plot type was already so clichéd that Hegel could effectively and openly mock it for its needless drama and hackneyed conventions (Miles 1974). Therefore, it is no surprise that the writers of postclassical bildungsromans set about challenging and shifting the traits of the genre, especially in terms of the protagonist's eventual return to mainstream life and society. The form became essentially psychological and reflective, often

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<sup>13</sup> A popular genre of novel in western Europe from the 1700s, the bildungsroman was originally seen as a light, moralistic fare which both encouraged personal freedom as well as enforced social conformity by repeating the same convention of "childhood → adventures → maturity → marriage," with the result being the protagonist puts away childish things to take their expected place as part of a bourgeois married household (Miles 1974; Swales 1978).

<sup>14</sup> That the bildungsroman grew during the Enlightenment is likewise natural, as not only did this era give increased value to individualism, it also gave rise to the idea of the child. With the increased wealth, social welfare systems and emphasis on education, childhood effectively became a whole new, extended category – where, previously, youths were folded into adult lifestyles and responsibilities almost immediately due to survival needs and death rates, the idea of nurturing and educating offspring well into adolescence made the child into something very different from "the miniature adult" of the past (Jeffers 2005). Further, the literary obsession with realism in this period also contributed to the growth of the bildungsroman, as these works attempted to show the journey towards maturity with some sensitivity to the complexity of the process (Swales 1978).

abandoning the traditional narrator for the protagonist's own journals or letters to allow the readers access to their educational process. Whereas traditional bildungsroman had a special interest in love and life, modern bildungsroman became obsessed with sex and death. By this modern era, the preoccupation with individual growth and stories of ambition had grown stale, and these authors frequently withheld clear happy endings from their young characters, illustrating the disillusionment with the societal myth of progress and individual satisfaction amongst these modern writers. They longed for meaning and community, for which personal ambition was not a substitute (Miles 1974).

Even though this form of literature grew out of mainstream cultures in Germany, France and England, it became a central form for Jewish-American authors in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Writers such as Bellow and Roth "all produced a bildungsroman in which the protagonist was a writer coming to terms with a tutelary figure" (Rosenberg 1981: 55). Ruth Rosenberg (1981), having admitted that this was once a central genre for Jews, denounces the apprentice novel as foreign to the Jewish artistic tradition, claiming they are merely narcissistic pieces of navel gazing that chronicle personal ambitions and exploits, which deign to embrace the authors' place in Jewish history and seek to do nothing but plead with the readers to agree that the writers did the correct thing by choosing their personal ambition over loyalty to their communities. For Rosenberg,

The strivings of a self for recognition is not considered a fit subject for literature in the Yiddish tradition. [Yiddish literature's] function is to render communal identity, to give a sense of collective identity, to exalt the aspirations of an entire people, not to deal with the aggrandizement of the individual. (56)

Rosenberg then goes on to pronounce the bildungsroman fad dead in Jewish art, in favour of the retrieval of more traditional modes, such as the Hasidic folktale. But, writing in 1981, Rosenberg did not have the benefit of foresight, because the wave of Jewish bildungsroman tales in film in the 1970s through to the new millennium has made the coming-of-age story the most prevalent and enduring of common trends in Jewish cinema. Further, Rosenberg misses the educational and communal nature of the bildungsroman.<sup>15</sup>

No matter how narcissistic bildungsroman may appear when semi-autobiographical, the “education” of the “novel of education” is never of the protagonist alone. Rather, the education referred to is for both the protagonist and the reader. Like the audience, the protagonist of this genre starts his<sup>16</sup> journeys with a certain amount of education and intelligence, but he, like the reader, has no idea what is about to happen to him. We must all discover the story together, allowing the reader to experience the process along side the protagonist. The protagonist’s mentors are our mentors; his learning is our learning. It is not that such works of literature or film attempt to impose a specific moral upon us – some of them can be frustratingly neutral, in fact – rather, we are compelled to make our own moral and ethical interpretations along the journey, spurring us to learn more about ourselves in the process. We first get a taste of the

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<sup>15</sup> When the author intentionally uses the protagonist as a symbol for the whole, or when readers understand them so to be, these works of art become educational for the community, as well as expressive of realities beyond the particular life of the protagonist. Furthermore, through the protagonist’s struggle between tradition and free will, and through his or her development, so too does culture and history change, for what else does society consist of than people? (Bakhtin 1986) Aside from these more theoretical communal aspects of such works, bildungsroman serve to preserve times and places for the sake of nostalgia (Stern 1964) even as they speak to more contemporary issues, so it is possible they do fall under what Rosenberg (1981) considers historical in nature. For these reasons, I disagree with Rosenberg’s assertion that there is something essentially non-Jewish about bildungsroman. When such coming of age stories focus on Jewish characters, they speak to the Jewish reader and community in a specific way. This function might be why such films seem so prevalent in the scope of Jewish film.

<sup>16</sup> The genre conventions were clearly established by male characters and female authors have had to adapt it for their own use (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 2000).



protagonist's world, see it for ourselves, examine his situation, imagine his possibilities along with him, and then make our own judgements about his life and choices. Through reading bildungsroman novels, or viewing bildungsroman films, we grow up over and over again, and get to discover new possibilities and modes of thought (Jeffers 2005). Part of this discovery (and re-discovery) in the Jewish bildungsroman is that these works give us new ways to explore the choices Jews have made over the centuries, and to examine the negative and positive aspects of the temptation of the "other." This educational aspect to bildungsroman seems to have eluded Rosenberg when she negated it as a useful form of Jewish literature. Further, she seems to be unaware of the ways in which minority writers and readers/viewers apply the bildungsroman genre as a metaphor for life outside the American mainstream.<sup>17</sup>

Classical bildungsroman generally focus on the romance of the protagonist with a partner of their own choosing, often against the wishes or interests of his or her parents, through which personal freedom is expressed and exercised (Miles 1974; Jeffers 2005). This trend is certainly no less common to the Jewish bildungsroman. While the use of romance in the European version has declined in postmodern times

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<sup>17</sup> In analyzing Chicano bildungsroman, Betsy Nies (2004) has established that the works she looked at had a common anti-assimilationist message, and were used to show the oppressive and harmful effects of forced Americanization of Latino and Latina Americans. For Chicano authors, the bildungsroman is a way to express the struggle of recent immigrants to survive the often hostile environments of America, and uses the hardships of the single protagonist to critique the system that places so many obstacles in between the immigrant and the success they seek. Nies also shows that, while traditional bildungsroman included the male hero escaping the stifling environment of his family and his traditions, Chicano literature subverts this idea by having the hero eventually realize that the home from which he is running is, in fact, the base which will eventually allow him to live the life he is seeking. Home, for these authors, is strength – home, family and community may all have their constraints and irritations, but, for minority groups living in America, they are the means for survival. As such, these works represent a hybrid between the traditional European bildungsroman of the Enlightenment and the immigrant tale emphasizing the realities of living as a minority in America. Further, Gilbert and Gubar (2000) argue that the titular protagonist of Emily Brontë's *Jane Eyre* represents the whole class of females struggling against the main obstacles facing women under patriarchal systems, namely poverty and the fight for personal freedom.

(Jeffers 2005), the romance between Jews and Gentiles is an essential characteristic for Jewish-American bildungsroman in film, as illustrated by three films, *Liberty Heights* (1999), *Biloxi Blues* (1988), and *The Way We Were*.

Barry Levinson, known for his nostalgic cinematic memorials to Jewish life and culture in 1950's Baltimore (*Diner*, 1982; *Avalon*, 1990), returns to this subject matter with the sentimental adolescent coming-of-age story, *Liberty Heights*, a story of Baltimore's reactions to Brown vs. the Board of Education (1954), which desegregated the schools and launched the interactions between African-Americans, WASPs and Jews into a whirlwind of transformation. The main events centre on the growth of two middle class Jewish teens, Ben Kurtzman (Ben Foster), the main character, and his older brother Van (Adrien Brody), and the changes experienced by their friends, family and city during the 1954-55 Hebrew calendar year, 5715.<sup>18</sup> Both brothers, as well as two of their Jewish best friends, have interfaith encounters or romances during that year which serve to change them as well as their communities. The main romance, which is limited to a friendship heavily laced with attraction, is between the high school senior Ben and the first African-American peer he has ever met, the upper-middle class Sylvia (Rebekah Johnson). Interestingly, Ben's attraction to Sylvia begins when he observes the fervent way in which she recites the daily required morning Psalms at school, a ritual which had always been empty for him in the past. Soon, spurred by curiosity as well as attraction, Ben follows her home and they begin a friendship which they must keep secret, given his mother's reaction to the possibility of Ben's relationship with a black girl ("Just kill me! Just kill me now!") and her father's rule that Sylvia may never

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<sup>18</sup> The dominance of the Hebrew year is established by the film's wraparound motif of beginning and ending at *Rosh Hashanah* services at their family's temple.

date a white boy. While everyone who observes their relationship assumes it is illicit – especially Ben’s immature best friend Murray (Gary Rosenthal) who convinces Ben to set him up with one of Sylvia’s girlfriends (a relationship that goes nowhere, contrary to Murray’s stereotype about African-American female sexuality) – the pair never give into their passions, and the ultimate result of the young romance is Ben’s growth as a person. While it is unclear what Sylvia gains from the relationship, the pair uses the assessable media of music and comedy to widen Ben’s experience with African-American culture, broadening his horizons and forcing him from the insular worldview he expresses at the beginning of the film.

In the end, however, the two part with their one act of physical rebellion – a sweet kiss in front of their stunned and angry parents after their high school convocation. This is the end of their time together, as he will attend the University of Maryland and she will go away to Spellman in Atlanta. They have known this would be the end throughout the friendship, as there was never any question of permanence. This relationship was simply a learning experience – a part of the growth process. That Ben is irrevocably changed by this transformative epoch is marked by the way we last see him as he and his two Jewish friends, who had before accepted the “No Jews Allowed” policy at the local Turkey Hill Swim Club, stubbornly trespass onto the bastion of Gentile leisure emblazoned with the letters J E W on their bare chests – one bold capital letter for each of them (Bartley 2007).

The other two interfaith romantic encounters happen for Ben’s older brother, college student Van, and his best friend Yussel (David Krumholtz). Yussel’s encounter is a brief but dangerous flirtation with a Gentile co-ed he meets at a party “across Falls

Road,” the border demarcating the old-money WASP society of Baltimore from the ethnic communities of the post-War suburbs (Bartley 2007). Yussel’s attempts to dance with the girl are foiled by her preppie boyfriend. While the fact that this newcomer attempts to interlope on what the established clique recognizes as the WASP’s property is the initial cause of the furor, it is probable that Yussel’s Jewishness (and stereotypically Semitic looks) aggravates the beating he receives. Yussel is forever marked by this event of pain and humiliation, which was aggravated by his refusal to verbally admit to being Jewish as the preppie demands the admission while beating him. Yussel goes on to dye his black hair blond and to insist people call him “Yates” from now on, despite holding on to an irremovable bitterness towards Gentiles. Thus, his small taste of interfaith attraction leads Yussel to bitterly obscure his Jewish roots while also hating the people he now seeks to emulate.

Van’s romance, also with a WASP, the blonde beauty Dubbie (Carolyn Murphy), is more sustained than that of Yussel, and is more dangerous emotionally than physically. From the moment he sees her at the Falls Road party, Van imagines Dubbie as his Dream Girl – knowing nothing about her, Van feels he can tell everything about her by her blonde beauty and sophisticated voice alone. He obsesses over finding her, though he doesn’t even know her name. Through a joke played on him by the bored preppie boys, he meets his Dream Girl again, and, to spite her drunk and insensitive boyfriend, Dubbie plays into Van’s fantasies. They start a romance unusual for them both. Ultimately, however, Dubbie cannot live up to the fantasies Van has constructed around her, and her façade of all-American privilege and health cracks under the weight of the family secrets she carries – her homosexual father who lives in Paris while her

mother refuses him a divorce so she can keep up appearances, and Dubbie's own resulting drinking problem. In fact, all the WASP youths Van encounters seem to maintain the outward appearance of glittering promise, even while they use excess and vice to fill their bleak and empty inner-voids created by the lack of authentic meaning and community in their lives. In the end, Dubbie's "particular brand of family dysfunction is simply too patrician for Van" (Bartley 2007: 263), and he realizes she cannot be what he wants, and he cannot be what she needs. His relatively dull family, even with his racketeer father, has not prepared him for deep emotional trauma, only for practical survival and the pursuit of more simple forms of happiness.

At the end of *Liberty Heights*, the two boys are left unfettered, and we do not know with whom they eventually end up. Their father is sent to prison on charges made more severe by his Jewishness, and their boyhoods effectively end by Rosh Hashanah 1955. Their growth is, in a way, the growth of the community as Jews became enmeshed with the Civil Rights movement, as well as suburban lifestyles, and lost much of the insularity their forbearers maintained in the Old Country and the urban centers of America. This film seeks to contextualize the effects of change and of personal choices within the particular milieu of Baltimore's Jewish community in the 1950s, and, on a broader scale, embraces the ways in which religion, tradition, history and personality all co-exist in an individual during private growth and life. According to William Bartley (2007), *Liberty Heights* is a prime example of how the literary genre of bildungsroman has infiltrated film, whatever the actual conscious intentions of the filmmaker, and notes that gradual change and transitional stages (with little complete resolution) are characteristics inherent to the genre. Citing Mikhail Bakhtin (1986), Bartley calls

bildungsroman a genre of “historical emergence” (Bartley 2007: 259), claiming that the small changes influencing and enacted by the protagonist engender the changes taking place in the wider society serving as a backdrop to the character’s development. This trend is certainly visible in Levinson’s *Liberty Heights*.

In Neil Simon’s *Biloxi Blues*, a similar nostalgic desire to hold onto lost times and transitory experience leads to a bildungsroman based in part on the real wartime experiences of the author, represented by the Jewish character Eugene Morris Jerome (Matthew Broderick), who, in 1943, is a young boot camp draftee, and would-be writer, stationed in Biloxi, Mississippi. Far from his Brooklyn environs, Eugene is determined to survive the war so he can achieve his goal of being a famous author, and, in the meantime, he maintains a memoir to help him to hone his craft.

One of only two Jews in a platoon of Gentile bohunks, dropouts and farm boys, Eugene is forced to extend himself beyond his original cultural contexts. In being forced to live and co-operate with people who seem to hold no affinity for him or his values, he often struggles to understand the behaviours he observes. While he is both handsome and charismatic, he is consciously aware of how the group’s low-level anti-Semitism could make his life very uncomfortable. This is made especially salient by the presence of Arnold (Corey Parker), the other “New York Jew” in his platoon, a twitchy, bookish young man with a biting wit and intestinal issues, yet also with a well of inconspicuous courage. Being completely outside masculine norms of this military culture, yet unconcerned with trying to fit in, Arnold is the most despised cadet by the Gentiles, while being a source of both fascination and horror for Eugene. Arnold makes Eugene acutely aware of that in himself which is foreign among the young Gentile men he is

forced to befriend, laying his Jewish vulnerability open in a way to which he is not accustomed. At the same time, Arnold's resolute dedication to remaining true to himself and the integrity he shows under their harassment also illustrates for Eugene the strength to be found in the Jewish community. Having never before been outside his Jewish home context, Eugene has never had to define himself according to his Jewishness, but in Biloxi he has two choices – join his new platoon friends in disdaining Arnold in order to deflect the anti-Semitic derision that could just as easily fall on him as well, or assert his loyalty to Arnold and embrace the courage he admires in the other young man.

Meanwhile, Eugene has other issues of masculinity on the line, namely his desire to lose his virginity before he is shipped out to war. While he achieves his physical milestone with a local prostitute, the main emphasis of Eugene's romantic growth has to do with losing his emotional virginity, in a manner of speaking. Eugene falls in love for the first time while stationed in Biloxi, meeting a young Catholic school girl, Daisy (Penelope Anne Miller), at a USO dance and giving her his heart. Unnaturally conscious of the momentousness of this stage in his life, Eugene chronicles their growing romance in his memoirs, and celebrates the new phase of manhood he is entering. Yet, as in *Liberty Heights*, there is no illusion that this romance will last forever. At the end of film, just as the platoon is ready for overseas action, the war ends unexpectedly, and Eugene and his beloved part forever with fond memories and gratitude towards the other. Love was shared, scopes of experience broadened, and,

then, ways were parted without regrets or drama.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Eugene ultimately chooses to side with Arnold, arguing passionately for his acceptance in the platoon even while resigning himself to his share in the outsider status Arnold represents. Like Daisy, the Gentile platoon friends Eugene made were fairly transitory and not part of his real existence; Arnold, even with his nervous stomach and overly critical personality, remains a more concrete part of Eugene's reality.

*The Way We Were* is another significant example of Jewish bildungsroman in which, despite the popular belief that love conquers all, the Jewish Katie's sexual attractiveness and efforts to keep her husband are not enough to make the relationship worthwhile for the Gentile Hubble, and political, emotional and social differences between them eventually sink their marriage.<sup>20</sup> During her journey, while Katie may appear on the surface to be a strong female character, she is not strong at all, and spends most of the film grovelling for Hubble's love. In every conflict, her inferiority is reaffirmed, making the eventual breakup the only satisfactory conclusion of this film. While several critics point to the issue of Redford's beauty in contrast to Streisand's interesting-at-best features as the defining problem in their base inequality (Hiller 1974; Kauffmann 1973; Hall 2006), no one ever asks why Katie, a committed and passionate woman, would ever wish to settle for such a simple and narcissistic bore (Hall 2006).

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<sup>19</sup> Not to draw out the parallel, but the lack of expectation Eugene experiences with Daisy is quite similar to that with the prostitute he visits earlier in the film – meeting, relationship and parting are all perfunctory, yet enjoyable.

<sup>20</sup> Lynn Hall (2006) identifies *The Way We Were* as part of a mini-genre that she calls political romance, in which the main plot is a romance, and the secondary plot is one of political commitment. Seeing a trend of passionate leftist females being dismissed by blasé conservative males, whose love-making seems more about calming down the overly-committed and vocal female than about affection, Hall notes that such films can explore multiple conflicting American values in the space of one film. The casual attitude of the male stands along side the determination of the female as if to remind the audience of the joys of apathy and the woes of activism. The use of politics in these films is, foremost, to create friction and obstacles in the way of the couple, but also to convince the audience that political differences should not be enough to keep people apart when “true love” is present.



The way that Katie's attraction to Hubble seems much more obvious than what he finds attractive about her seems to say something about the ways that WASP heroes are still understood in America. Katie is a metaphor for the Jewish experience in America (Green 1974). In her commitment to social justice, her acute sense of the ridiculous in the mainstream society around her, and her "pathetic confusions when suddenly confronted by the fraud of the omnipotent WASP *savoir-faire*" (Green 1974: 309), Katie illustrates the Jewish decision between gratefully accepting mainstream complacency or remaining in tune with their Jewish communal anxiety and drive. The attraction of opposites may be a long-standing Hollywood convention (Hall 2006), but this film serves to make us ask why such a myth has lived as long as it has. While Stanley Kauffman (1973) might have been correct when he labelled this film "Glittery Trash" (33), it does exemplify the new Jewish warnings that, when it comes to Gentile Dream Girls/Boys, not everything that glitters is gold. Katie's growth comes from setting aside the unrealistic fantasies about Gentile heroes and becoming at home inside her authentic Jewish self.

These are but a few examples of the Jewish tendency towards bildungsroman in film over the past decades, and many more could be cited – each assigning a Gentile romantic partner the task of helping the Jewish protagonist in their quest for maturity. Significantly, most such stories seem to start with the basic assumption that Jewish-Gentile romances are transitory, temporary flings, generally with the Jewish partner coming out of the relationship (and break-up) with more gain than the Gentile lover. The one example I have given where permanence was even attempted was *The Way We Were*, which ends on the note that the attempt was foolish at best – a foolishness that

was finally set right by the Jewish protagonist's eventual reconciliation with herself through a union with a Jewish mate. This is why I assert that the relegation of Gentiles to the status of flings or learning experiences reflects an increased ethnic awareness in these films, and emphasis placed on the reestablishment of the community after the transgression and rupture seen in the interfaith dalliance can be read quite effectively through the communitarian critique. Liberal multiculturalism might be fun to play with, and even educational in its way, but lasting happiness is not really to be found wandering without roots in the beautiful but empty WASP world, but in the establishment of communal links with other Jews.

### **Is Intermarriage Still Right for the Jews?**

Aside from the categories I have discussed, there are also two other trends of note. These trends are present to some extent within many of the issues I have delineated, so I have chosen to address them separately.

The first trend is the maintenance of platonic relations between Jewish and Gentile males and females, even though there might be sexual chemistry (Friedman 1982). Often, this failure (or refusal) to consummate the relationship makes it seem as if relations between Jews and Gentiles are basically impossible. *The Last of the Red Hot Lovers* (1972), which graphically and humorously emphasizes the multiple disasters which prevent the Jewish lover (Alan Arkin) from copulating with the Gentile women he aims to seduce, is an example of film mirroring the frustrating obstacles that might crop up between Jews and Gentiles on a larger social scale, and, metaphorically, between immigrant minorities and the American Dream. This impossibility of

consummation is taken to a further extreme in a symbolic way by the sexual and ethnic tensions inherent in the deceptively simple animated film *Bee Movie*. In this delightful film, for which comedian Jerry Seinfeld came out of retirement, a bee, incensed by the fact that humans are stealing honey and not working for it, files suit against the human race to stop the slavery of bees. Towards this goal, he gets help from a human woman for whom he carries a deep infatuation and admiration. When his best friend finds out he is “dating” a human, he warns that his parents will flip if he dates someone “not *beeish*.” The association between bees and Jews, as well as the humans as WASPs (pun very much intended), runs deep in this film, and the implications of comparing the Jews to a colony of bees is quite illustrative for our purposes. The sheer physical impossibility of a bee and a human mating, however, ensures their relationship will remain in the realm of friendship and never take that final step, no matter how much empathy and feeling pervades their bond.

In other films some Jewish-Gentile couples fail to consummate their attraction even when all other elements of the story click, including opportunity and motivation. While the sparks present would have naturally led to a romantic relationship between two members of the same culture in any other film, they do not here, often with no other explanation than an unspoken understanding that they are not able to do so based on their differences. Take, for example, the touching *Norma Rae* (1979). In this unionist fable, the titular Norma Rae (Sally Fields), a cotton mill worker in the South, decides to run contrary to her lifelong commitment to herself and supports the cause of unionization when an organizer from New York, Reuben (Ron Leibman), comes to their town. At first, no one else is willing to hear him out, since unionizing seems to threaten

their generational survival at the whim of the anti-union factory owners and bosses, but Reuben's charm, persistence and passion wins Norma Rae over. To Reuben, trade unionism is a family, as well as Jewish, tradition encompassing all he believes about justice and fairness, and he makes his family heritage of unionism persuasively attractive in comparison to Norma's family heritage of providing passive labour to rich owners, especially after her father dies due to the insensitivity of the policies in her mill. Eventually, they do bring the union to the town, and the factory improves, at the cost of Norma's own job. During the struggle, the perceptions Norma has always held of Jews ("I don't see no horns") are defeated one by one, and she and Reuben share an incredible chemistry which makes the audience yearn for the relationship's consummation. Yet, none is to be found. At the end of the picture, Reuben returns to his Jewish girlfriend in New York, and Norma stays with her redneck husband, and life returns to its surface normality. The fact is that Reuben and Norma must remain platonic ships passing in the night, even though they have changed each other spiritually, and Reuben expresses the reason perfectly. "You don't look much different than the rest of us," Norma offers to Reuben. "We are," he contradicts. "History makes us different." The strength of these two characters is, in the end, upheld because neither is forced to subvert their essence to the dominance of the other – they might be soul mates, but neither can sacrifice their being to the assimilation that their romance would require (Friedman 1982).

The second trend seen in problematic Jewish-Gentile romances is that films are becoming slightly more prone to show Jews marrying other Jews, which has been largely absent from Hollywood film in the past century. An excellent example of this is

*The Cemetery Club*, in which a relationship between a Jewish woman and a Gentile man is the butt of jokes, while a mature, warm relationship between a Jewish man and woman becomes the heart of the film (Greenblum 1995). With films such as *A Stranger Among Us*, where Ariel eventually settles down with a *rebbe*'s daughter in an arranged, yet welcome, marriage, and *Kissing Jessica Stein*, American romances are more often showing Jewish-Jewish couplings as a reasonable response to the obstacles presented in this chapter. Even films that seemingly promote Jewish-Gentile intermarriage, such as *Keeping the Faith*, cannot sustain the myth that Jewish men see every single Jewish woman as undesirable – even though it promotes many negative stereotypes of the Jewish female, there is at least one who Jake does find attractive and briefly considers as an alternative to the Gentile Anna. Of course, the ultimate example of this trend is *Crossing Delancey*, discussed in chapter two. Izzy, the Jewish heroine who obsesses over a Gentile poet while rebuffing the advances of an earnest Jewish pickle salesman, eventually realizes that the gentle romance of the less flashy Sam is preferable to the dramatic instability of her fantasy man.

This relatively recent acceptance of the Jewish ability to decide against liberal integration is further highlighted by the film *Hester Street*, directed by Joan Micklin Silver, the creator of *Crossing Delancey*. A largely Yiddish piece, *Hester Street* is a gritty look at the life that awaited Jewish immigrants on American shores, with much less optimism for the trials awaiting Jews in the New World. The film, based on the 1896 novella by *Forward* editor Abraham Cahan, begins with the immigrant Jake (Steven Keats), who was born Yekl Podkovnik in Tsarist Russia, who fancies himself a born again “Yenkee,” and far above the greenhorn Jews that he meets in the sweatshop

where he works, like his roommate Mr. Bernstein (Mel Howard), a former Yeshiva scholar who now bitterly spends his time over a sewing machine. Jake also considers himself a free agent, and enjoys a liberated sexual relationship with a “modern” and secular Jewish working woman, Mamie Fein (Dorrie Kavanough). However, when his father in Russia dies, Jake must send for his wife, Gitl (Carol Kane) and young son, Yossele, who he had left in his father’s care. When he goes to pick them up at Ellis Island, Jake is shocked – his wife, in her traditional wig, and his son, with his Orthodox forelocks, inspire only embarrassment and revulsion in him, as they symbolize everything foreign and traditional he had been trying to remove from himself. Even while feeling an obligation to his family, Jake feels the desire to punish Gitl for her inability to Americanize, and when he lops off Yossele’s forelocks, Gitl is shamed and horrified to find she no longer recognizes the man to whom she is married. Finally, urged by Mamie, Jake seeks a divorce from Gitl, who takes Mamie's bribe money in compensation. In the end, however, as Mamie marshals Jake up the courthouse steps for their secular wedding, he realizes, bleakly, that his newfound freedom is already gone again, while Gitl, who has remained steadfastly opposed to Americanization, convinces the Orthodox Bernstein to marry her, promising to use Mamie’s money to open a grocery store, in the back of which he can sit and study all day long. While the sentimental overtones of this film is that secular, assimilationist ways of life lack substance and meaning, the salient message for our use is that the characters are presented with a personal choice between tradition and assimilation, which are personified in their romantic options, even though all four participants are technically Jewish. Clearly, Jake, who is characterized by his eager drive towards assimilation, is

shown to be the gullible figure, while Gitl, clinging to the traditions she values, is shown to be the stronger character and far more in control of her destiny, refuting liberal notions that religious lifestyles are inherently involuntary or subjugated ones, particularly for women.

This new welcoming attitude to Jewish endogamy is a renewed trend, and one which I believe can be rooted in the new acknowledgement that there are obstacles between Jews and Gentiles, and that there are still prices to be paid for the seemingly free integration into liberal society, no matter what liberal ideals of tolerance tells us, and leads to the conclusion that Hollywood does not glorify Jewish-Gentile intermarriage as uniformly as it once did.

## **Conclusion**

Many of the films I have explored stand to challenge old ideas that assimilation leads to either safety or happiness for the Jews, and that intermarriage is the one road to romantic bliss. *Crossing Delancey*, *Annie Hall*, *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972), *Goodfellas*, *A Star is Born* (1972) and other such films, overturn misconceptions about the liberal emphasis placed on individual desires over communal identity. Whereas the Jews were once seen as rootless promoters of abstraction and deconstruction, it appears that their representation may be opening towards the concrete. The trend away from assimilation to group affinity is gaining ground in Hollywood, leading to the conclusion that the Jews of America are no longer seen as a rootless people, but as one with significant group ties to places, ideals and behaviours they wish to preserve. The films in this chapter are just brief examples of the many films placing obstacles in the paths of Jews

and Gentiles, and which acknowledge that interfaith couples do face challenges. By criticising liberal myths of tolerance and multicultural acceptance, they are not necessarily denouncing intermarriage, but they are counterbalancing the Hollywood glamorization of exogamy by tempering the myth that love conquers all through the honest exploration of issues presented to romantic partners of different ethnoreligious backgrounds.

As to whether or not Hollywood still promotes intermarriage, and whether or not the cinema is still teaching Jews that intermarriage is desirable for them, we can say that, judging by these films, Hollywood does still emphasize Jewish desire for Gentiles, as well as supporting the legitimacy of exploring interfaith relationships, but that, more than ever before, by reflecting communitarian ideals, filmic romances are questioning the possibility that these relationships can last beyond the initial excitement of the unknown, and casts doubt on the viability of exogamous marriage.

The next chapter, my conclusion, summarizes the main findings of this dissertation, and seeks to breach the silver screen standing between fiction and reality as I suggest some ways that these film ideologies may influence contemporary Jewish life in America, as well as some avenues for further research into how such films affect Jewish ways of seeing themselves.



**Conclusions:**  
**Happy Endings**

*Hollywood – the American Dream – is a Jewish idea. In a sense, it's Jewish revenge on America... The happy ending was the invention of Russian Jews, designed to drive Americans crazy.*

- Jill Robinson<sup>1</sup>

In this work, I have outlined the key ways in which I see Hollywood's romantic films as illustrative of the tensions in Jewish-Gentile intermarriage. I began by sketching an understanding of the fictional Jew, as a way to ground the discussions of representation throughout the rest of my dissertation. In the introduction, I also described the ideal forms through which I have made my analysis. The first category of thought I used was liberalism with its emphasis on modernity and the self, and I have employed this world view to highlight ways in which some films represent Jews and their integration in America. I then delineated ways in which liberal ideals have been critiqued through the more nebulous trend of communitarian resistance, which I have used to see meaning in negative romantic outcomes. In chapter one, I described intermarriage as a Jewish religio-cultural and historical issue to bring context to the debate, and in chapter two I explained romance as a genre in order to demonstrate how generic elements and romantic myths can reveal the significance of Jewish-Gentile romance narrative outcomes. In chapter three, I showed how liberal films criticize traditional hierarchies that are seen as standing in the way of the individual pursuit of happiness and individualism, and argued that these liberal films support the romantic perspective by employing ideologically driven narrative strategies to bring dissimilar Jewish and Gentile lovers together against all obstacles. Because my findings indicate that liberalism is not the only ideology useful for interpreting American film, in chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted on the frontispiece, Friedman (1982).

four I used communitarian resistance to liberal personalism and/or erasure of difference to analyze a more pessimistic or negative view of Jewish-Gentile romance presented by Hollywood in the past few decades.

In this conclusion, I first briefly review my arguments on films exhibiting liberal and communitarian issues, and then discuss how voluntary association plays a role in intermarriage, and how this, in turn, affects the American community, in the 2009 film *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*. I then re-address Joseph Greenblum's (1995) question of whether Hollywood still glorifies intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles, but I further ask what impact these films have had on the image of the Jew in America. This question leads me to end this work by suggesting areas for future study, including a need for ethnographic and reception criticism work.

*Do You Love Me?: Liberalism and Romance over Tradition*

My ideal type of liberalism has been in keeping with the classical Western liberal tradition stemming from the Enlightenment, with an emphasis on the ideal of the good life, including equality of the citizenry and the pursuit of personal happiness through the protection and advancement of individualism and autonomy. In this system, ethnicity and religion are accepted only insofar as they might present personal lifestyle choices to members of liberal society and give them tools for the creation of the self, but not as long as they interrupt the agency of the individual to control their own happiness or pleasure, or infringe on the citizen's engagement with the wider democratic society. In liberal ideology, emphasis is placed on the couple as the major social unit, instead of more traditional notions of the family and kinship group. This ideal is reflected in the romantic perspective, which encourages the pursuit of personal desires over the

demands of community responsibility and social conformity, advanced in liberal film. This perspective is a crucial part of what Thomas Wartenberg (1999) categorizes as “unlikely couple films,” which are films that seek to destabilize traditional hierarchies that would define for the individual their appropriate and acceptable choice of mate. According to Wartenberg, films that advance the romantic perspective see as faulty any system which bases mate selection criteria on socio-economic status or inherited characteristics. I saw this trend exemplified in many films, including *A Price Above Rubies*, *White Palace* and *The Jazz Singer* (1980).

Liberal ideologies have influenced Hollywood film for nearly a century, and can be used to interpret many early films, such as the Cohens and the Kellies film series (1926-33) featuring the adventures of the titular immigrant families, as well as the two versions of *Abie's Irish Rose* (1928 and 1946). These films exhibit very positive images of interfaith coupling as natural romantic consequences of life in a tolerant America (Friedman 1982). This trend is still a dominant one in Hollywood, exhibited in far more films than I have presented. Such films continue to offer similar narrative strategies for producing a happy ending, appealing to the need for sympathy within the relationship (*Torch Song Trilogy*), the idea that Jewishness is no longer a major issue (*Juno*, 2007; *Knocked Up*, 2007), or that Jewish and Gentile lovers will both be symbolically strengthened by merging their differences (*Giving it Up*, 1999). These and many other films serve as examples for how the liberal tradition in film continues to be a major lens through which Jewish-Gentile intermarriage continues to be viewed and refracted.

*Kiss Me, I'm Jewish: Jewish Communitarianism*

Communitarian resistance to liberal positioning of the autonomous self as more important than community is a subtle, yet useful, way in which to regard some films dealing with Jewish/Gentile romance films ending in negative outcomes (i.e. parted couples and broken hearts with an emphasis on maturing self-knowledge that allows the characters to walk away from the doomed relationships with rearranged priorities), in which barriers to mutual understanding are upheld through the ultimate failure of the romance. As I explored in chapter two, the fact that these romances fail makes them somewhat of an oddity in American romantic film, as the genre typically dictates that there should be a happy ending. Therefore, I have argued that the failure of these romances is meaningful, and I have explained this by showing how they acknowledge and display a myriad of difficulties faced by cinematic interfaith couples, and, subsequently, suggest that not all stumbling blocks to the attraction of opposites can be dissolved through a commitment to liberal tolerance (and the goal of romantic love) alone. While Wartenberg's theory would place such films in the social perspective with films that seek to uphold traditional hierarchies, they also maintain a certain counter-cultural stance insofar as liberal romantic views are now the dominant ideal in American society and are not always marked by the conservatism Wartenberg implies in his understanding of the social perspective. Works upholding the traditional Jewish value of endogamy are, ironically, now in the position of rebellion against the mainstream establishment. Such films revolt against the liberal notion that all one needs is love, and aims to remind audiences that family and ethnic group memberships are bonds that cannot be easily or completely dissolved, and that embracing the social networks of our heritage may be essential to our self-respect and security. For these

reasons, I chose to use communitarianism to interpret these films, including *A Stranger Among Us*, *American Pop* and *Prime*.

The communitarian urge can also be used to explain a form of romantic post-modernism, as the films follow the lead of the ground breaking *Annie Hall* in using difference to interrogate romantic genre myths, but the failure of Jewish-Gentile relationships are becoming more and more striking, even in the past few years during which Hollywood has returned to more traditional generic forms of romance (McDonald 2007). In *Elegy* (2008), for example, a mature Jewish academic (Ben Kingsley) rediscovers his vitality with a fiery young Cuban student (Penélope Cruz), only to realize, as he is drawn into a life with her, that he cannot sustain his exotic passion once the thrilling affair is about to become something more long term.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, in *Flannel Pajamas* (2006), we see a couple who seemingly fall madly in love only to be torn apart by the Jewish husband's (Justin Kirk) pathological rejection of his family, the Gentile wife's (Julianne Nicholson) excessive admiration of her own, and the anti-Semitism that still flourishes in her mainstream ethos. These and other examples show how communitarianism can be a useful way to view films ending in negative ways.

The communitarian element is perhaps even more salient for viewing the Jewish "Blaxploitation" spoof *The Hebrew Hammer* (2003), in which a young Jewish private investigator (Adam Goldberg) is sent to stop an evil Santa (Andy Dick) in his quest to crush all other traditions in an effort to make Christmas the only acceptable holiday in December once more. In this film, which has the appearance of being a film by Jews

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<sup>2</sup> However, this film is unclear as to which of the protagonist's issues are linked to his Jewishness, and which are matters of age and generational ideals.

and for Jews – as if it doesn't care whether non-Jews see or understand its cultural references to the often frustrating Jewish experience in America – the romance between this Jewish man and a Jewish woman (Judy Greer) is both lively and sexual. This film, perhaps more than any other in Hollywood, finally allows the American Jewish voice to speak as a truly Jewish voice, as opposed to the numerous films made by Jewish filmmakers in Hollywood who sought to submerge their Jewishness under a recreation of what they imagined mainstream America to be (cf. Friedman 1982).

### ***You Don't Mess With the Zohan and Voluntary Community***

A low-brow comedy about an Israeli operative, Zohan Dvir (Adam Sandler), A.K.A. “the Zohan,” who fakes his death and runs away to New York City to follow his dream of being a hair stylist, *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* can nevertheless be used to explore the complex relations between a simplified communitarian ethos and American Jewish coalescence (Fishman 2000) seen in Hollywood product. *Zohan* expresses a popular liberalism in that it criticizes community control of personal destiny, supports the idea of America as the land of personal freedom and rejects Zionism as misguided nationalism. Yet in *Zohan* we also see a need for community and an acknowledgement of how hollow life in the West can become under unfettered capitalist autonomy. The liberal communitarian ethos of the film's resolution is reminiscent of the vision of modern communitarian society as theorized by Amitai Etzioni with his “New Golden Rule” (1996), in which an appeal to community and collectively agreed values can exist within a liberal structure despite the variety of backgrounds within the citizenry. For Etzioni, an American community of communities can be established through an appeal to the founding documents of the democracy as a

shared tradition to encourage dialogue between separate communities and reduce their traditional conflicts by fostering tolerance for difference. This collective of multiple groups would promote a balance between the various layers of human loyalties within a society such as America by encouraging a group identity based on citizenship and cooperation, thus using voluntary obligations as a way to nourish both community and individualism. Using this theory to analyze *Zohan*, we see how this film suggests an urge towards a liberal-communitarian ideal in which community is lauded but is ideally based on voluntary associations. In this vision, America itself is the community, as well as a group of people who are both united and distinct by their existential individualism. This vision of America as a communal homeland comes into opposition with the Zionist ideal of Israel as being more a more authentic location for Jews and Jewish culture, an ideal that is refuted within the film.

There are some pro-Zionist elements visible in *Zohan* – including the desire to see Israel as strong and just, as evidenced by Zohan’s good nature, lack of rabid hatred for Arabs and his charismatic machismo – but these are not the dominant characteristics of *Zohan*’s Israel. It is the liberal concerns about Israel (Rosenthal 2003), as well as the American Jewish dismissal of Zionism’s foundational belief that Jewish life is more meaningful in Israel (cf. Graubard 1989; Friedman and Desser 1993; Stratton 2000), that underpin the ideological impact of the film’s portrayal of Israel and, more crucially for my purpose, its central interfaith romance. Initially, *Zohan* seems to be a story of an Israeli hero and Arab bad guys, complete with a celebration of Israeli masculinity and efficiency.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Zohan is a truly impressive man – his military and combat skills are astounding, and his caring for undefended people is laudable. Further, his skill at

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<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of Israel and masculinity, see Konner 2009.

preventing collateral damage, or at least offering a consoling hand to those inadvertently harmed in his justified skirmishes, helps characterize Israel as being far from ignorant and unfeeling where its Palestinian subjects are concerned. Finally, the main character's personal charm, confidence, health, vitality, and sexual prowess seem to bolster Zionist ideals of the "new Jew" becoming strong and free of diasporic neuroses when allowed to live freely in their own land (Konner 2009). However, underneath this façade of praise for Zohan himself, there seems to be a careful refutation of the three classical Zionist claims, namely the principle that Israel is required as a "safe haven" for Jews in world filled with anti-Jewish sentiment (Herzl 1988 [1896]; Kornberg 1993), that *aliyah* (migration to Israel) fulfills personal Jewishness (Stratton 2000), and the hope that Israel will become a root of authentic Jewishness for diaspora communities (Graubard 1989, cf. Stratton 2000; cf. Rosenthal 2003).

The safe haven principle, first, is one of the rejections of this film. One of *Zohan's* prime implications is that Israel may actually be one of the least safe places on the planet for Jews, as the very presence of the State in a sea of hostile Arabs makes it impossible for it to find a lasting peace. The nation's own policies, especially that of continually freeing captured Islamic terrorists to buy the release of Israeli soldiers, makes it a never-ending cycle of violence/action/release/violence/action, through which property and lives are destroyed while Israeli soldiers become mere unsatisfied pawns of an arbitrary and nonsensical government. That is, the practical concerns of enforcement personnel on the ground are being undermined by the more tactical and obscure reasoning of a disconnected political hierarchy on both sides. This situation means that Israel is not a safe haven, as it is constantly sabotaged not only by its



enemies, but by its own authorities. Meanwhile, the classical Zionist claim that the diaspora will always be marred by anti-Semitism, which will remain a threat to the safety of those communities (Herzl 1988 [1896]; cf. Telushkin 1991; cf. Wistrich 1992), is refuted in this film. The intransigent hatred of the Jews among the Arab enemies of Israel is considerably worse than that of anti-Semites in America, a place which the film imagines to be a land of tolerance and personal freedom. The white supremacists that are shown living in America are highly marginalized and ineffectual, giving the image that the only true threat to Jewish survival, ironically, flourishes in the Middle East. Even the aspirant Muslim terrorists living in America are eventually overwhelmed by the spirit of personal choice provided by America's carefree lifestyle. America, not Israel, is the refuge of choice in the film, as this is the place to which Zohan flees in order to free himself of the parental and bureaucratic oppression of his native Israel, which is an inversion of the turn-of-the-last-century Zionist vision.

The Israel of *Zohan* seems to embody what could be considered a post-Zionist disillusioned version of the Jewish state. By virtue of its understanding of Jews living in the modern State of Israel as no longer being in exile, Zionism's vision of American Jewish life is that it remains Diaspora, and is, therefore, less rooted than the Jewishness of the "returnees" in Israel (Stratton 2000). This image of *aliyah* to Israel as the prime way for Jews to fulfill and express their Jewishness is not affirmed in this film. While Jews in America are seen as highly secularized and assimilated, Israeli Jews are not portrayed as being more spiritually or religious/culturally enlightened. "Assimilation" may not be much of an issue when one lives in a nation run for and by Jews, but the level of Americanization *Zohan* describes in Israeli pop culture renders it both obscene

and ridiculous. The Jewishness of Israel is thwarted for the sake of American pop music and a culture of pleasure, which is completely disconnected from religious ideals and discipline for the Jews in this film, and one is hard pressed to see how they differ, spiritually, from their American counterparts. As far as Israel remaining an outpost of authentic Jewish culture and religion in *Zohan* is concerned, Israel's Jewish cultural offerings are little more than the love of hacky sack, loyalty to local brands of soda pop and an extreme obsession with hummus. While much of this spoofing is seemingly done with some affection on the part of the filmmakers (Anonymous 2008), there is little evidence that Israel will provide diasporic Jews with a deep and lasting Jewish heritage. Further, the image projected of Israel as a place in which personal freedom is subjected to the needs of a militarized atmosphere that crushes individual creativity and spiritual concerns for the sake of security, making it void of tolerance and tranquility, makes it highly unlikely that this film sets Israeli productivity above that of the American Jewish community. The seedy sexuality, hyper-masculinity and trashy consumerism of *Zohan's* Israeli community seems to belie the breezy confidence advanced in the film. The constant threat of futile war has seemingly turned this community into a "live for today (and for pleasure)" culture which undermines the Zionist desire to create a permanent and lasting Jewish civilization there.

Young Israeli citizens are seen as generally liberal and attuned with the individualism of post-Enlightenment ideals, but these liberal Jews are completely devoid of religion. This lack of conventional substance suggests that progressive political and personal beliefs might come "naturally" to Jews (Graubard 1989), but that such beliefs may not support a continuing and vital religious or distinctly Jewish life.

Nevertheless, this challenge that liberalism presents to maintaining Jewishness is not criticized by the film, and we can assume it is not a concern, as religion is dismissed as unessential for personal happiness.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the State of Israel is emptied of its sacred importance. It is a political nation state like any other, with a human government that one can dislike and a people who are subject to human laws. This demystification of Israel is illustrated by the ways in which the film displays governmental blunder and the profanity of the Israeli citizenry. The liberal Jewish call of the left to provide Israel with “critical and loving support” (Graubard 1989: 20) is seen in the way the film is able to desacrilize the nation, leaving it open to affectionate, yet negative, appraisal. That the land is the mythological Jewish homeland does not relieve it of the obligation to withstand public scrutiny. On the contrary, it is the obligation of concerned liberals to take an interest in global issues such as terrorism and counter-terrorism. The film consistently upholds liberal values such as civil rights, the acceptance of ethnic diversity in voluntary social circles, the freedom of individual choice, and the continuous modernization of traditional values. *You Don't Mess With the Zohan* has as its underlying social perspective the assertion that people merely wish to live their lives, fulfill their occupational destinies and be left alone to pursue individual achievement and success.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Which seems normative in this type of American comedy

<sup>5</sup> In terms of political engagement with the crisis in the Middle East, furthermore, *Zohan* is also aligned with the liberal ideal. Specifically, we see in the film what conservative Zionist Ruth Wisse's complains is the leftist Jewish need "... to argue the Palestinian case *within* the Jewish community" (quoted in Graubard 1989: 20). *Zohan* is not immune to this desire, as the futility of the Israeli cause seems to be construed as a reason why it should be abandoned, especially considering the fact that America is a better option for the Jews, anyway. The plight of the Palestinians is also comically acknowledged, especially using the recurring symbolism of one man's emotional scars over losing his beloved goat (though sadly displaying an outdated stereotypic ethnic representation) to Israeli forces, metaphorically aligning the current Israeli regime with that of the biblical King David, cruelly snatching away the humble comforts of his subjects (2 Samuel 12. 1-13). In one scene, even as Zohan is fighting a Palestinian insurgent, the two

The majority of the storyline is concerned with the daily lives of Israeli-born Jews “making it” in America, alongside their Palestinian co-immigrants, and the community that is forged along a street the two cultures share in New York City (the Arab businesses on the west curb, and the Jewish shops on the east). While the arguments between the two groups are initially acrimonious, the two sides share a mutual identity as “Middle Easterners,” and, being relocated out of the violence and hatred of their homelands into the tolerant and carefree land of America, the severity of their mutual dislike is highly defused. The emphasis here is that personal destiny (hair dressing, selling electronics, shoe salesman, etc.) overrides the programming of one’s native community once the person is removed from the tense situation. The film suggests that community in America does indeed exist, but is not based on ancient divisions. Rather, the new, liberal community is self-determined and voluntary, as it is largely created through market-based friendships and professional affiliations.

For both the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs, liberal capitalism has become the dominating ideological force in their lives, allowing them new freedoms, but also supplying them with fresh struggles and concerns. Even the immigrant Arab cab drivers (Daoud Heidami and Rob Schneider) who are shown as aspiring terrorists have no intention of being martyred, and do it primarily to cash in on the fame they hope to receive from killing the Zohan by starting their own Arab fast food chain. In the context of their new American lives, dying for the sake of Allah does not make sense, and is not a reasonable option within the matrix of choices offered by their new personal

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maintain a dialogue that problematizes the legitimacy of terms such as “terrorist” and the blame inherent in recent politics – “So I am automatically the bad guy?” the Palestinian asks, reasonably; Zohan, in his good nature, agrees the situation is far from black and white. However, the film does not offer much by way of solution to the Palestinian suffering, except to suggest, as it does to Israeli Jews, that emigration is a path to freedom.

freedom. However, capitalism is not simply a buffet of choice and success, but is, in its way, a task master equal to any oppressive tradition. When a massive global conglomerate seeks to overcome the Arab/Israeli business district, the two sides must band together against their new white American-born landlords who wish to run the immigrant shopkeepers out for the sake of a characterless mall. By mixing a criticism of homogenizing capitalism in with its critique of ancient prejudices, the film manages to assert a universal message of humanity over numbers, even as it preaches the pluralistic ideal of liberal America. The preponderance of American liberal ideas that are both submerged and overt in *Zohan* ultimately is what defines this film, especially in terms of the interfaith romantic subplot.

This overall “heart” of the film is, of course, conveyed most strongly through the metaphorical pairing of its hero, the disguised Zohan, with Dahlia (Emmanuelle Chriqui), the beautiful Palestinian owner of the hair salon whose liberal tolerance and kindness allowed him to enact his personal destiny even without actual cosmetology training or credentials (as if passion renders such formal qualifications unnecessary). When he first arrives at the salon, Zohan is charming and eager, and becomes a quirky addition to the staff, which also includes an Asian-American (Alec Mapa) – one of only a handful of non-immigrant Americans seen in the film – who is defined by an aggressively ambiguous sexuality, mirroring the belief amongst Zohan’s friends and family that male hairdressers are always gay. When he is finally given the chance to cut hair, Zohan proves to be excessively popular amongst the female clientele, due to his ability to make any woman, regardless of age, ethnicity or physical state, feel sexually desirable. The shop’s new-found popularity is also due to his willingness to

consummate the “foreplay” of the hair cutting process under his libidinous hands in the adjacent supply room. Soon, the salon becomes the most successful business on the block, thanks to Zohan and what amounts to his voluntary prostitution. Even male customers are charmed by Zohan’s “coolness,” as the hero sprinkles his indiscriminate charisma on everyone around him. Zohan’s friendship and/or sexual accessibility are freely offered to people of all backgrounds, and the audience is left with a sense that, by relocating to America, Zohan is where he is meant to be – a spiritual home for someone of his open and liberal character, where he can practice his art in peace.

This sense of belonging is further evidenced by his growing romantic relationship with his Palestinian boss, who informs him that she, as well, has come to America to prosper and to leave behind the hatred and divisions of her homeland. The two seem destined for each other by their mutual affinity for personal freedom, and this destiny is affirmed when Zohan is stricken with impotence with any other woman. Before he fell in a particular love, Zohan could share his body without restrictions, but, after finding his special, destined love – which according to romantic notions is defined by exclusivity (Fromm 2006) – his body and the enjoyment of his sexual prowess belongs only to his beloved, Dahlia. Nevertheless, a kind client (Charlotte Rae) comforts him after he is unable to perform sexually with her, saying that his charm and likeability will still make him a favourite stylist because of the happiness he gives freely, even without the physical consummation he can no longer offer to them. Thus, the film asserts the belief that emotional satisfaction and happiness is separate from physical acts of masculine power by showing us that Zohan’s earlier sexual promiscuity was a symptom of his underlying dissatisfaction. Therefore, not only is the personal

freedom expressed in intermarriage preferable, it is also the sign that American tolerance is working correctly by showing the groups intermingling successfully away from traditional hatreds.

The film then goes further than this, in revealing that Zohan's beloved is actually the sister of his nemesis from his military counter-terrorism days, the Palestinian assassin Fatoush, A.K.A. the Phantom (John Torturro). At first the Phantom is outraged at his sister's alignment with an Israeli, but her love for Zohan convinces him that old boundaries might be counterproductive for personal happiness. After the Phantom confesses to Zohan that he himself had always wanted to sell shoes before he had been forced into terrorism by his parents, Zohan, understanding this plight, embraces and encourages the Phantom's desire to fulfill his destiny, and the two, brought together through their mutual love for Dahlia as well as their existential similarities, are reconciled in America. The Palestinian Muslims and Israeli Jews of the street come together to establish a mall dedicated to friendship, and they all live happily ever after under the metaphorical roof of American democracy and social liberalism.

*You Don't Mess with the Zohan* can be read in light of the practical communitarian ideals of Etzioni (1996) in that it idealizes co-operation of the Arabs and Jews in the neighbourhood as a means to communal interaction despite ancestral tensions. Through this, *Zohan's* messages about community in America also reflect the communitarian dissatisfaction with liberal isolation, especially in terms of how it portrays the harsh criminality of the extremely individualistic cooperation executives, and in the pathetic powerlessness of the few assimilated non-Israeli Jews Zohan encounters. Yet, its critiques of Israeli society and Zionism are essentially American

liberalism, as are its messages about parental pressures, hierarchies that interfere with romance and its emphasis on personal destiny. In this way, *Zohan* shows us that the strict dichotomy of liberalism and communitarianism as opposing poles on a spectrum is generally faulty, and may be built on too narrow an idea of community – for *Zohan*, (and Etzioni) community *is* America. Instead of placing its community emphasis on one's family, one's religious or ethnic group or one's traditional homeland, *Zohan* presents America itself as a community, one based on multicultural co-operation and shared existential needs and goals grounded in the framing ideals of America as a form of shared tradition among diverse people. *Zohan* replaces traditional ideas of Jewish peoplehood with a new primacy of voluntary associations, reflecting the ways in which modern people see such associations as central to their identity. It is not that *Zohan* doesn't believe in community, it is, rather, that it seeks to promote a co-operative, coalesced understanding of different immigrant people coming together to make an American community, symbolized by the friendship mall that the Arabs and Jews create at the end of the film as they rise from the threat of soulless capitalist incursion on their neighbourhood. It does not directly reference the melting pot, but *Zohan* does advance the idea of the new American forged from the peaceful co-existence of people with a variety of heritages. It presents this means to happiness as a community of mutual interdependence on one another and resistance to both the traditional communities that would oppress their individuality, as well as against the austere heartlessness of acquisitive society, highlighting the ambiguity between communitarianism and liberalism when using them to interpret film.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I am not forgetting that, while this film speaks to Jewish issues, a factor in its pro-America agenda must be the role that non-Jewish (and non-Arab) audiences play in its ideology. No American film can expect



## **“Say Goodnight, Gracie”: Some Final Thoughts**

Does Hollywood still glorify Jewish-Gentile intermarriage? As we have seen, very early American cinema did provide cautionary tales against leaving one’s rightful place and people for the sake of romance, with heavy consequences paid by the children of immigrants who follow their hearts outside the Jewish community (Friedman 1982).<sup>7</sup> By the advent of talking pictures and end of World War II, Jews were chasing the American dream and entering American society with increased gusto and success, creating a climate in which intermarriage, if not full-out assimilation, was glorified as a means to cast off ancient stigma and fully enjoy the fruits of American citizenship. Non-Jewish partners, who are often presented as inherently more American than the first or second generation Jews, were tickets to a better life, increased happiness, and romantic fulfillment, and seemed to be promoted as symbols of the triumph of reason and liberty over “traditional” ghetto life (Friedman 1982; Greenblum 1995). Early talkies promoted a tolerance for Jews as marriage partners, but not a total acceptance of difference – assimilation was the mode of peace, involuntary ties were marginalized, and the Gentile partner was idealized. In recent decades, however, this trend has changed (Greenblum

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to make money by appealing solely to Jewish viewers, and it is to be expected that a film starring Adam Sandler will have a wide viewership. Thus, this film is “Jewish”, in my opinion, but it also maintains a solid universal theme in its exploration of parental expectations, and the search for romantic and professional fulfillment – indeed, it is on this universal claim that the Palestinian and Israeli combatants come together. Therefore, the criticisms of Israel in this film are put on display for more than just Jewish consideration. As Graubard (1989) reminds us, “... you don’t have to be Jewish to be a progressive liberal” (23), and non-Jewish criticism of Israel is growing in North America, which likely influences the ideology of the film to some extent. However, it is ironic, yet elementally Jewish, that *You Don’t Mess With the Zohan* is actually vastly more open to Arab humanity than are many recent non-Jewish Hollywood films, particularly since the events of 9/11, reflecting a Jewish-American commitment to empathy – even to one’s enemies – consistent with a coalescent view of “natural” Jewish ethics.

<sup>7</sup> While one might be tempted to suggest this socially conservative position was due to the anti-Semitism of non-Jewish audiences and/or filmmakers, the evidence suggests that it was, in fact, largely for the sake of homesick Jewish newcomers, who made up a large portion of the early silent film audiences, that motion pictures warned of natural order and punishments in even the new and changing world they had found (Friedman 1982).

1995). Since the 1970s, while a few films maintain an assimilationist view, most films treat intermarriage in a much more complex manner – they show negative outcomes to Jewish-Gentile romance more than ever before, and even of those that have the romance succeed many tend to at least acknowledge the significance of Jewish identity and group affiliation. Further, current films are less and less prone to present the Gentile lover as the answer to Jewish dreams of success, by portraying Jewish characters as capable of satisfying their ambitions through their own abilities.

Greenblum (1995) points out the significance of this trend in a time where Jewish-Gentile marriage is so prevalent, as opposed to earlier decades, which promoted intermarriage on screen, even while it remained relatively rare in real life. Of course, part of this increased complexity in portraying intermarriage must be attributed to the increased realism of cinema craft in general (Arnheim 1957; Greenblum 1995). The shift may also be motivated by societal change over the past century, in which both the function and profile of intermarriage has changed, as has the status of Jews as an American minority. Assimilation through intermarriage was a much more common trope when audiences required cinematic assurances of the Jewish ability to integrate to American society, and the downplaying of difference was needed to counteract past anxiety that Jews were too alien to be embraced. As the subsequent generations of Jews in America were enfolded into the American mainstream, however, this function was no longer required of film. Intermarriage was, in essence, presented as the culmination of the melting pot's possibilities, and the pinnacle of liberal tolerance in action – the literal embrace between Jewish and Gentile American on the most intimate level (Greenblum 1995). Further, the continued romanticisation of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage was

serving to depopularize traditional modes of thought and lifestyle that placed barriers between groups, leaving more room for intergroup relations on many different levels. Therefore, after World War II, which marks a shift from Jews as alien outsiders to members of the post-War mainstream as their position improved dramatically, both financially and socially (Brodkin 1999), these functions dropped away. This process was no doubt assisted by the new political and social views of the Civil Rights era, as well as the general transformation of Gentile concepts of Jewishness after the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel (Friedman 1982). Jews were now looked upon as proof that America was truly the land of hospitable opportunity, and were often held up as the perfect minority (Brodkin 1999).

Because of the Jewish social mobility of the past fifty years, intermarriage rates in real life have climbed. When considering why intermarriage is now so much more complex on American screens even as intermarriage rates climb, the rate itself must be considered – because so many more marriages are being made, so many more options are being experienced, ones in which the Jew converts, the Gentile converts, neither convert, the two remain married, or the two divorce. Essentially, more common complex outcomes in real life have resulted in more variance in American cinematic portrayals. Further, the higher social profile of Jewish-Americans mean that intermarriage is no longer viewed as a means to advancement for Jewish *parvenus*. Together with the new post-1960s pluralist mode of multiculturalism allowing for more expression of individual difference in general, Jewish-Americans can be said to have enough confidence and social capital as a group to effectively hold onto their identity and to have it realistically explored in Hollywood product despite their relatively small

numbers.<sup>8</sup> Finally, it should be considered that the increased acknowledgment of Jewish difference in film, along with the increased complexity of intermarriage tales, might be because, in light of the skyrocketing rates of intermarriage in real life, Jewish sensibilities respond better to stories presenting such relationships as complex as such portrayals reassure the audience that they are still, indeed, different, even without ghetto walls and anti-Semitic adversaries. Therefore, we can say that while many films still do present interfaith romances as ending positively, Hollywood does not glorify intermarriage as it once did, and tends to have a great deal more sensitivity to the trials Jewish and Gentile lovers might encounter when attempting to bridge the gap (Greenblum 1995).

### *The Impact of Intermarriage Romance Films on American Jews*

There is often a desire in research projects to be of use to “real people,” so I feel compelled to ask what the implications of these films are for American Jews. This question is extremely difficult to answer with any academic certainty. Nevertheless, I can speak, somewhat cautiously, of the positive and negative ramifications of the liberal and communitarian elements seen in the movies that I have presented in this work.

Liberal ideologies in the romantic perspective films I have examined generally advance a belief in the equality of individuals and show an antipathy for traditional values or roles assigned to people based on their birth characteristics, particularly their class, gender or ethnicity. Such films eschew antique hierarchies that separate people

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<sup>8</sup> The large Jewish presence on American television, as well as the sheer number of Jewish-Gentile couples represented therein, since World War II, has also been quite interesting. While, unfortunately, television is not a part of my study here, it also presents a wealth of material for analysis, and has been a hotbed of Jewish media representation, especially in the 1990s.

into eligible or ineligible categories for marriage or mating based on communally agreed upon labels, particularly those of traditional Jewish concerns prohibiting the marriage between Jews and Gentiles, but also conservative prejudices barring Jews from entrance into Gentile societies or families. Further, they advance a belief in the primacy of personal choice or individual rights and freedoms, and the personalist pursuit of happiness, above the obligations of religion, community and kinship. Therefore, they emphasize choice and voluntary associations, particularly romantic ones, as being more existentially authentic as markers of identity than involuntary ones, such as family or community members (i.e. co-religionists). Finally, most of them assert a humanist view of the individual that, even while maintaining a belief that all people are autonomous, somewhat incongruously portrays all people as being essentially the same in terms of their needs and rights, regardless of how the histories of their families might differ. As a result, such films, and the ideologies they represent, can be seen as having both negative and positive implications for how Jews are viewed, and the ways in which Jews view themselves, as American citizens. It is certainly positive that Jews are now largely without social barriers to their vocational and personal mobility. That the rights of Jews to live unmolested in equality is seemingly enshrined in American society is an improvement over previous eras and less liberal environments. More particularly, American trends in self-expression and egalitarianism have added incalculable benefits to American Judaism, especially in terms of the increasing presence of a female voice in worship and education. Many Jewish families no doubt consider themselves blessed with the increasing diversity of their newest members gained or born through intermarriage. It is likely that these films have been inspired by

these changing realities, as well as contributed to the propagation of liberal sentiment towards inclusion.

Despite all of the wonders of America, it is nevertheless also possible to identify several areas of liberal society that are much less positive for Jewish group identity, as well as, perhaps, for Jews as individuals. First, the blanching of Jewish identity in America – that is, the way that ethnic identity is reduced to surface differences only through the view that all people are essentially the same at their core – is a problematic proposition for all ethnic groups, as it implies that ethnicity is an item of choice, rather than a relatively stable and rich well of meaning within the person and their families. The reduction of ethnicity to window dressing also may have the harmful effect of denying its deep value to many. In turn, this erasure of ethnicity's value ironically has the ultimate effect of allowing assimilationists to argue that the modes and means of ethnicity should rightfully, and easily, be shed in favour of a homogenized "American" identity, which, while promoted as "impartial," is most often a deracinated and secularized Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. Indeed, liberalism untempered by an understanding of the need for recognition, seems to deny no right except that which allows people to be different (Taylor 1992). By voiding pre-migrant roots of their emotional and moral importance in human life, and by reducing society to its smallest possible atom – the individual, as opposed to the family or the kin group – life becomes relativistic beyond reason, and can present us with little to which we can cling. These films encourage Jews to see nothing more than the desires of their own heart in their choice of mates or spouses. In fact, they don't even see liberalism itself (Walzer 1990) or its ideological roots in post-Enlightenment Protestantism (cf. Asad 1993). As a result,

what were traditionally seen as helpful devices in a serious decision (particularly cultural values, family obligations and community consensus) are now relegated to the status of intrusions on individualism or punitive obstacles. Taken at its face value, liberal ideology advances such a strong defence of the personalist view that one wonders how a couple made of two such isolated individuals can ever survive past the romantic phase – can happiness be achieved or even recognized as being happiness-attained, or will the desires of our hearts cause us to be in constant pursuit of an illusion?

Likewise, the films I have identified as having communitarian aspects also contain both blessings and pitfalls for the Jews of America. According to my explorations of modern communitarian impulses evident in film, these films exhibit a belief that community cannot be forgotten in the rush towards liberal individualism. Such films suggest that the liberal message of community or involuntary group identity/inheritance as meaningless in matters of the heart is faulty. They seek to reassert the prominence of difference in the lives of ethnic and religious minorities in America, even those as long-settled and embraced as the Jews, and provide a warning to those who would place their faith in love alone to bridge all gaps. These films show intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles as a potentially problematic undertaking, contrary to the “love conquers all” mentality of traditional romantic cinema. Some narratives locate the difficulty in a basic historical or existential incompatibility between Jews and Gentiles, while others simply acknowledge that some Jews may find their loyalties to their religion or their communities eclipsing their infatuation with the Gentile object of their desires. Communitarian ethics comprise both a warning against

the loss of the communal dimension in contemporary life, as well as a critique of the liberal emphasis of individualism over group concerns. Communitarians contend that, no matter how much one wishes to devalue it, community will always be important to the choices one makes and the outcome of these choices over time. That is, even if one wishes to assert one's autonomy, the choices one makes are never disengaged from one's community, as the community will always have a strong effect on the success and/or failure of those choices. Again, the positive implications of this ideology are clear. By asserting the Jewish right to difference, these films are attempting to instil in their audience a willingness to both express and tolerate real, lasting and meaningful cultural diversity in a pluralistic society. Additionally, such films work to maintain a sense of marginality which has long been a cornerstone of Jewish art (Friedman and Desser 1993). Further, in acknowledging the challenges faced by intermarried couples, these films offer perhaps their greatest benefit to the Jewish community. But, as our simple survey of intermarriage rates confirmed, this benefit is not a reduction in the numbers of intermarriages taking place. Rather, by producing more realistic views of intermarriage, communitarian films are counteracting the over-simplified vision of love promoted in most liberal romances despite an ever-increasing divorce rate. Communitarian films may provide Jews, who have abundant freedom of choice, with cautionary tales for consideration, thereby functionally replacing those lost communal devices for guiding one in making serious choices with complex media representations, allowing the audience member to maintain a comfortable level of autonomy while still benefiting from the collective experience of their community.



All of these positive services of communitarianism in film make the trend quite welcome in Hollywood cinema. However, as with liberalism, communitarianism should not be seen as completely without negative ramifications. While it is likely that many Jewish communitarians would not prefer to see Jews returned to their pre-liberal, subjugated state in the ghetto, and that they are, in reality, liberal in their views of society, communitarian ideology has some very serious conservative implications if taken too far. Jewish communitarianism could result in isolationist, segregationist or chauvinistic beliefs that are as undesirable in Jews as they are Gentiles. The presentation of the Jewish/Gentile dichotomy in these films has a slightly uncomfortable, alienating quality. While I agree that acknowledging the specificity of Jewish history and culture is a beneficial innovation of these films, the implication that Jews and Gentiles are like oil and water – or, if you will, like the proverbial bird and the fish – can appear divisive and counter-productive in democratic society, and posing a strict “in or out” dichotomy forces Jews to choose between the two positions, which is a harsh approach. Further, the continued assertion of Jewish difference is a problematic one. It is very unlikely that any of these films will be seen only by Jews, so one must give some care to how others, particularly those who are not personally well acquainted with any “real life Jews,” will perceive and read these films, and how future Jewish-Gentile relations might be affected by these calls to Jewish communitarianism.

This concern brings us to another, perhaps more important area of influence in these films, through which both the liberal and communitarian ideological products can have serious implications for the Jewish image and self-image in America, and that is the continued development of Jewish tropes and representational conventions,

especially in the portrayal of the fictional Jewish male and the fictional Jewish female. In my introduction, I wrote of how the opus of Jewish representation constitutes a shared body of tropes and symbols that was passed on and transformed, through numerous political and religious waves of influence, from early artistic renderings through to early cinema and beyond (Bartov 2005). It would be temporal hubris, and highly unwise of us, to assume our own age is not part of this continued development of the Jew as a construction of artistic, political and spiritual invention.

The portrayal of Jewish women is, of course, particularly troublesome, as their representation has not progressed much beyond the mother-hatred of Philip Roth and his generation, particularly in intermarriage films. While a few films in which the Jewish female is the one seeking love with non-Jewish mates do allow their Jewish female protagonists to be sexy, attractive and even charming, films in which Jewish males retreat from their community towards Gentile dream girls do insist on using rejected Jewish females as fodder for comedic relief and as a way to communicate why the Jew seeks his escape in the first place. The Jewish woman is virtually useless in such films, and certainly their lack of class, substance and, perhaps, even soul is a repeated theme in these films. The portrayal of Jewish women as droning and controlling objects of disdain is partnered with an equally unattractive portrayal of Jewish men in liberal cinema. While the Jewish female controls, the Jewish male is unable to control anything. Ben Stiller, as the descendant of the Jewish male image in Hollywood, gives us a solid view of how the *schlemiel* functions in these films. While his predecessors Woody Allen and Jerry Lewis, both famous for their portrayals of ineffectual and unhealthy Jewish male types, played their neuroses and weaknesses as

part of their characters' charm, the new Jewish male under Stiller takes a much more harmful turn (Bronski 2004). While the Jewish male is still seen as living out of harmony with his physique and as a victim of his environment, he is now played as fundamentally unlikeable, as well as emotionally stunted, angry and judgmental. As the stereotypical male Jewish figure grows into a stale rehash of Vaudevillian *shtick*, it seems to become more bitter, and less in touch with modern ideas of style and humanity, thus rendering the Jewish male not the symbolic Everyman he often was under Allen, but, rather, a cartoonish figure whose pain and suffering are not only deserved but humorous. It is true that the Stiller-form of cinematic Jewish maleness is most predominant in liberal romantic comedies, but the communitarian films are not without their own representational concerns. For example, they may wish to assert Jewish pride in their difference, but their continued reliance on out of date portrayals of Jews – as if the Jewish male is perpetually stuck in a 1970s Woody Allen film or Philip Roth novella – to drive their point presents a Jewish image that is increasingly irrelevant to current Jewish reality.<sup>9</sup> Further, while the stereotypes these films employ, such as the funny, talented, sensitive or extraordinarily intelligent Jewish male (i.e. the "special" Jewish male), may appear as complimentary to the Jews, they remain, nonetheless, reifying stereotypes stemming from essentialist views of Jewish being and culture, and, as such, still tap into the wider allosemantic belief that the uncanny Jew can only mimic the ways of the mainstream, but will forever remain alien due to his very nature.

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<sup>9</sup> Both the liberal and communitarian films show a troubling propensity towards locking Jewish culture into a nostalgic memory – particularly of the pre-Depression days or the decade spanning World War II and the immediate end of that war – complete with sepia tones and golden lighting (cf. Friedman 1982; Friedman and Desser 1993), which continues to freeze Jewish life in its immigrant state, rather than as a modern people with not only a past but also a future. Taking as our example the copious reproductions of the Native American brave coming to the end of his trail, hunched in the saddle on an exhausted horse and looking out over a future in which he has no part (cf. Lubbers 1994), we must be ever aware of how artistic conventions for rendering the past reflect a general feeling about the future of an ethnic group.

Studies done on the ways Jews perceive themselves and other Jews show that these means of projecting Jewish maleness and femininity are not only offensive but also dangerous to traditional endogamous families. The Morning Star Commission conducted in California in 1997-98 has become rather famous for what the intense focus groups revealed about how Jews imagined themselves and other members of their community, including how Jewish men saw Jewish women, and vice versa. Jewish men described Jewish females as rabid consumers who sought wealthy husbands and then drove them into the ground with their incessant need for material comforts. These men acknowledged Jewish women as good cooks, but otherwise discounted the possibility of a Jewish woman making a good wife or lover, describing them as un-sexy and passionless.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Jewish women described Jewish men as passive, anal retentive and weak. Interestingly, however, Jewish men failed to list “wimpiness” as a common Jewish male characteristic, while it was one of the major themes in the interviews with single Jewish women on why they refuse to date Jewish men. It would be logical to suggest that Hollywood tropes, particularly those in intermarriage films, have become real in the minds of many Jews when they contemplate marriage to another Jew. The report suggested that media representations are a major part of the social construction of identity and reality, in that people begin to believe they have knowledge of topics, such as Jewish characteristics, when this is based merely on artistic/media renderings alone. Yet, having been convinced by the media that Jews exhibit habitual traits, they are certain they see these traits in Jews they meet in real life,

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<sup>10</sup> The Jewish male view of Jewish females as unattractive, sexually, may pre-date cinema in America, however, as evidenced by the opinion of Groucho Marx. On the subject of endogamy, the comedian was reported as saying in the 1970s, “It just always seemed to me that making love to a Jewish girl would be like making love to your sister” (quoted in Chandler 1979: 77).

regardless of the evidence. The Commission also suggests that these negative images have an indelible effect on the desire heterosexual Jews feel for Jews of the opposite sex. It gives good reason to believe that we should worry about more than just non-Jews consuming negative images of Jews, as the Jews themselves seem to accept the stereotypes repeated in the media, meaning that the ways in which Jews see other Jews are, even without their knowledge, descended from very old anti-Semitic images of Jews from Christian Europe, as I explored in my introduction. The war between the sexes takes on a much more sinister hue in the Jewish community, as it echoes the ways in which gender was so devastatingly employed in old anti-Semitic art (cf. Abramson 1996), showing to what extent the Jews have absorbed and integrated the loathing behind centuries of their persecution. As a result of all of this, as Arendt (1946) pointed out, each Jew wishes to see him or herself as the “privileged Jew” who rises above the Jewish masses who so offend their own senses – masses that have been created largely through the media via the repetition of negative gender stereotypes in Hollywood product (Prell 1990, 1999; Hyman 1995; Fishman 2004). In America, the media holds up a judgmental mirror through which Jews feel compelled to compare their community to the ideals of “civility” (i.e. WASP ideals of upper class behaviour), which brings a desire to differentiate themselves from their shameful co-religionists (Friedman and Desser 1993), which, sadly, often takes the form of gendered repulsion. Regardless of how one interprets intermarriage as a challenge or an opportunity for the Jewish community in America, there can be little doubt that this attack on Jewish gender relations is of no benefit to anyone.

*Avenues for Future Exploration*

This thesis has focused on the narrative structures of several key films which I read through the ideologies of liberalism and communitarianism, and has not been able to go much past the boundaries of the screen with any certainty. If Arthur Miller was correct when he asserted that the stage is "...where a collective mass of people, through the genius of some author, is able to project its terrors and its hopes and to symbolize them" (1996: 311), I consider ideological film readings to be beneficial for considering issues of authenticity in American life. Understanding that film plays a far greater role in the lives of North Americans than "entertainment" alone (Lyden 2003) and that the media plays a significant role in culture and identity (Pellegrini 1996), more work is needed to investigate the ways that ideology not only becomes enfolded in art and performance (Schechner 1985), but also the ways in which art inspires the audience to employ it in viewing the world (Leppert 1996). There is still more to learn about the symbolic mechanisms through which cinematic texts confer subjectivity upon viewers through the ways that they encourage audience members to stitch themselves into the film narrative, and how this subjectivity creates meaning for Americans (Moore 1993). In other words, we need more information on how Jews consume, understand and enact the meanings in these films. The analysis I have presented could be used as a jumping off point for future ethnographic work with young Jews and intermarried couples, especially through the use of focus group screenings, to explore how these films and others contribute to the ways in which Jews see themselves, how they envision relationships with Gentiles, and how they perceive Jews of the opposite sex (Fishman 2004). It would be fascinating to look deeper at why Hollywood film continues to present intermarriage as an issue for screen couples when more than half of America's

Jews are marrying non-Jews, and whether or not this trend will continue to have an effect on young, unmarried Jews and their attitudes towards interfaith romance, as well as their relationships with other Jews.

In this dissertation, I have highlighted two trends as a way to understand negative and positive outcomes in intermarriage films and attitudes about Jews and their relationship with America presented within. The liberal outlook has been dominant in Hollywood, so the communitarian outlook I have illustrated with the selected films is somewhat surprising in film. Both trends co-exist side by side, and cannot always be simple to distinguish from one another due to the fact that communitarianism is not synonymous with conservatism. Yet, by reading Jewish-Gentile romances through the ideal types of liberalism and communitarianism, we have seen that some films do exhibit an anxiety over meaningful identity which suggests that, to borrow from Mark Twain, the rumour of the Jewish assimilation in America has been grossly exaggerated.

## Filmography by Decade

### 1910 – 1919

- Barrier of Faith, The* (General Film Co., USA, 1915)  
Dir. V.D. Brooke, Prod. N/A, Perf. V.D. Brooke, N/A.
- Faith of Her Fathers, The* (Universal Film Manufacturing Company, USA, 1915)  
Dir. C. Giblyn, Prod. C. Laemmle, Perf. M. MacQuarrie, N/A.

### 1920 – 1929

- Abie's Irish Rose* (Paramount, USA, 1928)  
Dir. V. Fleming, Prod. B.P. Schulberg, Perf. Buddy Rogers, N/A.
- Jazz Singer, The* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1927)  
Dir. A. Crosland, Prod. N/A, Perf. A. Jolson, DVD, 89 mins.
- Private Izzy Murphy* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1926)  
Dir. L. Bacon, Prod. N/A, Perf. G. Jessel, N/A

### 1930 – 1939

- Bringing Up Baby* (RKO, USA, 1938)  
Dir. H. Hawks, Prod. C. Reid, Perf. C. Grant, DVD, 102 mins.
- Cantor's Son, The* (Yiddish, Eron Pictures, USA, 1937)  
Dir. I. Motyleff, Prod. A. Block, Perf. M. Oysher, Online, 90 mins.
- Svengali* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1931)  
Dir. A. Mayo, Prod. N/A, Perf. DVD, 81 mins.
- Tevye* (Yiddish, Mayman Film Inc., USA, 1939)  
Dir. M. Schwartz, Prod. H. Ziskin, Perf. M. Schwartz, Online, 93 mins.

### 1940 – 1949

- Abie's Irish Rose* (United Artists, USA, 1946)  
Dir. A.E. Sutherland, Prod. B. Crosby, Perf. J. Dru, DVD, 96 mins.
- Bishop's Wife, The* (RKO, USA, 1947)  
Dir. H. Koster, Prod. S. Goldwyn, Perf. C. Grant, VHS, 109 mins.
- Casablanca* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1942)  
Dir. M. Curtiz, Prod. J.L. Warner, Perf. H. Bogart, DVD, 102 mins.
- Gentleman's Agreement* (Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1947)  
Dir. E. Kazan, Prod. D.F. Zanuck, Perf. G. Peck, DVD, 118 mins.
- Jew Süß* (Terra-Filmkunst, Germany, 1940)  
Dir. V. Harlan, Prod. O. Lehman, Perf. F. Marian, DVD, 197 mins.
- Shop Around the Corner, The* (MGM, USA, 1940)  
Dir. E. Lubitsch, Prod. E. Lubitsch, Perf. J. Stewart, Online, 99 mins.

### 1950 – 1959

- Affair to Remember, An* (Twentieth-Century Fox, USA, 1957)  
Dir. L. McCarey, Prod. J. Wald, Perf. C. Grant, DVD, 119 mins.
- Jazz Singer, The* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1952)  
Dir. M. Curtiz, Prod. L.F. Edelman, Perf. D. Thomas, VHS, 107 mins.
- Ten Commandments, The* (Paramount Pictures, USA, 1956)



Dir. C.B. DeMille, Prod. C.B. DeMille, Perf. C. Heston, DVD, 220 mins.

### 1960 – 1969

*Exodus* (United Artists, USA, 1960)

Dir. O. Preminger, Prod. O. Preminger, Perf. P. Newman, DVD, 208 mins.

*Funny Girl* (Columbia Pictures, USA, 1968)

Dir. W. Wyler, Prod. R. Stark, Perf. B. Streisand, DVD, 151 mins.

*Goodbye, Columbus* (Paramount Pictures, USA, 1969)

Dir. L. Peerce, Prod. S.R. Jaffe, Perf. R. Benjamin, VHS, 102 mins.

*Graduate, The* (Embassy Pictures, USA, 1967)

Dir. M. Nichols, Prod. J.E. Levine et al, Perf. D. Hoffman, DVD, 105 mins.

*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* (Columbia Pictures, USA, 1967)

Dir. S. Kramer, Prod. G. Glass, Perf. S. Tracy, DVD, 108 mins.

*Pawnbroker, The* (Landau Company, USA, 1964)

Dir. S. Lumet, Prod. W. Miner, Perf. R. Steiger, DVD, 116 mins.

*Sound of Music, The* (Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1965)

Dir. R. Wise, Prod. R. Wise, Perf. J. Andrews, DVD, 174 mins.

### 1970 – 1979

*Angel Levine, The* (United Artists, USA, 1970)

Dir. J. Kadar, Prod. C. Schultz, Perf. Z. Mostel, DVD, 104 mins.

*Annie Hall* (United Artists, USA, 1977)

Dir. W. Allen, Prod. R. Greenhut, Perf. W. Allen, DVD, 93 mins.

*Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, The* (Paramount, CAN/USA, 1974)

Dir. T. Kotcheff, Prod. G. Schneider, Perf. R. Dreyfus, VHS, 120 mins.

*Dog Day Afternoon* (Artists Entertainment Complex/Warner Brothers, USA, 1975)

Dir. S. Lumet, Prod. M. Bregman, Perf. A. Pachino, DVD, 125 mins.

*Fiddler on the Roof* (United Artists, USA, 1971)

Dir. N. Jewison, Prod. N. Jewison, Perf. C. Topol, DVD, 181 mins.

*Fritz the Cat* (Steve Krantz Productions/MGM, USA, 1972)

Dir. R. Bakshi, Prod. S. Krantz, Perf. S. Hinnant, DVD, 78 mins.

*Funny Lady* (Columbia Pictures, USA, 1975)

Dir. H. Ross, Prod. R. Stark, Perf. B. Streisand, DVD, 136 mins.

*Goodbye Girl, The* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1977)

Dir. H. Ross, Prod. R. Stark, Perf. R. Dreyfuss, DVD, 111 mins.

*Heartbreak Kid, The* (Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1972)

Dir. E. May, Prod. E.J. Scherick, Perf. C. Grodin, DVD, 106 mins.

*Hester Street* (Midwest Films, USA, 1975)

Dir. J. Micklin Silver, Prod. R.D. Silver, Perf. C. Kane, DVD, 90 min.

*Last of the Red Hot Lovers, The* (Paramount, USA, 1972)

Dir. G. Saks, Prod. H.W. Koch, Perf. A. Arkin, DVD, 97 mins.

*Love Story* (Paramount Pictures, USA, 1970)

Dir. A. Hiller, Prod. H.G. Minsky, Perf. A. MacGraw, DVD, 99 mins.

*Made for Each Other* (Wylde Films, USA, 1971)

Dir. R.B. Bean, Prod. R. Townshend, Perf. R. Taylor, VHS, 100 mins.

*Minnie and Mosvowitz* (Universal Pictures, USA, 1971)  
 Dir. J. Cassavetes, Prod. A. Ruban, Perf. G. Rowlands, VHS, 115 mins.

*Norma Rae* (Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1979)  
 Dir. M. Ritt, Prod. T. Asseyev et al, Perf. S. Field, DVD, 110 mins.

*Star is Born, A* (Barwood Films, USA, 1976)  
 Dir. F. Pierson, Prod. B. Streisand, Perf. B. Streisand, DVD, 139 mins.

*Way We Were, The* (Columbia Pictures, USA, 1973)  
 Dir. S. Pollack, Prod. R. Stark, Perf. B. Streisand, DVD, 118 mins.

*What's Up Doc?* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1972)  
 Dir. P. Bogdanovich, Prod. P. Bogdanovich, Perf. B. Streisand, DVD, 94 mins.

*Where's Poppa?* (United Artists, USA, 1970)  
 Dir. C. Reiner, Prod. M. Worth, Perf. G. Segal, VHS, 82 mins.

*Who is Harry Kellerman and Why is He Saying Those Terrible Things About Me?*  
 (Cinema Center Films, USA, 1971)  
 Dir. U. Grosbard, Prod. F.C. Caruso, Perf. D. Hoffman, VHS, 108 mins.

*Wiz, The* (Universal/Motown Pictures, USA, 1978)  
 Dir. S. Lumet, Prod. K. Harper et al, Perf. D. Ross, DVD, 134 mins.

#### 1980 – 1989

*American Pop* (Columbia, USA, 1981)  
 Dir. R. Bakshi, Prod. M. Abbot et al, Perf. R. Thompson, VHS, 96 mins.

*Biloxi Blues* (Universal, USA, 1988)  
 Dir. M. Nichols, Prod. M. Powell et al, Perf. M. Broderick, DVD, 106 mins.

*Brighton Beach Memoirs* (Universal, USA, 1986)  
 Dir. G. Saks, Prod. D. Chasman, Perf. J. Silverman, DVD, 108 mins.

*Chariots of Fire* (Twentieth Century Fox Film Co., UK, 1981)  
 Dir. H. Hudson, Prod. D. Puttnam et al, Perf. N. Farrell, DVD, 124 mins.

*Crossing Delancey* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1988)  
 Dir. J. Micklin Silver, Prod. M. Nozik, Perf. A. Irving, DVD, 97 mins.

*Daniel* (Paramount, USA/UK, 1983)  
 Dir. S. Lumet, Prod. E.L. Doctorow et al, Perf. T. Hutton, DVD, 130 mins.

*Diner* (MGM, USA, 1982)  
 Dir. B. Levinson, Prod. J. Weintraub, Perf. S. Guttenberg, VHS, 110 mins.

*Dirty Dancing* (Vestron Pictures, USA, 1987)  
 Dir. E. Ardolino, Prod. L. Gottlieb, Perf. J. Grey, DVD, 100 mins.

*Fox and the Hound, The* (Walt Disney, USA, 1981)  
 Dir. T. Berman/R. Rich, Prod. R. Miller, Perf. M. Rooney, DVD, 83 mins.

*Jazz Singer, The* (EMI Films, USA, 1980)  
 Dir. R. Fleischer, Prod. J. Leider et al, Perf. N. Diamond, DVD, 115 mins.

*Mrs. Delafield Wants to Marry* (TVM, CBS, USA, 1986)  
 Dir. G. Schaefer, Prod. M.H. Karpf, Perf. K. Hepburn, DVD, 95 mins.

*New York Stories* (Touchstone Pictures, USA, 1989)  
 Dir. W. Allen et al, Prod. C.H. Joffe, Perf. W. Allen, DVD, 124 mins.

*Private Benjamin* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1980)  
 Dir. H. Zieff, Prod. G. Hawn, Perf. G. Hawn, DVD, 109 mins.

*Sophie's Choice* (ITC, UK/USA, 1983)

Dir. A.J. Pakula, Prod. M. Starger, Perf. M. Streep, DVD, 150 mins.  
*Stardust Memories* (Rollins-Joffe Productions, USA, 1980)  
 Dir. W. Allen, Prod. J. Rollins, Perf. W. Allen, DVD, 89 mins.  
*Torch Song Trilogy* (New Line Cinema, USA, 1988)  
 Dir. P. Bogart, Prod. R.K. Fierstein, Perf. H. Fierstein, VHS, 120 mins.  
*When Harry Met Sally...* (Castle Rock, USA, 1989)  
 Dir. R. Reiner, Prod. N. Ephron et al, Perf. M. Ryan, DVD, 96 mins.  
*Witness* (Paramount, USA, 1985)  
 Dir. P. Weir, Prod. W. Weir et al, Perf. H. Ford, DVD, 112 mins.  
*Yentl* (United Artists, USA, 1983)  
 Dir. B. Streisand, Prod. L. DeWaay, Perf. B. Streisand, VHS, 132 mins.  
*Zelig* (Orion Pictures, USA, 1983)  
 Dir. W. Allen, Prod. J. Rollins et al, Perf. W. Allen, DVD, 79 mins.

### 1990 – 1999

*Avalon* (Columbia, USA, 1990)  
 Dir. B. Levinson, Prod. M. Johnson et al, Perf. L. Fuchs, VHS, 126 mins.  
*Beautician and the Beast, The* (Paramount, USA, 1997)  
 Dir. K. Kwapis, Prod. F. Drescher et al, Perf. F. Drescher, DVD, 105 mins.  
*Bugsy* (TriStar, USA, 1991)  
 Dir. B. Levinson, Prod. B. Levinson et al, Perf. W. Beatty, VHS, 136 mins.  
*Cemetery Club, The* (Touchstone Pictures, USA, 1993)  
 Dir. B. Duke, Prod. H. Hurst et al, Perf. E. Burstyn, DVD, 106 mins.  
*Corrina, Corrina* (New Line Cinema, USA, 1994)  
 Dir. J. Nelson, Prod. B. Goldman et al, Perf. W. Goldberg, DVD, 115 mins.  
*Deconstructing Harry* (Sweetland Films, USA, 1997)  
 Dir. W. Allen, Prod. J.E. Beaucaire, Perf. W. Allen, VHS, 96 mins.  
*Giving it Up* (Lions Gate Films, USA, 1999)  
 Dir. C. Kublan, Prod. D. Bigel et al, Perf. M. Feuerstein, VHS, 90 mins.  
*Goodfellas* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1990)  
 Dir. M. Scorsese, Prod. I. Winkler, Perf. R. Liotta, DVD, 146 mins.  
*Jungle Fever* (40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks, USA, 1991)  
 Dir. S. Lee, Prod. S. Lee, Perf. W. Snipes, DVD, 132 mins.  
*Liberty Heights* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1999)  
 Dir. B. Levinson, Prod. B. Levinson, Perf. B. Foster, DVD, 127 mins.  
*Miami Rhapsody* (Hollywood Pictures, USA, 1995)  
 Dir. D. Frankel, Prod. J. Kerner et al, Perf. S.J. Parker, VHS, 105 mins.  
*Miss Rose White* (TVM, Hallmark Productions/NBC, USA, 1992)  
 Dir. J. Sargent, Prod. M. Rees, Perf. K. Sedgwick, VHS, 100 mins.  
*Mr. Saturday Night* (Castle Rock, USA, 1992)  
 Dir. B. Crystal, Prod. B. Mandel, Perf. B. Crystal, VHS, 119 mins.  
 “Nanny, The” (Series, CBS, USA, 1993-1999)  
 Dir. D. Lyman et al, Prod. F. Drescher et al, Perf. F. Drescher, TV, N/A.  
*Preacher’s Wife, The* (Touchstone Pictures, USA, 1996)  
 Dir. P. Marshall, Prod. E. Abbott, Perf. D. Washington, DVD, 124 mins.  
*Pretty Woman* (Touchstone Pictures, USA, 1990)

Dir. G. Marshall, Prod. L. Ziskin, Perf. J. Roberts, DVD, 119 mins.  
*Price Above Rubies, A* (Miramax, UK/USA, 1998)  
 Dir. B. Yakin, Prod. The Weinsteins, Perf. R. Zellweger, DVD, 117 mins.  
*Prince of Tides, The* (Columbia, USA, 1991)  
 Dir. B. Streisand, Prod. C. Corman et al, Perf. N. Nolte, DVD, 132 mins.  
*Reality Bites* (Jersey Films, USA, 1994)  
 Dir. B. Stiller, Prod. S. Sher et al, Perf. W. Ryder, AVI, 99 mins.  
*School Ties* (Paramount, USA, 1992)  
 Dir. R. Mandel, Prod. D. Rissner et al, Perf. B. Fraser, VHS, 106 mins.  
*Shadowlands* (Price Entertainment, UK, 1993)  
 Dir. R. Attenborough, Prod. T. Clegg, Perf. A. Hopkins, DVD, 115 mins.  
*Shadows and Fog* (Orion Pictures, USA, 1991)  
 Dir. W. Allen, Prod. C.H. Joffe, Perf. W. Allen, DVD, 85 mins.  
*Sleepless in Seattle* (TriStar, USA, 1993)  
 Dir. N. Ephron, Prod. L. Obst et al, Perf. M. Ryan, VHS, 105 mins.  
*Stranger Among Us, A* (Hollywood Pictures, USA, 1992)  
 Dir. S. Lumet, Prod. C. Baum et al, Perf. M. Griffiths, VHS, 110 mins.  
*Sunshine* (Alliance Atlantis, GER/AUS/CAN/HUN, 1999)  
 Dir. I. Szabó, Prod. J. Debin et al, Perf. R. Fiennes, DVD, 181 mins.  
*There's Something About Mary* (Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1998)  
 Dir. Farrelly Bros, Prod. F. Beddor et al, Perf. B. Stiller, DVD, 119 mins.  
*Walk on the Moon, A* (Miramax, USA, 1999)  
 Dir. T. Goldwyn, Prod. G. Burke et al, Perf. D. Lane, DVD, 107 mins.  
*Wedding Singer, The* (New Line Cinema, USA, 1998)  
 Dir. F. Coraci, Prod. B. Grey et al, Perf. A. Sandler, DVD, 95 mins.  
*White Palace* (Universal, USA, 1990)  
 Dir. L. Mandoki, Prod. S. Pollack, Perf. S. Sarandon, DVD, 103 mins.  
*You've Got Mail* (Warner Brothers, USA, 1998)  
 Dir. N. Ephron, Prod. G.M. Brown et al, Perf. M. Ryan, DVD, 119 mins.

### **2000 – 2009**

*Along Came Polly* (Universal, USA, 2004)  
 Dir. J. Hamburg, Prod. J. Bartelme, Perf. Ben Stiller, DVD, 90 mins.  
 “Angels in America” (Miniseries, HBO, US, 2003)  
 Dir. M. Nichols, Prod. C. Brokaw et al, Perf. J. Kirk, DVD, 352 min (6 pts)  
*Anger Management* (Columbia, USA, 2003)  
 Dir. P. Segal, Prod. A. Sander et al, Perf. A. Sandler, DVD, 106 mins.  
*Anything Else* (Dreamworks, USA, 2003)  
 Dir. W. Allen, Prod. J. Rollins et al, Perf. J. Biggs, DVD, 108 mins.  
*Bee Movie* (Dreamworks, USA, 2007)  
 Dir. S. Hickner, S. J. Smith, Prod. J. Seinfeld, Perf. J. Seinfeld, DVD, 91 mins.  
*Bee Season* (Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 2005)  
 Dir. S. McGehee/D. Siegel, Prod. A. Milchan et al, Perf. R. Gere, DVD, 104 mins.  
*Believer, The* (Lions Gate Films, USA, 2001)  
 Dir. H. Bean, Prod. D. Diamond et al, Perf. R. Gosling, DVD, 102 mins.

*Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (Universal, USA/UK, 2004)  
 Dir. B. Kidron, Prod. L. Chasin, Perf. R. Zellweger, DVD, 108 mins.

*Brooklyn Babylon* (Artisan, USA/FR, 2001)  
 Dir. M. Levin, Prod. A. Gibney et al, Perf. T. Trotter, DVD, 89 mins.

“Curb Your Enthusiasm” (Series, HBO, US, 2000-2009)  
 Dir. R.B. Weide et al, Prod. L. David et al, Perf. L. David, DVD/TV, N/A.

*Elegy* (Sony Pictures, USA, 2008)  
 Dir. I. Coixet, Prod. J. Malkin et al, Perf. B. Kingsley, DVD, 112 mins.

*Flannel Pajamas* (Gigantic Pictures, USA, 2006)  
 Dir. J. Lipsky, Prod. J. Gray, Perf. J. Kirk, DVD, 124 mins.

*Hebrew Hammer, The* (Intrinsic Value Films/Comedy Central Films, USA, 2003)  
 Dir. J. Kesselman, Prod. J. Schmidt et al, Perf. A. Goldberg, DVD, 85 mins.

*Invention of Lying, The* (Focus Features, USA, 2009)  
 Dir. R. Gervais/M. Robinson, Prod. R. Gervais, Perf. R. Gervais, DVD, 99 mins.

*Juno* (Fox Searchlight, USA/CAN, 2007)  
 Dir. J. Reitman, Prod. J. Malkovich, Perf. E. Page, DVD, 96 mins.

*Keeping the Faith* (Touchstone Pictures, USA, 2000)  
 Dir. E. Norton, Prod. J. Glickman et al, Perf. B. Stiller, DVD, 128 mins.

*Keeping Up With the Steins* (Miramax, USA, 2006)  
 Dir. S. Marshall, Prod. A.D. Oppenheim, Perf. D. Sabara, DVD, 90 mins.

*Kissing Jessica Stein* (Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA, 2001)  
 Dir. C. Herman-Wurmfeld, Prod. B. Zions, Perf. J. Westfeldt, VHS, 97 mins.

*Knocked Up* (Universal Pictures, USA, 2007)  
 Dir. J. Apatow, Prod. J. Apatow, Perf. S. Rogen, DVD, 129 mins.

*Meet the Fockers* (Universal Pictures, USA, 2004)  
 Dir. J. Roach, Prod. R. De Niro, Perf. B. Stiller, DVD, 115 mins.

*Meet the Parents* (Universal Pictures, USA, 2000)  
 Dir. J. Roach, Prod. R. De Niro, Perf. B. Stiller, DVD, 108 mins.

*Notebook, The* (New Line Cinema, USA, 2004)  
 Dir. N. Cassavetes, Prod. T. Emmerich et al, Perf. R. Gosling, DVD, 123 mins.

*Prime* (Focus Features, USA, 2005)  
 Dir. B. Younger, Prod. M. Gordon et al, Perf. U. Thurman, DVD, 105 mins.

*Rachel Getting Married* (Sony Pictures, USA, 2008)  
 Dir. J. Demme, Prod. C. Cuddy, Perf. A. Hathaway, DVD, 113 mins.

*Serious Man, A* (Focus Features, USA, 2009)  
 Dir. J. & E. Coen, Prod. T. Bevan et al, Perf. M. Stuhlbarg, DVD, 106 min.

*Something New* (Gramercy Pictures, USA, 2006)  
 Dir. S. Hamri, Prod. P. Holmes, Perf. S. Lathan, DVD, 99 mins.

*Something's Gotta Give* (Columbia Pictures, USA, 2003)  
 Dir. N. Meyers, Prod. B.A. Block, Perf. D. Keaton, DVD, 128 mins.

*Spanglish* (Columbia Pictures, USA, 2004)  
 Dir. J.L. Brooks, Prod. J. Bradshaw et al, Perf. A. Sandler, DVD, 131 mins.

*Twilight* (Summit Entertainment, USA, 2008)  
 Dir. C. Hardwicke, Prod. M. Bowen et al, Perf. K. Stewart, DVD, 122 mins.

*Two Lovers* (2929 Productions, USA, 2008)  
 Dir. J. Gray, Prod. M. Cuban et al, Perf. J. Phoenix, DVD, 110 mins.

*You Don't Mess with the Zohan* (Happy Madison Productions, USA, 2008)  
Dir. D. Dugan, Prod. R. Smigel et al, Perf. A. Sandler, DVD, 113 mins.

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