

The Melting Plot: Interethnic Romance in Jewish American Fiction in  
the Early Twentieth Century

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## ABSTRACT

### The Melting Plot: Interethnic Romance in Jewish American Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century

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This dissertation argues that interethnic romance narratives reflect and express central religious, political, racial, and gendered identities and agendas of Jewish American literature and culture in the early twentieth century. Chapter One shows that fin-de-siècle Reform Jewish women authors employed interethnic romance narratives to express a belief in America as exceptional as a place of religious and gender egalitarianism. Chapter Two turns to journalist and fiction writer Abraham Cahan, who wrote interethnic romance narratives to weigh the balance between idealism and pragmatism, socialist universalist values and the principles of Jewish nationalism in determining the character of Jewishness in America. Chapter Three demonstrates that Jewish American women's popular fictions of interethnic romance in the 1920s employed interethnic romance plots to show women's independence and mobility in light of early feminism and to express the limitations of feminist discourse when it ran counter to their ethnic identities. Chapter Four describes how narratives of interethnic romance written by Yiddish writers I. I. Shvarts, Joseph Opatoshu, Isaac Raboy, and David Ignatov employ tropes of interethnic romance together with geographical border crossings into non-immigrant or non-Jewish spaces, co-locating physical dislocation and disorientation and intimate interpersonal desire and unease. Together, these studies demonstrate the significance of interethnic romance in the American Jewish collective imaginary in this period and reveal the flexibility and longevity of this central theme in American Jewish discourse.

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## Introduction

In 1903, American Yiddish dramatist Leon Kobrin published a short story, “*Barukh Dayan Emes*” [“Blessed is the True Judge”] in a collection of stories he called “ghetto dramas” that depicted, using the tools of realism and of melodrama, the trials of East European Jewish immigrants to America at the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> Kobrin, who had immigrated to the United States in 1892 and was one of the earliest Yiddish writers to describe East European Jewish immigrant life in America, was successful on both sides of the ocean, bringing to Yiddish readers an image of American immigrant life as varied and, in the words of his translator Isaac Goldberg, “exotic.”<sup>2</sup> The story is told from the perspective of poor, illiterate Jewish widow Basha who sees promise and possibility in her beautiful and educated daughter Hanneleh. Despite her misgivings about losing a daughter she holds so dear, Basha sells her home to finance her daughter’s journey to America to find a marriage partner who will bring her wealth. Invoking God’s justice as she sees her daughter off at the railway station, Basha already acknowledges through her use of the traditional formula spoken at a time of death (“*barukh dayan emes*”) that her daughter’s departure is akin to her ultimate loss. Yet Basha continues to lose her daughter as she lacks control of their relationship, which is mediated through a town scribe who reads Hanneleh’s letters aloud and composes Basha’s responses, and as she becomes

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Kobrin, “Baruch Dayan Emes,” in *Ertseylungen: Geto Dramas* (New York: A Hillman, 1903), 40-54. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Yiddish in this Diss. are my own. In her article “Khava and Her Sisters: Sholem-aleichem and the Lost Girls of 1905,” Olga Litvak argues that this story may have been the basis for Sholem Aleichem’s story “Chava” from his cycle about Tevye the Dairyman. *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no.3, (2009): 1-38.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Goldberg, “Introduction” to Leon Kobrin, *A Lithuanian Village*, trans. Isaac Goldberg (New York: Brentano’s, 1920), v-x, vi.

increasingly unable to understand her daughter's thoughts and experiences – her worldliness and her political tendencies - which illustrate a profound and ever widening cultural gap. This culminates in Hannaleh's final letter, in which she confesses to her mother that she has married a Christian, although she knows that the marriage will cause her mother great pain. She explains, "Please don't think, dear mother, that a Christian is any less a human than a Jew is... All human beings are brothers." Through this formulation, Hannaleh demonstrates that her affiliation to her newfound socialist universalism has shaped her worldview such that is incompatible with her mother's experience, in a town called "Pogromovka," of violence and oppression engendered by religious, national, and racial difference.

Depending on the sympathies of the reading audience, this story may appear as a cautionary tale about America as a place where Jewish affiliation is utterly lost, where Jews become strangers to their past and disloyal, even hurtful, to the vulnerable and powerless Jewish communities they leave behind in Europe. However, it may also appear as a triumphant tale of a young woman who overcomes her mother's struggles, ignorance, and trauma by going to a place where "all human beings are brothers" is a truism that can be lived out, a place free of the Old World religious and cultural animosities that prevent true equality.<sup>3</sup> Although to Basha, Hannaleh's marriage is a great tragedy akin to a death, to Hannaleh it is a moment of hope, oriented toward a future in which old prejudices can be eschewed in the great American melting pot.

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<sup>3</sup> Such a reading is supported in comparing this story to Kobrin's 1899 novel, *Yankl Boyle*, set in a Russian village on the Dnieper River, in which a handsome young man, Yankl, in love with a Russian peasant girl named Natasha and duty-bound to marry his Jewish cousin Khayke, kills himself when he learns that Natasha is pregnant with his child. In a Russian context, interethnic romance is tragic, but in an American context interethnic romance may mean the escape from such tragedy. See Leon Kobrin, *Yankel Boyle: fun dem Idishen fisher-leben in Rusland, un andere ertsehlungen* (New York: Realistic Library, 1898).

In either case, for both Hannaleh's Americanizing generation and Basha's generation languishing in the Old Country, America represents complete and utter transformation, and the ultimate symbol for that transformation is love and marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew. Setting his story from the perspective of a woman who has never seen and cannot understand America, Kobrin suggests that to the Jews of Eastern Europe, and perhaps to the transnational Yiddish readership writ large, Jewish immigrants' romance with American culture and the transformations they underwent constituted a change in loyalty and identity akin to intermarriage and to conversion.<sup>4</sup> In the Jewish literary imaginary, America and interethnic romance, whether regarded as symbols of progress or of loss, are intertwined, even interchangeable, ideas.

Interethnic romance is a central device in Jewish American literature in the early twentieth century for examining Jews' relationship with American religious and secular cultures, American people, and American spaces. In this dissertation, interethnic romance refers to love or marriage plots and scenarios between characters who identify as Jewish, in terms of family, culture, and background, and those who do not identify as Jewish (including those who convert outside of Judaism or pass as non-Jewish). Interfaith romance, a term also employed in this dissertation, refers specifically to love between those who identify with a religious confession, and who see potential conflict or obstacles in their romance as stemming from differences in religious belief and practice.<sup>5</sup> In this dissertation, interethnic romance is a broader term,

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<sup>4</sup> A 1909 article from the Warsaw-based Yiddish newspaper *Haynt*, for instance, demonstrates an impression that marriages between Jews and non-Jews in America are commonplace, and that the Reform rabbis who perform them do not treat them with deliberateness or seriousness. See "Gemishte Khasenes in Amerike," *Haynt*, October 15, 1909, 2.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "interfaith romance" largely in Chapter One, which discusses writing by Reform Jews who employed the language of faith and religion in their discussions of romances, and made specific reference to religious tradition as a hindrance to such romances. Nevertheless, differences in family background, heritage, and

inclusive of interfaith romance, that encompasses love across class, religious belief, social status, and immigrant status, insofar as it occurs between a Jew and a non-Jew.

This dissertation uses the terms “intermarriage,” “interfaith romance” and “interethnic romance” (and occasionally “interracial romance/marriage”) to describe similar phenomena that were viewed somewhat differently depending on the contexts in which they were deployed. Because Jews have long been, and continue to be, defined both as a religious group with a shared set of beliefs and practices and as a descent-based group with shared culture or blood, the term intermarriage is indeterminate and non-committal as to the nature of the “Jew” and “non-Jew”

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blood figure prominently in these narratives that I have labeled as “interfaith.” I have employed the term “interethnic romance” in the following chapters (with some exceptions), in which often religious difference is not directly referenced or is not the primary concern, and questions of family, culture, heritage, and blood are of primary interest as factors that separate Jews from non-Jews. Here again, matters of faith and practice have relevance in these “interethnic” romantic settings, as do class differences (many of these romances could just as easily be labeled “inter-class” romances), but I believe that for these authors matters of family and culture are the strongest signifiers that tend to stand in for and encompass these other metrics of difference. I have avoided the term “interracial” to describe these romances because of the tendency, in American discourse, for the term “racial” to be assigned to differences in skin tone, though racial thinking about Jews was certainly prevalent in this period. In the United States, interracial implies interaction across the color line, between someone viewed as ‘white’ and someone viewed as ‘non-white.’ While the whiteness of Jews in this period was in question, in comparison with groups such as Native Americans and African Americans, they held a stronger claim on whiteness and its privileges, and the term “interracial” might be misleading in this context. In avoiding the use of “interracial,” I have adopted the term “ethnic,” which came into circulation in an academic context in the 1960s, and thus would not have been familiar to, or employed by, the subjects of this study. Ethnicity is a notoriously ambiguous and slippery concept. According to the definition set forth by Stephen Cornell and Douglass Hartman, ethnic groups share a belief in a common descent, based on shared physical resemblance, cultural practices, or historical experience of intergroup interaction. In America, ethnicity is often related to a shared group identity around the memory of emigration and a shared country of origin. Ethnic identities are both externally assigned and internally asserted, which is to say that ethnic groups like Jewish Americans form not only around shared identity and culture, but also a shared experience of being labeled by other Americans as an ethnic group, and fashioning a collective identity to suit a political and social environment in which such identities are rewarded, in a process Jonathan Sarna has discussed as ‘ethnicization.’ Because today in America Jews and Jewish histories are often understood under this rubric of ethnicity, I have used this term in my work. Stephen Cornell and Douglass Hartman, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 2007); Jonathan Sarna, “From Immigrants to Ethnics: Toward a New Theory of ‘Ethnicization,’” *Ethnicity* 5 (1978): 370-378.

between whom the marriage is conducted.<sup>6</sup> No such term has been coined to describe romances between a Jew and a non-Jew (“interromance”?) and my usage of both the terms “interethnic romance” and “interfaith romance” demonstrates the difficulties of defining these communities along these two separate but related rubrics. Indeed, this dissertation is largely about, and sheds light on, the interrelatedness of class, ethnicity, and faith as categories of difference between Jews and others and as metrics of Jewish unity.<sup>7</sup>

A historical approach to intermarriage in American Jewish history obscures the importance of the idea of interethnic romance in this period: because of the low incidence of intermarriage, historians tend to dismiss the idea of interethnic romance as unimportant to Jewish American thinking at this time.<sup>8</sup> Intermarriage rates are both low and difficult to document, and

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<sup>6</sup> As Leora Batnitzky explains, the question of whether Judaism is a religion, a culture, or a nationality has been central to modern Jewish thought since the eighteenth century. Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> My choices in labeling romances as “interethnic” or “interfaith” demonstrate how Jewish affiliation and identification shifted from the realm of religion to a more diffuse, secular, and racialized realm of identification in America during the early twentieth century. Nevertheless these are not easy or complete distinctions, as even avowedly antireligious texts draw on real and imagined differences in beliefs and practices between Jews and non-Jews that derive from religious tradition, as well as employing religious symbols (like the cross in Ignatov’s “Fibi,” discussed in Chapter Four) to stand in for racialized ideas of otherness in addition to their original religious valence. It may be that romances between Jews and non-Jews are among the instances in which the conflation of, and slippage between religion and ethnicity in Jewish communal identity-making are at their strongest.

<sup>8</sup> Despite the strong symbolic value placed on romance between Jews and non-Jews in the sphere of Jewish literature, scholars tend to agree that rates of marriage between Jews and non-Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (in contrast to both earlier and later periods) in reality were quite low. There are no statistics and it is impossible to speculate about romances between Jews and non-Jews that did not involve marriage, but presumably the rates of marriage correspond with similarly low rates of romances. While according to some estimates Jewish intermarriage in the colonial period accounted for 10 to 15 percent of all Jewish marriages, and according to another estimate between the years 1776 and 1840, the rate of Jewish intermarriage was 28.7 percent, in 1908 the intermarriage rate for Jews was less than 2 percent, and it remained around 3 percent until the 1940s. The discrepancy in numbers between the earlier and later periods is due in a large part to the onset of the large Eastern European immigration at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as an increased presence of Jewish infrastructure, including clergy, who could offer policies to regulate and prevent such marriages. In the period between 1908 and the 1940s, scholars explain that there are many reasons for the low intermarriage rate, having to do with East European Jews’ more traditional outlook and practices and American

the historical record does not include flirtations, thoughts and desires about interethnic romance that do not end in marriage. This dissertation asserts and uncovers the central role that the idea of romance between Jews and non-Jews, even when unconsummated, rejected, or only fantasized, plays in the Jewish American imaginary in this period. In this regard, a full historical account of American Jewry in this period requires an examination not only of sociological trends, but also of the collective imaginary, which situates the non-Jew as an object of desire and fear.

In my reading of Jewish texts representing interethnic romance in this period, romance with non-Jews is not only the rare exception of marital assimilation that proves the rule that Jews resisted ‘total assimilation’ in America, nor does it only represent the lofty faraway goal of achieving the American Dream. Often, in the literature of this period, interethnic romance is a

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xenophobia toward these more foreign-seeming immigrants (factors that I will discuss at greater length later in this introduction). Even as East European Jews adjusted to American culture and gradually achieved socioeconomic mobility, entered the professions, obtained American educations, and accumulated social capital, a tendency toward residential segregation among Jews that was propelled both by discriminatory housing practices and social stigma among non-Jews and by Jewish preferences to be among those who shared their religious and cultural affiliations contributed to low rates of intermarriage. As Jonathan Sarna explains, middle class Jews constituted a separate subculture, a “parallel universe” that had institutions similar to that of the American middle class but was composed entirely of Jews. Intermarriage was unlikely to occur because “besides the religious taboo against intermarriage, young Jews and Christians did not interact enough to fall in love.” Consequentially, historical studies of Jewish American experiences of love, romance, courtship, and marriage, tend to mention interethnic romance only briefly, while the topic was of central importance in the imagination of Jewish American writers and readers, who saw it as representative of the process of modernization and Americanization and its dangers. See Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (Yale University Press, 2004), 27, 45, 222; Malcom H. Stern, “The Function of Genealogy in American Jewish History,” in *Essays in American Jewish History to Commemorate the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Jewish Archives* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1958), 85; Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492-1776* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 1232; Malcom H. Stern, “Jewish Marriage and Intermarriage in the Federal Period (1776-1840),” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 19 (1967): 142-144; Gerald Sorin, *Tradition Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 167-168; In her article “Interfaith Families in Victorian America,” Anne C. Rose gives a rough overall estimate for intermarriage during the nineteenth century as between 5 and 10 percent of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. See *Moral Problems in American Life: New Perspectives on Cultural History*, ed. Karen Halttunen and Lewis Perry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 223-244, 226.

commonplace threat that undermines parents' relationships with their children and Jewish individuals' relationship with traditions of the past and opportunities for the future. Interethnic romance stands in for participation in American urban capitalism, American Christian religious ideals, American racialist and socioeconomic hierarchical beliefs, and American ideologies of gender (both in terms of emerging feminisms and bourgeois gender norms). While interethnic romance was the primary narrative of American national unity and the assimilability of new immigrants in mainstream American political and popular culture of this period, Jewish American authors, aware of this discourse, resisted and repurposed interethnic romance plots to support their criticisms and concerns about individual and communal Jewish participation in American culture. The literary historical approach of this dissertation reveals the prevalence and immediacy of interethnic romance in the collective imagination of American Jews in this period, even as the incidence of intermarriage itself was low.

This dissertation also intervenes in the landscape of American Jewish literary history by placing analyses of Yiddish and English language literature alongside one another, grouped around one central theme. While this dissertation places the texts within their generic, linguistic and aesthetic contexts, by situating these works of diverse genre, language, authorship and readership within the expanse of American Jewish literature in this period it demonstrates continuities throughout American Jewish discourse. Jewish writers representing interethnic romance composed texts with striking similarities, across major cultural and socioeconomic as well as linguistic divides. The authors examined in this dissertation employed interethnic romance to write about compelling desires for utopian universalism (whether from the perspective of Reform Jewish teleology, socialist political activism, or feminism) and the pragmatic, realistic desires for communal cohesiveness that undermine or delay those ideals.

They wrote from the convictions of left-leaning political principles (of socialism and of feminism) that required leaving behind tradition, and they revealed what might today be termed their ‘intersectional’ concerns that pushed back against the universalizing (and therefore pro-assimilation) tendencies of these political movements. There was a Jewish American dream of American success that resisted participation in central American institutions (including, in some instances, marriage itself), that these authors saw as potentially corrupting.

Moreover, in writing about interethnic romance, the authors in this study responded to and articulated not only what they felt about the intersection between Jewish and American identities and narratives, but also their innovations on, and participation within, trends in modern literature. They created popular literature that resisted the popular romance plot, modern literature that focused not only on the individual but also on the collective fate of his, or her, people. In this way, an examination of interethnic romance literature is crucial to unlocking the political, social, and literary commitments of Jewish American authors in this period.

Together with the examination of continuities between Yiddish and English Jewish American literature in this period, this dissertation takes into account both major figures in Jewish American literary history, such as Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yeziarska and Edna Ferber, contributing to the existing body of scholarship on these writers, and obscure authors such as Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust and Marianne Spitzer, about whom little or no scholarship exists, as well as major figures in American Yiddish history such as David Ignatov and Isaac Raboy, about whom little has been written in English. In this way, the dissertation extends the canon of Jewish American fiction, arguing that a full picture of Jewish American literature in this period must



take into account both popular and high culture, obscure, well-studied, and widely-circulated texts.

Even as it explores continuities between a diverse array of authors within a discourse of interethnic romance in Jewish American writing, this dissertation resists the notion of a singular “melting pot” narrative of assimilation through love between Jews and non-Jews. By exploring the gendered dimension of interethnic romance narratives, this dissertation uncovers a broad spectrum of “melting plots” that have a much to do with internal Jewish gender politics as they have to do with the Jewish literary imagination of non-Jewish America. Reading Jewish interethnic romance narratives of this period through the lens of gender reveals how Jewish women’s bodies were employed as instrumental to Jewish male continuity, how Jewish women asserted the need for womanly sensibilities in Jewish communal leadership through the strategic use of love plots, how interethnic love narratives could be a site for women’s self-empowerment, and how interethnic love plots offered a platform for a critique of Jewish men’s failures to live up to imagined American masculinities. Interethnic romance narratives are about defining men and women in relation to, and through, love and marriage, as well as, and alongside, defining Jews vis a vis a non-Jewish America. They are about determining the role of desire and love in making Jews modern, American, men, and women.

### **The Question of Jewish Assimilability in Early Twentieth Century America**

Despite low rates of Jewish intermarriage in the early twentieth century, the idea of intermarriage, of Jews as well as of other national groups, was prevalent in political and popular culture as a plot arc narrating ideologies of American national identity, and this explains its

currency in Jewish American literature. In the early twentieth century Jews' suitability to be a part of American society was a matter of public debate, and the idea of intermarriage took on great symbolic value as an illustration of the assimilability of the Jews. Love, romance, and marriage between Jews and non-Jews was part of a larger conversation about assimilation in America, during a time, between the 1890s and the 1920s, when, as historian John Higham explains, an "acute consciousness of assimilation as a problem marked a great crisis in ethnic relations."<sup>9</sup> While in the nineteenth century, he contends, the decentralization of American society allowed for a complex and contradictory diversity of relations between cultural, ethnic, and racial groups, the end of the nineteenth century saw a "fundamental change" during which Americans of Protestant, northern European backgrounds from all regions of America became aroused together against outsiders of all kinds, linking regional prejudices into a generalized national ethnocentrism just as American localities became increasingly economically interdependent through the growth of industrialism and bureaucracy.<sup>10</sup> As a centralized notion of American nationhood developed, it bore implications that America had, or ought to have, a singular racial identity as well. American nativists equated both African Americans and immigrants with impurity – the spread of crime, disease, immorality, and the corruption of the body of the nation through interracial breeding which would yield mixed or impure blood for the American body public.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Progressives, following the same impulse toward purifying the American polity, argued for an inclusive view of America that would bring new

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<sup>9</sup> John Higham, "Integrating into America: The Problem of Assimilation in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 1, (Fall 1981): 7-25, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

immigrants into the American fold, on the condition that these immigrants be trained to adopt American customs, beliefs, norms, and ideologies.<sup>12</sup>

Prominent American politicians, political thinkers, social scientists, and race scientists argued about the nature and responsibilities of American citizenship and national belonging, connecting these issues to characterizations of new immigrants as potentially assimilable or inassimilable to their ideas of what it meant to be American. Claiming to defend the interests of Anglo-American workers, politicians such as Senator James Blaine advocated for immigration restriction, beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, arguing that Chinese immigrants brought with them “impurity,” “moral and physical disease, destitution, and death.”<sup>13</sup> Blaine argued that the local issue of Chinese immigrants (97 percent of the nation’s 105,000 Chinese immigrants lived in the West) was of national significance because of potential competition with American workers and because of a desire for so-called race purity. He, and others, argued that Chinese immigrants threatened the white racial purity of America because they were racially inassimilable to whiteness and in their potential to amalgamate with the white race they might cause the “superior race” to deteriorate. With the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, precedent was set for future restrictions barring specific groups of people because of race and nationality, instituting an ideology of “gatekeeping” with regards to race and immigration in the United States.<sup>14</sup> According to the growing logic of American nationalism, immigrant groups

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Blaine’s speech to the Senate of the United States in 1879 is quoted in Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Erika Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3, (Spring 2002): 36-62.

were only welcome if they were assimilable into the white American mainstream – those who were racialized as permanently alien had to be kept out. While Chinese immigrants in America had long been treated by the state as racial outsiders, barred from testifying against whites and viewed as not eligible for citizenship, Jewish immigrants in America had long held the legal status of white, and their legal and social role in the American race and nation was fluid and under scrutiny during this period, particularly as a blurring of social boundaries between non-Jews and Jews of Central European origin who had been in America for several generations coincided with an influx of Eastern European Jewish immigrants whose linguistic difference, residential and occupational concentration made them appear distinctive and separate from the white majority.<sup>15</sup>

Jews, who belonged to a category that Matthew Jacobson terms “probationary whiteness,” were therefore the subject of a public debate, the terms of which was their fitness for assimilation versus the necessity of protecting the American body politic through their exclusion.<sup>16</sup> Race philosophers and eugenicists such as Madison Grant, who combined aristocratic sentiments with his background in natural sciences to articulate a philosophy of intellectual racism that drew upon Darwinian theory, racial science, and fears of European radicalism, argued that new immigrants would produce unfit offspring who threatened the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon American race.<sup>17</sup> As members of the “new immigrant” groups

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<sup>15</sup> Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11-50.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Charles Alexander, “Prophet of American Racism: Madison Grant and the Nordic Myth,” *Phylon* 23, no.1, (1962): 73-90.

from Southern and Eastern Europe, Jews, along with Italians, Poles, and other immigrant groups, were contrasted negatively with Americans of Western and Northern European origin and nativists argued for the concept of reversion – that intermixture between racial types in America would cause Americans to take on the primitive characteristics of the immigrants arriving at American shores.<sup>18</sup> These sentiments were not limited to the work of a few scientists and theorists – they were widely read and employed in the public sphere. Legislators read from Grant’s work *The Passing of the Great Race* as they argued for immigration restriction. Employing the language of race science, politicians such as Majority Whip Harold Knutson complained that immigration had a “mongrelizing” effect on American society.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, race science was also used in favor of race mixing. The literature on race, claiming the authority of science, was indefinite and indeterminate about the potential consequences of racial mixing of groups such as the Jews who held intermediate statuses.<sup>20</sup> Theodore Roosevelt argued that low birth rates among ‘native’ Americans led to the necessity for race mixing between old and new immigrants that would improve the “racestock” through bringing out the best qualities of each race of white immigrants.<sup>21</sup> Together with these race-based concerns, political leaders expressed fear about immigrants’ loyalty, particularly around World War I. Campaigning against “hyphenated Americanism,” leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt argued that immigrants should be “100 percent American,” not thinking in terms of their ethnic affiliations or their

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>19</sup> Bill Ong Hong, *Defining America: Through Immigration Policy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Anne C. Rose, *Beloved Strangers Interfaith Families in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 124.

<sup>21</sup> James R. Barrett and David Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no.3, (Spring, 1997): 3-44, p. 11.

country of origin, but as patriots who have left behind all other affiliations to declare their American loyalties.<sup>22</sup> This dovetailed with race thinking, as cultural differences such as language, hygiene, and political beliefs were understood as inherited racial traits.<sup>23</sup> Immigrants engaged and were compelled to engage in a process of Americanization through which they would lose their in-between racial status as well as their cultural differences and join the “American race” of whiteness.<sup>24</sup> In the increasingly nativist environment of the 1910s and 1920s, cultural differences were discouraged as politicians argued either for the exclusion of new immigrants, or for their complete assimilation into American society and the erasure of the particularities of their backgrounds.

As the debate about Jewish immigrants centered around the question of whether or not Jews were assimilable to an imagined American whiteness, the idea of romance and marriage took on particular significance as a symbol for the potential of Jews to transform themselves through marital union into American citizens, pledging allegiance to American civic and cultural norms through love. As marriage scholar Nancy Cott explains, “immigrants inclined toward desirable patterns of love and marriage... were seen as voluntarily choosing and contributing to what it meant to be free Americans,” participating in American gender norms and legal structures.<sup>25</sup> At a time when race science debated the nature of Jewishness in relation to racial

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<sup>22</sup> For a study of American presidents’ attitudes toward immigrants and nationhood, see Hans Peter Vought, “Redefining the ‘Melting Pot’: American Presidents and the Immigrant, 1897-1933,” PhD. Diss., University of Connecticut, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Barrett and Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples,” 12.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 155.

hierarchies of whiteness, tales of interethnic romance between Jews and non-Jews that circulated through popular culture suggested that Jews were physically, biologically, compatible with more accepted forms of American whiteness. Moreover, these Christian-Jewish coupling narratives sometimes took on additional significance wherein “the ‘Christian’ signified normativity, hegemony, and the nation-state, while the ‘Jew’ signified opposition, resistance, and cosmopolitanism,” thus, the coupling narrative allowed writers to explore the contested realm of political and social change through individual stories of romantic desire.<sup>26</sup> These narratives represented a utopian vision of assimilation that “brought discourses of European nativism and American multiculturalism into conversation,” especially reflecting a liberal ideology of American individualism and the possibility of self-transformation and socioeconomic uplift over and against loyalties of class or ethnic origin.<sup>27</sup> In popular forums, romance served as a vehicle for liberalism by “us[ing] sympathetic couples as a way for audiences to test and evaluate traditional hierarchies and outmoded values,” in particular calling upon audiences to reject the undemocratic values represented by the older generation opposing the romance and to celebrate the liberal ideologies embodied by young lovers from different backgrounds.<sup>28</sup>

In his work on American Jews’ deployment of, and placement within American racial discourse, Eric Goldstein notes that “whiteness was not stable and monolithic but was constantly

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<sup>26</sup> Joshua Louis Moss, “When Harry Met Sally: Coupling Narratives and the Christian-Jewish Love Story,” PhD. Diss., University of Southern California, 2012, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Moss, “When Harry Met Sally,” 12; Holly A. Pearse, “But Where Will They Build Their Nest? Liberalism and Communitarian Resistance in American Cinematic Portrayals of Jewish-Gentile Romances,” Ph.D. Diss., Wilfrid Laurier University, 2010, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Pearse, “But Where Will They Build Their Nest?” 16.

informed and reshaped by other competing identities.”<sup>29</sup> The interethnic romances discussed in this dissertation support this thesis, demonstrating that Jews did not simply learn and claim white status, but also, simultaneously, resisted ‘Americanization’ into a monolithic white culture through their class and gender orientations, religious sensibilities, and Jewish nationalist commitments. That interethnic romances could be imagined and desired without the threat of violence that such romances would provoke if they crossed the black/white racial divide is an indicator of the extent to which Jews in America operated within the privileged category of whiteness, even in narratives in which such romances were rejected. But this rejection signals what Goldstein calls the “hard choices and conflicting emotions” that accompanied American Jews’ search for a synthesis between Jewish and American forms of identity. On the part of the authors considered in this dissertation, the question of Jewish assimilability was not only about whether Jews could become part of American whiteness, but the extent to which Jews should desire such an outcome.<sup>30</sup>

## **Jewish Interethnic Romance in American Popular Culture**

In American popular culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, romantic encounters between Jews and other groups within the racial spectrum of American whiteness captured the American public’s imagination, especially in the realms of theater and cinema. American popular culture proliferated with fictional representations of marriage between white ethnic groups as a form of

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<sup>29</sup> Goldstein, *Price of Whiteness*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



racial and cultural “amalgamation” through which Americans would become a unified nation.<sup>31</sup> Novels and short stories such as Edward A. Steiner’s collection *The Broken Wall: Stories of the Mingling Folk* (1911) encouraged immigrants to embrace American social and cultural norms through tales of socioeconomic mobility through interethnic romance.<sup>32</sup> Cartoons like Hy Mayer’s “Hereditary Types” (*Judge*, 1895) about Catholic-Jewish intermarriage allowed for representations contrasting stereotypes of ethnic groups for comic effect, while also offering an opportunity for “self-righteous repudiation of Old World ‘un-American’ hatreds.”<sup>33</sup> Songs featuring Jewish-Irish romances, such as Fred Fischer and Alfred Bryan’s “Yiddisha Luck and Irisha Love,” (1911) and Jack Stern’s “There’s a Little Bit of Irish in Sadie Cohn” (1916) treated Jewish-Irish intermarriage with humor, affirming the ethnic markers of each culture through reflecting on the differences between them, while songs like “The Argentines, the Portuguese, and the Greeks” (1920) humorously expressed popular anxieties about racial mixing.<sup>34</sup> Plays such as Rita Wellman’s *The Gentile Wife* (1919), Augustus Thomas’s *As a Man Thinks* (1911),

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<sup>31</sup> Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 60. See also: Joyce Flynn, “Melting Plots: Patterns of Racial and Ethnic Amalgamation in American Drama Before Eugene O’Neill,” *American Quarterly* 38, (1986): 417-38; Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 118-57; Larry May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Kathleen Mari Fielder, “Fatal Attraction: Irish-Jewish Romance in Early Film and Drama,” *Eire: A Journal of Irish Studies* 20, (1985): 6-18; Thomas Cripps, “The Movie Jew as an Image of Assimilation, 1903-1927,” *Journal of Popular Film* 4, no.3, (1975): 190-207.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Alfred Steiner, *The Broken Wall: Stories of the Mingling Folk* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911).

<sup>33</sup> John J. Appel, “Jews in American Caricature: 1820-1914,” *American Jewish History* 71, no.1, (Sept. 1981): 103-134, p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> Ted Merwin, “The Performance of Jewish Ethnicity in Anne Nichols’ ‘Abie’s Irish Rose,’” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 2, (Winter 2001): 3-37, p. 11; “The Argentines, The Portuguese, and the Greeks,” *Visions and Divisions: American Immigration Literature, 1870-1930*, ed. Timothy Prchal and Tony Trigilio. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 181.

and Edward E. Rose's *Rosa Machree* (1922) represented interfaith marriage as a significant problem facing the modern American Jew.<sup>35</sup> Popular culture outlets targeted at Jews fed off these trends, exemplified by plays such as B. Botwinik's *Beylke maronetke oder di tayvlshe libe* ("Beylke Maronetke, or Devilish Love") (staged in 1913 and 1919 by the Yiddish Art Theater) and serialized novels such as A. M. Rubin's *Ihr kristlekher man* ("Her Christian Husband") (printed in 1915 in the newspaper *Varhayt*).

Most famously, Israel Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*, which opened in Washington, D. C. on October 5, 1908, supplied the leading metaphor for American assimilation (and inspired the title to this dissertation). As a work by an author who was then considered one of the leading writers in Britain, it generated early interest and was a topic of conversation among cultural consumers from its first performance. The play centers around Russian Jewish immigrant composer David Quixano's romance with Vera Revendal, the Greek Orthodox daughter of Baron Revendal, the commander of the Czarist troops that killed David's parents in a pogrom. David and Vera meet at a settlement house where they share their idealism about America and fall in love, leading David to forgive the Baron and propose marriage to Vera, declaring that America is a place where "all races and nations come to labour and look forward" rather than dwelling on the hatred and prejudices of the past.<sup>36</sup> The play was described through pre-performance publicity and by reviewers as a serious work, a play with a "Big Purpose" that contained

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<sup>35</sup> Rita Wellman, *The Gentile Wife* (New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1919); Augustus Thomas, *As a Man Thinks: A Play in Four Acts* (New York: Duffield, 1911); my knowledge of *Rosa Machree* comes from the following review: "Rosa Machree: Entertaining Play at Lexington," *New York Clipper*, January 18, 1922, p. 20. I am indebted to the following article for referring me to these plays: Edna Nachson, "Jewish American Drama" in *The Cambridge History of Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 224-241.

<sup>36</sup> Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot: A Drama in Four Acts* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 185.

“magnificent argument” about the meaning of America itself, which encouraged its consideration as a controversial work of social import.<sup>37</sup> As Werner Sollors explains, despite its “vague and self-conscious literary symbolism” the play has, since its earliest performance, been central to “discussions of American ethnic interaction.”<sup>38</sup>

*The Melting Pot* was only one of many such works that used intermarriage to articulate political and social platforms in relation to the role of new immigrants in American society. Ann Nichols’ *Abie’s Irish Rose*, which ran from 1922 until 1927 in New York, became a sensation with a record-setting 2,327 performances in New York and ran for months in cities across the country.<sup>39</sup> The play, thick with humor based in ethnic stereotypes, centers on the marriage of Abraham Levy, son of Jewish immigrants who speak in heavy Yiddish accents, and Rose Mary Murphy, a Catholic actress whom he met in France while serving in the American army during the First World War. As Ted Merwin explains, through intermarriage the play offers a vision of a “world free from prejudice” in which ethnic groups could exist side by side in peace and mutual respect, even within the same family, a vision that was appealing after the strife of the World War and in the face of American nativist xenophobia.<sup>40</sup> Capitalizing on the success of

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<sup>37</sup> Guy Szuberla, “Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot* Plays Chicago,” *MELUS* 20, no. 3, (1995): 3-20, p.6, quoting Amy Leslie, reviewer for the *Daily News*, October 21, 1908, p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 66.

<sup>39</sup> Merwin, “The Performance of Jewish Ethnicity in *Abie’s Irish Rose*,” 11, 18

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

*Abie's Irish Rose*, a large number of films about Jewish-Irish intermarriage appeared in its wake, many of which, like *The Cohens and the Kellys* (1926), enjoyed enormous popularity.<sup>41</sup>

The inclusion of an interethnic romance in a film of such technological and historical import as *The Jazz Singer* (1927), hailed by newspaper and magazine reports at the time as a breakthrough film, considered either the first talking film or the last silent film (with musical track and singing sequences) of the silent era, demonstrates the centrality of the interethnic romance plot in American popular culture in the early twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> The film's position as a cultural monument affixed interethnic romance as one of the quintessential tropes of American film. Much has been written about the racial masquerade that accompanies the plot of assimilation and secularization as Jackie Rabinowitz, the cantor's son, becomes Jack Robin, a jazz

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 12. Film scholar Patrica Erens explains that a marriage between Christian and Jew was a narrative element that constituted a happy ending for many Hollywood films by the 1920s, articulating a sense that Americans were being ushered into a new, modern era, and leaving behind the past. Erens notes that since the earliest American films, dramatic narratives centering on Jewish life depict families and are primarily interested in generational conflicts. Films such as *Becky Gets a Husband*, (1912), *The Jew's Christmas* (1913), *The Faith of Her Fathers* (1915), *The Barrier of Faith* (1915), and *We Americans* (1928) center on Jewish women who fall in love with non-Jewish men and face resistance from their stern, traditionally oriented fathers. Each of these films set a new generation valuing universalism and equality against an older generation of immigrants steeped in religious tradition and ethnic prejudice which is made to seem absurd and comical (in the comedy *Becky Gets a Husband*), outdated and able to be overcome and transformed through an act of love (in the dramas *The Jew's Christmas*, *The Barrier of Faith*, and *We Americans*) or noble but tragic (in the tragedy *The Faith of Her Fathers*). Contrariwise, films set in Europe such as *Broken Barriers* (1919), based on the story "Khava" by Sholem Aleichem, *Leah the Forsaken* (1908) and *Deborah or the Jewish Maiden's Wrong* (1914), which share a plot based on Augustin Daly's popular play *Leah the Forsaken*, itself adapted from the well-known German play *Deborah* by Salmon Mosenthal, deliver the tragic message of the impossibility of interethnic romance in a Europe steeped in racial prejudice. The failure of the romances in Europe stands in contrast to intermarriage films that take place in an American setting of freedom and equality in which such a love is not only possible but worthy of celebration. Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 74, 49, 32, 62, 74, 61; Edna Nahshon, "Introductory Essay to *The Melting Pot*" in *From Ghetto to Melting Pot: Israel Zangwill's Jewish Plays*, ed. Edna Nahshon (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 211-264, p. 254.

<sup>42</sup> For an account of media responses and box office data suggesting popular reception of the film, see Donald Crafton, "The Jazz Singer's Reception in the Media and at the Box Office" in *Post Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 460-480. He argues that Broadway statistics do not corroborate the legend of the film's initial success – it was moderately successful but not a Broadway smash, although *The Jazz Singer* later went on to become a national success.

singer.<sup>43</sup> The interethnic romance plot of the film contributes to the questions of passing, performance, and authenticity around which the film is built. Jack's romance with a non-Jewish woman, the dancer Mary Dale, serves to accentuate Robin's dilemmas of identification and performance. Positioned against Jack's mother as a representative of future rather than past, of Jack's love of secular theater in opposition to his love for family and for the traditional liturgical music of his father, Mary's presence seems to suggest Jack's turning away from his Jewish religious and ethnic past. The racial masquerade component of the film serves both to alienate Jack (as racially other) from Mary (as white) and to suggest that their union is possible precisely because Jack becomes coded as white through his blackface performance.<sup>44</sup> Through his conversations with and love for Mary, Jack articulates the conflicts of his double consciousness as an assimilating Jew, and the teleology of the romance plot suggests the ultimate success of his assimilating narrative as he moves from his mother's to his lover's world.<sup>45</sup>

It is in this context rife with popular representations of Jewish intermarriage as one of the key tropes through which Jews were presented to the broader American public in entertainment venues that the works discussed in this dissertation should be considered. Writing both alongside and against popular representations of Jewish intermarriage, the authors profiled in this dissertation, among others, created narratives of interethnic romance in part because these were

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Corin Willis, "Meaning and Value in *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927)" in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, ed. John Gibs and Douglas Pye (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 127-140.

<sup>44</sup> See Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*; Willis, "Meaning and Value."

<sup>45</sup> Willis, "Meaning and Value," 129-130.

the narratives of Jewish adjustment to America that were prominent and attractive in mainstream public performance.<sup>46</sup> In dialogue with these representations, Jewish authors celebrated the liberal politics of acceptance that these Americanizing narratives laid forth while resisting the complete erasure of Jewish religious or ethnic identity that such narratives tended to propose. Jewish authors wrote fictions of interethnic romance that drew upon, referenced, and argued against this archetypal assimilationist allegory. Just as popular American representations of interethnic romance served to narrate American national unity or to question it, Jewish authors wrote narratives of interethnic romance to define Jewish unity or to undermine it: Jewish authors wrestled with defining Jewish collective identity, variously weighing categories of race, nationhood, culture, gender, and religion, using the non-Jewish other of the intermarriage plot as a mirror in which to sharpen Jewish visions of communal boundaries and communal selfhood.

## **Interethnic Romance in Ethnic American Literatures in the Early Twentieth Century**

Like Jewish writers, authors from many other minority groups wrote narratives of interethnic romance in efforts to defend and uphold the separateness of their group in religious or ethnic terms or in an effort to argue for the assimilability of their group into American

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<sup>46</sup> Many Jewish authors who thematized interethnic romance in their works are not discussed in this Diss. because there was simply not space or time to do their work justice. Some of works that bear mentioning include (although this is also not an exhaustive list): Ezra Brudno's *The Tether* (1908), Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Island Within* (1928), Sydney Nyburg's *The Chosen People* (1917), Elias Tobenkin's *Witte Arrives* (1916), Lilian Lauferty's *The Street of Chains* (1929), Jacob Lazarre's *Beating Sea and Changeless Bar* (1905), Viola B. Shore's *The Heritage, and Other Stories* (1921), Myron Brinig's *This Man is My Brother* (1942), Nat J. Ferber's *One Happy Jew* (1934), Barukh Gloszman's *Af di Felder fun Dzshordzshiye* (1927), Lamed Shapiro's "Nyu Yorkish" (1931). I have written about Gloszman's and Shapiro's work elsewhere. See Jessica Kirzane, "'What Kind of a Man are You?' The Sexualization of Race and the Trope of Alienation in Yiddish American Narratives of Interethnic Sexual Encounter" in *The Sacred Encounter: Jewish Perspectives on Sexuality*, ed. Lisa Grushcow (New York: CCAR Press, 2104), 195-208.

nationhood. Writers from a variety of backgrounds drew upon the historical and cultural particularities of their group to create interethnic romance narratives that served their social, political, and aesthetic purposes. Multiethnic writers explored communal and national identities, broadening the definition of what it meant to be American and offering considerations about how ethnic groups could, should, and ought not to be incorporated into American society.<sup>47</sup> These authors tended, like the Jewish American writing examined in this dissertation, to resist the intermarriage plot by representing interethnic romance as a threat to ethnic solidarity and tradition. However, the interethnic romance narrative in Jewish literature is unique among these works both in the frequency of its appearance and in its engagement of the vexed question of defining Jewishness along multiple vectors of race, religion, class, gender, and language.

While Jewish authors argued for preservation of Jewish religious or ethnically-inflected moral traditions, Polish authors composed their narratives within the context of transnational Polish political loyalties and devotions to the injustices visited on their people in their collective homelands. According to scholar of Polish American literature Karen Majewski, intermarriage was a common plot device in Polish American literature post-World War I, through which Polish writers explore patriotism and national unity through a rejection of, especially, German or Russian potential lovers, representing the politics of Polish patriotism in light of the partition of Poland in domestic terms.<sup>48</sup> These political allegories are focused on transnational Polish unity

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<sup>47</sup>Molly Crumpton Winter, *American Narratives: Multiethnic Writing in the Age of Realism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 151.

<sup>48</sup> According to Majewski, the partition of Poland made its way into Polish American literature in the form of interethnic romance: for example in Henryk Nagiel's crime novel *God's Punishment Crosses the Ocean* (1896), a loveless marriage between a German baron and a wealthy Polish woman stands in for the relationship between Poland and its Prussian rulers, demonstrating Polish complicity in submitting to its powerful neighbors. Ultimately the theme of familial reunification and restoration of family property in the novel stands in for a political, patriotic

in the context of the Polish homeland, and are less concerned with Polish Americans as immigrants integrating into America than as emigrants maintaining Polishness in exile. In addition to these concerns specific to the contemporary political situation in Poland, Polish American literature of interethnic romance often illustrated anxieties about the transmission of family values and property across generations that threatened to forget the familial past.<sup>49</sup> In general, Polish American narratives of intermarriage tend to subvert and resist intermarriages for the sake of preservation of Polish property, land, and political nationhood, rather than an inherent sense of identity.

Irish American literature, on the other hand, used interethnic romance to represent an embattled Catholic religious tradition. In Irish American literature, intermarriage narratives tend to be cautionary tales in which characters refuse to sacrifice either family or salvation for the false idol of love or assimilation.<sup>50</sup> Whether the protagonist refuses to engage in an interfaith

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message of a return of Polish sovereignty. See Karen Majewski, *Traitors & True Poles: Narrating a Polish-American Identity, 1880-1939*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003), 68-70.

<sup>49</sup> Majewski, *Traitors & True Poles*, 61.

<sup>50</sup> In Katherine E. Conway's *Lalor's Maples* (1901), which Irish American literature scholar Charles Fanning cites as a representative work of turn of the century Irish American fiction, a young Irish-American woman journalist named Mildred must choose between her Catholicism and saving her family's newly earned fortune in America. When her unscrupulous Protestant editor, Ellis, acquires her father's mortgage, he offers Mildred the option of marrying him outside the Catholic Church or facing her family's eviction: she must decide whether she is willing to sell her body and soul for her family's socioeconomic benefit. Mildred runs away, refusing to marry Ellis, despite her villainous, arrogant mother's pleadings, but on his deathbed Ellis deeds the home back to Mildred, who marries an Irishman, thus completing the sentimental and didactic message of the text, which urges the importance of keeping the Catholic faith in America (the plot bears some resemblances to Bettie Lowenberg's *The Irreversible Stream*, discussed in Chapter One of this Diss.). As Fanning explains, the novel contains elements of didacticism coupled with realism, but is ultimately one of many of what he refers to as "Catholic-tract novels," or conventional materials replete with Irish-American aristocrats who sacrifice romantic love for filial or religious duty. Anne C. Rose discusses Mary Anne Madden Sadlier's *The Blakes and Flanagans* (1855) as a similarly representative work of Irish Catholic fiction that uses intermarriage as an example of individuals' compromising their Catholic faith for the sake of self-gratification. The melodrama presents an argument in favor of endogamy and against its opposite, figured in the novel as a result of impiety. Fanning, Charles. *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 156, 175; Rose, *Beloved Strangers*, 67-69.



romance, as in Katherine E. Conway's *Lalor's Maples* (1901), or whether, as in J. L. Meany's *The Lovers, or Cupid in Ireland* (1891), the interfaith coupling is resolved through conversion, ultimately these Irish American novels use the interethnic or interfaith love plot to bolster community cohesion and loyalty.<sup>51</sup> However, as Irish American mixed-marriage plots tend to focus on the *interfaith* component, the conflicts fall not around family cohesion or innate ethnic sensibility, but around belief, ritual, and religious identity. In this way, Irish identity and religious faith can emerge triumphant through conversion, and Irishness need not be threatened by interethnic romance in the same way that racial and cultural mixing in Jewish American narratives threaten to dilute Jewishness itself.

While Jewish American authors of interethnic romance write against the hegemonic melting plot, arguing for Jewish communal cohesion through rewriting and rejecting narratives of marital assimilation, members of groups that were not included in the "melting plot" of white ethnicity tended to write in favor of the plot, and of their inclusion within it. Such narratives of interethnic romance argue for greater inclusion of minority groups, demonstrating the equality and desirability of minority figures as romantic partners and therefore also as candidates for citizenship and American national belonging. Winnifred Eaton, daughter of a Chinese mother and a white English father and thought to be the first Asian American novelist, who was well known at the turn of the twentieth century under her Japanese-sounding pseudonym, Onoto Watanna, was famous for her romances that featured love between Japanese or mixed-race heroines and white American or English men. These romances contained stereotypical features - the women are charming in their exotic beauty - and yet the women are also often assertive and

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<sup>51</sup> Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America*, 175.

independently-minded. In her representations, mixed-race marriages are at once doomed to failure, as the logic of white American societal norms dictated, and also displayed positive images of interethnic romance that worked to undermine these norms. These narratives provided dignity to mixed race characters and offered images of Japanese characters as equal in honor, devotion, and beauty to their Western counterparts.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the work of Eaton's sister, Edith Eaton, who wrote under the Chinese pseudonym Sui Sing Far, represents Chinese-white marriage in a way that argues for Chinese inclusion into white America at the expense of "the more offensive threat of black racial difference" in her fiction.<sup>53</sup> Through representation of interethnic romance, both writers argued in favor of greater inclusion and a sense of dignity and worth for Asian Americans as part of the American nation.

Of course, each of these "melting pot" narratives was predicated on the notion that white ethnics could be "melted" into American whiteness at the expense of the ultimate unassimilable other: African Americans. Just as "melting pot" narratives captured the popular American imagination, so too did its counterpart, the miscegenation narrative. Fears and representations of interracialism in the form of black-white romance were a pervasive theme of American culture and one of its most distinctive features, and laws restricting marriages and sexual relations between blacks and whites proliferated.<sup>54</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, discourse around American bodies created fantasies of separate white and black Americas, linking whiteness to

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<sup>52</sup> Pat Shea, "Winnifred Eaton and the Politics of Miscegenation in Popular Fiction." *MELUS* 22, no. 2, (Summer 1997): 19-32.

<sup>53</sup> Jane Hwang Degenhardt, "Situating the Essential Alien: Sui Sin Far's Depiction of Chinese-White Marriage and the Exclusionary Logic of Citizenship," *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 4, (Winter 2008): 654-688.

<sup>54</sup> Werner Sollors, "Introduction" to *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature and Law*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-21.

good, and blackness to that which was primitive, dark, dangerous, or evil.<sup>55</sup> Literature portraying interracial marriage in a positive or negative light was therefore inherently political, speaking to the institutions of racial prejudice and separation that structured American life and the way that whiteness and its limits has been central to America's social order.<sup>56</sup>

Representations of mulatto figures positioned on the boundary between black and white allowed authors to expose and discuss the relationship between race and nationhood in America and the contradictions between the idea of an American creed of liberty and equality and America's reliance on racial exclusion and exploitation to support its ideals.<sup>57</sup> Both African-American and European-American writers explored, questioned, supported, and critiqued the social order through portrayals of interracial romance and interracially positioned characters.<sup>58</sup>

Jewish writers both engaged in this racializing discourse and benefitted from the ways in which the process of Americanization, coercive though it often was, privileged those of European origin as probationary white Americans and reinforced the division of white from black, offering Jewish immigrants the potential for a privileged position in American racial

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<sup>55</sup> Felipe Smith, "Preface" to *American Body Politics: Race, Gender, and Black Literary Renaissance* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1998), vii-xvii.

<sup>56</sup> Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> Cassandra Jackson, *Barriers Between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth-century American Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 2-4.

<sup>58</sup> Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition," *Representations* 24, (Autumn 1988): 28-59; Jackson, *Barriers Between Us*; Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); William L. Andrews, "Miscegenation in the Late Nineteenth-Century American Novel" in *Interracialism: Black-White Inter marriage in American History, Literature and Law*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 305-319.

hierarchies.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Jewish authors of interethnic romance, writing within religious laws and cultural norms that prohibited such couplings and American liberal individualism that promoted them, created characters positioned, like tragic mulatto figures, on the boundary between Jewish and Christian that revealed the instability of these categories themselves. In representing interethnic romance and Jewish/Christian mixing as tragic, unsettling, and impossible, these writers' employed tropes that, in the American literary tradition, are usually conceived of as referring solely to the black/white color line. While interethnic romance between Jews and Christians was not illegal according to American law (as was black/white interracial romance), it was outside the bounds of Jewish religious law and custom, and couples participating in such relationships exceeded and transgressed sacrosanct communal boundaries and taboos.

### **Interethnic Romance in Jewish American Fiction: Existing Scholarship**

A significant body of work has been written about interfaith and interethnic romance in Jewish fiction and among Jews in fiction in America, such as Lauren S. Cordon's *The 'White Other' in American Intermarriage Stories, 1945-2008*, Frederic Cople Jaher's foundational article "The Quest for the Ultimate Shiksa," Adam Sol's "Longings and Renunciations: Attitudes Towards Intermarriage in Early Twentieth Century Jewish American Novels," André E. Elbaz's *Les Romanciers Juifs Américains et les Mariages Mixtes*, and Josh Lambert's *Unclean Lips: Obscenity, Jews, and American Culture*, which, together with Riv Ellen Prell's *Fighting to*

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<sup>59</sup> See Gary Gerstle, "Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans," *The Journal of American History* 84, no.2, (Sep, 1997): 534-558; Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*.

*Become Americans*, maps the gendered imagination of and desire for non-Jewish bodies in Jewish American fiction, especially in the post-World War II period.<sup>60</sup> This dissertation addresses a significant gap in this scholarship on American Jewish fiction by focusing on the question of interethnic romantic encounter specifically in the early twentieth century, a question that has been understudied in this time frame.

Scholars have given significant attention to interethnic romantic encounter in English-language American Jewish fiction post-World War II. They have noted that the period following World War II was a “golden age” of Jewish interethnic romantic narratives as Jews rapidly adjusted to suburban middle class American lives. Interethnic romances offer opportunities for writers to explore, through allegory, Jewish American identity conflicts as Jews gained acceptance in mainstream American culture. Many of these interethnic romantic scenarios focus on Jewish men and their sexual desires for non-Jewish women who represent material achievement and sexual availability and prowess, and who embody the temptations and promise of America itself. This dissertation explores interethnic romantic narratives prior to this “golden age,” representing a more variegated landscape of cultural meanings and gendered expectations placed onto the experience of interethnic romance. Studies of representations of interethnic romantic encounter in Jewish American fiction have generalized that early twentieth century literary representations of intermarriage were formulaic, unidirectional representations of assimilation into white American culture, while in actuality these texts are dynamic and varied

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<sup>60</sup> Lauren S. Cardon, *The "White Other" in American Intermarriage Stories, 1945-2008*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Frederic Cople Jaher, "The Quest for the Ultimate Shiksa," *American Quarterly* 35, no.5, (Winter 1983): 518-42; Adam Sol, "Longings and Renunciations: Attitudes Towards Intermarriage in Early Twentieth Century Jewish American Novels," *American Jewish History* 89, no.2, (June 2001): 215-230; André E. Elbaz, *Les Romanciers Juifs Américains et les Mariages Mixtes* (Paris: Jean Grassin, 1972); Josh Lambert, *Unclean Lips: Obscenity, Jews, and American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation*. (Boston, Mass: Beacon, 1999).

contemplations on the meaning of Jewish and American cultural identity, within the context of contemporary Jewish and American discourses of gender, race and class.<sup>61</sup>

There have, of course, been several (though not enough) explorations of this topic in early twentieth century Jewish American fiction that have informed this dissertation: In one of the first scholarly explorations of the topic, in “Genesis: The American-Jewish Novel Through the Twenties” Leslie Fiedler posits that through interethnic romance, the drama of assimilation into America is “posed in terms of sexual symbols,” with the tempting non-Jewish woman standing in for the pleasures and dangers of America. Fiedler falls short insofar as he focuses entirely on narratives of Jewish men desiring non-Jewish women, while my study has found that the narrative of interethnic romance was just as often told from a woman’s perspective.

Expanding on this work by introducing the perspective of women authors, in her article “Fannie Hurst and Her Nineteenth-Century Predecessors,” Diane Lichtenstein describes the use of intermarriage in the works of Rebekah Gumpert Hyneman, Emma Wolf, and Fannie Hurst, explaining that for each of these women, intermarriage offered an opportunity to depict their struggles as Jewish women with “how to live with and in” American culture, especially in light of changing roles and expectations for women. In “Longings and Renunciations: Attitudes Towards Intermarriage in Early Twentieth Century Jewish American Novels,” Adam Sol explores the work of Anzia Yezierska, Edna Ferber, Ludwig Lewisohn and Sidney Nyburg to show that in the early twentieth century “intermarriage represented all of the potential joys and

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<sup>61</sup> For example, in her study *The ‘White Other’ in American Intermarriage Stories, 1945-2008* Lauren Cordon describes intermarriage stories of the early twentieth century as following a unified formula of estrangement from the ethnic community and assimilation into American society. She writes, “These earlier texts privilege a white, dominant culture partner in an intermarriage union, casting the ethnic ‘other’ as inferior in appearance and cultural status.” This description is accurate for some intermarriage narratives, but does not fairly categorize all early twentieth century intermarriage narratives, as this Diss. demonstrates. Cordon, *The ‘White Other,’* 2.

dangers of complete entrance into American culture,” and yet authors regarded it with ambivalence, representing characters who reject complete assimilation in order to continue to identify with Jewishness. This dissertation benefits from Lichtenstein’s and Sol’s insights and contextualizes them within the political, theological, literary and social trends in which the authors they discusses participated, arguing that interethnic romances are not only about the question of assimilation, but also partake in and contribute to feminist, socialist, and universalist discourses.<sup>62</sup>

## Description of Chapters

As this dissertation will demonstrate, writers of Jewish American fiction wrote from their gendered positionalities, their religious and political affiliations, their regional variations vis a vis the homelands they or their ancestors came from and the places in America in which they settled, and within the dictates of their specific genres and publications. As each of the writers examined in this dissertation employed interethnic romance plots, they did so in service of their prescriptions for and definitions of American and Jewish community and identity, with love plots between Jews and non-Jews often standing in for Jews’ relationships with America itself. Interethnic romance was not only the primary metaphor for literature in favor of Jews’ total assimilation into white America, via the image of the melting pot, but it was also a significant tool that authors could use to undermine or set limits on assimilation by penning romance

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<sup>62</sup> Leslie Fiedler, “Genesis: The American Jewish Novel Through the Twenties,” *Midstream* 4, (Summer 1958): 21-33; Lichtenstein, Diane, “Fannie Hurst and Her Nineteenth Century Predecessors,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 7, (Spring 1988): 26-39; Adam Sol, “Longings and Renunciations.”

narratives with tragic or ambivalent outcomes, therefore arguing that total assimilation was irresponsible, inadequate, dangerous, or even impossible for Jews in America.

This dissertation does not aim to be a comprehensive catalogue of representations of interethnic romance among Jewish writers in America at the turn of the century. Rather, the chapters in this dissertation are case studies that examine the ways in which variously positioned Jewish American authors used fictions of interethnic romance to establish, critique, and describe the changing American Jewish community and the roles of men and women within it. The chapters of this dissertation are organized in roughly chronological order, and alternate in English/Yiddish linguistic focus and in the gender identity of the authors.

**Chapter One** examines narratives of interethnic romance written by fin-de-siècle Jewish women authors, largely identified with the Reform movement and of Central European heritage. In their narratives, the authors discussed in this chapter employ romance between Jews and non-Jews as a domestic, feminine setting in which women authors engage with contemporary theological and social debates within the American Reform Jewish community while remaining within the realm of sentimental fiction. The chapter examines the work of authors Rosa Sonneschein, Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust, Emma Wolf, Bettie Lowenberg, and Freidrich Kolbenmeyer, arguing that these authors employed interethnic romance narratives to express a belief in America as exceptional as a place of egalitarianism between Jews and Christians, and as a place of growing equality between men and women. Their narratives of interfaith romance also express a belief in a Reform Jewish teleology in which ultimately all religious difference would one day resolve into universal faith, characterized by the brotherhood of man and the



unity of God, and argue for the necessity of women's sensibilities in building that future. While this time of unity is, for many of these authors, an inevitable outcome of American egalitarianism, the authors differ in their assessment of the coming universalism as a tragic loss of religious, cultural, and racial purity, or the promise of a more enlightened, more virtuous future. Their attitudes toward intermarriage are directly related to, and expressed through, their gendered lens: women writing about interfaith romance tended to view it more optimistically, as a sign of and venue for Jewish women's growing roles as Jews and as women in an egalitarian America.

The writers in this chapter position interfaith romance as a narrative that describes a distinct, pivotal moment in the teleology of Reform Jewish thought, as the Jewish community stands on the brink of an ideal of a universal future, while nevertheless holding onto a desire to maintain Jewish distinctiveness in the present. While this moment is framed in these narratives through Reform Jewish theology, it bears strong resemblances to the struggles between particularism and universalism expressed by Jewish socialists during this period. These authors' concerns about the symbolic role of interfaith romance in navigating between universalizing, modern love and respect for traditions of the past bears strong and surprising resemblance to the writing of Abraham Cahan (the subject of Chapter Two), despite the differences in class, gender and language that separate these authors.

**Chapter Two** explores the work of journalist and fiction writer Abraham Cahan (1860-1951) who saw himself as an intermediary between East European Jewish immigrants and American culture, both by writing fiction in English that translated immigrants' struggles to

come to terms with life in a new American context, and by editing the *Forverts*, a newspaper that he saw as a tool for bringing American values and language to new immigrants. Throughout his work, Cahan used issues of love and romance between Jews and non-Jews as a way of exploring Jewish American processes of ethnicization and group identity formation over and against the melting pot ideal of assimilation, and as a way of weighing the balance of socialist universalist values and the principles of Jewish nationalism, carving a sometimes ambivalent and inconsistent ideology and the borders of each of these streams of thought. Cahan's writing about intermarriage focuses on the defining terms of Jewishness: racial, cultural, historical, communal, and religious, and the ways that these multiple ethnic and religious group definitions make it impossible to contain, enforce, and define Jewishness as it undergoes rapid transition into a secular American context.

Cahan situates the question of interethnic romance within socialist discourse, but pushes back against socialist anti-religious sentiment in favor of the preservation of Jewish family and culture (which, as the intermarriage question suggests, cannot so easily be separated from the idea of religion). Chapter Three turns to Jewish women writers whose interethnic romance plots in popular fiction in English were situated in feminist discourses and thus were also overtly political in their turn away from tradition and toward idealistic visions for modernity. Nevertheless, like Cahan, the women authors discussed in Chapter Three resisted the universalizing impulses of their political movements, which tended to erase ethnic differences in favor of an imagined American womanhood that was uniformly modern, and modern in its universality. Instead, these women resisted the "melting pot," proposing narratives of endogamous marriage, or indeed of no marriage at all, that allowed their subjects greater degrees of self-actualization as *Jewish* women.

**Chapter Three** turns to early twentieth century feminist discourses and reflects on how Jewish American women's popular fictions of interethnic romance in the 1920s engaged with new ideas of American and of Jewish womanhood, employing such love plots to discuss women's independence and mobility in light of early feminism. This chapter examines narratives of interethnic romance as a paradigm of women's newfound freedom, such as Marian Spitzer's *Who Would be Free* (1924), Elizabeth Stern (pseud. Leah Morton)'s *I am a Woman – and a Jew* (1926), Anzia Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) and Edna Ferber's *Fanny Herself* (1917). These writings present the idea of interethnic and inter-class romance as a bold, nontraditional choice on the road to women's claims for familial and economic independence, but at the same time, several of these authors express the limitations of intermarriage as a feminist discourse when it runs counter to their desires to articulate and lay claim to an authentic ethnic identity, revealing and problematizing the coercively homogeneous concept of modern American identity put forth by early twentieth century feminism.

The gender dynamics at play in these narratives, asking whether and how Jewish women can be modern, feminist women while retaining their Jewishness, complement similar questions that arise in the interethnic romance narratives penned by male American Yiddish authors, discussed in Chapter Four, who provocatively critique Jewish manhood against American masculinities. Seeking to situate a new Yiddish literature in the soil and people of America, these authors find Jewish masculinity to be corrupted by the decadence and decay of urban environments and articulate desire for a new American Jewish masculinity tied to the American rural landscape.

**Chapter Four** examines narratives of interethnic romance written by Yiddish writers David Ignatoff, Joseph Opatoshu, Y. Y. Shvarts and Isaac Raboy, who were associated with the literary group “Di Yunge” [“The Young Ones”]. For this group, the primary purpose of writing Yiddish literature was to explore aesthetic principles of representing emotions and beauty using new experimental forms and the creation of impressions and feelings, in counterdistinction to the stridently political approach of their predecessors, known as the “Sweatshop Poets.” Thus, even though these authors had stakes in the political and social questions that surrounded interethnic romance and that motivated many of the other works discussed in this dissertation, they employed interethnic romance in service of their desires to explore dichotomies between the natural and the unnatural, fantasy and reality. These authors employed tropes of interethnic romance together with geographical border crossings into non-immigrant or non-Jewish spaces, co-locating physical dislocation and disorientation and intimate interpersonal desire and unease as part of Jewish immigrants’ response to an “authentic” version of America. Their narratives suggest that Jewish immigrants’ displacement in America was not simply a matter of a gap between Old and New World cultures, but also had to do with Jewish gender identity in relation to American masculinities and Jewish urban settlement and cosmopolitan identity in an America imagined as most authentic in its rural spaces. Through interethnic romance they explored a modern sensibility of disruption and dislocation.

Today, intermarriage is the central question of American Jewish identity, with American Jewish intermarriage rates hovering around fifty percent since the 1990s.<sup>63</sup> As intermarriage has

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<sup>63</sup> See “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” *Pew Research Center*. October, 2013. <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>.

become an increasingly common phenomenon among American Jews, narratives about love between Jews and non-Jews tend to represent such romance as something normal, acceptable, even beautiful, even as they draw on older tropes about these relationships as also deeply disturbing, strange, and self-alienating (if not self-annihilating).<sup>64</sup> Jewish American communal conversation about this hot button issue “slides between” categories of race/ethnicity and religion as it defines Jewishness and non-Jewishness and questions whether and how individuals from within these categories can cross their boundaries for the sake of love.<sup>65</sup> Regarding intermarriage as a “crisis” that threatens Jewish American “continuity,” or as a barometer of increasing Jewish sense of “Americanness,” American Jewish communal leaders, writers, and scholars alike draw upon intermarriage as a touchstone for conversations about the borders and definitions of American Jewishness.<sup>66</sup> The authors in this study understood the significance of interethnic romance as a trope in the American Jewish collective imaginary early on, before

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<sup>64</sup> Recent examples of Jewish American fiction thematizing interethnic romance include: Christopher Noxon, *Plus One* (New York: Prospect Park Books, 2016); Gary Shteyngart, “Several Anecdotes About my Wife,” *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction From the Edge*, ed. Paul Zakrzewski (New York: Perennial, 2013) 22-55. Ehud Havazelet, “Leah,” *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction From the Edge*, ed. Paul Zakrzewski (New York: Perennial, 2013) 96-145. Max Apple, “The Eighth Day,” *Scribblers on the Roof: Contemporary American Jewish Fiction*, ed. Melvin Jules Bukiet and David G. Roskies (New York: Persea Books, 2006) 21-34; Susan Rieger, *The Divorce Papers* (New York: Broadway Books, 2014); Laurie Gwen Shapiro, *The Anglophile* (New York: Red Dress Ink, 2015); Adam Langer, *Crossing California* (New York: Riverhead, 2005); Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Single Jewish Male Seeking Soul Mate* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2015); Nancy Datan, “Making Jews,” *The Woman Who Lost Her Names: Selected Writings of American Jewish Women*, ed. Julia Mazow (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 153-158; Eleanor Lipman, *The Inn at Lake Devine* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Binnie Kirshenbaum, “Who Knows Kaddish.,” *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction From the Edge*, ed. Paul Zakrzewski (New York: Perennial, 2013), 171-182; Gabriel Brownstein, “Bachelor Party,” *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction From the Edge*, ed. by Paul Zakrzewski (New York: Perennial, 2013), 146-169.

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Imhoff, “Intermarriage and the Complexity of Jewish American Identity,” *Marginalia: Los Angeles Review of Books*, December 29, 2015. <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/intermarriage-and-the-complexity-of-jewish-identity-by-sarah-imhoff/>.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Imhoff, “All in the Family? Jewish Intermarriage in America,” *Religious Studies Review* 36, no. 4, (December 2010): 263-266. For a discussion of intermarriage, shifting boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, and the pulls of dual American/Jewish loyalties from a sociological perspective, see: Richard Alba, “On the Sociological Significance of the American Jewish Experience: Boundary Blurring, Assimilation, and Pluralism,” *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 4, (2006): 347-358.

intermarriage rates themselves became a matter of communal concern. Their employment of these romance narratives allows today's readers to appreciate the flexibility and longevity of this central theme in American Jewish discourse.

## Chapter One

### American Egalitarianism and Women's Empowerment: Interfaith Romance in Late Nineteenth Century Jewish American Women's Fiction

In her critical literary study *Writing Their Nations*, Diane Lichtenstein demonstrates that there is an identifiable tradition of Jewish women writing in America in the nineteenth century. This body of work shares particular concerns and can be read to illuminate the needs and values of the authors' historical moment and vantage point. According to Lichtenstein, these women drew upon contemporaneous American and Jewish myths about womanhood, such as women's selflessness, as well as a consciousness of dual citizenship in Jewish and American spheres, to create literary works. She identifies this body of work as one produced by women writing in English in America who had some affiliation with Judaism and expressed these components of their identity literarily.<sup>67</sup> The theme of interfaith romance is central to nineteenth century Jewish American women's writing, but Lichtenstein's analysis falls short of recognizing its importance.

Although Lichtenstein presents examples of literature that thematizes interfaith romance in her study, she does not take up such romance as a major concern within this body of work.

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<sup>67</sup> Diane Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations: The Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). As Jonathan Hess, Maurice Samuels, and Nadia Valman explain in their anthology *Nineteenth Century Jewish Literature*, many Jewish authors writing fiction in the nineteenth century were women whose target audience was comprised largely of women as well. Not only were Jewish women traditionally closer to vernacular literary culture than Jewish men as they did not have the obligations of religious literacy incumbent upon men, but also that the genre of the novel that was prominent in eighteenth- and nineteenth- century Europe and America was "often seen in gendered terms" as a literary form for and by women. Although there are many examples of American Jewish men's literary production during this period, this chapter focuses on the body of work produced by women or for a presumed female audience because it forms a cohesive body of writing grouped around shared concerns particular to the gendered roles, experiences, and interests of Jewish women in America in the late nineteenth century. See Jonathan Hess, Maurice Samuels, and Nadia Valman, "Introduction" to *Nineteenth-Century Jewish Literature: A Reader*, ed. Jonathan Hess, et al, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 4.

This chapter aims to fill in this gap in the scholarship, and in particular to examine the gendered nature of interfaith romance narratives in this period.

In fin-de-siècle America, intermarriage, a rare occurrence that seemed to be on the rise, was a prominent issue in Jewish communal conversations. As Anne C. Rose notes in her history of intermarriage in nineteenth-century America, as “aspiration increasingly displaced inheritance as social capital,” it became easier to imagine crossing previously sacrosanct boundaries and to contemplate what this would mean for the Jewish community and its future.<sup>68</sup> The turn of the century was a formative period for the discussion of interfaith marriages, a time when these marriages seemed newly possible and communal policies on the issue were not yet in place. These marriages were rare, but they were widely discussed.<sup>69</sup> Although no statistics exist enumerating the frequency of marriages between Jews and non-Jews, the Jewish press’s repeated interest in the subject and concerns expressed by Jewish rabbis and communal leaders indicates a perception among Jews that intermarriage posed a serious and rising challenge for the Jewish people in America.<sup>70</sup> Jewish women, charged with the responsibility for transmitting religion to their children because of their adherence to bourgeois norms and the Victorian cult of domesticity, were central subjects of the discourse surrounding intermarriage, and their increased

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<sup>68</sup> Rose, *Beloved Strangers*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 11..

<sup>70</sup> Eric L. Goldstein, “‘Different Blood Flows in Our Veins’: Race and Jewish Self-Definition in Late Nineteenth Century America,” *American Jewish History* 85, no. 1, (1997): 29-55. p. 34.



social contact with non-Jews was viewed as a potential threat to the future of the Jewish people.<sup>71</sup>

Stories of intermarriage in late nineteenth century literature by American Jewish authors and largely by or directed toward women offer insights into their perceptions of how Jews should interact with their Christian neighbors and the roles women and men should take in arbitrating boundaries of Jewish community and culture in a Christian American context. Women authors' presentation of the issue of intermarriage, which did not rely as heavily on prognosticating and mourning the decline of Jewish faith and race as contemporaneous writing by male authors, reveals their gendered perspective on women's roles and responsibilities as leaders in American Judaism, and women's agency and independence within marriage, all in the context of their celebration of a belief that America was exceptional in its liberalism toward both Jews and women.

This chapter argues that narratives of intermarriage written by Jewish American women authors in the late nineteenth century emboldened women and Jews as independent actors not to be subsumed by Christian society or male power. Such narratives of intermarriage are not uniquely American; they have strong resonances, for instance, with German Jewish literature of the period.<sup>72</sup> However, Jewish American writers drew upon ideas of American exceptionalism

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<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of the changing roles of women in modern Jewish culture as a result of assimilating to bourgeois norms, see Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> In her work on intermarriage narratives in German Jewish literature, Eva Lezzi explains that romantic encounters between Jews and Christians were a prominent theme in German literature and European literature in general in many literary forms and variations. Jewish writers, telling interfaith romance stories from the perspective of Jewish women, who were often eroticized objects of sexual fantasy in literature, wrote against this dominant, objectifying lens. They dignified Jewish women's perspectives and their participation in the conflict

and celebrated America as a uniquely progressive nation, with intermarriage standing as a symbol of that progressivism. The idea of a marriage in which both partners retained their religious affiliation was a bold manifestation of the egalitarianism that Jewish women writers saw as exceptionally American. It was also an illustration of the Reform Jewish messianic mission of a universalist liberal religion, and by placing that mission into the context of romantic love, women authors insisted that women had a vital role to play in the project of Reform Judaism.

This chapter argues that interfaith romance in literature of this period written by women is symbolic of their celebration of American liberal egalitarianism toward women and Jews, which they believed heralded a new era of opportunity for Jewish women in America. This chapter is divided into three sections: In the first section, I explain how authors in this period represented America as a uniquely egalitarian place for both Jews and women. Through contrasts with and drawing upon an imagined European past and European Jewish literary trends, authors Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust and Rosa Sonneschein proclaim the newness and continuities of America as a place of refuge and egalitarianism for Jews and for women. In the second section, I offer a comparison between a text by a female author (Emma Wolf) and a male author (Fredreich Kolbenheyer) to support my claim that narratives of intermarriage are gendered. For women authors, marriage was not merely instrumental to having children and extending the male line, it was also about relationships between men and women negotiated and experienced in the

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between tradition and modernity, from their position of authority as representatives of the ideal of the bourgeois family. See Eva Lezzi, *“Liebe Ist Meine Religion!”: Eros Und Ehe Zwischen Juden Und Christen in Der Literatur Des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Gottingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013). For a discussion of the history of the legalization of mixed confessional marriage in Germany and its role in political, religious, and social discourses of German-Jewish relations, see Christopher W. Griffin, “The Evolution of German-Jewish Intermarriage Laws and Practices in Germany to 1900,” MA Thesis, 2005, The Florida State University.

domestic sphere. This difference in perspective about marriage deeply influenced authors' attitude toward the meaning of intermarriage and whether it signaled tragedy or progress. In the third section, I demonstrate that in their narratives of intermarriage, women authors such as Emma Wolf and Bettie Lowenberg elaborated on contemporary theological and philosophical claims about Judaism's relationship to Christianity through the sentimental and domestic spheres that were the traditional provenance of women's writing, thus empowering women as agents of Reform Judaism. Although scholars of Jewish American literature tend to assume that Jewish authors uniformly approached interethnic romance through the lens of tragedy and loss, in this chapter I assert that women authors saw in interfaith romance a symbol of and venue for the opportunities granted Jewish women in America.

## **Intermarriage and American Exceptionalism**

In the late nineteenth century, American Jewish writers drew on a comparison between the European past of Jewish immigrants and their American present.<sup>73</sup> American Jewish literary

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<sup>73</sup> As Adam Mendelsohn has shown, nineteenth century American Jewish literary culture was embedded in a transnational Anglophone Jewish diaspora that drew upon a "shared culture specific to Anglophone Jewry." Because of advances in transportation and communication and the similarities in the "challenges and opportunities" facing Jews across the British Empire and in America, communities across the English-speaking world shared a common repertoire of ideas, books, and newspapers. Moreover, Jews of Central European backgrounds writing in America drew upon cultural relationships with their German *Heimat* and were influenced by and participated in German Jewish literary trends. Nevertheless, they also participated in a culture of American exceptionalism, and their work reflects a belief in the uniqueness of American democracy and Jews' position within it. See Adam Mendelsohn, "Tongue Ties: The Emergence of the Anglophone Jewish Diaspora in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *American Jewish History* 93, no. 2 (June 2007): 177-209. See also: Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994); Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Tobias Brinkman, "Jews, Germans, or Americans? German-Jewish Immigrants in the Nineteenth-Century United States," in *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness*, ed. K. Molly O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, Nancy Reagan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 111-140.

culture in this period, though dependent on transnational literary trends, themes, relationships between writers, and networks of publication and circulation, relied heavily on a trope of American exceptionalism. Through an America/Europe dichotomy, writers expressed pride in their American identities and trumpeted American nationalism, asserting their own place within American nationhood. Poems such as “The New Colossus” (1883) by Emma Lazarus and “To Persecuted Foreigners” (1820) by Penina Moise extol the virtues of an America that offers a safe haven of “Union, Liberty, and Peace” over and against the experience of “oppression’s tread” that Jews experienced in Europe.<sup>74</sup> As Lichtenstein notes, such expressions of American pride allowed the author to “inscribe herself as an American” even as Jews had to work to “establish their right to an American identity.”<sup>75</sup> Comparing American welcoming of immigrants to historic examples of European intolerance, such as the Spanish Expulsion, writers “verbally constructed an ‘America’ which was a haven of tolerance for... Jews.”<sup>76</sup> Although authors were often respectful of their immigrant ancestors, they wrote with “measured distance” about Europe as a place of their past and represented themselves as thoroughly American, which went hand-in-hand with their identities as thoroughly modern.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Moise’s “To the Persecuted Foreigners” (1820) is reprinted in full in Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations*, 98.

<sup>75</sup> Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations*, 99; See also Daniel Morris, “Active and Passive Citizenship in Emma Lazarus’s ‘The New Colossus’ and Judith Ortiz Cofer’s ‘The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica,’” *Lyric Encounters: Essays on American Poetry from Lazarus and Frost to Ortiz Cofer and Alexie* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 67-80.

<sup>76</sup> Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations*, 101.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

For writers employing feminist tropes of New Womanhood, America was not only a place of potential freedom for Jews, but also a site of independence for women.<sup>78</sup> America, representing the future and progress, is depicted as offering women possibilities for public roles and marital choice that a more tradition-bound Europe cannot. This contrast between America and Europe is especially evident in journalistic writing published in *The American Jewess*, the first independent English-language Jewish women's journal in the United States, published monthly between April 1895 and August 1899 in Chicago, which set out to describe and instruct American Jewish women in their changing roles and to bolster their identities as both Americans and Jews.

Editor Rosa Sonneschein both describes the magazine's 'modern' audience and prescribes her aspirations for what modernity should mean to that audience in her 1898 article "The American Jewess." In this article, Sonneschein describes American Jewish women as distinctly modern in outlook, insisting that "new conditions must be met by modern measures."<sup>79</sup> *The American Jewess* foregrounds the Americanness of the imagined ideal American Jewish woman by contrasting American freedom and European constraints on women. An article titled "The American Girl" from February 1896 celebrates the "American girl" for the "self-reliant,

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<sup>78</sup> The term "New Woman" was coined in England in March 1894 in an essay by novelist Sarah Grand describing a woman who argued against the idea of a separate domestic sphere for women. The idea of a New Woman quickly took hold of popular imagination first in England and then throughout the Western world as a woman who, to various degrees, rejected the traditional bourgeois ideal of separate, feminine, womanly roles, behaviors, and dress. Women who lay claim to the category of New Woman were not a uniform group, but they shared a desire for emancipation, greater educational and career opportunities and public roles, and they argued for increasing women's power within marriage. Many employed scientific language of progress and evolution to describe their commitments to and belief in progressive social reforms, personal freedoms, and political equality. Women participating in New Womanhood shared a sense of themselves as taking part in a new cultural phenomenon, as part of a broader modern ideal of self-refashioning. Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

<sup>79</sup> Rosa Sonneschein, "The American Jewess," *The American Jewess* 6, No. 5 (February, 1898): 205-209, p. 207.

independent creature she is.” By way of contrast, European women “are less free and independent.”<sup>80</sup> The author proudly declares, “I would not exchange one hour of American independence and freedom for all the European dependence I could buy me.”<sup>81</sup> Thereby, the author insists upon her own affiliation with the term “American” in contradistinction to the restrictiveness she perceives as “European,” despite the association that Jewishness had with recent European immigrant status and the continuing cultural ties many American Jews shared with European Jewry. She asserts that to be an American requires no more than participating in the freedoms American women are granted and thus articulates an easy entry point for her readers into the identity of “American Girl,” free from the particularism of the Jewish modifier.

In literature thematizing intermarriage, a contrast between Europe and America foregrounds this assertion that America holds a unique promise of liberal egalitarianism for Jewish women. As this chapter will demonstrate, Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust’s novel *A Tent of Grace* (1899), set in late nineteenth-century Germany, explicitly articulates the argument that America is a land in which relations between Jews and Christians, in both practical social terms and in eschatological terms, holds the promise for equality under love that the violence and backwardness of Europe disallows. Rosa Sonneschein’s story about the dangers and impossibilities of intermarriage, “A Modern Miracle,” likewise underscores America’s exceptional potential as a site for Jewish liberty through admonitions about European anti-Semitism and an implication of its lack in America. Sonneschein links this American egalitarianism not only to Jews’ newfound freedom from violent, superstitious antisemitism, but

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<sup>80</sup> S. A. S., “The American Girl,” *The American Jewess* 2, No. 5. (February 1896) : 252-253, p.252.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

also to women's newfound independence and leadership opportunities within the American Jewish community. American egalitarianism extends to Jewish women new opportunities to work publically *as Jews* and *as women* in the furtherance of liberal causes.

Both of these narratives are written within the German literary tradition of the “ghetto story,” and this genre enabled the authors to stake a claim about a faraway past as being distant, temporally and geographically, from the newfound freedoms of the American present. The “ghetto story” was a particularly Jewish adaptation of the village tale genre, in which traditional Jewish familial and communal life of the past is represented with ethnographic detail while at the same time the social and religious life of the ghetto is imagined as an “otherworldly, fantastical place.”<sup>82</sup> For American Jewish readers, these stories served similar purposes to their European counterparts who remembered an idealized past fondly while using it to make distinctions between that past and their now-modern selves.<sup>83</sup> American Jewish readers, distanced from the

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<sup>82</sup> Hess, et al, “Introduction” to *Nineteenth-Century Jewish Literature: A Reader*, 15. Nineteenth-century American Jewish consumption and production of literature within the “ghetto stories” genre demonstrates continuing and creative engagement with a transnational Jewish literary culture, reflecting American hopes and sensibilities produced through and against German Jewish cultural production. “Ghetto stories” were a popular genre in contemporaneous German fiction. They portrayed for urban Jews recently removed from Central European village life a sentimentalized version of their shared background, and provided “a source for particular Jewish identity in the modern city.” Sharing in the trends of European romanticism to valorize the “folk” as a source for modern cultural cohesion, these stories tended to eulogize the Jewish communal past for “the strength of Jewish solidarity and religious observance” while, through placing these traditions firmly in the past, asserting the modernity of the urban Jewish community. Paula Hyman, “Traditionalism and Village Jews in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Western and Central Europe: Local Persistence and Urban Nostalgia,” in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 191-202, p. 192-193; Richard I. Cohen, “Jewish Nostalgia in the Era of Globalization,” in *Mediating Modernity: Challenges and Trends in the Jewish Encounter with the Modern World*, ed. Lauren B. Strauss and Michael Brenner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 305-314, p. 306, 193, 196-7.

<sup>83</sup> American Jewish readers were inspired by ghetto literature soon after its inception in the 1840's. According to *The Menorah: A Monthly Magazine for the Jewish Home*, Leopold Kompert, the father of the “ghetto literature” genre, was first introduced to an English-reading American audience in *The Occident* in 1857 when his story “Reb Isaac's Spectacles” was published in translation “and aroused keen interest.” Kompert's *Scenes from the Ghetto: Studies in Jewish Life* appeared in English translation in 1882, and his *Christian and Leah and Other Ghetto Stories* was published in English translation in 1895. American Jews often contributed to the genre of ghetto literature not

“ghetto” by physical, cultural, and linguistic factors, found in “ghetto” stories an opportunity to insist on their particularity as descendants of traditional Jewish village life within the safety of their much removed and changed circumstances. As Rosa Sonneschein claims in her article on the “American Jewess,” the “ghetto Jewess” was the archetypal grandmother of modern American Jewish woman, and therefore Jewish women could simultaneously identify with her and see themselves as having progressed beyond her.<sup>84</sup> These stories also created a shared literary experience for American and European Jews and helped them to build an imagined transnational Jewish community even as they participated in the imagined national community of America.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, reading about Europe from an American vantage point could serve

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only through translation but also through the creation of new English-language versions of ghetto literature. Some examples include Martha Wolfenstein’s *Idyls of the Gass* (1901), Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise’s *The Convert* (1854) and *The Shoemaker’s Family* (1854), and Rabbi Dr. Bernard Drachman’s *From the Heart of Israel: Jewish Tales and Types* (1905). Drawing upon this tradition of ghetto literature, Israel Zangwill’s *Children of the Ghetto* (1892), depicting life in the Jewish quarter of London, Hutchins Hapgood’s *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902) and Abraham Cahan’s *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), brought to their depictions of contemporary urban life a sense of traditional Jews as picturesque, insulated, and consumed by “small vices and... many virtues.” Henry S. Morais, “Leopold Kompert” *The Menorah: A Monthly Magazine for the Jewish Home*, 2 (January to June 1887): 9-11; Leopold Kompert, *Scenes from the ghetto : studies of Jewish life* (London: Remington, 1882); Leopold Kompert, *Christian & Leah, & other Ghetto stories*, trans. Alfred S. Arnold (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1895); Jonathan M. Hess, *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 105; Dudley F. Slicher, “Zangwill and Jewry,” *The Yale Literary Magazine* 19, issue 6, no. 615 (Mar 1904): 225-230.

<sup>84</sup> Sonneschein, “The American Jewess,” 206.

<sup>85</sup> Matthew Jacobson notes that while American historians tend to think about immigrants through the lens of arrival and settlement, “the migrants themselves often experienced the move – and the weight of emigrant cultures perpetually enforced interpretations of the move – as departure and absence.” They imagined the peoples they left behind as nations to which they belonged and through allegiance to their places of origin they created cultures of nationalism within an American context. *The American Jewess’s* printing of ghetto literature thus served to connect emigrants to one another and to German and Central European Jewry through an emerging national consciousness by creating a sense of unified communication and cultural exchange. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2; see also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).



to highlight the distance between American Jews and their imagined European past, casting American liberty and modernity in stark relief against the superstitions and dangers of the ghetto.

### **Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust's *A Tent of Grace***

Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust's tragedy *A Tent of Grace* (1899) articulates the messianic possibilities represented by America as an egalitarian utopia through a ghetto story of interfaith romance.<sup>86</sup> Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust (1860-1914) was born in Crefeld, Germany, but immigrated at an early age to England and arrived in America 1876, settling first in New York and later in Chicago. She participated in American literary culture as a writer of short stories, editorials, and newspaper articles, for a variety of newspapers.<sup>87</sup> *Tent of Grace* (1899), her only novel, draws upon conventions of ghetto fiction and Victorian sentimentalism to weave a tale of romance, antisemitism, and universal enlightenment. The novel received significant attention at the time of its publication, was reviewed in the *Detroit Free Press*, *The Scotsman*, *The Book Buyer*, *The Spectator*, *The Athenaeum*, and *The Literary World*, and was hailed as "the book of the season" by the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.<sup>88</sup> Set in the mid-nineteenth century, the novel seeks, as one

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<sup>86</sup> Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust, *A Tent of Grace* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1899).

<sup>87</sup> Elana Shever, "Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on June 15, 2016) <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/lust-adeline-cohnfeldt>>. Lust's serialized work, "Harum Scarum" appeared in the New York and Cincinnati *Illustrated Graphic News*, and following its printing she contributed to the New York *Daily Graphic* as well as for the American Press Association. Her "Features of New York Life" were published as editorials in the New York *Daily Graphic* without a byline.

<sup>88</sup> "A Tent of Grace," *Detroit Free Press*, Apr 24, 1899, p. 7; "Chicago Woman's Novel," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Apr 30, 1899, p. 62; "Fiction," *The Scotsman (1860-1920)* [Edinburgh, Scotland], 16 Oct 1899: 3; Mary Tracy Erle, "Novels in Divers Tones," *The Book Buyer (1867-1903)*; Sep 1, 1899; 19, 2; "NOVELS OF THE WEEK (Book Review)"

reviewer describes it, to “teach a lesson to the [contemporary] age” drawn from the past.<sup>89</sup> This lesson is “a protest against hatred of the Jews and against the isolation enforced by Judaism.”<sup>90</sup>

In other words, the novel critiques Christian antisemitism and Jewish anti-Christianity in favor of the union of these two faiths in enlightened tolerance.

In the novel, the tragic European past is characterized by violent antisemitism that makes even the most hopeful and redemptive love between Jews and Christians impossible. The novel is framed by incidences of antisemitic violence: young, Jewish orphan Jette is nearly murdered by a gang of Christian bullies in the opening pages of the novel, and years later, at the novel’s end, the same gang beats her to death based on a blood libel accusation. In the intervening pages, Jette enjoys an idyllic life as the adopted child of a small-town pastor, who encourages Jette to follow the precepts and practices of her own religion while living in a Christian home. This peaceful coexistence leads inevitably to Jette’s romance with the pastor’s son Fritz, but the novel cannot come to fruition in a socially sanctioned marriage because the violence of European antisemitism will not allow such a neat resolution.

The body of the novel is taken up by the gradual unfolding of the love story between Fritz and Jette, which promotes the novel’s premise that in an antisemitic Europe Jewish-Christian tolerance and love is desirable but impossible. This romance, while perhaps initially concerning to the readership because of its interfaith nature, is presented as morally good and in service of the social order, a conclusion supported by the logic and inevitability of the love plot.

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*The Spectator*; Oct 28, 1899, 83, 3722; “OUR LIBRARY TABLE,” *The Athenaeum*; Nov 4, 1899, 3758; *The Literary World; a Monthly Review of Current Literature (1870-1904)*; Apr 29, 1899, 30, 9.

<sup>89</sup> “A Tent of Grace,” *The Jewish Messenger (1857-1902)* [New York, NY] 28 Apr 1899, 1.

<sup>90</sup> Erle, “Novels in Divers Tones,” 2.

The beauty and virtue of both characters and their love characterize the romance as desirable according to Victorian norms of gender, sexuality, and love, thus rejecting the idea that the couple is poorly matched on the grounds of their differing faith or racial background.<sup>91</sup>

Moreover, many conversations, debates, and lamentations about the conflict between their individual love and the structures of religion, society, and filial obligations that stand as barriers to its actualization, serve to air and disprove arguments against the romance. Jette's concerns about maintaining loyalty to her Jewish heritage and identity are bound with her sexual modesty and virtue, so that marriage appears to be the socially sanctioned path to overcome these objections and consummate the merging of Jew and Christian. The pastor's decision to accept a

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<sup>91</sup> Both Fritz and Jette are described as physically attractive, with much attention focused on Jette's appearance marking her as exceptional both for her beauty and her virtue. "Her wavy black hair, glossy as finest satin, rippled and curled and caressed and coquetted around a face of the purest oval; the chin, in which a dimple slyly peeped forth, perched rather saucily forward. Her mouth was adorable, the upper lip short and curved, the lower pouting and most beautifully moulded. [sic] The nose was delicately aquiline, and sweeping, long black eyebrows contrasted with nobly shaped eyes of the most intense blue... And those eyes, how shy, how innocent, how wistful in expression when lifted to one's own...The brow, wide and somewhat high, gave its stamp of nobility to her features, with their dazzling purity of complexion. Her hair...was the crowning glory of this beautiful being, a fit frame for such a picture." Here, Lust describes Jette as desirable, through an Orientalist fascination with her exotic, thick, black hair as a symbol of her sexual desirability, and yet through multiple references to her simple and "pure" white muslin dress, her "milk-white arm," the "white neck beneath her coal of black hair" which was Fritz's "favorite spot of adoration," she characterizes Jette as having the moral purity and social acceptability of European whiteness. Fritz is her perfect match because his blond hair complements her black locks, but his skin, like hers, shares the purity of whiteness, and his "brown eyes – dear beautiful eyes of velvety softness..." like Jette's blue eyes, reveal his sincerity and moral worth. "With his student's cap set rakishly upon his thick, fair curls" he is both beautiful and full of masculine, athletic energy who "kicked up his heels like a colt." The characters deserve one another because both are perfect specimens of the ideals of their sex – physical beauty, innocence, female subservience and male athleticism. Jette's physical appearance places her within a Victorian ideology that sees moral women as chaste, fragile, docile, and childlike 'angels,' admired and objectified as objects of male consumption and dominance, and also as containing sexual power and potential that must be subdued through marriage. Her hair in particular, is rich in symbolic value as a symbol of her racial otherness and exotic desirability, and as something that can be tamed and civilized into a European coiffure as she becomes an object of Fritz's desire. Fritz's and Jette's bodies, in their inherent attractiveness and conformity to gender norms, and in their desire for one another, reveal their moral goodness through adherence to normative gender roles and embrace of conventional sexual values, which is articulated through and confirmed by their beauty. Lust, *Tent of Grace*, 59-60, 201, 255, 274, 287, 30; Lisa Michelle Hoffman-Reyes, "Subversive Beauty –Victorian Bodies of Expression," Ph.D. Diss., University of South Florida, May 2014; Elisabeth Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," *PMLA* 99.5 (1984): 936-54.

love between Fritz and Jette after soul-searching struggle is framed as a sign of the ascendance of tolerance and of universal human feeling and love over narrow prejudices and religious beliefs. Ultimately, the novel suggests that interfaith romance signals progress, of Christian morality (represented by the pastor's accession to the match), and the ascendance of universal love. The novel's tragic outcome turns Jette into a martyr who further proves, by her death, the necessity of such a love to reverse and redeem the deep-seated, superstitious hatred of the European past.

The story imagines Jewish particularistic objections to interfaith romance as a direct result of antisemitic violence, thus positing that in a place and time free from European prejudices, Jews should not object to such a union. In his decision to approve the marriage, the pastor first consults a rabbi, who argues against the marriage based on his experiences as a victim of violent antisemitism in Warsaw. The rabbi explains that Jews have been and are killed for their beliefs and in honor of this history they cannot allow the "edifice" of their separate religion to crumble.<sup>92</sup> While the pastor bemoans the rabbi's anti-intermarriage stance as tribalistic and backward, ultimately, the rabbi's predictions that antisemitism keeps Jews and Christians apart prove true, despite Fritz and Jette's decision to marry. After Jette has already agreed to the marriage, she is attacked in the woods by an angry mob under the premise of a blood libel and is beaten. She dies pathetically in Fritz's arms, suggesting the impossibility of a union sanctioned by God and love, but forbidden by human prejudices. As Lichtenstein writes of the events in the novel, "the world can be cruel, and even savage, when it comes to Jews" and it is this anti-Semitism that "militates against intermarriage" rather than personal relationships or

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<sup>92</sup> Lust, *Tent of Grace*, 381.

even questions of faith between husband and wife.<sup>93</sup> But this cruel world is a European world, and Jewish anti-intermarriage sentiment is only justified under European cruelty.

According to the novel, Fritz and Jette's marriage could only be possible in some future utopia in which violent antisemitism, and Jewish self-defensive tribalism as a result of that antisemitism, are no longer present. In the events of the novel, this place is heaven, where Fritz and Jette will meet after death, since life offered no sanctuary for their love. But the novel indicates that such a marriage is also possible in what Lichtenstein describes as a "figurative 'America'" with its "myths of liberty and new beginnings offered refuge for those seeking personal and spiritual freedom."<sup>94</sup> As Fritz interjects in his efforts to convince Jette to accept his proposal, "This spot of earth is not the whole world."<sup>95</sup> His brief comment hints at the idea that religious prejudice is not only a thing of the past to be discarded but specifically a vestige of the Old World, of Europe, that does not exist in an idealized version of America, equated with heaven as an idealized space free from hatred. He later explains, "There is a land – far across the sea – where neither she nor I are known– where liberty of thought and action prevails – where life may be begun anew and made hallowed and sweet by our own efforts."<sup>96</sup> Fritz's romantic construction of America aligns the imagery of a new, unsettled geographical space and the political liberties of democracy with the idea of holiness, suggesting that heaven on earth is a place where European prejudices can be forgotten both by their victims and by their perpetrators,

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<sup>93</sup> Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations*, 97.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Lust, *A Tent of Grace*, 278.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

and Judaism and Christianity united in a common faith. Although Jette contests Fritz's understanding of America, arguing that "the synagogue will cast me out, it will lay its ban upon me...the ban of which I speak would not be left here. Wherever I went, - to the remotest corner of the earth, - would it pursue me," contemporaneous reviewers affirm this messianic vision of America, arguing against the novel's tragic ending with the commentary, "It would have been better to have allowed the lovers to go to America, where the Jewess is not excommunicated if she marries out of her faith, although it is a hazardous step."<sup>97</sup> Though the idea of America appears only briefly in the novel, which was published in America and read primarily by American audiences, its setting in Germany, and in the past, and its tone that readers recognized as "intensely German" suggest that the prejudices represented in the novel can be, and are being, overcome in modern America.<sup>98</sup> In imagining America as the idealized refuge in which intermarriage is possible, Lust congratulates her American readers (both Jewish and Christian) for their advances toward egalitarianism which have allowed them to surpass the backwardness

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 279; "A Tent of Grace," *The Jewish Messenger*, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Erle, "Novels in Divers Tones," 2. Bettie Lowenberg's *The Irreversible Current* (1908), discussed later in this chapter, shares a similar attitude about American exceptionalism. The novel opens like a conventional immigrant narrative, detailing the journey of a young woman, Ruth, as she leaves her home in Wiesbaden, Germany behind and comes to America. In the first chapters, which are structured as a kind of prologue to the American narrative that follows, a young woman (who will later become the protagonist's mother) argues to her parents that America, where her brother Joseph has settled, could be a place where they would find happiness and prosperity, "even if people are not so religious there." Her parents, however, are resistant to change, believing that "everything which came from their forefathers...was wise, beneficial, and good" and that America is a place where Jews lose their religious traditions. In response to the parents, the authorial voice intrudes in favor of a positivist interpretation of historical events, moralizing that "innovation means advance." The author resists a stereotypical narrative of immigrants assimilating into American Christianity and losing their traditions by urging that America's philosophical, religious, and social possibilities transcend European Christianity and represent something future-oriented to which Jews can contribute. The author advocates for "progress," imagining America as the home of a more advanced historical and evolutionary reality that rejects "sectional isms" in favor of the worship of humanity as a whole. America is not, according to this narrative, a place where Jewish religious identity is *lost*, but instead a place where a universal, scientific, and inspired communal understanding and celebration of humanity is *gained* for Jews together with non-Jews. America offers an exceptional opportunity for this collaborative Jewish-Christian Enlightenment. Mrs. I. Lowenberg, *The Irresistible Current* (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1908), 3-5.

of a faraway Europe. The narrative shows American exceptionalism in relational terms, praising America as a heavenly utopia for having superseded European prejudices.

### **Rosa Sonneschein's "A Modern Miracle"**

In a narrative that makes use of interfaith romance, Rosa Sonneschein, editor of *American Jewess*, similarly foregrounds American egalitarianism in marriage as progress through a comparison to European prejudices. Her commentary on egalitarianism extends beyond relations between Jews and Christians, linking religious tolerance to gender politics, under the shared rubric of modern liberal thought. "A Modern Miracle" is the story of the Jewish community overcoming potential destruction instigated by interfaith romance through the cunning of a communal leader. At its heart, the story offers a vision of interfaith romance as potentially disastrous to the entire Jewish people in a context in which antisemitism is rampant, suggesting through comparison that America offers freedom from such a scenario.<sup>99</sup>

"A Modern Miracle" was published in the very first pages of the inaugural issue of *American Jewess*, marking its status as a mission statement for that journal's aim of cultivating Jewish female leadership for American Reform Judaism. By placing this story as the opening to her journal, Sonneschein implicitly sets up binaries between the American Judaism of the present and the European Judaism of the past, the American woman of the present and the European woman of the past. The story's authorship and its prominent placement in the journal suggest

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<sup>99</sup> Rosa Sonneschein, "A Modern Miracle," *The American Jewess* 1, no. 1, (April 1895): 1-9; 1, no. 2, (May 1895):53-61.

that it be read as a strategic platform through which Sonneschein defines Jewish American womanhood against an imagined past of European antisemitism and Jewish patriarchy.

Although America itself is not mentioned in the story, by representing the dilemmas, superstitions, and violence faced by Jews in the past as picturesque and archaic, Sonneschein asserts American Jews' security living in a time and place that have progressed beyond the antisemitism of the past.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, by setting a narrative of male Jewish leadership in a distant, parochial past, Sonneschein makes the case for America as a site of expanded women's leadership roles, as part of the promise of American egalitarianism.

Sonneschein's story explains through a lover's quarrel the tumultuous relationship between Jews and Christians in the past, the precariousness of Jewish communities in an antisemitic Christian context, and the problem of a male Jewish communal leadership insensitive to the need for relationship building as a form of peace-building. The story features a Jewish hero, Israel Ben-Levy, who, through his own cunning, saves the Jewish community of the village

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<sup>100</sup> *American Jewess's* serialized publication of Pauline S. Wise's translation of Leopold Kompert's "Christian and Leah" accomplishes similar work of contrasting European and American opportunities for women's leadership and Jews' integration with Christians, through a narrative of intermarriage set in the Central European ghetto. Wise, a member of the St. Louis Jewish women's literary club the "Pioneers," of which Rosa Sonneschein was also a prominent member, wrote several unpublished stories and penned translations of literature from German. She was married to Dr. Julius Wise, son of the leading figure of American Reform Judaism, Isaac Mayer Wise, and a contributing journalist to the *American Israelite*. Her translation of Kompert's story demonstrates the strong cultural ties felt by the Reform Jewish establishment to "a spiritual Germany" encapsulated in German Jewish literary production, since Kompert was a leading figure in contemporaneous German Jewish writing. In its context in *The American Jewess*, "Christian and Leah," a story that ends with a hope for a future world in which intermarriage is possible under Enlightenment ideals and a universal unity brought about by God, appears as a meditation on the *past* of Jewish separateness and the *future*, perhaps in America, of ecumenicism. Leopold Kompert, "Christian and Leah," trans. Pauline S. Wise. *The American Jewess* 1, No. 3 (June, 1895): 105-112; 1, No. 4 (July 1895): 159-167; 1, No. 5 (August, 1895): 215-222; 1, No. 6 (September 1895): 271-277; 2, No. 1 (October 1895): 36-42; 2, No. 2 (November 1895): 67-72; 2, No. 3 (December 1895): 154-159; Thomas Winkelbauer, "Leopold Kompert und die böhmischen Landjuden," *Conditio Judaica: Judentum, Antisemitismus und deutschsprachige Literatur vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Hans Otto Horch and Horst Denkler 2, (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989), 190-217, p. 198; Brinkman, "Jews, Germans, or Americans?" 133.



of Zomra, in the Carpathian Mountains, from destruction at the hands of antisemites who were perpetrators of the “tyranny” of “ignorance and superstition.”<sup>101</sup> The event that precipitates this potential destruction is Israel Ben-Levy’s own doing – an interfaith romance and its unraveling. As a “love-sick seventeen year old youth,” Israel Ben-Levy falls “head over ears” for a beautiful non-Jewish girl, Ilma Holosy, confessing to her his “great love” for her. Israel and Ilma place their “faith in each other,” ignoring their religious differences as they court one another for two years.<sup>102</sup> But their relationship grinds to a halt when Israel’s father insists that he be sent away to a rabbinical seminary. Ilma remains in Zomra, awaiting her lover’s return. When Israel returns to serve as the rabbi of the town, he ignores Ilma, marrying a Jewish woman instead. Spurned and enraged, Ilma Holosy becomes the embittered “witch of Zomra.” To fill the wound of her rejection, “the passionate love of the Christian was transformed into boundless hatred for Jews.”<sup>103</sup> She becomes obsessed with “the painful past” and flees into isolation. In her bitterness, Ilma devises a plan to falsely accuse the Jews of the murder of a Christian woman and then to persuade the Christian townspeople to poison the Jews’ bread at the end of Passover. The rapid decline of Jewish-Christian relations from a story of love regardless of religious difference to one of violent and irrational hatred reveals the unpredictability and volatility of Jewish-Christian relations in the European past.

The crisis is narrowly averted through Jewish cleverness, but only at the hands of the male leader whose irresponsible romance is the root cause of the potential disaster, and only

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<sup>101</sup> Sonneschein, “A Modern Miracle,” 1.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

through his manipulation of his congregants' religious faith and the Christian peasants' religious superstition. His lack of foresight and the contingencies upon which his solution hinges suggest that new times require new forms of leadership. Israel learns of the plot from his Christian servant woman and, alarmed for the safety of his community, he convinces his faithful congregation to observe Passover for one more day to keep them from eating the poisoned bread. When the peasants discover that the Jews survived their holiday they believed "that Jehovah had again given proof of his might and rendered the poison in the bread harmless. The old God of the Jews alone had performed a modern miracle" and they were grateful not to have been responsible for the deaths of the Jews.<sup>104</sup> Israel cleverly employs his congregants' faith in his rabbinical leadership and stringent adherence to ritual law to save them from destruction, and prevents further violence in appealing to peasants' credulity that a miracle has occurred. By referring to this miracle as "modern," Sonnenschein suggests that Israel's manipulation of Jewish and Christian blind faith reveals his own modern lack of superstition, and harbors a moment when such a stratagem will no longer be effective, when rational thought will be more widespread. Sonnenschein thus positions her readers to look to a different kind of leadership, perhaps female leadership, as a model for the future.

In "A Modern Miracle," male leadership brings about communal crisis: Israel himself bears the burden of having caused the potential destruction of the entire Jewish community because he transgressed forbidden lines in relations between Jews and non-Jews. As Israel declares to God when he learns of Ilma's plot to poison all of the Jews, "I am the guilty one. Let

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 61.

me alone suffer punishment!”<sup>105</sup> Although Christians in this story are unpredictable and unstable purveyors of ancient hatred and inheritors of the tradition of antisemitic violence, the ultimate blame for the violent incident falls not on Ilma, but on Israel.<sup>106</sup> It is his broken promise of love and devotion that turns Ilma from a sympathetic non-Jew into a witch who plots against the Jews. Although his initial transgression was one of love, because the story is set in the context of an old Europe full of superstition and hatred, Israel should have been able to predict that Ilma’s frustrated love would curdle into violent antisemitism, that her love is not a true or reasonable love built on virtue, but a senseless and changeable passion as irrational and volatile as antisemitic hatred. His transgression as a man in love with a woman put his entire Jewish community at risk.

“A Modern Miracle” is Sonneschein’s attempt to record and memorialize the history that Jews had overcome, marking the present moment as one of transcendence over religious prejudice and gender inequality. By representing the past as a place of irrational superstition, Sonneschein suggests that the prejudices that that governed Christian-Jewish relations in Zomra are also not part of the American present. The European past is one in which interaction between Jews and Christians, even when based in love and desire, is unpredictable and potentially calamitous. The present, the story implies, is one in which interaction between Jews and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>106</sup> In the story, for all that she is labeled as a “witch,” Ilma appears pitiable as an disenfranchised victim of male control and choice, and it seems that Israel’s great sin was not only that he began a relationship across the boundaries of religion but also that he terminated it – in so doing he wronged not only his community and the sacrosanct lines between Jews and Christians, but also wronged an innocent woman who had no choice or power to determine her own fate. The ambivalence the story offers with regard to interfaith romance is a result of the competing disenfranchisements of a rejected Christian woman and the vulnerable, victimized Jewish population, a representation of Rosa Sonneschein’s own intersectional sympathies of the promotion of women’s and Jewish rights.

Christians promises more stable relations based on rationality rather than passion. Likewise, by representing the past as a place devoid of Jewish women's leadership, and a place in which Jewish male leadership fails to achieve peaceful Christian-Jewish relations because of gender-based flaws, Sonneschein sets up her assertion that the egalitarianism of the American future depends on the participation of Jewish women.

Jewish women are absent from the story. Israel's wife has passed away and Israel must negotiate Jewish-Christian relations and lead his community without feminine guidance. The explicit purpose of *American Jewess*, an unofficial organ of the newly formed National Council of Jewish Women, was to cultivate American Jewish women's leadership, both within and without Jewish spheres. In representing male Jewish leadership resulting in a catastrophe that nearly leads to the destruction of a Jewish community, Sonneschein highlights the need of the American Jewish community for the particular virtues that women's leadership might offer – insights into the human heart (which would have allowed Israel to foresee that his abandonment of Ilma was cruel and potentially calamitous), and the ability to create interfaith connections with Christian women to build a community of understanding rather than one of fear.

*The American Jewess*, created as the “journalistic counterpart” to further the vision of the National Council of Jewish Women, had in its inception a vision of shared religious mission with Christian women's organizations, working as women toward the betterment of humanity.<sup>107</sup> The

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<sup>107</sup> Jane Heather Rothstein, “Rosa Sonneschein, *The American Jewess* and American Jewish Women's Activism in the 1890's,” Thesis, Case Western Reserve University, 1996, p. 8. *The American Jewess* appeared on the American Jewish literary scene as part of an increasing number of publications seeking to unify the American Jewish community and to facilitate communication and shared standards for American Jews. Newspapers such as *Occident*, established in 1843 in Philadelphia, and *American Israelite* and *Die Deborah*, established in Cincinnati in 1854 and 1855 respectively, allowed Jews from around the country to share their achievements and concerns and to reaffirm shared values. Like *American Israelite* and *Die Deborah*, which served as semi-official organs of the

National Council of Jewish Women was created as a result of the Congress of Jewish Women at the World's Parliament of Religions as part of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.<sup>108</sup> The Parliament, in which representatives of the world's religious traditions met together, was seen as a symbol of the modern era of enlightened religious pluralism, through a shared "search for spiritual unity and understanding."<sup>109</sup> Reform Jewish leaders were supportive of this venture, which they saw as an opportunity to publically refute antisemitism and participate in ecumenicism, and it naturally followed that Sonneschein shared in their enthusiasm for the Congress as a symbol of American religious tolerance.<sup>110</sup> Rosa Sonneschein, in her notes from

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Reform Movement in American Judaism and as such sought to bolster a sense of bourgeois cultural values among American Jews, *The American Jewess* served the National Council of Jewish Women in an unofficial but recognized capacity. See Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 207-208; Charles A. Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America: The Impact of Jewish Writing on American Culture* (New York, Sanhedrin Press, 1976), 18; Jonathan Sarna, "The History of the Jewish Press in North America," in *The North American Jewish Press: The 1994 Alexander Brin Forum* (Waltham, Mass: Cohen Center for Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 1995), 2-7. Reprinted in revised form in *Metro-West Jewish News 50th Anniversary Edition* (January 24, 1997), 60-66., p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> For a detailed history of this event, see Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993). See also Deborah Grand Golumb, "The 1893 Congress of Jewish Women: Evolution or Revolution in American Jewish Women's History?" *American Jewish History* 70, no. 1 (Sept 1980): 52-68.

<sup>109</sup> Egal Feldman, "American Ecumenicism: Chicago's World Parliament of Religions of 1893." *A Journal of Church and State* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1967): 180-200. The Congress, though it had a global reach, overrepresented American religious denominations, underrepresented marginalized American religions such as Mormonism, Native American religions, and African American religious denominations. There was no significant representation from the continent of Africa or South America, Islam was underrepresented, Sikhs and Tibetan Buddhists were not represented at all. Yet, American religious historian Richard Hughs Seeger argues that although its inclusivism "was tainted by racism and ethnocentrism and its platform flawed by facile theological assumptions" this "should not be allowed to overshadow its actual accomplishments" as standing "at the forefront of the ecumenical, dialogue, and interfaith movements that have been an important and conspicuous part of the religious world in the twentieth century." See Richard Hughs Seeger, "General Introduction" to *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893*, ed. Richard H. Seeger (Open Court Publishing, 1993), 3-11, p. 10. See also Justin Nordstrom, "Utopians at the Parliament: The World's Parliament of Religions and the Columbian Exposition of 1893," *Journal of Religious History* 33, no. 3 (Sept. 2009): 384-365.

<sup>110</sup>Feldman, "American Ecumenicism," 189-190. The Congress marked a turning point in American religious history, in which Judaism, along with Catholicism, were becoming part of the American religious mainstream. Although many faiths and communities were marginalized in this pluralist vision of American religion, Reform

the “editor’s desk” with which she concluded the first issue of the journal (the same issue that begins with her story “A Modern Miracle”), describes the enormous promise that she feels the Parliament symbolizes as “the first time the representatives of the principal religions of the world came together, each expounding the truths of its own faith”<sup>111</sup> She explains that though “metaphysical questions may yet divide the disciples of various faiths,” these differences of theological belief can be set aside, especially in the realm of women’s philanthropic work, which she calls “the endeavor of almost one million women to better the condition of sex, sect, and section.”<sup>112</sup>

As Rosa Sonneschein’s “A Modern Miracle” demonstrates, a hopeful vision of American egalitarianism linked to interfaith romance is a distinctively female presentation of the interfaith

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Judaism was accepted within it, and this feeling of acceptance surely shaped Reform belief in American exceptionalism. See Richard Hughs Seeger, “General Introduction,” 9.

<sup>111</sup> “Editor’s Desk,” 49.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. It is not clear where the number one million comes from, or precisely what organization she is referring to here. Sonneschein praises the National Council of Jewish Women for taking part in the religious parliament, and then writes vaguely of women’s philanthropic endeavors across religious divides. Multiple articles in the intervening pages between Sonneschein’s contributions to the issue affirm her message about the possibilities of the American present. In her “Report of the National Council of Jewish Women,” Hannah G. Solomon, the inaugural president of the organization, explains that the women of the council are “always ready to join hands in any work for the good of men, regardless of creed.” The article asserts that Jewish women working together on a national level can together combat religious prejudice and can work hand-in-hand with Christian women, tolerant of one another’s differences, in their shared charitable, social, and political goals. In his “The Position of Woman in America,” Dr. Adolph Moses, a Radical Reformer, argues that America is exceptional insofar as “the American nation... [has] redeemed women from the state of legal, social, and intellectual inferiority in which she had been kept from time immemorial” and explicitly contrasts the position of women in the “Old World” of Europe with that of emancipated American women. For Moses, as for Solomon and Sonneschein, women’s position of greater influence and liberty in America relates directly to the ecumenical possibilities of America because of women’s propensity toward promoting peace and reconciliation. He explains that women will, together with men and “loving harmony with him, work out the salvation of the race...and plant social light and truth... [she will] grapple with the great problems of humanity, and with her love and wisdom aid in giving them a peaceful solution.” Hannah G. Solomon, “Report of the National Council of Jewish Women” *American Jewess* 1, no. 1, (April 1895):27-31, p. 31; Adolph Moses, “The Position of Woman in America,” *American Jewess* 1, no. 1, (April 1895):15-20, pp.15, 18.

romance narrative, in which women's and Jews' growing equality are central principles of American liberal enlightenment. Sonneschein's representation in "A Modern Miracle" at the start of the issue of *Ilma Holosy*, neglected and ignored, using her bitterness and the suspicion with which others treat her to rouse hatred between religions and cause harm to people who do not share her faith stands in direct opposition to her praise, at the end of the issue, for the National Council of Jewish Women's empowering women to work together toward uplift for those in need, in the name of universal religious principles. This powerful contrast suggests the potential for the American Jewish woman, as a liberated woman in a land of religious tolerance, to bring about a time of universal brotherhood and peace. As the first issue of the journal progresses, the calamities of interfaith romance between Ilma and Israel in a European past give way to the hopefulness of women of different faiths working together for eleemosynary purposes in an American present, and this both justifies and glorifies the work of American Jewish women in their new roles of communal leadership. In Rosa Sonneschein's narrative, the failures and dangers of interethnic romance in the European past reveal what she feels was most lacking in the Jewish communal past, and is most urgently needed and being developed in the American present: Jewish women's communal leadership that can bring about, by virtue of women's strengths as relationship builders and lovers of peace, harmonious relations between Christians and Jews in America.

### **Female Optimism, Male Pessimism: The Romance and Tragedy of Inter-marriage**

A comparison between Emma Wolf's novel of interfaith marriage, *Other Things Being Equal* (1892) and Freidrich Kolbenheyer's novella "Jewish Blood," (1896), published serially in

*American Jewess*, further reveals the gendered dimension of interfaith romance as a model for Jewish/Christian relations in an increasingly secularizing society. Like Sonneschein, Wolf expresses the interarticulation of Jewish and women's increased rights in an American context through an interfaith romance narrative. The more commonly examined trope of interfaith romance as a tragedy that predicts the loss of Judaism in a temptingly accommodating Christian America is, largely, a male literary construction.<sup>113</sup> An examination of Wolf's novel reveals that literature about intermarriage written by women in this period, tying women's and Jews' rights to one another, paints an optimistic picture of an egalitarian society of individuals maintaining their identity privately within a secular public sphere, akin to women retaining independence within marriage.

### **Emma Wolf's Other Things Being Equal**

Emma Wolf's *Other Things Being Equal* (1892), which was reprinted six times and reissued in a revised version in 1916, is the best known example of American nineteenth century Jewish women's writing tackling the topic of intermarriage in narrative form. Through her title *Other Things Being Equal*, Wolf implies that intermarriage is only possible or desirable in a

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<sup>113</sup> Some examples include the novels of Sidney Luska, a Jewish-sounding pseudonym for the American Protestant-born author Henry Harland, who was a participant in German-Jewish society via Society of Ethical Culture. According to Leslie Fiedler, Luska "invented" the Jewish American novel with his representation of a discontented, alienated Jew uncertain of his identity who will one day merge with American Christian culture. The Jewish man is a symbol for assimilation itself, and struggles against that assimilation and the destruction of Jewishness that it entails. The overarching question of these novels is whether there can be a Jewish identity that "survives the abandonment of ghetto life." Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Island Within* (1928), which details generations of Jewish decline through intermarriage, and the struggle of a Jew to retain his Jewish soul within a marriage to a non-Jewish woman. The Jew must reject the non-Jewish woman, and thereby the Gentile world, in order to preserve himself and his people. See Fiedler, "Genesis: The American Jewish Novel Through the Twenties."



moment and place that allows for Jews' equality in citizenship, education, wealth, and social position, and that her characters exist in such a moment. The equality referenced in the title concerns not only Jews' position vis-a-vis the Christian majority, but also women's position in marriage in relation to their husbands. In order for a marriage between a Jewish woman and a Christian man to be possible, "other things" must already be equal in their marriage, such that the woman is able to maintain a separate and individual identity that her husband respects from the perspective of liberal egalitarianism.<sup>114</sup>

Centering on the romance between the educated, intellectually liberal upper-middle-class Jewish woman Ruth Levice and Dr. Herbert Kemp, an intimate in her family because of his role in treating her mother's rest cure, the novel advocates for a prioritization of intellectual equality in marriage over barriers of religion. Among nineteenth century American Jewish women's depictions of intermarriage, the novel is unique in its adoption of a marriage between a Jew and a Christian as one that, because of its basis in love and equality, cannot be wrong although it will surely be socially difficult. *Other Things Being Equal* represents intermarriage as a source of intergenerational conflict and a sign of an approaching enlightened, egalitarian future, drawing from and progressing out of tradition, but moving in a new and laudable direction. The narrative

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<sup>114</sup> This is the only kind of intermarriage Wolf finds acceptable. In her subsequent novel, *The Heirs of Yesterday* (1900), Jean Willard, the Jewish heroine, refuses the advance of a Christian who admires her and is willing to ignore her Jewishness because of her beauty. Her suitor argues that she is not among the Jews he reviles because "your sex unsects you." Jean is not receptive to this appeal, insisting that she is Jewish and will not idly listen to insults against Jews. Her rejection is evidence of Wolf's insistence that intermarriage is only possible or desirable in cases in which women are respected beyond the outward attractions of their sex, in which they are seen as entire people, with loyalties to their families and religions, and with independent beliefs. And, such a marriage is only possible and desirable when a man is willing to marry a woman not *despite* her Jewishness, but in acceptance of it. In other words, if (and only if) Christian men see Jewish women's sex and sect both as integral parts of the individual Jewish woman, and still want to marry them, than "other things" may be "equal" enough that such a marriage is possible, and even desirable. Emma Wolf, *Heirs of Yesterday* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1900), 62.

seeks a balance between preservation of Jewish distinctiveness and equality within Christian society, and finds a compromise between these conflicting poles in the controversial idea of intermarriage, precisely because of the nature of modern, egalitarian forms of marriage, in which men and women can retain and respect their separate identities in the same household.<sup>115</sup>

For Emma Wolf, intermarriage was a present reality of American life that demonstrated the potential Jews experienced for social acceptance as they rose on American socioeconomic ladders and integrated culturally into the American upper middle class. As Lori Harrison-Kahan explains, Wolf's representation of "cultured, professional, well-off Jews who could not be differentiated from their gentile neighbors except in their religious practices," draws upon her experiences in the Reform Jewish community of San Francisco's Pacific Heights, in which Jews "modeled their community and social lives on those of their gentile neighbors."<sup>116</sup> For Wolf, "intermarriage functions as a public affirmation of a social equality that has already been achieved," although hesitations expressed by characters opposed to the marriage suggest that

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<sup>115</sup> An egalitarian understanding of marriage was central to early feminist thought. Drawing upon and in conjunction with abolitionism, proponents of the antebellum women's rights movement argued against the notion of wives as property within marriage and for the idea that women were fundamentally human and deserving of equality. Fighting for married women's property ownership, shared child custody, and the keeping of earnings and inheritance, early women's rights advocates offered a new vision of marriage as a partnership between individuals, rather than a relationship of a husband's stewardship over his disenfranchised wife, even though this vision often did not match the reality of women who were dependent on their husband's income and therefore not on equal footing. This coincided with newly heightened emotional expectations that middle class marriage partners should love, respect, and be happy with one another. Wolf's representation of individuals involved in companionate harmony within existing patriarchal structures of marriage is by no means a radical feminist understanding of marriage. Rather, it incorporates new social and legal expectations of wives' growing independent status into existing marital models and insists that Ruth's participation in these trends be seen as evidence of her modern, liberated womanhood. See Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>116</sup> Lori Harrison-Kahan, "Pioneering Women Writers and the De-Ghettoisation of Early American Jewish Fiction," *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction*, ed. David Brauner and Axel Staehler (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 20-32, pp. 22, 20.

barriers to social integration between Jews and gentiles have not fully disappeared.<sup>117</sup> Wolf trumpets intermarriage as a symbol of the progress Jews and Christians have made in their ability to see one another as equals and to live together in a tolerant civil society in which religion is a matter of individual faith rather than corporate, sectarian division, just as she promotes egalitarian marriage as a symbol of women's progress toward equality.

In much of Wolf's writing, including *Other Things Being Equal*, female characters, while primarily concerned with and wholly devoted to their responsibility to family, "exhibit an independent sense of self."<sup>118</sup> Through marriages and work that evidence their limited choices, her protagonists illustrate women's independence as decision makers, who even within the contractual obligations of marriage choose how they will execute their role as wives, mothers, and sisters, basing their decisions on their moral values, emotions, and erudition.<sup>119</sup> In *Other Things Being Equal*, Ruth Levice is a strong-willed, educated, morally resolute woman who finds in Dr. Kemp a partner who encourages and facilitates these strengths. Ruth is drawn to Dr.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>118</sup> Barbara Cantalupo, "Introduction" to Emma Wolf, *Other Things Being Equal* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 9-58, p. 16. In her critical introduction to *Other Things Being Equal*, Barbara Cantalupo notes that Emma Wolf likely did not identify as a feminist, since contemporaneous feminism was often hostile to Jews or at best Christian-centered, and her consideration of women's issues "does not fit neatly into any ideology." Yet, in her writing she is broadly in favor of women's self-worth. Cantalupo, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>119</sup> Sophia B. Lehman, "Wolf, Emma." *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000. <http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-02877.html>. For instance, In *A Prodigal In Love* (1894), the heroine, Constance, who has developed a "manly" sensibility because of her responsibilities as guardian to her orphaned siblings, is persuaded to marry on the grounds that it is "practical" for two people in need of companionship. She envisions executing her responsibilities toward her siblings with the same devotion and discipline that she displayed as a head of household, not rescinding this power through marriage. Hers is a marriage based on friendship rather than dependence. In *The Joy of Life* (1896), Barbara Gerrish, a feisty young woman who attends college despite her family's concern that "men don't want to marry blue-stockings" insists that "I shall grow the way I want to grow, and if men don't want me they may leave me." Although she falls in love, she ends the novel alone after the object of her affections is killed in an accident, and she is unafraid and unhesitant about her role as an independent, unmarried woman. Emma Wolf, *A Prodigal in Love: A Novel* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), 18, 256; Emma Wolf, *The Joy in Life* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1896), 72.

Kemp for his “dignity” and “gentleness” as a doctor, and especially to his respect for the women who are under his care. Kemp insists that Ruth’s mother Esther Levice, his patient, is “not a child,” evincing respect for her as an individual even though she is emotionally fragile and in need of medical attention.<sup>120</sup> He empowers Ruth to tend to her mother, thus giving her responsibility and a sense of importance. He introduces her to a morally compromised woman, whom she aids, thereby encouraging her to take risks and take a stand outside the purview of her parents’ guidance and approval. In this way, Dr. Kemp helps Ruth to develop her independence and maturity, and their romance is built around Dr. Kemp’s encouragement and guidance of Ruth’s development as an independent, modern woman.

In the narrative, Wolf frames women’s independence as an emblem of social progress through intergenerational comparisons. She depicts Ruth’s mother as a woman incapable of the pressures of public life. Esther Levice has a great “love of society,” but through participation in “continual gaiety” she has become “nervous and hysterical” and is in need of medical care and strong manly guidance to assuage her feminine complaint.<sup>121</sup> She needs her husband to arrange for her care, and she allows him to make decisions about their daughter’s upbringing and her marriage on behalf of the couple. She lacks the strength to insist on her own opinions outside the realm of fashion. Ruth, on the other hand, exceeds her mother’s capacities, acting with confidence and self-assuredness as she takes on her mother’s care. In this way, she exemplifies contemporary standards of “New Womanhood” – she represents the future of femininity as strong, useful, oriented toward the betterment of society, and with an independent set of beliefs

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<sup>120</sup> Emma Wolf, *Other Things Being Equal* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 79.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

and expertise. With Dr. Kemp's permission, and under his supervision and tutelage, Ruth develops the moral certitude that differentiates her from her mother and guarantees that she will remain an individual even within marriage, and this is represented in the novel as a mark of women's social progress. Although this model of women's 'independence' is predicated on a patriarchal structure in which a male trains and allows a woman under his purview to behave in ways they both see as modern, Wolf indicates that the level of responsibility and public duty that Ruth takes on is a marker of her status as a modern woman.

In *Other Things Being Equal*, not only women's independence but also ecumenicism is a signpost of liberal social progress. Interfaith romance is positioned in the novel as a sign of the future, and the intergenerational emplotment of Ruth's desire for the marriage against her father's reluctance creates a sense that intermarriage (both as a sign of women's independence in marriage and as a sign of Jews' participation *as Jews* in liberal, universalizing religious sensibilities) is part of the natural progression of the generations, according to an evolutionary logic of cultural progress. Ruth's father Jules Levice's objections to the marriage stem from his sense of pride in the uniqueness of Jewish history. He asserts to Dr. Kemp that Judaism is "a faith that has withstood everything and has never yet been sneered at, however its followers have been persecuted" and it is for this reason that Ruth should feel pride in her religion that would keep her from marrying outside of it. Yet, as Levice explains, "many of its minor forms are slowly dying out and will soon be remembered only historically."<sup>122</sup> This admission of Jewish separateness as part of a past-oriented religious sensibility suggests the inevitability that his daughter's religious ecumenicism should exceed even Levice's own social and theological

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

liberalism. Ultimately, Levice acknowledges that his objections are grounded in an “outworn restriction” and although he blesses the marriage before he dies, as he succumbs to illness the moribund objections to intermarriage are symbolically extinguished with him.<sup>123</sup>

The intermarriage that Ruth Levice and Dr. Herbert Kemp plan and describe to her father when they ask his approval is dependent on modern ideas of womanhood, liberal religious faith, and state-sponsored religious freedom. Their proposed marriage is one of domestic religious coexistence that resists the conflation of marriage and conversion, thereby also challenging models of marriage in which the woman is subsumed under her husband’s social and cultural identities. Interfaith marriage is only fathomable in a context in which religion is divorced from matters of state: Ruth need not convert in order to marry Dr. Kemp, and the couple may therefore envision what a marriage between members of a different faith might be. The respect and privacy Ruth and Kemp allot one another’s religious affiliations within their planned marriage is predicated upon a notion of religion as primarily the spiritual beliefs of an individual rather than the behaviors of a community.<sup>124</sup> Ruth’s adherence to Reform Judaism is presented as compatible with Kemp’s liberal Christianity, which takes the specific form of Unitarianism, both of which are modern, liberal forms of religion that tend toward a universalist approach.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>124</sup> As Leora Batnitzky argues, the notion of Jewish religion is a modern one, conforming to a modern Protestant category of religion as adherence to faith or belief, “which by definition is individual and private.” She explains that major German Jewish thinkers tried to reconcile a Jewish tradition of practice and communal life with this modern conception of religion. Here, intermarriage between individuals of differing faiths is possible only insofar as these are ‘faiths’ in the sense of private belief and will not interfere with the shared spheres of public and even of domestic life outside of the small compartment allotted to religious belief. Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, 1.

<sup>125</sup> For an overview of Reform Judaism’s relationship to Unitarianism and liberal Christianity in this period, see Benny Kraut, “The Ambivalent Relations of American Reform Judaism with Unitarianism in the Last Third of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, no. 1, (Winter 1986): 58-68.

Minimal differences in their religious practices will not interfere in the couple's shared devotion to one another, to values of charity and community service, to the everyday conduct of their household and lives. Both Ruth and Kemp see themselves as pious individuals who have "absorbed the essence" of their religions, but whose participation in religious custom is minimal.<sup>126</sup> Because their religions are a matter of individual belief rather than communal participation and practice, Ruth's insistence that "I am a Jewess and will die one" is a matter of personal confession and identity, and also an articulation of her independence as a woman from her husband's ways of thinking and of identifying himself.<sup>127</sup> Ruth will not simply take on Dr. Kemp's religion by marrying because she will not be subsumed by her husband in marriage. She sees herself as an individual in the marriage, who can have her own beliefs, ideas, and religious traditions. As such, her interfaith marriage provides a space for both women's and Jews' acceptance as equals alongside a Christian male counterpart.

### **Friedrich Kolbenheyer's "Jewish Blood"**

Freidrich Kolbenheyer's "Jewish Blood" (1896), a serialized story printed in *American Jewess*, refutes Emma Wolf's representation of intermarriage as holding the redemptive promise of women's and Jews' independence within an enlightened and tolerant society.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Wolf, *Other Things Being Equal*, 195.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>128</sup> Freidrich Kolbenheyer (1843-1921), who is perhaps most famous for being Kate Chopin's long time friend and family doctor, was an Austrian-born physician trained in Vienna who immigrated to St. Louis in 1871. Famous for his strident antimonarchal political views and fascinating conversation, Kolbenheyer was an intellectual conversant in philosophy and history and devoted to serving the poor. As vice president of Joseph Pulitzer's *Post-Dispatch*, he was a leader in St. Louis literary and intellectual circles. Before moving to Chicago and establishing *American Jewess*, Rosa Sonneschein lived in St. Louis, with her then-husband (the couple subsequently divorced) who served as a rabbi of a liberal Reform congregation in the city. There, she was a leader in St. Louis Jewish intellectual circles

Kolbenheyer's story warns against the dangers of assimilation that might result in the end of Jews as a separate entity.<sup>129</sup> Given his participation in Jewish literary circles in which *Other Things Being Equal* was widely read and discussed, it is extremely likely that Kolbenheyer would have read Wolf's novel, and "Jewish Blood," arguing against intermarriage, stands as a counterpoint and a response to Wolf's more liberal narrative.<sup>130</sup> Ignoring the Wolf's focus on women's independence, Kolbenheyer responds solely to her positive assessment that intermarriage heralds a future of Jewish integration into Christian society. Kolbenheyer disputes Wolf's optimism about intermarriage, arguing that such integration would be disastrous for the continuity of the Jewish people. His story details an unfulfilled romance in which the love between Jew and non-Jew is represented as real and pure, but forbidden because of its threat to Jewish continuity. Using the language of race, he argues that Jewish equality requires not only the opportunity to persist in independent beliefs within a tolerant society, but in Jewish women's bodies producing Jewish children into perpetuity. As such, Kolbenheyer's story is representative of a dominant male narrative of intermarriage.

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and was likely friendly with Kolbenheyer. Both writers frequented Chopin's home which was a gathering place for St. Louis intellectuals. See Emily Thoth, *Unveiling Kate Chopin* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), 75, 105-106; Nancy A. Walker, "'Local Color' Literature and *A Night in Acadie*," in *Kate Chopin*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 167-190, p. 175.

<sup>129</sup> Friedrich Kolbenheyer, "Jewish Blood," *The American Jewess* 2, No. 7 (April 1896): 329-334; 2, No. 8 (May 1896): 389-395; 2, No. 9 (June, 1896): 447-453; 2, No. 10 (July 1896): 505-514; 2, No. 11 (August 1896): 563-569; 2, No. 12 (September 1896): 613-616.

<sup>130</sup> An unattributed positive review of Wolf's *Other Things Being Equal* was published in *The American Jewess* in September 1895, praising the novel for "trying to establish a closer social relationship between Jews and Gentiles" by "holding out the possibility of such a union [between a Jew and a Christian] without violating religious convictions." Kolbenheyer's story appears to be a counterpoint to this review, as well as to Wolf's novel itself. See "Emma Wolf," *The American Jewess* 1, No. 6 (Sept. 1895): 294-295.



In polemicizing against intermarriage, Kolbenheyer focuses on the responsibility of Jewish men to produce heirs. Jewish women in the story are silent, but the idea of Jewish women is pivotal – Jewish women are the necessary vessels of Jewish male continuity, their sole purpose in the story determined by their reproductive role. Kolbenheyer represents marriage as a means toward the traditional Jewish obligation to “be fruitful and multiply,” and he evaluates interfaith romance only as a stumbling block to this mission. Kolbenheyer’s focus on the bodily effects of interfaith romance with his emphasis on the impossibility and the sterility of romances between Jews and non-Jews, reifies the category of Jew as a biological entity. This racial component of his argument aligns with his conflation of women with their wombs: he is less concerned with the marriages and relationships that emerge out of interfaith romance than he is with the reproductive component, in its racialist, religious, and cultural dimensions.

“Jewish Blood” takes place in contemporary fin-de-siècle America, in “one of the large cities of the West” (like the San Francisco setting of Emma Wolf’s work).<sup>131</sup> The story is an accounting of generations of change and assimilation, emphasizing the processes of historic change as experienced on the level of one particular man and his family. “Jewish Blood” offers a depiction of interfaith romance as a crisis point through which characters articulate their definitions of what it means to be a Jew and the borders and boundaries between Jews and non-Jews. In Kolbenheyer’s story, three men articulate a variety of expressions of the limits of Jewishness, from religious faith to filial loyalty, from a particularistic window through which to achieve universalist thought to a simple question of physical bodies. Through these definitions, the characters enact a debate about the value of Jewishness and whether it can or should continue

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

into the future. Ultimately, the story offers a powerful critique of interfaith romance as devastating to the Jewish reproduction imperative.

Kolbenheyer's story centers on Abraham Nieder, an immigrant from Posen, in Germany, who had come to America with his wife Sarah (who is otherwise absent from the text) "enticed by the subtle charm of the word 'liberty.'"<sup>132</sup> Abraham is the inheritor of what is presented as an authentic and ancient experience of Jewish learning, having studied in Germany under his father-in-law, an "old Jewish savant whose mind was overloaded with ponderous and unpractical learning."<sup>133</sup> Abraham had "culled the useful from the rubbish of his teacher's wisdom" so that by the time he arrives in America, Abraham and his wife Sarah are already venturing into a new kind of Jewish living, less informed by tradition than that of his ancestors.<sup>134</sup> Echoing the Biblical story, Abraham smashes the idols of his forefathers by applying logic to ancient custom and settles in the uncharted territory of America with the aim of building a new home full of righteousness without superstition. But his failure to increase and multiply suggests the limitations and dangers of establishing an American Jewish family without the faith and religious tradition that defined Abraham's European Jewish background.

Abraham's ambitions to expand his family into future generations is stymied when only two of his children survive to adulthood, his oldest son Aaron and his youngest son, Jacob. In a

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 330. In "Jewish Blood," Abraham enacts the Biblical story by smashing the idols of traditional Judaism and turning toward an Enlightened, rational form of Judaism. But although he has two sons, one who is a disappointment and who becomes part of a different faith tradition, and one who follows his father's advice and allegiance to his faith, neither son is an Isaac insofar as neither is the progenitor of a new nation. This subversion of the Biblical story suggests that the new, enlightened form of Judaism is one that does not have a future.

story in which Jewish futures depend on a woman's reproductive capacity to produce another generation of Jews, Abraham and Sarah's low fertility indicates how imperiled their reproductive mission is, even at the story's outset. It also links them to their Biblical predecessors, whose low and belated fertility nevertheless yielded a vast tribe of descendants, and whose success as a people relies on Jacob as a progenitor of the Tribes of Israel.

Abraham aims to bring these two precious sons up in his new and modern interpretation of Jewish religious tradition and through them to continue his faith in a new land, yet Abraham has long been worried about the possibility of his children losing touch with their religious background through "contamiat[ion] by modern innovations."<sup>135</sup> Their religious upbringing is also complicated by their relationship with Clara, the daughter of their Catholic neighbor, who becomes an adopted member of their household at the age of fifteen, after her mother's death. Like the pastor in Lust's *Tent of Grace*, Abraham pledges that Clara will be encouraged to maintain her religion: "Clara, while in my house, shall remain as true and faithful a Catholic as I hope to remain a Jew."<sup>136</sup> Abraham protects religious pluralism within his home, encouraging Clara's practice of Catholicism and demonstrating that Jewish and Christian religious traditions can live peaceably under one tolerant roof. Predictably, both of Abraham's sons fall in love with Clara, thus jeopardizing their father's dreams of continuing his Jewish customs, ethical tradition, and familial inheritance into the future.

For Aaron, love is intertwined with religious faith, and falling in love with Clara necessitates religious conversion. Having rejected Jewish religious tradition because it fails to

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

ease the pain he feels that his love for Clara may be unrequited, Aaron returns to the idea of religious faith through watching Clara pray in church on Easter. Although he had not felt moved by religion before, “he eagerly seized the idea of praying to Clara’s God; to share with her the faith that had made her so good and kept her so pure... For him Christianity was indeed the religion of love.”<sup>137</sup> For Aaron, romantic and religious love are one and the same, and both have the redemptive power to rescue him from his self-doubt and to imbue his life with meaning. He is drawn to religious expression, but as he lives in a household that has eschewed Jewish ritual practices, he looks for inspiration in another faith. Aaron’s love for a Catholic woman cannot be separated from his newfound love for Catholicism, and his identity as a Catholic is bound up with his association that the faith is “Clara’s religion.”<sup>138</sup> His love for Clara is not about a relationship with another individual (like that of Ruth and Dr. Kemp in *Other Things Being Equal*) but about religious belief and practice. Aaron’s love for Clara does not properly constitute an interfaith romance, because through his devotion to Clara and her religion, Aaron ceases to be a Jew, in the sense of religious confession. This romance follows an older European model in which marriage between Jews and Christians could only legally be possible with an act of religious conversion (at which point it would cease, at least in terms of religious confession, to be an intermarriage).<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 390.

<sup>139</sup> Mixed confessional marriage was first legally permitted in Germany in 1875 and in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1868. Because the United States constitution established separation of church and state from its founding, such marriages were legal since the country’s inception. For this reason, I am referring to the idea of conversion for marriage as a European narrative arc of intermarriage.

Kolbenheyer discounts Aaron's definition of Jewishness (purely religious, rather than racial) as misguided by emphasizing the imperfections in his physical form. Aaron's body displays the weaknesses associated with stereotypes of the European Jew, and his actions are the result of his imperfections.<sup>140</sup> Aaron is an "unsightly hunchback, with his head greatly too large for his body. His face was without beauty, the nose of the prominent oriental type."<sup>141</sup> Together with his physical malformation is an accompanying malformed personality, characterized by "sharp and remorseless cynicism."<sup>142</sup> Aaron's warped, malformed physical and intellectual characteristics cause bitterness and self-hatred which lead him to, like his biblical antecedent, worship a false idol, embodied in Clara and her Christianity, rather than having the patience to find redemption and fulfillment through family loyalty and Jewish faith. Kolbenheyer punctuates his argument that such a love cannot produce Jewish children or Jewish futures with its tragic ending: when Clara leaves the Jewish family's home as a result of the family's distress over interfaith romances, Aaron dies in pursuit of her and is given a Catholic burial at his own request. Even after his death, Aaron has abandoned Jewishness through interfaith romance and its traditional corollary, conversion.

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<sup>140</sup> By describing Aaron as physically degenerate and therefore pathologically embittered and traitorous, Kolbenheyer is making use of tropes of Jewishness taken from contemporary anti-Semitic discourse, in which, over the course of the nineteenth century, Jews were increasingly seen as physically diseased rather than theologically threatening. Interestingly, in this story it is Aaron's repulsively Jewish body, inherently untrustworthy and ugly, that precipitates his betrayal of his Jewish family to become a Christian. He is too Jewish, in the sense of the anti-Semitic stereotype, to remain a Jew in a story that seeks to present Jews in a positive light. See Sander L. Gilman, "The Madness of the Jews," in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 150-162.

<sup>141</sup> Kolbenheyer, "Jewish Blood," 330.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

Jacob's form of interfaith romance is not a conversion narrative but a modern, American interfaith romance, akin to that of Ruth and Dr. Kemp in *Other Things Being Equal*. Through his rebuttal of this form of interfaith romance, which takes up most of the story, Kolbenheyer asserts that Wolf's innovative vision of interfaith love is as dangerous to the future of the Jewish people as the conversion narrative. He turns Wolf's idea of progress on its head by equating older and newer forms of interfaith love narratives as having the same ultimate consequence for the Jews: Kolbenheyer claims that all forms of interfaith love will result in the tragic end of the Jewish people.

Jacob's love of Clara is not about religion or ideology, but about his attraction to her as an individual. As he describes it, "our hearts spoke."<sup>143</sup> His love is an expression of individual preference that he makes without thought to national, religious, or familial obligations, and he does not anticipate that he or Clara will change their religious or communal identities through their union. But his is an unthinking love, and he is unable to articulate its merits in the face of his father's opposition. He (unlike Wolf's Ruth) is easily swayed by his father's powers of persuasion when his American-born individualism is challenged by his greater obligations to Jewish peoplehood.

When Abraham learns of Jacob's love for Clara, he explains his position on the matter to his son. Abraham's discourse in response to his son's declaration of love takes up a significant percentage of the story, making the rest of the narrative a mere frame for the "struggle between the Jew and the man" that Abraham undergoes in trying to "save his house" (the house of Jacob

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

or the Jewish people writ large) “from destruction.”<sup>144</sup> Abraham does not deny Clara’s desirability: As a rational “man” he is a proponent of love and choice. But Abraham argues that he is more than an individual – he is a member of a collective based on history and biology, and his Jewishness requires a sense of collective obligation. A marriage partner is more than an individual, she is a conduit for Jewish peoplehood (by her ability to produce Jewish offspring) and as a “Jew” he must argue against his son’s romance.<sup>145</sup> Abraham defines Jewishness in two ways: as a biological entity, the integrity of which would be compromised by the creation of an interracial family, and as an intellectual pursuit linked to enlightenment. In this way, he links his protests against intermarriage to the very forces that Wolf suggests intermarriage represents: modern liberal thought. As Abraham describes it, “Judaism gives full scope to free thought... and assists the progress of humanity and the world of ideas.”<sup>146</sup> Judaism, in its particularity and separateness, allows liberal enlightenment to flourish, and therefore Jews have an obligation to maintain their separateness in the name of that enlightenment.

In his argument about race and biology, Abraham claims that although Jacob and Clara are good people and deserving of one another, they must not disregard the “dissimilarity” of their races. They may love one another, but they should not marry because “a chemical fusion is impossible.”<sup>147</sup> He claims that “their union can never be wholesome, homogenous or enduring”

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

because on a physical level Christian and Jewish bodies are not compatible.<sup>148</sup> Here, Abraham sets the limits of Jewish identity on the level of blood and bodies, arguing that there is a chemical element to intermarriage that seems unhealthy or unpalatable. Abraham's tracing Jewish difference to blood is an instance of what David Biale describes as "the way blood inhabits the imagination as both substance and symbol."<sup>149</sup> The "giving of blood" through exogamy, creates community outside of the family group, thus raising the question of where the borders of community end. As he explains, "blood is what humanity has in common. But it is also what separates and distinguishes... blood is a universal fluid but also a marker of difference."<sup>150</sup> Having let go of the Jewish intellectual and religious traditionalism with which he was educated, Abraham shores up the boundaries of Jewishness not on ideas or actions, but on the basis of blood, a rhetoric common to modern nationalism, claiming that Jacob and Clara represent "opposite group[s] of the human family."<sup>151</sup> He therefore argues that even the preservation of Judaism at the biological level is a triumph in the American "warfare" between the races in a fight for survival, a struggle between races that he describes using Darwinian rhetoric.<sup>152</sup> As Anne C. Rose and Eric Goldstein have demonstrated, Jews at the end of the nineteenth century employed the language of race science that was current throughout Western society to describe the American Jewish community "on new terms" that were not religious but based on a shared inheritance with a "broader foundation than ritual," thus encompassing Jews who had eschewed

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>151</sup> Kolbenheyer, "Jewish Blood," 451.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 452.



traditional beliefs and practices.<sup>153</sup> In Abraham's polemical lecture to his son, he attempts to harness a positive sense of 'race,' a term widely and variously employed at the turn-of-the-century to safeguard the boundaries of Jewish community as the characteristics of that community were increasingly difficult to define.<sup>154</sup>

Abraham urges his son not to marry Clara not only because such a mixture of blood is incompatible, but out of loyalty to the idea of the continuation of the Jewish race for its own sake, for the sake of "old historic unity" and the beliefs of the past, whether or not Jacob holds such beliefs himself.<sup>155</sup> Abraham's usage of the idea of blood and race, as with many other contemporaneous writers and thinkers, is imprecise equates biology with what today might be described as 'culture.'<sup>156</sup> Abraham justifies his racial language by claiming that "to the Jew the questions of race and faith are identical" and therefore that "our religion, with its exalted and inspired idea of God" can only be protected by preserving the separateness of Jewish bodies, "the integrity in isolation of the Oriental people."<sup>157</sup> For Abraham, the continuation of Jewish blood stands in for the continuation of historic Jewish beliefs and communities, and he asks his son to maintain this purity of blood out of respect for the Jewish past that it represents, regardless of Jacob's own beliefs and knowledge about Jewish tradition and history. Although Jewish extinction seems inevitable at some point in the future of America, Abraham does not feel that

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<sup>153</sup> Anne C. Rose, "Jewish 'Race' in America: Racial Language in Jewish American Prose, 1890-1933," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 36 (2002-2003): 239-252, p. 240.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>155</sup> Kolbenheyer, "Jewish Blood," 452.

<sup>156</sup> Rose, "Jewish 'Race' in America," 243.

<sup>157</sup> Kolbenheyer, "Jewish Blood," 505.

Jacob should voluntarily take part in the American process of assimilation and “surrender his existence before his time.” He continues, “My son, do you realize what it means for a Jew to desert his post? We are beset by dangers on every side; we are about to sink in a sea of troubles. But the most suicidal of all our faults and follies is the introduction of mixed marriages.”<sup>158</sup> Jacob bows to his father’s wishes and tells Clara that he cannot marry her out of a sense of duty to the Jewish people. He reiterates his father’s synecdochal arguments about blood by using the language of history, peoplehood, and victimhood in his explanation to Clara: “we are scattered over the earth, reduced in numbers, of little importance, confined to narrow pursuits; and we must not give away one drop of blood, nor permit the infusion of any strange blood into our system.”<sup>159</sup> In linking blood and culture to questions of continuity, Abraham and Jacob make an argument for marriage as primarily reproductive, invalidating Wolf’s attempts to represent intermarriage as an act between individuals irrespective of their collective religious or cultural identities.

After his brother’s death, Jacob ultimately defies his father’s advice and searches the world for Clara, who, he eventually finds, is serving as a nurse in Turkey and has taken gravely ill. Weeks before her death he marries her, but their marriage is “only a sacred union of the soul. In such circumstances there could be no question of a fusion of blood.”<sup>1</sup> Jacob does not wish to leave her grave and may never return home. Through this pathetic ending, although he treats the lovers with sympathy and emphasizes their honorableness and the purity of their romantic feelings, Kolbenheyer warns that intermarriage is nothing but tragedy and devastation, and that

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

there is no middle ground on the issue of intermarriage save for in some imaginary space in which intermarriage is divorced from the question of continuity: Jacob and Clara can only marry if a procreative relationship is impossible. Abraham's assertion that the future of Judaism in America is its dissolution appears true, as Abraham is ultimately unable to convince his children to stay within the fold and unable to perpetuate his family into another generation. As a cautionary retelling of Biblical story of Abraham, (contrasted with Wolf's optimistic retelling of the Biblical story of Ruth, discussed below), Kolbenheyer represents through his symbolic American Jewish progenitor's failure, through the tragedy of intermarriage, the demise of Jewishness in America writ large.

Kolbenheyer presents his story in the formula of a sentimental romantic tragedy, to an audience of women trained to find the tale of a woman's self-sacrifice and death beautiful and affecting.<sup>160</sup> Jewish women themselves have no voice in the story: it is a story about male leadership, male choices, and male cultural inheritance, in direct contrast to *Other Things Being Equal* as a novel in which women's agency and voice are central, even when the protagonist accedes to her father's wishes. In "Jewish Blood," the idea of intermarriage as threatening to Jewish racial continuity is corroborated by the notion of matrilineal descent: according to Jewish ritual law, any children Clara would bear in a marriage to a Jewish man would not be Jewish, and the marriage from Abraham's point of view therefore would be childless – the marriage might be more hopeful if it were between a Jewish woman and a Christian man (as is the case in Wolf's narrative). Regardless, Kolbenheyer uses this fiction about men to lecture Jewish women (the

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<sup>160</sup> For a discussion of the role of self-sacrificing, beautiful death in literature of the period, see Ann Douglas "The Domestication of Death," in *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 200-226.

presumed audience of *American Jewess*) on their obligations to peoplehood over love, condemning the sentimentality that might lead women to value love over obligation to Jewishness through the mode of sentimental fiction. As a response to *Other Things Being Equal*, Kolbenheyer's narrative argues that the idea of individual love, however beautiful from the vantage point of the Victorian novel, will prove disastrous to the Jewish people writ large. Insofar as intermarriage is a trend of the future, that trend is not one of progress to be celebrated (the dual egalitarian gains of Jews and women that Wolf describes) but one of impending tragedy for the Jewish patriarchal line.

### **Theological Implications and the Role of Women**

Kolbenheyer's assessment of intermarriage as tragic is not only about demographic concerns for the future of the Jewish people. It is also an argument for the importance of the preservation of modern, enlightened forms of Judaism to support the special mission of Reform Judaism in the promotion of liberal discourse.<sup>161</sup> As Abraham explains, "Judaism...assists the progress of humanity."<sup>162</sup> This idea of the need to preserve Reform Judaism for the present, for the sake of an enlightened future, was an established argument in contemporaneous Reform Jewish discourse. Professing that liberal Judaism was "the only true religion compatible with intellectual freedom, science, and progress," Reform Jewish leaders such as Isaac Mayer Wise

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<sup>161</sup> Nineteenth century Jewish authors often used literature as a "forum for theological debate ... [that] gave ordinary readers access to the arguments articulated more abstractly by religious leaders and pamphleteers," and Kolbenheyer and Wolf's narratives are emblematic of this kind of theological conversation couched in popular fiction. Hess, et al, "Introduction" to *Nineteenth Century Jewish Literature: A Reader*, 19.

<sup>162</sup> Kolbenheyer, "Jewish Blood," 450.

advocated for Jews to continue adhering to the particularism of their religious practice in order that they could lead the way toward the universal “religion of humanity” based in enlightened Judaism that lay in store for the future of the world.<sup>163</sup> They celebrated a Judaism rooted in the achievements of the Jewish past that demanded the future existence of the Jews through their “historically mandated Jewish mission to disseminate ethical monotheism to the world.”<sup>164</sup> Thus, Kolbenheyer’s present-minded particularist critique of intermarriage promotes a future-oriented vision for universal religion.<sup>165</sup>

What Kolbenheyer fails to take into account is that Emma Wolf’s representation of intermarriage as symbolic of progress is not only about Reform Judaism’s mission to preserve and promote liberal religion, it is also about Jewish women’s special role in that project. For nineteenth century Jewish women in America, writing within a Reform Jewish context, intermarriage had symbolic value in literature that extended beyond practical concerns of communal integrity, cultural assimilation, and intergenerational conflict. Through writing about domestic arrangements, Jewish women authors could claim authority over, and present in the

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<sup>163</sup> Benny Kraut, “Judaism Triumphant: Isaac Mayer Wise on Unitarianism and Liberal Christianity,” *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982/1983):179-230, p. 184.

<sup>164</sup> Benny Kraut, “Unitarianism on the Reform Mind,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division B: The History of the Jewish People (1981): 91-98, p. 94.

<sup>165</sup> Kolbenheyer insists that Judaism must be kept separate from Christianity in order to further this mission, rather than merging in the present moment with liberal Christianity to form a more universal ethical monotheism (as some liberal theologians proposed) by equating Christians, and therefore Christian American society, with Catholicism. Through his use of a form of Christianity often represented as antithetical to liberalism and individual thought, associated with Europe and with medieval anti-Judaism, as opposed to the liberal Christianity espoused by Wolf’s Dr. Kemp, Kolbenheyer subtly argues that the religious landscape of America is not so different from that of Europe. He therefore implies that a narrative of intermarriage in America should be the same as such a narrative in a European context (like Sonneschein’s “A Modern Miracle” and Lust’s *Tent of Grace*): that crossing boundaries between Judaism and Christianity is dangerous and potentially disastrous. See Elizabeth Fenton, *Religious Liberties: Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

language of sentimental fiction, contemporaneous concerns about Jewish theology. Jewish women's interfaith romance narratives in this period embolden Jewish women as agents of Reform, Jewish messianic beliefs, at a time when women had limited authority within the rarified sphere of religious leadership. By emplotting intermarriage as a narrative of religious merging into messianic universalist monotheism, Emma Wolf asserts women's centrality to the central teleological goal of Reform Judaism.<sup>166</sup>

Emma Wolf's *Other Things Being Equal* demonstrates that women's capacity for love and loyalty to father and husband bridge the gap between the separateness of the past and Enlightened monotheism of the future. The force of Wolf's teleological narrative of women's involvement in humanity's progress toward universalist ethical monotheism is compounded by her use of Biblical precedent to explain Ruth's marital choice. As Dena Mandel explains in her

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<sup>166</sup> Intermarriage in fiction represented the narrative equivalent of a prevalent Reform Jewish theological stance, an eschatological belief in a millennial eventuality of a universal religion of humankind "whose central ideas were the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man." As Gunter Plaut explains, Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century was characterized by an urgent sense of messianism that combined modern evolutionary science with religious tradition, Biblical prophecy with enlightenment dreams of man's brotherhood, expressing a conviction that human and religious traditions moved in the direction of progress that would eventuate, soon, in a universal, egalitarian human religion." Although some proponents of Reform Judaism suggested that Reformers unite with Unitarians in a shared platform of the "Unity of God, the Immortality of the soul, and the binding force of the Mosaic moral code," for most this universal moment was not a present reality but a goal for the future, and leaders of Reform Judaism argued that it was Judaism's task to bring about this millennial moment of universalism, and that it was incumbent upon Jews to maintain their path of Jewish chosenness and separateness until the millennial moment of universalism was achieved. That is to say, for Reform leaders a belief in universalism "was not to be equated or confused with the dissolution of contemporary Jewish social and religious life," it was instead a hope for a future egalitarianism that relied upon Jewish separateness in the present, since Jews were chosen, uniquely qualified through their prophetic faith, to bear the burden of bringing about this Messianic age of universalism in the future through their present particularism. Discussions of intermarriage in the novels of American Jewish women writers in the late nineteenth-century allowed authors to express through popular and sentimental means their attitudes toward these Reform Jewish theological perspectives about the particular role that Jewish religion had in bringing about a universal human religion. Benny Kraut, "The Ambivalent Relations of American Reform Judaism with Unitarianism in the Last Third of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, no. 1, (Winter 1986): 58-68, 60; W. Gunther Plaut, "Introduction" to *The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook of its European Origins*, ed. W. Gunther Plaut, (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1963); Lewis Godlove in a letter to Rabbi Solomon H. Sonneschein (Rosa Sonneschein's ex-husband), quoted in Benny Kraut, "Unitarianism on the Reform Mind," 91-98; Kraut, "Judaism Triumphant," 181.

dissertation on Emma Wolf's fiction, the Book of Ruth "functions as a typological template for Ruth Levice's endorsement of intermarriage in *Other Things Being Equal*."<sup>167</sup> By naming her protagonist for the scriptural archetype for both conversion through marriage and filial devotion, values that are at odds in Wolf's novel, Wolf presents Ruth's dilemma as one between two fundamentally ethical and sacred courses of action: leaving one's community and faith for the sake of love and making enormous personal sacrifice out of devotion to a parent, and endorses Ruth's compromise between these poles (remaining Jewish in marriage) as a Biblically-inspired choice. Through use of this Biblical model of Jewish women's relationships, Wolf articulates a claim that Reform Judaism's special mission to humanity cannot be performed through separation from Christian society, but must be enacted through love and loyalty to past and future, and through the kind of relationships that are especially associated with women.

In her novel *The Irreversible Current* (1908), Bettie Lowenberg (néé Lilienfeld) (1845-1924), who emerged out of the same San Francisco Jewish literary and social circles as Emma Wolf, makes a similar claim about women's love as instrumental to theological and social progress toward ethical monotheism. Bettie Lowenberg, a reformer and socialite, wrote three novels about liberal social reform, the first of which, *The Irreversible Current*, thematizes intermarriage.<sup>168</sup> In this novel she argues for social acceptance of Jews into American Christian society, and of Christians within Jewish circles, on the premise of religious equality and through the vehicle of love. Her novel simultaneously resists the idea of Jewish conversion to

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<sup>167</sup> Dena Mandel, "A World of Difference: Emma Wolf, a Jewish-American Writer on the American Frontier," PhD. Diss. University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2008, 36-39.

<sup>168</sup> In her article "Pioneering American Jewish Women Writers," Lori Harrison-Kahan provides biographical information about Lowenberg, connecting her novels to the ideals of "social purpose" to which she dedicated her life as a civic leader within Jewish women's organizations in San Francisco.

Christianity and the practice of Jewish social and interpersonal exclusion, imagining instead interfaith union on the grounds of a new, universal religion.

Two climactic moments in Lowenberg's long novel epitomize her attitude toward intermarriage and the promise it holds for future universal ethical monotheism. When a minor Jewish character, Mark Everard, marries the Presbyterian Amelia Hill, overcoming her anti-Semitic scruples and winning her heart with his kindness, he and Amelia are both converted, through their marriage, to a new form of religion that does not recognize the ceremonial barriers that preclude recognition and worship of universal truth. Everard explains, "you are no Christian, I no Jew, we are simply Monotheists, believers in God and in immortality..."<sup>169</sup> Like Ruth and Dr. Kemp in Emma Wolf's *Other Things Being Equal*, neither Everard nor his wife will officially change their status to belong to the other's religion, but unlike Ruth and Dr. Kemp they nevertheless disavow their religious differences through their union, claiming that the union is emblematic and generative of a new, more moral, and more universal form of faith. Everard explains, "we worship one God, believe in right thinking, right doing and in the imperishableness of the soul; nothing more..."<sup>170</sup> Through their marriage, Everard and Amelia represent the possibility that Americans can overcome social, cultural, and historical distinctions on the basis of love and universal religion, creating something new to which Jews can contribute as fellow monotheists and with the moral sensibilities they share with their Protestant brethren.

Lowenberg's novel culminates with a scene that affirms her thesis that intermarriage is the pinnacle of the irreversible current of social, intellectual, and theological progress that the

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<sup>169</sup> Lowenberg, *The Irreversible Current*, 547.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 552.



novel advocates. Grace Feld, the novel's heroine, whose many misfortunes have arisen from her loyalty to her family and her refusal to marry the Protestant man she loves, lies on her deathbed. Her two former suitors and loves of her life (one Protestant and one Jewish), and her well-meaning Catholic friend, gather at her deathbed. Leaving behind their devotion to the faiths of forefathers past, the interfaith tableau of characters who gather at Grace's deathbed celebrate a future that exceeds the limits she so virtuously placed upon herself. In a sentimental moment that scholar Lori Harrison-Kahan likens to the final scene of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, these characters pay homage to her sacrifice by pledging themselves to overcoming the circumstances that made it necessary.<sup>171</sup> Intermarriage expresses what Grace's former suitor, the Unitarian pastor Montmartre, later describes as a religious "idea of a uniform belief in God... so that all may dwell together in concord, and so that no difference of creeds will exist to intervene and destroy human happiness." This religion is "the trend of the times," and as such it is the religion of a future-oriented America that Jews can co-create and of which Jews and their religious traditions together with those of Christians, "the precepts of Moses, Jesus, and other great teachers" are an essential component.<sup>172</sup> Through the narrative arc of tragic romance, Lowenberg secures for Jewish women, in their feminine capacity for love, filial loyalty, and self-sacrifice, an essential role in bringing about the lofty goals of "the brotherhood of man and the unity of God."

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<sup>171</sup> Harrison-Kahan, "Pioneering American Jewish Women Writers," 29.

<sup>172</sup> Lowenberg, *The Irreversible Current*, 558.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

For both Wolf and Lowenberg, interfaith romance narratives support the assertion that women, in their unique capacity for love, are necessary to further Reform Judaism's teleological aim of universal, ethical religion. Moreover, as women writing sentimental romances that promote this aim, they found a venue in which they could work, as women and within traditionally female spheres, as agents of Reform Judaism and disseminators of Reform Jewish theology. In the content of their interfaith romance narratives, and in the very act of penning their novels, these authors assert the importance of women's sensibilities to the future of Reform Judaism in America.

## Conclusion

Through the story of Grace Feld's potential romances and tragic death, Lowenberg celebrates intermarriage between Protestants and Jews as heralding future ethical monotheism, and champions women's roles in bringing about this future. Yet, in a plot arc about Grace's potential conversion to Catholicism, Lowenberg expresses her doubts about present-day America's capacity for the religious universalism she predicts for its future.<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>173</sup> Lowenberg's use of Catholicism to represent fundamentally inassimilable Christian religious belief and its potential danger to the Jewish community bears striking resemblances to Kolbenheyer's narrative. As in Kolbenheyer's "Jewish Blood," the novel's fear of Catholic conversion relates to contemporaneous anti-Catholic sentiment in America, and particularly to the notion that Catholicism, as opposed to liberal democracy, was backward, hierarchical, and enthralling. Fears of Catholicism in the novel may also be due to the undesirability of horizontal assimilation: Catholics represented another marginalized class in Protestant American society, while intermarriage into Protestantism offered an escape from marginalized status. Toward the novel's end, an exhausted and desperate, orphaned and lovelorn Grace recuperates from illness at a convent and agrees to convert to Catholicism and become a postulant. Grace's friend, Sister Louise, eagerly exploits Grace's vulnerability, offering her sanctuary from her worldly problems in exchange for a commitment in life and afterlife to the Catholic faith. Grace's conversion is an absolute severing of ties with her ancestors, her Jewish family and friends, and with all of society itself. She does not leave the convent, never sees the family who inquires after her, and therefore through conversion she is not only religiously but also physically lost to them. For her Jewish relatives, Grace's

Lowenberg imagines interfaith romance as a redemptive hope, something that present-day Jews, and Jewish women in particular, should strive toward. Insofar as the narratives discussed in this chapter express hesitations regarding intermarriage - such as "A Modern Miracle," with its emphasis on the violent consequences of intermarriage, and *The Irreversible Current*, with its concerns about the present religious landscape of America as not yet representative of utopian universalism - these concerns are contradicted by ideals of universalism and repeatedly undermined as a relic of clannish hatred between Jews and non-Jews that, in a perfect world, should one day be overcome. Prohibitions against intermarriage in these narratives are often situated in the past or located in the values of fathers and mothers (like Jules Levice in *Other Things Being Equal*). These narratives project into the future a time when divisions between Jews and non-Jews will no longer be relevant. The American Jewish woman is thus situated in between an imagined past and a predicted future, as representative of the continuity of the Jewish people, and also as an agent for its change, modernization, and Americanization. A sense of live and unsettled debate permeates these narratives and urges Jewish women's involvement in the project of shoring up Jewish identity and of building future egalitarianism.<sup>174</sup>

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conversion is an affront to previous generations, and Grace is an innocent victim coerced into throwing away her body, and especially her womb with its potential for assuring a Jewish future. Much of the novel has been preoccupied with Grace's finding a mate, and her conversion keeps her away from the male society that promises future generations of her family, marking conversion as the ultimate loss and dead end. When Grace's former lover learns of her fate in a convent, he explains that it would have been better for her to have died than to be "sacrificed to a convent life," for at least if she had a grave he and her loved ones could visit it and her memory could be part of the world of the living, but in a convent she is even further removed from her loved ones, in both life and afterlife, than she would have been in death. Conversion to Catholicism represents the greatest possible loss for the American Jewish community. Lowenberg, *The Irreversible Current*, 389, 486.

<sup>174</sup>The models of pluralist integration and the potential for assimilation outlined in these narratives presume and are predicated upon a Jewish American experience of, as Lori Harrison-Kahan describes it, "middle-class Jews who have achieved economic stability, and, with that, a degree of social equality." As she explains, the readers, writers, and protagonists of these narratives are Jews who do not merely have the "potential to become Americans" through assimilation, but who "can pass effortlessly" proving that they "already are." It is precisely the

In Chapter Two, I turn to Abraham Cahan's writing about intermarriage, examining his conflicting pragmatism and idealism about egalitarianism and Jewish solidarity and his sense of American Jewish identity as in flux. In the very different context of an author/journalist writing for or about recent, Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jewish immigrants living in New York, Abraham Cahan (1860-1951), like the Reform Jewish women authors examined in this chapter, explores interethnic romance as a window into an unsettled question of what Jewish identity can and should be in America.

Like Reform Jews whose engagement with Enlightenment thought propelled a theology of universal brotherhood in a delayed messianic future, socialist Jews in America, influenced by the creation of the General Jewish Labor Union (Bund) in Vilna in 1897, straddled nationalist and universalist ideals by employing a teleology that saw universalist class-based brotherhood as an eventual goal supported by Jewish peoplehood and self-advocacy in the present moment.<sup>175</sup>

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problematic of a Jewish difference that is so difficult to define that occupies these narratives testing, upholding, reifying, and redefining boundaries between Jews and Christians. Therefore, these narratives, in their use of racial language, and, even absent explicit racial language, in their insistence on separateness within equality, also indicate the ways in which Jewish Americans navigated and differentiated themselves within American whiteness while claiming it as their own. Freidrich Kolbenheyer's insistence on the differentness of Jewish blood, even as he is writing from racially segregated St. Louis, Missouri, in which the implications of the hierarchical white/black racial divide in America were so deeply felt, are proof positive of Eric Goldstein's thesis that in the late nineteenth century Jews in America felt leeway to use racial language precisely because their whiteness was not threatened. When Emma Wolf's novels include Chinese American servants, their marginal presence articulates the shared status of privilege even among her protagonists whose financial difficulties, orphanhood, womanhood, or Jewishness present challenges to their social acceptance and participation. Although their intermarriage narratives are largely about a Jewish difference that might someday be erased in an egalitarian and utopian society, even in their idea that these differences could ever be erased these authors also reveal the extent to which the distance between Jews and Christians could appear minimal from the reference point of racial privilege in America. Harrison-Kahan, "Pioneering American Jewish Women Writers," 26; Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 15-16; Emma Wolf, *Fulfillment: A California Novel* (New York: H. Hold and Co., 1916).

<sup>175</sup> As Ezra Mendelsohn explains, the "mission of Israel" doctrine of Reform Judaism that argued that Jews must retain their particularism because Judaism's prophetic vision would lead to the triumph of universalism shares with the General Jewish Labor Union (Bund) in Russia and Poland the idea of a Jewish "mission" to promote the ideals of universalism (here in the political arena of proletarian solidarity) through Jewish particularity. The Bund's syncretic doctrine of socialism coupled with Jewish communal loyalty and advocacy became a central tenet of

As demonstrated by the writing of Abraham Cahan, celebrated long-time editor of the widely circulating, New York City-based socialist Yiddish daily newspaper the *Forverts* (Forward), socialist Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants living in New York's ethnic Jewish enclaves at the turn of the twentieth century—like the middle-class, acculturated Jewish writers discussed in this chapter—found in intermarriage a symbol for the dangers of cultural loss and familial disintegration in the present moment as well as an emblem of hope for an egalitarian future. He expressed these poles of fear and desire in political and cultural, rather than religious, terms.

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transnational Jewish politics in the early twentieth century. Ezra Mendelsohn, "Jewish Universalism: Some Visual Texts and Subtexts," in *Key Texts in American Jewish Culture*, ed. Jack Kugelmass (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 163-184; Jonathan Frankel, "The Roots of 'Jewish Socialism' (1881-1892): From 'Populism' to 'Cosmopolitanism'?" in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 58-77.

## Chapter Two

### Abraham Cahan and Interethnic Romance: Between Idealism and Pragmatism

Author and journalist Abraham Cahan (1860-1951) depicted and discussed interethnic romance within a balance between socialist universalism and Jewish nationalism.<sup>176</sup> He wrote about and for immigrants living primarily in New York City in close quarters with other minority groups, such as Polish, Irish, and Italian Americans, who viewed the question of intermarriage as not only one of potential upward mobility through marriage into the bourgeois white Christian American establishment, but also one of horizontal mobility across ethnic groups.<sup>177</sup> These relationships reflected the realities of living together in densely populated immigrant

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<sup>176</sup> The socialist Yiddish press in America tended to adhere to an intentional political advocacy for Jewish people as both workers and Jews, and Cahan's straddling nationalist and socialist universalist ideals in his representations of intermarriage is consistent with this trend. This balancing act between Jewish national loyalty and socialist class-based politics is most commonly associated with the Bund (see note 173 of this Diss.). Although Cahan was not technically a member of the Bund, he helped to raise funds for the Bund in the United States and represented the "cultural" facet of the Bund "as a political intellectual who preached for Jewish cultural integration in the United States." Cahan split with Bund leadership in 1925 after a fact-finding trip to Palestine, criticizing the Bund for its leftist positions that were, in Cahan's mind, too close to Communism, and for what he argued was the Bund's lack of commitment to the entire Jewish people, caring only for the Jewish working class. Their antireligious stance, concluded Cahan, made them intolerant to the Jewish masses. Nevertheless, the Bund's initial commitment to a coupling of Jewish and socialist concerns was formative for much of Cahan's political outlook, even ultimately shaping his criticisms of the Bund itself. Ezra Mendelsohn, "Introduction" to *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn. (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 1-18, pp. 2-3. Yosef Gorny, *Converging Alternatives: The Bund and the Zionist Labor Movement, 1897-1985* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), 108, 111; see also Harry Rogoff, *Der gayst fun 'Forverts': materyaln tsu der geshikhte fun der Idisher prese in Amerike* (New York: Forverts, 1954), 84.

<sup>177</sup> As Deanna L. Pagnini and S. Philip Morgan explain, Jewish men who married non-Jews tended to prefer old immigrants (i.e. British, Scandinavian, or German) – perhaps because "successful Jewish men were able to marry 'up' in status while Jewish women were less able to do so," and Jewish women were more likely to marry men from new immigrant groups (such as Italians). Describing marriages between Jewish women and Italian men, writer Celia Silbert posits that the tendency came from the two groups working alongside one another and learning to have shared "temperaments" and "tendencies." Deanna L. Pagnini and S. Philip Morgan, "Intermarriage and Social Distance Among U.S. Immigrants at the Turn of the Century," *American Journal of Sociology* 96, No. 2 (Sep., 1990): 405-432; Celia Silbert, report in the *American Jewish Chronicle*, Aug. 18, 1916, 456-2457, quoted in Gil Ribak, *Gentile New York: The Images of Non-Jews among Jewish Immigrants* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 181.

neighborhoods and adopting American practices of courtship that placed authority to make decisions about marriage in the hands of individuals in love, rather than the interests and desires of parents and families.<sup>178</sup> For Cahan, romance between immigrant groups threatened loss of Jewish culture, language, and familial loyalty without the benefit of upward mobility or social acceptance that intermarriage signaled for the writers discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation. Rather, intermarriage indicated the costs of the younger generations' efforts to become American at the expense of an internationally embattled Jewish people and through integration with other minority groups that Jews often viewed with distrust or contempt.<sup>179</sup> At the same time, intermarriage also held symbolic value as an emblem of an egalitarian world free from prejudice.

Cahan lacked a cohesive and consistent representation of and response to interethnic romances. This inconsistency reflects the tension he felt between confirming the conservative communal values of the immigrant reading audience of his newspaper and encouraging socialist universalism, between decrying prejudice as a rule and expressing a deep, communally-held discomfort with non-Jews and with the idea of intermarriage.<sup>180</sup> Cahan's writings in favor of

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<sup>178</sup> As Jenna Weissman Joselit explains, the Jewish community defined "love and the pursuit of matrimonial harmony in collective terms," refusing a more typical American conception of marriage as simply a "private, consensual matter between two individuals" intermarriage went against these collective practices, turning instead toward the model of "American marriage," which Riv-Ellen Prell describes as one motivated by "romantic love, loyalty to the nation, the opportunity for mobility, and the pleasures of being an American family" rather than the interests of conservation of Jewish community and family. Jenna Weisman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 43-54; Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans*, 67-77. See also Naomi Seidman, *The Marriage Plot, Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

<sup>179</sup> See Ribak, *Gentile New York*, for an analysis of Jewish immigrants' views on other minority groups in this historical period.

<sup>180</sup> An article by journalist J. Green detailing the history of the advice column the "Bintel Brief" (discussed later in this chapter) at the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Forverts* reveals this ambivalence: "the

intermarriage, when they appear, urge Jewish Americans to embrace the socialist ideals championed by the *Forverts*. When choosing to critique or discourage of intermarriage, Cahan attempts to protect and conserve Jewish families and communities while provoking questions about the nature of the Jewishness that atheist, socialist Jewish immigrants wished to preserve. Through his writing and editorship about intermarriage, Cahan reflected on the changing definitions of Jewishness itself in the context of America and within a politics of American Jewish socialism as well as the sense of disillusionment and displacement that immigrants felt, and that he, himself, as an interpreter of immigrant experience felt, as they searched for communal identity in their new home.

Abraham Cahan enjoyed a long and varied career as an activist for socialist causes, a representative of the urban Jewish immigrant population to a wider non-Jewish readership, an educator catering to an Americanizing population, and an advocate of Jewish consciousness for East European Jewish immigrants following American models of ethnicization.<sup>181</sup> Although his political and social allegiances and beliefs shifted significantly over the course of his career, throughout his writing Cahan was dedicated to representing East European Jewish immigrant life

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newspaper came to the decision that as a general principle they could not be against mixed weddings, but in actuality such marriages are not happy ones." Even in summarizing the newspaper's stance on intermarriage in a celebratory article about the advice column the editors were unable to articulate a consistent position on the issue, simultaneously claiming a theoretical acceptance of the practice and a practical rejection of it. J. Green. "*Di Geshikhte un Entviklung Funem 'Bintel Brief'*" ["The History and Development of the '*Bintel Brief*']. *Forverts* 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Jubilee Edition (1897-1917) (New York, April 22, 1917), 51-56, p.52. The concern about "happy marriages" expressed in this quotation indicates the growing influence of the companionate marriage ideal, which led experts to advise on what made a successful or happy marriage, arguing that "the very stability of society depended on good marriages." See Lila Corwin Berman, "Sociology, Jews, and Intermarriage in Twentieth-Century America," *Jewish Social Studies* 14, no. 2 (Winter, 2008): 32-60, p. 39.

<sup>181</sup> For an overview of Cahan's life and work, see Ronald Sanders, *The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1969), 200; Seth Lipsky, *The Rise of Abraham Cahan* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2013); Sanford E. Marovitz, *Abraham Cahan* (New York: Twayne, 1996).



realistically, revealing the diversity of immigrants' experiences, the complexities of their longings and desires, and the circumstances that shaped their lives. As the editor of the organ that was at one time the most widely read Yiddish publication in the world and as the author of fictions that have become classics of ethnic American literature and are considered foundational for the field of Jewish American literature, Cahan was a prominent voice of and to the large numbers of East European Jewish immigrants who settled in America in the early twentieth century.

In both his journalism and his fiction, Cahan often turned to issues of love and romance. For Cahan, love and romance constituted "a real part of the lives of a deprived and often tradition-bound population," and writing about these issues was part and parcel of his aims to realistically depict the urban Jewish immigrant experience.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, writing about love was a way to use entertaining, popular tropes as frameworks to explore political and social issues within the Jewish immigrant population that went well beyond individuals' romantic, cultural, and economic considerations in love and marriage.<sup>183</sup> In his work the diversity and contradictions within the Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrant community in America are dramatically displayed through narratives of love, desire, and marriage, and immigrants' longings, aspirations, and disappointments are made tangible through the use of love plots. This chapter examines Cahan's use of interethnic love in particular in his fiction and journalism, arguing that Cahan approached interethnic love as both an expression of a political and social ideal and a representation of practical, pragmatic concerns about the social and cultural

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<sup>182</sup> Albert Waldinger, "The Objectivity of Abraham Cahan," *Proteus* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 50-56, p. 53.

<sup>183</sup> For instance, Ronald Sanders characterizes Cahan's *Yekl, a Tale of the New York Ghetto* as "a morality tale built around the theme of failure in love" and points to this as a formula that characterizes much of Cahan's fictional writing. Sanders, *The Downtown Jews*, 200.

integration of Jews in America with their non-Jewish neighbors. He used the status-shifting, border-crossing nature of interethnic love as a platform from which to depict and critique the changing nature of American and Jewish identities for his constituency.

Because of his enormous influence among Jewish readers in America, and because interethnic romance was a topic that Cahan returned to on numerous occasions as a narrative of changing American Jewish identities, Cahan is a crucial figure for this the study of American Jewish literary representations of interethnic romance. His attitude toward interethnic romance, approaching it both idealistically as a symbol of hopes for Jewish integration and American egalitarianism and pragmatically as problematic for Jews facing intergenerational and interethnic conflicts in their everyday lives, is emblematic of the two-pronged attitude toward interethnic romance expressed by many authors and thinkers of this period.<sup>184</sup> Existing scholarship on Abraham Cahan's work tends to focus on either his English fiction or his Yiddish journalism, but

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<sup>184</sup> In her scholarship on race in French and American Jewish fiction in the 1920s, Nadia Malinovich notes that in many narratives, Jewish protagonists conduct failed romances with non-Jews, but their "sense of connection" with the Jewish people makes the relationship impossible. Nevertheless "these figures are left with feelings of ambivalence and regret, as they realize that their universalist dream of uniting with someone from a different 'racial' background is not possible in the real world." Sholem Aleichem's 1905 story "Chava," the fifth story in his famous cycle of stories about *Tevey the Dairyman*, is probably the most famous example in Yiddish literature (and perhaps in all of Jewish literature) of this push/pull between an idealistic view of intermarriage as representative of egalitarian universalism and intermarriage as destructive of Jewish families. Tevey's daughter Chava makes the idealistic argument that "to me all people are equal." Tevey, on the other hand, cannot accept this idealism since in his experience while non-Jews and Jews may be equally valuable, the categories into which they fall are distinctly defined. This is a matter of pragmatism, as Tevey lives in a non-Jewish culture that is prone to anti-Jewish violence and hatred. In his longing to reverse the loss of his daughter to intermarriage, Teve asks, "Why had God created Jews and non-Jews?" For a moment, he entertains his daughter's idealistic notion that the "walls between" Jewish and non-Jewish communities are painful and perhaps unnecessary. But these doubts triggered by the ideal of universality contradict so strongly the reality of Tevey's own life and the position of Jews in his place and time that he cannot accept them. Ultimately Chava returns home, less bright eyed, having left her husband to rejoin her father, and it is clear that it was foolish of her to believe that the cruel non-Jewish world of Eastern Europe could support her utopian dream of equality and love between Jews and non-Jews. Nadia Malinovich, "Race and the Construction of Jewish Identity in French and American Jewish Fiction of the 1920s," *Jewish History* 19, (2005):29-48, p. 29; Sholem Aleichem, "Tevey der Milkhiķer," *Ale Verk Fun Sholem Aleichem* 3. (Buenos Aires: Editorial "Ikuf", 1952), 185-374, pp. 286-287, 297. See also: Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey through Language and Culture* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 52-54.

this study unites these two aspects of Cahan's writing through the narrowed thematic lens of interethnic romance.<sup>185</sup> This chapter demonstrates the interconnectedness and distinction between Cahan's fictional and journalistic approaches as he directs and describes Jewish American immigrant life. Cahan's journalistic explorations of intermarriage are oriented toward policy-making: whether Jews should or should not marry non-Jews, while his fiction explores the topic on a theoretical level: asking what interethnic romances reveal about American Jewish identity. This study proposes that Cahan worked out through fiction the hesitations and hopes he felt about interethnic romance that he had to address more pragmatically in advice he offered to actual or imagined readers of his journalism.

## **Idealism and its Failures in Cahan's Fiction of Interethnic Romance**

In Chapter One, I demonstrated that for authors such as Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust and Rosa Sonneschein, intermarriage narratives presented an opportunity to elaborate on the promise of

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<sup>185</sup> See, for example, the following studies focused solely on Cahan's fictional output in English: Jules Chametzky, *From the Ghetto: The Fiction of Abraham Cahan* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977); David Fine, *The City, the Immigrant and American Fiction, 1880-1920* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1977); and more recently D. Shiffman, "The Halo of Education in Abraham Cahan's 'The Imported Bridegroom' and *The Rise of David Levinsky*," *Shofar* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 83-100; Sabine Haenni, "Visual and Theatrical Culture, Tenement Fiction, and the Immigrant Subject in Abraham Cahan's *Yekl*," *American Literature* 71, No. 3 (September 1999): 493-527; Philip Joseph, "Literary Migration: Abraham Cahan's 'The Imported Bridegroom' and the Alternative of American Fiction," *ELUS* 27, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 3-32; Clay Motley, "'Dot'sh a 'Kin' a man I am!': Abraham Cahan, Masculinity, and Jewish Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century America," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 30 (2011): 3-15. For studies focused only on Cahan's Yiddish journalism see: EHUD Manor, *Forward: The Jewish Daily Forward (Forverts) Newspaper: Immigrants, Socialism and Jewish Politics in New York, 1890-1917* (Sussex Academic Press, 2009); Daniel Soyer, "Abraham Cahan's Travels in Jewish Homelands: Palestine in 1925 and the Soviet Union in 1927," in *Yiddish and the Left*, ed. Mikhail Krutikov (Oxford: European Humanities Research Center, 2001), 56-79. This chapter follows the model of studies by and Hana Wirth-Nesher and Alice Nakhimovsky that explore continuities between Cahan's journalistic and fictional output and connect Cahan's English language fiction to both Yiddish and American literary traditions. Alice Nakhimovsky, "The Moral Evolution of the Russian-Yiddish-English Writer Abraham Cahan," *East European Jewish Affairs* 38, number 2 (2008): 159-167; Hana Wirth-Nesher, "'Shpeaking Plain' and Writing Foreign: Abraham Cahan's *Yekl*," *Poetics Today*, 22, no. 1 (2001): 41-63.

America as a place that offered new possibilities for egalitarianism, in which messianic ideals of human brotherhood could be made real. For Abraham Cahan, advocating for the class struggles of working Jewish immigrants and deeply aware of the racism faced by his constituents, America was far from an idealized Promised Land. In some of Cahan's fiction, America appears to be an ideal place for individuals' self transformation, signified through their participation in the status-changing act of interethnic romance. But through the failures of interethnic romance, Cahan deflates this idealistic vision of America, offering instead a realistic portrait of class struggles, competing national loyalties, and the continuities of prejudices transferred from the Old World to the New World. Nevertheless, as a believer in political action to promote socialist egalitarian ideals, Cahan employs interethnic romance to discuss the responsibilities he believes his readers have toward building a more just society in America, and the unique potential of America to be home to social egalitarianism. Cahan's vacillation between socialist optimism and pragmatic, realistic pessimism result in a conflicted presentation of intermarriage as representative of a positive political ideal of egalitarianism and a symptom of the confusion, disruption, and disorientation of the present moment.

Cahan's "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg," published in *The Century* in November 1899, is emblematic of his approach to interethnic romance as a plot arc through which he explores the idealistic dreams, deflated hopes and impossibilities of America. I will return to this story, his most sustained and complex fictional representation of intermarriage, throughout this chapter to illustrate Cahan's nuanced use of interethnic romance plots to examine the ambivalent and ill-defined positioning and inchoate identity-formation of Jewish immigrants in America at the turn of the twentieth century. The story opens with a statement about the promise of America as a site of self-transformation for new immigrants. The protagonist, Michalina, who has married a

Catholic, Polish man, Wincas, and come to America to establish a new life declares, “So this is America, and I am a Jewess no longer!”<sup>186</sup> Although Michalina married Wincas in Poland, she has immigrated with him to America on the belief, like that of Fritz and Jette in Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust’s *Tent of Grace* (discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation), that in America intermarriage does not bear the weight of European prejudices. Michalina has left her home and family because her father treated her marriage with “horror and loathing,” mourning her as though she were dead, and proclaiming that her conversion was “far worse than death.”<sup>187</sup> In coming to America, she seeks escape from being “buried alive” in her marriage, from her feeling that she was “the same girl as of old, except that something terrible had befallen her.”<sup>188</sup> It is her hope that in a new place, she will become fixed in a new identity, that she will feel herself to be a Catholic and will not be weighted down with guilt over having betrayed her people or longing for the Jewish identity and community she has renounced.

Yet, even after Michalina has landed on the shores of America, she remains unmoored, attached to both Jewish and Catholic identities without having a firm place in either: “she longed for [Jews] as one for the first time in mid-ocean longs for the sight of land.”<sup>189</sup> The figurative language that Cahan employs of Michalina still at sea, even though she has arrived in America, demonstrates the ways in which America has failed to be the anchoring homeland that Michalina anticipated. The story takes up and elaborates on this predicament of homelessness that

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<sup>186</sup> Abraham Cahan, “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg,” in *Grandma Never Lived in America: The New Journalism of Abraham Cahan*, ed. Moses Rischin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 165-182, p. 165.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

Michalina faces in America, arguing that America is no different from Europe, that Michalina cannot simply become something new, even in a new place. She and the Poles and Jews with whom she interacts bring with them the communal definitions, prejudices, and boundaries through which they defined themselves in Europe.

“The Apostate of Chego-Chegg” is set in Long Island, away from the densely populated Lower East Side of most of Cahan’s fictional oeuvre. Michalina and her husband Wincas live in Chego-Chegg, an ethnically segregated, Polish-American village of peasant farmers.<sup>190</sup> Nearby is the Jewish settlement of Burkdale.<sup>191</sup> As Cahan explains, the Jewish population of that village consists of traveling salesmen who spent their Sabbaths in the town and sweatshop workers whose bosses had moved business to Long Island as the result of a prolonged strike in New York.<sup>192</sup> The differing economic portfolios of the populations of these ethnic enclaves correspond to the differences that characterized their East European socioeconomic positions, and Cahan seems to suggest that the Jewish villagers, with their “far more profitable” industrial work, their travel

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<sup>190</sup> Cahan’s schematic ethnic segregation largely functions symbolically in his story to create a no-man’s land in which Michalina eventually settles with her husband – making physical and geographical the displacement at the heart of her identity (this mapping of identity onto geographical space resonates with narratives discussed in Chapter Four of this Diss.). Nevertheless, the imagined ethnically segregated landscape also has some basis in the historical reality of Long Island. Joshua Roff details the geographical areas in which Polish, German, Scandinavian, Italian, and Russian Jewish immigrants tended to settle, separately from one another. He also notes that many Long Island Jews had strong ties to Manhattan and Brooklyn that other immigrants lacked, taking the Long Island Railroad into the city to visit relatives and purchase kosher meat. See Joshua Roff, “Diasporas in Suburbia: Long Island’s Recent Immigrant Past,” *Long Island History Journal* 21, no. 1, (2009): <https://lihj.cc.stonybrook.edu/2009/volumes/2009vol21-1/>

<sup>191</sup> Cahan explains that the new town owes its name to Madison Burke, the president of the “Land Improvement Company,” a business founded to manage the area’s urban development. Land Improvement Companies purchased and built upon farmland, particularly but not exclusively near railroad tracks, in order to plan and build towns. The town name signals its participation in modern capitalist industrialism, while Chego-Chegg sounds more parochial. For a discussion of the work of Land Improvement Companies, see John Triolo and Liz Marren Licht, *Dunellen* (New York: Arcadia Publishing, 2012); Lauren Otis, “On the Map; From Worker’s Housing to Pint-Size Urban Enclave,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1999.

<sup>192</sup> Cahan, “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg,” 168.

and business interactions with Christian clientele, and their use of trains that bring them into the rapid-paced world of New York City, are more fully adjusting to American life, even as they cling to religious traditions and prefer to live in an exclusively Jewish area of settlement.<sup>193</sup> He racializes the difference between the villagers, suggesting that the Poles do not share Jews' capacity for modern industrial work – the “soil call[s them] back” to the sleepy, simple peasant lifestyle to which they were accustomed in their old country.<sup>194</sup> Through this racial characterization of their work, and through the secluded setting in which exposure to American working class popular culture and integration in American schools and institutions are extremely limited, Cahan recreates an East European dynamic of Polish-Jewish relations in an American setting (negating the idealistic view of American exceptionalism by presenting continuities between American and European residential and labor segregation), with the railroad the sole indicator that such relations are unstable because of the potential for exchange, travel, and participation in broader American (and specifically New York) culture and society.<sup>195</sup> In this way, Cahan is able to impose on an American setting a simple bifurcation of Jewish and Polish/Christian, in which Michalina is unable to find a middle ground.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 174, 172.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 174. Philip Joseph notes that the racialized difference between the Jewish and Polish populations in the story corresponds to the difference in how suited Cahan, as a socialist, thinks these groups might be to the American urban environment. He writes, “the Jewish residents of Burkdale, having achieved a measure of class consciousness in their New York labor dispute, represent a stage of development that is...advanced” while “the Polish peasantry, in contrast, remain mired in a primitive condition, not yet ready to participate in the struggle of labor against capital.” As Joseph explains it, the problems in Michalina’s marriage stem in part from this difference not in religion but in social evolution: Michalina is naturally interested in the progressive industrializing Jewish village and its open borders with other contemporary places, an interest that her husband does not share because he wants to live in an agrarian environment similar to that of his homeland. Philip Joseph, *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 78.

<sup>195</sup> The railroad played a similar role in Poland, and in the literature of Polish Jewry in this period. See Leah V. Garrett, *Journeys Beyond the Pale: Yiddish Travel Writing in the Modern World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

By situating Michalina in this Europe-like setting even after her immigration to America, Cahan suggests that America, for all the rhetoric of the melting pot, is not free from these clear communal divisions, and that Michalina cannot escape the complexities of her identity or the communal politics that exclude her from Polish and Jewish belonging simply by immigrating. In Michalina's experience, Jewish-Christian mutual exclusion characterizes both the Old World and the New, as though there were no real difference between these two contexts; the only difference is in Michalina's expectations, which are deflated over and over again, that America will be somehow different, that "This is America, and I am a Jewess no longer." As the story progresses, in Michalina's inability to be rid of her Jewish identity or her dedication to her Catholic husband, or to find a sense of belonging in either the Polish or Jewish communities, Cahan exposes America's false promise of newness and transformation. If, as I argued in the introduction to this dissertation, Leon Kobrin's "Blessed is the True Judge" suggests that America is the land of intermarriage, Cahan in "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg" reminds his readers that intermarriage does not necessarily mean easy fusion between different individuals and cultures.

The protagonist of Cahan's "Dumitru and Sigrid," printed in *Cosmopolitan* in March, 1901, experiences a similar hope and deflation of America as a place of new possibilities, depicted through the trope of intermarriage.<sup>196</sup> This story describes a potential romance between a Romanian immigrant, Dumitru, and a Swedish immigrant, Sigrid, as an illustration of the innocence and hope invested in the idea of America as a place in which prejudices and differences can be eliminated. Dumitru's relationship with Sigrid stands in for his relationship to

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<sup>196</sup> Abraham Cahan, "Dumitru and Sigrid" in *Grandma Never Lived in America: The New Journalism of Abraham Cahan*, ed. Moses Rischin. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 191-201. This story describes a potential romance between two non-Jews and therefore circumvents the religious taboos and Jewish communal politics attendant on the subject within the Jewish community.



America itself, which he first approaches both with the innocent love of a stranger for a mysterious and desirable other, only to be disappointed in the truths and realities of a flawed lover and a flawed America.<sup>197</sup>

In this story, Dumitru and Sigrid are seated near each other at the holding pen of Castle Garden, awaiting entry to the United States. They find companionship in one another across the language divide, expressing sympathy for one another's fears about the overwhelming immigration process through gestures and looks. Eventually Dumitru obtains a Swedish-English dictionary for Sigrid, and using his own Romanian-English dictionary, he manages to strike up some rudimentary conversation with the woman. He is entranced with the process by which "it seemed as though a deaf-mute had all of a sudden begun to speak."<sup>198</sup> Their conversations become flirtations and then amorous, as Dumitru pledges in his laborious dictionary-translated English, "I not joke, Sigrid...Know not where I be and where thou be, but I eternal remember thou," and Sigrid also pledges "never, never" to forget Dumitru.<sup>199</sup>

After the couple is separated, Dumitru continues to think about Sigrid and imagines her as an angel away from the bustle, strangeness, and hardship of his new life. Never having known her as a real person beyond the few translated words she was able to communicate, he treats her as an empty canvas for his longings. The divide of time and language has allowed Dumitru to recreate Sigrid as a symbol for the hopes and innocence he carried with him to America, and it is

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<sup>197</sup> Louis Harap describes the story as one that affirms Cahan's preference for "unresolved conflict." For Cahan, Dumitru's state of longing for Sigrid and not really knowing her is preferable to his rejection of her on the basis of knowledge, because it is the state of being in-between loyalties that is most creatively productive and most interesting. See Louis Harap, *The Image of the Jew in American Literature: From Early Republic to Mass Immigration* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 505-506.

<sup>198</sup> Cahan, "Dumitru and Sigrid," 195.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

this moment that he is in love with, rather than Sigrid herself. Here, as elsewhere, Cahan uses romance as a vehicle for an immigrant's introspection, longing, and disappointment with the realities and challenges of adjusting to American life and leaving behind a foreign and radically different past.<sup>200</sup>

Before arriving in America, Dumitru felt about his new country the same way he felt about Sigrid – he interpreted it through a dictionary, saw it through the walls of Castle Garden that obscured it from view, and he was able to retain hope that it would offer him a better life. But once he has been exposed to being “treated like a servant” or “being in constant dread of losing his job” or when “the American city impressed him as a world of savages and the strange tongue he heard around him seemed to speak of his doom,” he loses the hope that he had previously felt for America, where he believed he might have a better life away from his mistreatment and humiliation at the hands of a superior officer in the Romanian army.<sup>201</sup> Instead he relies on Sigrid as a symbol of that innocence and hope that he felt on coming to America.

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<sup>200</sup> For instance, in *Yekl*, the protagonist Jake sends for his wife, Gitl and brings her to America, only to find that he has become foreign to her, almost non-Jewish in his Americanized form, and that from his Americanized stance he sees Gitl only as an embarrassing reminder of ethnic and religious difference that he has rejected in himself. Jake's longing for and rejection of Gitl stands in for his poor adjustment to American life. In “The Imported Bridegroom,” Asriel Stroon attempts to marry his daughter Flora, an educated, propertied American young woman who represents his American achievements to Shaya, a religious scholar from his hometown who represents his dream of achieving greatness in terms of his birthplace. This marriage promises the possibility of reconciling his past and present selves into a seamless whole of assimilated and unassimilated accomplishment and prominence, uniting his contradictory ethnic and national loyalties, his past and his present, his material and spiritual aims, through his daughter's marriage. But this proves impossible because neither Flora nor Shaya are the perfect models of authentic Americanness and Jewishness that Stroon imagines them to be, and because the ideals of past and present, each of which do not correspond to reality, cannot be fully reconciled. Abraham Cahan, *Yekl and The Imported Bridegroom and other stories of the New York Ghetto* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1970). See also Cheryl Alexander Malcom, “Othering the Other in Abraham Cahan's ‘Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto,’” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 46, no. 2 (2001): 223-232.

<sup>201</sup> Cahan, “Dumitru and Sigrid,” 197, 192, 193.

When, years after their first meeting, Dumitru later encounters Sigrid and finds her to be an ordinary woman living an ordinary immigrant's life, this last symbol of his idealistic optimism about America is shattered. As she tells him of her life and of her happy marriage to a Swedish man, Dumitru feels that "her speech made another woman of her. It was not the Sigrid of his daydreams."<sup>202</sup> Precisely because she is able to communicate with him in accented English, Dumitru becomes more aware of the ethnic divisions between them, and his idealism surrounding Sigrid is deflated. Although both Dumitru and Sigrid have learned English, the differences in their pronunciations of their language are metaphors for the ties of ethnic community that continue to separate them in America. Describing "the first oral conversation they had ever held," Cahan explains that "it was carried on being mispronounced by each in his or her own way – his hard Rumanian accent set off by the flabby consonants of her Swedish enunciation."<sup>203</sup> In her work on language in Jewish American literature, Hana Wirth-Nesher has argued that in Cahan's dialect writing, accent and incomplete language acquisition "measures the distance between [the immigrant character] and his desired Americanness."<sup>204</sup> In this case, the distinctions in accent between immigrant groups amplify one another, and their language demonstrates how the experience of American immigration, which Dumitru once imagined as romantically breaking down barriers between national groups, actually continues to divide them through their incomplete absorption in American language and life. As Jean Lee Cole explains in her work on dialect in literary representations of immigrant culture, the characters' continued

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call it English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 33.

use of dialect reveals their “inability to successfully negotiate American culture and the linguistic terrain,” and the failures in language that make Dumitru feel distant from and even disgusted with Sigrid indicate the “ambivalent linguistic psychologies” embedded in dialect speech that render them mutually unintelligible and alien to one another.<sup>205</sup> Hearing Sigrid’s English, to Dumitru, is like listening “to the scratching of a window pane” - it is at once irritating and unpleasant, inspiring characterizations of Sigrid as “flabby” and unappealing based on her ethnic difference, and it is the sound of the division that exists between him and an ethnic other despite the American illusion (like a window pane – transparent and yet solid) that these boundaries no longer exist.

This story presents the dream of America as the site of a perfect interethnic romance. For Dumitru, it is Sigrid’s very difference, her mysterious inscrutability, that makes her an object of love. Dumitru’s later disgust with the reality of Sigrid mirrors his disappointment with the reality of American life, suggesting that interethnic romance in reality, like immigration in reality, fails to meet expectations and hopes. Through the story, Cahan laments that despite promises and expectations immigrants may have of them, neither interethnic romance nor America can change or mitigate the insurmountable differences between groups, or change individuals to the point that they are no longer identifiable as members of differing ethnic groups.

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<sup>205</sup> Jean Lee Cole, “Rising from the Gutter: Rudolph Block, the Comic Strip, and the Ghetto Stories of Bruno Lessing,” *MELUS* 41, no. 2 (2016): 27-54, p. 18; Wirth-Nesher, *Call it English*, 154.

## Radical Egalitarian Politics and Interethnic Romance

Despite his use of interethnic romance to illustrate America's failures to live up to immigrants' expectations of homeland and self-transformation, Cahan, as a journalist and in his capacity as editor of the *Forverts* also employs interethnic romance to shore up the idealistic potentiality of an America that embraces social egalitarianism – and the work that his readership must do to actualize that potential. This is most clearly apparent in the famous “Bintel Brief” advice column.<sup>206</sup> The “Bintel Brief,” or “Bundle of Letters” column, a daily feature of the *Forverts* beginning in 1906, was structured around a long biographical narrative ending in a specific question relating to a personal quandary followed by a terse response in bold lettering from an editorial persona representing the official opinion of the *Forverts* in general and most specifically its famed editor Abraham Cahan.<sup>207</sup> Weaving contemporary political and social

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<sup>206</sup> For an analysis of the frequency and content of “Bintel Brief” letters about intermarriage in the early twentieth century, see my article “Ambivalent Attitudes toward Intermarriage in the *Forverts*, 1905-1920,” *Journal of Jewish Identities* 8, no. 1 (January 2015): 23-47.

<sup>207</sup> It is impossible to know to what extent these letters represent the experiences of their writers in a factually accurate manner, or indeed whether the letters were written by readers at all or by the *Forverts* editorial staff, and they were almost certainly heavily edited before they were printed in the newspaper. This is consistent with the dynamic relationship between fiction and journalism that characterized much of American newspaper writing of the period. Steven Cassedy notes that the editor who responded to the “Bintel Brief” was not named but addressed as “Esteemed Mr. Editor” and that it was likely that the editor who responded to the letters actually changed from time to time. Yet, “whether or not readers truly believed that Cahan himself was answering their letters” the implied editor was Abraham Cahan, as “his person was the one with which they would associate their notion of the figure behind the responses.” Throughout the rest of this chapter, I refer to “the editor” or “the editorial persona” with the recognition that although there may have been more than one respondent, readers would have associated the editorial persona with Cahan and would have understood it as a consistent personality. As Magdalena Ewa Bier notes in her study of the *Bintel Brief* column, the idea of authenticity was propagated by the *Forverts*, and Cahan was invested in “giving his readership the impression that all letters were originals.” I see the editor's responses to the “Bintel Brief” letters as part of Cahan's oeuvre, whether he contributed to them as a writer or oversaw them as an editor, or both. Steven Cassedy, “A Bintel Brief: The Russian Émigré Intellectual Meets the American Mass Media,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 34, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 104-120, p. 111; Sanders, *The Downtown Jews*, 367; Karen Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2005);

issues into individuals' personal narratives, the feature brought "domestic intimacy" to the newspaper and appealed to readers' desire for sentimental stories and gossip.<sup>208</sup> Curated by the *Forverts* staff, the letters in the column reflect what the editors must have thought appealing and edifying for the growing *Forverts* readership, and while they lean toward sentimental advice about love and pragmatic concerns about managing family dynamics and intergenerational conflict (to be discussed later in this chapter), occasionally these letters emphasize ideals of egalitarianism through narratives of interethnic romance.<sup>209</sup> In these letters the idea of intermarriage served as an opportunity for the editor to draw distinctions between traditional and modern values and to clarify the importance of enlightened and universal socialist values. Often, as Steven Cassedy notes, the editor's opinions on intermarriage would make references to "freethinkers" and "civilized people," extolling the virtues of secularism against traditional observance.<sup>210</sup> Discussion of marriages between Jews and non-Jews offered the editor a space to articulate his commitment to modern ideas of racial egalitarianism and anti-religiosity.

Despite his hesitations about intermarriage in practical terms (discussed later in this chapter), the editor occasionally stakes a claim that intermarriage demonstrates and celebrates

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Magdalena Ewa Bier, *How to Become Jewish Americans: The A Bintel Brief Advice Column in Abraham Cahan's Yiddish Forverts* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 76.

<sup>208</sup> Cassedy, "A Bintel Brief," 111.

<sup>209</sup> Intermarriage and out-dating were a natural fit as subjects for "Bintel Brief" letters. For Abraham Cahan and the editors and writers he worked with, the representation of romance and marriage between Jews and non-Jews offered an opportunity to address domestic issues and appeal to a broad popular readership through stories that were dramatic enough to attract attention while containing elements of the familiar – love and family relationships – that made them accessible to readers. These stories were also appealing as subjects for the letters because the letters often corresponded to and were inspired by the contents of serialized fiction published elsewhere in the newspaper. See Ellen Kellman, "The Newspaper Novel in the Jewish Daily Forward, 1900-1940: Fiction as Entertainment and Serious Literature," PhD. Diss., Columbia University, 2000, p. 95.

<sup>210</sup> Cassedy, "A Bintel Brief," 110-111.

egalitarian values, and he uses intermarriage stories as a vehicle through which to affirm an idealistic belief in the equality of all peoples. He asks his addressees to “forget the question of religion entirely and only to remember that he is a person and she is a person and they will live together as two people, and nothing more.”<sup>211</sup> In the case of love between a Jew and an African American woman, the author uses a “Bintel Brief” letter as an opportunity to praise the value of equality among peoples and cites important figures in liberal, enlightened history as evidence for his argument in favor of such mixed marriages: “the great French writer Alexandre Dumas had Negro blood, and the great Russian poet Pushkin was very close to having partly Negro parents.”<sup>212</sup> Ignoring completely the issue of a Jew marrying a non-Jew, the editor focuses on the question of marriage between “white” and “black” people, in which Jews are positioned as “white” and he uses the letter as a platform from which to argue against racial prejudice in general.<sup>213</sup> In another, similar letter, Cahan advocates for racial equality in marital choice,

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<sup>211</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), February 24, 1909, p. 5. All translations in this Diss. are my own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>212</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), February 3, 1909, p. 5.

<sup>213</sup> As discussed in the introduction to this Diss., the racial positioning of Jewish immigrants in America in the early twentieth century is best categorized as “off-white.” To white America, Jews were dirty and unruly, they had strange customs and were marked by their language, their religious tradition, and their foreignness generally. But, in a country founded upon the black-white racial divide, Jews by virtue of their skin color were no longer the ultimate Other in America that they had been in Europe. In his treatment of blackness in this letter, Cahan acknowledges the privilege of Jewish off-whiteness as he offers support for Jewish/black romance on ideological grounds. Given the fear, revulsion, and legal consequences of miscegenation in the United States in the early twentieth century, Cahan’s support of miscegenation here is a radically left-leaning political position. Even the Socialist Party in America advocated for “political but not social equality” for African Americans, upholding taboos against miscegenation while arguing for full rights for African Americans’ political participation. Here, Cahan argues for an ideal of egalitarianism that exceeds social taboos and racist thinking. See Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 63. For a history of the creation and enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws in America, see Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

arguing that “we as Jews must know what prejudice is” and fight against it.<sup>214</sup> In the more common cases of marriage between Jewish and non-Jewish European immigrants, the editor also occasionally makes the case for equality between peoples through his responses, dismissing “unjust feelings toward ‘strange sorts of people’” as “backward.”<sup>215</sup> In response to a letter asking for advice about a friend who is in love with a Christian woman but hesitant to marry her because of loyalty to his parents, the editor uses Biblical allusions to bolster his arguments in favor of the marriage. He advises the friend to “remind [his parents] that Moyshe Rabeinu took a priest’s daughter as a wife and also a black convert. And King David and King Solomon had many non-Jewish wives. In the Torah it tells the Jews that if they see a pretty non-Jew during war they should take her.”<sup>216</sup> Speaking in a language of traditionalism, the editor advocates a position of radical acceptance of the shocking and modern idea of intermarriage, urging the older generation to view it as something rooted in the past and therefore more acceptable. In one letter extolling the preciousness of a love between a Jewish man and a non-Jewish woman the editor asserts, “such a love deserves the greatest respect.” In his description of the letter, the editor proclaims, “nature makes no distinctions based on religion or race,” making an argument for the newspaper’s egalitarian stance and its connection to the rational, scientific realm of “nature.”<sup>217</sup>

In these instances, Cahan dismisses race and religion as categories through which to uphold difference, arguing instead for equality through an act of love. Here, the intermarriage

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<sup>214</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), April 26, 1909, p. 5.

<sup>215</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), August 20, 1911, p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), August 7, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>217</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), January 22, 1907, p. 5.



narrative celebrates a “pure heart” winning over against the “unjust feelings” that separate ethnic groups.

In “Apostate of Chego-Chegg” and “Dumitru and Sigrid” Cahan laments that America is a place in which ethnic groups continue to be separate, and that in their continued loyalty to European ethnic identity, religion, and language they remain alien to each other and to their new homeland. Through these stories he expresses immigrants’ idealistic assumptions of American exceptionalism with regard to ethnic segregation, and the ways in which these hopes prove to be untrue. For the immigrants in these stories, America may be the land of intermarriage, but that intermarriage instigates immigrants’ “category crises” as they experience competing national loyalties and a feeling of displacement and homelessness.<sup>218</sup> In the above “Bintel Brief” letters, Cahan urges his readers to overcome these disappointments of America, laying claim to social egalitarianism through approval and celebration of intermarriage as type scene that affirms the importance of individual love over ethnic loyalty. He suggests that only in accepting such a radical view of love can his readers be truly modern.

### **Interethnic Romance as a Threat to Jewish Community**

As was the case for Jews generally throughout the history of their intersection with European modernity and its American variants, Cahan’s embrace of the modern, and the

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<sup>218</sup> “Category crisis” is a term coined by cultural critic Marjorie Gerber to describe the way that cultural border crossings tend to disrupt, expose, and destabilize categories themselves. See Marjorie Gerber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 14.

American, was partial, limited by his own Jewish cultural allegiances as well as the social reality of Jewish occupational, residential, and linguistic separateness, and this is epitomized in his relationship to interethnic love.<sup>219</sup> The question of interethnic romance in the “Bintel Brief” in the early twentieth century was often situated within a discourse of romantic love as a symbol of the new, the modern, and the American.<sup>220</sup> Because intermarriages were generally conducted without the approval of parents, without matchmakers or institutional support, they were understood to be marriages instigated because of the love of individuals. These couplings did not take into account the collective nature of marriage in East European Jewish culture, which, as Naomi Seidman explains “was an important part of this cultural system...as a part of a larger economy that united families and friends and that reached back into the past as well as forward into the future.”<sup>221</sup> Instead, they recreate narratives popularized in novels, in which a couple progresses toward marriage as the “embodiment of a new social order” of modern values, and members of the older generation serve as “blocking figures” that forestall and complicate their progress toward “sexualized fulfillment and Europeanized modernity.”<sup>222</sup> “Bintel Brief” letters about courtship and marriage generally, and interethnic romance in particular, often detail young women’s experiences of sneaking out with non-Jewish suitors to go to the theater or other public

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<sup>219</sup> Seidman, *The Marriage Plot*, 9.

<sup>220</sup> As Riv Ellen Prell notes, love, marriage, and domesticity “became essential strategies in [immigrants’] upward mobility” and “marriage was closely tied to Americanization.” She explains that marriage signified the creation of new families that could embrace American values of freely chosen love rather than traditional Jewish family structures under parental authority. Werner Sollors explains that the rhetoric of America drew upon and was conflated with the concept of romantic love because “American allegiance...was – like love – based on consent, not descent.” Love and American identity shared an ideology of individual choice, and celebrating romantic love was a way of celebrating the liberal state. Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans*, 59; Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 72.

<sup>221</sup> Seidman, *The Marriage Plot*, 18.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

spaces of courtship outside parental spheres of authority or young men's experiences of declaring their love to non-Jewish women they encountered in the workplace and through their broad social circles. In these stories young people participate in broad trends that at the turn of the century shifted courtship from family parlors to the public and commercial spheres of restaurants, theaters, and dance halls, and away from parental supervision toward independent choices in life partner through dating.<sup>223</sup> Beyond simple courtship and love, these relationships represented the most radical instances of an already radical and modern idea of romantic love as un beholden to traditional and familial conventions. In their attraction to non-Jewish lovers, the subjects of these letters reveal their attraction to the foreignness of romance itself, as well as to the individual non-Jewish lovers they consider marrying.<sup>224</sup>

For the editor, modern concerns about independence and love, individualism and universalism, come into conflict with values of Jewish communal and familial cohesion. Insofar as his advice about cohesion went against his egalitarian ideals, the editorial persona responding to "Bintel Brief" letters often comes out in support of the "blocking figures" that disrupt the "Bintel Brief" narratives of modern love, and the editor acts as such a figure, staving off the radical modernity of lovers in favor of familial loyalty. He thus subverts readers' expectations, as consumers of popular literature, that love should always triumph.<sup>225</sup> While he promoted

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<sup>223</sup> Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

<sup>224</sup> Seidman, *The Marriage Plot*, 57.

<sup>225</sup> As Naomi Seidman notes, in a typical *Haskalah* marriage narrative, with which many of the *Bintel Brief* letters are closely aligned, "parents and other members of the older generation" serve as "blocking figures" who provide tension and conflict in the plot and serve as foils to the younger generation who are the "ideological embodiment of a new social order." They are the villains that allow the heroes to prove, through trials and tribulations, the rightness of their cause. By aligning himself with these blocking figures, Cahan turns the expectations of a popular

assimilation, Cahan was also dedicated to the idea of Jewish continuity – of perpetuating Yiddish language and Jewish community into the future, and this manifested in his resistance to intermarriage. He wanted his readership to adjust to American life, but he resisted an assimilationist solution to the Jewish question that would lead to the erasure of Jewish national identity in support of socialist unity.<sup>226</sup>

Cahan’s fictions of intermarriage such as “The Apostle of Chego-Chegg” and “Dumitru and Sigrid” offer insights into value of interethnic romance as a plot arc that reveals the shifting loyalties, allegiances, and identities Jewish immigrants experienced at a historical moment of intense change for Jewish communities as they transitioned from rural to urban lifestyles, from lives governed by religious traditions to lives guided by secularism, and from Europe to America. But in his journalistic depictions of intermarriage, Cahan often insists on intermarriage as a practical, real problem of individual Jewish Americans, rather than a set of narrative conventions employed to illustrate the upheaval faced by the broader community. In his pragmatic advice about interethnic romance, the “Bintel Brief” editor insists that intermarriages are a common occurrence – an insistence echoed in articles on the subject published elsewhere in the newspaper.<sup>227</sup> These articles embrace a sociological framework in which they seek to

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reading audience on their head, asking them to cheer, at least sometimes, for the forces often positioned as in opposition to progress, youth, beauty, and goodness in popular literary forms. See Seidman, *The Marriage Plot*, 78.

<sup>226</sup> See Rogoff, *Der gayst fun 'Forverts,'* 123.

<sup>227</sup> In an article titled “*Ayngelibt in Idische Kinder*” [“In Love with Jewish Young People”] published in the *Forverts* on March 16, 1902, Cahan insists that “such events [i.e. intermarriages] are not so rare here in New York. They happen more often than we would think.” An article published in the *Forverts* on January 19, 1907 insists that these romances are “in fashion” and becoming increasingly common, and an article from September 3, 1922 insists that the numbers of intermarriages are rising and will someday have an impact on American Jewish life. This article argues that marriages between Jewish girls and Italian boys in particular are becoming commonplace because their close associations in tenements, schools, dance halls, and workplaces create the circumstances for

interpret a widespread social phenomenon, framing it as a problem for the Jewish community that needs to be solved.<sup>228</sup> In his responses to “Bintel Brief” letters on intermarriage the editor tended to eschew intermarriage as a symbol for the modern or for idealistic egalitarianism, taking on a conservative stance in favor of preservation of individual Jewish families and of Jewish peoplehood.<sup>229</sup>

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love affairs. While such love affairs used to be the stuff of fiction or the result of forbidden tawdry romances resulting in shotgun weddings, nowadays intermarriages are more frequent and built on a more solid foundation. In an article from the *Forverts* published on June 20, 1923, Z. Libin insists that marriages between Jewish girls and Christians are common – he asks “why do so many Jewish girls marry Christians?” comparing the high incidence of intermarriage to an outbreak of influenza. He posits a misogynistic argument that Jewish girls who are ugly, old, or otherwise undesirable don’t have good chances in the Jewish marriage market but are able to find husbands among the Gentiles. In response, Z. Kornblit affirms that such marriages are increasingly common but argues that often pretty Jewish girls marry Christian men, and suggests that intermarriage should not be framed as a problem, and that freethinking individuals arguing against intermarriage are “enslaved” by old religious traditions, and that their secularism is only a “thin skin” concealing the “thick fanaticism” that lies beneath. Abraham Cahan, “*Ayngelibt in Idishe Kinder*” “[In Love with Jewish Young People],” *Forverts*, (New York), March 16 1902, p. 4-5. According to Ronald Sanders, this article originally appeared in English in the *Commercial Advertiser*. See Sanders, *The Downtown Jews*, 257; B. Faygenboym, “*Iden mit goyes far vayber, idishe froyen mit goys far mener*,” *Forverts*, January 19, 1907, p. 4; L. Malkes, “*Shidukhim tsvishen Idishe meydlekh un Italienishe bokherim*,” *Forverts*, September 9, 1922, p.4; Z. Libin, “*Varum hayraten manche Idishe meydlekh Kristen?*” *Forverts*, June 20, 1923, p.4. Z. Kornblith, “*Hayratn tsvishen Idishe meydlekh un Kristlikhe bokherim*,” *Forverts*, June 25, 1923, p. 3.

<sup>228</sup> For instance, L. Malkes writes that there are no statistics, but nevertheless insists that it is a noticeable “trend” among Jewish families in America. He seeks to find a reason for these marriages around the language of social trends, family structures, and environmental factors, and he employs the language of “happiness” and “success” in evaluating the marriages. L. Malkes, “*Shidukhim tsvishen Idishe meydlekh un Italienishe bokherim*,” *Forverts*, September 9, 1922, p.4; For a discussion of the rising importance of sociology as a communal authority on interpreting the meaning and significance of intermarriage for the American Jewish community see Berman, “Sociology, Jews, and Intermarriage in Twentieth-Century America.”

<sup>229</sup> This concern over familial and communal fragmentation, refracted through the trope of intermarriage, also appears Cahan’s “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg.” Michalina’s marriage not only instigates and necessitates her migration away from her parents, but it also engenders a sense of alienation between Michalina and her own child. Although Michalina later comes to think of her child differently, when Michalina’s daughter is born she is at first “overcome with terror and disgust” at the “*shikse*” she has brought into the world. Michalina’s sense of disgust and alienation from a daughter she takes to be ethnically Polish Catholic reflects the impossibilities of her internal category crisis, her sense of herself as bifurcated between Catholic and Jewish loyalties. In the moment of her daughter’s birth she feels physically that she has no singular identity in which to ground herself: her “splitting” headache and the splitting of her pregnant self into mother and daughter are external realizations of her internal bifurcation. Because of her dual loyalties to Christianness and Jewishness, she cannot find a sense of wholeness or continuity within the family she tries to establish in the no-man’s-land between Jew and Catholic Pole. Cahan, “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg,” 172.

“Bintel Brief” letters discussing the issue of marriage often center on resolving intergenerational conflict between children interested in marrying non-Jews and their more traditional parents. The editorial voice tends to urge children to respect their parents’ wishes and parents to forgive their children’s missteps, sometimes thereby recommending that children abandon mixed relationships and other times suggesting that parents accept their children’s choices of non-Jewish spouses, presumably all for the sake of establishing peace between parents and their children. Regardless of their religious beliefs and discomforts with intermarriage, the editor consistently advises parents to forgive and seek to understand their children: “We believe,” he writes, “that there needs to be a compromise here... the [mother] must take into consideration the feelings of her child.”<sup>230</sup> In a letter from July 30, 1908 he writes, “parents can never expect their children to follow them in matters of love.... Imagine if you told your daughter that she was not allowed to shed tears when she cut an onion ... could she help it? In the same way young people can’t help loving the people they fall in love with.” Parents are routinely told to put aside their reservations and fears about intermarriage for the sake of maintaining connections to their children and allowing their children to try to find happiness with their non-Jewish partners.

Likewise, while the editor usually advises parents to accept their children’s intermarriages, many of the children who write to the *Forverts* asking advice about the intermarriages they are contemplating are met with the editor’s discouragement. One young man writes, “I love her with my whole heart, but the fact that she is a Christian stands like a stone in my path. I myself am not religious, but my mother in my home country will suffer greatly if I

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<sup>230</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), November 26, 1919, p. 5.

marry a Christian.” In response, the editor chides, “You can find another lover, but you can never have another mother,” and he tells the young man to try to forget the Christian woman because his mother is more important.<sup>231</sup> In response to a letter dated June 18, 1908, the editor praises a woman who did not marry the Christian man whom she loved out of consideration for her parents. Remarking on the pureness of the love that this woman sacrificed, the narrator calls her “brave” and tells her she should be proud of her “vast moral heroism” in sacrificing her own happiness for the sake of her parents. However painful her decision not to marry the Christian may have been, ultimately she should be proud of her “martyrdom” which preserved her relationship with her parents – a relationship the editor prizes above that of romantic love.<sup>232</sup>

The editor’s realistic, pragmatic approach to advice about intermarriage not only favors family cohesion over the modern ideals of romantic love, but reveals the prejudices and suspicions of non-Jews the editor maintains despite his theoretical support of universalist egalitarian values. As Gil Ribak explains, even committed Marxists who believed in class solidarity with non-Jewish workers held “prevalent Jewish conceptions regarding non-Jews” in actuality, including fears of Christian anti-Semitism, belief that Christian peasants were ignorant and violent, and a general distrust of non-Jews as potential enemies of the Jewish people.<sup>233</sup> These Marxist Jews, including Cahan, “shared with other Jews...certain assumptions about Gentile behavior, and those conceptions and assessments of the non-Jewish masses had a

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<sup>231</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), March 9, 1916, p. 5.

<sup>232</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), June 18, 1908, p. 5.

<sup>233</sup> Ribak, *Gentile New York*, 31.

direct...effect” on their policies toward and about non-Jews.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, Jewish immigrants in America learned and adopted surrounding American attitudes toward other immigrant groups as they acculturated to American ideas, beliefs, and customs. When the editor writes against interethnic romance, it is also with the force of this adopted American anti-immigrant sentiment.<sup>235</sup> This explains the distance between a theoretical, fictional representation of interethnic romance in “Dumitru and Sigrid” as an innocent ideal shattered by American reality, or in “the Apostate of Chego-Chegg” as a hoped-for ideal of self-transformation that cannot be realized in actuality, and advice columns warning against intermarriage as bringing together Jews with threatening, hateful non-Jews, something that could never be desirable even in the realm of fantasy.

“Bintel Brief” letters and editorial responses reflect a deeply held suspicion of non-Jews, even though this suspicion contradicts the editor’s political stance on the equality of all peoples. According to the editorial persona, non-Jews are much more likely than Jews to be carrying hidden secrets of anti-Semitism and of radical, unreasonable, and dangerous religious beliefs,

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 32; For an example of Cahan’s assertions of the superiority of the Jewish working class to their non-Jewish counterparts, see Abraham Cahan, “Unzer inteligents,” *Tsukunft*, Jan. 1910, 41; Feb. 1910, 109, quoted in Ribak, *Gentile New York*, 104.

<sup>235</sup> For instance, the editor’s hesitations about Irish and Italian immigrants as potentially violent may certainly stem from American anti-immigrant discourse, which included a wide spectrum of representation of these immigrants as comic, primitive, savage, and prone to drunkenness. Likewise, his concerns about Jews conducting romances with Slavic immigrants may derive as much from contemporary American stereotypes of Slavic immigrants as physically strong and mentally insufficient, as much as they derive from Jewish stereotypes of Slavic peasants that originated in Eastern Europe. Such anti-immigrant sentiment had a strong impact on how Jewish immigrants classified and interpreted their neighbors and, indeed, themselves. See Kevin Kenny, “Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment in the Nineteenth Century” in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. Marion Casey, J. J. Lee (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 364-380; Ilaria Serra, *The Imagined Immigrant: Images of Italian Emigration to the United States Between 1890 and 1924* (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009); Karel D. Bicha, “Hunkies: Stereotyping the Slavic Immigrants, 1890-1920,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1982): 16-38.



and Jews contemplating marriage to non-Jews should take extra precautions because “they belong to two different nationalities.”<sup>236</sup> In a response to one letter, the editor argues that an Italian is “a whole other kind of person” from a Jew, and that this poses a danger for a Jewish woman contemplating a marriage with an Italian man: “If an Italian is a bad person he is a thousand times worse for a Jewish woman because he is an Italian.” In another letter he warns a Jewish woman that “a large percent of the Italians who come here are hot blooded and horribly behaved people because almost only small town Italians immigrate here and the tyranny of their land makes them extremely wild and primitive.”<sup>237</sup> Statements such as, “their quarrels might be much worse and more dangerous,” hint at the editor’s affirmation of a commonly held stereotype of Italian men’s violence, especially against their wives.<sup>238</sup> Notably, this sentiment ignores the widespread problem of Jewish domestic violence and abandonment, a subject that received much attention elsewhere in the newspaper.<sup>239</sup> The editor likewise betrays prejudices in the case of a Russian man who is in love with a Jewish woman. He warns the woman that she should consider whether the Russian man has “the usual bad qualities of simple Russians” such as alcoholism.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), May 21, 1909, p. 5.

<sup>237</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), January 27, 1908, p. 5.

<sup>238</sup> In his work on Jewish immigrants’ impressions of non-Jews in New York at the turn of the century, Gil Ribak notes that the Yiddish press often associated Italians with violent criminality and hotheadedness. See Ribak, *Gentile New York*, 84.

<sup>239</sup> The *Forverts* famously addressed the issue of men abandoning their wives through publishing a “Gallery of Missing Husbands,” soliciting the readership’s help in locating the men pictured. This was part of a broader Jewish anti-desertion campaign. See Anna R. Igra, *Wives Without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 23-26.

<sup>240</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), August 12, 1915, p. 5.

The editor's concerns that non-Jews are not suitable partners for Jews are often born of fears that most Christians bear a "deeply-rooted hatred toward Jews."<sup>241</sup> Antisemitism is part and parcel of the debauchery and violence that he associates with what Gil Ribak has referred to as "a non-genteel 'Gentileness,'" or "a kind of *goyishkayt*, a Gentile essence that was seen as the innate opposite of Jewishness."<sup>242</sup> That is to say, non-Jewish immigrants were viewed as perpetrators of hooliganism and anti-Jewish violence as a result of and in conjunction with debased lifestyles of drunken and disorderly conduct, and antisemitism was assumed to be essential to the Gentile character, along with other unsavory behaviors and tendencies. The editor warns that "Christians are used to the idea that a Jew is to be hated and this idea bubbles up into every little disagreement between man and wife."<sup>243</sup> Even as the editor insists that in a perfect world in which one could be sure of the character of one's partner, intermarriage is, on a theoretical level, permissible, he also urges caution because of his suspicion concerning non-Jews as potentially abusive, antisemitic marriage partners who could bring their insidious antisemitic beliefs into the Jewish home and even into the hearts of children born to Jewish parents.

As I have demonstrated, editorial responses to "Bintel Brief" letters promoted the values of familial and community cohesion ahead of the universal egalitarian beliefs that intermarriage often signalled. This is also consistent with the narrative with which contemporaneous sociologists discussed intermarriage: while some claimed that the existence of individual

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<sup>241</sup> "A Bintel Brief" ["A Bundle of Letters"], *Forverts* (New York), March 29, 1916, p. 5.

<sup>242</sup> Ribak, *Gentile New York*, 68, 66.

<sup>243</sup> "A Bintel Brief" ["A Bundle of Letters"], *Forverts* (New York), May 21, 1909, p. 5.

intermarriages proved the assimilability of Jews into the American people, sociologists speaking for and to Jewish Americans attempted to replace the melting-pot idea with one that advanced group distinctiveness.<sup>244</sup> Cahan and his editorial staff were deeply concerned with the question of intergenerational conflict among Jewish immigrants, particularly as immigrant Jews were overwhelmingly young and lacking traditional structures of parental and institutional authority. Immigration to America from overseas went hand-in-hand with the rupture of family units, which was further aggravated by long hours spent working outside the home and the permissive social mores of the American urban environment.<sup>245</sup> In Cahan's "Bintel Brief" editorial advice, intermarriage is not only a narrative illustrating the ideal possibility of egalitarianism in America, but a symptom of what he feared was the real disintegration of Jewish community. Cahan was also deeply concerned about protecting Jews against antisemitism, and insofar as Gentiles represented the potential for antisemitism, his editorial advice about intermarriage warned against its potential dangers of allowing antisemitic values to infiltrate the domestic spaces and intimate familial relations of his constituency. Cahan saw the *Forverts* as an organ that helped to coalesce and sustain a sense of community among Jewish immigrants around socialist and Jewish concerns and that protected and educated the community about the dangers and rewards of American life, and his encouraging children and parents to reconcile over this most controversial issue, and Jews to be cautious in their interactions with potentially antisemitic non-Jews, follow from the urgency that he felt about the potential for the fragmentation and dissolution of the Jewish community in America.

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<sup>244</sup> See Berman, "Sociology, Jews, and Intermarriage in Twentieth-Century America." See also Michael Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>245</sup> Tony Michels, *A Fire in their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 12.

## Conversion: The Hypocrisies and Possibilities of a Secular Jewish Community

Cahan's concerns about Jewish communal fragmentation come not only from the external threat of antisemitism or the internal threat of intergenerational conflict around issues of modernization, but also from a fundamental question of the definition of Jewishness itself for a community that disavowed religion as a category of practice, belief, and identity-making. For Cahan, the idea of conversion stands in for these anxieties about defining Jewishness in a post-religious age. In editorial responses to "Bintel Brief" letters, conversion to Judaism appears at once to be a potential resolution for intergenerational conflict around the question of intermarriage and a hypocritical fiction that allows individuals to enter into Judaism as a religion, when religion is not the primary category through which Cahan identifies the Jewish community. Conversion to Judaism is not, for Cahan, a complete or authentic vehicle for becoming a Jew according to the national, racial, and cultural rubrics he finds meaningful, and conversion away from Judaism does not allow an individual to meaningfully change who they are according to these metrics of Jewish identity.

In his article "In Love with Jewish Young People," comprised of a series of anecdotes about interethnic romance, conversion plays a central role in narratives of intermarriage.<sup>246</sup> Young Christians become religiously Jewish in order to marry their loved ones but are nevertheless continually referred to in the article by their original ethnic orientations ("a Greek man," "a Swedish Christian girl"). This illustrates the way in which, because the boundaries of Jewishness had religious, racial, and cultural components, marriages between Jews and converts

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<sup>246</sup> Cahan, "Ayngelibit in Idische Kinder," 4-5.

to Judaism are in many ways still considered intermarriages with all the concerns about group solidarity and change that surrounded the issue of intermarriage at this historical moment.<sup>247</sup> Although, for instance, a Greek man “took on the Jewish religion all because he was madly in love with a Jewish girl,” it is much less possible for him to “take on” unchangeable features of Jewishness that were tied to the body (race) or to personal and familial history (culture), and therefore the extent to which such a convert belonged to the collective body of the Jewish people may also be questionable. While it might be more difficult to imagine and scandalous to write about stories of marriages that do not involve conversions, the fact of conversion does not mean that Cahan or the readership consider the converted spouse to be fully Jewish, or that familial and cultural conflicts will not arise. Here we see Cahan’s attention to the multiple boundaries that make up American Jewish identity which call into question the cohesiveness of the Jewish community itself in a moment of transition in which new communal norms have not yet been firmed.

In his response to “Bintel Brief” letters, the editor expresses skepticism with the legitimacy of conversion, which may make intermarriage more acceptable in the eyes of Jewish families but comes at the cost of ideological compromise for atheists opposed to religion. He asserts that “intelligent people should know that this [conversion] does not make a difference” and pointedly asks, “What worth does such a ceremony have for modern people who don’t

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<sup>247</sup> According to *halakhah* (Jewish law), a non-Jew who converts to Judaism has become a Jew, and a Jew who converts out of Judaism remains a Jew (cf. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah 268:12 [which also cautions against permitting conversion for the sake of marriage]). One might therefore expect that the stories of Christians who converted to Judaism in “*Ayngelibt in Idische Kinder*” would demonstrate a different attitude toward the status change of the converted individuals than “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg” does for Michalina, a Jew who converted to Christianity. However, in both cases the completeness of the transformation is questioned. This demonstrates not only the multiple rubrics through which Jewishness is assessed, but also the extent to which ritual law is, for Cahan, not the most relevant factor in determining the boundaries of the Jewish community.

believe in their own religious ceremonies?”<sup>248</sup> Although conversion is a solution that might appease parents and create peace between families and within communities, to freethinking individuals who do not believe in religion it is no more than an empty symbolic act and does not actually change the identity of the individual in question or make the marriage any more or less of an intermarriage.<sup>249</sup> In one letter, the editor even goes so far as to decry the circumcision ceremony in the case of a socialist freethinker who is converting to Judaism for a marriage. In discussing this case the editor writes, “it is simply laughable” for the man to participate in this religious ceremony while insisting that he does not believe in religion.<sup>250</sup> The conversion of a freethinker who does not want to convert, claims the editor, is “no more than a joke” and that it is wrong to “make [the non-Jewish freethinker] undergo a ceremony that is against [his] principles.”<sup>251</sup>

Several letter writers to the “Bintel Brief” share in this suspicion of the hypocrisy of conversion for the sake of marriage when as “freethinkers” they disavow religion. What does it mean, they ask, to disbelieve in religion and yet allow the mechanism of conversion to solve the problem of intermarriage? Does participation in a conversion ritual undermine the couple’s authenticity as freethinkers? As one letter writer phrases it, “I am a freethinker and the idea that

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<sup>248</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), January 22, 1915, p. 5; June 27, 1915, p. 5.

<sup>249</sup> As he makes evident in “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg,” for Cahan Jewishness exists according to a competing set of criteria and within multiple categories. Religious conversion may change the religious status of an individual, and their status under religious law, but it does not change their cultural heritage, their sense of history, their behaviors, or their physical attributes, each of which make up the essential and unchangeable qualities of a Jew according to categories outside of religion.

<sup>250</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), January 27, 1908, p. 5.

<sup>251</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), October 7, 1918, p. 5.

my beloved would convert to Judaism is like a slap in the face.”<sup>252</sup> The marriage remains as much of an intermarriage as ever—a marriage between two people of different backgrounds with families located in different religious and ethnic communities—and as little of an intermarriage as ever—a marriage between equals who do not hold to religions and who believe that all people are essentially the same. According to this writer, the religious conversion does not shift the nature of the marriage or affect the identity of the individual undergoing the ritual, and if intermarriage is acceptable, it has to be permissible without the hypocrisy of a conversion ceremony. Yet the letter writer begs the “Bintel Brief” editor for an answer about whether it would be acceptable for her beloved to undergo a conversion under these circumstances. This author recognizes that there is a social component as well as a religious component to conversion, and that undergoing the religious ritual may gain her fiancé entry into her family’s ethnically segregated community. “The joy or sorrow of two families depends on your answer,” she writes. If a conversion is not utterly hypocritical, if it does not entirely undermine her status as an authentic freethinking secular person, then the conversion could be the perfect solution to allow the writer to simultaneously marry her non-Jewish lover and appease her more traditional parents, providing a vehicle through which her family can embrace her spouse as one of their own.<sup>253</sup> Even if it does not represent a transformation in religious faith, conversion can signal acceptance into Jewishness as a community or family, broadening the borders of Jewishness, in the language of Werner Sollors, scholar of ethnicity in America, from a community of “descent”

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<sup>252</sup> *A Bintel Brief* [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York), August 30, 1915, p. 5.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

to “consent,” and thereby allowing the letter writer’s lover entry into a non-religious Jewish community through the religious ritual of conversion.<sup>254</sup>

In his responses to “Bintel Brief” letters, the editor’s attitude toward Reform conversion reveals his willingness, despite his aversion to religion, to make use of religious ritual in favor of community cohesion. Seeking to preserve families and placate the parents’ generation, the editor encourages the conversion of non-Jews to Judaism in the case of intermarriage. He also sees the conversion as a way for the non-Jew to affirm his or her lack of prejudice toward Jews. In a long and tearful tragic letter about a woman deciding between a Christian lover who says he will die if he cannot be with her and her parents who beg her not to burden them with the scandal of intermarriage, the woman’s lover has offered to convert to Judaism in order to be with her, but the woman finds such a conversion hypocritical as neither she nor her lover are believers in religion. The editor responds with an affirmation that Jews and Christians can intermarry provided that they hold the same freethinking beliefs and values. He argues that conversion to Judaism can be a way for this Christian lover to affirm his nonsectarianism – not necessarily inducting himself into Judaism so much as rejecting the problematic past of Christian relations toward Jews and affirming that he is not among the Christians who continue to persecute Jews both in America and in Europe. The editor offers the option of conversion to Judaism through a Reform rabbi based on his impression that such a conversion would not require an affirmation of faith but rather a mere avowal that he believes “that Jews didn’t sin when they didn’t take Jesus

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<sup>254</sup> See Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*.



to be a God ... and that the other accusations against Jews are false.”<sup>255</sup> In this case, conversion does not change the status of the Christian into a Jew – a freethinker does not give such credence to religious ritual – instead it simply allows the freethinker to publically affirm his freethinking beliefs. On occasion the editor recommends conversion as a “sacrifice to bring” before parents to appease their misgivings about intermarriage, even if for the “educated and modern” non-Jewish partner the conversion is meaningless.<sup>256</sup>

Cahan’s approach to conversion in the above letters sees it as a pragmatic, functional convenient marker for an older, religious generation that will allow a non-Jew entry into a Jewish family with little consequence for the non-Jew who undergoes the process. Through his lack of belief in the religious component of conversion as a declaration of faith in a Jewish conception of God, Cahan can both advocate for conversion as a means of bringing families together despite intermarriage, and criticize conversion for its hypocrisy, relying through both positions on a conception of conversion as essentially meaningless for Jews without faith. Yet, despite his protests, the conversions he describes in these letters do bear meaning in inducting individuals into a familial and communal conception of Jewishness – otherwise Cahan would have no reason

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<sup>255</sup> The editor’s impression of Reform conversion does not accurately represent what such a conversion entailed at the time but reveals the editor’s desire to find compromises for intermarrying couples that protect Jews from marrying anti-Semites, which he believes is one of the chief potential dangers of intermarriage. In actuality, although the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the unifying body of American Reform rabbis, resolved in 1893 that converts could be accepted as Jewish without an initiatory rite or ceremony, this was not because of an indifference to the religious beliefs of the convert but because of Reform Judaism’s emphasis on application of moral principles rather than practice of ritual as a basis of Reform religious expression. Reform rabbis typically required converts to receive instruction in the Jewish religion, and to promise to live as a Jew and to raise Jewish children. These expectations extend beyond Cahan’s assumption that Reform conversion consisted of a promise not to maintain anti-Semitic feelings. See Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 264, 280.

<sup>256</sup> “A Bintel Brief” [“A Bundle of Letters”], *Forverts* (New York November 1, 1919, p. 13).

to support them for the sake of family unity.<sup>257</sup> In denying the religious salience of the ritual while advocating its performance, Cahan shifts religious ritual into the realm of secular, ethnic affiliation while retaining the religious mechanism of conversion to signal the possibility of an ethnic community regulated by the possibilities of “consent” as well as “descent” – an ethnic community that can accept new members through an act of ritual. The editor at once insists on the religious meaninglessness of religious conversion and advocates its potential for the meaningful creation of secular forms of community.

### **Intermarriage as a Site for Immigrant Jewish Americans’ Displacement and Uncertainty**

Where conversion to Judaism illustrates the potential flexibility of the boundaries of the Jewish community that would allow for marriage between individuals of Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds, conversion away from Judaism illustrates the anxiety and uncertainty around these very same boundaries. As Gauri Viswanathan explains, conversion out of a group calls into question the cohesion of the entire group: “with the departure of members from the fold, the cohesion of a community is under threat just as forcefully as if its beliefs had been turned into heresies.”<sup>258</sup> She goes on to explain, “by undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities, conversion unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community

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<sup>257</sup> In her analysis of the *Bintel Brief* letters, Magdalena Ewa Bier argues that Cahan encourages conversion because it is “linked to Jewish culture... the woman’s conversion might help to preserve Jewish traditions in the household” not as a matter of faith, but as a matter of culture. See Bier, *How to Become Jewish Americans*, 24.

<sup>258</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), xi.

are defined, exposing these as permeable borders.”<sup>259</sup> Conversion calls attention to the constructed nature of identity itself, allowing for the possibility that an individual can move in and out of identities that might previously been conceived of as essential and fixed. For Cahan, conversion out of Judaism, especially given that there is no *halakhic* way to undo Jewishness, reveals the indefinability of Jewishness itself when religion is one of many factors in defining Jewishness.<sup>260</sup> In “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg,” Cahan thematizes conversion and intermarriage to demonstrate Jews’ fundamental displacement in secular modernity, and the Jewish community’s hypocritical blindness to the nature and creative potential of their own uncertainty.

In “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg,” conversion’s failure to fully induct Michalina into a new identity – she has changed her religion to marry her husband but does not identify with the people who practice that faith – suggests that she remains within and belongs within a Jewish identity, regardless of her ritual status. Michalina’s conversion to Christianity seems to suggest that she has placed herself outside the fold of Judaism and Jewish community and is instead a Catholic. Yet religious faith is not enough to encapsulate her Jewish identity, which is related to “her father’s house and her Jewish past,” to Jewish histories of “religious persecution and enforced clannishness,” to the Yiddish language to which she feels a nostalgic attachment, to the Jewish ways of preparing and eating food and ritual customs toward which she continues to be

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<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>260</sup> See footnote 247. The principle that there is no way to undo Jewishness has been disputed. Israeli social historian Jacob Katz demonstrates that the principle was formulated into one slogan – *af-al-pi she-hata yisra’el hu* (although he sinned, he is still a Jew) – during the First Crusade when many Jews were told to convert to Christianity or be killed. It came at a time of mass, forced conversion, and may not fully apply beyond this context. See Jacob Katz, “*Af-al-pi She-Hata Yisra’el Hu*,” *Tarbiz* 27 (1957-58), 203-217.

drawn, and to the appearance of her own recognizably Jewish body.<sup>261</sup> These racial, historical, cultural, and familial metrics for measuring identity are stronger than the ties of religious conversion and marriage, and they pull her back into her Jewish identity even as the Jewish community shuns her as a “living stigma” for having converted. Her identity as a *meshumedeste*, a converted Jew, demonstrates the incompleteness of religious conversion to communal identity making – in her mind she has changed her religion but not her essentially Jewish self: she is not, as her husband insists, simply a Catholic, she is “a convert Jewess,” and her Jewishness remains a key component of her identity and behavior.<sup>262</sup> Yet the Jewish community with which she identifies shuns and shames her until and unless she accepts her identity as Jewish according to ritual, religious law, and disavows her conversion and marriage to a Catholic. This exposes the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of Jewish community-making around religious taboo, rather than cultural and national forms of identity which Cahan posits are more authentic to the lived experience of Jewish communities, and which should be fluid enough, theoretically if not practically, to allow for the acceptance of someone who has intermarried and converted within the family, nation, and historical trajectory of Jewish peoplehood.

As a result of her conversion, Michalina is a character fraught with internal divisions. She suffers from irreconcilable desires that coincide with the stark differences in context she has experienced in her life. For Michalina these differences are not simply the contrast between pre- and post- immigration, but also between Christian and Jewish communities and statuses. As in similar conversion narratives, as Gauri Viswanathan describes, memory “becomes a

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<sup>261</sup> Cahan, “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg,” 165-166, 173, 176.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

counterweight to the conversion experience,” tying her inexorably to the community from which she fled.<sup>263</sup> Yet even in her nostalgic remembrances of her pre-immigration past, Michalina experiences displacement and impossible longings: “she was yearning for her Gentile husband and their common birthplace, and she was yearning for her father’s house and her Jewish past.”<sup>264</sup> In one sentence, in one seamless thought, Michalina experiences a desire to be where she is not, articulated in the bifurcated terms of her identity as a converted Jewess: at once Gentile and Jew. In either case, she attributes a sense of belonging to her past, although the contrast between these two representations of her pre-immigration home – as both a place she shares with her Gentile husband and a place that represents a Jewishness that excludes him – call into question whether she ever experienced such an uncomplicated feeling of being at home.

Michalina longs for a non-existent past of belonging because her present is so filled with a sense of displacement. Although Michalina has declared “I am a Jewess no longer” through her marriage, conversion, and immigration, she does not feel that these ritual, legal, and geographical shifts have been matched by an equally straightforward internal transformation: “she turned herself adrift on the feeling that she was the same girl as of old,” despite the new trappings that surround and define her.<sup>265</sup> Nor do others recognize her as a Pole. When the devout Jewish Rabbi Nehemiah comes through the Polish settlement of Chego-Chegg on his way home from a speaking engagement, he is distraught to find Michalina working on the (Jewish) Sabbath, sure from her physical appearance that she was a “child of Israel,” although she denies

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<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

it, speaking to him in Lithuanian.<sup>266</sup> Here Cahan suggests that there is something biological to Jewishness, and that Michalina *looks* Jewish and can be interpreted by others as Jewish regardless of her religious status. Michalina is Jewish according to some categories of Jewish belonging, and is excluded from Jewishness according to others: Racially, Michalina is Jewish, as affirmed by the fact that others judge her appearance as a Jewish one. According to her memories and childhood experiences, Michalina is Jewish, and this frames the way she sees herself in relation to her past. But Michalina's ritual status and her social exclusion from the Jewish community place her in exile from that community. This illustrates how multiple categories of Jewish belonging - racial, religious, communal, and cultural – create contradictions and impossibilities in establishing and policing the borders of Jewish identity, particularly as Jewish identity fluctuates in the face of modern secular ideas.

The Jewish community offers Michalina the possibility of relief from this position of an individual of divided and competing loyalties and affiliations, “doomed to have no rest in either this world or in the other.”<sup>267</sup> As Michalina learns from a rabbi on Orchard Street who acts as a legislator of authentic Jewish identity according to the rubric of religion, according to Jewish law she is still a Jew – “once a Jew, forever a Jew” – and her marriage is not recognized by the laws of her faith.<sup>268</sup> She further learns that according to Jewish law the child follows the status of the mother, and thus her daughter is also a Jew. Addressing her daughter by a Jewish name, Michalina (who soon is referred to as Rebecca) affirms the transformative power of religious legal status – her visit with the rabbi has allowed her to see herself and her daughter in a new

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<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

light, free from the guilt and discomfort of their double and in-between identities (although according to Catholic law, she is a Catholic as a result of her conversion). Together with her Jewish neighbors, she launches a plan to marry a Jew and move to London to live out a Jewish life away from the secular law of America, according to which she is technically still married to her Polish husband. This plan offers her the hope of being permanently and definitively Jewish, reversing the decisions that placed her in the impossible position of falling into the cracks between communal boundaries.

But Michalina/Rebecca quickly realizes that the Jewish legal system that would claim her fully as a Jew is as false and incomplete as the Christian legal system that would accept her marriage and baptism as evidence that she is fully a Christian. When her neighbors see Wincas out of their window and refer to him as “her husband,” they reveal that their adherence to Jewish law does not change their feelings and memories of Michalina/Rebecca’s past as a *meshumedeste*, just as Michalina/Rebecca’s conversion to Catholicism and marriage failed to put to rest her past as a Jewish woman. Layers of Michalina/Rebecca’s conflicted identities - as a Jew returning to the fold and a Jew who had left her community; as a woman who loves her Catholic husband and a woman who longs to love a Jewish man; as a woman rejected and scorned by the Jewish community and a woman newly embraced by her co-religionists – come to a head as she shouts out that she cannot leave her husband. The illusion that Michalina could repair her divided self crumbles immediately as she is already alienated from her Jewish identity: “again her own Yiddish sounded like a foreign tongue to her.”<sup>269</sup> She flees the Jewish village among “a bedlam of curses” and a Jewish woman’s injunction “a *meshumedeste* is a

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<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

*meshumedeste*,” decrying the notion of transformation and asserting a permanence to Michalina’s in-between status with all of the guilt, alienation, and impossibility that the status entails.<sup>270</sup>

Michalina’s predicament as an in-between person in a society that draws meaning from clear ethnic, religious and social divisions shares many similarities with the prevalent American literary trope of the “tragic mulatta,” who serves as both an “agent of social change” and an “emblem of victimization” at the center of contemplations of the viability of a biracial, or in Michalina’s case a multiethnic republic.<sup>271</sup> Michalina, like the “tragic mulatta” is a “fictional symbol of marginality” and the tragedy of her not belonging within the clear bounds of accepted sociocultural categories represents the anxieties of a moment of crisis when these categories were in flux.<sup>272</sup> As an in-between figure, Michalina, like the “tragic mulatta,” raises epistemological questions about what it means to be Jewish or non-Jewish and about the line between religions and ethnicities and how it is constituted and policed. As a figure whose “‘identity’ or ‘loyalty’ is ambiguous” and who “questions what we understand race [religion and culture] to be,” she raises Cahan’s questions about essential qualities of Jewishness, who has the authority to regulate the boundaries of Jewishness, and the emerging role of the secular in modern Jewish life. As with the “tragic mulatta,” statutes and legal decisions (for Michalina these are religious conversion, American legal marital status, and traditional Jewish law) attempt to erase her in-between status, and yet she ultimately persists in challenging the “color line”

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<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>271</sup> Eve Allegra Raimon, *The “Tragic Mulatta” Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>272</sup> Judith Berzon, *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. (New York: NYU Press, 1978), 100.



between Jew and Pole, Jew and American, and Jew and Gentile more generally.<sup>273</sup> She resists ambiguity and resides in the politics and poetics of ambivalence that several scholars have identified as Cahan's hallmark contribution to American Jewish literature – a representation of the in-between status held by immigrant Jews whose split selves (past and present, English and Yiddish) undergo constant change without ever finding a comfortable sense of singularity or belonging.<sup>274</sup> To borrow a phrase from the protagonist of Cahan's novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*, these fragmented parts of the self “do not comport well,” and it is in this tension and displacement that Jewish American identities lie.<sup>275</sup> Michalina's choice to continue her in-between status rather than marrying a Jew, declaring herself Jewish, and leaving America demonstrates Cahan's ambivalence about the potential for Jewish belonging in non-Jewish spheres as well as his concern that traditional Jewish structures are no longer relevant if they ignore the changes facing Jews in the contemporary moment. Cahan uses the symbolism of

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<sup>273</sup> Teresa C. Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2010), 186-187.

<sup>274</sup> Scholars have typically located this ambivalence as a contest between assimilation and Jewishness, wherein, as Benjamin Schreier notes, this duality posits a “historically coherent Jewish identity” as well as a unified Americanness into which Jews might assimilate. However, as Schreier argues, this ambivalence might better be placed in the nascent formation of new identities than in the negotiation between identities already in existence and continuous from Cahan's moment to our own. See Benjamin Schreier, “Against the Dialectic of Nation: Abraham Cahan and Desire's Spectral Jew,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 276-299. For other scholarly treatments of Abraham Cahan's ambivalence, see: Eric Homburger, “Some Uses for Jewish Ambivalence: Abraham Cahan and Michael Gold,” in *Between 'Race' and 'Culture': Representations of 'the Jew' in English and American Literature*, ed. Bryan Cheyette. (Stanford University Press, 1996), 165-82; Adam Sol, “Searching for Middle Ground in Abraham Cahan's 'The Rise of David Levinsky' and Sydney Nyburg's 'The Chosen People,'” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 16 (1997): 6-21; Stephanie Foote, “Marvels of Memory: Citizenship and Ethnic Identity in Abraham Cahan's 'The Imported Bridegroom,'” *MELUS* 25, no.1 (Spring 2000): 33-53.

<sup>275</sup> Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishing, 1917), 530. Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* has been taken as “a typical example” of representations of immigrant Jewish Americans' “ambivalent relation[s] to the old continent.” Stanislav Kolar, “Functions of Recollections in Jewish American Literature,” in *Narratives of Resistance: Literature and Ethnicity in the United States and the Caribbean*, ed. Ana María Manzanás Calvo and Jesús Benito Sánchez (La Mancha: Univ de Castilla La Mancha, 1999), 249-258, p. 250.

intermarriage as an incomplete act of status-changing, like immigration itself, that left its participants stranded without clear demarcations of belonging to one people or nation.

Michalina's choice to remain in this disruptively ambivalent position between Jew and Christian, in a Long Island reminiscent of European social structures that is oddly poised between Europe and America, reveals the nascent, uncharted nature of American Jewishness for Cahan: For Cahan America is not an exceptional, utopian land in which radical egalitarianism allows interethnic romance to occur without theoretical or social complications, but his writing demonstrates his hope that America could become such a place, and that Jews in America could come to exemplify that idealism, precisely because the nature of their identity is so imprecise. As Benjamin Schreier describes in his analysis of Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*. "in the wake of the destabilizing variety of Jewish self-identification available in the book...Levinsky cannot take his Jewishness for granted as an internally coherent identify formation under the administration of some controlling factor."<sup>276</sup> Rather "Jewishness remains a powerful axis of desire" for Levinsky as for Michalina, who longs to find a place for herself within some kind of Jewishness but resists renouncing those parts of herself that exclude her from the bounds of Jewishness as it has been previously articulated.<sup>277</sup> Without the traditional measures of family loyalty, religion, home, ritual, and place, Michalina's desire can only be for a kind of Jewishness not yet articulated or formed, a Jewishness outside the rules by which previous Jewish communities and identities have adhered. Her intermarriage, then, is not a betrayal of her Jewish identity, her Jewish community, and her Jewish religion. Instead, it is a gesture toward an

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<sup>276</sup> Schreier, "Against the Dialectic of Nation," 279.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

unknowable future in which Jewishness, married to the intransigencies of the modern moment, must become something utterly new and as yet indefinable.

## **Conclusion**

In his writing on interethnic romance, Cahan reflects on the uncertainty and creative potential of Jewish immigrants to America as they desire and imagine new rubrics for Jewishness outside of the cultural and religious bounds that historically contained Jewish self-definition. At the same time, he adjudicates pragmatically about the possible immediate effects of such romances for the Jewish community, advocating for familial cohesion and representing concerns about Gentiles as symbols for and purveyors of antisemitic violence. In this way, he takes on both the position of Michalina in “The Apostate of Chego-Chegg,” whose sense of displacement within her intermarriage mirrors the uncertainty and homelessness of Jews in America, and the position of the Jewish community Michalina encounters, who reject her in order to bolster and preserve their sense of self. In either case, through fiction and journalism, his forays into both ‘real’ and imagined incidences of interethnic romance allow him to speculate about the fluid and changing definitions and boundaries of Jewishness among immigrants to America, and to imagine a future for American Jews that may involve acculturation that increases the permeability of these boundaries or perhaps exceeds them.

By employing romance and marriage as the site of these speculations, Cahan relies on the category of gender as a vehicle through which immigrants transform themselves in their efforts to find their new identities as Americans. In his work on masculinity in Abraham Cahan’s

fiction, Clay Motley has noted that as male characters in Cahan's fiction negotiate "behaviors that identify them as an American man and those that mark them as Jewish" their balancing between gender expectations "ultimately alter each other, rendering attainment of either identity in some pure and isolate sense impossible."<sup>278</sup> Yet, as Susan Kress notes, while marriage narratives in Cahan's fiction offer men the opportunity for self-definition and self-transformation, they tend to represent the restrictions women face as they are defined by and contained within their marital choices.<sup>279</sup> In "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg," Michalina converts not out of "an inner conviction" but because it is a requirement of her marriage that she take on her Catholic husband's faith. Kress suggests that Michalina's decision not to leave her husband and assert her return to Jewishness by marrying a Jew is an indication of the lack of choice and agency available to Michalina – such a marriage would not be an expression of Michalina's identity since her adherence to Judaism would only be "for the sake of another" in marriage, and not an expression of her independent selfhood.<sup>280</sup> Identity formation through marriage choices demonstrates women's dependency on families and their subordinate position under patriarchy. If intermarriage is, for Cahan, a site for contemplating the limitations of Jews' experiences of secularization: they remain tied to pragmatic concerns of family cohesion and cultural memory even as they strive toward modernity and socialist egalitarianism, women's limited choices in marriage are a profound point of comparison through which to express the in-between position of immigrant Jews in America. In Chapter Three, I discuss women writers who

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<sup>278</sup> Clay Motley, "'Dot'sh a 'Kin' a man I am!': Abraham Cahan, Masculinity, and Jewish Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century America," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 30 (2011): 3-15, p. 6.

<sup>279</sup> Susan Kress, "Women and Marriage in Abraham Cahan's Fiction," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 3 (1983):26-39.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

harness the theme of intermarriage as a platform through which to articulate women's striving for liberation from patriarchal control.

## Chapter Three

### Laying Claim to the Self: Interethnic Romance and Early Feminist Discourse

As I discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, early feminist attempts of middle class women to gain the vote, to attain political power through participation in organizations, to go to college, and to enter the professional workforce challenged the middle class Victorian doctrine of “separate spheres.” Notions of ‘New Womanhood’ and “sex radicalism” proposed a wide range of possibilities for women’s public and private roles, from an embrace of marriage in modern terms, in particular marriage based in romantic love and companionship, to a rejection of the institution of marriage itself.<sup>281</sup> Early feminist discourse was taken up by new concepts of women’s roles and opportunities in love and in marriage. In this chapter I discuss writings by a selection of women authors from a variety of socioeconomic, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds within the broad umbrella of Jewish American identity in the 1920s who, in their fictions and memoirs, enter into this discourse of women’s increasing independence and the importance of love as a basis for a more equal, more modern version of the institution of marriage, and who do so through narratives of interethnic romance. The writers in this chapter composed their narratives in a context in which, as I explained in the introduction to this dissertation, intermarriage constituted a widespread plot arc depicting the progression of immigrants toward assimilation, in arguments both for and against the phenomenon. Yet the authors in this chapter used intermarriage not only as a site for discussing the dangers or benefits of assimilation, but also, at the same time, as a forum for burgeoning feminist ideas. They engage with the

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<sup>281</sup> For a discussion of the history of “sex radicalism,” see Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

intermarriage plot as a way to discuss women's independence and mobility, representing Jewish women as "vibrant metaphors of transition" for society as a whole, and as agents of self-transformation through revolt against patriarchal tradition.<sup>282</sup>

Rather than using the trope of interethnic romance to attempt to define the nascent meaning of Jewishness in America in the early twentieth century, as did Abraham Cahan (see Chapter Two of this dissertation), they turned their attention specifically to Jewish *womanhood*, using interethnic romance as a platform for posing the question of how and whether Jewish women could be modern while remaining under the rubric of a Jewish culture that many of these authors found patriarchal and stifling. Their writing extends and questions the assertions of the women writers in Chapter One of this dissertation, who employed interethnic romance as an emblem of women's, and Jews' growing equality. These writers discussed in this chapter assert ethnic and class elements of Jewish identity that complicate and disallow the idea, put forth by the Reform Jewish authors discussed in Chapter One, that Jewishness is a matter of belief that can be independently held within a modern interfaith marriage. Their protagonists find the idea of intermarriage to be a bold, nontraditional choice on the road to women's claims for familial and economic independence.<sup>283</sup> At the same time, several of these authors express the limitations of intermarriage as a feminist discourse when it runs counter to their desires to articulate and lay claim to an authentic ethnic identity, revealing and problematizing the

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<sup>282</sup> See Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>283</sup> Jewish women authors' use of interethnic romance contributed to the trend in early twentieth-century feminist texts to deconstruct, reinvent, and make use of the marriage plot and to rethink the institution of marriage in a way that allowed greater independence for women in political and economic spheres. See Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 20.

coercively homogeneous concept of modern American identity contained within early twentieth century feminism.<sup>284</sup> In discussing how Jewish ethnicity inflects feminist narratives of romance in this period, this chapter participates in scholarly efforts to expose the variety of feminist identities that proliferated in the turn-of-the century.<sup>285</sup>

This chapter is organized around Jewish women writers' employment of interethnic romance as an expression of rebellion against parental expectations, as an opportunity for entry into new spheres of professional and creative achievement, as a political statement about women's independence and in relation to issues of class, and as an affirmation of Jewish womanhood as a fulfilling identity in resistance to assimilationist pressures. The chapter outlines through these parameters Jewish women authors of the 1920s' representation of interethnic romance as a metaphor for the promises and failures of Jewish women's interaction with the non-Jewish, male-controlled America in which they lived.

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<sup>284</sup> For instance, Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams explains that Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a pioneer of American feminist theory, saw the influx of new immigrants at the turn of the century as "a threat to her vision of a homogeneous American public comprised of enlightened, rational women and men" in her story "Moving the Mountain," serialized in *The Forerunner* in 1911, she advocates for an assimilationist scheme for new immigrants that uses "applied sociology" to force immigrants to uphold a "certain standard" of Americanization. In *Herland* (1915), Gilman's utopian novel of a society composed entirely of women, immigrants who do not adapt to the country's social and political standards are deported. In these and other cases, modern feminism requires the cooperation of a modern public, and ethnic difference, in Gilman's view evidence of foreign backwardness, hinders feminist social progress. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and *The Forerunner*," in *Feminist Forerunners: New Womanism and Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Pandora, 2003), 44-57.

<sup>285</sup> See, for instance, Carmen Birkle, "Multiculturalism and the New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century America," in *Feminist Forerunners: New Womanism and Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Pandora, 2003), 58-75.



## Interethnic Romance as Adolescent Rebellion in Marian Spitzer's Fiction

Marian Spitzer (1899-1983) wrote middlebrow magazine fictions targeted to young audiences who saw themselves as modern. Her narratives of young women's adolescent rebellion against parental control introduce interethnic romance to expose the coerciveness of marriage as a tool for parental agendas of maintaining class and social standing. In presenting women who consider interethnic romance against their parents' wishes, Spitzer suggests that interethnic romance is liberatory, not because it offers love across boundaries, but because it allows women to articulate their refusal to follow parental dictates and expectations.

A graduate of Wadleigh High School in New York and New York University, Spitzer began her career as a writer for the *Brooklyn Times* and the *New York Globe*, served in the publicity department of the Palace Theater, and later wrote five novels and memoirs about women with careers and about show business, as well as writing several screenplays in Hollywood.<sup>286</sup> She was a member of the story board at Allen studio and the first woman ever to become an assistant to a producer of motion pictures.<sup>287</sup> Committed to working womanhood

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<sup>286</sup> See "Marion Spitzer Thompson; Wrote Books and Screenplay" [Obituary], *New York Times*, July 22, 1983; Irving Gerdy, "Literary Comments and Book Reviews: Literary Comment Concerning Marian Spitzer," *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (January 30, 1925), 10; Transcript of Interview with Bennett Cerf, Session 11 p. 470-471. Notable New Yorkers Collection, Columbia University Libraries Oral History Research Office, 1967-1968. <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/nny/cerfb/index.html>. Spitzer's writings include: *Who Would Be Free* (1924); *A Hungry Young Lady* (1930); *I Took it Lying Down* (1951); and *The Palace* (1969). Her screenwriting credits include: *The Dolly Sisters* (1945); *Look for the Silver Lining* (1949), *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959) and several episodes of the "Loretta Young Show" in addition she holds credits for the exhibition and catalogue "Stars of the New York Stage: 1870-1970, A Special Exhibition," Museum of the City of New York, 1970. Her short articles appeared in several magazines including *The Smart Set*, *McCall's*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook Magazine*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Pictorial Review*, *The American Mercury* and *Good Housekeeping*.

<sup>287</sup> See Hubbard Keavy, "Married Women are Rated Higher in Business, Says Marian Spitzer," *The Atlanta Constitution* November 11 1935, p. 13.

while writing in popular modes and publications aimed at women, Spitzer was a quintessential middlebrow feminist writer of her time. Although Spitzer's work has been mentioned in several examinations of the history of Vaudeville Theater, her fictional writing has yet to receive scholarly treatment.<sup>288</sup> Spitzer's fiction is characterized by fast paced, understated wit, and an unrelenting criticism of hypocrisy and of women's displays of silliness or weakness around romantic affairs – her writing is both critical of the patriarchal culture of romantic love and mocking of women in their participation and their rebellion from this culture.<sup>289</sup> Her representation and transcendence of the intermarriage plot accords with contemporaneous “modern love” stories, which Nina Miller describes as “diffuse and culturally pervasive” narratives “concerned with negotiating the new social terrain defined by the modern woman” that “took its driving force from the assumption that gender relations were permanently and

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<sup>288</sup> See Richard Moody, “Negro Minstrelsy,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 30, no. 3 (1944): 321-328; Robert W. Snyder, “Vaudeville and the Transformation of Popular Culture,” in *Inventing Time Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (Russell Sage Foundation, 1961), 133-146; Douglas Gomery, *The Coming of Sound: A History* (Psychology Press, 2005). Spitzer's novel *Who Would Be Free* is briefly mentioned in Joselit, *The Wonders of America*.

<sup>289</sup> Marian Spitzer was notoriously resistant to sentimentalized gendered expectations about women's roles and behavior. As Mary Astor recalls in her diary, “when Marian [Spitzer] ... became pregnant, she was shockingly callous about it... To her it was a ‘biological experiment.’ ... She used to write me in great glee after she went to New York about how worried Harlan [Spitzer's husband] was that she hadn't started to get baby garments and couldn't get a kick out of soft woolly blankets.” Although in her memoir *I Took it Lying Down*, Spitzer relates her love for her children, this excerpt demonstrates the way Spitzer resisted and resented expectations about how she, as a woman, should feel and act. In her short story “And You Weren't There,” Spitzer elaborates on the dilemma of a woman who wants to be flirtatious, young-looking, and have a life outside the home, but who also wants to support and be loved by her son, showing Spitzer's frustration with the incompatibility between women's independence and her supporting role as a mother and wife. Spitzer's views on gender traditionalism in marriage reflect her ambivalence about women being trapped in traditional roles. Although Spitzer's marriage to Harlan Thompson was by all accounts a happy one, her pragmatic support for her friend Mary Astor, whose extramarital affairs and custody battle made headlines, reflects a modern attitude that values love and compatibility over marital vows. See Mary Astor diary excerpt from February 15, 1932 in online preview of Joseph Egan, *The Purple Diaries: Mary Astor and the Most Sensational Hollywood Scandal of the 1930s* (Diversions Publishing, 2016). <http://thepurplediaries.com/diaries-excerpt/> (accessed August 31, 2016); Spitzer, *I Took it Lying Down* (New York: Random House, 1951); Marian Spitzer, “And You Weren't There,” *McCalls* (October 1948): 18, 72, 74, 76, 88, 92, 96. For reference to Spitzer's support of Astor's affairs, see “Bare Excerpts of Mary Astor's ‘Lavender Diary,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 11, 1936, 5-6.

intrinsically flawed.” Modern love discourse presented romance as comical and “inscribed its readers as sophisticates” who viewed it with skepticism that belied their self-conscious identity as modern.<sup>290</sup> Through a glib, cynical tone, Spitzer at once presents her characters’ brazen rebellion from their bourgeois parents in pursuit of bohemianism and modern womanhood and pokes fun at her immature, self-centered heroines with their incomplete forays into an ideal of self-actualization and independence.

Spitzer wrote several short stories depicting romance between young Jewish women and Christian suitors and criticizing the marriage practices of Upper West Side Reform Jews in *The Smart Set* in 1922 and 1923, culminating in her novel on this theme, *Who Would Be Free* (1924).<sup>291</sup> Each of these stories reflects, in some way, Spitzer’s relationship to her own parents and her budding romance with a non-Jewish newspaper reporter. Marian Spitzer met her future husband Harlan Thompson when they were both on the staff of *The Globe* (likely in 1922). In 1925, Spitzer and Thompson were married in secret, and as *Who Would be Free* was written during their courtship, it seems that the hesitations about intermarriage, and about marriage in general, expressed in her writing during this period are related to Spitzer’s own life circumstances and choices.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Nina Miller, *Making Love Modern: The Intimate and Public Worlds of New York’s Literary Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109.

<sup>291</sup> Marian Spitzer, “The Six Greatest Moments,” *The Smart Set*. 68:1 (May 1922): 47-59; Marian Spitzer, “The Rise and Fall of Florrie Weissman: A Complete Novelette,” *The Smart Set*. 68:3 (July 1922): 5-30; Marian Spitzer, “The Best Husbands,” *The Smart Set*. 70:4 (April 1923): 87-104; Marian Spitzer, *Who Would Be Free* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924).

<sup>292</sup> Thompson, a theater and film director, screenwriter, lyricist, and film and television producer, was raised in Missouri and attended the University of Kansas, where he studied chemical engineering. He became a reporter and editor for *The Kansas City Star* and the *Kansas City Post*, and came to New York to work for the *New York World* following his service in the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I. In her memoir *I Took it Lying*

Each of these stories follows an adolescent Jewish woman from a similar upper middle class, Reform Jewish, New York background as she negotiates her relationship with her parents through love and marriage. In Spitzer's interethnic romance narratives, Jewish parents participate in and encourage a bourgeois culture of marriage that would allow their daughters to maintain their upper middle class lifestyles by attaining favorable marriages. Marriages are commodities desired by, and procured by, consumers of a marriage market, and young women are victims bought and sold under the false promises of that market.<sup>293</sup> For instance, in "The Six Greatest Moments" (1922), Teddy Baer, whose name represents her as child-like and as a plaything upon which her parents enact their ambitions and desires, is infatuated with an ideal of bourgeois marriage, as depicted in popular illustrator Harrison Fisher's postcard series "The Six Greatest Moments in a Girl's Life," which her parents bought for her when she was a child.<sup>294</sup>

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*Down*, Spitzer briefly mentions that Harlan is not Jewish and that this is a cause of some discomfort with her mother, but she does not dwell on her feelings or ideology relating to the marriage. See "Writers Wed in Secret," *The New York Herald, New York Tribune* (20 June, 1925), p. 15; Spitzer, *I Took it Lying Down*.

<sup>293</sup> In "The Rise and Fall of Florrie Weissman" (1922) Spitzer makes clear that the purpose of marriage is the maintenance of class as she represents an interethnic and interclass romance as a radical act of rebellion against bourgeois Jewish parents. When Florrie Weissman, a Jewish heiress and socialite, fails to marry within her social set, she becomes fearful that she will be an "old maid," and "anything was better than that." She agrees to marry her family's Irish chauffeur because "many society girls were marrying their chauffeurs and grooms and other servants, it was really quite chic." For Florrie, the marriage is about the trendy unconventionality of turning against her parents' attainments and allegiances of class by marrying beneath her station, both in terms of ethnicity and class, which are intertwined in the figure of the chauffeur. Spitzer, "The Rise and Fall of Florrie Weissman."

<sup>294</sup> Harrison Fisher painted this series of six postcards, "The Greatest Moments in a Girl's Life," around 1911. Fisher was a popular illustrator of the period, whose work was found primarily in magazines as well as books, advertisements, calendars, bookmarks, prints, and postcards. He produced covers for *Cosmopolitan* for twenty years, as well as covers for *Nash's* magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *Ladies Home Journal* and was considered the successor to Charles Dana Gibson, the creator of the famed "Gibson Girl." The images in this postcard series were widely known and popularly produced. They charted a narrative for the ideal life of an American Beauty, tying feminine beauty to love, marriage, and motherhood. The six moments in the series were: The Proposal, The Trousseau, The Wedding, The Honeymoon, The First Evening in Their Own Home, and Their New Love (which depicts the couple admiring a baby). See Melissa Speed, "Harrison Fisher and the American Beauty," Term Paper, University of North Texas (Fall 1999).

She compares her own life to these unreachable ideals and models herself on the appearance of happiness they convey, refusing to see the way that she and her life fall short of this ideal.<sup>295</sup>

When, at her parents' encouragement, at the age of eighteen she is married to a wealthy forty-year-old Jewish man, her single-minded belief in the perfection of marriage, as laid out by the Fisher illustrations, distracts her from the failures of her own married life, especially her husband's infidelity. Here, Spitzer insists that bourgeois marriage is a trap for young women that promises them the illusion of success and happiness rather than its reality. Teddy's upwardly aspiring parents are complicit in her self-delusion and eagerly place her in circumstances in which it will be impossible for her to achieve real happiness, privileging status and money over their daughter's feelings and relationship.

In her stories, Spitzer writes with condescension and disgust toward German Jewish parental figures who are vulgar, hypocritical, and overly controlling of their independently-minded daughters. The parents speak with accents, are focused on class and material wealth, and their parochial concerns about their Jewish social circles are represented as narrow-minded. For instance, in "The Best Husbands" (1923), the protagonist's parents insist that "Jews make the best husbands" to the detriment of their daughter Roslyn, who marries an abusive Jewish man on their advice rather than following her own inclinations and dating a non-Jewish newspaper

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<http://freepages.misc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mspeed/fisher.html> (accessed September 7, 2016); Naomi Welch, et al., *The Complete Works of Harrison Fisher, Illustrator* (La Selva Beach, Calif: Images of the Past, 1999).

<sup>295</sup> In her introduction to an anthology of writing on the American New Woman, Martha H. Patterson notes that the emphasis on illustration in magazines and newspapers contributed to an association between ideal modern American womanhood and the attractive woman, such that the New Girl was a product consumed by readers who sought to emulate her by purchasing items that "defined a woman's leisured lifestyle." Martha H. Patterson, "Introduction" to *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 5.

reporter (reminiscent of Spitzer's own suitor Harlan Thompson). Spitzer's use of anti-Semitic stereotyping demonstrates how, for Spitzer and her protagonists, asserting an identity as a sophisticated modern American woman required the denunciation of ethnicity.<sup>296</sup> As with other witty "Modern Love" writers of the kind associated with the Algonquin Round Table (Spitzer was at least tangentially part of the Algonquin crowd and offered her reminiscences to Dorothea Parker's biographer), Spitzer's wry and skeptical advocacy for women's self-determination is predicated on a modern style that was an expression of "assimilation." Their writing relied upon a flattening of difference that allowed women protagonists to assert their independence as individuals, rather than their participation in collective ethnic identities, cultures, and commitments.<sup>297</sup> As her protagonists struggle against the control that parents wield over daughters in maintaining their material and cultural interests through marriage, they must necessarily turn away from ethnic identity as a manifestation of patriarchal control.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Rejection of explicit antisemitism was "part and parcel of the cultural revolt" of bohemianism in which Spitzer participated, and the Jew was a symbol of modernity (in fact, Eleanor Hoffman's attraction to a Russian Jew, Ted, signals her modern attraction to secularism and her rebellious leftist politics, as opposed to her German Jewish parents' stilted bourgeois attitudes). Nevertheless, ethnic difference did not comport with the mainstream image of the young feminist, and Hoffman's separation from her Jewishness is integral to her identity formation as a modern, independent woman. See Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2000), 24.

<sup>297</sup> Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 91-92. For a reference to Marian Spitzer as part of Dorothea Parker's circle, see Marion Meade, *Dorothea Parker: What Fresh Hell is This?* (New York: Penguin, 1989).

<sup>298</sup> Spitzer also critiques young women for their false idealism as they participate in cultural revolt for self-centered reasons. Spitzer's wry tone targets not only parents, but also young women, for their participation in the hypocrisies of the marriage market. This critique is at its sharpest in "The Rise and Fall of Florrie Weissman," in which the title character becomes engaged to her family's Irish chauffeur in order to improve her social standing by becoming a notoriously rebellious young woman. Florrie looks forward to the scandal: "Everybody would be talking about her... Risking everything for the man she loved. That would sound very romantic." Spitzer lambasts Florrie's self-presentation as a romantic sacrificing her family's desires for the sake of love when in reality she does not love, or even really notice, the chauffeur. She is not interested in the interethnic or interclass dimensions of the romance, nor is she interested in the chauffeur as an individual. Rather, she is interested in what the act signifies as a radical rebellion against parental and social expectations and control, and the attention that the act will draw as a result. Her romance is about thwarting social and cultural expectations. The interethnic component

*Who Would Be Free* (1924) is in many ways a reworking and rewriting of the above stories into novelistic form. The novel departs from the wry tone of Spitzer's periodical fiction, as is perhaps necessitated by a more sustained literary effort, as it sympathetically explores one woman's desire to be "free" and modern. As one reviewer explains, the protagonist, Eleanor Hoffman, a "high-spirited young modernist" leaves home because of tensions with her parents, as both the daughter and the parents are exaggeratedly "impossible" to one another.<sup>299</sup> She searches for an independent identity and life, separate from her parents' desire for her to conform to their upwardly mobile Jewish "social set" through marriage choices, both in terms of their expectations of her role as a wife (she pursues instead a life as a career woman) and as a Jew (she eschews Jewish religious belief, communal participation, and ethnic orientation). Eleanor experiences romantic relationships as steps that further distance her from the shackles of social and familial tradition. Increasingly radical romantic choices are the stepping stones to Eleanor's achievement of complete liberation according to her feminist ideal of freedom.<sup>300</sup> Ultimately,

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of the relationship underscores its false promise: in the "slick utopian sameness" of modern bohemian literature, ethnicity often signaled poignancy, idealism, and authenticity, but in this case Florrie capitalizes on the romantic, exotic idea of interethnic love in order to project an idea of herself as idealistic and revolutionary, when she is only self-serving. By presenting such a romance as a shocking act of rebellion, Spitzer suggests that interethnic romance might be one potential escape from the conservatism of the bourgeois marriage plot, but she deflates that possibility through a character who pursues the plot out of narcissism rather than earnest political or social commitment. Florrie is unable to find fulfillment even in interethnic romance because her rebellion is always in relation to and about the coercive patriarchal family and social expectations under which she operates, rather than about an authentic political conviction or sense of self. Spitzer, "The Rise and Fall of Florrie Wiessman," 28; Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 92.

<sup>299</sup> Louis I. Newman, "Mothers and Daughters 'Who Would Be Free,'" *The American Israelite* (November 27, 1924), p. 5.

<sup>300</sup> Keren Majewski describes several similar novels in Polish in which Polish girls pursue interethnic romance with Americans in order to rebel against parents. In one such novel, "Stella z Buffalo" by Melania Nestorowicz, a young stenographer declares, "I am a free woman, independent of my father and mother," and desires to be part of a modern womanhood beyond the ethnic and old-fashioned visions of her parents. Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, 143.

however, to find her true sense of self, Eleanor believes she must escape the conceit of romance as a solution for self-actualization altogether, opting not for interethnic romance, but for abstinence from marriage, as the ultimate rebellion against her family's expectations and the ultimate feminist act of staking a claim on her own life.

Eleanor articulates her ideological independence from her parents through social and romantic relationships. Self-consciously modern, she models her life on stereotypes of bohemianism: she rents a furnished room and attends an art school in midtown Manhattan, where she befriends non-Jews with radical ideas about free and informal relations between men and women.<sup>301</sup> This confirms her belief that living life according to a fixed "pattern," whether one of religious faith or one of social convention, is too confining to allow her true freedom (although she fails to notice that she is conforming to the conventions and patterns of Greenwich Village bohemianism in her rebellion against her parents' social world).<sup>302</sup>

Eleanor's first marriage choice, her childhood friend, the atheist, socialist Russian Jewish radical Ted Levine, who is outside her parents' Reform German Jewish social set and socioeconomic station, is an act of resistance against parental control. Initially, Eleanor worries that her desire to escape patriarchy, what she calls her "struggle for freedom" would be

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<sup>301</sup> Nina Miller notes that an "aura of *being* modern," of living out modernist convictions in their personal lives as a mode of critique and distance from normative society, was essential to the "transcendent urbanity" that defined Algonquin Round Table culture. Thus, Eleanor's behaviors self-consciously, performatively exhibit what Miller would term her "subclutural affiliation" as a modern. Eleanor's decision to live on her own in a furnished room district, in particular, signals her ideological and sexual radicalism. Furnished room districts, which housed young middle- and upper-class bohemians who experimented with new sexual possibilities alongside working-class women and men were symbols for sex radicalism and new urban dating patters. See Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 5-7; Joanne Meyerowitz, "Sexual Geography and Gender Economy: The Furnished-Room Districts of Chicago, 1890-1930," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1990), 307-323.

<sup>302</sup> Spitzer, *Who Would Be Free*, 132.



undermined by marriage: “Wouldn’t being in love interfere somehow with belonging to herself?”<sup>303</sup> It is only when Eleanor’s parents express their disapproval of the match, seeing it as a kind of intermarriage and asserting that Ted is a “kike” (racializing the class differences between German Reform Jews and new immigrants through the use of an epithet), and that Eleanor’s choice is “perverse,” that Eleanor asserts the rightness of her choice, defying her parents to pursue the engagement.<sup>304</sup> When her choice in love is framed as an act of rebellion against her parents, rather than a concession to the traditional forces of love and marriage, Eleanor is able to claim this choice as part of her narrative of independence. Yet, in doing so she acts not out of love for Ted but out of opposition to her parents’ control, revealing the extent to which she is not exercising independent choice and self-fulfillment, but acting in petty reaction to, and therefore still in the purview of, her relationship with her parents.<sup>305</sup>

After Ted’s death during World War I, Eleanor’s second love takes her farther afield from her parents and the boundaries of their closed social circle. She becomes involved with a

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 172. Spitzer also depicts Reform, German Jews’ disdainful attitudes toward East European Jews in her earlier story, “The Six Greatest Moments.” She demonstrates the hypocrisy of the Baer family who wanted to “show the Jew haters that only a certain class of Jews was objectionable” and to differentiate themselves from the “kikes” who “make it hard for real refined Jews” and who are only “ignoramuses” who “can’t stay in Hester Street where they come from” in the story, this classist, racialized approach to East European Jewish immigrants is background information that characterizes the Baers as vulgar, unaware of their own hypocrisy, and desperate to participate in the trappings American bourgeois life. It sets up as corrupt the goals of conventional marriage to which Teddy Baer, their teenage daughter, aspires. See Spitzer, “The Six Greatest Moments.”

<sup>305</sup> In “The Rise and Fall of Florrie Weissman” and *Who Would be Free*, the Jewish heroines who contemplate marrying “down” in socioeconomic status, and marrying ethnic others who are not White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, do so out of rebellion against their parents (rather than love), and this choice is treated as foolish and immature. When Eleanor of *Who Would be Free* and Roslyn of “The Best Husbands” contemplate relationships with White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, these relationships are part of their modern, emancipated lives as working women. This suggests that such an upwardly mobile interethnic pairing serves to flatten the Jewish woman’s ethnic difference and initiate her into a modern New Womanhood that did not accommodate ethnic difference. See Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 90-91.

professional acquaintance, Stephen Sayre, a non-Jew, about whom she never tells her parents. As she considers marrying Stephen, Eleanor comes to express the idea that intermarriage is a positive development for the Jews, whose most debilitating racial trait is the “fierce kind of parental ownership” in which children are an “absolute obsession” of their parents. Because Jews have been so disempowered historically they see children as “just something to own, and to work off your feeling of power on.”<sup>306</sup> Although Stephen suggests that this is not a problem unique to Jews, Eleanor insists that this is a specifically Jewish problem, and that it will be solved through mixed marriage and the creation of a generation of children of mixed parentage. In theory, Eleanor intimates that intermarriage would bring her increasing independence from her parents, and that it promises to free future generations from the yoke of Jewish parenting. Eleanor’s love for Stephen is not only about their mutual attraction and shared professional and artistic interests, it is an ideological choice in the hopes of assimilating and negating the ethnic trait of overbearing parenting that she believes herself to have been victim to, a bow to eugenicist logic of race mixing as a means of social progress. For Eleanor, progress and modern, independent womanhood require the elimination of Jewish ethnicity, something that can best be accomplished through interethnic romance.

Yet, Eleanor pursues ideology over love to an even greater degree as she chooses to distance herself further from social convention and parental authority by deciding not to marry at all. Eleanor refuses to marry Stephen, deciding that she would rather be a slave to her idea of freedom, and be lonely for the rest of her life, than to marry any man.<sup>307</sup> She claims that in

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<sup>306</sup> Spitzer, *Who Would Be Free*, 284.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 316 .

proposing to her, Stephen was “trying to do to [her] exactly the same thing that [her] mother tried to do when [she] was a child,” and that she needs to “separate” from Stephen in order to escape this stifling situation of being under someone else’s authority.<sup>308</sup> Equating the position of a wife in relation to her husband and the position of a child in relation to her parents, she finds that her lifelong struggle to escape patriarchal control will be upended through participating in the institution of marriage. Although Eleanor does not discuss her decision not to marry as a commitment to sex radicalism, her language of freedom resonates with contemporary writing about free love as a “distinguishing feature of modernity” that saw marriage as an institution that resulted in the subjection and enslavement of women.<sup>309</sup> This is the culmination of Eleanor’s trajectory of rejecting conventions cherished by her parents in favor of radically modern ideals. She exercises her radicalism not through intermarriage, but through no marriage at all – not through children free of Jewish parental authority, but through the absence of children and the continuity they represent, and through singular devotion to herself and her individual freedom.

For Eleanor, becoming a modern, independent woman is contingent upon distancing herself from her family’s Jewish values and society, as well as from the restrictive women’s role of traditional marriage: to become unhinged from societal obligations as a woman, she must be utterly individual, without the constraints of ethnicity, the obligations of communal identity.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>309</sup> Stansell, *American Moderns*, 276.

<sup>310</sup> The novel begins with her teenage theological crisis, in which during her own Confirmation ceremony Eleanor finds the memorized prayers and promises of her Reform synagogue incompatible with modern secular thinking. In her internal monologue, she equates the Confirmation and marriage ceremonies. Both of these ceremonies would require an oath to her parents’ worldview and society that seem “terribly permanent” and cause her to feel “as though some heavy weight had been placed suddenly upon her heart.” Eleanor begins the novel at her Confirmation, professing Jewish faith and commitment in front of a community of hundreds and ends it in her

This is because ethnic and class identity are imposed on her by her parents, who aim to preserve these assets through their daughter's romantic relationships. Ethnic and class identification are not a matter of personal choice for Eleanor, and as a modern woman she is devoted to her need for independent choices. Her decision to be "free" is an act of self-definition as an individual, not beholden to communal obligations of ethnicity (as a Jew who must marry other Jews to continue the Jewish community) or social obligations as a woman (who must marry to participate in the social order). In Spitzer's work, interethnic romance is a part of this trajectory of resistance to patriarchy in the form of parental control, though in the case of *Who Would Be Free* even the radical step of interethnic romance is not the most extreme form of rebellion.

### **Interethnic Love as a Path to Creative and Professional Self-Expression in the Work of Rose Gollup Cohen and Leah Morton**

For authors Rose Gollup Cohen and Leah Morton (a pseudonym for Elizabeth Stern), while interethnic love begins as an act of adolescent rebellion, as it does in Marian Spitzer's work, romance outside the bounds of Jewishness opens up opportunities for women's self-

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room alone, with "the rest of the world...shut outside," professing faith in only herself, and offering the ultimate rejection of her parents' faith and lifestyle. The novel's opening and closing suggest that for Eleanor religioethnic identity is about social conformity and lack of individual choice, and to be free (as a woman and as an individual), she must shed the obligations and hypocrisies of both Jewishness and womanness and live outside of them as a single individual separate from social institutions of religion, ethnic identification, or marriage. It is notable that Eleanor's sole participation in Jewish ritual in the novel is her Confirmation, a ritual that scholars have referred to as "the most conspicuous influence of Christian custom on educational innovations of the Jewish Emancipation." Eleanor's rejection of her parents' Judaism as too parochial follows a history of previous generations' rejections of Jewish ritual as unenlightened and in need of rational and Christianizing influence. Even despite its reforming, modernizing stance, Reform Judaism is too restricting for Eleanor because it is enforced by her parents and not something she independently chose or desires. Spitzer, *Who Would Be Free*, 17-18, 319. See Mordechai Eliav, *Ha-Hinnukh ha-Yehudi be-Germanyah bi-Ymei ha-Haskalah ve-ha-Emanzipazyah* (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 257, translated and quoted in David Resnick, "Confirmation Education from the Old World to the New: A 150 Year Follow-up," *Modern Judaism* 31, no. 2 (May 2011): 213-227, p. 215.

expression that would have been impossible in the ethnic enclave and under the gender expectations of their parents, especially their fathers. Interethnic romance therefore represents not only an assertion of independence against their fathers, but also an introduction into the broader American social world, the world of women's work, the English language (for Cohen), and an opportunity to find and express their own voice. Interethnic romance therefore exceeds its initial expression as an act of romantic love and adolescent rebellion and becomes an embodiment of engagement with the world outside the family, the Jewish ethnic enclave, and the expectations of a Jewish family bound by religious and social traditions of gender.

Rose Gollup Cohen's memoir *Out of the Shadow* (1918) traces a working class Jewish immigrant woman's coming of age and coming into selfhood through dual narratives of Americanization and loss of religious strictures and of the development of sexual self-awareness and the desire for freedom of self-expression as a woman and as a writer.<sup>311</sup> Rose Gollup Cohen, who immigrated to New York in 1891 at the age of twelve, worked in the garment industry and as a domestic. Five years after she arrived in America, she began formally studying English after

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<sup>311</sup>Although *Out of the Shadow* (1918) was written by an obscure author, it enjoyed a wide readership. It was published by the George H. Doran Company, a major American publishing firm that catered to popular audiences and featured "surpassingly fine" illustrations by the prolific Walter Jack Duncan, a "wizard of pen and ink" whose work appeared in *Century Magazine* and many other widely circulated periodicals and books. The work had popular appeal and made waves among contemporary readers and reviewers as a realistic representation of an immigrant Jewish woman's life and struggles. Thomas Dublin, in his introduction to the 1995 reprinting of *Out of the Shadow*, describes enthusiastic reviews from *The Outlook*, *New York Times*, and the famed Settlement House worker Lillian Wald. *Out of the Shadow* was also published in French and Russian translations. Together with her memoir, Cohen published several short stories and autobiographical essays, including "Natalka's Portion," a story about a mother struggling to provide a dowry for her daughter, which was included in the *Best Short Stories of 1922*. See review of *Out of the Shadow* in *The Christian Century: An Undenominational Journal of Religion* 35:41 (October 24 1918), 18; Thomas Dublin, "Introduction to the 1995 Edition" in Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), ix-xix; Cohen's other published writings include "My Childhood Days in Russia," *Bookman* 47 (Aug. 1918): 591-608; "The Books I Knew as a Child," *Bookman* 49 (Mar. 1919): 15-19; "Sifted Earth: A Story," *The Touchstone* 7 (July 1920): 255-60 and "Natalka's Portion," *The Best American Short Stories of 1922*. (The Dial Publishing Company, 1922): 83-99 (originally published in *Pictorial Review*, Feb 1922 and reprinted in *Current Opinion* 72 (May 1922): 620-28).

leaving her job due to ill health, and these night classes, at which she struggled to read one word a time, were her first venture outside her neighborhood and ethnic enclave. When she was seventeen, Lillian Wald of the Henry Street Settlement advocated on her behalf and sent her to the Presbyterian Hospital for a three-month recuperation. There, she met kind, charitable non-Jews who seemed vastly different from the impoverished Jewish immigrants of her neighborhood, was encouraged to speak their language, and read their books. When she returned home, she began to read books she found at the Aguilar Free Library. Her reading instilled in her a “desire to get away from the old order of things.”<sup>312</sup> Lillian Wald helped her find a position in a cooperative dressmaking workshop at the Nurses’ Settlement and there, under the tutelage of Leonora O’Reilly, Cohen continued to read and to satisfy her voracious intellectual curiosity. After her marriage to Joseph Cohen and the birth of her daughter, Evelyn, at the age of twenty-two Rose Cohen attended writing classes, began to write and published her memoir which received laudatory reviews. Contemporary readers saw her as a spokesperson for the experience of immigrant women, although her writing is likely also inspired by and modeled after the novels she painstakingly read in pursuit of English literacy, including Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, George Eliot’s *Silas Marner*, and Nikolay Chernyshevsky’s *What is to Be Done?*<sup>313</sup> In *Out of the Shadow*, the act of reading and writing in English and among non-Jews signals Cohen’s opportunity for self-expression, self-improvement, and the fulfillment of her desire to learn. In her narrative, the possibility of marriage outside of her faith represents a key episode in Rose Cohen’s assertion of her independence from her parents’ (especially her father’s)

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<sup>312</sup> Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), 204.

<sup>313</sup> See Barbara Sicherman, *Well-Read Lives: How Books Inspired a Generation of American Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 198-208.

expectations for her performance as a woman in a traditionally family-centered, selfless interdependent role, particularly as it relates to Cohen's development as a writer.

At the memoir's opening, Rose's sense of self is initially entirely situated in relation to her family. She first "became aware of [her] existence" as she snuggles against her father, awaiting her sister's birth.<sup>314</sup> Rose is thus initiated into selfhood through her supporting role in relation to her father, and as a woman who can look forward to the future of childbearing that she glimpses through her mother's experiences. Her life story, as she describes it, follows her struggles to define herself without and within the expectations and roles that she receives from her family in this first moment of self-recognition.

The pivotal moment in which Rose frees herself from the "confinement in ethnicity" of religious traditionalism centers on the question of romance and marital choice.<sup>315</sup> At the age of sixteen Rose, under pressure from her father, is engaged to marry a Jewish immigrant named Israel.<sup>316</sup> For her father, the marriage represents success: "he was branching out, he was to be allied with a fine respectable family, with men of business."<sup>317</sup> But Rose ultimately refuses to marry the young man because when her fiancé demands a kiss she realizes "what married life may mean with a person for whom one does not care."<sup>318</sup> While Rose expresses hesitations about living in Israel's tiny bedroom with barred windows, sharing a home with a mother-in-law,

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<sup>314</sup> Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 9.

<sup>315</sup> Lisa Muir, "Rose Cohen and Bella Spewack: The Ethnic Child Speaks to You Who Never Were There," *College Literature*, 29, 1 (Winter, 2002):123-142, p. 136.

<sup>316</sup> Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 205.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

and taking on the bookkeeping responsibilities of a grocer's wife, her final rejection of Israel is about the modern ideal of marriage as a partnership built out of love, rather than a protest against the lifestyle such a marriage would give her. As she explains to Israel when she refuses to marry him, "you wanted to kiss me last night... I can imagine that if I loved you it would have made me happy. But as it is, the very thought of it drives me mad."<sup>319</sup> Rose is unwilling marry a man she does not love for the sake of her father's interest in her family's material success.

Rose's physical repulsion at the idea of kissing a man she does not love jostles her into a realization that she is a separate self with needs and desires apart from that of her family, and this in turn gives her confidence as someone who has a unique and creative perspective to share. This sense of self is tied to the growth of her identity as a writer and to the development of her authorial voice. Although Rose has explained her previous delight with reading, which she describes as "a necessity and a joy" for herself, her mother and her sister, she had heretofore not attempted to create literature of her own.<sup>320</sup> Directly after her failed engagement Rose tries to write a diary and begins with the words, "I feel new joy in life and in freedom."<sup>321</sup> She thus connects the act of writing to her refusal to marry according to her father's expectations, insisting that her life has been made "new" through these developments and that she wishes to celebrate them.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 225-228.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>322</sup> This act of writing does not provide her escape from her life. Rather, it is bound up in her confidence in taking control over her life against traditional roles for women and against the interests of her family in general, and her father in particular, tying her development as an independent woman to that of her development as an artist, and giving her interpretive authority over her own life. In this way, her narrative comes to resemble *Little Women*, a



Rose's next romance, with a boy whose Jewishness is in question, heightens her development as a writer and her rebellion against her parents. Her parents' hopes of securing Rose's traditional Jewish future through an appropriate marital partner and a limited intellectual scope are both dashed at once in the figure of the suitor who appears at the end of Rose's memoir, L. V. He is a young man originally from the Jewish neighborhood, and when Rose's parents first see her speaking to him they "smiled at each other" with the thought that Rose might be heading down the path they envisioned for her.<sup>323</sup> As it turns out, however, L. V. has been baptized and is training to become a missionary, and Rose's parents come to see him as "worse than a Gentile, worse than a heathen."<sup>324</sup> Just by associating with him, her parents claim, Rose was risking her chances of an appropriate marriage – "and marriage was all important...it would be a blessing if I were married...and it was really high time." While Rose is unsure at first about whether she should end the friendship, her rebelliousness convinces her to continue it precisely because "father, as of old, wanted me to submit to him in the old custom. His opposition antagonized me now more than ever."<sup>325</sup> Her romance with L.V. is thus presented as a conscious rebellion against her parents and the obligations they place upon her, similar to the kind of adolescent rebellion Marian Spitzer's protagonists engage in. Rose pursues her friendship with L.V. in her parents' home under their disapproving gaze, and in doing so she demonstrates to

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novel that she mentions having read with interest, insofar as in learning to write, Rose learns to, in the words of one Alcott scholar, become "quietly free," pursuing an "independent life as a writer" outside the expectations and separate from the ideas held by her family. Susan Naomi Bernstein, "Writing and 'Little Women': Alcott's Rhetoric of Subversion," *ATQ* 7, no. 1 (Mar 1993): 25-44, p. 26.

<sup>323</sup> Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 293.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

them that she is hardened against their efforts to control her, is not afraid of causing them shame, and will not comply to their wishes regardless of the social and material consequences this might have for them in a culture in which marriage is primarily an economic alliance. She explains that her father's "opposition antagonized me now more than ever" and the more he protested, the more she refused.<sup>326</sup> She signals to them and to herself that while she lives in their ethnic enclave, her mind and body are not bound by the restrictions of her parents' ethnically inflected worldview.

When L. V. leaves for Chicago to begin his theological studies, Rose conducts an epistolary relationship with him that she credits with "a great deal of what I learned of writing in English."<sup>327</sup> Through her rebellious relationship she becomes a writer – "the thought that what I wrote would be read and weighed and thought about filled me with excitement."<sup>328</sup> Through the act of writing for an audience her thoughts gain legitimacy and she becomes proud of the accomplishments of her own mind. Rose suggests that this interfaith romance is an important step toward her self-fashioning as a writer, as the person who was able to compose the very memoir in which the incident figures. Rose's father quarrels with her and "commands" her to stop writing the letters, and introduces her to a slew of young men through a matchmaker out of "terror" over her "friendship with L. V."<sup>329</sup> In this way, her relationship with L.V. seals Rose's identity separate from her parents both through the act of forbidden love and the act of self-

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<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

expression, which for Rose go hand-in-hand. While Rose ends her own story in the memoir with a budding romance with L.V.'s friend, she credits her relationship with L.V. as a defining moment in carving a claim for herself as a person who could make up her own mind about her future and who had thoughts and feelings to express outside the bounds of her family's experience. Rose finishes the memoir with her brother's successes in university, "terminating on the kind of celebratory note" American audiences had come to expect in immigrant memoirs.<sup>330</sup> In so doing, Rose leaves herself out of the final pages of her own memoir, casting doubt on the extent to which she really has been able to separate from her family and remake herself as an independent woman. Nevertheless, to the extent that she is able to express herself, think of herself apart from her family, have and describe secret longings and feelings, she owes much to her short-lived relationship with L.V., which is a turning point in her narrative that explains the genesis of her project of life-writing and of self-actualization.<sup>331</sup>

Interfaith romance in Cohen's narrative is only one part of a larger story of self-actualization through writing and the self expression it allows. This larger story of American education allowing a woman to remake herself into an American citizen is the major theme of much immigrant writing, most famously Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912). Cohen's tying of education and literacy to forbidden and boundary-crossing romance corresponds to

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<sup>330</sup> Muir, "Rose Cohen and Bella Spewack," 140.

<sup>331</sup> Although Rose attributes early attempts at writing to this pivotal moment of rebellious romance, she did not gain the confidence in her English skills or have the time to devote to writing until many years later. In her thirties, after she had married Joseph Cohen and stopped working to care for her daughter Evelyn, when her daughter was four years old and could be left with her husband Rose attended English classes at Breadwinners' College sponsored by the Educational Alliance and at the Rand School of Social Science. Her instructor, Joseph Gollumb, encouraged her to write her life's story, and this resulted in her published memoir. See Rose Gollup Cohen, "To the Friends of 'Out of the Shadow,'" *The Bookman* 55, no. 1 (Mar 1922): 36-40.

Naomi Seidman's assertion that for Jews, reading modern literature and participating in modern love were bound up with one another as new cultural practices that signaled the "sexual-literary form" of Jewish literature and Jewish modernity.<sup>332</sup> Cohen's romance that threatens to exceed the boundaries of Judaism clarifies the extent of her rebellion against her parents' expectations, even as she remains in her parents' household at the narrative's end. It also is her first significant outlet for writing, suggesting that her break from her parents' expectations allows her the freedom of self-understanding and self-expression that are required for the act of life-writing. Knowing that she is incurring her parents' disapproval, she enters into a world of private thoughts and secrets, private communication, that later translate into the skills of life-writing through which she asserts her ability to interpret her own life and place it before the public as representative of Jewish immigrant America. It also gives her occasion to communicate in English and to hone her reading and writing ability in English, thereby initiating her into a literary landscape beyond her own ethnic community. Her romance with L. V. exceeds its initial significance as an act of rebellion against parental control: rebellion through romance aids to Rose's creative self-expression not only *against* but also *outside* of her parents' purview and their linguistic and social spheres and gendered expectations.

Likewise, in Leah Morton's *I am a Woman – and a Jew* (1926), intermarriage, which begins as an act of rebellion against a controlling father, allows the protagonist an opportunity for professional and creative development and expression that would be impossible under her father's traditional regime of gender expectations. The protagonist in this narrative experiences romance outside the bounds of Jewishness as a step away from a past that she understands as

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<sup>332</sup> Seidman, *The Marriage Plot*, 35.

controlled by patriarchal tradition and toward a future of fulfilling work in a broader non-Jewish world. Leah Morton is a pseudonym for Elizabeth Gertrude Levin Stern (1889-1954), a social worker and author of thirteen books. Stern maintained that she was born in Konigsberg, Prussia and came to the United States with her parents, Sarah Leah (Rubenstein) and Aaron Kleine Levin, a cantor and rabbinical assistant, but her son later asserted that while she had been raised by the Levins, Stern was actually born out of wedlock in Pittsburgh to a non-Jewish couple, Lillian Morgan and Christian Limburg, a store owner and merchant. Stern graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 1910 and entered the New York School of Philanthropy. There she met Leon Stern, a fellow student, whom she married in 1911. Elizabeth and Leon worked with American Jewish immigrants in Galveston, Texas from 1912 to 1913, and she was a professional welfare worker in Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, in a community center in New York City, and became executive director of the Council House in New York in 1924. Among her many professional accomplishments and affiliations, she served as an organizer of the National Jail Association, a member of the Publicity Council for National Defense in Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Executive Committee for Amnesty to Political Prisoners, the Voluntary Defender Committee of Philadelphia, and the joint committee of American Friends' Service and the Women's International League, and served as an adviser to many social service, civic, and educational agencies and organizations. She also lectured widely before civic and church groups. Stern was a prolific and accomplished writer who began her writing career in local newspapers as early as 1908 and published feature articles in the *New York Times* in 1914. She wrote under the pen name Eleanor Morton for the *New York Evening World* and the *Philadelphia Public*

Ledger, and her books include personal memoir, biography, and fiction, largely about modern women and their accomplishments and struggles.<sup>333</sup>

*I am a Woman – and a Jew* is a continuation and rewriting of Stern's previous work *My Mother and I* (1916), though the fictionalized narrator's life circumstances have some significant differences from that of Elizabeth Stern's self-characterization in her first memoir.<sup>334</sup> While *My Mother and I* chronicles a young woman's education and its effect on her relationship with and estrangement from her immigrant mother, *I am a Woman – and a Jew* focuses on intermarriage as an impetus for moving the author into new cultural contexts, social spheres, career

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<sup>333</sup> Stern's writing includes: *My Mother and I* (1917), *A Friend at Court* (with Leon Stern) (1923), *This Ecstasy* (1927), *A Marriage was Made* (1928), *When Love Comes to Woman* (1929), *I am a Woman – And a Jew* (pseud. Leah Morton) (1930), *Gambler's Wife* (1931), *Not All Laughter* (1937), *Sanctuary* (1939), *Vacations from Prison* (1939), *Memories: the Life of M. M. Scott* (1943), *House of Detention for Adult Prisoners* (1944), *Josiah White, Prince of Pioneers* (1947), *The Women in Ghandhi's Life* (1953) and *Women Behind Ghandhi* (1954). See "STERN, Elizabeth (Eleanor Morton)," in *Marquis who was who in America 1607-1984* (New Providence, NJ: 2009); Ellen Umansky, "Elizabeth Gertrude Levin Stern," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

<sup>334</sup> *I am a Woman – and a Jew* is presented as a memoir of and by the persona Leah Morton, and contemporary reviewers assumed the book was Morton/Stern's personal story, though in fact much of it is fictional, including the element of intermarriage. According to her son, Thomas Noel Stern, whose claims cannot be substantiated, his mother Elizabeth Stern, unlike the protagonist of her fictionalized autobiography Leah Morton, was born in Pittsburgh, the illegitimate child of a Welsh Baptist mother and a German Lutheran father. She was raised by Rabbi Aaron Levin from the age of seven until seventeen. She and her husband, Leon Stern, were married in an Orthodox Jewish ceremony, which indicates that he was probably Jewish, running counter to intermarriage as a major theme of her fictionalized autobiography. It is therefore notable that she chooses to represent her experience of marriage as an intermarriage in her fictionalized text, perhaps asserting a feeling of independence and defiance from her Jewish foster father, or perhaps enacting a more straightforward and relatable version of the ethnic slippages that characterized her life as someone who was raised in a Jewish foster family and took on Jewish identities at times, but also at times boasted of her German, Welsh, and English backgrounds and affiliated religiously with Ethical Culture and Quaker organizations. See Tsvi Howard Adelstein, "Self, Other, and Community: Jewish Women's Autobiography," *Nashim* 7 (Spring 5764/2004): 116-127, p.123; Ellen M. Umansky, "Representations of Jewish Women in the Works and Life of Elizabeth Stern," *Modern Judaism* 13 (1993): 165-76; Laura Browder, *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2000), 165-170.

opportunities, and expressions of identity.<sup>335</sup> Thus, in Stern's narrative, marriage takes on a "heightened importance" as a moment of rupture from the traditions and strictures of her past.<sup>336</sup>

Among the first lines in *I am a Woman – and a Jew* is the narrator's realization "Now I am free!" which she utters in response to her father's death. This initiates readers into the major theme of the work: separation from a patriarchal past represented by the narrator's father gives the narrator room to create a life for herself apart from the patriarchal tradition of Orthodox Judaism.<sup>337</sup> Born of Eastern European immigrant Jewish parents, the protagonist Leah feels stifled by her parents' traditional worldview, especially by her father's authoritarianism, and by her mother's suspicion of non-Jews. Although she feels some reverence and respect for her father, whose faith she finds "unbelievably beautiful" even as it is so "intense" and "passionate" that it threatens to "destroy everything in his life, the very happiness of his children, that it might not be, in one small observance, unhonored," she expresses discomfort at the separation from non-Jews that her parents' traditional religious beliefs demand.<sup>338</sup> She explains that her mother does not allow non-Jewish children in their home because "every time a Gentile child touched a dish, it was, in my father's eyes, defiled, and had to be thrown out."<sup>339</sup> Consequentially, "we could not afford" to host non-Jewish children in the house.<sup>340</sup> This creates a de facto contrast

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<sup>335</sup> For an extended analysis of Stern's *My Mother and I*, see Wendy Zierler, "Border Crossings: The Emergence of Jewish Women's Writing in Israel and America and the Immigrant Experience." Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 1995.

<sup>336</sup> Zierler, "Border Crossings," 284.

<sup>337</sup> Leah Morton, *I am a Woman – and a Jew*. 1926. Reprint (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1986), 1.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 1.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

between the domestic world of isolation through strict adherence to religious law and the public arena of exploration and freedom, represented especially by contact with non-Jews. But the division between her family and the Christian world is not only based in the details of observance and religious law, it also comes from Leah's father's deeply felt "hatred and indignation" toward Jesus, "who caused so much suffering to his people."<sup>341</sup> By detailing her father's quotidian reasons for separation from non-Jews (preservation of dishes) alongside his emotional and historical reasons for separation (anti-Semitism), Leah demonstrates that while her childhood experience of Jewish/Christian separation was of an arbitrary and old fashioned boundary that should be transgressed, her father experienced this boundary as essential to his view of himself in relation to the world around him. These two fundamentally different perspectives on the same policies of exclusion and isolation will later result in Leah's estrangement of her father in favor of liberal universalism and freedom of self-discovery.

Although her mother does not allow non-Jewish children in the house, Leah befriends Catholics and Presbyterians and learns about their religious beliefs. She resents the gender disparities of her father's Orthodox Judaism and the social separateness between Jews and non-Jews that her parents enforce. She articulates her protest to her family's tradition by sneaking out to dances with non-Jewish boys, and she is amazed when she learns of one of her non-Jewish admirers that his relationship with his own father was close, informal, and friendly, rather than distanced and worshipful as it was in Leah's Orthodox Jewish household.<sup>342</sup> Non-Jews seem to offer an alternative to the forbidding family relationships and gender hierarchies that Leah

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.



identifies with her family and religious background and seeks to escape. Her choice of career is tied to her dating non-Jews, both of which are a break from her father's wishes and the traditionalism he represents.

Leah Morton first encounters her husband in her work at a settlement house. He had been a graduate student at the school of social work she attended, and she is impressed with him for hiring her even though she is Jewish. She recounts his sympathetic understanding of the women that she serves in the settlement house, and Dr. Morton is impressed by Leah's willingness to break rules in order to express sympathy and offer aid to people in need.<sup>343</sup> Leah's ambitions become wrapped up in this man with whom she has found love: "I knew that I would not be happy unless I was working at something I believed- but it would have to be some work done with him too."<sup>344</sup> Work creates the context in which her romantic relationship blossoms, and the marriage furthers her ability and opportunity to do her work. Her relationship with a non-Jewish spouse open the doors for and stands as a symbol for her broader engagement with American society as a whole, on a professional as well as a personal level. Leah's intermarriage occurs at the start of the novel and is the premise upon which the rest of Leah's struggles to be an independent, modern woman lie. Her struggles to maintain a career, to raise children, to make ends meet, to write and be published are all negotiated in a space that must necessarily be separate from her father's world and therefore, she believes, from her identity as a Jew.

As a social worker, Leah is invested in a Progressive ideal for society as a whole, and the equality and mutual respect she believes she has found in a companionate marriage of equals

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<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

with shared work represents her vision for a progressive, forward-thinking society at large, in contrast to her backward-thinking religious upbringing. In her narrative she is converted from Judaism, a religion she associates with gender inequality, to a secular universalist worldview that she associates with respect and love for women, which she explicitly contrasts to the kind of love that traditional Judaism has to offer. She writes:

I had, all my life, thought of the womanhood in me as something rather to be deprecated; a man, I knew, of my faith, must absent himself from his wife, as from defilement, at certain holy times of his life. And always, she must humbly beg God to pardon her that she is a woman... But my love found me God-worthy because I was a woman. He found me holy...he seemed to love me for just that which I was.<sup>345</sup>

Here, Leah asserts that her relationship with her husband negates her Jewish past, offering a more egalitarian and more beautiful experience of family life, womanhood, and love than she believes traditional Judaism contains.

Leah believes she has escaped patriarchy through intermarriage, and romance is part of and abets her journey into the broader secular world in which she can participate as a social worker and a writer, finding a meaningful career and public role that she would have been sheltered from under the gender expectations of endogamy within her father's Orthodox Judaism. Although Leah's interactions with non-Jews begin as an adolescent rebellion against her parents, the bulk of her narrative takes place away from her parents and in a mature contemplation of identity, womanhood, and motherhood that outlasts and surpasses these feelings of brash rejection of parental constraints. Her philosophical, vocational, and spiritual separation from her parents' ethnically and religiously restricted worldview allow her to achieve

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 69.

a career and sense of self as a modern woman. While Rose Gollup Cohen's romance with L. V. is short-lived and Leah Morton's marriage is a lifelong commitment, the relationships serve a similar purpose insofar as they initiate and support the protagonists' advancement into opportunities for work, independence, and self-expression that they were denied or cut-off from in their religious, ethnically isolated, patriarchal homes.

### **Intermarriage and Class Politics in the Writings of Rose Pastor Stokes and Anzia Yeziarska**

While Spitzer, Cohen, and Morton's narratives make use of interethnic romance as a site of women's independence, Rose Pastor Stokes and Anzia Yeziarska invest interethnic romance with political and class arguments in addition to their concerns of gender. Stokes and Yeziarska, both attendees of the Greenwich Village Heterodoxy Club of radical feminists, believed, along with other members of their circle, that fighting for women's rights could and should dovetail with working toward many other liberal and radical issues.<sup>346</sup> For Rose Pastor Stokes, interethnic romance is a radical act that signals a politics of radical egalitarianism, as it sometimes did for Abraham Cahan, whose thematization of intermarriage is discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Anzia Yeziarska, however, rejects the idea of interethnic romance a vehicle for radical politics. In undermining the intermarriage plot she demonstrates the

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<sup>346</sup> For an accounting of the work and membership of the Heterodoxy Club, see Judith Schwartz, *Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy, Greenwich Village 1912-1940* (Norwich, Vermont: New Victoria Publishers, 1986). In her biographical account of the Yeziarska-Dewey romance, Mary Dearborn discusses Yeziarska's association with Heterodoxy. There is no documentation to confirm that Yeziarska was a member of the club (Stokes was, indeed, a member), but many of her closest friends were members and Dearborn asserts that Yeziarska was "inevitably exposed to its views." Mary Dearborn, *Love in the Promised Land: The Story of Anzia Yeziarska and John Dewey* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 70.

intersection of class, racial, and gender hierarchies that make mobility so elusive for her protagonist. Like Rose Gollup Cohen, both authors depict East European, Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants who experienced poverty, poor working conditions, and religious traditionalism that would have been alien to the protagonists of Spitzer's and Morton's narratives. Both Rose Pastor Stokes and Anzia Yezierska employ interethnic romance in diverging ways to demonstrate how impoverished, disenfranchised women attempt to transform their own lives and fortunes, and how they can and should see their own actions in relation to the collective fate of Jews, women, and the working class. In both cases, their class politics and feminism reinforce one another through their narratives of interethnic romance.

Rose Pastor Stokes, labor, birth control, and anti-war activist, begins her unfinished autobiography *I Belong to the Working Class*, written in 1933, with a description of her mother's forced loveless marriage as a backdrop to the social injustice she experienced as a child, which fueled her later beliefs and actions.<sup>347</sup> "I slipped into the world while my mother was on her

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<sup>347</sup> Rose Pastor Stokes (1879-1933), born Rose Harriet Wieslander in Augustova, Poland, was a leftist organizer, lecturer, and public figure. She immigrated to England with her mother at the age of three and was raised in London's East End, where she joined the workforce at the age of eight. In England her mother was remarried to Israel Pastor and the family resettled in Cleveland in 1890. Rose worked as an unskilled cigar roller for twelve years, and when her step-feather abandoned her family she became the sole supporter of her mother and five siblings. In 1901 a letter she wrote in response to a call for letters in the *Yidishes Tageblatt* [Jewish daily news] was published and she became a regular contributor. As a result of the success of the letters, she was offered a full-time position as a columnist in New York City, where she resettled with her mother and several siblings in 1903. As part of her journalism, she interviewed James Graham Phelps Stokes, a reform-minded millionaire. They became friends and in 1904 they were engaged to be married. Newspapers reporting on the marriage sensationalized the contrasts between their backgrounds and highlighted it as a classic American success story. Rose Pastor Stokes and her husband joined the Socialist Party of America in 1906, and she became a popular and prominent speaker on the Intercollegiate Socialist Society tour. She aimed to use her newfound prominence in service of the working class. Stokes was an organizer, encouraging chambermaids to unionize and strike and agitating in support of birth control and of Margaret Sanger. She was also a prominent antiwar activist and was arrested in 1918 as a result of her public antiwar stance. Stokes was a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America and served as an American delegate to the Comintern's Fourth World Congress in Moscow in 1922. Stokes' increasingly radical politics became incompatible with her husband's political beliefs and his position as a millionaire socialist, and their marriage ended in divorce in 1926. In the last years of her life, Stokes suffered from

knees, scrubbing the floor,” she writes, situating her own humble birth into the action of unpaid domestic labor and social inequality. She describes her mother’s marriage:

She was married off at seventeen.

Her father, Berl the Fisherman, was pleased with the attention paid her by Jacob the Learned Bootmaker.

But Hindl didn’t love Jacob.

She secretly adored a young Pole who was madly in love with her.

But filial piety was strong in the heart of young Hindl. She could not wound her old father. Besides, daughters did not marry – they were married off, and her father was determined upon her marriage with Jacob.<sup>348</sup>

In this passage, Rose Pastor Stokes tersely demonstrates her mother’s lack of control over her own life through the phrase “married off,” which signals a marriage transaction between men that strips the woman of agency. She demonstrates that traditional marriage in her mother’s generation and in Jewish Eastern Europe was controlled by the father, and was conducted outside the framework of love. The author introduces the concept of love early in the passage, indicating the value that she herself places on love as a key concern in marriage, in contrast to the economic and family motivations of Berl the Fisherman. By inserting her mother’s love for the Pole into the story of her marriage to the Jewish bootmaker, presumably an inheritor and advocate of this

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breast cancer and although her illness prevented her from active political participation, she continued to swear allegiance to the Communist Party. See Judith Rosenbaum, "Rose Pastor Stokes," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, 20 March 2009, Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on September 22, 2016) <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/stokes-rose-pastor>; Pearl Zipser and Arthur Zipser, *Fire and Grace: The Life of Rose Pastor Stokes* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989). Stokes began her autobiography in 1924, and when she became too ill to finish it, she asked her friend, Samuel Ornitz, a communist writer, to complete it. He finally abandoned it in 1937, and it was not published until 1992.

<sup>348</sup> Rose Pastor Stokes, *I Belong to the Working Class: The Unfinished Autobiography of Rose Pastor Stokes*, ed. Herbert Shapiro and David L. Sterling (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 3.

traditional system of marriage through patriarchal determination, Stokes asserts that love is blind to national and religious affiliation, that love defies traditions of the past, that love is a radically individual experience through which her mother rebels from parental authority. Hindl's filial piety and her individual feelings, the traditions of her culture and family and the yearnings of youth are at odds with one another. Although the forces of patriarchal tradition are stronger than Hindl can withstand, she does not agree to the marriage without protest:

When Jacob came courting her, she smudged her face and hands, and put on a soiled gown.

But Jacob the Learned Bootmaker was not to be discouraged. Her father approved of the match. That was sanction enough for the wedding.

When the marriage canopy stood ready and the guests were there, and he himself came to lead his daughter to the waiting groom, he found her sitting near the tile oven in his fisherman's hut, her hair uncombed, her face unwashed, and downed in old worn homespun.

Berl loomed before her like 'the wrath of God.' His powerful frame with the slightly stooped shoulders straightened like a bow freed of its string. His thinly-bearded rugged face, with its high cheek-ones, generous mouth, and kindly grey eyes gloomed darkly upon her.

"You won't go? You will go!"

For the first time in Hindl's life her father's hand came down across her cheek.

Her mother, silently weeping, helped to deck out the unweeping bride.

Her father went off for reinforcements.

When he appeared with kin and neighbors, she was literally carried to the marriage ceremony.

So Hindl the Straw Girl was married off to Jacob the Learned Bootmaker.

And they lived like strangers under a common roof...<sup>349</sup>

Here, Rose Pastor Stokes situates herself as a product of power struggles and rebellion that begin before her own birth. As Stokes describes her mother's experience, Hindl is an active agent in her own life, even when she is forced to take part in a traditional patriarchal marriage system. Stokes frames her mother's protest as one that follows the political strategies her daughter would later espouse as a socialist leader. Hindl engages in subterfuge and disguise by trying to make herself unappealing to her potential husband, and when this fails she protests the marriage by refusing to attend, so that she must be physically forced to the *chuppah*. Although ultimately hers is a failed protest and Hindl falls victim to the imbalance of power in her family and society, Hindl's protest, situated at the start of Rose Pastor Stokes's autobiography chronicling her life as a socialist activist, creates a model of defiance upon which the narrator continues to build in her activist life.

In this passage, Stokes demonstrates that the politics of resistance of unfair power structures is for her not an abstract theory but a personal, individual, lived reality. It has to do not only with the circulation of money and power through global political forces, but with the right of one woman to protest her family's marriage choice. Long before the feminist dictum of "the personal is political," Stokes insists that the account of her development as a socialist activist begins with the domestic woman's experience and within the drama of marriage. In the narrative, the domestic drama of arranged marriage stands in for and introduces the unequal power distribution and abuses of the patriarchal social order. The female experiences of love and

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<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

marriage are torn from the cordoned off sphere of domestic private life promoted by domestic fiction, and are reinserted into the world of politics.<sup>350</sup> Her argument accords with anarchist Emma Goldman's assertion that marriage is an economic arrangement that is "like that other paternal arrangement – capitalism."<sup>351</sup> She places worker's rights outside the home in conversation with women's rights inside the home, much as she later insisted upon in her birth control advocacy, and she ties interethnic love (between Jewish Hindl and the Pole) to the revolutionary impulse to resist systems of oppression, even if in Hindl's case this protest does not succeed in reversing her father's hegemonic power.<sup>352</sup> Interethnic love in the narrative represents an option outside the patriarchal norms of Hindl's culture and family; it introduces the idea of a level of freedom and choice not afforded to Hindl in her traditionally patriarchal context.

Nevertheless, when Jacob the Bootmaker grants Hindl a divorce, "so bound by my tradition was my mother, she would not marry her Polish lover – out of the faith and against her

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<sup>350</sup> For a history of the work of the domestic novel to "d disentangle the language of sexual relations from the language of politics, and, in so doing, to introduce a new form of political power" for the middle class see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>351</sup> Emma Goldman, *Marriage and Love* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), 11.

<sup>352</sup> Rose Pastor Stokes was a supporter and ally of Margaret Sanger and the movement for birth control. She publically distributed contraceptive information and spoke on behalf of the cause of birth control, which she linked to class politics. In a major speech she gave at Carnegie Hall on May 5, 1916, Stokes argued against class inequalities that left working women vulnerable because of a system "that operates to keep the knowledge of contraception from the mothers of the poor and blinks the fact that the comfortable classes obtain that knowledge from their highly paid physicians." Stokes wrote a play, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* (1916) that included a birth control plot element, in which a working class woman refuses to bring a child into the world in poverty, and chooses birth control instead. For Stokes, the question of birth control was part of her broader leftist political activism in toward personal and political freedom for the working classes. Melissa Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890-1940* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 79-81.



father's will."<sup>353</sup> Hindl's initial defiance against the marriage her father arranges for her becomes obedience to her father and his tradition in relation to taking the defiant step of intermarriage. Stokes recounts her mother's fidelity to family and tradition as a marker of an old world that should be left behind. She discusses fragments of memories of her European past as a demonstration of "the simple non-revolutionary background against which I had my beginnings."<sup>354</sup> Her mother's sense of independence and rebellion is quelled by her adherence to this non-revolutionary background, her filial loyalty, her entrapment as "bound" to tradition. In contrast, Rose Pastor Stokes sees herself as unbound, rewriting and superseding her mother's story of failed romance and failed rebellion.

Later in her autobiography, Rose Pastor Stokes writes of her own marriage to James Graham Phelps Stokes, a wealthy philanthropist from a prominent New York family, whom she befriended through Socialist advocacy. Enchanted with this man who had such "sympathy for the poor" and who invited her into intellectual circles where she could expand her political awareness, Rose Pastor Stokes married across religious, cultural and material divides despite disapproval from many quarters, forging a marriage that she felt was grounded in her feminism and political radicalism.<sup>355</sup> Rose Pastor Stokes was uncomfortable with the "ever-renewable fairy-tale-come-true" that her marriage came to represent to the public, which she recognized created a fantasy of rags-to-riches as an individual triumph rather than promoting a change to

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<sup>353</sup> Stokes, *I Belong to the Working Class*, 4.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>355</sup> See Keren McGinity, *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 46.

systems of ownership, labor, and oppression.<sup>356</sup> Despite these concerns that the sentimentalized and sensationalized image of the marriage would distract from feminist and revolutionary politics, Rose Pastor Stokes's interclass, inter-religious, and interethnic marriage served as a strong statement for an egalitarian vision of partnership between men and women, working class and aristocrat, toward the betterment of society, "demonstrating the ideal of universal brotherhood" before the public eye.<sup>357</sup>

Written after the breakdown of her own marriage over increasing political differences between herself and her husband, Rose Pastor Stokes's autobiography nevertheless accentuates the revolutionary potential of intermarriage as a declaration of women's independence from the patriarchal strictures of the past.<sup>358</sup> Rose Pastor Stokes saw her marriage as modern: it was a marriage between equals (despite their differing economic and ethnoreligious backgrounds and their gender) who were dedicated to their revolutionary work (not dissimilar from the kind of marriage Leah Morton envisions for herself in *I am a Woman – and a Jew*), and like socialist activists Eleanor Keeling, Katharine St. John Conway, Enid Stacy, and Annot Wilkie, among others, she removed the term 'obey' from her marital vows to signal the modernity of the

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<sup>356</sup> Stokes, *I Belong to the Working Class*, 101.

<sup>357</sup> In an interview with J.G. Phelps Stokes, a newspaper reporter used this language to describe the Pastor-Stokes marriage: "Mr. Stokes is the hero of our greatest social romance, a figure in the one marriage of recent years that has come nearer than any other to demonstrating the ideal of universal brotherhood." Edward Marshall, "A Talk with the Richest Socialist in America," *New York Times*, Magazine Section, Oct. 23, 1910, p. SM2.

<sup>358</sup> The marriage between Rose Pastor and James Graham Phelps Stokes ended in divorce as their political views grew apart and Rose's dedication to political agitation drove a wedge between them. See Rose, *Beloved Strangers*, 158-160. See also Zipser and Zipser, *Fire and Grace*, 251-263.

marriage.<sup>359</sup> More significantly, her marriage was radically socialist insofar as she saw it as part of her working partnership with Stokes as they advanced their socialist politics together, rather than removing her from the public world and into the domestic sphere through marriage. Like Emma Goldman, Rose Pastor Stokes wrestled with a desire to “reconcile sexual and individual freedom with the demands of love and reciprocity” and her divorce demonstrates the ways that she insisted on her individual right to political beliefs and work ahead of her relationship with her husband: their divorce, freely given, indicating that Stokes was not imprisoned in a domestic arrangement by her marital vows, marks the marriage as an egalitarian and progressive arrangement.<sup>360</sup> This type of marriage resulted from Stokes’ consciousness that the structure of the family is related to the organization of social relations and the economy, and reflected her belief that society should be constructed upon free contracts and mutual self-interest rather than dependence and self-sacrifice.<sup>361</sup>

In writing about her mother’s thwarted attempts at escaping the patriarchal system of traditional marriage in juxtaposition to her own egalitarian marital partnership in service of socialist activism, in her autobiography Rose Pastor Stokes offers a vision of marriages across social and cultural boundaries as politically potent acts of female liberation and of social progress. The idea of interethnic romance and intermarriage punctuate her life story as instances

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<sup>359</sup> See McGjny, *Still Jewish*, 38; Krista Cowman, “‘You Might be More Useful Together’: The Search for a Perfect Socialist Marriage in Fin de Siecle Britain,” paper delivered at Socialists and Marriage Conference, Laboratoire de Demographie historique de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, October 6-7, 2006.

<sup>360</sup> Lori Jo Marso, “Emma Goldman on the Politics of Marriage, Love, Sexuality and the Feminine,” *Feminist Theory* 4: no. 3 (December 2003): 305-320, p. 312.

<sup>361</sup> Kathryn Tomasek and Adam Tuchinsky, “‘Spirits Bound to the Same Haven’: American Fourierists, Marriage, and the Political Economy of Love,” paper delivered at Socialists and Marriage Conference, Laboratoire de Demographie historique de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, October 6-7, 2006.

of feminist rebellion against patriarchal tradition even in the context of the love plot with all of its tendencies to reinscribe women in traditional gender roles as “relational creatures” and “objects of others’ desires.”<sup>362</sup> For Rose Pastor Stokes, intermarriage is one way that women can exercise desires that flout the capitalist structures of class difference and the patriarchal structures of ethnic difference as represented by her grandfather’s demands on her mother Hindl. For Stokes intermarriage, like the Free Love ideology more commonly associated with the anarchists and “romantic” socialists of the American Left, liberated love from restraints placed upon it by social custom and used its potential to work toward a world of equality.<sup>363</sup> While intermarriage is not the only focus of her story, she uses it as a tool in her argument for women’s creative and political exercise of their own beliefs, claims on their own bodies, and use of their own voices in service of social justice.

In her writing, Anzia Yeziarska also employs interethnic romance to advance a political message about women’s independence as well as the inequities of class in America. Yeziarska’s work has received much scholarly attention as emblematic of East European Jewish immigrant writing of this period, and her strategic deployment of the interethnic romance narrative to make claims for her impoverished Jewish female heroine’s right to dignity are symbolic of American Jewish immigrants’ struggle for and against the forces of Americanization.<sup>364</sup> Anzia Yeziarska

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<sup>362</sup> Julie Shaffer, “Not Subordinate: Empowering Women in the Marriage-Plot— The Novels of Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen,” *Criticism*. 34, no. 1 (Winter, 1992): 51-73, p.51.

<sup>363</sup> Jesse F. Battan, “Living the Life of ‘Love in Liberty: Free Unions and Free Love in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” paper delivered at Socialists and Marriage Conference, Laboratoire de Demographie historique de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, October 6-7, 2006.

<sup>364</sup> See, for instance, Mary V. Dearborn, “Anzia Yeziarska and the Making of an Ethnic American Self,” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 105–123.; Thomas J. Ferraro, “‘Working Ourselves Up’ in America: Anzia Yeziarska’s *Bread Givers*,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (Summer

(188?-1970) was a popular writer who, in the early 1920s, became “something of a household name” because of her literary success achieved from and based upon her experiences in the impoverished Jewish New York ghetto.<sup>365</sup> She chronicled American Jewish immigrants’ poverty and desire for security, education, love, and beauty in stories accepted for publication by major magazines such as *The Metropolitan*, *The New Republic*, *Harper’s*, *The Century*, *The Nation*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Good Housekeeping*, and she published several novels in major presses to wide critical praise.<sup>366</sup> She was born in the Russian-Polish village of Plinsk, near Warsaw, and arrived in the United States with her family in the early 1890s. As a girl, Yeziarska worked as a domestic servant and in factories to help support her family. As a young woman she moved out of her parents’ apartment and into the Clara De Hirsch Home for Working Girls. While she worked, she pursued education, attending Columbia University Teacher’s College from 1901 to 1905. She taught elementary school from 1908 to 1913 and then began to write fiction. In 1917 she met John Dewey, an instructor of social and political thought at Columbia University, and they conducted a romance. This relationship was pivotal to Yeziarska’s intellectual and personal development, and she returned to their romantic relationship time and again in her fiction.

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1990): 547–581; Blanche H. Gelfant, “Sister to Faust: The City’s ‘Hungry’ Woman as Heroin,e” in *Women Writing in America: Voices in Collage* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1984), 203–224; Babbette Inglehart, “Daughters of Loneliness: Anzia Yeziarska and the Immigrant Woman Writer,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 1 (Winter 1975): 1–10; Martin Japtok, “Justifying Individualism: Anzia Yeziarska’s Bread Givers,” *The Immigrant Experience in North American Literature: Carving out a Niche*, ed. Katherine B.–Rose and Toby Payant. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 17–30. Magdalena J. Zaborowska, “Beyond the Happy Endings: Anzia Yeziarska Rewrites the New World Woman,” in *How we Found America: Reading Gender through East European Immigrant Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 113–164.

<sup>365</sup> See Wendy Zierler, “The Rebirth of Anzia Yeziarska,” *Judaism* 42 (Fall 1993): 414-422.

<sup>366</sup> Yeziarska’s published writing includes: *All I Could Never Be* (1932); *Arrogant Beggar* (1927); *Bread Givers: A Struggle between a Father of the Old World and a Daughter of the New* (1925. Reprinted 1975 and 1984); *Children of Loneliness* (1923); *How I Found America: Collected Stories of Anzia Yezerskia* (1991); *Hungry Hearts* (1920); *Hungry Hearts and Other Stories* (1985); *The Open Cage: An Anzia Yeziarska Collection* (1979); *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (1950. Reprint, 1981); *Salome of the Tenements* (1923, reprint 1992).

Yeziarska enjoyed brief fame when a silent film was produced based on Yeziarska's *Hungry Hearts*, but as Yeziarska found herself unable to write in Hollywood, so far removed from the culture that inspired her writing, she turned down the opportunity to continue further to work in the movie industry.<sup>367</sup>

Unlike Rose Pastor Stokes, in her writing Yeziarska invokes intermarriage in order to reject it, articulating radical gender, ethnic, and class politics by complicating the smooth teleology of rags-to-riches and romance stories. In her novel *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), Yeziarska problematizes the Cinderella plot of an individual woman overcoming poverty and loneliness to be saved by a romantic hero by placing it in a racialized context in which class and race are intertwined and difference, essential and unchangeable, cannot be overcome through love. In so doing, she creates a narrative of an ambitious, self-reliant, resourceful woman who is corrupted by the desires and false promises of the marriage plot, but who regains her dignity as she finds another avenue for success. In juxtaposing the conditions of the life of an immigrant woman and a blue-blooded Anglo-Saxon philanthropist, Yeziarska highlights the indignities and absurdities of class difference, making an argument for the need for an improvement of conditions for the immigrant working class writ large.

Yeziarska's novel, loosely based on the marriage story of Rose Pastor Stokes, is famously also a retelling of Yeziarska's own relationship with the philosopher John Dewey, an experience of love, desire, and education that Yeziarska repeatedly re-imagined and drew upon

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<sup>367</sup> See Sara R. Horowitz, "Anzia Yeziarska," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on September 23, 2016) <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/yeziarska-anzia>; Louise Levitas Henrikson and Jo Ann Boydston. *Anzia Yeziarska: A Writer's Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

throughout her writing career.<sup>368</sup> In both cases, the young women were swept away by the settlement house movement's promise of moral and economic uplift, and sought romantic, personal, and financial salvation through relationships with wealthy men. The notorious Pastor-Stokes marriage brought hope of success through the fairy-tale story of sentimental romance to a broad newspaper reading audience. However, this story did not accord with Yeziarska's own experiences with Dewey and her sense that his philosophy failed to acknowledge the immigrant populations as fully human with emotional and aesthetic needs. The incompatibility of Anglo-American and Jewish cultures and disillusionment with Progressive reform ideals are preoccupations that undergird many of Yeziarska's writings, and her romance with Dewey, with its attendant desires, fantasies, and failures "remained a central...episode in her understanding of her particular identity as an immigrant woman artist," and in particular "the inappropriateness of the Western male model for her female immigrant writing."<sup>369</sup> In *Salome of the Tenements*, this argument against American Dream rhetoric and the promise of Progressive reform is made through an anti-romance that overturns the possibility of the ideal of intermarriage as a path toward freedom that the Pastor-Stokes marriage seemed to represent and argues for the need for dignity among people of all classes.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> See, for instance, "The Miracle," "Wings," "Hunger," "Where Lovers Dream," in *Hungry Hearts* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920). In her work on the Yeziarska-Dewey romance, Mary V. Dearborn demonstrates that Yeziarska's writing time and again presents fictional counterparts of John Dewey who are attracted to the otherness of immigrant women and yet find these women overwhelming and are unable to sustain a relationship with them. Dearborn, *Love in the Promised Land*.

<sup>369</sup> Zierler, "Border Crossings," 302.

<sup>370</sup> Gay Wilentz, "Introduction" to Anzia Yeziarska *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), xiv.

In Yeziarska's *Salome* the protagonist, Sonya Vrunsky, ensnares herself in a love plot of her own making, an interethnic romance, only later to reject it as inadequate to the independence, class mobility, and beauty she seeks. Sonya, a poor immigrant, becomes infatuated with "her saint," the wealthy, Anglo-Saxon social worker, John Manning (whose name demonstrates his positioning as the ideal(ized) man) and sets out to seduce him through pragmatic, manipulative and coldly determined attempts to portray herself and her living quarters as simple, pure and well managed according to Progressive Era aesthetics.<sup>371</sup> Sonya consciously manipulates Manning, using her independence, artistic eye, and hard-working tenacity to obtain clothing and furniture that will appeal to Manning and force him to see past her poverty into the vibrancy of her character, a stereotype of agitated and lively ethnic otherness that Sonya believes to be her greatest virtue.<sup>372</sup> Through her efforts to woo Manning, Sonya achieves the intermarriage that

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<sup>371</sup>In *Arrogant Beggar*, Yeziarska explores in greater detail the coerciveness of Progressive Era aesthetics. In this scathing social criticism of philanthropic work, Yeziarska's protagonist, Adele Lindner, describes the charity-run boarding house in which she lives as a "sickening farce" that promises to help the immigrant by imposing a pseudo-scientific approach to health, hygiene, and aesthetics onto the immigrant in order to domesticate that which the middle class charity workers see as foreign and inferior. Progressive aesthetics require that the immigrant repress her own culture and sense of beauty and adopt a whitewashed, sanitized ideal. In *Salome of the Tenements*, Sonya makes up her rooms and dresses herself not in a way that Manning will find appropriate and beautiful, rendering her own culture and aesthetics, as well as her poverty, invisible in order to make herself attractive. Sonya's attempts to make her room and her body attractive to Manning in the hopes that their relationship will contribute to her upward mobility come close to prostitution in exchanging desire for economic betterment. Joanne Meyerowitz notes that it was often the case in the early twentieth century that young working class women in the urban dating scene benefitted economically from dating and that many relied on dating and on occasional prostitution for supplemental income. As she explains, in the early twentieth century sexual revolution, "the exchange of sexual services for monetary support moved beyond the marital bedroom and the brothel and into a variety of intermediate forms including dating, pickups, temporary alliances, and occasional prostitution." While many middle class American reformers lamented the vulnerability of sexually active women lodgers as "passive, pure, and impoverished orphans duped, forced, or unduly tempted by scheming men" Yeziarska depicts Sonya as a woman who has agency and responsibility for her own sexual behavior and who seduces as a display of her determination and savvy. Anzia Yeziarska, *Arrogant Beggar* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, 1927); Meyerowitz, "Sexual Geography and Gender Economy," 313-314.

<sup>372</sup> Here, Sonya's use of clothing to mask her poverty and gain upward mobility is commensurate with mass-market manufacturers' advertising strategies stressing the makeover as a route toward upward mobility. See Kathy Peiss, "Making Faces: The Cosmetics Industry and the Cultural Construction of Gender, 1890-1930," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2000),



she believes will afford her the opportunity and freedom the American Dream promises – in the same way that Leah Morton experiences intermarriage as an opportunity for an expansion of her horizons, upward mobility, and acceptance into Americanness. As Ljiljana Coklin explains, marriage to an affluent man outside her immigrant community “brings a desired social status, liberates the woman from the constraints of the ghetto patriarchy, and creates an identity separate from the amorphous immigrant crowd in which she grew up.”<sup>373</sup> But the business-like, even prostitute-like, pursuit of Manning contradicts Sonya’s romantic, sentimental feelings of “unreasoning admiration” for him, exposing a flaw in the plot of intermarriage as a method for the Jewish woman’s self-betterment.<sup>374</sup>

Several scholars have noted that Yeziarska’s work highlights the gendered nature of class mobility because of her characters’ inability to “escape the romance plot” and the “mechanisms of sexual politics.” Female mobility is expressed in sexualized scripts “in which heterosexual romance rather than labor effects class mobility.”<sup>375</sup> The pairing of the romance plot with a plot of upward mobility exposes women’s sexuality as an object of economic exchange and inserts

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324-335; For an exploration of overemotionality as a negative ethnic stereotype see Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005), 93.

<sup>373</sup> Ljiljana Coklin, “Between the Orient and the Ghetto: A Modern Immigrant Woman in Anzia Yeziarska’s *Salome of the Tenements*,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 27, no. 2 (2006): 136-161, p. 144.

<sup>374</sup> Anzia Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 76.

<sup>375</sup> Christie Launius, “The Three Rs: Reading, (W)riting, and Romance in Class Mobility Narratives by Yeziarska, Smedley and Saxton,” *College Literature* 34, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 125-147, p. 126; Lori Merish, “The Matter of Identification: Yeziarska’s *Arrogant Beggar* and the Gendered Injuries of Class,” *Studies in American Fiction* 39, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 207-241, pp. 291, 226.

socioeconomic ambition into the love plot.<sup>376</sup> Imagining Manning to be “the man of her dreams” in a romantic sense, while also recognizing that the “millionaire, philanthropist” offers the possibility of social mobility, Sonya’s desire for and pursuit of Manning combine the sentimental marriage plot with the rags-to-riches immigrant striver story to create a feminine version of the Horatio Alger myth.<sup>377</sup> Yet this version, substituting female desirability for male work, highlights the indignities of a Cinderella plot in which a woman must rely on love as an escape for poverty. Sonya compromises the integrity of the love plot by making herself attractive through lies and pretense, and she compromises the integrity of the rags-to-riches plot by employing sexual attraction rather than work. In so doing she exposes the failures of both plots for working class women.

Sonya comes to articulate the incommensurability of the love plot and the immigrant’s economic rise through the language of racial and class difference. Initially the perceived racial differences between Sonya and Manning create erotic tension that fuels their romance – Sonya sees their emotional differences as a challenge to be overcome – she hopes to unleash Manning’s emotions and to learn to control her own feelings that “let loose in [her] like the suppressed avalanche of centuries” of Jewish racial experience.<sup>378</sup> However, after their marriage, Sonya is immediately disillusioned that love did not conquer the vast differences in experience and nature that have always divided her from Manning. Class and race perspectives are conflated as

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<sup>376</sup> Yeziarska makes explicit the role of socioeconomic ambition in the romance plot that, according to Ian Watt, was always there in disguised form. See Ian P. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (University of California Press, 1957).

<sup>377</sup> Natalie Friedman, “Marriage and the Immigrant Narrative: Anzia Yeziarska’s *Salome of the Tenements*,” *Legacy* 22, no. 2 (2005): 176-186, p. 176.

<sup>378</sup> Yeziarska, *Salome*, 37.

Sonya's natural, Jewish emotional exuberance and her alienation from the culture of wealth lead her to feel uncomfortable in Manning's home and with his friends. She is not used to a house "so big, so cold – like a museum not a home."<sup>379</sup> She becomes nostalgic for the familiar, longing for "one little room, with nothing in it but our love."<sup>380</sup> She is particularly upset by her husband's continued coldness and restraint, that he "become[s] one with" the high society people with whom he socializes, and she realizes that she cannot "meet him fully in his own world."<sup>381</sup> All of this, of course, is helplessly stereotypical: Yeziarska racializes and essentializes her characters who are flat and underdeveloped under the weight of the conventions she employs.

The effect of this racialization of class is to render the Cinderella story ineffective and impossible in an immigrant context, as it involves not only the acquisition of wealth, but the merging of essentially different individuals. As Ljiljana Cokin notes, the failure of Sonya and Manning's marriage "reveals ultimately patriarchal underpinnings of the institution of intermarriage" in which the "freshness and excess of the Orient/woman are supposed to revitalize the world-weary and impotent West/man," and even in her vulnerability and need, the

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 112. Yeziarska explores this theme earlier in her story "The Fat of the Land," in which Hannah Breineh's son becomes a successful businessman and through his efforts she escapes the poverty of tenement life and lives in a brownstone on Eighty-Fourth Street, dresses in silk, and is attended to by hired servants. Hannah Breineh remains nostalgic about tenement life and finds her new, wealthy existence to be lonely and cold. She explains, "When I was poor, I was free, and could holler and do what I like in my own house. Here I got to lie still like a mouse under a broom." She feels that her life of wealth and her Americanized children cut her off "from everything warm and human." She does not want to return to the ugliness of her poverty, nor does she want to be isolated in her wealth from her friends and culture. See "The Fat of the Land" in *Hungry Hearts* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920).

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 129.

poor Jewish woman exists to be of service to the wealthy white, Christian man.<sup>382</sup> When Manning attempts to force himself on Sonya after she has left him, claiming that “you belong to me” he articulates her position as an object of exchange who has been purchased in a marriage to a wealthy man, and not a person in her own right.<sup>383</sup> Instead, Sonya divorces Manning and marries Jack Hollins, a Jewish clothing designer who “understands me as I am” and who gives her “freedom enough to try out your wild dreams in the air” and together they work to design beautiful clothing that they will share among Jewish patrons in need of something beautiful with which to ennoble their lives.<sup>384</sup> Here, Sonya commits to working for, uplifting, and dignifying her own race and class, rather than serving another. Through the failure of Sonya’s intermarriage, Yeziarska articulates a politics in favor of women’s labor (in opposition to the bourgeois ideal of the supported wife), class solidarity, and collective betterment (rather than the one exceptional success who leaves behind her class to reach the American Dream).<sup>385</sup> Yeziarska’s illustration of the failures of interethnic romance is not an argument against the rebelliousness and self-actualization that Sonya expresses through her desire for Manning. Instead, it is an indictment of Sonya’s failure to realize that in pursuing Manning’s cold-hearted

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<sup>382</sup> Coklin, “Between the Orient and the Ghetto,” 140. Yeziarska’s *Solome*, in which an ethnically inflected immigrant engages in romance with an American and then rejects it, shares much in common with the works of Polish American writer Melania Nesterowicz, who published several novels in Polish centered around romances between ethnic Poles and wealthy Americans. As Keren Majewski explains, “The fantasy of escape... propels these young women into the arms of American men, whom they imagine carry the key to the American ancestral mansion” but these relationships fail because “American wealth is linked consistently not with the mythical drive, determination and creative vision of the legendary self-made man, but with inherited privilege perpetuated through bigotry and resulting in arrogance, corruption, and dishonor.” Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, 142.

<sup>383</sup> Yeziarska, *Solome*, 181.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 182, 178.

<sup>385</sup> See Susan Edmunds, “Between Revolution and Reform: Anzia Yeziarska’s Labor Politics,” *Modernism/modernity* 18, no. 2 (April 2011): 405-423.

wealth, and the abandonment of class, gender, and racial interests that it would require, Sonya has misplaced her ambitions, which should instead be set on broad social betterment which could improve the lot of others like herself, and together with them could help her achieve greater economic security and access to beauty, on their own terms.

In both Stokes' and Yezierska's narratives, interethnic romance is a step toward realization of class- and ethnicity- oriented politics of self-actualization that go beyond the limits of traditional thinking about the marriage plot that contains women's roles, passions and objectives within the domestic space of marriage. Stokes, from within her radical and unorthodox marriage, and Yezierska in her narrative that rejects the confines and expectations of the intermarriage plot, both assert that women can achieve more than simply marriage. Fighting to pursue the potential of women beyond their inscribed feminine roles, as members of Heterodoxy and other radical feminist organizations sought to do, they created narratives in which interethnic romance plots necessitate women's participation outside of marriage, in careers devoted to class and ethnic uplift.<sup>386</sup>

### **Rebelling Against the Melting Plot: Maintaining Jewish Identity in Leah Morton, Anzia Yezierska, and Edna Ferber's Narratives of Interethnic Romance**

While many of the authors discussed in this chapter employ interethnic romance as a moment of women's self-actualization and rebellion against patriarchal norms, Sonya's ultimate

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<sup>386</sup> For an accounting of early feminism's challenging of the doctrine of separate spheres, see: Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

rejection of intermarriage in *Salome of the Tenements* is exemplary of a counternarrative in which authors resist an intermarriage plot that requires the relinquishing of ethnic and class allegiances in favor of a homogenized ideal of America. Leah Morton's narrative of a modern woman's freedom from the patriarchy of her ethnic enclave through intermarriage is likewise disrupted and modified by a later realization of the continued significance of her ethnic identification. This revelation abruptly reinserts the narrator's identity as an outsider into the narrative as a point of pride. Although in much of her writing Edna Ferber employs interracial romance plots to express the inevitability and desirability of liberal inclusiveness, in her novel *Fanny Herself* (1917), she advocates for endogamy as a way for her Jewish character to live out her unique potential as a Jew. In each of these cases, the authors respond to the proliferation of intermarriage narratives in contemporaneous popular culture by asserting Jewish women's participation in sentiments of ethnic pride that resist a trajectory of complete assimilation through the analogy of the American melting pot.<sup>387</sup>

Unlike the radical gender politics of Spitzer's *Who Would Be Free*, in which feminist rejection of (inter)marriage goes along with rejection of ethnicity in asserting a young woman as an individual without obligations to family (ethnicity) or spouse (marriage), in Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements*, feminist rejection of intermarriage requires an assertion of ethnicity, as a woman lays claim to her true self and refuses to bend to societal pressures to assimilate in order

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<sup>387</sup> The introduction to this Diss. discusses the widespread trope of interethnic romance in film and theater in the early twentieth century. Liljana Coklin speculates that Yeziarska found inspiration for *Salome of the Tenements* from the nickelodeon films she likely frequented, in which women were "desired sexual objects implicated in a romantic love that conquers all." She likely was familiar with the "rudimentary, if not simplistic" plot of intermarriage in these films which tended to "situate romance in the context of assimilation and conflate sexuality with ethnicity and melting-pot immigration policy" and her writing draws upon and responds to the assumptions of this prevalent theme of popular culture. Coklin, "Between the Orient and the Ghetto," 139.

to achieve success according to American bourgeois norms. This aligns with Yeziarska's self-presentation as a "radically unassimilable Jew," a persona that made her visibly different in the Algonquin Round Table circles in which she and Spitzer both tangentially participated.<sup>388</sup> The Jewish immigrant women of Yeziarska's narratives are incapable of passing into a non-Jewish America, instead insisting on bringing their ethnically inflected "Jewish passion," authenticity, and difference to bear on the American ideal of success. In Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements*, Sonya eschews intermarriage as a means for personal betterment, instead employing talent and perseverance in the garment industry. In her rejection of the marriage plot in favor of the success plot, Yeziarska not only demonstrates a critique of Progressive era gender politics, as she transforms from a "husband-stalking femme fatale, complicit with conventional gender ideologies, to a self-actualized career woman," she also demonstrates her resistance to "marriage [as] a form of assimilation."<sup>389</sup> While Sonya initially sees in a possible union with a wealthy Anglo-Saxon man an opportunity to find a place for herself in America by breaking down race and class boundaries with love, ultimately Sonya pursues an avenue for successful and fulfilling

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<sup>388</sup> Yeziarska dined with major literary figures at the Algonquin and felt herself to be an accepted American author, but only insofar and when she was distinctive through her celebrity as the "Sweatshop Cinderella." While authors such as Dorothea Parker masked and downplayed their Jewishness to create a universal middlebrow literary culture, Yeziarska emphasized her difference and exoticness, and her intermarriage novel follows suit, insisting on ethnic identity over the assimilative temptation of intermarriage. Yeziarska's ethnic self-presentation went hand-in-hand with her genre of choice, melodrama, which allowed her to present earnest, passionate characters, unlike the ironic, jaded figures of Parker's sketches. The concerns of this genre fell outside the bounds of the modern wit espoused by Dorothea Parker and her cohort, and for the Algonquin Roundtable members, Yeziarska served as a symbol of the "other New York" of which their writing was not a part. Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 92, 117, 257n19 and n20.

<sup>389</sup> Charlotte J. Rich, *Transcending the New Woman: Multiethnic Narratives in the Progressive Era* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009), 171. Naomi Seidman suggests that the chivalric romance narrative that underpins the Christian romantic novel form was foreign to Jewish discourses of love because Jews did not share the religious estimation of virginity upon which such narratives are grounded. Thus, even the form of marriage as assimilation may ring untrue to Yeziarska's sensibilities, and to those of her sexually charged protagonist, whose failure to take seriously the "secular modern 'overestimation' of both celibacy and the (female) love object" lends her story its distinctively Jewish character as a failed romance. Seidman, *The Marriage Plot*, 66.

life in which she will not disappear, as a woman, behind a head of household or as a Jew inside a Christian home.<sup>390</sup>

As she accumulates wealth and prestige, Sonya finds herself in a love and work partnership with the famous Jewish clothing designer Jack Hollins. Their pragmatic work ethic, born of their shared working class sensibilities, combined with their artistic, emotional sensibilities born of their shared Jewish race, make theirs a perfect partnership of love and purpose that gives Sonya the financial and artistic independence she was always striving toward. As Wendy Zierler notes, this is a “utopian, formulaic ending” that allows Sonya to achieve quick professional success and love in order to neatly force a happy ending onto the novel. Sonya’s marriage to a successful businessman “trivializes and undermines the story of Sonya’s emergence as an artist in her own right” by making her fate dependent on her love for a man and on his successes. Yet, by marrying an immigrant Jew who shares her ambitions, Sonya finds balance between the rejection of the Old World of immigrant poverty and her rejection of the New World aesthetic of coldness, allowing her together with Hollins to create their own aesthetic that combines Jewish and American-born cultures.<sup>391</sup> Her marriage to Hollins, as Karen Majewski notes of similar narratives in Polish American literature in which Poles consider intermarriage but return to marry other Poles, signals a renewal of patriotic passion for her Jewish ethnic identity: she and Hollins declare their marriage and business success to be in service of their own people, for whom they will manufacture beautiful commodities to help them

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<sup>390</sup> Friedman, “Marriage and the Immigrant Narrative,” 177.

<sup>391</sup> Zierler, “Border Crossings,” 339; See also Mary V. Dearborn, *Pocahontas’s Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 125.



achieve a sense of self-worth.<sup>392</sup> Through this romance, Yeziarska rejects the intermarriage plot, positing that Sonya's happiness and success can only truly be achieved with someone who is like her, who can encourage and bring out her Jewish qualities of passion and ambition, who paradoxically in marriage can help her to become an independent woman, free from ensnarement in a love plot that would keep her from her true artistic calling.

Sonya's Jewishness is an inescapable characteristic of her body – she understands her class sensibilities, together with her passions and drives, as part of the Jewishness that she carries in her blood. When she seeks to break with her community through intermarriage, she is not only turning her back on individual people and institutions, tenements, ready-made clothing, dirt and grime. She is also trying, and failing, to leave behind a part of herself in order to “pass” in an Anglo-Saxon society.<sup>393</sup> Intermarriage is not a path toward self-liberation because it would force her to be something she is not. Instead, marriage to a Jew promises her freedom of the spirit, upward mobility through work, woman's liberation, and a piece of the American Dream, and in particular the ability to attain the twin ideals of Progressive New Womanhood – a fulfilling career and companionate love.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, 127.

<sup>393</sup> See Melanie Levinson, “To Make Myself for a Person: Passing Narratives and the Divided Self in the Work of Anzia Yeziarska,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 13 (1994): 2-9.

<sup>394</sup> Rich, *Transcending the New Woman*, 175; As Wendy Zierler explains, this return to an endogamous romantic relationship and alongside it the development of a career coincides with Yeziarska's affirmation of her “immigrant (female) idiom” as her most genuine form of writerly expression. The intermarriage story for Yeziarska is as much a story about experimentation with “American-born forms of language and culture” and a return to an aesthetic native to immigrant Jewish culture as it is about romance per se. The romance, the experimentation with the novel form and its preoccupation with the marriage plot, is an expression of the anxieties of Yeziarska's authorship as she struggles to express and preserve her unique creative voice. Zierler, “Border Crossings,” 298.

Leah Morton's narrative also promotes this theme of a Jewish woman's retaining her essential quality of Jewishness in order to achieve self-actualization as a modern woman. In *I am a Woman – and a Jew*, the arc of the protagonist's intermarried family life brings her full circle to an embrace of *Jewish* identity, albeit one that is not ruled by the patriarchal concerns and demands that she rebelled from through her marriage.<sup>395</sup> Morton's autobiography follows a Romantic pattern of a "circuitous journey" of innocence, loss and recovery through a series of transformative experiences that lead the protagonist to rediscover her original Jewish identity through a wiser and more reflective lens.<sup>396</sup>

Although intermarriage offers the conditions that make freedom and self-empowerment possible for Leah, the secular world fails to live up to her universalist expectations. She proclaims that "to me life was not Jewish or non-Jewish; it was universal," but when her children face rejection from schools as a result of their Jewish ancestry, Leah comes to realize that non-Jews as well as Jews equally fall short of her universalist vision of America – non-Jews are also prejudicial and exclusive.<sup>397</sup> "I was bewildered and angry," she describes, "but I would not have had my daughter live only as the daughter of her father. That Jewish heritage I bring her must be hers, too."<sup>398</sup> This experience of rejection that forces Leah into a defiant stance of reaffirming

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<sup>395</sup> When Morton later experiences frustration with the gender imbalances of her marriage – her husband belittles her contribution to the household income, is embarrassed when she works during her pregnancy, and tells her not to "bother" with her work even though she finds it fulfilling – these discontents with a marriage that does not live up to its promises of gender equality foreshadow her return to Jewishness in the face of antisemitic sentiment, as the modern secular world also fails to live up to its promise of ethnic equality. Morton, *I am a Woman – and a Jew*, 106-107, 137.

<sup>396</sup> Peter A. Dorsey, *Sacred Estrangement: The Rhetoric of Conversion in Modern American Autobiography* (Penn State Press, 1989), 51-54.

<sup>397</sup> Morton, *I am a Woman – and a Jew*, 338.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

the importance of Jewishness is a moment of social revelation that forces the narrator to rethink her relationship to religious and social institutions and to her own ethnic and religious identity. Just as she initially rejected Judaism because of a desire to distance herself from her family, she is motivated to return to a sense of Judaism through advocacy for her family, for her children. Although her marriage was earlier described as an action taken in rejection of her Jewish faith, her identity within intermarriage takes a surprising and abrupt turn at the end of the novel as she declares that her children “shall not be ashamed of my people. They shall know the glory and the pride of being a Jew.”<sup>399</sup> Leah thus comes to define her own Jewish identity as something separate from her marriage, from patriotism or piety, something connected to personal and inherent racial and religious identity.<sup>400</sup> If her religious identity was previously shaped in reaction against her father or in attraction to and validation from her Christian friends and later her husband, it is now directed toward her role as a mother in relation to her children. She proclaims that:

All... racial strata in the United States are different from one another, but we Jews are alike. We have the same intensities, the sensitiveness, poetry, bitterness, sorrow, the same humor, the same memories. The memories are not those we can bring forth from our minds: they are centuries old and are written in our features, in the cells of our brain.<sup>401</sup>

Leah comes to feel that her individual personal identity is marked by racial history that cannot be erased, regardless of her daily practices, marriage, or friendship. She rejects the social

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<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

restrictions that traditional Judaism represents, but comes to embrace an internal form of Jewish identity as a kind of sensibility that she carries with her into non-Jewish circles, including her own non-Jewish husband. Although, as Wendy Zierler accurately notes, the autobiography is “a long, rambling work, filled with contradictory observations,” its presentation of a series of awakening or conversion experiences leads toward a conclusion about the narrator’s spiritual and ethnic identity that is presented in a summative, moralizing tone.<sup>402</sup> Ultimately Leah’s intermarriage gives her both the freedom to leave traditional hierarchies, and also the freedom to return to her racial identity free of Jewish communal social constraints, on her own terms as an individual outside the burdens patriarchal authority, and as a mother who can bestow a feminized version of Jewishness conveyed through maternal love rather than paternal rules and restraint.<sup>403</sup> For Leah Morton, intermarriage offers the conditions under which she can develop a sense of independent personhood which allows her to return to her religious and familial traditions and

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<sup>402</sup> Zierler, “Border Crossings,” 287

<sup>403</sup> In her analysis of Stern’s other autobiographical work, *My Mother and I*, Magdalena J. Zabowowska notes that Stern’s text “challenges both the stereotypical tale of female Americanization and the archetypal female Bildungsroman” because it does not have a clear trajectory toward acceptance in the adopted culture. Rather, this narrative moves toward the heroine’s loss of self as she claims her identity as American, and represents the frailty of the melting pot myth. See Magdalena J. Zaborowska, *How We Found America: Reading Gender Through East-European Immigrant Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 89. Laura Browder notes that given that the author associates Jewish identity with her abusive foster father, the protagonist’s re-adoption of Jewish identity as something inescapably part of herself can be read as “a vision of ethnicity as a straight jacket.” For Stern, Browder speculates, “ethnicity is the result of a trauma” and “Jewishness becomes a metaphor for the memories she cannot escape and for the identity [of an abused person] imposed upon her by her rabbi foster father when he began his abuse of her.” Browder asserts that Morton’s re-embrace of Jewish identity is not an act of self-affirmation, but an expression of powerlessness, that she is compelled toward and cannot escape connection to the man who traumatized her and his ethnic identity. She has tried to leave the father figure behind at the start of the story, but ultimately finds that “her embrace of his identity cannot leave her free to be herself.” Rather than a vision of a healthy, independent, and maternal version of Jewishness, Browder’s reading suggests that Morton’s affirmation of Jewishness demonstrates Elizabeth Stern’s psychological and emotional restraints as a result of childhood abuse. See Browder, *Slippery Characters*, 165-170; Laura Browder, “‘Imaginary Jews’: Elizabeth Stern’s Autobiography as Amnesia,” faculty symposium, Department of English, Virginia Commonwealth University, Spring, 1995. Accessed online: [http://www.has.vcu.edu/eng/symp/brow\\_txt.htm](http://www.has.vcu.edu/eng/symp/brow_txt.htm).

glean new meaning from them. Thus, intermarriage figures as a necessary step for Leah in the feminist process of self-determination and identity formation, even as she returns to her Jewish roots at the novel's end. Morton's narrative is not a rejection of intermarriage, but it is a rejection of the idea of complete assimilation that is often associated with intermarriage. Morton ultimately argues for retention of an identity as a Jew, within an intermarriage, as an assertion of the individuality and independence of her Jewish protagonist even within her marriage.

As with *I am a Woman – And a Jew*, Edna Ferber's *Fanny Herself* (1917) is a narrative of return to an ethnic solidarity and Jewish identity that is aligned with feminist ideals and allows for a full expression of the protagonist's ethnic and feminist sensibilities. However, unlike Morton's narrative, Ferber's novel disallows intermarriage as a venue for such a realization. Rather, it is in rejecting romance outside of Jewishness that the title character is able to see the truth of herself in relation to her ethnic identity.

Edna Ferber's *Fanny Herself* (1917) is a coming of age novel based on Ferber's own childhood experiences.<sup>404</sup> Written at the start of Ferber's successful career as a popular middlebrow fiction writer who focused on the representation of independent, hard working women, *Fanny Herself* was the only one of her novels that contained a strong autobiographical element.<sup>405</sup> The novel centers on Fanny Brandeis, a Jewish girl growing up in Winebago,

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<sup>404</sup> *Fanny Herself* was published serially in the *American Magazine* and then published in book form by Frederick A. Stokes Company in 1917.

<sup>405</sup> Edna Ferber (1885-1968) was a widely recognized and popular author whose writing focused on the diversity and resilience of America's working people. She began her writing career as a reporter for the *Appleton Daily Crescent* in Appleton Wisconsin, and later for a larger paper in Milwaukee. At the age of twenty-two she began to write and publish short stories, including popular tales about the fortunes of the fictional businesswoman Emma McChesney. In 1912 she came to New York, where she socialized with writers, editors, producers, performers, and artists, and from there she continued to write the novels, stories, and plays that made her famous. Jewishly

Wisconsin, in the orbit of her mother, Molly Brandeis, a businesswoman running a general store, whose competing goals of success in the commercial world and a means of creative self expression drive her emotional growth as she develops into an independent modern woman and an artist. In the novel, Fanny's relationship to her Jewishness is fraught, as it was for Ferber herself, and Fanny's "journey away from her mother and then back to the values she represents" is deeply entwined with her feelings about her ethnic identity and the role it plays in her life.<sup>406</sup> For Fanny, from childhood on, Jewishness is best categorized not as a set of rituals or beliefs, but as a feeling of difference that is linked to inherent gifts and tendencies, artistic and moral qualities that accomplish the "sublimation of ethnicity into art."<sup>407</sup> As the narrator explains, "the real difference [between herself and the rest of Winnebago] was temperamental, or emotional, or dramatic, or historic."<sup>408</sup> Fanny is a "little Oriental" with an inherent artistic sensibility that is

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uneducated, Ferber nevertheless upheld the importance of her own Jewish identity, connecting it to a sense of being different and even superior in relation to others, and to her experiences as a victim of anti-Semitic sentiment. She likewise espoused an attitude that women developed strengths as a result of their subjugation, and therefore had special talents overlooked by men. She was also a deeply patriotic writer, who saw her work as a celebration of the vibrancy and variety of the American working class. Her published works include: *American Beauty* (1931); *Buttered Side Down* (1912); *Cimarron* (1930); *Come and Get It* (1935); *Dawn O'Hara, the Girl Who Laughed* (1911); *Dinner at Eight*, with George Kaufman (1932); *Emma McChesney and Co.* (1915); *Fanny Herself* (1917); *Giant* (1952); *The Girls* (1921); *Great Son* (1945); *Ice Palace* (1958); *A Kind of Magic* (1963); *Minick*, with George Kaufman (1924); *Mother Knows Best* (1927); *No Room at the Inn* (1941); *Nobody's in Town* (1938); *Our Mrs. McChesney*, with George V. Hobart (1915); *A Peculiar Treasure* (1939); *Roast Beef, Medium: The Business Adventures of Emma McChesney* (1913); *The Royal Family*, with George Kaufman (1927); *Saratoga Trunk* (1941); *Show Boat* (1926); *So Big* (1924); *Stage Door*, with George Kaufman (1936); *They Brought Their Women* (1933). See Janet Burstein, "Edna Ferber," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, 1 March 2009, Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on September 22, 2016) <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/ferber-edna>>; Eliza McGraw, *Edna Ferber's America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

<sup>406</sup> Lawrence Rogers, "Introduction" to Edna Ferber, *Fanny Herself*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), viii.

<sup>407</sup> Martin Japtok, *Growing Up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 74.

<sup>408</sup> Ferber, *Fanny Herself*, 24.

connected to her ethnic difference.<sup>409</sup> Even in the context of a fasting on the Day of Atonement, Fanny does not experience “religious fervor” from the ritual, but has a unique “emotional” sensibility its “sheer drama and magnificence.”<sup>410</sup> She has a drive to represent real life through art, and in particular to demonstrate her sympathy for the poor through art. In one childhood instance, this leads her to take a job at a paper mill so that she can write an essay about the lives of the mill workers.<sup>411</sup> Through the description of her childhood it becomes clear that, Fanny’s sense of Jewishness is linked to emotional and moral differences that affect her aesthetic taste—and not to religious beliefs or practices. Fanny’s mother’s unique ability to sympathize with customers and her self-sacrificing nature demonstrate that she shares these Jewish traits, and Fanny’s story of growing up and gaining independence from her mother is linked to a narrative of distancing and return to these tendencies that the narrative insists are a result of her Jewish sensibility.<sup>412</sup>

As an adult, when Fanny leaves behind Winnebago after her mother’s death and seeks to make her fortune in the business world, she eschews what she sees as her mother’s tendencies to be “sentimental and unselfish” in favor of pursuing business success that her mother had been

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<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.* 76, 42.

<sup>412</sup> This subscribes to a racialist rather than strict “scientific racist” tendency. Racialism refers to an ideological complex of ideas in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries about race that were not simply biologically deterministic, but rather, to racialists “the important point was not that biology determined culture (indeed, the split between the two was only dimly perceived) but that race, understood as an indivisible essence that included not only biology but also culture, morality, and intelligence, as a compellingly significant factor in history and society.” Peggy Pascoe, “Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of ‘Race’ in Twentieth-Century America,” *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2000), 161-182, p. 163.

afraid to attempt.<sup>413</sup> Her decision to “leave Winnebago behind” is framed as a choice to leave behind both her moral duty and her Jewish sensibility – “she would crush and destroy the little girl who had fasted on that Day of Atonement; the more mature girl who had written the thesis about the paper mill rag-room.”<sup>414</sup> Pursuit of material success is interpreted here as a break from Fanny’s ethnic self and an outcome of Fanny’s adoption of white, non-ethnic American standards and goals. As Fanny moves into adulthood, her moral and ethnic development are framed through romantic choices that will determine her relationship to her own Jewishness as an articulation of her sense of self. Different kinds of work – mathematically-oriented business work and emotionally-oriented artistic work are tied to different potential marriage partners, and Fanny’s choice of work and partner ultimately determines her relationship to ethnic identity.<sup>415</sup>

Fanny’s moral and ethnic transformation, passing as a non-Jew and following a non-Jewish moral code of American capitalism and materialism is solidified through her potential romantic alliance with her boss, Michael Fenger, in the Hays-Cooper clothing manufacturing plant. Her relationship with Fenger, contaminated by the introduction of an initial untruth, becomes a metonym for the corrupt business world in which Fanny is taking part and which causes her to be untrue to her Jewish self. When Fenger asks Fanny if she is a Jew, in a

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<sup>413</sup> Ferber, *Fanny Herself*, 106.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>415</sup> Here, as Nina Miller explains of 1920s literature in general, ethnicity signals old-fashioned authenticity, idealism, and romance, as opposed to the detached irony of wit that was the common mode among self-consciously modern writers. Fanny’s rejection of the modern workplace is joined with her rejection of a modern, urban erasure of ethnic identity, and her return to ethnicity is also a nostalgic return to a more moral, less mechanized and fabricated, economic order, and to a femininity that allows for public expression without engaging in the tainted masculinity of business. See Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 91.



“breathless instant” Fanny contemplates her answer before insisting, “no.”<sup>416</sup> Although she is “gripped with horror” at what she had done, Fanny recognizes that she has voiced “the fruit of all these months of inward struggle and thought,” and has signaled her personal transformation away from those parts of herself that she associates with Jewishness.<sup>417</sup>

Her relationship to Fenger, like her work in the fashion industry, threatens her moral and aesthetic gifts through the false attractions of success, admiration for her business savvy, and monetary gain. In her first meeting with him, Fanny and Fenger assess one another in mathematical terms: “even as he indexed her, Fanny’s alert mind was busy docketing, numbering, cataloguing him.”<sup>418</sup> This indicates Fanny’s newfound reliance on a vocabulary of mathematics and calculation over and against her previous predilections toward art and the sentimental; situating her relationship with Fenger as representative of the cold world of figures that threatens to erase Fanny’s moral, ethnic, and aesthetic particularities and penchants.<sup>419</sup> Fenger, a married man and possibly also a Jew passing as a non-Jew, later offers Fanny a proposal for a dinner.<sup>420</sup> From this follows a series of veiled romantic overtures that demonstrate Fenger’s moral turpitude in the face of conventions of the novel toward a happy ending in

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<sup>416</sup> Ferber, *Fanny Herself*, 136.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>419</sup> See Ann Brubaker, “The Subject of Accounting: Bookkeeping Women in American Literature, 1885-1925,” *Genre* 45, no. 2, (2012): 239-268, p. 259.

<sup>420</sup> Martin Japtok notes that Fenger’s appreciation for the etchings on his office walls suggests that he has an artistic sensibility. Because the novel associates “artistic sensibility” as an “ethnic trait,” in this way Ferber indicates that Fenger is also a passing Jew who shares Fanny’s desire for beauty. Japtok suggests that this moment in which “passing is subjected to moral judgment” is when the novel changes from a traditional bildungsroman into an “ethnic revision of the genre” that repudiates individualism in favor of ethnic pride. Japtok, *Growing Up Ethnic*, 80.

marriage, a convention especially of the genre of popular middlebrow fiction in which *Fanny Herself* falls. Fenger, who represents both business-mindedness and a disregard for conventional romantic morals, is set up structurally as the villain who keeps Fanny from her appropriate happy ending, and his ambiguous Jewishness is key to his status in the novel. He is Fanny's temptation away from the appropriate marriage partner, career, and ethnic identity that would bring her to fulfill her destined purpose. Early on, Fanny explains that her entanglement with Fenger is a result of her denial of her Jewish identity: "That placed you. That stamped you. Now he thinks you're rotten all the way through. You lied on the very first day."<sup>421</sup>

Fanny returns to her sense of self and to her Jewish sensibilities through a romance with Clarence Heyl, a Jewish man from her hometown whose simplicity, love of nature and art demonstrate a confidence with ethnic belonging that Fanny lacks.<sup>422</sup> Heyl, a journalist and naturalist who uses his artistic mind in service of his social conscience, is, according to the novel's logic, making use of his talents as a Jew and fulfilling his American Jewish destiny.<sup>423</sup> Through Fanny's romance with Heyl, she comes to do the same. Heyl argues against Fanny's work, putting forth the novel's thesis that, as Martin Japtok phrases it, "the nonethnic world is equated with materialism and individualism, the ethnic world with other qualities."<sup>424</sup> He serves

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<sup>421</sup> Ferber, *Fanny Herself*, 153.

<sup>422</sup> Karen Majewski describes the novels of Polish author Melania Nesterowicz as following a similar plot arc of escape from and return to ethnicity through romance: "Nesterowicz's heroines use romantic relationships to refashion their identities, playing out alternative ethnic scenarios before 'finding themselves' in their Polishness...They follow a trajectory that seems to lead farther and farther away from home...But the path is circular and these characters can find fulfillment only by reconstructing and reinhabiting their ethnic selves." Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, 141.

<sup>423</sup> See Japtok, *Growing Up Ethnic*, 82.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

as her “ethnic conscience” insisting that Fanny be true to herself rather than to her ambitions, that she use her “gift” of “being able to see life in a peculiar light, and to throw that light so that others get the glow,” pursuing a career in art rather than in marketing and sales.<sup>425</sup> He claims that her amateur sketching is “a real expression...the Jew in you” that she cannot forever suppress.<sup>426</sup> When, at the novel’s end, the two contented lovers imagine their futures together, Fanny not only sees herself as a wife to the appropriate loving partner and as a Jew not denying her sense of ethnic heritage, but also as an artist for a newspaper covering issues of social justice, a successful working woman who is not trapped in the cogs of cold hard business. As Japtok explains, her “art is the medium of ethnicity” so that in becoming the artist Heyl encourages her to be, she also claims her Jewishness.<sup>427</sup> In the sentimental narrative in which happy marriage is the obvious conclusion, “novelistic and ideological needs both find their happy ending” when her romance with Heyl must go hand in hand with her reclamation of a sense of Jewish identity.<sup>428</sup> The narrative of professional development and the romantic plotline are enmeshed here such that her work is determined *through* her ethnic identity and her romantic interest. Her work and her

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<sup>425</sup> Ferber, *Fanny Herself*, 81, 188.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>427</sup> Japtok, *Growing Up Ethnic*, 72. Karen Majewski analyzes similar narratives in Polish American writing, in which “Polishness...is not so much a matter of ancestry as it is a moral category” and unions between true Poles and Americanized Poles or ethnic others are untenable because they compromise the moral quality of Polishness. She describes several narratives of second generation Polish-American “flaperki” who are seduced by materialism and seek social independence from their ethnic enclaves, but ultimately reject relationships with “cold-blood Americans” to find a way back to an ethnic home. See Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, 134, 141.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

romance will match and feed her sense of self as a moral and creative person, and therefore as a Jew.<sup>429</sup>

The threat of romance outside the bounds of Jewishness (between two individuals passing as not Jewish) haunts *Fanny Herself* as the threat of an imperfect and untrue love, standing in for the imperfect and untrue social order of corporate, capitalist America in which sentiment and sympathy are discarded as extraneous to the bottom line of business success.<sup>430</sup> As Ellen Watts explains, Fanny must win the “battle for [her] soul.”<sup>431</sup> She must reject the “American Dream of being a financially successful textile buyer, who lies about her Jewish identity” in favor of following “the humanitarian thrust of her Jewish soul” and in so doing she must make romantic choices that align with her anticapitalist ideals and the value of ethnic solidarity.<sup>432</sup> Fanny’s turn to ethnic identity and with it to endogamy stands in for an advocacy of a social order in which creative and humanitarian work, emotion and sentimentality are also markers of success, in which a changing social and economic environment need not require the abandonment of principle.<sup>433</sup> In a scene in which Fanny exercises her artistic passion by drawing illustrations of immigrant women protesting labor conditions, Ferber aligns Fanny’s ethnic reorientation with

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<sup>429</sup> Just as Ferber’s narrative butts against a modernist erasure of ethnic identity, so too does it argue against the value of Free Love, allowing the sentimental marriage plot (the virtuous relationship rather than the adulterous one) to triumph alongside the triumph of ethnic identity. Ferber, who was a frequent participant in the Algonquin Round Table, was “explicitly scorned” by many members for writing “potboilers” that went against the sophisticated, urbane tone and ideologies of the group. This novel, with its conventional love plot, illustrates the ways that ethnic identification ran counter to the rebellious ideologies of Round Table culture. See Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 256 n6.

<sup>430</sup> Brubaker, “The Subject of Accounting,” 262.

<sup>431</sup> Eileen H. Watts, “Edna Ferber, Jewish American Writer: Who Knew?” In *Modern Jewish Women Writers in America*, ed. Evelyn Gross Avery (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 41–61, p. 48.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>433</sup> Brubaker, “The Subject of Accounting,” 264.

the ethnic authenticity of the heroines of Yeziarska's novels, suggesting an allegiance with left-leaning politics of class together with ethnic identification through the conventional endogamous marriage plot. In this context, adherence to a morality based in sympathy and charity and adherence to ethnic solidarity become one and the same, and marriage between Jews who are honest and open about their Jewishness symbolizes an honest and open American society writ large.

This message in support of endogamy comes in contrast to the liberal universalism espoused in several of Edna Ferber's other works, in which eugenicist logic is employed in favor of race mixing in America as a way of reinvigorating the American race while creating a more egalitarian American future. In *Dawn O'Hara* (1911), the title character, an Irish American woman, achieves happiness and fulfillment by marrying a German American man.<sup>434</sup> In *American Beauty* (1931) the multigenerational saga of the Oakes family's decline is reversed when a daughter marries a Polish immigrant and their son restores the family's vigor and prosperity.<sup>435</sup> In *Show Boat* (1926), when a romance between leading actors Steve Baker and Julie Dozier, who is passing as white, is uncovered and Julie is forced to leave the boat, her white protégée Magnolia performs her African American repertoire keeping alive the idea of race mixing as creative and essential to the performance of American culture.<sup>436</sup> In *Cimarron* (1929) Yancey and Sabra Cravat, themselves of "hybrid and multiple racial and regional

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<sup>434</sup> Edna Ferber, *Dawn O'Hara: The Girl who Laughed* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1911).

<sup>435</sup> Edna Ferber, *American Beauty* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1931). For an extended analysis of this work, see Susan Edmunds, *Grotesque Relations: Modernist Domestic Fiction and the U.S. Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97-122.

<sup>436</sup> Edna Ferber, *Show Boat* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, 1926).

identity,” combining French, Indian, Anglo, northern, and southern cultural and biological origins in their marriage, conflict over their feelings toward American Indians. When their son, Cimarron Cravat, marries Ruby Big Elk, the daughter of an Osage chief, his father “sees it as the perfect model for Oklahoma’s future” while his mother is shocked, believing the union grotesque because she thinks of Native Americans as less than human. Ultimately Sabra comes to a paternalistic acceptance of the Osage people as a result of the interracial marriage, and the future of Oklahoma appears to be one of racial and ethnic blending, even while the fissures of racial hatred and suspicion remain apparent.<sup>437</sup> In each of these cases, Ferber promotes a liberal universalist version of eugenics through which Anglo-America and an “unjustly reviled” marginal group mutually transform one another toward the betterment of America.<sup>438</sup> This is part and parcel of her preoccupation with cultural and ethnic blending as necessary to improving the moral, cultural, and biological nature of America.<sup>439</sup> The political ideologies in favor of racial mixture for the sake of the reinvigoration of American blood and the decline of American racism juxtaposed with her message in *Fanny Herself* of ethnic solidarity bolstered by endogamous romance suggests the contradictions in Ferber’s and others’ ideologies of racial and cultural belonging. By advocating both for American hybridization and Jewish endogamy, she sets forth a complex program of American acceptance of immigrants and Jewish resistance to Americanization, in the name of Jewish authenticity in service of the greater social and artistic good, and in service of a woman’s realization of her true, artistic self. Implicit in both the endogamy of *Fanny Herself* and the exogamy of these later novels is a social critique of America

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<sup>437</sup> Edna Ferber, *Cimarron* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1930); McGraw, *Edna Ferber’s America*, 65-70.

<sup>438</sup> See Edmunds, *Grotesque Relations*, 97-122.

<sup>439</sup> See McGraw, *Edna Ferber’s America*, 17.

that ran through Ferber's oeuvre. In each of these cases Ferber advocated sympathy for the oppressed and criticized a culture of wealth that exploited the powerless.<sup>440</sup> For Ferber, romance outside the bounds of Jewishness signals a turning away from what she understands as a Jewish ethnic predilection toward artistic expression and social justice, and so her title character Fanny reclaims her sense of self, her ethnic sensibility, and her moral worth in refusing such a relationship.

In Yeziarska's, Morton's and Ferber's narratives, a Jewish woman's independence, her ability to control her own life and her power to define herself as an individual outside the social pressures of marriage, capitalism, and the melting pot, require a resistance to the assimilatory trope of intermarriage. Feminism, ethnic identification, and class-oriented politics are interarticulated as each narrative relies on an arc of rejection and return to some form of Jewish identity as an affirmation of the Jewish woman's new appreciation for and reclamation of her own selfhood.

## Conclusion

In 1927, Anzia Yeziarska published a short story in *Century Magazine* describing the tragic suicide of a character, Ruth Raefsky, loosely based on her friend Rose Gallop Cohen, whose work was discussed previously in this chapter.<sup>441</sup> As she does with Rose Pastor Stokes in

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<sup>440</sup> For an exploration of Ferber's commitment to social critique and the politics of its reception, see Ann Shapira, "When Edna Ferber Was Accused of Communist Propaganda," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 27 (2008): 16-22.

<sup>441</sup> Anzia Yeziarska, "Wild Winter Love," *The Century Magazine*, February 1927, 485-491.

*Salome of the Tenements*, in her story “Wild Winter Love,” Yeziarska reimagines and remembers Cohen’s life as through the conventions of the interethnic love narrative, using the love plot to discuss immigrant Jewish American women’s longings for self expression and belonging. She draws upon the news of Cohen’s death under uncertain circumstances as an opportunity to reflect on the anxieties, feelings of failure, and unfulfilled needs of independent and artistically-minded Jewish women such as herself. As in *Salome*, Yeziarska relies on the trope of interethnic and inter-class romance to accentuate the divide between Jewish women and the opportunities for self-expression and success that they long for.

Ruth, the protagonist of “Wild Winter Love,” is consumed by a desire to narrate her life in writing, though she has trouble expressing herself in a foreign language to an audience of “cold hard-headed Americans.”<sup>442</sup> In order to successfully write her memoir, she must reject the gender expectations that her patriarchal Jewish tradition imposes on her – in particular she cannot serve her husband as a wife in the way he wants her to because she is distracted by her passion for writing. Her husband Dave complains, “I married myself to a *meshugeneh* with a book for her heart.”<sup>443</sup> After her book is published, Ruth finds herself utterly alone, unable to be a traditional Jewish wife and without creative and intellectual peers who understand her and inspire her to write further. She suffers from a writer’s block compounded by her anxieties about all she has sacrificed in order to attain creative self-expression. Ruth explains, “I’m uprooted

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 486. Although the circumstances of the affair in the story bear closer resemblance to Yeziarska’s affair with Dewey than Cohen’s affair with “L. V.,” biographers speculate that the story was written in response to and based on Cohen’s death because of its timing (two years after Cohen’s death) and because of the tragic and uncertain circumstances of her death. See Thomas Dublin, “Rose Gollup Cohen,” *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, 1 March 2009, Jewish Women’s Archive. (Viewed on September 8, 2016) <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/cohen-rose-gollup>>.

<sup>443</sup> Yeziarska, “Wild Winter Love,” 487.



from where I started, and I can't find roots anywhere. I've lost the religion of my fathers. I've lost the human ties that hold other women. I can only live in the world I create out of my brain."<sup>444</sup>

For Ruth, interethnic romance arrives not as a precipitator of independence, as it had with Ruth Gollup Cohen in her memoir, but instead as a consequence and an articulation of her isolation from her traditional past and desire to bridge the gap and express herself as an American writer. Stifled with feelings of inadequacy to write, and having loosed her ties to the kind of marriage and tradition her husband expects of her, the protagonist, who bears strong resemblances to many of Yeziarska's other heroines, finds love with "one of those cold reasonable Anglo-Saxons," a married man to whom she is drawn with "that irresistible force as terrible as birth and death that sometimes flares up between Jew and Gentile."<sup>445</sup> She describes their attraction to one another as inevitable, through a similar logic of race that Yeziarska employs in *Salome*, "it's because he and I are of a different race that we can understand one another so profoundly, touch the innermost reaches of the soul..."<sup>446</sup> Ruth's Anglo-American lover enables and inspires her writing by serving as an appreciative audience motivated by curiosity for the exoticism of Ruth's cultural difference. Through his attentions Ruth is able to write again, declaring, "my writing is but a rushing fountain of song to him."<sup>447</sup> Ruth relies on her lover's approval and desire to motivate her creative self-expression.

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 488.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 489.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 490.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

After the affair ends, Ruth commits suicide, having lost her reading audience, in the form of her lover. In this story, Ruth is utterly reliant, as a woman, a Jew, a non-native English speaker, an immigrant, and a member of the working class, on approval, appreciation, and desire from someone whose structural privileges far exceed hers. The end of this romance, and Ruth's tragic death, reveal the dangers of love and desire as vehicles for the poor Jewish woman's uplift: they leave her dependant and vulnerable even in the self-affirming act of narrating her own personal story. When others attribute Ruth's suicide to her having left her husband for a lover who leaves her, in turn, for his own wife and children, the narrator of "Wild Winter Love" claims that Ruth was driven to suicide because of the "lonely losing fight" of trying to tell "in her personal story, the story of her people."<sup>448</sup> Without an Anglo-American audience to adore her, she "leaped into the gulf she could not bridge."<sup>449</sup> The interethnic romance that began with so much promise, offering Ruth a chance to rebel against the patriarchal and stifling institution of her own marriage and to gain access to English-language communication and encouragement to write for an audience outside her ethnic enclave ends in irrevocable, tragic failure, as complications because of Ruth's vulnerability in the love plot foreground her inability to become a part of the non-Jewish world that her lover taught her to desire. As a woman and as a writer, her worth is in her ability to appeal to, entertain, and be loved by America and Americans, and when that love is withdrawn, she can find no other source of power or empowerment.

The interethnic romance that Yeziarska imagines for Cohen is a failed one, representing the impossibilities of American Jewish women's full adjustment to and expression within an

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<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*

American creative idiom. This story demonstrates the strengths and limits of interethnic romance as a site of women's liberation in Jewish women's life writing in the 1920s. In freeing women from the expectations and conventions of endogamous marriage, it nevertheless shackles women to a love plot in which they may be economically and emotionally dependent not only on the men they love but on the entire non-Jewish society that these non-Jewish men represent for them. The story demonstrates the way in which romance outside of Jewishness stands for escape and freedom for Jewish women writers, and also encapsulates the limits of that freedom in an American society in which as women, Jews, and members of the working class, they continue to experience inequality and subjugation, even in their assertions of independence and self-actualization.

In these narratives, marriages to non-Jews, or the possibility of these marriages, set the stage for a life of freedom, and they are politically potent relationships invested with the women's choice to work and love of working, their creative expression, and their desire to break away from religious and family traditions to achieve something that they would call "freedom." Relationships with non-Jews provide distance and escape from the Jewish community, invest these women with resources outside of the parochial scope of their Jewish past, and serve to affirm their confidence in forging new paths for themselves. Significant differences of course exist between the narratives – for instance, Rose Pastor Stokes's marriage across class divides provides her the luxury to learn while both Eleanor Hoffman and Leah Morton educate themselves toward their professions because of their background of means. Moreover, Eleanor's experiences of potential intermarriages are stepping stones toward rejection of marriage entirely in favor of career and independence while Leah Morton's intermarriage is the situation within which she finds professional and artistic self-fulfillment. Despite their differences, ultimately

each of these narratives accomplishes the same goal: describing the self-actualization of a female Jewish protagonist, her artistic realization and career independence. Interethnic, interfaith, and inter-class romances are tools these authors use to thrust their characters into independence from their backgrounds, to set them off as unique and eager to achieve something apart from what is expected of them by parents or society, to advance them into the liberation of American culture, even in instances, such as in *Fanny Herself* and *Salome of the Tenements*, when that culture is under critique.

As this chapter has demonstrated, Anzia Yeziarska, Rose Pastor Stokes, and Rose Gallop Cohen, alongside Marian Spitzer, Elizabeth Stern, and Edna Ferber, participate in and develop a discourse in which the conventions of interethnic romance plots are used in support of women's independence and artistic self-expression through contact with and desire for liberal universalism, American culture, and a break from the patriarchal past. Writing to, about, and alongside one another as well as within contemporary feminist discourses, these authors create a language for interethnic romance as a new kind of love plot, a love plot between the Jewish immigrant and the America she yearns for, finds a place within, or rejects. Although scholarship on these authors tends to treat them as individuals, in my reading of their output around the theme of interethnic romance, I have found a remarkable group cohesiveness and interrelatedness in their writings. These women were involved with similar discourses of feminism, were related to organizations such as Heterodoxy and the Algonquin Round Table where modern writers and thinkers congregated, and advocated, whether through socialism or social work, for improving the lot of vulnerable populations. As such, their writing on the topic of interethnic romance reveals them to be something of a literary movement, much like the group "Di Yunge," discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation, whose writing is more typically

viewed alongside one another as part of a shared literary endeavor. The interethnic romance narratives of the women writers in this chapter build upon each other, reinforcing interethnic romance as a trope of immigrant Jewish women's defiance of patriarchal tradition, and as a source of Jewish women's inspiration and creativity through dialogue with a desired other and through access to the cultural and financial resources that other can provide.

The notion of interethnic romance as a metaphor for Jews' relationship to America itself, put forth by the writers discussed in this chapter, is also central to the work of American Yiddish authors in this period. In Chapter Four, I examine writers who were associated with the the impressionist group "Di Yunge," [The Young Ones], a constellation of American Yiddish poets and prose fiction writers. These authors explicitly linked interethnic romance to American landscapes, especially to an imagined rural America, in their critique of Jewish American urban life. In so doing, they measure Jewish effeminacy against American masculinity, and depict Jewish women's bodies as vulnerable to the demands of American melting pot ideology. Like the women writers discussed in this chapter, they express the Americanization narrative as gendered. They search for a definition of Jewish manhood within the American rural/urban divide.

## Chapter Four

### Mapping Modern American Yiddish Narratives of Interethnic Romance

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that for American Jewish women writers in English participating in a feminist discourse, narratives of interethnic romance signaled a break from the patriarchy of the past aligned with progressive views about women's expanding roles in the (non-ethnic) public sphere. For Anzia Yeziarska, feminist melting pot narratives like Marian Spitzer's that relegate ethnicity to the status of an irrelevant, despised past to be overcome do not align with her convictions and loyalties to the representation of the dignity of her immigrant community. She refuses to relegate Yiddish-speaking immigrant culture to the past, but instead seeks a compromise in her narrative, through rejection of interethnic romance, that will allow her to imagine the modernization and beautification of that culture as part of a more egalitarian future in America.

For Yiddish writers in America, this conviction that immigrant culture and Yiddish language could and should express the most pressing concerns of the modern moment was paramount. Modern writers in Yiddish, regardless of their affiliation within constellations of shared poetic purpose, each felt an "acute sense of breaking with the past and an intense self-consciousness about the linguistic texture of a literature in a state of radical flux."<sup>450</sup> They wrote about and within Yiddish culture with a conviction that Yiddish culture was not a remnant of the past to be left behind through assimilation into an American "melting pot," but that Yiddish

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<sup>450</sup> Shachar Pinsker, "The Urban Literary Café and the Geography of Hebrew and Yiddish Modernism in Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Etaugh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 433-461, p. 437.

writing could be an expression of, and could interact with, the modern moment. Their writing on interethnic romance was a small part of a larger discussion that characterized much of modern Yiddish writing: the relation between the individual and the world, Jews and the surrounding urban cultures as writers sought to create a “selective hybrid” of specifically Jewish cultural material, avant garde European artistic movements, and their own artistic innovations.<sup>451</sup> The writers examined in this chapter, all of whom were in some way associated with the impressionist group “Di Yunge,” [The Young Ones] a constellation of American Yiddish poets and prose fiction writers, deploy interethnic romance to express the fragmentation and newness of their moment, their feelings of disorientation and displacement, and their gender critique of American Jewish life.

“Di Yunge” coalesced as a group around their desire to divorce Yiddish literature from “lachrymose sentimentalism” and to create art that, rather than offering solutions to social problems and directly addressing political platforms, would be focused on the aesthetic experience of art, on “personal feeling and the perception of beauty,” and would engage with new and experimental forms and the creation of impressions and feelings.<sup>452</sup> Most of these writers were manual laborers, engaged in work in the garment industry or painting houses, with little or no secular formal education, who sought to create in Yiddish expressions of the modernist impulses of art for art’s sake and to enrich the language and scope of Yiddish writing

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<sup>451</sup> Laetitia Tordjman, “L’avant-garde Yiddish, une littérature transnationale et transculturelle, ou comment penser l’invention de l’idée du collectif dans l’art et la littérature,” Unpublished Presentation, European Association for Jewish Studies, Paris: July 24, 2014.

<sup>452</sup> Solomon Liptzin, *The Flowering of Yiddish Literature* (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1963), 206; See also: Ruth Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

through literary translation.<sup>453</sup> Meeting in literary cafes on New York's East Broadway, the writers of "Di Yunge" were disparate in attitude, personality, and style, and their differences were supported by the group's goal of "setting out to encourage individual uniqueness" and to represent their own individual impressions of their world rather than to deal with collective experiences of Jewish immigration.<sup>454</sup> While "Di Yunge" was largely a movement of modernist poets, several prose writers in the group's orbit, some of whom wrote within the rubric of modernism and others who tended toward literary realism and naturalism, contributed to its project of individualism and especially the group's desire to create a new kind of Yiddish writing specific to the American circumstances of the group. The writers associated with "Di Yunge" drew upon American settings and themes in order to explore their own "artistic concerns or obsessions."<sup>455</sup> Despite their differences, as a group writing with American subject matter and aspiring to self-consciously modern forms while writing for a specifically Yiddish reading audience and in a language bearing Jewish cultural meanings, each of these writers reckoned with tensions between global and local aspirations, cosmopolitan and parochial concerns and loyalties, expressing their "experience of dispersal and precarious being and belonging on the American scene."<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Wisse, *A Little Love*, 52. The group of writers first published together in their 1907 journal *Yugend* (*Youth*) followed by two issues of *Literatur* in 1910 and several volumes of their irregularly published literary journal *Shriften* from 1912 until 1926. In 1914 a breakaway group led by Joseph Opatoshu formed its own journal *Di Naye Heym* to express their desire to engage with real world issues that drove their work alongside their continuing engagement with innovative aesthetics.

<sup>454</sup> Liptzin, *The Flowering of Yiddish Literature*, 218.

<sup>455</sup> Ruth Wisse, "Di Yunge: Immigrants or Exiles?" *Prooftexts* 1, no.1 (January 1981): 43-61, p.44.

<sup>456</sup> Cristina Stanciu, "Strangers in America: Yiddish Poetry at the Turn of the Twentieth Century and the Demands of Americanization," *College English* 76, no. 1 (Sept. 2013): 59-83, 63. In this article, Stanciu argues that by their very use of Yiddish, "an inaccessible language," Yiddish poets in America participated in an act of "dissimulation,"



Although it was not a central theme for writers associated with “Di Yunge,” appearing in only a handful of their many short stories, poems, and essays, the theme of interethnic romance, when it was employed, emphasized, clarified, and furthered concerns at the heart of modern American Yiddish writing: defining and participating in ideas of Jewishness and Americanness, cosmopolitanism, and universalism, the primitive and the civilized, and expressing an urgent feeling of fragmentation in the face of the new. Like Abraham Cahan, the writers discussed in this chapter explore the idea of displacement through their representations of interethnic romance, but their interests tend to be less focused on communal policy-making or searching for definitions and prescriptions for American Jewishness. Rather, in romances between Jews and non-Jews they explore the in-between spaces of racial and gender identity that evoke a feeling of disruption, bewilderment, and the uncanny. Harnessing Jewish communal unease at the notion of interfaith or interethnic romance, these writers coupled the realistic realm of representation of Jewish integration into American society and the consequent sociological concerns about cultural loss with a mode of surreality and eeriness that captured Jews’ unspoken fears, disgust and desires for non-Jewish bodies, culture and status. In their writing, Jewish and non-Jewish bodies become sites of negotiation of the tensions and contradictions of immigrant Jewish life in America. Their narratives suggest that Jewish immigrants’ displacement in America was not simply a matter of a gap between Old and New World cultures, but also had to do with Jewish gender identity vis à vis American masculinities and Jewish urban settlement in an America

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resisting the ideology of the American melting pot, even as they dealt with American themes. In “Di Yunge: Immigrants or Exiles?” Ruth Wisse demonstrates that this engagement of American themes was short lived and not as extensive members of Di Yunge represented it to be, and that tapered after World War I, as nostalgia and a sense of responsibility toward the traumatized Jewish world of Eastern Europe pulled these authors’ attentions and creative energy away from American subjects. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the group’s formation, attention to creating an American Yiddish oeuvre was one of the organizing principles of the group.

imagined as most authentic in its rural spaces.<sup>457</sup> For each of these writers the American landscape was intertwined with the theme of intermarriage, linking notions of home and belonging, dispersion and exile to romance, love, the body, and race.

The writers discussed in this chapter describe American geographies and border crossings together with the crossing of the boundary between Jew and non-Jew in sexual and romantic spheres. Yiddish writers employ the American landscape as a metonym for the American people, and through interethnic romance in American urban and rural spaces, authors articulate their vision for and critique of Jewish participation in American cultural identities. This chapter is divided into geographical spaces writers employ in their representations of interethnic romance, and explores the confluence of landscape on their articulation of attitudes toward interethnic romance and toward Jewish roles in American culture, and American roles in Yiddish writing. Through geographical imagery, these writers articulate the idea of transgression over conceptual boundaries: disrupting gender norms, racial mixing and purity, and the expression of internal psychological division. The first section of this chapter focuses on American agricultural landscapes, the second on a movement from rural to urban environments, the third on the city, and the fourth on back-and-forth border crossings.

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<sup>457</sup> As Michael Steiner notes in his study of American regionalism in the 1930s, American culture was preoccupied with a search for an authentic, primal, basic America that would underscore a stable community identity, and this was primarily located in rural regions away from the “artificial, complex, and materialistic civilization” of the cities, such as New York, in which Jewish immigrants tended to settle. Michael Steiner, “Regionalism in the Great Depression,” *Geographical Review* 73, no. 4 (Oct 1983): 430-446.

## **Beyond the City: Intermarriage and the Possibility of Jewish Belonging in non-Jewish Spaces**

Yiddish authors and poets writing about American settings outside New York City often employed tropes of interethnic romance together with geographical border crossings into non-immigrant or non-Jewish spaces, co-locating physical dislocation and disorientation and intimate interpersonal desire and unease as part of Jewish immigrants' response to an "authentic" version of America. Although Yiddish writers, themselves primarily located in urban centers and especially in New York City, wrote largely about the New York urban landscape, when they engaged with rural settings in America, American landscapes and American earth, these spaces outside the city often stood for an escape from Jews and Jewish culture, and for direct contact with the "authentic" American people.<sup>458</sup> Ruth Wisse explains that writers associated with "Di Yunge" began their artistic project with immigrant sensibilities, oriented toward America and seeking to find and articulate a place in the American land and its people through their literary efforts.<sup>459</sup> As these writers self-consciously employed American-based themes, especially of

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<sup>458</sup> In my analysis, I group spaces outside New York City as a single, separate region that Yiddish writers contrast with New York. Although American Jewish history and literature can easily be divided into more distinctive regions, and Schwartz and Raboy do articulate and thematize distinctive characteristics of the South and the West respectively, including race relations and the idea of the frontier, more salient in these authors' geographical imaginations is the sense that their protagonists are in American landscapes that are, for their being away from New York, more authentically American. Their treatment of the American space shares more with one another than it does with Yiddish writers' renderings of Northeast urban centers, which David Katzman has described as "the default region in general American and American Jewish history" in grouping their writing together, my approach aligns with what historian Deborah Dash Moore articulated in a roundtable on regionalism in American Jewish history – that the difference between urban and rural might be most important distinction in American Jewish regional thinking, rather than location on a map. David Katzman, "The Kansas Jewish History Project," paper before the Midwest Jewish Studies Association, Springfield, MO, September 2016; "Roundtable: Regionalism: The Significance of Place in American Jewish Life," *American Jewish History* 93 (June 2007): 113-127, 115.

<sup>459</sup> Wisse, "Di Yunge: Immigrants or Exiles?"

American race relations and American Indian dispossession, they articulated their participation in a distinctively American variant of Yiddish poetry and sense of belonging in America/as Americans, even while simultaneously sympathizing with and speaking of displacement and disenfranchisement within America.<sup>460</sup> Wisse argues that “American subject matter was widely exploited for its novelty, its social significance, and for its capacity to signal the new departure of “Di Yunge” from classical Yiddish influences.”<sup>461</sup> In this way, for writers associated with “Di Yunge” the trope of settling, crossing into, and encountering new American geographies stands in for an immigrant desire to become part of the American people, and fears about what that transformation might entail and what its limits were. By writing characters that became American by living and working on American soil, and by engaging in romances with non-Jewish Americans, Yiddish authors could make a claim that Yiddish writing itself could be American.<sup>462</sup>

Y. Y. Shvarts and Isaac Raboy are exceptional even among the “pioneering” literature of “Di Yunge” writers that sought to create a distinctly American tradition for Yiddish writing and

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<sup>460</sup> See Stanciu, “Strangers in America”; Rachel Rubinstein, *Members of the Tribe: Native America in the Jewish Imagination* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010).

<sup>461</sup> Wisse, “Di Yunge: Immigrants or Exiles?” 44.

<sup>462</sup> The same can be said for other immigrant communities whose writings thematize Jewish interactions with new landscapes and the cultural heroes and tropes of new lands. For instance, Alberto Gerchunoff’s *Los gauchos judíos* (1910) claimed Argentina as a Jewish homeland through imagining Jews as linked to a rural life on the Argentinean soil. In this text, Jewish women are “always eloquent and attractive, always desirable, always available, always understanding and understandable,” thus making the case for Jewish desirability as part of Argentinean society. Gerchunoff’s work celebrates multi-ethnic Argentinean cosmopolitanism and imagines a past for Jews in which they shared in Argentinean national mythology, and intermarriage figures as a demonstration of Argentinian tolerance and of the potential for Jews to fully integrate into Argentinean society. See Mónica Szymuk, “Home on the Pampas: Alberto Gerchunoff’s Jewish Gauchos,” in *Jews at Home: The Domestication of Identity*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Portland: Oxford University Press, 2010), 241-256, p. 253; Ilan Stavans, “Review: Alberto Gerchunoff and the Jewish Writer in Argentina,” *Prooftexts* 9, no. 2 (May 1989): 184-194.

to describe the “new dimensions” of modern American Jewish life.<sup>463</sup> These writers, both of whom settled for a time away from American cities and ethnic enclaves, wrote at a remove from their colleagues in New York, inspired by their agricultural, rural experiences. They imagined and expressed Jewish “spiritual regeneration” and the development of American Jewish history through the generations related to the land and landscapes of America itself, and wrote not only with romanticized ideas of a faraway American frontier, but with thick descriptions of the actual landscapes they had encountered, shaping narratives that were steeped in their understanding of American spaces.<sup>464</sup> Both of these writers employ interethnic romance as part of the drama of their characters’ romance with American land and landscapes.

Y. Y. Shvarts (1885-1971) was raised in Lithuania in a religiously traditional family, and discovered *Haskalah* literature while he was a student in a yeshiva. He began to publish poetry in *Dos Yidische Folk* in 1906, and his poetry reflected his love of nature and his efforts to create a “synthesis between deep Jewishness and secularity.” He immigrated to America in 1906 and worked as a teacher. Shvarts published Yiddish translations of John Milton, Walt Whitman, William Shakespeare, and Hayyim Nachman Bialik, demonstrating his knowledge and affinity toward English literary traditions and modern Jewish literature as part of the same enterprise. In 1918, he relocated to Kentucky where he worked as a peddler for twelve years, and during that

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<sup>463</sup> Shmuel Rozshanski, “Di ‘yunge’ in Amerike un zeyer pionirishkayt,” *Pionern in Amerike*. (Buenos Aires: YIVO, 1964), 5-16, p. 10.

<sup>464</sup> Avraham Novershtern, “The Bounty of the Earth: I. J. Schwartz’s Kentucky,” trans. Avi Steinhart, *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 34, no. 1 (2015): 6-23, p. 7.

time he wrote the epic poems and idylls of his collection *Kentoki* [Kentucky] (1924), which came to be known as a foundational work of American Yiddish literature.<sup>465</sup>

In Y. Y. Shvarts's "Nay Erd," ["New Earth"] the first and longest in his series of six long epic poems, *Kentoki* (1925), love of the American earth is central to the poem's conciliatory, if removed and impersonal, attitude toward its narrative of inevitable assimilation and gradual, intergenerational cultural loss. The poem chronicling a Jewish family's settlement in, and encounter with, post-Civil War Kentucky, begins with the words, "I love the earth on which I stand" and describes the earth as "young-womanly" and "fertile." American soil is the feminine mate for the male immigrant: "she kisses my steps with her grass...my child is a part of this earth."<sup>466</sup> Using this sexual imagery for the American landscape, Shvarts unites the immigrant with his new environment in erotic potential and reproductive promise.

As Avraham Novershtern has described, the poem "Nay Erd" begins with a representation of Kentucky as an empty frontier, a "horizontal plane of boundless nature, unlimited and uninhabited" in which the immigrant can plant himself.<sup>467</sup> But as the Jewish peddler settles in what is actually a southern urban environment, full of racial and class tensions, his integration in the land becomes interconnected with his merging with the social context in which he finds himself. The new earth of the American south is not only a rich and expansive frontier, but it is also, as the poem's translator Gertrude Dubrovsky notes, a land of "blossoming and decay" steeped in racial injustices that are a major theme of the poem. The Jewish family's

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<sup>465</sup> Shmuel Rozshanski, "Y. Y. Shvarts," *Pionern in Amerike* (Buenos Aires: YIVO, 1964), 18. See also: S. Niger, *Yidishe shrayber fun tsvantsikstn yorhundert* (New York: Alveltlekher yidisher kultur-kongres, 1973), 2:139.

<sup>466</sup> Y. Y. Shvarts, *Kentoki* (New York: Farlag N. Mayzel, 1925), 3.

<sup>467</sup> Novershtern, "The Bounty of the Earth," 11.

adaptation to racist attitudes, despite the protagonist's affinity toward his black neighbors, is evidence that his children have truly grown into and become part of southern soil.<sup>468</sup> His business success, the growth of his Jewish community, his oldest child's intermarriage to a non-Jewish woman and his granddaughter's marriage to a Reform rabbi, pull the family toward and away from Jewish identity and reshape that identity in an American context.

For Shvarts, the Jewish immigrant's becoming part of American culture and blending, through intermarriage, with American people, occurs through the natural progression of time and generations as the Jewish protagonist, Josh, settles on American soil. When Josh's son, Jacob, marries a non-Jewish woman, the marriage is a symptom of his gradual cultural loss, dating from his acculturation as a child to his non-Jewish, American, surroundings. It is framed as part of a natural process of growth and evolution, an interpersonal component of the larger narrative of transplantation onto American land. Jacob "grew up in the new air," seeing and hearing the realities of the "southern land" in which he lives, together with "the sweet, wine-tasting scent of the wonderful, vibrant blue grass," and the "thousands" of sounds and colors and scents he has experienced in his new home "have seeped into the boy's heart and soul."<sup>469</sup> As a young man, he falls in love with Vivian, who "came from that land" and who is described as though part of the landscape itself, as a "young sapling" with "eyes as bright as corn blossoms." Vivian is not only a representative of the land; she is a "synthesis" of the land and its people: she blends "the skill and will of the pioneers and the optimism and gentleness and passion of the generations

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<sup>468</sup> Gertrude Dubrovsky, "I. J. Schwartz's 'Kentucky': The Americanization of 'The Grandchildren of Wander,'" *Judaism* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 216-228, p. 225.

<sup>469</sup> Shvarts, *Kentoki*, 111-113.

rooted in peace.”<sup>470</sup> By falling in love with and uniting with her, Jacob seals his fate as part of the land and its people.

Vivian gradually comes into the life of the Jewish family, first befriending Joshua’s daughters, then capturing Jacob’s heart as a friend and then a lover. This slow courtship mirrors Josh’s family’s slow and steady growth into and adoption of their new homeland. The closer Vivian and Jacob become the more that the “estrangement between the races” diminishes.<sup>471</sup> Instead, their relationship grows up in and alongside the earth: their “young laughing hearts soak up the fresh stream” of the passions of new love “like the fresh spring earth soaking in the first aromas of spring rain.”<sup>472</sup> Here, Shvarts represents the love between Jacob and Vivian as a natural outgrowth of Jacob’s development as an American and on American soil. The intermarriage narrative follows from, contributes to, and affirms his sensibilities about Jews’ intergenerational cycles of growth, evolution and change as they adapt to new American spaces among and of the American people.

But for other Yiddish authors, the American landscape is threatening in its paradoxical contradictions: it is at once a place of freedom and constriction, insofar as the vastness of the landscape and the American mythos of frontier suggests endless opportunity, but the isolation of Jews in a non-Jewish environment threatens Jews’ personal safety as well as the possibility that they may remain Jews in a foreign atmosphere. By linking interethnic romance to the American soil these authors challenge the notion that Jews are at home in America. Several stories by Joseph Opatoshu, whose writing on interethnic romance is discussed at greater length later in this

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<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.



chapter, take up this sense of the American rural landscape as foreign and threatening specifically in its interpersonal dimensions. In a short story titled “A Hendl,” [“A Little Hen”] (1929) when a Jewish man has sexual relations with a non-Jewish woman on his farm in an unnamed American rural area, he wakes up in the morning to find the woman butchering a hen for him in an unkosher fashion.<sup>473</sup> He is appalled at the bloody beheading he witnesses, a kind of castration scene, that demonstrates for him that while non-Jewish land and non-Jewish bodies offer pleasures, these pleasures are, on a visceral level, foreign, *treyf*, and even violent to his identity as a Jew and as a man. In another short story, “A Keps Vayb” [“A Concubine”] (1922), Opatoshu retells the Biblical narrative of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar on American soil as the story of a Jewish man, Abraham, who is not content with his Jewish wife and fantasizes about pursuing a non-Jewish mistress.<sup>474</sup> In this story Abraham as a man, full of lust and need, comes into conflict with Abraham as a Jew, bound by the social rules of his religion and people. His socially bound self sets limits on his natural, physical desires, and this is accentuated by the boundary-crossing nature of his lust. While the American landscape initially appears to be a natural breeding ground for Jewish continuity, as it is home to a patriarchal Jewish figure, Abraham, the protagonist’s lust for a non-Jewish woman belies the danger of Jews living in non-Jewish spaces. Like his Biblical antecedent, Abraham’s role as progenitor is contingent on the success of his marriage over foreign temptations, and Abraham’s desire to take a mistress threatens the possibility of a new Jewish people in the American territory. As Abraham has

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<sup>473</sup> Joseph Opatoshu, “A Hendl,” *Gezamlte Verk* 10 (Vilna: Vilner Farlag fun B. Kletskin, 1929), 53-58.

<sup>474</sup> Joseph Opatoshu, “A Keps-Vayb,” *Gezamlte Verk* 8 (Vilna: Vilner Farlag fun B. Kletskin, 1929), 102-105.

settled in the American wilderness, his romantic choices are fraught with the newness and instability of the Biblical moment.

In his frontier novel *Herr Goldenbarg*, Isaac Raboy invests American landscape and earth, particularly agricultural labor, with the potentiality for intermarriage, as symbols of Jewish immigrant belonging in America.<sup>475</sup> Isaac Raboy (1882-1944) was born in the Ukraine and raised in northern Bessarabia in a multiethnic environment. He immigrated to New York in 1904 and began to work in a factory. There, he met and befriended David Ignatoff and Mani Leyb, leaders in the “Di Yunge” literary circle and began publishing his image-laden prose in their journal *Shriftn*. In 1908, he left New York to study for two years in an agricultural school in New Jersey, specializing in raising horses, and took on a post in a horse farm in North Dakota, where he spent several years. In 1913, he returned to New York, married, became a businessman, and when his money dissipated returned to factory work. Following his return to New York, he wrote *Herr Goldenbarg* (1916) inspired by his North Dakota experiences. The novel was celebrated by critics as the first Jewish pioneer novel in America. His later works, *Der Pas Fun Yam* (1917), *Dos Vilde Land* (1919), *Besaraber Iden* (1922) and *Gekumen a Yid in Amerike* (1927), as well as his short stories, each thematized Jewish longing for and love of the earth and of agricultural labor. He brought to Yiddish literature a focus on the theme of Jewish longing for the land and instinctual love of nature I general and in particular “the joy and quiet of the prairie.” In his novels, thinly drawn silhouettes of characters and uncomplicated plots

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<sup>475</sup> Isaac Raboy, *Herr Goldenbarg* (Warsaw: Farlag Peretz Bibliotek, 1923). The novel was first published in 1916 by the *Literarisher farlag* in New York.

emerge out of and accompany lyrical, poetic descriptions of nature, supporting the central theme of his work – a Jew’s love of and desire for land and his place upon it.<sup>476</sup>

As literary critic Boris Rivkin explains, Raboy’s writing is deeply invested in describing the landscape, and the plot appears to emerge as though organically out of the landscape: “a Raboy-story... was like a plant that sprouted up... from the earth.”<sup>477</sup> The human plot of romance and marriage is intertwined with a subplot of the beauty and grandeur of the American frontier. His work, which, as Josh Lambert describes, is characterized by erotic and symbolically suggestive images combined with realism, “transformed the frontier into a metaphor for how far immigrants might go in America.”<sup>478</sup> While in much of his writing, Raboy tended to be optimistic about the redemptive nature of America as a geographical space and about the people who occupied it, arguing for cooperation across class lines and for the establishment of immigrants’ sense of home through working the American land, in *Herr Goldenbarg*, his first novel, Raboy employs intermarriage to demonstrate the dangers of non-Jewish land and people for a vulnerable Jewish community.<sup>479</sup>

*Herr Goldenbarg* was first published in *Shriftn* in 1914 and “was received with joy by critics and readers as the first broad description of Jewish life in the lap of American nature.”<sup>480</sup> The novel asserts the possibilities and promises of Jewish self-determination through agriculture and through marriage.

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<sup>476</sup> Zalman Reyzin, “Isaac Raboy,” *Leksikon fun der yiddisher literature, prese un filologye*, 4 (Vilna: Boris Kletskin, 1929), 2.

<sup>477</sup> Boris Rivkin, *Grunt-tendentsn fun der yiddisher literature in Amerike*. (New York: Ikuf, 1948), 185.

<sup>478</sup> Josh Lambert, “Shipped to Dakota,” *Forward*, Sept 30, 2011, pp. 11, 14.

<sup>479</sup> See Wisse, *A Little Love*, 106.

<sup>480</sup> Reyzin, “Isaac Raboy.”

In the novel, Herr Goldenberg, a Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe has settled in the “far west” to build a life for himself and his wife. Their love of their Dakota homestead, their hard work in farming the land, and their enormous success serve only as the background to the novel’s plot, and yet the bulk of the novel is taken up with descriptions of their memories and experiences in building their agricultural lives. Herr Goldenberg felt “like the naked prairie was his home” as soon as he settled there.<sup>481</sup> He marvels at the opportunity to sign government forms for tracts of land and to own and plant and settle on his own soil, and this official sanction, together with his love and labor for the land itself, make his life in North Dakota feel permanent and secure in a land that is “safe, undisputed, and able to sustain its owners.”<sup>482</sup> But Herr Goldenberg’s childless marriage attests to the uncertainty of Herr Goldenberg’s future in the territory, forcing him into the position of a temporary dweller on a property he believes belongs to him in perpetuity, and his neighbors’ jealousy and discomfort at his success confirms his outsider status. Although Herr Goldenberg asserts and celebrates his belonging on the prairie, as Hana Wirth Neshet notes, his very name belies the fact that he is a transplant who is out of place on the American frontier he settles: Goldenberg, meaning ‘gold mountain,’ is “a topography entirely out of place on a prairie. With ‘gold’ as a vestige of Jewish typology in Christian culture, and with the mountain as an alien apparition on a flat landscape,” the name offers an image of the Jew as someone who literally sticks out in the American frontier.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Raboy, *Herr Goldenberg*, 39.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>483</sup> Hana Wirth-Neshet, “Encountering English,” in *The Cambridge History of Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Neshet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 41-61.

The novel's plot focuses on Herr Goldenbarg's niece, Deborah, and her courtship by two men who represent two possible futures for her, and for the Jewish people writ large: Isaac, Goldenbarg's Jewish stable hand, who wants to marry her and take her to Palestine to settle the Jewish territory, and Herr Goldenbarg's neighbor, Johan Elkins, who wants to settle with Deborah on Goldenbarg's land and make her part of his coercive, threatening non-Jewish family. Although it is framed as a story of desire and love, Deborah's marital choice is clearly a political one: the question before Deborah is whether her love and loyalty lie with American soil or with Jewish feeling. This question pivots around Deborah's simultaneous unabashed love, sexual expression, and sense of natural belonging in the prairie and her fear and vulnerability in the same space, which calls into question the possibility of her safety and belonging in America.

In these courtship scenarios, the prairie figures as a place not only of freedom, bounty and beauty, but also of uncertainty and fear, in which Deborah becomes lost and helpless. The novel's plot turns on a pivotal scene that takes place in the open prairie.

The scene begins with a sweeping pastoral romance, in which Deborah and the stable-hand Isaac set off into the fields together on horseback to corral wild horses. In the vast expanse of the field Deborah surrenders to flirtation and expression of desire: "she held on with her round, dark little hand to his massive, strong arms. His tall, strong chest was aflame, and she breathed these flames into herself. He took hold of her fingers, brought them to his mouth, and kissed them."<sup>484</sup> Deborah's horse, Katie, also lunges toward the wild horses, acting on the

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<sup>484</sup> Raboy, *Herr Goldenbarg*, 12.

instincts that demonstrate the sexually charged animal potential of the prairie as a space that frees Deborah from civilized constraints.<sup>485</sup>

But this idyllic moment of expansive desire and possibility through love in the open field is followed by a moment of devastating powerlessness. When she playfully sets off on her own to corral the horses, Deborah is thrown from her horse, tumbling into the valley and spraining her ankle. While Katie feels entirely at home and reverts to the instincts she “remembers from the milk that she suckled from her mother on these very fields,” Deborah lies alone and helpless in the “deep, wet grass.”<sup>486</sup> She does not share Katie’s natural belonging in the prairie, and alone she falls victim to its strangeness. Deborah’s fate is uncertain, as she later tells the story, “who knows what would have happened...” if she had not been saved.<sup>487</sup> But Deborah is fortunate that her non-Jewish neighbor, Johan Elkins, finds and saves her, carrying her in his lap as he rides to her uncle’s home. Raboy returns over and over to this image of Deborah prone on Johan’s lap, the damsel in distress rescued by a savior figure as a pivotal moment that could decide Deborah’s fate. Here, the prairie is dangerous for Deborah – it does not free her (as it appeared to do at the scene’s beginning) but traps and demobilizes her, so that she is disempowered to protect herself and must be saved.

For Johan, who had long admired Deborah, the incident on horseback is an opportunity to assert his claim on Deborah. Johan speaks to a journalist friend who publishes an announcement in the local newspaper: “Johan Elkins, riding in the prairie, found a woman lying unconscious. He approached her and recognized that she was from the Goldenbarg’s household... He brought

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<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

her to the Goldenbarg's house and out of appreciation the woman will marry him... We don't know where Johan will settle, but it will surely be on Goldenbarg's land..."<sup>488</sup> In response to Johan's assertion of ownership as he claims Deborah as an object of sexual desire and economic exchange, Deborah "began to develop a feeling of disgust when she remembered how Johan carried her in his lap."<sup>489</sup> This feeling of dread and horror only increases when she reads the newspaper announcement: "She was again overcome with the same ugly feeling that she felt the whole time she was lying on Johan's lap, when he brought her home from the prairie."<sup>490</sup> Johan's assertion of ownership of Deborah's body as payment for his chivalry undercuts Goldenbarg's narrative of Jewish independence on and ownership of American soil. In her expressions of fear and loathing, Deborah demonstrates her knowledge of the tenacious position she is in as a woman and as a Jew, categories historically excluded from self-determination. "A hero – Deborah thought to herself, growing pale from her internal emotional turmoil. If only she had not been such a fool, she should have jumped out of his lap and made her way home by herself!..."<sup>491</sup> Deborah insists that, despite her uncle's belief in the security of their position and their right to determine their own fate, she should have been able to predict and prevent an outcome in which Johan co-opted her body to fulfill his sexual and material desires. The prairie, for Deborah, is not only a site of possibility, but the place in which her freedom is most threatened, her independence curtailed.

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<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

In Raboy's narrative, the open field offers the temptations and promise of Jewish freedom and agency (for men like Goldenbarg), but at the price of Jewish women's bodies, and of the continuity for the Jewish people that women represent. The prairie is a false homeland, and Johan's coercive assertion of ownership over Deborah emphasizes and defines the limits of Jewish freedom in non-Jewish territory. When Isaac convinces Deborah to emigrate with him to Palestine, Raboy asserts that true Jewish freedom does not come from the striking beauty and expanse of the American frontier, but from Jewish self-ownership, from Jewish men and women laying claim to one another on Jewish soil, free from non-Jewish hatred or acts of control. For all that intermarriage represents the most practical choice for Deborah and her uncle, which would marry the fertility of the American land with the fertility of Deborah's body, keeping Deborah and her future children on her uncle's homestead, Deborah rejects the possibility as repulsive. For Raboy, a future of Jewish self-determination requires Jewish ownership over Jewish women's bodies as well as Jewish land. As in Shvarts's "New Earth," Jewish settlement, growth, and literal and metaphorical rootedness in non-Jewish spaces of the American landscape is co-articulated with Jewish marriage to non-Jews, but for Raboy such integration is a threat to Jewish independence, rather than an example of the organic growth of Jewish life in America that Shvarts describes.

### **From the Country to the City: Interethnic Romance Transplanted**

A contrast between country and city, and especially between New York City and other, less Jewishly populated, areas of America, is central to modern American Yiddish writers' vision of Jewishness and Yiddish in America, and is articulated together with, and through, plots of



interethnic romance. As I demonstrated through Raboy's *Herr Goldenberg* and I. J. Shvarts's "Nay Erd," for modernist Yiddish writers, the rural American landscape outside of New York City serves as the backdrop for interethnic romantic encounter, both symbols of Jewish rootedness in American culture and the changes and erasures that will entail. In stories in which characters and couples are transplanted from country to city - between ethnic isolation and ethnic enclave, between open spaces and built environment - Joseph Opatoshu introduces an element of uncertainty that strikes at the heart of the modern experience, and of modern writing. For Joseph Opatoshu, who was writing from within the city, the country is an imagined space that serves as a contrast to the urban spaces he critiques.<sup>492</sup>

Joseph Opatoshu (1887-1954) was raised in Poland in a family of lumber merchants, by a father who was devoted to learning, especially texts of Jewish mysticism. He immigrated to the US in 1907 and worked in factories, as a Hebrew School teacher, and as a civil engineer, while also dedicating himself to writing. He began as a member of "Di Yunge" but, even in the context of this American literary group, his early writings, including his famous novella *A roman fun a ferd-ganev* (1912), were set central Poland and made use of some autobiographical elements. Opatoshu is remembered for his exploration of the underbelly of Jewish society and for his "new type of Jewish character: young, active, willful, and energetic, ready to

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<sup>492</sup> This urban/rural dichotomy in Opatoshu's American literature certainly has analogs in Yiddish literature outside American spaces. For modern Yiddish writers the world over, as Leah V. Garrett asserts, "the city was a symbol of modernization, progress, and cosmopolitanism in contrast to the parochial Jewish shtetl." But American Yiddish writing positions city and country differently from European Yiddish models. In a reversal of the trope of the small town as a traditionally Jewish space and the city as a modern multicultural entity of interethnic encounter, Yiddish writers in America view the city as a space for urban Jewish immigrants and the American country as a non-Jewish space in which Jews may have a romance with Americans, and with America itself. Leah V. Garrett, *Journeys Beyond the Pale*, 87; For an analysis of the use of the urban scene in modern Jewish literature to create tension between freedom and the pull of traditional culture see also Murray Baumgarten, *City Scriptures: Modern Jewish Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

break...norms.” In his work set in America, he continued to explore the “low life,” and his novel style and content drew attention across the Yiddish literary world. In 1914 he broke from “Di Yunge” to establish a faction dedicated to naturalism rather than symbolism, and his prolific body of work continued to thematize the base urges of human nature. His writing is deeply invested in how the past and present inform one another, and how dark truths are hidden underneath the trappings of civilization.<sup>493</sup>

Joseph Opatoshu, known for his gritty naturalism, contributed short stories regularly to *Der Tog* from the paper’s founding in 1914 until his death in 1954.<sup>494</sup> His stories tended to be concise representations of latent interpersonal conflict within American Jewish and multicultural cosmopolitan life. Opatoshu’s short stories dealing with interethnic romance were a small fraction of the enormous output of stories he produced for *Der Tog*, but they serve to highlight key concerns and features of Opatoshu’s oeuvre – in particular his interest in the fissures he posits underlie and threaten to overwhelm American Jewish life, including rifts between women and men, Jews and non-Jews. These stories, alongside much of Opatoshu’s work, tended to follow a fixed pattern detailing “a situation laden with tension and conflict, which sometimes erupts into an open confrontation and sometimes stays dormant, but never gets resolved in the end.”<sup>495</sup> For Opatoshu, stories of Jewish life in America almost always ended in breakdown,

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<sup>493</sup> Zalman Rayzin, “Yoysef Opatoshu,” *Leksikon fun der yiddisher literature, prese un filologye*, 1 (Vilna: Boris Kletskin, 1929), 145-150. See also: Gennady Estraiikh, Sabine Koller, and Mikhail Krutikov, “Joseph Opatoshu’s Search for *Yidishkayt*,” in *Joseph Opatoshu: A Yiddish Writer between Europe and America*, ed. Sabine Koller, Gennady Estraiikh, and Mikhail Krutikov (London: Legenda, 2013), 1-17.

<sup>494</sup> Estraiikh, Koller, and Krutikov, “Joseph Opatoshu’s Search for *Yidishkayt*,” 6.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*

“portraying disintegration rather than growth,” part of his pessimistic assessment of Jewish life in America and his pessimistic sentiment about human nature in general.<sup>496</sup>

In several of Opatoshu’s stories of interethnic romance, a move from a rural setting to New York City reshapes what is possible for Jewish identity and Jewish sexuality vis a vis non-Jewish lovers. In rural landscapes in Opatoshu’s stories interethnic romance is a possible, even an inevitable outcome of Jews’ interaction with the American landscape, while in the city these relationships become corrupted by social expectations and the urban environment. For Opatoshu, the city corrupts and obscures humans’ true nature, confining it within social rules, capitalist exchange, and the metropolitan built environment. The possibilities represented by intermarriage are repressed in the city, contributing to a narrative of decline, devolution, and decay. In his stories, the contrast between country and city allows for a dark psychological portrait of the New York Jew’s urban life.

In his short story “In a Levone Nakht” [“In a Moonlit Night”] (1927), Opatoshu turns to dreams and fantasy of rural spaces as the unconscious doubling of the individual’s lived experience in urban spaces that makes evident the embattled relationship between an individual’s conscious and unconscious desires.<sup>497</sup> A contrast between sexual fantasy which takes place in the non-Jewish space of the American rural soil with a non-Jewish partner, and a sexual reality,

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<sup>496</sup> Avraham Novershtern, “The Flesh and the Spirit: Opatoshu’s Novel *Di Tentserin* (The Dancer),” in *Joseph Opatoshu: A Yiddish Writer between Europe and America*, ed. Sabine Koller, Gennady Estraiikh, and Mikhail Krutikov (London: Legenda, 2013), 136-159, p. 143.

<sup>497</sup> Joseph Opatoshu. “In a Levone-Nakht,” *Gezamlte Verk* 10 (Vilna: Vilner Farlag fun B. Kletskin, 1929), 48-51. The original appeared in *Der Tog* on February 6, 1927, according to *Opatoshu-biblyografye* (Opatoshu bibliography) 1, (New York: (Mlaver-Bendiner) Y. Opatoshu Branch 639 of the Workmen’s Circle, 1937).

which takes place in the civilized urban environment, allows Opatoshu to explore the idea of repression and to offer a gender critique of modern urban Jewish life.

In the story, a Jewish woman, Stella, is content by day in her conventional bourgeois marriage to the Jewish Dr. Gold, whose name signifies his role as a representative of Jewish American pursuit of upward socioeconomic mobility. She awakens in the middle of the night with a nightmarishly uncontrollable sexual desire for the unnamed non-Jewish field hand who worked on her father's farm when she was an unmarried woman. Stella experiences this desire as forbidden and unwanted, something hidden that should never have emerged into her conscious mind, and that she pushes away in pursuit of her waking desires. Through the story, Opatoshu makes use of this uncanny relationship between conscious and unconscious desire, dream and waking, to demonstrate the ways in which underneath the seeming ideal of modern urban American Jewish life lie desire, rebellion, and a yearning for something more raw, authentic, and natural. For Stella, the non-Jewish male body represents her most basic animal desires, her connection to nature, the parts of herself that have been tamed and trapped by her conventional married life. A Jewish woman's repressed sexual desire also signals its opposite, a Jewish man's lack of masculine sexual vigor, and through representation of Stella's unfulfilled and unbidden yearnings Opatoshu issues a critique against the Jewish man for not responding to these needs.

Opatoshu describes the desire that Stella experienced as a bride for the material trappings of bourgeois life with the same physical sensations that he uses to represent her sexual fantasy: she "was feverish with love" and "shivered" in anticipation of her city life and her husband's

furnished doctor's office.<sup>498</sup> These sexually-inflected physical sensations reveal the unconscious truth that Stella is a sexual being who has needs beyond the material items that she believes herself to lust after. Yet her stated, conscious anticipation of the marriage had little to do with sexual desire – in actuality she “barely understood” the “secret of what goes on between a husband and a wife” until she learned about it from a recently married neighbor.<sup>499</sup> By the story's end it is clear that hers is not a marriage of passion. When Stella kisses Dr. Gold at night in bed he rejects her advances with the words “let me sleep, Stella! Why are you kissing me like this all of a sudden? You know that I came home late, that I was seeing a patient tonight.”<sup>500</sup> Stella wants to be loyal to her doctor husband, but she chose her marital partner based on the lifestyle he could offer her, and as a consequence her marriage does not quench the sexual passion that resides in Stella's body unbeknownst to her conscious mind.

It is for this reason that Stella experiences a sexual fantasy outside her conventional marriage as she lies in bed beside her sleeping husband. The object of Stella's sexual fantasy is a non-Jewish farm hand who worked on her father's farm, and whom she “barely knew,” with whom she interacted on the day her newly married neighbor explained sexual intercourse to her.<sup>501</sup> She comes to associate him with the trauma and excitement of this revelation and with the idea of sex itself, so that the image of this man returns to her with every experience of sexual

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<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

arousal, and she repeatedly relives her original sexual fantasy.<sup>502</sup> Through his representation of an uncanny, unbidden sexual fantasy in a rural landscape, Opatoshu foregrounds his critique of urban life as unnatural, out of touch with the animal nature of human beings.

Stella experiences herself as having no control over her desire. She is devoted to her husband and her four-year-old son, she has “dedicated her whole life to them,” yet the thought of the young farm hand who worked on her father’s farm comes to her and “however much she drives him away, chases away every sinful thought of him, it does not help.”<sup>503</sup> Stella experiences her desire as though it were a supernatural force controlling her against her will: “something latent and hidden suddenly opened up within her...[and] ensnared her young body.”<sup>504</sup> In this way, Stella experiences a central principle of Freud’s formulation of the uncanny: she “becomes uneasily aware that [s]he is literally of two minds simultaneously... inhabited by the constitutively foreign psychic agency of the unconscious.”<sup>505</sup> This uncanny sensation is in accordance with what Fredrik Svenaeus describes as Freud’s model for explaining various phenomena in which the individual becomes aware that she is not “at home in h[er]self” – when “something that *belongs* to the person,” in this case her powerful sexual urges, “but

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<sup>502</sup> This corresponds with Freud’s notion that trauma and the memory of trauma recur in individuals producing “distressing affects – such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain.” Stella relives the original trauma of sexual self-discovery through her sexual fantasy. See Joseph Breuer, Sigmund Freud, 1893, “On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication from Studies on Hysteria,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey. 2, (London: Hogarth Press, 1952), 5.

<sup>503</sup> Opatoshu, “In a Levone-Nakht,” 49.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Adam Bresnick, “Prosopoetic Compulsion: Reading the Uncanny in Freud and Hoffman,” *Germanic Review* 71, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 114-132, 117. See also Natasha L. Reby, “Disintegrated Subjects: Gothic Fiction, Mental Science and the *fin-de-siecle* Discourse of Dissociation,” PhD. Diss., University of British Columbia, March 2013.

which is still not *known* by...her, presents itself in dreams” and she becomes “controlled by impulses that [she] cannot muster, but which are still parts of [her]self and formed by [her] own history.”<sup>506</sup> Stella’s own mind has betrayed her, and she embraces her husband to assure him that “it wasn’t her who was thinking of the young man, but another Stella, a demon.”<sup>507</sup> Her uncannily divided self allows her to at once participate in and critique the bourgeois Jewish life that she has chosen for herself by consciously affirming her marriage while her unconscious is sexually unfaithful.

In Stella’s sexual fantasy, she goes out into the field and encounters the field hand, who is walking toward her home from the field in the middle of the night.<sup>508</sup> As a figure emerging from the field, it appears that he has no place in the civilized, domestic space of the farm house, but is, like an animal, of the field itself.<sup>509</sup> Their sexual encounter follows:

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<sup>506</sup> Fredrik Svaneus, “Freud’s Philosophy of the Uncanny,” *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 22, no. 2 (1999):239-254, p. 244.

<sup>507</sup> Stella cites the idea of possession to explain and allow her illicit sexual desire. As Agnieszka Legutko explains, possession “has been viewed as an instance of rebellion against oppression by socially constructed norms, and an expression of sexual frustration, with the emphasis placed on women’s agency. Agnieszka Legutko, “Possessed by the Other: Dybbuk Possession and Modern Jewish Identity in Twentieth-Century Jewish Literature and Beyond.” Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 2012, 47.

<sup>508</sup> It is unclear whether the fantasy is of her own imagination, or whether she is recalling an event that actually occurred the night that she first learned about sex, before she was married.

<sup>509</sup> In this case, Opatoshu constructs the non-Jew as the primitive other to the civilized Jew, which may seem a reversal of Orientalist stereotypes of Jews as representatives of a backward, primitive East. It would be tempting to suggest that Opatoshu’s use of the non-Jew haunting the Jewish woman’s consciousness and drawing her away from her respectable bourgeois life is an example of what Teresa Goddu has termed “haunting back,” in which an author inverts the typical Gothic representation of the Other as frightening and in need of repression by making the marginalized Other the character with subjectivity and humanity and recasting the dominant Other as a frightening, supernatural presence who haunts and torments the story’s subject. This would, to my mind, be a misreading, as Opatoshu’s goal here is internal criticism of Jewish American society through use of tropes common to American literature. See Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 131-160.

“The young man suddenly stood still, turned his head, sniffed with his nose like he was on the hunt and smelled a mare...[The two] stood silently facing each other, looked in each other’s eyes and Stella’s body rose, stiffened. She was afraid, wanted to scream and all the while she thought about his graceful gait, in his smooth shoulders and his lips that were always poised to whistle... The young man took her in his arms and went with her into the field. As they went, Stella’s fear dissipated... they carried on in the night, became one with the cool, deeply plowed earth.”<sup>510</sup>

Through the content of this sexual fantasy, Opatoshu makes use of the non-Jewish male body as a symbol for animal passion and its connection to nature, and for the kind of virile masculinity that Stella responds to and desires as a passive receptacle of her own unbidden sexual desire. Opatoshu presents this primitivism in a positive light, as a sign of manliness. The image of the non-Jewish farm worker in “In a Levone-Nakht” as a figure of gallant, rugged, heroic masculinity who marks command over nature and women’s bodies by acts of physical labor resembles the image of the American cowboy that dominated American mythologies of the West. Opatoshu’s contrast between the Jewish man who pursues a professional career and his sexually virile rugged non-Jewish counterpart associates the Jew with the urban, effete male who was a stock figure of American cultural criticism. Opatoshu therefore aligns his critique of Jewish masculinity with a general American critique of urban male effeminacy, over and against the authentic manhood of American rural spaces.<sup>511</sup> While Dr. Gold is only described in relation to his work and its socioeconomic benefits, the farm hand is only presented as a body with heightened senses and attractions – he is the person of the body in contrast to Dr. Gold’s person

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<sup>510</sup> Opatoshu, “In a Levone-Nakht,” 51-52.

<sup>511</sup> John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1920*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 21.



of the book, and it is his status as a non-Jew that allows him to become, for Stella, Dr. Gold's opposite and the fulfillment of her forbidden desires.

As they engage in sexual intercourse, the agricultural metaphor of the man subduing the land through plowing turns Stella - who by day belongs in the civilized space of the house and plans soon to relocate to a modern, urban setting - into the land itself, suggesting that in her truest form Stella is fertile and fallow, waiting to be seeded by a virile mate in order to achieve fulfillment of her most primal needs. The notion that the sexual encounter between Stella and the field hand is natural, as they "became one with the ...earth" suggests that this more primitive state of being is closer to the truth of human nature. Through her sexual encounter with the non-Jewish field hand Stella is undoing the trappings of culture (Jewish, middle class, etc) and reducing herself to her base function as a woman in need of penetration by a man – the kind of penetration that her own husband refuses to provide because he is too tired from his work. Stella in her sexual desire is reduced to an object of male domination, and her availability and lust for submission serve as a critique of her Jewish husband, who fails to exert his power and duty as a man to sexually possess his wife.<sup>512</sup>

Through "In a Levone-Nakht," Opatoshu gives voice to women's lust as an unspeakable and forbidden half of her divided self. The figure of the non-Jewish body haunts Stella, plaguing

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<sup>512</sup> As Ann Pellegrini, among others, has noted, Jewish men in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century were at the site of an interarticulation of race and sex whereby the Jewish male in contemporary scientific discourse coming from Germany and Austria and certainly influencing intellectual, cosmopolitan Yiddish writers such as Opatoshu, were assimilated into the category of women so that Jewish men became a category of gender as well as of race. Through this story, Opatoshu engages in a discourse whereby the Jewish male is urged to identify with masculine vigor, and the Jewish woman appears to be a screen through which one can see a threatened and problematized Jewish masculinity. Stella's enactment of her "properly passive and vaginal female sexuality" urges her husband to take on his role of active masculinity and dominance. Ann Pellegrini, "Whiteface Performances: 'Race,' Gender, and Jewish Bodies," in *Jews and Other Differences*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 108-149.

her with desire that cannot be fulfilled, that she would never actually want to be fulfilled in her waking life, but that nevertheless dwells in her subconscious self. Her physical needs as a lustful human being are at odds with her societal desires as a Jewish woman in a proper bourgeois Jewish marriage: her affinity with the land, with nature, and with the animal desires of nature undermine her participation in modern urban civilization.

Stella is trapped in these conflicting desires precisely because of her husband's refusal to accept her offer of intercourse. Opatoshu's representation of Stella as a divided personality full of nighttime lust and daytime proper matronly behavior is ultimately a critique of the Jewish man's singular, undivided self who even in the middle of the night is concerned with sleep and treating patients, and who represses, or perhaps does not fully possess, a manly, animal instinct for sex. Dr. Gold singularly pursues economic and career success, which can be achieved in the 'civilized' space of the city to which he and his wife have relocated, and he has no room for the natural – for sexual intercourse or for the land that is the primal location for sex. While the story's narration is taken up with representing Stella's internal struggle with her own lust, she is ultimately a screen through which Opatoshu offers an argument about Jewish masculinity in the civilized space of the city through its inability to conquer and satisfy the sexual needs of an imagined, objectified Jewish woman.<sup>513</sup> Stella, filled with natural, animal lust, silently critiques her husband's unnatural, civilized lack of virility in contrast with non-Jewish America(ns) as a symbol for the unrestrained and the wild.

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<sup>513</sup> This is unsurprising. As Agnieszka Legutko asserts, "The objectification of the female body is an inevitable feature of the male representation." Legutko, "Possessed by the Other," 111.

Like “In a Levone-Nakht,” Opatoshu’s story “Gertrude” (1926), represents the upwardly mobile Jewish man as a monstrous instrument of urban capitalism, unable to control his socioeconomic greed, which far exceeds his humanity. The story centers on the devolution of a marriage, from its beginnings with sexual attraction and honorable marital vows in an agricultural setting to its twisted, brutal end in the basement of a New York apartment building.<sup>514</sup> In the story, the non-urban landscape plays a minimal role, but its presence in the text accentuates the extent to which the city, as a place that is inherently corrupt, is responsible for the horrific trajectory of the story.

In “Gertrude,” the Jewish protagonist Jack Oppenheim immigrates from Bern to an unspecified location in the American West where he goes to work on a ranch owned by a non-Jewish German man. There, he pursues and marries his boss’s daughter, Gertrude, stealing her away from her disapproving father. Jack marries Gertrude as a part of his process of adjusting to his new life on the American frontier. He meets Gertrude “as soon as he arrived in America,” before he has a chance to learn about American social and economic realities, and he sees Gertrude as a symbol for socioeconomic mobility.<sup>515</sup> In pursuing his boss’s daughter, Jack believes he is attaining a prize. He is especially enticed by Gertrude because she is not Jewish – when he wins her as a wife he “congratulates himself that his wife is a non-Jew” and calls her “my *goyke*,” treating her otherness as a source of pride.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Joseph Opatoshu, “Gertrude,” *Gezamlte Verk* 10 (Vilna: Vilner Farlag fun B. Kletskin, 1929), 42-47. The original appeared in *Der Tog* on October 15, 1926, according to *Opatoshu-biblyografye* (Opatoshu bibliography) 1, (New York: (Mlaver-Bendiner) Y. Opatoshu Branch 639 of the Workmen’s Circle, 1937).

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Jack later comes to learn that his wife was not the boon for upward mobility that he believed her to be. Jack and Gertrude relocate to New York City, and there he finds that as the daughter of a small ranch owner, Gertrude has no coveted status in the city. Jack's wealthy Jewish relative in New York, owner of the two Park Avenue apartment buildings for which Jack serves as the head janitor, "told Jack at every opportunity that he need not have looked for a person such as Gertrude from among the *goyim*."<sup>517</sup> She asserts that he was wrong to assume that because Gertrude is a non-Jew she represents something unique, special, or difficult to attain – and Jack becomes convinced of his relative's point of view. "He saw that the marriage was no great match" and it is for this reason that he begins to "harness his wife to hard housework" rather than treating her with the elevated status of the bourgeois wife of an upwardly mobile, respectable man.<sup>518</sup>

Jack is only interested in his wife for the status that he believed she might bring him, and when he comes to recognize that she does not in fact confer upon him such a status, he comes to value her only as a source of labor – both in the sense of her work as a housekeeper, and for her potential to produce a child. He demands that Gertrude "have a child!" to save their marriage, demonstrating that his interest in her is limited to the objects that she might produce, and is not love for her as a person.<sup>519</sup> When Jake threatens to divorce Gertrude because she has not produced a child, Gertrude becomes "confused in her mind," losing touch with reality and

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<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

becoming unable to perform her role as a wife.<sup>520</sup> Gertrude's psychological ailment produces a newfound stubbornness and protest: "Gertrude refused to do any of her duties. She no longer washed the marble stairs; she even stopped cooking her husband's meals." Gertrude's reaction of insanity in the face of this impossible request can easily be read as analogous to a worker going on strike, demonstrating that Opatoshu's critique of Jack as a husband is not simply a domestic issue, but has to do with Jack's participation in an urban capitalist system of which Opatoshu disapproves. When these tactics fail, Gertrude goes into the basement as if in search of an explanation for her situation. There she discovers the ghastly secret of her life: that Jack's greed is a monster that feeds upon her weakness and will destroy her. Jack has been training attack dogs in the basement of the building, cultivating wild animal violence within and underneath the structures of urban civilization. The final scene of the story lingers in gruesome documentary detail as Gertrude literally faces the beast of Jack's nature:<sup>521</sup>

With one leap the hungry, enraged dogs surrounded Gertrude, who stood still and was silent. The dogs rose onto their hind legs... Out of fear, Gertrude crouched down, grew smaller...The dogs... broke into fierce barking and ran at her with impatience, with a shine in their wolflike eyes, so that Gertrude fell without a fight.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> It is worth noting here that this is an inverse of the trope of the non-Jew setting the dogs upon a Jewish victim. Perhaps the use of dogs in particular here is a signal of Jack's ethical decline to the level of a brutal non-Jew. See Steven G. Kellman, "Jews, Beasts, and Americans," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 5 (1986): 61-68. See also Anna Shternshis, "Dogs," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, accessed 11 December 2015, <<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Dogs>>.

<sup>522</sup> Opatoshu, "Gertrude," 46-47.

Overtaken by the greed of his urban, bourgeois, capitalist lifestyle, Jack consumes his wife's labor until his dogs are literally feasting off of her body, robbing it of its life in his endless, blind quest to attain more. When Jack finds his wife's decimated body, he continues to claim it as his own, not mourning her as a lover who has died. Instead, "he took his half naked wife in his arms, cradled her like a scared child, carried her into the house and whispered, 'my child.'"<sup>523</sup> Jack is determined that even in her death he possess her, can define and control her, and that she can be the commodity (child) that he had desired her to produce. She is his material possession in death, even as she was no more than a material possession to him in life.

In "Gertrude," Opatoshu uses intermarriage as an instance of Jewish male social climbing and reliance on female labor, both ways in which the Jewish bourgeois man has dehumanized himself to become part of a capitalist system. Although the woman is the title character and much of the narration focuses on her psychological experience, she is a screen through which to view the failings of the Jewish man, whose pursuit of upward mobility in America have turned him into a monster.

Each of these stories relies on a contrast between city and country to suggest that the city, and Jews as participants in the modern city, are corrupted by the environment in which they live. Opatoshu thereby participates in trends transatlantic urban modernism that position the city as a site of degeneration and alienation, a mechanical and inhuman force blind to natural emotional

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 47.

and sexual needs (represented by women), and through interethnic romance pinpoints the Jewish man, as a man and as a Jew, as the target of his critique.<sup>524</sup>

## **Interethnic Romance and the City**

If, in Shvarts and Raboy's narratives, the American rural landscape is a place where interethnic romance, even when problematized, seems to be a natural extension of the interaction between Jews and the American landscape, Joseph Opatoshu's interethnic romances that take place in the city present the idea of the urban environment as a place where social and physical structures make interethnic romance undesirable, even when political ideologies favor it. In New York City, amidst other immigrant minorities with hierarchical attitudes toward languages, cultures, and levels of adjustment to American life, such relationships appear to be evidence of the contradictions, impossibilities, and prejudices of urban life.

In his short story "Shmelts-Top" ["The Melting Pot"] (1922), titled after the famous play by Israel Zangwill, Opatoshu tests the limits of the ideology of Jewish English author Israel Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*.<sup>525</sup> He critiques the political philosophy behind Zangwill's sentimental love story, its articulation of one of the "principle myths of America" through the central metaphor of a melting pot in which "all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming"

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<sup>524</sup> See, for instance, Desmond Harding, *Writing the City: Urban Visions of Literary Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>525</sup> Joseph Opatoshu, "Shmelts-Top," *Gezamlte Verk* 8 (Vilna: Vilner Farlag fun B. Kletskin, 1929), 140-143.

by presenting the practical implications of such a philosophy on a woman and her desire for individual choice in matters of body and of love.<sup>526</sup>

“Shmelts-Top” is the story of a young Jewish woman, Miss Caplan, who teaches English in a night school to a group of Italian immigrant men, and whose responsibility, according to her bosses, is to be like “a mother, or like a sister” to the men and thereby to “Americanize a foreign element.”<sup>527</sup> Miss Caplan has just finished reading Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot*, and although she had not initially intended to use her newly-minted teaching degree in this night school setting, her reading of Zangwill’s work has led her to view her new role in a positive light: she “felt that she had been given a very important task.”<sup>528</sup> Yet, Miss Caplan does not, in her reading of *The Melting Pot*, consider the eugenic elements of the text and its implications that she participate in a “crucible of love” by lending her body to intermarriage in service of the creation of a new, superior American body.<sup>529</sup> Rather, Miss Caplan reads in the text the assimilationist potential of America and sees her role as encouraging the assimilation process through intellectual and emotional service, and not through her physical body. Through his story Opatoshu suggests that Miss Caplan, alongside other well-meaning optimists, has fundamentally misread Zangwill’s text

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<sup>526</sup> Joe Kraus, “How the Melting Pot stirred America: The reception of Zangwill’s play and theater’s role in the American assimilation experience,” *MELUS* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 3-19, 13; Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot: A Drama in Four Acts* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920): 33.

<sup>527</sup> Opatoshu, “Shmelts-Top,” 140.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>529</sup> I have taken this phrase from Zangwill’s “Afterword” to *The Melting Pot*, in which he insists that “in the crucible of love... the most violent antitheses of the past may be fused into a higher unity.” Although he later goes on to explain that “the Jew may be Americanised and the American Judaised without any gametic interaction” it is clear that his phrase “crucible of love” refers to primarily, although “not exclusively” to a process of cross-breeding, a physical amalgamation. Zangwill, *The Melting Pot*, 203, 207.



and failed to see its threatening, coercive elements, viewing it from within social hierarchies rather than fully understanding its potential to undermine them.

Miss Caplan's interactions with non-Jewish men are framed by her position within the structures of social work and immigrant aid that construct roles and lines of authority between her and her students, separating them from one another personally as they inhabit professional roles of teacher and student. Miss Caplan is naively proud of her work and her students, yet she distances herself from them by imagining them as endearingly in need of her skills and her love. She views her charges as innocent and pathetic, and their worthiness of her charity mirrors her own self-understanding of her virtue in participating in the project of the American melting pot.

Yet, early on, Miss Caplan realizes that she is paradoxically above her students as a teacher, mother-figure and fluent English speaker, and below and vulnerable to them as a young woman alone in a workplace in which she has been put in charge of a room of strange men. She feels as though "forty pairs of hungry eyes tucked into her, and she was embarrassed, for the first time considering that she found herself alone among men, Italian men, no less." Her prejudices against Italians as potentially violent and sexually rapacious, as well as her condescending feelings toward them as children under her care, already expose her ambivalences toward the melting pot project she claims to so virtuously and charitably promote.<sup>530</sup> Nevertheless, Miss Caplan relies on the fundamental lack of equality conveyed by the urban social services in which she participates to save her from the threat of unwanted sexual contact or sexualization of her relationship with her students.

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<sup>530</sup> Opatoshu, "Shmelts-Top," 141. See p. 120 of this Diss. for a discussion of immigrant Jews' anti-Italian sentiments.

At a social gathering organized by the school, Miss Caplan asks a student to dance with her at the urging of one of her bosses who encourages her with the words, “we have to make them feel at home. If not, our whole work will be for naught!”<sup>531</sup> Here, Miss Caplan is taught her position in the social hierarchy between her wealthy philanthropist overseers and her immigrant students, as her body is offered as an incentive to the men in her class to continue in their work toward assimilation. Far from the desexualized position of mother or sister that her bosses initially suggested she hold, Miss Caplan is now officially thrust into a role as a potential love interest, for the sake of the cause of assimilation. Her boss argues that Miss Caplan’s proffer of her body in the dance is more valuable than her work in the classroom, that the very project of the Americanization of immigrants hinges on Miss Caplan at least producing the illusion that she is available as an object of desire for the immigrant men. This incident sets up the story’s denouement, in which Miss Caplan comes to learn the true meaning of the “Melting Pot” ideology as one that calls for the sacrifice of women’s bodies through sexual union in the creation of a new American type, rather than one that simply encourages upward mobility through cultural shifts and strivings.

When Miss Caplan’s dance partner, Parello, later asks Miss Caplan for help in writing a love letter to a girl in English, her first concern is that he will be competing with American men for higher-status partners. Through this concern, Miss Caplan reveals that she believes in an ideology of social hierarchies between Americans and immigrants that undercuts the ideology of the Melting Pot that is supposedly so important for her work. Still, she ultimately gives in to his request, reminding herself “that her purpose was to Americanize” and that writing the letter

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<sup>531</sup> *ibid.*, 142.

would be in service of this goal.<sup>532</sup> When, predictably, Miss Caplan receives Parelo's love letter herself, she must confront her role in encouraging Americanization, both as a teacher and as a woman, and the limits of her own position, as a woman and as a Jew, in the social hierarchy. Her vulnerability, as a female object of male desire, and as an immigrant aspiring to upward mobility who finds herself a commodity for the consumption of men seeking that mobility, calls into question her positive reading of Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*.

In "Melting Pot," Miss Caplan becomes subject to and tests *The Melting Pot's* ideology of complete assimilation, and she is asked to sacrifice her body to enact this ideology. Miss Caplan's hesitations to fulfill the Melting Pot ideology by participating in an interethnic romance - whether because of her position on a hierarchy from which she does not want to assimilate downwards, because of a Jewish aversion to intermarriage, or because of her race-motivated suspicions of Italian immigrants - shed light on the limits of *The Melting Pot's* ideology. It reveals that although the "melting pot" idea is purportedly in the interest of Jews and other immigrants, it is a potentially coercive ideology that forces individuals, particularly Jewish women, to sacrifice their cultural and racial separateness and individual integrity for the greater American goal of conformity.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> My supposition that *The Melting Pot* was composed as a vision of something that would improve the lives of Jews and other immigrants comes from a conversation between Zangwill and Guggenheim published in the *New York Herald* titled "Should Jews Marry Christians," reprinted in Meri-Jane Rochelson's *A Jew in the Public Arena: The Career of Israel Zangwill*. In the interview, Zangwill explains that although he advocates a Jewish state through Territorialism as the best possible future for Jewish life, he believes that those Jews who choose not to participate in such a venture, and who are rapidly losing "remnants of the old faith, changing their names, denying their parentage, and losing themselves in the new conditions" would be best served by a Melting Pot ideology which would allow them full participation in the new society in which they find themselves. See Meri-Jane Rochelson, *A Jew in the Public Arena: The Career of Israel Zangwill* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 183.

In his story “Jim Wang,” (1923), Opatoshu similarly articulates that America’s absorption and assimilation of new immigrants requires the sacrifice of Jewish women’s bodies as a medium through which new immigrants can lay claim to and participate in whiteness. In this story, a Chinese immigrant buys a laundry in a Jewish neighborhood, cuts off his queue, wears American clothing, changes his name, and starts to build friendships with the locals. He hopes to assimilate upward, across racial and cultural differences. He expresses his interest in a Jewish young woman and she laughs at him, right in his face. When he kisses her, she runs away and tells everyone what happened, claiming that he should know better than to kiss a white woman. Recognizing his failure and the impossibility of assimilation and upward mobility, Jim Wang feels that there is no use in trying “to crawl out of his skin” and become an American, and returns to China. Here, the Jewish woman’s refusal of her body reverses Jim Wang’s assimilation process. Told from Jim Wang’s perspective, the Jewish woman appears cruel in her refusal of Jim Wang’s social and romantic ambitions. In Opatoshu’s narratives, ownership of a Jewish woman’s body is a necessary step toward Americanization, and Jewish women are both victims whose bodies are vulnerable to non-Jewish male ambitions and cruel, privileged power brokers who deny non-Jewish men access to romantic assimilation because of their own racial prejudices.<sup>534</sup>

In “Shmelts-top” and “Jim Wang” Opatoshu also demonstrates the ways in which social structures of hierarchy – between teacher and student, acculturated immigrant and new immigrant - obscure the underlying humanity of individuals and make it impossible for Miss

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<sup>534</sup> See Joseph Opatoshu, “Jim Wang,” in *Rase, lintshery un andere dertseylungen* (Warsaw: Farlag Perets Bibliotek, 1923), 76-81.

Caplan to initially even see or consider the potential romantic or sexual dimension to her teaching a roomful of men, or for the Jewish woman in question to see Jim Wang as anything other than the laundry service he provides. The built environment of the city, in which individuals are separated from one another in their homes and neighborhoods, and meet in sanitized public spaces like classrooms and businesses where they play public roles, makes implementation of a “melting pot” ideology of race mixture even more unthinkable – it is not a natural outgrowth of immigrant life, but a disruption of the ethnic separateness and social hierarchies around which immigrant life is organized. Kept apart by social structures and built spaces, and brought together through the urging and management of social service and philanthropic organizations, members of different immigrant groups cannot organically form relationships or romances. Their separateness and their merging are both engineered as a product of the urban social and physical structures that govern their lives.

### **]Country as City, and City as Country**

Opatoshu’s contrast of country and city, and his materialist moral critique of the city, emerge from the politics and poetics of his literary naturalism, through which he, like other naturalists, “depicted the city as an energy system and an alienating mechanism that inculcated a degenerative process by creating a diseased center outside of nature.”<sup>535</sup> David Ignatov, whose aesthetic principles aligned with literary modernism rather than naturalism (these differences caused Opatoshu to break from “Di Yunge”), read and represented the city and country, and

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<sup>535</sup> Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 70.

interethnic romance, within a model less inclined toward cultural and socialist critique, and more invested in individual experiences of the city as opaque, mysterious, and uncanny.<sup>536</sup>

David Ignatov's novella "Fibi" ["Phoebe"] (1914) exemplifies an aestheticized vision of American geographies, in which the unnamed artist protagonist searches for the authentic, natural, and beautiful America outside and within the city and outside and within the bounds of Jewishness.<sup>537</sup> This is part and parcel of the paradoxical simultaneity of the novella, in which multiple possibilities for reality and its interpretation are suggested: present and eternal, reality and fantasy, city and country, ethnic homogeneity and marital assimilation. At the heart of the narrative is an unresolved riddle: in consecutive scenes the protagonist's half-Jewish lover - a woman whose status as the product of an intermarriage baffles and unsettles the protagonist - first commits suicide and then lives on, and the protagonist is unsure which outcome is real. This exemplifies Ignatov's equivocation about the role of Jewishness in America, and of America in Yiddish literature: he at once celebrates and fears the Christian/Jewish, foreign/familiar mixing that the creation of a new Yiddish American literature will entail. The protagonist of "Fibi" romanticizes and fears the idea of crossing borders between city and country, Jewish and non-Jewish spaces, and the narrative's circuitous geographical path, from city to country to city again, suggests the unresolved ideological questions at the heart of the novella. The protagonist's anxiety and lack of understanding about non-Jewish spaces and his half-Jewish lover mock the romantic frontier myth of America and the possibility of a role for Jews within that mythology, while the protagonist's continued grappling with uncertainty even in

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<sup>536</sup> For a discussion of differences in perspective in literary naturalism and literary modernism vis a vis the city, see Lehan, *The City in Literature*.

<sup>537</sup> David Ignatov, "Fibi," *Oysgeklibene Shriftn*, ed. Shmuel Rozshanski (Buenos Aires: YIVO, 1975), 239-310. "Fibi" was first printed in 1914 in the journal *Shriftn*, associated with Di Yunge, which was edited by David Ignatov.

urban spaces urges the idea that assimilation is not an abstract, faraway process of immigrants becoming part of an idealized America, but a messy, nonlinear process of cultural hybridity and fragmentation performed within the city itself. The geographical and romantic blending in “Fibi” is part and parcel of Ignatov’s larger project, as Boris Rivkin describes, of “giving the American land a role in Yiddish literature” and finding a place for Jews in America.<sup>538</sup>

In “Fibi,” Ignatov cultivates a sense of confusion as part of his representation of the inevitability and inescapability of Jewish Americanization, and American Judaization, through a constant conflation of rural and urban settings, disorienting readers with startling depictions of cityscapes as expansive frontiers, and of rural landscapes as narrow, limited spaces. The protagonist is an earnest young man who has foresworn love in his pursuit of what he calls “room and distance” (*roym un vaytkayt*), an ill-defined aesthetic principle of beauty in the freedom of open space and the contemplation of the infinite through that space. In his pursuit of this elusive ideal, the protagonist yearns for, seeks, and believes he has found “room and distance” in both the city and the country. In the novella’s opening scene, the narrator celebrates springtime in the city, in which the long streets are surrounded with “multicolored broad and sky-high walls with their thousands and thousands of windows stretching higher and higher, as though reaching to the heights of the pale blue sky” and factory whistles “together, in brotherly spirit” announce that it is springtime.<sup>539</sup> He waxes lyrical about the apparent endlessness of the Grand Concourse, that has a “breadth that grows broader and wider before your eyes,” and which he compares to a river, explicitly connecting and conflating urban and pastoral landscapes as

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<sup>538</sup> Boris Rivkin, *Grunt-tendentsn*, 177.

<sup>539</sup> Ignatov, “Fibi,” 241.

both having the promise of freedom and a connection to something infinite and eternal.<sup>540</sup> The protagonist expresses his reverence for natural settings in similar ways. He describes New Hampshire's White Mountains as "miles and miles of grass-covered wilderness," emphasizing their breadth and apparent endlessness as he does with the city environment, and he imagines that they were built by some "white, bright" spirit, constructed by a god in the same way that the urban environment was made by people.<sup>541</sup> Yet, the narrator also finds both the city and the country fall short of his ideal. At the beginning of the novella, the protagonist flees the city in search of "broad and strong movement" that will get him away from his own confused mind, his social predicament of his peculiar and provocative love interest, and especially the confines of the city itself.<sup>542</sup> In the country, he finds that he feels "confined" amongst the tall mountains. "Wherever I lifted my eyes they were assaulted by mountains" that are like "walls that kept me from the room, the distance."<sup>543</sup> Here, Ignatov represents the natural world as being flawed in its similarity to the urban environment, limiting his ability to reach his unattainable ideal. Both country and city are built environments with the capacity to awe and evoke a spiritual dimension, and both fall short of this exalted plane. Because both environments are described so similarly, and explicitly compared to one another, although they are dramatically different the narrative positions them as interchangeable, geographically, descriptively, and topographically setting up the paradoxical simultaneity of the novella's plot and its ideological underpinnings. If, as Opatoshu's above narratives posit, the country is a place that generates interethnic romance and

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<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, 242, 243.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.



the city renders it impossible, Ignatov's country-as-city, city-as-country descriptions suggest that such bifurcated understandings, even in metaphorical terms, of the possibilities of assimilation, fail to capture the complexities of American Jewish life.

The novella, which has been called "possibly the most American, most modern...story in American Yiddish Literature," like Ignatov's earlier work *In kesselgrub* (1918), argues against zealous pursuit of an extreme ideal and criticizes naïve and self-aggrandizing ideological certainty.<sup>544</sup> In "Fibi," the narrator's pursuit of "space and distance" in exclusion of all else has led him to the conclusion that he must never succumb to love: he declares "I will remain alone because I want my path to always be pure and broad and far-reaching."<sup>545</sup> Like the hero of *In kesselgrub*, the protagonist of "Fibi" feels he must preserve and separate himself from the emotion of love and the seductive power of women, and this is coupled with an anti-assimilationist stance, in which Jews must separate themselves from the seductive potential of non-Jewish America. The protagonist of "Fibi" over-values self-control and separateness for himself and for the Jewish people, and these concerns are both mocked and upheld by the two possibilities contained within the riddle of Phoebe's demise and survival, and the beauty and danger of both city and country.

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<sup>544</sup> Shmuel Rozhanski, "David Ignatov: der izolierter romantiker fun di yunge in Amerike," *Oysgeklibene Shriftn*, ed. Shmuel Rozhanski (Buenos Aires: YIVO, 1975), 11-23, p. 22.

<sup>545</sup> Ignatov, "Fibi," 245. This ideological opposition to love replicates a political, feminist free love stance, like that of Eleanor Hoffman in Marian Spitzer's *Who Would Be Free*, discussed in Chapter Three of this Diss.. Ignatov's *In Kesselgrub* directly concerns the idea of free love as an excuse for and cause of degeneracy in American socialism, and here his protagonist claims suspicion of the ties of love and marriage, not for any explicit political feminist reasons, but because of his ill-defined aesthetic ideal. His own lack of understanding about what he pursues and where it can be found calls into question the legitimacy of his stubborn, austere sense of purpose, suggesting that his anti-love stance emerges not out of principled opposition to the social structures of love and marriage, but out of the protagonist's self-important identity as an iconoclast.

Phoebe at times seems to be a demon who teases and tempts the protagonist away from his sexual discipline and from his principled anti-assimilationist stance. Mutual friends, the Bosh family, introduce the protagonist to Phoebe precisely because he has foresworn love: they believe that she will challenge his abstinence. Phoebe is a flirtatious sexual temptress – she feigns helplessness in asking the protagonist to teach her to ride a bicycle and mount a horse, provocatively falling into his arms while under his tutelage, she kisses him when he is unprepared and unsuspecting, and this all contributes to his feeling of confusion and fear. Phoebe is dangerous not only as a woman coaxing a man into a sexual relationship, but particularly and especially as a representative of Jewish/Christian intermixing who threatens to draw the protagonist out of his anti-assimilationist stance. When the Bosh family introduces the protagonist to Phoebe, they not only want to disrupt his sexual abstinence, they want to further their own ideological agenda. Mr. Bosh is an advocate of “mixing” with non-Jews because he argues that “we all must go before the great holy spirit, who is clothed in the flags of all peoples.”<sup>546</sup> His universalizing, anti-parochial stance contrasts with the protagonist’s feelings that intermarriage leads to irrevocable loss, with mothers telling family stories of cultural heritage to their children in “foreign tongues” to children who are “foreign vessels.”<sup>547</sup> When, at the end of the story, Phoebe appears teasingly before the narrator wearing a cross that turns into a snake and devours her, she is a testament to the threatening and destructive power of Christianity for the Jewish protagonist.<sup>548</sup> In a dream, when the protagonist ascends to the heavens to meet

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<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 307-308

the spirit clothed in the flags of all peoples, he finds that the spirit has goat feet, like a devil, revealing the evil underneath the seemingly divine ideal of universalism.<sup>549</sup>

Phoebe is particularly disturbing to the protagonist because she is impossible to define according to the strict classifications, separateness, and discipline with which the protagonist governs his life. Even before he knows that Phoebe is the product of an intermarriage, the protagonist senses Phoebe's essential difference and feels haunted by it even before it is affirmed.<sup>550</sup> He describes Phoebe as having the appearance of "a typical Jewish girl, with pretty somewhat curly black hair, a pale white face, black eyebrows and pretty eyes" and yet when their eyes meet "her huge grey eyes bit into mine sharply and coldly. ...and I felt a chill in my body."<sup>551</sup> Here, the narrator explains a feeling of disjuncture between Phoebe's external appearance as a Jew and something internal about her that seems cold and brutal, and that he will later attribute to her non-Jewishness. Early on in their relationship Phoebe hints at her status as an emblem of mixture, a site of impossibility. She speaks of Jews as though she is an outsider, telling the narrator that "Jews are the most interesting people" who "have something about them which is eternal."<sup>552</sup> She likewise gives an outsider's account of non-Jews, who she claims "have a sort of 'wild flesh' that no amount of civilization or religion will heal."<sup>553</sup> When the

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<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>550</sup> Although according to Jewish law, Phoebe, the daughter of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father, is technically Jewish, the narrator is not concerned with the religious legal implications and meanings of their romance, but with something on a racial and essential level – he feels instinctively that he is in a romance with someone mysterious, both different and the same as he, and this uncanny feeling is more significant than the niceties of law or convention.

<sup>551</sup> Ignatov, "Fibi," 246-247.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*

narrator accuses her of speaking like a ‘good’ non-Jew, Phoebe retorts that she is not a ‘bad’ one, sending the narrator into a fit of confusion: “I felt shaky, not knowing what was going on.”<sup>554</sup> Phoebe’s confession of her identity as a non-Jew right after her accusation that non-Jews are untamable animals exposes her as conflicted to the very core of her being. As a Jew she contains something of the eternal, she represents holiness; as a non-Jew she is a beast, threatening to the Jewish narrator and also to herself; as a Jew she represents control, order, and intellect; as a non-Jew she represents the desires of the body. These forces of good and evil, familiar and foreign, tame and wild make her into a terrifying monster precisely because the narrator does not know where to place her and how to relate to her. He reflects: “I felt lost, not knowing what it meant.”<sup>555</sup>

But the protagonist’s apparent foolishness and inability to correctly interpret the events before him call into question the extent to which Phoebe’s Christianity and the uncanny mixing she represents are actually a threat. The protagonist repeatedly proves to be unable to understand Phoebe’s social cues, recoiling in fear and awe in the most mundane circumstances. When Phoebe flirts with the protagonist and pretends to be helpless so that he will teach her to ride a bicycle, squealing and falling into the protagonist’s arms, the protagonist believes she earnestly wants to learn and “gets angry at her for not following my directions...but every time I put her on the bicycle she fell in my arms and from time to time the skin of her face touched my face.”<sup>556</sup> Frustrated with the protagonist’s obliviousness to her flirtation, Phoebe tears the bicycle away from him and rides quickly away. Rather than realizing that Phoebe had been pretending her

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<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

inability, the protagonist misinterprets the obvious scenario before him. He is terrified that Phoebe is riding faster than she can handle and will crash, and he chases after her to help her, colliding with an automobile in his haste.<sup>557</sup> The protagonist displays similar credulity when a field hand, Williams, who had been admiring his gold fountain pen, steals the pen while he is sleeping. The theft is obvious – the protagonist awakens in the middle of the night to find the field hand hovering over his bead, ready to steal, and goes back to sleep. When the pen is missing in the morning and the protagonist asks Williams about it, Williams suggests that it must have been lost in the grass where the protagonist was lying the day before, and then speaks admiringly, gloatingly about the ‘real gold’ pen. The credulous protagonist accepts William’s suggestion and his help searching for the missing pen, even though it is clear from the narration that he is the culprit. The narrator’s childish acceptance of Phoebe’s claim that she cannot ride a bicycle and Williams’ claim that he did not steal the pen demonstrate that he is an unreliable interpreter of reality, a fact of which Phoebe herself seems keenly aware, as she listens to the protagonist’s philosophizing like “the babblings of a child she loves.”<sup>558</sup> While the protagonist consistently expresses awe, fear, and confusion about Phoebe and the uncanny, demonic puzzle she represents as a product of interethnic romance, his nightmare-like fears of Phoebe are a testament not only to the fearful newness of assimilation, but also to the immaturity and absurdity of his fear. By aligning the unreliable, oblivious, foolish narrator with fear of assimilation, Ignatov suggests that such alarmist views are simplistic, childish misinterpretations of the basic facts of American Jewish life: that complete separation between city and country,

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<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

Jew and non-Jew is either desirable nor achievable. When Phoebe throws herself off a cliff, dejected and defeated by the protagonist's refusal to consummate their relationship, this appears to signal the novella's rejection of the evil urge toward mixing that she represents. But when, in the next scene, she sits next to the protagonist "as though nothing had happened" and he looks into her eyes and sees the "peace and distance" he has always been seeking, the novella simultaneously upholds Phoebe as the ideal toward which the protagonist strives.<sup>559</sup> The protagonist's uncertainty about which outcome is true - "one of these things must certainly be a dream... but which of them is a dream?" - suggests that ambivalence about assimilation as an ideal lies at the heart of the novella.<sup>560</sup>

"Fibi" is predicated on a sense of confusion and of mixing, with multiple binary categories that are simultaneously true complicating the deceptively clear anti-assimilationist ideology articulated by the protagonist at the surface of the text. In the mountains, Phoebe throws herself off a cliff and crashes into the rocks, a victim to the austere ideology of the protagonist who refuses her sexual advances. But in the city, Phoebe is a siren who steers the protagonist off course, who threatens to cause him to crash from his straight and narrow ideological path. As Mikhail Krutikov has noted, Phoebe's role as a siren is accentuated and solidified through reference to Heine's poem "Lorelei" and the monument of that poem, the Lorelei fountain that stands alongside the Grand Concourse in the Bronx.<sup>561</sup> At the novella's

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<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>561</sup> Mikhail Krutikov, "Lorelei in di Bronx," *Forverts*, October 11, 2013. <http://yiddish.forward.com/articles/172955/lorelei-in-the-bronx/>. I am grateful to Joshua Price for bringing this article to my attention. "Die Lorelei" was published in Heine's *The Book of Poems (Buch der Lieder)* (1827) and retells a German folk legend in which a maiden who drowned herself after a lover's betrayal sits upon the Lorelei

beginning and end, the protagonist rides his bicycle past the monument, and it fills him with “Phoebe-fear.”<sup>562</sup> At the novel’s end, he approaches the hill where the monument sits and hears Phoebe sing to him, “could you have died here?” in explicit reference to the dangers posed to the sailor drawn in by Heine’s siren Lorelei as they crash against the rocks.<sup>563</sup> Thus, it is not only Phoebe’s death or survival that is in question, but also the protagonist’s potential death and the hands of an enchanting temptress. Like Heine’s “Lorelei,” Ignatov’s “Fibi” evokes and cultivates a mood of uncertainty, and of the “mutual dependence” of conflicting religious and secular outlooks, of competing Jewish, Christian, ancient and modern affinities and ways of seeing the world.<sup>564</sup>

By associating Phoebe with Lorelei, Ignatov asserts that his singularly American work is also continuous with Jewish European literary traditions, transplanting them to create an American Yiddish modernism.<sup>565</sup> “Fibi,” which has been read as “a kind of artistic manifesto of

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rock above the Rhine river, luring boatmen to their death with her song. The Heinrich Heine Fountain, also known as the Lorelei Fountain, was dedicated on the south end of the Grand Concourse Plaza on July 8, 1899.

<sup>562</sup> Ignatov, “Fibi,” 243.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>564</sup> See Willi Goetschel, “Heine’s Critical Secularism,” *boundary 2* 31, no. 2 (2004): 149-171.

<sup>565</sup> While I. L. Peretz argued for “the importance of distinguishing between viable Jewish folk traditions and the notoriously middlebrow poetry of Heinrich Heine” and saw Heine’s poetry as “an obstacle that repeatedly intrudes itself into Jewish literary history,” American Yiddish writers such as Yehoash felt that Heine’s expression of “melancholic exile” resonated with the American Jewish experience of ambivalence and confusion about the relation between sacred texts and the diasporic experience. Heine’s writing was important to the literary efforts of “Di Yunge”: In 1918 the publisher Farlag Yidish produced an eight-volume edition of Heinrich Heine’s collected works, translated by a list of Yiddish writers that included many writers associated with “Di Yunge.” As Jeffrey Grossman explains, “the scope of this project, together with the involvement of such writers, makes the Heine edition into a veritable *event* in Yiddish literature, one that clearly attests to his importance – especially, tough not solely, in the American context.” See Michael T. Williamson, “Modernist Yiddish Aesthetics, I. L. Peretz’s Middlebrow Yiddish Poetics, and the Place of Yehoash in Modernist and Middlebrow Literary History,” *The Space Between* (2013): 37-59, p. 45; Jeffrey A. Grossman, “The Invention of Love? Or How Moshe Leyb Halpern Read Heinrich Heine,” *Leket: Yidishe Shtudiyes Haynt* 1, ed. Marion Aptroot, et al. (Dusseldorf: Dusseldorf University Press, 2012), 129-152, p. 129.

Yiddish modernism,” signals its newness by rewriting and revisiting literary models for an American context.<sup>566</sup> The uncertainty and simultaneity of death and life, old and new, Jew and Christian, city and country in the story creates a fragmented modernist sensibility that is not so much a prescription for or against assimilation as a reflection of the turmoil surrounding the question of assimilation for Jews in America.

## **Conclusion**

American Yiddish writers’ representations of interethnic romance emerge out of and are bound up in their attitude toward American spaces: the ethics and politics of the modern industrial city, the aesthetic pleasures of the vast American landscape, the rigors of claiming a Jewish relationship with nature and the land, and especially the search for a place for Jews within America. Non-Jewish romantic partners personify the dangers and temptations of America for Jewish subjects: non-Jewish Americans claim, exploit and corrupt Jews, and Jews, in turn, racing toward the corrupt culture of urban capitalism, overlook and abuse non-Jewish partners and the values they stand for.

With the exception of Y. Y. Shvarts’s depiction of organic change in Jewish identity through interethnic interaction in American spaces, each of these authors represents interethnic romance as a symptom of the problematic relationship between Jews and America, or through the destruction of an interethnic relationship predict the future deterioration of Jews in America through their interaction with American, and modern, culture. While these works are not

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<sup>566</sup> Krutikov, “Lorelei in di Bronx.”



focused on communal policy setting, overt political platforms or moralizing, the cumulative effect of these interethnic romantic tragedies, horror tales, and moments of danger or unease is to illustrate not only the impossibility, even unthinkability, of interethnic romance for these authors, but also, and perhaps more significantly, the general feeling of displacement and uncertainty these authors express about Jewish immigrants' relationship with America itself.

## Conclusion

In Leon Kobrin's "*Barukh Dayan Emes*" ["Blessed is the True Judge"], the short story with which I began this dissertation, an interethnic romance introduces and intersects with key concerns in modern Jewish life. Hanneleh, the daughter who marries a Christian when she comes to America, justifies her marital choice through her socialist, universalist belief that Christians and Jews are equal under the rubric of their shared humanity. But to her mother Basha, who receives word of the marriage through her daughter's letter, this universalist stance appears idealistic, foreign, and far away. Basha's particularism is a product of her circumstances as a member of an oppressed minority in a climate of social and cultural segregation. Hers is not a principled stance but a response to the realities of Jewish-Christian relations as she knows them. The story presents a contrast between pragmatism and idealism, the particular past and the universal future, plotted through intergenerational conflict and love across ethnic boundaries. Such a contrast resonates throughout narratives of interethnic romance in this period discussed in this dissertation, from Emma Wolf to Abraham Cahan to Rose Pastor Stokes.

But the story is not only about this central question of a hope for universalism (articulated through socialist politics), the limitations of a pragmatic present, and the lingering influence of the antisemitism of a European past. Like each of the texts discussed in this dissertation, "*Barukh Dayan Emes*" is also, and equally as much, a story about power and disempowerment especially through the lenses of gender, class, and region. In Kobrin's narrative, Basha's status is dependent on her husband: as a married woman she thrived and was able to provide for her daughter and procure her a modern education, but as a widow she is penniless and powerless.

With no source of income and no education, she must sell all her possessions, including her home, to finance her daughter's journey to America in search of a wealthy husband. When her daughter marries a Christian, from Basha's perspective her sacrifice and downfall are complete. She will be scorned, pitied, and reviled, and her daughter, her most prized possession, will remain far away in the hands of Christians, whom she sees as enemies. Basha, as a poor woman, is disenfranchised as she tries to use what little possessions she has - her money and her daughter - to her own and her daughter's advantage, and intermarriage is the symbol of this failure. Moreover, Hannaleh's participation in the worker's movement and her marriage within it suggests that she does not achieve the wealth that Basha dreamed of for her. Instead she participates in a struggle to alleviate the exploitative labor conditions under which she toils and her intermarriage is forged within the context of that struggle. Hanneleh, it seems, is vulnerable as a worker in the way that her mother is vulnerable as a woman. This is a story about Jewish women's dispossession of themselves, their futures, their means, and their independence in the face of global political forces, patriarchy, and Christian society. With a contrast between country and city, Europe and America, Jew and non-Jew, man and woman, the story sets up a series of power imbalances that suggest that intermarriage, which Hannaleh presents as a kind of escape from the antisemitic and patriarchal past, is an incomplete one. Intermarriage bears its own new infringements on Hannaleh's freedom as a working woman and further disempowers the mother she left behind. Hannaleh's socialist universalism impinges on Basha's sensibilities, desires, and needs as a Jewish woman. This story, like each of the narratives discussed in this dissertation in all their various stripes, intertwines literary, political, and gender-oriented goals of egalitarianism into the discourse of intermarriage and reveals the ways in which these vectors contradict and undercut one another.

At the same time, Kobrin's story, like many of the works discussed in this dissertation, is also a meditation on Jewish literature itself, and its possibilities and limits in an American context. Written in Yiddish in America for transatlantic Yiddish-reading audiences, the story poses the question of whether interethnic romance narratives are universally interpretable across the diaspora of Yiddish readership, or whether American interethnic romance narratives are part of an exclusively American discursive community and are unreadable (or read in utterly different ways) for European Jewish audiences. Like David Ignatoff, Isaac Raboy, and I. I. Shvarts, Kobrin posits a new kind of Yiddish writing distinctively shaped by the American experience. But Kobrin suggests that this new writing may be fatally flawed insofar as it is so foreign to European audiences that it may not even be interpretable outside an American framework. When Basha, who is illiterate, sets out to read her daughter's letters about America (which one might see as symbolic of the new American Yiddish literary sphere) through the help of a town scribe, neither she nor the scribe are able to understand the socialist political vocabulary, the experiences of work and of city life that Hannaleh relates. The incomprehensibility of the letters increases Basha's sense that she continues to lose her daughter, not only geographically but also religiously, culturally, politically, and linguistically. These failed acts of reading reveal an increasing gap in interpretation and meaning between the empowered American daughter who writes, and who intermarries, and the disempowered mother, who cannot read, and who cannot understand the "melting plot." These characters stand in not only for the breakdown between generations that Abraham Cahan fights against in his advice to readers of the *Bintel Brief*, but also a breakdown in communication across the places and contexts of Yiddish writing, so that Yiddish American writing perhaps more closely resembles other American Jewish writing in English than it does global modern Yiddish literature. Just as American Jewish literature on the

theme of intermarriage bears striking similarities across linguistic, cultural and other divides, on this particularly central American theme American exceptionalist discourse, Jewish American fictions in Yiddish and in English are tightly related to each other, and in many ways stand self-consciously apart from world Jewish and Yiddish literary discourses as American in theme and content.

An engagement with the long history of American Jewish literary discourse surrounding the topic of interethnic romance demonstrates that such narratives are woven into the very fabric of what it means to be a Jew in America. Thinking about, worrying about, celebrating and decrying intermarriage are essential to American Jewishness itself. This is not simply because such concerns have a long history in American Judaism but also because the way that American Jews have long defined their practice and identities is through attempts to unite disparate “Jewish” and “American” traditions, practices, cultures, and belief systems into one happy synthesis—one happy marriage—that makes American Jews uniquely American and uniquely Jewish.<sup>567</sup> Intermarriage, at least metaphorically speaking, is what makes American Jews who they are.

Jews in America today continue to engage these themes through narratives of interethnic romance. In fact, the proliferation of intermarriage narratives in representations of Jews in film, television, and other forms of popular culture suggests that interethnic romance remains one of

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<sup>567</sup> Jonathan Sarna famously identified this notion as the “cult of synthesis,” defining it as the idea that American Jews merge their American and Jewish identities so that the “two traditions converge in a common path” in ways that reinforce one another and are entirely compatible. According to Sarna, this notion “permeated all of the major movements and ideologies of American Judaism.” It has become a central tenet of American Jewish culture, shaping the way that American Jews collectively identify themselves in relation to their history and their present circumstances. See Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture,” *Jewish Social Studies* 5, no. 1 / 2 (1998/1999): 52-79.

the central vehicles, not only in sociological studies and policy making, but also in the Jewish literary and cultural imaginary, for articulating, theorizing, and creatively unraveling this thorny question of American Jewish communal identity, and doing so together with vectors of gender, religion, culture, race, and politics.<sup>568</sup> The preoccupations, motivations, and rhetorical strategies employed by the authors in each of these chapters continue to find relevance in fictional representations of interethnic romance in contemporary Jewish American fiction, even as intermarriage itself has become a much more widespread phenomenon. Like Adeline Cohnfeldt Lust and Bettie Lowenberg's narratives, Isabelle Allende's *The Japanese Lover* (2015) imagines interethnic romance as beautiful, redemptive, and impossible love.<sup>569</sup> As in Abraham Cahan's fiction, in *Single Jewish Male Seeking Soulmate* (2015) Letty Cottin Pogrebin wrestles with the demands of political liberalism and universalist values butting against family loyalties and promises.<sup>570</sup> Like Marian Spitzer and Anzia Yezierska, and in the tradition of David Ignatov and Joseph Opatoshu, Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (1973) employs interethnic romance toward an exploration of the complexities of human sexuality and female self-realization.<sup>571</sup> In each of these cases, authors explore the meaning of social and cultural categories themselves through the points of convergence, collision, and cross-over that interethnic romances suggest.

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<sup>568</sup> See, for instance: Vincent Brook, *Something Ain't Kosher Here: The Rise of the "Jewish" Sitcom* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Joseph Greenblum, "Does Hollywood Still Glorify Jewish Intermarriage? The Case of 'The Jazz Singer,'" *American Jewish History* 83, no. 4 (December 1995): 445-469.

<sup>569</sup> Isabel Allende, *The Japanese Lover: A Novel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).

<sup>570</sup> Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Single Jewish Male Seeking Soulmate* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2015).

<sup>571</sup> Erika Jong, *Fear of Flying* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

These fictional narratives appear within a landscape that is increasingly dominated by writing in the genres of social science, memoir and advice literature aimed at describing and helping individuals to navigate an increasingly interfaith and multiethnic American landscape in which romances and marriages between Jews and non-Jews are a widespread phenomenon.<sup>572</sup> In recent decades in the United States, interfaith families who practice elements of both Christianity and Judaism have become part of a public discourse of a multicultural, interfaith America. Through the language of multiculturalism, rather than religious intermixing, families are able to practice traditions from more than one religious faith under a morally cohesive rubric of multiculturalism.<sup>573</sup> Scholarship on intermarriage has begun to pivot away from a focus on intermarriage as a crisis that must be averted to an interrogation of how intermarriages are lived and practiced, in dimensions such as religious life, marital happiness, sexual practices, and

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<sup>572</sup> Recently published books of advice and personal experience about Jewish intermarriage include: See, for example, Sally Srok Friedes, *The New Jew: An Unexpected Conversion* (Hants: O Books, 2009); Yael Ben Zion, *Intermarried* (Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 2014); James Keen, *Inside Intermarriage: A Christian Partner's Perspective on Raising a Jewish Family* (New York: URJ Press, 2006). Carlos E. Cortes, *Rose Hill: An Intermarriage Before its Time* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2012); Jane Larkin, *From Generation to Generation: A Story of Intermarriage and Jewish Continuity* (CreateSpace, 2014); Jon M. Sweeney and Michal Woll, *Mixed-Up Love: Relationships, Family and Religious Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Jericho Books, 2013); Gayle Redlingshafer Berman and Harold Berman, *Doublelife: One Family, Two Faiths and a Journey of Hope* (Longhill Press, 2013); Gabrielle Glaser, *Strangers to the Tribe: Portraits of Interfaith Marriage* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); *Half/Life: Jew-ish Tales from Interfaith Homes*, ed. Laurel Snyder (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2016). This element of recommending how Jewish identity should be understood and performed in America is also at the center of a subgenre of contemporary intermarriage fiction: numerous novels written for and about children of intermarriages focus not on whether such romances should be permitted, but how children can embrace and creatively live within their mixed-heritage identities. See, for instance: Paula J. Freedman, *My Basmati Bat Mitzvah* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2015); Nora Raleigh Baskin, *The Truth About my Bat Mitzvah* (New York: Aladdin, 2009); Ilene Cooper, *Sam I Am* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2004); Micol Ostow, *Emily Goldberg Learns to Salsa* (New York: Razorbill, 2007); as well as Daniel Klein and Freke Vuijst, *The Half-Jewish Book: A Celebration* (New York: Villard, 2000). For a review of recent sociological literature about intermarriage, see Aviva Gordon, "Jewish Intermarriage in American Society: Literature Review," *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 11, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 1-14.

<sup>573</sup> Samira Mehta, "Christmukkah: Millennial Multiculturalism," *Religion and American Culture* 25, no. 1 (2015): 82-109.

childrearing.<sup>574</sup> These studies focus on new ways of being Jewish in America through and around family life, romance, and multicultural, interfaith identities. They contribute to the kinds of speculations that the fiction in this dissertation presents: thinking not about how to prevent interethnic romance but about what it is, what it means, and what it reveals about the meaning of modern Jewish American life.

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<sup>574</sup> See, for instance: Keren McGinity, *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Keren McGinity, *Marrying Out: Jewish Men, Intermarriage, and Fatherhood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Jennifer A. Thompson, *Jewish on Their Own Terms: How Intermarried Couples are Changing American Judaism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013); Samira Mehta, "Negotiating the Interfaith Marriage Bed: Religious Differences and Sexual Intimacies," *Theology and Sexuality* 18, no. 1 (2012): 19-41; Patricia Keer Munro, "What are THEY doing on the Bimah?: How Intermarriage Changes Jewish Ritual," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 8, no. 1 (January 2015): 95-115; Janice McDavit, "A More Perfect Union: Modern American Christian-Jewish Marriages," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 8, no. 1 (January 2015): 117-127.



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