

Crafting the Jewish Writer:
Jewish Writing, Professionalism, and the Short Story in Post-War America

By

Daniel Rochelson Mintz

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language and Literature)
in the University of Michigan
2013

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Anita Norich, Chair
Professor Jonathan E. Freedman
Associate Professor Julian A. Levinson
Professor Deborah D. Moore

© Daniel R. Mintz 2013

DEDICATION

*For Meri-Jane and Joel,
Sarah, Sam and Karl*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support of a great many people. My profound thanks are due to my chair, Anita Norich, for her patient guidance, incisive readings, steadfast support, keen practical advice, and for her friendship; and to Julian Levinson, Deborah Dash Moore, Jonathan Freedman, and Patsy Yaeger, for their generous and insightful comments on the dissertation manuscript, for their sage counsel throughout the writing process, and for innumerable occasions of support, encouragement, and illumination. I am grateful, also, for the intellectual and professional direction provided by Todd Endelman, Sarah Blair, Alan Wald, Michael Awkward, Kerry Larson, Susan Najita, Carol Bardenstein, and Danny Hack throughout graduate school and in the early stages of this project's formation; to Nancy Cho and Susan Jaret McKinstry, whose examples of passion, learning, and humane engagement with literature and with students inspired me to enter the profession, and whose encouragement and support have been sources of strength; and to Karen Sutton and Peggy Haun Monteil, who fostered the deep joy and fulfillment I find in conversations about culture.

The financial support of the Horace H. Rackham Graduate School of the University of Michigan, the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, the University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, the University of Michigan Department of English Language and Literature, and Marshall Weinberg provided invaluable time and resources to focus on this project. Jan Burgess and Senia Vasquez have provided kind and expert administrative support in negotiating the University's many and branching bureaucratic paths.

I am grateful for the advice and critiques offered on portions of this project by the USists Consortium at the University of Michigan, the University of Michigan Judaic Studies Capstone Seminar, the 2010 AAJR Summer Graduate Student Seminar, and the Stanford University Jewish Studies Graduate Colloquium. I am also particularly indebted to Inger Bergom, Nick Block, Tom Clark, Sara Feldman, Adam Frelander, Molly Hatcher, Sasha Hoffman, Emily Kopley, Dan Kupfert-Heller, Kenny Ligda, Spencer Piston, Ben Pollak, Molly Sandomire, David Schlitt, and Oren Segal, for their care, assistance, and camaraderie, which in many ways, large and small, I have felt while completing this work.

Finally, the constant support of my family has made the troubles of the dissertation less bitter, and the joys, more savory. Thanks beyond words to my parents, Meri-Jane Rochelson and Joel Mintz, who raised me with a reverence for books and for the sanctity of the minds they represent, and to Serafima Mintz, my sister, friend, and teacher. My grandparents, Pearl Rochelson, Samuel Mintz, and Eleanor Mintz, encouraged me from the beginning of this project. Though Grandma Pearl and Grandpa Sam didn't live to see its conclusion, their love continues to inspire me. My friendship with Grandma Ellie is a treasured gift. Thanks, too, to my parents-in-law, Eva and Brian Allison, who have welcomed me warmly into their family, and have supported me with kindness and love. My son Sam has started recently to sit at my computer in front of an open text document, typing nonsense. "Daddy," he says, "I'm working on my chapter." His brother Karl begins to babble. My love for them only deepens as we discover each other, and has buoyed my completion of this work. In this joy, and in so much else, Sarah Allison has been my partner. Her lively intelligence and wit have touched all of the ideas in this text, to the ideas' great benefit, and to my own. I am grateful, in this acknowledgment and always, always, to her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTERS	
Foreword.....	1
Chapter One: Jewish Writing vs. Jewish Writers: Genre and Authorship in Post-War American Anthologies of Jewish Fiction	12
Chapter Two: Maturity, Form, and Tillie Olsen’s <i>Tell Me a Riddle</i> : From “Early Genius” to “Fragments and Scraps”.....	56
Chapter Three: “Literature Isn’t Little Stories!”: Cynthia Ozick’s Poetics of Littleness and the Construction of Jewish American Authorship.....	110
Chapter Four: “I <i>Am</i> the Kind of Person who Writes this Kind of Story”: The Jewish Writer as Jewish Professional in Philip Roth’s <i>The Ghost Writer</i>	150
Conclusion	199

ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers the place of the short story in the post-war efflorescence of American Jewish writing. It focuses particularly on the strategies that Jewish writers deployed, through their uses and meta-fictional portrayals of the short story form, to negotiate between Jewish and professional personae. The short story is at once a vehicle of entry into single-author publication and a generally insufficient guarantor of further publication, a forum for experimentation and an emblem of high-art mastery. In works foregrounding the liminality of the short story as a marker of professional attainment, I argue, writers of Jewish fiction interrogated their professional, Jewish, and Jewish-professional identities in the postwar American literary scene. Many writers of Jewish descent or of Jewish subject matter have professed ambivalence (if not hostility) to being labeled Jewish writers. Between their own Jewishness and their work, these writers maintain a barrier of professionalism, arguing that their work, whatever else it is, stands in relation to them *as work* and not as scarcely-mediated expression of their selves or their cultural origins. Chapter one compares two approaches to the definition of Jewish writing—Jewish communal and literary-professional—in anthologies edited by Harold U. Ribalow (*This Land, These People*, 1950) and Saul Bellow (*Great Jewish Stories*, 1963). Chapter two examines Tillie Olsen’s enlistment of the short story form in *Tell Me a Riddle* (1961), in the service of a post-Communist politics that draws on narratives of Jewish socialism to link the discontinuities in a writer’s career with the political ruptures confronting the political Left in the early Cold War. Chapter three moves from Olsen’s concern with gaps in political commitment to Cynthia Ozick’s treatment of the truncated careers of Yiddish writers in her 1969 story “Envy; or, Yiddish in America.” Chapter four

concludes with an analysis of Philip Roth's investigation of Jewish literary professionalism in his 1979 novella *The Ghost Writer*.

FOREWORD

In an essay titled “Clearing My Jewish Throat,” (2005) written for *Who We Are: On Being (and Not Being) A Jewish American Writer*, a collection in which Jewish writers discuss the place of Jewishness in their work, Grace Paley offers this account of the beginning of her career as a writer:

In 1959, three volumes of short stories were published to reviews that cheered the authors. They were then told by their publishers that they’d have to write a novel. Short stories were not a popular genre. (The collections, *Tell Me a Riddle*, *Goodbye, Columbus*, and *The Little Disturbances of Man*, are still in print some forty-five years later, still read at homes, libraries, schools.) Obediently, Tillie Olsen and I made an honest effort. She labored at Yonondio [sic] for years, starting and stopping as life permitted, and it was finally published. I tried for about two years and a hundred pages to make a novel, saw that it was no good, and have written short stories and poems ever since. Philip Roth, equally obedient, was successful, writing the big books so truthfully and well that the Jews were angry at him for at least fifteen years before they became extremely proud. In any event we were all Jews. Of course we hoped that Americans, the regular kind, were listening too. (13)¹

Paley’s career is admittedly unique, and not only among Jewish writers, in being constructed almost entirely out of stories and poems (and then mostly out of stories) with no published novel either buoying or weighing down her oeuvre. But nonetheless Paley’s suggestive relation of the short story form to the situation of the Jewish writer has significance beyond her own career. In Paley’s report of her career’s beginning, the Jewish identity that she, Olsen, and Roth share appears incidental. “In

¹ In fact, as I discuss in chapter two, the story of *Yonondio*’s composition is more complicated: the novel was begun, as a novel, early in Olsen’s career. Half of its first chapter was published as a short story in *Partisan Review* in 1934, earning Olsen a contract for the novel then in progress. Ultimately, the novel remained unfinished, however, and thus was unpublished until after Olsen’s reputation had been secured by her story collection and her widely acclaimed 1973 critical essay, *Silences*. When the novel finally saw publication, its lack of completion was central to the rhetorical work that it performed.

Significantly, Olsen’s collection was published in 1961, not, as Paley writes, in 1959. This error suggests that the cohort of Jewish story writers that Paley creates for herself in this essay is even more a matter of chosen self-presentation than the coincidental dates of their first collection publications would imply.

any event,” they were all Jews. Indeed, Roth’s case, the writer’s aggravation of a large segment of the Jewish community testifies to how “truthfully and well” he writes. More meaningful to their experiences as writers is their relative comfort with a particular form (the novel) and their relative preference for another form (the short story). The publishers’ desire for novels, in Paley’s account, signifies the larger compromise between an author’s formal inclinations and extra-literary considerations that the writer makes in the service of access to a wider audience. This wider audience is not identical to “Americans, the regular kind,” but neither is it entirely different. In this context, Jewishness occupies an ambiguous position in relation to artistic autonomy: its relevance to Paley’s specific argument about the pressures that the publishing industry exerts on aspiring writers is not immediately obvious, but it is included in Paley’s account nonetheless. The publishers’ dictation of the authors’ next form strikes an oppressive tone, casting the writers’ subsequent work as acts of obedience or disobedience, but the desire for access to a wide and unknown audience motivates the writers’ assent. In the context of the market’s demand for novels, the short story, for Paley, is a rebellious form. Writing stories, and attempting to get those stories published in single-author collections, Paley suggests, is a matter of professional integrity: of dedicating herself to her own particular art. The apparent marketplace pressure to produce novels manifests a larger pressure to tailor one’s fiction to publishers’ preferences. Paley’s point, posing the difficulties that she and Olsen faced in composing a novel against Roth’s comparatively easy success, is primarily feminist: though the gender of the authors suggests a reading of the short story in line with Tillie Olsen’s own argument about the social politics of fragmented authorial careers (discussed at greater length in chapter two of this dissertation), their shared Jewishness seems to sit alongside the more central issue of the exploitation of talent in a context of gender inequity. Paley’s invocation of Jewishness, understandable in the context of a volume subtitled “On Being (and not Being) a Jewish Writer,”

appears in this section of her essay without much argumentative context at all. Jewishness at best suggests an audience insufficient to the writers' ambitions.

And yet, the titular clearing of Paley's "Jewish throat" is clearly an artistically significant event, intimately related to the aesthetics and politics of Paley's short stories. For Paley in particular, voice is a central feature through which Jewishness (among other ethnic identities) is encoded in her fiction. The development of a colloquial narrative voice is, in Paley's account of becoming a writer, a mark of independence from the norms of formal and academic writing that presented her with a blocked literary pathway (Auden, reading one of her poems when she was his student at the New School, asked her "if I used words like 'subaltern' frequently" [15]). As such, the development of Paley's colloquial voice echoes her resistance to composing a novel for the sake of custom or commerce. "It took me years," she writes, "to clear my Jewish throat. This did not happen until I began to write stories—in my midthirties. The people in my stories were often opinionated, sometimes took over all the telling. These women and children, the men also, were mostly New Yorkers, occasionally Irish or Black, frequently two or three generations of Jews. [. . .] I had to let them speak and I noticed that when they were telling the truth, any truth, they spoke well, or at least interestingly" (15–16). Here, Paley links truth telling—an act with unambiguous social and political significance—with a mode of self-expression that her fiction codes as casual (and that characterizes, too, the voice in her non-fiction essays), and that thereby appears aligned with an ideal of authenticity (as opposed to market-driven self-interest), and with a humanistic appreciation for her characters' complete personhood, suggested by their embeddedness in robust social worlds that give them their characteristic modes of expression.

The effect of allusive exposition of a full life, the significance of which runs beyond the incident of the story—expressed in Paley's story "A Conversation With My Father," (1974) in the comment that "Everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life" (232)—is largely

conditioned by Paley's reliance on brief narratives that emphasize the flavor of her characters' speech, often over and above the specific events that they relate. The various opinionated people who "sometimes took over all the telling" are given large presence in minimal space. Paley's discovery of a voice that is not only her own, but is a *Jewish* voice, and that finds its characteristic expression in shorter forms, is far from incidental, but rather an originary formal decision with profound importance for the writer's professional life. Read against this textual practice, Paley's comment that "we hoped that Americans, the regular kind, were listening too," becomes at once a straightforward expression of a writer's desire for an unfamiliar audience and an implicit indictment of the sensibility that aims for normative approval, and that is thus more willing to capitulate on critical artistic choices; such as, for example, the form—novel or short story—that a writer's prose fiction will take.

This dissertation considers the place of the short story in the post-war efflorescence of American Jewish writing. It focuses particularly on the strategies that Jewish writers deployed, through their uses and meta-fictional portrayals of the short story form, to negotiate between Jewish and professional personae. For many of the writers that I discuss, the term "professional Jewish writer" contained an implicit paradox: that the writer's Jewishness or invocation of Jewish themes was of an entirely different nature than their professional identity, and yet that for many it provided a literary context crucial to understanding their careers. In works that foreground the short story's ambiguity as a marker of professional attainment—at once a vehicle of entry into single-author publication and a generally insufficient guarantor of further publication, a forum for experimentation and an emblem of high-art mastery—these writers of Jewish fiction interrogated their professional, Jewish, and Jewish-professional identities in the postwar American literary scene. Often, in the works that I discuss, the short story is anything but a neutral medium for considering the tension between Jewish writing and Jewish writers. Instead, even for such established writers as

was Philip Roth in 1979, the short story virtually squirms with contending connotations of virtuosity and striving, potential and limitation. Indeed, all of the narratives that anchor this dissertation's single author chapters are linked in the ambiguous relationship they share with the form of the short story itself: from Tillie Olsen's "Tell Me a Riddle," which fills about half of the four-story collection that bears its name, to Cynthia Ozick's "Envy; or, Yiddish in America," billed as a novella in the number of *Commentary* in which it appeared, to the fictional story "Higher Education," written by Nathan Zuckerman in Roth's own novella *The Ghost Writer*, these stories are long. The stories, joined also by the thematic attention that they pay to the development and frustration of potential—political, cultural, and literary—themselves play at the boundaries of the development (artistic and professional) that is considered possible in magazine fiction. In these works, I argue, the short story, precisely for the complexity of its relationship with single-author publication, becomes a key site for examining the conflict between authors' Jewish and professional identifications.

My study begins with the 1950 publication of the first anthology dedicated to contemporary American Jewish writing, Harold U. Ribalow's *This Land, These People*, and concludes with the 1979 publication of Philip Roth's *The Ghost Writer*, a novella published first in two parts in the *New Yorker*, which looks back at the development of a Rothian Jewish writer in the immediate post-war period and which focuses on a controversial but professionally significant short story. As is evident in Grace Paley's account, the short story, viewed through the lens of career advancement, has had a vexed relationship to the professional development of authors in postwar America. The form's tricky position relative to specifically single-author publication is particularly significant to this study's consideration of the often complicated intersection of the Jewish and professional identities of authors. With very few exceptions, short stories (contra novels) always appear materially contextualized by other texts, whether additional stories in an anthology, articles in a magazine, a blogroll on an online literary journal, or other stories by the same author in a collection. As such,

stories are uniquely positioned, relative to the novel, to introduce an author's work to an audience who might have no additional knowledge of that author's writing, to develop a reader's sense of an author's characteristic style as it develops over several works, and to provide a thumbnail characterization of that author (as, say, a *New Yorker* writer, a science-fiction writer, a Chicana writer to watch, etc.). Though novels, of course, also offer readers material clues in the form of typesetting, jacket design, blurbs, etc., to the kind of book they are and the kind of author who wrote them, these effects, I would argue, are heightened in the short story (particularly in short stories by un-established writers) by the robustness of the contexts in which they appear. Especially for authors at the beginning of their careers, the short story offers not only different narrative constraints than the novel, but a fundamentally different set of professional possibilities, and thus, as we'll see in several of the following chapters, a pointed forum for considering the development of professional personae.

The connection between biography and subject matter can be particularly complicated in the case of postwar Jewish writers, many of whom have professed ambivalence or even hostility to being labeled "Jewish writers." Biographical definitions of Jewish writing can cast or can appear to cast such writing as a personal expression of the writer's essential self, downplaying the significance of craft in the interpretation of a writer's work. Rachel Kadish, writing in the note to her story, "The Argument," in the collection *Lost Tribe* (2003), expresses a common authorial dissatisfaction with this categorization: "In subject and in voice, 'The Argument' is identifiably Jewish (though as I type these words I practically hear [my protagonist] Kreutzer's protest: 'As if a story was a thing you circumcised . . .?'). And I understand that labels such as 'Jewish writer' or 'woman writer' can be in some way helpful to readers. I choose, however, to consider myself simply a writer" (370–1). Though the work may be Jewish (and even that is a matter of dispute), the writer rejects the label. This is not to say that Kadish or any of the numerous other writers who have offered similar

disclaimers, in doing so renounce any personal connection to Judaism. Rather, between their own Jewishness and their work, they maintain a barrier of professionalism. Their work, whatever else it is, stands in relation to them *as work*, they argue, and not as scarcely mediated expression of their selves or their cultural origins. Indeed, while definitions of Jewish *fiction* can plausibly (and pragmatically) be offered on the basis of subject matter, voice, cultural context, readership, etc., definitions of Jewish *writers* tend to make ontological claims. These claims are made more complicated, still, by the variety of common vectors of Jewish identification, particularly ethnicity, which frames Jewishness as cultural inheritance, and religion, which links Jewishness more concretely to some observance (or even the pointed non-observance) of a set of practices. If the writer's craft functions rhetorically to guarantee the distance between the writer's Jewishness and the text's Jewishness, then the career of the author, drawing their work together by intimating their biographical wholeness, troubles this distinction.

This dissertation begins with a consideration of a key venue for the presentation of stories in a Jewish context, Jewish story anthologies, and then proceeds to three case studies of Jewish writers addressing the relationship between Jewishness and literary professionalism in the short story form. Chapter one pairs two post-war anthologies of Jewish fiction: Harold U. Ribalow's *This Land, These People* (1950), the first anthology to focus exclusively on contemporary Anglophone American Jewish Writing, and Saul Bellow's *Great Jewish Stories* (1963), which differs from Ribalow's in reaching back to biblical literature and drawing from a number of linguistic traditions, but which nonetheless responds directly to Ribalow's anthology. Ribalow, editor of several collections of Jewish stories along with other volumes on Jewish culture, approached the category of Jewish literature as a partisan of the cause and published his anthologies through comparatively small presses, only in hardcover format; Bellow, whose own fame stemmed from his novels' critical acclaim, edited *Great Jewish Stories* as part of a line of quality mass market paperbacks produced by the Dell publishing

house. Despite the differences in these texts' historical scope and material form, they share a direct connection through Bellow's review of *This Land, These People*, fragments of which review Bellow later adapted for his own anthology's introduction. These two collections, I argue, represent two distinct and characteristic approaches to the problem of defining Jewish fiction, each placing different weight on the Jewish identity of the author in the definitions they offer for literary quality, that is: *good* Jewish writing. Ribalow's approach places a premium on the author's insider knowledge of the Jewish community and the texts' fidelity to Jewish communal life, while Bellow's, though still reliant on the author's biographical Jewishness as a criterion for the categorization of Jewish fiction, aims to conceptualize Jewish writing in terms of literary form. These two approaches to Jewish textual categorization reflect competing conceptions of the professional field of Jewish literature: one (Ribalow's) understands Jewish writing in terms of a network of Jewish writers continuous with the broader Jewish community, and the other (Bellow's) understands Jewish writing as a category meaningful primarily as a subset of professional literary activity more generally.

Chapter two analyzes Tillie Olsen's *Tell Me a Riddle*, a 1961 story collection that constituted the writer's only internally complete published volume (her novel, *Yonnonddio*, discussed in a footnote above, was published as an uncompleted work). *Tell Me a Riddle* approaches Jewishness obliquely, primarily through its portrayal of an extended family of Jewish heritage. Despite the relative absence of direct consideration of Jewish subjects or practices, however, the collection draws on the idea of Jewish continuity—a heavily weighted concept in post-war American Jewish discourse—as an element of its larger concern with Left political fragmentation and discontinuity during a period of Cold War deradicalization. As author of the pioneering 1978 feminist text *Silences*, Olsen devoted significant consideration to the conditions that hinder authors from doing or completing significant work. *Tell Me a Riddle*, likewise, is a book about what can be made out of discontinuity. The collection is dually motivated by concerns for the social blocks that hinder the development of

individual potential and the socio-political blocks that frustrate attempts to extend a revolutionary politics across several generations. The collection's title story, multiply anthologized in anthologies of Jewish writing, frames Jewish continuity, traditionally considered (and continuity in general) as at best an unattainable goal, and at worst an agent of oppression. The collection instead imagines fulfillment in discontinuity through a recurring secondary character.

Chapter three considers Cynthia Ozick's "Envy; or, Yiddish in America," a 1969 short story which focuses its attention on a specific narrative of Yiddish writers in post-war America. Ozick, in interviews and essays, has argued that the story is an act of mourning for a literature and a culture too soon truncated. Ozick's story, however, is no simple elegy for the loss of vernacular Yiddish culture as such. Rather, "Envy" situates its treatment of Yiddish culture in the professional context of the literary publishing industry, which, as the readership for Yiddish literature increasingly reads that literature in translation, functions as a gatekeeper (of a now narrower gate) between writers and their readers. "Envy" presents not simply the plight of the Yiddish writer whose audience is on the wane, nor the tragedy of that shrinking audience, but rather each of these concerns manifested in the new need for Yiddish literature to be published in translation, a situation in which Yiddish writers enter the market for publication at a disadvantage compared particularly to Anglophone Jewish writers, and with a waning native audience to support them. The story's winking reference to living Yiddish writers appears to offer a direct connection between historical and fictional subjects. The identity of the writers who inspired the story, however, is more fungible than it first seems: Ozick has claimed in interviews that the writers in the story were inspired by the experiences of American Hebrew poets. Moreover, the story's depiction of the isolated and unread writer closely reflects Ozick's own professional experience in crafting her first novel. In this way, Ozick's story generalizes from the specific case of post-war Yiddish writers, to American Jewish writers more broadly, to, finally, the common professional hurdles faced by writers seeking to publish.

The fourth chapter examines Philip Roth's treatment of the conflict between the ideology of professionalism and the position of the Jewish writer in his 1979 novella *The Ghost Writer*. Roth's protagonist, Zuckerman, spends the book in hot water with his family over a story that he has written which shows them, his father feels, in an unfavorable light. The paradox at the heart of *The Ghost Writer* is that the very professional norms that would appear to guarantee Zuckerman's success and his family's approval necessitate his production of a story that secures his alienation from them. Roth's novella pivots on writerly ambition—on the making of the writer's name. *The Ghost Writer* simultaneously plumbs the limits of the popular metanarrative of Jewish American success—a story rooted in the understanding that the rise of American Jews to the middle class is predicated on professional performances that are at once a credit to the community and that depend on the erasure of their practitioner's racial, ethnic, and religious distinction. In this context, I argue, *The Ghost Writer* locates a key tension between the two sides of the term "Jewish writer": that between the anonymizing preference of professional ideology, the often explicitly biographical referent of the adjective "Jewish," and the product of a writer's work: at once personal and crafted.

Together, these chapters argue for a view of Jewish American writing that pays greater attention to the intersection of specifically professional performances, formal artistic choices, and the history of American Jewish life. Professional pressures, I argue, are centrally important both to the literary choices that writers make—down to the level of formal and aesthetic choice—and to the ways in which we read them as representative figures of American Jewry. By examining these stories against the narratives of their production, we discover the ways in which the profession of authorship itself shapes the representation of Jewish culture.

Works Cited

- Kadish, Rachel. "The Argument." *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction from the Edge*. Paul Zakrzewski, Ed. New York: Perennial, 2003. 345–371.
- Paley, Grace. "A Conversation with My Father." *The Collected Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994. 232–237.
- . "Clearing My Jewish Throat." *Who We Are: On Being (and Not Being) a Jewish American Writer*. Derek Rubin, Ed. New York: Schocken, 2005. 12–18.

**CHAPTER ONE: Jewish Writing vs. Jewish Writers:
Genre and Authorship in Post-War American Anthologies of Jewish Fiction**

The evaluative gesture—the establishment of the quality of a literary work, bread and butter of the book review—is largely alien to contemporary literary criticism. Notwithstanding the recovery projects and canon contestations central to the culture wars of the eighties and nineties, the task of classifying a work as good or bad has long been understood to be outside the purview of literary academia, at least in formal professional publications. Even when academic literary critics venture into reviewing *per se*, we clearly perform a different kind of critical function than that dictated by the analytical epistemology that governs the field and that we encourage our students to develop. The authority to claim a work as good or bad, however implicit it may be in the syllabi we create and the comments we make offhandedly in class, is not the same as the authority claimed in a journal article or scholarly book. Moreover, the broadly conservative cast that such evaluation was understood to possess in the culture wars of the eighties and nineties—the understanding that absolute claims of literary quality reinforce rather than scrutinize existing distributions of cultural power—fortified the barrier between academic and popular critical postures, particularly in the case of literature introduced under a multiculturalist rubric.² And yet, just such evaluative claims have been central to

² John Guillory concludes his preface to *Cultural Capital* with the recognition that “The strangest consequence of the canon debate has surely been the discrediting of judgment, as though human beings could ever refrain from judging the things they make” (xiv). He further explains: “It is scarcely surprising that a critique of canon formation which reduces that process to conspiratorial acts of evaluation is compelled to regard the discourse of the aesthetic as merely fraudulent, as a screen for the covert affirmation of hegemonic values which can be shown to be the real qualification for canonicity in the first place. For the same reason that such a critique sees the discourse of the aesthetic only as a mystification of the bias of judgment, it can ignore the mediating functions of the school, reducing that institution to a support for the equally fraudulent claims to objectivity or expertise on the part of the judges, the gatekeepers of the canon” (270). Guillory

the popular advancement, marketing, and discussion of what we can broadly call ethnic literature during the periods when such works were coming to cultural prominence. Leslie Fiedler, appraising the state of American Jewish fiction in the Jewish publication *Midstream* in 1958, is representative in his emphasis on the importance of literary quality in crafting a literary history of twentieth century American Jewish writing and in connecting that literary history to the social history of American Jewish life: “[The fifties] demanded a Jewish hero, perhaps, but hesitated indifferently between Augie March [hero of Saul Bellow’s *The Adventures of Augie March*] and Marjorie Morningstar [Herman Wouk’s eponymous heroine]. What was demanded was the talent and devotion and conviction which belong particularly to Bellow, and to the rich, complicated milieu out of which he emerged” (35). While the 1950s provided a fertile soil for the emergence and flourishing of Jewish themes and characters, it is through the talent, devotion, and conviction which attest to the *literary* quality of Bellow’s work—and that separates Bellovian achievement from the Woukian middlebrow—that the potential of American Jewish writing is realized. Jewish American literature entered a position of prominence on the American literary scene not simply on the grounds that it was important, but rather on the grounds that it was good. But what, in this context, does such a claim mean? On what rationales and to what effects did proponents of American Jewish literary culture claim the literary quality of the works they advanced? What, to popular advocates of Jewish writing during the postwar period, was the value of Jewish literature, and the value of Jewishness to that literature?

A key place to look for answers to these questions are the popular (i.e., commercially produced) anthologies of Jewish writing that appeared with increasing frequency in the postwar

ultimately argues that the aims of canon reformers to redress social inequities through reform of the curriculum would be better served by fixing inequities in access to the classroom. He thus concludes with a defense of aesthetic judgment that rests on just such academic standards as I mention above—one which substitutes standards of intellectual importance for standards of representation as the grounds for curricular revision, though in principle it would allow the inclusion of many of the same texts that were the object of feminist and multiculturalist recovery efforts.

period. Such collections, whether focused entirely on contemporary American Jewish writing or spanning multiple historical periods, languages, and geographic boundaries, not only presented implicit and explicit arguments about how Jewish literature was constituted, but also offered examples of that fiction as evidence of its quality. To a large extent, as various scholars have argued,³ these anthologies function as sites for Jewish literary canon formation, or at least for the articulation of the meaning of Jewish literature as a literary historical category. But, as this chapter will argue, canon formation and literary historical interventions are only a small part of the work of these publications, which targeted themselves not mainly to scholars, but to casual but interested readers. Readings of these anthologies which use them as evidence for the state of the art of Jewish writing at different periods of history, supported by the anthologies' often polemical introductions, privilege the interventions that they make in literary historiography and the evidence that their content and composition provide for analyses of American Jewish identity formation.⁴ These approaches to the anthology are certainly valuable—they tell us much about the nature of postwar American Jewish life as imagined in literature, and about the cultural work that such anthologies perform in the project of developing and articulating Jewish culture outside of (and alongside) Jewish religious institutions (from synagogues to rituals to religious texts). But whatever claims

³ See, in particular, Jeremy Shere, “Jewish American Canons,” and David Stern, “The Anthological Imagination In Jewish Literature.” Stern writes that “Surely the most (and almost the only) discussed aspect of the anthology has been its canonizing role, its service in authorizing, sacralizing, and legitimating certain works and of marginalizing, delegitimizing, and anathemizing others” (5).

⁴ Julian Levinson, for example, argues that postwar anthologies of Jewish literature are “premised on the idea that a definable Jewish culture, not reducible to religion, exists” (144), and that imaginative literature occupies a privileged place in their definitions of this secular Jewish “culture” or “ethnicity.” “If the central metaphors for Jewishness are the debate, the struggle, and the bridge, and if the authority of the normative religious tradition has been unseated,” he writes, “the only remaining mediating force becomes human consciousness, which itself becomes the final arbiter of meaning. And imaginative literature, we might say, specializes in the representation of individual consciousness and subjective response” (145). If anthologies instantiate secular Jewish culture, their literary content points to the personalization of Jewishness, and the connection of secular Jewish identification to literary modes of thought. For Levinson, “secularism need not be looked for in the literature itself,” but rather “can be seen instead as a project that might use literature in defining Jewish identity” (134).

these volumes make to the work of cultural summation they make as commercial objects, premised, among other things, on the attractions that they hold for a definite class of readers.

If the introductions and design of these collections present them as records of Jewish American literary writing, then their stories also function for readers as objects of emotional engagement and literary enjoyment. Indeed, a key function of these commercial anthologies, published during a period in which Jewish writers and intellectuals were coming into positions of increasing cultural cachet, was to lay claim to a readership on the basis of the categorical appeal of Jewish stories—that is, to suggest, and to bank on the suggestion, that Jewish writing had a specifically generic value: that it could command the enthusiasm of a significant group of readers on the basis of their interest in something called “Jewish writing.” Situating postwar American ethnic modernism within the structures of literary production defined by the rise of creative writing programs, Mark McGurl argues that postwar ethnic writing might best be understood as “high-cultural pluralism,” a literary mode which “enacts a layering of positively marked differences: in the modernist tradition, it understands its self-consciously crafted and/or intellectually substantial products as importantly distinct from mass culture or genre fiction, although in practice [. . .] this distinction is often blurred or intentionally put at risk. The high-cultural pluralist writer is additionally called upon to speak from the point of view of one or another hyphenated population, synthesizing the particularity of the ethnic—or analogously marked—voice with the elevated idiom of literary modernism” (56–7).⁵ The prestige of high-cultural pluralism—its “high culture”

⁵ The emphasis of McGurl’s argument is on explaining the peculiar rise of “systematic creativity” with the increasing dominance of the creative writing program as an American literary institution after the second world war. To this end, his idea of high-cultural pluralism offers a powerful explanation of the work that ethnic literary fiction does to marry group identification with a form (late modernism) that emphasizes the irreducible intellectual and aesthetic achievements of the individual writer—that is, to enlist ethnic writing as a vehicle for high cultural prestige. In this explanation of the post-war American literary system, genre fiction, which is “systematic” in a fundamentally different way from the output of creative writing programs, stands against the literary modes at the center of his study. McGurl’s analysis of ethnic modernism is animated by a tension

pedigree—depends upon the theoretical dominance of its affinities with modernist craftsmanship over those it shares with genre fiction. The anthologies under discussion in this chapter at once lay claim to the contemporary, literary prestige of Jewish writing and construe such writing as a genre with popular appeal. The attractiveness of Jewish writing may be linked to secular or religious feelings, and it certainly holds different meanings for different readers, but regardless of the specific form such attraction takes in any individual reader and of the personal motivations that compel it, the generic appeal of Jewish fiction combines a reader's presumably extra-literary interest in Jewish culture with their enjoyment of literary reading. The question of literary quality is thus crucial to the anthologies that I discuss below, for more than simply their marketing. Anthologies such as Harold U. Ribalow's *This Land, These People* (1950) and Saul Bellow's *Great Jewish Stories* (1963), this chapter's main objects of inquiry, see literary quality as crucial to the connections that each collection makes with its readers, and to the ways in which such collections seek simultaneously to court and to evade their genericity. Though "literary quality" holds different meanings for each editor, in each case it mediates between the enticement that the category of Jewish fiction holds for the reader and the threat of sentimentalism, parochialism, and formulaicism that such categorization presents.

The issue of literary quality is particularly acute in the genre of the commercial anthology. As aggregations mainly of previously published works, commercial anthologies imply that their contents represent a selection of excellent or at least reasonably good representations of their subject. At the same time, such collections tend not to have much highbrow cachet. Consider, for example, Random House publisher Bennett Cerf's introduction to his 1945 collection, *Modern American Short Stories*:

This is the golden age of the anthology. Give any amiable hack a pair of scissors and a paste pot, and he'll bring you back the day after tomorrow a fully annotated collection of "The World's Great Fish Stories," "Great Tales of Error and the

between structured, institutional pedagogy of the creative writing program and the individual creative expression that the program tries to foster.

Supercilious,” “My Favorite Seventy-three Nymphomaniacs,” or “The Nursery Book of Famous Hatchet Murders.” There are only two valid excuses for adding another anthology to the ever-expanding array. One is the hope that it can introduce at least a handful of insufficiently exploited talents to the general reading public. The other, in the words of Frank Morgan, is to make a little money. (10)

Such collections, in Cerf’s sardonic view, are not standard bearers of artistic merit, but rather a convenient and relatively easy way to capitalize on niche readerships within the larger market for fiction. If the literary prestige of story anthologies is tainted by the form’s association with commercial exigencies and cynical pandering to an audience’s unliterary desires, the short story itself is also a bearer of compromised cultural capital. Though the short story has been associated with craftsmanship and formal unity by commentators from Edgar Allan Poe to the New Critics, it has by the same token been disparaged as a genre of formulaic aesthetic conservatism—the fit form of writing handbooks and conventional hackery. As Andrew Levy has argued, “to the extent that the short story is a celebration of the marginal voices of our culture, that celebration is mitigated by the marginalization of the short story itself” (47).

Collecting stories that treat several subjects in diverse styles, anthologies of Jewish fiction offer the reader a variety of potential points of attachment to Jewish culture, from literary historical engagement to emotional and aesthetic experience. The anthology of Jewish fiction thus speaks in two voices: the scholarly-but-accessible tones of popular literary historiography and the often ad-inflected enthusiasm of projected emotional engagement. Consider, for example, two ways in which Irving Howe’s 1977 New American Library anthology, *Jewish-American Stories*, frames itself: its introduction, written by Howe, and the copy on its back cover. Howe’s introduction assumes a voice of critical authority, situating its subject, Jewish American literature, within a discourse of large-scale literary movements with deep historical resonance. “Over the decades, by now stretching into centuries,” Howe begins, “American literature has steadily drawn fresh energies from regions, subcultures and ethnic and racial groups which, if taken together, form a pleasing heterogeneity” (1).

Jewish American literature, an entity greater than the sum of the stories collected in Howe's volume, is thus introduced as a vital contributor to American letters—at once an expression of “a kind of regional culture [. . . Probably] one of the last this country is going to have” (2), and the product of “a profound, even a mysterious sense of distinctiveness” (4). Howe's introduction aims to establish the significance of Jewish American literature to American writing more broadly, and to enumerate, “a bit quixotically, [. . .] some of the main characteristics of American Jewish writing” (4): its style, its subject matter, its authors' sensibilities, its construction of Jewishness, etc. Howe's introduction, that is to say, focuses on Jewish American writing as such, training its analysis on the writers and works that, in Howe's argument, make up the Jewish American literary tradition. Though Howe's introduction projects a Jewish or Judeophile reader for whom the texts of Jewish American literature would be meaningful (“almost all [of the stories in this collection] would be incomprehensible to a reader who lacked some memory or impression—firsthand or through reading—of the immigrant Jewish milieu” [5]), he constructs that reader with reference to a standard of comprehensibility, rather than to one of emotional engagement. While Howe's introduction is, in fact, attuned to emotions associated with Jewish American experiences, he associates these emotions overwhelmingly with Jewish American writers rather than with readers of their stories.

The book's back cover strikes a markedly different note. Red capital letters above a selection of stories from the anthology announce the legibility of these particularistic texts to the most general of readers: “FROM THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE—FICTION OF UNIVERSAL APPEAL.” The remainder of the cover's text goes on to characterize the drama of that experience and the texture of that appeal:

These are among the 26 outstanding short stories selected for this landmark collection by Irving Howe, author of World of Our Fathers, and one of our leading literary critics and social chroniclers. In them are reflected one of the greatest and most dramatic of American experiences—the soul-shaking changes that occurred when age-old Jewish traditions came into contact, in ways that resulted in either conflict or fusion, with the ideas of the New World. Here are stories filled with

laughter, tears, compassion, wisdom. Here are humanity and artistry that touch and move us all.

Though the jacket copy, like Howe's introduction, suggests a metanarrative which draws these stories together, the emphasis of that narrative is on its personal effects—both the “soul-shaking changes” of American Jewish immigration and its aftermath, and the emotionally resonant “laughter, tears, compassion, wisdom” that emanate from the stories' writers (and, implicitly, from both their “age-old Jewish traditions” and their dynamic modern milieux), in order to touch and move the reader. While they address different concerns and speak in different tones, the introduction and jacket copy of Howe's anthology aren't in conflict. The emotional experience of text and context suggested by the jacket-copy is compatible with the intellectual interest implied by the tone and content of the introduction. Indeed, the jacket copy touts Howe's scholarly bona fides, while the introduction tends to present its claims in an objective but not entirely disinterested tone that invites the reader's emotional investment in the story of Jewish American literary history—a tendency evident in the pathos of Howe's much quoted claim that mid-century Jewish American culture “finds its voice and its passion at exactly the moment it approaches disintegration” (3). Nonetheless, Howe's introduction, characterizing the works in the collection and the literary tradition of which they are a part, emphasizes a critical and intellectual interest in the materials of the anthology, and the paragraph on the back cover suggests a frame for a reader's engagement rooted in an emotional experience of the stories and of the larger historical narrative that they reflect. If the focus of Howe's introduction is weighted toward the collection's authors, the book's packaging is weighted toward a reader's projected experience.

The interplay between the dual editorial voices of Howe's anthology, from the comparatively dispassionate mood of literary history to the exhortatory tones of commerce, don't simply characterize this anthology alone, but also reflect the broader project of the publication series of which it is a part, the Mentor imprint of the New American Library (NAL). The NAL was (and is) a

mass market press specializing in the publication of works of traditional literary or cultural value in inexpensive, mass market editions. As the NAL's slogan, "good reading for the millions" suggests, the press was founded both on the democratic ideal of publicly accessible culture and on the profitability of making such culture available. According to book historian Thomas Bonn, "The New American Library's major contribution to American culture and to book publishing was its Mentor imprint, which proved that serious works of nonfiction can be sold cheaply and profitably through a variety of mass distribution channels" (183). While Howe's introduction situates Jewish American literature as part of a broader intellectual history of American letters and literary regionalism, the book's publication by "the most literary of the mass market publishers" (Bonn 183) aligns it with the mass market dissemination of American literary culture. The value of Jewish American stories for the NAL is necessarily both cultural and commercial—indeed, in the context of NAL publication, the stories' literary value furnishes their value within a mass market context.

As the example of Howe's 1977 collection suggests, one of the main activities of anthologies of Jewish fiction is to frame the Jewishness of their stories not only as a subject of analytical interest, but as a marketable *attraction* to their readers. Viewed through the lens provided by the popular Jewish anthology, Jewishness is not simply an analytical category, but also an appealing category: a label, like Chicano fiction or African-American fiction, but also like science fiction, medical thriller, or detective novel, that for a variety of idiosyncratic reasons might draw a reader to pick up a book. In the eyes of the popular anthologies of Jewish fiction that I discuss in this chapter, then, Jewishness is at once a subject of quality literary treatment and a signifier of generic interest, by which I mean a category that provides the initial connection between the stories of the collection and their readers. In addition to the literary historical functions that they possess, postwar American popular anthologies of Jewish fiction place their stories before their readers as objects of enjoyment, and appeal to those readers as potential fans of Jewish writing. These anthologies thus propose that

Jewish stories have both commercial and literary value. Regardless of the evenness of quality that a reader might perceive across the stories in an anthology, the anthologies that I discuss in this chapter make constitutive claims for the literary value of their contents *qua* Jewish stories, and for the marketability of Jewish stories as objects of literary quality. Such professions of quality, variable in their particulars, cast Jewish stories as unique points of readerly attachment to Jewish culture. Indeed, the commercial appeal of these volumes was often predicated, as in Howe's collection, on the idea that the reader would be moved both by the stories themselves and by the stories as metonyms for a larger Jewish experience. Anthologies of Jewish fiction address two subjects at once: the Jewish writers whose concerns and approaches they present, and the readers of Jewish texts, often presumed to be Jewish readers, for whom they provide material.⁶ They thus reveal a productive uncertainty about just what value such collections provide, and for whom.

Great Stories and Composite Portraits: Saul Bellow and Bernard Ribalow on Jewish Writers and Jewish Form

This section considers two post-war anthologies of Jewish fiction as a case study in different modes of conceiving the appeal of Jewish fiction *per se*: Harold U. Ribalow's *This Land, These People* (1950) and Saul Bellow's *Great Jewish Stories* (1963). Though these anthologies reflect different editorial frameworks, *This Land* drawing only on then-contemporary Anglophone American Jewish

⁶ For Harold U. Ribalow, writing in the weekly organ of the American Jewish Congress, the connection between Jewish books and Jewish readers was straightforward. In a 1951 article titled "Do Jews Read?" Ribalow laments that while the publication of titles of Jewish interest increased since his previous consideration of the subject in 1949, sales figures for most titles remained low: "That serious volumes by men like Lewisohn, Gaster and Heschel sell in dribblets is not to the credit of the community. That works of fiction cannot as easily be analyzed is not surprising, for no publisher can guess what kind of novels people will buy. But that the finest Jewish fiction, as some of the books listed here undoubtedly are—sell poorly is another mark against the community" (12). If Jewish books, including volumes about Israel, the Holocaust, Jewish theology, and American Jewish life, sell poorly, Ribalow suggests, it is because their implicit audience of Jewish readers has failed to meet their cultural obligation to buy them.

literature and *Great Jewish Stories* compiling work from different languages, historical periods, and geographical regions, the two volumes taken together reflect a developing discourse on what Jewish fiction is and could be for post-war American readers. The volumes are connected by more than just their shared form. In 1951, Saul Bellow authored a critical review of the *This Land* in *Commentary* magazine. Over a decade later, in composing the introduction to his own anthology (an introduction that is now itself frequently anthologized in collections of essays about Jewish writing), Bellow adapted a substantial section of material from his earlier review to furnish the concluding note of his remarks on Jewish fiction. Read in light of the material connection between the two anthologies, Bellow's later essay emerges as a continued engagement with an ongoing process of collecting Jewish writing, and an extended response to the faults that he finds in Ribalow's collection. Moreover, Ribalow's and Bellow's anthologies embody two materially and commercially distinct approaches to the collection of stories under the rubric of Jewish fiction: that of smaller Jewish publishing houses (such as Thomas Yoseloff, whose press oversaw the reprinting of Ribalow's first two anthologies in a single volume and the initial publication of his subsequent collections), and that of the mass market press, for whom Jewish fiction was one category among many. While Ribalow's hardback collection brought Jewish writing before the public eye in a comparatively limited quantity and through traditional book distribution channels, Bellow's *Great Jewish Stories* was published in several editions as a part of major mass market publisher Dell's Laurel imprint, a line of classic reprints and newly compiled anthologies designed to appeal to high-school and college students.⁷ Bellow's anthology thus placed Jewish stories between covers aesthetically

⁷ Dell's Laurel Books were part of a diversification strategy that moved the publisher outside of their traditional association with paperback pulps, reprints of contemporary hardcover novels, and assorted other print ventures (their best-selling title for many years, for example, was the *Dell Crossword Dictionary*). Per a report in *Book Production Magazine*, "The books [in Dell's catalogue] reach every age level and appeal to the many tastes within those levels. Members of the 'crayon set' are often introduced to Dell through the Color and Learn language books, grow into the Harlin Quist

indistinguishable from, for example, those of *American Short Story Masterpieces*, another Laurel anthology partaking in the same marbled cover design, enlisting Jewish fiction as a genre category appealing to a discrete audience. These two forms of Jewish textual dissemination were in commercial competition with one another. According to a 1979 *Publishers Weekly* survey of the state of Jewish publishing, “‘There is a belief in the industry,’ Schocken reports, ‘that Jews buy a disproportionately large number of books and therefore are receptive to books of Jewish interest’ [. . .] But as David Olivestone, Hebrew Publishing Company’s Editor-in-Chief, points out, this new consciousness of ‘the fact that Jews constitute a large percentage of book buyers’ contains a threat to the very life of the specialized Jewish publisher. ‘More general publishers are putting out books of Jewish interest,’ Olivestone notes, a fact clearly borne out by *PW* responses from two trade publishers who voice what is being felt and acted upon by many other general publishers: namely, that titles of Jewish interest may well be good book business.” (64) Ribalow’s and Bellow’s anthologies thus represent not simply two different individual takes on what constitutes good Jewish writing, but different commercial approaches to the issue of publishing Jewish texts and attracting and engaging with a Jewish audience.

This Land, These People, was produced in 1950 as the first anthology entirely devoted to contemporary fiction about American Jewish life written by American Jewish writers. The book, published by the comparatively small Beechurst Press, contained a selection of short stories by Jewish authors on Jewish themes published largely in the two decades before the volume’s compilation. As such, it extended Ribalow’s larger career as a guide to and partisan of Jewish literary culture. Ribalow (son of Menachem Ribalow—a noted Hebraist and the editor of the American Hebrew language publication, *Hadoar*) worked largely within secular Jewish cultural contexts as an editor for *Congress Weekly* (magazine of the American Jewish Congress), *American Zionist*, and the

line to meet ‘little Boy Blue’ and his friends, advance through school with the Laurel Leaf Library, and supplement their college educations with Laurel and Delta paperbacks” (qtd. in Laughlin 94).

Jewish Telegraphic Agency, an occasional contributor to Jewish cultural journals, and author or editor of over a dozen books of general Jewish interest (e.g., in addition to several anthologies of Jewish fiction, *The Jew in American Sports*, *Fighting Heroes of Israel*, and *Autobiographies of American Jews*), and a regular reviewer (often of books of Jewish interest) for general interest publications. Ribalow additionally can be credited with having returned the now classic *Call It Sleep* to the public eye, having initiated a correspondence with its author, Henry Roth, on the Maine duck farm where he was working in 1959, and having arranged for the novel's 1960 republication.⁸ In articles in such publications as the *Nation* and the *American Mercury*, Ribalow recommended Jewish literature as a uniquely intimate guide to Jewish culture for a (largely gentile) population in the dark about Jewish life and customs, not to mention Jewish writing. Ribalow's articles sketch a historical moment crying out for an editorial hand—one in which a profusion of work on Jewish subjects offered unprecedented opportunities for popular insight into Jewish culture and concomitantly many opportunities for misinformation about Jewish life:

Many areas of Jewish concern were treated—and still are being described—in current works of fiction, yet the general reader, picking up these books promiscuously, guided to them either because of the fame of the author's by-line or

⁸ In the introduction to *The Tie That Binds*, a collection of his interviews with Jewish writers, Ribalow calls the continued success of *Call It Sleep* “one of the most gratifying experiences of my own literary life” (11). *The Tie That Binds* is itself a fascinating document of Ribalow's construction of Jewish literary culture: organized both around its subject and the person of its editor, it places Jewish writing in a decidedly personal frame, allowing the reader a rich sense of Ribalow's opinions and editorial philosophy as developed in continuing conversation with a wide cohort of Jewish writers, most still well known. Animating Ribalow's interviews, for which he read the entire published corpus of each author, is a passion both for his subject and for the people who write Jewish fiction, a personal connection to the material augmented by author snapshots, occasionally blurry or lit with a bright full flash, taken by Ribalow at the time of each session. About Charles Angoff, a particular friend, for example, Ribalow writes, “I remain puzzled and angry that none of Angoff's novels are in paperback, that his name is mentioned only in passing when contemporary critics write comprehensive essays on American Jewish writing. His work is substantive, suffused with love for his people, and written out of a deep knowledge of the American Jew” (17). The “love for his people” and “deep knowledge of the American Jew” that Ribalow finds in Angoff's work are, I would argue, central to Ribalow's aesthetic of Jewish fiction—one which presupposes an affectionate engagement not only with Jewish culture but, through Jewish writing, with the Jewish community.

because of the enthusiasm of a particular critic or reviewer, who often has no background to judge the book accurately, has only a dim notion of Jewish life in this country.

Yet there have appeared, among the hundreds of novels devoted to Jewish themes, a handful which, if read by non-Jews in a number of concentrated sittings, will offer a better than fair idea of the American Jew; the background which formed his personality; the reasons for his neuroses, if any; the differences between himself and his fellow Americans. (“Jewish Life” 110)

In these essays, Ribalow presents Jewish fiction as a uniquely potent guide to the communal life and concerns of American Jews, yet one not without risk. To realize their potential as instruments of general education about Jewish life, such works of fiction require more than the “promiscuous” browsing of the casual reader—they demand, rather, reliable recommendations and careful attention. Such an understanding envisions the writer as an ethnographic informant, chronicling the ways that Jews respond to certain situations, the problems they tend to face, their manner of speaking and habits of thought, and the reviewer as a necessary arbiter of a source’s reliability. Thus, the watchword of the recommender (cousin of the anthologist) is “accuracy,” a term defined by their insider knowledge into American Jewish life and by an implicit separation of authentic from synthetic or stereotypical accounts.

The introduction to *This Land, These People* opens with the bold proclamation that “Every one of the short stories in this book is a story that only a Jew could have written” (1). For Ribalow, the Jewishness of the collection’s authors is of paramount importance in attesting to the worth of the collection as a record of American Jewish life. The promise that “only a Jew could have written” the stories in his collection⁹ not only vouches for their authenticity as representations of American Jewish life, but it also frames Jewish identity as literary capital. Ribalow immediately qualifies his

⁹ This partial definition of Jewish fiction resonates with Michael Kramer’s controversial 2001 argument that “[the] foundational definition of Jewish literature is the sweeping, seemingly tautological definition that, ironically, many find the least appropriate of all—that Jewish literature is simply literature written by Jews” (289). Kramer’s own argument relies heavily on the work of Jewish literary anthologists to provide evidence of the often unspoken Jewish biographical determinant underlying Jewish literary canon formation.

initial claim of the stories' Jewish provenance: "[this] is only to say that there is some aspect—reflected in either the characters, situations or mood employed—in each story that is inextricably bound to Jewish life in America" (1). But his original, controlling idea, that the contents of his anthology not only reflect American Jewish life, but that they do so in a way that is theoretically (and not just practically) unique to Jewish writers, firmly associates contemporary Jewish fiction with community participation and communal self-representation. Jewish fiction, as defined by Ribalow's anthology, is not simply fiction produced by Jews, it is fiction that *only* Jews could produce: fiction authorized as accurately Jewish by the essential authenticity of its Jewish writers.

This Land, These People is an anthology conceived in this explanatory mode: one in which "[S]lowly and individually, these Americans [its writers] have been contributing and continue to contribute to a wider understanding of Jewish life in this country in the best way they know how—through the medium of literature" (10). Even as it casts Jewish writing as part of a larger project of advancing the general understanding of Jewish life, however, *This Land* presents its writers not only as guides to Jewish life, but also as examples of Jewish integration with American culture. Ribalow's anthology thus has at least two main aims: to provide its reader with insight into American Jewish life and to argue for the achievements of American Jewish writers as contributors to a larger American literary culture. In this second sense, the collection casts its writers at once as artists ("among the most widely read in the United States," of whom "a handful [. . .] have been considered by acute literary critics as truly significant American writers" [1]) and exemplars of American Jewish cultural achievement. At the same time, Ribalow clearly understood his anthology's audience not only to consist of gentiles roaming bookstores for literary enlightenment about the state of American Jewry, but also (and more frequently) American Jews themselves. A 1951 article titled "Do Jews Read?" which Ribalow penned for *Congress Weekly* laments, among other evidence of paltry support for quality Jewish literature among Jewish readers, the disappointing sales ("not quite

4,000” [12]) of his own collection. In its editorial design, *This Land* embodies a tension between didacticism and literary enjoyment that comes into sharp focus in the ways that it imagines its readers: as Jewish insiders for whom the stories will have the appeal of truthful hominess and whose purchase of the volume might be understood as a matter of intra-ethnic solidarity, and as non-Jewish outsiders for whom the book provides a window into a previously opaque American subculture. If the recommendations that Ribalow provided in review essays in non-Jewish periodicals aimed to put accurate representations of Jewish life before the eyes of gentile readers, those works remained (like many of the stories in his anthology before their collation) in contexts that were not particularly Jewish. Indeed, the virtue of these stories and novels, implicit in Ribalow’s remarks, is that through them the gentile reader can encounter Jewish life without needing to enter a specifically Jewish space (either textual, social, or physical). Collected in *This Land, These People*, however, the stories enter a decidedly Jewish milieu, a development which threatens the didactic function they have for the non-Jewish magazine subscriber or bookstore browser even as it resolves the dangers of unselective reading. This tension is apparent in the prominent disclaimer that opens the second paragraph of the collection’s jacket copy: “No chauvinistic catalogue of stories, this anthology was compiled as a book to be read and enjoyed as literature.” Implicit in the reassurance that the reader might find more than just the pleasures of ethnic familiarity to enjoy in the volume is the concern that the anthology’s Jewish focus projects a lack of aesthetic ambition. Indeed, the introduction’s several citations of the provenance of its stories in “class magazines,” little magazines, and only a select few quality Jewish publications and its repeated reference to the popularity and acclaim of its authors serve to reassure its readers that the Jewish content of the stories in the collection doesn’t pre-empt their aesthetic value; that reading the stories can be fun, and not (or not only) work.

The jacket’s disclaimer did not satisfy Saul Bellow’s misgivings about the collection, and his review found plenty to fault. While the book presents a variety of slices of Jewish life from around

the nation, Bellow argues, “[t]he subjects are here, but they are not, except by [Delmore] Schwartz, Michael Seide, and two or three others, entered, opened, and brought to life” (203). In Bellow’s estimation, the collection is, at best, uneven. The shortcomings that Bellow finds in the stories of the collection bring his attention to their authors. “Still, I was intrigued by this collection, not because it added much to my knowledge of Jewish life on the frontier or in Cleveland or the Bronx, but because of the writers. Their own difficulties, and the degree of resourcefulness they brought to their solution, were often far more interesting than those of the characters in their stories” (203). The predicaments faced by the authors as they composed their stories here fill in for the absence of interest generated by the stories themselves. The style of the stories in *This Land, These People* is, in Bellow’s reading, obtrusively bad, bringing to mind other instances of similar stylistic missteps. Thus, the straining metaphor of musical composition and overabundance of adjectives in Louis Zara’s “Resurgam” carries Bellow “back in thought to the kitchen, where the gifted and inspired adolescent theme-writer sat beside the stove,” and the stiff propriety of Ludwig Lewisohn’s “Writ of Divorcement” suggests “that great plush horse of a style, sixteen hands high and panting like Macaulay” (203–4). In a surprising way, then, the stories’ correspondence to pre-established forms—their genericity—calls attention to their authors at the moment of composition, while, in the system of aesthetic value upon which Bellow’s review relies, the mark of stylistic mastery is to defer a reader’s awareness of the author through their absorption in the story.

Bellow begins his review, titled “In No Man’s Land,” with an evaluative critique of the writing in the collection, much of which, to his ear, is overblown. This, he argues, is a trait common to both the anthology’s excerpted writers and to its compiler. “In his rather inflated introduction, Mr. Ribalow is, I think, trying to speak for the record and to perform a public-relations function. And the contributors do something similar” (204). The problem at the heart of the anthology’s failure, in Bellow’s reading, is the tendency that he sees for these writers to produce idealized types

of American Jewish life rather than authentically felt and deeply imagined characters—a tendency by no means limited to Jewish writers but, in his view, particularly fatal to their ambitions to produce emotionally authentic fiction of Jewish life: “The American character is in a fluid state, not yet defined, and teachers, leaders, scholars, publicists, and writers are engaged in defining it. Or, rather, not so much in defining as in asserting what it is. [. . . The figures that come from this activity] exist by fiat. They are constructions and, at this level, construction faces construction and type faces type. The Jewish figures in this volume come into being by a comparable process” (204–5). But, though Bellow sees the construction of ideal types as a common and symptomatic project of his contemporary American culture, Jewish writers are in his view uniquely susceptible to this mode of idealization. “It is more difficult for [these Jewish writers] than for other children of Europeans to divorce themselves from a long history, and they therefore feel obliged to explain themselves and create an acceptable picture of the American Jew” (204). Where other European ethnic writers, Bellow claims, can easily sever their ethnic ties and blend into the American mainstream, or approach their ethnic subjects from a posture of objectivity, Jewish American writers continue to identify as Jews even while assuming American identity, and therefore feel the need to justify to the American mainstream the Jewishness which remains a part of their self-conception.

Bellow’s critique of the anthology hinges on the limitations of its authors’ engagement with psychologically realistic representation. As his review’s ascerbic title suggests, Bellow’s critique occupies the same ground as Ribalow’s praise: that of literary realism. Ultimately, however, Bellow’s conception of realism differs substantially from Ribalow’s. Whereas for Ribalow the hallmark of good Jewish fiction is the recognizability of the social world that it presents to a Jew engaged with Jewish communal life, for Bellow the chief priority of realistic literature is the description of individual character in ways that necessarily resist what he sees as sentimental boosterism. “[These authors’] effort is to present themselves, to explain differences and strangeness, and back of it,

behind the painting of the radiance of Jewish virtue in the face of a mother, the solemnity of a *kaddish*, the naming of Jewish dishes, behind the comedy of Jewish American speech, behind even the ‘social criticism,’ there is something uneasy and not quite true” (204). The lamentable characteristics of the anthology come down to a sentimentalism and superficiality that, in Bellow’s reading, are symptomatic of an American Jewish unease with the completeness of their assimilation. Bellow’s review reads bad writing (surely not a unique property of Jewish fiction) as a token of the disordered contemporary Jewish condition.

It is clearly a problem for Bellow that the writers of Ribalow’s anthology capture his attention more pointedly than do their stories. This objection, though Bellow doesn’t argue so explicitly, extends to the design of the anthology as a whole, insofar as it aims to enlist Jewish writers as representative examples of American Jewish success. The review casts Ribalow’s collection as a paradigmatically sociological document, and goes on to diagnose this problem as a reflection of the authors’ desire to ameliorate the discomfort they feel as Jews in America. The straining, false note that Bellow detects in their language is symptomatic of a straining for social acceptance. The value of the writing, then, is in what it reveals about the writers, rather than in what it reveals, as a story, to the reader. And yet the review’s concluding thought turns, too, to an invocation of Jewish pride: “The less we find of actuality in reading stories such as these, the more a mass of unreclaimed material weighs with a great weight upon us. And as long as American Jewish writers continue to write in this way we will have to go elsewhere for superior being and beauty, and will thus continue to be foreigners, seeking these things in other centuries and in other countries” (205).

The “we” of Bellow’s conclusion is the sophisticated Jewish reader, whose reading is a search for “superior being and beauty.” A page earlier, Bellow argues that “this accident—the strangeness of discontinuity and of a constant, immense change—happens to all and is the general condition. The narrowly confined and perfect unit of a man, if we could find him now, would prove

to be outside all that is significant in our modern lives, lives characterized by the new, provisional, changing, dangerous, universal” (204). The mournfulness with which he characterizes the doom of the Jewish intellectual to the condition of a literary foreigner in his or her own land—the evident longing for an end to that condition—is a surprising departure from the cosmopolitan appreciation of the literatures of other centuries and other countries that underlies the review’s sensibility. To some extent they can’t be reconciled. But if we move past the incongruous implication that Bellow would prefer to have *all* of his literary needs met by Jewish writing, what we find is a desire for serious Jewish writing for serious Jewish readers—a conception at once cosmopolitan and Jewishly particular that his own selections in *Great Jewish Stories* will attempt to realize.

The reading of a particular story in Ribalow’s anthology, Meyer Levin’s “Maurie Finds His Medium,” serves as a bridge between thoughts first articulated in Bellow’s review and their revision and inclusion in Bellow’s own later anthology. Maurie, Levin’s title character, is a *luftmensh*—a man with artistic and business aspirations but with a flightiness that brings all of his projects to dissolution. The story finds him taking up and dropping a variety of endeavors before eventually settling in Palestine to become a visual artist, painting works that are “all of one sort: hackneyed, common repetitions of landscape and Arab head, banal, except for an occasional splash of outrageously brilliant and meaningless color” (189). The “medium” of the title, then, is kitsch. An outgrowth of the credo that Bellow scorns, “art to be universal must be narrowly confined. An artist must be a perfect unit of time and place, at home with himself, unextraneous” (184), Maurie’s work reveals the theoretical desire for a pure and distinct Jewish subjectivity as something that must fail to generate work of artistic merit. Bellow not only reads Levin’s story as kitschy, he imagines that Levin shares his impression of the work.

Levin’s story is particularly significant to Bellow’s review because it thematizes the problem that Bellow puts at the center of his critique: that Ribalow’s anthology is stocked with poorly written

texts. “For the majority of these writers the problem of language is not an easy one” (204), Bellow writes, but rather an “uneasiness over language” that is rooted in a propagandizing urge—a desire to justify their Jewishness which leads to poor writing: “they are not describing actualities and they therefore doubt their words” (205). Levin’s honesty, in this reading of “Maurie Finds His Medium,” is in his frank acknowledgment of his shortcomings as a Jewish writer, and his value, for Bellow, is that he “comes out with it” (204). Bellow’s misreading of Levin’s story is predicated on his assumption that Levin lacks literary sophistication, and that this unsophistication manifests in a too-close relationship between the author’s views and those of his character. In other words, Bellow’s problem with Levin’s story stems from the same identification of Jewish writers with their work that justifies *This Land* as a chronicle of Jewish achievement. Levin’s story, in this reading, fails to convert the author’s interests into characters with lives and stories of their own. In the context of Levin’s story, this misreading suggests a telling anxiety about the category of Jewish fiction. Bellow’s misreading cuts precisely against the story’s orientation toward Maurie’s work and ideological position, interpreting it to validate the idea that an artist—a Jewish artist in particular—must be both existentially whole and wholly at home with his or her cultural medium to produce work of value. The supposition against which Bellow reacts so strongly—that the Jewish artist’s work is the outgrowth of a unitary Jewish position—is in effect remarkably close to the assumptions that he makes about Levin’s position (i.e. that it is the same as Maurie’s), and that he generalizes to the collection as a whole. From the beginning of his review, Bellow reads through the stories to their authors. Bellow’s misreading of “Maurie” tellingly brings together two objects of Bellow’s critical derision: the neat identification of an author with his or her work (which undermines the professional artistry of fictional characterization) and the idea that a character can be adequately defined by a complete embrace of a particular subject position. Insofar as Jewish stories point back to their authors rather than out to a broader significance, and insofar as they hew to ideologically

determined constructions of character, Bellow argues, then Jewish writing as such is of limited literary value. The solution proposed in his own anthology is to recast Jewishness not as a tautological property of particular persons, but as a sensibility: a quality with literary form outside of the individuals who embody it.

Saul Bellow's introduction to his *Great Jewish Short Stories* (1963) construes the Jewishness of a text as an open secret to be sussed out by the observant, keyed-in reader: "Most of the stories in this collection are modern; a few are ancient. They were written in Hebrew, German, Yiddish, Russian and English, yet all are, to a discerning eye, very clearly Jewish" (9). The Jewishness of the stories that Bellow assembles, while not necessarily apparent in their linguistic form, is taken to be accessible to a sufficiently astute observer. In this introduction, Bellow understands the Jewishness of texts to consist in their "oddly tilted perspective" (9), in their endowment of the universe with "a human meaning" (10), and in an attitude in which "laughter and trembling are so curiously mingled that it is not easy to determine the relations of the two" (12). Thus, Bellow frames his conception of Jewish texts in terms of a particular sensibility—an affective posture that, in his description, approaches a Jewish *form*, rather than a Jewish subject—though, in the event, all of the stories in the volume center around Jewish characters and were written by Jewish authors (with the arguable exception of Heinrich Heine, whose contribution, "The Rabbi of Bacherach," was written after his conversion to Christianity). Bellow's selections, moreover, are motivated not solely out of a concern for representative balance, but also out of standards of literary taste and readerly engagement, which Bellow sets explicitly against an unliterary reverence for the Jewish past. Thus, discussing his editorial decisions with regard to Yiddish fiction, Bellow writes:

The effort to describe [the uniqueness of some of our Yiddish classics] may lead us into exaggeration and inflation, from inflation to mere piety. And from piety to boredom the path is very short. I do not see the point of boring anybody for the sake of the record. Opening a book in order to pay our respects to a vanished culture, a world destroyed to the eternal reproach of all mankind, we may be tempted to set literary standards aside. Still, a story should be interesting, highly interesting,

as interesting as possible—inexplicably absorbing. There can be no other justification for any piece of fiction. (13)

There is an element of posturing in this avowal of editorial freedom from the inclusion of stories for the sake of the historical record; though Bellow confesses that he “[does] not wholly admire the stories of I. L. Peretz” and avers that Sholem Aleichem “gives the Yiddish reader indescribable pleasure, but his stories themselves are by a more general standard often weak,” he nevertheless includes four stories by Peretz and two by Sholem Aleichem (12–13). But even if his editorial practice fails to conform to his defense of it, Bellow’s identification of interest as the central justification for all fiction rhetorically connects his argument for a Jewish literary sensibility to the standards of aesthetic judgment that justify his work as editor of a mass market collection.

To conclude his justification for the particular form that his anthology takes, Bellow returns to the same quotation from Levin’s story that he addressed in his 1951 review:

“I was a foreigner, writing in a foreign language . . . What am I? Native, certainly. My parents came to this country . . . they were the true immigrants, the actual foreigners. . . . But I, American-born, raised on hot dogs, I am out of place in America. Remember this: art to be universal must be narrowly confined. An artist must be a perfect unit of time and place, at home with himself, unextraneous. . . . Who am I? Where do I come from? I am an accident. What right do I have to scribble in this American language that comes no more naturally to me than it does to the laundry Chinaman?”

Theories like those expressed by Mr. Levin’s character, as Mr. Levin is at pains to show, about the “perfect unit of time and place” seldom bring any art into the world. Art appears, and then theory contemplates it; that is the usual order in relations between art and theory. It cannot be argued that the stories of Isaac Babel are not characteristically Jewish. And they were written in Russian by a man who knew Yiddish well enough to have written them in that language. [. . .] Why should he have chosen therefore to write his own stories in Russian, the language of the oppressors, of Pobedonostev and the Black Hundreds? If, before writing, he had taken his bearings he could not have found himself to be “a perfect unit of time and place.” He wrote in Russian from motives we can never expect to understand fully. These stories have about them something that justifies them to the most grudging inquiry—they have spirit, originality, beauty. Who was Babel? Where did he come from? He was an accident. We are all such accidents. We do not make up history and culture. We simply appear, not by our own choice. We make what we can of our condition with the means available. We must accept the mixture as we find it—the impurity of it, the tragedy of it, the hope of it. (15-6)

Bellow's treatment of Isaac Babel foregrounds a critical tension in his understanding of the mechanisms by which Jewish literature is created and codified as such. In Bellow's account, Babel's case demonstrates the artistically fruitful convergence of unmotivated fate and artistic agency, understanding a writer as an intentional actor, whose creations are at once motivated by their creator and a product of the inscrutable conditions of that person's development. In Bellow's review, Maurie's lamenting (and lamentable) search for a place outside of contingent history in which he can plant his essentially Jewish flag is a screen for an ethno-religious separatism keyed to a broader discomfort with "American" expression: "Why is there this anxiety about using a language our parents did not speak? Music is also a second language, yet the composer, unlike Maurie, does not think to examine his right to it. For Americans, what there is to be said, passionately said, can come out only in American, the language we have in common with the Chinese laundryman's son" (204). Maurie's problems with the contingency of his existence are resolved by invoking America as a signifier of a unified form of expression that retains room for heterogeneous experiences. Maurie's discomfort with "American" is a misunderstanding of America, which isn't, for Maurie, one option among many, but his "only" choice. As his reading of the story is adapted for the introduction to *Great Jewish Stories*, however, Bellow rejects the emphasis on the rightness of American expression for American writers in favor of an analysis that foregrounds a writer's prerogative to choose his or her linguistic medium.

Levin's Maurie, "American-born, raised on hot dogs," is a far cry from Bellow's famously game "American, Chicago born," Augie March—a difference in sensibility connected to Bellow's disdain for the character's artistic ideology.¹⁰ The focus of Bellow's critique is Maurie's naïve

¹⁰ An aversion which extended, in an earlier version of the introduction, to a hostility towards Levin himself—as Andrew Furman reports, Bellow's introduction to the first edition of the anthology accuses Levin of "a curious surrender to xenophobia [. . .] in this theorizing about art," a position amended only after Levin's complaints, his editors' urging, and his own move toward ideological alignment with Levin's Zionism (24-6).

understanding of the artist's perfection as prerequisite for the art's success, a theory which, as Bellow notes, privileges context over text and places theory before art.¹¹ Bellow objects to a fussy essentialism in Maurie's theory; an understanding that the perfect conditions for artistic production (in particular, for Jewish artistic production) are attainable and therefore necessary. Bellow's point, centrally, is that Jewish language, no less than Jewish content, is not a sufficient condition for Jewish art. The question of linguistic medium is for Bellow (like everything else) subordinate to the question of literary quality.

The key change between Bellow's treatment of the story in his review and his discussion of it in the introduction to his anthology is his recognition that Maurie, the character, is distinct from Levin, the writer. This corrects the perception that Maurie's predicament is the same as Levin's, and avoids the implication that Levin understands his own position as a Jewish writer in America to limit his artistic achievements, and by extension that his own story labors under similar limitations as Maurie's kitsch. As Levin's criticism of Maurie is incorporated into Bellow's introduction to his own anthology, it transforms from a neat encapsulation of all that Bellow finds wrong with Ribalow's collection into a corroborating voice for the contention that ends Bellow's essay: that art must be generated prior to the theory that accounts for it, and that the best Jewish stories are those which embrace the accidental and unresolved in Jewish life instead of grasping for an essentialized wholeness guaranteed by the embrace of one's Jewish identity. The shift from Bellow's criticism of Levin to a criticism of the story's character is significant to the way that Bellow, in each of these

¹¹ Bellow's comments here, and his invocation of high-art standards throughout his introductory essay, seem to me to be aligned with George Steiner's notion of a Jewish homeland in the text, insofar as both see textuality as a bearer of value that is not only not dependent on its contexts, but that in fact might be devalued by too close an association with a particular place and time—a specifically literary disagreement with Zionist ideology. “Locked materially in a material homeland,” Steiner writes, “the text may, in fact, lose its life-force, and its truth-values may be betrayed” (120). So too do Bellow's arguments aim to provide the texts of his choosing with an essentially textual Jewishness that avoids the imposition of material considerations on aesthetic sources of textual authority.

documents, construes the connection between literary quality and the Jewish writer. Dissociating Levin from his creation (though notably not re-anthologizing him), Bellow shifts from a paradigm in which Maurie represents Levin, who in turn represents the state of Jewish culture, to one which recuperates Levin as a writer with a meaningfully self-aware critical perspective on Jewish life. The anthology's introduction presents Levin as a figure with critical agency, rather than one whose writing, down to its style, is predetermined by a doomed attempt to relieve a Jewish anxiety of alienation in America.

Bellow's review discounts the stories of *This Land* as such, in favor of the stories they tell about their writers. Thus Bellow reads Ribalow's collection as an ersatz sociology of American Jewish writing, a reading which parodies the ambitions that Ribalow has for the collection itself—for it to stand as a particularly resonant document of American Jewish life, at once balancing sociological accuracy with literary merit. For Ribalow, the medium of fiction allows the reader to access something closer to the inner life of American Jews than what is available from traditional historiography. Though Ribalow understands the fiction in his collection to offer a reasonably transparent window onto American Jewish life, he imagines that such access will come through the writer's stories, rather than their biographies, the product of professional effort rather than unintentional revelation. All the same, Ribalow's anthology, interested at once in representing Jewish life and cataloging Jewish artistic success, places a particular stress on the biographical Jewishness of its writers: however much insight the content of their stories might offer into the social world of American Jews, it is the authors' Jewishness that underwrites their authority and that attests to the vibrancy and cultural success of American Jewish letters. If the stories' content constitutes "a definitive composite portrait of American Jewish life" (10), then the authors' Jewish identification, combined with their artistic ability, justifies the accuracy of their portraiture.

In Bellow's view, however, the artistic deficiencies of the anthology focus the reader's attention instead on the writers themselves. The main difference between the two anthologies, as described by their editors, is that Ribalow's understands Jewishness in historical terms, as the culture produced by Jews, while Bellow's understands it in theoretical terms, as a transhistorical sensibility. Though for Ribalow Jewish culture has Jewish content beyond the simple fact of its being produced by Jews, this content is defined practically (in terms of the Jewish subjects that Jewish writers have chosen to tackle) rather than theoretically. Bellow, by contrast, presents Jewish writing not simply as the cultural production of Jews that relates in some way to Jewish life, but rather as an "attitude in which laughter and trembling are so curiously mingled that it is not easy to determine the relations of the two" (12). Significantly, it is not only the closeness of laughter and trembling that characterizes Jewish storytelling, but that the relationship between the two is difficult to explain. If a close relationship between laughter and trembling forms the basis for Bellow's characterization of the attitude of Jewish stories—and thus the content of literary Jewishness—the complexity of that relationship, and the sophistication that such complexity implies, marks these stories as serious literature. Indeed, Bellow's characterization of the value of these stories prizes the very virtues embraced by the New Critics: complexity, ambiguity, and nuance. Bellow thus frames the element of Jewishness in his collection's stories as something that is itself well suited to gratifying a cultivated reader's curiosity. The value of Jewishness is itself literary, and is understood to act upon a reader's aesthetic consciousness.

In his own introduction, Bellow argues, moreover, that not only can Jewish writing be defined in terms more precisely "literary" than those of their content, but that there is a special relationship between Jewish culture and storytelling. "For the last generation of European Jews, daily life without stories would have been inconceivable. My father would say, whenever I asked him to explain any matter, 'The thing is like this. There was once a man who lived . . .?' 'There was

once a scholar . . .’ ‘There was a widow with one son . . .’ ‘A teamster was driving on a lonely road . . .’ (11). Jewish storytelling, then, is at once a matter of sensibility and cultural practice: a literary outlook that creates the written world from a perspective in which “the world, and even the universe, have a human meaning” (10) that is not only a matter of literary style but also part of the texture of very recent lived Jewish experience. If Ribalow argues that “the Jewish contribution to American fiction, far from small, is quite impressive” (1), Bellow responds with an explication of Jewish writing that casts storytelling as a characteristically Jewish gesture. Ribalow, cataloging the ways in which Jewish writers “have been contributing and continue to contribute to a wider understanding of Jewish life in this country in the best way they know how—through the medium of literature” (10), makes no claims about a particularly Jewish literary sensibility. Rather, Ribalow implies that authors he collects, “these Americans” (10), write in an American idiom—that what draws their stories together is not a Jewish set of formal characteristics or authorial attitudes, but rather the fact of their treatment of Jewish subjects and the Jewish identification of their authors. Bellow, in adducing a Jewish mode of writing, produces a mythography of Jewish literary production, a definition of Jewish writing that is at once composed of the work of Jewish writers and storytellers and that hovers above them, a cloud of tropes and dispositions with its own fuzzy coherence.

Selling the Collection: Jack B. Creamer’s “The Klippah”:

If the anthologies of Ribalow and Bellow offer distinct answers to the question of how to value Jewish fiction, triangulating between the commercial marketplace, aesthetic value (however conceived), and concerns related to Jewish representation, such concerns are also present in “The Klippah,” Jack Creamer’s contribution to Harold Ribalow’s 1959 anthology of Jewish fiction, *The Chosen* (the title of which, in addition to being a stunning moment of editorial hubris—aligning the anthologist, selecting texts, with God, choosing the Jewish people to receive the commandments—marvelously conflates Jewish authorial identity, fictional subject, and anthological practice).

Creamer’s piece, first published in 1954, shortly after the appearance of his own anthology, *Twenty-Two Stories about Horses and Men*, in *Charm: The Magazine for Women Who Work* (a title later incorporated into *Glamour*), expresses a pointed ambivalence about the commercial value of Jewish texts. “The Klippah,” is a story about a seller of Jewish books with an exceptionally knowledgeable customer whose jealous wife, the “klippah”¹² of the title, threatens the customer’s devoted compilation of his library of Jewish volumes. Creamer’s story, depicting the assembly, maintenance, and financial appraisal of a curated collection of Jewish books, thematizes the problem of negotiating between the commercial value of Jewish texts, their use value as conveyors of cultural knowledge, and the sentimental value they contain. In Creamer’s story, which was accompanied in its original publication by an illustration by Ben Shahn,¹³ a man named Grossman makes a substantial purchase of good books from the narrator Levinson’s bookshop. Shortly after he leaves, his wife arrives holding a small child, to claim that Grossman has used all of their grocery money to buy the books. Grossman later returns, explains that his wife, jealous of his collection, was lying

¹² “Klippah,” literally “shell” or “husk,” is translated in the story as “shrew” (“The Klippah” 50), and signifies in kabbalah the outer, material covering that hides the divine light: a husk that Kabbalists endeavor to remove through their fervent worship.

¹³ Many thanks to Ben Pollak for bringing this image to my attention.

about the money and that their pantry is in fact well stocked, and soon becomes a regular customer at the bookshop. Some time passes, and Grossman stops visiting the store, until eventually Levinson receives a call from Grossman's wife, asking him to appraise his customer's library of three to four thousand volumes for sale to raise money for an unspecified operation necessary for her health. Grossman, it turns out, has gone nearly blind, and while he can make his living as a Hebrew teacher by teaching from memory he can no longer read new books. Levinson appraises the books, valuing them at eight-thousand dollars, and Grossman's wife, whom Grossman has given a very low estimate of their initial cost—three or four times lower than he paid—relents, now believing the books to be a sound financial investment. The story's close finds Grossman's wife now enabling her husband's habit, bringing Grossman by the store to purchase new books to add to what she believes is a fantastically lucrative investment, and what Grossman sees as his son's legacy.

At the heart of the story is a conflict over how to value Jewish texts. For the customer, Grossman, the primary value of Jewish books is their content—Jewish knowledge that transcends market value (this knowledge need not be solely religious—the customer first distinguishes himself by asking for works by the *maskil* [proponent of the 19th century Jewish enlightenment] Jacob Reifman—but Grossman's attitude towards Jewish books bears the imprint of the rabbinic ideal of *torah lishma*, the study of torah for its own sake). For his wife, however, who disdains his collection and who enters the story with claims about the books' ruinous cost, their financial value is paramount. The bookseller, Levinson, who narrates the story, mediates between the two positions. While he expresses his intellectual appreciation for good Jewish books, financial concerns dominate his role in the plot—not only does Grossman's first purchase convert Levinson's stagnant stock of Jewish texts to, “a good dinner, a really good dinner,” his first in quite a while (“The Klippah” 48), but his own potential purchase of his customer's library, a collection sure to launch its possessor to the top of the New York Jewish book market, is the key to his fortune or failure. Thus, while the

story's conclusion, which sees the wife's jealous disdain for Grossman's books subverted and the books still in Grossman's hands, would seem to validate Grossman's implicit position that the book trade, while necessary for the dissemination of texts, can offer little measure of their true value, the focalizing consciousness of Levinson the bookseller casts the reader back to the commodified materiality of the texts.

Importantly, it is not only the physical texts that have financial value in the story, but, in a clear analogy with the editorial content of an anthology, the labor of the compiler as well. Sold as a lot to a single deep-pocketed buyer with an interest in Jewish texts, the organizational apparatus that accompanies the collection itself takes on value—an extra \$1,500, in Levinson's estimation (58). Grossman's catalogue, an index embellished with news clippings and biographical information about the authors, cross-references to other books in the collection, and the original purchase price of each book, is of only marginal value separated from the library in which it originated. However, as a paratextual device analogous to the introduction and notes of an anthology, it has substantial financial worth. If we read Grossman's library as the product of activity analogous to that of assembling an anthology, the card catalogue, a tangible artifact of the labor of the collector, stands in for the explanatory supplements of the anthology's editor. Not only are they valuable in their own right as contextualizing or interpretive devices, but also as traces of the value that the act of compilation adds to the source texts.

The final paragraphs of the story seem, with a conspiratorial wink, to align Grossman and Levinson against the materialistic Mrs. Grossman, threat to the romantic integrity of the metaphysical value of a good library:

“You see, Mr. Levinson,” [Grossman's wife] would sometimes say, with her kind of attempt at being pleasant, “maybe you didn't get our books away from us, but at least you didn't lose a good customer. We're still adding to our investment in the future.”

Of course it's hard to tell exactly what goes on behind a very thick pair of glasses, but it was at times like this that I'm almost sure my friend Grossman the

Hebrew teacher would wink at me as he stroked the little boy's head and said: "Yes, it's very important . . . our investment in the future." ("The Klippah" 60)

The apparently unavoidable language of finance and the focalizing frame of the book business, however, temper the explicitly anti-financial and misogynistic transvaluation of Jewish texts into objects above the feminized financial fray. Grossman can recast the terms of his son's "inheritance" through a (nearly literally) veiled expression of solidarity with a masculine notion of immaterial textual value, but it is precisely the material collection of volumes that he hopes to leave to his son, with no guarantees that this son won't simply sell off the lot.

In pitting the jealous, materialistic wife against her bookish husband, the story casts intellectual and pecuniary value in diametric opposition. On one side, Mr. Grossman: "What the books are worth to me, no one can know." On the other, Mrs. Grossman: "Ha! *I* can know!" (57). In the scene of the story and in the profession of the narrator, however, intellectual value translates directly to monetary worth. A good book—here, a good library—is also a good sale (surely a somewhat utopian textual economics). The material circumstances of the story—Grossman's vision problems, Levinson's job, the capacity of Levinson's collection to intervene in the New York Jewish book market, dramatically altering the narrator's life—all suggest that the exchange value of Jewish texts is not so easily escaped. Further, what ultimately enables Grossman to retain his library is not his wife's acceptance of the inherent value of the knowledge that the books contain and her desire that this knowledge, metonym for Jewish intellectual culture, be passed on to her son, but her ignorance of their initial cost—a willful misvaluation on the part of Grossman, uncorrected by Levinson, that provides her with an inflated understanding of the speed with which the books will rise in value. The story concludes less with the triumph of textual immateriality than with the successful manipulation of a market. Grossman's library is maintained on a bubble.

It is not Jewishness, precisely, that is commodified in the story, but the monetary value of the collection, *as a collection*, is nonetheless tightly bound to the books' Jewish content. Though the

individual works would presumably be of some value to a generalist bookstore, the quality and coverage of the collection as a whole make them particularly valuable to a Jewish bookseller, for whom, as the story makes clear, they would constitute a career-making acquisition. In this regard, however, the Jewishness of the collection is instrumentally rather than inherently valuable. Indeed the story (contra its illustration, which identifies the store's wares as Jewish through its incorporation of Hebrew letters reading *makhzorim* [high-holy day prayerbooks] and *sforim* [books of religious significance]) explicitly notes that Levinson's store is formally indistinguishable from generalist bookshops, its specialization evident only to those able to read its context—"The wooden sign hanging outside my shop reads: I. LEVINSON BOOKS. But it tells more than that. From the neighborhood, you would know right away that the 'books' are Judaic and Hebrew books" (47). Thus, in the story, the neighborhood as an ethnically homogeneous space and the bookstore is a commercial venue that is *not* specifically ethnically marked. In Creamer's story, contrary to the narrator's assertion that the *sign* "tells more than that," it is precisely the information that the sign doesn't present that is important: the sign specifically does not reveal anything more than the proprietor's name and merchandise—the storefront, requiring the narrator's clarifying exposition, takes its Jewishness to be understood from its context. In this regard, the store functions less as a figure for the anthology than as a figure for the anthologized story, defined by the neighborhood of other stories in which the anthology situates it—a definition in line with Ribalow's conception of American Jewish fiction as distinct from other American writing in its content, but similar in its form.

The store in "The Klippah" is simultaneously a bookstore like any other: the uninflected I. Levinson Books, and a *Jewish* bookstore: I. Levinson "Books." Though the narrator claims that the specific genre of bookstore that he owns is legible from its environs, the codedness of the store's Jewish content, which we can see in the quotation marks with which Levinson surrounds the word

“books” in his exposition, signals an uneasiness with the construction of Jewish books as a genre like all other genres, even as the story presents a sympathetic picture of the business of selling Jewish texts. In labeling the bookstore as just a bookstore, but claiming that it is nonetheless clearly legible as a *Jewish* bookstore by virtue of its Jewishly inflected surroundings, Creamer’s narrator suggestively positions Jewish texts between generic particularity and universal form.

This story—Jewishly anthologized fiction, multi-faceted allegory of the anthological apparatus, product of an anthologizer of genre fiction—presents an image of the uneasy positioning of Jewishness as a marker both of culture and of commerce: content whose value is at once immaterial and monetizable. Indeed, even Grossman, for whom Jewish culture provides a refuge from an unhappy marriage and a subject pursued for its own interest makes his living in the story teaching Hebrew lessons all week, “even a few hours on Saturdays to pupils whose families don’t believe in keeping the Sabbath” (50). Creamer’s story thus also introduces a concern that shadows both Ribalow’s and Bellow’s volumes: the Jewish continuity that Jewish books might (or might fail to) guarantee, and the corollary affective attachment that readers might feel for Jewish writing by virtue of its Jewishness. Creamer’s story ends on a note of the conspiratorial masculine safeguarding of cultural continuity against the irrevocable, feminized transformation of Jewish cultural capital into secular economic capital. As Grossman can no longer read the books that he and his wife continue to purchase, and as his wife has no interest in them, their only value is as a projected inheritance for Grossman’s young son. Keeping Grossman’s library intact preserves both the collector’s labor and the idea of Jewish culture as an object of lineal dissemination, passed from one generation to the next in an unbroken patriarchal line. But if we imagine a different ending for the story, one in which the books are sold to Levinson, catapulting him to the heights of the New York Jewish book trade, what we find is simply another model of Jewish cultural transmission: one closer to that offered by the anthology of Jewish fiction. In Levinson’s shop, the books that Grossman has spent a lifetime

compiling remain in circulation. Not bound to the young his son's interest or disinterest they are instead accessible to other readers from other families—readers whose encounter with the books is motivated not directly by family connections, but by enthusiasm for the material. It is to these readers in their encounter with the anthology that we turn in the final section of this chapter.

Conclusion: Hasidic tales, Jewish detectives, and the affective work of genre

The secondhand copy of Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim* that I purchased online sometime in 2010 is inscribed with a personal note, dated 2008, that implies a poignant narrative of frustrated Jewish continuity:

Dear N——
 This is the book that let me know I could love Judaism—
 I read it when I was 15.
 Love,
 Aunt A——¹⁴

This note from Aunt A—— supplements the text's fairly substantial editorial apparatus, which is dedicated to explaining the history and cultural context of the tales and their redaction by Buber,¹⁵ with a more personal and contemporary account of their use. Buber's prefatory notes cast his collection in two molds. In one reading it is a historical record—a book which “purports to express and document the association between zaddikim [charismatic leaders of Hasidic sects] and hasidim [followers of zaddikim],”¹⁶ (I.2). In another it is a tool of renewal: part of a continuous living culture, in which “story is more than a mere reflection. The holy essence it testifies to lives on in it. The miracle that is told, acquires new force; power that once was active, is propagated in the living

¹⁴ The original inscription includes the full first names of the gift giver and the recipient, as well as a specific date. I have omitted these details in deference to their privacy.

¹⁵ The book includes a foreword by Chaim Potok, a preface and two introductions from Martin Buber, two glossaries, two sets of notes, two indices (one of each for each of the collection's original volumes), a genealogy of the Hasidic masters, and an alphabetical index to that genealogy.

¹⁶ Zaddik (pronounced TSA-dik [s.] and tsa-DIK-im [pl.]) literally translates to “righteous one.” Hasidim (s. KHA-sid; pl. kha-SID-im) translates to “the pious.”

word and continues to be active—even after generations” (xvii). This dual resonance of the tales—as a document of both historical significance and personal religious meaning—is amplified in Chaim Potok’s 1991 foreword, which argues that the collection embodies both “a unique world of the spirit that existed until its destruction by the Germans in World War II,” and the voice of Buber, who “speaks to us through these eternal tales” (xv). The tales, as described in their introductions, at one and the same time represent a mode of spiritual connection (between zaddikim and their adherents and between Buber and the Hasidic mode of life[as he constructs it]) and act as a vehicle for connecting the reader to the spiritual world of the Hasidim and to Buber himself.

A——’s note extends and modifies this logic. For her, the value of the collection lies in the mode of Jewish culture that it projects—one that she finds it possible to love. A——’s inscription implies a narrative of alienation and return. A—— discovers in Buber’s collection something lovable in Judaism, something that negates her implicit estrangement from Judaism as an object of affection. As she presents it to her niece, the love that A—— experiences begins but doesn’t end with Buber’s collection. Instead, as anthologies aspire to do, *Tales of the Hasidim* provides her with a window onto a larger world: a category—Judaism—for which she can now feel affection. The inscription frames the collection as part of a meaningful narrative of the gift-giver’s life, and as an agent of personal and communal connection. Giving the collection as a gift, A—— proposes to extend the chain of affective attachment that binds the zaddikim, hasidim, and the divine; Buber and his image of the hasidim; and A——, the tales, and Judaism, by presenting her niece with the possibility of a similar experience: an attachment to Judaism that strengthens her attachment to her aunt.

Though I have no further information about the circumstances of this inscription, its details (the fact that the aunt gives her age, the content of her comment) suggest that perhaps N——’s position in life is analogous to her Aunt’s at the time that she read the collection. The gift might be

a fifteenth birthday present. Whatever N——’s attachment to Judaism, Aunt A—— might imagine, it is not defined by love. The book, a formative component of A——’s Jewish life, might furnish the same spark of affection for her niece. In any case, somewhere between the gift’s presentation and my purchase of the volume, the book appears not to have had its intended effect. I can think of several possible reasons for the book’s reentering circulation, but for the sake of argument, let’s assume that N—— simply met the book with indifference, and got rid of it. For her aunt, fifteen, receptive for unexpressed reasons to the book’s portrait of Jewish culture, Buber’s collection proved personally resonant. For N——, it just wasn’t her thing. Such is the peril of giving books as gifts. An inscription projects a hope that the reader will be moved, entertained, delighted—but only if they read the book. A gift-book comes with a request: be absorbed in this book and absorb its contents; don’t just put it on your shelf, take it into your experience. But our friends and family sometimes have strange and disagreeable taste and we can’t or don’t want their books. To be honest, we’re a little embarrassed to have them on our shelves, at least the ones in the front room.

A particular gift presentation of *Tales of the Hasidim* is a unique case, and the text itself differs in important ways from the collections of largely non-religious Jewish fiction that this chapter analyzes. But the divide between A——’s embrace of the book as a formative connection to Judaism and the possibility of its rejection that N—— represents forms a key context in which American postwar anthologies of Jewish fiction operate. While such anthologies have often, and productively, been adduced as evidence in arguments about the emergence of Jewish American literature, such citations rarely treat the affective dimension of these anthologies’ appeals to their readers. All texts, of course, are susceptible to wide and unpredictable variations in the readerly responses that they engender, from attachment, to repulsion, to indifference. But such responses are particularly central to the ways in which postwar American anthologies of Jewish fiction function

not only to define the contours of Jewish literature, but to provide their (not necessarily Jewish) readers with focal points for an emotional attachment to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish culture.

For many readers, as, for A——, in her relationship with Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, anthologies of Jewish fiction are not just about Jewish literature, they are modes of being Jewish or of relating to Jewish life. *Candles in the Night*, a 1940 anthology subtitled "Jewish Tales by Gentile Authors," and compiled by Rabbi Joseph L. Baron, a reform congregational rabbi working in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, frames its mission in clear terms: "The lights of civilization have indeed been extinguished temporarily, and the Jew has been overwhelmed by the floods of hatred. At this time the eloquent and sympathetic portrayal of the Jew by some of the most distinguished artists and thinkers of the world needs repeated emphasis. [. . .] If this volume will succeed in awakening here and there the dormant sympathy of a non-Jewish reader, and in strengthening the morale of a Jewish youth, the editor and all those who have aided in the production of the book will feel gratified and rewarded for their effort" (xv–xix). Though few anthologies of Jewish literature share the circumstances that account for Baron's straightforwardly utilitarian statement of the collection's goals, the attention that he pays to the affective relationship the reader forms with Jews and Jewish culture through his or her reading of the text is a salient component of the work that Jewish anthologies perform. Baron's collection aims to leverage the cultural capital of respected non-Jewish writers *and* the affective force of their writing to bolster support for Jews in times of uniquely terrible trial. The quality of the writing that his anthology contains is a key element of its rhetorical appeal. Not only do the stories he collects remind the reader of gentile philosemitic feeling during a period of murderous Nazi antisemitism but they also assert the fineness of such feeling in aesthetic as well as moral terms.

While the claims of aesthetic distinction made by postwar Jewish fiction anthologies, and the prestige, both social and personal, associated with the appreciation of their stories as high cultural

artifacts are important elements of these anthologies' presentations of Jewish culture, such appeals are only half the story. Such anthologies simultaneously mobilize the particular, and quite different, appeal of genre in drawing their readers to Jewish fiction. Toward the end of his essay "Imaginary Homelands," Michael Chabon confesses to a dual defection from identities that he once called his own—his Jewish identity, and his identity as a writer of genre fiction—defections that mark a low ebb in what is for him a narrative of return. Having been accepted into an MFA program at the University of California, Irvine and eager to begin his career as a writer, he sets aside plans for a whimsical science fiction epic, producing instead "a straightforward realistic narrative, equally influenced by Proust, Fitzgerald, and Philip Roth, about summertime and sexual identity in the city of Pittsburgh." At the same time as he jettisons his ambitions as a genre writer, he says, he puts aside his Jewish identity. "I also turned my back on Judaism. I was learning to question everything; I guess I was trying to fit in" (177). In Chabon's provocative pairing, Jewish practice and genre fiction are two sides of the same coin: superficially different but fundamentally similar modes of creating a feeling of rootedness and belonging while preserving a particularistic otherness from mainstream culture. In the genre of literary realism, Chabon finds the same pressures to conformity that he holds responsible for his abandonment of Jewish ritual; and in his return to genre fiction and turn to domestic Jewish rituals, Chabon sees a path to what he understands as an authentic expression of his self.

"For a long time I've been busy, in my life and in my work, with a pair of ongoing overarching investigations: into my heritage—rights and privileges, duties and burdens—as a Jew and as a teller of Jewish stories; and into my heritage as a lover of genre fiction. In all those years of lighting candles on Friday night and baking triangular cookies for Purim with my children and muddling through another doomed autumn trying to atone, years spent writing novels and stories about golems and the Jewish roots of American superhero comic books, Sherlock Holmes and the Holocaust, medieval Jewish freebooters, Passover seders attended by protégés of forgotten Lovecraftian horror writers, years of writing essays, memoirs, and nervous manifestoes about genre fiction or Jewishness—I failed to notice what now seems clear, namely that there was really only one investigation all along. One search, with a sole objective: a home, a world to call my own." (Chabon 158)

Chabon's collation of Jewishness and genre fiction flirts with glibness, but his point is sincerely made: each furnish him with frameworks for constructing his belonging in the world. But though both Jewishness and genre fiction scaffold one unitary search for Chabon's metaphorical "home," they rest on different foundations. As Chabon frames them in this essay, his relationship to Judaism is a matter of performance (he tells Jewish stories) and ontology (he is a Jew), while his relationship to genre fiction is a matter of performance (he writes genre fiction) and affection (he loves genre fiction).

Though both make the claims of a heritage and thus balance what is gained ("rights and privileges") with what is owed ("duties and burdens"), the basis for Chabon's serious attachment to genre fiction, conceived in unambiguously communal terms, is the enthusiasm he shares with other lovers of genre works. Indeed, Chabon describes his return to Judaism as part of a broader attempt to retreat from the self that he had constructed in pursuit of normative literary success (i.e., the successful composition of artful realist novels) into one defined by more personally meaningful trappings of his past:

"I wanted to know where I came from, to retrace my steps and see if I dropped anything along the way that might serve me, now, better than I had imagined at the time of letting it go.

I started to light candles; I met and married my present wife, the grandchild of European Jewish immigrants; I abandoned the [realist] novel and began wandering back to a place where I could feel at home. (178)

What links Judaism and genre fiction in Chabon's experience is the fact of his having let them go. But the affective grounds of Chabon's abandonment of Jewishness and genre fiction are markedly different from one another. Chabon's disavowal of his Jewishness appears to him as an organic outgrowth of his encompassing engagement with the non-Jewish world: "Nothing about my being Jewish—about my ancestors, about their languages and histories, about the stale holiday invocations of freedom, continuity, and survival—seemed to have use or relation to the ongoing business of my

life at the time” (178). The author’s turn from genre fiction, however, appears much more as an unwilling capitulation to the anti-genre norms of the literary academy than as the slow passage into irrelevance that characterizes his slide from Jewish identification—dropping genre fiction constitutes a renunciation of passions that he continues to hold rather than a loss of already attenuated beliefs. “As a young man, an English major, and a regular participant in undergraduate fiction-writing workshops, I was taught—or perhaps in fairness it would be more accurate to say I learned—that science fiction was not serious fiction, that a writer of mystery novels might be loved but not revered, that if I meant to get serious about the art of fiction I might set a novel in Pittsburgh but never on Pluto” (176).

Though Chabon’s essay begins by placing the author’s commitments to Judaism and genre fiction on an equal footing, as it develops, “Imaginary Homelands” frames the author’s return to Judaism as in a sense secondary to his return to genre fiction. Despite the invocation of Jewish observance with which the essay opens, its concluding gesture, a defense of Chabon’s *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*, suggests that the author’s return to literary Jewishness comes *through* his embrace of genre fiction and casts *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union* as a work that transposes Chabon’s sometimes wavering affinity for Judaism into a medium for which he feels a more straightforward and unwavering enthusiasm: detective fiction. This is not to question the sincerity of the author’s personal commitment to Jewish religious life, but rather to foreground the extent to which genre fandom and genre production furnish him with a model of passionate enthusiasm that translates to an engagement with Jewish identification and a degree of religious observance. To an extent, Chabon’s association of his love of popular genres with his return to religious engagement is strategic: it mobilizes the respectability and earnestness associated with religious commitment in the service of legitimating his serious relationship with the “unserious” genres of detective and sci-fi writing. But if we credit Chabon’s account of his mutually entwined pursuits of authentic selfhood

as something more sincere than a bid to give Sherlock Holmes a lift on the coattails of the Sabbath blessings (and we don't need to accept uncritically Chabon's valuation of authenticity to do so), we find a position that draws together Ribalow's and Bellow's anthologies by substituting the reader's prerogative for the editor's pronouncements: one in which Jewishness doesn't simply mark sociological content or signify a transhistorical sensibility, but is an object of readerly affection.

Works Cited

- Bellow, Saul. *Great Jewish Stories*. 1963. New York: Dell Publishing, 1988. Print.
- . "In No Man's Land." *Commentary* 11 (1951): 203–205. Web.
- Bonn, Thomas. "New American Library." *Mass Market Publishing in America*. Ed. Bill Crider. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. 183–193. Print.
- Buber, Martin. *Tales of the Hasidim*. 1947. Trans. Olga Marx. Introduction by Chaim Potok. New York: Schocken Books, 1991. Print.
- Candles in the Night: Jewish Tales by Gentile Authors*. Ed. Joseph L. Baron. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1940. Print.
- Cerf, Bennett. *Modern American Short Stories*. Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1945. Print.
- Chabon, Michael. "Imaginary Homelands." *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2009. 157–179. Print.
- . "Trickster in a Suit of Lights: Thoughts on the Modern Short Story." *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2009. 1–14. Print.
- Creamer, Jack B. "The Klippah." *The Chosen*. Harold U. Ribalow, Ed. New York: Thomas Yoseloff Press, 1959. Print.
- Fiedler, Leslie. "The Breakthrough: The American Jewish Novelist and the Fictional Image of the Jew." *Midstream* Winter 1958: 15–35. Print.
- Furman, Andrew. *Israel Through the Jewish-American Imagination: A Survey Of Jewish-American Literature On Israel, 1928-1995*. SUNY Press, 1997. Print.
- Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993. Print.
- Howe, Irving. *Jewish-American Stories*. New York: New American Library, 1977. Print.
- Kramer, Michael. "Race, Literary History, and the Jewish Question." *Prooftexts* 21.3 (fall 2001): 287–321. *Project Muse*. Web. 18 April 2013.
- Levinson, Julian. "People of the (Secular) Book: Literary Anthologies and the Making of Jewish Identity in Postwar America." *Religion or Ethnicity*. Zvi Gitelman, Ed. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers UP, 2009. 131–146. Print.
- Levy, Andrew. *The Culture and Commerce Of the American Short Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Print.
- McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2009. Print.

Edelman, Lily. "The Changing World of Jewish Publishing." *Publishers Weekly* 12 Feb. 1979. 63–4. Print.

Ribalow, Harold U. "Do Jews Read?" *Congress Weekly* 8 October 1951: 10–12. Print.

---. *This Land, These People*. New York: Beechhurst Press, 1950. Print.

---. *The Tie That Binds: Conversations with Jewish Writers*. San Diego: A. S. Barnes & Company, Inc. 1980. Print.

Shere, Jeremy. "Jewish American Canons: Assimilation, Identity, and the Invention of Postwar Jewish American Literature." Doctoral Dissertation. Indiana U. 2006.

Steiner, George. "Our Homeland, The Text." *The New Salmagundi Reader*. Ed. R Boyers & P Boyers. Syracuse University Press, 1996. 99-121. Print.

Stern, David. "The Anthological Imagination In Jewish Literature." *Prooftexts* 17.1 (1997): 1-7. JSTOR. Web. 14 August 2013.

**CHAPTER TWO: Maturity, Form, and Tillie Olsen's *Tell Me a Riddle*:
From "Early Genius" to "Fragments and Scraps"**

“It is a painful thing to be asked to live again through events ten years gone, to admit one’s identity with the person who bore one’s name in a by now incredible past. It is hardest of all to confess that one is responsible for the acts of that past, especially when such acts are now placed in a new and unforeseen context that changes their meaning entirely. ‘Not guilty!’ one wants to cry; ‘that is not what I meant at all!’”

—Leslie Fiedler, “Hiss, Chambers, and the Age of Innocence,” December 1950

The arc of Tillie Olsen’s career is famously fragmented. Olsen entered the literary scene in 1934 to significant acclaim, when the second issue of *Partisan Review* published half of the first chapter of her still only partly-written proletarian novel. Almost immediately, however, Olsen faded from literary view, producing no published work until her 1956 publication of the short story “I Stand Here Ironing,” and the subsequent 1961 collection *Tell Me a Riddle*, containing it. In 1974, Olsen published *Yonnonddio*, a version of her 1930s novel culled from fragmentary drafts and given the subtitle “From the Thirties,” marking it as an artifact of that earlier period. The question of early genius and the limits on its realization is both a key component of Olsen’s biography, but also a central thematic concern of her work. Much as Olsen’s career up to the composition of *Tell Me a Riddle* presents a narrative of early potential, fostered in the active Left political milieu of the Great Depression but ultimately unrealized, the stories of *Tell Me a Riddle* focus on characters painfully reconciling themselves to the limitations that life and their social environment impose on personal and political fulfillment. Thus, a mother in the collection’s first story sums up her musings on her daughter as follows: “There is much to her, and probably little will come of it. She is a child of her age: of depression, of war, of fear. / So all that is in her will not bloom—but in how many does it? There is still enough left to live by” (20–1). And the collection’s title story defines Eva, its dying,

elderly protagonist, adherent of the failed 1905 Russian revolution, in terms singularly linked to the failure of the revolutionary engagement of her youth: “*Being at last able to live within, and not to move to the rhythms of others*, as life had helped her to: denying; removing; isolating; taking the children one by one; then deafening, half-blinding—and at last, presenting her solitude. / And in it she had won to a reconciled peace” (77, italics in the original). Olsen’s are the poetics of failed revolution and stunted development. But, significantly, they mobilize tropes of Jewish continuity in order to imagine a persistence of radical political commitment into the future: an intergenerational continuity that would mitigate the disappointments of the political deradicalization of the early Cold War moment in which “Tell Me a Riddle” was written. *Tell Me a Riddle* articulates a ruptured narrative which places the structural continuity offered by family against a discontinuity that characterizes both the ideological changes of the post-war left and the shape of her characters’ lives. The anthologies of the previous chapter presented conflicting interpretations of the literary salience of Jewishness: Ribalow’s, understanding Jewishness in terms of a communal politics, as the fiction produced by and for the Jewish community, and Bellow’s, resisting the incursion of that politics into what it understood to be an aesthetic sphere, casting Jewishness instead as a literary sensibility. *Tell Me a Riddle* mobilizes Jewishness in the service of a different politics entirely: a Jewish Socialism whose Jewish cultural overtones are progressively more salient in a post-radical era that increasingly privileged ethnic fiction as a vehicle for aspirations to social justice. Olsen’s collection, taken as a whole, presents a vision of political possibility rooted in discontinuous development. As Olsen goes on to shape the narrative of her career, situating her work within the various contexts of feminism, popular-front-era radicalism, and Jewish history, the liminality of *Tell Me a Riddle* in terms of its author’s professional development becomes key to interpreting the work’s political effects.

Olsen’s *Tell Me a Riddle* is a collection of four stories, three of which are linked by their mutual depiction of several generations of a single extended family, while one stands apart from the

fictional universe of the others, sharing no characters and no fictional landscape with its companions. Though only three of the stories are linked into an unambiguous cycle unified through the family network that they depict, all four place families at their center. Indeed, though the collection is bound by a thematic focus on narratives of political disappointment—the failure of the revolutionary fervor of the thirties to have taken hold in the United States, and the concomitant early Cold War retrenchment of the American Left—all of its stories mediate their political concerns through depictions of family dynamics. In *Tell Me a Riddle* the family sits in a tense structural position. As a symbol of the early Cold War turn from political action to domestic insularity and a site for imagining not class solidarity but social mobility, the collection sees family as a diversion from effective political action for change—a place of retreat from radical agitation to liberal reform, and, for radical women in particular, a deflection of the energy needed for public political action into domestic drudgery. But family, in the collection, also provides a structure for lamenting the loss of the radical idealism of an earlier historical moment—a model for imagining the continuity of radical political ideals in de-radicalized times. By the same token, the family is the conduit for the title story’s consideration of Jewishness, both as negatively valued ritual observance and as positively valued (largely socialist) secular culture, arranged under the rubric of *yiddishkeit*. All the same, for the central character of “Tell Me a Riddle,” a radical whose politics were shaped in the failed 1905 Russian revolution but whose praxis has been thwarted by American domestic life, Judaism represents a false legacy: her conscription in a past she has rejected for the sake of a future she doesn’t want. Where the story invokes Jewishness directly, it is for the main character to deny its salience to her life.

Nonetheless, “Tell Me a Riddle” has regularly been considered a Jewish story, finding its way, for example, into two influential anthologies of Jewish literature: Irving Howe’s 1977 *Jewish-American Stories* and the 2001 *Norton Anthology of Jewish American Literature*. *Tell Me a Riddle* situates its

brief consideration of Jewish tradition in a broader treatment of the intersection historical and individual development in Cold War America. The title story, the only story to include any reference to Jewish practice, is unquestionably the most “Jewish” of the four stories in the collection. By resituating it among the three other stories produced during Olsen’s late-fifties productive period and constituting her entire corpus of completed mature fictional works, I would like to focus our attention on the connections between those aspects of the story that render it excerptable as a “Jewish story” and Olsen’s larger project of documenting the fragility of intergenerational ideological transmission.

The main differentiating factors between short story cycles and novels are in their potential narrative foci and the opposed possibilities for narrative fragmentation offered by each. Where novels tend to focus on the narrative of a single protagonist (or an ensemble of protagonists) presented through a main plot interwoven with subplots, short story cycles often concern themselves with an aggregate “protagonist” (a family, a location, etc.), and are defined by the containment of their constituent stories, which each offer a sense of narrative closure, and are legible as complete stories even outside of the context of the cycle (themselves often finding publication in magazines, journals, and anthologies, both before and after their inclusions in cycles) (Nagel 13-17). J. Gerald Kennedy locates the short story cycle as a site of tension between the community suggested by the apparent unity of the short story sequence and the fragmentation suggested by the narrative breaks which differentiate the sequence from the novel (195). Kennedy’s description of “[t]he obscure or victimized figures populating the story sequence [who] comprise an imaginary confederacy, a cast of loners and losers gathered to create the semblance of community in the face of the storyteller’s irrevocable separation from a living audience,” and his understanding that “the genre embodies an insistent paradoxical semblance of community in its structural dynamic of connection and disconnection” (ibid.), accounts for the genre’s implicit proposition of

unity through fragmentation with a metaphor that socializes the form, reading structures of communal affiliation (and disaffiliation) in narrative interconnections.

In my readings of the stories that comprise Olsen's collection, I focus on the texts' consideration of the family as a locus of historical action and as a barometer of national politics. The story's portrayal of the family, I suggest, is central to its relevance to a Jewish American literary tradition. Continuity, a central concern of twentieth-century Jewish communal discourse, appears not only as a key theme in Olsen's collection, but also as a structural problematic. The final three stories in the collection are continuous insofar as they treat a single family in a chronological sequence. The first story portrays a separate family, but is thematically aligned with the narrative of a young woman's development that is strung through the stories which constitute the family cycle. *Tell Me a Riddle* thus offers two contiguous models for conceiving of continuity: the genealogical and the ideological.¹⁷ In both "I Stand Here Ironing" and the three linked stories which succeed it, gender is also a crucial element of the collection's social critique. "I Stand Here Ironing" explicitly filters its thematic treatment of individual potential and development through the a critique of the dynamics of motherhood. The story's narrator remains unnamed and is defined through her literal position performing domestic work—standing over the ironing board—and in relation to her developing daughter. The three linked stories similarly focus on the ways in which normative gendered behavior conditions class prejudices, and on the connections between inequitable divisions of domestic labor and the silencing of women's voices in radical political critique during the early

¹⁷ I intend for these terms to recall the key concepts of Dan Miron's argument against models of Jewish literary study that privilege unitary conceptions of a continuous Jewish literary tradition, and for a pluralistic (even Bakhtinian) recognition of the linguistic, thematic, and ideological multiplicity historically unavoidable in Jewish literary production. "What we should part with—indeed, what we must exorcise from our cognitive system," he writes, "is the obsessive theoretical craving for all-encompassing unities and continuities. [. . .] Modern Jewish history, with its wildly colliding crosscurrents, did not allow for the emergence of one unified modern Jewish culture or for an integral, albeit multilingual, modern Jewish literature. It rather forces upon the scholarly observer the realization that Jewish culture and literature were fragmented beyond repair" (33-34). These ideas are further elaborated in Miron's monograph, *From Continuity to Contiguity* (2010).

Cold War period. The collection critiques the sublimation of radical political energies—particularly women’s radical action—into the domestic sphere. At the same time, *Tell Me a Riddle* draws on the emotional resonance of family to lament the decline of the political left in the early post-war period, drawing together biological and ideological reproduction.

The collection’s title story is primarily connected to post-war Jewish American cultural concerns via its treatment of the Jewish family. Though Eva, the story’s protagonist, strongly distances herself from Judaism, claiming a socialist politics as her authentic legacy, Judaism nonetheless remains an important piece of her extended family’s self-definition. Olsen’s collection, I argue, uses the form of the short-story cycle, a form dependent on the tension between the apparent self-sufficiency of its units and the larger narrative continuities visible in their aggregation, to complicate questions of cultural and ideological continuity. Jewishness, evoked most often in its negation, forms the context for the collection’s ambivalent treatment of ideological transmission along family lines: a model for the maintenance of political commitment in ideologically hostile times.

In *Tell Me a Riddle*, Olsen’s sense of the legacy of the radical past, *as past*, takes its place as a central narrative concern. The structures of family that Olsen invokes to frame a project of historical retrospection situate her politics in a context of legacy and a tradition, rather than solely as a response to the material pressures of the historical moment. *Tell Me a Riddle* thus responds to the legacy of a progressive politics in retreat through an uneasy invocation of the domestic as a model for historical continuity and rupture. In their retrospective orientations, the stories in Olsen’s collection frame their consideration of contemporary political realities and future social possibilities through narratives of loss. The volume’s critique of domesticity as an institution that co-opts

economic relations as impetus for social reform,¹⁸ is tempered by its suggestion that the language of family tradition embedded within the domestic provides a sturdy platform for a critique of the resoundingly de-radicalized situation of the American left in the early Cold War. This aspect of Olsen's invocation of family, underplayed in critical considerations of her work's engagements with the domestic,¹⁹ casts questions of political and social justice in terms of historical continuity. In so doing—in mobilizing the memory of the past as a motor for action in the present—Olsen structures *Tell Me a Riddle* as a text simultaneously pre-occupied with the obstacles limiting the fulfillment of an individual's potential and concerned with a time scale larger than that of the individual person, on which the political disappointments of the left during the early Cold War might not yet be counted as failures. The text's episodic structure, then, offers a series of narratives that enlist the family as a provisionally unifying structure, useful not for the mode of social connectedness that it presents, but for the ready-made structure that it provides for diachronic investigation.

The danger, for Olsen's project, of relying on a generational model of historical continuity is in part that it places a subject in relative, rather than historical time, potentially sublimating the material conditions to which her critique responds to the logic of lineal reproduction. In this regard, the episodic form of *Tell Me a Riddle*, Olsen's work most thoroughly interested in the ways in which intergenerational family structures contribute to the formation of historical subjectivity, constructs the family as both a continuous and fluid whole and as a series of discreet states. The collection as such incorporates a short story cycle united around several generations of a family, but composed of three discontinuous narratives. Not united in a single novelistic structure, but possessing instead a

¹⁸ See Edmunds, "Introduction" for an extended discussion of this tendency in American social policy, and the modernist literary response that it engendered.

¹⁹ See, for example, Rosenfelt, "Rereading *Tell Me a Riddle* in the Age of Deconstruction;" Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire*; Coiner, *Better Red*; and Faulkner, "Motherhood as Source and Silencer of Creativity."

sort of fragmentary unity, the form of the story collection foregrounds historical ruptures imperfectly contained within a generational paradigm.

Tell Me a Riddle finds its coherence in the interplay between the connective tissues that suggest a conceptual unity in the text, and the structural fissures that disrupt that unity. The stories in the collection can be connected on the level of theme, through their mutual concerns with the social and political growth of individual characters, their mutual portrayals of the drama of unmet expectations, personal, parental, and political, and their treatments of working class lives; or through a combined consideration of theme and character, linking the anxieties of generational succession at the center of “I Stand Here Ironing” to the family narratives of “Hey Sailor What Ship?,” “O Yes,” and “Tell Me a Riddle.” As Deborah Rosenfelt notes, the collection’s critique of domesticity is undercut by its (perhaps unavoidable and almost certainly unwilling) capitulation to the norms of its era, as its stories, “incorporate a ‘structure of feeling’ [. . .] characteristic of fifties literature, in which resistance is depoliticized, and unwittingly reinscribe, even in protesting against it, the ideology of female containment and domestication [. . .] central to the period” (“Rereading *Tell Me a Riddle* in the Age of Deconstruction” 52). But Olsen’s treatment of the family is neither simply an epiphenomenon of the ideology of her times, nor solely the subject of her pointed critique. In all of the stories in *Tell Me a Riddle*, the desire for a better world filters through a family frame. Family serves a narrative function as well, encoding and organizing Olsen’s consideration of social shifts over historical time. Thus, while Rosenfelt correctly notes the extent to which the stories of *Tell Me a Riddle* repeatedly figure the family as a mode of social organization that encourages an escape from or diminishment of the class solidarities and reform movements advocating for progressive social change, familial relationships nonetheless provide Olsen with a potent lens through which to inventory the disappointments and possibilities of the twentieth century political left.

Indeed, while Olsen doesn't see the family as a vehicle for social reform, the conceptual focus on lineage, inheritance, and futurity offered by the family frame presents Olsen with a means to consider and forecast historical change. If, as Susan Edmunds argues, "we need to recognize the American family as a recent, costly, and deeply unreliable vehicle of personal and social amelioration, the alienated product of an uneasy partnership between the global market and a welfare state no longer prepared to fund its own initiatives" (37), then Olsen's collection, maintaining an understanding of the domestic sphere as a diversion from real reform, nonetheless encodes the family as its primary vehicle for interrogating the history and fate of radical political engagement, and for uniting the insights of Marxist and feminist critiques of social organization. The disjunctures and disunities of Olsen's episodic narratives, then, can be read as a strategy for puncturing the lineal order of the family, while maintaining some of its utility as a structure for tracing the drama of potential and disappointment in politics and in life more broadly.

Already in 1934, Olsen's work was fundamentally concerned with the precariousness of artistic potential and the tension between growth and the dislocations of circumstance. By the time Olsen's proletarian novel *Yonnonidio* was published in 1974 as a piece of recovered literature²⁰, Olsen's own career had become emblematic of this same dynamic of potential and dislocation. Olsen's short story collection, *Tell Me a Riddle*, published between the composition and the publication of *Yonnonidio*, filters the question of maturity and potential through its episodic form. *Tell Me a Riddle* embraces an episodic plot structure to refract questions of its characters' potential and growth. The collection employs episodic narrative as a way of reconciling social change on a historical time scale with the growth and maturity of individual characters. Rendered not as a central

²⁰ In this regard, *Yonnonidio* engages with a tradition of feminist literary recovery work that Olsen was herself instrumental in encouraging, distributing reading lists of under-read and out of print books by women, and convincing Florence Howe to reprint Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills* through the Feminist Press in 1972, which inaugurated the press's re-orientation towards the recovery of out of print works by women.

protagonist of a *bildungsroman*—subject of a continuous narrative of development—Jeannie, the only character to appear in all three connected stories in the collection, and a character notably tangential to the lives of the central characters of each story, is, in fact, the only subject observed by the reader in the process of maturing. Her *maturity*, though, is rendered in fits and starts, each story marking a moment of apparently stable personality and forceful conviction, only to be overturned in the next, until the final story, in which Jeannie’s transformation from callousness to compassion is signaled by her disillusionment with the bureaucratizing effects of her job as a social worker and her embrace of an affective, humanistic response to tragedy.

Tell Me a Riddle encodes disjunction as a way to perceive maturity as contingent, and legible most readily across gaps of historical time. Where the disjointed lives of the peripatetic protagonists of *Yonnonddio*, repeatedly uprooted by economic exploitation, figure cultural and economic struggle, the authorized, formal disjunctures of *Tell Me a Riddle* signal a reconciliation, in Olsen’s writing, of a certain type of rupture and the possibility of achieved maturity.

***Tell Me a Riddle*: Family Ties and Fragmented Form**

In the advertising material in the back of the 1983 Laurel paperback edition of *Tell Me a Riddle*, a notice for Jayne Anne Phillips’s short story collection *Black Tickets* carries a blurb from Tillie Olsen, praising the collection as, “[t]he unmistakable work of early genius.” This phrase, on its face, reads as an advertising blurb should: an unreserved recommendation of the work and of its author’s potential. But the particular phrasing of her praise might strike a reader familiar with Olsen’s own early career as surprising. In a frequently cited 1934 *New Republic* review of fiction appearing in the “little magazines” prevalent in the period, Robert Cantwell singles out Olsen’s work in remarkably similar terms to those with which she praises Phillips fifty years later: “out of the two hundred stories published in the magazines covered in this survey there is one fragment (by Tilly Lerner) [sic]

so fresh and imaginative that even a cautious critic can call it a work of early genius” (295). In light of Olsen’s relatively sparse literary production in the wake of Cantwell’s praise, her invocation of “early genius” to describe Phillips’s book could as easily read as a curse as it could a portent of future success (though Phillips herself continues to have a successful literary career).

So what are we to make of this striking echo? On one level, not too much. “Work of early genius,” is an appropriately effusive appraisal for ad copy promoting a first publication, and one can’t say conclusively that Cantwell’s citation, which jumpstarted Olsen’s career, garnering her offers of publishing contracts from several reputable houses, was on Olsen’s mind as she composed her response to Phillips’s work. But the phrase itself—the concept of early genius and its implication that the work in question is valuable not only for its content (though that, too, is presumed to be uniquely strong) but in relation to other, better work, not yet realized—not only echoes Olsen’s own past, but also resonates with a central concern of the collection in which it is situated: the dynamic between potential (both the potential of individuals and of progressive movements) and the social conditions that limit its realization.

In Cantwell’s review, Olsen’s early genius is set against another bit of evaluative augury: “A good part of [the magazines’] fiction is of the sort that is usually called promising” (295). This is to say, not good—at least, not yet. But “early genius” suggests that there is something there already: in contradistinction to the work of promise, the work of early genius is itself exceptional, even if those exceptional elements it contains are not completely shaped by a mature creative hand into a polished whole. *Yonnonidio*, particularly that section of *Yonnonidio* excerpted as “The Iron Throat,” a story of a young girl of unusually gifted aesthetic perception and the work to which Cantwell refers, is concerned with early genius. *Tell Me a Riddle*, though, is concerned with promise. The stories in the collection track the realization or stagnation of its characters’ potential—a potential understood to be important not because it marks these characters as exceptional, but rather because it marks

them as broadly representative. Indeed, one of the key arguments of the collection is that the circumstantial brakes on this *ordinary* potential can, too, be tragic. The shift from the concern for the fate of early genius manifest in *Yonnonidio* to a concern for more quotidian promise in *Tell Me a Riddle* is emblematic of a larger shift in Olsen's historical concerns. Where *Yonnonidio* crafts its narrative in relation to a revolution that might just be imminent, *Tell Me a Riddle* attempts to deal with diminished revolutionary expectations, to create a fiction that treats the failure of a revolutionary moment to come to its maturity, and to imagine that moment's fractured and diminished legacy.

Not only in their themes, but also in their form, the stories of *Tell Me a Riddle* address the question of how developmental narratives are produced, and to what extent they might be resisted. "I Stand Here Ironing," the first story in the collection, introduces the theme of frustrated promise through a narrative of a teenage girl's unsettled development, told by her mother as she moves back and forth over an ironing board. The three remaining stories constitute a short story cycle treating a single extended family. Beginning with the tensions between Whitey, the sailor protagonist of "Hey Sailor, What Ship?" and Lennie and Helen, his friends from the 1934 San Francisco general strike, newly-middle class at the time of the story; running through the growing divide between Carol, Lennie and Helen's daughter, and her working class African-American friend Pariale in "O Yes;" and culminating in the strife between Lennie's parents, Eva and David, and between Eva and her children in "Tell Me a Riddle," the final three stories in the collection generate their conflict through the drama of eroding relationships. Determined by divergent class positions, shifting ideological alignments, and the fruition of long germinating arguments, the fallings-out at the center of these stories draw their affective force from a sense of what Olsen describes in her afterward to *Yonnonidio* as "what might have been, and never will be now" (*Yonnonidio* 133). Where the dislocations in *Yonnonidio*, more narrative than formal, serve as an index of socio-economic deprivations, the formal disjunctures of *Tell Me a Riddle* address what is essentially a discursive problem: the narration of

shifts in political and social attitudes across historical time and over several generations. Like *Yonnonidio*, *Tell Me a Riddle* filters its historical concerns through family narratives. However, unlike the narrative of *Yonnonidio*, which uses the Holbrook family as a frame through which to provide a capsule history of proletarian tragedies leading to a radical consciousness that was very much of the compositional moment, the stories of *Tell Me a Riddle* possess a historical consciousness that is as much retrospective as it is progressive, and a concomitant attention to the dynamics of limited promise and unrealized potential. The form of the collection, the juxtaposition of a single story thematically concerned with a mother's pained, guilty, occasionally defiant consideration of her daughter's development, with a short story cycle consisting of three stories connected through their concern with a single extended family, traces broken narratives of uncertain development and apparently inevitable disillusionment. *Tell Me a Riddle* keys the gaps and fragmentation that formally constitute the short story cycle to a thematic interest in the disjointed legacy of the American left at the beginning of the Cold War. In (and in between) the stories of the collection, "development" is interrogated in its political and individual dimensions.

Three linked stories appear in the collection in chronological order, but with varied temporal foci. The first, "Hey Sailor, What Ship?" introduces "Lennie and Helen and the kids [Jeannie, Carol, and Annie]" through the central consciousness of Whitey, a sailor briefly ashore in San Francisco, who had saved Lennie's life during the 1934 San Francisco general strike (*Tell Me a Riddle* 22). The second, "O Yes" records the growing distance of Carol, the middle daughter, from her working-class African-American friend Pariale (Parry) Phillips as they move into junior high school, and in the wake of Carol's unsettling experience of Parry's baptism. The final and longest story, "Tell Me a Riddle," from which the collection's title is taken, focuses on the lives of Eva and David, the elderly parents of Lennie and six other children, who have grown apart in their marriage, and who, after Eva is diagnosed with terminal cancer, travel around the country visiting their children and

grandchildren. Each story treats a unique episode in which the gradual processes of historical change become visible in the discreet incidents of their characters' lives. These stories all tend toward tragedy and build toward a localization of historical meaning in the family.

"I Stand Here Ironing," the opening piece of *Tell Me a Riddle*, however, begins the collection on a note of deep skepticism not only of the value of lineal inheritance, but of the value of explanatory narrative itself in the face of a more powerful social imperative to simply make things better. The linked stories of *Tell Me a Riddle* emphasizes the family drama of ideological changes that occur across generations—the tragic combination of social success with the weakening of social conscience. "I Stand Here Ironing" focuses on the failure of an individual to succeed, and on the representational problems generated by trying to explain that failure. We can understand the rest of the collection, in its piecemeal exposition of another young girl's development into social consciousness, as an attempt to answer Emily's nihilistic exit from the story. The three stories which follow "I Stand Here Ironing" constitute a short story cycle, connected through their treatment of three generations of the same family, with multiple generations appearing in each story. The connected stories of the collection present a vision of a community fragmenting and being reconstituted. But taken together, the stories combine to portray the fragmentation and reconstitution of character within individuals across historical time.

In a note included with the publication of "Help Her to Believe," the story which would become "I Stand Here Ironing," in the 1956 *Stanford Short Stories* collection, Olsen relates the compositional difficulties that she faced in writing the story (her first published work of fiction since the 1934 *Partisan Review* printing of half of the first chapter of *Yonnonddio*). The story takes the form of a mother's unspoken apologia for her daughter's upbringing, prompted by a school counselor's inquiry about her daughter's life, and thought out while the mother irons clothes. For Olsen, who began the story's composition with the intention of presenting a full exposition of the daughter's life

to illuminate the circumstances limiting her potential, the scope of the story's explanatory ambitions quickly began to seem impractical. "I would start a scene and realize it required too much development," she writes. "There was too much material. What could I select to best show her [the daughter in the story, Emily]? to best show 'what had made him [the story's inspiration, Olsen's friend's son] how he is.' It needed to be a novel" ("On the Writing of a Story" 134). Olsen's desire to explain her characters' lives threatens the narrative cohesion of her project, not to mention the possibility of ever completing it. While the ethical motivation that Olsen offers for her story demands comprehensiveness, the narrative that would fulfill that requirement strains against the boundaries of her form. The immediate significance of "development" in Olsen's remarks is narratological, but her comments apply to her ambivalent treatment of biographical development as well. Indeed, Olsen's framing links the question of narrative development (how do I mold this story into a complete and finished narrative?) to the question of an individual's development in their social context (how did this person get to be how she or he is?). The tension here is between story and plot—in particular between Olsen's expressed desire to present the story in its explanatory fullness (which she casts as a novelistic enterprise) and the requirements of narrative compression imposed by the short story form. Olsen's resolution situates the explanatory story of the child's life within a narrative of the mother's concern for her daughter, structuring its discussion of the daughter's life in relation to the mother's expectations and immediate emotional state; that is, maintaining a perpetual link between the incidents of the daughter's story and the larger generational frame into which her life can be fit.

The rest of Olsen's author's note explains the process of distillation that leads from an unmanageable proliferation of causes to a coherent and cohesive portrait of an emotional effect. Indeed, if the complex of social and personal circumstances that would account for the totality of the daughter's life seem, to Olsen, to exceed the bounds of what is possible in the short story form,

then the emotional experience of failing to produce a sufficient explanatory narrative of a life (an experience felt by Olsen as author and mirrored by her narrator) prove to be a subject that the short story can grasp. The flight from novelistic expansiveness into a short narrative marked by lyrical compression frees Olsen from the unfulfillable demands of narrative development made by her initial conception of the story. Only once Olsen is able to shed the burdens of robust novelistic explanation can she produce a story that she can call “her own”:

The emotional tone of the story came as the story became my own, not in the incidents in which the story was clothed, but in the emotions of a parent whose tasks are finished with a particular child and who can only at this time of life, when it is too late and the mistakes and successes are irrevocable, begin to see what was and what was not determining, can feel how much “could not be helped,” and know that the kind of world it is, is what will determine what ultimately happens with the child. (136).

Olsen’s note frames the story’s production in explicit reaction to the novel, a genre that she conceives as fundamentally a vehicle for the placement of individual characters in relation to a system of historical and local incidents (thus, the trimmings from the story, which “filled a paper bag,” include “a hospital scene, the Spanish Civil War, a school scene, a long diatribe about school homework” [135]). Deciding to abandon the novelistic aspirations to an explanatory scope encompassing both the world historical and the local, Olsen subsumes the etiological questions that would be addressed by a narrative of Emily’s development to an exploration of the dread that strikes the narrator when she attempts to narrate her daughter’s life. Though Emily’s narrative is essentially linear—a progression from birth to an early adulthood of dimmed prospects—the overt action of the story is essentially static, encapsulated in the mother’s back and forth vacillation over the ironing board—agitated movement without direction. The ironing itself has a clear teleological focus: the flattening of clothes, the smoothing of their wrinkles and regularization of their form, the fulfillment of a domestic chore. The motion behind the ironing, extending a classical Marxist understanding of alienated labor to the domestic sphere, mechanizes the mother, imagining her in relation to the

potentially permanent stream of clothes to be ironed, and reiterating the oscillation of the mother's emotions ("Aren't you ever going to finish the ironing, Mother?" Emily asks. "Whistler painted his mother in a rocker. I'd have to paint mine standing over an ironing board" [19]).

"I Stand Here Ironing" begins with contesting notes of defiance and regret. The action of the story consists of the narrator ironing and mulling over her daughter Emily's development. The mother's recollections are sparked by a school counselor's request that she come in to talk about Emily, "a youngster who needs help and whom I'm deeply interested in helping" (*Tell Me a Riddle* 9). The mother does not come in, but in response mentally narrates a procession of incidents that may offer some purchase on her daughter's life: her nursing schedule, oppressive desire for her daughter to be good, and unstable employment in "the pre-relief, pre-WPA world of the depression" (10); the daughter's indifferent childcare at the hands of her absent father's family, experience of a bad teacher, residence at a nightmarish camp for the treatment of eating disorders, apparently innate wit, brown hair and dark, "foreign looking" features (20); and the broader social factors of Cold War nuclear panic and economic depression.

From the beginning of the story, the mother's understanding of her own limited agency ability to affect her daughter's life colors her responses to the counselor's prompt. "Even if I came, what good would it do? You think because I am her mother I have a key, or that in some way you could use me as a key? She has lived for nineteen years. There is all that life that has happened outside me, beyond me" (10). In responding to the question, which "moves [her] tormented back and forth with the iron," the mother immediately distances herself from any potential utility that she might have in the counselor's efforts to help her daughter. This distancing extends both to her role as a source of narrative information about her daughter that might be instrumentalized in the counselor's intervention, and to her own possible transformation into an instrument of reform. The

mother thus tries to divorce her retrospective consideration of her daughter's life from any potential utility it might have. The mother presents her narrative for herself and to herself.

In this regard, the story presents an ambivalent transfer of agency from the mother to the counselor (from the family to social institutions), and a shift from a narrative of action to a narrative of memory. The mother's narrative doesn't offer a solution to the problems that it presents (the mother from beginning to end disavows any actual communication with the counselor, despite ending her monologue with a clear, if unvoiced, request *to* the counselor), but only a meditation on the problem of the daughter's life. As it is framed by the story, Emily's problems are of the past, and insofar as they continue into the present, they are a problem for someone other than the mother to solve. The act of narration, though entirely internal, creates an event with an endpoint—a moment of at least provisional maturity, in which the daughter's fate seems to be sealed, and the mother's responsibility opens up onto a responsibility to address the conditions in which her now nearly adult daughter moves—in which, by virtue of its closure, the mother's own actions might be judged.

In contrast to the counselor's optimism about Emily's prospects, the mother's reaction to Emily's entrance at the end of the story suggests that the mother constitutes her own identity in relation to her daughter by imagining her, at least in part, as an already determined subject. When Emily enters the story, near its conclusion, she does so with a mixture of whimsy and fatalism that signal her apparent unconcern with futurity:

She starts upstairs to bed. "Don't get me up with the rest in the morning." "But I thought you were having midterms." "Oh those," she comes back in, kisses me, and says quite lightly, "in a couple of years when we'll all be atom-dead they won't matter a bit."

She has said it before. She *believes* it. But because I have been dredging the past, and all that compounds a human being is so heavy and meaningful in me, I cannot endure it tonight. (19–20)

The mother's pose of retrospection which heightens her sensitivity to her daughter's apocalyptic nihilism, in part because her remembering, itself, invokes the language and structures of progressive development. Her concern with "all that *compounds* a human being," is a concern with events considered in light of their ends: by the extent to which they determine the trajectory of an individual's life. In this sense, the mother's assertion, immediately following the lines quoted above, that she will "never total it all" (20) resists the impulse to biographical summation that would subsume her into the narrative of her daughter's life, as a cause of which Emily is an effect.

The episodic descriptive structure that the mother refuses to bring into a totalized narrative line mirrors the organizational logic of the collection as a whole, placing incidents alongside one another, hinting at throughlines of narrative development (and routing many of them through intergenerational family structures), but resisting a unified resolution. Composed of an aggregation of various events, Emily is an effect that defies easy causal explanation. But though the narrator refuses to impose a structure of explanatory coherence on her daughter's life, neither does she accept the counselor's understanding of her daughter's youthful malleability, or her sense that because Emily's *might* be helped, the counselor must intervene in ways grounded in an understanding of her personal past. Emily's youth and maturity are, for the mother, relational and contingent—not essential to her age but a function of her roles and circumstances. Emily early in life assumes gendered adult roles: "She had to help be a mother, and housekeeper, and shopper. She had to set her seal" (18). The ambiguity of the mother's assertion that "she had to set her seal" (a phrase that evokes the need to make one's mark, in the sense of pressing a signet into wax, the progression from lability to rigidity in the material transformation of the sealant, and the sense in which a seal serves both to close off and separate thing from thing, and also to attach two objects) reflects an ambivalence about maturity, conceived as the final issue of a coherent project. This phrase, moreover, has particular resonance with the mother's narrative project of retelling, even if ultimately

only to herself, the story of Emily's life. In telling the story—in engaging in the act of comprehensive recollection, if not final summation, the mother sets a seal of her own. Resisting the counselor's desire for a narrative of recovery, the story concludes with an appeal to the counselor, and to the reader, to alter the circumstances in which the daughter moves: "Only help her to know—help make it that there is cause for her to know—that she is more than this dress on the ironing board, helpless before the iron" (21). The mother's parry, ending the imagined conversation with the counselor, ultimately reframes the terms of the conversation away from the daughter herself and towards the circumstances in which the daughter lives. As such, the story's conclusion is oriented away from an individual, biographical logic, and towards a social logic. Rather than trying to make a better Emily, she suggests, the counselor should make a better world.

But if the story's focus on Emily moves from the personal to the political—away from Emily's development and towards its milieu—its treatment of the mother retains a pronounced developmental focus. In opening up onto a broad call for changed circumstances, the narrator converts the setting of the story into a metaphor that gestures again towards her own implication in her daughter's life story. After dictating the circumstances that render her, too, a victim, keeping her from being the mother she would have liked, she appears to conclude on a note of resignation:

"She has much to her and probably little will come of it. She is a child of her age, of depression, of war, of fear."

Let her be. So all that is in her will not bloom—but in how many does it?
There is still enough left to live by. (20-1)

The turn to the metaphor of the dress and the ironing board, however, suggests a complicated and still-unresolved responsibility that the mother feels for her daughter's alienation and limitation. Indeed, even as she appears to accept that her daughter's primary developmental moment has passed, she herself is now behind the iron metaphorically bearing down on Emily.²¹

²¹ Patricia Meyer Spacks notes of mid-twentieth century fiction of adolescence, that, "the psychological satisfaction it provides for adults partakes in the pleasure of self-castigation.

On the level of metaphor, abstracted from the narrative situation of the mother ironing, the mother's plea that the daughter understand herself to be capable of resisting apparently determining social forces despite her likely failure to realize her potential depends on Emily's ability to define herself in a position other than that of the dress, steamed, pressed, and flattened. But the metaphor allows for only a few positions that Emily might occupy: the controlled, objectified dress, the ironing enforcer of domestic order, and a figure outside of the overt metaphorical structure: the wearer of the dress, or the person unconcerned with the event of ironing entirely. I don't want to suggest that the metaphor entirely forecloses on the daughter's possibilities outside of its immediate structure—she could potentially occupy the positions of the dress-wearer or of a woman outside of the house altogether—but rather to point out the unattractive possibility, held out by the mother's metaphor, that her daughter might merely assume her own position as motor behind the iron's flattening force. Insofar as the metaphor positions the mother as an agent of oppression (literally pressing, if not oppressing), then a portion of the mother's worry is that the daughter is not only subject to oppression at her hands, but that upon maturing she will simply take her place.

This, I would like to suggest, is central to Olsen's problematic of maturity, evident in the tension between the ideals of the epigraph to "Tell Me a Riddle"—"These things shall be," a line from John Addington Symonds's labour song, "A Vista," (1880)—and the possibility of static or worsening social relations implied in the anxiety that Emily might only either be oppressed or take her mother's unenviable place. The danger looming over "I Stand Here Ironing" is the danger of tradition-as-stasis: a danger that individual development will not be accompanied by social

Increasingly in the twentieth century, the novel of adolescence provides not a device for criticizing the existing state of society (a function it has served from the beginning) but a record of adult guilt" (288). This tendency towards reading fictions of adolescent development as indictments of the vacuity of adult poses of maturity is evident in "I Stand Here Ironing." The mother's anxiety in the story, however, bears a complex relation to the daughter's putative accession to adulthood. The hope that Emily will know, or will have cause to know, "that she is more than this dress on the ironing board, helpless before the iron" (21), turns the mother's immediate situation into a figure for broader oppressive social forces.

development, but instead will simply re-inscribe unjust patterns of social organization. Symonds's song, as voiced by David, a central character in "Tell Me a Riddle", proclaims that, "These things shall be! A loftier race / Than e'er the world hath known shall rise / With flame of freedom in their souls / And light of knowledge in their eyes." The song's utopian vision depends, crucially, on a narrative of generational progress. The final verse, not referenced in "Tell Me a Riddle," begins, "These things—they are no dream—shall be / For happier men when we are gone," emphasizing an earthly messianism of social development. The ideals of the present will not be realized in the present generation, but by future inheritors of contemporary idealistic legacies. This is the mood of "secular Jewish utopianism" referenced in the *Norton Anthology of Jewish Literature's* introduction to the story (689). But "I Stand Here Ironing" offers a clue to the ambivalent relationship to Jewish tradition evident in "Tell Me a Riddle." Emily's development, the focus of the well-intentioned counselor's concerns, would be negated by the injustice of the world into which she matures. Moreover, Emily's understanding of the imminence of atomic annihilation, which underwrites a nihilistic counter to the school's expectations that she will take a path toward "being helped," undermines the utopian hope of an earlier generation. The threat of atomic destruction undermines both the narrative concern for Emily's potential and the Emily's rationale for pursuing a better life or a better world. The shift from the political moment of the 1930s, imbued with a revolutionary immediacy that authorizes the apparent teleology of Olsen's proletarian novel *Yonnondio*, to the Cold War period of de-radicalization and feared atomic destruction and in which the stories of *Tell Me a Riddle* were composed, signals, for Olsen, a change in formal possibilities. From the revolutionary telos of the proletarian novel, in which the Holbrook family's dissolution—the end of a lineal family narrative—is aligned with the definite end of demonstrating the need for a new social order, *Tell Me a Riddle* adopts an anti-teleological, retrospectively oriented narrative strategy that marries a lament

for a defunct popular radicalism with a concern for the development of individual characters in post-radical conditions.²²

While “I Stand Here Ironing” is centrally focused on an individual character’s *Bildungs* narrative, the three stories which follow—a linked but discontinuous whole—trace a dialectical movement between the development of Jeannie, a secondary character in each story in which she appears, and the shifting class position of that character’s family. In the stories’ negotiation between Jeannie’s developing social consciousness and the larger narrative of the embourgeoisement of three generations of her family, the family itself emerges as a site in which ideological shifts are rendered legible, and an individual’s political position can be understood in relation to a longer tradition.

While the individual stories tend towards a tragic aesthetic of dissolution, disappointment, and the destruction of ideals at the hands of circumstance, the cycle as a whole holds out the hope of progress in the figure of Jeannie. Peripheral in each of the earlier stories, Jeannie is essential to the final story’s conclusion, linking a new socially-engaged generation to the immigrant grandparents who serve as the matriarch and patriarch for the cycle’s central family. Jeannie’s growth as such is not directly narrated in these stories, but rather is implied in the changes in her attitude evident in her successive appearances in the final three stories. Indeed, the book’s structure, in which the incidents in each of the connected stories are separated by impermeable narrative barriers—despite the continuity of characters, no one story references any other—tempers the narrative prominence of incident with a larger, un-narrated plot of individual development in historical time. Nowhere is this tendency more evident than in the transformation of Jeannie’s character from the teenager who

²² The turn to the psychological implied by this shift resonates with the account of post-War Jewish American letters offered in Mark Shechner’s *After the Revolution* (1987), which, as the title of two of its chapters (“From Socialism to Therapy” [parts I and II]) suggests, reads Marxism and psychology as the beginning and ending points of the trajectory of Jewish American literature in the twentieth century. The nearness of this narrative—not premised on particularly Jewish concepts (the biographies of Freud and Marx notwithstanding)—to the central concerns of Olsen’s collection offers some background for the legibility of *Tell Me a Riddle* as a text with something to say about American Jewish life.

snobbishly derides Whitey for his language and his drinking into the young woman whom Eva, the matriarch protagonist of “Tell Me a Riddle,” recognizes as a kindred spirit of Lisa, the woman who taught her to read in pre-revolutionary Russia (112).

Olsen’s biographer, Panthea Reid, notes that the author appears to have worked through a process of distillation, moving from the expansiveness of the novel to the compression of the short story. In response to Malcom Cowley’s estimation of her as, “essentially a novelist rather than a short story writer,” Olsen “said she had written several thousand pages but reduced whole scenes to a paragraph, or a sentence, or nothing at all. Thus she was ‘a short story writer, I leave things out.’ She did not want to remake her novella into a novel by ‘padding, fattening, putting back what was cut away’” (Reid 212). Though the extent of Olsen’s drafting may be an exaggeration,²³ the practice and aesthetic of distillation that she claims as her own positions the story’s completeness as a function of the spare intensity of its prose. The paratactic structure of the stories that comprise *Tell Me a Riddle*’s short story cycle offer an escape from the burden of the full exposition of a character’s development. Jeannie develops for the reader precisely because she is ancillary to the main action of every story in which she figures. The gemlike lyricism of Olsen’s prose, concentrated on the precise, intense exposition of the diegetic moment, allows little space for the narrated growth of its characters. The third-person narratorial voice that replaces the first-person narration of Emily’s mother in “I Stand Here Ironing” is decidedly terse, often providing the physical outlines of a scene’s setting, and letting the dialogue do the work of emplotment. Consider, for example, the opening sentence of “Hey Sailor, What Ship?,” the first of the three connected stories: “The grimy

²³ A strength of Reid’s biography is the extent to which it explores the falsehoods and self-inventions underlying much of Olsen’s comments about her own writing, both in public and to publishers. Olsen, who throughout her career requested and accepted numerous foundation grants and publishers’ advances, often with false avowals that she was working on material that she had apparently abandoned, appeared almost pathologically unable to fulfill a contract. For a piercing criticism of the mythologies of Olsen’s silences, read in light of her persistent institutional support, see the first chapter of Myles Weber’s, *Consuming Silences: How We Read Authors Who Don’t Publish*. (2005).

light; the congealing smell of cigarettes that had been smoked long ago and of liquor that had been drunk long ago; the boasting, cursing, wheedling, cringing voices, and the greasy feel of the bar as he gropes for his glass” (22). All action is substantiated to description. The voices in the bar are emptied of semantic value. The central character’s movement conveys information about his character primarily through his location—his fingers allow us to feel the bar’s greasiness. All subject and no predicate, the sentence offers a particular moment, its concrete details foregrounded, that emphasizes the material presence of the figure who is to become the story’s protagonist—a lyrical appreciation of the scene as such, itself a figure for the action of the social forces with which it is instantiated.

The burdens of social comprehensiveness that Olsen sees as a novelistic imperative fall away with the development of the lyrical center of the story. Jeannie’s reappearance across the final three stories of the volume allows for an escape from the lyrical moment through an implied and fragmentary temporal movement. The piecemeal presentation of Jeannie’s arrival at three separate developmental stages tempers the stasis of Olsen’s lyrical presentation of static moments through the narrative movement of Jeannie’s developing character. By avoiding an expressed narrative of development in favor of one implied in the gaps between the collection’s stories, Olsen mitigates the pessimism of her political moment, providing a figure of continuity who disrupts the apparently final endings of her stories. Jeannie’s implied development, I argue, is given fuller and more complicated historical weight by its ultimate realization in relation to the family of which she is a part. It is in the connection of Jeannie’s personal narrative of development with that of her grandparents’ political frustration that her story comments on and ameliorates the frustrations of the contemporary cultural moment.

Jeannie is as close to an antagonist as we find in the story, “Hey Sailor, What Ship?” her first appearance in the collection. The narrative center of the story is Whitey, the sailor in whose

consciousness the story begins and ends, and the plot hinges on the realization of his growing distance from the people with whom he shares a long history, and who serve as his most significant grounding while ashore. The story's opening establishes a dramatic tension between the grimy, well-worn dive bar where Whitey finds himself (but no company) on coming ashore at San Francisco, and the attraction of "Lennie and Helen and the kids," a quasi-familial relationship that serves simultaneously as a social draw and as a source of shame. Jeannie, to whom Whitey is uniquely attached, and who, during the span of the story, openly disdains Whitey's working-class language and habits, is the main figure through which the reader encounters Whitey's transformation from a central participant in the family's emotional and economic life to "old friend"—a figure of nostalgic affective attachment now alienated from the family's newfound self-sufficiency.

Whitey's feeling for Jeannie is in part dictated by her young, playful proclamation of marriage to him, which is revealed parenthetically in the story, and which serves to anchor Whitey in the life of the family—"(He had told the story so often, as often as anyone would listen, whenever he felt good, and always as he told it the same shy happiness would wing through him, how when she was four, she had crawled into bed beside him one morning, announcing triumphantly to her mother: I'm married to Whitey now, I don't have to sleep by myself anymore.)" (39). The mock marriage authorizes and formalizes Whitey's connection to Helen and Lennie's family beyond the moment of the 1934 general strike in which it was forged. In "marrying in" to the family, Whitey lays claim to the domestic solidarity that replaces the labor solidarity that he and Lennie once shared—a transposition echoed in Lennie's comment to Whitey that the family, whose relative stability Whitey notices in the new domestic order in which dishes are done immediately after dinner, has "gotten organized" (36). At least part of the appeal of the marriage, for Whitey, is that it cements his connection with and responsibility to a younger generation—one that he defines as affective, rather than material. Younger sister Allie's later comment that he should "kiss the dolly

you gave me [. . .]. She's your grandchild now," presents a further figure of the limitations of this elective family affiliation to encompass the class-solidarities of the '30s—the simulated grandchild, a mute and purchased legacy, foregrounds that while, for Helen and Lennie, Whitey is a figure of the past, for him they are a link to the present and the future.

As the story continues it is precisely Jeannie's insensibility to Whitey's emotions that signals the depth of his remove from the family's contemporaneous situation. Jeannie's reactions to Whitey reveal a particularly classed conception of maturity. Her objections begin with his cursing, a mode of speech offensive in part because out of place in the domestic norms to which she subscribes:

I don't go over to anybody's house and hear words like that.
 Jeannie, [says her mother], who are you kidding? You kids use them all.
 That's different, that's being grown up, like smoking. [. . .] He's just a
 Howard Street wino now—why don't you and daddy kick him out of the house? He
 doesn't belong here. (42-3)

In the context of Jeannie's domestic objections to Whitey, Whitey's tender feelings towards their mock marriage run all the more strongly against Jeannie's developing bourgeois social consciousness. The adolescent experience of taboo language as a hallmark of "being grown-up" is an iteration of the ideological inflection of maturity that Olsen elaborates (and of which Jeannie is acutely aware) in "O Yes." Here, however, the defamiliarization at the heart of the story's account of Jeannie and Whitey's relationship serves as an indictment of the exclusivity of the middle class family structures into which Helen and Lennie's children acculturate.

At the end of "Hey Sailor," Whitey leaves Helen and Lennie's house in San Francisco, unlikely to return:

By Jeannie, silent and shrunken into her coat. He passes no one in the streets. They are inside, each in his slab of house, watching the flickering light of television. The sullen fog is on his face, but by the time he has walked to the third hill, it has lifted so he can see the city below him, wave after wave, and there at the crest, the tiny house he has left, its eyes unshaded. After a while they blur with the myriad others that stare at him so blindly.
 Then he goes down.
Hey Sailor, what ship?

Hey Marinero, what ship? (47)

The houses on the San Francisco hills ultimately figure atomization: the solitary figure in front of the flickering TV opposed to the communalism that Whitey instantiates in his unpredictable entrances and exits, and that, the story posits, existed in the now bygone solidarity of “seafaring gen’lmun” (35). The synecdochal blurring of the “eyes” of the family’s house with those of the other “blindly staring” houses and the prominence of Jeannie upon Whitey’s departure signal the collection’s critique of the family as a unit of progressive change and ideological transmission. As the final member of the family to be mentioned, wrapped in a coat that emphasizes her own insularity, Jeannie is foregrounded as a representative of the family’s trajectory. Indeed, for Whitey, who variously confuses Jeannie for Helen and Carol for Jeannie, Jeannie connects the different generations of women in the family: a figure of Helen’s past, “so much like Helen of years ago,” and of Carol’s future (31).

In filling this role, Jeannie acts for Whitey as an embodiment of youthful potential—a figure in which the young version of her mother imaginatively can be re-embodied, and also a symbol for youth as such: a model through which Whitey sees her younger sister Carol.²⁴ That Whitey sees

²⁴ A curious line in her afterward to the Feminist Press’s reissue of Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills* bears on the significance of the family in Olsen’s historical imagination in ways relevant to our discussion of Jeannie’s interchangeability with her mother, in Whitey’s eyes. “[Davis] was a dark, vigorous, sturdily built girl,” she writes, “with a full handsome face that decades later was to become the most admired, sketched, photographed face of its generation in the person of her famous son Richard” (*Silences* 55). Olsen’s primary aim here is to contrast Harding Davis’s relative hardships with the advantages enjoyed by her son by virtue of his sex (she continues: “in her own time [. . .] her appearance was probably considered unfortunate—for a girl” [*ibid.*]), but the transitive character of her claim is striking. In Olsen’s telling, it is not only Davis’s influence that survives into the next generation (her son, too, has a successful career as a writer and beneficiary of his mother’s professional advice), but also elements of her material self. The link between mother and son holds out the possibility of re-instantiating the mother as a man, and thereby redeeming her misprized virtues for public consumption. According to the progress of generations implicit in this account, the later generation reframes the life of the earlier, casting into relief changes in social circumstances as well as inherent differences between the individuals in each generation (in the context of Olsen’s afterward, gender is clearly the most significant factor differentiating Davis from her son, but character, personality, ability, etc., also play a role in her use of generational comparisons to

Jeannie as a young Helen suggests his nostalgia for the situation of their youth. That he confuses Carol for Jeannie suggests a more generalized longing for a younger Jeannie, not yet socialized into the class prejudice that defines her subjectivity in the story. In both misidentifications, however, Whitey's desire for continuity, as such, is evident. Indeed, Whitey's working class masculinity is at the root of Jeannie's rejection of him. His joking references to their marriage, his penchant for physical intimacy, and his comparisons of Jeannie to Helen all point to the instability of the family's class position—an alternate past in which Helen's husband is a sailor or longshoreman, or an alternate future in which Jeannie's husband is working class. Whitey's presence threatens Jeannie with the possibility that sexual reproduction will fail to lead to the reproduction of the middle-class status that the family enjoys. The arc of her character's development ultimately depends upon her acceptance of such a situation as a non-tragic possibility, and on her decoupling of sexual reproduction from the reproduction of class altogether.

Whitey is a nomadic outsider, and though the story begins and ends focalized through his perspective outside of the house, from the moment that Lennie picks Whitey up on the street early in the story until the moment he leaves the house at the story's end, Whitey is only seen in the context of his interactions with the family. The story documents the family's insufficiency as a container for social relations defined by class and labor solidarity. But it is not the family in isolation that proves incapable of incorporating Whitey into its purview. Instead, in light of Helen and Lennie's continued affection for Whitey, the family represents a potential site of resistance to the disdain for the working class demonstrated in Jeannie's behavior. Family in the story, then, is a contested concept. A site in which Whitey imagines continuity and Jeannie imagines upward

foreground historical change and historical stagnation). The literalized presence of Davis's face in her son's gives Olsen's description its uncanny charge (it is *her* face, more than Richard's, that becomes "the most admired, sketched, photographed face of *its* generation"). Generational distinctions thereby collapse as the family becomes a vehicle for transhistorical transit.

mobility, the family provides a potential link to the more radical past, and a measure of its failure to persist.

Within the structure of the family, moreover, larger scale social and political shifts are situated within contexts of individual development. The reader's awareness of Jeannie's youthful enthusiasm for Whitey and her eventual rejection of him tempers the sweetness of Carol's unmitigated affection. Thus, when Carol figures her desire for a knee bounce as one potentially inappropriate for her age—"guess you think 'cause I'm ten I'm too big to bounce any more" (36)—she rejects the projected reluctance of early adolescence, but also acknowledges an understanding that growing older entails the socially proscribed rejection of one's former self. It also foregrounds the class-determined sexual threat that Whitey appears to present to Jeannie—puberty, and with it the possibility of sexual reproduction across class lines, separates Jeannie from Carol. This understanding has poignant resonances for Whitey's relationship with the family, as he discovers himself to be more a figure from the past than an easy participant in the family's present—a fact reinforced in Whitey's recitation of Jose Rizal's valedictory poem, *El Ultimo Adios*, a recitation which includes the lines "Little will matter, my country, / That thou should'st forget me. / I shall be speech in thy ears, fragrance and color, / Light and shout and loved song. . . ." before drifting off into incomprehensibility, Lennie assuring the children that "he'll tell it all some other time" (42). The children's appreciation for Rizal's poem isn't concretely explained in the story, but seems based less on its content than on the ritual and form of its recitation: it is a begged-for act, a regular part of Whitey's visit. As such, the resonance of the poem with Whitey's own departure is lost on its young auditors in the story, but available to the reader. Rizal's valedictory claims its speaker's cultural significance beyond his personal persistence in memory. In the context of Whitey's departure, his previous recitations of the poem take on a proleptic significance, as he arrives at the moment of his

departure from the family's life, and metonymically, of the radical worker from the national imaginary.

But the poem, of course, has additional significance as an object of Whitey's avuncular relationship with the children. A key text in Filipino nationalism and international anti-colonial revolutionary literature, the poem entertains the children. This framing subordinates the song's revolutionary significance to its playful performance. It is special—unique to Whitey's visits, and a marker of his ties to a culture with which the children's parents (Lennie, in particular) identify, but that evidently forms little of their domestic life. As an object of the children's youthful experience, the poem is liable, like the knee-bounces, to being outgrown. Indeed, Carol's demure request for a bounce is couched in her recognition that her enjoyment of the act is in danger of being out of step with the expectations associated with her age. "Guess you think 'cause I'm ten I'm too big to bounce anymore." Whitey's response, "Bounce everybody. Jeannie. Your mom. Even Lennie," jestingly asserts that, whatever the age of the bouncee, he's game—unwilling to let decorum interfere with their play (36). But coming on the heels of Jeannie's expressed disdain for Whitey's manners, his willingness to pretend that age doesn't matter immediately calls the reader's attention to the fact that if Whitey's up for a bounce, Jeannie decidedly isn't. Whitey's claim that he'll "bounce everybody" is voiced to make Carol feel better, and to feel that the patterns of interaction and affection that they've established remain valid. Jeannie's presence troubles the list. The political import of this scene is in its inflection of Jeannie's development. Jeannie is unfit to be bounced not only because she's too big, or because the sexual overtones of the bounce, echoing her discomfort with even the satirical implication that she could marry Whitey, would render the bouncing inappropriate for their relationship (though both of these contribute to her refusal), but because she constitutes her own developing maturity in class-bound terms that are opposed to Whitey's affect and mode of carrying himself. In linking Rizal's valedictory with the playful episodes of Whitey's

visits, the story foregrounds the fragility of ideological continuity in the face of the social forces acting to interpellate Jeannie as a member of a different class from that in which her parents grew up.

At the same time, however, the content of Rizal's poem and of the origin of Lennie's relationship with Whitey does provide a potentially usable narrative through which the children might develop a social consciousness in line with the tradition of their parents. Though this process evidently fails with Jeannie, at least within the bounds of the story, it is nonetheless a tradition on which the children can draw to interpret their parents' social understandings, and to develop their own. In this way, the poem's premonition of Whitey's departure also prefigures its own eventual interpretation, the meaning of the verse latent for the children to access, and modeling the reader's potential mobilization of the story itself to understand its contemporary moment in relation to a marginalized history of radical engagement. This potential, unrealized in the story, sits next to a potent metaphor of embourgeoisment as the process of *outgrowing* one class affiliation for another, putatively more mature. The process of *Bildung* is thus negatively weighted for its implication of working class atavism. By aligning upward class mobility with the developmental narrative of adolescence, the story mounts a critique of class-disaffiliation by associating individual class ascent with the uniquely immature gesture of claiming one's maturity. Jeannie's snobbishness, then, is at once adolescent and middle-class: an assertion of developmental achievement realized simultaneously along biological and socio-economic lines.

"O Yes," the story that immediately follows "Hey Sailor" in the collection, reinforces and expands the collection's association of developmental milestones and the concretization of class identity. "O Yes," titled "Baptism" in its original 1957 publication in *Prairie Schooner*, centers on the relationship between Jeannie's younger sister, Carol, and Pariale Phillips, her working-class African-American friend. Picking up a consideration of the previous story's family, "O Yes" embraces the

family as a unit through which individual ideological development might be evaluated and contextualized. The story recapitulates Jeannie's self-distancing from Whitey, as Carol and Parry grow apart upon their entrance into middle-school, a context in which racialized and classed segregation progresses through the official discourse of school pride, mandated middle-class standards of dress, and racist presuppositions of teachers and other school officials. Though Carol's story is very much one of her own unique development into social consciousness, the story as it appears in the collection places this narrative in direct dialogue with Jeannie's, and with the conflict between her mother's idealism and the social forces at play in the school. In this way, Carol's narrative trajectory is not solely a matter of individual importance, but a reflection on her family as well.

In "O Yes," Jeannie serves as forerunner and interpreter of Carol's experience. Having passed through a similar experience of sorting at her middle school, she displays a cynical expertise that extends to the social tragedy of her sister's situation, but that doesn't encompass the possibility of a different system outside of the relatively freer racial mixing in the school in a nearby wealthy suburb. Here, too, Jeannie serves as a foil for both her mother and her sister, filtering her sister's experiences through her own, while occupying the position of silent critic that her mother will echo in her own unvoiced advice at the story's end:

You don't realize a lot of things, Mother, Jeannie said, but not aloud. [. . .]
 Enough to pull that kid apart two ways even more, Jeannie said, but still not
 aloud. [. . .]
 "Grow up, Mother." Jeannie's voice was harsh. [. . .]
 It's like Ginger and me. Remember Ginger, my best friend in Horace Mann.
 But you hardly noticed when it happened to us, did you . . . because she was white?
 (62-3)

Jeannie's characteristically adolescent demand that her mother grow up presses her to accede to Jeannie's own weary sense of the leveling force of school norms, echoing the lament at the end of "I

Stand Here Ironing.” Growing up, in this construction, entails the abandonment of an idealistic view of social possibilities for an acceptance of structural divisions along the lines of race and class.

But Jeannie’s is far from the only definition of what it means to be “grown-up” offered in the story. The controlling metaphor of “O Yes” is that of baptism, used in the story to explore the various inflections of an individual’s accession into a community. The literal baptism of Pariale Phillips with which the story opens accompanies her secular transition into middle-school, which, in turn, presents a codified structure for her separation from Carol. The story is coy about the baptism’s significance for Parry: she isn’t scared, but she “ponders the platform,” the private meaning of the ritual opaque to the reader (51). For Carol, however, Parry’s baptism is a profound experience of alterity that leads to her own fainting, and that embodies the difference that she can begin to comprehend only at the story’s end. In this regard, the baptism is also a figure for Carol’s own transformation. Carol is at first overwhelmed by the ecstatic scene of the baptism, fainting before Parry mounts the baptismal platform. The baptism thus begins as a marker of unassimilable difference—a celebration of Parry’s accession to a particular religious and ethnic community, an event to which Carol can only respond by withdrawing.

On Carol’s fan, a little Jesus walked on wondrously blue waters to where bearded disciples spread nets out of a fishing boat. If she studied the fan—became it—it might make a wall around her. If she could make what was happening (*what* was happening?) into a record small and round to listen to far and far as if into a seashell—the stamp and rills and spirals all tiny (but never any screaming). (56)

Through Parry’s church, the story ties racial difference to distinct forms of emotional expression. Carol, for whom this difference resonates with the implicit disapproval of her continued friendship with Parry in the new social regime of middle school, understands herself only to be able to approach the milieu of Parry’s church through dissociation and reification—casting the baptism not

as a vital cultural moment in which she might participate but as an object that she can observe from a distance.²⁵

The logic by which the story figures Carol's own experience, though, is one of inevitable immersion. "*It is a long baptism into the seas of humankind, my daughter,*" her mother thinks. "*Better immersion than to live untouched. . . . Yet how will you sustain?*" (71). Helen frames Carol's "baptism" as a choice, an assent to immersion against a default position of "living untouched," but Carol experiences empathetic identification with another persecuted African-American girl at her school as involuntary: "Mother I want to forget about it all and not care,—like Melanie. Why can't I forget? Oh why is it like it is and why do I have to care?" (71). Carol, then, is pulled in two different directions in her growth: the direction of socialization into the discriminatory norms of her white, middle-class classmates, and the direction (here, naturalized) of a conscientious understanding that the sociability that she and Parry shared, predicated on an acknowledgement of their mutual, unqualified, and equal humanity, is a moral action that runs counter to those other norms.

While school most concretely sets Parry and Carol on separate tracks, it also acts as agent and function of larger social structures that interpellate these girls differently, and against one another. The school's setting highlights their growth into separation, framed, socially, *as growth*, implicitly casting their continued friendship as atavistic. The moral tension of the story is filtered through an appeal to what once was. Indeed, not only the immediate past of Carol and Parry's friendship, but the more distant past of Carol's religious heritage provide models for imagining an anti-racist present. Among the unvoiced explanations for the forms of worship that Carol

²⁵ A model, perhaps of the reader's own position vis-à-vis the action of the text, and one that repeats the indictment of the reader's capacity to aestheticize the mine explosion in *Yonnonidio*: "And could you not make a cameo of this and pin it onto your aesthetic hearts? So sharp it is, so clear, so classic. The shattered dusk, the mountain of culm, the tipple; clean lines, bare beauty—and carved against them, dwarfed by the vastness of night and the towering tipple, these black figures with bowed heads, waiting, waiting. [. . .] You will have the cameo? Call it Rascoe, Wyoming, any of a thousand mine towns in America, the night of a mine blowup. And inside carve the statement the company is already issuing" (20).

encounters in the church is one which calls attention to the Judaism of Carol's great grandparents, drawing a connection between the oppression of African Americans and the oppression to be found in Carol's ancestral past: "*Emotion*, Helen thought of explaining, *a characteristic of the religion of all oppressed peoples, yes your very own great grandparents*—thought of saying. And discarded" (70). By situating Carol in relation to her Jewish ancestry, Helen seeks to enable a more equitable human understanding. Jewishness thus becomes a transhistorical structure through which Carol might understand herself to be implicated in the social injustice that separates her from a racial and class other. Crucially, this use of Jewishness depends on a continuity of Jewish identity that would allow Carol to imagine herself, via her great grandparents, as a potential victim of social oppression—an understanding central to Jewish tradition and embodied in the injunction in the Passover *bagaddah* to understand oneself to have been a slave in Egypt. "Tell Me a Riddle," immediately following "O Yes," takes up this discarded thought, further expanding the ideological and emotional genealogy of the family. But "Tell Me a Riddle" contests the very genealogical logic that links it most concretely to the other stories in the collection.

"Tell Me a Riddle" relates the pained peregrinations of Eva and David, parents of the previous two stories' Lennie and Helen, as David drags Eva around the country to visit their adult-children and their grandchildren, attempting to keep Eva unaware of her terminal cancer. Shifting its focus from the generation that came of age in the 1930s to one whose formative political experience was the failed 1905 Russian revolution (the story is dedicated to "two of that generation, Seevya and Genya," and takes a line from a late nineteenth century British labor song as its epigraph and theme, linking it to the leftist politics of an earlier era), the story presents the apotheosis of the collection's consideration of how the problems and politics of the past impress themselves upon the present. Cognizant of the strife, political, social, and economic, that defines its protagonists' lives, the story resists idealizing Eva and David as part of a storied past. Instead, "Tell Me a Riddle"

understands its protagonists as robust characters whose developed relationship is defined by still-contested desires.

Indeed, while the genealogical logic that links the story most concretely to the other stories in the collection would tend to subsume David and Eva's lived experiences into their roles as parents and grandparents, the story in fact emphasizes their autonomous lives. This is not to say that the story does not serve any genealogical function. Part of the effect of "Tell Me a Riddle" in the larger family narrative presented in the collection is to situate Helen and Lennie's anxieties about the world in which their children grow up and the ideologies that they adopt within a broader history of the American left, and the explication of Lennie's lineage offered by "Tell Me a Riddle" surely deepens our understanding of his character. The story's understanding of David and Eva's practical problems as a disruption of—or an escape from—their youthful social commitment, too, implicates their lives in a larger historical and ideological frame. But the central conflict of the story is not inter- but intra-generational, and its causes and potency remain to a large extent inaccessible to the younger generation. Moreover, the facts of the story's conflict—whether Eva and David will remain in their house or sell it to move into an elder cooperative, the contrast between Eva's decaying body and David's resilient vitality—are primarily in, between, and about the protagonists' bodies (as opposed to their reputations or their relationships with their children). By sidelining intergenerational issues to focus instead on the immediate problems of two members of the older generation, "Tell Me a Riddle" approaches the legacy of the relatively recent past not primarily in terms of its intangible significance for coming generations, but in terms of its tangible, material implications for the lives of the generation that lived it. Eva and David's lives are story, not backstory.

"Tell Me a Riddle," like Olsen's later publication of *Yonnonndio* which presents the work as a surviving trace of a distanced past, suggests a reading of the past not only for its utility to the present

but also for its own sake. The story's trenchant focus on its protagonists' lives beyond their significance relative to their children, even despite the structural logic that would link them, via their children, to the rest of the collection and the significant presence of the children in the story, expands the collection's critique of the family as the site of one's social legacy. The story offers a partial pre-history of the conflicts of the two preceding stories—highlighting their connections to an earlier era's politics and expanding the collection's treatment of the family at its center—and elaborates the post-revolutionary context of the other stories. David and Eva are important both as Lennie's parents and in their own subjectivity. Much of the story's import, in fact, is in its recognition of the interplay between the two—of a robust physicality which links a mythologized past with a material present. "Tell Me a Riddle" mediates a contest between historical subjectivity and historical objectivity; that is, between Eva and David's objectivity as quasi-mythologized instruments in their children's self-construction and their subjectivity as historical actors for whom the lived experience of ideological struggle (both on the world-historical and on the personal scale) has material significance.

The story's opening frames the relationship between its two central characters as a continuing quarrel: an argument briefly interrupted and free to be resumed as the constraints of work and childcare have been lifted:

For forty-seven years they had been married. How deep the stubborn, gnarled roots of the quarrel reached, no one could say—but only now, when tending to the needs of others no longer shackled them together, the roots swelled up visible, split the earth between them, and the tearing shook even to the children, long since grown.
(72)

The story opens not with the reasons for the argument, but with the fact of the argument itself, and, equally importantly, with the fact of its repression. The metaphor that describes Eva and David's quarrel foregrounds the latency of their argument, framing their marriage as a period in which their argument ferments, rendering its depths obscure. This metaphor figures a long-standing

disagreement, held back by the forms and obligations of domesticity, as a thing with a vegetal power—organic but not sentient, possessing a force commensurate with the duration of its growth. The metaphor's force in part consists in the way in which it returns material significance to a figure of speech often emptied of its full metaphoric content. "Roots," in "the roots of the quarrel" would seem at first to refer to the causes of the quarrel—the term used here not in a robust metaphoric construction, but in its colloquial meaning as a synonym of "origins." But as the metaphor extends, it becomes clear that "roots" signifies the quarrel itself, not cause but effect, and not figure of speech but a figured object, the materiality of which is essential to its interpretation. The shift here, literalizing and concretizing an idiomatic usage, has important implications for the story's understanding of Eva and David as representatives of a particular generation, as characters understood in relation to other key figures in the story, and as historically embedded subjects of a certain and significant age. In transforming "roots" from a figure for an origin to a figure with a disruptive material presence in the narrative present, the story provides a model for understanding the history of the twentieth century in terms of the ferment, latency, and recrudescence of political radicalism—that is, for understanding the politics and ideologies of the past not as products of their moment, tending towards obsolescence and with implications understandable primarily in terms of their "afterlives," but as concepts with continuing, if latent, pressure in the present.

In this regard, the material conditions of David and Eva's lives, too, significantly inflect their narrative importance. Coming on the heels of the collection's previous two stories, the focus of "Tell Me a Riddle" on Lennie's parents offers a backstory for Helen and Lennie's lives: a partial genealogy for Lennie and his children. But as the story progresses, it becomes clear that Eva and David's family not only explains the couple's legacy but also their troubles. In "Tell Me a Riddle," the family is not a blank screen on which the scenes of history are projected, but a mode of social organization that complicates a socialist ideal. Thus, the voices of Eva and David's children,

introduced at the beginning of the story as a chorus of responses to their parents' quarrel, asking "why now?," sympathizing with their strife, and suggesting that what's needed is for someone to "knock their heads together," are immediately undermined by the voice of the narrator, offering a definitive answer to Lennie's incredulous question:

Lennie wrote to Clara: They've lived over so much together; what could possibly tear them apart?

Something tangible enough. (73)

Indeed, it is precisely the tangibility of Eva and David's problems that separates the narrative's understanding of their lives from their children's understandings of their lives.

The "tangible" ground of David and Eva's rift is the conflict over David's desire to sell their house to move into "The Haven," a cooperative for the aged sponsored by David's fraternal lodge, and Eva's categorical rejection of that idea. As David and Eva argue, Eva's health falters, and she spends an increasing amount of time in bed until being convinced to see a doctor. The doctor offers "a real fatherly lecture. Sixty-nine is young these days. Go out, enjoy life, find interests" (81), but as Eva's condition fails to improve, her doctor son-in-law Phil examines her and finds a pervasive and untreatable cancer. Phil removes much of the cancer immediately, leading to a brief resurgence in Eva's strength, but ultimately he indicates to David and the children that she has only about a year left to live. Several of the children decide, with David, that Eva should not be told her prognosis, and instead should travel to visit her children and grandchildren, a plan to which Eva objects, but with which she complies. David and Eva spend some time with their daughter Vivi and her family, and then leave for Los Angeles, to recuperate before seeing Lennie and Helen in San Francisco. They never leave Los Angeles, though, and the story ends with Eva's death in that city, attended by Jeannie, Lennie and Helen's daughter.

Eva's objection to David's plan to sell the house and move to the Haven, transparent to the third-person narrator but obscure to her children, stems from her understanding that the solitude of

old age affords her a self-determination that she has long desired, and that would be threatened by a move to a communal environment:

Being able at last to move within, and not move to the rhythms of others, as life had forced her to: denying; removing; isolating; taking the children one by one; then deafening, half-blinding—and at last, presenting her solitude.

And in it she had won to a reconciled peace. (77, italics in the original)

As “a reconciled peace,” Eva’s solitude is far from ideal. Indeed, her isolation, while a consoling alternative to, “the days when it was her family, the life in [the house], which had seemed the enemy: tracking, smudging, littering, dirtying, engaging her in endless defeating battle,” is a notable diminishment of the utopian social ideals with which she and David began (*ibid.*). The house, the husk of a life dominated by pressing parental obligations compounded by poverty, now stands as a trophy simply of her survival. The house is significant to Eva as a past opponent. Remaining there is a way to reclaim it as her own home, rather than letting it stand as the site of her domestic labor.

But the relative freedom from domestic labor that Eva now experiences in the house doesn’t fully explain her tenacious desire to stay. The absence of her children enables Eva’s attachment to the house. Indeed, Eva’s triumph consists in the success she finds in dissociating the house from her family and transforming it into a place in which she can go about the habits of old age. In this transformation, Eva reclaims the house from its history, and from the traditional associations of the domestic. Where the Haven offers convenience greater than that of the house, the convenience has not been won, but purchased, and therefore lacks the savor of the contrast between the work that the house once implied and the leisure that it now allows. Part of the pleasure of the house, for Eva, is that it was once a location of pain. What Eva stands to lose in a move to the Haven is the peace of which the metaphorical scars of the progressive loss of her children, her deafness, her blindness, and her isolation are the price.

So, at least, goes Eva’s reasoning. The story, however, does not entirely endorse the consolation that Eva finds in her late-life isolation. While perhaps a triumph in opposition to the

drudgery that defines her married life, Eva's withdrawal is also a pathological removal of herself from the social world: not a victory but a forfeit. In Eva's conflicted relationship with the past, conveyed through her stance towards the house, the story offers a microcosm of the dilemmas of historical perception.

Consider Eva's mediation on her first airplane flight, to Vivi and her children:

In the airplane, cunningly designed to encase from motion (no wind, no feel of flight), she had sat severely and still, her face turned to the sky through which they cleaved and left no scar.

So this was how it looked, the determining, the crucial sky, and this was how man moved through it, remote above the dwindled earth, the concealed human life. Vulnerable life, that could scar.

There was a steerage ship of memory that shook across a great, circular sea: clustered, ill human beings; and through the thick stained air, tiny fretting waters in a window round like the airplane's—sun round, moon round. (The round thatched roofs of Olshana.) Eye round—like the smaller window that framed distance the solitary year of exile when only her eyes could travel, and no voice spoke. And the polar winds hurled themselves across snows trackless and endless and white—like the clouds which had closed together below and hidden the earth. (91-2)

The airplane, for Eva, is modernity as isolation: motion without the feeling of motion, transportation that fails to leave its imprint on the earth over which it travels. The specific critique embedded in this image depends upon a positive valuation of scarring, a notion, recalling the discussion of Fiedler with which this chapter began, of life as constituted by a vulnerability to permanent effacement—by the experience of a past that one cannot slough off. But if the airplane figures the alienation of easeful movement, then the “steerage ship of memory” offers an alternative mode of travel, historically situated at a moment of early twentieth century emigration, marked by its materiality: a rocky ride in “thick stained air” among “ill human beings.” At one level, the contrast here serves to reiterate a well worn notion of the privileged relationship between suffering and the Real, one which elevates a history of hardship over a present of relative ease (a key binary in Eva's dissent from David's desire for the Haven). Thus the difference in conveyances extends the story's critique of comfort for comfort's sake.

But the ship of memory, for all its redolence of grungy authenticity, is no pleasure cruise either. As the story's portrayal of Eva and David's physical voyage gives way to a progression of visual affiliations—the round windows of the airplane suggest the portholes of the steerage ship, which recall the round roofs of the shtetl from which Eva hails, which in turn evoke round windows of Eva's exile, likely in a Russian prison—the particular contours of Eva's historical experience reveal an unenviable series of injuries leading to her scars. Eva, opposed to the isolations of modernity but isolating herself nonetheless in her past, embodies the dilemma of how to incorporate unfinished historical experience into the present. The answer, for Eva, is certainly not Judaism. From the bitterness that has dominated the later years of her life, Eva assumes an attitude of “musing; gentleness—*but for the incidents of the rabbi in the hospital and the candles of benediction*” (89, emphasis in the original). Her reaction to the Rabbi who, having seen her name on a list of the hospital's Jewish patients, appears “like a devil in a dream” at her bedside is at once unambiguously dismissive and inflected with the cadence and syntax of Yiddish: “Not for rabbis. At once go and make them change. Tell them to write: Race, human; Religion, none” (89). And in response to her daughter's suggestion that she help to bless the Friday night candles, Eva's feelings about Judaism are made clear: “Superstition! From our ancestors, savages, afraid of the dark, of themselves: mumbo words and magic lights to scare away ghosts” (94).

Central to the conflict between Eva and David is David's own abandonment of his historical legacy. Ferrying Eva around the country, David becomes complicit in the marginalization of her concerns. Indeed, as much as his own desire to live in the Haven can be read as a withdrawal, Los Angeles, where he and Eva finish the story, is defined by its capacity to isolate its elderly residents from the rest of the world: “It is back to the great city he brought her, to the dwelling places of the cast-off old” (101). Beyond just his withdrawal from Eva's concerns, though, David ends the story by confronting the extent to which he has abandoned the future that they imagined in their youth:

Escaped to the grandchildren whose childhoods were childish, who had never hungered, who lived unravaged by disease in warm houses of many rooms, who had all the school for which they cared, could walk on any street, stood a head taller than their grandparents—towered above, beautiful skins, straight backs, clear straightforward eyes. “Yes, you in Olshana,” he said to the town of sixty years ago, “they would be nobility to you.”

And was this not the dream then, come true in ways undreamed? he asked.
And are there no other children in the world? he answered, as if in her harsh voice.
And the flame of freedom, the light of knowledge?
And the drop, to spill no drop of blood? [. . .]

To let her die, and with her their youth of belief out of which her bright, betrayed words foamed; stained words, that on her working lips became stainless.
 (121-2)

The grandchildren’s ease indicts David, in Eva’s voice. But if the multigenerational family frame diverts David’s radical energies, his begrudging partnership with Eva, and the almost reflexive penetration of her consciousness into his recalls him to his ideals.

At this point in the story Jeannie, whom earlier Eva had compared to Lisa, the Russian radical who taught Eva to read, seems to address David’s and Eva’s needs for continuity. Julian Levinson notes that “Tell Me a Riddle,” one of the two longest selections in the Norton Anthology of Jewish Literature, offers in the character of Jeannie a comforting vision of the transmissibility of radical politics—evoking continuities between the old left and a nascent new left, meant, in the context of the Norton Anthology, to suggest the allied continuity of American Jewish culture (144). In the context of the *Tell Me a Riddle* collection as a whole, Jeannie’s reappearance, pacifying role, and identity as an artist, also offer partial resolution to the otherwise unmitigated tragedies with which the family ends each story. Jeannie is transformed at the end of “Tell Me a Riddle” from the jaded and callous teenager of the previous stories into a social worker, disillusioned with a job that demands she disrupt a Mexican family’s mourning because their rituals violate California health codes. This professional development, along with the beginning of her development as an artist, partially resolves David’s fear that with Eva will die their youth of belief. Jeannie, alone among the family, finds peace in Eva: “shameful the joy, the pure overwhelming joy from being with her

grandmother; the peace, the serenity that breathed” (116). Significantly, her qualms about her job center around its disruption of memorial practices. This iteration of Jeannie is set apart by her care for the past—an attitude that transforms cultural memory into artistic action with political overtones. Jeannie’s final words, which close the story and the collection, cement the reader’s sense that she provides the link between Eva and David’s generation and the present: “Leave her there, Granddaddy, it is all right. She promised me. Come back, come back and help her poor body to die” (125).

Jeannie’s intervention enables the resolution of Eva and David’s story. But “Tell Me a Riddle” ultimately expresses an ambivalence about the lineal logic that would see Jeannie herself as the resolution to the ideological dilemma of continued socialist engagement in the inhospitable context of Cold War America. “Ahh children,” David exclaims towards the end of the story:

“how we believed, how we belonged.” And he yearned to package for each of the children, the grandchildren, for everyone, *that joyous certainty, that sense of mattering, of moving and being moved, of being one and indivisible with the great of the past, with all the freed, ennobled*. Package it, stand on corners, in front of stadiums and on crowded beaches, knock on doors, give it as a fabled gift.

“And why not in cereal boxes, in soap packages?” he mocked himself. “aah. You have taken my senses, cadaver.” (122)

David rediscovers his lost radical belief by framing it as his legacy and his inheritance. But this recovery, while directly enabling his reconciliation with Eva, giving him access to an identification with Eva’s continued belief, is otherwise apparently without consequence. This is not to say that this private epiphany is unimportant, the story continues to privilege the private, neglected emotional lives of its aged central characters—as in all the stories in the collection, the expression of its character’s emotional experience is crucial to the story’s narrative and political projects. But the story’s conclusion with Eva’s death foregrounds the belatedness of the revelation, and the rupture between that past and Jeannie’s present.

Conclusion: The Metanarrative of *Yonnonidio* and the Aesthetics of Unfulfillment

Yonnonidio, Olsen's unfinished novel written between 1932 and 1937 and published, finally, in 1973, ends with a disclaimer, discounting its ending as a non-ending, and framing its completion as a response to contingency, rather than an unfettered authorial choice:

Reader, it was not to have ended here,²⁶ but it is nearly forty years since this book had to be set aside, never to come to completion.

These pages you have read are all that is deemed publishable of it. Only fragments, rough drafts, outlines, scraps remain—to tell what might have been, and never will be now.

Yonnonidio! Yonnonidio!—unlimned they disappear. (*Yonnonidio* 133)

The novel traces the progressive degradation of the Holbrook family as they travel from exploitative job to exploitative job, becoming poorer, sicker, and more run down with each move, and it ends before the clear narrative movement towards collective action that we might expect from a work of proletarian fiction. In this context, “what might have been, and never will be now” reads as a lament with several significations: the failure of a book to reach its potential, an author to reach her conclusion, a plot to find its resolution, and a revolution be realized.

²⁶ This construction is reminiscent of 19th Century invocations of the reader. Of these, Garrett Stewart writes: “Even in the coils of a certain tutoring self-reference, this [a direct invocation of the presence of the reader and the mediating tangibility of the book] is the drastic ontological reflex that realism usually holds in check. So it is that reading remains largely illegible in the genre whose plots necessitate so much mention of its everyday prominence” (18). As she invokes the reader at the end of the book, Olsen calls attention to the text as text: to the shift from a documentary realism aligned with a pressing and present social movement to the nostalgic and elegiac lament signaled by the book's title, itself only legible in reference to another memorial text and as a function of the book's transformation (at best only partially realized) from historical intervention to historical document. Indeed, the action described in the afterward—setting aside the book—is an accurate projection not of the writer's act (the book, for Olsen, was not a book or even a complete manuscript, but a series of drafts, outlines, fragments, and scraps throughout its composition, as she herself signals to the reader in the introduction and afterword) but of the reader's, who, upon reading those words at the end of the book, literally moves to set aside the physical book in their hands. Thus, though Olsen may refer directly to the process by which she abandoned the *idea* of the book, this action is mirrored most directly in the reader's physical movement, enrolling the reader not only in the text's completion, but potentially in a sense of guilty participation in its unfinished project, not narrative, but historical.

The post-script's multiply regretful tone is, however, tempered by Olsen's account in the introduction of the text's transformation from a lost manuscript into a published text, and from a mark of literary anachronism into a work of new relevance to literary and social history. Though the final words the reader encounters in the novel's original 1973 publication point to an absence—the phantom book that has not been published (the proximal subject of Olsen's influential *Silences*)—the note opening the novel invokes what we might consider to be its author's excessive presence—the distinctly divided selves of past author and present redactor that emerge with the novel's delayed publication: “In this sense—the choices and omissions, the combinings and reconstruction—the book ceased to be solely the work of that long ago young writer and, in arduous partnership, became this older one's as well. But it is all the old manuscripts—no rewriting, no new writing” (*Yonnonidio* vi–vii).²⁷ In the same breath as it affirms Olsen's reclamation of the work as a product of the literary present, the novel's paratextual apparatus claims the text's documentary authenticity (that the language, political milieu, and thematic pre-occupations all come down relatively unmolested “from the thirties”), and thus its historical significance. In this framing, *Yonnonidio* morphs from a text primarily about the ongoing oppression of working people to one about the *representation* (and the lack thereof) of the working class and of the revolutionary milieu that enabled the novel's

²⁷ Olsen's correspondence indicates that the discomfort she felt at the publication of her work so long after its initial composition was in part a matter of embarrassment at its immature style. From an August 28, 1973 letter to Hannah Green: “Nothing to be done about the found-finished parts, they have to stand (my writers [sic] sense revolting) in all their mawkishness, overwriting, ponderousness, triteness. The rest, the certainty, some certainty, has to be mine but no more certainty reading the proofs (from word choices to meaning-important ones) (except o how I hardened Jim in selections made) than when working on the makings & I put in took out put in took out reverted re-nigged judgment gone

“I want it to die, be finished, behind me, done with. The decisions final, right or wrong. Rid myself of it.” (“Letter to Hannah Green”)

And from a letter to Harriet Wasserman, her literary agent: “Send nothing out to the mag's [sic] without enough of this information so it is unmistakable how long ago this was written, that was awful that Curtis thought it writing I was doing now” (“Letter to Harriet Wasserman”).

composition. *Yonnonidio*, therefore, engages with the moment contemporary to its publication as new evidence of its own past.

The novel's lack of an ending, in the context of Olsen's career and the popular elision of American radicalism, comes to seem strategic. The critical response to *Yonnonidio* has tended to understand its lack of a written ending as an indication of the novel's incipient estrangement from (and ascendance above) the aesthetic and narrative norms of 1930s proletarian fiction. Constance Coiner (1995), for example, has argued that Olsen's text embraces a strategic logic of open-endedness, subverting the proscriptively authoritative voice of proletarian realism with an implicit appeal to the reader's participation—a move towards the heteroglossic narrative forms that she sees as defining Olsen's later writing, and that are less reductive or dismissive of women's experience than the dogmatically masculinist mode of the genre as defined by Mike Gold²⁸. And Deborah Rosenfelt (1981) has conjectured that the novel remains uncompleted in part because, while the literature and criticism of the Marxist left provided a rich milieu for Olsen's literary development, "the dominant tenets of proletarian realism also required a structure, scope, resolution, and political explicitness in some ways at odds with the particular nature of her developing craft" ("From the Thirties: Tillie Olsen and the Radical Tradition" 390).²⁹ Thus *Yonnonidio*, in its innovation of the

²⁸ "[I]f one is a tanner and writer," Gold writes, "let one dare to write the drama of a tannery; or of a clothing shop, or of a ditch-digger's life, or of a hobo. Let the bourgeois writers tell us about their spiritual drunkards or super-refined émigrés; or about their spiritual marriages and divorces, etc., that is their world; we must write about our own mud-puddle; it will prove infinitely more important" (qtd. in Coiner 24).

²⁹ It is worth noting that even for the Olsen of the 1930s, the revolutionary ending customary to the novel's genre seemed out of step with the novel itself. A plan for the unwritten chapters that Olsen sent to Donald Klopfer at Random House in 1935, while the book was still in active composition, situates the revolutionary moment outside of the scope of the novel: "as you see, the revolutionary part which was in the novel as I wrote it in Faribault isn't in. It can't be—there's too much in this, and I can't have a 800 or more page tome. [. . .] And the revolutionary part demands a whole book by itself" (qtd. in Reid 249). Instead of a revolutionary awakening, the projected plan for the novel mandates a succession of dissolutions, deaths, tragedies, and withering character trajectories—not even the seemingly central figure, Mazie, the artistic Holbrook child whose sensibility structures the

genre in which it participates, is understood as a work ahead of its time, which is to say (though with a positive valence to the term): anachronistic. In its abrupt and inconclusive ersatz ending, the novel becomes a synecdoche for the fate of thirties radicalism. The metanarrative of the novel's long non-existence in print and incomplete recovery transposes its diegetic concern with the maturity of social conditions into the conditions of revolution onto an extradiegetic understanding of the text's own failure to reach completion, and the concomitant change in historical conditions that render its ultimate fulfillment impossible, or at least, of limited value. *Yonnon-di-o's* publication in 1974 claims the artifactual relevance of the Holbrooks, transposing its diegetic questions of fulfillment to a literary historical frame.

The text's intervention in literary history on the grounds of its incompleteness is complicated by the 1994 University of Nebraska Press edition of the book, edited by Linda Ray Pratt, which appends additional, fragmentary materials not incorporated into the 1974 Delacorte Press / Seymour Lawrence publication.³⁰ What has changed, that these segments, formerly included among the "fragments, rough drafts, outlines, [and] scraps" remaining, are now, "deemed publishable," if in a form that maintains their separation from the earlier text? How is the nature of the text's unfinished-ness altered by the migration of these fragments from the archive to the published record? Is the text somehow more finished for their inclusion, or does their fragmentation, different

novel's more lyrical passages escapes some sort of diminishment: "[. . .] there's only two characters in this book that continue on, Mazie and Arthur, and then not as main characters)" (ibid.).

³⁰ These scenes substantially extend the dissolution of the Holbrook family: protagonist Mazie Holbrook is sexually molested by the man for whom she sells peanuts after school, two of the Holbrook children die, father Jim Holbrook briefly returns after abandoning the family (an event which is also outside of the scope of the 1974 edition) only to father another child with Anna Holbrook and then to leave, mother Anna begins literally to break up, losing two front teeth, and finally Anna, too, dies following an unsanitary abortion of the child fathered in the earlier episode. These scenes are key to the text's afterlife (and a person can claim that this text has nothing *but* afterlife) both in countering the authorized text's moderately happy ending of youngest daughter Bessie's aesthetic self-realization, and in challenging the editorial closure imposed upon the earlier text by Olsen.

from the relatively unified structure of the rest of the work, underscore the fundamental incompleteness of the novel's continuous narrative?

What has changed, I would argue, is Olsen's cultural position as a foundational and transformational voice in literary feminism (and a limited commodity, whose reputation is matched only by the scarcity of her output), and the profound influence of her deeply fragmentary text: *Silences*. The publication of *Silences* in particular, in its thematic consideration of breaks in writing, and in its long, elliptical part two, which reads as notes and addenda to the main body of the text, provides both a justification and a model for the inclusion of still more overtly unfinished pieces in the Olsen canon. These changes foreground the extent to which the novel is fundamentally *about* its unfinishedness. Olsen presents *Yonnonidio* (the very title of which, taken from Whitman's "lament for the aborigines," which begins, "A song, a poem of itself—the word itself a dirge," announces the novel as in part a meta-critical lament) as part of a forgotten lineage demanding a contemporary legacy—an artifact with distinct claims for immediate relevance. The publication of the text in a University Press edition, moreover, justifies the inclusion of these additional uncompleted narrative lines on grounds of literary historical interest.

The "present" of *Yonnonidio* is at least three-fold: at once the diegetic present of the 1920s—precursor to the radical thirties, the compositional present of the 1930s, and the editorial present of the 1970s. The novel thus invokes a complicated temporal imaginary. In reading the novel, the reader is asked to imagine the narrative as taking place in an unsustainable past leading to a revolutionary present and to understand the present of the novel's intended readers as one that has failed (that is, to imagine that present's imagination of its future, and to understanding that future, from the vantage of the reader's own present, as one that never came to pass). As published in 1973, the novel inscribes a narrative of teleological progress, and its failure. The text's avowals of its own incompleteness point to the presumption, inscribed in the form, that the novel should have a

conclusive and authorized ending. The novel is remarkable in part because it defies expectations of a novel's unitary completeness.

Olsen's introduction to *Yonnonidio* claims the continuity of Olsen's past and present work even as it highlights the division between the "long ago young writer" who authored the work and the contemporary writer who takes ownership of the novel only "through arduous partnership." The temporality of the novel's authorship is thus split between the period of the book's writing and that of its publication and reception: the "Tillie Olsen" on the book's cover is both the radical writer whose work intervenes in the historical struggles of its moment and the recovery-minded redactor guiding the text's engagement with its future.

Yonnonidio, in 1974, sits poised between revolution and retrospection—a position emblematic of the politics and aesthetics of *Tell Me a Riddle*. But while the incompleteness of *Yonnonidio* is determined (or overdetermined) by circumstances, only later enlisted as a metanarrative argument for the text's importance, *Tell Me a Riddle* claims incompleteness as a formal principle. *Tell Me a Riddle* understands continuity of character as a principle of legibility and continuity of ideology as at best an uncertain contingency. In *Yonnonidio*, the family, dissolving, reveals a historical problem. In *Tell Me a Riddle*, that relationship between the family and radical politics is more complicated. Insofar as the collection's central family reproduces existing class structures, then the family's desire for continuity reads, in the collection, as reactionary. But the family also provides the collection's main vehicle for productive emotional tension: the tragedy of the family's de-radicalization, as such, only makes sense if we conceive of their politics not simply as a set of individual commitments, but as a tradition, betrayed in their *embourgeoisement*. The story of Olsen's own career, in which formal fragmentation at once reveals a professional tragedy and a virtuoso solution to the problem of representing disjointed individual development, further complicates the picture. The form of the short story cycle doesn't quite reconcile these tensions. Rather, Olsen's stories foreground dynamics of promise and deferral,

revolutionary breaks and the continuity of social idealism that enable Olsen to conceive of revolution as return and to enlist Jewish tradition as both antagonist and ally in a complex struggle for social justice. Ultimately, too, the fragmentary unity of the story cycle allows Olsen to reclaim rupture as the coherent substance of her career: to cast her own work as a broken bridge that might still be traversed between the social promise of the thirties and the disappointments of the Cold War.

Works Cited

- Cantwell, Robert. "The Little Magazines." *New Republic* 25 July 1934: 295-297. Print.
- Chametzky, Jules et al. *Jewish American Literature: a Norton anthology*. New York: Norton, 2001. Print.
- Coiner, Constance. *Better Red: The Writing and Resistance of Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Print.
- Edmunds, Susan. *Grotesque Relations: Modernist Domestic Fiction and the U.S. Welfare State*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald. "From Anderson's Winesburg to Carver's Cathedral: The Short Story Sequence and the Semblance of Community." *Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 194-215. Print.
- Levinson, Julian. "People of the (Secular) Book: Literary Anthologies and the Making of Jewish Identity in Postwar America." *Religion or Ethnicity?: Jewish Identities in Evolution*. Ed. Zvi Y. Gitelman. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009. 131-146. Print.
- Miron, Dan. "From Continuity to Contiguity: Thoughts on the Theory of Jewish Literature." *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*. Ed. Anita Norich & Yaron Z. Eliav. Providence, R.I.: Brown Judaic Studies, 2008. 9-36. Print.
- Miron, Dan. *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010. Print.
- Nagel, James. *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: the Ethnic Resonance of Genre*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001. Print.
- Olsen, Tillie. "Letter to Hannah Green." 28 Aug. 1973: n. pag. Print.
- . "Letter to Harriet Wasserman." 1973: n. pag. Print.
- . "On the Writing of a Story." *Stanford Short Stories 1956*. Ed. Wallace Stegner & Richard Scowcroft. Stanford University Press. 134-6. Print.
- . *Silences*. New York: Feminist Press, 2003. Print.
- . *Tell Me a Riddle*. New York: Delta Press / Seymour Lawrence, 1961. Print.
- . *Yonnonidio: From the Thirties*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1974. Print.
- Reid, Panthea. *Tillie Olsen: One Woman, Many Riddles*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010. Print.
- Rosenfelt, Deborah. "From the Thirties: Tillie Olsen and the Radical Tradition." *Feminist Studies* 7.3 (1981): 371-406. Print.

---. "Rereading Tell Me a Riddle in the Age of Deconstruction." *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*. Ed. Elaine Hedges & Shelley Fisher Fishkin. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 49-70. Print.

Shechner, Mark. *After the Revolution: Studies in the Contemporary Jewish American imagination*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. Print.

Spacks, Patricia Ann Meyer. *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination*. New York: Basic Books, 1981. Print.

Stewart, Garrett. *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Web. 24 Mar. 2010.

Weber, Myles. *Consuming Silences: How We Read Authors Who Don't Publish*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005. Print.

**CHAPTER THREE: “Literature isn’t little stories!”:
Cynthia Ozick’s Poetics of Littleness and the Construction of Jewish American Authorship**

As its title suggests, Cynthia Ozick’s 1969 story, “Envy; or, Yiddish in America,” aims to portray the particular frustrations, enmities, and jealousies of the post-War American Yiddish literary scene. The story centers on a day in the life of the fictional Yiddish poet Edelshtein, embarked on a fruitless and increasingly unhinged quest for translation and living in the shadow of his wildly successful rival Ostrover. An account of a particular ethnically and socially identifiable type of writer, written in a realistic mode, the story has a clear historical referent—and it is to this engagement with the history of American Jewish writing that its critics have directed most of their attention. But “Envy” is also, as Sanford Pinsker has noted, “a story about the making of stories,” not solely an appraisal of Yiddish culture, but a more general consideration of what it is to be a writer, and what it means to write a story (47). Indeed, not only is “Envy” *about* the making of stories, but it, itself, contains other stories, not simply sub-narratives, but renderings, in summary and transcription, of the kind of thing that we usually mean when we say “short fiction:” crafted, artistic, imaginative prose. The two stories that Ozick “reproduces,” fables by the character Yankel Ostrover, a writer closely modeled on Isaac Bashevis Singer, stand out as the story-world’s sole successful entries of Yiddish letters into the mainstream of Anglophone American literature. As *contes a clef*, lampooning events from the life of Envy’s protagonist Edelshtein, they call attention to Ozick’s own (very) thinly veiled representation of Bashevis Singer, and suggest a somewhat more obscure biographical referentiality for her protagonist Edelshtein. Indeed, one of Ostrover’s stories-within-the-story is at the narrative and narratological center of Ozick’s tale. The action of Ozick’s plot comes into narrative focus at the scene of a public reading of Ostrover’s work, where the first

public presentation of a story based on Edelshtein's search for a translator brings the story from the generalized past of character development to a specific present of conflictual plot, synchronous with the writing of "Envy" itself. It is through a short story—its content, the scene of its public presentation, the emotional reactions that it sparks, and the characters brought together by its reading—that "Envy" leaves the mode of description, and enters the mode of event. Short stories, then, are both the medium and a central subject of Ozick's narrative.

Despite the title's identification of "Yiddish in America" as the story's focus, Ozick has argued in recent years that its characters—particularly its protagonist, Edelshtein—were based not on American Yiddishists but on American Hebrew writers, one of whom, Abraham Regelson, was her uncle.³¹ Michael Weingrad, picking up on Ozick's identification of Regelson and his Hebraist colleagues as a key source for the story, notes that despite Ozick's own impulse to praise Hebrew in other writings and her various nods to the American Hebrew context in "Envy" itself:

the Hebraists upon whom Ozick based the characters in her story remain hidden [. . .], only revealed by the author in later interviews. The work of the story, Ozick has explained, is to mourn the demise of Yiddish. A story mourning the demise of Hebrew in the United States would be more ambivalent, as, unlike Yiddish, the language thrives elsewhere, in Israel. [. . .] American Jewish ignorance is ignorance of Yiddish. Hebrew on the other hand, cannot be mourned because it is a success—only not in America. (239–40)

If the figure of the American Hebrew poet as such isn't fit for the kind of cultural work that Ozick wants her story to perform, the fungibility of Jewish authorial identity that authorizes her

³¹ See, for example, the author's comments in a 2005 interview conducted as a part of London's Jewish Book Week:

["Envy"] was inspired by . . . I mentioned my uncle, the Hebrew poet. There was a little organisation called "The Hebrew Poetry Society of America" and there were very few members. All of them, including my uncle, finally ended up in what then became Israel, except Gabriel Preil who lived with his mother and couldn't leave his mother because he was a 'momma's boy', and he is a great poet also. I think he was afraid to get on an aeroplane.

I went to these sessions as a child and I saw the—what shall we say?—well, yes, the envy among this tiny handful of poets and how they couldn't stand each other, and they only had each other to read their work. I transmuted it into Yiddish. ("Ozick in Conversation with Mark Lawson")

transposition of Hebrew writer to Yiddish context is significant for our discussion. It is not only the Hebrew writer who serves as a model for Ozick's frustrated Yiddishists, but the Anglophone Ozick herself. Indeed, it is not only through their Jewish linguistic media that Ozick's story unifies Hebrew and Yiddish poets, but through their shared intelligibility as representatives of particular professional frustrations faced by authors. Put another way, "Envy" understands the plight of Yiddish writers not only as a figure for Jewish writing more generally, but as a symbolic figure for the more mundane disappointment of the professional lives of unknown or poorly known writers. In this regard, Ozick's story extends a theme that we saw to be central to Tillie Olsen's career: the reading of an author's non-production as a correlative of larger social injustices. Jewishness, however, functions differently for Ozick than it did for Olsen. Whatever her biographical connections to Judaism and Jewish culture, Olsen's engagement with Jewishness in her work is comparatively limited. For Ozick, however, Jewishness is not only a biographical fact but also, as the thematic substance of much of her fiction and the ground in which many of her signal ethical interests are rooted, a central professional concern. Thus, while Jewishness, for Olsen, has a specifically political valence as an imperfect framework for imagining the continuity of a radical politics in the de-radicalized Cold War world, the relationship between an author's biographical Jewishness and her or his professional identity is not among Olsen's main concerns. But the identity of the Jewish literary professional, as such, is indeed central to Ozick's writing, particularly at the phase of her career in which she composed "Envy."

This chapter aims to explain the significance of the short story form in "Envy." To think about the place of the short story in Ozick's tale is to understand its treatment of the mystery of literary success and failure as one grounded in the materially specific conditions of the writer's life, work, and professional milieu. It is, moreover, to understand that Ozick's treatment of Yiddish itself, and, more pointedly, of the ramifications of the Holocaust for American Yiddish culture, is

inseparable from a perhaps surprisingly material consideration of the author's career. "Envy"'s approach to the social world of American Yiddish writing appears far from reverent, and this treatment of the story's subject was, in the time of its publication, controversial. Irving Howe, writing in his memoir *A Margin of Hope*, described the story as "at once brilliant and malicious, [. . . . Its total effect] reductive and, in the view of the Yiddish writers, demeaning" (265). Yiddish writer Elias Schulman, responding to the story in *Commentary*, the venue in which it first appeared, offered the particularly harsh evaluation that, "[n]ot since the days of Dr. Goebbels have we seen expressed in writing such hatred towards Jews, Yiddish, and Yiddish literature" (18). What these polemical responses leave out, however, is a sense of the story's deep connection of the events of recent Jewish history to the working life of the Jewish writer, and of the story's exploration of the porous boundaries between Jewish and authorial identities. In the reading of "Envy" that follows, I would like to suggest a reappraisal of Ozick's now canonical work that understands its treatment of Jewishness to proceed through its often quite pessimistic consideration of the possibilities and limitations of an author's career. Secular authorial identity, understood by Ozick to draw together the profane, the sacred, and the profanely sacred aspiration to pure aesthetic achievement, is, I argue, inseparable from the story's consideration of the broader history of Yiddish and American Jewish letters. In "Envy," the particular situation of the Yiddish writer in post-war America, already a transposition of the significantly different situation of American Hebrew writers, becomes a generalizable figure for authorial frustration.

Within this framework, the short story maintains a position of unique importance. The smallness of the short story is of a piece with the narrow focus that Ozick advocates for American Jewish letters in the metaphor of the shofar in her 1970 essay "America: Toward Yavneh"³²: "If we blow into the narrow end of the shofar we will be heard far. But if we choose to be Mankind rather

³² Originally delivered under the title, "America: Toward a New Yiddish."

than Jewish and blow into the wider part, we will not be heard at all; for us, America will have been in vain.” (34). The shofar’s narrow end—what Ozick describes as “the inch-hole” through which “the splendor spreads wide”—is not only a figure for a robustly particularist Jewish culture but also a broader signifier of formal smallness. Though Ozick doesn’t go so far as to advocate the short story as a paradigmatic or even a particularly valuable (or particularly Jewish) form, short fiction nonetheless serves her as a medium for a vibrant, immediate, and communally oriented Jewish literary culture. In “Envy,” the short story emerges as the form at once of intimate, yet public conversation between members of the same community and a vehicle of passage into the secular Anglophone literary canon. At the same time, the smallness of the story echoes and amplifies the demographic diminishment of American Yiddish literary culture in this period. If, in the story’s imagination, the littleness of Yiddish in America is at once the pettiness of “envy,” and “a littleness, a tiny light—oh little holy light!” (42)—then the short story itself serves as a formal synthesis of the profane and the elevated in Yiddish and Jewish life.

I would like first to turn to a little-discussed aspect of the 1970 essay I referenced earlier: the self-description with which Ozick introduces and authorizes her polemical cry for a new “liturgical literature,” that will “last for the Jews” (“America: Toward Yavneh” 28). In examining Ozick’s invocation of “the inch-hole,” I would like to argue that the author’s interest in the cultural possibilities of amplification extend not only to minority politics, but also to minority poetics: to a particular aspiration for a short fiction that will resonate more loudly and broadly than its size would suggest. In my reading of Ozick’s argument, the size of a literary work is not incidental to its more significant aesthetic and cultural ambitions, but is a key indicator of those ambitions as they manifest themselves in the person of the professional author. The form of the short story—and the charge

of “minorness” that it invites—becomes for Ozick a site in which literary power and literary prestige might both be generated.

The theory of Jewish literary production advanced in Ozick’s “America: Toward Yavneh” set off from the premises that Jewish authors who attempt to work in the cultural frames of diaspora are doomed to historical obscurity, and that modernist artistic autonomy and post-modernist metafictional experimentations, understanding art as its own object, are essentially idolatrous. Here, Ozick limns a portrait of the essentially Jewish writer—a writer who is both religiously Jewish (“[t]he secular Jew is a figment; when a Jew becomes a secular person he is no longer a Jew” [“America” 28]) and (somewhat at odds with Ozick’s insistence that Jewishness is an exclusively religious category) is excluded from gentile culture by virtue of his or her Jewish identity (i.e., for reasons not related to Jewish practice or sensibility, but what Ozick understands as Western Culture’s bias against the Jew, as such—a notion which depends on an essentialized understanding of the identity of Jewish writers). On these grounds, Ozick argues that lasting Jewish literary achievement in diaspora can only occur in a “liturgical” idiom, “in command of the reciprocal moral imagination [. . . , possessing] a choral voice, a communal voice, the echo of the voice of the Lord of History” (“America” 28). The Jewish writer’s task is to negotiate *literary* success on *Jewish* terms. The pressures on the Jewish writer, as Ozick articulates them in 1970, are thus both intrinsic and extrinsic: intrinsic in that the Jewish writer is bound by a primary obligation to write within a frame defined by Jewish ethics; extrinsic because the biographical fact of their Jewish identification (as distinct from the ethical orientation that would mark their *work* as Jewish) *a priori* excludes them from participation in the literary tradition of Western Culture. In the logic of Ozick’s argument, Jewish literature—that is, literature that operates in a Jewish mode—secures the ethnically Jewish writer’s place in literary history by abandoning the untenable aim of lasting success among the gentiles for the possibility of lasting achievement among the Jews (though it maintains the possibility

that this intramural success might open up onto broader acclaim). Ozick's call for a liturgical literature is thus a call for cultural autonomy—a reaction against what she understands as the categorical exclusion of Jews from an essentially Christian cultural field, and a call for the development of a particularistic literature on identitarian grounds. “If we blow into the narrow end of the shofar,” she writes, “we will be heard far. But if we choose to be Mankind rather than Jewish and blow into the wider part, we will not be heard at all; for us, America will have been in vain” (34).

So argues Ozick in 1970. By the time of her 2005 contribution to *Who We Are: On Being (and Not Being) a Jewish American Writer*, written after thirty-five years of successful engagement with the literary world, Ozick's position is substantially altered:

A Jewish book is didactic. It is dedicated to the promotion of virtue attained through study. It summons obligation. It presupposes a Creator and His handiwork. Is what is popularly termed the Jewish-American novel (if in fact there exists such an entity today) likely to be a Jewish book?

I think not; indeed, I hope not. If a novel's salient aim is virtue, *I want to throw it against the wall*. It is commonly understood (never mind the bigots' immemorial canards) that to be a Jew is to be a good citizen, to be socially responsible, to be charitable, to feel pity, to be principled, to stand against outrage. To be a novelist is to be the opposite—to seize unrestraint and freedom, even demonic freedom, imagination with its reins cut loose. The term “Jewish writer” ought to be an oxymoron. That may be why novelists born Jewish, yet drawn wholly to the wild side—Norman Mailer, for instance—are not altogether wrong when they decline to be counted among Jewish writers.

What we want from novels is not what we want from the transcendent liturgies of the synagogue. The light a genuine novel gives out is struck off by the nightmare calculations of art: story, language (language especially), irony, comedy, the crooked lanes of desire and deceit. (“Tradition and (or Versus) the Jewish Writer” 125–6, emphasis in the original)

No longer seeking a synthesis of authorial and Jewish identities in a literature that “touches on the liturgical,” Ozick now understands the two categories to have reached a détente in their incommensurability. Indeed, the more recent essay's emphatic separation of the “transcendent liturgies of the synagogue” and “the light [of] a genuine novel” clearly repudiate Ozick's earlier claims, and its brief mention of Norman Mailer further solidifies its status as a refutation of Ozick's much-discussed polemic: if the Ozick of 1970 asks, “[w]hy, [. . .] does Norman Mailer, born in the

shtetl called Brooklyn, so strenuously and with so little irony turn himself into Esau?” and answers, “Because he supposes that in the land of Esau the means to glory is Esau’s means,” the Ozick of 2005 appears to have concluded either that the means to glory *is* Esau’s means or that America is not the land of Esau, and that this glory, whatever its terms, is both attainable by the Jewish writer and, attained, is not half bad. “Writers of fiction,” she writes, “ought to be unwilling to stand for anything other than Story, however deeply they may be attached to a tradition” (“Tradition” 128).

Ozick’s turnabout is aligned with changes in the ideological context of Jewish American cultural politics: Ozick’s argument in “America: Toward a New Yiddish” takes a line that is fundamentally identitarian, and that bears affinities with multiculturalist paradigms of literary history; “Tradition and (or Versus) the Jewish Writer” rejects the multiculturalist, identitarian grounds of her earlier argument.³³ The 1970 essay’s claim that, “[i]f [Jewish writing] is centrally Jewish it will last for Jews; if it is not centrally Jewish it will last neither for Jews nor for the host nation,” holds out the possibility that “centrally Jewish” writing might last for the host-nation too, part of the rise to prominence of literary cultural pluralism that was, by 1970, well underway (“America” 27–8).³⁴

³³ For a fuller discussion of the uneasy position of Jewish American writers in multicultural paradigms of literary history, see Andrew Furman, *Contemporary Jewish American Writers and the Multicultural Dilemma: Return of the Exiled* (2000). While Jewish American writing has a clear place in an earlier, pluralist multicultural literary history, Furman argues, the shift to an oppositional multiculturalism rooted in a theoretical concern for the literary responses to racial and ethnic oppression categorically excludes contemporary Jewish and other white-ethnic writing. Furman argues, essentially, for the re-incorporation of Jewish American literature under the old rubric of multicultural pluralism. Ozick, of course, argues for the wholesale abandonment of multiculturalism as such, in favor of a universalized, and universalizing, “literature.” It should be noted that while pluralist multiculturalism is mainly interested in the inclusion of texts in the canons of academic literary study (that is, in the anthologies and syllabi that define the field) using a generalized “difference” as the basis of its epistemology, what Furman, following Gregory Jay, calls “oppositional multiculturalism” understands its object to be social and political oppression, suggesting an shift from broadly cultural to broadly political categories of analysis.

³⁴ Christopher Douglas, in his *Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism* (2009), traces the first wave of literary multiculturalism to the advent and popularization of Boazian anthropology in the 1920s and 30s. In brief, he argues that the Boazian understanding of racial and ethnic *cultures* (most famously exemplified in literature by Boaz’s onetime assistant, Zora Neale Hurston), returns in the 60s and 70s to underpin a third wave of multiculturalist literature, characterized by an investment in cultural

“Tradition” abandons this hope in language that suggests that the Jewish writer may now stake his or her claims on putatively universal aesthetic grounds: “no writer should be expected to be a moral champion or a representative of ‘identity.’ That way lies tract and sermon and polemic, or, worse yet, syrup” (128).

Though Ozick’s 1970 remarks posit that a writer’s endurance for posterity is the test for that writer’s success, Ozick’s success in her own time, as a well-regarded literary writer, undercuts her earlier contention that Jewish writers have little place in gentile culture. The intersection of the now-established author’s success and her radical repudiation of the statements of her early career calls attention to the importance of her own professional biography in her argument that the Jewish writer is at an inherent structural disadvantage in any lasting participation in gentile culture.³⁵ To be sure, Ozick frames her critique in terms that exceed any individual writer’s life: she questions whether a Jewish writer can last (i.e., have a continued impact for future generations of readers and culture producers) in a non-Jewish idiom. Nonetheless, this exhortation to canonicity is only part of

nationalism, though it is briefly eclipsed in the 40s, 50s, and 60s by the sociological understanding that racialized subjectivity is socially determined (exemplified, for example, in Richard Wright’s fiction). Ozick’s essay lies somewhere between these two poles (a tension which may account for her later abandonment of its premises), defining Jewish writing by reference to external notions of Jewish culture, but understanding the position of the Jewish writer to be conditioned by gentile culture’s exclusion of the Jew. She thus brings together claims for the self-sufficiency of Jewish culture with claims for the externally circumscribed position of the Jewish writer akin to Richard Wright’s understanding of African-American difference as a function of white oppression and Sartre’s claim, in “Anti-Semite and Jew” that the Jew is defined always with reference to the hatred of the Jew.

³⁵ Elaine Kauvar notes the connection between biography and fiction in the writer’s work: “[F]or [T. S.] Eliot the mind that creates was separate from the man who suffered; for Ozick they are inseparable and their union exhibits itself in the forms she declares twins, the biography and the novel” (xi). Moreover, she writes, “In her refusal to divide the author from the text, Ozick reaffirms the writer’s creative and communicative power and makes the texts that writers construct their own rather than the autonomous products of readers” (240). In a related line of argument, Sanford Pinsker writes, “‘Envy’ is a story about the making of stories, from Ozick’s telling ‘imitations’ of Ostrover/Singer to her uncompromising ‘lives of Yiddish poets.’ Those who read the tale as a roman à clef failed to give enough space to Ozick’s own painful experiences as one who sat, like Edelshtein, and watched others being lionized. In this case, the lack of publication—and let us say it without apology, the lack of recognition—binds character and author into curious secret-sharers” (47).

a larger concern for the writer's access to publication—a condition which in most cases precedes any possibility of canonization, and which has a particular importance in separating Ozick's ideas about Jews, as such, from her ideas about Jewish writers, defined at least as much by their profession as their religion. Though the main force of Ozick's 1970 polemic is directed at the unique conditions Jewishness appears to impose on the Jewish writer, its argument is underwritten by the experience of commercial publication that Ozick faces as an unknown first novelist—that is, by virtue of her professional (or pre-professional) identity alone.

Ozick's essay, adapted from an address delivered at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, Israel, directly responds to a lecture given at the same forum, two years prior, by the critic George Steiner. Where Steiner, by Ozick's account, offers himself as a paragon of diaspora achievement in a spirited defense of the generative rootlessness of diasporic life, Ozick presents herself as Steiner's antithesis: a model of diaspora failure. "I am a writer," she writes:

slow and unprolific, largely unknown. Obscurity is here doubly and triply pertinent, for to be a writer is to be almost nothing; the writer is not a religious thinker, or a philosopher, or a political scientist, or a historian, or a sociologist, or a philologist. To be a writer is to be an autodidact, with all the limitations, gaps, and gaucheries typical of the autodidact, who belabors clichés as though they were sacral revelations.
(22)

Ozick here presents the writer as a paradigmatic minor figure, and herself as exemplary in her marginalization. The writer, moreover, is a figure of isolation—a person not engaged in the communal production of knowledge that typifies the humanities and social sciences, but in the private and isolated project of discovering a personal, aesthetic truth: a romantic conception of the creative individual that allows for connection with social world mainly through the decidedly unromantic mechanisms of the culture industry. The situation of the writer, as Ozick has it, is thus one of littleness, minoriness, a vanishing importance, but one which nonetheless holds out the possibility of remediation through wide readership. If the author toils in obscurity, the work is

redeemed in publicity. This situation, offering at best a troubled redemption of the writer's lot, has formal implications. Not much later in the essay, Ozick continues:

When at last I wrote a *huge* novel I meant it to be a Work of Art—but as the years ground through that labor, it turned, amazingly and horribly, into a curse. I discovered at the end that I had cursed the world I lived in, grain by grain. And I did not know why. Furthermore, that *immense* and silent and obscure labor had little response—my work did not speak to the gentiles, for whom it was begun, nor to the Jews, for whom it had been finished. And I did not know why. (23, emphasis added)

Here, the size of Ozick's first novel, *Trust*, is integral to its folly. And it is significantly by virtue of its length, and the length of time required for its composition, that the novel stands as a monument to the absolute devotion to art that for Ozick shades so easily into idolatry. But part of the problem is also that the novel remains unread. In a 1984 review of Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise*, Ozick remarks on the circumstances of her first novel's writing and publication: a slew of rejections, and a long layover on the journey to the presses, untouched in an editor's desk drawer: "[A]ll the while I was getting older and older. Envy of the published ate at me; so did the shame of so much nibbling defeat. [. . .] I wrote, and read, and filled volumes of Woolworth diaries with the outcry of failure—the failure to enter the gates of one's own literary generation, the anguish of exclusion from its argument and tone, its experience and evolution" (63).

The heft of Ozick's failed tome, as she describes it in "Towards a New Yiddish" is a correlative for the wide world signified by the Jamesian high art tradition. But it also signifies the long delay in the writer's entry into the literary conversations of her time: a shadow existence of unfulfilled ambition at the cultural periphery—issues at the heart of Ozick's portrayal of the Yiddish poet's futile quest for fame in "Envy." The short story, in its comparative littleness, has decidedly different stakes from those of the novel: the story writer's labor may, too, be silent and obscure, but it is unlikely to be immense in the way that Ozick's first novel is immense, and its size is therefore unlikely to indict the writer's assessment of the fit between her ambition and her skill. In this context, Ozick's turn towards the short story, sustained through the publication of her next three

volumes, *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories* (1971, containing “Envy”), *Bloodshed and Three Novellas* (1976), and *Levitaton: Five Fictions* (1982), is a move away from the pursuit of a singular masterpiece in a Jamesian mode, towards a form that, at the very least, doesn’t require ten years to produce, and doesn’t make so exclusive a claim on a writer’s time and reputation. In contrast to the novel of Ozick’s compositional experience, the short story is a genre of immediacy, both of composition and of publication: one capable of abrupt intervention into public literary culture. It is also, crucially, and by the same virtues, a genre of gossip, and it is through gossip that it enters the world of “Envy.”

The story that Yankel Ostrover presents to the public in a reading at the 92nd St. Y amounts to a public literary humiliation for Ozick’s protagonist Edelshtein, a beleaguered and largely unread Yiddish poet who is in attendance at the hall.³⁶ Ostrover, a success, hearing of Edelshtein’s unsuccessful hunt for someone to translate his verse, pens a tale about a failed poet, a writer in the imaginary language of Zwrldish, who sells his soul to the devil piece by piece for fluency in many languages, eventually speaking all but Zwrldish itself. The poet remains, nonetheless, a failure, writing bad poetry for obscurity in an infernal office, his lines swept away into the great fire as each stanza is finished. “He wrote in every language but Zwrldish,” Ostrover intones, “and every poem he wrote he had to throw out the window because it was trash anyhow, though he did not realize it.” (61).

³⁶ While Ozick’s story treats the Y primarily as the site of Ostrover’s elevation and Edelshtein’s exclusion, between 1963 and 1969, the venue served as the location for an important series of readings by major American Yiddish poets of the era: a site in which a writer like Edelshtein would have been likely to enjoy public contact with his audience. Ozick herself participated in the final reading of the series as one of several translators to present work undertaken for Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg’s *Treasury of Yiddish Poetry* (1969). For more on this lecture series, including a reading of “Envy,” see Jan Schwarz, “Glatshiteyn, Singer, Howe, and Ozick: Performing Yiddish Poetry at the 92 Street Y, 1963–1969.”

It is in this context of what is essentially a literary rout—a demonstration of Ostrover’s competitive dominance over Edelshtein—that Edelshtein stages an imaginary argument with Ostrover about the nature of literature itself:

OSTROVER: Hersheleh, I admit I insulted you, but who will know? It’s only a make-believe story, a game.

EDELSHTEIN: Literature isn’t a game! Literature isn’t little stories!

OSTROVER: So what is it, Torah? You scream out loud like a Jew, Edelshtein. Be quiet, they’ll hear you. (68)

On its face, Edelshtein’s objection to the imagined Ostrover’s dismissal of his story is part of a defense of literature against the trivialization that Ostrover (and his success) represent. The imagined argument between Edelshtein and his rival depends upon the difference in each figure’s professional achievements. Edelshtein, not having achieved a broad readership, imagines an Ostrover who trivializes literature as a matter of course. Indeed, the entire apparatus of Ostrover’s success, as Edelshtein understands it, rests on trivialization, a shallowness akin to the joking parries with which he deflects serious questions following his public reading (e.g.: “Q: What would happen if you weren’t translated into English? A: the pygmies and the Eskimos would read me instead. Nowadays to be Ostrover is to be a worldwide industry. Q: Then why don’t you write about worldwide things like wars? A: Because I’m afraid of loud noises” [62]³⁷). But if little stories are

³⁷ Ostrover’s repartee, I should note, here reveals itself to be more significant than its offhanded delivery would suggest. As a performer addressing an audience well acquainted with his public persona, Ostrover’s task in the Q and A is essentially one of characterization. The various feints that Ostrover employs to avoid the appearance of sincerity support an understanding of authorial popularity as something rooted in the concealment of the biographical author. Playfully conflating the world of his stories and the world in which he lives, Ostrover’s comment that he doesn’t write about “worldwide things like wars” because he is “afraid of loud noises” writes him into his own stories in a way that foregrounds the common objectification of character and author-figure. Though Ostrover of course doesn’t believe that writing about a war entails the physiological experience of hearing a loud noise, the same understanding of authorship (and celebrity) that renders Ostrover “a worldwide industry”—i.e., not a specific historically bounded individual but a disembodied commodity—turns the writer into a character of literary discourse. All the same, Ostrover’s recourse to personal preference—“*I don’t like* loud noises”—points to the working writer’s prerogative: the writer writes what the writer wants. To close this digression, I would like to point out that the issues of authorial representation raised by Ostrover’s obligingly raffish banter

here implicitly posed against an aesthetically and intellectually weightier poetry, they are also understood to have the cultural capital of a comparatively greater readership and marketability. Little stories may, in Edelshtein's estimation, be trivial, but they are also publishable.

"Little stories" and the short story are, of course, not the same thing. But the "smallness" of the little story—a smallness that refers at once to its cultural import, its pettiness, its apparently easy legibility, and the number of words it contains—reflects, too, on the smallness of the short story as a literary genre. "Envy's" dualistic construction of holy littleness and petty littleness breaks along formal lines. In the story's formal logic, the "holy" littleness of Yiddish, given its fullest elaboration in the verse that Edelshtein recites following Ostrover's reading, is fundamentally poetic; the profane littleness of gossip is the littleness of Ostrover's "little stories," and of short prose. Though not all short stories, of course, are vehicles of gossip, every short story that "Envy" reproduces (including, arguably, Ozick's story itself) *is*, or at least flirts with that genre, more social than literary. To be very clear, I don't mean to suggest that Ozick thinks (or that I think) that the short story is uniquely and essentially rooted in gossip. What I *do* want to argue, however, is that "Envy" presents an undeniable correlation between the short story form and the increasingly and definingly circumscribed community that it represents—and that its understanding of the social smallness of American Yiddish letters develops in tandem with its consideration of the writer's career through the crude category of literary length.

Issues of scale emerge as early as the story's bifurcated title: "Envy" locates the story in the comparatively narrow frame of its characters' emotional world; "Yiddish in America" casts it into the realm of sociological generalization. The title's conflationary "or" therefore contains the

manifest themselves as transformations of scale. Ostrover is at once a worldwide industry and a private individual, a writer of international renown and a chronicler of a small world of Jews and dybbuks. A key task of "Envy," I would argue, is to elucidate the nature of the "smallness" that Ozick understands to adhere to Yiddish (and that suggests both a particular Jewish intimacy and the unique acrimony of a small social group) at a moment at which Jewish literature begins to come to Ostrover-esque popularity.

provocative suggestion that the broader historical category of “Yiddish in America” might adequately be described in terms of “envy,” not only an emotion that implies a particular, localized envious action, but also one redolent of pettiness—a version of littleness that carries a clear negative connotation. It is worth noting, here, that it was not Ozick but *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz who appended “Envy [. . .]” to the submitted manuscript’s “Yiddish in America” when the story first appeared in print in that magazine (Cohen 62). Ozick, however, retained this title in subsequent republications over which she presumably had greater control (as, indeed, she has changed the title of her well-known essay “America: Toward a New Yiddish,” to “America: Toward Yavneh”). Hana Wirth-Nesher understands the title to move in the opposite scalar direction, “from the general sentiment of envy into a particular milieu of Jewish American literature” (142). While Wirth-Nesher’s reading emphasizes the story’s treatment of the particular contours of Jewish American and American Yiddish literary culture as against a general and universally available affective experience, my understanding of the story focuses on its negotiation between the particularistic but still sociologically generalizable portrayal of American Yiddish literary culture and the irreducibly idiosyncratic history of particular authors. These two readings, I would argue, are not irreconcilable, but vanishingly little attention has been paid to the story’s treatment of authorship as a category at once as general as Jewishness and narrowly defined by the particular career of specific writers.

The intersection between the literary short story and the gossip of a small community is still more evident in another fable taken from Ostrover and Edelshtein’s lives: a rendering of an affair between Ostrover and Edelshtein’s wife, as a parable about the inescapability of impotence. With Ostrover’s establishment as a major modern writer, this event in his and Edelshtein’s life, as recorded in fiction, becomes a matter not of personal history, but of literary record. It is this

transformation, from the stuff of biography to the stuff of literature, that is at stake in Edelshtein's defensive definition of "little stories."

Edelshtein's reaction to the circulation of his *petite histoire* reveals a resistance to understanding his own life as something transmutable into fiction—a remarkable position, considering the poet's own use of the event of his wife's affair and miscarriage as the fodder for a mournful lyric published in the small journal *Bitterer Yam*.

A stupid fable! Three decades later—Mireleh dead of a cancerous uterus, [Ostrover's wife] Pesha encrusted with royal lies in *Time* magazine [. . .]—this piece of insignificant mystification, this *pollution*, included also in Ostrover's *Complete Tales* (Kimmel & Segal, 1968), was the subject of graduate dissertations in comparative literature, as if Ostrover were Thomas Mann, or even Albert Camus. When all that happened was that Pesha and Mireleh had gone to the movies now and then—and such a long time ago! (50)

The littleness of this story, in the pejorative sense in which Edelshtein uses the term after Ostrover's lecture, consists in the way in which it registers, for Edelshtein, not as a crafted short story, but simply as a record of the events it contains. As Edelshtein has it, Ostrover's tale is significant for "all that happened" in it—it is a story in the same sense captured by the narratological distinction between story and discourse, in which story refers to the events that are the raw material of the tale, and discourse refers to their constructed composition.³⁸ If Edelshtein's transposition of the event into a poetic key—a process that, in the identification of the lyric "I" with the writer, maintains the distinction between the event's historical occurrence and the poet's reflection—registers as an artistic act, then Ostrover's fictionalization appears to the poet as something simultaneously less artistic and less aesthetically honest. For Edelshtein, what Ostrover proffers his readers is not the "literary" representation of the writer's consciousness, but the sub-literary reporting of historical events.

³⁸ See Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse*.

This understanding of the story as something that can comprehensively be understood as its events, relates, I would argue, to Edelshtein's self-understanding as a professional writer. By confining his analysis of Ostrover's tale to the level of the personal, Edelshtein limits his understanding of the story writer's success to biographical, rather than literary explanations. Thus, the key to the mystery of Ostrover's success is not, for Edelshtein, to be found in the stories' technical achievement or artistic merit, but rather lies buried in Ostrover's commonplace biography:³⁹

The same as anybody, a columnist for one of the Yiddish dailies, a humorist, a cheap fast article-writer, a squeezer-out of real-life tales. Like anybody else, he saved up a few dollars, put a paper clip over the stories, and hired a Yiddish press to print up a hundred copies. A book. Twenty-five copies he gave to people he counted as relatives, another twenty-five he sent to enemies and rivals, the rest he kept under his bed in the original cartons. Like anybody else, his literary gods were Chekhov and Tolstoy, Peretz and Sholem Aleichem. From this, how did he come to *The New Yorker*, to *Playboy*, to big lecture fees, invitations to Yale and M.I.T. and Vassar, to the Midwest, to Buenos Aires, to a literary agent, to a publisher on Madison Avenue? (48)

Ostrover moves, in this account, not only from the apparently circumscribed and avowedly insular world of Yiddish self-publication to the wider world of commercial publication, but also from the mode of "squeez[ing]-out [. . .] real-life tales" to that of writing literature. Edelshtein's closeness to the stories' sources, however, leaves him stuck on their real life antecedents.⁴⁰ The sneering answer of Paula, wife of Edelshtein's crony, Baumzweig, to the question that ends this characterization of

³⁹ Part of Edelshtein's myopia here, too, might stem from his overestimation of the Yiddish readership for poetry. According to the editors of the *Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*, "[p]rose [in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries] has the further advantage of appealing to a large audience of Yiddish readers for whom the stories of Sholem Aleichem and Avrom Reisen seem like sparkling mirrors into their lives, while Yiddish poetry, rarely if ever able to gain a mass audience, must undertake the difficult task of training a corps of qualified readers" (Howe, et al. 15).

⁴⁰ In light of his complementary bitterness toward successful Anglophone Jewish American writers, this aspect of Edelshtein's critical recourse to biography echoes what Benjamin Schreier has identified as an overdetermined critical attention to the Jewish biography of Jewish American writers—one that in the case at least of story writer, poet, and editor Delmore Schwarz, comes at the expense of attention to the author's own distrust of apparent semiotic stability. See Schreier, "Jew Historicism: Delmore Schwarz and Overdetermination."

Ostrover's start in the business also remains at the level of the personal and the biographical: "he sleeps with the right translators." I do not mean to suggest that Ozick's story authorizes this understanding of the divide between the literary and the anecdotal. In an important sense, the "little story" of Edelshtein's misery both is and prompts the short story that is "Envy." If we take Edelshtein's meaning of "little stories" to be the putatively unliterary material of real life—Mireleh and Pasha's trips to the movies, his own futile search for translation—then we must consider, too, how the question of just what transforms the little stories of anecdotal history into the art of fiction resonates in Ozick's story itself.

In his letter to Kimmel & Segal, Edelshtein claims a privileged position for poetry, vis-à-vis the story: "Esteemed Gentlemen, you publish only one Yiddish writer, not even a Poet, only a Story-writer" (52–3). In part, this is a self-interested bid for his own publication, but it nonetheless reflects an understanding of genres in hierarchical arrangement, with stories in a position of inherently lesser artistic merit than poetry. The story itself advances a dialectical understanding of these two modes of Yiddish littleness—a version, too, of the division of sacred from profane. A poetics of smallness subtends the story's aesthetics, linking the petty emotion of envy to understandings of Yiddish as a language of intimacy, and to the shortness of the short story itself. Indeed, though we cannot credit Edelshtein's distinction between literature and little stories as the story's aesthetic philosophy, the question of the intersection between high art and petty gossip is central to the story, and must figure into our interpretation of its form.

The category of "little story," exemplified in the pair of tales that Ostrover bases on events in Edelshtein's life, is subjective, connoting a broad and flexible triviality. To some extent, Edelshtein understands this pejorative littleness in terms of technique—the unserious jokiness of Ostrover's style qualifies most of his work as "little stories"—but it clearly also has much to do with the nearness of Ostrover's stories to the private events of Edelshtein's life. The episode of Mireleh,

Peshe, and Ostrover's love triangle, for instance, rates as un-literary for Edelshtein because he understands himself to have participated in the tale's story, a position from which he is blind to the discursive structure that Ostrover builds around it. In this sense, the distinction that Edelshtein wishes to draw between literature and little stories is one that separates his life from his work as literary objects. Edelshtein wishes, above all, to enter literary history as an author. Ostrover's stories would draft him instead as a character.

The poet's concern with the grounds on which he may engage with literary production is evident in the poem that he recites in the lobby of the YMHA reading hall, a performance that serves as a counterpoint to Ostrover's mocking tale. The poem, beginning as an address to the "little fathers, little uncles" who people the Eastern European Jewish world that Edelshtein has left behind, now destroyed in the Holocaust, meditates on Yiddish poet's dual alienation: from the figures that he addresses and from history which has in multiple ways "left [him] out." For the sake of discussion, I have reproduced the poem in full, along with the narration that indicates the mode of its performance, as an appendix to this chapter.

Littleness is present in the poem's opening lines in a way that, for Ozick's readers (as opposed to the characters in the story-world), underlines the ambiguity, variability, and cultural specificity of the term. Edelshtein's poem appears in Ozick's text in English, translated from the diegetic Yiddish by the unmarked agency of the narrator. It is therefore not possible to know from the text of the story itself whether the Yiddish "original" begins, like its translation, with the word "*kleyné*" ("little," which would refer directly to the stature of the fathers invoked), or with the diminutive, "*tatelekb*" ("little fathers," which would imply a degree of emotional closeness between the speaker and his auditors). By the final stanza, screamed by Edelshtein, littleness has become a hypostatized figure, itself the poem's auditor ("*Littleness, I speak to you*"). The "little fathers, little uncles" whom the poet earlier understands precisely in terms of their embodiment (their beards, the

glasses they hold, their curly hair, their eyes, fingers, and long coats) dematerialize, at the poem's end, into littleness itself, and it is littleness, as much as the fathers and uncles themselves, at whose grave the poet sings. The final stanza transforms the characteristic weight of littleness from that which attends the writer's nostalgia for his now alien ancestors to that which binds poet and subject alike. Though the poet recognizes his inability to fall into his subjects' grave, their littleness is finally transferred to his "little huddle," "little hovels," and the "little, little words" that he chants in elegy (71). The assumption of littleness as a characteristic of Edelshtein's poetry, indicating the paucity of writing in the face of the destruction of Eastern European Jewry, is at the same time a lament for the loss of what would seem to be a respectable position from which to inhabit a "little" identity. From the perspective of the story, Edelshtein cannot be little in the way that his little fathers and little uncles are little. However humble his poetics, his desire is unquestionably for international fame.

To a large extent, this registers in the poem as it appears *in situ* as a conflict between Yiddish and English paradigms of grammatical diminution. From the poem's first word, already separated from the rest of the poem by several paragraphs of dialogue and narration and recited by one of the poem's readers and not, like the rest of the poem, by the poet himself, the texture of the Yiddish poem's language of littleness is occluded by its translation and rendered ambiguous by this occlusion. That English has no direct equivalent for "*tatelekl*"—a plural diminutive modifier—constrains the nature of the littleness that ultimately overtakes the little men of the first stanza as the object of poetic attention. But the poem that Edelshtein shouts, though he shouts it in Yiddish, in fact exists only in English. It is a translation without an original. Though the poem exists only as translation, however, its interpretation necessarily takes place in the shadow of the unrecoverable Yiddish "original." In translation, the littleness of the poem's little men is marked from the very beginning: the men are not addressed in the diminutive, but are diminished in a qualitatively

different way by the adjective that modifies them. To the reader conscious of the translator's intervention, the poem's poetics turn on the limited ability of English to render the diminutive as a common habit of speech. The hypothetical Yiddish original offers the poet a choice: the strong assertion of the fathers' and uncles' littleness from the poem's opening or the gradual transformation of the *-lekh* in "*Tatelekh, feterlekh*" into the subject of the poetic address. The English translation, however, settles this choice by linguistic default: in the absence of a common diminutive mode, the modifying adjective wins out over the conventionally affectionate form of address.

Translation—the transposition of the poet's text from Yiddish to English—changes the framework through which littleness, always a relational attribute, is determined. Though the poem appears in the story with the conceit that it is recited in the untranslated Yiddish original, its subject is that of the situation of the Yiddish poet in an Anglophone context. The question of how to translate the poem's first line back into Yiddish, a proxy for the question of how to reconcile the cultural assumptions of Yiddish and English, illuminates a rift already existing in the poem between the speaker and his absent auditors. Even if the speaker addresses his little fathers and little uncles in the familiar diminutive, the littleness that he associates with their cultural milieu is unavoidably also that of the cosmopolitan speaker's perception of the shtetl. Despite the poet's desire to "fall into your graves," proclaiming that he "[has] no business being your future," he is alienated from the world that he addresses, enlarged beyond its bounds: "the village is so little it fits into my nostril" (70–1). Edelshtein's predicament consists in his position between these two identifications. Though he is alienated from the intimacy of the old world by his participation in emancipated cultural modernity, he remains a minor figure in his wider world, and not simply because of the language in which he composes.

Any interpretation of Edelshtein's poem, as such, is caught between the poem itself as a text that theoretically exists in print (i.e., in a form other than Edelshtein's performance, and therefore

separated from its author's body and accessible without his direct intervention) and the circumstance and mode of its recitation. To a large extent, the poem is inseparable from its dramatic situation, as Ozick's story enlists the poem as an element of characterization. Recited on a cue from a young fan of Ostrover who hears and recognizes the poet's name after the reading, Edelshtein's humbly offered declamation—"It'll take a minute only, I promise"⁴¹ (70)—soon becomes an uncontrollable utterance: littleness, shouted. The poem appears in the story's context not with the depersonalizing structures of publication or official promotion (the paratextual apparatus that removes the work from the singly produced manuscript to the reproduced and objectified literary object, the lectern that shields the speaker and authorizes the speech as an event of public record), but accompanied by an eruption bodily response as Edelshtein presents his own work before an audience. From the beginning of his recitation, "he clawed at his wet face and declaimed," "[h]e gargled, breathed, coughed, choked, tears invaded some false channel in his throat," "each bawled word" is "a seizure," and twice "he screamed" (70–71). If the poem appears as something of a tour de force, it is in large part through its invigorating effect on its own creator. Indeed, Edelshtein's delivery cuts against the poem's generic self-description: a screamed lullaby surely misses its mark.

All the same, it is significant that the poem is presented in full—a condition that neither of Ostrover's stories enjoy, one being summarized and the other cut off by Edelshtein's musings. Indeed, the poem is voiced in its entirety despite the increasing unseemliness of Edelshtein's fervor and the embarrassment of at least one of his friends—"Into his ear Paula said, 'Hersheleh, I apologize, come home with us, please, please, I apologize.' Edelshtein gave her a push, he intended to finish" (71). Edelshtein's desire to finish his work, and the inclusion of the work itself in "Envy," marks a will to different mode of representation than that offered by either Ostrover's or Ozick's prose. Edelshtein's struggle to finish his recitation is a struggle for him to be represented not simply

⁴¹ It doesn't.

as an author, but *through* his work: a struggle, essentially, against characterization. Edelshtein's entry of the poem into the record of the story is his bid to be a part of "literature" rather than "little stories." But the task of, "Envy," I would argue, is to dismantle this distinction. It is precisely the little story of Edelshtein's life as a writer, a narrative that to some extent mirrors Ozick's own writerly experience, that Ozick's work proposes as literature.

This is evident too in a scene directly following the reading at the Y: Edelshtein's brief, voyeuristic encounter with a sleeping Baumzweig and Paula. Edelshtein has returned to Baumzweig and Paula's apartment where, his hosts asleep, he pens a letter to Hannah, his would-be translator. "I am a man," he begins, "writing you in the room of a house of another man. He and I are secret enemies, so under his roof it is difficult to write the truth. Yet I swear to you I will speak these words with my whole heart's honesty. I do not remember either your face or your body. Vaguely your angry voice. To me you are an abstraction. [. . .] It is an incarnation of the future to whom this letter is addressed" (73–4). The letter, then, begins with an image of its writer, embodied and emplaced in a setting that works to restrict his candor, writing to a correspondent whom he conceives to be a disembodied figure of futurity. This contrast between the physically defined and constrained Edelshtein and the almost wholly conceptualized avatar of youthful modernity sets the terms for the immediately following encounter with the sleeping forms of Baumzweig and Paula. Edelshtein imagines Hannah not only as a translator into English, but also as a vehicle beyond his narrow social circle to the incorporeal world of distributed, impersonal readership. Translation, as Edelshtein imagines it here, begins with dematerialization: the move from an embodied historical actor (Hannah at the lecture) to a disembodied agent of the effacement of form (Hannah as translator, resituating the text in a new language).⁴²

⁴² In *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature, and Personification*, Amy Hungerford argues that one prominent response to the philosophical and ontological questions posed by the Holocaust, emblemized by the creation of genocide as a category of criminal activity, was an impulse towards

In contrast to Hannah's idealized futurity, Baumzweig and Paula present Edelshtein with a richly concrete spectacle of aging bodies, identified more with past action and present decay than with future possibilities:

He turned the paper over and wrote in big letters:

EDELSHTEIN GONE,

and went down to the corridor with it in pursuit of Paula's snore. Taken without ridicule a pleasant riverside noise. Bird. More cow to the sight: the connubial bed, under his gaze, gnarled and lumped—in it this old male and this old female. He was surprised on such a cold night they slept with only one blanket, gauzy cotton. They lay like a pair of kingdoms in summer. Long ago they had been at war, now they were exhausted into downy truce. Hair all over Baumzweig. Even his leg-hairs gone white. Nightstands, a pair of them, on either side of the bed, heaped with papers, books, magazines, lampshades sticking up out of all that like figurines on a prow—

the personification of texts—that is, an understanding of the text (and culture more generally) as an object that can be murdered, and thus that is possessed of a quasi-human status. The problem with this understanding of textuality, she argues, is in the logic by which it replaces an understanding of humanity as something that inheres in the embodied person, along with the specific moral obligations that embodiment entails, with an understanding of humanity as something that inheres in culture, divorced from particular, instantiated individuals: “The material difference between texts and persons comes down to embodiment, and embodiment (to oversimplify) comes down to the capacity for pain and the fact of morality. [. . .] By exalting—and at the same time, reducing—the literary to the personal, the text to the embodied person, we both constrict our freedom (to disagree, to read, not to read) and expand our obligations (to agree, to read, not to read)” (154–5). If, in the logic of post-war textual personification, “the highest cultural value is assigned not simply to persons in the humanistic sense, but to persons as embodying cultural identities,” then our humanistic obligation to our fellow people as such is necessarily subordinated to our more diffuse obligation to culture, and thus to people as bearers of cultural content (11).

While Ozick unquestionably understands Jewishness to entail some “obligation to culture,” “Envy,” as I have argued in this chapter and as I develop further below, shows a clear concern for the integrity and literary value of the embodied character, over and against aspirations to a disembodied futurity and cultural continuity. This is not to say that Ozick herself rejects the aspiration to the canon that underwrites her “America” essay and that justifies Edelshtein's lust for wide publication (even if present popularity and literary longevity are far from the same thing). I would like to argue, however, that the opposition that Hungerford identifies between the obligation to culture and the obligation to embodied humanity accounts for a key tension between the story's avowed concern for the fate of Yiddish, as such, and its substantial focus on the biography of the writer and the affective experience of literary failure. Edelshtein's claims to represent Yiddish are always dubious, and often contested even in the character's interior consciousness. In part this is because these claims align so directly with Edelshtein's self-interest, suggesting that they can never truly be disinterested assertions (i.e., that Edelshtein himself never quite buys that to translate his verse is to “save Yiddish”). But the uneasy fit between Edelshtein and “Yiddish poetry” *per se* speaks to a larger skepticism of representation at work in the story (and extending to Edelshtein's ire towards “so-called Jewish novelists” [79]).

the bedroom was Baumzweig's second office. Towers of back issues on the floor. On the dresser a typewriter besieged by Paula's toilet water bottles and face powder. Fragrance mixed with urinous hints. Edelshtein went on looking at the sleepers. How reduced they seemed, each breath a little demand for more, more, more, a shudder of jowls; how they heaved a knee, a thumb; the tiny blue veins all over Paula's neck. Her nightgown was stretched away and he saw that her breasts had dropped sidewise and, though still very fat, hung in pitiful creased bags of mole-dappled skin. Baumzweig wore only his underwear: his thighs were full of picked sores.

He put EDELSHTEIN GONE between their heads. Then he took it away—on the other side was his real message: secret enemies. He folded the sheet inside his coat pocket and squeezed into his shoes. Cowardly. Pity for breathing carrion. All pity is self-pity. Goethe on his death bed: more light! (75–6)

This encounter, predicated on voyeuristic revelation, closes with textual concealment in the name of pity. If Hannah's disembodiment signals the kind of futurity to which Edelshtein aspires—one which depends on his works' consumption by an unseen audience and his own attendant transformation from a man writing in obscurity to a Writer, known by his works—then Baumzweig and Paula, in their closely observed, grotesque physicality, offer an opposing image of the writer's compositional present, and an occasion for Edelshtein to retreat from what he realizes would be a hurtful publication. The letter that Edelshtein drafts and ultimately removes from between Baumzweig and Paula couches his appeal for translation as a bid to save Yiddish, transfiguring the poet into a figure for the language itself. But even for Edelshtein, this rings a false note: "he knew he lied, lied, lied. [. . .] What did the death of Jews have to do with his own troubles? His cry was ego and more ego. [. . .] He wanted someone to read his poems, no one could read his poems. Filth and exploitation to throw in history" (75). Not wholly reducible to a representative of Yiddish, Edelshtein is recalled to the containment of his troubles in his body: he is "this old man," as much as his companions are "this old male and this old female."⁴³ Edelshtein's turn from a magnified

⁴³ This understanding, of course, removes Edelshtein from the social and historical context in which his troubles are, in fact, situated. Just as he argues too forcefully for his significance as the possible salvation of world Yiddish culture, he here removes himself too completely from the history of Yiddish and Yiddish speakers. His troubles also have to do with the structure of the publishing industry, which is not a major part of his critique.

understanding of his own importance to an intensely localized view of his immediate social circle is itself a turn to littleness. The poet's narrated thought, "how reduced they seemed," forms the basis of an intimate moral perception. Far from dehumanizing the subjects of his gaze, Edelshtein's conception of Baumzweig and Paula as "breathing carrion" is precisely what authorizes the pity he displays in removing the note. It is in this sense, too, that the ugly pettiness of the story's governing emotion can be understood as a reverent gesture, the "gift" that Ozick claimed she "felt as if [she] held up [. . .] to my mother and father, and in return they had struck me a blow on the skull" ("A Bintel Brief" 60).

"Envy" is a story about what it is to be a writer, failing. Its protagonist has his greatest opportunities for success behind him and futility ahead of him. A Yiddish poet publishing in obscure journals for a dwindling readership, he finds his work unmarketable in the translation that would offer it a chance at broad popularity. The arc of Edelshtein's career is unavoidably connected with the fate of Yiddish, determined by the arc of the linguistic medium in which he writes, and it is through its connection to the decline of Yiddish as such that Edelshtein's otherwise personal failure, sad, but not of particularly apparent historical resonance, makes its strongest bid for broader significance. But the nature of the connection between Edelshtein's obscurity and the fate of American Yiddish culture—a connection at once symbolic, metonymic, and historical—is not as straightforward as the story's doubly generalizing title might imply.

Edelshtein's quest for a translator is essentially self-interested: though he occasionally justifies his fervor by framing the translation of his poems as one and the same with the salvation of Yiddish itself, it is clear that he is motivated by a desire for personal success: "[t]ranslated I'd be famous," he pleads to his reluctant would-be translator, "this you don't understand" (98). Indeed, though Edelshtein, in a much quoted section of the story, implores Hannah, his potential translator,

to embrace Yiddish, and thus to “[c]hoose death or death. Which is to say death through forgetting or death through translation” (74), he elsewhere describes the virtues of translation precisely in terms of what it can do for the author, with little concern for what it might do to the work. Meditating on the sudden celebrity of a young and undistinguished Yiddish poet, recently surfaced in the Soviet Union, the granddaughter or niece (he speculates) of Soviet Yiddish “marranos,” Edelshtein considers Russian as an alternate mode of passage into world literature: “He visualized himself translated into Russian, covertly, by the Marranos’ daughter. To be circulated, in typescript, underground: to be read, read!” (85). In Edelshtein’s fantasy of his works’ samizdat circulation in Russian—“[a] *thick* language, a world language” (ibid.)—it is the writer who *experiences* translation, and the writer who is read, to his own rapturous gratification. Indeed, the story’s consideration of the ethics of translation centers primarily, nearly entirely, on the writer seeking to be translated. In Edelshtein’s understanding of translation from Yiddish-to-English, translation is almost synonymous with mass success (the kind of success that Edelshtein and Baumzweig find most compelling). But the cultural politics of translation that underlie Edelshtein’s ambition imply that allowing one’s work to be translated is to invite the charge of selling out. Edelshtein’s pursuit of translation is thus an acknowledgement that Yiddish offers him no future, and, taken to its extreme, the expression of a desire to be free of Jewish culture as the defining frame for his literary efforts (how else to interpret his epiphanic [if brief] embrace of Jewish particularity near the story’s end, but as an acknowledgement that he wanted out of “Jewish literature” and in to “world literature” all along?: “He saw everything in miraculous reversal, blessed—everything plain, distinct, understandable, true. What he understood was this: that the ghetto was the real world and the outside world only a ghetto” [96]). To some degree, then, Ozick’s story equates translation from the Yiddish, at least from the perspective of the translated author, with the betrayal of ethnically specific form. The story’s logic here essentializes the language, associating Yiddish with a nascent cultural

politics of ethnic nationalism, and translation—the move away from particularly Jewish form—with an abandonment of Jewish cultural commitments.

But if the story's author-based consideration of translation from the Yiddish is suspicious of the capitulation to non-Jewish cultural influence that it may imply, Ozick elsewhere (and in relation to the composition of "Envy") describes her own efforts in Yiddish-to-English translation, from the translator's perspective, as a way of inhabiting an earlier generation's Jewishness. "My father is gone now, but I continue to find him in these poems. And as I struggled with each poem, condemned by the hopeless nature of translation to failure, it seemed to me that I *became* the poet who had written it. Chaim Grade's 'Elegy for the Soviet Yiddish Writers,' for instance, endures in the marrow and has irresistibly entered our moral landscape" ("A Bintel Brief" 60, emphasis in the original).⁴⁴ If to be translated is in part to allow oneself to be removed from a Jewishly particular context in pursuit of wider celebrity, then to translate from Yiddish is to assume imaginative residence in the more Jewishly particular milieu.

The citation of Grade in Ozick's comments on translation suggests a specific connection between Ozick's work on this particular poem and her conception of "Envy." Ozick's description in "Envy" of the Soviet Yiddishists as "Marranos" is likely a reference to Grade's "Elegy," which Ozick indeed translated for Howe and Greenberg's *Treasury of Yiddish Poetry* (1969):⁴⁵ "And so I tell / your merits, have always looked to your defense, not to justify / for pity of your deaths, but for what you were when all the space / of Russia sustained you still, and you lived your deathly lie: /

⁴⁴ See also Ozick's "A Translator's Monologue," in which she makes a similar argument that translation, though finally an impossible task, calls upon the translator to inhabit the writer's consciousness, and to re-write the work, in a new linguistic medium, through this act of imaginative identification.

⁴⁵ All of the nine Jewish writers whom Ozick references in this section of the story as victims of Stalin's purges are also referenced in Grade's poem, the first verse of which ends with his description of the Soviet writers as hidden Jews. Only two writers, the author and critic Yekhezkl Dobrushin and the symbolist writer Der Nister, are present in Grade's elegy but absent from Ozick's catalogue.

Marranos—your deepest self denies your face” (12–16, Ozick’s translation) [“Deriber hob ikh shtendik nokhgezukht af aykh a zkhus, / nit makhmes ayer toyt hob ikh af aykh gefunen zkhusim; / bay ayer lebn nokh in land fun rekhovesdikn rus / hob ikh gevust, az in der tif fun harts zayt ir anusim” (13–16)]. Like Ozick’s “Envy,” Grade’s poem concerns the lives (and deaths) of Yiddish writers in adverse conditions (albeit dramatically different conditions from those facing Edelshtein and his cronies). Grade’s elegy, published ten years after Stalin’s August 1952 purge of Soviet Jewish writers, describes the poet’s relationships with writers murdered by Stalin’s regime, unsparingly faulting them for their support for the system under which they would ultimately be killed. The poem is at once intimate and admonitory in ways that echo the strategy of unattractive intimacy that Ozick, I argue, employs in her portrayal of “Envy”’s Yiddishists. Where the central stanzas of Grade’s poem proceed through specific recollections of Soviet Yiddishists, memorializing each in turn through biographical and physical characterizations and considerations of their attitudes towards the regime, his final stanza returns to the poet’s grief, mediated through the language he shares with the elegized victims, a theme introduced in the opening lines that give the Yiddish poem its title, “I weep for you with all the letters of the alphabet” [“Ikh veyn af aykh mit ale oysyes fun dem alef-beys”]. The changes that Ozick’s translation introduces into this stanza, then, suggest her response to the particular problem of translating grief for Yiddish, in Yiddish, into an English context—a key problematic for the specific cultural context that “Envy” invokes.

Grade’s original closing stanza, for which I offer a translation here that aims for fidelity to the poem’s syntax, emphasizes the changed state of Yiddish in a post-purge world, and the specific inheritance of the Yiddish writer who understands his own writing to exist in the specific wake of Stalin’s atrocities:

Ghosts justify the depth of my sadness,
 With their lost, silent, and ashamed smiles.
 From your dreams and fevers through long nights,
 There remained the beauty of a ruined temple.

In your poems, you were like a river,
 That reflects up the existing world—reversed.
 There remained a young generation that doesn't ask about you,
 And not about me, and not about our generational sadness.
 For your body-and-soul killed in the darkness,
 Your widows received—money, a blood-ransom.
 But your language, which executioners made mute,
 Is still mute in the land, where poets still sing ceaselessly.
 For me your language remained! Like the clothes remain,
 of a drowned man, who remains lying in the river.
 O, your borrowed happiness doesn't remain for me,
 But only the bitterness of your Yiddish/Jewish melody.⁴⁶ (109, my translation)

Ozick's translation of the stanza differs in crucial ways from a more literal rendition of the Yiddish:

Ghosts justify my despair, phantom faces
 smile their lost mute shame.
 Through nights of fever and dream
 you razed your palaces
 to glimmering ruin. In your poems you were
 like a pond—crooked mirror
 to the world of truth. The young
 have forgotten you and me and the hour
 of our grief. Your widows receive their dower
 of blood money. But your darkly murdered tongue,
 silenced by the hangman's noose,

⁴⁶ I have opted here for a translation that privileges semantic meaning over lyricism and poetic form—both clearly central conditions of Ozick's own translation. Much is lost in this rendering of the verse, but I hope it will aid my non-Yiddish speaking readers in assessing some of the compositional choices that Ozick's own translation reflects. Below is a transliteration of the verse in its original Yiddish.

Vi troyerik mir iz vos shotns gibn mir gerekht
 mit zayer blondzshendikn, shtumen un farshemtn shmaykhl.
 Fun ayer kholemen un fibern durkh lange nekht,
 geblibn iz di sheynkayt fun a ruinirtn hikhl.
 In ayer lid zayt ir geven geglikhn tsu a taykh,
 vos shpiglt op di vorhaftike velt—kapoyer.
 Geblibn iz a yunger dor vos fregt zikh nit af aykh,
 un nit af mir, un nit af undzer doyresdikn troyer.
 Far ayer layb-un-lebn in der finster umgebrakht,
 bakumen hobn ayer almones—gelt, dmey-koyper.
 Nor ayer loshn, vos tlonim hobn shtum gemakht,
 iz vayter shtum in land, vu dikhter zingen nokh on oyfher.
 Iz mir geblibn ayer loshn! Vi es blaybt dos klayd
 fun a dertrunkenem vos iz in taykh geblibn lign.
 O, mir iz nit geblibn ayer oysgeborgte frayd,
 nor gor dos biternish fun ayer yidishlekhn nigun.

is no longer heard, though the muse
 again sings in the land. You left
 me your language, lilted with joy. But oh, I am bereft—
 I wear your Yiddish like a drowned man's shirt,
 wearing out the hurt.

The most significant alterations introduced by Ozick into the final stanza of Grade's elegy are the possibility of redemption—of “wearing out the hurt”—and the absence of a strong emphasis on those things that “remain” after the Soviet poets' deaths. These two changes converge in Ozick's translation of the poem's final simile. In Grade's original, the simile of the drowned man elaborates how Yiddish *remains* for Grade, rather than what the poet *does* with Yiddish in the wake of the Soviet writers' murder, as in Ozick's construction. While Ozick's speaker engages in a gesture of recovery, taking the shirt from the drowned man on himself, Grade's drowned man is unredeemed—he “iz in taykh geblibn lign” [“remained lying in the river”]. The clothes covering his corpse are thus garments that have outlived their use, and symbols of the drowned man's abandonment. Remaining either on the body or on the shore in the Yiddish original, the clothes point to the absence of a burial shroud and of the ritual care for the dead such a shroud implies. The pathos of Grade's image rests not simply in the drowning, but in the body's abandonment. The clothes on the man in the river thus signify the absence of social concern: the breakdown of those rituals that claim even an unliving body as part of society and therefore subject to social codes that recall the humanity the corpse once contained. If Yiddish remains for Grade “like the clothes remain of a drowned man who remains lying in the river,” the language thus remains as a symbol of abandonment and desecration. Ozick's translated speaker, however, actively assumes the mantle of Yiddish—“I wear your Yiddish like a drowned man's shirt”—accepting it as an inheritance, transferred from one owner to another, later owner. Yiddish, in the Yiddish, however, is not left to Grade specifically; it is simply left. Grade's emphasis on the language *remaining* depersonalizes the closing connection between the speaker and his Soviet colleagues. The language does not pass directly from one to the

other, as a bequest from one generation to their successors, but is altered by its use and history for the murdered writers' contemporaries.

In its emphasis on the remaining traces of the Soviet Yiddish writers and its interrogation of the *ways* in which these traces remain, the poem's closing lines recapitulate the mediated relationship between Grade and the subjects of his elegy introduced in the poem's first lines: "Ikh vayn af aykh mit ale oysyes fun dem alef-beys, / vos ir hot im farnutst tsu zingen hoferdike lider. [I weep for you with all the letters of the alef-beys, / that you used to sing hopeful songs]." Here, too, Yiddish is a malleable medium that exists between Grade and his subjects. This is not to say that Grade's relationship with the Soviet writers is exclusively literary, occurring only in the identity of the letters that they use. Grade's address to the Soviet Yiddish writers is in fact both literary and personal, considering both the Soviet writers' public figures and the poet's private impressions, gathered on visits with them in the Soviet Union. But the relationship that these writers share by virtue of their mutual manipulation of Yiddish letters is distinct from the personal connections also present in the poem in that it offers the possibility of situating the Yiddish reader in a parallel relationship to the one the poet shares with his colleagues. When Grade and Leib Kvitko kiss goodbye in the poem's fifth stanza, the reader doesn't, too, kiss Kvitko—the poets touch; the reader touches no one. But when the poet and the Soviet writers are understood to be connected through their usage of Yiddish letters, the Yiddish reader is at the same mediated remove from the Soviet writers and the elegist as the writers are from each other. In casting Yiddish as a constant between his dolorous verse and the murdered writers' "hoferdike lider," Grade construes the language as a vehicle of a suggestive near-intimacy shared by the reader of the Yiddish text.

To put this another way, Grade's poem presents a particular problem for its translator in the way that it figures Yiddish as the thread connecting Grade and the Soviet poets. "All the letters of the alphabet," are not the same as "ale oysyes fun dem alef-beys"—or, more to the point, they are

not the same as אלע אותיות פון דעם אלף בית. Read in the context of translation, the opening lines foreground the particular unification of Yiddish writers through the language itself. In English translation, there is no Jewishly particular valence to “all the letters of the alphabet,” or, rather, the English reader, to understand the material contours of the linguistic connection between the Soviet writers and Grade must imagine that the “letters of the alphabet” are the “oyses fun dem alef-beys.”

The closing lines of Grade’s Yiddish emphasize the common stock of Jewish suffering: Grade is left not with the “borrowed happiness” that the Soviet writers held in proportion to their faith in the Soviet system, but with “the bitterness of your Jewish melody.” While the misguided hopefulness of the Soviet writers vanishes with their murder, Jewish melancholy runs through their verses as a component of the language. And Ozick’s translation, tellingly, elides Grade’s emphasis on the Yiddish melody as a vehicle for the expression of suffering. Instead, the language emerges in her translation “lilted with joy,” and it is the poet, “bereft,” who introduces the melancholy note, albeit in a the quasi-therapeutic context of “wearing out the hurt.” The poet’s sadness, prompted though it is by the death of his friends and the implications that their murders hold for the future of Yiddish as a world literary language, becomes in Ozick’s telling not a property of the language, activated by the poet’s emotion, but an artifact of the poet’s emotion, imposed on the language. Ozick’s translation thus introduces a note of optimism in the promise that the contemporary Yiddish poet might “wear out the hurt” that in Grade’s original appears endemic to Yiddish itself.

This transformation of the bitterness of the language to the melancholy of the poet prefigures the universalizing gesture of “Envy” in which the suffering of the frustrated Yiddish writer in America stands as an emblem of the anguished striving of young writers as such. In Ozick’s translation of Grade’s closing lines, Yiddish is, in a sense, already translated and redeemed in its translation. Through the agency of the Yiddish translator, bringing Yiddish into the more widely

read context of English, the hurt can be worn out, the language recuperated and redeemed. Where Grade's speaker, forgotten by the younger generation, possesses a muted language structured by sadness, Ozick writes the final lines, I would argue, more *as* a translator, vivified by her work of recovery, than out of fidelity to the original.

Underpinning the criticisms leveled at Ozick's story upon its initial publication is the sense that the story does an injustice to the writers that it represents, elevating its author—a member of the increasingly hot category of Jewish American writers⁴⁷—at the expense of increasingly disadvantaged Yiddish writers. The liberties that Ozick takes with the translation of Grade's final lines, however, suggests the prominence of the redemptive frame in Ozick's use of Yiddish source material. A parallel to Ozick's position vis-à-vis the Yiddish poets, then, can be found in the composition that Edelshtein condemns as a "little story." Ostrover's tale of the Zwrldish poet, narrated from a position of achieved literary success, is a cruel caricature, but it nonetheless articulates a problem central to Ozick's story: that of marking the value of a literary work without recourse to readers; that is: to the literary marketplace or the literary critical apparatus. Removed, in the poet's damnation, from any literary, social, or historical context, the Zwrldish poet's terrible poetry finally vanishes before it has a chance to fail. What tragedy there is in Ostrover's story lies in its protagonist's eternal unawareness of his own mediocrity. "Remember that you are in hell,' Satan says sternly, 'here you write only for oblivion.' The poet begins to weep. 'No difference, no

⁴⁷ In the world of the story, Jewish American writers are definitely "a thing." Where Anglophone Jewish writers appear in the story, they enter the page as "so-called" Jewish American writers (138, 160) or have their modifier marked with italics: "*Jewish* novelists! Savages!" (161). In his letter to Kimmel and Segal, Ostrover's (fictional) publishers, Edelshtein names "Roth Philip/ Rosen Norma/ Melammed Bernie/ Friedman B.J./ Paley Grace/ Bellow Saul/ Mailer Norman" as authors about whom he has definite opinions. In a later letter to Hannah, a young, American born Yiddish speaker whom he courts as a translator, he singles out "Elkin, Stanley" for the condemnable shallowness of his Jewish knowledge. In each case, Edelshtein understands the Jewishness of Anglophone "Jewish" authors to be something produced not in their published fiction, but in the mouths of unnamed members of the literary establishment. That is to say, they appear as a group defined by popular literary discourse, and are treated by Edelshtein as contemptible precisely for this group identification.

difference! It was the same up there! O Zwrđl, I curse you that you nurtured me!’ ‘And still he doesn’t see the point!’ says Satan, exasperated” (60). The Zwrđlish poet, having failed relentlessly and predictably in each language he tries on earth, remains uneducated by the literary marketplace. Ostrover casts the market for publication as an effective arbiter of literary quality, and the Zwrđlish poet, meant to be read as Edelshtein (“That one you shouldn’t throw out the window,” Ostrover quips after an impromptu recitation of one of Edelshtein’s poems), as a fool for missing its message. The Zwrđlish poet’s curse remains one of misapprehension—what for him is the tragedy of good work unjustly thwarted is for the auditor the dark comedy of misdirected grief.

The case of Edelshtein’s grief, however, is more complicated than that of his parodic avatar. Though the motive of preserving Yiddish often serves as a rhetorical cudgel in Edelshtein’s harangues of publishers and reluctant translators (a fact that he himself recognizes: “The difference between [Edelshtein] and Ostrover was this: Ostrover wanted to save only himself, Edelshtein wanted to save Yiddish. / Immediately he felt he lied” [56]) his late epiphanic understanding of Yiddish (and Jewish particularity) as a blessing suggests a real tenderness for the language, and true grief—and not only self-pity—at its loss (96). Moreover, the loss of Yiddish is understood nearly from the story’s opening as a historical tragedy both greater than Edelshtein’s personal problems and essential to their mitigation: “And the language was lost, murdered. The language—a museum. Of what other language can it be said that it died a sudden and definite death, in a given decade, on a given piece of soil? [. . .] Yiddish, a littleness, a tiny light—oh little holy light!—dead, vanished. Perished. Sent into darkness. / This was Edelshtein’s subject” (42). This move from elegy for Yiddish to the professional use of that elegy marks the central tension of the story’s treatment of Edelshtein’s career. The lament, in the narrator’s voice, over the dissolution of Yiddish seems at first to stand on its own: a moment of mourning establishing the historical and emotional mode of the text. But the abrupt identification of what appeared to be the narrator’s threnody as

“Edelshtein’s subject” moves the reader from a solemn consideration of Yiddish as a dead language to a consideration of Yiddish as a determining component of a working writer’s life. While both Edelshtein and the poet in Ostrover’s story mourn their unheralded genius, Edelshtein lacks the clear dismissal of the “plain rejection slip, no letter,” that the Zvrdlish poet ignores (59).

Edelshtein’s rejection, as presented in the story, precedes any evaluation of his work itself: “Though your poetry may well be of the quality you claim for it, practically speaking, reputation must precede translation” (53).

The problems faced by “Envy’s” protagonist, Edelshtein, are essentially those of any young author searching for professional success. Translation, of course, places an additional hurdle in Edelshtein’s path to readership, but his desire for publication, and his frustration at finding his work essentially unpublishable is remarkably close to the autobiographical narrative that Ozick outlines in her review of Cyril Connolly’s *Enemies of Promise*. In this sense, the ordinary, arbitrary, operation of the literary marketplace renders the specific role of Yiddish in determining Edelshtein’s obscurity opaque. Focusing our attention not on the way that Yiddish is depicted in “Envy,” but on the story’s construction of the writer’s profession raises the question of how Yiddish is made to function as a foil for and microcosm of the trials of a young writer. In the person of the struggling writer, the (ethnic) particularity of Yiddish dissolves into the (professional) particularity of the writing profession. Thus, what begins in Ozick’s 1970 “America” essay as the littleness of ethnic particularity eventually transforms in her later comments about the autonomy of the literary writer into a littleness of idiosyncratic authorial consciousness. The seeds of this change are present in “Envy,” written shortly before her well-known polemic, and in the story’s attitude toward the short story form. As the next chapter’s analysis of Philip Roth’s *The Ghost Writer* will argue, the transformation of ethnic particularity into professional particularity, latent in “Envy” and traceable in the development of Ozick’s non-fiction writing over the course of her career, might also be seen

as part of a larger meta-narrative of American Jewish socio-economic ascent, for which professionalization is both the keynote of the American Jewish story and a process into which the particular and varied content of American Jewish culture fits only unevenly.

“Envy,” like Ostrover’s mocking tales, brings the people it represents into literary history not as writers, but as characters. Or, rather, as the title of a later Ozick essay, “Portrait of the Artist as a Bad Character” suggests, Ozick sees the writer as herself a kind of character. But if the writer is a character—if, as Elaine Kauvar has written, “The interlacing of [fiction and biography] has always set Cynthia Ozick’s imagination ablaze and continues to as tale after tale illuminates one form with the other, suggesting the inseparability of writer from work” (58)—then her treatment of the short story in *Envy* suggests that the constraint of aesthetic ambitions is central to the story of the writer’s life, and that this constraint is also a liberation into both ethnic and formal narrowness.

Appendix: “Little fathers, little uncles,” Edelshtein’s Poem, *In Situ*

She recited: “*Little fathers, little uncles, you with your beards and glass and curly hair. . . .*” [. . . .]

“Listen,!” said Edelshtein, “[I’ll say the rest for you. I’ll take a minute only, I promise. Listen, see if you can remember from your grandfather—”

Around him, behind him, in front of him Ostrover, Vorovsky, Baumzweig, perfumed ladies, students, the young, the young, he clawed at his wet face and declaimed, he stood like a wanton stalk in the heart of an empty field:

*How you spring out of the ground covered with poverty!
In your long coats, fingers rolling wax, tallow eyes.
How can I speak to you, little fathers?
You who nestled me with *lyu, lyu, lyu*,
lip-lullaby. Jabber of blue-eyed sailors,
how am I fallen into a stranger’s womb?

Take me back with you, history has left me out.
You belong to the Angel of Death,
I to you.
Braided wraiths, smoke,
let me fall into your graves,
I have no business being your future.*

He gargled, breathed, coughed, choked, tears invaded some false channel in his throat—meanwhile he swallowed up with the seizure of each bawled word this niece, this Hannah, like the rest, boots, rough full hair, a forehead made on a Jewish last, chink eyes—

*At the edge of the village a little river.
Herons tip into it pecking at their images
when the waders pass whistling like Gentiles.
The herons hang, hammocks above the sweet summer-water.
Their skulls are full of secrets, their feathers scented.
The village is so little it fits into my nostril.
The roofs shimmer tar,
the sun licks thick as a cow.
No one knows what will come.
How crowded with mushrooms the forest’s dark floor.*

Into his ear Paula said, “Hersheleh, I apologize, come home with us, please, please, I apologize.” Edelshtein gave her a push, he intended to finish. “*Littleness*,” he screamed,

*I speak to you.
We are such a little huddle.
Our little hovels, our grandfathers’ hard hands, how little,
our little, little words,
this lullaby
sung at the lip of your grave,*

he screamed. (70–71)

Works Cited

- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978. Print.
- Cohen, Sarah Blacher. *Cynthia Ozick's Comic Art: From Levity to Liturgy*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. Print.
- Douglas, Christopher. *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism*. Cornell: Cornell UP, 2009. Print.
- Furman, Andrew. *Contemporary Jewish American Writers and the Multicultural Dilemma: Return of the Exiled*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse UP, 2000. Print.
- Grade, Chaim. "Ikh veyn af aykh mit ale oysyes fun dem alef-beys (elegie af di sovetish-yidishe shrayber)." *Der mentsh fun fayer (The Man of Fire): Lider un poems*. New York: CYCO Bikher Farlag, 1962. 103–109. Print.
- . "Elegy for the Soviet Yiddish Writers." Trans. Cynthia Ozick. *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry*. Ed. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. 339–345. Print.
- Howe, Irving. *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography*. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982. Print.
- Howe, Irving, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk, Eds. *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*. New York: Viking, 1987. Print.
- Hungerford, Amy. *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature, and Personification*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003. Print.
- Kauvar, Elaine M. *Cynthia Ozick's Fiction: Tradition and Invention*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993. Print.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. Print.
- Ozick, Cynthia. "A Bintel Brief for Jacob Glatstein." *Jewish Heritage* Spring 1972: 58–60. Print.
- . "A Translator's Monologue." *Metaphor and Memory*. New York: Knopf, 1989. 199–208. Print.
- . "America: Toward Yavneh." 1970. *What is Jewish American Literature?* Ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994. Print.
- . "Cyril Connolly and the Groans of Success." 1984. *Portrait of the Artist as a Bad Character and Other Essays on Writing*. London: Pimlico, 1996. 61–73. Print.
- . "Envy; or, Yiddish in America." 1969. *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories*. 1971. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1995. 39–100. Print.

- . "Cynthia Ozick in Conversation with Mark Lawson." *Jewish Book Week Online Archive*. Jewish Book Council, 2005. Web. 27 Feb. 2012.
- . "Tradition and (or Versus) the Jewish Writer." 2005. *The Din in the Head*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006. 125–130. Print.
- Pinsker, Sanford. *The Uncompromising Fictions of Cynthia Ozick*. Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1987. Print.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*. 1948. New York: Schocken, 1995. Print.
- Schulman, Elias. "Letter." *Commentary* 49.3, Mar. 1970: 18. *PAO Opinion Archives*. Web. 27 Feb. 2012.
- Schreier, Benjamin. "Jew Historicism: Delmore Schwarz and Overdetermination." *Prooftexts* 27.3 (2007): 500–530. *Project Muse*. Web. 16 Jan. 2012.
- Schwarz, Jan. "Glatshetyn, Singer, Howe, and Ozick: Performing Yiddish Poetry at the 92 Street Y, 1963–1969." *Prooftexts* 30.1 (2010): 61–96. *Project Muse*. Web. 16 Jan. 2012.
- Weingrad, Michael. *American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2010. Print.
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. *Call It English*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.

**CHAPTER FOUR: “I *am* the kind of person who writes this kind of story”:
The Jewish Writer as Jewish Professional in Philip Roth’s *The Ghost Writer***

A popular narrative of postwar Jewish American success runs like this: In the period after the Second World War, American Jews experienced a large-scale occupational shift of considerable significance, both actual and symbolic, moving into the professions in unprecedented numbers. With the Eastern European immigration of 1880–1924, the composition of American Jewry changed from a collection of comparatively small communities occupied mostly as traders and businesspeople to one defined by a substantially larger contingent of new arrivals from Eastern Europe, who found employment in the American working class, and as small-scale entrepreneurs, many of them as peddlers and workers in the garment industry. With the functional end of European Jewish immigration after the passage of the National Origins Immigration Act in 1924, the economic development of American Jews proceeded without supplementation by new arrivals entering America at lower rungs of the economic ladder. Thus, as Jews employed in industries with relatively small start-up capital requirements and straightforward paths for advancement (e.g., peddling and garment manufacture) moved into positions of management, store or shop ownership, or out of these industries entirely, no other Jewish workers replaced them, shifting the aggregate economic position of American Jews into the middle class. By the end of the Second World War, this economic mobility was paired with advantageous federal loan and housing policies, combined with a broad acceptance of Jews as whites in America’s racial imaginary, resulting in a smoother passage for Jewish acculturation to American norms, establishment in the middle class, and large-scale participation in white-collar work, particularly in the professions (i.e., broadly, those occupations, like medicine, the law, academia, engineering, etc., which involve mental labor, often

salaried, and generally require the possession of formal professional credentials).⁴⁸ During this same period, post-immigration American Jewish writing experienced a surge in critical appreciation and popular visibility.⁴⁹ The prominent Jewish presence in American letters thus became emblematic of the master narrative of American Jewish socio-economic success that I have sketched above. The terms of this retelling of Jewish American experience link professional identity with ethnic identity, casting professionalization as a hallmark of American Jewish acculturation (a version of the model minority narrative). Despite actual variation in class among American Jews, professional white-collar employment became, in the symbolic structure of this historical narrative, emblematically Jewish.

But while professional labor became a key marker of American Jewish upward mobility, professional identity itself depended on a person's Jewishness being invisible from the perspective of their professional performance. The structural logic of the professions, in which one's credentials depend upon a depersonalized certification of professional ability, militates against Jewishness marking a person's professional identity in the same way that membership in the professions could mark their Jewish identity. The logic of professional credentialing depends on the separation of vocational abilities from the extra-professional conditions of a person's life. Indeed, professional certification by objective and depersonalized institutions developed as an alternative to modes of professional validation that rely on status and social connections.⁵⁰ Professional credentialing

⁴⁸ Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States*.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Louis Harap's *In the Mainstream*, and, in the immediate post-War period, Leslie Fiedler's "The Breakthrough" *Midstream* (1958), and Ted Solotaroff's "A Vocal Group" *TLS* (1959)

⁵⁰ Magali Sarfatti Larson summarizes the shift to formalized systems for certifying professional competence as a turn from the informal regulation of professional access to clients via the clients' social circles to one following a market logic: "The first market-oriented phase of professionalization introduced a principle of objectification at the core of the professional commodity. Standards of value derived from this principle tended to displace (though never entirely to replace) pre-capitalist standards based on narrow monopolies of status, on the social position of the clientele, or on the personality or idiosyncratic biography of the professional. The particular aspects of use-value in the professional commodities limited the scope of this transformation." Since the idiosyncratic skills of

therefore depends in theory, if not necessarily in practice, upon the idea that the professions are meritocracies. The professions justify the social power that they wield by reference to the disinterested and socially beneficial performance of their functions. And though the ethics of professionalization are circumscribed, nominally applying only to the conduct of professionals as they perform the activities of their field, *within* the professional fields the claims of professionalism are total and absolute.

The principle of conduct which links the professions with the outside world, and which justifies professional autonomy, is the service ethic: an understanding that the professions exist in the service of a greater social good, and that, taken as a whole, the professions are dedicated to the just and rational distribution of social resources. During the 1970s, considerable theoretical attention was directed to the rise of what was known variously as “The New Class” and the “Professional-Managerial Class” (PMC): a class of laborer that fit poorly within the traditional Marxian categories of bourgeois and proletariat, exercising control but not ownership of the means of production.⁵¹

the professional—including relevant aspects of their personality and, in some cases, their social connections (a client may, for example, prefer a doctor with whom they have an easy rapport or a lawyer well known and respected in their community)—are germane to their job performance, their services are not as easily or wholly objectified as unskilled labor. Nonetheless, the idea of objective skill certified by a professional’s peers became an important and internally coherent basis for claims of professional ability. Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism*, 212–13.

⁵¹ See Barbara and John Ehrenreich, “The Professional-Managerial Class” (1976) and Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the New Class* (1979). The Ehrenreichs define the PMC as “consisting of salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production, and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations” (12). This analysis understands the relationship of the PMC to the working class to be “objectively antagonistic” (17); the PMC, in its capacity as reproducer of capitalist culture, functions, the Ehrenreichs argue, to atomize working class leisure activities, to privatize and commodify culture, and to institute the supervisory control that allows working class labor to be routinized and degraded.

Gouldner’s view of what he calls “the New Class” is considerably more optimistic (and more focused on the norms of conduct internal to the professions) than the Ehrenreich’s:

The fundamental objectives of the New Class are: to increase its own share of the national product; to produce and reproduce the special social conditions enabling them to appropriate privately larger shares of the incomes produced by the special cultures they possess; to control their work and their work settings; and to increase

Writing in 1978, sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson argued that the ideological function of professionalism is to obscure the mechanisms by which the socially produced competencies of the professional are expropriated into private hands. In Sarfatti Larson's analysis of the social and

their political power partly in order to achieve the foregoing. The struggle of the New Class is, therefore, to *institutionalize a wage system*, i.e., a social system with a distinct principle of distributive justice: "from each according to his ability to each according to his work," which is also the norm of "socialism." (19–20)

Furthermore,

Like the working class, the New Class earns its living through its labor in a wage system; but unlike the old working class, it is basically committed to controlling the content of its work and its work environment, rather than surrendering these in favor of getting the best wage bargain it can negotiate. The New Class's consciousness is thus not "economistic." It is committed to producing worthy objects and services and to the development of the skills requisite for these. It is, therefore, not simply a proletariat alienated from work which is experienced—in Marx's image—as a process in which the dead products of past human labor dominate its own living labor in the present. Aspiring to produce worthy objects and services, the New Class must also be concerned to control its work environment. The New Class thus embodies any future hope of working class self-management and prefigures the release from alienated labor. (20–21)

Thus, for Gouldner, "The paradox of the New Class is that it is both emancipatory *and* elitist. It subverts all establishments, social limits and privileges, including its own" (84).

Indeed, Gouldner sees the primary emancipatory contribution of the New Class as a "Culture of Critical Discourse" (CCD): "an historically evolved set of rules, a grammar of discourse, which (1) is concerned to *justify* its assertions, but (2) whose *mode* of justification does not proceed by invoking authorities, and (3) prefers to elicit the *voluntary* consent of those addressed solely on the basis of arguments adduced" (28). This new discourse:

is the grounding for a critique of established forms of domination and provides an escape from tradition, but it also bears the seeds of a new domination. Its discourse is a lumbering machinery of argumentation that can wither imagination, discourage play, and curb expressivity. The culture of discourse of the New Class seeks to *control* everything, its topic and itself, believing that such domination is the only road to truth. The New Class begins by monopolizing truth and by making itself its guardian. It thereby makes even the claims of the old class dependent on it. The New Class sets itself above others, holding that its speech is better than theirs; that the examined life (*their* examination) is better than the unexamined life which, it says, is sleep and no better than death. Even as it subverts old inequities, the New Class silently inaugurates a new hierarchy of the knowing, the knowledgeable, the reflexive and insightful. Those who talk well, it is held, excel those who talk poorly or not at all. It is now no longer enough simply to be good. Now, one has to explain it. The New Class is the universal class in embryo, but badly flawed. (84–5).

For its critics on the left, the general point of definitional agreement about the New Class/PMC is its unique position of social power and non-ownership of capital—a situation that Gouldner articulates as one in which the New Class's interests are directed toward professional autonomy rather than compensation.

economic logic of professionalism, the economic advantage of the professions in a capitalist labor market consists in their production of monopolies of specialized training, and restrictive definitions of what constitutes professional competence. In this view, the professions serve the ideological function of legitimizing the private appropriation of socially produced knowledge, through appeals to a professional ideal of service—the ideology of professionalism, that is, exists to justify the transformation of social resources into private competence: a construction relevant, I will argue, to the relationship between the Jewish writer and the Jewish community. “The ideal of service,” Sarfatti Larson writes, “cannot solve the contradiction between the monopoly of training, which is the goal of professionalization projects, and the market situation, in which services are sold (in the classical personal professions) or skilled labor power is bought (in the case of salaried professionals). [. . .] The revelation that socially produced knowledge is privately monopolized (and artificially limited) challenges the egalitarian and democratic legitimations built into the dominant ideology” (223). Professional objectivity, in this reading, necessarily emphasizes the instrumentality of professionals and de-emphasizes the gain that accrues to them as private citizens. Indeed, Sarfatti Larson argues, precisely because access to professional training presents itself, in principle, as being open to all, and because professional services (through the intervention of the welfare state) are in principle also *available* to all, the ideology of professionalism understands professional labor as a solution to social inequities. The justification of professional prerogatives that the service ideal provides operates not only on society at large, but on the professional as well—that is, the ideology of professionalism justifies the social position of professionals to the professionals themselves. Distinct from routinized manual labor, the intellectual labor of the professions stakes its claim to autonomy precisely on the promise that the professional’s creative intellectual work will serve professional ideals. This ideal of professional independence, according to which responsible professional performance is the professional’s main vehicle for contributing to the common welfare,

holds the professional to a canon of ethics that outweighs all other concerns, even the direct preferences of their immediate employer, in the execution of professional responsibilities.

Professional ethics both justify and demand autonomy. And the posture of professional objectivity required by the service ideal turns the professions into institutions that could, in the middle of the twentieth century, simultaneously signal broad Jewish class mobility and provide a space in which one's Jewishness is understood not properly to matter. Indeed, it is in part by virtue of this property of professionalism—its avowed indifference to the identity of its practitioners—that medical school and university quotas limiting Jewish enrollment presented American Jews with an enduring symbol of social injustice and eventual collective triumph.⁵² The figure of the Jewish author and the category of secular Jewish writing, however, unsettle the clear distinction between Jewish and professional identities. Authorship would seem to lack many of the elements that define the traditional professions, particularly in the absence of a formal process of credentialing. Mark McGurl has noted the increasingly central presence of formal education (in the form of the MFA program) in American literary production in the twentieth century—a move, in the writing trade, toward a principal structure of professional culture: a well defined educational apparatus that terminates in a degree. But McGurl's enlightening commentary on the rise of the “program era” notwithstanding—and notwithstanding, too, the undoubted importance of the development of this institutional writing culture to the picture of authorship that I present here—the occupation of writing doesn't inherently *demand* specialized training (the field is in principle open to a self-tutored

⁵² It is also on the basis of this property of professionalism that opponents of affirmative action stake their claims. As we shall see, the particular case of professional authorship foregrounds the significance of idiosyncratic aspects of writers' lives to their professional performance. Indeed, support of affirmative action policies often argues for the necessity of minority representation within the professions would reject such absolute claims of professional objectivity, and would note the salience of a professional's identity to their work with or for minority clients (among others). Such support, moreover, begins with an acknowledgement of the correlation of life history and professional and educational opportunities, and seeks to remedy inequities in access to professional training that are correlated with race and, to some degree, class.

amateur, turned professional by the sale of a book or a story). Authors labor toward the production of discrete commodities, rather than the services that are the typical form of professional work: poems and prose narratives distributed (at least in the mid-twentieth century) in the relatively durable forms of books and magazines. Nonetheless, authorship generally shares many of the justifications and understandings that Sarfatti Larson and others identify as central to the professions' shared conceptions of themselves—a service ideal (a sense of the social good of one's occupation), an avowed dedication to the craft of the profession, and a sense of the importance of autonomy and professional self-determination. Authorship is situated, then, between a cultural affiliation with the professions (an association bolstered by the high proportion of working writers employed in higher education), and an ambiguous relationship with the process of certification that generally ratifies professional competence.

This chapter considers Philip Roth's 1979 novel *The Ghost Writer* as an attempt to situate the "Jewish writer"—in the novel, a writer of Jewish origins, writing about Jewish subjects—within a discourse of Jewish American professionalization that casts social progress in terms of the independence of professional opportunities and Jewish identity. The novel places its protagonist, Nathan Zuckerman, at a moment of personal conflict between his thus-far straightforward Jewish identification, expressed mainly through his family attachments, and a career breakthrough in the form of an ambitious story that estranges the author from his father and from the Jewish community of his father's generation. But though the story centers upon conflicting demands of ethnic and professional identification, it ultimately recognizes the interpenetration and limitations of each. Roth's novel, featuring a protagonist of roughly Roth's background in a professional situation that tracks well-known episodes in Roth's career, plays with the inter-permeability of the author's work and the author's life. The shared Jewishness of author and character, in particular, has had a special place alongside correspondences of gender, profession, age, and location in authorizing the

apparent biographical link between Roth and many of his protagonists. In this chapter in particular, professional identity emerges as the main counter-category to Jewish identity in classifying a Jewish writer's fiction, as Roth's protagonist, developing in craft and reputation, stakes a claim for professional activity that falls outside the purview of the organized Jewish community and his own family alike, even as it draws heavily on their experiences and cultural codes. But though *The Ghost Writer's* conflict depends on the idea that a sharp line between Jewish and professional obligations is desirable for a maturing young writer, more directly posing a writer's Jewish and professional affiliations against one another than the works that were the focus of the previous chapters, it also contests the terms of the Jewish/professional distinction more directly than those other works. For *The Ghost Writer's* artist, writing is not a Jewish activity, but the profession and professional achievement are inseparable from American Jewish self-understanding. In *The Ghost Writer*, moreover, however professional literary performance might be fetishized as an impersonal devotion to craft, it nonetheless affects and draws upon the writer's personal self and extra-literary communal ties.

The hallmark of professionalism is the elevation of objective professional competence to an ethical good—essentially a defense of the instrumentalization of professionals in the performance of their tasks.⁵³ In the case of the story written by *The Ghost Writer's* protagonist, this task is defined as

⁵³ Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Ethics of Identity*, important in the formulation of this chapter's argument, argues that ethical decisions and ethical judgments are necessarily determined by processes of identification: that is, decisions about what type of person to be. Following John Stuart Mill, Appiah understands the liberal tradition to ground its ethical judgments about a life in the evaluation of that life's plan: "the measure of my life, the standard by which it is to be assessed as more or less successful, depends, if only in part, on my life's aims as specified by me. [. . . M]y life's shape is up to me (provided that I have done my duty toward others), even if I make a life that is less good than a life I could have made" (xii). Contra what many commentators have understood to be liberalism's emphasis on the autonomous individual, however, Appiah advances an understanding of liberalism that begins with a socially and historically situated individual: "But [the task of shaping my life] doesn't take place in a vacuum; rather, it is itself shaped by the available social forms. And it can involve obligations that seem to go beyond my voluntary undertakings, and beyond the basic requirements of morality" (xiii). This construction of identity vis-à-vis ethics leans heavily, as we

a writer's representation of an unflattering episode in his Jewish family's life. Roth's career stages a complicated intervention into this understanding of professional conduct. Roth defends his work as the product of a creative mind (i.e. intellectual labor) rather than a transcription of experience, while producing work that, to a reader aware of his popular reputation, inevitably recalls the biography of the writer himself. If Roth frequently defends his writing against reductively biographical interpretation by asserting that the fiction writer's vocation is to transform the raw materials of life into crafted art, his fiction foregrounds the convergence of work and life. By focusing on the close connection between the personal and the professional identity of its writer-protagonist, *The Ghost Writer* emphasizes the liminality of literary labor to the discourse of professionalization discussed above. But far from presenting writing as therefore alien to the norms of the professions, *The Ghost Writer* casts the connection between personal and professional life as fundamentally inescapable—particularly for the writer—consequently positioning the writer as an ideal example of a tension present in all professional labor: that between an ideal of objectivity and the necessarily subjective professional worker.

Indeed, *The Ghost Writer* was written at a point in Roth's career when his reputation was enough to command much of two issues of the *New Yorker* for the novel's original publication,⁵⁴ and

might expect, on race, gender, nation, and religion (though less often, class), as common modes of identification, but Appiah also, perhaps more surprisingly, frequently lists profession—distinct from class—as another key vector of identity formation. This, to my mind, is a crucial move in his argument and one that receives surprisingly little direct attention in the book. In contrast to other modes of identification, which present themselves as ontological categories, the professions, built around the structure of the career, bear a close relationship to the “life plan” that, for Appiah, is the hinge of ethical judgment.

⁵⁴ June 25, 1979: 23 pages; July 2, 1979: 29 pages. The conclusion of the novel is the only longform piece in this issue. Roth's first publication in the *New Yorker* was “The Kind of Person I Am” (1958), an essay in which Roth finds himself cornered by a young woman at a party, and identified, though trenchant guesses at his habits (a subscription to the *Partisan Review*, writing, largely unpublished) as one of a well-defined type, sending him into a dizzying uncertainty about his authenticity. Following an encounter in which the woman “had examined me as though she knew not only my title but the quality of glue that kept me bound together” (173), Roth decides that he will give up the trappings of the cultural elite: “I would leave the hi-fi set unfixed. I would cut out

when a reader might be expected to recognize the correspondences between author and protagonist. In the print space that it was able to command in a major national magazine, in the gambit that it would remain viable as a single-volume publication even after its complete publication in the *New Yorker*, in its overt engagement with the model of mastery presented by Henry James (about which more below), and in its assumptions about the reader's familiarity with Roth's career, *The Ghost Writer* amounts, as well, to an assertion of Roth's status in the profession—an assertion which brings together the significance of his writing and the significance of his fame. Roth's mid-career novel may not seem like an intuitive venue for extending this dissertation's investigation of the uses Jewish American writers made of short stories in negotiating their relationships with the category of Jewish fiction, especially considering the availability of significant (and widely taught and read) stories by Roth written about distinctly Jewish subjects. *The Ghost Writer*, however, offers a sustained and subtle engagement with short fictional forms both in its own form—it is brief enough to fit into a premier commercial venue for short fiction, long enough to sprawl across two issues—and in its thematic treatment of the genre through its protagonist's potential break-out story and its invocation of the

buying the *Times Literary Supplement*. I would never return to Paris, or, for that matter, to the basement of Kroch & Brentano's bookstore. There would be a change in the kind of person I was" (176). After trying the trick of armchair sociology himself, however, he finds that there is no escape from being some kind of type—"Ah, of course—you're the kind of person who *doesn't* work in advertising" (177)—he decides to return to being the type of person he was to begin with, walking down to the store to get the hi-fi fixed, and back home carrying the *TLS* with the cover out (178). This light commentary identifies Roth with the community of letters that the *New Yorker* embodied, particularly under the editorial direction of William Shawn (ed. 1952–87), and identifies, as well, an anxiety about individuality common to the period and presumably shared or at least recognizable by Roth's readers. The gesture of choosing his tribe that Roth makes lightly here seems to forecast a similar concern, refracted through Jewishness, in *The Ghost Writer* and other of his writings that I discuss below. Roth's only other *New Yorker* publications predating *The Ghost Writer* are "Defender of the Faith" (1959) and "Novotny's Pain" (1962). For an account of the *New Yorker* under editors Harold Ross and William Shawn addressing the relationship with its readers and with mass culture that the magazine projected, see Trysh Travis, "What We Talk About When We Talk About *The New Yorker*."

Jamesian *nouvelle* as a vehicle for literary mastery.⁵⁵ Indeed, through its various permutations of the story form, the novel uses the short story to interrogate two distinct and related moments of professional development: the beginning of a career and the consolidation of an author's reputation.

The Ghost Writer casts the struggle for professional autonomy as one between the author, Zuckerman, and the stated preferences of the Jewish community. The status of secular Jewish writing as "Jewish culture" thus becomes a crucial point for determining the nature of Zuckerman's claims to professional autonomy. While Zuckerman understands his work to be responsible to literary standards alone, his critics in the Jewish community hold his writing responsible to standards of Jewish communal self-interest. In so doing, they cast Zuckerman as a Jewish writer—that is, a professional whose intellectual labor is a matter of specifically Jewish cultural production and who is therefore responsible for upholding what they see as the interests of American Jews. Zuckerman, however, draws a distinction between professional and ethnic / religious affiliations—in composing his story, he acts as a writer, bound solely by the ethics of writing, and not predominantly as a Jew. And yet *The Ghost Writer* suggests the failure of such compartmentalization: what the writer's mentor refers to as a "turbulence" that powers Zuckerman's talents. The novel's conflict stems from the category of Jewish writing itself, and from the tensions internal to the synthesis of Jewish and professional identities. The conflict between what Zuckerman sees as the demands of his profession and those of the Jewish community of which he is a part—which receives significant treatment in Roth's essays and interviews—causes Zuckerman's dilemma. I do not propose that this tension is experienced by all Jewish writers (certainly some write with a profound sense of professional integrity without coming into any conflict with Jewish communal expectations of their writing), nor do I propose that this tension is felt equally across historical periods. What I do argue, however, is that Roth's novel crystallizes a structural conflict within professional categories that invoke Jewish

⁵⁵ Thanks to Jonathan Freedman directing me toward the significance of Roth's engagement with James via the *nouvelle*.

content. *The Ghost Writer* is set in a period during which Jewish participation in the professions encoded the new potential for a person's Jewishness to be invisible, or at least irrelevant to their work. The substance of Zuckerman's professional performance is Jewish, and yet it is directed toward a general audience. A key component of *The Ghost Writer*, then, is the compromise that Jewish authorship represents for idealized notions of professional objectivity.

Roth Talks Shop; or, P. R. and "The PR Man"

The primary conflict facing Nathan Zuckerman, the protagonist of *The Ghost Writer*, closely recalls (but does not mirror) an experience faced by Philip Roth early in his career. After Roth's short fiction had begun to achieve significant critical attention, but before the stir that attended the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint*, he was accused by several rabbis and other members of the Jewish community of writing stories that amounted to defamations of the Jewish people—accusations to which Roth responded in print. Though the connections and ruptures between this episode in Roth's life and his novel are of some interest, I won't map them out here.⁵⁶ Instead, I will analyze a selection of Roth's responses, in essays and interviews, to this and similar episodes, in order to lay out the author's statements, in his own voice, about the ethics of representing Jewish characters. In this analysis, I read Roth's essays and his novel as two modes of professional response to extra-professional claims on his work. In essays and interviews with the author published between 1963 and 1984, Roth, in dialogue with critics who disparaged his work's treatment of its Jewish content, developed a position on the ethics of fiction writing that privileged writing as something valuable for its own sake and without reference to its effects on the unwritten world. These essays and interviews represent a shift in Roth's position from an ethics that understands fiction writing as a vehicle for human betterment toward an ethics rooted in craft for its own sake—a shift that

⁵⁶ Debra Shostak's *Philip Roth: Countertexts/Counterlives* (2004) considers the author's canny manipulations of the correspondences that readers have drawn, and with which Roth himself flirts, between the novelist and his characters.

develops in reaction to what Roth presents as the claims that both formal and informal representatives of the Jewish community make on his fiction.

In “Writing about Jews,” an essay published in *Commentary* in 1963, Roth responded to the case against his short fiction, which had been “attacked from certain pulpits and in certain periodicals as dangerous, dishonest, and irresponsible” (446). “When I speak before Jewish audiences,” Roth wrote, “invariably there have been people who have come up to me afterward to ask, ‘Why don’t you leave us alone? Why don’t you write about the Gentiles?’—‘Why must you be so critical?’—‘Why do you disapprove of us so?’—this last question asked as often with incredulity as with anger; and often by people a good deal older than myself, asked as of an erring child by a loving but misunderstood parent”⁵⁷ (446). These readers, Roth argues, who see themselves named and maligned in Roth’s stories, harassed by the author’s criticism, and wishing, above all, for the author to take someone else as his fictional subject, misread his fiction on two counts: reading disapproval where none is intended and reading *for* disapproval where they should instead read for understanding:

Not always, but frequently, what readers have taken to be my disapproval of the lives lived by Jews seems to have more to do with their own moral perspective than with the one they would ascribe to me: at times they see wickedness where I myself had seen energy or courage or spontaneity; they are ashamed of what I see no reason to be ashamed of, and defensive where there is no cause for defense.

Not only do they seem to me often to have cramped and untenable notions of right and wrong, but looking at fiction as they do—in terms of “approval” and “disapproval” of Jews, “positive” and “negative” attitudes toward Jewish life—they are not likely to see what it is that the story is really about. (446)

As is implicit in this characterization of his stories’ Jewish critics, Roth understands his authorial vision to entail a more nuanced, finely tuned, and realistic moral sensibility than that of these readers. The reader attuned to the novel’s “attitude” toward Jews, in this argument, necessarily relies

⁵⁷ This framing evokes that which Cynthia Ozick deployed in discussing the reaction to her story “Envy; or, Yiddish in America,”: “I felt as if I had held a gift up to my mother and father, and in return they had struck me a blow on the skull” (“Bintel Brief” 60), discussed further in chapter three of this dissertation.

upon moral categories limited by bourgeois propriety, whereas the writer, who understands, for example, that, “[f]or all that some people experience [an adulterer] as a cheat and nothing else, he usually experiences himself as something more” (446), is drawn by fiction into expressive and imaginative empathy—ultimately a more humane position. The novel, therefore, is a laboratory for the development of moral understanding:

The world of fiction [. . .] frees us from the circumscriptions that society places on feeling; one of the greatneses of the art is that it allows both the writer and the reader to respond to experience in ways not available in day-to-day conduct; or, if they are available, not possible, or manageable, or legal, or advisable, or even necessary to the business of living. [. . .] And this expansion of moral consciousness, this exploration of moral fantasy, is of considerable value to a man and to society. (446–7)

The experience that fiction enables, in this defense of fiction writing, is valuable because it allows the reader to render moral judgment outside of his or her social context. Fiction therefore has a value “to a man and to society,” and not primarily or solely a value intrinsic to the experience of reading itself. “Writing About Jews” presupposes the imaginative independence of the author from his or her community, and defends Roth against his critics precisely on the grounds of the moral importance of free literary expression and open literary interpretation. Though Roth claims in this essay that what draws most readers and writers to fiction is “all that is beyond simple moral categorizing” (446), this claim grounds an appeal to a more sophisticated moral good, one in which, “[c]easing for a while to be upright citizens, we drop into another layer of consciousness,” which itself constitutes an “expansion” (ibid.). If fiction thereby stands against communal responsibility (upright citizenship), it affirms a moral imagination that is far from anarchic, but rather supports a more thoughtful and, presumably, forgiving basis for social relations.

Responding to the vocal criticism of representatives of the Jewish community, Roth’s essay approaches the author’s moral position in society through a consideration of the burdens placed upon the author called upon to represent the Jews well in both senses of the term: as an

embodiment of Jewish achievement and as a writer depicting Jewish characters. In this context, Roth's primary concern is to defend as morally necessary the autonomy of writing from partisan interests. "The concerns of fiction, let it be said, are not those of a statistician—or of a public-relations firm. The novelist asks himself, 'What do people think?'; the PR man asks, 'What *will* people think?' But I believe this is what is actually troubling the rabbi, when he calls for his 'balanced portrayal of Jews.' What will people think? Or to be exact: what will the *goyim* think?" (448). The novelist's function is diagnostic, his or her responsibility: professionally objective vision. When the rabbi masquerades as PR figure, he, too, fails to do his job, as Roth makes explicit in his ascerbic closing line: "If there are Jews who have begun to find the stories the novelists tell more provocative and pertinent than the sermons of some of the rabbis, perhaps it is because there are regions of feeling and consciousness in them which cannot be reached by the oratory of self-congratulation and self-pity" (452). In other words, if novelists are taking the rabbi's audience, it is because they are *unconcerned* with pleasing any audience at all, but are focused instead on the object of their craft. Roth's argument meets the rabbis on what Roth suggests should be their own terms. In later essays and interviews, Roth rejects this idealized reader response and the salience of moral improvement to the reader's or the writer's experience of fiction altogether. In 1963, however, taking off from an unexpectedly acrimonious confrontation with ordained and informal representatives of Jewish culture, Roth presents fiction as an extension, and a more successful realization, of the rabbi's task.

Against the censure of "the rabbis," Roth claims not an abstract freedom of conscience, but a specifically professional freedom to practice his craft. His question—what *do* people think—isn't necessarily the *right* question, *per se*, but it is the novelist's question. All the same, in writing against the censure of members of the Jewish establishment, Roth maintains a link between what is good for his profession and what is good for the culture of which novel writing is a part: "I should agree

to sacrifice the freedom that is essential to my vocation, and even to the general well-being of the culture, because—because of what?” (450). As Roth’s direct criticism of a rabbinical “oratory of self-congratulation and self-pity” suggests, the novelist’s candor is also a general human good. Self-congratulation and self-pity encode problems of perspective and judgment—the gratification of each, unconnected to any comparative standard, has no objective measure.

As will become more clear when we turn to Roth’s later essay “Imagining Jews,” “Writing about Jews” roots its consideration of the ethical import of fiction in a concern for the reader, figured alternately as Jewish reader and as a “general” reader whose extraliterary concerns and affiliations remain, for the purposes of Roth’s argument, obscure. I will return to this point in my discussion of the novel *The Ghost Writer*. For now, however, it is enough to indicate just how central the reader is to Roth’s 1963 defense of his fiction. If the defensive Jewish reader finds himself or herself targeted by Roth’s representational attention, this reader misses an opportunity to transcend his or her limited, moralizing, bourgeois perception of others through the medium of the fiction itself. The problem facing the writer is external to the writer and to writing: it is the problem of misreading and of attempts to infringe the writer’s autonomy that flow from it.

Where “Writing About Jews,” published in *Commentary* (a magazine sponsored until 2006 by the American Jewish Committee), engages with Jewish communal discourse, performing a writer’s response to being received negatively by the Jewish community,⁵⁸ “Imagining Jews,” published ten years later in the *New York Review of Books*, focuses, as its title suggests, on the pressures that pre-existing conceptions of Jewish virtue have on the writer’s ability to conceive rounded Jewish characters. The earlier essay concentrates on the pressures of reception; the later essay turns its

⁵⁸ While the bulk of the essay castigates Roth’s critics, he is careful to note that their antagonistic response is no more representative of “the Jews” than are his stories. “When I did begin to receive speaking invitations, they were from Jewish ladies’ groups, Jewish community centers, and from all sorts of Jewish organizations, large and small. [. . .] Some Jews are hurt by my work; but some are interested” (210).

attention to pressures affecting composition. “Imagining Jews” shifts the ethical frame that Roth uses to imagine the writer’s task from the text’s effect on the reader to the writer’s responsibility to the text, a change of emphasis which alters the salience of Jews to the writer’s task. Here, it is not the Jewish audience that is the writer’s concern, but the ways in which the writer’s own preconceptions of the virtues that make a Jew a Jew limit his or her imagination of Jewish characters. “Writing About Jews” addresses Jews as the writer’s audience. “Imagining Jews” collapses the Jew and the writer on fundamentally different grounds: not only does this essay understand the Jewish writer to be prone to the same tendency to conceptualize Jewishness as another name for virtue experienced by a certain kind of Jewish reader, but it also depicts the writer, like the Jew, as an identity in need of demystification.

“Imagining Jews” (1974) focuses on the particular problems that Roth finds in attempts by contemporary Anglophone Jewish writers (exemplified by Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud) to imagine Jewish characters. Roth argues that when Jewish writers imagine the Jew, as such, they tend to fall into the trap of imagining not a character, but a caricature: a figure who, insofar as he or she⁵⁹ is Jewish, is also improbably virtuous. The figure of the Jew, however, doesn’t stand alone as an object of idealizing misconception. Roth introduces his critique of the figure of social acceptability cut by the Jew of myth by debunking the equally mythic figure of the morally authentic writer.

“Alas,” Roth opens his essay, under the section-heading “Portnoy’s Fame—and Mine,” “it wasn’t

⁵⁹ More often “he” than “she.” The examples Roth offers from novels by Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud are all male, and the understanding of “virtue” to which Roth most often refers has to do with heterosexual masculine sexual conduct, which in *Portnoy* in particular stands apart from professional performance—another mode of performing masculine competence. While *The Professor of Desire* thematizes another transgression of the division between professional and sexual interests, and *The Counterlife* offers a picture of an affair between a dentist (Zuckerman’s brother) and his hygienist, perhaps the most pointed consideration in Roth’s work of the link between professional competence coded as masculine and sexual conduct comes in the glove factory episode in *American Pastoral*. Here, Swede Lvov’s erotic interest in his daughter’s friend Rita is almost entirely sublimated into his demonstration of his work, the glove that his factory produces mediating an enveloping contact with Rita’s body.

exactly what I'd had in mind. Particularly as I was one of those students of the Fifties who came to books by way of a fairly good but rather priestly literary education, in which writing poems and novels was assumed to eclipse all else in what we called 'moral seriousness'" (22). This "moral seriousness" is distinct from conventional respectability: "As it happened," Roth continues, "our use of that word 'moral'—in private conversations about our daily affairs as easily as in papers and classroom discussions—tended to conceal vast reaches of naïveté, and served frequently only to restore at a more prestigious cultural level the same respectability that one had imagined oneself in flight from in (of all places) the English department." (22) The English department, and the profession of writing itself, serve the young Roth as a place where it seems possible to be in respectable flight from conventional respectability.⁶⁰ And yet "morality," whatever its specific content, remains, for Roth, more of an exercise—an artifact of the classroom—than a descriptor of life as it is lived. The flight from bourgeois prudery to a higher morality is merely a flight into a more sophisticated prudery. The English department, it seems, is no place to rebel.

But if a classroom disavowal of conventional morality is necessarily naïve, or at least ironic, Roth's interpretation of the scandal surrounding *Portnoy's Complaint* suggests that the conditions are somewhat different when a writer leaves the classroom to become a professional author, and that the idea of the respectable position, signified alike by one's identity as writer and one's identity as Jew, is itself a fertile ground for scandal. His novel, he argues, came in for condemnation because it dared to introduce a psychological realism that recognizes the desire to be bad, itself honest and lustful, into the literary discourse of Jewishness, formerly dominated by symbolic treatments of the Jew as a representative of ethical conduct in a corrupt world, and the suffering that such conduct often entails.

[T]he impious and unseemly in *Portnoy's Complaint* would still not have been so alluring (and likewise, to many, so offensive) if it weren't for the other key element

⁶⁰ See Ross Posnock, *Roth's Rude Truth*.

which, I think, worked to make the wayward hero a somewhat more interesting case than he might otherwise have been at that moment for those Americans whose own psychic armor had been battered by the Sixties: the man confessing to forbidden sexual acts and gross offenses against the family order was a Jew. And that was true whether you read the novel as a novel or as a thinly veiled autobiography. [. . .] That not even a Jew could put up a successful fight any longer against non-negotiable demands of crude anti-social appetite and vulgar aggressive fantasy. (23)

The scandal of *Portnoy's Complaint*, as Roth presents it here, arises from the failure of the label “Jewish writer” to signify a virtuous identity.

The student Roth's embrace of art as a noble calling, introduced and disparaged at the essay's opening, depends upon a symbolic reading of literary production in which the act of writing itself assumes a moral seriousness. While the essay goes on to disavow this position, casting writing as no more of an inherently moral occupation than anything else, the essay's critique of the symbolic status of Jews in the work of Roth's successful Jewish colleagues nonetheless understands craft in a way that imbues a particular mode of writing—psychological realism attentive to the internal contradictions of characters and the messiness of human desire—with a moral weight. This mode of writing certainly has its own moral code, but it is a code which neither leads Roth's writing to model ideal relations between people, *nor* to present some specimen of conduct for moral critique. Instead, the ethical case that Roth makes in “Imagining Jews” has to do with the responsibility to mimetic accuracy that this form imposes upon its author. Roth's essay, then, ultimately advocates fiction that judges only the presumption to judgment—or, in positive terms, fiction unclouded by the author's own moral response to his or her characters. The essay advocates, in other words, an ethic of professional objectivity.

In “Imagining Jews,” the writer and the Jew are linked by their reputations for virtue. In defending the writer's prerogative to draft Jewish characters who are far from figures of virtue, Roth also offers an account of his own realization that to be an author is not itself a signal of personal morality. For Roth, in this essay, to be a writer is just that: to be a writer, and not to possess a moral

status elevated above that of other professionals. Indeed, Roth's attempt here to disabuse his readers of any illusions that they might have had about the uprightness of the author hints at a larger dismissal of any such leap from professional to personal virtue (a separation thematically central to Portnoy's complaint, whose Alexander Portnoy, no paragon of private respectability, is Assistant Commissioner of New York City's Human Opportunity Commission). And to be a Jew is likewise no guarantee of moral conduct. But for a writer to treat either identity as if they *did* signify an *a priori* righteousness is to transgress against the professional obligation of the craft, the standard that justifies the writer's other habitual transgressions. "I am not interested in writing about what people *should* do for the good of the human race and pretending that's what they *do* do," Roth states elsewhere, "but writing about what they do indeed do, lacking the programmatic efficiency of the infallible theorists" ("Paris Review Interview" 133). Writerly virtue, then, comes in the writer's clear vision and in the ability to construct a fiction that differs from the events of the world but that nonetheless presents people as they are, not as the author would like them to be. Roth's ultimate obligation is to character, not to category.

The controversy that met *Portnoy's Complaint* is then, in Roth's explanation, a function of two related transgressions: the public airing of shameful private desire, based in a titillated confusion of fiction with confession (that is, the desire on the part of the mass reading public for a scandalous real life tale to disapprove of), and the novel's refusal to represent Jews as symbols of virtue. Portnoy's resonance, Roth argues, is based in the character's (and Roth's) refusal to conform to the powerful myth of the "good" Jew, paradigmatically oriented towards untroubled social integration, and in the consonance of this refusal with the popular late-sixties reevaluation of normative moral categories. Roth's point about the misreading of *Portnoy* as a confessional novel is twofold: 1) that he, Roth, is *not* Portnoy, but, 2) that he, or a Jewish man like him *could be* Portnoy. That is, just as he was incorrect in his understanding of literature as "the domain of the truly virtuous" (22), so too are

his critics and the Jewish writers of Jewish characters he goes on to discuss incorrect in assuming that to be a Jew is to be a virtuous pursuer of righteousness, and only that. By refusing to allow a Jew to be at the same time a character determined by the symbolic resonances of Judaism and a character with psychological complexity, Roth argues, the objects of his critique—primarily Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud—fail to deal with the often contradictory forces of conventional symbolic significance and personal desire that make for strong characters motivated precisely by the conflict between the ideals of their identities and their actual lives. Roth argues that Jewish people and Jewish characters remain Jewish even when doing “un-Jewish” things and thinking “un-Jewish” thoughts.

In both the case of Roth’s understanding, as a student, that writing is an inherently moral occupation and the case of the elevation of the Jew to a moral ideal, Roth understands the substitution of typological legend for psychological and moral complexity not simply as a social problem, but as a professional failing. Roth’s 1974 essay is concerned primarily with the problem of accurate characterization. The writer’s task, as he constructs it, is to craft honest characters whose inner conflicts, while inevitably affected by the conditions of their lives, are not constrained by popular mythical constructions of their identities. On one level, Roth’s critique of Bellow and Malamud hinges on the effects that their representations of Jews have for other Jews (namely, Roth, for whom this is a professional rather than a personal issue), whose own lives are constrained from free public expression by the myths that characters like *The Victim*’s Asa Leventhal and *Pictures of Fidelman*’s Arthur Fidelman perpetuate. About Bellow, he writes: “reading Bellow, what does one find? That almost invariably his heroes are Jewish in vivid and emphatic ways when they are actors in dramas of conscience where matters of principle or virtue are at issue, but are by comparison only faintly marked by their Jewishness, if they are Jews at all, when appetite and quasi or outright libidinous adventure is at the heart of the novel” (24); about Malamud: “[f]or Malamud, generally

speaking, the Jew is innocent, passive, virtuous, and this to the degree that he defines himself or is defined by others as a Jew; the gentile, on the other hand, is characteristically corrupt, violent, and lustful, particularly when he enters a room or a store or a cell with a Jew in it” (25). But on another level Roth faults these authors not for wrongs against Jews, for whom their novels’ reinforcement of myths of Jewish virtue reinforces constraining stereotypes about Jewish conduct, but for wrongs against their craft. “Imagining Jews” argues that however interesting the image of a Jew might be as a subject of fiction and a contribution to the background and social circumstance of a character, this image poses the danger of pre-empting an author’s imaginative freedom when the author imagines that it describes not an ideal, but a realistic account of the psychology or tendencies of actual Jews. Equally important as the harmful ideal of the good Jew, for the author of “Imagining Jews,” is the idea that writing exists in the service of a higher moral purpose and that there is therefore an ethical exculpation for lazily imagined characters. Instead, the position outlined in “Imagining Jews” holds mimetic fidelity to the complicated psychology of actual people as the overriding ethical concern of the fiction writer. While this framing relies upon moral presuppositions that are not specifically about fiction (i.e., that it is good to approach human character as it is, rather than as one believes it should be), it also subordinates broader moral concerns to their effects on fiction. Malamud and Bellow, in other words, aren’t primarily at fault for holding limiting conceptions of the moral life of the Jew, but for letting these conceptions into their writing. Writing is not the moral pursuit that Roth once understood it to be, but it nonetheless has a morality of its own, demanding rigor, precision, and unshielded perception for the sake of art. This professional ethic applies to its practitioners and constitutionally avoids making claims on the ethics of others.⁶¹

For Roth, the conventions of Jewish representation, as expressed in the work of Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, are at odds with the full and accurate representation of the possibilities that

⁶¹ Cite Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, JF’s articulation of the close relationship between *fin-de-siècle* art for art’s sake and the professionalization of literary labor.

real life presents for Jewish transgression and Jewish libido—the final two-thirds of his essay aims to explain “just how strongly the Jew in the post-Holocaust decades has been identified in American fiction with righteousness and restraint, with the just and measured response rather than with those libidinous and aggressive activities which border on the socially acceptable and may even constitute criminal transgression” (24), and to critique this tendency from the position of a working novelist. But the question raised and never quite answered by the suggestive pairing of image of writer and image of Jew in the essay’s opening section is that of the extent to which writing itself is one of those “libidinous and aggressive activities” that the essay insists is open to Jews, and should be open to Jewish characters as well. Roth dismisses “the idea that literature was the domain of the truly virtuous” as a symptom of a young writer’s naïveté (22). But he also maintains that there is a meaningful distinction between the artist’s depiction of transgression, and transgression itself.

The connection between Roth’s discussion of the popular biographical interpretation of his novel and his broader point about the dominant image of the Jew as a figure for responsibility and restraint centers on the shared Jewish identity, and related transgressions, of author and protagonist. For scandal-hungry readers of *Portnoy*, the novel’s impact can be explained by the fact that “the man confessing to forbidden sexual acts and gross offenses against the family order was a Jew. And that was true whether you read the novel as a novel or as a thinly veiled autobiography. [. . .] Going wild in public is the last thing in the world that a Jew is expected to do[. . .] He is not expected to make a spectacle of himself, either by shooting off his mouth, or by shooting off his semen, and certainly not by shooting off his mouth about shooting off his semen” (“Imagining Jews” 23). Thus, the scandal of *Portnoy’s Complaint* is not just the scandal of personal disclosure suggested by the line that Jacqueline Susann delivered to Johnny Carson, that she would like to meet Roth, but she wouldn’t want to shake his hand (*ibid.* 22), it is also the scandal of Roth’s making of his literary art a burlesque of Jewish stereotypes and sexual mores. In Roth’s reading of the novel’s reception, his Jewishness

and Portnoy's are key to the popular connection of the writer with his protagonist—the resonance of the Jew as a symbol of virtue allows Jewishness to be the focus of readings that conflate the author and his character, commenting on the sexual transgressions of each. That authorship is also a putatively virtuous profession amplifies *Portnoy's* function as a boundary-breaking novel.

Insofar as Roth's essay concerns itself not only with the reception of his character, but with the confusion of his character's exploits and his own, and insofar as his essay addresses not just any writer's imagination of Jewish characters, but the ways in which *Jewish* writers imagine Jews, we might consider his essay as an embrace of the interpenetration of Jewish and authorial identity. The essay features an ironic riff on the degraded state of deference to the artist in Roth's time, in which Roth compares his reception by an agent of the charge department at Bloomingdale's to that which Thomas Mann's Aschenbach, decorated and pedophilic protagonist of *Death In Venice*, would presumably have received:

Finally, in May, at about the time I was considering returning to New York, I telephoned down to Bloomingdale's one day to try to correct an error that had turned up in my charge account for several months in succession. At the other end, the woman in the charge department gasped and said, "Philip Roth? Is this *the* Philip Roth?" Tentatively: "Yes." "But you're supposed to be in an insane asylum!" "Oh, am I?" I replied lightheartedly, but knowing full well that the charge department at Bloomingdale's wouldn't talk that way to Gustav von Aschenbach if he called to report an error in *his* charge account. Oh no, Tazio-lover though he was, it would still be, "Yes Herr von Aschenbach, oh we're terribly sorry for any inconvenience, Herr von Aschenbach—oh do forgive us, Maestro, please." (22)

The status that Gustav von Aschenbach commands is rooted in a now defunct vision of the author as "maestro": a serious person whose public profile is defined entirely by professional mastery. The comedy in this scene, in which the Bloomingdale's employee addresses Roth not in the guise of the corporate "we," but as a private person who reads the celebrity pages and who thus casts Roth not as the private consumer whose charge account has an error, but as a character in a public drama, himself in error and out of place, comes from the collapse of high-status renown into low-status mass celebrity. This adds up, however, not to a curmudgeonly diatribe about the state of the culture,

but to an account of the damage done to the writer's work when too great a concern for status seeps into the writing, whether that concern is for the status of the writer or for the status of Jews. The project of writing, *as* a Jewish writer, fiction that allows Jews to be recognizably Jewish at the same time as they transgress against conventional morality unites Roth's practice as a writer with the subject of his writing.

Mark Shechner's comments on the difficulty of determining Roth's take on his characters' actions crystallizes the issue of how to handle the relationship between Roth's Jewishness, his Jewish characters, and an apparently "Jewish" ethical focus in his fiction. "I'm certain that Roth would be no more at ease being mistaken for a moral agent than he ever was when mistaken, as he has sometimes been, for an immoral one," writes Shechner, "and while his books are brimful of ethical considerations—he is, after all, a Jewish writer—there is seldom a place where one can firmly place a finger on a moral issue and say for certain: 'Here is where Roth comes down'" (4). The compartmentalization of life and art (or life and work) as separate spheres of ethical evaluation reaches a crisis in Shechner's argument at the point at which he labels Roth "after all, a Jewish writer." Here, the Jewishness of Roth's career consists in his literary attention to the drama of ethical life (even in the absence of pronounced ethical judgment), but his career is not as easily incorporated into a Jewish frame that understands itself in terms of ethical conduct, precisely because it privileges drama (the literary) over ethics. Being a Jewish writer, in this analysis, consists of balancing each side of the label: being "Jewishly" attuned to ethical dilemmas, while maintaining a "writerly" distance from direct interest in their resolution. The Jewish identification of an author becomes an issue precisely at the moment that Jewishness crosses over from *de facto* component of an author's biography to a component of their fiction itself—that is, when it is presumed to have ethical content that bears on the work itself. In identifying Roth as he does—as a "Jewish writer" whose Jewishness leads to an interest in ethical problems but not in conclusive ethical judgment—

Shechner echoes a key component of Roth's construction of his professional self: his indeterminate relationship with a Jewishness that is at once distanced from his writing self and the intimate subject of his fiction, of a piece with the playful "he is and he isn't" identification of Roth with his protagonists.

The audience, in 1963's "Writing About Jews," was a concept that the writer was obliged to reject for that audience's own good—a fundamentally social and political force whose interests were aligned against those of writing, and in 1974's "Imagining Jews" the audience became a counterpart to the personalized author, inappropriately interested in the writer's biography, rather than the work. By Roth's 1984 interview for the *Paris Review*, however, he portrays the "ordinary reader" as in some ways beside the point, and in most ways a mystery to the writer.⁶² In this interview, Philip Roth stresses the limits of the novelist's power to affect the world outside the novel:

But don't you feel powerless as a writer in America?

Writing novels is not the road to power. I don't believe that, in any society, novels effect serious changes in anyone other than the handful of people who are writers, whose own novels are of course seriously affected by other novelists' novels. I can't see anything like that happening to the ordinary reader, nor would I expect it to.

What do novels do then?

To the ordinary reader? Novels provide readers with something to read. At their best writers change the *way* readers read. That seems to me the only realistic expectation. It also seems to me quite enough. Reading novels is a deep and singular pleasure, a gripping and mysterious human activity that does not require any more moral or political justification than sex.

But are there no aftereffects?

[. . .] If you ask me if I *want* my fiction to change anything in the culture, the answer is still no. What I want is to possess my readers while they are reading my

⁶² The *Paris Review* interview, intended to provide readers with a window on the writer's personal process, as well as on her or his thoughts about writing in general, is perhaps the pre-eminent American venue for authorial self-mythologization in this period. Usha Wilbers, in her fascinating review of the magazine's editorial practices, argues that, considering the significant degree of interviewee involvement in the *Review's* editorial process, *Paris Review* interviews would be better considered as conscious constructions of a writer's professional mystique, recording not only the writer's responses during the period of the interview, but also their reflective revision for the historical record, than as authoritative factual statements of these writers' creative practice.

book—if I can, to possess them in ways other writers don't. Then let them return, just as they were, to a world where everybody else is working to change, persuade, tempt, and control them. (147)

Whatever the writer's political or social goals, Roth argues, the novel is certainly not the best means to achieve them. The novel's power is private and the duration of its effects, brief. Moreover, in those instances in which novels do affect changes in the world, those changes are likely to have little to do with the author's will: "Novels *do* influence behavior, shape opinion, alter conduct—a book can, of course, change somebody's life—but that's because of a choice made by the reader to use the fiction for purposes of his own (purposes that might appal the novelist) and not because the novel is incomplete without the reader's taking action" ("Interview on Zuckerman" 155). The novelist acts on the reader as reader, Roth argues, and on the actions of reading and writing, and that is "quite enough." For Roth, the issue with the moral or political implications of the novel is not only that the writer can't influence the world in predictable ways, or even that the novel is an almost singularly inefficient means of staging a political or social intervention, but also that such action is to him, as a novelist, undesirable. Against the pervasive apparatus that acts outside of fiction to persuade a reader to a particular action (to buy a product, support a candidate, to act morally; in short, to do something), Roth conceives of the novel as something that doesn't ask the reader to *do* anything at all. Instead, the novel's demands are ontological: rather than acting, the reader is to surrender their action—to be possessed by the novel (and thus by its writer)—severed from the world outside the text and existing in the imaginative world that the text generates.

This programmatic separation of the reader from the author denies any unmediated obligation between one and the other. Roth's desire to possess his readers and then return them right where they began is a matter of aesthetic compulsion. The possessed reader doesn't *owe* anything to the author or even to the book, he or she simply can't put it down. Similarly, Roth, in this model, doesn't appear to owe anything to the reader (even a good time). His obligation, as

author, is to the object he creates. Roth's contention that reading doesn't ask anything in particular of the reader outside of their attention is signally important to his construction of the moral status of the writer, as writer. If the effects of writing are limited to the period during which the reader holds the book in her or his hands, then the writer's chief moral responsibility falls not to the community of readers, on whom his influence is at best obscure, but rather to the community of writers, and, more directly, to the craft of writing itself.

“How exhaustive [she] had meant to be [. . .] with the ringing words, ‘higher education’”: Professionals and Amateurs in *The Ghost Writer*

The primary conflict affecting Nathan Zuckerman, *The Ghost Writer's* protagonist, is a conflict between the demands of his family (to an extent metonymic for the Jewish community) and the demands of his art. This conflict is staged as a contest between two figures: his biological father, “Doc” Zuckerman (“for a time his class-conscious little boy used to think that if only there had been no quotas and he'd become a *real* physician [instead of a chiropodist], they would have greeted him as ‘Doctor Zuckerman’” [84–5]), and the writer E. I. Lonoff, for whom the young writer feels “a son's girlish love for the man of splendid virtue and high achievement who understands life, and who understands the son, and who approves” (56–7). A central theme of *The Ghost Writer*, then, concerns the relationship between professional success and parental approval: a question, fundamentally, about the divergence of success within a profession from the symbolic resonance of such success outside of the profession's social boundaries. The apparent conflict between professional and personal loyalties is closely connected with the question of what Zuckerman's Jewishness has to do with his writing, that is, whether he writes as a representative of the Jewish people, with the obligation to be a credit (or at least not a disgrace) to the community, or whether, as a writer, his relationship to Jewishness is primarily one of the exploitation of the biographical and social resources of his Jewishness for artistic production.

The novel finds its protagonist, Nathan Zuckerman, at the house of the novelist Lonoff, a Jewish writer out of favor with the New York literati, who lives a life of professional dedication and personal deprivation in a Berkshires house near the artist colony where Zuckerman sits in residence. Zuckerman arrives at Lonoff's primed for professional and paternal guidance. Before leaving for the Quahsay Colony, Zuckerman began a quarrel with his father over the contents of a story, "Higher Education," which draws on an episode of family scandal (about which more below), which quarrel remains unresolved for the duration of the narrative. At Lonoff's, however, Zuckerman finds not one but two models for considering his predicament: "the great man" himself (3), who, too, struggles to balance personal and professional obligations, and Amy Bellette (perhaps the novel's most well-known invention), a young writer like himself, newly graduated from Athena College where she studied writing under Lonoff, in frustrated love with the self-denying author, and, Zuckerman fantasizes, Anne Frank, absorbed into *belles lettres*, still alive and living under an assumed name. How Jewishness figures into the secular profession of writing is, for Zuckerman, a live question. Zuckerman's relationship with Lonoff consists, in part, in his attempt to pin down a "family resemblance" between Lonoff, Isaac Babel, and the fictional Jewish author Felix Abravanel, a resemblance explicitly channeled through the authors' shared Jewishness. "I think of you as the Jew who got away," Zuckerman tells Lonoff. "You got away from Russia and the pogroms. You got away from the purges—and Babel didn't. You got away from Palestine and the homeland. You got away from Brookline and the relatives. You got away from New York—[. . .] Away from all the Jews, and a story by you without a Jew in it is unthinkable" (50–51). Zuckerman's burning question for this figure of literary mastery who pairs personal Jewish disaffiliation with literary concern for the Jewish subject, is just what this story of Lonoff's career proves, and, implicitly, what it might suggest about Zuckerman's own fate as a writer and as a Jewish son. Lonoff's answer, however, is less than completely revealing: "He thought about it for a moment. 'It proves why the

young rabbi in Pittsfield can't live with the idea that I won't be "active." I waited for more, but in vain" (ibid.). The riddle of the "Jewish writer," as such, whose relationship with Judaism flows exclusively through his work and isn't paired with biographical ties to the Jewish community is a question, Lonoff's answer suggests, not for the writer, but for the Jewish community—for the rabbi for whom Jewish literary activity finds its necessary counterpart in activity within the synagogue community. For Zuckerman, however, this is not enough. His own engagement with this issue focuses on the convergence of personal and professional Jewish identities, and he approaches Lonoff not only in search of a professional mentor, but, as the novel makes clear, of a surrogate father who might provide an alternative mediation of his relationship with Jewishness.

But if Lonoff and Doc Zuckerman represent two possible fathers for Zuckerman, the literary and the biological, a third character, Judge Leopold Wapter, extends Zuckerman's Jewish concerns from the family, immediate and metaphoric, to the broader Jewish community. Wapter's authority in the Jewish community distinctly diverges from that of the rabbis who bear the brunt of Roth's 1963 argument. Wapter's significance in the Jewish community depends upon his significance in the non-Jewish world. Thus the Judge, unlike Roth's rabbis, is a voice speaking from what appears to be a position analogous to the author's own, or at least one which he assumes the writer aspires to occupy: one of social eminence underwritten by professional success, and of personal, rather than professional interest in the Jewish community. Wapter appears in the novel as a figure of Jewish professional attainment, and as an *éminence grise* of the Newark Jewish community: "after [actor Robert] Ellenstein and Rabbi Joachim Prinz perhaps the city's most admired Jew" (96). While Zuckerman's relationships are structured in terms of direct descent, Judge Wapter's claim on Zuckerman's loyalty is, for the writer, less clear. In contradistinction to the idealized reader of Roth's essays and interviews, one who would respond to Zuckerman's writing as an appeal to their individual sensibilities abstracted from the obligations of social affiliation, Wapter reads

Zuckerman's story in the capacity of a social representative. "I do believe that, like all men, the artist has a responsibility to his fellow man, to the society in which he lives, and to the cause of truth and justice," Wapter writes to Zuckerman. "With that responsibility and that alone as my criterion, I would attempt to give [your father] an opinion on the suitability for publication in a national magazine of your latest fictional effort" (101).

As Zuckerman describes it, the story titled "Higher Education," is at once a major step in his career—"the most ambitious I had written—some fifteen thousand words" (79)—and a troubled link between the writer's professional and family lives: a story "that borrowed from our family history instances of what my exemplary father took to be the most shameful and disreputable transgressions of family decency and trust" (81). Zuckerman's story, summarized in the novel, concerns a family conflict between, on the one hand, a woman's aspirations for her children's professional success, and on the other, her brother's desire for a smooth and easy, if not professionally distinguished, life. Centering around a family dispute over the disposition of an inheritance, "Higher Education" essentially retells an event in the life of the fictional writer's family. Per Zuckerman's synopsis, the writer's aunt Essie, left a large sum of money to put towards the higher education of her children by his grandmother, Meema Chaya, would like to use the money to send her sons to medical school. His uncle Sidney, however, counts on using the inheritance to buy a parking lot in downtown Newark, for a source of comparatively low-maintenance income. The dispute, opposing Essie's dreams of her family's upward class mobility against Sidney's desire for continued ease and a steady income, aligns the majority of the family with Essie, leaving Sidney defended only by his wife, his mistress, and the teenaged Nathan. The argument eventually issues in a lawsuit, "whose outcome hinged on how exhaustive Meema Chaya had meant to be in her will with the ringing words 'higher education'" (82). Sidney wins the case but is forced to sell his lot to the mob for a tenth of its value and subsequently, to the family's shame, dies in a non-Jewish

woman's bed. Essie puts her sons through medical school without the inheritance, selling siding and shingles to raise the funds. At the story's end, Essie, in a movie theater on a rare break from her sales canvassing, raises a hammer that she keeps for personal protection, poised to break the wrist of a stranger in the next seat who, getting too familiar, has reached his hand onto her knee.⁶³

The story, "long for a magazine," and thus, Nathan imagines, unlikely to be published by one (90), signifies a peculiar point in the advancement of Zuckerman's career: following on a write-up of Zuckerman as one of "A Dozen to Keep Your Eye On" for the *Saturday Review* and preceding his residency at the fictional Quahsay artists' colony, "Higher Education" marks the beginning of Zuckerman's passage from story writer to novelist—from the appearance of his name among other names in a magazine's table of contents and his face among other faces in the *Saturday Review* spread to the production of texts to be produced and sold as a single volume, marketed primarily under his own name. This, I would argue, is a crucial shift for the novel's treatment of "Jewish writing." As a story that might be published in a national magazine, as Judge Wapter's letter makes clear, the story might be understood as a foray into gentile cultural venues: a mode of representing Jews to others. At the same time, such publication links the author's cultural capital with that of the magazine. The magazine brings the author's work to the attention of those who might not otherwise have read it, rendering recognition the author's name less responsible for bringing the work to public notice. As a story long for magazine publication, however, "Higher Education" represents a move toward

⁶³ The drama between Essie and Sidney replays what recent scholars have seen as a transition as a move in the middle class away from ownership of productive capital and towards the possession of intellectual capital in the form of skills. Where Sidney wants to use the money to buy land on which to build a parking lot, Essie uses it to finance her sons' acquisition of the social and symbolic capital of a professional degree. That Sidney's parking lot is expropriated by organized crime seems to verify the prudence of her decision. For a further elaboration of how this socio-economic dynamic affected the American middle class literary imaginary, see Schryer, *Fantasies of the New Class*, and Hoberek, *Twilight of the Middle Class*. The work that Essie undertakes for the benefit of her sons' professional opportunities is also a gendered instance of the deferred gratification of social advancement. In this sense Roth's novel is briefly in dialogue with Tillie Olsen's stories discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

independence from print publications in which any individual work shares space with other features of the publication, including ads, event listings, reviews, and non-fiction articles. If “Higher Education” is not quite novel-length, it might nonetheless be fit for publication in a collection organized under the rubric of the author’s identity. The significance of the shift to single volume publication (and of the story’s liminality in this regard) is in the increased centrality that such publication gives to the author as a key link between the text and the unwritten world. If magazine publication brings the story to its readers by situating it among other texts, the single volume, through the mechanisms of book tours, alphabetical shelving, cover design, advertising, and author interviews (surely among others), advances the author’s name as a primary reservoir of cultural capital. Such a configuration of a text’s identity, in which the author becomes more clearly the final agent of responsibility for the text (consider the difference, for example, between a letter to the editor and a letter to the author) appears to offer more solid ground for considering the author’s biographical Jewishness in understanding the text’s reception. *The Ghost Writer*, it is important to note, has it both ways. First published over two issues of the *New Yorker*, it at once plays on the cultural capital of the magazine as a pre-eminent venue for cultural production with a tone of worldly and sophisticated gentility and a significant readership; asserts Roth’s own cultural significance as a figure who can command so much of such precious literary real estate; calls attention from the magazine to the writer through the device of serialization (which extends, in fact, over the rest of the Zuckerman series and on into others of Roth’s works, including the biographical *The Facts*, which features a rebuttal from Zuckerman); and flies under the writer’s own flag in its eventual issue by Farrar, Straus and Giroux as a single volume.

Sent to Zuckerman’s idol, Lonoff, the story proves Zuckerman’s chops: “Look, I told [my wife] Hope this morning: Zuckerman has the most compelling voice I’ve encountered in years, certainly for somebody starting out. [. . .] I don’t mean style’—raising a finger to make the

distinction. ‘I mean voice: something that begins at around the back of the knees and reaches well above the head’ (72). To Zuckerman’s father, however, the story is something entirely different: an exposure of family shame and grist for the antisemitic mill. Indeed, the motivating conflict of the novel—the event which sends Zuckerman in search of a “father” to approve of his literary activity—is the conflict between the professional success that Zuckerman’s story represents and the father’s unexpected refusal to respond to this success with approval. As Zuckerman describes it, he is blindsided by his father’s chagrin: “Oh, what sitting ducks I had for parents! A son of theirs would have had to be a half-wit or a sadist *not* to make them proud. And I was neither” (80). “Higher Education” thus marks the moment at which Zuckerman discovers the limits of professional success as a guarantor of parental pride—his first inkling that the demands of his professional dedication might be at odds with the desires of his family, and that staking a claim for professional autonomy could mean claiming autonomy *from* his background.

Zuckerman does not consciously make a bid for autonomy from the Jewish community by composing “Higher Education.” The story seems to him a fulfillment of the same desire for a child’s professional achievement that motivates Essie as he sends it to his parents to stoke their pride, and as a celebration of the Jewish milieu in which he grew up. Nathan Zuckerman is no alienated intellectual on the model of an earlier generation of Jewish writers (like, for example, Delmore Schwartz)—he is instead very much at home with his parents and surprised that they don’t read his story as an affectionate gesture. So if Zuckerman imagines the story not to be a display of alienated artistic consciousness but rather of intimate familiarity with his family’s way of conducting itself, his failure to anticipate his father’s reaction comes from a break that he doesn’t recognize between professionalization and family pride. Since the story frames Essie’s desire for children’s professional success as her most clearly expressed and zealously pursued desire, then that success is a way for them to display their affection for Essie. But her sons’ passage through medical school is

depersonalized: their achievement reflects well on her but their work itself has nothing to do with her. Zuckerman's story, however, makes the family's life the center of his professional performance. This tension between affection displayed *by* professional achievement and affection displayed *through* professional achievement is foregrounded in a turn of phrase that appears both in Roth's essay, "Writing About Jews," and in Zuckerman's conversation with his father: "As I see it," Roth writes in *Commentary*, "one of the rabbi's limitations is that he cannot recognize a bear hug when one is being administered right in front of his eyes" (197); and in *The Ghost Writer*, with Roth's rabbi transmuted into Zuckerman's father, "I thought, I said angrily, 'I was administering a bear hug, to tell you the truth'" (94). In both cases, the author characterizes his story as a bear hug in order to deflect criticism of the story's depiction of the Jewish community. If the story's objectors read it as unduly harsh or too focused on those actions of Jewish characters that defy moral convention, the author's defense casts those aspects of the story as part of a vigorous embrace of all that is messy in lived Jewish life. The image of the bear hug, however, is not entirely innocent. Suggesting more a smothering intimacy than a gentle exchange of physical affection, the bear hug is excessive, overwhelming, animalistic—an aggressive display of fondness. But more striking than the simple fact of the bear hug is the verb that describes its performance. The hug is not "given," or even "hugged," but "administered," a description that divorces it from colloquial usage (when was the last time you were "administered" a hug by someone you love?) and casts hugging as a transaction subject to professional norms. The idea of an administered hug suggests a distance antipathetic to the closeness that a hug otherwise necessarily implies. The hug administered is the hug managed, shifted from a personal to a clinical discursive context and delivered by the expert to his charge. Perhaps in the bear hug the dosage is off. All the same, however awkward and possessive the language of administration may be, the image of the hug itself still implies real affection on the part of the writer to subject. It is hard to say whether the administered bear hug, in the transition from

Roth's authorial voice to the voice of his character, becomes an object of self-parody. But in either context—that of the essay or that of the novel—the term expresses an intimacy rendered uncomfortable by the lay / professional divide that it must bridge.

Wapter's response to Zuckerman's story is an exercise in the performance of social obligation. In his letter to Zuckerman, as in his courtroom, the judge sits in judgment as a representative of social responsibility. Moreover, since the judge's letter was composed as a favor to Zuckerman's father, the judge, in writing it, places his own agency at the service of Doc Zuckerman. Judge Wapter's employment as the father's representative, like his assumption of the ability to judge "the suitability [of 'Higher Education'] for publication in a national magazine," extends the structure of his official duties beyond the courtroom. Just as Wapter's role as a judge depends upon him sublimating his (aesthetically responsive) self into the exercise of official responsibility (a fealty to the community's trust and its legislated will), the letter that he writes to Nathan frames his response to the story in terms of responsibility, both to Zuckerman's father and to the wider Jewish community.

This chain of obligation, in particular, that implicates Nathan in a way that is harder for him to escape than the simple censure of the Jewish community's doyens. Begging Wapter's intervention with his son, Zuckerman's father expends social capital. "To approach the judge, my father had first to contact a lofty cousin of ours—an attorney, a suburbanite, and a former Army colonel who had been president for several years of the judge's Newark temple" (97). When Nathan receives Wapter's letter, his father's agency has thus been filtered from the father through cousin Teddy and Wapter himself, incurring social debt for the elder Zuckerman at each step. Wapter, too, expends a certain amount of capital, which is also added to Zuckerman's father's account. Answering Teddy's request, the judge risks a blow to his ego if Nathan refuses (as he does) to reply. Indeed, the judge's entire role in the story is defined through acts undertaken (or frames as being

undertaken) on other people's behalf: as judge, he acts as an agent of the state; recommending Nathan for college admission, he extends himself in support of Nathan and Newark's Jewish youth; writing to Nathan, he performs a favor for Nathan's father. But where his earlier composition of a letter recommending Nathan for admission to the University of Chicago cements his standing in the community as an emissary between Newark's Jews and the gentile-controlled world of professional attainment and creates a meaningful and productive relationship of patronage to the younger generation, the fact that Nathan can ignore his rebuke not only suggests that his ties to Newark's promising youth are not as strong or as mutually felt as he might imagine, but also recasts the exercise in self-aggrandizement that was his publicized recommendation of five Jewish Newark youths as merely instrumental in the ascent of the young generation, if it matters at all. Thus, when Zuckerman's mother contacts him at his writer's colony to find out why he hasn't responded to the judge's query, it is not only his father, but also Teddy, who is "a little fit to be tied" (105).

Though the judge's questions to Zuckerman (e.g., "1. If you had been living in Nazi Germany in the thirties, would you have written such a story? [. . .] 7. What in your character makes you associate so much of life's ugliness with the Jewish people?" [102–3]) primarily invoke Zuckerman's responsibility as a Jew to other Jews, the concern that sends Zuckerman searching for paternal validation in the Jewish author E. I. Lonoff is more immediate and more personal: that he is dodging an obligation to his father, whose support of his son is more tangible and more emotionally significant than the more nebulous support offered by the Jewish community. "[W]hat about sons?" Zuckerman asks himself, straining to balance his filial disobedience with professional responsibility:

It wasn't Flaubert's father or Joyce's father who had impugned me for my recklessness—it was my own. Nor was it the Irish he claimed I had maligned and misrepresented, but the Jews. Of which I was one. Of which, only some five thousand days past, there had been millions more.

Yet each time I tried again to explain my motives, the angrier with him I became. It's you who humiliated yourself—now live with it, you moralizing ass! Wapter, that know-nothing windbag! (111–2)

The anger that Zuckerman expresses at his father, “moralizing ass,” who has humiliated himself, reflects some level of guilt at refusing to help his father to a graceful exit from his obligations to Wapter and Teddy. Only Nathan, by answering Wapter’s letter, can repay the debt that his father had incurred on Nathan’s behalf. To get his father out of this bind, however, would be to submit to the validity of judge Wapter’s “court” and to betray the validity of Lonoff’s judgment of his talents. It would also mean acceding to the relevance of his parents’ ethnic network of social uplift to his own shot at success in the ostensibly meritocratic field of literature. He doesn’t answer the letter.

What this leads to, in effect, is a broader critique of the objectivity of professional judgment, ultimately extending from the legal professions to the profession of writing. Wapter’s judgment of Zuckerman’s story is predicated on the sublimation of his own aesthetic response into a depersonalized paradigm of social responsibility; Lonoff’s judgment of Zuckerman’s voice is rooted in the qualifications offered by his talents and sensibility, and by his fastidious sense of responsibility to serious writing. “He [Lonoff] did not do justice to a writer unless he read him on consecutive days and for no less than three hours at a sitting. [. . .] Sometimes, when he unavoidably had to miss a day, he would go back to begin over again, rather than be nagged by the sense that he was wronging a serious author” (67). Judge Wapter’s critical authority derives from his respectability—the close match between his own judgments and those condoned by his community, and the substantial overlap between his symbolic and practical professional achievements and the organized interests of the Jewish community. In exercising judicial judgment, he repays his debt to community. All the same, Wapter is a figure of ridicule in the novel precisely for his overweening extension of his authority as a judge from the judicial bench to the reading chair. To the extent that Judge Wapter understands his judicial authority to certify the authority of his judgments over other areas of experience, he presents a burlesque of the Jamesian author, specialized generalist, a figure of “human expertness” (Attridge 31). Lonoff’s judgment, more wholly contained within the sphere of

his professional expertise, repays a different kind of debt: that incurred by another writer's talent and craft.

Zuckerman's father and Judge Wapter are both characteristically interested readers. If readings governed by the category of art demand a degree of disinterested critical appraisal, then the interest in how Zuckerman's story reflects on the Jews and, more narrowly, on Zuckerman's family, exemplify an unprofessional, vernacular approach to literature. These non-professional readers, however, are not only readers, but also practical theorists of reading, filtering their readings through the imagined consciousness of an altogether other, oppositional reader. Consider, for example, the reaction of Zuckerman's father to his son's story, which vacillates between universalistic and particularistic theories of literary reception:

[F]rom a lifetime of experience I happen to know what ordinary people will think when they read something like this story. And you don't. You can't. You have been sheltered from it all your life. [. . .] It's not your fault that you don't know what gentiles think when they read something like this. But I can tell you. They don't think about how it's a great work of art. They don't know about art. Maybe I don't know about art myself. Maybe none of our family does, not the way that you do. But that's the point. People don't read art—they read about *people*. (91–2)

For Nathan's father, the gentile reader is at once universal (the "ordinary people" whose reaction he projects) and particular: "Nathan, your story, as far as Gentiles are concerned, is about one thing and one thing only. Listen to me before you go. It's about kikes. Kikes and their love of money. That's all our good Christian friends will see, I guarantee you" (94). This reading doesn't endow the text with the power to transform social understandings or to affect social change, but rather to reinforce existing prejudices. The distinction between reading about art and reading about people is, in this context, another way of talking about the power or powerlessness of art. In this configuration, interestingly, it is Nathan whose commitment to craft, echoing Roth's statements in contemporary interviews, assumes that the danger of literature is limited, while his father assumes that the story represents a real threat. Considering the emphasis that Roth's interviews and essays

place on the importance of rounded characters, the greater problem with the elder Zuckerman's analysis is not his contention that "people [. . .] read about people"—that is, that they read through the literariness of a text to its characters—but the collapse of "people" into the category "kikes." In this theory of the text's reception, Zuckerman's father leaps from an understanding of fiction that Roth might conceivably approve to one close to that which Roth denounces in Bellow and Malamud: the understanding that reads through the idiosyncrasy of written characters and past the author's creative action to draw generalizations, from characters, about the world outside the text.

The father's and the judge's reactions to Zuckerman's story are the reactions of non-specialists. They thus, in a sense, represent a universalized (i.e., untutored, popular) response, as opposed to the particular response of initiates to the world of literary exegesis. At the same time, the local controversy surrounding the story also revolves around different questions of particularist interpretive paradigms: Zuckerman experiences his story's reception by readers whose interpretive lens focuses on representations of Jews, and on the question of whether a given work is "good for the Jews." Roth's own comments on how he imagines his audience suggest that, contrary to Doc Zuckerman's concern with the gentile response to his son's story, Roth would hesitate to project what a general reader might think about his story, but finds the imagined response of a Jewish readership to be a productive component of his professional life:

I've had two audiences, a general audience and a Jewish audience. I have virtually no sense of my impact upon a general audience, nor do I really know who these people are. [. . .] I don't think anymore about them when I'm at work than they think about me when they're at work. They're as remote as the onlookers are to a chess player concentrating on the board and his opponent's game. [. . .]

Counterbalancing the general audience has been a Jewish audience, affording me the best of both worlds. With my Jewish audience, I feel intensely their expectations, disdain, delight, criticism, their wounded self-love, their healthy curiosity—what I imagine the writer's awareness is in the capital of a small country where culture is thought to mean as much as politics, where culture *is* politics: some little nation perpetually engaged in evaluating its purpose, contemplating its meaning, joking away its shame, and sensing itself imperiled in one way or another. ("Interview on Zuckerman" 151–2)

The turn Roth's analogy takes toward the artist's place within a state places his Jewish audience (and the Jewish community in general) in an interestingly liminal position. Indeed, the analogy is almost unnecessary. Roth could just as easily argue that these characteristics apply directly to the Jewish community: "For Jews..." or "For American Jews, culture is thought to mean as much as politics," etc. Instead, Roth's analogy privileges citizenship in a nation over cultural affiliation, just as he argues that his relationship with a Jewish audience furnishes him with a unique imaginative resource: that of the community's engaged attention. That he re-imagines this audience in national terms both links literary to national projects and indicates a less fraught relationship between Roth as writer and the concept of citizenship than the one which links Roth's writing to his ethnicity. It also gestures toward the gap between the claims that ethnic and civic affiliation can make upon the writer—namely, those dictated by the author's relationship to state power a subject of particular resonance during this period of Roth's career, at which time he was taking regular trips to Prague, and was actively engaged in arranging the translation and publication, in the West, of writers working in communist countries.⁶⁴

Compare this with Roth's earlier (1969) comment that he doesn't write for any particular audience:

To write to be read and to write for an 'audience' are two different matters. If you mean by an audience a particular readership which can be described in terms of its education, politics, religion, or even by its literary tone, the answer is no. When I'm at work I don't really have any group of people in mind whom I want to communicate with; what I want is for the work to communicate itself as fully as it can, in accordance with its own intentions. Precisely so that it *can* be read, *but on its own terms*. If one can be said to have an audience in mind, it is not any special interest group whose beliefs and demands one either accedes to or challenges, but those ideal

⁶⁴ Roth's fiction treats this most directly in *Operation Shylock*, in which the issue of authorial identity is at once a matter of nationality, ethnicity, the confluence of the two (the book's protagonist, "Philip Roth," runs a mission for the Mossad, mobilizing his Jewishness for the interests of the Israeli state), the stability of one's sense of self (Roth begins the novel suffering a psychological break caused by Halcion, a sleeping pill that he has been prescribed), and transferability (the novel's Roth is impersonated by another "Philip Roth," masquerading as the famous author to advance the cause of "Diasporism," and whom Roth renames Moishe Pipik.

readers whose *sensibilities* have been totally given over to the writer, in exchange for his seriousness. (“On *Portnoy’s Complaint*” 15)

Here, Roth constructs the concept of audience as a threat to the integrity of the work, and to its autonomy from political concerns, broadly conceived. On this understanding, the audience (as opposed to the reader) can only obtrude into the writer’s aesthetic design, prompting the writer to make choices that are not in the best interest of the work, which, the true object of the writer’s vocation, must exist as an end in itself. Roth claims the novel as a refuge from the temptations and manipulations that characterize commercial and political culture, but not a refuge from the author’s control. Stressing the limits of the novel’s power to generate lasting and predictable effects on its readers, Roth instead emphasizes the particular interchange through which the novelist exercises power over the reader, to which the reader consents, for as long as the reader chooses to continue reading the book. But if the novel’s power to shape the world is (by the author) unpredictable, the pleasures of writing a novel are nonetheless connected to the pleasures of power. At its root, Roth’s understanding of the pleasure of authorship is linked with the free exercise of his talent.

Max Weber’s comments in “Science as Vocation” are particularly relevant to the conception of writing that Roth presents here and in “Imagining Jews,” according to which the writer’s professional performance depends upon a clear-eyed and objective social vision. “[I]n the realm of science,” writes Weber:

the only person to have “personality” is the one who is *wholly devoted to his subject*. And this is true not just of science. We know of no great artist who has ever done anything other than devoted himself to his art and to that alone. [. . .] Nor is it the sign of a personality to go on to ask: How can I show that I am more than just a mere “expert”? How can I manage to prove that I can say something, in form or substance, that no one has ever said? [. . .] It always diminishes the man who asks such questions instead of allowing his inner dedication to his task and to it alone to raise him to the height and the dignity of the cause he purports to serve. And in this respect, the situation with the artist is no different. (10–11)

In Weber’s terms, the personality of the scientist or the artist inheres in their work to the exclusion of their non-professional life. Indeed, Lonoff, whose professional persona is bound up with a

regimen of personal self-denial personifies this Weberian professional ideal. But this model of vocational dedication cannot work for Zuckerman. Though early in the novel Zuckerman takes stock of Lonoff's life and muses, "All of one's concentration and flamboyance and originality reserved for the grueling, exalted, transcendent calling. I looked around and thought, This is how I will live" (5), the stark choice between "perfection of the life, or of the work" posed in Yeats's poem, "The Choice," (wryly referenced by Zuckerman in describing his failure, as a young magazine salesman, to be propositioned by any housewives) is not conducive to Zuckerman's writing. As Lonoff acknowledges in *The Ghost Writer's* first chapter, "an unruly personal life will probably better serve a writer like Nathan than walking in the woods and startling the deer. His work has turbulence—that should be nourished, and not in the woods" (33).

In the context of the novel, what Lonoff identifies as "turbulence," encompasses not only the trials of Zuckerman's romantic life, but also the connection between his Jewishness and his art. The ascetic devotion with which Lonoff abjures literary fame implicitly rejects biographical keys to reading his work (the writer "chose not to be photographed, as though to associate his face with his fiction were a ridiculous irrelevancy"), but leads to work which engenders, in Zuckerman, not only a literary but also a Jewish response. "In fact, my own first reading through Lonoff's canon—as an orthodox college atheist and a highbrow in training—had done more to make me realize how much I was still my family's Jewish offspring than anything I had carried forward to the University of Chicago from childhood Hebrew lessons, or mother's kitchen, or the discussions I used to hear among my parents and our relatives about the perils of intermarriage, the problem of Santa Claus, and the injustice of medical-school quotas" (12). Lonoff's fiction, moreover, "seemed to me a response to the same burden of exclusion and confinement that still weighed upon the lives of those who had raised me, and that had informed our relentless household obsession with the status of the Jews" (ibid.). Lonoff's writing, then, is not just a professional model for Zuckerman the aspiring

writer, but also a key text in the development of his Jewish consciousness, and the connection of his Jewish and his intellectual life.

As much as lay readers, with their propensity to read stories for their own ends, are something of a problem for Zuckerman (and Roth) as a writer, Zuckerman's relationship with Lonoff, a matter of professional aspiration *and* personal fulfillment, begins with Zuckerman's reading of Lonoff's stories as a way to mediate between his literary sensibility and his Jewish self-recognition: a way to find the personal in the professional. Indeed, as Zuckerman's description of masturbating to the imagined encounter between Lonoff and Bellette suggests, any public, communicative composition implies a relevant subject position that draws on personal experience as well as writing-specific competence. Masturbation, however, is the literary outlet of the amateur—a counterpart to professional writing but also the generative spark for the novel's most inventive section: the narrative re-animation of Anne Frank as a living writer:

The rest of what I'd been waiting up for [that is, some kind of sexual encounter with Lonoff's guest, Amy Bellette] I had, of course, to imagine. But that is easier work by far than making things up at the typewriter. For that kind of imagining you don't even have to know the alphabet. Being young will usually get you through with flying colors. You don't even have to be young. You don't have to be anything. (112)

The imaginative apparatus supporting masturbation is a radically democratic model of literary production. Not only is it “easier work by far than making things up at the typewriter”—that is, something which makes no professional demands—but it also, in Zuckerman's interpretation, makes no ontological demands: “You don't have to be anything.” The kind of freedom that Zuckerman finds in the masturbatory fantasy is the opposite of the pressure that he feels from his family's expectations. If Zuckerman doesn't have to be anyone in particular to invent some scene that will get him off, this is perhaps because the imaginative work of masturbation is so thoroughly functional, and thus indifferent in its particulars. It doesn't much matter what Zuckerman imagines, so long as it gets the job done. In contrast, the specific content and texture of the writer's work

does matter, and to achieve the ends of literature the writer implicitly *does* need to be something—at the very least, he or she needs to be a writer.

The compositional theory that Zuckerman implies in his discussion of masturbation links literary production to the possession of a particularly literary subjectivity. Indeed, in this framework, the successful creation of a literary work is an act with ontological authority, proving, for example, that one has a voice “that begins at around the back of the knees and reaches well above the head.” What matters for Zuckerman is that talent which is exercised in the public sphere and amenable to public judgment. Zuckerman may, in fact, be a world-class masturbatory fantasist, but such a talent won’t prove who he is, in the terms he desires, and won’t win him any prizes.

And yet, the narrative that I have sketched, drawing a clean line between the private talents of erotic imagination and the public talents of literary composition, is at odds with the development of the novel itself and with Zuckerman’s career over the succeeding Zuckerman novels. *The Ghost Writer’s* most audacious section, “Femme Fatale,” which imagines the life of an Anne Frank who has survived the war, made her way to America, found her diary in print, and determined to remain unknown, is thus a way for Zuckerman to raise his masturbatory fantasy-making from the realm of anonymous and unlettered jerking off to the level of professional activity.

Virtuous reader, if you think that after intercourse all animals are sad, try masturbating on the daybed in E. I. Lonoff’s study and see how you feel when it’s over. To expiate my sense of utter shabbiness, I immediately took to the high road and drew from Lonoff’s bookshelves the volume of Henry James stories containing ‘The Middle Years,’ the source of one of the two quotations pinned to the bulletin board. And there where I had indulged myself in this most un-Jamesian lapse from the amenities, I read the story two times through, looking to discover what I could about the doubt that’s the writer’s passion, the passion that’s his task, and the madness of—of all things—art” (112–13).

The James volume, however, doesn’t remain an escape from the shabby shame of self-gratification in the house of Zuckerman’s idol. After several reads through “The Middle Years,” Zuckerman

hears Lonoff and Bellette arguing in the room upstairs and stands on the book to bring his ear to the ceiling. High literary achievement becomes the literal step-stool to private gratification.

Zuckerman's fantasy of Amy Bellette as Anne Frank, alive, well, and potentially open to a relationship with the young writer, presents marriage to Frank as an ideal (if farcical) bridge between the personal and the professional. "I kept seeing myself coming back to New Jersey and saying to my family, 'I met a marvelous young woman while I was up in New England. I love her and she loves me. We are going to be married.' 'Married? But so fast? Nathan, is she Jewish?' 'Yes she is.' 'But who is she?' 'Anne Frank'" (157–8). Anne Frank is the romantic attachment that authorizes all that Zuckerman might write about Jews. Zuckerman's desire for Frank is thus a desire for authorial freedom legitimated by sexual and social union. Even in this fantasy, it is worth noting, Zuckerman's Jewish sympathies are initially suspect: "Nathan, is she Jewish?" his imagined mother asks. The suddenness of their engagement seems to suggest shame, transgression, some unsavory character. But the name Anne Frank retains the talismanic quality that Judge Wapter engages when he urges Nathan to catch the Broadway version of Frank's autobiography. Of course, all of this takes place under the banner of farce. The name "Anne Frank" stops the conversation not only because it signifies innocent Jewish adolescence, communal pieties, and collective suffering, but also because the idea that Anne Frank is alive, well, and Zuckerman's girlfriend feels like blasphemous satire. The fantasy that marrying Anne Frank will furnish Zuckerman with irreproachable Jewish credentials is tainted by the likelihood that claiming to have married Anne Frank would seem insane—an abandonment of the real self to the fantasy of fiction.

In many ways, the fantasy of Bellette as "ghost writer" also casts Bellette / Frank as a mirror for Zuckerman's predicament. Like Zuckerman, Bellette searches for a new literary father, and like Bellette's "I love you so, Dad-da. There's no one else like you" (118), Zuckerman's attachment to Lonoff has a sexual component that acts as a proxy for professional parity—a fantasy at once of

apprenticeship and mutual erotic enjoyment: “Suddenly I wanted to kiss him. I know this happens to men more often than is reported, but I was new to manhood (about five minutes into it, actually) and was bewildered by the strength of a feeling that I had rarely had toward my own father once I’d begun to shave” (74). But, crucially, Bellette not only occupies a literary position that is in some ways similar to Zuckerman’s, she voices a defense of literary realism in the treatment of Jewish characters (her family) that echoes Zuckerman’s and Roth’s own.

What would happen when people had finally seen? The only realistic answer was Nothing. To believe anything else was only to give in to longings which even she, the great longer, had a right to question by now. To keep her existence a secret from her father so as to help improve mankind . . . no, not at this late date. [. . .] Her responsibility was to the dead, if to anyone—to her sister, to her mother, to all the slaughtered schoolchildren who had been her friends. There was her diary’s purpose, there was her ordained mission: to restore in print their status as flesh and blood . . . for all the good that would do them. (146–7)

What links the diary to Zuckerman’s story is a sense that the highest professional standard of representational literary art is its ability to give flesh to the characters it portrays. That is, Frank’s mission to “restore in print their status as flesh and blood” is, in the end, strikingly close to Zuckerman’s defense that his Uncle Sidney, the heel of his father’s version of the story behind “Higher Education,” “actually existed [. . .]—and no better than I depict him!” (93).

In *The Ghost Writer* presents the psychologically real mimetic representation of characters as a writer’s sacred obligation: a responsibility that demands that authors cut ties with their communities, their families and their friends when they sit down at the writing desk to become, for as long as they lay fingers to the keyboard, professionals. And yet Roth’s novella also reveals the impossibility of the writer’s willed alienation from all that provides material for her or his creations. The gratifications of literary composition are neither exclusively public nor exclusively private, nor are the terms of professional conduct. In Roth’s novella, Jewishness provides the shape and the context for this confluence of personal and professional concerns in a writer’s work, and the key to the ambiguous link between biography and craft.

Works Cited

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2005. Print.
- Attridge, John. "‘Human Expertness’: Professionalism, Training, and the Prefaces to the New York Edition." *Henry James Review* 32.1 (Winter 2011): 29–44. *Project Muse*. Web. 18 July 2012.
- Brodkin, Karen. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1998. Print.
- Diner, Hasia. *The Jews of the United States, 1654–2000*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2004. Print.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara and John Ehrenreich. "The Professional-Managerial Class." *Between Labor and Capital*. Ed. Pat Walker. Boston: South End Press, 1979. 5–45. Print.
- Fiedler, Leslie. "The Breakthrough: The American Jewish Novelist and the Fictional Image of the Jew." *Midstream* 4.1 (Winter 1958): 15–35. Print.
- Freedman, Jonathan. *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Print.
- Gouldner, Alvin. *The Future of Intellectuals and the New Class: a Frame of Reference, Theses, Conjectures, Arguments, and an Historical Perspective on the Role of Intellectuals and Intelligentsia in the International Class Contest of the Modern Era*. New York: Seabury Press, 1979. Print.
- Harap, Louis. *In the Mainstream: The Jewish Presence in Twentieth Century American Literature, 1950s–1980s*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987. Print.
- Hoberek, Andrew. *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2005. Print.
- McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009. Print.
- Ozick, Cynthia. "A Bintl Brief for Jacob Glatstein." *Jewish Heritage* Spring 1972: 58–60. Print.
- Posnock, Ross. *Philip Roth's Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.
- Roth, Philip. *American Pastoral*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. Print.
- . "Imagining Jews." *The New York Review of Books* 3 Oct. 1974: 22–28. Print.
- . "Interview on *Zuckerman*." 1985. *Reading Myself and Others*. New York: Vintage International, 2001: 149–162. Print.
- . "Interview with *The Paris Review*." 1984. *Reading Myself and Others*. New York: Vintage International, 2001: 119–148. Print.

- . *The Counterlife*. 1986. New York: Vintage International, 1996. Print.
- . *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988. Print.
- . *The Ghost Writer*. 1979. New York: Vintage International, 1995. Print.
- . "On Portnoy's Complaint." 1969. *Reading Myself and Others*. New York: Vintage International, 2001: 13–20. Print.
- . *Operation Shylock*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. Print.
- . *Portnoy's Complaint*. 1969. New York: Vintage International, 1994. Print.
- . *The Professor of Desire*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977. Print.
- . "Writing About Jews." *Commentary* Dec. 1963: 446–452. Print.
- Sarfati Larson, Magali. *The Rise of Professionalism*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1977. Print.
- Schryer, Stephen. *Fantasies of the New Class: Ideologies of Professionalism in Post-World War II American Fiction*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. Print.
- Shechner, Mark. *Up Society's Ass, Copper: Rereading Philip Roth*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003. Print.
- Shostak, Debra. *Philip Roth: Countertexts/Counterlives*. Columbia, S.C.: U of South Carolina P, 2004.
- Solotaroff, Theodore. "A Vocal Group: The Jewish Part in American Letters." *The Times Literary Supplement* 6 November 1959: 35–6. *TLS Historical Archive*. Web. 20 Sept. 2012.
- Travis, Trysh. "What We Talk About When We Talk About *The New Yorker*." *Book History* 3 (2000): 253–285. *Project Muse*. Web. 13 Aug. 2013.
- Weber, Max. *The Vocation Lectures: "Science as Vocation,"* [1917] "Politics as Vocation" [1919]. Ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004. Print.
- Wilbers, Usher. "The Author Resurrected: The *Paris Review's* Answer to the Age of Criticism." *American Periodicals* 18.2 (2008): 192–212. *Project Muse*. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.
- Yeats, William Butler. "The Choice." 1928. *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2000. Print.

CONCLUSION

For all of the obvious enthusiasm that Harold Ribalow, editor of *This Land, These People*, displays for his subject and for the volume's claims to represent Jewish literary achievement, a comment in his introduction betrays some reservations about the short story as a vehicle for Jewish literary excellence. On the one hand, he writes, "In the field of the short story in particular, the contributors to this volume have done their best work when they have written about Jews." That is, the Jewish theme spurs Jewish writers to achievement in the short story form. On the other, however, "Although the list of Jewish writers who describe Jewish life can easily be expanded [from those Ribalow lists], the impression remains that, in the main, those writers have comparatively little stamina where Jewish themes are concerned." (*This Land* 3). If the short story is a pronounced site of Jewish literary productivity and a premier venue for the then-contemporary expression of Jewish themes in American literature, it is also a symptom of a broader hesitation among Jewish writers who, though they "have concerned themselves with Jewish subjects with the same artistry and feeling that characterize all their work, [. . .] do not write as often as they might on Jewish themes" (*ibid.*). The suggestion that the shortness of the short story marks it as a genre of secondary importance underlies the restrained ruefulness of these remarks. Ribalow's introduction intimates that while the short story provides a crucial window into Jewish literary creativity, the window is a narrow one. In Ribalow's discussion, the short story signifies Jewish literary energies that are at once latent insofar as the short story form enables literary productivity that is for whatever reason less prevalent, he argues, in the novel, and limited insofar as the short story itself represents a

constrained horizon for Jewish literature—a symbol of the stamina that Jewish writers lack when approaching Jewish subjects.

It is not coincidental that the works on which this dissertation focused, with the exception of the anthologies treated in its first chapter, are long for the form. Indeed, Tillie Olsen's "Tell Me a Riddle," Cynthia Ozick's "Envy; or, Yiddish in America," and Philip Roth's *The Ghost Writer* could all easily be considered novellas—*The Ghost Writer*, in fact, *is* a novella (or as its publication, in full, across two consecutive issues of the *New Yorker* in the summer of 1979 identified it, a novel); it is primarily its metafictional portrayal of a short story that justifies its inclusion in this study. And yet the engagement of each work with the short story form is also unmistakable: Olsen's story gathers significance as a consideration of intergenerational ideological transmission from the stories that it accompanies, and with which it forms a collection; Ozick's "Envy" draws from the formal smallness of the short story a complex collation of Jewish culture, an intimacy that at times becomes claustrophobic, and the aspirations and frustrations of a writer pounding on the gates of the profession; Roth's novella outlines, in "Higher Education," a story in which length at once signifies ambition and marginality, as Zuckerman's story both exceeds his prior efforts in scope and is too long for magazine publication. So what are we to make of the length of these stories—of their apparent resistance to the major defining element of the short story form (its shortness) even as they productively use the medium to convey meaning about the situation of the Jewish writer?

Ribalow's ambivalence about the short story form helps us toward an answer. In 1842, Edgar Allan Poe theorized that the short story "affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent, which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose"—a space for the display of authorial prowess made possible by the "unity of effect or impression" that the story, consumed in a single sitting, could impart to a reader (46). But the 19th Century also offers an alternative genealogy for the short story, on which, in fact, also runs through Poe: the genre as a

vehicle for popular literary regionalism—a generic undertaking more closely linked with commercial concerns than with aesthetic mastery and, later, with the mass market audience of the pulps than with the high- or middlebrow readers of the slicks (Current-Garcia). Moreover, as several of its theorists have noted, the modern short story as a category derives what meaning and coherence it has from its (generally agonistic) relationship with the novel—a genre in whose shadow it is understood to sit (Ejxenbaum, Pratt).⁶⁵ This dualistic understanding of the genre, and the tendency to read the short story as the novel’s younger sibling illuminates the hesitation in Riblow’s praise of Jewish short fiction. The short story may well mark the literary achievement of American Jewish writers, but an *overproduction* of short stories relative to novels (itself an impressionistic evaluation—what would be the *right* ratio of stories to novels?) signifies, in Riblow’s comments and, as I discussed in chapter one, in Bellow’s evaluation of his volume, the continued immaturity of American Jewish writing as a literary category. Part of what haunts the Jewish short story as a genre bidding for prestige in the post-war period is its association with local color regionalism (which we see explicitly in Irving Howe’s introduction to his 1974 anthology, discussed in chapter one), and the pulpy appeal that it makes to Jewish and non-Jewish readers alike. Moreover, Riblow’s comments suggest that the baggage loading down the short story can easily be seen to migrate to a Jewish literature still finding its footing in the American literary landscape.

Over the course of Tillie Olsen’s, Cynthia Ozick’s, and Philip Roth’s careers, the status of Jewish literature changed. If in 1950 Saul Bellow could argue, as I discuss below, that Jewish

⁶⁵ Mary Louise Pratt lists eight characteristics that define the short story in relation to the novel, grouped under the general rubrics of “Incompleteness” and “Minorness, Lesserness.” Particularly salient to our discussion are her observations that the short story “is a sample” while the novel “is the whole hog” (103), that the novel comprises a whole text (i.e., a self-contained volume), while the story is a part of a text, that short stories introduce the new into the literary arena, that stories are more commonly associated with (oral) narrative traditions than the novel, which tends to be associated with textual traditions, and that the story tends to be associated with craft, while the novel is associated with art. While these characteristics apply unevenly to different stories, and while some stories work against some of these assumptions, Pratt’s typology nonetheless offers an invaluable summary of general attitudes toward and assumptions about the form.

American fiction had thus far proven an insufficient container for high literary ambition, by the time Olsen published her first complete volume, Bellow himself had become an exemplar of literary achievement in a recognizably Jewish idiom, and by the publication of *The Ghost Writer* “The Jewish Author” was already a well-established archetype (defined in large part by Roth himself) with which Roth could expect his readers to be familiar. Yet it is worth noting that Bellow’s achievement, popularly ratified by the 1954 National Book Award for *The Adventures of Augie March* is defined by a maximalist style: sprawling sentences in a picaresque tome; not homely anecdotes of Jewish life in Chicago, but a cosmopolitan verbosity whose length constitutes its own argument for the book’s significance. I have argued in this dissertation that the particular professional tensions that attended the short story rendered it anything but a neutral choice for authors whose fiction is concerned with the relationship between Jewish and professional identities (be they the quasi-professional activities of radical political action or the professional situation of working writers. Extending beyond the length at which a short story might comfortably be published in the periodical press without either elbowing aside other submissions or extending the publication’s length and production costs, the long short story amounts to an assertion of professional privilege: a magnification of the single author’s significance in the multiple-author publication.

In this context, we might read the length of the stories on which I’ve focused as an index of their authors’ more general resistance to classification. Each of these authors has had a vexed relationship with the category of “Jewish writer,” despite which, their Jewishness and the Jewishness of their subjects has remained relevant to readings of their work. Likewise, the publication of their comparatively lengthy work in traditional venues for short stories (magazines and anthologies in particular) classifies their writing in terms of the expectations that attend the short story even as it asserts their prerogative to extend, alter, or reject those boundaries altogether.

The story of the professionalization of writing did not begin in the post-war period. But the political reconfigurations of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, as Tillie Olsen's *Tell Me a Riddle* forecasts, saw the fortification of ethnicity as a political and literary category. This change amounted to a significant shift in how literary professionalism was defined. Thus, even as Philip Roth interrogated the distinction between Jewish and professional conduct, asserting in essays the overriding significance of a professional ethic to a Jewish writer's portrayal of fictional Jews, the profession itself, and the related profession of literary criticism, saw the writer's identity as increasingly significant, if not to their professional activities, then to the work that their work does in the world. The short story, ripe for categorizing, collecting, republishing, and slotting into a Jewish literature syllabus was a key venue in which the categorization of Jewish writing inserted the author into a Jewish literary context, naming Jewishness as a professional category. In their manipulations of the form, the Jewish writers that I discussed contested the grounds on which Jewish and professional identities were joined, and revealed that constitutive role of professional concerns in the cultural crafting of the Jewish writer.

Works Cited

- Current-García, Eugene. *The American Short Story Before 1850: A Critical History*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985. Print.
- Ejxenbaum, Boris M. "O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story." *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1994. 81–88. Print.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "Review of *Twice Told Tales*." 1842. *Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1976. 45–51. Print.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It." *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1994. 91–113. Print.
- Ribalow, Harold U. *This Land, These People*. New York: Beechhurst Press, 1950. Print.