Eating the Bread of Affliction: Judaism and Feminist Criticism

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At most Passover celebrations, participants make a Hillel sandwich: matzah, the unleavened bread taken in haste by the ancient Jews on their flight from slavery, is eaten with maror, a bitter herb, usually horseradish. Sometimes, to set teeth further on edge and to dramatize the paradox of a feast commemorating the misery of slavery as well as the joy of liberation, the matzah is topped with maror and kharoset, a mixture of apples, honey, and cinnamon that represents work (the mortar and bricks made for the pharaohs) but also the exhilarating relief of release: deliverance from bondage in Egypt. While the sharpness of the horseradish brings stinging tears to the eyes, the tongue tastes intense sweetness.

Eating the bread of affliction had nothing to do with nutrition, appetite, or taste—not health, not need, not desire—or so I thought, as if I could detach all three from my Jewish identity. If anything, my scholarly commitment to feminism only further convinced me that my health, my needs, my desires depended on being a Jewish non-Jew, a secular Jew. It took some time for me to feel anything but bitterness about Judaism as a religion. Yet I have come to believe that Jewish experience has profoundly shaped the evolution of feminist thinking in our times. Still, even now the vexed relationship between Judaism and feminism seems to mean that the pleasure I and many of my contemporaries can receive from our heritage will always be mixed with sorrow, the pride with grief, the joy with anger, sweetness with bitterness, honey on the tongue with tears in the eyes.

The First Seder

It must have been the late seventies or early eighties, the first time I put together a Seder of my own, because the girls were quite young. Figuring time the way parents do, say 1980, and that would mean Simone was 3, Molly 7. Why would an assimilated nonbeliever attempt this kind of event? Perhaps it was related to the fact that as Jews we were such a tiny
minority in our midwestern college town that I had to explain Chanukah at all the daycare centers and elementary schools my children attended, getting dreidels through the mail from my mother in New York and handing around jelly beans for the bets. Maybe it was because the little one, Simone, wanted to grow up and become not Christian but, in her own language, “Christmas.” Or that the older, Molly, had insisted on enrolling in Sunday school at the only synagogue in town, a conservative shul where she learned all about customs never practiced at home. Could the motivation have come from a rebellious determination to resist conforming to an overwhelmingly goyische society, to affirm genealogical roots? If so, the nostalgia was a fictive one for what had never been. Neither my husband nor I came from religiously observant families.

Yet there we sat, a jar of Manischevitz gefilte fish in the refrigerator, matzo-ball soup simmering on the stove, chicken roasting in the oven, red wine and grape juice on the table, and a copy of the Maxwell House Passover Haggadah, deluxe edition, at each place setting. Of course, I had participated in other Seders: in my Brooklyn childhood, just a particularly good meal with matzah passed around the table along with rye bread; during City College days, with Israelis who smoked, drank, and argued politics throughout the prayers; in graduate school, with orthodox friends whose rigorous adherence to Hebrew made the whole event incomprehensible to me. But at this Seder, I was reading with skills related to my newfound involvement in feminist criticism. Sandra Gilbert and I had just published The Madwoman in the Attic; we were beginning to think about the possibility of a sequel, examining the achievements of women writers in the twentieth century; and, because we had collaborated successfully on selecting the essays for another book, Shakespeare’s Sisters, we were also deciding to continue working together as editors, though the idea of compiling a Norton Anthology of Literature by Women would not arrive till the next year.

What did it mean to interpret the Haggadah by taking on the role Judith Fetterley had just called that of “the resisting reader”? Not merely a confirmation of my earlier estrangement from Judaism, this experience actually fueled more anger than I had thought possible, given my noninvolvement, my life as a Jewish non-Jew. Sandra and I had begun The Madwoman in the Attic with a discussion of the interrelatedness of ideas about authority and masculinity in the history of Western culture, and the Haggadah seemed to dramatize the spiritual, social, ethical, and political repercussions of that connection. The God of Maxwell House was a “King of the Universe,” “our Father” (p. 34), “the Ruler in His kingdom” (p. 52); blessed be “He,” who witnesses the Pharaoh’s cruel decree and then punishes Egypt for it. The Egyptian tyrant had commanded that “every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save

294
alive” (p. 17). Was the God of the Jews enraged by the death sentence against the boy babies or the survival rate of the girls? The text leaves itself open to such a scandalous question not only because its God is presented in terms of male domination but also because His followers in the Bible, His interpreters in the past, and His celebrants in the present function together as an exclusive men’s club.

Thus the Maxwell House God’s anger causes him to “smite every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast,” as he vindictively demonstrates his superiority to all other gods: “on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment I, the Eternal” (p. 17). With “a strong hand” and “an outstretched arm” (p. 17), this God takes revenge out of regard for his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for he is “our God, and the God of our fathers” (p. 45). His ancient interpreters include only the male of the species: the wise Rabbis Eliezer, Joshua, Elazar, Akeebah, and Tarphon. And His newly inducted followers—whose four questions the Seder leader must answer—consist of “the wise” son, “the wicked” son, and “the simple” son, along with him “who hath no capacity to inquire” (p. 11). Male god language, the preservation of an exclusively male genealogy both in the Bible and in its interpretive community, and the assumption that normative Jewish presence in the present time is masculine: how could these surprise me? Yet they took on new meaning unfolding before the eyes and ears of my girls because this Haggadah metaphorically casts every daughter into the river, even as it saves alive the sons and their lineage as the only liturgical and historical Jewish reality.

The authority of that reality seemed grounded not only in assumptions of male superiority but also of Jewish—and only Jewish—righteousness. I was dismayed watching Molly and Simone dip their fingers in their cups to sprinkle grape juice on their plates as they lustily shouted out the ten plagues visited on the Egyptians: “blood, vermin, murrain, hail, darkness, frogs, flies, boils, locusts, and the slaying of the first-born” (p. 19). We had an Egyptian friend; the plagues, followed by the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, seemed a bit grisly or ghoulish, sort of like overkill. What if the idea of the Jews as a chosen people was as vexed as the idea of masculinity as a chosen gender? Was chosenness a form of self-righteousness? of sanctimoniousness? an ideology of racial or ethnic superiority? If the Maxwell House Haggadah was right, moreover, God “brought us forth from” bondage “that He might give us the land which He swore unto our ancestors” (p. 25). We were supposed to exclaim, “THE FOLLOWING YEAR GRANT US TO BE IN JERUSALEM” (p. 53). “Grant Us To Be In”—not felicitous phrasing. In any case, though, did teaching the kids about Jewish ceremonies necessarily induct them into a Zionism I had always questioned? The same year as our Seder, some thirteen years after Israel’s
occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, the Copenhagen International Women’s Conference served as the setting for a passionate speech delivered by the PLO representative Leila Khaled. To the consternation of many Jews on all sides of the Zionist issue, Khaled highlighted the injustices suffered by Arab refugees, heralding the idea—tragically illuminated two years later during the invasion of Lebanon and the massacres at Sabra and Shatila—that the Palestinians were the Jews of the Middle East.3

MA NISH-TA-NAW HA-LAI-LAW HA-ZEH MEE-KAWL HA-LAY-LOS? (‘Wherefore is this night distinguished from all other nights?’ p. 9). Why should this night be different from other nights? Indeed, why consider this God, this religion, this version of the past different from other patriarchal cultural constructs? After the gefilte fish, the matzo-ball soup, and the roast chicken, with some snickering the adults sitting around the table agreed not to read aloud the line “Gentlemen, let us say Grace.” After opening the door for Elijah, we refused to ask God to “Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen who will not acknowledge thee. . . . Pursue them in wrath and destroy them” (p. 38). Enough is enough, I thought, so we all sang “Dayenu”; the kids found the hidden piece of matzah, the Afikomen, and used it to mop up the remaining kharoset, while the adults dipped ceremonial celery and lettuce into the salt water of tears.

Although at the time I did not know it, my personal anger at this Seder resembled the responses of a generation of women writing during the seventies and the eighties, and now, in the nineties, of feminists reacting to gender asymmetries in the legal, liturgical, and spiritual traditions of Judaism. From Rachel Adler and Cynthia Ozick to Judith Plaskow, Jewish women have explored their bitterness about their secondariness in their own heritage. In “The Jew Who Wasn’t There: Halakhah and the Jewish Woman” (1973), Adler documented the ways in which women are categorized with children and slaves in Jewish law—excluded from the minyan (the community of prayer) and exempt from the commandments that shape the Jewish man’s life (praying, hearing the shofar [horn] at the New Year, wearing such sacred symbols as tallit and tefillin)—and she therefore asked, “Are women Jews?”4 In “Notes toward Finding the Right Question” (1979), Ozick admitted with some pain that “my own synagogue is the only place in the world where I am not named Jew,” attributing the problem to the Torah itself:

The relation of Torah to women calls Torah itself into question. Where is the missing Commandment that sits in judgment on the world? Where is the Commandment that will say, from the beginning of history until now, Thou shalt not lessen the humanity of women?5
More recently and most extensively, in *Standing Again at Sinai* (1990), Judith Plaskow has confronted the ways in which "the central Jewish categories of Torah, Israel, and God all are constructed from male perspectives," only to find herself wondering "what can we claim that has not also wounded us?"6

Countless other scholars have analyzed particularly vexed areas of Judaism for women,7 but I did not read them. By an accident of birth, I was a Jewish feminist, but by virtue of that very fact I could not conceive of myself becoming a feminist Jew, a label that would have struck me as a contradiction in terms. In the catalogue of quintessentially misogynist sayings listed under "Know Your Enemy" in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, I underlined the daily orthodox prayer: "I thank thee, O Lord, that thou hast not created me a woman."8 As a literary critic supplied with at least a cursory Biblical background, I understood how difficult it is to reclaim what has wounded the imagination. The linking of the covenant between God and Abraham with circumcision (Genesis 17:10); the maxim that a woman who bears a male child is unclean for seven days, while she who bears a female baby remains contaminated for two weeks (Leviticus 12:2–5); the law "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence" (Leviticus 18:22) (how hilarious this sounds if we suppose it to be meant for a female reader!); the punishment allotted a man raping a virgin, which consists of a fine paid to her father and of the rapist having to marry the woman without the right to divorce her (Deuteronomy 22:28–29): how could the Torah seem like anything but an anachronistic, wounding *patrius sermo*?

In these same years, the essayists and scholars I did read—Adrienne Rich and Carolyn Heilbrun, Florence Howe and Annette Kolodny, Alicia Ostriker and Nancy K. Miller, Jane Gallop and Nina Auerbach—wrote about androgyny, marginality, and maternity; about women's experience and metaphors of the feminine in the works of American colonists, British poets, and French psychoanalysts. Like me, they examined many different aspects of what we were beginning to call "the cultural construction" of femininity, a virtual cornucopia of femininities except, oddly enough, the one manifest in the (quite startling) fact that so many of our peers in this undertaking were Jewish.9 Did my own sense of alienation and anger reflect the feelings of the others, feelings that might explain these silences—even-in-the-midst-of-speech? Throughout this period of time, my collaborator was composing a series of eloquent, evocative poems and essays about being an Italian-American, but even that did not inspire any comparable undertaking by me or my cohorts.10

Indeed, some time ago, on setting out to draft this essay, I felt so unnerved that I decided not only to engage in the usual background reading,
in this case looking for recent meditations by feminist critics on the relationship between their Jewishness and their feminism, but also to raise the subject directly with a number of my contemporaries, knowing full well how very different—in degrees of orthodoxy, geographical origins, attitudes toward assimilation, and native languages, as well as economically—our backgrounds were bound to be. Both publicly in print and privately in correspondence, many expressed a sense of estrangement not unlike my own. Writing retrospectively about her sense of herself amid a tumultuous feminist movement that in its beginnings “claimed universality,” Adrienne Rich explained in her essay “Split at the Root” that she “saw Judaism, simply, as yet another strand of patriarchy; if asked to choose I might have said (as my father had said in other language): I am a woman, not a Jew.”

Carolyn Heilbrun, also invoking her parents’ severing of their roots, found that “being Jewish was for me altogether unreal.” Like Rich and Heilbrun, many feminist critics came from assimilationist and highly secular Jewish backgrounds: Elizabeth Abel describes her family’s household as “vehemently atheistic,” while Rachel Blau DuPlessis remembers being brought up as “an explicit secular humanist (in the Ethical Culture Movement).” Judith Kegan Gardiner and Nina Auerbach depict the religion of their girlhoods not as traditional Judaism but, in Auerbach’s phrase, as “its New York offshoot, Freudianism.”

Rich’s title “Split at the Root” may refer explicitly to her sense of herself as “neither Gentile nor Jew” because born of an interfaith marriage, but implicitly it describes many other women’s sense of alienation, ignorance, embarrassment, and anger about a Jewishness in early life shared but often denied, derided, or diluted by parents, or at a later time split off in antago

nism from feminist aspirations. Thus one anonymous respondent to my queries confides that, though her identity and ideals are “very specifically those of a firmly secular, highly assimilated person of Jewish-diaspora descent,” these same identity and ideals depend “on an intimate loathing of Judaism as a religion.” For her, the “unthinkable” of this “too unstructurable and ungroundable set of issues . . . feels like the very Abject.” In a fascinating analysis of the ways in which her Jewishness has “always been defined through contradictions,” Annette Kolodny recalls her grandfather taking her to an Orthodox synagogue on High Holy Days, at the same time teaching her that “religion was the opiate of the masses”: “It wasn’t until I was in my teens,” Kolodny wryly admits, “that I realized the statement . . . wasn’t an original insight of my grandfather’s.”

Significantly, Kolodny and her beloved grandfather stopped going to temple when she reached puberty and would have been segregated from the men in an upstairs women’s section of the synagogue: “We rejected my rejection, together,” she writes. Less fortunate in this respect, Florence
Howe—recalling her childhood education in Hebrew and Yiddish from a “Zaida” who feared he was “wasting” his time on a girl—summarized “the lesson that orthodox Jewry had taught me”: “there are rewards for good women students, but to get them they must keep their place. Education prepares women well for submission or stupidity.” Just as ambivalent about Judaism as Kolodny and Howe, Alicia Ostricker, who terms her grandparents, her parents, and herself “socialist Jews” and “atheists,” begins a meditation entitled “Entering the Tents” with the sentence “I am and am not a Jew” and later in it elaborates:

Published in 1989, this piece would have been inconceivable earlier when she was working on Writing Like a Woman and Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America, paradoxically at least in part because the problem it addresses (women’s marginality in Judaism) had made Judaism seem marginal to Ostricker’s feminism.

Similarly, when Sandra Gilbert and I found in Lilith the prototypical madwoman in the attic, I remained almost willfully ignorant of any connection that might have existed between our ideas and those that began appearing in Lilith: The Jewish Women’s Magazine. Like the rebel Lilith, defiantly inhabiting a liminal zone outside the Jewish community and like the disobedient, stiff-necked Jews who had escaped Egyptian pursuit only to find themselves in the wilderness unable to drink the bitter waters, many scholars in the so-called second wave of feminism felt themselves embittered, hopeless about receiving spiritual sustenance suited to our desires. In our revulsion against “the terrible past” and “in the bitterness of youth,” we could only forget, deny, distance ourselves; yet, as Rich intimated in one of her poems about being split at the root, for some there may have been an awareness even then that such denial was an aspect of “the task of being ourselves,” a task that would eventually require or enable us to heed her prayer: “May the taste of honey linger / Under the bitterest tongue.”

The Second Seder

By the mid-eighties, my family and friends sat down to the Seder with a mimeographed, revised Haggadah at each place setting and with kepot (no
longer called yarmulkes) available for female as well as male heads. Actually, I was far too dispirited to create such a liturgy. We owed it to our Catholic friend, Mary Jo Weaver, who was wrestling with her own recalcitrant tradition and who had adopted the girls as her honorary nieces, thereby rather bizarrely taking responsibility for their further induction into their own heritage. Say it was 1986: Molly, getting ready for her bat mitzvah, had searched through the Torah for a nonsexist portion and was learning to read her passage in Hebrew, although the visiting student Rabbi had refused to change gender-specific pronouns in the translation, prohibited Mary Jo from participating in the service, and discouraged Simone from performing a cello solo at the service; Shabbat was a day of rest and no amount of argument would persuade him that music was played, not worked. The youngest child and therefore the one who was supposed to ask the four questions, Simone had found some time earlier that her most disturbing questions—whether people could be counted on to die in their birth order, whether they could find each other after death—remained unanswered at temple, so she overslept most Sundays and now scornfully let her older sister recite her part.

Many xeroxed Haggadahs like ours exist and quite a few have been privately circulated or published. They celebrate the Kiddush and the Washing of the Hands by calling on Shechina—the female aspect of divinity—as a “Presence, Source of Life.” The four questions are asked by daughters now, not sons. The story of the liberation from Egypt includes legends about the prophecies of Miriam, the savior of Moses, as well as accounts of the heroism of the two midwives Shiphrah and Puah (both of whom refused to obey Pharaoh’s command to kill male babies) and of the Pharaoh’s daughter (who circumvented her father’s law by adopting Moses). We named the plagues in sorrow over the pain that exists in the world, sprinkling wine on our plates to diminish Egyptian suffering, and consecrated sips from our cups to those strangers in many lands who suffer the grief of oppression. “This year we are slaves,” all at the table proclaimed at the blessing of the matzah, “but next year we shall be free women and men.” We opened the door for Miriam and filled a cup of wine in her name to commemorate the joyous dance with tambourines she performed in the desert with other women. When we made the bittersweet Hillel sandwich with maror and kharoset, we recalled that Hillel had asked, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”

What did it mean to read the Passover story in relation to the injunction “In every generation it is the duty of each woman to consider herself as if she had come forth from Egypt”? My Sabbath goy, my schiksa friend, had reproduced from a feminist Haggadah a passage entitled “Remember-
ing” about Pesach in 5703 (1943) when the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto began. “Blessed is the heart with strength to stop its beating for honor’s sake”: a poem by Hannah Senesh, a resistance fighter, was accompanied by an account of her tragic dilemma. Her mother would be killed by the Nazis if Hannah did not reveal the names of other members in the movement, but Hannah knew she could not betray the resistance. Her mother replied that by not informing, Hannah proved her love. Though seated at the head of the table (I was supposed to be in charge), I found my eyes filling with tears, unable to read the words on the page. “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?”

My husband’s family was from Russia and Poland, mine from Germany. We were both first-generation Americans, but his parents had arrived right after the First World War while mine had miraculously come forth on the brink of the Second, only some four decades ago, just a few years before my birth. In fact, my mother’s father was drafted as a doctor in the Great War on the German side—I had a photo of him in uniform and on horseback to prove it—and during the Depression my father had recited the poetry of Heine to himself when he was sent with bushels of money to buy an apple at the market in Hamburg. Only later did those who were able to leave disperse: to Israel, to England, to Central and South America, to New York.

“Das einzige amerikanische Kind,” the only American-born child, I was not to dwell on these uncertainties. Instead I was supposed to be happy, have fun, live the normal life the others had abandoned, remain mystified by the German spoken only when the kids were not meant to understand. Along with German culture and their history and their property and, most of all, the community of each other, the immigrants in my family relinquished what little faith they had. “Quatsch,” my father would call Judaism. Rot. Nonsense. Yet my mother had seen to it that both her German-born child and her American-born child received at least a minimal education in a Reform congregation so we would “know what it means to be Jewish.”

They were not exactly “survivors” because they had not been incarcerated in the concentration camps. Yet like many survivors, they and the tiny circle of relatives in our vicinity would never again be the people they had been. First hiring herself out as a maid and then keeping house and sewing gloves until midnight to sell to visiting customers and neighborhood stores, my mother mourned her youthful ambitions for college in Nuremberg. Hammering out dents in the fenders of cars, my father never worked less than nine hours a day, six days a week, haunted by the deaths of the parents he had left behind, his abrupt descent into the
working class, his inability to attain in English the fluency he had enjoyed in *Hoch-deutsch*.

The atmosphere of dread and humiliation, of grueling work and social isolation, made itself palpable on their hands—in the dark, dead callus from a crochet hook in my mother's palm; in the tenacious dirt beneath my father's scrubbed fingernails. "*Alt und arm und krank und Jude, ein viefach Elend!*"—a variant of Heine's line, the source of the inscription on the Jewish hospital in Hamburg where my brother had been born—became their self-mocking motto: "old and poor and sick and Jewish, a fourfold misery." During the McCarthy hearings, my parents intently watched the television screen to see if "it" would happen again, but the fragmentary, allusive stories they rarely recounted to my brother and me left us mystified about what had actually happened to grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. We were our parents' hope, just as they had been their family's and Molly and Simone were mine. Yet, as one scholar of the Holocaust has put it, "a resurrected hope is not like a hope that never died."21

When the murder of Jews became national policy in the homeland of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, when the "Aryan\"/"non-Aryan\" polarity organized a great divide into which all Jews were to be thrown and, dead or alive, buried, many people besides my father believed themselves to be witnessing what Martin Buber called the "eclipse of the light of heaven, eclipse of God." But for my parents, as for many other highly assimilated European Jews, a shattered faith in a religion that had never really shaped their imaginative or practical lives was itself eclipsed by a shattered faith in virtually any social group or political party or economic coalition or geographic assembly or national identity. What trust they had left they placed in relatives and close friends, personal ties that had provided the tenuous, fragile umbilical cord to a new world, which they inhabited warily.

Reading from the feminist *Haggadah* about the egg, hard-boiled to signify how an oppressed people harden (their resolve? their hands? their hearts?) under slavery, I began to decipher in my own commitment to feminism a response, if not to Judaism, then to Jewish experience, which turned out also to inform the feminist criticism of many contemporaries. While we had documented the influence of Civil Rights on the women's liberation movement, we never understood the impact of our own past. Despite the antagonisms between Judaism and the women's movement, Jewish history may have served as a leavening for the second wave of American feminism, especially in the academy.

Clearly, those of us who grew up Jewish during the postwar years inherited a distrust of public authority and a reliance on private bonds that anticipate the feminist imperative to interrogate (male) institutions of authority and to valorize (female) networks of reciprocity. Just as important,
we had been served up a monitory lesson about conformity and acquiescence: living through debates over the immorality of “blaming the victim,” we nevertheless harbored some suspicions about a generation of adults blind to the writing on the wall because of their belief that they had integrated successfully into mainstream European culture. These were suspicions that I, for one, was discouraged from expressing, but they nevertheless persisted. Why hadn’t our parents left earlier, organized more effectively, saved their families? Or if they had to remain in Europe, why did their survival depend on risky evasions, tenuous lies, grievous sacrifices?

Typical of the children hidden from the Nazis, Susan Suleiman, provided with false papers, a false name, and a false faith during her escape from occupied Budapest, attributes to her wartime “adventure” a lapse in memory and a reconceptualization of history: after the time spent hiding out in the countryside, “I could not remember my name,” she explains, and she began to think “of history as a form of luck.”

Typical of the children brought up by parents who fled Europe, Naomi Schor finds her Jewishness “bound up with the Holocaust”: “when I was a teenager I thought I was Anne Frank,” she explains; “Her diary probably had a more profound impact on me and my sense as a subject of writing (as well as history) than any other book I read during adolescence.” Typical of the children brought up by American-born parents, Andrea Dworkin recalls “the first time” the “earth moved” for her when, at ten years of age, she visited a “shaking, crying, screaming, vomiting” cousin caught in the vise of a terrible anniversary, the month “her youngest sister had been killed in front of her, another sister’s infant had died a terrible death, their heads had been shaved. . . .” In multiple ways, what our Jewish backgrounds foregrounded was the problematics of hyphenated identities—German-Jewish, Polish-Jewish, Hungarian-Jewish—or, to put it another way, the dangers of difference. Repositories of otherness, many Jews in European history had been forced to dramatize for the entire world the deathly double bind of integration and separatism when played out within a hostile dominant culture, the stranglehold of anti-Semitic stereotyping that could not fail to produce hatred as well as self-hatred.

Of course, precisely the category of alterity and the consequences of its attendant stereotypes form the basis for feminist investigations of women’s situations in male-dominated societies. Beginning with an analysis of woman as other, two stages in feminist literary criticism developed to examine, first, the ways in which misogyny generates disabling engendered images, which operate to silence, marginalize, or demean women, and, second, the strategies by which female aesthetic traditions provide unique tropes empowering women’s efforts to escape a secondary, subordinated, or self-subverting position. More recently, in a logically inevitable phase in-
augurated by postmodernist theorists as well as by scholars of African-American and Gay Studies, both the “ghettoization” of women’s worlds or works and the “universalizing” of generalizations about them have become suspect, for such critical moves could reinstate debilitating stereotypes or might naively discount differences among women or could underplay the significance of the interactions of men and women in particular historical, aesthetic, or ethnic contexts. Even in this third stage, however, the project has continued to depend on refuting what Elaine Showalter defined as the prefeminist “assimilationist” position taken by women writers, namely the view that their achievements—being “as good” as those produced by men—should be judged as qualitatively not different from those created by men.

Both the category of “other” and the repudiation of “assimilation” depended on insights not only achieved directly after the Second World War but also framed in the context of the history of anti-Semitism. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), which introduced the crucial notion of female alterity, evolved out of her work in the French Resistance and negotiated between, on the one hand, her assertion that “the biological and social sciences no longer admit the existence of unchangeably fixed entities that determine given characteristics, such as those ascribed to woman, the Jew, or the Negro” and, on the other, her belief that “to decline to accept such notions as the eternal feminine, the black soul, the Jewish character, is not to deny that Jews, Negroes, women exist today—this denial does not represent a liberation for those concerned, but rather a flight from reality.” Even more pointedly, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) relied on a comparison between the housewife in the home and the prisoner in a concentration camp: in a chapter that alludes to Bruno Bettelheim’s work on the “zombies” who inhabited Nazi camps, Friedan argued that “the comfortable concentration camp that American women have walked into, or have been talked into by others, is . . . a frame of reference that denies woman’s adult human identity.”

Similarly, exploring Hitler’s assertion in his 1934 Nuremberg speech that “woman’s emancipation is a message discovered solely by the Jewish intellect,” Kate Millett argued in *Sexual Politics* (1969) that “as in the case of the Jews (why persecute your finest talents?) the Nazi method with [gentile] women was hardly practical,” and she therefore interpreted sexual politics as an ideology that shapes all psychological and emotional facets of existence, rather than an isolatable political or economic phenomenon.

No wonder, then, that Naomi Weisstein’s touchstone essay elaborating the ways in which “psychology constructs the female” was resonantly titled “‘Kinder, Küche, Kirche’ As Scientific Law” (1969). As disturbing as the metaphorical conflation of woman and Jew has become for Holocaust his-
torsians, it continued to play a crucial role in the influential poetry of Sylvia Plath, whose ferocious curses against “Herr God, Herr Lucifer” and the man with “a Meinkampf look” were articulated by means of her adoption of a Jewish mask that bespoke a sense of herself as a displaced, doomed victim.30

Behind the project of many feminist critics, propelling or motivating it, resides a distrust in official authority that can sometimes be traced back biographically to Jewish roots. Explaining her personal suspicions inside and outside the academy, Annette Kolodny remarks, “Somewhere lurking in my responses to everyone I meet is the unarticulated question, ‘Would you hide me?’” According to Nina Auerbach, “the Holocaust and the blacklist were twin specters” of a youth in which she “grew up mistrusting society in general. . . . Official authority has always looked stupid and menacing. . . . I associate this sense of exile, mistrust, and damn-the-consequences pride in integrity with Judaism.” Jane Gallop believes that Jewishness bequeathed “a ‘negative’ identity” of being “set apart from a larger culture.” Her sense of herself as “an internal alien within American (Christian) culture”—“being proudly not-Christian”—has “analogies in my theoretical positions and in my implicit definition of woman as proudly not a man.” Naming this sense of being set apart “productive alienation,” Judith Frank explains that her own estrangement from Judaism does not stop her from feeling in certain spaces like Woody Allen in Annie Hall when he imagines himself as a hasid at the dinner table of Annie’s aggressively gentile family.31

Rarely do the critics I have mentioned present themselves professionally as representing a Jewish community, and not a few would disclaim the association entirely.32 Lillian Robinson, for example, came from a “free-thinking” family whose “lexicon in the matter of the Jewish religion ran the gamut from ‘fanatic’ . . . to ‘hypocrite.’” Yet this “free-thinking tradition” trained her “to treat the very idea of a sacred text skeptically, which is a pretty good beginning for someone seeking to expand and enrich the literary canon.” Similarly, Nancy K. Miller admits that she “does not always want to speak ‘as a Jew’”; however, she concedes that “being both Jewish and a feminist is a crucial, even constitutive piece of my self-consciousness as a writer.”33 Privately, she has explained that in her New York childhood “most everyone I knew was Jewish and yet the world seemed divided into who was and wasn’t. (Perhaps this crucial division of the world into two was what predisposed me both to feminism and to structuralism).”

Miller’s reference to structuralism, as well as her sense that “most everyone I knew was Jewish,” should remind us of the general influx of Jews into American, English, and Comparative Literature during the postwar years.
Like Leslie Fiedler and George Steiner, Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Hartman, some of these contemporary scholars are religiously observant or flauntingly ethnic, while others are self-confessed "terminal Jews," to use Fiedler's phrase for those with whom Jewish tradition dead-ends.34 Clearly sharing a devotion to the book, which may have been fostered by a religion based on reading, interpreting, blessing, kissing, and parading classical Jewish texts, as well as an absorption with what Steiner calls "the unhousing" of language, many have extrapolated a career in letters from their own complex relationship to, say, German or Hebrew or Yiddish or Ladino or, for that matter, English.35 Obviously, too, the orientation toward education in Jewish culture brought many Jews into the academy.

For Jewish daughters during the postwar years, teaching in the humanities became a viable means of advancement into the American middle class since training in medicine, science, and law was generally assumed to be the prerogative of their brothers. For Jewish daughters of Eastern European background, a division of labor that defined men's spiritual role as intellectual and women's secular job as providing the material conditions to make men's holy work possible helps contextualize a paradox that may have shaped the evolution of a generation of feminist scholars: on the one hand, the strength and success of Jewish female immigrants—mothers and grandmothers—and, on the other, their exclusion from the intellectual fruits of their labor.

For many feminist critics, moreover, Jewish devotion to the text and to education has been supplemented by the equally long history in Judaism of a strong commitment to each individual's social responsibility. Indeed, precisely what Judith Gardiner considers the "habit" of "fighting for social justice," what Rachel Brownstein refers to as being "by definition and by blood on the side of the oppressed," reflects the ethical teachings of Judaism that insist upon personal responsibility for acting justly in this world. Annette Kolodny therefore attributes her own "powerful sense of wanting to live in a just universe," as well as her "passionate moral outrage at injustice," to Judaism. Similarly, Elizabeth Abel, considering a Jewish inheritance "deeply intertwined with the labor movement," sees her own feminism as "in part the extension of a political perspective that had to do less with thinking of myself as Jew than with thinking of myself as positioned by my [Jewish] heritage already on the left." Exactly such concern about political and social justice would underscore the exclusion of women from, in Alicia Ostriker's words, the "questions and answers twining minutely like vines around the living Word."

The jarring contradiction between women's liminality in Judaism and the lesson of, say, Passover—"You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the..."
land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9)—may have spawned not only the feminist movement in Judaism but also feminist scholarship and even feminism itself: not only the work of Adler, Ozick, and Plaskow, but also that of Bella Abzug, Shulamith Firestone, and Gloria Steinem as well as Blanche Wiesen Cook, Natalie Davis, Estelle Freedman, Linda Gordon, Ruth Rosen, etc. . . . Thus, according to Naomi Schor, though the “rush” to establish “ethnic credentials” after “years of assimilation” seems “spurious and opportunistic,” a pattern of “working on the underdog (aesthetically), the victim,” is “connect[ed] to being Jewish.”

At the same time, these jostling terms—“credentials” and “assimilation,” “victim” and “Jewish”—raise issues related to what Nancy Miller calls “the shifting line between the poignancy of self-representation and the didactics of representativity.” Her insight reminds us that the tensions between Judaism and feminism result in an acute awareness of the interlocutionary setting within which language reverberates, the atmospheric change that accompanies the shift from “I am” to “You are” syntax. In the mid-eighties, two incidents jolted me into the realization that, regardless of any personal disavowals, others would embed me in the history I was only just beginning to comprehend. First, at a retreat for American and Continental feminists in upstate New York, a participant from Amsterdam turned to me and cheerfully, even benevolently, remarked, “Your type doesn’t exist any more in Europe.” Then, several years later at a speaking engagement in London, an audience member waiting behind me in line at the drinking fountain commented with some astonishment, “I didn’t know you weren’t Caucasian.” Despite Sandra Gilbert’s subsequent and hilarious etymological riffs on the terms “type” and “Caucasian,” we were both struck by how “You are” sentences inundate “I am” sentiments.

“Why did he call me a keek?” Simone asked about a hostile paper boy. “He meant kike,” I explained, wondering again about what Miller calls “the didactics of representativity.” Or “How could she say that in front of me? ‘Jew him down . . . I’ll just Jew him down?’”—a phrase, used by a respected, devoted music teacher, that clearly outraged Molly. Had I too quickly rejected as indulgently poignant a self-representation that might have seemed credentializing? If my earlier feminist reaction to the Hag-gadah involved me in worries about reclaiming what has wounded the imagination, now I wondered about the effects of disclaiming such traditions altogether.

Couldn’t the idea of chosenness be interpreted as a safeguard, a warrant—complete with rights and responsibilities—for survival under hostile circumstances? Given the history of the Holocaust, how can one deny the need for a safe place for Jews, a refuge from the wilderness? What does it mean to suggest that Judaism is so constituted as to silence or marginalize
women, when Jewish mothers and their children were criminalized and murdered as non-Aryans? And if Jewish feminists had been in the vanguard of deconstructing patriarchal authority, couldn’t it be said that they did so precisely because they saw—stamped on the bodies and minds and spirits of their fathers—the disabling effect of marginalization, dislocation, and emasculation on men? In her verse sequence Sources, Rich writes, “I saw the power and arrogance of the male as your true watermark; I did not see beneath it the suffering of the Jew.”38 But it may have been precisely the unnerving mixture of arrogance and suffering in Jewish history that enabled a generation of us to see in the figure Sandra Gilbert and I have called the “no man” a shadow of ourselves, the root of our bitterness but also, paradoxically abiding in a memory straining against the impulse to forget, the sweet anticipation of a hope resurrected.39

The Third Seder

The third Seder is always in the future, or so it seems to me. Yet, marking solidarity with the dead, it brings the past into the present. How odd that this time—the late eighties, the early nineties—has been transformed by the courageous tenacity of Jewish women more religiously observant than anyone sitting around my dining room table.40 A microcosm of sorts, Bloomington’s congregation Beth Shalom, house of peace, now has as a resident rabbi a feminist named Joan Friedman whose cantor, Deborah Gordon, serves as Simone’s tutor for a bat mitzvah preceded by a Mozart trio and centered on her chanting of the Torah portion. Although Simone may harbor private doubts about death-order and death-loneliness, she has been attracted back to Judaism by the neat rankings of the degrees of tzedakah (charity) enumerated by Maimonides, a fitting conversion for a daughter of the commandments (a bat mitzvah). When Molly is called up after my mother to recite the blessings, to receive an aliyah, and when Mary Jo appears on the bema to hold the scroll, we are looking at a community of women who have passed over the resentments of contradictions and tensions not so much through resolution or transcendence but by dwelling within them in a postmodernist collage that resembles nothing so much as the Jewish heritage itself. No doubt Passover, too, will become such a collection of competing, checkered, even incongruous rituals dedicated to marking loss in the past, renewal in the future.

Pointless to ask if we have adulterated the tradition to such an extent that we have lost touch with Jewish roots, for both the Passover meal and the bat mitzvah are paradoxically more conventional than the Reform equivalents with which I had grown up. Nevertheless, our participation—
as well as this sort of writing about it—does pose problems related, at worst, to political correctness and, at best, to ethical insensitivity. Does a return to even a modified form of Judaism involve substituting the metaphysics of identity for the materiality of history and thereby capitulating to a faddish, retrograde identity politics, as Jenny Bourne has recently charged?: has "What is to be done?" been replaced by "Who am I?"41 In our efforts to examine the dynamics of anti-Semitism, have Jewish women been guilty of eliding the differences between our history of oppression and that of other peoples and in the process eclipsing the struggles of those others? Or, worse yet from some points of view, in our appreciation of the need for Israel as a Jewish refuge from anti-Semitism, have we ignored, again in Bourne's terms, "the exclusionist basis of Zionism and the racist practices of Israel"?42 American and Israeli racism both have been used recently to qualify the trajectory traced here, a progress admittedly eccentric and consciously meant as nonteleological, for many have traveled between its two poles in an opposite direction from mine and still others continue to oscillate between them.

To take the charge of American racism first, clearly all claims about parallel oppression threaten to involve Jews and women of color in a "competition of victimization" that can only trivialize the complexities posed by two quite distinct histories.43 Indeed, any equation of anti-Semitism and the persecution of African Americans could be said to backfire against Jewish and African-American proponents, with the former committed to resisting analogies to the Holocaust, which rob that event of its catastrophic singularity as a rupturing of civilization, and the latter dedicated to redressing a grievous inheritance of slavery and colonialism, which continues to deny black people economic, political, educational, and social equality. Yet such analogies have always haunted the women's movement, dating back to the writings of Margaret Fuller and Olive Schreiner in the nineteenth century and forward to the crucial scholarly work on African-American culture done by such historians and literary critics as Gerda Lerner, Florence Howe, and Elizabeth Abel, many of whom resemble Lillian Robinson in her attributing a commitment to multiculturalism to an "awareness of the existence of anti-Semitism as a form of racism."44 Abel, confronting the "problematic displacement of [her] Jewishness," describes a preference for dealing with "other, more unambiguously virulent forms of racism than with . . . anti-Semitism." Rather than allowing our attempts to deal with our various backgrounds and allegiances to splinter the feminist movement, she tries to keep in focus the problems and ambiguities of cross-racial, cross-cultural identifications.

Has so-called "Holocaust blackmail"—the justification of Israeli actions on the basis of a history of genocide—led us to defend the indefensible
sexism, homophobia, and imperialism of the Israeli government? Here one can only point to a chorus of voices—including those of Grace Paley, Evelyn Torton Beck, Elly Bulkin, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Irena Klepfisz, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, and many others publishing in the new *Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends*—that addresses, first, the necessity of distinguishing between the various populations of Israel and a government that too often speaks in the cadences of the Maxwell House God, and, second, the need to support Palestinian and Israeli peace activists, whose efforts are dedicated to the proposition that military occupation cannot be countenanced as a safeguard against past or present anti-Semitism.45 Although we (Jews safe in America) have been taught that only the Jews in Israel will suffer the consequences of a rash trust in Arab coalitions proven capable of terrorism or dedicated to the elimination of Jewry, we (Americans who may need someday to find refuge in a Jewish homeland) have also been admonished to accept our responsibilities to Israel. Since we are deeply implicated in Israeli policy, in the eyes of others and in our own eyes, what is to be done except to translate our personal efforts to negotiate between rivalrous commitments into an admittedly controversial politics of cooperation that respects differences; for anything else constitutes a diminishment or, as our own history shows us, a tragic loss. Yet, as Judith Gardiner points out, such a stance will “involve us in difficult controversies . . . with members of our own families and communities as well as with segments of Israeli opinion.”

Writing about the loss of Jewish lives in her own time, Muriel Rukeyser mourned the double bind posed by European history:

To be a Jew in the twentieth century
Is to be offered a gift. If you refuse,
Wishing to be invisible, you choose
Death of the spirit, the stone insanity.
Accepting, take full life. Full agonies:
Your evening deep in labyrinthine blood
Of those who resist, fail, and resist; and God
Reduced to a hostage among hostages.46

Poised between “death of the spirit, the stone insanity” and the “full agonies” of “labyrinthine blood,” throughout her life Rukeyser herself chose to associate with resistance, failure, and resistance again. Today, at least in part because of the existence of Israel, we Jews need not choose “the stone insanity,” for like Moses wandering in the wilderness, we can find nourishment in the desert, suckling “honey from the rock.”47 Yet, unless we too align ourselves with those who resist, fail, and resist again, the gift will be
poisoned by an "evening deep in laybrinthine blood" and by the bitterness of those to whom we deny full humanity, thereby dehumanizing ourselves.

Blood on the lintel, a signpost to stay destruction, the blood of a sacrificed lamb to save the blood of a child. Will the ceremonies of innocence at Pesach be drowned each year in a doomed sense of bad faith, inauthenticity, ignorance, and anger? Or will we continue to eat the bread of distress, hoping that—bitter with maror, sweet with kharoset—it will speak to the bittersweet experience of those who have come to hunger for coexistence between feminism and Judaism, between women and men, between Jew and Gentile, between Palestinian and Israeli? When the hidden piece of matzah is found by the child, should the broken afikomen fit like a jigsaw puzzle piece into the other half of matzah on the Seder plate, could we almost taste a spring in which kindness endures forever? Or is the concealed afikomen called tzafoon (that which is hidden) because such a consummation always eludes us?

NOTES

This essay is dedicated to my dear friend Mary Jo Weaver. It was originally written for and will eventually appear in Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky and Shelley Fisher Fishkin's Re-Configuring Jewish-American Identity: Literary and Cultural Essays in an Autobiographical Mode (forthcoming from the University of Wisconsin Press). I have received helpful suggestions and encouragement not only from Mary Jo Weaver, Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, and Shelley Fisher Fishkin but also from Luise David, Sandra M. Gilbert, Molly and Simone Gubar, and Donald Gray.

1 The Passover Haggadah, Deluxe Edition, Compliments of the Coffees of Maxwell House (New York: General Foods Corporation, 1964), has been used for many years by many synagogues and families. According to Burton L. Visotsky, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, "Maxwell House has probably done more to codify Jewish liturgy than any force in history," in Allen R. Myerson, "Editions of the Passover Tale: This Year in Profusion," New York Times, 4 April 1993, Sec. 4, pp. 14-15. Subsequent references to the Maxwell House Passover Haggadah will be cited parenthetically in the text.

2 Judith Fetterley, The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. xx–xxii. My learned colleague Alvin Rosenfeld has pointed out to me that my phrase "Jewish non-Jew" deviates from Isaac Deutscher's "non-Jewish Jew"; however, I have kept it here to emphasize through the adjectival an inescapable history, not an acclaimed identity.


4 Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halakhah and the Jewish
Woman,” in On Being A Jewish Feminist, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Schoc-

5 Cynthia Ozick, “Notes toward Finding the Right Question,” in On Being A
Jewish Feminist, pp. 125, 150.

6 Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective

7 See, for example, Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, The
Jewish Woman in America (New York: New American Library, 1976); and Elizabeth
Koltun, ed., The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives (New York: Schocken Books,
1976). Many of the authors included in these anthologies and in On Being a Jewish
Feminist discuss exclusionary aspects of Judaism: the partition separating women
from men in the synagogue, for example; the prohibiting of women from saying
Kaddish at the grave; the injunction of kol ishah, whereby a female singing voice is
considered sexually arousing to men and thereby forbidden in worship; and perhaps
most alarmingly, the discussion in Talmudic Tractate Ketubot of whether a woman
should be considered a virgin for the purposes of her marriage contract if a man had
intercourse with her when she was under three years old.

Others examine disturbing Torah passages: the episode in which two strange
men under threat of sexual molestation by the male inhabitants of Sodom are
offered by Lot his two virgin daughters (Genesis 18:4–8); the law that a jealous
husband who suspects his wife “has defiled herself” may require a priest to adminis-
ter “the water of bitterness”—sacral water mixed with earth from the floor of the
Tabernacle—that will distend her belly and make her “a curse among her people,”
unless she miraculously remains unharmed, thereby proving her innocence (Num-
bers 5:11–28); the description of the war with the Midianites, in which the Israe-
lites’ booty amounts to “675,000 sheep, 72,000 head of cattle, 61,000 asses, and a
total of 32,000 human beings, namely, the women who had not had carnal rela-
tions” (Numbers 31:32–35). Such texts deny women full humanity, although (as
Alvin Rosenfeld has pointed out to me) any interpretation of them as constituting
Jewish thought omits the entire corpus of the oral Torah.

More recently, Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish, ed. Christie
Balka and Andy Rose (Boston: Beacon, 1989), provides crucial insights on the
contradictions between Jewish traditions and homosexual existence, as does Eve
Kosofsky Sedgwick in Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California
Press, 1990), pp. 75–82.

8 Robin Morgan, ed., Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the

9 At the time, at least one commentator noticed the disparity between the
number of Jewish feminist critics studying literature and the paucity of Jewish
women writers: see Carole Zonis Yee, “Why Aren’t We Writing About Ourselves?”
in Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, ed. Susan Koppelman Cor-
131–34. Lillian Robinson has pointed out to me that “the cover of Showalter’s The
New Feminist Criticism, where your collaborator is the only gentile on the list, is an
especially striking example” of how many feminist critics are Jewish. She adds that
“another cover, this one listing the five co-authors of Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe, includes four Jewish women and one gentile. (It may be of some sociological interest that the four Jews are named DuBois, Kelly, Kennedy, and Robinson, and the only gentile, Carolyn Korsmeyer, is married to [a Jewish scholar].)”


11 In an eccentric and nonscientific manner, my questionnaire went out to feminist critics who had not established their professional identities on any Jewish scholarly subject. I am grateful throughout this essay for the wonderful responses sent to me by Elizabeth Abel, Nina Auerbach, Rachel Brownstein, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Judith Frank, Jane Gallop, Judith Kegan Gardiner, Annette Kolodny, Nancy K. Miller, Alicia Ostriker, Adrienne Rich, Lillian Robinson, Naomi Schor, Susan Suleiman, and several respondents who wished to remain unnamed. Subsequent references to these critics not otherwise cited are from the questionnaire.


13 Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Reinventing Womanhood (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 23. Earlier in this essay, Heilbrun admits that “having been a Jew had made me an outsider. It had permitted me to be a feminist,” but she goes on to explain that “if Jews were outsiders, women were outsiders among Jews” (pp. 20–21).

14 Judith Kegan Gardiner, who grew up in Chicago, writes that “my father used to tell me bedtime stories about Freudian theory.”


19 This is one of many themes running through Helen Epstein’s excellent book Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors (New York: Putnam, 1979).

20 It was not until reading Sander Gilman that I knew this phrase to come from Heine’s “The New Jewish Hospital in Hamburg” (composed in 1842):
A hospital for poor, sick Jews, for people afflicted with threefold misery, with three evil maladies; poverty, physical pain, and Jewishness.

The last named is the worst of all the three: the thousand-year-old family complaint, the plague they dragged with them from the Nile valley, the unhealthy faith from ancient Egypt.

Incurable, profound suffering! No help can be looked for from steam-baths, showerbaths, or all the implements of surgery, or all the medicines which this house offers its sick inmates.


26 Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. xiv. Also see pp. 118–19: "Just as in America there is no Negro problem, but rather a white problem, just as 'anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem; it is our problem'; so the woman problem has always been a man's problem."


31 Judith Frank, who describes herself as "bitter" about Judaism and Israeli culture, explains that this feeling of being identifiable as a Jew in a gentile context "gives me a certain amount of wry pleasure, but also a certain belligerence about my style of talking and arguing: I'm prone to a kind of aggressiveness, even vulgarity, when speaking among my genteel colleagues."

32 In other words, I did not send my questionnaire out to self-identified Jewish


36 Esther Ticktin proposes a “new halakhah” on the basis of this Exodus text; see “A Modest Beginning,” in *The Jewish Woman*, ed. Koltun, pp. 129–35.

37 Miller, *Getting Personal*, p. 95.


39 Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988 and 1989); see especially Volume 1: *The War of the Words*, pp. 43–53, and Volume 2: *Sexchanges*, pp. 258–69. The “no man” made impotent by, say, the Great War cannot, of course, be equated with Jewish men’s experience during the Holocaust; however, the crisis of virility Sandra Gilbert and I study in relation to modernism clearly shaped Jewish history throughout the late thirties and forties.

40 Kaye/Kantrowitz, Klepfisz, and Grace Paley make a similar point in “An Interview with Grace Paley,” in *The Tribe of Dina*, p. 329.


43 See Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1988) for extended analyses of “competition for victim status” and “oppression privilege” (pp. 75, 99). About the “relative silence among Jewish feminists about Jewish oppression,” Bulkin argues it must be seen in the context of self-hatred or assimilation, both of which define “any visible Jewish presence as ‘too much’” (p. 145).

44 Elizabeth Abel explains, “I do think that my current attraction to black women’s writing is shaped by my Jewishness; there’s some identification at work here that’s only starting to become clear to me.” When Toni Morrison dedicated her novel about slavery, *Beloved* (1987), to “Sixty Million and More,” she implicitly compared the loss of six million Jews in Germany to the annihilation of African Americans in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America.

45 See Klepfisz, “Yom Hashoah, Yom Yerushalayim: A Meditation,” in *Nice Jewish Girls*, ed. Beck, pp. 260–85. I am indebted to Adrienne Rich for sending me several copies of *Bridges*, which is published by New Jewish Agenda and which is committed to combining “the traditional Jewish values of justice and repair of the world
with insights honed by the feminist, lesbian and gay movements" (Editorial Mission statement).
