

Justice You Shall Pursue: Jewish American Pragmatism

by

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Abstract

Pragmatist thinkers like Jane Addams, W.E.B. Du Bois, and John Dewey advocated for greater inclusivity in our democracy, urging Americans to an understanding of democracy as process. Nevertheless, pragmatist philosophy has sometimes been accused by critics and adherents alike of being insufficiently political, particularly where racism is concerned (West 1989, Hart 2006, Muyumba 2009). While some scholarly work has identified and traced an African American pragmatist lineage (Posnock 1998, Glaude 2010), pragmatism is still largely associated with white male philosophy, considering that the most well-known pragmatist figures—C.S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey—were all white men. However, scholarship to date has not addressed the central question of pragmatism’s political power, particularly regarding social justice. My project, *Justice You Shall Pursue: Jewish American Pragmatism*, remedies this gap by analyzing the socially and politically conscious impact of Jewish writers and thinkers on the development of American pragmatism.

Chapter 1 identifies two major concerns of twentieth century Jewish pragmatists: a developing Jewish identity politics in the first half of the century and calls for inclusive democracy in the latter part of the century. Chapter 2 explores politics of feeling in the work of Gertrude Stein and Anzia Yezierska, which contributes to an evolving discussion of identity as essentialist vs. constructed in the early part of the twentieth century by suggesting that neither viewpoint is wholly accurate. Chapter 3 details the post-Holocaust focus of Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick on Jewish dignity and collective Jewish responsibility as well as Ozick’s push

for Jewish identification over assimilation. Finally, Chapter 4 discusses the Deweyan democratic visions of Malamud, Grace Paley, and Tony Kushner, who champion the cause of a more inclusive democratic community in their work. I conclude that, like African American pragmatism, Jewish pragmatism maintains a focus on social justice as central to democratic progress, and I propose additional areas of research for reading other multicultural writers using pragmatist philosophy. Far from being politically powerless as some critics have claimed, my research reveals that pragmatism is politically active when engaged by marginalized groups, which demonstrates the importance of both Jewish and African American (as well as other multicultural) writers to the continued development of historically white-centered theory.

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Introduction: Another Pragmatism

In his 1998 book *Color and Culture*, Ross Posnock hailed what he saw as “the current decline of identity politics.”¹ As I write, in the wake of the 2016 election, it seems that not only has identity politics *not* declined since Posnock’s book was published, but Americans of all colors and creeds appear to have doubled down on identity politics, resulting in both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, there have been more calls for multiculturalism in terms of representation in the academy and greater diversity in race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity in film and on television. On the other hand, this doubling down has simultaneously resulted in the election to the presidency of an unstable demagogue with no prior political experience who rose to the top on a platform of white (supremacist) identity politics. In a *New York Times* op-ed column published shortly after the 2016 election, Columbia professor Mark Lilla argues in favor of “a post-identity liberalism,”² pointing out that the decades-old liberal tactic of focusing on identity politics has “encouraged white, rural, religious Americans to think of themselves as a disadvantaged group whose identity is being threatened or ignored.”³ Recent research supports Lilla’s conclusion about the beliefs of white Americans. For example, in 2011, Michael Norton and Samuel Sommers found that many white people in the U.S. view racism as a zero-sum game in which “decreases in perceived anti-Black racism over the past six decades [are] associated with increases in perceived anti-White racism.”⁴ Furthermore, they conclude, “Whites now believe that anti-White bias is more prevalent than anti-Black bias [,

¹ Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 10.

² Mark Lilla, “The End of Identity Liberalism,” *New York Times*, 18 November 2016.
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-identity-liberalism.html>>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Michael I. Norton and Samuel R. Sommers, “Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 3 (2011): 215.

which] has clear implications for public policy debates.”⁵ Similarly, Richard Bernstein argues in a 2010 critique of multiculturalism in its current form that “All sorts of groups, whether religious, ethnic, or political, begin to think of themselves as self-enclosed windowless monads that are threatened by their ‘enemies.’ [...] One of the great dangers of the ‘politics of identity’ is that it fuels this type of mentality – the mentality of those who are convinced that ‘outsiders’ do not really understand; that ‘outsiders’ are threatening because they oppress and humiliate.”⁶ Considered together, this research suggests that perhaps identity politics has ultimately caused more harm than good, resulting in decreased communication between different groups of people, increased paranoia within groups and fear of outsiders, and abandonment of fact-based reality in favor of the comforts of a pre-existing and familiar echo chamber across the political spectrum. Stuart Hall seems to have anticipated this eventual breakdown in identity politics in the late 1980s when he questioned “how a politics can be constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification [that] make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities.”⁷ I contend that the resulting politics would be achieved through balancing identification with a particular group *and* identification with the universal. It is, in short, a pragmatist politics.

Classical American pragmatist philosophy has its roots in the natural observations of figures like Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson as well as in European thinkers like Alexander Bain, Henri Bergson, and Hegel, but was fully realized as a method of thinking by mathematician-philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. In a definition of pragmatism, Peirce argues

⁵ Norton and Sommers, “Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game,” 217.

⁶ Richard J. Bernstein, “The specter haunting multiculturalism,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36, no. 3-4 (2010): 390.

⁷ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” [1989] in *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996): 444.

that the pragmatic method “is to trace out in the imagination the conceivable practical consequences,—that is, the consequences for deliberate, self-controlled conduct,—of the affirmation or denial of [a] concept.”⁸ William James, a friend and contemporary of Peirce who popularized and expanded pragmatist philosophy in the United States by applying it to psychology and religion, similarly explains pragmatism in his 1907 book on the subject:

To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all. This is the principle of Peirce, the principle of pragmatism.⁹

Thus, the goal of the pragmatist is to uncover the practical consequences of our ideas, since according to James and Peirce, it is only those practical consequences that give ideas and beliefs any real value in our lives. James refers to this as “cash-value.”¹⁰ He explains that if we follow the pragmatic method, we must “bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of [our] experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*.”¹¹ Classical pragmatism is both a method for examining the usefulness of concepts and an instrument through which more work can be done in the world.

Like science, the pragmatic method operates via communal inquiry and its results are experimental and must be tested and retested over time. In his 2001 account of the rise of American pragmatism, Louis Menand argues that the classical pragmatists believed in the contingency of ideas and their suitability under specific sets of circumstances. On this point, he

⁸ Charles S. Peirce, “Pragmatism Defined,” in *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 246-247.

⁹ William James, *Pragmatism* [1907] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

writes, “since ideas are provisional responses to particular and unreproducible circumstances, their survival depends not on their immutability but on their adaptability. The belief that ideas should never become ideologies—either justifying the status quo, or dictating some transcendent imperative for renouncing it—was the essence of what they [the classical pragmatists] taught.”¹² Appropriately, the pragmatism of Peirce and James was further expanded in the twentieth century by other philosophers: John Dewey applied it to education and democracy; Jane Addams applied pragmatism in social work; W.E.B. Du Bois (a student of James) applied pragmatism to thinking about race and democracy; and Alain Locke used pragmatism to consider scientific and cultural understandings of race. These thinkers performed a pragmatist gesture by testing and adapting the philosophy to their own experience of the world, and pragmatist philosophy was given new shape and direction by having these experiences incorporated into its realm.

While classical pragmatism as I have sketched it above had great and lasting influences on 20th century philosophical thought in the United States¹³, less scholarly attention has been paid to the ways in which pragmatism has influenced the shape of American literature. Contemporary scholarship on pragmatism’s influence on American literature tends to focus on linguistic and democratic experimentation. Richard Poirier, for example, traces a line of Emersonian pragmatists in his 1992 book *Poetry and Pragmatism* including William James, Robert Frost, Gertrude Stein, and Wallace Stevens, citing these authors’ linguistic skepticism as integral to their pragmatism. Similarly, Joan Richardson examines language and thought as “life form[s] constantly undergoing adaptation and mutation”¹⁴ in the pragmatist figures she discusses

¹² Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), xi-xii.

¹³ This influence has been examined at length in such volumes as Menand’s *The Metaphysical Club* (2001), Ross Posnock’s *Color and Culture* (1998), Joan Richardson’s *Pragmatism and American Experience* (2014), and Robert Westbrook’s *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (2005), among others.

¹⁴ Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8.

in *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (2007). Giles Gunn and Walton Muyumba both explore pragmatist democratic experimentation in literature. Gunn argues that the object of the pragmatist narrative “is not to reach closure so much as to suspend its achievement indefinitely for the sake of keeping the narrative from terminating before all the voices implicated in it [...] get to be heard.”¹⁵ Considering this trope of democratic inclusivity in African American pragmatist writers, Walton Muyumba contends in *The Shadow and the Act* (2009) that Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin both use jazz improvisation in their writing as a means of advocating for experimental democracy. Taken together, these analyses of literary pragmatism tend to focus more on universal aspects of pragmatism like linguistic and democratic experimentation and less on identification with particular groups, as would be expected of a philosophy conducive to identity politics.

Ross Posnock discusses the allegiance of W.E.B. Du Bois to a philosophical and political ideal that mediates between specific group identification and universal affiliation in *Color and Culture*: “Du Bois insisted on a dialectic between (unraced) universal and (raced) particular: ‘Failure to recognize the Universal in the Particular,’ he wrote in 1921, breeds ‘the menace of all group exclusiveness and segregation’ (*Writings* 1194). The reality of particularity would be affirmed by the mediation of the universal and vice versa.”¹⁶ In other words, Du Bois calls for a balance between consideration of individual groups and tribalist desires and consideration for the good of all people. This pragmatist understanding of identity politics as mediating between the universal and the particular is tied to democracy in the United States. Many Americans tend to vote in favor of policies and politicians who support legislation that is beneficial to their particular group without consideration for outsider groups or for the common good. This mindset

¹⁵ Giles Gunn, *Thinking across the American Grain: Ideology, Intellect, and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 148.

¹⁶ Posnock, *Color and Culture*, 13.

has allowed white supremacy to flourish and for systemic racism, sexism, and discrimination against those who are not cis-gendered, heterosexual Christians to remain ensconced in all levels of government. Pragmatist thinkers like Du Bois and John Dewey advocated for greater inclusivity in our democracy, urging Americans to an understanding of democracy as process. Acknowledging democracy as a process means always striving toward the ideal that everyone has a chance to contribute and everyone's voice is heard, regardless of the fact that no policy can please every group. Nevertheless, pragmatist philosophy has sometimes been accused by critics and adherents alike of being insufficiently political, particularly where social justice is concerned.

In his 1989 book *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, Cornel West highlights a significant problem for much of pragmatist philosophy: political impotence. He argues that both Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James's individualism prevented them "from taking seriously fundamental social change; instead, [they opt] for a gradualism supported by moral critique."¹⁷ West criticizes pragmatism's lack of social activism again in a section on W.E.B. Du Bois where he observes that in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois highlights the blindness and silences in pragmatist reflections on individuality and democracy. He writes, "Although none of the pragmatists were fervent racists themselves—and most of them took public stands against racist practices—not one viewed racism as contributing greatly to the impediments for both individuality and democracy [in America]."¹⁸ In response to this lack of pragmatist action and stress where social and political justice are concerned, West posits his concept of prophetic pragmatism, which he sees as refining and revising "Emerson's concerns with power,

¹⁷ Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 146-147.

provocation, and personality in light of Dewey's stress on historical consciousness and Du Bois's focus on the plight of the [marginalized]."¹⁹

I wish to further examine this criticism of pragmatism as a politically impotent philosophy, for West is not the only figure to raise this argument with respect to social activism and racial injustice. William D. Hart, in an essay on Richard Bernstein's philosophy, harshly criticizes pragmatism's silence on race, arguing that the "distinctively American problem [of white supremacy] remains a problem about which pragmatists and other American philosophers—Royce, Du Bois, Locke, and Cornel West excluded—have been strangely and scandalously silent. We are still silent."²⁰ Bernstein himself also addresses pragmatism and racial injustice in response to Hart:

Dewey and Mead were most directly concerned with social issues, and with taking seriously the task of the thinker to illuminate and guide social reform. But it is striking how little attention they paid to what was—and still is—the most intractable social question in the United States—the question of race. [...] It is important that others who take pragmatism seriously should face the tangled questions of race and racism better than the classical pragmatic thinkers.²¹

Walton Muyumba likewise echoes the concerns of Hart and Bernstein in his 2009 volume *The Shadow and the Act*. In tracing a genealogy of pragmatism, Muyumba observes that key pragmatist thinkers like William James and John Dewey "turned away from addressing American racial conundrums"²² in their work. Considered together, all of these contemporary scholars raise questions about pragmatism's relationship to social justice, calling pragmatist thinkers to account for West's charges of political in-activism and impotence. This raises the

¹⁹ West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 212.

²⁰ William D. Hart, "Theses on Bernstein," in *The Pragmatic Century: Conversations with Richard J. Bernstein*, eds. Sheila G. Davaney & Warren G. Frisina (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006): 30.

²¹ Richard J. Bernstein, "Richard J. Bernstein's Response to William D. Hart," in *The Pragmatic Century: Conversations with Richard J. Bernstein*, eds. Sheila G. Davaney & Warren G. Frisina (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006): 37.

²² Walton M. Muyumba, *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation, and Philosophical Pragmatism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4.

question of what to do with a pragmatist identity politics such as the one espoused by W.E.B. Du Bois that attempts to balance the universal and the particular.

Nancy Fraser has argued that Alain Locke's critical pragmatism provides "another pragmatism."²³ She circles back to this notion of multiple pragmatisms in the concluding remarks to an essay on Locke, writing, "The most important lesson for those proposing to revive pragmatism today is this: There is not one pragmatism, but several. We had better know which of them we want to revive."²⁴ Fraser is of course right that there are several pragmatisms. There is the classical pragmatism of C.S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, the bedrock philosophy that usually comes to mind when pragmatism is mentioned. There is the neopragmatism of Richard Rorty, W.V.O. Quine, Richard Poirier and others, which tends to be concerned primarily with language. There is also a clear trajectory of Black pragmatist thinkers beginning with Du Bois and continuing through the twentieth century to Cornel West that has been largely neglected in both pragmatist and African Americanist scholarship. This is the critical pragmatism to which Alain Locke's philosophy on race rightly belongs. However, scholarship to date has not addressed the central question raised by West of pragmatism's political power, particularly regarding social justice.

Like Fraser, I too want to suggest the existence of 'another pragmatism,' one that responds to Cornel West's criticism of pragmatism as politically inactive: a Jewish pragmatism. West's prophetic pragmatism aims to be a socially conscious philosophy that empowers people to think for themselves and to be individuals, as West suggests was Emerson's focus, in addition to a focus on helping the marginalized and oppressed as Du Bois had. I question how necessary

²³ Nancy Fraser, "Another Pragmatism: Alain Locke, Critical 'Race' Theory, and the Politics of Culture," in *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education*, ed. Leonard Harris (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999): 5.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 18.

‘prophetic pragmatism’ is however, given the strong contributions of Jews and African Americans to shaping a critical pragmatism throughout the twentieth century. While numerous scholars have written about the connections between one Jewish writer and one pragmatist figure (e.g., Sidney Hook and John Dewey, Gertrude Stein and William James, Horace Kallen and George Santayana, and so forth), none has examined in detail the relationship between pragmatism and Jewish American thought and writing in the twentieth century. In the chapters that follow, I will argue for a Jewish pragmatism for which the central concern is social justice—a critical pragmatism in the vein of Black pragmatist thinkers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Cornel West. This examination of a socially empowered and active pragmatism will, I hope, lay to rest West’s charges that pragmatists have been (or continue to be) politically impotent. Jewish pragmatist thinkers and writers have made social justice their chief cause above all others, and in doing so they have answered the criticism that pragmatism is too concerned with abstract or theoretical notions of truth and belief and therefore fails to do enough critical work in the world.

Through an analysis of the arc of Jewish pragmatist thought across the 20th century, I explore how the writers I discuss inherit, extend, and adapt classical pragmatist philosophy, first to create a distinctive identity politics centered around dignity in the early and mid-twentieth century—one that balances universal and particular concerns as advocated by Du Bois and Posnock—and then to advance a more inclusive vision of democracy in the last decades of the century. Ultimately, I argue that there is a lineage of Jewish American writers who engage pragmatism either directly or indirectly to political ends in their work. This research complements existing scholarly work on African American pragmatists, since, like African American critical pragmatism, Jewish pragmatism sees social justice as central to democratic

progress. While some scholars have argued that pragmatism has historically been politically impotent as a philosophy, my research suggests that pragmatism is better understood as critical and politically active when engaged by marginalized groups, which demonstrates the importance of multicultural writers to the continued development of historically white-centered theory.

In addition, my project adds to the developing canon of female pragmatist writers. Typically, Gertrude Stein and Jane Addams are the only two women acknowledged as engaging with and shaping the development of American pragmatism. West suggests that one possible reason for why pragmatism has been so heavily male-dominated is “its aggressive and self-confident stance toward the realities and spheres of American power [that] has been virtually the possession of males in patriarchal America.”²⁵ However, it is not lack of opportunity that has kept women away from pragmatist philosophy, but lack of acknowledgement. Women have been engaged with pragmatism since the early twentieth century, yet many of their contributions have gone unnoticed. Among the male figures I discuss, I also trace an arc of Jewish women pragmatists in this project starting with Stein—Anzia Yezierska, Cynthia Ozick, and Grace Paley—whom I hope will come to be recognized as significantly contributing to twentieth century American pragmatism and retroactively included in the pragmatist canon alongside Stein and Addams.

My dissertation, *Justice You Shall Pursue: Jewish American Pragmatism*, spans the twentieth century, from Jewish immigration and resulting anti-Semitism in the early twentieth century to pre and post-Holocaust Zionism, the Cold War, and 9/11. Chapter 1 lays the philosophical groundwork for the rest of the project. This chapter identifies two major concerns of twentieth century Jewish pragmatist thinkers: a developing Jewish identity politics in the first half of the century (in the work of Franz Boas, Morris Cohen, Horace Kallen, and Sidney Hook)

²⁵ West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 180.

and calls for inclusive democracy in the latter part of the century (in Sidney Hook and Richard Bernstein). Chapter 2 explores a politics of feeling in the work of writers Gertrude Stein and Anzia Yeziarska, which contributes to an evolving discussion of identity as essentialist vs. constructed in the early part of the twentieth century by suggesting that neither viewpoint is wholly accurate. Stein's work calls upon the reader to feel with the title characters in her *Three Lives* stories and to incorporate their experiences into the reader's own, while Yeziarska's prose encourages readers' sympathy for the female immigrant protagonists of her fiction, whose experiences differ radically from the American men around them. Chapter 3 details Bernard Malamud's post-Holocaust focus on Jewish dignity and collective Jewish responsibility in "The Last Mohican," "The Lady of the Lake," and "The Jewbird" as well as Cynthia Ozick's push for Jewish identification over assimilation in her early stories "The Pagan Rabbi," "Envy; or, Yiddish in America," and "Bloodshed." Finally, in Chapter 4, I discuss the Deweyan democratic visions of Malamud, Grace Paley, and Tony Kushner, all of whom champion the cause of a more inclusive democratic community in their work. I conclude that, like African American pragmatism, Jewish pragmatism maintains a focus on social justice as central to democratic progress, and I propose additional areas of research for continuing to expand pragmatist philosophy, rendering it more democratic through the inclusion of diverse voices.

Jewish Pragmatism, Race, Identity Politics, and Democracy

In her introduction to *American Jewish Identity Politics*, Deborah Dash Moore concisely traces questions surrounding Jewish understanding of identity throughout the twentieth century. She cites Ezra Mendelsohn's observation that "from the 1880s until after World War II people asked not 'Who is a Jew?' but 'What is a Jew?'"²⁶ The question 'What is a Jew?' suggests a primary concern with whether Jewishness is a race or a set of religious beliefs and practices. At that point, political activism had not yet entered the picture. Moore, who sees the post-World War II era as the birth of identity politics among American Jews, argues that with the rise of identity politics, "the question 'Who is a Jew?' became more prominent."²⁷ She explains: "The possibility now arose that a Jew could lose her Jewish identity if she adopted the wrong politics. [...] No longer could one claim an identity as a Jew and then adopt whatever politics one desired. The issue was no longer 'What is to be done?' but rather, 'Where do I stand?'"²⁸ Moore notes that continued disagreement over which politics was the 'correct' version for American Jews to support led to increasing fracture and splintering within Jewish communities across the United States. Near the end of the twentieth century, she concludes, "Jewish identity politics had coalesced around either Jewishness as ineluctable or Jewishness as elective. [...] The idea of selecting affiliation, practice, or belief undermined the premise of identity politics since it suggested the mutability of identities and hence of any political ideologies codependent with them."²⁹ In other words, Moore describes identity politics here as incompatible with flexibility or fluidity in one's identity; she sees an essentialist quality in Jewish identity that is linked with identity politics and without which, identity politics cannot flourish.

²⁶ Deborah Dash Moore, introduction to *American Jewish Identity Politics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008): 9.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 18.

I previously suggested the existence of another pragmatism; I would now like to suggest the existence of another Jewish identity politics from the type Moore describes—a pragmatist identity politics. This is a radically different understanding of identity from the one Moore lays out in which identity politics is somehow dependent upon immutable or essentialist notions of Jewish identity. While this pragmatist identity politics does have its origins in the notion of ethnicity as immutable, it develops over the course of the twentieth century to acknowledge, finally, that individuals are “endowed with an indefinite plasticity”³⁰ and that Jews do in fact have a choice in their affiliations, practices, and beliefs. While pragmatist Jewish identity politics (like the identity politics Moore discusses) asks ‘What is to be done?’, it also asks ‘How shall I regard myself?’, for those who subscribe to this identity politics are painfully aware that the personal is political, and thus, that individual Jewish conception of the self is of utmost significance. Furthermore, it mediates this awareness of particular Jewish experience with universal concerns for the United States and American democracy like immigration/assimilation, science, and the mistreatment of other races (particularly African Americans) in the fashion of W.E.B. Du Bois. I will first briefly describe the socio-political context for the development of this identity politics among Jewish pragmatists. Next, I will examine the empirical stance taken by Jewish pragmatists with respect to race, as this influenced their conception of identity. Finally, I will trace the development of a Jewish identity politics through three pragmatist figures over the course of the twentieth century: Horace Kallen, Morris Cohen, and Sidney Hook. Although they engaged with different issues (Kallen with cultural pluralism, Cohen with Zionism, Hook with democracy), their collective contributions were all grounded in the notion of Jewish self-acceptance, which serves as the underlying thrust of this pragmatist identity politics.

³⁰ Sidney Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 106.

Socio-Political Catalysts

The emergence and growth of identity politics among American Jews in the twentieth century is largely, if not entirely, attributable to anti-Semitism and Zionism. With respect to anti-Semitism, from the turn of the century until World War II, there was tremendous cultural pressure upon Jews, whether immigrants or native-born, to assimilate into mainstream (that is, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) American culture. Eli Lederhendler argues that “factors in the world of work and class [served] as a chief site of Americanization”³¹ for immigrant Jews in the early twentieth century, while Leonard Dinnerstein asserts that “becoming more American for Jews meant a weakening of religious ties.”³² Both of these arguments and the general early twentieth century struggle between Jewish tradition and American assimilation are exemplified in Jewish literature of the time such as Israel Zangwill’s play *The Melting Pot* and Abraham Cahan’s novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*. Priscilla Wald suggests that in such literature “a sense of loss, an experience typically described in the language of melancholy, infuses the experience of assimilation.”³³ Terry Cooney writes that among the New York Jewish intellectuals specifically in the early part of the twentieth century, “one impulse for a majority of them was almost certainly to pursue principles of cultural and political life that would define a context into which they could comfortably fit as Jews.”³⁴ At that time in the United States, there was a substantial amount of anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish sentiment propelling the uncomfortable yet necessary negotiation between one’s Jewish and American identities. It was

³¹ Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism, 1880-1920: From Caste to Class* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 107.

³² Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*, 5th edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 76.

³³ Priscilla Wald, “Of crucibles and grandfathers: the East European immigrants” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, eds. Michael P. Kramer and Hana Wirth-Nesher (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 53.

³⁴ Terry Cooney, “New York Intellectuals and the Question of Jewish Identity,” *American Jewish History* 80, no. 3 (1991): 348.

this context from which Franz Boas's and Morris Cohen's empirical views on race sprang, as well as Horace Kallen's conception of cultural pluralism.

At the same time in Europe, there was rampant discrimination and persecution of Jewish citizens that led to the origination of political Zionism—a movement in support of an independent Jewish homeland—by Theodor Herzl. Herzl's call for a Jewish state in the land of Israel not only influenced the migration of several waves (referred to by the Hebrew word 'aliyah') of European Jews to Palestine, but also divided American Jewish opinion between those who supported the formation of a Jewish state and those who opposed it. In this context (and between the two World Wars), Morris Cohen declared that Zionism was merely a form of nationalistic tribalism that served as a distraction rather than a solution to the problem of Jewish assimilation while Horace Kallen supported Zionism as democratic. Later in the 20th century, Sidney Hook, whose work bridges pre and post-Holocaust eras, discusses how in his youth he was inclined to think differently about Zionism (that is, closer to the views espoused by Morris Cohen) than he was after the state of Israel was established in 1948 and “the grim facts of the Holocaust were revealed.”³⁵ From World War II onward, Ruth Wisse observes that among Jewish intellectuals, “to be a Jew was to be on the side of the persecuted,”³⁶ and this sentiment seems to ring true for Hook.

Thus, the emergence of a Jewish identity politics and its evolution over the course of the twentieth century was fueled in large part by on-going politics and discussions surrounding anti-Semitism and Zionism. For Jewish pragmatists like Cohen, Kallen, and Hook, politics and public policy issues like anti-immigration laws and the U.S. role in World War II influenced the

³⁵ Sidney Hook, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 5.

³⁶ Ruth R. Wisse, “The New York (Jewish) Intellectuals,” *Commentary* 84, no. 5 (1987): 34.

direction of this pragmatist identity politics, which was both particularly concerned with Jews and also responsive to the plight of other marginalized groups.

The Science of Race

In this section, I will discuss the work of two Jewish pragmatist figures—Franz Boas, and Morris Cohen—whose work laid the grounds for the development of an identity politics with concern for the universal as well as the particular. The work of both men reflects concern for marginalized groups other than their own, especially African Americans, however, they were also writing at a time when their Jewish identity worked against them in society, and this concern for the threat to their own livelihood is reflected in their writing on science and culture.

Franz Boas (1858-1942) is well known for his pioneering work in American anthropology. I am discussing Boas here as a proto-pragmatist figure because, like Morris Cohen and C.S. Peirce, Boas looks at everything from an empiricist standpoint. In doing so, he performs the quintessential pragmatist act of tracing “the conceivable practical consequences ... of the affirmation or denial of [concepts],”³⁷ which Peirce argues is the whole point of pragmatism. However, Boas is not a true pragmatist; although he is able to regard many racial and anthropological issues through an empirical lens, he denies the acknowledgement of culture that he freely grants to other groups to Jews for personal and emotional reasons rather than rational, empirical ones. I will first explain Boas’s particular motivations for writing about race and then outline his more universal contributions to this area of social justice—his insistence on examining race by properly scientific criteria and his observation that human identity is more fluid and changeable than had previously been thought.

³⁷ Charles S. Peirce, “Pragmatism Defined,” in *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 246-247.

Boas's writings on race appear to stem from a complicated and rather problematic negotiation of his German and American identities with his Jewishness. Leonard Glick argues that as a German Jew, Boas was in many ways "a typical representative of that segment of late 19th century German Jewry who had in effect abandoned the struggle to integrate Jewish identity with German nationality and had opted for an all-out effort to assimilate themselves out of existence."³⁸ This emphasis on German identity and rejection of Jewish identity continued after Boas immigrated to the United States. Glick observes, "Boas faced the problem [of American assimilation] with a strategy that was essentially the obverse of his insistence on maintaining his identity as a German-American: he was determined not to be classified as a Jew."³⁹ So even as Boas clung to his nationalistic pride in Germany, he categorically rejected any suggestion of Jewishness as a distinct culture or identity, partly because he understood how identification as a Jew could hold him back in society. This fear about his own ethnic identity was a driving force behind much of Boas's writing about racial justice, however, it does not diminish the significance of his calls for scientific responsibility and for empirical data to serve as evidence where race was concerned rather than mere feelings and inclinations.

Much of Boas's work is concerned in part with explaining how white people tend to view European ancestry as an inherently superior racial type without any real scientific evidence on which to base this assertion. In "Race Problems in America," Boas explains how many people are inclined to think of Europeans as a "pure stock," however, he argues that the "concern felt by many in regard to the continuance of racial purity of our nation is to a great extent imaginary."⁴⁰ Similarly, in Boas's best-known work, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, he notes that people tend to

³⁸ Leonard B. Glick, "Types Distinct from Our Own: Franz Boas on Jewish Identity and Assimilation," *American Anthropologist* 84, no. 3 (1982): 546.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 554.

⁴⁰ Franz Boas, "Race Problems in America," *Science* 29, no. 752 (1909): 842.

“infer that the White race represents the highest [racial] type. The tacit assumption is made that achievement depends solely, or at least primarily, upon innate racial ability.”⁴¹ He observes that because of this assumption of white superiority, whites therefore view any deviation from whiteness as inferior. This has consequences for non-white individuals in the United States, Boas notes, for “the Negro, no matter how completely he may have adopted what is best in our civilization is too often looked down upon as a member of an inferior race.”⁴²

By pointing out the obvious white tendency to irrational racial bias, Boas simultaneously questions white treatment of other races, particularly African Americans, who are often mentioned in Boas’s work as an example of a race that has been unfavorably and unfairly judged. He goes on to argue in *The Mind of Primitive Man* that the white assumption of black inferiority is “a formidable obstacle to the Negro’s advance and progress, even though schools and universities are open to him. [...] It is hardly possible to predict what would be the achievements of the Negro if he were able to live with the Whites on absolutely equal terms.”⁴³ Here, Boas indirectly invokes the then-common racist argument that if black people were as intelligent or capable as white people, then they would have progressed as far as whites in terms of civilization and culture. Boas aptly notes that because society is fundamentally unequal, there is no way of proving with empirical evidence that black people are culturally inferior to white people since black people are held back at every turn, even though they theoretically possess the same access to resources that white people do.

Due to many people’s unfounded assertions about racial superiority, Boas argues that only biological and scientific solutions are feasible ones when considering issues like race and immigration that tend to provoke strong emotional responses and even hysteria in many

⁴¹ Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938): 4.

⁴² *Ibid*, 11.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 15.

Americans. One of his strongest statements on this subject appears at the end of his article “Race Problems in America”:

When the bulky literature of this subject [the qualities and characteristics of blacks as a racial ‘type’] is carefully sifted, little remains that will endure serious criticism; and I do not believe that I claim too much when I say that the whole work on this subject remains to be done. The development of modern methods of research makes it certain that by careful inquiry, definite answers to our problems may be found. Is it not, then, our plain duty to inform ourselves that, so far as that can be done, deliberate consideration of observations may take the place of heated discussion of beliefs in matters that concern not only ourselves, but also the welfare of millions of negroes?⁴⁴

In his work, Boas essentially presents a three-point argument for why scientific evidence should be the basis for any claims about race. First, whites tend to think of themselves as a superior race for a variety of reasons. Second, almost all of these reasons are based on emotions or feelings rather than objective facts or empirical evidence. Finally, because whites rely on their feelings about race rather than the facts, they unnecessarily jeopardize and potentially hinder their own well-being and the well-being of individuals of other races. Boas, like later pragmatist figures C.S. Peirce and Morris Cohen, understands that speculations and unfounded assertions are easy to come by, but that scientific evidence is what will ultimately point us closer to the truth.

It bears mention here that when Boas argues in favor of science as the basis for claims about race, he means objective, empirical science based on observation and testing rather than racist junk science like craniometry (and later, Nazism) that relied on *a priori* belief. Peirce defines the *a priori* method of belief as one that adopts propositions that seem agreeable to one’s thinking. On this point, Peirce argues, “it does not mean that which agrees with experience, but that which we find ourselves inclined to believe.”⁴⁵ Both craniometry and Nazi junk science rely on predetermined conclusions about racial groups—particularly the inherent superiority of

⁴⁴ Boas, “Race Problems in America,” 849.

⁴⁵ Charles Sanders Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief,” in *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition Volume 3 1872-1878*, ed. Christian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986): 252.

whites—that are rationalized using so-called science. As Robert Lifton explains in his book on Nazi doctors, “evolutionary theory is more or less democratic in its assumption of a common beginning for all races [and] is therefore at odds with the Nazi principle of inherent Aryan racial virtue.”⁴⁶ Boas railed against the abuse of science to support racist conclusions, arguing that the assumption of whites’ inherent racial superiority was not scientific.

Boas’s related contribution to a universal social justice and an identity politics that located the universal in the particular was his assertion that people should be judged and valued as individuals, rather than defined by their race. This argument is a product of his understanding of identity as more fluid than had previously been thought. After spending much of his early career calling for scientific responsibility and factual evidence on race over baseless emotional judgments, Boas’s own scientific observation led him to the same conclusion that Morris Cohen would also find: generalizations about humans based upon their groups will almost always be proven wrong when weighing the general stereotype against individuals on a case-by-case basis. In an article for *The Nation* entitled “What Is a Race?” Boas argues, “A whole racial group can never be described by a few descriptive terms, because there will always be many individuals of deviating types. It is our impression that the Swede is blond, blue eyed, tall, and longheaded; but many Swedes do not conform to this description.”⁴⁷ Because we cannot formulate generalized rules about groups based upon their race due to individual variance, Boas concludes that “the behavior of an individual is therefore not determined by his racial affiliation, but by the character of his ancestry and his cultural environment. We may judge of the mental characteristic of families and individuals, but not of races.”⁴⁸ This observation is predicated upon Boas’s

⁴⁶ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 16.

⁴⁷ Franz Boas, “What Is a Race?” *The Nation* 120, no.3108 (1925): 90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 91.

examination of different racial groups existing in the same social and physical environments. When this is the case, Boas finds that such racial groups tend to develop similar “functional tendencies”⁴⁹ from exposure to their environment rather than some innate capability based upon race. “The plasticity of function is so great that it may overcome to a great extent the difference in organic form,”⁵⁰ Boas writes. He posits that because racial groups have individual internal variance but share similar qualities to other racial groups in similar environments, people should not be judged on their inherent abilities based upon race, but rather, culture.

Boas tended to apply his scientific theories to African Americans, since he believed them to be unfairly treated in society however, Leonard Glick has suggested that when Boas makes a scientific case for individuals to be judged upon individual merit and as a product of their culture instead of their race, it seems likely that “the people he had primarily in mind were Jews like himself who were aiming for complete assimilation into the White majority population.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, one of Boas’s most important contributions to social justice is his empirical conclusion that “The individual must be valued according to his own worth and not to the worth of a class to which we assign him. [...] Groups as they exist among us are all too often subjective constructions; those assigned to a group often do not feel themselves to be members of it, and the injustice done them is one of the blots on our civilization.”⁵² Whether his motivations derived primarily from his wish to cast off his Jewish identity, to help temper racial injustices against black people, or a combination of the two remains unknown. However, Boas undeniably helped to lay the scientific groundwork for a wider understanding of race as a social construct rather

⁴⁹ Boas, “What Is a Race?” 91.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Glick, “Types Distinct from Our Own,” 556.

⁵² Franz Boas, “An Anthropologist’s Credo,” *The Nation* 147, no. 9 (1938): 203.

than a biological determinant, a subject that would also be taken up in a non-anthropological setting by his contemporary, Morris R. Cohen.

Morris Raphael Cohen (1880-1947) had a notoriously complicated relationship to pragmatism. Despite his well-documented criticism of pragmatism⁵³ (and oft-made self-deprecating claim that he was a “stray dog among philosophers”), I believe that Cohen is most usefully read as a pragmatist thinker, particularly since his application of scientific empiricism to the social sciences is reminiscent of writings on similar themes by pragmatist figures such as Jane Addams and Alain Locke. Like Franz Boas, Cohen’s pragmatic contributions to social justice center on his dedication to the empirical method and the observations he drew from it about race. As a Jew, Cohen was particularly sensitive to discussions of race, for he understood that ultimately, racist and anti-Semitic attitudes undermined rational empiricism. He was adamant that social changes ought not to be explained by “fixed racial traits,”⁵⁴ for these qualities are much more subjective and open to interpretation than the fixed characteristics of elements and phenomena found in the natural world. He argues that because social facts seem more familiar to us, as a result, it is “easier to be misled as to the amount of accurate knowledge that we have about them.”⁵⁵

In *Reason and Nature*, Cohen describes three types of laws regarding observation of natural phenomena: general facts that can be authenticated, empirical or statistical sequences, and statements of universal abstract relationships that may be connected systematically with other laws in the same field (laws of physics, for example). He then proceeds to explain why these laws cannot be scientifically applied in a social setting. Regarding observable facts that can

⁵³ For instance, Cohen’s student Sidney Hook recalls in his autobiography *Out of Step* that Cohen regularly referred to pragmatism as “a philosophy for people who cannot think.”

⁵⁴ Morris R. Cohen, *Reason and Nature: An Essay on the Meaning of Scientific Method* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company: 1931), 340.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 355.

be authenticated, he writes, “that gold is yellow is the assertion of a law, i.e., whenever you find a substance having a certain atomic weight, etc., it will also be yellow in colour. [...] such laws or facts are basic to science, and in the social realm they do not seem so numerous or so readily authenticated. Is it a fact, for instance, that the negro race is not ambitious?”⁵⁶ Here, Cohen notes that generalizations made about natural phenomena simply will not work in the social realm, for unlike gold, individual people have different temperaments, and therefore any attempt at making social generalizations about groups of people (i.e. stereotypes) will not hold up when examined on a case-by-case basis in the way that in nature all pieces of gold will be yellow in color. His use of the then-common stereotype of lazy black people indicates a thoughtfulness about the reductive nature of stereotypes and their harmfulness to any group of people who found themselves the subject of them. Cohen might just as easily have asked if it were a fact that the Jewish race is necessarily covetous. However, like Horace Kallen and Sidney Hook, Cohen is concerned not only with questions or problems that affect Jews, but any dangerous and unscientific perceptions of social groups, for he understands that where injustice exists for other groups, it will also exist for Jews, and thus, correcting the larger problem is key to achieving true social progress.

Alain Locke, an African American pragmatist whose work was inspired partly by William James, had similarly applied this sort of scientific empiricism to considerations of race some years earlier in his 1924 essay, “The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture.” Much like Cohen does in *Reason and Nature*, Locke champions the interpretation of culture by “properly scientific criteria,”⁵⁷ as opposed to “the error of assuming basic common factors and

⁵⁶ Cohen, *Reason and Nature*, 357.

⁵⁷ Alain Locke, “The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture” [1924], in *The Works of Alain Locke*, ed. Charles Molesworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 275.

commensurate values.”⁵⁸ This is because, he argues, most scientific studies of races and cultures tend to rely on generalizations and stock arguments rather than thorough examinations of race and culture with objective details. Both Locke and Cohen argue against scientific absolutism being applied to social culture, because, as they demonstrate through their respective discussion of racial and social generalizations, these ‘observations’ simply do not hold up under scientific scrutiny, and thus, any general ‘facts’ gleaned from them cannot be considered laws.

Cohen’s contributions to a pragmatist social consciousness and advocacy include an insistence that our methods in the social realm must constantly be tested and refined, his observation that general scientific laws cannot be applied in the same way to social groups, and his plea to develop sympathy for our fellow man. Considering this well-developed and scientifically-based critical consciousness, it is unfortunate that Cohen has been all but forgotten in contemporary scholarship, pragmatist or otherwise. What is certain is that Cohen helped to pave the way for a Jewish pragmatist understanding of race and its relationship to identity, which would influence his public debate with Horace Kallen over Zionism.

Anti-Semitism and the Jewish Question

Horace Kallen (1882-1974) was a student of William James and a lifelong friend of Alain Locke. According to Louis Menand, Kallen considered himself “James’s disciple and philosophical heir”⁵⁹ and by the 1910s, Kallen had become “a figure in pragmatist circles.”⁶⁰ In his younger years, Kallen desired, much like Franz Boas, not to be thought of as Jewish, but rather, as an American. However, he later rejected this view in favor of Zionism, and this

⁵⁸ Locke, “The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture,” 275.

⁵⁹ Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001), 388.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 399.

philosophy combined with the anti-Semitism and outright discrimination Jews still experienced in the United States during this time influenced Kallen's philosophy of cultural pluralism. In Kallen's worldview, ethnicity is both immutable and the basis for one's culture and station in life. As I will explain, cultural pluralism is ultimately an outgrowth of the desire for Jewish acceptance—by others and by Jews themselves.

One of Kallen's most well-known works is a two-part essay published in *The Nation* in 1915 called "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot." In the first part of this essay, Kallen anxiously observes that all "immigrants and their offspring are in the way of becoming 'Americanized' if they remain in one place in the country long enough."⁶¹ Speaking from personal experience, Kallen acknowledges the great temptation to surrender one's ethnic origins or identity to the ideal of the American 'melting-pot,' as he himself wished at one point to do. For Kallen, renouncing one's identity to Americanization is unacceptable, in part because in the United States, "there is a marked tendency... [for] industrial and social stratification to follow ethnic lines."⁶² If one's social position and job in society is a function of one's ethnicity, then, Kallen asks, why give up one's ethnic identity? Furthermore, Kallen argues in Part II of this essay that "we know what the qualities and capacities of existing types are"⁶³ and in order to achieve harmony in society, it is necessary "to provide conditions under which each [ethnic and cultural group] may attain the perfection that is proper to its kind."⁶⁴ He explains:

Men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent: they cannot change their grandfathers. Jews or Poles or Anglo-Saxons, would have to cease to be. The selfhood which is inalienable in them, and for the realization of which they require 'inalienable' liberty, is ancestrally determined, and the happiness which they pursue has its form implied in ancestral endowment. This is what, actually, democracy in operation assumes. [...] a democracy of

⁶¹ Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot," *The Nation* 100, no. 2590 (1915): 192.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 194.

⁶³ Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot, Part II," *The Nation*, 100, no. 2591 (1915): 219.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kind.⁶⁵

This is the essence of Kallen's philosophy of cultural pluralism. In his view, our ethnicity necessarily determines our culture and preferences in life, and a true democracy seeks to enable this concept by allowing every ethnic group to develop according to its predetermined will. Menand observes that cultural pluralism "makes a problematic politics [because] identifying people by culture has the same effects as identifying people by race: it prejudges their possibilities."⁶⁶ To understand why Kallen would adopt and advocate for a philosophy in which people are judged by their ethnic or cultural origins, we must turn to his writings on anti-Semitism and Zionism.

Kallen believed anti-Semitism to be "a chronic aspect of Christian history [that] becomes acute during social crises and subsides in prosperity."⁶⁷ This cyclical harmonious and disastrous coexistence of Jews with Christians is due to "the status which Christianity assigns to the Jews"⁶⁸ as Christ-killers who rejected atonement and the Christian new covenant. In essence, Jews are "the villains of the Drama of Salvation,"⁶⁹ Kallen argues. In his essay "The Roots of Anti-Semitism," after recounting a number of instances where he witnessed anti-Jewish discrimination of one kind or another, Kallen concludes, "The reaction seemed in all cases the unconscious response of a habit whose base was the religious preconception—the definition of the central role and status of the Jew in the Christian system."⁷⁰ However, Kallen acknowledges, modern society is too sophisticated to justify its anti-Jewish prejudice by lobbying medieval accusations

⁶⁵ Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot, Part II," 220.

⁶⁶ Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 406-407.

⁶⁷ Kallen, "The Roots of Anti-Semitism," *The Nation* 116, no. 3008 (1923): 240.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 241.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

of ‘Christ-killer’ at the Jews.⁷¹ Instead, Jews are accused of not being able to assimilate into society; the religious component of anti-Semitism underlies this accusation, though it may be subconscious. For every critic who accuses the Jews of being unassimilable, Kallen writes, “They do not want the Jews to be assimilated into [society]. What really troubles them is the completeness with which the Jews want to be and have been assimilated.”⁷² Thus, cultural pluralism is essential to Jewish survival under democracy. Since a majority of citizens in the United States practice Christianity, Kallen believes that anti-Jewish prejudice and discrimination will never disappear. In order to protect Jews (as well as other marginalized groups), the democratic system must make affordances for them to pursue happiness and self-realization in such a way that no one is unjustly treated. By adopting a philosophy that stresses immutable ethnicity, Kallen ultimately supports the idea that a democracy should treat its citizens fairly, regardless of their ethnic or cultural origins, so that all groups are able to contribute productively to society.

On one hand, cultural pluralism advocates for Jewish acceptance by non-Jews; however, Kallen’s philosophy also encourages Jewish self-acceptance. His Zionist advocacy to establish an independent Jewish state originates from Kallen’s desire for Jews to be able to fulfill their cultural destiny. He argues that any contributions Jews (or for that matter, Poles, Germans, French, etc.) might make to American society will be perceived as a product of distinctly *American* culture rather than *Jewish* culture (or Polish, German, French, etc.). “Only in cases where the Jewish community can survive and grow *in toto* as Jewish can the Jews’ contribution to civilization be Jewish,”⁷³ he writes, and an important part of this distinctly Jewish contribution

⁷¹ I should note here that these opinions were expressed between the wars, before Adolf Hitler became a prominent figure, and prior to the Nazi Party’s ascent to power in Germany.

⁷² Kallen, “The Roots of Anti-Semitism,” 242.

⁷³ Horace Kallen, “Zionism: Democracy or Prussianism,” *The New Republic* 18 (1919): 313.

comes from achieving “a cause for pride and distinction in its children.”⁷⁴ While Jews are forced to assimilate or are accused of being unassimilable in other countries, they are necessarily made to feel ashamed of their cultural and ethnic identity. Kallen believes that by founding a Jewish state with a distinctly Jewish culture, only then will Jews be able to take pride in their Jewishness rather than suppressing or wishing to be rid of it as they do in societies where anti-Semitism flourishes.

Sidney Hook similarly addressed the continued existence of anti-Semitism in his own time. Hook recalls being aware of how Jews suffered discrimination in his early years, stating “I was also too much aware of the fact that most of the obstacles in my life arose from the fact that I was Jewish, much more than from the fact that I was a radical.”⁷⁵ Like Kallen, Hook believed that anti-Semitism was an intrinsic part of Christian mythology. As he puts it, “if you’re told every Easter that Jews killed God, you’re going to have a certain feeling against them.”⁷⁶ However, Hook did not come to these conclusions until after the horrors of the Holocaust had been exposed. In his youth, although he was aware of the existence of anti-Semitism and personally witnessed its effects, Hook writes that both he and his fellow Jewish socialists “never sensed the depth and varieties of anti-Semitism,”⁷⁷ and believed that it would disappear with the increased economic well-being that socialism could provide.

In contrast to Kallen, Hook did not view Jewishness or ethnicity as fixed and unchangeable. Hook writes that he learned from Dewey, “the danger of passing final judgments about human beings,”⁷⁸ for individuals are “endowed with an indefinite plasticity.”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Kallen, “Zionism: Democracy or Prussianism,” 313.

⁷⁵ Sidney Hook, interview by Norman Podhoretz, *Commentary* 88, no. 4 (1989): 32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁷ Hook, *Out of Step*, 33.

⁷⁸ Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life*, 106.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, Hook's definition of Jewishness is radically inclusive. He states in response to the question of who is a Jew, "I say, a Jew is anyone who calls himself such or is called such and lives in a community which acts on the distinction between Jew and non-Jew. [...] People who've given up their Judaism are still called Jews, people who have no belief at all. A Jewish atheist, is that an oxymoron? It's not, because he's still Jewish."⁸⁰ While Kallen proposed that the "qualities and capacities of existing types"⁸¹ were known, Hook proposes a definition of Jewishness that is not biologically deterministic, but is instead predicated on how people called Jews are treated in society. Hook's is a truly pragmatic explanation of Jewish identity, for it relies on the consequences of social beliefs and actions to understand what the practical effects of the concept of 'Jewishness' are.

Inspired by his conceptualization of Jewishness, Hook stressed Jewish education and self-respect. He recalls his relationships with other young Jews in his boyhood, emphasizing "we were very militant in expressing our Jewishness and defending the Jews against attacks, and we wouldn't even dream of conversion, or, later on, of leaving the fold for the belly's sake. We even had a sort of negative feeling when we read about someone who had been converted, like Karl Marx's father or Heinrich Heine, who said that conversion was a way of getting into European society."⁸² This early attachment to and defense of his Jewish identity, even though he was not religiously observant or a militant Zionist, influenced Hook's belief in the importance of Jewish education. He became disillusioned by the number of Jewish students he encountered over the years who would have elected to change their religious affiliation if they could. As a result, he emphasized the significance of Jewish education in order "to be able to accept yourself as a Jew

⁸⁰ Hook, interview with Norman Podhoretz for *Commentary*, 34.

⁸¹ Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot, Part II," 219.

⁸² Hook, interview with Norman Podhoretz for *Commentary*, 30.

and try to build a life of dignity on that basis.”⁸³ Like Horace Kallen before him, Hook also viewed self-acceptance as a primary goal of Jewish identity politics. This notion of self-acceptance was also key to the Jewish debate over Zionism throughout the twentieth century.

The Debate over Zionism

Both Morris Cohen and Horace Kallen were concerned with addressing ‘the Jewish problem’ of adjustment to American society, and both believed that Jewish self-acceptance was a key component of solving this ‘problem.’ However, their philosophical outlooks placed them on opposite sides of the debate over Zionism, with Kallen as an ardent Zionist and Cohen as skeptical of Zionism’s merits.⁸⁴ As I mentioned previously, Kallen’s notions about cultural pluralism inclined him to believe that ethnicity was immutable and should be acknowledged as such so that all cultural groups could be allowed to fulfill their unique destinies. Because of Cohen’s scientific background, he was unwilling to make vast, sweeping generalizations about all members of a cultural or ethnic group, certain in the knowledge that men and women could not be categorized like precious metals.⁸⁵ But even as Kallen and Cohen feuded over the usefulness and practical implications of Zionism, they agreed that raising Jewish self-respect was one of its most important contributions to Jews in America.

In an essay published in *The New Republic* in 1919, Morris Cohen argues that for people who face “the problems of the harmonious adjustment of the Jew to American life Zionism is a distraction, not an answer.”⁸⁶ Cohen felt that Zionism was not a solution to ‘the Jewish problem’ in America because at its core, Zionism was a form of nationalistic philosophy based in tribalism

⁸³ Hook, interview with Norman Podhoretz for *Commentary*, 34.

⁸⁴ I hesitate to use the term ‘anti-Zionist’ here, since, at that time, many people who espoused anti-Zionist views were anti-Semites.

⁸⁵ See section on Cohen in “The Science of Race” for more on this.

⁸⁶ Morris R. Cohen, “Zionism: Tribalism or Liberalism?” *The New Republic* 18 (1919): 183.

that more or less mimicked anti-Semitic ideology even as it inverted its hierarchy. On this point, he writes, “Zionists fundamentally accept the racial ideology of [the] anti-Semites, but draw different conclusions. Instead of the Teuton, it is the Jew that is the pure and superior race.”⁸⁷ He contrasts Zionism with American democracy, objecting that “nationalistic Zionism demands not complete individual liberty for the Jew, but group autonomy,”⁸⁸ since an independent Jewish state would be founded upon “a peculiar race, a tribal religion and a mystic belief in a peculiar soil.”⁸⁹ Cohen believes that Zionism also highlights a fear among American Jews—the fear that Judaism will become diluted or even vanish as more and more Jews assimilate to an American way of life at the expense of their Jewish identity. He remarks that the American “ideal of freedom is just what the Zionists most fear,”⁹⁰ because they have no faith that Judaism will be able to ‘hold its own’ when given full liberty and freedom. Cohen concludes that tribalism should be recognized for the evil it is, and that “thinking men should reject it as such.”⁹¹

A few weeks later, Horace Kallen published a chilly response in *The New Republic* to Cohen’s essay on Zionism, in which Kallen argues that the nationalistic philosophy Cohen spoke of “is as widespread as civilization, [it] permeates all peoples, particularly oppressed peoples [and] it utters a state of mind and feeling basic to established as well as aspiring nationalities.”⁹² Kallen addresses Cohen’s point that Zionism inverts anti-Semitic ideology to favor the Jews by underscoring the egalitarianism of Zionist ideology. On this point, he writes, “The Jews are a historic people among other peoples, neither better nor worse. [...] They are entitled equally with any other to express their qualities freely and autonomously as a group, making such

⁸⁷ Cohen, “Zionism: Tribalism or Liberalism?,” 182.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Kallen, “Zionism: Democracy or Prussianism,” 311.

contribution to the cooperative enterprise of civilization as their qualities as a group promise.”⁹³

Above all, Kallen emphasizes Zionism as fundamentally democratic and welcoming to all peoples, including non-Jews, and he quotes a resolution adopted by Zionist organizations of the world at a recent convention to support his assertions. Most significantly, Kallen argues that Zionism “demands not only group autonomy, but complete individual liberty for the Jew *as Jew*,”⁹⁴ which he states has not been the case in the United States where Jews are forced or strongly encouraged to give up their Jewish identity in exchange for an American one.

My interest in these arguments about Zionism lies not in determining which argument is stronger or more correct; instead, I wish to highlight the importance of Jewish self-respect and self-acceptance that both men attribute to Zionism as a philosophy. Cohen writes near the end of his essay, “The older ideal of assimilation had degenerated into an ideal of blind aping of Gentile ways. Yet, obviously, Jews could not make any contribution to American civilization by mere imitation or acceptance. Zionism has rendered the supreme service of *increasing men's self-respect*.”⁹⁵ Cohen believes that in increasing Jewish awareness and desire for an independent homeland, Zionism has also elevated Jewish self-acceptance. This is important, Cohen argues, since “self-respecting Jews also cannot help leaning backward in expressions which may endanger their being identified with those who for their belly’s sake creep out of the Jewish fold.”⁹⁶ Cohen explicitly acknowledges here that Jewish assimilation to the point of erasure for an American, Gentile-like identity is a problem in society. To combat this problem, Jews must feel less ashamed of being Jewish, and Zionism, even with all the faults Cohen attributes to it as a philosophy, has at least managed to increase Jewish pride and visibility. Likewise, Kallen

⁹³ Kallen, “Zionism: Democracy or Prussianism,” 311.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 312.

⁹⁵ Cohen, “Zionism: Tribalism or Liberalism?” 183. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 182.

argues that by establishing an independent Jewish state, “what is achieved is a cause for pride and distinction in its [the Jewish people’s] children elsewhere.”⁹⁷ This is something that in Kallen’s view is currently lacking in Jews who live in so-called democratic nations like the United States, France, Germany, and so forth. Because anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish sentiment are so prominent, Jews are made to assimilate, to hide their Jewish identities, and to feel shame in their heritage rather than pride.

What Cohen and Kallen’s opposing views of Zionism ultimately illustrate is how Zionism became part of Jewish identity politics in America. Zionism increased conversations and debates between Jews about what course of action would best ensure future survival and ability to thrive. At the same time, as Cohen and Kallen both note in their respective essays, Zionism increased Jewish self-respect and self-acceptance. For ardent Zionists like Kallen, no longer would Jews be pressured to renounce their Jewish identities when an independent Jewish state existed. For skeptics like Cohen, Zionism served to raise awareness of the problems of assimilation and ‘blind aping of Gentile ways’ and it would continue to remain part of Jewish identity politics throughout the twentieth century.

As Sidney Hook’s writing on the subject reveals, there is a clear distinction between pre- and post-Holocaust discussions of Zionism amongst American Jews. Hook highlights this distinction over Jewish views of Zionism in his autobiography. He writes, “we [New York intellectuals] were wrong [about] the Jewish question. None of us were Zionists. We were sensitive to the national aspirations of all other persecuted people, were positively emphatic with them. Yet when it came to our kinsfolk, we lapsed into a proud universalism.”⁹⁸ Like, his teacher Morris Cohen, Hook and many of the other Jewish intellectuals initially viewed Zionism as a

⁹⁷ Kallen, “Zionism: Democracy or Prussianism,” 313.

⁹⁸ Hook, *Out of Step*, 5.

form of nationalism. In an interview given less than a year before his death, Hook reveals that when Cohen's piece on Zionism as tribalism was first published, he and his fellow socialists agreed with it because it reinforced their feelings on nationalism. He explains: "We were all impressed with [Cohen's] argument, everybody was reacting then against the excesses of nationalism, which [World War I] had illustrated. And we were young, idealistic socialists, we were universalists, although we were prepared to defend the right of any nation to self-determination. We just never thought of the Jews in the same way."⁹⁹ Hook's autobiography suggests that one reason why he and other Jewish socialists did not think of Jews in the way they thought of other nations or peoples may have been due to the fact that most of them were raised in Orthodox Jewish environments and taught in Orthodox yeshivas, but had grown skeptical of their childhood religion. In fact, they viewed Judaism as "mainly a mass of superstitions taught by tyrannical old men who brooked no contradiction or honest doubt,"¹⁰⁰ while simultaneously, socialism became "an *ersatz* religion"¹⁰¹ for which they were "prepared to make sacrifices."¹⁰² When Zionism burst onto the intellectual scene, Hook explains that while the Zionist movement did win some adherents, the young Jewish socialists felt that they had "transcended American nationalism by our allegiance to a universalist ideal, in which all men were brothers, [and] we were not going to settle for a more parochial national ideal."¹⁰³ Ever the devotees to their socialist religion, they believed that socialism was the proper response to 'the Jewish problem,' which would be solved "when the economically classless society of the future was established."¹⁰⁴ Despite his abundant optimism about a utopian socialist future in the 1910s and

⁹⁹ Hook, interview with Norman Podhoretz for *Commentary*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Hook, *Out of Step*, 33.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

1920s, Hook clarifies that intellectual discussions and debates over Zionism “changed, of course, after the U.N. established the state of Israel and the grim facts of the Holocaust were revealed.”¹⁰⁵ Although late into his life, Hook still did not consider himself a political Zionist, he maintained support for Israel from its founding until his death.

Fundamentally, what is at stake for Hook in the debate over Zionism is that same thing that is at stake for Cohen and Kallen: Jewish self-acceptance. Hook stresses the importance of dignity in people’s views of themselves. He states of himself and his Jewish peers in adolescence and young adulthood that they were militant about expressing their Jewishness and defending Jews from attacks. “We had no real faith,” he says, “but we thought it was inappropriate and undignified to renounce our religion; it was like renouncing yourself.”¹⁰⁶ Hook identifies a feeling of identity common to many American Jews during the twentieth century: he has no particular ties to Judaism—religiously, politically, or even academically—“and yet I’m a Jew and I feel that I’m a Jew,” he says.¹⁰⁷ He describes a thought experiment he conducted with many of his students in conjunction with reading part of Plato’s *Republic*, which was to have them write down their identifying characteristics (nationality, sex, religion, etc.) and then write how they would choose to be reborn if they could do so. The results were telling. Hook recalls, “I very rarely met a Jewish student, and my students were predominantly Jewish, who wanted to be born into the Jewish religion. Many of them said any religion that is not discriminated against. Or no religion.”¹⁰⁸ The fact that so many of his Jewish students would not want to be reborn as

¹⁰⁵ Hook, *Out of Step*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Hook, interview with Norman Podhoretz for *Commentary*, 30.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Jews is, in Hook's view, "perhaps the most powerful argument for Zionism."¹⁰⁹ As a result, Hook emphasizes self-acceptance for Jews, and trying "to build a life of dignity on that basis."¹¹⁰

In sum, Jewish identity politics need not be dependent upon unchangeable identity. While the pragmatist identity politics I have described was initially rooted in the notion of ethnicity as immutable via the cultural pluralism of Horace Kallen, Morris Cohen and Sidney Hook both pushed back against this idea while simultaneously acknowledging Jewish culture as important and affirming Jewish self-worth and acceptance for different forms of expression of one's Jewish identity. While Kallen, Cohen, Hook, and Franz Boas understood that certain limitations and restrictions were placed on them in society because of their identity as Jews, their work also demonstrates universal concerns over race and social justice. Boas and Cohen examined social and scientific misperceptions of African Americans. Kallen's cultural pluralism was intended to help peoples of all races fulfill their unique destinies. And Sidney Hook's ties to socialism reflected his commitment to the plight of the marginalized and oppressed.

This developing identity politics is closely tied to democracy in the United States. Kallen and Cohen's public debate over the merits of Zionism (and its relation to democracy or nationalism) demonstrates this connection, as does Hook's democratic socialist activism. However, this evolving Jewish identity politics was particularly concerned with democratic communication—the ability to freely and openly discuss and debate ideas with others—and this continuing concern is reflected in Sidney Hook's and Richard Bernstein's later fights against absolutism in political thought.

Jewish Pragmatists and Democratic Communication

¹⁰⁹ Hook, interview with Norman Podhoretz for *Commentary*, 34.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

In addition to their contributions to a developing sense of Jewish identity politics throughout the twentieth century, Jewish pragmatists have also spoken out strongly in support of democracy and democratic communication as key to social and political progress. An identity politics that takes into account both the particular and the universal requires democracy and open exchange of ideas in order to flourish, since marginalizing voices is anti-democratic. Sidney Hook and Richard Bernstein championed this kind of open democratic communication in the face of absolutist thought in the U.S. in quite different contexts. Hook spoke out against the lack of democratic communication and subversion of the democratic method by a perceived external threat to democracy—the Communist Party—during the Cold War. Nearly fifty years later, Bernstein would challenge absolutist rhetoric from the government that he saw as posing an internal threat to democratic communication in the U.S. post-9/11. Both Hook and Bernstein share a fundamental commitment to Deweyan democracy that is characteristic of the Jewish pragmatists I discuss.

Sidney Hook's (1902-1989) intellectual legacy is steeped in controversy. For many scholars, a first point of reference for Sidney Hook is not pragmatism, nor even Hook's teacher and mentor John Dewey, but Hook's staunch commitment to anti-Communism. In 2004, Richard Rorty wrote of him that "at the present time (if perhaps not forever) our major interest in Hook will be in his crusade against the influence of Stalinism on US intellectual and political life,"¹¹¹ an assertion that has yet to be disproven in the years since. With few exceptions, critical scholarship surrounding Hook since the 1980s has tended to focus primarily on his anti-Communism, from the Committee for Cultural Freedom to the Waldorf Conference to Hook's denouncement and suggested suspension of academics who were Communist Party members.

¹¹¹ Richard Rorty, "Afterword," in *Sidney Hook Reconsidered*, ed. Matthew J. Cotter (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004): 282.

Perhaps even worse, Hook has been lambasted for being so swept up in his anti-Communist agenda that his stance becomes distinctly non-pragmatic. On this point, Robert Talisse writes that philosophers who consider Hook at all often read him as “abandoning Deweyan pragmatism for some awkward combination of analytic philosophy and conservative politics”¹¹² in his later career.

My reading of Hook indicates that he should be viewed as less of a Cold War villain and more as a victim of misreading. Richard Bernstein has written that a common way of thinking about Freud’s writings on religion¹¹³ “does the greatest violence to what he is trying to show us,”¹¹⁴ and I contend that a parallel situation has occurred with Hook’s staunch anti-Communist stances before and during the Cold War. Hook’s longstanding fight against Communism does not constitute a deviation from or betrayal of pragmatism, as some scholars have concluded. Rather, Hook’s unwavering commitment to democracy as a method is in line with both his mentor John Dewey’s understanding of pragmatism as well as the commitment to scientific empiricism espoused by earlier pragmatist figures like C.S. Peirce and William James. In spite of pragmatism’s decline in popularity around mid-century¹¹⁵, Hook nevertheless succeeded in championing an engaged and politically active philosophy that was committed to democratic communication.

Between his contributions to Cold War anti-Communist politics and his endorsements by conservative scholars and intellectuals as a man who represented so-called traditional American values, it comes as little surprise that there is no love lost between Hook and politically left-leaning scholars and academics. Ruth R. Wisse has observed that in several volumes published

¹¹² Robert B. Talisse, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 115.

¹¹³ Specifically, the view that Freud gives a reductive account of religion that discredits its significance.

¹¹⁴ Richard J. Bernstein, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 40.

¹¹⁵ Noted by John Capps and Robert B. Talisse in 2003 issues of *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* as well as by Louis Menand in his 2001 book *The Metaphysical Club*.

on the New York Intellectuals (NYI)¹¹⁶ in the mid-1980s, Hook “emerges [as] a favorite antagonist.”¹¹⁷ Alan Wald, for example, accuses Hook of not only betraying the socialist, revolutionary views of his youth, but of refusing to admit it. On this point, he writes that Hook’s viewpoints changed as he grew older due to “social pressures brought on him and... a loss of ability to view the world from the class perspective of the oppressed.”¹¹⁸ Russell Jacoby is more straightforward about why scholars have not been particularly kind to Hook, arguing that leftists “feel little affection for a philosopher who worked nights to establish the grounds to exclude subversives, communists, and student radicals from universities. Hook’s publications relentlessly raise the alarm that leftists, communists, radicals, and what he calls ‘ritualist liberals’ endanger freedom.”¹¹⁹ Tity de Vries points out that many biographers of the NYI accuse the group, Hook included, of “sell[ing] out their critical and non-conformist position,”¹²⁰ explaining that the NYI are primarily studied by “liberal and left historians, who either [deny] an increasing conservatism among the NYI or who [attack] them for becoming conservatives in the 1950s and 1960s.”¹²¹ Taken together, these portraits suggest a fairly strong bias against both Hook and the NYI by academics, scholars, and historians who view them as having forsaken their socialist, Marxist roots in favor of what Nathan Abrams has called an “alliance with the anticommunist hegemony.”¹²²

¹¹⁶ A group including Sidney Hook, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, Leslie Fiedler, Philip Rahv, and Lionel Trilling, among others.

¹¹⁷ Ruth R. Wisse, “The New York (Jewish) Intellectuals,” *Commentary* 84, no. 5 (1987): 30.

¹¹⁸ Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 293.

¹¹⁹ Russell Jacoby, “New York, Jewish, and Other Intellectuals,” in *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 106.

¹²⁰ Tity de Vries, “Creating a Group Identity: The New York Intellectuals,” in *Writing Lives: American Biography and Autobiography*, eds. Hans Bak and Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam, Netherlands: VU UP, 1998): 254.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 255.

¹²² Nathan Abrams, “‘A Profoundly Hegemonic Moment’: De-Mythologizing the Cold War New York Jewish Intellectuals,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 21, no. 3 (2003): 64.

Arguably worse than Hook's habitual casting as the villain of narratives surrounding the NYI, he has also been accused of being unpragmatic in his anti-Communist views. Cornel West writes that Hook's attachment to "tendentious cold war ideology"¹²³ clouded and overshadowed his commitment to Deweyan pragmatism. Similarly, Robert Westbrook argues in a review of Hook's memoir *Out of Step* that after his break with Communism in the mid-thirties, Hook maintained "an inflexibly essentialist conception of communism, [...which resulted in] a curiously unpragmatic way of looking at the world."¹²⁴ In his critique of Hook's Cold War politics, John Capps specifically points to Hook's argument in favor of a policy that excluded members of the Communist Party from university teaching positions. Capps argues that Hook's position is "at odds with other elements of his philosophical identity as a pragmatist."¹²⁵ Similar to Capps, Edward Shapiro observes in Hook a "tendency to substitute dogmatism for empirical evidence [in] the 1950s, when Hook maintained on *a priori* grounds that Communists should not be allowed to teach"¹²⁶ in universities. Both Capps and Shapiro conclude that Hook's lack of attention to context is distinctly unpragmatic.

Despite such criticism of his political and philosophical positions, Hook retains a small contingent of support, mostly from scholars who examine the relationship between his pragmatist philosophy and his anti-Communist views. These scholars acknowledge that while Hook's philosophical stances became more polemic and perhaps even dogmatic by the end of his life, his initial disdain for Communism and his strong anti-Communist stances during the Cold

¹²³ Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 123.

¹²⁴ Robert Westbrook, "Stream of Contentiousness," *The Nation* 244, no. 21 (1987): 730.

¹²⁵ John Capps, "Pragmatism and the McCarthy Era," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 39, no.1 (2003): 73.

¹²⁶ Edward Shapiro, "Sidney Hook, Higher Education, and the New Failure of Nerve," in *Sidney Hook Reconsidered*, ed. Matthew J. Cotter (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004): 194.

War are rooted in his Deweyan pragmatism.¹²⁷ Such critical examinations of Hook's philosophy converge around the point that Hook's anti-Communist views are more nuanced and more closely tied to his understanding of Dewey and pragmatism than other scholars have given him credit for. Similarly, I suggest here that Hook's anti-Communist views are most accurately understood as an unwavering application of the democratic method in line with Dewey.

Robert Talisse and Robert Tempio argue in the introduction to their edited collection of Sidney Hook's essays that central to his political philosophy "is the radical conception of democracy that he inherited from John Dewey. It is with this conception that one must begin, and it is in the context of this conception that one must understand Hook's other political commitments."¹²⁸ Dewey saw democracy as cooperative and experimental, and he viewed freedom of thought as essential to maintaining a democratic society. In "Democracy and Educational Administration," Dewey argues, "The democratic idea of freedom is not the right of each individual to *do* as he pleases [...rather,] the basic freedom is that of freedom of *mind* and of whatever degree of freedom of action and experience is necessary to produce freedom of intelligence."¹²⁹ He goes on to say that political democracy "must be buttressed by the presence of democratic methods in all social relationships."¹³⁰ In other words, Dewey believed that open and informed inquiry was of utmost importance to democracy and that democratic methods should be applied in the social as well as the political realm. Similarly, he writes in *Democracy and Education* that an undesirable society "is one which internally and externally sets up barriers

¹²⁷ See, for example, Matthew J. Cotter, preface to *Sidney Hook Reconsidered*, ed. Matthew J. Cotter (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004): 11; Laurence R. Jurdem, "James Burnham, Sidney Hook, and the Search for Intellectual Truth: From Communism to the Cold War, 1933-1956," *American Communist History* 13, nos.2-3 (2014): 172-173; and Robert B. Talisse, "Sidney Hook, Pragmatism, and the Communist Party: A Comment on Capps," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 39, no. 4 (2003): 660.

¹²⁸ Robert Talisse & Robert Tempio, introduction to *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 12.

¹²⁹ John Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration," *School and Society* 45 (1937): 459. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 462.

to free intercourse and communication of experience.”¹³¹ Like Dewey, Hook viewed the abilities to freely collaborate, exchange ideas with others, and reach one’s own conclusions without being influenced by outside forces as cornerstones of democracy. Furthermore, Hook insisted on Dewey’s rule of applying the democratic method in social and political arenas alike to support free and open inquiry.

Democracy for Hook entails a commitment to a procedure and a method rather than any specific theory or belief system about how the world works. Talisse and Tempio argue that Hook opposed any movement that operated outside of democratic processes and any policy that could not be established using the democratic method.¹³² In fact, Hook believed that democracy had established itself as a superior social method. On this point, he argues:

Let us remember that when we are called upon to fight for democracy we are not asked to fight for an ideal which has just been proposed as a *merely possible* valid ideal for our times; we already have considerable evidence in its behalf, the weight of which, unfortunately too often, is properly evaluated by some critics only when democracy is lost or imperiled. We have every reason to believe that we are fighting for a truth [...] in contradistinction to others who fight for their truths, we are prepared to establish to reasonable men that democracy is the better alternative.¹³³

In Hook’s philosophy, democracy must be applied as a method; that is, there can be no absolutes in our beliefs about democracy except the way in which we test those beliefs. If society wavers in its application of democracy as a rule of living, then it ceases to follow the method and can no longer call itself democratic.

Hook’s commitment to method is evident from his earliest writings. In his dissertation *The Metaphysics of Pragmatism*, he argues that scientific rules or laws “can only be established by *experiment* and cannot be deduced from *a priori* notions or assumed to hold for one set of

¹³¹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 115.

¹³² Talisse & Tempio, introduction to *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism*, 19.

¹³³ Sidney Hook, “Naturalism and Democracy,” in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays*, eds. Robert Talisse & Robert Tempio (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 245.

properties on the ground that they hold for any other.”¹³⁴ Here Hook emphasizes the necessity of experimentation as a means of verifying scientific principles—using the scientific method to test results. He later asks how a proposition is determined to be false and offers by way of response that it is “not by a leap of intuition but by a test of its implications—and the implication to be recognizable must be of a type which is evidenced in some *experienced context*.”¹³⁵ Thus, for Hook, testable, observable experience is critical to determining the truth or falsity of an idea, highlighting the importance of applying the scientific method to verify one’s results.

Hook applies his thinking about the scientific method—the notion that science is self-corrective—to his understanding of democracy. Because our society is ever changing and we are repeatedly faced with new situations and ideas, Hook advises that the most important question is “What *method* shall we follow in developing new beliefs and testing the old? For it is clear that no matter what belief we come to regard as valid, the evidence of its validity will depend in part, at least, upon the method which has been followed in reaching it.”¹³⁶ Hook identifies three values central to a democratic way of life: first, a belief in the “intrinsic worth or dignity”¹³⁷ of individuals; second, a belief in the value of diversity and variety; and finally, “a faith in some method by [which] conflicts are resolved.”¹³⁸ On this last point, Hook elaborates, “Since the method must be the test of all values, it would not be inaccurate to call it the basic value in the democratic way of life. [...] In a democracy it must be directed to all issues, to all conflicts, if democracy is not to succumb to the dangers which threaten it from both within and without.”¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Sidney Hook, *The Metaphysics of Pragmatism* (New York: AMS Press, 1977), 37. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 89. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁶ Sidney Hook, “Conflicts in Ways of Belief,” in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays*, eds. Robert Talisse & Robert Tempio (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 269. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁷ Sidney Hook, “The Democratic Way of Life,” in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays*, eds. Robert Talisse & Robert Tempio (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 285.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 286.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*.

Therefore, the democratic method, which Hook equates with free and open inquiry and application of the scientific method, is the cornerstone of any society that calls itself a democracy. Throughout his life, Hook maintained that the “democratic process is more important than any predetermined program,”¹⁴⁰ and this commitment to democracy was evident in his dealings with Communism.

In his early years, Hook had similarly viewed Marx’s dialectical method as an empirical method of verification. Christopher Phelps argues that in Hook’s 1933 volume *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* Hook recommends “an experimental intellectual method, with knowledge considered hypothetical, fallible, and provisional, ideas held true only insofar as verifiable in experience or practice, and knowledge created and obtained, not solely received as sense-impression.”¹⁴¹ Like the scientific method, the dialectic method was experimental and its results were contingent upon verification in experience. Phelps concludes that for the young socialist Hook, “historical materialism *was* experimental naturalism,”¹⁴² and indeed, Hook himself writes in 1936 that “properly understood, dialectical materialism is a form of historical, experimental naturalism which stresses the role of human activity, under determinate conditions, in transforming the social world.”¹⁴³ Yet just four years later in 1940, Hook wrote a letter to Albert Einstein in which his view of dialectical materialism had changed significantly. In this letter, Hook reveals, “I am at work on an extended critique of ‘dialectical materialism,’ the state philosophy of Soviet Russia, which seems to me every whit as false and pernicious as current

¹⁴⁰ Sidney Hook, “The Intellectual in America,” in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays*, eds. Robert Talisse & Robert Tempio (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 454.

¹⁴¹ Christopher Phelps, “Why Wouldn’t Sidney Hook Permit the Republication of His Best Book?” *Historical Materialism* 11, no. 4 (2003): 312.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

¹⁴³ Sidney Hook, “Revolutionary Mythology,” *The Nation* 142, no. 3687 (1936): 290.

‘philosophical’ doctrines in Germany.”¹⁴⁴ Hook’s reversal on dialectical materialism stems from the same source as his certainty that Communism was a threat to democracy.

In *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, Hook distinguishes his analysis of Marx from what he terms “orthodox Marxism,”¹⁴⁵ which he understands as “an emasculation of Marx’s thought.”¹⁴⁶ Hook criticizes so-called orthodox Marxists for their misuse and abuse of dialectical materialism, citing that “whereas Marx projected it as a *method* of understanding and making history, his disciples have tried to convert it into a *system* of sociology.”¹⁴⁷ Hook believed that this misinterpretation of Marxism led to unchallenged dogmatism among Communists. In an article on Marxism published the same year as *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, Hook argues that refusing to distinguish Marx’s analysis from the subjective view of economic classes inherent to his (Marx’s) philosophy “has led to the mischievous myth that Marxism is an objective science which can demonstrate both the inevitability of communism and its inherent moral superiority.”¹⁴⁸ While Communists believed Marxism to be an objective science and as a result claimed any Marxist analysis as scientific, Hook regarded dialectical materialism as conceived by Marx to be aligned with the scientific method—that is, its results were contingent and subject to change based on experience rather than correct as a predetermined conclusion.

After dialectical materialism became the official doctrine of the U.S.S.R., Hook observed that rather than remaining flexible and resulting in tentative conclusions (as he believed it had in the writings of Marx and Engels), any flexibility inherent to the dialectical method was

¹⁴⁴ Hook, *Out of Step*, 466. Hook provides the full contents of the letter in his autobiography but frames his question to Einstein with the remarks cited above on dialectical materialism.

¹⁴⁵ Sidney Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx: A Revolutionary Interpretation* (New York: The John Day Company, 1933), ix.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 115. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁸ Sidney Hook, “Marxism: dogma or method?” *The Nation* 136, no. 3532 (1933): 284.

“sacrificed for unverifiable dogma.”¹⁴⁹ Hook saw that discovering knowledge or truth was far less important to Communists than asserting official state doctrine. In his autobiography *Out of Step*, Hook recalls that after the Moscow Trials, Dewey admitted that “regardless of the accuracy of [Hook’s] interpretation of Marx, it was largely an intellectual conceit: To the extent that ideas counted in the world, Marxism in our time, he said, was the state philosophy of the Soviet Union and its satellites.”¹⁵⁰ Hook felt similarly about the dialectical method. In a 1937 article entitled “Dialectic and Nature,” he concludes, “the dialectic method can claim to have meaning and validity only when it is understood to be synonymous with scientific method [and] since in its traditional formulation it is burdened with many misleading and mistaken conceptions, it would be more conducive to clear thinking if the phrase were dropped.”¹⁵¹ In other words, in spite of whether Hook’s assessment of the Marxian dialectic as method in volumes like *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* was correct, dialectical materialism had been verified in experience to be the version espoused by orthodox Marxists and orthodox dialectical materialists. The dialectical method was no longer open to empiricism and experience; it was closed to all ideals except those of the CP.

Communism as it was implemented by the Soviet Union was irreconcilable with the communally agreed upon nature of inquiry and truth provided by the method of democracy because it was totalitarian. Avital Bloch explains that totalitarian regimes “violated individual liberties and free culture, whose protection was for Hook the primary condition for any political order calling itself a democracy.”¹⁵² Pragmatism is necessarily anti-totalitarian and anti-exclusionary because it supports open inquiry and exchange of ideas (as Dewey and Hook argue

¹⁴⁹ Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, 115.

¹⁵⁰ Hook, *Out of Step*, 140.

¹⁵¹ Sidney Hook, “Dialectic and Nature,” *Marxist Quarterly* 1 (1937): 283.

¹⁵² Avital H. Bloch, “The Controversy over the University Multicultural Curriculum during the 1980s: The Pragmatist Polemics of Sidney Hook,” *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 45 (2002): 34.

that democracy does). In fact, C.S. Peirce defines truth as “the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate,”¹⁵³ linking scientific inquiry with the search for truth. Scientific truths are confirmed by a community of inquirers who arrive at the same conclusion, and in order for such a conclusion to be reached, people must be free to investigate ideas. For Hook, democracy operates under parallel principles: people must be free to apply the democratic method by ensuring that as many voices and opinions as possible are welcomed and considered. Totalitarianism is by its very nature opposed to such a goal, as it operates under the method of authority¹⁵⁴ Peirce discusses in “The Fixation of Belief” wherein opinions are regulated by a governing body (in this case, the Communist Party) and any dissent from the knowledge or truths espoused by this body is stifled.

Aside from the general disillusionment of the NYI with Stalinism after the Moscow Trials and Hitler-Stalin Pact¹⁵⁵, Hook’s experience with the Waldorf Conference also led him to believe that Communists were not interested in intellectual freedom or knowledge generated from open and communal inquiry, two qualities Hook saw as essential to democratic progress. Neil Jumonville writes that of the NYI, Hook was the most adamant “about the Waldorf Conference’s betrayal of intellectual values, and his passion on this point was a hallmark of his life and ideals.”¹⁵⁶ Hook had requested that he be allowed to speak at the Waldorf Conference; he was concerned about the conference because it was promoted as an event for intellectuals to discuss current affairs, yet Communists dominated among the speakers.

¹⁵³ Charles Sanders Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” in *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition Volume 3 1872-1878*, ed. Christian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986): 273.

¹⁵⁴ Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief,” 250-251.

¹⁵⁵ de Vries, “Creating a Group Identity,” 253.

¹⁵⁶ Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: the New York intellectuals in postwar America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 17.

Hook wrote to Harlow Shapley, one of the conference organizers, requesting to read a paper at the conference, but he was denied, which Hook interpreted as intellectual dishonesty. According to Jumonville, “Hook told Shapley he would argue that there were no national, class, or party ‘truths’ in science, and that international peace and science had been ‘seriously undermined’ by those doctrines.”¹⁵⁷ Hook firmly believed that we gain knowledge and insight based upon our observation and analysis of facts, and *not* based upon our preconceived notions or feelings about the facts. As a result, like Dewey, he was determined to reject “party discipline in favor of freedom of thought.”¹⁵⁸ In “Naturalism and Democracy,” Hook writes, “scientific empiricism as a philosophy is more congenial to a democratic than to an antidemocratic community, for it brings into the open light of criticism the interests in which moral values and social institutions are rooted.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, Hook saw Communism as distorting and obfuscating scientific truth and progress for the sake of pushing its own agenda, and to Hook, this was fundamentally anti-democratic.

Considering what had become of dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union, the Moscow Trials, and his experience with the Waldorf Conference, Hook was convinced that Communists had no interest in scientific progress or pursuit of real knowledge, for they had made clear their stance that the Party trumped free and open communication and exchange of ideas. In so doing, Communism had revealed itself to be directly in conflict with democratic progress. Hook explains in *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* that “the only reliable evidence”¹⁶⁰ of a person’s change of heart on a subject is “the change in his habits, his deeds, his

¹⁵⁷ Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 16.

¹⁵⁸ Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 322.

¹⁵⁹ Hook, “Naturalism and Democracy,” 236.

¹⁶⁰ Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life*, 41.

personal and public behavior.”¹⁶¹ Hook saw that Communist Party members would have no change of heart with respect to putting free and open discussion above their concern for advancing the Party. Robert Talisse has argued that Hook viewed “free consent and free discussion as *epistemic* matters”¹⁶² integral to democracy and that “in particular, citizens must be able to inquire.”¹⁶³ For Hook, the CP cared more about its political agenda than about scientific or communal inquiry, and thus posed a threat to the democratic method.

Hook’s experiences with the CP convinced him that advancing a pre-determined set of objectives was more important to them than allowing for intellectual differences and democratic communication. Robert Talisse points out that throughout his life, Hook never displayed “a refusal to argue, a reluctance to listen to an opposing view, or an unwillingness to reconsider his own position in the light of opposing considerations.”¹⁶⁴ Given Hook’s adherence to the primacy of open inquiry and discussion as well as to both the scientific and the democratic method throughout his lifetime, I must conclude with Talisse and contra many Cold War and NYI scholars and historians that Hook did not betray or abandon pragmatism in his hardline stance against Communism. Rather, he demonstrated a sustained commitment to the scientific method and democratic communication. In an essay on the common philosophy that democracies share, Hook argues, “We cannot make absolutes of doctrines, tastes, or principles without inviting the evils of fanaticism. Nonetheless, there must be one working absolute on which there can be no compromise, about which we must be fanatical: the rules of the game, by which we settle

¹⁶¹ Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life*, 41.

¹⁶² Talisse, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy*, 118. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 119.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 124.

differences.”¹⁶⁵ For Hook, the ‘rules of the game’ meant democracy, which explains why he so fanatically defended it from any perceived threats. Communists had shown themselves to be intolerant of open discussion and intellectual inquiry, and thus, their goals were not compatible with the goals of those who wished, like Hook, to preserve and extend democratic freedoms. During the Cold War, Communism loomed large in the national consciousness as a potential threat to democracy, and Hook was determined not to let intellectuals who were affiliated with the Communist Party subvert free inquiry for the sake of a politics where intellectual progress and scientific contributions were not valued or given consideration.

Richard J. Bernstein makes scant reference to Sidney Hook in his writing—even Bernstein’s work on Dewey—however, these two pragmatist philosophers share a common commitment to the thought of John Dewey and to democratic communication. Despite their generational gap (Hook was born in 1902, Bernstein in 1932) and their activity in very different time periods (Hook being most active during the Cold War, and Bernstein from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s), both men railed against absolutism as an impediment to democracy. While Hook was concerned with the Communist Party’s potential destruction of scientific and democratic progress, Bernstein’s writings in the early 2000s frame his concern with absolutist post-9/11 political rhetoric that he views as counter-productive to democracy. Bernstein has argued that all pragmatists (from classical to neopragmatists), “have always been sharply critical of any and all appeals to absolutes. They have insisted upon a robust plurality of experiences, beliefs, and inquiries. They have rejected fixed fact-value and descriptive-prescriptive dichotomies.”¹⁶⁶ Bernstein’s pragmatism, heavily influenced by Peirce, Dewey, and Rorty,

¹⁶⁵ Sidney Hook, “The Philosophical Heritage of the Atlantic Democracies,” in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays*, eds. Robert Talisse & Robert Tempio (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 264.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Bernstein, “The Resurgence of Pragmatism,” *Social Research* 59, no. 4 (1992): 831-832.

maintains a focus on fallibilism and exposing false dichotomies in his criticism of post-9/11 political rhetoric. In this section, I will explore the Deweyan link between the pragmatism of Sidney Hook and Richard Bernstein and I will argue that Bernstein's criticism of 9/11 rhetoric parallels Hook's Cold War anti-Communism in spite of the 40-50 year gap in their respective writings, thereby demonstrating continuity in pragmatist thought and the long-standing commitment of Jewish pragmatists to democracy.

Hook's ties to Dewey, as well as the nickname 'Dewey's bulldog' that he was given by critics¹⁶⁷, are well known, however less well known is the fact that Bernstein shared a remarkably similar philosophy to Hook where Dewey was concerned. Mary Doak has argued that Bernstein's work is "consistent with Dewey's pragmatist interest in defending democracy,"¹⁶⁸ the very argument I made of Sidney Hook earlier in this chapter. William Hart has observed that Bernstein advocates for "a notion of praxis that stands somewhere between Marx and Dewey."¹⁶⁹ Hook himself has discussed "the fundamental agreement between Marx and Dewey"¹⁷⁰ in his work, and a number of scholars have discussed Hook's philosophical synthesis of Marx and Dewey. For instance, Michael Eldridge remarks upon Hook's postwar "rational, secular blend of Dewey and Marx"¹⁷¹ as central to Hook's pragmatism. In short, there are numerous instances where scholars observe Dewey's influence on Hook's work in which they might as well be talking about Bernstein in the same breath.

¹⁶⁷ Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life*, 114.

¹⁶⁸ Mary Doak, "Bernstein among the Prophets? Justice, Public Life, and Fallibilistic Pluralism," in *The Pragmatic Century: Conversations with Richard J. Bernstein*, eds. Sheila G. Davaney and Warren G. Frisina (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006): 156.

¹⁶⁹ William D. Hart, "Theses on Bernstein," 29.

¹⁷⁰ Sidney Hook, "Experimental Naturalism," in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays*, eds. Robert Talisse & Robert Tempio (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 44.

¹⁷¹ Michael Eldridge, "Dewey's Bulldog and the Eclipse of Pragmatism," in *Sidney Hook Reconsidered*, ed. Matthew J. Cotter (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004): 142.

Bernstein himself also acknowledges John Dewey's influence on his conception of pragmatism. Not only did Bernstein write his dissertation on Dewey and begin his scholarly career with several articles on Dewey¹⁷², but Dewey has also been included throughout Bernstein's career and in his contemporary work. When Bernstein brings Dewey into a discussion, it is typically to comment on Dewey's views of democracy or the importance of contingency to his thinking. In his 2010 volume *The Pragmatic Turn*, Bernstein includes a chapter on Dewey in which he explores "what we may still learn from Dewey in our own attempts to understand and foster democratic practices."¹⁷³ Similarly, he argues in a recent article for "learning from our traditions, engaging in dialogue with them, [and] seeking to appropriate what might still be relevant for confronting our problems and tasks"¹⁷⁴ with respect to Dewey's philosophy on democracy and education. "The Dewey who I admire is the one who refused to give in to cynicism or despair—who knew that democracy withers away or becomes meaningless unless we strive over and over again to make it a concrete living reality,"¹⁷⁵ he writes. Dewey had a clear lasting impact on the pragmatism of both Sidney Hook and Richard Bernstein where democracy is concerned.

Bernstein views 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism' as a representation of "what is best in our pragmatic tradition."¹⁷⁶ By this, he means that we must be willing to listen to others and hear what they are saying rather than simply dismissing their views as wrong or only engaging them in order to demonstrate the correctness of our own opinions. Thus, like Hook and Dewey,

¹⁷² See, for example, the articles "Dewey's Naturalism" in *Review of Metaphysics* (1959); "Knowledge, Value, and Freedom," in *John Dewey and the Experimental Spirit in Philosophy*, ed. Charles Hendel (1960); and "John Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience" in *Journal of Philosophy* (1961).

¹⁷³ Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 71.

¹⁷⁴ Richard J. Bernstein, "Democracy and Education," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2008): 22.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁷⁶ Richard J. Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Wounds," in *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 336.

Bernstein is in favor of democratic communication. Bernstein also suggests that we must be willing to revise our own views when necessary if sufficient evidence is presented that challenges or invalidates those views. He explains that when we are “primarily concerned with exposing weaknesses [in another’s argument,] we can be blind to what the other is saying and to the truth that the other is contributing to the discussion.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, communal and democratic inquiry and a rejection of absolutism are at the core of Bernstein’s pragmatism, and these two qualities of pragmatic fallibilism serve as a contrast to what Bernstein views as the essentialism and absolutism of post-9/11 rhetoric about evil in the U.S.

In *The Abuse of Evil*, Bernstein argues “In times of widespread anxiety, fear, and perceived crises, there arises a craving for absolutes, firm moral certainties, and simplistic schemas that help make sense of confusing contingencies; they help to provide a sense of psychological security. Since 9/11 we have been living through such a time.”¹⁷⁸ Bernstein describes the political rhetoric that took hold shortly after 9/11—one that was characterized by sharp false dichotomies of good vs. evil, us vs. them, America vs. radical Islam, and so forth—as “an *abuse of evil*.”¹⁷⁹ He explains: “Traditionally, the discourse of evil in our religious, philosophical, and literary traditions has been intended to provoke thinking, questioning, and inquiry. But today, the appeal to evil is being used as a political tool to obscure complex issues, to block genuine thinking, and to stifle public discussion and debate.”¹⁸⁰ What Bernstein finds disturbing in the post-9/11 rhetoric of the Bush administration is that it is simplistic fear-mongering designed to convince Americans that they should not rationally question the circumstances surrounding the 9/11 attacks (for example, how we might have prevented them or

¹⁷⁷ Bernstein, “Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Wounds,” 337.

¹⁷⁸ Richard J. Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion since 9/11* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 120-121.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, viii. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

the objective behind the attackers' terrible mission), only emotionally react to it. Furthermore, such rhetoric encourages binary thinking along the lines of the following: if you are a patriotic American who loves this country, you will support the administration's immediate plans for retaliation. If you do not support these plans, you are a traitor to your country and no better than the terrorists who attacked us. This type of absolutist thinking is undemocratic because it offers only two possible responses—one 'right,' the other 'wrong'—and drowns out other voices and other ways of thinking about the issue.

As Bernstein points out in an article on Hannah Arendt's book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, our immediate response to an unconscionable act of evil "is to appeal to what is familiar—demonizing the 'enemy'—rather than seeking to comprehend what is new and novel. But this is a temptation that must be resisted."¹⁸¹ In Bernstein's view, we must resist this temptation to demonize the enemy because it stifles critical thinking. William James wrote nearly a century earlier on the popular conception of truth vs. pragmatism's conception of truth: "The popular notion is that a true idea must copy its reality. [...] When you've got your true idea of anything, there's an end of the matter. You're in possession; you *know*; you have fulfilled your thinking destiny."¹⁸² This is more or less what Bernstein believes happens when we demonize the enemy: this categorization of person or group X as 'evil' keeps us from any further questioning or thinking on the subject. Post 9/11, we have decided that Islamic fundamentalists are 'the enemy,' and now there is nothing more to consider, no greater knowledge or perspective to be gained.

Aside from the unstated discouragement of critical thinking inherent to post-9/11 rhetoric, Bernstein also objects to the fact that this way of talking about evil turns it into a

¹⁸¹ Richard J. Bernstein, "The Origins of Totalitarianism: Not History, but Politics," *Social Research* 69, no. 2 (2002): 385.

¹⁸² William James, *Pragmatism* [1907] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 96. Emphasis in original.

monolith, thereby un-complicating and simplifying it in the same way that our discourse has been simplified. In his book *Radical Evil*, Bernstein interrogates the concept of evil, tracing its evolution through various philosophers and over the twentieth century. He worries that in popular culture, the understanding of evil is guided by what he calls “vulgar Manichaeism,”¹⁸³ which Bernstein defines as “the ease with which the world gets divided into good and evil forces. Evil ... comes to represent everything that one hates and despises, what one takes to be vile and despicable, which is to be violently extirpated.”¹⁸⁴ Because of Bernstein’s pragmatist stress on the notions of fallibilism and contingency, he (like William James and Sidney Hook before him) cautions us to beware that we have reached the end of our thinking about any concept, especially evil, since, according to Bernstein, there is “something about evil that resists and defies any final comprehension.”¹⁸⁵ However, post-9/11 rhetoric in the government and media groups everything considered bad together under the banner called ‘evil,’ as if all evils were equal to one another. He elaborates: “In the abuse of evil there is a manipulative—and sometimes cynical—*fusing* together of widely disparate phenomena into a single, reified evil enemy. Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Palestinian suicide bombers, and Chechnyan rebels are lumped together as if they were a single evil enemy—or part of a single global conspiracy.”¹⁸⁶ By discussing all evils as if they are the same, this false dichotomy of ‘us vs. them’ is reinforced and, yet again, critical thinking or questioning of the mainstream narrative about evil is discouraged. This leads to undemocratic communication as Americans are encouraged to take part in a binary, absolutist way of thinking and talking about the world.

¹⁸³ Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002), 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸⁶ Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil*, 58. Emphasis in original.

For Bernstein, the most distressing consequence of the abuse of evil is that it undermines American democracy. Bernstein strongly believes that pragmatism “is not a ‘party line’ [but] a firm set of commitments about the character of critical inquiry that is compatible with [different] beliefs and attitudes.”¹⁸⁷ This sentiment is precisely what Sidney Hook had attempted to convey about science to the attendees of the Waldorf Conference in 1949; Hook found that Stalinist Communism undermined scientific progress and democracy. Likewise, over 50 years later, Bernstein found that absolutist post-9/11 rhetoric similarly undermined critical thinking and democratic progress. He argues that in a strong democracy, “there will be sharp disagreements, and strong opinions among citizens. But when absolutes, certainties, rigid dichotomies are introduced into politics they corrode and corrupt democratic politics.”¹⁸⁸ In other words, the post-9/11 abuse of evil creates a single narrative that must be adhered to (much like Stalinist Communism had done during the Cold War), thus undermining the communal inquiry that democracy should naturally encourage. “Both [Dewey and Arendt] teach us how *fragile* democracy really is—how its fate is always uncertain,”¹⁸⁹ Bernstein writes. Like Dewey and Hook, Bernstein subscribes to the notion of democracy as progress. We must be vigilant to ensure that democracy is still functioning as such—supporting open dialogue and enabling as many citizens as possible to have a voice in this communal experiment toward progress and greater understanding.

Bernstein’s proposal to remedy the problematic post-9/11 rhetoric of evil is to suggest that rather than absolutism, we should cultivate an attitude of pragmatic fallibilism. He explains that such a mentality “rejects the appeal to ideology, to absolute foundations, to incorrigible

¹⁸⁷ Richard J. Bernstein, “Pragmatism’s Common Faith,” in *Pragmatism and Religion: Classical Sources and Original Essays*, ed. Stuart Rosenbaum (Urbana & Chicago, IL: UIUC Press, 2003): 139.

¹⁸⁸ Richard J. Bernstein, “The Abuse of Evil,” in *Deliver Us from Evil*, eds. M. David Eckel and Bradley L. Herling, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008): 112.

¹⁸⁹ Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil*, 122. Emphasis in original.

truths and certainties, [and] to rigid ahistorical dichotomies including the dichotomy of absolute good and evil.”¹⁹⁰ Bernstein argues that a pragmatist mindset will encourage critical thinking, thoughtful deliberation, and democratic communication while acknowledging life’s unforeseen contingencies (as well as the fact that none of us can know with absolute certainty how best to respond to them). He believes that pragmatic fallibilism will help us to cultivate what is best in democracy: “tangible public freedom”¹⁹¹ and the ability to hear and thoughtfully and rationally weigh conflicting opinions. To the absolutists who would argue that only moral certainty justifies decisive actions, Bernstein responds:

There is no incompatibility between being *decisive* and recognizing the *fallibility* of our choices and decisions. On the contrary, this is what is required for *responsible* action. We need to recognize that whatever we do there will always be unintended consequences. Acknowledging and intelligently assessing these consequences may require altering our conduct. Dewey wrote that ‘only the conventional and the fanatical are always immediately sure of the right and wrong [or the good and evil].’¹⁹²

Bernstein concludes that responsible, deliberative democracy is best, and that this type of democracy cannot be achieved through the abuse of evil, the appeal to absolutes, or the desire for moral certainty to guide our actions (strong though that desire may be).

Some 50 years apart from one another, Sidney Hook and Richard Bernstein both turned to a pragmatism heavily informed by Dewey to respond in times of national crisis, times when each man feared that our democracy and intellectual freedoms were at stake. Both favored rational thought and were opposed to absolutist thinking that they viewed as undermining democratic progress and freedom. Hook’s firm anti-Communist stance may have seemed absolutist and un-pragmatic in its own right to some critics, however, this reading of Hook fails to take into account his commitment to democracy as method. Similarly, while Bernstein’s

¹⁹⁰ Bernstein, “The Abuse of Evil,” 107.

¹⁹¹ Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil*, 124.

¹⁹² Bernstein, “The Abuse of Evil,” 108. Emphasis in original. The notion to Dewey’s quote is Bernstein’s addition.

opposition to post-9/11 rhetoric that he felt constituted an abuse of evil may at first glance appear divisive at a time when togetherness and national unity were viewed as paramount, his stance reflects his own commitment to the values of American democracy. Far from being politically stagnant or inactive, these pragmatists demonstrate a willingness to fight for the ideals they hold dear and to encourage rational debate and democratic communication as central values of our shared democratic experiment.

Conclusions

The figures I have discussed in this chapter serve as a philosophical framework for my discussions of twentieth century Jewish American literature in the chapters that follow. In Chapters 2 and 3, I trace the pragmatist identity politics developed by Gertrude Stein, Anzia Yezierska, Bernard Malamud, and Cynthia Ozick from the early twentieth century through post-Holocaust and mid-century. To reiterate, the pragmatist Jewish identity politics that developed throughout the first half of the twentieth century was characterized by the desire for Jewish self-acceptance and evolved as the result of several different factors, including immigration, assimilation, American and European anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and political Zionism. This identity politics was not rooted in the notion of Jewishness as an essential, inherent quality of every Jew, but rather the idea that individuals change over time and have the ability to choose their affiliations, beliefs, and practices. Simultaneously, Horace Kallen, Morris R. Cohen, and Sidney Hook all understood and acknowledged that other people's perceptions of Judaism and Jewishness play a role in identity formation as well, which is why each of them believed that Jewish self-acceptance was so important. Cohen and Hook especially believed that considering identity as a kind of absolute was a danger to the Jewish community as well as other groups

(African Americans, for example) who were particularly at risk of being mistreated or denied equal rights on the basis of their alleged ‘inherent’ ethnic differences from the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority. This identity politics considers both particular concerns for Jews and universal concerns with scientific responsibility and social justice as it develops; this Du Boisian mediation between the universal and the particular is reflected in the work of Stein, Yeziarska, Malamud, and Ozick that I will discuss in Chapters 2 and 3.

Connected to this pragmatic identity politics is a concern for democracy and preserving democratic communication, for only democratic community (as opposed to polarization and extreme partisanship of the kind Hook and Bernstein observe) can create the kind of conditions necessary for a pragmatist identity politics to flourish. In Chapter 4, I return to this focus on Deweyan democratic communication in the work of Bernard Malamud, Grace Paley, and Tony Kushner. Fellow Deweyan pragmatists Sidney Hook and Richard J. Bernstein fought against absolutism and the totalitarianism of undemocratic communication. Hook’s staunchly anti-Communist Cold War views earned him a position of infamy among scholars (and for some, even villainy), but when his views are considered in light of his commitment to democracy as a method, Hook’s strict adherence to democracy resembles that of his mentor John Dewey or the adherence of classical pragmatists C.S. Peirce and William James to the empirical or scientific method in their work. Based on his experiences with Stalinist Communism, Hook feared that absolutism pervaded at the expense of the free, open exchange of ideas so critical to sustaining democracy. Richard Bernstein, some 50 years later, tackled national politics by addressing the problematic ‘abuse of evil’ in post-9/11 rhetoric that he believed curtailed critical thought and democratic freedoms. This commitment to democracy is based in Deweyan pragmatism, and,

like Sidney Hook, Bernstein too demonstrates a willingness to speak out when freedom of expression and democratic communication are at stake.

In their development of a Jewish identity politics over the twentieth century as well as later confrontation of threats to democracy, the Jewish pragmatists I have discussed here have made social justice their chief cause above all others, and in so doing they have answered the oft-cited criticism that pragmatism is politically impotent and fails to do critical work in the world. Far from being content to discuss things in the abstract and from a distance, these pragmatist figures were determined to make a difference in the world around them and to create change for the better—both for Americans and American democracy as a whole as well as for Jews in particular.

Felt Facts: Stein and Yeziarska's Identity Politics

A pragmatist identity politics is one that mediates between universal and particular concerns. It encourages a balance between consideration for the good of all people and specific tribal affinities and desires. Previously, I discussed Horace Kallen, Morris Cohen, and Sidney Hook as proponents of just such an identity politics. For these Jewish pragmatist figures, more universal concerns with scientific responsibility and social justice undergirded particular concerns about the mistreatment of particular groups in American society, like Jews and African Americans. Similarly, Gertrude Stein and Anzia Yeziarska were concerned with the mistreatment of particular groups, especially immigrants. Their writing is connected to the pragmatist lineage I traced in Chapter 1 through a shared focus on how to incorporate particular experiences of marginalized groups into the experience of ‘universal’ American readers. To this end, Stein and Yeziarska employ a politics of feeling in their work that encourages audience identification with the female immigrant protagonists of their stories, thus realizing the dignity that all people share and the importance of being able to live a life of dignity on one’s own terms.

In the early twentieth century, it was a radical proposition to declare that identity was not fixed and essential due to race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, but instead fluid, evolving, and dynamic. Between the mid-nineteenth century craniometry of Samuel Morton and Josiah Nott and the propagation of nativist, anti-immigrant sentiment through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was clear that many Anglo-descended Americans, including scientists, believed in the inherent superiority of their race over that of others. However, Dana Carluccio has argued that while “we routinely conceive of the late nineteenth century as a time of unreconstructed biological essentialism, and while we measure that period through the eyes of a late twentieth-century idea of social construction, many early twentieth-century thinkers believed

that evolution supplied a middle term between these two frameworks.”¹⁹³ Although we tend to think of race (as well as identity more broadly) as socially constructed today, Carluccio suggests that early twentieth century scientific discussion was not entirely dominated by the concept of race as essential and biologically deterministic.

Franz Boas, Alain Locke, and Morris Cohen all argued against stereotyping groups of people based on race because first, many scientists tended to base their racialized conclusions on generalizations rather than empirical evidence, and second, as Morris Cohen notes in *Reason and Nature*, generalized “laws or facts are basic to science, [but] in the social realm they do not seem so numerous or so readily authenticated.”¹⁹⁴ In other words, because individuals are so different from one another in temperament and character traits, unlike scientific categorizations, attempts at making social generalizations about groups of people will not hold up when examined on a case-by-case basis (whereas in nature all occurrences of gold will share a certain atomic weight and all hurricanes will possess a low-pressure center).

Gertrude Stein and Anzia Yezierska were two writers who shared this pragmatist vision of fluid and evolving identity rather than essentialized and immutable understandings of people based on particular categories. As a result of their own identities and experience as Jewish women (as well as Stein’s sexual orientation as a lesbian and Yezierska’s position as an immigrant), each understood the danger of biological and cultural determinism. Although they had very different writing styles (Stein’s modernism vs. Yezierska’s sentimental realism) and social upbringings (Stein’s family was wealthy and assimilated, whereas Yezierska’s parents were impoverished immigrants who raised her in an Orthodox Jewish home), both women

¹⁹³ Dana Carluccio, “The Evolutionary Invention of Race: W.E.B. Du Bois’s ‘Conservation’ of Race and George Schuyler’s *Black No More*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 55, no. 4 (2009): 513.

¹⁹⁴ Morris R. Cohen, *Reason and Nature: An Essay on the Meaning of Scientific Method* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company: 1931), 357.

ultimately engaged with pragmatist philosophy in their fiction in part due to the influence of a non-Jewish, American male mentor. Furthermore, both women articulate what I am calling a *politics of feeling* in their work that ties them to the pragmatist Jewish identity politics I have been tracing. Politics of feeling refers to Stein and Yeziarska's use of feeling with or for the characters in their stories to effect a shift in the views of their audience to recognize the universal desire for dignity and acknowledgement of universal experience in the particular circumstances of their female protagonists. This is significant because of the implications of both women's relationship to social justice. In Yeziarska's case, she is largely neglected by scholars¹⁹⁵ and seldom discussed as a champion of social justice or progressivism despite acknowledgement of the "persistent criticism of the inadequacies of democracy"¹⁹⁶ in her work. In Stein's case, her contributions to modernism are almost universally lauded, even as some scholars have accused her of supporting eugenics and Nazism.¹⁹⁷ In my discussion of Stein and Yeziarska in this chapter, I will argue that both make substantial contributions to existing Jewish pragmatist identity politics in the early twentieth century through their articulation of a politics of feeling that extends and adds to an evolving discussion of identity as essentialist vs. constructed by suggesting that neither viewpoint is wholly accurate. In addition, both women highlight the universal experience of the desire for acceptance within the particular circumstances of their immigrant characters, much the way Boas, Kallen, and Cohen argued for acceptance of other races in society to benefit society as a whole.

¹⁹⁵ Although her semi-autobiographical and best-known novel *Bread Givers* (1925) has been examined by numerous scholars.

¹⁹⁶ Magdalena Zaborowska, *How We Found America: Reading Gender Through East European Immigrant Narratives* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 121.

¹⁹⁷ See, for example, Daylanne English, "Gertrude Stein and the Politics of Literary-Medical Experimentation," *Literature and Medicine* 16, no. 2 (1997): 188-209 and Barbara Will, "The Strange Politics of Gertrude Stein," *Humanities* 33, no. 2 (2012): 24-49.

Like the philosophy of Cohen, Kallen, and Hook, Stein and Yeziarska's identity politics is concerned with dignity, particularly how essentialized understandings of identity—biological or cultural—undermine dignity and prove fatal to individuals, relationships, and (for Yeziarska) even democracy. Despite their vastly different life experiences, both Stein's *Three Lives* (1909) and much of Yeziarska's work acknowledge that 1) change is an intrinsic part of human nature, as people gradually evolve over time; 2) identity is dynamic rather than stable and immutable; and 3) individuals thrive most when they are able to live lives of dignity on the basis of their own felt facts, for then they will encourage that same dignity in others.

Stein's Politics of Feeling in Three Lives

Gertrude Stein's connection to pragmatism is well documented; biographers and scholars alike concur that Stein's early studies with William James at Radcliffe and her experiments on automatic writing played a significant role in shaping her philosophical perspective.¹⁹⁸ However, Stein's early collection *Three Lives* (1909) has received far less scholarly attention than the experimental and autobiographical works written later in her career. On the surface, these stories appear to follow conventions associated with literary naturalism: Stein details the lives of the three title characters—Anna, Melanctha, and Lena—ending each story with its main character's death and highlighting the unique unhappiness and oppression of each woman. Like much of Stein's work, however, there is more to *Three Lives* than what appears on the surface, particularly in light of Stein's studies with William James. *Three Lives* encourages feeling with the characters of Anna, Melanctha, and Lena, so that a gradual shift in perception on the part of the reader is achieved. Thus, Stein's pragmatist politics of feeling in this collection enables the

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Dana Cairns Watson, *Gertrude Stein and the Essence of What Happens* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005); Steven Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); or Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

reader to incorporate the particular experiences of immigrants and people of color into his/her own experience.

One special point of interest among scholars who have considered *Three Lives* is the relationship between this early Stein collection and cubist painting, particularly since Pablo Picasso developed a friendship with Stein while she sat for the portrait he painted of her between 1905 and 1906. Susanna Pavloska describes how Picasso and Stein studied Cezanne's paintings and suggests that both artists "adopted an aesthetic of crudeness, incompleteness, and ugliness that culminated for Stein, in 'Melanctha,' and for Picasso, in *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*."¹⁹⁹ L.T. Fitz observes of "Melanctha" that, similar to cubist work, "Stein's fiction lacks a focal point of action [...] Her stories have a sameness throughout that makes them more portraits than stories."²⁰⁰ Likewise, Marianne DeKoven notes that Stein's early fiction shares with cubism "an orientation toward the linguistic or pictorial surface, a movement in and out of recognizable representation; both shatter or fragment perception and the sentence (canvas), and both render multiple perspectives."²⁰¹ Given the close proximity between Picasso's portrait of Stein and her writing of *Three Lives*, this comparison has yielded useful insight into Stein's understanding of composition.

Several scholars of Stein's work have noted her use of repetition in the stories of *Three Lives* and the effects of that repetition on the reader. Marjorie Perloff argues that Stein's prose "seeks to enact the rhythm of human change, to show how a relationship, any relationship between two people who are at once the same and different, evolves. This is why repetition is

¹⁹⁹ Susanna Pavloska, *Modern Primitives: Race and Language in Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 4-5.

²⁰⁰ L.T. Fitz, "Gertrude Stein and Picasso: The Language of Surfaces," *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 45, no. 2 (1973): 231.

²⁰¹ Marianne DeKoven, "Gertrude Stein and Modern Painting: Beyond Literary Cubism," *Contemporary Literature* 22, no. 1 (1981): 81.

essential.”²⁰² Perloff suggests that the repetitions in *Three Lives* serve a purpose of allowing change to occur in gradual shifts as it typically does in relationships. We say and do the same things over and over again, but each iteration is not an exact replication of what came before. Stein shows that people repeat with a difference and this is how growth or evolution occurs. Related to Perloff’s argument, Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick asserts that Stein’s repetitions “encourage us to grapple with how we understand names as markers of identifications, even though these names signify identities that are always in flux, in terms of language and representation and in terms of changing entities in the real world.”²⁰³ So, for example, the fact that Lena Mainz is repeatedly described by Stein as ‘german’—“Lena was patient, sweet, gentle, and german,”²⁰⁴ “Lena’s german patience held no suffering,”²⁰⁵ “Lena’s unexpectant and unsuffering german nature,”²⁰⁶ and so forth—may enable the reader of the story to see that we often think of others in simplistic, reductive terms even though people are constantly changing and evolving. Similarly, Aidan Thompson has argued that Stein’s writing “demand[s] that the reader make connections and actively participate in the meaning making process, which in turn requires thinking that is not overwhelmed by automatic patterns.”²⁰⁷ In other words, reading Stein’s fiction requires our active engagement and a break from habits we typically rely on for understanding, which fosters growth.

²⁰² Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 93.

²⁰³ Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick, “Reconfiguring Identities in the Word and in the World: Naming Marginalized Subjects and Articulating Marginal Narratives in Early Canonical Works by Gertrude Stein,” *South Central Review* 31, no.2 (2014): 9.

²⁰⁴ Gertrude Stein, “The Gentle Lena” in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 240.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

²⁰⁷ Aidan Thompson, “Language and Democracy: Making Meaning as Existing in the Work of Gertrude Stein,” *Arizona Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2013): 146.

The most frequently discussed story of *Three Lives*, “Melanctha,” has the distinction of being both the longest and the most problematic story in the collection. The use of racial stereotypes and seemingly racist language along with Stein’s appropriation of the “tragic mulatta” trope to retell an earlier story, *Q.E.D.*, has generated much debate among scholars as to whether the racist elements of “Melanctha” should be taken at face value or if there is more to Melanctha’s story than meets the eye. Sonia Saldívar-Hull calls out Gertrude Stein as a “white supremacist”²⁰⁸ and argues that in “Melanctha” Stein employs “racist stereotypical characterizations”²⁰⁹ of African Americans. Likewise, Milton Cohen charts Stein’s descriptions of people of color in the story, asserting that Stein “clearly links skin tone to personality traits [and] her associations follow many of the established stereotypes that whites held of blacks.”²¹⁰ On the other hand, Laura Doyle suggests that there is “an incisive critique of racialism implicit in [Stein’s] modernist narrative practice”²¹¹ while acknowledging that Stein’s position as an educated white woman allows her to “‘play’ with racism.”²¹² In that same vein, Corinne Blackmer points to Stein’s creation in “Melanctha” of an “oscillation among [traditional] categories [that] results in the disruption and confounding of stable binarisms.”²¹³ Other scholars have speculated that Stein uses the bisexual African American character of Melanctha to work through anxieties about her own identity as a Jewish lesbian. Barbara Will, for example, has argued that Stein’s “African-American types are also projections and displacements, carriers of

²⁰⁸ Sonia Saldívar-Hull, “Wrestling Your Ally: Stein, Racism, and Feminist Critical Practice,” in *Women’s Writing in Exile*, eds. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1989), 185.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

²¹⁰ Milton A. Cohen, “Black Brutes and Mulatto Saints: The Racial Hierarchy of Stein’s ‘Melanctha,’” *Black American Literature Forum* 18, no. 3 (1984): 120.

²¹¹ Laura Doyle, “The Flat, the Round, and Gertrude Stein: Race and the Shape of Modern(ist) History,” *Modernism/modernity* 7, no. 2 (2000): 264.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Corinne E. Blackmer, “African Masks and the Arts of Passing in Gertrude Stein’s ‘Melanctha’ and Nella Larsen’s *Passing*,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, no. 2 (1993): 240.

her contradictory desires for both identification with and distance from the category of race.”²¹⁴

Similarly, Elizabeth Rodrigues suggests that both Stein and her character Melantha Herbert are in “search [of] a story that can deal with the reality of self exhaustively conceived.”²¹⁵ The other two stories in *Three Lives*, “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena” are, with few exceptions,²¹⁶ rarely explored individually or in depth, despite the fact that the latter is one of Stein’s most widely anthologized stories. Studies of Stein that have considered pragmatism in her work, such as Steven Meyer’s *Irresistible Dictation* (2003), emphasize the science that undergirds her writing.

Rather than science, I am interested in feeling in Stein’s work. In her 2007 book *A Natural History of Pragmatism*, Joan Richardson argues that in *Three Lives*, Gertrude Stein “translates [William] James’s major reformation of the way consciousness is conceived into a performative exercise, a kind of catechism demonstrating the necessity of taking the fact of feeling fully into account in understanding rationality.”²¹⁷ In other words, what James theorizes about, Stein articulates with feeling in her stories of three women by exploring subjective emotional and psychological experiences. My interest in *Three Lives* stems in part from its chronological placement in Stein’s work: as it is among her earliest fiction, it is also the work in which Stein’s pragmatism is most clearly observable. Additionally, *Three Lives* is the work that comprehensively articulates what I am calling a *politics of feeling* in Stein. Like the heroines of Anzia Yezierska’s fiction that I will address later in this chapter, the lives of the three women

²¹⁴ Barbara Will, *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of “Genius,”* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 40.

²¹⁵ Elizabeth Rodrigues, “‘Contiguous But Widely Separated’ Selves: Im/Migrant Life Narrative as Data-Driven Form,” *Biography* 38, no. 1 (2015): 68.

²¹⁶ For detailed considerations of “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena” see Thomas Fahy, “Iteration as a Form of Narrative Control in Gertrude Stein’s ‘The Good Anna,’” *Style* 34, no. 1 (2000): 25-35; Mary Wilson, “Stein’s The Gentle Lena,” *Explicator* 64, no.2 (2006): 94-96; or Harriet Scott Chessman’s chapter on *Three Lives* in *The Public Is Invited to Dance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989).

²¹⁷ Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 232.

Stein describes all share a common oppression: the felt facts of their lives are ignored or denied. In other words, their community and society or specific characters (or both) in “The Good Anna,” “Melanctha,” and “The Gentle Lena” deny each female protagonist the reality of her experience and the benefit of a life fully lived in accordance with her perceptions and emotions.

William James argues in *Pragmatism* that new truths are the result “of new experiences and of old truths combined and mutually modifying one another.”²¹⁸ We gain new knowledge and understanding based on our previous knowledge combined with new experiences, perceptions, and sensations. For this reason, James also asserts that truth “*happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events.”²¹⁹ Based on this Jamesian idea of truth, Stein illustrates in *Three Lives* the consequences for women who are denied the ability to act based on their experiences or to discover new truths. Each woman’s life demonstrates a different relation to felt facts. Anna feels but does not act, paralyzed by a fear of deviant sexuality in a heteronormative society. Lena acts but is not empowered to act in accordance with her own feeling, instead living a life that is deemed appropriate for her by her aunt. Melanctha feels and acts in accordance with her experience and she is alienated and marginalized as a result. Thus, Stein demonstrates that the societies these characters inhabit fail to take into account their particular experiences as women, immigrants, and people of color.

Stein’s politics of feeling in *Three Lives* is uniquely Jewish (rather than universally feminist) because it is based on Stein’s own understanding of and relation to her Jewish identity. In this way, it is related to the pragmatist identity politics I traced in Chapter 1. Horace Kallen, Morris Cohen, and Sidney Hook each desired an increase of Jewish self-acceptance; these men all wanted Jews to take pride in their identities and live dignified lives rather than feeling

²¹⁸ William James, *Pragmatism* [1907] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 83.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

ashamed of who they were. In Stein's case, the politics of feeling she espouses demonstrates her own wish for all women—regardless of gender, race, or sexuality—to be able to live their lives with dignity and on their own terms.

In her early years, Stein viewed race and ethnicity as essentialist, but eventually came to acknowledge that identity is always in flux because human beings are constantly changing and evolving. On this point, Amy Feinstein writes:

From early on...Stein had a racial understanding of human nature and Jewish identity that derived in part from her work as a student and researcher of the medical and psychological sciences of the day. She considered Jewish-Americans to be racially distinct from Anglo-Saxon Americans and, at Radcliffe College in 1896, wrote an essay asserting that even non-practicing 'modern' Jews should avoid intermarriage in order to maintain a vibrant familial separatism.²²⁰

That Stein initially considered ethnicity to be immutable is unsurprising, given the common scientific insistence well into the twentieth century on distinct racial 'types' who possessed inherent traits and abilities based on skin color.²²¹ Figures like Franz Boas, Alain Locke, and Morris Cohen, however, argued against stereotyping groups of people based on race because many scientists tended to base their racialized conclusions on generalizations rather than empirical evidence. Maria Damon argues that for Jews in "mainstream intellectual life of the twentieth century, the challenge was to position themselves in relation to these sociobiological, psychological, sexological, and anthropological systems in a way that did not subordinate them to these discourses of classification and control but rather enabled them to participate affirmatively in the process of social definition."²²² In other words, rather than being subject to a deterministic outlook based upon their Jewishness, Jewish intellectuals instead attempted to

²²⁰ Amy Feinstein, "Gertrude Stein, Alice Toklas, and Albert Barnes: Looking Like a Jew in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 25, no. 3 (2007): 50-51.

²²¹ For more on this topic, please refer to the section entitled "The Science of Race" in Chapter 1.

²²² Maria Damon, "Writing, Social Science, and Ethnicity in Gertrude Stein and Certain Others" in *Modernism, Inc.: Body, Memory, Capital*, eds. Jani Scandura and Michael Thurston (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 139.

shape and change the notion of what it meant to be Jewish. Feinstein suggests that Stein began “to distance herself from racial understandings of human nature more broadly,”²²³ until she arrived at “a performative understanding of Jewish identity.”²²⁴ Acknowledging the performative aspects of identity enabled Stein to take charge of her Jewishness, which for Stein (like Franz Boas) resulted in distancing herself from Jewish affiliation. Barbara Will observes that although Stein sometimes strongly affiliated herself with the Jewish people during her years at Radcliffe and Johns Hopkins, “after abandoning her psychological studies and moving to Paris, Stein would increasingly repudiate racial identification.”²²⁵ Nevertheless, this shift in her understanding of her own Jewishness allowed Stein to see “the instability of identity, or its illusory nature.”²²⁶

This shift in her thinking about ‘types’ and identity more broadly conceived is reflected in the unstable and fluctuating identities of the characters Stein creates in *Three Lives*. Her repetition in these stories underscores the ever-changing nature of human beings, and the unhappy lives of Anna, Melanctha, and Lena show the difficulty of life for women who have been placed in predetermined categories based on their gender, race, and nationality. (In fact, Concetta Principe has argued that Stein’s early literary works may be read as “an unconscious expression of the trauma of her Jewish difference in Protestant America.”²²⁷) Although none of the characters in *Three Lives* is Jewish, each female protagonist serves as a ‘type’ whose identity Stein complicates and blurs throughout the course of her story: Anna and Lena are both German immigrants and Melanctha is the mixed-race daughter of a dark-skinned black man and a “pale

²²³ Feinstein, “Gertrude Stein, Alice Toklas, and Albert Barnes,” 53.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

²²⁵ Will, *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of “Genius,”* 37.

²²⁶ Maria Damon, “Gertrude Stein’s Jewishness, Jewish Social Scientists, and the ‘Jewish Question,’” *Modern Fiction Studies* 42, no. 3 (1996): 500.

²²⁷ Concetta Principe, “The Trauma of *The Making of Americans*: Stein and Protestant America,” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 15, no.2 (2013): 241.

yellow woman.”²²⁸ I argue that each story in *Three Lives* explores its title character’s relationship to felt facts in her life in addition to highlighting injustices she experiences as a result of her environment. Rather than writing a story that leaves the reader feeling a certain way about the main character and events—happy, sad, angry—Stein’s stories in *Three Lives* demand reader engagement, attention, and identification *with* the main character’s thoughts and feelings so that the reader can change and evolve alongside the protagonist, incorporating those particular experiences into his or her own. Ultimately, this is what is at stake in Stein’s politics of feeling: breaking her white, educated audience’s automatic habits as they read so that they might come to question the validity and stability of false dichotomies like male/female, white/black, and gay/straight. Paul Jay writes that for Stein reality “does not simply appear as it is in some fixed and absolute sense, but is a composition that depends upon how the perceiving subject looks at things and conducts his or her life.”²²⁹ Only when Stein’s readers understand that identity, like reality, is not fixed and absolute, that it is always in flux and ever-evolving, will they live lives of dignity on the basis of their own felt facts and encourage that same dignity in others.

The Good Anna and Heteronormative ‘Dignity’

Anna Federer, the title character of “The Good Anna,” is characterized as good by virtue of her self-restraint. Anna is “a small, spare, german woman”²³⁰ who is from “solid lower middle-class south german stock.”²³¹ When the reader is first introduced to Anna, she lives with Miss Mathilda, for whom she is a servant for five years. The narrator recounts Anna’s immigration to the U.S., her time working for her first mistress, Miss Mary Wadsmith, her years

²²⁸ Gertrude Stein, “Melanctha” in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 128.

²²⁹ Paul Jay, *Contingency Blues: The Search for Foundations in American Criticism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 111.

²³⁰ Stein, “The Good Anna,” in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 71.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 78.

working for Miss Mathilda, her friendship with Mrs. Drehten, her relationship with the widow Mrs. Lehntman—“the romance in Anna’s life”²³²—and finally, Anna’s death. Throughout the story, Anna compulsively frets over her own and others’ dignity, but the dignity that she works so hard to uphold is defined by a repression of natural feeling and the absence of action.

The word ‘dignity’ occurs within the first few pages of “The Good Anna,” in reference to sex. Near the beginning of the story, the narrator relates an anecdote about Peter, one of Miss Mathilda’s dogs, who mates with Foxy, “a little transient terrier for whom Anna had found a home.”²³³ Anna is very upset about this, for she has “high ideals for canine chastity,”²³⁴ and the word ‘bad’ is used multiple times to describe Peter and his actions. After a description of the great pains Anna goes to in order to ensure that the chastity of her dogs is upheld, the narrator comments, “Innocent blind old Baby was the only one who preserved the dignity becoming in a dog.”²³⁵ Here, Baby’s ‘dignity’ comes from a repression of any natural desire she may have had to mate. Like her beloved dog, Anna also maintains her ‘dignity’ throughout her life by remaining chaste and refusing to act on any sexual desires she has. In spite of the sarcasm with which this phrase is periodically repeated throughout “The Good Anna,” Anna does in fact lead “an arduous and troubled life”²³⁶ because she denies her own felt facts and abstains from acting in accordance with her feelings and experience when it comes to love.

Anna, the reader is told, possesses “a firm old world sense of what was the right way for a girl to do.”²³⁷ Often, this ‘right way’ means *not* doing something. For example, Anna “never

²³² Stein, “The Good Anna,” 83.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 70.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

would sit down during the long talks she held with Miss Mathilda,”²³⁸ and although she likes her brother, Anna is “never in any way dependent on him.”²³⁹ She also refrains from taking care of herself, preferring to work herself sick, for she believes “in her stubborn, faithful, german soul, this was the right way for a girl to do.”²⁴⁰ Even when Anna disagrees with and argues with a former mistress, Miss Mary Wadsmith, over blue dressings in her room, she is tellingly described as “stiff with repression [...] Her bearing was full of the strange coquetry of anger and of fear... underneath the rigidity of forced control, all the queer ways the passions have to show themselves all one.”²⁴¹ Although in this particular instance, Anna seems to be trying to control her temper and anger over the blue dressings when speaking to Miss Mary, Stein’s use of the word ‘queer’ in this passage indicates what Anna is repressing more generally with her forced control: homosexual desire. In fact, it is just after this incident with Mary Wadsmith that the narrator first makes another statement that is reiterated throughout the story: “Mrs. Lehntman was the romance in Anna’s life.”²⁴² This unrequited ‘romance’ with her friend, the widow Mrs. Lehntman, is the cause of much sorrow for Anna, for this is the relationship in which her feelings contradict most strongly with her actions (or lack of actions), creating a tension that ultimately leaves Anna broken and unfulfilled.

In her dealings with most people, Anna is described as “stubborn always...and fearful of interference in her ways.”²⁴³ Soon after Mrs. Lehntman is introduced, she is referred to as “the only [person] who had any power over Anna.”²⁴⁴ When Anna starts working for Dr. Shonjen, the

²³⁸ Stein, “The Good Anna,” 79.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

reader learns that Anna “loved it best when she could scold,”²⁴⁵ and she enjoys a jovial relationship with the doctor—she scolds him and he jokes with her. Anna scolds everyone “save for Mrs. Lehntman,”²⁴⁶ which illustrates the power dynamic of their relationship. Anna is typically content when people let her do things her own way or when she can coerce people into letting her do as she thinks best; however, with Mrs. Lehntman, Anna represses her usual sense of the correct way for things to be done. When Mrs. Lehntman asks to borrow money from Anna so that she can fix up a house to take in girls who are in trouble, Anna thinks it is a bad idea, but gives her all of her savings anyway: “Of course Anna gave the money for this thing though she could not believe that it was best. No, it was very bad. [...] But what could our poor Anna do? Remember Mrs. Lehntman was the only romance Anna ever knew.”²⁴⁷ Anna is typically stubborn and unyielding, but the way she shows affection to Mrs. Lehntman is by not refusing her. Similarly, when Anna feels conflicted about what to do after leaving Dr. Shonjen, Mrs. Lehntman insists on taking her to a medium for advice, even though this conflicts with Anna’s religious beliefs. Anna knows that “it was very bad to go to a woman who tells fortunes. [...] But what else now could the good Anna do?”²⁴⁸ Anna goes to the medium and consents to taking a position with Miss Mathilda, which Mrs. Lehntman had also “urged”²⁴⁹ her to do.

When Anna and Mrs. Lehntman have a falling out over a doctor with whom Mrs. Lehntman keeps company, this proves fatal to their relationship. Even after they make up a number of years later, “they could never be as they had been before. Mrs. Lehntman could never be again the romance in the good Anna’s life.”²⁵⁰ Anna never again feels about any other woman

²⁴⁵ Stein, “The Good Anna,” 89.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

what she felt for Mrs. Lehntman, not even Miss Mathilda or her close friend Mrs. Drehten. For Anna, “there was no one now that made anything important.”²⁵¹ When Miss Mathilda moves and Anna starts taking in boarders, they are all men, for “she would not take in women.”²⁵² Anna has been too badly hurt by the one romance of her life to risk that same heartbreak with another woman. Eventually, as Linda Wagner-Martin observes, Anna “exhaust[s] herself into an early grave,”²⁵³ literally working herself to death and refusing to attend to her own needs or take any rest. Anna uses hard work as a means to repress her inner feelings throughout her life. After the first time she has a fight with Mrs. Lehntman, she turns to work in the Drehten house for relief: “Her affair with Mrs. Lehntman was too sacred and too grievous ever to be told. But here in this large household, in busy movement and variety in strife, she could silence the uneasiness and pain of her own wound.”²⁵⁴ Essentially, if Anna is busy attending to other people’s needs, she can ignore her own. She cannot control her emotions, despite her best efforts to ignore, deny, or repress them, but she can control her actions, and she uses this form of control to maintain her ‘dignity’ in the face of personal heartbreak.

Thomas Fahy suggests that Anna’s understanding of sexuality “has arguably been shaped by societal and religious norms that have forced her to reject the possibility of lesbianism in her own life. Because she sees sexual activity outside of marriage as immoral, she leaves no space for homosexual intimacy to occur.”²⁵⁵ Because of Anna’s convictions about “the right way for a girl to do,”²⁵⁶ she is unable to come to terms with her feelings, choosing instead to exert control

²⁵¹ Stein, “The Good Anna,” 119.

²⁵² Ibid, 120.

²⁵³ Linda Wagner-Martin, *Favored Strangers”: Gertrude Stein and Her Family* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 78.

²⁵⁴ Stein, “The Good Anna,” 96.

²⁵⁵ Thomas Fahy, “Iteration as a Form of Narrative Control in Gertrude Stein’s ‘The Good Anna,’ *Style* 34, no. 1 (2000): 29.

²⁵⁶ Stein, “The Good Anna,” 79.

over her actions and deny herself. In this way, she submits to a heteronormative ‘dignity’ in which desire is forcefully controlled and inaction is deemed virtuous. Anna controls those around her with the exception of Mrs. Lehntman, determined that everyone else should act in accordance with the ‘dignity’ to which she holds herself. Fahy argues that “The Good Anna” challenges the reader “to evaluate repeatedly what is wrong with a culture that privileges heterosexuality in a way that paralyzes homosexual experiences.”²⁵⁷ The politics of feeling that we see in “The Good Anna” invites readers to question the intrinsic value of ‘dignity’ if maintaining it means refusing to act and suffering as a result. Furthermore, Anna’s story serves to complicate readers’ understanding of homosexuality as an identifier by questioning the relationship between sexual orientation and identity when one feels—like Anna or her dog, Baby—but never acts on those feelings. Stein’s largely heterosexual audience thus incorporates the particular experience of repressed homosexuality into their own experience.

The Gentle Lena—Is Ignorance Really Bliss?

Lena Mainz, rather than serving as the central figure of Stein’s “The Gentle Lena,” becomes a character in someone else’s story. On this point Harriet Scott Chessman writes, “Hurried along a pre-determined narrative path by Mrs. Haydon, married off to a man for whom she has no desire, and made into a vehicle for her husband’s reproduction through his children, [Lena] lives out a story that is almost at no point her own.”²⁵⁸ Indeed, although Lena seems at times aware of her own feelings, for the most part, she has little self-awareness or self-knowledge, which enables other characters in the story, especially her aunt Mrs. Haydon, to take advantage of her and push her into acting according to what they want and think is best. Mary

²⁵⁷ Thomas Fahy, “Iteration as a Form of Narrative Control,” 33.

²⁵⁸ Harriet Scott Chessman, *The Public Is Invited to Dance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 37.

Wilson has suggested that Lena's character "becomes interesting in her very dullness [since her] tragedy arises not from her submissiveness but from an utter lack of desire of any kind."²⁵⁹ However, Wilson's reading fails to take into account Lena's periodic demonstrations of emotion and desire throughout the story. Lena does not lack desire so much as she lacks the ability to access her feelings about events and the people around her. This distinction is significant because it bears on Stein's politics of feeling. In "The Gentle Lena," Stein portrays a character that acts for others but not herself and who is seldom in touch with her own feelings about the world around her. Thus, Stein demonstrates the necessity of acting on the basis of one's own experience, which is predicated upon cultivating an inner life and awareness of oneself. At no point has the virtue of reflection ever been impressed upon Lena, which is why she often remains ignorant of what she wants. In contrast with the good Anna, who understands herself and her desires but suppresses them and elects not to act, the gentle Lena acts in a way that is almost automatic, for her actions are almost never informed by her emotions. Through Lena, Stein urges the importance of feeling and action working in tandem.

Throughout "The Gentle Lena," the narrator sometimes qualifies how much awareness Lena has of her feelings in a given situation. At the beginning of the story, the reader learns that Lena has been employed in the same place in Bridgepoint for four years, and "this place Lena had found very good."²⁶⁰ Lena's life is described as "a peaceful life,"²⁶¹ and even when she is teased by the other girls she sits with in the park, "that only made a gentle stir within her."²⁶² Thus far, the reader has no cause to doubt that Lena is anything other than aware of the feelings the narrator relates. However, when the narrator explains how Lena came to live with her aunt

²⁵⁹ Mary Wilson, "Stein's The Gentle Lena," *Explicator* 64, no.2 (2006): 94.

²⁶⁰ Stein, "The Gentle Lena," 240.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

Mrs. Haydon, the reader learns “Lena did not like her German life very well. It was not the hard work but the roughness that disturbed her. [...] They were good people enough around her, but it was all harsh and dreary for her. Lena did not really know that she did not like it. She did not know that she was always dreamy and not there.”²⁶³ This is the first point at which Stein makes a clear distinction between what Lena knows and what the narrator knows about her. Likewise, the reader later learns that “Lena always saved her wages, for she never thought to spend them, and she always went to her aunt’s house for her Sundays because she did not know that she could do anything different.”²⁶⁴ Harriet Scott Chessman suggests that “the gap between the narrator and Lena [is] a problematic one, for the narrator always ‘knows’ more than Lena,”²⁶⁵ and therefore is able to dominate her as Mrs. Haydon does. However, I would argue that the narrator’s purpose in informing the reader of Lena’s feelings is to articulate the knowledge that Lena herself cannot access. If the reader remains (like Lena) unaware of the discrepancy between Lena’s feelings and her awareness of these feelings, then it would not be apparent that Lena has so little knowledge of her own felt facts or that she always acts in accordance with what others want rather than what she wants. In other words, Lena’s actions in the story are driven purely by universal expectations of marriage and motherhood rather than attention to her particular experience of those things or the world around her, thus inviting readers to question not only these larger institutions but also what life means when it is not lived on the basis of one’s own experience.

Only once does Lena demonstrate a keen awareness of how she feels. When Mrs. Haydon decides to marry Lena to Herman Kreder, the narrator states several times that “Lena did not care much to get married.”²⁶⁶ However, when Herman runs away to his sister in New York to avoid

²⁶³ Stein, “The Gentle Lena,” 245.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁶⁵ Chessman, *The Public Is Invited to Dance*, 40.

²⁶⁶ Stein, “The Gentle Lena,” 249.

marriage, Lena cries. She does not cry because she is in love with Herman, but because she understands “she was not going to be married and it was a disgrace for a girl to be left by a man on the very day she was to be married.”²⁶⁷ Despite the fact that Lena had not cared about getting married nor felt strongly about Herman Kreder, she nevertheless “went home all alone, and cried in the street car.”²⁶⁸ That Lena cries *by herself* is important because it demonstrates her internalized feelings of shame and embarrassment over what has happened. Even when the girls she sits with in the park attempt to console her, Lena is still “miserable”²⁶⁹ because she “felt the disgrace it was for a decent German girl that a man should go away and leave her.”²⁷⁰ However, once Herman returns and the wedding plans are rearranged, Lena’s Aunt Mathilda tells her that she is no longer disgraced. At this point, Lena “fell back into the way she always had of being always dreamy and not there, the way she had always been, except for the few days she was so excited, because she had been left by a man the very day she was to have been married.”²⁷¹ So even at the one time Lena acts in full awareness of her feelings (to cry in shame upon being left by Herman Kreder), she is ultimately unable to sustain this knowledge of the felt facts of her experience, falling back upon her earlier passivity and submissiveness to the will of others.

Once Lena and Herman are married, things begin to decline for her rather quickly. Not only is Mrs. Kreder particularly mean to her, but Lena “never really knew herself what she needed”²⁷² and no one in the Kreder household pays much attention to her. In fact, Lena never directly speaks again in the story after the incident of her crying in the streetcar. Once she gets pregnant, Herman begins to take better care of her and even stands up to his mother on her

²⁶⁷ Stein, “The Gentle Lena,” 253.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 256.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 257-258.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 263.

behalf, but nevertheless, these are “really bad days for poor Lena.”²⁷³ Lena feels afraid that she will die (a justified fear since she ultimately dies in childbirth), and once her first child is born, Lena “just dragged around and was careless with her clothes and all lifeless, *and she acted always and lived on just as if she had no feeling.*”²⁷⁴ Before her marriage, Lena seems to demonstrate an awareness of her feelings from time to time, but after giving birth, she continues to act and more or less ceases to feel anything at all.

I would argue that the streetcar incident represents the climax of Lena’s story because it is when Lena possesses the strongest understanding of her feelings and takes some action (albeit a small one) as a result. Omri Moses argues that in *Three Lives*, Stein “assembles characters defined by their habits. But rather than indicating the fixity of temperament, she seems to understand their dispositions and distinguishing forms of personal preference as a collection of evolving tendencies, sometimes in conflict with each other [and] amplified differently in different situations.”²⁷⁵ In “The Gentle Lena,” the main character is largely defined by her gentle nature and passivity. However, Lena is also defined by her ignorance of her own feelings about events and people around her. This habit changes some over the course of the story: Lena reaches the height of self-awareness after being left on her wedding day, and she ceases to feel anything at all after giving birth to her first child, which demonstrates how the traditional institutions of marriage and child-rearing can erase women.

Stein’s politics of feeling in this story urge readers to acknowledge the necessity of being emotionally self-aware and to warn them against taking action for the sake of others rather than themselves. Lena, who is ultimately “decentered in her own story,”²⁷⁶ serves as a cautionary tale

²⁷³ Stein, “The Gentle Lena,” 267.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 268. Emphasis mine.

²⁷⁵ Omri Moses, “Gertrude Stein’s Lively Habits,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 55, no. 4 (2009): 458.

²⁷⁶ Wilson, “Stein’s The Gentle Lena,” 96.

on the importance of reflection and attunement to one's own felt facts. In addition, Stein uses Lena and her marriage to question gender essentialism and socially constructed gender roles, since Lena and Herman are both marked by gentleness and relative passivity. However, rather than Lena fulfilling the stereotypical female role of being excited about marriage or taking joy in motherhood, it is instead Herman who demonstrates the strongest reaction to his impending marriage by initially refusing and running away. Likewise, it is Herman, not Lena, who finds meaning and happiness in his role as a parent while Lena slowly wastes away and continues to feel nothing. Stein questions sexual orientation without action in "The Good Anna" and in "The Gentle Lena" questions the meaning of gender as a category or type when an individual exists without feeling.

Each One as She May; or, Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't

While Melanctha Herbert is Stein's most fully self-actualized character in *Three Lives*, she still suffers for acting in accordance with her lived experience and seeking out the "ways that lead to wisdom."²⁷⁷ Marjorie Perloff has written of Melanctha's story that "we come to know the heroine less and less rather than more and more [as] we gradually enter the world of a Melanctha whose behavior is oddly unpredictable."²⁷⁸ Early on in the story, the reader learns of her that she "was always seeking rest and quiet, and always she could only find new ways to be in trouble. Melanctha wondered often how it was that she did not kill herself when she was so blue. Often she thought this would be really the best way for her to do."²⁷⁹ Melanctha often feels depressed because she inhabits a world where people neither understand her nor accept her deviations from what is expected. Melanctha's actions often conflict with what others want from her, and she is

²⁷⁷ Stein, "Melanctha," 132.

²⁷⁸ Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, 95.

²⁷⁹ Stein, "Melanctha," 127.

feared and alienated as a result. Her father “fear[s] her tongue, and her school learning,”²⁸⁰ and is so upset by Melanctha’s head-strong desire to do what she wants that he threatens to kill her. Melanctha’s lover Jeff Campbell also expresses some fear of her; Jeff “always hated to go to her [because] somehow he was always afraid [of going] to her.”²⁸¹ Both Jeff Campbell and Melanctha’s other lover Jem Richards eventually leave her, and after the death of her mother, Melanctha never sees or hears from her father again. She is also left by her friend Rose Johnson, who cites her frustration with the fact that Melanctha “never can have no kind of a way to act right, the way a decent girl has to do.”²⁸² The only person who does not leave Melanctha is her equal, Jane Harden, who is “not afraid to understand.”²⁸³ Rather than Jane leaving Melanctha or vice versa, the two women instead simply “drift apart from one another.”²⁸⁴

Unlike Anna or Lena, Melanctha does not abide by religious, societal, or familial expectations for her behavior. Melanctha, the reader is told, “wanted and respected gentleness and goodness [...] and Melanctha felt such things very deeply, but she could never let them help her or affect her to change the ways that always made her keep herself in trouble.”²⁸⁵ Anna’s and Lena’s defining qualities—goodness and gentleness, respectively—are alluded to here as an explanation for how Melanctha’s character differs from the other female protagonists of *Three Lives*. She keeps herself ‘in trouble’ by refusing to be easily defined by one trait or one way of thinking. She is neither ‘good’ and self-denying like Anna, nor is she ‘gentle’ and un-self-aware like Lena. Life would perhaps be easier for Melanctha if she had a single defining characteristic like Anna and Lena, as such a trait might help her ‘to act right,’ as Rose wants her to do, or not

²⁸⁰ Stein, “Melanctha,” 138.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 163.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 236.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, 138.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 140.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 135.

to be so excited and constantly seeking new experiences, as Jeff dislikes. While “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena” demonstrate the significance of action and reflection respectively, “Melanctha,” which features a protagonist fully in touch with her felt facts who acts accordingly, highlights the constraints of gender and race as categories to which one is expected to adhere. While Anna and Lena both suffer in part because of their identities as female immigrants, both of these characters also limit themselves in some way with respect to their own felt facts. Melanctha does not, but Stein shows that even someone as in touch with her emotions and experiences as Melanctha is can still be constrained by the arbitrary categories assigned to her by society. In “Melanctha,” even more so than in “The Good Anna” or “The Gentle Lena,” Stein’s politics of feeling calls attention to the problem of other people’s expectations. We are limited not only by categories in which we willfully place ourselves (like Anna’s chaste, heteronormative ‘goodness’), but also by those categories that are thrust upon us.

Omri Moses suggests that most readings of Stein’s “Melanctha” “assume that her types spring from limitation, that they are a concession to determined lives.”²⁸⁶ Indeed, as I mentioned briefly near the beginning of this chapter, there are quite a few scholars who argue that Stein’s portrayal of African American characters in this story is racist. However, even among scholars who are quite critical of what they consider to be the racist elements of “Melanctha,” they nevertheless call attention to Stein’s own discrepancies in her descriptions of characters. Milton A. Cohen, for instance, asks, “for all of its obvious racism [... why] do some of the ‘mixed-blood’ shades (e.g., the light brown) show fairly consistent qualities, while others (e.g., Jane Harden’s almost-whiteness) are contradictory?”²⁸⁷ Likewise, Sonia Saldívar-Hull suggests that Stein “cannot decide how ultimately to place the black people in her story. She wants them all to

²⁸⁶ Moses, “Gertrude Stein’s Lively Habits,” 471.

²⁸⁷ Cohen, “Black Brutes and Mulatto Saints,” 120.

conform to her vision of this foreign race, but she keeps undermining her own project by making exceptions.”²⁸⁸ While Omri Moses concedes that certain “baseline characteristics that Stein associates with African American racial types deserve scrutiny,”²⁸⁹ he goes on to observe that “even determining that normative average, however, is not easily done, given [Stein’s] emphasis on the exception. The narrator frequently makes racial generalizations only to qualify or undermine them.”²⁹⁰ Cohen concludes that Stein’s inconsistencies with respect to character descriptions stem from her equation of “complexity and contradiction with intelligence; i.e., with whiteness.”²⁹¹ However, Stein’s dark-skinned black characters are equally complicated and even contradictory. For example, Rose Johnson is early on described by the narrator as “a real black, tall, well built, sullen, stupid, childlike, good looking negress.”²⁹² She is not long after described in back-to-back lines as simultaneously “coarse, decent, sullen, [and] ordinary”²⁹³ along with “unmoral, promiscuous, [and] shiftless.”²⁹⁴ The narrator further describes Rose as having a strong “sense of proper conduct”²⁹⁵ as well as “always comfortable and rather decent and very lazy and very well content,”²⁹⁶ all within the first few pages of the story. Several of these qualities are in clear conflict with one another – can a person be decent *and* unmoral, good looking *and* ordinary, sullen *and* content, stupid and childlike *but also* with a strong sense of proper conduct? Likewise, Melanctha’s father James Herbert is described in somewhat contradictory terms. He is first mentioned as “robust and unpleasant and very unendurable,”²⁹⁷

²⁸⁸ Saldívar-Hull, “Wrestling Your Ally,” 191.

²⁸⁹ Moses, “Gertrude Stein’s Lively Habits,” 479.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Cohen, “Black Brutes and Mulatto Saints,” 120.

²⁹² Stein, “Melanctha,” 124.

²⁹³ Ibid, 125.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 126.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 128.

then later as a “common, decent enough, colored workman”²⁹⁸ and finally, as “a powerful, loose built, hard handed, black, angry negro.”²⁹⁹ He is at once robust *and* loose built, unpleasant and unendurable *yet* decent enough, and common *but* powerful. Marjorie Perloff has argued for the complexity and conflicting tendencies of Melanctha and Jeff, observing that “Melanctha is submissive but wild, graceful but self-destructive, soothing but always getting into trouble, intelligent but never able to get what she wants. A similar indeterminacy is found in the characterization of Jeff Campbell.”³⁰⁰ Therefore, I would conclude that most of the significant characters (rather than just the lighter-skinned ones) in “Melanctha” demonstrate inherent complexity and contradictions, even when they are identified as less intelligent than Melanctha herself. While this complexity does not excuse Stein’s uses of racial stereotypes in the story, her contradictory descriptions of characters are not without purpose. To understand this purpose, we must consider her audience.

As Laura Doyle has suggested, the “polite society of established whites”³⁰¹ is most likely Stein’s intended audience, and like Doyle, I believe that Stein’s use of stereotypical characteristics in her descriptions of black characters in “Melanctha” is intended to call this audience “out of its ideological closets.”³⁰² Doyle argues that Stein’s descriptors of characters in “Melanctha” are “calculated to offend [...because] their function is to echo the audience’s racism in a way that makes readers squirm.”³⁰³ However, while Doyle concludes that racism thus helps Stein achieve the status of author (and therefore, “Melanctha” is in some sense rightfully called a racist text), I would like to suggest that Stein’s purpose in this story is concerned not so much

²⁹⁸ Stein, “Melanctha,” 128.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁰⁰ Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, 93.

³⁰¹ Doyle, “The Flat, the Round, and Gertrude Stein,” 263.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

with narrative expediency as it is concerned with cultivating a certain amount of sympathy in the reader in order to shift his/her attitudes toward the main character.

Barbara Will observes that the character of Melanctha is “a racial ‘type’ that would have been instantly recognizable to Stein’s readers: the tragic mulatta,”³⁰⁴ however, “Melanctha” is hardly a typical tragic mulatta story. Eve Allegra Raimon notes in *The Tragic Mulatta Revisited* that using “narrative strategy and characterization, writers in the [tragic mulatto/a] tradition employ the device as an agent of social change as much as an emblem of victimization.”³⁰⁵

While Melanctha Herbert faces restrictions and some oppression on the basis of her race and gender in Stein’s story, she is hardly victimized. She is a character who ‘wanders,’ seeks out new experiences, and for the most part, lives her life as she sees fit. Likewise, although Marianne DeKoven has suggested that the reader is “made to want the best for [Melanctha]”³⁰⁶ since the story is constructed in such a way that we “feel as if we are living through an experience rather than reading about it,”³⁰⁷ Stein’s narrator remains detached from the events of the story and refrains from any and all sentimentality. Although the reader is often told about how certain characters feel (such as Melanctha feeling so blue that she could kill herself), we are rarely if ever given a sense of their interiority. Thus, “Melanctha” is not a story that invites readers to identify strongly with the emotions of its protagonist, and for this reason, it is not a text that straightforwardly advocates for social change in the fashion of many tragic mulatto/a stories. Neither does it serve to entertain the audience as an example of illicit sex or the title character’s disastrous undoing as the product of forbidden romance.

³⁰⁴ Will, *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of “Genius,”* 38.

³⁰⁵ Eve Allegra Raimon, *The Tragic Mulatta Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-century Antislavery Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 7.

³⁰⁶ Marianne DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 82.

³⁰⁷ Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein’s Experimental Writing* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 42.

What Stein *does* do in “Melanctha,” however, is to invite her white readers to sympathize with Melanctha when those around her shun or misunderstand her. For instance, Melanctha’s relationship with Jeff Campbell is often characterized as a struggle between emotion and rationality, and in fact, one of the first things Melanctha states directly in the text is a comment on the inconsistency of Jeff’s thoughts and actions. She says, “It don’t seem to me Dr. Campbell, that what you say and what you do seem to have much to do with each other.”³⁰⁸ Jeff’s response is to laugh and tell Melanctha that she just doesn’t understand what he’s saying. Today, we would likely use the neologism ‘mansplain’ to describe Jeff’s behavior toward Melanctha, however, Stein’s audience would still be able to recognize the patronizing and condescending way Jeff speaks to Melanctha because she is a woman. Similarly, Stein evokes the reader’s sympathy when things are going badly between Melanctha and Jem Richards and yet “each day Rose treated Melanctha more and more as she never wanted Melanctha any more to come there to the house to see her.”³⁰⁹ When Rose does finally cast Melanctha out and asks her not to come back, Melanctha “stood like one dazed, she did not know how to bear this blow that almost killed her”³¹⁰ and she was “all sore and bruised inside her”³¹¹ as a result of this friendship ending. Right after this, Jem leaves her and Melanctha eventually dies all alone in a “home for poor consumptives.”³¹² Rather than relying on heavy-handed sentimentalism, Stein instead elicits her audience’s sympathy for the title character subtly and at key points of the story, so that, by the end of reading “Melanctha,” the audience may have experienced a gradual shift in attitude toward the characters.

³⁰⁸ Stein, “Melanctha,” 149.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 235.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, 237.

³¹¹ *Ibid*.

³¹² *Ibid*, 239.

In “Melanctha,” Stein encourages readers to (re)consider the seemingly arbitrary categories to which the characters are assigned. Because these categories and descriptors are often in conflict (with both dark-skinned and light-skinned characters, as we have seen), the reader is left with only an impression of any given character rather than the full picture, and this is Stein’s entire point. As Melanctha is for Jeff, the characters are “too many”³¹³ for the reader to truly know or understand. It is easy for people to assume, like Jeff Campbell does, that we “don’t change, never”³¹⁴ and that other people also do not change and are definable by a single string of stereotypical character traits or adjectives. Like Melanctha, Stein’s view is that people are “always changing,”³¹⁵ but they do so in ways that are so subtle and gradual as to be almost imperceptible to the individual him/herself. Stein’s politics of feeling in this story operate under this assumption, with the goal of subtly eliciting sympathy for Melanctha and effecting a gradual change in attitude toward a character that might at first glance be thought of as a tragic mulatta. Stein demonstrates in this story that even though Melanctha is a character who understands and appreciates her own felt facts, she still suffers from the constraints of society, for Black experience in the U.S. is marked by various essentialized stereotypes thrust upon African Americans by white people, *including the author herself*.

Stein pushes back against the essentialized constraints of categories or ‘types’ in *Three Lives* by questioning what practical purpose such categories serve. In “The Good Anna,” Stein questions the use of sexual orientation as a ‘type’ since Anna represses her feeling and chooses not to act. In “The Gentle Lena,” she interrogates the purpose of gender roles performed without feeling. Finally, in “Melanctha,” Stein highlights the implausibility of assigning specific qualities to individuals based on race since people are constantly changing and evolving—a point she

³¹³ Stein, “Melanctha,” 193.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, 171.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*.

demonstrates through her repetitions with a difference in characters' actions and descriptions. Stein's repetitions and vague, generalized terms serve to force a careful reading of her stories, since meaning cannot really be gained from a cursory reading. As a result, the educated and largely white readership of *Three Lives* (Stein's target audience) infuse the stories of each woman's life with their own experiences, so that the reading of the story *becomes* part of their experience, and thus, a kind of felt fact. Stein's writing demands feeling *with* the characters so that a gradual change in perception is achieved. Her three female protagonists are all harmed by universal expectations and standards to which they are held—heterosexuality, traditional gender roles, and racial stereotypes. Stein's pragmatist politics of feeling in *Three Lives* ultimately invites the reader to identify with the main characters and to incorporate Anna's, Lena's, and Melanctha's particular experiences of the world into their own.

By contrast, Anzia Yezierska's stories of immigrants take a different (although still pragmatist) approach from Stein in *Three Lives*. Her language is distinct from the world her readers inhabit: it is the language and dialect of Jewish immigrants and of specific Jewish communities in New York. Yezierska's stories are presented straight-forwardly, with no expectation of recursive action or complex meaning-making to incorporate the characters' experiences into those of the reader. The characters are purposefully separate from the reader so that the reader will feel sympathy *for* the immigrant heroines of Yezierska's fiction. While Stein's readers ideally incorporate her stories into their own experiences, Yezierska lays bare the felt facts of her female protagonists to show how different their experiences are from those of other characters (especially the American men) around them.

Immigrant Feeling in Anzia Yezierska

Anzia Yeziarska's name and work are not particularly well known to most scholars and students of American literature, outside of those who study early twentieth century feminist or Jewish American writing. Delia Konzett suggests in her 2002 volume *Ethnic Modernisms* that over the past few decades "there has been renewed interest in Yeziarska by sociologists and literary critics, due to her documentation of women's experience of immigration and her relationship with John Dewey."³¹⁶ Several works, including Jo Ann Boydston's 1977 book *The Poems of John Dewey*, Mary Dearborn's *Love in the Promised Land*, and Louise Levitas Henriksen's biography *Anzia Yeziarska: A Writer's Life* (both published in 1988) confirm and document the brief romantic relationship between Yeziarska and Dewey, which occurred between 1917 and 1918.

It is worth noting that Yeziarska is rarely, if ever, mentioned in biographies or scholarly work on John Dewey. Robert Westbrook's 1991 book *John Dewey and American Democracy* devotes barely two pages to their relationship even though Westbrook claims that "emotionally [the relationship] deeply affected both Dewey and Yeziarska."³¹⁷ He goes on to say that what is most interesting about Dewey and Yeziarska's short-lived romance was "the way both parties construed it as [a] 'harmonizing' of cultures"³¹⁸ between the native-born American and the immigrant. Jay Martin's 2003 biography *The Education of John Dewey* paints a different and somewhat untruthful picture of Yeziarska and Dewey's romance. Martin describes Yeziarska as prone to fantasy and assumes that Dewey's emotional involvement with her was primarily a distraction from the stresses of his family life. While there may be some truth to this, Dewey wrote dozens of poems about his feelings for Yeziarska, indicating more than a casual passing

³¹⁶ Delia Caparoso Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yeziarska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 20.

³¹⁷ Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 221.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

interest in her. Furthermore, Martin argues that the relationship was “a literary, not a sexual, episode. Yeziarska’s stories and memoir clearly indicate that nothing physical, not even a kiss, occurred.”³¹⁹ While most scholars believe that nothing sexual occurred between Dewey and Yeziarska, in her fictive retellings of her relationship with Dewey, Yeziarska almost always describes her immigrant protagonist as shrinking back from the American man whom she held in such great esteem precisely *when* the relationship progresses to physical intimacy. In her autobiography *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, Yeziarska recalls the moment of dissolution of her romance with Dewey as follows:

For a long moment we stood silent. Then I was in his arms and he was kissing me. His hand touched my breast. The natural delight of his touch was checked by a wild alarm that stiffened me with fear. I had the same fear of drowning in his arms that I had of drowning in the river. His overwhelming nearness, the tense body closing in on me was pushing us apart instead of fusing us. A dark river of distrust rose between us. [...] Old fears bred into me before I was born, taboos older than my father’s memory, conflicts between the things I had learned and those I could not forget held me rigid.³²⁰

Yeziarska’s memoir, as well as her fiction, would appear to indicate that the very physical intimacy she once thought she craved from Dewey ended up driving a wedge between them.

Yeziarska’s relationship with and connection to Dewey is primarily discussed only in studies of Yeziarska’s life and writings, in part because Dewey had such a significant impact on both her personal and professional life. Louise Levitas Henriksen, Yeziarska’s daughter, writes that she “had always known about [her] mother’s relationship with Dewey”³²¹ because Yeziarska “spoke about it often.”³²² Mary Dearborn argues that for Yeziarska, “Dewey was no less than America incarnate,”³²³ and suggests, like Robert Westbrook, that Dewey and Yeziarska each

³¹⁹ Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 290.

³²⁰ Anzia Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950), 113.

³²¹ Louise Levitas Henriksen, *Anzia Yeziarska: A Writer’s Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 8.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Mary V. Dearborn, *Love in the Promised Land: The Story of Anzia Yeziarska and John Dewey* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 4.

viewed their relationship in highly symbolic terms. In her creative work, Yeziarska re-imagined her romance with Dewey time and time again, in short stories from *Hungry Hearts* and *Children of Loneliness* as well as in her novel *All I Could Never Be*.³²⁴

Despite renewed interest in Yeziarska's work and acknowledgements of the impact of her brief romance with Dewey, almost no scholarship exists on the philosophical effect that Dewey had on Yeziarska. One notable exception is Amy Dayton-Wood's article "Anzia Yeziarska and the Problem of Progressive Education," in which she argues that Yeziarska's writings "perform the cultural work of educational and social critique as Yeziarska positions herself in relation to Dewey's progressivism."³²⁵ Dayton-Wood's focus is on Dewey's educational pragmatism, especially his notion of learning through experience. Ultimately, she argues that Yeziarska endorses and simultaneously critiques Dewey's pedagogy in her work by "pointing to the institutional structures that constrain it, and [casting] doubt on the ability of vocational education to offer the meaningful preparation that Dewey envisions."³²⁶

Both Carol B. Schoen's and Louise Levitas Henriksen's biographies of Yeziarska only hint at Dewey's pragmatist influence on her work. Schoen admits that it is difficult to know with certainty how much of Dewey's philosophy Yeziarska shared, but "just as Dewey-like characters recur again and again in her books and lines from his poems echo in her writing, so [too, do his] ideas underlie much of her fiction."³²⁷ Similarly, Henriksen writes of her mother that Dewey, "who had always been in her [Yeziarska's] thoughts, had given her a certain education, even during his absence. Reflecting on their past conversations and the seminar sessions, and reading

³²⁴ See, for example, Ann R. Shapiro's "The Ultimate *Shaygets* and the Fiction of Anzia Yeziarska," *MELUS* 21, no. 2 (1996): 79-88 or Blanche H. Gelfant's introduction to Yeziarska's *Hungry Hearts* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

³²⁵ Amy Dayton-Wood, "'What the College Has Done for Me': Anzia Yeziarska and the Problem of Progressive Education," *College English* 74, no. 3 (2012): 216.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

³²⁷ Carol B. Schoen, *Anzia Yeziarska* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 13.

his books, she had absorbed many of his ideas—political, philosophical, and literary—and used them in her writing.”³²⁸ Even Mary Dearborn’s *Love in the Promised Land*, the only full-length treatment of Dewey and Yeziarska’s relationship, does not discuss Dewey’s philosophical impact on the woman he briefly loved. Dearborn sides with Yeziarska in condemning Dewey for his failure “to live up to his own precepts and principles in the course of the romance by refusing to accept the consequences of his actions,”³²⁹ but this nod toward Yeziarska’s criticism of Dewey’s philosophy is the most she mentions of Yeziarska’s engagement with pragmatism.

In sum, there is a distinct lack of scholarly attention paid to the influence of pragmatism on Yeziarska’s work, despite a general understanding of how important a figure John Dewey was in her life. An understanding of the pragmatist concerns that underlie Yeziarska’s writings shed new light on her literary significance, especially since her work has been largely neglected since the height of her popularity in the 1920s. Those who have studied Yeziarska in recent years have generally tended either to criticize or dismiss her work for possessing technical deficiencies and “a patriotic assimilationist”³³⁰ quality or else to laud her as an early feminist writer documenting the experience of the Jewish immigrant woman near the turn of the century. Magdalena Zaborowska has suggested that scholars who wish to study Yeziarska may quickly “become dismayed at too many melodramatic conclusions, too many scenes depicting a young immigrant woman’s pathetic encounters with America, and too much of an emotional and overdramatic style.”³³¹ Considering Yeziarska’s pragmatist concerns not only helps to position her as a ‘serious’ writer to whom “attention must be paid” (to use the words of a more well-known Jewish writer), but it also helps to further contextualize her obsession with Dewey. Yeziarska

³²⁸ Henriksen, *A Writer’s Life*, 230-231.

³²⁹ Dearborn, *Love in the Promised Land*, 121.

³³⁰ Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms*, 20.

³³¹ Zaborowska, *How We Found America*, 118.

was certainly drawn to Dewey as a powerful figure who, to her, symbolized the American dream, but of the relationships she formed and abandoned over the course of her life, why is her brief relationship with Dewey the one that haunted her? I argue that she was drawn to his philosophy and (not unlike Morris Cohen), her work was at times critical of pragmatism in order to demonstrate how this philosophy could better align principles with practice in the world. Like Stein, Yeziarska's work uses a politics of feeling to interrogate identity—in her case, Jewishness vs. Americanness—and her fiction suggests that notions of identity as either essentialist *or* constructed can ultimately undermine democracy.

Essentialized Science vs. Individual Feeling

Like Stein, Anzia Yeziarska also emphasizes the importance of feeling in her work, and her protagonists typically take issue with the detached rationality and over-reliance on scientific observation of her Dewey-like characters. However, unlike Stein, Yeziarska does not merge scientific observation with subjective feeling in her writing; instead, she criticizes Dewey (and the figures representative of him) for his failure to consider lived experience in a concrete way by acknowledging individual experience in terms of emotion rather than as a set of data points from which to draw objective conclusions. Yeziarska believed that Dewey could not understand the experiences of immigrants by making them into an object of study, for in doing so, the researchers essentialized and stereotyped the immigrants' identity based on their observations. Her fiction challenged 'experience' as an abstract concept by confronting her Dewey-like characters as well as her readers with facts of feeling from her own and other immigrants' experience, demonstrating that they were not a homogenous group that could be easily understood if observed under a microscope for long enough.

Perhaps the strongest criticism of scientific objectivity as essentializing immigrant identity occurs in Yeziarska's 1932 novel *All I Could Never Be*, in which she fictionalizes her experience working as a translator on Dewey and Albert C. Barnes's ethnographic study of a Polish community in Philadelphia where the immigrants resisted assimilation.³³² The novel's protagonist Fanya clashes with her fellow researchers (including the Deweyan scholar and object of Fanya's affections, Henry Scott) at several points during the study. When Henry first tells Fanya of his intentions to study the Polish community, she asks, "How will you set about to know the Poles?"³³³ She then tells him that she hopes his will not be "another study of the poor,"³³⁴ for these are only "grand words, but nothing back of them."³³⁵ Lori Jirousek has observed that because Yeziarska was closer than Dewey or Barnes to the immigrant community they studied, she could more clearly see the limitations of their research, citing "the disadvantages of an impersonal scientific method that, while attempting objectivity, prevents thorough familiarity with the Poles and withholds immediate benefits from its informants."³³⁶ Yeziarska's protagonist Fanya objects to studying the poor without taking the experiences of individual people into account, alluded to here in her statement that ethnographic studies have no backing to their impressive and scholarly words. Recall Morris Cohen's statement that generalized "laws or facts are basic to science, [but] in the social realm they do not seem so numerous or so readily authenticated."³³⁷ This is what Fanya is getting at in her criticism of the Polish study: the Poles in this community are individuals who indeed share some similarities but

³³² Henriksen, *A Writer's Life*, 94.

³³³ Anzia Yeziarska, *All I Could Never Be* (New York: Brewer, Warren, & Putnam, 1932), 37.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ Lori Jirousek, "Ethnics and Ethnographers: Zora Neale Hurston and Anzia Yeziarska," *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 2 (2006): 28.

³³⁷ Cohen, *Reason and Nature*, 357.

are also “burning up with a million volatile ideas”³³⁸ and cannot serve as the basis for sweeping generalizations as to why some immigrants resist assimilation.

In fact, the Dewey-esque character Henry Scott ends up agreeing with Fanya’s views later in the study when she once again quarrels with her fellow researchers. When the other researchers ask Scott to remove Fanya from the project for impeding the progress of their work, he rebukes them, declaring, ““People are not fixed objects, like tables or chairs [...] The way in which you treat them and feel toward them—that’s half of what they are to you. She [Fanya] represents the impatience with conventionality, that suffocating unwillingness to be held down by non-essentials which is exactly what we need to warm and animate our reasoning habits.””³³⁹ Here, Scott concedes that Fanya has a point about the impersonality of their research methods, and that their group might do well to approach the study from a more personal angle, since people are not ‘fixed objects.’

Yeziarska similarly criticizes the ethnographic study of immigrants in her 1920 story “Wings,” again demonstrating a disconnect between scientific generalizations or essentializing and the facts of individual feeling and experience. In “Wings,” the impoverished immigrant protagonist Shenah Pessah makes the acquaintance of John Barnes, a sociology instructor. In their first encounter, rather than connecting with Shenah Pessah emotionally, Barnes instead “congratulate[s] himself at his good fortune in encountering such a splendid type for his research.”³⁴⁰ Barnes is writing about education among Russian Jews and “in order to get into closer touch with his subject, [decides] to live on the East Side during his spring and summer vacation.”³⁴¹ While Shenah Pessah is hungry for human compassion and attention, Barnes sees

³³⁸ Yeziarska, *All I Could Never Be*, 37.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁴⁰ Anzia Yeziarska, “Wings” in *Hungry Hearts* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 7.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

her as merely a potential useful subject for his research. So wide is the divide between Shenah Pessah's feelings and Barnes's detached scientific view that Barnes does not even humanize her at first, instead thinking of her as 'a splendid type' and completely essentializing her identity. As they continue to talk, Barnes observes in her speech "the gleam of the visionary—the eternal desire to reach out and up, which was the predominant racial trait of the Russian immigrant."³⁴² Again, Barnes looks past Shenah Pessah's humanity and capacity for individual thought and experience by reducing her to an essentialized stereotype of her racial group. When Barnes leaves, he ponders Shenah Pessah's emotional outbursts during their conversation and thinks to himself, "There it is [...] the whole gamut of the Russian Jew—the pendulum swinging from abject servility to boldest aggressiveness."³⁴³ Despite his background in sociology, Barnes can only see Shenah Pessah as a representative of her essentialized racial group, possessing particular characteristics and idiosyncrasies as a result of this ethnicity rather than her individuality.

In her critical portrayal of scientists who have little sympathy for the human beings they are studying (ostensibly in order to help them), Yeziarska criticizes Dewey's pragmatism as insufficiently taking into account particular, individual experience. Amy Dayton-Wood argues that "rather than merely [critiquing] the progressive movement, however, Yeziarska articulates a vision for addressing some of its shortcomings by returning to the power of *experience*, a term that is rooted in Dewey's and James's [pragmatist] philosophy but given particular resonance in her depictions of immigrant life."³⁴⁴ By arguing that scientific inquiry where people are involved must take those people's experience into account, Yeziarska demonstrates a more inclusive and democratic pragmatism similar to Jane Addams's vision of social ethics. As an immigrant

³⁴² Yeziarska, "Wings," 8.

³⁴³ Ibid, 10.

³⁴⁴ Dayton-Wood, "What the College Has Done for Me," 220.

herself, Yeziarska is especially sensitive to the experience of the other, and she insists that immigrants be treated with dignity.

Calls for Social Reform

In addition to criticizing the essentialism of scientists with respect to identity, Yeziarska voices a similar criticism of charity workers, again using a politics of feeling to expose the hypocrisy of social workers who insist on the homogenous nature of their clients. She promotes a pragmatist ideal of social work in her fiction similar to ideas espoused by Jane Addams in her 1902 book *Democracy and Social Ethics*. One of the central tenets of Addams's book is the importance of experience as it relates to knowledge and understanding for the charity worker. She writes, "A man who takes the betterment of humanity for his aim and end must also take the daily experiences of humanity for the constant correction of his process. He must not only test and guide his achievement by human experience, but he must succeed or fail in proportion as he has incorporated that experience with his own."³⁴⁵ In other words, someone who intends to provide charity or to do social work for others should always consider the needs and experiences of the recipients and take these views into account before deciding what is 'best' to do for those in need. Addams believes that the charity giver must not think of herself as morally superior to the recipient, but to imagine what the recipient's life is like on his or her own terms without first jumping to the conclusion that she knows better than the charity recipient what is needed.

Like Jane Addams, Yeziarska writes about social workers who have not successfully incorporated the experiences of their clients into their own. Nihad Farooq has recently argued that Yeziarska's fiction "does not extol the redemptive virtues of middle-class charity.

[...Instead, she critiques] the cold mistranslations of scientific language and its fixed ambition to

³⁴⁵ Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* [1902] (Chicago, IL: Merchant Books, 2009), 70.

define and contain immigrant groups without attempting to learn about what motivates them.”³⁴⁶ Likewise, Carol Batker contends that “in Yeziarska’s texts, immigrants rescue themselves from Americanization workers in order to critique and revise immigrant aid.”³⁴⁷ Yeziarska’s short story “The Free Vacation House,” from her 1920 *Hungry Hearts* collection demonstrates her contempt for charity workers. Delia Konzett has argued that by the end of this story, its immigrant narrator realizes that “the goal of educational and philanthropic institutions is not motivated by an altruistic desire to help immigrants but by the intent to impose upon the immigrant community a specific social order.”³⁴⁸ In this story, Yeziarska articulates an Addams-esque pragmatist vision for social work through her narrative of the immigrant protagonist’s struggle to conform to the charity workers’ standards at the vacation home.

The unnamed narrator of “The Free Vacation House” is recommended to the Social Betterment Society by one of her children’s teachers. Miss Holcomb the teacher explains that there is a free vacation home in the country for mothers and children because “some kind people”³⁴⁹ have arranged it so that the families who go there do not have to pay. Just a few days later, a woman from the Society comes to the narrator’s home and begins asking her a number of invasive and personal questions, including about her finances and her children’s medical history. When the narrator protests, the woman explains that they must investigate each case because “there are so many who apply to the charities [that] we can only help those who are most worthy.”³⁵⁰ This is the first of many embarrassments to the narrator, as she had no idea the free vacation house was run by a charity, and she does not consider herself a charity case. She tells

³⁴⁶ Nihad M. Farooq, “Of Science and Excess: Jacob Riis, Anzia Yeziarska, and the Modernist Turn in Immigrant Fiction,” *American Studies* 53, no. 4 (2014): 75.

³⁴⁷ Carol Batker, “Literary Reformers: Crossing Class and Ethnic Boundaries in Jewish Women’s Fiction of the 1920s,” *MELUS* 25, no. 1 (2000): 98-99.

³⁴⁸ Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms*, 31-32.

³⁴⁹ Yeziarska, “The Free Vacation House” in *Hungry Hearts* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 62.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 63.

the woman from the Society, “‘Ain’t the charities those who help the beggars out? I ain’t no beggar. I’m not asking for no charity. My husband, he works.’”³⁵¹ But the woman from the Society is uninterested in how the narrator defines herself; all she knows is that the narrator is a potential charity recipient—a ‘type’ not unlike how Russian and Polish Jews are viewed by the scientists—and she conducts her interview in a business-like manner, completely unconcerned with the narrator’s feelings about being identified as someone who should receive charity.

The narrator feels conflicted about accepting charity like a beggar, but decides that she needs a vacation from the stresses of her life too badly to turn down the offer. The woman from the Society eventually returns to give the narrator a card and tell her she must come to the charity office the next day and will leave to go to the country house from there. The narrator feels ashamed, thinking, “how I would feel, suppose somebody from my friends should see me walking into the charity office with my children,”³⁵² but she goes anyway. When she arrives at the charity office, she sits in wait with a crowd of other women and children who were “sitting and looking on one another, sideways and crosswise, and with lowered eyes, like guilty criminals. Each one felt like hiding herself from all the rest. Each one felt black with shame in the face.”³⁵³ One by one, the women are asked by a nurse the same questions they have already been asked by another Society worker, only this time, in front of everyone. The narrator’s shame increases even more. She wonders, “For why should everybody have to know my business? [...] At every question I felt like she was stabbing a knife into my heart.”³⁵⁴ Not only do all of these women have to mentally identify as charity cases, but now they must tell everyone among them details of their personal lives. The Social Betterment Society has failed to incorporate the

³⁵¹ Yeziarska, “The Free Vacation House,” 63.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

experiences of its charity recipients into its methodology, and Yeziarska criticizes this failure by providing the seldom-heard perspective of the immigrant in need of aid. Because the story is narrated by the immigrant woman, the reader cannot help but sympathize with her situation in a way that the Society workers are unwilling to do. Yeziarska's readers must confront the narrator's shame while the charity workers in the story simply ignore it.

The narrator and the other charity recipients suffer a number of other injustices en route to the vacation house and after they arrive. The narrator compares herself and the other mothers to animals in the eyes of the charity workers: "why did they make us walk through the street, after the nurse, like stupid cows?"³⁵⁵; "like tagged horses at a horse sale in the street, they marched us into the dining room"³⁵⁶; "[we were] like dogs...chained in one spot."³⁵⁷ This treatment of the women and children as animal-like is compounded by the fact that the vacation home is governed by dozens of rules detailing what the women are and are not allowed to do and what parts of the house they are allowed to access. The narrator explains that the reason for the rules is because every few days, a group of rich ladies come to the house, and all the beautiful parts of the house are really for these ladies rather than the needy women and children. During one of these visits, the narrator hears a lady call the women "poor creatures"³⁵⁸ in need of a restful place like the vacation house. But in the eyes of the narrator, the house is nothing more than a prison in which the women and children are made to perform for wealthy guests. On the way home from the so-called vacation house, the narrator concludes that the social workers must "need the worn-out mothers as part of the show."³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ Yeziarska, "The Free Vacation House," 66.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 68.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 71.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 70.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 71.

Jane Addams writes that our charity is not scientific enough for we tend to think of what people *should* be and in so doing “we ruthlessly force our conventions and standards upon [them], with a sternness which we would consider stupid indeed did an educator use it in forcing his mature intellectual convictions upon an underdeveloped mind.”³⁶⁰ This is precisely what happens to the mothers and children in Yeziarska’s story: they are forced to adhere to the standards and conventions of a Society that ostensibly exists for their betterment at a house that is supposed to provide a vacation from the struggles of their daily lives. Yeziarska questions the motivations of charity organizations in a pragmatist way by suggesting that they do not sufficiently consider the experiences of those in need since charity workers shame the poor at every turn and insist upon controlling so many aspects of the charity recipients’ lives. Yeziarska advocates for a system of charity in which the poor are met as equals and helped in a way that is consistent with their needs by taking their desires and experiences into account. Such a system would involve ongoing conversations with those who are being helped and granting those like the narrator of “The Free Vacation House” equal agency in the actions that are taken to improve her life rather than maintaining the condescending assumption that the impoverished do not know what they need. Yeziarska insists that individual feeling must be acknowledged as a way of providing balance to impersonal, ‘objective’ charity, locating the universal desire to be recognized within the particular needs of the Jewish immigrant community with which she is familiar.

Essential or Constructed Americanness?

American identity in Yeziarska’s writing is represented as both essential *and* constructed. The native-born American Dewey-esque men in Yeziarska’s stories possess an identity that from

³⁶⁰ Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 32.

their own standpoint and that of the immigrant protagonist is essential. However, the repeated attempts at assimilation and Americanization on the part of the Jewish characters simultaneously suggest the constructed nature of American identity. In Yeziarska's portrayal of Americanness as either constructed or essentialized in her fiction, she demonstrates that neither viewpoint is wholly accurate, as her female protagonists struggle to come to terms with their innate Jewishness as they work to create an American identity that is not forced and artificial and enables them to maintain their individuality and dignity.

Americanness in Yeziarska's fiction is portrayed as distinct from class, although her immigrant protagonists' impoverished, lower-class status also comes into conflict with the high-class society of the American men they meet. Catherine Rottenberg has noted that "the absence of the assumption of essentialism in class discourse creates the condition of possibility of upward mobility and serves as the basis for the unique modality of class performativity in the United States."³⁶¹ While it is true that class distinctions are not essential, when conflicts inevitably arise in Yeziarska's stories, they are nearly always characterized as the result of the female immigrant being unable to conform to the essentialized version of American identity the Dewey-like character demands of her. As Christopher Okonkwo has argued, for Yeziarska, differences between Jewishness and Americanness are "real, tenacious, and constantly exposed,"³⁶² and even as the immigrant protagonists try to repress these differences and perform an American identity, such a "socially constructed national identity"³⁶³ is inauthentic and doomed to failure, for the immigrants' Jewish identity "defies constructed erasure."³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ Catherine Rottenberg, "Salome of the Tenements, the American Dream and Class Performativity," *American Studies* 45, no. 1 (2004): 67.

³⁶² Christopher N. Okonkwo, "Of Repression, Assertion, and the Speakerly Dress: Anzia Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements*," *MELUS* 25, no. 1 (2000): 131.

³⁶³ *Ibid*, 136.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 133.

This conflict of Americanness as essential vs. constructed can be seen in “Wings” through Shenah Pessah’s thoughts about John Barnes and attempts to Americanize in order to win him over. As Blanche Gelfant notes in her introduction to *Hungry Hearts*, in this story “each [character] has misunderstood the other; and each has misused the other”³⁶⁵—Barnes views Shenah Pessah as an object of study rather than an individual, and she views him as a savior who will rescue her from her loneliness. The first time she meets Barnes and talks to him, she thinks that his “face, his voice, his bearing, [were all] so different from any one she had ever known,”³⁶⁶ and when he leaves, she worships the idea of him, conferring a godlike status upon a man she has just met. “I’m nothing and nobody now, but ach! How beautiful I would become if only the light from his eyes would fall on me!”³⁶⁷ For Shenah Pessah, there is something innately different about Barnes separating her from him, but she hopes to learn and mimic his American ways—style of dress, manner of speaking, the way he carries himself—nevertheless.

The next time she and Barnes are together, Shenah Pessah has bought an American-style dress to wear in order to impress him, however, she quickly realizes that there is more to Americanness than clothing choices. When she and Barnes visit the library, the separation between them again becomes clear:

In the few brief words that passed between Mr. Barnes and the librarian, Shenah Pessah sensed that these two were of the same world and that she was different. Her first contact with him in a well-lighted room made her aware that ‘there were other things to the [American] person besides the dress-up.’ She had noticed their well-kept hands on the desk and she became aware that her own were calloused and rough.³⁶⁸

While Shenah Pessah acknowledges that there are some aspects of American identity that can be imitated, like American dress or well-manicured hands, her observation of Barnes’s brief

³⁶⁵ Blanche H. Gelfant, introduction to Anzia Yeziarska, *Hungry Hearts* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), xxvi.

³⁶⁶ Yeziarska, “Wings,” 8.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 20.

interaction with the librarian reinforces her earlier view that there is an essential difference between them that she may never bridge.

A similar trajectory occurs in Yeziarska's 1923 novel *Salome of the Tenements*, in which Sonya Vrunsky, the Russian immigrant protagonist, comes to a greater understanding of herself through her tumultuous courtship, marriage, and separation from the wealthy American philanthropist John Manning. At the novel's opening, Sonya has just finished conducting an interview with the famous Manning, and he complements her writing. Sonya responds by asking, "You, a great philanthropist, to say that to me—a nobody? There are millions like me—" ³⁶⁹ When Manning playfully protests, Sonya again insists to him, "there are millions of us here." ³⁷⁰ She does not view herself as distinct in any way from the millions of other Jewish immigrants in New York. In denying herself independence from the Lower East Side masses, she unknowingly devalues herself, unable to acknowledge the inherent worth of her people and herself, as well as essentializing her own Jewish and immigrant identity. Manning represents greatness and uniqueness to her because he is a wealthy, educated, American philanthropist. Sonya notices his "low voice of cultured restraint," ³⁷¹ and even "his formal manner—his unconscious air of superiority—roused in her the fire of worship." ³⁷² But she also notices something that separates them from one another—Manning possesses an inherent restraint and repression of emotion while Sonya is unable to conceal her emotions. She "lift[s] her shining face to him" ³⁷³ in a warm smile, but even at this gesture on her part, Manning's "frosty blue eyes failed to kindle." ³⁷⁴

³⁶⁹ Anzia Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Sonya debases herself to win Manning's affections, borrowing from a pawnbroker and sweet-talking a famous fashion designer to dress her in gowns fit for American royalty to impress the object of her admiration. As with so many of Anzia Yeziarska's stories, once Sonya has 'won' her American millionaire and becomes Mrs. John Manning, she quickly learns that he is not everything she had thought him to be and she is miserable because she can no longer be herself. Manning expects Sonya to assimilate to high society, to do things his way—the 'American' way—and at first, she "follow[s] him like a faithful dog."³⁷⁵ Little by little, his coldness in dealing with her erodes her feelings for him. Unable to appreciate Sonya for herself (only what she represents), Manning calls her full of "selfish emotion,"³⁷⁶ "over-emotional,"³⁷⁷ and, finally, "insane"³⁷⁸ as he simultaneously insults her people. When Sonya reveals her debt to 'Honest Abe' the pawnbroker, Manning recoils in disgust, exclaiming, "'My name in the hands of *that Jew!*'"³⁷⁹ Here Manning also seems to acknowledge a fundamental schism in identity between Jews and Americans, even though he has spent a great deal of time insisting that Sonya conform to the ways of his world.

To Sonya, Manning is cold, repressed, and empty of emotion, and these are character traits that are not simply associated with wealthy or high class Americans, but *Americans in general*. At a reception the Mannings host at their home, Sonya meets her husband's relatives and reaches out to hug them "with Jewish fervor,"³⁸⁰ a phrase that suggests passion is a distinctly Jewish trait and not an American one. Likewise, although some of Sonya's friends and acquaintances come to the reception dressed in fine American clothes, their actions and bearing

³⁷⁵ Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements*, 109-110.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 128.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 133.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 150.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 151.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 121.

betray their Jewishness. Gittel Stein, even though she is dressed nicely, is described as “uncouth”³⁸¹ and provides “obvious proof of the crude and inferior social order into which John Manning has married.”³⁸² John Manning’s American guests make Sonya feel like “an outsider in her own house [...] lost among Manning’s people like a stranger in a strange land.”³⁸³ Again, there is an essential distinction between Jewish and American identities portrayed here that cannot be covered up or erased by superficial constructed changes like clothing and manners. Christopher Okonkwo observes of the novel that “Americanization promises the immigrants cultural acceptance if they renounce ‘different’ loyalties, but it never genuinely delivers on this bargain. Even as Yeziarska’s immigrants willingly, innovatively, and sometimes beguilingly comply with the mandate of ethnic repression, they [are] unable to merge with Anglo-Saxon America.”³⁸⁴ This is because in Yeziarska’s stories, immigrants must find a balance between constructed American identities and essentialized Jewish identities that does not rob them of their dignity or individuality. While many of Yeziarska’s immigrant heroines wish to assimilate and become American by virtue of their dress or manners, they ultimately embrace or celebrate the difference of their Jewish identity, seeing it as a point of pride rather than an embarrassment. By embracing their Jewish identity, they become American: part of the universal nation of immigrants but still attuned to the dignity of their Jewishness.

Conclusions

I previously suggested that the concept of Jewish self-acceptance is central to the Jewish pragmatist identity politics I have been tracing. In Yeziarska’s work, this notion is likewise at the

³⁸¹ Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements*, 123.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁸⁴ Okonkwo, “Of Repression, Assertion, and the Speakerly Dress,” 133.

heart of her understanding of the problems inherent to Jewish immigrants who were under pressure to assimilate or Americanize. The protagonists in Yeziarska's fiction are forced to choose between a false dichotomy of adhering to their Old World origins or assimilating to the culture of the New World. Their dilemma is usually compounded by their interactions with American characters, who tend to further pressure them to adopt white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant customs and repress their Jewishness. Ann R. Shapiro has suggested that in Yeziarska's stories, "Judaism can be reaffirmed only after the ghetto heroine has explored the Gentile world and found acceptance,"³⁸⁵ however, I would argue that Judaism can only be affirmed (for there is typically no initial affirmation by Yeziarska's heroines that their Jewishness has any value or dignity) once the protagonist has explored and been *rejected* by the Gentile world. It is only then that she comes to understand that the Americanization she was urged to undertake masked a sense of shame and fear over who she is. Once the protagonist sees this untruth for what it is, she can then affirm her inherent dignity and self-worth, providing herself with the acceptance she craved from the start. Yeziarska's immigrant Jewesses, like Gertrude Stein's Anna, Melanctha, and Lena, need to be able to feel to experience life, and their personal struggles are part of a pragmatist identity politics.

Yeziarska's politics of feeling go further than Stein's, to suggest ultimately that American democracy itself is at stake in the struggle of essentialized vs. constructed Jewish and American identities. She writes in her essay "America and I," "As a young girl hungry for love sees always before her eyes the picture of lover's arms around her, so I saw always in my heart the vision of Utopian America."³⁸⁶ As I have argued in this chapter, Yeziarska's vision of Utopian America is a country in which people are not limited by an essentialist vision of their

³⁸⁵ Ann R. Shapiro, "The Ultimate *Shaygets* and the Fiction of Anzia Yeziarska," *MELUS* 21, no. 2 (1996): 87.

³⁸⁶ Anzia Yeziarska, "America and I," in *Children of Loneliness: Stories of Immigrant Life in America* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1923), 48-49.

identities, but neither are those identities wholly constructed. Like Stein, Yeziarska suggests that identity evolves and changes at a gradual pace. When Americans are able to recognize this fact, only then will “the Americans of tomorrow, the America that is every day nearer coming to be, [be] too wise, too open-hearted, too friendly-handed, to let the least last-comer at their gates knock in vain with his gifts unwanted.”³⁸⁷

In its focus on mediating between particular and universal experiences, Stein and Yeziarska’s pragmatist identity politics is reminiscent of the Du Boisian identity politics espoused by Franz Boas, Horace Kallen, and Morris Cohen. Boas, Kallen, and Cohen emphasized the universal values of scientific responsibility and social justice in their work, yet also considered the particular experiences of Jews and African Americans. Likewise, Stein and Yeziarska write for an American, largely white and assimilated audience, yet draw that audience’s attention to the particular experiences of women, immigrants, and people of color. Their politics of feeling encourage incorporating the particular into the universal in society, enlarging the audience’s realm of experience for Stein and enlarging democracy as a result for Yeziarska. This pragmatist identity politics would also be taken up by later writers Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick, whose post-Holocaust focus on Jewish assimilation reveals the dangers of identifying too much with a universal ‘American’ standard or ideal at the expense of one’s particular Jewish identity.

³⁸⁷ Yeziarska, “America and I,” 51.

Appreciating Jewish History, Acknowledging Jewish Dignity: Malamud and Ozick

By mid-twentieth century, American pragmatism had undergone several transformations. C.S. Peirce's original definition of pragmatism as tracing "the conceivable practical consequences"³⁸⁸ of a concept had been applied to religion and psychology by William James, to democracy and education by John Dewey, and to social work by Jane Addams. W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke had applied pragmatism to thinking about race in the United States, while Gertrude Stein and Anzia Yezierska considered mainstream understandings of identity as it related to immigrants, with Stein's stories about the German characters Anna and Lena and Yezierska's tales of Jewish immigrant heroines. Pragmatism as it was shaped by Jewish Americans had likewise undergone a shift by mid-century. The insistence on properly empirical considerations of race by such figures as Franz Boas and Morris Cohen had paved the way for an early twentieth century Jewish identity politics championed by Horace Kallen and Sidney Hook, the foundational tenet of which was Jewish self-acceptance. This pragmatist identity politics was further shaped in Stein's and Yezierska's nuanced examinations of identity in their fiction. As I discussed in Chapter 2, acknowledgment of people's inherent dignity and incorporation of the fact of feeling into experience were at the core of both women's writing. But this pragmatist Jewish identity politics would undergo one final shift in the aftermath of the Holocaust in the literary work of Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick. While Jewish dignity remained at the center of their identity politics post-Holocaust, Malamud and Ozick further shaped this politics by highlighting the necessity of appreciating Jewish history and community in their fiction.

When Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick were born (in 1914 and 1928, respectively), they were already a generation removed from the East European Jews who immigrated to the

³⁸⁸ Charles S. Peirce, "Pragmatism Defined," in *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic* by Charles Sanders Peirce, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 246.

United States en masse at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. By the time they began writing fiction (Malamud's first story "Armistice" was published in 1940; Ozick's debut novel *Trust* appeared in 1966), Malamud was already two generations removed from the immigrant experience, while Ozick was three generations removed. Thus, both writers were not concerned so much with societal pressures on immigrants to assimilate, but were more interested in considering the consequences of assimilation on American Jewry. Gur Alroey has argued that the Holocaust "changed the nature of the Jewish people in modern times,"³⁸⁹ and the slaughter of millions of Jews in the Shoah had a profound impact on both Malamud and Ozick and provided a motivating force behind much of their work. Thus, in addition to their shared interest in the consequences of Jewish assimilation in the United States, both writers also examined Jewish assimilation in light of the Holocaust. More than just contemporaries, Malamud and Ozick were also friends. Evelyn Avery observes that the two shared "a deep respect, affection, and concern for each other's lives and writings as evident in their letters and interviews,"³⁹⁰ and at Malamud's funeral, Ozick "mourned the loss of a great Jewish writer and friend."³⁹¹

Neither Malamud nor Ozick is typically read as a pragmatist writer. While Ozick has a clearer connection than Malamud does to pragmatist figures such as Henry James and Lionel Trilling (a connection that I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter), I contend that it is not only possible but *necessary* to read both writers as pragmatists in order to bring to light the shared identity politics present in their work. Malamud's writing has long been read in a universalizing way, based on his oft-quoted line, "All men are Jews except they don't know

³⁸⁹ Gur Alroey, *Bread to Eat and Clothes to Wear: Letters from Jewish Migrants in the Early Twentieth Century* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 78.

³⁹⁰ Evelyn Avery, "Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick: Kindred Neshamas," in *The Magic Worlds of Bernard Malamud*, ed. Evelyn Avery (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001): 161.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

it.”³⁹² However, as I explain in the next section, an over-reliance on this line as an interpretive lens denies explicitly Jewish content in Malamud’s fiction that would benefit from being read as Jewish rather than as universal. Furthermore, reading his work as pragmatist highlights this Jewish content both in terms of an identity politics centered on dignity and the importance of Jewish history as well as calls for more inclusive democracy in his writings. In Ozick’s case, the identity politics present in her early work has been largely neglected at the expense of discussing the recurrent themes of Judaism vs. Hellenism and the idolatry of art in her fiction. Considering Ozick using a pragmatist lens both emphasizes this identity politics and reveals another layer of Henry James’s influence on her work. In addition, Malamud and Ozick share the same concern with dignity I have examined in previous Jewish pragmatists, which is why they are included in the genealogy of Jewish American pragmatists I have been tracing along with Morris Cohen, Sidney Hook, Horace Kallen, Gertrude Stein, and Anzia Yezierska.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the literary rebukes of Stein and Yezierska to essentialized understandings of identity as well as their shared focus on dignity. Malamud and Ozick likewise share Stein’s and Yezierska’s pragmatist concern with dignity and self-acceptance, and they add to this concern an appreciation of Jewish history and connection to other Jews. Both believe in the dignity of Jewish identity and both writers maintain that Jews will suffer merely for being Jews, as has been borne out by history. For Malamud, being an assimilated Jew who denies responsibility and dignity to his fellow Jews is the ultimate crime. For Ozick, on the other hand, any Jew who succumbs to the temptations of assimilation at the expense of Jewish dignity must pay a price. Thus, both writers subscribe to the Du Boisian pragmatist notion that it is necessary to mediate universal concerns with attention to the particular—in this case, connection to fellow

³⁹² “An Interview with Bernard Malamud,” in *Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays*, eds. Leslie A. Field & Joyce W. Field (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975): 11.

Jews. Neither Malamud nor Ozick believes the non-Jewish world to be a force of evil, but they see it as a corruptive influence when it severs a Jew's connection to other Jews. This is a concern they share with Boas, Cohen, Kallen, and Hook, all of whom are attuned to problems that Jews face as Jews in the U.S. and Europe, but who balance these particular concerns with universal ones like scientific responsibility and the mistreatment of other marginalized groups.

Malamudian Jewish Identity

There has been much debate over the course of Bernard Malamud's career and since his death as to whether he ought to be categorized as a Jewish American writer. Some critics have argued that his many Jewish characters are symbolic Everymen, particularly in light of one of Malamud's most famous quotations that "all men are Jews, except they don't know it."³⁹³ Robert Alter, for instance, has argued that Jewishness in Malamud's work is a metaphor for the modern man's imprisonment and his obstacles to self-fulfillment, positing that although "most of his protagonists are avowedly Jewish, he has never really written *about* Jews."³⁹⁴ Similarly, Alfred Kazin has observed of mid-century Jewish and African-American writers (and he includes Malamud in this statement) that "there is a certain over-eagerness in them all to stand and deliver, to be freed of certain painful experiences through the ritualistic catharsis of modern symbolism. The Jewish or Negro writer, far from being mired in his personal pathos of yore, is now so aware that his experience is 'universal' that he tends to escape out of his particular experience itself, to end up in the great American sky of abstractions."³⁹⁵ More recently, J.P. Steed has argued that Jewishness for Malamud is "an active metaphor—ethnically for the

³⁹³ "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," 11.

³⁹⁴ Robert Alter, "Jewishness as Metaphor," in *Bernard Malamud and the Critics*, eds. Leslie Field and Joyce Field (New York: New York University Press, 1970): 30.

³⁹⁵ Alfred Kazin, "The Magic and the Dread," in *Modern Critical Views: Bernard Malamud*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986): 16.

individual's membership in an intimate group, and religiously for the element of divinity locatable in everyone.”³⁹⁶

Still other critics insist that Malamud’s characters largely tend to be distinctively Jewish and that his writing deals with Jewish themes. Allen Guttman concludes that Malamud’s portrayal of Yakov Bok in *The Fixer* “suggests that the flamboyant, quotable assertion of the universality of Jewishness is hyperbole”³⁹⁷ and that despite characters who have often been read as universal, Malamud “seems in his heart of hearts to be, like Ludwig Lewisohn, a believer in peoplehood.”³⁹⁸ Likewise, Leslie Field has argued that Malamud’s roots “are Jewish roots. The original soil nurtures a writer in such a way that in any age his writing is immersed in that which concerns Jews most directly.”³⁹⁹ While there is no denying that most of Malamud’s fictional protagonists are Jewish and that he often treats Jewish subject matter in his work—for instance, “The Magic Barrel,” which centers around the Jewish matchmaker Salzman and his client Leo Finkle, or “The Silver Crown,” whose protagonist purchases a crown from a faith-healer rabbi to save his dying father—scholars continue to disagree about whether his Jewish characters are best understood as Jews or as symbols.

Malamud himself gave mixed messages on this subject: he did not like the label of ‘Jewish American writer,’ calling it “schematic and reductive,”⁴⁰⁰ and he sometimes spoke of how his Jewish characters represented all men, yet he also highlighted the Jewishness of his characters and themes or motifs in his writing that are explicitly Jewish. In an interview with

³⁹⁶ J.P. Steed, “The Spirit in All Things: The Search for Identity in Malamud’s ‘Angel Levine,’” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 18 (1999): 11.

³⁹⁷ Allen Guttman, “‘All Men Are Jews,’” in *Modern Critical Views: Bernard Malamud*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986): 157.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁹⁹ Leslie Field, “Bernard Malamud and the Marginal Jew,” in *The Fiction of Bernard Malamud*, eds. Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 1977): 109.

⁴⁰⁰ “An Interview with Bernard Malamud,” 12.

Leslie and Joyce Field, Malamud discusses his comedic worldview, stating, “Consider the lilies of the field; consider the Jewish lily that toils and spins.”⁴⁰¹ In this instance, the author aligns himself with a particularly Jewish vision of humor that repeats and revises a well-known Christian saying from the Sermon on the Mount.⁴⁰² He also cited the Holocaust as a major catalyst in his decision to become a writer explaining, “The suffering of the Jews is a distinct thing for me. I for one believe that not enough has been made of the tragedy of the destruction of six million Jews. Somebody has to cry—even if it's a writer, 20 years later.”⁴⁰³ However, in a 1975 *Paris Review* interview, Daniel Stern asks Malamud if he is a Jewish writer, to which Malamud responds:

I’m an American, I’m a Jew, and I write for all men. A novelist has to, or he’s built himself a cage. I write about Jews, when I write about Jews, because they set my imagination going. I know something about their history, the quality of their experience and belief, and of their literature [...but] I was born in America and respond, in American life, to more than Jewish experience.⁴⁰⁴

Here Malamud somewhat resists the label of ‘Jewish writer,’ insisting that his work is for everyone and that he responds to American life generally rather than American Jewish life in particular.

Although many critics and scholars⁴⁰⁵ have interpreted Malamud’s work using the ‘all men are Jews’ line as a magic key of sorts that unlocks the underlying meaning of his stories, I believe that an over-reliance on this statement has led to an abundance of universalist

⁴⁰¹ “An Interview with Bernard Malamud,” 16.

⁴⁰² Matt. 6:28 KJV, in which Jesus says, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.”

⁴⁰³ Mervyn Rothstein, “Bernard Malamud, Author Dies at 71,” *New York Times*, 20 March 1986, D26.

⁴⁰⁴ Daniel Stern, “Bernard Malamud: The Art of Fiction No. 52,” *Paris Review* 61 (Spring 1975):

<<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3869/the-art-of-fiction-no-52-bernard-malamud>>

⁴⁰⁵ See, for example, Robert Alter, “Jewishness as Metaphor,” in *Bernard Malamud and the Critics*, eds. Leslie Field and Joyce Field (New York: New York University Press, 1970): 29-42; Alfred Kazin, “The Magic and the Dread,” in *Modern Critical Views: Bernard Malamud*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986): 15-19; Steven G. Kellman, “Tenants, Tenets, and Tensions: Bernard Malamud’s Blacks and Jews,” in *American Literary Dimensions: Poems and Essays in Honor of Melvin J. Friedman*, eds. Ben Siegel and Jay L Halio (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999): 118-127; or J.P. Steed, “The Spirit in All Things: The Search for Identity in Malamud’s ‘Angel Levine,’” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 18 (1999): 11-17.

interpretations of Malamud's writing at the expense of other ways of seeing his work. In a 1973 interview with Leslie and Joyce Field in which Malamud is asked whether he ever made this statement and if he would elaborate upon it, he responds, "I think I said 'All men are Jews except they don't know it.' I doubt I expected anyone to take the statement literally. But I think it's an understandable statement and a metaphoric way of indicating how history, sooner or later, treats all men."⁴⁰⁶ This elaboration upon the initial statement reveals two important, if potentially uncomfortable, facts: first, Malamud did not intend for people to take the 'all men are Jews' remark at face value, and second, he intended *that statement* (as opposed to his fiction more broadly) to serve as a metaphor for the way in which any group of people may eventually come to be scapegoated as Jews typically have been throughout history. While Malamud's fiction has long been read using the 'all men as Jews' metaphor as an interpretive lens, I believe this not only distorts the true meaning of that line, but consigns Malamud's stories to a perpetual symbolic or universal reading when there is obvious Jewish content that would benefit from being read as Jewish rather than universal or symbolic. As Malamud himself later observes in the Field interview, a scholar does himself no good "if he limits his interpretation of a writer to fit a label he applies."⁴⁰⁷

In reading Malamud as a pragmatist, my understanding of him is as a Jewish American writer with a particular identity politics in which dignity plays a central role. Reading him as a pragmatist brings to light a pattern of identity politics in his work that has not previously been accounted for. I previously discussed the evolving identity politics of Horace Kallen, Morris Cohen, and Sidney Hook, a politics for which Jewish dignity and self-acceptance is a central

⁴⁰⁶ "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," 11.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 12. In the interest of full disclosure, Malamud is referring here to the label "Jewish American writer," however I think his statement applies just as well to interpreting all of his stories and novels as symbolic or universal, as this is equally limiting and reductive.

concern, and considered dignity in the writing of Gertrude Stein and Anzia Yeziarska as it relates to the pragmatist notion of felt fact. But what of Malamud's connection to pragmatist thinking? Admittedly, his link to figures who tend to be regularly discussed as pragmatists is less clear-cut and compelling than Stein's years of study with William James or Yeziarska's relationship with John Dewey. A handful of scholars⁴⁰⁸ have considered Malamud alongside Ralph Ellison in thinking through portrayals of ethnic identity in both authors' work. Ellison has been ensconced in a lineage of twentieth century African American pragmatists beginning with W.E.B. Du Bois by such authors as Ross Posnock in *Color and Culture* (1998), Michael Magee in *Emancipating Pragmatism* (2004), and Walton Muyumba in *The Shadow and The Act* (2009). More scholars have cited Henry James⁴⁰⁹ as an influence on Malamud's writing, including Malamud himself. Christof Wegelin argues that Malamud's Italian stories "contain numerous Jamesian motifs,"⁴¹⁰ citing "The Lady of the Lake" as particularly influenced by James since in this story, Malamud "stays [close] to James [and examines] clearly the change a century has brought in the American consciousness."⁴¹¹ Wegelin also discusses Malamud's recurring character Fidelman, observing that Fidelman's stories "conform to the basic plot of [Jamesian] international fiction in which the

⁴⁰⁸ See, for example, Sanford Pinsker, "Are All Men Jews, All Americans Black? Thinking about Bernard Malamud and Ralph Ellison," *Yiddish* 13, no. 1 (2002): 142-156; Rachael Peckham, "Identity Anxiety and the Problem and Power of Naming in African American and Jewish American Literature," *Xavier Review* 29, no. 1 (2009): 30-47; and Paul Grundy, "Invisibility and the Surpassing of Ethnic Authenticity: Reprise Strategy in Malamud, Roth, and Woody Allen," in *The Déjà-Vu and the Authentic: Reprise, Recycling, Recuperating in Anglophone Literature and Culture*, ed. Jean-Jacques Chardin (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2012): 125-139.

⁴⁰⁹ Brother of William James, who popularized pragmatist philosophy in the United States, Henry James was also acquainted with Charles Sanders Peirce, who developed many of the ideas that William James popularized and applied to psychology and religion. Henry James's pragmatism has been explored at length by scholars over the past several decades. See, for example, Ross Posnock's book *The Trial of Curiosity* (1991) or Joan Richardson's chapter on Henry James in *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (2007).

⁴¹⁰ Christof Wegelin, "The American Schlemiel Abroad: Malamud's Italian Stories and the End of American Innocence," in *Critical Essays on Bernard Malamud*, ed. Joel Salzman (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co, 1987): 141.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

American goes to Europe, where he is tried and where his identity is defined.”⁴¹² In his *Paris Review* interview with Daniel Stern, Malamud acknowledges James as one of his influences.⁴¹³

I will show in this chapter that, like fellow Jewish pragmatist writers Stein and Yeziarska, Malamud is sensitive to dignity in his fiction. While Stein and Yeziarska employ felt fact in their writings to emphasize the evolving nature of identity, Malamud’s focus is on collective Jewish responsibility for self-acceptance. In a Malamud story, it is a terrible thing to feel shame over or to attempt to abandon one’s identity as a Jew; such abandonment usually leads to negative, if not disastrous, consequences. Much in the vein of Morris Cohen, who argued that Jews “could not make any contribution to American civilization by mere imitation [of non-Jews] or acceptance [by them],”⁴¹⁴ Malamudian protagonists who attempt to distance themselves from their Jewish heritage and identity must discover the importance of self-acceptance and living a life of dignity on the basis of that acceptance. While the protagonists of the stories I will examine—Arthur Fidelity, Henry Levin, and Harry Cohen—seem to appreciate the perks of the universal that come from denying or repressing their Jewish identities, their fates suggest that Malamud believes that attention to the particular circumstances of their fellow Jews is in order. Likewise, Ozick’s protagonists in “The Pagan Rabbi,” “Envy” and “Bloodshed,” meet similar fates for rejecting their particular Jewish identity and culture. In both authors’ texts, a loss results from sacrificing the dignity of one’s identity in order to better conform to a universal ideal that draws one away from community.

Malamud’s emphasis on dignity is quite similar to his contemporary Sidney Hook’s understanding of Jewish identity. Both born in Brooklyn in the early part of the twentieth

⁴¹² Wegelin, “The American Schlemiel Abroad.” 146.

⁴¹³ Stern, “Bernard Malamud: The Art of Fiction No. 52,” <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3869/the-art-of-fiction-no-52-bernard-malamud>>

⁴¹⁴ Morris R. Cohen, “Zionism: Tribalism or Liberalism?” *The New Republic* 18 (1919): 183.

century, Malamud and Hook came of age around roughly the same time (separated by a little over a decade), shared ties with the larger New York Intellectual community, and published their work in some of the same journals, including *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*.⁴¹⁵ In Chapter 1, I discussed Hook's understanding of Jewishness as pragmatic because it relies on the consequences of social beliefs and actions to understand what the practical effects of the concept of 'Jewishness' are. On this point, Hook explains Jewish identity as follows: "I say, a Jew is anyone who calls himself such or is called such and lives in a community which acts on the distinction between Jew and non-Jew. [...] People who've given up their Judaism are still called Jews, people who have no belief at all. A Jewish atheist, is that an oxymoron? It's not, because he's still Jewish."⁴¹⁶ Likewise, Malamud demonstrates in his fiction that there are practical consequences for being Jewish, even if a person has assimilated or tried to leave behind a Jewish past. The Holocaust and anti-Semitism loomed large in the minds of both writers, and their solution was to call for collective Jewish dignity and self-acceptance, since, as Malamud would famously write in *The Fixer*, "there's no such thing as an unpolitical man, especially a Jew."⁴¹⁷

I will discuss three of Malamud's short stories in which he highlights the importance of collective Jewish responsibility to the tribe, so to speak: "The Last Mohican" and "The Lady of the Lake," both of which appear in *The Magic Barrel* (1958), and "The Jewbird," which appears in *Idiots First* (1963). All three of these stories feature a main character that either fails in his responsibility to help a fellow Jew in need and/or denies his own Jewish identity. This notion of

⁴¹⁵ Curiously enough, both writers also taught courses at Harvard in the summer of 1961, maintained homes in southern Vermont about an hour apart from one another, and were considered for the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1976, according to a memo from the John Marsh Files at the Ford Presidential Library (<<https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0067/7773889.pdf>>). While I could find no record of correspondence between the two, it seems very likely that they might have been acquainted at some point and would have been familiar with each other's work.

⁴¹⁶ Sidney Hook, interview by Norman Podhoretz, *Commentary* 88, no. 4 (1989): 34.

⁴¹⁷ Malamud, *The Fixer* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1966), 299.

collective Jewish responsibility is an important one to Malamud, since he writes three stories on the subject and later dedicates an entire novel, *The Fixer* (1966), to its exploration. “The Last Mohican,” “The Lady of the Lake,” and “The Jewbird” are pragmatist in their portrayal of Jewish identity as mediating between universal and particular as well as having practical consequences. Even though Judaism is not personally important to the respective protagonists Arthur Fidelman, Henry Levin/Freeman, or Harry Cohen, Malamud demonstrates through other characters in each story that to be a Jew often leads to suffering. Malamud’s stories also call for Jewish dignity in the face of undue suffering, further linking him with Hook, Cohen, Stein and Yeziarska who highlight the importance of dignity in their writing. This focus on dignity and suffering also connects Malamud to contemporary Cynthia Ozick, who shared Malamud’s belief that to be a Jew often leads to suffering, and therefore it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of Jewish history when faced with anti-Semitism and/or the temptation to assimilate into non-Jewish society.

“The Last Mohican,” which appears in *The Magic Barrel* (1958), is Malamud’s first story to feature the recurring protagonist Arthur Fidelman. In this story, Fidelman, who is a “self-confessed failure as a painter,”⁴¹⁸ has traveled to Italy to write a critical study of Giotto. He is approached by Shimon Susskind, a poor Jewish beggar, who at once recognizes Fidelman as a Jew, much to the protagonist’s dismay. So far removed is Fidelman from his Jewish roots that when Susskind says ‘Shalom,’ Fidelman replies likewise “so far as he recalled—for the first time in his life.”⁴¹⁹ Susskind reveals that he is in need of a new suit and wants to know if Fidelman has an extra he can spare. He does, in fact, but Fidelman refuses to give Susskind his other suit. Susskind and Fidelman meet a few other times in the story, sometimes in waking life and

⁴¹⁸ Malamud, “The Last Mohican,” in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 200.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid*, 201.

sometimes in Fidelman's dreams, but each time Susskind asks for the suit, Fidelman says no. Eventually Susskind comes into Fidelman's hotel room while he is away, but rather than stealing his suit, he takes a briefcase containing Fidelman's only completed chapter of the Giotto study. Desperate to retrieve his missing chapter, Fidelman tracks Susskind down and finally gives him the suit he requested, whereupon he learns that Susskind burned his Giotto chapter. Enraged, he begins to chase Susskind, but stops suddenly because he has "a triumphant insight."⁴²⁰ He shouts to the refugee to come back, saying, "The suit is yours. All is forgiven,"⁴²¹ but Susskind just continues to run.

Several scholars have noted the irony with which Fidelman regards ancient Italian history in comparison to the recent historical events embodied by Susskind. Upon seeing the Baths of Diocletian, Fidelman sighs, "Imagine all that history,"⁴²² but when Susskind implies that his refugee status is a result of his running to escape Nazis and the Holocaust in "Germany, Hungary, [and] Poland,"⁴²³ Fidelman responds with "Ah, that's so long ago."⁴²⁴ David Mesher has observed of this scene, "Compared to this history of ancient Rome, of course, the recent horrors of Nazi persecutions, as represented by Susskind the individual, hardly occurred 'long ago.' In contrast, the history of Susskind, representative of the Jewish people, is far longer than that of Rome, to which Fidelman is attracted because of its apparent antiquity."⁴²⁵ Fidelman responds to Susskind the way that he does because of Fidelman's own views about Jewish identity. He badly wants to become a part of the non-Jewish world and escape the consequences of Jewishness that Susskind represents, but through his encounters with the refugee, Fidelman

⁴²⁰ Malamud, "The Last Mohican," 220.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid, 200.

⁴²³ Ibid, 202.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ David R. Mesher, "The Remembrance of Things Unknown: Malamud's 'The Last Mohican,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 12, no. 4 (1975): 401.

learns to accept his own Jewish identity and gains a dignity he had not previously possessed. Furthermore, in contrast to his attitude at the beginning of the story of appreciation for only the ‘universal’ Italian culture, Fidelman locates an appreciation for the particular Jewish history of Susskind and Jews like him who did not survive the Holocaust.

Fidelman initially rejects Jewish culture and his Jewish identity for the sake of assimilation. When Fidelman tells Susskind in their first encounter that “‘freedom is a relative term,’”⁴²⁶ Susskind counters with, “‘Don’t tell me about freedom.’”⁴²⁷ This exchange is important because it reveals that Susskind understands Fidelman’s lack of freedom. On the surface, Fidelman appears to be the free person between the two of them: he is traveling of his own accord, has money to support himself, and has no responsibilities to speak of. Susskind, on the other hand, lives in a hovel, peddles for money, and continues to move around from place to place. But Susskind is free in the sense that he knows who he is and he is prepared to face the consequences that come with his Jewish identity. Fidelman is not, for he has “‘rejected his own Jewish culture, but is unable to assimilate into that of the Italians.’”⁴²⁸ Likewise, Karen Polster argues that in Fidelman’s pursuit of Christian Italian culture, “‘he has rejected his own. It is this lack of awareness of the importance of his own history to his identity that is responsible for Fidelman’s failure both in life and in art.’”⁴²⁹ It is because of this rejection of his own Jewish identity that Fidelman refuses help to Susskind, the very embodiment of the consequences of Jewishness Fidelman wishes to escape. In addition, this rejection of Jewish culture exposes a lack of dignity in Fidelman, who is desperate to be accepted by Christian Italians, writers, and scholars—all groups with more social capital than Jews.

⁴²⁶ Malamud, “The Last Mohican,” 204.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Mesher, “Remembrance of Things Unknown,” 401.

⁴²⁹ Karen L. Polster, “America and the History of the Jews in Bernard Malamud’s ‘The Last Mohican,’” in *The Magic Worlds of Bernard Malamud*, ed. Evelyn Avery (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001): 61.

When Fidelman's own history confronts him in the form of Susskind, he denies any responsibility to it. When Fidelman asks why he should be responsible for Susskind, the following exchange occurs:

[Susskind] "You know what responsibility means?"

[Fidelman] "I think so."

"Then you are responsible. Because you are a man. Because you are a Jew, aren't you?"

"Yes, goddamn it, but I'm not the only one in the whole wide world. Without prejudice, I refuse the obligation. I am a single individual and can't take on everybody's personal burden. I have the weight of my own to contend with."⁴³⁰

Fidelman's response to Susskind brings to mind a famous quotation from Rabbi Tarfon in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), which roughly translates to "You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to withdraw from it."⁴³¹ Fidelman explicitly denies any sort of responsibility to Susskind regardless of their connection and shared heritage as Jews. The fact that Susskind phrases this as a question—"you're a Jew, aren't you?"—implies that there is something distinctly un-Jewish about Fidelman's refusal to take responsibility for Susskind. This quality Fidelman seems to lack is perhaps best expressed by the word *yiddishkeit*, which Bonnie Lyons defines as "the sense of a people, a cohesive group bound together by ties of memory [...] Jewish tradition and Jewish history."⁴³² Fidelman lacks this emotional and historical attachment to Judaism and thus, he cannot understand why he has any obligation to Susskind.

The change that occurs in Fidelman over the course of "The Last Mohican" is that he comes to view his own identity and Jewishness more broadly as worthy of the same dignity and respect with which he initially regards Italian culture. When his manuscript on Giotto goes missing, Fidelman suspects Susskind and tries to track him down. In his journey to find Susskind, Fidelman discovers the Jewish culture that had existed in Rome all along, but that he

⁴³⁰ Malamud, "The Last Mohican," 208.

⁴³¹ Pirkei Avot 2:21 - ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל ממנה

⁴³² Bonnie Lyons qtd. in Karen L. Polster, "America and the History of the Jews," 61.

had not considered worthy of his attention like the Italian culture he openly admires. On this point, Suzanne Roszak observes, “Malamud depicts Fidelman as a member of an ethnic and religious minority community that is culturally disenfranchised by the Italian Catholic majority.”⁴³³ Fidelman wanders into a Sephardic synagogue where he inquires after Susskind and is told to look in the ghetto. He walks through the streets of the ghetto with “the present-day poor, Fidelman among them, oppressed by history.”⁴³⁴ For perhaps the first time in his life, Fidelman sees the impoverished Jews around him as ‘oppressed by history’ and sees himself among that group. When he goes to the Jewish section of the Cimitero Verano, he sees “an empty place, [which] said under a six-pointed star engraved upon a marble slab that lay on the ground, for ‘My beloved father/Betrayed by the damned Fascists/Murdered at Auschwitz by the barbarous Nazis/*O Crime Orribile*.”⁴³⁵ Although Fidelman had earlier referred to World War II and the Holocaust as “so long ago,”⁴³⁶ he now directly faces the tragic consequences of this recent history in contrast to his previous unwillingness to face those same consequences as represented by Susskind. Finally, Fidelman discovers where Susskind lives and searches for his chapter there while the refugee is out peddling. Susskind’s residence is described as “a pitch-black freezing cave”⁴³⁷ and “an icebox someone had probably lent the refugee to come in out of the rain.”⁴³⁸ To face the squalor of the place where Susskind lives is more than Fidelman can bear, since “from the visit he never fully recovered.”⁴³⁹ Fidelman had only been aware of poverty, suffering, and tragedy in an abstract sense while dealing with the annoyance of Susskind

⁴³³ Suzanne Roszak, “Sex, Diaspora, and the New ‘Italian Novel’: James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* and Bernard Malamud’s *Pictures of Fidelman*,” *Arizona Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2015): 98.

⁴³⁴ Malamud, “The Last Mohican,” 214-215.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, 215.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, 202.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*, 218.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid*.

repeatedly asking him for a suit, but through his quest to get back his missing Giotto chapter, he faces the tragic consequences of Jewish identity (those for which he previously refused obligation) head on—first in the ghetto, then in the cemetery, and finally in the hovel where Susskind resides.

This appreciation and understanding of Jewish culture and Jewish suffering prove redemptive for Fidelman. Although he had previously denied responsibility to Susskind, Fidelman offers his suit to him at the end of the story without wanting anything in return. He is initially enraged when he discovers that Susskind burned his Giotto chapter, but “moved by all he had lately learned,”⁴⁴⁰ he gains newfound insight and forgives Susskind. As David Mesher notes, Susskind’s presence and influence “show Fidelman his true, innermost self.”⁴⁴¹ Similarly, Pirjo Ahokas argues that Fidelman’s “reaffirmation of his ethnic-cultural identity is prefigured by traditional Jewish symbols.”⁴⁴² Through his encounters with Susskind, Fidelman has realized both the importance of Jewish responsibility for one another and the dignity of Jews like Susskind—like the beadle in the synagogue, the poor Jews of the ghetto, and the father whose grave he saw in the cemetery—who have suffered for the sake of their Jewishness. Fidelman initially embraces Italian culture at the expense of his Jewish heritage in “The Last Mohican,” and in so doing, he shirks his responsibility to a fellow Jew, but the consequences of Jewishness he faces in his search for Susskind lead him to self-acceptance. Fidelman thus provides a positive example of identity politics for Malamud, in which the Jewishness and dignity of Jewish identity that initially was denied is reaffirmed. Fidelman finds a balance between the raced particular and unracial universal (as Du Bois puts it). In this way, Fidelman is reminiscent of many of Anzia

⁴⁴⁰ Malamud, “The Last Mohican,” 220.

⁴⁴¹ Mesher, “Remembrance of Things Unknown,” 399.

⁴⁴² Pirjo Ahokas, “Through the Ghetto to Giotto: The Process of Inner Transformation in Malamud’s ‘Last Mohican,’” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 19 (1987): 65.

Yeziarska's immigrant protagonists, who are rejected by the non-Jewish world before ultimately affirming the inherent dignity of their Jewish identity. Although Malamud's later stories of Fidelman, which appear together in the 1969 collection *Pictures of Fidelman*, do not explicitly address Jewishness as "The Last Mohican" does, identity politics more broadly conceived remains important for Fidelman, who goes on to affirm other aspects of his identity such as his artistic nature and his sexuality in later stories. Jewish identity and mediation of the universal with the particular likewise retain their importance as recurring subjects for Malamud, as we will see in "The Lady of the Lake" and "The Jewbird."

Unlike Fidelman, Henry Levin in "The Lady of the Lake" is unable to embrace his Jewish identity and he suffers unhappiness and the loss of the woman he loves as a result, acting as a kind of negative counterpart to Fidelman's positive growth in "The Last Mohican." Levin, who goes by the name of Freeman while abroad in Europe, is characterized as "tired of the past—tired of the limitations it had imposed upon him,"⁴⁴³ and while he visits Italy he meets and becomes enamored of a woman named Isabella, who shows him around Isola del Dongo. Isabella asks directly or obliquely multiple times about Freeman's heritage, as she believes him to be Jewish. Each time this occurs, he denies his Jewish identity, only to discover at the end that Isabella herself is Jewish and was a survivor of the concentration camp at Buchenwald. She tells Henry that she cannot marry him, revealing, "'We are Jews. My past is meaningful to me. I treasure what I suffered for.'" ⁴⁴⁴ Before Freeman can tell her the truth about who he is, she disappears, leaving him to "vainly [seek] her in the veiled mist that had risen from the lake, still calling her name."⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³ Malamud, "The Lady of the Lake," in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 221.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Most readings of “The Lady of the Lake” have discussed the irony of Levin’s desire to shape a new identity for himself in a new location when the very Jewish identity he eschews is what Isabella most desires from him. Iska Alter argues that Levin, “following the [*sic*] resurrective American design, believes he can assume a new persona, becoming a Freeman without any consequences, only to discover that in spurning his Jewish birth and sacrificing the heritage of the Holocaust, he loses love’s redeeming grace.”⁴⁴⁶ Likewise, Christof Wegelin observes that Isabella “treasures what she has suffered for in Buchenwald, treasures, that is, the very Jewish solidarity which [Henry] has denied by changing his name. [...] In Malamud, the lady’s title may be spurious, but her innate nobility has been certified in experience; it is Freeman who turns out to be a sham.”⁴⁴⁷ More recently, Rachael Peckham has argued that Henry “hides behind his newly constructed identity [and] the story’s greatest irony is that this re-naming is the real ‘limitation’ to Henry’s freedom, as it keeps him from being with the woman he falls in love with.”⁴⁴⁸ Considered together, all of these readings attest to “The Lady of the Lake” as a Malamudian “cautionary tale,”⁴⁴⁹ in which the major emphasis and key takeaway from the story is Levin’s foolhardiness in denying his Jewish identity.

My own understanding of “The Lady of the Lake” concurs with and extends this existing scholarly reading of Malamud’s story by locating it within a broader framework of identity politics in Malamud. Furthermore, I am suggesting that not only is Levin foolish for trying to be someone he is not, but that in constructing this non-Jewish identity and insisting upon it throughout his encounters with Isabella, Henry denies Jewishness its dignity through erasure and

⁴⁴⁶ Iska Alter, *The Good Man’s Dilemma: Social Criticism in the Fiction of Bernard Malamud* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1981), 157-158.

⁴⁴⁷ Wegelin, “The American Schlemiel Abroad,” 141.

⁴⁴⁸ Rachael Peckham, “Identity Anxiety and the Problem and Power of Naming in African American and Jewish American Literature,” *Xavier Review* 29, no. 1 (2009): 41.

⁴⁴⁹ Alter, *The Good Man’s Dilemma*, 158.

his inability to identify with a fellow Jew. Like Fidelman, Henry appreciates the universal but is unable to muster any feeling for the particular circumstances of his fellow Jews. Unlike Fidelman, however, Henry does not overcome his inability to see the universal in the particular, and he is punished as a result.

Ezra Cappell, who argues that Malamud appropriates and misuses Holocaust imagery in this story, posits that Isabella's "treasured past is not oriented around any covenantal, or traditional value which has sustained the Jewish people for thousands of years, and which before the Holocaust constituted a communal history. Instead Isabella, like many of Malamud's characters, treasures the reminders of her immediate past of suffering and anti-Semitism."⁴⁵⁰ Cappell goes on to say that Isabella's suffering is "divorced from Judaism itself, rendering her rejection of Freeman on the grounds of a Jewish identity contrived and hypocritical."⁴⁵¹ However, what I believe Cappell misunderstands in this reading of "The Lady of the Lake" is that for Malamud, suffering cannot be divorced from one's Jewish identity because the practical consequences of being Jewish—whether one is a highly religious Jew or secular and assimilated—are the same regardless of religiosity. We do not know if Isabella's family was made of up traditionally religious Jews (although this seems unlikely since Isabella herself does not observe traditional religious laws such as *tzniut* or *shomer negiah*⁴⁵²), however this was not a factor for the Nazis who sent her family to Buchenwald. Regardless of Isabella's or Henry's beliefs in Judaism or observation of traditional Jewish laws and customs, or in Henry's case even appreciation of his Jewish culture and history, Malamud makes clear that Jewish identity has historically led to suffering and will likely continue to do so. This fate is what makes Henry's

⁴⁵⁰ Ezra Cappell, "Reflecting the World: Bernard Malamud's Post-Holocaust Judaism," *Yiddish/Modern Jewish Studies* 13, no. 1 (2002): 46-47.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, 47.

⁴⁵² *Tzniut* refers to the laws of modesty regarding what type of clothing a woman wears. *Shomer negiah* refers to the custom of not touching someone of the opposite sex unless married or related.

denial of his Jewish identity and his hesitance to identify with Isabella even after she reveals her Jewishness so egregious for Malamud. They inhabit the type of world Sidney Hook refers to—one in which religious ancestry has practical and dangerous consequences—yet Henry remains unable to face these consequences. He does not mediate his acknowledgement of the universal with consideration for the particular, and thus, he represents a failed example of identity politics for Malamud, pragmatically speaking.

When Henry first meets Isabella, she is described as possessing a “dark, sharp Italian face [that] had that quality of beauty which holds the mark of history, the beauty of a people and civilization.”⁴⁵³ While Henry, similar to Fidelman in “The Last Mohican,” immediately admires her Italian features—a ‘universal’ beauty, it should be noted—it is in fact Isabella’s Jewish body that quite literally ‘holds the mark of history’ in the form of the tattooed number she later reveals to Henry. One of the first things Isabella asks him is whether he is Jewish. Like Susskind who recognizes Fidelman’s Jewishness at once, Isabella likewise locks in on this quality in their first encounter. At her question, Henry “suppressed a groan. Though secretly shocked by the question, it was not, in a way, unexpected. Yet he did not look Jewish, could pass as not—had. So without batting an eyelash, he said, no, he wasn’t.”⁴⁵⁴ Only a few moments later, the tour guide from whom Henry had escaped in his quest to make Isabella’s acquaintance reappears, and yells that Henry is a “transgressor.”⁴⁵⁵ The juxtaposition of Henry’s first denial of his Jewish identity with this accusation from the guide that he is a transgressor—a word with clear religious connotations—illuminates Malamud’s feelings about his protagonist’s denial of Judaism: it is a moral sin.

⁴⁵³ Malamud, “The Lady of the Lake,” 226.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Once Henry and Isabella have gotten to know each other better, Henry ruminates on the thought that worries him the most moving forward with their relationship: “the lie he had told her, that he wasn’t a Jew.”⁴⁵⁶ Henry concludes that “a man’s past was, it could safely be said, expendable,”⁴⁵⁷ and his solution is to legally change his name to Freeman “and forget that he had ever been born Jewish”⁴⁵⁸ because he is an only child and both of his parents have already died. He even considers moving to San Francisco with Isabella “where nobody knew him and nobody ‘would know.’”⁴⁵⁹ However, he remains somewhat bothered by the whole business, not because he is denying his Jewish identity, but because he is lying to Isabella. Henry even thinks about his Jewishness, wondering, “what had it brought him but headaches, inferiorities, unhappy memories?”⁴⁶⁰ Since Henry is willing to give up his Jewish identity because of the inconvenient consequences it has brought him in the past—to give up an identity that is to him ‘expendable’—it is perhaps unsurprising that he is ultimately unable to sympathize with Isabella when she reveals her status as a survivor of the camps.

Henry does not accept the consequences of Jewishness, and thus, he is prevented from using his Jewish identity at the end of the story simply because it would be convenient to him. When Isabella reveals that she is Jewish and that she had been sent to Buchenwald as a child, Henry is unable to speak. She tells him that she cannot marry him because her Jewish identity is meaningful to her, and he responds, ““Oh, God, why did you keep this from me too?””⁴⁶¹ In this moment, Henry seems to be concerned only with the fact that Isabella kept her Jewishness a secret, not with sympathizing with a fellow Jew who has suffered greatly for her identity. He is

⁴⁵⁶ Malamud, “The Lady of the Lake,” 235.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

still unwilling to identify with her as a Jew until she reveals that she had hoped he was Jewish. By then, it is too late. He cries, “Listen, I—I am--,”⁴⁶² but Isabella has already disappeared. Henry Levin/Freeman never publicly attests to his Jewish identity in “The Lady of the Lake,” not even brokenly, desperately, at the end for Isabella’s sake. In his denial, he refuses to acknowledge any dignity in Jewish identity, the dignity that Isabella, whose “innate nobility has been certified in experience,”⁴⁶³ possesses. Henry’s alienation and loneliness at the end of the story emphasize the destructive consequences for denying one’s identity in pursuit of a universal that is not balanced by consideration of the particular and refusing the obligation of collective Jewish responsibility. Thus, the same Malamudian identity politics that rewards Fidelman in “The Last Mohican” for appreciating Jewish history and affirming his responsibility to Susskind punishes Henry Levin for denying his Jewish identity, declining to confront the tragic consequences of Jewishness, and failing to recognize the particular contingencies of Jewish history.

Perhaps Malamud’s strongest condemnation of those who eschew responsibility to their fellow Jews occurs in his 1963 story “The Jewbird.” In this story, a talking bird named Schwartz comes into the Cohen family’s apartment on the run from “anti-Semeets,”⁴⁶⁴ as he calls them, and in need of food. The Cohens feed and shelter the bird, despite the protestations of the father, Harry Cohen, who is immediately skeptical of the bird and whose dislike of him grows throughout the story. Ultimately, Cohen violently flings the bird out of the apartment one day while his wife and son are away, killing Schwartz. When Cohen’s son Maurie eventually finds

⁴⁶² Malamud, “The Lady of the Lake,” 240.

⁴⁶³ Wegelin, “The American Schlemiel Abroad,” 141.

⁴⁶⁴ Malamud, “The Jewbird,” in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 323.

the dead bird, he sees “his two wings broken, neck twisted, and both bird-eyes plucked clean.”⁴⁶⁵ When Maurie asks who could have done this to Schwartz, his mother responds, ““ Anti-Semeets.”⁴⁶⁶

Harry Cohen is presented in “The Jewbird” as an assimilated Jew who has no particular affinity for religious tradition. Based on his immense dislike of Schwartz, Cohen has often been read as a self-hating Jew who denies Jewish religious tradition entirely. Where Schwartz appears to embody Old World religious values, Cohen is a New World, assimilated man who has no pity for Schwartz or the struggles of those like him. In other words, Cohen, too, fails to locate the universal in the particular when it comes to Schwartz’s suffering. When questioned about his identity as a Jewbird, Schwartz “began dovening. He prayed without Book or tallith, but with passion.”⁴⁶⁷ Cohen’s identity as a Jew is never brought into question, but Schwartz does question his pursuit of the American Dream, which angers him greatly. When Cohen, proud of Maurie’s improved grades, remarks that if he keeps up he’ll be able to attend an Ivy League school—a marker of elitism and prestige in America—Schwartz replies, ““ He won’t be a shicker or a wife beater, God forbid, but a scholar he’ll never be, if you know what I mean, although maybe a good mechanic.”⁴⁶⁸ This enrages Cohen, who values American symbols of prestige, living as he does in a Manhattan penthouse apartment. Eileen Watts argues that Cohen “stinks of the arrogance and self-hatred engendered by living in a subtly anti-Semitic society. He has absorbed the Gentile’s airs of superiority and directs them toward embarrassing ‘greenhorns’⁴⁶⁹ like Schwartz the Jewbird. Likewise, Philip Hanson contends that Cohen’s resentment of Schwartz “recalls early twentieth-century disputes between Jew and Jew. Many early German Jews had

⁴⁶⁵ Malamud, “The Jewbird,” 330.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, 323.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 326.

⁴⁶⁹ Eileen H. Watts, “Jewish Self-Hatred in Malamud’s ‘The Jewbird,’” *MELUS* 21, no. 2 (1996): 161.

sought to remove practices and garb that identified them as Jews. They wished to be accepted by established Christian Americans.”⁴⁷⁰ Because of Cohen’s internalized self-hatred, he cannot abide the openly Jewish Schwartz, nor see himself as connected to the bird by the bonds of community in any way.

As is the case with Fidelman and Susskind in “The Last Mohican,” Cohen has an obligation to Schwartz whether he likes it or not. Philip Hanson observes that Schwartz “is in flight, both as a bird and as a persecuted Jew. He needs charity. By the nature of his identity, rather than through biology, he is connected to the Cohens.”⁴⁷¹ Cohen’s crime against Schwartz is in some ways a combination of Fidelman’s crime against Susskind in “The Last Mohican” and Henry Freeman’s crime against Isabella in “The Lady of the Lake.” Not only does Cohen refuse charity to a fellow Jew who is in need of it, denying his obligation to another Jew as Fidelman initially does with Susskind, but he also refuses to identify with Schwartz as Henry fails to identify with Isabella, which demeans Jewish identity more broadly and robs Jewishness of its dignity. However, Cohen’s crimes against Jewish identity are the worst of these three stories because he actually kills another Jew. This is why Malamud applies the harshest condemnation possible to Cohen and ends the story with Edie, Cohen’s own wife, calling her husband an anti-Semite. For Malamud, there can be no greater crime than refusing to help someone in need, denying one’s own identity, and taking a life that embodies the very identity that has been denied.

Assimilation vs. Jewish Selfhood in Ozick

⁴⁷⁰ Philip Hanson, “Horror and Ethnic Identity in ‘The Jewbird,’” *Studies in Short Fiction* 30, no. 3 (1993): 361.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

Assimilation plays a significant role in the work of Malamud and fellow Jewish pragmatist writer Cynthia Ozick. For Malamud, being an assimilated Jew who denies responsibility and dignity to his fellow Jews is unforgivable. In his view, Jewish assimilation is not the biggest threat to Jewish identity, but cutting oneself off from one's people is. For Cynthia Ozick, on the other hand, any Jew who succumbs to the temptations of assimilation at the expense of Jewish dignity must pay a price. In her understanding, the nature of assimilation, which involves explicitly trying to be other than one is, necessarily leads to denial of Judaism and the Jewish people. Hence, Malamud would agree with Isaac Kornfeld in Ozick's story "The Pagan Rabbi" that "Idolatry is the abomination, not philosophy,"⁴⁷² while Ozick herself subscribes to his father's reply that "The latter is the corridor to the former."⁴⁷³

In essence, Malamud and Ozick fall on opposite sides of the same coin. Both believe in the dignity of Judaism as well as the premise that Jews will suffer merely for being Jews. Where they diverge is in what leads to denying Jewish dignity. For Malamud, it is dodging responsibility and refusing to identify with a fellow Jew in need. For Ozick, any deeply felt desire for assimilation necessarily detracts from recognition of Jewish dignity and connection to fellow Jews. Despite their divergence on which actions result in denying Jewish dignity, both write under the assumption that theirs is a world in which the non-Jewish universal must be mediated by attention to the Jewish particular. As a result, both writers are concerned with the practical consequences (specifically, anti-Semitism and/or the Holocaust) that result from being Jewish. Because these consequences are at play either directly or lurking just beneath the surface of their stories, the protagonists of Malamud's and Ozick's stories draw attention to both writers' pragmatist focus on Jewish dignity and self-acceptance.

⁴⁷² Cynthia Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi" in *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 3.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

For many years now, Cynthia Ozick scholars have examined Ozick's feelings about the idolatry of art⁴⁷⁴, the recurrent theme of Judaism vs. Hellenism⁴⁷⁵ in her stories, and the comic nature of her work.⁴⁷⁶ Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find an Ozick scholar or critic who did not take up or interrogate one or more of these notions in their considerations of her work at any point from the 1980s through the early 2000s. However, Dean J. Franco has recently argued that during the years when Ozick was "building her literary reputation (1965-75) [...] she participated in the ongoing Jewish response to the new politics of identity and cultural recognition."⁴⁷⁷ Franco is far from the first person who argues for the importance of Jewish identity to Ozick's work, however, his argument uniquely casts Ozick as actively engaging with identity politics in her fiction. As he contends in his argument, the "default critical paradigm[s]"⁴⁷⁸ for Ozick, although useful for illuminating certain aspects of her work, neglect how Ozick's "complicated aesthetics are embedded in a concomitant politics."⁴⁷⁹

My own argument extends Franco's reading of Ozick as engaged with identity politics in her early work—an engagement that, admittedly, gave way over time to more long-standing concerns with memory and imagination in such novels as *The Messiah of Stockholm* (1987) and

⁴⁷⁴ See, for example, Janet Handler Burstein, "Cynthia Ozick and the Transgressions of Art," *American Literature* 59, no. 1 (1987): 85-101; Timothy L. Parrish, "Creation's Covenant: The Art of Cynthia Ozick," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 43, no. 4 (2001): 440-464; or Beth Ellen Roberts, "Cynthia Ozick's 'The Pagan Rabbi' and the Seduction of the Storyteller," in *Scribbling Women & the Short Story Form: Approaches by American & British Women Writers*, ed. Ellen Burton Harrington (New York: Peter Lang, 2008): 154-164.

⁴⁷⁵ Consider, for example, Harold Bloom's edited collection of critical essays on Ozick (1986); Christina Dokou and Daniel Walden, "The Pagan Condemnation and Orthodox Redemption of Rabbi Isaac Kornfeld," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 15 (1996): 6-16; Elaine Kauvar's *Cynthia Ozick's Fiction* (1993); and Victor Strandberg's *Greek Mind/Jewish Soul* (1994).

⁴⁷⁶ Refer to Emily Miller Budick, "Literary Symptomology and Jewish Fiction: 'Envy; or, The New Yiddish in America,'" in *Anglophone Jewish Literature*, ed. Axel Stähler (New York: Routledge, 2007): 79-92; Sarah Blacher Cohen's *Cynthia Ozick's Comic Art* (1994); or Leah Garrett, "Cynthia Ozick's 'Envy': A Reconsideration," *Studies in Jewish American Literature* 24 (2005): 60-81.

⁴⁷⁷ Dean J. Franco, "Rereading Cynthia Ozick: Pluralism, Postmodernism, and the Multicultural Encounter," *Contemporary Literature* 49, no. 1 (2008): 59.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Heir to the Glimmering World (2004)—by illuminating her pragmatist concerns regarding Jewish identity and dignity. However, while Franco argues that Ozick’s characters and communities “are embedded in a politics not of individual resistance but of cultural incommensurability,”⁴⁸⁰ I contend that the central tensions of three Ozick stories that Franco examines and that I will discuss here—“The Pagan Rabbi,” “Envy; or, Yiddish in America,” and “Bloodshed”—revolve around individual *failure to resist* temptations to assimilate and the consequences of the protagonists’ attempts at assimilation when thrown into Jewish relief. Thus, Ozick’s understanding of Jewish identity emphasizes not so much incommensurability with non-Jewish or American culture but an advanced appreciation for the contingencies of history and heightened awareness of the risks to selfhood inherent in the drive to assimilate. Reading Ozick as a pragmatist not only illuminates the Jewish identity politics at play in her early work, but it emphasizes the significance of her connection to Henry James, who played a critical role in shaping her work.

Ozick’s admiration of Henry James has been well documented by scholars, as well as by Ozick herself, who wrote her master’s thesis on James and has continued to write numerous essays on James over the years.⁴⁸¹ Henry was the brother of William James, and his connection to the pragmatist philosophy that William James helped to popularize in the U.S. has been explored by several scholars over the past few decades, including Ross Posnock’s book *The Trial of Curiosity* (1991) and Joan Richardson’s chapters on Henry and William James in *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (2007). Richardson’s book focuses on a number of what she calls

⁴⁸⁰ Franco, “Rereading Cynthia Ozick,” 61.

⁴⁸¹ See, for example, “The Lesson of the Master” in *Art & Ardor* (1983), “Henry James’s Unborn Child” in *Metaphor & Memory* (1989), “What Henry James Knew” in *Fame & Folly* (1996), “The Selfishness of Art” in *Quarrel & Quandary* (2000), and “Henry James, Tolstoy, and My First Novel” in *The Din in the Head* (2006).

“frontier instances”⁴⁸² in American thought, defined as “particular accidental moments in time and place [...when] the intruding features of as yet unaccountable phenomena, instances of being, interrupt an old logic to produce new habits of mind, new species of thinking.”⁴⁸³ While Richardson focuses on Henry James’s linguistic experiments in *The Ambassadors* as a representative ‘frontier instance,’ I am suggesting that one line of James’s influence traceable in Ozick’s early writing is her application to Jewish identity politics of what Richardson calls ‘interrupt[ing] an old logic to produce new habits of mind’ in James’s work. For Ozick, assimilation represents the old Jewish logic: idealization of the unraced universal without regard for the raced particular. In its place, she advocates for a new habit of mind in the form of appreciating particular Jewish history and suffering and recognizing the connection between all Jews because of this shared history, thereby affirming the dignity of one’s Jewish identity. Her early stories “The Pagan Rabbi,” “Envy; or, Yiddish in America,” and “Bloodshed” all feature protagonists who struggle with the old logic of assimilation vs. the new habit of recognizing a connection between all Jews and embracing their Jewish identity, with varying degrees of success.

One of her earliest works, Ozick’s short story “The Pagan Rabbi” (1966) is a mystery of sorts in which the reader discovers alongside the unnamed narrator, former friend and seminary classmate of Isaac Kornfeld—the rabbi referred to in the title—the circumstances surrounding Isaac’s suicide. The narrator first looks around Trilham’s Inlet, a public park where Isaac hanged himself from a tree, then visits Isaac’s widow Sheindel and reads through the deceased’s notebook which she gives him, and finally hears the disturbing details of a ‘love letter’ (as Sheindel calls it) written by Isaac that fully illuminates the cause of his death. The narrator learns

⁴⁸² Joan Richardson, preface to *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), x.

⁴⁸³ Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism*, 18.

that Isaac had an affair with a dryad named Iripomonoeia, whom he addresses in the love letter, and this affair was what led to Isaac's increased absences from his family and his eventual suicide, as his soul separated from his body in his desire for union with the dryad, leaving him to hang himself in despair.

The three main characters of "The Pagan Rabbi"—Sheindel, Isaac, and the narrator—represent distinct relationships to and appreciation of history. Furthermore, their relationships to history and understanding of the consequences of Jewishness affect their respective levels of desire to assimilate and their ability to mediate the universal with the particular. Sheindel, Kornfeld's widow, stands the closest to history in the story as a physical representation of the consequences of Jewishness and is opposed completely to assimilation as a result (all particular, no universal). Ruth Rosenberg has noted that the scar on Sheindel's cheek is "more than a visual detail, [as it] carries the symbolic weight of individual and cultural history."⁴⁸⁴ The narrator reveals that Sheindel was born in a concentration camp and "saved by magic."⁴⁸⁵ The Nazis were about to throw her against the electrified fence "when an army mobbed the gate; the current vanished from the terrible wires, and she [Sheindel] had nothing to show for it afterward but a mark on her cheek like an asterisk, cut by a barb."⁴⁸⁶ Thus, Sheindel's presence throughout the story illustrates the tangible consequences of being Jewish with respect to anti-Semitism. Because she is an orphan who has "extraordinarily, God to show,"⁴⁸⁷ she practices Judaism in the most traditionally religious way of the three main characters. Like Malamud's characters Susskind, Isabella, and Schwartz, all of whom have suffered for their Jewishness, Sheindel, too,

⁴⁸⁴ Ruth Rosenberg, "The Ghost Story as Aggada: Cynthia Ozick's 'The Pagan Rabbi' and Sheindel's Scar," in *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminine Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*, eds. Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991): 222.

⁴⁸⁵ Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," 14.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

bears the weight of suffering for who and what she is and living a Jewish life is especially important to her as a result. Her interactions with the more even-tempered narrator of the story reveal her extreme views, to the point that she is so immersed in the particulars of Jewish history and suffering that she is unable to locate any respect for or appreciation of universal ideals.

Sheindel has often been read as an unsympathetic character because she has nothing but contempt for her husband's paganism, even telling the narrator, "I think he [Isaac] was never a Jew."⁴⁸⁸ Janet Handler Burstein has argued that Sheindel presents a "troubling image of loveless piety and traditionalism."⁴⁸⁹ Likewise, Christina Dokou and Daniel Walden read Sheindel as "dry, cold, inhumanly rigid and eventually—though the reader can sympathize with her plight—unlikeable."⁴⁹⁰ However, Sheindel's lack of sympathy for Isaac makes more sense when considered in light of her relationship to Jewish history. She bitterly tells the narrator, "I was that man's wife, he scaled the Fence of the Law. For this God preserved me from the electric fence."⁴⁹¹ As the bearer of a physical scar and daily reminder of history, she can muster no compassion for her husband Isaac, who denies his Jewish soul for the bodily pleasures of paganism. Sheindel knows all too well that forsaking Jewish practice for non-Jewish ways means nothing in the face of anti-Semitism, and thus, she can only scorn Isaac's attempt to reconcile Jewish and pagan rituals.

Despite the fact that Kornfeld is married to Sheindel, who bears the physical traces of history and its consequences, his own view of history is alarmingly abstract, and ultimately, this is what enables him to succumb to the assimilating forces of Nature. In contrast with his wife, Kornfeld becomes *too* enamored of the universal (in this case, Nature), and loses his appreciation

⁴⁸⁸ Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," 13.

⁴⁸⁹ Janet Handler Burstein, "Cynthia Ozick and the Transgressions of Art," *American Literature* 59, no. 1 (1987): 92.

⁴⁹⁰ Christina Dokou and Daniel Walden, "The Pagan Condemnation and Orthodox Redemption of Rabbi Isaac Kornfeld," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 15 (1996): 14.

⁴⁹¹ Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," 24.

for the dignity of the particular (Jewish identity and culture). Isaac's letter begins with a statement on biblical history, "My ancestors were led out of Egypt by the hand of God,"⁴⁹² but within the first few lines, he quickly moves to question it by engaging in what Janet Cooper has called a "struggle to reinvent history."⁴⁹³ Isaac's questions lead him to conclude that it is a "false history, false philosophy, and false religion which declare to us human ones that we live among Things. [...] There is no Non-life. Holy life subsists even in the stone, even in the bones of dead dogs and dead men. Hence in God's fecundating Creation there is no possibility of Idolatry..."⁴⁹⁴ He goes on to explain that there are two kinds of souls, free roaming and indwelling, and proposes an answer to his question of why Moses never told the Israelites about free souls—"lest the people do not do God's will and go out from Egypt."⁴⁹⁵ Isaac here thinks about history in a conceptual rather than a concrete way. He is concerned less with specific facts than he is with theorizing principles. Ozick highlights Isaac's preference for principles over facts at several points in the story. When Sheindel says that her husband was meticulous in accounting for his proofs, the narrator questions how, and she responds, "By eventually finding a principle to cover them."⁴⁹⁶ Similarly, when Isaac first encounters Iripomonoeia, he rationalizes his sexual escapades with her through his observation that "Scripture does not forbid sodomy with the plants."⁴⁹⁷ While he is correct that there is no explicit commandment against lying with plants as there is with animals (an injunction he quotes earlier), his excuse ignores the more obvious commandment against committing adultery in deference to an abstract principle. I am suggesting that it is perhaps Isaac's more abstract view of history and his preference for generalizing

⁴⁹² Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," 19.

⁴⁹³ Janet L. Cooper, "Triangles of History and the Slippery Slope of Jewish American Identity in Two Stories by Cynthia Ozick," *MELUS* 25, no. 1 (2000): 182.

⁴⁹⁴ Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," 20-21.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

principles over specific details (in contrast to his wife Sheindel, who bears the physical marks of concrete historical events) that cause him to turn away from Judaism and seek assimilation with non-Jewish forces.

Janet Cooper has argued that Ozick's stories are full of "characters in a state of identity crisis,"⁴⁹⁸ and "The Pagan Rabbi" is no different in this respect, for Rabbi Kornfeld's struggle is primarily one between his Jewish identity and the non-Jewish outside world he finds himself drawn to. This is a story about the tragic consequences of a man's failure to resist the temptations of assimilation. As Dean Franco has suggested, "Isaac's suicide is less an act of despair and more a desperate attempt at assimilation. He no longer wants to be a Jew, committed to Hebraic denials of a wider sphere of corporal pleasure, but to be, instead, liberated from a self-limiting culture."⁴⁹⁹ Likewise, Sarah Blacher Cohen notes that this story "reminds us how tempting it is to turn our backs on painful Jewish history and live in the sensual present"⁵⁰⁰ as Kornfeld does, abandoning religious and ethical principles. While a number of scholars⁵⁰¹ have suggested that Rabbi Kornfeld attempts to reconcile Judaism and paganism, he is in fact *abandoning* Judaism, as evidenced by his increasingly distant relationship with his family and his encounter with his own soul at the end of the story. Despite his wife's miraculous survival in the death camps, Isaac (like Henry Levin in Malamud's "The Lady of the Lake") seems to have no appreciation for Sheindel's suffering or his own connection to it, opting instead to forsake his Jewish identity for the bodily pleasures of paganism. Thus, for Ozick, Isaac provides an example of a character who

⁴⁹⁸ Cooper, "Triangles of History," 181.

⁴⁹⁹ Franco, "Rereading Cynthia Ozick," 76.

⁵⁰⁰ Sarah Blacher Cohen, *Cynthia Ozick's Comic Art: From Levity to Liturgy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 68.

⁵⁰¹ Including Cooper, "Triangles of History," 184; Dokou and Walden, "Pagan Condemnation and Orthodox Redemption," 9; and Kauvar, *Cynthia Ozick's Fiction*, 46.

fails to incorporate the new habits of mind of Jewish connection and historical contingencies. Instead, he falls back on the old logic of assimilation, and pays for it with his life.

Isaac's confrontation with his soul cements his abandonment of Judaism. Despite Isaac's insistence that his soul loves the dryad Iripomonoeia, she tells him, "I do not like that soul of yours. It conjures against me. It denies me [...] it is an enemy, and you, poor man, do not know your own soul."⁵⁰² His soul is an elderly version of himself carrying a bag of books and studying a tractate of Mishnah in the middle of beautiful natural scenery that he does not notice, a clear illustration of Isaac's Jewish self who abides by Pirkei Avot's injunction⁵⁰³ not to be distracted from study of the Law. Isaac asks his soul "if he intended to go with his books through the whole future without change, always with his Tractate in his hand, and he answered that he could do nothing else."⁵⁰⁴ At this, Isaac becomes furious and sputters that this soul "is not mine! I will not have it be mine!"⁵⁰⁵ After his soul reveals that the dryad "who does not exist, lies"⁵⁰⁶ and insists that Jewish Law is greater than any natural phenomenon, Isaac takes the tallit and hangs himself with it, calling for Iripomonoeia as he does so; she does not answer. Janet Cooper asserts that in this scene, Isaac "rejects traditionally Jewish aspects of himself."⁵⁰⁷ Although he had been a renowned professor of Mishnaic history, he is too far gone in the throes of pagan desire at this point to be drawn back to anything Jewish, but his suicide demonstrates that "attempts at assimilation are deadly."⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰² Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," 34.

⁵⁰³ A reference to the story's epigraph: "Rabbi Jacob said: 'He who is walking along and studying, but then breaks off to remark, "How lovely is that tree!" or "How beautiful is that fallow field!"—Scripture regards such a one as having hurt his own being.'"

⁵⁰⁴ Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," 35.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ Cooper, "Triangles of History," 188.

⁵⁰⁸ Franco, "Rereading Cynthia Ozick," 75.

That Isaac turns his back on his Jewish soul is significant. In denying this Jewish part of himself, he becomes like a Malamudian character that denies his Jewishness or refuses to help a fellow Jew in need. His denial of his soul and subsequent hanging signals a lack of self-acceptance and an elevation of the dignity and beauty of the non-Jewish world (in this case, capital-n Nature) above Judaism. His denial of history and Jewishness are contrasted with his faithful wife Sheindel, who denounces his actions as ““an abomination””⁵⁰⁹ and the Jewish image he outwardly presented to the world as ““an illusion.””⁵¹⁰ Kornfeld’s withdrawal from his Jewish environment and from his closeness to Jewish history as represented by Sheindel betray his desire not to reconcile the Jewish with the non-Jewish, but to abandon one for the other. Thus, like Sheindel—despite the fact that he appears to be the more open-minded of the two of them—Kornfeld, too, fails to recognize the universal in the particular, and he is punished for his exchange of Jewish identity for pagan spirituality.

The narrator of “The Pagan Rabbi” embodies a middle ground of sorts between the extremes of Isaac’s desertion of Jewishness for the sake of assimilation on one hand and Sheindel’s refusal to have anything to do with the non-Jewish world on the other. He comes closest to achieving a balance between considering individual, particular groups while maintaining universal ideals. While some have argued that Rabbi Kornfeld is the most resonant character in Ozick’s story—Dokou and Walden, for instance, assert that Kornfeld is “a strong, sympathetic advocate of pagan values [...] against whom, in contrast, the rage of his wife Sheindel, and the baffled horror of his friend (the narrator) are completely impotent”⁵¹¹—it is telling that Ozick grants the narrator the final word, particularly when considered in light of the fact that Isaac’s letter comprises nearly the entire second half of the story. The narrator’s parting

⁵⁰⁹ Ozick, “The Pagan Rabbi,” 37.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ Dokou and Walden, “Pagan Condemnation and Orthodox Redemption,” 6.

words to Sheindel are to go to Trilham's Inlet and seek her husband's soul there. He then closes the story as follows: "But her [Sheindel's] low derisive cough accompanied me home: whereupon I remembered her earlier words and dropped three green house plants down the toilet; after a journey of some miles through conduits they straightway entered Trilham's Inlet, where they decayed amid the civic excrement."⁵¹² Although the narrator is clearly more sympathetic to Isaac's plight than Sheindel is, his final act is to flush his houseplants down the toilet, in remembrance of her earlier statement that she "'couldn't sleep in the same space with plants. They are like little trees."⁵¹³ In spite of his compassion for Isaac's torment and confusion, the narrator desires to affirm his connection to his Jewish identity and acknowledge the dignity of this identity, hence his disposal of the houseplants that represent the temptations of the outside, non-Jewish world. As Beth Ellen Roberts has observed, when he first learns of Isaac's death, "the narrator's flight from Judaism has left him unfulfilled,"⁵¹⁴ for he has separated from his non-Jewish wife and seems unsatisfied with his work. In attempting to uncover what happened to his former friend Isaac, the narrator returns to his Jewish roots in a sense. Although he ultimately rejects Sheindel for an adherence to the Law that lacks all pity, the narrator's disposal of the plants suggests that his takeaway from Isaac's tragic demise is to guard against the temptations of assimilation and to mediate concern for the universal with regard for the particulars of Jewish history and culture.

To reiterate, an appreciation for historical contingencies is critical to my reading of this story. Susanne Klingenstein has observed in Ozick's fiction that "at all points [her] artists are either mocked or stopped from going further in their imaginations by representatives of history,

⁵¹² Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," 37.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵¹⁴ Beth Ellen Roberts, "Cynthia Ozick's 'The Pagan Rabbi' and the Seduction of the Storyteller," in *Scribbling Women & the Short Story Form: Approaches by American & British Women Writers*, ed. Ellen Burton Harrington (New York: Peter Lang, 2008): 160.

by those for whom death was not make-believe but real.”⁵¹⁵ Sheindel serves as a physical reminder of Jewish history in “The Pagan Rabbi,” and the narrator pays homage to her experience at the end of the story when he flushes his plants down the toilet. Both of these characters recognize the inherent danger in the drive to assimilate and the damage it does to Jewish selfhood and dignity. Isaac Kornfeld, the pagan rabbi, failed to resist the temptations of the non-Jewish world and denied his Jewishness; he paid for this denial with his life. Although he observed a traditionally Jewish life until his encounter with the dryad, Ozick’s story demonstrates that even the very religious can fall prey to old habits of assimilation, losing their Jewish identity as a result. For Ozick, both Kornfeld and Sheindel fail to apply a pragmatist identity politics, since neither is able to appreciate both the universal *and* the particular. The narrator is the only character who succeeds in this arena, incorporating the Jamesian (and Du Boisian) new habit of mind to appreciate particular historical contingencies for Jews and to recognize and honor that shared history and connection while still acknowledging the unraced universal.

Ozick returns to an examination of Jewish identity politics in a later story, “Envy; or, Yiddish in America” (1969), this time featuring characters who are culturally Jewish rather than religiously so. Nevertheless, she shows that such characters struggle with assimilation just as the pagan rabbi did. In “Envy,” Ozick shows that sometimes Jews are tempted to assimilate not to pursue bodily pleasures as Kornfeld does in “The Pagan Rabbi,” but for ego-driven reasons like fame and fortune. “Envy” follows the Yiddish poet Edelshtein as he seeks a translator for his poetry and curses the fame and respect that fellow Yiddish writer Yankel Ostrover has gained from having his work translated into English and enjoyed by the masses. This story is similar

⁵¹⁵ Susanne Klingenstein, “‘In Life I Am Not Free’: The Writer Cynthia Ozick and Her Jewish Obligations,” in *Daughters of Valor: Contemporary Jewish American Women Writers*, eds. Jay L. Halio and Ben Siegel (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1997): 55.

to “The Pagan Rabbi” in terms of its character structure. “The Pagan Rabbi” presents two characters—Kornfeld and Sheindel—who fail to incorporate new habits of mind and mediate the particular with the universal. In “Envy,” there are two important characters who have given up their particular Jewish history and assimilated into a universal, non-Jewish society, to be rewarded with power and/or fame: Ostrover and Hannah. Edelshtein is the sole character that possesses an appreciation for Jewish history and identity in “Envy,” yet he is sorely tempted to assimilate in order to gain the prestige and reputation that Ostrover has won. It is only after Edelshtein is rejected by Hannah that he comes to a greater understanding of what Hannah and Ostrover have given up in their assimilation and affirms the dignity of his Jewish identity, thus successfully applying Ozick’s pragmatist identity politics.

There has been much disagreement among scholars as to whether “Envy” should be read as a comic/parody or as a serious consideration of the problems affecting the Yiddish literary world. In addition, depending upon one’s reading of the story, Edelshtein becomes either a bitter and pathetic figure or a pitiable and neglected artist. Sarah Blacher Cohen, for instance, has called the story “a satire on American Jewry’s abandonment of an authentic Yiddish tradition.”⁵¹⁶ Leah Garrett has likewise read “Envy” as a parody, arguing that it presents “an extremely negative portrait of the Yiddish literary world in America after the Holocaust,”⁵¹⁷ even going so far as to suggest that Ozick’s portrayal of Yiddishists demonstrates that “Yiddish literature deserves to be confined to the dustbin of literary history.”⁵¹⁸ On the other hand, Victor Strandberg contends that what essentially defeats Edelshtein in this story is his “entrapment

⁵¹⁶ Cohen, *Cynthia Ozick’s Comic Art*, 48.

⁵¹⁷ Leah Garrett, “Cynthia Ozick’s ‘Envy’: A Reconsideration,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 24 (2005): 60.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid*, 69.

within a minority culture that is dying from world-wide loss of interest within modern Jewry.”⁵¹⁹ Similarly, Susanne Klingenstein writes that “Envy” came from “the intellectual and emotional turmoil caused by Ozick’s immersion in Yiddish poetry [and shame] that her generation had been so incurious about their parents’ culture.”⁵²⁰ My own reading of “Envy” is aligned with critics who read the story as a serious portrayal of the Yiddish world’s somber fate. I base this understanding of the story on Ozick’s own words about it in “A Bintel Brief for Jacob Glatstein,” in which she states that she wrote “Envy” as an “elegy, a lamentation, a celebration, because six million Yiddish tongues were [buried] under the earth of Europe.”⁵²¹ Furthermore, Ozick argues that if her generation “did not come to the heart and bones of [Yiddish] itself, we would only betray it and ourselves, becoming amnesiacs of history.”⁵²² Considering that Ozick aligns herself with the opinion of her protagonist Edelshtein that “whoever forgets Yiddish courts amnesia of history,”⁵²³ it is clear that remembering and appreciating Jewish history is of central importance to this story. In addition, I argue that Jewish dignity is connected to this appreciation of history, as it is in “The Pagan Rabbi,” for although Edelshtein is tempted at every turn by fame in “Envy,” he ultimately retains a sense of Jewish selfhood that Hannah and Ostrover have given up in their rush to assimilate.

Ostrover is the successful Yiddish writer envied by both Edelshtein and his fellow Yiddish poet Baumzweig “for the amazing thing that had happened to him—his fame.”⁵²⁴ Ostrover gains fame because his Yiddish work is translated and he is considered by critics to be a

⁵¹⁹ Victor Strandberg, *Greek Mind/Jewish Soul: The Conflicted Art of Cynthia Ozick* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 88.

⁵²⁰ Klingenstein, “In Life I Am Not Free,” 69.

⁵²¹ Ozick, “A Bintel Brief for Jacob Glatstein,” *Jewish Heritage* 14 (1972): 60.

⁵²² *Ibid.*

⁵²³ Ozick, “Envy; or, Yiddish in America,” in *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 74.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

‘modern’ writer. However, as far as his Jewish identity is concerned, Ostrover seems to use Jewishness to appeal to non-Jewish audiences. Following a reading that Edelshtein and Baumzweig attend, Ostrover has a question and answer period in which he makes light of every question he is asked in the style of a Catskills comedian:

Q. Sir, I’m writing a paper on you for my English class. Can you tell me please if you believe in hell?

A. Not since I got rich.

Q. How about God? Do you believe in God?

A. Exactly the way I believe in pneumonia. If you have pneumonia, you have it. If you don’t, you don’t.

[...]

Q. Do you keep the Sabbath?

A. Of course, didn’t you notice it’s gone?—I keep it hidden.⁵²⁵

Dean Franco suggests that Ostrover produces “a market-driven Jewishness for a non-Jewish readership,”⁵²⁶ which accounts in part for his success. Edelshtein and Baumzweig refer to Ostrover as ‘*der chazer*,’ or ‘pig,’⁵²⁷ a name that seems appropriate considering that the pig is a non-kosher animal that at first glance appears kosher because of its cloven hooves.⁵²⁸ Likewise, Ostrover outwardly seems to be representing Jewish identity and Yiddish culture, however in a conversation with Edelshtein, he claims that he is “one of *them*,”⁵²⁹ meaning a Gentile. When Edelshtein confesses his desire to be a Gentile like Ostrover, the latter replies, “I’m only a make-believe Gentile. This means that I play at being a Jew to satisfy them. In my village when I was a boy they used to bring in a dancing bear for the carnival, and everyone said, ‘It’s human!’—They said this because they knew it was a bear, though it stood on two legs and waltzed. But it was a

⁵²⁵ Ozick, “Envy,” 62.

⁵²⁶ Franco, “Rereading Cynthia Ozick,” 63.

⁵²⁷ Ozick, “Envy,” 46.

⁵²⁸ The other requirement for a land mammal to be kosher is chewing the cud, according to Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

⁵²⁹ Ozick, “Envy,” 68.

bear.”⁵³⁰ Although Ostrover first claims here that he is a ‘make-believe Gentile,’ his assertion that he is playing at being a Jew like the dancing bear from his youth suggests that he is really a non-Jew who only pretends to be Jewish for the amusement of others. Janet Cooper has observed that Ostrover does not “proclaim himself to be either Jew or Gentile; he insists that he ‘plays’ the part of both when it is to his advantage.”⁵³¹ Thus, Ostrover’s portrayal of Jewishness leaves the impression that he views his Jewish identity as expedient, a source of entertainment to a non-Jewish audience, and certainly devoid of any dignity or value (other than financial, of course). He has rejected consideration for the raced particular in his quest for unraced universal approval, and thus, like Kornfeld, he falls back on the old logic of assimilation, failing to incorporate pragmatist habits of mind that would enable him to recognize the universal in the particular.

While Ostrover uses his Jewish identity and history for financial gain when it suits him, Hannah, Vorovsky’s niece, denies her history and Jewishness entirely. Like Ostrover, she idealizes the universal while disregarding the particular historical contingencies of Jewish identity and history. The first time Edelshtein meets Hannah, in fact, she denies history—his history. After Ostrover’s public reading, Vorovsky introduces Edelshtein to Hannah, who is familiar with Edelshtein’s earlier work because she reads Yiddish. Hannah is taken aback at meeting Edelshtein and says that “‘it’s not possible’”⁵³² that he’s still alive because her grandfather used to read Edelshtein’s poetry to her: “‘And he was an old man, he died years ago, and you’re still alive—’”⁵³³ This meeting prefigures their later encounter when Edelshtein begs Hannah to be his translator and give life to his poetry; she refuses, insisting that old men like him

⁵³⁰ Ozick, “Envy,” 69.

⁵³¹ Cooper, “Triangles of History,” 192.

⁵³² Ozick, “Envy,” 69.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 70.

are “hanging on [her] neck [...like] parasites.”⁵³⁴ She wishes for their death and for her generation’s ‘turn’ in the world, totally unsympathetic to the life and death struggles of previous generations like Edelshtein’s. In fact, Edelshtein notes that Hannah was born in 1945 “in the hour of the death-camps. Not selected. Immune. The whole way she held herself looked immune—by this he meant American.”⁵³⁵ Hannah does not know or understand what a generation of European Jews—millions of whom did not survive—went through. By virtue of her American birth, she has the privilege of remaining ignorant of Jewish history.

Hannah separates herself from the Jewish people and Jewish history far more forcefully than Ostrover does. Ostrover plays with Jewishness and Judaism when he can use them to his advantage, but Hannah sees no use in either. She says of her uncle Vorovsky, ““He likes to suffer. He wants to suffer. He admires suffering. All you people want to suffer.””⁵³⁶ When Edelshtein questions her use of the phrase ‘you people,’ she replies, ““You Jews,”” thereby making a distinct separation between herself and the Jewish people as represented by Edelshtein and Vorovsky. Hannah’s self-alienation from Judaism delineates a tribe to which she does not feel that she belongs despite the fact that she is Jewish by blood. Even worse, she denies that history has any meaning or value for the present when she tells Edelshtein that suffering is ““unnecessary””⁵³⁷ and ““History’s a waste.””⁵³⁸ Miriam Sivan observes that Hannah in this scene is reminiscent of the wicked son mentioned during the Passover seder who asks what the history is ‘to you,’⁵³⁹ and likewise Hannah “deliberately removes herself from the collective experience

⁵³⁴ Ozick, “Envy,” 97.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ During the Passover seder, the haggadah tells of four sons or four children—one who is wise, one who is wicked, one who is simple, and one who does not know how to ask. Of the wicked son/child, it is written that he asks, “What is the meaning of this service to you?” Saying *you*, he excludes himself from the group.

of the Jews and their celebratory and mournful relationship to Yiddish.⁵⁴⁰ Similar to the response given to the wicked son's question during the seder⁵⁴¹ Edelshtein finally tells Hannah that she is "a vacuum"⁵⁴² who has no right to Yiddish. She is just like the Jewish American writers he reads who know nothing about Judaism: "Spawned in America, pogroms a rumor, *mamaloshen* a stranger, history a vacuum."⁵⁴³ Janet Cooper argues that Hannah has "turned her back on the history and anguish of her people, and wants only 'universalism' or assimilation into the American mainstream,"⁵⁴⁴ which someone like Ostrover has attained. Sivan contends that Edelshtein's generation and attachment to Jewish history and suffering "represent Jewish powerlessness, weakness, a defeatist exile posture"⁵⁴⁵ to Hannah, who believes that assimilation will bring her greater opportunities for success. As Sarah Blacher Cohen has noted, this viewpoint derives from internalized anti-Semitism so that Hannah ultimately represents the self-hating Jew.⁵⁴⁶

Ostrover and Hannah, then, have both been seduced by the lure of the universal, non-Jewish world, and they have assimilated for the sake of fame and opportunity. Central to their assimilation is a rejection of Jewish identity—"A distinction, a separation,"⁵⁴⁷ between the Jewish people and themselves, as Edelshtein puts it—and a disavowal of the dignity of particular Jewish history. For Ostrover, Jewish history is only useful insofar as he can use it to power his next literary success. In Hannah's view, there is no benefit whatsoever to remembering particular Jewish history. She sees it as vampiric: a drain on her time and a detriment to her potential

⁵⁴⁰ Miriam Sivan, "The Words to Say It: The Loss of Language and Power in Cynthia Ozick's 'Envy; or, Yiddish in America,'" in *Anglophone Jewish Literature*, ed. Axel Stähler (New York: Routledge, 2007): 229.

⁵⁴¹ The traditional response to the wicked son/child's question is, "'Because of what the Eternal did for me when I came forth from Egypt.' For *me* and not for *him*; had he been there, he would not have been redeemed."

⁵⁴² Ozick, "Envy," 97.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁴⁴ Cooper, "Triangles of History," 192.

⁵⁴⁵ Sivan, "The Words to Say It," 229.

⁵⁴⁶ Cohen, *Cynthia Ozick's Comic Art*, 60.

⁵⁴⁷ Ozick, "Envy," 93.

success in America. Both characters abide by the old logic of assimilation, forsaking their Jewish heritage and connection to history and to one another in the process, failing to apply a pragmatist identity politics. Edelshtein, on the other hand, despite his overpowering desire to achieve the success of Yankel Ostrover, clings to history and Jewishness and is therefore, “credibly, the supreme Yiddishist, the last Jew.”⁵⁴⁸ He is the only character who successfully incorporates Ozick’s pragmatist habit of mind—appreciating Jewish history and suffering and affirming his Jewish identity.

Edelshtein’s primary motivation throughout much of the story is to find a translator for his poetry (he sends a query letter to Ostrover’s publishers, writes to Ostrover’s translator, and finally asks Hannah to translate his work), and there is a clear connection between his desire to have his poetry translated and an inner drive to assimilate and be like the Gentiles. At several points in “Envy,” Edelshtein reminisces about Alexei Kirilov, an assimilated Russian Jewish boy he tutored in his youth. Although Edelshtein at first worries that his intrusive thoughts about Alexei must mean that he is “a secret pederast,”⁵⁴⁹ he realizes when he begs Hannah to be his translator that in fact “he longed to *be* Alexei [...] Alexei whose destiny was to grow up into the world-at-large, to slip from the ghetto.”⁵⁵⁰ He then understands that his obsession with being translated has been “an infatuation [...] and] Western Civilization his secret guilt.”⁵⁵¹ Miriam Sivan reads what Edelshtein calls his infatuation as “an attraction to privilege, a desire to assimilate which would then eliminate the need to always proclaim difference, to always resist.”⁵⁵² Earlier in the story, Edelshtein looks at himself in a mirror and sees “an old man

⁵⁴⁸ Paul Theroux, “On *The Pagan Rabbi*,” in *Cynthia Ozick*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986): 20.

⁵⁴⁹ Ozick, “Envy,” 44.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 96. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² Sivan, “The Words to Say It,” 232.

crying, dragging a striped scarf like a prayer shawl. He stood and looked at himself. He wished he had been born a Gentile.”⁵⁵³ Although the man Edelshtein sees possesses the outward trappings of a Jew, on the inside he longs to be other than who he is. He is drawn to the power that Ostrover and Hannah possess in their ability to separate themselves from their Jewishness. As Sarah Blacher Cohen observes, Edelshtein would like to escape “from being Jewish, if he could achieve fame.”⁵⁵⁴ But when Hannah denies her Jewishness and the significance of history so vehemently, Edelshtein suddenly sees “everything in miraculous reversal, blessed [...] the ghetto was the real world, and the outside world only a ghetto.”⁵⁵⁵ At this point, he recognizes in the particulars of Jewish history and his Jewish identity something universal. Ostrover and Hannah have renounced their claim to Jewish history and they are spiritually impoverished as a result, despite their greater success in the non-Jewish world.

Temptation to assimilate plagues Edelshtein throughout “Envy,” but in the final scene of the story, he rails against it. Looking for a little sympathy, he dials a telephone number he has seen advertised by a Christian-operated line, which claims to offer help and advice. The voice on the other end urges Edelshtein to accept Jesus as his savior, positing that Christianity is “Judaism universalized. Jesus is Moses publicized for ready availability. Our God is the God of Love, your God is the God of Wrath. Look how He abandoned you in Auschwitz.”⁵⁵⁶ When Edelshtein dismisses this as propaganda, the person becomes agitated and makes a string of anti-Semitic remarks, culminating in an accusation that even after all of his years of living in the United States, Edelshtein still “talk[s] with a kike accent. You kike, you Yid.”⁵⁵⁷ The story closes with Edelshtein’s final remarks to the person on the line: “Edelshtein shouted into the

⁵⁵³ Ozick, “Envy,” 67-68.

⁵⁵⁴ Cohen, *Cynthia Ozick’s Comic Art*, 56.

⁵⁵⁵ Ozick, “Envy,” 96.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 99.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 100.

telephone, ‘Amalekite! Titus! Nazi! The whole world is infected by you anti-Semites! On account of you children become corrupted! On account of you I lost everything, my whole life! On account of you I have no translator!’”⁵⁵⁸

While it is easy to read Edelshtein’s closing words as completely self-interested, he has actually arrived at an understanding that assimilating into the mainstream, as Hannah and Ostrover have done, will not save the Jewish people from anti-Semites who hate them and wish to destroy them. Although Hannah and Ostrover appear to have made it in non-Jewish society, Edelshtein’s phone conversation demonstrates that it takes nothing more than one refusal to assimilate (in this case, his refusal to accept the caller’s Christian rhetoric) to reveal the latent anti-Semitism harbored by many. In addition, internalized anti-Semitism has ‘corrupted’ Hannah, made Ostrover cynical toward religion, and caused Edelshtein to waste decades chasing assimilation in his search for a translator. Sarah Blacher Cohen observes that many Jews accept and internalize anti-Semitic viewpoints like those the caller espouses. She argues that this “self-hatred prompts a sizable number of Jewish artists to abandon Jewish sources for creativity in pursuit of worldly fame. It also causes the majority of American Jews to abandon Yiddish for fear of being considered ‘kikes.’”⁵⁵⁹ Even though Edelshtein is marginalized in a world in which most people cannot read or understand Yiddish, and even though he is mocked in his own community by those who think he should abandon Jewish history to appease a Gentile majority (like Hannah and Ostrover), he retains and embraces his Jewishness. Judaism and Jewish history are to Edelshtein ‘the real world,’ and he acknowledges non-Jewish society and assimilation as a world of false promises. Edelshtein’s realization makes him the only character in “Envy” who successfully applies Ozick’s new habit of mind, spurning the old logic of assimilation as a result.

⁵⁵⁸ Ozick, “Envy,” 100.

⁵⁵⁹ Cohen, *Cynthia Ozick’s Comic Art*, 60.

While “Envy; or, Yiddish in America” exposes the dangers of fame and internalized anti-Semitism lurking in the desire to assimilate, Ozick’s story “Bloodshed” (1970) shows the literal risks inherent in assimilation in the vein of “The Pagan Rabbi.” The story follows a secular Jew named Bleilip who is visiting his Hasidic cousin Toby and her husband Yussel. While he attends synagogue with Yussel, Bleilip is confronted by the rebbe about his identity and his beliefs. The rebbe demands that Bleilip empty his pockets and Bleilip reveals that he carries two guns around with him—one, a toy, the other, a real piece—and the rebbe returns the real gun to him at the story’s end “for whatever purpose he [Bleilip] thought he needed it.”⁵⁶⁰ Vera Emuna Kielsky has argued that this story “depicts a confrontation between an assimilated Jew, seeking the sense of life, and orthodox Jews, who appear to possess it.”⁵⁶¹ To this point, Bleilip is carrying around guns for an unknown purpose, while the Hasidic community of believers he visits is largely made up of refugees and survivors of the Holocaust. Although Bleilip starts out assuming the moral high ground and is self-assured that his life choices have been the correct ones, by the end of the story Ozick demonstrates through the rebbe’s confrontation with Bleilip that assimilation troubles one’s appreciation of history and poses a danger to the self. Furthermore, Bleilip’s ambivalence at the end of the story regarding Jewish connection to other Jews (a point the rebbe forcefully makes) reveals Ozick’s indecision over whether he is a protagonist who has the ability to affirm his Jewish identity, like Edelshtein, or one who succumbs to the old logic of assimilation, like Isaac Kornfeld. In “Bloodshed,” the rebbe, rather than Bleilip, ultimately affirms a pragmatist identity politics.

Bleilip’s actions in the story demonstrate that he is unable to acknowledge or appreciate his connection to fellow Jews. The rebbe gives a lesson on Leviticus 16, which is about sin

⁵⁶⁰ Ozick, “Bloodshed” in *Bloodshed and Three Novellas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 72.

⁵⁶¹ Vera Emuna Kielsky, *Inevitable Exiles: Cynthia Ozick’s View of the Precariousness of Jewish Existence in a Gentile Society* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 79.

offerings, focusing on the casting of lots and the goat that is sent into the wilderness ‘for Azazel.’ Bleilip lets his imagination wander during the rebbe’s talk and begins to think about how he “pitied the hapless goats, the unlucky bullock, but more than this he pitied the God of Israel [...] all the while Bleilip, together with the God of the Jews, pitied these toy children of Israel in the Temple long ago.”⁵⁶² Here Bleilip makes a distinction between himself and the Israelites referred to in Scripture, between the ‘God of the Jews’ and his own skepticism about a higher power. This distinction is an extension of Bleilip’s general air of superiority over the Hasidic neighborhood he is visiting, feeling that he is “part of society-at-large”⁵⁶³ while the Hasidim know only “private pieties, rites, idiosyncrasies.”⁵⁶⁴ As Vera Kielsky observes, Bleilip “has always equated assimilation with progress and orthodoxy with backwardness.”⁵⁶⁵

The rebbe reveals the depth of Bleilip’s unwillingness to identify with the Jewish community in his sermon. He goes on to state that, “for animals we in our day substitute men,”⁵⁶⁶ and draws a comparison between the scapegoat offered for the Israelites’ sins and the Jews who perished in the Shoah. However, he reveals to the assembled men that this extended comparison was in fact what Bleilip had been thinking in his heart: “Man he equates with the goats. The Temple, in memory and anticipation, he considers an abattoir. The world he regards as a graveyard.”⁵⁶⁷ Susanne Klingenstein argues that this comparison between the goat for Azazel and the Holocaust “recalls the Nazis’ substitution: Jews were thrown into cattle cars. Play with metaphor — Jews instead of vermin —hardened into literal equation and made plausible to

⁵⁶² Ozick, “Bloodshed,” 63-64.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid*, 58.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 59.

⁵⁶⁵ Kielsky, *Inevitable Exiles*, 82.

⁵⁶⁶ Ozick, “Bloodshed,” 65.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 68.

perpetrators and onlookers the ‘extermination’ of the Jews with pesticide.”⁵⁶⁸ Similarly, Janet Burstein writes that here “the danger of violent transgressions is increased by unsanctified images which help us ‘get used to’ the idea of shedding blood.”⁵⁶⁹ Bleilip’s abstract, metaphorical understanding of Jewish history is contrasted with the concrete experiences of the survivors in the Hasidic community. This abstract understanding leads him to conclusions devoid of hope: that there can be no God after the death camps, that the ritual slaughter of a goat can be equated with the systematic slaughter of millions of people, that most people’s actions are driven by fear or cynicism rather than joy or sincerity. Because many of them have survived the death camps, the rebbe and the other Hasidim understand all too well the contingencies of history, but do not allow that knowledge to drive them away from their Jewish identities as Bleilip has been.

While the presence of the toy gun and the real gun in Bleilip’s pockets goes unexplained in the story, some critics have concluded that Bleilip is ‘toying’ with the idea of suicide.⁵⁷⁰ Even if he is not contemplating suicide, Bleilip nevertheless “harbors a vague paranoia”⁵⁷¹ and is said to be ““looking for something””⁵⁷² in his visit to the Hasidic neighborhood. Vera Kielsky writes that Bleilip “senses discomfort in his ‘assimilated’ soul but tries to suppress this feeling.”⁵⁷³ Likewise, Lawrence Friedman argues that the rebbe “accurately reads the guns as tokens of despair despite Bleilip’s repeated [assertion] ‘I don’t have a mistaken life’ (72). Tension is generated in ‘Bloodshed’ by playing off this increasingly hollow disclaimer against the many signs of Bleilip’s subconscious longing for the meaning and certitude conferred by covenantal

⁵⁶⁸ Susanne Klingenstein, “‘Hard for a Goy to Make Out’? Thoughts about Cynthia Ozick’s ‘Bloodshed,’” *Yiddish/Modern Jewish Studies* 10, no. 4 (1997): 53.

⁵⁶⁹ Burstein, “Transgressions of Art,” 93.

⁵⁷⁰ See, for example, Kauvar, *Cynthia Ozick’s Fiction*, 91; or Strandberg, *Greek Mind/Jewish Soul*, 95.

⁵⁷¹ Franco, “Rereading Cynthia Ozick,” 78.

⁵⁷² Ozick, “Bloodshed,” 58.

⁵⁷³ Kielsky, *Inevitable Exiles*, 81.

Judaism.”⁵⁷⁴ Despite his initial feelings of superiority that the way of life he has chosen is the right way and that the Hasidim are backward fanatics, the presence of the two guns undercuts Bleilip’s assumption that assimilation and secularism are preferable to a religious and Jewishly-focused life. Bleilip’s assimilation has resulted in alienation from himself, his past, his family (as represented by Toby and Yussel), and the larger Jewish community. He has either been driven to despair and contemplation of suicide, or (at the very least) fear of someone or something that motivates him to carry the guns around. Thus, assimilation is no guarantee of solace, and in fact, Ozick’s protagonist demonstrates that assimilation can have a damaging effect on the psyche.

On the other hand, a proper appreciation for Jewish history and affirmation of Jewish identity—as seen in the character of the rebbe—provides spiritual and emotional sustenance and the ability to locate the universal in the particular. When the rebbe asks him to identify himself, Bleilip responds that he is ““a Jew. Like yourselves. One of you,””⁵⁷⁵ to which the rebbe replies that this is a ““presumption.””⁵⁷⁶ The rebbe understands that in spite of Bleilip’s assertion that he is a Jew ‘like them,’ Bleilip feels no connection to his own identity or to the other Jews in the synagogue. After getting Bleilip to reveal the toy gun in one of his pockets, the rebbe refers to him as ‘Esau’ and goes on to say, ““Let us not learn more of this matter. This is Jacob’s tent.””⁵⁷⁷ With this reference to the biblical rivalry between the brothers Jacob and Esau, the rebbe draws a clear separation between the identities of the Hasidim and Bleilip’s identity. The Jacob and Esau reference also emphasizes Esau’s reliance on superior physical strength—seen in the actual gun Bleilip later reveals—in opposition to Jacob’s reliance on intelligence and the collective strength of the community, in which the rebbe in “Bloodshed” takes comfort. Although it first seems like

⁵⁷⁴ Lawrence S. Friedman, *Understanding Cynthia Ozick* (Columbia, SC: University of SC Press, 1991), 105.

⁵⁷⁵ Ozick, “Bloodshed,” 67.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

the rebbe is unwilling to acknowledge Bleilip as part of the Jewish community, he later has a change of heart.

At the end of the story, only the rebbe accepts that there is a connection between Bleilip and the Hasidic community. Bleilip's ambivalence on this matter points to Ozick's indecision over whether her protagonist possesses the ability to overcome the old logic of assimilation in favor of communal acknowledgement and identification as Edelshtein does in "Envy," or whether he will ultimately succumb to assimilation as Kornfeld does in "The Pagan Rabbi." In their final exchange, the rebbe says to Bleilip, "It is characteristic of believers sometimes not to believe. And it is characteristic of unbelievers sometimes to believe. Even you, Mister Bleilip—even you now and then believe in the Holy One, Blessed Be He? Even you now and then apprehend the Most High?"⁵⁷⁸ Bleilip at first answers no, but then says yes. At this the rebbe tells him, "Then you are as bloody as anyone,"⁵⁷⁹ pointing to their shared heritage and identity. The rebbe is thus portrayed as the most pragmatist character in "Bloodshed," since it is he who adopts a new habit of mind—locating something of the universal in Bleilip with respect to belief and non-belief—and affirming Bleilip's connection to their Jewish community as a result.

Ozick's three protagonists—Isaac Kornfeld, Edelshtein, and Bleilip—each respond differently to the challenge with which she confronts them: incorporating a new habit of acknowledging Jewish history and dignity and affirming their own Jewish identities when confronted with the false promises of assimilation. Of the three, only Edelshtein openly resists after much struggle. Kornfeld, on the other hand, yields to assimilation while Bleilip seems to remain ambivalent. The Jewish identity politics present in these three early Ozick stories demonstrate the author's concern over the fate of Jewish Americans in a post-Holocaust world:

⁵⁷⁸ Ozick, "Bloodshed," 72.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

would we continue to rely on assimilation as Jews had done in the past, or would our response to this immense tragedy be to remember our shared history and to take pride in our Jewish identity?

As Dean Franco observes, although Bleilip and the rebbe “may have little in common as they go about their daily lives in America, they are bound together by past suffering and the potential for future cataclysm.”⁵⁸⁰ This is likewise an apt assessment of Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick as individuals. The two diverged considerably in terms of their adherence to Jewish Law—Malamud was non-practicing and married a non-Jewish woman while Ozick maintains a stricter adherence to religious traditions and rituals—but they converged regarding the centrality of Jewish history to their work. For both writers, Jewish selfhood and recognizing the dignity of Jewishness was key to their pragmatist identity politics, whereas assimilation offered empty promises and false rewards, particularly in light of the Holocaust and ongoing anti-Semitism. Thus, Malamud’s and Ozick’s contribution to the Jewish identity politics developed by Kallen and Cohen and further shaped by Hook, Stein, and Yeziarska was an acknowledgement of the significance of shared Jewish history. They believed that our identities as Jews bind us together—for better or worse—and that Jewish identity should be celebrated and appreciated, lest we forget the suffering that connects us to one another.

⁵⁸⁰ Franco, “Rereading Cynthia Ozick,” 81.

“We will be citizens”: Jewish Pragmatists and Deweyan Democracy

For Jewish pragmatists, identity politics goes hand-in-hand with creating a more ideal democracy; in fact, it is a means to enlarging democracy in the United States. Writers like Horace Kallen, Anzia Yeziarska, and Cynthia Ozick championed the inherent dignity of Jewishness as a way to keep Jews from succumbing to the idea that their Jewish identity somehow made them less American or, that in order to be American, one had to renounce any ties to traditional Jewish practices and culture and choose assimilation. Celebrating their Jewish identity and their difference paradoxically made Jews more American, more politically involved, and more likely to lobby for legislative and social changes that would guarantee their rights as American citizens. Like their fellow critical pragmatists, a similar phenomenon exists within the genealogy of African American pragmatist thinkers. W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Cornel West all celebrated their Black identity, and their pragmatist identity politics (along with other pro-Black activism and rhetoric) helped to galvanize the African American community toward political activism to ensure their participation in American democracy.

This critical pragmatist identity politics is tied to American democracy, particularly the ideal of democracy as inclusive of multiple voices. In Chapter 1, I discussed Sidney Hook and Richard Bernstein in the context of their pragmatic contributions to Deweyan community and maintaining an inclusive democracy in the United States. Hook challenged members of the American Communist Party, particularly at the Waldorf Conference, citing their reluctance to allow opposing viewpoints to be heard or scientific-based evidence to be presented. Hook believed that communists were devoted to the ideals of the Party at the expense of democratic process and would not include or tolerate alternative points of view. Bernstein, nearly fifty years

later, addressed a new threat to American democracy: the abuse of evil. Bernstein argued that dividing Americans with inflammatory rhetoric infused with false dichotomies after 9/11 was a danger to maintaining an inclusive and healthy democracy, essentially citing the same concern that Hook had with the Communist Party—alternative viewpoints were being sacrificed to uphold a single narrative.

Like Hook and Bernstein, Bernard Malamud, Grace Paley, and Tony Kushner all address similar concerns about creating a Deweyan community and progressing toward a more inclusive democracy in their literary work. These writers took up explicitly political issues in their texts, often involving race, to suggest that Americans' concept of community would benefit from being enlarged. Similar to Hook's involvement with the Waldorf Conference, Malamud emphasized the importance of incorporating voices that are typically on the margins into one's sense of community. Paley and Kushner, more along the lines of Bernstein, demonstrate how a more inclusive notion of community, as opposed to divisiveness and separation, is beneficial to democracy. Instead of positing the view that community only consists of people who are somehow alike, who share similar traits or interests, Malamud, Paley, and Kushner emphasize the significance of a diverse community in the vein of pragmatist thinker John Dewey. Dewey argues in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) for a distinction between "society" and "community." Society arises from the politics of individual nations, how a particular country governs and what political policies are enforced, whereas community is unrestricted and made up of diverse groups that share a common solidarity. Malamud, Paley, and Kushner each model pragmatist communities in the style of Dewey in their writing. They also highlight models that are anti-Deweyan: there is no great community—no solidarity between different groups of Americans—and thus, there is no realized democracy. While both democratic and un-democratic

communities are represented in these texts since their authors favor inclusivity, Malamud, Paley, and Kushner demonstrate the superior merits of Deweyan democratic community for relationships between individuals as well as for American democracy as a whole.

In recent years, John Dewey's notions of community and his pedagogy have come under scrutiny from critics who rightly cite the ethnocentrism that undergirds much of his early philosophy in these matters.⁵⁸¹ This is perhaps unsurprising considering how the Dewey character Henry Scott in Anzia Yezierska's fictionalized account of her work on Dewey and Albert Barnes's study of a Polish immigrant community (*All I Could Never Be*, 1932) views the Poles as a monolith rather than as individuals. Thomas Fallace notes that because pragmatism is "a self-correcting theory of knowledge,"⁵⁸² by 1916, Dewey understood that "a plurality of cultures was necessary for democratic living and intellectual growth."⁵⁸³ Nevertheless, Fallace argues, "ethnocentrism was built right into Dewey's early pedagogy and philosophy."⁵⁸⁴ This ethnocentrism troubles Dewey's notion of community; he conceived of community as "not merely a variety of associative ties which hold persons together in diverse ways, but an organization of all elements by an integrated principle."⁵⁸⁵ If Dewey believed that white, European-descended citizens represented a more advanced form of civilization that African Americans or immigrants had not yet achieved, then how would it be possible to form a community in which 'all elements' are organized by the same principle? As Eddie Glaude has noted, democracy for Dewey "is a form of life that requires constant attention if we are to secure

⁵⁸¹ See, for example, Shannon Sullivan, "From the Foreign to the Familiar: Confronting Dewey Confronting Racial Prejudice," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18, no. 3 (2004): 193-202; Frank Margonis, "John Dewey's Racialized Visions of the Student and Classroom Community," *Educational Theory* 59, no. 1 (2009): 17-39; and Thomas D. Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race: An Intellectual History, 1895-1922* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011).

⁵⁸² Thomas D. Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race: An Intellectual History, 1895-1922* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011), 4.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 38.

the ideals that purportedly animate it.”⁵⁸⁶ Likewise, Scott Stroud emphasizes that a “real amount of openness is implicated in the [pragmatist] habits of democracy.”⁵⁸⁷ In other words, democracy is a process, one which must continually be reexamined to ensure that we are increasing democracy and participation among citizens, creating a more inclusive community rather than excluding or marginalizing certain voices, as Dewey was guilty of doing in his early career. As Dewey himself put it, “only when we start from a community as a fact, grasp the fact in thought so as to clarify and enhance its constituent elements, can we reach an idea of democracy which is not [merely] utopian.”⁵⁸⁸

One particular benefit to considering the vision of Deweyan communities and democracy in the writing of Malamud, Paley, and Kushner is that, several generations removed from Dewey, they are all interested in how to incorporate citizens from different backgrounds with vastly different life experiences into the great community Dewey envisioned, particularly African Americans. Thus, their reexamination of community and inclusive democracy is itself pragmatic in that they consider the conditions and context of American life and democracy from the 1950s through the 1980s, revising Dewey’s idea of community by incorporating more and varied groups and voices into it. Fallace argues that an important part of Dewey’s pragmatism was context: “all knowledge was context-bound; it served a purpose in a particular situation and its usefulness was dependent upon that context.”⁵⁸⁹ Malamud, Paley, and Kushner all speak to a particular historical moment in their writings about community, examining the anxieties and shortcomings of American democracy in light of black-white/black-Jewish relations or (in

⁵⁸⁶ Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 6.

⁵⁸⁷ Scott R. Stroud, “The Challenge of Speaking with Others: A Pragmatist Account of Democratic Rhetoric,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2015): 100.

⁵⁸⁸ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 149.

⁵⁸⁹ Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race*, 9.

Kushner's case) gay-straight relations. Thus, reading these writers as pragmatist increases our understanding of what an ideal community might look like, taking into account the experiences of those who are often pushed to the margins of society by the not-so-silent majority. A consideration of how these writers treated the power disparities they observed at work in society may also prove instructive for how the U.S might address current forms of oppression and marginalization in society.

While I previously discussed Malamud in the context of a Jewish pragmatist identity politics in Chapter 3, I want to return to him here to connect his feelings about Jewish dignity and celebrating one's identity to his concept of community and democracy more broadly conceived. I will examine three texts by Malamud that explicitly treat race—"Angel Levine" (1955), "Black Is My Favorite Color" (1963), and *The Tenants* (1971)—in order to trace a pattern in his work of returning to the idea of inclusive community. Malamud's idea of community, much like Dewey's, hinges on a coming together of different groups of people who find themselves united by a common goal or principle. I will also discuss three stories by Grace Paley that involve her recurring character Faith Darwin—"Faith in a Tree" (1974), "The Long-Distance Runner" (1974), and "Zagrowsky Tells" (1985). While Paley is often talked about as an explicitly feminist and political writer, the Deweyan community and democracy for which she advocates in her stories has not previously been explored. Paley's ideal community, like her character Faith, evolves over time. Finally, I will turn to Tony Kushner's 1992 play *Angels in America* to argue that the 'Great Work' referred to at the end of both *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* is, in part, a call to greater democracy and diverse community reflected in the play's epilogue and championed over the closed views of community embodied in Roy Cohn and Joe Pitt. All three writers share a similar vision of Deweyan community, one that emphasizes

inclusion and listening to marginal voices; characters in these texts ignore the voices of the other at their peril.

“Angel Levine,” originally published in 1955 in *Commentary*, appears in Malamud’s first short story collection *The Magic Barrel* and provides (by the end) an ideal model for Malamudian community. The story follows a tailor in his fifties with the stereotypically Jewish-sounding name of Manishevitz who prays for his dying wife to return to good health. A black angel named Alexander Levine comes to Manishevitz and says he can provide assistance, but Manishevitz must first accept that Levine is in fact a Jewish angel. During their first encounter, when Levine reveals that he is Jewish, Manishevitz feels “an unusual sensation,”⁵⁹⁰ for he had “heard of black Jews but had never met one.”⁵⁹¹ After Levine tells him that he is also an angel, Manishevitz is “thoroughly disturbed”⁵⁹² and questions, “what sort of mockery was it [...] of a faithful servant”⁵⁹³ for God to send a black angel to his aid. Manishevitz asks Levine where his wings are, which embarrasses the angel, for he blushes in response. Manishevitz then insists that Levine recite the blessing for bread in Hebrew, which Levine does, but Manishevitz still “somewhat angrily”⁵⁹⁴ demands more proof of Levine’s “true identity.”⁵⁹⁵

While some skepticism of a man claiming to be an angel is naturally to be expected of Malamud’s protagonist in this story, Manishevitz’s feelings and actions reveal that he is probably less comfortable with the fact that Levine is a black Jew than the fact that he is an angel. Consider his final question before Levine’s departure: “So if God sends to me an angel,

⁵⁹⁰ Bernard Malamud, “Angel Levine” in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 159.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

why a black? Why not a white that there are so many of them?”⁵⁹⁶ As Daniel Walden has observed, Manishevitz “[refuses] to believe that a Jew could be a Negro, a person of color, or that a Negro could be a Jewish angel.”⁵⁹⁷ Similarly, Idit Alphandary contends that Manishevitz “rejects Levine’s identity as it threatens the coherence of his own identity.”⁵⁹⁸ The tailor appears visibly irritated during their first meeting that he is unable to disprove Levine’s identity as a Jew and exclude him from his idea of community. At the beginning of the story, Manishevitz has in his mind an idea of what Jewishness looks like, and it looks white, like he does. Iska Alter argues that for the protagonist “even to consider the idea of a black Jew threatens [the] insular cohesiveness that permitted Jewish survival. Confronted by the actual probability of a black Jewish angel, Manishevitz regards it as a cruel and bitter joke on a man whose identity has been defined by references to Jewish religious practice.”⁵⁹⁹ Because Levine does not fit Manishevitz’s close-minded criteria for inclusion in the larger Jewish community—despite the fact that Levine is able to recite the blessing for bread in “sonorous Hebrew”⁶⁰⁰—Manishevitz remains unconvinced that Levine is Jewish.

After a few days, Manishevitz seeks out Levine, wondering if he had been “in his blindness too blind to understand”⁶⁰¹ God’s work. Manishevitz finds Levine in a Harlem nightclub looking “deteriorated in appearance”⁶⁰² since their first meeting and dancing with the owner of the club, Bella, in a sexualized manner. The tailor goes in search of Levine one more time after this second encounter, finally ready to concede Levine’s Jewishness after he stumbles

⁵⁹⁶ Malamud, “Angel Levine,” 160.

⁵⁹⁷ Daniel Walden, “The Bitter and the Sweet: ‘The Angel Levine’ and ‘Black Is My Favorite Color,’” *Studies in Jewish American Literature* 14 (1995): 102.

⁵⁹⁸ Idit Alphandary, “Wrestling with the Angel and the Law, or the Critique of Identity: The Demjanjuk Trial, *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, and ‘Angel Levine,’” *Philip Roth Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 60.

⁵⁹⁹ Iska Alter, *The Good Man’s Dilemma: Social Criticism in the Fiction of Bernard Malamud* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1981), 66.

⁶⁰⁰ Malamud, “Angel Levine,” 160.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid*, 161.

⁶⁰² *Ibid*, 162.

upon a synagogue in Harlem where three men and a bar mitzvah-age boy, all black, are studying Torah. This scene is significant, for it gives insight into Malamud's notion of community, which has its basis in Jewish thought. At the synagogue, Manishevitz overhears a conversation over the idea of a Jewish *neshoma*, "the word that means soul."⁶⁰³ When one of the men questions the soul's immaterial substance, another replies, "It's the *primum mobile*, the substanceless substance from which comes all things that were incepted in the idea—you, me, and every-thing and -body else."⁶⁰⁴ The bar mitzvah-age boy concludes, "God put the spirit in all things [...] That's how it came to us."⁶⁰⁵ This explanation of what connects all Jews to one another draws on the traditional Jewish idea that every Jewish soul stood at Sinai to receive the Torah, including unborn future generations and converts to Judaism.⁶⁰⁶ This Talmudic concept comes from a passage in Deuteronomy 29 in which Moses tells the Israelites, "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day."⁶⁰⁷ The invocation of this traditional interpretation of Jewish souls coupled with one of the men's insistence that skin color has nothing to do with spirit or soul precedes Manishevitz's acceptance of Levine as a fellow Jew, part of his community and connected to him regardless of skin color. When Manishevitz locates Levine at Bella's again, he is dismayed that "a drunken look had settled upon his [Levine's] formerly dignified face."⁶⁰⁸ Once Manishevitz declares that he believes Levine to be Jewish and "an angel from God,"⁶⁰⁹ Levine begins crying and sobs, "How you have humiliated

⁶⁰³ Malamud, "Angel Levine," 163.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁶ Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 164.

⁶⁰⁷ Deut. 29:13-14. <<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0529.htm>> Accessed July 27, 2016.

⁶⁰⁸ Malamud, "Angel Levine," 165.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

me.”⁶¹⁰ At this point, Manishevitz finally hears and *listens to* Levine, rather than meeting his every word with skepticism as he had in their previous encounters, and he apologizes. This moment results in “sympathy and active cooperation,”⁶¹¹ hallmarks of Dewey’s democratic community.

What is the reader to make of Levine’s cries and accusation that Manishevitz has humiliated him? Iska Alter argues that because Levine’s Jewish identity is what makes him unique, “when this [identity] is denied him by Manishevitz’s suspicion and prejudice, Alexander Levine declines into a vicious parody of what white society assumes the black man is.”⁶¹² Robert Solotaroff concurs, arguing that the tailor’s “inability to be fully human and give credit [to Levine’s Jewish identity] drives Levine into the stereotypes of a *shvartzah* (Negro) joke.”⁶¹³ In other words, because Manishevitz refuses to accept Levine as part of his Jewish community, Levine takes on a stereotypically black identity that Manishevitz will find familiar and believable. Thus, Levine is ‘humiliated’ because Manishevitz has forced him to perform stereotypical blackness—hyper-sexuality, drinking, frequenting a juke joint, wearing certain clothes, speaking in black vernacular—through Manishevitz’s failure to acknowledge that Jewish community is larger than the European-descended Jews with whom he is familiar.

Edward Abramson argues that Manishevitz initially possesses “a view of Jewishness limited by a rigid orthodoxy,”⁶¹⁴ referring to the tailor’s unwillingness to see a black man as a Jew, however, at the end of “Angel Levine,” Manishevitz rushes home to find his wife restored to health and tells her “‘A wonderful thing, Fanny [...] Believe me, there are Jews

⁶¹⁰ Malamud, “Angel Levine,” 166.

⁶¹¹ Hongmei Peng, “Toward Inclusion and Human Unity: Rethinking Dewey’s Democratic Community,” *Education & Culture* 25, no. 2 (2009): 82.

⁶¹² Alter, *The Good Man’s Dilemma*, 66.

⁶¹³ Robert Solotaroff, *Bernard Malamud: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 38.

⁶¹⁴ Edward A. Abramson, “Magic, Miracle, and Faith Healing: Bernard Malamud’s ‘Angel Levine’ and ‘The Silver Crown,’” *Yiddish* 13, no. 4 (2004): 81.

everywhere.”⁶¹⁵ Manishevitz transforms through his encounters with Alexander Levine from a character with a narrow view of community to someone with the ability to acknowledge and celebrate a wide range of Jewish identities. J.P. Steed emphasizes that one reason why Manishevitz has a hard time accepting Levine as a Jew is because Manishevitz too “lacks [a real] sense of belonging or community,”⁶¹⁶ particularly in light of his son’s death and his daughter’s estrangement from her parents. However, by the end of the story, Manishevitz has embraced a Deweyan sense of community, acknowledging that although all Jews may not look like he does, this does not deny their place in the community of those who are Jewish by birth or by choice. This is a deeper sense of community, based on a shared ideal—or, as Dewey puts it, “an integrated principle”⁶¹⁷—rather than a surface-level characteristic like skin color. What Manishevitz gains from Levine in addition to the miracle of his wife’s return to health is the knowledge that his notion of community is limited and incomplete. His closing statement to Fanny that ‘there are Jews everywhere,’ reinforces this lesson and, by extension, encourages readers to let go of any preconceived notions of their own regarding community as comprised only of people who look like one another.

In contrast to the epiphany regarding community Manishevitz gains and the moment of democratic communication that he has with Levine at the end of the story, narrator Nat Lime in “Black Is My Favorite Color” (from Malamud’s 1963 collection *Idiots First*) gains no insight into himself or others throughout the course of the story. Instead, Nat’s lack of awareness is clear to readers, as is the self-serving nature of his alleged ‘love’ for black people. Nat ends up looking foolish to the other characters in the story and to Malamud’s audience for the same inability to

⁶¹⁵ Malamud, “Angel Levine,” 166.

⁶¹⁶ J.P. Steed, “The Spirit in All Things: The Search for Identity in Malamud’s ‘Angel Levine,’” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 18 (1999): 13.

⁶¹⁷ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 38.

create inclusive community that Manishevitz ultimately rejects in “Angel Levine.” While “Angel Levine” serves as an ideal model for community where Manishevitz acknowledges and accepts Levine, “Black Is My Favorite Color” exposes some of the obstacles that stand in the way of creating a more inclusive community, specifically, lack of democratic communication.

“Black Is My Favorite Color” has sometimes been misread by those who take Nat’s account of events at face value—for instance, Daniel Walden’s assertion that Nat offers his love to Ornita Harris “with an open heart”⁶¹⁸ only to be rebuffed—but Nat is best understood as an unreliable narrator who is deluded about his own motivations. Steven G. Kellman describes Nat as “a smug Jewish liberal [who] is naturally resented for his presumption of empathy with a destitute black [person].”⁶¹⁹ Likewise, Elizabeth Fifer explains that Nat fails “to realize the Jewish ideal of *mitzvot*, fulfillment through connection and even identification. The black characters realize their state of otherness to [Nat] and consequently turn away to protect their sense of dignity and self-worth.”⁶²⁰ Nat describes his interactions with his housekeeper, Charity Quietness⁶²¹, recalls his childhood friendship with Buster Wilson, and details his unsuccessful courtship of Ornita Harris, but during each vignette, Nat’s words reveal that he does not see any of these people as individuals or connect with them in a way that would foster community. On the contrary, his communication with them is entirely self-focused, the antithesis of Deweyan democracy.

⁶¹⁸ Walden, “The Bitter and the Sweet,” 103.

⁶¹⁹ Steven G. Kellman, “Tenants, Tenets, and Tensions: Bernard Malamud’s Blacks and Jews,” in *American Literary Dimensions: Poems and Essays in Honor of Melvin J. Friedman*, eds. Ben Siegel and Jay L Halio (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999): 121.

⁶²⁰ Elizabeth Fifer, “Black Is Black: Jewish-American Reparations in Bernard Malamud’s ‘Black Is My Favorite Color’ and Stanley Elkin’s ‘I Take Care of Ed Wolfe,’” in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, eds. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn (New York: New York University Press, 1994): 353-354.

⁶²¹ This character is referred to as Charity Sweetness in *Idiots First* (1963), but Charity Quietness in Malamud’s collected stories (1997). Since I am quoting from *The Complete Stories*, I will refer to her as Charity Quietness.

Although Nat remembers his mother's advice that "if you ever forget you are a Jew a goy will remind you,"⁶²² he is happy to conflate his own experience with black people's experience of the world despite his staggering lack of understanding of what it is like to be black. Rather than attempting to understand or imagine the experiences of Charity Quietness, Buster Wilson, or Ornita Harris, Nat views them all as the same: they are all black people who do not accept his friendship and love. Black people for Nat are a monolith of sorts, and his understanding of Black experience is rooted in assumptions and stereotypes, whereas a pragmatist view would privilege facts and experience (like the conclusion Manishevitz comes to regarding Levine's Jewishness in "Angel Levine"). Nat's patronizing 'kindness' to the black people he meets results in frustration and alienation. His penultimate remark in the story, "I give my heart and they kick me in my teeth,"⁶²³ serves as a warning against non-democratic communication with others. The black people Nat tries to befriend resent his use of them as bolsters to his own ego and the fact that he does not listen to what they have to say. For Dewey, "democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion"⁶²⁴ that involves "full and moving communication,"⁶²⁵ but this state is never achieved in "Black Is My Favorite Color."

Nat's failed childhood friendship with Buster Wilson provides a good example of his inability to communicate democratically with another person. Scott Stroud explains that in Dewey's philosophy of communication, "human experience in the social environment is a dance between emphasizing self and deferring to the selves of others,"⁶²⁶ yet Nat's interactions with Buster only emphasize himself and never take Buster into consideration. Nat watches Buster play

⁶²² Bernard Malamud, "Black Is My Favorite Color," in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 336.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁶²⁴ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 184.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁶ Scott R. Stroud, "Democracy, Partisanship, and the Meliorative Value of Sympathy in John Dewey's Philosophy of Communication," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2016): 80.

marbles by himself for a number of days and finally one day when Buster's father is injured in a violent altercation with some other black men and then beaten and taken away by the police, Nat offers to take Buster to a movie. Nat reveals the reason why he chose Buster to be his friend: "Maybe because I had no others then, we were new in the neighborhood [Williamsburg, Brooklyn], from Manhattan. Also I liked his type. Buster did everything alone."⁶²⁷ The dual implications of the word 'type' here are significant—Nat specifies that he admires Buster for being a loner, but the phrase 'his type,' almost certainly refers to his blackness as well. Nat's reaction to the arrest of Buster's father also betrays the narrator's motivations for trying to befriend Buster. He remembers, "I personally couldn't stand it [the sight of all the violence and blood], I was scared of the human race so I ran home, but I remember Buster watching without any expression in his eyes."⁶²⁸ Rather than showing compassion for the boy he wanted to befriend in a time of need, Nat opportunistically steals money from his mother's purse and attempts to buy Buster's friendship by taking him to see a movie. His statement about fearing 'the human race' is particularly revealing. Elizabeth Fifer suggests that the cause of Nat's fear is the same force compelling him to seek validation from black people. She writes, "Because [Nat] cannot see [himself] reflected in the approved and sanctioned faces of white America—[he] cannot compel the glance—[he therefore seeks his] Other, the societally marginalized black, feeling that here at last is a face that cannot risk turning away."⁶²⁹ In other words, Nat is aware of his position in society—the fact that his whiteness works to his advantage, even though as a Jew he still does not occupy the most privileged position—and he wields that privilege like a metaphorical club rather than seeking to form a genuine community with those around him. Hence, it is no wonder that Buster forcefully rejects Nat after a few months, calling him "a Jew

⁶²⁷ Malamud, "Black Is My Favorite Color," 332-333.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid*, 334.

⁶²⁹ Fifer, "Black Is Black," 357-358.

bastard.”⁶³⁰ Buster refuses Nat’s charity and pretense of friendship because, as Steven Kellman argues, “Neither black nor Jew yet feels the anguish of the other, though the Jew believes he does.”⁶³¹

Nat’s relationship with Ornita Harris likewise ends badly when she decides she cannot marry him because “I got troubles enough of my own,”⁶³² suggesting that she is not prepared to take on Nat’s needs in addition to her already complicated position as an African American woman in the 1960s. His response to this news is “I coulda sworn you love me,”⁶³³ which illustrates Nat’s tendency to think only about his own position in a relationship and about how people’s actions affect him rather than deferring to others and their experiences. As opposed to the moment of democratic communication shared by Levine and Manishevitz in “Angel Levine” where a Great Community is acknowledged and embraced, Nat Lime is never able to form such a community or to communicate democratically with the black people around him in “Black Is My Favorite Color.” Thus, Malamud models one form of Deweyan democratic community in which citizens are able to overcome their initial skepticism of one another and unite under a guiding principle and one form of non-democratic community that illustrates the obstacles to achieving such unity (in Nat’s case, a self-serving nature and an unwillingness to listen to marginalized voices).

In his later novel *The Tenants* (1971), Malamud again returns to this idea of community and democratic communication, this time to show characters who at first appear to possess the necessary qualities to form a true community and communicate with one another, but who ultimately fail due to partisanship. *The Tenants* was motivated by the anger Malamud felt upon

⁶³⁰ Malamud, “Black Is My Favorite Color,” 334.

⁶³¹ Kellman, “Tenants, Tenets, and Tensions,” 121.

⁶³² Malamud, “Black Is My Favorite Color,” 339.

⁶³³ Ibid.

reading Richard Gilman's review of Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* in *The New Republic*.⁶³⁴ Briefly, Gilman argues that Black writing "is not [capable] of being democratized and assimilated in the same way that writing by Jews has been,"⁶³⁵ in part because "the Negro doesn't feel the way whites do, nor does he think like whites."⁶³⁶ Gilman more or less makes the case for a black aesthetic, noting that because he is not black and he is not part of the intended audience for *Soul on Ice*, it cannot be judged by the same criteria by which he would judge, for example, a novel by Malamud. While likely well intentioned, Gilman's review angered Malamud, I suspect—given what happens in *The Tenants*—because it endorses a separation between white and black rather than a coming together. For Malamud, this is anti-democratic because it fragments what should be a unified community in which citizens are capable of listening and imagining the experiences of one another. In a 1971 interview, he described the book as "a sort of prophetic warning against fanaticism."⁶³⁷

The two main characters in *The Tenants*, the Jewish American Harry Lesser and the African American Willie Spearmint, are often discussed as needing the qualities of the other in order to succeed as writers—Lesser would do well to locate Spearmint's passion within himself and apply it to his writing, while Willie's passion could use Harry's structure and formal organization. Edmund Spevack argues that Lesser "clings to a nearly defunct style of literature"⁶³⁸ based primarily on form while Spearmint represents the never-ending "challenges of the social reality in which [he, Spearmint,] has been and is forced to live."⁶³⁹ As Paul Grundy

⁶³⁴ Steven G. Kellman, "Tenants, Tenets, and Tensions," 121.

⁶³⁵ Richard Gilman, "White Standards and Negro Writing," *New Republic* 158, no. 10 (1968): 25.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁷ Israel Shenker, "For Malamud It's Story," [1971] in *Conversations with Bernard Malamud*, ed. Lawrence Lasher (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1991): 33.

⁶³⁸ Edmund Spevack, "Racial Conflict and Multiculturalism: Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*," *MELUS* 22, no. 3 (1997): 50.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

observes, “the failure of Lesser and Spearmint to ‘join forces’ is spectacular.”⁶⁴⁰ Rather than banding together to address what Grundy calls “more communal concerns,”⁶⁴¹ they tear one another apart in the name of adherence to their own separate spheres. Similarly, Edward Margolies argues that Lesser and Spearmint are “unable to make moral or spiritual connections because each locks himself in his own delusory ideological space.”⁶⁴² In this way, Malamud provides a cautionary tale in *The Tenants* about lacking sympathy and being unwilling to communicate with one’s fellow man, and he criticizes each character’s inability to imagine the experience of the other, and Lesser in particular for his unwillingness to revise his beliefs.

Lesser and Spearmint are capable of relating to one another as writers, and their similarities are commented on by Irene, who dates both men. She says they are “both alike”⁶⁴³ and that she is “attracted by characters like both of [them...] men more deeply involved in their work than with [her].”⁶⁴⁴ Their tentative friendship and connection to one another as writers falls apart when Lesser begins dating Irene (originally Willie’s girlfriend) behind Willie’s back. In retaliation after this fact is revealed, Willie and his friends trash Lesser’s apartment and Willie burns the only copy of the manuscript of his third novel, which Lesser has been working on for ten years. When they finally see one another again and begin to argue, Lesser pleads, “For God’s sake, Willie, we’re writers. Let’s talk to one another like men who write.”⁶⁴⁵ Dewey notes in *The Public and Its Problems* that, “associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community. But association itself is physical and organic, while communal life is

⁶⁴⁰ Paul Grundy, “Invisibility and the Surpassing of Ethnic Authenticity: Reprise Strategy in Malamud, Roth, and Woody Allen,” in *The Déjà-Vu and the Authentic: Reprise, Recycling, Recuperating in Anglophone Literature and Culture*, ed. Jean-Jacques Chardin (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2012): 133.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Edward Margolies, *New York and the Literary Imagination: The City in Twentieth Century Fiction and Drama* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 110.

⁶⁴³ Bernard Malamud, *The Tenants* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 140.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid, 189.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, 224.

moral, that is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained.”⁶⁴⁶ Thus, due to their shared interest and passion for writing, Lesser and Spearmint have the ability to form a community organically with one another. It even seems as though they might succeed for a good portion of the novel, considering Lesser’s mentorship of Willie, the novice writer, Willie’s intervention to save Lesser from being beaten up by his friends after Lesser sleeps with Mary Kettlesmith, and their banding together against a common enemy, the landlord Levenspiel. Early on, the writers embrace one another “like brothers,”⁶⁴⁷ yet by the end they are physically attacking each other with the intent to kill. What went so wrong in their relationship?

Aside from the obvious betrayal of Willie by Lesser in sleeping with Irene and Willie’s vengeance in burning Lesser’s manuscript, one of the central problems in Lesser and Willie’s failed friendship is the lack of sustained effort to maintain their relationship (the ‘moral’ aspect Dewey refers to above). The other problem is a clear lack of communication, which Dewey cites as “a prerequisite”⁶⁴⁸ for community. On this point, Dewey argues that a community “presents an order of energies transmuted into one of meanings which are appreciated and mutually referred by each to every other on the part of those engaged in combined action.”⁶⁴⁹ In other words, within the community, participants must agree on a common set of terms and standards so that when an action is taken by one member, the other members of the community understand what has occurred and why. Lesser and Willie never seem to be able to reach a consensus on terms or standards of understanding within their failed community. Lesser is wedded to the idea of form, which Willie feels belittled by, while Willie is suspicious of Lesser and never quite trusts him

⁶⁴⁶ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 151.

⁶⁴⁷ Malamud, *The Tenants*, 54.

⁶⁴⁸ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 152.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 153.

because, as Irene observes, “‘he’s been hurt so often because he’s black.’”⁶⁵⁰ This initial suspicion keeps Lesser at a distance from Willie and then becomes a *fait accompli* when Lesser sleeps with Irene. Similarly, Lesser’s insistence on correct form alienates him from Willie, whose writing varies from “naturalistic confessional”⁶⁵¹ to Amiri Baraka-style experimentation. These standards are never made explicit by either writer to the other and because they do not communicate about their expectations or experiences, each man is surprised when he learns how the other really feels.

These expectations become partisan in their way, in the sense that they disrupt the guiding principle of Lesser’s and Willie’s almost-community: passion for writing. Scott Stroud explains that partisanship is harmful because “it divides and destroys instances of communities where democratic rhetoric ought to build such linkages.”⁶⁵² For Stroud, the solution to partisanship is democratic communication. He argues: “The sort of speech that is conducive to the flourishing of democratic communities will be speech that instantiates the democratic habits of communicating with others. Speech fails to be an instance of the sort of community we envision when its constraints preclude the open, fallible asserters listening to each other we envision in an ideal democracy.”⁶⁵³ Thus, habit itself is important, the regular practice of communication, as is the acknowledgement of one’s own fallibility. Lesser and Willie fail at democratic communication on both of these points, and the result of this failure is that they become divided from one another despite the strong common bond they share as writers.

Lesser is ultimately more to blame than Willie is for their lack of communication, for he has a greater belief in his own infallibility than Willie does. Although Willie initially rejects

⁶⁵⁰ Malamud, *The Tenants*, 149.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid*, 60.

⁶⁵² Stroud, “The Challenge of Speaking with Others,” 97-98.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid*, 98.

Lesser's comments on his manuscript regarding form, proclaiming “*I am art. Willie Spearmint, black man. My form is myself,*”⁶⁵⁴ he is open to the criticism and tries to take Lesser's advice. Similarly, even though Willie has been hurt in the past, he begins to trust Lesser when the latter helps hide his presence in the building from Levenspiel. Willie even picks up some of Lesser's writing habits and speech patterns, joking “*You young bloods have got it all over us alter cockers.*”⁶⁵⁵ In addition, since Lesser reads a good deal of Willie's writing, he gains emotional perspective on Willie, the same understanding Irene shares when she confides to Lesser, “*I have this awful feeling as though you and I are a couple of Charlies giving a nigger a boot in the ass.*”⁶⁵⁶ Lesser, knowing full well that he is betraying Willie by sneaking around with Irene, will not admit his own fault in the situation, instead rationalizing it with thoughts like, “*It's a free country*”⁶⁵⁷ and “*She made her free choice. I made mine. I treated you [Willie] like any other man.*”⁶⁵⁸ While Willie is open to revising his habits, indicating the ability and willingness to communicate democratically with Lesser, Lesser's partisan insistence on his own infallibility in every action he takes ruins any chance at community for the two writers.

After their respective betrayals, the only redeeming moment for Lesser and Willie occurs at the end of the novel. As Morris Dickstein notes in his review of *The Tenants*, “*out of the community of pain, a brief communion of sympathy*”⁶⁵⁹ occurs as Lesser and Willie try to kill one another when “*Each, thought the writer, feels the anguish of the other.*”⁶⁶⁰ This momentary emotional connection could have previously sustained the writers' fellowship as part of the same

⁶⁵⁴ Malamud, *The Tenants*, 75. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 156.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 148.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 142.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 224.

⁶⁵⁹ Morris Dickstein, “*The Tenants: By Bernard Malamud. 230 pp. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$6.95,*” *New York Times Book Review*, 3 October 1971.

⁶⁶⁰ Malamud, *The Tenants*, 230.

community, but here it arrives too late and after too much damage has been inflicted to serve as an ameliorative force. Malamud includes this final moment to highlight the *possibility* of community, even though Lesser and Willie ultimately fail to achieve it. Malamud's statement that *The Tenants* "'argues for the invention of choices to outwit tragedy'"⁶⁶¹ suggests that had one or both men acted differently, they may have forged a genuine connection based on their shared vocation as writers and bridged their other differences to form a democratic community.

Malamud's texts that deal explicitly with race emphasize a Deweyan community in which members openly communicate and actively listen to one another. Furthermore, Malamud highlights the importance of acknowledging one's own fallibility: Manishevitz is rewarded for his willingness to revise his beliefs, while Nat Lime and Harry Lesser suffer as a result of their self-involvement and partisanship. *The Tenants* in particular demonstrates that even when one party is willing to communicate democratically, like Willie is, he is still harmed by Lesser's adherence to his own ways and unwillingness to compromise or revise his views. There is no such thing as a community of one, and so there can be no Great Community if its constituent members cannot communicate with one another. Nat's selfishness in "Black Is My Favorite Color" and Lesser's inability to admit fault in *The Tenants* undermine their relationships with others and prove damaging to those around them and to themselves. For Malamud, community is located in the coming together of individuals, and democratic community means that those individuals actively communicate with one another, acknowledge their mistakes, and move forward together. "Angel Levine" presents the best model of democratic community, one that is ultimately triumphant despite initial resistance, while "Black Is My Favorite Color" and *The Tenants* showcase failed communities, cautioning readers of the obstacles and challenges that stand in the way of Deweyan democracy and communication.

⁶⁶¹ Shenker, "For Malamud, It's Story," 33.

While Malamud may be read as more pessimistic given his focus on hesitation and obstacles to community, Grace Paley is generally more hopeful in her stories about democracy due to her acknowledgement that individuals change and evolve over time, typically for the better. Paley's recurring character Faith Darwin Asbury and Izzy Zagrowsky, the narrator of "Zagrowsky Tells," both provide good examples of this focus on personal evolution. Furthermore, Paley's concern for democracy is reflected in her portrayals of democratic community in her stories, which, like Dewey, are centered around open communication and listening to others. I will first discuss the character evolution of Faith in three of Paley's stories ("Faith in a Tree," "The Long-Distance Runner," and "Zagrowsky Tells") and Izzy Zagrowsky's evolution as demonstrated in "Zagrowsky Tells." Then I will offer a reading of each story in which I argue that the democratic communities of Paley's stories are Deweyan communities, as evidenced by their focus on shared communication and willingness to confront conflicting ideas.

In "Faith in a Tree," which appeared in Paley's 1974 collection *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*, Barbara Eckstein discusses Faith's "progress toward concern for a world community"⁶⁶² in this collection, arguing that Paley's stories "demonstrate a consistent distrust of the wounded, alienated self and develop an understanding of the evolutionary nature of change."⁶⁶³ The narrator Faith is herself an example of this evolutionary change, and she experiences a shift in viewpoints—both literally and metaphorically—over the course of "Faith in a Tree." Minako Baba notes that while Faith's physical location in a "twelve-foot-high, strong, long arm of a sycamore"⁶⁶⁴ gives her a wider, more expansive viewpoint, simultaneously "this vantage point lets her assume a superior air and enables her to survey, comment on, and literally

⁶⁶² Barbara Eckstein, "Grace Paley's Community: Gradual Epiphanies in the Meantime," in *Politics and the Muse: Studies in the Politics of Recent American Literature*, ed. Adam J. Sorkin (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989): 134.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁶⁴ Grace Paley, "Faith in a Tree" in *The Collected Stories* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994): 176.

talk down to her fellow New Yorkers in a sympathetic tone that slightly leans toward condescension.”⁶⁶⁵ However, an antiwar protest that is dispersed by the neighborhood policeman enrages Faith’s nine year-old son, Richard, who angrily shouts at his mother that she and her friends should have stood up to the cop. Faith had half-heartedly yelled after Doug the policeman that the protesters ““look pretty legal to me,””⁶⁶⁶ and Richard is offended by her lack of effort. It is at this point, as many Paley scholars have noted, that Faith has her most important realization: “And I think that is exactly when events turned me around, changing my hairdo, my job uptown, my style of living and telling. [...] I thought more and more every day about the world.”⁶⁶⁷ This enlargement of her priorities is a marked shift in Faith from her appearances in Paley’s first collection *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959). Dena Mandel observes that in *Enormous Changes*, Faith “is not preoccupied with who she is [as she was in *Little Disturbances*], but with how to live.”⁶⁶⁸ Her realization in “Faith in a Tree” also marks a shift in priorities from an earlier story in *Enormous Changes*, “Faith in the Afternoon,” in which Faith does not “yet fully realize the community of suffering humanity”⁶⁶⁹ and is cautioned by her father not to be selfish. In the conclusion of “Faith in a Tree,” her vision expands outward, beyond herself and her immediate problems toward concerns about the larger world.

Faith progresses further still in “The Long-Distance Runner” (also in *Enormous Changes*), in which she lives with a black family for three weeks. Upon meeting Mrs. Luddy’s son Donald, Faith decides “to bring him up to reading level at once,”⁶⁷⁰ soon learning that in fact

⁶⁶⁵ Minako Baba, “Faith Darwin as Writer-Heroine: A Study of Grace Paley’s Short Stories,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 7, no. 1 (1988): 45.

⁶⁶⁶ Paley, “Faith in a Tree,” 193.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁶⁶⁸ Dena Mandel, “Keeping Up with Faith: Grace Paley’s Sturdy American Jewesses,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 3, no. 1 (1983): 91.

⁶⁶⁹ Baba, “Faith Darwin as Writer-Heroine,” 44.

⁶⁷⁰ Grace Paley, “The Long-Distance Runner,” in *The Collected Stories* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994): 253.

Donald is “well ahead of [her] nosy tongue”⁶⁷¹ and writes poetry in addition to being an avid reader. This is one of a number of liberal misconceptions Faith foists upon African Americans in general and the Luddys in particular. As Adam Meyer explains, “one of the most important things that Faith learns in the story is that, regardless of how she might think of and view herself, she has ingrained racist beliefs that she must now begin to search for and attempt to eradicate.”⁶⁷² At the end of the story, Faith confesses that she “learns as though she was still a child what in the world is coming next,”⁶⁷³ indicating that her self-reflection and growth will continue. This is an example of what Dewey calls “the importance of ideas and of a plurality of ideas employed in experimental activity as working hypotheses.”⁶⁷⁴ Faith held certain attitudes about the black community—for example, that they were in need of help she could provide—but her experience with Donald and Mrs. Luddy shows her another way of thinking and she revises her previously-held notions as a result. Because Faith’s “experience has reached maturity,”⁶⁷⁵ she is willing and able to let go of her old assumptions and evolve. While she expands her vision beyond herself and her immediate community in “Faith in a Tree,” Faith learns in “The Long-Distance Runner” that her well-meaning, liberal-white-woman concerns about minorities are not always justified, nor do black people necessarily need or want her help (in this story, Faith is the one who requires help, and Mrs. Luddy graciously takes her in).

In “Zagrowsky Tells” from *Later the Same Day* (1985), Faith’s evolution occurs alongside her realization that Izzy Zagrowsky, the narrator, has evolved from racial prejudices he previously harbored. A number of years earlier, Faith and some of her friends had picketed

⁶⁷¹ Paley, “The Long-Distance Runner,” 253.

⁶⁷² Adam Meyer, “Faith and the ‘Black Thing’: Political Action and Self-Questioning in Grace Paley’s Short Fiction,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 31, no. 1 (1994): 84.

⁶⁷³ Paley, “The Long-Distance Runner,” 258.

⁶⁷⁴ John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* [1939] in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 13: 1938-1939, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988): 131.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Zagrowsky's pharmacy, holding signs declaring that he was a racist who refused to serve black customers. Zagrowsky himself reveals two reasons for his discrimination, the first a matter of business etiquette, the second due to racial prejudice. He explains, "a stranger comes into the store, naturally you have to serve the old customers first. Anyone would do the same. Also, they sent in black people, brown people, all colors, and to tell the truth I didn't like the idea my pharmacy should get the reputation of being a cut-rate place for them [...] discourage them a little, they shouldn't feel so welcome."⁶⁷⁶ There is a clear disparity between his racially-motivated attitudes then and his current love and pride for his mixed-race grandson Emanuel, which he acknowledges by stating: "You have an opinion. I have an opinion. Life don't have no opinion."⁶⁷⁷ Izzy seems to appreciate the irony of his having a black grandchild, considering his previous hardness of heart. While he initially reacted with disgust at the pregnancy of his daughter—"I can't stand it. I refuse. Out of my Cissy, who looked like a piece of gold, would come a black child"⁶⁷⁸—once Emanuel is born, Zagrowsky embraces the child as his own. This is evident in his desire to have the baby circumcised as part of traditional Jewish religious custom as well as his mention of darker-skinned Jews:

This [the circumcision] is done so the child will be a man in Israel. That's the expression they use. He isn't the first colored child. They tell me long ago we were mostly dark. Also, now I think of it, I wouldn't mind going over there to Israel. They say there are plenty black Jews. It's not unusual over there at all. They ought to put out more publicity on it. Because I have to think where he should live. Maybe it won't be so good for him here.⁶⁷⁹

Like Manishevitz in Malamud's "Angel Levine," Zagrowsky learns that there are Jews everywhere, and his concern over where Emanuel should live indicates an awareness that black people are not treated equally in the United States, as well as a hope that because Emanuel is

⁶⁷⁶ Grace Paley, "Zagrowsky Tells," in *The Collected Stories* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994): 353.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 362.

Jewish, he would be treated like other Jews in Israel. Zagrowsky has evolved from his former racial prejudices due to love and concern for his grandchild, demonstrating a more inclusive vision of community than he previously expressed. However, he is not the only character in whom the reader sees a change. Faith also experiences a shift in perspective over the course of her encounter with Zagrowsky.

When she first sees Izzy with a black child, Faith immediately reverts to her old well-meaning, liberal-white-woman concerns, demanding to know “Who is he? Why are you holding on to him like that? [...] Why are you yelling at that poor kid?”⁶⁸⁰ Upon learning that he is Izzy’s grandson, Faith drags the story of Emanuel’s birth out of Zagrowsky. Insistent that she and her friends “were right”⁶⁸¹ in picketing Zagrowsky’s pharmacy years earlier because of his discriminatory practices, even now when Faith sees Izzy with a black grandson, she cannot help herself in wanting to intrude into his business. As Jacqueline Taylor argues, seen through Zagrowsky’s eyes, “Faith appears insensitive and patronizing.”⁶⁸² She tells him that Emanuel “should have friends his own color, he shouldn’t have the burden of being the only one in school,”⁶⁸³ to which Zagrowsky responds that they live in “New York, it’s not Oshkosh, Wisconsin.”⁶⁸⁴ When Faith starts discussing the integrated neighborhoods she knows of, Zagrowsky cannot handle her “self-righteousness”⁶⁸⁵ and shouts, “You don’t know nothing about it [...] Go make a picket line. Don’t teach me,”⁶⁸⁶ implying that he speaks from facts and experience while Faith only understands abstract principles.

⁶⁸⁰ Paley, “Zagrowsky Tells,” 348.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, 352.

⁶⁸² Jacqueline Taylor, *Grace Paley: Illuminating the Dark Lives* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), 118.

⁶⁸³ Paley, “Zagrowsky Tells,” 362.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Meyer, “Faith and the ‘Black Thing,’” 88.

⁶⁸⁶ Paley, “Zagrowsky Tells,” 363.

Although it seems here that Faith has forgotten her earlier lesson from “The Long-Distance Runner” of listening and being willing to change when informed by new experiences, she stands up for Zagrowsky at the end of the story. When Izzy is approached by a young man with a baby who asks whose child Emanuel is, he becomes agitated, so Faith and her group of friends swoop in to “let him have it”⁶⁸⁷ until he backs off. Faith then smiles at Zagrowsky in a reversal of how she appears at the start of the story when she comes over to Zagrowsky “minus a smile,”⁶⁸⁸ gives him a kiss and waves goodbye. Victoria Aarons notes that in this action, Zagrowsky has become an insider in Faith’s community, and “despite squabbles and misunderstandings within the community, when any member is threatened—real or perceived—the community forms a protective shield.”⁶⁸⁹ Thus, Faith’s evolution here shows that while it is very tempting to fall back on our old habits (as she does in her well-intentioned intrusive way with Zagrowsky and Emanuel), ultimately our actions must be informed by context and experience. Faith and her friends see that Zagrowsky has had a true change of heart where race is concerned: he is protective and loving toward Emanuel and beams with pride that he is “the smartest boy in kindergarten,”⁶⁹⁰ and so Faith revises her actions and includes Izzy in the community where he was formerly excluded.

In all three of these stories (though this applies to other of Paley’s stories in addition to these three), Paley offers a Deweyan vision of community that is democratic and inclusive. Dewey writes that “the primary loyalty of democracy”⁶⁹¹ is to communication, and furthermore, that democracy may also be measured by “the will to transform passive toleration into active

⁶⁸⁷ Paley, “Zagrowsky Tells,” 364.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁶⁸⁹ Victoria Aarons, “Talking Lives: Storytelling and Renewal in Grace Paley’s Short Fiction,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 9, no. 1 (1990): 24.

⁶⁹⁰ Paley, “Zagrowsky Tells,” 349.

⁶⁹¹ John Dewey, “The Basic Values and Loyalties of Democracy” [1941] in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 14: 1939-1941, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988): 275.

cooperation.”⁶⁹² As I discussed earlier, Malamud’s stories invoke Deweyan democratic community in several ways: there is an emphasis on inclusivity, communication, and openness with one another, the community is organized based on shared values and some kind of overarching or guiding principle, and members of an ideal community are not partisan, but recognize their own fallibility and possess a willingness to revise their beliefs based on new information or experience. The communities that Paley develops in her stories share these same qualities.

In “Faith in a Tree,” the narrator is fairly explicit about her understanding of community, and her vision includes diversity. Although at the story’s opening, Faith is literally in a tree, symbolically removed from the community and a bit condescending toward those whom she observes from her lofty perch, she is coaxed down by an attractive man named Philip. She remains on the ground for the rest of the story, which is where she experiences her shift in perspective, becoming more involved with what is going on in the world and less self-involved. From the tree branch, Faith tells her son Richard that while she would prefer to live in the country, she stays in New York ““in soot and slime just so you can meet kids like Arnold Lee and live on this wonderful block with all the Irish and Puerto Ricans, although God knows why there aren’t any Negro children for you to play with.””⁶⁹³ While this remark is largely self-interested, it reflects an increased understanding of community from Manishevitz’s view in “Angel Levine” that community must be comprised of people who look alike. Faith’s community is inclusive and diverse, although she expresses some self-serving concern over the distinct lack of African Americans in her community—a concern that is explored at length in “The Long-Distance Runner.” However, after the Vietnam protest is interrupted, Faith’s superficial desires

⁶⁹² Dewey, “Basic Values and Loyalties of Democracy,” 277.

⁶⁹³ Paley, “Faith in a Tree,” 181.

for racially and ethnically diverse community become more genuine, for she is made to see in graphic terms⁶⁹⁴ the consequences of being an outsider to a community, in this case, Vietnamese children who suffer the effects of napalm because they happen to live in a country influenced by communism. Once she sees the effect this has on her son, who copies the protestors' slogan onto the sidewalk "in a fury of tears and disgust [...] in letters fifteen feet high, so the entire Saturday walking world could see,"⁶⁹⁵ Faith recalls, "I think that is exactly when events turned me around [...] I thought more and more every day about the world."⁶⁹⁶

Faith's community shifts from everyday concern about the people in her building and on the playground to "women and men in different lines of work, whose minds were made up and directed out of that sexy playground"⁶⁹⁷ to involvement in social activism and advocacy. Kremena Todorova argues that for Paley, the playground becomes "the location for the kind of democratic engagement that Wilcox, Curtis, and John Dewey alike perceived as weakening in modernity."⁶⁹⁸ In fact, Faith herself mentions Dewey in an off-handed remark about her friend Kitty's children, stating, "Children are all for John Dewey."⁶⁹⁹ It is not entirely clear what exactly Faith means by this comment, however based on the context, it seems likely that she is referring to Dewey's pragmatic joining of principles or beliefs with actions. She then goes on to relate an incident in which Kitty's girls were in the wrong (thus appearing to undercut Dewey), however, if Marianne DeKoven is correct in her assertion that "Richard is the conscience of [the] story,"⁷⁰⁰ then it is her child's joining together of his principles and actions that ultimately

⁶⁹⁴ Protestors carry posters of Vietnamese children bearing the words "Would you burn a child? When necessary."

⁶⁹⁵ Paley, "Faith in a Tree," 194.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Kremena Todorova, "'A Splinter in the Toe': Mothering and Democracy in Grace Paley's Fiction," *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 11, no. 1 (2009): 298.

⁶⁹⁹ Paley, "Faith in a Tree," 189.

⁷⁰⁰ Marianne DeKoven, "Grace Paley's Formal Strategies," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 3, no. 2 (2009): 157.

motivates Faith to make significant moral changes in her life and to build a community that is organized by the principle of campaigning for social justice. This action also demonstrates her willingness to be skeptical rather than unyielding about her own beliefs and revise them along with her actions when motivated by new information and experiences.

Paley explores this last quality of democratic community at length in Faith's encounter with the Luddy family in "The Long-Distance Runner." Having decided to take up running at age 42, Faith runs to her old neighborhood in Brooklyn, which is now mostly African American, and finds herself "suddenly surrounded by about three hundred blacks."⁷⁰¹ Faith tries awkwardly to make conversation despite the fact that a good number of the group look at her with "contempt and anger,"⁷⁰² and then a girl named Cynthia insists on showing her the old building where Faith used to live. Cynthia becomes upset by the thought of her mother dying and Faith attempts to console her, which upsets Cynthia even more. Faith offers to let Cynthia come live with her and her two boys in the unlikely event that Cynthia's mother should die. Cynthia becomes frightened and yells for help, screaming, "Stay away from me, honky lady. I know them white boys. They just gonna try and jostle my black womanhood. [...] Somebody help. She gonna take me away."⁷⁰³ When the young men from outside come in to investigate and rescue Cynthia, Faith takes refuge in the apartment where she grew up, now occupied by a Mrs. Luddy, and (bizarrely) she winds up staying there "for about three weeks."⁷⁰⁴

Faith's miscommunication with Cynthia is the first of many that occur in this story. Nearly every time that Faith makes a suggestion or offers help in her well-meaning, white liberal way, she is rebuffed because she has little understanding of the facts or situation. As Jacqueline

⁷⁰¹ Paley, "The Long-Distance Runner," 244.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Taylor has observed, Faith reveals both “her good intentions and her limited awareness”⁷⁰⁵ in this story. In a way, Faith is reminiscent here of Nat Lime in Malamud’s “Black Is My Favorite Color”—somewhat self-serving in her assumptions and not able to base her conclusions on actual experience because she does not understand what it means to be black. However, unlike Nat, Faith recognizes her ineptitude and resolves to listen to the Luddys and open herself to democratic communication. One example of Faith’s misappraisal of the situation occurs when she asks Mrs. Luddy’s son Donald why he doesn’t play with some of the other black kids she sees sitting outside. He responds, “My mama don’t like me to do that. Some of them is bad. Bad. I might become a dope addict.”⁷⁰⁶ Despite the fact that Donald has just explained that his mother is trying to keep him from potential negative influences, Faith then tells Mrs. Luddy, “He ought to be with kids his age more, I think.”⁷⁰⁷ She responds with, “He see them in school, miss. Don’t trouble your head about it if you don’t mind.”⁷⁰⁸ It is suggestions like this one that cause Mrs. Luddy to tell Faith periodically, “Girl, you don’t know *nothing*.”⁷⁰⁹ Adam Meyer argues that Faith’s experience with the Luddys demonstrates to her that “belief in equal rights as an abstract principle [is] not good enough, unless one puts that love into practice in a necessarily small and local way,”⁷¹⁰ what Dewey refers to as the “active cooperation”⁷¹¹ found in a democratic community.

After about three weeks, Mrs. Luddy tells Faith, “Time to go lady. This ain’t Free Vacation Farm. Time we was by ourself [*sic*] a little.”⁷¹² Because she has learned “the limitations

⁷⁰⁵ Taylor, *Grace Paley: Illuminating the Dark Lives*, 84.

⁷⁰⁶ Paley, “The Long-Distance Runner,” 252.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁷¹⁰ Meyer, “Faith and the ‘Black Thing,’” 84.

⁷¹¹ Dewey, “The Basic Values and Loyalties of Democracy,” 277.

⁷¹² Paley, “The Long-Distance Runner,” 255.

of her own experience and perspective”⁷¹³ in her short time with the Luddys, Faith leaves. As she is running back home, she passes a group of young mothers near her house and tells them, “In fifteen years, you girls will be just like me, wrong in everything.”⁷¹⁴ This shows Faith’s willingness to acknowledge when she is wrong and re-evaluate previously held beliefs, as she does in “Faith in a Tree.” Dewey writes that democracy must demonstrate “the efficacy of plural, partial, and experimental methods [...] in service of a freedom which is cooperative and a cooperation which is voluntary.”⁷¹⁵ As opposed to her initial superficial desire for diversity in “Faith in a Tree,” Faith’s experience with the Luddys, the open nature of their communication, and her willingness to listen and revise her actions and beliefs as a result (which Nat Lime failed at in “Black Is My Favorite Color”) demonstrate that she puts into practice the experimental methods that Dewey sees as essential to democracy in service of cooperation and communication. Furthermore, this experience reveals that Faith truly values democratic inclusiveness in her larger sense of community.

We also see democratic community at work in “Zagrowsky Tells,” although it comes after some work and revision of beliefs from both Zagrowsky and Faith. They are open and truthful with one another in their communication, in spite of discomfort. When Zagrowsky tells Faith that it hurt his heart when Faith and her friends protested in front of his store, he notes, “She’s naturally very uncomfortable when I tell her.”⁷¹⁶ Nevertheless, Faith engages him on this subject, counters that they were right, and explains why they escalated to picketing the store. Izzy then thinks, “why should I talk to this woman,”⁷¹⁷ but concludes that he doesn’t want her to leave and says, “I’ll tell you how Cissy is but you got to hear the whole story how we

⁷¹³ Taylor, *Grace Paley: Illuminating the Dark Lives*, 84.

⁷¹⁴ Paley, “The Long-Distance Runner,” 256.

⁷¹⁵ Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 187.

⁷¹⁶ Paley, “Zagrowsky Tells,” 352.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid*, 353.

suffered.”⁷¹⁸ Molly Vaux argues that, “telling and listening are the communal glue in [Paley’s] stories. The tellers bind the listeners to them and to their subjects by inviting them down the private paths of their lives and the lives of others.”⁷¹⁹ This is what happens in “Zagrowsky Tells” between Faith and Izzy. As Izzy illuminates the details of his daughter’s life and the birth of his grandson, Faith feels sympathetic toward him; her eyes tear up and she puts her hand on his knee in a gesture of comfort. Faith and Izzy Zagrowsky are bound together by their shared history, by their religion, and by their roles as parents, but their conversation further connects them. Victoria Aarons contends that Paley’s characters “talk in order to create and embrace communities, to include other characters in ongoing and changing relationships.”⁷²⁰ Likewise, Barbara Eckstein observes that for Paley, “in conversation [there] is community.”⁷²¹ Thus, for Faith and Zagrowsky, their willingness to communicate democratically with one another creates community, and the organizing principle of this community is free, open discussion and exchange of ideas.

Paley’s understanding of democracy and democratic community is rooted in the belief that individuals are capable of growth and change over time. As we have seen with her characters Faith and Zagrowsky, beliefs evolve alongside changing circumstances and new information. Furthermore, a democratic community is sustained by members of that community talking openly with one another and listening to one another’s voice and experience, like Faith and Mrs. Luddy in “The Long-Distance Runner” or Faith and Zagrowsky in “Zagrowsky Tells.” These characters are not partisan in their beliefs, as Lesser and Spearmint were in Malamud’s *The Tenants*, and because they are not partisan, Paley’s characters are open to hearing conflicting

⁷¹⁸ Paley, “Zagrowsky Tells,” 355.

⁷¹⁹ Molly Vaux, “Between Knowing and Telling: Voice and Community in Grace Paley’s Fiction,” *Green Mountains Review* 7, no. 1 (1994): 27.

⁷²⁰ Aarons, “Talking Lives,” 21.

⁷²¹ Eckstein, “Grace Paley’s Community,” 139.

ideas, confronting their own wrong actions and beliefs when necessary, and revising those beliefs as a result. Like Paley, Tony Kushner depicts several characters in his play *Angels in America* who are able to form a democratic community and maintain democratic communication with one another, despite some initial missteps. Kushner also demonstrates what undemocratic community looks like through two characters in the play, and these characters are punished in the fashion of Malamudian characters that remain closed off to communication and unwilling to change or confront their prior misdeeds.

In the epilogue to Part Two of *Angels in America*, Prior leaves the audience with an optimistic vision for the future, stating, “The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come.”⁷²² He then offers a blessing of ‘more life,’ and the play concludes with the same phrase that appears at the end of Part One: “The Great Work Begins.”⁷²³ As David Kornhaber has recently observed, many scholars and critics are dissatisfied with the play’s conclusion due to “the reconciliationist politics it seems to espouse,”⁷²⁴ which for them provides “a too-easy gloss on more intractable problems”⁷²⁵ that continue to plague society. Thus, Kornhaber reasons, “a lot must depend on how one figures what seem to be the two key concepts of Kushner’s conclusion: citizen and blessing.”⁷²⁶ Like Kornhaber, I believe that individual understanding of the term ‘citizens’ as well as broader notions of what constitutes citizenship figure heavily in interpretation of both the epilogue and *Angels* as a whole. Furthermore, I contend that Kushner’s idea of citizenship is necessarily linked to the beginning of the ‘Great Work’ invoked at the end of both parts of the play. In *Angels*, ‘citizens’ are those who are part of the Deweyan community,

⁷²² Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, Part Two: Perestroika* [1992] (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004), 146.

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ David Kornhaber, “Kushner at Colonus: Tragedy, Politics, and Citizenship,” *PMLA* 129, no. 4 (2014): 728.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Ibid, 729.

made up of diverse people with sometimes conflicting opinions who listen to each other and who are nonetheless connected by their desire to enact positive change in the world, to progress toward a more ideal and inclusive democracy. This is what Prior (and by extension, Kushner) means by ‘Great Work.’ Individualism and undemocratic communication—represented by Roy Cohn and Joe Pitt—fall away by the end of *Angels in America*, making room for what Atsushi Fujita calls a “a new model of community,”⁷²⁷ consisting of Belize, Hannah, Louis, and Prior, who value inclusivity and democratic communication.

Kushner writes in the Afterword to *Perestroika* that Americans “pay high prices for maintaining the myth of the Individual,”⁷²⁸ which he contrasts with the idea that “the smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction.”⁷²⁹ This juxtaposition of individualism with community, illustrated in the play by Roy and Joe as opposed to the community envisioned in the epilogue, is central to Kushner’s understanding democratic progress and what it means to be a citizen. Some leftist critics may bemoan the ending of *Angels* as “turn[ing] away from the kind of collective action demanded by Marx and staged by Brecht,”⁷³⁰ but as Hussein Al-Badri has recently observed, the play’s main flaw in this regard is merely presenting “a different politic[s] than its detractors would like it to be.”⁷³¹ Kushner is ultimately more concerned with how to enact Deweyan democracy and community—which he believes will lead to real and lasting social change—than he is with envisioning an America based around socialism or Marxism.

⁷²⁷ Atsushi Fujita, “Queer Politics to Fabulous Politics in *Angels in America*: Pinklisting and Forgiving Roy Cohn,” in *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays*, ed. James Fisher (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), 125.

⁷²⁸ Tony Kushner, “With a Little Help from My Friends,” [1993] in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, Part Two: Perestroika* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004), 149.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷³⁰ Kornhaber, “Kushner at Colonus,” 736.

⁷³¹ Hussein Al-Badri, *Tony Kushner’s Postmodern Theatre: A Study of Political Discourse* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 73.

Roy Cohn and Joe Pitt are representative of undemocratic communication in the play— Roy because he dominates those around him, and Joe because he cannot be truthful with others or see beyond himself. Dewey writes that in a democracy, “both parties learn by giving the other a chance to express itself, instead of having one party conquer by forceful suppression of the other.”⁷³² For Roy, suppression of the other in communication is par for the course. One early example of this occurs in Act One, Scene 9 of *Millennium Approaches* when Roy’s doctor Henry diagnoses him with AIDS. Roy then tries to force Henry to call him a homosexual, finally threatening, “No, say it. I mean it. Say: ‘Roy Cohn, you are a homosexual.’ And I will proceed, systematically, to destroy your reputation and your practice and your career in New York State, Henry. Which you know I can do.”⁷³³ When Henry gives him the diagnosis of AIDS, Roy counters, “No, Henry, no. AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer.”⁷³⁴ Roy forcefully suppresses Henry from telling anyone that Roy is gay by threatening his career, and he even manages to suppress the diagnosis of AIDS. The next time Henry appears is in *Perestroika* to facilitate Roy’s admission to the hospital, even his medical charts, as Belize reads them, say “liver cancer.”⁷³⁵ Roy’s relationship with his nurse Belize in *Perestroika* is similarly domineering, as Roy makes racist and homophobic remarks, even goading Belize into using an anti-Semitic slur in one scene, knocks over pills he is supposed to take, and generally proves to be an insufferable patient. Roy also makes it clear that even though he is somewhat dependent on Belize, he does not consider him an equal in any way. In Act Three, Scene 5, Roy is high on morphine, but this does not stop him from calling Belize, “the Negro night nurse. My

⁷³² John Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us” [1939] in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 14: 1939-1941, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988): 228.

⁷³³ Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, Part One: Millennium Approaches* [1992] (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004), 44.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷³⁵ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 21.

negation.”⁷³⁶ and “Nothing. A stomach grumble that wakes you in the night.”⁷³⁷ Bemoaning his imminent disbarment in Act Four, Scene 1 of *Perestroika*, Roy says, “Every goddam thing I ever wanted they have taken from me. Mocked and reviled, all my life.”⁷³⁸ When Belize identifies and responds, “Join the club,”⁷³⁹ Roy says, “I don’t belong to any club you could get through the front door of. You watch yourself you take too many liberties.”⁷⁴⁰ Shortly after when Roy has a series of violent spasms, Belize says that he almost feels sorry for him. Roy is quick to remind him, “You. Me. No. Connection.”⁷⁴¹ Thus, Roy suppresses Belize any time Belize attempts to identify with him in the slightest. Roy has a history of undemocratic communication, even subverting democratic law itself in order to convince the judge in the Rosenberg trial to give Ethel Rosenberg the death sentence.

If democracy is characterized by open communication, then Roy’s constant desire to ‘win’ or conquer in conversations with others exposes him as a totalitarian at heart. This totalitarian communication is a natural result of Roy’s individualism. He relishes his status as “the dragon atop the golden horde,”⁷⁴² and tells Belize that he is “not moved by an unequal distribution of goods on this earth.”⁷⁴³ As opposed to other characters like Belize and Hannah who value community and view responsibility to others as a moral obligation, Roy maintains that “Life is full of horror; nobody escapes; nobody; save yourself. Whatever pulls on you, whatever needs from you, threatens you.”⁷⁴⁴ This philosophy clearly runs counter to Kushner’s belief in the smallest indivisible unit as two people. As a result, while Kushner includes Roy in the play as

⁷³⁶ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 75.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid*, 77.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid*, 87.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid*, 88.

⁷⁴² *Ibid*, 55.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴⁴ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*, 58.

“a part of the gay and lesbian community even if we don’t really want him to be a part of our community,”⁷⁴⁵ Roy cannot be a citizen who participates in democratic progress, so he does not ultimately survive the play.

While Joe is not like Roy in his communication in the sense that he has to win or dominate whomever he is talking to, his general untruthfulness and unwillingness to take responsibility for his actions make him undemocratic in his dealings with other characters in the play. Kushner has sometimes been criticized in scholarship on *Angels in America* for being too hard on Joe. Hussein Al-Badri, for example, asserts that Kushner’s omission of Joe from the community included in the epilogue runs counter to Kushner’s “own political ideology of inclusion and inclusiveness.”⁷⁴⁶ However, this dramatic punishment seems more fitting when Joe’s undemocratic communication and individualism are taken into consideration, for then it is clear that like his mentor Roy, Joe too is incapable of acting as a citizen of democracy. Dewey argues for truthful communication in “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us” writing, “knowledge of conditions as they are is the only solid ground for communication and sharing.”⁷⁴⁷ Joe lies about his identity as a gay man to his wife Harper, he keeps from Louis the fact that he is a Mormon, and he repeatedly tells Harper that he is not going to leave her, only to abandon her anyway. Because Joe lacks a foundation of truthfulness with people who are important to him, open, democratic communication is not possible.

Like his mentor Roy, Joe also acts with the individual—himself—in mind, rather than considering community or the circumstances and experiences of others. When Hannah tells Joe

⁷⁴⁵ Charlie Rose, “Tony, Tonys, and Television,” in *Tony Kushner in Conversation*, ed. Robert Vorlicky (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998): 46.

⁷⁴⁶ Al-Badri, *Tony Kushner’s Postmodern Theatre*, 93.

⁷⁴⁷ Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” 229.

in Act Four, Scene 4 of *Perestroika* that his silence and unwillingness to be in contact with either Harper or her for the past month is “cruel,”⁷⁴⁸ the following exchange ensues:

Joe: I’m taking her [Harper] home.

Hannah: You think that’s best for her, you think that she...

Joe: I know what I’m doing.

Hannah: I don’t think you have a clue.⁷⁴⁹

Hannah is right that Joe has no idea what he’s doing, since after he takes Harper home, he has sex with her and runs out to find Louis again. Following an irreparable fight with Louis, he then tries to return to Harper, not because she needs him but because he is once again only thinking of himself. He then tells her, “I don’t know what will happen to me without you. Only you. Only you love me. Out of everyone in the world. [...] Please, please, don’t leave me now.”⁷⁵⁰ Joe is reminiscent here of Nat Lime in Malamud’s “Black Is My Favorite Color”—unable to sustain a community or communicate democratically with others because he never considers the experience of the other person, only his own needs and desires. In fact, Joe even tells Louis that “sometimes self-interested is the most generous thing you can be,”⁷⁵¹ a notion that serves as Joe’s modus operandi throughout the play. Deweyan communication requires what Hongmei Peng calls sympathetic thinking, the ability to “step outside of [one’s] own experience and see it as the other would see it by putting [oneself] in the place of the other and using imagination in order to assimilate the other’s experience.”⁷⁵² Since Joe proves incapable of imagining the other’s experience, he necessarily excludes rather than includes others in his would-be community, particularly Harper and Hannah. His unwillingness or inability to change in this regard is why he

⁷⁴⁸ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 96.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁵² Peng, “Toward Inclusion and Human Unity,” 82.

cannot be included as a ‘citizen’ in the epilogue, since undemocratic communication and exclusive community building stand in opposition to Kushner’s Deweyan model of community.

Although Roy and Joe form a community of sorts in *Angels*, it proves to be undemocratic and closed to communication, similar to the failed community of Lesser and Spearmint in Malamud’s *The Tenants*, and representative of anti-Deweyan communication. In spite of the father/son-type relationship that Roy and Joe maintain throughout most of the play, there is much that they keep from one another, and their relationship is marked as much by silence as it is by the closeness and warm feeling for one another of mentor and mentee. This silence comes to a head in Act Four, Scene 1 of *Perestroika*, when Joe visits Roy in the hospital. When Joe reveals that he left his wife Harper and has been living with Louis, Roy does not permit him to continue talking; he gets out of bed, removes his IV tube, and starts bleeding everywhere. Roy then forcefully silences Joe:

Joe: Roy, please, get back into...

Roy: SHUT UP! Now you listen to me.

[...]

Roy: I want you home. With your wife. Whatever else you got going, cut it dead.

Joe: I can’t, Roy, I need to be with...

Roy: YOU NEED? Listen to me. Do what I say. Or you will regret it. And don’t talk to me about it. *Ever again.*⁷⁵³

Although Roy has previously attempted to manipulate Joe into doing what he wants, he reacts more forcefully here than to anything else Joe says to him in either part of the play. Furthermore, Roy not only silences Joe in that moment, but he commands him never to speak of his relationship with Louis or to make any allusion to homosexuality again. Thus, Roy’s silencing of Joe is distinctly undemocratic and unrepresentative of the kind of communication expected in a democratic community. Far from being an outlier, this is not the first time Roy has stifled Joe’s communication with him. Rather than being open to hearing what Joe wants to express (even if

⁷⁵³ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 85. Emphases in original.

he disagrees with it), Roy chastises him in *Millennium Approaches* for having ethical reservations about interfering with the disbarment committee hearing on Roy's behalf asking, "What the fuck do you think this is, Sunday School?"⁷⁵⁴ and calling Joe "Dumb Utah Mormon hick shit"⁷⁵⁵ and "a sissy."⁷⁵⁶ As for Joe, he claims to love Roy, but is unwilling to go to bat for him when the chips are down. Although this is a legal as well as an ethical quandary, it demonstrates that Joe's love for Roy is more theory than practice. He asserts, "I'll do whatever I can to help,"⁷⁵⁷ but those are empty words, as Roy later reveals, "You broke my heart. Explain that."⁷⁵⁸ They cannot agree on a shared ideal toward which they can work together, and thus, their efforts toward community building are doomed to fail.

Given Dewey's assertions that community involves "communication in which emotions and ideas are shared"⁷⁵⁹ and that such community is "a pressing [concern] for democracy,"⁷⁶⁰ Roy and Joe fail at both democratic communication and maintaining a community even with one another. In addition to their undemocratic communication, Roy and Joe are devoted to exclusion rather than inclusion and individualism rather than community, qualities that are distinctly anti-Deweyan, and for which (along with their undemocratic communication) they are dramatically 'punished' by Kushner. Roy succumbs to his illness, while Harper leaves Joe for good and Joe is nowhere to be found in the epilogue to the play.

Unlike Roy and Joe, Louis is able and willing to change, demonstrating a commitment to open communication and revising harmful beliefs and actions by the end of the play. While

⁷⁵⁴ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*, 68.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 106.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 107.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 66.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 107.

⁷⁵⁹ Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 176.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 177.

Louis initially abandons Prior when “Louis and Prior and Prior’s disease”⁷⁶¹ becomes more than he can handle, he eventually sees the error of his ways and atones for his past misdeeds. Prior tells Louis when they meet after Louis’s month-long absence in *Perestroika* that when he cries, “you endanger nothing in yourself. It’s like the idea of crying when you do it. Or the idea of love.”⁷⁶² Similarly, Belize remarks to Louis in *Millennium Approaches*, “All your checks bounce, Louis; you’re ambivalent about everything.”⁷⁶³ For much of the play, Louis claims to support things in theory, but his practice reveals his own ambivalence on the subject, from his alleged love for Prior to his support of the Rainbow Coalition. However, following a conversation with Belize in Act Four, Scene 3 of *Perestroika* in which Belize observes that Louis is “up in the air, just like that angel, too far off the earth to pick out the details. Louis and his Big Ideas. Big Ideas are all you love,”⁷⁶⁴ Louis realizes that theory and practice must be joined, both in love and in democracy. This is confirmed for him when he researches Joe’s legal decisions written on behalf of Justice Wilson and finally understands that Joe, who wants to be “a nice, nice man”⁷⁶⁵ (as Roy aptly puts it), has rendered legal decisions that have real and damaging consequences for children and gay people. Dewey argues for praxis in democracy, asserting that democracy is “a *personal* way of individual life [...] Instead of thinking of our own dispositions and habits as accommodated to certain institutions we have to learn to think of the latter as expressions, projections, and extensions of habitually dominant personal attitudes.”⁷⁶⁶ Joe thus expresses a clearly undemocratic viewpoint when he tells Louis of his legal decisions, “It’s law

⁷⁶¹ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*, 78.

⁷⁶² Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 83.

⁷⁶³ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*, 95.

⁷⁶⁴ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 94.

⁷⁶⁵ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*, 107.

⁷⁶⁶ Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” 226. Emphasis in original.

not justice, it's power, not the merits of its exercise, it's not an expression of the ideal."⁷⁶⁷ The discrepancy between Joe's theory and practice in multiple areas of life, including love and democracy, causes him to think that he must accommodate himself to institutions (like "legal fag-bashing"⁷⁶⁸ or heterosexual marriage, for example) rather than viewing such institutions democratically, as potential sites for expressing his own experiences and habits. Louis recognizes his own behavior in Joe's habits and after their fight, Louis finally understands the extent to which he has failed Prior. He later asks to come back to Prior and tells him, "Failing in love isn't the same as not loving. It doesn't let you off the hook, it doesn't mean...you're free to not love,"⁷⁶⁹ indicating a respect for the importance of praxis that he previously lacked.

In addition, Louis gains "expiation for [his] sins"⁷⁷⁰ through his recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish for Roy Cohn. Although he had previously refused to identify with Roy in any way, calling him "the polestar of human evil [...] the worst human being who ever lived, he isn't *human* even,"⁷⁷¹ with some coaxing from Belize, who insists "Louis, I'd even pray for you,"⁷⁷² and help from the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg to remember the words of the Kaddish, Louis recites the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead, thus affirming Roy as part of the Jewish community. Framji Minwilla argues that the coming together of Belize, Ethel, and Louis to say Kaddish for Roy "invent[s] a more complex yet exact sense of self and a more expansively conceived idea of community."⁷⁷³ This community is a democratic one, in which people who have ideas and beliefs differing from the mainstream (like Roy, for whom this is the case not in

⁷⁶⁷ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 109.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 140. Ellipses in original.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷⁷³ Framji Minwilla, "When Girls Collide: Considering Race in *Angels in America*," in *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, eds. Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997): 110.

life nor in the Reagan years of the play, but within the politics espoused by Kushner and the characters in the epilogue of *Angels*) are nevertheless included and acknowledged as part of the larger community. Based on his joining together of theory with practice and expanding his idea of community by praying for Roy, Louis is able to participate as a ‘citizen’ in the epilogue: he argues at points with Belize about politics, but he is ultimately able to listen and he values the presence of differing opinions in his community.

Prior also makes a few missteps, but like Louis, he ultimately “succeeds because he is willing to change,”⁷⁷⁴ to become more democratic in his communication with others and his vision of community. For instance, when he first meets Joe’s mother Hannah, he assumes that because she is Mormon, she must be trying to convert him when she helps him to the hospital. After they arrive at the hospital, Prior tells Hannah about his visit from the Angel, and she says he had a vision, drawing a comparison with Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, and Prior once again rushes to make assumptions about her because of her Mormonism:

Prior: But that’s preposterous, that’s...

Hannah: It’s not polite to call other people’s beliefs preposterous. He had great need of understanding. Our Prophet. His desire made prayer. His prayer made an angel. The angel was real. I believe that.

Prior: I don’t. And I’m sorry but it’s repellent to me. So much of what you believe.

Hannah: What do I believe?

Prior: I’m a homosexual. With AIDS. I can just imagine what you...

Hannah: No you can’t. Imagine. The things in my head. You don’t make assumptions about me, mister; I won’t make them about you.⁷⁷⁵

This is the first moment of democratic communication between Prior and Hannah. He acknowledges her point, listening and taking to heart her experiences. This openness serves him well when Hannah advises, “An angel is just a belief, with wings and arms that can carry you.

⁷⁷⁴ Al-Badri, *Tony Kushner’s Postmodern Theatre*, 101.

⁷⁷⁵ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 102.

It's naught to be afraid of. If it lets you down, reject it. Seek for something new."⁷⁷⁶ Prior takes her advice, struggling with the Angel of America and returning the Book of the Anti-Migratory Epistle to Heaven. He previously identified with the Angels—their abandonment by the Almighty and desire to go back—but ultimately he insists upon progress and a blessing from the Angels of “more life.”⁷⁷⁷ Additionally, Prior’s vision of community becomes more expansive and inclusive by the end of the play. He tells Louis in *Millennium Approaches* that if Louis walked out on him, he would hate him forever. While he does not take Louis back as a partner in *Perestroika*, he forgives him, tells him he loves him, and Louis remains an important presence in Prior’s life based on their interaction in the epilogue.

In Hannah’s first appearance, she does not seem particularly inclusive or capable of democratic communication given her outrage at Joe’s admission that he is gay, however she experiences a transformation in *Perestroika* and shows more concern for others, particularly Prior and Harper. Despite Hannah’s somewhat gruff manner (she is described by Sister Ella Chapter in *Millennium Approaches* as “the only unfriendly Mormon [she] ever met”⁷⁷⁸) and her claim that she “[doesn’t] have pity,”⁷⁷⁹ she tends to both Prior and Harper, both of whom have been abandoned by the person closest to them. Hannah explains her actions by claiming, “I know my duty when I see it,”⁷⁸⁰ which suggests that unlike Joe, she is willing to take the needs and experiences of others into consideration before acting. Much like Dewey, Hannah acknowledges that communication and community require cooperation, “understanding, learning, [and] other-regarding thinking.”⁷⁸¹ Given her sympathy and concern for Prior and Harper as well as her

⁷⁷⁶ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 103.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 133.

⁷⁷⁸ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*, 82.

⁷⁷⁹ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 101.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 66.

⁷⁸¹ Peng, “Toward Inclusion and Human Unity,” 82.

advice to Joe to reflect on his actions and beliefs by asking himself “what it was [he was] running from,”⁷⁸² Hannah has become a Kushnerian ‘citizen’ in the epilogue, musing about the “interconnectedness”⁷⁸³ of people in the world and providing hope for Prior to keep moving forward. Her advice to Prior that he should “seek for something new”⁷⁸⁴ if his beliefs fail him demonstrates her own willingness to revise previous assumptions and incorporate new knowledge into her experience, an essential quality in a member of a democratic community.

As for Belize, who has been described in scholarship as the moral center of *Angels in America*⁷⁸⁵, his actions toward Roy and Louis show a commitment to inclusivity in line with Deweyan democratic community. Belize empathizes with Roy and Louis as fellow gay men, despite his outright hatred for some of their actions and ideologies. He advises Roy about the best course of treatment for late-stage AIDS, contra the opinion of Roy’s “very qualified, very expensive WASP doctor,”⁷⁸⁶ and warns him about the double blind AZT trials, prompting Roy to secure his own stash of “serious Honest-Abe medicine.”⁷⁸⁷ Despite the fact that Roy is a terrible patient and person who, as I mentioned previously, takes every opportunity to remind Belize that Roy considers him beneath him, Belize feels, as he puts it, a sense of “solidarity. One faggot to another,”⁷⁸⁸ and reminds Louis that Roy “died a hard death.”⁷⁸⁹ With Louis, Belize embodies the democratic value of believing in human nature’s capacity for change. Dewey argues in “Creative Democracy” that democracy is “a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature.”⁷⁹⁰ Although Belize disdains Louis for his abandonment of Prior, he meets with

⁷⁸² Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 96.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid*, 144.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 103.

⁷⁸⁵ See, for example, Minwilla, “When Girls Collide,” 104-105; or Al-Badri, *Tony Kushner’s Postmodern Theatre*, 96.

⁷⁸⁶ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 26.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 27.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 122.

⁷⁹⁰ Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” 226.

Louis in both *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* and offers him some moral guidance, indicating that he has not given up on Louis and retains some hope that he will change for the better.

Belize's inclusivity is unsurprising considering his description of Heaven as encompassing "voting booths [...] everyone in Balenciaga gowns with red corsages, and big dance palaces full of music and lights and racial impurity and gender confusion"⁷⁹¹ with gods who are all "brown as the mouths of rivers."⁷⁹² This utopic vision eradicates all of the obstacles to justice and democratic participation of marginalized groups in the United States—everyone has gained suffrage, wealth inequality has been destroyed, and racism, sexism, and transphobia have all been tempered by mixed-race divinities and blurred gender boundaries. Belize's idea of Heaven is aligned with Kushner's philosophy on freedom; he argues that freedom "expand[s] outward"⁷⁹³ and the most "basic gesture of freedom is to include, not to exclude."⁷⁹⁴ This sounds remarkably like Dewey, who concludes in "Creative Democracy" that the task of democracy is always to create "a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute."⁷⁹⁵ Belize's vision of Heaven and Kushner's understanding of freedom express Dewey's practical ideal for democracy.

The four characters included in the epilogue to *Angels in America*—Belize, Hannah, Louis, and Prior—represent democratic community either because they have demonstrated a willingness to change, listen to others, and revise previous beliefs/actions in the course of the play, or (in Belize's case) because that kind of inclusivity and democratic communication had

⁷⁹¹ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 76.

⁷⁹² Ibid.

⁷⁹³ Tony Kushner, *Thinking about the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995), 6.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid, 7.

⁷⁹⁵ Dewey, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us," 230.

already been attained. Michael Cadden argues that the epilogue to *Angels* “leaves us with the image of four individuals who, despite their very real differences, have chosen, based on their collective experience, to think about themselves as a community working for change.”⁷⁹⁶ Similarly, Ron Scapp suggests that Kushner’s ending embraces “the hope of democracy.”⁷⁹⁷ For Kushner, the ‘hope of democracy’ is embodied in these characters who have become “citizens”⁷⁹⁸ with differing thoughts and opinions who are nevertheless capable of working together to accomplish the “Great Work”⁷⁹⁹ of expanding democracy. Roy and Joe, who were neither inclusive of dissenting voices nor able to form democratic communities, are incapable of acting as citizens and thus omitted from the epilogue. Kushner’s epilogue ultimately advocates for more ideal democracy, which must begin with individuals who act as citizens. This is the kind of democracy envisioned by Dewey, where all citizens believe “that even when needs and ends or consequences are different for each individual, the habit of amicable cooperation [...] is itself a priceless addition to life.”⁸⁰⁰ Such a community stands in stark contrast to the exclusive, undemocratic, and homophobic legislation and political rhetoric of the Reagan years as portrayed in the play and embodied by Roy and Joe. Kushner’s small democratic community at the end of *Angels* reminds the audience that democracy is a process, one that we must constantly work at to ensure we are applying the democratic method—expanding rights and freedoms outward, revising beliefs or actions based on experience and new information, and open to democratic communication with others.

⁷⁹⁶ Michael Cadden, “Strange Angel: The Pinklisting of Roy Cohn,” in *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, eds. Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997): 88.

⁷⁹⁷ Ron Scapp, “The Vehicle of Democracy: Fantasies toward a (Queer) Nation,” in *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, eds. Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997): 98.

⁷⁹⁸ Kushner, *Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika*, 146.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁰ Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” 228.

Malamud, Paley, and Kushner all begin from the premise that including marginalized voices is not only beneficial but essential to democracy. This revises some of Dewey's early notions, which had been grounded in ethnocentric thinking, and provides a foundation for what including others in a democratic community looks like. The inclusivity these authors portray in their respective texts demonstrates that democracy does not mean that *all* voices are equally valid, rather, voices that are similarly committed to democracy as method. Nat Lime from "Black Is My Favorite Color," a younger Izzy Zagrowsky (prior to the birth of his grandchild) from "Zagrowsky Tells," and Roy Cohn in *Angels in America* are all examples of voices who cannot be reasoned with because they are too partisan and too committed to their own (individualistic and undemocratic) way of thinking. However, it is important to note that such people are not irredeemable; they have the capacity to change, as Zagrowsky does. As a result, they deserve to be included in the larger community (as Kushner includes Roy) even if their ideology is itself anti-democratic. Malamud, Paley, and Kushner all caution that such individualism and anti-democratic thinking is harmful to democratic inclusivity and communication. Thus, anti-democratic ideology must not be allowed to dominate at a legal level, as we see its harmful consequences in the exclusive, homophobic legislation of the Reagan administration in *Angels*. In addition, these authors urge democratic communication on a personal level, too, otherwise relationships and communities run the risk of being torn apart, as evidenced by Lesser and Spearmint in *The Tenants* or Roy Cohn and Joe Pitt in *Angels*. Like Dewey, these authors believe that it is necessary to revise our methods to become always more democratic and more inclusive—like Kushner's 'citizens'—progressing slowly but ever closer to true democratic communication and community with one another.

Conclusions: Putting Pragmatism to Work

I suggested in the introduction that identity politics as currently practiced in the U.S. ought to be revised in favor of a more pragmatist politics that balances identification with any particular group alongside identification with the universal. I further claimed that this type of pragmatist identity politics bears on democracy, particularly democratic communication and community. I do not believe that achieving a perfect and equal consideration of the particular and the universal in all situations is possible however, like the ideal of democracy itself, I believe it is a standard worth striving toward regardless of our potential missteps along the way. My research in the preceding chapters is likewise concerned with both the particular—tracing a distinctively Jewish genealogy of pragmatist figures—and the universal—examining the pragmatist identity politics that emerges over the century along with potential models for democratic communication and community.

How is this useful in the present moment of polarization, anxiety, and uncertainty in the U.S.? What is its cash value, ultimately? One of the most important things revealed by the 2016 election is the fact that Americans of different political persuasions often do not talk to one another, opting instead to seal ourselves in insular communities that reinforce our existing views. This hold true of Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, Tea Party and Green Party members. Not only does this lack of communication and identification occur across political party lines, but we are often equally silent across the color line, class line, religion line, and geographic line (e.g. North vs. South or urban vs. rural communities). When we engage in this sort of insular groupthink, it damages our capacity for humanity as well as democracy itself. We end up looking at people who are not on ‘our team’ (however that is defined within the group) as inhuman monsters. On this subject Richard Bernstein observes, “People confront each

other as if their total outlooks, values and commitments are incommensurable [...] The despised ‘other’ is not only incommensurable with everything that ‘we’ take to be human but a dangerous threat to humanity.”⁸⁰¹ If we adopt the pragmatic method of democratic communication with one another as exemplified in Hook, Bernstein, Malamud, Paley, and Kushner, then we will be able to relate to and sympathize with others who hold viewpoints that differ from our own. We can move toward better, more open and less confrontational communication across and within groups with competing interests. As Bernstein notes, “If we are serious about encouraging mutual understanding, then we should not fool ourselves into thinking that this can be achieved simply by willing or by talking about it. It requires [...] a whole set of interlocking habits, dispositions and practices. And it requires hard work.”⁸⁰² Like democracy itself, this kind of democratic communication is a process, one that requires our constant attention and daily practice.

Giving in to a group mentality that outsiders are inhuman likewise undermines democracy. If the purpose of democracy is to evolve continually and to become always more inclusive and more representative of *all* citizens, as the pragmatist figures I have discussed believe, then insular groupthink that pits one group against another causes us to become *less* open, retreating from what Lincoln called ‘the better angels of our nature’ when it comes to recognizing and upholding the democratic method. Eddie Glaude contends, “When we stop talking with and provoking our fellows we in effect cede our democratic form of life to those forces that would destroy it.”⁸⁰³ In other words, this breakdown in communication between groups and upholding of one narrative as the only acceptable truth leads to extreme partisanship

⁸⁰¹ Richard J. Bernstein, “The specter haunting multiculturalism,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36, no. 3-4 (2010): 386.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, 391.

⁸⁰³ Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), xi.

of the kind Sidney Hook warned about in the Communist Party. The recent example of the North Carolina Republican-led legislature convening to undermine the power of the newly-elected Democratic governor⁸⁰⁴ illustrates this extreme partisanship all too well.

The pragmatic method acknowledges that sometimes values *are* incommensurable and should be recognized as such. Sidney Hook argues regarding the democratic method:

[T]here must be one working absolute on which there can be no compromise, about which we must be fanatical: the rules of the game, by which we settle differences. Whoever plays outside the rules, whoever tries to write his own rules, has given a clear declaration in advance that he proposes to interpret differences as *ipso facto* evidence of hostility. [...] There is no inconsistency whatsoever in being intolerant of those who show intolerance. In fact, tolerance of the actively intolerant is not only intellectually stultifying, but is practical complicity in the crimes of intolerance.⁸⁰⁵

Thus, citizens of North Carolina, for example, would be justified in vigorously protesting the actions of the legislature and Governor Pat McCrory as being fundamentally undemocratic. Over the next few years, we would all do well to increase our capacity for democratic communication with others, but we should likewise be attentive to instances in which democracy is being undermined and rail against them in order to prevent the dismantling of democracy in the U.S.

Along with this increase in democratic communication and mindfulness of threats to democracy, it seems clear that current identity politics should be revised. In their current practice, identity politics seem predicated on a too-easy reversal of the white supremacist paradigm (this was Morris Cohen's critique of Zionism as a philosophy). As Stuart Hall noted decades ago, "Once you enter the politics of the end of the essential black subject [...] you can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the

⁸⁰⁴ Trip Gabriel, "North Carolina G.O.P. Moves to Curb Power of New Democratic Governor," *New York Times*, December 14, 2016. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/14/us/politics/north-carolina-governor-roy-cooper-republicans.html>>

⁸⁰⁵ Sidney Hook, "The Philosophical Heritage of the Atlantic Democracies," in *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays*, eds. Robert Talisse & Robert Tempio (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 264.

place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject.”⁸⁰⁶ Our identity politics must be intersectional and pragmatist. Intersectionality enables identity politics to take into account differing particular groups (women, people of color, Jews, Muslims, the LGBT community, low-income people, etc.) and to consider how those groups are uniquely affected in society while pragmatism calls for a balance between consideration of particular groups and identification with the universal. The pragmatist identity politics espoused by Gertrude Stein and Anzia Yeziarska also acknowledged that our conception of identity as either essential or constructed is a false dichotomy. Our identity is neither wholly biologically determined, nor entirely socially constructed. There are real differences—biological and social—between groups, and we must recognize these differences and accept ourselves with dignity. This, Stein and Yeziarska believed, would lead to the understanding that all people possess dignity and should be allowed to pursue fulfillment. At the same time, because particular groups are bound together by their particular experiences and treatment in society, Malamud and Ozick demonstrate that we have a responsibility to our group and to ignore it is to betray our heritage. This means that while it is important to advocate for groups that we belong to, we should also pay attention to the struggles of other groups as well as maintaining focus on what policies would have positive or negative consequences for Americans *as a whole* (and not always just for our particular group). Balancing these competing interests is a difficult path to navigate, and we are sure to make mistakes along the way, but it is the path of greater unity and stronger democracy.

Like American democracy, pragmatism has grown and expanded as a theoretical lens and philosophy to encompass increasingly diverse voices. In truth, it has always been diverse; before

⁸⁰⁶ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” [1989] in *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996): 444.

Cornel West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989) identified W.E.B. Du Bois as part of the pragmatist lineage, however, there was little recognition of people of color as having contributed to the shaping of pragmatist philosophy. Similarly, prior to Charlene Haddock Seigfried's *Pragmatism and Feminism* (1996), there had been only scant acknowledgement of women (primarily Jane Addams and Gertrude Stein) as part of the American pragmatist tradition. These two volumes paved the way for the expansion of African American pragmatist scholarship and feminist pragmatist scholarship, respectively. Ross Posnock's *Color and Culture* (1998) emerged as the first book-length study of African American contributions to American intellectualism and pragmatism. *Color and Culture* has been followed by volumes that consider the relationship between pragmatism and the African American jazz tradition—Michael Magee's *Emancipating Pragmatism* (2004) and Walton Muyumba's *The Shadow and the Act* (2009)—as well as Eddie S. Glaude, Jr.'s book *In a Shade of Blue* (2007), which argues that Deweyan pragmatism has the potential to help “address many of the conceptual problems that plague contemporary African American political life.”⁸⁰⁷ Seigfried's *Pragmatism and Feminism* was the first of several scholarly considerations of women and pragmatism.⁸⁰⁸ In recent years, there has also been some study of pragmatism and queerness, including Kim Emery's book *The Lesbian Index: Pragmatism and Lesbian Subjectivity in the Twentieth-Century United States* (2002) and a handful of articles that treat pragmatism's relationship to queer identity and politics.⁸⁰⁹ Even

⁸⁰⁷ Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue*, x.

⁸⁰⁸ For other examples of pragmatist/feminist scholarship, see Lorraine Code, “Feminists and Pragmatists: A Radical Future?” *Radical Philosophy* 87 (1998): 22-30; Judy D. Whipps, “Jane Addams's Social Thought as a Model for a Pragmatist-Feminist Communitarianism,” *Hypatia* 19, no. 2 (2004): 118-133; Susan Dieleman, “Revisiting Rorty: Contributions to a Pragmatist Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 891-908; and Sean Epstein-Corbin, “Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Sentimental Subject,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 50, no. 2 (2014): 220-245.

⁸⁰⁹ See, for example, Bart Schultz, “Comment: The Private and Its Problems—Pragmatism, Pragmatist Feminism, and Homophobia,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 29, no. 2 (1999): 281-306; John Tessitore, “The ‘Sky-Blue’ Variety: William James, Walt Whitman, and the Limits of Healthy-Mindedness,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 62,

more recently, José-Antonio Orosco's *Topping the Melting Pot* (2016) offers an examination of pragmatist thought "explicitly through the lens of immigration."⁸¹⁰

Since pragmatism is a philosophy that stresses experimentation, evolution, and openness to change, these scholars of African American, feminist, and queer pragmatism have all performed a pragmatist gesture by testing and adapting the philosophy to their own or others' experience of the world. American pragmatism has been given new shape and new direction by having black, female, queer, and immigrant experience incorporated into the realm of its philosophy. Similarly, I hope that my own study will add to the enlargement of pragmatism as a theoretical lens by considering the relationship of Jewish American thinkers and writers to this philosophical tradition and their contributions to its development, particularly with respect to a pragmatist identity politics and Deweyan democracy.

In addition to expanding pragmatism by incorporating Jewish experience into it, my study also responds to Cornel West's charge that pragmatists have historically "downplay[ed] injustice, suffering, and impotence in the world and rest[ed] content with inaction or minimal resistance to evil"⁸¹¹ and contemporary critiques of pragmatism as inactive with respect to social justice. The scientists and philosophers I discuss in Chapter 1—Franz Boas, Morris Cohen, and Horace Kallen—all worked to illuminate the racism inherent in early twentieth century science and culture as a means of encouraging peaceful coexistence and cooperation between different races in the United States. In separate eras, philosophers Sidney Hook and Richard Bernstein issued public calls for the significance of the democratic method—open inquiry and the freedom

no. 4 (2008): 493-526; and Michael Fuerstein, "Democratic Experiments: An Affect-Based Interpretation and Defense," *Social Theory & Practice* 42, no. 4 (2016): 793-816.

⁸¹⁰ José-Antonio Orosco, *Topping the Melting Pot: Immigration and Multiculturalism in American Pragmatism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 4.

⁸¹¹ Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 24.

from dichotomous, Manichean thinking—in the wake of Communist suppression of science that did not support the Party and what Bernstein calls the post-9/11 abuse of evil in American political rhetoric. In Chapter 2, I explore how Gertrude Stein and Anzia Yeziarska employ a politics of feeling in their literary work to encourage identification with female characters of color and female immigrants that are likely different from the intended audience for these texts. Chapter 3 details the importance of Jewish identification with fellow Jews in the work of Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick, particularly in light of the Holocaust. In their stories, Malamud and Ozick never lose sight of the fact that a shared Jewish identity binds their characters to other Jews and that they have a responsibility to the particular even in an assimilated, diasporic environment. Finally, in Chapter 4, I discuss the Deweyan democratic visions of Malamud, Grace Paley, and Tony Kushner, all of whom champion in their work a more inclusive democratic community that incorporates diverse voices with respect to race, religion, and (in Kushner’s text) sexuality. These Jewish American pragmatist writers all share a concern with justice, politics, and democracy in the United States. They bring attention to injustice and suffering in their work and encourage responsible action and concern for the other as a result. Ultimately, like their African American pragmatist counterparts, Jewish pragmatists maintain a focus on social justice as central to democratic progress and should be considered part of the heritage of critical pragmatists like Du Bois, Locke, and Baldwin.

There is still more work for pragmatism to do in order to grow in new directions and incorporate more varied experiences. For example, there is more to be done in charting African American connections and contributions to pragmatism, particularly in considering the shift toward neo-pragmatism in the work of later twentieth and twenty-first century African American poets like Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka, Harryette Mullen, and Claudia Rankine. While

earlier African American pragmatists like Du Bois, Ellison, and Baldwin were concerned with American democracy in the vein of pragmatist John Dewey, these later writers focus on the limits of language and creating an African American vocabulary that is more in line with the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty. Another potentially fruitful area of study would be in Asian American literature, particularly the representation of identity in the work of writers like David Henry Hwang, Gish Jen, and Bharati Mukherjee, which seems to align with W.E.B. Du Bois's adherence to "a dialectic between (unraced) universal and (raced) particular."⁸¹² Like the identity politics of Du Bois and Alain Locke and the Jewish identity politics I identify and discuss in earlier chapters, these Asian American writers similarly appear to seek to achieve a balance between the universal and the particular in terms of their characters' identities.

In an increasingly polarized society where people regularly defame others who disagree with them in online forums (and even ruin people's private lives through doxxing) and where both election campaigns and now our day-to-day government are fueled by inflammatory and derogatory rhetoric, American pragmatism provides a philosophical grounding for considering the practical consequences of our public actions. Furthermore, pragmatist thinkers like Dewey, Ellison, Baldwin, Malamud, Paley, and Kushner advocate for greater inclusivity in our democracy, urging readers to an understanding of democracy as process. Their work points to democracy as an action that must be realized, open to continued growth and change rather than mired in old ways of thinking about ideas or doing what has 'always' been done. My research here considers pragmatism as it has been shaped and put to use by Jewish American writers. Far from being politically powerless as some critics have claimed, pragmatism is politically active when engaged by marginalized groups, which demonstrates the importance of both Jewish and

⁸¹² Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 13.

other multicultural writers to the continued development of historically white-centered theory.

This research has the potential to enlarge ways of considering theory as scholars continue to work toward expanding our understanding of the contributions to literature and literary theory of those on the margins of society and academia. It is my hope that this work will contribute to continuing conversations on pragmatist philosophy and that it will play a role in shaping research on considerations of both politics and multicultural American literature in the coming years.

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