

TORTURED ZIONISM:
MESSIANISM, AMBIVALENCE, AND ISRAEL IN POST-HOLOCAUST JEWISH
AMERICAN LITERATURE

BY

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*Tortured Zionism: Messianism, Ambivalence, and Israel in post-Holocaust Jewish
American literature*

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Introduction

On a July 21, 2014 episode of “The Daily Show,” during the height of the most recent Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Jewish American comedian Jon Stewart began a segment by stating with trepidation, “We need to talk about Israel.” At the mention of the tiny Middle Eastern country, seven of his cast mates popped out, throwing verbal assaults at Stewart’s supposed anti-Jewish and pro-Hamas stance. He then continued to talk about Gaza, when the same cast mates popped out again, spewing vitriolic remarks, including “Zionist pig.” The comical segment was meant to comment on both the intense and loaded media discourse surrounding the issue, and the criticism Stewart had earlier received for his views on Israel. The audience laughed as Stewart said, “Let’s move on to a more lighthearted topic: the Ukraine.”

Stewart’s hilarious bit touches on a compelling issue for Jewish American writers: the difficulty and complexity of addressing Israel and Zionism (especially regarding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the complex relationship between Israel and Jewish diasporic communities). In *Tortured Zionism: Messianism, Ambivalence, and Israel in post-Holocaust Jewish American literature*, I look at post- Holocaust Jewish American novelists who try to tackle Israel as a subject, despite and because of these difficulties. I explore narratives by Michael Chabon, Philip Roth, and Tova Reich, which span from the mid-1980s to 2013, to locate their engagement with Zionism. In varying ways, they align

with Zionism, but their Zionism is an ambivalent Zionism, or what I term tortured Zionism. I name it thus because when they delve into their Zionism, they struggle, present fear and trepidation, but ultimately project a Zionist stance. More specifically, I look at how Chabon, Roth, and Reich negotiate their tortured Zionism through messianism, or messianic allusions, themes and tropes, to ultimately present a complicated, nuanced, and ambivalent Zionist stance. Through their narratives' development of tortured Zionism, these writers contribute to what I believe is one of the most important issues in contemporary American Jewry, the cultural, religious, artistic, identifying, and ethnic relationship to Israel.

Chapter summaries

I begin with Michael Chabon and his use of the messianic figure in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000)¹ and *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007),² in my chapter entitled "The Messianic Figure in Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*: A Study of the Limitations of Art and Tortured Zionism." I argue that in both narratives, the messianic figure represents a longing for a post- Holocaust resolution that can manifest either in cathartic art (as in *Kavalier and Clay*), or in the utopic actualization of the Zionist dream (as in *Yiddish Policemen*), a counter-historical novel built on the premise that the Jews were defeated by the Arabs in the 1948 war. However, Chabon's messianic figures fail in their missions and Chabon infuses his narratives with a feeling of longing, and a painful desire for redemption that never actualizes. With both novels, I delineate how Chabon portrays the limitations of artistic creation to simultaneously address how Chabon's engagement with

¹ From here on, *Kavalier and Clay*.

² From here on, *Yiddish Policemen*.

the Holocaust and Israel is likewise limited; in *Kavalier and Clay*, I argue that Chabon utilizes the messianic figures of the Golem and the comic book character the Escapist to suggest that art cannot generate a full catharsis from Holocaust trauma. However, he asserts that the process of engaging the Holocaust through art is imperative nevertheless. My chapter on *Kavalier and Clay* differs from current discourse because while many scholars address Chabon's treatment of the Holocaust, the Golem, and comic books,³ they do not acknowledge the messianic component of that dynamic. Furthermore, I also highlight how Chabon does not even mention Israel in his narrative about the post-war years, which reveals to me a certain timidity when handling Jewish post-war issues, an idea reverberated in scholars' criticism of Chabon's engagement with the Holocaust.⁴

The second part of the chapter looks at *Yiddish Policemen's* messianic characters and Chabon's use of the counter-historical form to delineate his portrayal of jaded Zionism. Unlike in *Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon addresses Israel in the later novel. But by presenting Israel's counter-historical eradication (in the 1948 war), Chabon develops a

³ See Hillary Chute, who argues that Chabon's novel reveals how contemporary fiction is in dialogue with comic books. She also sees the Golem as Chabon's way of encountering history (282), as the Golem "registers on a formal level both the urgency of representing trauma and traumas' seeming unspeakability" (287). Nicola Morris delineates how the Golem represents power and powerlessness, suggesting that while the Golem helped save Joseph from the Nazis (when Joe hid in the Golem's coffin), the Golem was unable to save Prague Jewry. Derek Parker Royal studies the rise in comic book studies, which he views as a new discourse that recognizes how comic books reflect ethno-cultural issues. He points out that Chabon's novel is often cited in these studies as a way to legitimize scholars' critiques on comic books and culture ("Jewish Comics").

⁴ Alan Berger highlights Chabon's role as a third-generation Jewish American writer, and thus removed from the Holocaust. This distance is reflected in Chabon's work, as Berger criticizes *Kavalier and Clay* for its defunctive approach to the Holocaust through its use of mysticism rather than factual details. However, he admires Chabon for nurturing the Holocaust as a relevant subject in Jewish American literature and compellingly delineates how Chabon presents the promise of American opportunity as dependent on the repression of Holocaust trauma. Lee Behlman similarly argues that through the character of the Escapist (and the overall motif of escape artists) Chabon problematically advocates escape instead of adequately dealing with the legacy of the Holocaust. Other scholars who critique third-generation approaches to the Holocaust and who likewise delineate the indirectness of the writers' approaches, include John Podhoretz, who highlights that writers' use of metaphor for the Holocaust distance their work from the historical reality, and Anna Hunter looks at Chabon's Holmesian Holocaust novella *The Final Solution* (2004) to critique the use of fairy tale in third-generation Holocaust works.

theme of tortured Zionism in the narrative, where the promise of Israel is likewise diminished. Chabon also creates a messianic figure in his character Mendele, the excommunicated, gay, heroin-addicted son of the Verbover Rebbe. In his messianic potential, I argue that Mendele bears a striking resemblance to the actual messianic figure Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), former leader of the Hasidic Chabad movement. Critics have not addressed the parallel of Chabon's Mendele and Rabbi Schneerson. Rather, they primarily locate Chabon's counter-historical eradication of Israel and his use of Yiddish as indicators of the text's diasporism.⁵ I argue that his use of the fallen messianic figure concurrently represents a longing and hope for the Zionist dream that never comes to fruition. In the conclusion of the chapter, I delineate how Chabon's use of the detective genre works well to narrate the protagonist Landsman's tortured Zionism, a concept critics have not yet made. Instead, they view Chabon's use of detective fiction for various reasons that touch on diasporic anxiety but do not solidly situate it within a messianic fulcrum.⁶

Chapter 2, entitled "Philip Roth's circumcised conscience: Zionism and narrative in *The Counterlife*, *The Facts*, *Patrimony*, and *Operation Shylock*", explores Philip Roth's dizzying Israel-centered novels *The Counterlife: A Novel* (1986) and *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993), and his non-fictional memoirs *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1988) and *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991). In the novels, Roth presents

⁵ Amelia Glaser, Sarah Casteel, D.G. Meyers, and Ruth Wisse point to Chabon's appropriation of Yiddish as an indicator of Chabon's diasporist message, which they find troubling. Jennifer Glaser reads the Sitka Jews/Tinglit dynamic as a problematic way the Jews negotiate diasporic anxiety, despite what she sees as Chabon's valorization of diasporic ingenuity. Sarah Casteel delineates how Chabon values familial ties over geographic ones and thus presents a tacit condemnation of Zionism.

⁶ See Margaret Scanlan, who views Landsman's detective identity as a marker of powerlessness in a post 9/11 world, Daniel Anderson, who argues that Chabon conflates multiple genres (like the hard-boiled detective) to create a postmodernist ontological critique of geography and Jewish identification, and Bennet Kravitz, who sees Landsman's occupational search for justice as an efficient way to quell diasporic anxiety.

messianic movements to assert a stance of tortured Zionism, while concurrently criticizing ideological simplification (when engaging with Zionism); in *The Counterlife*, he portrays messianic Zionism, and in *Operation Shylock*, he presents the reverse messianic process, Diasporism. His two nonfictional works, which in typical Roth-like nuance, are consciously connected to the Israel novels, delineate how and why Roth's novels perpetuate an ambivalent Zionism that is rooted in paternal lineage and the conflation of familial/individual concerns with collective/Zionist imperatives.

I argue that by merging history with fiction as well as utilizing postmodern devices like counternarratives (where one scenario is played out in divergent ways) and doubling (with the character Philip Roth's imposter Moishe Pipik), Roth highlights that the Jewish American relationship to Israel must be embraced, but approached with honesty and contradiction. Furthermore, I trace how Roth develops a circumcision motif throughout the Israel-centered novels that represents his writer-protagonists Nathan Zuckerman and Philip Roth's progressive prioritization of the welfare of the Jewish collective over the individual concerns of the writer. In *The Counterlife*, Nathan vows to circumcise his unborn son, and in *Operation Shylock*, Philip excises the last chapter of his book in an act that I refer to as textual circumcision,⁷ a move that indicates Philip's self-censorship for the sake of Israeli security and finalizes Roth's alignment with Zionism and the Jewish collective. I also delineate how the nonfictional *The Facts* and *Patrimony* contribute to the progression towards Jewish collectivity in the way Roth concurrently critiques the ethics of writing and presents the importance of paternal legacy (which, in the Israel-centered books, is ritualized through circumcision). I build off of the copious criticism dedicated to Roth to reveal how the series that I am looking at presents a new

⁷ See also Emily Budick, who also refers to Philip's self-censorship as textual circumcision.

development in Roth's relationship with the Jewish collective, a major theme throughout his oeuvre.⁸ Unlike other critics who see Roth's engagement with Jewish identity and Israel as open-ended and ambiguous,⁹ I argue that the four-book series reveals that, for Roth, Jewish identity is aligned with Zionism, be it a tortured Zionism. My analysis differs from those of other scholars because I delineate how Roth's commentary on the ethics of writing, Zionism and Jewish identity conflate to reveal that Roth, who is notorious for ambiguity and prioritizing literary integrity over the Jewish collective, develops a stance of tortured Zionism that is valued more than the literary concerns of the novelist.¹⁰

The final chapter, "The Maternal and the Messianic Extreme: Tova Reich and Failed Feminist Revisions", explores the Israel novels of the lesser-known Tova Reich. In her *Master of the Return* (1988), *The Jewish War* (1995), and *One Hundred Philistine Foreskins* (2013),¹¹ Reich fills her narratives with characters that are messianic extremists wreaking havoc in Israel. By portraying fanatics, Reich develops a feminist critique on Zionism that does not question the Zionist imperative but does present an ominous

⁸ See Alan Cooper for a study on Roth's relationship with his Jewish audience and how that dynamic inspires and presents itself in Roth's fiction.

⁹ Derek Parker Royal sees *The Counterlife* as a negotiation of ethnic identity that fosters the notion that ambiguity "lies at the heart of writing about one's identity" and is an "ongoing process" (441). In another article, Royal argues that, in *Operation Shylock*, Roth presents Jewish identification as a nullified absence. To Royal, Roth has moved from the ethnic marker of the circumcised penis (in *The Counterlife*) to an anatomical indicator of absence (the belly button, as symbolized in Pipik, which translates as bellybutton). Royal argues that this ethnic absence is not a nihilistic claim but a postmodernist embrace of a fluid and dynamic Jewish identification. Ranen Omer-Sherman, on the other hand, sees both Israel-centered works as Roth's inability to find any type of solid Jewish identification in an era where both diasporic Judaism and Zionism are lacking. Debra Shostack looks at *Operation Shylock's* use of contradiction and identity performativity to highlight Roth's perception of the textuality of Jewishness and the irreducibility of the Jewish self.

¹⁰ Many scholars, including Harold Bloom, Elaine Kauver, and David Gooblar, group the nonfictional works with *Operation Shylock* or *The Counterlife*. But they do not group both Israel novels with the non-fictional groups. Bloom, however, groups the latter three together with *Deception* (1990) and suggests that *The Counterlife* serves as a precursor to the non-fictional works. Furthermore, despite the similarities in the groupings, most critics emphasize Roth's critique on writing but not how that critique relates to his portrayal of Zionism.

¹¹ From here on, *Philistine Foreskins*

perspective on the patriarchal roots of Zionism and an exploration of the dangers of extremists whose excesses exploit and corrupt Zionism. While less ambivalently Zionist than the other texts, Reich's novels present a tortured Zionism as well because they present a genuine fear for Israel's future if the current gendered and political dynamics remain status quo.

More specifically, I delineate where Reich makes a second-wave feminist critique on the patriarchal origins of Zionism and Judaism. Utilizing contemporary maternal studies,¹² and Israeli and Jewish feminist critiques,¹³ I delineate Reich's portrayal of female powerlessness and disembodiment. I also look at Reich's use of the Akedah (sacrifice) motif to explore how she presents the disastrous consequences when the maternal collides with the messianic extreme. While not much scholarly attention has focused on Reich, I build on Andrew Furman and Axel Stahler's gendered critiques to reveal how Reich is presenting Zionism's issues within the fulcrum of messianic extremism. Furman and Stahler suggest that Reich presents moments of female empowerment which counter the patriarchy that the female characters suffer under, but they do not relate the patriarchal oppression to a larger and specific understanding of Zionism. I, however, delineate how Reich is both making a pointed critique of Zionism and revealing the limitations of those fleeting moments of female empowerment. In her most recent work, *Philistine Foreskins*, Reich presents a female messianic figure in Ima

¹² I build off of Adrienne Rich's seminal *Of Woman Born* (1976) and contemporary scholarship by Andrea O'Reilly and Lynne Hallstein, who delineate, like Rich, between the patriarchal construct of motherhood and the act of empowered mothering. While Rich does not define empowered mothering contemporary critics are trying to locate it and advocate its study in feminist discourse.

¹³ For Jewish American feminism, I look most notably at Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again at Sinai* (1990), which tries to redefine Judaism on feminist terms and the eradication of chosenness and hierarchy. I also utilize the work of Alicia Ostriker that interprets the Torah from a female voice. For Israeli feminist discourse, I work with Tamar Mayer, Marsha Freeman, and Esther Fuchs, who analyze the masculinity inherent in Zionist discourse and Israel's relationship with Judaism.

Temima, who ultimately fails to bring redemption. I explore how Temima's messianic potential reveals that she is initially presented to be the feminist eradicator of the problematic patriarchy presented in all three novels. But her messianic failure likewise reveals the limitations of her feminist movement, which suggests, I argue, that Reich is tacitly advocating a more radicalized solution to patriarchy in Israel and Judaism. This solution is laid out in Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again at Sinai* (1991) and calls for a complete overhaul of Jewish practice that eliminates hierarchy and a sense of chosenness. As such, my last chapter concludes that Reich is concurrently presenting an ominous foreboding for Israel if it does not both eradicate its patriarchal structures and quell extremists, and offering a tacit feminist solution for those issues.

Methodology

As Jon Stewart is well aware, when engaging with the subject of Israel it is imperative to define terms, which I define based on scholarly discourse devoted to Middle Eastern¹⁴, Judaic,¹⁵ and post-colonial studies,¹⁶ but which invariably are affected by my own upbringing as a Jewish American raised in a Zionist home. As such, my bias is Zionist, but I am not writing about my own Zionism, which too suffers when I see both Israeli and Palestinian violence. I am locating the tortured Zionism of Chabon, Roth and Reich, writers whom I respect for their literary prowess but also for the fact that they are

¹⁴ In addition to the various Israeli feminist writers, including Fuchs, Freeman, Mayer, and Pnina Motzfaï Haller, who looks at the disenfranchisement of Mizrahim in Israel, I also utilize post-Zionist critics like Benny Morris, who deconstruct perpetuated Zionist propaganda for the betterment of Israel, and Caryn and Aviv Schneer, who deconstruct Zionist ideology and myths, like the centrality of Israel vs. diasporic Judaism to advocate for a global Judaism (Schneer).

¹⁵ I unearth various biblical and rabbinic allusions in the novels that are largely based on talmudic and biblical sources, such as the biblical Akedah (or sacrifice of Isaac) (Genesis 22), the kabbalistic concept of the Lamed vav Tzadikim (Zohar 53), appropriations of biblical phrases as "We will do and we will follow" (Exodus 24:7), and the talmudic idea that the Jewish Messiah will be born on the 9th of Av (TJ.Ber 2:4).

¹⁶ For example, I utilize Brent Hayes Edwards' notion of the international/cultural exchange in the diaspora, which he devotes to black internationalism, to apply it to the Jewish American dynamic with Israel.

engaging with the topic of Zionism, a feat not to be taken for granted and that solidly situates them as pioneers in Jewish American literary history. In my project, I trace these writers' reactions to and concerns over Zionism, a concept defined by Israel's right to exist in its current state (as a Jewish sovereign nation in Israel). More specifically, *Tortured Zionism* builds on Caryn Aviv and David Shneer's definition: "Zionism [is] the nationalist movement to establish Jewish political independence" (352). While that definition alone is a given to some, it is inciting to others. In fact, as I wrote *Tortured Zionism* over this past summer, during the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, I could not help but be reaffirmed of the relevancy of my project, as American Jews openly debated their views on Israeli policy and Zionism, and tacitly defined the Jewish American relationship to Israel; the heated discourse (amongst American Jewry) certainly mirrored the ambivalent Zionism of the writers whom I highlight, and empowered me to probe further into my project and my own perspectives on Israel.

Post-Zionism

My analysis is influenced by post-Zionist discourse, which critiques Zionist discourse, ideology, and policies to dislodge and dismantle its shortcomings and inconsistencies but is not meant to debunk the Zionist project (Silverstein 5). Post-Zionism manifests in two ways in *Tortured Zionism*. First, I delineate how the authors engage Zionism with a post-Zionist lens. Second, I utilize post-Zionist hermeneutics and discourse in my analysis. Of the writers in *Tortured Zionism*, Reich most obviously builds her narrative on post-Zionist discourse, as she presents a feminist perspective on Zionism and extremism. I apply post-Zionist gender studies to delineate how and why she

is locating her feminist critique in her portrayal of extremists.¹⁷ In his Israel novels, Roth takes on post-Zionist hermeneutics by criticizing the ideological simplicity of Zionist propaganda. Utilizing a post-Zionist lens, I explore how Roth's criticism focuses on the problems of ideological Zionist and anti-Zionist propaganda to unearth his complex and nuanced critique of Zionism. While less overt, Chabon reveals a post-Zionist perspective in his willingness to explore the disappointments of Zionism. When looking at his narrative, I build on post-Zionist discourse that dismantles the homeland/diaspora binary,¹⁸ to assert the symbiotic nature of both for the Jewish American imagination.

By unearthing and engaging post-Zionist hermeneutics in my discussion, I am situating my project at the forefront of Israeli and Jewish American approaches to Israel. Furthermore, I utilize post-Zionist discourse that also borrows from post-colonial studies, like Brent Hayes Edwards' work, to engage with how the authors in *Tortured Zionism* represent the Jewish diasporic/Israel binary. Post-Zionist scholars are now dismantling the centrality of Israel (and the Homeland) in the Israel/diaspora binary,¹⁹ and even advocating for a diasporist conception of Jewishness that rejects Israel's primacy and views the diaspora/diasporic experience as authentic Jewishness. I build on this discourse, but I do so to delineate how these Jewish American writers are asserting a Zionist stance, but one that is ambivalent, thoughtful, and productive.

Furthermore, my affirmation of Chabon, Roth, and Reich's Zionist stance, be it a tortured Zionist stance, sets my project apart from the small amount of American critics

¹⁷ See for example Hanna Herzog's study on the effects of the Israeli military and Israeli security concerns on both Palestinian and Israeli women, or Nira Yuval Davis' gendered study on Zionism and rabbinic authority in Israel.

¹⁸ Advocating diasporism, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin see Zionism as antithetical to rabbinic Judaism and Judith Butler believes Zionism and its policies will dismantle the notion of Jewish justice.

¹⁹ See the Boyarins and Butlers.

who are engaging with Jewish American literature on Israel and who overwhelmingly read these Jewish American texts as a promotion of diasporism. When scholars engage with the authors that I am studying, they primarily define their works as diasporist or open-ended, but rarely Zionist. With Chabon and Roth for example, scholars like Ranen Omer Sherman, Ella Shohat, and Jennifer Glazer recognize in the novels' ambivalence towards Zionism a rupture in the Israel/Jewish American dynamic. I, in contrast, see that the novels' present a painful attachment to Zionism. Scholars recognize an unstable, post-modernist display of Jewish American identity but not one that aligns with Zionism and while they locate Roth and Chabon's engagement with Zionism they do not read the authors' loyalty to it. I, on the other hand, delineate how Chabon and Roth's presentation of Israel is constructively rife with ambivalence but concomitantly, steadfastly Zionist. All the writers I discuss look at the Jewish American exchange with Zionism as complicated and difficult, but in no way do they renege or abdicate that connection. This steadfastness is vital to underscore, considering Israel's place in world media attention, and the current rise in global anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.

Messianism

Messianism is a constructive conduit to negotiate tortured Zionism, as the Judaic concept of the Messiah invokes a long-awaited salvation and redemption, which manifests geographically as a return to Zion, the land of Israel, and to some messianic Zionists, modern-day Israel. Other Jewish American writers have explored Israel. But by situating their Zionist critique within the fulcrum of messianism, Chabon, Roth, and Reich highlight the intensity of emotion, intellectual speculation, and spiritual yearning that Israel evokes for Jewish Americans. As such, their novels are rife with emotional

energy: Chabon's jaded yearning, Roth's nervous anxiety, and Reich's ominous foreboding bolster the contemporary relevancy of their novels, as Israel remains situated at the forefront of a heated international conversation, and as American Jewry contribute to that discourse with impassioned and dissenting voices. By negotiating their tortured Zionism through messianism, these writers echo what is apparent in contemporary Jewish American conversations, and emphasize that Israel is integral to Jewish American identity.

In many ways, Jewish messianism creates a cultural bridge between the *Galut* (exile and post-exilic existence) and the *Geulah* (homeland or redemption.) This differentiation between Galut and Geulah is a fundamental component of Judaism, especially since rabbinic Judaism, which determined modern Jewish law and ritual, essentially began when the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed and when the Jewish people were exiled from Israel. Jewish liturgical, ritualistic, cultural, and spiritual concepts are thus deeply rooted in the concept of exile. But it is an exile that always looks towards Jerusalem, with the central hope of returning to Israel. As such, that return is a manifestation of redemption. Describing the emotional and imaginative pull Israel has historically had on diasporic Jews, Caryn Aviv and David Shneer write: "For Jews, Israel evokes particularly resonant, complicated meanings of home. Centuries of migration, history, politics, culture, and religious yearning have layered upon Israel multiple and conflicting meanings of home and homeland" (352).

For much of Jewish history, Israel was situated as the center of the Jewish imagination, and the diaspora, situated at the periphery, was defined in negative terms. In an attempt to dismantle that traditional binary, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin advocate for

a diasporist Judaism, and Aviv and Shneer redefine the homeland/diaspora binary as “global Judaism,” where Jews are at home anywhere they reside. But it is important to note that this concept of exile and homeland is also rooted in Judaic ideas of messianism, which reiterates the appropriateness of authors utilizing messianism to engage with Zionism and Israel’s relationship to Jewish American identification, and recognizes that in Judaic discourse, salvation can manifest in political and historical ways.

I base my understanding of messianism on Gershom Scholem’s canonical writings on Jewish messianism, which are rooted in rabbinic and biblical exegesis. In his seminal work *Toward an Understanding of The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (1971), Scholem describes the complexity of the Jewish concept of the Messiah, delineating how early biblical, messianic references were obtuse at best but became the foundation for a multitude of interpretations that built on each other,²⁰ generating a rich discourse in rabbinic, kabbalistic, and Hasidic messianic concepts.²¹ In a sense, because the Jewish idea of the Messiah is not borne by one particular source but rather engendered from a multitude of interpretations spanning thousands of years, the Jewish Messiah is one that can always occur (in its inchoate definitional borders) and one that can never occur (for the same reason). Scholem writes, “The arrival of the Messiah himself is tied to the impossible, or at any rate highly paradoxical, conditions...the conditions for the redemption, the most surprising and at the same time the most impossible!” (34). The writers in *Tortured Zionism* tap into this indefiniteness, manipulating it to strengthen their

²⁰ See Isaiah 2, 11, 42; 59:20, Jeremiah 23, 30, 33; 48:47; 49:39, Ezekiel 38:16, Hosea 3:4-3:5, Micah 4, Zechariah 14:9 and Daniel 10:14.

²¹ There is an ample amount on works that build on the kabbalah’s description of the Messiah, which are, of course, derived from biblical sources. But the main kabbalistic text that discusses the messiah is the Zohar, which was written by Rabbi Shemeon Bar Yocahi in the 2nd century or Moshe De Leon in the 13th century). See in the Zohar most notably section II.9A-B. Of the hasidic messianic texts, see, for example, *Likutei Dibburim*, Simchat Torah 5690, #30 [p. 618ff], which is Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak’s 20th century interpretation of the Baal Shem Tov’s 18th century letter about the Messiah.

critique of Zionism and Jewish American identity, as Scholem's description of Jewish messianism's "paradoxical conditions" mirrors the narratives' ambivalently tortured Zionist stance.

Despite the inchoateness of the Jewish messianic concept, Scholem categorizes Jewish messianism into three strains: 1) the apocalyptic, 2) the restorative and 3) the utopian, which have overlapped each other and waxed and waned throughout history. It is a categorization important in understanding modern-day Zionism, since Zionism is intimately tied to messianism, partially due to the conflation of these three strains. According to Scholem, the Jewish hope for the Messiah manifests as a restorative desire (to return Jews to a more ideal time, place and relationship to God) and a utopian impulse, because it is pointed to a perfected existence or even a perfected version of the past. He also delineates the apocalyptic strain, which locates redemption after a period of severe upheaval and traumatic change. The blurring of these categories is important when approaching *Tortured Zionism*, because the post-Holocaust period encapsulates the conflation of the three messianic strains that Scholem discusses. (For example, in the immediate years after the Holocaust, with the rise of Jewish nationalism, Jewish messianic discourse emphasized the restorative strain.) Consider the period from a messianic perspective: as the Holocaust was the worst Jewish catastrophe in the 20th century and, more importantly for Scholem, represented a major upheaval in world Jewry, its place in the messianic schema lends it an apocalyptic quality. When looked at in tandem with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, a mere three years after World War II and almost two thousand years after Jewish sovereignty in Israel was lost, the Holocaust was the apocalyptic marker for a restorative epoch in Israel. Furthermore,

the establishment of Israel also indicates a utopian era, since rabbinic and biblical literature describe the return to Zion as a manifestation of the ultimate divine redemption.²² As such, Jewish messianism is intimately related to Zionism (though Scholem asserts that Zionism is not meant to be a manifestation of messianism but is often interpreted as such by messianic Zionists).²³

Scholem emphasizes how messianism has traditionally been tied to Jewish history, particularly to episodes of upheaval, and explains: “The magnitude of the Messianic idea corresponds to the endless powerlessness in Jewish history during all the centuries of exile, when it was unprepared to come forward onto the plane of world history” (35). To Scholem, because Jews have suffered without reaping the overt redemption of the Messiah, and because any attempt to “realize it tears open the abysses which lead each of its manifestations ad absurdum,” the hope in the Messiah is compelling. And yet, while that hope can empower existence there is “also something profoundly unreal about it” (35). Scholem argues that Zionism was a proactive reaction to the fear that the Messiah would never materialize, as Zionism tries to tangibly actualize a restorative or utopian hope (in a geographic locale). Furthermore, Zionism, as a tangible messianic manifestation, occurs collectively (in a nation) as opposed to individually (which was, for example, an idea perpetuated in Hasidic, messianic discourse) and is humanly decreed. Scholem writes, “Little wonder that overtones of Messianism have accompanied the modern Jewish readiness for irrevocable action in the concrete realm, when it set out on the utopian return to Zion” (35). After reaffirming the intimacy between Jewish historical events, like the Holocaust, with the concept of redemption (that

²² See, for example, Devarim 30:3-5.

²³ See Joseph Dan for an analysis of Scholem’s major themes.

modern Zionism is particularly hinged upon),²⁴ Scholem poses a question that goes to the heart of my dissertation:

Whether or not Jewish history will be able to endure this entry into the concrete realm [Israel as redemption] without perishing in the crisis of the Messianic claim which has virtually been conjured up—that is the question which out of this great and dangerous past the Jew of this age poses to his present and to his future (36).

In each of their narratives, the novelists in *Tortured Zionism* engage with the quandary Scholem poses: whether the insertion of messianic hope into Zionism is sustainable, viable, and productive. Exploring Scholem's concept, Chabon, Roth, and Reich utilize messianism to express their trepidation over the successes, failures, and future of Israel.²⁵ Through the predicament of the Sitka Jews facing Reversion and exile, Chabon asserts the lingering desire for the actualization of Zionism's utopic, redemptive promise in the face of problematic realities - like Holocaust-caused displacement, Israel's relationship with the Arabs, and Jewish diasporic vulnerability.²⁶ Roth builds a growing solidarity to

²⁴ Scholem writes, "Born out of the horror and destruction that was Jewish history in our generation [the Holocaust], [the readiness to be bound to concrete history] is bound to history and not to meta-history; it has not totally given itself up to Messianism" (36).

²⁵ In the novels, the writers also utilize specific messianic allusions that are sourced in different rabbinic messianic ideas. For example, Chabon references biblical ideas about the heralding of the Messiah that include restitution of the Jewish holy temple in Jerusalem and Jewish sovereignty in Israel. He mentions the prophet Elijah and the parah adumah (or red heifer) used for sacrifice. He also alludes to the historical Menachem Mendel Schneerson, leader of the Chabad movement, whose followers believed he was the Messiah. Reich similarly utilizes multiple biblical and historical messianic references, including Rebbe Nachman of Breslav and the Temple Mount.

²⁶ While I locate the narratives' various messianic allusions, I also acknowledge the disparate ways that the authors view the diasporic experience. As such, I accordingly identify their respective notions of the diaspora and alternate the way I name the Jewish American experience. At times I locate the Jewish American experience in the diaspora and at times I identify it as the Galut, which translates as diaspora but also relates to spiritual and historical states: in the Jewish binary of homeland/exile, or Geulah (redemption)/Galut, the Galut not only signifies not physically being in Israel but also refers to a state of being that is pervasive with danger, vulnerability, disenfranchisement, and spiritual pain. Mostly, I reference the diasporic experience as the Galut when discussing Chabon's *Yiddish Policemen*, because in the novel, Chabon presents a dismal and dangerous situation for the Sitka Jews that is primarily due to the fact that they do not have a homeland and have been exiled from Israel.

Jewish collectivity (and a loyalty to Zionism) in the span of four books to suggest that his connection to Zionism is paternally driven but that it can only remain relevant when American Jews honestly critique Israel, even if it is painful to do so. As such, Roth takes the messianic hope (as a singular translation of redemption), applies it to Zionism, and subverts it by criticizing its ideological simplicity. Reich most pointedly echoes Scholem's question, as her narratives forewarn of the dangerous dynamic when messianic extremism exploits Zionism. She directly addresses the potentially menacing qualities of messianism that Scholem mentions by portraying the dangers of messianic extremists when they translate Zionism and Judaism into fanatical excess, consequentially threatening the future of Israel and the Jewish family.

Whether through Chabon's messianic failures, Roth's rationalist rejections of messianic ideological simplicity, or Reich's pointed criticism of messianic extremism, messianic hermeneutics are a constructive way to approach Jewish American relationships with Israel in the post-war period. By utilizing a messianic lens for post-Holocaust novels, I highlight that the post-Holocaust period represents the major players in the messianic framework (homeland, catastrophic upheaval, and diasporic longing) and underscore the intensity of hope, disappoint and importance that the wait for and arrival associated with messianism creates. My argument emphasizes that messianism is a fitting medium for a discussion of Zionism in a post-Holocaust world that critics have yet to acknowledge.

Messianic hermeneutics

My project further builds on literary scholarship that engages with messianism in Jewish American literature, including Barbara Gitenstein, who looks at the recent

resurgence of Jewish American texts that explore mystical and messianic figures and tropes.²⁷ For example, the Golem figure has appeared in a multitude of Jewish American works, including those by Chabon, Cynthia Ozick,²⁸ and Helene Wecker.²⁹ Scholars argue that this resurgence of mystical figures mirrors a larger Jewish American interest in re-exploring Jewish roots and traditions in the post-assimilationist age. The rise in Yiddish studies is also a manifestation of this trend.³⁰ But most scholars that look at these works do not recognize the sociopolitical role the messianic and mystical figures play in the texts and many writers do not acknowledge the political nature of their fiction, whether out of fear of alienating readership or because the authors themselves may not intend for a political reading.³¹ My dissertation locates the politics of these tropes to explore how these writers use them as a negotiating tool for their own tortured Zionism, which may not be politically motivated but which, because of its subject, possesses a political component nevertheless.

The Holocaust

²⁷ Among others, see Nathan Englander's gilgul in *The Relief of Unbearable Urges* (1999), Aryeh Lev Stollman's false messiah Shabtai Zevi and the Shekinah in *The Dialogues of Time and Entropy* (2003), and Steve Stern's multiple mystical figures in *Lazar Malkin Enters Heaven* (1987) and *The Frozen Rabbi* (2005). Many writers have been utilizing Rebbe Nachman of Breslav, who was a Hasidic Rebbe in the 19th century and has become a messianic figure in their works, including Pearl Abraham's *The Seventh Beggar* (2005) and Curt Levinas' *The Man Who Thought He Was the Messiah: A Novel* (1990).

²⁸ See *The Puttermessaer Papers: A Novel* (1997). Presenting a feminist interpretation of the Golem tale, Ozick's Golem is a female and sexually assertive.

²⁹ See *The Golem and the Jinni* (2013). Wecker adapts immigrant fiction by utilizing mystical figures like the Golem and the Jinni (for a character of Arab descent).

³⁰ See most notably David Roskies who writes about the infiltration of Yiddish and Yiddish in contemporary culture. He also advocates the study of Yiddish culture and literature as way to help formulate an authentic Jewish self.

³¹ For example, in a recent interview in *Bomb* magazine, Aryeh Lev Stollman discusses his story "Dialogues of Time and Entropy" which describes the Shekinah, Shabtai Zevi and Israel. In one scene, Jewish settlers are forced to move out of a settlement, a similar scene also depicted by Reich in *The Jewish War*. The Israelis uproot the newly planted trees before they leave. But when asked about the political implications of the scene, Stollman responds, "I didn't intend it to be political." But of course, it is political.

While Jewish writers are revisiting Jewish mysticism in their works, Scholem similarly identifies the importance of the Jewish past in contemporary conceptions of messianism; he ponders over how the Jewish messianic impulse manifests in modern Zionism, asserting that Jewish messianism relates to concrete Jewish history and circumstance. It is not surprising then that the Holocaust would play such a vital role in Zionist discourse and the formation of the State of Israel.³² I delineate how the authors present the Holocaust in their fiction as a player in the triangular relationship between Israel, the Holocaust, and Jewish American imagination.³³

Chabon and Roth centrally situate the Holocaust in their critiques. Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*, for example, relays the story of Jewish Holocaust refugee Joseph Kavalier, whose family all perished in Europe, and his journey to American success in the comic book industry.³⁴ While the novel critiques the Jewish American writer's responsibility towards art about the Holocaust, it does not even mention Israel or specifically describe the disastrous situation in Europe, a glaring problem in the novel, which I discuss in my first chapter. However, in *Yiddish Policemen*, Chabon solidly

³²See Yehuda Bauer's studies on Jewish American involvement in the Zionist imperative. See Alan Dowty on the role the Holocaust played in Zionist ethos. See Ronit Lentin for a gendered perspective. She delineates how the Shoah and the narrative of victimization in the Holocaust was feminized. This feminization then encouraged the new Hebrew, masculine and subjective, and problematically perpetuates a narrative where occupation of Palestinians is justified. See also Yonat Klar, Yechiel Kalr, and Noa Shuri Eyal for a discussion of how the legacy of the Holocaust for Israelis has changed. They argue that while the Holocaust in the 1950s and 1960s was related to un-Israeliness, now the Israeli relationship with the Holocaust is more complex, verbose, and contradictory. See David Wyman's anthology, which presents various international responses to the Holocaust vis-à-vis Israel.

³³ This dynamic most obviously plays out in social rituals like the two-week trip "March of the Living," where Jewish American teenagers travel to Poland for a week and visit various concentration camps. On the second week, the teenagers travel to Israel and tour the country. Also, many Jewish day schools observe the Israeli national holidays Yom Hashoh (Holocaust Remembrance Day), Yom Hazikaron (day of remembrance for fallen soldiers) and Yom Haatzmaut (Israeli Independence Day.) The Israeli calendar highlights the intimacy between the Holocaust and Zionism, as Yom Hashoah is a week before Yom Hazikaron. Yom Haatzmut directly follows Yom Hazikaron, which suggests that Israel owes its independence to its fallen soldiers and that Israeli independence is a natural consequence of the Holocaust.

³⁴ Chabon's novella *The Final Solution* also explores the topic of the Holocaust without giving any account of the Holocaust. In that vein, it is similar to *Kavalier and Clay* and *Yiddish Policemen*.

creates a triangular relationship between the Holocaust, the Zionist dream, and diasporic Jewry, by centering the plot on a counter-historical premise. Chabon references the following historical episode: in 1939, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes proposed designating parts of Alaska as an asylum for Jewish European refugees. But the plan was rejected in Congress. Chabon plays on that proposition, and counter-historically relays that the bill was passed, granting the Jewish refugees asylum in Sitka, Alaska for 60 years. In Chabon's narrative, thousands of Jews fled Europe to Sitka, lowering the Holocaust's Jewish death toll to two million (as opposed to the actual six million). The counter-history also depicts how the Jews lost Israel to the Arabs in the 1948 war and were banished from the land. Chabon begins his narrative when the 60-year Sitka asylum period is drawing to a close and the Sitka Jews will once again be homeless. Through his use of counter-history, Chabon creates a world that not only addresses the effects of the Holocaust but also echoes the Holocaust's bleakness.

Roth interweaves the legacy of the Holocaust throughout his novels, by including historical characters that were involved in the Holocaust, such as John Demjanjuk, accused of being Ivan the Terrible, and Aharon Appelfeld, a Holocaust survivor and canonical Israeli writer. But he also creates a discussion about the intimacy between the message and legacy of the Holocaust and the Zionist imperative (for Israel and for American Jews). With fictional characters like the American Jimmy Ben Joseph, who writes a manifesto, "Israel without the Holocaust," and Philip's Israeli cousin Apter, a Holocaust survivor traumatized by his experiences in the war, Roth critiques how Holocaust remembrance plays into Zionism and also relates contemporary anti-Semitism to the Holocaust, concurrently reifying Zionism. So while Chabon only alludes to the

magnitude of the Holocaust's devastation in his narratives, Roth zeroes in on the lasting effects of that devastation on world Jewry.

Of all the writers, Reich most minimally discusses the Holocaust, which might be due to the fact that her 2007 novel *My Holocaust* satirically critiques the commercialization of the Holocaust. Or perhaps she is intentionally distancing the legacy of the Holocaust from contemporary Zionist imperatives.

By critiquing the Holocaust's role in Jewish American identity, the writers in *Tortured Zionism* represent a current trend in Jewish American literature that similarly addresses Jewish American relationships to the Holocaust, a phenomenon progressively growing since the 1970s. True to Roth's intuition regarding Jewish American issues, Roth's career approach to the Holocaust is emblematic of the general Jewish American literary engagement with the Holocaust, but precedes it by a few years. For example, in his Israel books Roth continues with a discussion on the Holocaust that he had started in his earlier novels: In *the Ghost Writer* (1979), Roth's Nathan fantasizes that he's dating Anne Frank, who is actually alive and living under an alias, and in *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), Nathan's dying mother, who is a first-generation American, scrawls one of her last words on a piece of paper; it reads "Holocaust." In both literary instances Roth critiques the paramount role the Holocaust has in the Jewish American imagination. But Roth did not always engage with the Holocaust so egregiously, mirroring the taciturn perspective most Jewish American writers possessed shortly after the war (Budick 203). In the post-war years spanning the 1940s-60's, Jewish American writers barely touched the Holocaust in overt terms. However, as Morris Dickstein explains, "those horrors cast their shadow on every page" (61) nevertheless. Jewish American writers engaged with the

Holocaust's devastation by representing it as individualized tribulations of profound loss and suffering, (Brauner 9) and/or depicting supernatural presences that cause or justify tremendous suffering. Dickstein also delineates how the Jewish figure in Jewish American literature became an individualized symbol of universal suffering, rather than a representative of a tragedy belonging to a specific and collective ethnic group. As such, Jewish American approaches to the Holocaust were situated in the modernist movement. David Brauner argues the Holocaust was a hidden wound, shrouded in darkness and suffered in silence, felt everywhere but confronted virtually nowhere (Brauner 9). In a sense, Jewish American writers, notably Roth, Bernard Malamud, and Saul Bellow, indirectly approached the Holocaust under veils of individual suffering and loss. For example, Malamud's story "The Mourners" (1955) and its depiction of the inundation of loss and endless mourning is such a manifestation, while Roth's short story "Eli the Fanatic" (1959) represents Jewish Americans' reluctance to engage with the significance of the Holocaust and their disavowal of the magnitude of its devastation.

In a sense, Jewish American writers were apprehensive about approaching the Holocaust and representing it through a collective lens, which would bring attention to their own Jewish ethnicity, a feature they were nervous about highlighting considering the Holocaust's recent devastation, the presence of anti-Semitism in America, and, as Peter Novick argues, the potential accusations that World War II was fought for the Jews. The magnitude of loss in the Holocaust was also no doubt a deterrent for Jewish American authors. And since they had not experienced the war, writing directly about the Holocaust could feel sacrilegious.

During the 1950s and 1960s, only a smattering of Holocaust novels were published, mostly in the form of survivor accounts like Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960). However, in the 1970s and 1980s, as television and film began to take on the Holocaust as a subject, most famously in the "Holocaust" miniseries, Jewish American writers were empowered by the Holocaust's increased accessibility and began to explore the subject.³⁵

In 1980, Art Spiegelman published *Maus I*, a graphic novel that relays his father's experiences in the Holocaust, and drastically altered Jewish American literary treatment of the Holocaust. As *Maus* is a Holocaust narrative in comic book form, depicting Jews as mice and Nazis as cats, it opened a new space for Jewish American writers to engage with the Holocaust in creative, seemingly irreverent, and ingenious ways that also diverged from the modernist and realist traditions of Malamud and Bellow.

Spiegelman's 2nd generation graphic novel was the harbinger for the ways third generation Jewish American writers, like Jonathan Safran Foer, and Nathan Englander,³⁶ have begun to explore the Holocaust, often utilizing mystical themes and tropes, metaphor, magical realism,³⁷ and humor; it is a trend that critics have been picking up on.

³⁵ In fact, the devastation incurred on Jews during the war was described amorously up until the 1970's when it was eventually referred to as the Holocaust. Peter Novick delineates how "in the 1970s and 1980s the Holocaust had become a shocking, massive, and distinctive *thing*: clearly marked off, qualitatively and quantitatively, from other Nazi atrocities and from previous Jewish persecutions, singular in its scope, its symbolism, and its world-historical significance." And so once the Holocaust had a title, and an avenue to explore it, Jewish American writers began approaching it as a subject.

³⁶ In *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), Foer alternates his narrative between the humorous broken English of an Ukrainian tour guide and the magical realist description of the pre-war Ukrainian shtetl of Trachimbrod. In Englander's short story collection *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (1999) and his novel *The Ministry of Special Cases* (2007), which revolves around the government sanctioned "disappearances" of Argentinean youth in the "dirty war", the Holocaust is approached through parable. In his most recent collection of short stories *What we talk about when we talk about Anne Frank* (2012), Englander explores the legacy of the Holocaust for American Jewry and also conflates Americanness (as in the allusion to Carver's title) and the Holocaust (as in *Anne Frank*).

³⁷ As such, contemporary discourse engages Howe's discussion from 1977, which declared the end of the golden age of Jewish American literature. Morris Dickstein acknowledges Howe's infamous assertion, by highlighting the postmodernist nature of contemporary Jewish American texts. He suggests that contemporary Jewish American writers are only able to produce relevant works when they build on the texts of second generation writers (like Malamud, Bellow, and early Roth) and other traditional Jewish

For example, Lee Behlman and Anna Hunter suggest that the third-generation Jewish Americans are historically and personally distant from the Holocaust and yet indoctrinated with the importance of its legacy. As such, they utilize formally indirect and roundabout ways that explore the Holocaust, but distance it from realistic presentations, (since the realities of the Holocaust are so foreign to their reality as comfortably American Jews). Thematically, third-generation Jewish American writers are exploring the legacy of the Holocaust, rather than just engaging with the occurrences of its destruction, and are critiquing the significance of Holocaust memory and lessons on contemporary American Jewry, while concurrently revealing how centrally located the Holocaust is for contemporary Jewish Americans. This idea is most emphatically revealed in Englander's newest short story collection, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank* (2012). However, not all scholars recognize the value of these contemporary engagements with the Holocaust. By jumping off of Irving Howe's notorious foreboding for the future of Jewish American literature,³⁸ Eugene Goodheart, Hana Wirth-Nesher³⁹ and Morris Dickstein see a revived interest in the Jewish past as a desperate move to find relevant literary material now that American Jews have assimilated. However, while Jewish American literature reveals a heightened interest in the past, and most American Jews have assimilated, what is happening in the Jewish

texts. According to Dickstein, contemporary Jewish American writers are returning to their roots out of necessity to find an ethnic voice (72-79). Eugene Goodheart suggests that a recent resurgence in Holocaust narratives is another manifestation of this desire to find something to write about, now that the difficulties of Americanization are over (107), and most scholars agree that we are witnessing a tremendous production of Holocaust related fiction (and films) (Steier 387). For example, Susanne Klingenstein recognizes a recurring motif in Jewish American fiction, one in which Jewish American characters return to Europe to explore the site of the Holocaust's devastation (366).

³⁸ He famously wrote in 1977, "My own view is that American Jewish fiction has probably moved past its high point. Insofar as this body of writing draws heavily from the immigrant experience, it must suffer a depletion of resources, a thinning out of materials and memories. Other than in books and sentiment, there just isn't enough left of that experience."

³⁹ She specifically studies Jewish liturgical references in contemporary Jewish American literature

literary circle is the antithesis of creative desperation. Jewish American writers are confronting issues that are vital to contemporary Jewish American identity but that invariably deal with the past.

As Victoria Aarons, Avinoam Patt, and Mark Shechner, argue contemporary Jewish American writers are openly engaging with the pervasiveness of the Holocaust in Jewish American identity, tackling it head on, especially relative to how first- and second-generation Jewish Americans had previously approached the Holocaust. He also delineates how contemporary writers look at the Holocaust and other Jewish issues from a collective stance, reversing the “I” centric, individualized, psychological concerns of earlier Jewish American writers like Bellow and early Roth (5). I argue a similar point, though I locate that collectivity specifically in the writers’ engagement with the Holocaust *and* Zionism. In fact, this collective lens, like many developments in Jewish American identity, is first made apparent in Roth’s Israel-centered books, as his writer protagonists, Nathan and Philip (Roth), sacrifice individual concerns for the larger Jewish collective. *Tortured Zionism* mirrors Shechner’s analysis but directs it towards Israel, a significant point for the following reason: when Jewish American writers talk about Israel, they generally avoid critiquing the Jewish American collective relationship with Israel. But by negotiating ambivalent Zionism through messianism, I argue that Chabon, Roth, and Reich recognize the communal significance of Jewish American relationships with Israel. As such, *Tortured Zionism* is highlighting a discourse about Israel, the Holocaust, and Jewish American identity that has, in varying degrees, been addressed separately but not yet in conjunction with each other. Unlike most Jewish American

literary scholarship, my project looks at the major historical events of the 20th century for Jewish Americans in a holistic and interrelated framework.

Israel

Chabon, Roth (and Reich in *My Holocaust*) explore how the Holocaust relates to Israel and the Zionist claim. It is an important dynamic that in many ways goes to the heart of Zionism and distinguishes *Tortured Zionism's* authors from contemporary Jewish American writers, who, for the most part, approach Israel and the Holocaust as mutually exclusive subjects or do not acknowledge the political components of that relationship. As such, they ultimately fail to address how the Holocaust and Israel's dynamic relates to Jewish American identity.

In fact, Jewish American writers have only recently been addressing Israel as a subject, underscoring how Jewish American approaches to Israel follows a similar trajectory as Jewish American approaches to the Holocaust. After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jewish American novelists barely explored Israel in their fiction, partially out of alienation from the Israeli experience as Bernard Malamud so aptly explained,⁴⁰ and partially out of fear of self-identifying with the Jewish other (which would de-Americanize Jewish Americans). Except for a few literary tangents and “visits” to Israel, such as Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) and his memoir *To Jerusalem and Back* (1977),⁴¹ most Israel-focused literature was almost propagandist in nature, like Leon Uris' eponymous pro-Zionist novel *Exodus* (1958).

⁴⁰ “Many people tell me I should write about Israel, but that's absurd; I don't know the country, I haven't been there enough” (qtd.in Betsky)

⁴¹ *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) describes a group of Jewish Holocaust survivors on 1960s Upper West Side. The protagonist Artur Sammler briefly visits Israel in the novel during the 1967 war because he cannot stay home and watch it on TV; as such Bellow presents the conflation of the Holocaust and Israel, and (inspiring Roth) presents the importance of Jewish history on Jewish reality. (In Reich's *The Jewish War*, the characters Yehudi and Hoshea similarly cannot stay in American while Israel fights during the

Like Bellow's fictional sojourn to Israel in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Roth briefly visits Israel in *Portnoy's Complaint* (in 1969). But in *Portnoy*, Roth describes a scene that epitomizes Jewish American alienation from Israel. The lascivious Portnoy tries to bed an Israeli female soldier, only to experience impotence with her, representing both the Jewish American Portnoy's feeling of inadequacy in the face of post-1967 Israeli virility and his sense of alienation from Israeli Jews. Portnoy's impotence also expresses how Jewish American attitudes towards Israelis changed after Israel's victory in the 1967 war, a transformative moment for both Israel and American Jewry. When the small and outnumbered Israeli army defeated six (arguably attacking) Arab national armies, the image of Jews as the symbol of victimization (especially in the post-Holocaust era) was diminished and a new image of Jews emerged - strong, virile and aggressive (Budick 207). In the post-1967 years, and due to the wars that followed, Israeli boundaries extended onto Arab territories (often out of defensive strategies or after having been attacked), the Israeli/Palestinian situation became more complicated, difficult and heated, and world opinion of Israel became increasingly critical (Silberstein 3). The open criticism of Israel and Jewish Americans' comfortable and assimilated place in American society made Israel fair game as a literary subject (Furman 8). Furthermore, as Israel built up its infrastructure (and international travel became more accessible) more Jewish Americans were able to travel to Israel and experience the country firsthand. The

1967 war. They leave their fiancés in America, sneak on a plane transporting bodies to be buried in Israel, and hide in coffins. As such, Reich picks up on both the significance of the 1967 war for Jewish Americans and the Jewish impetus to locate oneself in Jewish history.) In his memoir *To Jerusalem and Back* (1976), Bellow fills his work with a description of his various encounters with a multifaceted (Jewish) Israel. In both his Israel-centered novels, Roth heavily emulates Bellow's density of perspectives and encounters, ranging from heated conversations with Abba Eban to Bellow's taxi driver.

alienation towards Israel was ameliorated, encouraging Jewish Americans to write about Israel.

However, for almost half a century, Jewish American writers still stayed away from Israel as a subject. That primarily changed in the late 1980s/1990s and, reflecting Lillian Kremer's idea that contemporary Jewish American writers represent a "freer generation of writers," a group of Jewish American writers began approaching Israel as a subject, including Anne Roiphe, Rachel Kadish and Naomi Ragen, who utilize Israel as a medium to critique gendered issues in Judaism⁴² (which Reich explores as well). In other more recent works by writers such as Risa Miller, Ruchama King Feuerman, and Naama Goldstein (all women), Israel is the site for spiritual exploration (especially in contrast to what they present as the shallow emptiness of America),⁴³ a theme Roth likewise

⁴² In *Lovingkindness* (1987), Roiphe describes the dynamic between the American mother figure and Jewish patriarchy, when Annie, a feminist American, tries to retrieve her once wayward and secular adult daughter, who has now become an ultra-orthodox Jew, from a Hareidi yeshiva in Israel. Like Reich's works, the novel engages with the collision between the mother figure and patriarchy, but it most significantly critiques secularist feminism and ideological pluralism, and not the relationship between Zionism and feminism. Kadish's *From a Sealed Room* (1997) explores the Israeli experience for three women, the Holocaust survivor Shifra, the American-born Tami, and her American young cousin Maya. Through Shifra, Kadish intersperses the tense gulf war-era Israel with the legacy of the Holocaust, and also includes a messianic component, as Shifra, who has dementia, believes Maya to be a sort of redemptive figure. However, while the Israeli setting is visceral and Israeli geopolitics are prevalent in the novel, Kadish focuses on the individualized, personal journeys of the women. Ragen's *Sotah* (1992) is set in Jerusalem and like many of Ragen's other works including *Jephthe's Daughters* (1989) and *The Sacrifice of Tamar* (1994), critique ultra-orthodox patriarchy and reveals the struggles of Hareidi women trying to locate subjectivity in their oppressive and circumscribed worlds. In *Sotah*, Ragen does not comment on the political/collective role of Israel, utilizing its scene as an exotic backdrop for the exclusive Hareidi enclave. And again, the female protagonists' journeys in Israel are individualized, emotional and spiritual.

⁴³ Miller's *Welcome to Heavenly Heights* (2003) focuses on a community of American expatriates who live in Israeli settlements. Miller fuses the intensely spiritual motivations of the American settlers, who give up comfortable lives in the US, to actualize their spiritual desires. Unlike Reich's characters, they are not portrayed as extremists, but rather as people genuinely devoted to spiritual growth devoid of politics. But Miller complicates her portrait as the difficult realities of living in Israel as well as the dangers of the political climate, undermine her characters' spiritual quest. Miller doesn't directly address Zionism or messianism, but she does explore the complex potential and detriments of Israel for Jewish Americans seeking a more meaningful life. Ruchama King similarly conflates the spiritual with the political in both *The Seven Blessings* (2004) and *In the Courtyard of the Kabbalist* (2013). In her earlier novel, King-Feuerman focuses on American expatriates seeking marriage matches in Jerusalem. Their search for a mate serves as a spiritual journey, while Israeli politics and the visceral setting of Jerusalem significantly surrounds the spiritual critique. In *the Courtyard of the Kabbalist*, Feuerman again engages with American

explores in *The Counterlife*, and which Reich also engages within her feminist critique. Furthermore, these more recent narratives add a political dimension that the earlier explorations of Israel did not. Sanford Pinsker similarly observes these works as a recent trend in which Jewish American writers utilize Israel and America as the locus for their protagonists' search for self-identification through geography, dismantling stereotypes about Israel and America;⁴⁴ (though not concerned with assimilation necessarily, in this search for belonging amidst alienation, I believe these novels emulate the immigrant fiction of the early 20th century). Pinsker argues that Jewish American writers need to explore their relationships with Israel, as it is a subject significant in Jewish American existence, in the same way immigration and the Holocaust was for Jewish Americans earlier in the century. Pinsker, however, does not mention the new wave of immigrant fiction created by Jews of Russian origin or descent, who emigrated to the States after the fall of the communist Soviet Union. The noteworthy fiction of Gary Shteyngart is one such example.⁴⁵ And yet, Pinsker's assessment is compelling. What we are witnessing now with these Jewish American explorations of Israel is new and significant.

The writers represented in *Tortured Zionism* are pioneers in Jewish American literature, not only because they engage with the once untouchable subjects of Israel and the legacy of the Holocaust for Jewish Americans, but also because they conflate the two subjects, underscoring that the dynamic between the two is an important one for Jewish American identity. Furthermore, they do not solely relegate Israel as a site for meditation

expatriates' spiritual quests in Jerusalem, but focuses on Jewish/Arab dynamics. So while Miller and King-Fuerman are not directly political (and interested in collective Jewish issues) they represent a trajectory where the personal and collective/national overlap.

⁴⁴ Pinsker specifically notes Danit Brown's *Ask for a Convertible*, since it deconstructs Jewish American romanticized attitudes towards Israel, by depicting Israeli expatriates trying to find their place in America.

⁴⁵ See *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (2002) and *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010).

on spiritual longing and self-identification. Rather, they situate characters' individualized journeys within the political discourses of Zionism and within the schema of Jewish American cultural, spiritual and political ties to Israel. They look at Israel and Jewish American identity from a collective lens. To them, Israel is a setting to explore collective Jewish issues and not merely a locus for individualized experiences (that may or may not symbolize larger Jewish issues). This differentiation between the writers in *Tortured Zionism* and others who tackle Israel mirrors the trajectory of Jewish American literary treatment of the Holocaust: it initially negotiated the Holocaust through the symbol of the individual and then moved to openly acknowledging the collective ramifications of the Holocaust on Jewish American identity. In the same way, most Jewish American writers use Israel as a setting to explore individual spiritual journeys. But the writers I discuss in *Tortured Zionism* brazenly identify the collective in their negotiation of Israel and Jewish American identity. By utilizing messianism to explore Jewish American relationships with Israel (and the Holocaust), these writers emphasize that they are addressing collective Jewish issues and not merely individualized concerns. The collective engagement with Israel is a notable phenomenon because 1) it begins to emulate Jewish American literary treatment of the Holocaust, suggesting that we will continue to see more Jewish American writers engaging with Israel in this way, and 2) it suggests that Israel is indeed an important subject for Jewish Americans, despite a countercurrent of diasporist sentiments in academic discourse.⁴⁶

It is important to note, however, that while Chabon, Roth and Reich tackle Israel as a compelling subject for the Jewish collective, they minimally address the Palestinian predicament and the Israeli/Palestinian dynamic. Palestinians surface in most of their

⁴⁶ See most notably Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin.

Israel-centered works, but they are situated in the background of the writers' critique. For example, both Reich and Roth include only one Palestinian character in each of their novels and all three writers merely describe a couple of incidents of Palestinian/Israeli violence. As such, their novels focus on Jewish dynamics towards Israel that are suggestively impacted by Israel's relationship with the Palestinians.⁴⁷

Critical approach

While there is a wellspring of scholarship on the representation of the Holocaust in Jewish American literature,⁴⁸ there is a limited amount of scholarship focused on Jewish American relationships towards Israel. I build on that limited scholarship in my project, including Andrew Furman's *Israel in the Jewish American Imagination: A Survey of Jewish-American Literature on Israel, 1928-1995* (1997), Ranen Omer-Sherman's more recent *Diaspora and Zionism in Jewish-American Literature: Lazarus, Syrkin, Reznikoff and Roth* (2002), and Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (2000). Emily Budick and Derek Parker Royal (most notably when analyzing Roth), similarly engage with Israel and Jewish American identity. However, those studies do not overtly emphasize the triangular relationship between the Holocaust, Zionism and Jewish American identity.⁴⁹

Furthermore, aside from Ezrahi, when scholars approach Jewish American identification

⁴⁷ See Andrew Furman's analysis of Roth's treatment of the Palestinian character. Furman delineates how Roth attempts to portray Palestinians with nuance and honesty but nevertheless falls into confirming to Jewish American stereotypes of Palestinians.

⁴⁸ See Alan Berger and Gloria Cronin for a compilation of essays that look at Jewish American treatment of the Holocaust from a postmodern lens. See Efraim Sicher for an overview of critical approaches. For an encyclopedic treatment see Lillian Kremer *Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*. See Harold Bloom's anthology, which explores the difficulties of Holocaust representation in literature. See David Roskie's *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (1989) and *The Literature of Destruction* (2007). In both works, Roskie explores the Jewish reaction to catastrophe, which he views as unique in its ability to counter destruction with creation and renewal.

⁴⁹ Budick compiles her anthology so that Israeli and American literature are in dialogue but the individual studies do not really engage American and Israel simultaneously.

with Israel, they often do so with a diasporist lens, a perspective that I counter in all my chapters, most notably with Roth and Chabon.

Tortured Zionism differs from other Jewish American scholarship because it is the only study of these particular novels examined in tandem. For example, while scholars have focused on Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* and *Yiddish Policemen*, they have not compared the two works, especially through a messianic lens, a compelling fact considering the thematic similarities between the two novels and the way the earlier novel's treatment of the Holocaust informs the later work's trepidation towards Israel; that trepidation highlights Chabon's ambivalent Zionism and undercuts a diasporist reading of his novels.

An ample amount of scholarship compares Roth's Israel-centered novels to each other but has not thoroughly examined the Israel-centered novels with his non-fiction. And when scholars examine the non-fictional works (sometimes along with *Operation Shylock*) they do not explore Roth's depiction of Israel, primarily focusing on Roth's critique of the ethics of writing,⁵⁰ as well as Roth's critique on Jewish identity.⁵¹ By including the nonfictional works in my analysis, however, I am able to delineate how Roth's ambivalent Zionism relates to his perspectives on writing.⁵² That distinction is

⁵⁰ See for example David Gooblar who includes *Deception* and *Operation Shylock*, to *Patrimony* and *The Facts* as nonfictional works that in tandem work to present Roth's treatise on what comprises ethical writing. He does explore Zionism in his critique but does not recognize an ambivalent Zionism.

⁵¹ Debra Shostack examines the performative selves in *Operation Shylock*, focusing on the role textuality plays in identity formation. She asserts that Roth is neither affirming postmodernist subjectivity or reality, but letting the narrative unravel itself, just talking about it (752). Harold Bloom similarly sees a critique on identity (and not necessarily Zionism) as Pipik (and Shylock) represent Roth's career struggle with accusations of being a self-hating Jew.

⁵² Derek Parker Royal does not address Roth's non-fictional works, but he does comment on the possibility of reinvention through writing in *The Counterlife*. He sees Roth's critique as asserting how ethnic identity negotiates the malleability of writing fiction and fixedness of history (postmodern Jewish identity). In regards to *Operation Shylock*, he sees Israel as a site that puts Roth into an identity tailspin, but not one that is nihilistic or exclusive. Royal rejects postmodern negation and argues that Roth is accepting the reality of it all("Moses belly button"). Elaine Kauver relates *Operation Shylock* to *Patrimony* and similarly

significant because one of the major themes of Roth's career works has been the act of writing, and the question of the responsibility the writer has to his/her community and family.⁵³ By underscoring the relationship of Roth's portrayal of Israel with his critique on writing, I am highlighting a shift in Roth's interest.⁵⁴ Finally, since Reich's novel *Philistine Foreskins* was only published in 2013, scholars (to my knowledge) have not yet addressed it. When looking at Reich's career and her feminist critique of Zionism, it is imperative to study her latest work *Philistine Foreskins* because the narrative veers from her earlier works, and tacitly and concurrently presents a gendered solution to Israel's issues and reveals an anxious foreboding that that solution may never be implemented. Her later novel also presents a feminist revision of scenes from the earlier texts.

Overall, my study builds on scholarship that addresses how Chabon, Roth, and Reich separately approach the Holocaust, Israel and Jewish American identity. But I synthesize those themes to locate in all three writers a Zionist stance, though it is tortured and ambivalent. My hermeneutics most closely resembles Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's study on Jewish American literature because she recognizes and encourages the confluence of

identifies Philip's self-censorship as an act of paternal loyalty. But she asserts that he is motivated by the ambiguity that Smilesburger represents and is thus embracing ambiguity. She writes, "Amid the reality of ambivalence, the power of repletion, and the stark fact of the intermittences of the heart, the patrimony one generation hands down to the next proves indispensable: armed with that unbroken chain of tradition, the individual can sustain existence in the 'house of ambiguity'"(307).

I however am arguing that Roth presents a definite Zionist stance, engendered from patrimonial loyalty, and despite ambivalence. I also assert that Philip aligns with Zionism out of patrimonial loyalty.

⁵³ Donald Kartinger writes about the Jewish American artistic predicament: the Jewish writer is caught "between loyalty to the father and loyalty to art, between the capacity of the artist for self-sacrificing dedication and the capacity for self-promoting unscrupulousness, between the artist as beholden to his Jewish heritage and the artist as the singular being"(quoted in Kauver 615). Roth most notably presents this dilemma in both *Operation Shylock* and *Patrimony*.]

⁵⁴ Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky sees Roth's use of ambivalence in both Israel-centered novels as a celebration of diasporic Judaism and the freedom of Jewish American reinvention. While he celebrates diasporic achievement, he also questions if American Jews have lost some Jewish relevance by separating themselves from Israeli culpability("Philip Roth"). I, on the other hand, see Roth's acceptance of that responsibility.

the diasporic experience on Zionism. She argues that because the diasporic relationship to texts and imagination is open-ended, creative and ingenious, it can help foster a better Israel in its willingness to critique and adapt.⁵⁵ (Aside from my reading of Chabon, I likewise recognize where the writers utilize diasporic imaginative powers to critique Israel constructively, and most notably in the chapter devoted to Reich.)

Trajectory of project

In my project, I begin my analysis with Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and end with Tova Reich's *One Hundred Philistine Foreskins*. Though Reich's novel is the most recently published of all those that I study, *Tortured Zionism* is not a chronological study. Rather, the three writers' approaches towards Zionism work coherently together as the settings and perspectives move progressively more East, from Chabon's Jews in New York and Sitka, Alaska, to Reich's Jewish messianic extremists in Jerusalem. Chabon sets his work in the diaspora and presents a perspective on Zionism that is rooted in abstraction and imagination, as his characters vie for a Zionist dream that is impossible and thoroughly intangible. Roth's Israel novels span America, England and Israel, engaging with the Jewish American negotiation of Israeli realities, including a vast patchwork of people in Israel and the diaspora who represent multiple perspectives and approaches to Israel. Reich exclusively situates her narratives in Israel, primarily with (fanatical) religious characters who are mostly American expatriates, solidifying her novels as critiques on the Jewish American relationship to Israel. The Israel-centric nature of her novels mirror how they already

⁵⁵ Budick, however does not limit her scholarship to American writers and analyzes early 20th century and mid-century writers, including Roth.

present an acceptance of Zionism, but simultaneously reveal the dangers of messianic extremism to the future of Israel. (In this way, she builds on Ezrahi's theory that diasporic eyes, like Reich's expatriates, can most constructively criticize Israel.) While the authors all critique a tortured Zionism, they bring to the discussion a multifaceted approach to the Jewish American relationship to Israel that varies between distance and intimacy.

I chose these particular writers and texts based on that diversity, as in contemporary Judaic studies Jewish American approaches to Israel are largely determined by the amount of intimacy Jewish Americans have with Israel, by the cultural divide or kinship between American Jews and Israelis, and between religious or secular attitudes towards Judaism and Israel. While certainly not exhaustive, Chabon, Roth and Reich's works come to a discussion of Zionism with divergent perspectives that never overtly present political affiliation but are integrally political nevertheless. Furthermore, the writers are situated in different places in the Jewish American canon: Chabon is a Pulitzer Prize-winning best seller, whose marketability is partially generated by his use of genre fiction. Roth is the preeminent canonical Jewish American writer, whose prolific career works as a mirror of 20th- and 21st-century Jewish American issues and interests. And Reich, the only female writer discussed, is still relatively unknown; her literary anonymity may be borne from her heavy use of Jewish references that can alienate most readers (Jewish and non-Jewish alike). Roth's career and literary standing is reason enough to include him in this study. But I chose Chabon because his popularity can be read as a signpost for popular ideas. As such, when we read Chabon we are reading popular discourse. Reich serves as an excellent counter to both Roth and Chabon in the

fact that she has not garnered as much popular or scholarly attention. Often what remains in the shadows and unaddressed is an excellent litmus test for social zeitgeists. Reich's texts are overtly culturally Jewish and religious. They are also steadfastly Zionist but not propagandist. Finally, her political critique is simultaneously a gendered critique, conflating social concerns with collective political concerns, a noteworthy distinction since, given Israel's precarious position, Israeli political and international issues often take precedence over social change. As such, she seems to have created her own niche, which I believe audiences, in the highly polarized discourse on the Middle East, are perhaps not quite ready to explore. I also wanted to end my project with Reich because she is presenting, I believe, the most constructive critique of Zionism, where issues are delineated, exposed and painfully examined, but which are given a possible solution. While I do not think Reich's feminist critique will necessarily solve the difficulties Israel faces today, I do think that when she centers her latest novel on a tacit solution for some of Israel's challenges, she is also subtly presenting an optimistic hope for Israel, the Palestinians, and Zionism that I, as a Jewish American, find inspiring and vital.

Chapter 1

The Messianic Figure in Chabon's

***The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*:**

A Study of the Limitations of Art and Tortured Zionism

In his glowing review of Michael Chabon's 2007 novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Terrence Rafferty insightfully qualifies the novel's limitations and asserts that it teaches us "about how the grandest fictions raise expectations unreasonably high, paralyze us with anticipation, doom us to the perpetual check of chronic dissatisfaction." In this chapter I will explore this paralysis of anticipation and "chronic dissatisfaction" throughout Chabon's pages, as he utilizes them to navigate Jewish American identity in a post-Holocaust world. Rafferty ends his review referencing the novel's tragic messianic hero Mendele, asking ironically, "You were expecting maybe the Messiah?" No, readers were not. Chabon's characters, however, do wait for salvation, suffering in their anticipation and disappointment, and their tortured state mirrors what seems to be Chabon's image of the internality of Jewish America in a post-Holocaust world: a torturous and indefinite longing for resolution, safety, and justice that never actualizes.

I will engage with this perpetual psychological/ideological torture by looking at the failed messianic figure in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*¹ and Chabon's earlier *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2001).² Through the lens of the messianic figure, which I base off of Maimonides' definition of the *Mashiach*, I will explore Chabon's negotiation of post-Holocaust Jewish American identification, diaspora,

¹ From here on, *Yiddish Policemen*

² From here on, *Kavalier and Clay*

homeland, and loss. In *Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon constructs failed messianic figures to suggest art that addresses the Holocaust cannot eradicate its ensuing trauma. However, Chabon's novel asserts that art about the Holocaust should be created nevertheless, even if it can never fully heal loss, and that America is a land of opportunity where people can rebuild lives despite their wounds.

Six years later, in *Yiddish Policemen*, Chabon darkens the narrative and moves his focus to the subject of Israel, which he does not even touch on in the earlier novel. He utilizes the failed messianic figure both to develop a theme of tortured Zionism and to present the Jewish diaspora as a hopeless, frightening place. In the novel, the Jewish diaspora (or the *Galut*) is seething from the homelessness engendered from the loss of European Jewry (and Europe as a home for Jews), and the counter-historical eradication of the State of Israel in 1948. Through thematic and historical allusion to the Messiah, the novel becomes a manifesto of tortured Zionism, where the necessity and desire for Israel is recognized and yet Zionism in the 20/21st centuries seems irreparably flawed. So while the earlier novel presents optimism about postwar American possibilities, *Yiddish Policemen* is dismal and portrays the Jewish diaspora (without Israel) and Israel (as a state that does not welcomes Jews) as frighteningly hopeless.

In the closing of both novels, Chabon also critiques the role of narrative in negotiating Jewish identification. In *Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon expresses the promise, be it limited, of postwar Jewish American possibility by presenting the power of the artistic process and creative potential, while *Yiddish Policemen* ends with narrative bleakness and creative impossibility.

Ultimately I compare both novels to reveal how Chabon has not as of yet adequately negotiated the triangular relationship between Israel, Jewish America and the Holocaust, despite the narratives' richness and sociological/historical importance in a discussion of Jewish American postwar fiction. The novels beg comparison because they both explore the consequences of the Holocaust for diasporic Jewry. The earlier novel recognizes American opportunity for postwar Jewry, but it does not even mention Israel. The later novel makes a grand critique of Jewish diasporic existence and Israel in the Jewish imagination. However, it does not solidly situate the Jewish American in that dynamic, choosing to locate American Jewry in a tacitly implied but problematically peripheral place. It alludes to the Jewish American experience without overtly naming it thus, revealing that perhaps Chabon's critique is problematically timid. And so, just as Chabon's characters wait for the Messiah, it seems as if we are still waiting for a rigorous discussion on Jewish America and Israel.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay

In *Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon shows his heightened literary interest in the Jewish American experience and its relationship to the Holocaust.³ The novel, set in 1940's/50's New York, tells the story of European Jewish refugee Joseph Kavalier and his Jewish American cousin Sammy Clay. At the start of the narrative, Joe escapes Nazi-occupied Prague and finds himself in New York. With Sammy, he creates the immensely popular comic series *The Escapist*.⁴ Through the literary history of *The Escapist* comic book series, which has strong Jewish undertones and is anti-Nazi, Chabon not only creates a

³ Chabon infused his earlier novels *Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988) and *Wonder Boys* (1995) with Jewish references. But he only began to focus on Jewish issues in *Kavalier and Clay*.

⁴ See Andrea Levine for her discussion on the cousins' representational roles, as markers of post-war American Jewry.

large-scale story about two cousins finding opportunity in America, but also explores the relationship between Jewish artistic creation and the Holocaust. As such, *Kavalier and Clay* concomitantly works as an epic history about the American comic book industry and a critique on the psychological relationship between art and Holocaust trauma.⁵

Critical field

Due to *Kavalier and Clay*'s atypical conflation of the Holocaust and American comics, most scholarship has focused on its formal aspects. Mainly, critics delineate how Chabon's decision to utilize comic books to engage with the Holocaust mirrors other literature created by third-generation Jewish Americans; these writers similarly explore the Holocaust via unlikely lenses (like comic books) to maintain a fractured and indirect approach to the Holocaust. For example, Lee Behlman parallels Chabon to Nicole Krauss and Jonathan Safran Foer, who intertwine their Holocaust narratives with unlikely tropes, like fantasy and mysticism.⁶ Anna Hunter also compares Chabon to Foer (and Israeli novelist David Grossman) to delineate how contemporary Jewish writers infuse their Holocaust narratives with fantastical elements to situate their Holocaust narratives within the fairy-tale genre.⁷ Behlman argues that because third-generation Jewish American writers are so far removed from the Holocaust, but concurrently indoctrinated with the importance of its legacy, they can take on the Holocaust only by formalistically rejecting realism.

⁵ See Hillary Chute for a discussion on Chabon and comic book history, and see Danny Fingeroth for a broader study on the Jewish role in the American comic book industry.

⁶ He specifically addresses Krauss' *The History of Love* (2005) and Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002).

⁷ Looking at *Kavalier and Clay*, we can also recognize Art Spiegelman's *Maus I* (1980) as a groundbreaking influence in its fusing of the graphic novel form with the Holocaust narrative. However, Spiegelman is a second-generation Jewish American, relaying his father's first-person account.

Critics mainly agree that Chabon's approach to the Holocaust is refreshingly progressive and relevant. However, scholars also compellingly criticize Chabon for creating a disconnect between the heavy subject of the Holocaust and the pulp of comic books. Critics take issue with the novel's theme of escapism. Lee Behlman and Alan Berger suggest that, like the fictional comic *The Escapist*, the novel actually avoids meaningfully engaging with the Holocaust (81-84).⁸ They argue that though Chabon's novel helps position the Holocaust as a relevant subject in American literature, in praxis, it problematically advocates "escape," an "unforgivable" way of forgetting the Holocaust.

And indeed Chabon develops this theme of escapism throughout the novel. For example Joe never discusses his loss. Instead, *The Escapist* becomes for Joe a medium to vicariously attempt avenging his family's death, whom he soon learns were all murdered in the war. Joe tries to enact justice for his family, not only through his comic book character, but also by agitating German Americans in New York, joining the American army, eventually killing his own "Nazi," and writing an epic graphic novel about the Golem, who avenges anti-Semitic violence.

However, despite the novel's indirect exploration of Holocaust realities, Chabon compellingly asserts that creating art about the Holocaust is necessary. While Joe blatantly admits about his Escapist character, "I wished he was real...[otherwise] what was the point of it" (135), Chabon's narrative asserts that art's importance is not merely located in its product. Rather, the novel suggests that "the point of" artistic creation is the attempt itself; its power lies in its process.

⁸ See also Anna Hunter's analysis of the fairytale-like qualities in Chabon's *The Final Solution*; she similarly asserts that his engagement with the Holocaust is problematically allusive.

I build on Behlman and Berger's analysis of Chabon's stymied approach to the Holocaust to delineate how Chabon's messianic allusions in the novel create an anxiousness towards Holocaust art, defining art addressing the Holocaust as simultaneously limited, difficult and vital, an approach that critics haven't yet addressed in Chabon's work. More specifically, I look at the messianic qualities and failures exhibited by both Joe and Joe's graphic creations *The Escapist* and *The Golem!* to elucidate how Chabon's messianic failures paradoxically reveal that like the failed messianic figure who is unable to bring salvation, art about the Holocaust cannot fully heal Holocaust-engendered trauma. My analysis underscores that while Chabon presents the creative opportunities of postwar America, the novel is seething with an anxiousness fueled by the failed messianic figure.

The messianic figure

Gershom Scholem describes Jewish messianism "in its origins and by its nature a theory of catastrophe" (7), suggesting that the Jewish Messiah is intimately related to the trajectory of Jewish historical disasters. Chabon cues into this dynamic by utilizing the messianic figure to engage with legacy of the Holocaust. His interrelated exploration of the superhero in comics is an appropriate medium to engage with messianic promise. According to Maimonides, the messianic figure will restore the Jewish people to Zion and temple service in Jerusalem, will free the Jews from their oppressors, and motivate people to act according to divine will, in a just way (Mishneh Torah 11- 12). A superhero, especially like the Escapist who fights Nazis, certainly protects the oppressed and tries to restore justice. In *Kavalier and Clay*, Israel is not mentioned, but the desire for a restoration of justice is present throughout the narrative via the superhero figure.

In fact, when researching material for his novel, Chabon interviewed some of the originators of American comics, including the Jewish Will Eisner, who also related the superhero to the Golem; Eisner saw the Golem as an inspirational source behind his superheroes as well as those of his contemporaries, who were predominantly Jewish as well.⁹ Commenting on Superman, Al Jaffe (of MAD magazine) similarly located the messianic in Superman. “Who is the Messiah? The Messiah is Superman, a Super-God. I think that’s a great part of Jewish history - the need for a Messiah. And of course, in modern times, the Messiah is Superman” (qtd. in Kaplan 17).

By conflating the superhero (and the Golem) with the messianic figure, Chabon overlays the fictional superhero with the potential for redemption. When the superhero, which in the narrative manifests as the Golem, The Escapist, and eventually Joe, fails to bring redemption or a restitution of justice and Jewish freedom from oppression, Chabon implicitly suggests that art too cannot be fully restorative.

Chabon develops his critique on Holocaust art by providing his messianic characters with three parallel qualities. First, they are artistic creations in their own right, a fitting quality considering Chabon’s critique on Holocaust art. Second, they fight anti-Semitism, and third, they all fail to bring redemption and enact justice, which appropriately underscores the limitations of Holocaust art. I will delineate the novel’s multiple messianic allusions to reveal how Chabon, subtly but consistently, infuses his text with messianic anxiety that serves to comment on art about the Holocaust. It is important to pinpoint the varied messianic instances because, on the surface, the novel focuses on the comic book industry and presents postwar American opportunity, but,

⁹For example, Jack Kirby, Joel Schuster and Jerry Siegel are all Jewish. See Kaplan, Johnson, and Aushenker, among others, for a discussion of how Chabon was inspired by Jewish comic book creators and their interpretation of the Golem in their series.

beneath the surface and at a constant pace, it is pervasive with messianic anxiety, a quality critics have not acknowledged.

Consider the first messianic allusion in the text: the Golem of Prague, whom Joe later uses as the basis for both his comic books. The Golem of Prague was a mythic clay man created by the Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Judah Loew Ben Bezalel) in the 16th century. While the Golem is not specifically a messianic figure, it possesses messianic qualities in its protection of Jews, its role as an arbiter of Jewish justice in the wake of anti-Semitic calamity, and the way it is enlivened with the name of God.¹⁰

“The Escapist” similarly possesses messianic qualities, since the superhero’s mission is to fight Nazis and thus act as an agent of Jewish protection and justice. The series also includes other mystical motifs that are tied to messianic concepts.¹¹ For example, the Escapist benefits from the help of the “Members of the Golden Key,” who mirror the Talmudic (and kabbalistic) “lamed vav Tzadikim” - a group of 36 clandestine, holy people, whose righteousness constantly dissuades God from destroying the world (Sanhedrin 97b, Sukkah 45b).¹² Kabbalistic literature also states that the Messiah will initially be a member of the Lamed Vavnicks (Zohar 2.15.A).

Despite their intended missions, however, the Golem and the Escapist fail in both their global and artistic missions: Chabon’s Golem escapes Nazi-occupied Prague, failing to save Prague Jewry and arriving years later at Joe’s American address in a coffin, but degraded to a pile of dust. Joe’s *The Golem* will most likely remain unpublished and

¹⁰ See Weiner for a discussion on the Golem’s role in early comics. Weiner recognizes the Golem as a prototype for the superhero. See Baer for a discussion on the Golem as a representative of early Zionism.

¹¹ The most well-known kabbalistic text, the Zohar, is believed to have been transcribed in the 2nd century C.E. by Rabbi Shimeon Bar Yochai. Gershom Scholem believes that the Zohar was written by Moses De Leon in the 13th century in Spain.

¹² “Lamed vav” is the Hebrew term for the number 36, equal to double the Hebrew numerical value of “God”.

unfinished. *The Escapist* series is initially a bestselling success, but soon loses its market appeal and is canceled.¹³ “Gotham Comics” owner Sheldon Anapol also steals millions of dollars from Joe and Sammy, acting in total discord with The Escapist’s mission of justice, indirectly victimizing the superhero. Their messianic failures reveal that, for Chabon, true justice for Jewish suffering is unattainable through art.

Chabon most emphatically develops the relationship between artistic creation and messianism by transforming Joe into a failed messianic figure, most notably when Joe returns to New York after the war, masquerading as his own creation “The Escapist.” During the war, Joe volunteers for the United States army and serves in Antarctica. When the war ends, Sammy and Rosa eagerly await his return, but Joe does not come home, refusing to contact them for 10 years when he hides as a recluse in the Empire State Building. When Joe does return (to a social schema), his reappearance becomes a unifying moment for the rest of the characters in the narrative, revealing that his family, past colleagues, and strangers had consciously and unconsciously yearned for it. Joe returns dressed in The Escapist’s costume and his arrival transforms a family reunion into a large-scale event, which as Chabon describes it, promises, for those who witness it, a reckoning for loss. (Chabon, however, does not explicate as to the specifics of those losses, only articulating the hope that Joe will enable some vague type of redemption.) Through the grandiose nature of Joe’s return, and the impetus behind it (Joe’s desire to heal from the war,) Chabon solidifies Joe’s role as a conduit to explore anxiety regarding art and the Holocaust.

¹³ In 2005, Chabon created an actual comic book series about the Escapist in collaboration with Dark Horse Comics. It is an eight-part series that includes many of the characters mentioned in *The Escapist* in *Kavalier and Clay*, like Luna Moth, the league of the Golden Key, and, the Escapist, Tom Mayflower.

But even before Joe returns, Chabon already begins to establish Joe's messianic quality, in the prolonged yearning surrounding his absence/disappearance. Chabon describes Joe's disappearance as a circumstance more compelling than death and one that engenders a lingering longing for reunion: "Joe's vanishing had been a loss in some ways more genuine than that which death represents. He was not merely dead - and thus in a sense always locatable...Because he had not been taken from them, they could not seem to let him go"(488-489). Highlighting this action of waiting, Chabon makes it the central focus of the narrative, as the other characters negotiate Joe's absence via relational compensation. For example, Sammy and Rosa, Joe's girlfriend, deal with the void of Joe's absence by marrying each other. Together, they raise Joe and Rosa's son, Tommy, even though Rosa is still in love with Joe and Sammy is secretly gay. Tommy even emulates his missing father, whom he is told is his missing uncle, unknowingly replicating his interest in magic.

In a sense, even before Joe's grandiose return, Chabon suggests Joe's messianic persona through the way Joe's family consistently yearns for and anticipates Joe's presence, via Tommy's resemblance to his father and the suggestive whispers in neighborhood gossip. The neighborhood women constantly gossip about Rosa's lingering affection for Joe, saying, "Rosa always carried a torch for Joseph"(498), and Tommy speculates as to who his biological father is from "deciphering the overheard hints and swiftly hushed remarks"(498) even though nobody has revealed to him that Sammy is not his father. Also, Sammy hires numerous private detectives to locate Joe. In a sense, the musings about Joe's whereabouts is pervasive in their everyday lives, so that their family unit is built on the wait and desire for Joe's return.

Certainly, the Clays' reaction to Joe's disappearance and absence is expected. However, by centering their lives on Joe's absence (and the hope for his reappearance) and situating his return with a grandiosity in the public sphere, Chabon urges a symbolic reading of the family and public's reaction to Joe's disappearance. This conflation of personal yearning and public release highlights Joe's figurative capacity (for the characters in the novel and for the novel itself), as he elicits a hope for something more profound and significant than a family reunion. By elevating the anticipation of Joe's return, Chabon intensifies the disappointment of Joe's failure, and highlights his role as a failed messianic figure, who does not deliver resolution and thus symbolically solidifies the limitations of the healing capacity of art.

Joe's return morphs from a family event into a public spectacle when Tommy, unbeknownst to Joe, publishes an ad in the newspaper heralding the return of the Escapist.¹⁴ The anticipated return is located in bustling, midtown Manhattan at the Empire State Building. Tommy realizes that Joe needs a grandiose impetus to persuade him to overcome the trauma of loss and return to his American family. Joe then publishes a letter in the *Herald-Tribune*, stating that the Escapist "threatened to expose the unfair robberies and poor mistreatments of his finest artists by Mr. Sheldon Anapol (the owner of Empire comics)" (482).¹⁵ He steals the Escapist costume from Sammy's office, wraps himself in rubber bands, and intends to jump off the 86th floor of the Empire State Building.

¹⁴ Exposing their paternal bond, Joe reads it and rightfully attributes the announcement to Tommy and decides to actualize what Tommy had so brazenly publicized.

¹⁵ When discussing the early Superman series, Chabon has said that the early version of the superhero was more man-like and messianic: "It was not about fighting super villains, but rescuing people from bosses that were exploiting them" (qtd. in Aushenker). Calling out the corruption of Sheldon Anapol, Joe emulates Chabon's image of the early Superman.

When the public reads the letter and learns that *The Escapist*/ Joseph Kavalier is returning from the abyss of disappearance on the specified date, they join in Rosa and Sammy's anxious anticipation for Joe's resurrection, so to speak. Reinforcing the role art possesses in Joe's symbolic capacity, Chabon utilizes a conversation between comic book insiders, including Lee, to frame Joe as a sort of legendary figure:

"Tell us who [you think} he is."

"Joe Kavalier."

"Joe Kavalier, yes! That's exactly who I was thinking of."

"Joe Kavalier! Whatever happened to that guy?"

"I heard he's in Canada. Somebody saw him up there."

Mort Meskin saw him in Niagara Falls."

"I heard it was Quebec..."

"I always liked him."

"He was a hell of an artist" (479).

Reifying the significance of Joe's talent, Chabon reveals how the general public similarly recognizes in Joe rare artistic ability. After seeing the newspaper announcement, about 200 people gather en masse, waiting for Joe to appear. And for the crowd, the name "Joe Kavalier stirred long-dormant memories of reckless, violent, beautiful release" (493). When Joe finally returns, the scene is epic in scale, where those who are strangers to and intimate with Joe, who are members of the Clay family and just New Yorkers, gather at the Empire State Building, waiting to witness his arrival. Chabon describes the scene: "[they] stand in clumps behind police lines, gazing up. ... They checked their watches and made the hard-bitten remarks of New Yorkers at the prospect

of a suicide—"I wish he'd do it already, I got a date"-but they did not take their eyes from the side of the building" (495). Two hundred people, including a school of orphans,¹⁶ neglect their work and everyday obligations for Joe, knowing that they should be somewhere else but are inexplicably compelled to wait for his appearance. While waiting, they discuss his impending arrival:

"...Some kook wants to pretend he's the Escapist, he has a right."

"You don't think it's *him*?"

"Nah" (485).

Notice the italicized pronoun, which Chabon frequently uses when mentioning Joe's return. Whether believing in him or thinking his return is a sham, people wait for "*him*." There is a "swelling crowd, pushed back to the opposite sidewalk, the streets blocked off and filled with honking cabs, the reporters and photographers, everyone looking up at the building around where the untold Escapist millions had coalesced for years" (496). Chabon constructs the scene to emphasize the specificity of the spectacle; that it is significant not only because a person in costume promises to leap off of the Empire State Building, but more so because it is Joe Kavalier, long-lost member of the Clay family and creator of *The Escapist*, the superhero who avenges victims from WWII and who was robbed by the executives in the comic book industry and will now return to restore justice. (In a sense, he is out to avenge victims and his own victimhood.) People in the crowd also speculate whether the return is a "hoax," which presents the possibility of Joe becoming a failed messiah, as if he were a messianic hoax.

In the familial sphere, the Clays had always wanted Joe to return and had faith that he would return, especially Sammy. When Sammy first thinks that the scheme has

¹⁶ Joe too became an orphan during the war.

been completely orchestrated by Tommy, Sammy says, “I was, you know I really was hoping he would come back.” Emphasizing the grandiose significance of the imminent arrival, Tommy exclaims, “He *has* come back!” The boy shouted this, and even Lieber jumped a little. “He’s here” (497). By describing in detail the collective and familial reactions to the possibility of Joe’s arrival and by repeatedly presenting the wait (and the uncertainty of its actualization), Chabon emphasizes both the collective and personal importance of Joe’s return and, for those watching him, Joe’s representational capacity as a symbol of justice, hope, and resolution in the postwar era.

Chabon’s detailed focus on the wait for Joe’s return begs the question: why so collectively? Why did Joe have to keep “his grim promise to the city of New York” and leap off of a skyscraper dressed as the Escapist? The reason is that Joe’s return possesses a symbolic capacity that borders on messianic and that engages with significant post-war Jewish American issues: Joe is a victim of the Holocaust who finds opportunities in America. But despite that opportunity, he is cheated and never heals from his devastation. He is a culmination of Jewish American post-war circumstances, but he is also a sophisticated creator of art who powerlessly responds to the injustices of Jewish persecution.

Joe’s return is anticlimatic, even disappointing, as he in no way physically resembles a messianic figure, let alone a superhero. His appearance is not extraordinary or inspiring, but comically pathetic. Chabon describes Joe in his Escapist costume:

the suit clung to his lanky frame...He wore a pair of soft gold boots, rather shapeless, with thin rubber soles. The trunks were nubby and had a white streak on the seat, as if their wearer had once leaned against a freshly

painted doorjamb. The tights were laddered and stretched out at the knees, the jersey sagged badly at the elbows, and the rubber soles of the flimsy boots were cracked and spotted with grease (550-551).

Epitomizing the experience of hopeful messianic expectation, the initial part of Joe's leap is somewhat glorious. Joe begins his leap and "stepped backward into the air. The cord sang, soaring to a high, bright C. The air around it seemed to shimmer, as with heat" (538). But the descent reverses the celestial quality, as Joe prematurely hits bottom on a terrace on the 84th floor, just two flights down. As the arch from his cord began to fall, the crowd heard:

a sharp twang, and...a brief muffled small like raw meat on a butcher block, a faint groan... 'Ow!' Captain Harlet slapped the back of his head as if a bee stung him. [The crowd] ran to the parapet...and peered down at the man lying spread-eagled, a twisted letter K,¹⁷ on the projection roof ledge of the eighty-fourth floor. The man lifted his head. 'I'm all right,' he said. Then he lowered his head once more to the gray-pebbled surface onto which he had fallen, and closed his eyes (538).

Joe's much-anticipated leap becomes akin to watching someone accidentally walk into a glass door. The wait for Joe's arrival begins with people staring up at the Empire State Building in hopeful excitement; it ends with a crowd looking down on a minimally wounded Joe. For the spectators, whatever symbolic capacity Joe possessed as the creator of the Escapist has been eradicated with this leap. Even his fallen body takes the shape of a "K." He is no superhero; he is just a "man," just Joe Kavalier.

¹⁷ Joe's leap forms the shape of a "C," as in Clay, and then falls flat, forming a "K," as in Kavalier.

While Joe's messianic persona is far more subtle than Mendele's overt role as a messianic figure in *Yiddish Policemen*, Chabon utilizes both to construct a sense of hopeful anticipation for the surrounding characters, who are suffering from uncertainty, loss, and exile (from either a homeland or loved ones), which ultimately results in disappointment. Joe's (literal) fall and the discouragement it incurs serves another purpose. If *Kavalier and Clay* is a critique of contemporary Jewish American perspectives on the Holocaust and its legacy on Jewish American identity, then Joe's messianic-like return and failure helps construct Chabon's discussion of art's role in that dynamic. Certainly, Joe's unremarkable leap articulates that the Escapist and his ability to enact justice on evil is a fictional creation that cannot be actualized in reality (even fictional reality). As such, Joe's fall to the platform on the 84th floor represents his failure to bring collective and personal closure to the insurmountable grief, destruction and loss of the Holocaust, a devastation that art cannot heal.

The Artistic imperative

However, Chabon adds another dimension to the symbolic capacity of Joe's return, by delineating how the process of creating art about the Holocaust can be cathartic, despite the limitations of the artistic creation. During the 10 years that Joe cut off contact with his loved ones, he was writing an epic comic book about the Golem and the Jewish community in Prague, which had been decimated during the war. The book describes not only the mystical mud creature, but also tells the story of Jews who futilely awaited salvation, "anticipating horror but hoping for something more" (542). The epic comic book is a thousand pages long and bolsters Chabon's critique of creative opportunity; reiterating the power of artistic creation, Sammy describes the comic as

“just so *good*. It makes me want to...*make* something again” (585). Through depicting the Jewish community of Prague, Joe negotiates his personal loss and translates that loss on a collective level. The book’s subjects possess an even larger figurative capacity to represent diasporic Jews, since the presence of the Golem is a symbol of diasporic suffering and justice (Scholem. “The Golem”). The symbolism extends to Joe as well, since name of the Golem is Joseph the Golem, situating Joe again in the representational role of the savior.¹⁸ Describes Joe’s writing process as all-encompassing, Chabon reasserts the graphic novel’s cathartic role:

It absorbed all his time and attention. And as he immersed himself ever deeper into its potent motifs of Prague and its Jews, of magic and murder, persecution and liberation, guilt that could not be expiated and innocence that never stood a chance - as he dreamed, night after night at his drawing table, the long and hallucinatory tale of a wayward, unnatural child, Joseph Golem, that sacrificed itself to save and redeem the little lamp-lit world whose safety had been entrusted to it, Joe came to feel that the work—telling this story—was helping to heal him (577).

Through creating the Golem comic book, Joe attempts to be a savior on two levels: one, as the symbolic extension of the fictional savior, Joseph the Golem, who can “redeem the little lamp-lit world” and two, as the creator of the comic book, the creation of it “helping to heal him.” However, while he believes that drawing the epic comic serves as a productive catharsis, he eventually discovers that no matter how many pages he creates, he is not sufficiently healed to return home to Rosa, Tommy, and Sammy - his American

¹⁸ The Maharal’s golem is also named Joseph (Yidl Rosenberg). Sammy also possesses a golem-like role since his original last name was Clayman, an obvious allusion to the golem, a man made of clay.

family. As Chabon explains, “Joe’s ability to heal himself had long since been exhausted” (578).

In a sense, Chabon may value the catharsis located in artistic creation but he debunks the notion that art can really heal. Through *The Golem!*, Chabon raises the question as to whether Joe can come to terms with the Holocaust through creating a book. But we are convinced that it will likely remain unfinished and never read by anyone else. While Sammy says that he would like to work on the Golem epic with Joe, we learn that Sammy moves to Los Angeles at the end of the narrative, despite the fact that Joe bought Empire Comics with the intent of renewing their old creative partnership. Chabon also parallels Joe’s epic comic book with Sammy’s epic and unfinished novel, *Disillusioned America*, to suggest that Joe’s brilliant work will likewise perpetually be an unpublished, unfinished work in progress.

However, to Chabon, a finished product is not the only purpose for artistic creation. Instead, through the Golem comic book and, by extension, through *Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon asserts that the process of creating art in response to the Holocaust is significant enough to matter in its own right. Joe’s book is perhaps not a completed work in itself, because no closure (through art or otherwise) will ever occur.

Joe may never complete his epic Golem work, but Chabon nevertheless closes his narrative with the Golem. After returning home to Rosa, Joe receives a mysterious package from Prague, which we learn is the actual remains of the Golem. Before escaping Prague during the war and while preparing for the imminent Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia, Joe had hidden a box containing the Golem so that the Nazis wouldn’t find it. Twenty years later, upon receiving in the mail a large box containing a lump of

mud, Joe realizes that it is the remnants of the Golem. He remembers how when he had hid the Golem in Prague before the war, the box that held it was surprisingly lightweight. This box, in contrast, is extremely heavy. Joe sifts the dirt through his fingers, “wondering at what point the soul of the Golem had reentered its body, or if possibly there could be more than one lost soul embodied in all that dust, weighing it down so heavily” (612). The passage suggests that Joe carries the burden of avenging and remembering the victims of the Holocaust, of all those “soul[s] embodied in all that dust.” It is a heavy burden that he may not have the ability to carry or adequately represent through art, or in memory.

Joe represents the difficulty a Jewish American artist faces when negotiating with the legacy of the Holocaust, as art can never fully depict the Holocaust or enact justice for its victims. Joseph the Golem couldn’t save the Jews of Prague, the epic novel might never be completed, the Escapist (as Joe) is a laughably disappointing messianic figure, but Chabon asserts that Jewish American art, in whatever form, should engage with the Holocaust.

Unlike *Yiddish Policemen, Kavalier and Clay* is not tortured, though Chabon’s characters might be. Despite the anxiety-producing energy of the failed messianic figures seething throughout the narrative, the book ends with optimism, with a new American family intact (be it unconventional) taking the place of Joe’s old European family, who has been completely eradicated from the text. With Joe having bought Empire Comics and romantically reuniting with Rosa, and Sammy’s move to Los Angeles as an openly gay man, there is a sense that the characters will rebuild their lives and create some art (even if it inadequately approaches what lies in their hearts of its creators).

The Yiddish Policemen's Union

Seven years after the commercial success of *Kavalier and Clay* and its optimistic ending, Chabon returned to the legacy of the Holocaust in his counter-historical *Yiddish Policemen*. But in this novel, Chabon darkens his Holocaust critique and brings Israel into the dynamic. Instead of depicting (wounded) people at the cusp of American opportunity, like *Kavalier and Clay*'s Joe, Chabon in *Yiddish Policemen* describes a community of Jewish refugees in Sitka, Alaska, on the brink of an exilic displacement. Adding to the setting's bleakness, Chabon delineates how the community has already suffered devastation from the Holocaust and the counter-historical loss of the nascent State of Israel in 1948, when the Arab population defeated and banished the Jews. Chabon also situates the narrative in the underbelly of criminal activity, by constructing it as a hard-boiled detective novel: the plot revolves around a murder investigation, with detective protagonist Meyer Landsman slowly discovering why and how the novel's messianic figure Mendelev Shpilman was murdered.

The novel opens with bleakness, describing the dangerous circumstantial turn that has occurred for its protagonist and the Jews of Sitka. Chabon writes, "Nine months Landsman's been flopping at the Hotel Zamenhof without any of his fellow residents managing to get themselves murdered. *Now* somebody has put a bullet in the brain of the occupant of 208, a yid who was calling himself Emmanuel Lasker" (1).¹⁹ As if the setting were pregnant with potential, "nine months later" the novel's opening births a murder, and it is the murder of a man whom we learn was believed to be the Messiah and a last hope for redemption for the desperate community. Landsman thinks, "Nothing is clear

¹⁹ Lasker was a highly reputed Jewish chess player in the early twentieth century.

about the upcoming Reversion,[or exile from Sitka], and that is why these are strange times to be a Jew” (7). From the first page, Chabon distinguishes his later foray into the Holocaust’s legacy from his earlier one,²⁰ suggesting to the reader that what we are about to embark on will not be a treatise on American opportunity, but rather a manifesto of loss and yearning and a prime medium to express both the need for a belief in Zionism and its failure to deliver salvation. It is a setting appropriate for a manifesto of tortured Zionism.

Chabon’s dark counter-historical premise plays on an actual historical situation: in 1938, shortly after Kristallnacht, American Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes proposed providing European Jewish refugees temporary asylum in Alaska. The proposal, known as the Slattery plan, was quickly rejected in Congress. Chabon’s counter- history uses the premise that the proposal passed but modifies the proposal’s timeline, describing how Sitka became a haven for Jewish refugees in 1940, during the middle of World War II, and not in 1938. In Chabon’s world, Jewish refugees escaped Europe during the war and settled in the Sitka haven, lessening the number of Jewish deaths in the Holocaust to 2 million (as opposed to the historical 6 million). After the war, even more Jews fled to Sitka, most notably in 1948 when the nascent State of Israel was defeated by Arabs and the Jewish population was expelled from the land. With the prospect of living in Israel gone, Chabon’s Jewish refugees accepted the Sitka haven, which granted asylum for a temporary period of 60 years. The narrative begins when that asylum period is drawing to a close and the Jews now must contend with “Reversion” or

²⁰ True to the novel’s overall optimism, *Kavalier and Clay* opens by describing an older Sammy Clay, who still possesses adoring fans: “In later years, holding forth to an interviewer or to an audience of aging fans at a comic book convention, Sam Clay liked to declare...of his and [Joe’s] greatest creation”(3). From the passage, the reader already knows that at least one protagonist, the legacy of his creation and his fan base will survive to old age.

a return to exile, a particularly troublesome plight considering that they do not have Israel to flee to, are forbidden entry into the mainland USA--despite an already present Jewish American population-- and have no other viable geographical havens.²¹

In his nonfictional work, Chabon has related *Yiddish Policemen's* ominous exilic setting, to the fact that "I write from the place I live: in exile" (maps 156). And indeed, the concept of exile is the central basis of the narrative, since the plot centers on the imminent exile of a Jewish refugee community at the mercy of American legislation, and encourages a post-colonial reading that explores issues of the Jewish diaspora and Zionism. Because the Sitka Jews experience an exile that is full of dread, and one that is figuratively represented by the murder of a messianic figure, I argue that Chabon presents Jewish diasporic anxiety and a yearning for Zionism that is painful and futile. Chabon accomplishes this critique in two ways: First, Chabon highlights the Jewish diasporic quality of the situation in Sitka, including the novel's counter-historical structure and the characters' Yiddish culture and shtetl-like qualities. Second, Chabon articulates the characters' feelings about Zionism, represented by their relationship to the Hebrew language and the myth of Zion, and the symbolic role that Mendelev and his murder play. I argue that through both techniques, the novel develops a diasporic anxiety situated in both diasporic vulnerability and disappointments in Zionism.

Critical Field

²¹ The recent anti-Semitism in France, most notably the murder of four Jews taken hostage in a kosher supermarket bolsters this point. When visiting France for the solidarity march, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the French Jewish community telling them that "Israel is your home." And indeed French Jewish immigration to Israel has increased exponentially in the last 10 years due to a rise in anti-Semitism in France. See David Remnick for a discussion of contemporary anti-Semitism in France.

I read Chabon's work as a manifesto of tortured Zionism, where Jewish diasporic anxieties are intricately woven into a concurrent adherence to Zionist ideology and a disappointment in its actuality. However, most critics read the novel as one that perpetuates Jewish diasporism, a belief that Jewish identity and imagination is and should be strictly located in the Jewish diasporic experience (as opposed to in or regarding Israel). Amelia Glaser, Ella Shohat, and Jennifer Glaser, for example, assert that *Yiddish Policemen* locates the Galut, or the Jewish diaspora, as the new center of Jewish American identity and imagination and not as a "location of lack" in opposition to Israel. This is a significant position because in Judaic literature the Galut has been negatively defined as "not in the homeland,"²² a sentiment heightened when Israel was established in 1948,²³ and increasingly perpetuated during the last 30 years by both American and Israeli Jewry (Magid). Epitomizing this approach to the Galut, for example, Jennifer Glaser suggests that "[Chabon] argues for the power of exile, cosmopolitanism, and marginality in the creation of art - a kind of at-home-ness with homelessness" (8). Her position is inspired by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin's seminal essay, which also dismantles Zionist primacy over the Jewish American imagination in favor of a diasporism of sorts. In summary, the Boyarins' thesis suggests that Zionism and Jewish political hegemony is a betrayal of Jewish values and a means to destroy Judaism (and not as a medium, device, or location for Jewish security and survival) (345-347). While the Boyarins assert the importance of the Jewish cultural and spiritual relationship to Israel, they suggest that the diasporic experience creates tools that enable an ideal

²² The Galut and Homeland binary are not exclusively geographic locales but also refer to spiritual, religious and emotional states. See my introduction for further explication.

²³ Bristman and Shain delineate how the centrality of Israel in the Jewish American imagination is partially borne from the notion that Israel's survival is dependent on Jewish American support (ideologically, financially and politically).

approach to the global cultural economy, where the Jewish diaspora ingeniously perpetuates deep ties to ethnic culture and immersion in the general culture (347). Building on the Boyarins' thesis, Glaser delineates how Chabon describes the Jewish diaspora as fertile with productive energy. Furthermore, she asserts, "for Chabon, this 'diasporism' has become a site for critique and a ground upon which a meaningful secular Jewish identity can be built" (8). While I agree with Glaser that Chabon underscores the creative energies of the Jewish diaspora, I also argue that Chabon's critique does not dismiss Israel from the dynamic; instead, I believe that Chabon focuses on how Jewish perspectives towards Israel remain central in secular diasporic Jewish identity despite the Galut's potential for creative ingenuity.

Many critics locate Chabon's diasporism in the novel's play on Yiddish. Their Yiddish-focused arguments are compelling, since Chabon has likewise emphasized Yiddish' role in the creation of his novel. In interviews and essays, he has repeatedly stated that he was inspired to write *Yiddish Policemen*, which represents itself as a translation of Yiddish, after finding a copy of "Say it in Yiddish," a pedestrian language dictionary intended for travelers.²⁴ His discovery compelled him to imagine a post-Holocaust world, where one would need to speak Yiddish fluently, an unlikely circumstance in Chabon's eyes given the decimation of the majority of Yiddish-speaking communities in World War II.²⁵ I maintain the importance of Israel in Chabon's critique, but I also agree with critics' important insight about Chabon's creative engagement with Yiddish as the most ubiquitous language of the Jewish diaspora and a tool for

²⁴ The basis of the novel is Chabon's earlier essay in a 1997 issue of *Harpers* entitled "Guidebook to a Land of Ghosts."

²⁵ Obviously Chabon's will to imagine may seem ironic, as there are still primarily Yiddish-speaking enclaves in ultra-Orthodox communities in New York and Israel. See Jeffrey Chandler for a discussion of contemporary Yiddish-speaking communities.

commenting on the Jewish diasporic experience.²⁶ Consider Amelia Glaser, who points to the characters' use of Yiddish as their primary language to highlight the "diasporaness" of the *Sitka*.²⁷ She even suggests that by choosing Yiddish over Hebrew as his characters' vernacular, Chabon makes a political statement, indirectly advocating a Jewish American identity exclusively aligned with diasporism (160).²⁸ However, not all critics praise Chabon for his representation of Yiddish. Ruth Wisse strongly calls out Chabon for his irreverent and inaccurate appropriation of Yiddish (75),²⁹ and D.G Meyers criticizes Chabon for misusing Yiddish and misrepresenting Jewish Orthodoxy (586-588).³⁰ But despite the inaccuracies of Chabon's Yiddish, we can recognize that Chabon is making a point to prioritize Yiddish in an effort to underscore the diasporic quality of his setting.

Most critics agree that Chabon explores diasporic anxiety, which they recognize as a way for Chabon to perpetuate diasporism. (Not all critics are pleased with what they think is Chabon's diasporist message; Sarah Casteel, Meyers, and Wisse strongly criticize Chabon for it. Both Meyers and Wisse believe that Chabon is problematically advocating diasporism and disavowing Israel through its counter-historical eradication (587). Wisse delineates how Chabon's problematic use of inaccurate Yiddish perpetuates a stereotypical image of diasporic Jewish powerlessness in contrast to his portrayal of

²⁶ Reading Yiddish as the primary symbol of Jewish diasporic culture is limiting and ignores other Jewish diasporic cultures and communities, including Jews of Sephardi and Mizrahi descent.

²⁷ Glaser's assessment about Yiddish as representative of Jewish diaspora in America is persuasive and yet problematic. Her statement reflects a large omission in literary criticism of the influential role Sephardi culture has in Jewish American diasporic culture.

²⁸ This choice between Yiddish and Hebrew is reminiscent of the political and ideological debate over Israel's official language in 1948. While there were strong proponents for both Yiddish and modern Hebrew, Hebrew was chosen, partially to symbolically differentiate diasporic culture from the new modern Jewish state. Hebrew remains the only ancient language revived for daily use.

²⁹ Wisse writes, "And what about Yiddish itself? What has it ever done to deserve this reduction to schlock and shtick?"

³⁰ Meyers argues that Chabon presents the *Verbover Hasidim* as ultra-Orthodox Jews but mistakenly depicts them as making various halachic transgressions that would be inconceivable in an actual Hasidic community.

violent Zionists. Amelia Glaser agrees with Wisse's assessment, since the only living Zionists concoct a violent plan to blow up the Temple Mount, an act of which she says "can only be read as apocalyptic terrorism" (159). Sarah Casteel further suggests that Chabon presents an "implicit critique" of Zionism and "valorize[s] family ties over geographical ones" (797) but problematically negotiates their Jewish identity through performativity, at times playing the Native American Indian and at times playing the Jew (797). Jennifer Glaser similarly suggests the novel's sense of diasporic anxiety is situated in the Sitka Jews' exploitation of the indigenous Tlingit population (11). Despite that problematic dynamic, Glaser still asserts that Chabon promotes diasporism and rejects Zionism. Bennet Kravitz similarly recognizes this identity ambivalence and argues that it is later reconciled through Landsman's desire for justice and his ability to tell a story, ultimately suggesting that the novel supports diasporism.

I too recognize Chabon's presentation of diasporic anxiety, but I suggest that it is located in both the Jewish diasporic experience and in the Jewish relationship to Zionism. Furthermore, I argue that through the concept of Reversion and the failed messianic figure of Mendele Shpilman, Chabon does not disavow the importance of Israel in the Jewish American imagination, but instead presents Israel through a complicated ambivalence. As such, I see Chabon's diasporic critique as formulated by Jewish American relationships with both the diaspora and Israel. I build on Brent Hayes Edwards' transnational and discursive approach to diaspora, and unlike other critics, I argue that Chabon is concurrently describing the Galut *and* Israel as lacking and as legitimate centers in the Jewish American imagination.

Consider Edwards' thesis. Though he focuses on black internationalism, Edwards' concept of diaspora as a practice of intellectual/cultural exchange is relevant in a discussion of the Jewish American relationship to Israel. Applying Edwards' argument to *Yiddish Policemen*, we can recognize that Chabon sees the Jewish American experience as not solely comprised of living in the diaspora and engaging with American culture. Rather, Chabon highlights how the Jewish American experience is influenced by its dynamic with other transnational Jewish communities, particularly Israel. Jewish American identity may not solely depend on its relationship with Israel, but Chabon suggests that it is inescapably a significant component of it. Similarly, Edwards explicates that understanding and forming black internationalism are not engendered from a static definition, but are rather comprised of "*déclage*, the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred over or exchanged..." (14). We can look at *déclage* from a Jewish American perspective to suggest that approaches to Zionism and the diaspora will undoubtedly be affected by difference. And that difference does not encourage the exclusion of the other. Rather the difference is what actually defines the practice of diaspora. The apparent irrelevancies of the other, which, for Jewish American diasporists, could be the concept of Zionism and Israeli existence, are ironically an integral part of the diaspora. As Edwards suggests, articulating these differences is the only way to truly understand and encourage progress in the diaspora. He writes that "articulations of the diaspora demand to be approached...through their *déclage*. For paradoxically, it is exactly such a haunting gap of discrepancy that allows the African diaspora to "step"...in various articulations. Articulation is always an...ambivalent gesture" (15). Unlike critics who suggest that Chabon disavows Zionism's importance for the Jewish American

imagination, I argue that Edwards' treatise can inform a more relevant reading of *Yiddish Policemen*. When Chabon renders diasporic anxiety and ambivalence towards Israel, he is not advocating diasporism. Instead he is revealing the difficulties of diasporic experience, which, as he presents it, also enforces the necessity for Israel. Chabon is "articulating" the diaspora, acknowledging the importance of both Israel and the diaspora in the Jewish American experience.

American and diasporic Jewry

Yiddish Policemen's formal counter-historical structure emphasizes this Jewish American "articulation of the diaspora." But it is important to note that though the novel is located in Sitka, Alaska, it makes what I think is a problematic differentiation between the novel's American Jews and Sitka Jews. Chabon clearly differentiates their experiences but we are nevertheless encouraged to see the Jews in Sitka as figurative conduits for the contemporary Jewish American experience. As such, the Jewish experience in Sitka can be a lens for reading the contemporary Jewish American experience.³¹ The Sitka Jews' figurative role is not only engendered from the fact that Michael Chabon is Jewish American but also from the symbolic role detective Landsman plays. Chabon makes a point to highlight both the Americanness and Jewishness of his protagonist to underscore the representative roles the Jews of Sitka possess for contemporary American Jewry.³² On the one hand, Landsman's name is a Yiddish word

³¹ Chabon said in an interview "the whole novel is itself a simile. It's setting up a series of semblances and mirrorings of the world we live in, so it seemed almost necessary, not just from a stylistic point of view but from a thematic point of view" (qtd. in Weiner).

³²In an essay discussing his motivation to write *Yiddish Policemen*, Chabon similarly alludes to the inter-relational dynamics between Israel and the diaspora on Jewish identity formation and preemptively rejects a diasporist reading of his work:

For a long time now I've been busy, in my life, and in my work, with a pair of ongoing, overarching investigations into my heritage...--as a Jew and teller of Jewish stories, and into my heritage: as a lover of genre fiction...There was really only one investigation all along.

that translates as “country man,” but which is used to identify another (diasporic) Jew in vernacular as “one of us.” On the other hand, the novel’s hard-boiled quality and Landsman, as a cynical detective, are thoroughly American. In fact, Chabon has openly admitted that the character Sam Spade influenced his creation of Landsman, who is replete with a brash tongue, tortured soul, jaded sensibility, broken marriage and drinking habit (Leopold). Solidifying Landsman’s hard-boiledness, Chabon describes Landsman’s alcohol as a necessary respite from the harshness of the job; to escape the grimness of his reality Landsman drinks “the crude hammer of hundred-proof plum brand.” Chabon also reveals the typical hard-boiled criminality of detective work in his description of Landsman’s abilities: the “memory of a convict, the balls of a fireman, and the eyesight of a housebreaker” (2).³³ Given the Americanness of the genre that Landsman so obviously echoes, Chabon is consciously associating contemporary American Jewry with the fictional Jewish community in Sitka.

Counter-historical form

Chabon’s use of a counter- history infuses the novel with diasporic anxiety. But it also manipulates the reading experience to force readers to engage with the dynamic between Zionism and Jewish Americans on a heightened level. In his essay on the rhetorical possibilities of counter-historical novels, Adam Rovner discusses Chabon’s counter-historical form and similarly argues that Chabon’s novel creates a reading

One search, with a sole objective: a home, world to call my home...I am an American, of course, what else?—but the American in which I feel at home is only a kind of Planetarium show...[There is an] impossibil[ity] to live intelligently as a member of a minority group in a nation that was founded every bit as firmly on enslavement and butchery as on ideals of liberty, and not feel... that you can no more take for granted the continued tolerance of your existence here...I guess every American Jew has a moment in which he or she feels the bottom drop out (Maps 159).

³³ Chabon has admitted to Chandler’s influence on his writing, having re-read through Chandler’s works in preparation for writing *Yiddish Policemen* (Leopold).

experience pervasive with anxiety (136). He delineates how counter-historical novels, or what he defines as allohistories, become philosophical texts that highlight contemporary social anxieties because counter-histories conflate two types of awareness in the reader. First, the reader simultaneously recognizes the fictionalized rendition of known history and the knowledge of factual history.³⁴ Second, the reader continuously engages with the historically altered circumstance, questioning its hypothetical effects and consequences, and philosophizing on the results of and reasons for factual history, in the past and future. Ultimately, the musings about the past and future, both hypothetical and factually based, arouse a hypersensitivity to the present situation and, as such, highlight the present more than any other temporal arena. Consider how striking it is when we first encounter this counter-historical moment in Chabon's narrative, which describes the Jewish banishment from Israel in 1948: "But Jews have been tossed out of the joint [Israel] three times now—in 586 B.C.E., in 70 C.E. and with savage finality in 1948" (17). (The adjective of finality highlights the intense reactions that counter-histories can elicit.) Rovner suggests that Chabon's counter-history reflects Jewish American anxieties about living in the diaspora by examining the place of Israel (and in this case the eradication of Israel) in the Jewish imagination (145-147, 151). For example, Chabon's counter-history draws attention to the current diasporic situation for American Jews, since the "Reversion" reveals the antithesis of contemporary Jewish American security and privilege; in contrast to contemporary Jewish Americans, the Sitka Jews are not citizens of the state, have no rights, and soon will have no home.

By utilizing a counter-historical form and creating an ominous premise, Chabon creates the setting where contemporary diasporic anxieties can be unearthed. The reader

³⁴He also builds on Gavriel Rosenfeld's analysis of World War II alternate histories.

is aware that, unlike in Chabon's narrative, Israel is in fact now under Jewish control, ameliorating, one can argue, Jewish territorial vulnerability around the world. However, the situation in Israel between the Israelis and Palestinians is highly volatile and precarious. The reader may recognize that Israel can fall out of Jewish hands, as it did in Chabon's counter-history. And the reader ponders: Could American Jewry end up like Chabon's Sitka Jews - facing reversion?

In a sense, if Chabon forces us to imagine a world without the State of Israel, we are obliged to ponder over what the State of Israel means to us now. And if we are forced to imagine a contradictory situation where America simultaneously serves as both a protector over its American Jewry and an evictor of its Sitka Jews, we are compelled to ponder over the vulnerability and security of contemporary Jewish Americans.

Critique of Zionism: Messianic figures and Zionist tropes

In addition to utilizing a counter-historical form to unearth diasporic anxieties, I argue that Chabon presents the failed messianic figure to reveal and represent the characters' tortured Zionist yearning, which concomitantly furthers diasporic anxiety. What makes it a tortured Zionism is the fear that Zionism (as a redemptive force and as represented by the salvation a failed messiah promises to deliver) will never actualize. In fact, early in the narrative Landsman articulates this jaded perspective on Israel when he considers the upcoming Reversion. Thinking about the three exiles from Zion, (including the counter-historical one in 1948), Landsman realizes that "it's hard even for the faithful not to feel a sense of discouragement about their chances of once again getting a foot in the door [of Israel]" (17). And yet, throughout the narrative Landsman and his fellow Sitka Jews maintain a hope in Zion.

Chabon emphasizes the painful futility of Zionism for the Sitka Jews by relating it to the messianic impulse, which epitomizes intense striving for a perfection/redemption that has yet to materialize. For example, Chabon first conflates Zionism and messianism through Landsman's exchange with an old beggar who is asking for donations for Israel. Chabon writes:

Walking to his home in the seedy hotel Zamenhof, Landsman is confronted by Elijah, an old beggar shaking a likewise antiquated wooden charity box. The man pushes himself like a "rickety handcart...From his beard, armpits, breath and skin, the wind plucks a rich smell of stale tobacco and wet flannel and the sweat of a man who lives on the street" (15).

On the charity box, it is written in Hebrew "L'erezt Yisroel," which translates to "To the Land of Israel." Before their conversation begins, Chabon already creates a relationship between the idea of Messiah and the promise of Israel. The name Elijah references the biblical prophet who predicted the destruction of the first Jewish Temple, the Jewish exile from the land of Israel, and the ultimate return of the Jews to "Eretz Yisrael" in messianic times. According to rabbinic tradition, Elijah will arrive imminently before the Messiah arrives (Eruvin 43b).³⁵ And here is Chabon's Elijah, except that he is filthy and decrepit. Furthermore, through the charity box and the request for funds that will help build Israel, Chabon underscores both the promise and, because of the counter-historical context, the failure of a modern Israeli state.³⁶ Chabon continues the passage: "'A small donation?'

³⁵ The persona of Elijah occupies a privileged place in the Galut/Geulah (redemption) binary because of his mention during the Passover Seder, which ritualizes the Children of Israel's redemption from exile.

³⁶ The image of the box in the text is a striking visual reference as, in actuality, many Jewish diasporic homes possess(ed) one in their homes, temples, or schools; in fact, since the late 19th century and the birth of political Zionism, they were and continue to be ubiquitous. As the coin slot reveals, diasporic

Elijah says.³⁷ The Holy Land has never seemed more remote or unattainable than it does to a Jew of Sitka” (17).

Chabon positions the concepts of Messiah, represented by an old and filthy, homeless man, and Israel under an umbrella of expectant disappointment - especially for a “Jew of Sitka” facing reversion. The passage continues describing the counter-historical status of contemporary Israel: “Jerusalem is a city of blood and slogans painted on the wall, severed heads on telephone poles. Observant Jews around the world have not abandoned their hope to dwell one day in the land of Zion. But Jews have been tossed out of the joint three times now” (17). Chabon’s mention of the three exiles is noteworthy because in rabbinic tradition the third official Jewish return to Zion is supposed to be concurrent with the Messiah, an idea rooted in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, and a concept in Chabon’s narrative that is squashed by counter-historical information.³⁸ The passage also layers Landsman’s feelings of wariness towards Israel, as Landsman reacts to the beggar in emotionally contrasting ways. Exhibiting his tortured Zionism, Landsman “reaches out and pulls at Elijah’s sleeve, a question formulating in his heart, a child’s question about the old wish of his people for a home” (17). Landsman then allows his jadedness to dominate his emotions, “feel[ing] the questions ebb wash like the nicotine in his bloodstream” (17) as if a hope in the homeland was an unhealthy addiction rather than an indication of admirable faithfulness, as if nationalist sentiments were juvenile.

Jews around the world were urged by fellow Jews to give money to Israel on a daily basis, playing a small but regular role in its birth.

³⁷ This charity-driven exchange is a similar device employed by Philip Roth in his novel *The Counterlife*, which I will discuss in chapter II. Notably, in Roth’s narrative the conversation occurs at the Western Wall, the remaining outer Wall of the ancient Jewish Temple’s grounds. (In rabbinic tradition, the Messiah will catalyze the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple.)

³⁸ This idea is the central basis of messianic Zionism. See my introduction for more on messianic Zionism.

After declaring to Landsman that the “Messiah is coming,” Elijah returns the money that Landsman had pushed into the ‘pushke’ disgusted with Landsman’s response: that it was good the Messiah is coming “since the hotel has a new vacancy.” While readers are not aware of it yet at this point in the novel, the vacancy is caused by the murder of Mendele, the second messianic figure in the text. And so Chabon has created a situation where messianic hope is completely eradicated even before the novel has really begun; the vacant room that could be intended for the Messiah is vacant because the would-be Messiah has already been murdered.

Early in the novel, Chabon mirrors Edwards’ diasporic concept and suggests that Jewish American diasporic anxiety is equally situated in its negotiation of the diasporic experience as well as in Zionism.³⁹ Mirrored in Landsman’s exchange with Elijah, the Sitka Jews are cognizant of Israel’s importance and yet are disheartened by it as a solution to diasporic anxieties and as a manifestation of Zionist yearning, ancient and modern. And yet they, Landsman included, nurture a desperate hope for Zion and consequently suffer from years of disappointment. They develop a Zionism that is painful to endure - it is a tortured Zionism.⁴⁰ Unlike critics who see *Yiddish Policemen* as a rejection of Zionism, I argue that the novel instead perpetuates a tortured Zionism, where

³⁹ In this way, the central tension of the novel reflects what Jasmin Habib defines as diaspora nationalism, where American Jews consider the U.S. their home, but are also fervent Zionists and possess a deep cultural, spiritual and emotional relationship to Israel. More specifically, their diaspora nationalism is complicated by their ambivalence towards Israel. She bases her argument on the time she spent on sponsored tours to Israel with diasporic Jews.

⁴⁰ The presence of tortured Zionism in *Yiddish Policemen* is echoed in Chabon’s non-fictional writings. After the tragic flotilla incident in 2010, where Israeli soldiers killed two Turkish activists in what they argued was self-defense, Chabon wrote an op-ed piece for the New York Times. He said:

The past two decades in particular have illustrated to Jews and to the world a painful premise, but one that was implicit in the Zionist idea from the beginning....[that] the history of the Jewish people and of the human race, has been from the beginning a record of glory and fiasco, triumph and error, greatness and meanness, charity and crime. (“Chosen”)

deeply ingrained Zionist beliefs are constantly challenged in the face of problematic realities in Israel.

Most critics read the eradication of Israel as a symbol of Chabon's diasporism; I see it as an obvious signpost that Chabon suggests that Israel is necessary for Jewish security. Without even addressing history and religion, the most obvious way to assert the need for Jewish national sovereignty is to present the current Jewish diasporic situation as dangerous. Chabon affirms basic Zionist thought through the imminent Reversion in Sitka,⁴¹ which could not be more troublesome especially since Israel no longer exists as a Jewish state and Jews are not welcome there, and solidifies the disastrous climate of Reversion. Chabon develops the refrain of "as strange times to be a Jew" (13), when he describes both the Reversion, and the loss of Israel in 1948. The semantic parallel suggests that without a stable and secure territory designated for Jews, the Jewish predicament of exile is a dangerously recurring circumstance.

In addition to depicting an unreachable Israel, Chabon situates Sitka as a representative of modern-age Jewish diasporic communities. However, he complicates that representation by concurrently distinguishing between the Sitka Jewish community and the Jewish American community, on a literal level, and presenting Sitka as a symbol of the Jewish diasporic experience, including the Jewish American experience. The Sitka Jews' predicament epitomizes historical Jewish diasporic experiences because of its heightened precariousness; it is the antithesis of security. Chabon introduces Sitka on the verge of Reversion, where even the institutions intended to protect the Jewish population will be eradicated: "The District Police, to which Landsman has devoted his hide, head,

⁴¹ See Theodore Herzl's *The Jewish State*.

and soul for twenty years, will be dissolved...Nothing is clear about the upcoming Reversion” (7). Like the majority of Jewish diasporic communities around the world (at least in the Eastern Hemisphere) who were exiled or forced to flee from their nations, the Sitka community experiences security only ephemerally. As Sarah Casteel elucidates, “the reversion is an imaginative construct that condenses the patterns of expulsion and dispersion that characterize Jewish history” (795). Outside of the novel, [Chabon] has admitted that such traumatic historical events “as the destruction of the temple, the expulsion from Spain, Kristallnacht, these key moments, these dates that both seem to change everything and yet merely were repeating, in some way, the last time” [Jews 795].

Testifying to the repetition of Jewish vulnerability through the Reversion, Chabon describes Sitka’s Jewish anthem “Nokh Amol,” which was intended to be “an expression of gratitude for another miraculous deliverance: Once Again. Nowadays the Jews of the Sitka District tend to hear the ironic edge that was there all along” (4). The declaration of “Once Again” clarifies that the ominous situation is not exclusive to this particular narrative, undermining a diasporist reading of the novel. The fact that the Sitka refuge was initially considered the site of “miraculous deliverance” now layers disappointment with fear. As such, “the miraculous deliverance” echoes how many contemporary American Jews, outside of the text, view the United States and the State of Israel, underscoring Chabon’s irony. Describing a Jewish diasporic community on the brink of exile and also spiritually tied to Israel, Chabon makes a fictional choice, loaded with political implications. Through the upcoming Reversion, Chabon asserts Israel’s practical importance to world Jewry. After all, imagine if, after the Reversion, the Sitka Jews could

settle in Israel. Reversion would be more of an inconvenience than a catastrophic predicament.

However, Chabon also suggests that Israel's importance extends beyond pragmatics. In Chabon's narrative, Israel, despite its eradication and as related to the Zionist dream, remains at the forefront of the Sitka Jews' imagination. I argue that the narrative further discourages a diasporist reading through the Sitka Jews' emotional attachment to the concept of Zion, as the Sitka Jews still consider the Galut as a temporary peripheral locale in contrast to the emotional and spiritual center of Israel.

However, Chabon heightens the bleak counter-historical portrayal of Israel by eliminating nostalgic sentimentality from the Sitka Jews' feelings towards Israel. Instead, the Sitka Jews' sentiments towards Israel are at once longing and infused with feelings of disappointment. Consider, for example, Landsman's musings when confronted with an abandoned suburban development project. Landsman encounters an empty cul-de-sac named "Tikvah Street, the Hebrew word denoting hope and connoting to the Yiddish ear...seventeen flavors of irony" (198). Similar to the irony-laden "Nokh Hamol" anthem, Tikvah Street plays on its literal translation and in its association with the current Israeli National Anthem *Hatikvah*, which translates as "The Hope." Like the development on Tikvah Street, in the narrative, Israel was a potential settlement - a place for Jews to live safely that never actualized. For the Sitka Jews, that fact is not only disappointing; it is disastrous. Furthermore by mentioning "the Yiddish ear's" reaction to the Hebrew street name, Chabon highlights the ideologically significant dynamic between the diasporic experience and Israel.

And still, in the Sitka Jews' imaginative vocabulary, Zion always lingers, and Chabon encapsulates the lasting importance of Zionist mythos but frames it within tragedy. Consider, for example, when Landsman thinks about how his sister Naomi died in an airplane crash:⁴²

as Landsman understands it, the wings of an airplane are engaged in a constant battle with air...Fighting it the way salmon fights against the current of the river in which its going to die. Like a salmon, the aquatic Zionist, forever dreaming of its fatal home—Naomi used up her strength and energy in struggle (238).

Comparing Zionists to salmon, Chabon presents a relationship with Zionism that is bounded by disappointment and yearning; it reveals a painful futility in hoping in and striving for Jewish nationalism in Israel.⁴³ And yet, like salmon yearn to make it upstream, the diasporic Jews of Sitka yearn for Israel. Zionism is also tied to the tragic death of Naomi; we later learn that she was murdered by the Zionists who wanted to retain their secret plan to expedite the Jewish Messiah, suggesting that in the narrative Zionism is destructive. Jennifer Glaser picks up on Chabon's description of tragic Zionist yearning and, informed by the Boyarins' thesis, attests to the novel's diasporism. She bases her argument on Chabon's choice to render a diasporic community that is successful, while in the narrative, Israel, linguistically and content-wise, is only associated with failure (12). In contrast to Glaser, I argue that Chabon's depiction of Israel's defeat contributes to, even heightens, Jewish diasporic anxiety. The fact that

⁴² Biblically Naomi was Ruth's mother in law, who returned back to the land of Canaan to be with her Jewish family. In a sense, she represents an exilic Jew returning to Zion.

⁴³ This futile yearning is preceded most famously perhaps in Moses' inability to reach the Land of Israel. He died shortly before the Children of Israel entered the land.

Israel failed does not make Galut better; rather it makes Galut communities, like Sitka, dangerously vulnerable.

Chabon even deconstructs the traditional sentimentality related with Zionism (especially for diasporic Jews), suggesting that the ideological and utopic nature of Zionism was plagued from its conception, amplifying the novel's overall presentation of tortured Zionism. Consider the scene when Landsman is captured by the Zionists, who kidnapped Mendele and are plotting to blow up the Temple Mount in an effort to expedite the Messiah. The Zionists drug Landsman and he loses consciousness, and has a dream about Zionism that reveals the impossibility of its utopic actualization. Chabon writes, "[Landsman and his captors] are standing in a desert wind under the date palms, and speaking Hebrew, and they are all friends and brothers together and the mountains skip like rams, and the hills like little lambs (263). Chabon conflates biblical imagery, particularly from sections of Isaiah,⁴⁴ with date palms, desert wind, and (sacrificial) lambs and rams, and an early Zionist song from the 19th century, "Hinei matov umanayim" ("how good and pleasant it is when brothers (or friends) dwell together in unity").⁴⁵ By synthesizing these disparate allusions, which all possess messianic undertones, the passage suggests that Jewish diasporic perspectives on Israel are often borne from thousands of years of Zionist-driven discourse. Not only has Zionist rhetoric existed since the Jews' first expulsion from Israel in 550 B.C.E., but also, often, Zionist discourse is an amalgamation of biblical, ancient and modern sources. Similarly, the

⁴⁴ Chabon's passage most closely resembles Isaiah 11:6. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the panther shall lie down with the kid."

⁴⁵ The song has widely been performed and referenced in large- and small-scale diasporic productions. It is the song often sung on Israel Independence Day in Jewish American day schools and has appeared in various films, including the American film *The Raid on Entebbe* (1977). Besides for "Hatikvah" (the Israeli national anthem), it is the go-to song for celebrating Israel in the Jewish American diaspora.

current Jewish American generation is aware of the Zionist leanings of previous generations, whether they were manifested in prayer or political action. However, Chabon undermines the intensity of that idealistic tradition as Landsman's dream is akin to "mak[ing] a dazzling leap into impossible understanding, like the sudden consciousness in a dream of one's having invented a great theory or written a fine poem that in the morning turns out be gobbledygook" (262-263). The passage implies that Zionist sentimental rhetoric, even its ancient biblical source, is the "gobbledygook" discovered in the light of morning, as if to suggest that once someone is thinking lucidly, he/she would not be a Zionist.

Landsman's dream is a significant moment in the text because it underscores the profound pull Zionism has on Landsman (and by extension many diasporic Jews, considering the symbolic capacity of Landsman's name). The promise of Israel for Jews like Landsman is presented as an ancient wish and a modern imperative, in which modern Zionist rhetoric jumps off of ancient biblical tropes. Landsman's dream reveals that the Zionist dream is present in the Jewish diasporic imagination, even in a jaded cynic like Landsman. However, the violent situation in which it is experienced suggests that for Landsman the reality of the dream is centered on violence; it is the antithesis of the longed-for brotherhood and peace of Zionist ideology.⁴⁶ It is a tortured Zionism because it cannot ameliorate the feelings of ethical ambivalence borne from the complex and violent Palestinian/ Israeli dynamic.

Mendele: The failed messianic figure

⁴⁶ Chabon's mention of problematic violence is fitting in the direct aftermath of the 2006 Israel/Lebanon war, where various human rights groups accused both Israel and Hezbollah of war crimes. Sufficient evidence was not solidly found to condemn either side.

I have already delineated how Chabon presents the diasporic anxieties of the Sitka Jews through the imminent reversion, the Sitka Jews' conflicted relationship with Zionism, and the counter-historical failure of a nascent Israel. By utilizing the messianic figure in the text, who likewise disappoints and fails and who is concomitantly tied to Zionism, Chabon asserts that diasporic anxiety is fueled by a symbiotic relationship between Israel (as a manifestation of Zionism) and the Galut, in the Jewish American imagination. That part of the Galut experience is a belief (even subconsciously, as with Landsman) in the Zionist dream only makes the Sitka Jews' predicament more difficult. This conflation of ancient hope, and a disappointment in the failed promises of Zionism is reminiscent of Gershom Scholem's dialectical view towards Jewish messianism,⁴⁷ where the Jewish Messiah is one that can paradoxically always and never occur, and echoes Mendele's messianic role in the novel: Mendele encompasses hopeful redemption, Zionism's dream, and tragic futility. Chabon constructs Mendele to incarnate a dream shattered, as he becomes the symbol of tortured Zionism.

Like the novel's erasure of the State of Israel, the novel's primary messianic figure Menachem Mendel Shpilman, or Mendele, is similarly eradicated even before the narrative begins. In fact, we are first introduced to Mendele in the first pages of the novel, before we are even aware of it; he is the murder victim, under the pseudonym Emmanuel Lasker, whose death Landsman has to investigate on page one. As the novel progresses, we discover more about Mendele, his murder, and the fact that his messianic persona is largely borne from his genuine greatness, amplifying the painful disappointment that Mendele's demise and death engender. And so from the novel's opening pages, the

⁴⁷ See my introduction for a more thorough description of Scholem's interpretation of the Jewish Messiah.

double eradication of Israel and Mendele work to solidify Chabon's development of tortured Zionism and the visceral pain of disappointment that it causes. In a sense, Mendele's murder is not merely the source of the hard-boiled mystery but it is also the foundation of the novel's development of tortured Zionism and the revelations of Mendele's greatness and failure are as important as Landsman's ability to solve the crime.

For Sitka's Jewish community, Mendele's death is strikingly heartbreaking because his upbringing, intelligence, and mythic persona all pointed to him being the future Messiah. Mendele was the son of the Verbover Hasidic Rebbe, possibly the most powerful (and corrupt) man in Sitka. Growing up as the son and heir apparent of the Verbover Hasidic dynasty, Mendele was widely regarded as a genius. A Talmudic prodigy, Mendele astounded everyone with his intellectual prowess. As a boy, he also performed miracles, healing people from physical illnesses and revealing his innate holiness. The Verbover community not only assumed that Mendele would eventually occupy the position of Rebbe but they also believed in and witnessed Mendele's exceptional spiritual and intellectual gifts. He began to transcend the persona of a gifted prodigy to become a nascent messianic figure. The fact that he was born on the 9th of Av, in the Hebrew calendar, reaffirmed the Verbovers' belief that Mendele would eventually bring the Messiah, since, in actuality, the Talmud states that Messiah will be born on that date, Tisha B'av, which is also the day that both Jewish temples in Jerusalem were destroyed and two Jewish exiles began (JT. Berachot 2:4).

Throughout the novel, Chabon takes pains to develop the power of Mendele's lasting legend. When Landsman arrives at the Verbover Rebbe's home to inform him of

his son's murder, the usual groups of loitering Verbovers are aghast to hear the name of Mendele. Despite the fact that Mendele was excommunicated from the community 20 years prior, the mention of Mendele reveals "the old power to conjure of a name in which their fondest hope once resided" (140). Landsman asks the Rebbe about the rumor that "[Mendele might have] revealed himself as the messiah, and the Rebbe says:

We are taught...that a man with the potential to be Messiah is born into every generation. This is the Tzaddik Ha-Dor. Now, Mendel. Mendele, Mendele...had a remarkable nature as a boy... I'm not talking about miracles. Miracles are a burden for tzaddik, not the proof of one. Miracles prove nothing...⁴⁸ There was something in Mendele. There was a fire. This is a cold, dark place, Detectives...Mendele gave off light and warmth. You wanted to stand close to him. To warm your hands, melt the ice on your beard. To banish the darkness for a minute or two. But then when you left Mendele, you stayed warm, and it seemed like there was a little more light...And that was when you realized the fire was inside of you all the time. And that was the miracle. Just that (141).

Through the Verbover Rebbe's description of Mendele, Chabon underscores that Mendele possessed true greatness. Various characters in the novel attest to the wonders of Mendele, even when he was a young boy. For example, through the strength of his internal warmth, Mendele cured a dying woman merely by sending her, via messenger, a verbal blessing (124). Mendele's reputation was justified, making his death heartbreaking.

⁴⁸ Maimonides states that miracles are not signposts for a messianic figure (Mishneh Torah.11.3).

But when Mendele ran from home on the day of his arranged marriage to the daughter of another Rabbinic dynasty, he not only abdicated his position as his father's successor, he was also excommunicated. Further ostracizing himself from his Hasidic community, Mendele fled because he knew he was homosexual, considered a mortal sin in the Verbover world; he later became a heroin junkie (who tied up with his Tefillin straps).

Nonetheless, the legend of Mendele's greatness and role as a potential messiah remained strong. It was so strong that a group of Zionists try to clean Mendele of his drug habit so that he could act as a messianic figure, motivating the Sitka Jews out of Alaska and to Palestine, where they planned to blow up the Temple Mount and start a war; in their minds, it was their only solution to the Reversion predicament. Of course, their plan fails and Mendele (and his great messianic potential) are murdered in the process.

Mendele and the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Chabon constructs the tragedy of Mendele to affirm Mendele's role as the failed messianic figure (and as a representative of ambivalent feelings towards Zionism). But Chabon further heightens diasporic anxiety in the novel by paralleling Mendele and the historical figure of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, a tactic that both blurs fiction and history and reiterates Mendele's legendary status and wasteful death. In a seemingly conscious move, Chabon's Mendele and the disappointment surrounding Mendele's death bear obvious similarities to Menachem Mendel Schneerson and his death in 1994. Chabon develops this implied comparison between Schneerson and Mendele to produce the same sense of heightened diasporic anxiety that the novel's counter-historical form accomplishes - an experiential comprehension of diasporic

anxiety as opposed to a merely observational understanding, which in its potency further undermines a diasporist reading of the novel.

Considering Schneerson's messianic focus, Chabon's allusions to Schneerson are appropriate. Of all the Hasidic figures in the 20th century, Schneerson, who was the leader of the international and Hasidic Chabad movement from 1951 until his passing in 1994, was the most messianic driven. While most Hasidic sects believe in the concept of the Messiah, no Hasidic or even modern Jewish group has focused more on it than Chabad, particularly during Schneerson's leadership.⁴⁹ Schneerson was simultaneously known as a righteous and holy man even amongst non-Chasidim and non-Jews, and a highly controversial figure. Much of the admiration for him is engendered from thousands of widely circulated stories of the miracles he performed,⁵⁰ very much like Chabon's Mendelev, and the fact that many regarded the advice he disseminated to public figures and private individuals as prophetic. His leadership was dynamic, causing the opening of thousands of Chabad centers worldwide, including one in Alaska, whose members consider themselves the "frozen chosen" (Fishkin 132-138) - the same term Chabon's fictional American Jews use to refer to the Sitka Jews.

⁴⁹Schneerson thoroughly incorporated messianism into his movement, often saying that the Messiah is at "the threshold" (Metzger) to inspire his follower's religious adherence and acts of Jewish outreach. Schneerson would encourage his followers to do good deeds (not just to strictly adhere to Jewish law) and encourage unaffiliated Jews to do Jewish rituals, as a way to welcome the arrival of the Mashiach instead of remaining sheltered in their Brooklyn enclave). According to rabbinic law, one may expedite the Messiah through spiritual means (like good deeds, Torah learning, or prayer) (Zohar). It is forbidden, however, to attempt to catalyze the Messiah by manipulating the physical world, like actually rebuilding the Temple before God has sanctioned it (Rashi). Many Hareidim and Hasidim in the diaspora and in Israel are anti-Zionists for this reason, as they believe the establishment of Israel was an attempt to expedite a messianic return without God's initial approval. (The Chabad movement is notably separate from these anti-Zionist Hasidic groups) (Shain and Bristman 77).

⁵⁰ There are countless recorded stories about Schneerson that are similar to the aforementioned story about Chabon's Mendelev and the woman in the hospital. For more accounts of Schneerson's miracles see Joseph Telushkin and Mordechai Staiman.

However, by the mid 1980's Chabad's messianic message became intimately tied to the Rebbe himself, with the majority of Lubavitchers believing that he was Messiah, and he increasingly became a more controversial figure. Schneerson neither confirmed nor denied that claim, instead reiterating that the Messiah was imminent. When in his old age, Schneerson, who remained the leader of the movement until his death and was childless, did not appoint a successor to his movement, the belief that he was the Messiah skyrocketed. (Mendele was also childless.) Full-page ads were printed in the New York Times with the Rebbe's photograph stating, "The messiah is on its way." The song "long live the Rebbe, King Moshiach. Forever and ever" became the anthem for Lubavitchers around the world. He was even strongly criticized by other Jewish leaders, who thought that he should not have perpetuated or permitted the messianic cult of personality surrounding him. In fact, the contemporary Lubavitcher community has experienced a rupture between those who still believe that Schneerson is the Messiah and those who do not. To this day, no one has replaced Schneerson as the official leader of the Chabad movement.

To the Lubavitch community, the fact that their Rebbe passed and the Messiah had not arrived was shocking, utterly disappointing, and even tragic. Chabon's reference is no accident, considering the similarities between the Lubavitcher Rebbe and Mendele. (Case in point, their names are almost identical.)⁵¹ In addition, Mendele was regarded as "the tzaddik ha dor", the holy man of his generation, alluding to the idea that there is only one tzaddik ha dor per every generation. To many, Schneerson was indisputably the tzaddik ha dor. But, like Mendele, Schneerson was also a controversial figure. By

⁵¹ It should be noted that Lubavitchers often name their first son Menachem Mendel or Mendele after their Rebbe, and so Chabon's name choice is significant.

referencing Schneerson and his messianic cult of personality through the character of murder victim Mendele, Chabon is not only constructing a sense of communal despair but is actually reminding us of a relatively recent historical account of communal despair and fear. Through the parallel between both Mendels, Chabon is suggesting then that the disappointment felt by the Sitka Jews has been felt before in the Lubavitch community: Chabon utilizes both Mendels to heighten the feeling of current diasporic disappointment, even diasporic devastation.

Chabon's parallel of Schneerson and Mendele is quite overt, though critics have not yet touched on it.⁵² Highlighting the parallel, Chabon mirrors the language of disappointment used in various publications describing Schneerson's death in his description of the Sitka Jews' reaction to Mendele's death. Consider an obituary about Schneerson from *The New York Times*, a source unaffiliated with the Chabad movement:

He was also widely criticized outside his group for not halting the movement to declare him the Messiah, though his close aides say he never claimed any special divinity... "We are certain that he will now be resurrected," said Rabbi Shmuel Spritzer...just before the burial ceremony. "The revelation will come at any moment." Some Hasidim danced to tambourines on the street yesterday,

⁵² Mark Oppenheimer asserts that the Verbovers are meant to symbolize the Lubavitch community, especially since Mendele and Schneerson are buried in a cemetery sharing the name "Montefiore." But Oppenheimer doesn't compare Mendele to Schneerson. I am not, however, suggesting that the Verbovers represent Lubavitch Hasidim, since the Verbovers' insularity does not resemble Chabad's emphasis on Jewish outreach. Chabon had even said in an interview:

The thing that annoyed me the most in the (negative) reactions is that people made an assumption that the bad guys in my novel, the gangster sect, were supposed to be the Lubavitchers, which was just idiotic. That assumption was made out of a profound ignorance of the diversity of the Orthodox community. The Lubavitchers are this incredibly outgoing, outwardly oriented organization, so engaged with the world in so many ways and so willing to talk to outsiders. The (gangsters) in my book are completely insular (qtd.in Weintraub).

certain that his passing meant the Day of Judgment was now even closer (Firestone).

Mendele's Sitka obituary similarly describes his mourners' belief in his messianic persona, stating, "Many hoped and even arranged to be present on one of a number of occasions when rumors flew that he was about to declare his kingdom. But Mr. Shpilman never made any such declarations..." Besides bolstering Mendele's similarities to Schneerson, the obituary again reflects hope destroyed by disappointment. Both funerals evoke a sense that the messianic arrival is imminent, and both obituaries reveal that, of course, no such arrival will ever actualize. Even though Mendele was already exiled from the community for 20 years, his death is a symbol for the Verbovers, encapsulating the utter despair that Reversion elicits. Mendele is not merely a messianic figure that fell into a taboo lifestyle and then failed to bring salvation. He is the last hope for salvation, albeit based on a violently destructive, highly flawed and unlikely plan, and he epitomizes a longing for vital redemption that does not actualize. In the narrative, Mendele becomes a representative for a yearning for a homeland, for an Israel that is concurrently necessary (because of the Reversion) and impossible (because of Mendele's death).

Action and Anxiety

By depicting a demoralizing sense of failure in Mendele's mourners, Chabon heightens the narrative's portrayal of tortured Zionism as both circumstances encourage the desire to rectify issues (surrounding Israel) without having an ability to do so. Consider again the scene at Mendele's funeral. Chabon writes, "Every generation loses the messiah it has failed to deserve. Now the pious of Sitka District have pinpointed the site of their collective unworthiness and gathered in the rain to lay it in the ground" (195-

196).⁵³ The passage is significant because it suggests that the arrival of the Messiah is meritocratic.⁵⁴ As such, it reveals another component of diasporic anxiety - the potential and inability for rectifiable action. By presenting the Messiah as a failure due to the shortcomings of the expectant community, Chabon puts the onus of diasporic calamity on the community. The Sitka Jews' failure to help catalyze the Messiah mirrors the anxiety inherent in tortured Zionism, and we can recognize Mendele's messianic failure as a vehicle to understand real-life Jewish American perspectives towards Israel. Furthermore, as revealed in Mendele's death and in the plot to blow up the Temple Mount, the community does not come to terms with the failure. Chabon presents a group of people utterly despondent in their diasporic situation. Can we not then recognize the same type of anxious hopelessness in tortured Zionism, where the desire to rectify a situation is impeded by an inability to do so?

Through the Zionists' convoluted plot, Chabon further parallels Mendele's failure to redeem his people with the failure surrounding Israel - they plan to use Mendele's cult of personality and present him as the Messiah in an effort to mobilize the Sitka residents to Israel. But even before Mendele is unable to occupy his (forced) role in the scheme, he is already an imperfect and tainted player. Along with being a gay heroin addict, Mendele was a promising chess prodigy who was discouraged from competing. While Mendele's astounding ability in chess indicates his preternatural intelligence, it also

⁵³ Mourners also stood in the rain to pay their respects to the Lubavitcher Rebbe at his funeral. David Firestone's obituary writes:

But when his plain pine coffin was borne out of the headquarters building into a light rain yesterday afternoon, a huge cry of grief shook the crowd of mourners jammed onto Eastern Parkway, whose size the Emergency Medical Service estimated at 12,000.

⁵⁴ The meritocratic nature of the Messiah is discussed in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 98 B). As the Talmud exemplifies, there are disputed ideas about the meritocratic arrival of the Messiah versus a predestined arrival.

alludes to a trope of literary madness, associating Mendele with mental instability.⁵⁵

Chabon dooms Mendele's messianic promise from the start, reiterating that Mendele's inability to herald the Messiah or occupy its role is notably situated in the center of a Zionist imperative.

Similarly, Chabon utilizes ambivalent language surrounding the Zionist plot to underscore the impossibility of its actualization (even without Mendele's failure), further developing the narrative's theme of tortured Zionism. Chabon describes Landsman's discovery of a Zionist compound complete with a pasture field for cows (that the Zionists use to camouflage the Para Adumah, or red heifer, whose appearance is an indication of the messianic restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem).⁵⁶ Reinforcing the theme of disappointment (especially regarding the opportunities of diasporic existence), the field reminds Landsman of various attempts to by the Sitka Jews to develop agricultural communities in Alaska during the asylum period. As Landsman remembers, the U.S. State Department glorified its description of the Sitka territory and promised the refugee Jews fertile lands to cultivate. But the Jews eventually discovered that the Alaskan landscape was unsuitable for agriculture. Looking at the pasture, Landsman thinks he is seeing another of those idealistic attempts at Jewish bucolic utopia, or the communities inspired by "Fata Morgana," a "Mirror made of weather and light and imagination on men raised on stories of heaven" (289). As Chabon describes it, Fata Morgana is the phenomenon of trying to follow an idea to its conclusion despite its unlikely fruition; it is

⁵⁵ See Vladimir Nabokov's *The Luzhin Defense* (1930) and Stefan Zweig's *A Chess Novella* (2005).

⁵⁶ The Book of Daniel makes an allusion to the red heifer and the end of days (12:10). Also, because the red heifer can purify those considered impure to give sacrificial prayer to God, its presence indicates that the practice of animal sacrifice can resume and thus the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem can be rebuilt.

an attempt to build the impossible based on a false promise of salvation. Looking at the field, “Landsman thinks he’s looking at the dream...a mirage of the old optimism. That future itself, he believes, is the *fata morgana*”(292).⁵⁷ Despite Landsman’s jaded sensibility, Landsman *is* one of those men raised on “stories of heaven,” reiterating Landsman’s steadfast hope not only in the diasporic promise but more so in Zionism; we later learn that field is not an attempt at an diasporic agricultural community but a component of the messianic/Zionist plot to expedite the Sitka Jews’ return to Israel (which Chabon presents as another *Fata Morgana*). Despite encountering a crazy plan to expedite the Messiah by cultivating the Parah Adumah (and blow up the Temple Mount), Landsman remains steadfast in his Zionist leanings. He thinks, “No matter how powerful, every yid in the District is tethered by the leash of 1948. His kingdom is bound in the nutshell. His sky is a painted dome, his horizon an electrified fence. He has the flight and knows the freedom only of a balloon on a string” (283). In a sense, the promise of salvation is located, still, in the idea of Israel, so much so that the Sitka Jews cannot practically and ideologically imagine a salvation situated elsewhere, especially since their temporary haven is expelling them.

What solidifies the tortured aspect of Zionism in the novel is Landsman’s final investigatory epiphany: the chess Zugzwang found at Mendelev’s murder scene. The Zugzwang serves as central motif to the predicament of tortured Zionism as it becomes what the entire narrative indirectly revolves around. When Landsman examines Mendelev’s dead body in the hotel room, he notices that the body is lying next to a chess

⁵⁷ The scene is also reminiscent of Israeli A.B. Yehoshua’s presentation of Jewish American contribution to the Zionist imperative in his canonical *Facing the Forests* (1963). In both Yehoshua and Chabon, Jewish American investment in Israel seems out of place, and Zionism appears like a dream on the brink of destruction.

game abandoned in the middle of play, baffling Landsman, who is a chess aficionado himself. At the end of the narrative and after the details of Mendelevich's death are revealed - that he escaped the messianic enclave and was killed by Hertz, in an attempt to prevent the terrorist plot - Landsman finally figures it out. The chessboard presents a "Zugzwang" - when a player is forced to move but understands that any possible move will directly lead to losing. Bina realizes that Mendelevich left the chessboard for the investigators to send a message from the grave - that the crime was "committed against a man who found himself left with no good moves at all" (401). As a drug addict, excommunicated from his family, and pursued by desperate people who want to exploit that which he cannot give them or he dies, Mendelevich indeed feels trapped. The Sitka Jews facing Reversion similarly have a Zugzwang - the Messiah is uplifted and fails, the messianic/Zionist plot is presented and it is a disaster. The Zugzwang symbolizes the Sitka Jews' desperate diasporic situation, where they "are [literally] forced to move" but where each move leads to disaster, again debunking a diasporist reading of the novel. But because of Mendelevich's messianic role and his (involuntary) participation in the Zionist plot, the Zugzwang also compellingly represents the location of tortured Zionism: a fervent, perhaps uncompromising belief in Israel, as an ideal and as a practical necessity, that never successfully actualizes but that one cannot and will not abandon.⁵⁸

Productive ambivalence

I have delineated how Chabon utilizes the messianic figure Mendelevich, including his potential, failure, and his circumstantial Zugzwang, as well as the Sitka Jews' reaction

⁵⁸ Bennet Kravitz looks at the "futility of Zionism" in the text literally, comparing the Zugzwang to the "real-life state [and] the latest manifestation of impossible is the war in Gaza" and suggests that it represents the debilitating dynamic of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. (106). Chabon, however, has denied that the novel allegorically references the Israeli/ Palestinian situation (Jeffries).

to him, to present the dangerous impossibilities situated in the diaspora and the lingering hope and devastating disappointment in Zionism. The novel posits the question of how to reconcile the difficulties and *Zugzwangs* of both situations for diasporic Jews, without providing a clear answer to the conundrum. While many critics see the novel as an embrace of diasporism, I argue that Chabon does not glorify the diaspora in the text, nor does he completely disdain Zionism. Instead, Chabon intentionally builds a conundrum around Zionism and the Galut so that the solution remains elusive, ultimately creating a constant presence of anxiety and uncertainty about Jewish American identity in the post-Zionist and post-Holocaust era.

But what is at stake with Chabon's decision to present the dynamic between the Galut and Zionism as endlessly uncertain and ambivalent, as painfully unstable? Edward Said's approach to exile can serve as a springboard for this discussion and provides an approach that emulates Chabon's perspective on post-Holocaust art in *Kavalier and Clay* in its emphasis on productivity. Said looks at the unique perspective of the exiled critic, who is afforded the ability to critique homeland and exile, simultaneously. Distinguishing the expatriate from the refugee, who is forced into an onerous predicament, Said suggests that the expatriate chooses to live away from home. The freedom of choice enables the expatriate a clear perspective on home that will be productive because it simultaneously perpetuates a longing for home and a skepticism towards the idea of a home; as such, exile becomes intellectually productive ("Reflections"). However, while Said asserts the potential productivity of exile, *Yiddish Policemen* suggests that the ambivalence expressed towards Israel and the diaspora is too painful to rectify, even through Chabon's medium of choice – writing. In other words, while Chabon develops this endless

ambivalence in the novel, the way he presents narrative at the end of the novel suggests that he is not comfortable embracing that ambivalence, mirroring through narrative his characters' tortured predicament. He cannot summon the productivity of exile. As such, *Yiddish Policemen* finds itself at a similar impasse to the one presented in *Kavalier and Clay*, where the process of writing is important yet highly limited when engaging with Jewish issues in the post-Holocaust world. Perhaps the limitations of writing in *Yiddish Policemen* are most notably located in Chabon's decision to create a circumstantial distinction between the American Jews and the Sitka Jews, as if to only circle around the idea of Jewish American diasporic anxiety and Israel. The disparity suggests Chabon has not yet fully engaged with Israel, the Holocaust and American Jewry. (Consider that Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) is a counter-history, but it specifically imagines what would happen to *American Jewry* if Nazi sympathizer Charles Lindbergh were elected president in 1940.)

Writing the Galut

Ironically, Chabon writes the impossibility of ameliorating the pain of tortured Zionism by creating a storyteller whose creative ingenuity is impeded. Like much of his work, Chabon's *Yiddish Policemen* is an exploration of genre fiction;⁵⁹ in this case it is the hard-boiled-detective novel. And certainly, Landsman's typical hard-boiled cynicism works well to convey tortured Zionism. However, Chabon utilizes the novel's hard-boiled genre to further elucidate the painful quality of tortured Zionism, specifically in Landsman's inability to enact change. Consider Ernst Bloch's discussion of detective/hard-boiled fiction, which describes the genre as a confluence of tension,

⁵⁹ Chabon explores comic books in *Kavalier and Clay*, a Holmesian detective novel in *The Final Solution* (2005), adventure fiction in *The Gentlemen of the Road* (2007), and young adult fiction in *Summerland* (2002).

between solving a crime and desiring justice. Bloch explicates the hard-boiled reading experience, delineating how it forces the reader to be immersed in a world alien to his/her own choosing as it narrates the solving a crime that has already been committed outside of the text - and re-experienced in the text through the detective's eyes (148). As such, detective fiction "highlights the arbitrary, and preserves traces of possible future change" (148). Bloch suggests that the possibility of future change promotes "utopian desire to change wrongs" but is limited by an innate propensity to maintain the status quo (148). Adam Rovner applies Bloch's theory to *Yiddish Policemen* to critique counter-histories. I expand on Rovner's argument, by suggesting that Bloch's assessment of a concurrent utopian desire and status quo limitation is in *Yiddish Policemen* a conflation of utopian desire (Zionism) and an inability to actualize that utopia. In Chabon's novel, the desire for the status quo is replaced by a torturous inability to actualize change. When coupled with the wish fulfillment inherent in counter-histories, the hard-boiled voice of the narrative (and as such utopian desire, be it cynically masked) makes the novel's relationship between diasporic fears and Zionist disappointment that much more compelling. As the detective who solves the crime and discovers the truth—ultimately unveiling the murder of the Messiah—Landsman becomes an ironic prophet and an ancient storyteller;⁶⁰ his painful inability to rectify the situation in the diaspora and actualize his utopic desire through Zionism (in effect, his own *Zugzwang*) crystallized through his hard-boiled narrative voice.

Ultimately the novel is an expression of Landsman's jaded and dark perspective. However, it may also reveal what Bloch describes: an initial desire for change quashed by a propensity to retain the status quo. In the text, the Galut is dangerous and Israel is a

⁶⁰ Adam Rovner defines him as a "good literary theorist."

failure, which the Sitka Jews still vie for, reflecting a sense that there is a promise for a better existence in Israel but it has not been actualized. With the outrageousness of the Temple Mount plot, the narrative seemingly encourages its characters to accept the dual disaster of the Galut and Israel and embrace the familial bonds situated in the diaspora. Even Landsman finally seems to give up on his lingering Zionist yearnings.

With a superficial reading then, the narrative may support the Boyarins' idea of the new primacy of the Galut in the Jewish American imagination and identity. Certainly scholars, including Glaser, suggest that it does. After all, one of the more infamous lines of the narrative seem to support this argument: Landsman embraces the nomadism of diasporic existence, declaring that his “homeland is in his ex-wife’s tote bag.” To Glaser, Landsman and Bina “agree that the only way of maintaining sanity in the contemporary world comes from finding an ethics rooted in transience...” (17). Rather than rectify the complexity and quell the violence situated in and around Israel, they instead recognize that what they already have in the Galut is the cornerstone of their Jewish identity; in other words, they celebrate the diasporic status quo and disavow their connection to Israel.

However, I argue that if Chabon presents a scenario where Zionism is tainted, diasporic nomadism is equally as problematic. Consider the passage referring to Landsman’s familial geography more closely:

Fuck what is written,” Landsman says...All at once he feels weary of ganefs and prophets...He’s tired of hearing about the promised land and the inevitable bloodshed required for its redemption. “I don’t care what is written. I don’t care what supposedly got promised to some sandal-

wearing idiot whose claim to fame is that he was ready to cut his own son's throat for the sake of a harebrained idea. I don't care about red heifers and patriarchs... My homeland is in my hat. It's in my ex-wife's tote bag (368).

What's striking about the tirade is that we find out that he does care about what is written and that he is subconsciously creating a parallel to himself and the "sandal-wearing idiot," the sacrificially-inclined patriarch Abraham,⁶¹ by having earlier urged Bina to abort their own unborn son, despite that now she "may be pregnant again." While the passage does not present Landsman as a hypocrite, it does present the issues of exile and Zionism as far more complex than fitting neatly into a "fuck it" attitude. It reveals Zionism and the Galut as so intimately tied to his self-identification that intellectually becoming fed up with the repercussions and foundations of Zionism does not obliterate his belief in it. Furthermore, Landsman reveals that locating Jewish identity in the homelessness of diasporic living is equally as problematic. After all, Landsman is depending on his relationship with his ex-wife. Their relationship is already saddled with rupture in divorce, and the death of potential, as symbolized by Bina's voluntary abortion. If his home is in his ex-wife's tote bag, who is to say that he will actually be around his wife and her bag? Furthermore, Landsman thinks about Bina, perhaps even optimistic that he will find redemption in his relationship with her: "He has prayed to [Bina] for rain and she has sent cool showers. But what he really requires is a flood to wash his wickedness from the earth. That or a blessing of a yid who will never bless anyone again" (409). And here Chabon asserts that familial relationships are clearly not

⁶¹ In his essay "The Cut," Chabon writes that Abraham was compelled to sacrifice Isaac because he "he had been commanded to do so by the almighty asshole or by the god-shaped madness whose voice was rolling like thunder through his brain" (*Manhood* 26).

enough for Landsman, despite his frustration with Zionism. For salvation, he needs something larger that mirrors messianic desire.

Landsman finishes the narrative by beginning another one. The novel ends with Landsman saying, “I have got a story for you,” perhaps symbolizing the openness of the creative process and thus the creative opportunities that scholars recognize as endemic to the Galut.⁶² However, I argue that the actual creative ingenuity unique to the diaspora that the Boyarins describe is still absent in the narrative, and yet the utopian desire for practical change (and ameliorating ambivalence towards Zionism) remains. To foster my position, I look at Israeli scholar Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi’s approach to the creative opportunities of exile. Discussing how the establishment of the State of Israel changed Jewish poetics of exile and return, Ezrahi suggests that the circumstances of the Galut creates, fosters and represents a Jewish narrative of poetic possibility; while the Galut nurtures openness, authenticity and honesty, the fact of Israel, as an actualization and thus termination of Zionist yearning (and imagination), represents and creates narrative impossibility.

Engaging with Ezrahi’s argument here, I suggest that in *Yiddish Policemen* it is not the establishment of Israel that engenders narrative impossibility, especially since Israel does not exist in the narrative. Rather, I argue that the diasporic template of eventual disenfranchisement and exile symbolizes narrative impossibility, especially if the notion of the return to Zion is eliminated - which Landsman, superficially, subscribes

⁶² For example, Bennet Kravitz suggests that indeed Landsman had tried to rectify the dismal situation by solving the crime and thus became a sort of “secular messiah.” But Kravitz argues that ultimately it is Landsman’s desire to “tell a story,” which reverses the bleakness of the plot and completes it with optimism: “Beyond the conundrum of statehood, telling good stories is the essence of being a Jew - for Landsman and perhaps for Michael Chabon as well” (110). While compelling, I disagree with Kravitz’ optimistic reading.

to. Consider the completion of the book: Bina tells Landsman, “I could see you had something to say [as Landsman became infuriated with Hertz’s confession of killing Mendele]...so just go ahead and *say* it already. I’m tired of waiting” (410). Bina’s language is revealing because it underscores narrative through Chabon’s italicized emphasis. The fact that Bina is “tired of waiting” is reminiscent of messianic anticipation, which in this novel is doomed never to actualize. After Landsman seemingly reinforces the primacy of familial ties—which are incredibly volatile in this novel—over spiritual, idealistic, and perhaps practical longings, Landsman picks up the phone and calls an American detective to the south, saying, “I have a story for you” (411). We can only assume that the story he is about to tell is the story we have just read. But ironically, within this repetition lays the narrative impossibility. Landsman may be a part of a nation “who carries... their world on the tip of their tongue” (411). But rather than affirm the possibility of creative ingenuity in the diaspora, a retelling of a story is not necessarily ingenuous or creative. It is repetition. It is also maintaining the status quo so that utopian desire and wish fulfillment are likewise not actualized.

The concept of history repeating itself is fittingly affirmed repeatedly in the novel, from “nokh hamol” to fata morgana to Landsman stating towards the end of the narrative, “I guess that’s always how [Jewish diaspora] goes...Egypt. Spain. Germany.” Landsman is merely retelling the ancient story of Jewish expulsion. While the story is compelling-- even in its repetition-- its retelling is doubly as painful because Landsman is placing his hopes in a familial relationship that might collapse, in the false promise of creative control and change, and in the failure of Israel, which remains strong in his Jewish ideological imagination but which he tries to eradicate verbally. (In a way, Landsman’s

unwillingness to acknowledge at the end of the novel his Zionist leanings mirrors Chabon's unwillingness to directly locate Jewish Americans in the diasporic/Israel dynamic.) Earlier in the text, the Verbover Rebbe tells Landsman that he "might be a fine *shammes* (detective) but he is no "sage"(143). And towards the end of the novel, after thinking about the relationship between Eternal Return of the Jew and the Eternal Exile of the Jew, Landsman realizes that he "knows nothing at all" (373). Rather than present Landsman as having a revelation, Chabon reveals that diasporic exile only affirms the detective's lack of knowledge and forces him to regurgitate ancient exilic topos. Despite Landsman's angry harangue and his apparent abandonment of Zionism, we can recognize that he still yearns for the promise of Israel to actualize, because his approach to the Galut remains unfinished and deeply flawed. It does not promote diasporism. But despite its visceral presentation of disappointment, the novel is the antithesis of nihilism. Throughout the narrative, Landsman tries to repress his Zionist leanings only to acknowledge that he will always have them, no matter what. Can we believe him at the end when he says his promised land is in his wife's tote bag? Landsman's inability to openly negotiate that ambivalence towards Israel, and to actualize the relationship between the Galut and Israel in a positive, meaningful way, is revealed in his inability to create a new narrative. By transcending Landsman's position as hard-boiled detective to a storyteller, Chabon at the end of the novel presents a writer, and he is a writer who can only continue or retell the story he has just experienced, instead of creating something new that would rectify the conundrum he finds himself in. At the end of the narrative, Chabon does not empower writing. Instead, he diminishes its agency.⁶³

⁶³ Discussing the allure of hard-boiled narratives, Charles Rzepka asserts that the reader reads these novels not to discover the truth or reach the end of the mystery. Instead, the reader relishes in the

If *Yiddish Policemen* ends with a declaration of yearning, which I think it does, perhaps Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi's thesis on the diasporic imagination can help ameliorate Landsmen's gripe, or Chabon's for that matter. Being a tortured Zionist can be productive but only if Ezrahi's concept of the diasporic imagination is utilized: that the diaspora can inspire a rectification of the problems in Israel, not eradicate its presence from Jewish- American identity . The fact that Chabon fictionally separates his Jewish Americans from the Sitka Jews' disastrous calamity suggests his unwillingness to fully engage with the critique Ezrahi elucidates. We are meant to recognize the symbolic capacity of the Sitka Jews. In that way, we can engage with the compelling critique about Zionism and the diaspora that Chabon has painstakingly developed in *Yiddish Policemen*. However, Chabon limits his critique by not overtly naming tortured Zionism and diasporic anxiety Jewish American issues. Similarly, in *Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon stymies his examination of the post-war Jewish American experience by completely excluding Israel from the scenario. Nevertheless, like Joe's imperfect approach to Holocaust art and Landsman's lingering ambivalence about Israel, Chabon's imperfect, but profound, narratives reveal, again and again, that engagement with Jewish American issues is necessary and illuminating, even if those engagements do not solve problems or deliver absolute resolution. Books need to be written, and ideas need to be discussed, despite their limitations.

opportunity to flex imaginative muscles while negotiating the crime's many possibilities. In a sense, the reader likes the search (28-31). Looking at Chabon's critique of Jewish- American identity through Rzepka's lens, we can recognize how suited the hard-boiled narrative is for a critique on tortured Zionism. By retelling and beginning the story again, we can perhaps assume Landsman is postponing the termination of imaginative opportunity and symbolically gratifying the reader. After all, as the novel closes, we aren't privy to another clue or incident. We know the end; we have reached it. Landsman may retell the story, wanting his own imaginative powers to linger—which is clearly a desire-- but the story is already over. And there again we see a manifestation of futile hope.

Chapter 2

Philip Roth's Circumcised Conscience: Zionism and Narrative

in *The Counterlife, The Facts, Patrimony, and Operation Shylock*

Philip Roth is one of the most controversial best-selling writers in the United States, especially to his Jewish American audience. Since first publishing the short story "Defender of the Faith" (1959) and the novel *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), Roth has received complaints, threats, and accusations that he has irresponsibly portrayed Jewish Americans and has made selfish artistic choices that feed already formed anti-Semites and nourish those who would become them. He has been called a Jewish anti-Semite and an informer. Anyone who has read Roth, whether his Zuckerman, Kepesh, or Roth books, knows that his Jewish American audience has taken issue with his representations of American Jewry, as Roth plays off that heated relationship in his fiction.¹ As such, Roth's novels often present characters who are writers struggling to weigh artistic integrity against communal appeasement.² But Roth does not share his characters' ambivalence when representing Jews: the needs of the fictional work continually take priority.³ For twenty years, he had maintained this stance.

¹ Consider a scene in Roth's *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), the 2nd book in a series that portrays Nathan Zuckerman, a young Jewish American writer, an alter ego to Roth. The novel describes Nathan's rise to fame after having written "Carnovsky", a novel that seems to closely resemble Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*. The narrator declares,

You see, not everybody was delighted by this book that was making Zuckerman a fortune. Plenty of people had already written to tell him off. 'For depicting Jews in a peep-show atmosphere of total perversion,. Someone wrote on letterhead stationary as impressive as the president's had even suggested that he 'ought to be shot'.(7)

² For example, Donald Kartinger describes Nathan's ambivalence, throughout *Zuckerman Bound*, as the "Jewish writer caught between loyalty to the father and loyalty to art, between the capacity of the artist for self-sacrificing dedication and the capacity for self-promoting unscrupulousness, between the artist as beholden to his Jewish heritage and the artist as the singular being" (37). Later in this chapter, I will also discuss this theme of paternal loyalty.

³ Roth comments on his relationship to his Jewish American audience in the 1963 essay "Writing About Jews," stating that what other Jews may recognize as a Jewish character's "wickedness" he sees as "energy or courage or spontaneity" (194). But more so, despite Roth's admiration for those he portrays in fiction, Roth declares, "I did not

In 1986, however, Roth's fiction ventured to Israel, and the perspective presented in his fiction seemed to change. In *The Counterlife: A Novel* (1986),⁴ the first of two novels that are set in and focus on Israel and its issues, Roth's individualized writerly stance is diminished through both his protagonist's initial exposure to a form of Jewish collectivity in messianic Zionism, and ultimately through the act of circumcising his son, as a symbolic identification with the larger Jewish community. Put another way, after encountering messianic Zionists and European anti-Semitism, and with his decision to circumcise his son, Roth's writer protagonist symbolically reveals that he is putting the concerns of the Jewish collective before the literary concerns of his novel(s). The Jewish writer's prioritization of Jewish collectivity over his identification as a writer bent on individualized literary pursuits is an unprecedented move both for Roth's character Nathan Zuckerman and for Roth's fiction. In his fiction, it also becomes the harbinger of a major shift in how Roth presents the responsibility of the Jewish American writer to his Jewish audience. But it is a shift that is specific to his Israel books.

In this chapter, I look at how Roth's fictionalized responsibility to his Jewish audiences changes in his Israel books, germinating with Nathan Zuckerman's choice to join the Jewish collective in *The Counterlife* and culminating five years later with the character Philip Roth's decision to self-censor some of his novel for the sake of Jewish security in *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993). Looking at *The Counterlife*, *Operation Shylock*, and his non-fictional *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1988)⁵ and *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991),⁶ I will delineate how Roth creates a series out of the four works to engage with the questions of what it means for

want to, I did not intend to, and was not able to speak *for* American Jews; I surely did not deny...that I spoke *to* them" (211). Roth insists that his only responsibility is to fiction and reads his critics' accusations as a plea to write with "timidity and paranoia" (208), an approach he has adamantly refused to take. Doing so would be "agree[ing] to sacrifice the freedom essential to my vocation, and even to the general well-being of the culture" (208).

⁴ From here on, *The Counterlife*.

⁵ From here on, *The Facts*.

⁶ From here on, *Patrimony*.

a Jewish writer to be loyal to the larger Jewish ethnic group and how a Jew can identify Jewishness with regard to Israel. (Specifically, I subdivide together group A as *The Counterlife* and *The Facts*, and group B as *Operation Shylock* and *Patrimony*, since the latter group amplifies the themes present in group A.) Many critics primarily recognize Roth's ambivalent Jewish identification and relationship to Israel.⁷ However, I argue that, in his Israel-centered books, Roth presents a loyalty to Zionism. Through that loyalty, Roth concurrently suggests that Jewishness is Zionist and that, despite its legitimacy, Zionism is still complex and difficult to negotiate. I will also delineate how Roth utilizes a messianic motif as well as postmodernist formal devices to underscore the need to critique Zionism honestly in order to remain loyal to it. Through his messianic characters, Roth criticizes simplified idealism and a unilateral agreement/disagreement with Zionism. In contrast, his postmodernist devices present Jewish issues vis-a-vis Israel as highly complex and contradictory, suggesting that Jewish identification necessitates a constant struggle with Jewishness, Israel, and the Holocaust.

Other critics have recognized the relationship between the four works as an intertextual critique of the ethics of writing, a literary focus already alluded to in the texts' subtitles, *A Novel*, *A Novelist's Autobiography*, *A True Story*, and *A Confession*.⁸ However, I argue that in addition to commenting on writing, the series represents a journey for Roth, in which he ultimately asserts fidelity to Jewishness and Zionism out of patrimonial loyalty. First, I suggest that Roth uses a circumcision motif in the narratives to present his characters' loyalty to a patrimonial Jewishness. Second, with *The Facts* and *Patrimony*, he utilizes intertextuality to solidify the relationship between patrimonial Jewishness and Israel, and Jewish personal history and Jewish

⁷ See Ranen Omer-Sherman, Josh Cohen, Helen Meyers, and Jeffrey Rubin Dorsky. Rubin Dorsky, however, argues that Roth creates a moral equivalency between American Jews and Israeli Jews.

⁸ See David Gooblar, and Harold Bloom, though Bloom doesn't include *The Counterlife* in his analysis. Instead, he groups the texts with Roth's novel *Deception* (1990).

collective history. While scholars have recognized the importance of the father figure in Roth's identification of and with Jewishness, they have not addressed Roth's representation of the paternal role in a Zionism rooted in Jewishness.⁹ I will argue that Roth's fictional patrimonial loyalty to the Jewish collective engenders a loyalty to Zionism as well, despite presenting troublesome Israeli issues. Finally, I will delineate how Roth's eventual decision to fictionally prioritize the Jewish collective (in solidarity with Zionism) over the individualized literary desires of the Jewish writer differs from the novels' messianic motifs; unlike the ideological simplicity of messianism, Roth's prioritization of the Jewish collective is suitably fraught with ambivalence.

Critical field

As a highly prolific, ingenious, and controversial writer, Roth has garnered a justifiably large amount of scholarly attention with his works from the 1980s and 1990s. To delineate how Roth utilizes anxious ambivalence to create his form of tortured Zionism, I draw on important and insightful scholarship that specifically examines the formal complexity of Roth's works. The scholars who most compellingly identify Roth's nuanced style are Ross Posnock, Debra Shostack, Ranen Omer-Sherman, and David Brauner. Posnock argues that Roth's mission is to "shatter the myth of the natural" (20), identifying Roth's ambiguity as literary "immaturity" and as a "vehicle for aesthetic exploration and moral fantasy." He also recognizes that Roth's "Jewishness" is a literary style, but compellingly asserts Roth's cosmopolitanism, when he "appropriate[s]" tactics, and styles from other writers in the great "library of culture." Shostack similarly examines the complexity of Roth's intertextual conversations and textual contradictions to suggest that Roth critiques ethnic identity formation, emphasizing how Roth presents ethnic

⁹ See Elaine Kauver, Derek Parker Royal, Donald Kartinger, Emily Budick, Steven Milowitz and Debra Shostack.

identity through textuality. And Brauner sees Roth's use of paradox as both a reflection of other American writers' influence (not just Jewish writers) and as a hallmark of his "literary style," which highlights Roth's examination of the interrelationship between literary realism and post-modernism.

Certainly, we can recognize that Roth's works both reveal and engage with the complexity of ethnic identity (most notably addressed by Shostak), and generally explore the subversiveness of identification (in line with Posnock's notion that Roth is emulating the formative culture of immaturity in the 1960s).¹⁰ Roth does indeed show, as Brauner emphasizes, a postmodernist sensibility that explores the dynamism of literary influence, identity formation, and the tenuous role of the writer engaging with individual histories and literary context. However, I am looking at Roth from a specifically tapered critical point of view that has not yet been addressed completely: I not only engage with Roth's grappling of Jewish identification and his role as a writer, but I do so through the lens of the Jewish American dynamic with Israel. I argue that Roth also uses this four-part series to consciously approach the Jewish American writer's relationship to Israel, a connection that has not yet been acknowledged in scholarship with regard to these particular narratives working in tandem with one another. Furthermore, when scholars have addressed the narratives' respective relationships to Israel, like Ranen Omer-Sherman, Andrew Furman, and Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, they look at the novels individually, minimally engage with the non-fictional works, and do not look at the four texts as a series that addresses Jewish American identification with Zionism. By exploring the works in tandem, I am able to delineate the development of Roth's engagement with Israel, an appropriate and significant virtue, since in the series Roth likewise emphasizes the necessity of constantly critiquing issues surrounding Israel.

¹⁰ Posnock describes immaturity as a form of subversiveness.

Other scholars also argue that Roth's critique of Jewish American identification with Israel remains open-ended. For example, Shostack suggests that Roth's use of contradiction does not engender any type of ideological synthesis, and Omer-Sherman reads the novels as an expression of Roth's inability to identify with any solid type of Jewishness in an age where both diasporic and Zionist Judaism are defunct for the diasporic Jew. While I will similarly delineate Roth's ambivalence regarding Zionism, unlike Shostack and Omer-Sherman, I argue that Roth ultimately uses the series to develop an ideological standpoint that should not be read as open-ended, but rather as a stance that is uniquely steadfast and concomitantly apprehensive. Put another way, Roth raises his (Zionist) flag, but with trembling hands. And he does so only because he is addressing Israel. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi has similarly argued that Roth uses *Operation Shylock* to specifically critique diasporic longing for an imperfect Zion in the post-Holocaust world. I argue along similar lines, but I look at the four works as a series to delineate the trajectory of Roth's changing fictional relationship to Israel, one that ultimately culminates in an unprecedented loyalty to Zionism, a point that Ezrahi cannot make when addressing *Operation Shylock* in isolation from Roth's other texts. In short, I argue that the four-book series serves as Roth's treatise on Jewish American identification with Israel and that the series is an exposition of his complicated, developing relationship with Israel.

Jewish American Literature and Israel

Roth's first literary exploration of Israel is in *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969).¹¹ In the now canonical novel, Roth examines Jewish American alienation from Israel (and Israelis), though minimally. His Jewish protagonist Alex Portnoy figuratively conquers the American landscape through his various sexual exploits with women, mostly gentile. However, he has little success when he arrives in the holy land and is intimate with an Israeli woman, Naomi. With Naomi,

¹¹ From here on, *Portnoy*.

who had served in the military, Portnoy is impotent. An exasperated Portnoy declares, “I say to myself, ‘A Jewish country!’ But the idea is more easily expressed than understood; I cannot really grasp hold of it. ‘I couldn’t get it up in the State of Israel! How’s *that* for symbolism, *bubi?*’” (256-257). Here, Portnoy’s impotence signifies an inability to connect with his Jewishness as it is related to Israel.

In addition to evoking Jewish American alienation from Israel, the novel also suggests a sentiment of diasporic inadequacy and weakness in the face of strong, Israeli virility, mirroring the post-1967 persona of the strong Israeli Jew.¹² Roth published *Portnoy* just two years after Israel’s stunning victory in the 1967 war, when Israel defeated four Arab nations in six days. In the wake of the victory, the narrative expresses diasporic Jewry’s admiration for, but concomitant intimidated alienation from, Israeli Jewry. The image of the post-1967 Israeli was strong and virile, a marked contrast to the diasporic persona of the anxiety-ridden, intellectual Jew, a depiction mirrored in *Portnoy*. Roth highlights that juxtaposition in the physical dynamic between the two types of Jews, with the Israeli Naomi possessing the dominant role. After Naomi accuses Portnoy of being self-hating, he admits that he epitomizes “what was most shameful in the ‘culture of the diaspora’” (264). Finally he confesses his impotence. The soldier then “stood up. Stood over [him]. Got her wind. Looked *down*” (268). We can recognize that Portnoy’s inability to bed the Israeli female alludes to Roth’s own trepidation, lack of desire, or unwillingness to conquer the Israeli landscape rather than a complete rejection of it as a subject. But after *Portnoy*, Roth waited 20 years until *The Counterlife* to pick up on Israel again. The delay is notable and indicative of a larger absence of Israel in Jewish American fiction.¹³

¹² As I mention in my introduction, Israeli’s unlikely victory over multiple Arab nations during the six-day war created a new persona of Jew that defied the previous image of the weak, victimized Jew. Israel’s victory significantly altered perceptions on Zionism and Jewish identity.

¹³ See my introduction.

When Roth returned to the subject of Israel 20 years after *Portnoy*, he did so with full force.¹⁴ As Debra Shostack suggests, *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock* are the first works in which Roth situates the diaspora against the “icon of Israel” (745), allowing the locale of Israel (and more specifically messianic movements in Israel) to drive the plot and become the central focus to which all other characters orbit around and respond.

Change in oeuvre

Prior to *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*, no Jewish American author had presented Israeli characters, or the setting of Israel, with the same amount of intricate neurosis, anxiousness, and familial dynamics that fill Roth’s Israel-centered books.¹⁵ Put another way, Roth’s Israel-centered books suggest for him, and for Jewish American literature, that Israel and its issues are intimately but ambivalently tied to the Jewish American psyche and the Jewish American family.

In his essay “Writing About Jews” (1964), Roth comments on the inadequacy of early Jewish American writing on Israel. Discussing Leon Uris, the most infamous Jewish American novelist to engage with Israel as a subject and the author of *Exodus* (1958), the tour de force of American pro-Israel propaganda, Roth criticizes what he thinks is Uris’ oversimplification of the Holocaust and Israel. Roth suggests that when Uris constructs Jews to appear only as the personification of strength, as in his character Ari-Ben Canaan,¹⁶ rather than victimhood, Uris

¹⁴ Derek Parker Royal similarly asserts that until *Operation Shylock* and *The Counterlife*, Roth had never really explored where to locate himself in the “larger ethnic community, in either Israel or American, and define himself in relation to it” (423).

¹⁵ Certainly, the Israel scene in *Portnoy* presents Freudian neurosis, but it is only a small part of the novel.

¹⁶ To give a sense of Uris’ valorization of Zionism, in the film adaptation of the novel, Ari Ben-Canaan is played by a strapping and young Paul Newman.

unintentionally ameliorates the crimes of the Nazi victimizers. In a sense, by completely eradicating the victimhood of the Jew, Roth argues that Uris eliminates the victimizer as well.¹⁷

Throughout his career, Roth constructs his Jewish characters as far more complex and full of nuance. He predominantly sets his work in his childhood neighborhood, Weequahic, Newark, focusing on the locus of the family kitchen table and Jewish family dynamics.¹⁸ However, in *The Counterlife*, Roth constructs a family dispute in Israel, about Israel and Jewishness. While *The Counterlife* is not entirely set in Israel, the Jewish foreign setting is no longer an alien territory with which Roth cannot engage,¹⁹ as in *Portnoy*, but is rather intimately connected to Jewish American identity, the subject of force for most of Roth's fiction. The nuanced cast of characters Nathan to encounters in Israel serve a dual purpose: one, they critique different facets of Zionism and Israel, which I will discuss shortly, and two, they solidify Israel as an appropriate setting for a Roth work, in that they construct a complex web of identity formation that is heavily focused on familial and psychological dynamics.

The Counterlife is comprised of counternarratives, (where the narrative presents different versions of the same scenario). It centers on the writer Nathan Zuckerman, the Jewish protagonist, his brother Henry, a married father and successful dentist in New Jersey, and Nathan's gentile, pregnant wife Maria and revolves around the premise of Henry's life threatening heart surgery. But Roth structures the counternarratives so that the most dramatic familial moments are engendered by Henry's life-changing decision to move to Israel and devote his life to the cause of messianic Zionism (in chapter 2 "Judea"). At the behest of his frantic

¹⁷He also takes a case against the sentimentalized fiction of Harry Golden in *Only in America*. Golden presents Jewish immigrant suffering as opportunities to nourish Jewish "warmth" and rehash Jewish culture in a framework of nostalgia ("some new Jewish stereotypes" 187).

¹⁸ See *Portnoy's Complaint*, *American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998), *The Plot Against America* (2004), *Indignation* (2008), and *Nemesis* (2010). Much of Roth's other fiction is also briefly situated in Newark.

¹⁹ In the 1980s, Roth became very interested in Eastern Europe and the effects of fascism on the literary imagination. His novella *The Prague Orgy* (1985) exemplifies that interest.

sister-in-law Carol, Nathan flies to Israel to talk sense into his brother and bring him home; he is rebuffed. Later, in chapter 5 “Christendom”, Nathan breaks off his marriage to Maria, partially because of his exposure to Jewish collectivity in Israel, which markedly contrasts with the anti-Semitism he experiences in England with his gentile wife. (The counternarrative chapters are: chapter 1, "Basel," which describes how instead of living and becoming a messianic Zionist, Henry dies during heart surgery; chapter 2 “Judea” that narrates Henry’s transformation to Hanoch in Israel; chapter 3, "Gloucester," which relays how Nathan is the one who has the surgery and dies; chapter 4 "Aloft," which relays Nathan’s flight back to England after his visit in Israel and chapter 5 “Christendom” that describes Nathan’s encounter with English anti-Semitism and his decision to circumcise his unborn son.)

Israeli historical context can also explain the shift in Roth’s new focus on Israel. To many, by the 1980s Israel no longer seemed like a David encountering a Goliath. By the 1970s, Israel had advanced and occupied Syrian and Egyptian territory, when it was attacked during the Yom Kippur War (1973), and finally approved the first Jewish settlements in the West Bank for the controversial settlement movement Gush Emunim (1975). From 1979 to 1982, Israel and Egypt negotiated the Camp David Accords, and Israel agreed to leave the Sinai peninsula but maintained occupation in Gaza and the West Bank.²⁰ In 1987, one year after the publication of *The Counterlife*, the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) occurred. As the Israeli army grew in strength and Israeli policy instituted military offensives (often to create defense buffers), world opinion towards Israel became increasingly critical, and the situation in the region became even more complex. Perhaps, for Roth, Israel’s publicized difficulties made it literary fair game.

²⁰ To create a security buffer, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and withdrew in 1985 with a security zone in the South.

Mirroring the complexity of Israel's international issues, *The Counterlife* depicts Israel as a breeding ground for conflict, full of what Derek Parker Royal describes as a number of dissenting contradictory voices (429).²¹ (In this way, Roth emulates Saul Bellow's 1977 memoir *To Jerusalem and Back*, in which Bellow describes Israel as a patchwork of strong and dissenting voices.) However, what mostly distinguishes the novel from Roth's other fictional works in that period, which end ambiguously,²² is that Nathan completes the novel with a clear decision (to circumcise) that is not countered. It is also a decision that tacitly suggests a pro-Zionist perspective. Despite its counternarrative form, which is comprised of contradiction, the text is still linear, and we end the reading of it in chapter 5, with Nathan's decision to leave his gentile wife and circumcise his unborn son, if he has a son. He ends his winding journey to Jewish self-identification with the decision to join his son (and in turn himself) to the larger Jewish collective with the circumcised marker of male Jewish identification. The complex counternarrative structure and Nathan's firm closing decision, suggest that for Roth, solidarity to the Jewish collective does not preclude a critical perspective on Jewish issues.

While *Operation Shylock* differs structurally from *The Counterlife*, it too reinforces Roth's theme that Jewish solidarity demands a complex critique of Jewish issues. The protagonist, Philip Roth,²³ ventures to Israel because he has an imposter (whom he calls Pipik) using Philip's renown to perpetuate his Diasporism movement. Along the way, he encounters various facets of Israeli society and Zionist discourse,²⁴ and finds himself in a perplexing whirlpool of international politics and intrigue, including being recruited for a mission by the

²¹ Certainly, most good novelists give nuance to their characters. But Roth's novel represents a notable change in his oeuvre and in the Jewish American genre, considering that Israel and Israeli characters were largely untouched by Jewish American writers (including Roth) prior to *The Counterlife*.

²² See *The Dying Animal* (2001), *The Human Stain* (2000), and *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983).

²³ From here on, I will refer to him as Philip.

²⁴ This too emulates Bellow's memoir.

Mossad. *Operation Shylock* renders a nuanced critique of Zionism, but also ends with the writer-protagonist's decision to censor his writing, which describes the Mossad mission, for the sake of the larger Jewish good. Both Israel-centered novels criticize ideological simplification through their messianic characters. Both plots center, directly and indirectly, on a messianic figure that is unilaterally pro-Zionist, as in *The Counterlife*, or unilaterally anti-Zionist like Pipik and his Diasporism, the reverse messianic process. Both novels end with the writers expressing loyalty to the larger Jewish collective through the act of circumcision. Nathan decides he wants to circumcise his unborn son, and Philip essentially circumcises his text for the sake of Israeli security. The conflation of solidarity and complicated honesty alludes to Roth's larger project in the two novels, which present a loyalty to Zionism while disdaining a simplistic approach, and suggests that loyalty to the Jewish collective is contingent on negotiating a tough array of complex issues.

While I will further discuss both Nathan and Philip's acts of circumcision, it is important to note that fundamentally both writer-characters identify physical and textual circumcision, respectively, as gestures that symbolize compromising for and/or joining the larger Jewish collective. In *The Counterlife*, Nathan resolves to leave his wife and circumcise his unborn son because, "Circumcision confirms that there is an us, and an us that isn't solely him and me. England's made a Jew of me in only eight weeks" (324). Similarly, in *Operation Shylock*, Philip is motivated to textually circumcise his narrative in an act of sacrifice for the larger Jewish good.²⁵ His Mossad handler instructs him to take money (which he does not need) in exchange for censoring the mission, with an abstract and bold statement, "Let your Jewish conscience be your guide" (398), which Philip seemingly does. We never learn the details of the Mossad mission, and the narrative ends with that statement.

²⁵ Emily Budick similarly names his decision to censor his last chapter as an act of textual circumcision (75).

Throughout my dissertation, I discuss the dynamic between Jewish Americans and Israel, as well as the historical predicament of Jewishness as it relates to the diaspora and Israel. Both of Roth's novels end with the writer-protagonist doing something that would have been unprecedented in his earlier fiction, and they do it for the Jewish collective or according to a collective ideal. Their closing decisions explore the definition of Jewishness for Nathan, and the makeup of Philip's Jewish consciousness, eventually revealing how they relate to the responsibility of the Jewish writer and the Jewish writer to Israel.

Counternarrative structure

In *The Counterlife*, Roth first addresses Jewish identity in the book's structure. By constructing a mode for comparison through the counternarrative form, Roth demands that the reader creates binary systems of Jewish identification that ultimately conflate and complicate ideological perspectives on Israel: diaspora/Israel, meaning/superficiality, individual/collective.²⁶ I argue that Roth's counternarrative structure reveals that the journey to Jewish self-identification mirrors his overall theme: solidarity does not have to be a result of oversimplified certainty.

Exemplifying how Roth uses contradiction to develop his characters' journey to Jewish solidarity, Henry's and Nathan's respective experiences in the diaspora and Israel reveal multiple sides of Jewish identification with just two characters and one premise, the brothers' heart surgeries. Some critics read Roth's novels through binary lenses, where the narrative is either totally engrossed in diasporic concerns or Israeli concerns, and that even an Israeli setting works to only comment on the diaspora. Put another way, these critics do not recognize how the novels

²⁶ Derek Parker Royal sees the novel's structures as a description of American Jews trying to define their relationship to Israel (429). And Ross Posnock develops a compelling parallel between Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism and advocate for the New Jew (and thus identity transformation), and *The Counterlife*'s fulcrum of narrative reversal.

highlight the symbiotic effects of Israel and America on Jewish American identity.²⁷ I argue, however, that in *The Counterlife*, the counternarratives, which are set in Israel and the diaspora, present a trajectory of identification: each chapter (and counternarrative) are not only paralleled or juxtaposed but also concurrently contradict and build on each other to foster Nathan's final decision to join the Jewish collective. Furthermore, the novel differs from Roth's other works because, as Jeffrey Rubin Dorsky suggests, the counternarrative structure forces the novel to veer from Roth's usual study about Jewishness as a psychological condition; instead "Jewishness [in *The Counterlife*] became a historical condition whose meaning must be explored, as well as a series of conflicting ideologies whose demands must be analyzed within the novel's intricately imagined structure" (92).

Consider the ideological juxtaposition presented in Judea and Basel. In first chapter "Basel", we are exposed to Henry's rather secular and superficially successful existence in America. He has a lucrative dental practice and multiple, passionate extramarital affairs. He risks undergoing dangerous surgery to correct impotence due to heart medication so he can continue sleeping with his dental assistant. But he dies on the operating table, and his wife and children eulogize him at the funeral. The chapter is replete with typical Roth elements: family dramas and humorous psychological insights. Relaying a conversation he has with Carol at the funeral, Nathan already uses a counter-narrative device and says: "Carol did not then respond, 'of course that's why I said what I did [revealing Henry's supposed decision to have heart surgery so he can sleep with Carol]. Those bitches all weeping their hearts out - sitting there weeping for their man. The hell with that!' Instead, she said to him, 'It meant a lot to the children to see you'" (147). The chapter is a familiar place for most Roth readers, brimming with the foibles of the Jewish American family. However, the chapter also alludes to Roth's newly directed attention to Israel:

²⁷ See most notably Ranen Omer-Sherman.

the chapter's title of "Basel," site of the first Zionist conference, already hints at the proceeding chapter "Judea", and makes a tacit and perhaps ironic commentary on Jewish life in the diaspora. However, chapter 2, "Judea," brings readers and characters into uncharted territory and explores the Jewish American experience, looking not simply at Israel but more precisely at Israel compared to America. In "Basel," Roth initially presents Henry's superficial, though successful, life in Jewish America. In Judea, he constructs a drastically different setting in the messianic Zionist settlement in Agor Israel, and a Henry, now Hanoach, who is barely recognizable, having abandoned his family in NJ to devote himself to the Jewish collective cause of messianic Zionism in an Israeli settlement.

If we finish chapter 1, "Basel", and recognize a sort of meaninglessness in Henry's "sacrifice" for sex (and the desperation of his sex-starved wife Carol, who is now widowed), in "Judea" we see a markedly different Henry who radically abandons his current existence (and family) for ideological meaning and a life full of purpose devoted to the Jewish people.²⁸ Ranen Omer-Sherman describes *The Counterlife* as a study in "shrilly polarized positions" (225). However, I argue that through the counternarrative structure, and our reading experience of it, Roth creates confluences of those polarized positions. Through Henry's transformation, Roth not only engages with Jewish identity vis-a-vis the diaspora and Israel, but also begins to highlight how the counternarrative structure works to engage with those issues simultaneously. Both Henrys are imperfect, and yet Nathan's decision to circumcise his son, an act that symbolizes diasporic alignment with Jewish collectivity somewhat legitimizes both as well.

Henry's transformation to Hanoach highlights Roth's critique of the tension between individual pursuits and the act of sacrificing for the larger Jewish community, the fundamental

²⁸ Roth ends the chapter with Nathan's notes on Carol and Henry's marriage (before he dies). He presents a desperate Carol trying to salvage a sexual relationship with Henry, by dressing in the same type of lingerie that Maria wore to seduce Henry. On Carol, however, the lingerie repulses Henry (49).

issue of this four-part series. Henry takes time off to recuperate after his surgery and travels to Israel. While in Jerusalem, he walks by a religious (or hareidi) school in an ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood and overhears children singing Hebrew. Though he does not understand Hebrew, the language awakens his feeling of connection to the Jewish collective and impels him to develop his Jewish identity. When Henry has his revelation, he concludes that his diasporic Jewish experience in America is vacuous and selfish, despite the fact that he has a wife and children who depend on him. When Nathan visits him at Agor, in an attempt to bring him home, Henry tells Nathan, “I have never been anything, the way that I am this Jew.... all of my life I was swimming against it.... Everything else was superficial, everything else was burned away... *I’m a Jew as deep as those [hareidi Jews]*. The fact that that is the root of my life!” (61). Note that he ties his Jewishness with the Jewishness of the collective, rather than an individualized understanding and experience of Jewishness. In Israel, Henry is fostered by the preaching of Mordechai Lippman (mouthpiece of the Agor settlement), and believes a life in the diaspora does not contribute to the Jewish collective, which in his mind is the only cause worth living for and which can only be selflessly actualized in Israel. Hanoch derides Nathan as a “decadent Jew” who is too comfortable with, and perhaps unaware of, the abnormality of diasporic existence (Rubin-Dorsky 92).²⁹ And Nathan thinks Henry has gone off the deep end. In the “Judea” chapter, Roth situates a familial dispute within and around a larger cultural disagreement, and Jewishness is identified not as a solipsistic endeavor but one that germinates in collective civic-mindedness. It also presents two sides of the diasporic/ Israeli binary that are concurrently related and intertwined but that also can manifest as deeply problematic when Jewishness is relegated to either/or, instead of a symbiosis of both. However, because of the

²⁹ The idea of diasporic abnormality blossomed with Theodore Herzl (and early Zionism) and has been repeatedly discussed in contemporary post-Zionist criticism, as well as in the book itself. See more in Rubin-Dorsky.

counternarrative structure, we, unlike Henry, do not embrace or reject one over the other. Instead, we engage with both concurrently, perhaps dismantling the mutual exclusiveness of both.³⁰ (In effect, Roth suggests that one can pursue individual and collective Jewish pursuits in Israel *and* the diaspora.)

By including a representation of the Jewish writer, through Nathan and his fictional choices,³¹ Roth adds another dimension to the question of what comprises Jewishness: pursuing what is good for the Jewish collective or being Jewish and pursuing individual desires. Both Nathan and Philip are famous Jewish writers, (and characters in other Roth fiction). However, in *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*, Roth suggests that the writing decisions Nathan and Philip make determine what type of Jews they are, or what type of Jews they think they are.

Roth probes the idea in *The Counterlife* when Daphna, Lippman's wife, attacks Nathan's writing career. Daphna is an American émigré and a staunch messianic Zionist. She lives in Agor and aligns with the concept that a singular Jew should devote his/her life to the Jewish collective (and to Israel). For her, the responsibility of the Jewish writer is to present Jews in a favorable (or perhaps perfect) light, even if the writer needs to sacrifice the quality of his/her fiction. Daphna lambasts Nathan for being an irresponsible Jewish writer who sacrifices the larger Jewish collective for the sake of writing. Referencing the perceived irresponsibility of Nathan's previous portrayals' of Jews (and the criticism his work incited from American Jews), Daphna aggressively says to Nathan: "Bad Jews make better copy. But I don't have to tell that to Norman

³⁰ Roth continues to juxtapose (and engage with multiple perspectives) in his "Gloucester" chapter. The chapter describes Nathan as the brother who has surgery and dies on the table. Roth highlights the insular world of writing in that chapter and the ethical issues of writing about one's own family. The chapter is void of politics and drama. It relates the theme of authorial responsibility to the other chapters, like Judea, but it does so quietly, remotely. Like "Basel", It also focuses on the Jewish American experience but presents it through the Jewish American writer's perspective.

³¹ Nathan is considered Roth's alter-ego, having reached fame with *Carnovsky*, which emulates Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* in its sexually explicit content and the anger it incited from the (fictional) Jewish American audience.

Mailer³² or Nathan Zuckerman. Bad Jews sell newspapers just the way they sell books” (128). Her comment implies that Nathan sacrificed the reputation of Jews in order to be a successful writer—success that, in Nathan’s case, was partially engendered from his uncensored portrayal of American Jews, an accusation that Roth has repeatedly suffered from. Daphna insists that successful books about Jews cannot possibly be good for Jewish public relations.

However, even before Daphna’s tirade, Roth already engages with that Jewish authorial dilemma: can *he* be a good Jew and write a good book about Israel? The counternarratives serve as Roth’s various attempts (and failures) at concurrently writing a good book and maintaining the status of a good Jew. Roth does not present a unilaterally negative or positive portrayal of Israel. Instead, he uses the counternarratives to explore various dimensions of the Jewish American dynamic with Israel to reveal Zionism’s complexity.

Roth’s four-book series takes the issues presented in Daphna’s argument head-on: he writes about an Israel that is full of complexity and contradiction (qualities Daphna does not recognize or would rather not expose since they may portray the Zionist imperative negatively). But he does so ultimately to claim a solidarity to Zionism and Jewish collectivity--values that Daphna prioritizes. Unlike what Roth thinks of Uris’ Israel- centered work, Roth’s engagement with Israel is not grossly simplified, unilaterally pro-Israel propaganda. As such, Roth seemingly succeeds, writing very good books about Israel precisely because they are loaded with ambivalence.

Messianic rejection

Despite equivocally aligning with Zionism, Roth prevents his Israel novels from becoming pro-Zionist propaganda. By including the messianic persona, which becomes the foil to his nuanced perspective, Roth criticizes propagandistic support of Israel that is devoid of

³² Roth discusses Mailer in his essay, “Writing about Jews.”

honest critique. In chapter 1, I discuss how in Chabon's fiction the messianic figure becomes a conduit to explore a jaded ambivalence to the Zionist dream. In chapter 3, I will delineate how Reich uses messianism to examine the dangers of patriarchy and extremism in Israel. In this chapter, messianism is also dangerous in its rhetorical simplicity: in both *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*, messianic movements serve as the antithesis to Roth's complex approach to Israel because they are overly simplified ideological approaches to Zionism. He presents the messianic figures of Lippman in *The Counterlife* and Moishe Pipik in *Operation Shylock* to suggest what Jewishness and a relationship to Jewishness should not be: simple. More specifically, Roth criticizes Lippman and Pipik's approach to Israel and Judaism, which is uncompromisingly Zionist and diasporist, and precludes a productive discussion on Israel.

Lippman is a messianic Zionist who is the leader of his community in Agor, a settlement on the West Bank. In a way, whether or not Roth presents a disagreement with Lippman's politics is irrelevant. Roth most criticizes Lippman for his inability to compromise and recognize any ambivalence in his credo. Lippman is too much of a believer, a quality Roth wants us to mistrust. While Lippman never claims to be a Messiah, he does represent messianic Zionism; Lippman is unwavering in his confidence that the Jewish people possess a divine right to all of Israel, the Palestinian-occupied disputed territories included, and is convinced that God will ultimately defeat the Palestinian population. He declares to Nathan, "We don't need luck! God protects us! All we need is never to give ground and God will see the rest! We are God's instrument! We are building the land of Israel!" (122). He also believes that there may be another Holocaust in America and that American Jews, as well as others from the diaspora, will return en masse to Israel. The fear of annihilation represents a theory of messianic Judaism, where Jews suffer catastrophe only to return and conquer the land of Israel in the messianic age (Talmud

Sanhedrin 97A). While not a predominant character in the novel, Lippman becomes the driving plot motivator, as Nathan goes to Israel to free his brother from Lippman's charismatic lock, and the representative of the dangerously simplistic perspective that Roth debunks in his four part series.

Operation Shylock's messianic figure Pipik, who is Philip's imposter, represents the other end of the ideological spectrum, as he is a diasporist. Throughout the novel, Pipik is organizing the Diasporism imperative, which is a reversal of the traditional Jewish messianic process; he negotiates with the leader of Poland to uproot and migrate all Jews of Ashkenazi descent in Israel to Poland, in an effort to avoid another Holocaust, this time at the hands of the Arabs.³³ With an uncompromising, and historically unsound, motivation, Pipik would like to de-populate Israel of Jews. Highlighting his problematically unilateral approach to Zionism,³⁴ Pipik does not address, for example, the fact that much of the Jewish-Israeli population is of Sephardi or mixed Sephardi/Ashkenazi descent. He has blinders on, a quality Roth criticizes.

In keeping with typical Rothian irony, the believers in his novels are not to be believed. Roth rejects their perspectives and hermeneutics in favor of a different approach to Israel and Jewishness that results in a loyalty to Zionism but insists on a long, winding journey replete with complicated family dynamics, approaches to history and fiction, and sociological views of Israel. By criticizing the ideological certainty of Lippman and Pipik, Roth distinguishes, Nathan and Philip, his writer-protagonists', solidarity to the Jewish collective and Zionism, since it is not

³³ Pipik's Diasporism excludes those Jews of Sephardi or Mizrahi descent, suggesting that since they do not originate from Europe they should not return. The exclusion of Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews is notable since there is a large socioeconomic and hierarchical divide amongst the Sephardi/Mizrahi and Ashkenazi population in Israel. Also, the fact that Diasporism is considered a movement for Jews and yet excludes a large portion of the Israeli population, reflects the neglect of Sephardi subjects and characters in Jewish American fiction and scholarship.

³⁴ Pipik's claim also refutes the idea that the Holocaust is a legitimate reason for Zionism, a controversial viewpoint.

engendered from ideological oversimplification but rather from a real and nuanced engagement with the issues.

Patchwork of Israeli Society

In *The Counterlife*, Roth presents a multilayered look at Zionism, as the novel's counternarrative structure works well in creating multiple opportunities for Nathan to meet various faces of Israeli and Jewish American identity. When Nathan ultimately decides to circumcise his son, it is only after we are exposed to a patchwork of perspectives on Israel and Jewishness. The trajectory towards circumcision suggests that Nathan's solidarity to the Jewish collective is engendered from a multilateral approach to Israel and Jewishness. Presenting the issues in complex form and ending the narratives with an uncharacteristic decision (especially for this novel) to solidly identify with the Jewish collective, Roth suggests that solidarity is incumbent on an ambivalent view of Jewishness and Zionism.

Structurally, the counternarrative mirrors the multiple perspectives and experiences in Israel. If Henry can experience two drastically different consequences from his surgery, Israeli society and diasporic Jewry experience various different types of Israel daily. Of the patchwork of people Roth presents in Israel there is, for example, the Yemenite Israeli taxi driver in Tel Aviv (in the "Judea" chapter) and Nathan's American and financially successful relatives, Shimmy and Grossman, who discuss Israel at Henry's funeral (in "Basel"). The cultural difference between Nathan's relatives and the Yemenite taxi driver is as obviously stark as their experience with violence in Israel. While Shimmy and Grossman confidently declare from New Jersey that Israel "should bomb the bastards [the Arabs]"(38), the taxi driver has lost his son, who was a soldier, to a Palestinian suicide- bomber attack, and articulates a more somber, apolitical view of the situation. Nathan also encounters Buki, a native Israeli settler in the Agor

settlement, who addresses the role anti-Semitism plays in the Zionist imperative. He declares that Israel is flawed. But he insists that the world demonizes it more than any other country, rhetorically asking why the world hates Menachem Begin:³⁵ “Because of politics? In Bolivia, in China, in Scandinavia, what do they care about Begin’s politics? They hate him because of his nose!”(123) Similarly, the messianic Zionists look at the relationship between Israel and anti-Semitism, by declaring that Palestinian violence against Israelis is not politically driven against occupying Israelis but against Jews. Lippman declares that, “Every stone thrown [in the intifada] is an anti-Semitic stone” (122), reasserting that Zionism serves to protect Jews from anti-Semites and is not only politically motivated.

Juxtaposed with the Lippmans, the most sensible and moderate voice in the novel belongs to Shuki Elchanan, a journalist and former press attaché for David Ben Gurion (Furman). Meeting with Nathan in the metropolis of Tel-Aviv—a marked contrast to Agor—Shuki discusses the complexities of the Israeli Palestinian situation. Shuki even says of Lippman: “I smell fascism on people like Lippman” (76). Speaking with Shuki, Nathan remembers his first visit to Israel in 1960, when he dined with Shuki and his father Mr. Elchanan. Mr. Elchanan impressed Nathan with his grounded Israeli patriotism, intelligent perspective, and hard work ethic; he represents an admirable face in Israeli society. Mr. Elchanan reminded Nathan of his own father in Newark—the ultimate compliment. Highlighting his moderation, Shuki decries Lippman’s messianic Zionism (and its project to occupy the West Bank) declaring, “This state was not established for Jews to police Nablus and Hebron! This was not the Zionist idea! I have no illusions about Arabs...and Jews. I just don’t want to live in a country that’s *completely* crazy” (76). More subtly, however, through a “thoughtful” approach to Zionism, Shuki counters Nathan’s (initial) problematic and diasporic-centered apathy towards Israel (Furman 134). In the

³⁵ Begin was Prime-Minister of Israel from 1977-1983.

early “Judea” chapter, Nathan expresses his alienation from Israel and Zionist beliefs when he views his first few days in Israel as “a walk-on-role—as Diaspora straight man—in some local production of Jewish street theatre” (101). Later, (in *Christendom*) Nathan’s ideological shift towards Jewish collectivity that is full of critique suggests that Roth aligns with Shuki’s Zionist moderation, rather than Nathan’s initial diaspora-centered perspective in *Basel*.

Emphasizing the significance of Israel to American Jewish identification, Roth includes an array of diasporic characters that engage with Israel and Zionism, rejecting Jewish American isolationist diasporism. In “Judea”, Nathan first meets Jimmy Ben Joseph, an American student studying in Israel, who appears mentally unstable and is obsessed with Israel’s relationship with the Holocaust. Nathan also encounters Daphna, who believes strongly in messianic Zionism and judges diasporic Jewry harshly, probably because she chose to abandon the diaspora for a life in Israel. And on the flight from Israel, in the “Aloft” chapter Nathan sits next to an unnamed ultra-Orthodox Jewish American who expresses guilt about living in the diaspora when Israel exists and is so inspiring. Roth further represents the complexity of Israeli social and cultural attitudes through characters not directly connected to Israel such as anti-Semitic Europeans, including Maria’s family, in “Christendom”.³⁶

Operation Shylock similarly presents multiple facets of Israeli society. While the plot of *Operation Shylock* is not as complex as *The Counterlife*, since it is not comprised of counternarratives, the novel is perhaps even more dizzying in its critique of Zionism as it juxtaposes multiple perspectives on Zionism that all seem to be presented equally. Despite or because of that judiciousness, Roth ends the novel with a positively Zionist stance. When the novel begins, Philip has just recovered from Halcion Madness, which diminishes his abilities to determine between reality and fantasy. He ventures to Israel to interview Aharon Appelfeld, his

³⁶ The novel does, however, exclude an Arab character.

actual friend and acclaimed Israeli writer. (The interview was a real event and was recorded in the February 28, 1988 edition of *The New York Times*.)³⁷ But Philip is also motivated to venture there because he learns that an imposter, presenting himself as Philip Roth, and whom Philip later refers to as Pipik, has been fundraising for and spearheading a diasporist movement, which calls for all Israeli Jews of Ashkenazi descent to return to Poland. Throughout the novel, Philip is thrown into absurdly complex, inane, unbelievable, and dangerous situations. Eventually he is approached by the Mossad to perform a covert mission named “Operation Shylock,” which is supposed to discover which American Jews are funding the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Throughout the novel, Roth creates a setting rich with political, historical, and cultural critique, underscoring again that the Zionist ending is founded on a painfully honest engagement with Jewish issues that include the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and the Holocaust. Furthermore, the electric tone of the novel is appropriate, since at the time of writing and publication, the Oslo accords were drafted, an unprecedented move towards peace between the PLO and Israel.³⁸ The novel is set during the same year that Roth wrote *The Counterlife* and also depicts a political context fraught with contention and intensity. It is the beginning of the first Palestinian Intifada, proceeding shortly after Leon Klinghoffer’s murder by Palestinian terrorists aboard the cruise ship *Achilles Lauro*, and during the trial of Nazi John Demjanjuk, suspected to be the notorious

³⁷ See *The New York Times* for the actual interview. Appelfeld answers Roth, “Your question touches on a matter which is very important to me. True, Israel is full of drama from morning to night, and there are people who are overcome by that drama to the point of inebriation. This frenetic activity isn’t only the result of pressure from the outside. Jewish restlessness contributes its part. Everything is buzzing here, and dense; there’s a lot of talk, the controversies rage. The Jewish shtetl has not disappeared.”

³⁸ The time period was intense: a year after the accords were signed, Hamas, under the auspices of the PLO, inflicted a series of suicide bombings on Israelis and prime minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by Israeli extremist Yigal Amir.

Ivan the Terrible.³⁹ The three contextual events highlight the significant positions the Holocaust and the Palestinian population have when the Jewish American imagination encounters Israel.

Of the characters in *Operation Shylock* who represent the nuanced dimensions of the Zionist debate, there is George Ziad, or “Zee,” a Palestinian (and member of the PLO) who was once Philip’s roommate at the University of Chicago. According to Andrew Furman, Ziad can be read as an alter ego to *The Counterlife*’s Lippman and, “in Nabokovian twist” as a counter image to the other “Z,” Zionism. Philip is astounded by how “Zee,” once a suave friend, who loved Western literature, has transformed into a militant member of the PLO. There is also Philip’s imposter, whom he re-names Pipik, (which translates from Yiddish to Moses Bellybutton). Though dying from cancer, Pipik devises an inane messianically-driven plot to prevent another Jewish genocide, which is based on diasporist principles. His girlfriend Wanda Jinx is a “recovering anti-Semite” and represents contemporary, latent anti-Semitism. Philip also meets with Appelfeld and Philip’s cousin Apter, who both survived the Holocaust, but negotiate their traumas in drastically different ways. One of the more significant characters of the novel is the elderly Mossad agent Smilesburger, a nod to John Le Carre’s spy George Smiley. The cunning, tenacious and ruthless Smilesburger can be read as a simultaneously admirable and problematic symbol of Jewish perseverance and survival.⁴⁰ Given the territorial and security concessions Israel made for the Oslo accords, Smilesburger’s tenacity is significant, mirroring Jewish fears and concerns about the accords.

Anti-Semitism and Zionism

³⁹ When on trial in Israel, he was acquitted of the war crimes attributed to Ivan the Terrible but he was convicted of other, heinous war crimes as Ivan Demjanjuk.

⁴⁰ In his 1986 review of Le Carre’s *A Perfect Spy* in *The Observer*, Roth named the book as the “best English novel since the war.” See Charlotte Higgins.

In both novels, Roth bolsters his disdain for ideological over-simplification of Zionism by presenting his ensemble of characters, even Lippman, and their viewpoints with contradictory nuance, where perspectives are concurrently validated and debunked. This nuanced critique manifests mostly when Roth engages with the triangular relationship between Israel (and Zionism), the Holocaust, and Jewish identity, as he simultaneously criticizes and lauds various perspectives on Israel. Roth also provides an understanding of the post-World War II Jewish imagination encountering Israel, to suggest that though it is a complex subject, Zionism is a legitimate answer to the Holocaust, a highly political statement since many anti-Zionists refute it (Guttman). As Michael Rothberg compellingly argues, Roth carefully reveals how "Israel has insinuated itself into American Jewish consciousness in close proximity to the catastrophe in Europe" (62). I agree but also argue that by situating his narratives in Israel, Roth suggests that that triangular dynamic is legitimate and applies to historical and political realities in Israel; it is not merely a Jewish American rhetorical construct.

The first reference to the Holocaust in *The Counterlife* occurs during a conversation between Nathan's elderly relatives Shimmy and Grossman and underscores their belief that Zionism manifests in the form of Jewish military strength and is a physical deterrent to anti-Semitism. Roth describes how Nathan's elderly and "unintellectual" relatives were discussing Israel's foreign policy. "'Bomb' em," Shimmy said flatly, "bomb the Arab bastards till they cry uncle. They want to pull our beards again? We'll die instead!" (38).⁴¹ And then later (though years earlier chronologically), Nathan's father says in reaction to Israel's victory in the Six-Day

⁴¹ As will be discussed later in the chapter, Roth mentions *The Counterlife* in his autobiographical *The Facts*. The non-fictional text ends with a letter from the fictional character Nathan Zuckerman to his creator Roth. The epistemological insert comments on the relationship between fact and fiction, and the truth in fiction. In the letter, Nathan mentions that his wife Maria, who is still pregnant—two years after he leaves her in England, pregnant—complains about Nathan's new beard, as if he used it to emphasize his Jewishness. Considering the fact that their relationship seemingly ended because Nathan experienced anti-Semitism in England, his beard can be interpreted as reactionary.

war (in 1967), “Now, they’ll think twice before they pull our beards!” Nathan muses, “Militant, triumphant Israel was to his aging circle of Jewish friends their avenger for the centuries and centuries of humiliating oppression; the state created by Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust had become for them the belated answer to the Holocaust” (56).⁴² The phrase alludes to European anti-Semitism, and is a visual reference to Nazis forcibly and publicly cutting off the beards of pious Jews in the street. For Nathan’s father’s generation, first-generation Americans Jews who lived during World War II, passivity when encountering ridicule has helped perpetuate or maintain anti-Semitism. The solution to that type of anti-Semitism is Jewish physical intimidation, defense, retribution, and brute force, as epitomized perhaps by the Israeli army. But Roth reveals his stance apprehensively by diminishing the validity of its mouthpieces Shimmy and Grossman. Furman asserts that Nathan disdains this view on Israeli military force, since he calls Shimmy the stupidest member of the family. But we can recognize that despite Shimmy Grossman’s “stupidity,” historically, the Holocaust has indeed played a major role in Zionist ideology and in the formation of the State.⁴³ Furthermore, Nathan and Shuki can affirm Shimmy’s perspective, since both experience European anti-Semitism that is masked as anti-Israeli policy. Underscoring the distasteful irony of anti-Israel rhetoric, Shuki relays an interview he had with the BBC: “We’d been on the air two minutes when the interviewer said to me, ‘You Jews learned a lot from Auschwitz.’ ‘What’s that?’ I asked. ‘How to be Nazis to the Arabs,’ he said” (66). The vitriolic disdain for Israel is so palpable that Roth marks it as clearly anti-Semitic. Here Roth again simultaneously underscores the threat of anti-Semitism, while

⁴² During the early years of the State, Israel consciously perpetuated the image of strength and virility in opposition to the victimized Jew of the diaspora, like those who were victims of the Holocaust. Appelfeld actually discusses this dynamic in his *Times* interview with Roth. See Tamar Mayer.

⁴³ It is well known that many Western countries granted political and financial support to Israel because of the Holocaust’s devastation and Jewish Americans, who had previously segmented views on Zionism, increasingly began to support Zionism in the post-Holocaust years. Ritualistically, and discursively the Holocaust and the Zionist imperative have been perpetuated as intimately linked. See my introduction for further explanation.

mentioning Israel's problematic relationship with the Palestinians. As such, he concurrently bolsters the Zionist project and reveals its consequential issues.

However, while the the message of the Holocaust (and subsequent anti-Semitism) logically leads to the necessity for a Jewish state,,Roth further critiques the rhetorical emphasis on that relationship through Jimmy Ben Joseph, the erratic Jewish American yeshiva student in Israel, whom Nathan meets at the Western Wall. Jimmy's perspective on Israel and the Holocaust is especially significant in the narrative because he represents the intersection of American and Israeli Jewish identity, and is another individualized manifestation of madness in Israel.⁴⁴ On the plane returning to England, Nathan again runs into him. He shows Nathan his manifesto about the future of the Jewish people, one of many examples in the novel where Roth includes other texts. The manifesto is entitled "Forget Remembering!"—a clear play on the post-war Jewish credo of "Never Forget" [the Holocaust].⁴⁵ Jimmy demands the closing of Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust museum, and declares that the Jewish people must put Jewish suffering behind them. The manifesto's bullet points include: "ISRAEL NEEDS NO HITLERS TO BE ISRAEL!...ZIONISM WITHOUT AUSCHWITZ! JUDAISM WITHOUT VICTIMS! THE PAST IS PAST! WE LIVE!"(169).⁴⁶ Shortly after, an Israeli flight marshal notices that Jimmy is holding a grenade, tackles him and knocks him out. Clearly, Jimmy is mentally unstable. But his message, if we weed away the extreme nature of it, is not so ludicrous.

Indeed, the Holocaust is legitimately, intimately, and historically related to the establishment of Israel. But Roth raises vital questions regarding how we should sustain and

⁴⁴ Derek Parker Royal comments that Jimmy's name is a conflation of Hebrew and English. Nathan and Jimmy's first meeting solidifies that intersection, when Nathan first encounters Jimmy at the Western Wall: Jimmy informs him that the Messiah will arrive in Israel when baseball does and declares himself a great fan of Nathan's work. Royal notes Jimmy's rhetorical and emotional similarities to crazed fan Alvin Pepler, from Roth's *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981) (435).

⁴⁵ This phrase emerges in importance in *Patrimony* as well.

⁴⁶ For a compelling portrayal of contemporary Israelis' relationship to the Holocaust, see the Israeli film *Walk on Water* (dir. Eytan Fox 2004.)

perpetuate that association, (between the Holocaust and Zionism), and to what degree should we do so. In his earlier fiction, Roth engaged with this same question but solely as relegated to the American landscape, and critiqued “Holocaust-mania” in America, which, as Emily Budick suggests, signals the “bankruptcy of Jewish American culture” (77). In *The Ghost Writer* (1979), for example, the young writer Nathan fantasizes that he is dating Anne Frank, mainly so that he can quell the “self-hating Jew” backlash he is receiving from his family and the Jewish community on his published short story about Jews.⁴⁷ In *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), Nathan’s mother’s last word, written on a note because she can no longer speak, is “Holocaust.” Since his mother, though Jewish, was not a Holocaust survivor but a first-generation American, we can read the scene as a parody of the centrality of the Holocaust in the Jewish American imagination. The scene also suggests that American Jews are indoctrinated with the notion that “it all boils down to the Holocaust.” Like other issues vital to Zionist discourse, it is a concept that Roth concurrently adheres to and satirizes.

In *The Anatomy Lesson* and *The Ghost Writer*, Roth looks at the Holocaust’s relationship to Jewish Americans. But *The Counterlife* signals Roth’s first engagement with the Holocaust’s relationship to Israel. True to the nature of the novel, that relationship is not presented simply, further underscoring the text’s pervasive ambivalence, despite its implicit Zionist conclusions. Like Jimmy’s paradoxically crazed and logical stance, Lippman’s monologue on contemporary anti-Semitism bases the necessity of a Jewish state on the presence of contemporary global anti-Semitism. In fact, Roth develops a connection between Lippman’s tirade on the presence of global anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitic occurrence that Nathan later experiences in England.

⁴⁷ As a number of critics have noted, Roth often plays with his reader’s desire to identify the non-fictionality of his fictional works. If we indulge in that game, we can recognize how Roth’s early career experienced the same type of backlash, especially after the publication of his short story “Defender of the Jews” and his novel *Portnoy’s Complaint*.

The connection suggests that Lippman is not only justifying Israel's historical claims through the Holocaust but is justifying its current claims for the same reason: the threat of anti-Semitism. Consider the following scene depicting European anti-Semitism. Late in the "Christendom" chapter, Nathan is enjoying dinner at a restaurant with Maria. An elderly English woman is fixated on Nathan caressing Maria's cheek. She shouts to the waiter, "Open a window immediately—there's a terrible smell in here...The stink in here is abominable...They smell so funny, don't they?" (292).⁴⁸ Nathan is compelled to castigate the English woman for passively-aggressively alluding to the "stink" that is emanating from his Jewish self,⁴⁹ stating, "You find Jews repellent, do you?...You are most objectionable madam, grotesquely objectionable...[I will] *have-you-thrown-out*" (292). In Agor, Lippman ironically creates a parallel to the English restaurant scene in his tirade over pervasive anti-Semitism and Jews' need to protect themselves. He rhetorically asks, "Tell me, can a Jew do anything that doesn't *stink* to high heaven?" (128). The semantic connection again reveals Roth's desire to unearth the complex truisms and validity of those he satirizes and disagrees with, reinforcing his distaste for essentialist views. In a sense, while Lippman seems paranoid in his setting, he is sort of proven correct in "Christendom,"⁵⁰ especially since Nathan also encounters Maria's family's blatant anti-Semitism. Sarah, Maria's sister, tells Nathan "Our mother's terribly anti-Semitic, you know" (279), and after throwing a

⁴⁸ More of the scene is as follows:

"Open a window," she told him, again in a voice that no one in the restaurant could fail to hear. "You must open a window immediately—there's a terrible smell in here...." Turning to Maria, I quietly told her, "I am that stink." She was puzzled, even at first a little amused. "You think that this had to do with?" "Me with you." "Either that woman is crazy," she whispered, "or she's drunk. Or maybe you are." ...But in as much as he continues looking at me, or me with you, I have to assume that I am that stink." "Darling, she is mad..." "It is a racial insult, it is intended to be that..." From down the banquette I heard her saying, "They smell so funny, don't they...A window, before we are overcome!" ...Can I help with your problem?" I asked. "You find Jews repellent, do you?" "Jews?" She repeated the word as though she'd not come upon it before. "Jews? Did you hear that?" she asked her husband. [I said] "You are most objectionable, madam, grotesquely objectionable, and if you continue shouting about the stink, I am going to request that the management have you expelled." "You will do *what*?" "*Have-you-thrown-out*." Her twitching face went motionless, momentarily at least she appeared to have been silenced (292-293).

⁴⁹ Roth depicts a similar scene in his later novel *Deception*.

⁵⁰ Furman points out how Nathan admits that Lippman had "rhetorically outclassed him" (143).

wave of anti-Semitic comments his way, she describes his and Maria's marriage as "the pathetic Jewish Anglophilia Maria's cashing in on" (280).

In *Operation Shylock*, Roth utilizes the same nuanced approach. By including characters who are Holocaust survivors, like Aharon Appelfeld and cousin Apter, and perpetrators, like Ivan the Terrible, Roth emphasizes the triangular relationship between Jewish American identity, the Holocaust, and Israel, and again suggests that one view on the Holocaust and Israel is insufficient for understanding the political and historical ethos of Israel. Philip's professional capacity in Israel to interview Aharon Appelfeld exemplifies this engagement with historical complexity and nuance. Appelfeld, an acclaimed Israeli writer, survived the Holocaust as a child and writes about the Holocaust in his fiction. Philip (Roth) and Appelfeld are friends because,⁵¹ according to Roth, they represent duality, since their lives are almost antithetical to each other. Philip (Roth) grew up in the comforts of Newark, NJ, surrounded by a loving family. Appelfeld was a child of the Holocaust; when he was eight years old, Nazis murdered his entire family and he was forced to survive the war by hiding in the forest.⁵² Suitably for a writer so concerned with the craft of writing in his fiction, Philip (Roth) discusses with Appelfeld the nature of imagination versus reality.⁵³ This discussion of writing and imagination from two very different Jews (and two very different Jewish writers) occurs within the location of a highly tense Israeli

⁵¹ I parenthetically include Roth because the interview between Philip and Appelfeld was an actual occurrence that Roth borrowed for his fictional novel.

⁵² Emily Budick compellingly delineates how Roth and Appelfeld, as writers, are actually more similar than Roth admits in *Operation Shylock*, since both are at odds with their Jewish audience. The Jewish-American community's response to Roth's fiction (especially his early work) is well known. While Appelfeld is immensely popular for Jewish American audiences, he received criticism from the Israeli literary establishment, especially during the 1940s and 1950s. Jewish Americans are comfortable with, and arguably relish stories about the Holocaust, but Israelis, particularly in the early State period, wanted to cast off the image of the victimized Jew and thus rejected much of Appelfeld's work (77).

backdrop.⁵⁴ Representing another type of Holocaust survivor, Roth's cousin Apter, who fled to Israel after the war, is a physically and emotionally traumatized man. Paralleling Apter to Appelfeld reveals a complex view of the Holocaust and Israel. If Israel was founded, as some argue, because of the Holocaust, and if Zionist discourse perpetuates the image of Israel as a falcon rising from the ashes, Apter is a bleak reminder of the horrific legacy of the Holocaust:⁵⁵ namely that it not only destroyed families and communities, but that it destroyed individuals who survived it, despite the presence of a Jewish state. And these individuals (obviously more so in the 1980s when the narrative is set) comprise part of the patchwork of Israeli society.⁵⁶

Historical Accuracy and Fiction

Interweaving real, historical events within the fictional narrative, Roth again highlights the novel's labyrinthine presentation of the Holocaust/Israel relationship, a very significant issue, loaded with political and historical importance. By including in his fiction, for example, Appelfeld, who is also an eyewitness to the Holocaust, Roth manages to accomplish simultaneously paradoxical effects. First, with Appelfeld, he bolsters his commentary on the relationship between the Holocaust and Israel, emphasizing the relevance of his fiction, and paradoxically devalues the historical critiques of his fictional characters, which cannot be equated with the severe realness of Appelfeld's story of survival. Second, he raises the legitimacy of fictional approaches to the Holocaust since Appelfeld is known to write fiction based on his experiences during the Holocaust, and, in the novel, despite his actual friendship with him, Appelfeld is manipulated by Roth's pen as a character in a fictional work; the

⁵⁴ It is a compelling discussion particularly for this novel, since the narrative begins with Roth's description of how he just recovered from Halcion Madness and since Philip repeatedly wonders if the maddening plot that he is experiencing in *Operation Shylock* is his imagination, is due to coincidence or is a manifestation of someone else's convoluted plan.

⁵⁵ See Shlomo Aronson for a discussion on the Holocaust's role in Zionist discourse.

⁵⁶ For a fascinating and disturbing look at the psychological effects of the Holocaust on survivors in Israel, see Ilana Tzur's documentary *The Last Transfer* (1997). The haunting effect of the Holocaust on Israelis has been addressed in Israeli literature, most notably in Nathan Grossman's novel *See under love* (1989).

dichotomy is striking, especially since Roth and Appelfeld's *Times* interview is published as non-fiction and the novel, which describes the circumstances of the interview, is a work of fiction. In a sense, by depicting fact and fiction as an often-shifting line in the representation of history, Roth adds another dimension to his critique, which addresses the challenge a Jewish American writer faces when encountering Jewish history and Israel. Roth suggests that both the representation and method of representation of Israel and the Holocaust are duly weighted, since the writer must be responsible to historical fact, and produce relevant and quality fiction. Reiterating the merging of fact and fiction, of the two Holocaust survivors in *Operation Shylock*, Apter and Appelfeld—with alliterative names—one represents a real person, while the other is a fictional construction. The setting likewise conflates fact and fiction as Philip goes to Israel to interview Appelfeld and sits in on the real trial of John Demjanjuk, but also engages with the fictional subplot of Pipik, who wants to re-imagine the site of Judaism in post-war Poland (the country both the fictional Apter and the real Appelfeld fled from). And so, Roth critiques the concept of fictional reactions to historical events, highlighting the importance of both in understanding and negotiating the legacy of historical events, like the Holocaust.

Obviously, the backdrop of the Demjanjuk trial, and the fact that Philip is an observer of it, highlight the importance of the Holocaust in Israeli society. But Roth complicates the legacy of the Holocaust, as well as the subjectivity and accuracy of historical representations, through metatextual devices that concurrently question the absoluteness of historical accounts and solidify the certainty of historical fact.⁵⁷ Holocaust remembrance, then, permeates the novel and becomes underscored by more contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism, which Roth

⁵⁷ Referring to the pervasive ambiguity in *The Counterlife*, Jeffery Rubin-Dorsky compellingly suggests that by conflating meta-fictionality, and fictionality with binary issues, galut/Israel, Jew/non-Jew, Holocaust victim/perpetrator, Israeli/ Palestinian, Roth underscores the dynamic where a Jew can reinvent him/herself but cannot reinvent history (93).

situates to make us question if they are modernized extensions of the circumstances surrounding the Holocaust. That engagement with Zionism, anti-Semitism, and historical anti-Semitism also refers back to Roth's role as a Jewish American writer delving into Jewish identity and history, and creating relevant fictional work; as such, that engagement underscores the difficulty of writing novels from an ethnically Jewish perspective.

In *Operation Shylock* and specifically in his depiction of the Demjanjuk trial, Roth's approach to the Holocaust is similar to his approach in *The Counterlife* with Jimmy Ben Joseph. Jimmy may be mentally unstable, but the content of his argument, though presented extremely, has some legitimacy. Similarly, though John Demjanjuk is acquitted, and the survivor Alvin Rosenfeld's testimony is found to be slightly manipulated in the trial, Roth affirms that Rosenfeld was a victim and survivor of the Holocaust and that there was a historical indisputable fact of the Holocaust. That Appelfeld writes fiction based on his real wartime experiences bolsters this theme. The trial reveals the fine line between fact and fiction, which is often located in the legitimate nuances of rhetoric surrounding the Holocaust. In a way, Roth does not shy away from critiquing Jewish responses to the Holocaust. But in no way does he diminish the Holocaust's legacy or the validity of its historical reality, message, and impact, mirroring Roth's larger theme of solidarity to Zionism that honestly rejects a propagandist approach.⁵⁸ By conflating historical fact and an emphasis on subjectivity through the presence of performativity, (like Rosenfeld's minimally skewed testimony), Roth reveals his anxiety about writing novels that address Jewish history (and, in turn, Jewishness). We can recognize, then, the anxious quality of a novel engaging with historical (and significant) events but which still emphasizes the inherent subjectivity of fictional creation and reactions to history.

⁵⁸ In fact, given Roth's later work *The Facts*, which I will discuss later in the chapter, and the content of his interview with Appelfeld, it would seem that Roth sees more truth in fiction than in rigidly documented fact.

Roth further complicates his perspective on fact and fiction, and the Holocaust and contemporary anti-Semitism, by including the diaries of Leon Klinghoffer, which Philip later discovers are inventions of the Mossad. In 1985, Klinghoffer was on a vacation cruise with his wife when Palestinian hijackers overtook the ship. The hijackers killed the wheelchair-bound Klinghoffer and threw his body overboard; as such, Klinghoffer became a martyr and symbol of contemporary anti-Semitism. In the novel, David Supposnik, an Israeli secret police officer posing as a book dealer, approaches Philip at the Demjanjuk trial and asks him to write an introduction for the (fabricated) diaries. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a fabricated piece of writing does not diminish the fact that Klinghoffer, a Jewish American citizen, was murdered in an act of anti-Semitism. As such, Roth links the anti-Semitism discussed at the trial of a Nazi war criminal and a more contemporary act of anti-Semitism at the hands of Palestinian terrorists, suggesting that the threat of anti-Semitism did not end when the Holocaust ended. Instead, the parallel suggests that anti-Semitism is an ongoing, contemporary reality, tacitly affirming a Zionist claim that Jews need a sovereign state to evade and prevent anti-Semitic persecution. Furthermore, Roth anticipates anti-Israel rhetoric, which tries to de-legitimize Zionism by suggesting that the devastation of the Holocaust and the threat of anti-Semitism are exaggerated, by affirming this particular Zionist claim even in the face of fictionalized documents about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Roth also includes Pipik's perpetuation of Diasporism, and his girlfriend Wanda Jinx's recovery from her anti-Semitic inclinations, again underscoring the various manifestations of anti-Semitism throughout the world, even in America.

Roth may affirm the Zionist imperative. Yet, with the presence of Philip's former college roommate George Ziad, a Palestinian whom Philip sits next to at the Demjanjuk trial, Roth heightens the complexity of the setting and the ambivalence of that claim. In the novel, Ziad's

anger and frustration over the Palestinian conflict has transformed him into a volatile militant. But that transformation is not entirely ungrounded. Unlike in *The Counterlife*, Roth in *Operation Shylock* does approach the Palestinian perspective and addresses abuses made by the Israeli government to the Palestinian population. Philip ponders about Ziad:

I saw the, the overexcitability, the maniacal loquacity, the intellectual duplicity, the deficiencies of judgment, the agitprop rhetoric - for the fact that amiable, subtle, endearing George Ziad had been turned completely inside out. Or maybe it just came down to injustice: isn't a colossal, enduring injustice enough to drive a decent man mad? Our pilgrimage to the bloodstained wall where Israeli soldiers had dragged the local inhabitants to break their bones and beat them into submission was thwarted... (152)

As such, Zee may be extreme, but Philip nevertheless sympathizes with him. Finally, in the backdrop of it all, the Intifada is brewing, solidifying the loaded significance of Zionism, over which people fight wars.⁵⁹ In an earlier essay, Roth writes that he is intellectually and emotionally excited by his own Jewishness, which he defines as being part of a historical “predicament” (“On Portnoy’s” 16). Roth’s perpetuation of that excitement also manifests as anxiety, as Roth portrays the writer’s anxious and byzantine journey to Jewish solidarity.

Texts and Public Relations

Roth epitomizes the Jewish American writer who not only has to negotiate complex issues, but who also has a heightened responsibility to his or her Jewish audience precisely because the audience is an ethnic minority, with a long history of persecution, and possesses a nationalized state that is constantly in a precarious position. By including texts written or supposedly written by Jimmy Ben Joseph, Aharon Appelfeld, Ivan the Terrible, Nazi bureaucrats,

⁵⁹ Philip actually phones the Israeli police when, from his East Jerusalem hotel, witnessing a group of Palestinians mustering for revolt (223).

and Leon Klinghoffer, amongst others, Roth reveals the politicized nature of texts (both fact and fiction) that address Israel and Jewishness. But he takes it one step further to suggest that there is a lot at stake when one writes about Israel, suggesting that when he writes about Israel he is not just presenting a perspective on Israel but is voluntarily or involuntarily serving in the Israel/Jewish public relations department. Throughout the series, Roth develops the anxiety that reaffirms that his solidarity to Zionism is not reached without ambivalence and trepidation, underscoring that Roth's writerly decisions work in tandem with his relationship with Israel, a significant point considering his high literary claim and his heated relationship with the Jewish audience.

Nathan's discursive exchange with Shuki in *The Counterlife* encapsulates Roth's negotiation of the Jewish American writer's responsibility to Jewish issues. The dialogue reveals Nathan's keen awareness that what he says about Israel can have a lasting impact on the security of Israel and becomes a precursor to Philip's decision to textually circumcise his chapter in *Operation Shylock*. In *The Counterlife*, while Nathan is on board the flight from Israel to London, he reads a letter from Shuki, who warns him that to write about Lippman in one of his novels would have negative repercussions. Shuki argues that though Lippman, as a "fanatical outlier," does not represent Israeli society, readers will only remember Lippman and will identify him with all of Israel. To Shuki, Nathan would be playing in his fiction with "an argument in which people die" (158). As a journalist and former press attaché, Shuki is emphatically aware of the consequences of discourse surrounding Israel, and so by extension, fills the role as public relations for Israel. Emily Budick highlights the parallel between Shuki and Nathan: she suggests that Shuki and Nathan, as creations of Philip Roth, i.e. P.R., are both unofficial representatives for Israel's public relations (69 and 70). For Roth then, the stakes with his fiction transcend from

typical literary concerns to concerns over human life. And Roth appropriately mirrors the weightiness of those potential consequences by infusing his texts with ample anxious energy.

In *Operation Shylock*, Roth heightens his portrayal of writerly ambivalence about writing a book about Israel, through the question of self-censorship, or in this case an act of textual circumcision. Philip must decide if he will excise chapter 11 of his book, which possesses content that may be damaging for Israel from a public relations stance, and dangerously revealing for security issues; indeed, the content may situate Israel and Jews in a precarious position. After all, as Shuki explains in *The Counterlife*, Israel depends on a lot of foreign aid and so its world image affects its survival as a Jewish state. Similarly, when Philip's Mossad handler Smilesburger tries to persuade Philip to omit his chapter 11, he likewise poses the request as a life or death issue, reiterating Roth's exploration of the weighty significance of rhetoric surrounding Israel.

Doubling

Through the use of doubling, Roth underscores the ambivalent relationship between ethnic identification of Jewishness and literary responsibility to fiction and Israel. As a formal tactic, doubling delineates how ethnic identity is performative, a postmodernist concept that again highlights the subjectivity of ideas. Many critics have recognized in Roth's use of doubling his postmodernist sensibility and investigation of all things ambiguous. However, I argue that we cannot ignore how Roth ends his narratives: with a definite alignment with Jewish collectivity. Despite the pervasive performativity throughout the narrative, which suggests that relationships to Judaism and Israel are always in flux, Roth ends the narratives with his characters making solid decisions. Both writer-protagonists, Nathan and Philip, ultimately choose to circumcise in

an act of solidarity to the Jewish collective, suggesting again that ambivalence does not trump ethnic solidarity.

While not as apparent as in *Operation Shylock*, where Philip actually possesses a double in Pipik, in *The Counterlife*, the counternarrative structure enables doubling, where each chapter (other than "Aloft") is a double of another chapter. In a sense, through the counternarratives, there are two forms of Henry and two forms of Nathan. Roth uses Henry and Nathan as conduits to explore ways to write Jewish American identity as related to sex, family, and Israel. Elaine Kauver discusses the doubleness of *The Counterlife's* narrative structure, suggesting that the "competing variations create tension of perpetual self-contradiction and continual uncertainty" (433). I similarly argue that like the conflation of fact and fiction in *Operation Shylock*, *The Counterlife's* narrative-doubleness infuses the novel with anxiety and nervous energy. Deborah Shostack has also suggested that the multiplicity of voices and counter-voices are postmodernist devices that examine the self-dividedness of ethnic identity (726). Shostack's point is compelling, since the counternarratives in *The Counterlife* function to reveal the performative quality of ethnic identity. We can also recognize that for Roth, identity is performative. In *The Counterlife*, Nathan expresses the concept directly when he writes Maria: "If there even is a natural being, an irreducible self, it is rather small...I am a theatre and nothing more than a theatre" (322- 323). The many voices in the novel externalize the performative quality of identity, suggesting again that Jewish identity should be played with to fully take ownership of Jewishness. In contrast, Ranen Omer-Sherman suggests that the counternarratives underscore Roth's inability to find a sustainable sense of Jewish identity, and Helene Meyerson recognizes in them a sort of postmodernist nihilism, where binaries are deconstructed to reveal an identification with nothing (133). I would agree, however, with Shostack, who sees Roth's

counter-voices as essential components in the performative quality of ethnic identity, especially considering Roth's typical literary "mischief," a term Andrew Furman uses to describe Roth's playfulness with the reader. Furthermore, I take their arguments a step further to assert that this playfulness and performativity become for Roth the necessary means not only to explore Jewish identity but also to find it; in these novels, it is a found Jewish identity that aligns with Zionism but that should always be open to critique. It is the antithesis of nihilism.

With the character Pipik, *Operation Shylock* heightens this concept of identitative performativity (and doubling), and reveals another aspect of Jewish American relationships to Israel and the diaspora: the temptation of assimilation and the betrayal of self-hate. Pipik's persona then goes to the heart of Roth's oeuvre and career, as Roth suffered from consistent accusations of self-hatred. As Harold Bloom suggests, Roth uses the double Pipik as a means to explore these issues, in order to eradicate them from his protagonist Philip, and from the text itself. Since Roth already possesses his double in Philip, Pipik layers the doubling project with another double. Naturally, Philip is troubled when he discovers the presence of his imposter Pipik, who is a leader of a movement that Philip thinks is irrational. But his reaction to Pipik reveals that Philip is threatened by him for even more complex reasons, which explore Jewish identification. Through Pipik's troubling unilateral views on Israel and Jewish identity, Pipik becomes a representation of parts of Philip and his persona that to Philip are problematic. (After all, Pipik and Philip are so intertwined that Philip slept with Pipik's girlfriend Wanda Jinx.)⁶⁰ Consider Philip's reaction to the news of Pipik's death at the end of the narrative, in which he

⁶⁰ Critics have at length discussed the symbolism of Pipik. Elaine Kauver examines the narrative psychoanalytically to suggest that Pipik represents Philip's other self: the self-hating Jew he has been accused of being by the Jewish community. And Debra Shostack sees him as Roth's "true American self the child of the diaspora": a Jew who problematically disavows the threat of anti-Semitism, as symbolized by Wanda Jinx, by assuming it is a personal issue, like alcoholism, instead of a historical and collective danger (736). Pipik then represents hyper assimilation (736). David Gooblar suggests that Roth figures Pipik as a text that becomes an invasion of privacy for Philip and is thus situated in Roth's larger critique of the consequences of non-fiction writing (46).

tells Wanda that he might publish Pipik's unwritten, but promised, manifesto on diasporism in a letter to Wanda: "I'd be a very foolish writer, now that he's gone, not to be the imposter's creature and, in my workshop, partake of his treasure (by which I no longer mean you). Your other P.R. assures you that the imposter's voice will not be stifled by him (meaning me)" (376). That letter is intentionally confusing. But it suggests that Philip will finally gain control over his imposter with the opportunity, should he take it, to write Pipik's manifesto. He ultimately decides not to write the manifesto. The critique is an allusion to the narrative's larger commentary on the power and powerlessness of writing, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Furthermore, the letter highlights the lingering presence that Pipik has in Philip's life as a symbol of the dividedness of the self. Even after Pipik dies, Philip admits that despite the eradication of his torturous double, Philip "will dwell in the house of Ambiguity forever" (307). The liturgy-like admission reflects that Pipik, dead or alive, is an outward manifestation of an internal and continuous predicament. As Smilesburger later asserts that "inside every Jew, there is a *mob* of Jews" (334), Pipik represents the dividedness of the self.

As critics compellingly argue, Pipik encapsulates various postmodernist devices that transmit an anxiety and ambivalence to the narrative.⁶¹ However, critics have not yet addressed the significance of Pipik's movement as diasporism and a large-scale counter-solution to Zionism and its relationship to messianism. I argue that Pipik's historical and political perspective is a crucial point directly addressing the anxiety engendered from Jewish American identification when it confronts Zionism and the complexity of the Israeli/Palestinian situation. We can recognize why Philip would so reject Pipik's plan. Certainly the return of all Ashkenazi

⁶¹ Josh Cohen aptly describes Pipik as "internalized double hood" (91) and Robert Alter describes *Operation Shylock* as a "series of encounters between performing selves," an apt portrayal that is epitomized when Philip pretends to be Pipik in his meeting with "Zee." Shostack highlights the point by elucidating how Pipik represents pure subjectivity, in his "simultaneous absence and ubiquity," and is thus the "abyss of identity" (746).

Jews to Poland is practically and historically unsound. But it is also limiting. Pipik's plan not only ignores the historical devastation of the Holocaust and the residue of Polish anti-Semitism but it also disavows the political and cultural developments of the more recent post-war period: Pipik has an anachronistic view of the diaspora that predates Zionism's actualization, the inclusion of a larger non-European population of diasporic Jews (namely Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews), and the dismantling of the limiting diaspora/homeland binary.

To elucidate Philip's problem with Pipik's diasporism, consider a form of post-Zionism advocated by Caryn Aviv and David Schneer. Proposing what would be the antithesis of Pipik's plan, they suggest that instead of "refer[ing] to Jews as "in Israel" or "in (the) diaspora, "we refer to new Jews as "global" (Israelis included), and break down the geographic dichotomies as either situated in Israel or situated everywhere else (340). Pipik's plan is problematic because it ignores the eclectic range of Jewish origins and practice by exclusively maintaining a European/Israeli binary. It is a definition engendered from the demographic facts of the Holocaust, and yet, even then it is inaccurate, as there were many Jewish victims that were in countries located outside of Europe. Roth is also victim to this Ashkenazi-centric view of Judaism--after all, the last scene of *Operation Shylock* is set in a New York food store, complete with smoked fish.⁶² But at least Roth presents a face of Jewish America that may eat food inspired by Europe but that has now become solidly American (or at least New York-specific). Pipik's plan is problematic for Philip (and Roth) because it also ignores the nuanced approaches to Israel that diasporic Jewry possesses. For Roth, while he prioritizes Israeli safety over literary pursuits, his Jewish identification is no longer separate from Israel. By parodying diasporism, by rejecting Pipik, by "vicariously killing" off that side of himself, Roth is advocating diasporism that is conflated with

⁶² When Roth visited Bradley Beach as a child, he had encountered Syrian Jews there, and could not believe that they were Jewish (Cooper 10).

Zionism. This rejection of Pipik emulates Schneer and Aviv's global diasporism because Roth situates himself with the concerns of the diaspora and Israel. But Roth's literary traversing through Israel and identity is still fraught with ambivalence, another reason why he would so vehemently despise Pipik's simplistic and limited approach to the diaspora and Israel.

Illness

Identity related ambivalence and ambiguity are further underscored through the motif of illness in both novels, highlighting the trajectory of identity exploration that Philip and Nathan endure in order to make their decision to join the Jewish collective. Emily Budick explains that illness in Roth's oeuvre is often associated with identitative crisis, coining the term "Jewish disease" over identity, an anxiety-inducing state. Consider, for example, Roth's earlier Zuckerman book *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983). In the novel, Nathan experiences chronic back pain that represents his conflict between Jewish guilt (and the guilt of the Jewish son) and artistic integrity.⁶³ What makes illness and its cure significant in both *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock* is that Roth highlights the process of recovery, suggesting that a cure for the disease of identitative ambivalence is writing about that ambivalence. In *Operation Shylock*, Philip's mental state is in recovery from Halcion madness, which blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. When the narrative begins, he is forced to confront identitative ambiguity again with his imposter Pipik. And illness in *Operation Shylock* is not exclusive to Philip. Pipik is dying of cancer and is forced to wear a prosthetic penis, a significant detail since the Jewish penis, through circumcision, is a marker of ethnic identity. But in both *The Counterlife* and *Operation*

⁶³ In his analysis of illness in "Zuckerman Bound", Donald Kartinger suggests that Nathan's illness is engendered from the artistic predicament of the Jewish writer caught between "loyalty to the father and loyalty to art" (37). It is a dynamic Roth overtly explores again in *Operation Shylock*.

Shylock, Roth provides an attempt to ameliorate disease through surgeries and “operations.”⁶⁴ Certainly, the operation in *Operation Shylock* refers to the Mossad mission that Philip is involved in later in the narrative. However, Budick reads the operation as the book itself, where Roth is attempting to heal the Jewish “dis-ease” of identitative ambivalence and complexity. In a sense, Roth works through that ambivalence by writing the novel especially since, to Budick, ambivalence can never be cured, but it can be ameliorated. And Harold Bloom sees the Mossad operation as a way to eradicate Philip’s self-hating self, especially since it is intended to expose Jewish collaborators with the PLO. He coins it a “mission against self-hatred”(8). Similarly, in *The Counterlife*, both Henry and Nathan undergo surgeries to correct their impotence, a condition that in Roth’s works represents a failure to forge a sense of Jewish identity. I also argue that the counternarrative structure can also be viewed as an operation of sorts, as each chapter can be read as an attempt to fix the narrative that precedes it. More importantly, those operations ultimately influence Nathan and Philip’s decision to align with the Jewish collective, reiterating how Roth relates identity and illness/cures.

Language and ambiguity

In *Operation Shylock*, Roth again depicts this struggle with identitative ambivalence through the only inclusion of Hebrew in the text. Roth’s commentary on Hebrew also highlights the role writing and language have when Roth negotiates identitative ambivalence, especially with regard to Israel, and again underscores the importance of writing about the complexity of Jewish issues. Philip’s relationship with Hebrew gives insight into Philip’s diasporic relationship to Israel: he is simultaneously alienated to and intimate with Israel. Kidnapped by Mossad agents, (so that they can present Philip with his mission), Philip is held in a classroom in an ultra-

⁶⁴ It should be noted that Roth ends his Zuckerman series with *Exit Ghost* (2007) when Nathan develops prostate cancer and undergoes a prostatectomy, leaving him impotent.

Orthodox Jewish neighborhood. He reads on the blackboard a quote from Genesis that must be a remnant from a past lesson. Having a striking appearance on the page and thus importance in the book, the verse is written in Hebrew script typeface. Also used as one of the book's epigraphs, the verse reads "So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak" (Genesis 32:24). The other epigraph is from Kierkegaard and reads, "The whole content of my being shrieks in contradiction against itself...Existence is surely a debate." Both epigraphs obviously allude to the contradictory nature of identity formation as developed in *Operation Shylock*. However, prioritizing the "Jewishness" of identitative ambiguity, Roth only includes the Hebrew quote in the body of the narrative. Furthermore, the fact that the quote is written in a classroom for Israeli hareidim is significant, since in *The Counterlife* Henry explains how his spiritual revelation occurred when he overheard ultra-Orthodox Israeli children singing in their classroom. As if this were the classroom that Henry walked by, Roth is connecting both texts with narrative moments that bridge Israel's language and locale to diasporic Jews.

Henry's epiphany and Philip's reading are revelatory for another reason: both classroom encounters allude to a sense of ancient collectivity that both Henry and Philip are drawn to, despite the concomitant foreignness of them. The Hebrew verse is loaded with cultural and historical weight, as it describes the biblical scene that causes God to rename Jacob Israel. Rabbinic commentary suggests that by wrestling with the angel, Jacob passed a spiritual test and earned the role of the paternal leader of "Bnei Yisrael," the children of Israel. (More explicitly, "bnei" translates as sons, who later become the 12 tribes of Israel, and as such, the incident marks the beginning of tribal Judaism, an appropriate citation given Philip's decision to circumcise his text.)⁶⁵ The quote describes the ancient (but collective/tribal) Jewish struggle of identity that concurrently occurs individually. As the backdrop for Philip's encounter with

⁶⁵ Harold Bloom recognizes Jacob as a symbol for Philip, and Esau as a symbol for Pipik ("Operation Roth").

Smilesburger, the quote encompasses the internal debate Philip will inevitably undergo when he struggles on his road to collective alignment. Can we also not recognize it “as the writing on the wall,” forecasting Philip’s ominous struggle with his Jewish identity, that ultimately ends in his literary sacrifice for the sake of Israel and the larger Jewish collective?

Robert Alter points to the quote’s Hebrew, a language Philip does not understand, so is only comprehensible through translation. To Alter, Philip’s encounter with the quote mirrors contemporary diasporic Jewish culture, where tradition is only understood and related through translation. It is a significant point that bolsters Roth’s portrayal of the performativity of identity. Roth affirms Alter’s keen assessment, which disavows any sense of essentialist identity, through Philip’s musings on Hebrew. Though he does not understand it, the Hebrew alphabet he encountered in Hebrew school as a child every day instilled in him a great attachment to the Hebrew language and became the source of his relationship with writing (English included.) Philip narrates:

What came of [those hours in the classroom at Hebrew school] was *everything!* That cryptography whose significance I could no longer decode had marked me indelibly four decades ago; out of the inscrutable words written on this blackboard had evolved every English word I had ever written. Yes, all and everything had originated there, including Moishe Pipik (313).

While Hebrew is the source of his literary ability, it is also a language he is tied to and simultaneously alienated from. More so, being held “captive,” yet not in chains, in this classroom, Philip reveals again a deep and fraught attachment to the Hebrew language, to the Israeli setting, that seems concurrently unnatural and innate.

Textual Circumcision

Roth encapsulates Philip's contradictory feelings towards Jewishness and plants the seed for Philip's decision to join the Jewish collective in a classroom in a children's school, very similar to the one where we learn Philip's own Jewish education began. In the classroom, Smilesburger also assigns Philip a mission, "Operation Shylock." Though we never learn explicitly what that mission is, we are told that Philip will impersonate Pipik and go to Greece to discover which Jews are funding the PLO. In typical Roth fashion, the mission highlights the theme of (layers of) performativity, and what defines a self-hating Jew. However, Roth never tells us the mission, as it is presumably included in chapter 11, the chapter that Philip chooses to excise. (So while we don't know what is included in that chapter, we assume it details Philip's role in the Mossad mission.) Like Nathan's decision to circumcise his son, this narrative omission becomes a textual circumcision of sorts, and further develops the debate between loyalty to the Jewish collective and to individual literary desires. Roth describes how, in the last actual chapter of the narrative, Smilesburger meets Philip in New York, and urges him not to publish the last chapter for the sake of Israeli security and for Roth's own security as well. The question as to why Philip listens to Smilesburger and to why he even shows his handler the manuscript for "scrutiny" (377) (something he had never done before) becomes the central question of the narrative and is the culmination of the themes developed in the four-part series.

Many critics have suggested that Philip excises the last chapter for the sake of Israeli security. Almost continuing what Shuki says to Nathan in *The Counterlife* about people dying due to what is said about Israel, Philip's decision could be understood as an admission that in Israel there are higher stakes than in America. Certainly, Israel is a far more contentious subject than Jewish Newark. But while Roth recognizes the tenuousness of Israel, an acknowledgement clearly manifested in both Israel novels, Roth's works do not explicitly distinguish between the

security of Jews living in Israel and those living in the diaspora. When writing about Leon Klinghoffer, for example, Philip describes how the banality of Klinghoffer's travel diary belies the incapability of ordinariness in Jewish existence and the threat of anti-Semitism to Jews worldwide. Philip notes in the diary: "Jews would be people if they could forget they were Jews. Ordinariness. Blandness. Uneventful monotony. Uneventful existence. The repetitious security of one's own little cruise. But this is not to be. The incredible drama of being a Jew" (329).⁶⁶ In 2004, Roth continued his exploration of the threat of anti-Semitism outside of Israel when he published *The Plot Against America*, a counter-historical novel that explores what would have happened in the U.S. during the World War II years if Charles Lindbergh, a known anti-Semite and Nazi sympathizer, became president instead of FDR. The book is a chilling contradiction to the Jewish American claim that the Holocaust could never occur in America. Certainly, Roth recognizes the heightened security measures Israel must take in order to survive, which perhaps includes the censoring of incriminating or sensitive information. However, I argue that by dramatizing Philip's decision to circumcise the text, Roth not only reaffirms the tenuousness of writing about Israel but also points to the tensions between literary responsibility and collective ethnic loyalty.

Thus far, I have delineated how Roth develops the pervasive complexity, nuance, and anxiety when the Jewish American writer engages with Jewish issues and Zionism, and how solidarity to the Jewish collective is fraught with difficult but constructive ambivalence, particularly when writing about it. In the next section of my chapter, I will discuss the circumcision scenes in both *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*, and their intertextual connection to the non-fictional *The Facts* and *Patrimony*. Through the circumcision scenes, I will show that Roth emphasizes the Jewishness of the writer and the Jewishness of the topics at

⁶⁶ Of course, the description of "drama" also underscores Roth's notion of the performativity of ethnic identity.

hand. In fact, if the Jewish American writer were not part of Roth's critique, the series would seem limited rather than a brilliant epic on Jewish American identification with Israel.

Philip deeply struggles with his decision to remove chapter 11. For him, it is akin to Jacob's wrestling with the angel, since he presents it as artistic integrity (the solitary Jacob) versus Jewish communal loyalty (the communal leader Israel). He rants to himself about his career and his tumultuous relationship with his Jewish audience, remembering that he has never before acquiesced to them and silenced his artistic vision in his portrayal of Jews:

Never in my life had I submitted a manuscript to any inspector anywhere for this sort of scrutiny. To do so ran counter to the inclination of one whose independence as a writer, whose *counter-suggestiveness* as a writer, was simply second nature and had contributed as much to his limitations and his miscalculations as to his durability...Jews who [labeled] me guilty of the crime of "informing", had been calling for me to be "responsible" from the time I began publishing in my middle twenties...The writer redefined the permissible. *That* was the responsibility. Nothing need hide itself in fiction. And so on (377).

Roth represents the debate between self-censorship and artistic freedom, not only through Philip's own musings but also through Smilesburger's long-winded and excited monologue about Sigmund Freud and the late nineteenth-century Rabbi known as the Chofetz Chaim. In the classroom scene, Smilesburger delineates between the two Jews and their relationship to speech. The appearance of Freud in a Roth novel is not surprising, since much of Roth's work is influenced by psychoanalysis.⁶⁷ As Debra Shostack explains, many of Roth's characters are

⁶⁷ The most obvious example of Roth's interest in psychoanalysis is in *Portnoy's Complaint*: The narrative takes place in Portnoy's session in psychoanalysis. One of Roth's most infamous lines is *Portnoy's* last, "So... Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?"

“babblers” (79), in line with Freud’s notion that talking in free association is constructive.⁶⁸

(Certainly *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock* possess that “babbling” quality.) Not an advocate of babbling,⁶⁹ the Chofetz Chaim represents the opposite end of the Jewish schema; in contrast to the assimilated Austrian Freud, he was a revered ultra-Orthodox Rabbi in Galicia. Also unlike Freud, he was an advocate for silence, admonishing the evils of “loshon Hara” (or “evil speech”) and preaching the rabbinic idea “words generally spoil things.”⁷⁰ Obviously for a person who makes his living with words, Philip would naturally not be a follower of the Chofetz Chaim. And yet, in *Operation Shylock*, he indirectly becomes one when he censors his chapter 11.

Ironically, Smilesburger uses about nine pages to explain the difference between the men, advocating the necessity for both (332-341). But despite his own effusive talking, Smilesburger ultimately suggests that for Israel, Philip, and his chapter 11, the Chofetz Chaim’s route is the way to go. He also cites a talmudic source that blames the destruction of the second temple on the rampant *lashon hora* present in Roman-occupied Israel,⁷¹ suggesting that *lashon hora* dismantles solidarity and security (and destroys Israel).

So why do Philip (and Roth) align with the Chofetz Chaim, abandon the usual muse Freud and remain silent about the Mossad mission? Why does Roth willingly associate writing fiction with public relations, a dynamic he adamantly rejects in his infamous 1963 essay, “Writing about Jews”?⁷² While I agree with critics who suggest that advocacy of Israeli security

⁶⁹ Alter similarly refers to that babbling quality “Spritz” - a sort of “verbal vaudeville” reminiscent of Jewish American comedy of the 50s and 60s, which unapologetically addresses issues of Jewish American identity

⁷⁰ It is also the title of *Operation Shylock’s* epilogue.

⁷¹ Talmud, Gittin 56A.

⁷² In the essay, he writes, “I did not want to, I did not intend to, and was not able to speak *for* American Jews; I surely did not deny...that I spoke *to* them”(211). Roth insists that his only responsibility is to fiction and reads his critics[’]” accusations as a plea to write with “timidity and paranoia”(208), an approach he has adamantly refused to

motivates Roth's textual omission, I argue that Philip's decision is also his attempt to pay homage to his father, Jewish patrimony and indirectly Jewish tribalism, an idea that critics have not thus far acknowledged.⁷³ Certainly it would be unwise to explain Roth's fictional work with his biographical information. And, given Roth's literary playfulness, it is also naïve to assume that his non-fictional work is purely non-fictional. Nevertheless, as I will delineate, the connection between his Israel-centered novels and his non-fictional *The Facts* and *Patrimony* develops the notion that Philip's decision is a fulcrum to perpetuate the Jewish paternal chain and reveals that Roth associates Zionism with tribal Judaism, or simply that Zionism is part of the paternal legacy handed to him. Philip's eventual decision to sacrifice his fiction for the Zionist cause is not entirely politically driven; it is also driven by emotion and family. It goes to the heart of much of Roth's oeuvre and the singular question of this four-part series: what is the responsibility of the Jewish American writer when engaging with Israel? Through the intertextual relationship as well as Philip's feelings for Smilesburger, Roth ultimately suggests that that responsibility is engendered from a loyalty to Jewish patrimony.

While Roth ends the series addressing the responsibility of the Jewish American writer to Israel, he had already established the foundation of that critique in the circumcision scene in *The Counterlife*.⁷⁴ In *The Counterlife*'s final counternarrative, and with Nathan's eventual decision to

take. Doing so would be "agree[ing] to sacrifice the freedom essential to my vocation, and even to the general well-being of the culture" (208).

⁷³ Sylvia Barak Fishman, however, argues that his decision reveals that Israel is at the heart of the diasporic Jew and Elaine Kauver sees it as an alliance with cultural patrimony that is fostered by Smilesburger, who is Philip's "kind of Jew." Kauver does not, however, make a connection between Roth's writing about his own father and a larger idea of patrimonial Jewishness. She seems to suggest that Philip likes Smilesburger or admires him, prompting his compliance.

⁷⁴ As I have already discussed, *The Counterlife* is an exploration of selves through its counternarratives, and many critics point to the novel's postmodernist portrayal of multiple selves. For example, Debra Shostack says that *The Counterlife* is an external portrait of the dividedness of the self, in a psychoanalytic schema, as even Nathan says that there is no irreducible self. We can recognize that though Nathan can't define what Jewishness is, he knows that he is a Jew. Ross Posnock sees the counternarratives as Roth's admission that playacting, or immaturity, is closer to reality than a supposed mimesis of reality. To Posnock, performativity is reality, and fiction is in line with how people really live their lives: through invention. Omer-Sherman, in contrast, suggests that *The Counterlife* (and

circumcise his unborn child, Roth establishes the connection between Jewish identity and the paternal chain, personal history, and collective history, and finally Jewish writing and the rejection of idealistic simplicity, all themes that culminate in *Operation Shylock*.

Circumcision and *The Counterlife*

Nathan's decision to circumcise his unborn child is motivated by an incident that highlights his Jewishness: the anti-Semitism he encounters in England. As Sylvia Barack Fishman has noted, in both Israel-centered novels, "Roth suggests that one of the primary deciding factors of Jewishness are the boundaries provided by anti-Semitism" (149). The decision also possesses a discursive critique, conflating principles of writing with ethnic identity, to highlight the significance the Jewish American writer plays in Roth's discussion on Jewish American identity and Zionism. Consider first Nathan's reaction to the anti-Semitism he experiences in England. While he is upset when he learns that Maria's mother and sister are anti-Semitic, the incident in the restaurant, where the woman complains of the "stink", is the catalyst for a discussion that presumably breaks up Nathan and Maria's marriage. Nathan writes a farewell letter to his pregnant wife Maria, explaining how "England's made a Jew of [him] in only eight weeks" (324). She tells him angrily "Go back to America, please, where, everybody loves Jews—you think!" (306). But why does Nathan feel his Jewishness so pronouncedly in England, and what is Roth suggesting with his reaction? Having escaped the madness that he experienced in Israel, Nathan had excitedly been looking forward to delving into quiet domesticity with Maria. But his first few days back in England present a rude awakening:

Here in England I was all at once experiencing first hand something I had never been personally bruised by in America...I felt as though gentlest England had suddenly reared

Operation Shylock) reveal Roth's inability to find or relate to any strong sense of Jewish identity, and Helene Meyerson suggests that the counternarrative structure becomes an act of negation, where all binaries and premises cancel each other out to result in nothing (133).

up and bit me on the neck...I had written my fiction in the knowledge of [anti-Semitism], and even I consequence of it and yet... down to tonight...the experience of it had been negligible in my personal life.(307)

Nathan even states that prior to the incident, he had always written about the Jewish historical circumstance of anti-Semitism with “naïveté.” Now his perspective on Jewish identity changes.

When Nathan declares that England made a Jew out of him, he explains, “A Jew without Jews, without Judaism, without Zionism, with Jewishness, without a temple or an army or even a pistol, a Jew clearly without a home, just the object itself, like a glass or an apple” (324). At this point in the four-part series, he expresses his inability to solidly identify his Jewishness with a descriptive label. However, Nathan knows that he is a Jew since he is born from a long chain of Jews. Having experienced anti-Semitism in England, which emphasized his Jewish otherness, Nathan wants to imprint and announce that otherness on his child in an act that Josh Cohen calls a “performative conception of selfhood” (89). In a sense, if English anti-Semitism is subtle but grotesquely apparent, then he will counteract it by putting an irreversible marker of difference on his child’s body. His decision also counters the wishes of Maria’s family, who would like to christen the child and not have him circumcised in a Jewish public ritual.

More significantly, through his son’s circumcision, Nathan is not only marking his son as a Jew, but also making himself a Jewish father (Budick 81). It is a gesture that reflects the importance of a patrimonial connection to Judaism that will be further explored in the three later works. Nathan writes to Maria his reasoning behind the decision. In the letter, he alludes to his previous novels, which were labeled by many in the Jewish American population as irreverent to Jewish tradition and the concerns of Jewish “elders” (a term later referenced in *Operation Shylock*):

That delicate surgery should be performed upon the penis of a brand-new boy seems to you the very cornerstone of human irrationality, and maybe it is. And that the custom should be unbreakable even by the author of my somewhat skeptical books proves to you just how much my is worth against a tribal taboo (323).

This mention of tribal(ism) is significant because it already conflates Jewish identification with writing, suggesting that how a Jewish writer writes determines what type of Jew he/she is. It also references Nathan's, (and Roth's), previous novelistic irreverence toward the tribe, or Jewish collectivity, (and Roth and Nathan's unwavering prioritization of artistic integrity over tribal responsibility). As such, the decision to circumcise out of tribal loyalty marks a change in Roth and Nathan's oeuvre that can be associated with the novel's engagement with both Israel and paternity.

When Nathan attributes his decision to circumcise as a rejection of the pastoral, in life and literature, Roth further conflates Jewish identification with the Jewish American writer's literary choices. Nathan positions the pastoral against circumcision, which he describes as the anti-pastoral. In *The Counterlife*, Cheswick, England represents the pastoral. Epitomizing peace and serenity, it is a beautifully idyllic town where Nathan and Maria are building a home by the Thames. To Nathan, the pastoral is gentile and effuses gentility; it is the domestic bliss promised by Nathan's gentile wife in picturesque England. Circumcision, however, is aligned with Jewishness and is the antithesis of the pastoral. Consider the following scene: A few pages before Nathan's decision to circumcise,⁷⁵ he visits the home he and Maria are will soon occupy. It is under construction but already ideally situated with a garden along the Thames and is being remodeled to "encapsulate what we had imagined we had, the house that was being transformed

⁷⁵ In a novel comprised of various geographic locations, the narrative location should be read as a geographic location in its own right,

into ours and that represented my own transformation - the house that represented the rational way" (309). As a writer, Nathan can't help but place symbolic meaning on the house, suggesting that it is a physical manifestation of a domestic ideal that he and Maria imagined for themselves. Emphasizing a novelist's sensibility, Nathan continues to explain the figurative meaning behind the house, stating that it also represented the "warm enclosure that would shelter and protect something more than my narrative mania. It seemed at that moment that everything was imaginable for me except the mundane concreteness of a home and a family" (309). The home and the blissful, uncomplicated domestic life it represents is the pastoral scene for Nathan the man. For Nathan the writer, the pastoral is a refusal to deal with and write about the complexity of life by opting instead to cower behind the shelter of idealism; to Nathan, the pastoral negates ambivalent thinking. Describing the pastoral as "moving and pathetic" because it "cannot admit contradiction and conflict!" (322), Nathan sees the pastoral genre as a manifestation of a writer's unwillingness to write about complexity. Nathan declares "That [the pastoral] is the womb and this is the world is not as easy to grasp as one might imagine" (322). Thus, the pastoral, in writing and life, is a failure to engage with the complexities of reality. It is like the shelter of the womb. The womb image is important because Roth, as a writer, and particularly in *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*, is concerned his relationship to personal history and Jewish history, and their conflation.⁷⁶ In a sense, the womb is pre-history.

While Roth delineates the geographic differences between the harsh landscape of Israel and the blissful serenity of Cheswick, England, he categorizes Lippman and the Agor settlement in the pastoral genre because Lippman too refuses to acknowledge the complexities of reality. Nathan says,

⁷⁶ *The Plot Against America* exemplifies Roth's interest in personal and Jewish history as Roth describes the consequences of Lindbergh's counter-historical presidency for the Roth family.

As I discovered at Agor, not even Jews, who are to history what Eskimos are to snow, seem able, despite the arduous education to the contrary, to protect themselves against the pastoral myth of life before...the split began...at the core is the idyllic scenario of redemption through the recovery of a sanitized, confusion less life. (322)

As they both emulate womb-like cloistering, Maria's anti-Semitic and genteel England is paralleled to Lippman's rocky and harsh messianic settlement. The messianic impulse in *The Counterlife* is pastoral; it then not only works as a plot motivator but also represents a flight from reality and history (particularly Jewish history). After further paralleling Henry's escape to Agor, his own to England, and counternarratively to the "charming medieval byways of orderly old Schweiz,..to the idyllic scenario of redemption through the recovery of a sanitized, confusion-less life" (322), Nathan even mentions his unborn child in a messianic context. He questions, "What's our unborn offspring meant to me, right up to tonight in fact, but something perfectly programmed to be my little redeemer," alluding to the absurdity of total belief in anything that promises uncomplicated salvation.

Nathan makes a decision: "The pastoral stops here and it stops with circumcision" (323). To Nathan, circumcision is a Jewish act that conflates the embracing of complex history and Jewishness. He writes, "Circumcision makes it clear as can be that are here and not there, that our out and not in" (323). As a marker of affiliation to the Jewish tribe, circumcision makes it "clear...that you're mine and not theirs. There is no way around it: you enter history through my history and me." While circumcision welcomes complexity and ambiguity, the act itself is also perhaps the only "clear" marker of figurative, historical, and ethnic place.⁷⁷ Nathan is aligning

⁷⁷ Of course, Nathan's view of Jewish tribalism here is clearly misogynistic. He aligns gentile anti-Semitism with women (i.e. with Maria's mother, sister, and the old woman at the restaurant), and even compares the pastoral, which he rejects, to an "imagined world, often green and beastlike"(322), no doubt a reference to life with Maria in England.

himself with his tribe, with the Jewish collective, with Jewish history, and declaring himself a Jewish father, since he will make his son part of the tribe as well.⁷⁸ Emphasizing his adherence to the Jewish collective, he continues, “Circumcision confirms that there is an us, and an us that isn’t solely him and me” (324). In a novel that constantly positions the needs/desire of the collective versus the needs/desire of the individual, such as in Hanoach’s argument with Nathan at Agor, Nathan’s ultimate decision is striking, even surprising, given Roth’s and Nathan’s (fictional) oeuvres. After all, Nathan earlier admits that he was indifferent about circumcision while discussing it with Shuki in Tel Aviv.⁷⁹ And he says it in a way that pits the individual against the collective, defining circumcision “as probably irrelevant to my ‘I’” (324).

Utilizing the circumcision motif, Roth suggests that the relationship to Zionism and the larger Jewish collective is intimate and yet suitably complex, and that a loyalty to one engenders a loyalty to the other, even if it is a loyalty filled with ambivalence. The novel ends with a description of Maria’s “amusement” at the rapid transition of Nathan’s circumcised penis, a transition Derek Parker Royal suggests is appropriate in a text filled with rapid transitions (324). The image of the erect circumcised penis is an appropriate counter-image to Roth’s earlier description of the circumcised penis in *Portnoy*, the novel that raised him to fame and further ignited accusations of him being a self-hating Jew. At the end of that novel, Portnoy tries to bed an Israeli woman but is prevented by impotence and is unable to fulfill the “challenge.”⁸⁰ But in

⁷⁸ It should be noted that according to rabbinic tradition, circumcision in Judaism is considered an obligation for the child’s father. It is the father’s responsibility to seek out a *Mohel* and pay his fee.

⁷⁹ The fact that Nathan mentions a change of heart from one geographic section to another suggests that the counternarratives cannot be read as completely separate entities but as parts of a whole, though fractured, narrative.

⁸⁰ Derek Parker Royal suggests that in contrast to Portnoy’s flaccid penis, the erect circumcised penis is a marker of ethnic difference, though I would argue that in *Portnoy* it also represents marker of ethnicity. Consider, for example, Henry’s impotence at the beginning of the narrative and Lippman’s carrying of the gun, an obviously phallic image. Royal reads Henry’s impotence as his “inability to define solidly his Jewishness” as an assimilated Jewish American, and Lippman’s gun is meant to intimidate Arabs with a Jewish machismo that ignores historical reality (439).

The Counterlife 20 years later, the Jewish circumcised penis reappears, erect and functioning.⁸¹

Nathan's erection also works as a symbol for the lineage between father and son, and, as a rejection of the pastoral; it symbolizes an engagement with the complex fabric of history and reality. If we read the experiences in Israel as Roth's counternarrative suggests we do, as the characters' disparate and contradictory voices instruct us to, we see an engagement with the complexities of Israel and Zionism, rather than a rhetorical rationale to dismiss it. Josh Cohen suggests that counternarratives, which often cancel each other out, are also revelatory and "rich in creative possibilities" (92). Certainly, Nathan's decision shows that he is aligning with the collective by acknowledging its problems, by honestly rejecting the idealism and essentialism of the pastoral, of the messianic, of the extreme, represented both by messianic Zionists and rational English gentiles.⁸² It is a circumcised Zionism because it identifies with the collective and the need for Israel, but it does not shy away from the ambivalence, ambiguities and contradictions that Zionism poses. Parker-Royal suggests, "ambiguity lies at the heart of writing about one's identity...it is an ongoing process" (441). As writers, Nathan's (and Roth's) engagement with Israel and Jewishness are suitably presented through the circumcised penis; it may waver between impotence, flaccidness, and arousal, but it will always remain circumcised. (Needless to say then Roth problematically presents a completely masculinized view of Judaism and Zionism, which makes no room for a female presence. It is an especially problematic perspective given that Jewishness is matrilineal.)⁸³

⁸¹ Look at Daniel Boyarin's study on Jewish masculinity. He suggests that current Jewish masculinity constructions are reactions to fin de siècle anti-Semitism and the masculinity perpetuated by rabbinic culture. In *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema*, Raz Yosef elucidates how Zionist propaganda created the image of the Arab feminized male to counteract the Eastern Europe masculine Israeli.

⁸² At a dinner party in England, Nathan realizes how upper-class British liberals are antagonist towards Israel: "Last night, at a dinner party, when Maria mentioned [I was going to Israel], I wasn't the most popular boy at the table...when it comes to Israel, it's the Sayings of Chairman Arafat right down the line" (65).

⁸³ It is out of the scope of my argument to engage Roth through a gendered lens. See David Gooblar (in *Philip Roth's Studies*) for an overview of gendered studies on Roth (and the lack thereof).

Nonfiction and intertextuality

The Counterlife culminates with Nathan embracing his role as a Jewish father, and willingly conflating collective and personal history. Continuing to examine personal history with familial and collective history, Roth follows *The Counterlife* with his first forays into official non-fiction: *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1988) and *Patrimony: A Memoir* (1991). In his typical fashion, Roth blurs the boundary between non-fiction and fiction and extends the boundaries between the four texts because he makes intertextual references about them. By explicitly interrelating his non-fictional works to his Israel novels, Roth has incited a lively scholarly debate on how to categorize these narratives: opinions range from including Roth's non-fictional *Deception* (1990) in the series to excluding *The Counterlife*.⁸⁴ Unlike other critics, however, I argue that *The Counterlife*, *The Facts*, *Patrimony*, and *Operation Shylock* comprise a series.⁸⁵ Furthermore, I subdivide the four works into two categories: A) *The Counterlife* and *The Facts*, and B) *Patrimony* and *Operation Shylock*. Group B is a heightened version of group A, a distinction that I will delineate later in my argument. In both *The Facts* and *Patrimony*, Roth consciously constructs a connection between Jewish identification and the Jewish father, between being a Jewish son and being a Jewish writer, and finally between Jewish patrimony and a loyalty to Zionism, dynamics eventually crystalized in the fictional *Operation Shylock*.

⁸⁴Elaine Kauver groups *Patrimony*, *Operation Shylock*, and *The Facts* together. David Gooblar groups *The Facts*, *Deception*, *Patrimony*, and *Operation Shylock* together as non-fictional works that investigate the ethics of writing about others. He acknowledges, however, the slippery definition of non-fiction, especially when referring to *Operation Shylock* (34). Harold Bloom groups *The Facts*, *Deception*, *Operation Shylock*, and *Patrimony*, suggesting that *The Counterlife* serves as a precursor to the rest. I agree with Bloom, who recognizes *Deception's* place in the intertextual relationship between all the works, especially since it clearly raises the issues on the ethics of writing, the blurring of non-fiction and fiction, and seems to be a de-facto account of incidents that inspired certain scenes in *The Counterlife*. The text, however, seems more like an experiment in dialogue and form rather than an engagement with Jewish American identity and thus falls out of the scope of my discussion.

⁸⁵ Written in (1990), a year prior to *Operation Shylock*, *Deception* is comprised only of dialogue in a series of conversations between the writer Philip (who is obviously Roth) and his married mistress, and between Philip and his wife. Certainly the mistress has a striking resemblance to Maria in *The Counterlife*. In her memoir *Leaving a Doll's House: A Memoir* (1996), Roth's ex-wife Claire Bloom discusses her reaction to the character of the wife that she recognized as herself in the novel and also raises the issue about the ethics of Roth's writing. She says that Roth initially named the character Claire but after she pleaded to him to change it, Philip finally conceded to do so.

The intertextual references and pairings (of group A and group B) elucidate that Jewishness for Roth is engendered and passed down from father to son, and that being Jewish is recognizing Jewish collective history with personal history. Ultimately, the four narratives work in tandem to reveal that, for Roth, Jewishness is Zionist, a relationship borne by patrimonial historical inheritance and the desire to remain loyal to the Jewish father. The series concurrently underscores that because the Jewish American writer is part of that lineage, he/she possesses a significant and tenuous role when encountering the patrimonial gift of Zionism.

Roth complicates his foray into non-fiction when he begins *The Facts* by undermining its biographical veracity. He tacitly infers that while the book is biographical, it should also not be read as pure fact, undoubtedly a nod to Roth's interest in postmodern sensibilities such as metatextuality, intertextuality, the inherent and complex significations of language and written forms, and complex subjectivities. *The Facts* opens with a letter from Roth to his fictional character Nathan. In addition to alluding to Roth's neurosis about writing, the letter also reaffirms the significance that writing and being a writer possess in these books. It also makes important connections between the writer's life and his/her fictional creation and, by extension, his Jewishness and his responsibility to his Jewish American audience. In the letter, Roth explains the reasoning behind his exploration of non-fiction⁸⁶ - it is an attempt to go back to his "original well" of imagination and "tank up on the magic blood." He calls the manuscript "*my* counterlife, the antidote and answer to all those fictions that culminated in the fiction of you [Nathan]. If in one way *The Counterlife* can be read as fiction about structure, then this is the bare bones, the structure of a life without the fiction" (6).⁸⁷ Certainly, *The Facts* addresses the

⁸⁶ The book ends with Nathan's response, which criticizes Roth's non-fiction as stymied and too considerate of its non-fictional subjects to possess any real form of honesty and truth.

⁸⁷ Elaine Kauver sees the exchange between the fictional character and the newly minted autobiographer as a signpost that the truth is always open to debate (416).

ethical conundrum of the Jewish American writer, a topic that Roth engages with in *The Counterlife*, *The Facts*' fictional counterpart. But how does this intertextual relationship relate to Israel and specifically to Nathan's decision to circumcise his son and join the Jewish collective? How does it relate to Roth and Nathan's responsibility as Jewish American writers writing about Israel?

Nonfiction and circumcision

One answer is quite simple, though limiting: Nathan's historical awareness and tribalism is bolstered by the autobiographical *The Facts*, since the non-fictional work focuses on the personal history of Roth, including his childhood growing up in Jewish Newark, and the vitriolic backlash thrust upon him as a self-hating Jew by a large portion of the Jewish American community. *The Facts* presents itself as a reflection on the life events that molded Roth as a writer and consequently affect the type of characters he creates. Consider the dedication at the beginning of the book, which is a quote from *The Counterlife*: "And as he spoke I was thinking, *the kind of stories that people turn life into, the kind of lives that people turn stories into.*" Reflecting on the symbiotic nature of art and life for a writer, Roth first suggests that Nathan, his fictional creation, impacts his actual life. Second, he asserts that his non-fictional life is a direct source for his fictional creations, most notably Nathan Zuckerman. As such, Roth's dedication tacitly instructs us to locate where the content of the autobiography manifests in his fiction and most specifically in the previously published *The Counterlife*, a hermeneutically dangerous, though tempting, endeavor to take on, especially considering Roth's literary playfulness. Roth's overall body of work and the significance of Nathan's presence in *The Facts*, make us certain that Roth does not want us to read his non-fiction as an unwavering hermeneutical guide to his

fiction. Instead, *The Facts* suggest that the concept of personal history is related to collective history, a theme Roth similarly develops in *The Counterlife*.

Looking at *The Counterlife*'s content, we can't help notice Roth's abundant identification with the Jewish community; from his parents to his school mates to his Hebrew school taught by Jewish immigrants from the "old world," Roth was certainly exposed to a sense of Jewishness, implicitly suggesting that both Nathan and Henry's fictional identification with Jewish collectivity is born from Roth's own upbringing. And yet, by describing his parents' Jewish cultural ties and traditional reverence for the Jewish community, Roth makes a more significant comment that situates his history within a larger scope of communal Jewish history. Delineating how his own oeuvre is engendered from his father's propensity to repeat the same stories, Roth says, "his [father's] repertoire has never been large: family, family, family, Newark, Newark, Newark, Jew, Jew, Jew. Somewhat like mine" (16). With this statement, Roth is not merely revealing the sources of his literary imagination (an unsurprising revelation) but is situating the personal ("family" and, his hometown, "Newark") with the ethnic communal ("Jew").

The Facts also continues *The Counterlife*'s engagement with the Jewish father's symbolic and cultural importance.⁸⁸ In *The Facts*, Roth alludes to a concept that will be more apparent and significant in *Patrimony* and *Operation Shylock*: the enduring and imperative presence of the Jewish father in the life of the Jewish son vis-à-vis Jewish identification.⁸⁹ In *The Facts*, Roth spells out the theme: "I naively believed as a child that I would always have a father present, and the truth seems to be that I always will...the link to him has been omnipresent" (16). (At the time of writing *The Facts*, Roth's father is aging and his mother has recently passed.) Roth's reference

⁸⁸ It should not be taken for granted that the only person in *The Counterlife* Nathan wholeheartedly admires is Shuki Elchanan's father, who reminds Nathan of his father (51).

⁸⁹ Roth has developed this theme throughout his career, most notably in the Zuckerman novels, including *The Ghostwriter* and *The Anatomy Lesson*. A strong paternal presence is also in the Roth book *The Plot against America*.

to the paternal chain is similarly apparent in *The Counterlife*, when Nathan desires to perpetuate it through making his child Jewish via circumcision. The novel, however, does not merely comment on Jewish identity (via circumcision); it also critiques Israel's place in that identity formation. Nathan admits that he has no affiliation with Zionism or really anything Jewish other than the identification of being a Jew. But the counternarratives are highly concerned with Israel and the Jewish American's relationship to it, especially since Henry "finds" himself in Israel. As such, the following questions need to be addressed: How does Nathan's decision to perpetuate and identify with tribal Judaism, most notably as a Jewish father, relate to Israel? How does Roth's foray into non-fiction that emphasizes his role as a Jewish son inform that relationship?

First, from the biographical information that Roth provides in *The Facts*, we learn that his father was a staunch Zionist, whose daily activities included "defending Israel" (18). Roth also describes a keen memory of being taught to give "the bearded old Jew" money for the Jewish National Fund (30).⁹⁰ However, because the counternarratives center on Israel, and particularly an Israel seen from a Jewish American identity, Roth is positioning Zionism as a part of that larger Jewish collective. In other words, when Nathan decides to circumcise his son in a loyalty to some form of Jewish tribalism, he recognizes that Zionism and a relationship to Israel comprise some of that dynamic. It is a fictionalized relationship that in *The Facts* Roth concurrently instructs us to simultaneously attribute to Roth's biographical childhood and the notion that personal (familial) and collective (Jewish and Zionist) history conflates.

The Counterlife presents circumcision as a complicated form of solidarity, and *The Facts* informs us of Roth's autobiographical relationship to his father and Israel and the nuanced dynamic between fiction and non-fiction. *Patrimony* continues where *The Facts* leaves off by

⁹⁰ Roth's image is similar to Chabon's "bearded old Jew" in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, who also collects money in the JNF charity box. In Chabon's counter-history, however, Israel no longer exists.

addressing Jewish father-son relationships and the dynamic between personal lives and fictional creation. It is important to look at *Patrimony's* handling of these issues because in *Operation Shylock* Roth connects the two works and develops both themes to culmination. I argue that that connection between *Patrimony* and *Operation Shylock* underscores Roth's critique of Israel, fiction, and Jewish American identity; he maintains an ambivalent and nuanced critique of Israel, but remains loyal to it as a son remains loyal to a father. For Israel, he will ultimately sacrifice his fiction, in an act of transferred patrimonial loyalty.

Patrimony and Zionism

Like the intertextual relationship between *The Counterlife* and *The Facts*, *Operation Shylock* is the fictional counterpart to *Patrimony*, a memoir describing his father's illness and death. And like in *The Counterlife* and *The Facts*, Roth consciously connects the two works, by referencing *Patrimony* in *Operation Shylock*.⁹¹ It is Smilesburger who mentions *Patrimony*:

with an open, appealing, spirited warmth that I was unprepared for from this master of derisive artifices, carried me almost to the edge of gullibility by saying, 'And so how are you, Philip? You had heart surgery.'⁹² Your father died. I read *Patrimony*. Warm hearted but tough. You've been through the wringer. Yet you look wonderful. Younger even when I saw you last. (380)

It is a revealing moment, since the non-fictional work is a heartrending account of the death of Roth's father, Herman, and, as many critics argue, Smilesburger develops into a quasi-father-like figure for Philip.⁹³ When an exasperated Philip wonders why he has decided to censor the

⁹¹ In fact, in *Patrimony*, two years before he describes it in *Operation Shylock*, he mentions that he attended the trial of Ivan the Terrible in Israel.

⁹² A notable detail that indirectly reminds the reader of *The Counterlife*, since both Nathan and Henry undergo heart surgery.

⁹³ Elaine Kauver also recognizes Smilesburger as an "emblematic" father. She further makes a parallel between Smilesburger and Nathan in *The Facts*, suggesting that they both serve to judge Roth's control over subjectivity and fact (439). Debra Shostack agrees that Smilesburger represents a paternal figure, and elaborates that Smilesburger is

Mossad mission from his book, he asks himself why he has “degenerated into an acquiescent Jewish boy pleasing his lawgiving elders, whether I liked it or not, [despite the fact that being in his 50s he had] acquired the makings of a Jewish elder” or “why [is he] a sucker for [Smilesburger]” (377). Given the recent death of Roth’s father, we can perhaps recognize a psychological need to please Smilesburger, the narrative’s father figure, (even in fiction). And Philip recognizes in the Mossad handler surprising glimpses of sincere empathy. In fact, when Smilesburger and Philip meet for the last time in the novel, we also learn that Smilesburger is visiting his son, daughter in-law, and grandchildren in New York and that he has supposedly retired from the Mossad. In a sense, Smilesburger transcends from a covert espionage handler to a father and grandfather, and Philip becomes more youthful, as he “looks younger”; they meet in a “Jewish food store, specializing in smoked fish” and which reminds Philip of his boyhood. As such, they are meeting in Philip’s locale, further emphasizing the intimacy between them.

The end of the novel, in the food store scene, describes the debate between Philip and Smilesburger about whether Philip should excise chapter 11. The conversation reinforces the connection between *Patrimony* and *Operation Shylock*, and by extension between loyalty to the father and loyalty to Israel. Roth literally grants Smilesburger the last word and ends the narrative with: “Let your Jewish conscience be your guide” (398). Given the absence of chapter 11, and in turn, the fact that Philip acquiesces to Smilesburger's request, the question of what defines Roth’s Jewish conscience lingers. Put another way, Roth ends the book with an act that is supposed to be a manifestation of Philip’s Jewish conscience: it is a negative act of textual omission that also reveals a loyalty to Zionism.

“Prosepero,” whom he quotes: “A godlike father figure of Philip, elusive, authoritative, and manipulative...the archetypal of the diaspora Jew. And with his actions in the world and in text is also the Israeli Jew.” She also emphasizes his textuality (749).

While the fictional omission of chapter 11 is striking in *Operation Shylock*, the inclusion of a scene in *Patrimony* is equally significant, and I argue, is related to Philip's decision to erase the details of his Mossad mission in his novel. In *Patrimony*, Roth paints a scene that describes his father's bowel movement accident, a humiliating moment for his father and a literary moment that poses an ethical issue about the power of the writer over the subject. Including the scene in the memoir reveals Roth's inability to remain loyal to his Jewish father. Put another way, in *Operation Shylock*, Philip's textual omission is a literary sacrifice made for Israel, and a rectification of Roth's betrayal in *Patrimony*. In *Operation Shylock*, Philip remains quiet for Israel because in *Patrimony* he did not censor himself for his father.

Throughout *Patrimony*, Roth, through Philip, portrays himself as a loving son dealing with the imminent death of his father. Preparing for the end, Philip tries to find something that can serve as his patrimony. As sources of patrimony, he identifies (and ultimately rejects) the shaving cup that was passed down from his grandfather, the tefillin that his father left in the gym locker room, and the inheritance money that Philip signs away to his brother Sandy. Midway through the narrative, Roth describes a poignant scene where his elderly and ill father, despite his previous vitality and admirable attempts at strength, has a bowel movement accident. And Roth does not just mention the incident in passing or through allusion. Rather, he uses four pages to explicitly paint the scene. For example, he writes, "the shit was everywhere, smeared underfoot on the bathmat, running over the toilet bowl edge...." He describes his father's reaction: "In a voice as forlorn as any I had ever heard, from him or anyone, he told me what hadn't been difficult to surmise. 'I beshat myself' (172). And then a page later, "'I beshat myself.' he said, and this time he dissolved in tears" (173).

David Gooblar discusses the ethical implications of including the scene, suggesting that *Patrimony* is not only a loving tribute from a son to a father, and a memoir of the pain of loss, but through this scene, a study of the ethical implications of writing non-fiction (185). The issue of the responsibility of the writer to his non-fictional subject was already discussed in *The Facts* when Nathan chastises Roth for going easy on his non-fictional subjects.⁹⁴ While cleaning the mess, Philip realizes that the act of cleaning his father is his patrimony because "cleaning shit" is what a son does for an aging and dying father. However, the scene and portrayal of patrimony are complicated, because however much Roth can narratively justify the scene, as Gooblar suggests, Roth then includes the following exchange, which implicates Roth even further (38):

Herman tells his son after having been cleaned up and lying in bed, "Don't tell the children, "He said, looking up at me from the bed with his one sighted eye."

"I won't tell anyone," I said. "I'll say you're taking a rest."

"Don't tell Claire."

"Nobody," I said. "Don't worry about it" (172),

Herman's vulnerability and Philip's sensitivity are palpable. But inevitably Roth lies and does tell someone: his worldwide readership. If his father is vulnerable in life, how much more so in death when he becomes his son, the writer's, non-fictional subject? Consider an ironic scene in the memoir, when, after Herman has passed, Philip and his brother Sandy have to decide what Herman should be buried in. Despite the fact that Herman and Philip were not religiously observant Jews, Philip decides to bury his father in a shroud, which is the traditional Jewish burial garb. After mulling over the decision for a while, Philip explains:

⁹⁴ Nathan criticizes Roth for censoring unfavorable descriptions of people. He says: "This manuscript is steeped in the nice-guy side. In autobiography you seem to have no choice but to document mainly the nice-guy side" (170).

I said to my brother, “A suit? He’s not going to the office. No, no suit. He should be buried in a shroud, I said thinking that was how his parents had been buried and how Jews were buried traditionally. But as I said it I wondered if a shroud was any less senseless...and if it wasn’t perhaps pretentiously literary and a little hysterically sanctimonious as well...But as nobody opposed me and as I hadn’t the audacity to say “Bury him naked” we used the shroud of our ancestors to clothe his corpse (232).

Gooblar suggests that the passage is also ironic. Philip won’t bury his father “naked.” He will, however, portray him as naked in writing, both literally and metaphorically (39). On a literal level, Roth describes his father’s penis. A day after his father’s bowel accident, Philip helps Herman take a bath. Philip recounts how he catches a glimpse of his father’s penis, though Philip does not express any shame in seeing it or describing it. In fact, he describes it with pride, mentioning that “it was the one bodily part that didn’t look at all old” (177). In the bowel movement scene, Roth reveals his father’s “nakedness,” exposing Herman at his most vulnerable, especially since Herman had understandably wanted the incident to remain a secret. Philip may not have the audacity to bury his father naked, but he does have the nerve to expose his father’s shame through writing about him. Betraying his father’s request “not to tell” anyone about the bathroom scene, Roth treads an unethical line and reveals his power over his father, and as a writer over the powerlessness of his non-fictional subject.

In fact, after seeing his father’s penis, the marker of Jewish identity in Roth’s works,⁹⁵ Philip is struck by the imminence of his beloved father’s death and tries to absorb as much visual memory of Herman as he can. He says to himself, “*You must not forget anything*” (177). The

⁹⁵ Appropriately for this series, the image of the circumcised penis compels Roth to think about memory and legacy. Furthermore, Philip describes Herman’s penis as looking “stout...serviceable” (177). Continuing the circumcised penis motif, we can read the description as symbolically suggesting that Herman’s Jewishness is healthy and vigorous, prime for passing down.

command becomes a sort of refrain in the work. And indeed, it seems that with *Operation Shylock* he takes that vow seriously, especially given the disturbing dream Roth recounts at the end of *Patrimony*:

At around 4:00 A.M., [Herman] came in a hooded white shroud to reproach me. He said, “I should he been dressed in a suit. You did the wrong thing.” I awakened screaming. All that peered out from the shroud was the displeasure in his dead face. And his only words were a rebuke: I had dressed him for eternity in the wrong clothes. (237)

Certainly Philip’s anxiety and grief is understandable, even expected. However, he adds a layer of insight and self-awareness when he continues explaining his reaction to the dream. His explanation also reveals why Philip (and Roth) excise chapter 11 from *Operation Shylock*.

Consider the explanation in *Patrimony*: Philip chastises himself for betraying his father through writing, not just in the bathroom scene but also through the memoir itself. Roth writes, “In the morning, I realized that [his dead father in the dream] had been alluding to this book, which, in keeping with the unseemliness of my profession, I had been writing all the while he was ill and dying” (237). The passage first highlights Philip’s role as a writer. However, Roth ends the book emphasizing Philip’s role as a son.⁹⁶ He finishes the thought (and the book) by stating:

The dream was telling me that, if not in my books or in my life, at least in my dreams I would live perennially as his little son, *with the conscience of a little son* [my emphasis], just as he would remain alive there not only as my father but as *the* father, sitting in judgment on whatever I do. You must not forget anything. (238)

As a son, Philip forever feels watched and judged by his father. Certainly, that paternal judgment hovers over what he writes about, and how he writes it, an idea that is clearly recognizable at the

⁹⁶ Hana Wirth Neshier argues: “Roth’s autobiographies are exercises in asserting his freedom as a an artist within the constraints of being a Jew, constraints that lead him, in *Patrimony*, to the universal constraints of the aging and dying body, and to this individual mind forever limited to its individual point of view” (“Roth’s” 171).

end of *Operation Shylock*, the novel that directly follows *Patrimony*. Roth mentions the archetype of “the father,” an archetype transferred to Smilesburger in *Operation Shylock*. In *Patrimony*, Roth describes the eternal, looming gaze of the father (even after death); he also situates himself in the role of the “little son” and, more specifically, “with the conscience of a little son.” Roth further develops that theme in *Operation Shylock*. Roth ends *Operation Shylock* with Smilesburger, the text’s father figure, telling Philip to “let his Jewish conscience be his guide.” In a way, the “little son’s conscience” (from *Patrimony*) is transferred to the “Jewish conscience” (of *Operation Shylock*). Elaine Kauver compellingly suggests that the final lines of both works “signal Roth’s brand of Jewishness” (442). But we can also recognize that it is a Jewishness that is patrimonial. In *The Counterlife*, Nathan solidifies his role as the Jewish father; here in *Operation Shylock*, Philip affirms his place as the Jewish son. Exonerating himself from his transgression in *Patrimony*, Philip in *Operation Shylock*, becomes the good Jewish son. He listens to the father figure Smilesburger and refuses to make Israel vulnerable through writing. By opting to listen to his elders, and censor his writing, which he clearly did not do in *Patrimony*, Philip acknowledges his patrimony as a Jewish son. Cleaning his father’s mess in *Patrimony* is not the ultimate patrimony Philip thinks it is. Rather, his patrimony is another selfless act made for the Jewish father: the act of textual circumcision in *Operation Shylock*.

Roth ends both *Operation Shylock* and *Patrimony* with a command from the father figure. Given the interconnectedness of the two works, the respective last lines are also revealing and underscore Roth’s critique of ambivalent Zionism. It is no accident that that the last line of *Patrimony* resembles a significant credo for post-World War II Jewish communities: “You must not forget anything.” The Jewish relationship to the Holocaust is firmly expressed with “Never

Forget.”⁹⁷ Ending the memoir with an echo of such a culturally loaded slogan transcends Philip’s memory of his father to a larger Jewish issue. The last line of *Operation Shylock* is a command to adhere to “your Jewish conscience,” a conscience that is responsible to both the personal realm, like in *Patrimony*, and to the collective, like in *Operation Shylock*.

The relationship between *Patrimony* and *Operation Shylock* reveals that the conscience of the Jewish son develops into the conscience of the Jewish writer. It is an affirmation that Jewish American identity cannot escape historical remembrance (especially regarding the Holocaust) and the importance of Israel in Jewish American identity. It is a refusal to renege on the Jewish American connection to Israel, as Pipik advocates, by completely embracing a diasporism that will not even look East. And with Roth’s use of semantics that reverberate with Holocaust remembrance and solidify the importance of remembering Jewish history, Roth solidifies his adamant, though tortured, connection to Israel; as a Jew, in the long paternal chain of Jews, he is tied to Israel. As a writer, who is also Jewish American, his writing has an important stake in Jewish issues and Israel.

Unlike Roth, Judith Butler insists that Jewishness cannot be equated with Zionism, and as such, Jews, inspired by the Jewish tradition of justice, must critique Israel and Zionism in order to maintain authentic Jewishness. Her argument began as a retort to the president of Harvard University, Larry Summers, in 2003, and his public suggestion that criticism of Israeli policy are expressions of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.⁹⁸ In the light of this discursive dispute between Butler and Summers, I argue that Roth’s Israel-centered works, which precede that discourse by about 20 years, similarly raise the same issue. On the one hand, it would seem as though Roth is in Summers’ camp. After all, the four texts present a trajectory in which the

⁹⁷ It is also expressed with “*Zachor*” or “Remember.”

⁹⁸ For a more detailed work, see Butler’s recent critique of Zionism; in it, her perspective is increasingly critical of Israeli policy and Zionism,. See *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2012).

Jewish American writer engages with Jewish history, both personal and collective, and contemporary Jewish identitative issues, (Holocaust remembrance, diasporic affiliation, and Zionism) to eventually solidify a loyalty to Zionism that is manifested through silence. However, by criticizing an ideologically simplified approach to Israel, through messianism, and by presenting the complexity of Zionism, Roth anticipates Butler's response to Summers and insists that the Jewish American writer approach those complex issues with continued engagement.⁹⁹

And yet, even after his labyrinthine series, Roth concurrently suggests the impossibility of *fully* being able to articulate his ambivalent Zionism to completion. After all, the novel seemingly closes with eradication. Yes, it ends with a decision to circumcise the text, representing Roth's affirmative solidarity with Jewish collectivity. But with that circumcision comes an (almost painful) silence, in the lingering negative space of chapter 11. While Debra Shostack recognizes in that negative space a manifestation of postmodern ontology (748-749), I believe in that space exists the ambivalence of the Jewish American writer when engaging with Zionism and Israel. Perhaps it is torture for Roth to want to write something, to think it is important to do so, to affirm continued engagement with it, and yet not entirely know how to go about it—not knowing if, in this case, he should. Referring to a petition to economically boycott Israeli businesses out of protest of Israeli policy and as part of her response to Summers, Butler admits that those Jewish academics, including herself, who signed had “*heartache* when taking a stand against Israeli policy in public, and that their hands shook as they entered their names on the list”(377). Is this Roth's hand shaking? Yes, but not because he is aligning with Butler's approach. Rather Roth, is aligning with Summer's perspective that Jewishness is also equated

⁹⁹ It should be noted, however, that Roth does not disavow or reject Zionism, and does not encourage cutting off financial or academic ties to Israel. In fact, Roth's Zionism looks increasingly dissimilar to Butler's current views of Zionism, which have become more critical.

with Zionism but Roth is only doing so with an anxiously honest critique. And yet, because of the heavy complexity of the Jewish American exchange with Israel, that complicated Zionist affirmation makes his heart tremble, makes his hand shake so that he does not write, so that he cannot write. At the end of *Operation Shylock*, he can only erase words. And I wonder: were Roth writing about Israel now, while the Palestinian/Israeli conflict has only escalated in complexity and in casualties, what would he say? What would he write? Perhaps the more compelling fact is that Roth has not returned to Israel as a subject. Considering that Roth has just recently announced his retirement, we can presumably assume that the last bit of Roth's fiction devoted to Israel and Zionism is an omission. It is the silenced chapter 11.

Chapter 3

The Maternal and the Messianic Extreme:

Tova Reich and Failed Feminist Revisions

Known for her use of satire, Tova Reich is adept at constructing characters that are on the fringe as extremists. However, with her fiction set in Israel, Reich is not purely a satirist. Her extremist characters should be taken seriously, and not as caricatures, because they are enmeshed in, and taken away by the profound intensity of Israel: its historical significance, religious politics, and, for those who seek it, its spiritual potency. In Israel, and perhaps only in Israel, Reich has a setting ripe for exploring the collision of fanatics because, as one of Reich's characters asks, "Are there truly some things left that have never happened in Israel?" In Reich, the answer is no. When we look at Reich's Israel, we are looking at extremist Israel, where extreme circumstances occur, and disaster ensues. After all, Israeli colonel Uri Lapidot, one of Reich's few moderate characters and her narrative's representative of Zionism assesses, "extremism in Israel is a 'a lethal mixture...of messianic religious zeal and rabid nationalism'" (*Jewish War* 137). Colonel Lapidot is Reich's mouthpiece in that literary moment, as her portrayal of Israel addresses Zionism, but her discussion of Zionism does not question its validity, since for Reich that is a given. Instead, her critique focuses on the excesses of Zionism, and the ways in which extremists manipulate Zionism to catastrophic ends.

In this chapter, I will look at Reich's exploration of religious and political extremism in her three novels set in Israel: *Master of the Return* (1988), *The Jewish War* (1995), and *One Hundred Philistine Foreskins* (2013). Utilizing gender studies and feminist hermeneutics, I will argue that Reich critiques the dangers of extremism in Israel. In her critique, she suggests that

political and religious extremism are outgrowths of older patriarchal structures and ideology, and not only endanger the State of Israel, but also damage the Jewish family. More specifically, Reich examines the dynamic of mothers (many of whom are American expatriates) in messianic movements to expose the problems of patriarchy in Judaism and Zionism and the dangers of that patriarchy when it is exacerbated by extremism. I will argue that the collision of the maternal with the messianic reveals both her characters' longing for spiritual redemption and an ominous foreboding of Israel's future. Reich ultimately uses the three novels to suggest that in order to eradicate the dangers of extremism for Israel and the Jewish family, Judaism and Zionism need a radical change that enables the flourishing of female subjectivity and the empowerment of motherhood.

In the three novels, Reich creates a series of sorts: she subtly utilizes intertextual references and she ends the last novel with a female messianic figure, Ima Temima, who fails to bring redemption.¹ Through Temima's failure, Reich presents a feminist stance that both engages with contemporary feminist motherhood studies, which seeks to foster empowering mothering, and is in line with Judith Plaskow's feminist Judaism from her seminal work *Standing Again at Sinai* (1990), which advocates for a complete revision of Jewish praxis and theology. Building on Plaskow, Reich ultimately suggests that Zionist ideology and Judaism need more than just an increasingly feminist presence and inclusive approach. Rather, in order to survive and flourish in the 21st century without falling prey to mass extremism, Judaism and Zionism require a complete upheaval of structure and doctrine that rejects hierarchy and a sense of "chosenness" - to Reich, only that radical change can prevent extremists from exploiting and excessively appropriating their patriarchal origins.

¹ Among others, in *The Jewish War* Reich mentions the following characters from the earlier *Master of the Return*: Sora Katz and Reb Lurie. In *Philistine Foreskins*, the crippled street beggar Yisrael Gamzu from *Master of the Return* also makes an appearance (286).

Extremists and historical context

Messianic characters and ideas are strongly present in all three novels and (as in the other works discussed in my dissertation) drive the plots. Unlike how Philip Roth and Michael Chabon engage with Israel, however, Reich almost exclusively constructs characters who are somehow involved in messianic movements and who adhere to a fanatical approach to Judaism or Zionism. There are hardly any moderates in Reich's fiction, highlighting that she first and foremost is critiquing the excesses of extremism in Judaism and Zionism, and not Zionism itself. For example, *Master of the Return* explores the Israeli right wing through its motley cast of characters, as Reich depicts the ideological fabric of the ultra-Orthodox and the extreme; Reich narrates the spiritual longing and pilgrimages of messianic penitents, who travel or attempt to travel to various holy sites like Mt. Sinai, the Temple Mount, and the grave of Rebbe Nachman of Breslav in Uman.² Epitomizing Reich's fanatic characters, there is Abba Nissim, a supposed mystic; he plans to kill a child he kidnapped in an attempt to expedite the Messiah by reenacting the *Akedah*,³ on the Temple Mount.

Reich's consistent focus on extremism does not just exhibit her individual interests but also serves as a reflection of the political climate in Israel when she wrote each of the three novels. For example, we can read *Master of the Return* as a response to the political sanctioning of messianic extremism in Israel, and the Jewish/Palestinian violence partially engendered from it. Consider that Reich published *Master of the Return* 1988. In 1987, Palestinians began the first intifada, which was partly a reaction to the expansion of Israeli settlements on Palestinian disputed land, an impetus primarily orchestrated by messianic Zionists. In 1988, Israeli elections again gave control of the Knesset to Likud, a political party situated on the right of political

² .The leader of the Hasidic Breslav community in the 19th century.

³ Akedah refers to the biblical account of Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22).

discussion and often sympathetic to the settlement cause. The Likud further created tension with more left-wing Israelis, when it created an alliance with the right-wing ultra-Orthodox religious party of Shas.

Reich heightens the conflation of extremist ideology and politics in her subsequent *The Jewish War* (1995), perhaps commenting on the major dissension in Israel at the time of her writing it. In 1994, Israelis suffered from a slew of Palestinian terrorist attacks, raising tensions in the Israeli public. In an effort for peace with the Palestinians in the Oslo accords, Israel withdrew from many West Bank areas, a controversial and polarizing move, especially among the Israeli right-wing.⁴ Reich sets her novel in similarly disputed territories,⁵ including the settlement of Yamit in the Sinai Peninsula,⁶ and Hebron (by the Cave of the Patriarchs) in the West Bank, narrating the story of Yehudi HaGoel and his followers, who are driven by messianic Zionism and settle illegal outposts on Palestinian land. While much of the narrative is set in the 1970s and 1980s, the novel reflects the discord between left-wing and right-wing Israelis during the mid 1990s (Sachar 1105-1106).⁷ Amplifying violence in *The Jewish War*, Reich also mirrors the Israeli civilian violence in the 1990s,⁸ including the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by an Israeli extremist Yigal Amir.⁹ The novel echoes the damaging and fracturing results of messianic extremists like Amir, as Yehudi and his followers try to bring in the messianic age:

⁴ As those areas possessed Jewish communities.

⁵ Other politicized terms for disputed territories, include "occupied territories", "Palestinian occupied territories", and "illegal settlements." Israel refers to these areas as "disputed". For the sake of this chapter, I will likewise name them "disputed" because the chronology of Reich's novels span 30 years and the status of Palestinian occupation changed. (Israel no longer occupies Gaza but does control border and maritime rights.) For the sake of simplicity, I will use "disputed".

⁶ As part of the 1982 Camp David Accords with Egypt, Israel evacuated its Jewish settlers from the Yamit settlement.

⁷ Highlighting this discord, Reich depicts another extremist group, the ultra-Orthodox Messiah waiters, who believe that only God can actualize the Messiah, and who also are anti-Zionist. In my description, I cite Howard Sachar, left-wing Zionist, and member of J-Street. For more on the era see Colin Schindler 262-265.

⁸ In 1994, Israeli fundamentalist Baruch Goldstein opened fire on a mosque in Kiryat Arba, near Hebron, murdering 29 Palestinians at prayer.

⁹ See *Murder in the Name of God* by Michael Karpen and Ina Friedman for a full analysis on Amir.

they secede from Israel to form the Kingdom of Judea and Samaria and anoint Yehudi as the leader of the movement. Eventually, the group hides from the Israeli army in a series of underground tunnels in Hebron's Ma'arat Hamachpela,¹⁰ and commits mass suicide. While both novels explore messianic extremism and the dangers engendered from it, *The Jewish War* is notably darker and more violent.

Messianism is also a central fulcrum of the narrative in Reich's most recent novel, *One Hundred Philistine Foreskins* (2013).¹¹ The novel narrates the journey of Brooklyn-born Tema Bavli, who in Israel evolves into the messianic and feminist leader Ima Temima Ba'alatOv (Mother Temima, mistress of the ovary). While in Israel, Temima has sexual relationships with various men who also have messianic agendas: her husband, Howie, Haim Ba'al-Teshuva, becomes a messianic settler vigilante Goel HaDam, Elisha, her lover, is the Toiter Rav of the Breslav messianic Hasidic sect, and, her quasi husband, Abba Kadosh, formerly Elmore Clinton from Alabama, is the black American leader of the Bnei HaElohim messianic group in the Negev. Eventually, Temima's followers declare her as the redeemer in a farcical way, and she dies without managing to bring the Messiah. The book ends as her few remaining followers await her messianic resurrection. Certainly, with her messianic characters and the violence that ensues from their interactions, Reich reflects the usual intensity of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. However, in *Philistine Foreskins*, Reich most focuses on domestic violence, as opposed to the political and communal violence of *The Jewish War*, which echoes contemporary Israelis' dissatisfaction with Israeli domestic politics and social hegemony. For example, during the 2000s, there was a plethora of corruption scandals in the highest levels of the Israeli government,

¹⁰ The cave of the Patriarchs, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah are buried. A mosque, which was converted from a Herodian structure, is currently located on top of it.

¹¹ From here on, *Philistine Foreskins*.

including President Katzav's imprisonment for rape.¹² By targeting the domestic realm in her critique, Reich mirrors these internal issues. As such, in *Philistine Foreskins* Reich heightens her critique of the destructive impact messianic extremism has on the Jewish family unit, since in this novel families completely fall apart. She also solidifies the problematic relationship between patriarchy, Judaism, and Zionism to suggest that when Zionism and Judaism are interpreted into excessive extremism, women and children suffer the most. As such, she criticizes extremism in Israel and not Israel itself. She presents an ominous foreboding of Israel's future when extremism intensifies, a fear perhaps engendered from two disturbing trends in Israel during the 2000s: the rise of religious fanaticism among ultra-Orthodox Jews, which included increasing gender segregation and female oppression,¹³ and the rise in vigilante vandalism amongst fanatical Jewish settlers against both Palestinians and Israeli soldiers.¹⁴

If we compare Reich's critique of Zionism to Philip Roth's and Michael Chabon's ambivalent engagements with Zionism, we can recognize that Reich looks at Israel from a solidly Zionist perspective. Her works never implicitly question Israel's right to exist or criticize Israeli policy. Furthermore, when the Israeli establishment and Zionism are present in the narratives, they are represented by Israeli soldiers, like Colonel Lapidot, whom Reich consistently depicts as sensible and humane. However, through her extremists, Reich criticizes foundational elements of Israeli and religious society, and Jewish and Zionist origins,

¹² Israeli president Moshe Katzav was sentenced to prison in 2011 for raping a female subordinate, and in 2008 Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was accused of real estate corruption, and resigned due to the charges. In 2014, Olmert was sentenced to 6 years in prison but is appealing the decision (Revital Hovel). Furthermore, from 2012 through 2013, social justice protests that demanded more financial and social equality for Israel and social changes more in line with Zionist ideology, were widespread and backed by the public majority

¹³ In 2011, for example, an 8-year-old girl was walking in her ultra-Orthodox community in Beit Shemesh, near Jerusalem, when she was cruelly harassed. A mob of Hareidim men objecting to her clothing, which they thought was immodest, surrounded her, spit on her and called her nasty names. Their acts caused an uproar in the secular world as well as in other more moderate ultra-Orthodox communities, including some in Beit Shemesh (See Haaretz editorial, December 2011).

¹⁴ See "The Rise of Settler Terrorism" by Daniel Byman and Natan Sachs for a more detailed account of settler vigilantism.

underscoring how those flawed components not only harm the Jewish family but also put the Zionist imperative in danger. So while her works do not present an apprehensive belief in Zionism, they do reveal a painful fear for the quality and/or possibility of Israel's future when extremism corrupts already problematic aspects of both Zionism and Judaism.

Critical field

Not many critics have written about Reich's works. Those that have primarily ignore her use of historical reference,¹⁵ focusing instead on Reich's gender critiques. And certainly, Reich's Israel-centered books clearly lend themselves to gendered and feminist readings. For example, Andrew Furman suggests that Reich uses Israel's symbolic status to engage with the intersection of gender, religion and Zionism, ultimately constructing a feminist narrative that counters patriarchy. Axel Stahler sees Reich's Israel as pervasive with dichotomies (exile/home, secular/religious, male/female), which enables Reich's rich critique of feminism in Israel (202). No doubt Israel is a fertile setting in which to engage issues of gender, religion, and Zionism, because its heightened representational and political importance magnify issues. However, I also argue that the messianic extremism present in Reich's Israel texts provides a unique critique of both feminism and Zionism through her representations of motherhood in Israel and Judaism that scholars have not previously addressed in the context of Reich's works.

Building on these readings of Reich's critique of gender issues in Israel and Zionism, this chapter will delineate how Reich uses messianic movements in Israel as a medium to explore the ways in which patriarchy in Zionist ideology, Israeli society, and Judaism intersects and often

¹⁵ Some of novels' details that reference historical events/people and contemporary realities include: the Uman pilgrimage, where every Rosh Hashanah eve, thousands of men venture to the Ukraine to pray by Rebbe Nachman's grave, in hope of personal or communal salvation. Similarly, *The Jewish War* is based on the Gush Emunim settler movement, a messianic group that began in the post 1967 war period, and Yehudi Hagoel is most likely modeled after one of its more controversial founders, Moshe Levinger. The historical and contemporary references in Reich's novels lend her critique social and political urgency, as if Reich were using her fiction to catalyze social/political change.

engenders these types of extremist movements. Put another way, certain aspects of these messianic movements are mirrored in or born from the patriarchal structure of Zionism, Israel, and Judaism. But they are glaringly exploited by and amplified in their extremist excess, a particularly significant and dangerous dynamic when their extremist nature collides with the Jewish mother figure.

Structure of argument and theoretical context

The three Israel-centered novels, which span 30 years, become a feminist treatise of sorts, as Reich uses the novels to critique messianic movements in several ways: First, she situates herself in second-wave American feminist literary theory by exploring sites of oppression for women.¹⁶ But as Israeli and Jewish feminism do not run parallel to American feminism, Reich mostly aligns with contemporary Israeli and Jewish-American feminist literary studies by addressing feminist issues that are at the forefront of Jewish and Israeli feminist discourse.¹⁷ Doing so, she extrapolates how patriarchy manifests in these messianic groups, through the following motifs and themes of female powerlessness - representations of polygamy, as a medium to emphasize the purely procreative role of women, and the appropriated female body, to explore women's submission and powerlessness. Second, Reich again situates herself in second-wave feminist discourse by identifying the gendered motifs that reveal and respond to patriarchal loci, and critiques Zionism's problematic patriarchal origins through the novels' depictions of violence, child sacrifice, and maternal powerlessness in these messianic groups. As

¹⁶ For a description of third-wave interests, including sex positivism, the dynamic between queer and feminist studies, the critique and redefinition of second-wave agendas, and the overall inability to "thematize" the third wave, see Claire Snyder.

¹⁷ However, it should be noted that Jewish and Israeli literary feminism is in line with American feminism in a couple of aspects, especially in its recent focus on locating female subjectivity and subversiveness in traditional Judaic and Jewish American literature. See Wendy Zierler's "The Making and Re-making of Jewish American Literary History" (2009) for an overview of contemporary discourse. For an analysis on the influences of American feminism on Israeli and Jewish feminism, see Yael Feldman's *From the Madwoman in the Attic to the Women's Room*.

such, she is also at the center of Israeli feminist criticism, which advocates an intersectional reading of literature; it concomitantly develops a post-Zionist critique and deconstructs Zionist mythos within feminist hermeneutics.¹⁸

After delineating the presence of patriarchy (and its ensuing violence) in the narratives, I will locate where Reich presents her characters' futile attempts at female empowerment in the earlier novels. In this way, Reich (and I) are situated in both contemporary American feminist literary theory, and Israeli and Jewish literary theory, which seek to revisit traditional texts and tropes in an effort to identify feminist subversion and female empowerment.¹⁹ To this end, I argue that in *Master of the Return* and *The Jewish War*, Reich depicts various moments that can be viewed as bids for female subjectivity and/or feminist revisions: female characters try to rewrite or restructure the patriarchal constructs imbedded in their messianic communities, an idea also delineated by critics.²⁰ Unlike these critics, however, I argue that Reich's feminist revisions cannot ameliorate the women's maternal failures and weak subjectivity, and are thus not empowering enough to negate the patriarchal rule they suffer under. Finally, in the third and most recent novel, *Philistine Foreskins*, I read Temima's journey as Reich's attempt to revise patriarchal messianism from a feminist standpoint. Initially, it seems that while Reich's other women are unsuccessful in their attempts to gain female subjectivity, Temima situates herself as

¹⁸ For criticism that intersects Jewish feminist literary studies and post-Zionist critiques, see, for example, Nathan Devir's study on Jewish/Israeli/Tunisian literature.

¹⁹ See in American feminism the slew of criticism revisiting earlier literary feminist scholarship and novels. For example, many critics have revisited Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's canonical *The Madwoman in the Attic*, notably Shelley Fisher Fishkin. Other re-visitations include, Chloe Avril's study on Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Allison Pease's study on the culture of boredom in literature. Feminist literary discourse also explores feminist and historical literature that has not been looked at through a feminist hermeneutic, like Sylvia Jenkins Cook *Working Women* (2008), which examines the discourse of working-class women, and Kathlene McDonald's *Feminism, the Left, and Postwar Literary Culture* (2012), which revisits McCarthy-era feminist literature. Regarding Israeli and Jewish American literary studies, for an example of discourse that also utilizes a biblical reader response lens to locate female subjectivity, see Judith Baskin's *Midrashic Women* (2002) and Amnon Shapira's *A Feminist Re-Reading of the Hebrew Bible* (2010). See Ivy Schweitzer's study on the voiceless sister in Roth's canonical *Portnoy's Complaint*.

²⁰ See Andrew Furman and Axel Stahler.

the woman to finally overturn patriarchy and the patriarchy of extremism. She willingly occupies her role as female messianic leader guiding particularly disenfranchised women, which superficially suggests that she is the feminist hero for whom the women in all three texts have been waiting. However, I argue that Temima ultimately fails as a feminist redeemer in her maternal inadequacy and in the way her movement emulates the patriarchal constructs she seeks to dismantle. Through Temima's feminized messianic failure, Reich reveals that Temima's feminist revision is not sufficient to rectify the patriarchal problems of Judaism and Israel. Reich additionally presents Temima's messianic failure as a manifestation of maternal powerlessness and through Temima's maternal inadequacy, Reich joins the burgeoning discourse in feminist mothering studies, led by Andrea O'Reilly, and examines what comprises feminist mothering. Via Temima's failure, Reich tacitly suggests that in order to eradicate the problems of extremism in Israel, Judaism and Zionism need a complete revamping. Her final suggestion adheres to Plaskow's concept of feminist Judaism, which seeks to eradicate the patriarchal constructs of hierarchical difference and a sense of chosenness in order to create an egalitarian Judaism based on feminist principles. As such, Reich's novels possess both American second-wave and contemporary Israeli/Jewish feminist hermeneutics. However, because Reich presents the feminist revisions as failures, she is debunking older ideas about female empowerment, exposing their weaknesses and insufficiencies, and, as such, ultimately aligns her work with an American third-wave perspective, which engages with the limitations (and untapped potential) of earlier feminist treatises.²¹

Female powerlessness: Polygamy and procreation

²¹ For a study on the re-visioning to second-wave feminist discourse, see Leah Claire Allen's *Fact and Fictions*. (2014).

Through her representations of polygamy in the messianic movements, which is illegal in Israel, Reich most obviously begins to develop a feminist critique of patriarchy and extremism. The presence of polygamy in these Israel-based messianic movements is significant because it serves as a mechanism through which Reich can critique the way Israel enforces women in a primarily procreative role. All three texts describe polygamous marriages, highlighting the cultural subordination of women to men as both a result and a linchpin of messianic extremism, while critiquing an Israeli social problem that is born from a supposed and biased political necessity, and a tradition of patriarchal families.

In *Master of the Return*, for example, Reb Lurie and his American wife,²² Bruriah, encourage a polygamous marriage for members of the Uman house. Not surprisingly, Bruriah will not permit her marriage to become polygamous, but pushes polygamy on her friends Golda and Sora.²³ In *The Jewish War*, Yehudi eventually takes on two more wives in addition to Shelly, so that the family unit becomes comprised of Shelly, Israeli-born Carmela—an unconditional believer in Yehudi's mission—and Malkie, an American divorcee who regretfully loses custody of her children when she marries Yehudi. Polygamy is also depicted in *Philistine Foreskins*, as Temima becomes another wife of the many that Abba Kadosh possesses in the Bnei HaElohim community.²⁴ Even Abba's name glaringly highlights his patriarchal persona, since in Hebrew Abba means father - holy father. Reich does not romanticize these representations of polygamy, and primarily represents them as failures, but their presence in the novels allows Reich to expose

²² As Axel Stahler intimates, many characters in *Master of the Return* and *The Jewish War* are American expatriates. Reich presents then a concept of changing identities, where Israel becomes a locus for transformation (208).

²³ In an intertextual note, we learn in *The Jewish War* that Golda's polygamous marriage falls apart. Sora eventually marries another man, Rabbi Yom Tov Freud, Yehudi's nemesis.

²⁴ In Bnei HaElohim, girls of 3 years are consecrated to other men/boys in the community. Sons, including Abba's, who seem independent, willful, or dominant, are sent off to orphanages.

and critique the diminished status of the woman's body as purely procreative in the ideology of extremist messianism.

Reich spells out the political motivation of polygamy in *Master of the Return* and relates it to the Zionist imperative's desire to keep Israeli government primarily in Jewish hands. Convincing Sora Katz to become the second wife of Rami, Bruriah calls for the "medieval ban against polygamy" to be "revoked, especially here in the Land of Israel, where the Arabs have such a high birthrate. Imagine how many more Jews we could produce if every Jewish man married how many wives he could handle. All our problems with territory and power and control would be solved." She calls monogamy a "Western notion," that "must be shed along with all the secular and profane trappings of Western culture" (110). Bruriah represents the voice that Reich criticizes: messianically driven, extremist Zionist ideology. As indicated here, polygamy as a practice emphasizes female procreation. From a political standpoint, polygamy is also complex in Israel because reproduction carries such political weight for both the Jewish and Arab demographics; political power is partially determined by how many seats a political party possesses in the Knesset, and a party's supporters are often of the same race and religion. In such a polarized country like Israel, ethnicity, race, and religion often determine political votes and power. There is, then, amongst other types of conflict, a demographic war between the Israeli and Palestinian population. For Israeli, Jewish women, the pressure to reproduce is notable, a feat mainly accomplished by the ultra-Orthodox (Hareidim) Jews who have on average seven children ("Israel-demography"), and one that is encouraged in the larger society by compensating women well for reproducing. With Sora's speech, Reich is underscoring contemporary Israeli feminist criticism, which examines the oppressive ideological and civic

forces that link women with reproduction.²⁵ Through her characters' unconstructive polygamous relationships, Reich is not suggesting that Israel eradicate polygamy (a relationship already deemed illegal for Israelis).²⁶ Rather, through the excesses of polygamy, she is exposing the mainstream problem of Israel's view of women as solely reproductive agents.

Certainly, women all over the world encounter a pressure to procreate. But what Reich is criticizing is Israel's inability to fully actualize its egalitarian ideology. Consider that part of early Zionism's ethos was an invention of the "New Jew," as initially defined by the founder of Zionism, Theodore Herzl, and a new type of Jewish community. The new Judaism would not emulate the ghettoized, patriarchal, Judaism of Eastern Europe. The Zionist mythos of equal opportunity among gender was born of an egalitarian-driven desire to rid Judaism of its oldness and begin anew, according to modern ideals. And certainly, Zionism created a more egalitarian space for Jewish women, especially relative to how other women in the Middle East are treated. After all, Israeli women are in politics and the workforce and even have obligatory military service, in which they wear uniforms, carry weapons, and serve as officers. However, the structure of Israel's military reveals that women are still primarily viewed as vessels of procreation. For example, Yuval Nora Davis delineates how even though women serve in the

²⁵ For example, Hanna Herzog explains that while women's education and job training are not governmentally encouraged, the government provides excellent maternity leaves, daycare facilities, and subsidies to large families (15). Nitza Berkovitch delineates how Israeli legislation treats women as "private subjects, [as] mothers, [and] wives," but not as citizens. She explains, "By giving priority to reproductive duties...Israel makes women exclusively reproductive agents". Furthermore, Andrea Dworkin argues that in Israel, where nationalism and patriotism are negotiated in daily life, women's loyalty to the State is solely tested through their familial roles and reproductive abilities (232).

²⁶ While Ashkenazi Jews accepted Rabbi Gershon's ban on polygamy in 11th century, many north African and Arabic Jews practiced polygamy well into the 20th and 21st centuries. Israel makes legal exception for Jewish families, who immigrated to Israel while already in a polygamous marriages. Furthermore, in Israel polygamy is illegal, but for the Palestinian and Palestinian Bedouin community that rule is not penally enforced. See Rabia for an analysis on polygamy in contemporary Bedouin communities. Also, polygamy is legal for Palestinians in the West bank and Gaza.

military, their contribution to Israel is still determined by their reproduction, a significant point because of the importance and value of Israel's military in Israeli society.²⁷

Reich's novels highlight this irony of imprisoned freedom that women endure in mainstream and extremist society. For example, in *The Jewish War*, Reich depicts a scene in which Yehudi's first wife, Shelly, and second wife, Carmela, are imprisoned together, after they and the rest of Yehudi's followers resist Israeli orders to vacate the Yamit settlement. As they chain themselves to each other and to the roof of a building, Israeli soldiers, including female soldiers, enter and forcibly evacuate the settlers before Yamit is bulldozed to the ground. Due to Carmela's "ferocious" "resistance," she was "stuffed in to a separate cage, with Shelly, heavy and inert, attached." In their "private cage," Shelly sighs:

"At last," summoning up, in the wilderness, her Ivy League education, "a room of one's own." Then she noticed Carmela, howling at her side. "Well almost," she amended, "almost, but not quite. Still, it's probably the best I can expect under the circumstances."
(119)

Here, Shelly's tongue-in-cheek reference to Virginia Woolf's famous feminist image paints the picture of a relatable and accessible person. From below the hovering helicopter, however, Shelly is a raving extremist. Once inside the "cage," she is a woman resigned to her situation as the first wife of a fundamentalist. While Shelly is intelligent, has the monetary backing of her wealthy American father, and had earlier shown her resilience by leaving Yehudi when he took Carmela as a wife, here she is literally encaged in her circumstance. The ironic image of a caged woman who quotes Virginia Woolf's feminist treatise and yet follows the lead of her polygamous husband complicates the image of women perpetuated in Zionist doctrine, and, in

²⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis has argued that even though women serve in the military, they still occupy roles that are exclusively supportive or nurturing, revealing that the military is a "gendered regime that fosters hierarchical relationships between the sexes" (202).

particular, early Zionist ideology. Part of the Zionist mythos is the idea of Jewish men and women working side by side, physically building the country and cultivating the land. Critiquing Zionism from a feminist perspective, Irit Umanit explains how much of the Yishuv ideology advocated for total equality of the sexes in terms of labor and social roles (132).²⁸ However, as Deborah Bernstein argues, that egalitarian ideal was not actualized, as even in the pre-State era, Jewish women were primarily assigned familial and domestic roles (82). Though the helicopter scene depicts an extreme scenario, Reich exposes the glaring reality of gender inequality that encompasses all Israeli society but is heightened in fundamentalist sects.

In the novel, Reich reveals that the Zionist dream of equal opportunity is readily subverted by a socially and culturally mandated norm of male leadership and female submission that is expressed in the main character's gender relationships throughout their lives.²⁹ If Shelly has misgivings about her "circumstance," she never leaves Yehudi irrevocably, attesting partially to the powerful force of his charisma and determination, traits that he exhibits earlier in his life as well. Yehudi's magnetic charisma also demonstrates how he is able impose his own ideological fervor on those around him, making them, particularly the women in his life, submit to his will.

Female disembodiment and appropriation

Reich further explores the idea of male appropriation and ownership of the female body in darker, more disturbing ways. In *Master of the Return*, for example, Reich exemplifies the dispossession of the female body through the (accident caused) paralysis of one of the main female characters, Ivriya. Before her accident, Ivriya was a secular Israeli who would ride horses

²⁸ Pre-State Jewish settlements in Palestine.

²⁹ Shelly is the only American born character that doesn't change her name to a Hebrew one loaded with meaning. However, the name Shelly is also a Hebrew word: Shel-li, which translates to "mine." Her name appropriately characterizes that she belongs to someone, like Yehudi.

on the beach bareback and she herself bare-chested. She was known for her feral beauty. After her accident, Shmuel, who has already achieved his own spiritual “enlightenment,” encourages her to make penance, and become an Orthodox Jew; when she follows his advice, he marries her. But Shmuel blames Ivriya’s accident on her previous vanity and bodily exposure, writing in his diary: “They used to call her Ivriya the beauty and some of the old charm still hovers over her face. All vanity. When she would race, her rich hair blended into the chestnut mane of her favorite stallion. Now it’s losing its thickness and shine” (18). Though married to Ivriya, Shmuel does not value her beauty and even demonizes her for vanity. Moreover, Reich’s use of vague pronouns “it’s” and “its” confuses the reader as to whose hair he is speaking about—his wife’s, or the animal’s— and underscores Ivriya’s disembodiment.

Shmuel continues to describe Ivriya’s accident as a punishment, revealing a patriarchal (possessive) view of the female body and alluding to the problems engendered from Israel’s patriarchal religious society: “What does it matter [about her hair]? She obeys me and conceals every strand under a kerchief, even in bed...She had sinned with her breasts, and she has been judged. Her legs are wasted” (19). Shmuel is referencing the rabbinic law that a married woman must cover her hair. Not surprisingly, Shmuel makes Ivriya “obey” one of the more stringent interpretations of the law, where a woman must cover her hair, not only in her own home but in her bedroom—precisely the intimate setting where the more lenient rabbinic view permits and encourages a husband to look upon his wife’s hair. It is beyond the scope of my argument to discuss the modesty rules of Judaism, but it is significant that Shmuel describes Ivriya’s adherence to this rule as an act of “obedience” to him rather than Ivriya’s spiritually inclined choice. The scene reveals that Shmuel, and by extension rabbinic authority, have ownership over Ivriya’s body. I am not arguing, however, that Reich is anti-religious. Reich is a proponent of the

spiritual and religious quest, but on feminist terms, as Reich exposes the price women pay at the expense of patriarchal religious doctrine and not from religious observance itself.

Reich not only emphasizes the loss of Ivriya's body through her paralysis but suggests that Shmuel's extremist spiritual quest disembodies her as well. In addition to viewing her crippled body as a sign of her religious infractions, Shmuel sees Ivriya's body merely as a vessel for procreation and bodily concerns. When she is pregnant with Akiva, Shmuel prioritizes his spiritual quest and abandons Ivriya in his attempt to get to Uman. In his diary to Akiva, Shmuel describes the scene when he leaves: Ivriya calls out to him, "Oh, Shmuel, what will become of me—pregnant and in a wheelchair?" But I turned a deaf ear. 'You are like a pot with a seed in it,' I said. 'Sit out in the sun and in the rain. God will help.'" Clearly, comparing his wife to a pot with a seed in it emphasizes Shmuel's view of Ivriya as a purely reproductive creature. Here Reich again reveals the ironic cruelty of religious extremism, where a man seeking spiritual enlightenment abandons his paraplegic pregnant wife to make a spiritual pilgrimage. Shmuel admits to his cruelty but only to clarify that he did what was necessary, though minimally difficult for him. He admits that her wailing of "Shmuel, please, Shmuel" "haunted [him] all that day, like a slight and common tune you can't push out of your mind" (20). In fact, his regret appears more like a short-lived irritation than a feeling of genuine remorse.

It is nothing new that men have claimed ownership over the female body. But what Reich touches on here is a Zionist critique with which many Israeli feminists are currently taking issue: that in the beginning of statehood, Israeli legislation empowered and enabled religious patriarchy to have full control of the female body, while paradoxically passing the Women's Equal Rights Act in 1951, which promised equal rights amongst men and women in social and commercial arenas. The Women's Equal Rights Act was meant to actualize the egalitarian ideology of

Zionism. However, Israel also gave the Jewish religious authority (who are ultra-Orthodox) control over marriage legislation. As Andrea Dworkin compellingly articulates, Zionism “advocated for equality of the sexes; a principle cannibalized by the state when it gave religious courts authority over the private and family lives of women and children” (214). Rabbinic control over marriage puts women in a precarious position, since the ultra-Orthodox establishment strictly adheres to the patriarchal dictates of rabbinic Judaism, and is becoming increasingly extreme, separatist, and right-wing in its thinking and practice.³⁰ For example, in rabbinic law, in order for a woman to divorce her husband, she has to receive his consent, called a “Get.” (He, however, can remarry without his wife’s permission.)³¹ In practice and in theory then, a man can control his wife by holding her as a social hostage of sorts. When a man refuses to give his wife a “Get,”³² she becomes an “agunah,” existing in state of social limbo, where she cannot marry anyone else. Unfortunately, there are currently thousands of “agunot” (The Jewish Week), a phenomenon that many Israeli feminists see as antithetical to the Zionist project.³³ As such, like much Israeli feminism, Reich’s feminist critique is concurrently a critique on Zionism as well.

Not surprisingly, Reich highlights the problem of the agunah in all three of her Israel-centered books, since the agunah’s predicament is one of the major issues in Jewish feminism now, so much so that Plaskow calls it a “disgrace to the Jewish community” that demands

³⁰ For a description of the current Hareidim social climate in Israel see Haaretz editorial by Avirama Golan. Considering that Reich wrote *Master of the Return* when the Hareidim religious establishment gained political power (in the Likud’s alliance with Shas), it is not surprising that she would critique the problematic conflation of religion and governmental policy, especially for women who have the most to lose under patriarchal ultra-Orthodoxy.

³¹ The rabbinic laws of Onah, where a husband must sexually satisfy and delight in his wife are remarkably sensitive to women, and seem so contrary in nature to rabbinic divorce rules. See Rachel Biale for a more detailed explanation.

³² A woman is also an agunah when her husband is missing but not officially declared dead. Because of Israel’s various wars and the number of soldiers missing in action, many Israeli women are agunot. See Marsha Freeman’s “A Human Rights Perspective”.

³³ See Marsha Freeman, Andrea Dworkin, and Nira Yuval-Davis for a more detailed critique of the Equal Opportunity Act and rabbinic authority.

immediate rectification (147), but which has disproportionately been ignored in literary and sociological scholarship.³⁴ Reich takes on the agunah issue with Ivriya who is an agunah for two years until Shmuel's body is found in *Master of the Return*. *The Jewish War's* Malkie is an agunah because her husband, out of anger, will not give her the "Get" until Shelly's father pays him off. And in *Philistine Foreskins*, Temima also turns into an agunah when Howie, who is selflessly devoted to the settlement cause and the spiritual legacy of Israel, refuses to divorce her, stating, "No way I'm gonna give that bitch a *get*." Reich continues: "In this way Temima officially became an agunah, chained to a dead marriage, by a recalcitrant husband who had sole power to grant the divorce-*gufah kanui*, as the Talmud like to put it, her body is bought" (231).³⁵ Reich's portrayal of these gender imbalances entrenched by social and religious practices helps expose the damage that patriarchy inflicts on women, especially when patriarchal authority permits and encourages an excessive interpretation of an already imbalanced law. Through her portrayal of the agunah, Reich again highlights the disastrous consequences when patriarchy collides with extremism.

Like Reich, other Jewish American women writers engage with the collision between Jewish tradition and ultra-Orthodoxy and female subjectivity. Allegra Goodman, Tova Mirvis, Naomi Ragen, Pearl Abraham, and Nessa Rappaport similarly explore how to situate contemporary women and feminism within in a traditional Jewish schema. These writers critique patriarchal Judaism, by either disdaining it (as with Naomi Ragen and Pearl Abraham) or attempting to reform or find the female place within it (as with Goodman, Mirvis and

³⁴ The agunah problem has also recently garnered attention in literary feminist discourse as well. See Bluma Goldstein's *Enforced Marginality* (2007), which looks at how the agunah has been ignored in canonical texts and literary scholarship.

³⁵ Currently in the US, there is a rabbinic imperative to eradicate the problem of agunot, by encouraging couples to sign a prenuptial agreement that contractually obligates the husband (under secular law) to grant a Get in the event of divorce.

Rappaport).³⁶ But unlike Reich, they do not critique the dynamic between Zionism and patriarchy, and they do not examine motherhood within a political framework. Reich's novels, in particular *Philistine Foreskins*, most emulate E.M. Broner's feminist, canonical *A Weave of Women* (1978), since Broner constructs an alternative female community in Israel based on second-wave feminist principles and that seeks spiritual fulfillment. Broner also dismantles patriarchal Judaism and exposes the marital abuse indirectly enabled by rabbinic Judaism. However, Broner does not engage with the sociopolitical dynamic between the maternal, Zionism and feminism, focusing instead on the concept of Jewish sisterhood in Israel.

I argue, however, that Reich uses her three novels to comment specifically on the dangers of patriarchal extremism and messianism for Israel, women, and the family dynamic. Portraying the intersection of the mother figure with messianic extremists, Reich reveals how extremists are destructive to their own members. (In Reich's narratives, as I will address later, women and children are abused, kidnapped, and murdered.) As such, by connecting patriarchy to messianic extremist groups in Israel, Reich exposes the flawed structure of Zionism that will ultimately be its own destruction if Israelis and Zionists continue to abide by it and/or allow it to be exploited by extremists.

Maternal disembodiment

Reich most significantly underscores the powerlessness of the female body when it encounters religious extremists (like the right-wing rabbinical authority in Israel), by depicting the dynamic between messianic movements and the mother figure. Through the collision between the mother and extremism, Reich's novels articulate Adrienne Rich's distinction between motherhood, as a patriarchal construct meant to confine women into reproductive and

³⁶ See Ragen's *Sotah* (1992) and *Jephthe's Daughter* (2002), Abraham's *The Romance Reader* (1995), Mirvis' *The Ladies' Auxiliary* (1995) and *The Outside World* (2004), and Goodman's *Kaaterskills Falls* (1999).

domestic roles, and empowered mothering,³⁷ which Rich does not overtly define but whose definition has been recently discussed in feminist mothering discourse.³⁸ In each of the three novels, the fundamentalist father attempts to eradicate empowered mothering, robbing the mother of her importance, and enforces the view of motherhood that values the mother solely on her ability to reproduce child(ren). For example, in *Master of the Return*, Shmuel negates the significance of Ivriya's maternal role and writes to Akiva that he "spent almost the entire period of our gestation in Jerusalem, [having abandoned Ivriya]. I was not far away from you; I was pregnant with your soul" (22). Shmuel not only refuses to recognize his horrific abandonment of Ivriya, but he also absurdly disavows her role in the pregnancy, diminishing both the miraculous physical and emotional state of pregnancy and suggesting that Ivriya's only contribution to her son is her role as a vessel for his gestation. Shmuel ennobles an abstract and absurd claim of paternal, spiritual pregnancy instead. Presenting Ivriya and Shmuel's dynamic, Reich makes the following critique (within the lens of feminist mothering studies): Israeli society may subsidize pregnancy, encouraging the embodiment of female physical ability, but by giving ultra-Orthodox dictates control over the female body (and mothers included), Israel negates female (maternal) power.³⁹

Andrew Furman and Axel Stahler similarly address the mother figure in *Master of the Return*, when they compare it to Anne Roiphe's *Lovingkindness* (1987), a more well-known novel that similarly depicts the American female (and mother) encountering ultra-Orthodox patriarchy. Furman and Stahler parallel Roiphe's and Reich's novels to delineate the unique responsibility of motherhood (whether as an American or native Israeli) in Israel. However, while Roiphe's work is similar to Reich's in the mother's encounter with extremists, I see in

³⁷ See *Of Women Born* (1976).

³⁸ See, for example, Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Fiona Green.

³⁹ See Susan Jacobowitz' article on Reich's short stories and the separation of the female mind and body.

Reich's narratives a much more nuanced and radical presentation of feminism, Judaism, and Israel, especially since all of her American characters are not merely visitors to Israel. Roiphe's narrative presents issues of mothering and patriarchal influence but does not fully suggest that the novel's ending, which makes an ominous forecast for the State of Israel, is related to the problems of patriarchy. Rather, as Stahler compellingly argues, Roiphe's engagement with the intersection of motherhood and patriarchal religious fundamentalism raises questions about secular feminism, ideological pluralism, and relationships between mothers and daughters, and not really questions about Judaism and Zionism (204).

Thirty years later, in *Philistine Foreskins*, Reich depicts male appropriation of female bodily importance and the maternal experience, when Howie arranges that his and Temima's newborn son be snatched away from Temima and given a "brit mila" in Hebron (without Temima there). Temima wakes up from sleep with her "body still tender from the poundings and lacerations of childbirth," breasts heavy and ready to nurse her newborn son, only to find him gone. In his religious and political fervor, Howie prioritizes the symbolic significance of Hebron over the physical and emotional welfare of his child and wife: "they [Howie and his extremist cohorts] had decided it was in the boy's best spiritual interest to remain with his father at this unprecedented messianic time" (216). It is a heartbreaking scene where Reich palpably articulates the physical and emotional pain of a mother not allowed to nourish her newborn child.

Later in the novel, when Temima is a pregnant member of Abba Kadosh's compound, she is again confronted with a father who wants to rob her of maternal importance. While Temima is in labor, and as with the birth of all his children, Abba Kadosh simulates childbirth. Reich describes the scene with splendid absurdity: Temima and Abba are taken to two adjacent

rooms. Able to hear Temima's labor sounds next door, Abba copies her vocal exertions and improvises what he thinks her bodily movements are. Reich writes:

[Abba Kadosh] awaited now to hear her screams through the thinness of the partition wall... he would replace cry for cry, only louder and stronger and more heartrending, overpowering her voice and drowning her out...he would take full possession of her labor....and claim it as his right for himself and occupy it, thereby asserting prime ownership as the father (242).

Realizing that she can only retain her importance in the birth by muffling her voice, Temima vows to be silent, no matter how painful the labor becomes. She succeeds in having a silent labor. After finally pushing her daughter out, the midwives snatch the baby away before even telling Temima its sex and "rushed into the adjacent room, shoved the baby with its cord up between Abba Kadosh's legs.... Urging him to push with all his might. Push, holy father, push!" (242).⁴⁰ The scene is preposterous, yet it underscores the problems of a social structure that confines women to the procreative role but does not validate their biological and emotional experiences as mothers. In this critique, Reich solidly situates herself in the midst of mothering discourse, dramatizing the tension between men trying to limit the maternal experience of motherhood, while mothers vie for empowered mothering. Locating her critique on motherhood/mothering in messianic communities, Reich blatantly expresses the problematic nature of that contradiction through her extremists' actions: the remarkable insensitivity of Howie and the theatrical absurdity of Abba Kadosh underscore the gender imbalance in Israeli society and in Judaism.

Internal dangers of patriarchy and messianic extremism: Violence and radical feminism

⁴⁰ The scene also hinges on Christian imagery with its emphasis on the Holy Father.

I have delineated how Reich depicts the submission of the female body and maternal power when encountering religious and political fundamentalism. She makes her most evocative and significant critique, however, through the presence of violence, abuse, and child sacrifice in extremist groups, and suggests that extremism is dangerous to the familial structure. I argue that Reich depicts violence in these groups to serve as a cautionary device, warning readers of the dangers of patriarchal-inspired extremism in Israel. She also uses second-wave feminist hermeneutics, which is contemporaneous with much of Israeli feminism, to critique the patriarchal, militaristic, and masculine nature/origins of Israeli culture and Zionist ideology, especially when it manifests in violent extremist excess.

In the novels, there is an array of violence and abuse. Just looking at *Philistine Foreskins*, for example, Reich describes the public lashings (of children) at the Bnei HaElohim compound, the murder by stoning of Ketura - Temima's Arab friend and midwife,⁴¹ Howie's vigilante anti-Arab terrorism, Temima's son Kook Immanuel's murder and Essie's suffering of domestic violence, all inflicted in some form or other as a means to assert patriarchal authority in the name of a larger ideal. Most compelling, however, is how Reich depicts violence inflicted on children, primarily in the form of child sacrifice, reiterating that messianic extremism hurts children and destroys the Jewish family unit. In *Master of the Return*, Reich establishes child sacrifice as a motif in her oeuvre through Abba Nissim's reenactment of the biblical Akedah, (when Abraham attempts to sacrifice Isaac). Abba Nissim kidnaps Akiva (on Mt. Sinai) and eventually sneaks him by the Al Aska mosque to the Temple Mount, believed in rabbinic discourse to be the

⁴¹ Ketura's death and the public lashing of her son Ibn Kaddosh at the Bnei HaElohim compound are the only examples of Palestinian victimization in all of Reich's Israel centered texts. In her critique of Israel, Reich minimally addresses Palestinian/ Israeli relations. But for a feminist perspective on problems in the Palestinian community, see Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's articles on Palestinian femicide, "Reexamining Femicide."

biblical site of the Akedah. There, in the role of Abraham, Abba Nissim tries to reenact the Akedah to completion with Akiva as Isaac, but thankfully, Israeli soldiers foil the sacrifice.

Later, in *The Jewish War* and *Philistine Foreskins*, Reich similarly emphasizes the danger of fundamentalist movements by situating the Akedah (in less overt terms), but by intensifying the disastrous repercussions of those sacrifices. I argue that Reich utilizes the Akedah scenes to critique the masculinized ethos of militarism in Zionism, suggesting that when Zionist extremists appropriate and exploit that ethos, disaster ensues on domestic and political levels. In fact, the motif of the Akedah is often utilized in Modern Hebrew literature.⁴²

Considering that Israel has compulsory military service for Israeli men and women once they graduate high school,⁴³ and has a tragic history of many young Israelis dying in conflict (for the presumed sake of the nation), the presence of the Akedah motif is not surprising. In a sense, the motif illustrates that these young people are viewed as sacrifices for the State of Israel.⁴⁴

However, Reich takes the motif further to contribute to her critique, as a feminist reading of the Akedah underscores its patriarchal quality, especially in the Akedah template of Abraham and Isaac, and highlights Reich's engagement with the patriarchal origins of extremism in Israel.

In the Akedah scene in *Master of the Return*, Reich differentiates her criticism of messianic extremism from her views on the Israeli army, which in Reich's novels represent Zionism. Consider that Abba Nissim tries to reenact the Akedah, only by illegally sneaking past the Israeli soldiers on the Temple Mount, who have orders to strictly prohibit Israeli entrance.⁴⁵

When Israeli soldiers catch Nissim attempting the Akedah, he translates the interruption as God's

⁴² See Yael Feldman's study on the changing representation of the Akedah in Hebrew literature: "*Glory and Agony*."

⁴³ Women can choose to do national service, where they volunteer in civic projects, instead of joining the army. Also, according to the Tal law, the Hareidim community does not currently have compulsory military service. Some in the Knesset are currently trying to repeal that law.

⁴⁴ Of course, many Palestinians die in conflict as well. But when used by Israeli writers, the motif mostly addresses Jewish deaths.

⁴⁵ Jews are at times allowed to enter the Temple Mount but non-Muslims may not pray there.

hand and a sign that his reenactment brought the messianic age closer. In contrast, the soldiers are notably humanistic and grounded in their response, prioritizing the life of Akiva (and not the problematic repercussions that could be incited by an Israeli presence at the Dome of the Rock).⁴⁶ Just as Nissim is lifting his blade, the soldiers scream, “Don’t touch that boy!” While the soldiers’ focus on Akiva’s well-being seems natural, it is important to point out because it is antithetical to Abba Nissim’s extremism, which prioritizes a messianic ideal over a boy’s life. Juxtaposing Nissim with the soldiers, and especially since Israeli soldiers are the only characters in Reich’s works who are not extremists, Reich reaffirms that she takes issue with extremism (and the excesses of Zionism).

Certainly, the Akedah scene in *Master of the Return* figuratively presents Reich’s theme: a child’s life is endangered when encountering messianic extremism, an urgently moral issue that often results in children being killed or psychologically and physically traumatized. The motif also bolsters Reich’s broader feminist perspective, as her critique suggests that Akedah damages the mother and the child, when both become irrevocably wounded from the sacrifice (either through death or a near-death experience). While the traditional rabbinic reading of the Akedah praises Abraham for his devotion and does not consider the harm done to Sarah, Reich aligns with contemporary Jewish feminist literary theory, which reinterprets biblical and rabbinic concepts, and most notably with Alicia Ostriker, who provides a feminist interpretation of the Akedah. Drawing from midrashic sources,⁴⁷ Ostriker delineates how Abraham’s decision, determination, and alacrity to sacrifice Isaac were enabled by his deception and inconsideration

⁴⁶ Jewish presence on the Temple Mount, by the Al Aqsa Mosque, often creates severe and violent tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. Case in point, Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount in 2000 was said to be a catalyst for the second intifada.

⁴⁷ Midrash is a body of rabbinic commentary on Biblical stories that dates from the 2nd century CE.

of Sarah (68).⁴⁸ According to rabbinic midrashim,⁴⁹ Sarah hears about the Akedah and dies because of her broken heart. Isaac was the dear child of her old age, after suffering years of painful barrenness, and Abraham took him as a sacrifice to appease God. (It is an act similar to Howie's stealing Pinkhas away from Temima.) Reich takes Ostriker's imperative a step further because Reich not only debunks the rabbinic tradition of valorizing Abraham (and the patriarchal willingness to sacrifice) but also dismantles Zionism's appropriation of that theme. In the case of Reich's Akedah in *Master of the Return*, no one dies; Akiva is returned to Ivriya. But irrevocable damage has been inflicted. To use Reich's term, the two victims of the patriarchal Akedah, Sarah and Isaac, or Ivriya and Akiva, are "the damaged, and the tainted" (240). Reich closes the novel by describing Akiva's return:

The child that was returned to Ivriya Himmelhoch was not the same as the one she had lost, nor was she the same woman who had lost the child. That child had been sacrificed, and that woman's soul had burst out of her and surrendered (239).

Andrew Furman suggests that this particular scene highlights the importance of Ivriya's maternal role, since she will have to reverse or heal the damage inflicted by Nissim and his extremism (186). We can also recognize that the Akedah is a precursor to the sacrifices of children that occur in *The Jewish War*, which are similarly patriarchally sourced but result in the violent tragedies of Golana's death and mass suicide. Similarly, Furman suggests that Reich's construction of child sacrifice in the later novel works to expose how children (worldwide), who are born to or involved in fundamentalist groups, suffer neglect and violence. The fact that

⁴⁸ Ostriker writes in Sarah's voice, "until [Abraham] betrays me. He takes the boy without my permission. They are already gone when I wake...." (*Voice of the Fathers* 68).

⁴⁹ See Midrash Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 31. *Midrash Leviticus Rabba on Genesis 23:1-2*. Midrash Tanhuma. *Rashi on Genesis 23:2*.

Emunah parallels their suicidal pact to what occurred in Jonestown brings home the point that this type of abuse is universal (192).

To delineate the negative impact extremism has on families, Furman examines the short and tragic life of At'halta D'Geula, Yehudi and Carmela's daughter. Both of At'halta D'Geula's parents are completely swept up in the messianic movement, and it is no surprise that they name her "the beginning of the redemption," a tragically ironic name that underscores her short life in the narrative.⁵⁰ I agree with Furman, who reads the narrative, and particularly the ending with the mass suicide, as a universal statement about the abuses and negligence inflicted on children in fundamentalist groups. However, Furman does not acknowledge how Reich positions the Israeli soldier in the dynamic, which I argue layers a Zionist critique on Furman's sociological perspective. Consider, for example, the scene where the Israeli army forcibly takes Yehudi and his followers out of the Yamit settlement. All the children are stationed on the roof with the adults, witnessing and vulnerable to the violence that ensues. As the settler women (most of whom are mothers) resist, the female Israeli soldiers scream at them: "Wicked women! Evil, rotten mothers! How can you bring your children to such a place? How can you place your babies in such danger?" (119). Once the settlers are airlifted out but before the army bulldozes the settlement, Colonel Uri Lapidot orders an inspection of the area to make sure no one is left behind. Lapidot finds At'halta D'Geula asleep on the roof: "curled up like an infant in the womb, the silken edge of her blanket pulled up to her nose. She was asleep" (121). Lapidot is stunned at the near tragedy he just avoided, and at the precarious position of the child. He is so "overcome by the discovery of this little girl that, to his own astonishment, he began to cry openly" (121). And again, as in *Master of the Return*, Reich portrays the Israeli soldier: the symbol of Zionism

⁵⁰ Reich briefly mentions her in *My Holocaust* (2007). Reich alludes to the fact that At'laha D'Geula is alive and living with a group of fundamentalists, who are using her to hide an explosive.

in Reich's works, as the humane player in the Israeli drama, rather than an aggressive, unsympathetic force, reversing the stereotypical images of military brutishness and the nurturing family. It is in scenes like this that Reich is overt about her anti-fundamentalist attitudes, which admonish the excesses of extremism and not Zionism itself.

Epitomizing Yehudi's prioritization of his messianic mission over his child's well-being, Yehudi later lowers At'halta D'Geula into a dark cave beneath the ground at the Ma'arat Hamchpela, Cave of the Patriarchs. (He uses her to scout out the location of the graves so that they can eventually create a labyrinth of tunnels.) Furman cites the scene to delineate Yehudi and his followers' dangerous parental negligence and delusions. But I argue that the scene also highlights how Reich rejects the false promise of Yehudi's messianism, emphasizing the importance of family instead. Reich strongly juxtaposes the disturbing terror that At'halata experiences to the ecstatic spiritual delusion of her parents, revealing Carmela and Yehudi's misplaced priorities. This juxtaposition underscores Reich's scathing criticism of Carmela and Yehudi's abuse and the way in which they sacrifice family for their futile ideal. Consider At'halta D'Geula's reaction to being lowered into the ground: She screams "Ma, Ma, Ma" (129). It is noteworthy that she utilizes the English "ma" (for mother), though we learn that she calls her Israeli mother by the Hebrew "Ima." While the American reader can clearly recognize who she is crying for, Yehudi, Hoshea, and even her mother Carmela, all believe she is chanting the beginning of the word "Mashiach," which translates as Messiah. The adults begin to pray and are overtaken by what they think is the religious significance of the moment. As At'halta D'Geula screams for a mother, who is too swept up in the supposed spiritual importance of the moment to protect her daughter, Reich epitomizes how messianic fundamentalism not only retards maternal abilities but also diminishes basic familial morality.

Sacrifice and Zionist ideology

I agree with Furman's suggestion that Reich critiques the universal abuse of children in fundamentalist groups. However, I use a gender studies lens to argue that through her visceral portrayals of child sacrifice, Reich implicitly criticizes the Zionist mythos' preoccupation with the concept of the New Jew and violent machismo. By unpacking the tragic scene in *The Jewish War* that describes the death of Golana, Yehudi and Shelly's daughter, we can recognize how Reich criticizes Zionism's prioritization of toughness and violent resistance. I argue that the excesses of messianic Zionism emphatically expose its problems. Consider the scene: Upon his release from prison—for his siege at the Yamit settlement—Yehudi leads a procession of followers from Jerusalem to Hebron, passing through hostile Palestinian territory. When Palestinians begin to throw stones at the group, the “women and children” are “ordered at once” to retreat “into the vehicles,” and the men “proceeded stalwart ahead, shooting wildly with their Uzis and pistols at the rising and vanishing shadows of young boys masked in checked kaffiyes” (221). As Yehudi fights, he “raise[s] his banner ever higher,” but fails to pay attention to his daughter Golana, “adamantly, steadfastly beside him.” Reich zooms in on the child, as Golana “arched her young body tensely and placed her two small, nail-bitten hands upon the pole below her father's to show her support.” As the group gets attacked, “[s]tones and rocks continue to rain upon them and occasionally gunfire, Molotov cocktails, grenades,” until, horrifically, “a single gunshot” “divided time,” and “Golana's hands slid slowly, slowly down along the pole. With a soft moan, she drew herself in. With a rustle, she let herself go, and she folded up like an offering at her father's feet” (221). Furman astutely suggests that Reich is marking Golana as a sacrifice to her father's messianic mission. And indeed, Reich emphasizes Golana's young age by juxtaposing her “small, nail-bitten hands” on the flagpole, which is literally the banner for

Yehudi's cause. What complicates the scene is that the ones who attack and kill Golana are "young boys" as well, and the fact that Golana voluntarily marches beside her father "in support."⁵¹ While the women and children go into the vehicles for protection once attacked, Reich conveys that they are clearly still in danger and that obviously, as a parent, Yehudi is responsible for Golana's choice to march with him.

We can read Yehudi's extremism as a manifestation of the excess of Jewish masculinized violent resistance, especially because in this scene, resistance, on both sides, is born from antagonism. Reich emphasizes the masculinity of the scene, as the women and children are first ordered away from it. The men brandish weapons; some are Uzis⁵²—which are Israeli-made weapons—and they exhibit an undeterred and open willingness to fight, especially when the Palestinians attack them. Reich writes of Yehudi and his followers: "Defiantly, openly, they made their way, along the brow of the Judean Hills [...] no man would stop them, no man would tell them where they could and could not abide, down toward home" (221). Reich's description echoes early Zionist mythos, as it perpetuates the relationship between inhabiting territory in Israel and an open willingness to bravely fight (and die) for it. More specifically, the instruments of that resistance is most notably assigned to Jewish men, for obvious practical reasons, but as Tamar Mayer (104) and Andrea Dworkin (94) argue, also to counter the image of the feminized Jewish male that was perpetuated in European anti-Semitic discourse. Zionist ideology invented a New Jew: a Jew that inhabits his own land, a Jewish, masculine man who is strong and defiant. Reich critiques that sentiment by depicting how it manifests in the excesses of Yehudi's messianic extremism, and exposes how that mythos of masculine violent resistance for

⁵¹ But Reich does not present a Palestinian perspective or a Palestinian face. It is notable that the Palestinians wear masks, with hidden faces, because aside from Abu Salem's small role in the text, Palestinians are not represented. (In fact, Palestinians are almost completely absent from *Master of the Return*.)

⁵² The phallic quality of the gun does not escape Andrea Dworkin's attention, as she insists that militaristic gun violence is a manifestation of asserting masculinity (96).

the sake of defense actually endangers the Jewish family when extremists appropriate it.⁵³

Instead of avoiding the threat of attacking Palestinians, Yehudi places himself and his followers in harm's way. He reveals the excesses of that mythos of masculine resistance and refuses to "cower like a ghettoized Jew", by not only intentionally putting himself, his followers, one of his wives, and his child in extreme danger, but by arguably antagonizing the Palestinians whom he passes. That antagonism is a corrosion of Zionist ideals.

Through the title *The Jewish War*, Reich further critiques the militaristic component of Zionist ideology, and specifically the idea that Israelis, at times, must justifiably sacrifice themselves defending the land of Israel. *The Jewish War* is an obvious reference to Josephus Flavius' first-century account of the Great Jewish Revolt against the occupying Roman army, including Josephus' description of Masada. Nine hundred and sixty Jewish Zealots, including families, committed a mass suicide at the fort of Masada, rather than face capture by the Romans. The event occupies a notable role in Zionist mythology, and the archeological site remains a major tourist destination in contemporary Israel.⁵⁴ Certainly, Yehudi emulates that mythology in disastrous excess when he eventually convinces his community to kill themselves for the sake of their cause, which is not to evade capture and is never explicitly defined. Reich's title does not work as a justification for Yehudi; even if the reader views the Zionist image of Masada as a site of heroic resistance, it is clear that Yehudi's mass suicide is futile and baseless. By paralleling her narrative of Yehudi's suicide with the story of Masada, Reich highlights how

⁵³ In a study on the impact of the Palestinian occupation on women's lives (both Palestinian and Israeli), Simona Sharoni suggests that Israel's prioritizing of security over social equality has created a complex form of gender and race inequality in the country.

⁵⁴ Ari Shavit discusses how the ancient fort of Masada only became a symbol of Zionism in the 1930s through intentional propaganda. Shavit argues that prior to the twentieth century, Masada was barely spoken about in the larger Jewish community and, if it was, it was considered a tragic incident of misplaced martyrdom. But in the later 1930s, Zionists (in Palestine) felt the imminent threats of the Axis powers as well as the Arabs. According to Shalit, 1930s Zionist ethos consequently did not promote suicide but it did perpetuate the willingness to die for Israel (its people and land), and it consciously perpetuated Masada as a symbol of that willingness to resist in death.

Yehudi has appropriated a Zionist symbol (which was ironically appropriated by Zionists in the 1930s) to ideologically support baseless martyrdom and murder of children (who are killed in the suicide).⁵⁵

Sacrifice and the powerless mother

Reich continues her critique of extremist excess in *Philistine Foreskins*, revealing how patriarchal excess eradicates maternal power. As such, Reich situates herself with contemporary feminist mothering studies, a discourse conceived by Adrienne Rich. Building on Rich, contemporary mothering discourse tries to define empowering mothering, most notably with Andrea O'Reilly's differentiation between non-patriarchal mothering and feminist mothering, with the latter utilizing mothering as a platform for activism. By presenting the severity of powerlessness in the face of patriarchal-driven extremism, Reich certainly echoes Rich's description of motherhood. And with Temima's eventual maternal failures, Reich reveals that empowered mothering is impossible in a patriarchal extremist schema.

Reich presents Rich's concept of motherhood (but in an extremist setting) with multiple incidents. For example, with the death of Temima's son Kook Immanuel, Reich conveys how the mother becomes powerless when encountering extremists' willingness to sacrifice the welfare of children for the sake of an ideal. Temima's husband Howie goes to a pro-settlement protest in the volatile heart of Hebron and takes their two young sons with him, including the baby Kook Immanuel, an irresponsible act, to say the least. A Palestinian throws a stone at them, hitting and killing Kook Immanuel instantly. While carting his dead child at the funeral procession, Howie articulates the excesses (and misplacement) of his resistance:

⁵⁵ The scene also points to another quality of the masculine nature of Zionism that is shown in excess, the prioritization of land over human life. See Axel Stahler.

Howie cradled in the crook of his injured arm the tiny wrapped package of the dead baby, Kook Immanuel, rocking him back and forth and singing over and over the lullaby, “No, no, no, no we won’t go from here. All of our enemies, all those who hate us, all of them will go from here. Only we, only we, we won’t move from here.” (146)

Reich brings Howie’s messianic prioritization home through his politicized lullaby, when he seizes the moment to not only mourn his child but to also publicize his commitment to the settlement cause. In contrast, Temima does not acknowledge politics or ideology, but is only able to focus on the grief she experiences as a mother burying her child. She says to a friend at the funeral, “There is no word in the English language for or a parent who lost a child, but we have one in Hebrew.... because we Jews have always needed such a word.” Then Temima “coughed out a hard subversive laugh, like Mother Sarah” (146). The juxtaposition between the two parental reactions is clear: the extremist father uses the death of his child to reaffirm his mission and territorial resistance, while the mother references another mother, Sarah, who similarly suffered from the sacrifice of her son, and solely self-identifies as a parent (and not as a woman on an ideological mission.) Here again, we see how Reich implicitly criticizes Howie’s extremism and is sympathetic to the mother who values family over a messianic mission.

But Reich complicates the image of the grieving mother because we later learn that Temima, like many of the mothers in Reich’s novels, is an ineffectual parent. Temima is aware of her shortcomings, as she admits that she is also like Mother Rachel. She cites the biblical passage in Jeremiah that describes Rachel’s lamentations for her children’s suffering in exile and incidentally depicts the nation of Israel’s return to Zion in messianic times (31:15). In line with the biblical description, Reich depicts Rachel as a mother who cannot be comforted (from the loss of her children - the children of Israel) (147). But Temima identifies with her: like Rachel,

Temima does not raise her children into adulthood. Temima also becomes a mother who is powerless; encapsulating Rachel's lament, Temima cannot nurture her children, since they are dead or taken from her, and she cannot comfort them. She mourns them, recognizes their pain, but cannot do anything to ameliorate it.⁵⁶

The failure of female empowerment

I have delineated how Reich develops the motif of the powerless mother consciously and consistently throughout the three books, revealing that, to Reich, extremism completely eradicates maternal power. In the next section of my argument, I will look at how Reich presents moments of female empowerment, only to expose female weaknesses in the face of patriarchy. As such, Reich presents both Adrienne Rich's concept of motherhood and her failure to explicitly define (successful) empowered mothering. Reich's rhetorical strategy first elucidates the strength of extremism's patriarchal oppression and second, reiterates Reich's alignment with Judith Plaskow's radical insistence that Judaism completely revamp itself. I will first look at the *Master of the Return* and *The Jewish War* to delineate where in the narratives we can recognize female subversion of patriarchal authority and where patriarchal extremism quells that subversion, suggesting that a female voice in a patriarchal-defined extremist world cannot adequately reverse gender oppression (and endangerment to the Jewish family). I will then examine how Temima in *Philistine Foreskins* initially presents herself as a feminist redeemer strong enough to actualize a lasting feminist reversal of patriarchal extremism. But Reich reveals Temima's shortcomings as a feminist redeemer, suggesting that even a strong female leader cannot liberate women (and families) from patriarchal extremism. The glimpses of power displayed by the women in Reich's texts and their concomitant failures and weaknesses (as

⁵⁶ In her rendition of the Akedah, Ostriker writes in Sarah's voice: "Whoever lays a hand on my child, I think, I'll kill him. Then I remember I am powerless" (60).

mothers) suggest that Reich is aligned with Plaskow's vision of feminized Judaism, where women do not try to fit themselves into the male norm, but where the structure of Judaism itself changes to create a truly egalitarian society.

My argument about Reich's presentation of maternal weakness, amidst fleeting moments of female empowerment, contradicts the few scholars who have studied Reich's works and recognize in them a lasting liberating portrayal of motherhood. For example, looking at *Master of the Return* and *The Jewish War*, Andrew Furman suggests that Reich presents a revised form of parenthood that follows a feminist model. I agree that there are certain scenes in the texts that highlight maternal and feminine power; those scenes give a taste, so to speak, of what maternal capability can look like if not impeded by patriarchal extremism. In this way, they emulate contemporary Jewish feminist literary studies that find female subjectivity in biblical and rabbinic literature and suggest that Reich is in line with other Jewish writers that rework Jewish tropes to examine feminine empowerment. But, while Furman defines those moments as feminized revisions of patriarchal structures, I see them as indications of the implacable strength of extremist patriarchal oppression. Ultimately in those scenes, patriarchal extremism interrupts the moments of female empowerment and/or causes maternal powerlessness. Reich underscores that despite their potential, these mothers are no match for patriarchal extremism.

Glimpses of feminine and maternal power

In *Master of the Return*, Reich describes a childbirth scene that epitomizes female empowerment, sisterhood, and maternal capability so much so that it perfectly juxtaposes the patriarchal theatrics of Temima's labor in Abba Kadosh's compound. When Ivriya's friend Tikva gives birth, the men wait in the other room excitedly anticipating the birth. Inside the birthing room, the women of the Uman house support Tikva through her labor. Most notably,

Shifra Puah, the elderly midwife, encapsulates female power when she morphs from an old woman into a vibrant young woman again through the act of delivering the baby. As she turns the breeched baby, Shifra Puah's skin loses its wrinkles and brown blotches and "forty years had glided like oil off of Shifra Puah's voice" (123).⁵⁷ When Shifra Puah finally delivers the baby successfully,⁵⁸ Reich describes her as a "woman in the full power and strength of her thirty years" (124). In a female sanctum, replete with womanly support, female and maternal empowerment can thrive, blossom, and, as with Shifra Puah, even cause transcendence. (At the very least, the scene encapsulates Lynne Hallstein's concept of "empowered mothering that allows for maternal agency" (269).) However, the men erroneously assume that Tikva births a son. Upon learning that he now has a daughter and not a son (as the men had mistakenly told him), Tikva's husband laments, chastising her: "If you would have listened to me and gone to the hospital God would have given us a boy... To Shyke [her first husband] you give a son, but to me—look what you give!" (126). His reaction obviously underscores his disappointment, but more significantly his admonishment exposes his discomfort with abdicating male control of Tikva's birth to a female sanctum, preferring instead that her birthing experience occur in a male-dominated hospital.

As a counter to this kind of pressure from patriarchal ideology and institutions, like Shuki's admonishment, Reich presents female dialogue in the novel to offer a feminized model of a spiritual community replete with mutual respect and kindness; it also echoes contemporary Jewish feminist discourse, like when Jewish feminists Tamar Ross and Judith Hauptman find

⁵⁷ Her name is a play on the two heroic midwives Shifrah and Puah, mentioned in Exodus. "The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah" "When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see them on the birth stool; if it is a son, you are to kill him, and if it is a daughter, she shall live (Exodus 1:15-17). However, the midwives refused to kill the babies. Exodus continues, "the midwives feared God and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them" The text continues, "and they caused the boys to live" (Exodus 1:17). The midwives then reference female empowerment and heroic subversiveness.

⁵⁸ See Judith Plaskow for feminist rituals for childbirth.

female empowerment within traditional Judaism. For example, Furman cites a scene in which Reich describes the women's conversation at the celebratory feast for the Purim meal (and Golda's polygamous marriage) where, per custom, the women sit separately from the men. The women smoke a little hashish, and, feeling free to speak openly away from the men, engage in a heartfelt and honest conversation about their spiritual desires. Unlike earlier in the narrative when men attempt to silence Ivriya at Shmuel's funeral,⁵⁹ in this scene we are privy to a deep and sincere conversation among the women. Reading it and noticing the women's authentic desire for spirituality, we can recognize that Reich is an advocate for those seeking spiritual fulfillment when the search for it and means to it are on feminist terms. We learn that when not impeded by patriarchal extremism by either men or women, the women exhibit great kindness toward each other, exemplifying what Israeli feminist Einat Ramon describes as the feminine power of *hesed* (loving-kindness) and the divine covenant of the foremothers; Reich again echoes contemporary Jewish feminist discourse, as Ramon locates this manifestation of feminist empowerment in the biblical narratives of the foremothers and in their midrashic explanation. In Reich's text, we have a similar moment, when Ivriya and Golda relay the story when Golda, who had been abused by her husband in the desert, flees and finds sanctuary in Ivriya's home. At the time, Shmuel is off on one of his spiritual quests, and a pregnant Ivriya nurses Golda back to health. When Shmuel returns, he burns the mattress that Golda had slept on because he is concerned the fetus that Ivriya is carrying would be spiritually contaminated by Golda's "impurities." Ivriya admits, "if Shmuel had been at home, I'm afraid I could never have earned the *mitzvah* of performing that *hesed* (kindness) for you...of taking you in....with loving-kindness..." (160). The conversation not only reiterates Shmuel's problematic prioritization of

⁵⁹ See page 78 in *Master of the Return*.

spiritual ideals over humanity, but it also shows what Reich's women are capable of doing when they are not impeded by extremist patriarchal ideologies.

If Reich criticizes the misplaced extremism of the men's religiosity, she simultaneously lauds the women's sincere and intense spiritual quests. Andrew Furman and Axel Stahler recognize in that sincerity how Reich constructs a revision of Jewish spirituality and religiosity based on feminist terms. The women discuss how they want to be spiritually fulfilled, whole, balanced, and closer to God. Certainly, and they will admit it, they are high from the hash, but what they say nevertheless comes across as sincere. For example, Ivriya insists, "Because the truth is, I believe a person can change. I believe in penance. I believe in *teshuva*.⁶⁰ I believe in the return" (162). Bruriah affirms, "No outsider can understand the absolute beauty of the Jewish woman's position. To the outsider, it looks like we're downtrodden and oppressed...But we know the truth, don't we?" (162) And Tikva agrees, explaining how on the secular kibbutz where she grew up, girls were expected to lose their virginity by the time they reached puberty. "It was as simple as that. Totally...secular and corrupt. They put a lot of pressure on you...That's liberation? I ask you!" (157). The rhetorical question reiterates that Reich is not advocating secularism.⁶¹ Rather Tikva (and Reich) re-imagine religion from a feminist standpoint that recognizes the importance of female sexual ownership.

The women also discuss marital dynamics, a significant inclusion since marriages in Reich's works are far from harmonious. Nevertheless, Bruriah describes a portrait of a Jewish marriage that to her is egalitarian and defined by reciprocity; a woman's spirituality is a man's "gift to her, which is made possible only through her gift to him" (158-159). She describes the

⁶⁰ Returning to religious observance or becoming newly observant.

⁶¹ After all, Ivriya's overtly secular mother Frida Mendelssohn, may be efficient, but she and her methods do not find Akiva. Her name is a play on Moses Mendelssohn, founder of the 18th century Haskalah (or Jewish enlightenment) movement, which advocated a secular and rational approach to Jewish culture, and assimilation into mainstream society.

ideal Jewish marriage as a "partnership of equals in the truest sense of the word" (158-159), although her actual marriage undermines these ideals. Bruriah's ability to locate a space of subjectivity within traditional Judaism emulates, in a positive way, what Jewish feminists Tova Hartman and Tamar Ross see in Jewish Orthodox feminism: a constant engagement and re-engagement with feminism and rabbinic Judaism.-Yet, Bruriah's credo is undermined through the ironic meaning behind her name. During talmudic times, Bruriah was the only Jewish woman infamous for her Torah scholarship; however, Bruriah disavows her namesake by speaking about how women receive spirituality through their husbands' Torah scholarship and not through their own intellectual or spiritual endeavors. Her affirmation seems to buy into the rabbinic midrashic discourse that lauds feminine loving-kindness as a religious covenant expressed through daily domestic duties (rather than ritualistic or public acts).⁶²

Thus, while Andrew Furman and Axel Stahler make a compelling argument as to Reich's feminization of Judaism, (and align with Ramon in their hermeneutics), Reich is not presenting those revisions as solutions to the larger problems found in all the novels. Those moments of female community, sincerity, and kindness are flashes of respite from the oppressive patriarchy in the narratives. They improve the issues I have already discussed, by reclaiming the female body with loving-kindness, enabling the actualization of maternal power during childbirth, and discussing an idea of egalitarian marriage. However, Reich reveals, again and again, that those feminized moments are limited, or rebuffed, impeded or halted by patriarchal intervention. And

⁶²See Einat Ramon for an analysis of how rabbinic hegemony exploited the midrashic hallowing of female loving-kindness to restrict women to the domestic realm (165).

Reich solidifies the implacable force of the women's patriarchal reality in their extremist groups.⁶³

Maternal failure and extremist charisma

In Reich's earlier texts, Andrew Furman and Axel Stahler recognize a lasting feminist revision of patriarchal extremism. However, I argue that Reich delineates how patriarchy and extremism will always suppress female maternal power to disastrous ends. In her earlier novels, Reich presents what Andrea O'Reilly describes as intensive mothering, a symptom of the patriarchal institution of motherhood, which "assigns mothers all of the responsibilities for mothering but denies them the power to define and determine their own experiences" (in *Feminist Mothering* 10). As such, Reich's mothers are forced to implement and follow the disastrous lead of their extremist husbands. Reich may present fleeting moments of maternal power but they are glimpses in the face of lasting patriarchal motherhood.

In *The Jewish War*, for example, Yehudi and his followers, women and children included, perform a mass suicide. Of course, when discussing a mass suicide that also victimizes children, we can solidly name the act as murder. How can we recognize a feminized version of Judaism, replete with loving-kindness and sisterhood, when mothers murder their children? And how can the mothers go through with it at all? The seeming unfathomable nature of the mothers' actions suggests that in the face of charismatic leadership, messianic extremism, a patriarchal social structure, and an indoctrination of an idealized sense of irrefutable resistance, mothers lose—and willingly give up—their subjective power and are taken into the dangerous fold; they follow instructions or get swept up in dangerous messages, even if they are aware of their disastrous mistakes or possess persistent foreboding. Reich describes this loss of power, saying

⁶³ See page 217 in *The Jewish War*, where Reich describes a biblical study group comprised of Yehudi's wives and the other women in the community. They openly discuss sexism in the Torah and relate it to their lives and are interrupted by the news of Yehudi's homecoming.

the women "had no choice"; the ideology "swept like fire over" them, "engulfing them all with a passion like rapture, sustaining with purpose and determination," as "the mothers in charge of feeding their families passed [out the poison]" (268-269). Here, the mothers, who used to nourish with food, now pass out the poison to their families, to their children! We are eerily dismayed at the suicide, especially considering what Shelley had earlier said of loyalty to Yehudi's mission: "He's a man of flesh and blood...Faith—blind faith—would be a disastrous mistake on our part. We are mothers, after all, with children to protect" (214). Near the end of the siege, Shelly, grief-stricken, curls up into a burial nook only asking for Golana (who has already been killed) and repeating "Oh, never, never should have let that child go" (247). And yet, a few days later in the mass suicide, she lets her still-living children (and grandchildren) perish as well. Blossom Kirshenbaum blames maternal resignation in *The Jewish War* on the power of patriarchy, but she argues, "the novel suggests that women incline toward flexibility and reconciliation, and it invites maternal attention to the fevers of patriarchal religion" (79). Her statement is compelling, yet I would go a step further to argue that Shelly is not merely reconciling with Yehudi's mission but submitting to it.

Reich also comments on the danger extremism poses to the State of Israel through Emunah's response to the imminent mass suicide. Emunah, who is arguably stronger than Shelly, also submits to the force of patriarchal extremism in the mass suicide. She articulates her submission and resignation in a letter to a friend who had witnessed the suicide at Jonestown, writing, "The day we hand the children over to their fathers, on that day we become accomplices" (247). She then makes a larger comment on the Zionist imperative and its excesses, suggesting that Jews have always possessed a fanatical approach to Israel. According to Emunah, despite modern Zionism's desire to change the Jewish attitude towards Israel (and Judaism) as

one that values a healthy approach to a balanced life, it too fell prey to ideological excess.

Emunah continues, “For centuries, my people have come to the Holy Land to die and be buried.

The novelty of Zionism was the idea of coming here to live. What hubris must have possessed us when we subscribed to the notion that we of all Jews past and to come could change things?

Felicity, I am buried alive” (247).⁶⁴ Her letter is telling because it suggests that the dangers of extremism in Israel loomed from its inception, but “by handing the “children to the fathers” (and to patriarchal control) mothers enable that latent extremism to actualize. Though Shelly and Emunah regretfully blame themselves for not protecting their children, Reich provides the reader with a holistic view of extremism, which shows that the mother can only protect the child from extremism when she is not impeded by patriarchy herself.

In the penultimate passage of the book, Reich reiterates that the mass suicide (in the name of patriarchal, messianic Zionism) is a crime against children and is symptomatic of weak female leadership. The book ends with Colonel Lapidot’s musings on Masada: an ironic mediation since Lapidot does not yet know of the mass suicide beneath his feet. Looking across at Ma’arat Hamachpela, Lapidot has a vision where he sees a “ghostly procession, a tall slender bride-like figure in a white robe at its head, trailed by a long column of smaller, nearly transparent figures, also clothed in white,” figures that seems to be “dancing toward some heavenly being, yet never quite reaching him” (269). We can read the scene in many ways, including Axel Stahler’s interpretation that the figure represents the Shekinah, the female divine presence (209), or perhaps a precursor to Temima.⁶⁵ Whomever the figure signifies, however, we can certainly read the “smaller...figures” as children dressed in shrouds. They represent the children who have just been killed underground. By including, “all nearly transparent figures,” Reich is clearly alluding

⁶⁴ Notably, Yehudi and Hoshea came to Israel by smuggling themselves in coffins (50-53).

⁶⁵ The medieval rabbinic and kabbalistic text the Zohar describes the messianic age as the merging of the Shekinah with the male version of God, suggesting that the messianic age will bring equality to the sexes.

to At'halta D'Geula, whom Reich had earlier described in the same way.⁶⁶ As such, Lapidot sees a procession of the ghosts of abused children. They are led by (an also dead) female figure who is ineffective (“never quite reaching [the heavenly being]”). Ending the narrative with their procession, Reich highlights that the real victims of extremism are children.

In last few lines of *Master of the Return* and *The Jewish War*, Reich solidifies her warning about the future of Israel and Zionism when patriarchal extremists pervade power structures and corrupt families. Many scholars gloss over Reich's endings, suggesting that they all possess a strange tonal shift from humor to stoic seriousness that cannot be reconciled.⁶⁷ I argue that the novels' tonal shifts bolster Reich's precautionary message about the dangers of extremism in Israel. It is as if Reich changes tone abruptly to isolate and emphasize her message. Furthermore, the endings reiterate that despite the presence of feminized revisions of motherhood and Judaism, patriarchal extremism overpowers those feminized glimmerings in dangerous ways. For example, at the end of *Master of the Return*, which describes how after Akiva is returned home from the foiled Akedah, Ivriya and Akiva begin normal life again. Andrew Furman makes a persuasive argument that the scene projects a feminized model of parenthood and Jewish Orthodoxy, where Ivriya instinctively meets Akiva's needs (187-188). And indeed Reich describes a beautifully peaceful scene, which contrasts strongly with much of the novel's tone:

In the morning Ivriya poured some of the milk into a glass and placed it on the table in front of him. She cut a thick slice of bread and spread it with translucent honey. She rolled her wheelchair up to the table, set her elbows on top and rested her chin in the sling of her palms (241).

⁶⁶ See page 103 in *The Jewish War*: “At'halta D'Geula, tiny, nearly transparent in her thinness, sat all day in the courtyard of the Forefather's Compound clutching the silken edge of her blanket...”

⁶⁷ See, for example, author Faye Kellerman's review: “Jewish Pilgrims, Comic Progress.”

As Furman explains, Ivriya enjoys meeting her child's needs with natural simplicity. Reich continues, portraying Ivriya's protection of Akiva and the consequential sustenance he receives from his mother: "Not for one second did she take her eyes off the child as he ate the bread and the honey and drank the milk. This was mother food. Each time the child drew the mother food away from his face, the down above his upper lip was filmed in white, and his breath dripped sweetness" (240). Ivriya also watches over him vigilantly as his protector, an understandable vigilance considering what had just happened to him. Addressing both Ivriya's ability to nurture and her maternal instinct to protect, Kirshenbaum reads the scene as an example of how the narrative "celebrates the triumph of life over absolutism - thanks to maternal vigilance" (75).

However, Furman and Kirshenbaum do not point out the loaded significance of the fact that the "mother food" is milk and honey, a reference to the biblical account of Canaan (or the land of Israel) that the Israelites encountered when leaving the desert and which was described in those terms (Numbers 13:27). Reich ends the passage: "Flowing with milk and with honey. For the sake of this milk, and this honey, you must speak no ill of the land, and of its inhabitants say no unkind word" (240). Reich alludes to the promise of Israel, then for the Israelites, and now in the Zionist imperative,⁶⁸ and relays that Ivriya, the mother, says nothing about the dangers of extremism. The mother stifles her own voice. She nurtures her child despite and because they are surrounded by dangers. Her power is strong but not strong enough. For the sake of "this milk, this honey," modern-day Israel, the woman must remain silent. Despite Akiva's return, the kidnapping irrevocably wounded Akiva and Ivriya (240). Ivriya may feed Akiva with love, she may sustain him, but she does not say anything beyond the kitchen table. She can give him food,

⁶⁸ Axel Stahler interprets the passage to mean that for the mother, food is a replacement for the land, suggesting that the mother gives sustenance to the child rather than occupy herself with issues of territory, as the father is prone to do (214).

but Reich begs the question: how else can Ivriya protect her son against extremists like Abba Nissim?

The Jewish War similarly ends the narrative with an ominous foreboding cloaked in irony. Lapidot closes the novel relaying his skepticism about the veracity of Josephus' account of Masada:

The Jewish War was a novel... Masada certainly was real...But as for the mass suicide that took place there, all that remains of significance is Josephus' report, and as a historian, Josephus was not reliable...Josephus was a notorious opportunist and self-server, a writer of fiction (270).

By referencing the writer (Josephus) and the text (Josephus' account of Masada), Reich comments on her own narrative and the role it has in exposing the danger of extremists. Lapidot's musings ironically underscore the unfathomable reality of extremist actions, since Lapidot cannot believe something as horrific as mass suicide could happen (in Israel), when Yehudi and his followers have already killed themselves under Lapidot's watch. By juxtaposing Lapidot's naïve perspective and the reality of Yehudi's horrific actions, Reich distances Zionism (as represented by Lapidot) from the terrors of extremism, since Lapidot cannot even fathom a mass suicide. That said, Reich does not diminish the urgency of her critique on extremism just because of Lapidot's naivete. In fact, his ironic skepticism heightens the ending's ominous tone. First, it suggests that extremists pose a disastrous danger to Israel because even a seasoned Israeli colonel cannot prevent, let alone anticipate mass murder. Second, by disproving Lapidot's skepticism with Yehudi's suicide, Reich asserts that her narrative should not be attributed to mere fiction. Rather she is urging us to take it seriously, seriously enough to view it as warning against the very real threat of extremism in Israel. Reich completes both *Master of the Return*

and *The Jewish War* by describing the disastrous repercussions of patriarchal messianic extremism on the Jewish family: the Jewish family is either irreversibly damaged or eradicated and the mother's power is disabled. And Reich suggests that if patriarchal extremism goes unchecked (by the powerless mother), the future of Israel is at risk.

Temima and the feminist revision

In *Philistine Foreskins*, Reich heightens her critique of patriarchal extremism and subtly and ironically presents a way to rectify it, by tacitly advocating for Judith Plaskow's concept of egalitarian feminist Judaism. Reich develops Temima into a feminist redeemer who tries to revise the patriarchal issues present in all of Reich's Israel-centered novels, namely the loss of the female body, the female body's subjugation to violence and abuse, and the absence of the female experience in the Torah. Reich presents no trepidation in her narrative, as Cynthia Ozick describes it as a "feminist novel like no other," Temima as an "oracular heroine," and Reich as a "daring seer." As such, Temima and her feminist revisions seemingly reverse or attempt to reverse male destructive messianic extremism. However, through Temima's failure as a messianic figure and mother, Reich ultimately exposes her revisions' limitations. Because Temima still fails, despite her bravery, strength and charisma, we can recognize that the narrative advocates a radically changed feminized Judaism that aligns with Plaskow's feminist vision calling for a non-hierarchal Judaism devoid of chosenness.⁶⁹

Reich most obviously identifies Temima as a feminist savior through the evolution of her name from Tema Bavli to Ima Temima Ba'alatOv. Reich initially describes Tema, as "perfection from Babylonia" and as a child of the Galut (i.e. Babylonia),⁷⁰ Tema already possesses the

⁶⁹ Though Reich published the book in 2013, the novel does not allude to Plaskow's more recent stance, which encourages that dissolution of binary gendering. See "The View from Here Gender Theory and Gendered Realities."

⁷⁰ The first Jewish exile occurred in 586 B.C.E when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish temple, exiling the Jewish population out of Israel.

spiritual potential to be someone remarkable once she reaches the Land of Israel. Eventually in Israel, Tema becomes Ima Temima, the mother Temima, mistress of the ovary, a name that articulates her role as feminist leader, who is also empowered by her maternal capabilities. It is important to note her redemptive power is apparently tied with her role as the mother, a concept mirrored in contemporary Jewish feminism where women are creating Jewish ritualistic practices that celebrate feminine lifecycle events, like childbirth,⁷¹ and which suggests that Temima represents the cutting edge of Jewish and Israeli feminist agendas. It is also an ironic title, since Temima fails as a mother.

Throughout the narrative, Temima exhibits fortitude, wisdom and power. As a child, she is preternaturally smart and curious. She is able to stop her abusive father from raping her by chastising him. (But she had to suffer three horrific years of sexual abuse first.) She refuses to marry any of the potential matches her father and community suggested, despite great pressure, including being subjected to a Rabbi's exorcism. Once in Israel, she becomes renowned for her feminized and insightful interpretations of the Bible and her spiritual wisdom. She evolves into a sort of Deborah figure, sitting under a tree meditating and divulging wisdom. She creates a passive resistance when Abba Kadosh tries to appropriate her birthing experience. She defends Ibn Kadosh when he is publicly lashed at Abba Kadosh's compound. Overall, she refuses to irrevocably submit to any man who tries to control her.

Eventually, she creates a loyal following comprised of inner-circle "prophetesses" and outer circle groupies, in addition to thousands of people who visit and write her for guidance and blessings. Her first loyal follower is Kol-Isha Erva, with whom she escapes Abba Kadosh's compound. With Kol-Isha in Jerusalem, Temima becomes the messianic figure of Ima Temima.

⁷¹See Judith Plaskow and Tamar Ross' discussion on contemporary Jewish feminism: "The View from Here Gender Theory and Gendered Realities."

Unlike the self-proclaimed messianism of Abba Kadosh, Temima's messianic persona arises from her acts of courageous loving-kindness. She takes on a mythical status through the way she performs the "tahara" or Jewish cleansing of just-deceased bodies, considered in Judaism as one of the highest forms of loving-kindness someone can perform because the kindness can never be reciprocated. Her exceptional reputation is justified, as her altruism is sincere. But her role as a savior really germinates with Kol-Isha's help, when Kol-Isha becomes a bodyguard/prophetess. They work together to save abused Jewish women from domestic violence. That altruistic collaboration is significant because it indicates Temima's sincerely good intentions and her prioritization of sisterhood, a prioritization that certainly contrasts with the selfish spiritual journeys of the extremist men. Through those early scenes of Kol-Isha and Temima's partnership, Reich engages with gender issues that many women in Israel currently endure, namely domestic violence, sexual subjugation, and social alienation. In a sense, by giving shelter to abused women and becoming a beacon of feminine power, Temima also becomes the adoptive mother of disenfranchised women in Israel. Engaging with domestic violence, Reich specifically depicts the overarching intimidation of patriarchal hegemony and how women dangerously internalize abuse: many of the women prevent their own salvation. For example, while Temima and Kol-Isha search for women to help, Reich describes how one woman silences herself to evade Kol-Isha's preternaturally hypersonic hearing (of cries). While the woman is beaten by her husband, she shoos Kol-Isha away and says "It's me, I deserve it.... Go away, it's nobody's business... There are ten children to marry off" (260). The woman's protest alludes to the pressures on Hareidi women to maintain the status quo so as not to ostracize their children from the larger community.⁷² Accordingly, Reich touches on a current discourse in Israeli feminism. As Irit Umanit explains, the simulacra of domestic harmony in Hareidi communities is a myth

⁷² Hareidimm is another term for ultra-Orthodox Jews.

that is just recently debunked, and domestic violence shelters are a relatively new phenomenon in Israel, a phenomenon that Israeli feminists worked vigilantly to establish (140).

When Temima takes in the Yemenite Mazal, a cleaning lady of a SatmarHasidic yeshiva, Reich concurrently addresses the racist disenfranchisement Israeli Mizrahim encounter in the Ashkenazi Israeli hegemony and the disenfranchisement of Ashkenazi women within that hegemony.⁷³ Many Israeli feminist scholars have newly engaged with the plight of the Mizrahi women,⁷⁴ and the historical crimes that they suffered at the hands of Ashkenazi seculars and ultra-Orthodox Hareidim, incorporating feminism in a post-Zionist critique. Similarly, Reich presents Mazal as a woman severely suffering from her disenfranchisement so much so that she appears crazy, ironically talking to herself in Yiddish (the language of Ashkenazi Jews) and pouring a slop bucket on pedestrians in the street. Reich heightens the dynamic between Ashkenazi hegemony and Mizrahis by including one of the neighborhood “righteous [Satmar] maidens,” who says to Temima:

“[She claims] that we [Satmar Hasidim] stole her babies from their hospital bassinets after she gave birth to them and told them they were dead. I’m not saying yes, I’m not saying no. But just between us, it would not have been such a bad thing for these poor dark *kinderlakh* [children] to be handed over to families that would raise them in the proper religious way.”

Her statement makes historical reference in the Yemenite Children Affair, the alleged kidnapping of children of Yemenite descent in 1950s Israel, a gross example of sephardi disenfranchisement in Israel, and expresses the maiden’s racist attitudes towards Mizrahim. In

⁷³ Referring to Jews of middle Eastern or North African descent. Mizrahim is often conflated with Sephardim, though Sephardim also includes Jews who originated in Spain and Portugal.

⁷⁴ For more studies on mizrahi women in Israel, see Pnina Motzafi Haller’s *In the Cement Boxes* and “Scholarship, Identity, and Power. Mizrahi Women in Israel.” See also Ella Shohat’s “Rupture and Return.”

the incident with Mazal, who becomes one of Temima's most powerful followers, Temima (and Reich) provides a feminist revision of the narrative of a lowly, disenfranchised woman. As becomes Temima's habit, and a sign of her creative powers, she gives her followers new names. Temima changes Mazal (which means a divine sort of luck, something Mazal clearly lacks) to Rizpah, which literally means floor but which also has a heroic biblical namesake. The maiden says, "Rizpah, -very nice. It means 'floor' in Loshon Kodesh-no? Good. She mopped our floors, so now she'll mop yours" (15).

In response to the maiden, Reich addresses two other key points in contemporary Jewish feminist discourse: female education and the concept of menstrual impurity. Addressing education, Reich elucidates why the maiden does not pick up on the biblical reference of Rizpah from the book of Samuel, who had vigilantly protected the corpses of her murdered sons. According to Reich, in the Satmar community, girls do not engage with vast biblical exegesis. Instead they are only instructed: "to kosher a chicken and [in] the laws of *niddah* relating to menstrual impurity..., all the rules and regulations of regarding getting rid of the blood... that was education enough for them" (15). As a girl, the maiden would only have learned how to cook (and prepare food according to kosher standards), and reflecting the hareidi concept of *niddah*, she would have been indoctrinated with the sentiment that her biological female functions are dirty and must be cleansed. The concept of *niddah* and rabbinic control over the female body, sexual relations, and menstrual cycle are significant issues in Jewish feminist discourse.⁷⁵ It is beyond the scope of my argument to address them. But we can recognize that Reich presents what she thinks is an extremist ultra-Orthodox view of *niddah* and *mikvah* (the ritual bath), (which contrasts with the ultra-Orthodox feminist stance that recognizes *mikvah* as an

⁷⁵ See Blu Greenberg, Tova Hartman, Tamar Ross and Judith Plaskow.

empowering ritual for Jewish women).⁷⁶ According to Reich, extremist Satmars view mikvah as a means to cleanse the woman of her innate dirtiness and impurity.

Reich heightens her feminist critique by not only exposing the Satmar's damaging indoctrination of feminine uncleanliness (as opposed to female capability) but also by narrating Rizpah's biblical story of maternal suffering and strength. It is a story not well known to the maiden, who would never be privy to such a narrative in her limited Jewish education. Reich writes: "Why should Temima have expected them to recognize this reference to the concubine of King Saul, Rizpah ... Rizpah sat guard there from the beginning ... and she would not allow the birds of the sky to touch the bodies of her sons"(15), Again Reich articulates another incident of child sacrifice for the sake of "important affairs of men."⁷⁷ Temima's feminized revision presents the biblical Rizpah as a devoted mother who resists her children's sacrifice (even posthumously), and who suffers and loves deeply. It is a fitting name for Reich's Rizpah, considering the tragedy of her lost children, and is meant to empower her. To the patriarchal (and Ashkenazi) ultra-Orthodox, whom the maiden suffers under as well, Rizpah's identity is synonymous literally with the bottom, the floor, but Reich revises that image with Temima's biblical interpretation. In the elucidatory scene with the Satmar maiden and Yemenite Rizpah, Reich presents issues that are at the forefront of Israeli and Jewish feminist discourse. Furthermore, Reich heightens the import of Temima's role as a feminist redeemer, and seemingly mirrors a third-wave feminist perspective on the diversity of women, because Temima does not umbrella all Jewish women under one category. Rather, she recognizes the nuances of women's issues in Israel, seeing the

⁷⁶ While many Jewish feminists see the rabbinic role in the laws of niddah as invasive, there is a new wave in Jewish orthodox feminism that seeks out ways to continue to adhere to the niddah tradition by beautifying and empowering it. (See Ross' discussion in "The View from Here Gender Theory and Gendered Realities"). Furthermore, many Orthodox communities now accept female poskim (or halachic arbiters) on issues of niddah, a groundbreaking move.

⁷⁷ In the story, Rizpah's sons are killed as pawns in a struggle for political power between King David and his opposition.

distinction between the situations of women who are Hasidic, who are poor, who are Ashkenazi, who are Mizrahi, in order to sufficiently address and rectify them.

Temima's most obvious feminist revision is her gendered interpretations of the Torah, which provide a female perspective and reveal the subjectivity of its female characters. Reich fills her novel with Temima's fascinating perspectives on biblical narratives that are closely aligned with Alicia Ostriker's biblical hermeneutics and, as counter-interpretations of the Torah, represent a trend in contemporary Jewish feminism. For example, again addressing the Akedah, Temima sees it with unapologetic irreverence. Giving her revised account of the Akedah, she inhabits the role of Sarah, saying, "I should have never have let the child out of my sight for a minute, I should never have left him alone with that old man—I'll never forgive myself" (136).⁷⁸ She asserts, "I am the original woman of valor...He was always hearing voices, the old man—but the true test is to distinguish the voice that is meant to be disobeyed" (136). Her reading is obviously irreverent and reverses the traditionally apologetic interpretation of Abraham's act, simultaneously providing the mother's perspective and de-glorifying Abraham. It also reiterates the theme of child sacrifice by the male extremist and the necessity of maternal protection in the face of it.

Leprosy and feminism

In Temima's decision to relocate her headquarters to a former leper hospital in Jerusalem, Reich finally solidifies Temima's role as messianic feminist redeemer, one who intends to reverse/rectify the oppression of patriarchal messianic extremism. Her messianic mission is subversively intended, as it welcomes and redeems those who are most wounded by patriarchal extremism. On a literal level, a leper is one who is quarantined, separated, ostracized from society because of his/her illness. Similarly, Temima's congregation is comprised of the

⁷⁸ Notice the similarity to Shelly's grief-stricken chant at the end of *The Jewish War*. See my page 38.

disenfranchised. They are mostly women who have been abused or maltreated by men, and whose abuse was sanctioned by the structure of their extremist patriarchal society.⁷⁹ In this way, she pays homage to Broner's *A Weave of Women*, since Broner also created a counter-space and narrative for women in Jerusalem. But Temima is trying to usher in a new age, an age that will rectify the problems that Broner's women suffered under. Temima intentionally makes a spectacle of the relocation to the leper hospital so that the procession becomes a ritual of sorts, marking a beginning of a feminized Judaism open to those who have been oppressed. The procession, on the anniversary of Miriam's death,⁸⁰ is supposed to mark a new age, a significant moment that carries the weight of revision. Reich also inserts various biblical allusions that refer to the period of Moses and the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, suggesting that the procession represents a new beginning, a new relationship with Torah and God, and a redeeming moment where the downtrodden are raised. While the procession journeys through ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim, many of the Hareidim curse them and throw stones, a reaction that Temima anticipated. She chose that route intentionally, "into the most narrow and choked straits of pious conviction [...] in order to purge them of the mentality of slaves, in order to assert her rights and stake her claim"(28). The passage references the biblical idea that the long-winded journey through the desert was a purgation exercise to rid the Israelites of a slave mentality. It also further develops Temima as a counter figure to right-wing orthodoxy, as a marker of resistance.

So Temima becomes a Moses-like figure, who also pays homage to Miriam. Along the way, she picks up all types who join the throng: sincere penitents, lunatics (suffering from

⁷⁹ Kol-Isha was a concubine to Abba Kadosh, whose daughter was taken from her. Rizpah's children were similarly kidnapped by the Ashkenazi, Hareidi community. Aish Zara, formerly Essie Rappaport from Brooklyn and Temima's childhood friend, is a Hareidi woman, who was taken from school as a teenager and married off in Israel to a physically abusive husband. Originally Anna Oblenskaya, Cozbi is a Russian immigrant, who upon arriving in Israel was tricked and sold into prostitution in Tel Aviv.

⁸⁰To right the wrong that was done to Miriam, "to correct the this slighting of a women who had always tried her best to do the right thing," (27) namely her leprosy-induced ostracism. Broner likewise appropriated Miriam as a symbolic image for women's rights, most notably in *The Women's Haggada* (1977).

Jerusalem syndrome), “Muslim girls in head scarves and tight jeans..., the gay Arab boys from Nablus...,” Israelis [on] cell phones, immigrant workers—the Thais, curious American tourists, recently released convicts who are now Breslav Hasidim” (37). Amidst the chaos of her procession, her messianic persona is solidified. For example, as she looks down from her new quarters in the hospital she sees a crowd of people chanting, “Te-Tem-Ima-Temima-from – Brooklyn,” (34) a direct nod to the Breslav chant about Rebbe Nachman, which when said is supposed to expedite the messianic arrival. Furthermore, when all the upheaval dies down, her congregation is mainly comprised of disenfranchised Jewish women. Through Temima’s evolvment into a messianic figure with a reforming and feminist agenda, Reich seemingly presents an antidote to the destructive patriarchal extremism pervasive in her Israel-centered novels. By revealing Temima’s evolved persona with such fanfare, Reich underscores the hope and promise of Temima’s mission. However, the hoopla is ironic because Temima inevitably fails as a messianic feminist redeemer. In a sense, Reich heralds Temima’s potential only to solidify that it is inadequate.

The failure of the redeemer and radical feminist Judaism

Temima may be the savior of many women; she may enlighten with a female perspective; she may empower women—like Kol-Isha, who becomes her biographer—to have a voice; she may resist patriarchal and extremist hegemony. But she does not bring the Messiah. She does not bring redemption. In fact, she cannot even redeem her own children. Instead, she is a mother who abandons her children to remain in the patriarchal and extremist societies of their fathers.

Reich ends the narrative with longing: Temima has died and the last few of her congregants (including Kol-Isha) await her resurrection. Reich closes *Philistine Foreskins* by

reiterating Temima's messianic failure and her followers' messianic longing. While their futile longing bears similarities to Chabon's ending of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Reich uses it to present a solution to the problems Zionism possesses, instead of a hopeless despair in Israel's future, as in Chabon. The ending reveals that to Reich, Zionism's egalitarian promise can be actualized, but that actualization is contingent on radical change in Judaism and Israel. Consider the message that Kol-Isha receives from Temima: Kol-Isha finds a letter (or kvitel) addressed to her from Temima, who is supposedly beyond the grave. In the letter, she tells Kol-Isha to stop awaiting her, as she will not return as the Messiah: "I have shed my snake skins, all of them false and diseased - the idea of there, the idea of master, the idea of messiah.... It was all vanity and idolatry. Do not believe in it...Do not wait for me. I shall not return" (362). The passage is dismal when considering how invested its recipient is in the messianic message of Temima. And it is notably obscure, except that Reich seems to suggest that Temima is in an act of selfless, self-negation. From a gender perspective, the letter describes a leveling of dynamics between men and women.⁸¹ Temima also rejects her messianic platform, naming it vanity and idolatry. Temima "sheds" her skins: her roles as mother, master, and Messiah, resonating with Plaskow's concept of non-hierarchical Judaism. Plaskow writes in her seminal work *Standing Again at Sinai* that Judaism needs a "fundamental transformation of both structures of leadership and sexual roles" (228). But this transformation is contingent on the eradication of both hierarchal structure and a sense of chosenness (that is so integral to Judaism, since it perpetuates the chosen people concept). Temima's letter is certainly radical, as she disavows her former roles, completely dissolving her previous identification with and organization of the world. In her

⁸¹ The passage begins, "From where I am now, an eternal place without past, present, or future, I see and I know everything but blessedly I am liberated from caring. Hava and Adam, prototypical wife and husband, are winded together in the form of two serpents mouth to tail; they have left the mothers and fathers; they never had to devour each other for eternity thereby becoming one flesh...."(362).

treatise, Plaskow writes of a similar dissolution of roles, but Plaskow emphasizes hierarchal ones and the relationship of identitative difference to that hierarchy. Plaskow writes that "[i]deas and structures within Judaism that reflect and foster models of domination [...] must be reconstructed for the sake of a different mode of relation" (234).⁸² Plaskow sees the feminist mission as a holistic one that can help rectify the world at large. To Plaskow (and most Jewish feminists), feminism is ethically and justly driven: difference is embraced and not hierarchically structured, oppression is eradicated in the face of all-encompassing egalitarian openness, acceptance, and mutual appreciation of difference. As such, Plaskow does not advocate for the complete abolition of Judaic tradition and thought, but suggests that a real upheaval needs to occur in Judaism and in Israel that eradicates oppression.⁸³ Plaskow continues, "A spirituality that emerges out of the vision and sometime reality of diverse, egalitarian communities, that knows God as present within—not above—community as its binder, sustainer, and goad, can nourish and is nourished by the critique and transformation of all structures of oppression" (234). Through her treatise, she explains that in order to achieve gender equality and Jewish fulfillment, women cannot just adapt to and fit into masculine-defined spaces, like other Jewish feminists have postulated.⁸⁴ Women should not relate to Judaism, God, spirituality, and Israel through the lens of male experience. As such, while women should be given the freedom to participate in traditional

⁸² Plaskow continues, "a Torah that mirrors and reproduces the power of men over women," an Israel that in conception and communal form constructs difference as hierarchy, a notion of God as dominating Other, a legal structure that defines sexuality in terms of possession (284).

⁸³ More recently, Plaskow has been arguing to dismantle the gender binary in favor of viewing the world through multiple genders. Israeli feminist Hanna Herzog has similarly argued.

⁸⁴ The Women of the Wall movement (WOW) is one of the most vocal and popular feminist movements in contemporary Israel, most likely because of its highly publicized and controversial activities at the Western Wall. It describes its mission: "to achieve the social and legal recognition of our right, as women, to wear prayer shawls, pray, and read from the Torah collectively and out loud at the Western Wall. (WOW website)." Certainly, WOW advocates for an egalitarian Judaism, but its female rituals and spaces are emulations of male ritual and spaces (kippot, tallit, etc.)

prayer *minyan*,⁸⁵ read from the Torah, be ordained as Rabbis, or put on Tefillin, Judaism needs to be redefined and molded equally by a feminine perspective, and by female experience and memory.

And indeed it seems as if Reich adheres to Plaskow's call "to critique oppression" with Temima's revisions, which I have already delineated. But does Temima "transform" oppression? Does she redefine Judaism from a female perspective? If we look closely at Temima's messianic movement, we can recognize that despite its acceptance of traditionally disenfranchised women (and despite Temima's closing letter), it still suffers from the same hierarchal structure of male-dominated hegemony and, as such, does not actualize the transformation Plaskow describes (or that perhaps Temima desires). Put another way, Temima's feminist revisions still suffer within the confines of a male-defined Judaism. For example, when Temima marches through the street of Mea Shearim looking for victims of domestic violence, a notably valiant and necessary act of salvation, she dresses as a Hasidic grand Rebbe. While the costume is certainly an act of resistance and antagonism, it still lacks imagination or revisioning. Wearing the Hasidic garb, she appropriates a male conception of Jewish leadership and salvation.

Plaskow advocates for a reimagining of Jewish ritual that includes a female perspective, molded by female memory and experience. It would seem that Temima would advocate for the same. But beside having a lenient view towards women's dance, and music, and divulging feminist biblical exegesis, Temima's congregation does not really celebrate feminine experience, or even motherhood. She may be referred to as "Ima" Temima, but she does not focus on maternal power at all. In the leper hospital, there are barely any encounters with children and

⁸⁵ A minyan is a prayer group that according to rabbinic law is comprised of ten or more men. Women are not included in the counting of members in a minyan.

mothers, noteworthy since most of its members are mothers. Where are their children? Where can the women express their maternal power? Temima's group instead emulates a traditionally male congregation but one that is now inhabited mostly by women and it is one that does not combine maternal power with Jewish practice, ignoring a major component of female experience.

Temima's revision is also limited by the hierarchical structure of her congregation. Even in the leper hospital, which symbolizes the counter-hegemonic, the various prophetesses arrange themselves by seniority and privilege; they possess an inner circle that demands respect from the subordinates. Certainly it is hard to imagine any type of organization that does not necessitate some type of hierarchy. However, Reich's depiction of Temima's hierarchical organization is notable. For example, Kol-Isha states "Aishet-Lot ...threw herself on top of me despite the fact that I am her superior in the school for prophetesses deserving of her respect and pinned me to the floor" (357). The passage has an added dimension of critique since Kol-Isha's comment seems almost satiric, highlighting the silliness (and ineffectiveness) of such a hierarchy.

Temima's messianic mission is further tainted by the sentiment of chosenness, a concept that Reich implicitly criticizes throughout the novel, since it is a fundamental quality of extremist groups. Plaskow similarly writes about the problem of chosenness within Judaism and in Israel, arguing that chosenness is dangerous because it can justify any sort of abuse on the non-Jewish or Jewish Other (118). Reich repeatedly presents the abuse of the Other's body in *Philistine Foreskins*. We see it in Temima's abuse as a child and Essie's abuse as a married woman, Rizpah's (on her Mizrahi female body), Ketura's murder (on her Arab female body). We see it in the vitriolic statements Hasidim make to the non-Hasidim during Temima's infiltration of "their

neighborhood.”⁸⁶ In fact, what is religious chosenness if not a feeling of holy separateness that is built on hierarchical difference? Plaskow’s concept of chosenness is significant to my argument not only because of her feminist critique but also because the concept of chosenness is the core foundation of messianic extremism (of all types of extremism): that chosenness dictates a hierarchical differentiation between us and them, “our glorious mission over their sordid existence.”

Recognizing the ontological imperative of feminist Judaism, Plaskow suggests that eradicating gendered chosenness and hierarchy within Judaism and Israel creates a religious, gendered, racial, and economic egalitarian space, and as such enables the feminist mission of *tikkun olam*, rectifying the world. However, Temima does not create the non-hierarchical space that Plaskow describes. She does not encourage Jewish practice based on feminine experience but rather mimics a male template of Judaism. And because her congregation still suffers from a feeling of chosenness (despite its acceptance of the disenfranchised), Temima cannot actualize *tikkun olam* and fails her messianic mission.

The failure of motherhood

Reich reveals Temima’s failure as a redemptive figure most strikingly in Temima’s maternal weakness. Temima’s title as *Ima* (of the disenfranchised) ironically underscores both her inability as a mother and her failure as an agent of salvation. As such, Reich again emphasizes that the intersection of the maternal with the extremist is a debilitating dynamic, even when the mother is a messianic redeemer. Through Temima’s failure Reich reiterates what

⁸⁶ Reich also utilizes Hebrew semantics to underscore the dangers of chosenness and its relationship with extremism. Consider that two of the novel’s most patriarchal, problematic and destructive men, Abba Kadosh and Kaddish Lustiger, possess names that are derivatives of the Hebrew word “Kadesh.” While “Kadesh” means holiness or sanctification, it also means separateness, alluding to the Judaic concept that to be holy one must separate from the profane. In the context of our narrative, and when we consider the depravity of Abba Kadosh (a megalomaniac) and Kaddish Lustiger (a rapist and pedophile), we can recognize the inherent dangers in the association between separateness and holiness; that association becomes dangerous when in excess because it allows the abusers to justify their crimes with chosenness.

feminist maternal scholars assert: that the maternal experience is and should be a fundamental component of feminist criticism. But Temima is a bad mother, and, with varying degrees of willingness, sacrifices her children by abandoning them in patriarchal communities, not entirely unlike the way that the extremist men sacrifice their children for their mission. During the narrative, Temima gives birth to three children, her son Pinkhas with Howie, her son Kook Immanuel with the Toiter Rav (but whom Howie thinks is his), and her daughter Hagar with Abba Kadosh. All her children suffer or die prematurely due to a conflation of Temima's negligence and the children's upbringing in messianic movements. Like Shelly and Emunah, Temima eventually allows her children to suffer at the hands of patriarchal extremism. As such, Temima reveals that she has not been able to actualize empowered and feminist mothering.

Consider Andrea O'Reilly's definition of feminist mothering:

a counter narrative of motherhood, [seeking] to interrupt the master narrative of motherhood to imagine and implement a view of mothering that is *empowering* to women. [There are} anti-sexist childrearing and maternal activism. Both perspectives emphasize maternal power and ascribe agency to mothers and value to motherwork. As a consequence, mothering becomes reconfigured as a social act (*Between the Baby* 326).

On the one hand, Reich presents Temima as in line with O'Reilly's definition, since, to her followers, Temima is the antithesis of patriarchal mothering. However, Temima abandons her biological children in their patriarchal spheres. As such, she mothers in the social sphere (as an activist) but abdicates the job of rearing her children (with an anti-sexist perspective) in the

private sphere. Through Temima's inability to fully actualize empowered mothering in the face of patriarchal extremism, Reich suggests that her redemptive feminist revision is a failure.⁸⁷

We first see Temima's failure to mother when, due to no fault of her own but born from her husband's prioritization of messianic fundamentalism over familial relationships, she is unable to nurse her newborn son. When Howie takes Pinkhas away from Temima's care so that he can circumcise him in Hebron, he already conducts a sacrifice for his politico-religious ideals over familial responsibility. However, Temima later willingly abandons her maternal care of the child. After that first forced separation, Temima abandons Pinkhas again and again, fully aware of her actions. For example, she leaves an angry Howie: "With a slight farewell wave of her hand to her son, she turned and began to make her way out of the camp, the child following behind, walking and weeping like Paltiel [Pinkhas] 'Ima [mother] please don't go, please don't go, Ima,' the boy was sobbing" (230). The scene is heart-wrenching, but Reich certainly does not portray Temima here as a mother who is forcibly separated from her child. Willingly walking away from her only surviving son, Temima appears callous and cruel here, even though she is justifiably leaving her husband. She may be rejecting patriarchal motherhood but she is in no way expressing empowered/feminist mothering. She leaves her child under Howie's care, the same man who caused the death of her second child. However, Reich reiterates the role extremism plays in Temima's inability to find maternal subjectivity, by referencing Palitel and Mikhal, with Temima in the powerless role of Mikhal and Pinkhas as Paltiel the innocent pawn, ultimately suggesting that Temima's maternal powerlessness is a consequence of extremist, patriarchal hegemony. With Temima's maternal failures, Reich delineates the debilitating force oppressive extremism has over maternal capability. Temima not only abandons Pinkhas but she also

⁸⁷ Her daughter Hagar and her son Paltiel arrive at Temima's compound but she does not foster a constructive parent/child relationship with either of them.

abandons her daughter Hagar in the Bnei HaElohim compound to be married off as a juvenile, actions that she admits are reprehensible. Right after leaving Pinkhas in Hebron with Howie, Temima acknowledges her sacrifice and muses that she should rename her son Isaac, since she sacrificed him.⁸⁸ Similarly, shortly after abandoning Hagar at the Bnei HaElohim compound, when Hagar is just three years old, Temima “thumps her fist against her chest over her heart [in act of repentance] ‘I have sacrificed all my children here,’ she cried. ‘Oh, my daughter, I opened my mouth to God and could not take it back’” (257).⁸⁹ Considering that Temima is aware of how she abandons her children, I also argue that her maternal failures go right to the heart of our discussion: that empowered mothering is disabled in the face of patriarchal extremism.

Despite Temima’s feminist revisionism, resistance and strength, she is still powerless as a mother, her most significant failure. Reich uses the three novels to develop the intersection of the maternal with patriarchal extremism in Israel, revealing how the mother cannot function appropriately in the face of dangerous patriarchal extremism. In *Philistine Foreskins*, despite and interlaced with Temima’s various feminist revisions, including when she herself becomes a messianic figure with a strong following, her maternal role is inadequate. I am not suggesting that Reich is presenting motherhood as the definitive role of women. I am, however, arguing that Reich develops the powerless mother to 1) reiterate the importance of feminist mothering in feminist discourse and imperatives and to 2) expose that the excesses of extreme religion and Zionism are fundamentally dangerous and destructive (to children), to the extent that even if a woman like Temima is in charge of an extremist group (that has a patriarchal template), children

⁸⁸ The Toiter Rav chastises Howie for sacrificing Kook Immanuel for the sake of Howe’s messianic settler, calling his action idolatry (193).

⁸⁹ Susan Reimer-Torn compellingly suggests that Temima’s failures as a mother (and her bad choice in men) are better understood by her own mother’s failures (and abandonment). As such, Reimer-Torn argues recognizes an emotional truth in Temima’s character. I agree; certainly, her horrible experience as a daughter impacts her ability as mother.

will suffer. Put simply, patriarchal extremism poses severe challenges for mothers, and they are challenges that women cannot possibly overcome. When the mother is weak due to patriarchal extremist hegemony, the child is in danger. We see it with Akiva and Ivriya, with Shelly, Emunah and all their children, with Temima and all her children. Messianic extremism disables maternal capability, and, as such, children are abandoned and/or die. With the patriarchal oppression of extremism, the family unit is destroyed—in this case, putting the State of Israel at great risk.

Blossom Kirshenbaum astutely delineates the ineffectual mother in Reich's earlier works,⁹⁰ suggesting that the daughter must alienate and isolate herself from the ineffectual mother (and damaging father) in order to liberate herself.⁹¹ She compellingly elucidates in Reich's short stories that "the daughter who eludes maternal protection does not survive her father's idealism" (79). And certainly Kirshenbaum's point is well documented in Reich's works, including the later *Philistine Foreskins*, a work that Kirshenbaum does not address. Yet, we see that in *Philistine Foreskins*, the daughter Tema does strengthen herself to become Temima, a foil to her weak mother Beverly. She transforms into a dynamic leader of an extreme messianic group. Despite that, and more likely because of that, Temima becomes an ineffectual mother too. Temima's dynamic trajectory and ultimate failure suggest that patriarchal circumstances and models (of Judaism) must change in order for mothers to be effective. It also suggests that feminist empowerment must also include maternal empowerment for it to be transformative.

Reich is advocating for the abolition of patriarchal extremism in Israel. If Ima Temima is forced to sacrifice her children (by coercion, influence, or trauma), then we have to read the

⁹⁰ Namely her short stories and her novel *Mara* (1978).

⁹¹ Very much in line with second-wave thinking, in particular Adrienne Rich's critique of mother/daughter dynamics.

socio-cultural circumstances as the catalyst for such maternal failure. It's as if Reich presents maternal capability as a litmus test for the health of a society. When the mother is severely tested by patriarchal extremism, the mother inevitably fails, and children are killed or irrevocably damaged: the future of the society is endangered, abused, abandoned, murdered. And as a Zionist, Reich is worried about the state of Israel's future. Will mothers in Israel be able to protect their children from being sacrificed for extremism? Reich's answer is a fearful no.

In *Philistine Foreskins*, with Temima's messianic failure, Reich implicitly presents a solution for the eradication of extremism in Israel, which insists on a total restructuring of gendered attitudes and roles. Kol-Isha Erva retains hope in Temima, despite Temima's insistence to forget her. She writes, "But what if the Messiah is a woman—a mother? Therein lies the true salvation. It is for our mother we always cry out in the darkest night and deepest pain and always in the end our mother comes."⁹² And with a nod to *Master of the Return*, she continues, "she sustains us with sweet cakes...she sits across from us at the table, her hand propping her chin, watch over us and we are restored, for we are sick with love and she will never forsake us" (363). What can we make of Kol-Isha's maternal affirmation? We see maternal bravery, resistance, and love in all the texts. We also see its limitations, failures, and heartbreaking abandonment. In the earlier novels that maternal limitation leads to the vanishing and death of children, and to irreversible damage inflicted on the Jewish family. In *Philistine Foreskins* the child is murdered and abandoned even though the mother's voice is becoming stronger and independent. But what I think Reich is suggesting is that redemption, salvation—perhaps even the Zionist dream—can only arrive when maternal potential is entirely free to actualize itself, when it is not impeded by patriarchy, when messianic extremism and patriarchal fundamentalism

⁹² This "calling out" references when Tema was raped by her father nightly, and Tema would chant "Ma-Ma-Ma-", a call that was never answered by her mother Beverly, who turned a blind eye towards her daughter's abuse (321).

are eradicated, and when the mother is free to love and nourish both sons and daughters. To Reich, when that happens, Israel too will fulfill its promise.

Conclusion

While writing *Tortured Zionism* and immersed in the portrayal of Israel in Jewish American novels, I often thought about Bernard Malamud and the fact that he didn't engage with Israel as a subject. When asked why he didn't write about Israel, Malamud said, "That's absurd. I don't know the country, I haven't been there enough" (qtd.in Betsky). The statement is fair enough for Malamud, who chronicled the post-war Jewish American experience with profound insight. However, with Malamud's statement lingering in my mind, I was simultaneously engrossed with media regarding Israel: watching the news, reading op-eds, and scrutinizing social media posts. During the Israeli/Gaza conflict in 2014, in particular, I was enraptured by the dissenting Jewish American voices expressing their perspectives on Israel. On Israel, they projected loyalty, distaste, ambivalence, anger, disappointment, and pride, and often a conglomeration of them all. In the conversation about Israel, the Jewish American voices were impassioned.

Through my scholarship with *Tortured Zionism* and in my everyday encounters, I realized that in Jewish American literature, the attitude towards Israel in the Jewish American imagination has shifted, from one of alienated and intimidated disinterest to one of ardent engagement. What I hoped to have conveyed in my dissertation is that Jewish American writers are articulating the vitality and importance of their relationship with Israel. However, as *Tortured Zionism*'s messianic lens elucidates through Chabon, Roth, and Reich's works, the Jewish American relationship to Israel is both saddled and blessed with complexity. For the study of literature then, this relationship is exciting to witness, especially since we, as readers, are watching it unfold in these recent and contemporary narratives (and while the media buzzes about Israel in the background.)

Through their articulations of tortured Zionism, specifically in Chabon's jaded yearning for the Zionist dream, Roth's nervous rejection of ideological simplicity, and Reich's paradoxical foreboding and solution for a better Israel, these narratives reject a diasporist approach to Judaism, and openly embrace the complexities of Jewish American relationships with Israel in a post-Holocaust world. Rather than remain unknowable and untouched in Jewish American literature (as it had in Malamud's oeuvre), Israel is being approached, grappled with, embraced, understood and misunderstood, admired, and internalized in contemporary Jewish American literature. While other Jewish American writers have recently explored Israel as a subject, the writers in *Tortured Zionism* approach Israel in a significantly, complex way; Chabon, Roth, and Reich not only engage with the Holocaust in their Zionist critiques and comment on the role writing fiction plays in their negotiation of Jewish American identity and Israel, but they also openly embrace and reflect the difficulties of their ambivalence about Zionism. If Malamud didn't "know" Israel enough to write about it, it seems as if Chabon, Roth and Reich get to know Israel through writing about it.

This constructive ambivalence lends all of their texts an effusive anxiousness. For example, Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* reveals that art about the Holocaust can only heal trauma in a limited capacity. When engaging with the Holocaust, the Jewish American artist suffers from those limitations and the concurrent desire to enable catharsis through art. Through the failures of the narrative's messianic figures, The Golem and Joe, Chabon openly recognizes these artistic and emotional limitations, but reiterates that creating art about the Holocaust is imperative nevertheless. Ironically, when Chabon discusses art's limitations, he reveals a limitation in his own work, as he does not mention Israel in his

portrayal of the immediate post-war years. *Yiddish Policemen* exudes diasporic anxiety but it is located in the characters' diasporic plight and relationship to Israel. In my discussion of the novel, I utilize post-colonial and post-Zionist discourse to explore the Galut/Geulah binary and debunk a diasporist reading of Chabon's work. In analyzing Chabon's use of the counter-historical form, and the shtetl like qualities of Sitka, Alaska, I highlight the text's diasporic anxiety. However, I argue that Mendele, as the failed messianic figure (and his similarity to Menachem Mendel Schneerson) present a lingering hope in Zionism. Chabon successfully develops a palpable paradox of despair and hope, a powerful but debilitating dynamic that is reiterated by the protagonist Landsman's inability to articulate his ambivalence about Israel. And again, Chabon mirrors his characters' narrative limitations, since Chabon does not adequately locate Jewish Americans in that ambivalent space, opting instead to reflect that experience on them through the Sitka Jews representational capacity. Yet, his novels are major contributions to contemporary Jewish American literature because they approach the once untouchable subjects of Israel and the Holocaust with formalistic gusto and ingenuity, asserting that fiction is vital to the discussion of complicated Jewish issues.

In contrast to Chabon's limited (though inventive) treatment of Israel and the Holocaust, Roth dives into those subjects with full force, and exposes their contradictions and nuances like no other Jewish American writer before him. I look at his Israel books in conjunction with his non-fictional works to delineate how Roth's brand of Jewishness is paternally borne and intimately tied to Israel and Zionism. Through his criticism of messianic and reverse messianic movements, Roth asserts the importance of engaging with Israel and the Holocaust with appropriate labyrinthine complexity. He also reveals

that his attachment to these complex subjects is engendered, simply, from his own sense of Jewish paternal tribalism, which is represented by a circumcision motif. Furthermore, through the four narratives, his writer protagonists, Nathan and Philip, progressively align with the Jewish collective, when they prioritize the concerns of the Jewish collective over the individual (literary) concerns of the Jewish American novelist, an unprecedented move in Roth's novels. As such, the series that I explore both represents a change in Jewish American literature (and anticipates and informs later Jewish American works), and a shift in Roth's literary oeuvre. But though Roth infuses his narratives with a thick array of eclectic voices and perspectives on Israel and the Holocaust, he ends the series with an in-articulation in the omission of chapter 11. By seemingly censoring chapter 11, Roth, through Philip, tacitly implies his inability or unwillingness to fully approach the headiness and difficulty of the Jewish American relationship to Israel. It is an ironic admission (through omission) since by the time we finish with Roth's series, we are dizzy with divergent views on Israel that productively encourage us to ponder over the triangular relationship between Israel, the Holocaust, and the Jewish American imagination.

Unlike Chabon and Roth, Reich is clearly, un-ambivalently Zionist. However, in her novels, Reich expresses foreboding for Israel's future, when pervasive extremism corrupts Zionism and Judaism. I delineate how Reich delineates patriarchy in Zionism and Judaism in her effort to expose how messianic extremists exploit those patriarchal elements into dangerous excess. Most of her characters are American expatriates traversing intense, spiritual and nationalistic journeys in the holy land. In that sense, Reich is situating the Jewish American in Israel's spiritual and political vortex. I

delineate where Reich utilizes a second-wave feminist lens, and I likewise utilize a second-wave hermeneutics, to reveal the patriarchal elements in Zionism and Judaism. I then engage with literary criticism on Reich that locates in her novels feminist moments of female subversion. But I suggest that those empowering moments are fleeting, quickly eradicated or diminished in the face of oppressive patriarchy. With a third-wave lens, I suggest that Reich is rejecting a feminist approach to Judaism and Zionism that merely advocates for more female inclusion within the existing patriarchy. I argue that Reich initially presents her messianic figure Ima Temima as a feminist redeemer with the potential to rectify patriarchal oppression (and the dangers of extremism). But, as I elucidate, Temima fails in her messianic mission. Through Temima's failure, I read Reich's rejection of a feminist Israel and Judaism that is still defined in patriarchal terms, and argue that Reich is tacitly advocating for Judith Plaskow's feminist Judaism that eradicates chosenness and hierarchy in Judaism.

Reich, in the midst of her heavy fears for Israel, alludes to another possibility for Israel's betterment (in Plaskow's idea of feminist Judaism). In fact, all three authors, despite their struggle and grappling with Israel's complexity, ultimately present an optimistic view of Israel just by virtue of writing about Israel. *Tortured Zionism* affirms that in their narratives, Chabon, Roth and Reich are leading a Jewish American literary conversation about the Holocaust, Israel and Jewish American identity, and the triangular relationship between the three. Over the past thirty years, Jewish American writers have been exploring the Holocaust. *Tortured Zionism's* authors' continue the conversation about Holocaust, a point not to be taken for granted. By engaging with the legacy of the Holocaust, they present updated perspectives on a vital Jewish American issue,

particularly because there are not many Holocaust survivors remaining to elucidate and remind us of its significance anymore. More than ever it is imperative that Jewish American writers continue to explore the legacy of the Holocaust. Furthermore, the writers in *Tortured Zionism* present another facet to the Jewish American connection to the Holocaust, by exploring the Holocaust's relationship with Israel, a vital subject that has been predominantly untouched by writers.

In a way, *Tortured Zionism* explores what I think is the beginning of new era of Jewish American writing that further engages with the Holocaust from a 21st century perspective and that approaches Israel with courageous complexity and impassioned connection. I believe we are situated in a creative era, where Jewish American writers are re-engaging with difficult but valuable Jewish American subjects and exploring Jewish American topics previously ignored or recently emergent: in the near future, perhaps we will see Jewish American writers negotiating the role of the American expatriate in Israel, and the Israeli expatriate in America, the image of Palestinians and their predicament, the void suffered from the loss of the remaining Holocaust survivors, and the reaction to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict on college campuses. For Jewish Americans authors, there is much to write about. As the borders between the Jewish homeland and diaspora are progressively redefined in academic discourse and in Jewish experience, Jewish American authors will continue to recognize and explore how Israel remains vital to the Jewish American imagination, despite and perhaps because of those changing definitions. And because that relationship is notably complex, the literature that aptly approaches that complexity will be stellar and worth reading.

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Abstract

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*Tortured Zionism: Messianism, Ambivalence, and Israel in post-Holocaust Jewish
American literature*

Dissertation directed by Leonard Cassuto, Ph.D.

This dissertation examines post-Holocaust, Jewish American novelists that utilize messianism in their narratives to negotiate ambivalence about Zionism. Studying novels from the mid-1980's to 2013, I look at the triangular relationship between Jewish American identification, the Holocaust, and Israel, to explore major topics in contemporary Jewry and fiction, including the homeland/ diaspora binary, the Jewish American writer's ethical responsibility, the legacy of the Holocaust, the complexity surrounding Zionism, and the formalist experimentation of postmodernism. My study begins with Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, and his use of the messianic figure, which works as a fulcrum to examine both the limitations of Holocaust art as a healing device, and post-Holocaust diasporic anxiety; Chabon suggests that this anxiety is exasperated by ambivalent feelings about Israel and a lingering hope in the actualization of the Zionist dream. I continue with Philip Roth's Israel centered novels, *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*, and his non-fictional, *The Facts* and *Patrimony*, delineating how Roth both depicts his writer protagonists' progression towards Jewish collectivity and presents

a template for Jewish American solidarity to Zionism. Roth identifies loyalty to Zionism with a Jewishness that is paternally engendered, and, in his rejection of messianic ideology, suggests that his model of Zionism can only exist when Jewish Americans critique Israel with honesty and complexity. My study ends with a gendered reading of Tova Reich's Israel novels, which portray the disastrous consequences of the collision between messianic extremism and the Jewish mother. Within that dynamic, Reich delineates Zionism's and Judaism's patriarchal origins and inconsistencies, and reveals how extremists exploit those patriarchal elements to dangerous excess. Through the novels, Reich tacitly advocates for a complete revamping of Zionism and Judaism that eradicates hierarchy and chosenness and that is aligned with Judith Plaskow's concept of feminist Judaism. *Tortured Zionism* utilizes post-colonial, post-Zionist, Jewish, gender, and formalistic hermeneutics to elucidate that contemporary Jewish American writers are rejecting a diasporist approach to Jewish American identity and are solidifying the importance of Israel in the Jewish American imagination, despite and because of the complex issues surrounding Zionism.

VITA

Elana Hornblass Dushey received her B.A. from Stern College/Yeshiva University in 2002. She then worked at a New York based publication, which focuses on art and literature. While earning her Masters from St. Johns University, she taught composition and literature at St. Johns College. After completing her masters in 2005, Elana entered the Ph.D. program at Fordham University. There she was awarded numerous teaching fellowships, including the Senior Teaching Fellowship, and taught various courses in literature and composition. While teaching undergraduate courses, she worked towards her Ph.D. under the mentorship of Dr. Leonard Cassuto. She lives in New Jersey with her husband and three children.