AT THE BORDERS, AT THE MARGINS
Feminist Theory, Jewish Studies, and Identity Politics

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In *A Trap for Fools,*[1] a mystery novel by Amanda Cross, amateur detective and feminist literary critic Kate Fansler is called upon to investigate the suspicious death of a professor of Islamic studies at an unnamed university strongly resembling Columbia. As in other Amanda Cross books—detective novels in academic settings—"whodunit" plays second fiddle to "wheredunnit." The unraveling of the mystery, in other words, serves as a pretext for detective Fansler's explorations of academic, intellectual, and sexual politics.

Amanda Cross is, of course, the fiction-writing pseudonym of Carolyn Heilbrun, a Jewish-American woman whose academic work opened up the field of women's studies, shaping much of what we read and write in feminist literary theory and criticism. The generic conventions of the detective story serve as the vehicle for her popularization of hot issues in literary studies, such as feminist criticism, sexual harassment, multiculturalism, and the changing canon. In the act of untangling the strange death of Canfield Adams, *A Trap for Fools* explores the interconnections between racism and sexism, the relationship between the emergent civil rights and feminist movements, and the disjunctures between black feminism—what Alice Walker has termed "womanism"[2]—and mainstream feminism—what Deborah McDowall calls "normative, white feminism."[3]

In their critiques of normative feminism, women of color have spoken of multiple exclusions: from male traditions and privileges, but also from white female traditions and privileges. In insisting that mainstream feminism falsifies their own historical experiences and collective memories, women of color have impelled us to pluralize feminism(s), and to complicate and thus refine ideas about gender and identities.

Jewish feminism, situated at the borders of Western male traditions, Jewish male traditions, and women's traditions, also points out multiple exclusions. Feminist and gender theories have begun to provide new resources for work in Jewish studies. Bringing women in from the margins to the center, Jewish feminists have opened up the boundaries of Jewish studies. But what impact have Jewish feminists had on women's studies? The term "Jewish feminists" as used here refers not to Jewish women who do feminist work, but to women (and men) working out of Jewish feminist perspectives. Many of the early feminist critics were themselves Jewish by origin, but did not view Judaism as a significant component of their lives and identities. Reflecting on her own life, Heilbrun observes, "Being a woman and a Jew were in no way of comparable importance in my life."[4] In what follows, I read Amanda Cross to articulate the multiple exclusions of Jewish feminisms, and to pursue uneasily a connection between the works of Jewish women and other women of color.[5]

To solve the mystery of the wealthy Adams's death, Kate Fansler interviews the usual panoply of mystery suspects: a new, younger wife, disagreeable adult children fighting over the inheritance, other nasty acquaintances with long-standing enmities. Adams's associates include a male African-American professor, a young black woman student activist, and several victims of sexual harassment. Interviewing the roster of suspects allows Fansler to meditate upon gender, race, and class differences, academic sexual politics, and, most pointedly, the special case of black women writers in contemporary feminist literary theory. These reflections emerge as a by-product of tracking down red herrings. The mystery hinges on a seemingly insignificant bit of information. Revealed early on and ignored by the detective (and presumably by the reader, or else the book would fail as detective fiction) is the academic setting of the deceased: the Department of Middle East Culture and Literature, "anomalously housed in a building named Levy," with no Jewish faculty, and no Jewish areas of scholarship. "That no tenured professor in the department taught Hebrew or anything to do with Israel had seemed awkward" (p. 4). Belatedly following up on this clue, Fansler unravels a heinous entanglement involving embezzlement, blackmail, and multiple murders.

Who is the implied reader of this novel? Surely not I, who waded through Fansler's meetings with feminist scholars, departmental secretaries, university administrators, student activists, security guards, publishers, waiting impatiently for her to turn her attention to the Middle East, Israeli politics, and Jewish-Arab relations. That Professor Fansler, bred in

"the higher reaches of Waspdom" (p. 75), would overlook this context, one could understand. But that the author would assume the same of her reader puzzled me long after I finished reading the novel. With this slippage in mind, I make Heilbrun's novel the point of departure in this discussion of feminist literary theory, womanism, and Jewish feminism.

Not without controversy have feminist perspectives begun to mark Jewish studies. Some scholars fear that feminist methodologies and concerns, imported into the sphere of Jewish scholarship, will distort Jewish history and experience, rendering it somehow less authentically Jewish. For example, Ruth Wisse, Harvard-chaired professor of Yiddish, criticizes the growing academic preoccupation with women and "feminist issues" in Jewish studies. Wisse asserts that women's studies and "the ideology of the modern women's movement has done more to obscure than to illuminate the problems of Jewish womanhood."[6] In her view, "ideological feminism" constructs a version of women's history, tradition, and experience which excludes—or worse, repudiates—Jewish women's history, tradition, and experience.[7]

Although not intended as such, Wisse's criticism resonates with critiques of feminism by women of color of what Elaine Showalter calls "the female literary tradition."[8] Showalter, like Heilbrun an early and important feminist critic whose theoretical and critical insights continue to shape women's studies, once described women as "unified by values, conventions, experiences and behaviors impinging on each individual." Because of this shared terrain, according to Showalter, women constitute a "subculture," a "minority group" (by which she means an oppressed group). According to the early writings of Showalter and others, feminism and the civil rights movement reciprocally fuel one another, building on the earlier alliance between suffragists and abolitionists.

Like Wisse, black feminists take issue with the idea of a universal women's literary tradition, and with the presumption that feminist critics such as Showalter and Heilbrun can speak for them. Hazel Carby, an African-American literary theorist, calls the universal perspective "parochial," reifying "the narrow concerns of white middle class women under the name of 'women.'"[9] Like Wisse's important insight that the women's movement has not spoken for and about Jewish women, African-American women assert that feminist literary theory claims or recovers a history often different from the historical experiences of black women—so different, in fact, that one cannot properly speak of a women's literary tradition at all.[10]

In literary studies, "normative feminism" constructs a line of imagined

maternal ancestry, reaching back past Virginia Woolf, George Eliot, Jane Austin, and the Brontes in order to recover and reinterpret women's voices, to trace literary influences, and to think in more complicated ways about sexuality and gender. But, as women of color open up feminist theory to their experiences, they raise awareness of other possible genealogies. For example, Barbara Christian explains, "to understand the remarkable achievements of a Toni Morrison, an Alice Walker, a Paule Marshall . . . one must appreciate the tradition from which they have come and the conflict of images with which their foremothers have had to contend."[11]

In other words, black women's writing taps a rich and complex literary tradition of other black women's writing, encompassing not only contemporary and earlier fiction writers and poets, but also authors of slave narratives and other memoirs. To the extent that black women's writing also participates in a more broad-based women's literary tradition, it does so with an awareness of the historical exclusionary and racist practices of the society in which that literature was produced. Similarly, the experiences of Jewish women reflect not merely difference from the dominant culture; they bear the mark of anti-Semitic practices.

Black feminist writers repeatedly complain of being positioned with an untenable choice: to repudiate the experiences and histories of their black mothers and grandmothers in order either to affirm a version of black nationalism constructed by black men or to affirm a version of feminism constructed by white women. Susan Willis observes, "For black feminists, history is a bridge defined along mother lines."[12] This dilemma is exemplified by Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use," in which the narrator's daughter Dee, who now calls herself by an African name unpronounceable to her mother, comes home to claim artifacts from her ancestral past. The narrator, a poor but physically and psychologically powerful black woman, takes issue with her daughter's new name.

> "Well," I say, "Dee."
> "No, Mama," she says. "Not Dee. Wangeroo Leewanika Kemanjo!"
> "What happened to Dee?" I wanted to know.
> "She's dead," Wangeroo said. "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me."
> "You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.
> "But who was *she* named after?" asked Wangeroo.
> "I guess after Grandma Dee," I said.
> "And who was she named after?" asked Wangeroo.
> "Her mother," I said . . .
>
> (p. 198)

As Walker sets up the story, to recapture pride in a distant African past that preceded the humiliation of slavery, Dee/Wangeroo repudiates her more recent foremothers. Correspondingly to accept her matriarchal lineage, to see in it a source of pride and resistance, she believes she has to relinquish her African past. The story examines the problematic complexity of political ideologies which paradoxically serve as a source of pride and empowerment for Dee and at the same time lead her to repudiate the real accomplishments of the women in her own family. Walker suggests elsewhere that black women adopt the term "womanist" to connote a double resistance—to white feminism and to patriarchy (which encompasses African-American patriarchy).

Walker's exploration of the conflicting pulls on African-American women bears a striking similarity to Anne Roiphe's novel *Lovingkindness*,[13] which explores the competing values of a dejudaicized feminism and a defeminized Judaism through the conflict between academic feminist Annie Johnson and her *ba'altshuvah*[14] [*sic*] daughter Andrea. For Annie, Judaism represents exclusionary practices which consign women to ignorance and domestic servitude; her spiritual ancestors are the "New England spinsters" whose writings constitute her life's work. Andrea, on the other hand, sees her mother's avid faith in secular democracy as selling out to the dominant culture. Like Walker's character, Dee/Wangeroo, Andrea adopts a new name—Sarai—which affirms pride in a national ancestry but distances her from her mother's accomplishments.

Ruth Wisse's repudiation of "ideological feminism," by which she means liberal feminism, mirrors the womanist critique along "mother lines." Wisse wonders how "the granddaughters of . . . Jewish matriarchs" could come to ignore history, and instead believe "that their grandmothers and mothers have been tricked into brainless, submissive femininity." Leaving aside the question of the accuracy of Wisse's description of Jewish feminist writing, one is struck by the consonance between her criticisms of mainstream feminism and those of women of color. For example, Chicana theorist and critic Alvina Quintana cautions that normative feminism flattens ethnic differences in values, language, and historical experience. Quintana observes, "Although the Anglo future with its 'proper' emphasis on 'modernization' offers the promise of feminist liberation, it is also limiting because it offers a future which is dominated and controlled by the English language and American value system, a system which, for the most part, has failed to consider cultural or ethnic diversity as variables in female experience(s)."[15]

Wisse reminds us that Jewish women too enact multiple resistances. As Jewish women scholars continue to bring feminist insights into the

varied disciplines of Jewish studies, there evolves a specifically Jewish feminism which incorporates these resistances. For Jewish women looking to address the complicated issues of multiple identities and/or multiple oppressions, the writings of Chicana women offer promising resources. In the introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul = Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color,*[16] Gloria Anzaldua extends the black feminist critique to include the life and writings of "*mestizas*—biologically and/or culturally mixed" women (p. xv). A self-identified Chicana—an American woman of Mexican or Mexican-Indian descent—Anzaldua conceptualized the collection of essays in *Making Face* as a challenge both to "the white women's movement" for ignoring racism and to the (male) Chicano movement of the 1960s for ignoring gender oppression.[17] The working out of a Chicana ethnopoetics offers a valuable paradigm for thinking through the intersections of Jewish and feminist studies. The concept of the *mestiza,* in particular, as a "culturally mixed" woman bears importantly on questions of identity and community for Jewish-American women. From the compendium of diverse writing collected in Anzaldua's two volumes and elsewhere, a theory of Chicana literary production touches on several strategies relevant to a Jewish women's ethnopoetics.

Consider, for example, the consequences of modernity for different ethnic or racial groups of women. The "universalist" promise of modernity—a promise embraced by traditional feminism (what Anzaldua calls "whitefeminism")—proved a mixed blessing for Chicanas, much as it did for Jewish women. In actuality, for minority groups, universalism simply meant the abandonment of one's own culture for membership in the dominant culture. This was true, of course, no less for men than for women. Irving Howe, for instance, recollects with ambivalence his youthful eagerness "to find a place in the spacious arena of American culture, which was decidedly gentile in origins and tone." This "spacious arena" contrasts with the "narrow habits of response" of a "parochial" Jewish culture of origin.[18]

The presumed openness of modern democratic culture thus turns out to be less open to cultural difference than originally appears. Historian Shulamit Magnus's work on Pauline Wengeroff,[19] a turn-of-the-century German-Jewish woman, cautions against uncritical idealization of the effects of modernity on Jewish family life and, most notably, on Jewish women. Wengeroff's memoirs document an active, intelligent woman who ran the family business expertly and efficiently until, at her husband's insistence, she withdrew entirely from the world of commerce. As her memoirs indicate, the advent of modernity often cost Jewish women like Wengeroff their active place in the public sphere as Jewish husbands tried to replicate the household arrangements of what Wisse describes as "the bourgeois family of Western Europe, where husbands supported their wives and protected the women and children."[20]

Magnus notes Wengeroff's observation that, in the domestic, public, and ritual spheres, "[Jewish] women were losing status, function and power because . . . Jewish men blinded by ambition were rushing headlong into modernity, recklessly abandoning one culture for another" (p. 187). While for men, assimilation promised empowerment and acceptance into the dominant culture, for women it too often meant moving from one kind of marginality to another, more radical marginality,[21] with a concomitant loss of cultural center. As Cynthia Ozick notes, "The hope derived from Enlightenment tolerance is an idol that will not serve women as it turned out not to serve Jews."[22]

In addition, bilingual, bicultural contexts figure importantly in both Jewish and Latina writing and art, which highlight rather than blur differences.[23] Chicana poets, fiction writers, and essayists struggle to retain the collective memory enfolded in Mexican-American argot, just as Jewish writers struggle against forgetting the experiences embedded in Yiddish, Ladino, and other Jewish languages.

The womanist critique of mainstream feminism takes center stage as Carolyn Heilbrun develops *A Trap for Fools* into a didactic vehicle for feminist theory.[24] Kate Fansler's criminal investigation brings her to interview an African-American male colleague, and also an African-American professional woman her own age. These interactions give Fansler the occasion to reflect several times on the relationship between white and black women.

Fansler repeatedly paraphrases novelist Toni Morrison: "Toni Morrison had said somewhere that white women were wholly different from black women, but that white and black men were the same" (p. 122). Fansler herself feels completely at ease with her male colleague, but palpably uncomfortable with both the black woman and her daughter, a university student. Pondering her encounter with the daughter, Kate can imagine "no comfortable ground on which the two of them could meet" (p. 119); with both women, "her social antennae were unable to operate at their full capacity; something subtle in the environment was askew. Kate again recalled what Toni Morrison had said . . ." (p. 144).

For Fansler, the "difference" implied by the Toni Morrison allusions is one of moral stature; Fansler's experience of gender oppression is

trumped by the history of black oppression. Fansler stands on firm ground only by thinking of her own marginalizing deviance—childlessness: this chosen condition "has set me aside with white women as well" (p. 144).

The Jewish women in the novel evoke none of this moral confusion for Fansler. Miriam Rubin, a colleague in her early sixties, is just like a white feminist, only more so. Fansler reflects admiringly on Rubin's "gift of courage" and "wonderful indifference to what anybody thought of her" (p. 61). But Fansler does not feel discomfited by any suggestions of differences in ethnicity, culture, or historical experience. Is this Heilbrun's ironic critique of normative feminists? I think not. In *Writing a Woman's Life,*[25] Heilbrun locates an essential difference between the experiences of white and black women (p. 61) which must be noticed and articulated constantly, the demarkation always before one's eyes. Her writing moves seamlessly, however, between Jewish and non-Jewish texts whose contextual differences thereby become diminished and effaced. For example, Heilbrun elides Adrienne Rich's discomfort with her father's denial of Jewish heritage—his "devoted belief in 'passing'" (p. 69)—with Anne Sexton's difficulty living the "middle class dream" (p. 70). While opposed to the appropriation by white women of black women's experience, Heilbrun speaks approvingly of Sylvia Plath's symbolic use of Shoah imagery to "recognize her suffering as connected . . . to fascism" (p. 70).

While the plot centers on the unraveling of two murders, *A Trap for Fools* is really about the nature of privilege—WASP, wealth, white, male, professional. In the novel, those victimized by racism and sexism get to articulate and interpret their own experiences. Anti-Semitism, by contrast, is genteelly (gentile-ly?) discussed by two WASPs who calmly agree that it is despicable. They do not for a moment reflect that they might be complicitous, in the way that Fansler's feelings of guilt in the presence of women of color suggest that one is inevitably complicitous in racism if one is white.

This may not be simply omission. Much feminist writing across racial lines elides Jewish women into white women, ignoring not only experiential differences but also the history of anti-Semitic practices. For example, in her introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul,* Anzaldua envisions a coalition of women whose actual communities often find themselves in conflict or competition. Yet, despite their requisite history of oppression and marginality, Jewish women are explicitly excluded. For Anzaldua, Jewish women represent the dominant culture "being white but often sympathizing with colored" (*Making Face,* p. xx). Anzaldua describes a university colloquium in which

> Most of the white Jewishwomen in the class did not want to identify as white. . . . Some declared they "belonged" more to the women-of-color group than they did to the white group. Because they felt isolated and excluded, they felt that their oppressions were the same and similar to those of women-of-color. . . . The problem was that whitewomen and white Jewishwomen, while seeming to listen, were not really "hearing" women-of-color and could not get it into their heads that this was a space and class on and about women-of-color.
>
> (p. xx)

The discourse thus shifts from history to race, from a nuanced appreciation of the complicated pulls on women's lives to a flattening of women's experiences through terms intended as defining status. Anzaldua's spelling practices recapitulate this essentializing move: "women-of-color," "*mujeres-de-color,*" "African American women," and "Asian women" are written either as hyphenated or separate words, emphasizing the complexities of culture brokering. This counters what Anzaldua sees as the "whitefeminist" impulse "to blur racial difference" in favor of "a complete, totalizing identity" (p. xxi). By contrast, Anzaldua spells "whitewomen" and "Jewishwomen" as single words, construing both as privileged rather than oppressed, dominant rather than marginal.[26] This passage makes clear that the decision about who should speak and who should listen precedes the conversation in the colloquium, and that Anzaldua has determined that one need not listen to Jewish voices. Much as they might try to pass, Jewish women, Anzaldua asserts, do not "belong."

In the complicated mosaic of identities, where *do* Jewish women "belong"? In *A Trap for Fools,* the author's insistence on seeing Jews as representative of the dominant culture serves to flatten the mystery. Although the Amanda Cross mystery turns on the conflict between Jews and Arabs, the dynamics on campus are shorn of any possible political ramifications. Both Jews and Arabs are depicted as economically and politically privileged groups. The Jews are wealthy enough to endow both Levy Hall and a Center for Jewish Studies; the Arabs, the Department of Middle East Culture and Literature and an Islamic library. That the Arab donors successfully veto any Jewish hirings and, as well, Israeli studies in the Middle East department is rendered a nonissue by the "very well-endowed" Jewish Studies Center. The "wealthier Arab and Jewish communities" are contrasted with the "poorer black communities" (p. 213), whose oppression Fansler piously affirms. Thus, as in Anzaldua's discussion of Chicana and *mestiza* feminism, Fansler acknowledges the double marginality experienced by African-American women—marginalities of race and gender—while implicitly denying the double marginality of Jewish women.

Nor does she acknowledge the complexity of studying Islamic culture in the West, what has come to be called (following Edward Said) orientalism.[27] Kate gains valuable information from a former student of the murdered professor, a wealthy alumnus named Witherspoon in whose elaborately furnished WASP apartment she feels nostalgically at home and singularly at ease. Witherspoon recalls that because the university offered no courses on the Crusades, he had studied Islam, "the culture at which the Crusades were aimed" (p. 76). Never do he or Fansler reflect on the Crusades as the agent of a colonizing culture which massacred both Jews and Moslems.

Because the sleuth (and the author) sweep both Arabs and Jews into the dominant culture, erasing their present and historical struggles, the novel breaks an important convention of mystery fiction—that the reader should not outsmart the detective. At the end of the penultimate chapter, Fansler finally announces, "It suddenly came to me that we'd overlooked a very interesting thing about Adam: that he was writing about Arab culture and religion. . . . [I]'d ignored the Middle East aspect of the whole affair" (p. 194).

What happens when feminist literary theorists, even (especially) those who happen to be Jewish, fail to consider the complexity of Jewish feminism, a complexity which they deem an essential component of womanism or mujerism? In *A Trap for Fools,* Kate Fansler overlooks the obvious, and a second murder takes place. Amanda Cross fails in her work of creating a suspenseful detective fiction with a surprising (but inevitable) twist.

Where is the author in all this? Heilbrun's discussion of the Fansler series makes it clear that—to borrow from Flaubert—Kate *c'est moi.* "The woman author is, consciously or not, creating an alter ego as she writes," Heilbrun asserts (*Writing a Woman's Life,* p. 110); "another identity, another role" (ibid., p. 114). In "creating Kate Fansler and her quests, I was recreating myself" (p. 117). Heilbrun explains that in Kate "I created a fantasy. Without children, unmarried, unconstrained by the opinions of others, rich and beautiful" (p. 115). She notes the deliberate contrast to her own life, encumbered with a husband, three children, a dog, and worries about tenure.

Heilbrun does not comment, however, on her choice to install Kate in the "higher reaches of Waspdom" (*Trap for Fools,* p. 75), privileged childhood and all. But it is clear from Heilbrun's writing elsewhere that this aspect of the author's fantasy alter ego provides the sharpest contrast with her own family background. Heilbrun describes her roots as "peasant" (*Reinventing Womanhood,* p. 20), by which she means that her Jewish ancestors were poor, ignorant, and illiterate.

Heilbrun's consideration of her own Jewishness, as presented in the broader discussion of issues of identity for modern American women in *Reinventing Womanhood,* sheds light on the problematic representation (or absence) of Jewish feminism—not only in *A Trap for Fools,* but in her writing more generally. Perhaps more importantly, taken as an exemplar of founding feminist critical thinking, Heilbrun's attitude toward Jewishness and Judaism has ramifications for the place of the Jewish feminist agenda in normative feminism in a more generalized sense. Heilbrun's relationship to her Jewish roots is characterized largely by a mixture of distance, estrangement, and revulsion.

Like many American Jews of her generation from immigrant families, Heilbrun was born into a kind of Jewish anomie. "My parents' roots consisted precisely in their severing of them. My father and mother had cut themselves off from their past" (p. 19). She notes her father's self-presentation as "his own creation," and her mother's "clean separation from her family and past" (p. 19). Thus, Heilbrun reflects, at best "being Jewish was for me altogether unreal" (p. 23).

Moreover, Heilbrun's autobiographical musings make clear that her family absorbed and internalized anti-Semitic stereotypes from the dominant American culture into which they desired entry. She recollects encounters with "Jewish relatives, whose manners and filth appalled my mother" (p. 56), and her mother's abiding "horror of everything Jewish" (p. 58). During a brief stint as a graduate student working in media at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Heilbrun herself found the rabbis and rabbinical students "highly distasteful" (p. 63).

The possibility of positive connections between Jewishness and feminism comes to her only in her early fifties, when she is already a scholar of stature. Long aware of the sexism at her alma mater, Wellesley College, a women's college "miraculously uncommitted to the problems of women," she suddenly becomes aware that the institution "had always been, in the nicest way, anti-Semitic" (p. 18). Struck by the coalescence of these two biases, "for the first time these two terms had come together: feminist and Jew" (p. 19).

The implication for Heilbrun of bringing together these two poles of identity is a deeper understanding of the roots of her commitment to feminist work. "Having been a Jew had made me an outsider. It had permitted me to be a feminist" (p. 20). In other words, Heilbrun reasons, one finds the inner courage to take a stand as a feminist because in some other way

one has already experienced life as "an outsider more extreme than merely being a woman" (p. 20). Thus, as Heilbrun sees it, being Jewish fuels feminism.

Being a feminist, however, further erodes Heilbrun's sense of Jewishness. Citing the traditional exclusion of Jewish women from religious ritual, she notes the double marginalization of Jewish women, "outsiders twice over" (p. 37)—as Jews from Western culture, as women from Jewish culture. In contrast to Jewish feminist scholars who, like Magnus in her discussion of Wengeroff, point to "a powerful female realm in traditional Jewish society" (p. 184) even as they criticize the position of women in Judaism and Jewish culture, Heilbrun locates in Judaism only a singular, essential, and pervasive anti-female slant. Opposing the Jewish and Anglican traditions with respect to their treatment of women, she notes, "the Greek, the gentlemanly, English tradition, at least allowed for the possibility of bringing women into the mainstream of the culture" (p. 62). Thus, notwithstanding the sea changes already occurring in Jewish practice and scholarship by the time Heilbrun wrote *Reinventing Womanhood,* Judaism struck Heilbrun as supremely and irredeemably sexist, far more so than Western culture generally. "Jewish judgment had always failed when contemplating women" (p. 21), she reflects. "I discovered that to a Jew women are, in fact, seen as vile" (p. 63).

While Heilbrun's thinking about women's experiences and women's writing becomes increasingly complex over time, especially with respect to racial diversity, her reading of Judaism and Jewish culture remains static and simplified. Because she remains at a distance from Jewish scholarship and activism, her intellect and sensibilities are not challenged to incorporate these into her evolving feminist perspective. This is not intended as a personal criticism of the way Heilbrun has constructed her own identity. Each person has the right to think through and live out life commitments and aspects of identity that strike her as meaningful and essential. Rather, because of the importance of her work for feminist literary scholarship, the mere fact of Heilbrun's Jewishness seemingly legitimates a pervasive attitude among feminists toward Judaism and Jewish identity. Thus Heilbrun's assertion that Jewish women's groups address themselves to "Jewish . . . women's concerns . . . directed at children and families," but "never for one moment" to "women themselves, with problems . . . of rape, unwanted pregnancy . . . marital rights, or the ownership of property by women" (*Reinventing Womanhood,* p. 27) carries weight, although untested.

As contemporary Jewish feminists simultaneously criticize Jewish scholarship for marginalizing them as women, and feminist theory for marginalizing them as Jews, they are most surprised by resistance to their critiques of feminism. Why has it proven so difficult for feminist thinkers to hear and respond to Jewish feminists, especially when women of color have by now compelled feminist theory to complicate and diversify its understanding of differences among women and among cultures?

The claims of exclusion from normative feminist writing put forth by women of color are buttressed by the absence of women of color among the founding generation of feminist critics and theorists, and by the paucity of literary texts by women of color among the works retrieved, analyzed, and celebrated. That is, precisely their invisibility makes their critique visible. The womanist critique along "mother lines" redraws the line of literary ancestry to encompass women-of-color writers and storytellers, along with the lost voices of silenced women of color, such as the enslaved, the illiterate, the impoverished.

However, as Jewish feminists criticize the philosophical stance of the founding feminist theorists, they find that the exclusion of Jewish women's experience is harder to discern because, unlike women of color, Jews are, indeed, strongly represented among early feminist thinkers. Because many influential feminist thinkers, like Heilbrun, happen to be Jewish, the exclusion from feminist agendas of Jewish feminist issues and perspective has been veiled. Like Heilbrun, many feminists who are Jewish feel neutral or hostile toward Jewish culture and tradition. Even those with a more positive sense of Jewish identity have largely kept Jewishness outside their feminist work. Yet their obvious presence in the feminist arena seemingly belies the claim of Jewish marginalization, opening a space for the critiques of women of color, but not of Jewish women.

The effacing of Jewish feminist perspectives comes through in subtle and astonishingly blatant ways. In writing about the impact of the Holocaust on her assimilating Jewish-American family of origin, Heilbrun reflects that Nazism had been too "unbelievable" for her to "come to grips with" its implications at the time. Immersed in an academic culture whose anti-Semitism was "so genteel as to be wholly lost on me," Heilbrun recognizes only belatedly, safely in retrospect, that she had ignored anti-Semitic attitudes because they threatened her sense of belonging to American culture, and because they came nicely packaged. In the paragraph immediately following this revelation, Heilbrun observes, "Black women are thus particularly vulnerable: they are the objects both of racism and sexism" (*Reinventing Womanhood* p. 23). The dilemma of Jewish women who similarly want to lean on both poles of identity, gender

and race/ethnicity, slips inexplicably out of focus, veiled by Heilbrun's musings on the dilemma of women of color.

As womanists construct varieties of feminism along "mother lines," they reach back across time and through imagination to counter and complicate the more homogeneous vision once tendered by normative feminism—a vision as devoid of Jewish women as it is of women of color, a vision which Heilbrun, herself Jewish, helped to construct. As Heilbrun reconstructs her own past, she chooses to pursue literary rather than actual ancestral connections. "Where in Europe and America any of [my parents'] forebears had lived seemed to have much less to do with me than where Jane Austen had lived" (*Reinventing Womanhood,* p. 25). In this, she resonates uncannily with Annie, the protagonist of Roiphe's *Lovingkindness,* who much prefers the imagined ancestry of the "New England spinsters" who comprise her academic work to her actual Jewish mother line. While these imagined foremothers—Jane Austen, the New England writers, and others—nourish one's feminist commitment, positing them as the only ancestry worth acknowledging makes impossible a genuine confrontation with issues of Jewish feminism. In forging and refining feminisms born out of Jewish engagement, Jewish feminists continue to construct a mother line to encompass Heilbrun, the shtetl, Ladino, Yiddish, and our own work.

1. Amanda Cross, *A Trap for Fools* (New York: Ballantine, 1989). All references are to this edition.

2. Although in some works by African-American women the term "womanist" is used in opposition to "feminist," Walker coined the term to refer to a specifically black feminism (see bell hooks, *Talking Back*).

3. Deborah E. McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism," *Black American Literature Forum 14* (1980); reprinted in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory,* ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 186–199.

4. *Reinventing Womanhood* (New York: Norton, 1979; reprint ed., 1993).

5. In "Jewish Studies as Oppositional?" in *Styles of Cultural Activism,* ed. Philip Goldstein (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), pp. 152–164, I argue that Jewishness may be viewed as another kind of color.

6. "The Feminist Mystery," *Jerusalem Report,* January 9, 1992, p. 40.

7. Wisse's column assumes a single "ideological feminism," as explicated in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique,* which rests upon the concept of an unremitting victimization of woman.

8. Showalter, *New Feminist Criticism,* p. 27.

9. Hazel Carby, "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," in *Gender and Discourse,* ed. Alexandra D. Todd and Sue Fisher (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing, 1988).

10. By contrast, black feminism—"womanism"—exists at the interstices of sexism and racism. In "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction," in *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Women Writers* (Elmsford, N.Y.: Pergamon, 1985), Barbara Christian observes, "The development of Afro-American women's fiction is . . . a mirror image of the intensity of the relation between sexism and racism in this country" (p. 317). Womanism maps and resists the double exclusion of black women writers—from (as Deborah E. McDowell puts it) the "Afro-American literary tradition by black scholars" and from "normative, white" feminism (p. 186).

11. Christian, "Trajectories of Self-Definition."

12. Susan Willis, "Histories, Communities, and Sometimes Utopia," in *Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

13. Anne Roiphe. *Lovingkindness* (New York: Summit, 1987).

14. The Hebrew term *ba'al tshuvah* (fem. *ba'alat tshuvah*) refers to a religiously nonobservant Jew who has become Orthodox.

15. Alvina Quintana, *Homegirls* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

16. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990.

17. Chicana writing holds ground on two fronts—against sexist oppression from the macho, and against racist oppression from the "whitefeminist." In *Making Face* and in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back* (Watertown, Mass.: Perephone Press, 1981), Anzaldua attempts to formulate the outlines and concerns of a feminist literary theory and ethnopoetics consonant with the cultural and historical experiences of women-of-color, or as she sometimes writes, "mujeres-de-color."

18. Irving Howe, "An Exercise in Memory," *New Republic,* March 11, 1991, pp. 29–32.

19. Shulamit S. Magnus, "Pauline Wengeroff and the Voice of Jewish Modernity," in *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition,* ed. Tamar Rudavsky (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 181–190.

20. Wisse, "Feminist Mystery." For further discussion of the evolution of the Jewish family in modernity, see Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Paula Hyman and Steven M. Cohen, eds., *The Jewish Family* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), and Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Woman* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

21. For a more detailed discussion, see my "Portnoy's Sister—Who's Complaining? Contemporary Jewish American Women's Writing on Judaism," in *Jewish Book Annual,* ed. Jacob Kabakoff, 51 (1993–94): 26–41.

22. Cynthia Ozick, "Hannah and Elkanah: Torah as the Matrix for Feminism," in *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible,* ed. Christina Büchman and Celina Spiegel (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), pp. 88–93.

23. Chicana aesthetics, Anzaldua asserts, "does not address itself *primarily* to whites, but invites them to 'listen in' to women-of-color talking to each other, and, in some instances, to and 'against' white people" (*Making Face,* p. xviii).

24. She also discusses it in *Writing a Woman's Life,* where she repeats the distinction between black and white women's writing, and gives the quotation which forms the basis of the Toni Morrison allusions in *A Trap for Fools.*

25. New York: Norton, 1988.

26. The one entry in either book by a Jewish woman reinforces the arbitrary selection of some Jewish women as oppressed. Judit Moschkovich begins her essay, "But I Know You. American Woman" (*This Bridge Called My Back,* pp. 79–84) with the statement "I am Latina, Jewish and an immigrant." She imagines the response of an astonished reader who wonders, "How can you be both Jewish and Latin-American at the same time?" Yes, she assures the reader, "It *is* possible." One would have to be a reader sorely ignorant of Jewish

history, ignorant of the migrations triggered by anti-Semitic persecutions, to share this imagined surprise.

27. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

DEFINING JEWISH IDENTITY IN AN OPEN SOCIETY*

RELA MINTZ GEFFEN

Introduction

Following the reporting out of the Council of Jewish Federations *1990 National Jewish Population Survey* (NJPS 1990), Jews in leadership positions have arrayed themselves at several points along an opinion spectrum vis-à-vis the future of the American Jewish community.[1] Some say that Judaism has always survived through the existence of a highly identified "saving remnant" (*she'erit ha'playta*) of the people, therefore energy should be focused on the inner circle of perhaps 2 million Jews who have already demonstrated their commitment. They argue that the majority of communal resources should be invested in reinforcing the institutions that underpin their Jewish way of life.

Others say that all Jews are bound to assimilate to some degree, and therefore the key to Jewish survival is outreach. The operative principle here is *arevut* ("interdependence"), the responsibility of every Jew as a member of a covenantal community to care for every other Jew in need. Advocates of this approach revise the traditional halakhic (Jewish legal) borders of who is a Jew or a potential member/citizen of the Jewish community. Then, they assert the importance of individual and communal responsibility for the maintenance of the Jewish identity of all members of the group. Such outreach would require that some minimum education in Jewish history and rituals be made available to anyone who is of Jewish lineage or is married to a Jew and has an interest in perpetuating Jew-

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