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Sex and Difference in the Jewish American Family: Incest Narratives in 1990s Literary and Pop Culture

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SEX AND DIFFERENCE IN THE JEWISH AMERICAN FAMILY: INCEST
NARRATIVES IN 1990S LITERARY AND POP CULTURE

A Dissertation Presented

by

ELI WOLF BROMBERG

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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DEDICATION

For Leroy Enrick Lewis

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ABSTRACT

SEX AND DIFFERENCE IN THE JEWISH AMERICAN FAMILY:
INCEST NARRATIVES IN 1990S LITERARY AND POP CULTURE

FEBRUARY 2018

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My dissertation investigates protective representations of white male Jewish masculinity in the 1990s, via the lens of celebrity incest narratives. In chapters on Woody Allen, Roseanne Barr, and Henry Roth, I demonstrate how media coverage of their respective incest denials (Allen), allegations (Barr), and confessions (Roth) intersect with a history of sexual anti-Semitism. Though prevalent in nineteenth century Europe, sexual anti-Semitism, which simultaneously emasculated Jewish men and rendered them as sexual threats, no longer permeates discourse in the same fashion as the sexualizing component of antiblack racism. I examine how these iconic Jewish artists, news media, and artistic contemporaries, negotiated the hidden, but never absent specter of Jewish male incestuous pedophile in telling these stories. The project intervenes in gender and sexuality studies and ethnic studies by arguing that the particular histories of white ethnic groups, in this case Ashkenazi Jews, informs the manner in which contemporary white privilege operates discursively. The project reveals the community protective patriarchal politics that define “Jewish” interests in a narrow, gendered fashion that dismisses female

Jewish (and non-Jewish) accounts of abuse, instead obeying an imperative to deny anti-Semitic stereotypes, even when individual instances demand confirmation. Furthermore, the project proposes that this Jewish community protective politics falls within a broader category of white male class interests, and serves a demonstrable purpose: helping construct a white masculinity that subtly incorporates and champions Jewish male historical vulnerability in order to reconstitute white male American identity as similarly vulnerable and sympathetic in the face of allegations of sexual transgression.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Do You Think Woody Allen Jerked off his Kids?” and Other Questions

On August 4, 2016, in an interview on Marc Maron’s *WTF* podcast, the comedian Eric Andre mentioned that Bill Cosby happened to attend his high school graduation, and that he got his autograph at the event. Andre expressed ambivalence about the keepsake:

Andre: Should I burn this, or should I keep it forever?

Maron: Well, it’s very hard – it’s very hard to separate the – the Bill Cosby we grew up with and – it’s – it’s no longer a question. But it’s fucked up.

Andre: It’s fucked. Woody Allen too. Do you think Woody Allen jerked off his kids?

Maron: It seems like he did something. But I, you know – again –

Andre: It’s a fucking bummer man. People are fucked. Everybody’s fucked.

Maron: They are fucked, and those two specific ways of being fucked are really fucked. (“ERIC ANDRE – WTF Podcast”)

In many respects, this dissertation project germinated from a version of Andre’s question. I was curious about Woody Allen’s resilience as a celebrity despite allegations regarding his behavior with his family and children. I also could not help linking Bill Cosby and Allen in my thinking despite the very different circumstances of their alleged sexual transgressions; they were both comedic icons. But as I began working on the project, I quickly encountered a number of challenges with the construction of the question I – and Andre – attempted to ask. Who are – or were? – Allen’s “kids?” And what possible verb might apply to his daughter Dylan Farrow’s allegations of sexual abuse, as well as a consensual affair with Soon-Yi Previn, who was Allen’s partner’s Mia Farrow’s daughter, but not Allen’s direct legal relation?

So while the dissertation began with a version of this question, it gradually evolved into a fascination with the problem of how to even arrive at a question. Here, I want to juxtapose Andre's seemingly earnest question, which provocatively, purposefully, and imperfectly, uses the verb "jerked off" to discomfit Maron, to a similar one he poses to Seth Rogen on his avant-garde talk show. Here, Andre asked Rogen:

Andre: You think Woody Allen should get Chinese castrated so he stops jerking off his ex-kids?

Rogen: I don't know. ("Seth Rogen Part 2")

All of a sudden, "jerked off" is only one of multiple problematic aspects of the question. What are "ex-kids?" Why is castration suggested? What do we make of it being "Chinese" castration? What, exactly, is the joke here?

These components of Andre's question touch on "taboo" elements of the Allen incest narrative that comedians, news media, critics, and scholars have all struggled to articulate. Castration as vigilante imposed punishment for alleged sexual offenders has a horrific history, involving lynching as a form of domestic terror wielded against black men. White Jewish men have been less common targets of such vigilante justice. "Chinese" castration, in my reading, is utilized less for the specific type of sterilization and deformation it denotes, than for its racist signification of the Asian members of Allen's current (and former) family. The notion of "ex-kids" complicates our vocabulary of family. Many of Allen's films deal with "ex-wives," but "ex-kids," generally speaking, is not a thing. Too resonant to be a malapropism, Andre uncomfortably utilizes a prefix traditionally used in a relationship context (i.e., "ex-wives," "ex-girlfriends") for children. And finally, the one consistent piece from the Maron interview: jerking off as verb. What verb would better encapsulate the question of Allen's behavior with Dylan

and the very different (but clearly, according to the construction, still related) question of Allen's consensual sexual relations with Previn?

There is one last version of Andre's question that I want us to consider, which brings us, essentially, to a game of sexual transgression telephone. In a fawning review for the web-zine *PopOptiq*, the author includes the joke as evidence of Andre's provocative, avant-garde humor. Except the reviewer gets the joke wrong:

Sometimes he'll even casually ask them about off-topic important issues to add to the uncomfortable tension ... the season 3 premiere finds him asking Seth Rogen "Do you think we should Chinese-castrate Woody Allen so he'll stop jerking off *to* his ex-kids?" (my emphasis, Griffin).

Here, Andre's joke is sanitized, even as it's used as evidence of his commitment to creating "uncomfortable tension." The misquotation seems minor, but fundamentally changes the nature of Allen's sexually transgressive behavior, defanging the question. That is, masturbating to fantasies of one's children is not considered appropriate behavior, but it's far less damning than masturbating them. Or...maybe it's not, if the "ex-kid" is someone with whom he's in a consensual relationship and legal marriage. But that question is made moot by the functional, de facto censorship of the misquote.

Andre's joke serves as a departure point for this dissertation partially because it helps to identify specific frameworks that contribute to the difficulty of discussing Jewish American incest narratives. However, I am just as interested in the contexts that surround Andre's joke. In interviewing Seth Rogen, and being interviewed by Marc Maron, Andre dialogues with contemporary Jewish comedians who are largely recognized and celebrated as such by their fans. Andre is also a Jewish comedian who makes frequent reference to his Jewishness in interviews and stand-up, but he is also a black comedian (and a black Jewish comedian). Maron and Rogen may fit preconceived notions of Jewish

racial identity more than Andre. Andre's black Jewishness reminds us, crucially, that Rogen and Maron are not merely Jewish comedians – they are *white* Jewish comedians.¹ And certainly, it's crucial to remember that each of these comedians are men, as Andre's humor also targets the (a)moral suppositions we might associate with a male gendered subjectivity. The circumstances of Andre and Rogen and Maron's conversations remind us that Jewish community protective politics which I engage throughout this dissertation, may better be considered as an explicitly *white* Jewish community protective politics.

Ultimately, the notion of a (white) Jewish respectability politics sits at the heart of this dissertation's argument: Jewish community anxiety about white Jewish male vulnerability results in Jewish male interests' being privileged above Jewish women's and children's interests, as well as non-Jewish and nonwhite interests, in a fashion that works to silence those who accuse white Jewish men of sexual transgressions such as incest. I demonstrate this through an investigation of protective representations of white male Jewish American masculinity in 1990s incest narratives, and the mechanisms by which these representations helped displace historical sexual antisemitic stereotypes onto marginalized groups. The project links incest scholarship with Jewish Studies, but its most purposeful engagement may be with questions of white Jewish racial formation. That is, this project tells a story about how histories of Jewish stereotypes and antisemitism intersect with how various media depicted late twentieth-century incest narratives. But I argue that this intersection cannot be considered in a vacuum, that it

¹ Katya Azoulay, in *Black, Jewish, and Interracial*, comments on the risks of associating "Jewishness" with "whiteness," not just in terms of allowing the term "Jewish" to more accurately represent various types of affiliation, but also the fact that Ashkenazi ethno-racial descent can and does also incorporate nonwhite ethno-racial descent.

instead must be analyzed as an American phenomenon complete with its own distinct history of racial stereotype and white privilege that intersects in complex, but meaningful ways with centuries of Jewish stereotype. Ultimately, I argue that the understandable impulse of historically maligned Ashkenazi descended white Jews to shed historical stereotypes associating Jews with incest, displaced these stigmas (irrespective of intent) onto non-Jewish black, nonwhite, and poor families. By focusing on the whiteness of an ethno-religious group with contemporary white privilege as well as historic vulnerability to incest stereotype, I reveal how white Jewish males accused of incest (or who defiantly confessed incest) become sympathetic figures representing supposed white male vulnerability writ large.

As an American Studies project, then, this project foregrounds aspects of Jewish American experience, but my analyses frame how artists and media define “Jewishness” against other ethno-racial groups (African Americans, Asian Americans, and “white trash”) when it comes to the politics of depicting and discussing sexual transgression. I do not do this to single out “Jewishness,” but rather to argue that as an ethno-racial white American identity, white Jewishness defines itself affirmatively – like so many other forms of whiteness – but also, crucially, by what it is not, especially at those moments where there is a community imperative to distance the group from a stigma. But having introduced some of the themes of this project via the Andre joke(s), I want to speak to the various disciplinary foundations on which I have attempted to build this project, and to the interventions I attempt to make.

“Incest” and The Problem of Language (“Jerking Off” and Imperfect Verbs)

“Incest” has a complex relationship with language on two fronts. First, it resists clear-cut definition as a concept. Second, historically, its ostensibly taboo qualities make it resistant to straightforward discussion.

Definition-wise, consider the following concise assessment of incest: prohibited sexual conduct within traditional family units. Clearly, this begs for further refinement. What kind of sexual conduct? Intercourse between siblings is certainly incest, but what about non-reproductive sexual touching? Who gets to define whether touching is or is not sexual? Traditionally prohibited types of relationships may seem straightforward, but what traditions? Legal or cultural? How do differing “Jewish” definitions of incest intersect with differing “American” definitions of incest? How does historical context fit in? Are cousin marriages incest? Multiple states have made it illegal on those grounds. Does it depend on whether the cousins are getting married today versus in eighteenth-century Lodz? Also, what’s a family unit? If we consider nuclear families, and thus put aside the cousin-question for a moment, this might simplify things. But what about “nontraditional” family units? How do step-parents or adopted children/siblings function here? What role does (or should) consanguinity (blood-relation) play in categorizing all of this?

Some of the difficulty in defining incest involves its having meant different things in different historical and societal contexts. Judith Herman’s *Father-Daughter Incest* makes a strong case for understanding stepfather / stepdaughter incest as a form of incest facilitated by the lack of consanguineous relatedness, stressing how the psychological burdens and power dynamics have little to do with blood relation. But the prospect of congenital risk in reproduction, a facet of numerous incest narratives, would not play a

role in such an instance. Alternatively, framing incest as primarily involving anxieties regarding reproduction dismisses same-sex incest. My approach towards incest is inclusive – incorporating anything that might be described as involving familial sexual relations or transgressions – as my interest involves social stigma, and narrative expressions of anxiety regarding social stigma. Cousin marriages, for instance, rarely come up within incest scholarship, as they take place outside of the construct of a traditional nuclear family. However, multiple states prohibit cousin marriage. I engage with cousin marriage, and sexual relations, in this study precisely because it sits on the outer boundaries of proscribed familial sexual relations, a liminal space that generates commentary and questions about why it is, or is not, incestuous. It's also a type of relationship that many Americans (Jewish or otherwise) can locate in ancestors without going too far back in their family tree. Even if we reject the cousin marriages as incest, conversations about cousin marriage and relations almost inevitably reveal incest anxiety.

Language itself poses a problem even for clear-cut categories of incest (i.e., father-daughter, consanguineous), because talking about such events often becomes no easier once they have been identified. This quality undergirds a number of insights within incest studies, a field that encompasses a number of academic disciplines and literary genres. Lynn Sacco titled her history of American incest *Unspeakable*, foregrounding the problem of discussing (let alone historically documenting) a type of interaction that is so taboo as to preclude utterance. This echoes Toni McNaron and Yarrow Morgan's theorization that the supposed taboo surrounding incest involves its discussion, and not its existence. McNaron and Morgan cite the frequency with which women report incest as evidence that the taboo sits firmly on the side of the act's verbal expression (15).

Florence Rush's *The Best Kept Secret*, which I discuss in detail in chapter one, addresses child molestation broadly, though it also engages with incest specifically. Its title implies that the notion of child molestation as taboo is confused with the prohibition on its "telling."² But by the 1970s, incest found more frequent expression as a topic for analysis within white feminist literature and scholarship, and a topic for literary exploration in black feminist novels and memoir. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges comment on this phenomenon facilitating a shift in this discourse, writing in 2001 that "it may even seem that incest is now talked about too much" (1).

This relatively recent shift in incest discourse comes up again in Gillian Harkins's *Everybody's Family Romance*, which engages the 1990s in particular as an era during which cultural productions involving incest found mass consumption, while lawsuits involving pedophilia found frequent litigation. Harkins's argument suggests that we consider incest narratives vis-à-vis their position as object of neoliberal consumption. Harkins elucidates how this phenomenon operates for largely female authors and consumers, and I believe that the male-authored narratives in this project (Allen's and Roth's) may operate as a countervailing trend to "reclaim" the historically privileged white male incest subjective authority encroached upon by feminist and queer voices from the 1960s through to the 1990s. While Harkins and Doane and Hodges correctly note the increased expression of incest through the 1990s, I contend that Jewishness

² Michel Foucault's theory of the "repressive hypothesis" fits here too. As Foucault suggests, if we spend a lot of energy discussing how we do not or should not talk about sex, we actually focus on it quite a bit. I do not mean to suggest that incest can substitute for sex in Foucault's theorization, so much as to point out that the complexity of incest discourse, and incest meta-discourse, may reflect broader contradictions in discourses involving sexuality.

within these narratives remain obstructed by meaningful silence. If the logic of whiteness involves a resistance to sexual stereotype, the intersection of Jewishness and historic incest stereotypes are meaningfully muted in discussions regarding these narratives. In setting up the ways in which my project links incest theory with Jewish Studies, I aim to underscore the relevance of historical Jewish sexual antisemitism and stereotype to these more recent narratives.

Incest, Endogamy, and Sexual Antisemitism

Presumably, incest's resistance to definition might be less at issue within specific cultural contexts, such as Judaism. The Torah, commentary within the *mishna*, and rabbinic approaches to the topic in different sociohistorical contexts provide a foundation for specifying incest beyond the various earlier posed questions. We might not find complete consistency across texts and historical record, but this in and of itself should not be surprising; the texts span an enormous swath of history, and a vast array of social contexts.³ However, the current iteration of this dissertation project lacks an intricate engagement with these laws and customs, as they evolved.

What accounts for this seeming inattention? Fundamentally, my project focuses on the intersection of incest anxiety and societal proscriptions for decidedly secular artists / icons. In my case studies, there are instances of specific types of prohibited relations finding direct commentary in scripture (Woody Allen films, in particular, are rife with examples on this front; men sexually engaged with sisters, or non-consanguineously

³ For instance, Calum Carmichael argues that the prohibitions detailed in Leviticus serve less to reflect social history at the time of their writing, and in fact reveal a direct linkage to the sexual and marital activity of patriarchs in Genesis (8). That is, Carmichael provocatively complicates the distinction between Torah and commentary by arguing for a reading of Leviticus as, essentially, commentary on Genesis.

related aunts). I allude to the significance of these depictions where applicable. But across primary texts and media commentary, anxiety emerges from endogamy's (and specifically "close endogamy's") relationship to often vague *concepts* of incest.

The vagueness of these incest concepts, I contend, is structural; that is, they reflect the uncertainty regarding religious tradition's categorization of what is prohibited; secular non-Jewish law's categorization of what is prohibited; and anxiety regarding antisemitic stereotypes associating endogamy with incest.⁴ This triangulation highlights the significance of incest stereotype to historically, culturally *permitted* marriages. Incest anxiety may adhere as assiduously to the relationships on the outer boundaries of permittedness (such as cousin and uncle-niece marriages) as it would on the inner bounds of familial relations (where it involves clear nuclear familial transgressions). As such, my project is especially sensitive to the discourse surrounding endogamy in nineteenth century Europe, and in particular the way that antisemitic pseudoscience collapsed endogamous tradition into "incest."⁵ These anxieties, I contend, continue through the twentieth century, and emerge in the artwork of each of the icons whose work I examine.

In this regard, the fact that cousin marriages were not prohibited in Jewish Ashkenazic tradition during the nineteenth century, and cousin marriages were not uncommon, make them central to my examination of incest discourse precisely because

⁴ Brian Connolly gets at a version of this tension in *Domestic Intimacies*, a study on nineteenth century American incest and liberalism; he notes that a history of incest during this period "entails excavating this space between the universal and the particular in various articulations of the prohibition" (2).

⁵ Naomi Seidman's *The Marriage Plot* addresses the manner in which Jewish marriage traditions modernized during the nineteenth-century, and how literature played an important role in that process. Her "Matchmaking and Modernity" chapter is particularly relevant to how endogamy anxieties functioned in Yiddish literature of that era.

of the disconnect between contemporary norms and those of the nineteenth century. Though non-Jewish European groups also engaged in cousin marriage as a common practice, Jewish cultural endogamy – the tradition of Jews only marrying other Jews – found itself distorted by antisemitic thinking and theorizing into an incestuous practice.

The centrality of nineteenth-century endogamy-related cultural contexts to my project builds upon a range of studies in a variety of disciplines. Historians David Warren Sabean and ChaeRan Freeze establish how Jewish cousin-union discourse functioned within larger discursive contexts regarding non-Jewish marriage traditions in nineteenth-century Germany and Russia. Micah Fitzerman Blue has conducted historical legal scholarship on how Rhode Island provided legal exceptions for Jews from incest laws regarding uncle / niece marriages. Genetic biologist David Goldstein's *Jacob's Legacy* engages the science of historical endogamy and close endogamy, but notably mentions anxiety regarding the science as highly relevant to the current discourse regarding "Jewish genetics." I examine these scholars' work more closely in chapter five, which deals with the pairing of a sibling incest and first-cousin sexual relations / rape narrative in Henry Roth's *Mercy of a Rude Stream*. But these themes buttress the project as a whole. Alys Eve Weinbaum contends persuasively that this very association of incest / close endogamy with Jews even impacted Sigmund Freud's own linguistic choices in writing about incest in "The Aetiology of Hysteria." I discuss Weinbaum's analysis in more detail in chapter one, but she suggests we consider Freud's choices as a writer to be linked inexorably to a problem of signification: whether Freud explicitly wrote about Jewishness in his discussions of incest or not, his audiences would inevitably read Jews into his narrative. That was how strong the incest stereotype was at the time.

While nineteenth-century associations of Jewish incest with Jewish close endogamy impact our understanding of how these historical discourses operate, Sander Gilman reminds us that all of this sits under the umbrella of how sexual antisemitism cast Jews as sexually non-normative. Gilman helps establish how literature echoed the antisemitic pseudo-medical discourse's preoccupation with Jewish close endogamy as incest; he also helps broaden the geography of the stereotype, pointing out that while Thomas Mann presents incestuous longing amongst siblings in "Blood of the Walsungs" (1905), Edgar Allan Poe racializes the same themes in the United States decades earlier, in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) (*Love + Marriage* 138). Gilman's work also links the lateral incest stereotype with sexual antisemitism that conjured the specter of the Jewish male sexual predator as threat to non-Jewish European children, which also played an oversize role in the non-Jewish European imaginary. Not only does Gilman suggest that Jewish men represented a sexual threat to non-Jewish children (as in representations of Jack the Ripper), he contends that the lateral aspect of sibling incest and the vertical aspect of adult Jewish victimization of non-Jewish children intersect meaningfully: "child murder and sibling incest came to be linked in the forensic science of the period as twin signs of the madness of the Jews" (*Love + Marriage* 136). Storylines involving Jewish male sexual predation required non-Jewish children to be coded as innocent. Jewish children (who could be cast as immorally incestuous siblings) would not serve that representational purpose. Gilman's theorizing helps demonstrate the overlapping resonance of various types of sexual transgressions; a juxtaposition of a sexually threatening adult and innocent children evokes consideration of pedophilia, and not just incest. And the notion of "innocent children" and childhood more broadly evince

how indispensable queer theory is to analyzing these concepts. But before moving to the distinct American socio-historical contexts for incest discourse and stereotype, I want to draw attention to Karl Abraham's 1913 psychoanalytic essay, "On Neurotic Exogamy."

Abraham's essay explicitly situates the incest anxiety as tied to exogamous impulses, and though his argument is presented as universally applicable, he focuses extensively on Jewish male patients. This connection of incest anxiety and out-group partnering finds almost continuous expression in Jewish literature and films over the course of the twentieth-century, most frequently in juxtapositions of the "*shiksa*" (non-Jewish, white, often blonde, Jewish male love interest) and the Oedipal complex. But Abraham's identification of incest and exogamy as paired impulses helps set up the corresponding, but ethno-racially differently constructed pairing of these impulses in the United States. If, as we've established, European discourse surrounding incest marked Jews as racial others, how did American discourse surrounding incest operate historically in terms of racial difference and othering?

Exogamous Incest and Slavery: American Families and Plantations

While Gilman and Weinbaum establish Jews as a foundational "other" for incest stereotype in a European context, the United States features a distinctly different genesis for incest stereotype: one that involves slavery, its justifications, and its familial consequences. Doane and Hodges are among the incest scholars who have commented upon how American stereotypes of incest attach themselves to black families: "The projection of the actuality of incest onto cultural others, often the poor and black, is a sign of 'the thing's' danger to imaginary, moralized communities" (2).

This projection intersects not only with the history of racism in the United States, but also with some of its earliest justifications. The Hamitic myth, which functioned as a theological explanation for racial difference rooted in Genesis, suggested that either Ham, or his son Canaan, were cursed by either Moses, or God, for Ham's looking upon his father Noah's "nakedness" (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Gen. 9-21.22). This discourse dates back to the Sanhedrin tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, from around the fifth century. That Talmudic commentary considered whether Ham's transgression with Noah involved sexual abuse or violation, while also suggesting that the subsequent curse, which declared that Ham's son Canaan be the "lowest of slaves" (Gen. 9.24-25) to his brothers, also left Ham "smitten in his skin" (*Babylonian Talmud* 477). This has been interpreted as a biblical explanation for racial difference; Noah's curse, according to this theological tradition, creates blackness. With the advent of the transatlantic slave trade, pro-slavery theologians in the United States and England utilized the Hamitic myth to justify (and even considered it to prophesy) slavery of Africans and black people, and African Americans (Whitford 160).⁶

The Hamitic myth helps establish just one example of the historical linkedness of notions of incest and white and black families. Hortense Spillers's theorizing of incest in American literature notes the interconnectedness of plantation histories and families with contemporary moralizing. Spillers notes that sexual relations in a plantation family

⁶ Thomas Peterson's *Ham and Japheth: the Mythic World of Whites in the Antebellum South*, David Whitford's *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era*, Sylvester Johnson's *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth Century America*, and Stephen Haynes' *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* all provide further historical contexts on how ubiquitous Genesis Nine, and the Hamitic myth, was to American conceptions about race and slavery.

constructed property relations that voided the meaning of “kinship” (“Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” 218). In “In the Time of the Daughters and the Fathers” she considers late twentieth-century feminist African American literary depictions of incest as arising from a consideration of how kinship relations between black fathers and black daughters were disrupted by white male ownership and all of its familial destructive consequences.

While *Spillers* focuses on how black feminist authors represent incest within historically contextualized African American literature, Werner Sollors’s work on antebellum and postbellum American literature identifies how incest and “miscegenation” were conflated, revealing the psychological rationalization involved in interracial incest. According to Sollors, “interracial alliances are often perceived to be the opposite of, or antidote to, closely endogamous ones;” incest is “too close,” interracial is “too far” (318). The racist logic that suggests that these sexual transgressions were mutually exclusive yielded a literary record often preoccupied with the plausibility of their simultaneity. This tension, between the confused taboos of “too close” and “too far” surfaces consistently in my case studies, and also, with slightly different vocabulary, in the European Jewish-focused contexts (as in Karl Abraham’s aforementioned essay “Neurotic Exogamy”). It also thematically underscores a large amount of American Jewish literature that pairs the Oedipal complex with a sexual attraction to non-Jewish women (often archetypal “*shiksas*”). But the notion of the interracial plantation family construct as providing a clue to contemporary notions and conversations about incest finds expression not just in literary studies, but legal scholarship as well.

Zanita Fenton’s “An Essay on Slavery’s Hidden Legacy: Social Hysteria and Structural Condonation of Incest” contends that legal circumstances provided white slave

owners with the justification to consider their daughters' status as property to overrule their status as kin. Fenton makes the case that this facilitated incest with nonwhite daughters, while also inevitably weakening the incest taboo for their white daughters as well. Fenton's legal historical theorizing makes the case for considering the particular subjectivity of white men who initiate incest, and their rationalizations. Her work is especially vital to my consideration of the Woody Allen narrative, given the presence of two daughter figures; one white (Dylan) and one nonwhite (Soon-Yi Previn). But this leap requires the consideration of Allen as a figure with two distinct historical contexts: the European one, in which his historical lineage is as stereotyped, "othered" object, and the American one, in which his historical lineage is as privileged, "othering" subject.

A considerable number of American incest scholars and theorists (including Doane and Hodges, Harkins, Sandra Butler (*Conspiracy of Silence*), Judith Herman (*Father-Daughter Incest*), and Brian Connelly (*Domestic Intimacies*) draw attention, within their work, to the black incest stereotype and contextualize it alongside white racism and projection. I aim to juxtapose the broad historical contexts informing the American-rooted black incest stereotype with the European-rooted Jewish incest stereotype. What racial formation do white Jews exhibit, in the 1990s, when cast in narratives that depict them alongside white and nonwhite family members, whose registry as "family members" often depends on the word of a white Jewish subject? What happens to the social resonances of Jewish sexual threat when white male Jewish subjects emerge in narratives that cast their white subjective privilege alongside allusions to their historic vulnerability as an oppressed minority? My hope is that attending to these questions in a multicultural, multiracial context can reveal contemporary ways in which

whiteness works, even as American racial discourse does not operate in a simple white/black or white/Jewish dichotomy. In contemplating various forms of threatened or threatening masculinity, how do we contextualize blackness, whiteness, and Jewishness, while also considering Andre's decision to allude to "Chinese castration?"

On Castration, Circumcision, and White Jewish Masculinity

The specter of castration allows us to connect historical terrorization of black men and masculinity, the history of antisemitic stereotype, and contemporaneous notions of how sexual transgression should be "policed." Andre's reference to castration as a consequence of alleged sexual transgression signifies America's history of lynching, with its systemic castration of and murdering of black men. White supremacy used the mythology of black male sexual threat to terrorize black communities, and dismember and murder black men, though black women historically had no meaningful legal recourse to white male rape.⁷ Jewish male sexual threat also involved the penis, and castration, but in a very different context. Freud explored Jewish circumcision and culturally specific and universal forms of "castration complex," and Sander Gilman and Daniel Boyarin are among those who have analyzed Freud's theorizing on the topic.⁸ The extent to which Jews were, within an antisemitic discourse, largely considered castrated, perhaps explains why no cultural logic allowing castration as a method of "policing" Jewish sexuality emerged. But this involves cultural logic regarding sexual antisemitism,

⁷ Jacqueline Goldsby's *A Spectacular Secret* expertly examines lynching as a form of social terror that undergirded national consciousness, and whose cultural logic also helped to shape American modernity.

⁸ Boyarin argues in *Unheroic Conduct* that alongside antisemitic stereotypes that conjured Jewish men as types of women, on account of circumcision, that Jewish culture also rejected European gender roles in favor of a notion of "the Jewish ideal male as countertype to 'manliness'" (4).

and not its absence. Consider Franz Fanon's observation in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "No anti-Semite would ever conceive of the idea of castrating the Jew. He is killed or sterilized. But the Negro is castrated" (125). Fanon creates a dichotomy in terms of how contemporaneous antisemitism functions vis-à-vis contemporaneous racism: "In the case of the Jew, one thinks of money and its cognates. In that of the Negro, one thinks of sex" (123).⁹ Fanon's construction dismisses the extent to which sexual antisemitism functioned alongside other forms of antisemitism in the years preceding the Holocaust. The notion of castration as a less "effective" logic or myth for policing Jewish sexuality, though, aligns with Boyarin's reading: what sense would it make to threaten a supposedly castrated class with further castration?

This notion of Jewish masculinity, as well as male sexuality, as already vulnerable to antisemitic discourse, also intersects with a crucial aspect of incest theorization: Judith Butler's argument that the incest prohibition functions within a "heterosexual matrix." According to Butler, in most assessments (and certainly Freud's) of a "universal" incest taboo, the taboo reveals a prior proscription ruling out same-sex relations. Butler quotes Gayle Rubin as she builds this argument, calling attention to how Rubin connects the notion of taboos to the distinction between sex and gender: "A prohibition against *some* heterosexual unions assumes a taboo against *non*heterosexual unions. Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed towards the other sex" (Butler 99). While Rubin (in Butler's analysis) is theorizing how sex, gender,

⁹ Brian Cheyette provides extended analysis of the limitations of Fanon's reading, and his sustained (if disembodied) focus on Jews and antisemitism, in the second chapter of *Diasporas of the Mind*.

and taboo sexuality operate (temporally) “before the law” – I want to focus on how this intersection might function for men who historically have had to contend with an incest stereotype as well as a discourse that, in casting circumcision as castration, challenged their gender identity and capacity for male heterosexuality. That is, what happens when one of these taboos can disprove the other? And further, what happens when one of these taboos disproves the other by asserting agency and power, *even* if demonized, which rules out the homophobic constructed “weakness” of the other taboo?

Psychologically, can incest between a man or a boy and a woman or a girl, according to the homophobic logic of the heterosexual matrix, have the effect of “proving” masculinity *and* heterosexuality? Might the willingness to tell stories about a transgression of the incest prohibition (as some artists do), permit that artist to reveal a supposed abundance, essentially, of heterosexual inclination? My close reading of Henry Roth’s *Mercy of a Rude Stream* suggests that in Roth’s novel heterosexual incest functioned as a badge of hyper-heterosexuality. I believe this reading may speak to ways in which Woody Allen has appealed to his audiences as well.

But, as this introduction has hopefully made clear, the notion of Jewish masculinity as being historically, “especially” vulnerable must sit alongside a recognition of the ways nonwhite masculinities are threatened, and made bodily vulnerable under contemporary logics of white supremacy. Andre’s castration joke underscores that any American castration reference adheres to subtext and history; his signifying of racial sexual threat is dependent on the particulars of the raced, castrated male figure.

These frameworks contextualize how this project engages incest as it relates to language; slavery and ethno-racial difference; antisemitism and ethno-religious historical

stereotypes; and masculinity. In the next section, I attempt to place this project amidst the relevant scholarship focusing on the 1990s.

Historicizing the 1990s

In attempting to put incest scholarship, history of Jewish incest stereotype, and the historical, slavery-based familial constructs for American incest narratives into dialogue, I approach the 1990s as a recent, but nonetheless historically examinable era. Various scholarly historical engagements with the period inform aspects of my own methodology.

A number of projects engaging the 1990s have focused on how the decade functioned as a fulcrum point for types of American sexual discourse, including political, medical, and media-based. W. Joseph Campbell argues in *1995: The Year the Future Began* that 1995 operated as a “watershed” year, in which various events (the release of Windows 95, the OJ Simpson trial, and the Oklahoma City bombing) can be considered to have presaged aspects of technological advancements, voluminous 24-hour media coverage, and political extremism that distinguish our contemporary American era from prior historical moments. Campbell also investigates Bill Clinton’s sexual liaison with Monica Lewinsky, as well as Clinton’s battle with Newt Gingrich over “family values,” a subject I engage in my first chapter on Allen. I am also cognizant of Dagmar Herzog’s work in *Sex in Crisis*, situating the 1990s as an era in which the Christian Right’s supposed “family values” crusade utilized rhetoric that “served not only to repulse but also to titillate its target audience” (61), while the erectile drug Viagra shifted conversations about sexual performance towards chemicals, and away from sexual desire. Joshua Gamson’s *Freaks Talk Back* considers the talk-show circuit of the 1990s, a genre often maligned for sensationalism, that Gamson argues provided platforms for LGBTQ

guests to frame their sexuality and identities in their own terms on broadcast television. And James Kincaid's *Erotic Innocence*, despite being published in 1998, reveals a sustained contemporaneous focus on 1990s celebrity and media culture, as it argues that American society demands narratives and images that eroticize youth, a predilection that, for Kincaid, belies the moralizing tenor of conversations about "protecting" children. Kincaid makes compelling arguments, but historians and clinicians continue to compile considerable evidence that child sexual assault occurs, whatever the discursive hypocrisies of American media. Ross Cheit's *The Witch-Hunt Narrative* begins his examination of child sexual molestation cases in the 1980s, meticulously examining courtroom evidence to argue that even cases contemporarily used as "proof" of the danger of witch hunts or false allegations (such as the McMartin Preschool Case), often reveal evidence of sexual transgression committed against children.

"Childhood," however, may not be a race-neutral concept. Kathryn Bond Stockton and Robin Bernstein both suggest it is raced as white in the popular American imaginary.¹⁰ Jews, as Katya Azoulay laments, are also frequently raced as white in that same imaginary. The notion of racial formation, which helps in considering how popular conceptions of Jews and children register as "white," lies at the heart of this project.

Racial Formation and White Jews

Racial formation serves as a crucial construct for considering how once prevalent, centuries-old stereotypes (such as those linking Jews and incest) can operate at a much more muted contemporary register. Michael Omi and Howard Winant define racial

¹⁰ Bernstein and Stockton perform their close readings of various cultural texts and artifacts while still, importantly, keeping children's lived experiences and vulnerabilities at the fore of their scholarly consideration.

formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (55). Karen Brodtkin has considered this process as involving the legal benefits accorded to white Jews following WWII, along with the manner in which Jewish intellectuals began to speak *as* white during this period. Matthew Jacobson has approached Jewish racial formation as part of a broader inquiry into ethnic white racial formation, and has engaged both the specific fashion in which movements like second-wave feminism concretized ethnic white European integration into whiteness (*Roots Too*), as well as the legal treatment of Jews as early as 1790 (*Whiteness of a Different Color*). For Jacobson, the sociohistorical process of white Jewish racial formation is not a simple one-way trajectory. While white Jews had access to American citizenship in the eighteenth century, the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 demonstrates how nativist sentiment sought to quell Jewish (as well as eastern European, Asian, African immigration) immigration prior to WWII. By utilizing incest, close endogamy and exogamy, and their attached anxieties, as my primary contexts for exploring white Jewish racial formation, I examine white Jewish racial formation more in terms of cultural production than engagement with set immigration policy, economic policy, or protection of legal rights. My attempt to contextualize white Jewish racial formation occurs alongside consideration of both antisemitism and racism, and my chapters are largely structured around consideration of white Jewish difference alongside other forms of ethno-racial difference. Jonathan Freedman’s *Klezmer America*, which calls attention to

American Jewish cultural production as part of a transformative, “syncretic, hybridizing engagement,” has helped inform this approach.¹¹

At the same time, I want to be very careful in not dichotomizing white Jewish difference into the only form of Jewish difference. Katya Azoulay’s scholarship, from an anthropological disciplinary perspective, helps to emphasize the silencing of nonwhite Jewish voices that occurs in analyses that continue to associate Jewishness with whiteness “as a racially significant mark” (10). Given my emphasis on white Jewish masculinity, my project may run this risk, but my goal is to consider the white Jewish father figure, in all of his complex contemporary and historical racial formation, as a significant figure for Jewish, non-Jewish, white and nonwhite consideration. One of Azoulay’s observations about racial identity involves the importance of family; as she puts it, “It is not really the color of one’s skin that matters, but the ‘race’ of one’s kin” (4). Harkening back to the Andre anecdote, and expanding slightly on Azoulay’s notion of family and kinship, I want to emphasize that Andre’s interest in Allen as an iconic figure, and his immediate connection of Bill Cosby with Allen as problematized icons, involves an identification of Allen as Jewish father-figure, and “kin,” at the same celebrity level we might observe with black comedians invoking Cosby. Even though the associations of Jewishness with whiteness may create the appearance, for some viewers,

¹¹ Though my project does not focus explicitly on what Jennifer Glaser refers to as racial ventriloquism (other than aspects of my chapter on Roth), Michael Rogin’s *Blackface*, *White Noise*, Jeffery Melnick’s *A Right to Sing the Blues*, Lori Harrison-Kahan’s *The White Negress* and Glaser’s *Borrowed Voices* all engage deeply with questions of racial formation and continue to influence my thinking and reading of white Jewish racial formation through the perspective of white Jewish artists.

that Andre's question functions as an aggressive act, in which he asks white Jews to, essentially, account for their Jewish "kin," he poses it as an in-group interlocutor.¹²

Popular culture, obviously, plays a very large role in all of this, especially as it involves the particular narratives of Woody Allen and Roseanne Barr. The incorporation of Jewishness into whiteness during the 1990s occurs within a range of popular cultural productions. Daniel Itzkovitz makes a strong case for this normalization involving a pair of vested interests: white Jews are made mainstream, with all of the adherent benefits, while Jewish "liminality" (and all its adherent threats) is domesticated by an ostensibly non-Jewish, white power structure. In Itzkovitz's words, "the ascendance of the liminal Jewish man to normative American everyman suggests a profound popular identification with the unsettling and unsettled Jewish man in the postmodern era, and the desire to contain that liminality" (245). Itzkovitz's readings of white Jewish film and television protagonists during the 1990s suggests the centrality of this notion of "liminality," but it's the question of "unsettling" that I find myself wrestling with here. How "unsettling" can normative American Jews get, before it's too unsettling? Close reading Jewish incest narratives may not answer that question, but it can help orient us to why it's an important, if uncomfortable question to ask, and reveal that there's almost always another, more vulnerable ethno-racial other beyond the liminality of the Jewish figure.

Methodology

¹² Hannibal Burrell's presence in the Rogen sketch signifies this further, given Burrell's role (as a black comic) in re-introducing the allegations of rape against the iconic Cosby in a stand-up routine that went viral, prompting mass corporate disavowal of Cosby, and public reconsideration of the dozens of public rape allegations.

My methodology involves close reading a wide variety of texts as primary sources, giving consistent attention to the very different types of space that emerge between authors' texts and their actual lives. The particular types of primary sources depend on the chapter in question; writing about Roseanne Barr and Woody Allen, for instance, provide a larger archive of pop culture productions and celebrity news coverage than available for Henry Roth. My first chapter, on Jewish second-wave feminist criticism of Freud, conducts close readings and rhetorical analysis of canonical feminist theory in the late 1960s through the 1970s, by putting these texts in conversation with the biographies of the women who wrote them. The next two chapters deal more directly with pop culture, and in my chapter on Roseanne Barr and the show *Roseanne*, and the chapter on media depictions of the Woody Allen incest narrative in the early 1990s, I incorporate a range of aforementioned pop culture texts. The Barr chapter utilizes sitcoms, memoir, television newsmagazine features, interviews, talk-show interviews, celebrity weekly magazines, televised sketch comedy, stand-up routines, supermarket tabloids, and fan fiction. The first Allen chapter utilizes many of these as well, in addition to a "tell all" memoir, cable news reporting, biographies, press conferences, national political convention speeches, political editorial commentary, and courtroom trial and legal coverage. The second Allen chapter is perhaps most methodologically straightforward, as it is structured directly around close readings of Allen's films and their intersections with aspects of his life documented in biographies, memoirs, interviews, and journalistic reporting. Lastly, the chapter dealing with Henry Roth considers his novel *Mercy of a Rude Stream* against the draft versions of scenes in the

novel collected in his papers at the American Jewish Historical Society in New York City, as well as the edits to manuscripts of the novel.

In each chapter, I attempt to tell a story about *how* stories about “Jewish incest” have been told. Authors abound. This involves the collaborative nature of some of these works, but it also involves the way in which a story finds itself echoed and retold, worked over, and re-presented, especially when it involves taboo and stigma. The misrepresentation of Eric Andre’s joke in an online review speaks to a discursive shift even as it might easily be considered as mere typo. For my analysis, the question of how and why these discursive shifts happen predominate. As such, I find myself as interested in the jokes made at Woody Allen’s expense, as I am in Woody Allen’s films’ engagement with his autobiography. Within each of these chapters, I attempt to represent how these stories found their expression as “incest narratives,” a term I use to indicate stories that showcase two separate types of transgressive relations: kinship *and* exogamy. Building on Werner Sollors’s theorization about the intersections of anxiety regarding “too close” and “too far,” it’s my contention that the specter of ethno-racial difference buttresses the stories that artists and the media tell about incest.

An Overview of the Chapters

In chapter one, I set a foundation for the 1990s case studies by rhetorically analyzing secular Jewish authored second-wave feminist texts that criticized Freud. Paula Hyman and Sylvia Barack Fishman have commented on the prevalence of Jewish second-wave feminists, but have considered their early contributions to be less involved with Jewishness than subsequent texts that more explicitly discussed Jewishness. However, by revealing how authors like Shulamith Firestone and Susan Brownmiller

rarely foregrounded their own, or Freud's, Jewishness, I argue that Jewish collective anxiety regarding sexual antisemitism facilitated the displacement of sexual stereotypes from Jewish fathers onto black men. While Florence Rush made culturally grounded mention of Jewish male patriarchal and sexually exploitive behavior, I contend that her attempts to specify Jewish male patriarchy as distinct from an otherwise prevalent white / black dichotomy served largely as an exception to the rhetorical rule, which otherwise served to cement white Jewishness's incorporation into whiteness.

In chapter two, I argue that the television show *Roseanne* reveals a pair of complex, interlinked incest metanarratives. Building on Juliet Mitchell's recentering of lateral relations as central to the incest prohibition, I contend that the sitcom reflects Roseanne Barr's anxiety over her family's lateral close endogamies, as well as her experiences of her father Jerry Barr, whom she alleged of sexually molesting her in 1991. I contend that Roseanne's television father, Al Harris, conjured Jerry Barr in meaningful ways, given widespread media coverage of Barr's allegations, as well as ample evidence of Al Harris being depicted as a Jewish father on her sitcom. I speculate that resistance towards identifying Jewish content in *Roseanne* involves the fact that Al Harris is physically abusive, and responsible for an extended somber plot arc, in which the show's rejection of patriarchy finds expression in its challenge to a Jewish father figure. The specter of the vulnerable, accused Jewish father, alongside white Jewish community protective politics that historically privileged Jewish fathers given their historical vulnerability to antisemitism, may help account for why the fictional Roseanne Connor's Jewish roots have been overlooked in *Roseanne* scholarship.

In chapter three, I begin my discussion of the Woody Allen incest narrative by arguing that Allen's decades of honing a "Woody Allen persona" that was widely associated with Jewishness facilitated his insinuating that allegations that he had sexually transgressed with either Dylan or Soon-Yi Previn functioned as antisemitic attacks. In making this argument, I analyze the ways various forms of media and commentaries engaged ethno-racial identity in telling the stories of Allen's defiantly confirmed and defiantly denied sexual relationships with his (or Mia's) family members. I contend that media treatment of Allen routinely cast him as white when juxtaposed against Soon-Yi Previn's Asian racial otherness, while his own Jewish otherness registered most saliently when he was juxtaposed against Mia Farrow and Dylan Farrow's comparative Catholic whiteness. I also apply Werner Sollors and Zanita Fenton's theorizing on the confusion of incest and miscegenation anxieties during slavery to reportage of the Allen narrative, as media routinely demeaned Previn as a hypersexual caricature, while also privileging Allen's arbitrary statements about who should or should not be considered his "family."

In chapter four, I continue with Allen, but move to a more traditional set of close readings of some of his films. Here, I argue that Allen's post 1991 films engage incest, and in particular, his own incest narrative explicitly, rewarding his knowledgeable viewers with what I refer to as "incest Easter eggs." The chapter contends that scholarly attempts to grapple with Allen's autobiography's relationship to his films consistently depart from a flawed premise that forswears Allen's alleged transgressions with adopted daughter Dylan as meriting analysis vis-à-vis his films. Ironically, Allen's films actually demand such investigation, as they reveal complex meditations on incest and the notion of getting away with family-destroying crimes (such as incest).

My final chapter, on Henry Roth's *Mercy of a Rude Stream* argues that the autobiographical novel's supposedly scandalous depiction of a sibling incest relationship is secondary to its normalization of the young adult protagonist's routine statutory rape of his first cousin. By showing the pattern of revisions between manuscripts and published text, I contend that Roth's iconic status compelled his publishing house to eliminate evidence of Roth's protagonist being a rapist and racist by raising his cousin's age by two years (from twelve to fourteen years old) and deleting dozens of instances of Roth using racist slurs, accommodating white readers' participation in what Jonathan Arac calls narcissistic mirroring.

In my conclusion, I briefly depart from the 1990s in order to meditate on the present moment, in which sexual assault and other forms of sexual abuse in the entertainment industry have been receiving significant news coverage, though the Jewishness of some of those alleged of abuse tends to only find expression by white supremacist news organizations and twitter accounts. I also make mention of additional texts and stories that might be examined as "Jewish incest narratives," especially those that offer more constructive guidelines for how we might discuss incest today.

CHAPTER 2

A VICTORIAN FREUD

A Rhetorical Analysis of Jewish Second-Wave Feminist Criticism of Freud

While the majority of this project focuses on the 1990s, I begin with a chapter focused on the 1970s to showcase a post-civil rights era framework for the racial and cultural logics of the incest consumption of the 1990s. While the sociohistorical contexts of the nineteenth century (which I address in the introduction) are central to each chapter, here I want to juxtapose that history with the themes of Jewish community protective politics surrounding white men that surface meaningfully in the 1970s, in the white Jewish feminist critique of Sigmund Freud. I demonstrate that several Jewish authored second-wave feminist texts dealing with incest and child abuse, and especially those texts that were specifically critical of Freud, made no mention of Freud's Jewishness, revealing a profound ambivalence about how white Jewish men, and white Jewish father figures in particular, function vis-à-vis American racial formations. At the heart of this ambivalence was a deeply felt awareness of Jewish male vulnerability to sexual antisemitism, an awareness that did not always allow for a simultaneous acknowledgment of white Jewish men as privileged relative to black men. Jewish community protective politics informs subsequent chapters, but within this examination of Freud criticism, my goal is to exhume just how personal, and central, these community protective impulses were to a discourse that has not been analyzed for its rhetorical protections of masculine Jewish vulnerability, ethno-racial Jewish community, and white identity. These veiled community protective politics informed groundbreaking works that levied vital criticisms against white male patriarchy, while avoiding mention of the particular vulnerabilities

and exploitative acts of white Jewish patriarchy, even as comparatively resonant criticisms of black patriarchy were often unambivalently voiced.

These Jewish second-wave feminists' choices to omit reference to Freud's Jewishness (and to minimize mention of their own) ironically privileged protective Jewish community politics that valued Jewish male adult interests above others. Second-wave feminism's consequential discursive integration of secular Jewish identity into whiteness essentially protected Jewish males from ethno-racial pathology, establishing the terms for subsequent discussions regarding Jewish white figures and incest, and helping to displace that pathology onto black men. For all of its insight, this criticism of Freud failed to straightforwardly negotiate Freud's Jewishness, Jewish vulnerability, or problematic incest theorizing in the context of the taboos associating Jews with incest. That is, while Freud was rightly criticized by second-wave feminists for building a psychoanalytic structure that too often cast daughters' testimonies as fantasy, identifying him as Jewish while accusing him of this moral failure risked branding him as an anti-Semitic stereotype writ large: a Jewish man responsible for societal failure to deal honestly with the reality of incest.

This palpable threat yielded an unorganized, perhaps unconscious community protective response among white Jewish second-wave feminists in which they consistently omit mention of Freud's Jewishness in their criticism. This coincided with black feminist authors (such as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou and Gayl Jones) choosing to address incest and criticize black patriarchy in specifically black terms. The rhetorical choices that forged these second-wave feminist discourses thus muted the association of incest with Jews and ultimately realigned it with the pathologized black family. And,

concomitantly, these rhetorical choices discursively facilitated Jewish women's continued integration into the more empowered construct of "white women."

In building this argument, this chapter historically contextualizes Freud's own Jewish racial identity during an era of pervasive anti-Semitism, before examining how numerous classic Jewish second-wave feminist texts, with the notable exception of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, consistently cast Freud as a Victorian, while never presenting him as Jewish. I consider how the authors of these very same texts deal with their own subjective Jewish perspectives, as Jewishness's incorporation or exclusion in these critiques of patriarchy provides a glimpse of how European (Ashkenazi and Sephardic) Jewishness disappears into "whiteness." Finally, the chapter contrasts these patterns in Jewish second-wave feminist writing against the expansive literary record of how black feminist authors dealt with incest in their novels, memoirs, and poetry.

When Did Freud become White?

Asking the question, "When did Sigmund Freud become white?" is, on the one hand, anachronistic. Present understanding of "white" as a racial construct extending to and enveloping European Jews cannot be applied to Freud's era. Yet Freud is commonly discussed *as* white; he is often invoked in popular American discourse as a figure representative of a sort of hegemonic, supposedly universal, "normative" racial quality. I contend that Jewish feminist criticism of Freud during the 1970s went a long way towards cementing Freud's whiteness. Instead of considering how Freud asserted racial identity in his writing, I contemplate how his critics projected racial identity onto him.¹

¹ Numerous scholars have contemplated the significance of Freud's Jewishness to his theorizing: John Murray Cuddihy (1974) contends that the oppression of nineteenth century facilitated Freud conceiving of the "coarse, importunate id" from the

Though it goes unmentioned in many Jewish authored second-wave feminist texts critical of him, Freud lived in a Europe in which Jews were targets of broad societal discrimination and racial violence for the duration of his lifetime. Freud was born in 1856 in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, shortly before a wave of pogroms across Russia and eastern Europe. He died in 1939 in the United Kingdom having escaped the Nazis and the fate of six million Jews systematically murdered on account of race, not faith, during the Holocaust. Freud was secular, but his own religious non-observance would have been irrelevant to the vast majority of antisemites, which may constitute a central, and ironic, aspect of his current lionization as a secular icon.² But the antisemitism Freud encountered in Vienna clearly impacted his social and professional opportunities.

Freud's Jewishness is central to contemporary understanding of the historical figure, but Freud's texts' engagement with race (and racism) remind us that Freud the author also helped create an entire medical discourse that impacted the way in which European thought dealt with racial difference. Certainly, in *Totem and Taboo* (1913),

"importunate Yid" (18). Estelle Roith (1987) argues that Freud's Jewishness had particular underexamined significance to how he conceived of "femininity." Freud biographer Peter Gay, in *A Godless Jew*, explores Freud's emphatic declarations of his atheism as critical to any understanding of his Jewish identity's relevance to his work. Sander Gilman's extensive scholarship has examined the link between European scientific racial and gendered formulations of "Jewish" and Freud's own ideas about race and gender, while warning against reducing Freud's scholarship to contemplation as merely a function of his Jewish identity (5). More recently, Eliza Slavet's *Racial Fever* (2009) contemplates Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* for its serious contributions to contemporary conceptions of Jews, memory and race. There's a lot out there. When Gilman wrote *Freud, Race, and Gender* in 1993, he compiled nearly four pages of endnotes on scholarship regarding Freud's Jewishness.

² The contradiction in Freud's iconic status as a larger-than-life secular figure is perhaps best represented by the phrase, "There is no god and Freud is his prophet," levied as a criticism of American society's over-secularization by Francis Cardinal George in a discussion of Pope Francis's election in 2013 (Brennan 2016). Such a statement also connotes what may be antisemitic undertones: Jewish secular influence fomenting a particular type of antireligiosity.

Freud's anthropological attempt to theorize incest, endogamy, and exogamy relies on indigenous Australians to consider issues of family and partnering. In setting up a dichotomy of "savages" and "neurotics" in discussing sexual partnering practices, Freud creates distance between European Jews and non-European "savages." An alignment of Jewish identity and normative "whiteness" are formulated through sexually othering nonwhite figures around an issue widely associated with European Jews at the time. Edward Said (2003) argues forcefully that Freud's writing as a whole reflects "a Eurocentric view of culture" (16), even while establishing Freud's Jewish identity as crucial to his intellectual endeavors, especially in his last major book, *Moses and Monotheism*. For Said, Freud's writing presents a textual landscape in which European-ness, German and Jewish identity, and Egyptian, Palestinian, and Arab identity, can all be contemplated amidst Freud's subjective theorizing of Moses. As Said inquires,

Could it be, perhaps, that the shadow of anti-Semitism spreading so ominously over his world in the last decade of his life caused him protectively to huddle the Jews inside, so to speak, the sheltering realm of the European? (40)

Said suggests that Freud's own words facilitate a discursive shift of Jewish towards European. But Said's argument also compels us to understand the unavoidable significance of Freud's Jewishness to his subjectivity and theorizing. As Alys Eve Weinbaum (2004) reminds us, "In Austro-German medicine and science, as in the immediate sociopolitical milieu of Freud's Vienna, race invariably called up the constellation Aryan/Jew" (146). While Freud's theorizing helped to begin rhetorically re-categorizing European Jewishness as European, he did this as a Jewish man whose secularity provided no meaningful reprieve from the weight of systematic state-sponsored antisemitism. And yet, as the following section shows, Freud is almost invariably

categorized as Victorian by Jewish second-wave feminists, a discursive reinvention that renders him, within the anachronistic logic, as a flawed but iconic white father figure, and protects him from criticism as a Jewish man whose theorizing facilitated incest.

A Consistently Victorian Freud

This section reveals how various Jewish second-wave feminists identified Freud according to racial, ethnic, national and cultural categorizations. Classic second-wave feminist texts authored by Shulamith Firestone (*The Dialectic of Sex*, 1970), Ellen Frankfort (*Vaginal Politics*, 1972), Phyllis Chesler (*Women and Madness*, 1972), and Susan Brownmiller (*Against Our Will*, 1975) all levy significant criticisms against Freud's patriarchal theorizing, and while each of the aforementioned authors identify as Jewish (even if not in these texts), none of these texts mention Freud's Jewishness. Instead, they depict Freud as culturally "Victorian," as Viennese, and, ironically, as a sort of religious father figure for secularism. But never, other than brief but meaningful comments by Betty Friedan in 1963's *The Feminine Mystique*, as Jewish. The subsequent close readings trace the rhetoric depicting Freud in each text, and delve into Friedan's language to reveal how an alternative choice might have rendered Freud vulnerable to ethnoracial pathologizing.

Jewish second wave feminist authors often characterized Freud as a product of a repressed Victorian culture, and framed their criticisms of his patriarchal theories on that formative culture. In 1972, Ellen Frankfort published *Vaginal Politics*, a thorough condemnation of various systemic instances of sexism and misogyny within the healthcare industry. Addressing Freud's influence on medicine, Frankfort writes, "Like many older doctors practicing today, Freud was, however, the products (sic) of a

repressed Victorian upbringing and an authoritarian education” (202). Phyllis Chesler’s *Women and Madness*, also published in 1972, indicts sexism in psychology, and the categorization of women as “mad” as a historical tool for oppressing women. Chesler identifies Freud’s tone in the “Case of Dora” as “cold, intellectual, detective-like, controlling, sexually Victorian” (80). Chesler never identifies Freud as Jewish, nor does she identify either Anna O. or Dora as Jewish. Susan Brownmiller published *Against Our Will*, a touchstone of rape scholarship and history, in 1975. In labeling the psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch a “traitor to her own sex” (350) for her thesis on female masochism, Brownmiller considers both Deutsch and Freud as products of their culture, defined quite narrowly; Deutsch’s “attitude was in keeping with the Victorian times in which she and Freud lived” (351). Brownmiller makes no reference to Freud’s Jewishness, despite her analysis of Jewish women as victims of rape in Europe during pogroms and the Holocaust. Instead, she marks Freud as “Victorian,” subsuming his Jewishness with a shorthand for a broad-brushed mainstream culture that Frankfort describes as “repressed,” and Chesler describes as “cold” and “controlling.”

References to Freud as a father-figure – the “father of psychology” – were also commonplace. Brownmiller calls Freud the “father of psychoanalysis” (305), and Judith Herman, in her comprehensive study *Father-Daughter Incest* (1981), describes Freud as “the patriarch of modern psychology” (9). Interestingly, while Herman sets Freud up explicitly as a cultural father figure, she never roots him in any specific historical cultural context; she marks him as neither Jewish nor Victorian.

No text does more to present Freud as Victorian, father-figure, and culturally iconic, while still avoiding any mention of his Jewishness, than Shulamith Firestone’s

The Dialectic of Sex (1970). Firestone's influential text outlined socialist terms for feminist revolution, and spends a chapter analyzing Freud and Freudianism, labeling the phenomenon a "misguided feminism" (38). Firestone distinguishes between Freud and Freudianism – the contemporaneous mainstream popularity and influence of a watered-down version of psychoanalysis. But despite asserting that she interrogates Freud's "cultural bias" (13), the chapter focuses almost entirely on his American cultural impact. Firestone writes, "If we had to name the one cultural current that most characterizes America in the twentieth century, it might be the work of Freud and the disciplines that grew out of it" (38). Indeed, the chapter mocks American preoccupation with Freud by considering him as a cultural phenomenon wholly extracted from his historical context:

Freudianism has become, with its confessionals and penance, its proselytes and converts, with the millions spent on its upkeep, our modern Church. We attack it only uneasily, for you never know, on the final day of judgement, whether they *might be right*. (38)

Firestone's acerbic writing, throughout her chapter on Freudianism, punctures the image of Freud as God-like figure. But the extent to which she draws our attention to Freud as a religious figure also reinforces the association. Firestone says of Freud, "...at the end of each new critique we find a guilt paean to the Great Father who started it all. They can't quite do him in" (39). Numerous constructions identify him as a recognizably Christian figure (Church, confessionals, and proselytes all displace the Judeo- from the Christian imagery), revealing a fascinating contrast with the man's historical secular Jewishness. Firestone's diminishment of Freud also enshrines him: his singular impact constitutes the one cultural current characterizing twentieth-century America, and simultaneous evidence of his false Godhood. Yet Firestone never establishes Freud's "cultural bias" in anything but national terms:

Both Freudianism and feminism came as reactions to one of the smuggest periods in Western civilization, the Victorian Era, characterized by its family-centredness, and thus its exaggerated sexual oppression and repression. (41)

Throughout, Firestone anchors her assessment of Freud's "cultural" characteristics with familiar nods to "Western civilization," "Victorian Era," and Vienna.

Despite her criticism of Freudianism, Firestone's assessments of Freud's failings are, occasionally, sympathetic:

Given (Freud's)...own psychic structure and cultural prejudices – he was a petty tyrant of the old school, for whom certain sexual truths may have been expensive – he can hardly have been expected to make such an examination part of his life work. (42)

But why should he "hardly have been expected" to look inward? And isn't this a strange, ahistorical statement, especially given that Freud's collected letters reveal that he attempted this sort of self-analysis *extensively* (independent of its success).

Firestone's sympathy towards Freud may reflect her ambivalence about her choice (conscious or otherwise) not to examine aspects of cultural tyranny and sexual truths in terms of her ethno-religious upbringing. But before analyzing how Firestone and other Jewish second-wave feminist authors rhetorically positioned their own Jewishness, consider Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

Betty Friedan's Prayer and The Jewish Tradition of Autocratic Authority

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, an influential, canonical text marking the advent of second-wave feminisms. Friedan also holds Freud, and Freudian influence, to account for contemporaneous American sexism, but unlike the aforementioned authors, Friedan remarks on Freud's Jewishness. Given the importance of Friedan's book, and the chronology (she published her study seven years before

Firestone's *Dialectic*), Friedan's invocation of Freud's Jewishness suggest that subsequent texts *removed* it from the narrative.

Friedan's cultural assessment of Freud considers the various components of his national, contemporaneous, and ethno-religious identities. The fifth chapter, "The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud," begins by distinguishing Freud from American Freudianism (as Firestone would later do). Friedan writes, "It would be half-wrong to say it started with Sigmund Freud. It did not really start, in America, until the 1940s" (103). Questions of temporality and nationality complicate conversations of Freud and Freud's influence from the outset, and Friedan tracks this discrepancy in her analysis. She also roots her first assessment of Freud's culture in familiar terms, referring to "penis envy" as "a phenomenon he observed in women – that is, in the middle-class women who were his patients in Vienna in the Victorian era" (105). In the same paragraph, Friedan once again refers to Freud's patients as "those Victorian women," (105) and, more vaguely, suggests Freud "was a prisoner of his own culture" (105), and that "his culture denied sex" (106).

Freud's culture, thus far in the text, is readable only as Victorian/Viennese. But while Freud has not yet been described as Jewish, his female patients have been described as "middle-class women" and "Victorian women." This is true, yet Freud's female patients were also, as Weinbaum notes, most commonly Jewish woman whose Jewish identifiable qualities were muted, if not omitted, from Freud's writing (178).³

³ Weinbaum discusses at length how Bertha Pappenheim is transformed into "Anna O.", but she persuasively accounts for how Freud's language contains hints regarding Jewish racial identifications for his subjects.

While Friedan never identifies Freud's female patients as being largely Jewish, she does, six pages into her chapter, reference Freud's Jewishness. In stating that Freud saw women as "childlike dolls," Friedan writes:

Freud grew up with this attitude built in by his culture – not only the culture of Victorian Europe, but that Jewish culture in which men said the daily prayer: 'I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast not created me a woman,' and women prayed in submission: 'I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou has created me according to Thy will.' (108)

Friedan alludes to a blessing that is referenced extensively in subsequent second-wave feminist texts and throughout the Women's Movement. Friedan also referenced the blessing in the keynote speech she delivered for the Women's Strike of 1970, and Vivian Gornick invoked the same prayer a year later (Jacobson 2006, 259). Elizabeth Martinez (2007) recalls Firestone mentioning the quote in the late 1960s, in the *Feminist Memoir Project* (118). By the early 1980s, reference to the blessing had taken on a life of its own. Letty Cotton Pogrebin (1982) discusses the repeated feminist "invocation" of the blessing as evidence of anti-Semitism in "Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement." Pogrebin quotes Pnina Tobin as saying, "I wish I had a nickel for every time a feminist has quoted that prayer to argue the supreme sexism of the Jewish faith... That prayer has probably been spoken more by anti-Semitic non-Jews than by Jewish worshipers" (70).

Hyperbole aside, Tobin fairly interrogates whether Judaism might be targeted more than other faiths that developed on similarly patriarchal foundations. But even if we are sympathetic to Tobin's assessment, it's a Jewish authored text that seems to be the launching point of the blessing's second-life in feminist criticism infamy, and the prayer is actually far less potentially evocative of antisemitism than the Freud family

observation that directly follows it. Indeed, the sentence that directly follows the prayer reference is unique in Jewish second-wave feminist assessments of Freud's "culture":

Freud's mother was the pretty, docile bride of a man twice her age; his father ruled the family with an autocratic authority traditional in Jewish families when the fathers were seldom able to establish authority in the outside world. (Friedan 109)

Subsequent references to Freud's cultural milieu return, exclusively, to allusions to Victorian norms. This ethnographic linking of domestic Jewish patriarchal autocratic behavior to societal antisemitism, though, is absent in subsequent second-wave feminist texts addressing Freud. The blessing anecdote speaks to a criticism of organized religion, yet Friedan's reference to "Jewish families" evinces a far more overt framework for how social science can pathologize minority groups.⁴ Friedan's reading suggests that the large-scale psychological costs of societal anti-Semitism rendered Jewish masculine insecurity so severe as to yield a predictable – *traditional*, in Friedan's words – Jewish male autocracy in the domestic space. In short: Jewish men ran their houses in autocratic fashion *because* of antisemitic persecution.

Indeed, Friedan's "autocratic authority" observation startles less on account of its absence in subsequent Jewish authored feminist texts, and more in its unmistakable echo in those same texts' critiques of black men. While the specificity/spectacle of Jewish male vulnerability yielding a domestic Jewish autocracy vanishes, a similar phenomenon

⁴ Stephanie Coontz (2011) has commented on how Friedan's early drafts featured "parallels between the prejudices against women and those against African Americans and Jews" (104). These are largely absent in the final version. Daniel Horowitz (1998) also argues that Friedan, despite her politically leftist history and labor journalism, "strove for a race-neutral picture" in *The Feminine Mystique* in order to meet editor's demands and to help ensure a broad readership (205). While Horowitz stresses that Friedan's editors wielded considerable powers, it's notable that Freud's Jewishness remains in the final version.

emerges in Brownmiller's and Firestone's analyses of black men. Essentially, the model Friedan presents for assessing Jewish male historical patriarchy is removed from Jewish men and applied to black men. The erasure of Freud's Jewishness facilitates the erasure of specifically Jewish male instances of patriarchy and misogyny, while instances of black male patriarchy and misogyny are instead incorporated and pathologized.

As a thesis, we might test this by examining whether and how Jewishness emerges elsewhere in these Jewish authored second wave feminist texts. How do the authors allude to their own Jewish identities, or their white identities? How does subsequent scholarship contextualize these authors' battles with identifiably Jewish patriarchy that goes unseen in these earlier texts?

When Do White Feminists Become Jewish?

Throughout the long 1970s, many Jewish second-wave feminists made only minimal mention of their Jewish subjectivity. Having tracked Freud's emergence as Victorian, and thus, "white," across specific texts, we might also inquire: how do these particular texts position their authors' own Jewishness? Considering these two questions together illustrates how meaningful choices about the depiction of Jewishness and the occupation of "white" subjectivity consistently worked to fold Jewishness into an expanding, white ethnic collective. The choice to render Freud as a white father figure also mirrored the choice to protect actual Jewish fathers from specific scrutiny by rarely affixing recognizably Jewish characteristics to the representations of patriarchy mobilized in these texts. While Jewish patriarchal specificity evaporates, Jewish feminists framed their critique of black patriarchy in specific, sustained, pathologizing arguments reminiscent of Friedan's assessment of Freud's autocratic Jewish father.

Numerous scholars have commented upon the considerable involvement of Jews among second-wave feminists, as well as the corresponding purported disengagement with specifically Jewish issues. Paula Hyman suggests that a combination of post-World War II social factors yielded a larger number of young Jewish women in college communities where the feminist movement developed (223). But Hyman distinguishes between Jewish involvement in “mainstream” second wave feminism and what she terms “a specifically Jewish feminism”; she characterizes the work of Firestone, Friedan, and Robin Morgan as not having “dealt specifically with Judaism or with the Jewish community” (224, 233). Sylvia Barack Fishman suggests something similar:

Although a substantial proportion of early feminist writers were Jewish, the milieu they identified with and wrote about was melting-pot America – that amorphous amalgam of ethnicities and religions blended into a secularized white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. (6)

Mathew Jacobson’s read on the era challenges Fishman’s construction, contending that the specifically Jewish, Italian, and Irish “accents of white feminism...help to explain both the obstacles that arose and the alliances that were forged as white women and women of color reconfigured the personal and the political” (*Roots Too* 248). Second wave Jewish feminists were not blending into “WASP” culture so much as helping to create a new normative “ethnic” whiteness. Jacobson helps remind us that secular Jewish feminist texts were creative, not simply assimilative, forging new links between secular Jewishness, and eventually even religious Jewishness, and white identity.

The fact that Jewishness emerges rhetorically in 1980s feminist texts also draws attention to its prior absence. Fishman sees this phenomenon as a type of mainstream surfacing of a more Judaism-inflected form of Jewish feminism, breaking away from assimilative pressures. She posits, “In reaction to the pressure that they either repudiate or

at least keep silent about their Judaism, even secular Jewish feminists have frequently discovered, explored, and begun to take pride in their Jewishness” (12).⁵ For Fishman, then, antisemitism accounts for the turn to more assertive Jewish identification.

While some Jewish feminists may well have felt pressure to “repudiate or at least keep silent” about Judaism, I argue that another element of “keeping silent” about Jewishness played a very specific role in whitening Jews: it facilitated, amidst criticism of patriarchy, a way to assert a community protective politics of respectability for Jews. It kept Jewish men out of the spotlight within texts where Jewish feminist authors frequently, assertively, moved black men into the spotlight.

Within the following two sections, I perform close readings of Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will* (1975) to investigate how the authors invoked their own Jewishness beside their sustained consideration of black male patriarchy. I illustrate how Firestone and Brownmiller’s Jewishness, and their implicit understanding of their community vulnerability as Jewish daughters of Jewish fathers within a historical antisemitic context, play a specific role in their assessment of black men. I do not believe these authors made conscious decisions to displace Jewish male vulnerability onto black men. However, independent of intent, the rhetorical consequences of their choices to omit a specific contemplation of Jewish patriarchy from

⁵ Fishman mentions a number of tensions between Jewish feminists and non-Jewish feminists. Israel emerges as a touchstone. Barbara Hausman’s article “Anti-Semitism in Feminism: Rethinking Identity Politics” (1991) in which she writes, “I speak as a Jewish woman,” provides a detailed assessment of how tensions regarding Israel played out among Jewish feminists, nonwhite non-Jewish feminists, and non-Jewish white feminists, with regard to the UK feminist publication *Spare Rib* (83). Barbara Smith’s “Between a Rock and a Hard Place” (1998) also addresses Israel as a source of tensions between Jewish white feminists and Third World feminists, from the author’s multiply referenced Black, Third World, lesbian subjectivity.

their analyses helped fold Jewishness into the confines of American ethnic whiteness. Simultaneously, this rhetoric subjected black masculinity to a racialized critique whose tenor and tone may have been amplified due to the ambivalence of unwittingly othering black men in the precise ways that Jewish men had been historically othered.

Firestone's Father and the Un-dissolved "Ties of Blood"

Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) focuses considerable attention on black male patriarchy, and omits any reference to identifiably Jewish patriarchal behavior. Firestone theorizes racism as an extension of sexism, and bases this theory upon a metaphorical familial construct for understanding social dynamics between white men and women and black men and women (where black people are children). Angela Davis has criticized this theorizing for relying on the "timeworn myth of the Black rapist" (182-183), and being built on embedded notions of black pathology. Black/white racial constructs dominate Firestone's theorizing of American society, but Jewishness appears in her book only once. In a footnoted aside regarding Jewish education in Firestone's community resembling (in a positive fashion) Middle Age European approaches to educating children, Firestone writes, "In the orthodox Jewish milieu in which I grew up, considered anachronistic by outsiders, many little boys still begin serious study before the age of five, and as a result Talmudic prodigies are common" (75). This is the lone reference Firestone makes to her own Jewish upbringing.

Yet personal experience of Jewish patriarchy may have informed Firestone's feminist politics in significant ways never broached in her book. Susan Faludi's "Death of a Revolutionary," published after Firestone's death in 2012, examines Firestone's family history and her battles with mental illness, juxtaposing these struggles against her

early influence within the Women's Movement. Faludi interviews Firestone's youngest sister, who reveals that, "My father threw his rage at Shulie." Another sister recounts a physical fight between Firestone and her father which featured "Sol shouting, 'I'll kill you!,' and Shulamith yelling back, 'I'll kill you first!'" (Faludi).

The article provides a devastating portrait of a tyrannically patriarchal household, and includes an excerpt from a letter that Firestone wrote to her mother when she and Firestone's father moved to Israel in 1977, in which Firestone wrote, in capital letters, "I DISSOLVE MY TIES OF BLOOD" (Faludi).

Despite its omission in *The Dialectic of Sex*, Faludi's telling of Firestone's story highlights how centrally Firestone's Orthodox Jewish familial upbringing, and her father in particular, impacted her experience of domestic patriarchy. The conspicuousness of this absence cannot be understated given that Firestone's own theorizing establishes American patriarchal oppression in exclusively white and black racialized formations. I do not suggest that Firestone *ought* to have addressed the Jewish elements of her life experience – but instead, want to illuminate how this choice contributed to aspects of feminist and mainstream discourse that flow from this, and other, massively influential books. Firestone's theorizing of race and gender, in which black male behavior with white and black women exists as a function or consequence of white male racist oppression, also reflects, in small but meaningful ways, Friedan's assessment of Freud's father's "autocratic" behavior. Both constructs feature a large societal oppressive force (racism/antisemitism) compelling a minority male to exert his power over more vulnerable members of the same minority community (black women/Jewish wives and

Jewish children). And this precise formulation also seems to fit Faludi's model for presenting Firestone's own autocratic Jewish father.

Firestone's specific experience of being a Jewish daughter of an autocratic Jewish father is divorced from her ethno-religious experience, though. The very social phenomenon that might (albeit, too simplistically) account for her father's behavior (antisemitism/racism) is repackaged, re-raced, and projected onto black men. Just as Tanehisi Coates (2016) connects the pathologizing of black family in Daniel Patrick Moynihan's "The Negro Family" to Moynihan's ambivalence about his own absent father, Firestone's discussion of black male sexism manifests as a placeholder for anger and ambivalence about Jewish patriarchy that Firestone cannot articulate.

This very omission is thus deeply protective of Jewishness, Jewish claims to whiteness, and Jewish fathers. Firestone's father called *Dialectic* (which he never read) "the joke book of the century" (Faludi), and yet Jewish fathers are spared any ethnographic analysis as Jewish fathers. While one Jewish father does appear extensively in the text, Firestone never identifies Freud as Jewish, as demonstrated earlier. The overall effect is to rhetorically disappear Jewishness behind a façade of Freud's purported whiteness, and displace the problematic behavior of Firestone's father onto black men. Proving a negative is impossible, and certainly, I am making a leap in theorizing this space between "omission" and "protection." And yet for a movement so famously aligning the personal with the political, the omission of Jewish fathers depersonalizes these texts. Ascribing these omissions to the protection of Jewish fathers suggests one possibility for how these texts operated politically.

From "I Was a Jewish Girl," to "I Speak as a White Woman":

Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975), a groundbreaking study of rape as ubiquitous phenomenon, makes more extensive reference to Jewishness than Firestone, but a similar rhetorical phenomenon emerges: American Jewishness disappears into whiteness, while black male rape is pathologized. However, Brownmiller employs a transnational approach distinguishing American Jews from European Jews. Angela Davis has commented on Brownmiller's racist construction of black men as sexual predators of white women, but this sits against a related construction in which non-Jewish European men are sexual predators of Jewish European women. Contemplating Brownmiller's language regarding her identity (sometimes marked as Jewish, other times as white) helps us read *Against Our Will* not just as an important, if imperfect, critical history of rape, but as a racially formative document regarding Jewish American whiteness.

It is fully 350 pages into her study that Brownmiller first invokes her Jewish identity. As she analyzes the "Red Riding Hood" fairy tale as a parable of rape, she considers its lessons against her own experiences of geopolitics as a child:

This was the middle of World War II, the German Army had marched through Belgium a second time, and I was a Jewish girl growing up in Brooklyn. I could not help but conclude that the Hun and the Nazi were one in the same and, therefore, I had to be Belgium. (Brownmiller, *Against* 345)

Brownmiller (1975) reconstructs her childhood subjectivity in national terms. Huns and Nazis are "one in the same," yet despite first specifying her ethno-racial identification as "a Jewish girl," (345) she pivots, fascinatingly, to identifying as Belgium. Like Firestone, Brownmiller's invocation of Jewish identity is located in her childhood. The ethno-racial ordering to Brownmiller's anecdote is far more complex, though; the allusions to Nazis and the German Army sit beside an identification as Jewish, which she transfers to

Belgium, given its status as a plundered country. The sequence of these identifications initially claim, and immediately disassociate, Brownmiller's Jewish identity. While "being Belgium" exposed her to the same violent threat, the terms of the metaphor allow for distance in contemplating that violence. In fact, the only purpose of "being Belgium" is to use metaphor to replace the harrowing fact of her distinct Jewish vulnerability.

By themselves, these words reveal something of the painful process of distinguishing her own ethno-racial identity in an American context versus a European genocidal one. But they are even more significant given that Brownmiller writes extensively about Jewish vulnerability to rape in a chapter titled, "Riots, Pogroms and Revolutions." Jewish women are discussed, as Jewish women, as victims of extensive sexual violence throughout Eastern Europe. In that chapter, Brownmiller does not remark on her Jewish American subjectivity. Yet in a chapter entitled, "A Question of Race," – a chapter that bore considerable scrutiny for its assessment of black male rape and its deployment of Emmett Till – Brownmiller frames her positionality thusly:

There is no unemotional way to approach the subject of interracial rape, and no way for me to pretend to an objectivity of my own. I speak as a white woman whose first stirrings of social conscience occurred when I read of certain famous cases, now legend, in which black men had been put to death for coming too close to white women. (*Against* 230)

Brownmiller identifies her subjectivity in a very straightforward fashion. Speaking as a "white woman" does not preclude identification as Jewish. But there is something noteworthy about the tenses of her two invocations: "I speak as a white woman" accompanies a contemporaneous assessment of black male sexual threat. "I was a Jewish girl growing up in Brooklyn" places Jewishness in the past tense, as something formative.

This shift in subjectivity reveals how racially formative discourse navigates complicated terrains of national and racial categorization, and also speaks to power dynamics. Speaking as a white woman asserts greater social currency than speaking as a Jewish woman, especially since identifying as Belgium constituted a preferable choice for negotiating her gendered vulnerability than Jewishness in the context of World War II.⁶ But Brownmiller's mode of speaking/writing as a white woman functions less, in Davis's reading, as an acknowledgment of privileged subjectivity, than as an assertion of "an unthinking partisanship which borders on racism" (Davis 199).

While Davis correctly critiques Brownmiller's implicit assumptions in speaking as a "white woman," Brownmiller's construction of her own subjective identity, combined with her depictions of Jewish men, illuminate the racially formative aspects of the text. As established earlier, while Freud appears extensively in *Against Our Will*, he is never identified or analyzed as a Jewish figure, though Brownmiller discusses Till and others in regard to their blackness. Other Jewish American figures emerge in a similar fashion – unidentified with regard to race, religion, ethnicity. Jews are identified as Jews when discussing the rape of European Jewish women, but only in that context. Otherwise, they are represented as white insofar as they are not identified as anything else. Norman Mailer is identified as a buffoon, but not a Jewish one (Brownmiller, *Against* 339). But having explored the rhetorical phenomenon of texts that address patriarchy and Freud generally, I want to juxtapose Florence Rush's markedly different approach to Freud criticism in her 1977 article "The Freudian Cover-Up" and her 1980 book *The Best Kept*

⁶ Brownmiller's 1999 memoir, *In Our Times*, in contrast, pays comparatively thorough attention to the ethno-racial, religious, and regional backgrounds of almost every white feminist in her narrative.

Secret. Rush's texts exposed how patriarchy provided the opportunity for the sexual exploitation of children, in particular, especially within familial settings.

In preparation for my discussion of Florence Rush, it's worth noting that Judith Herman, to whom I referred as describing Freud as a "patriarch of modern psychology" (*Father-Daughter* 9) also cites Rush extensively in her own work.⁷ Susan Brownmiller was also close friends with Florence Rush, and alludes to her work on incest in *Against Our Will*, though Rush's work had not yet been published. Brownmiller wrote the forward to Rush's 1980 book. Rush and her scholarship may not have had the same broad influence and cultural impact as Firestone, Brownmiller, and Herman, but she is a crucial figure. She presented a paper on incest at the New York Radical Feminist Conference on Rape in 1971, wrote about incest and Freud for the feminist publication *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Women's Culture* in 1977, and then published her monograph, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children* in 1980. Writing a journal article presents different challenges than writing an entire book on a subject. Yet the choices Rush makes in how she presents material in 1980, versus 1977, help illustrate how incest as a racialized discourse depended, at foundational levels, on how Freud was depicted, and how authors depicted themselves.

Florence Rush, "Dr. Greenberg," and an Absent "Uncle Willie"

Chrysalis's first issue appeared in 1977; its cover, a mosaic of racially and generationally diverse women's faces, makes clear the editors' attempt to depict a more visually inclusive image of women than *Ms. Magazine's* 1972 iconic debut image of

⁷ Sandra Butler, who published the book-length incest study *Conspiracy of Silence* in 1978, also bears mention here; Herman wrote the forward for the 1985 edition. Butler is Jewish, and while her text also bears scrutiny for its negotiation of Jewish versus other ethno-religious identifiers in its discussion of incest, she omits Freud entirely.

“Wonder Woman for President.” Rush’s article, boldly titled “The Freudian Cover-Up,” takes direct aim at her eponymous subject:

...when Freud claimed that children who reported sexual abuse by adults had imagined or fantasized the experience, he was quite wrong. Children know the difference between reality and fantasy, often with more accuracy than adults, and sexual advances are in fact made to children in the course of everyday life. (31)

Rush’s article, to my knowledge, is the first to address the issue of Freud’s abandonment of the “seduction theory” from a feminist critical perspective. Relying heavily on Freud’s correspondences with Wilhelm Fliess, which had been translated and published in 1954, Rush argues that Freud abandoned evidence of female patients testifying that their fathers sexually abused them as children. Freud’s arrival at the Oedipus complex, and male-childhood-fantasy for the mother as his predominant incest theory, is portrayed as a deliberate move away from the patriarchy-challenging discovery: that some men, even respected and wealthy ones, took advantage of their power in society and family to sexually exploit their daughters.

I find Rush’s argument enormously compelling and textually supported quite effectively by her readings of the Freud/Fliess letters. But despite Rush’s profound influence within the women’s movement, and generally positive reviews, Catherine McKinnon described her book as “groundbreaking and largely overlooked” in a *New York Times* feature on “summer reading” for presidential candidates in 1988.⁸ As the first second-wave feminist author to attempt a book-length theorizing of child sexual predation and incest in conjunction with sustained focus on Freud, examining her book

⁸ Grace Paley’s review, in *Ms. Magazine*, thanked Rush for writing a book that provides “knowledge” that might “act to change childhood’s delicate and fearful world” (40).

alongside her article reveal the high stakes of Rush's choices in recasting scholarly and activist conversations about incest.

Rush's 1977 essay's cultural depiction of Freud is entirely consistent with Firestone and Brownmiller. She states that Freud "informed a society still deep in Victorian prudery that very little children had strong erotic drives" (31). Rush references Freud's "Victorian world" (35) and Freud's patients as "middle-class Victorian women" (38). She suggests that Freud's "cover-up" required "only that forbidden sex be practiced with tact and discretion so that surface Victorian respectability was in no way disturbed" (45). Consistent with other Jewish second wave feminists, Rush emphasizes "Victorian respectability" while making no mention of "Jewish respectability," leaving Jewish respectability politics sitting, perhaps, just beneath the surface. But Rush is the first Jewish second-wave feminist to argue that cultural mores specific to Freud's time, place, and identity, informed his decision on whether to "name the offender" in the case of incest. The Freudian cover-up, in Rush's view, centers upon this failure to name fathers as implicated by their daughters.

These daughters, cast by Rush as "middle-class Victorian women," were also predominantly Jewish women. Rush characterizes these women in the same universalizing terms used later by Judith Herman, who calls them "women from prosperous, conventional families" (*Father-Daughter* 9). Yet, as Alys Eve Weinbaum has established, Freud's female patients were almost all Jewish; antisemitism in Freud's Vienna was pervasive such that he "had difficulty securing an academic position" (146). I return to Weinbaum shortly, to demonstrate how the community protective politics of Jewish authored second-wave feminist texts simplify the complexity of Freud's Jewish

milieu, but I want to emphasize that de-Judaicizing Freud also featured the de-Judaicizing of Freud's patients. Jewish daughter figures were rendered Victorian.

While Jewishness is absent from discussion of Freud and his patients in "The Freudian Cover-Up," Rush (1977) includes a personal anecdote on the article's first page:

I remember that as a child I struggled with a nagging fantasy in which I pleaded desperately with disinterested adults to acknowledge my fears. Considering that I had been told that my tonsillectomy was "not that bad" or that the dentist whose hands were between my legs was really "fixing my teeth," my concern was not unfounded. (31)

Rush's personal testimony to abuse at the hands of an authority figure, and the compounding trauma from other adults' refusal to believe her, frame her argument. She revisits this experience in the "Forward" to *The Best Kept Secret*. But here, a far more specific ethno-racial language emerges.

Rush's 1980 book begins with the preface, "Growing Up Molested." She reveals that while working as a social worker, she "painfully remembered that I, despite the amenities of a middle-class upbringing, had also been sexually abused as a child" (x). Rush establishes her familial history in ethnic terms: her "parents left a small town in Czarist Russia to escape my father's imminent conscription into the Russian army and the suffering imposed on their lives by anti-Semitism and poverty" (x). She describes how her parents labored in sweatshops on the Lower East Side, before her father, with the help of relatives and her mother's support, graduated from Brooklyn College and opened up a drugstore. Rush's depiction replicates, almost note for note, an idyllic narrative portrayal of the urban Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant experience.

Rush's narrative choices here are purposeful: by depicting a version of an idyllic home, she forces her reader to grapple with the home's simultaneous existence as a place

of sexual vulnerability for children. But Rush roots this contradiction in Jewish terms. She describes Friday nights as “a festive time”: “The candles burned for the Sabbath and the dining room table was spread with lace cloth and covered with a variety of cakes, fruits, nuts, wine and tea for guests who customarily dropped in” (x). One guest disturbs the scene:

Among our regular visitors was our family dentist, whom I shall call Dr. Greenberg, and his wife. This couple, along with many others, would share in the warmth and laughter, discussing politics, singing old Russian and Yiddish songs and telling stories. (x)

Rush then reveals, with detail, how “Dr. Greenberg” fondled and sexually molested her when she was about seven. And, in line with the problems of incest testimony that Rush interrogates throughout her book, she reveals how her mother refused to believe her: “I ran home as fast as I could and told my mother everything. Momentarily shaken, she regained composure by reassuring herself that I was lying and had invented the story to avoid the necessary dental work” (xi). Rush indicts her mother’s failure to believe her alongside her account of “Dr. Greenberg.” Rush’s choice of milieu and pseudonym anchor her discussion of abuse in specifically Jewish familial and cultural terms.

While this language is far more personal and revealing than the *Chrysalis* article, Susan Brownmiller’s memoir provides even more details about Rush’s childhood. According to Brownmiller, Rush first remembered her childhood abuse after attending a rape speak-out near the beginning of the Women’s Movement. Brownmiller (1999) writes that Rush told her:

I sat there and began remembering that I had been molested as a child...My uncle Willie, our family dentist, the men who exposed themselves in the movie theater, on the subway, in the street. (*In Our Time* 203)

The Best-Kept Secret makes no mention of “Uncle Willie,” but Brownmiller’s account of Rush’s words indicate that in addition to “Dr. Greenberg” and the movie theater exhibitionists (who appear in the book preface), Rush was molested by an uncle. We can infer that despite Rush’s ostensibly thorough, very personal account of sexual abuse, she still chose not to implicate a family member as having molested her in her book. More pointedly: Rush depicts a Jewish man as a sexual abuser, and a Jewish home as a site of sexual abuse, but she refrains from implicating the/her Jewish *family* as a site of incestuous abuse.

Rush’s text portrays Jewishness as one meaningful cultural construct amongst many. She portrays child sexual exploitation as universal by discussing various religious and ethno-racial cultural traditions. Chapters include “Greek Love,” “A Victorian Childhood,” “The Christians,” and “The Bible and the Talmud: An Infamous Tradition Begins.” Regarding Judaism, Rush mentions the Talmud holding that “a female child of ‘three years and one day’ could be betrothed by sexual intercourse with her father’s permission” (17), and Maimonides approving this in the *Mishnah* during the twelfth-century. She traces rabbinical practice regarding child marriage through to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century, in the context of European pogroms, and discusses contemporary Israeli state law regarding the age fathers could contract their daughters for marriage.

The chapter on the bible and Talmud does not discuss incest, but it explores historical contexts that may have contributed to antisemitic discourse stereotypically associating Jews with incest and child sexual violence.⁹ A subsequent chapter, “Fathers

⁹ Sander Gilman roots these antisemitic stereotypes in the Christian failure to distinguish Jewish endogamy from incest (*Love + Marriage* 137). However, the root of the

and Daughters” also interrogates Mosaic and Judaic law, and uses biblical stories to contemplate father-daughter incest specifically. Part of the structural accomplishment of Rush’s book is its ability to interrogate a set of distinct histories related to sexual exploitation, and yet to lean most heavily on those histories associated with “Western” and/or Judeo-Christian culture, largely avoiding the result of pathologizing nonwhites. While there is a chapter on “Child Marriage in India,” it is just six pages long. In contrast, the sustained attention to Jewishness, in the preface, the chapter on the bible and Talmud, and the chapter on father-daughter incest, stands out. Rush made a choice to engage Jewish child sexual exploitation in specific terms, and while she never mentions the taboo or stereotype regarding Jews and incest, or child sexual predation, her text is still unique in not simply disappearing Jewishness into whiteness. The chapter on Freud is the exception. An exact republication of the *Chrysalis* article, it may signal that while pogroms, Israeli laws, and the *mishnah* helped contextualize aspects of how Jewish history intersected with cross-cultural trends in history’s condoning of sexual abuse, a Jewish Freud represented the limits of this specification.

This limitation brings us to a possible intersection between Rush’s criticism of “Aetiology” and Weinbaum’s invaluable analysis of Freud’s racialized, genealogical metaphors in “Aetiology.” Weinbaum argues that Freud’s use of language and genealogical metaphor in “Aetiology” clearly signal Jewishness by using imagery of a “genealogical tree” to illustrate potentially intertwined branches that would symbolize inbreeding, or incest. In writing, ostensibly, about the phenomenon of fathers/father figures sexually abusing their children, the tree metaphor connects father-daughter abuse

stereotype (traditional endogamy) does not preclude other evidence (scriptural record) that might align with an antisemitic reading from “confirming” a particular bias.

with close lateral (and vertical) endogamies. While Freud's mobilizing this metaphor might seem to reify these antisemitic associations, Weinbaum emphasizes that the discourse was already saturated with antisemitic associations of incest and Jewishness:

Although Freud's genealogical metaphors make his conclusions about the sexual nature of hysteria appear inevitable, it is imperative to note that assertion of the "universal validity" of his findings for all the psychoneuroses and all neurotic people would have been viewed as outrageous by the Austro-German medical and scientific establishment. Not only were Freud's findings audaciously sexual, but incest, far from being regarded as a "universal" experience, was within the scientific and medical literature of the period invariably cast as a Jewish racial trait characteristic of a people who were thought to be mired in tribal exclusiveness. (164-165)

As Weinbaum makes clear, "Aetiology" put a spotlight on Jews and incest not simply because it utilized a genealogical metaphor that connected father-daughter abuse with lateral close endogamies; it put a spotlight on Jews and incest because it dealt with incest. This alone signaled "Jews."

For Freud, the ubiquity of anti-Semitic discourse connecting Jews and incest was unavoidable, and so he utilized that discourse as best he could: "Rather than creating psychoanalysis as a universal science by purging it of Jewishness, Freud incorporated racialized discourse to new ends and built universal claims out of Jewish particularisms" (Weinbaum 168). A variety of "racialized discourse" may be functioning differently in Jewish second-wave feminist texts. By eschewing their own Jewishness (with the exception of Rush), stripping Freud of any identification as Jewish, and moving the focus onto black male "particularisms," Jewish second-wave feminist rhetoric created the conditions not for building universal claims, regardless of the stated intent, but instead for the systematic displacement of pathology from Jewish men onto black men.

At its core, Weinbaum's argument suggests that Freud was in an inescapable double-bind: how could he write persuasively about incest as a universal phenomenon when mentioning incest exposed Jews to further vulnerability given widespread antisemitism? Weinbaum makes a compelling case that in writing "Aetiology," Freud did the best he could given enormous societal impediments:

In reappropriating a discourse on Jewishness and wayward reproduction, harnessing it, gaining control over it, Freud (consciously or not) managed to render the aspect of anti-Semitism by which he was assaulted productive rather than destructive of "genuine" science. (169)

It is this sympathetic reading of Freud's synthesis of "Aetiology," and the (albeit imperfect) seduction theory therein, that may mirror Rush's authorial approach to *The Best-Kept Secret* (1980). While other Jewish second-wave feminists tended to minimize or evade entirely the "particularisms" of their Jewish subjective experiences, Rush builds her own diverse Jewish experience into the text. Rush, unlike many of her peers, creates a text that can help shoulder the burden of incest stereotype by acknowledging that Jewish men with connections to the Jewish home may engage in sexual exploitation of children. "Uncle Willie" goes unmentioned, but *The Best-Kept Secret* forces its readers to reckon with "Dr. Greenberg." Still, even Rush omits Freud's Jewishness.

As Weinbaum makes clear, Freud's Jewishness could not have been more central to his subjective navigation and writing regarding the issues of incest, close endogamies, and antisemitic stereotype. Given that "Aetiology" was so saturated with Jewish signifiers, Freud's subsequent abandonment of the "seduction theory" might be read as its own distinctly Jewish community protective move. As Sander Gilman opines, "His abandonment of the trauma theory, in which the reality of incest was the key to understanding specific hysterical symptoms in specific cases, meant that he was able to

categorize incest not as a problem of particular people but of human nature in general” (*Freud, Race* 151). By the time Freud settled on the Oedipus theory, Freud’s new incest theorizing could alleviate Jewish fathers from the association with incest unavoidably present in “Aetiology.” By the time Jewish second-wave feminists criticized Freud’s abandonment of the “seduction theory” without acknowledging Freud’s Jewishness, they could further alleviate Jewish fathers (and Freud in particular) from an association with incest by shifting that burden to a different group. I’m not arguing that any conscious intent accompanied either the choice to minimize Freud’s Jewishness, nor the choice to displace stigma onto black men and black families. However, it seems eminently plausible that, at some level, these Jewish feminists were aware that a more comprehensive linkage of Freud’s Jewishness to his rejection of the seduction theory would have been welcome by antisemites. By thinking about this phenomenon as something that occurs within a community that thinks of itself both as white *and* as Jewish, we can see how an unexpressed undiscussed anxiety regarding Jewish vulnerability justify actions that privilege Jewish white interests over black and nonwhite interests, even as they utilize flawed logic: Jews’ tenuous white privilege, in this equation, must be protected at all costs. Subconsciously imagined as a zero-sum game, the impulse to retain white privilege accounts for displacing the felt horrors of sexual antisemitism onto a more vulnerable social group. Only the expression of this anxiety may fully allow for it to contribute to coalition-building. The irony is that the unexpressed and un-articulate aspects of Jewish incest anxiety account for an often defensive posture that insists on its ally-ship regarding certain forms of anti-racist

behavior, even as it refuses to address the sexual stigmas that link antisemitic and antiblack racism.

Juxtaposing Jewish and Black Approaches to Incest in *Chrysalis*

Jewish authored feminist texts consistently whitened Freud, frequently operated from a rhetorical subjectivity that minimized or made no mention of their Jewishness, and too often pathologized black male patriarchy while avoiding mention of identifiably Jewish patriarchy. My contention is that these patterns arise out of inchoate community protective impulses regarding Jewish men, Jewish fathers more precisely, and anxiety regarding the historical antisemitic incest and child sexual predation stereotypes in particular. This phenomenon surfaces even more concretely when juxtaposed against black feminist authors' approach to incest: where Jewish second wave feminists, other than Rush, tended to eschew Jewish particularisms in deference to male-oriented Jewish community protective politics, black feminist authors addressed black patriarchy and the incest taboo in culturally specific terms.¹⁰

The link in these discourses emerges vividly in *Chrysalis*, where Rush first publishes her criticism of Freud. Rush's article ends on page 45. Audre Lorde's poem "Chain" begins on page 46. Lorde's poem features the following stanza:

Two girls repeat themselves in my doorway
their eyes are not stone.
Their flesh is not wood nor steel
but I cannot touch them.
Shall I warn them of night
or offer them bread

¹⁰ These black feminist authors may have been in a version of the same double-bind Freud found himself in during the 1890s. That is, the pathologization of black families was such that there may have been no viable "community protective" fashion in which they could have addressed incest in a manner that would not have immediately been considered a specific signifier for black incest.

or a song?
They are sisters. Their father has known
them over and over. The twins they carry
are his. Whose death shall we mourn
in the forest
unburied?
Winter has come and the children are dying. (47)

Lorde's poetry extends, thematically, Rush's discussion of incest. Lorde's poem features no explicit invocation of race. The racial or cultural context for these daughters and father are not, in any fashion, specified. The opening words, "Faces surround me that have no smell no colour no time" evoke a universal, timeless setting (Lorde 46).

This begs the question: given Lorde's status as a renowned black poet, how would this poem have been read, vis-à-vis these questions of universality and specificity? Lorde wrote extensively about her subjectivity as a Third World Feminist. While both Lorde's poem and Rush's text contain no direct or explicit reference to the authors' ethno-racial identities, Lorde's poem could be categorized into a literary "subgenre" of black feminist literature dealing with incest.

The extensive, pioneering poem, fiction and memoir treatment of incest by black feminist authors serves as a literary counterpart to white (and Jewish) non-fiction approaches. However, black feminist authors who chose to depict incest in recognizably black milieus risked what Jewish feminists avoided: direct implications of in-group patriarchy/incest. Black feminist authors portrayed incest despite the risk of reifying associations of incest with black families. Judith Herman alludes to this problem of associating black families with incest in *Father-Daughter Incest*:

White people have indulged for too long in discussion about the sexual capacities, behaviors, and misbehaviors of black people. There is no question, however, that incest is a problem in black families, as it is in white families. Many of the first, most daring, and most honest

contributions to the public discussion of incest were made by black women, and much of our work has been inspired by theirs. (67)

While Herman acknowledges the problem of racist discourse and stereotyping, she praises black feminist authors as inspirations, naming Maya Angelou, Anne Moody, Toni Morrison, and Gayl Jones in her footnote.¹¹ However, while these authors address incest in narratives rooted in the simultaneous diversity and specificity of black American experience, Herman (and, excepting Rush, most other Jewish second-wave feminists) “universalize” their criticism of patriarchy by removing any ethno-racial identifiers other than a white / black binary.

If we consider stereotypical associations of pathologized behavior as a burden weighing on particular social groups, contemplating black and Jewish feminist approaches to incest, and patriarchy, over the long 1970s, illustrates how rhetorical choices shift that burden. Incest scholars Janice Doane and Devon Hodges have observed that American racism and classism set the conditions that “made it easy for the prosperous and white to understand incest as a problem of the poor and black” (31). But

¹¹ The timing is worth mentioning here: Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is published in 1968; Angelou’s autobiography in 1969; *The Bluest Eye* in 1970; *Corregidora* in 1975. Herman might also have named Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, which is published in 1982, and Audre Lorde. But several of these canonical black feminist texts dealing with incest appear at the close of the 1960s. For further reading on African American incest narratives, Hortense Spillers theorizes African American literary depictions of incest brilliantly in “‘The Permanent Obliquity of an In[pha]lly Straight’: In the Time of the Daughters and Fathers,” marking Morrison’s incorporation of incest in *The Bluest Eye* as a response to Ralph Ellison’s Trueblood section in *Invisible Man*. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges *Telling Incest* meditates on those two texts’ further, while also close reading more contemporary “revisions” of black incest narratives, such as Sapphire’s *Push*. Gillian Harkins’ *Everybody’s Family Romance* considers race’s role in the consumer appeal of these narratives, and considers Carolivia Herron’s *Thereafter Johnnie*. Herron’s novel exposes the complexity of these distinctions: though her text is often categorized within the black incest genre, Herron was studying to convert to Judaism while writing it (Ghert-Zand).

within that construct of “prosperous and white” there is a sub-group of American Jews for whom incest had been, historically, a problem associated with *them*. During this era, white Jewish second-wave feminists rarely wrote about specifically Jewish instances of incest, and rarely wrote about Jewish patriarchy. By simultaneously writing as “white women” (per Brownmiller), these authors articulated an inchoate, but palpable community protective discourse that shifted the burden of pathologized behavior off of their collective shoulders.¹²

My argument is speculative, but I contend that alternative explanations for why Freud’s Jewishness, or the authors’ Jewishness, are so consistently omitted either resist scrutiny or align with comparable root causes. The notion that Freud’s Jewishness was unknown to these authors simply does not seem plausible; these texts are remarkable, thorough, crucial intellectual undertakings. While they are (like all texts) imperfect, the notion that a shared ethno-religious identity with a central figure of their studies would escape their attention is unlikely.¹³ That they instead actively chose not to mention Freud’s Jewishness due to their finding it irrelevant is more likely, but this illuminates the fact that their choice not to mention his, or their, Jewishness constituted a deliberate,

¹² As an exception, Kate Simon’s 1982 memoir *Bronx Primitive* stands as a Jewish authored text that explicitly narrates molestation at the hands of a cousin and Jewish neighbor (along with non-Jewish acquaintances), and echoes the type of experience Florence Rush explores. Simon, born in 1912, also aligns generationally more closely with Rush (born in 1918) than most of the Jewish second-wave feminists who wrote more theoretical texts. While I am certain there are additional exceptions, I think the trend might be more aptly considered as generational, rather than chronological.

¹³ It’s worth mentioning that Freud himself wrote about Jewishness and his Jewishness. That said, not every text of that era foregrounded Freud’s Jewishness. For instance, while Philip Reiff’s *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (1959) made numerous references to his Jewishness, Lionel Trilling (in *Freud and the Crisis of our Culture* (1959) and Herbert Marcuse (in *Eros and Civilization* (1955)) make only passing reference to Freud’s Jewishness; both Trilling and Marcuse were Jewish.

disruptive wedge between the notions of personal and political. These community protective politics may also function as a form of assimilation. The choice not to identify Freud's Jewishness, for fear of reifying an antisemitic stereotype, may also be considered an assimilative statement articulating that Jews are, essentially, no different than other white people. But assimilation, typically speaking, is politically charged – it suggests a minority losing some aspect of its culture in order to blend in. I see this functioning less as a loss of cultural identity, and more as an active investment in whiteness and antiblackness; a melding of white identity with Jewish community identity.

Though Herman appears to acknowledge the problem of black families bearing the burden of the association with incest, her choice (and others') not to historically contextualize that Jews also bear(ed) this burden reveals the problem with this rhetoric: even without intent, and even with earnestly stated concern regarding antiblack stereotype, it prioritizes the disassociation of Jews from incest over the emulation of the "most daring, and most honest" strategies of the black authors she praises.

The manner in which Jewish second-wave feminists discussed incest in the long 1970s reveals how the conversation itself helped to cement white Jews as white. That this conversation took place amidst a feminist movement that Matthew Jacobson argues helped to fold various ethnic white groups into whiteness is especially significant, in moving to the next chapter. As I will argue, the feminist politics of the 1980s and 1990s sitcom *Roseanne* departs from a conceit that a sitcom family could read as simultaneously white, "white trash," poor, and Jewish. But the show's incorporation of a pair of pseudo-incest storylines may play something of a role in why the show's Jewish content has been largely written out of its narrative.

CHAPTER 3

INCEST, EXOGAMY, AND JEWISHNESS ON *ROSEANNE*

On the April 17, 1994 episode of *60 Minutes*, Morley Safer reported on daytime television's fascination with confessions, recovered memories, and adult allegations of childhood abuse. As Safer put it, "the more bizarre the confession, the more airtime you get." Dr. Elizabeth Loftus, a central figure in the 1990s "Memory Wars," who consistently challenged the credibility of recovered memories of sexual abuse, framed the issue starkly: "People are remembering sexual abuse in ways that is [sic] absolutely impossible; being abused in the womb, being abused in a prior life, being abused by uh, an alien... on a UFO" (Safer). Safer also interviewed Roseanne Barr's siblings, and her parents, Jerry and Helen Barr, whom she had accused of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in 1991. Then known as Roseanne Arnold, the actress and comedian disclosed her memories of abuse, and her identification as a survivor, at an incest survivor meeting at a church in Denver, Colorado, and in *People Magazine* in October of 1991. Barr stated, "My father molested me until I left home at age 17. He constantly put his hands all over me. He forced me to sit on his lap, to cuddle with him, to play with his penis in the bathtub" ("A Star").¹ Describing her difficulty in coming to terms with the trauma, Barr wrote, "I clung to my fantasy of our happy, quirky family, a bit off-kilter, but colorful, all-American, Jewish" ("A Star").

¹ Barr's allegations of abuse extended to her mother, and some of these were also sexual; in *My Lives* she alludes to her mother having her "strike nude poses with her in various sexual positions," and "touching, but not of the kind of healthy, loving families" (178). Given my focus on male Jewish vulnerability, I analyze the father-daughter dynamics here, and not Barr's engagement with her mother. In attempting to prioritize father-daughter dynamics, I concede the risk of foregrounding it to the detriment of a more complex, comprehensive reading involving Roseanne's mother.

The *60 Minutes* interview allowed Jerry and Helen Barr, along with Roseanne's siblings Geraldine, Ben and Stephanie, to publicly deny these (and other) allegations, as the sitcom *Roseanne* drew to the close of its sixth season. While the denials are forceful, Barr's parents and siblings also acknowledge some truths. When Safer brings up Barr's daughter's contention that her grandfather molested her at Barr's wedding (misattributing the accusation to Barr), Jerry Barr responds in an equivocal fashion: "And then my children asked me, 'Dad, did you pinch her on the tush?' And I said, 'I can't recall,' but knowing me? Probably, probably." Barr's sister Geraldine confirms this: "My parents are guilty of being tushy touchers. They are. And that, I believe, is the genesis of a lot of Roseanne's claims. And I think, however, as tushy touchers, the punishment should fit the crime" (Safer).

Geraldine Barr's allusion to punishment fitting the crime is more than idiom. In her second memoir, *My Lives*, Roseanne Barr divulged that her then-husband, Tom Arnold, "filed police reports in three states" against Jerry Barr based on his granddaughter's allegations. While Jerry Barr was never convicted of any crime, the tabloid and news media fascination surrounding Roseanne Barr's "crying incest" was enough for Safer to describe Jerry and Helen Barr as "the most famous accused molesters in the country." While Safer presents Roseanne's words with skepticism, the Barr family – Jerry Barr in particular – are treated sympathetically. Yet only a hundred years earlier, nineteenth century antisemitic stereotypes associated Jewish men with incest and sexual predation, especially in Europe. The historical context reveals an extraordinary transformation: a once prevalent stereotype has not only receded considerably, but white Jewish men now often benefit from white privilege in the face of such allegations.

This rare televised appearance of Barr's parents and siblings frames the ensuing reading of Barr's eponymous television show. *Roseanne* directly engaged issues of memory, abuse, and incest within the Conner family, a working-class white family whose representative qualities invite consideration next to Barr's assessment of her own working-class family as "all-American, Jewish." The show's depictions of the fictional Roseanne and (her sister) Jackie's memories of physical abuse at the hands of their father dovetailed with ongoing media coverage of Barr's actual family allegations, blurring the lines between fiction and autobiographical fiction. While *60 Minutes* cast doubt on Barr's assertions and credibility, Barr's television show can be read as a complex incest narrative with vertical and lateral components, offering a sophisticated rendering of how abuse (and memories of abuse) could affect siblings in different ways, and portraying the possibilities and limitations of reconciliation. Jewish signifiers and class politics also intersected in a charged fashion around the show's consideration of incest. The show's rare, but meaningful, depictions of Roseanne Conner's "part-Jewishness," challenged contemporaneous normative depictions of Jewishness, and Jewish masculinity in particular, by evoking the specter of the pedophilic, incestuous Jewish male. I hypothesize that resistance to identifying Roseanne Conner as even remotely Jewish stems not just from the Conner family's class status, but also from anxiety regarding the show's mobilization of a violent Jewish father figure, and implicit associations of that figure with Barr's allegedly sexually abusive father. Finally, I argue that a close reading of the lateral components of the incest narrative, involving the pseudo-siblings David Healy and Darlene Conner, reveals the displacement of Jewish incest anxiety onto white working-class Americans categorized by the show (affectionately) as "white trash."

While subsequent chapters focus on how these displacements can occur with nonwhite figures, the Barr narrative shows sexual antisemitism and Jewish community protective politics contributing to racial formations distinguishing middle-class white Jewishness from a socio-racial construct commonly referred to, in contemporary political parlance, as the “white working class.” The very fact that Barr is less commonly considered a Jewish icon than Woody Allen, or Henry Roth, owes significantly to the sort of myth-building that serves both antisemitic purposes (a preference to imagine Jews as rich and powerful) and community protective ones (a preference within the Jewish community to imagine themselves as economically self-sufficient). While Allen and Roth are more likely to register as Jewish icons, something meaningful may account for the comparative reticence to recognize Barr’s Jewishness, as well as the Jewish content in *Roseanne*. I contend that the show’s problematization of conventional notions of Jewish ethnicity, and specific challenge to Jewish patriarchy, help explain its having been read out of Jewish American text-hood.

In viewing *Roseanne* and watching the Barr family, I attempt to convey their placement within the discursive context of Jewishness and whiteness during the 1990s. As previously mentioned, Matthew Jacobson and Karen Brodtkin have explored this discursive shift in terms of the fluidity with which American racial categorizations mirrored changes in various state, institutional and legal policies, along with popular cultural discourse. In trying to understand how Jewish whiteness has helped construct modern conceptions of whiteness, *Roseanne* emerges as a compelling text precisely because it has so rarely been seen as meaningfully depicting any representative aspect of Jewishness. Sander Gilman’s work on sexual antisemitism, and the intersection of incest

and pedophilia stereotypes of Jews in nineteenth century discourse, is relevant here, even as the resonance of such stereotypes had receded so largely besides the increased conception of Ashkenazi-descended Jews as white.

In accounting for *Roseanne*'s depictions of the Conner family's ethnic and religious heritage, I draw attention to specific episodes, while conceding the nine-year television series' inconsistent approach to continuity. The show featured numerous writers, well-publicized battles regarding creative control, and two actors (both with good hair) playing the role of Becky Conner. In a move consistent with the series' humor, the show self-consciously drew attention to this bodily inconsistency.² In mining this territory for humor, *Roseanne* draws attention not to the lack of overarching consistency, but instead to the limits of the form, confidently invoking its concessions while asserting that Becky – played by Lecy Goranson or Sarah Chalke -- always remains Becky. Similarly, my approach to the show's depiction of the Conners' ethnicity proceeds from a commitment to taking the show's fictional world-building seriously: where others might see throwaway lines, inconsistent with the broader world of fictional, working-class Lanford, my intent is to examine, first, why we might find these moments "inconsistent" and, second, what they reveal about the world that Barr, along with a large staff of writers, producers, and actors, collaboratively created.

"Can Jews Be Trailer Trash? Apparently So"

² Season eight features both actresses playing Becky at different points, with jokes playing on the viewers' awareness – for instance, Roseanne greets Lecy Gorenson's Becky with "I'm so glad you're back this week," in the season premier, a welcome the studio audience happily interprets as meant for Becky *and* original Becky actress, Gorenson ("Shower the People You Love With Stuff").

Season six's "I Pray The Lord My Stove to Keep," which aired on May 3, 1994, establishes the premise of the Conners as a part-Jewish family. DJ, the Conner's then youngest son, rebels by secretly attending church. Roseanne and Dan intervene, and DJ asks a straightforward question:

DJ: "What religion are we?"

Roseanne: "I have no idea. Dan?"

Dan: "Well, my family's Pentecostal on my mom's side, Baptist on my dad's. Your mom's mom was Lutheran, her dad was Jewish."

DJ: "So what do we believe?"

R: "Well, we believe in uh, being good. So basically, we're good people."

D: "Yeah, but we're not practicing." ("I Pray the Lord")

This exchange occurred on the first episode of *Roseanne* to air after the 60 Minutes interview with Barr's parents and siblings, immediately reminding viewers of the fictional Roseanne's Jewish father just weeks after Barr's Jewish father was defended as nothing more than a "tushy toucher." The episode establishes Dan and Roseanne's parents' religious backgrounds explicitly, poking fun at the vague, not-quite-ecumenical religious world of the show. Roseanne's claim to have "no idea" of her family's religion mirrors what close viewers of the show might have concluded. Despite numerous Christmas oriented episodes, and extensive Christmas decorations, *Roseanne* was largely secular: Christmas, like Halloween and Thanksgiving, emerge as family holidays, but religion remains peripheral. For instance, one Christmas episode takes the opportunity to engage gender wage inequality, featuring Roseanne in drag as Santa (which paid more than playing Mrs. Santa) ("Santa Claus"). Furthermore, a menorah appears as part of the Conner's self-consciously tacky Christmas decorations earlier in season six ("White Trash Christmas").

In “I Pray the Lord,” though, the Conners dodge the question. Roseanne defers to Dan, who cites their parents’ religions, but avoids identifying *their* religion. And for one grandparent, Dan cites a religion that doubles as an ethnic identity. The scene establishes Roseanne as a product of intermarriage. She may not identify as Jewish, but she grew up with a Jewish parent.

While Roseanne Conner had just one Jewish parent, Roseanne Barr frequently asserts her Jewish identity. Her first memoir declares itself a book “about being Jewish in America” (“My Life as a Woman” xi). She cites the combination of being Jewish and from Salt Lake City in multiple stand-up routines, as early as the late 1980s.³ Her engagement with Israel has ranged from hyper-critical to hyper-supportive over the past five years. While her ideology has shifted, her Jewishness has remained a loudly proclaimed piece of her public persona. Each of her three memoirs – *Roseanne: My Life as a Woman* (1989), *My Lives* (1994) and *Roseannearchy* (2011) – mobilizes Jewishness as a significant component of her life narrative. And her *People* feature’s assessment of her family as “All American, Jewish,” aligns Jewish American-ness with normativity. While the religious or ethnic self-identification of the many writers, performers, and creative talents working on the show over its nine seasons is impossible to completely – or accurately – report, or draw meaningful conclusions from, it bears mention that one writer, Mark Rosewater, claimed that nine of the thirteen writers were Jewish during his tenure (Rosewater). And yet, midway through the first season, Walter Goodman wrote in the *New York Times*, “although Ms. Barr was wont to make quite a megillah in her stand-up routines about being Jewish, that, too, is an unmentionable on the tube” (“TV VIEW;

³ Her (marvelous) routine about her father wearing a large turquoise Star of David belt buckle appears almost identically in her 1987 HBO special and her 2005 one.

Roseanne”). The number of Jewish writers on *Roseanne* was not uncommon for sitcoms generally, but there’s a meaningful tension between the number of Jewish creative forces behind the show, and assessments, like Goodman’s, that explicitly Jewish content would be prohibitive.

All of this is to contextualize my focus on Barr as the central figure behind the show’s creative energy, alongside a suggestion that multiple figures involved in the show likely had some investment in the show’s depictions of Jewishness, or part-Jewishness. However, for the fictional Roseanne Conner this explicit expression of “part” Jewish identification – itself a refutation of an essentialist either/or approach – comes six years in. It is, however, not without precedents. Season two features Roseanne using Yiddish words on three occasions, and while these terms had largely crossed over into “Yinglish” by this time, the circumstance of their usage still merits attention. In the Halloween episode “BOO!” (aired October 31, 1989) she calls Dan a *schmuck* after he deliberately frightens her. She also calls a muscle-bound hunk a *mensch* in a dream sequence on “Sweet Dreams” (aired November 7, 1989), and in that season’s first episode (“Inherit the Wind,” aired September 12, 1989) corrects her friend Crystal when they discuss an acquaintance, Edna. Crystal knows Roseanne dislikes Edna because she’s “a whining, complaining, sniveling kletch.” Roseanne (misquoted) corrects Crystal: “*Kvetch!*” Each moment of linguistic “Jewishness” expressed through Yiddish occurs during a private moment: alone with her husband, in a dream sequence, and in a recounted, off-screen conversation. Despite the Roseanne character’s bold, public, outspoken persona, Yiddish expression occurs privately. Chronologically, these were the first, seventh and eighth episodes of the second season; Yiddish on *Roseanne* disappears after “Sweet Dreams.”

What do we do with these moments, especially given their apparently haphazard deployment – Yiddish early, a random menorah later on? Rosalin Krieger, discussing the Jewish-ness of *Seinfeld*, suggests that “Jewish-Yiddish symbols come in the form of historical and cultural references, names, foods, verbal and body language, phenotype, and religious rituals, all of which rely upon individual viewers to identify these clues that represent things Jewish and elements that can be read as possibly Jewish” (388). The menorah in the window in “White Trash Christmas” is as close as we get to religious Judaism – that is, not close. And using three lone Yiddish (or “Yinglish”) words cannot be cited as incontrovertible evidence of a speaker’s Jewishness. But how does Roseanne’s use of language (verbal and body) contrast with her Jewish and non-Jewish contemporaries vis-à-vis Jewish performance?

A *Saturday Night Live* sketch from February, 1992 provides useful context for considering this question, and how Barr fit within that prescribed space. Barr and then-husband Tom Arnold hosted, and Barr appeared in the recurring, popular “Coffee Talk” sketch, alongside Madonna and Mike Myers (“Coffee Talk: Barbra Streisand Stops By”). Myers, who based Linda Richman on his Jewish mother-in-law, mixes actual Yiddish with made up words, continuously primping his wig and becoming momentarily overcome with emotion in his drag rendering of a specific form of stereotypical, well-to-do, New York rooted Jewish femininity (Witchell). Madonna follows suit, while Barr, playing Madonna’s character’s Jewish mother, visiting from Arizona, occasionally breaks as she struggles with a Yiddish inflected New York Jewish accent. The choice to make Barr’s character from Arizona is itself an interesting reflection of Barr’s own Southwestern biography. But while Barr is the only Jewish performer during the sketch

(prior to a cameo by Barbra Streisand), her performance of Jewishness is far milder than that of her non-Jewish collaborators.

We might infer that Barr made choices as a performer to temper, or counter, expectations regarding “Jewish” performance. This may provide useful context for considering Barr’s performative choices on *Roseanne*, and adamant scholarly claims regarding the non-Jewishness of the Connors, despite Barr’s Jewish identity. Scholarship on *Roseanne* has tended to foreground the show’s Marxist content and feminist politics. However, Joyce Antler, Alessandra Senzani, David Marc, and Kathleen Rowe also mention the significance of Barr’s Jewish upbringing. Antler and Marc touch on Barr’s Jewishness extensively, making compelling arguments that *Roseanne* subverted anti-Semitic depictions of Jewish mothers.⁴

However, Antler also claims that “Roseanne Conner had no specific ethnicity and was never portrayed Jewishly” (175). Antler offers this observation directly after alluding to Barr’s own contrary reading of her show, as Barr described Roseanne Conner as “actually a Jewish mother” (175). David Marc states, “Roseanne is a Jewish performer who... self-consciously constructed an American – as opposed to a Jewish-American – persona” to build a “transdemographic audience” (199). Marc contends that Barr “created not only public masks, but also fictional domestic sitcom milieus that in no way indicated background, culture, or religion,” noting that Barr *never* used “phonetic or phonemic Yiddishisms” (199). Senzani identifies the Connors as a “working-class white family,”

⁴ Antler also sees *Roseanne* as challenging the depiction of “benevolent” Jewish motherhood, such as on the 1950s sitcom *The Goldbergs*, an important precedent for televised, sitcom depictions of Jewish mothers. Vincent Brook also discusses *The Goldbergs* in *Something Ain’t Kosher Here: The Rise of the “Jewish” Sitcom*, which focuses primarily on the 1990s (and only mentions *Roseanne* in passing).

footnoting: “There is no other ethnic reference, though it is widely known that Roseanne comes from a poor Jewish family” (237, 248). Rowe claims, “*Roseanne* leaves the issues of race, ethnicity, and its own whiteness unexamined,” before noting that the show instead “mines the issues of class and gender” (84).

These last two quotes from Senzani and Rowe illuminate one aspect of what may read so convincingly as non-Jewish about the Connors: they were contemporaneously working class. Popular depictions of Jewish American families are largely consistent in depicting white Ashkenazi-descended Jews as middle class, or at the very least, upwardly mobile. The Connors joke about being “white trash,” and the harsh reality that their children will not have it as good as they have. These “white trash” riffs echoed jokes about Barr: her husband, Tom Arnold (who also has a complicated relationship to Jewishness) joked that he and Roseanne were “America’s worst nightmare...white trash with money” (Elkin 9X).⁵

But the pejorative “white trash,” which has its own antiblack racist undergirding, is not often stereotypically associated with Jews. As the comedic/exclusionary website *jewornotjew.com* inquires on its Barr page, “Can Jews be trailer trash? Apparently so” (“Barr”). The entry reveals a problematic intersection between Jewish exceptionalism, classism, and assessment of secular Jewish “authenticity.” This supposed incongruity, though, finds vivid expression in Barr’s standup. In her first HBO special, *The Roseanne Barr Show*, Barr leaves the stage to tend to her kids’ complaints about their father, played by Tom Arnold. The camera cuts to Barr in a trailer behind the theater, where she

⁵ Tom Arnold’s Jewishness is a matter for extended focus: though he plays the role of proto-typical *goy* in Barr’s stand-up routines, he converted to Judaism when he married Barr, and was in fact born to a Jewish mother, though he was raised by his Christian father and step-mother after his mother abandoned him early in his life (Ilana).

reprimands Arnold by berating him with Yiddish curses (including, delightfully, an imperative that Arnold should catch the cholera) (*The Roseanne Barr Show*). Years before *jewornotjew.com*'s offensive question, Barr's comedy was emphatically challenging the notion of Jewish middle-class normativity. The same stand-up set also explicitly establishes her "domestic Goddess" persona as being part of an intermarried family:

We got like a mixed marriage, me and my husband, on account of like I'm Jewish and he ain't, and everything, so like at the wedding we each tried to please the other person's family, like for my family he crushed a beer can under his heel, and for his family I pretended I was a virgin, so that went really well. (*The Roseanne Barr Show*)

Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis's study of *The Cosby Show* also helps delineate how class might function for white viewers of *Roseanne*. Jhally and Lewis reveal some middle-class white respondents expressing disgust at the Connors' class position, preferring the Huxtables' middle-class milieu. Said one respondent, "I just don't like the way they look" (78). Jhally and Lewis don't account for white ethnicity here, and so this is speculative, but taken alongside the *jewornotjew* website's expression of disdain for Jewish "trailer trash," we might ponder whether Jewish anxiety about class position and perception yields a particular form of Jewish exceptionalist classism resistant to Barr's attempts to collapse differences between Jews and working-class non-Jewish whites.

None of this is meant to suggest working-class secular Jews are absent in Jewish American cultural production. But in the late twentieth century they tend towards existing in a nostalgic past, signifying upward mobility.⁶ Consider Woody Allen's *Radio Days*

⁶ It's perhaps worth emphasizing that the notion of "becoming white," when applied to American Jews, involves, essentially, an enhancement in social class. Karen Brodtkin's *How the Jews Became White Folks* examines how the New Deal and other institutionally

(1987) and Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1986), films released just prior to *Roseanne*'s run. Though Neil Simon and Woody Allen had notoriously difficult relationships with their parents, the films nostalgically portray sympathetic, working-class fathers. These sensitive, thoughtful souls are nothing at all like Al Harris, Roseanne Conner's fictional father, played by John Randolph.

Born Emmanuel Hirsh Cohen, John Randolph made only two appearances on *Roseanne*, though his character (in absence) would dominate an important storyline over several seasons. In his first appearance, though, Al greets Roseanne affectionately, calling her "kapushka" as he embraces her. The moment seems to immediately announce Al Harris as being, in some fashion, ethnic; "kapushka" is a dialectical variation of the Russian or Polish "babushka." Though the line is stepped on, he also seems to call Roseanne's sister Jackie "bubela." Roseanne and Jackie happily hug Al here, but later episodes portray a less idealized figure. They remember the razor strop he kept by the front door, with which he beat them ("This Old House"). They discuss how displaying the strop meant their friends saw it, publicizing their abuse, adding another layer of traumatization. Another episode finds Roseanne spanking and even kicking her son DJ after he steals the family car. In tears, Roseanne apologizes while eating cookies, explaining that her father hit her, but that she would not hit DJ again ("The Driver's

racist government and business policies that discriminated against African Americans and other non-white groups facilitated Jews "becoming" white. The fact that contemporaneous depictions of Jews in popular culture are rarely anything other than middle class may speak to the inherent paradox of what working-class Jewishness represents about American race and class intersections. If the "whiteness" of contemporary American Jews can most easily be observed through their class privileges, white Jews cannot be depicted as working class or "white trash" because the undergirding logic of ethnic whiteness involves a mythology of earning white status through overcoming hardship and "achieving" class mobility.

Seat”). The distinctive, sobering scene invites the audience to connect abuse with eating habits as an emotional salve – Roseanne eats as she speaks, focusing her eyes on the cookies as much as on DJ. Sitcoms commonly feature performative eating, but Roseanne speaks while chewing and the clarity of the dialogue suffers. The scene meaningfully draws attention to the choice to eat cookies while discussing abuse, and in so doing, evokes Judith Herman’s work on trauma theory, and sexual abuse, which mentions eating disorders as a potential symptom of survivors of sexual abuse (*Trauma and Recovery* 108).⁷ But what bears emphasis here is that the show’s celebrated critique of patriarchy – which targets male politicians, male bosses, abusive husbands, and corporate entities – also targets Roseanne Conner’s Jewish father, Al.

This may constitute a reason why some viewers might have been quick to read the Conner family as decisively non-Jewish. The relationship between feminist critique of white patriarchy, and Jewish feminist critique of Jewish male patriarchy is fraught with tension, as I demonstrate in chapter one. In the 1970s and 80s, second-wave feminist critique of Freud featured numerous Jewish American feminists who criticized Freud’s “abandonment” of the seduction theory. Many of these authors cast Freud as a demonstrably white, Victorian patriarchal figure – Freud’s Jewishness was unmentioned, for instance, in no less than five important Jewish authored texts that criticize Freud’s theorizing.⁸ The result was a critique of patriarchy that accommodated Jewish community

⁷ The show does not suggest any overdetermined link between abuse and eating disorder. Jackie Harris also testifies to Al Harris’s abuse, and while her character also deals with trauma in specific ways, an eating disorder is not one of them. The show takes care in depicting different people responding to similar traumas in different ways.

⁸ These include Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Ellen Frankfort’s *Vaginal Politics* (1972), Phyllis Chesler’s *Women and Madness* (1972), Susan

protective impulses surrounding the Jewish father figure, while simultaneously whitening Jews. If discussing a Jewish child molester as a Jewish child molester reeks of antisemitism, rhetorically, the community protective impulse demands the figure either not be identified as Jewish, or be innocent.

Reading *Roseanne* as unengaged with Jewishness permits celebration of Barr as a Jewish artist without her art being considered at cross-purposes with Jewish respectability politics. Consider Jonathan Freedman's observation regarding how Philip Roth and Tony Kushner challenged sexual antisemitism in their "triumphant transformation of the culturally loaded figure of the Jewish pervert into a culture hero" (6). In assigning her eponymous hero the status of "culture hero," Barr withholds that status from the one Jewish recurring character depicted on her show, and provides her audience with the choice of either reconciling the loaded associations with the Jewish assignation, or – perhaps easier – choosing to ignore the Jewish component altogether. Withholding Al Harris's Jewish significance equates to removing a non-heroic instance of the problematic "culturally loaded figure of the Jewish pervert."

The obvious danger here is collapsing the fictional world of the show – which only mentioned physical abuse – into the real world. But the show always played with the boundaries of real and fiction. Not only did the show playfully draw attention to its two Beckies, it also relied on audience awareness of Barr's love life, which was covered extensively in the tabloids. One post-credit 1992 scene features Tom Arnold approaching John Goodman about Dan Conner having kissed Roseanne passionately earlier in the episode ("Less is More"). The brief sketch requires the audience to know that Barr and

Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975) and Florence Rush's *The Best Kept Secret* (1980), all of which I discuss in detail in chapter one.

Arnold were married, and furthermore, to know something about Arnold's tabloid persona. Otherwise, Arnold's self-deprecating performance (clueless, jealous, powerless, yet convinced of his own importance) would not hit the same comic notes. The fact that *The Roseanne Barr Show* had already established Arnold as a non-Jewish marital foil to the Yiddish speaking Barr in her HBO stand-up special also suggests that the alluded-to Arnold / Barr romance registered as an intermarriage plot; perhaps one that mirrored the Roseanne Conner / Dan Conner marriage. The autobiographical tensions saturate the show, informing the viewing experience all the way up to the two-part series finale, which aired on May 20, 1997. These episodes reveal the entirety of the series to have been conjured by the fictional Roseanne (Conner), who was writing a book about her family. The meta aspects of the show compound here, as Roseanne reveals that Jackie (not Bev) was gay, and that she had essentially husband-swapped her daughters' partners. As the fictional Roseanne puts it, "As I wrote about my life I relived it, and whatever I didn't like I rearranged" ("Into that Good Night, Part 2"). The fictional Roseanne speaks to her autonomy in utilizing creative license in telling what she still maintains to be *her*, ostensibly non-fiction, story. The rhetorical move also creates space for understanding Barr's assessment of her ownership of the show, despite its collaborative authorship and its fictional construct.

It is precisely this deliberate mixing of fiction, real life, and meta-fiction, that helps account for why Al Harris's stature in the show is so charged. Tabloid and mainstream news coverage of Barr's abuse allegations regarding her father (covered in *TV Guide*, *USA Today*, *60 Minutes*, *Sally Jesse Raphael*, and *People*, among other print and television outlets) was widespread. Undoubtedly, many viewers watched the Al

Harris storyline on *Roseanne* knowing that Barr herself alleged that her father had been sexually abusive; viewers of *Roseanne* that watched the *60 Minutes* segment would have been reminded of Al Harris's Jewishness on the subsequent episode. Barr herself has indicated how carefully she and the show writers chose what issues would be addressed (Williams, "Excuse the Mess" 191). Television programming addressing issues of abuse was not unusual at the time; Jane Feuer writes about the market that developed for "Trauma Drama" in the 1980s, and Joshua Gamson has shown how talk shows' increased democratization revolved around more open discussions of abuse, alongside other themes. But *Roseanne* moved that conversation to the heart of a highly-rated primetime network sitcom. Given the extensive coverage of Barr's sexual abuse allegations by mainstream media, the real life allegations of sexual abuse very plausibly informed how segments of the audience viewed the Al Harris storyline, especially considering how the show blurred the line separating Barr the actress from Roseanne the character. Some of the textual references to abuse were very general. In the episode where Al dies, Roseanne confronts his mistress, who assumes Roseanne is angry at Al for having cheated on her mother. Roseanne says, "You think this is about the affair? You don't know nothing. You don't know nothing about my childhood. I could tell you stuff about my dad that you couldn't even handle" ("Wait Till your Father gets Home").⁹ The scene draws attention to what is left unsaid, and like the apology scene with DJ, possesses what Ien Ang calls "emotional realism." Despite the sitcom format, the scene speaks to Roseanne's anger at her father (and those who protect or idealize him). The show's autobiographical elements

⁹ Noel Murray's close reading of "Wait Till Your Father gets Home," which also touches on the parallels between Barr's personal life and the abusive figure of Al Harris, makes a very compelling case for the sheer quality of *Roseanne's* (and her writers') aesthetic engagement with working-class households.

consistently intersect with what many Barr's fans would have recognized as an intensely personal matter involving the star's actual life and contested memories.

“Oh, Look, Honey. Our Kids are Necking”

To fully appreciate the complexity of *Roseanne*'s incest narrative, though, consider that the Al Harris storyline (with its layered depiction of physical abuse, memory, trauma, and extra-textual allusions to sexual abuse) represents only one vector of the show's exploration of incestuous themes. The romance between Roseanne and Dan's daughter Darlene Conner and her boyfriend David provides material for numerous sibling incest jokes. In season four, David Healey (played by Jonathan Galecki) is introduced as Becky's boyfriend Mark's younger brother. Darlene and David begin dating shortly prior to Becky and Mark eloping; when Mark sees David, and asks how he is, David replies, “Pretty good, except thanks to you now I'm related to my girlfriend” (“Terms of Estrangement, Part 2”). The Connors invite David to move in with them after Roseanne witnesses David's mother subject him to emotional abuse. At the episode's conclusion, Darlene and David share an affectionate moment that Roseanne observes, commenting to Dan, “Oh, look, Honey. Our kids are necking” (“It's a Boy!”).¹⁰

The Connors welcome David into their home in the same season that Al Harris dies, which ran from 1992-1993. The humor mined from the laterally incestuous dynamic of Darlene and David sits against the drama of the vertical (father-daughter) dynamic of the Al Harris storyline. Certainly, the lack of consanguineous relation between David and Darlene might be said to establish the pairing as pseudo-incestuous, but the show works towards establishing David as a son to the Connors independent of his relationship with

¹⁰ The episode title (“It's a Boy!”) also does work in establishing the irony of David's arrival (if not birth) as a Conner child.

Darlene. Incorporated as family, David is representative of how *Roseanne* articulated family possibilities involving non-traditional kinship.¹¹ But while the lateral incest dynamic is positively charged, and the vertical one with Roseanne's father is negatively charged, they are ethnically charged in contrasting ways. Al Harris's Jewishness is established, yet never explicitly centered alongside the negative revelations about his character. David and Darlene's relationship, though, is utilized as fodder for "white trash" jokes.

Nowhere is the intersection of lateral incest and "white trash" identification more explicit than when Darlene announces that she is pregnant by David, and that they will get married. This episode ends with Roseanne soothing a furious Dan, finally making him laugh by declaring: "Check this out. Not only... are we going to have a grandchild who is roughly the same age as our own child, but our daughter is marrying the boy we considered to be our son. I think that means we are now officially *the* white-trashiest family in all the land!" ("Another Mouth to Shut Up"). If the Al Harris storyline ran the risk of associating abuse with a Jewish patriarch, especially for the viewers who were aware of Barr's allegations regarding her father, the lateral dynamic between David and Darlene subsumed this tension by explicitly associating incest with a "white trash" ethnic identity. Barr's memoirs, however, reveal a more nuanced and historic conception of lateral incest as having particular resonances in Jewish communities. Writing about her daughter marrying a close family friend (not unlike the Darlene/David romance), Barr wrote:

¹¹ In this respect, *Roseanne* joins a long list of sitcoms from its era depicting families with non-traditional kinship relations (consider *Diff'rent Strokes* (1978-1986), *Who's the Boss?* (1984-1992) and *Full House* (1987-1995), among many others).

It was a little too European shtetl for my liking, like marrying your cousin or something, as every one of my overly hairy relatives indeed did. My mother's aunt was married to her own uncle (and by the way, I'm my own grandpa!). Two of my sisters are married to a brother and sister, and both of my sisters last names are Epstein-Barr. You can't make this shit up, folks! (*Roseanne* 161)

A parallel emerges: ethnic Jewishness is invoked in Barr's memoir in a similar fashion to how "white trash" identity is invoked on "Another Mouth." Both examples use self-deprecating humor to negotiate close endogamy. While contemporary incest can exist in a purportedly non-ethnic, working-class "white trash" household on *Roseanne*, Barr's memoir casts the incestuous undertones of her daughter's relationship as akin to the Jewish past intruding upon the present. But the nostalgia of contemporary economically privileged Jews for a working-class past also features an ambivalence towards the close endogamies that mark that the working-class past as pseudo-incestuous.

Taken together, Barr's writing and show might be said to speak to a cultural logic that locates white incest as conceivable only in working-class families. As such, the tendency to view the *Conners* as decisively non-Jewish may hinge not on the separate points of incest and class, but on these two points' crucial linkedness. Essentially, white incest finds itself divorced from middle-class normativity; contemporarily or otherwise. Kirstine Taylor observes that in the past two decades, following progress for non-whites in anti-discrimination laws during the 1970s and amidst a rise in neoliberal governance, some poor whites have chosen to "positively inhabit" a "white trash identity" (74). The *Conners* reveal a consistently playful attitude towards this identity, but Barr's show also indicates that ethnic Jewish and "white trash" identity could – and did – intersect in meaningful ways. Chronologically, this post-Civil Rights timeline also overlaps with the eras discussed by those scholars who trace Jews "becoming" white. Regarding the show's

incest narrative, one dynamic could hold more “charge” than the other: the “white trash” lateral incest dynamic, which draws attention away from the negatively charged vertical dynamic involving Al Harris, is ethnically reoriented despite striking biographical consistency with Barr’s familial close endogamies (both her siblings and children). Meanwhile, Barr’s real-life anxiety about close endogamy seems eclipsed by David and Darlene’s almost uncomfortably saccharine wedding vows, in which Darlene states that the “best way we can make it” is to “rely on each other the way *our* parents, Dan and Roseanne Conner, have” (my emphasis, “Another Mouth”). Not only do they marry to begin their own family, their vows reveal a continued effort to normalize the non-traditional family in which David was taken in, as an authentic sibling. The resultant wedding vows, in which a bride and groom discuss their affection for “our” parents, is not played for comic effect at all, but rather as a deeply touching tribute from sibling lovers to their parents.

None of this works out well for Dan, who has a heart attack at the wedding. Here, anxiety about lateral endogamies explodes into the storyline. The idea of a daughter’s marriage resulting in the symbolic (or literal) replacement of a father reads as deeply Freudian, but this narrative arc merits consideration alongside Juliet Mitchell’s *Siblings*, which helps to re-center the lateral dynamics of the incest taboo. Mitchell’s theory counters generations of psychoanalytic and Freudian theory that have reinforced the incest taboo as being vertically enforced by parents. If, as Mitchell argues, siblings themselves enforce the incest taboo in order to maintain societal conventions and preserve family connections, the David/Darlene/Dan dynamic takes on added nuance. Darlene and David’s marriage reveals a defiant rejection of the notion that siblings

themselves enforce the incest taboo, as only Dan seems especially troubled by the marriage (albeit, more for the opportunities it may foreclose for Darlene than for her marrying a brother-figure). Sure enough, seeing his daughter and son wed gives Dan a heart attack, as he collapses at the reception. But while the subsequent episodes show his convalescence, the series finale, revealing the entire series to have been written by the fictional Roseanne Conner, asserts that Dan's surviving the heart attack was merely a fictional departure from the "real," to help Roseanne process her grief. Barr commented that this narrative mechanism provided "another dimension, another layer, when you watched the entire thing again" ("Season 9: Breaking the Sitcom Mold"). Dan's death does help account for various ninth season plotlines, where Roseanne's processing of grief through writing accounts for the series' simultaneous and sudden incorporation of extreme escapism alongside melodrama.

However, the notion of a wedding killing or replacing a father is not, by itself, an especially unique narrative. Any marriage, accompanied by a Freudian reading, features a daughter replacing a father with a substitute. Instead, it's the subsequent pregnancy scare, alongside the specter of Dan's death/non-death according to the season's narrative conceit, which complexly renders the linked-ness of vertical and lateral incest. First, the marriage of David and Darlene simultaneously kills and does not kill Dan, a paradoxical result achieved by waiting until the last episode to revise the show's history. Second, the sibling agency (and failure to enforce the incest taboo) that might appear as the narrative reason for Dan's death upon the initial viewing, is superseded by Roseanne's creative choice to keep Dan alive. Thus, female creative agency establishes whether the incest taboo does or does not result in the death of the father. Especially given the history of

silencing surrounding women's storytelling regarding incest, the ninth season's narrative conceit of Roseanne's writing/re-writing of two divergent autobiographical stories seems especially subversive, and a provocative challenge to the "truth/lie" binary that surrounds most incest discourse.

Third, and most important, the indeterminacy of Dan's survival is mirrored by the indeterminacy of David and Darlene's daughter's survival. Indeed, Harris Conner Healey's premature birth intimates that lateral incest is vertically destructive in *both* directions. Henry Roth's *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, which I explore in greater detail in chapter five, depicts protagonist Ira Stigman's intense anxiety surrounding the possibility that his sister is pregnant by him: the fear of their child being congenitally affected by consanguineous incest dominates Ira's fears when his sister Minnie tells him that she missed her period (157). *Roseanne's* depiction of Harris's premature birth, and a tearful scene in which Darlene and David wonder what they might have done to "deserve" a prematurely born, near-death infant, resonates with narrative conventions regarding the genetic risks of lateral incest. Darlene and David's lack of a consanguineous relationship proves the narrative mechanism that allows for their positively charged pseudo-incestuous bond, but the transgression undergirding that union yields the precise consequence literature so often associates *with* consanguineous sibling relations (and Jewish ones in particular).¹²

In contemplating *Roseanne's* thematizing of vertical and lateral incest, there is a temptation to consider the show's audiences along ethnic lines. But in examining the

¹² As indicated in the introduction, Gilman cites Thomas Mann's "Blood of the Walsungs" (1905) and Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), as revealing less positively charged depictions of Jewish lateral sibling longing and its consequence.

manner in which Jewishness, and part-Jewishness, are invoked in explicit and non-explicit fashions alongside storylines dealing with whiteness and incest, attempting to delineate *Roseanne*'s Jewish audience from its non-Jewish audience might prove to be a fruitless endeavor. Freedman's compelling argument that Jewish American cultural production reflects a "syncretic, hybridizing engagement with a national culture in ways that transform both their own identity and experience and that of the culture at large" seems especially relevant regarding the liminal Jewish space carved out on *Roseanne* (38). The show provides its own critique of even mild essentialism, as Roseanne herself, and her family, emerge at the center of the liminal space that is often disallowed in conversations of what "is" or "is not" Jewish. That is to say, by crafting a fictional reality that commits to a part-Jewishness without ever championing Jewish identification, Barr's show speaks most directly to a liminal audience – crucially, a liminal audience that would be defined as decisively *not* Jewish according to Jewish institutions that privilege matrilineal descent.¹³ On *Roseanne*, an intermarried part-Jewish family that expresses ambivalence about their religious and/or ethnic categorization emerges, finally, as the epitome of "white" in the scholarly record. Consider Ralph Ellison's paint factory in *Invisible Man*: one drop of blackness creates the whitest white. *Roseanne*'s achievement is depicting a world where the whitest white working-class family has a Jewish father/grandfather. Borrowing from Ellison's critical eye, we might consider that Al

¹³ That Barr's Jewish identity might pronounce itself in ways resistant to the matrilineal tradition may relate to her mother's ambivalence about being Jewish in largely Mormon Salt Lake City. In *My Life as a Woman*, Barr discusses her mother's decision to raise her (and her siblings) in two worlds: "Friday, Saturday, and Sunday morning I was a Jew; Sunday afternoon, Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday afternoon we were Mormons" (51). There may be some reflection of this matrilineal continuity inconsistency in the depiction of Roseanne Conner's non-matrilineal part-Jewishness.

Harris's Jewishness is structural, and not incidental, to the Conner family's undeniable whiteness. This is not to suggest that the liminally Jewish content of *Roseanne* supersedes the far more saturated Marxist content, but rather to surmise that a particular amount of ethnic identity can be found within this artistic depiction of a purportedly proto-typical white working-class family, as long as it accedes to particular cultural logics. But while scholarship has flattened the Conner family's ethnicity into a non-Jewish, nondescript whiteness, not all viewers missed the cues.

A 2006 online fan-fiction piece entitled "Lanford Days Again," by an author using the screen-name "CNJ," picks up eight years after the end of the series. The story reveals Jackie still dealing with the trauma of her father's abuse, but situates those memories alongside Nana Mary, Jackie and Roseanne's maternal grandmother, discussing family history over photos of long-dead relatives. About a great aunt Annika, Nana Mary says, "Their father was killed in the pogroms raging through Eastern Europe then. I remember her telling me about this when I was little" (CNJ). The story ends with Nana Mary's "mostly... secular funeral," presided over by a rabbi. One piece of fanfiction cannot and does not serve as proof for my claims. But I show this to suggest that close viewers of the show might well have contemplated the Conners' Jewishness in complex ways invited by the show, despite consistent scholarly assessments of the Conners as decisively "not Jewish." Indeed, a *Roseanne* fan-fiction author reading Jewishness into the Harris family background is not altogether surprising, as the show explicitly marks Al Harris as Jewish, and features the aforementioned signifiers of some Jewish heritage. But Nana Mary is *not* Al Harris's mother; she is Roseanne's *maternal* grandmother.

As such, CNJ reads, and subsequently writes, Jewish history into Roseanne's Lutheran mother's genealogy, opening up an entire subtext regarding Jewish conversion, passing, and assimilation. In this respect, CNJ does not seem to be merely "racebending" here, though racebending is characteristic of fanfiction. The choice seems less about departing from the text, and more about reading deeply into it. CNJ's choice to make Nana Mary Jewish concretizes Barr's own allusions to the character, as she described Shelley Winters' (who was Jewish) performance of Nana Mary as representative of one of her Jewish grandmothers, Bobbe Mary, whom she discusses extensively in her memoirs. Winters delivered "a good representation of my actual grandmother whose name was Mary. She was very much like that. All the women of that generation who were Jewish from Russia and Europe were kind of like that too" ("Thanksgiving 1991 (Commentary)"). Barr's commentary here speaks to a simultaneous specification and universalization of the Nana Mary/Bobbe Mary "type;" she pronounces her recognizably Jewish on a show that also presented her as simultaneously, recognizably, "white trash," clad in trucker hat, sipping hard alcohol. Among his arguments in *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills contends that the distinction between "white" and white ethnic groups considered "off white" may be overstated in terms of how global racial politics involving the oppression of nonwhite peoples operate. The politics of Jewish representation on *Roseanne* speaks to the flexibility with which some audiences could view the same characters as distinctly representative of some version of non-Jewish "whiteness," even as the other viewers saw a much more complex picture. "Off white" and "white" can be coded into the same character, but read towards different purposes. Reading Nana Mary as Jewish, and thus her daughter Bev as converted (or as a closet Jew), reveals

Roseanne's more layered engagement with whiteness than Rowe's assessment of an "unexamined" approach.

Uncle Sol and a New Jerry

Season eight's "The Last Date" speaks obliquely to the charged nature of Al Harris's Jewish patriarchal character through its deployment of Shecky Greene, the noted Jewish stand-up comedian, as a far more traditional, positively charged, Jewish paterfamilias. Yet the episode, which features Roseanne and Dan crashing a Bar Mitzvah on their final date prior to Roseanne giving birth to their youngest child, also portrays Dan and Roseanne's encounter with the Jews at the Bar Mitzvah as so detached and othering as to strain credulity that Roseanne grew up with a Jewish father, or that the Dan character might have two seasons earlier matter-of-factly disclosed to DJ that his grandfather was Jewish. The nature of that detachment, though, builds towards a climax when "Uncle Sol," played by Greene, confronts Roseanne and Dan for having crashed the event. Roseanne protests his outing them as outsiders, asserting, "I know what all this is about. It's because I married a gentile, isn't it?" ("The Last Date").

The line, which provokes no laughter from the studio audience, draws attention to Barr's real-life intermarriages, while also remaining true (even in its jest) to the fictional reality of Lanford: however indeterminate Roseanne's Jewish identity, her part-Jewishness proves itself in her assertion of Dan as a gentile, and her claiming of that as grounds for her unjust banishment from the Jewish celebration they crash. Yet Uncle Sol does not banish them at all. Instead, he provides sage wisdom and encouraging words for them, and alleviates their concerns about once again becoming parents. While Al Harris's fatherly parental authority vanishes in Roseanne and Jackie's memory of his physical

abuse, Uncle Sol serves as an idealized, decisively Jewish paternal presence. The episode's mobilization of Jewish stereotypes (the Bar Mitzvah family are depicted as gossips, *fressers*, lawyers, and doctors), ends with Uncle Sol's positioning as a viable, charitable male patriarch – a sort of father-knows-best-type – the very archetype the show otherwise deconstructs as sitcom mythology. Read through this lens, the episode may be the most anti-canonical in the series run, and perhaps reveals something of Barr's (and the show's) anxiety and ambivalence about the show's sustained criticism of patriarchy. Though Al Harris never finds redemption on the show, the figure of the Jewish patriarch does; Uncle Sol, more than any other male figure on the show, is given the authority to bless Roseanne and Dan's intermarriage and procreation, even within an episode emphasizing Roseanne and Dan's outsidership to Jewish traditions. This episode reads very differently if removed from a viewing so sensitive to depictions of Jewishness across the show's nine-year duration, and so I emphasize that I put this reading forward as viable and worth contemplation, and not definitive. But if we acknowledge that Roseanne's critique of patriarchy emerged as its most charged involving the Jewishness of her father, "The Last Date" cedes patriarchal Jewish authority back to Uncle Sol within a cartoonish Jewish space (the Bar Mitzvah party) which emphasizes Roseanne and Dan's unbelonging.

Though Al Harris never finds redemption on the show, the fictional Roseanne does find some muted resolution in confronting him after he dies, giving a speech to his coffin-interred body. Roseanne's last words to him, "I-love-you-goodbye," are muttered quickly as she leaves the room in the funeral parlor ("Wait Till"). Even as she attempts closure, there is ambivalence. But the fictionalized lack of resolution, and heartache,

dramatized in the episode pale next to what Barr has said and written in recent years regarding her real-life allegations. In a 2000 interview, Barr reflected on her choice to publically air her allegations, as well as her status as an inspirational figure for having done so:

“It’s been 10 years since I spoke to my family. They’re not willing to.” Her voice drops and there’s a long pause. “Now I do regret it, yeah. I get letters from people saying: ‘When you did it, it gave me courage.’ But I was just thinking about this yesterday, the price that I had to pay is too high. I go back and forth.” (Bradberry)

After then attributing her decision to go public in 1991 to Tom Arnold’s pressure, Barr goes even further, offering the following advice to abused children: “I wouldn’t urge any kid to tell. I’d tell ‘em not to. I really thought about that a lot. But, knowing what happens, I think the best you can do is grow up and deal with it. Grow up, go to therapy and deal with it” (Bradberry).

In 2011, in her most recent memoir, *Roseannearchy*, Barr went into depth regarding her allegations, and her thoughts regarding them two decades later:

The word *incest* conjures ideas of sex, but there was never any sex between my father and me. There was violence, humiliation, inappropriate words, ‘jokes,’ and rather grotesque displays that never should have occurred between a father and his daughter, but there was no actual sex. (217)

She even addresses her parents having passed a lie detector test, stating:

Of course, they passed a polygraph test, proving there was no ‘incest.’ I still wonder what word would have been better to use. It doesn’t seem that there is one that conveys the feelings I had as a young girl in a family that didn’t really value women’s needs, privacy, shame, or pride. (Barr, *Roseannearchy* 217)

On the talk show circuit, promoting the book, Barr and Oprah Winfrey would have the following exchange:

“I think it’s the worst thing I’ve ever done,” Roseanne told Oprah. “It’s the biggest mistake that I’ve ever made”

“Calling it incest? Or going public?” Oprah asked.

“Well, both of those things,” Roseanne said. “I think what happened was that – well, I know what happened was that I was in a very unhappy relationship. I was prescribed numerous psychiatric drugs. Incredible mixtures of psychiatric drugs to deal with the fact that I had, and still in some ways, have and always will have some mental illness. And the drugs and the combination of drugs that I was given, which were some strong, strong drugs, I totally lost touch with reality in a big, big way.”
 (“Roseanne Reveals New Reality Show”)

Here, too, Barr alludes to her relationship with Arnold in contextualizing her behavior in 1991, while also candidly revealing her battles with mental illness. But the question she arrives at in her memoir is deeply provocative: what word would have been better than “incest?” The years between Barr’s initial allegations, and her more recent recantation of their public nature and wording, but not content, featured an even higher profile examination of sexual semantics regarding the word “is,” and Bill Clinton’s testimony regarding whether oral sex was, or was not, sex. Indeed, Barr’s apology is difficult to read; her assessment of having “lost touch with reality” in the Winfrey interview seems to invite complete discrediting. The extent to which these nuanced, regretful meditations were simplified and packaged as click-bait (the above cited article was titled, “Roseanne Reveals New Reality Show; Apologizes for 1991 ‘Incest’ Claim”) also speaks to the continued political relevance of the two decades old “memory wars,” and the societal predisposition to simplify incest narratives into “truth/lie” propositions. While some have used Barr’s words to declare belated victory in a battle against the reliability of testimony regarding sexual abuse, *Roseannearchy* finds Barr expressing Clintonian ambivalence

regarding sexual semantics, posthumously alleviating her deceased father from the weight of her allegations, though pointedly refusing to remove it completely.

On April 18, 2001, the *National Enquirer*, a tabloid that Roseanne Conner would jokingly refer to as the newspaper “of record” on *Roseanne*, reported on Jerry Barr’s death of a heart attack, while noting “his heart was broken years ago when his superstar daughter publically accused him of molesting her” (“Roseanne’s Dad Dies With a Broken Heart”). The article focuses on Barr and her father’s failure to reconcile, but an accompanying feature, a “Fast Fact,” reads as follows: “Roseanne’s dad, who was Jewish, once sold crucifixes door-to-door” (“Roseanne’s Dad Dies”). The sentence is alarmingly dense with subtext regarding the Barr family, the question of their ethnic identity, and their liminal status as Jews. Separated from an “obituary” that only addresses allegations of molestation (avoiding the word “incest”), the “Fast Fact” simultaneously assigns and qualifies Jerry Barr’s authentic Jewish identity.

While Jerry Barr and his daughter never reconciled, in 1995, during *Roseanne*’s eighth season, Roseanne gives birth to Jerry Garcia Conner, named after the famous lead singer of the *Grateful Dead*. This episode aired directly after the one with Uncle Sol, and features Roseanne Conner bequeathing on her fictional son the very same first name of Barr’s father. The choice to name Roseanne’s son Jerry seems to suggest the possibility of integrating flawed father figures back into the family – even if only symbolically. The show’s ambivalence regarding closure remains consistent on a thematic and episodic level throughout: problems are not generally solved; they are just replaced by new ones. But in this context, Jerry Garcia Conner seems especially significant, and perhaps radical, in his symbolic importance to generations-long disputes regarding the plausibility and

denial of paternal sexual abuse. Barr's eventual ability to see her father as flawed, but not monstrous, despite her public campaign to draw attention to her memories of his problematic behaviors, may not have ultimately contradicted her ability to honor him, however obliquely, on her show after they had become estranged.

In contrast, for Woody Allen and his daughter Dylan, the estrangement that began when she accused him of molestation when she was seven-years-old has never abated. Where Barr's narrative shows the formidable resistance a Jewish woman faced in discussing, and artistically depicting, an abusive Jewish father, Allen's narrative reveals how much more power he had, as a white male Jewish icon, in framing his own incestuous narrative in a fashion that might elicit sympathy in his audience.

CHAPTER 4

WOODY AND WOOD YI

Interracial Family Values and Dog Whistling Antisemitism in the Allen Incest Narrative

In my previous chapters, I examined how Jewish community protective politics helped displace incest stigma onto black families, and the construct of (implicitly non-Jewish) “white working class.” This chapter deals with a more complex incest narrative involving one white male Jewish father figure and two daughter figures who were racially categorized very differently. In telling the story of how media reported the Woody Allen incest narrative, I argue that Allen’s racial categorization was unstable, and dependent on the daughter figure he was juxtaposed against: next to the Asian American Soon-Yi Previn, Allen registered as white, or white and Jewish. Next to the white, Catholic Dylan Farrow, Allen registered as distinctly Jewish.

I also contend that Allen told his side of this story in a fashion that relied on the credibility of a persona he honed over years of stardom, that presented “Woody Allen” as a sympathetic prototype of Jewish American masculinity. In essence, Allen’s appeals, many of which featured dog whistles regarding supposed antisemitism, implied that allegations against Woody Allen equated to allegations against all Jewish men. Allen’s success at inhabiting a persona that many audience members considered to define Jewish masculinity in positive terms made the act of criticizing Allen enormously fraught, and almost by definition, at risk of being labelled antisemitic. Furthermore, the narrative’s grip on the national imagination extended to presidential politics involving “family values,” and the 1992 presidential campaign, in which Republican attempts to denigrate Allen yielded a protective response from many liberal media outlets. The suggestion that

Allen was an incestuous sexual predator served as a greater perceived antisemitic threat to Jewish community and mainstream liberal outlets than the notion that Allen abused or acted incestuously with members of his family, a tension explored even then by some artists, such as Ben Stiller, in his brilliant “Woody Allen’s Bride of Frankenstein” sketch.

Multiple Authors, Methodology, and Proteophobia

Like Roseanne’s incest narrative, the Allen narrative begins in the 1990s, but has re-emerged contemporaneously. In February 2014, writing under a name that she had not used for years, Dylan Farrow published an open letter in *The New York Times* detailing two-decades-old allegations regarding sexual abuse by her father, Woody Allen. Dylan began by inquiring, “What is your favorite Woody Allen movie,” implicating her audience’s affinity for her father’s art prior to revealing her fraught relationship to his ubiquitous image: “Each time I saw my abuser’s face – on a poster, on a t-shirt, on television shows – I could only hide my panic until I found a place to be alone and fall apart” (“An Open Letter”). Though *Times* editorialist Nicholas Kristof introduced the piece by describing Dylan as Allen’s “adoptive daughter,” Dylan offered no such qualifier with her language: “For as long as I could remember, my father had been doing things to me that I didn’t like.” Allen dismissed the allegations in the *Times* the following week, contending that Dylan Farrow’s memories were the result of Mia Farrow’s “indoctrination” (“Woody Allen Speaks Out”). “Undoubtedly,” Allen surmised, “the attic idea came to her from the Dory Previn song, ‘With my Daddy in the Attic.’” Allen not only denied Dylan’s allegations, but contended they were not truly *her* allegations: “One must ask, did Dylan even write the letter or was it at least guided by her mother?”

Dylan's letter and Allen's response introduce central themes that I attempt to unpack. We encounter questions of biological and non-biological familial relations, Allen's ubiquity as icon ("on a poster, on a t-shirt"), Allen's strategy of invalidating Dylan's voice by characterizing it as Mia Farrow's manipulation, and the notion (per Allen's invocation of Dory Previn's song) of life imitating art. We also encounter Allen's voice as that of commentator, as opposed to artist, a distinction that reminds us that Allen's voice has had far greater reach than Dylan's.¹

I foreground Dylan's words here to underscore that this chapter treats Allen as just one of many voices telling different versions of a contested story. As such, I purposefully omit Allen's films, dealing with them instead in the subsequent chapter. Here I consider the narrative that surfaced on cable news, talk shows, sketch comedy, memoirs, and court reporting. Mia, Dylan, and Soon-Yi Previn also author this narrative, as do comedians and politicians like Howard Stern, Ben Stiller, and Newt Gingrich. In close reading disparate texts, I argue that Dylan, Mia and Previn emerge as distinctly raced figures, while Allen is inconsistently raced, his whiteness and Jewishness reading differently depending on the daughter-figure with whom he is juxtaposed.² Next to

¹ This stems from Allen's celebrity and prodigious artistic output, as well as Dylan's silence between making her allegations in 1991 and sitting for a *Vanity Fair* interview with Maureen Orth in 2013, shortly before her 2014 letter in *The New York Times*.

² Referring to Previn as a "daughter figure" will surely dissatisfy some, but I do not use the characterization to essentialize some aspect of Allen or Previn's feeling towards each other (though I do engage in some analysis of their statements about each other later in the chapter). Rather, I use the term to reflect a broad consensus that Previn's daughterly qualities dominated media coverage of the narrative, regardless of whether one finds their relationship incestuous. For example, Lloyd Michaels' recent article "Woody Allen's Cinema of Regret," which I discuss later in this chapter, incorporates the following interjection about Previn: "who, it still needs to be said, was not Allen's legal stepdaughter" (469). The fact that it "still needs to be said" indicates that even today,

Previn, Allen registered as white, as Previn's Asian racial identity reinforced a categorization that allowed Allen to read as both white *and* Jewish. Next to Dylan, Allen registered as far less white – as a fundamentally Jewish “other” – on account of Dylan's non-Jewish baptized Catholic whiteness. Furthermore, each juxtaposition carried distinct ramifications regarding how the incest narrative might be consumed: as white male father figure, Allen wielded a subjective authority (and privilege) built into American incest logic since slavery; as Jewish male father figure, Allen aligned with centuries old stereotypes of Jewish men as incestuous and pedophilic. Equally significant, Allen's capacity to read as ethno-racially distinct in the different contexts evokes what Zygmunt Bauman has termed “proteophobia:” an antisemitic anxiety regarding how Jews do “not fall easily into any of the established categories,” instead possessing a capacity for shape-shifting that carries its own dehumanizing associations (144).

Essentially, I argue that Allen utilized, and in fact cultivated, the specter of antisemitism to evoke Jewish community protective impulses in his media audience. He also, simultaneously, asserted his white male subjective authority to declare who was and who was not a member of his family. Allen thus fought incest allegations on two fronts: as a white male who foregrounded his privilege through willful, if often illogical and inconsistent pronouncements, and as a sympathetic *schlemiel* who cast allegations of incest as antisemitic and thus without credibility. But the complex racial juxtapositions of Allen and Farrow's multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic family also evoked proteophobic responses, and thus Jewish community protective responses on that front as

those who would minimize Allen's transgression with Previn, acknowledge a broad tendency for their audiences to see Previn as a daughter-figure.

well. Even amongst audience members who were unsympathetic to Allen's behavior with Previn or alleged behavior with Dylan, racist and antisemitic media depictions that suggested Allen's uncategorizable ethno-racial qualities sometimes provoked a sympathetic response to Allen, one that overruled the anxiety regarding the plausibility of Allen having sexually transgressed with Previn or Dylan.

While Allen fought the incest allegations by suggesting antisemitism, Mia and those sympathetic to her emphasized her Catholicism and Allen's Jewish secularity in ways that complicated the distinction between positive valuation of Christian faith and demonization of Allen. Demonizing Allen for his alleged immoral behavior had the capacity to register as antisemitic because it simultaneously read as demonizing a secular irreligious Jew for his irreligious world-view. Because Allen's persona, as I demonstrate, equated to archetypal Jewish secular maleness, criticizing Allen inevitably posed the risk of seeming antisemitic, even to those sympathetic to Mia's allegations. For both Allen and Mia, telling their versions of the incest narrative required telling their story of exogamous partnership. But this tension between incest and exogamy appeared in media commentary as well, notably in *The Howard Stern Show*'s racist character "Wood Yi," and Ben Stiller's *Husbands and Wives* satire, "Woody Allen's Bride of Frankenstein." In these texts, comedians and commentators riffed on Allen's paradoxical (perhaps shape-shifting) sexuality; allegedly threatening, even monstrous, and simultaneously self-deprecating and *schlemiel*-like.

Referring to Allen as a *schlemiel*, though, requires explication. Allen has played *schlemiels* in films for decades. Prior to the allegations regarding Dylan, the public knowledge of Woody Allen emerged largely from his film roles, in which he played very

similar characters, all of which we might categorize as iterations of the Woody Allen persona. In understanding how Allen emerged in the early 1990s narrative, it's vital to consider the Allen persona as a central character – as vital as, but distinct from, Allen the man. The persona involved a version of Allen that owed less to fact or biography than it did to Allen's decades of craftsmanship as a performer.

Allen Konigsberg and the Woody Allen Persona

Allan Konigsberg legally changed his name to “Heywood Allen” at sixteen (Lax 9). As such, “Woody Allen” refers both to the individual (Konigsberg's legal name for decades) as well as a comedic and filmic persona in over forty movies and countless standup routines. From its inception, according to Allen biographer Marion Meade, Allen's early stand-up persona was “an ‘exaggerated version’ of Allan Konigsberg, one that blurred the line between autobiography and comedy” (54). Colleen Glenn makes a similar observation that “the private or offscreen Allen is virtually indistinguishable from the public/ onscreen Allen – so much so that his audience generally perceives the two to be one and the same” (36). Allen himself downplayed his agency in creating the persona, stating, “Gradually, the character evolved...It didn't evolve deliberately. I just wrote stuff that seemed funny. But the character was assigned to me by the audience” (Meade 54). Allen's creation myth downplays his agency in crafting such an iconic persona, and is consistent *with* the ambivalent persona consistent in the characters he portrays. But as a filmmaker and artist, Allen is famously precise with his authorial choices.

This ethno-racially significant contradiction – Allen's decisive and precise performances of a version of Jewish masculinity that struggles with a lack of agency – may account for much of Allen's star appeal. Film critic Richard Dyer argues for the

importance of reading celebrity figures through their relationships with particular social groups. Paul Robeson and Marilyn Monroe, for example, figure as “key figures in the debate about the representation of women and whiteness, blackness and masculinity” (x). Allen, certainly, qualifies as a comparably key figure for six decades of filmic depictions of whiteness, Jewishness, and masculinity. Since *What’s New Pussycat* in 1965, the Allen film persona has presented a depiction of whiteness, Jewishness, palpable (hetero)sexuality, cosmopolitanism, and middle/upper-middle class normativity. Yet significant social change has occurred over the last five decades. In his early films, Allen’s presentation of Jewish male heterosexual protagonists struck a subversive note. Allen’s persona was that of an everyman, but a distinctly Jewish one; often characterized as a *schlemiel* or a *nebbish*. Certainly, much of the persona’s appeal emerges from its non-threatening relatability. As John Baxter related in his biography, a French cab driver once characterized his affinity for Allen to a female journalist thusly: “Well...look at him, madame. He’s short. He’s bald. He’s ugly. He can’t get laid. He’s just like me” (30).

The cab driver’s affinity for Allen involves his particular un-star-like qualities; his physical inadequacies, and supposed sexual failures. Yet Allen’s film protagonists almost always succeed in finding new sexual partners over the course of his films. Allen’s persona is fascinating for its performance of a masculinity that presents itself as incapable of attracting women, despite manifesting itself in countless successful seductions.³

Allen’s persona, however recognizably Jewish, carries appeal across race and nation; the very non-typicality of his masculine presence speaks to a desire for alternative masculine

³ Allen plays numerous characters who do not maintain successful relationships in films like *Play it Again, Sam*, *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan*, and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (among others), but these characters are sexually active in all of these films.

archetypes. Allen's cultural impact involves his success rendering the sexually potent *schlemiel* as recognizable everyman for non-Jewish audiences.

While the Allen persona often sexually transgresses, most commonly through cheating on a partner, Allen's early films were known for their protagonists' pronounced superegos. Paula Span notes that, "the nebbishy Woody character often agonizes over moral choices, considers good and evil, reflects on life's meaning. He's the stubborn ethicist." Span wrote these words for *The Washington Post* while covering the Allen Farrow custody trial, and this is characteristic of post-1991 commentary that attempted to discern the man from the persona. However, scholars have widely approached Allen's films with the notion of the actor/director and the protagonists he plays as ethicists. Some scholars, like Vivian Gornick, have called attention to the misogyny in Allen's work (as early as the 1970s), but Allen's work is widely celebrated by academia for its humor, technical merit, style, and sophisticated engagement with moral questions.⁴

Allen's films engage these moral questions through their mobilization of a very specific cultural figure: the *schlemiel*, a ubiquitous type dating back to the advent of Yiddish literature.⁵ Theorist Menachem Feuer has described the Allen persona as a "sexual schlemiel," whose performance of sexual "awkwardness" comes across as charming. Though Gornick (and others) challenge the "charming" characterization, the

⁴ Mark Conard and Aeon Skoble's collection *Woody Allen and Philosophy*, as the title suggests, is representative of scholarship on Allen's engagement with philosophical concepts and conceits regarding ethics and morality. But there are extensive additional studies that take this approach to Allen, both in academic and non-academic genres.

⁵ Ruth Wisse's *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* sets up how the archetype emerged in Jewish literature in the context of anti-Semitic nineteenth century Europe, rooted in the historic emasculation of oppressed Jews in anti-Semitic Europe. Without alternative options to contend with the dehumanizing efforts of state sponsored anti-Semitism, wit and humor emerged as a way of undercutting the arbitrary humiliations of everyday life.

Allen persona has emerged as a sort of prototypical *schlemiel*; in fact, the Allen persona may be a representative archetype of the *schlemiel*. Diane Tobin labels the inability of many Americans, Jewish or otherwise, to fully grasp the intersections of diversity, race and Judaism as “Woody Allen Syndrome.” For Tobin, Allen’s ubiquity as a signifier for Jewishness obscures the awareness that nonwhite Jews exist. We might extend this further: Allen’s filmic persona normalizes Jews not merely as white, but also as male, well-off, heterosexual, urban, neurotic, and secular. Allen signifies “Jewish,” but in so doing, signifies (and normalizes) a very limited cross-section of contemporary Jewishness. Novelists like Philip Roth and Saul Bellow tend toward depicting Jewish male protagonists along a similar, limited, spectrum, contributing to this same process. But Allen helped affect this change through movie stardom, and achieved such success that we might consider the relationship between the Allen persona and Jewish masculinity as a two-way street; that is, in becoming a ubiquitous stand-in for a version of Jewish masculine identity, allegations against Allen the man negatively reflected upon the (limited) idea of Jewish masculinity in popular media. The Allen persona, as with all *schlemiel* performances, suggested a comparative powerlessness at the hands of society, police, the state, and of course, his wife or partner. Furthermore, Allen’s decades-long crafting of this persona helped him to deflect accusations of wrongdoing by insinuating his own victimhood at the hands of antisemitism, obscuring the image of a man possessing and wielding power in a destructive, sexually abusive fashion.

“He Was Never Any Kind of Father Figure to Me”

Allen’s ability to withstand the negative stigma of Dylan’s allegations, in 1991 and then more recently in 2014, owes a great deal to the success of the Woody Allen

persona, and its linkage of Allen with a positively-charged Jewish masculinity. But the presence of two distinct daughter figures also serves to complicate the question of Allen's culpability for wrongdoing. As Eric Andre's joke from the Introduction illustrates, Dylan and Previn's accounts of their relationship to Allen are both alarmingly distinct and disconcertingly parallel. While both function as daughter figures who allege or confirm sexual interaction with Allen, Dylan frames her experience as non-consensual sexual assault, while Previn frames her relationship with Allen as one of consenting adults. Furthermore, Previn publically declared her relationship with Allen as non-incestuous, in emphatic terms, quite early on. In August, 1992, she stated in *Newsweek*.⁶

⁶ In setting up these close readings, a timeline of the relevant contested and non-contested events may help frame the narrative:

In 1976 Mia Farrow and then husband Andre Previn began work on adopting Soon-Yi Previn, a Korean orphan who had been abandoned by her mother.⁶ In 1977, Mia Farrow travelled to Seoul to bring her home. Mia wrote in her memoir that in 1976, Previn's "precise age was not known, but estimated to be around five" (179). In April, 1980, Allen and Mia began dating each other, and in September 1980 Allen first met Mia's children, including Previn, whom Mia describes as having been "seven going on eight (her age was finally determined through the standard method of X-raying her wrists)" (191, 196). Mia Farrow adopted Dylan in the summer of 1985 (229). On December 17, 1991, Allen, with Mia's support, legally adopted her adoptive children Dylan and Moses (Meade 200). Just weeks later, on January 13, 1992, Mia found nude Polaroids Allen had taken of Previn. That same day, Allen and Previn admitted to their affair (Meade 11). Mia and Allen did not immediately separate; both indicated to each other, at times, an interest in trying to salvage the relationship. On August 4, 1992, a baby-sitter witnessed Allen engage in "disturbing" behavior with Dylan in the Farrow's Connecticut home, sitting with his head, face-first, in her lap (Meade 225). On August 5, Dylan would tell her mother that Allen touched her "privates" (227). Mia brought Dylan to her pediatrician, where Dylan refused to repeat her allegation, later telling Mia that she was embarrassed (227). The following day, they returned to the doctor, where Dylan stated her allegation; the doctor informed Mia he had to contact the authorities (227). Mia called Dr. Susan Coates, a therapist who had been working with Satchel (Allen and Mia's biological son) and Allen for his "inappropriate" (but until then not considered sexual) behavior with Dylan (228).⁶ On August 13, Allen filed suit for sole custody of Dylan along with Moses and Satchel (230). On August 17, Connecticut police confirmed to the press that they were investigating allegations of child abuse involving Allen, and Allen issued a press release

He was never any kind of father figure to me. I never had any dealings with him. He rarely came to our apartment before his own children were born. Even then, he never spoke and the truth is I never cared that much for him. He was always preoccupied with work and never talked to me. Not really to any of us. (“Soon-Yi”)

Previn argues that Allen was not a “father figure” because he was disinterested, unengaged, and unlikeable. Cultural critic Lili Loofbourow has analyzed the statement by considering how the above dynamics actually facilitates eventual romantic connection:

I hope Soon-Yi has found happiness, and it seems she has, but this is a completely devastating portrait. A painfully quiet, socially awkward girl comes of age with a stepfather figure who never showed any interest in her or acknowledged her presence. Instead, he lavished his attention on her mother and her blond little sister. She develops, and suddenly this man who has been in her house for years but seemed not to see her notices her! Her!

Loofbourow’s reading reflects the type of dynamic that Judith Herman explores in some families in *Father-Daughter Incest*. But by quoting Loofbourow’s full paragraph, I want to draw special attention to the sentence that precedes her analysis. What does it mean to rhetorically wish for her happiness while also drawing attention to the dynamic as “devastating?” Are these inclinations truly compatible?

Some of the reticence to engage the Allen incest material, ostensibly, involves disbelief in these compatibilities; a sense that analyzing the record too deeply, as it concerns Previn, amounts to an attack not merely on Allen’s behavior but on Previn as well. And yet, the Dylan allegations and the Allen and Previn declarations cannot be effectively separated; they are tangled components of a layered narrative. Thus, it’s

(and on August 18 held a press conference) denying Dylan’s allegations, but affirming his relationship with Previn (232).

important to note Previn's choice to make her voice heard, early on, declaring her relationship with Allen as consensual and non-incestuous. It's equally important to note that challenges to Previn's statement silence Previn in a similar fashion to Allen's allegation that Dylan's words were actually Mia's. Maureen Orth's "Mia's Story," published in *Vanity Fair* in 1992, delved into Previn's learning and reading disabilities prior to noting that Previn's long-time tutor "doubts that Soon-Yi could have written the statement to the press." The insinuation that Allen wrote Previn's statement reveals its own patriarchal logic, dismissing the possibility that Previn might speak for herself. Even as we analyze various statements, we must still allow Previn's authorial voice to catalogue her experience of Allen on her own terms, just as we take a similar approach to Dylan, Ronan, and Mia.

Without invalidating any individual voice, my goal is to unpack the narrative's tangled complexities: a religiously and ethno-racially diverse family/non-family with an alleged abuser who simultaneously occupied and rejected the role of father. One daughter alleged abuse, and one daughter figure denied any coercion, instead characterizing their relationship as consensual and romantic. And yet, while media coverage tended to foreground Previn, news media and popular culture consistently reported and commented on the narrative in ways that merged Previn and Dylan, often making Previn younger in a way that signified Dylan's presence, even when she was not explicitly mentioned.

How Old Are "Girls Who Do Homework?"

Even in absence, Dylan effected considerable influence on how media reported on Allen's affair with Previn. Conversations about Previn and Allen consistently signified Dylan, revealing an ambivalent, but persistent connection in how reporters and other

media told the story of Allen's different alleged transgressions. And yet, until Dylan rearticulated her abuse allegations in the aforementioned 2013 *Vanity Fair* article, she had largely vanished from scholarly discussions about Allen's "scandal." However, as early as Allen's first public assertion of his love for Previn in August, 1992, which took place at the end of a press conference spent denying Dylan's allegations, media struggled with how to articulate the two daughter figures' different circumstances. Allen's characterization of his relationship with Previn as a positive development garnered far more commentary than Dylan's allegations. Gentle condemnation of Allen's ostensibly inappropriate, but uncontested and consensual relations with an of-age Asian daughter-figure facilitated consensus on a comparatively minor sexual transgression that preempted more uncomfortable conversations about a pre-pubescent white daughter's claims of sexual violation.

Once Allen issued his press release confirming/denying events, local and national news immediately began covering the story. Both the local Fox affiliate in New York City and CNN featured clips from Allen's 1979 film *Manhattan*, where Allen, playing protagonist Isaac Davis, declared, "I'm dating a girl who does homework." CNN correspondent Cynthia Tornquist arrived at the same point as many commentators: "in *Manhattan*, Woody Allen portrayed a 42-year-old writer who has an affair with a 17-year-old prep school student played by Mariel Hemingway. Now, the filmmaker reveals that his real life is not so different from his art."

"Homework" serves as a flexible childhood signifier; it can be associated with college age "girls" (Previn), high school age "girls" (Previn or Mariel Hemingway's character in *Manhattan*) or elementary school age "girls" (Dylan). As Allen biographer

Marion Meade observes, though, these associations have vastly different implications regarding the relative impropriety of Allen's behavior. Even after Allen and Previn married, Meade notes, "the national press, unwilling to make allowances, continued to treat him just as if he had driven up to Soon-Yi's playground in his Mercedes and waved a Snickers bar at her" (280). Tellingly, "playground" is more age-specific than "homework," evoking Dylan's age (seven), not Previn's, at the time of the alleged abuse.

While Dylan was seven-years-old, Previn's exact age was unknown, given the circumstances of her adoption from Seoul. Allen would consistently describe Previn as 21 at the time they began their affair, while Mia stressed that she might have been younger. Media carelessness or duplicity does not fully account for Previn's age being so consistently mischaracterized, though. In particular, early comedic routines reveal how jokes ostensibly made at Previn and Allen's expense deliberately evoked Dylan without naming her. The prospect of making jokes about a seven-year-old white girl who might have been sexually molested by her adoptive Jewish father may have been too charged (and disturbing) for mainstream comics and comedy writers, many of whom were also Jewish. Even discounting the Jewish/non-Jewish distinction, such jokes might have tested limits of comedic taste. Jokes about Previn and Allen, however, were ubiquitous.⁷

⁷ Just days after the story broke, on August 21, David Letterman's Top Ten list featured "you're dating your step-daughter" as the number six sign "your marriage wasn't working." This joke evokes Previn exclusively, but others seemed to merge Dylan with Previn. For instance, on April 29, 1993, after the Allen / Farrow custody case had been widely covered for months, Letterman named Previn in a "Things Overheard During Take Your Daughter to Work Day" joke: "This is the director's chair, Soon-Yi" ("Top 10 Things"). The punchline is not age-specific so much as the set-up; "Take Your Daughter to Work Day" is traditionally targeted at young children. Meade might have cited this joke as among that media commentary which unfairly depicted Previn as younger than she was. However, by April 1993, coverage of court testimony regarding Dylan's allegations was widespread in mainstream news media. Between March 26 and April 10,

Many comedians centered their commentary on Allen and Previn's racial difference. Meade's biography observes the racist nature of jokes made at Allen and Previn's expense; *Saturday Night Live* and *Mad TV* featured multiple sketches throughout the 1990s depicting Previn in various degrees of yellow-face caricature or sexual objectification, while rarely making direct reference to Dylan. However, racist humor at Previn's expense was rarely more explicit than on *The Howard Stern Show*, which reached the largest radio audience in both New York City and Los Angeles by the end of 1992 (Puig). After Allen's August 17, 1992 press release, Stern and co-host Robin Quivers emphasized the racial difference of the parties with attention to their sexual relationship during their news segment:

RQ: Woody uncharacteristically issued a statement through a spokesperson yesterday confirming the tabloid reports that he, yes, is in love, (HS: with what's her name) with his stepdaughter.

HS: And what is her name?

RQ: Um, bang some -

HS: Bang some schmuck.

After Stern suggests "Lick some Jew" and "Two-Jew Wang" as alternative names,

Quivers quotes Allen directly (but for the name changing) citing the press release:

RQ: The 56 year old movie maker avowed his love for the Korean-born girl, saying 'Regarding my love for... [Bang...some schmuck], it's real, and all happily true'"

HS: Can you imagine this? This is so depraved. ("Wood Yi's First")

Without mentioning Dylan's abuse allegations, Quivers and Stern utilize racist, mock-Asian names that draw attention to Allen's Jewishness, emphasizing difference, and

print media including *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* all published articles referencing specific details of the molestation accusations based on Allen / Farrow custody case testimony.

framing Allen and Previn's relationship as purely sexual. This undermines Allen's comparably lofty discussion of love, but also leaves unexamined what, exactly, Stern finds "so depraved." Ostensibly, it is Previn's being Allen's "step-daughter" (technically, she was not). However, in racially demeaning Previn by reducing her to a sex object, the humor implicates the interracial element of the relationship as transgressive.

Stern's ostensible confusion of the interracial sexual taboo for the incestuous sexual taboo is not unusual. Werner Sollors' aforementioned observation about nineteenth-century American interracial incest narratives, that "interracial alliances are often perceived to be the opposite of, or antidote to, closely endogamous ones" (318), may help unpack Stern's humor here. If incest is "too close," and interracial sex is "too far," the logical gaps thus precluded interracial incest from reading (to white men, and fathers in particular) as incest (318). But Stern's jokes seek to have it both ways; he seemingly mocks Allen for failing to recognize the logical gaps, while also explicitly drawing attention to the interracial aspect of his affair with Previn while only making minimal mention of their familial relationship. While the humor may function by displacing what Stern (and his writers) find most disturbing (incest), the effect is an explicitly racist emphasis on racial difference.

The vivid references to sex in Stern and Quivers' routine also undercut the seeming hypocrisies in Allen's (and the aforementioned Allen persona's) strange relationship to sexual frankness. Despite the centrality of sexual relationships to his catalog, some critics underplayed Allen's artistic engagement with sex. Movie reviewer Roger Ebert, commenting on the media's depiction of the events, offered "The press depicted him as a dirty old man but nobody considered he might be more of a mentor to

Soon-Yi. With Woody Allen, sex is not the point so much as communication” (Meade 242). Ebert’s willingness to defend Allen from harsh press coverage belies the fact that Allen first met Previn when she was a prepubescent child, complicating the distinction between “mentorship” and predatory grooming. For Stern, emphasizing Allen’s sexuality revealed the hypocrisy of the positively-valued “mentorship” defense.

The introduction of a recurring character called “Wood Yi,” played by Steve “The Engineer” Fried, concretized how Stern’s show purposed anxiety about interracial sex to de-normalize Allen and Previn’s relationship. The premise of the Wood Yi character was simple: Steve Fried, a microphone-shy member of Stern’s staff with a vague New York accent and no comedic timing, read lines written for him, performing an ostensibly unintentionally terrible Allen “impression.” Wood Yi was an utter failure at capturing the Allen persona, making it a unique comic takedown. Allen, so commonly mocked as a brilliant intellect with a troubling capacity to rationalize any transgression, here found himself transformed into a dim-witted cipher.

But while removing all wit and super-ego comprised a crucial aspect of the bit’s humor, the premise demanded further transmogrification. The implication of Wood Yi is that Allen’s interracial relationship transforms his own racial and gender identity. His relationship with a Korean American woman manifests itself in Allen’s name being Korean-ified, and simultaneously feminized. Reborn as a gender and racial hybrid, Woody as Wood Yi makes jokes which focus on sex acts with Asian women, and most frequently, younger versions of Previn: self-love and love of racial other are merged. Sollors’s logical gaps of “too close” and “too far” thus find perverse, literal, expression.

The sketch resonates not only with incest theory, but also with Bauman's aforementioned theory of proteophobia. That is, the sketch's negotiation of racial exogamy and incest as simultaneous acts "blurs the borderlines which ought to be kept watertight and undermines the reassuringly monotonous, repetitive and predictable nature of the life-world" (Bauman 144). While Bauman uses those words with ethno-racial and religious qualities in mind, they also apply to concepts of family, sexuality, and gender. In essence, the sketch's proteophobic response to the Allen incest narrative is to collapse all of the vexing complexities involving Allen's whiteness and Jewishness, Previn's Asian-ness, the problem of the contested Allen / Previn familial relation, and Allen's vulnerable Jewish masculinity alongside Previn's Asian hyper-sexuality, into a single body. Wood Yi manifests a proteophobe's nightmare.⁸

While Previn is incorporated *into* Wood Yi, she also functions as the predominant sexual target of the Wood Yi jokes. In this external role, though, she also stands in for the otherwise erased Dylan. Even Stern, never one for self-censorship, avoided explicit reference to Dylan in these early sketches. But Stern's writers evoked Dylan in the Wood Yi routine: numerous jokes referenced recess, lunch boxes, and even diapers (in each case signifying a younger figure than Previn). One joke is especially specific: "What goes into seven twice?" Wood Yi asks, before answering, "me" ("Wood Yi's First").

⁸ Though I want to avoid too much emphasis on Allen's films in this chapter, any discussion of proteophobia requires a mention of *Zelig*. The Jewish *Zelig*, played by Allen, is also proteophobia bodily manifested, but as comedic farce, as opposed to Wood Yi's implied body horror. *Zelig* takes on the characteristics of whoever he spends time with; he's a black man at one point, a Nazi at another. Robert Stam and Ella Shohat deftly analyze the way *Zelig* comments on antisemitism and assimilation in their article "Zelig and Contemporary Theory."

While Wood Yi's one-liners repeatedly focus on Previn's recognizably Korean first name, this joke clearly indicates that the writers were cognizant of Dylan, and her specific age, when they made pedophilia jokes. Stern and his writers depicted Previn as younger than she was in order to signify the presence of a younger figure whose sexual vulnerability or ostensible "innocence" could not be directly invoked. This phenomenon transpired in other media coverage – comedic and otherwise – regarding Previn and Allen. James Kincaid, for instance, has noted that "the twenty-one-year-old Ms. Previn somehow gets younger and younger, folds into the body of the seven-year-old Dylan" (227). Kincaid correctly categorizes this displacement as a function of a broad sexual fascination, but we can mine this phenomenon further by considering exactly how race facilitates these transmogrifications, or mergings, of Previn and Dylan.

Stern's show was far from the only program to depict Previn in a racist fashion. Indeed, comedic depictions that were suggestive of Allen having been incestuous with Previn consistently emerge as distinctly racist. In 2002, Martin Short's short-lived *Primetime Glick* depicted Previn and Allen meeting as characters in a "Punch and Judy" type puppet show, with the puppet Previn saying in a mock-Asian accent, "So good to make your acquaintance, honorable common-law stepdaddy. I am huge fan of your early work." The Allen puppet responds, "You know, of all the members of my common-law family, you're the one I find myself most sexually attracted to" ("Hollywood Story"). The sketch deconstructs the imprecision of language in describing non-traditional families (ostensibly, few people address their common-law stepparents with such specificity), and invites skepticism regarding Allen's claim to never have known or noticed a younger Previn despite their being in a family unit. But the sketch also utilizes

the familiar racist crutch of a mock-Asian accented Previn to stress the racial difference that allowed for commentary on the incestuous aspect.⁹

Considering how race (and racism) functioned in these comedic depictions of Previn reminds us of white, Catholic Dylan's absence. Kathryn Bond Stockton's theorizing of childhood, as a raced, classed, and desexualized concept, helps elucidate how Previn and Dylan both operate in archetypal fashion. In Previn and Dylan, the media had two distinctly different versions of "children" to situate versus Allen. Dylan, who might be read as "pre-sexual," and the older Previn, who emerged as "the Freudian child...remarkably, threateningly, precocious: sexual and aggressive" (Stockton 27). Race undergirds this dichotomy, though. Stockton suggests that, "children, as an *idea*, are likely to be both white and middle-class" (31). Just as whiteness and middle-class status are privileges, the idea of a sheltered childhood – a childhood deserving of such protections because of its implicit "innocence" – becomes raced and classed. For poor nonwhite children, such as Previn, experience (of poverty, violence, racism, etc.) signifies a lack of innocence. In addition to being Korean, and thus part of a broad, racist discourse of hyper-sexualized Asian-ness, Previn grew up impoverished in Seoul, the child of a physically abusive prostitute (Meade 205). Allen himself referred to Previn (affectionately) as the "kid who was eating out of garbage pails in Korea" (*Wild Man Blues*). Allen also characterized the nude photographs he took of Previn as her idea

⁹ *Mad TV*'s first season's film trailer parody "Crimes, Misdemeanors, and Payback" (a Woody Allen / *Die Hard* mash-up which aired on November 4, 1995) features a Previn stand-in, but uniquely avoids a mock-Asian accent (if not sexual objectification) ("MADtv – S01E04").

(Meade 15). Allen's descriptions of Previn align with the notion of her "childhood" being "too advanced for innocence" (Stockton 32).

The notion that Previn was "too advanced for innocence" likely helped mitigate, for some audiences, the sense that Allen had acted inappropriately. How do you hold someone accountable for corrupting someone who is already too experienced? Further, the fact that Previn was already 21 according to most initial news reports of their relationship suggested that legally, Allen had violated no statutory rape laws. The question of when Allen and Previn began their affair was left to Allen and Previn's telling. While a photograph taken at a Knicks game in January, 1990 showing them holding hands garnered significant press attention, ultimately it proved nothing regarding a sexual relationship (Meade 209). However, Mia's memoir claims that Allen first met Previn when she was not yet eight years old (196). The uncertainty as to exactly when Allen and Previn began their affair (along with Previn's indeterminate age) may have influenced jokes that cast Previn as younger than she was. But joking about Allen as a pedophile in the context of the "experienced" Previn shifted commentary away from the more socially unacceptable act of sexual abuse of a "pre-sexual" white seven-year-old.

An April 10, 1993 *Saturday Night Live* sketch featuring Jason Alexander proved the rare mainstream comedic commentary to explicitly discuss Dylan ("Season 18: Episode 17"). While the Previn / Allen jokes reveal Dylan's erasure, the *SNL* sketch suggests that audiences (and comedy writers) were aware of Dylan's existence, paying attention to the extensive coverage of Allen's custody suit, and resistant to Allen's courtroom defenses. But while the trial did not end until early May, and the verdict was

not released until about one month later, the *SNL* sketch imagines a dwindling number of Allen fans' absurd suspensions of disbelief at Allen's actual testimony.

Set at a "Woody Allen Fan Club" meeting at the 92nd Street Y, numerous members of the cast do their best Allen impressions as they discuss the trial. As each Allen fan recounts one disturbing piece of court testimony after another, they rationalize each behavior and re-present it as good parenting. Kevin Nealon's character remarks, "It's all coming out now. He's a very affectionate father! I mean, sticking his face in his daughter's lap. I mean, you know, my parents have kissed me in all kinds of places. It's completely natural!" ("Season 18: Episode 17"). Other performers would make reference to similarly specific court testimony, such as Allen's supposedly inappropriate placement of sunscreen lotion on Dylan's "tush" ("He's a concerned father. What, he's gonna' let it burn?") and, in the one Previn-reference during a Dylan-centered sketch, his rationalization of his sexual relationship with Previn ("And so what if he had sex with Soon-Yi. He was right. It gave her more confidence").

The sketch pays artistic homage (referencing *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*) as it registers disillusionment, dwelling on specific testimony regarding Allen's behavior. By featuring so many cast members' impressions of Allen, the sketch stresses just how easily Allen's supposed rationalizations and statements, whether corroborated by his testimony or not, could be imagined in his voice. Unlike when comedians or news programs made *Manhattan* references that framed Allen's wrongdoing as indiscretion (an attraction to younger women), the "Fan Club" sketch intimates that Allen's transgressions stem from their incestuous nature within a family construct. The sketch also serves as an exception that proved the rule in its choice to showcase, and not hide, Dylan.

While Dylan so rarely surfaces in mainstream comedic depictions of Allen's incest narrative, she is occasionally referenced in antisemitic online comments and message board posts that characterize Allen as an incestuous Jewish pedophile. Dylan's erasure from mainstream comedic commentary may involve an anxiety that even just invoking Dylan creates enough of a problematic construct (Jewish pedophile and white, Christian victim) to register as potentially antisemitic. Allen himself alluded to veiled antisemitism in press conferences and interviews. The following section explores how Mia's Catholicism functioned against Allen's secular Jewishness, and reveals how Allen foregrounded his own ethno-racial Jewish identity in discussing Dylan's allegations, in order to frame them as antisemitic, and elicit a protective response from the Jewish community, and those inclined towards sympathy with the Jewish community.

Rugelah and Communion Wafers

Media coverage that juxtaposed a white Jewish Allen against a yellow-face caricature of Previn presented the most overt (and racist) depictions of racial difference, but this was never the only paradigm. Dylan and Mia's presence complicated the racial calculus; their whiteness, and more particularly, their white Catholicism, mitigated the extent to which Allen appeared Jewish *and* white. Against these comparatively "whiter," Catholic figures, Allen could be read as a sexually threatening Jewish other, in line with the still-extant, if muted, nineteenth-century images of the incestuous Jew / Jewish pedophile. Allen himself intimated that the allegations of sexual abuse had antisemitic undertones, attributing this, conspiratorially, to Mia and state authorities, but never to Dylan. Meanwhile, Mia's court testimony and memoir, *What Falls Away*, and Kristi Groteke's account, *Woody and Mia: The Nanny's Tale*, all emphasized Mia's Catholic

faith, and correspondingly drew attention to Allen's secularity and reliance on therapy; characteristics that the Woody Allen persona had associated with a certain type of Jewish masculinity for decades.

In depicting Allen's identity as marked by an amoral faithlessness, Mia's narrative sought to undercut Allen's white male privilege by challenging the notion that Allen's secularity was moral. This approach posed risks: how do you characterize a beloved Jewish icon as a sexual predator without veering into antisemitic innuendo by suggesting that said Jewish icon utilized that persona as a shield for his behavior? In intimating that Farrow's characterizations of Allen as a sexual predator were antisemitic by design, Allen found a rhetorically formidable defense. In Allen's version of the narrative, he was the victim of an antisemitic smear campaign, but his strategy involved emphasizing antisemitic undertones without explicitly suggesting Mia was antisemitic. In both Allen and Mia's telling, Allen's celebrated secularity (or alternatively, his godlessness) and Farrow's Catholic piety (or alternatively, her cynical faux-religiosity) formed an ethno-racial subtext in which the privileges of Jewish secular white manhood were cast against those of religious white Catholic womanhood.

Mia published her memoir, *What Falls Away*, in 1997, the same year Allen released *Deconstructing Harry*. The memoir, which begins with Mia's account of contracting Polio, immediately establishes a framework of her Catholic faith, mentioning The Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Rosary, and her First Communion prayer book all in the first few pages. Farrow describes spending time with her grandparents in Ireland, where she learned stories of "Jesus and His miracles, the cross,

the nails, the crown of thorns, an agony beyond comprehension, and out of everything the rising in an exultation of angels, and oh the glory and mystery of all these things” (9).

In contrast, Mia’s depiction of Allen avoids almost any religious or ethnic signifiers. A rare exception occurs when Mia discusses her work in *Broadway Danny Rose*: “Woody the actor had long ago invented his screen persona: a loveable nebbish, endlessly and hilariously whining and quacking, questioning moral and philosophical issues great and small” (216). She then dismisses this persona as: “A guy who is nothing like the real Woody Allen” (216). While “nebbish” is the book’s only explicit Jewish signifier, it’s doubtful many readers needed cues to Allen’s Jewishness in 1997.

Mia does allude to Allen’s secularity, though, establishing a contrast between her faith and his lack thereof. She includes a letter she wrote to a friend after discovering Allen’s affair with Previn: “I have spent long years with a man who had no respect for everything I hold sacred – not for my family, not for my soul, not for my God or my purest goals” (285). At the American Booksellers Association convention in June of 1996, Mia used similar language in promoting the book, saying, “Very quickly I learned that this man had no respect for everything I hold sacred – not for my family, not for my soul, not for my God or my goals” (Meade 309). Note how Mia crafts an exogamy narrative with an incestuous subtext; in her telling, Allen’s religious difference accounts for his failure to abide by religious proscriptions against incest.

But while Mia paints Allen as spiritually bereft, she also paints a picture of Allen’s reliance on psychotherapy as a sort of false faith:

Looking at the place psychoanalysis had occupied in Woody Allen’s life, it seemed that it had helped to isolate him from people and the systems we live by, and placed him in the center of a different reality- one that exists only after he has bounced his views off his therapist. (288)

The notion that Allen revealed the limitations of psychotherapy as an alternative to religious faith found frequent expression for those of (various) faith(s) who found Allen's behavior problematic. A September 1992 editorial in *The Jewish Advocate* concisely opined, "The psychiatrist's couch, which has an important place in medical treatment, apparently has become skewed into an idol for him."

While *The Jewish Advocate* casts psychotherapy as representative of Allen's betrayal of Jewish traditions, sympathetic portrayals of Mia routinely juxtaposed her Catholic faith against Allen's Jewish secularity. Maureen Orth's November 1992 article for *Vanity Fair* ends with a jarring juxtaposition, suggesting the uncertainty surrounding how Mia, Allen and the children could move on from the events:

Left unresolved, however, is the healing process – how Mia and Woody and these 11 children can ever be reconstituted as a family.

In March, Mia Farrow had all of her children who were not Catholics – including Soon-Yi – baptized.

Orth's article makes no explicit mention of Allen's Jewishness, but intimates that Allen, famous for being Jewish and secular, has no place in this baptized familial reconstitution.

Kristi Groteke, also Catholic, frames her time as a nanny for the Allen-Farrow family as a testament to faith. Groteke's 1994 book begins with an account of the day she testified in the Moses/Dylan/Satchel custody case, when she felt like a:

...big, scared, clumsy Catholic girl from Bridgewater, Connecticut...I saw Mia sifting through her mammoth straw pocketbook, finally picking out the heavy wooden rosary beads with the silver cross, beads that had once belonged to her father. "Here, Kristi, do you want these while you testify?" she asked, holding them out to me. (22)

Groteke invokes her shared Catholic faith with Mia at the moment of testifying against Allen. In Groteke's words, Mia emerges as a devout Catholic with an "angelic smile"

(49) who wanted to be a nun as a child, who “really *lived* her religion,” (53), who told her, “Catholicism is tattooed on your soul. You never get rid of it” (53).

But where Mia and Orth minimize direct invocation of Allen’s religious or ethnic difference, Groteke’s depiction of Farrow’s Catholic faith finds colorful juxtaposition in Allen. Groteke suggests that “Woody was as different from Mia as rugelach from communion wafers” (56). Subsequent depictions of physical difference may register as more loaded: discussing (pre-breakup) pictures of Allen and Mia in tabloids, Groteke writes, “Always, there would be an angelic smile on her face. And we couldn't help wondering, who is this brainy little troll who has managed to captivate Beauty's heart?” (49). Groteke again draws attention to her perceived discrepancy in attractiveness by referring to “the Gentile goddess and the Jewish nerd” (51). The description of Allen as a “little troll” likely plays to her audience’s distaste for him (the book clearly announces its sympathies lie with Mia). But it also registers as a dehumanizing effort.

While Groteke, Orth and Mia Farrow stressed the value of Farrow’s Catholic faith, Allen denigrated it. In a *60 Minutes* interview with Steve Kroft, Allen connects Farrow’s supposed faith in God with her newfound association of Allen with the devil:

I started getting phone calls all night long, and death threats, and – and calling me the devil and evil incarnate, and – and – and she ran out and adopted two kids, and suddenly ran out and you know, baptized a number of kids. She was never religious for 60 seconds in all the years I knew her, then suddenly ran out and baptized the kids and told me that she had found God, and now everything was going to be directed toward a richer life and a greater life, and she was at peace and she was forgiving. And 24 hours later, she was threatening my life, threatening to stick my eyes out. (“Woody Allen Defends Himself”)

Allen's appearance on *60 Minutes* presents Farrow's Catholicism as inauthentic, and hypocritical, stressing Mia's violent threats.¹⁰ Both Mia and Allen allude to faith and Catholicism in telling their stories, but in diametrically opposed ways. Mia uses religious iconography to privilege her faith-driven subjectivity over that of Allen's secular appeal. Allen, correspondingly, draws attention to Mia's very same allegations of godlessness, but characterizes the accusation as irrational and dehumanizing, stressing that she considered him not merely a threat, but an inhuman one: "the devil and evil incarnate." Further, by challenging Farrow's ever having been religious, Allen defends his own secularism by casting her own supposed faith as inauthentic.

To whom, exactly, is Allen appealing here? He seemingly forsakes any attempt to gain sympathy from those that consider religious awakening a reasonable response to a family trauma. Instead, he insists there was no trauma, appealing to an audience that would find a characterization of Farrow's behavior as irrational (perhaps hysterical) as compelling. And in drawing attention to Farrow's use of religious language, he intimates that being called evil incarnate and the devil by a non-authentically faithful Catholic is problematic, without overtly naming antisemitism. Allen presents himself as victim, threatened by an irrational, inauthentic Catholic who (mis)expresses her faith by not demonizing, but devil-izing, a Jew. Allen also alludes to the baptisms. Allen's secular

¹⁰ Kroft was very sympathetic to Allen in his interview. Allen later referred to Kroft as a "hero in this thing" and said, "While all the press was vilifying me, Steve Kroft and *60 Minutes* came to me and said, 'We want to help' (McGrath 126). Allen later cast Kroft in *Small Time Crooks*. In an interview with Meade, Kroft alluded to being "starstruck" by Allen. More troublingly, Kroft said that "some of the best material in the interview," which involved Allen's comments on Previn, which revealed "a total blind spot about the impropriety of his relationship with Soon-Yi," was "cut so as not to offend viewers" (Meade 241).

Jewish continuity is severed by what Allen presents as a forced, insincere conversion. Orth presents baptism as Farrow's attempt to reconstitute (without Allen) "the family." Allen seems to invoke the baptism to mark the point at which his family is taken from him. In his reference to Mia having baptized "a number of kids," and later "baptized the kids," Allen's awkward wording may reflect the complicated task of how to refer to a collective of children without folding Previn into that group (despite the fact that she, too, was baptized). Lamenting that Mia baptized "*our*" kids would make for a stronger condemnation of Mia's unilateral decision. But Previn rules that determiner out.

Mia's belief that Allen was "evil" emerged in coverage of the custody trial as well. Susan Coates, one of Allen's therapists, reported that Mia called Allen "satanic and evil" prior to Dylan making her allegations, regarding his relationship with Previn (Marks, "Doctor Recounts"). Mia's lawyers responded by inquiring if it was unusual "for a mother under the circumstances to believe that the man she had brought into the family, introduced to her children as a lifetime partner, who was having an affair with one of her daughters, is evil?" (Marks, "Allen and Farrow"). The judge was sympathetic to the question, and the judge, lawyers and witness actually discussed what distinguished a "bad man" from a "bad act," in the context of Allen's affair with Previn. Meanwhile, *New York Times* testimony described Mia as looking "like a Roman Catholic schoolgirl" while under cross-examination by Allen's lawyers (Grimes).

Outside of the courtroom, Allen exerted more control on the narrative. His most overt allusion to antisemitism occurred in a televised press conference after Frank Maco, the Connecticut prosecutor assigned with the abuse case, announced that he would not press charges. Allen made the choice to speak directly to Dylan, assuring her that "the

dark forces will not prevail,” listing the forces as “Not second-rate police or judicial setbacks, not tabloid press nor those who perjure themselves nor all who rush to judgment, not the pious or hypocritical, the bigoted” (Henneberger). Allen groups “pious,” “hypocritical” and “bigoted” together, suggesting that those who proclaimed faith were both hypocritical and antisemitic; no other form of bigotry seems plausible given the context.¹¹

Though Allen remarked that he intended the words for Dylan, remember that Dylan, at the time, was just eight. Allen also implied that Connecticut authorities had nefarious reasons for even conducting an investigation: “Is it possible they were prejudiced against me because I'm a diehard New Yorker and all that implies, and Ms. Farrow a Connecticut local?” (Groteke 202). Allen’s reference to “prejudice” and use of the phrase “and all that implies” asks his audience to connect “diehard New Yorker” with his own vulnerable Jewishness. This conflation of “New York” and “Jewish” is nothing new, but worth considering alongside contemporaneous discussion of Allen. The aforementioned *Jewish Advocate*’s critical op-ed about Allen also lamented that “Allen's ideas, intonations, mores, as depicted in many of his pictures, have been instead narrowly ‘culturally’ New York, but confused with being Jewish in content because of his identity.” Though the *Jewish Advocate* bemoaned Allen’s role in transforming “New York” into a signifier for secular Jewishness, Allen embraced this conflation, utilizing it to suggest his victimization by antisemitic forces. That Dylan would be sensitive to these

¹¹ It strains credulity to argue that Allen uses “bigoted” here in the broader context of the racist attacks on Previn. Reminding audiences of Previn would not have served Allen’s narrative purposes at this time; in order to portray himself as a responsible parent, it was not in his interest to even allude to Previn.

insinuations seems unlikely; Allen directs his appeal to those, Jewish or not, that might be sympathetic to Allen's casting himself as vulnerable as a Jewish New Yorker.

In interviews and press conferences, Allen suggested that antisemitism accounted for the abuse allegations, while never explicitly saying "antisemitism." Like a dog whistle, his evocation of anti-Semitism is inaudible to those unconcerned with it, but unavoidable to those sensitized to it. Joanna Silberg and Stephanie Dallam suggest that in orthodox Jewish communities, the threat of antisemitism influences community members to defend Jewish men accused of pedophilia, even when Jewish children and Jewish women do the accusing: "the historic effects of being a persecuted outsider living within a closely knit family unit, combined with interpretations of religious precepts, have aided the forces of denial in the Jewish community" (93). A similar secular phenomenon seems to have occurred with Allen.

Unsurprisingly, drawing attention to the specter of antisemitism also magnified the narrative's exogamous qualities. Allen, like Mia in her memoir, casts the exogamous choice as regrettable morality tale. By coupling with a Catholic, Allen intimates he set himself up for this sort of betrayal. In asserting publically that he in no way transgressed with Dylan, even as he proclaimed his love for Previn, Allen seemed to offer an implicit mea culpa for his naïve transgression in coupling with a white Catholic, whose latent antisemitism pronounced itself in (supposedly) unfounded allegations of sexual abuse. Why didn't Allen's interracial coupling with Previn also register as problematically exogamous? First, the racist humor directed at Previn may have helped make her sympathetic to those who found Allen similarly vulnerable to bigotry. Second, exogamy itself was likely less of the issue than the narrative construct through which the exogamy

anxiety pronounced itself. The undergirding anxiety about Allen and Previn, even for those who mocked them in racist terms, was most likely their relationship's presumed incestuous quality (which found confused expression in the aforementioned racist terms). Allen's denials that anything about his relationship with Previn was in any way paternal helped sooth these anxieties.

In the following section, I argue that despite his allusions to Mia's and Maco's supposed antisemitism, Allen's prerogative to dictate who was and was not his child, and what was and was not a family, must be considered in the context of white male subjective privilege regarding who gets to define "family."

Paternal Authority and Plantation Constructs: Who Defines Family?

In an August 31, 1992 interview with *Time*, Allen defended his relationship with Previn by stressing that he had no paternal relationship to her. When the interviewer asked, "Did you think about how it would affect her siblings?" Allen dismissed the possibility, responding, "These people are a collection of kids, they are not blood sisters or anything" (Isaacson). But just a year earlier, when Eric Lax published his official biography, Allen declared, "Mia's been a completely different kind of experience for me, because the predominant thing has been family" (312). Allen's protestation that his affair with Previn was not incestuous required denying a paternal relationship with Previn, but also depicting the Farrow family as *not* a family. Yet to convince the court that he should be given custody of Previn's siblings, Moses, Dylan and Satchel, Allen had to make a case that *he* was the component that created "family," but just for his children (and thus *excluding* their siblings; including, crucially, Previn). To set conditions for a new family, Allen had to deny (if not destroy) the existence of a previous one.

It's worth considering how incest scholars might read some of these dynamics. While both Allen and Previn's claims to not viewing their relationship as incestuous convinced many viewers, Judith Herman stresses that "paternal authority" overrides paternal biology and "paternal feeling" in accounting for how power dynamics function in incestuous families. Herman's depiction of incest frameworks with older female children who become "their fathers' confidantes" matches Allen's own presentation of the Allen/Previn dynamic (Herman 80). Juliet MacCannell suggests that viewing father figures as Freudian father figures (akin to powerful "tyrants" or bad dads) obscures how male familial privilege operates in a post-Freudian context in which men often rail against their own "tyrant" fathers. In such a reading, Allen's citing of multiple mitigating factors reflects a narcissistic, shape-shifting quality typical in "brothers": "the modernized fraternal superego is both ego and *It*, changing roles whenever it suits him" (17).¹² We grant Allen's non-consanguineous paternity of some of Farrow's children, but happily accede to his denial of paternity for Previn, whom he claims to love differently.

MacCannell's observation about the dangers of "brothers" as opposed to "tyrant fathers" helps in theorizing Allen's patriarchal behavior, but we might also consider how specific rhetorical and societal conditions contribute to, and perhaps facilitate, Allen's subjective, inconsistent, categorization of "family." Earlier in this chapter, I examined how Allen alluded to his Jewishness in intimating, without ever explicitly stating, that antisemitism accounted for Mia's and the state's preoccupation with his behavior. Here, I want to focus on a different ethno-racial formation, in which Allen's whiteness and

¹² MacCannell's description of the brothers as "changing roles whenever it suits" them may also resonate with the earlier discussion of Bauman's proteophobia.

Jewishness are understood as compatible. How, historically, has white male paternal subjectivity functioned in American incest narratives?

Historically, Jews were objects of racial “othering” in incest and pedophilia narratives. However, Allen’s celebrity, and whiteness, allowed him far more agency in telling his story than more societally disadvantaged Jews have typically, historically possessed. As such, we might consider Allen’s rhetorical inconsistencies, in particular, his seemingly illogical authority to declare or deny his paternity within whatever family construct he acknowledges or denies, as involving particular American racial formations. The legal theorist Zanita Fenton contends that American incest must be considered in its particular overlooked historical and legal context: a plantation system in which “incest and miscegenation were inseparable and socially and politically synonymous” (324):

White slave masters could enjoy unrestricted sexual access to their black children that breached the underlying objective of both the incest and miscegenation taboos: he could have relations with his biological child because she was not white; he was not...expected to interconnect (read: marriage / read: sex) with non-related individuals from the subordinated black slave community. (323)

Fenton builds upon Sollors’ assessment of the confusion of “too close” and “too far,” but theorizes that this confusion actually served to hide incest in plain sight: “racial politics,” she argues, “created the hidden exhibition of incest” (324).

In calling on Fenton’s theorization of incest to discuss Allen’s rhetoric, I suggest that Allen’s illogical defense (his choice to deny the Farrow family as family, even as he protested that his family was being taken away from him), actually fits a distinctly familiar pattern. Fenton theorizes that the historical system of white patriarchal supremacy is built upon a refusal to see any contradiction in said defense, as societal “proscriptions” against both miscegenation and incest (built upon the racist, illogical

notion that one ruled out the other) actually facilitated these sorts of transgressions.

Foundationally, white men's subjective perspective on who was or was not a family member trumped any other consideration, biological, legal, or otherwise.

In applying Fenton's theorization to the Allen family construct, I am aware of the decidedly different sociohistorical and legal contexts. But considering Allen's subjectivity in a sociohistorical American context, and not merely a Jewish one, helps reveal how "whiteness" functioned for white Jews like Allen in the 1990s. If white male privilege historically involved the freedom to commit incest with nonwhite children, the Allen incest narrative emerges as a very important case study for how white male privilege functioned for white Jewish men.

One other aspect of Fenton's theorization parallels the Allen incest narrative.

Fenton suggests that:

...once there was silent condonation for the liaisons between a white father and his reflection in brown, it must have become more psychologically plausible that such liaisons could also occur, with impunity, with his reflection in white. The commonsense progression within this power dynamic includes the unchallenged access of these same fathers to their white children. (321)

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the danger of referring to the "Allen / Previn" scandal involves the removal of Dylan from a history that, from the outset, involved a complicated family structure and intertwined narratives. For Fenton, the manner in which a white father conceives of the incest taboo with regard to a nonwhite child inevitably impacts his conception of what might be plausible with his white children. Allen's relationship with Previn, by all accounts, began well before he was accused by Dylan of sexual molestation. For all the suggestions that Allen's alleged transgressions with the of-age, or nearly of-age Previn were categorically different than those with Dylan, Fenton's

analysis of plantation dynamics suggests the utility of her theoretical construct on contemporary society: for a white male father, the ability to get away with incest with a nonwhite child might make that same white father more bold in testing boundaries regarding his white children.

Family Values for a Non-Family

While Allen's white male subjectivity afforded him a certain amount of credibility to set the terms regarding what was and what was not considered his "family," Allen also found himself thrust into a larger, national conversation about family and family values. Conservative politicians incorporated commentary on Allen's incest narrative into the presidential campaign. Ironically, both Allen and conservative commentators rejected the notion of the Farrow family as "family."

At the 1992 Republican National Convention, Newt Gingrich made direct reference to Allen in attacking Democratic politics: "I call this the Woody Allen plank. It's a weird situation, and it fits the Democratic Party platform perfectly... Woody Allen had non-incest with his non-daughter because they were a non-family" (Berke). Conservative political commentator Robert Novak also invoked Allen at the Republican National Convention, declaring "Woody Allen is not family values" (Burke). Prompted, "Not anymore?" Novak clarified, "He never was, for crying out loud" (Burke).

"Family values" had been a long-standing preoccupation amongst conservative politicians, but political commentator Morton Kondracke noted just how frequently Republicans emphasized Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton's confessed marital infidelities at their convention. Kondracke observed that Republicans "seemed to be trying to make Governor and Mrs. Clinton out to be political counterparts to Woody

Allen and Mia Farrow.” But in drawing Allen into the political debate, Gingrich and Novak suggested that his transgressions existed only partly in his dating Farrow’s adopted daughter; Allen and Farrow’s unmarried twelve-year relationship was equally damning. Indeed, Allen’s entire filmic catalog could be categorized as anti-family values for its uninhibited treatment of extramarital and premarital sex. In his characterization of “non-incest” being unproblematic because it happened with a “non-daughter” within a “non-family,” Gingrich satirizes Allen’s use of technical mitigations to justify inappropriate behavior. But the work done by “non-,” three times in the sentence, might be understood in the context of Lee Edelman’s discussion of queerness, which he suggests “can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (17). For all of Allen’s films’ emphasis on Jewish masculine heterosexuality, Gingrich identifies in the Allen incest narrative a threatening queering of the family structure.¹³

Both Allen and Gingrich denigrated Allen’s “non-family” with Farrow, but to very different purposes. Allen did so to normalize his relationship with Previn, while Gingrich attempts to create a causal link between any sort of non-traditional family structure (unmarried parents, non-co-habiting parents) and subsequent amoral behavior. *New York Times* critic Walter Goodman published a column entitled “Woody Allen As

¹³ The relationship between Allen’s incestuous sexuality and its relationship to other types of non-heteronormative sexuality merits further exploration. For instance, while *The New York Times* did not report on Farrow testimony in 1993 that she suspected Allen of having a homosexual affair, multiple other outlets did; the *Daily Mail* leading with the byline, “Woody’s ‘Gay Affair’” (Burton). In my chapter on Roth, I explore more comprehensively the notion that artists might depict heterosexual incest in a manner that defiantly rejects the stereotypes of ambiguous Jewish male gender and sexuality. Aspects of this seem pertinent to the Allen narrative as well.

Metaphor In Campaign For President” on August 22, emphasizing how Allen’s multi-racial, multi-religious, dysfunctional “non-family” stood in for the Clintons:

For the uncertain television voter in this season of the family, the political choice was sharpened this week. The election came down to a contest between the score or more Bushes and the dozen or so Farrow-Previn-Allens who populated the tube during the days of public embraces in Houston and domestic disruption in New York City.

Goodman playfully analogizes the choice of television consumption to voting. But in mocking the Republican preoccupation with the Allen narrative, Goodman champions Allen, saying “he has never been a closet atheist,” and noting that his films “delight in kicking around men of the cloth and milking the amusement in scenes of real churchgoing Americans, whom he plainly finds ridiculous, being confronted with a neurotic Jew from New York” (“Woody Allen”). This ostensibly liberal response to the right’s attack on Allen involved a doubling-down of support for Allen; a suggestion that America is, at its essence, more “Farrow-Previn-Allens” than “Bushes.” Having never been “a closet atheist,” Allen cannot be accused of hypocrisy for whatever other sexuality found in his closet. The impact of Allen’s behavior on Dylan, and Mia’s family, become secondary, for Goodman, to the threat of continued, national Republican political dominance. Allen, again representative of the secular Jew, served for Goodman, and others, as a national rallying point for liberalism under attack. Dylan’s allegations, and the Allen’s grooming of Previn, are thus problematically stricken from the record.

But if voting Democrat, and opposing Republican preoccupation with “family values” involved, at some level, “voting Woody,” Allen’s symbolic (or metaphorical) resonance on the 1992 election pales next to his direct impact on legalizing gay adoption. Since 1992, almost every news item about Allen and Dylan mentioned his adoptive

parenthood, while most news items mentioning Previn stressed that she was Farrow's daughter, and the absence of any legal relationship between she and Allen. Coverage rarely dwelled on how the distinction between Allen's adoptive children (Dylan and Moses) and those of Mia's children who were *not* his children (including Previn) only became a point of legal distinction after tremendous effort by Allen's lawyers to circumvent New York State law in December 1991. Allen formally adopted Dylan and Moses just a few weeks prior to Mia discovering Allen's photographs of Previn, the evidence that prompted Previn and Allen to admit their affair. Despite the very small window between the adoption becoming legal and Farrow finding evidence of Allen's affair with Previn, Allen had been trying to adopt Dylan since 1985 or 1986, shortly after Mia brought her home from Texas (Meade 176). However, New York State did not, at the time, permit the adoption of children by unmarried couples (Meade 176).

Though it took years, in 1991, Allen and Farrow's lawyers eventually identified a "loophole in the adoption law" when Paul Weltz found a sympathetic judge in Surrogate Court, and stressed Allen's intellectual ability and financial means (Orth). Only via securing an exception to the state law could Allen gain legal recognition as adoptive parent to Moses and Dylan. Farrow submitted affidavits supporting Allen, but did not know about his affair with Previn at the time. This point served as grounds for Mia's future lawsuit claiming Allen's adoption was fraudulent.

Weltz's strategy reveals how Allen's financial worth and celebrity (specifically his well-known "intellectual ability") facilitated his circumventing New York State law to adopt a child without marrying the parent of said child. The judge's exception for Allen – essentially, broadening the definition of family by granting a non-married non-

cohabitating partner legal status as parent – possessed vast legal implications, all of which possessed significant relevance to national discussions about “family values.” Where Gingrich and his political allies denigrated Allen’s “family values” as part of a political campaign, Allen and his lawyers took their fight to the legal system, seeking to transform New York State family law.

In 1995, the state law that would have (but for the specific exception) prevented Allen from adopting Dylan and Moses was overturned when the State Court of Appeals ruled on a pair of adoption cases, one involving a lesbian couple. The other case, “Matter of Jacob,” involved a family situation not dissimilar to (pre-Previn-affair) Allen and Farrow’s. Allen bankrolled that case (Feeney). Broader political motives or ideologies notwithstanding, Allen financially supported the case in order to challenge Farrow’s lawsuit that Allen’s co-adoption in December of 1991 was on fraudulent grounds. As Sheila Feeney observed regarding the improbability of Allen’s 1992 custody lawsuit in *The New York Daily News*, “What made the Allen/Farrow case unique was that Allen could sue at all: There was no precedent of an unmarried couple either together or sequentially adopting a child (other than a case involving a lesbian couple).”

Upon the law being overturned, though, “Interviews with lawyers, court personnel and adoption specialists indicate that few if any of the approximately 3,400 adoptions in the city last year involved a heterosexual trying to adopt the child of a person to whom he was not married” (Feeney). Allen’s team’s legal victory helped prevent the nullification of his adoptions, but got him no closer to custody or visitation rights with Dylan. Yet it

paved the way for legal adoptions by gay and lesbian couples in New York State.¹⁴ Thus, Allen fundamentally contributed to queering legal definitions of family in New York.

The fact that Allen participated in the legal battle to expand New York State legal recognition of families to encompass adoption rights for gay and lesbian couples might seem to sit at odds with his otherwise patriarchal behavior. But we might differentiate Allen's politics and his political impact, especially given that Allen's support of the Jacob case was motivated by the chance to strengthen his position vis-à-vis his custody lawsuit, and Farrow's lawsuit alleging the fraudulent grounds of his adoption of Moses and Dylan. Allen's political significance to national election discourse, and state-law regarding adoption rights, confirm the broad importance of a narrative too easily dismissed as "scandal." Allen emerges as change agent in the Jacob case, and major actor in the morality tale Gingrich utilized to court voters. Allen built his fame, however, upon his own artistry, and within his films, far more than his press conferences, he (literally) re-casts his incest narrative, asserting his authorship in a way that merits close examination, and reveals the appeal of such incest narratives to his audience.

Coda: Husbands and Wives and Monsters

The following chapter provides close readings of four Allen films to demonstrate how Allen's films trade on readily-identifiable, specific allusions to his incest narrative. In setting that chapter up, I want to discuss one last sketch, which deals, obliquely, with the question of endogamy, community protective politics within an insular minority community, and what it means to be (or to be associated with) a "monster."

¹⁴ Farrow would eventually drop her fraud suit because of its expense, and because Allen had lost each of his appeals for custodial access to Dylan (Farrow 330).

The Ben Stiller Show's "Woody Allen's Bride of Frankenstein" makes no direct reference to Dylan or Previn. The sketch, a shot for shot parody of scenes from Allen's *Husbands and Wives*, came out just months after Allen made his public denial/confirmation. The sketch makes no mention of the incest narrative, and subsequent interviews and DVD commentaries reveal no cast members mentioning the sketch having been conceived at the apex of Allen's infamy. The premise is simple: Allen and his demonstrably Jewish cast of characters (a la *Husbands and Wives*) are monsters, except, as with any Allen production, two want to have affairs – one with a human.

On the one hand, the sketch may be a straightforward Allen film parody poking fun at exogamy themes. However, considering that the sketch appeared just months after Allen had publically denied molestation charges in the same press conference in which he declared his love for Previn, we might consider the sketch's transformation of Jews into monsters as deliberately resonant with both historical sexual antisemitism as well as the specific charges levied against Allen. If sexual molestation of a seven-year old girl is "monstrous," what would it mean – what would it look like? – for Allen to be a monster?

Stiller's sketch answers this question: Allen is depicted as typically non-threatening, charming, banal neurotic: and literally monstrous (he is "the Mummy"). But the entire cast, other than Frankenstein's blonde, non-Jewish girlfriend ("she's not even one of *us* – she's *alive*") is also made up of monsters. A surface reading of the sketch suggests that, Jewish or otherwise, sexuality makes all of us potentially monstrous, and yet simultaneously not particularly scary.¹⁵ At a deeper level, the sketch may also suggest

¹⁵ This likely only works in Allen's almost exclusively white films. The racialized logic of the parody plays upon the contemporaneous absurdity of thinking of white Jews as monstrous; nonwhite sexuality (black sexuality in particular) continues to be cast as

that identification with Allen is facilitated by the incongruity of imagining him as a monster. If Allen's film catalog consists of thirty-plus depictions of the Allen persona as driven by a non-threatening, but potent id, the sketch underscores just how impossible and incongruous it is to imagine that id as threatening.

The allegorical depiction of white Jewish difference as unmistakable, and bodily, however, suggests that even as Stiller's writers can engage with the problem of Jewish sexuality as a form of "monstrosity," it accomplishes this via a blatant rejection of the proteophobic anxieties that Allen works through in *Zelig* and *THSS* considers with Wood Yi. Frankenstein's monster, the Mummy, the Bride of Frankenstein and zombies are "fixed" monsters. They do not shape-shift; whatever transformation renders them undead has already occurred. The Wolfman, or Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde – monsters who play on proteophobic anxiety – are metaphorically too charged, perhaps, for a sketch meditating on 1990s white Jewish identity at the time that a beloved icon was alleged to have sexually molested his white Catholic daughter. Woody Allen as the Mummy is funny because Woody Allen is nothing like the Mummy. Woody Allen as the Wolfman or Dr. Jekyll, on the other hand, would suggest that Allen might be capable of the transformation into (and importantly, out of) monstrous form that Mr. Hyde and the Wolfman dramatize.

The sketch thereby reminds us of the limits of depictable forms of monstrosity, and also societal expectations regarding monstrosity. On February 7, 2014, shortly after Dylan Farrow wrote her open letter re-articulating her abuse allegations, a victim of child abuse named "William Warwick" (a pseudonym), addressed Dylan's accusations by

monstrous in pop culture and literature – I explore this in more detail in my chapter on Henry Roth.

noting how society brands child abusers as monsters, when, in fact, they are merely humans – including loving fathers – who have committed reprehensible acts. Warwick writes, “Those of us who were abused by a family member, or a family friend, have shared banal time and space with the sort of people who molest kids.”

Warwick’s observations are helpful to our reading of Stiller’s sketch. The premise of “Woody Allen’s *Bride of Frankenstein*” is the absurdity of watching monsters sharing “banal time and space” together. This parody functions well with Allen’s film, in large part due to the ethno-racial homogeneity of the cast and characters. But while Stiller and his writers broached the topic of Allen’s monstrosity in 1992, Allen would have at it as well, most audaciously in 1997’s *Deconstructing Harry*, one of four Allen films that engage his incest narrative in specific terms which I analyze in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

BLOOD LIBEL HUMOR AND INCEST EASTER EGGS

Family and Destruction in *Deconstructing Harry*, *Irrational Man*, *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, and *Blue Jasmine*

In March 2016, Malcolm Jamal Warner gave an interview on the daytime television show *The Real*, and suggested a media double-standard in the treatment of Bill Cosby's collaborative work. Warner was careful not to defend Cosby, but stood by *The Cosby Show*, the television show on which he (and so many other black actors) appeared, noting that corporate entertainment industry responses to allegations that Cosby sexually abused more than fifty women (including more than twenty allegations of rape) seemed quite distinct from those concerning white male artists also accused of rape (Holpuch). Referring to Woody Allen, Roman Polanski and Stephen Collins, Warner claimed, "it's very clear the crimes they've committed...But there is no one that's calling for Woody's movies to be pulled off the air" (Lutkin).¹

In mentioning Polanski and Allen, Warner might make an unintentional second distinction: not just between white and black entertainers, but also between white and white Jewish entertainers. However, Warner does not take this step; his comparison suggests that white Jews, like Allen and Polanski, group easily with non-Jews like Stephen Collins – even though Allen and Polanski are celebrated world-famous directors, while Collins has comparatively limited acclaim as an actor.

¹ A range of online publications covered this story, and the appearances for Warner also served as publicity for *The People Vs. OJ Simpson*, a critically acclaimed television series that meditated complexly on the differentiation between persona and personhood for a black male celebrity who, according to the show's logic, was likely framed by police for a murder that he almost certainly committed.

I begin with this anecdote because of the limits of Warner's juxtapositions: Allen's (and Polanski's) whiteness subsume their Jewishness, despite the historical parallels between threatened black masculinity and threatened Jewish masculinity. Warner observes a double-standard, but it's one that writes out the possibility of antisemitism that Allen alluded to in press conferences and interviews in the 1990s, as established in the previous chapter. While historical and contemporary antisemitism certainly function in and inform conversations and media coverage of Jews and incest, it certainly does not operate as a parallel form of oppression to antiblack racism. Within these narratives, racism, antisemitism, and white privilege intersect in complex ways. I have tried to demonstrate how racism, and anti-Asian racism in particular, functioned within media representations of Allen's incest narrative to cement Allen's whiteness as compatible with his Jewishness.

Returning briefly to Warner's assertion, and leaving aside his assessment of the clarity of Allen's guilt, Warner expresses exasperation regarding why Allen's movies continue to be celebrated, while *The Cosby Show* has been pulled from the air. Warner's complaint invites contemplation especially if we consider the content of the artists' work; while *The Cosby Show* depicted a fictional well-to-do black family, and, per the sitcom formula, rarely touched on questions of sexual assault (unlike Cosby's stand-up), Allen's films are saturated with questions of child sexuality, sexual predation, incest, and the literal and metaphorical destruction of families. In the years since Allen and Farrow's custody case, in particular, Allen's films have consistently, even obsessively, engaged

these themes in hyper-specific terms clearly evocative of his incest narrative, and even more of his films have engaged the theme of getting away with a serious crime.²

This chapter argues for a reading of post-1991 Woody Allen films as consistently engaging his personal incest narrative as central to Allen's creative process, telling and re-telling a patriarchal, popular, incest narrative for mass consumption. Allen's films routinely draw on his autobiographical experience in ways that package his incest narrative in recognizable filmic vignettes. Despite Allen's repeated denials of having incestuously transgressed, his films reveal a simultaneous vicarious invitation, if not insistence, that his audiences celebrate narratives that consistently suggest the plausibility of Allen having incestuously transgressed. Similarly, despite Allen's repeated denials of his films being at all autobiographical, the stories are so specifically targeted in their layered references to his incest narrative that the denials cannot be considered to possess any kind of serious credulity.

In particular, close readings of scenes in *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* (2010), *Blue Jasmine* (2013), and *Irrational Man* (2015) reveal how Allen repeatedly draws on his own autobiographical incest narrative in recognizable fashion, always in plots where figures accused of committing a crime are in fact guilty of having committed said crime. While three of these films post-date the 1990s, they touch on particular components from the 1990s-incest narrative (Ronan Farrow's parentage, Mia Farrow's call to a doctor to report Dylan's allegations, and the family court judge, Elliott Wilks). After close reading these scenes, I compare Allen's

² *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), *Match Point* (2005), *Scoop* (2006), *Cassandra's Dream* (2007), and *Irrational Man* (2015) all feature plot points involving getting away with murder, specifically.

approach to storytelling to Jim Trueblood's; the infamous narrator of his own father-daughter incest violation from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, a figure who markets his incestuous relations with his daughter to eager audiences, who financially compensate Trueblood for facilitating their vicarious celebration of his acts.

Incest in the Early Work, via Leviticus

The close readings in this chapter involve films Allen made in or after 1997, but Allen engaged incest in his work prior to this point. Most famously, *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) tells the stories of two men who have affairs with sisters/sisters-in-law. Though not consanguineous, sexual intercourse with a spouse's sibling is prohibited in Leviticus, and historically considered an incest prohibition within Jewish communities.³ *Shadows and Fog* (1991) also features a protagonist (Kleinman) who has an affair with the sister of his fiancé. And *Deconstructing Harry*, which I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, begins with a depiction of a sexual affair between a novel's character and his sister-in-law. Allen's fiction also delved into the subject, as his short story "Retribution" finds its protagonist falling in love with his girlfriend's mother, and marrying the mother, which makes him (as father) sexually irresistible to his ex-girlfriend. "Retribution" delves into the incest theme along distinct vectors: first, the protagonist's sexual attraction to members of the same family (Leviticus 18 and 20 prohibit multiple iterations of such sexual relations), and second, the Elektra complex (the daughter/father version of the more commonly discussed Oedipus complex). Meanwhile, *Stardust Memories* (1980) and *Anything Else* (2003) also engage the Elektra complex, as both films feature the protagonist's love interest discussing their sexual

³ Marriage to an unmarried sibling-in-law is condoned, however, in the event of a spouse's death (known as Levirate marriage).

attraction to their fathers. (*Stardust Memories* also features Dorrie (Charlotte Rampling) accusing Sandy (Allen's character) of flirting with her thirteen-year-old cousin.) Most recently, *Café Society* (2016) features Bobby (Jesse Eisenberg) in a love triangle with his uncle Phil (Steve Carell). After Phil marries Bobby's love interest Vonnie (Kristen Stewart), Bobby confides his continued feelings for her: "I was in love with you, and you decided to marry my uncle, which makes you my aunt... Aunt Vonnie. I think I still have a crush on you, Aunt Vonnie."

Incest emerges thematically in much of Allen's work, and it emerges with remarkable consistency. Stephen Marche, writing for *Esquire* in 2014, around the time that Dylan wrote her letter to the *New York Times*, compiled a list featuring several of the aforementioned scenes, as well as others with "newly-chilling themes" involving sexual transgressions. Regarding incest in particular, Allen's works mine the attraction men feel for non-consanguineous members of one's family, as well as the Elektra complex. (Curiously, even keeping "Oedipus Wrecks" in mind, straightforward Oedipus complex narratives are correspondingly rare in his work.⁴) Here, it's worth pausing momentarily to consider that Allen is examining, thematically, the incest or incest-associated proscriptions set forth in Leviticus that have no consanguineous consequence. This facilitates Allen artistically interrogating incest prohibitions simultaneously with his examination of exogamy taboos. *Hannah and Her Sisters*, *Stardust Memories*, *Café*

⁴ "Oedipus Wrecks" makes for an interesting outlier in Allen's engagement of the theme. It explores the exogamy/endogamy taboo far more than any sexual attraction to the Allen character's mother. Essentially, only when Sheldon and his non-Jewish fiancé break up, and Sheldon reveals his new Jewish fiancé to his mother, does mom cease tormenting him as a supernatural, all-seeing apparition above Manhattan. The film is also an outlier in that the Allen character ultimately partners with a Jewish woman.

Society, and “Retribution” each depict the verboten “family” members as “*shiksa*” types – they are never Jewish.⁵

Close reading Allen’s films with these relationships in mind permits a deeper analysis of how these films consider questions of family, difference, sexual attraction and legal marriage. In avoiding these issues, scholars risk dismissing contradictions and inconsistencies that, ironically, Allen demands his audience engage. Consider Lloyd Michaels’ recent word-choice for introducing a limited reading of Allen’s personal life in considering his “cinema of regret”:

Allen’s place as the epitome of artistic integrity and icon of intellectual hipness met its demise with the scandal over the breakup with his star and longtime romantic companion, Mia Farrow, following the revelation of his affair with Farrow’s adopted daughter, Soon-Yi Previn (who, *it still needs to be said*, was not Allen’s legal stepdaughter), and the subsequent custody battle over their children in 1992. (469, my emphasis)

Michaels’ idiomatic insistence that “it still needs to be said” that Allen was not Previn’s legal step-father sits problematically aside Michaels’ choice *not* to say anything about Dylan Farrow’s abuse allegations, which, as I have argued, cannot be separated from the Previn affair. But this choice to so curtly dismiss any audience inclination to consider Previn as a daughter-figure seems especially ironic given the content of an article that mines the artist’s consideration of regret. Christopher Knight, on the other hand, decisively labels Allen’s behavior with Previn as immoral, on account of “entering into a sexual relation with a very young Soon-Yi, the daughter of his partner” (77). However, in his examination of themes of melancholy, regret, and despair in Allen’s post-1991 films, Knight makes only very cursory reference to Dylan, and instead of dealing

⁵ *Café Society* draws particular attention to the strange triangulation of endogamy, exogamy, and incest, by allowing Bobby a brief character building scene where he elects to pay a prostitute for her services, but declines sex with her, upon learning she’s Jewish.

straightforwardly with the nature of her allegations, tends towards vague euphemisms (i.e., regarding Allen's custody case, "the matter, as we know, became more complicated, with the result that Allen lost custody of his natural male child" (77)).⁶

This tendency to avoid mentioning Dylan in scholarly assessments of Allen's work, even regarding the "scandal," is relatively common. Colleen Glenn and the aforementioned Christopher Knight are the only scholars to make even passing reference to Dylan and her allegations in 2013's *A Companion to Woody Allen*, a compendium that comes in at over 600 pages of essays. Vincent Brook's more recent collection, *Woody on Rye*, which focuses on Jewishness and Allen's films, features essays which refer to the "scandal," but only makes very brief mention of Dylan in Brook's essay. That said, Brook and Grinberg's introduction notes the importance of the "scandal" to Allen's work, "particularly in regard to depictions of women and romantic relationships" (xviii). The acknowledgment only highlights the corollary gap: any corresponding notion that depictions of children and fatherhood might also be significant are left to be inferred by readers familiar with the Dylan allegations' significance, or skeptical of Allen's inconsistent claims that his relationship to Previn was not paternal.⁷

⁶ Knight's argument, that regret and guilt dominate late-era Allen works as he works through the sense of loss emerging from the events of 1991, is highly persuasive, but by ruling out the possibility that Allen might feel strong moral misgivings about a specific crime / behavior (the Dylan allegations) Knight diminishes the applicability of his own analysis and erases a vitally important aspect of the historical record. Any conversation about Allen's sense of guilt and remorse needs to engage a thorough consideration of *what* he might feel guilt regarding, especially when there is copious material and testimony about a specific alleged form of transgression.

⁷ Allen said the relationship was not paternal just about every chance he was given in the early 1990s. More recently, he's freely characterized his relationship with Previn as working because "I was paternal. She responded to someone paternal" (Fragoso).

We might also consider the term “scandal.” On the one hand, it makes for a convenient short-hand, and certainly a less awkward one than “incest narrative.” But by referring to a “scandal,” the voyeuristic engagement may subsume serious consideration of the specific transgression – indeed, the extent to which Allen scholarship refers to the Allen/Previn or Allen/Mia “scandal” reminds us that it’s rhetorically more difficult to characterize alleged sexual abuse of a seven-year-old as “scandal.” Further, to speak of the Allen “scandal” emphasizes its contested qualities, and public interest in Allen’s celebrity. It also functions euphemistically, suggesting a prurient preoccupation with sexual transgressions that cannot be named, leaving the incestuous or pedophilic quality unspoken. By referring to the “scandal,” but neglecting to speak to the incestuous quality of the alleged behavior, these scholars seem to exemplify Toni McNaron and Yarrow Morgan’s assessment: “We believe that there is not a taboo against incest; merely against speaking about it” (15). Communications scholars James Lull and Stephen Hinerman argue that star scandals emerge “when the mass media reveal an instance of how the desires of famous people overrule social expectations, norms, and practices” (21). Exactly which “social expectations, norms, and practices” were overruled are thus left obscured with this shorthand.

Among those creating scholarship about Allen’s life and work since 1992, Samuel Dresner is unique in addressing the incest narrative in detail. In “Woody Allen and the Jews,” Dresner approaches Allen’s films and his personal life from a religious Jewish perspective. The piece makes a thoughtful and compelling case for understanding Previn and Allen’s relationship as incestuous, defining the incest taboo as serving to “prevent the power relations and emotional ties of the family from being abused” (195). But this

comes directly after the observation that “for some, it took the tragedy of Mia and Woody to demonstrate the value of marriage” (194). Dresner also laments Allen’s filmic depictions of “the lusting of the Jew for the Gentile women” (193). Indeed, Dresner’s critique of Allen seems to align with Newt Gingrich’s when he asks, “Once we abandon the strictures of marriage, family, the home, the bulwarks of Jewish and Christian morality, why not approve pedophilia and incest?” (197).

Dresner’s scholarly consideration of Allen and incest, in many respects, is the exception that proves the rule (along with Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky’s fascinating essay on *Deconstructing Harry*, which I will consider shortly). In the subsequent close readings, my goal is to depict how Allen’s post-1991 films frequently invite the audience to consider the art alongside the public incest narrative that had, by that point, so comprehensively impacted discourse regarding Allen. That is, the axiom of “separating the art from the artist,” even were we to grant it as an ideal for considering any artistic aesthetic, had been rendered moot for Allen by the media coverage of his relationship with Previn and Dylan’s allegation. The media coverage, discussed in detail last chapter, prohibited the severance of artist from art. But even more importantly, Allen’s art delved so deeply into the content of his real-life incest narrative, court case, family rumors, etc., that any suggestion that considering Allen’s work in the context of the allegations was unfair to Allen is simply disingenuous. Allen’s films invite the connections. Thinly veiled allusions to specific allegations, along with the question of how to come to terms with getting away with a moral transgression, dominate Allen’s filmic themes since 1991.

Crimes and Felonies (and Guilt, or Lack-thereof)

Crimes and Misdemeanors, released in 1989, predates the public incest narrative. But it marks the beginning of Allen's decades-long engagement with the theme of getting away with murder. It has also (rightly) been considered one of Allen's more "Jewish" films, in terms of its religious content and preoccupation with faith, sin, and moral judgment. While Allen's engagement with the "getting away with murder" theme has been explored by various scholars, the extent to which plot points in these films intersect directly with his autobiographical narrative has not been considered troubling with regard to allegations of Allen's transgressions, despite the thematic parallels.

Allen's *Deconstructing Harry* is rarely grouped in the "getting away with murder" genre. Far more conventionally, the film is analyzed for its layered depictions of fictions within fiction: the plot involves an author dealing with custody issues and self-loathing retreating into his own fictional worlds for respite from the "reality" in which he's failed to forge meaningful relations. Sam Girgus analyzes the autobiographical components of the film in some detail, including an allusion to protagonist Harry Block's custody situation with his ex-wife:

As a profound reminder of the relationship between Allen's life and his fictional characters, in a scene near the end of *Deconstructing Harry*, Harry sits in jail after being accused of kidnapping his son, a distressing reminder of accusations of molestation and abuse that were made against Allen just a few years earlier. (152)

Girgus identifies an important intersection – the specific issue of custody that comes up again in *Irrational Man* – but uses passive voice, ostensibly to avoid attaching the claims of abuse to Dylan or Mia. But Girgus later makes clear that considering the sexual content of Allen's films "compels some reference" not just to Allen's affair with Previn, but to Dylan's allegations as well (162). Girgus analyzes the film in the context of the

significant criticism Allen had received since 1991 regarding these events, suggesting that by “embodying Harry’s horrible qualities of character, Allen mitigates somewhat the effectiveness of...attacks on Allen’s own moral character” (152). Essentially, by having the Allen character concede his immorality, Allen the artist can succeed at creating art delving into Block’s introspection and artistic struggles, even if the film is marked by “nihilism and cynicism” (163). Mary Nichols also reads the autobiographical elements of *Deconstructing Harry* as serving a defensive purpose, suggesting that Harry Block provides Allen’s “most vociferous critics, who confuse his art with his life and judge both harshly, a version of the despicable person they imagine that he is. He holds out bait, and critics bite” (x). Where Nichols indicates more of Allen’s playful, or perhaps defiant, mode, both she and Girgus read the film as responding to negative coverage of Allen.

But the depths of the nihilism and cynicism in *Deconstructing Harry* may reach deeper than even Girgus allows. Of all the film’s varied set pieces, the Max Pinkus story finds Allen engaging complexly, and disturbingly, with the blood libel and sexual antisemitism. A close reading of the vignette requires acknowledgment of Allen’s own status as a Jewish man accused of child abuse. Without calling attention to that intersection, audiences may struggle to fully recognize the provocative content.

The Max Pinkus story begins with an accusation. The film’s protagonist, Harry Block, has been called a self-hating Jew by his sister. As evidence, the film then jumps from the “real” (Block’s visit with his sister) to a Bar Mitzvah scene in which Block (Allen) narrates Pinkus’ story, in which an elderly Jewish man finally admits to his wife that years ago, he killed his wife and *her* children (not *their* children) and disposed of the bodies by eating them. All of this is consistent with blood libel, but Allen mines the

territory for comedy. The Bar Mitzvah scene has a *Star Wars* theme, and Darth Vader's disembodied head sits as a centerpiece of nearly every shot. The problem of bad dads is introduced as not merely a universal problem, but a galaxy-wide one, though it is also engaged in specifically Jewish vocabulary. Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky identifies these tensions, and contemplates Allen's choice to depict "Jewish primitivism" (22), and whether the story's use of antisemitic themes ought to offend his "fiercely loyal" (28) Jewish audience. Rubin-Dorsky's nuanced analysis considers the type of community protective impulses that inform Block's sister's emphatic rejection.

Though Rubin-Dorsky correctly identifies the charged nature of Allen engaging antisemitic stereotype in this manner, he avoids mention of the scene's blatant intersection with Allen's autobiography. The scene begs for analysis in the context of Allen having been accused of sexual molestation of a white Christian girl. The blood libel, the notion that Jews killed Christian children and consumed their blood, has sexually antisemitic undertones. Cannibalism – bodily consumption – echoes sexual threat; especially when the assailant is an adult and the victim a child.

Indeed, for anyone resistant to the notion that the blood libel intersects with sexual antisemitism, Allen's incorporation of the Max Pinkus scene seems to emphasize it. The precise element of the Allen "scandal" that finds itself consistently removed in order to focus on the "Allen/Previn" component involves Allen's white, non-Jewish daughter's allegation that her father sexually abused her; an act which Mia depicted as destroying (or nearly destroying) their family. Pinkus, on the other hand, literally destroys a family that he is at once part of, and not a part of (the children are from a

previous marriage), by devouring a wife, her two children, and a neighbor.⁸ Rubin-Dorsky suggests that Allen's Jewish audience might find his mining the blood libel for comedy offensive, but this begs an uncomfortable question as to what a "fiercely loyal" Jewish audience does or does not find offensive in Allen's scene. By referring to his audience as "fiercely loyal," Rubin-Dorsky ostensibly identifies those Allen fans that remained loyal after the events of 1991. The offense Rubin-Dorsky alludes to, without actually identifying, is Allen's reminding this audience that *they* overlooked serious allegations as to his behavior with his previous, non-Jewish family, in choosing loyalty.

On that note, for all its autobiographical intersection, the scene completely avoids regret and remorse in arriving at its amoral punchline. When confronted by his wife of thirty years about his murderous past, Pinkus offers, "If I tell you why I did it, will you promise not to nudge me?" Pinkus's defiant, dismissive defense is, "So what are you making a fuss? Some bury, some burn, I ate!" The supposed apologia is again satirized. Having set up the suspense of Pinkus finally revealing *why* he committed an unspeakable act, he instead affirms of cannibalism as his preferred method of disposing of the bodies. In his film-making choices, Allen also bypasses any impossible, pointless attempt at apologia for a clear, defiant assertion of his preference to satirize apologia. Allen intimates: some apologize, some go on *Oprah*, he makes jokes.

Pinkus's demeanor and name also merit scrutiny. The comedic energy of the scene necessitates Pinkus be utterly unthreatening. Allen does not reveal Pinkus until the last scene in the vignette, and all he wants is to eat his dinner. The build-up yields an

⁸ The protagonist kills a neighbor (along with his pregnant ex-lover) in *Match Point* as well. That neighbors die when families are destroyed, in Allen's films, may be an illustration of how collateral damage accompanies any targeted destruction.

unconvincing monster, and yet a murderer nonetheless; his flippant admission seems all the more horrific, and thus comedic. This too intersects, in disturbing ways, with the Allen narrative. How much evidence of sexual transgression would Allen have to present for his adamant defenders to find him morally culpable, or capable, of committing such transgressions? In many respects, the Pinkus scene echoes Stiller's "Woody Allen's Bride of Frankenstein" sketch. But where Stiller's sketch obliquely engages the question of the Allen abuse allegation vis-à-vis Jewish community complicity and community protective politics, Allen's vignette is far more defiant and aggressive.

Regarding the name, the "*pinkus*" (or *pinkas*) refers to the book of records in Yiddish-speaking eastern European Jewish communities. Perhaps we should read the scene as involving some comment about the relationship between immoral actions, history, and stereotype – maybe some actions cannot be removed from the record? And if we fully consider the name in an autobiographical context, perhaps the idea that Allen transgressed with his previous family, including his white, non-Jewish daughter, may simply be a part of the "record."

A Consequential Phone Call in *Blue Jasmine*

Blue Jasmine (2013) functions as a metaphorical "getting away with murder" plot, but with a twist. The plot indicates that protagonist Jasmine's (Cate Blanchett) ex-husband Hal's (Alec Baldwin) Bernie Madoff-esque financial transgressions serve as the film's pivotal crime. Towards the end of the film, though, we learn that Jasmine turns her husband in to the FBI. His eventual suicide, according to this reveal, along with the devastation wreaked on her and her son's lives, weigh on her conscience.

The viewer learns this information from Jasmine's estranged son, who introduces the relevant flashback after defiantly telling her, "I know the whole story; I found it out, so don't act surprised." The flashback reveals the moment when Hal tells Jasmine of his affair, and his plan to leave her. Blanchett performs Jasmine's emotional devastation, while Alec Baldwin's Hal is calm, collected, and direct. He tells her, "Lisette and I are in love," and "I know this comes as a shock but I have to be honest with you." Hal's calm only accentuates Jasmine's state of distress. When she exclaims, "She is a teenager for Christ's sake!" there are echoes of both Mia's and Allen's descriptions of Mia's reaction to learning about Allen's affair with Previn.

Reviews occasionally commented on this evocation. Annise Gross observed:

The scene where she confronts Hal about his affair with au pair, she is portrayed in classic Woody Allen 'hysteria' but really she's only responding naturally to a horrific scenario. My friend Larry pointed out that while watching the scene he couldn't help but wonder if this wasn't more or less the exact exchange between Woody Allen and Mia Farrow when he told her he was leaving her for her daughter.

Similar scenes of betrayal occur across Allen's post-1991 films.⁹ We might think of this moment as a return for Allen; he's covered this territory before. But this portion of the scene is merely prelude. Hal leaves, unwilling to continue interacting with Jasmine during what he characterizes as her "tantrum." Jasmine finds the phone and, wrought with emotion, calls the FBI. The next scene shows Hal being arrested.

We then return to the present, where Jasmine's son, Danny, tells her, "As disillusioned as I was with him, I hated you more." Jasmine, through tears, responds,

⁹ *Deconstructing Harry*, *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, and *Celebrity* (1998) all feature variations on the husband informing an emotionally distraught partner of an affair with a younger woman.

“The moment I did what I did I regretted it.” Her son replies, “You can’t take back that phone call.” The cinema of regret, as Michaels puts it, cannot be mistaken – the twist reveals Jasmine’s responsibility, and its consequences.

As Gross, and others, have observed, an autobiographical reading of the Hal / Jasmine relationship, especially the affair with the teenage *au paire*, invites consideration against the Allen / Mia / Previn triangle. Vincent Brook also makes the case that Allen revisits the “Mia Farrow/Soon Yi Previn scandal of 1992” in direct fashion:

Hal’s high profile scandal itself, which, though of a more serious nature (legally and ethically) than Allen’s affair with, and later marriage to, Soon-Yi (discounting unproven charges of sexual abuse of his adopted daughter Dylan), has clear associations with it. (“Woody’s Revenge”)

Brook proceeds to comment on the parallels between Jasmine’s relationship with her estranged son and Moses Farrow’s public declaration of siding “with Allen on the child molestation charge” (“Woody’s Revenge”).¹⁰ Brook’s insistence upon reading into the autobiographical intersections in Allen’s work helps to analyze the film. However, Brooks choice to “discount” Dylan’s “unproven” allegations prevents a more comprehensive sense of how the film’s plot points intersect with Allen’s biography.

That is, Jasmine’s phone call – and the idea of a phone call that puts catastrophic events in motion, and cannot be taken back – seems to echo descriptions of phone calls (in Mia’s memoir and Marion Meade’s biography of Allen) which Mia made to her lawyer, Dylan Farrow’s pediatrician, and one of Allen’s therapists (Susan Coates) in which she relayed Dylan’s allegation that Allen had touched her inappropriately.

¹⁰ As a child, Moses was critical of Allen during the custody case, though he’s been supportive of Allen recently. He claimed in an interview that Mia “drummed it into me to hate my father for tearing apart the family” (Dennis). Dylan responded by labeling Moses’ words “a betrayal to me and my whole family” (Dennis).

Unlike other aspects of the incest narrative, nobody contests that these phone calls took place, though Allen and his apologists insist that Mia fabricated or somehow implanted Dylan's allegations. However, according to Marion Meade, after Dylan communicated to Mia that Allen touched her "privates" during a visit at Mia's Connecticut home, Mia called Eleanor Alter, the divorce lawyer who would represent Mia in the subsequent custody case. Alter, according to Meade, "advised her to take Dylan to the family pediatrician immediately" (227). Mia did so, and though Dylan did not repeat her abuse allegations at that first visit with her physician, the following day Mia returned to the doctor, who "was able to elicit the story Dylan had told to her mother" (228).

Again, while the phone calls, and the visits, are uncontested, Allen and his lawyers and supporters have consistently suggested that Dylan fabricated her testimony on account of Mia's brainwashing or bullying. But for this close reading of *Blue Jasmine*, the offensive question of whether Mia did or did not "implant" memories is moot. Following the second visit to the pediatrician, he "phoned Mia to say he would be notifying the authorities. *Surprised, she tried to dissuade him, but Dr. Kavirajan had already checked with his lawyers*" (Meade 228, my emphasis). Meade reports that Mia then called Susan Coates, who told Mia she also legally had to contact the authorities in New York City if Dylan's pediatrician was contacting Connecticut authorities, and that she would also contact Allen. Meade reports, "Mia burst into tears. Fearing Woody's anger, she begged Coates not to tell him" (228).

In her memoir, Mia conveys the same information, though she provides dialogue for her conversation with Coates: "'Don't tell him,' I said. 'I'm scared of what he'll do.

Can't you just deal with it? Don't report it to the authorities. That will destroy everything. It's too big. Terrible things are going to happen!" (300). Mia's real-life calls are not conveyed as impulsive, so much as protective, in either her or Meade's telling. (Of course, Meade and Mia proceed from the premise that Dylan told Mia that Allen touched her vagina.) However, Mia, even more than Meade, reveals a sense of foreboding regarding the inevitable consequence of her choices, and, to be sure, a sense of regret – if not remorse, to keep Lloyd Michaels' relevant distinction in mind.¹¹

Blue Jasmine clearly intimates that Jasmine's call does "destroy everything," including any chance that she and Danny might end their estrangement. And yet, while we are not privy to Jasmine's call, at no point does the plot suggest she lies in providing information to the FBI. Allen casts Jasmine's immorality as involving her complicity, and her choice to implicate her husband based on jealousy. Essentially, the film asks us to see Jasmine for what she "truly" is – a hypocrite who brought her downfall on herself. The very same scene provides a strange exoneration of Hal, who is presented as clearly, forthrightly, owning up to an affair. But Hal *is* a criminal. And while Brook contends that Hal's crimes are more serious than Allen's transgressions with Previn, the moral calculus may change if we consider Dylan's sexual abuse allegations.

Again: I do not mean to suggest that *Blue Jasmine* functions as autobiography. However, it engages the question of guilt and consequence in highly specific terms that intersect with a pivotal moment in Allen's life that hinged on someone else's choice. In drilling down into the intersections, we see that if Jasmine is a Mia surrogate, she is one

¹¹ Michaels makes clear that regret "carries with it the inability or the unwillingness" (471) to change one's circumstances, as opposed to remorse, which involves shame and guilt. Michaels aptly notes that remorse "rarely appears" in Allen's films (471).

that Allen reveals not as a liar, but as a hypocrite. This is unexpected. According to his public and courtroom testimony, Allen swore that he never touched Dylan in the fashion alleged in Mia's initial phone-call. He suggested that Mia fabricated Dylan's allegations. Yet as an artist, he writes a story that suggests Jasmine sins by telling the FBI the truth. If we take seriously the notion of Jasmine functioning as a Mia surrogate, and read *Blue Jasmine*'s moral universe onto real life, Allen's complaint with Mia's call to the pediatrician is not that she reports anything untrue, but rather, that the call is motivated by her jealousy regarding Allen's affair with Previn.¹²

Now, I have to emphasize the "if" in the above sentence. I am *not* claiming that Allen molested Dylan, or claiming *Blue Jasmine* as evidence. Instead, I am attempting a reading of *Blue Jasmine* that numerous Allen film scholars attempt with his films, and which Allen himself begs for: an attempt to understand his films in the context of his life and stardom. Glenn reminds us that Allen's fans have difficulty discerning the movie character from the man himself, and while I agree, I also want to foreground that this confusion involves Allen's purposeful crafting of a viewing experience that demands that

¹² To expand slightly, we might consider this scene as "apologia" (i.e., a defense, and not a true apology): even if I did it, Allen intimates, Mia should not have done what she did. Here, it's worth returning to a central piece of information that gets consistently lost in discussions of Dylan's allegations: Allen's problematic behavior with Dylan was confirmed and well documented by Allen's therapists, one of whom he agreed to see *because* he and Mia, then in a committed relationship, agreed that in order for Allen to be a better parent to Dylan he needed to work through his issues with how to provide physical affection to his daughter (Meade 199). This too functions as a parallel with *Blue Jasmine*: Jasmine's failure to arrive at moral outrage regarding Hal's behavior *prior* to her learning of his affair proves her hypocrisy; Mia's failure to arrive at moral outrage regarding Allen's behavior with Dylan prior to her learning of the affair with Previn – despite the fact that her objection was significant enough for Allen to work with a therapist to "modify inappropriate behaviors" (Meade 199) – likewise seems consistent with Allen's casting her as hypocritical for reporting his actions to Dylan's doctor – *even* if he committed said actions.

confusion. Allen's public insistence of his innocence is necessary for reviewers and critics to laud films that consistently reveal "Woody Allen characters" getting away with serious crimes. The disconnect, it seems, always resides in departing from the premise of Allen's innocence, and the choice to ignore Allen's simultaneously disturbing and "playful" suggestion that, perhaps, he isn't.

Ronan and *You Will Meet A Tall Dark Stranger*

If the above reading of *Blue Jasmine* may seem too speculative, consider that the film fits within a broader pattern of Allen referring to very specific and personal aspects of his (public) biographical record. Family – its authenticity, legal status, and validation via the legal system – comes up repeatedly. In *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* (2010), it emerges with a very particular Allen/Farrow family resonance.

In *YWMATDS*, Allen sets up a familiar tableau: Alfie, an older man (Anthony Hopkins) has left his wife for a younger woman, Charmaine, who is also a prostitute (Lucy Punch). However, infidelity, so often presented in Allen films as the older man's failing, is re-worked. After a failed attempt to reconcile with his ex-wife, Alfie returns home and finds his younger wife having sex with her trainer. Alfie accosts the trainer, but is soundly beaten. Later, tending to his wounds, Charmaine tries to placate Alfie by telling him she's pregnant. His response is, "How can I be sure it's mine?"

The scene plays out: Hopkins reveals Alfie's humiliation, anger, and defiance, but also his desire for a son, even if the son might not be biologically his. Charmaine moves from blatant denial of her affairs to matter-of-fact assertion of Alfie's uncontested paternity – as long as *he* chooses not to contest it:

C: What's the difference? You always wanted a kid.

A: I want a son. My last son. My last little boy. I want it to be my son.
You understand?

C: Who's going to know?

A: I'll know. If it's a boy. And if I decide to have it tested.

The audience never learns if it is or is not a boy, nor whether Alfie has the baby tested.

The scene ends hanging on Alfie's "if's."

Alongside betrayal, the scene promises some measure of hope: Alfie's humiliation, which drives his early anger, gives way to his contemplation of becoming a father, albeit to a possibly non-consanguineous son. And Alfie's humiliation, as a plot point, occurs after he has left his wife of many years; Charmaine's infidelity is played, at some level, as Alfie's earned comeuppance. But the scene also reminds the viewer of the rumor that has surrounded Allen's relationship with Ronan (born Satchel) Farrow for years. And while Ronan Farrow's paternity might be considered independent, as family drama, of the question of Allen's behavior with Dylan or Previn, it actually emerges consistently in media depictions of the incest narrative.

The Maureen Orth article that, in 2013, re-surfaced the Dylan allegations and in fact quoted Dylan as an adult for the first time, was initially reported as click-bait not for Dylan's allegations, but rather for Farrow's insinuation that Ronan was "possibly" Frank Sinatra's child. These rumors were anything but new. In Meade's 2000 biography of Allen, she documents how Mia omitted Allen's name on Satchel's birth certificate (184), and how Allen "jokingly" referred to him as a "little bastard" (190). Most recently, after Dylan published her letter in the *New York Times*, Allen's response pointedly drew attention to Mia's suggestion that Allen might not be Ronan's father. Regarding child support, Allen wrote, "Is he my son or, as Mia suggests, Frank Sinatra's?... Was I

supporting Frank's son? Again, I want to call attention to the integrity and honesty of a person who conducts her life like that" ("Woody Allen Speaks Out").

Indeed, the fact that Allen uses Mia's allusion to her own infidelity as evidence for her untrustworthiness, and thus the grounds for dismissal of Dylan's claims (which, in Allen's logic, were implanted by Mia), ties Ronan's contested parentage into the incest narrative. But again, if we consider the scene in *YWMATDS*, Alfie's agreement with Charmaine hinges on the notion that if he accepts the child as his own, nobody would contest it. When Allen challenges the "integrity and honesty" of Mia in suggesting Sinatra is Ronan's father, it seems unclear whether the betrayal involves the sexual affair with Sinatra, or its public disclosure. *YMATDS* hints at the possibility of Alfie and Charmaine arriving at a sort of arrangement. Meade's biography indicates Allen may have suspected someone else's paternity since Satchel/Ronan was an infant.

These scenes, it should be noted, mine the emotional journey of the "Mia" surrogates with some care. But I emphasize "some." Alfie's mere contemplation of being a father to Charmaine's child augments the audience's regard for his character. Charmaine's dismissive assertion regarding true paternity ("what's the difference?"), in contrast, paints her as anything but sympathetic. She is also a former prostitute, and Allen's consistent commitment to filling his films with prostitutes remains a repetitive, unimaginative crutch for engagement with female sexuality. But Allen at least attempts to build a believable character. This may seem like faint praise, but consider the treatment Allen reserves for Elliott Wilk, the deceased family court judge that serves as an unmistakable inspiration for *Irrational Man*, a murder fantasy masquerading as cinema.

Irrational Reading of a Custody Case Conversation

Elliott Wilk presided over the custody case that Allen brought against Mia for sole custody of their adopted children Moses, Satchel (now Ronan), and Dylan. His decision not only denied Allen custody, but undercut the Child Sexual Abuse Clinic at Yale New Haven's findings regarding Dylan's allegations of abuse, as Yale-New Haven suggested that Dylan's claims were fantasy.¹³ Wilk wrote, in his opinion, "Unlike Yale-New Haven, I am not persuaded that the videotape of Dylan is the product of leading questions or of the child's fantasy" (Farrow 362). By the time *Irrational Man* (2015) hit theaters, Wilk had been dead for over a decade.

In *Irrational Man*, the plot revolves around philosophy professor Abe Lucas (Joaquin Phoenix) murdering a family court judge after overhearing a conversation at a diner. Lucas hears a woman accuse the judge of denying her custody of her children due to the judge being "cozy" with her ex-husband's attorney. Joan Ullman, writing for *Psychology Today*, connected Allen's autobiography to the plot, noting that because Wilk "sided with Mia in almost every particular," Allen had "every motive to wish any biased family court judge – real, or fictional – dead." While Ullman found Allen's use of the autobiographical material justified, and entertaining, other critics found it disturbing. As reporter Kate Aurthur put it, in a conversation with Allison Willmore, "it's a shocking autobiographical reference on Allen's part. Is there a term for an inside joke...when it's something about that time you were accused of incestuous pedophilia?"

The plot point may register as shocking because reviews and scholarship have, for more than a decade, taken pains not to engage the number of inside jokes Allen has included about the time he was accused of incestuous pedophilia, such as in

¹³ Maureen Orth describes some of the issues with the Yale-New Haven report (some of which Wilk alludes to in his decision) in her 2013 article, "Momma Mia!"

Deconstructing Harry and *Blue Jasmine*. *Irrational Man*'s specificity, though, stands out: Lucas poisons Judge Thomas Augustus Spangler when he sits down on a bench at a park after his morning jog. Meade's biography of Allen refers to Wilk as "the jogging jurist." The unexpected nature of the relatively young Spangler's death at 61 factors into suspicion that he was murdered. Wilk died at 60 from cancer (Martin). The mother, in the diner, says of Spangler, "I hope the judge gets cancer." Allen returns to the specifics of the incest narrative, but with even more precision here. Taken as a body of work, we might think about Aurthur's sense of "inside jokes," and consider the observation alongside a feature of film fandom dating back to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

The presence of actual "Easter eggs," discernible in various scenes in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, accounts for the name of particular details purposely placed in films to reward attentive viewers. Because these references are immaterial to the plot, they demand no exposition, and neither disturb nor complicate the viewing experience for the broader audience. However, for the discerning viewer, Easter eggs can augment the viewing experience, providing, in many cases, a sense of being in on something inaccessible to other, less informed viewers. *Deconstructing Harry*, *YWMATDS*, *Blue Jasmine* and *Irrational Man* all contain incest Easter eggs. Now, Allen himself has contradicted this premise, stating that "People are always making these crazy parallels between my life and my films" (Girgus 149). But we cannot take Allen at face value in making this claim. The specificity of these intersections – these "crazy parallels," as he puts it – defy categorization as mere creative coincidence.

Allen, essentially, hides these Easter eggs in plain sight, and his assertion that they are *not* there provides the cover for him to incorporate such blatant references. The

notion that these choices are mere coincidence begs disbelief; not merely because of their specificity, but because ignoring them also requires diminishing Allen's intelligence and artistry. Of course, only via ignoring them can we consider Allen "moral," in that the alternative would be to recognize that Allen recognizes that his art trades on incest narratives packaged for misogynistic consumption. The alternative would also force audiences to honestly reckon with how his films consistently suggest the plausibility of the incest allegations in terms of the moral quandaries and ambivalences of the various Allen / Farrow surrogates.¹⁴ Even when scholars assert amoral or nihilistic structures in *Deconstructing Harry*, for instance, these studies depart from an assumption that Allen, as artist, *must* depart from a functioning moral compass to render his view of nihilism or amorality, a preconception that requires a blindness to how the amoral logic of Allen's films extends to excusing, justifying, or defiantly accommodating abusive, even monstrous, adult male behavior. Yet, through Max Pinkus, Allen depicts monstrosity as paradox; unthreatening, familiar, and familial; revealing Allen's awareness of how these dynamics function, and how his own persona functions as a shield against allegations.

¹⁴ At this point, very few scholars and film critics take Allen at face value when he, on occasion, denies any autobiographical element to his films. However, his assertion that these are "crazy parallels" provides cover for the scholarship departing from the premise of Allen's innocence. It seems to me that the most plausible account of Allen's choice in characterizing these films as non-autobiographical is that he is lying. That is to say, Allen clearly understands the parallels that his interviewers allude to, but he refutes them with such dismissive assertion – with such force of will – as to shift the conversation entirely on his terms away from these clear parallels. Put differently, the precondition for engaging Allen in a conversation about his films seems to be agreeing to believe him. Asserting that Allen's films have *any* autobiographical content emerges as sufficiently oppositional in this construct (i.e., the "call me crazy but I think this has to do with Previn" departure point masquerades as challenging Allen, but actually abides by his insistence to not mention the Dylan content). Allen has shifted the Overton window so far as to mask a blatantly obvious assertion into scholarly "claim."

So if we concede that Allen consciously incorporates these moments into his films, we must also acknowledge that he trades on his autobiographical incest narrative. On the one hand, this makes sense; the material is compelling, if disturbing, and provides a window into his thinking on allegations about which he is often far more circumspect in discussing in interviews. But it does seem odd, given the extent to which Allen scholars go out of their way to avoid engagement with the incest narratives, ostensibly premised on a notion that it is either lurid, or libelous, that Allen returns to it and again. It may make Allen a more compelling artist, but it also reaffirms what incest scholars like Gillian Harkins have argued persuasively: incest narratives attract mass consumption.

Scholarly assessment of the incest media boom of the 1990s notes that the increase involved the advent of female authored (and broadly, female consumed) incest narratives during that decade. Harkins notes, “Once the publishing industry grasped the possibilities of this new market, more and more women were empowered to speak out and contradict the masculinist silencing of incest in print” (3). Harkins’ analysis examines how many of these texts simultaneously reified and resisted, in subtle ways, patriarchal neoliberal logics regarding sex and family. But Harkins makes an important distinction between types of sexual abuse narratives – she notes that incest narratives were largely consumed during the 1990s, while pedophilia narratives were often litigated. Allen’s narrative, as established in the previous chapter, simultaneously linked and unlinked incest and pedophilia in its telling; the family structure was constantly being qualified as not *truly* a family. Previn’s age was constantly confused, deliberately or subconsciously, with Dylan’s age. Race also played a role in affecting the extent to which Previn was depicted as capable of having ever had a “childhood.”

Thinking about Allen as an author of incest narratives forces us to consider, first, the subjectivity of his films and, second, the amount of Dylan references within his work. He purposefully returns to those autobiographical intersections that evoke Dylan, and time and again engages the trope of a protagonist getting away with crime. We might also think of the particular scenes he revisits time and again, such as the betrayal scene. In *Deconstructing Harry*, Kirstie Alley plays the role of the scorned adult lover, who yells and screams at Allen's Block. In *Blue Jasmine*, Alec Baldwin dismisses Cate Blanchett's emotional response as a "tantrum."

The betrayal scene – the trope of the "woman scorned" – is worth considering as part of a broader incest trope. While Harkins focuses on female authored texts that "contradict...masculinist silencing," (3), Allen's films give voice to "hysterical" women. This may reveal a particularity of how masculinist incest narratives play to their audiences: incest needs to have consequence. It just doesn't have to be a big consequence. Being yelled at, in Allen's films, generally suffices. For fragile masculinities, being yelled at may seem authentically terrorizing.

Consider Jim Trueblood's role in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Trueblood does not merely tell the unbelievable story of his having supposedly unintentional sex with his daughter Matty Lou, he also tells the story of how his wife Kate accosts him with an axe afterwards. The consumable aspect of Trueblood's incest story, in order to successfully appeal to his white audience in order to secure their financial donations, requires a particular framing. First, he has to successfully convince his audience that having sex with his daughter was an accident, and second, he has to reveal that his wife was severely angry with him afterwards. The Trueblood incest narrative has a built-in excuse (I didn't

mean to do the thing you're paying me to tell you about), and a built-in point of sympathetic engagement (my wife was unreasonably angry with me when she saw what I "accidentally" did; your wife probably would have been too).

We might consider Allen's storytelling as akin to Trueblood's. Not only does he repeatedly revisit the scene of betrayal, he also consistently denies agency. He does this by referring to the autobiographical content of his films as "crazy parallels" – with Allen, it is not the sex that is accidental, but the autobiographical intersections that are. He insists we suspend disbelief. But his manner of appealing to a predominantly masculinist audience's vicarious interest in incest is familiar: he just replaces Kate's axe with Kirstie Alley's (and others') traumatized, furious, screams.¹⁵

Café Black Guys Playing Jazz and Jewish Guy Being Exotic

In closing this chapter, and setting up the subsequent discussion of Henry Roth, I want to discuss a meaningful moment in Allen's recent film *Café Society*, one of Allen's period pieces. Set in New York City and Los Angeles in the 1930s, its protagonist, Bobby Dorfman (Jessie Eisenberg), falls in love with a young woman also romantically involved with his uncle. Bobby confides his continued feelings for Vonnie (Kristen Stewart) to her even after she and his uncle Phil (Steve Carell) wed, calling her "Aunt Vonnie." But the scene I want to focus on occurs with Bobby's eventual wife, Veronica, played by Blake Lively, when they go to a jazz club on the evening (or, early morning) they meet.

¹⁵ There is some irony in the fact that Allen's films appear to provide these female Mia surrogates with speech, despite the fact that Allen writes the lines. Hortense Spillers notes a similar parallel in terms of male authorship of an incest narrative when she observes that "For all intents and purposes, the wife/mother Kate and the daughter/surrogate lover Matty Lou are deprived of speech, since what they say and did and when are reported/translated through the medium of Trueblood" (235).

The scene has no overtones of incest. But it features an explicit and fascinating discussion about antisemitic stereotypes, layered onto conversation rife with sexual tension. The topic of their conversation, in essence, is Bobby's exotic sexual appeal.

The scene begins with the camera panning across a small nightclub before focusing in on Bobby and Veronica, as the band plays Ralph Rainger's composition "June in January." With the possible but unlikely exception of the light-skinned standing bass player, everyone in the club is black. As Bobby and Veronica flirt, eventually she shares her political philosophy, saying, "I hope you don't mind a Democratic liberal." Bobby explains his family is Jewish, and Veronica teases him, "how quaint," before sharing (and flirting) about antisemitism growing up in Oklahoma:

V: Plays right into my rebellious streak! You know, in Oklahoma, we weren't even allowed to mingle with Jews growing up!

B: Really?

V: Yeah, you guys are money lenders!

B: No, we control everything, actually.

V: I didn't even see a Jew until I moved to New York.

B: No horns, so.

V: I find Jews exotic, mysterious. I wouldn't mind if you had horns.

B: You wouldn't?

V: No.

B: OK, come on, let's go.

V: What?

B: We'll go to my place. (*Café Society*)

Veronica refuses to sleep with him that night, but replies by combining antisemitic stereotype with flirtatious banter, "It's true what they say, you people are pushy!"

Eisenberg plays Bobby's emotional response to Veronica with nuance. His jokes draw attention to the absurdity of Veronica's comments, but also cut the tension regarding her immense familiarity – he seems, between jokes, to sip his drink and arch his eyebrows in



Figure 5.1: Screenshot, Bobby and Veronica at the jazz club, *Café Society* (Directed by Woody Allen) (used under Fair Use)

ways that suggest annoyance and amusement with her flirtatious othering. But the scene explicitly connects sexual attraction with Jewish exoticism drawn from specific antisemitic stereotypes. It's Veronica's vocalized exoticizing of Jews ("I wouldn't mind if you had horns") that directly spurs Bobby to proposition her.

That line, in particular, hits at a theme of how Allen presents Jewish masculinity throughout his films. Jewish masculine potency as derived from its historically marginalized status serves as a challenge to, and not an affirmation of, Bobby's individual sexuality. For Veronica, Bobby's attractiveness may center his Jewishness above his other human qualities. Furthermore, while Veronica explicitly references the Jew's horns, she may also allude to cuckoldry (i.e., the cuckold's horns) – a theme that Allen explores, as discussed earlier, in *YWMATDS*.¹⁶ Her othering of Bobby

¹⁶ Though I have not found many sources suggesting a direct linkage between these two types of imaginary horns, Louise Mirrer considers the likelihood that these stereotypes overlapped meaningfully in Medieval societies, as Jewish men were associated with

simultaneously hyper-sexualizes him and emasculates him; he becomes her object.

Propositioning her directly after her “horns” statement facilitates Bobby confirming some of her flirtatious insinuations as to his sexuality, while refuting others.

But the setting of this scene speaks to an even broader set of contradictions for which Allen’s films have received significant, and important, criticism: Veronica sexualizes Bobby in a jazz club with a black band and black audience members surrounding them. Bobby brings them to the club after Veronica confirms her love for jazz, and the jazz facilitates their sexual banter. Ralph Rainger, the composer of the song, it bears mention, was Jewish and not black. Allen’s films, so many of which are set in New York City, have consistently eschewed depicting the city’s vast nonwhite population. Spike Lee, most notably, stated in an interview in 1987, “Woody Allen, he can do a film about Manhattan – it’s about one-half black and Hispanic – and he doesn’t have a single black person in the film” (Mieher). In *Café Society*, Allen films black jazz musicians and customers, but they sit there silently as a non-Jewish white woman finds the ability to voice her sexual expression through black music. The fact that the song in question is composed by a Jewish musician seems to function as a preemptive rejoinder, reminding us (as Jonathan Freedman argues in *Klezmer America*) that any art-form cannot be simplistically essentialized as “black.”

Set in the 1930s, the sense of foreboding, in Veronica’s antisemitic flirtation, cannot be dismissed. In that sense, the scene echoes aspects of Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America*. Both Roth’s novel and Allen’s film engage, though very briefly and

homosexuality and effeminate characteristics, traits that also emerge in conceptions of “cuckolds” horns overlapped, in its signifying othering, with the feminizing associations of the cuckold’s horns (74). Richard Halpern also makes the connection in his close reading of *Ulysses* in *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (170).

ambivalently, the problem of contextualizing antisemitism alongside American racism. African Americans play a very small role in *The Plot Against America*, but for a thought-provoking, discomfiting scene in which Walter Winchell, the Jewish anti-fascist presidential candidate, attempts to rouse audiences with his pro-democracy, anti-Lindbergh rhetoric. On September 8, 1942, Winchell campaigns across New York City, with varying success, and finally arrives in Harlem,

...where, in the crowd of several hundred Negroes who gathered at dusk to hear him speak at the corner of Lenox Avenue and 125th Street, a few laughed and a handful applauded but most remained respectfully dissatisfied, as though to work his way into their antipathies would require his delivering a very different spiel. (Roth, *Plot* 338)

The crowd is relatively unmoved, and the narrator seems at ease with this. While American Jews of European descent pursued the promise of democracy with earnest, due to their legal whiteness, Roth considers that appealing to these ideals might leave black citizens “respectfully dissatisfied.” The Harlem crowd’s reaction to Winchell’s speech implies skepticism regarding his attention to their oppression. We might, as readers, be somewhat skeptical of whether black voters in Harlem would have been so indifferent to Winchell’s appeal (black voters distinguishing amongst politicians with varying degrees of insincerity and fascistic intent was nothing new in the 1930s). But Roth, to his credit, seems to be trying to wrestle with the very presuppositions of his historical novel, which departs from the premise that the absence of Roosevelt in the presidential race clears the way for fascism. But this type of historical fiction obscures Jim Crow (among other systems of distinctly American fascist oppression) to achieve this contrast.

Read sympathetically, Roth’s novel acknowledges, albeit briefly, the irony of a Jewish American candidate failing to rouse moral indignation from an American

population whose rights had never been fully granted. *Café Society* seems more cynical. Black extras sit in the club, play music, and provide “atmosphere” to accentuate Bobby’s catch-22: his “seduction” of Veronica has less to do with Bobby as a person than it does his membership in an exoticized group. And while Bobby struggles with whether the beautiful woman flirting with him will acknowledge his humanity, his citizenship rights are far more assured and protected than his fellow club-goers. But in focusing solely on Bobby’s experience, Allen does not address the irony of Bobby’s masculine insecurities being exposed while sitting among black extras and performers who have no dialogue, muted such that they cannot even be “respectfully dissatisfied.” For Allen, these black faces serve merely as backdrop, augmenting the “authenticity” of the jazz club scene in which Jewish male sexual insecurity can be explored.

In book-ending this chapter with close readings of scenes in Allen’s films that deal directly with Jewishness and sexuality, I concede that the content of *Blue Jasmine*, the paternity scene with Alfie and Charmaine in *YWMATDS*, and the murder of the family court judge in *Irrational Man*, do not actively engage questions of Jewishness or Jewish-identified characters. It may be that by de-racinating the characters, and content, in *Blue Jasmine*, *YWMATDS*, and *Irrational Man*, Allen can more comfortably engage with his personal incest narrative. But even in this deracinated form, the intersections are so particular as to demand that we consider Allen’s incorporation of these moments as deliberate engagements with a narrative he struggled to control in the early 1990s. As a writer and director, he tells his own story, and the ethno-racial significance of Jewish male sexuality demands, for Allen, that it be foregrounded in a New York City that never accurately reflects the city’s demographic realities. That loose framing, that sense of what

moves, as Toni Morrison puts it, at the margins, sets up my final case study, of Henry Roth's *Mercy of a Rude Stream*.

CHAPTER 6

“TILL A *KHUSIN* COMES ALONG”

Cousins, American Africanism, and Rape in Henry Roth’s *Mercy of a Rude Stream*

For a project eponymously engaged with incest narratives, this chapter takes a slightly counterintuitive approach: when a text gains notoriety for its provocative, explicit engagement with an autobiographical incest narrative, what might that celebration obscure? In Henry Roth’s mid-1990s autobiographical novel, *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, the protagonist reveals a sexual relationship with his sister, a component of the plot that has generated significant critical and scholarly commentary. This chapter explores two heretofore less examined facets of the text: the protagonist’s sexual relationship with his first cousin, and the structural role played by hypersexual black characters. I argue that approximately lateral sibling incest taboo functions as a sensationalistic magnet deflecting attention from the novel’s depiction of more deeply felt Jewish taboos: pedophilia and antiblack racism.¹ Put differently, while everyone agrees that sibling incest is bad, perhaps it’s less taboo than white Jewish complicity or investment in white supremacy, or the prospect of a Jewish teenager raping his eleven-year-old first cousin.

I examine these themes via close reading Henry Roth’s autobiographical second novel, *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, along with its manuscripts, and spotlighting the editing process, overseen by editor Robert Weil, that substantially altered Roth’s original text. By considering why a publishing house removed Roth’s racist language for describing

¹ “Hebephilia” is a term sometimes used to refer more specifically to sexual fascination with early adolescents (typically, 11 to 14 years old). I utilize the term “pedophilia” throughout this chapter because in the context of sexual stereotype and sexual antisemitism, Roth was never at risk of being labeled a “hebephile” by antisemites. They would, presumably, prefer to use the more evocative, well-known term, “pedophile.”

black characters, and changed the age of a character the novel's protagonist repeatedly rapes, I demonstrate how the novel abided by the logics of Jewish community protective politics. In presenting long-anticipated new work by an iconic Jewish artist, Roth's publishing house permitted graphic renderings of sibling incest, and pronounced homophobia, yet precluded Roth's depiction of pedophilia and the protagonist's explicit racism, subjects thereby revealed as better fitting the definition of "taboo."

Though Henry Roth was best known as the author of *Call It Sleep* (1934), widely considered a classic of modernist immigrant American literature, his second novel, *Mercy of a Rude Stream* (*MORS*), garnered significant attention for its depiction of an autobiographical protagonist's sexual relationship with his sister. *MORS* was published in four volumes from 1994 to 1998 (the final two volumes released after Roth's death), and follows the story of Ira Stigman, Roth's autobiographical surrogate. The main narrative begins with Ira as an eight-year-old, and follows him through his twenties, when he wrote a novel that would bring him great acclaim. A secondary narrative finds the elderly Ira commenting on his long-lost youth, the writing process, and his late-in-life perspective on the world: his heartfelt idealization of his wife M; his identification with Israel; his rejection of James Joyce as a literary forebear; his rightward political trajectory; his ambivalence about his first novel; and his declining physical health. Roth conducts this largely in third person, but occasional moments of first person narration survive into the final publication. Roth also employs a third narrative voice, a character named "Ecclesias," the post-modern, disembodied voice of Roth's computer's word processing program. Ecclesias exists as a sort of alter-ego, or literary conscience, serving as interlocutor, and therapist, for the elderly, often obstinate Ira character.

A four-volume epic originally designed with a six-volume arc, the plot features multiple components. I propose a reading of the published novel as structured intently around Ira's sexual trauma and his subsequent struggle to come to terms with his incestuous relationship with his sister, cease the serial raping of his cousin, and (ironically) establish the conditions for his authoring the novel he distances himself from in the secondary narrative. A summary of specific, pertinent plot points frames this close reading: volume one finds Ira being molested by adults on two occasions; once in Ft. Tryon park by a stranger named "Mr. Joe," and later by his Spanish teacher, Mr. Lennard. Mr. Joe gropes Ira's buttocks while masturbating, while Mr. Lennard simultaneously masturbates himself and Ira. Volume two reveals the presence of Ira's sister Minnie, named "Ruthie" in drafts, a name ultimately changed because it was too similar to Roth's actual sister's name (Rose). Minnie is revealed mid-way through volume two, and the revelation ostensibly accounts for the elderly Ira's frequently stated anxiety about content he had thus far omitted from the narrative. Volume two also depicts Ira's sexual relationship with his fourteen-year-old cousin Stella, though unlike with Minnie, Roth graphically portrays their initial sexual encounter. Volume three, largely due to Roth's sister Rose Broder's legal challenge, features no sexual contact with Minnie, but follows Ira's continued sexual relationship with Stella, his friendships with Lester Gordon and Edith Welles, and his intellectual awakening.² In volume four Ira finally moves out of his parents' apartment in Harlem and moves in with Edith, now his lover.

² Steven Kellman's biography of Roth, *Redemption*, features a fairly comprehensive examination of the interactions between Rose Broder and Roth after he told her he wrote about their sexual relationship in *MORS*. Broder was so hurt and angry about this revelation that she threatened a lawsuit if Roth did not remove all subsequent depictions

Before delving further into *MORS*, I should provide background on Roth's first novel. *Call It Sleep* (1934) cemented Roth as an iconic, almost mythical figure in American Jewish literature, and *MORS* deals extensively with Ira's psychological navigation of having written a celebrated novel that he artistically disowns. Both novels are inextricably linked. As Rachel Rubinstein observes of *MORS*,

Call It Sleep haunts both the narrative and the metanarrative: Stigman explicitly refers to the traumatic effect of the writing of the novel during his metanarrative, and the narrative itself is rife with quotes and references to *Call It Sleep*, as scenes, images, and phrases are reproduced, and often implicitly explained, in the sections that recount Ira's childhood and young adulthood. (143)

As Rubinstein makes clear, the novels overlap extensively, and both feature a child protagonist, though Ira Stigman eventually grows older than David Schearl does. But while *Call It Sleep* was largely well received upon its publication (Kellman indicates most reviews were highly favorable), Roth was devastated by a review in a Communist journal (*The New Masses*) he took to be negative (Kellman 132, 134).³ In 1960, Harold Ribalow bought the rights to the novel and arranged for its first reprinting (Kellman 220). Four years later, Irving Howe reviewed *CIS* in *The New York Times Book Review* and the paperback edition became one of the year's best-sellers, going through six printings in five weeks (Kellman 226). Even then, though, Roth felt alienated by his first novel, referring to it as a text that felt like it was written by someone else (Kellman 233). Since

of Minnie and Ira having sex. Alan Gibbs' *Henry Roth's Semi-Autobiographical Tetralogy* Mercy of a Rude Stream considers the artistic ramifications of those revisions.

³ Josh Lambert's *Unclean Lips* notes how *CIS*'s obscenity, in the context of legal uncertainty regarding censorship laws of the era, put the novel in a "literary-historical limbo" that may well have affected the book's early sales (though reviews were favorable enough for him to get an advance for a second book) (88).

the publication of *MORS*, scholars tend to accept the premise that Roth's shame regarding incest largely accounted for the period of relative literary silence.

While both novels are autobiographically influenced, *Mercy of a Rude Stream* sits precariously on the precipice of novel and memoir. Volume one featured photographs of Roth as an adult and a child on its back cover, and its front and back endsheets feature a posed family picture from his youth. The Library of Congress categorization on the title page marks it as fiction, but the book's design creates ambiguity. Close examination of Roth's manuscripts and drafts, as well as his previously published materials, reveal how much Roth's creative process blurred the lines between fiction and memoir. A *MORS* character strikingly similar to Larry Gordon, based on Roth's real-life friend Lester Winter, appears with the name Lester Winter in a story called "Itinerant Ithacan," published in 1984. The same story also features a character named Eda Lou, who would be called Edith in *MORS*. But only in *MORS*, with the legal advice of his editors, does Roth change the name of his real-life friend and mentor Eda Lou Walton to "Edith Welles." The overwhelming autobiographical content motivated Hannah Wirth-Nesher to refer to *MORS* as a meta-memoir. For Wirth-Nesher, Roth's approach to carving out space between autobiography and fiction involved the challenges of writing about a life that was a subject of public fascination, and dealing with his unavoidable status as a supposedly representative Jewish-American writer. By writing a meta-memoir, Roth provides a "self-reflexive" response "to public discussion of...[his] career" (260).

While Wirth-Nesher's analysis creates a vocabulary for considering Roth's navigation of fact and fiction, I consider Roth's choices alongside those of his editors, who I argue fundamentally transform Roth's text. Alan Gibbs takes a similar approach

regarding the impact of Roth's editors on the characterization of Ira's sister. However, I am less interested in the revisions' impact on the quality of the text than I am in their political ramifications. In a text dedicated to the disclosure of a supposedly unspeakable sexual taboo, why was some content beyond the pale of representation, especially during the 1990s, an era during which sexually explicit discourse became more mainstream?

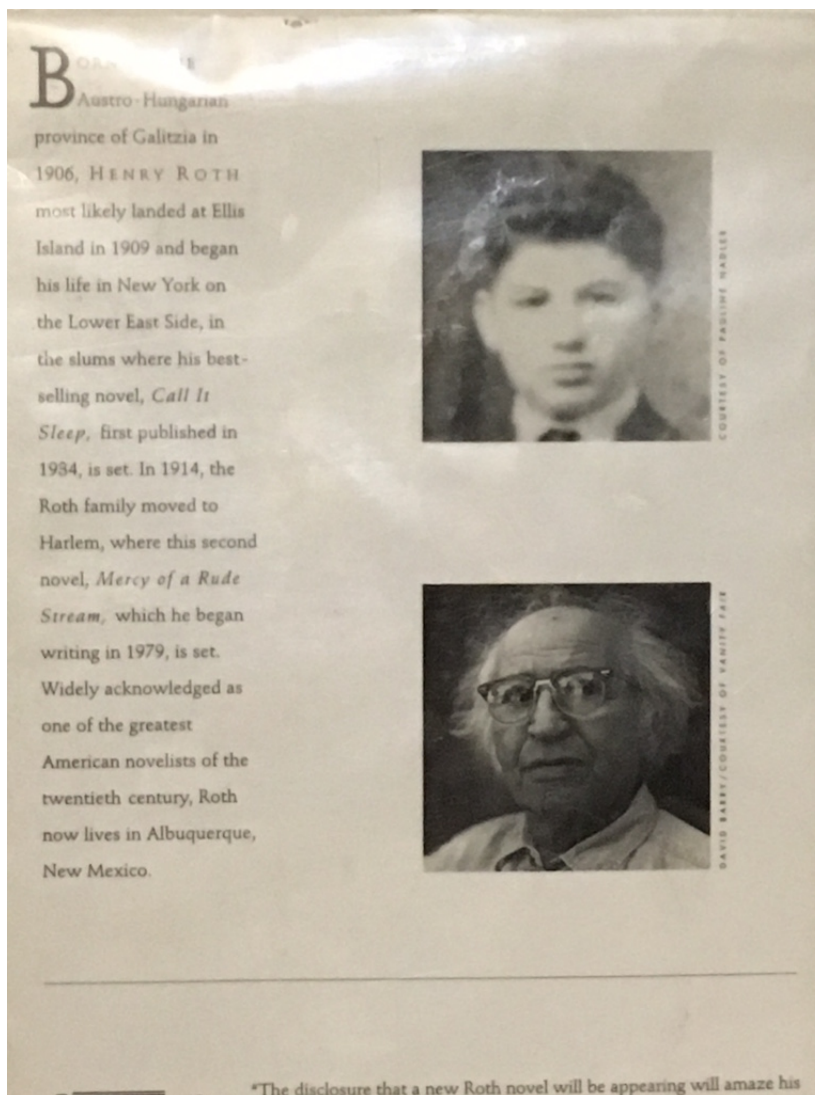


Figure 6.1: Roth as a boy and Roth as an old man, *Mercy of a Rude Stream* (volume one book jacket, picture from author's personal collection)

In focusing on the sibling incest content in the novel, Roth scholars have tended to leave the first-cousin sexual relations – the close endogamy – less examined. I contend that the fixation on sibling incest has actually obscured the novel’s portrayal of close endogamy, a phenomenon that was very common through to the early twentieth century, and not just in Jewish communities, but across a range of ethno-racial groups. Unlike sibling incest, first- and second-cousin marriage is identifiably extant in many family genealogies, Jewish or otherwise. Also not uncommon are ancestors who married at young ages. *MORS* allows for a consideration of consent, rape laws, ethics of representation of rape, and cousin relations, topics that may be more uncomfortable than easily condemned sibling incest. Sibling incest may also provide scholars a more comfortable premise for Roth’s long literary “silence.” Suggesting that Roth waited half a century to write his second opus to process his shame at consensual incest makes for a more comforting account than suggesting that even with decades to reflect, Roth never truly processed the implications of his repeated rapes of an eleven- or twelve-year-old first cousin for whom, in his editor’s estimation, he felt no respect (Gibb 2002 157).

The Significance of Two Years

Unlike Ira’s sister Minnie, who shockingly appears mid-narrative in volume two, Stella, Ira’s first cousin, shows up early in the first volume of *MORS* as a little girl. In a scene following Ira’s Bar Mitzvah, Ira briefly introduces the various members of his extended family, and then describes Stella as she leans out a window:

...Mamie was admonishing her seven-year-old daughter, Stella, not to lean out so far, and Ira, stealing glances at his cousin’s plump legs, slumped further down in his chair so that he could see up further, and fantasizing with fierce intensity that Stella was older. (1 162)

The scene is set in “the early summer of 1919” (1 161), as Ira’s family welcomes his uncle Moe back from WWI. With Ira just having had his Bar Mitzvah, we know that Ira was thirteen, and can calculate that Stella was born in either 1912 or 1913.

This six-year age difference shifts in volume two. In conversation with his friend Larry, Ira refers to “a cousin who’s nearly fourteen years old. Stella” (2 194). Stella’s next appearance, and the first episode in which she and Ira interact, finds Ira meeting her at a family *bris*, where he either seduces her, coerces her, or rapes her. What you call it depends on a number of factors, including legalities (and the temporality of those laws), and how to assess sexual consent for an act conveyed by the narrator/rapist. But before arriving at a close reading of that scene, consider the sentences that precede the sex act. Upon seeing her at the *bris*, Ira thinks to himself: “Stella. For Chrissake. How old was she? Fourteen? Was he crazy or was he right?” (2 282).

Note the attention that Roth has already devoted to establishing Stella’s age. She is seven when she first appears in volume one, and even at thirteen, Ira’s gaze already features a lustful quality, and he wishes that the seven-year-old Stella were older. In volume two, she goes from “nearly fourteen” to “fourteen?” – a distinction significant in terms of highlighting Ira’s uncertainty, but also historical consent laws.

Despite the question mark, Roth documents his timeline with relative precision when it comes to Stella: “The year 1924 waned into the Christmas holidays. In the Farb family a *bris* was to be celebrated on a Sunday during the Christmas holidays” (2 278). Ira, born in 1906 (like Roth), having been bar mitzvah in 1919, would be approximately 18 during this scene. This means a six-year age difference has collapsed into a four year one. Ira’s wish, “that Stella was older,” (1 162) has been granted.

Drafts for volume two reveal the precise moment this revision occurs on paper. The copy-edited version features strikethroughs over the word “twelve” whenever Ira speculates as to Stella’s age, with the word “fourteen” written in its place (Roth Collection, box 7, folder 49, 299/305):

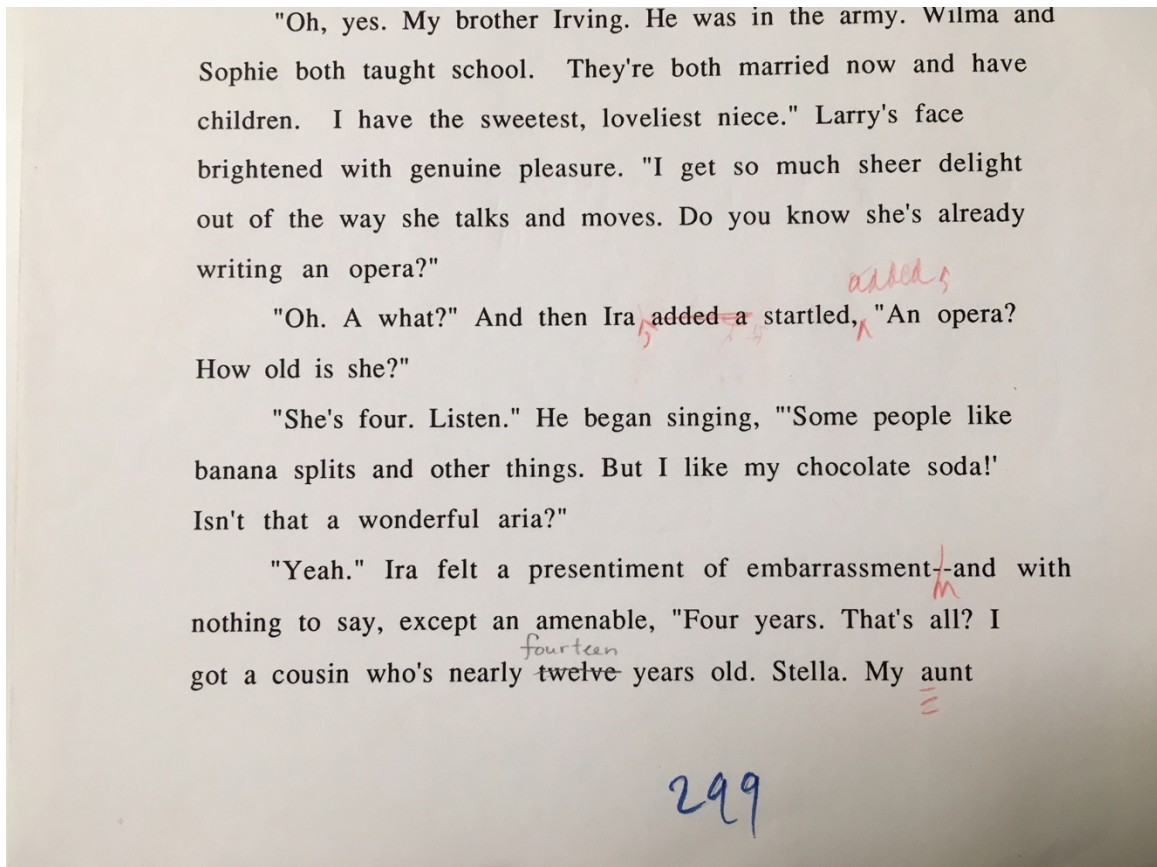


Figure 6.2: The first instance of Stella’s age being changed in the manuscript for *MORS* volume two (*MORS*, Volume II: (copy- edited version), p. 299/305, [1994]; Henry Roth Collection; P-694; box 7; folder 49; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.)

This revision not only changes our reading of the novel, it also calls into question Roth’s documented history and biography. Kellman states in his biography that at another cousin’s *bris*, Roth “led his fourteen-year-old first cousin, Sylvia Kessler, downstairs into a freshly cemented basement and seduced her” (68). We can presume that Kellman is writing about the act that served as source material for the scene in Roth’s

autobiographical fiction, but additional documents suggest that Sylvia Kessler, like Stella in the original drafts, was either eleven or twelve years old at the time of this *bris*. Gibbs consults records from the 1920 US census, which reveal that Sylvia would have been eleven at the time of the 1924 *bris*; consistent with Ira's uncertainty as to whether Stella was indeed twelve in the original drafts (2008 19). Further, in January, 1971, Roth's sister wrote him about the death of their cousin, Sylvia Ackerman (Kessler's married name). Lamenting that she "never made it to her 58th birthday," Broder's letter implies that Ackerman was born after January, 1913 (Roth Papers, Box 1, Folder 19). This also indicates that Sylvia Kessler was eleven years old at the *bris*.

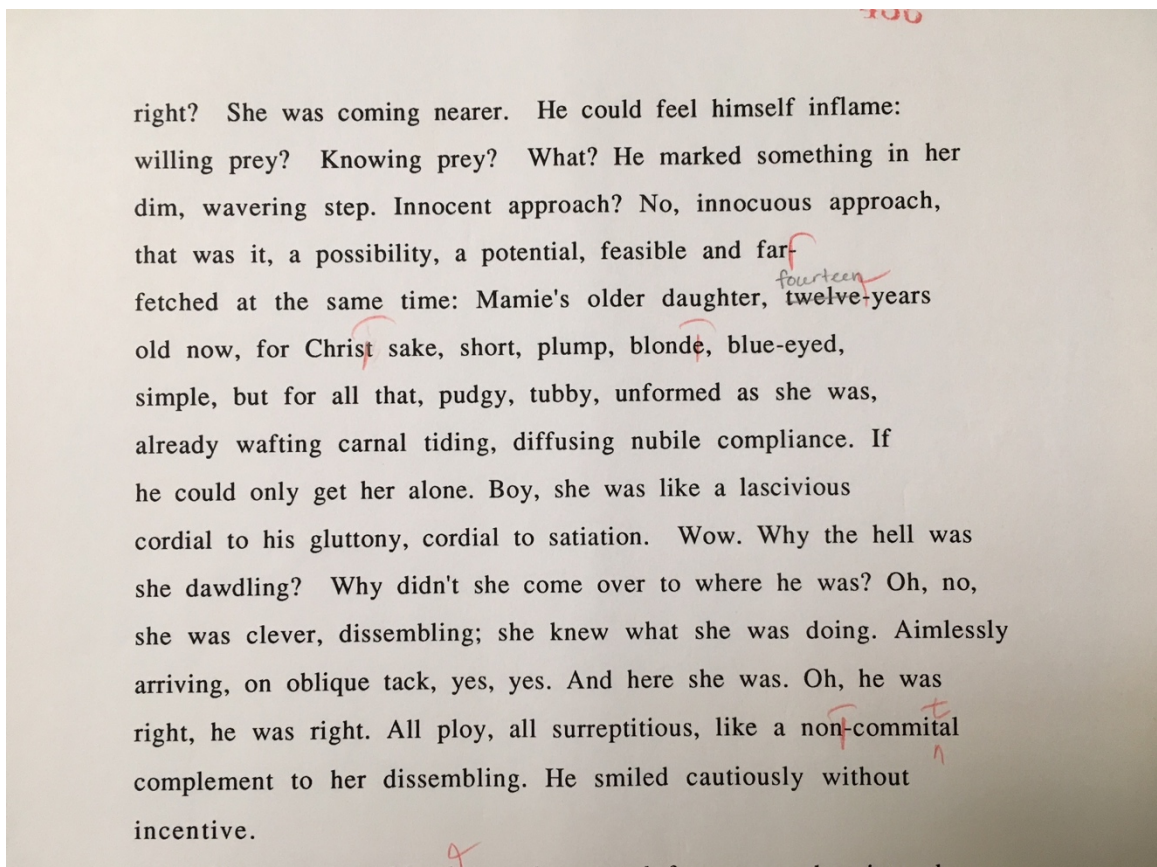


Figure 6.3: Another instance of Stella's age being changed in a manuscript for volume two (*MORS*, Volume II: (copy-edited version), p. 430/436, [1994]; Henry Roth Collection; P-694; box 7; folder 50; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.)

The historical record sheds light on Roth's imprecise language regarding Stella's age in Ira's interaction with Stella, as well as his broader depiction of sex/rape. That is, despite scholarly accounts casting the scene as a fictionalized version of a seduction (to use Kellman's term), the scene may be more accurately described as a literary depiction of a rapist's mindset. The manuscript draft questions ("How old was she? Twelve? Was he crazy or was he right?" (Roth Collection, box 6, folder 46, 429-430)) take on new meaning here; they seem to indicate Ira's attempt to convince himself, or rationalize, that she's twelve (and not eleven). But why would twelve have been a meaningfully more acceptable age for sex with an adolescent girl than eleven?

Historically, twelve signified a common age at which girls could be understood to give consent in early twentieth century legal and sexual discourse. Carolyn Cocca, a historian of statutory rape laws, notes that English Common Law assessed the age of consent as ten by 1576, and American colonies "basically imported" this legal language, though the age of consent was set at ten or twelve in the United States until late nineteenth century legal reforms increased the age of consent drastically (11). This means that at the time of Ira's sexual conduct with Stella, the age of consent across the United States was sixteen or eighteen, meaning that according to laws contemporaneous with the scene, Roth definitively depicts Ira raping Stella (whether she was twelve, as in the drafts, or fourteen, as in the published version).⁴ Furthermore, no age span provisions, today far more common in statutory rape laws, existed at that time. Instead, in the original drafts, Ira's focus on Stella being twelve conveys a meaningful preoccupation with an age that, up until quite recently in the novel's temporality, had been a widely

⁴ In New York, the age of consent was changed from 10 to 16 in 1890, and then raised to 18 in 1920. It would only be lowered, to 17, in 1999 (Cocca 23).

utilized age of consent. The revision makes Ira preoccupied with an arbitrary age, as opposed to a historically significant one. The legal history supports a reading where Ira's imagining of Stella as twelve accounts for why he considers his sex with her *acceptable*, as opposed to prohibitive.

The revision of Stella's age changes Ira's rationalization of the sex act. And yet, no concomitant revisions are made to Stella's characterization, even though not-yet twelve year olds are, ostensibly, distinct from not-yet fourteen year olds. The changes to Stella's age were made quite late in the process, on the fourth draft of the manuscript, and are not in Roth's handwriting. While Roth's editor, Robert Weil, has discussed aspects of the editing and revising process he undertook with Roth, this revision of Stella's age has not come up, as far as I have found, in the published record. But changing Stella's age without changing any other aspect of her characterization has stark, problematic implications: the revision suggests that age, in the context of rape and consent, functions merely as a number which indicates legal status, and not a reflection of adolescent, human development. And yet, Ira himself diagnoses the act as rape in both versions. He depicts Ira musing, after the scene, that he is "doubly liable to indictment for statutory rape" (2 287). An excised portion of volume two's manuscript also calls it rape, while juxtaposing it with Ira's sexual relations with his sister: "Incest (sic) a cut higher – or was it a cut less, cutless – than with Ruthy: screwing your kid first-cousin, statutory rape. She was only thirteen" (Roth Collection, box 4, folder 32, 980).⁵ A very early draft that did

⁵ Note that Stella is "only thirteen" in this manuscript passage, indicating that it refers to a point in the narrative where Ira had already been sexually active with her for some time.

not make it to Weil's hand for editing refers to Ira's sex with Stella as "semi-rape" (Roth Papers, box 26, folder 3, 308)⁶.

While Roth uses the term rape, scholarly accounts of Roth, and the novel, tend to avoid that word. Gibb, who notes that Sylvia Kessler was younger than fourteen according to the census, is correct in noting, "Roth's relationship with Sylvia Kessler is more troubling when one realizes that its fictional representation in the *Mercy* series raises her age" (19). Wirth-Nesher does refer to Roth's rape of his sister in her article on meta-memoirs, but more often, scholars have used the euphemisms that Roth also relies heavily upon. Ira is frequently identified as a "predator" (a term Roth uses often).

I introduce this distinction of rape/rapist and "preying/predator" for three reasons: first, very few studies or reviews of *MORS* use the word "rape" or consider either author or protagonist as rapist. Second, as the title of Roth's first novel indicates, the question of assigning language to concepts is a key literary thematic of Roth's work. Third, rape speaks to a legal designation. "Preying" upon people is discouraged, but is not a criminal, illegal act. But understanding rape as legal designation also reminds us that laws change.

Contemporarily, some states' legal designation of statutory rape can be mitigated by certain age gaps. This legal development helped clarify power dynamics, and preserves sexual agency in adolescent girls. Age spans as a legal concept were widely introduced during the 1970s, at the apex of the Women's Movement, as a reform of

⁶ Stella is not yet Stella, but instead Bella here. This figures as a meaningful name choice vis-à-vis Roth's dismissal of James Joyce. He refers to Bella Cohen, the Jewish madame from *Ulysses* (along with the prostitute Zoe), in denigrating Joyce's representations of Jews: "Two whorehouse denizens have to be Jewish, and that's greeted by Jews as a pyrotechnic display of tolerance. With such a Judeophilic who needs a pogrom?" (Roth Papers, Box 28, Folder 5, 706-707). Yet in his drafts, Roth has named the character representing his cousin after the very Jewish prostitute he chides Joyce for creating.

previous consent laws that, in many cases, dated back to the nineteenth-century.

Considering the depiction in this legalistic light, the fact that Ira was only four years older than Stella in the published version makes the two parties read as more akin to peers, than if Stella was eleven or twelve. New York actually changed statutory rape laws to account for age span earlier than other states. In 1950, New York passed a law making a five-year age gap the boundary distinguishing a sexual act between consenting parties and statutory rape (Cocca 38). By adjusting the age difference between Ira and Stella from six years to four, the revisions ensured the narrative does not depict rape according to present-day (i.e., post-1950) New York law. In order to read the published scene as something other than rape, the reader would have to apply present-day New York law, with the age-span corollary, to a sex act that occurred twenty-five years prior to that law taking effect (the draft scene, with its six-year age gap, functions as rape even with the age-span provision).

Leaving aside the legal definitions of rape, the age revisions take on a separately insidious quality when we consider that Stella's characterization is never revised. A close reading of the scene reveals that Ira's sex-act with a fourteen-year-old girl resembles the rape of a twelve-year-old girl because Roth wrote the scene to physically and emotionally depict Stella as twelve. The revisions suggest that the theoretical differences between the literary representation of an eleven- or twelve-year-old girl versus a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old girl were meaningful *only to the extent* the age proved problematic for the male protagonist, male author, or publishing house. The patriarchal logic of the narrative is so deeply ingrained that the revision of Stella's age challenges our assessment of whether it meaningfully revises anything. The intended literary characterization of an eleven- or twelve-year-old remains. The age revisions actually disguise the *absence* of revision.

Consider the physical characterization of Stella as Ira plots the sexual assault:

She was coming nearer. He could feel himself inflame: willing prey? Knowing prey? What? He marked something in her dim, wavering step. Innocent approach? No, innocuous approach, that was it, a possibility, a potential, feasible and farfetched at the same time: Mamie's older daughter, fourteen years old now, for Chrissake, short, plump, blond, blue-eyed, simple, but for all that, pudgy, tubby, unformed as she was, already wafting carnal tiding, diffusing nubile compliance. If he could only get her alone. Boy, she was like a lascivious cordial to his gluttony, cordial to satiation. Wow. Why the hell was she dawdling? Why didn't she come over to where he was? Oh, no, she was clever, dissembling; she knew what she was doing. (2 282)

Ira's gaze reveals his predatory psychology: he refers to Stella as "prey" twice, but plays at mitigating this by using adjectives like "willing" and "knowing," and later still suggesting: "Oh, no, she was clever, dissembling; she knew what she was doing." The prose also reveals Ira's own revising how he narrates Stella's sexuality; after first reading her as making "Innocent approach?" he quickly re-interprets: "No, innocuous approach, that was it."⁷ Catherine MacKinnon's theorization that rape is legally theorized by adjudication as to whether an accused *perceives* consent, finds literary explication here: Roth depicts Ira projecting consent onto a figure he simultaneously labels "prey."

The physical descriptions describe a girl on the verge of puberty, and eroticize that transition into puberty: "unformed as she was, already wafting carnal tiding, diffusing nubile compliance." Later, upon bringing Stella to the cellar, Stella's physicality is again depicted in early pubescent terms: "She pulled aside the skimpy sling of her teddy to reveal elemental, adolescent fuzz" (2 284). Bodily, Stella is clearly

⁷ Consider also the "for Chrissake" that follows Ira's assignment of her age as "fourteen years old now," given that in both the draft and published scene, Ira seems uncertain as to whether she has just turned a year older. Roth crafted the language to indicate his awareness of a discrepancy between Stella's age and Ira's sense of Ira's age. It reads, in this context, as if Roth is trying to assert something he knows to be untrue.

portrayed as having just begun puberty. It is plausible that an adolescent girl might begin puberty at fourteen, but it is certainly on the late end of the spectrum.

We might benefit from thinking about how Roth depicts Stella's physicality, and what it reveals about Ira's sexuality, in the context of historical literary portrayals of girls, and pubescent girls. In particular, consider Stella alongside Delores "Lolita" Haze, from Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Kathryn Bond Stockton's scholarship on *Lolita*, and its filmic adaptations, helps illuminate how popular media consumption of child sexuality navigates the contradicting impulses towards moral condemnation and lustful celebration (of what James Kincaid refers to as "erotic innocence"). Stockton argues that while the novelistic *Lolita* is twelve, both filmic versions of *Lolita* use older actresses, and employ different strategies, for adapting Nabokov's story. Adrian Lyne's 1996 version casts fourteen-year-old Dominique Swain, while Stanley Kubrik's 1962 version casts fifteen-year-old Sue Lyon. Stockton suggests that the difference in age is less important than the different approaches to filming the actresses: Kubrik depicts Humbert's fascination with *Lolita* in "normal" terms: the viewer's eyes, like Humbert's, tell "us that she is not a child: she is a sexy cinematic still" (149). Stockton indicates that Kubrik is showing the viewer a woman, even though the story is ostensibly about a "child." Lyne's approach, in contrast, is to "carefully spoil our viewing pleasure – literally to give it for a certain interval, then take it away" (Stockton 151). Lyne accomplishes this by showing *Lolita*'s retainer, for instance, and showing her move with "the frenetic kind of motion we cannot associate with beautiful women" (Stockton 151). As Stockton puts it:

Adrian Lyne, feminist nemesis, makes us Mulvey's perverts for a moment, makes us feel the comfort of our usual perversion, our Playboy-channel gaze as it extends to the beauty of a girl, before he rips the rug of our perversion out from under us, so that he may offer a sexual child. (151)

Unlike with Kubrik and Lyne's casting choices, replacing the word "fourteen" with "twelve" does not change Roth's imagery of the character. Moreover, Roth never has to "spoil our viewing pleasure" because he never depicts Stella as beautiful, unlike, for instance, how he describes characters like Edith. By denigrating her appearance, Roth's descriptions conflate Ira's disgust with Stella's physical characteristics with his erotic obsession, a very different style of rendering a pedophilic fascination than what Kubrik or Lyne provide. Like Lyne, Roth reminds us of Stella's girlishness, but Roth's vision here does not demand that the reader "see" a woman whom he spoils by revealing as a child. He presents Stella as a girl consistently, and this is why the age revision is legally meaningful but otherwise meaningless: whether twelve or fourteen, the depiction is of a girl who has just begun puberty, *not* a girl who could be reasonably mistaken for a woman. If Lyne suggests that the pedophilic gaze sits uncomfortably close to the heteronormative gaze, and surreptitiously indicts the audience as complicit, Roth's text reveals how misogynistic physical degradation can function as part of a pedophilic gaze, while still indicting his audience as complicit. Ira's expressed disgust purports to mask Ira's (and perhaps, the complicit audience's) lust for a pubescent girl's body. But while Lyne operates as a "feminist nemesis" who "rips the rug of our perversion out from under us" (Stockton 151), the revisions to Stella's age mask the extent to which the audience is forced to confront their own complicit engagement of a pedophilic gaze. In Roth's novel, there is no ripping out the rug from under us – if anything, the editorial revisions help secure it firmly beneath the audience's feet.

As such, we need to consider both the original and published manuscript of *MORS* as inviting voyeuristic participation in Ira's sexual objectification of a pubescent

girl. And as we navigate the implications of Roth's depictions, and the editorial revisions, we might also recognize how the cellar rape revises a celebrated cellar scene from *Call It Sleep*, which cast its young Jewish male protagonist's sexuality in sympathetic terms that Roth rejected in crafting the first-person accounts of rape in *MORS*.

Of Cellars and Consent:

Positive reviews of *Call It Sleep* celebrated Roth's craft as well as the characteristics of the young, vulnerable protagonist, David Schearl. Understanding Roth's commitment to showcasing Ira's depravity requires the juxtaposition of David's sexual innocence. *MORS* revises an immensely popular image of Jewish male sexual innocence.

David Schearl never rapes a girl in a cellar, but he does have a famous prepubescent sexual initiation in the first section of *CIS*, titled "The Cellar." A girl named Annie initiates, convincing an unwitting David to play a game with her. Annie wants to "play bad," but she tells David that "Yuh must ask me," in order to displace her initiative of their play onto him (Roth *CIS* 53). David cooperates, but when, "revolted," he attempts to stop the play, Annie unexpectedly insists on his continued participation: "Yuh must!...yuh ast me" (Roth *CIS* 53). This scene inverts typical power and gender dynamics of rape. A boy attempts to withdraw consent he unwittingly provides prior to understanding the terms of play, but a girl asserts that a boy's consent, once provided, cannot be revoked. Annie's language ("yuh ast me" – my emphasis) also confuses the answer as to who initiates the play (clearly Annie, but linguistically, David).

David is at the mercy of a manipulative, confusing world, and his encounter with Annie reinforces that David is preyed upon, not just by peers, but by girls his own age. While Annie takes advantage of David in "The Cellar," Roth re-casts this original,

famous scene in *MORS* by showing Ira rape Stella in a cellar. The inverted gender and sexual power dynamics of the *CIS* scene seem to invite revision; certainly, a boy's uncomfortable sexual initiation occurring via a girl's assertive sexual behavior is feasible, but the history of sexual power dynamics suggests that the earlier story enshrines male innocent vulnerability to an even more historically vulnerable class. And from personal experience, Roth knew that the scene inverted more common sexual power dynamics.

In *MORS*, the cellar power imbalance is clear: Ira is the sexual aggressor, moreover, the rapist. And while Ira does not explicitly threaten the use of force, Roth's language suggests the violence of the act, even as he also depicts, as referenced earlier, Ira's projection of Stella's consent:

And standing tubby, standing in front of him, in front of Ira, burning now in predatory rut, in lecherous fury that he felt would kill him, if he didn't gratify it on her. "Why don'tcha sit down." He beckoned innocently at the twin seat at his back. "It's nice here. Quiet.

And in vapid collusion she complied.

Sitting opposite, his eyes fixed watchfully on the kitchen door, he titled his head sideways, sought her mouth. She converged. She parted her lips for his tongue to delve – to plumb. Oh, yes, Jesus Christ, no doubt, discreet, ready, expectant. Where could he try? Boyoboy, his blazing passion could kill this little, oh, fat little heifer, supine, submissive, inviting murderous sacrifice. Jesus. But where? Where freedom for rut to erupt, where a minute of privacy, innocent seeming privacy? (2 282-283)

If we read this scene's use of free indirect speech as revealing the mindset of a rapist, we might consider the projective qualities of Roth's terminology. The characterizations of Stella, including Roth's usage of terms like "complied," "vapid collusion," and "discreet, ready, expectant," seem far more consistent with a choice to portray Stella as passive. The notion that they suggest Stella's consent seems undercut by the text's disinterest in Stella beyond as object of lust and target of denigration, as well as the recurring violence of Ira's vocabulary: by foregrounding the scene's "predatory" character, and referring to

“murderous sacrifice,” and a “passion” that “could kill” Stella, Roth clearly implicates sex with Stella as violence done unto her.

Ira then leads Stella to the cellar, where he continues to revise the content and symbolism of “The Cellar,” the first section of his first literary work. By revealing Ira’s rape of Stella (and his own rape of Sylvia) as what was truly concealed in the cellar, Roth revises an inversion of sexual power dynamics, divulges his own history of perpetrating sexual violence, and rewrites his own literary trajectory. “The Cellar” no longer merely represents the literal first pages – the advent – of Roth’s iconic literary career. It signifies the re-categorization of Roth’s literary, ostensibly moral, artistic vision, into the space of his moral failure, the space of his first rape (of someone other than his sister).⁸

While *MORS* complicates our reading of Roth’s earlier novel’s portrayal of sex and consent, the politics of Roth’s depiction of rape remain quite patriarchal. Like Lyne, Roth draws his audience into Ira’s subjective point of view in a way that indicts the male audience and male gaze. But Roth also incorporates dialogue that mobilizes common, insidious patriarchal rationales for rape:

Already out with it, his charger ready, brute in the van, hauling creature after it, mind and body. “Ever do it before?”

She hesitated a moment, reluctant to confess, and yet not to forgo, to miss by being remiss: “The painter.”

“The painter?” he approached.

⁸ According to the laws of Roth’s youth, his sexual intercourse with Broder (and Ira’s with Minnie) was also statutory rape. Roth’s novelistic characterization of Ira’s sexual relationship with Minnie is of a consensual, lateral relationship; in contrast, I would argue that Ira’s relationship with Stella at twelve *or* fourteen is *not* depicted as lateral, nor is Stella truly ever depicted as consenting. However, Roth’s depiction of Minnie’s consent through her stating the imperative, “fuck me, fuck me good” (2 140) upon her introduction to the text should *not* be used as evidence for the notion that Roth and Broder’s relationship was consensual; the self-serving aspects of *MORS*, and the evidence that Roth departed from the historical when he felt it suited him, deprive that depiction of power relations and consent of any meaningful biographical credibility.

In crafting this scene, Roth reveals himself as an architect of the type of sexist double-standards patriarchy utilizes to justify rape. The painter serves no other discernable plot point other than to establish that Stella has already been sexually active, and thus exculpate Ira from responsibility for his own sexual assault. Catherine MacKinnon discusses how men often struggle to conceive of consent: “Virtuous women, like young girls, are unconsenting, virginal, rapeable. Unvirtuous women, like wives and prostitutes, are consenting, whores, unrapeable” (175). Depicting Stella as “reluctant to confess” is also enormously problematic: the characterization attempts an empathetic insight, but Roth reveals himself to be largely incapable of and disinterested in any meaningful empathetic understanding of Stella. Stella’s “reluctance to confess” more likely confirms *Ira’s* belief that Stella bears responsibility for her prior sexual assault, than Stella’s. Applying MacKinnon’s theorizing to this scene indicates that Ira’s patriarchal, flawed logic allows him to see Stella as unrapeable because she is not virginal.

As the scene continues, it becomes increasingly pornographic, and stylistically familiar:

“After we moved in. The new rooms.” Her shallow blue eyes glazed – Oh! – glazed, unblinking ...at his penetration, unblinking, shallow blue eyes accomplice of his perpetration. Minnie closed her hazel eyes, but not Stella, shallow, blue stare, gone vacuous, gone void. It was working, working, it was working, working. Look at her eyes, shallow, blue, stupefied: stultified inanity fixed on him, his prey, accessory to his violation, Jesus Christ, intrinsic to his spraddling her. Destroy her, ah-h, straddling him – slump, mum, larva, squash her dumbstruck trance with guy-geyser brutish he – fucking her. Ai-i. Get out! Get away! Aoh, just when –

It was over (2 284).

Roth, who gives ample attention to Ira's rejection of Joyce as literary forebear, provides a distinct Joycean rhythm to his depiction of sexual climax during rape.⁹

The manner in which gaze operates in the above passage is also quite complex. Ira's visual engagement with Stella here is almost entirely with her eyes. They are described as "glazed, unblinking ...at his penetration," with the ellipses marking something that cannot find expression. Her eyes have "gone vacuous, gone void," and yet Ira narrates her "stultified inanity fixed on him." Ira's narration also characterizes her as "accomplice of his perpetration," and "accessory to his violation."

Ira's language casts Stella's as a partner (accomplice and accessory), but these terms are more associated with criminal activity than consensual sex. Furthermore, the language reveals that Stella is not present other than in the physical sense. The emphasis on her eyes reminds us that she sees all of this too, but in depicting them as "gone vacuous, gone void," "stupefied," and as "dumbstruck trance," we might infer that Stella has "gone void" in order to manage an experience beyond her capacity to fully "see." Roth forces the reader to witness Stella's trauma within Ira's sexually graphic language.¹⁰ Given Ira's own victimization via sexual molestation, this scene may reveal Ira's simultaneous awareness of and sexual gratification at inflicting trauma upon Stella. But it's also important to think of eyes and seeing in terms of subjectivity: Roth's male rapist subjectivity is rendered here with explicit metaphoric cruelty: Roth insists the reader see, through his eyes, the fact that Stella herself, having "gone void," *cannot see*. Depicting

⁹ It's also relevant that Roth's echo of Joyce's style involves Leopold Bloom's masturbatory orgasm in *Ulysses*, which takes place as he ogles a girl (Gerty MacDowell) in a park. Ira's (and Roth's) rejection of Bloom (and Joyce) may involve anxiety regarding how Joyce himself depicted Jewish male pedophilic sexuality.

¹⁰ Elsewhere, at least once, Ira refers to Stella's "glazed" eyes during sex as evidence of her sexual satisfaction (3 51).

Stella as unable to see what is happening to her amounts to something even more destructive than a silencing; Roth renders Stella as incapable of subjectively observing the assault Ira commits. Roth's language robs Stella of her very subjectivity.

This deeply disturbing rendering of rape finds further explication in an exchange with Ecclesias. When Ecclesias asks him why he did this, the elder Ira responds: "To alert the world to the menace of housepainters" (2 285). Ira uses humor as a tool for navigating his confession/non-confession to rape, and Ecclesias' response, "Dispense with the levity" (2 285) stands in for the reader's. But Roth gets to have it both ways here, as he does throughout the narrative, particularly with sex. The elderly Ira's question on the tenor of his narrative, and the male gaze, is revelatory: "Have I overstepped the boundary from the erotic into the pornographic?" (2 285).

This is a stunning question to ask about purportedly "artistic" representation of rape, revealing just how completely Roth has destroyed any notion of boundary in his graphic depiction of the rape of a character that might be eleven, twelve, thirteen, or fourteen years old. Having indulged in a lengthy free indirect depiction of rape tied to the rapist's point of view, Roth audaciously implies that any artistic overstep involved his not merely allowing for the ostensibly "more appropriate" eroticism. Ecclesias, ultimately a limited super-ego, and as a projection of Ira's mind, unsurprisingly so, lets this question's implications go without challenge.

This question helps remind us that for all the critical attention that stresses Ira's "confessional" voice, and the reading that presents Ira's journey as redemptive, the elderly Ira is not contrite. His "reflection," at this crucial moment, involves whether he might have provided a more erotic, and less pornographic, account of rape. And this

interchange also occurs in the same passage where Ira regards himself as “doubly liable to indictment for statutory rape” (2 287). Within the same conversation, Ira contemplates his sex with Stella as erotic, as perhaps pornographic, *and* as statutory rape. The text self-consciously aligns rape and the erotic. The question is not whether Roth invites a voyeuristic reading of rape, but to what degree; merely erotic or fully pornographic? Ecclesias, serving as analyst as Ira struggles to reflect meaningfully on the depiction, observes, “I do think that you wrote as explicitly as you did because you still are what you are. That the hold on you of what you were is, so to speak, still in force” (2 286). It is impossible to square Ira’s story, and the elderly Ira’s eroticization of that story, with the notion that *MORS* is redemptive. But especially given the religious overtones of the term “redemption,” we might contemplate how Ira’s (im)morality intersects with his irreligious perspective, especially as it involves Ira’s relationship with his orthodox grandfather.

Zaida’s Inassimilable Lesson

Why did Roth, in the estimation of editor Robert Weil, have “no respect for” his cousin Sylvia (Gibbs “Conversation” 157)? Scholarly analysis has tended to consider Stella as primarily a double for Minnie, and Gibbs’ research, which reveals how Weil oversaw edits that displaced sexual focus on Minnie onto Stella after Broder’s legal challenge, aligns with this view. However, this approach largely dismisses Stella’s standalone significance, and overlooks how sibling and cousin relationships are defined differently in familial, societal, religious, and secular contexts. Kellman makes numerous references to Ira committing “incest” with Stella (69, 97, 231), but first cousin relationships were not commonly considered incestuous in the United States in the early

twentieth century, nor were they in most contemporaneous iterations of Jewish religious traditions. For Ira, traditional Jewish acceptance of close endogamy and rejection of sibling incest functioned as a contradiction given his own understanding of family and boundaries. This fundamental tension may have contributed to his rejection of religion.

As with the different legal proscriptions for defining statutory rape in the 1920s versus the 1990s, views on first cousin marriage have changed. Neither Torah nor Talmud prohibits cousin marriage. But cousin marriage was neither especially taboo nor especially unusual in a range of ethno-racial groups through the early twentieth century. David Warren Sabean's research into the German town of Neckarhausen explores kinship relations, focusing largely on non-Jews, but provides helpful contextual information. While discussing a 1920s Willhelm Reutlinger study concluding that Jews (based on a particular population enclave) were far more likely to engage in first-cousin marriage, Sabean suggests that this scholarship may have been flawed (categorizing even second and third cousin unions as first cousin unions). Perhaps most importantly, Sabean contextualizes that non-Jewish groups also showed high rates of consanguineous marriage in studies from that time, due to economic circumstances (435).¹¹ Micah Fitzerman-Blue's research into uncle-niece marriage, legal for Jewish families in Rhode Island and endorsed by Talmudic commentary, also mentions dowry as a device that incentivized close endogamous marriages (417). ChaeRan Freeze uses historical records of the Jewish population of a Russian town Korostyshev to uncover extensive consanguineous marriages, while also noting that as early as the late nineteenth century,

¹¹ Sabean views economic circumstances as more determinative of the inclination towards cousin marriage across different groups. He notes, "the ecology of the enclave Jewish population... might well have supported an endogamy favoring first cousins" (435).

“Jewish reformers castigated this consanguinity as detrimental to family health” (27). The biological geneticist David Goldstein contends that, “Traditionally, Jewish groups have not regarded consanguineous marriages as taboo,” but Freeze’s research indicates that some level of Jewish ambivalence has surrounded consanguineous unions dating back at least to the Jewish enlightenment (103). Fitzerman-Blue also mentions the frequency of scholarly approaches to Jewish consanguinity suggesting that small Jewish enclave communities accounted for the propensity towards cousin marriage in the American colonies and United States. But as he demonstrates in his article, such rationales discount the extent to which consanguineous marriage occurred prior to Jews arriving in America, the extent to which economic motivations factored in, and the Talmudic endorsement. None of which should distract from the fact that cousin marriages were not historically uncommon amongst non-Jews either.

Freeze’s observation that Jewish reformers objected to consanguineous marriages on health grounds, in the late nineteenth century, helps to ground this conversation as a contested one taking place alongside modernization. This also brings us back to Freud, and his “Aetiology” essay, which Ays Eve Weinbaum reveals to be assiduously preoccupied with the problem of how to discuss incest, child abuse, and consanguinity in the context of antisemitic discourse casting Jews in those pathological terms. In sum, the history of Jewish cousin marriage, at least dating from the late nineteenth century and *haskalah* (Jewish enlightenment), is also a history of Jewish ambivalence about the intersections of tradition, antisemitic pathologization, antisemitic medical discourse, secular marriage laws, and anxiety about genetic consequences of close endogamy.

Jewish American fiction, film, and memoir provide a type of record for considering the range of representations of anxiety, fantasy, and ambivalence about cousin relations. Romantic or sexual engagement with first cousins appears in a variety of texts (fiction, song, memoir, film, etc.) dealing with early twentieth century Jewish families. In *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, for instance, Neil Simon milks the protagonist Eugene's attraction to his cousin Nora for humor. Ultimately, Eugene displaces his close endogamous fixation with Nora an interracial exogamous fascination with the topless African women he encounters in *National Geographic*.¹²

While humor appears in many Jewish American depictions of cousin relations (male authored ones in particular), some texts depict cousin relations as points of tension, anxiety, and victimization. *MORS* fits into this category, while Kate Simon's memoir *Bronx Primitive* presents a female Jewish American perspective on terror in the face of a cousin's secretive, but perhaps condoned, sexual advances. Simon depicts a childhood experience in which her older cousin Yankel snuck into bed with her, and "pushed his big thing, pulsating like a machine, as near as he could to my opening but never went in" (123-124). For Simon, her interaction with Yankel features his repeated sexual molestation, and then his pleading for her not to report him to her mother: "He could be arrested and sent back to Poland if I said anything" (124). Significantly, though, Simon

¹² Other examples of cousin romance (or romanticization) include the Yiddish folk song "Di Grine Kuzine" (or, "My Cousin the Greenhorn") which tracks the disillusionment of a once beautiful, youthful female cousin who is worn down by life in America. There is nothing explicitly suggestive of cousin romance within the lyrics, but some versions meditate extensively on the physically attractive aspects of the cousin: "*liplech vi karshlekh a tsviling*" (lips like a pair of cherries). More recently, the television show *Arrested Development* showcases a secular, but seemingly ethnically Jewish family, in which one first cousin, George Michael, pines for another (Maebly). The early-aught film *When Do We Eat?* also reveals how the terminology of this discussion has shifted, as characters refer to sex between first cousins once removed as incest.

infers that her father silently condones his nephew's behavior: "My father, like myself, slept lightly; he must have known what Yankel was doing and had done before" (172).

While Simon's anxiety involves the horror of her father knowing about his nephew sexually assaulting her but not doing anything about it, Ira's anxiety is that of the assailant. But Ira is particularly anxious about Zaida discovering his behavior. Roth provides some cues that this is because of his grandfather being a religious man, except the consequence Ira fears is very specific: it's not that he would be exiled from the family, but rather that he will be further tied to his family: if discovered, he worries that he will be forced to marry Stella. In a conversation between Ira and Stella's sister Hannah, Roth implies that Stella may also consider their relationship in the context of marriage. When Hannah complains about her and her sister's limited social opportunities, she remarks, "Only Jewish girls have to live, live – till a *khusin* comes along" (3 315). Given the affair with Stella, and Roth's patterns switching from Yiddish to English, Roth puns on *khusin* (groom) and cousin here. Additional evidence points to the marriage prospect, including a specific conversation Ira has with his grandfather, just after a sexual encounter with Stella. The scene is distinct in that initially, the elderly Ira recounts it (or attempts to), as opposed to its transpiring in the young Ira narrative:

The old man did something he had never done before: he called Ira into his room again – just as Ira was leaving, walking down the hall toward the apartment door. And what had the old man done? Under pretext, Ira was sure, of reminiscing about his early boyhood, he had given Ira a lecture on how one obtained a wife, according to Judaism. Sitting at the keyboard of his word processor over sixty years later, Ira tried to remember his grandfather's version. It wasn't easy: how much sixty years had eroded! But it all seemed to add up to a hint on Zaida's part that he was on to something. It *seemed* a hint – until Minnie brought the tidings of Zaida's departure from Mamie's. Then it no longer seemed a hint; it *was* a hint, and a broad one, in fact, a disclosure of the old man's suspicions about the behavior of his two grandchildren. (4 93)

Curiously, Roth first allusion to the conversation is to draw attention to the elderly Ira's difficulty remembering the conversation. A few pages later, Roth revisits the conversation, here depicting the younger Ira's attempt to recall it:

But what the hell did the old man say when Ira was on the way out? Still with a Trojan on – did he or didn't he have it on? Disgraceful, downright sacrilegious, to sit down with a devout old man, with holy writ, a *siddur*, in front of him, and still be wearing a bag of sticky stuff: semen, Abraham's seed... The more he ruminated on it, the daffier life was. Zaida communing with his third-generation offspring, with his fourth-generation seed caught in a condom (he hoped). (4 97)

Roth dramatizes Ira's attempt to remember his grandfather's words, presenting us with the irony of Zaida's lecturing him about marriage directly after Ira and Stella had sex. The passage foreshadows the pregnancy scare that drives the plot for the fourth volume, utilizing a crude metaphor for the regulation, and interruption, of male lineage. Roth again relies on humor to navigate discomfort, as he attempts to recount his grandfather's words: "But what the hell had the old guy said? Now think, think. 'When I was a child, I thought as a child – ' No, no, no. That was Saint Paul'" (97). Roth, doubtless aware that he has presented his *frum* grandfather in clichéd terms throughout the novel, humorously deflects attention from the gravity of the conversation by again rendering him as cliché – except within the wrong liturgical tradition.

Eventually, Ira does successfully recount his grandfather's words, and they clearly proscribe a religious resolution for Ira and Stella's situation. Zaida tells Ira that the Talmud reveals that there are "three ways of getting a wife" (4 98). After mentioning *kessef* (coin) and *shtar* (bond), he says, "And the third is by *biyah*" (4 98):

"By beer," Ira had chortled nervously.
"By *biyah*. To have intercourse with her. You come upon her, and you have intercourse with her."

“That’s simple, Zaida.” Ira had maintained his sangfroid with a show of facetiousness: “*Kessef, shtar, and biyah*. Anybody can remember those.” Holy jumpin’ Jesus! How much more did he need to be told? The old boy was driving the spike right through him. That was it, that was it.

And the way he stared at Ira, out of hard, brown, uncompromising eyes. But then maybe it was just because of the cataracts he had in his eyes: “You say to her, ‘By this act I have made you my wife.’” (Listening, Ira had forgotten his restiveness.) “What did I understand as a child of eleven: ‘By this act’?” Old man with stained vest over paunch speaking, old man in a black yarmulka and with scraggly beard delivering his homily. “But you see how wise the Talmud was to prepare the immature mind for the time when the mature mind would understand?” (4 99)

Zaida sums up his lesson by stating that “before he knew desire, each child knew how God decreed desire should be satisfied: by taking a wife. And how wives were taken” (4 99). And Roth depicts Ira’s anxiety at this lesson immediately: “It’s nothing, Ira assured himself...It’s nothing with nothing” (99). Zaida’s lecture leaves Ira shaken – but it’s not merely the notion that Zaida knew of his grandchildren’s relations. It’s that Zaida’s proposed solution was for his grandchildren to marry; or rather, to suggest that Ira had already made that decision by initiating sex with Stella.

The cognitive dissonance here comes from the intersection of Ira’s conflicted, frayed sense of morality in a secular American context with his grandfather’s distinct, inassimilable Jewish solution. Ira, as we’ve established, struggles with the knowledge that his relationship with Stella constitutes rape. Ira’s disgust with Stella may, at some level, reflect his own self-disgust at his behavior. Yet Zaida cites marriage as the only morally sound choice for a young man in Ira’s position, indicating that engaging in sex performs the very act of “getting a wife.” Essentially, Zaida is attempting to teach his grandson that according to Jewish tradition, marriage – the sanctifying of Ira and Stella’s relationship – is his only moral option. For Ira, this is inassimilable. Roth repeatedly draws attention to Ira’s confusion about the speech. Not long after the scene, Ira again

ponders the same question: “Still, why had the old man recited that business about getting a wife, especially that business about coming upon her and having sexual relations with her? Only a week ago, and so pointed in Ira’s direction” (4 106).

Again, the answer to Ira’s question is quite self-explanatory: Ira is morally obligated, according to his grandfather, to marry his cousin. But Ira continually struggles to arrive at this conclusion, and its implications. Ira is incapable of reflecting meaningfully on his grandfather’s lecture because, first, it speaks to the supposed abomination of his relations with his cousin as not, actually, being considered abomination in the light of familial or religious tradition, and, second, also indicates that by Zaida’s logic, he has, in effect, made his sister into his wife as well. Josh Lambert has established that Ira’s “frequent characterization of incest as ‘sin’ and ‘abomination’ reveals that he understands it in the context of Leviticus and, to some degree, his Jewish identity” (75). But while Leviticus prohibits sibling relations, it does not prohibit cousin relations. Ira, however, understands both relations as being similarly forbidden. A passage that Lambert references in volume three mentions both Minnie as well as Stella, prior to Ira confessing that “he lusted for the prohibited, the proscribed” (120). Ira may combine prohibitive traditions here (seeing Stella as “prohibited” on account of statutory rape law), or he may be confused as to how traditional Jewish mores might allow for something he has internalized as forbidden.

Ira’s alienation from Judaism may emerge from the trauma of Zaida’s inassimilable lesson. Ira, psychologically unable to cease from sexually exploiting Stella, receives a Jewish lesson in (a)morality from his grandfather: a symbol of familial patriarchy and religious authority. Ira is not reprimanded, he is instead encouraged to

marry his cousin. Learning that his behavior, and more specifically, his rape of Stella, can be assimilated into Jewish tradition might account for the ambivalence about religion Ira elsewhere pins on the “trauma” of growing up in a non-Jewish neighborhood.

Ironically, the very tension that complicates Ira’s ability to distinguish his sibling incest from his cousin “incest” – the fact that one can be condoned by family and religion, while the other cannot be – replicates itself in scholarly focus on Roth that focuses on the issue of sibling incest. But if sibling incest is indeed rare, and rejected by laws of family, religion and state, it may be, paradoxically, less taboo than cousin marriage. That is, sibling incest is universally condemned. Cousin relations were/are permitted, and historically, were not infrequent. *MORS*’ engagement with sibling incest presents an easily condemnable act that draws attention away from the more controversial act of first cousin endogamy, and Roth’s depiction of rape. The scandal of sibling incest in *MORS* is not limited to the sibling incest itself; it also involves how it has deflected attention from the artist’s confession of rape, stymied conversation about the novel’s ethics of representation regarding rape, and overlooked Roth’s critique of patriarchal Jewish law’s allowance for rape and close endogamy in order to celebrate a “redemptive” embrace of Israel and Jewish identity.

Roth’s Africanism

Having argued that *MORS* and its manuscripts reveal a text complexly engaged with literary depictions of cousin relations, rape, and pedophilia, I shift my focus to the text’s preoccupation with the racial other: what does *MORS* reveal about white Jewish racism? *MORS* manuscripts were revised with the specific outcome of erasing Ira’s antiblack racism, despite other characters’ (Jewish and otherwise) antiblack sentiments

remaining. Two heavily edited but still extant scenes featuring hypersexual black characters frame Ira's incest and close endogamy narrative. Even with the revisions, I contend that antiblack racism structures the novel's engagement with Jewish sexual taboos. Still, the textual revisions reflect the broader white-washing of the history of American Jewish racism as central to American Jewish white identity, and protect Roth, Ira, and the readers identifying with both, from being implicated as explicitly racist.¹³

Prior to arriving at the specific scenes, it's worth thinking briefly about how American Jewish artists tended to represent American Jewish culture (and masculinity, in particular) in the mid- to late-1990s and early 2000s. Daniel Itzkovitz points out the increase in Jewish male protagonists in both films and television during this period, drawing special attention to movie stars like Adam Sandler, Ben Stiller, and Jason Biggs, each of whom performed versions of the *schlemiel* that indicated audience receptivity to depictions of masculinity clearly marked as Jewish. Stiller's role in *Meet the Parents* (2000) and its sequels seem especially characteristic in its suggestion that Jewish men might represent sexual and gender flexibility and difference (i.e., the last name "Focker" and his job as a nurse), vulnerability to mild, veiled antisemitism (in the persona of Robert De Niro's skeptical character), and yet, desirability. There is room for some transgression regarding more typical traditional representations of masculinity and

¹³ I focus on Roth's depiction of black characters, but multiple inroads exist for considering Roth's thoughts on race and nation. Stella's mother has Puerto Rican boarders, often referred to via the slur "Portorickies," and Minnie has a Latino boyfriend named Arturo. Rachel Rubinstein writes a compelling account of how Native Americans play a significant role in Ira's conception of Edith, American identity, and his own ability to imagine himself as a storyteller, and also links his conception of Native Americans to his sense of Zionism. And the language with which Ira discusses Israel and Zionism features similar, troubling revision patterns to those discussed here; offensive language regarding Arabs and Palestinians is excised in the final version.

whiteness, here, but it's quite mild. And the *schlemiel's* resilience in the face of (mild) marginalization involves something of the character's appeal. But this functions as decisively different from the sort of sexual transgressive threats, for instance, that Gilman harkens to when he discusses characterizations of Jack the Ripper in the nineteenth century. As Khalil Muhammad has observed, within American contexts, this did not happen by accident: "innovative racial demographers...explicitly sanitized and normalized the criminality of northern white working and immigrant classes. Consequently, the black southern migrant – the 'Negro, stranger in our midst' – was marked as an exceptionally dangerous newcomer" (6). Stereotypical discourse associating Jews with incest, or pedophilia, did not vanish completely, but the extent to which these stereotypes registered as criminal receded given prevailing trends to instead criminalize and condemn blackness along these terms. Roth's novel, appearing as it did in the midst of this new saturation of Jewish *schlemiel* protagonists, reveals how cultural productions could actively displace these stereotypes in consequential, harmful fashion.

The first scene I examine occurs in volume two, directly prior to the reveal of Ira's sister, Minnie, and their sexual relationship. The revelation aims to stun the reader—fully a volume and a half into the novel, the character shows up unaccounted for, asking her brother to "Fuck me, fuck me good!" (2 140). Instead of focusing on how Roth depicts Ira's sister here, I want to investigate how Roth lays the groundwork for the reveal. The crucial preceding scene finds Ira contemplating New York's African American community and America's history of slavery prior to visiting a black prostitute.

While working at Yankee Stadium, Ira flirts with a black woman named Pearl Canby who eventually invites him to her home to pay for sex. Upon arriving at her

supposed apartment, though, Ira meets a different woman, Theodora, whom he describes as “scrawny and homely and black-coffee brown” (2 133). Theodora and Ira have sex, and Ira loses his virginity: “He knew all along that was the way it was done, but he’d never done it” (2 135). The subsequent scene, where Minnie appears for the first time, and demands Ira have sex with her, thus requires the suspension of disbelief. Ira has just learned how to have sex with actual penile penetration from Theodora. Ostensibly, we are to believe that Minnie, who has (according to the logic of the sequence) yet to be penetrated, greets her brother with “fuck me good” despite their sexual engagement never previously involving penetrative sex. Theodora “teaches” Ira about sex, but the language Roth crafts for Minnie indicates that she already knows. As with Stella’s allusion to the plumber, Roth’s depiction of Ira’s initial sexual encounter with Minnie necessitates the intimation that she has already been sexually active (ostensibly, paradoxically, with Ira).

None of this makes any narrative sense. But it follows a perverse racist logic in addition to a patriarchal one. As Alan Gibbs, Lene Schott-Kristensen, and Steven Kellman have all observed, Roth indicated to Robert Weil that Ira’s encounter with Theodora was entirely fabricated. In a video interview with Weil, Roth divulged this in order to help clarify that *MORS* was a novel, legally pertinent testimony given the fact that Broder had threatened a lawsuit regarding Roth’s depiction of Minnie. About Theodora, Roth disclosed: “It’s completely made up! I never went there, I never had a black whore, and I was scared to death of that kind of woman anyway” (Roth Papers, box 22, folder 19a, 5).

The interview reveals Roth’s incorporation of the scene to move the plot. As such, we can infer that Roth needed his protagonist to receive initiation by a black character in

order to facilitate his narrative's arrival at the incest. He requires the use of a blatant fiction to arrive at his most personal autobiographical facts. The intersection of "too close" and "too far," which Sollors locates in fiction, emerges here as a fictional component necessary for Roth to arrive at a factual revelation in a meta-memoir.

Roth's use of fabricated interracial exogamy to tell his incest story mirrors incest in historical American literature, and reveals Roth's reliance on the same Africanist presence that Toni Morrison observes in canonical white authors like Poe, Melville, and others in *Playing in the Dark*. As Morrison remarks, "black people ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them" (viii):

Through significant and underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this presence – one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness. (6)

Reading *MORS* through Morrison's "American Africanism" lens highlights Roth's use of black characters to structure his incest story and announce the "Americanness" of his protagonist and his narrative. Hypersexualized black characters narratively enable Ira's sex with Minnie, and mark Ira's final published sexual encounter with Stella (which I address shortly). While these scenes remain, Roth's manuscripts show extensive revision and excision in areas involving Ira observing and commenting on black people. The published version of *MORS* suggests to some readers that Roth was not especially concerned with or observant regarding black people in New York. Kellman's biography notes the few black characters that appear in *MORS*, concluding, "the black population in Roth's fictional New York is extremely sparse" (100). The manuscripts, however, reveal more sustained, problematic engagements with black people and blackness.

In volume two, Roth contrasts the attractive Pearl Canby with a “heavy colored woman” also at the stadium. In the manuscripts, Roth refers here to “black mammies” (Roth Papers, box 27, folder 2, 594). The published text ponders whether it’s worth the trouble to go “way up there in black Harlem” (2 130). In the manuscripts, Ira refers alternately to “niggertown” and “nigger Harlem” (Roth Papers, box 27, folder 2, 594). The manuscripts use the term “*shvartzeh*” and “darky” repeatedly. And after sex with Theodora, Ira immediately contemplates black sexuality with the history of slavery:

Dark 119th Street, ahead of him walking at a good clip toward the Cut, the trestle, the darker dark, the way she was on the bed – he smirked at himself – her twat licorice embedded in chocolate. So if you had slaves, the way they once did in the South, Jesus, all kinds of things you all of a sudden possessed: Darky wench, all right, darky wench. Then, you took her like an animal. If she had a child, darky he too, slave, not your cherished kid, but to sell, like, whew! Now wait a minute, before you cross Park Avenue, cross under the overpass, go by the pillars, oh! What he was thinking: This was worse, worse than with a slave. (Roth Collection, Box 4, Folder 27, 605)

Everything following “embedded in chocolate” is removed in the published text.¹⁴ In the margins, Weil writes, “Unfortunately we will be in big trouble if we leave this in. Things are controversial enough” (Roth collection, box 4, folder 27, 605). In essence, Weil intimates that Roth has only a limited amount of audience goodwill; enough to engage incest, presumably, but not enough to depict Ira as racist.

The irony is twofold: the narrative depicts incest in graphic terms, and concerns itself extensively with the societal injustice of even mild forms of antisemitism. Yet the removed passage reveals Ira’s negotiation of his racial positioning vis-à-vis American history, and makes clear that Ira processed his sexual encounter with a black woman by contemplating American slavery, identifying with white slave owners, and imagining his

¹⁴ Eventually, the adjective “dusky” is added before “chocolate” (2 136).

own sexual ownership of black women, as well as any children born from such encounters. The passage is certainly disturbing, but why is a passage suggesting that white Jewish immigrants identified with slave owners when contemplating race and slavery more disturbing than explicit depictions of sibling incest and cousin rape?

Few Roth scholars have engaged this question, though Lene Schott-Kristensen does make mention of these issues. Schott-Kristensen correctly notes that “on request, Roth changed Ira’s use of ‘nigger’ and ‘*schvartze*’ to ‘coloured’, a revision which seems wrong to me since it quite obviously misrepresents Ira and his culture” (205). Likely alluding to Weil’s handwritten note, she observes that Weil “feared such passages would get Roth into trouble” (205). Revising fictional Ira also amounts to protecting the actual author. But while these revisions seemingly misrepresent Roth’s culture, Weil does not put much effort into revising Roth’s contemporaries’ racist language. The published version finds Larry referring to “darkies” (3 154). Stella calls three black youths “niggers” in a crucial scene, language Ira uses only when quoting Stella (4 207). The misrepresentation, then, has a particular logic: Jews *can* be racist, in *MORS*, but the anti-hero protagonist cannot be.

While the sex with Theodora opens the door, structurally, to Ira’s incestuous relations with his sister, the threat of rape from three black teenagers facilitates Ira finally ending his relations with Stella. Kellman, in his biography of Roth, refers to these three characters once as “thugs” (100) and once as being “like avenging angels,” (325) but in both references he states that they “harass” Ira and Stella, never mentioning their intent to rape. Gibbs writes that, “Only after being interrupted by three youths in the movie theatre (when Stella’s bravery is of considerable help in extricating them from a threatening

situation) does Ira feel anything approaching admiration for her” (*Tetralogy* 229). Gibbs omits the characters’ racial categorization entirely, despite Stella’s “bravery” involving her yelling “Rotten niggers!” as she “threw herself forward with flailing fist” (4 207).

Manuscripts reveal that Weil has again removed multiple instances of Ira using the word “nigger” in this section. But Roth’s original text also reveals a more complex narrative depiction of Ira’s racism. Both draft and published versions of the scene begin with the resolution of a major plot point: Ira learns that Stella is no longer pregnant. To celebrate Stella’s menstruation, the end of the pregnancy (and for Ira, marriage) scare, Ira spontaneously takes her to Fox’s Theater, a movie house where he’s previously worked. Ira takes Stella to the balcony (he calls it “nigger heaven” in the drafts – a term referring to segregation in movie theaters), where she performs oral sex on Ira. When three black teenagers notice, Ira and Stella abscond to a ladies room. The teenagers follow, one produces a razor, and they demand sex with Stella before she leads her and Ira’s escape.

The manuscript is very different. It proceeds in a similar fashion until Ecclesias interrupts the proceedings with the word “Wait.” Ira responds, “You?” and then, “I thought I had dispensed with you,” alluding both to Ecclesias’ diminished role in the manuscript, and Ira’s obvious satisfaction at Ecclesias’ absence (Roth Papers, box 77, folder 4, 1054). Remember, Ecclesias functions not merely as alter-ego in the text, but as something of a disembodied conscience calling Ira to account. Ira, anticipating Ecclesias’ critique, asks, “where have I failed?” Ecclesias’ response is sharp and to the point:

You failed in representing your black or Afram youth as human beings, as varied human beings. You’ve depicted them, if not as thoroughgoing stereotypes, then as mere counters carrying out your will in effecting your larger design, in a word, your plot. They were merely serving your needs, not being the several and diverse individualities they

are, giving no hint of their potential emergence as a distinct ethnic force. True or not? (Roth Papers, box 77, folder 4, 1054-1055)

This critique is accurate. Note that neither Ecclesias nor Ira discuss the scene in terms of its memoir-istic fealty to history. Ecclesias instead suggests the characters “serve” Ira’s needs in a fashion that suggests that this scene, like the Theodora scene, was invented.

Ecclesias’ observation also evokes Morrison’s theory of American Africanism:

Just as entertainers, through or by association with blackface, could render permissible topics that otherwise would have been taboo, so American writers were able to employ an imagined Africanist persona to articulate and imaginatively act out the forbidden in American culture. (66)

Ecclesias and Morrison both recognize the manner in which black characters facilitate white authors negotiating taboos, and Ecclesias assesses this as an artistic failure; an inability to represent black characters as human. But Ecclesias’s observation, taken alongside Morrison’s discussion of taboo, clarifies how Roth’s ability to explore his own factual history of committing incest and rape are rendered “permissible topics” only through the incorporation of black figures who may or may not have existed. If we zoom out, we see a disturbing set of book-ends: Theodora initiates Ira into penetrative sexual relations, “teaching” him so that he can then commence sexual activity with Minnie, “the right way.” The three black would-be rapists, essentially, scare the white rapist straight. Encounters with hypersexual black characters frame Ira’s incest, rape, and predatory behavior; first facilitating it and then marking it as unacceptable.

The supposedly “redemptive” arc of Ira’s journey requires the displacement of his sins and morally questionable characteristics onto a predictable scapegoat. In discussing how race, rape, and lynching intersect in turn of the century novels, Sandra Gunning observes that “sexual and political agency became increasingly linked in the figure of the

black rapist precisely because of the dependent definition of citizenship on definitions of (white) manhood” (7). Though Gunning (like Morrison) does not look at white ethnic immigrant texts in her study, her observations are quite relevant to *MORS*, which, though written in the 1990s, depicts the same approximate era she interrogates; one marked by “an unprecedented rise in the number of lynchings and white race riots directed specifically at African American communities” and “an outpouring of distinctive narratives concerned with white supremacy and alleged black degeneration in the wake of Reconstruction” (4). If Gunning’s study, which focuses on Thomas Dixon, Kate Chopin and Mark Twain, establishes the significance of the figure of the black rapist for non-immigrant white American authors, Roth’s novel confirms that the figure was equally useful for ethnic white Americans attempting to integrate into white American society.¹⁵

In short, in order to establish, or perhaps, redeem Ira’s “(white) manhood,” Roth contrasts Ira’s masculinity with that of sexually threatening black men. But Gunning’s study is of fiction; what to make of Roth’s autobiographical fiction utilizing the same framework? Here, too, a return to the manuscript helps clarify Roth’s artistic choices, and their barely concealed ideological ramifications. After Ecclesias interrupts the narrative, Ira interrupts Ecclesias, mid-sentence, and resumes the narrative, except instead of resumption, it is a full re-conception of the scene. Stella, who previously has run out yelling “poleese” is still trapped with Ira. The scene rewinds and resumes thusly:

“What you here for?” the hulking black youth at the door--mute till now--demanded. He had a surprisingly soft, silky voice, not much above a whisper.

“You know what I’m here for.”

¹⁵ Roth’s novel also suggests a link between the racial politics of the late twentieth century and the nostalgic imagination for the early twentieth century.

“We here for the same thing.” (Roth Papers, box 77, folder 4, 1055)

In the published version, the demand for sex specifies the act: “She blow you, she blow us” (2 206). But after Ecclesias’s intervention, in the manuscript, Roth emphasizes that young Ira and the youths are there “for the same thing,” a distinction that is not merely semantic; it aligns them. It complicates any notion of Ira as Stella’s protector. Further, Ira’s tone, conciliatory in the first version, becomes more assertive. He exclaims, “you’re here to rape her!” and after Stella also protests, the second-take scene embarks on another narratively suspect turn:

The hulking youth at the door ignored her. “Your people got plenty o’ brown pussy whether they like it or not.”

“My people? My people had nothing to do with it!” Ira retorted outraged. [“]Slavery? Never! What’re you talking about!”

“Sure they did.”

“How? Tell me.”

“You never hear o’ Judah Benjamin?”

Taken aback Ira stared into the others soft brown eyes, “Well, if you know that much, what the hell are you doing here?”

“Same as you, I told you.” (Roth Papers, Box 77, Folder 4, 1055-1056)

Just how taboo is Jewish racism? So taboo that a scene ostensibly about the threat of rape instantly, and bizarrely, shifts into one where Ira defiantly and defensively asserts that Jews “had nothing to do with” slavery. The “hulking black youth,” who is named Chester, makes no explicit allusion to Ira being Jewish. Ira does not hear “your people” as indicating “white people” though; he interprets (correctly) the term to mean Jews and reacts with more indignation to this accusation than he does to the threat of rape.

In this reimagined version of the movie theater scene (remember, this is take two), Ira ends up in a debate as to whether white Jews functioned as white people in an American racial context. Stella’s vulnerability to Chester and his associates’ sexual threat

becomes secondary, to Ira, to a defense of Jewish innocence regarding the history of American slavery. When Chester names Judah Benjamin, the Jewish Attorney General and Secretary of State for the Confederacy, Ira is incredulous; but he clearly recognizes the name. That Chester should have such knowledge, and still be a would-be rapist, is something Ira cannot fathom – Chester’s intelligence, Ira’s question indicates, precludes his being a rapist. But once again, upon being asked why he’s there, Chester replies, “same as you.” The irony of Ira’s incredulity is apparent: intelligent, knowledgeable men of all backgrounds can and do attempt rape.

The scenes also undercut the sense of *MORS* as memoir, or autobiography. How can this be a record of an event if the event happens twice, and very differently? It’s impossible to know whether the Fox Theater scene was entirely fabricated, but it bears re-emphasis that Ecclesiastes implies that it was (“they were merely serving your needs”), and it also merits consideration for its self-consciously theatrical qualities: the scene is staged twice and with heightened stakes and drama. And it takes place in a movie theater.

The double-scene reminds us that what we witness in movie theaters is often made-up. Val Smith, writing about the racist history of American cinema, observes:

...despite their constructedness, media representations of members of historically disenfranchised communities reflect and, in turn, affect the lived circumstances of real people. But the relationship between media representations and ‘real life’ is nothing if not complex and discontinuous; to posit a one-to-one correspondence between the inescapability of certain images and the uneven distribution of resources within culture is to deny the elaborate ways in which power is maintained and deployed. (3)

Smith reminds us that filmic representations of black people have real effects, mentioning D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*, for instance, as significant not just for setting the tone for racist depictions of African Americans in film, but for its “direct impact on

contemporaneous race relations” (1). Roth’s Fox Theater scene takes place in the early 1920s; just a few years after the release of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), though he likely wrote this scene in the 1980s or 1990s. *The Birth of a Nation* casts black men as sexual threats to white women, displacing a historical record in which white men could rape black women without black women having access to legal recourse. Roth’s movie theater scene casts black men as a more dangerous sexual threat to Stella than Ira, despite the fact that Ira had been raping Stella from a young age, and any contemporaneous sense of consent on Stella’s part involves the impact of sexual abuse beginning when she was (in the drafts) eleven or twelve.

Smith also draws our attention to the notion of how “power is maintained and deployed,” and to that end, I want to stress that what Roth’s texts reveal about Jewish racism cannot be fully appreciated by merely looking at the edits, the language, the staging, of particular scenes. It again requires a pulling back; the recognition that Roth dedicates thousands of words in *MORS* to the exposure of the multiple ways antisemitism affected his experience growing up in New York City. Even as Ecclesias chides Ira for his racist choices in depicting black characters, the overarching effect of the text is to confirm for readers the oppressive experience of growing up Jewish in a diasporic, antisemitic, non-Jewish New York City neighborhood, where non-Jews lurked as threats, and nonwhite non-Jews loomed most threatening of all. A brief mea culpa about the racist imagery in the text from Ecclesias does not an anti-racist text make. In fact, the revisions suggest that stories highlighting American antisemitism may self-consciously remove Jewish racism to avoid complicating prevailing narratives of Jews as a comparatively disempowered and vulnerable class.

The tension in the depiction, revision, and omission of antiblack racism in *MORS* reflects broader historical debates about the history of black Jewish relations, or, as Adam Zachary Newton calls them, “blackjewishrelations,” indicating the extent to which the topic has become its own self-referential genre. Luther Adams has observed that despite contemporary discussion on the supposed political alliance of blacks and Jews focusing “on the conflict, the ‘broken alliance’ or ‘tragic confrontation’ between blacks and Jews symbolized by a few specific instances of hostilities,” the significance of studying black Jewish relations historically involves how they are “deeply implicated in the history of twentieth-century America” (902). In particular, Adams writes:

Jewish-black experiences stand at the center of urban history, our understanding of immigration and migration; assimilation and exclusion; the social construction of whiteness and blackness; the issue of power, access, and equality. (902)

If one of the strengths of *MORS* is its seemingly encyclopedic depiction of New York City, one of the published version’s weaknesses is the extent to which the historical significance of blackness to Ira has been scrubbed from its pages, and Ira’s overwhelmingly condescending views on black characters sanitized. That is, in the manuscript of Ira’s ostensibly Jewish bildungsroman, we learn an enormous amount about the social construction of whiteness accommodating Jewishness.

But just as Weil removes so much of what Roth has to say about black people in his New York story, historians have made similar choices in recording Jewish American history. Regarding Harlem in particular, Joe W. Trotter notes how Jeffrey Gurock’s *When Harlem was Jewish* suggests that “Jews did not leave this particular community specifically because of their feeling any special aversion to, or fear of, living among

Blacks” (203).¹⁶ And yet Roth, in the manuscripts, published version, and his video-recorded interview with Weil, clearly reveals his fear and aversion to black people, even emphasizing the fictionalized aspect of Ira’s visit to Theodora by stressing he was “scared to death of that kind of woman anyway” (Roth Papers, box 22, folder 19a, 5).

Still, Weil’s editorial attempts at erasing Roth’s racism occasionally just made text into subtext. For example, in volume one, Ira complains about having to do manual labor at his job at a department store. In the manuscript, Ira thinks to himself, “Lousy bastard manager, why didn’t he let the nigger do it?” (Roth Collection, box 1, folder 3, 247). The revised version changes one word: “why didn’t he let the porter do it?” (1 184). The reader has already been introduced to the character, Harvey. The meaning of the sentence – a thirteen-year-old Ira’s indignation at being made to do work he considers beneath him, but appropriate for the black adult he’s just met – seemingly remains consistent. And yet, for some readers, the racism that underscores Ira’s objection might go unnoticed with the elimination of the slur.

At other times, Roth’s writing on race straddles the line between naïve and disingenuous. For example, between the movie theater scenes, Ecclesias puts forth the following, seemingly antiracist argument in critiquing Ira’s narrative:

But more important, you failed to represent the changes that have taken place in your own attitude toward them, changes in the psyche of the writer: Where is the new element, the new ingredient impregnating your outlook, nay, your very approach, a new natural approach. An approach that was fashioned, among other things, by their decencies and sympathies and multitude of kindnesses shown you in your many illnesses, your sufferings, where the new comprehensions of their plight, their

¹⁶ Lila Corwin Berman’s *Metropolitan Jews* addresses Jewish participation in white flight and suburbanization via an examination of Detroit’s Jewish communities, with a more comprehensive historical engagement with race and racism in the post-Civil Rights era.

deprivations, the hideous cruelties they had to endure, but above all--to you--their infinite capabilities, as with all human beings: Their dynamic vigor, art, wit, not merely from the nurse who comes to the house, changes the dressing on your foot, chaffers, counsels, or the physician who examines, prescribes, conscientious, thoughtful, colloquial, no, to the entire range of their massive ethnic force; unique, eventually dominant. All these have changed your own nature, where have you acknowledged the change? (Roth Papers, box 77, folder 4, 1055)

The claim that Ira outgrows his racism because of the kindness of his medical attendants registers as disingenuous. The allusion to black people becoming “eventually dominant” reeks of the racist paranoia white supremacist groups express in crying “white genocide.” Whatever the positive individual attributes of the black doctor, the notion of “massive ethnic force” suggests that Ira views his interests and black interests as fundamentally opposed; if they are “eventually dominant,” Ira (and whatever group Ira identifies with here) is eventually dominated.¹⁷ Ecclesias’s chiding of the elderly Ira for his racist prose, then, actually serves as an opportunity for Roth saturating the text with further racist suppositions. Roth intimation of Ira’s fear of non-whites’ “eventual dominance” indicates that Ira’s white Jewish racism explicitly parallels a very particular white supremacist ideology, despite commonplace, naïve assumptions that white supremacy and white Jewish antiblack racism cannot align in elements of their worldview. But Roth also indicates a more predictable white Jewish racism narrative, one in which Ira’s xenophobia happily softens with the chance to build actual relationships with black people. However, the premise that Ira became less racist thanks to his black nurses and

¹⁷ Other manuscript drafts confirm Ira’s fear of a black planet. A vignette from *MORS* drafts depicting a dance at a Communist rally features Ira reflecting upon being shoved by a black man trying to stop a fight: “sent on my way by easy thrust, it seemed to me I glimpsed the power that would one day be theirs. How would I like that day, day of their mastery” (Roth Papers, box 26, folder 3, 331).

physician asks us to completely separate race from a narrative that occasionally dwells on Ira's political conversion from youth socialist to elderly neoconservative.

Ira's politics as a youth reflect Roth's politics as a youth. And Ira was amply cognizant of antiblack racism to have suggested, in another excised portion of the manuscript, that a writer friend of his have a white character make false accusations of rape and murder a plot point in a story involving a son raping and killing his mother:

How strange the dynamism driving the psyche revealed in one's answer: The young central character ought to rape his mother, I proposed, come home drunk and rape her, have her rush to the police with an incoherent story about a black assailant. And then to culminate all, have the solving of the crime assigned to a sleuth who was actually a Negro, but one who "passed"; and in the course of investigation began an affair with the mother. J P found the suggestion hilarious -- and impossible. (Roth Papers, Box 22, Folder 20, 515)

Consider what Roth accomplishes in that brief passage. He links (again) the anxieties of close endogamy with interracial exogamies; acknowledges structural racism by suggesting a plot where police are easily deceived by false accusations of black criminality; showcases an awareness of the phenomenon of passing; and associates the capacity to imagine this plot as reflecting a strange "dynamism" in his own psyche. This reveals a sophisticated capacity for contemplating race and racism, and emphasizes just how much inconsistency Roth reveals in his characterization of Ira across drafts.¹⁸ Even allowing for the premise that Roth designed Ira as a character who convincingly converts racial ideology via the kindness of black health care providers, the early manuscript

¹⁸ Elsewhere, and more commonly, Roth characterized his move away from racial progressivism in stark, positive terms. In a 1976 interview with Bonnie Lyons, about a 1969 short story, "Final Dwarf," which revealed an autobiographical protagonist's discomfort with his father's explicit racism, Roth described the story as "sort of prophetic," because "it meant the shrinking of the liberal. The retreat of the liberal from his own position without his knowing it" (*Shifting Landscape* 166).

excerpt only draws attention to how both Roth and Ira, as authors, knew better than to use hypersexual black characters as ahistorical MacGuffins for Jewish incest narratives. Or rather, Roth did not know better, but he knew what he was doing.

But if Jewish racism, Jewish pedophilia and rape, and Jewish incest are all taboo, what accounts for the different ways in which the revision process navigated each taboo? Certainly, Robert Weil played an important role in this decision-making, but Weil also acted in a predictable fashion, attempting to mold Roth's novel for a particular audience, inclined towards positively identifying with a type of Jewish male protagonist. Novels that depict rape, and racism, are common. But those that depict the male hero protagonist as racist and rapist are less so. To make sense of why Ira could not be depicted as raping (or in Roth's revealing, disturbing words, "semi-raping") an eleven- or twelve-year-old girl, any more than he could refer to (essentially all) black characters with slurs, we might contemplate Roth, and David Schearl, as Jewish American icons.

Huck, David, and Jewish Narcissistic Mirroring

Although *Call It Sleep* garnered some positive reviews upon its release, only in the 1960s, thanks to the attention of scholars like Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin, did the novel become a best-selling phenomenon. At that time, Roth expressed ambivalence about the book's newfound success, and distanced himself from it. In interviews, he suggested that he was no longer the same person that wrote the celebrated novel (Kellman 233). Wirth-Nesher reads *MORS* as reflecting Roth's desire "to set the record straight by shocking his readers into the realization that he was victimizer, not only

victim, that the only child of *Call it Sleep* is an elegant evasion” (273).¹⁹ Roth was eager for his audience to encounter the flawed protagonist of *MORS*. Prior to its release, Roth told a journal editor that “Volume two is scandalous,” and, refusing to offer hints, offered, “You’ll have to read it” (Kellman 301). Weil reports that Roth was impatient for him to arrive at the sibling incest passages in reading his drafts (Gibbs “Conversation” 157). The novel’s structure, which waits until volume two to present Ira as incestuous, pedophilic, or rapist, is also instructive. If we again consider Stockton’s reading of Lyne’s *Lolita*, in which the revelation of the child spoils the camera’s erotic focus on the supposed woman, we might contemplate *MORS*’ focus on Ira: Roth *attempts* to spoil the male hero protagonist (in culturally specific terms, the *schlemiel*) by revealing the rapist.

Reviews of *MORS* regularly touched on the tension between Ira and David Shearl. Some reviewers were immediately sensitive to the differences in their character. Robert Cohen, reviewing volume one in *Tikkun*, referred to Roth’s own childhood as “Schearlsh,” and observed that “If *Sleep*’s David Shearl is portrayed as a kind of baffled innocent, Roth, these many painful years later, seems to have exhausted all sympathy for his earlier self.” Others went so far as to essentially merge the two protagonists into a singular autobiographical protagonist in two different works. In *Newsweek*, Jack Kroll wrote, “‘Call It Sleep’ was an astonishing projection of the mind of a small boy, David Shearl, growing up in the slums of New York’s Lower East Side. Roth picks up his autobiographical hero (now called Ira Stigman) in 1914... and takes

¹⁹ Roth’s desire to shock his readers might be considered against his difficulty doing so with *CIS*. Consider Maxwell Geismar’s take on the Oedipal overtones of *CIS*: David’s relationship with his mother is “described so beautifully, so completely, that one realizes that the author, too, wrote this classic fable in all innocence of spirit” (Rubinstein 41). Even when Roth was writing about a boy’s sexual yearning for his mother, it came across as so aesthetically compelling as to make the Oedipal complex itself adorable.

him to 1920 when he is 14 years old.” Predictably, given Roth’s authorship of such an iconic text, almost every review considered the new novel in light of the earlier one; often unfavorably, and protective of *CIS*. Mary Gordon’s review of volume two for the *New York Times* had an especially emphatic take on the earlier novel’s superiority. In that review, Gordon quoted Roth’s own allusion to Ira and David Schearl’s relationship from a 1986 essay. Gordon wrote that Roth “says that the point of his project, the sequel to ‘Call It Sleep,’ is ‘to take the ground from under the innocent victim’ of ‘Call It Sleep’ and to show him as the ‘victimizer, but more to the point, all of us as victims -- in a degenerative society.’” Very aware of Roth’s artistic intent, Gordon does not so much reject the premise as she does fault Roth’s execution, and Ira’s (and Roth’s) lack of empathy for their sisters (fictional and real alike). Gordon concludes that “‘Call It Sleep’ remains a masterpiece; nothing is lost from it, or added to it, by reading its sequels.”

So, while Roth clearly intended that *MORS* might permit him to issue a “corrective” to what he felt was a dishonest portrayal of an autobiographical protagonist, not every reader accepted the denunciation of *Call It Sleep* or David Schearl. But Roth utilized the form of *MORS* as a form of bait and switch, to expose the protagonist as “victimizer,” by withholding information from his audience, and his editor, who had no knowledge of the second volume incest reveal until he came across it in drafts.²⁰ Thus, even while Roth articulated iconoclastic goals (towards himself and his character), he arrives at the iconoclastic moment having drawn the reader into identifying with what appears, at first, to be a not unfamiliar protagonist. The ambivalence Roth felt regarding Schearl extended to his audience; he felt Schearl was dishonest, and punished his fans for

²⁰ Weil confirmed in an interview with Gibbs that he did not know the content of volume two until after volume one was complete (“Conversation” 155)

their fealty to Schearl by creating a relatively similar protagonist, only to reveal the character's transgressions after having the reader bond with Ira for over 400 pages.

Weil's revision suggestions reveal his sense of the limits to what Roth's audience might have tolerated in a protagonist. Jonathan Arac, writing about white American emotional investment in Huckleberry Finn, may help contextualize readers' relationships – Arac uses the word idolatry – to David Schearl, Ira Stigman, and Roth:

Because the structure of the sublime joins reader, character, and author in interlinked identifications, it may lead to narcissistically fixed mirrorings rather than “ecstatic” mobility. Readers may then tend to be highly protective of the characters and authors in which they are invested, and at the same time will feel themselves intimately threatened by anything that seems to criticize or diminish either Huck or Twain. (36)

Arac writes about Huck and Twain as figures who, essentially, cannot be considered racist by white American readers because they represent white moral triumph over slavery and racism. A similar phenomenon might be in play with Roth and both Ira and David Schearl for Jewish American audiences: David Schearl's appeal involves an ambivalence about Jewishness, American identity, and assimilation, and a deep-seated guilt that Schearl carried as a result of an overdeveloped superego. Schearl's desire to purify himself does not emerge out of any act that most readers would identify as immoral; Schearl's appeal involves the guilt of an innocent. As such, Schearl may invite mirroring on account of his reflection of a narcissistic yearning by American Jews for an immigrant origin story that not only engages their own ambivalence about assimilation and Jewishness, but does this through a figure of innocence. Leslie Fiedler's observations on *CIS* as having Christological qualities, and Schearl as a Christ figure, reinforce a

reading of Roth's novel as seductive origin story.²¹ But showing Ira rape an eleven- or twelve-year-old girl, and repeatedly refer to black characters with racial slurs, would have precluded narcissistic mirroring of the protagonist and the author.

The fundamental tension marking the creative process that brought *MORS* to press involved the cross-purposed goals of Roth and his publishers. Roth sought to author a book that punished (or made complicit) his fans for their narcissistic mirroring of him and David Shearl, a task achieved by ultimately exposing Ira Stigman as unforgivable; even abhorrent. Weil's editorial task, meanwhile, involved blocking Roth from this objective, preventing Ira from becoming too fundamentally detestable a figure. Commercially and critically, keeping *MORS* protagonist "narcissistically mirrorable" made sense given that Roth's appeal involved his rendering of one of the most narcissistically mirrorable protagonists in American Jewish literature. What *MORS* may reveal is that, while compelling, interesting protagonists are always flawed, there may be particular, unexpected types of transgression that permit narcissistic mirroring by readers invested in a certain white male subjectivity. Arac's theorizing suggests that for readers who do engage in narcissistic mirroring, some taboo element of self-identification with flawed hero protagonists is *constitutive* of the identification process. For Arac, white American identification with Huckleberry Finn involves celebrating Huck as an exemplar of anti-racism precisely because Huck's interactions with Jim actually establish him as a symbol of white supremacy. Narcissistic investment in Ira on account of his supposedly confessional, contrite rejection of his younger self's behavior actually facilitates

²¹ Fiedler's influential essay "The Christian-ness of the Jewish-American Writer" expands on this, and considers *CIS* as one of many similar themed Jewish authored texts.

celebrating Ira's graphic depictions of rape besides the disingenuous guise of celebrating Ira's moral transformation.

In conducting this analysis of Roth's work, my goal is to demonstrate the structural link between Roth's portrayal of close endogamy with his depiction of interracial exogamy. While the tension between fact and fiction regarding Roth's and Ira's relationship with their sister[s] has garnered scholarly and critical attention, less attention has been paid to the novel's engagement with rape and race. The attention heaped onto the "scandalous" sibling incest component, in effect, actually serves to deflect attention from the text's comparatively more demeaning sexual and racial politics.

By way of conclusion, I introduce one final editorial revision that underscores just how much Roth's text and its revisions, ostensibly about Jewish American identity, actively collapse the space between Jewishness and American whiteness, and dehumanize nonwhites in service of that goal. The aforementioned attempted rape scene in the movie theater, in which Ira and Stella are confronted by black youths, intersects directly with the Stella revisions. Stella is always younger than originally intended. So are the black youths that follow them into the bathroom.

In the published version of *MORS*, Roth describes the characters as "Elastic, brown striplings, fourteen years old, fifteen, who knew?" (4 205). The manuscript reads: "Brown, alert striplings, seventeen years old, eighteen, who knew?" (Roth papers, box 77, folder 4, 1052). Even the sentence construction echoes Ira's inability to confidently assert Stella's age in volume two ("How old was she? Fourteen? Was he crazy or was he right?") (282). Why make the black characters three years younger? Aging Stella involved changing a number in order to make her read as less "innocent," more

responsible for sexual activity, more capable of consent, even as her characterization remained the same. Making the black youths younger does not accomplish the inverse; they do not read as more innocent. Instead, they read as more threatening.

In January of 1996, Hillary Clinton made her infamous “superpredator” comments. Referring to black youths and crime, she said: “They are not just gangs of kids anymore. They are often the kinds of kids that are called ‘superpredators.’ No conscience, no empathy” (Byrnes). Clinton’s two-decades-old comments received significant press attention during her 2016 presidential campaign, alongside consideration of the outcomes of the crime bill for which she advocated, the success of the Black Lives Matter movement in drawing sustained attention to black vulnerability at the hands of America’s police forces, and the consequences of racist rhetoric about black male youth. Clinton’s words reflect a broader history of race and racism’s intersection with the concept of childhood, subjects analyzed by Stockton and Robin Bernstein, among others. Bernstein comments on the “underanalyzed exclusion of black youth from the category of childhood” (16) as a phenomenon dating back to the nineteenth century, and Stockton locates this rhetoric in late-eighteenth-century literature (31).

While *Lolita* figures as a relevant literary comparison for *Stella*, the age revision of the black youths in the movie theater invites contemplation alongside the way policemen and armed nonblack civilians described black male teenagers like Tamir Rice, Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin, prior to killing them. Timothy Loehman, the officer who murdered the twelve-year-old Rice while he played with a pellet gun in a park, testified that he thought Rice was eighteen years old (Laughland and Swaine). This might initially seem like an inversion of the *MORS* revision, in which the characters are made

three years younger, but the logic is consistent. To Ira and Stella (and reader) the “fourteen or fifteen” year old black youths might appear more threatening, older, than their age would indicate, and the revision history confirms this: the characters were designed as seventeen or eighteen year olds. Just as raising Stella’s age preserves the notion of some innocent childhood that the text dare not disturb, lowering the black teenagers’ age underscores the premise that the sexually threatening qualities of young black men exist regardless of the specifics of age or the concept of childhood. Making the black teenagers younger concretizes the sense of their total amorality. An eighteen-year-old rapist (like the youths in the manuscript, or Ira, when he first rapes Stella) implies immorality. A fourteen-year-old black rapist suggests a far more pathologized amorality, contributing to a culture that refuses to recognize the concept of black childhood.

The Intersections of *MORS*’ Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia

In closing, I want to touch briefly on immigrant pathologization before sketching out Roth’s investments in white masculinity. Reading *MORS* as utilizing incest as a theme to evoke the close-knit reality of Jewish families upon their arrival in New York City and the “new world” requires minimizing numerous clues Roth provides about the cycle of sexual assault, while also disregarding the experience of women and girls who encountered the threat of sexual violence not just in their surrounding communities, but in their own homes. Kellman, for instance, states that “incest is a dramatic manifestation of immigrant insecurity, the newcomers’ inability to invest their emotions in anything beyond the reassuring confines of the clan” (70). This sort of reading overlooks the gendered power dynamics which facilitate women and girls being especially vulnerable to incestuous abuse. Furthermore, there are numerous scenes that suggest Roth

consciously depicts sexual violence as a form of generationally replicated trauma, and *MORS* can be read as a literary examination of how victims of sexual abuse revisit their trauma upon others. Furthermore, framing the incestuous content as constitutive of immigrant experience or anxiety contributes to a discourse that pathologizes immigrants in racist terms. That is, even though this specific narrative reading puts the onus of incestuous behavior on early twentieth century Jewish immigrants, the (faulty) logic is too easily transferable to contemporary immigrant communities. If we consider Ira's sexual conduct with Stella and Minnie in the context of Ira's molestation at the hands of a stranger in Ft. Tryon park, and later his Spanish teacher, we can perhaps avoid pathologizing immigrants, and instead interrogate Ira's own inability to discuss his adult male abusers with anything other than homophobic vitriol, as well as the way in which his abuse reproduces itself through his targeting of female family members societally, and domestically, more vulnerable than he.

MORS reveals illuminating intersections of Ira's homophobia, misogyny and racism. An especially revealing passage in volume two finds Ira in a euphoric state, expressing relief upon learning Minnie's pregnancy scare has ended:

There was no brag, no parading, nothing but shame. Genie in a vase. Pandora's box. His sister's box! Can you imagine bragging about that? Jesus, it almost made him shut his eyes in the enormous twinge the very thought caused him. Hey, fellers, I thought I knocked up my sister! Was I scared. Boyoboy. Holy Jesus Christ, of all the things he had ever heard those guys say: pratt and blow and lap and go down on it, back scuttle, and every other goddamn thing he once believed was just make-believe, but even if it was true, nobody ever said I laid my sister. Yeah, the Italian kids said, aw, yer mudder's ass, yer sister's cunt – but what was that compared to: my sister's cunt? (2 167)

Roth utilizes paralipsis; he denies bragging about having sex with his sister only to set up extensive bragging about having had sex with his sister. But Roth's fantasized impulse to

brag to “the Italian kids” requires consideration alongside his specific insecurities, and in particular, his pronounced homophobia. Despite the revision of Ira’s racial slurs, Ira refers to Mr. Lennard, the Spanish teacher who molests Ira, as a “fag” on multiple occasions (1 148, 2 155, 3 119). Editing volume one, Weil felt that Roth would “hint at things,” and that Roth was “about to account for his homosexuality,” (Gibbs and Weil 157) as opposed to incest. Where Weil senses misdirection, there is also meaningful linkage: Ira’s misunderstanding, and rejection, of what he considers homosexuality, is absolute. Not only does he conflate homosexuality with pedophilia, his bragging to the “Italian kids” involves the extent of his heterosexual impulse, his strident inclination towards sex with women *or* girls. The premise of Ira’s boast is that age or familial relation cannot stifle Ira’s heterosexual urges. Warren Hoffman’s *The Passing Game*, which engages with queer Jewish identity, asks “To what extent do Jewish male narrators work to exhibit a virile heterosexual masculine identity that counteracts the stereotype of the effeminate Jew?” (15). Roth’s novel indicates that the imperative for some narrators to express that virile heterosexual masculine identity can catapult them clearly well past the bounds of an ostensibly unspeakable taboo.

MORS should not be read as a novel of redemption. Reading it in that fashion requires its audience to participate in the displacement of Ira’s transgressions onto black characters, and cosign the misogyny with which Ira depicts Stella and Minnie. Ecclesias’s ongoing conversations with the elderly Ira reveal that the protagonist suffers from the same sexism, racism and homophobia in his old age that impacted his behavior in his youth. As Ecclesias tells the octogenarian writer, “you still are what you are” (2 286). One important facet of the manuscript’s usability lies in its depiction of how racism,

sexism, and homophobia intersect in Ira's attempt to craft his sense of self. This usability is diminished, but still extant, in the published novel.

In illustrating how an ideology of white supremacy involves the demarcation of a border, Ta-Nehisi Coates highlights the intersections of race, sexuality and gender: "The nigger, the fag, the bitch illuminate the border, illuminate what we ostensibly are not, illuminate the Dream of being white, of being a Man" (*Between the World* 60). Coates uses slurs to illustrate his point because the conception of difference involves a demeaning categorization, even if polite society edits its language. That *MORS* required one slur be erased, while the others remained, speaks to a logic of how that border operates, but in suggesting Roth's second novel is redemptive, we misuse a disturbingly revealing text. I'm not altogether certain we *can* use *MORS* in a truly responsible fashion without discussing the revisions that fundamentally altered the novel's presentation of race and rape. Certainly, even in its present construction, the text does present an opportunity for discussion in the context of other texts that probe the limits, and logics, for the celebration of a form of white patriarchal villainy, especially those that present it in an ostensibly vulnerable masculine form. And Ira's myopic preoccupation with his Jewish vulnerability, which seems to facilitate his exploitation of those more vulnerable than he, does juxtapose in some interesting ways with how the novel's narration speaks to power dynamics. But the revisions are fundamental because *MORS* is, at heart, a revision of *Call It Sleep*. And the editorial revisions facilitate *MORS* being read as an acceptable expression of misogyny and racism, as opposed to an unacceptable one. That process, and the way that it implicates not just an author, but an editorial process, a publishing house, and an audience, requires attention, meditation, and reflection.

CONCLUSION

Over the past several months, high profile stories involving powerful white men sexually harassing and assaulting women have proliferated. Several of these involving the entertainment industry have implicated white men of Jewish descent, and while these stories do not involve incest, they do invite analysis as to whether aspects of Jewish community protective politics account for how the stories are told (and how long it has taken for some of the stories to be told). Among the most prominent of these stories involves film producer Harvey Weinstein. After Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey broke the story about Weinstein's decades of sexual harassment in the *New York Times*, Ronan Farrow – Woody Allen's son – followed up with an immensely detailed piece for *The New Yorker* in which multiple women recounted sexual assault and rape in addition to sexual harassment.¹ Allen, in an interview, provided his own thoughts on the matter, including his worry that Weinstein's alleged behavior might lead to a “witch hunt atmosphere” (Chow). Given Allen's track record implying antisemitism in the coverage of allegations of his own behavior with Dylan, the invocation of unwarranted persecution (of whom? Men? White men? Jewish men? Industry insiders?) bears note.

It's also worth mentioning these stories have broken during the first year of the Trump administration. Trump was elected despite having been accused by more than a dozen women of sexual assault, and admitting to sexual assault in a recording of a conversation between him and Billy Bush while filming a 2005 segment for

¹ Farrow's article, “From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein's Accusers Tell Their Stories” was published online on October 10, 2017. Kantor and Twohey's article, “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades” was published on October 5, 2017. Farrow has since published a subsequent article on Weinstein.

Entertainment Tonight (“An Exhaustive List”). Questions regarding the legality of Trump’s sexual conduct accompany his extensive, demeaning, public sexual rhetoric, which has included, for years, sexualized commentary on his eldest daughter, Ivanka, now a part of his administration. Perhaps most infamously, in 2004, he affirmed a description of her as “a piece of ass” in an interview with Howard Stern, and suggested – joked? – on *The View* in 2006 that, “If Ivanka weren’t my daughter, perhaps I’d be dating her” (Withnall). While Trump is not Jewish, Ivanka is; she converted when she married Jared Kushner, Trump’s legally beleaguered Jewish son-in-law.

In drawing brief attention to the above narratives, my goal is to suggest just how ripe the current political moment is for continued analyses regarding how Jewishness, whiteness, racism, and misogyny combine to impact how these stories of sexual harassment and sexual assault are told. While the cursory allusion to the Trump family dynamics omits any direct reference to racism and people of color, I contend that we can better understand some of the cultural logic behind Trump’s white supremacist rhetoric and policies by considering the simultaneously signified incestuous and exogamous qualities of his family. And even where incest is not involved, as in Weinstein’s case, the Jewish community protective politics question is one worth pursuing. Weinstein was not alleged to have done anything incestuous, but he was a successful white male Jewish moviemaker who abused his power. If a centuries old, muted incest stereotype might prompt Jewish community protective responses, certainly a far more extant one involving powerful Jews who exert control over media could elicit a similar response.

I’ll return to Weinstein at the end of the conclusion, but to facilitate some reflection on the project, and its major claims, I want to touch on one episode involving

Trump to underscore how silencing operates in these incest narratives, as it involves Jewish women and (in this case, non-Jewish) patriarchs.

Who Gets to Tweet about Incest?

On October 19, 2016, just under a month prior to the election, The ADL commissioned a study regarding online antisemitic harassment of journalists (“ADL Report”). Writing about the study in the *Washington Post*, Callum Borchers noted that Jewish journalists had been targeted by 19,000 antisemitic tweets, and made specific mention of the harassment endured by Julia Ioffe, a Jewish journalist who then worked for *Politico*. In addition to drawing attention to antisemitic tweets, Ioffe publically posted and commented on antisemitic images emailed to her, and indicated that she received a phone call from a blocked number that played a speech by Hitler (Borchers).

After Trump was elected, various press organizations and reporters speculated on whether Ivanka Trump would occupy a role in the White House, given that Melania Trump had indicated a preference to remain in New York City (Calfas). Ioffe tweeted a joke in response to the speculation: “Either Trump is fucking his daughter or he’s shirking nepotism laws. Which is worse?” (Feldman). Ioffe, who had previously announced that she would be leaving her job at *Politico* for *The Atlantic*, was summarily dismissed by *Politico* on the same day of her tweet (Feldman).

Ioffe deleted the tweet, and apologized for it in two separate tweets just hours after posting it. But prior to the apology, she attempted to frame her thinking, tweeting, “We have a president-elect who popularized ‘saying what everyone is thinking,’ but I guess my phrasing should’ve been more delicate.” Ioffe’s explanation is vague, but it’s worth parsing: she intimates that everyone must notice the irregularity, so to speak, of a

president-elect's daughter being reported to play the role of the First Lady, but notes the double-standard that only Trump be permitted to give voice to the sort of observations that should otherwise never be spoken. (It's also worth stressing that the crux of her joke involved the bald-faced demonstration of unchecked nepotism.) Where the most powerful man in the world is allowed to joke about supposedly unspeakable taboos regarding his own daughter, a woman journalist loses her job for a joke about the same topic.

McNaron and Morgan's observation, that the taboo lies in speaking about incest, and not incest itself, again seems relevant here, but note that it only holds for Ioffe. Trump's invocation of incestuous desire may not be altogether that different, in its appeal, from Woody Allen's and Henry Roth's art. That is, the incestuous content of Allen's films, despite Allen's disingenuous insistence that there is none, and the explicit incestuous and sexually violent content in Roth's novel constitute a significant aspect of their appeal to their audiences. I would argue this phenomenon holds true for Trump as well.² A thorough analysis of Trump's Jewish incest narrative, paying attention to how he presents his persona alongside Jewish familial figures such as his daughter and son-in-law, and also how various media and critics do the same, would expose some of the logic of his use of incest, and the ethno-racial logic of this incest rhetoric, to appeal to his fans and base. Such analysis could be instructive, and perhaps quite useful in understanding

² Though there is not space for it here, there's a more thorough analysis worth conducting on how Allen and Trump both execute their patriarchal authority in ways that rely on contradictory public presentations: they both project seemingly contradictory presentations of self; simultaneously in-control (consider Trump's claim, "I alone can fix it"), and hapless (consider the scotch tape on Trump's tie) (Appelbaum). This tension, which I see as consistent with elements of Julia MacCannell's theorizing of the "brother," and Esther Rapoport, Dale Beran, and George Lakoff's theorizing of Trump, facilitates their power.

elements of Trump's appeal. As I consider ways to expand this dissertation into a book, a sustained investigation into Trump's incest narrative, as a figure whose decades-spanning rise to celebrity and political prominence traverses the 1990s, seems appropriate.

But while there is value in deconstructing the misogynistic and racist mechanisms that accompany these male storytellers' approach to incest narratives, there is also a danger in focusing too much attention on the powerful white male voices (Jewish or otherwise) that use their art and rhetoric to justify and/or rationalize violence against women, adolescents, LGBTQIA persons, and children. Julia Ioffe's voice is just one of many that Trump and his supporters have attempted to silence. But as a Jewish female journalist fired for making an incest joke, we should also think of her as one of the many authors of Trump's incest narrative, and consider how the silencing mechanisms regarding incest discourse function not merely at the level of allegation and/or denial; they function at the levels of profession, publication, livelihood, consumer culture, and certainly, within a capitalist system, profit. One of Gillian Harkins arguments in *Everybody's Family Romance* involves the notion that women successfully took ownership of incest narratives in the 1990s, and were able to profit from their authorship in a fashion not previously widely available to female authors. Roth's *MORS*, Allen's post-1991 films, and Trump's incestuous rhetoric regarding his daughter are not mere simultaneous developments with the boom in woman-authored incest narratives. They are observable, countervailing attempts to contest inroads in female ownership over incest narratives, and sexuality narratives more broadly. Roth's and Allen's projects involves reclaiming white male subjective ownership over the terms of the incest discussion.

This dissertation reflects my strong belief that the logic of this misogynistic, racist, homophobic reclamation project requires extensive analysis of white male incest narratives like Allen's and Roth's. But even with ostensibly progressive projects like the Women's Movement, white Jewish second-wave feminists assisted in the displacement of pathology from Jewish men onto black men. And even as *Roseanne* provided a far more sophisticated roadmap for thinking about incest stereotypes and Jewish masculinity, that chapter demonstrated how Jewish community protective impulses may account for why the show's explicit Jewish content has been largely ignored. But I hope that this dissertation's identification of these narratives as worth excavation is not read as an endorsement of their deserving prioritization. Considering additional woman-, nonwhite, non-binary- and queer-authored incest narratives promises to further broaden our understanding of incest dynamics, how we might discuss and conceptualize it, and how gender, sexuality, and race function in its context. As such, I want to briefly mention a few texts I find constructive in their articulation of incest as a phenomenon that, while destructive, does not necessarily result in families', women's, or children's destruction; even as they offer more honest depictions of the power dynamics surrounding incest that Allen and Roth distort in service to their (and many of their fans') male egos.

Incest Texts Worth Writing into the Narrative

While I make passing reference to Kate Simon's *Bronx Primitive: Portraits in a Childhood* (1982) in my chapter on Roth, her autobiographical writing also consists of two subsequent memoirs, *A Wide World: Portraits in an Adolescence* (1986), and *Etchings in an Hourglass* (1990). The last of her published autobiographical pieces brings us into the 1990s, but her focus on growing up in the Bronx in the very early

twentieth century (she was born in 1912, in Poland) situates her narrative as a relatively generationally consistent corollary to Roth, as does her broader project, which involves chronicling her adulthood. Her depiction of incest anxiety from a young girl's subjectivity directly dislodges myopic suggestions that Jewish incest anxiety involved insular fear of the wider non-Jewish world. Furthermore, as a successful and well-known travel writer, Simon's impact as a popular storyteller deserves attention, especially given how her creativity reached wide audiences in a different fashion than we might find with more conventional genres like film, novels, or television.

Bettina Aptheker, who writes of growing up in the 1950s, and the decades that followed, in her invaluable memoir, *Intimate Politics*, provides a different generational voice than Simon. But while her memoir was released in 2006, and sits outside the confines of the 1990s, the book traces the vertical and lateral intersections of incest in a forthright, brave, and affecting fashion. Before revealing her own history of having been sexually molested by her father, the acclaimed Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker, Bettina Aptheker notes early on that her father and mother were first cousins. Aptheker's narrative recounts a story of incestuous abuse, but also her coming out as a lesbian, her experience as a member of the Communist Party, her years at Berkeley during the Woman's Movement, and the trial of (and Aptheker's friendship with) Angela Davis. Perhaps most unusual about Aptheker's incest narrative, though, is its arc. Roseanne Barr, Woody Allen, and Henry Roth were all estranged from some family members after their respective allegation, denial, and confession. Aptheker's book shows how allegations and denials do not necessarily permanently estrange parties, and how initially adamant denials can be followed by concession, conversation, and even rapprochement.

Carolivia Herron's *Thereafter Johnnie* (1991) lacks any explicitly Jewish content, but Herron herself converted to Judaism shortly after the novel was published. The novel's depiction of a dystopian, post-nuclear-attack Washington D.C.-based black family relies heavily on religious imagery, though the presumably Christian biblical themes of the fixed text were produced by an African American author who embraced Judaism after learning as an adult about her Jewish lineage (having been raised Christian) (Sternberg). The novel, which is often categorized in the sub-genre of African American incest literature, also challenges attempts to categorize literature according to authorial identities that can and do shift. *Thereafter Johnnie*'s protagonist is also the product of an incest; a perspective rarely foregrounded in either incest literature or scholarship.

While the current project's transnational focus is largely limited to the European historical context, I hope to incorporate some consideration of how incest narratives function in an Israeli context. Shira Stav, an Israeli scholar and poet, published a Hebrew study titled, *Father-Daughter Relationships in Hebrew Poetry* in 2014. The opportunity to contemplate how some of the themes of this project express themselves similarly, or differently, in Israeli literature and society, might also prove quite useful.

On Jewish Community Protective Politics, and the non-Jewish Variety

The above texts provide a roadmap to a revision, or expansion, of this project that expands the types of voices reproduced. In ending this dissertation, I want to attempt to flesh out something of the necessity, as well as the precariousness, of arguing for the importance of discussing Jewish community protective politics. I begin with a concession: there is something vague and not altogether academically satisfying about this construction: *who* declares that someone needs protection via Jewish community

protective politics? The vague element can quickly become distressing; it may, to some, sound like conspiracy.

I don't mean for it to. My sense is that this vague concept can be boiled down to two criteria: one piece that is relatively systemic (white privilege), and one piece that requires triggering (an anxiety about antisemitism). While some chapters illustrate intentional invocation of the Jewish community protective response (Woody Allen, for instance, was deliberate in this regard), others show how multiple individuals came to the same Jewish community protective conclusions, even if unintentionally, or subconsciously (I would consider Brownmiller, Firestone, and other Jewish second-wave feminists in this category). The uncomfortable vagueness may also involve the extent to which Jewish community protective politics operate through a discursive absence; that is, explicit allegations of antisemitism are rare; instead, intimations abound. Pointing to a discourse that, at a surface level, features no direct mention of Jews or Jewishness, and claiming that Jewishness plays an important role, especially when it involves transgressive or taboo behavior, may also troublingly resemble an antisemitic "methodology." That troubling quality looms even larger given antisemitic stereotypes of Jews controlling the media.

I do not discount these observations, but rather suggest that while they serve as understandable, valid, and even logical responses, that very response that can also facilitate dangerous silencing. As such, it's imperative to discuss this phenomenon explicitly, for the good of Jewish communities and broader non-Jewish communities alike.

Community protective politics are visible in the defense of particular members of a group, often (but not always) men, against allegations that are thought to threaten a group via association (with criminality, stereotype, etc.). The dangers of Jewish community protective politics are multiple, but one involves the fallacy that white male Jewish interests (the interests of those Jews who tend to wield more power in the Jewish community and in the larger community) represent or serve the interests of the more vulnerable members of the Jewish community. For any group, community protective politics provides a skewed logic for dealing with wrongdoing thought to reflect poorly on a community: the impulse is to eliminate the association with the wrongdoing, and not the phenomenon of bad behavior itself. Often, this occurs via disowning or excommunicating a figure (which may account for some responses to *MORS* suggestive of the novel not being truly “Jewish”), or insisting upon that figure’s innocence (a common response with Allen). But the refusal to discuss how a figure’s ostensibly vulnerable identity might *facilitate* his harmful, destructive, and violent behavior may be the most damaging aspect of this politics. Such refusal facilitates continued exploitation of community protective politics in victimizing women, children, and other vulnerable members of society; those that are within the Jewish community as well as those considered external to it.

There is also a rhetorical danger that facilitates Jewish community protective politics, and its corollary for other minority groups: any attempt to discuss how community protective politics operate is likely to function as grist for white supremacist mills. Mark Oppenheimer wrote an argumentatively flawed piece for *Tablet* titled, “The

Specifically Jewish Perviness of Harvey Weinstein.”³ The white supremacist Richard Spencer tweeted a link to the essay, calling it “powerful” (Blumberg). But Richard Spencer’s reasons for re-tweeting the article are – and should be – different from our reasons for condemning Oppenheimer’s piece. Spencer did not call attention to Oppenheimer’s piece on account of the argument’s strength or weakness; he likely did it because the article mentions “Jewish Perviness” in the title. That is, the mere mention of Jewishness with sexual transgression serves Spencer’s white supremacist purposes of disingenuously using a Jewish-authored text as evidence for his white supremacist worldview. While Spencer does this with a flawed and offensive article by Oppenheimer, David Duke has done the same with important, nuanced scholarship on Jews, obscenity, and pornography by Josh Lambert (“Jewish Supremacists”). Any writer, scholar, or activist, regardless of the strength of their argument or writerly skill, runs the risk of being featured on the *Daily Stormer* if they speak out on Jewish community protective politics involving Jews and sexual transgression. But the goal of the Spencers and Dukes of the world is not to engage argument, so much as to utilize association.

The problem with this particular risk is that there’s no way around it. But the fact that avowed white supremacists will likely seize upon and distort these arguments should not stop us from drawing attention to phenomena that can perhaps shed a light on how some powerful men attempt to evoke antisemitism anxiety to excuse inexcusable actions,

³ There are many problems with Oppenheimer’s essay, among them his suggestion that a “revenge-tinged fantasy” of exerting power over non-Jewish women is an essentialist Jewish attribute as opposed to a misogynistic one. But the article’s misogynistic qualities are most insidious; like so much misguided coverage of destructive white men, Oppenheimer expends a significant amount of energy inviting the reader to recognize Weinstein’s humanity, as opposed to that of his victims.

and how even the unspoken anxiety regarding certain forms of antisemitism can impact how many individuals choose to tell stories about sexual transgression. Will open discussion on this subject yield disingenuous championing by white supremacists? Probably. But the goal is not to dialogue with avowed white supremacists. The goal is, first, to call out the inappropriate behavior of white Jewish men who conduct themselves in violent or predatory fashion. And then the goal is to examine how preconceptions of white Jewish masculinity *in particular* contribute to the silencing mechanisms that allow some of these men to get away with decades of abuse.

Is there a double-standard here? Yes, and it mostly involves white non-Jewish men. Roger Ailes, Bill O'Reilly and Eric Bolling, to name just a few Fox News figures (including its former CEO), have been implicated by numerous employees, colleagues, and acquaintances for sexual harassment. A right-wing media organization with a gender politics dismissive of and derisive of progressive, feminist, and queer worldviews is unlikely to engage in any meaningful reckoning regarding how their prominent non-Jewish white male figures use their power to oppress women. As Rebecca Traister puts it, these are "men whose work to bolster the white-male power structure was always direct."

To build upon Traister's statement, we might think of Woody Allen, then, as a man whose work to bolster the white-male power structure was *indirect*. An important part of what makes it indirect is that Allen never explicitly championed whiteness; instead, his persona stresses how his Jewish qualities mark him as fundamentally "other." Understanding the direct *and* indirect ways in which the white-male power structure maintains itself requires a further examination of the role of Jewishness, and Jewish masculinity, in Jewish community and broader national discourse. Within Jewish Studies,

my intervention involves this attempt to call attention to this phenomenon of Jewish community protective politics. In American Studies, incest studies, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies, my intervention is slightly different: in order to understand how whiteness and patriarchy operate to oppress people of color, I argue that whiteness cannot be conceived as a monolithic racial construct. Instead, attention to the specific discursive history of antisemitism, and attention to its collision with a countervailing contemporary white privilege, can better help us understand whiteness's more complex functions, and its versatility.

As to how my project intervenes in, or contributes to, a growing scholarship of the 1990s? At a surface level, I hope to draw attention to how performances of Jewishness and whiteness in media served conservative, patriarchal political ends despite a contemporaneous over-appreciation for the "subversive" quality of white Jewish artists like Allen and Roth. But at another level, I struggle with the question because lately, the 1990s don't really feel like they're over. Whether it involves culture wars and memory wars, or particular figures who loomed over that decade, so much of what and who seemed very present and relevant and contested in the 1990s feels quite similarly today. Allen is still making movies, *Roseanne* is returning for a tenth season, *MORS* was re-released as a tome and as an audiobook, and then, of course, there's the president. I'm reminded of Mary Gordon's emphatic, perhaps defensive claim in her review of the second volume of *Mercy of a Rude Stream*: "'Call It Sleep' remains a masterpiece; nothing is lost from it, or added to it, by reading its sequels." I'm not certain I agree. I don't mean to suggest a reappraisal of the *quality* of Roth's first novel, so much as I believe that, as readers, we can certainly benefit from considering the relationship

between those texts. So, even for readers who love *CIS* and reject *MORS* outright, *something* is added, even if it's uncomfortable, in allowing *MORS* help us have an important conversation about the power dynamics as they are presented in *CIS*. As Allen and Barr continue making art and occupying their spotlights, their new work will likely impact how we consider their earlier work, as their projects inevitably revise the autobiographical incest narratives that have underscored so much of their work. There's comfort in that, as this project's commentary on the 1990s, and how that decade continues to have an impact on the present today, will doubtless also require revision.

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From the Henry Roth Papers (P-702):

Sylvia Ackerman “never made it to her 58th birthday” Letter from Rose Broder to Roth, January 8, 1971; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 1, folder 19; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“semi-rape” *MORS*, Book II: 1928-1932 B, p. 308, undated; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 26, folder 3; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“Two whorehouse denizens have to be Jewish, and that’s greeted by Jews as a pyrotechnic display of tolerance. With such a Judeophilic who needs a pogrom?” *MORS* 2: Section III, pp. 706-707, 1993; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 28, folder 5; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“black mammies” *MORS*, Volume II: (unedited), p. 594, undated; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 27; folder 2; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, N.Y. and Boston, MA.

“niggertown” and “nigger Harlem” *MORS*, Volume II: (unedited), p. 594, undated; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 27, folder 2; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“‘Wait.’ Ira responds, ‘You? ... I thought I had dispensed with you,’” *MORS*, Volume IV: (before editing), p. 1054, 1994; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 77; folder 4; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“where have I failed?” *MORS*, Volume IV: (before editing), p. 1054, 1994; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 77, folder 4, American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“You failed in representing your black or Afram youth as human beings, as varied human beings. You’ve depicted them, if not as thoroughgoing stereotypes, then as mere counters carrying out your will in effecting your larger design, in a word, your plot. They were merely serving your needs, not being the several and diverse individualities they are, giving no hint of their potential emergence as a distinct ethnic force. True or not?” *MORS*, Volume IV: (before editing), pp. 1054-1055, 1994; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 77; folder 4; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“‘What you here for?’ the hulking black youth at the door--mute till now--demanded. He had a surprisingly soft, silky voice, not much above a whisper. / ‘You know what I’m here for.’ / ‘We here for the same thing.’” *MORS*, Volume IV: (before editing), p. 1055, 1994; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 77; folder 4; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“The hulking youth at the door ignored her. ‘Your people got plenty o’ brown pussy whether they like it or not.’ / ‘My people? My people had nothing to do with it!’ Ira retorted outraged. Slavery? Never! What’re you talking about!’ / ‘Sure they did.’ / ‘How? Tell me.’ / ‘You never hear o’ Judah Benjamin?’ / Taken aback Ira stared into the others soft brown eyes, ‘Well, if you know that much, what the hell are you doing here?’ / ‘Same as you, I told you.’” *MORS*, Volume IV: (before editing), pp. 1055-1056, 1994; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 77; folder 4; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“But more important, you failed to represent the changes that have taken place in your own attitude toward them, changes in the psyche of the writer: Where is the new element, the new ingredient impregnating your outlook, nay, your very approach, a new natural approach. An approach that was fashioned, among other things, by their decencies and sympathies and multitude of kindnesses shown you in your many illnesses, your sufferings, where the new comprehensions of their plight, their deprivations, the hideous cruelties they had to endure, but above all--to you--their infinite capabilities, as with all human beings: Their dynamic vigor, art, wit, not merely from the nurse who comes to the house, changes the dressing on your foot, chaffers, counsels, or the physician who examines, prescribes, conscientious, thoughtful, colloquial, no, to the entire range of their massive ethnic force; unique, eventually dominant. All these have changed your own nature, where have you acknowledged the change?” *MORS*, Volume IV: (before editing), p. 1055, 1994; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 77; folder 4; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“sent on my way by easy thrust, it seemed to me I glimpsed the power that would one day be theirs. How would I like that day, day of their mastery” *MORS*, Book II: 1928-1932 B, p. 331, undated; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 26; folder 3; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“How strange the dynamism driving the psyche revealed in one’s answer: The young central character ought to rape his mother, I proposed, come home drunk and rape her, have her rush to the police with an incoherent story about a black assailant. And then to culminate all, have the solving of the crime assigned to a sleuth who was actually a Negro, but one who “passed”; and in the course of investigation began an affair with the mother. J P found the suggestion hilarious -- and impossible.” “Irish Stew with Matza Balls,[”] (a sequence from *MORS*, a work in progress), p. 515, undated; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 22; folder 20; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“Brown, alert striplings, seventeen years old, eighteen, who knew?” *MORS*, Volume IV: (before editing), p. 1052, 1994; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 77; folder 4; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“It’s completely made up! I never went there, I never had a black whore, and I was scared to death of that kind of woman anyway.” Interview by R. Weil: Transcribed from Video Recording, p. 5, 1994; Henry Roth Papers; P-702; box 22; folder 19a; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

From the Henry Roth Collection (P-694):

“How old was she? Twelve? Was he crazy or was he right?” *MORS*, Volume II: (fourth version), pp. 429-430, 1993; Henry Roth Collection; P-694; box 6; folder 46; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“Incest (sic) a cut higher – or was it a cut less, cutless – than with Ruthy: screwing your kid first-cousin, statutory rape. She was only thirteen” *MORS* Volume II: (edited version), p. 980, 1993; Henry Roth Collection; P-694; box 4; folder 32; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“Dark 119th Street, ahead of him walking at a good clip toward the Cut, the trestle, the darker dark, the way she was on the bed – he smirked at himself – her twat licorice embedded in chocolate. So if you had slaves, the way they once did in the South, Jesus, all kinds of things you all of a sudden possessed: Darky wench, all right, darky wench. Then, you took her like an animal. If she had a child, darky he too, slave, not your cherished kid, but to sell, like, whew! Now wait a minute, before you cross Park Avenue, cross under the overpass, go by the pillars, oh! What he was thinking: This was worse, worse than with a slave.” *MORS*, Volume II: (edited version), p. 605, 1993; Henry Roth Collection; P-694; box 4; folder 27; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

“Unfortunately we will be in big trouble if we leave this in. Things are controversial enough” Robert Weil handwritten note on *MORS*, Volume II (edited version), p. 605, 1993; Henry Roth Collection, P-694; box 4; folder 27; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, N.Y. and Boston, MA.

“Lousy bastard manager, why didn’t he let the nigger do it?” *MORS*, Volume I: (original draft), p. 247, 1992; Henry Roth Collection; P-694; box 1; folder 3; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

Pictures courtesy of AJHS:

MORS, Volume II: (copy-edited version), p. 299/305, [1994]; Henry Roth Collection; P-694; box 7; folder 49; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.

MORS, Volume II: (copy-edited version), p. 430/436, [1994]; Henry Roth Collection; P-694; box 7; folder 50; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY, and Boston, MA.