

FROM THE FUTURE TO THE PAST

HYBRIDITY AND DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN

CONTEMPORARY JEWISH-AMERICAN LITERATURE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Chapter 1 Who Am I? | |
| The Hybrid, Diasporic Identity of Jewish Immigrants in America | 8 |
| Chapter 2 Recapturing Judaism | |
| The Quest for Identity in Allegra Goodman's <i>The Family Markowitz</i> | 13 |
| Chapter 3 Returning Home | |
| Hybridity and Diasporic Identity in Jonathan Rosen's <i>Joy Comes in the Morning</i> | 21 |
| Conclusion | 28 |
| Bibliography | 30 |

INTRODUCTION

In 1977 the influential literary critic Irving Howe trumpeted the death of Jewish American fiction as a force to be reckoned with (“Introduction” 16). The immigrant experience was running sour, and a thinning out of materials and memories would inevitably mean the end of the heyday of Jewish writing in America (“Introduction” 16). After all, it had been a strong sense of alienation and marginality that drove second generation¹ Jewish-American writers like Saul Bellow, Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud and produced a golden age in Jewish American literature (Furman, Contemporary 16). In the years following World War II, however, alienation and marginality ceased to define the Jewish American experience (Furman, Contemporary 16). During this period, Jewish Americans rapidly grew in affluence while integrating more and more into the American cultural mainstream. This indeed led literary critic Leslie Fiedler to state in 1986 that “the Jewish American novel is over and done with, a part of history rather than a living literature” (Furman, Contemporary 16).

What had bound the work of the golden age writers of Jewish American literature together was that their writing was based on an encounter between their immigrant culture and the majority culture of the United States (Howe, “Introduction” 3). In subject matter, tone and setting these second generation writers strongly resembled one another (Howe, “Introduction” 2). Their protagonists were overwhelmingly trying to find their way from their distinct immigrant culture to the American mainstream to which they longed to belong. The setting of their novels and stories is primarily Jewish immigrant neighborhoods or the better

¹ The 1st generation of Jewish American writers started writing in the late 1800s. Their writing was steeped in the immigrant experience of predominantly European Jews that had immigrated to the United States. The 2nd generation of Jewish American writers started in started already in the 1930s, but came to its peak in the 1950s and 1960s, as the children of the first generation of Jewish immigrants focussed more on the American main culture and less on the immigrant culture of their parents. The 3rd generation Jewish American writers who will be referred to in this thesis came of age between the 1960s and 1990s, and contributed to the renaissance of Jewish American literature that started in the 1980s and continued in the 21st century. (Furman, Contemporary 177; McClymond 13)

neighborhoods to which the second generation of Jewish immigrants had relocated (Howe, “Introduction” 3).

However, towards the end of the twentieth century the tide seemed to turn. Jewish writing in America was resurging. A new generation of Jewish American writers, such as Pearl Abraham, Allegra Goodman, Nathan Englander and Jonathan Rosen, drew from a brand new treasure chest of experience in their writing. Morris Dickstein sums up these newly emerging realities of Jewish life as follows: “the unexpected return to religion, the conflicts over assimilation, the youthful rebellion against suburbia, the key Jewish role in the New Left and the counterculture, the growing involvement of American Jews with Israel, and the newly-awakened memories of the Holocaust after 25 years of amnesia” (“Ghost Stories” 34). Literary critics hailed a renaissance in Jewish American literature and searched for reasons for this unexpected phenomenon. “Perhaps the question lies in the burden of memory,” Thane Rosenbaum suggests; “with third and fourth generation American Jews, and children of Holocaust survivors, re-enacting experiences that they could never have possibly had” (33).²

Whereas the post-immigrant Jewish American authors, to put it in the words of Dickstein, “brought real Jews into modern American literature but left Judaism out,” this new generation of Jewish writers did not shy away from religion and looked towards Orthodoxy as a main source of inspiration (“Ghost Stories” 36; Furman, “Is the Jew in Vogue” 29, 30). They do not seem to be afraid of combining the holy with the earthly, as they alternate between awe and irony in their literary quests to their Jewish roots. Weaving Judaism, Jewish history and collective memory together with their contemporary more assimilated experience, their writings reflect a search to what binds Americans of Jewish origin together. Thus, the

² N.B.: In this thesis a distinction will be made between generations of Jewish-American writers and Jewish-Americans in general. Critics generally refer to the modern generation of Jewish-American writers who made up the renaissance in Jewish-American fiction starting in the 1980s and continuing into the 21st century as the *third* generation of Jewish-American authors; a group consisting of both the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of Jewish immigrants to the United States who’s work shares strong similarities in subject matter and style. Hence, this third generation of Jewish-American authors includes *both* third *and* fourth generation Americans of Jewish immigrant descent.

works of these third generation Jewish American authors testify of a new generation seeking its identity in a Judaism that was marginalized and abandoned by their parents (Dickstein, “Ghost Stories” 36).

As their works focus on what makes these seemingly fully assimilated Jewish Americans “Jewish,” it is useful to further elaborate on the term “Jewishness” first. This concept seems to convey more of a feeling; a “connectedness,” than a specific set of parameters. The existence of Jewish American literature as such naturally makes the case for something like a distinct Jewish identity. As Irving Howe points out: “[M]any of the American-Jewish writers have started with the assumption that there remains – perhaps in secure possession, perhaps no longer in their grasp – a body of inherited traditions, values, and attitudes that we call “Jewishness” (“Introduction” 9,10). Howe describes the term as follows:

The very term “Jewishness” suggests, of course, a certain vagueness, pointing to the diffusion of a cultural heritage. When one speaks of Judaism or the Jewish religion, it is to invoke a coherent tradition of belief and custom; when one speaks of “Jewishness,” it is to invoke a spectrum of styles and symbols, a range of cultural memories, no longer as ordered or weighty as once they were still able to affect experience. (“Introduction” 10)

This definition of “Jewishness” as mosaic of a wide range of experiences, memories, beliefs and culture, rather than a set body of cultural practices, is the one that will be referred to in the following chapters.

Hybridity is an ongoing story for the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Jewish immigrants in the United States. As Jewish-American hybrid and diasporic identity changes per generation, Jewish American authors express their “Jewishness” in a way that represents both their hybridity and the struggles and advantages of their generation. Postcolonial

theorists such as Stuart Hall, Robert Young and Helen Tiffin have written extensively about the concepts of hybridity and diasporic identity. Although Jewish Americans cannot be classified as post-colonial in the traditional sense of the word, these postcolonial theoretical frameworks are remarkably useful in deciphering the complex cultural identity of protagonists in Jewish American literature.

Hence, these concepts of hybridity and diasporic identity as explained by postcolonial theorists such as Stuart Hall, Robert Young, James Clifford, Kirsten Holst Peterson, Anna Rutherford, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin will provide the theoretical framework for a study of two works that are quintessential to the renaissance of Jewish American literature in the closing years of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century. This thesis will focus on Jonathan Rosen's novel *Joy Comes in the Morning* (2004) and Allegra Goodman's collection of stories *The Family Markowitz* (1996) and analyze how both authors portray Jewishness in their novels, how they deal with their hybrid identity as the grandchildren of Jewish immigrants, and how they position themselves between the Jewish immigrant subculture of their grandparents and the American host culture. As representatives of a generation of modern Jewish-American authors who brought identity politics back to the Jewish-American literary agenda, Goodman's collection of stories and Rosen's novel confirm the hybrid and diasporic identity of a seemingly fully assimilated third and fourth generation of Americans of Jewish descent who look for meaning and a sense of self in a communal past and a shared sense of a hybrid cultural identity.

In this thesis both the postcolonial theory and the literary texts themselves will be discussed elaborately, since they are in dialogue and both complement and illustrate one another. Chapter one discusses the concepts of hybridity and diasporic identity as they occur in postcolonial cultural theory and sets them in the context of Jewish-American literature in general. The second and third chapters zoom in on Goodman's *The Family Markowitz* and

Rosen's *Joy Comes in the Morning* respectively, and focus on the significance of hybridity and diasporic identity as keys to understanding these works of literature and placing them in the Jewish-American literary and cultural tradition and history.

Chapter 1

WHO AM I?

THE HYBRID, DIASPORIC IDENTITY OF JEWISH IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

[I]t's my present that is foreign, and the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the midst of time. (Rushdie, 9)

At first sight, postcolonial theory might seem an awkward choice as the starting point of a study of the Jewish experience in the United States. After all, postcolonialism is often explained as a juxtaposition between the white and the non-white, the haves and the not-haves, the west and the non-west. American Jews, however, are usually white, but not Anglo-Saxon Protestants. They are seen as representing colonizers and persecutors by the critics of contemporary Israeli politics, but they also represent one of – if not *the* – historically most persecuted and marginalized people groups on earth. Nevertheless, postcolonial theory forms an excellent starting point when it comes to deciphering identity in all its variety and complexity. It gives us insight into the hybrid and diasporic identity of Jewish Americans in general, and Jewish American literature in particular. Irving Howe, for example, finds American Jews to be left with “a nagging problem in self-perception, a crisis of identity, as it came to be called, which seems beyond solution or removal” (“Introduction” 11). “They had achieved ‘a normal life’ in America,” Howe claims, “and for those with any taste for self-scrutiny, it was a life permanently beset by the question: who am I and why do I declare myself? To live with this problem in a state of useful discontent was perhaps what it now meant to be a Jew” (“Introduction” 11).

According to Wilson Harris identity is shaped by the past (Holst Peterson and Rutherford, "Fossil and Psyche" 139). "By entering into a fruitful dialogue with the past one becomes able to revive the fossils that are buried within oneself and are part of one's ancestors," Harris finds. In line with this, Howe argues that "nothing is more deeply ingrained in the Jewish experience than the idea of the past, the claim of memory" ("Introduction" 4). He argues that the hospitality, tolerance and generosity of American democracy could never wash away the Jewish sense of distinctiveness because there is too much pain and history behind that sense of distinctiveness (Howe, "Introduction" 4). "In story after story," Howe states, "there are characters moved by the persuasion of distinctiveness, or at least by recollections of its earlier power. Jewish belief and custom may have become attenuated, and the writers themselves only feebly connected with them; yet the persuasion remains that "we" (whoever that may be, however defined or bound) must live with a sense of our differentness" ("Introduction" 10).

Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford argue, however, that the realization of one's vision, i.e. the unique individual or group *voice*, requires recognizing that identity is not a static entity, but rather "part of an infinite movement" (142). It requires a dialogue with both the past and the future, and is found in the process – "the eternal process of becoming" - rather than the "rest" (Peterson and Rutherford 142). Stuart Hall likewise argues against the idea of a static cultural identity in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (435). "Cultural identity [...] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being,' Hall states. "It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (435). According to Hall, "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (435).

This process of becoming is what underlies the cultural theory of hybridity. In his essay “The Cultural Politics of Hybridity” Robert Young writes: “At its simplest, hybridity...implies a disruption and forcing together of any unlike living things, grafting a vine on a rose on to a different root stock, making difference into sameness. Hybridity is a making one of two distinct things, so that it becomes impossible for the eye to detect the hybridity of a geranium or a rose” (158). “Hybridization,” Young argues, “can also consist of the forcing of a single entity into two or more parts, a severing of a single object in two, turning sameness into difference [...]” (158). Hence, the cultural concept of hybridity rules out essentialism; i.e. fixed ideas about cultural identity (Young 159).

Young’s first definition of hybridity, the making difference into sameness, suggests the existence of a “root;” an original state. In the hybrid form, however, it is impossible to recognize the rose from the vine. In the case of Jewish immigrant culture in the United States, the root would be American culture and the vine Jewish culture. The latter is grafted onto the former. In the story of the integration of immigrant Jews in the United States this process would have started with the first wave of Jewish immigrants from Europe before and during the 1950s. After decades of *becoming American*, however, it seems impossible to untangle the cultural identity of third and fourth generation Jewish Americans. What has evolved is a true hyphenated identity; not more Jewish than American and vice versa. By now, it has become impossible to distinguish root from vine. The Jewish-American’s Jewish identity is so intertwined with his American identity; more equal than separate, that to speak of merely a cultural dualism would be both incorrect and insufficient.

This making difference into sameness and sameness into difference, “operates according to the form of logic that Derrida isolates in the term ‘bristle’, a breaking and a joining at the same time, in the same place: difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity,” Young explains (158). The hybridity of the immigrants’ *Jewishness*

and their (increasing) *Americanness* did indeed cause a Derridaic ‘bristle;’ a breaking with a European Jewish immigrant culture and a joining of the American host culture. The resulting hybrid persona represents both the marginal and the ‘majoritarian’; the outsider and the insider; the ‘chosen’ and the gentile. In *Who We Are: On Being (and Not Being) a Jewish American Writer*, Derek Rubin likewise acknowledges that “outsidership and insidership are tricky concepts that often overlap and designate intertwined experiences.” (xiv).

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explain this place between the past and the future as “a fundamental ambivalence” that is embedded in the cultural concept of *diaspora* (425). The diasporic subject is characterized by both hybridity and duality. What is embedded in the term *diaspora* thus is “a dual ontology in which the diasporic subject is seen to look in two directions – towards a historical cultural identity on the one hand, and the society of relocation on the other,” Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain (425). For diasporic subjects, like Jewish immigrants in America, “identification [...] is a very clear act of choice. A choice [...] of belonging to a group, of belonging to a nationally-based community which they may never have visited geographically” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 427).

Although immigrants can double as diasporic subjects, as is the case with Jewish immigrants in America, there is a distinct difference between regular immigrants and diasporic populations. James Clifford describes this difference as follows:

Diasporic populations do not come from elsewhere in the same way that ‘immigrants’ do. In assimilationist national ideologies such as those of the United States, immigrants may experience loss and nostalgia, but only en route to a whole new home in a new place. Such ideologies are designed to integrate immigrants, not people in diasporas. [...] Peoples whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be ‘cured’ by merging into a new national community. (451)

However, the diasporic subject's sense of connection to a prior home "must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing process of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing" (Clifford 451).

Chapter 2

RECAPTURING JUDAISM

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN ALLEGRA GOODMAN'S *THE FAMILY MARKOWITZ*

Our [diasporic] identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel like we straddle two cultures; at other times we fall between two stools. (Rushdie 15)

In 1996 Allegra Goodman published *The Family Markowitz*, a collection of stories about three generations of a Jewish-American family. It is Goodman's conviction that "Jewish American writers must recapture the spiritual and the religious dimension of Judaism." (Rubin 274) She rejects the satirical, self-deprecatory stance towards their Jewishness of "such ambivalent assimilationists as Bellow and Roth" (Rubin xi, 270). "I agree wholeheartedly with Solotaroff that it is time for Jewish American writers to use the Jewish religion as more than "shtick," to borrow Solotaroff's term," Goodman argues. "If literary images of Judaism are to be read seriously and not satirically or sentimentally or dismissively, they must be written that way. There must be Jewish wedding scenes other than that of *Goodbye, Columbus*" (Rubin 275).

About her own literary perspective Goodman elaborates:

I write about Jewish culture, but not merely Jewish culture. I write about religion as well. [...] I write from the inside, taking [...] an idiom in which ritual and liturgy are a natural part of my fictional world, and not anthropological objects to be translated and constantly explained. My choice was

influenced not only by my reading of Jewish literature, but also by my background as a child growing up in Hawaii. (Rubin 271)

The Family Markowitz is indeed full of references to Jewish rituals and references, without explanation provided. Her stories are full of irony and sharp observations which will appeal to both the gentile and the Jew, but some *inside* knowledge of Jewish culture and Judaism is desirable to fully understand the humor, drama and nuances in this collection of stories. In the first story of the collection, for example, the following conversation comes up between the family matriarch Rose Markowitz and her friend Esther:

‘I’m speaking Hebrew,’ Esther tells Rose. ‘*Ani midaberet ivrit.*’

‘You took those Hadassah classes?’ Rose asks.

‘I went on ulpan,’ Esther says, as if to say she went on safari. (Goodman 4)

Nowhere in this story is explained what the quoted Hebrew means or what Hadassah classes or ulpan are. The reader is clearly expected to have some background on Jewish culture and rituals. Later on in the story Rose compares the difference between phone call conversation styles with her two sons as follows: “From the ice into the *shvitz* bath. [...] Ed all business, and Henry just overcome” (Goodman 14).

It is clear that Goodman’s characters in her 1996 collection of stories are shaped by a communal past; reinforcing Harris’s statement that “each living person is a fossil,” and “carries within himself remnants of deep-seated antecedents” (Peterson and Rutherford 139). Goodman’s wealth of a diverse range of Jewish-American characters and her storytelling indeed seem to spring from a fruitful dialogue with and a sense of nostalgia to the communal Jewish past. Hence, Ivan Kreilkamp argues that through Goodman’s stories “one feels

plunged into a lost world of tightly knit community, binding ethical structures and, most of all, of individualism firmly constrained by allegiance to authority and tradition” (49).

There are many different perspectives on Judaism to be found within the Markowitz family. Goodman’s stories in this collection seem to emphasize both the consistency of Jewish culture in America and the diversity within the Jewish American community - even on a family level. One example of the differences in cultural and religious experience is the following dialogue between Rose and her son Ed after Rose’s husband Maury’s death:

‘He did not want a rabbi,’ Rose tells Ed. ‘He did not believe in them.’

‘Look, Ma, he was Jewish, and I think – ‘

‘He told me a hundred times, he wanted to be cremated and scattered,’ Rose says.

(Goodman 19)

Moreover, Henry, Rose’s other son, shocks the family by marrying a woman after living a presumably homosexual lifestyle and having the ceremony conducted by a priest rather than a rabbi:

‘Hmm,’ Rose says. ‘And who is performing the ceremony?’

‘The Junior Chaplain at the College. We got him because I’m staff.’

[...] ‘You’re having a priest?’ Rose asks.

‘A very liberal one,’ Susan says. ‘Very young. Vegan.’

[...] Rose begins to cry. ‘What would your dear father say to this?’ she asks. ‘Did I bring you up to give you away to a priest? Just tell me, Henry, what change has occurred in you to bring you to this?’ (Goodman 86,87)

Finally, Ed's son Avi makes his maternal grandmother uncomfortable by bringing his Methodist girlfriend Amy to their family's Passover meal. Hence, every member of the Markowitz family seems to be in a different stage in their dialogue with their past and their future; what Peterson and Rutherford refer to as the "eternal process of becoming" (142).

Still, the Jewish characters in Goodman's collection of stories all live in a predominantly modern, thoroughly integrated and secular, Jewish subculture. They read Jewish newspapers and magazines, send their children to Jewish camps and interact predominantly with Jewish friends. Although Henry's fiancée Susan is not Jewish, nearly all his wedding guests are. Another example is his discussion with his Jewish dermatologist about news from the *Jewish Opinion* (Goodman 38). In this sense, *The Family Markowitz* affirms the findings of Andrew Furman that "Jewish American fiction continues to embody the distinct values and preoccupations of a decidedly minority culture" (Furman, *Contemporary* 11). This decidedly minority culture is exemplary of the "fundamental ambivalence" Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin refer to when they speak of the cultural concept of diaspora. For the protagonists in Goodman's stories, participating in a Jewish-American subculture is indeed "a very clear act of choice;" "[a] choice of identification, of belonging to a group, of belonging to a nationally-based community, which they never may have visited geographically" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 427). Although all characters in the Markowitz family can be seen as fairly assimilated to American host culture, they still experience a sense of connection to a prior home and the Jewish community in large is strong enough "to resist erasure through the normalizing process of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 451).

Although Goodman's collection of stories is not predominantly religious, Judaism still occurs regularly and in various forms in *The Family Markowitz*. Henry, for instance, uses Toraic figure of speech when talking about Venice, California: "Venice, with its art and

beach, and all its local color, is really Sodom. It is really Sodom and Gomorrah put together. [...] He will leave, will leave, and he won't look back over his shoulder. He will leave, and he won't look back" (Goodman 44). When he moves to England and marries an English woman he indeed not only leaves Venice behind, but also his former homosexual lifestyle. Moreover, despite their mostly secular lifestyle, Ed and Sarah belong to a conservative congregation, keep their kitchen kosher and celebrate the Jewish holidays as a family. The fact that the prayers in their congregation's prayer book are also printed in English is a reflection of the assimilation and hybridity that have taken place in the practice of Judaism in America. In a conversation with his brother after visiting his Congregation Shaarei Tzedek Ed confesses to Henry: "[I]t would be very comforting to believe in God. Just for some sense of permanence. The stability. I think I would like to believe in God" (Goodman 154).

In the diversity of religious experience within the Jewish-American community, one also sees a generational gap displayed within the Markowitz family. Ed is, for example, disturbed by his oldest daughter's Orthodoxism: "They had raised their children in a liberal, rational, joyous way – raised them to enjoy the Jewish tradition, and Ed can't understand why Miriam would choose austerity and obscure ritualism. She is only twenty-three – even if she *is* getting married in June. How can a young girl be attracted to this kind of legalism?" (Goodman 187,188). At their Passover meal, for instance, Ed leads the seder – in English - in a liberal manner; tying the Passover to current events and general political and social oppression. While doing this, Ed is offended by the fact that Miriam's chanting to herself out of her Orthodox Birbaum Haggadah and the fact that she seems to be ignoring him.

After the seder the following discussion takes places between Ed, Miriam, Miriam's grandfather Sol and her mother Sara:

'Daddy,' Miriam says.

‘Yes.’

‘This is ridiculous. This seder is getting shorter every year.’

‘We’re doing it the same way we always do it.’ Ed tells her.

‘No, you’re not. It’s getting shorter and shorter. It was short enough to begin with! You always skip the most important parts.’

[...] ‘Why do we have to spend the whole time talking about minorities?’ she asks. ‘Why are you always talking about civil rights?’

‘Because that’s what Passover is about,’ Sol tells her.

‘oh, okay, fine,’ Miriam says.

[...] Miriam looks down in her book and continues reading to herself in Hebrew.

[...] ‘It doesn’t say a single word about minorities her,’ Miriam says stubbornly.

‘He’s talking about the modern context – ‘

Miriam looks up at Sarah. ‘What about the original context?’ she asks. ‘As in the Jewish people? As in God?’ (Goodman 197, 198)

This dialogue not only illustrates the difference in religious experience between father and daughter, but also a more general generation rift that has seemingly occurred in the Jewish-American community. As the generation of the Sixties seemed to flee from their parent’s ghetto mentality and old-world habits and beliefs, the new generation seems to be looking to return to their roots; to recapture a part of their identity that was lost in the integration process of their parents.

Still, Goodman’s *The Family Markowitz* is full of examples of the amount of assimilation and extensive hybridity that has taken place in Jewish American society. Inter-marriage rates between Jews and Gentiles have definitely gone up since the 1950’s and 1960’s, which is illustrated by Henry’s marriage to a gentile British woman, and Avi’s Methodist girlfriend from college. Another example of the cultural hybridity that has taken

place, and the tension that this hybridity entails, becomes clear from the following dialogue between Miriam and her parents about mixed dancing at her wedding:

“What first dance?” Miriam asks, alarmed. “Mommy, we aren’t having mixed dancing at the wedding.”

“What are we, Puritans?” Ed mutters. Miriam and Jon in their young-blood traditionalism are having an Orthodox wedding with *glatt* kosher food, a *very* young and baleful Orthodox rabbi, and separate dancing circles for men and women.

“You mean you and Jon aren’t going to have a first dance?” Sarah asks.

“Nope. There is going to be no mixed dancing, remember? We had that big discussion and everything –“

“Well, yeah,” Ed says. “But there’s gotta be a first dance. First you and Jon dance together and then you dance with me, and Jon dances with his mother – and that’s how it’s gotta be. Gotta be.”

(Goodman 240)

Striking in this dialogue is not only the normality of mixed dancing at weddings in contemporary Jewish American circles, but also the generational divide between parents and daughter, as well as the reference to the Puritans when talking about an Orthodox Jewish wedding.

Moreover, the current normality of a Jewish presence in American culture is illustrated by the fact that Ed and Sarah do not visit a Jewish bookstore to shop for a bar mitzvah present, but turn to the Judaica section of an American bookstore. The books which they consider buying are almost all works of Jewish American literature, although Ed ridicules Sarah for considering the quintessential WASP novel *Little Women*. In the end, however, they return home with two autobiographical books; *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Surely You’re Joking Mr. Feynman*. The fact that Anne Frank’s is an old-world, Jewish Holocaust

account, and Feynman's is a new-world success story of a Jewish-American Nobel Prize winner could as well be seen as a clear illustration of diasporic identity that is the result of a decennia-long process of cultural hybridity. The bookstore dialogue on pages 169 to 172 not only illustrates the hybridity of the Jewish-American community, but also the complexity of the hybrid persona that has developed out of this disruption and forcing together of two initially separate cultures. As Sarah acknowledges in another short story: "It has been difficult for [Sarah] as a poet, to be influenced by Donne, Marvel, and Herbert, but to write about giving birth, a son's bar mitzvah, Yom Kippur" (Goodman 221).

Hence, in the *The Family Markovitz* 'Jewishness' has both a strong religious component and a strong (sub)cultural component. Goodman tries to recapture the spiritual and religious dimension of Judaism in her literature, and although not overtly religious, *The Family Markovitz* is no exception to this. The characters in her collection of stories seem to be on a quest to find their own identity somewhere in between their Jewish-American subculture and mainstream American culture. Their habitat is a predominantly modern, thoroughly integrated and secular Jewish subculture. Each of the characters carries with him deep-seated antecedents from a communal past, which result in a wide range of outlooks and expressions in regards to what it means to be Jewish in the United States. All the characters demonstrate a hybridity that merges 'Jewishness' and 'Americanness' to varying degrees, i.e. all of them are in a different stage in their dialogue with their past and their future. The hybrid identity of Goodman's characters is deeply effected by their diasporic identity. The diversity in life styles between the different family members demonstrate a diversity in deliberate *choices* of allegiance to their communal Jewish past. In this process of merging and disrupting Jewish and American culture, a generational difference is evident. In the Markovitz family Miriam represents the third generation of Jewish Americans who turn to their Jewish and religious roots in their quest for their individual identity.

Chapter 3

RETURNING HOME

HYBRIDITY AND DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN JONATHAN ROSEN'S *JOY COMES IN THE MORNING*

[I]t's my present that is foreign, and [...] the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the midst of time. (Rushdie 9)

Jonathan Rosen's sophomore novel *Joy Comes in the Morning* is essentially a love story between the reform rabbi Deborah Green, and the son of a Holocaust survivor, Lev Friedman. Judaism and Jewishness in all its varieties are the key themes of the novel. *The New York Times*'s Art Winslow comments that "[n]ot since E.L. Doctorow's 'City of God' have we seen such a literary effort to plumb the nature of belief – in Jewish American culture, in Talmudic study, in prayer, in sexual relations, in the very soundness of one's own mind". In doing this, Rosen challenges Ruth Wisse's statement in the 1970's, that:

[f]or those who take Judaism seriously as a cultural alternative, and wish to weave new brilliant cloth from its ancient threads, the sociological reality of the present-day American-Jewish community would seem to present an almost insurmountable obstacle. Writers...who feel the historic, moral and religious weight of Judaism, and want to represent it in literature, have had to ship their characters out

of town by Greyhound or magic carpet, to an unlikely *shtetl*, to Israel,... to other times and other climes, in search of pan-Jewish fictional atmospheres (Howe, "Introduction" 16).

In *Joy Comes in the Morning* Rosen proves that it is possible to write a compelling novel about Judaism in New York at the turn of the 21st century.

Rosen, like Goodman, finds his identity in a historical and communal Jewish cultural identity, i.e. the "deep-seated antecedents" that Harris refers to, and in a feeling of distinctiveness that evolves from being a diasporic subject. He admits that it is more natural for his generation to be attracted by his Jewish roots, because of the integration and processes of hybridity that have already taken place:

The reality of my father's experience changed my relationship to the Jewish past. His parents and a great deal of his extended family had been killed in the Holocaust. Seeing the Jewish past through this terrible dark veil made me eager to draw close to that lost world. I believe an earlier generation of immigrant children was afraid of the world of their parents. They were afraid they might be sucked back into it. I was curious to learn about a world that didn't exist anymore (Rubin 251).

Hybrid identity is also a recurring theme in *Joy Comes in the Morning*. One example of this is Deborah's description of her ex-boyfriend Reuben:

It annoyed her to be thinking of Reuben now, in her moment of prayer, with his ortho-arrogant awkwardness, his air of entitlement and insecurity. Modern Orthodox men [...] expected to inherit the earth but they had a nagging inborn fear that they might be driven from it first. In this respect they weren't quite American, and Deborah supposed it was this mild foreignness, coupled with her own weakness for ritual rigor, that had drawn her to them in the first place. She herself must have held a

certain exotic appeal for [Reuben] – a Reform woman rabbi. She must not have seemed quite American either, or quite Jewish (Rosen 5).

The fact that Deborah describes Reuben's not quite-Americanness as foreign to her, testifies of her own rootedness in America and its culture. The very fact that she is a female Reform rabbi, moreover, is proof of the changes in Judaism in America that have taken place over the years, and Deborah refers to this when she acknowledges that she must not have seemed quite Jewish (or American) to Reuben either. Another example of Judaism being influenced and transformed by American culture is Deborah's habit of spontaneous prayer, which she has picked up in the hospital from a Baptist minister (Rosen 9). This and many other examples in the novel testify of the fact that identity and culture are fluid, and subject to constant change.

American culture has its influence on Judaism and the Jewish experience, but American Jews have also left a lasting mark on American culture. When Lev visits Deborah's Reform synagogue for the first time, and sees the Israeli flag at one end of the bimah and the American flag at the other, it reminds him of a high school assembly (Rosen 175). At the end of the 20th century Jewish Americans seem to be fully embracing both their Jewishness and their Americanness. In constructing their identity, modern day American Jews do not seem to feel they have to choose between their Jewish background and the American host culture, but seem to be comfortably at home in both – theirs is a truly hybrid, yet dual, new national identity, and the two flags at the back of the Reform congregation are a fitting symbol of this.

All the main characters in the novel seem to have become more aware of their Jewish roots at a certain stage of their lives. Henry has gone back to the Judaism of his childhood in Europe. Deborah comes from a secular, atheistic family but chose to "return" to Judaism during her teenage years. Lev initially has an ambivalent relationship with Judaism, but gives shape to his own longing to return to his Jewish roots by taking Krav Maga lessons and decides to start studying Talmud with Deborah later on in the novel. Moreover, Lev's best

friend Neal is increasingly suffering from schizophrenia which makes him believe that all his movements are being monitored by the Nazi's. While studying Talmud with Deborah, Lev wonders if this is perhaps "what his father meant – an education, a familiarity with his people and culture. Mending the broken thread" (Rosen 148). Deborah herself describes her embrace of Judaism as "the discovery of community and of ritual, the reclamation of a culture that two generations before her had been sustaining for generations of her family" (Rosen 235).

The experiences of the novel's main characters are in line with what Furman describes in the introduction to *Contemporary Jewish American Writers and the Multicultural Dilemma: The Return of the Exiled*: "Although assimilation will continue, I suspect, to "Americanize" its fair share of Jews in this country, I believe we are in the midst of a powerful countervailing trend toward rediscovery" (17). He adds that "[n]ominal Jews [...] are not only "returning" to Jewish Orthodoxy," but "a significant number of Jewish Americans continue to "feel Jewish" (Furman 17). Bershel and Graubard likewise conclude "that more and more Jewish Americans are discovering, rediscovering, or intensifying some impulse to Jewish identity" (Furman, *Contemporary* 18).

Deborah's conversation with Mrs. Fink at the hospital illustrates this difference between the new generation of Jewish Americans and the one that came before them. Mrs. Fink notes that she cannot talk with Rabi Elliot about God, because "[r]eligion is not his thing." When Deborah laughs at this comment, Mrs. Fink replies: "You shouldn't laugh – Elliot's a wonderful man, he does great things for many people. But he is who he is. Now you young people aren't afraid of God, are you?" (Rosen 138).

Yet, the Judaism that shapes Deborah's and to a degree also Lev's life is a Judaism that is more feeling-oriented, more inclusive, and simply more American than that of their forefathers. It is Judaism for a new generation who grew up amidst New Age and self-help books. In line with the general trend of religious experience in America their Judaism is more

mystical and emotional. Exemplary of this is are the following lines describing Lev's newfound religious experience:

Lev found Deborah's faith deeply consoling; being around her gave him a strange sense of getting closer to Judaism without begin annihilated by it. He felt in an almost primitive way that God was with her and therefore God was with him. The dry, rigid renunciations of his yeshiva days had both intoxicated him and made him feel cut off, as if Judaism were a monkish pursuit, abstract and intellectual. A form of self-righteous masochism. With Deborah the opposite seemed true. (Rosen 172)

After a seder with Deborah's friends, Lev confesses that he "had felt that these observant and semi observant Jews weren't quite American, but in fact he had come to realize that they were more American than he was. They never doubted their place in the culture. They chose to be Jewish and to be observant and, like Deborah, did it with a kind of joy. It was part of the freedom the country gave them" (Rosen 251).

What Peterson and Rutherford describe as fossil identities that shape a person's identity, becomes clear in the value the main characters in Rosen's novel ascribe to their Jewish identity and shared cultural and ethnic history. While performing a wedding, Deborah thinks to herself:

It was a miracle [...] that Rick was marrying Janet, that they were making a Jewish family. Did it matter that Jews married Jews? Somehow to her it did [...]. To what end one generation succeeded to the next, endlessly into an unknown future, she did not know. But she knew that an earth without human beings would be an empty earth. And an earth without Jews? For Deborah that, too, would be a terrible emptiness. Her sister called her tribal. Perhaps she was. (Rosen 64)

Moreover, when Lev visits a stranger's wedding where Deborah is conducting the ceremony, he observes: "There was an ethnic familiarity in the air, a sort of genetic overlap. Everyone's face seemed once-removed from faces he knew. These might have been his relatives. There was a Jewish undertow pulling everyone at some occult level toward a shared past – or was it a common future?" (Rosen 90).

Rosen's novel also testifies of the "fundamental ambivalence," however, to which Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin refer when they explain the cultural concept of diaspora. Although the decision to seriously explore one's cultural, religious and ethnic roots can be a very conscious and deliberate one, the diasporic subject is still defined by its dual and hybrid identity, which causes him or her to keep looking in two directions: towards the historical cultural identity on the one side, and the society of relocation on the other side. Both identities have their own norms, core values and particularities. This ambivalence also becomes clear in the following paragraphs, describing Lev's reaction when he discovers he has been walking outside with a kippah still on his head:

As if in confirmation of all Lev's fears, he noticed, looking in the mirror above the cash register as he stood waiting to pay, that he was still wearing the little kippah that Deborah had given him. He felt as if he had been walking around with his fly open.

[...] on Lev, the little knit bull's eye target seemed a virtual "Kick Me" sign.

He snatched the kippah off his head and stuffed it in his pocket, along with the change he received (Rosen 157).

This perpetual ambivalence of the diasporic subject, as portrayed in *Joy Comes in the Morning*, led Joan Carr to conclude that in his second novel, "Rosen writes about people who struggle with their Judaism in relation to the outside world" (Joan Carr, *Study Guide*).

Rosen's portrayal of Jewishness in *Joy Comes in the Morning* hence displays multiple facets of modern day Jewish-American hybrid identity. His characters display both a love for and unease with the American host culture and the Jewish subculture of their grandparents. Their individual identities consist of a merging of these two, initially separate, cultures. Every character *chooses* different aspects and variations of these two cultures to embrace, however, making the outcome of the merging of Jewish and American culture unique and different in each main character. Judaism and Jewishness being the key themes in Rosen's sophomore novel, demonstrate the importance the third generation of Jewish-American writers subscribe to their communal Jewish past and a return to their cultural and religious roots. Furthermore, these key themes and the way they manifest themselves in the novel's main characters testify of a feeling of distinctiveness that evolves from being a Diasporic subject. Both Deborah and Lev are fully rooted in American culture, but also firmly connected to their Jewish roots. Their identity and culture are fluid and subject to change. As it was with their parents, grandparents and great grandparents, the third and fourth generation of Jewish-Americans are not only transformed and shaped by American mainstream culture, but they also influence and transform that host culture along the way. The merge will never be effortless or easy, since there will always be an element of friction and disruption in the merging of two separate cultures or identities. Rosen's characters in *Joy Comes in the Morning* display the inevitable ambivalence and self-consciousness that stem from the process of hybridity and the unfolding of Diasporic identity.

CONCLUSION

In their literature Goodman and Rosen, as representatives of the third and fourth generation of Jewish-Americans, search for a long lost home. This new generation of prodigal sons and daughters are driven by a nostalgic desire to reclaim the culture and values of their grandparents and great-grandparents. In doing so, the new generation of Jewish-American writers revived the deep-seated fossils that were buried within them and their immigrant ancestors. The dialogue with their past resulted in a new wave of Jewish-American storytelling and a new richness in literary themes expressing “Jewishness” in a wide variety of ways. This new generation of Jewish-American authors affirm Irving Howe’s conclusion that the hospitality, tolerance and generosity of the American host culture is not capable of washing away the Jewish-American’s sense of distinctiveness.

Allegra Goodman and Jonathan Rosen are representatives of a generation that has grown beyond striving to assimilate into the mainstream American culture. Theirs was less a struggle to belong but more a journey to reclaim their roots. Hence, Rosen and Goodman make the journey from the future (i.e. American host culture) towards the past (i.e. a communal Jewish background). Their Jewish-American identity is not static, but to be found in the never-ending process of becoming. The dual identity of the new generation of Jewish-American writers such as Rosen and Goodman is intertwined to the point where it is not possible to untangle or separate the root from the vine, i.e. the Jewish part and the American part of their cultural identity. They are the assimilated generation whose journey in finding their unique identity is focused on the historical group identity of the Jewish diaspora. They prove that cultural hybridity is a seemingly perpetual process which continues, though in a different from and arguably a different direction, from generation to generation.

Yet, although the discussed authors' vantage points might differ greatly, Goodman and Rosen display a complexity, ambivalence and duality that seems to be the unavoidable consequence of the disruption and the forcing together of their *Jewishness* and their *Americanness*. The displayed ambivalence is tied to their identities as diasporic subjects. They look both to America and to their historical cultural identity – representing both the insider and the outsider; the marginal and the majoritarian. In their works of literature, the balance between the two cultures might remain fragile; showcasing both the art of balancing and the falling between stools. What remains however, despite their differences in character, background, experience and literary style, is Goodman and Rosen's literary testimony of the beauty and truth that lie in the process of becoming – whether it is from the past to the future or from the future to the past.

Since the renaissance of Jewish-American literature - of which Rosen and Goodman were key figures – Jewish-American writing has not faded to the background, but flourishes and continues with authors like Nicole Krauss, Paul Auster, Michael Chabon, Jonathan Safran Foer, Alan Kaufman, Lev Raphael and Art Spiegelman showcasing new shades and colors of the contemporary Jewish-American soul. Hence, this study could be taken as a vantage point to study new books and stories of new Jewish-American authors within the theoretical framework that postcolonial theory offers.

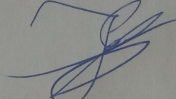
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