

JEWISH “BAD GIRLS”: TRANSGRESSIVE NARRATIVES AND REBELLIOUS DAUGHTERS IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH JEWISH WOMEN’S WRITING

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ABSTRACT: This contribution to a special issue on gender looks at contemporary Jewish women fiction writers in the UK who, following the sexual revolution, depict the rebellion against the restrictive gender roles and behavioural rules of the Jewish home. I will argue that the subversive representation of transgressive behavior demonstrates tensions between, on the one hand, loyalty to the Jewish home and the imperative of communal or tribal continuity and, on the other, the pull of ideologies and agendas which encourage women to be independent in a society that affords them freedom to do what they want.

Introduction: Rebellious Bodies

Alix is a tough woman, tough because her father Saul Rebick fought back when the fascists re-emerged after the war in England; tough because she is a graduate of second-wave feminism in the seventies; tough because, after centuries of persecution and deportation, it is time for Jews to stand up for themselves, and especially a Jewish woman who has no patience for the patriarchal rules of the Bible or the Jewish family. Her answer to Hitler is “We’re still here,” the title of the 2002 novel by Linda Grant of which Alix is the female protagonist and one of the narrators.¹ Alix is looking for a male partner who would be an equal in toughness. But as she nears the fifty-mark, Alix is becoming frustrated at waiting for the ideal solution to power relations in sex. Her body is betraying her; she relies on a woman’s cosmetic tricks to mask the unattractiveness of her age. It is in fact a face cream that her mother brought with her from Germany on the Kindertransport that stands at the centre of a dispute over inheritance. Her family’s claims to rights to the factory in Dresden, which used to produce the cream, raise questions of continuity after destruction similar to those faced by Alix in her job recovering and restoring synagogues in Eastern Europe. Her Jewish family is “still here” in Liverpool, not having made the Atlantic crossing, like so many Russian Jews at the turn of the twentieth century who intended to reach America and landed in England. But she is “still here” in a more regressive sense of being left on her own, unmarried and without children. Despite all the promises of the feminist revolution, she has found neither fulfilment nor satisfaction, yet she is trapped by her desire:

The phallic right, the phallic entitlement to which everyone else must submit—brutal, simple, magnificent—this is what thirty years of feminism had battled to overthrow, and where had it got us, the generation that took to the streets? What did we wind up with? Empty cunts. What’s the resolution? The resolution is that there is no resolution, no catharsis, no release. Submission and acceptance, or refusal to submit and accept. Both ways are intolerable.²

In the end, she finds her match in Joseph Shields, an American Jewish architect, whose Jewish phallus (quite literally) silences her Jewish mouth.³

Here we have in a nutshell the dilemma of the Jewish feminist in Britain at the end of the twentieth century as seen by the author of *Sexing the Millennium: A Political History of the Sexual Revolution* (1993), Grant’s seminal study of the sexual revolution of the seventies, which concluded that, while women had been liberated and could enjoy their sexuality more openly, they had not been released

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¹ Linda Grant, *Still Here* (London: Virago, 2010), 312.

² *Ibid.*, 342.

³ *Ibid.*, 372.

from male control and in fact their new freedom played to male fantasies. What was needed was a new language to replace phallocentrism and a new ethics of human relationships that would help women retain control of their sexuality and enjoy it beyond menopause.⁴ There is, nevertheless, no denying the changes that women's liberation has made to women around the world, particularly in the choice of freedom and a career over marriage and family. However, Jewish feminists have sometimes felt challenged in applying these achievements in a traditional Jewish home. As the British Jewish feminist dramatist and musician Michelene Wandor puts it, there is a "mythic duality" in "the dichotomy of the patriarchal Jewish father figure, on the one hand, and the dominant Jewish mother figure, on the other,"⁵ which creates "a peculiar love-hate ambivalence and fear in each sex for the strength of the other."⁶ Aside from the stereotypes invoked here, this view of the power relations in the Jewish home suggests one reason why it is not so easy for Jewish daughters to leave home without conflicted emotions and even harder to finally slam the door.

While Judaism emphasizes the importance of intimacy in marriage and of mutual harmony, especially the need for sexual pleasure, it insists on purposeful procreation and warns of the dangers of the mainstream permissive society. A traditional Jewish position would respond that the dominant discourse, which says do what you feel like, weakens faith and offers behavioural models that are inappropriate for a traditional Jewish life-style and the rules of *tsniut* (modesty) that regulate clothing and make talking about sexuality taboo.⁷ Some disaffected Jewish women are indeed pulled by the outside world where they do not have to worry about religious and social restrictions, yet all too often abandonment of the Jewish community leads to assimilation into the materialist values of a superficial consumer culture offering false happiness that lacks true spirituality. Freedom may be tempting, but can trap women into being evaluated for their sexual performance in a power game dominated by men, without necessarily attaining lasting relationships or family love. From a feminist viewpoint, from Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own* to coming out gay and gender switching, women have demanded the right to make their own choices, to be free of the strait-jacket of marriage and maternity. Unfortunately, many secular Jewish women who were brought up in the seventies were taught that Jewish marital laws practiced misogyny and that Judaism was the root of patriarchy; they mistakenly thought Orthodox feminism was some kind of contradiction and that they had to abhor religion if they valued their freedom.⁸

In the following discussion of contemporary Jewish women's writing in the UK, I will argue that the subversive representation of transgressive behavior demonstrates tensions between, on the one hand, loyalty to the Jewish home and the imperative of communal or tribal continuity and, on the other,

⁴ Linda Grant, *Sexing the Millennium: Women and the Sexual Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 254-56.

⁵ Michelene Wandor, "The Sex Divide in Jewish Culture: A Meditation on Jewishness and Gender," *Jewish Quarterly* (Spring 1997): 12-13.

⁶ Ibid. See Jenny Bourne, "Homelands of the Mind: Jewish Feminism and Identity Politics," *Race & Class* 29 (1987): 1-24. For the experiences of Jewish feminists in the United States *vis-à-vis* the feminist movement and the Jewish community see Dina Pinsky, *Jewish Feminists: Complex Identities and Activist Lives* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010). On the difficulties of defining Jewish women who are feminists in multicultural America see Naomi Seidman, "Fag-Hags and Bu-Jews: Toward a (Jewish) Politics of Vicarious Identity," in David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel, eds., *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 254-68. For the relationship between feminism and Jewish religious practice see T. M. Rudavsky, ed., *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); Susannah Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader* (New York: Schocken, 1983); Moshe Avital, *The Role and Status of Women in Jewish Tradition* (Jacksonville: Mazo Publishers, 2014).

⁷ See Rachel S. Harris, "Sex, Violence, Motherhood and Modesty: Controlling the Jewish Woman and Her Body," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 23 (Spring-Fall 5772-3/2012): 5-10; *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*, ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: New York University Press, 2009). For a Modern Orthodox perspective, see Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage* (Middle Village: Jonathan David Publishers, 1980); Raphael Aron, *Spirituality & Intimacy: Where Heaven and Love Meet* (White Plains: Mosaica Press, 2016). On the issue of modesty see Ayala Fader, *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing Up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Yehuda Henkin, *Understanding Tzniut: Modern Controversies in the Jewish Community* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2008); Jonathan S. Marion, "Seeing and Being in Contemporary Orthodox Dress," in Laurence Roth and Nadia Valman, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Jewish Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 297-307.

⁸ Helene Meyers, *Identity Papers: Contemporary Narratives of American Jewishness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 19-20. See also Andrea Dworkin, *Scapgoat: The Jews, Israel, and Women's Liberation* (London: Virago, 2000). For a critique of feminists' use of Christian anti-Semitism in their attack on "Jewish" patriarchy see Judith Plaskow, "Blaming the Jews for the Birth of Patriarchy," in Evelyn Torton Beck, ed., *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*, revised edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 298-302.

the pull of ideologies and agendas which encourage women to be independent in a society that affords them freedom to do what they want. I will focus on the rebellious daughter in particular as a way of exemplifying the self-liberation of some (but not all) Jewish women who break away from the Jewish family but do not always find resolution of their yearning for fulfilment (though this is surely never an either/or situation). I will select examples from prose fiction and film by women from North West London (one of the densest concentrations of Britain's small Jewish population), both from within and on the margins of the Jewish community, who portray a Jewish daughter's rebellion against the expectations and values of the Jewish family, as well as the restrictions of a religious or secular bourgeois home. After a brief look at Jewish "Bad Girls," I will present three novels and a movie by Jewish women who portray rebellion against the Jewish "marriage plot": a controversial novel, *Disobedience*, by Naomi Alderman, which gives a dual perspective on breaking from tradition; the fiction of Charlotte Mendelson that shows what happens when a Jewish family member breaks the sexual or gender rules; and Sandra Goldbacher's movie, *The Governess*, which I read as a parable of the Jewess who moves out of a comfortable Jewish home into Gentile society. It is not my intention to survey Jewish women's writing in Britain and for lack of space I will not deal with a number of contemporary Jewish women novelists for whom Jewishness and feminism are important.⁹

What concerns me is the recurrent transgressiveness represented in the work of several British Jewish women writers, which, as I will show, challenges traditional boundaries of Jewish identities and acceptable behavior, whether among strictly religious Hasidic and ultra-Orthodox or modern Orthodox congregations, Jews affiliated with Reform and Liberal synagogues, or middle-class assimilated secular Jews. We will see that the Jewish family can be as dysfunctional as any other. I do not claim these examples are representative, nor would I generalize about writers who address feminist issues from their experiences as Jews, yet whether they think of Jewish identities as primarily religious or ethnic, these writers engage with the tensions between the role of the obedient Jewish daughter and female liberation in a permissive society. In so doing, they raise issues of faith, gender, and sexuality in the dilemma of women seeking alternatives to marriage and a traditional life-style.

The Jewish female writers to be discussed in this essay describe provocatively transgressive behavior that resists the rigid rules of the Jewish family and critiques its social or sexual hypocrisy. Transgression, etymologically, is a crossing-over of boundaries, for example from the permitted to the forbidden, or beyond a community with strict rules of endogamy and clear demarcation of tolerated behavior, but it is also a crossing of social, gender, and sexual boundaries, as well as a broaching of taboo subjects, such as the exposure of same-sex relations or forbidden desire, that undermines the community's behavioural norms. More loosely, the term can apply to a range of subversive acts, from the debunking of sacred myths to provocative self-exposure. Performance of transgressive acts can also have libidinal charge, as well as enabling visibility, but can destabilize subjecthood when there is deviancy from the norms or a breaking of laws, creating space for reformation of identities.¹⁰

The transgressive has lost some of its power to shock as the envelope of permissibility is pushed further in popular culture as in much transgressive fiction that emerged from the counter-culture of the sixties and seventies in America which is no longer ruled obscene (William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, and so on). Feminist body performance art (for example, Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilkes, Yoko Ono, Marina Abramović, Ana Mendieta, or Milo Moire) acts out objectification, abuse, and misogyny, while stretching sexual taboos and protesting women's rights. A different example is the adoption of anti-social behavior as a way of freeing sexuality from male control

⁹ See Ulrike Behlau and Bernhard Reitz, eds., *Jewish Women's Writing of the 1990s and Beyond in Great Britain and the United States* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2004); Claire Tylee, ed., *"In the Open": Jewish Women Writers and British Culture*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006); Ruth Gilbert, *Writing Jewish: Contemporary British-Jewish Literature* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 122-43.

¹⁰ For the cultural history of transgression, see Chris Jenks, *Transgression* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); on transgression as a literary convention, see Julian Wolfreys, *Transgression: Identity, Space, Time* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). See also Diane Prosser MacDonald, *Transgressive Corporeality: The Body, Poststructuralism and the Theological Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

and enacting erotic fantasies (as did the 1994 "Bad Girls" Exhibition and, from 2002 until its dissolution, the all-female Rockbitch band).¹¹ The transgressive foregrounds the performativity of gender in the construction of identity, rather than some essential determinant interior to the body and draws our attention to the contingency of sexuality with social practices and discourses.¹² Radical Jewish feminists resist those determinants in their search for a female self, outside the communal frame of a safe track of obedience and maternity that dictates normative gender roles. In their performance of "Jewishness" they reposition themselves, in Lacanian terms, against the Law of the Father which determines the woman's paradoxical rejection of part of her femininity in order to be the signifier of the Other's desire, her lack of a phallus.¹³

As art historian Griselda Pollock reminds us in her contribution to the exhibition catalogue *Rubies & Rebels* (1996), the upsurge of Jewish women's consciousness in Britain echoed both the feminist revolution and the Jewish women's movement in America from the early seventies onwards. In fact, Jewish feminists addressed issues of the gender hierarchy and power relations in both society at large and the Jewish community.¹⁴ Yet while gender was socially and culturally constructed, being Jewish was something one was usually born with, but it could be questioned in the hybrid and shifting categories of the postmodern culture of the early twenty-first century.

As social and sexual attitudes changed in the permissive age following the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies, Jewish women asserted their own sexuality, and, in Foucauldian terms, reclaimed their bodies from the power relations of discipline.¹⁵ The New Jewess shakes off family and religion and asserts the liberated female body as no longer dependent on reproduction, which is so often a condition of communal and familial continuity. Turning from a perceived docility to active individualism affirms the pleasures of the body, an embrace of the body's sexuality rather than (as in Judaism) its sanctity. And yet there may be much ambivalence in the transgressive act of crossing ethnic, gender, and sexual boundaries and engaging with more fluid or multiple identities. The transgression of the boundaries of the Jewish home, moreover, undermines the stability of the assimilated Jewish family which has shed religious practice but clings to endogamy and ethnic exclusivity and which pressures its daughters to live up to their parents' expectations.

¹¹ On transgressive feminist art see Susan A. Owen, Leah R. Vande Berg, and Sarah R. Stein, *Bad Girls: Cultural Politics and Media Representations of Transgressive Women* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007); Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Erin Striff, "Bodies of Evidence: Feminist Performance Art," *Critical Survey* 9/1 (1997): 1-18; Mary Simonson, *Body Knowledge Performance, Intermediality, and American Entertainment at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Marta Zarzycka and Bettina Papenburg, eds., *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013); Christine Tamblin, "No More Nice Girls: Recent Transgressive Feminist Art," *Art Journal* 50/2, (2014): 53-7. On heavy metal bands see Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

¹² See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 177-80.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 582-83. The rebellious daughter is a stereotype in popular culture, and well before Jessica ran off with Shylock's ducats it has been a staple of conversion narratives; in their definition by gender and sexuality, moreover, women have been portrayed as transgressive in Antiquity and in misogynist readings of the Bible from Dinah to Judith; see Efraim Sicher, *The Jew's Daughter: A Cultural History of a Conversion Narrative* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017).

¹⁴ Griselda Pollock, "Is Feminism to Judaism as Modernity is to Tradition: Critical Questions on Jewishness, Femininity and Art," in Monica Bohm-Duchen and Vera Grodzinski, eds., *Rubies & Rebels* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996), 15-27.

¹⁵ As Lois McNay shows, feminist readings of Foucault freed the female body from essentialism and unhitched heterosexuality from the concept of the natural by describing sexual desire as a social construct produced for the purpose of regulation of unruly sexuality in power relations between the genders: power and sexuality are not ontologically distinct but make it impossible to know the materiality of the body outside its cultural significations. See Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender, and the Self* (Lebanon: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 29-30. See also Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining the Body: Feminism, Power and the Body* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991). Foucault does not address female sexuality directly, and his work has been much criticized by feminists; for a feminist critique of Foucault's work on sexuality see Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

Bad (Jewish) Girls

Before looking at contemporary British Jewish women writers, it is worth remembering that Anglo-Jewish literature was founded by women such as Grace Aguilar who responded to evangelical missionary novels which critiqued the patriarchal Jewish home and which urged the Jewess to adopt a model of domesticity based on Christian virtues. From the mid-nineteenth century, Anglo-Jewish women novelists vindicated the despised Jewish people, advanced the cause of emancipation, and advocated the ideal middle-class domesticity of the Jewish woman of valour (*eshet khayil*).¹⁶ Yet these early pioneers of Jewish fiction in England also critiqued the Anglo-Jewish establishment and pressed for religious and social reform. Later in the century, scientific scepticism and the women's rights movement affected the way women's roles were seen in society and in Judaism; one thinks here of the poet and novelist Amy Levy.¹⁷ However, the literary conventions of the marriage plot were also changing. The conventional marriage plot was subverted, Naomi Seidman has argued, when Jews encountered romance as they assimilated and read secular literature.¹⁸ In modern Jewish fiction, marriage based on a firm economic basis and social approval triggered the daughter's revolt against the institution of the Jewish family which did not recognize her sexual desires.

The "new wave" of Jewish writers after World War Two produced novels about generational rebellion against the assimilated Jewish homes of North West London, such as Brian Glanville's *The Bankrupts* (1958), in which Rosemary Frieman revolts against the mindless, moneyed bourgeois Jewish family and has a baby with a student who gets killed in a terror attack in Israel, exceptionally opting for a Zionist solution to assimilation.¹⁹ The critique of parental objections to intermarriage and assimilation in the movie *Suzie Gold* (UK, 2004) similarly draws on the familiar scenario of the Jewish daughter running away from the wealth and comfort of a North West London Jewish home, this time in pursuit of love with a Gentile, but ends with Suzie choosing a socially and financially suitable Jewish suitor over love and sex. The daughter's rebellion nevertheless questions the construction of British Jewish identity within an insular, xenophobic community that fears anti-Semitism and intermarriage, which threaten the community's survival and the sacred covenant with those who died in the Holocaust. The film suggests that such an identity does not allow full independence and growth of self.²⁰ There is here the usual ambivalence of disaffected Jews towards the community which is rejected yet which can provide a safety net after the fall-out following disastrous relationships, as we see in Francesca Segal's debut novel *The Innocents* (2012), a transformation of Edith Wharton to North West London, which pits the Nice Jewish Girl against the rebellious cousin who gets thrown out of Columbia University for her unruly behaviour. This is a story by the daughter of the author of *Love Story* (familiar from Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar*) where suburban affluence offers more happiness than the uncertainties and disappointments of a wild sex life.

Contemporary British Jewish women writers Michelene Wandor, Helen Zahavi, Elena Lappin, and Charlotte Mendelson have been labelled British Jewry's "bad Jewish girls" for having rejected the role of the Jewish Princess who is expected to obey her father and marry a wealthy Jewish

¹⁶ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer: Romance and Reform in Victorian England* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996); Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51–84. See also Michael Galchinsky, "Jewish Women in Victorian England," in Judith R. Baskin, ed., *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 211–12.

¹⁷ Nadia Valman, "From Domestic Paragon to Rebellious Daughter: Victorian Jewish Novelists," in Nadia Valman, ed., *Jewish Women Writers in Britain* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), 10–34.

¹⁸ Naomi Seidman, *The Marriage Plot: Or, How Jews Fell In Love With Love, and With Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

¹⁹ See Efraim Sicher, *Beyond Marginality: Anglo-Jewish Writing after the Holocaust* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 117–37.

²⁰ Michele Byers, "On the Threshold: British Jewish Femininity in *Suzie Gold* (2004)," in Nathan Abrams, ed., *Hidden in Plain Sight: Jews and Jewishness in British Film, Television, and Popular Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 205–25. For a comparison of this movie with Sandra Goldbacher's *Me without You* (2001) and Tom Vaughn's *Starter for 10* (2006) see Michele Byers, "Jewish Girls in British Cinema," *Journal of European Popular Culture* 3/2 (2012): 169–80.

businessman or doctor.²¹ They blast the stability and security of the Jewish family as illusionary or as causing the Jewish daughter pain. Feminist dramatist and musician Michelene Wandor explores a defiant Jewishness that is both promiscuous and clandestine. In her "Song of a Jewish Princess" (in her short-story collection, *False Relations*, 2004) a young woman flees the Inquisition and joins her lover to defy both Jewish and Gentile society's rules of segregation and female behavior. Like other stories in this collection, this is a transhistorical parable of the woman who seeks true love but does not want to play second fiddle to the man she desires. She wants to be herself and to love without social pressure, to be the music and not the mere instrument, yet her destiny as a hidden Jew marks her for the same fate as her mother, burnt at the stake, which she can avoid only by suicide. In these dream-like scenes "Isabella" imagines herself in love with non-Jewish men in various historical situations (including Esther's marriage to Ahasuerus). Freedom and independence, however, can exist only in fantasy: who one is and who one wants to be are "false relations" (a contradiction between two notes of the same chord).²² In her short story collection *Foreign Brides* (1999), Elena Lappin resists those historical givens and tries out various erotic fantasies of foreign women or female outsiders who take control of their situation. In one story in the collection, "Noa and Noah," an Israeli wife of a football-crazy British Jew seduces the pork butcher, finding sex with a stranger so much more enjoyable than with her husband once she knows all about him and is bored by life in North West London. She does it to be one up on her husband and his hypocritical Jewish friends and family; infidelity, it seems, empowers, though it is not clear in the story's ending who wins the competition of power relations.²³

The Jewish daughter's rebellion critiques marriage, which lies at the heart of the Jewish family tradition, with its match-making (*shidukh*), ostentatious weddings, and expectations of reproduction, but it also opens up the personal anguish of being expected to conform to rules that repress desire for self-fulfilment. Sarah Lightman, for example, has challenged the silencing of the female voice in the traditional Jewish home in her graphic novel *The Book of Sarah* (2019), offering an alternative "Hampstead Bible" in her confessional diary of growing up in North West London, feeling guilty for leaving religion behind and not marrying according to form: she asks, "how can I be a feminist in a traditional Jewish wedding?"²⁴ The pitfalls of a traditional Jewish marriage have in fact attracted polemical attention in much fiction and non-fiction that centres on Jewish women's struggle between faith and desire. In Reva Mann's autobiographical *The Rabbi's Daughter* (2007), a confessional memoir in the "off-the-derekl" genre,²⁵ the daughter of a prominent London rabbi and the grand-daughter of the second Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, relates her journey from a difficult childhood with a manic depressive mother and a handicapped sister into the drug scene, before trying to get high on religion. Expelled from her Jewish boarding school, she played the "bad girl" and lost her virginity at the age of

²¹ "Bad Jewish Girls" is the title of a brief newspaper item about contemporary Jewish women writers, *Jewish Chronicle*, June 12, 1998, referring to the cult of female self-representation as assertive and bitchy. On the stereotype of the Jewish American Princess see Riv-Ellen Prell, "Why Jewish Princesses Don't Sweat: Desire and Consumption in Postwar American Jewish Culture," in Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Too Jewish?: Challenging Traditional Identities* (New York: The Jewish Museum and Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 74-92; Rhonda Lieberman, "Jewish Barbie," in *Too Jewish?*, 108-13.

²² Michelene Wandor, "False Relations," *False Relations* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2004), 67.

²³ Ellena Lappin, *Foreign Brides* (London: Picador, 1999), 1-17.

²⁴ Sarah Lightman, *The Book of Sarah* (Brighton: Myriad Editions, 2019), 162. See also her video *The Reluctant Bride* (2012), accessed online at: <https://vimeo.com/65467054>. On her own work and on the Jewish female autobiographical genre of life-writing comics see Sarah Lightman, "Life Drawing: Autobiography, Comics, Jewish Women," in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Jewish Cultures*, 308-19; see Phina Rosenberg, "The Book of Sarah: Life or Reconstruction?: Situating Sarah Lightman's Illustrated Diary," in Sarah Lightman, ed., *Graphic Details: Jewish Women's Confessional Comics in Essays and Interviews* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 51-60. See also Efraim Sicher, "Bodies Beyond Boundaries: Gender and Judaism in Contemporary British Jewish Women's Confessional Graphic Art," in Andrea Greenbaum, Sarah Lightman, and Heike Bauer, eds., *Bodies and Borders in Jewish Women's Comics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, at press).

²⁵ On "off-the-derekl" novels see Karen Skinazi, *Women of Valor: Orthodox Jewish Women Troll Fighters, Crime Writers, and Rock Stars in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 30-74. Examples of this genre include Deborah Feldman's memoir *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of my Hasidic Roots* (London: Bravo Ltd, 2012), Anouk Markovits's novel *I am Forbidden* (London: Hogarth, 2012), and Leah Vincent's memoir *Cut Me Loose: Sin and Salvation After My Ultra-Orthodox Girlhood* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2014). In Australia Lee Kofman's novel *The Dangerous Bride* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2014) is a fictional memoir of breaking from her family in Crown Heights and rebelling against monogamy; she has co-edited *Rebellious Daughters: True Stories from Australia's Finest Female Writers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

sixteen. After an ultra-orthodox arranged marriage left her with three children and a thirst for sexual adventure, she reversed (as she puts it) the notion of “*tikkun*” (cosmic repair) by going on a self-destructive spree of sex and drugs. Mann describes in salacious detail her passage from the holy to the profane, from meticulous performance of the *mitzvot* (religious commandments) to sexual freedom.²⁶ Sinful promiscuity nevertheless leaves her empty (happiness, she says, lasts as long as a hard-on or a fix), and she searches for spirituality in the sacred waters of the Ganges, instead of those of the *mikvah*, before returning to Judaism.²⁷

Naomi Alderman's Disobedience

Naomi Alderman gives us an insider's view of what brings a woman to rebel against her Jewish home in her prize-winning first novel, *Disobedience* (2006), made into a movie starring Rachel Weisz and Rachel McAdams (USA/UK/Ireland, 2018). When Ronit Krushka returns to her Orthodox Jewish home in North West London after the death of her father, the community's rabbi, she shocks everyone with her immodest behavior and by renewing her lesbian relationship with her childhood friend, Esti. Esti is now married to her cousin, the favoured contender for the rabbi's position. The Jewish daughter has abandoned her father and his Orthodox ways in the North West London suburb of Hendon to lead a hedonistic lifestyle in New York, where she can do whatever she wants and be whatever she wants. As Martin Kindermann has argued in his reading of the novel, Hendon is one Jewish space among others but it excludes alternate Jewish groups and the diverse spaces of London. New York, by contrast contains any number of spaces that are ethnically marked or unmarked, and anyone can identify loudly and visibly as ethnically or religiously Jewish in a city with more Jews than Tel Aviv.²⁸ In New York, Ronit can perform the “slut” strutting along the street smoking a cigarette without anyone protesting or noticing her. In Hendon, however, Ronit feels hemmed in by a closed, Jewish middle-class religious world of rules and regulations, living in what Alderman describes as a portable *shetl* on the endless path of the Jews' exilic wandering, where Jews feel secure only within its boundaries. In New York her disobedience is barely visible; only when her transgressive behavior is an “in your face” desecration of communal values in North West London does her rebellion give her the illusion of empowerment. The symbolic revolt of eating a prawn sandwich is not enough; Ronit has to demonstrate that she defies the divine commandments under the nose of the community, so she walks into a local non-kosher café and orders a cake which she eats even though it is dry and tasteless.

Ronit's initial act of disobedience (eating an egg sandwich from a bakery of which her father did not approve) sparks off a rift from her silent father, as well as the heavenly Father, both of whom (as she sees it) want to control her and tell her what to do. Disobedience is a claim for her freedom, but it is freedom *from*, not freedom *to*; it has no orientation, and Ronit soon gets entangled in role-playing. When her father dies, for example, she asks Scott, a married male colleague, to come over to have sex with her for comfort, all the time over-conscious of trying not to be bound or committed in any of her actions, even in making coffee the way Scott likes. She becomes trapped in her compulsive behavioural patterns. Ronit is herself inconsistent in her rebellion, as when she chastises Scott, with whom she is having an adulterous affair, for marrying a *shiksa* (a non-Jewish woman).

This is a revolt against the whole set-up of marriage, the mainstay of Jewish family life, but also an institution deserted by many feminists and eroded in the postmodern era. Ronit wants to avoid what Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* once called the problem that has no name in the empty lives of suburban housewives, that nameless something which they cannot find in their conditioned lives of

²⁶ Reva, *The Rabbi's Daughter: A True Story of Sex, Drugs and Orthodoxy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007), 244.

²⁷ Eve Harris's novel *The Marrying of Chani Kaufman* (Dingwall, Scotland: Sandstone Press Ltd., 2013) likewise breaches modesty and propriety to demystify the strange rites of the ultra-orthodox Jewish community in an intimate account of a Haredi woman's marriage, revealing the embarrassment and emotional difficulties of an arranged match (a subject treated humorously in a short film by Sam Leifer, *The Honeymoon Suite*, UK, 2010).

²⁸ Martin Kindermann, “Locating Jewish Identities in Naomi Alderman's *Disobedience*,” in Alina Gromova, Felix Heinert, and Sebastian Voigt, eds., *Jewish and Non-Jewish Spaces in the Urban Context* (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2015), 273-89.

middle-class unsatisfied marriages.²⁹ In Jewish North West London, there is no outlet from such frustration for a rabbi's daughter because of close surveillance by local women who gossip about her every movement and demeanour. A little part of Ronit wants what she is running away from—the rigid track of teaching school, marriage, and children, in a middle-class comfortable home, safely within the walls of the community, her path marked out for her, like her school friends who are happy with their lot.

The novel is narrated in two voices, presenting alternate perspectives on the Jewish daughter's rebellion. The first is Ronit's, the rebellious daughter of a well-known and much revered rabbi, the pillar of the community. She loathes the moneyed, comfortable Hendon Jews with their middle-class homes and closed minds, but, when her father dies, she does not know what to feel, apart from contempt for the world she left behind. She goes back to Hendon to tidy up the house and reclaim her mother's silver candlesticks, which still mean something to her despite her rejection of the Sabbath rules, for after all she respects family memory and does wish to belong. She cannot decide whether to lie that she has a fiancé in Brooklyn and is still within the communal fold, or to shock everyone by appearing in immodest dress. In the end, she spoils an otherwise quiet Sabbath eve meal by telling the *dayan* (an important member of the Jewish religious court), who has been invited to help support her cousin Dovid's candidacy for the post of rabbi, that she is a lesbian and intends to have a commitment ceremony with her female partner. Her compulsive behavior has again trapped her in not being able to act otherwise, and she can only react angrily to anyone who tries to relate to her in conventional ways.

The second voice in Alderman's novel is that of Esti, with whom Ronit had a sexual affair and who is now married to Ronit's cousin, Dovid, with whom Ronit used to play as a child, taking on the dominant roles of Jewish heroes but also that of the brawny arch-enemy Goliath. Esti, who has tried to forget her lesbian past, believes in Torah ideas such as separation of the sacred and profane, the pure and the impure, which she teaches to girls at the local religious Jewish school. It is surely not insignificant that Esti accidentally tears the orderly chart of the constellation of the stars which symbolizes the ordered and regulated world of Jewish Hendon, where girls do what God and Daddy say. From her point of view, Ronit's rebellion goes against the dominion, ordained at creation, of the sun over the moon, of the male over the female. When Ronit comes to visit, Esti cannot easily control her emotions. For all her outward conformity to Torah law and her scrupulous observance of family purity, she unconsciously puts butter in the pot of meat, in contravention of the kosher dietary restrictions—breaking the principle of separation between permitted and forbidden, holy and profane.

After she has caused her pain by rejecting her, Ronit seduces Esti, a revenge for Esti's marriage to Dovid, which she felt to be a betrayal and a displacement of their re-enactment of the biblical David and Jonathan story. The novel ends with new beginnings when Esti gives birth to Dovid's child and they name the boy after the deceased rabbi. Dovid stuns the congregation by backing up his wife when she publicly acknowledges her lesbianism, speaking out where Rabbi Krushka called for silence. Nevertheless, the couple is accepted and the community can carry on drinking their tea undisturbed.

When her father Rabbi Krushka dies, Ronit returns, after some hesitation, to Hendon and scandalizes the leader of the community Hartog, who bribes her not to attend the *hesped* (memorial ceremony) for her father, the community's respected leader. Ronit has her revenge on Hartog and all that he represents by defying Hartog and turning up at the public memorial for her father disguised as an ultra-orthodox woman in a wig; Ronit then goes back to New York with her mother's candlesticks, sometimes lighting them and saying prayers, dreaming of somehow bringing together her sexual identity and her Jewish upbringing. Yet there seems to be no place for her within Hendon's Jewish religious community. In their different ways, Esti and Ronit remain caught between fear and desire in coming out. Ronit may well be Electra, the counterpart to Oedipus in Freud's theory of child development, and the archetypal rebellious daughter. The Father in heaven has killed her mother, while her earthly father kills her with silence. This is rebellion (*mordanut*, the title of the novel in its Hebrew translation) more than

²⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 15-32.

disobedience, but in the end her playing the “bad girl” results only in an escape to New York, where sexual and religious identities can be fluid, though Ronit can never shrug off entirely her filial attachments to ritual and ethnicity.

Extending the critique of North West London’s Jewish community, Alderman takes a step further from disobedience to full-scale rebellion in *The Power* (2016), a fantasy novel purportedly written by a man, about a feminist alternate reality in which women wield occult power to release electric charges of energy. In a global apocalypse, women have broken out of the prohibitions of repressive regimes at home and at large and use their bodies to inflict vicious pain in graphic scenes of women brutally raping men. If this is an inversion of how women feel to be abused and raped, it does not suggest that it would be a gentler place if women were in charge (the acknowledged inspiration of Margaret Atwood is obvious throughout the novel). In fact, women seem to have reverted to a natural state of cruel predators, while men are exposed when their pants are down as weak and vulnerable.

The projection of male violence shows what it feels like to be a woman in a phallogocentric society. Helen Zahavi, another Jewish “bad girl” who left the safe haven of a Jewish home in North West London, has written *female noir* novels which present a particularly vicious and vengeful female persona, as in *Donna’s Revenge* (UK title, *Donna and the Fatman*, 1998), who breaks the rules of female conduct. Zehavi’s notorious successful novel and later movie *Dirty Weekend* (1991) reverses gender relations when Bella, whom Margarita Stocker has identified with the feminist appropriation in art and fiction of the figures of Yael and Judith, wreaks bloody vengeance on men.³⁰ Reminding us of Brett Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991), the gratuitous violence in this novel goes beyond what is permitted in a public discourse which applies different rules to what women can or cannot do and say. In *True Romance* (1994) an illegal female immigrant is raped by the truck driver who smuggles her into Britain and is later exploited in a *ménage à trois*, a story narrated in a language which estranges body from self. Not only does this point out the injustice done to women by unscrupulous men and by society’s making their behavior (rather than that of the males) seem transgressive, but, on a more symbolic level, the woman is, not unlike the figural “Jew,” an alien who can be abused and (literally) burnt to death with impunity. In the work of Alderman and Zehavi we thus see a subversion of male-dictated norms both within the Jewish community and outside it.

Charlotte Mendelson, When We Were Bad and Daughters of Jerusalem

Scandal and rebellion come from within the Jewish community in Charlotte Mendelson’s *When We Were Bad* (2007), where a Reform woman rabbi’s family spins out of control. The opening scene scripts the scenario for the most public exposure of shame: the thirty-four year-old bridegroom Leo Rubin steps down from the wedding canopy in a synagogue to avow his devoted love to a married woman, Helen Baum, wife of the bride’s rabbi, Rabbi Nicholas Baum of West Finchley Liberal Synagogue. If, in the Prologue, we are introduced to a family that everyone thinks is “doomed to happiness,”³¹ it turns out that the Rubins are the model of a dysfunctional family. As the crisis spirals, instead of a coherent linear plot, a series of alternating comic scenes plays out melodramatic crises, while everyone pretends that nothing is happening: although intimidated by his volatile brother, the failed novelist Simeon, Leo is unable to forget his love for Helen and stay loyal to his family’s standing in the community; Frances’s marriage is falling apart; Emily covers up her emotional and professional failures. Emily and Simeon look quite hopeless in supportive roles. Claudia cannot confide her secret illness to her family, while Norman can never find the opportunity to confide in Claudia. He can only find a female admirer with whom to communicate and seems to be starting a furtive and guilty affair with her. The fall-out culminates in the multicultural Passover *seder* which does little to bring the family together. Only at the close of the novel

³⁰ Margarita Stocker, *Judith, Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 245-51.

³¹ Charlotte Mendelson, *When We Were Bad* (New York: Houghton Mufflin, 2007), 1.

does Claudia write her family the love letters they deserved, giving expression to what was missing in this Jewish family.

The members of the Rubin family each harbour secrets, but the women stake out their own gender and sexual choices, while the men cower in fear of reprobation or approbation—the runaway bridegroom in the end shows that he cannot easily leave his Jewish mother, Claudia. Claudia, who has a voluptuous body “which makes men weak,”³² is a celebrity rabbi about to bring out a new book and she is fêted by her synagogue, New Belsize Park Liberal (presumably based on Belsize Square Synagogue, formerly the New Liberal Jewish Congregation). Her husband Norman, eclipsed and emasculated by her fame, is therefore fearful of competing with his own new book, a biography that exposes the hidden past of an English writer, Cedric Vickers. When the secret is out, he shrinks under Claudia’s withering accusation of betrayal. Frances seeks rescue from her wreck of a marriage in Emily’s lover, Jay, whom she at first takes to be a man but then realizes is a cross-dressed lesbian. It seems that desire cannot be contained within the Jewish family, and only the female protagonists have any willpower to transgress traditional gender roles.

Mendelson wants us to come to a similar conclusion in her novel *Daughters of Jerusalem* (2008), which takes up the trope of the Daughters of Jerusalem in Song of Songs in a story of rebellious daughters and, as in *When We Were Bad*, reveals the secrets undermining family and marital relationships. Jean, a Lancashire lass, marries Victor, a Jewish refugee’s son, who grows up knowing Jews cannot be too lucky. Victor is conscious of his outsider status and aware of the memory of persecution that dogs his drive to rise to the top of the academic ladder. He brings up his two daughters Eve and Phoebe in the academic seclusion of an Oxford college, trying not to give in to a Jew’s aspirations to be a country gentleman: “He owes it to the memory of his parents, *olam le-shalom* [sic!], to the small hopes of his ancestors and the honest poverty of the English working class, who saved him, not to succumb to the fantasy of the country gentleman.”³³ Victor’s lapsed faith is discernible in his penchant for ham at college; nevertheless, Jean’s mother gives her a teapot because she believes Jews should be taught to respect English customs. Eve breaks that symbol of the Jew’s conversion to Englishness when Jean is in Paris with Eve’s spoilt sister Phoebe.

Although the novel is not set in North West London’s Jewish community, the Jewish “bad girl” pattern is repeated as each of the women in the household pursues secret plans to assert their independence, to break free from the family narrative. Eve self-abuses and loses her virginity to the same man her mother did, Raymond Snow, Victor’s rival for a coveted lectureship. Phoebe then steals him and also has sex with him before Victor publicly exposes him as a fraud and seducer of an under-age girl. Jean is seduced into an affair with the lesbian Helena, a lecturer at one of the Oxford colleges. In this satire of Oxford college life among dons who have difficulty tying up their laces but get caught in compromising positions in the bushes, Mendelson dishes out black comedy in parallel scandalous scenes that expose sexual secrets. The novel closes with Jean leaving home as the family falls apart to live on her own; presumably she will continue a sexual relationship with Helena and explore her discovery of freedom as an independent woman. The open ending suggests that leaving home and transgressing gender rules are the only hope to recover repressed sexuality and construct selfhood, a criticism not only of the Jewish community but of society at large, which reminds us, as in other tales of a Jewish daughter’s sexual maturation such as Mendelson’s *Almost English* (2013) and Linda Grant’s *The Clothes on Their Backs* (2009), that the delusion of discarding one’s origins cannot solve internal conflicts or defer discovery of family secrets.

³² Ibid.

³³ Charlotte Mendelson, *Daughters of Jerusalem* (London: Picador, 2008), 134.

Jane Eyre Walks Out of Shul: The Governess

The process of becoming an independent woman in these examples has entailed a transgressive crossing of gender, sexual, and ethnic boundaries. Sandra Goldbacher's movie *The Governess* (1998), set in the 1840s, could be read as a similar parable of the Jewish girl who grows up amid affluence and who runs away to remake her identity, but in the context (largely unnoticed by critics) of the situation of a young woman in an Anglo-Jewish middle-class home. Dreaming of becoming an actress like the famous Rachel, Rosina da Silva escapes from an arranged marriage with a fish-merchant after her father dies suddenly, to work as a governess in an isolated mansion on the Isle of Skye (the only alternative Rosina sees to earning money on the stage or on the street). She passes as an Englishwoman, Mary Blackchurch, who has a Protestant Italian mother (the association with Mary Magdalene is made early on in the movie). This is an anti-conversion narrative in which Mary/Rosina returns to Jewishness in the end after a love affair with the master of the house, Charles Cavendish, a natural scientist whom she has helped to develop a new solution that enables prints to be made from photographic plates (a salt solution was invented by Daguerre at the end of the 1830s, but development of a more efficient photographic process by Henry Fox Talbot came only in the 1840s).³⁴

The film pits female intuition and expression of feelings against male rationality and control, a contest in which Mary/Rosina attempts to direct the course of her love affair toward setting up a photographic studio in Edinburgh or Paris. Mary/Rosina wishes to fix the image in order to capture beauty in the female gaze. From the beginning of the film it is the female gaze that dominates, from the elevated women's gallery in the opening scene in the synagogue where Rosina and her sister measure up the men. Later, in the Cavendish household, she seduces Charles Cavendish and voyeuristically photographs him as he sleeps naked. Then she steals the process of mimesis itself when she flees with the chemical solutions he has prepared with her invention. She also orders his son Henry to strip for her and caresses his body from her superior position, in a reversal of the cinematic "male gaze."³⁵ This is (besides much else) *Jane Eyre* all over again, only this time the governess reaching across the social divide in her passion for the master of the house is a Jewess who is trying out some late twentieth-century ideas of gender and sexuality.

In her fantasy of her dead father coming to her at night and mesmerizing her, Mary/Rosina identifies Charles Cavendish as the father surrogate in her incestuous desire, uncannily aware of her father's secret sexuality (he apparently knew more of street life than her mother realized, yet another example of the Jewish community's dirty secrets). Mary/Rosina is literally the woman in the attic, though not this time a crazy alien Bertha,³⁶ but the hidden Marrano, wrapped in her father's prayer shawl, carrying out secret rituals of candle lighting and eating a salted egg (commonly thought to be a mourning rite, practiced at the *seder* on Passover). She is working through bereavement, but is also trying to separate herself from her former Jewish home, a process of individuation that gives birth to her sexual awakening. Her veiling and unveiling of identity is acted out when she loses her virginity to Charles. She tells him veiling is an ancient Hebrew deflowering custom, though in fact she is re-enacting (against the background of a sound track by Ofra Haza) Salomé's dance of the veils, which created a scandal at the end of the nineteenth century in Oscar Wilde's banned play and unleashed a trend of erotic performances of Strauss's operative version and adaptations. This indicates the proximity of Eros and death and draws attention to Rosina's difficulty in separating herself from her dead father, but it also acts

³⁴ In Grant's *Still Here*, Alix has a sexual fantasy in which she is similarly attracted to a powerful male figure from the Victorian past, the pioneering engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

³⁵ The seminal essay on the "male gaze" is Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 833-44.

³⁶ In *Jane Eyre* Rochester secretly kept his wife Bertha locked up in a third-storey room, often referred to in feminist criticism as the "woman in the attic."

out fantasies of Oedipal castration, again putting us in mind of the archetypal modern Jewish daughter's rebellion.³⁷

This is the stereotypical voluptuous *Belle Juive*, seen from the late twentieth century when women have taken control of their bodies and the New Jewess can assert her sexuality.³⁸ Prostitutes taunt Rosina with their Christian bodies, and sexual promiscuity beckons outside the Jewish home (the Gentile dish of semolina reminds her of her sister teasing her about drinking semen). But the story ends with Rosina rejecting the isolated world of Jane Eyre on a Scottish island, where a Jewess can only feel lost and lonely. In a closing voice-over (after she has returned to her dying mother in London), Rosina dismisses the episode as done with and, when Charles tracks her down, she shows him her independent studio, which she runs with her sister in a matriarchal household, fixing images of her people, proud of her ethnic identity (she wears a Star of David necklace and makes the bewildered Charles sit for his portrait in front of a seven-branched menorah, an emblem of lost Jewish sovereignty). She says, "They say I have captured the beauty of my people and I am glad." As if addressing postmodern concerns, the film concludes that bringing together Italian-Jewish and Scottish/English heritages does not result in a hybrid identity, but that reversing the anti-Semitic male gaze can allow the Jewess to come out as a sexually empowered woman and return to who she is, though only after she has left the Jewish home.³⁹

Conclusion

The act of writing can be cathartic, especially if it is confessional (as in the case of Reva Mann or Sarah Lightman). It is a way of working through pain but also an act of rebellion that brings into the open the hidden truth about the Jewish family. Naomi Alderman relates that though she herself did not rebel against her home in Hendon, writing the book was her act of rebellion.⁴⁰ As Naomi Wallace once commented, the best writing is transgressive,⁴¹ speaking back to the unspeakable and saying what one is expected not to say about one's closest family or friends, in order to release traumatic pain and establish subjecthood.⁴² Biting satire of the Jewish community used to shock, and Philip Roth has Zuckerman in *The Ghost Writer* face the ire of his community and family for obscene defamation, for not respecting what can or cannot be said. Nowadays desecration or blasphemy has to have more bite, more venom, to achieve an impact, especially if it is going to reach beyond the tiny Jewish readership in Britain and speak to similar concerns about gender, sexuality, and religion among other minorities and a wider public. Indeed, subversion and transgression have become conventional in the fascination in postmodernist women's fiction with excess or the breaking of taboos (one thinks of Angela Carter or Fay Weldon).⁴³ However, the transgressive act in contemporary fiction by Jewish women addresses the *constructedness* of ethnic and gender identities.

³⁷ For a Freudian analysis of the mind-body opposition here in the context of 1990s cinema, see Peter Lehman and Susan Hunt, "Passion and a Passion for Learning in *The Governess*," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Cinema* 45 (2002). Accessed online at: <http://www.cjumpcut.org/archive/jc45.2002/lehman/governesstext.html>

³⁸ On the transformation of the Jewess into the *femme fatale* and Salomé figure on the stage see Roberta Mock, *Jewish Women on Stage, Film, and Television* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); on the *Belle Juive* see Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture*.

³⁹ On the ambivalence of the portrayal of the Jewess in this film, see Judith Lewin, "Semen, Semolina and Salt Water: The Erotic Jewess in Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess*," in Nathan Abrams, ed., *Jews & Sex* (Nottingham, UK: Five Leaves Press, 2008), 88-100; Helene Meyers, "Educating for a Jewish Gaze: The Close Doubling of Philosemitism and Antisemitism in Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess*," in Phyllis Lassner and Lara Trubowitz, eds., *Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 103-18.

⁴⁰ Ader Edemariam, "There's really good stuff in the way I was brought up. But rubbish stuff too." *Guardian* February 20, 2006. Accessed online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/20/religion.books>

⁴¹ Naomi Wallace, "On Writing as Transgression," *American Theatre* (January 2008): 98-102.

⁴² Deirdre Lashgari, "Introduction: To Speak the Unspeakable—Implications of Gender, "Race," Class, and Culture," in Deirdre Lashgari, ed., *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 1-24.

⁴³ See Julie A. Chappell and Mallory Young, eds., *Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film*, (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Commenting on the British Jewish poet and artist Sue Hubbard, Lucy Wright points out the complex ways in which contemporary Jewish women writers are caught between feminist attempts to recover female subjectivity and postmodern scepticism about the subject, between a reshuffling of the relationship of society and the individual, between memory and history; the resulting diasporic sense of identity in space and time is paradoxically exilic and dislocated.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, multiple options for Jewish (or “Jew-ish”) identities have opened up varying combinations of secularism and tradition. Reaffirmation of Jewish identity in the face of anti-Semitism, larger visibility and self-confidence for self-identifying Jews, and a move away from affiliation based on a synagogue in a network of cultural and educational institutions in Britain from Chabad to Limmud, from Jewdas to JW3, have (as elsewhere in Europe) opened up a multitude of choices in the face of rampant assimilation and intermarriage. As Keith Kahn-Harris and Ben Gidley have noted, this was part of a Jewish renaissance that introduced dialogue and sometimes confrontation into Anglo-Jewish politics just when a discourse of continuity was giving way to a discourse of security, as British Jews faced a resurgence of anti-Semitism as well as anti-Israel boycotts and terrorist threats. But although the community (in its widest definition) has become more diverse and spans a broad spectrum of beliefs, non-belief, and practices, its institutions have not changed greatly, especially when it comes to gender balance in representation and participation.⁴⁵

The Jewish community’s small size and demographic concentration in London and Manchester, as well as the close proximity of family and friends, also contribute to guilt feelings for leaving, not to mention the difficult relations between daughters and mothers (above all—the Jewish mother).⁴⁶ However, breaking away does not necessarily mean disavowal or condemnation. Alderman, for example, presents central ideas in Judaism through Esti’s viewpoint in *Disobedience* without being apologetic, yet she can also be cynical about any future of a middle-of-the-road modern Orthodox Judaism in North West London: for example, in a satirical short story ironically called “United” (2009), Alderman forecasts that the members of Britain’s United Synagogue might in the near future be museum pieces, displaying their antiquated Friday night rituals as a by-gone way of life.⁴⁷

In the end, unlike America, where the values of the founding fathers blended with Jewish ideals and Jews were (on the whole) tolerated, maintaining a Jewish identity outside the geographical confines of the British Jewish community in North West London and Manchester can be challenging. While religion can be a topic for comedy or general derision, alienated or disaffiliated Jews may find themselves on the defensive, under attack for their association with Israel and with the “bad” religious Jews, or may simply face indifference and lack of understanding. In such a “goyish” country as England, quips Michelene Wandor, where keeping kosher does not matter to anyone, not keeping kosher matters even less.⁴⁸ In none of the texts discussed in this essay (with the exception of *Suzie Gold*) is there any resolution of the Jewish “bad girls” revolt. The story ends with new beginnings, as well as uncertainty about the possibilities that have opened up outside the home and the Jewish family. Wherever they are situated, whether within the community, outside it, or on the edge, these female protagonists cannot easily detach themselves from who they are both as women and as Jews, nor can they easily extricate

⁴⁴ Lucy Wright, “Opening Spaces: Sue Hubbard’s Poetry of Place,” in *Jewish Women Writers in Britain*, 218-19.

⁴⁵ Keith Kahn-Harris and Ben Gidley, *Turbulent Times: The British Jewish Community Today* (London: Continuum, 2010), 117-35. See also Dani Kranz, “Living Local: Some Remarks on the Creation of Social Groups of Young Jews in Present-Day London,” *European Review of History* 18/1 (2011): 79-88; Diana Pinto, “Negotiating Jewish Identity in an Asemitic Age,” *Jewish Culture and History* 14/2-3 (2013): 68-77. See also Nick Lambert, *Jews and Europe in the 21st Century: “Thinking Jewish”* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008). This is not the place to discuss the heated culture wars in Israel, which have spilled into the diaspora, over Jewish identities in a pluralist and post-secularist society; see the bibliographical essays in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Jewish Cultures*. On split, half, and “Jew-ish” identities see Ruth Gilbert, “Jewish, Half-Jewish, Jew-ish: Negotiating Identities in Contemporary British Jewish Literature,” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction*, 210-20.

⁴⁶ See Mandy Ross and Ronne Randall, eds., *For Generations: Jewish Motherhood* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2006); Brauner, “Jewish Mothers and Jewish Memory in Contemporary Memoirs,” in *Jewish Women Writers in Britain*, 192-215.

⁴⁷ Naomi Alderman, “United,” *Jewish Quarterly* 56/2 (2009): 3-5.

⁴⁸ *False Relations*, 145-46. See Sue Vice, “‘Becoming English’: Assimilation and its Discontents in Contemporary British-Jewish Literature,” *Jewish Culture and History* 14/2-3 (2013): 100-11.

themselves from the marriage plot without transgressing gender and sexual roles as they await Linda Grant’s sexual utopia.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ For a sociological analysis of why religious Jews leave the community, see Roni Berger, “The Journey of Leaving an Insular Community: The Case of Ultra Orthodox Jews,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 56/1-2 (2014): 75-98. On the experience of rebelling against a strictly religious Jewish community see Hella Winston, *Unchosen: The Lives of Hasidic Rebels* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Lynn Davidman, *Becoming Un-Orthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). See also Faranak Margolese, *Off the Derech: Why Observant Jews Leave Judaism* (Jerusalem: Devora, 2005).

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