

FEMINIST JEWISH WRITERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

by

MICHAEL J. ZERR

A Capstone submitted to the

Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

Graduate Program in Liberal Studies

written under the direction of

Dr. Richard M. Drucker

and approved by

Dr. Stuart Charme

Camden, New Jersey

October 2012

ABSTRACT OF THE CAPSTONE

Feminist Jewish Writers of the 20th Century

By MICHAEL J. ZERR

Capstone Director:

Dr. Richard M. Drucker

When the need for change is ignored, not recognized, or not fairly represented, one should do whatever it takes to bring this injustice to the forefront. My thesis for the Capstone Project, Jewish Feminist Writers of the 20th Century is one case in point. Throughout the early 20th century, recognition was given only to male Jewish writers, whereas the voice of the female Jewish writer was often silenced. The need for newfound freedom also influenced black, white and other feminist writers. Feminism was in its infancy at the turn of the twentieth century, it was seen as obscure, in the background, misunderstood, but still alive.

I want to bring the attention of today's reader to a specific group: 20th century Jewish feminist writers, to their struggles, their inspirations, and their insights through the written word, in both fiction and prose.

I will examine each author individually, their contribution to a concept of womanhood, family and identity, their unique style of literature, through the astute use of metaphor, vivid language, symbolism, and characterization. The use of the aforementioned criteria separates the 20th century Jewish feminist writers from their male counterparts, and exemplifies their "Jewishness," as the paramount agent of change.

These writers' accounts of the suffering of women, as mothers, daughters, and wives, and of their potential redemption through self-understanding provide readers with valuable insights.

Introduction: Defining Terms

In order to fully comprehend the literary material presented, one should start with defining and identifying terms. Some are narratological terms used in Gerald Prince's in his Dictionary of Narratology. Sometimes words can have multiple meanings. By defining, we will focus on the consistent meaning of these concepts throughout this study.

1. **Feminism:** the principle that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men and the movement to win such rights for women.
2. **Narratology:** the study of the nature, form, and functioning of narrative (regardless of medium of representation) and the concept of narrative competence.
3. **Focalization:** The perspective by which the narrated situations and events are presented; the perceptual or conceptual position in term of which events and characters are rendered (Genette).
4. **Characterization:** to describe or portray the specific features, traits, or distinctive qualities of a fictive character.
5. **Intertextuality:** referring from one text to another.

Briefly stated, the authors discussed are: Amy Bloom, Cynthia Ozick, Tillie Olsen, and Grace Paley. The writings will be addressed according to categories: feminism, motherhood and the family, changing societal views, self-understanding, identity, and transcendence. I will discuss each author's influence on ideas that stimulate social change.

A Theory of Narratology

Narratology means the study of narrative writing, its structure as related to how the reader perceives the intended narrative meaning of its discourse. We can begin with the study of Russian Formalists, and that of Vladimir Propp. David Herman comments that narratology is considered a program for research into a field and even a manifesto. It includes theories by Roland Barthes, Claude Bremond, Gerald Genette, Greimas, Todorov, and others, “which in turn often reference the works of Vladimir Propp” (Herman, 2004). To Propp we owe the distinction between story and discourse, between a story and its manner of telling.

For a better understanding, I turn to Jonathan Culler’s description of narratology as structured by many strands, “implicitly united in the sequence of actions or events conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse, and ‘discourse’, the discursive presentation or narration of events.” The subsequent views of the Structuralists, like Culler, differ from the Formalists. They believe that two separate models of narrative exist: thematic (Propp, Bremond, Greimas, Dundes, and Culler) and modal (Genette, Prince, et al.) narratology.

To better understand how narrative theory applies to the works I will be discussing I will be discussing only the relevance of the modal form that pertains to

Genette. Modal form examines the manner of the telling, stressing voice, point of view, transformation of the chronological order, rhythm and frequency (Ronen, 1990). The four Jewish feminist writers in this study demonstrate these features of narrative style, and applying a ‘modal’ analysis can help us understand these works.

Intertext or Intertextuality

The discussion of intertextuality in the work of key theorists such as Gerald Genette and Umberto Eco focuses much more on the role of intertextuality in guiding the reader’s interpretation of texts and in the cultural setting of texts (Phillips, P., n.d.).

Intertextuality means referring from one text to another. William Irvin says, the term “has come to have almost as many meanings as users, from those faithful to Kristeva’s original vision to those who simply use it as a stylish way of talking about allusion and influence (Irwin, 2004). I want to suggest that the authors in this study can be read in an intertextual sense.

Citing Roland Barthes, Leonard Orr has suggested that to remain with text origin-centered intertextuality simply misses the point: “Every text, being itself the intertext of another text,” (writes Roland Barthes), “belongs to the intertextual, which must not be confused with a text’s origins: the search for the ‘sources of’ and ‘influence upon’ a work to satisfy the myth of filiation” (Orr, 1986).

In other words, the focus on the connection between these Jewish American women writers texts should not be retrospective or “centripetal but centrifugal”- rather than intertextuality being focused on exploring the sources and roots of a discourse, intertextuality in these sense should guide the scholar out into other texts and into other manifestations of culture to explore the deep-seated foundations of which the text is a part, what Barthes and Michael Riffaterre would call the ‘Intertext’ (Orr, 1986). To say it more plainly, when we quote someone, use a cliché, or paraphrase we are using intertexuality. We are borrowing a person’s words or ideas. For example, the writers of the Bible would refer to older texts or offer ‘intertexts’ and intertextual narratives like the Book of Job and in other older writings. Twentieth century writers borrow ideas and stories from the ancient text and modernize them to fit society today. We always want the underdog to prevail, David v. Goliath or Harry Potter v. Lord Voldamort are archetypal enemies. In Olsen, Ozick, Paley, and Bloom, we can read Jewish literary and moral tradition into their narrative structures, sequences and voicing.

Intertextuality also helps us to focus on the connections between contemporary writers. Genette’s work relates to explorations of narrative structures, the interplay of different levels of composition, in the study of modern narratives. Genette’s theories, the that text “constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that- whether well or poorly understood and achieved- is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (Orr, 1986). The narratives and modes of intertexts help us to understand twentieth century Jewish feminist writers accomplish their political, social, and expressive goals.

Tillie Olsen: Jewish Feminism, Radical Socialism, and the Family

In her work, Tell Me A Riddle, Tillie Olsen evokes all of the readers' senses, through visceral sensation and produces a thought provoking analysis of a family that is victimized by economics and environment. As one reads her works, we can feel the passion, line by line, filled with her honesty and ability to capture a setting, an era in history unstable or under change. I feel that her Jewishness plays an important part in her writings and in her belief system. The topics that are important to Olsen are the socialist movement as a remedy for economic exploitation, the effects of economic deprivation on motherhood on the workingwoman, and the need for social justice.

In a well written critique Rodrigo Andres of the Universitat de Barcelona cites three important factors associated with Olsen: "I will focus on the centrality of the family and Jewish culture, the importance of 'Dos Kleine Menshele' (Yiddish for "the common man"), and the balanced and moderate vision of Jewish culture walking the line between optimism and pessimism and between complete hopeful affirmation and despair" (Andres, 2010). My analysis will follow these same parameters.

Critics view the family as the crucial bond that links-or chains- people together. This referenced by Bonnie Lyons in her epistemology "American-Jewish Fiction since 1945" (Lyons, 1988). She further states:

In this fiction the family is the locus of narrative and the agent of meaning. From the earliest American-Jewish literature until the most recent, the family is the heart of

human life. Certainly family life is not always depicted positively in contemporary American-Jewish fiction, but it is always central. (Lyons 78).

The problem until recently was the case that female Jewish writers voices about the family were kept silent or as Olsen has stated, silenced. In Tillie Olsen there exists a common theme of family and the endurance it shows as a collective organ in the struggles with acculturation and economic security in America.

Olsen traces the dynamics of a family in her novel Yonnondio, published in 1974, which she had started writing in the 1930's, of the Holbrook family and their struggles during the years following the crash of the stock markets and in the dust bowl era. Anna, the mother, is the anchor of this family. Jim, her husband, works hard for a living, but he is less sympathetic to their internal struggles. They each provide to the best of their abilities for the children. The family first lives in Wyoming when Jim works the coal mines, an unsafe and dangerous world, without any natural light. He and Anna want to move and start a farm and get out the symbolic darkness.

The family moves to South Dakota but all is not what one expected it to be, hard work that does not pay off, Jim is essentially a sharecropper there. Olsen's narrative reflects the struggles of the dust bowl families to live. Jim becomes frustrated and moves the family to Omaha to work in the slaughterhouses with deplorable conditions unsafe, unsanitary, where people lose limbs from being rushed to produce more. The house that they live in is filthy, no safe water to drink, no room for a family of this size, but Anna does what she can out of this miserable situation. Jim works long and hard and complains, Anna tries to be supportive, but the stress gets to Jim. He beats Anna, beats the children, drinks his pains away, while the family suffers and goes without eating.

Anna is pregnant and becomes ill shortly after the delivery of the baby. She becomes so ill that Jim believes that she will die if she doesn't receive the proper care. A friend tries home remedies but to no avail. Jim is forced to get a doctor. The doctor limits the activities of Anna. She is near the verge of physical exhaustion due to an infection she develops after childbirth. Anna's near death experience can be read as her reaction to both Jim's insensitivity to her, and to the destructive and isolating effects of their economic position. This situation forces Mazie, the daughter, to grow up quickly and become the "little mother," thus repeating the vicious cycle of repression. All Anna can do is rest and care for Bessie, her younger daughter. With the lack of food Anna's breasts are nearly dried up and Bessie, the baby fusses. This irritates Jim more and more. Mazie helps to watch her younger brothers, helps with the cooking, and helps Anna with the new baby.

Olsen writes sensitivity about motherhood and the daughter that Anna wants to receive a decent education, something she never received. This is not to say that she did not want the boys to get an equal education, but Anna felt it was especially important for a woman to be educated. Anna tries to live her life for her children but is overwhelmed. Jim tries his best to be a good father and a good husband but is consumed about money and "those damn kids". There are some scenes when he is loving, caring, and a good person, but the external narrator focalizes the story through Anna's and Mazie's thoughts and ever growing despair. The closeness between narrator and focalized characters conveys an immediate and real sense of social injustice to the reader,

In society at that time, men were the dominant figures in the house and the woman was to be submissive and bear the children. The woman did all of the domestic

work, while her husband farmed. Women canned foods or salted meats for the long cold winter. Women would mend clothes, help the children to read, and share stories they heard from their parents. Most could not read or were poorly educated, but oral storytelling kept memories and traditions alive. This was true especially with the poor or minority/immigrant families. When individuals were able to read and write, they retold these stories in the form of essays or in short stories. However, in Olsen's novel, these practices are suppressed. Olsen's female characters are vital forces, both as individuals and in their position in the family. However, because of patriarchy and an unjust economic system they are silenced. Olsen makes it very clear in Yonnondio, as well as in Silences, that economic conditions are just as responsible as patriarchy and tradition for women's exploitation.

Cynthia Ozick: Silencing of Women in Genocide

Another intriguing writer of this period and a writer who deals with motherhood, personal identity, womanhood, and the family is Cynthia Ozick. Ozick was born in the Bronx to a Russian Jewish family in 1928. She was an avid reader when she was very young; she read anything and everything. Ozick writes about the single mother with children and the struggles for success in this "new world". Two works of hers that I read were: The Shawl and The Messiah of Stockholm, riveting, suspenseful, and tragic. The Shawl is set during World War II, where Rosa, the mother, her infant daughter Magda, and her 14-year old niece Stella are marching with others to the concentration camp. The shawl is Magda's 'protector' and also comforts her when she is hungry. Instead of crying

Magda sucks on the shawl, which comforts her. Rosa is emaciated and her breasts are all but dried up due to the lack of nutrition. This hunger appears in Yonnondio where Anna's breasts symbolize the struggle of women to endure life and nurture their families. Here, Magda too, is not growing, as she should. Rosa's fear of the soldiers finding Magda and killing her consumes her every waking moment. As the story continues, the soldiers do eventually find Magda and kill her because her niece Stella steals the shawl for herself, because she is jealous of Magda. This terrible, shocking moment is devastating, and reflects the ultimate cruelty in the Holocaust and its dire consequences for families, women and children, however, Rosa is able to retrieve the shawl, Magda's 'protector', and this cloth now protects Rosa. When Rosa is afraid or wants to scream, she places the shawl over her mouth, as Magda would have done. The story told from an external perspective, and dramatizes a mother's agony, it focalizes Rosa's personal loss, highlights the horrific conditions found within the concentration camps. Just to survive the camps was a miracle and somehow both Rosa and Stella do survive and come to America to New York, to potential liberty and freedom. Ozick, like Olsen, believes that America has the potential to provide a happier life, although that potential is elusive.

In the second part of The Shawl the narrator tells also the story from the third-persons point of view and presents the letters that Rosa writes to Magda, although she died in the concentration camp during the war. Rosa imagines Magda as educated, sophisticated, well rounded, gifted in all things, something Magda could have been if she were to have survived the camp. The reader suspects that Rosa suffers from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) for all she endured while in the concentration camp. Writing to Magda helps Rosa to maintain her sanity and keeps Magda alive in her mind and in her

soul. This is very relevant today for both male and female readers who are unfamiliar with the Holocaust, or with trauma.

Rosa owns a furniture store in Brooklyn where she sells used furniture, antiques, and other items. One day, she has a mental breakdown and destroys her store. Her much loved antique mirrors smashed, furniture reduced to kindling wood. She moves to Florida to escape her past. She cannot live in New York anymore, the memories, the stress of surviving alone, and Stella her niece, who is self-centered. Rosa needs her “own world,” free from others’ opinions, or from being told she is crazy. Her “idol” the shawl as Stella calls it, is the sign of personal madness.

Rosa’s inability to have a relationship that is not founded on denial intensifies the narrator’s focus on Rosa and her state of indeterminacy.

One day while washing her clothes at a local laundry, a man, close to Rosa’s age engages her in conversation. He is inquisitive, ‘nosy’, asks a lot of questions. Rosa is repelled by his advances until she learns that he is Jewish. He invites her for tea at a local spot frequented by immigrants who speak Yiddish. They order their tea and order small pastries. The food potentially symbolizes happiness. The café serves a traditional turnip soup that Rosa hasn’t had in years, it sounds delicious and the “heavenly” aroma almost suffocates her. Rosa hasn’t had a date or eaten sweet food in many years. Rosa has become a recluse and rarely speaks to anyone other the desk clerk, a Cuban, at her hotel. The loneliness is part of her “survivor” legacy and like Anna, in Olsen’s novel, is a frequent condition of women who experience trauma and loss of identity. Rosa finds it hard to trust anyone including her niece Stella in New York.

Eventually Stella is charged with caring for Rosa because of her mental condition. Rosa's life in Miami is in a hotel with other elderly persons. Her uniqueness and her isolation, mainly due to her Jewishness and her past separate her from others. The external narrator notes that Rosa is clean and very meticulous, may even be obsessive-compulsive, and definitely very depressed. When Rosa arrives at the hotel desk, the clerk alerts her to a parcel and two letters for her. Rosa finds herself next to sheer panic when she discovers one letter from a Dr. Tree doing a study on Holocaust survivors. To her great distress she opens the two letters, one from Stella announcing that she has mailed out Magda's shawl and the other letter from Dr. Tree and his study. This remembrance of her past alarms her.

Rosa cleans her room from top to bottom. Finally after numerous demands and threats, Stella has complied with her aunt's wishes. Rosa keeps the box next to her bed that contains the shawl that Magda wore. She wants the small room to be perfect for the shawl (Magda's) arrival. This is a "sacred" article to Rosa, to a point that the shawl actually becomes Magda's spirit, for Rosa. This mental dislocation, like Anna and Mazie's in Olsen's novel points to the condition of women under dire economic, and/or political and social pressures. Rosa, like Anna, experiences silencing from both the society in general and within her own family. Her sense of motherhood can only live in the past.

Amy Bloom: Internal Narration and The Growing Female Consciousness of Identity

To start this section I want to next refer to the works of Amy Bloom. Bloom represents the new direction of American Jewish Feminist writers after 1970. For my project, I want to continue my focus on the narrative element of focalization and characterization and its use by Jewish American Feminist writers to focus attention on idiosyncratic characters as viewed by the the Jewish position. If not implemented properly, the focal character can be misconstrued, especially when a character within the story tells the story. In our example, Amy Bloom's "Silver Water" is the story's narrator, Violet. However Rose, Violet's older sister, is the primary focal character. In Silver Water, Violet's interior focalization is used to tell the story, other than directly through an external narrator. Olsen and Ozick's use of an external narrator highlights the Jewish feminist writers sympathetic, if ironic views of women. Bloom's internal narrator helps to bring the reader inside the story.

In Amy Bloom's Silver Water the story is told through the eyes of "Vi" (Violet) as narrator. Bloom is especially effective as she speaks through Violet, as Violet characterizes Rose, a schizophrenic, and her symptomology, her parents' reactions, and herself. Additionally Violet's and her family's view of the medical profession is also narrated and focalized. Rose's family therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and the whole treatment environment are viewed as inept, distrusting, and completely "out-of-touch" with their clients' needs or supporting the family's needs. Much like the external narrator in Olsen and Ozick, Vi's internal narrator is sympathetic, but is also ironic. Violet uses a most startling metaphor to focalize and characterize her sister Violet says of

Rose, "Her voice was like mountain water flowing into a silver pitcher." This metaphor denotes the healing power of Rose's voice, something Vi's narrative will develop. It also indicates Vi's deep personal connection to her sister, something she foregrounds immediately to her audience.

Bloom's ability to take a taboo subject such as mental illness is a credit to herself and her creative writing skills. Her descriptive sense of vision and use of vivid metaphors are present as Violet describes Rose's voice, her physicality, and her condition. Violet employs reflective focalization when she remembers and reports how Rose "belts out a song and the people who hear the sweet sounds and stopped in their footsteps and started to applaud her." Violet reminisces that moment in time and says, "That's what I like to remember and that's the story I told her therapist (Bloom, p.72)." She continues, "I want them to know her, to know that who they saw was not all there was to see. That there exists a person in that troubled body, capable to giving love and to be loved, someone who wants to be free of the voices in her head." Violet, like Rosa in The Shawl, and Mazie in Yonnondio, uses imagination and memory to recall a loved one. This narrative device as used by Jewish feminist writers, illustrates the crucial importance of love ones as constitutive of personal identity.

Rose, at fifteen years old, had her first psychotic break. The family is described as a typical nuclear one. The mother Galen a musician, the father David a psychiatrist, and the youngest, Violet, the budding college student with hopes of becoming a future writer. These names reflect symbolically their roles within the family, and provide a source of intertextuality as well as irony.

. Over the next ten years, Rose remains hospitalized, going from one institution to the next. Violet states, “We all hate family therapists”. In her therapy session the family meets is Mr. Walker. Rose describes him as “ferret-face”. Rose begins to sing beautifully and is slowly massaging her large breasts methodically. Mr. Walker is aghast, “My mother and I started to laugh and even my father started to smile. This was Rose’s usual opening salvo for new therapists,” said Violet. Our meeting with Mr. Walker lasted all but 14-minutes as he ushered us out of his office. We all had a good laugh, Rose is still crazy, so what’s new? This was a way to cut through the tension and to keep us “sane” said Violet. Bloom’s use of humor introduces a way to lighten Rose’s oppression.

We meet the next therapist. He was 300-pounds, as big as the state of Texas, “somehow” he is quite different and his name is Dr. Thorne. After introductions were made, Dr. Thorne eases the tension. Speaking in his thick Texas-drawl, this genuine spirit put everyone at ease. Rose’s opening salvo has no affect on Dr. Thorne. Readers can like Dr. Thorne from the moment we meet him. Dr. Thorne is large like Rose, a giant with personality and charm. Rose is placed in a halfway house where she is adjusting and appears happy. But the voices are still in her head. She tries to compensate by “screwing her brains out” to rid the voices to no avail. The medications help but are not totally effective. It appears that sex, like imagination and memory, can only help the troubled person so much.

One day Rose is near an A.M.E. Zion Church, she hears singing and walks in and starts to sing to everyone’s surprise. The choir director invites her to sing and she does. This big, blond lady among all of the other black people, who were all shades of brown, from a light hue to a deeper tone, all accept Rose and her amazing voice. We find in

Bloom, a lessening of racial or class tension, and the suggestion that identity becomes stable when it is shared.

After five good years with “Big Nut”, a.k.a. Dr. Thorne, he suddenly dies from an aneurism. The family, especially Rose, is devastated by the news. Rose was able to maintain for a short while after Dr. Thorne’s death, but now is deteriorating and finds it hard to cope effectively. Rose is soon out of the halfway house after a physical altercation with another client. The family is forced to bring Rose home, to many future challenges. Someway they will have to manage till Rose can get back into a new facility. It will be 45-days according her father’s new insurance policy. Rose comes home and immediately says “no meds” to her parents. Her parents don’t know how to respond to Rose’s request, they say nothing immediately in fear of setting Rose off again, and they redirect her attention to something else. Rose and her mother walk down to the lake to ease the tension. Rose returns with her bucket of shells and rocks. Galen asks Rose to leave them on the porch and Rose becomes upset and uncontrollable. Rose goes inside and starts to slam her head on the kitchen floor, Galen tries to intervene, Rose is not aware of who/what is trying to slow her down. She tosses her mom aside into the refrigerator, Galen calls out for Vi’s help. Violet throws herself to the floor where Rose’s head was. Rose stops and apologizes for what she has done, for she didn’t want to hurt Vi and struggles to get to her feet and runs to her room. The question I asked myself was why did Vi place herself between the floor and Rose’s head? The answer was its use as a metaphor. Semansky writes, “Violet, always struggling to hold her own identity in face of Rose’s overbearingly powerful impulse and actions, has now become simply a thing-a spot on the floor-against which her sister bangs. Violet’s loss of self has ebbed to its

lowest point, and she is utterly dispossessed.” David hears the commotion and asks what’s happened? Vi answers, “Rose rushed past mom and pushed her out of the way.” David helps Galen up, makes her tea, and tries to comfort her. Galen gives an icy glare to Violet in protest but doesn’t say a thing. This scene reflects similar episodes in Olsen’s portrayal of deterioration of the family, the silencing of motherhood, and the agony of children; common themes that occupy the writing of Jewish American feminist novelists.

The family decides to make dinner and then get Rose to come down and eat. Rose cannot concentrate on eating; she would rather hum the McDonald’s jingle. Rose spills her juice that’s followed by another outburst. Rose seems insistent on wanting to be changed and to go to bed. David escorts Rose upstairs to get her ready for bed. Violet describes her mother, “My mother sat at the table for a moment, her face in her hands, and then she began clearing the table. We cleared it without talking, my mother humming Schubert’s *Schlummerlied*”, a lullaby about the woods and the river calling the child to go to sleep.” She sang it each night when we were small. Soon Galen joins David to say goodnight to Rose. They both descended the stairs, both visibly worn down, and finally announce that Rose is asleep. Violet remembers all of them sitting on the porch to watch the sunset disappear and to listen to the sweet melody of the crickets. The rest of the evening is shrouded in a misty fog and very damp. Here the atmosphere and setting is ominous and deadly.

Violet goes to sleep but abruptly wakes up feeling very cold around 3 a.m., goes down the hall to fetch another blanket, and then unconsciously decides to check in on Rose. To her surprise, Rose is not in her bed. Violet in a panic gets dressed and goes out looking for her. She searches the yard quietly and discreetly as to not awake or alarm her

sleeping parents, for they all had a very difficult day. Violet soon comes upon footprints, she follows them while calling out to Rose, while searching in the dark she almost stumbles over Rose's body. Rose is barely breathing, lips pale, skin ice cold, eyelids fluttering wildly without any control. While bending down to check on Rose's breathing, Rose whispers to Violet, "closing time" as Violet finds a bottle of small white pills in Rose's enormous hands. This metaphor ironizes the concept of performance. Violet knew what Rose's cryptic message meant; Rose wanted to end her life on her terms and not be a burden on her family. Violet stayed with Rose till the stars faded introducing daybreak, the day was starting to warm, the fog lifting, and then the lonely trek back to the house. As Violet is walking up the path, she sees her mom alone and wrapped in a blanket on the porch. Galen kissed Violet and without anything being said between the two women and went into the woods to find Rose. Galen awakes David and tells him about Rose. Galen called the police, the funeral parlor and then went to bed until the funeral for she was emotionally and physically exhausted, and mentally spent. This deathly scene is played out in the same way in Rosa's and Magda's suffering. The existence of a perceptual and textual continuity in American Jewish feminist writers regarding the awareness of women's suffering provides both male and female readers with a penetrating insight into the condition of women. Rose's tragic death is focalized through the subsequent actions of the family.

David feeds the family, makes the necessary calls, and picks out Rose's casket. The separation and the way each individually copes with Rose's death, whether by not communicating with each other or in sheer personal isolation forces life to move on. I believe it was a little of everything mentioned by Vi: self- preservation, shock, horror,

and a sanity check. Comfort was provided by Galen as she played the piano and by Rose's friend Addie who sang songs, uplifting full and of life/spirit, touching each person's core, and their very soul.

Finally, Violet closes her eyes and reflects back to the happier times with Rose, "she sees Rose fourteen years old, lion's mane thrown back and her eyes tightly closed against the glare of the parking lights and the sound of Rose's sweet voice resonating with pure passion, touching all who would listen, while lifting spirits and memories abound."

Rose would spend time alone in the woods behind their house until her mother would have to bring her in at dusk. I initially didn't understand the symbolism of this sanctuary to Rose. Amy Bloom uses the symbolism of the Schubert's lullaby to connect when Rose chooses where to die-' where the river calls the child to go to sleep.'

Bloom's story, so touching, is very vivid, and bravely written of taboo subjects like suicide and mental illness, uplifting in many ways. Bloom's story is eye opening in its focus on the daily struggles of those afflicted with behavioral issues and the need for improved services and effective treatment modalities, whether rich or poor, male or female.

An inspiring read, one that I truly enjoy and personally connected with. Bloom's uncanny storytelling ability, her use of detailed prose, vivid description of Rose's breakthroughs and relapses, and use of well-placed metaphors, made this short story very believable and personal. The beginning and the end encapsulates Rose's life as reflected by Violet, " My sister's voice was like mountain water in a silver pitcher, the clear beauty of it cools you and lifts you up beyond the heat, beyond your body." Vi's characterization

of Rose through internal narration or as a focalizer, illustrates the Jewish feminist sensibility, the view that we tell stories and focus on others, to provide them with identity and justice.

In summary, the story told by Violet gives credence and validity to an individual's everyday struggles to just survive. Bloom's expert account of individuals fighting their demons, the health insurance system's inept response to help clients, and the federal government's lack of resources to combat growing problems in society. We must remain vigilant and proactive to those around us and if suffering from mental health issues, get them definitive help immediately. We can become an active voice in our community, in our churches and synagogues, our place of work, and train individuals to identify the hidden dangers of mental illness. We need not attach labels or stigmas to these individuals but get them the help they so desperately need. We need to become advocates to those with little or no voice, as Olsen, Ozick, and Bloom demonstrate.

Grace Paley: Jewish Feminism, Social Responsibility, and Optimism

Although Grace Paley's writings precede and overlap Amy Bloom's and are concurrent with Olsen's and Ozick's writing careers, her stories reflect the successes that Jewish American Feminist literature has achieved and thus I will discuss her now.

Grace Paley makes many contributions, as a mother, activist, feminist, and a fundamental Jewish writer of the 20th century. Paley holds true to her "Jewishness." Her stories are filled with tragedy, witty-humor, sensitivity, and at times a comical optimistic rhetoric. Many of these perspectives she learned first-hand from stories about her parents'

personal persecution in Russia. This truly influenced her political views and her future writings. Paley's work can provide readers with a sense of optimism, realism, and hope.

What Paley writes about are the struggles in the lives of everyday women, especially Jewish women. She references single mothers, their place in society and in the home, and how the feminist and sexual revolution changed their lives. In Enormous Changes At The Last Minute Paley reflects on women's daily struggles to keep their families together, the close-knit Jewish community, the interaction of the Grandmother's Wool Socks Association and the friendship of Faith's mother to her friend Mrs. Hegel-Shtein, though she can't stand her.

Paley's life spans the Great Depression until her death in 2007. On several occasions she travelled abroad to act on her moral beliefs: in 1969 she went to North Vietnam to try and secure the release of American POW's as a part of a peace delegation, and in 1974 she travelled to Moscow as a member of the American delegation to the World Peace Conference. She was arrested in Washington D.C. for demonstrating against the use of nuclear proliferation, and later against the illegal war in Iraq. Paley has identified herself as a lifelong advocate for liberal causes (Paley, 1998). She started the women's movement a decade earlier. Her writings critiqued the male controlled world, the capitalist system, where women had little or no voice, were kept silenced, and their creative art forms unknown. Men dominated everything in society from jobs to families, the numbers of children, sex with their wives, or the education their children received or didn't receive.

Paley gives credit to her "Jewishness". In a New York Times article dedicated to Ms. Paley when she passed away in 2007, a writer describe the following:

...To read Ms. Paley's fiction is to be awash in the shouts and murmurs of secular Yiddishkeit, with its wild onrushing joy and twilight melancholy. For her cadence and character went hand in hand: her stories are marked by their minute attention to language, with its tonal rise and fall, hairpin rhetorical reversals and capacity for delicious hyperbolic understatement. Her stories, many of which are written in first person and seem to start in mind-conversation, beg to be read aloud (Fox, 2007).

Language and idiom are narrative moves in Paley's stories, along with the right mix of characters; her stories use symbols and metaphors, which bring life to her characters' stories'. When we read Paley's stories we keep asking for more and what happens next, her stories are so intriguing, surreal, stimulating, and her characters real as if the pages come to life. Her writing has sometimes been called post-modern. Her use of language, her understanding of narrative structure, her expansive use of intertextuality, bringing stories told in the past into the present, and excites modern day readers and is based on her Jewish tradition of storytelling. This became her trademark, her individual style of writing that her readers have come to know. Language has always been important to Paley, her family spoke three languages: English, Russian, and Yiddish. Each has an influence on her life, her writing.

Paley also saw government control as an evil. She is an anti-government advocate on many levels: for women's rights, against nuclear power, the Vietnam War, and of recent times the war in Iraq. She has been arrested on several occasions because of her staunch views but she stands by her views, her beliefs and her Jewishness. Her readers can easily ascribe to the "truth" that Paley lives by, her beliefs and how she is not afraid to act on them. Her fictional characters illustrate these beliefs. Paley's "Collected

Stories" a wonderful collection of stories depicting life and changes. In The Little Disturbance of Man (1959), the short story "Goodbye and Good Luck", Paley describes a young woman seeking work in the male-dominated society full of sexist comments, cat calls, whistles, and a very controlling environment. Women were not judged by their skills but by other attributes: large breasts, long sexy legs, pouty lips, and pretty faces. It's not what they know but whom they know to get ahead. Desperate times required desperate measures and Rose Lieber needed to be married, to find a man who appreciated her and made her feel happy and complete. With Vlashkin, something was always amiss, mainly real feelings minus the lust. Rose was not a home-wrecker. She was in search of love, to be found with the right person. What happened between she and Vlashkin was a fling, a way to move up the social ladder and out of the Jewish ghetto. Her life was like a play with many sets, some filled with joy and others tragedy. This was the story that Rose told Lillie. Rose is trying to educate Lillie on the finer things in life, as Rose says for happiness makes a person and sorrow will rob your heart of joy. Paley's internal narrator, Rose, focalizes the story on herself, and on her journey from being a subject of patriarchy to an agent of herself, one with principles and beliefs, who ultimately finds happiness.

The movie: Grace Paley: Collected Shorts, a film by Lilly Rivlin says of Paley, "she often referred to herself as a "combative pacifist". Rivlin describes the delicate balance of the three pillars of Grace Paley's life...activism, writing and her circle of friends. It explores the power of literature and Paley's capacity to touch and comfort readers, as well as her ability to achieve the most human reaction to life's challenges...laughter" (Rivlin, 2012).

Paley, in Enormous Changes At The Last Minute, weaves this laughter into seventeen short stories touching life, love, and happiness. Her frequent character, Faith Darwin, entertains the reader by narrating her stories of her life and her family. Heart-warming and touching, reflecting what it was to live in that period of time. Her stories describe individual survival, with the family relationships and motherhood as the central tenant of the family. In Faith's narratives, characters strive for and attain goals.

Family relationships can be of all kinds and include extramarital affairs as in Paley's The Burdened Man. The old adage, "the grass is greener on the other side of the fence" could be applied here. Paley describes a chance encounter between two neighbors, which elevates to lust and sexual interlude with his voluptuous neighbor can also bring a kind of happiness.

An article written by Margalit Fox on August 23, 2007 entitled Grace Paley, Writer and Activist, Dies from the books section of the New York Times, addresses several key aspects of her life and her writing. Fox argues she wrote about the struggles of the ordinary everyday women. For it was language that moves Paley's stories, the characters take on a life of their own. Her main topic was single mother, this was important in her writings. In 1994, her "Collected Stories" was recognized as a finalist for the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. In an interview with the New York Times in 1978, Ms. Paley described the grass-roots sensibility that informed her work "I'm not writing a history of famous people," she said "I am interested in a history of everyday life." A final quote from Paley before her death:

...Paley said of her dreams for her grandchildren: "It would be a world without militarism and racism and greed-and where women don't have to fight for their place in

the world”... (Retrieved from The Eulogizer, 2012). This wish for transcendence embodies the idioms of Jewish ethics and feminist determination in Paley’s stories.

Evolution: Jewish Feminism as an Agent of Change

Tillie Olsen, Cynthia Ozick, Grace Paley, and Amy Bloom are interesting writers, who identify with their Jewishness. In order to be an effective writer, I believe that one has to be attuned to what is happening around you. Bloom represents for women living and writing today this concept.

Bloom by her training as a psychotherapist used her skill sets to allow her to listen intently and focus on the important agendas while filtering out the extraneous. When asked if this occurs when she writes, Bloom responds that the characters that she writes about are not former clients but are from her imagination. She has the courage to tackle taboo subjects: bisexuality, being gay, mental illness, suicide, single motherhood, working mothers, and just the fact of being a woman in a male dominated world. The pattern that she develops through her writing connects one plot to another linking them both thematically and modally. Who is telling the story, through whose eyes, be it the main character or a subordinate, or the narrator, this is decided early on. Bloom’s use of narration, metaphor, language, setting, and characterization accentuates her writing. One would assume that she was heavily influenced by her parents to write, both were writers; her mother wrote for various magazines and her father wrote financial columns. She had a middle-class upbringing on Long Island, went to college, and eventually got her

Master's in Social Work and worked as a psychotherapist for almost twenty years. Bloom has stated that she loved her job as a psychotherapist, for people interested her, but her true love was writing and expressing herself through words. Bloom says that being a mother gave her certain experiences that she wouldn't have experienced if she were never a mother. This combination of concern for other people and closeness to family distinguishes Bloom in the tradition of the Jewish feminist writers, and signals her attainment of womanhood, motherhood, and career.

When I read her novel Normal the book was anything but normal. Who defines what is normal...religion, social mores, family, or Freud? Life is anything but normal...life changes. Bloom allows the reader to understand what people are going through- their personal struggles- and suggests that they are comfortable with their "normal". She later addresses cross-dressers and hermaphrodites. Bloom is very respectful, intent on learning more, and asks questions where the subject can choose to respond or not. Bloom is genuine with her approach. She is sincere and respectful for their personal choices. Bloom ponders the psychological issues as to when these individuals knew that something was amiss with them.

Early psychologists believed that people who wished to change their sex, suffered from a personality disorder or pathology. Remember that homosexuality was deemed a psychological dysfunction until removed from the DSM-III (Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) manual. When people decide to go through with the sex change operations this is dramatic, it is more than satisfying the Id. The Id-it is an acknowledgement of identity. Bloom's literary and social work concerns the concept of identity.

Besides the torment of the psychological pain, there is also physical pain from numerous surgeries for the desired affects the individual desire. Surgeries are expensive and only a few doctors perform them. Intense counseling is needed both prior and after the surgery. The help from a supporting family cannot be dismissed; it is essential for a fast recovery. Bouts of depression are common and so is drug use. Shame is also encountered. This is quite different from a person with anorexia or who has Body Dysmorphic Disorder or BDD, where a person sees themselves as fat, unattractive and hate their bodies, related to obsessive compulsive disorder, exaggerated images with unrealistic outcome, as Rose's story illustrates. The individual needs to feel comfortable in their "new skin" and remain mentally positive. Any personality change should be addressed immediately and help should be sought. Individuals must have phone numbers to friends, family, and a support network, for the first year after the metamorphosis is a critical time. The body and the mind need time to adjust and must be supported by love and not persecution for being seen as different. We see the continuity of this Jewish American feminist tradition in these writers.

Olsen's uncovering of destructive social conditions, in Ozick's reflections, traumas, and histories, and in Paley's triumphant characters we can read the unities as well as the fragmentation of the feminine self, and its literary presentation.

Bloom brings seldom talked about topics to the reader and brings awareness that we are not all "black-and-white", or normal. She has done considerable research to better understand the topic herself and to present it to her readers, much in line with other Jewish American feminist writers.

Conclusion: Transcendence and Feminism

Transcendence is defined as going beyond the limits of possible experience and changing those limits to accommodate new forms. Transcendence begins with the Jewish feminist writers voice to be heard over the din of their more famous male counterparts (Bellows, Roth, Malamud, and Singer). Each of the four feminist authors suggests that feminism, social responsibility, and ethical behavior can create transcendence.

Each of the authors identified have gone beyond their individual limits to be heard, express their Jewishness, their political views, and religious/non-religious attitudes, which reflects both their personalities and their writings. All command a deep understanding of their culture, what it means to be a Jew in America, their place as a woman, a working mother, and a writer. I will conclude my discussion of these writers by suggesting that their works can provide grounds for going beyond negative social conditions.

Cynthia Ozick is one such author, who is proud of her Jewish roots, for she is fluent with the study of the Jewish religion, a deep understanding of the Jewish culture, and how the community in which she lives is influenced by her culture. She is not overtly a feminist/activist as Olsen or Paley she is more demure and goes about her writing and her activism with a different approach. She acknowledges the silence placed upon

women, their writings, and philosophy of the family in contrast of the male-dominant world where they reside, or within the abyss of cultural and religious hatred.

Deep personal interest to Ozick is the Holocaust and how history has depicted it, its victims, and its survivors both in Europe and in America. Ozick's writings vividly show the hurt, the scars, and the uncertainty as to what lies ahead of each, and an affinity of their Jewish faith that was essential to their survival. Her books demonstrate her personal respect for the Holocaust in The Shawl or Rosa. When one reads The Shawl or Rosa, we feel what Ozick is trying to portray a mother's loss, a mother's grief, powerlessness, dread, hopelessness, and eventual death at the hands of the Nazi. Rosa only wanted to protect her daughter and somehow survive the horrors of the "death camps". Stella and her greed, steals the shawl that had protected Magda from the view of the soldiers. Once Magda is found the soldiers kill her, Rosa contempt for her niece is quite evident Stella is in shock of the brutality of the soldiers. Eventually the Red Army frees the prisoners from the camp and both she and Stella make their way to New York.

Rosa is traumatized by her loss and develops PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), which is delayed after the initial state of shock that she was in. She is a survivor in many ways, she wants to make a life in America, hold on to her Jewishness, and possession of the shawl, Magda's protector while in the camp. Ozick give a voice to a mother who suffered because of the Holocaust. If Rosa's voice can be heard, perhaps a nightmare of the Holocaust can be survived.

Come to Me a collection of short stories about the family from a variety of narrative focal points including hopelessness to hopeful, and love love to bliss. Bloom presents the past, the present and the mystical effects that narrative can provide. Bloom

learned at a young age that males in society controlled society, for they held power. She had an affinity for the 19th century fictions and the interplay found within, whether it were a comedy or the classic tragedies. She cheered for the female heroines found within and these readings could have been seen at the start of her feminist political view. An engaging writer, her use of plot, irony, language, characters, narration, whose perspective and how it influences the plot, the story grows out of this tradition.

Transcendence can be seen in the writing of Tillie Olsen and Grace Paley who enveloped their Jewishness, views on equality, feminist roles, activism and how they embraced motherhood. They wrote about the human spirit, how we evolved from the past, and how socialism isn't a bad option. During the Depression the economy was dreadful, people had very little, to exist was to struggle. Capitalism was partly to blame for the position American had now found itself in. Anti-Government and non-religion tends to bind to each other. Religion was a foundation for many, and faith and family. But when the economy and jobs are scarce, some individuals become devoid of religion. We ask "Why has God abandon me when I really need Him" or "If He is a loving and merciful God, why must I suffer?" People feel that they are entitled and deserving of everything good but if things go bad then they tend to loose hope quickly and eventually their faith; for the spirit is broken.

What Paley's writings accomplish is bringing the hope back, recording job and a feeling of accomplishment, and a reason to hold on to faith even in the bleakest hour. When we want to make a difference we must take action and make a stand. This feeling is dramatized within the special idiom of Yiddish, Jewishness, and self-understanding that characters like Rosie Lieber in "Goodbye and Good Luck."

Tillie Olsen and Grace Paley were the first wave of feminists and they each viewed the effects of the Depression first hand, and subsequently became activists, writers, mothers, and humanists. Each supported the working class woman and motherhood, Jewishness and the family.

In Olsen's novel Yonnondio, such was for the Holbrook family; the parents Anna and Jim try as hard as they may, to provide the best for the family. Olsen's focalization on Anna provides a first hand account of the family's daily struggles.

Olsen did foster the idea of a dual income family ahead of its time, for sheer survival. If told by another person the impact would not have been as effective. Anna's struggles mirrored many of that time period post-Depression Era. Olsen and her prose kept the reader engaged throughout the short length book. Anna's will to hold the family together, her strong faith and her dream of having her children educated; something she never received combines with Mazie's imaginative flights towards transcendence. Olsen's writing is a testament to the great writing styles of Feminist Jewish writers of her day. Mazie is forced to grow up quickly to help her mother. By focalizing on Mazie's struggles Olsen creates a character that the reader can be sympathetic towards, and who is representative of the real life struggles that feminist writers wanted to challenge.

In Silences, Olsen introduces the reader to exactly what Jewish male writers want in fact to do "silence" their collective voices. Gifted female writers Olsen, Paley, and Ozick and later Bloom achieved something special through the gift of their individual writing style and their love of family accentuated by their Jewishness. Olsen displays her activism and feminism in One Out of Twelve: Writers Who Are Women in our Century. The timeline was the early 1970's; feminist movement, the sexual revolution, antiwar

movement sentiments, anti-government and an increasing push to have women's voices heard by all, not by only other women or academia. People like Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, and Grace Paley pushed back and America took notice. Olsen in her own right did this through her writing and her activism and Jewish spirit and breathed new life during a difficult period in our country. The vision of what one saw on television, was grainy, black and white, reporting on the number of dead in Vietnam, students protests against the war, the women's rights movement. Most appalling however, were the social, civil, and economic struggles of everyday people, something that is still with us.

What Olsen and other writers brought to the reader was real humanity though their stories. To quote her from One Out of Twelve: Writers Who Are Women in Our Century Olsen writes:

Linked with the old, resurrected classics on women, this movement in three years has accumulated a vast new mass of testimony, of new comprehension as to what it is to be female. Inequities, restrictions, penalties, denial, leechings have been painstakingly and painfully documented; damaging differences in circumstances and treatment from that of males attested to; a sense of wrong, voiced (Olsen, 1971). These lines testify to the will and the resolve of Jewish women writers wanting their voice just to be heard and because of their many efforts, that voice is being heard loud and clear. Their writings awakened a renaissance of female voices, to motherhood, activism, and a Jewish foundation for writers to admire and respect. These women have done so through actions, words, attitudes, and keeping faith to their moral foundation their Jewishness. It is through this identification with moral laws, and the imperative of voicing its existence, that their work created agency.

Finally, these Jewish Feminist writers create a sense of transcendence through intertextuality, realism, tragic history, and in the short story. Olsen understands that intolerable social conditions create unlivable lives. Ozick reveals the trauma of the Holocaust, Bloom's characters also experience a sense of tragedy, Paley's sense of transcendence reflects the possibility of redemption from suffering. The aim of this paper has been to bring the injustices of women, children, and families to the forefront, through a study of specifically Feminist Jewish Writers of the 20th century. Through the use of first person accounts, in Olsen and Paley, as to what life really was like post-Depression in America. Through the character relationships in Paley and Ozick, what were they and how they were formed and in the development of the characters, and lastly who is telling the story, from whose viewpoint. These writers direct our attention to the experience of women and to a Jewish perspective.

The use of the aforementioned criteria exemplifies their “Jewishness” as the paramount agent of change.

References

- Andres, R. (1996). Jewish Socialist Feminist and Motherhood in Tillie Olsen's "Tell Me A Riddle" given to the XX Congreso Internacional AEDEAN, Barcelona, 1996.
- Bloom, A. (2000). *A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.
- Bloom, A. (1993). *Come to Me*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins Publishers
- Bloom, A. (2002). *Normal-Transsexual CEO's, Crossdressing Cops, and Hermaphrodites With Attitude*. New York, NY: Random House Inc.
- Fishman, S.B. (2005). Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. Retrieved 15 July 2012 from the Internet from:
<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/fiction-in-united-states>
- Fox, M. (2007) Grace Paley, Writer and Activist, Dies. *The New York Times*. Book section: Written a Book? Retrieved on July 5, 2007 from the Internet:
<http://nytimes.com/2007/08/23/books/23nd-paley.html?pagewanted=all>
- Groffman, E. (2010). The Golden Age of Jewish American Literature. ProQuest Discovery Guides. Retrieved on 15 July 2010 from the Internet:
<http://csa.com/discoveryguides/discoveryguides-main.php>
- Johnson, K. (2011). Adventures in Feministory: Grace Paley. bitchmedia. Retrieved on 5 August 2012 from the Internet from:
<http://bitchmagazine.org/post/adventures-in-frministory-grace-paley>
- Olsen, T. (2003). *Silences*. New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City of New York The Graduate Center
- Olsen, T. (2004). *Yonnondio From The Thirties*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press
- Ozick, C. (1987). *Enormous Changes At The Last Minute*. New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux
- Ozick, C. (1996). *Fame & Folly*. New York, NJ: Vintage Books A Division of Random House, Inc.

Ozick, C. (2001). *Quarrel & Quandary*. New York, NY: The Vintage Books A Division of Random House, Inc.

Ozick, C. (1983). *The Shawl*. New York, NY: Vintage Books A Division of Random House, Inc.

Paley, G. (1998). *Just As I Thought*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux

Paley, G. (1994). *The Collected Stories*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux

Paley, G. (1987). *The Little Disturbance of Man- Stories of Women and Men at Love*. New York, NY: Penguin Books USA Inc.

Paley, G. (1988). *The Messiah of Stockholm*. New York, NY: Vintage Books A Division of Random House, Inc.

Prince, G. (2003). *Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press

Phillips, P. (nd). Biblical Studies and Intertextuality: Should the work of Genette and Eco broaden our horizons? Retrieved 15 July 2012 from the Internet.

Sullivan, B. (2012). The National Center for Jewish Film: Grace Paley: Collected Shorts A Film by Lilly Rivlin. Retrieved on 5 August 2012 from the Internet from:
<http://gracepaleythefilm.com/>

Williford, L. & Martone, M. (2007). *The Scribner Anthology Of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories Since 1970*. New York, NY: Touchstone A Division of Simon & Shuster, Inc.