ABSTRACT

Jewish American Women's Autobiography:

Mary Antin to Golda Meir

Carina Zuniga

Director: Sarah Walden, Ph.D.

Throughout the twentieth century, the United States experienced vast changes such as large-scale immigration, world wars, and civil rights movements. The effects of these changes on minorities, women, and especially individuals to which both descriptors apply have often gone unnoticed. Many Jewish American women, who fit this description, turned to autobiography to record their experiences. Using a literary approach, this work addresses three Jewish American women writers and the plights and feats in their autobiographies. Mary Antin, an immigrant and pioneer for this canon, confronts difficulties such as intolerance and assimilation. Gertrude Stein, a prominent modernist avant-gardist, addresses the inescapable impact war can have on an individual. Golda Meir, former Israeli prime minister and activist, challenges a woman's role and the political status quo. For a canon noted for its diversity, each woman records remarkably similar struggles across decades of change.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

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Dr. Sarah Walden, Baylor Interdisciplinary Core

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

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Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: ________________________

JEWISH AMERICAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY:
MARY ANTIN TO GOLDA MEIR

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By
Carina Zuniga

Waco, Texas
May 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Jewish history is filled with sufferings such as persecution, violence, and poverty. The substantial wave of eastern European Jews who immigrated into the United States, beginning around 1880, soon found a space in which this trend could change and its members could voice their struggles (Zierler). Although this was not the first wave of Jews to enter the US or the first to experience freedom of expression, the stage that America provided was different from those before (Wirth-Nesher and Kramer 3). In this new setting, a previously marginalized group, especially its women, found a haven for expressing their life stories. Using a literary approach, this paper examines how three Jewish American women voiced their lives through a genre well suited to this purpose: autobiography.

Who is Jewish-American?

Some define Judaism as only a religion while others find it fundamentally linked to more than rituals or texts. Even though Norman Solomon affirms Judaism as "the religion of the Jews," he cannot divorce the religious aspect "from society or from history or from the emotional experiences and intellectual insights of its adherents (4). For Solomon, the Jewish people's religious practices are more fully understood alongside their complex history. As evidence of how differently Judaism is defined, Solomon points to a number of Jewish schools of historiography with different approaches and emphases, including but not limited to the 'lachrymose' school, the 'Jerusalem' school, and 'Diaspora Judaism' (5). In light of these conflicting understandings of Judaism, this papers borrow Cronin and Berger's definition of a Jewish American as someone who is "of Jewish origin, [a] resident in America, aligned or not aligned with Jewish religious life in North America, and generally acculturated as a Jewish person" (viii). The ambiguity of who is considered a "Jewish person" is intentional; the definition lacks specificity in order to include people with different ideas of what Judaism is and what makes a person Jewish. This definition does specify that Jewish Americans are born with or have obtained United States citizenship, have resided in the US for at least part of their lives, and identify with at least some social or cultural traits of the global Jewish community.

Jewish American Literature

Although Jewish Americans were present in the United States before the 1880s, their numbers greatly increased around this time. Between 1883 and 1904, approximately 1.5 million Jews from Russia, Poland, and Romania arrived ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 109). Many of these were "essentially medieval, orthodox, and mostly Hasidic Jews" who had been dislocated by poverty and pogroms, defined as "government-organized burnings, lootings, rapes, and murders," which began after the Russian czar Alexander II was assassinated on March 1, 1881 ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 110). The wave of immigrants continued until the Johnson Act of 1924 brought an abrupt halt to the immigration (Cronin and Berger xvi).

Those who gained entry into America were faced with a largely Ashkenazim population, religiously more Protestant than Jewish and culturally distant from Yiddish traditions (Cronin and Berger xiii). This inevitably led to culture shock and difficult assimilation periods for the new immigrants, especially because of xenophobic attitudes held by many Americans ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 110). This group was consequently marginalized, subjected to ghastly living conditions, discriminated against for being Jewish, and exposed to a nimiety of other plights. Because of fear, uncertainty, and misdirected blame, many Americans were far from welcoming of the new immigrants.

In reaction to harsh cultural and religious persecution, many Jewish Americans opted against the idea of establishing a homeland for Jews, a trend that persisted until the rise of Nazism in the 1930s ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 111). This lost sense of connectedness with the Jewish community led to American Jews producing few literary works, such as almanacs, annuals, and Jewish newspapers in English. These writers had "no coherent sense" of unity and therefore stayed marginalized until almost two decades into the twentieth century ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 111).

Soon after, the first generation of English-speaking American Jews emerged ready to write. The success of Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* in 1917 provided a sense of optimism and encouragement for the developing canon. Many took full advantage of the opportunity to unveil their experiences of "deprivations, violence, anti-Semitism, and ghetto conditions in America's industrial cities" (Cronin and Berger xviii). In the 1920s and 1930s, many American Jews, enraged by social injustices caused by rapid industrialization, leaned toward a leftist, socialist political stance and fought for the formation of trade unions (Cronin and Berger xvii). Subsequently, Jewish Americans introduced "socially conscious" works into mainstream American literature in the 1940s. The pioneer piece of these works was the 1944 symposium "Under Forty," published in the *Contemporary Jewish Record* of the American Jewish Committee. These writers, who had to suffer through American anti-Semitism, World War II, and the Holocaust, zealously wrote to expose "the absurdity of war, anti-Semitism in the American military, and the impact of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948" in their literature while also criticizing "mainstream American bourgeois culture" (Cronin and Berger xx).

Some label the 1950s as the Jewish decade of American literature. During this time immediately following World War II, Jewish American writers had a significant effect on literary taste (Whitfield 242). This decade saw the emergence of Jewish American writers into the literary mainstream, such as Isaac Rosenfield, Delmore Schwartz, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Grace Paley, and Philip Roth, to name a few. Alan Ginsberg published "Howl" in 1954, which Cronin and Berger call "arguably the greatest work of the American Beat poets" (xx). These writers were the second-generation children of immigrants and had "succeeded far beyond the Jewish family and neighborhood" (Cronin and Berger xx-xxi).

The 1960s was a decade full of "a nationwide legitimization of diversity" and an increasing awareness of how greatly the Holocaust impacted Jewish identity (Whitfield 257). Some, like Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, compared and contrasted Jewish life before and after the traumatic event (Cronin and Berger xx). Many turned away from religious and communal life and traditions, which Cronin and Berger suggest may have been caused by "the gigantic shadow of the murdered 6 million" (xxi). In the following decade, Jewish-American writers began to use Jewish myth or mysticism as a framework for understanding Judaism in America after the Holocaust (Cronin and Berger xxii). From this point forward, no other topic surpasses the Holocaust's impact on this literary tradition.

Beginning in the 1980s, a literary revival began promoting young writers, focusing on literature about Israel, and holding revivals. Beginning in this decade, Jewish American literature was colored by the disappearance and reappearance of attention given to what happened to Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. As the Holocaust, which originally consumed America's attention, began to fade from our view, Jewish American writers gradually "coaxed it back into visibility," making the task an "all but obsessive preoccupation" (Burstein 3). These decades saw an upsurge of Jewish-American women writers, second-generation literature about the Holocaust's aftermath, and concern about preventing future genocides (Cronin and Berger xxiii).

Despite predictions saying otherwise, the tradition of Jewish-American literature has shown no signs of waning (Cronin and Berger xxiii). There has been a recent resurgence in this tradition in New York where famous writers used to live. Philip Roth, one of those writers, continues to be a prominent, acknowledged figure in American mainstream literature of the early 21st century. Many contemporary writers still use Jewish mysticism to cope with difficulties this community has faced (Cronin and Berger xxiv). Others continue to look back and look forward, "like the undertow that accompanies a breaking wave" (Burstein 174). This approach to writing produces works that function as communal memories. However, Burstein acknowledges how counterintuitive this is because the act of remembering is so personal (175). Jewish American women writers resolve this communal and personal paradox by writing as individual members of a Jewish American community.

Jewish American Women Writers

Wirth-Nesher points to Emma Lazarus, a successful writer in the late 1880s, as not only the historical beginning of Jewish American women authorship, but also as its conceptual origin. According to Wirth-Nesher, Lazarus describes her Jewish identity in terms of “four broad areas that would engage subsequent writers: ethnicity, religion or religious culture, language, and gender” (459). Writers who would take up these issues were not to emerge until several decades later.

With the exception of Lazarus, Rebecca Gratz, and Emma Wolf, Jewish American women writing at the start of the twentieth century were not able to emerge from literary marginality (Cronin and Berger xvii). Shapiro similarly comments on how women were simultaneously marginalized by men, both literarily and religiously, “[as] Jewish women in an orthodox synagogue must sit behind a *mechitza*, separated from the men, [they] have [also] been kept behind a metaphoric *mechitza* separating them from the men who are acknowledged as the legitimate participants in this subgenre of American literature” (8). This double-sided exclusion heavily contributed to the canon’s timid beginning.

This body of literature began developing in the 1920s, with Mary Antin bridging the gap between the canon’s previous literary paucity and forthcoming literary repute (Cronin and Berger xxiii). The modernist movement of Anglo-America and Europe played a major role in driving this emergence (Lewis 96). This particular movement, as well as the complementary emergence of the avant-garde, will be expounded upon in a later chapter. Jo Sinclair, who published *The Wasteland* in 1946, was another Jewish American woman writer to gain recognition at this time. Her success deemed her a “prominent Jewish lesbian literary voice.” The following two decades included other distinguished writers such as Grace Paley. The first half of the twentieth century saw a trend of women rising from the margins to achieve literary success and fame.

This trend has continued as more women have emerged as successful. The 1980s saw the early effects of the postmodern movement and a remarkable surge of literature by Jewish American women writers, such as Rebecca Goldstein and Diana Trilling (Cronin and Berger xxiii). No matter how few Jewish women writers are currently included in most collections of Jewish American literature, this trend is gradually changing. In the meantime, these women "have decided to take matters into their own hands to make sure that their voices [are] heard" ("Introduction" *Jewish*, 4). Autobiography offers the ideal arena for women to make their voice heard.

Development of Autobiography

Autobiography has not always been a popular genre of literature. Pritchett remarks that in the Middle Ages, people did not seem as concerned with writing about themselves (16). In fact, before modern times, autobiography was uncommon in the "West, Europe and America" (Seidensticker 47). This genre became increasingly popular with the development of individualism around the eighteenth century (Pritchett 20). Individualism, or "the habit of being independent and self-reliant…characterized by the pursuit of one's own goals without reference to others," encourages the individual to take an inward focus and to perceive the world in relation to him or herself ("individualism, n."). By the 1700s, individualism had become the governing social doctrine, which lead to a deeper examination of the self until "the love affair with the self becomes a romantic reverie" (Pritchett 20). Such a reverie manifested quite differently in two of the "great Western specimens of autobiography," that is, those of Benjamin

Franklin and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Seidensticker suggests that the two stand at opposite ends [private and public] of autobiography, and all others “lie along the way between” (47). Pritchett references Montaigne, who said that the first-person singular allows those examining themselves to view themselves “as being strange”, “extraordinary and new” (18). One must act like an explorer in a brand new place, searching for a “discovery, not a chronology” (Pritchett 19). This approach is interestingly different from Gore Vidal’s, who claims, “the autobiographer…checks carefully on all his details” (qtd. in Seidensticker 47). Pritchett suggests that instead, the autobiographer “must tell his ‘own truth’” (23). This conglomeration of autobiographical approaches speaks to how diverse the works, and their authors, tend to be.

James Olney, considered by some to be the father of autobiographical studies, has given many names to this genre: “confessions, autobiography, memoirs, periautography…[and] autography” (qtd. in Moseley 19). The term he prefers is periautography because of its “indefinition and lack of generic rigor, its comfortably loose fit and generous adaptability.” Ultimately, Olney settles on the term “life-writing” for his studies (qtd. in Moseley 19). Moseley brings up the difficulty that scholars have had with defining this genre; despite the recent increase in autobiographical studies, “the question of what exactly constitutes autobiography has not only not been resolved but, if anything, has become exacerbated” (Moseley 16).

Seidensticker defines autobiography as “a memoir about the life of the writer,” different from diary entries, which have not been shaped to form a narrative (47). Seidensticker’s definition suggests that memoirs and autobiographies are similar or the same. A memoir, however, focuses on a specific event or time period, while autobiographies cover all or most of a person's life. The difficulty that arises with writing about one's entire life is the fact that "it is not possible to tell everything" (Seidensticker 56). The shaping that diary entries lack results from choices about issues ranging from themes and style to people and memories. An autobiographer must decide whom and what to include and how to approach narrating his or her life.

Pritchett takes the writing process beyond stylistic choices and piecing together a narrative. For him, the writer, like the reader, has "fallen into the mysterious sea of memory and is struggling to find out who *he* is and who *he* was and to catch firm hold of the obsession that keeps him afloat" (25). The process therefore becomes one of self-discovery. Rubin adds that autobiographies give "a record of social history" ("American-Jewish" 287). Despite definitional disagreements, Moseley noticed an overall tendency for the genre to encompass "any text that reflects upon, and reflects upon itself reflecting upon, the vicissitudes of the self in relation to time, memory, narration, and/or gender, race, class" (Moseley 19). No matter how one chooses to define autobiography, the genre allows writers to reflect and examine any self-discoveries.

Jewish American Women's Autobiography

Most significantly for this paper, autobiography provides a mean of expression for minorities. Rubin argues that autobiography is an ideal means of expression because it is "inescapably historical, reflecting the wider concerns of society and culture in general" ("American-Jewish" 287). Throughout Jewish history, this group has been "considered to be different—religiously, ethnically, racially, and hence politically" (Wirth-Nesher and Kramer 1). As the number of Jewish people in the US rose, these immigrants were similarly treated as outsiders (Zierler). To the pleasant surprise of many Jews, "*America* was different" (Wirth-Nesher and Kramer 1). This difference enabled Jewish Americans to carve out what would soon be a "remarkably evident" literary and cultural presence (Wirth-Nesher and Kramer 2). This minority group began to write autobiographies reflecting both personal and societal or cultural concerns regarding their former and present selves.

For many Jewish immigrant writers, understanding past lives during the process of self-discovery was not a simple task. This group faced the additional challenge of "the ambiguous relationship between past and present identities, between Old World customs and New World values" (Rubin "American-Jewish" 287). In their struggle to define their identity, these writers had to piece together stories and memories from their old lives with the strangeness—and often hostility—of their new lives. Writing an autobiography, therefore, provided immigrant autobiographers "a vehicle for linking personal history with that of the group—with an entire social process" (Rubin "American-Jewish" 287). This specific genre enabled many immigrants to identify themselves as both individuals and members of the Jewish community.

Jewish American women face an additional factor: gender. Within the Jewish community, women have often not received the same opportunities but have often undergone many of the same challenges. As the status and role of women in American and Jewish life began to change, more and more American Jewish women turned to autobiographical writing as a means of documenting these changes and addressing questions of their American, Jewish, and female identity. One such change was when "middle-class American Jewish women, like their Gentile counterparts, began to turn away from the tenets of Victorian 'True Womanhood' and became increasingly involved in the women's movement" by campaigning for women's rights and opportunities. Besides social changes, these women also documented their narratives as immigrants, activists, or maturing young females (Zierler). Each woman was able to shape her autobiography in such a way as to capture her life and its fluctuations. Three prominent figures who took full advantage of the genre are Mary Antin, Gertrude Stein, and Golda Meir.

As a testament to how diverse this canon is, these women are, respectively, an immigrant-turned-literary-success, a modernist avant-gardist, and a political and religious activist. These very distinct individuals are significant figures in the canon for similarly distinct reasons. Mary Antin is located at the beginning of the canon and is therefore paramount to study in order to gain a better understanding of autobiographies to come. Gertrude Stein lived through some of the most infamous experiences in Jewish history: World War II and the Holocaust. Because she does not specifically reference the Holocaust, her text stands out from survival narratives such as Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Golda Meir served as Prime Minister of Israel, which she helped establish as the official State of Israel. Each woman also has a distinctive writing style and form. Despite their diverse backgrounds and contributions, these women cover a range of similar topics in their own way. Using a literary approach, this paper explores how each autobiographer addresses a number of those shared themes, as well as her style and form.

Themes

Wirth-Nesher begins her examination of Jewish American women writers with Emma Lazarus. Lazarus is a pinnacle in Jewish American writing. Her poem, "The New Colossus," was engraved inside the lower level of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty.

Wirth-Nesher recognizes that Lazarus "expressed her Jewish identity in the four broad areas that would engage subsequent writers: ethnicity, religion or religious culture, language, and gender" (459). Jewish American women autobiographers have addressed these issues along with countless others. Interestingly, such a wide array of topics complicates attempts to sort the canon into clear categories or topics ("Introduction" *Jewish*, 3). The result is a canon defined by its diverse autobiographies and their respective authors. Although these three particular autobiographers are considerably different individuals, their works reveal shared concerns for many issues: ethnicity, religion, gender expectations, language, education, and an immigrant narrative. This paper examines these concepts based on the order in which they are presented in the text, occasionally with other topics specific to each text.

Wirth-Nesher includes ethnicity in her list of topics important to these writers. She defines ethnicity as "the sense of being a member of a people with a shared history and culture that entails collective identity and responsibility" (459). *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ethnicity as "[s]tatus in respect of membership of a group regarded as ultimately of common descent, or having a common national or cultural tradition; ethnic character" ("ethnicity, n."). Both definitions mention a group with a common tradition that could be cultural. Every autobiographer in this canon is a member of the Jewish community, but ambiguity arises when members do not feel that sense of membership or identity. Lichenstein cites Edna Ferber as somewhat representative of many American Jewish women in the twentieth century because she "claimed to be proud of her heritage, yet…remained ambivalent about public declarations of her Jewish identity in her life as well as in her fiction" (129). Ferber is one example of a member and writer of the Jewish community who feels uncertain about her part in that group.

Many Jews in Ferber's position distanced themselves from the Jewish community. Showstack identifies a group of scholars, whom he calls "The Chicago Environmentalists," who focus on the "exodus from ethnically homogeneous areas of first settlement – the ghetto" (78). This group also argues that for those who left the settlement or ghetto, "the implied direction of adaptation was toward the adoption of and eventual conformity with the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant model" (78). This occurred to many Jews who fled violence and discrimination in Eastern Europe beginning in 1881.

Instead of turning away from the Jewish community, many Jews sought to establish Palestine as a place where that community could unite, a desire also known as Zionism ("Zionism, n."). Following the Holocaust, Jews felt "an imperative to claim that ethnicity and that history; to not deny that aspect of one's personal and family heritage" (Baker 7). Members of this generation realized that "to place oneself as an American *Jew* or a British *Jew* is significant and transcends religiosity and observance" (Baker 7). Their sense of Jewishness transcends the idea of Judaism as merely a set of religious practices or sacred texts.

The issue of Judaism as a religion is a complicated one. In the early 1900s, "the Orthodox tradition and a vibrant secularism vied for the allegiance of America's Jews" (Cronin and Berger xvi). American Jews therefore had to risk publicly declaiming their Judaism or choosing the "seemingly safe path of secularism" (Lichenstein 1). Some landed on either side of the issue while others, such as the poet Lazarus, devoted their efforts to creating “a middle way which would permit them to live as American Jews, celebrating both of their national identities” (1).

Jewish American women faced yet another challenge: limiting gender roles. A woman in nineteenth century Eastern Europe was only expected to become a mother and wife. Lazarus was one among many to face the dilemma between being Jewish and American with the additional factor of being a woman in this particular faith group. Many traditional Jewish religious scholars would typically “prohibit women from reading, no less writing, sacred texts” (“Introduction” *Jewish*, 7-8). This prohibition is troubling, since exclusion from these texts leads to women’s exclusion from the core of Judaism’s sacredness. Consequently, Jewish women are not only “outsiders in a Gentile world but outsiders in the double patriarchy of secular society and Judaism” (“Introduction” *Jewish*, 7). American Jewish women have simultaneously experienced both kinds of exclusion.

Women also experience exclusion from language acquisition. In the late 1800s, Eastern European Jews were not given access to a formal education. Besides Antin and her sister, here were few exceptions. As a child, she attempted to gain fluency and literacy in Yiddish and other languages on her own. In America, she eagerly tried to replace her first language with English and erase her foreign accent. Stein frequently traveled across Europe and America and lives in France for over 40 years. Meir took pride in knowing Yiddish and teaching it to younger generations. Shaked warns about “the problem of identity in Jewish literature,” particularly the potential loss of identity caused by Jewish literature “written in non-Jewish languages” (394). Despite this potential loss, there is no consensus among these three women over which language(s) Jewish Americans should know or at least try to learn.

For many Jewish families, the term "education" is often not a secular one. In addition to learning Yiddish or Hebrew, young men are expected to study the sacred texts and Jewish traditions as well as possible. Females were typically expected to stay at home, so most nineteenth century Jewish families only paid for their sons to receive educations. Some females' parents were progressive and wealthy enough to afford private tutors, but those girls were the exceptions. Young women were therefore often doubly excluded from studying language and their faith beyond the bare minimum. This was the educational environment in which Antin grew up; Stein had access to an education in the US, and Meir learned what she needed to, when she needed to from other activists.

One of the most common themes in this canon is the immigrant narrative. This issue appears in works by the children and grandchildren of immigrants (Shapiro 1). The sizeable group of Jewish Americans who arrived in the early 1900s faced a difficult decision: to either reject or assimilate to the new environment and culture. Some felt "embarrassed by the Yiddish of their 'foreign' parents" and chose to embrace "the theme of change—of transformation of self" (Cronin and Berger xviii; Rubin 288). Others rejected integration but soon experienced "a deep sense of loss," and diligently "embraced peoplehood and their own Jewish heritage" (Rubin "American-Jewish" 291). The split within this generation regarding assimilation resulted in an "intergenerational conflict that…marks all subsequent Jewish-American and other immigrant literatures" (Cronin and Berger xviii). For the generation that followed, Rubin notes that "the social, intellectual, political, and economic freedom" obtained by the middle of the century "only served to complicate the story" ("American-Jewish" 298). This convoluted environment contributes to the complex ways in which these autobiographers communicate their stories.

Each of these women exhibits a distinctly different writing style. This was partly due to influence from the literary movement(s) occurring around the time each was writing. Antin's writing was subject to influences from realism and naturalism. Modernism and the avant-garde affected Stein's work. Meir's was strongly influenced by the ideals of fellow political and religious activists. Each woman's style also varies based on factors such as tone, punctuation or lack thereof, point of view, diction, and many others.

Significance

The autobiographies of Antin, Stein, and Meir are held in esteem for different reasons. Each woman's autobiography may influence future autobiographers, modernists, activists, writers, Jews, Jewish Americans, or women. Even though the reach their autobiographies have had and will have is difficult to measure, they have been key players for the canon in exceptional ways. Specific impacts that their works may have will be further explicated at the end of each respective chapter. No matter her motivation for writing, each of these women succeeded in voicing her narrative to innumerable readers to come.

CHAPTER ONE

Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*

Mary Antin was born in Polotzk, Ukraine in 1881. She spent the first decade of her life in a predominantly Jewish settlement called The Russian Pale of Settlement. Her father left for Boston in 1891, and the rest of the family joined him in 1894—along with a historically sizable wave of Jews from Eastern Europe. After marrying and having a daughter, Josephine Esther, her friends encouraged her to write an autobiography; the resulting book, *The Promised Land*, earned her nationwide fame. Antin's continual purpose in her autobiography is to provide evidence and personal testimony to how the United States can become anyone's "promised land." Whether later autobiographies explicitly react to her work or not, Mary Antin's position at the beginning of the canon designates her autobiography as imperative to study in order to better grasp the issues, style, and form of the subsequent Jewish American women's autobiographies.

Immigrant Narrative

In the midst of living a life of affluence in Russia, Antin's parents grew ill, stopped working, lost the family business, and failed to regain financial stability; soon after his recovery, her father decided to leave Polotzk for America (Antin 63-4). She hears "America" as her father's dream in one of his letters, and it becomes hers, too (114). Although she never forgets Polotzk nor ceases to mention her former home and life, America becomes her new refuge. For Antin, America was bright in comparison to dark Polotzk: "I rushed impetuously out of the cage of my provincialism and looked eagerly about the brilliant universe" (143). From the moment she sees America for the first time, she calls it the Promised Land (142). Despite her difficulties as an immigrant, Antin enthusiastically embraces this land full of opportunity and freedom.Antin quickly grows to revere the United States to such a degree that she spends her early years in America almost entirely preoccupied with adaptation and absorption.

Her eagerness to adjust to American life often led to her downplaying the difficulties American Jews faced at this time. Americans across class lines feared the steep increase in immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, though Jews were only the second largest immigrants group ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 110). Life was difficult for the newcomers because many arrived "without money, skills, or English," and many were "crammed into slums of East Coast cities" such as Boston, where her family joined her father ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 110). Even though many displayed "good citizenship and prosperity," American Jews were still subject to "social anti-Semitism and discrimination" ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 111). She admits to being continually "corrected, admonished, and laughed at," for her impoverished situation, strange mannerisms, and barely developing English skills (143). Faced with these conditions, Antin still voices optimism about her ability to eventually adjust to her new, harsh environment.

Ethnicity

Antin essentially describes her ethnicity as synonymous with her Jewish culture and history (459). She identifies herself as part of this group, sharing its plights and fears from a young age. As Beck writes, other Jewish women also equate their ethnicity with their Jewishness:

> Being Jewish informs a woman's consciousness from the time she is young until she grows old, no matter how far from religion her family may be…To be born a Jew is to be born into a group with its own religious practices and beliefs, as well as a particular value system and code of ethics. (xvii)

Antin's consciousness, religiosity, value system, and code of ethics are strongly related to her Jewish culture. She begins her autobiography by revealing a truth to her readers, a truth upon which she progressively stumbles as a young girl: Jewishness equates with differentness. She remembers how different and second-rate she and the other Jews were from the Gentiles in the Pale of Settlement in which she grew up.

She identifies herself not as a Russian but as a Russian Jew in order to form solidarity with this particular group of Jews. She recognizes that these particular Jews are unified during their struggles by their beliefs:

> Harassed on every side, thwarted in every normal effort, pent up within narrow limits, all but dehumanized, the Russian Jew fell back upon the only thing that never failed him,—his hereditary faith in God. (26)

Antin continually discusses a shared value system and code of ethics among Jews of the Pale. She and her fellow Jews faced constant persecution and ridicule within the Pale and during any attempts to leave (Antin 7). They struggled to survive pogroms and judicial injustices (10). Furthermore, they faced incredibly high taxes and the painfully high cost of being a Jew; families were often forced to pay for their sons not to be sent to military because of how well Gentiles understood money (14, 16-23). In reaction to such a harsh reality, Antin describes how they had to find ways to simply survive within Polotzk. This kind of living style results in a value system and code of ethics based on survival and fear, where it is acceptable to cheat Gentiles but inconceivable to mistreat a fellow Jew. In an unforgiving environment where money and anti-Semitism govern, a Jew did whatever was necessary to survive no matter the cost.

Antin's description of her ethnicity falls within the approach that Showstack calls "The Chicago Environmentalists" (78). In the first half of *The Promised Land*, Antin focuses largely on her time in the ghetto. In the second half, Antin focuses more on her emigration to America and her journey towards assimilation into this new land. Wirth-Nesher remarks that Antin was "willingly and fervently remaking herself in order to assimilate into America" (461). Indeed, Antin finds it miraculous that she later "passes as an American" and gains the ability to dream "in English phrases" (197). According to Antin's departure from the ghetto and decision to transition fully into an American, she defines her ethnicity along the same lines as The Chicago Environmentalists. For Antin, her ethnicity is as tied to her Jewish culture, history, value system, and code of ethics as it is tied to her story of emigrating from The Pale and adapting to America.

Language

Even though her inability to speak English was another marginalizing factor in the US, Antin discusses language with a sense of pride. Her positive attitude towards language could be explained by the fact that language acquisition was withheld from Jewish females in the Pale. All Jewish boys in Polotzk were expected to attend a Hebrew school, or *heder*, and attain at least a rudimentary knowledge of the language (Antin 28). The same was not expected of young females. Antin explains:

> For a girl it was enough if she could read her prayers in Hebrew, and follow the meaning by the Yiddish translation at the bottom of the page…A girl's real schoolroom was her mother's kitchen. (29)

She and her fellow Russian Jews were held to a significantly lower educational standard than males in the Pale. Instead, her duties were restricted to marriage and childbearing. Besides becoming a wife, "a girl was born for no other purpose" (29). It was therefore extraordinary that Antin's parents allowed her and her sister to break gender boundaries. She proudly learned languages from her teachers, family members, books, and any other sources she could find. She and her sister learned minimal Russian in a classroom because her father was more progressive than most Jews in the Pale (62). In fact, neither of her parents ascribed to Polotzk gender expectations. As a result, Antin's parents gave her and her siblings as much of an education as they could. Her parents, however, were a rarity.

Religion or Beliefs

Antin experienced gender-based exclusion, especially within Judaism. During her childhood, female Jews were not only excluded from traditional educations, but also from studying sacred texts or receiving a religious education. Women, therefore become "exiled from Judaism itself, since many traditional Talmudists prohibit women from reading, no less writing, sacred texts. ("Introduction." *Jewish American*, 7-8)

This is troubling because exclusion from these texts leads to women's exclusion from the core of Judaism's sacredness. Antin had access to the sacred texts typically found in Jewish homes, but as a woman in Polotzk, she had no prescribed reason to receive instruction on them ("Introduction." *Jewish American*, 90).

Despite the exclusion, Antin saw her Jewishness as a spiritual and cultural connection with her fellow believers. She discovers their shared otherness at an early age, embraces it as unchangeable, and realizes that her religion represents a kind of fortress outside of which nothing matters:

> What did it matter to us, on a Sabbath or festival, when our life was centered in the synagogue, what czar sat on the throne, what evil counsellors whispered in his ear? They were concerned with revenues and policies and ephemeral trifles of all sorts, while we were intent on renewing our ancient covenant with God, to the end that His promises to the world should be fulfilled, and His justice overwhelm the nations. (27)

Worldly matters like politics and taxes scarcely mattered in comparison to the Jews' covenant and relationship with God. Within the stronghold of her religion, Antin felt that she did not need to worry about the rest of the world. She shared not only a culture and history with her fellow Jews, but also a religious belief system and a level of protection in unity.

Antin believes that Jews could not escape their religious origins even outside the Pale. She imagines that even someone who physically escapes the Pale and manages to completely transform himself would eventually look upon "his inmost soul, and [find] there the image of his father's God" (34). A Jew, whether intentionally or not, retains a level of closeness to God and a sense of the work he or she has to do for Him (34). Antin discovered from testing her faith and challenging its doctrine that she was certainly more Jew than Gentile even though she sometimes felt like a fraud or a terrible Jew (99-102). For Antin, the Jewish faith extends beyond physical and societal boundaries.

Interestingly, her autobiography is faintly riddled with mentions of spirituality different from her discussions of Judaism (1, 72). She begins her introduction with a sense of that spirituality:

> Now I am the spiritual offspring of the marriage within my conscious experience of the Past and the Present. My second birth was no less a birth because there was no distinct incarnation. Surely it has happened before that one body served more than one spiritual organization. (1)

Here, Antin discusses a spirituality separate from Judaism. Her use of the word suggests that "spiritual" relates to the spirit she previously had and the one she currently has, but not in a Christian sense. In this way, she is the metaphysical product of her past and present spirits. This metaphysical idea of being the spiritual or bodiless product of one's experiences is not explicitly mentioned within Judaism or Christianity. She then connects this concept with the Christian one of a second birth lacking an incarnation, specifically mentioned in John 3:1-21. Still, she does not explicitly state to which spiritual organizations she is referring. Antin may be trying to find her own spiritual identity separate from her Jewish faith, or she may be including a Christian reference to reach out to a Christian audience. No matter her intentions, Antin suggests that her own beliefs stand somewhere between her Jewish religiousness and a metaphysical take on her connection with her past, present, and body.

Education

Antin describes the history of educating Polotzk Jews as a complicated one. When Antin's mother was young, the czar thought he could win over the Jews by educating them. The problems that arose were in the schooling system itself: Christian instructors, Christian teachings, and anti-Jewish regulations and manners, to name a few. As a result, Polotzk Jews saw education as a path towards their children's apostasy. Jews bribed officials in charge of registration to keep their boys out of school. Eventually, these schools were closed, and young Jewish males continued their Hebrew education in safety. Soon afterward, some Jews changed their minds when they realized the benefits of their children learning history and sciences (Antin 24-5). These people, like Antin's parents, were considered progressive, but the czars who succeeded the pro-education one believed that "for the Jew no door should be opened" (25).

When Antin was growing up, she explains, "Even if your parents were rich enough to send you to a private school, you could not go very far" (23). She was referencing how the government controlled high schools; as a result, only a limited number of Jews were admitted. Furthermore, those who were permitted to attend faced intimidating tutors, drastically harder tests, and unfair grades without the ability to appeal (23-4). As a result, Jews in Polotzk were essentially confined to learning the Hebrew language and its literature. This is the atmosphere in which Antin grew up.

Gender

Antin makes sure to note when a particular woman's gender did not directly prohibit her actions. This might be because Antin has personally experienced the frustrations of not being the gender socially approved for an education, religious study, or life beyond the home. She could also be responding to the time she heard her brother praying to thank God for his not being born a girl (28-9). Whatever her reasons, Antin provides details about her mother's life to demonstrate that not every woman in Polotzk followed traditional gender expectations.

Her mother took over her grandfather's store after he passed away; since she had received training in the family business since childhood, "she naturally remained the leader" concerning the business and family finances (54). This story strongly contrasts how a Polotzk woman's traditional jobs are wifedom and motherhood in the home and kitchen. She explains that her mother did not play a large part in the behavioral training either because she was "confined to the store" (59). Antin remembers her mother's struggle:

> When she came home at night, with her pockets full of goodies for us, she was too hungry for our love to listen to tales against us, too tired from work to discipline us. It was only on Sabbaths and holidays that she had a chance to get acquainted with us, and we all looked forward to these days of enjoined rest. (59)

Here, Antin describes why her mother did not fulfill her motherly role of discipliner. She recounts memories of misbehaving as a child and being reprimanded by female figures other than her mother. Although her mother has an arguably legitimate reason, that reason undeniably goes against the norm. Antin's mother did not quite fulfill her gender role as an average woman in Polotzk was expected to.

Style and Form

Antin was writing as realism and naturalism began to emerge as literary and cultural movements. The influence of each movement is evident in her work. Antin's autobiography closely resembles the kind of realism embraced by Henry James, which "focused on the interior moral and psychological lives of upper-class people, although always taking care in describing those people's surroundings" ("Introduction" *The*

Norton Anthology: Vol. C, 9). Although she is not an upper class American, Antin mentions her family's affluence at the beginning of her life early in the book and continues to repeat it throughout the rest of the work. Antin seizes her autobiography as an opportunity to comment on her interior and psychological life, such as when she reveals that America, after reading about it in her father's letters, becomes her dream (114). She also consistently describes her surroundings, such as her homes in Polotzk then Boston. Realist writers aimed at using language to "represent reality in ways…true to their sense of the world" ("Introduction" *The Norton Anthology*: Vol. C, 10). Antin does this by describing her memories in a matter-of-fact way as though she were observing rather than remembering them. This approach frames her narrative quite distinctly from the two discussed in the next chapters.

Naturalistic writers described "human life as it was shaped by forces beyond human control" ("Introduction" *The Norton Anthology*: Vol. C, 10). Her family lost their business and her father had to leave for America because of serious illnesses. As Darwin's evolutionary theory was applied to society, naturalists then became interested in how "biology, environment, and other material forces shaped lives—particularly the lives of lower-class people, who supposedly had less control over their lives than those who were better off" ("Introduction" *The Norton Anthology*: Vol. C, 11). This naturalist approach also applies to Antin and her family after they fell into the lower class in Polotzk and remained there for a while in America. The family was subject to pogroms, discrimination, economic hardships, a barely livable apartment, and an unforgiving city—all factors which were largely out of their control until they assimilated. Antin's affluence and life in the Pale along with her family's poverty in both places allow her to feel the impact of seemingly insurmountable outside forces while trying to capture and depict her life in terms as accurate to real life as possible.

As an immigrant, Rubin argues that Antin likely had the difficulty of sorting through the "ambiguous relationship between [her] past and present identities, between old-world customs and new-world values" (Rubin "Style" 35). One way that Antin addresses this issue is by establishing a sort of dual persona by speaking about her past self as though she is a completely different person ("Style" 39). She speaks in third person to create distance between her past and present self, calling her old self "this little child," "a little girl in Polotzk," "the good little girl," and "this pious child," (98-9). Soon after creating this distance, she returns to first person to state that her childhood self was a fraud because she questioned God and because her religion "depended on [her] mood" (101).

Antin also recreates her own history, and that of Polotzk, through the use of figurative, profound language. She commonly ends a chapter with ideas and claims vastly larger than herself. In a lengthy, descriptive exposition of her food-related memories, she notes, "Give me to eat and drink, for I crave wisdom" (76). This is an example of an "imaginative re-creation of history" ("Introduction." *Jewish American*, 1). By taking her memories and embellishing them, Antin creates a sort of romanticized version of her past. Although this makes her autobiography seem proportionally grander than her life may have been, Starobinsky argues that Antin still creates an "authentic" image of the little girl in Polotzk (75). Antin's autobiography is written almost like a series of memoirs, which she visits then revisits with greater detail but never in a strict chronological order. This recollection without established chronological order contributes to the authenticity of the work as a collection of resurfacing memories.

Antin's autobiography ranges across nations, decades, and topics that are as complex and varying as her life story. Within the book's pages, she faces her plight as a Jew, female, and immigrant through various writing techniques. The result is a medley of memories and styles unique to Antin. Nonetheless, her chronological location in the canon inevitably results in the repetition, adaptation, and criticism of her work that is in subsequent Jewish women's autobiographies (Zierler). Perhaps most importantly, Antin provides ample proof, including her friendship with President Theodore Roosevelt, that anyone can find in the United States his or her very own promised land.

CHAPTER TWO

Gertrude Stein's *Wars I Have Seen*

Gertrude Stein was a Jewish American born in Allegheny, Philadelphia in 1874. She lived and wrote through both World Wars along with a handful of other wars that impacted her life and literature. She lived in Vienna, London, Baltimore, and California before the age of seven. Traveling became familiar and nearly as influential as her war experiences. Stein and her lifelong partner, Alice B. Toklas, held a famous salon in Paris, helped launch Pablo Picasso's career, and became friends with members of what she called The Lost Generation, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Earnest Hemingway (Day). Most notably, Stein becomes one of the most prominent modernist and avant-garde writers, and she is still influencing writers today.

Gertrude Stein stands at the forefront of modernist literature. Olsen reveals Stein's belief that World War I "catapulted Europe into the modern age," which "effectively forced the acceptance of a new modernist aesthetic" (329). Indeed, Stein has been called one of the "earliest experimenters" of the modernist movement and "the celebrated mother of the avant-garde" (Olson 328). Characteristics of modernism are quite conspicuous in Stein's narrative. Her autobiography seems to "advance without explanation," often jumping from one topic or memory to another with no clear order or transitions. Her rhetoric is often suggestive rather than assertive, "making use of symbols and images instead of statements" to communicate her ideas. Furthermore, reading an autobiography focused so largely on war can be "shocking and unsettling," and consequently "challenging and difficult" to read ("Introduction" *The Norton Anthology*:

Vol. D, 14). From the first page, her autobiography reveals an unconventional, confusing, and disorienting literary approach. Stein's autobiography also falls within a more technical definition of modernism, which applies mostly to works produced between the two world wars (Lewis 96). Whether a general or specific, the term "modernism" clearly applies to *Wars*.

Stein is also a modernist taking an avant-garde approach to literature. The avant-garde, which is French for "the forefront," originally referred to political movements; however, at the end of the 19th century, "the metaphor was transferred" over to literature and art (Weightman 20). While modernism today often refers to all literature written in English, avant-garde refers "mainly to continental European tendencies" (Lewis 96). Because Gertrude Stein spent over forty years in France, she was subject to both modernism and avant-garde, such as cubism and evolutionism. The "radical experimentation and rejection of existing conventions" that Stein implements in *Wars* is especially characteristic of an avant-garde (Lewis 96). The avant-garde has similarly been described as "partly a reaction against undue reverence for the past and an extreme and vivid way of making the point that the past should be subordinated to the present and the future" (Weightman 15). Rather than completely rejecting past conventions, the avant-garde can simply undervalue them in comparison to the present. Stein accomplishes this by experimenting with her style and form but not to the point that she embraces asemic writing.

Stein's autobiography bridges modernism, avant-gardism, and autobiographical theory. Her style of writing fits James Olney's description of autobiographies because of its "lack of generic rigor, its comfortably loose fit and generous adaptability" (qtd. in

Moseley 19). Her modernist approach leads to a final product that reads quite differently from many other Jewish American women's autobiographies. Using an unconventional style and frame, she writes about her entire life, gives a record of her "social history," and reflects upon who she is, especially as a Jewish American woman (Rubin 287). Her modernist writing style, much like autobiography, reflects "an individual's images, recollections, and ideas" (McParland). The objectives of these genres complement each other enough for Stein to narrate her life story in such a radical, unique manner.

Style and Form

Stein's style and form most clearly reflect the goals of modernism. She makes stylistic choices such as dismissing conventional punctuation use, repeating words and phrases, and employing the stream-of-consciousness technique. Her modernist and experimental avant garde approaches directly affect how challenging and difficult her book may be to readers unfamiliar with the movements.

Many of Stein's sentences sound like everyday conversation or an uninterrupted flow of thoughts. This is one defining characteristic of the stream-of-consciousness technique. Some assert that the term derives from an 1892 essay by psychologist William James, in which he uses the term to describe the "adult consciousness itself" (McParland). Stein's use of this technique from James's work is not surprising since the two became acquainted during her time at Radcliffe College. Day argues that Stein's "writing was the product of a completely systematic and sophisticated aesthetic: what one might call the psychological theories of William James grafted onto the Cubist concepts of Picasso and Braque," whom she also befriended. Modernists like Stein began using the term, quite complementary to modernism, to complement their adventurous writing styles (McParland). During her time in Vienna as a child, she recalls:

> And there were my mother and my brothers on horseback and there was a Czech tutor, one did not realise how important all these nationalities were going to be to every one then and a Hungarian governess, and there was the first contact with books, picture books but books all the same since pictures in picture books are narrative (5).

In this example, Stein goes from describing a memory to mentioning a past realization to naming an important time in her life to defining what makes a book good. Similar to everyday conversation, she jumps from one topic to another in close succession. Her thoughts are uninterrupted as though she is relating her narrative to a young nephew she called upon to hear her side of a story.

Another modernist style choice she makes is to use sparse punctuation where it is conventionally expected. In one example, she omits appropriate punctuation for separating numerous independent and dependent clauses. The sentence reads:

> Who said Christine aged six of her mother who is the Italians, Italians being in occupation it was a natural question, why the Germans said her mother, and who are friends of the Germans, why the Italians said her mother, and who are friends of the English said Christine, why the Americans said her mother, and is Stalin friends with Germans said Christine, no with the English said her mother, and who are the French friends of, said Christine, why no one said the mother. (Stein 51)

This sentence lacks quotation marks, commas, question marks, and periods in the appropriate places. The commas it does include are located where sentence-final punctuation marks would go and only serve the purpose of marking a change of speakers. The result is an amalgamation of dialogue and narrative details that blend together. According to conventions, Stein's sentence should have read something such as this:

> "Who," said Christine, aged six, of her mother, "who is the Italians?" [The] Italians being in occupation, it was a natural question. "Why, the Germans," said her mother. "And who are friends of the Germans?" "Why, the Italians," said her mother. "And who are friends of the English?" said Christine. "Why, the Americans," said her mother. "And is Stalin friends with Germans?" said Christine. "No, with the English," said her mother. "And who are the French friends of?" said Christine. "Why, no one," said the mother. (51)

After applying conventional punctuation and syntax, the sentence looks drastically different and is far easier for the average reader to understand. Comparing the two side by side iterates this point. Here, Stein takes a considerably bold approach with a punctuation-free dialogue.

In other instances, her lack of punctuation creates fused sentences with upwards of six independent clauses:

> We were all in Europe and I was eight months old and they left me in the arms of my uncle, why was never explained, but anyway I cried and ladies he knew came along and he did not like it. (4)

This sentence compresses a large number of independent clauses into an amalgamation of weighty details from her early youth. The lack of punctuation allows for a quick reading past the fact that she was left with an uncle before she was old enough to remember it, never given an explanation, not accepted by the aforementioned uncle, and subsequently taken up by nonrelative females. The absence of commas or periods, which usually tell the reader to pause, enable the reader to breeze through such troubling, unexplained, and potentially unsafe decisions that her family made.

Stein also confuses the meaning of sentences such as, “What is a legend,” in which she poses as a question that she subsequently answers (22). The curious punctuation choice she makes is to end this clause with a period instead of a question mark. This might have been because she is not asking her reader(s) what a legend is since she already knows the answer. She might want the reader to ask him or herself the question so that Stein’s answer becomes necessary to satisfy the reader’s newly acquired curiosity. Because of her knowledge about what a legend is, the period affirms Stein’s position as the teller of this story. As a result, the reader experiences Stein’s inquiry and its response through her eyes.

Beyond punctuation use, another stylistic choice that Stein frequently makes is word repetition. She repeats certain words and phrases within sentences, across paragraphs, and throughout the entire book. This can cause ambiguity or create emphasis, especially when combined with unconventionally absent punctuation marks. At the book’s start, she recalls:

> Anyway though I could not remember it from the beginning there was no doubt that I was the youngest of the children and as such naturally I had

> privileges the privilege of petting the privilege of being the youngest one. (3)

The repetition of "privilege" causes obscurity, since she could be listing two privileges or explaining that she has the "privilege of petting" a second privilege, that privilege "of being the youngest one" (Stein 3). The lack of commas in this case also results in a faster reading. She does not dwell on her lack of memory or personal knowledge on the matter, and the reader is discouraged from considering that her assertion may be inaccurate. Although she was too young to realize whether or not she had privileges or these specific ones, the reader is encouraged to accept that these privileges came to her naturally.

Another instance of repetition is with the word "prisoner," which begins on page 47. She mentions the word—in multiple forms—eleven times within one paragraph. She first uses the word three times in a row to set up the sense that everyone is in prison (47). She mentions someone by name who is in prison, then acquaintances, then "whole countries…[and] they who put everybody in prison…[as] now in prison" and feeling as though they are "imprisoned" (47). From friends to acquaintances to entire populations, she feels the overwhelming sense that everyone, even if not physically in prison, feels trapped by the war.

Stein makes other diction choices that allow her to powerfully execute her story. One striking example of this is her ambiguous pronoun use regarding a rather personal topic:

> But the European…people do not want to know it, they must know it of course, anybody must know it, and the Jews do not want anybody to know it…because it would make themselves to themselves feel less important

> and as they always as the chosen people have felt themselves to
> themselves to be important they do not want anybody to know it. (55)

Stein has not told us what "it" is before this point. She does not tell us in the following sentences although she references "it" over ten additional times. She only reveals what this pronoun references after a brief allusion to the Dreyfus trial and a mention of something to which the German people want to cling: anti-Semitism (56). Stein believes that the Europeans must know the reality of anti-Semitic sentiment among the Germans. She suggests that Jews do not want anyone to know what this hatred is like because they might start to believe it themselves. She implies that if the Jews start believing themselves to be inferior, then they would reject their status as God's chosen people. Rather than repeat anti-Semitism over twenty times, Stein more powerfully creates ambiguity over this great mystery that people must or cannot know. When the reader finally realizes what she is referring to, he or she must go back and fill in the harsh reality that Jews are often forced to face.

Stein's punctuation, diction, and tone make sense in the larger context of her life experiences; her unconventional, war-ridden life explains her unconventional, war-ridden autobiography. For someone who experienced both world wars, an avant-garde approach to telling her own story may have been the only approach that seemed appropriate to Stein. The "prison" repetition and allusion to anti-Semitism are two illustrations that reflect the tone of the entire book: somber, explanatory, remorseful, and imprisoned in a cyclical remembrance of the past. With this tone and her avant-garde writing style, she explores topics far and wide.

Themes

The way that Stein frames her narrative distinguishes how she discusses issues examined by many other Jewish American women autobiographers. These issues include gender roles, religious beliefs, and immigrant life, to name a few. Although these topics repeatedly arise in this canon, a focus on war does not. Her war focus strongly colors her comments on gender expectations, religious and secular beliefs, and the pervasiveness of fear. Additionally, the unusually high level of travel she does over the span of her life results in a more diverse approach to language and provides a new perspective to the immigrant narrative. Lastly, the life lessons she includes are presented as tied to her education and a very particular concept of science. This focus, along with her frequent travel and intermittent life lessons, creates a framework in which common issues are presented in an uncommon light.

War

As the title suggests, Stein largely concentrates on war. This theme manifests itself on nearly every page of the text. At the time she is writing, she experiences three wars: the Spanish-American war, World War I, and World War II. Other wars she remembers but did not feel connected to include the first and second Boer wars, the Japanese-Chinese war, and the Russian-Japanese war (4). From the start, she is conflicted about the reasons she has seen so many. After explaining how much her family traveled when she was a baby and a young girl, she remarks:

> Born that way there is no reason why I should have seen so many wars…I suppose it is not so remarkable that I should have seen so many wars having seen a good many countries when I was a baby and having a

> feeling about countries which I suppose…make you be one of those that see them. (4)

At first, Stein is not sure why being born in a traveling family could lead to her living through such a high number wars. She then thinks that perhaps she saw so many because she traveled through so many countries, particularly through ones that she suspects increase one's likelihood of seeing a war, although she does not explain what that means.

It is worth noting that over 130 armed-conflicts occurred during the wars she mentions (Sarkees 586). For Stein, however, to "see a war" means not only to be alive during the conflict, but also to experience and be personally concerned with it. When she lived in California from age six to 16, she reminisces, "there was no war and if there was it was not any war of mine" (7). At this young age, she did not have a personal connection to any ongoing wars; ergo, she does not feel as though she lived through any during that time. Conversely, the conflicts she did see later in life were pervasive enough to render her unable to "remember just how it is when there is no war" (5). Even though she experienced a decade without war in her youth, she can no longer clearly remember or appreciate that past innocence.

The unabating presence of war in her memories may explain why the topic so strongly frames her narrative. Another explanation may be that she felt the conflict reflected within herself: "Such wars as there were were inside me, and naturally although I was a very happy child there were quite a number of such wars" (6). This comment appears to contradict her aforementioned statement about there being no wars during her youth. To clarify, her previous comment refers to outside wars being nonexistent for her because she was not invested in them; the second implies that she had internal wars in which she could not help but invest. The battles occurring in distant lands were realized in her own thoughts and emotions. As she continues experiencing wars internally and externally, she lives “from war to war” and decides that there is no difference between life and war (15, 191). War has become her inner and outer life, so there is no longer a distinction between the two.

Gender

Her impression of gender roles is also shaped by the reality and impact of war. When she discusses gender differences, she often describes changes that men and women undergo during wartime. Solemnly, she thinks back to a time before the war when she saw “middle western men, young men, boys too many,” aged 20 and 21, head out to San Francisco to go fishing. She remembers that at this age, “they go to sleep anywhere sitting or standing, their heads and their mouths and their eyes can go to sleep anywhere” (40). Living in Europe when World War I arrives, she sees trainloads of men aged 21 or older who “have to go to Germany as hostages to be put in a pen, they say to work in factories but there is no work” (36). These men are carried off to “be tired out and go to sleep any way that it is possible to be sleeping, in a chair or standing or in any way” (40-1). The similarities between the two events are clear along with one particular distinction: the fishermen had the freedom to choose to tire themselves out until they could fall asleep anywhere, anytime, and anyhow.

She mentions a number of plights that women endure, which are typically a byproduct of their sons, brothers, or friends leaving. Stein describes a woman who she met as “charming…[and] courageous” with five children, the youngest of whom had to leave (44). After his departure, the woman recalls that although she “never lost any money…life is always dearer." Stein notices that the mother "had clear eyes very wide open" as she relayed the sorrows that had befallen her (44). This woman's sorrow exhibits how a mother, if her son leaves during wartime, must be strong for her other children. She must continue to feed them and teach them to survive. She needs to remain levelheaded despite the fact that she may never see her youngest child again. She has to find a way to accept how conflicting men's and women's roles are with one another. Stein quickly deduces that this woman has been successful in each of these mentally and emotionally challenging areas, and for that reason, she calls her courageous.

This woman's son departed from his family involuntarily, as did many others whom Stein personally knew. She writes, "Now it is June 1943 and two of the young men who are twenty-one have come to say good-bye, they hope they are not going to die right away." After she offers them advice and kisses them goodbye, she asides, "Oh dear me one cannot sleep very well" (36). These were young men from the village she was living in, whom she realizes she may never see again. Men in war often have to endure more physical pain than women, but women and those physically distant from the war have to endure a more psychological and emotional pain.

It is worth nothing that Stein does not explicitly reference her experiences as a woman beyond the realm of war. She also does not discuss her sexual orientation except for the brief mentions of her partner, Alice B. Toklas. At no point does Stein provide background information or an explanation of their relationship, suggesting that she deemed it unnecessary to explain in *Wars*.

Religion or Beliefs

Stein discusses religion and beliefs in a way that is unconventional, even for a canon as diverse as this one. She uses many different terms and phrases to describe her beliefs and those she observes. Those terms include faith, coincident, superstition, religion, visions or predictions, and whatever people repeat to themselves from day to day. There is overlap between when the terms occur, but no clear division or progression from one to another, such as coincidence to superstition coexisting at some times but not others.

Stein describes these terms in relation to her age, her actions, and the many wars she discusses. "Between babyhood and fourteen," she writes, "coincidences come to be stronger and stronger, [until] they replace faith" (20). After November of 1943, coincidences began to "recreate faith" (Stein 21). Religion was real for her "between twelve and seventeen, between Shakespeare and the Boer war which was the first war" she realized was a war (14). There was "very little religion" in World War I, and by the time World War II occurs, "all the superstitions have been used up used up and passed away" (14, 18). Having read Shakespeare's historical plays, it seemed to her "between eight and twelve…[that] more and more this war of 1942-1943" made people become superstitious and believe that "all the signs are bad signs" (13). Religious people are religious during World Wars "but otherwise…like everybody in what they do" (14). None of these indications of faith or religion specify what kind of faith or religion. Stein does not clarify who is superstitious or who believes in coincidences. The reader is not sure to whom to attribute these belief systems or lack thereof. The assumption is that

Stein is referring to herself, but at times she seems to allude to some unspecified group of people.

Other times, she is interpreting what she has heard or witnessed. She frequently references a vision Saint Odile had to explain the Second Great War, the fall of Germany against the "mountain" that Stein believes is Russia, and the reason that the French fight themselves in the streets (57, 67, 239). She asserts that the French believe whatever they repeat to themselves based on their observations of the war's progress (69). The French set a date for when they believe the war will be over to cheer themselves, and others choose to believe the dates or not (229). The same French people are also excited every time they see an American soldier, which they take as proof that the war is over (225). In an ambiguous way, Stein intermittently uses the phrase "God bless them" at the end of difficult or meaningful sentences and the end of the book. She never explains to which God she is speaking nor offers any another explanation.

Language and Culture

Stein's frequent travel immensely impacts how she talks about language and her culture, which she treats more like her heritage since she is surrounded by French culture for most of her life. Stein's frequent travel began in her early youth. After a two-year stay at Vienna, her father returned to America to find a stable economic footing before the family could join him—much like Mary Antin's father. In 1878, her mother took all of her children to Paris, where she was to spend the majority of her adult life. The family joined her father in America the following year and lived in California for the next 13, during which Stein and her siblings attend school. Across this timespan, she reports first understanding her emotions in German then French then "Baltimore" then her "emotions began to feel themselves in English" (6). By the time she is 17 years old, English has become her dominant language.

In 1893, Stein registers at what later became Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Because of her California schooling and ardent reading habits, she felt as though she had learned enough about literature. Consequently, she began attending non-literature courses, such as those taught by psychologist William James, who became incredibly influential on Gertrude (Day). Day explains how James's "insistence on empirical procedures…distrust of the 'intellectual method,' and…theory about the 'stream of consciousness' " would come to "dominate her entire literary career." Her mastery of the English language greatly develops from her experiences on both coasts of the United States.

When she leaves America for Europe, she cultivates a different attitude toward English. She goes to Italy and London in 1902 then Paris in 1903 (Day). After spending decades in France, she learns to enjoy hearing "Germans talking English on the radio." She reports, "There was a very funny one the other day," in which a German, who was insulting the English for using contraception, sounded "not childish but very small boyish," or more specifically as though he had "the mental development of a seven year old boy" (121).

Although she spends over 40 years in France, she still feels very much like an American. She does not use first-person plural pronouns when describing the French, nor with her any non-American neighbors and friends in France. A friend of Stein's told her that an interpreter for the German army had an accent that sounded similar to Stein's when he spoke French (225). This made her friend wonder whether the interpreter was American, a demonym that Stein sustains throughout her entire time overseas.

Stein recognizes the importance of language as a defining factor for her homeland. She calls America the only country that had “a certain difficulty in proving itself” a nation:

> By the time American became itself…very nearly everybody could read and write and so the language which would naturally have changed…remained English…so the only way the Americans could change their language was by…shoving the language around until at last the job is done, we use the same words as the English do but the words say an entirely different thing. (259)

American English is such a pivotal part of being American for Stein that she spends most of her epilogue discussing its development and usage. She is amazed by the differences between the voluble American troops from this world war and the taciturn ones from the first. “After all anybody is as their land and air is,” she writes. She clarifies, “Air is what makes a people, makes their kind of looks, their kind of thinking, their subtlety and their stupidity, and their eating and drinking and their language” (258). She holds that people are defined by the air, or *aire* meaning nature or character in Old French, of their native land. The French must have understood this connectedness to one’s national “air” because, during World War II, they invited her to a Lyon radio talk show to explain what Americans are (257). Before, during, and after nations from across the globe fought across several continents, Stein defines herself as part of the people whom she described that day in Lyon.

Immigrant Narrative

Stein's language is not the only factor characterizing her as an American; being away from home only proliferated her sense of nationality, especially while she was cut off from her native land during the world wars (250). Rather than assimilating to America as Mary Antin had to, Stein assimilates elsewhere *as* an American. Although she spent the first several years of her life—and the last four decades of it—in Europe, she calls the United States her home because her mother was born there:

> I do not know why but one is always proud of the places your people come from, you may never see them or perhaps never see them again…I did but nevertheless, that is where your mother came from and I suppose there is more meaning to that than where you were born… (11)

Stein was also born in the US, but she considers that as less important than the fact that her mother was born in Baltimore (Wagner-Martin). Whether she also felt American because of her birthplace becomes irrelevant; Stein maintains her connection with her mother's birthplace.

Unlike the immigrant narrative that typically includes a difficult adjustment period, living in Europe during the Great Wars was similar to living in the US for Stein; this was true for a number of reasons. In both place, she was continually surrounded by a variety of peoples native to the land. In California, she went to school with students of many nationalities (8). While in France during the second Great War, she tells her readers, "we had here in the house first the German officers and then later on the Italians. It is funny to be Americans and to be here in France and to have that" (69). European countries during the war become a land of immigrants like the US historically has been:

"There are so many refugees, roughly speaking one might say everybody is a refugee, nearly everybody certainly every city, town village and hamlet has its refugees, and plenty of them" (Stein 111). Neither the US nor Europe is a stranger to refugees and already-diverse, coexisting natives.

Despite the common ground, the US and European nations are still undeniably different. One difference for Stein is that America, a land founded by and comprised of a profusion of immigrants, it is not "a puzzle a considerable puzzle how everybody goes on living and spending money and looking fairly well fed and well clothed" with so many foreigners (111). In Europe, however, Stein considers the refugees' smooth entry and assimilation to be a thought-provoking puzzle (111).

Another difference between people in each place is the general mentality. She compares the American mindset to European and French ones. Americans have a one-track mind according to the French, a mannerism that Stein believes bothers the Europeans and strongly differs from how the French think (80). Despite this bothersome issue, Stein claims that the "whole population wants to learn English and quickly" for the American soldiers' arrival (220). It is worth pointing out that this mirrors what Antin experiences: non-Americans try to learn English to speak to Americans.

Despite being a longtime immigrant in a foreign country, Stein does not try to become or consider herself French. In contrast to Antin, she does not hastily try to learn the native language, diminish her native accent, or assimilate at any cost. This may be because she is already welcome in Antin's promised land.

Education

Stein's narrative is incredibly shaped by her vigorous reading. Throughout *Wars*, she cites literature she has read to explain or make sense of what is happening around her. She read her uncle's memoirs, Shakespeare's plays, and historical novels, from which she received her early exposure to wars (8, 13). Although she did not intentionally single out literature about war, she explains, "as an omnivorous reader, naturally there was a great deal of war" (9). She read Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III* to explain how similar war is to plays about kings killing kings (160). For Stein, Cooper's *The Spy* complicates the idea of who can be enemy or not. This ambiguity reflects her uncertainty of whether boys who lived in the mountains to escape the draft were enemies (170-1). She cites a story Winston Churchill wrote about the American Civil War called "The Crisis," in which a northerner and a southerner meet to try to stop a civil war from happening, to explain what is happening to the French: rather than negotiating, "they are violently divided and they cannot keep off the subject" (212). She extracts lessons and themes from Shakespeare's *King John* and *Henry VI*, Cooper's "Wyandotte, or the Hutted Knoll," and countless other unnamed works to understand her world and relay it to her reader.

Books also provide her with an escape from reality. When evolution becomes ubiquitous, music becomes "a background for emotion" while books become "a reality" (17). She mentions the nimiety of enemies in Shakespeare before beginning a lengthy explication of enemies in warfare. After seeing so much loss and destruction, she does not avoid "mystery stories and spy stories and all that." Instead, she wants "to read them more than ever, to change one reality for another, one unreality for another" (47). This desire is not surprising considering how life and war are synonymous for Stein.

At the end of the epilogue, she mentions how she exchanged books with American soldiers during both wars. One in particular came from soldiers passing through on the train and another from railroad boys at Chambery (256). Stein fondly reminisces over books she received from American soldiers in both wars.

This handoff at the end of the book is replicated in her handing *Wars* to readers. Although she does not directly receive something in return from each reader, he or she journeys with her from European countries to America and back, from the Boer wars and the Great Wars, and from repetitive diction to absent punctuation. The reader then return home with the reassuring knowledge that men regained the ability to whistle freely down the street (Stein 220). A second comfort is the knowledge that she lived through global havoc to craft a tale that has influenced postmodern poets, recent feminists, and everyday readers (Kaufmann 220). Her uniquely written autobiography, which has survived six decades, contains plights that still exist today: war, death, faithlessness, isolation, and discrimination. Even though, Stein as a modernist ends without a definite conclusion, she provides a narrative from which students can learn to face these issues and find a way to talk about them. Perhaps that is the book we hand back.

CHAPTER THREE

Golda Meir's *My Life*

Golda Meir was born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1898. She spent 15 years in the US, where she learned English and became introduced to the movements and ideas that led her to become a political and religious activist, especially in Zionism. Meir left for Palestine as a newly-wed 17-year-old with her husband to begin using her skills and drive to help establish the State of Israel. She ultimately served as Prime Minister of the State of Israel, which she helped found, from 1969 to 1974. The Yom Kippur War, also known as the Ramadan War or the Arab-Israeli War, of 1973 took place during her term. Even though she spent most of her life in Israel, Meir becomes a naturalized US citizen, lives in the US for a time, and dedicates her life to serving the needs of the Jewish community. Her narrative, *My Life*, is therefore a Jewish American woman's autobiography. As a testament to the canon's diversity, Meir's autobiography spans across the majority of the twentieth century, placing it among decades of varying contexts within Russia, the US, and Israel. Her autobiography is an ideal example of how diverse a work can be while still falling within the cannon of Jewish American women's writing.

Gender

Meir's explicit commentary on her gender seems to serve the purpose of addressing traditional gender expectations and her reactions towards them. When she and Morris, her husband, were living in the Jewish kibbutz, she was treated as equally as she would ever be in her life. Women were expected to make the same contributions as men, a challenge which she wholeheartedly embraced and overcame. When it came to kitchen duty, however, she stood apart from her fellow women; unlike the other women, who felt that it was a lesser form of contributing to the kibbutz, Meir rather enjoyed the work (88). She is quick to make culinary improvements because she feels it to be her duty to feed and serve her male and female comrades alike, to the best of her abilities (89). Meir embraced this traditionally female setting and role with open arms, not as a woman but as just another member of a kibbutz.

She also addresses the issue of image and physical beauty. Life in the kibbutz meant long hours in the sun and no beauty parlors or cosmeticians, so women aged more quickly. Nonetheless, Meir notes that women in the kibbutz "weren't any the less feminine, despite their wrinkles" (93). In fact, she remarks, "kibbutz romances and marriages were like romances and marriages anywhere" (94). Meir treats women in the community no differently than women outside of it.

When Meir dives into the difficulties she and other women faced, she falls under Wirth-Nesher's category—whether intentionally or not—of women who discuss gender to evoke empathy and imagination:

> In Jerusalem I was a sort of prisoner, sentenced—as are millions of women by circumstances beyond their control—to battling over bills that I couldn't pay, trying to keep shoes from falling apart because it was impossible to buy another pair, worrying whenever a child coughed or ran a fever that our inadequate diet and inability to keep the apartment warm in winter might be permanently damaging their health. (102)

She lists what was expected of her as a mother, describing the challenges of each meeting each need to emphasize how impossible they seem when compiled together. However, she knows that she is not alone. While this knowledge may seem comforting, her tone suggests that she finds it to be an ugly truth that so many women are sentenced to this kind of fate. Even though she suffered in silence, she emerged from that time period remembering the difficulties she wants to solve for her fellow Jews (104). Her decision to join the Women's Labor Council is an example of when she explicitly mentions guiding her actions by her desire to help her people rather than by her gender. She "was attracted to them not so much because they concerned women as such, but because…[of] the work they were doing" (113). Meir's accounts of her hardships and decision evoke empathy and guide the reader's imagination towards visualizing why she so strongly wanted to help her people.

After speaking about her upmost respect for the "spirited and hardworking leading women of the labor council," Meir summarizes her own thoughts in one sentence on what gender and religious freedom are:

> Naturally women should be treated as the equals of men in all respects, but as it is true also of the Jewish people, they shouldn't have to be better than everyone else in order to live like human beings or feel that they must accomplish wonders all the time to be accepted at all. (114)

She does not take an overly radical feminist viewpoint by placing women above men. Even though she acknowledges the additional uphill battles she faced as a woman in Jerusalem, she clarifies that throughout her entire life, "being a woman never [gave her] an inferiority complex or made [her] think that men are better off than women" (114).

She struggled as a woman, but also strove as a human being without her path being obstructed by gender.

Meir's autobiography follows Lichenstein's central point about how American Jewish women needed to navigate around their dual identities and historical obstacles that made writing difficult for Jewish women and nineteenth-century American women (1). Meir does explicitly address the fact that she is a woman, especially one in the predominantly male political profession. She writes, "being a woman has never hindered me in any way at all…But what is true, I think, is that women who want and need a life outside as well as inside the home have a much, much harder time than men because they carry such a heavy double burden" (114). Meir recognizes the greater difficulties faced by women who want successful home and work lives, and she admits to undergoing those exact dilemmas.

Language

Meir believes Hebrew and Yiddish are, or at least should be, the linguistic future of Israel. She affirms Shaked's wariness over a potential loss of identity; while Shaked believes this loss could be caused by the Jewish people reading Jewish literature "written in non-Jewish languages," Meir suggests that the loss might also be caused by Jews only speaking non-Jewish languages (394). While teaching Yiddish at a school created by a labor organization she worked with in the US, she thought of the language as "one of the strongest links that existed between the Jews" (61). She believed that Hebrew and Yiddish should be the two languages in Palestine, or at least Yiddish. Ironically, she later realizes that Hebrew was the language she should have studied more (62). Even though she has a preference for Hebrew and Yiddish being taught to Jewish children, Meir still highly respects the "fine language" that is English (61). She comments on her encounters with English, Hebrew, and Yiddish at different points of her life but never with a depreciative tone.

Unlike Antin, Meir does not view her native accent as an undesirable obstacle that she must conquer. Rather than, "willingly and fervently remaking herself in order to assimilate into America," Meir loses her accent while living in America by default (Wirth-Nesher 461). Furthermore, she only mentions the loss to point out that as a consequence, her mother dubbed her a "fine, upstanding girl" who was finally ready to work in their family shop and to start thinking about marriage (40). For Meir, losing her accent was not an uphill battle but rather an inadvertent rite of passage into womanhood, at least according to her traditional Jewish mother.

Religion or Beliefs

From a young age, Meir practices some Jewish traditions, is surrounded by Jewish people and culture, strongly identifies with the Jewish collective, and shapes her life around that community; this collective atmosphere is how she understands her Judaism, rather than in terms of venerating a deity or studying sacred texts. When reflecting on her religiosity, Meir separates her family's practice of traditions from the Jewish religion as much as possible to point out that from the beginning, she lived in what was "not a particularly religious household" (15). Although her parents "observed Jewish tradition…kept a kosher kitchen and celebrated all the Jewish holidays and festivals…religion as such…played very little role in [their] lives" (15). She acknowledges Judaism as "the religion of the Jews" and connects it to society, but she leaves out "emotional experiences and intellectual insights" until her Judaism becomes synonymous with her participation in that community (Solomon 4). Her parents sought out the familiarity of a Jewish community in Russia, Milwaukee, and Tel Aviv, but Meir's description suggests that they did so for social and humanitarian reasons rather than religious ones. She therefore hardly experienced gender-based exclusion within Judaism (7). Since Meir did not seek a traditional religious education or experience a more traditional version of Judaism, she did not suffer through that particular gender-based refusal or disapproval.

While the US provides an escape for Meir and her family from pogroms, as it does for Antin and her family, she does not feel the need to celebrate the religious aspect of her Jewishness in America. Her Jewishness is more of a cultural or national identity than a religious one. Nonetheless, Meir is able to celebrate her Jewish identity while living in the states.

Ethnicity

Meir, similarly to Stein, visited the United States quite often for both political and personal reasons but spent the majority of her life outside her native country. As a Jewish naturalized US citizen, she does not struggle to expunge one identity and master the other; rather, she openly embraces each culture and includes both as part of her identity. Of the three autobiographers Meir most strongly feels "the sense of being a member of a people with a shared history and culture that entails collective identity and responsibility" (Wirth-Nesher 459). Meir's desire to establish a state for her people is so strong that she leaves the US for Palestine before she is old enough to vote; her sense of community, which manifests itself in the form of socialism, prompts her to live in a Palestinian kibbutz. Her self-identification with the Jewish people and sense of responsibility to that community are what lead her towards choosing to move to Palestine early in her life, despite much hesitation from family, friends, and her new husband (64). Meir's yearning to help and unite this collective body becomes so strong that she willingly leaves those friends and family members to fulfill that desire.

Ethical Concerns

Beyond the four topics outlined by Wirth-Nesher, Meir also includes a great deal about her political life. Meir's political activity as a result of her ethical concerns, which largely motivated Jewish women writers (3). In general, "Jewish writers are a peculiar ethnic group in that their ethnicity is closely tied to a religion rich in ethical precepts" ("Introduction." *Jewish American*,3). Meir's political concerns are closely related to her ethical concerns for her Jewish people. She was not among those in the late nineteenth century who opted for an anti-Zionist position when faced with religious strife ("Introduction: The Great Tide" 111). Her zealous Zionism and labor efforts are evidence of that.

Even in her early life, Meir was immersed in political and philosophical discourses, largely due to her older and politically active sister, Sheyna. As a 14-year-old, Meir recalls living with Sheyna and her soon-to-be-husband and being "fascinated by the people who used to drop into their home and sit around talking till late at night" (45). She remembers that she "found the endless discussions about politics much more interesting than any of [her] lessons" (45-6). Meir was intrigued on a philosophical and abstract level in her youth, an intrigue that translates into political and religious activism within the preceding years and for the rest of her life.

Immigrant Narrative

Meir's autobiography begins and is filled with immigration narrative. She was not shielded from the dangers that caused many Eastern and Southern European Jews, including her family, to flee their homes. What she remembers most clearly from her childhood in Russia is the fear of persecution for being Jewish, a theme that would become central during World War I. She also remembers her consciousness of being different, a feeling that she would encounter repeatedly throughout her life alongside the fear and frustration that comes along with that self-awareness (13). Meir had to face the problem of a dual identity, not because of gender, but because of her Jewishness (Lichenstein 7). Her response was to embrace her Jewish identity more than her American one. She therefore did not share in the Jewish American triumph that was called a "remarkably evident" literary and cultural contribution (Wirth-Nesher and Kramer 2). Consequently, unlike Antin, Meir never fully assimilates and feels like a newcomer again when she returns to the US years later (17). During her stay, she also has to readjust to American life and English constantly being spoken around (17).

Style and Form

Literary movements influenced Mary Antin's and Gertrude Stein's autobiographies; Golda Meir's autobiography is heavily driven by political and religious activism. When Meir was in her late teens and early twenties, she starting becoming heavily supportive of Zionism. While Zionism is considered a movement rather than activism, and the two are generally connected, Meir's late night talks with Sheyna and her friends marked the beginning of her career as a religious activist ("Zionism, n."). She also began partaking in political activism with her attempts to help labor unions gain rights, most commonly through “methods of protest and persuasion” such as “speeches, slogans,” and the like (Martin). Her participation in these efforts shapes how she tells her narrative because the causes behind the efforts are so incredibly central to her life.

Meir’s activism more explicitly affects the content of her autobiography more than her style or form. Her zeal for establishing a unified, official State of Israel is what shapes her life, ethnic and religious identity, pride in the Yiddish language, dismissal of gender roles, and ethical concerns, to name a few. Her narrative provides a lens through which the reader can understand what drives Meir to take the unconventional actions that she does. This drive also impacts her tone; in general, her language is humble, subtly charged, optimistic, and goal-oriented.

Meir’s autobiography ranges not only across different decades, but also across many different topics. She writes about ethnicity, language, religion, and politics. She addresses gender equality and comments on her own struggles, not only as a woman, but also as a wife and mother. She fits the genre of Jewish American women’s writings in the sense that her work does not fit neatly into categories. Nonetheless, she addresses truths the she and countless other women have faced, truths that she worked to change in her lifetime. Meir, writing as a Jewish American woman, speaks to all women and the hope that stands at the end of their plights.

CONCLUSION

An immigrant-turned-literary-success, an avant-garde modernist, and a political activist walk into a room. Add over a century's worth of strikingly diverse Jewish American women. Place their autobiographies in one pile, and you have composed this canon. Despite their diverseness, all three women talk about gender roles. Each discusses being a foreigner, learning languages, understanding religion, and numerous other shared experiences. Even though their narratives are framed differently and presumably written for a variety of reasons, the women in this paper and this canon share their Jewishness, American citizenship, and womanhood.

Each of these characteristics has individually led to marginality and difficulties. When combined, they lead to a life of experiences worth documenting and analyzing. This applies even when extreme factors such as pogroms and world wars are absent. As Cronin and Berger rightly point out, Jewish American women writers "have moved their readers to new levels of understanding about what Judaism means to more than half of the members of the tradition whose orthodox voices were for too long silenced" (xxiii). Although Cronin and Berger focus on Judaism, these women bring about similar effects by speaking through their autobiographies.

Each woman has earned her place in this canon for her own reasons. Mary Antin provided her life story as evidence that what we call the "American Dream" is an attainable goal. She is one of countless individuals who have sought happiness, piece of mind, freedom, and a home in the US. Gertrude Stein lived through World War I and II to tell the tale. She stood at the forefront of an experimental literary movement while addressing universal struggles. Golda Meir helped establish a country, starting her career as a political activist before she was old enough to vote in the US. She also left a clear mark on the history of Israel.

These autobiographies are also significant because of the criticism they provoke. Starting with Antin, Zierler writes, "what has emerged…is a kind of Jewish American woman's autobiographical tradition, in which writers refer to and/or challenge the version of Jewish/American/female identity and life presented by their predecessors." These autobiographies reference and sometimes challenge the views of their forebears and of each other. The internal communication in this body of works is an especially significant defining factor that continues to persist.

Most importantly, each autobiography shows that discrimination has existed during this past century. Unfortunately, this harsh kind of prejudice is still very much alive. Americans are still discriminated against for their race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and countless other demographical features. Many of these characteristics cannot be helped, but that seems irrelevant to those acting upon negative prejudices. What matters is that we continue to write about the injustices. These three women understood what it meant to voice their struggles. Their autobiographies gave names to faces and conflicts. They also wrote about their triumphs. They reflect the importance of documenting the difficult parts of our lives rather than just the good. By letting others learn about our experiences, we enable others to learn *from* those experiences.

Past and future autobiographies may address these issues strongly or not at all. They may instead address the benefits of female submission or the harms of global warming. I would not find it surprising if these future works also discuss harsh treatment suffered by those in our generation. As time advances, our understanding of the world will continue to shift. It is imperative that we continue to study documentation of these individuals' experiences and struggles of being Jewish, American, and female in such a simultaneously difficult and wonderful world.

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