PASTRAMI ON WHITE?: NAVIGATING JEWISH WHITENESS THROUGH EATING PRACTICES

By

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine literary representations of Jewishness published between 1955 and 2021, after the perceived end of the transition of Jews into whiteness in the mid to late 1940s. Primary among these texts are Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955), Jonathan Rosen's *Eve's Apple* (1997), and Melissia Broder's *Milk Fed* (2021). In these texts, eating is figured as an important way that characters negotiate a conditional whiteness. To facilitate a more nuanced discussion about the racial formation of Jewish whiteness in the US, I explain the ways representations of eating and not eating in literature serve to reinforce the category of whiteness while simultaneously revealing the instability of Jewish whiteness. In addition, abstaining from particular foods and refusing to eat has implications for how eating and refusing food offer both the opportunity for individuals and communities to actively invest in ideologies of white supremacy that reinforce their inclusion in whiteness and to undermine that inclusion by revealing difference. Moreover, by examining food refusal, we can better understand the interplay of white hereopatriarchy and the pressure it places on Jews, particularly Jewish women. Thus, my dissertation explains how depictions of eating illustrate the ways that Jews are perceived as constantly on the verge of being full members of the category of whiteness. While Jewish communities have benefited from their inclusion in the category of whiteness, this inclusion is by no means stable or settled, and literature illustrates the ways Jewish communities and individuals continue to negotiate an ethnoracial identification and assignment that is continually in flux. Examining texts written between 1955 and 2021, this dissertation aims to examine the contemporary relationship between Jews and whiteness and its shifts to demonstrate how this unstable and every evolving relationship exists into the present.

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DEDICATION

Perpetually and simply for my family.

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Introduction

The Jewish comedian Milton Berle is credited with joking, "Every time someone goes into a deli and orders a pastrami on white bread, somewhere a Jew dies" (Hochman xii). He was not alone in commenting on the apparent disjunction between pastrami on white bread.[1] In 1968, the Jewish Jerry Stiller and Irish Anne Meara wrote, "Friends of ours have told us we go together like hot pastrami on white bread." A further afront to Jewish modes of eating is added by *Annie Hall* in 1977, which depicts the non-Jewish Annie ordering a pastrami on white bread with mayonnaise.[2] In Weird Al's 1999 parody of the Offspring's "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)," entitled, "Pretty Fly for a Rabbi," the song lauds the credentials of its titular rabbi.[3] The song assures the listener that this rabbi, "never eats pastrami on white bread with mayonnaise." More recently, a picture of a sign from a Jewish deli circulated social media. The sign reads, "Hot corned beef or pastrami cannot be served with mayo and or on white bread unless Nebraska I.D. is shown" and the text is credited to the management. In part, the joke, repeated again and again with slight variation, rests on an unstated but understood premise—eating a pastrami on white bread with mayonnaise does not violate the laws governing *kashrut*; however, to paraphrase Lenny Bruce's bit, white bread and mayo are goyish. But, why? What is it about white bread and mayonnaise that, when used to make a pastrami sandwich, becomes mortally threatening to or at the very least incompatible with the Jewish body?

These jokes and the lived realities that they point to begin to help illustrate the focus and stakes of this project. For a community that, almost since its arrival in the US, has been shuffled

[1] In Jewish delis, pastrami is most often served on rye bread with mustard.
[2] In *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), Woody Allen communicates his character's crisis of faith by showing him unloading a bag of Christian religious books and objects. Out of the same bag, he pulls a bag of Wonder Bread and Hellmann's Mayonnaise.
[3] Weird Al in not Jewish.

across the racial divide between Blackness and whiteness, whether they are perceived as more or less racially marked hold real stakes. In order to more clearly examine the operations of whiteness, this project focuses on Ashkenazi Jews. Jews who trace their ancestry from Europe have historically been more likely to transition into whiteness, and because of this, represent a useful population to examine for insights about how whiteness works. Throughout this project I refer to "Jews with the most access to whiteness." This term is necessarily flexible and broad because not all Jews have equal access to whiteness. Because of the flexibility of Jewishness which allows it to function as religion, ethnoracial lineage, and culture, I needed a term that applied to Ashkenazi Jews and Jewish converts who have greater access to the privileges of whiteness than many other Jews. Jewish communities were also well aware of the ways their racial assignment was out of their hands and how it could be weaponized against them. For many, no clearer modern example exists than the Nazi's program of racial cleansing that led to the Holocaust. In *The Jew's Body,* Sander Gillman likens life in a Jewish body to life on a fault line. He continues, "The social structure may suddenly shift beneath us, leaving us scrambling rather desperately for a foothold. It is not a paranoid fantasy, it's a historical reality" (Gillman 100). The instability of Jewish ethnoracial assignment is more than theory or concept, and it is even more than a historical reality.

In the face of this reality, any performance that has a raced component becomes particularly meaningful. The body is the site of many of these performances. In this project, I demonstrate how eating practices function as a raced performance. For Jews who navigate a still unstable relationship to whiteness, how, where, what, and with whom they eats influences their perceived proximity to whiteness. Those Jews with the most access to whiteness can eat in ways that align them with whiteness. Eating alternately also allows for the possibility of finding

resistance and ethnoracial difference in eating. As such, eating becomes a set of cultural tropes and references that we can better see and analyze a Jewish relationship to whiteness that is conditional and in relation rather than fixed and finite. It is because of the presence of both factors—A Jewish relationship to whiteness that is unsettled and eating as a raced practice and performance—that the joke about pastrami on white bread functions.

In this dissertation, I examine literary representations of Jewishness published between 1955 and 2021, after the perceived end of the transition of Jews into whiteness in the mid to late 1940s. Primary among these texts are Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955), Jonathan Rosen's *Eve's Apple* (1997), and Melissia Broder's *Milk Fed* (2021). In these texts, eating is figured as an important way that characters negotiate a conditional whiteness. To facilitate a more nuanced discussion about the racial formation of Jewish whiteness in the US, I explain the ways representations of eating and not eating in literature serve to reinforce the category of whiteness while simultaneously revealing the instability of Jewish whiteness. In addition, abstaining from particular foods and refusing to eat has implications for how eating and refusing food offer both the opportunity for individuals and communities to actively invest in ideologies of white supremacy that reinforce their inclusion in whiteness and to undermine that inclusion by revealing difference. Moreover, by examining food refusal, we can better understand the interplay of white hereopatriarchy and the pressure it places on Jews, particularly Jewish women. Thus, my dissertation explains how depictions of eating illustrate the ways that Jews are perceived as constantly on the verge of being full members of the category of whiteness. While Jewish communities have benefited from their inclusion in the category of whiteness, this inclusion is by no means stable or settled, and literature illustrates the ways Jewish communities and individuals continue to negotiate an ethnoracial identification and assignment that is

continually in flux. Examining texts written between 1955 and 2021, this dissertation aims to examine the contemporary relationship between Jews and whiteness and its shifts to demonstrate how this unstable and every evolving relationship exists into the present.

The Question of Ashkenazi Jewish Whiteness

The question of Jewish whiteness is, for most discourse communities, a historical one. In the many conversations I have had with people about this project, many are shocked to learn that the Jewish communities that I wrote about were not always considered white. Those who are not regularly engaged in conversations about Jewish whiteness seemed to treat Jewish whiteness as an uncontested reality. However, a growing number of white identity extremists outright deny that any Jew can be white. What seems to be a growing number of groups whose politics and perspective overlap with or derive from racist extremists espouse ideas about Ashkenazi Jewish ethnoracial identity that suggest white Jews are still "not quite white." These ideologies are fueled by antisemitism and the intersection of antisemitism with racism. However, there are also members of Jewish communities with the most access to whiteness that express that they do not feel they are white.[4] Still, there people who view the question of Jewish whiteness as a largely historical one; however, people within and outside of Jewish communities still wrestle with how to understand Jewish ethnoracial identity. Importantly, whiteness is a socially constructed category that, itself, is constantly shifting. This socially constructed category corresponds to a lived and embodies reality. Even in moments when this contestation feels mostly settled, there are echoes of this tension, lasting reverberations, that appear in more contemporary representations of white Jews.

[4] While at a lunch, I described this project to a fellow scholar from a different department. The woman, who worked in Jewish Studies and presented as white, told me that she did not feel white and did not think of herself as white. However, her parents both identified as white.

The central argument of my dissertation runs contrary to much of the scholarship on whiteness and Jewishness. Critical conversations about Jewish ethnoracial formation all too often simplify this process to fit into a progress narrative in which assimilation and whiteness is, very troublingly, the end goal. Scholars commonly trace the transition of Jews into whiteness along with other ethnic whites such as Italians and Irish communities. These scholars assume an end to this transition that maps onto the whiteness of other communities, inaccurately so. For example, Matthew Frye Jacobson traces the historical transition of several distinct groups into whiteness in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race.* In this work, Jewish populations are grouped with other racialized communities, like the Irish and Poles, that transitioned into whiteness. In David Roediger's *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*, he similarly groups Jews with other communities that would later become white. This is not so much a critique of either of these works which both make substantial contributions to the field. There are broad trends and realities that can be illustrated by including Ashkenazi Jews with other communities that transitioned into whiteness. While the transition of Ashkenazi Jews into whiteness certainly runs parallel to that of the communities that Jacobson and Roediger trace, their work doesn't undertake a detailed examination of how the Ashkenazi journey towards whiteness is unique and distinct because of the very different ways Jews have been racialized in Europe and the US. Works that speak generally about the process of becoming white, often fail to engage in a meaningful discussion of the ways Jewish identity is significantly different from Irish, Polish, or Italian identity. In the hopes of speaking about the functions of whiteness broadly, scholars often falsely equate Jewishness to a national identity when it is more accurately a religious, cultural and, sometimes, ethnic affiliation. For example, scholars will often talk about

Irish and Italian immigrants along with Jewish immigrants when discussing how immigrant populations transitioned in the category of whiteness. However, Irish and Italian identity are located in national origin. While Jews might be considered a people, they are a diasporic one. The Jews that these scholars identify originated from many different countries within Eastern and Western Europe. Moreover, Jewishness is connected to culture, religion, and ethnic heritage. These different ways of being Jewish can exist in conjunction or individually, and the subtilties of Jewishness, along with its unique history, make it exceptionally important to fully consider Ashkenazi Jewishness while also examining other white transitioning communities.

When scholars do focus on the transition of Jews into whiteness, they too often assume an end to this transition around 1945 or 1950. In Karen Brodkin's *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (1998), she traces the historical transition of Jews into whiteness from the 1930s to1960s. This well-respected and influential book explores the transition of Jews into whiteness. Bordkin skillfully tracks this transition. In this focused examination of the ethnoracial construction of Jewishness and whiteness, she posits they were "shuttled from one side of the racial binary to the other" (Brodkin 175). Brodkin is careful to state that Jews have been historically considered by dominant white culture as "off-white," and she expertly navigates the divide between ethnoracial assignment and lived ethnoracial identity. She concludes that the assignment of Jews to "a particular place in the American racial structure has affected Jewish collective attempts to create a Jewish ethnoracial identity" (Brodkin 175). Brodkin's work serves to illustrate some of the larger problems with the ways we talk about the racial construction of Jews in the US. The notion that Jews crossed the racial binary is troublingly simple because this representation of history does not consider that ways in which Jews continue to navigate race. In this dissertation, I argue that Jews still straddle that racial

binary. Rather than being shuttled across, Jews still exist between the racial binaries. Brodkin's narrative also falls into the problem of presenting whiteness and assimilation as a natural and inevitable end goal. Whiteness is not the natural conclusion, and presenting it as such allows us to ignore the ways Jews have actively invested in and courted whiteness. It also obscures the ways which communities maintain and reinvest into whiteness.

Despite the problems of overgeneralization that are present in some works about the construction of whiteness and the ethnoracial formation of Jews, a handful of scholars quite skillfully name and attend to the conditional whiteness of Ashkenazi Jews in the US. In *White,* Richard Dyer examines the ways visual culture communicates and constructs whiteness. When discussing his terms, he explains the difficulty of using "black" as a marker of racial identity in his work because, "it excludes a huge range of people who are neither white nor black, Asians, Native Americans (North and South), Chicanos, Jews, and so on" (11). Dyer's attention to the liminality of Jewish whiteness is nuanced and careful. He later elaborates, "There are gradations of whiteness: some people are whiter than others. Latinos, the Irish, and Jews, for instance, are rather less securely white than Anglos, Teutons, and Nordics; indeed, if Jews are white at all, it is only Ashkenazi Jews, since the Holocaust, in a few places" (Dyer 12). Dyer's focus on the gradations of whiteness allows for a reading of Jewish ethnoracial formation that does not assume their full and unqualified inclusion within whiteness. While Dyer makes numerous mentions to the conditional whiteness of some American Jews, the goals of his project direct his attention toward other subjects, so his work on Jewish ethnoracial formation is far from complete. George Lipsitz similarly notes the precarious whiteness of Jewish communities in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politic*s. Like Dyer, Lipsitz's reference to the ethnoracial formation of Jews does not receive further analysis. This

project seeks to build on the work of scholars like Dyer, Lipsitz, and Brodkin while moving beyond their original conceptions of Jewish whiteness.

Eating as Raced Performance

When we center eating, it calls us to think not about the material that we eat, the food, but the how of eating. When eating, not food, is the focus of study, we must attend not to the structures and systems that deliver a food to the table, but those systems and structures that create identities and differing kinds of belonging. In "Emmanuel Levinas and the Ontology of Eating," David Goldstein constructs an ontology of eating based on the writings of Levinas. Goldstein remarks, "the story is not that we eat. The story is that we eat and develop a relationship to eating, and that relationship in turn helps determine our sense of the world" (37). Thus, Levinas and Goldstein argue, when we examine the meaning of eating, we understand how eating plays a key role in the development of the self. Eating is here conceived of as the first way of experiencing that which is not the self. And in discovering what is not the self, the first sense of what is the self begins to develop. Goldstein explains "The telos of this line of thinking is that enjoyment, as marked foremost by the act of eating, brings the I into being" (37). Here, eating is offered as a primary sight of the development of a sense of self. And, as I argue, within the context of the US, this sense of self most often includes the knowledge that one identifies and is assigned a racial identity.[5]

A transition away from the material of consumption to the meaning of consumption opens new possibility for the field of food studies. In her book, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*, Kyla Wazana Tompkins proposes a shift to food studies in an attempt to "nudge food studies' interests and methods away from an unreflective collaboration. In the

[5] Some people do not have to develop a sense of themselves as raced, but this is a byproduct of the way whiteness presents itself and is understood as un-raced, the unmarked norm from which all other races deviate.

object-based fetishism of the foodie world" (2). She offers "critical eating studies" as an approach that refocuses analysis and thought on the how of eating and away from the what of eating (Tompkins 2). The framework that Tompkins models successfully demonstrates how:

> "Reading *orificially*, critical eating studies theorizes a flexible and circular relation between self and the social world in order to imagine a dialogic in which we – reader and text, self and other, animal and human – recognize our bodies as vulnerable to each other in ways that are terrible – that is, full of terror – and, at other times, politically productive." (3)

Thus, Tompkins's work asks us to consider the ways critical eating studies reorients our attention to the ways eating constructs subjecthood and identity performance and, as I posit, facilitates and complicates racial assignment and identification, particularly for Ashkenazi Jewish communities in the US after 1945.

In this dissertation, I embrace and use Tompkins' notion of critical eating studies, as opposed to a more traditional food studies approach, to shape and guide my approach because critical eating studies leaves space for tensions and conflict. Moreover, by examining eating, we can better understand how conception and constructions of race operate in the performance of eating. The shift to critical eating studies allows for more nuanced and complicated reading. Eating has been so overtly and popularly linked to constructions of Ashkenazi Jewish ethnoracial assignment and identification within the US, that to delve into the topic at any length, calls us to wrestle with stereotypical representations of Jews as voracious eaters, over eaters. The US popular imaginary is steeped in the image of an always eating Jew.

In framing her proposed shift to a focused analysis of eating, Tompkins notes, "the colloquial nature of eating, its everydayness, and the biological imperative that makes eating a

necessity often render it invisible as a highly discursive as well as material practice" (185). She posits that eating has escaped larger critical conversations because of the ubiquity of the act. I argue that this is also true of representations of Jews eating. In post WWII film, television, and literature, representations of Jews eating are prominent, so "everyday," to borrow Tompkins' term, that they have historically escaped critical attention.[6] When such images do garner representation, analysis often either emphasizes the important role of food culture in contemporary constructions of Jewishness or the stereotypical nature of these representations. But if we are to take seriously Tomkins' model of critical eating studies, we need to reassess these images from the lens of critical eating studies and consider why images of Jews as voracious eats seems to peak in the years after WWII. I argue that in the years after WWII, eating becomes a useful practice by which non-Jews can identify, and sometimes identify with, Jews. If Americans were eager to distance themselves from the logic of the Nazi's that posited that a Jew might be known and identified by sight and by blood, a new racial logic appears in its place, one that instead suggests that a Jew might be known by their eating.[7] This is just one example of the cultural weight eating bears when we talk about representations of Jews eating.

The relatively new framework of critical eating studies also offers us new and better ways of accounting for hunger and starvation. Too often, food studies treats the inability to eat or to eat enough among Jews as historical realities but not contemporary realities. In the study of Jewish American food ways, hunger is treated as a historical event without contemporary occurrence or reverberations. Not eating, disgust, and absence need to be included as scholars

[6] An extremely brief list of only television and film representations includes: *East and West*, *Everything Is Illuminated*, *Transparent*, *The Nanny*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Seinfeld*, *Even Stevens*, *Mad about You*, *Will and Grace*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Maron*, *Numb3rs*, *New Girl*, *The Goldbergs* (2018), *The Goldbergs* (1955) *Rhoda*, *Hunters* (2020), *Shiva Baby*, *The Nanny*, *Fleishman Is in Trouble*, *My Unorthodox Life*, *Transparent*, *A Serious Man*, *The Sarah Silverman Program*, *The Reluctant Traveler*, and many, many more.

[7] This of course is a racial/racist logic that finds its roots in the US and includes the history of Nazi Germany drawing inspiration and policy models from the US.

triangulate the meanings of eating, especially when considering food ways and communities who have had starvation weaponized against them. If we are focusing on the "how" of eating, as opposed to the "what," not eating (both intentional and unintentional) need to be incorporated.[8] The is particularly important when examining a community that has had food insecurity weaponized against it. While critical eating studies offers us a way to consider and read eating as inextricably tied to the performance of identity, we must also attend to the possibility that not eating functions similarly. Refusing to eat or not being able to eat are as crucial to the construction and representation of identity that they must be considered in connection.

Confronting images of Jews who refuse to eat requires us to first examine what is imagined by dominant western society to be the primary way that Jews refuse to eat, kosher. Conceptions of Jewish eating are often over-simplified by non-Jews to the topic of what "Jews cannot eat." My overly broad and simplistic phrasing is, in this case, intentional; it gestures to the notion that Jews are restrictive, abundant eaters. The imagined Jewish eater is restricted by the laws of kosher in ways that emphasize and reinforce the perception of Jewish communities as provincial, unsophisticated, and antiquated. At the same time, this imagined eater is perceived to overindulge within the limitations of *kashrut*. Attempts to define Jewish eating reveal the complex and often seemingly contradictory nature of Jewishness as a category. When I begin to talk with people about what eating practices signify Jewish eating, *kashrut* immediately comes into conversation. In the minds of many non-Jews and scholars with little to no training in Jewish

[8] Food insecurity and starvation are popular, but underexamined topics in Jewish literature. Some examples of texts that highlight starvation and hunger include such works includes Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Hunger* (1892), Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912), Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), Anzia Yezierska's *Hungry Hearts* (1920) and *The Bread Givers* (1925), Itzok Isaac Granich *Jews without Money* (1930), Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* (1959), Will Eisner's *The Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (1978), Art Spiegelman's *Maus I* and *Maus II* (1980), Aline Kominsky-Crumb's *Love that Bunch* (1990), Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000), Leela Corman's *Unterzakhn* (2012) among others.

literature or culture, kosher eating is the primary feature of Jewish eating. In addition, there seems to be a fairly limited notion of what kosher means. These same people position non-kosher foods as the primary marker of what it means to eat Jewish; rather than describing Jewish eating by what it allows, they describe this conception of Jewish eating by the avoidance of particular foods with specific attention to pork. This description not only misrepresents the complexities of the laws governing kashrut, which include methods of slaughter, food preparation, and eating, but also inaccurately frames food restriction as a Jewish value in ways that obscure Jewish ways of theorizing food and eating. *Kashrut* is one possible way to eat Jewish, but, as I have demonstrated, Jewish eating practices are more dynamic and varied than this simple conception.

Jewish eating can include an adherence to the laws of *kashrut*, but there is individual and group variation within this practice that make it far less uniform and static than an outsider might first conceive.[9] For example, some Jews combine vegetarianism with *kashrut* and avoid meat, including treyf meat, entirely. However, some who keep kosher will be quick to point out that eating meat, so long as it is kosher, is actually encouraged especially on Shabbat and holidays. In her memoire, *Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey to Traditional Rabbinic Ordination*, Haviva Ner-David recalls a moment of slight rebellion when she melted cheese onto a piece of turkey, a combination that is prohibited by the exegetical interpretations of the laws of kashrut but not prohibited by the laws themselves.[10] In addition, some people who keep kosher choose to

[9] The contemporary laws of *kashrut* originate from passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These passages were debated and interpreted, and those interpretations were set down in the Mishna and the Talmud. These interpretations were further detailed and elaborated in the late rabbinic period. Importantly, this process of scaffolded interpretation is not viewed by members of the community as a corruption of the original text.

[10] When two interpretations of Jewish law diverge, the tendency is to embrace the stricter interpretation. This is known as *khumra*: the practice of placing a fence around the Torah to protect the laws and to ensure the Jewish practices do not skirt dangerously near any prohibited practices. The laws of *kashrut* prohibit the mixing of meat and dairy, and because of *khumra*, poultry is interpreted as being close enough to meat to warrant avoiding combining it with dairy. However, the letter of the law (in the Torah) does not expressly prohibit the mixing of dairy and poultry. Therefore, Ner-David transgresses not the original prohibition but the stricter interpretation of the prohibition.

only eat out at kosher certified restaurants while others eat at non-kosher restaurants.[11] What it means to keep kosher varies widely and depends greatly upon the particular position of the adherent. Beyond eating in accordance with the laws of *kashrut*, Jewish eating has historically been associated with eating in particular kinds of Chinese restaurants in America continuing into the present. Jewish eating must be more broadly conceived as the practices and conditions of eating while Jewish. What does it mean to eat Jewish? The answer is as complicated and as simple as "Who is a Jew?" The simplest answer is: Anyone who claims Jewishness.[12] The complicated answer: Matrilineal, Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, Sephardic Jews, Black Jews, Jews of Color, Jewish converts, religiously Jewish, culturally Jewish, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and formerly religious. But then, things get more complicated. The question is also time in which the question is asked; when we ask, "who is a Jew?" influences the answer. Take for example shifting notions about the Jewishness of children born to interfaith parents. Or to be even more specific, interfaith families in which the person who gives birth to the children is not Jewish. We must also consider who we ask. Rabbis from different branches, say Orthodox and Reform, would likely have very different answers about the Jewishness of those children. The popular dictum among many Jews on the political and social left is that anyone who identifies as a Jew is a Jew. The statement, meant as a resistance to the gatekeeping of some more conservative strains of thought, is well intentioned in its efforts at inclusivity. Therefore, there can be no single definition of what it means to eat Jewish because there is no single definition of what it means to be Jewish. We must expand the notion of what it means to

[11] Because *kashrut* also includes laws governing how food should be prepared, some people who keep kosher choose to avoid eating at non-kosher certified restaurants because, even if they order a meal that does not in its ingredients violate the laws of *kashrut*, they cannot verify that it has been prepared so as to make the food kosher.
[12] Even this "simple" answer has been complicated by people, like Republican Representative George Santos who falsely claimed to be Jewish.

eat Jewish, paradoxically, by making the answer seem simple; however, this simplicity captures the complexity of the question, "Who is a Jew?" Jewish eating is eating while Jewish. Because eating is a practice and performance, the conception of what Jewish eating entails considers time and place.

To read Jewish eating is to attend to a set of shifting, ambivalent, often coded, signs with always at least three layers of meaning: The meaning that the Jewish eater assigns, the meaning that the observer assigns, and the meaning the Jewish eater assumes the observer assigns. When one resides in the normalized center and views Judaism and Jewishness as peripheral, it is easy to view Jewish eating as quaint, strange, obsessed with purity and restriction. Such ideas are products of white-supremacy and Christian-supremacy which center white, Christian experiences, ensconcing these practices as the unexamined, "universal" norm. By extension, the restrictions that the larger white, Christian culture of the US places around eating often go unexamined.[13] This is in part, why Jewish eating, and the eating practices of other marginalized communities is first conceived as difference, deviation, restriction, and abjection. However, white practices of eating also incorporate restriction and taboo. For example, white eating places taboos around eating various animals, for example guinea pigs. White eating also considers particular animal parts taboo. For example, it is considered normal to eat many parts of a chicken, but chicken feet are still largely taboo among white western eaters.

However, when taken to its conclusion, there is no practice of eating white enough to build sustainable Jewish whiteness. In fact, I argue that, taken to its conclusion, there is no place

[13] Some examples of normalized food restrictions are fasting for lent and eating fish on Fridays while restricting all other types of meat. The practice of Catholics and some other Christian sects to restrict meals on Friday to include fish as the only source of meat has become so normalized that McDonalds introduced the Filet-o-Fish to meet the needs of a restricting clientele; in addition, Chick-fil-a also markets and sells a fish alternative during the Lenten period. Both chains experience a spike in sales on Fridays occurring during Lent (Brazinski 35).

for Jews within white supremacy except as scapegoats, and so Jewish destruction and Jewish self-destruction are projects of whiteness. Jewishness is incompatible with whiteness because of its position as an ethnoracial identity, a religion, and a culture. Jonathan Freedman describes Jewishness as assimilating rather than assimilated. Jewishness as an identity marker possesses an incredible amount of flexibility, easily incorporating other elements. This is borne out by a history that has framed Jewishness in-between and mutable. Admission into whiteness requires an investment in the notion of a homogenous whiteness that flattens difference. Moreover, whiteness demands assimilation; whiteness and the projects of white supremacy are necessarily antithetical to the assimilative, dynamic nature of Jewishness because whiteness, as it is conceived, has no way to incorporate flexible, nuanced, and dynamic identities. However, this is not to say that Jews have not or cannot participate in the projects of whiteness and uphold white supremacy.[14] Those Jews with the most access to whiteness have historically leveraged this access against Black communities, communities of color, and Indigenous communities to reap the benefits of whiteness and settler colonialism.[15]

Chapter Overview

In chapter 1, I use Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar*, to explain how in the post WWII US, the performance of race was inextricably tied to the performance of eating for those Jews with the most access to whiteness. An examination of eating reveals the ways Jews with aspirations to

[14] An example exists in the construction and selling practices of Levittown. Levitt & Sons was responsible for the construction of the planned community. Though William Levitt was Jewish, he openly resisted the selling of houses to Black families. He and his sons also initially refused to sell houses to Jewish families, but later relented. Levitt's Jewishness provided a screen for his discriminatory practices. For more, consult *Strangers & Neighbors: Relations between Blacks & Jews in the United States*.

[15] The violences done to BIPOC communities and individuals includes violences done to Jewish BIPOC communities and individuals. But because of Ashkenazi normativity (the centering and over representation of Ashkenazi Jews), Jewish BIPOC communities are often obscured when we talk about the violences of white supremacy.

whiteness ate in particular ways that aligned them with that desired whiteness. Eating also offers a way to see and explore the limitations of Jewish whiteness in this period. In chapter 2, I turn the lens on Rosen's *Eve's Apple* and the televisions series *The Nanny* to explore and explain how refusing to eat is raced as a white practice. The particular history of eating disorders creates cultural understandings of these diseases as being linked to Christian fasting practices. Because of the ways doctors and scholars linked miraculous fasting Christian women to the development of turn of the century anorexia nervosa, modern anorexia nervosa still conjures associations to Christian practices and populations. Through the reactions of others to Jewish women with eating disorders, we can see the anxiety about Jewish ethnoracial assignment that persists into the 1990s. In the third and final chapter, I focus my analysis on Broder's *Milk Fed* to explore how the thin body is associated with whiteness. These texts help me to illustrate the continually sifting relationship between whiteness and Jewishness. Additionally, these texts help to further develop and extend an examination of Jewish women refusing to eat. Even with the relatively secure privileges of whiteness that some Jews experience, other kinds of difference threaten their access to whiteness. However, this novel also offers a method of resistance that is rooted in the Jewish gut, both literal and figurative, and in Jewish intuition. Broder's noel offers another touch point, allowing us to examine the further development of the relationship between Jewishness and whiteness. Moreover, *Milk Fed* helps to reveal how homophobia and white supremacy have both, and in conjunction, been weaponized against Jewish communities. The connections between homophobia and whiteness further complicate the shifting relationship between Jewishness and whiteness.

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Chapter 1: Eating (with) the Racial Other

Central to changing notions of Jewishness after WWII in the US was the related question of the racial and/or ethnoracial status of Ashkenazi Jews. Because eating is a performance, and as I establish a performance of race, it is culturally invested with even higher stakes in moments of potential transition. Early in Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955), Arnold Morgenstern voices his concerns to his wife, Rose, about their daughter's cast of suiters and her increasing worldliness. Arnold comments:

> "Well, I don't like these Manhattan boys […] They're too smart. They're cold fish. I talk to them, and suddenly I remember I've got an accent. I can hear it. After thirty years they make me feel like a greenhorn." Marjorie's father has only a slight accent, and the mother had virtually none, yet neither sounded native-born, and they knew they never would. […] "She told me about sex yesterday afternoon […] Studied it in Hygiene, she says. She knows the whole business like a doctor. She knows a lot more than I do." (Wouk 12)

Arnold's tone transitions from concern about the generational differences between Marjorie's suiters (and by extension Marjorie) and himself to disgust when he comments on exactly how much Marjorie knows about the biology of reproduction. His comments bely incredulity when he emphasizes that Marjorie claims to have learned this in school. The unstated alternative that prompts Arnold's disgust and dismay is that she might have learned at least some of this knowledge from first-hand experience. Arnold Morgenstern muses, "Maybe she knows too much. […] she never goes to temple except to dance, she's forgotten any Hebrew she ever knew, and if she doesn't eat bacon, she eats shrimp cocktails, I'll bet a hundred dollars on that" (Wouk 12). Arnold's comments hint at the intimate cultural connections between changing senses of group belonging and identity, sex, and eating. His disgust is not directed at individual foods that

are perceived to be either physically or ritually unclean and unfit for consumption, but rather at those practices that demonstrate Marjorie's worldliness: dating assimilated Jews, knowing about boys, and eating treyf.[16] Marjorie's troubling eating practices are placed in contention with what her father perceives as inadequate engagement with Jewish tradition paired with a worldliness. In this moment, what Marjorie eats, or is even likely to eat, stands in for other more momentous generational shifts in this Jewish family. For Arthur, his daughter's eating habits demonstrate the extent to which she has assimilated into the dominant, non-kosher culture. Rose's response, though brief, suggests that in America, even Jews might eat shrimp cocktail, if not pork. The events of the novel take place between the years of 1933 and 1954, and their conversation about what their daughter eats and knows speaks to a larger cultural contestation about what it means to be Jewish in the United States both during and after WWII. Complicating this is the additional question: What does it mean to be Jewish and white in the United States in this period?

In the above scene, food, or more accurately eating, is revealed to encompass meanings of group belonging and identity; eating becomes the object of anxiety because by eating a person might be known. Arnold's comments about his daughter's diet begin to illustrate that non-kosher foods only become worrisome when Marjorie eats them. The food material doesn't threaten; the consumption is what is threatening. This is visible in Arnold's focus on Marjorie as a consumer of inappropriate foods. He explicitly worries about her eating practices and what they signify. In this scene, the prospect of Marjorie eating non-kosher foods is a result of her disconcerting worldliness. As her father comments, "Maybe she knows too much," he also suspects that she

[16] Treyf is here and elsewhere used synonymously with the term non-kosher to describe foods that are not prepared in accordance with the laws of *kashrut* or are not permitted at all. Treyf (טרייף) is a Yiddish term and may be alternatively spelled treif, tref, or trayf. Its Hebrew root is טָרַף, meaning to tear or rend, and the term is often used to describe the tearing of animal flesh.

eats too much.[17] Here, knowing and eating too wide a variety of potentially dangerous and corrupting materials are inextricably linked. This begins to highlight the relationship between eating and knowing, eating and being known.

While there is a wealth of scholarship about *Marjorie Morningstar*, the majority of it focuses on a range of topics. While some scholars focus primarily on Wouk, his lack of recognition during his lifetime, and his political leanings, other focus on *Marjorie Morningstar*'s place in relationship to other Jewish American texts, especially Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959). This scholarly work tends to focus on how the character of Marjorie relates to other images of Jewish American women, especially depictions of Jewish American mothers and their daughters. Very few of this work focuses on the role of race and the role of eating in the novel.

Any historical examination of Jewishness must examine and acknowledge the difficulty of defining the term. This is particularly true of Jewishness in the diaspora of the U.S. where Jewishness must be understood by a host of ever-developing meanings. In this way, a seemingly simple question like: "Who is a Jew?" can only lead to further questions: What measures will we use to answer the question? Who developed those criteria? Who asks the question? Who is answering? When is the question asked? The relationship between eating and representing is placed under additional strain by competing pressures to maintain Jewish cultural practices and ethnoracial identity as well as to blend into dominant notions of whiteness. This strain can be attributed, in part to the tensions that can exist in the space between ethnoracial identification and ethnoracial assignment. The result is a kind of double sight, or as Du Bois terms it in *The Souls of Black Folks a* double consciousness, in which a subjects see themselves through the eyes of

[17] Here, Mr. Morgenstern's concern about his daughter's eating practices is not focused on the amount of food that she eats, but that she eats too many foods restricted by the laws of *kashrut*.

another. The result is a kind of internalized surveillance that forces a subject to read and understand the self from an interior and exterior position. As a result, the question "Who is a Jew?" forces us to also ask, "Who is read as a Jew? And who does that reading?" The prospect of either maintaining difference or obscuring it is further complicated by both fluctuating and contested ideas about the ethnoracial position of Jews as well as a tendency to read Jewishness as representative of an indeterminate identity, a third state that exists between the white/Black dichotomy that dominates many of the conceptions of race within the US.[18] In summation, to think critically about the histories of Jewishness and all of its variations requires us to hold a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory and mutually exclusive meanings and perspectives at once.

Herman Wouk's novel *Marjorie Morningstar* illustrates how the performance of eating becomes inextricably tied to the performance of race. Eating becomes a way Jewish characters can express their ambitions for inclusion in whiteness as well as a way to explore the limitations of Jewish whiteness. The novel focuses on Marjorie Morgenstern, a young, Jewish woman who dreams of a life as a professional actress with the stage name Marjorie Morningstar. The narrative chronicles her attempts to become an actress and her formative romantic relationships. The novel is punctuated by scenes of eating; some of these are specifically Jewish events like the dinner at her brother's bar mitzva and a Passover Seder. However, Marjorie's eating also takes her to a once-fashionable hotel that used to have an exclusively white clientele but now caters to Jews, a "fiesta" in the Catskills that features staff in brown-face, and a Chinese restaurant. These scenes of eating are often tinged with anxiety, nostalgia, disgust, repulsion, attraction, shame,

[18] For more on this topic see Jonathan Freedman's *Klezmer America: Jewishness, Ethnicity, Modernity* and Lori Harrison-Kahan's "Passing for White, Passing for Jewish: Mixed Race Identity in Danzy Senna and Rebecca Walker."

and joy. Eating is an act by which characters express their aspirations and discover their limitations. Each meal is a knot of complications. The novel makes clear the stakes of eating especially for Jews, like Marjorie, with aspirations to whiteness and the increased protections and privileges it provides. These representations of eating work together to articulate how eating, as a social process, forms group and individual identity. Eating is revealed as a mechanism by which those members of "off-white" Jewish communities might nudge themselves away from racial alterity, nearer to a homogenous whiteness. Through desire and disgust the eater aligns oneself with certain foods, spaces, practices, materials, and people. At a time when American Jewish communities were beginning the transition into whiteness, the stakes of eating were particularly high because certain eating practices could align the eater with whiteness or racial alterity. The novel represents the eating practices of different groups as being more and less aligned with whiteness.

Model Minorities and Alimentary Discomfort

The racial stakes of eating as a performative act are illustrated when Marjorie is faced with the prospect of eating a meal at a Chinese restaurant. Marjorie expresses disgust at both the material that arrives on her plate as well as the eating habits and bodies of the other diners; her disgust aligns her with a sense of whiteness. At the time of the novel's events as well as its publications, Chinese restaurants were imagined as sights of a complicated and changing sense of Jewishness.[19] As I detail later, eating Chinese food was seen, and is often still seen, as a way for Jews, particularly Ashkenazi Jews living in New York, to engage and affirm a sense of

[19] Contemporary Jewish identity is still often signified through embracing Chinese cuisine and restaurants. A brief list of texts that use "eating Chinese" as a way to signify Jewishness includes the *Saturday Night Live* digital short "Christmastime for the Jews," *The Nanny*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Seinfeld*, and many more. In a reworking of the stereotype, Rebecca, the Jewish protagonist of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, cooks dinuguan, a rich stew, to impress her ex-boyfriend's Filipino parents at thanksgiving.

Jewishness that was cosmopolitan while still comfortable, exotic but accessible. As Marjorie is preparing for her role in *The Mikado*, she is befriended by Marsha Zelenko, the play's costumer (Wouk 57)[20]. While Marjorie comes from an observant Jewish family with roots in Eastern European Jewish communities, Marsha's ethnoracial origins are less clear. She neither describes herself nor her family as religiously Jewish, but, using the racial logic of the Nazis, Marsha states, "Hitler would call [her] a Jew" (Wouk 61). Marsha convinces Marjorie to eat with her after rehearsal one evening. Despite Marjorie's protests that she is expected home for dinner, the two go to Mi Fong's Jade Garden. Eating draws Marjorie's attention and disgust. In this scene, we can clearly see her aspirations toward whiteness through these feelings of disgust she directs at the food and diners. Practices of eating are not uniformly racialized; when a practice/food is "unmarked," assigned no race, it has been cast as white. Marjorie's disgust and discomfort are directed at the restaurant, its patrons and the foods they eat; moreover, through her disgust, we can see how the eating done in Mi Fong's Jade Garden is intimately tied to constructions of race in America. At the heart of Marjorie's disgust is the troubling fear that she is navigating a precarious ethnoracial position that teeters between racial alterity and whiteness.

Images of Jews eating Chinese food are a common stereotype, and their abundance in American culture after 1945 represents a complicated history that illustrates some of the ways racial conceptions of Jewishness have changed. In the article, "Identity Takeout: How American Jews Made Chinese Food Their Ethnic Cuisine" Hanna Miller attempts to trace the historical interactions of Jewish communities with Chinese food in the US in order to discover how a taste for Chinese food became an "integral component of Jewishness" (430). Invoking Lenny Bruce's

[20] *The Mikado* (1885) is an opera in the opera buffa style created by W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. The farcical plot attempts to critique British politics veiled by the opera's setting in a fictional Japanese town. *The Mikado* has received criticism for its employment of orientalist stereotypes as well as its treatment of Black people.

joke in which he categorizes the world into that which is Jewish and that which is goyish and concludes that Chinese is Jewish, Miller argues, "'eating Chinese' has become a ritualized element of the ongoing acculturation process that affirms traditional values while embracing new ones. It repackages familiar Jewish sensibilities in an exotic and appealing form" (430). Miller spends the majority of the article framing "eating Chinese" as an affirmation of Jewishness. I do not agree that eating Chinese food reaffirmed traditional conceptions of Jewishness as Miller argues. Her reading of what it means to be Jewish and eat Chinese food flattens both Jewish and Chinese identities and cultures. The result is the further conflation of Chinese and Jewish communities in the US that fails to move beyond conceptions of Asian and Jewish communities as model minorities. Miller's article is not unique among scholarship about Jews and Chinese food. In "New York Jews and Chinese Food: The Social Construction of an Ethnic Pattern," (1992) Gaye Tuchman and Harry G. Levine aim to explore the "internal logic of ethnic cultural invention" (383). To illustrate these operations, they turn to Jewish communities in New York who embrace eating Chinese food, calling it a case of "an American ethnic group that has incorporated into its culture an utterly alien practice – something completely beyond the bounds of its traditional culture" (Tuchman 383).

Eating does not have a static meaning and must always be examined in its historical and cultural context. The types of eating that Miller describes represent complex navigations of racial identities. In Miller's discussion of the 1930s, she briefly mentions, "it is also possible that Jews feasting in Chinese restaurants were not recognized by the staff as Jews: they were merely white, like so many other Americans. Eating Chinese offered the opportunity to temporarily shake off one's Jewish identity" (458). Miller's aside is accompanied by a brief reference to Karen Brodkin's *How Jews Became White Folks*. Like Miller, Tuchman and Levine are tantalizingly

close to discussing the racial implications of "eating Chinese" for Jewish communities. They note that for some Jewish interviewees, "eating Chinese food actually has such a strong association with Jewishness that they avoided Chinese restaurants" (14). For Jewish communities facing the prospect of possible transition to whiteness, eating Chinese food in Chinese spaces allowed Jews a dizzyingly large array of possibilities for racial assignment and identification. Marjorie and Marsha have divergent responses to the Chinese restaurant and food, reminding the reader that there is no universal Jewish experience, nor is there a universal experience of being a Jew eating Chinese food especially when the stakes of racial assignment and identification are at play.

The scene at Mi Fong's Jade Garden calls us to consider the construction of race in America with its emphasis on off-white eatable material. Though Marjorie is relieved she had not "committed herself to eat" at the restaurant, Marsha convinces her to share a meal as long as they can order dishes without pork. When their meal comes, it seems to Marjorie to be "a white soup – dirty white. She had an ingrained dislike of white soup. There were things floating in it, some gelatinous, some shredded, some fleshy-looking" (Wouk 62). While she likes the flavor, she cannot stomach the texture, and rejects the food by spitting it into her napkin and pushing the dish away. At first, the soup appears white; however, this description is quickly followed with another. The soup might be white, but it is "dirty white." The description of the soup as "dirty white" is by no means racially neutral. Rather, we should read this moment in the context of a long history of racialized rhetoric of cleanliness in which communities of color and non-white communities were and are figured as both in need of cleaning and biologically fit for dirty work. The tautological nature of this logic reinforces itself and almost indefinitely works to keep racialized and off-white communities segregated from whiteness. Thus, the "dirty white" soup

betrays itself as a racial contaminant. Marjorie's inability to stomach the "dirty white" soup leads her to spit it out into a napkin.

The scene in Mi Fong's Jade Garden troublingly suggests that the danger of the moment stems from a kind of complicated and confused sense of Whiteness. When Marsha places their order, asking for "Absolutely no pork," adhering to Marjorie's request that they avoid pork entirely (Wouk 61). However, once they begin to teat, Marjorie is concerned that she has just taken a bite of pork. Though Marjorie is certain that she has just eaten pork, she asks, "'Isn't that meat sort of white for lamb?' said Marjorie, screwing up her face and her nose at the dish" (Wouk 63). Marjorie identifies the material because it retains its essential "pork-ness."

Mi Fong assures Marjorie that the dish before her is fine to eat and is made with Chinese white lamb. The narrator states:

> Not wanting to insult Marsha by seeming to caller her a liar, Marjorie made a hearty show of enjoying the dish, whatever it was; she scooped the rice from under the meat and ate that. But the light was dim and her instruments were greasy for such delicate work. She soon found herself chewing a large piece of rubbery meat. She went into a coughing fit, got rid of it in her handkerchief, and pushed the food around on her plate without eating anymore. (Wouk 63).

The scene is rich with productive confusion, offering multiple plausible readings. The scene asks if the question of whiteness is a linguistic, semantic, cultural, or material one. If there is a possibility that white Chinese lamb does exist, where does its whiteness lie? Any whiteness that the lamb might possess is contested when Marjorie questions the color of the meat. Here, questions about the mutable nature of whiteness are played out in small scale. When the meat is

presented as white lamb, Marjorie asks if it isn't a little too white to be lamb, contesting the extent to which the lamb can be accepted as white.

Like whiteness, this scene illustrates the ways Jewishness is confused and contested. Mi Fong confirms her request, saying, "No Polk. Sure thing. Polk too sensitive, sure?" (Wouk 61). It is unclear how Mi Fong reads Marjorie's racial position. For Jewish American communities, particularly those living in New York, Chinese restaurants were places where the familiar and foreign cuisine met. While the dishes served in Chinese restaurants in America followed some of the laws of *kashrut*, Chinese restaurants were hardly places Jews went for kosher food. Instead, some Jews who frequented Chinese restaurants were drawn to the idea of "safe treyf" (Tuchman 7).[21] Because the methods of preparation, including finely chopping, deemphasized the presence of any non-kosher ingredients, Jews eager to cultivate a worldly and cosmopolitan identity embraced the food they found in Chinese restaurants because it allowed them to push against "the orthodoxies of traditional Eastern European Judaism" and avoid ingrained feelings of repulsion that might "undermine their ability to rebel" (Tuchman 7). Another factor that drew Jewish communities to Chinese restaurants was anti-Chinese racism and antisemitism. In Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), Portnoy observes:

> Yes, the only people in the world whom it seems to me the Jews are not afraid of are the Chinese. Because one, the way they speak English makes my father sound like Lord Chesterfield; two, the insides of their heads are just so much fried rice anyway; and three,

[21] In their discussion of Chinese restaurants and "safe treyf," Tuchman and Levine relate the story of a man who experienced a headache when he took a bite of what he though was pork; however, the headache disappeared when he swallowed the mouthful (7). They also include an anecdote that reads like a Henny Youngman joke in which a woman recalls that her aunt kept kosher by having three sets of dishes: "one set for dairy, another for meat meals, […] and paper plates and plastic cutlery exclusively for take-out Chinese food" (Tuchman 7).

> to them we are not Jews but white and maybe even Anglo Saxon. No wonder they can't intimidate us. To them we're just some big-nosed variety of WASP. (90)

As Portnoy's comment demonstrates, Chinese restaurants were places where Jews could engage in anti-Chinese racism as well as feel that they were being read as white.[22] Because of this history, it is unclear if Wouk imagines Mi Fong to read Marjorie as a Jewish woman who is trying and failing to eat non-kosher food or as a white woman. Here, whiteness serves to confuse the moment and point to an impossible, ungrammatical[23] state of being by creating a moment in which lamb is pork and a Jewish woman is, perhaps, white. Eating, more than other actions or moments, offers a moment of potential transition.

Marjorie describes her adherence to some parts of *Kashrut*[24] as habit rather than belief. When Marjorie is having breakfast with a group of friends, the group is made up of wealthy non-Jews and assimilated Jews, a blond girl named Vera mocks her because she is the only person to not order bacon. Marjorie "was convinced that the Jewish food prohibitions were mere primitive taboos, but her upbringing was stronger than logic" (Wouk 21). The narrator continues, "once or twice she had tried to eat bacon and had failed; the red and yellow stripes made her gorge rise" (Wouk 21). Later, Marjorie resolves to "practice eating bacon sometime by herself" (Wouk 21). Here Marjorie's adherence to the laws of *Kashrut* marks her as more Jewish than her assimilated Jewish friends, and the revulsion she experiences is framed as a feeling that limits her access to

[22] The scholarship on Jews eating Chinese food focuses mainly of the perception of Jewish dinners. So, while we can safely conclude that Jews often *felt* they were being read as white, it is unclear if their assessments were in line with those of the staff and proprietors of the restaurants.

[23] Here I borrow the term of Tom Boellstroff's article, "Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia." Boellstroff uses the term to mean refer to incommensurate states of being or identities that are assumed to exclude one another.

[24] The term *kashrut* may be used to refer to is most commonly laws governing the foods Jews are permitted to consume as well as the methods of preparation and consumption. The laws stem primarily from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, but are further developed in the Mishna, Talmud, and later rabbinical literature. The term *kashrut* differs from kosher in that *kashrut* is the set of laws while kosher refers to those foods or items used in the preparation or serving of food that meet those laws.

belonging within this group. Marjorie understands the revulsion that marks her as Jewish and off-white as something to be surmounted if she is to pass as white. This moment should be read in conversation with her refusal to eat pork in the Chinese restaurant. While Marjorie wants to learn to eat pork, the pork she encounters in the Chinese restaurant is complicated with unwanted racial meanings. What Marjorie more accurately cannot stomach is the prospect that the way she is raced and read is out of her control. So, while eating the pork offers her a chance to be read as white, it also presents the more threatening chance that she will be read as Jewish. In a moment of potential racial transition, the stakes of what one eats are particularly high. While the eatable material matter, the context is inextricable from the meanings of the food.

Marsha's racial position throughout the novel also begins to suggest both the desire for whiteness and its impossibility for some Jews. In many ways, Marsha is figured as the antithesis of Marjorie. Where Marjorie is posh, slim, and elegant, Marsha is loud, large, and "exotic" (Wouk 64). At the restaurant, the two have a conversation about Jewishness and eating. They begin by using kosher as a way to talk about Jewishness. Marsha asks Marjorie, "You're kosher, aren't you?" to which Marjorie replies, "Well hardly. My folks are. But pork and shellfish – it's just the idea, it makes no sense" (Wouk 61). Marjorie in turn asks Marsha, "Aren't you Jewish?" (Wouk 61). Marsha's replay highlights the peculiarity of her subject position "Well now, strangely enough, I don't know. My father's a crusading atheist. My mother doesn't know what she is, she grew up in France as an orphan. I guess Hitler would call me a Jew, all right" (Wouk 61). Marsha represents multiple kinds of alterity. She doesn't go so far as to identify herself as belonging to a Jewish community or faith tradition, and in this way, she is outside of Jewishness. However, she also remarks that Hitler and Nazi racial logic would also place her in the position of alterity occupied by Jews. Marsha's position is one of ambiguity. The scene in the Chinese

restaurant is permeated with anxiety because of the ambiguity surrounding the ethnoracial positions open to Marjorie and Marsha. Over the course of the meal, the women engage in a conversation about different ways to be Jewish in the US. In this space where they might be read as either white or Jewish, they describe their senses of racial identification, often in ways that minimize and qualify their attachments to traditional conceptions of Jewishness.

In this scene, the space of the Chinese restaurant is used to represent a kind of racial transgression into a more explicitly racially marked Jewish identity for Marjorie who aspires to a level of whiteness not yet commonly granted to Ashkenazi Jews in the U.S. The blatantly racist treatment of the space and the characters that populate it reveals an intense anxiety about a kind of racial contamination – One who is transitionally or provisionally white might be particularly susceptible to non-white, racial alterity. What Wouk's novel begins to illustrate is that food is socially invested with meaning; this meaning includes conceptions of race. Food, by entering the body, represents a potent material that, when introduced to the stomach, that permeable border where foreign material is transmuted into the body, may influence the body and the self. Eating is bound-up with anxiety because it represents the process by which "foreign matter," to use Wouk's terminology, is introduced to the semi-permeable boundary between the body and the world, the stomach. When Marjorie and Marsha enter the Chinese restaurant, they enter a space and moment of racial ambiguity. How they will be read by the other patrons, by Mi Fong, by each other is indeterminant. However, as they eat, or refuse to eat, Marjorie makes clear her desire to align herself with the projects of whiteness by refusing to eat certain foods, expressing disgust, and by minimizing her relationship to keeping kosher. We can read Marjorie's discomfort and active disgust as connected to her unstated desire to achieve a more secure level of whiteness.

Just as eating studies must think about eating as a social process that is readable, the focus on eating foregrounds the actors and their bodies in a way that food studies does not always do. Thus, representations of bodies, the perceived readable sites and the imagined evidence of eating, are connected to representations of eating. The cultural logic suggests that the body is another site where one's eating practices might be made visible. So, as eating practices bear social connections to perceptions of gluttony, transgression, and race, so too do bodies. Wouk's text also begins to help us understand the ways ideas about weight and fat bodies acquire a racial dimension when considered with the racial schema of America. Because eating can only happen in the presence of a body, the body must be considered seriously as a site of meaning in critical eating studies.

Within the spectrum of racialized eating practices, the fat Jewish body is depicted as a less white eater. The descriptions of Marjorie's appetites and body stand in stark contrast to Marsha's. Marjorie's earliest interaction with food in the novel is her resistance to eating breakfast before riding.[25] Later, she is described as having a "small waist, slender ankles, and quicksilver chatter" (Wouk 15).[26] However, before Marjorie or the audience learn Marsha's name, she is introduced as "a fat girl with thick braided black hair" (Wouk 57). Marsha's appetite is foregrounded by her body and later connected to her love of the food at Mi Fong's restaurant. When Marjorie first resists Marsha's invitation to dinner, Marsha replies, "Oh. Of course. Well, then, come and have coffee and watch me eat until you have to go home" (Wouk 58). Marsha is positioned as the more voracious eater while Marjorie's eating throughout the

[25] Earlier in the novel, Marjorie's mother questions her daughter's breakfast commenting, "Is that all you're having for breakfast? Black coffee? You'll be a nervous wreck by the time you're twenty-one. Have a bun, at least" (Wouk 7).

[26] In a later scene at a Jewish summer camp in the Catskills, Marjorie's adoration for the Jewish but white passing Noel Airman is paired with her own growing sense of her disembodiment.

novel is best described as sporadic and restrictive. She drinks black coffee instead of eating meals and picks at her food when she does eat. However, Marsha speaks of her love for the "figure destroying" food of Mi Fong's (Wouk 59). As their dinner continues, Marsha comments on her own appearance, asking "What can you do for a big fat black-haired slob? Exotic is the word" (Wouk 64) The suggestion here is that Marsha is, unlike Marjorie, not in control of her own body, that she has "destroyed" her body, in part, by the consumption of Chinese food. Marsha's body and its size are explicitly connected to both the Chinese restaurant and what she calls her "exotic" appearance. Here, the eating practices that Marsha engages in and the presumed relationship between her eating and her body work together to depict Marsha as a more explicitly racialized character than Marjorie. Marjorie reads Marsha's body and eating habits as problems to be corrected, reigned in. In this articulation of eating, restrictive eating becomes synonymous with bodily control and self-fashioning. In response to their discussion of Marsha and her appearance, Marjorie thinks, "Given Marsha's face and figure, she thought, she would diet away a lot of weight, cut and thin her hair, underplay the makeup, and dress very severely. That way Marsha might achieve a certain theatrical attractiveness, instead of seeming overblown and frowzy" (Wouk 64). As Marjorie imagines herself in Marsha's body, she develops a plan to transition Marsha from a more explicitly racially marked "exotic" appearance to a less marked "theatrical attractiveness." Fatness becomes a way of signaling racial alterity. The first site that Marjorie imagines refashioning is Marsha's body by dieting. The suggestion is that the size of Marsha's body makes a substantial contribution to her racialization. Marjorie does not imagine that Marsha's Jewishness changes; she only imagines changing some elements of Marsha's physical appearance. Yet, by changing the borders of the Jewish body, Marjorie imagines that she can change how that body is read as a racial subject. The thinner body becomes

aligned with a racially unmarked, white body while the fatter body carried notions of exotic excess. These notions of exotic excess are amplified by the scene's location in the Chinese restaurant which similarly becomes understood by its non-Chinese patrons who, like the fat body, signify a less white, exotic racial alterity. Amid the blurring between the space's Chinese and Jewish connotations, the fatter body is more susceptible to being read as non-white.

Because racialization works through the dual functions of identification and assignments, shifts in the racialization of Ashkenazi communities spark anxiety because racial assignment is largely out of their control. Though Marjorie crafts plans and practices to align herself with dominant notions of whiteness, this scene's focus on fatness is evidence of her anxiety about the perils of being read as not quite white. Susan Bordo beautifully articulates how discourses of "firm," slim bodies relate to ideas of control. She posits, "the ideal here is of a body that is absolutely tight, contained, 'bolted down,' firm: in other words, a body that is protected against eruption from within, whose internal processes are under control" (Bordo 190). Bordo is referring to anxieties about the female body's perceived fickle mutability; however, I want to argue for the extension of her line of thinking to include cultural perceptions about bodies as raced subjects.

The text's emphasis on the fat bodies of the diners within the Chinese restaurant illustrates how the fat body is imagined as a body that fails to perform whiteness through eating. Taking up the premise that the body is the site where eating practices are evidenced, the novel articulates a notion that eating in excess is a less white practice. Marjorie notices a "fat woman with a mustache" using chopsticks to eat meat, "out of a tureen, from which there protruded a big horrible white bone" (Wouk 58-59). Marjorie is disgusted by the food at Mi Fong's but the depictions of this distaste are rooted in the language of racial difference and off-whiteness.

Fatness and appetite are markers of participation in an ethnic identity that is not quite white. Marjorie's disgust reveals her racism and her active investment in courting Jewish whiteness.

What we see is that there is no resting place in the racial transmutation. In this period Jewish whiteness for upwardly mobile Jews with the most access to whiteness is in a constant state of flux and navigation. Part of what this scene illustrates is that Marjorie does not and cannot occupy a fixed position. As Marjorie's fears about the Chinese restaurant reveal, when one invests in a racial schema in which whiteness and blackness are figured as binary opposites, those in the ambiguous middle/in between space experience incredible insecurity. Ways of eating that do not align the ethnoracially transitional subject with whiteness necessarily align one with a racialized "other."

A Trefa Fiesta

In Marjorie's pursuit of a career on the stage, she takes a job as a performer at South Wind, a Jewish summer resort in the Catskills. While there, she begins a tenuous romantic relationship with Noel Airman (née Saul Ehrmann), the camp's theatre director. At the end of the summer season, the camp prepares for its closing party, "Fiesta Day." The camp staff and visitors perform a stereotype of Mexican identity in which Wouk and the campers conflate Mexican and Spanish identities, practices, and traditions. Like the scene in Mi Fong's restaurant, Jewish racism is directed at what is perceived as a more explicitly racialized, non-white community.

Noel Airman stands out from the cast of Jewish characters as among the most assimilated. Despite a manic episode in which he plays with the idea of becoming a Rabbi, he spends a good deal of the novel openly mocking Jewish religious traditions and Marjorie's moderate attachment to them. Even Noel's chosen name emphasizes his level of assimilation.

Noel, more than many of the book's Jewish characters passes as non-Jewish. His ability to pass is so extensive that even some Jews read him as non-Jewish.[27] When Rose Morgenstern, Marjorie's mother, first meets Noel, she remarks, "Noel Airman, eh? That's an interesting name. I didn't catch it before. Well, so you're not Jewish. I didn't think you were" (Wouk 189). For Marjorie's mother, Noel's name serves to confirm her suspicions. Marjorie first questions the importance her mother places on Marjorie dating a Jewish man but corrects her mother. As if to push back against Marjorie's statement, Rose comments, "But *Noel*, […] Noel means Christmas, doesn't it? Nobody calls a Jewish boy Noel. You might as well call a Catholic boy Passover" (Wouk 189-90).

While Noel seems to have one of the more complete racial transformations, he remains known. The descriptions of Noel on "Fiesta Day" emphasize the extent to which he can assume the appearance of a differently raced group. The narrator describes:

> Into the center of the dance floor there leaped a tall figure in yellow, cracking a bull whip. It was Noel Airman, amazingly Mexican-looking in sideburns, mustache, and brown paint; only the deep-set glittering blue eyes identified him. […] 'Buenos días, señoritas, señoras y señores!' Flashing a wild white-toothed grin, he lashed out again with his whip […] With a laugh and a swift rattling announcement in Spanish, he disappeared. (Wouk 201)

[27] It is important to note that Noel's name becomes a point of conversation because the group is discussing his burgeoning career as a composer. Noel deflects praise by commenting that "One hit song doesn't quite make me Irving Berlin" (Wouk 189). Precisely because of the conversation that follows about Noel's name and its connection to Christian culture and practices, it is particularly important to note that he invokes the name of Irving Berlin, born Israel Isidore Beilin. Belin was born in Russia to Jewish parents and best know how composing "White Christmas" (1942). The song was featured in *Holiday Inn* (1942) as well as *White Christmas* (1954). The conversation that characters are having takes place in 1935, but Wouk's retrospective gaze allows us to read this reference to Irving Berlin in the context of his work before 1955, the year of the novel's publication.

However, this description is limited by the language of simile. The narrator comments that Noel was "Mexican-looking" (Wouk 201). Similarly, Marjorie later thinks to herself, "He [Noel] really looked like a Mexican" (Wouk 202). Noel takes center stage during this day of racial pantomime; however, the text highlights the extent to which he can remain unraced, and therefore closer to whiteness. Despite the brownface, his blue eyes, "identified him" (Wouk 201). In addition, while the grease paint might be seen to shift how Noel is read as a raced subject, it rather highlights his blue eyes and white-toothed grin. The emphasis on these features redirects the gaze to those features which cue others to read him as white.

It is as if this scene, in some contradictory manner, emphasizes the extent to which Jewishness is read by non-Jews and some Jews as being a kind of open signifier. The Jew as racial chameleon. But if this is the way it is read it belies the notion Jews are white, rather Jews can appear and act and eat white, and because of this are indistinguishable from other people who see themselves as belonging to the category of whiteness. In *The Races of Europe* (1899), economist and author William Z. Ripely classifies Jews in Europe as a "people" as opposed to a race (Painter 222). As Nell Irvin Painter explains in *The History of White People*, Ripley's decision to describe Jews as a people as opposed to a race contradicts the work of his contemporaries (222). By way of justification, Ripley cites regional variation in the physical appearance of Jews. According to Painter, Ripely also chooses the term people over race because "Jews conform closely to others among whom they live" (222). By way of evidence, Ripely discusses the ability of Jews noses to transform into roman noses, and he uses illustrations to demonstrate "how easily 'the Jew' may be turned into a Roman" (Painter 222). Ripely instructs his reading in how the Jewish nose can be transformed, saying, "Write […] a figure 6 with a long tail (Fig.1)" (Painter 222). Ripley describes the transformation of a Jewish nose into a Roman

one; he commands, "now remove the turn of the twist, and much of the Jewishness disappears; and it vanishes entirely when we draw the lower continuation horizontally […] Behold the Transformation!" (Painter 222). Riley's discussion of Jewish noses echoes anti-Semitic conceptions of Jews as deceptive and conniving. Rather than destabilizing the notion that there is such a thing as a "Jewish nose," Riley affirms its existence, but offers a warning to his readers about the racial transformation he assumes inherent in Jewishness. The scenes in which Jewish characters engage in the performance of brownface and imagined Mexican dress similarly highlight both the notion that Jewishness encompasses a racial flexibility and the limitations of this flexibility.

Noel's performance of brownface emphasizes his ability to assume different raced and unraced identities; however, when the visitors to South Wind attempt a similar racial pantomime, they are depicted as oddities and then as pitiable and sympathetic, but not wholly human. Marjorie reflects:

> The ring of guests made a bright show. Earlier they had struck her as a grotesque lot, skylarking about the lawn in Greech's cheap sombreros and pink cheesecloth mantillas, singing snatches of *Rancho Grande* and *Cielito Lindo*, calling each other Pedro and Carmen, affecting Mexican accents, often as not in the flat singsongs of the Bronx and Brooklyn. (Wouk 208)

While the narrator comments that Marjorie's perspective on the guests has changed, their description still holds traces of the disgust that Marjorie felt. As the text draws the reader's attention to Noel's mouth during his performance of brownface, here too the text focuses our attention on the mouths of the guests. Playing off of a familiar trope, the guests are depicted as

too loud. Their noise is all at once animalistic as it is described as skylarking and doubly accented.

Here, the sounds of the guests ask the reader to focus their attention on the beginning of the alimentary tract, the mouth, to think through the ways race is represented. The mouth is the representing device that comes to speak for the entire alimentary canal. In this way, we can read the production of sounds in combination with acts of eating as complimentary but opposite ways that the mouth signifies race: production of sound and the consumption of food. In Kyla Wazana Tompkins' *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*, she examines how eating blends the social and biological to argue that eating can function as mechanism for the development of political subjects, "and it is exactly as a site of racial anxiety that eating is most productively read" (2). As she draws out the connections between the kitchen and orality, she states, "Orality clearly was associated with the linguistic form that represented the kitchen's threateningly back-of-house, vernacular literary production; that orality threatened to upset the orderly performance taking place at the front of the house" (Tompkins 46). In her discussion of Roberts' *The House Servant's Directory; or, A Memoire for Private Families Comprising Hints on the Arrangement of Servants' Work* (1827), Tompkins explains "The cook must not only 'watch her mouth,' but, in a different way, she must learn to inhabit the mouths of her employers such that she can anticipate their tastes" (48).

The guests affect what they think of as Mexican accents, but their own Bronx and Brooklyn accents undercut their auditory performance of a different raced identity. The lasting impression created by the guests, is not that of racial transformation. While Noel is likened to a Mexican man, only identifiable as himself because of his blue eyes and white teeth, the guests don't possess a similar ability to appear or sound like different people. The "flat singsong of the

Bronx and Brooklyn" that stands in as nearly synonyms for "sounds Jewish" prevails and resists the guests' attempts to play at representing themselves as less white racial subjects (Wouk 208). While Noel comes to stand in for the imagined racial transmutable Jew, the guests suggest that such racial transformation is not universally accessible to all Jews.

The scene emphasizes the productive capability of the mouth as it used to affect another identity while inadvertently betraying the speakers as Jewish; however, the productive quality of the mouth is paired with its consumption properties. As the production of sound signifies racial identification so too does consumption. In part, Marjorie locates the grotesqueness of the guests' racial performance in their dress. Of particular focus are the "cheap sombreros and pink cheesecloth mantillas" (Wouk 208). While the men wear sombreros, the women instead of wearing cheap versions of mantillas, wear dyed cheesecloth. This roots their racial performance of non-white identity in the kitchen. At play in this representation are notions of class, who works in the kitchen, servitude, and for whom do those people in the kitchen work. The representation cannot escape the kitchen. Their accents mark them as less assimilated, more directly tied to the kitchen.

Throughout the novel, Wouk articulates a conception of off-white Jewishness that is tied to the kitchen. In a conversation about Marjorie's chosen stage name, Noel questions her motives for changing her name and askes Marjorie what she dislikes about her given surname. She replies, "It is too ordinary" (Wouk 272). When Noel retorts that the Irish sounding surname Sullavan seems much more ordinary than Morningstar, Marjorie says, "well that's different. Morgenstern sounds so … I don't know—" (Wouk 272). Noel finishes her sentence, "So Jewish, girlie, so Jewish. Those overtones of potato pancakes, Friday-night-candles, gefilte fish – that's what you don't like" (Wouk 272). Noel's comments suggest that Jewishness carries with it

connotations of the kitchen and dinner table practices. Jewish people and Jewish names are conceptually tied to the sights and smells of the kitchen in ways that reproduce anti-Semitic tropes and reference a history of anti-Semitism that persists to color Marjorie and Noel's conversation. Anti-Semitic rhetoric has history of associating Jews with offending smells. Perhaps the most notable historical example is the association of Jewish communities with garlic. The Romans referred to Jews as garlic eaters. In the 15th century, Andrés Bernáldez, a court historian, described Spanish Jews as "gluttons who never stopped eating onions and garlic fried in oil." He even went so far as to call the smell of fried garlic the smell of "the unbaptized." This association was so strong that is persisted into the 20th century. In Mark Graubard's *Man's Food: Its Rhyme or Reason*, he describes how the Nazis used garlic imagery to symbolize Jewishness. Graubard illustrates, "The garlic plant in particular was so indelibly associated with Jews that the Nazis issued buttons with pictures of garlic plants to demonstrate the wearer's ardent anti-Semitism. The mere mention of garlic by a Nazi orator caused the crowd to howl with fury and hatred" (72). In a scene about renaming things, it is particularly interesting that Noel Airman (Saul Ehrmann) offers his critique about changing names to their less-Jewish sounding forms by calling latkes potato pancakes and Shabbat candles Friday-night candles. Noel, who is already deeply invested in the process of obscuring his own Jewishness, linguistically navigates the divide between Jewish foods and Jewish names. The insinuation is that the linguistic changes can only do so much. In Noel's estimation, some Jewish practices and people cannot shake their connections to the kitchen, food production, and kind of domestic labor that is connoted with racially marked kinds of labor. As Marjorie watches the campers, she has a moment of sympathy as she recognizes herself in the guests. She realizes, "they were exactly like herself […] She even

had compassionate thoughts for the bulbous pigs scattered through the crowd, wearing rakish cocked sombreros" (Wouk 208).

These lingering connections that are imagined to tie some kinds of Jewishness to the kitchen reflect not only the racialization of domestic labor but the racial history of Jewishness in the US. Noel's observations about Marjorie's proposed name change and Marjorie's observations about the crowd of Jewish campers performing a further degree of racial alterity reflect a history of internal debate amongst Jewish American communities about the potential futures of Judaism and Jewishness in America. Within these debates, charges of "kitchen Judaism" were used to slander branches of Judaism and Jewish practices that were perceived by some to be anti-modern and ill-equipped for assimilation. The most notable example of this is the Trefa Banquet, otherwise known as the Highland House Affair, which sparked controversy because of its non-kosher menu. The menu included a first course of "littleneck clams and a sherry followed by [a second course of] consommé and Sauterne" (Sussman 33). The third course was comprised of "beef tenderloins with mushrooms, soft-shell crabs, a shrimp salad, potatoes in lobster bisque sauce, and another selection of Bordeaux wine" (Sussman 33). The main course was sweetbreads with peas that was followed by a fifth course which "featured frog legs in cream sauce, breaded chicken and asparagus" (Sussman 34). The sixth and final savory course included "pigeon and squab embedded in pastry, salads, and G. H. Mumm extra-dry champagne," which was followed by a final dessert course of ice cream and cakes (Sussman 34).[28] The banquet holds particular importance in American Jewish history because it exemplifies the changing relationship to *kashrut* that typified Reform Judaism between the 1870s

[28] Some of the original menus exist in the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati.

and 1880s. In addition, the banquet and the debates in reflected and amplified are credited with spurring on the growth of Conservative Judaism in America.

In 1883, some Jewish American groups including the Hebrew Union College (HUC), the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), and the Rabbinical Literary Association (RLA) met in Cincinnati to celebrate overlapping milestones at a shared meal. Gustave Lindeman, a member of Cincinnati's Jewish community as well as the food manager of the Jewish Allemenia Club, catered the banquet (Sussman 32). Later, Lindeman's granddaughter would state that Lindeman was given full control over the menu, but he was not told who the diners would be and "had merely followed instructions to provide 'an elegant and sumptuous meal'" (Sussman 33). She also states that Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of the HUC, and members of the committee approved the banquet's menu (Sussman 33). Rabbi Wise was noted for his ambivalence towards *kashrut.* In an 1865 issue of the newspaper *Die Deborah*, he wrote that he did not "worry about the kitchen" (Sussman 35). Additionally, in an 1893 issue of *The American Israelite*, another Jewish-American newspaper, Rabbi Wise critiqued Orthodoxy in England as a "kitchen and stomach" religion (Sussman 35). The description of Orthodox Judaism and practices that would later become associated with Conservative Judaism being overly concerned with the kitchen critiques these branches as parochial, overly concerned with the workings of the kitchen. At the heart of this critique is also the gendered notion that the work of the kitchen belonged to women and was inherently less valuable than labor done outside of the home. Thus, charges of "kitchen Judaism" position Conservative and Orthodox practices, especially eating practices, in opposition to the cultivation of a cosmopolitan Judaism. In many ways, the synecdoche created in Rabbi Wise's comments uses *Kashrut* to represent Orthodox and Conservative practices as a whole. The suggestion is that dietary laws are emblematic of a

myopic, provincial Judaism that is antithetical to modern American life. Rabbi Wise's critique echoes the language of non-Jewish critics of Judaism which is often deeply embedded in anti-Semitism. Beyond offering criticism, Rabbi Wise's remarks also illustrate the tension that arrives from the double vision of viewing Jewishness from within the identity as well as anticipating how non-Jews will view Jewishness. In a moment where Jewishness is contested and in flux, food becomes invested with ever changing meanings. At stake in the development of a modern, worldly Judaism was the ability of Jewish communities to assimilate in America. Contemporaneous notions of Jewishness as not white amplified pressures to assimilate into larger American culture. Food takes on extraordinary significance at this moment precisely because what Jews eat stands to influence who Jews can be in the US. Eating is invested with the power to make communities and to propel them into modernity or confine them to the past. Here, eating serves as the mechanism by which identity is formed and, very importantly, reformed.

While the menu avoided pork, it included non-kosher foods such as clams, frog legs, meat slaughtered using non-kosher methods, as well as the mixture of meat and dairy courses without a waiting period. In the banquet's aftermath, a supporter of Rabbi Wise defended the menu and argued in *Die Deborah* that it was time to consign, "kitchen Judaism to the antique cabinets where it belongs" (Sussman 35). Rather than illustrating a cultural shift among the majority of American Jews, the Trefa Banquet exemplifies the contested notions about the shape and role of Judaism in the US. The push to develop a cosmopolitan and modern Judaism prompts changes to the diets of some American Jews. As I have previously discussed, this push helped to develop a Jewish eating culture that embraced Chinese food and restaurants. The desire to develop a modern Jewish identity that could more easily transition into broader, whiter culture is also evident in the changing relationship among many reform Jews to food, a change that is

illustrated by the Trefa Banquet. Marjorie's ambivalent relationship to *kashrut* is directly connected to her desire to change her name. In the process of attempting to refashion how she is read as an ethnoracial subject, she is determined to change her name, with all its associations to the kitchen, and her diet. Eating offers the method for identity construction and reconstruction. However, Noel expresses doubt about her ability to sever her connections to Jewish identity; the novel similarly suggests that Marjorie's attempts to nudge herself into a more securely white position are not sustainable in the long term.

The scene in the Chinese restaurant and the description of the campers as "bulbous pigs," begin to allude to the racialization of weight, but the character of Samson-Aaron, Marjorie's uncle provides the clearest and most developed articulation of the perceived relationship between race and weight. Marjorie's uncle, Samson-Aaron, has also come to work at South Wind as a dishwasher at the behest of Marjorie's mother who asks him to watch over Marjorie. Among the Morgenstern family, Samson-Aaron, who is often called just "the Uncle," is renowned for his appetite and size.[29] During Marjorie's time at the camp, Samson-Aaron haunts the kitchen where he is found either washing-dishes or eating. As the camp, prepares for "fiesta day," Samson-Aaron is selected to play the lead role in the mock bullfight that concludes the day's activities. The narrator comments, "Samson-Aaron had been recruited to play the toreador in the bullfight. […] the custom was to give the bullfight to the fattest man in the camp. The Uncle had had no competition. The toreador's costume, outsize though it was, had had to been enlarged to fit him" (Wouk 193). Samson-Aaron, whose body bears the perceived evidence of his appetite and past

[29] When Samson-Aaron is first introduced, he is described through his body. He takes a slice of cake, and the narrator comments, "His paunch, always huge, now appeared to extend out beyond his knees. His blue serge trousers and brown jacket were shiny tight, and the skin on his hands and face was shiny tight" (Wouk 77). In English accented by a Yiddish inflection, he asks Marjorie, "Uncle Samson-Aaron, same old gobbage pail, hey Modgerie?" (Wouk 77).

eating, is chosen to portray the toreador in the bull fight. In this historical moment, the Jewish body is acquiring new meanings in the US. Where it was once ascribed to non-whiteness, it is now undergoing a shift that places the Jewish body in a liminal space between conceptions of white and non-white identity. By examining how characters navigate this imagined, third racial position, we can better understand the role eating and weight play in the racialization of Jewish bodies. The tradition of choosing the fattest man working at the camp each year to portray the toreador suggests that fatness is aligned the assignment of non-white racial identities. The sizing of the toreador's costume illustrates the imagined connection between racial alterity and fatness.

His performance in the fight illustrates the connections between "kitchen Judaism," racial alterity, and fatness, for "Fastened to his side on a belt in place of a sword was a gigantic meat cleaver. As he came trotting into the ring, his great paunch bobbed and flopped in the strained tights, which threatened to pop like an overblown lavender balloon" (209). Though the bull fight does not explicitly represent eating, echoes of it reverberate throughout the scene. Marjorie's proposed name change that might obscure her Jewishness, as Noel suggests, will be unsuccessful at obscuring her Jewishness. Similarly, Samson-Aaron seeks to perform a kind of racial alterity, one that relies on the reproduction of damaging, racist stereotypes, as he plays the role of the toreador; however, his performance of an imagined Mexican identity serves to highlight rather than obscure his own Jewishness.

As with the camp guests in their cheesecloth mantillas, Samson-Aaron's reliance on an oversized meat cleaver as opposed to a sword locates this performance inextricably in the kitchen. In this scene, Jewishness and Jewish eating practices, represented by the figure of Samson-Aaron, are aligned with fatness and its cultural associations. Moreover, the scene illustrates how a particular way of being Jewish, expressed by performances, is tied to the

kitchen. Commenting on the cultural perceptions of fatness in relation to social and class mobility, Bordo observes, "when associations of fat and lower-class status exist, they are usually mediated by moral qualities – fat being perceives as indicative of laziness, lack of discipline, unwillingness to conform, and absence of all those 'managerial' abilities that, according to the dominant ideology, confer upward mobility" (195). Bordo posits that the moralization of weight and its cultural connotations limit upward mobility. I argue that Bordo's concept holds true not only in terms of class mobility but also racial mobility for Jewish communities and individuals in the liminal racial space of off-whiteness. Samson-Aaron's weight cannot be disconnected from the ways the novel ties him to the kitchen because the novel locates them in a perpetual, tautological relationship. Samson-Aaron is connected to the kitchen because he is fat, and he is fat because he is connected to the kitchen. As a result, even when he is called upon to leave the kitchen where he works washing dishes to perform the starring role in the mock bull fight, he brings the kitchen with him. Samson-Aaron's fatness is presumed to reflect his eating practices and behaviors, a tautological result of his association with, and reason for, his connection to the kitchen. This connection to the kitchen is racialized as a less white Jewishness because of its perceived connections to unassimilated immigrant generations of Jews that are assumed to be unable to transition into whiteness.

When Samson-Aaron prepares to kill the bull with a blow from his cleaver, he discovers that the bull, like him, speaks Yiddish. Wouk writes, "At the finish, as Samson-Aaron with upraised cleaver was about to dispatch the bull, he pronounced over the drooping staring animal the first words of the Jewish prayer for the dead. The bull raised its head and bellowed the correct response" (210). The two then enter a conversation in Yiddish and realize that they both come from the same village. Samson-Aaron as the Toreador reveals his Jewishness by the use of

his cleaver and to some extent his size. However, when the bull responds in Yiddish, he reveals that he too is Jewish. Both are playing at Mexican identity; however, again the mouth, as the signifying, announcing end of the alimentary tract uses Yiddish to signal Jewishness. The use of Yiddish in this moment also serves to emphasize the connection between unassimilated Jewishness and the kitchen because of Yiddish's position as mother tongue and language of the home space. The moment in which the Toreador and the bull reveal their Jewishness to one another is silently mirrored by the audience of campers. As Samson-Aaron reveals his Jewishness, the audience, also playing with stereotypes of Mexican identity, by laughing, reveal the extent to which they are similarly playing racialized roles. The Joke depends upon the audience's inability to disappear into another racial identity.

The novel concludes on an ambivalent note by suggesting that a desire to become white might not be enough to facilitate this transition. At the novel's conclusion, Marjorie has not become a star, has not made the transition from Morgenstern to Morningstar. That transitions which she hoped would help her obscure her connection to the kitchen and Jewishness has not occurred. The text does not tell us if she abandoned her racial transition or if she failed. Now 39, Marjorie appears to be a religious housewife and mother. The suggestion is that, despite all of her attempts to control her appetite in ways that police the borders of her body, practice eating in ways that align her with whiteness, and invest in white supremacy through racism against Chinese and Mexican people and cultures, she has not transitioned into whiteness. The process of becoming white is by no means natural or unintentional, and the novel illustrate the ways Jewish characters court whiteness. Through an examination of eating, we can see how Jewish whiteness vacillates closer and further from whiteness. Eating reveals the instability of Jewish whiteness in this period and the conditional nature of whiteness for Jews.

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Chapter 2: Bad Eaters and Bad Jews

In Kim Chernin's *In My Mother's House* (1983), Chernin, her mother Rose, and her daughter Larissa gather in Rose's kitchen; they are surrounded by plates of cookies, platters wrapped in foil, cinnamon twists, chopped liver, and kugel brought by family members to celebrate Chernin's return.[30] Chernin remarks, "From the moment we entered the house my mother had been feeding [Larissa]" (8). Rose declares her granddaughter, "a good eater" (8). This scene will likely feel familiar because of the resemblance it bears to many other moments in literature, film, and television in which Jews are characterized as fixated on food and feeding to the point of obsession. Scholars who examine Jewish-American foodways most often focus their attention on Ashkenazi Jews who arrived in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. However, after 1945, the changes to the diets and tastes of Jews in America are subsumed into discussions of what the larger, white population ate.[31] Because so many have assumed that American Jews with the most access to whiteness ate whatever white people ate, their specific eating habits in relation to whiteness aren't often examined. The history of Jewish struggles to obtain the resources to eat is often used to illustrate larger narratives about immigration and assimilation. Despite the exaggerated depictions of Jewish food culture and the many scholarly works celebrating it, eating is often where the conversation ends. Even those scholars engaged in the emerging field of critical eating studies have not yet turned their attention to food refusal.

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[30] Kim Chernin is a prolific writer whose work spans genres. She is well known for her writing on eating disorders: *Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness, The Hungry Self: Women, Eating and Identity, and Reinventing Eve: Modern Woman in Search of Herself.*

[31] The lack of attention paid to Jewish populations suggests and creates the disappearing of Jews into whiteness. As I have argued, the relationship between Ashkenazi Jews and whiteness is more complicated and strained than this lack of attention suggests. An even greater scholarly lacuna exists regarding the eating habits of Jews of color and Black Jews within the U.S. The result is the further erasure of these communities from either discussion of Jewishness or of American food culture.

Rose Chernin's comment also illustrates that a less explored history of starvation and food insecurity is intertwined in the story of Jewish-American foodways. This history has an immense influence on how Ruth, Fran, and their respective eating disorders are perceived by the Jewish people around them. In *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, Hasia Diner argues that the push/pull relationship between hunger and food abundance incentivized the immigration of many Jews to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. She does not examine the role hunger played for Jews in the US. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Susan Bordo gestures to a more complicated version of Jewish-American food culture in a discussion of the increasing rates of anorexia nervosa among Black women in the United States. In this discussion, she briefly mentions Jewish women, saying, "A legacy of reverence for the zaftig body has not protected Jewish women from eating disorders (Bordo 63). However, Bordo never elaborates on this point, and it is left for the reader to assume that any examination of Jewish women is contained in her larger examination of white women. As a result, Bordo does not offer a dedicated and sustained critique of eating disorders in a specifically Jewish context. Jewish women with eating disordered are assumed to be among the white women she addresses.

The concept of a "good eat" is a useful way to examine the possibility of a "bad eater," those Jews who, despite an abundance of food, refuse to eat. The above moment from Chernin's work illustrates the focus on the "good eater," the voracious, eager eater; however, the notion of "good eaters" suggests the possibility of there being bad eaters as well. Rose's comments do not stop after she praises her granddaughter's appetite; she turns to Chernin and continues, "'This is what you used to be like,' she adds […], 'before you got it in your head to get so thin'" (8). Her remarks pass without comment or pause, and the narrative continues. This scene begins to

highlight that, despite the dominance of images of Jewish individuals as "good eaters," this experience is neither so simple nor universal. In this chapter, I illustrate how the Jewish women at the center of two very different texts, Jonathan Rosen's *Eve's Apple* (1997) and the television show *The Nanny* (1993-1999), refuse to eat and are viewed by those around them as bad eaters. While Ruth of *Eve's Apple*, struggles with an eating disorder, is portrayed by her partner as being less Jewish because of her eating disorder, Fran Fine of *The Nanny* also refuses to eat, and her portrayal of Jewishness that play with stereotypes of Jews and is described by critics as a bad Jew. These women who are unable to eat because of eating disorders, and their refusals offer a way to examine the negative productivity of the mouth; even as the mouth refuses to produce sound or take in food, it produces meaning. Moreover, the anxiety that those around Ruth and Fran place on their bodies and eating habits reveals the extent to which Jewish ethnoracial assignment in relationship to whiteness.

Jewish Women's Bodies and Eating Disorders

I argue that representations of Jews with eating disorders help reveal anxieties about a Jewish identity that is perceived as unfixed. These anxieties are often projected onto the bodies of women, especially young women, by others. Young Jewish women's bodies become the targets of external anxiety because they are often perceived as mutable sites, possible of both passing for non-Jewish and important in the reproduction of Jewishness. Similarly, their bodies also become the sites where external anxieties about racial passing and reproduction get played out. Within representations of Jewish women's bodies, we see not only the pressure of external anxiety but also the manifestation of that anxiety internally through the double seeing that accompanies subject positions that are culturally and historically marked by alterity. Previously, I have examined the ways a consciousness of being viewed by others within and outside of one's

own community can invest eating with performative qualities and over assign meaning to acts of eating.

Representations of Jews starving begin to give us a way of thinking about a continuing process of identity formation that persists into the contemporary moment and destabilizes the notion of a completed transition. I push back against the assumptions that Jewish-American identity is static and uncontested after many Jews moved to American suburbs after returning from WWII. In so doing, I extend the work of Richard Dyer, George Lipsitz, Karen Brodkin, David Roediger, and Matthew Jacobson who most often end their examination of the transition of Jews into whiteness in the 50s or 60s. Representations of Jewishness as fraught problematize narratives about a progressive and linear march toward assimilation and whiteness.

At the heart of *Eve's Apple* is an obsession that a young Jewish couple, Joseph and Ruth, share about Ruth's body and eating disorder. The narrative is told from Joseph's perspective as he tries to understand Ruth Simon and her eating disorder. Joseph's journey is sparked by an early incident. After a meal with her mother, Ruth returns from the bathroom, and upon kissing her, Joseph notices that Ruth's mouth tastes "like poison" (Rosen 9). Worried that her eating disorder has become more active, Joseph reads Ruth's diary in which she relates the night's events. Ruth's diary clarifies, "Threw it all up afterward. But that's not the terrible part […] The terrible part is Joseph […] He knows" (Rosen 23). Through Joseph's memories of Ruth, the reader learns that Ruth's eating disorder began in her junior year of high school (Rosen 26). During their early courtship, Ruth shares with Joseph her diagnosis, treatment at a clinic, and medical documents. Joseph seeks the help of Dr. Ernest Flek, a psychoanalyst and friend of the Simon family, who gives Joseph a reading list that includes medical texts, histories, letters, works of fiction, and philosophical essays. To this reading list, Joseph adds Ruth's diary that he

secretly checks every day. Ruth tries to help Joseph understand her experience of her disorder, but their discussions most often end in arguments. After a pregnancy scare and a brief separation, the couple reunites, but Joseph discovers that Ruth's eating disorder has become more active since he last saw her. The novel ends with Joseph convincing Ruth to reenter treatment.

Joseph's descriptions of Ruth often question her identity as a Jew, and his comments suggest that eating disorders are antithetical to Jewish identity. At the heart of Joseph's obsession with Ruth's starvation is a general uneasiness about her identity as a Jewish woman. After reading about the medieval practice of religious fasting, *anorexia mirabilis*, Joseph wonders if Ruth's eating disorder connects her to such Christian religious practices. He questions if Ruth[32] is like Saint Veronica who reportedly licked her living quarters clean and survived on what nourishment this provided. He asks himself:

> Could Ruth exhibit similar tendencies? Would Ruth, four hundred years ago (leaving aside the fact that she was Jewish) have joined a monastery and tortured her flesh, fasting and then dieting on disgusting food as a test of will? […] perhaps there was some link between dirt and a sinful sense of the body that I needed to explore. (Rosen 142)

Though scholars have largely rejected the notion that religious fasting and anorexia nervosa are linked, Joseph's questions reveal that an extremely thin body still signifies Christian devotional practices.[33] As he wonders if Ruth could have been a fasting woman living in a convent, he acknowledges her Jewish identity but places limitations on it. Joseph explicitly mentions

[32] The biblical figure Ruth, born a Moabite, is often associated with Jewish conversion because she marries into the Jewish faith. After the death of Ruth's husband, her mother-in-law, Naomi, tells Ruth to return to her family, but Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi. In the moment before Ruth states that she will stay, there is a sense of ambiguity about the extent of her Jewishness. Oprah, Ruth's country woman similarly marries into the Jewish people, but returns to Moab after the death of her husband.

[33] In Joan Brumbergs's *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa*, she argues that the medieval practice of religious fasting is distinctly different from the disorder anorexia nervosa. However, the contemporary disorder still carries many similar connotative meanings to *anorexia mirabilis*.

"leaving aside" Ruth's Jewish identity, this statement is placed in parentheses. As Joseph contemplates whether Ruth's eating disorder aligns her with the Christian tradition, the text separates her Jewishness visually. The text's use of parentheses visually separates Ruth's two read identities that Joseph cannot reconcile.

Joseph's remarks reveal that he sees Ruth's Jewishness as being in contention with her eating disorder as if each is mutually exclusive. The notion of self-denial and piety is antithetical to Jewish-American food culture, and Joseph is not alone in this observation.[34] Speaking about Ashkenazi communities in America at the turn of the century, Hasia Diner suggests, "Asceticism played little part in fostering Jewish piety. Jews did not correlate spirituality with a lack of interest in food" (154). While the practice of fasting and food restriction do play roles in some Jewish holidays, Diner encourages readers to consider such practices in combination with the celebratory meals that follow. Pointing to writings by rabbis, community members, and the Jewish calendar, she posits eating in abundance "fostered religious ecstasy" and holiday foods, "made the holidays" (Diner 154, 155). Diner's work helps to illustrate the ways that Jewish

[34] Sarah Friedman's young-adult novel, *Nothing,* centers around Danielle Rabinowitz, her older brother Parker, and his eating disorder. Although Parker sees himself as Jewish, he also comments that his first name and physical presentation don't communicate this identity. Speaking about his body and physical features, he comments, "It all fits the name Mom and Dad gave me [Parker] – except for the dead giveaway of Rabinowitz being my last name" (Friedman 2). Unlike the other members of his family, Parker is not read as Jewish. The text locates this difference in his physical appearance. Similarly, Parker is also differentiated from his family by his eating disorder. Parker's parents seem hopeful that their son's physical features, which include his thin, track-runner's body, will help him secure a place at a good university, but Danielle expresses frustration that "He's been hearing since first grade that he 'doesn't look Jewish'" (Friedman 8). The scare quotes communicate the anxiety and frustration with which Danielle makes this comment. The clearest example of Parker's eating disorder being aligned with non-Jewish identity occurs as the family watches Otto Preminger's Exodus. David, Parker's father, comments on Paul Newman's appearance, and Danielle responds that Parker looks like Newman. Her remark prompts David to explain, "Well, Parker's our resident Aryan. […] Right, pardner? That's why we named him 'Parker.' He's special" (Friedman 138). David's comments reveal how this representation of a character with an eating disorder is aligned with a non-Jewish identity. Joseph's comment calls into question the religious aspects of Ruth's Jewishness, and David's depiction of Parker as the family's "resident Aryan" similarly aligns Parker's physical representation with non-Jewish identity.

identity becomes associated with eating. Joseph's comments reveal that part of his anxiety about Ruth's eating disorder stems from his inability to reconcile her Jewishness with her disorder.

Representations of Jews with eating disorders expose concerns about a Jewish identity imagined as susceptible to indeterminacy. Focusing on representations of the body is a fruitful site for examining a continuing transition into whiteness and a notion of Jewish-American foodways that incorporates a more nuanced examination of the role starvation plays. Konner articulates a notion of anxiety that is bound up in Jewish embodiment, saying, "Like people living on the San Andreas Fault, […] Jews aware of their history live with the ongoing sense that a social or societal quake may make non-Jews their enemies more or less overnight" (100). As he points out, "The social structure may suddenly shift beneath us, leaving us scrambling rather desperately for a foothold. It is not a paranoid fantasy, it's a historical reality" (Konner 100). As with Rose's comment, the suggestion that some Jews are not "good eaters" escapes the critical attention it deserves. Missing from these discussions is a consideration of food insecurity and starvation.

A long tradition of Jewish-American literature highlights food insecurity.[35] The representation of starvation differs in each text; some recall a history of food scarcity and forced starvation while others focus on arguments about food at the dinner table between different generations. Still other representations situate starvation in the context of Western diet culture and eating disorders. Food studies similarly addresses food insecurity among Jewish Americans, often highlighting the struggles of immigrant communities to secure enough food to eat and the

[35] A brief list of such works includes Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Hunger* (1892), Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912), Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), Anzia Yezierska's *Hungry Hearts* (1920) and *The Bread Givers* (1925), Itzok Isaac Granich *Jews without Money* (1930), Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* (1959), Will Eisner's *The Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (1978), Art Spiegelman's *Maus I* and *Maus II* (1980), Aline Kominsky-Crumb's *Love that Bunch* (1990), Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000), Leela Corman's *Unterzakhn* (2012) among others.

ways that these struggles influenced future Jewish food ways. After WWII in the United States, eating acquired new and different possibilities, meanings, and stakes for Ashkenazi Jewish communities. The reality of Jewish American food insecurity stands in contrast with persistent stereotypes that gained popularity in the 30s and 40s of Jews as gluttonous consumers. In chapter 1, I demonstrate how these stereotypes about voracious and fat Jews persisted into the mid-50s. For those Jews, like Marjorie, who desire greater access to whiteness, controlling the borders of the body was an important way of distancing oneself from a kind of Jewishness still perceived, mainly by white non-Jews but some jews as well, as unsophisticated and unlikely to assimilate into white western norms. Despite the continued presence of this stereotype, another, that of the weak, starved Jew, gained popularity in the post WWII years. As images of emaciated and starved Jews trickled out of concentration camps, the Jewish body had new meanings to contend with. Because of this particular history, stereotypes about the Jewish body exist in extremes—the fat, gluttonous Jew who threatens to consume everything within their reach and the starved Jew who is too weak and ineffectual to resist. As a result, both the very fat and very thin body can, in the right context, signal Jewishness, and because of this, navigating the Jewish body as it resists eating is fraught with complex meanings.

Contemporary Jews operate within this complex set of ever shifting ideas, expectations, and stereotypes. One of the ways that some Jews could nudge their own racial alignment closer to whiteness, and its attendant social privileges, was by adopting those eating practices that are coded as white in the US.[36] In the years after WWII, Jews had the access to the foods and eating practices of dominant white western Christian culture, and Jews could mimic these eating

[36] As I have detailed elsewhere in this work, for an eating practice to be coded as white is more accurately the absence of coding that marks it as racial. As other scholars have discussed, whiteness is often imagined to be the norm from which all other racial positions deviate. As a result, whiteness is often imagined to be the absence of race.

practices in ways that emphasized their "fitness" for the whiteness that they courted. Viewed another way, those Jews with the most access to the privileges of whiteness could use eating to construct and contribute to the narrative that Jews were/could be white. Though, the erasure of Ashkenazi Jewish racial difference in the US happened, in part, at the dinner table.

Eve's Apple helps us articulate the perceived connection between the mouth as consumptive as well as productive. As I have previously stated, the mouth exists as the signaling end of the digestive tract. In this way, speech and dialect play a complimentary role to eating. Both the sounds produced by the mouth as well as the foods consumed by it have the power to signal a number of different subject positions. While my exploration of *Marjorie Morningstar* articulated the connections between dialect, class, race, and food, *Eve's Apple* prompts us to consider the negative productive quality of the mouth. In other words, this text presents us three mouths that are not producing sound of their own, yet they still produce meaning. Even when the mouth is not producing sound of its own, it is seen as creating meaning simply by its existence within a context. Joseph watches the news and reflects on his relationship with his father and the deep sense of sadness that has followed his father since the suicide of his daughter, Joseph's sister. Joseph remarks, "In his dental office my father plays opera, and the open mouths of his patients seem to be holding long ecstatic notes. But as he bends over them, he looks as if he is staring a great way down, and that at the very bottom the news is still audible, a ceaseless transmission of the misery of the world" (Rosen 61). Though the person is not producing sound, the presence of their mouth produces meaning independent of sound. This passage suggests that the alimentary track transmits meaning not only through its productive (sound production) and consumptive (eating) possibilities, but also creates meaning by its negative possibility. This

begins to help us articulate how the refusing mouth can still produce meaning even as it abstains from the production of sound.

The negative possibility of the mouth is further articulated when Joseph watches the muted commercials. Joseph reflects on the thought of his father peering into the mouths of his patients, and he thinks about his father's practice of listening to the news and muting the interrupting commercials. As Joseph watches the news, "A commercial came on, for which, perversely, I snapped on the sound, wishing to hear the voice that went with the beautiful body now whispering into the camera" (Rosen 63). Though the image is muted, Joseph anticipates the voice that accompanies the body. The construction of that last sentence creates an ambiguity as the body seems to be the thing whispering into the camera as opposed to the voice. This is not at all incorrect. The emphasis is not on the voice but on the communicative possibility of the body and the mouth as part of the communicating body.

Later that same evening, Joseph wakes up and realizes that Ruth is not in bed with him. "Frightening, hinting at flagellation, the sound was also innocently familiar. Suddenly, wide awake, I knew what it was. I heard the telltale *swish* of a rope and knew that out in the high hallway of the apartment Ruth was exercising. I pictured her now, vividly, skipping intently into the smiling mouth of the jump rope" (Rosen 64) In these sections, the novel presents three moments that help articulate a perceived through line, animated continuity that spans the mouth, the body, and its representation. Queued by the sound of the jump rope, Joseph imagines first an image of the rope swishing without human intervention. Joseph essentially creates the jump rope swishing without human propulsion and then places Ruth inside the smiling mouth. In the scene, what we see is not so much Ruth but Joseph's imagination of her. What we more accurately have is not the representation presented by the novel when Ruth is present as an actor but a kind of

further dislocated representation which calls upon Joseph as a literary representation to imagine Ruth. In this way, the novel begins to forcibly disconnect Ruth as a character from representations of her body and concerns about her body. In so doing, what is available is not so much insight into the reality of eating disorders but rather a clearer picture of what eating disorders mean, especially when that meaning is situated within a contemporary Jewish context. Joseph's characterization or perhaps the narrator's characterization of the sound of the jump rope as 'frightening, hinting at flagellation" begins to articulate the connections Joseph imagines or perhaps has received between Ruth's eating disorder and disordered eating in general and a Christian tradition of asceticism and corporal punishment. In the scene that Joseph imagines, it is not Ruth's mouth that signals. Instead, the jump rope is the mouth. We can read this alongside what we know about Ruth, that she is hyper fixated on limiting her calories and getting rid of calories. In this configuration, Ruth and her body exist in the jaws of the jump rope which threatens to consume her, consume her body. When we extend the metaphor, what we can see is an articulation of how Ruth has created the mouth that she uses to consume herself. This calls to mind images of self-flagellation. I argue that Joseph is actually perceiving culturally received notion that links eating disorders with practices of fasting more associated with anorexia mirabilis then with the fasting of Jewish tradition.

Casting the Anorexic Woman as Camp Guard

As a result of the shifting relationship between Jewishness and whiteness, Jewish women who display signs of an eating disorder are imagined by the Jews around them to be more flexible in their ethnoracial identity and closer to a whiteness that tied to Christian notions of womanhood. Joseph fixates on what he perceives to be Ruth's unstable identity. As Arthur Frank suggests, "serious illness is a loss of the 'destination and map'" (1). When Joseph confronts

Ruth's disorder, he does not know how to redraw the map. After their brief separation, Joseph and Ruth reunite, but she is now even thinner than before. Joseph sees Ruth naked and remarks, "It's like you are already dead […] I can't hold you. It's like you've been in a concentration camp. You're slipping away. You're gone" (Rosen 304). This statement at first does not seem to question or place limitations on Ruth's Jewishness; however, Joseph still views her as having an unstable identity. His comment about not being able to hold Ruth extends beyond the physical. In expressing his frustration at not being able to physically hold onto the increasingly thin Ruth, he is simultaneously frustrated by his inability to pin down Ruth's identity. She is present as she stands before him but is read as absent and "already dead." She is "slipping away" and "gone," even as she crosses the room and pulls on a shirt. He vacillates between stories about her body. Joseph's vision of Ruth is one in which she flickers in and out of existence and is described by irreconcilable contradictions.

The explicit comparison between Ruth's body and that of a victim of a concentration camp figuratively links her eating disorder to a moment of Jewish trauma with direct implications on the racialization of Ashkenazi Jews. Joseph likens Ruth to a victim of a concentration camp, and his comments discursively link Ruth's body with those of the victims of Nazi atrocities. And as Konner reminds his reader in his work on the Jewish body, hunger was among the weapons used against Jews during WWII. He points out that even before Jews were forced into concentration camps, they were systematically starved, elaborating, "Jews were strictly confined to their ghetto and doled out six hundred calories a day – part of a German mass starvation plan" (Konner 111). Joseph's comment is an expression of a historical wound and a signal of his distress. His distress echoes Konner's. Recalling a grim joke about the anxiety of Jewish embodiment, Konner reflects, "Millions of Jews are thinking thoughts we do not express.

You cannot live in a Jewish body after the Holocaust without being troubled by such musings about the body's nature and fate at the hands of others who can define it at will" (100). For Joseph, Ruth's body speaks to a cultural trauma and recalls a moment in Jewish history when, despite the ongoing process of becoming white in the US, Jewish whiteness was contested in Europe.[37]

When we examine the layers of meaning in Joseph's depiction of Ruth as like a victim of Nazi atrocities, we can see how this depiction reveals a more explicit anxiety about Ruth's Jewishness. While this comparison at first seems to clearly align Ruth with Jewish identity through a shared cultural trauma, a deeper investigation suggests that Joseph sees Ruth as both prisoner and guard. The text presents Ruth's starvation as the result of her own actions, not a situation beyond her control. In describing Ruth's body as like that of the concentration camp victim's, Joseph also troublingly casts her as the camp guard.[38] Joseph's comment paints Ruth as like the camp prisoner and guard, both starver and starved. Her disorder, in Joseph's eyes, calls into question her Jewish identity. Moreover, it leads him to see her as engaged in the work of destroying the Jewish body. Joseph is unable to comfortably hold both Ruth's eating disorder and her Jewish identity at the same time. He fails to imagine that her experience of starvation can be compatible with Jewishness especially given the context of forced starvation and so must imagine her as victim and perpetrator.

The other implication of this comparison is that, as Joseph sees it, Ruth is tasked with her own eradication. The project of the Holocaust was absolute elimination of Jewish populations

[37] Authors who take up the transition of Jews into whiteness in part or in full include *How Jews Became White Folks: and What that Says about Race in America* by Karen Brodkin, *White* by Richard Dyer, and *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* by Carl Zimring among others.

[38] The text does not distinguish between Ruth and her eating disorder, so it can't effectively be argued that this moment unequivocally aligns Ruth with a sense of Jewishness.

and other "undesirables," but when Joseph casts Ruth as both camp guard and camp victim, the project becomes one of self-destruction. This image of self-destruction recalls the scene in which Joseph imagines Ruth in the mouth of the jump rope. In the jump rope scene, her eating disorder is imagined as a project of self-flagellation as well as self-consumption. Joseph's comparison of Ruth to a concentration camp victim makes clear that, in Joseph's mind, the object of these practices is total self-destruction which includes the destruction of a Jewish self as well.

As I, and other scholars, have shown, after WWII, there is increasing acceptance of Ashkenazi Jews into whiteness by white Christians. However, I argue that this acceptance is, to some extent, conditional on Jew serving the projects of whiteness and white supremacy. We have to consider what end is possible for Jews eating to become white. It too ends in self-destruction. Narratives concerning Jews with eating disorders articulate the very dangerous end goal of white eating practices. There is no Jew white enough to participate in the white supremacist dream taken to its conclusion because Jewishness in too dynamic, assimilative, historically othered, elusive and hard to define. Moreover, the links between Christian nationalism and white supremacy create an extreme conception of whiteness that is necessarily Christian. And as a result, whiteness encourages Jewish self-erasure. In return, the veneer of whiteness offers those Jews with the most access to whiteness the privileges of that whiteness. At the same time, when white Jews invest in whiteness and perpetrate anti-Black racism on Black Jews and Jews of color, they are aiding the destruction of Jewishness which is a project of whiteness.[39] Jewishness is, as Freedman suggests, assimilating, not assimilated, the historical representations of Jewishness as being flexible, in-between, mutable are incompatible with the projects of whiteness. However, whites and white structures are happy to allow Jews, especially those Jews

[39] Patrilineal Jews, converts, non-white Jews have always existed. For more, see Lawrence H. Fuchs' *Beyond Patriarchy: Jewish Fathers and Families*.

with the most access to whiteness, to serve the projects of whiteness, but only to an extent. This is, in part, where the conditionality of Jewish whiteness comes from.

This is not to say that adopting white models of eating produce eating disorders. However, representations of eating disorders are historically very white and middle class. It is important to note that eating disorders have extremely high mortality rates.[40] When we start to talk about race, Jewish ethnoracial location, and anorexia nervosa, the current statistics and data collection methods present some serious challenges. It is particularly difficult to know how many Jewish women have or have had eating disorders at any one moment because current methods of categorizing cases of eating disorders often break down into the categories of race and income level. Jewishness, because of its flexibility as a term it is often not recorded or reported in statistics about eating disorders. In addition, those studies that do focus on Jewishness almost always exclusively sample women in ultraorthodox communities.

However, it is important to note that Ruth does not experience the same anxiety about her identity that Joseph does. Readers learn very little about the ways she tells the story of her disorder and even less about her internal life, but Joseph does indicate that Ruth tells him the story of her disorder. Ruth seems to have answered illness's call for storytelling. When Joseph laments that he thinks Ruth is gone, she responds curtly, "I'm right here" (Rosen 304). She, unlike Joseph, doesn't seem to suffer the same anxiety that her eating disorder makes her identity any less fixed or in need of fixing. And though her disorder is still active, Ruth has learned to tell her story to medical professionals during her treatment and to loved ones as an ongoing act of

[40] Eating disorders have the second highest mortality rate of all mental health disorders, surpassed only by opioid addiction (Chesney). Anorexia has an estimated mortality rate of around 10% (Arcelus).

repair (Frank 53). And Ruth, despite Joseph's insistence, calls attention to her own existence, and the existence of those in similar places, as a Jewish woman with an eating disorder.

Jewish Girls on Film

While literature is a fruitful place to examine the depiction of Jewish women with eating disorders, focusing on the body has a long history in Jewish women's comedy. Jewish women working in comedy have embraced many different tactics to delight, shock, and, most importantly, make audiences laugh. The strategy that is most relevant to this project is the popularity of bawdy and vulgar body humor. This specific strand of humor has its roots in vaudeville and has influenced a number of performers such as Molly Picon, Gertrude Berg, Fanny Brice, and Sophie Tucker. A more contemporary generation includes Judy Gold, Sara Silverman, Gilda Radner, Susie Essman, Chelsea Handler, Sandra Bernhard, Madeline Kahn, Maya Rudolph, Carol Kane, Rain Pryor, Alex Borestein, Rachel Bloom, Ilana Glazer, Tiffany Haddish, Abbi Jacobson, Jenny Slate and many, many, many more. Referencing performers such as Belle Barth, Sophie Tucker, Joan Rivers, and Totie Fields, Sarah Blacher Cohen called such women, "creatures of unclean lips" who used foul language and jokes about the body and bodily processes to challenge taboos and break old world patterns. In part, the ability to perform bawdy and bodily humor illustrates the way that many early Jewish women comics traversed insider and outsider ethnic status. They commanded both the privileges of whiteness as well as the positions of the ethnoracially marked other. These concurrent and relational positions aided these women as they mocked the culture that both protected and othered them.

The 90s is a particularly rich moment for representations of Jewish women with eating disorders. A cultural embrace of extreme thinness, perhaps best embodied by heroin chic, produced many thin bodies on film and television, including Jewish bodies. Just four years

before the publication of *Eve's Apple*, Fran Dresher became a cultural touchstone in the legacy of Jewish women on television by way of the show she helped to create and starred in, *The Nanny* (1993-1999). The show follows Fran Fine, played by Drescher, a Jewish woman from Flushing, Queens, who seeks employment as a nanny out of financial necessity. She finds work in the house of Maxwell Sheffield, played by Charles Shaughnessy, a Broadway musical producer originally from England, caring for his three children. Over the course of the show Fran and Maxwell develop a romantic relationship, eventually marrying and having children. The comedy of the show most often stems from Fran's working-class Jewishness and how it butts up against the world inhabited by her wealthy employer.

A common theme among the portrayal of non-religious Jews or cultural Jews on television is the signaling of Jewishness through stereotype, particularly a preoccupation with food. Appetite becomes a cultural shorthand that helps to signal Jewishness in the absence of overt depictions and references to religion. Appetite is also presented as a way that Jewishness might be known without identifying what are imagined as Jewish features. This is aided by an important shift in how many Jews identify and locate their Jewishness. Contemporary Jews are increasingly inclined to describe themselves as culturally and ethnoracially Jewish but not necessarily religious. A voracious appetite becomes one way to signal a character's cultural and ethnoracial Jewishness without addressing religion. Among those representations, is *The Nanny's* Fran Fine, played by Fran Dresher, a Jewish signaling character whose slim figure and abundant appetite are both the subjects of regular comment and jokes within the show. While *Eve's Apple* is a clear and serious illustration of the relationships between Jewishness, women's bodies, eating disorders, and whiteness, it is also rather niche. But *The Nanny* had broad viewership in

the US and was internationally recognized.[41] Drescher performs a kind of Jewish womanhood marked by the stereotype of Jewish food obsession, but this caricature is complicated by her extremely thin frame and jokes about food restriction. Fran is, as Rose Chernin might say, a "bad eater." Fran talks about food constantly, but rarely eats. She jokes about diet pills, getting fat, and throwing away food to spoil it. Together, these behaviors suggest a disordered relationship with food that allow us to consider Fran, like Ruth, a "bad eater."

Television offers a productive addition to this project precisely because of how it draws attention to the performance of eating, the lens that is trained on Jewish women's bodies, the performance of Jewishness, and the performance of eating. Television literalizes eating as a performance. Scenes of actual eating in three camera sitcoms are quite rare because of the challenges they present to production. Because of continuity, staffing, time, and money constraints, the food that appears in most sit-coms is not edible. Having actors eat real food is an expense saved for specific scenes where it becomes necessary for an actor to put food into their mouth. What we read as "food" is more accurately a prop. Once incorporated into the staging and setting of a scene, even edible and potable matter become props, no longer fit for eating because of the time they are required to sit out.[42] *The Nanny* is also particularly focused on Jewish women, and consequently, the performance of Jewish womanhood. While the show

[41] In addition to widespread popularity in the US, *The Nanny* gained international audiences. In *Since When Is Fran Drescher Jewish? Dubbing Stereotypes in the Nanny, Simpsons, and the Sopranos* by David G. McComb, Chiara Francesca Ferrari, and Joseph Straubhaar explore the politics of translating American television shows for global, and specifically Italian markets. They note that *The Nanny* was "exported worldwide, and re-runs are often still on the air in either subtitled or dubbed versions. The show, however, has also been adapted in several countries and sold as a formula" (Ferrari 53). Interestingly, the authors note that Fran Fine's Jewishness was purposefully eliminated in the show's dubbing. Fran becomes Francesca, and Queens becomes Ciociaria, a small town outside of Rome. As the authors note, "In losing her Jewish characteristics, Fran not only becomes a Catholic – the dominant religion of Italian audiences – but she also loses her ethnic 'Otherness'" (Ferrari 56).

[42] The show draws attention to the artifice of the food. For example, in an episode, Fran complains that she has to attend a party where no one eats but everyone is expected to bring food. She then pulls a plaster, prop cake out of her bag.

heavily features the women of the Fine family, the show only very rarely includes Fran's father. He is almost always off screen, and in the rare moments he is shown, only the back of his head is visible. Jewish women's bodies, thin, fat, young, and old, take center stage. This is further highlighted by the costume design for Fran, which developed an aesthetic of excess through vibrant color, bold patters, high hems, and big hair.

Additionally, examining this depiction allows us to further delve into the performative nature of the body. Again, via television, this performance is made literal even as the show tries to defy the clear separation between performance and reality. There is an intentional and important blurring between Fran Fine and Fran Drescher. Drescher, who was instrumental to the show's creation and writing, intentionally shares a first name with the character she portrayed. Moreover, Drescher often reported that the premise of the show was based on elements of her life and the lives of women in her family. In a 1994 interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, she commented, "The truth of the matter is I created Fran Fine based very closely upon my mother, myself and all the wonderful and rich characters I grew up around in Flushing, Queens" (Drescher). Indeed, when Fran's father is shown on camera, he is played by Drescher's father. In addition, referencing her character's nasally voice, she would start interviews by saying, "Yes, I really sound like this" (Drescher). The insinuation is that Fran and Drescher speak with the same voice. Though Drescher puts on a character, she is also performing a version of herself, blurring where the performance of the character and the self meet. Lastly, in her book, *Enter Whining*, Drescher revealed she suffered from an eating disorder that got increasingly serious as filming progressed (137). Here, we see a more subtle blurring of Drescher's person and character. Fran is portrayed as a food obsessed, emotional binge eater but perpetually thin. The character makes jokes about dieting, laxative, binge eating, and purging. While she might have an abundant

appetite, she is far from Rose Chernin's idea of a "good eater." Though she is never identified as having an eating disorder, the behavior alludes to it. The intentional commonalities between Drescher and her character call us to read Fran Fine's food obsession and disordered relationship to food as another blurred moment where reality and representation influence each other.

This blurring perfectly illustrates a set of investments and stakes: the real and the representational. Reading the character alongside the actor highlights both types of performance of Jewishness – the performance that exists for the lenses of the camera and the performance that is inherent to the expression and interpretation of ethnoracial identity as it is lived on a daily basis. We may read both Fran Fine and Fran Drescher because both are engaged in a performance of Jewishness. Drescher's performance of Jewish womanhood employs anti-Jewish stereotypes for laughs and she and the show received harsh criticism for it. Though she is a Jewish woman playing a Jewish character, this portrayal has roots in both a tradition of "Jewface" performance and Jewish burlesque that responds to and reclaims such performance traditions. Here "Jewface," a term that has been in use since at least the late 1880s, is used to refer to the stereotypical performance of stereotypical Jewishness in visual and auditory media.[43] In *The Case of the Sexy Jewess: Dance, Gender, and Jewish Joke-Work in US Pop Culture*, Hannah Schwardon explores how Jewish burlesque grew out of a response to the flattening of whiteness that assimilated, white Jews experienced.[44] To resist the flattening of whiteness,

[43] The term, which deliberately references the performance of blackface, often refers to portrayals by non-Jews; it can also be used to describe the flattening of a Jewish character into a one-dimensional stereotype played by a non-Jew or a Jew. There are many notable examples, but a very short list includes: Rachel Brosnahan in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, Felicity Jones in *On the Basis of Sex*, Gary Oldman in *Mank*, and Rachel McAdams in *Disobedience*.
[44] Schwadron doesn't specifically mention eating disorders. However, speaking about the scene in *Funny Girl* in which Fanny Brice dances as a swan, Schwadron notes, "For my mom, a ballet dancer with a professional career that was over by the time she was in eleventh grade, the swan scene saved her sense of humor, and likely her sense of self too. A thyroid failure accrued through years of eating disorders had led to a total bodily shutdown that kept my mom in her bed for her junior year of high school" (66).

Jewish performers looked back to "Jewface" and the ways such performance overemphasized Jewish difference and otherness. In this way, Jews performed excess and Jewish otherness, finding subversion of assimilated whiteness in both. Schwadron explains:

> Today's performers in Jewish-themed acts thus enter into a middle ground between effort to subvert hegemonic structures of race privilege on the one hand, and on the other, a Jewface autoexoticization, where in self-Othering provides a self-conscious performance tool of a postassimilatory Jewish whiteness […] Neo-Jewish burlesque gestures to reclaim exoticism while performers move to distance themselves from the whiteness they ultimately enact. Aware of its time after anxious assimilation and second wave feminism, performers appear to go "bad" via Jewishness as if in recognition that it is finally not so "good" – meaning pleasurable, or necessarily profitable – to be same, white, and mainstream. (49)

Schwadron offers us a way to understand the performance of Jewishness, especially Jewishness that delights in extremes, as a way of rebelling against assimilated Jewish whiteness. Through a process of performing "bad," unassimilated and anti-WASPY Jewishness, Jewish burlesque suggests that homogeneity of whiteness is not as good as was promised. In response to a critique of Fran Fine as mere stereotype and bad for Jewish representation on television, Drescher wrote that Fran was "too blatantly Jewish," for some people's taste because she, "is openly proud of her heritage, and often incorporates Yiddish expressions in her dialogue." This depiction, she insisted, ran counter to the belief, "that the only good portrayal of a Jew is an assimilated one" (Drescher). Fran, the bad eater, goes "bad" through a burlesque performance of Jewishness that draws attention to the ways the character resists assimilation.

The Fasting Girl from Flushing

Even as Fran avoids eating, she performs a stereotypical version of Jewish obsession with food. In this way, the character goes doubly bad; she is both a reluctant eater and a caricature of unrestrained, unassimilated Jewishness. In the pilot episode of *The Nanny*, Fran emerges from her room after just being hired to watch The Sheffield children. She enters the dining room to find the family seated together around breakfast. Grace and Brighton Sheffield, the two youngest children, push food around their plates only very occasionally moving what appears to be food to their mouths. However, the eldest daughter, Maggie, reads a book as a full plate of food sits in front of her. Later in the scene, she pushes food around her plate but never mimics eating any of it. Maxwell, likewise, has a plate in front of him but reads a magazine instead of eating. Both Maxwell and Maggie offer counterpoints to Fran. They are reserved and controlled around food. Both express a blasé, almost bored, relationship with eating.

However, when Niles, the butler, hands Fran a plate of food, Fran immediately moves to the serving dishes and loads more food onto her plate. Misreading the situation, she comments, "Oh I just love a good buffet" (Lyman). Niles responds, "It's free, Miss. Fine, you're allowed to go back" (Lyman). Fran begins to perform two well-worn antisemitic stereotypes. She signals a voracious appetite that is greater than those of her employer and his children. Her hunger blocks her from correctly assessing the situation. Moreover, Niles' comment plays on well-worn antisemitic portals of Jews as cheap. Finding no chair at the table for her, Fran asks where the previous nanny ate. When she learns that the previous nanny ate breakfast separately in the kitchen, she grabs a chair and pulls it to the dining room table. This moment calls back to older notions of "kitchen Judaism" and the term's assertion that Jews who kept kosher were overly concerned with food. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, one of the people to approve the menu of the

1883 Trefya Banquet, proudly declared that he didn't "worry about the kitchen" (Sussman 35). Wise argued for a Judaism that deemphasized and outright rejected the practice of keeping kosher as a way from distancing modern, white-aspiring Jews from a "kitchen and stomach" religion that would prevent them from assimilating into whiteness (Sussman 35). Getting Jewish minds off of the stomach and out of the kitchen, was, by his estimation, an important step in assimilating and accessing whiteness. Fran's good-natured insistence that she will join her employer and his family at their dining room table rather than be relegated to the kitchen might at first seem like the kind of shift Wise endorsed. Fran even signals her lack of adherence to kashrut. After learning that Maxwell and his business partner C.C. are hosting a fundraising event that evening Fran offers the services of her sister who makes "pork-o de prune-o" which she claims is not only "delicious but a natural digestive" (Lyman).[45] Fran shares a table with the sophisticated and WASPY Sheffields, and her comment suggests that she does not adhere to Kashrut. Fran performs a kind of unassimilated Jewishness that highlights a fixation on food. Instead of leaving the kitchen, Fran brings the kitchen into the dining room.

Moreover, in a move that harkens back to generations of Jewish women comedians who shocked and delighted audiences with bawdy and bodily humor, Fran connects food and eating to digestion and excrement. Through these moves, Fran aligns herself with a caricature of unassimilated Jewishness that, as Shwadron says, goes "bad," through an act of autoexoticization. Through her treatment of food and the body, she marks her distance from characters around her. Her refusal or inability to perform an assimilated, WASPY detachment from food and by extension the body, mark her as unassimilated and perhaps not capable of assimilation. Here, Fran "goes bad" by being "too Jewish." The people around Ruth read her

[45] Fran is most likely referencing a French dish, Porc aux Pruneaux.

obsession with restricting her eating as an indication that she is less Jewish. Ruth's eating disorder manifests through restriction, and because of the perceived connections between food restriction, fasting, and Christianity, her performance of self strikes others as not Jewish enough to withstand assimilation into whiteness. By their estimation, Ruth is both a bad eater and something of a "bad Jew" because of it. Fran offers a slightly different, but related, example. She too will prove to be a bad eater. However, she performs an obsession with food that plays into caricatures of Jews as people of appetite and food obsession. This is paired with a bodily performance that includes lots of curly dark hair, a loud nasally voice, and over the top clothing. The ways that Fran plays into and with stereotypes highlights the extent to which she is at odds with assimilated and WASPY whiteness. This burlesque performance of Jewishness led some critics to insinuate that the show and character were "bad for the Jews."

At the heart of this performance is Fran's distance from the characters with the most access to whiteness. Maxwell explains that C.C. has arranged for the food. Fran replies, "Well I just hope there is enough food. Shikas are notorious for not ordering enough food. Booze yes, but food they don't know from" (Lyman). Favoring a Yiddish sentence construction with the phrase, "they don't know from," Fran jokes that while white, non-Jewish women might know how to drink, they don't know how to eat.[46] This joke is in line with the same cultural history that allows those around Ruth to view her eating disorder as a non-Jewish characteristic. This moment is preceded by both Fran's comment about "pork-o de prune-o" as well as her serving herself more food. The insinuation is that she, unlike a shiksa, knows food. This moment

[46] In season 1 episode 17, Mr. Sheffield's sister, played by Twiggy, is visiting. When the butler makes steak and kidney pie, Fran voices her objections. She says, "No wonder Princess Di is always throwing up" (Lyman) In season 3 episode 4, Fran tries to negotiate a fight between her mother and aunt. As the pair fight, Sylvia, Fran's mother says, "drop dead." Her aunt retorts, "Cook for me and I will! Your father was the first bulimic in Flushing" (Lyman). Both moments align eating disorders, especially bulimia, with white, non-Jewish communities.

highlights the distance that exists between the shiksa C.C and the stereotypically Jewish Fran. Though Fran suggests that she knows food, the claim is undercut by her miss pronunciation of porc aux pruneaux. Moreover, she proves, despite her appetite, to be a bad eater. As they sit and talk about upcoming plans, Fran seasons her food and pours herself a cup of coffee, but she does not eat. The scene concludes with Fran picking up her plate and taking it off screen as she exits, she states, "I hate to waste" (Lyman). Schwadron argues that postassimilation performances of Jewish burlesque play with nostalgia for an earlier era of distinct Jewish ethnic otherness. The result is intentionally unresolved. It resists and rebels against the homogeneity of whiteness by playing with and on antisemitic stereotype even as its performers inhabit whiteness.

Ruth and Fran represent two contrasting but complimentary examples of the "bad eater" as bad Jew. Their refusal to eat and fixation on food prompt reactions from observers that call into questions their Jewishness. Ruth, whose eating disorder takes the form of extreme control and restriction, is perceived as less Jewish because of her eating disorder. In particular, Joseph who views Ruth as the potential mother of his children, goes beyond questioning her Jewishness and likens her to concentration camp guards. His anxieties about the unfixed nature of contemporary Jewishness manifest as concerns about both Ruth's physical ability to have children and the extent to which she can reproduce Jewishness through the production of more Jews. His concern originates from a belief that Jewishness is conditional upon a specific set of practices and investments, and if those practices and investments change, so might Jewishness. On the other hand, Fran performs a caricature of Jewishness that emphasizes excess. This extends to her performance of eating; she piles food high on her plate, talks about eating constantly, and asserts that her knowledge of food distinguishes her from non-Jewish women. All the while, she isn't seen eating. Food becomes a prop through which she employs the

stereotypical Jewish appetite. This performance of Jewishness plays with a history of Jewish ethnoracial difference by relishing the antisemitic accusations that were used to argue against their inclusion into whiteness. While the concerns about Ruth center on her ability to continue Jewishness through the production of children and the reproduction of culture, the critiques of Fran suggest that the character is not producing the right kind of Jewishness. The discomfort that many people experienced watching this portrayal helps to illustrate how relatively recent that history is and the extent to which upwardly mobile Jewish whiteness is still linked to a set of performances that are deemed whiter than others. Unsurprisingly, when Jewishness is perceived as unfixed and mobile, capable of vacillating closer too and further away from whiteness based on one's practices, the anxiety that a community feels finds its home on the bodies of women.

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Chapter 3: Kishka, Guts, and Indulgent Appetites

In more contemporary work, we can begin to see a major shift in the role eating places in ethnocratic identification and assignment especially as it applies to those Jews with the greatest and most secure access to whiteness. As these Jews become more securely white, the once racial and then ethnoracial sense of otherness is relocated to other identities.[47] While eating was and certainly is still employed by some in an attempt to gain the kind of access to whiteness, when Jewish whiteness becomes more secure, eating can also be utilized to connect with a personally and culturally important sense of difference. Eating itself is neutral. However, the world in which humans eat is not. Eating, like other processes, may be employed to comply with racist systems and ideologies or as a means of resisting them. This resistance is complicated by the larger inability to escape eating within the confines of the power structures that organize food production within the US. Eating as a tool for gaining closer proximity to whiteness is a tool most often and most "effectively" used by communities on the cusp of whiteness.

This chapter, and this project, require me to walk a delicate balance. My goals are to examine how those Jews with the most access to whiteness transitioned from more raced subjects to a state of provisional or conditional whiteness and then to full members of whiteness. The privilege white Jews experience is real. What we have then, is a kind of white privilege that functions very similarly to that held by white Christians. However, for Jews, there are still limits to this. For example, the more visibly Jewish an individual presents, the less safety they can be assured of. In some settings, bearing a Jewish surname, visible religious markers, or even

[47] Jewish whiteness is still debated, but this often occurs in relatively fringe antisemitic and white supremacist communities. This has bled over into national politics within the Unites States as these ideologies become less fringe. It is important to note that, though the specific language that is used in public spaces to dog whistle antisemitic and white supremacist ideologies does not often directly identify Jews as racially non-white, the communities and ideologies it signals to often do hold this belief.

stereotypically Jewish features place limits on how far white privilege might extend to insulate the individual and keep them safe. What I am arguing is that, even within their white identity, some white Jews, maybe most, cannot truly access that most central core of whiteness which is, I would argue, within its American context built on Christian nationalism. If Christian nationalism is a foundational pillar of whiteness and the racist ideology that it is built on, then white Jews cannot gain admittance to this most extreme version of whiteness while still being Jewish. Some might point out the seemingly contradictory presence of Jews on the Christian right and extreme right wing of American politics and ask, "How can one exist in this ecosystem without also occupying a normative whiteness?" The answer is that their white identity and proximity to some of the most extreme versions of whiteness exists with conditions.

This tenuous relationship between the Christian right and some Jews hinges in part on the investment of Christian millennialism in the existence of Israel and the presence of Jews there.[48] These Christians, many of whom exist on the extreme right, view the creation and continued existence of Israel as a crucial step in the second coming of Jesus. Moreover, there is significant overlap between this group of Christians and those on the right who adhere to a variety of conspiracy theories. These conspiracy theories, through coded or rather blatant language, cast Jews in well-known antisemitic roles. When these two factors are considered together, it becomes clear that, while Israel might be an important aspect of some Christian end times prophecies, Jews are much less important and are still largely subjects of hatred. While those Jews are who willing to align themselves with Christian Millennialism because of a shared interest in the continuation of Israel might seem like members of this most extreme version of

[48] In Timothy Weber's book, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1982,* he examines the growth of American evangelism and explores how Christian millennialism, and premillennialism in particular, effect the actions and ideologies of its followers.

whiteness, I argue that their presence is conditional and dependent on how they further the goals and ideologies of the Christian right. While, they might be white, deeply rooted antisemitic ideologies make admittance into the most extreme versions of whiteness an impossibility.

Melissia Broder's novel, *Milk Fed* (2021), follows Rachel, a non-practicing Jewish woman with an active eating disorder who works at a talent agency during the day and performs standup at night. Rachel meets and becomes attracted to an Orthodox woman, Miriam, who works at her favorite frozen yogurt shop. The two form a friendship around frozen yogurt, kosher Chinese food, and old movies. They grow closer and enter a romantic relationship despite the homophobia of Miriam's Orthodox family and the Orthodox restrictions against same-sex romantic relationships. As their relationship deepens, Rachel develops a healthier relationship to food, gradually gaining weight. Rachel experiences dreams in which Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, fabled creator of the Prague golem, visits her and comments on her relationship with Miriam, food, and Jewishness.[49] Rachel and Miriam hide the nature of their relationship from Miriam's family, but during a shabbat dinner Miriam's mother and Rachel argue about Israel. Miriam asks Rachel to leave. Unsure of the status of their relationship, Miriam cuts her hair short to resemble Ad Rock of the Beastie Boys. She then has sex with one of the actors the talent agency represents, which eventually leads to her firing. After Rachel and Miriam have sex one last time, Miriam leaves so that she can be home for sundown on shabbat but does not return as promised, marking the end of their relationship. Three years later, Rachel and Miriam pass one another on the street but do not speak.

[49] Much more could be said about Broder's use of Jewish mysticism in *Milk Fed*. The reoccurring figure of the golem and its relationship to notions of the constructedness of the body are particularly interesting avenues of inquiry but are outside of the scope of this project.

In *Milk Fed,* Jewish difference becomes more varied and contested, less on the basis of ethnoracial difference though that location of Jewish difference is still very much present. Instead, the book asks us to consider to what extend Jewishness can be figured as queer. Here I use the term queer in both its more historical and contemporary meanings. In the text, Jewishness is articulated as difference, and often "strangeness" when it is set against the wider, western, Christian world. The experience of being Jewish while also being white produces a simultaneously insider/outsider position. Beyond this lingering ethnoracial otherness, Broder's text posits a queer strand that runs through Jewish history into the present, identifying queer relationships as an ever-present part of Jewish history. While queer Jewish relationships have always existed, they have a long history of being driven out of sight because of homophobia and the very real threats to safety it presents to queer people and communities.

The Fear of Fatness

Through Rachel's fraught relationship with food and Jewishness, *Milk Fed* articulates the range of relationships different Jews can have to food. At play in these relationships are the varying ways different generations feel and express the stakes of eating Jewish. Rachel describes her religious education, recalling, "The reform synagogue I'd attended growing up in Short Hills, New Jersey, was way more Chanel bag Jewish than Torah Jewish" (Broder 7). Rachel's depiction of her childhood Synagogue as being more "Chanel bag Jewish" offers a characterization of the people there as upwardly mobile and wealthy.[50] The focus shifts away from formal religious education and instead describe the cultural Jewish education Rachel received from her grandparents, an education that focuses on food. She comments, "I felt most Jewish when my grandparents, also Reform but deeply obsessed with Jewish food, would drive

[50] The reference to Chanel is particularly interesting in this moment because of Coco Chanel's well documented ties to the Nazis and her antisemitic beliefs and statements. For more, see Hal Vaughn's book, *Sleeping with the Enemy: Coco Chanel's Secret War*.

me to New York and take me on a tour of all the old culinary haunts of our tribe […] There were delicious warm buttered onion rolls and creamed herring at the kosher dairy restaurants, cabbage borscht and hot pastrami sandwiches at Second Avenue Deli. There were black-and-white cookies from William Greenberg Dessert, pints and quarts of pickle-sour, half sour, and sweet-from Guss' on Essex Street" (Broder 7). Here, food holds equal if not greater weight than Rachel's experiences in synagogue. Space plays a role here as well. Rachel can experience joy in food and a connection to Jewishness in New York with her grandparents. Though she attends synagogue in her hometown in New Jersey, the dislocation or perhaps relocation to New York, facilitated by her grandparents, and its Jewish culinary world makes Rachel feel differently connected. In this way, eateries, restaurants, and grocers become ways of mapping Jewish history onto a city, and eating in these places helps Rachel locate a sense of Jewishness that is embodied and lived, a sense of Jewishness that can delight in food and the body.

The celebration of Jewish food and nourishment exist in tension to other demands of Jewish bodies, complicating Rachel's identification with Jewishness. In her grandparents, Rachel sees and at first positively identifies with their Jewishness, especially as it relates to loving food. She even goes so far as to call the restaurants they visited, "the culinary haunts of our tribe" (Broder 7). She most feels and enjoys her own Jewishness when she is eating with her grandparents, reveling in those parts of Jewishness which are sustaining and nourishing. However, Rachel also notes, "My grandparents were considered medically obese. They'd both developed diabetes as a result of their weight, but food remained something to be celebrated" (Broder 7).[51] She presents their medical issues as a result of their weight, but the passive voice

[51] Diabetes was so associated with Jewish communities in Germany that it was referred to as Judenkrankeit, meaning the Jewish disease. For more on the perceived connection between Jews as a race and diabetes, see Arleen Marcia Tuchman's *Diabetes: A History of Race and Disease*.

she uses to talk about her grandparents' weight suggests a distancing between this idea and her perceptions of them. In saying that they "were considered obese" without including the subject who considers them obese, the reader is left to assume that this comes not from Rachel but from some other source. External forces and actors have deemed her grandparents obese, but despite this, they still experience food and eating as something to be celebrated and enjoyed. This, even if only momentarily, seems to be true for Rachel as well. This moment suggests that a possibility of joyous and empowering relationship with food can exist. Food can be a powerful way to affirm a meaningful connection to Jewishness.

However, the larger cultural context in which this relationship exists makes this positive relationship hard to maintain. And the stakes are, as this project has demonstrated, quite high. If those Jews with the greatest access to whiteness are still only provisionally or conditionally white within a system that attaches real material and social advantages to whiteness, the possible consequence of identifiable difference is loss of those material incentives and social protections. Though she does not explicitly say that their diets have impacted their weight, she makes this observation amid her discussion of their trips to eat Jewish food. This, along with the perception that the body registers externally what is processed through the internal process of eating, allows us to read an insinuated connection between their love of Jewish food and their weight, and their weight and their illness. As I have explained in previous chapters, we should understand eating as a raced practice. Eating and its relationship to the body is both external and internal. While eating is often an externally observable action, digestion is internal and invisible. However, the imagined result of this eating, fatness or weight gain, is registered on the body as it is read by others. Because of this perceived relationship, the viewer may draw conclusions about a person's eating habits with only their body as evidence. And because of the ways food and eating have

been moralized and understood within a racist western and Christian context, the body is subject to racial assignment based on size and shape. A long history of depicting Jews as voracious eaters has led to an association between fatness and readable Jewishness.[52]

The Thin Body and Compulsory Heterosexuality

Rachel's mother provides a stark contrast to her grandparents, illustrating the ways Jews of different generations value Jewish eating and view survival in the US. Rachel highlights the difference between her grandparents and her mother, saying, "My grandparents were only a brief respite from the universe" (Broder 7). She continues, "My mother was what the universe was really about. My mother the sun, my mother the rules, my mother, god herself! My mother the high priestess of food, the religion of our household: abstain, abstain, abstain! My mother with her archaic ideas about dieting: melon and cottage cheese, tuna and carrot sticks, melba toast" (Broder 7). Rachel's mother presents a very different version of eating to her daughter, one that focuses on foods intended to shrink the borders of her body.[53] Rachel explains, "When I got back from New York, my mother would ask for a full report of all I had eaten" (Broder 7). In response, her mother asks an entirely rhetorical question, "Do you want to be a chubby or do you want boys to like you?" (Broder 7). Rachel's mother troubles the identification Rachel feels with her grandparents and, by extension, her Jewishness by introducing an awareness of how others will view Rachel's body if she does not meet dominant notions of thinness. She, like other

[52] A far from comprehensive list of Jews whose fatness plays a notable role includes *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *New Girl*, *Marjorie Morningstar* (both the film and novel), *Dead End: Paranormal Park*, *The Big Bang Theory*, Aline Kominsky-Crumb's *Love that Bunch*, and many more. There is also a well-known social media influencer professionally known as the Fat Jew and the Fat Jewish.

[53] Later in the novel, the adult Rachel meditates on her resemblance to one of her coworkers, Ana, who she imagines as a kind of substitute mother figure. Together they judge the weight of their other coworkers. The name Ana is significant because the term "pro-ana" has become widely used shorthand for pro anorexia sources that promote disordered eating behaviors. "Pro-mia" or pro-bulimia has since come into usage. Dedicated pro-ana websites have existed since the early 2000s as places for primarily young women to share tips for restricting calories and evading detection.

Jewish literary figures before her, worries about the consequences of fatness on Rachel's future, especially regarding her future romantic relationships. Through Rachel's mother, the notion that Rachel should develop a double sightedness regarding her body is planted. Rachel is encouraged to consider how her body and its borders are viewed by the dominant culture. The phrasing of "a chubby" connotes that fatness is neither a part of an identity nor a neutral aspect of a body, but the entire identity itself. There is no way to retain attraction, identity, sexuality, and be fat in her mother's conception. This is especially impactful when combined as it is with the idea that Rachel is responsible for patrolling the borders of her body in order to attract the desire of boys. Her body, her desire, her needs are displaced for those of others.

The consciousness that Rachel's mother expresses and asks Rachel to develop is further illustrated when we contrast the terms chubby and zaftig. The warning, phrased as a purely rhetorical question that Rachel's mother issues is softened by her use of the word "chubby." Though the warning is still tied to deep rooted notions about compulsory heterosexuality, male desire, and fatphobia, she softens it by using the diminutive, "chubby." The "y" ending attempts to take some of the sharpness out of the word. Despite this softening, "chubby" within the section and within the context of the culture and moment in which it is being used carry negative connotations. We might draw connections between the use of the term "chubby" and zaftig, the Yiddish term meaning plump and pleasantly round. As a term with etymological roots in the Yiddish words for "juicy," "succulent," and "sap," the term is often used to communicate an idealized female figure that is round and full. The zaftig body is perceived as feminine and sexually mature. In contemporary contexts, zaftig is often used to express feminine sexuality that is also exotic while it is desirable it is also a deviation from the more normative bodies and

sexualities. However, chubby is a word that possesses the power to neuter the subject.[54] As demonstrated in Rachel's mother's comment, "a chubby" is a neutered subject that does not possess the possibility of feeling desire. For evidence we have only to look at the prevalence of the trope we might call the chubby sidekick or the fat friend. In the pilot episode of Amazon's *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, the titular Midge Maisel describes her time at Bryn Mawr College as charmed. By way of example, she mentions that her roommate, "was friendly and fat, which was perfect" (Sherman-Palladino). She elaborates "I'll have someone to eat with who won't steal my boyfriend" (Sherman-Palladino). As with Rachel's mother's comment, the sexuality of the "chubby" person is not an issue because it is perceived as either nonexistent or superfluous. Their desires do not matter because their bodies preclude them from being perceived as viable sexual and romantic partners. Midge doesn't bother to mention how her roommate's desires might run because they do not matter. Because she is fat, it is assumed that she be the recipient of neither sexual nor romantic desire. This is the same logic that facilitates Rachel's mother's warning that one is either chubby *or* desired, but not both.

Additionally, this ideal of the zaftig woman is antiquated, belonging to an older generation that more viscerally remembers lean times. It references the memories and desires of an older generation of Jews who have a more direct link to memories of shtetel and Pale life and the forced starvation of the Holocaust. As such, the shift from the lauded zaftig woman to the derided "chubby" girl represent a generational disconnect and distancing from these histories, and a shift away from the zaftig to the very thin. The Yiddish term, like the language, has fallen out of fashion, with few people still speaking the language and few women, as this project has shown, wishing to be called zaftig. Both belong to an older generation of Jews, like Rachel's

[54] Chubby is also term that is most often used in reference to children.

grandparents. Rachel's brief excursions with her grandparents are fortifying and life-giving; however, when they conflict with contemporary notions of beauty that isn't enough. Difference still marks both the language and the idealization of the larger body. And while Rachel's grandparents find joy in this difference as it is expressed through eating, Rachel's mother emphasizes the needs for Rachel to conform to beauty and body standards that have not traditionally been popular in Ashkenazi communities until recently. Susan Bordo explores how "it has been argued that certain ethnic and racial conceptions of female beauty, often associated with different cultural attitudes towards female power and sexuality, may provide resistance to normalizing images and ideologies" (63). However, she cautions against suggesting this difference can fully insulate women. Bordo points out, "The equation of slenderness and success in this culture continually undermines the preservation of alternative ideals of beauty. A legacy of reverence for the zaftig body has not protected Jewish women from eating disorders" (63). The historical idealization of the zaftig body has lost its cultural sway when faced with the potency of the slender body and the cultural associations and realities that accompany it.

One of the reasons for this shift is the temporal distance between younger Jewish Americans and cultural memories of food scarcity and forced starvation. Bordo alludes to this when she describes how her father finished meals by asking her is she ate enough (102). She explains that his feelings about food stem, in part, from "memories of economic struggle and a heritage of Jewish-Russian preference for zaftig women" (Bordo 102). This ideology creates a divide between Jews of different generations. As exemplified in Bordo's comment, Jews with a closer temporal relationship to histories of food scarcity and forced starvation express a preference the zaftig body, associating it with the security that regular meals represent. In addition, this older generation still revers the zaftig body as beautiful, harkening back to shtetel

ideals. For this group, eating and its perceived relationship to body size offers a way to resist attempts to destroy Jewish communities. The round, presumably well fed, body comes to represent a kind of joyous resistance to antisemitic efforts. This relationship to eating, especially Jewish food, is present in the attitude of Rachel's grandparents and the delight they take in food and in exposing Rachel to Jewish eating. For this generation, eating offers a joyous way to ensure the survival of individuals and culture. However, this relationship to food stands in contrast to the perspective articulated by Rachel's mother.

Moreover, the text ties notions of slenderness and adherence to a dominant notion of desirability and beauty to heterosexual desire and non-Jewish whiteness. Revealing the reasoning for her interrogating about Rachel's Jewish eating, her mother asks, "do you want boys to like you?" (Broder 7). Though this is phrased as a question, Rachel's mother sets up a false dichotomy between the existence of "a chubby" and a woman who is slender enough to be desired by boys and men. This moment reveals the tension that still exists for Jewish women as they navigate food, ethnoracial identification and assignment, and sexuality in the US. At play in the dichotomy Rachel's mother sets up is the persistent stereotype that Jews might be known by non-Jews by their gluttonous behavior. This gluttony is made visual, it is assumed, on the fat body. Rachel is asked to hold and manage an impossible tension: loving those parts of Jewish culture that celebrate and enjoy food and maintain a mindset intent upon shrinking, fearing food and the jeopardy fatness represents. The impossibility of managing this conflict come not from biological or nutritional realities, but from the fundamental incompatibility of these ideologies.

Jewish Food and Ethnoracial Contaminant

Rachel develops a relationship to food, and Jewish food in particular, that is fraught with tension and a sense of danger. By the age of sixteen, Rachel is struggling with a very active

eating disorder and is rigorously restricting her food. She details the tactics she uses to minimize her calorie intake. However, Rachel still goes with her grandparents to the once beloved Jewish restaurants, but now, she attempts to avoid eating those foods that once helped her feel connected to her Jewishness. She describes how she, "fended off cheese blintzes, knishes, and schnecken, replaced cherry hamantaschen with Dr. Brown's diet soda" (Broder 8). Rachel, who has become accustomed to a diet of "Diet Coke, cigarettes, fake-sweetened everything, meal delay, [and] steamed vegetables" perceives these Jewish foods as hazardous. The anxiety Rachel feels at the prospect of eating at these places is made clear when she notes, "the restaurants that were once [her] temples had become a threat" (Broder 8). She continues to describe how, while on these trips, she attempts to consume as few calories as possible, saying, "I slurped around matzo balls, set boundaries with bagels, found safety in pickles-so low-calorie, baruch hashem" (Broder 8). She finds so great a degree of relief in the humble pickle that she utters what seems to be a half joking, half serious thanks to God.

In Rachel's preference for Diet Coke over Dr. Brown's diet soda, we can see that it is not just high-calorie Jewish foods that become threatening. Rather, those foods are threatening because they carry an association with Jewishness. This helps to show that the quest for thinness and for control is not simply about shedding pounds; it is also about shedding those associations to Jewishness. Rachel sets up a clear hierarchy. The sweet, buttery hamantaschen are off limits, but can be substituted for Dr. Brown's diet soda. However, Diet Coke is her regular, and seemingly preferred, sweet replacement. Nutritionally, Dr. Brown's diet soda and Diet Coke are identical with each aspartame sweetened soda boasting 0 calories. However, the history of Dr. Brown's dates to 1869 and is intertwined with Jewish delis and the Jewish communities of New York and Florida. Most Jewish delis did not stock Coke until after it received a kosher

certification in 1935, by which time Dr. Brown's had already garnered a substantial following in Jewish communities.[55] Today, you are still most likely to find Dr. Brown's in a Jewish Deli. In Rachel's preference for Diet Coke over Dr Brown's diet soda, we can see how avoiding calories is not enough. It is not simply choosing a diet soda that feels like a protective measure, one must also choose the less ethnically marked drink. Both are factors in Rachel's decision making. She takes seriously her mother's warning, and correctly acknowledges that her social survival, and the material rewards that accompany it, are dependent, in part, on her control over the borders of her body. She, like Marjorie Morgenstern before her, recognizes the stakes of being Jewish and fat as well as the privileges that accompany being white and slender. In this example, we can see that thinness for those Jews with the greatest access to whiteness acts as a complicating factor in regard to their whiteness. Jewish food threatens to distance white women characters from the security of that whiteness, revealing that, though still strong, the connection between Jews with the greatest access to whiteness and that whiteness is still conditional, even if those conditions have changed over time. Rachel, like Marjorie, seeks to limit her association with foods that are marked as Jewish.

As Rachel further describes her association with Diet Coke and Coke Zero, she articulates a sense of herself as between Jewishness and whiteness. Later, Rachel compares herself to her fellow comics, saying, "The other comics emanated Moon Juice, organic lip tint, and cocaine, whereas I used only cancer-causing cosmetics and sweated Coke Zero. […] I was an alt JAP; they were just alt" (Broder 19). Rachel reiterated her connection to Coke with a joke that insinuates that she drinks enough Coke for her to sweat it out. She also notes that her non-

[55] Coke's original ingredients included glycerin derived from non-Kosher beef tallow. But a shift to vegetable derived glycerin allowed a rabbi to certify it kosher. For more, see Roger Horowitz's *Kosher USA: How Coke became Kosher and Other Tales of Modern Food*.

Jewish peers are identifiable by their association with Moon Juice, a beauty and wellness brand that sells expensive supplements and drink powders all of which boast largely unsubstantiated health benefits. The insinuation here is that, to borrow Lenny Bruce's phrasing, Moon Juice is very goyish. On the other end of the spectrum is Dr. Brown's which is portrays as being so identifiable as a Jewish drink that it provides Rachel a working substitute for hamantaschen. According to the schema Rachel has set up, Diet Coke and Coke Zero exist somewhere in-between these two poles. Rachel, similarly, places herself in a similar place as the Coke products, a position she calls "alt JAP" (Broder 19).[56] While the comment, acknowledges her Jewishness, it simultaneously and powerfully minimizes and mocks it. She chooses the term, "JAP," short for Jewish American Princess, evoking the decades old stereotype that depicts young Jewish women in the US as vapid, image and money obsessed, and frigid. While there is a hint of a self-deprecating joke in her statement, I would argue that this joke reveals her sense that she is in-between Jewishness and whiteness. The kind of Jewishness that Rachel articulates is proximal to whiteness, but it is ethnoracially marked and incompatible with the most extreme version of whiteness. Moreover, her joke reveals the discomfort of this position. She is caught between the most extreme version of whiteness which she knows she cannot fully attain because she remains Jewish, even if this is an alternate Jewishness, and a kind of visible and identifiable Jewishness, exemplifying the still fraught relationship between whiteness and Jewishness that is visible through the matter she consumes.

The Starved Jewish Body

Milk Fed, like *Eve's Apple* before it, uses the images of the starving, Jewish concentration camp prisoner to talk about eating disorders, Jewishness, and whiteness. When

[56] Rachel will later describe her religious identification by saying, "I was reform,' I said, 'But now I'm sort of nothing" (Broder 85). This moment further highlights her sense of being caught between whiteness and Jewishness.

Rachel tells her mother that she suspects she has an eating disorder, her mother uses the image of the starving holocaust victim to minimize Rachel's concern. Rachel broaches the subject, "'I have to tell you something,' I said to my mother. 'I think I have an eating disorder, anorexia maybe'" (Broder 9). Her mother disagrees, saying, "'Anorexics are much skinnier than you,' she said, 'They look like concentration camp victims'" (Broder 9). Rachel's mother suffers from a fundamental misunderstanding about eating disorders: that those with eating disorders are so underweight as to cause alarm. Rachel's mother denies Rachel's understanding of her eating disorder because her body has not yet become so thin as to cause alarm. Moreover, Rachel's mother does not see an issue with her weight because she is in the thin space between two stereotypically Jewish body types. At the two extremes are very different images of Jews: the zaftig, food loving grandparents, and at the other, the starved, Jewish victim of the holocaust. There is a strong sense that her mother is focused on a bodily performance of Jewishness that is mostly concerned with how the body is read as opposed to how it identifies or feels. Rachel's mother is most focused on a kind of acceptable weight that reads as Jewish, white, and upwardly mobile, a kind of Jewish body that exists as close as possible to the most extreme versions of whiteness. Rachel's mother signals her preference for a kind of Jewishness that isn't too identifiably Jewish to outsiders, specifically those who exist in the most extreme versions of whiteness. There is a very narrow window of acceptable weight. The danger is that being not skinny enough (or perhaps even too skinny) throws the other categories into misalignment.

The imagery here is similar to that in *Eve's Apple* which also uses holocaust imagery to articulate a relationship to whiteness. However, in the previous examples from *Eve's Apple*, the images were used to separate the body of a woman with a diagnosed and visible eating disorder

from her Jewishness. A key difference between these moments is that Joseph knows that Ruth has an eating disorder, and the image is used by Joseph to place her eating disorder in opposition to Ruth's Jewishness. We tend to think about the proximity to whiteness as dictated by racial identity, perhaps even ethnoracial identity, sex, gender, class, maybe even religion, but less often do be consider how weight might shuttle a subject closer or further away from whiteness. If, as I suggest, eating is a cultural component of weight and legibly embodied performance, then eating too may similarly shuttle a subject closer to or further away from whiteness.

The thin, Jewish woman's body becomes a problem for others when it can no longer bear children. This reveals that despite subtle shifts in the relationship between Jewishness and whiteness that are visible through an examination of eating, the same preoccupation with a Jewish woman's possible productivity remains a social pressure. Rachel's mother is not concerned by the presentation of Rachels body because it exists between the two stereotypes of Jewish bodies, but when she learns that Rachel's period has stopped, she sends her to a nutritionist. Rachel explains, "My fertility was important; she wanted grandchildren one day" (Broder 9). The nutritionist works with Rachel to gradually increase her daily calories, but Rachel does not receive treatment for her eating disorder. The nutritionist seems only concerned with getting Rachel's period to return. While this eases Rachel's mother's anxiety, it does not help Rachel. She states, "I went from freezing to just cold. The shaking stopped. The fur disappeared. I could sleep on my stomach. The whispers got quiet. I bled again. But I remained engrossed in calories" (Broder 9).[57] As with, Ruth in *Eve's Apple*, the people around Rachel become nervous about her body when it seems that she cannot reproduce. Rachel, like Ruth, is caught between the competing desires of those around her. Rachel's mother would like her to be

[57] The fur to which Broder refers is lanugo. Lanugo is the layer of soft, fine hair that newborn babies are born with. This hair functions to help retain body heat. Its presence on adult bodies can also be a symptom of anorexia nervosa.

simultaneously slim enough to outwardly communicate the kind of Jewish identity that aligns itself with the more extreme versions of whiteness and heterosexual desire. This includes a slim body that resists the historical and cultural connotations of the zaftig body, the ethnoracially marked body. However, this comes into conflict with another competing demand, that Jewish women reproduce.

In my second chapter, I examine how this reproduction speaks to both the assumption that Jewish women will produce Jewish children and reproduce Jewish culture. The demands on Rachel are similar. Her mother expects her to have children. However, the cultural project is not to continue Jewishness through the production of more Jewish children or through a kind of cultural and religious education. We can see this in both Rachel's and her mother's loose attachment to a Reform synagogue that is presented as being more focused on status symbols than Jewishness. Instead, Rachel is expected to simultaneously fashion her body in ways that gain greater access to the most extreme version of whiteness as well as produce children who will do the same. Rachel's mother makes demands of Rachel's body, namely that she maintains a level of slimness that she associates with male desire. Rachel's mother is invested in the creation of another generation of white Jews who will, continue to distance themselves from the more ethnoracially marked versions of Jewishness. This struggle is already visible in how Rachel's mother discourages her from developing a relationship to food like that of her grandparents. In this way, the demand to reproduce is a simultaneous demand to reproduce a kind of Jewish whiteness that moves ever closer to the cultural capital offered by the most extreme versions of whiteness.

Rachel's mother rejects Rachel's suspicion that she has an eating disorder. The basis for this is that Rachel does not look thin enough, does not look like the victim of a concentration

camp. This connection, so eerily similar to the one in *Eve's Apple*, functions very differently. *Eve's Apple* uses the image of the Holocaust camp victim, the emaciated Jewish body, to highlight the seriousness of Ruth's eating disorder, and, in so doing, Joseph casts her as both camp prisoner and camp guard, suggesting that she is the one who is at fault for attempting to kill this Jewish body. However, Ruth rejects Joseph's insinuation. she is adamant that though she has an eating disorder it does not diminish her Jewishness. Rachel's mother, like Joseph, also believes that anorexics look like camp victims, but she differs in that she does not see young Rachel's slenderness as a problem. Instead, Rachel has been taught to view her starving body as a necessity for her future success and happiness. Rachel starving body is also the price of entry to a heterosexual relationship that will result in children which is her mother's primary concern. As such, Rachel's eating disorder only becomes a problem when her period ceases.

However, Rachel, like Ruth, tells her own narrative about her eating disorder. Ruth's assertion of her sense of self is brief and brushed aside by those around her, but Rachel offers more discussion of her sense of self in relation to her eating disorder. She explains:

> When I was seventeen, at the apex of my starving, I had a big, vintage poster of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* in my bedroom. My goal had been to become as narrow as Audrey [Hepburn], but no matter how little I ate, I could still feel meat on my abdomen, cushion on my thighs. Audrey was practically sculpted from bone. She was starved during childhood, World War II in Holland, which was why she was so skinny. I knew it was fucked up, but I found myself envious that she'd had skinniness thrust upon her. An enemy had inflicted her starvation, which made it heroic. She hadn't had to starve herself to become a star." (Brorder 78-9)

This section provides a sharp contract to the section in which Rachel's mom says that anorexics look like concentration camp victims. While Rachel frames it as stardom, she might just as easily call it survival because Hepburn's starvation was a byproduct of her survival. Something "thrust upon her." There is a very interesting difference here. Rachel represents Audrey Hepburn as passive. She "was starved," she "was practically sculpted." She is not an actor in her own starvation, but the victim of it. Rachel goes on to explain that she is envious that Hepburn found herself in this position. This takes on greater significance when we read this alongside the scene in which Rachel's mother says that Rachel doesn't look like a concentration camp victim and so cannot actually have an eating disorder. Here, Rachel's comments seem to suggest that she would experience less cognitive dissonance if she knew that her starving and the survival she connects with it were coming from an external source. There is, Rachel seems to suggest, a sense of shame that she feels at the prospect of starving herself, especially when the survival she seeks is connected to per proximity to whiteness. Unlike Ruth who is adamant about her Jewishness, Rachel's comments throughout the book reveal the troubling comfort that comes with starving herself and minimizing her connection to Jewish eating. While she, like Hepburn, may be starving out of a sense of necessity, Rachel seems troubled by her dwindling relationship to Jewish eating and her own sense of her Jewishness.

The Chinese Restaurant Revisited

Rachel and Miriam solidify their friendship over kosher Chinese food. In a scene that mirrors that from *Marjorie Morningstar*, the two Jewish women meet at a Chinese restaurant to talk about Jewishness while eating. The similarities between these scenes are worth noting and allow these scenes to talk to one another across the intervening 66 years. Marjorie, the thin protagonist with a habit of replacing meals with a cup of black coffee, is invited to the restaurant

by Marsha. Marsha is described as fat, ethnically marked, and "exotic" (Wouk 64). She is the one who frequents the Chinese restaurant and invites Marjorie to join her. In *Milk Fed*, Rachel, also thin and navigating a very active eating disorder, is invited to the Chinese restaurant by the "undeniably fat, irrefutably fat" Miriam (Broder 39). Once the two different parties are seated in their respective Chinese restaurants, the larger women do the ordering, demonstrating their knowledge of the menu and acting as the catalyst for the food that will soon be before the two reluctant eaters. Another similarity is that both sets of women engage in a conversation about their Jewishness over dinner. As each pair sits together in their respective Chinese restaurants, they try to describe their sense of Jewishness to each other. Both Marjorie and Marsha talk about their Jewishness in ways that emphasize their lack of religious connection. Somewhat similarly, as Rachel and Miriam sit and discuss their connections to Jewishness. As they joke and sip on strong tropical cocktails, Miriam asks Rachel:

> "'What kind of Jew are you again?'
>
> 'I was reform,' I said, 'But now I'm sort of nothing.'" (Broder 85)

Because of Rachel's previous comments we know when she talks about Reform Judaism that she means a kind of cultural connection that is not necessarily a religious one from her perspective. Her conception of Reform Judaism revolves around upward mobility and assimilation more than it does Torah study. So, when she says that she has transitioned from Reform to become "sort of nothing," we can read both her movement away from her sense of being a Reform Jew and the extent to which she feels she has slipped into whiteness.[58] We must understand whiteness as a kind of identity that obscures all others and purposely evades definition. Whatever is raced is not

[58] Rachel's comment about being "nothing" calls to mind Robin Friedman's young adult novel, *Nothing* about a teenaged boy named Parker Rabinowitz who, amid the stress of competing on his high school track team and applying to college, develops an eating disorder.

white, and whiteness is the absence of racialization. Because of this, Rachel accurately describes her whiteness as being "sort of nothing," an absence of those things which might mark her as belonging to any distinct ethnoracial or religious group outside of whiteness. Hand-in hand with this disappearance into whiteness is the attempted disappearance of her body. As we previously saw with Ruth in *Eve's Apple*, the people around her are concerned that her eating disorder aligns her with miraculous, Christian fasting women and threatens her Jewishness. While Ruth makes subtle but readable protestations that her Jewishness is not diminished by her eating disorder, Rachel seems to believe that her eating disorder separates her from her Jewishness. In her comment, we can read the connectedness she feels between the battle she wages against the borders of her body and the absence of the religious and ethnoracial identity she once experienced.

As we saw in *Marjorie Morningstar*, the space of the Chinese restaurant offers two Jewish women the opportunity to transgress within reason. In *Marjorie Morningstar* the transgression was the foreign food matter that challenged both white and kosher notions of eating. However, in *Milk Fed*, it is queer desire that threatens to complicate the relationship between Jewishness and whiteness. In *Marjorie Morningstar*, the space of the Chinese restaurant functions as a space for relatively safe transgression. As previously discussed, this transgression feels less safe for those characters who aspire to whiteness and simultaneously feel the precarity of their ethnoracial assignment. Two Jewish women, Marjorie and Marsha, can share a meal, with plausible deniability as to the kosher or non-kosher nature of the food. For this older generation of Jewish characters, the Chinese restaurant is a space where their ethnoracial assignment is more open to interpretation because of the space their bodies occupy and the eating they are doing. Additionally, the Chinese restaurant functioned historically for Jewish

communities as a place to demonstrate their cosmopolitan leanings and, in connection, a kind of desire for upwardly mobile whiteness. The food in the scene at the Chinese restaurant in *Marjorie Morningstar* helps to illustrate how Marsha's weight and appetite marks her as a less white subject. As Marjorie eats, she contemplates the nature of the food and wonders whether this eating experience will push her closer to or further from the whiteness to which she aspires. She refuses to eat in an attempt to shape her body in ways that move her closer to an acceptably slender and whiter body. In her worries, we can identify anti-Asian racism and concerns about the contaminating effect of Chinese food, people, and racially marked spaces, as the result of Marjorie's investment in the ideology of white supremacy.

For an older, less securely white, generation of Jewish patrons of Chinese restaurants, these establishments offered the prospect of transgressions that was relatively safe feeling. Chinese restaurants presented food that was considered "safe treyf," non-kosher food that was presented in ways that obscured its non-kosher nature. In addition, the walls obscuring the kitchen from the dinners allowed kosher patrons to not directly confront the non-kosher food preparation practices of the restaurant. Moreover, Chinese restaurants allowed Jewish diners to feel worldly in defiance of stereotypes that depicted Jews as provincial, shtetl dwellers. As an extension of this, Chinese restaurants also offered Jewish diners the opportunity to feel that they were being read as white. This was a significant draw for Jews in the 1940 and 50s. However, for contemporary American Jews with the most access to whiteness and a more secure relationship to whiteness, Chinese restaurant instead of offering them the opportunity to be read as white offer a very different kind of transgression.

The historical ties between Chinese restaurants and Jewish diners mean that contemporary Jewish patrons can indulge in this historical connection that emphasizes their

Jewishness in ways that feel indulgent and transgressive in a culture where they are most often read as white.[59] This is particularly true in the case of the Chinese restaurant in *Milk Fed,* which is kosher, truly safe treyf. The Chinese restaurant is still the space in which two Jewish women can flirt with transgression and liminality, even as the type of transgression has changed and the conditions in which they live have changed. The text subtly hints at the change in conditions, including in the ethnoracial location of Ashkenazi Jews. Rachel describes The Golden Dragon as looking like, "the corpse of somebody's 1950s Hollywood regency-tiki dream" (Broder 83). Her description suggests that the restaurant is something of a relic, belonging to an older time. The text suggests that the kind of Chinese restaurants that Marjorie and Marsha visited might still be physically present, but the conditions of the diners have changed. Though the "tiki bar" trend began in the 30s, it reached its peak in the 50s. To white patrons, these establishments offered an inauthentic, consumable, exoticized, and commodified idea of Polynesian culture.[60] Rachel's description of the restaurant as "the corpse of somebody's […] dream" points to that artificiality of this fantasy. This Chinese restaurant is kosher and serves a predominantly Orthodox community. Rachel notes that despite the state of disrepair, "the place was surprisingly popular. Women in wigs kept entering and leaving with takeout. A party of ten drunk Chassidic men clambered in" (Broder 83). While Marjorie and Marsha ate Chinese food in defiance of Kosher laws, Miriam goes to this Chinese restaurant because it is kosher. When Rachel and Miriam visit the Chinese restaurant in *Milk Fed,* we encounter a different kind of indeterminacy. While their

[59] I would argue that the draw to Jewish delis operates in a similar fashion, but this connection requires a more detailed and considered examination that in possible here.
[60] For more on tiki bars, see Wayne Curtis' "Tiki: How Sex, Rum, World War II, and the Brand-New State of Hawaii Ignited a Fad That Has Never Quite Ended" and Glenn R. Carroll and Dennis Ray Wheaton's "Donn, Vic and Tiki Bar Authenticity."

ethnoracial identity is relatively fixed, especially when compared to that of Marjorie and Marsha, it offers each Jewish woman a different kind of transgression and indulgence.

Importantly, The Chinese restaurant as described in *Marjorie Morningstar* and *Milk Fed* allows Jews with the most access to whiteness to capitalizes on the vague awareness that the Chinese restaurant and the Asian people within it are more racially marked than the Jewish patrons that are being discussed. In the case of *Milk Fed*, there is very little attention given to the identities of the people who work at the restaurant. However, *Marjorie Morningstar* absolutely deploys racist, anti-Asian stereotypes to present Chinese people and spaces as threats to white-aspirational Jews like Marjorie. In the intervening years between these two texts, the relationship between whiteness and Ashkenazi Jewishness has become significantly more secure. The threat that the Jewish women in *Milk Fed* will emerge from this meal less ethnoracially marked than when they began no longer looms. However, Rachel and Miriam still partake in the exoticization of Asian people, spaces, and traditions. Because of this, the Golden Dragon is perceived as a racially marked space; Miriam and Rachel act in ways that reveal how the space of the Chinese restaurant makes them feel unconstrained and free to indulge in ways of eating and being that are viewed by the characters as risky. Moreover, their relatively secure whiteness allows both Rachel and Miriam to do all this without much consideration about how their sense of abandon functions because they are white women entering a racialized space.

Treyf Desires and Appetites

Rachel uses the space of the Chinese restaurant to indulge in a connection to Jewishness and food, two interconnected forces that she has been taught to avoid for the sake of her own survival and well-being. The space of the Chinese restaurant allows Rachel to eat and to eat freely. The two start with drinks, and when Rachel remarks on the strength of the drink, Miriam

responds that getting drunk is a blessing (Broder 84). “I do feel chosen,” Rachel retorts. Both the women understand this as a reference to their shared Jewishness as what follows is a discussion of the extent to which each one feels connected to Judaism. The Golden Dragon offers Rachel a chance to drink and eat in ways that make her feel joyous and Jewish. Once, eating Chinese food offered Jews the opportunity to loosen their perceptible ties to Jewishness and eat in spaces and ways that, they imagined, led them to be read as white when that identity was still slightly foreign and precarious to Ashkenazi Jews. However, in this more contemporary moment, Rachel spends most of her life performing the kind of restrictive eating that is designed to align her with whiteness. This Chinese restaurant, because of the history tying Jewish diners to Chinese restaurants and because it serves kosher food and drinks, allows Rachel to experience a connection to Jewishness that she hasn’t felt in a long time. Rachel has so deeply internalized the performance of eating in ways that align her with the most extreme versions of whiteness that they are not so much choices as compulsions.

But now, she follows her desire for food, and she begins to feel a connection to Jewishness. Miriam handles the ordering, getting the pair pepper steak, sesame chicken, chef’s special pan-fried noodles, duck fried rice, a pu pu platter that feeds four, and wonton soup. As their meal continues, Rachel expresses a renewed sense of connection to her Jewishness. Full for the first time in a long time, Rachel tries and fails to count the calories she has just consumed with pleasure. Finding herself unable to calculate the caloric toll the dinner has cost, she wants to “run to the bathroom, to try and puke everything up,” but cannot because her legs are trembling (Broder 93). In a gesture that mimics lighting shabbat candles, Rachel describes her movements, saying, “I put my elbows on the table and took deep breaths. I held my hands up to my eyes. I could still see the flames in the spaces between my fingers” (Broder 93). As she peers between

her fingers, she notices she sees eight spots of light. “I am a menorah,” she tells Miriam (Broder 93). By the end of the evening’s dinner, Rachel has been transformed. Though Rachel finds the Chinese food delectable, she simultaneously notes that any Chinese food would be delicious simply because she has denied herself a full meal for so long (Broder 93). In this way, Rachel deemphasizes the food that she is eating, instead highlighting how the performance of eating itself, in this context, makes her feel her Jewishness. This moment harkens back to her memories of going to New York to eat Jewish food with her grandparents. While *Marjorie Morningstar* ties eating in abundance to a kind of gluttony that negatively marks one as Jewish, *Milk Fed* begins to suggest that enjoying food and a feeling of fullness in the company of others offers the prospect of connection to an affirming sense of Jewishness.

In addition to eating freely and with gusto in ways that connect Rachel to her Jewishness, she uses the Chinese restaurant as a space and opportunity to engage in queer flirtation, and the text begins to suggest that there is freedom and healing to be found in all three. Rachel’s love and desire for Miriam, which start in earnest in the Chinese restaurant, similarly offer her a feeling of connection to her Jewishness and a kind of Jewish continuity that feel vital and important. Rachel is enticed to The Golden Dragon by the prospect of a date with Miriam. In the Chinese restaurant, Rachel is relatively free to flirt with Miriam and to realize the depth of her feelings for Miriam. After Rachel comments that she likes how Miriam feeds herself, Miriam prepares a bite of food for Rachel. As Rachel eats it, she thinks to herself, “*Fuck,* […] *I might love this girl*” (Broder 92). As the two eat and talk, Rachel begins to realize that she could be falling in love with Miriam. In a later interaction, also at the Golden Dragon, Miriam and Rachel discuss their past relationships; Miriam begins the conversation by asking Rachel if she has ever had a boyfriend. After talking about boyfriends, Rachel asks, “What about a girlfriend?” (Broder

173). As the meal continues, Rachel explores further, asking, "What about girls? Are girls allowed to hug? […] And hold hands?" (Broder 174). In the relative safety of the Chinese restaurant, both women explore a different kind of "treyf," queer desire.

For the less religious Rachel, her attraction to Miriam is tinged by taboo in the form of her mother's desire for her to have a heterosexual relationship that results in a child and the knowledge that Miriam may not be free to pursue a same-sex relationship. For the Orthodox Miriam, the prospect of a romantic and sexual relationship with Rachel is less safe treyf. Rachel and Miriam face different repercussions for pursuing a relationship. While Rachel risks further troubling her relationship with her mother, Miriam risks losing her family This difference is illustrated by the cool feelings Rachel's mother expresses at her relationships with other women and Miriam's decision to marry a man and remain in her Orthodox community. Still, the Chinese restaurant offers Miriam a space where she can flirt with Rachel and explore their relationship in ways that are not possible in other places, such as her parents' home. Rachel finds connection to her own sense of Jewishness through her relationship with Miriam. After the pair visit The Golden Dragon, they have sex at Rachel's apartment. As she performs oral sex, she reflects:

> When I tasted her brine, I was hit with a feeling of timelessness, as though this had all happened before. Somewhere as far back as our ancestors in Russia or Lithuania or Poland or Moldova. We were two shtetl Jewish women reincarnated, two women who knew each other and had been lovers in a past life. I felt that all that had ever happened before was happening right now—and that everything happening right now would happen forever. There was a life that had always existed between women. It would continue to exist. (Broder 217-218)

Rachel follows her desire by pursuing a relationship with Miriam. As a result of following her intuition and desires, Rachel experiences a sense of self that is connected to her Jewishness and to a continuum of queer Jewish women who have come before her. This moment begins in the Chinese restaurant when Rachel and Miriam share a meal. Rachel watches Miriam eat and finds herself attracted to her appetite.[61] She plays with Miriam under the table and wishes that Miriam's arousal would cause her to become so wet she leaves a mark on the banquette seats. She longs for a mark that proves, "*we were here*" (Broder 216). This desire is fulfilled when she senses their connection to generations of Jewish women before and after them, when she realizes that, "everything happening right now would happen forever." In the Chinese restaurant, Rachel pursues her desires and indulges in a slightly risky proposition, flirting with an Orthodox woman who may or may not return her affection. Out of this first meeting grows a relationship that helps Rachel relearn to trust her impulses. This newfound trust and accompanying sense of self led her to a connection to Jewishness that feel vital, affirming, and like a meaningful form of resistance.

Jewish Guts and Intuition

As the novel continues, it presents a path back towards the self through this notion of appetite. The gut is presented as the place from which appetite originates. In this configuration appetite, as illustrated above, refers to both the desire for food and fullness as well as sexual and romantic appetite, the desire for connection. Likewise, the gut functions as both the seat of this appetite and a trusted organ with its own sense of intuition. Throughout the novel, Rachel is visited by Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel in her dreams. These dreams begin after she constructs a representation of her body in clay as part of a therapy exercise. The activity prompts her to read

[61] This scene echoes the combination of food and queer desire that exists in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*.

about the golem, and afterward Rachel meets and begins to fall in love with Miriam. Rabbi Loew becomes a frequent guest of her dreams. In one such dream, Rachel's hunger leads her to eat the petals of lilies. At first, she tries to only lick water droplets off the petals, fearing that the flowers are poisonous. However, she grows so hungry that she can't resist eating the flowers whole. She says to herself, "I'm not dying [...] I'm not dying" (Broder 197). As she munches, Rabbi Loew appears and says, "It's nice to see you noshing. It's a mitzvah, you know" (Broder 197). Rabbi Loew affirms that noshing is a blessing in a moment that mirrors the scene in which Miriam tells Rachel it is a blessing to drink. Overall, the novel presents many different ways of being Jewish with no way being more Jewish than the other. However, in the early sections of the book, Rachel perceives her mother and herself as being less Jewish. As previously illustrated, she even goes so far as to describe her Jewishness as "nothing." Against her own sense of being "nothing," Rabbi Loew and Miriam represent people with vital, lived connections to Jewishness. For Rachel, whose mother has framed eating as a transgression, these moments offer a different understanding of eating. By Rabbi Loew and Miriam's understanding, eating and drinking are blessings, actions that are holy. This stands in contrast to Christian traditions that position fasting as holy while feasting often threatens to verge into gluttony. Rabbi Loew and Miriam are not alone in this conception. There is a strong Jewish religious tradition that imagines feasting as a holy blessing. Even when holidays incorporate fasts, the feasts after are as important as the fasts. Rabbi Loew continues, "I don't want to interrupt your nosh. I just came to let you know that it's nice to see you trusting your kishka" (Broder 197). Not understanding the term *kishka*, Rachel asks for clarification, and Rabbi Loew responds, "Your guts! Your intuition" (Broder 197). Though Rabbi Loew uses the word kishka to mean guts it might also be translated as innermost parts; the term also refers to a sausage that uses an intestine casing. Rachel's appetite led her to

eat the lilies. Though she was, at first, fearful that they would poison her, she finds them delicious. For Rachel, who has been taught to fear her own appetite and the places that it may lead her, the fear of destruction that comes with listening to her gut is very serious. But she finds the pull of some delights too great, and she indulges in food and flirtation. While each exercise in trusting her gut feels risky, they lead her to experiences and relationships that help her feel connected not only to her Jewishness but to a more authentic sense of self, one less shaped by external forces and instead fashioned according to her own taste.

Milk Fed offers a response and a continuation to the previously created works to which it relates. While it takes up many of the same concerns as the previous works I have examined, it considers a contemporary moment when Jewish whiteness for those with the most access to that whiteness is only questioned by antisemitic and white supremacist groups. Despite this relative security, Jewish whiteness is still conditional upon the performance of practices that are perceived as aligned with whiteness. This includes the performance of a slender body and heterosexual desire. The novel helps to articulate an approach to Jewish eating, appetite, and food culture that views all as threats that might prevent assess to the most extreme, most Christian forms of whiteness. In previous texts, the Jewish gut has been positioned as a force that, if embraced, might lead racially ambiguous subjects further away from whiteness. The result of which is imagined to be ethnoracial precarity. However, *Milk Fed* helps to articulate the Jewish gut, the kishka, as a potential site for resistance and healing. By listening to one's desires and appetites, one might reconnect with an embodied experience of Jewishness that is joyous and connected.

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Conclusion

In 2019, the year that this project began in earnest, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) estimated that there were 2,107 antisemitic incidents in the US, representing a 12% increase from the year before ("Audit"). In March of 2023, the ADL released their summary of 2022 in which they counted 3,697 antisemitic incidents ("Audit"). Though 2022 was not as bloody as past years, the increase in incidents represents a 36% increase from the year before.[62] That means that since I started this dissertation, antisemitic incidents, as tracked by the ADL, have increased 75.46%. The ADL rightly identifies the increase in organized white supremacist propaganda activity as a major reason for this increase. They note, "This is the third time in the past five years that the year-end total has been the highest number ever recorded" ("Audit"). Sadly, for neither the first nor that last time, the ADL notes that 2022 had "the highest number [of incidents] on record since the ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979" ("Audit"). And sadly, there is no indication that this trend will abate. Those Jews with the most access to whiteness may live with its privileges, but many Jews are not so insulated by this privilege as to avoid antisemitic incidents entirely. Unfortunately, this demonstrates the continued need for scholars to examine Jewish whiteness, its shifts, and responses to it. Moreover, there is a clear need for those working in academic communities to make this work legible to the public.

While this project is primarily concerned with tracing the contours of contemporary Jewish whiteness as it shifts further and closer to the most extreme version of whiteness, this examination opens up many opportunities for further research. Future scholars might consider paying attention to antisemitic hate groups such as the Goyim Defense League (GDL), the Proud Boys, and the Oath Keepers and to propagators of antisemitism, like Turning Point USA, The Dailey Wire, Louder with Crowder, and many more. These organizations, online media outlets, and shows function in an interconnected web that shares antisemitic talking points and functions to radicalize people. Though they are often mocked for their

[62] The ADL notes that "no assaults perpetrated against the Jewish community resulted in mass causalities" in 2022. ("Audit"). The yearly audit tracks incidents of harassment, vandalism, and assault.

positions and disregarded because of their absurdity, they reach a staggering number of people. Further research might also consider conceptions of Jewishness as imagined of by the Christian identity movements that identify Christians as the real Jews. What does it mean to keep and use the identifier without actual Jews? As an outgrowth of this dissertation, future scholars might examine literary representations of BIPOC Jews eating to examine how these depictions of eating practices illustrate and engage the formation of race in the US. Fran Ross' *Oreo* and Brenda Serotte's *The Fortune Teller's Kiss* are particularly rich examples. Additionally, scholars might focus of Jewish women's joke-work and food to examine how playing with food and eating offer Jewish comedians ways of engaging in bawdy and body comedy while subverting expectations.

It is a strange position to be in, but I had hoped that this project would become less relevant, less needed, as I worked on it. This hope is, I would guess, shared by many scholars whose work is tied to the realities of racism and antisemitism. Jews with the most access to the privileges of whiteness live the benefit of those privileges daily. But, for many, the realities of this privilege are coupled with the knowledge that being identified or identifiable as Jewish holds very real stakes. The question of Jewish whiteness is not settled. Those Jews with the most access to whiteness still exist in proximity to whiteness, but that relationship is in flux and conditional upon the continued performance of whiteness. The stakes of this performance range from minor annoyances to real dangers. For example, after Ye, formerly Kanye West, posted antisemitic tweets and sat down with various rightwing extremists for interviews, an acquaintance contacted me to ask if he could still wear and buy Yeezys, shoes from Ye's line. What about listening to his music? The interaction was vaguely annoying. However, when I later looked at the comment sections below Ye's tweet thread, it was the number of replies that voiced their agreement that truly troubled me. Not long before that, I was hiking with some friends. I hadn't expected to see many people other than them and had worn a shirt with Hebrew text on it. As we made an unexpected stop at a rural grocery store in the Columbia River gorge, I spotted an older white man emerging from a car covered in stickers espousing his support of right-wing extremism and white

supremacy. Despite the heat, I felt the need to pull on my sweater before exiting the car. I both know that these moments are small in the scope of things and that they weigh on me, that I am both relatively safe and worried. Unfortunately, this project still fees relevant and necessary.

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