INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
RICE UNIVERSITY

THE BORDERING NATION:
PROBLEMS OF AMERICAN IDENTITY IN SELECTED NOVELS
FROM OUR NIG TO GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ

by

JANE CREIGHTON

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

David Minter, Professor, Director
English

Susan Lurie, Associate Professor
English

José Aranda, Assistant Professor
English

Elizabeth Long, Associate Professor
Sociology

Houston, Texas

September, 1996
Abstract

The Bordering Nation: Problems of American Identity in Selected Novels from *Our Nig* to *George Washington Gómez*

by

Jane Creighton

The dynamics between "American" constructions of ethnicity and the aspiration for and resistance to "American" identity are central to this study of several novels marked by their subjects' diverse racial, ethnic, gendered, regional, and class provenance. Beginning with the African-American tradition, I consider how Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912) recognize and critique the evolution of race and class politics from the mid-nineteenth century through the early twentieth. These novels, positioned as "bookends" to the troubled history of post-emancipation politics, sharply delineate the problems of self-authorizing "other" voices in dialogue with national identity at the same time that they establish prior historical ground for considering what is at stake in subsequent texts.

The major portion of this study concerns four novels from the 1920s and 1930s, and is drawn from two cultures differently absorbed in the dialogism of borders--urban Jewish New York and Chicano Texas along the Texas-Mexican border. The texts include Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*, Jovita Gonzalez's and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero*, and Américo Paredes's
George Washington Gómez. Among these texts exists a wealth of discourses that constitute rich pre-conditions for current debates on multiculturalism. The juxtaposition of Jewish and Chicano novels suggests parallel problems in cultures marked both by strong religious and secular traditions and by histories of diverse persecutions that finally meet within the contested meaning of Americanization. The worlds these novels reveal assert an ongoing making of an "America" that is fundamentally multicultural in the complex, often fraught negotiation of Anglo hegemony. The uneven parallel between the immigrant Jew who arrives from elsewhere and the colonized Mexican who remains surrounded by colonizers provides variant ways of looking at persistent conceptions of the "New World." If early Anglo mythology has long been dependent on notions of recurrent frontiers harboring "a nation of immigrants" within a consensual state of monologic Anglo hegemony, the shifting continental borders of the U.S. along with the immensity of its ongoing demographic changes have always offered a different model. The ways in which these novels dissect and contest that hegemony give this subject its voice.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study could not have been accomplished without David Minter's generosity of vision. His commitment—as a scholar, as a mentor, as a citizen—to the importance of American literature and the lives it addresses, is a model of excellence I can only hope to emulate. Susan Lurie has provided the tremendous support of her brilliant readings, handing me critiques that continue to push me beyond the tentativeness of my own thinking. I thank José Aranda for the constant opening of territory he provides me in pursuing this dissertation's concerns, and Elizabeth Long for her careful reading.

Kathye Bergin, Karen Latuchie, Harriet Barlow, and Rebecca Stern have richly delivered the double graces of friendship and shining intellect. Tom Kreneck of Special Collections at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, provided generous access to the manuscript of Caballero. Pat Jasper, my lifelong friend who first showed me Mexico and later the Texas-Mexican border, suggested George Washington Gómez to me, then brought me into the lively presence of Don Ámérico Paredes. For the interviews I had with him, I am forever grateful.

I am deeply thankful for the presence in my life of Lois Parkinson Zamora and Lee Dowling, whose intellectual methods and energetic concerns with hemispheric studies renewed my own delight in scholarship, and gave me a way to pursue within academia interests that have urgently marked my life both in and out of school.

Finally to my brother, Allan Creighton, and to my aunt and uncle, Drs. Margaret and Earl Green, I offer the depth of my gratitude and love. With great dignity, humor, and all seriousness, you have taught me throughout my life.
CONTENTS

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iv

Introduction 1

Chapter One


Chapter Two

"Mostly About Myself:" Anzia Yezierska and Languages of Contested Space 78

Chapter Three

"Footholds in Unmitigated Light:" Agency and Vertiginous Worlds in Call It Sleep 128

Chapter Four

Border Songs: Caballero, George Washington Gómez, and Rewriting the Past 169

Conclusion 220

Bibliography 234
Introduction

In the opening scene of *Millenium Approaches*, Part One of Tony Kushner's play, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, the aging Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz delivers a monologue over the coffined body of one Sarah Ironson, recently deceased denizen of the Bronx Home of Aged Hebrews. The year is 1985. The rabbi, unabashedly consulting his notes, tells his audience that Sarah Ironson is the devoted and beloved wife, mother, and grandmother to a family grouping of both deceased and presently living persons, a string of names beginning with Benjamin, Abraham, Esther, Rachel, that trails off into Louis, Angela, Luke, Eric. "Eric? This is a Jewish name?" He shrugs. He did not know her, though in the routine of his days at the Home, he speaks to many. Sarah, he reports, preferred silence. "She was," he says, "not a person but a whole kind of person, the ones who crossed the ocean, who brought with us to America the villages of Russia and Lithuania--and how we fought, for the family, for the Jewish home, so that you would not grow up here, in this strange place."¹

In a play eliciting speeches from its characters that fly in a tangle of national and local identifiers, Rabbi Chemelwitz's invocation of the great Atlantic migrations of Eastern European and Russian Jews heralds what will be a recognition, in ways both wildly ironic and straightforward, of the weight of the symbolic past in the making and unmaking of present selves. The Sarah Ironson who disappears into the coffin of the private self becomes in the rabbi's language a representative figure for intra-ethnic claims to distinct cultural and communal identity. Still close enough in time to the historic to be rendered in experiential terms, what she knows and remembers instead disappears into the
absence of person, into the figure of silence that is transposed over a portrait of migration, a bent woman who carries multitudes on her back.

"You can never make that crossing that she made, for such Great Voyages in this world do not any more exist. But every day of your lives the miles that voyage between that place and this one you cross. Every day. You understand me? In you that journey is." His remarks hearken to what Werner Sollors among others has referred to as a cultural emphasis on "unmelted ethnicity," a constitutive and easily recognizable thread in the argumentative fabric of "American" life. If one of the more contentious truisms about American national culture is that we are, in Sollors terms, ideologically committed to consent-based individualism rather than the privileges (or disablings) of hereditary descent, the rabbi's remarks strike a dissonant chord, particularly as they derive from inside an ethnic group characterized from the outside by its willed separateness.\(^2\)

I was sitting in Angel's Broadway audience one hot August afternoon in 1994, just after a trip backstage managed through the good fortune of having a friend among the cast. I had met F. Murray Abraham, the Lebanese-American actor from El Paso who played the Jewish Roy Cohn, the notorious right-wing lawyer at war with both the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg and his own sexuality. Hearing I'd arrived from his home state, Abraham told me a joke about a Texas oil man magically turned into a frog during the eighties oil bust. Already predisposed to enjoy the lively, particularly American irony of cross-cultural and cross-regional signifiers as I was to relish a scathing joke told me by an Academy Award winner, I settled into the play's opening. Listening to the rabbi's monologue I felt, without examining it, a sort of ragged amusement that attended the recognition of both identification and difference: identification derived from periodic senses I've had of being a gloomy citizen linked by birth
to an idea of the nation that had gone terribly wrong, an idea bred of a utopian exceptionalism still clinging to present practices that found its roots in exclusion and violence. As with, presumably, those children and grandchildren, I live in a state of both accepting and resisting the injunction to be in some way responsive to and responsible for the habits, actions, and consequences of my culture.

Difference lay, among other things, in an upbringing that assumed a consonance between nation and culture. That assumption partook of an ideological belief, felt but not interrogated in the practice of everyday life, that the flow of relations between individual desire and consensus should fuse the idea of individual good with a broader, social coherence that goes beyond attachment to local culture. We were secularized protestants, deriving from eastern Canada and New England, with intermittent and vaguely handed down political affiliations, but nevertheless firmly lodged in an adoption, no matter what the specific past, of certain Puritan tenets that Sacvan Bercovitch has argued formed the ideological transcendence of an "America" over volatile regional, gender, race and class differences.

This was [the Puritan's] legacy: a system of sacred-secular symbols (New Israel, American Jerusalem) for a people intent on progress; a set of rituals of anxiety that could at once encourage and control the energies of free enterprise; a rhetoric of mission so broad in its implications, and so specifically American in its application, that it could facilitate the transitions from Puritan to Yankee, and from errand to manifest destiny and the dream.3

If the nineteenth-century practice of territorial acquisition under the doctrine of manifest destiny no longer applied in visible ways to the mid-fifties and early sixties of my own middle-class childhood, the Cold War did, rumbling in the far
distant background of family pleasures, and with it, vaguely understood threats of totalitarianism, spies, informers, the Cuban missile crisis.

But memory has it that what I found particularly gripping—what first rivetted me to the notion that a "nation" might signify an entity provoking great passion and extraordinary personal loyalty—was the new nation of Israel, knowledge of which came to me largely by way of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, televised and print images of German concentration camps, and Leon Uris's novel, *Exodus*. The spectacle of bodies shrunken and contorted in ways I had never imagined, and stories of rape, medical experimentation, the codification of living and dying bodies according to separated, usable parts (teeth, skin, hair) were as incomprehensible as they were appalling. The attendant silence of the images, and the difficulty of forming appropriate questions as to how they could come to be, opened a chasm in the intelligence transmitted between viewer and viewed, an idea articulated by Elaine Scarry in terms of what happens to the victim:

For what the process of torture does is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the ever present but . . . only latent distinction between a self and a body, between a "me" and "my body." The "self" or "me," which is experienced on the one hand as more private, more essentially at the center, and on the other hand as participating across the bridge of the body in the world, is "embodied" in the voice, in language. The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushing present by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, absent by destroying it. ⁴

Much as I wanted to know what I was seeing, I couldn't imagine what it meant to undergo the collapse of the known world through relentless pain, and through
the physical and expressive disintegration that orchestrates the dissolution of
the future into a timeless, hopeless now. The presence of the decimated body
and the absence of voice in images from the Holocaust combined to awake in
me an urgent sympathy that was simultaneously distancing. I was, along I think
with many others of my pre-adolescent generation, struck dumb by the gap
between my own, vocal sense of humanity and the perceived silence of those
extreme "others," the Jewish people (other victims being unknown to me)
whose terrible persecution evaded adequate, articulable meaning.

What I could do was focus on what constituted salvation from the
torturers, whom I loosely understood to be massed in a faceless, gray grouping
of uniformed Germans devoted to an idea of culture figured in terms of racial
purity, and contained by the sharply outlined national entity called "Germany."
In contrast, the new "Israel" revived and mirrored the desired construct of my
"America," a dream of equality based in a sacred-secular mission that, in my
own rather feverish reading of Exodus, threaded principled heroics with
mingling sexual and romantic passions. One could be heroic, I saw, and
sexually active, fusing the two in a vibrant resistance that encompassed all it took
to invent and reproduce a resplendent nation.

For me that sense would be reconstituted during an adolescence
circulating through awareness of the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam
War, heightened by increasingly urgent demands that the U.S. cease the
undemocratic coercion of foreign peoples and return to the principles of
egalitarianism and equal opportunity in education and work upon which, I
raged, this country was founded. Loaded into the naïveté of those demands,
however just, was an assumption that differences among people don't matter.
Regardless of how much the experience not only of race but of class and
gender inequalities affected social relations among my peers—inequalities
manifested at home in more subtle and mysterious ways through the lower- and middle-class origins, respectively, of my mother and father—I assumed difference could be overridden by the cumulative effects of individual good will, by knowing and doing the right thing, whatever it was.

That difference matters in the way the story of America is told is a simple assertion fundamental to the project of this dissertation. My own early version of Americanness excludes me from any claim to the great and difficult voyages of which Kushner's rabbi speaks, my own ancestral immigrant past being largely unknown to me, and rather innocuously subsumed under the success of Anglo-Protestant migration to the Americas. But, ostensibly speaking to a gathering of predominantly Jewish mourners, the rabbi also spoke out alone on center stage to an audience that presumably could, no matter the national or ethnic provenances that exist within the range of Broadway-going audiences, tailor the rabbi's speech to its own sets of contradictory assumptions about what this strange place, America, is: hegemonic and pluralist, idealist and pragmatic, egalitarian and racist, corporate and individualist, protestant and not-protestant, violent and humane, unified and diverse. These are all finally contiguous terms inasmuch as it is difficult to assert one in the context of American culture and politics, without the other flinging itself alongside. They function, still, under the aegis of a desire for something, some representative body of work and of thought that will contain the idea of "the national" in its thematicas.

For the rabbi, the "here" of America is not really anywhere. "You do not live in America. No such place exists. Your clay is the clay of some Litvak shtetl, your air the air of the steppes." And yet he concludes, in a roundup that evidences a particularly American moment of cross-cultural fertilization, "So . . . She was the last of the Mohicans, this one was. Pretty soon . . . all the old will be dead."5 The poignant striking of this Cooperian note introduces the manner in
which *Angels in America* creates its present "fantasia" of human dilemmas from an expansive mingling of diverse cultural archetypes that resist, adapt to, and in the process reformulate the rubrics of Americanism. The play's Jews, Mormons, Afro-Caribbeans, and Anglo-Protestants carry the weight of heritages continuously reconfigured in the workings of homosexual and heterosexual desire, in the intimate and dangerous rendering of the body within the world of AIDS politics, and in the breaking and reforming of allegiances across ethnic and class lines. *Angels in America's* charged re-reading of the American past in terms of the past's persistent and complex emergence in a lived present of multicultural discourse suggests just how necessary to us ample exploration of our contested origins has become.

How the making of the "here" has been told by diverse writers of several eras is my subject. In the chapters that follow I investigate the dynamics between "American" constructions of ethnicity and the aspiration for and resistance to "American" identity as manifested in several novels marked by their subjects' diverse racial, ethnic, gendered, and class provenance. The major portion of this study concerns four novels from the 1920s and 1930s, and is drawn from two cultures differently absorbed in the dialogicism of borders--urban Jewish New York and Chicano Texas along the Texas-Mexican border. The texts include, on the one hand, Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep*, Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* and, on the other, *Caballero*, by Jovita Gonzalez and Eve Raleigh, and Américo Paredes's *George Washington Gómez*. The introductory chapter considers two novels from the African-American tradition, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912), in large part because they enable me to frame historical connectedness between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth at the same time that these novels, in a sense
positioned as "bookends" to the troubled history of emancipation and its aftermath, sharply delineate the problems of self-authorizing "other" voices in dialogue with national identity. Among all these texts exists a wealth of discourses that constitute the rich pre-conditions for current debates on multiculturalism.

Chapter One considers the evolution of racial codes and the reorganization of class within expanding corporate capitalism in terms of how they frame twentieth-century dilemmas about race, class, and gender diversely articulated in the above novels. I have relied greatly on Alan Trachtenberg's study of Gilded Age transformations of the economy and the meaning of culture, Lauren Berlant's theories on the construction of national identity, as well as David R. Roediger's exploration of shifting race and class relations in the nineteenth century, to develop theoretical and historical context. From William L. Andrews I have garnered a critical understanding of the evolution of the African-American autobiographical voice up to the Civil War, an understanding useful in evaluating the significant departures Wilson makes. Michel Foucault's theories regarding the relations of power and resistance manifested in the subject self help to link the cultural constructs with their starkly individual effects on the protagonists of both novels. And Robert B. Stepto's study of Johnson's signification upon prior African-American texts, particularly the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, informs my own arguments about Johnson's reconfiguration of turn-of-the-century dilemmas in African-American culture. Within this critical framework, my discussion of Our Nig and The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, along with several defining moments in Du Bois's The Souls of Black Folk, particularizes how these writers inhabit and contest the evolution of "whiteness" and its effects in the volatile period running from the Civil War through the Gilded Age and its aftermath. Our Nig is commonly discussed as fiction based
in autobiography, *The Autobiography* as a fiction self-consciously claiming the autobiographical from. Both might be said to challenge conventional borders of factual representation. *Qur Nig* is both a continuation of African-American narrative tradition within white culture and a departure to the extent that it radically novelizes the author, turning the self into other on a territory where readers, both white and black, present and past, must contend with the open-ended implications of the text. In *Our Nig*’s time period, the fight for emancipation coincided with the beginning of the end of American frontier expansion and the early growth of industrialization and incorporation which would, after the Civil War, increasingly result in wide-reaching networks of business, governmental, and communications/transportation entities that would reconfigure regional relations and hierarchize communally based regional cultures under the strictures of national identity. Agrarian pioneers of whatever ethnic cast who maintained a sense of individual entrepreneurship would become subject to railroad and agricultural conglomerates. In the cities, largely immigrant labor populations (including African-American, Hispanic, and Anglo migrants from rural regions as well as European) would find themselves subject to the economic discourse of capitalism which gave them hope of escaping to greater wealth, but which counted on maintaining them as a more-or-less steady underclass. Johnson’s hero manages to escape that underclass through a self-conscious and willed public disappearance of his "racial" history into the conditions of whiteness. His move in relation to Wilson’s forms both a chronological and thematic bridge upon which to interrogate the diverse cultural contexts of the subsequent novels.

Chapter Two concerns Anzia Yezierska’s *Bread Givers*, but begins with a discussion of the theoretical implications of Yezierska’s imagining herself and her characters as versions of “Columbus.” I look at imaginative renderings of the
New World within hemispheric parameters, using Tzvetan Todorov's reading of Columbus and Sacvan Bercovitch's reading of the Puritans to discuss both as near archetypal progenitors of complex nationalisms subject to fluid and often contradictory interpretation. Irving Howe and John Higham provide necessary cultural and historical background both for the immigrant journeys from Europe and for the political climate that marks their reception. Particularizing these concerns within the context of literary production, I consider how Israel Zangwill's *The Melting Pot* urges a style of assimilation that normalizes Jews within American culture at the same time that it protects them from Old World, anti-Semitic terror. Werner Sollors's comparative analysis of Johnson's *The Autobiography* and Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* provides a starting point for examining the critique each writer makes of the particularly masculine isolation consequent to Americanization in the cultural and economic mainstream. In some contrast, Yezierska examines the ways in which the European Jewish past and expectations about an imagined "America" as a place of liberation, especially for women, meet in Sara Smolinsky, the heroine through whom she negotiates the distance between the trope of the immigrant success story and the wrenching problems of assimilation. The strains of poverty and a gendered sense of filial and cultural loyalty are complicated by the narrative self's difficulty in determining what constitutes freedom from those constraints. Using Thomas J. Ferraro's study of Yezierska's mediation of Old World traditions and New World opportunities, as well as Mary V. Dearborn's work on the interplay of gender and ethnicity in women's experience of American cultural life, I evaluate Sara's efforts to construct her Americanization as a series of increasingly entangled crossings of the border between Jewish and Anglo economies and cultures. Both sides of that border are fiercely articulated in the complex fate of Sara's desire to become an American freed from
the tyrannies of her father's culture. Her story, in some ways like Columbus's, is argued here as an exemplary narrative about alienness, coercion, and adaptation.

In Chapter Three I consider how *Call It Sleep* is both linked to and a departure from the ideological concerns of the schematized immigrant story, a written terrain developed and articulated by, among others, Yezierska, Abraham Cahan, and Michael Gold, Henry Roth's contemporaries. For these writers, immigrant dilemmas could be said to arise out of conflicts engendered by the clash of coherent histories and ideological worldviews. The fragmentation of coherent worlds characteristic of modernist writing is signaled in *Call It Sleep*, but as a dissonance deeply linked to the immigrant subject's shaping contact with power and history, which places Roth's work at an interesting intersection between proletarian and high modernist writing. In developing this discussion, I consider the evolution of *Call It Sleep's* critical reception from the time of its appearance through the present, noting particularly Leslie Fiedler's and Thomas J. Ferraro's work as measures of the dramatic shifts that have occurred and continue to occur in debates over the relations between the aesthetics and politics of modernism, and constitutive ethnic and national identity. More than any of the other texts here considered, *Call It Sleep*, navigates the intricacies of interpenetrating languages—wildly variant maternal and paternal discourse, polyglot street language, gendered and sexualized discourses, Hebrew, the language of warring Christian and Judaic histories, the collision of sexual and class realities with the mixed languages of David's own origins. Here I use Foucault as a theoretical basis upon which to maneuver these multiple forces. Of primary concern, given the book's near total narrative focus at the level of David Scheurl's eight-year-old perceiving body, is the question of agency. This chapter considers the extent to which Roth's text produces and asserts an agent
self within the coercive experiences and languages that work toward the frag-
mentation of its protagonist.

Chapter Four shifts to the Texas border, revisiting aspects of nineteenth-
and early twentieth-century history and the tropes of both Mexican and U.S.
national origins in terms particular to the Tejano context. David Montejano's
history of Anglo-Mexican relations from Texas independence through the recent
present lends an understanding of the difficult economic and social
transformations pertinent to the historical terrains of both Caballero and George
Washington Gómez. I use José Limón's critical assessments of the folkloric and
writing careers of Jovita González and Américo Paredes as a departure for
discussing the ways in which their novels differently address the dissonance
between culturally gendered selves and dramatic shifts in bi-cultural social
relations. Jovita Gonzalez's and Eve Raleigh's Caballero considers from the
present of the thirties the particulars of a calamitous past, in this case the
transformation of Mexican land into U.S. territory. The novel is striated with
class and ethnic discourses pertinent to the history of Mexican conquest and
assimilation, with this border twist: the aristocratic patriarch persistently
hearkens back to his early Iberian ancestry and religious tradition as a way of
silencing the disputes of his daughters who wish to choose more democratically
minded Anglos as their marriage partners. If the political injustices resulting
from often violent Anglo takeovers of Mexican land are substantive to
arguments over the legacy of racism in Texas, Caballero references those
disputes only under the privileging of intra-familial gender battles that pit loyalty
to tradition against individual self-determination. As in Call It Sleep, where
David inadvertently mixes Catholicism with Judaism, and Bread Givers, where
Sara departs from religious edicts about her gendered place, Caballero raises
questions about the dialogic exchange between tradition and evolving political
and social circumstance at the site of the individual. What further complicates the text is the extent to which the emergence of a vocal female subjectivity against traditions of masculine dominance in Mexican culture depends on the maintenance of upper-class status within the new, ostensibly more liberal circumstances of Anglo-Mexican amalgamation. In contrast, George Washington Gómez concerns the fate of Tejano working classes in the early decades of this century, descendants of those meant to benefit from the liberalizing Anglo influences depicted in Caballero, who live at the center of the borderland between two national identities deeply compromised by violent, intersecting histories. The doubleness of the novel's protagonist, immediately apparent in the split between Mexican and Anglo versions of his name, grows in the progress of a life marked by conflicting assertions about what constitutes masculine identity and heroism. Raised to believe that he will lead his people through strenuous times by learning, managing, and subverting the language of Anglo dominance, Guálinto/George Washington Gómez contests that upbringing in ways that suggest how precarious resistance and cultural affirmation can be amidst the labyrinth of forces that go into the construct of subjectivity. The question of how to speak and to name erupts here with great force, in ways comparable to Call It Sleep but with an overt focus on the self-fragmenting effects of the conflict between Anglo-nationalism and indigenism. How the novel's hero departs from his communal origins, and how he returns, constitute the novel's grim critique of the warring discourses that go into the making of a particular, Mexican-American self. I consider the modernist quest of this novel in concert with the ground-breaking study of the border corrido in Paredes's With His Pistol in His Hand. Both articulate, in exemplary ways, the complex and conflicted assertion of heroism in highly contested national territory.
In great part, my attention is guided by the varied yet variously comparable ways in which these writers contend with difficult questions about the qualities of cultural loyalty, elusive definitions of democratically constructed "freedoms," and strategies of individual survival within the day-to-day divisiveness of American multicultural life. If the Anglo hegemony substantive to the process of Americanization is what, broadly speaking, aligns their work under the scope of my study, their multiple and diverse dissections of that hegemony and the ways in which they account for both resistance and compliance give this subject its voice.


5Kushner, 10-11.
Chapter One

Prior Ground: Our Nig,
The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man,
and the Making of Whiteness

The nineteenth was the first century of human sympathy,—the age when half wonderingly we began to descry in others that transfigured spark of divinity which we call Myself; when clodhoppers and peasants, and tramps and thieves, and millionaires and—sometimes—Negroes, became throbbing souls whose warm pulsing life touched us so nearly that we half gasped with surprise, crying, "Thou too! Hast Thou seen Sorrow and the dull waters of Hopelessness? Hast Thou known Life?" And then all helplessly we peered into those Other-worlds, and wailed, "O World of Worlds, how shall man make you one?"

--W.E.B. Du Bois

The epigraph is taken from the midst of an exemplary story that tells of the spiritual calling of Alexander Crummell, an aspirant to the Episcopal priesthood born "with the Missouri Compromise" who ended his days as a working, unknown priest "amid the echoes of Manila and El Caney," that is, from 1820 through the end of the century (153). The history in Du Bois's hands becomes a story instructive to sanguine assumptions that could be made about the nature of African-American progress from the declining days of the Atlantic slave trade forward. On the surface, the phases of Crummell's life constitute a parable of disillusionment overcome. Freeborn but haunted in his youth by the catalogue of stories about the suffering of enslavement, he resists the temptation of Hate through the benevolent intervention of a white schoolmaster, who educates him at his own school in the North. Feeling himself called to priesthood as the means by which he might lead his people from bondage, he is met with the
temptation of Despair in the visage of "calm, good men" who must, things being as they are, deny "Negroes" entry into the institutional church. Overcoming the bitterness of this initial defeat, he eventually accomplishes his ordination in Boston and enters the priesthood in New England. There, a colored congregation fails to respond to the seriousness of his call, resulting in the temptation of Doubt, a doubt that registers his worst fears about the capability of his race and the hope of communal uplift: "They do not care; they cannot know; they are dumb driven cattle,--why cast your pearls before swine?"

He spends long years of travel and study in an apparently enlightened England versed in the rhetoric and principles of reform, and in West Africa haunted by the "millions wailing over the sea" who are locked within a despair and hatred whose boundaries constitute the racially inscribed "Veil" across which no woman or man can carry themselves with a complete, unified identity. He returns to live and work in anonymity within the Veil. "He bent to all the gibes and prejudices, to all hatred and discrimination, with that rare courtesy which is the armor of pure souls. He fought among his own, the low, the grasping, and the wicked, with that unbending righteousness which is the sword of the just (157-159)."

It is, in one sense, a story of individual heroism that suggests--beginning with Crummell's infancy during Northern acquiescence to the demands of Southern slaveholders, through a bloody emancipation into the segregation-ridden present of the text--the unbending necessity of fortitude through relentless times. Du Bois's version of Crummell's life encompasses variations of journeys made throughout both slave and post-emancipation narratives. Africa, Europe and the North and South of the United States are the geographic sites of a symbolic space wherein the constraints of slavery, and later, post-emancipation racism, were played out in varying historical and spiritual
dimensions. Escaped slaves or freedmen who took the mantle of abolitionist orators in their own cause battled the intransigent south and the prejudices of the north, found temporary solace and public acclaim in England or France, considered in some cases the possibilities of an African homeland, and returned home to do battle in what had become their fraught and urgent "native land."

The significant sorrow of Crummell's story is the anonymity of the triumph, finally less a question of the fame of self than of that self's continual division from a world that steadfastly refuses to know it. If Alexander Crummell is a hero, he is so within a solitudinous community that, on the one hand, remains unknown outside itself, restricted by the magnitude of those "Other-worlds," and on the other, is trapped by that coercive magnitude into partial and fragmentary self-knowledge. For Du Bois, the exemplary becomes also a signifier for absence, the neglect of a self capable of being seen according to the evolution of its own terms: "And herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor . . . not that men are wicked . . . not that men are ignorant—what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men" (160). The problem of self-definition among African-Americans in the nineteenth-century would seem to be contained both in terms of the emergence of "that transfigured spark of divinity which we call Myself," and of the multiple ways in which that self is both resistant and acquiescent to the shifting constraints of the white Other-world. Within turn-of-the-century culture and politics, those constraints were comprised of a strenuous intermingling of the terms of class and race that held differing, but arguably comparable, degrees of consequences for various ethnicities.

It is worth stepping back to consider what has occurred in the cultural and political life of the United States prior to this period, and to situate this particular
story of unmarked heroism both within the broader terrain of African-American cultural conditions at the turn of the century, and the yet broader transformation of the meaning of American democracy, nationalism and American power. The appearance of *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 set an intellectual framework for the problem of black self-consciousness and self-representation in the United States that arguably operates as a kind of literary summation of the historical legacy of emancipation and, in Henry Louis Gates's term, as an "urtext of the African-American experience" for the decades of literature that follow.² Its appearance also followed two decades of intense national upheaval and unrest between laboring and monied classes provoked by the rise of corporate capitalism. The Gilded Age, measured from Reconstruction forward, oversaw major realignments of economic power in the form of centralized ownership devoted to expanding private minority control over national wealth. Alan Trachtenberg has argued for a corresponding conflict over the meaning of the term "America" in its post-frontier period--after the vanquishing of Indian and Mexican land claims--and of the culture--or cultures--it produced, a conflict taken up by Du Bois in ways particular to the African-American experience.³

With the rise of urbanization and an industrial economy in the latter part of the 19th century came divisions between a burgeoning middle class and, on either side of it, wealthy capitalists and the wage-earning proletariat, a good portion of which was comprised of European immigrants and blacks increasingly caught up in mechanized culture.

Mechanization made possible the mass production of culture in the form of consumable objects. The same process which fragmented labor into minute mechanical tasks, which brought into the cities new masses of people experiencing wage labor for the first time, thus destroyed old forms of labor and community, old
cultures of work and shared pleasures, replaced the larger extended family with the nuclear family as the basic domestic unit.\(^4\)

That nuclear family was projected for the benefit of the citizenry as a cultural ideal largely with Anglo-Saxon accents filtered through a picture of the domestic--the stable home, a certain quantity of books, mass-produced art, labor and pursuit of wealth outside the home and a portion of leisure time within which to enjoy and learn from the advantages that access to replicable forms of "high" culture made "popular" provided. Shadowing the placidity of this image were on the one hand diverse and unruly underclass ethnic immigrants and both white and black laborers, and on the other, the vulgar rich--or soon-to-be-rich--whose understanding of culture had thoroughly to do with what could be bought and sold.

For the New England-based intellectual elite, some of whom set the terms of intellectual culture in antebellum America but found themselves grappling with the repercussions of the national shift from agrarian to industrial life, the marginalization of that intellectual culture was appalling. Emerson's "American Scholar" of 1837 had, in his 1867 address at Harvard, become less a representative of the common man in a richly American culture than an endangered species. "Emerson gave heart to an attitude emerging since Appomattox that inheritors of New England culture and politics now represented a minority of virtue, intelligence, and cultivation, a saving remnant with a mission to preserve civility in public life."\(^5\) As thinkers largely perceiving themselves alienated from the savage mediocrities of a growing mass culture, they projected the notion of a hierarchy of cultural values correspondent to a social hierarchy of classes that spread subtly into public discourse.
The distinction between "high" and "popular" culture delineated the manner in which cultural superiors might provide the model for and education of inferiors—a benevolence from above, a distinction to which Walt Whitman, in "Democratic Vistas," took great exception. Seeing in this cultural expression an anti-egalitarianism mirrored by the carrying out of post-war business and politics, Whitman argued for a cultural equality that stood in rapport with the idea of political equality, an idea derived from the American revolution, and realized through the rigors of emancipation and the continuous value of the daily lives of working people. But, in Trachtenberg's argument, Whitman's vision of democratic rapprochement neglected the already hardening lines of class and ethnic divisions reflecting the political culture of the late 19th century. His plan for a revolution in cultural and political values depended upon the work of artists and poets, and upon a vague idea of the characteristic, rude and marvelous universal of working People.

Literature, strictly consider'd, has never recognized the People, and, whatever may be said, does not today. Speaking generally, the tendencies of literature, as hitherto pursued, have been to make mostly critical and querulous men. It seems as if, so far, there were some natural repugnance between a literary and professional life, and the rude rank spirit of democracies. There is, in later literature, a treatment of benevolence, a charity business, rife enough it is true; but I know nothing more rare, even in this country, than a fit scientific estimate and reverent appreciation of the People—of their measureless wealth of latent power and capacity, their vast, artistic contrasts of lights and shades—with, in America, their entire reliability in emergencies, and a certain breadth of historic grandeur, of peace or war, far surpassing all the
vaunted samples of book heroes, or any haut ton coteries, in all
the records of the world.\textsuperscript{6}

Whitman's idealism even after the fractures of the Civil War asserted a still vast
unanimity of selves who, though made distinct in his distillation of detail, the
"contrasts of lights and shades," remained distant and fixed in a kind of
timelessness. It is, I argue, another version of what Robert Stepto will call,
commenting on Washington's \textit{Up From Slavery} and Johnson's \textit{Autobiography
of an Ex-Coloured Man}, the "rhetoric of detachment," occurring in Whitman with
rather different consequences.\textsuperscript{7} His early envisioning of the self which "contains
multitudes" and absorbs contradictoriness between self and other became, in
"Democratic Vistas," a voice calling from the margins of inexorable change,
theoretical in its embrace of regional and ethnic diversity but unable to contend
close-up with the manifestations of difference, as David Simpson notes:

The details of people and things do \textit{not} modify with time and
place, in ways that might suggest growth and development;
instead, they go on being forever themselves, each individual
wedded to his attributes . . . . This is not the image of a society
constantly \textit{opening} itself to new challenges and situations, so
much as one that reproduces its own pre-established forms on its
members . . . . At the heart of Whitman's representation of
movement there is then a condition of near-reification. Those who
are themselves imprisoned within fixed occupational categories
cannot be expected to perceive the integrity of strange faces and
other minds.\textsuperscript{8}

Whitman's ideal of the working man and working woman, though embracing the
common sweat of "these interminable swarms of alert, turbulent, good-natured,
independent citizens, mechanics, clerks, young persons," failed to distinguish
the possibility of agency in the form of regional and communal social movements organized out of economic and social protest within particular sectors of the population. His heroic individual was finally a type too transcendent, and too amorphous for translation into the active and ongoing demands of diversity within national cultural and political life.

Those demands were in part taken up in the political sphere by third party movements that arose in response to the growing fusion of political and business interests in the two-party system. The solidification of Democratic and Republican party politics into "machine" organizations replete with a centralized system of bosses and the semblance of grassroots organizing—in the form of neighborhood clubs and appeals to civic welfare—professionalized participatory politics in a way that replaced Whitman's call for "uncommitted electors, farmers, clerks, mechanics . . . watching aloof, inclining victory this side or that side," with voters who were encouraged to think of authentic political participation in terms of party allegiance. In Trachtenberg's analysis, the parties controlled the electorate with a fierce hold on the local, producing a rhetoric of political life that valorized individual voter participation that at the same time played up ethnic and regional divisiveness. "Ethnicity, sectionalism, urban-suburban-rural distinctions: the party system raised tribalism to political salience, exploiting such differences by making them issues of loyalty and defining political interest in the imagery of group identity."10 The top echelons of the party structures came to be dominated by elites representing the business world, who managed national policies by vastly broadening the federal bureaucracy and its hold over civil society, while concerning themselves with the flow of capital according to the interests of corporations and other private business interests. Labor unrest and civil rights problems rising from below could be funnelled through local and state party machines that veiled
substantive debate about these issues in the guise of an identity politics that appealed to cultural divisiveness: immigrants versus native workers, whites versus emancipated blacks, Yankees versus Southerners, Anglo-Protestants versus Irish-Catholics versus Jews, "a political terrain," says Trachtenberg, "composed of such labels familiar in twentieth-century politics but [that] had its origins in the Gilded Age party system."11 Claiming to represent citizens from all classes, the parties played ethnic and race cards where they would work. Their efforts were meant to divide possible coalitions based in like economic and laboring circumstances that might disrupt the fundamental drive toward corporate capitalism emerging in the economic organization of the nation.

But urban labor strikes and third party movements from the end of Reconstruction to the Republican landslide of 1896 displayed a force that fought against the grain of cultural elitism and machine politics. From the Great Railroad Uprising of 1877 to the Pullman strike of 1894--each occurring after major national expositions that celebrated progress in smooth-running facades of a classless American life that effaced the messiness of rule by an ethnically and racially diverse people--the emerging terms of class violence and popular organizing challenged the ideological hold the Republican and Democratic parties maintained over the definition of participatory democracy. The Populist movement and the formation of the People's Party in 1892 sought to unite farmers and urban labor against the broad reach of urban industrialism, the private banking system, and agricultural and railroad conglomerates that were radically changing "the people's" ability to manage daily, material life in all parts of the country. In its attempt to disrupt the monopolistic trend of American life, the People's Party platform sought to reinvest "democracy" with an understanding of equal rights that included labor reform, women's rights, the
rights of "producers" in economic ownership, and government protection of individual civil and economic well-being against corporate interests.

The Party's failure to gain massive labor support lay in its inability to align its attack on the scale of capitalism with a more probing assault on "the fundamental relations of production: the wage system." Labor held back over a slippage in the farmers' ranks between the terms "employing" and "employed" that suggested the Party's limited assessment of new labor realities in national society. The utopian urge for a nation of producers treated as equals did not adequately address the different circumstances created by massive wage-labor. Thus the political coalition meant to transform conventional party politics dissolved under the pressure to ally itself with the Democratic Party and the loss in the 1896 national election to a Republican landslide. But its cultural significance, Trachtenberg argues, persisted in the critical space given to a growing number of dissident voices who sought union among the diverse disenfranchised sectors of the population. Under contention was the interpretation of longheld beliefs about the nature and destiny of the nation: not that "America" was an emerging modern political state, "an apparatus for governance in which laws serve to protect classes rather than universal interests in the society," but that it was a whole cultural body founded on principles which united the good of all private citizens, the people, with the political interests of the country. The widespread and deeply held strength of this idea continually dissolved the possibility of broad revolutionary movements that might have opposed the very structure of the national entity, the state. Driving toward a utopian sense of an "original" America, Populism expressed both a fierce critique of the management of state power and a cultural assent to the founding form of republican government, which contained within itself the the contradictoriness of diverse individuality and the collectivity of the nation.
The meaning of citizenship within the concept of originating principles in America carries its own historically complex and contradictory set of assumptions. If, as Lauren Berlant asserts, "national identity has become, in America, fundamental to the person, akin to gender, race, and family," the question of relation between self and nation remains constantly at the fore. In her study of antebellum constructions of national identity in the particularly influential work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Berlant elucidates two conflicting models of conferring citizenship: "These are generally called birthright citizenship, which incorporates both jus soli (place of birth) and jus sanguinis (nationality of the fathers) lines of political entailment, and consensual citizenship, which derives the polity from the aggregate consent of individual subjects." The birthright argument, a "monarchical trace," assumed a natural legitimacy of membership rendered, in the Constitution, to white males, although not all white males in the period of the making of the Constitution were enfranchised. Consensual citizenship broke from the notion of allegiance as a given, advocating instead a membership chosen by the individual subject who actively mingles personal identity with the more abstract collective identity of the nation. If the consensual model dominated overt American political discourse, the birthright model maintained a fundamental hold, particularly in relation to African-Americans and immigrants. Berlant thus argues that up to the Civil War the concept of citizenship remained only vaguely defined. It was over the issue of slavery and the "personhood" of African-Americans, as well as the conflict between state and federal rights, that the balance shifted.

[M]odern American citizenship is derived primarily not from Enlightenment Constitutional dicta but rather from the enfranchisement of African-Americans. Indeed, it is possible to see the history of the Constitution as a record of the nation's gradual
recognition that it needs officially to theorize an ideal relation between its abstract "citizen" and the person who lives, embodied, an everyday life. . . Benjamin Ringer, among many other historians of race in America, suggests that the Constitution's vagueness about this crucial matter was strategic on the part of the framers: "the Convention sanctified not one but two models of society. On the 'visible' level of the Constitution is the society built on the concept of the sovereignty of the people and on the rights of the governed. And on the 'invisible' level of the Constitution is the society built on the concept of 'unequal rights' and on the enslavement of subjugated 'other persons.'"16

If emancipation, at least in regard to men, succeeded in establishing the overt recognition of consensual equality in the concept of a citizenry, the practice of equality--the continuous interplay in the body of "the citizen" between deep identification with a hegemonic, national frame and myriad local, personal, gendered and racial exchanges--remained, and remains, a matter of constant negotiation and indeterminacy.

The critical space assumed by Populism for cultural definition within political life in many ways has been expressive of this indeterminacy, and has been revisited over the years and in myriad ways, becoming highly visible in movement cultures of the nineteen-thirties and sixties, and maintaining oppositional ferment in literary and social culture throughout the twentieth century. Central to the arguments made in that space was the call to unity among a citizenry, variously defined as workers and producers of diverse race, ethnic, and even gendered status, to resist capitalist exploitation of divisions among the lower classes and assert the power to control, as citizens, national economic and political processes. But if alliances remained partial and tenuous
in class terms—evidenced by the split between rural agrarian and urban labor movements—the difficulty of overcoming racist politics on every level was equally profound.

The problem of how to define relations between race and class analyses of the development of America has long been a subject for both historians and literary theorists. David R. Roediger, among others, has argued that traditional Marxism of the mid-twentieth century privileged class analysis over race by virtue of the "objective" features of class—property ownership, employers and labor—over constructionist theories of race. In the absence of a factual basis for race—it is not a marker of true biological or physical difference—the history of racism often becomes ideologically framed by the way ruling class elites foster division among races and ethnicities to prevent working class, or populist, unity. We can see the real degrees of justice in this argument through the evolution of the party system in the late nineteenth century and the ways in which political rhetoric divided the population in the scramble for equity. But if such oversimplification has largely subsided under the failure of class analyses to resolve the problem of racism that continues into our present, the impetus to render racial problems as fundamentally problems of economic inequity has not. Taking his lead from Du Bois, Roediger makes a convincing case for considering race and class not as separate, but as interpenetrating discourses historically rudimentary and, I would add, fundamental to the indeterminacy Berlant has suggested in the ongoing negotiations of the citizen-self with hegemonic myth of the nation.

Roediger looks at the colonial and antebellum development of the working class in America as constructed not only in terms of the difference between slave and free labor, but in habits of racial formation that included the concept of "whiteness" at its core.
Though direct comparisons between bondage and wage labor were tried out ("white slavery"), the rallying cry of "free labor" understandably proved more durable and popular for antebellum white workers... the white working class, disciplined and made anxious by fear of dependency, began during its formation to construct an image of the Black population as "other"—as embodying the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed for. This logic had particular attractions for Irish-American immigrant workers, even as the "whiteness" of these very workers was under dispute.18

Prior to the Civil War, whiteness among the lower classes constituted a protection within trying economic circumstances against designated caste and class subjugation under the terms of the constitutional republic. To be "not-Indian," "not Mexican," "not black," meant to be capable of gaining access to sovereignty under a racially tinged concept of citizenship. The racial coding that was written ambiguously into the text and subtext of the Constitution became a formative part of how white workers chose to see themselves as a class.

Emancipation of blacks by law, and by the agency of blacks themselves who fought both politically and militarily during the Civil War, radically questioned the privilege of whiteness. The 1868 passage of the Fourteenth Amendment both consolidated the priority of federal citizenship over state and guaranteed equal protection to all citizens under the Bill of Rights, in its intent giving the franchise to all African-American men. Emancipation opened the ground for black-white labor alliances, a concept practically unknown prior to the war. Also, in line with arguments above, it gave progressive movements the possibility of a more broadly national discourse that would encourage demands for federal government protection from and regulation of corporatism and
capitalist monopolies. Emancipation by and for blacks in many ways provided a model for what all labor might accomplish, as evidenced by dramatic shifts in the ability of the post-war white labor movement to assert a national program of demands for an eight-hour working day and union empowerment in the workplace. Progressive voices of the time urged unity among blacks and whites, arguing in ways similar to twentieth-century Marxist and labor historians that racist fragmentation only served capital.

But efforts to forge such unity were finally only tenuous and partial. The power of capitalism from above to maintain and strengthen divisiveness was, Roediger argues, only part of the story. There existed a strong tendency among white workers before and after the Civil War to view black emancipation as a reduction of their own status through increased competition for jobs—an old argument that continues to hold true in ever-present discourse about the threats of immigration. The evidence that black empowerment provided impetus for an invigoration of broad class resistance countered such views and in some sense liberated white workers from what Roediger has called "the weight of whiteness," the self-oriented, negatively derived satisfaction of being, if oppressed and downtrodden, at least "not black." But long habits ingrained in the racial formation of the white working class continued to return in post-war anti-suffrage movements, both North and South, and in shaky labor coalitions that almost simultaneously called for and sabotaged black-white, and Chinese, and Mexican, coalitions. According to Roediger, the 1877 Great Railroad Uprising, arguably the first national strike against a major corporation, attempted to make biracialism a strategic part of its organizing. It did so, partially, among the integrated ranks of picketers. But in St. Louis, the leadership backed away from identification with blacks, and in San Francisco, anti-Chinese clubs took over the socialist movement and initiated attacks on the
Chinese population. The instability of white relations to blacks and darker
ethnic groups within the labor movement suggests Roediger's argument that
white workers engaged in weakening their cause through troubling and fluid
divisions of race and class.

Such fluid divisions surfaced as well in national rhetoric regarding how a
post-Emancipation corporatizing America could operate in the world economic
system. Earlier extreme efforts by U.S. mavericks like William Walker to
establish slavery in Central and Latin America were doomed by the ultimate
disappearance of legal slavery in the Western Hemisphere. But racial codes
persisted, albeit in the guise of more liberal public language. In ways that
parallel the expanding role of commerce and the problems of wage-labor within
U.S. borders, American relations to foreign markets and foreign labor were
undergoing major shifts. The much-publicized entry by the United States into
the Spanish-American War in 1898 marked U.S. emergence into its twentieth-
century role as a world power. Lawrence Berkove points out that during this
period, the U.S. was caught up in a malaise pertaining to its economic, political,
and military presence beyond its borders:

America had no colonies, no guaranteed foreign markets for its
goods, and no outposts or secure coaling-stations to protect its
overseas markets and its fleets. When the war with Spain was
catalyzed--largely by the Hearst and Pulitzer newspapers--to
some it seemed a heaven-sent opportunity for America to have
one last chance at the vanishing opportunity of becoming an
imperial power.20
The war was created first in the U.S. press under banner headlines with Hearst-
instigated news stories about Spanish atrocities visited upon Cuban insurgents.
(One famous anecdote has Hearst replying to artist Frederic Remington's
request to leave Cuba for lack of action—"Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war.".) The war furor blossomed on the tacitly liberal American perception that insurgents in Cuba, and soon thereafter in the Philippines, were engaged in a democratic struggle to throw off the chains of the Spanish Empire. Intervention was taken to be a moral responsibility on the part of an American public responsive to the struggles of the oppressed.

Both Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain were leading figures in critiquing the way the U.S. justified its war effort. In his role as a columnist for William Randolph Hearst and the San Francisco Examiner, Bierce was decidedly iconoclastic in matters both political and military. He understood that the real facts of the war had less to do with egalitarianism than with the expansion of U.S. influence and territory in both the Caribbean and the Pacific. Week after week Bierce blasted patriotic hysteria in the same pages of the paper that induced it, and supported intervention only as a necessary military response to the sinking of the Maine in Havana harbor. Even then his comments on military matters focused on the less-than-perfect tactics of the naval command, who bombarded unpopulated hillsides while claiming great victories, and the soldiery who themselves were more favorably disposed to their Spanish captives than to the darker-skinned insurgents they claimed to support.

About the only writer of lasting national prominence who had seen combat on the Union side in the Civil War, Bierce's knowledge of the brutal excesses resulting from patriotic fervor kept him finely tuned to the realities that contradicted such fervor. He foresaw that support for the Philippine underdogs against Spain would result in the replacement of Spanish occupation forces with U.S. domination. History, it seems, has borne him out. In a larger sense, corresponding attitudes about race and class economics both inside and outside U.S. borders suggests a permeability in the way "Americanness"--and
the borders limning American self and the American nation—might be defined. The literary texts to be discussed through the length of this work, beginning with African-American and finishing with Mexican-American, contend on what has traditionally been thought of as the margin of representative American literature. But I find them at the center of a lengthy and multifaceted argument that remains open-ended, about what "Americanness" is and does.

The above discussion, then, operates as a sort of furrowing and seeding of the ground upon which a more specific discussion of racially and ethnically inscribed texts might be had. If the nineteenth century, in Du Bois's terms, was "the first century of human sympathy," it was also formative in the development of political and economic structures, and in the languages of perception about self and other, individuality and communality, that have provided some of the fiercest contests in the twentieth century. Du Bois's argument with Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition address revisits the urgent problem of class and caste rigidification in the domain of capitalism.

And so thoroughly did [Washington] learn the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of material prosperity, that the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home soon seemed to him the acme of absurdities. One wonders what Socrates and St. Francis of Assisi would say to this. (31)

For Du Bois, Washington's call for blacks to merge their interests with the lower reaches of capitalism by turning all their complex intelligence toward vocational training was an assent to white supremacy, rather than the useful assimilationism Washington believed necessary for the race's gradual but certain uplift. As Du Bois makes clear much later in *Black Reconstruction*, it is
not just that white supremacy was immoral and unfair, but that it encouraged class division and an attitude about work deleterious to workers both black and white. "Race feeling and the benefits conferred by whiteness made white Southern workers forget their 'practically identical interests' with the black poor and accept stunted lives for themselves and for those more oppressed than themselves."23 The freedom of full and complex self-realization gave way to constrictive measures of limited commercial gain that depended on race and class position. In this argument the consequences of racism across the broad population are indeed far-reaching.

I have invoked Du Bois at the beginning of this chapter both as a reader of the discursive dilemmas of the past and a prescient reader of the evolutions of those dilemmas in future texts. The paradigmatic nature of Alexander Crummell's story, along with the brutal demise in "Of the Coming of John" of the young, northern-educated black man who returns to the encroaching bitterness of a violently segregated Jim Crow South, evoke the continual return of figures throughout African-American autobiography and fiction who are fraught with the, by now, archetypal designation of double-consciousness, the definition of which bears repeating here:

... the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.... One ever feels his twoness--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (3)

If, let us say in Walt Whitman's terms, the lyrical optimism of the century asserts itself in a radical spirit of "Americanness" that says "I celebrate myself, and sing
myself / And what I assume you shall assume," the actual mechanics of driving across the boundary between self and other often become a matter of dogged assessment and, more than occasionally, disruption of the social and discursive contexts in which African-American writers tell their stories. The singular "I" of the African-American text is subject to "continual revelations of the other world" against and within which the narrator must practice politics in order to obtain a variety of purposes--from literal self-sustenance to the persuasion of a perceived white constituency--that circulate under a troublingly vague concept of "freedom."

That African-American authors in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth found it necessary to write their stories through the prism of essentialist racial categorization is a commonplace. How they did so--under evolving arguments in both the white and black worlds regarding their status first as enslaved inhabitants, then as a freed people, possibly or partially citizens--tells us something both of their strategies of resistance and the shifting terrain of racial and liberal ideologies. I have discussed above the ways in which critics have described how emancipation radically shifted the understanding of citizenship and the absolutism with which whites regarded their own racial and class identity. But it did not, as Raymond T. Smith emphasizes, solve the problem of social relations:

Emancipation was a revolutionary event, completely altering the legal basis on which social relations had been constructed since the settlement of slave colonies of the New World, and yet the core of those social relations changed hardly at all. This paradox can be understood only when it is realized that the [present] suffering of African Americans is not caused by slavery but by the forces that reproduce the social systems established after slavery: the
systems forged by the reforming zeal of abolition working on a
resistant power structure and carried forward to the present. 25
Abolitionism contained within itself contradictory tendencies that promoted
government-protected individual freedoms for blacks as citizens at the same
time that it resisted the unmaking of a racial ideology that sustained social caste
differences. The problem of negotiating these tendencies occurs in texts prior to,
as well as after emancipation. William L. Andrews, in his critical overview of the
evolution of African-American autobiography up to 1865, analyzes the example
of Frederick Douglass’s 1845 Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass in
terms of its revision ten years later in My Bondage, My Freedom. 26 Andrews
argues that the revision accomplishes a significant shift in attitude toward the
construction of the term “freedom.” If, in 1845, the self asserts its singular
rebellion against the institution of slavery with an eye toward an idealized
abolitionist North, in 1855 that assertion is complicated by a desire for black
community coexistent with a resistance to the attempted “making of himself” by
abolitionist whites, who respond to Douglass’s increasingly independent moves
in ways Douglass finds comparable to his Maryland masters. The argument for
legal emancipation is fundamental to both texts, but by 1855 the requirements
of the self-authorizing voice provoke an engagement of the problematic
restraints of racialism as they exist outside slavery and within liberal ideology
and the social relations of the nation. Similar moves, Andrews argues, can be
seen in Harriet Jacobs’s 1861 narrative, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.

Using Andrews as a frame, I am interested in considering aspects of
Harriet Wilson’s Our Nig, published in 1859, within the context of contemporary
autobiographical narratives, and James Weldon Johnson’s The Autobiography
of an Ex-Coloured Man, published anonymously in 1912 and republished
under his own name in 1927. The former is today commonly discussed as
fiction based in autobiography, the latter a fiction self-consciously claiming the autobiographical form. Both might be said to be challenging conventional borders of factual representation through a kind of overt usurpation of objective correlative. I am stretching the meaning of this term to suggest the extreme of an expectation that the African-American narrative, in reporting a life story, will in some sense function as a complete and coherent structuring of the events of racial oppression that will objectify experience and reproduce appropriate sympathy and horror in its readers. But these authors employ variant uses of self-representation and expression that in ways disrupt and critique, even as they engage, the sympathies of readers. They unsettle what, at least, the white reader might wish or expect--in 1859, clear-cut support for abolitionists; in 1912, perhaps, a "true story" harnessed to African-American autobiographical conventions that promotes the theme of uplift and asserts an externally fixed, black identity that cannot pass for white.

The contents of both texts are shaped differently, of course, by the exigencies of their respective historical periods. Wilson's subject was fueled by the existence of slavery in the South, more so by the inconsistencies of abolitionism in the North, and the urgencies of her own situation as an unknown outsider, a poor, free black. Johnson constructed his fiction while serving as a consular official in Nicaragua. He was a player in Republican Party politics, and already initiated into what would be a long career within an established African-American intellectual and political community. Over forty-five years had passed since the legal revolution of Emancipation, some thirty-five since the end of Reconstruction. The differences of both national and local circumstance, as well as the role that gender plays in variations of discourse, might strain comparative possibilities. But reading the former with the latter in mind yields a perspective
on the shifts and continuities in social systems that reproduce the effects of the color line across both black and white constituencies, and over time.

Both texts are most telling in the evolutionary terms of their discursive narrative projects—the narrative engagement of the margin between self and the perceived reader. Andrews's summation of Bakhtin and Hayden White is pertinent here:

For Bakhtin, discourse always takes place in an environment of alienation. The words of a speaker or writer are always engaged in a "dialogic relationship: with alien words that a listener or reader might have chosen from his or her conceptual and linguistic horizon to express a same or similar thing. . . . White amplifies Bakhtin in stating that discourse "moves 'to and fro' between received encodations of experience and the clutter of phenomena which refuses incorporation into conventionalized notions of 'reality,' 'truth,' or 'possibility.'" One of my assumptions about Afro-American autobiography is that it is very much a mediative instrument not only between black narrator and white reader but also . . . between alternative ways of encoding reality, some of which are prescribed by tradition and others "of which may be idiolects of the author, the authority of which he is seeking to establish."27

On the surface, the distance between Wilson and Johnson suggests the shift between the effects of externalized oppression on a young, indentured mulatto girl and oppression internalized in a free self irresolutely split between black and white. But the ways each narrator invents to mediate the line between external and internal, white and black, are arguably linked within a broadening tradition of the self-authorizing African-American voice.
The history that Andrews shapes of the evolution of slave narratives up to the period in which Harriet Wilson writes *Our Nig* suggests a graduated change in the authorizing voice as a mediative instrument. For the most part, early narratives from the eighteenth century—with the notable exception of Olaudah Equiano—occurred in discursive fields that put reportage of black experience into the linguistic terrain of the white amanuensis, whose way of "encoding reality" absorbed interpretation into the social hierarchy and moral codes of the predominant Anglo-Christian culture. Flight from bondage or criminal activity on the part of the slave was considered aberrant behavior to the extent that it alienated him from the ordering safety of the state and his duty toward it. Slavery itself was not under contention, nor was it cause for the disruptiveness of the slave subject, whose sins had to do with a natural indolence and whose salvation lay in a return to a bondage whose social coherence would enable him to achieve a spiritual restoration by the grace of God.

The shift into the nineteenth century, in some ways heralded by accomplishments of bi-cultural perspective in Equiano's autobiography, evidences what Andrews characterizes as a tension between ahistorical and historical versions of reality. If early narratives, routed through the preconditions of white readership, generally gave themselves up to culminating protestations of faith in a universalized status quo, subsequent efforts began to recontextualize the relation between the speaking self and the enclosing culture.

This tension is mirrored in other kinds of double consciousness in these early narratives, such as that which pits an ahistorical view of the Negro as Christian Everyman, a symbol of every pilgrim soul, against a counter-realization of the Negro as historical and
cultural individual, whose enforced alienation from Every(white)-man furnishes a commentary on the Christian culture. . . . When early black autobiographers started assigning causation and culpability to men for the evils they brought on their peers, the genre could begin to distinguish itself as an Afro-American form of discourse.28

Slave narratives throughout the first five decades of the nineteenth century became key tools in the movement for abolition, gaining a broad national and international readership and provoking support for the cause. For the political purposes of abolition as conceived largely by white abolitionists, it was believed necessary and no doubt reasonable to assert the value of a protagonist whose selfhood and moral standards could be sympathized with and approved by the reader, whose own virtues might be assumed. The discursive "to and fro" between the accommodation of white readers and the assertion of a black selfhood that might be different from, or resistant to, the evolving codes of a social hierarchy based in white superiority, increasingly made itself felt in the transformation of narrative voice. By the 1850s, Andrews argues, the limits of the white world's version of reality in the telling of black experience became subject to experiments in discourse. In the cases of Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, those experiments included extending the notion of a preferred community of readers to blacks and to women, both white and black.

With that sense of experimentation in mind, I want to think about Our Nig in terms of the risks it takes in exposing both blacks and northern whites to censure. In her recent study of the sketchy biographical framework for Our Nig, Barbara A. White points out that the relative "truthfulness" of the text is difficult to make out.29 Given that Wilson's stated purpose in writing it was to earn money for herself and her son, it is difficult to explain the apparent offenses the text
makes to an audience bent on sustaining an abolitionist effort. Frado is the product of an interracial marriage; her white mother is an "immoral" outcast singularly lacking in maternal interest; Frado's near conversion to Christianity is based solely on love and reverence for a kind white man, and remains unresolved; she marries a fake fugitive slave who deserts her; she suggests, in her preface and at the book's close, that there are further stories she could tell about the dread treatment of blacks in the North, but she'll refrain in the interests of the cause; and, she entitles her book with one of the more riveting epithets of slavery, guaranteed to disconcert if not turn away the sympathetic reader. In addition, White's discoveries indicate a strong argument for the identification of the Bellmonts with the Haywards, a family of strong abolitionist connections, though not precisely within the branch characterized in Our Nig.

The debate over whether this is a "true" story, or a fiction devised with possible aesthetic and monetary purposes in mind (or somewhere in between), begs the question of comparable discursive modes in Wilson's text and other contemporary autobiographies, as well as the interesting and, one might say, fierce departures she makes from convention. Research thus far suggests the general adherence of the text to events in Wilson's life, but certainly of equal interest is the way in which she chooses to tell her story. Andrews analyzes, both in Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Douglass's My Bondage and My Freedom, the stylistic move to re-create past factual events in terms of dialogic representation, in other words, to reproduce the past not as remembered reportage, but as performance, or novelization. Of the heavily dialogized scene in Incidents where both grandmother and daughter foil the low-class whites who are attempting to pillage their home, Andrews says,

[W]e should recognize this scene as an instance of Jacobs's releasing her voice into dialogue, exchanging her fixed narrating
role for role-playing, authorizing herself to become other, and then making free with that terrible white male other through comic caricature. Whether we call this narrative tricksterism something positive, like novelizing, or something negative, like outright fictionalizing, will be a function of our own sense of how much autobiography owes to the past or to the self when fidelity to each makes a conflicting demand on the writer. . . . Self-expressiveness presides over retrospective mimesis in the autobiographies of Jacobs and Douglass because of these writers' commitment to the ideal of freedom, not just as the theme of their life quests or as the moral aim of their narratives, but as the distinguishing characteristic of their style of story-telling.  

Novelizing of the past through the creation of dialogue arguably affords the possibility of liberating the self—the "I"—and its relation to others from a fixed reportorial place in the field of the text, in turn disrupting the fixing gaze of the reader, who under the circumstances of retrospective mimesis would only read the white characters through the distance of the narrator's explicating voice. In the referred-to passage, the "created" dialogue turns all characters into actors equidistant from the audience, and the victors of the scene win through the evidence of their ingenuity in action.

The difference between novelizing and fictionalizing would seem to be the difference between re-creating, or performing a remembered event and performing an event altogether made-up. If Harriet Wilson made up portions of her story, as it seems she might have, what truths are we to read from her narrative? Barbara White points out that the classification of Our Nig as the first African-American women's fiction comes by way of Gates rather than Wilson, who subtitles her work "Sketches from the Life of a Free Black," and nowhere
mentions it as a novel.\textsuperscript{31} In her preface Wilson speaks in a conventional apologia of her "crude narrations," and of events she will not divulge, in the interests of protecting "our good anti-slavery friends at home."\textsuperscript{32} This alone could be taken as simple justification for changing names and some incidents in the interests of preserving anonymity by a woman finally "too naive or untalented to disguise autobiographical fact."\textsuperscript{33} But the sheer inventiveness of the narrative style suggests a writer too well acquainted with her own complex purpose to assume such naïveté.

Keeping in mind the feats of story-telling Andrews points out in Douglass and Jacobs, one might think of Wilson's cross of first- and third-person perspective from the very beginning of her narrative as a daring, if unpopular, leap from the starting point of similar stylistic territory. If Douglass and Jacobs include as part of the first-person mode a dialogic re-telling of exchanges and more complicated investigations of the contradictions in abolitionist discourse, Wilson moves autobiographical discourse altogether into the realm of the novel, with all the attendant possibilities of "authorizing herself to become other, and then making free with that terrible white"--in this case, she-devil--Mrs. Bellmont, and her dreadful daughter.

Most critics who write about this text discuss the interesting dynamics of the book's title. Both the title and the first page dramatize the problematic posing of self and other, de-centering the auctorial voice from a fixed "I" and managing to be, really, in at least three places at once. If we consider the title \textit{Our Nig} to be the first utterance--the words that must be spoken if the book is to be asked for--the first-person plural use of language can either be contextualized as coming from the mouth of a white speaker, or a black speaker wearing, as it were, "white-face." Gates has noted the ironic inversion of the second use of the term in Wilson's designation of her own authorship.\textsuperscript{34} The byline "Our Nig"
repeats the objectifying term in a reversal that merits her a shift into the status of subject/author. But I argue that it also immediately implicates the white reader—and I would suggest this remains true—in the ongoing crisis, not just of slavery, but of racism. The dialectic between Our Nig and 'Our Nig' provides an interesting extension to double consciousness, where the black woman who can only see herself "through the revelation of the other world" turns that revelation back as a kind of glaring spotlight on the postures assumed by that other world. The specificity of the full subtitle, "Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North: Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There," suggests that the subsequent narrative, while telling the travails of the authoring subject, will also, in the most intimate terms, be investigating the construct of the "White House."

The only indications of first person singular come from the preface, an occasional reference by the narrating voice to "my narrative," and the subtitles of the first several chapters which refer to "Mag Smith, My Mother," "My Father's Death," and "A New Home for Me." The title in some sense has already relativized the white reader in relation to the self-as-subject through a recontextualization of language—forcing that reader into an alienating speech act, then repeating the term in such a way that the reader's projected utterance itself will become grounds for commentary by an authoring subject who has both claimed and distanced herself from the moniker, 'Our Nig.' The truth of narrative events is asserted through the application of "My," but the transition to third person enables the author/narrator to dislodge herself from surveillance, making herself the subject-as-other who operates both as the heroine and as a character alongside others, all equidistant from the reader.

This displacement of self, I believe, accentuates the particular rage of the text through the singular way in which the reader is called upon to witness its
grueling episodes. The apparent distancing between author/narrator and subject accomplishes a perspectival shift that squares the reader directly in front of events, rather than through the mediating "I" that, in the Jacobs and Douglass narratives, often intercedes with the reader and undertakes, at least in part, the responsibility of formulating critique. With Our Nig, readers--both white and black--are confronted close-up with a full range of context that, arguably, does not privilege the exigencies of one political agenda over another. Thus, we have both good and bad blacks, good and bad whites, and a heroine who, for the most part, is not called upon to excuse herself for any perceived failings in order to accommodate the reader.

That this approach makes the social arrangements of the white world peculiarly susceptible is evident from the beginning, in the freedom the narrator assumes to imagine the events of her mother's life. The problem of interracial marriage is intensified by its unconventionality: the offending white does not contain solely within her person the evils of the color code, as do the southern white fathers of mulatto children who might be said to absorb and isolate the crimes of slavery. Nor does she sanctify miscegenation through a higher moral code of resistance to racism as does, for instance, the marriage of Iola Leroy's parents in Frances E. W. Harper's 1892 novel. Neither completely good nor bad, Mag Smith is herself mutable, and subject to the abuses of the white world. "She had a loving, trusting heart. Early deprived of parental guardianship, far removed from relatives, she was left to guide her tiny boat over life's surges alone and inexperienced" (5). Her first love is a white man of upper class provenance, whom she loves as an "angel," a term here combining passionate romance with power--his power to provide for her a place in the world. "She thought she could ascend to him and become an equal" (6). Seduced and abandoned, she instead descends the social order and comes to live, finally
outside the society she has known, "in a hovel she had often passed in better
days, and which she knew to be untenanted . . . . Removed from the village, she
was seldom seen except as upon your introduction, gentle reader, with
downcast visage, returning her work to her employer, and thus providing herself
with the means of subsistence." Her bare subsistence eventually is threatened
by an influx of foreign labor, but she resists efforts by former associates to
provide her with drudge work and returns "to her hut morose and revengeful,
refusing all offers of a better home than she possessed. Thus she lived for
years, hugging her wrongs, but making no effort to escape" (8).

It is well worth pausing here to think of Hester Prynne living in her
abandoned cottage outside town, herself grimly pausing in her needlework to
contemplate the destruction of society in order to resurrect some glimmer of
hope for the "whole race of womanhood."35 The Scarlet Letter and Our Nig were
published within nine years of each other and prior to emancipation. Both
exercise their subjects from the mobile ground of the U.S. in the 1840s and 50s,
where Anglo-New England-produced utopian versions of an "American" polity
were coming into new conflicts with shifting local cultures and broad national
unrest between the industrializing North and the pro-slavery South. Each is a
story that investigates the complex of relations between individual agency and
cultural and legal regulation. Mag and Hester have in common a disgrace
resulting from an expressive sexuality, their "outsideness," and an interior
ferocity veiled by an exterior humility—a show of acquiescence to punitive
cultural codes. That the "show" in each case is both acted and complexly felt is
a measure of the taut weave of agency and constraint. Both characters manifest
what Foucault has called "points of resistance" in relation to power that are
multiple, partial, and in constant flux:
These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case . . . one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves.36

The social construction of gender is significant to the texts at hand. Gender—or here the question of what it means to be a woman within a set of cultural circumstances—is a focus of both resistance and constraint. Are we presented with portraits of femaleness, or portraits of a rather complex exchange between a subject position and culture, the effects of which fracture "unities" that might be assumed both about gender and culture?

The extent to which Hawthorne's Hester mounts a resistance to 17th-Century Puritan society reflects the extent to which Puritan culture is less than monolithic and permeable to individual transgressions of cultural codes. In the wild interior of her disciplined exile, Hester imagines a speculative space where "the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew," and "the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position." That Hawthorne, himself constrained by the cultural codes of his Puritan inheritance, is effecting a kind of "regrouping" in his heroine's imagination, is pertinent to the construction of Hester's fate. "It is remarkable," the narrator says, "that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society." Her ability to speculate behind a mask of adherence to
the law is a thrust toward imaginative free will that is both given and taken away by the progress of the narrative. That she can imagine revolutionary upheaval is a circumstance fraught with the complication that under revolutionary terms the very nature of her own existence is subject to disintegration: "She herself will have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated." The implication is that the annihilation of culture inevitably portends the eclipse of a known self. For Hawthorne, the unmaking of the female, the symbolic "opposite" upon which the capability of a culture to reproduce itself rests, would be a calamity.

His text seems to offer what Berlant has termed a "productive indeterminacy," here, a constantly unfolding negotiation between resistance and assent. Hester wears the letter and takes her punishment, yet invests it with a unique and disconcerting beauty. She lives as an outcast and a penitent, performing services to the community that are perceivably selfless or self-abnegating, yet she vividly asserts the authority of her maternal presence when the possibility arises of losing Pearl to the regulatory control of the Puritan community. Her efforts to cast off the letter and pursue her love of Dimmesdale are precisely thwarted by a daughter who cannot recognize her in terms other than those of a mother whose countenance is "furrowed" by Puritan constraints --not the least of which is Dimmesdale's inability to publicly acknowledge his own agency in his transactions with her. Yet when it becomes possible for her to leave--after Dimmesdale's role is acknowledged and she is judged to have honorably served her penance--she doesn't. Or rather, she returns to the community that was the site of both intense discipline and genuine resistance. That during her lifetime the controlling gaze of the Puritan community undergoes a change, that it appears to be only at times homogeneous, and
subject to diverse and increasing individual variations, suggests the malleability of that gaze. It could be argued that as much as Hester's fate is determined by both her resistance and obeisance, so is her culture susceptible to transformation based on the incremental moves of agent subjects. As there is "no single locus of great Refusal," there is no single locus of absolute power.

The power relations in *Our Nig* are differently complicated, but suggest through comparison a rather fundamental amplification of the problem of identity on American cultural ground. A first distinction is, of course, that this is finally not Mag's story, but Frado's. As such, the brief narrative telling of Mag's life begins in a discursive nexus of race, class, and gender that are integral to the "making" of Frado. Mag's white child of her white lover dies soon after birth. Mag says of that passing, "God be thanked . . . no one can taunt her with my ruin" (6). After this possible analogue for Pearl goes out of existence, an unanchored Mag drifts into marriage with Jim, a black man whose love for her is matched by pity. Or rather, love and pity are understood to be of the same substance. Paternalism is inverted here in the figure of a black man who provides both love and economic sustenance—and a highly vexed legal sanction—to an essentially disenfranchised white woman. This act exposes as a fiction any *a priori* presumption of watchful benevolence in white social, and economic, relations in New England. Mag is adrift in a wilderness that threatens social disintegration to a degree not seen in Hester's situation. That Mag is constructed without the consistency of a strong maternal will, and without "the spine," as it were, to make of ruin a test of her survival, raises questions not just about her own weaknesses, but about the relative value her culture places on individual agency.

Her class and her gender are brought into the spotlight through the expression of a transgressive desire that mingles both sexuality and the hope of
class ascent. She is cast out, like Hester, for the visible sin of unsanctified pregnancy. Unlike Hester, she is not marked by legal and familial constraints that keep her attached, in any official way, to the dominate social order: she bears no signifying letter, and has no living child who might draw out of her a disciplined, and disciplining social continuity. Her "outsideness," rather, is marked by class descent, the slippage from "cottage" to "hovel," and by the sense that she can altogether be neglected and forgotten. Her whiteness is invisible, an absence in the text, until she is seen and loved by Jim, who imagines "the pleasing contrast between her fair face and his own dark skin; the smooth, straight hair, which he had once, in expression of pity, kindly stroked on her now wrinkled but once fair brow." This whiteness is clearly of value to Jim, evoking race essentialism, and the ubiquitous spectre of black male desire for white women: "She'd be as much of a prize to me as she'd fall short of coming up to the mark with white folks" (11). But Jim's love for Mag has much to do with pity for her condition; it is arguably a compassionate response to the disabling effects of white culture both on its own and what it considers "other:"

You's had trial of white folks, any how. They run off and left ye, and now none of 'em come near ye to see if you's dead or alive. I's black outside, I know, but I's got a white heart inside. Which you rather have, a black heart in a white skin, or a white heart in a black one? (12)

One might provide the troubling interpretation here that Jim is claiming interior virtue for "whiteness," and "white" values. But I argue that the context of the novel and the context of his own speech subvert a constructed system of values that penetrates the individual subject, reducing her through race, class, and gender categories to abject circumstance. His reproduction of whiteness, in contrast to the socially recuperative feminine of Hawthorne's Hester, starkly
contrasts the punitive whiteness of Mag's society through an inversion of terms; his figuration of a white heart in black skin is, I believe, less a statement of belief than it is a manipulation of coded language in a manner that will be persuasive to Mag.

Through his agency she is provided with economic sustenance and familial connection. She bears two children with him who themselves become the "mark" of racially-coded transgression. They live in a contingent "happiness" until Jim's death from consumption, after which she moves into a marriage with his partner, Seth, a marriage marked not by the "rite of civilization or Christianity," but only by her "will" (16). It is fundamental to Mag's limited resistance that she become a defiant outcast, unwilling to invest herself in legal codes that prove fruitless in the social order, given that she has cast her lot with the black "other." At the same time, she understands and describes her situation with the same sort of debilitating signifiers that constrain her. She calls her mulatto children "black devils," as useless as she is in the social order (16). It is Seth who finds a way to reinvest them with value, and he does so in a move opposite to Jim's. Finding themselves overwhelmed by limited means and unable to care for the children, Mag and Seth devise a plan for unloading themselves of at least one, by way of Seth's prompting: "There's Frado's six years old, and pretty, if she is yours, and white folks'll say so. She'd be a prize somewhere," (17). Her value, of course, will be her ability to serve a white family. The shift of meaning between Jim and Seth in the use of the term "prize" marks the instability of cultural values. That the term is uttered so differently by black men intensifies that instability, suggesting that there are no fixed categories of solidarity--neither race, gender, nor class--that might be assumed as given. The narrator's own emphasis of this, in noting Mag's slippage of
"black devils" to she-devil when she refers to the white Mrs. Bellmont, suggests the sharp awareness this text holds for incongruities.

John Ernest has discussed Frado’s identity as a cultural product of her parents’ transgression of narrow and confining cultural codes, codes to which she is subject in ways both like and unlike her mother. Responding to Gates's assertion that Wilson has transformed "the black-as-object into the black-as-subject," he writes:39

[A]s Wilson makes painfully clear, this "black-as-subject" still must face a culture capable of transforming her into woman-as-object and, within yet another concentric circle of identification, worker-as-object. . . . Frado begins as a product not only of racist formulations but also of ethical, gender, and economic formulations. Troping one’s way into black subjecthood affects only the color of the corner one has been backed into . . . To escape this corner and save her son, Wilson would need to transform her economic as well as her racial identities.40

The discursive nexus of class, race and gender operations in the opening chapters reconvenes throughout the narrative in varying relation, suggesting that the freight of oppression extends beyond the perceived race boundaries of the institution of slavery. Frado as a young black woman resides at the center of that nexus, subject first to the repetition of neglect by the same mother who, though situated across the color line, suffered a similar lack of maternal care. Driven both by poverty and the status of a racial outcast to be deposited inside the two-story framework—the locale of white culture—of the Bellmont household, she passes her youth as the object of often horrific torture at the hands of Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter, Mary. But again, the narrative manages to return the gaze through an acute examination of relations among whites. If Frado's
blackness draws out the extremes of Mrs. Bellmont's behavior, it is clear that the latter's abusiveness spreads across the other inhabitants of the house, to Mr. Bellmont and his sons, and particularly to her sister-in-law and her daughter, Jane, whom she desires to marry off for money and class position. At the surface of the narrative, all the men of the house are treated kindly in terms of their, it seems, natural willingness to defend Frado and think of her as fully human. But the unnamed, provoking question that must ultimately engage the reader is why their moves to protect her from Mrs. Bellmont's wrath remain so partial and impermanent. They manage only short-term consolations, surging into the picture to intercede in particularly glaring moments of abuse, such as to remove the wood prop from Frado's mouth. But they disappear just as often, and often under their own volition, as when Mr. Bellmont removes himself to the grounds to avoid the sound of his wife's voice. As White points out, the only true friend Frado seems consistently to have is her double, the dog Fido, who like Frado is given the ability to discern and critique the arrangements among white humans.41

The answer may lie within the qualities that presumably caused the disappearance of this book soon after its publication. If Frado physically carries the brunt of hatred by virtue of her color, it is not her color in any essential form that is causal. That hatred is constructed within already existing social relations among whites who are capable of showering upon themselves degrees of abuse and neglect that find their fullest expression in a racism of both the fiercest, and the most benign kind. Mrs. Bellmont's haughty and devious treatment of in-laws who do not carry wealth into the family is countered by covert and partial resistances among her children. But Frado puts forward an overt resistance, in one instance by refusing to work if she is beaten, a move that echoes similar, in essence, labor strikes in other slave narratives. Of
particular interest here is another instance, the moment when she refuses to eat from a plate Mrs. Bellmont has already used until after her dog Fido has licked it clean. Delighted by the baldness of the insult to his mother, Jack tosses Frado a silver half-dollar. As Ernest suggests, Wilson's narration of this exchange honors the value Frado's refusal holds for other family members, and for a broader audience: "[T]he exposure of 'remissness' must be recognized as a valuable service if the nation is to maintain its moral foundations. The unmasking of willful leaders and tyrannical employers returns economic relations to their moral grounds, there to be evaluated."42 Slavery, and its shadows upon the northern house, is not, finally, an issue separate from other constraints. At issue, rather, are the ongoing essentializing codes that work to reduce the individual subject to rigid configurations that are either black or white, poor or rich, female or male.

Frado's resistance to her own salvation in Christianity provides a further look into this problem. Her near conversion is extremely localized, and fully contingent upon the presence and love of her closest benefactor, the dying James. She will not ultimately yield herself to a conception of heaven that includes any of the evil Bellmonts. And the prospect of a dead Mary in hell includes the utterance, "she'll be as black as I am. Would n't mistrees be mad to see her a nigger!" (107). The inversion echoes the title's distancing move, suggesting that the application of race as it occurs in this locale is a construct put to use in the uneasy negotiations of power relations. That this applies to perhaps a lesser degree among blacks as well as whites is evidenced in Samuel, the fake fugitive whom she marries and who deserts her twice, the second time after she is with child in circumstances that echo her mother's desertion by a white lover. For a time, he manages to master the game of power relations by constructing "illiterate harangues . . . for hungry abolitionists,"
before disappearing to die, reportedly, of yellow fever in the South (128). He has, in a sense, "made" himself over into a disguise that will please what this text views as the narrow designs of a white world that itself resists intimate examination. The appeal for patronage Wilson makes in her preface both to "our good anti-slavery friends" and to the more embracing, "my colored brethren," is arguably deeply compromised by the searingness of the narrative's critique that is, in many ways, unprecedented in its bluntness.

But similar tendencies in other texts of the period are suggested by Andrews's discussion of the interstitial figure of the trickster:

Such figures mediate and often reverse the binary oppositions that define differences between the hierarchical states to which they are marginal. Contrary to conventional wisdom, which believed that marginal figures like the octoroon were psychologically disjoined by their dual origins and identifications, the interstitial figure often defies expectations by conjoining and, we might say, confusing that which culture and society demand remain separate, distinct, and valorized according to rank. . . . a slave narrator like Jacob D. Green pushed the tradition of the trickster beyond the limits that William Wells Brown would take it; Green would celebrate himself as the violator of black, as well as white, social taboos.43

If the figure of Samuel conforms to the trickster who moves to and fro violating taboos in both black and white worlds through mimicking a devoted husband and an earnest fugitive, in a larger sense the entire text of Our Nig performs a usurpation of expectations that would, if they could, keep a black narrator from articulating linkages between black and white nefariousness, and, more to the point, that would prevent any articulation of fundamental vulnerabilities in white
social relations. *Our Nig* arguably infiltrates and exposes white culture, as *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* will do explicitly some fifty years later.

One further point of comparison within the period remains. Gates has spoken of the narrative's end as one that resists the closure typically offered by happy marriages in white women's fiction of the time, a genre he uses as the basis for comparing *Our Nig*'s formal structure.\(^{44}\) The disaster of her marriage results in the stated purpose of her writing the text as an appeal to raise money for her own, and her son's, care. Andrews offers a similar perception about the close of Harriet Jacobs's narrative that allows a comparison with the African-American autobiographical story rather than Anglo-American fiction. Jacobs remains unmarried at her story's end, and visibly worrying the dilemma of having to be grateful to the white woman who buys her freedom. Mrs. Bruce has been both friend and benefactor, provoking in Jacobs an uneasy mix of love and obligation. Rather than "writ[ing] herself off this margin" either by assuming the traditional female role of service, or asserting herself as independent from all forms of obligation, Jacobs chooses "to portray poignantly and subtly her dilemma itself," leaving the ambiguity of the problem to be settled by the reader.\(^{45}\) The marginality of her position echoes the uses the interstitial figure makes of "confusing that which culture and society demand remain separate," in this case friendship and white paternalism. It is a move that marks a departure from the convention in African-American autobiography of settling moral dilemmas within the compass of the text.

In a similar reader-oriented move, Harriet Wilson's economic salvation remains in the hands of the reader, a precariousness that can only be resolved by reader response outside the domain of the text. Is she, in a compellingly useful inversion of a slavery trope, to "follow the condition of the mother" and, like Mag, lose her children and disappear altogether from this text and from the
larger social fabric of which she has written? The closing paragraph of the text proposes a further problem that must be resolved according to how the reader chooses to interpret Frado's relation to the Bellmonts, both good and bad. Of the dead and remaining family, she says, "Frado has passed from their memories, as Joseph from the butler's, but she will never cease to track them till beyond mortal vision" (131). That she is forgotten is perhaps the final word on the ability of the white world to recall both what it loves and what it despises. But the ambiguous play of the word "track" suggests an eye whose purposes from the margin of observation are either to keep track of loved ones or to track and keep under surveillance those who wield such variegated constraints on the narrating subject, possibly both. It is this openness, the peculiar ability of the text to read its audience while it is being read, that poses *Our Nig* on the discursive borders of black and white social relations.

If it is credible that Wilson's project exposes the palpable rigors of racial configuration as the socially-induced product of white cultural arrangements, in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* James Weldon Johnson moves that investigation into the interior terrain of the African-American alienated self. He inverts the move of autobiography-into-novel that Wilson makes, by transporting the novel into the realm of autobiography, in some sense liberating the "I" to self-consciously name and perform the self-as-other within the borders of the subject body.

The nameless narrator comes to us striated with the effects of existing race codes that have not, arguably, changed since the period of emancipation. What has changed is the discursive articulation of those relations by the narrating African-American subject. If we take as an example the three instances of interracial liaisons in *Our Nig, Iola Leroy*, and Johnson's text, we
can begin to gauge a shift in the problem of self definition. Frado always knows she is black, through the visible presence of her black father and the articulated status of her white mother as "fallen." It is a knowledge shaped and reinforced by external, hierarchical codes which themselves become the subject of critique. In Frances E. W. Harper's 1892 novel, Lola Leroy believes herself and both her parents to be white, until enslavement reveals to her her mother's blackness, and her own. In a text that seems geared towards the recapitulation and exoneration of abolition's higher moral codes, Lola accepts and embraces her status as a black woman, though she could, once freed, easily continue to pass for white. The complete reversal of some seventeen years of assuming the identity of a southern white lady is taken as a clear-cut resolution to the problem of the color line. Lola, along with her husband and brother, accomplishes an unproblematized acceptance of a "true" black self that is understood to be intimately associated with projects of communal betterment, and the legal and moral emancipation of the race. But the long, partial, and regressive playing out of post-emancipation relations among blacks and whites would seem to effect a change in that optimism of self-perception in Johnson's novel.

Robert B. Stepto has articulated the depth of Johnson's signification upon prior African-American texts, from slave narratives to Du Bois's Souls, published just a few years before Johnson began work on his novel. The publisher's authenticating preface; the evocation of a southern childhood home; parentage based in the workings of the southern slave system--an aristocratic white father and a black mother; journeys north, south and across the Atlantic; all are moves that echo but refigure the ways in which ex-slaves and free blacks worked to negotiate identities in narratives whose broad goal is an always vexed concept of freedom. In following the canonical trails of self-discovery and
moves toward self-reliance, Johnson's novel marks a significant departure in its representation of the ways self-reliance might be compromised.

The narrator of Johnson's novel does not know he is black until he receives his revelation through the unkindly intercession of a teacher at school, in a time period we could roughly assume to be the 1870s in Connecticut. Prior to that revelation he is a "normal," or perhaps particularly talented, and gregarious schoolboy. The moment is a close version, Stepto points out, of Du Bois's narration of his own introduction to the color line: a "trivial" school incident in New England, wherein the protagonist is given to know that he is "different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (2).47 In both cases the consequences of the disclosure are not immediately catastrophic to the extent that either child is prevented from entering into the daily course of school activities or excelling at academics. Rather, both become aware of that peculiar shift from the sense of self-among-others to the sense of self-as-other that functions in innumerable ways across the flux of Northern cultural life, mingling an exterior crippling of opportunity with an interior weariness and doubt. In the Du Bois narrative, consciousness takes the direction of contextualizing his own partial but incremental victories against prevailing race codes within the broader range of black cultural losses:

With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white . . .

The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation.

(2)
Gifted with "second sight," the narrative voice recognizes a degree of irreducible community, ravaged as it is, with persons facing severities scaled to gradations of color. Relative whiteness or blackness are values rebounding across the subject self from the walls of white racial codes. The prison metaphor promotes the rigidity of the configuration, but it also suggests ways in which the "prisoners" might gauge the interior and press against those walls, casting an evaluative gaze outward as well as within.

Johnson's narrator, on the other hand, is manacled by what Stepto and others critics have noted as his peculiar inability to read beyond the surface of the world as it presents itself to him. When his blackness is uncovered, he speaks of that moment as a singular "pass[ing] into another world:"

From that time I looked out through other eyes, my thoughts were coloured, my words dictated, my actions limited by one dominating, all-pervading idea which constantly increased in force and weight until I finally realized in it a great, tangible fact.\textsuperscript{48}

The possible play on the word "passing" evokes Du Bois's doubleness--"an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts"--only to undercut it through domination by one idea, the force of which is dependent on its singularity. That the idea in the narrator's mind evolves from a mental and social construction to a hard fact suggests the narrator's inability to understand the full complications of his own peripatetic "passings" throughout the novel. His rendering of this moment is marked by a passive and near complete acceptance of blackness as a code for less-than-full-human status: "He is forced to take his outlook on all things, not from the viewpoint of a citizen, or a man, or even a human being, but from the view-point of a \textit{coloured} man" (21). Framed as a complaint against racism, the passage seems to foreclose resistance. As Stepto points out, his subsequent wonderment at the signs of black advancement that do exist are a--
to use an appropriate term--colorless echo of the "dogged strength" Du Bois ascribes to the American black as subject.49

It would seem a condition of being able to pass between black and white worlds that a confusion of identities is created in the passing subject, or a layering and overlapping that can be used narratively to different ends--in William Wells Brown's Clotel, for instance, as a means of tricking and escaping slavery, or in Iola Leroy, as a first move toward a self-knowledge that will lead to communal betterment. But although throughout he strikes chords of complaint against racial injustice, Johnson's narrator remains irresolute as to the uses to which he might put his "found" black identity. Johnson's particular sawiness in constructing his tentative narrator derives, I believe, from his own acute readings of his literary forebears and the historical moment in which he writes.

If we look yet more closely at the way the narrator comes to conclude the nature of the "coloured viewpoint," we begin to gauge the breadth of Johnson's critique. Well before he discovers his "true" relation to racial coding he is "a perfect little aristocrat," a well-dressed and "pretty" boy beloved by his mother and made much of by his mother's associates, ladies whom she never visits but who come to visit, it seems, because she "d[oes] sewing" (7). It is just part of the way the adult narrator maintains the sense of his buffered childhood that he refrains from identifying her as a seamstress, thus avoiding locating the nominative of her class status--and his--within that society. The joys of childhood, rather, reside in the apparent freedom with which his mother creates an interior space filled with pleasant and multiple activities--there are books; there is music; she teaches him reading and writing; she plays hymns and "some old Southern songs" that seem to call up in her memories of a past he is not given to read or share. Instead he finds comfort in the style, and in the way they are given life by her near presence. He begins to learn piano, describing
himself as the sort of student who "invariably attempt[s] to reproduce the required sounds without the slightest recourse to the written characters." The same style of learning applies to reading, where he will "substitute whole sentences and even paragraphs from what meaning [he thinks] the illustrations convey" (8-9). The admirable ability to "intuit" through vibrant imagination the ways in which a story or a piece of music will go without the hindrance of an already written text also signals an early narrative tension between his ongoing sense of his own "natural" intelligence and the difficulties he has in reading his relation to the class and race texts proliferating through and around him.

The shock of recognition that he undergoes when his blackness is revealed differs substantially from Du Bois's account: he does not discover his racial status and its constitutive difference simultaneously, but finds himself to be "coloured" within a difference he has already named and absorbed as applicable only to others. He is, as far as he is concerned, "not black," therefore, white in a world where such distinctions are sometimes subtly, sometimes harshly made. The best scholar in the class is so, he perceives, in spite of being black; other black children who do less well are socially dismissed by their white schoolmates. He even partakes in the taunting of some of those children, and becomes incensed when one of them retaliates by throwing a slate. When he furiously reports to his mother how "one of the 'niggers' had struck a boy," she turns on him:

"Don't you ever use that word again," she said, "and don't you ever bother the coloured children at school. You ought to be ashamed of yourself." I did hang my head in shame, not because she had convinced me that I had done wrong, but because I was hurt by the first sharp word she had ever given me. (15)
If we think back to Roediger's argument about the ways in which white workers sought to protect themselves from the terrible uncertainties of class by insisting on a white race pride that denigrated blacks and others, we gain some insight into the narrator's character formation. Along with his perceived peers, he reads himself into a text wherein the striving for self-betterment goes hand in hand with having an essential leg up on "the others," who, no matter what they might achieve in terms of self-betterment, remain outside and lower by virtue of what is constituted as natural fact. That his remorse is due to his first experience with his mother's anger, rather than with his own wrongness, marks a failure of understanding. But it also encourages a deeper re-reading of what he is given to understand.

The mother's response is marked by an absence of telling information. When she exhorts him to not "bother the coloured children," the explicit meaning contains an implicit sense of remaining at a discreet distance. Knowing what she knows, she is herself caught up in protecting her child from black otherness by allowing him to pass for white, thus preventing herself from being the agent of his discovery. And although she is the first agent of his early literacy, she keeps him from knowing his full history in relation to hers. To understand this, one must look to her own roots in the South as a probable ex-slave kept well in a cottage by "one of the greatest men in the country," her white lover and the man who is responsible for the narrator's having some of "the best blood of the South" (18). Removed North to another little cottage, she maintains her love and respect for this man who will, she hopes, eventually do something magnanimous for their son. Her stake in remaining loyal to the idea of a goodness in the man enhanced by wealth and social position is subsequently high. She does not, it seems, wish to complicate it by rendering to her child, or to anyone else, a balder picture of the situation: that her silence has
been bought by a white lover who establishes her in the North and offers some vague promise of future visits and security for this illicit family.

The studious absence of any overt naming of class and color status within the interior of his familial life is overlaid with another kind of early discernment on the narrator's part that nevertheless remains partial. His earliest memories of the house in Georgia, though he calls them only "faint recollections," are replete with vivid, atmospheric renderings. The "territory" of the house and yard comes back as pleasurable but boundaried ground filled with idyllic textures, a vegetable garden, blackberries, a "patient cow," and frontyard flowers hedged by "varicoloured glass bottles stuck in the ground neck down." Stepto has made much of the narrator's attraction to these bottles, particularly in regards to the incident that causes them to be etched in his memory. Thinking to see if the bottles grow as the flowers do, he digs them up to discover whether there are roots, and receives a "terrific spanking" (4-5). The punishment is the logical consequence for the child of creating disorder, but the adult narrator, working from hindsight, reads no more into it, though the memory is palpable. Using the expertise of Robert Farris Thompson on the history of African art, Stepto frames the meaning of the bottles as a survival of African traditions: "These objects express the 'flash of the spirit,' the 'spirit embedded in glitter'; they 'rephrase' the African . . . custom of 'inserting mirrors into the walls or pillars of tombs' . . . 'as a sign of mystic vision."" The narrator, both literally as a child and figuratively as an adult, is searching for roots yet is incapable of seeing the framing context within which the bottles are carefully placed. The past--the ways that it lives in and engages the present--remains a cipher.

What he does see is the periodic looming presence of a tall man whose boots and shoes are "always shiny," and who wears "a gold chain and a great gold watch" with which the child sometimes plays. For the service of removing
the shiny shoes to a corner and bringing a pair of slippers, the boy receives a "bright coin" which his mother teaches him to drop in a "tin bank." On the day prior to their departure for the North, a journey unbeknownst to the child, the tall man drills a hole in a ten-dollar gold piece and hangs it around his neck with a string. The obvious image of bondage becomes more complex if we consider its full ramifications in light of the narrator's attitude toward it as a fetish: "I have worn that gold piece around my neck the greater part of my life, and still possess it, but more than once I have wished that some other way had been found of attaching it to me besides putting a hole through it" (5-6). On first glance, the coin has less value as a meaningful reference to the narrator's past than it does, or would--had it not been disfigured--as a means of commercial exchange, suggesting the narrator's antagonism to the full implications--and the terrible limits--of the "gift" his white father has given him.

But the context in which the narrator's reports his earliest memories and the subsequent uses he makes of his life argue for a different perspective. In real ways, he has been initiated into the testy realm of a commodifying culture where communal interests appear swallowed up in the interests of self-reliance and individual success. Before he knows his blackness or any of the communal history black culture carries, he knows himself as white, and therefore as subject to the conditions of white race and class formation. As I have used Du Bois and Roediger to argue above, white self-perception includes a stunted perception of one's class interests that interferes with the possibility of broader cultural ties. If in Our Nig the exchange of coins signifies an appropriate wage for a hard-earned resistance to white racial codes, in The Autobiography that exchange is transformed into a mode of buying silence and assent.

The narrator is swamped by this problem. His early response to the discovery of his own and his mother's racial origins is to search for and find
imperfections in her countenance after mirror-gazing in pursuit of his own. Not unlike the way Jim's assessment of Mag in Our Nig reproduces whiteness, the beauty he construes in his own face centers on the way the "liquid darkness" of his eyes and the dark hair that falls "in waves" over his temples brings out "the ivory whiteness" of his skin, "making my forehead appear whiter than it really was" (17-18). Beauty becomes an uneven contest between darkness and light, his desire betting on darkness to sustain and even accentuate the values of whiteness. Putting this physical assessment together with the ways the narrator tries to accommodate the culture of his black origins, one begins to see what Johnson might be after.

The narrator's subsequent forays back and forth across the color line are fraught with a complex intersection of class and race. When his mother dies, the promise of financial deliverance by his father fails to materialize. He raises money through a benefit performance that also displays his musical talents, and decides to discover the South through study at Atlanta University. Robbed of all cash his first night in Atlanta, he heads to Jacksonville to work in a cigar factory, availing himself along the way of a full range of "experience" with all types and classes of people. What might be characterized as the flowering of an adventurous spirit is modified by his various disappointments in, and distastes for, the forlorn and drab nature of the South he sees. Instead of perceiving the "historic ground" Du Bois notes in a passage that holds obvious parallels with Johnson's text (77), he worries about the magnitude of the "lower class" among blacks: "the unkempt appearance, the shambling, slouching gait and loud talk and laughter of these people aroused in me a feeling of almost repulsion" (55-56). What interests him instead is the spoken dialect of Southern blacks, the style of the speech and the way that it seems to elicit an accommodating humor amidst degradation. His facility at picking up accents, at learning other
languages among the Cubans in Jacksonville and later in the cafe society of Paris, is a parody, Linda MacKethan argues, of episodes in slave narratives that privilege literacy. In those narratives, reading is fundamental to liberation, and to gaining access to black self-authorization.51 But in the narrator, facility in language becomes less a means to the acquisition of knowledge than to the possibility of getting around, and ultimately, getting ahead.

The narrator's expressed desire to learn something of his cultural heritage and "do something" for his race is always, in spite of himself, contingent upon what benefits will accrue to him. When the Jacksonville cigar factory closes down, he drops all notion of establishing a permanent home and marrying the schoolteacher with whom he has become involved. Seized by a "desire like a fever" to head north, he goes to New York, there applying his musical talents to the acquisition of a repertoire in rag-time, which would seem to put him on the innovative course of participating in and broadening the uses to which this aspect of black cultural heritage could be put.

The move North is a move away from the class stasis of a factory job, and from the possibility of a family lodged within the relatively comfortable confines of Jacksonville's black cultural life. In New York he uses his musical talents to pick up rag-time, and he gains, in his own terms, marketable fame as being "the best rag-time-player" in the city, a fame based in part on his syncretic ability to transform classical music into the new form (115). His facility gains him the patronage of a wealthy man assumed to be white, but whose secrecy and opinions about race questions in America give some indications of "passing." This patron eventually takes him to Europe, displaying him as a kind of cultural commodity and, in ways, as his own private cultural possession. In Europe, the enthusiasm for variations on ragtime provokes in the narrator the idea of returning to the South and collecting both modern rag-time and old slave
songs in the interest of transforming them into a popular and new American
music. At the surface, his desire seems a way of invigorating his connection to
black heritage, reproducing and enlarging its import in contemporary life. But as
with his other desires, this goal is crossed with the shadowy restraints of race
and class that derive both from within and without. The idea of "tak[ing] rag-time
and ma[king] it classic" carries the burden of marketing assimilation, of using the
syncretizing of cultures to create a product accessible to the consuming tastes
of the dominant culture (142). "This idea you have of making a Negro out of
yourself is nothing more than a sentiment; and you do not realize the fearful
import of what you intend to do," says his patron who is, perhaps, already aware
in himself of the narrator's fallibilities (145).

For the narrator's trip back to the South is ultimately about "collecting;"
there is little indication that he, in his continual aversion to close examination of
the roots of lower-class black life, will embrace the cultural source of his
interests. Though genuinely moved by the music he hears at a congregational
meeting, and particularly the famous description of "Singing Johnson," he
cannot imagine its origin, seeing and hearing only--as with the vari-coloured
bottles and the accents of his mother's voice--the wonderment of style:

How did the men who originated them manage to do it? The
sentiments are easily accounted for; they are mostly taken from the
Bible; but the melodies, where did they come from? . . . Any
musical person who has never heard a Negro congregation under
the spell of religious fervour sing these old songs has missed one
of the most thrilling emotions which the human heart may
experience. (181)

The wealth of what he himself is capable of articulating about African-American
cultural expression is here reduced to a professionalization (only a "musical
person" would understand it) that bases evaluation on an aesthetic that privileges style over substance. "Sentiments" derive only from a supreme canonical text, and not from the range of lived experience at the heart of an intimate, African-American locale. It is the beauty of the style--as with the beauty of his face--that might be syncretically merged with more classic, white mainstream forms, and become the narrator's product for trade within a broader cultural commerce.

Not that he is in any way baldly aware of this motive. Like the protagonist of *Iola Leroy*, his return to the South resonates with good will. He adopts a black identity linked with a sense of his own, artistic heritage, in an apparently fluid to and fro between black and white that he is capable of assuming throughout. The optimism of the text reveals itself in terms of the narrator's--and the author's--enthusiasm for the rituals and art of a perceived and identifiable African-American culture. The incident that ultimately turns him back into the guise of a white real estate speculator is his witnessing of the burning of a black man by a white mob. Moved by the "shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals," he drops his project in favor of this resolution: "I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race; but that I would change my name, raise a moustache, and let the world take me for what it would; that it was not necessary for me to go about with a label of inferiority pasted across my forehead" (190-91).

The lynching and what leads up to it are reminiscent of Du Bois's "Of the Coming of John" in *Souls*, where the black John Jones and his double, the white John--son of a local judge--return to their rural southern town after having received a northern education. Black John's return is motivated by his brush with a racism particular to the North which truncates the breadth of his
participation in the fields his education has opened for him: he by chance stumbles upon seats to the opera that put him next to that same white John, who subsequently has him ejected, but not before black John has a taste of the culture denied him. Johnson's narrator echoes the scene when he finds himself at the opera in Paris sitting unknown next to his father and a young woman who must be his half-sister. In both scenes, the well-educated protagonists succumb to verbal silencing. But while John smiles "lightly, then grimly" as he stares directly into the face of his antagonist (168), Johnson's narrator sits stunned, desiring but unable to publicly worship his unknowing sister's beauty and unwilling, finally, to "out" himself to his father which would, in effect, out the racial coding of their legally illegitimate relationship.

The scenes are revelatory of each subject's alienation within white culture, but implicit are the ways immersion in white culture creates alienated discourse in black terrain. The northern-educated black John Jones returns to help his people, but finds himself now a foreigner, alien to their habits. The headway he begins to make in teaching black children to read, write, and stand up for themselves is thwarted when the judge overhears of his teaching "radical notions" to the servile class and shuts the black school down. At last despairing of his ability to serve his own people, he is struck down in his meditations by the archetypal sword of the white South. Coming across his white counterpart attempting to rape his dark sister in the woods, he kills him, thereafter settling back to dwell on his time spent North and South and await the lynch mob: "The night deepened; he thought of the boys at Johnstown. He wondered how Brown had turned out, and Carey? And Jones,--Jones? Why he was Jones, and he wondered what they would all say when they knew, when they knew, in that great long dining-room with its hundreds of merry eyes." The doubleness is routed first through two Johns divided by racial status bound up in class, and
finally through the one black John who sees himself doubled—as the Jones who partook of the great long dining-room North and the Jones who will be imagined in that same world twisting by a rope while "the world whistle[s] in his ears" (175-176).

He is, in some sense, the same John from whom the narrator of The Autobiography flees, with the important exception that the narrator, by virtue of class distance and fear of contaminating racial otherness, sees him as a subhuman object through the lens of white racism. The particular juxtaposition Johnson creates by improvising on Du Bois both shows the cataclysmic effects of Anglo-produced racial codes on the black subject and their fallaciousness. If the narrator chooses to disappear himself among whites as an individual solution to the horror of a relentless racism, he gives himself up to "contingent revelations of the other world," fracturing his own agency in determining what the black subject is capable of thinking and doing. Simultaneously, the problem of whether the Anglo world can recognize him according to its own brand of essentialism is put back into its hands. It cannot do so, and is exposed to the fiction of that construct.

The Autobiography can be read as a meditation on the literary careers of Washington and Du Bois, and the arguments that accompany them. Stepto has made this case persuasively by reading the ways in which Johnson signifies upon Du Bois's Souls, disarming criticism that, through his adaptation of the autobiographical persona, links Johnson solely to Washington. I have followed him above in doing variations of that work. Stepto's designation of the "rhetoric of detachment" in both Washington's Up From Slavery and in The Autobiography points to the ways in which Johnson takes up the threads of the existing argument between Washington and Du Bois. Stepto observes:
The narrative balance between participation and observation is skewed toward observation... In *Up From Slavery* [this rhetoric] combines with the accumulating power of Washington's burgeoning résumé to express the domination of the past by the present; in *The Autobiography* it reveals almost singlehandedly how the unambiguousness of the Ex-Coloured Man's outward posture in the present (he is an ordinary white man who has made a little money...) dominates his interpretation of his ambiguous past and controls his actions.52

Washington's determined focus on the present uplift of blacks is aligned with the extraliterary ends of maintaining the mission of his Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute as the primary site and symbol for black national progress. Based in technical and vocational training that would give blacks purchase in the socio-economic life of the United States, the Institute and Washington's idea of it seems a virtuous imposition of pragmatic, or realizable, goals on the prevailing strife of race and class. Turning away from the past and asserting a self-reliant attitude toward the business of making one's self a working part of the U.S. class structure, he essentially argues, is the way toward black public ascent. It is the narrowness of the goal that Du Bois contests, its avoidance of a critique of economic relations and the ways in which it easily fits into a racially coded, ruling class arguments that promote the natural inferiority of blacks. In Johnson's narrator, these arguments come to crisis in the interior workings of character. The detachment that compels such distance between himself and his collective past, both black and white, constitutes a failure of informed intelligence which in turn prevents him from "owning" himself in all the complexity of his heritage. His return to whiteness is a choice grounded in the inability to conquer the particular narrowness that whiteness, in all the senses
have discussed here, entails. His success conforms to Gilded Age standards: money, a beautiful wife, two beautiful children— one of whom is a "golden-headed god"—and the demand for a detachment of solid public appearance from the indeterminacy of private life (209). That whiteness both makes him and disfigures that "transfigured spark of divinity which we call Myself," suggests the soulessness of a culture that wills the effacement of the other, and the self-as-other.

If, in this sense, The Autobiography is read in part as a warning to readers both black and white about the dangers of forever getting and spending at the surface of the present, Johnson's representation of his own life in his "true" autobiography Along This Way suggests the sort of life the Ex-Coloured Man might have wished for had he had the nerve. It is the history of a man who worked for the race, who did indeed accomplish the forwarding of specific black culture in collections of southern black music and folklore, who had his own thriving career as a cross-over Broadway lyricist, and who became a central figure in early twentieth-century political and intellectual life amidst a formidable black community. That his movement away from lower class black life and black southern regionalism occurs in Along This Way in a manner comparable to The Autobiography is, perhaps, a small measure of the dynamics between complicated cultural and political arguments and the living of a life that is both personally and publicly inscribed. An irony of historical hindsight allows us to think of Johnson as a Republican Party appointee, writing his novel of class and race during his tenure as a consul in Nicaragua. He is there in a period of civil strife, when U.S. corporate investment in Central America prompts the arrival of a force of three hundred and fifty-six Marines led by Major Smedley Butler. Of this and other events in his career, Butler later wrote, "I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests... I helped purify
Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers... In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism."53 The racial, ethnic, and class codes that played over the diverse population of a corporatizing America were, in that time, well on their way to hemispheric expansion. As one of many writers and thinkers simultaneously engaged in and resisting the fluid boundaries of that America, Johnson in many ways exemplifies both the excellence and contingency of particularly American intellectual struggle. The range between Wilson's tracking of the "Two-Story White House, North," and the White House of Johnson's era as a symbol of a nationally conceived "American" domestic space that works to absorb territory and the subjectivity of foreign others, suggests the open-endedness and multiplicity of an argument that continues to play, with stunning specificity, in diverse American texts.


4Trachtenberg, 150.

5Ibid., 156.


8Simpson, 192.


10Trachtenberg, 170.

11Ibid., 170.

12Ibid., 176.

13Ibid., 179.


15Ibid., 14.

16Ibid., 13-14. The Ringer quote is from Benjamin B. Ringer, "We the People" and Others (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1983) 103.


18Roediger, 14.

19Ibid., 170.


21Ibid., iv.
See Bierce on the Spanish-American War in Berkove 1-99.
Ibid., 17-18.
Ibid., 47.
Andrews, 280
White, 23.
Harriet E. Wilson. Our Nig (New York: Vintage, 1983) 3. Further references will be noted by page number in the text.
White, 22.
Hawthorne, 113.
Berlant, 9. Her use of "productive indeterminacy" occurs in the related context of Hawthorne's display of character through the complex interplay of "national, personal, juridical, and political identity," all terms pertinent to the ways in which the texts under discussion negotiate the constraints of race, class, and gender codes.
Gates, lv.
White, 22.
Ernest, 435.
Andrews, 178.

45 Andrews, 262.


49 Stepto, 113.

50 Ibid., 100. The Thompson quotes are from personal communication with Stepto.

51 MacKethan, 143-144.

52 Stepto, 108.

Chapter Two

"Mostly About Myself:" Anzia Yezierska
and Languages of Contested Space

BARON: A Jew!
VERA: How did you know? Yes, he is a Jew, a noble Jew.
BARON: A Jew noble!
[He laughs bitterly.]
VERA: Yes—even as you esteem nobility—by pedigree. In Spain
his ancestors were hidalgos, favourites at the Court of Ferdinand
and Isabella; but in the great expulsion of 1492 they preferred
exile in Poland to baptism.

--Israel Zangwill, The Melting Pot

Inside the ruin of my thwarted life, the un-lived visionary immigrant
hungered and thirsted for America.

--Anzia Yezierska, Soap and Water

Columbus sailed west, Tzvetan Todorov tells us, in pursuit of complex riches.
The gold he hoped to find amidst the wealth of the Orient was the means he
required for his broader project—the necessary conversion to Christianity of the
world beyond the boundaries of a known Europe, a world narrated through
memory of the Crusades, and by the medieval travel narratives of Marco Polo
and others who ventured east into the territories of the Emperor of Cathay. The
world Columbus "discovered" was a textured veil of nature and human
inhabitants that, once lifted, would reveal the earthly Paradise at the end of the
Orient, an Eden where no man might go except by God's will. His ultimate goal,
the Catholic reclamation of Jerusalem financed by the acquisition of riches from
an intuited Oriental empire, was storied with the unfolding of various kinds of "natural" teleological evidence—for instance that Cuba could not be an island but instead must be part of the sought-after Asian continent (any Spanish sailor who questioned this claim faced the danger of having his tongue cut out); or that the varieties of people he encountered, bereft of any sort of cultural coherence as he understood it, were nevertheless finely formed, as if the physical manifestation—like the verdant green of the trees, the miraculous birds, the vibrant harbors—of an absolute and divine good. They were often "well made, stout in body and very comely of countenance," almost always naked—with all the vexed weight of innocence, lasciviousness, and blankness that word carries—and either good or wicked, depending upon the manner in which he was received by them. At times aligned with a bestial nature, at times with qualities suggestive of a proto-Christian temperament, the inhabitants of these "known"/unknown lands were as yet unaware and incapable of properly articulating their place in the divine plan Columbus surmised to be the root and pattern of all worldly ventures.

"I felt like a Columbus," Anzia Yezierska writes in "America and I," "finding new worlds through every new word." How much like or unlike she is to the Italian navigator for the Spanish throne becomes a matter of both whimsical and serious interest. Like him, Yezierska is a border-crosser, single-minded in terms of what she intends to find. Unlike him, she senses cultural borders, knows them as constitutive spaces wherein the self might be made and unmade, almost simultaneously. The "savages" who compel and repel her are neither naked nor stout of body, clothed rather in an Anglo-Saxon coolness, abstract intellect, and exuding an efficiency conducive to the scientific management of self and others in a hungry, capitalist world. Her observations are acute, partial, shaped always by a delight in the fierce desire for knowledge
and always threatened by a swirl of limits born of gender, ethnic, and class
difference—all finding their heated expression in diverse turns of phrase that
both challenge and assert the distance between herself and what should be. "I
could not tear it out of me," she writes, "the feeling that America must be
somewhere, somehow—only I couldn't find it—my America, where I would work
for love and not for a living. I was like a thing following blindly after something
far off in the dark!

'Oi whi!' “5

New worlds through every word come to her, uttered in eager and
complaining accents that mediate the exchange between a self and an alien
other. For the monologic Columbus, every word, at least in regard to the
possibility of human contact and exchange, means a recapitulation of the old in
a virgin landscape, already "known." So great is his faith in the principles of
Catholic theology, and in the representation of that theology through the
financial support of the Spanish monarchy, that he hears only Spanish words
in the language of the indigenous other—all else is nonsense, unless, that is,
actions or gestures that attend alien speech can be interpreted in terms
Columbus already recognizes as appropriate to the dual nature of his goal: the
accumulation of wealth (the naming of land as property of the Crown; the
claiming of gold, natural resources, and the carrying of human beings to Spain
as material evidence and so that they might learn "to speak") wedded to the
visionary service of God.6 The vision, a universal human order rendered under
the dictates of Catholicism, is striated with tensions that have reverberated in
diverse but comparable ways across subsequent centuries of colonization,
enslavement, immigrant exile, and that have, as Todorov argues, presented
themselves in the construction of the Americas as "an exemplary story" about
the complex ways the self makes its discovery of the other. 7
To illuminate those tensions across the distance between Columbus and a Russian-Polish-Jewish immigrant writer of the early twentieth century is to tease out the dialogic relation between a contemporary imagination and an historical past. Within that relation dwells the desire for justification—"as he has so abundantly discovered, so shall I"—along with the ironies of raveling contexts. What Yezierska carries with her and what she meets in the evolving sense of nation that marks the first decades of the U.S. twentieth-century are effects far more complicated than her partial—though, for a time, nationally flaunted—"immigrant success story" suggests, as was the nature of Columbus's theological mission. The character Todorov reads from the diaries and letters of his voyages signals modernity by crossing an unknown frontier into a world where "Nature" reveals itself in a diverse and multifaceted beauty, a character who at the same time attempts to banish modernity's human contradictoriness through promoting the Counter-Reformation's coercion of alien indigenous practices into monolingual and territorial unity.

How to deal with the Indians? The question raised in what will be New Spain finds its counterpart in the Inquisition, and in the 1492 expulsion of Jews and Moors from Spain. The elimination of otherness manifested in the quemaderos (the burning places as an earlier version of American lynchings and Nazi "showers"), the flight of Jews, or the making of conversos who cloaked their Jewishness in Catholicism presents a version of interior conquest linked to nation- and empire-building that will in part characterize the relation between alterity and national identification for centuries to come. In Columbus the question is posed less as a probing interrogative than as an already answering option, one available to his own point of view rather more than that of the Indians, in whom no perceptible, autonomous choice as to how to deal with the Spaniards is imagined. Columbus's Indians, when he sees them on his horizon
as humanly equal, are capable of assimilation into the true faith, subject to inclusion and identification. But close-up, through unknown or unpredictable language and action, or if they appear to reject such identification through the use of force, flight, or capitulation, as in the case of women who "allow" themselves to be raped by various Spaniards, they are defined as naturally inferior and therefore subject to commodification.

How can Columbus be associated with these two apparently contradictory myths, one whereby the Other is a "noble savage" . . . and one whereby he is a "dirty dog," a potential slave? It is because both rest on a common basis, which is the failure to recognize the Indians, and the refusal to admit them as a subject having the same rights as oneself, but different. Columbus has discovered America but not the Americans.8

For all the differences that attend the ways explorers from Spain and Northern Europe encountered the American continents, the problem of assimilation and ethnic/racial difference first recorded on a number of small islands in the Caribbean has become a paradigm, variously fleshed out, for the contest inaugurated every time the self meets, is surrounded by, dominates and/or resists an other on the ground of what will continue to be known through the early twentieth-century as, among other things, the New World. How the paradigm is read, what is assumed or known about the cultural weight of its opposing figures and the ways they play upon and, in a profound sense, alter each other, constitutes the fluid and argumentative history of interpretation as it unfolds across disciplines, from academic to economic to the living spaces of diverse peoples contesting for a common ground.

Octavio Paz's canonical elucidation of the critical points of difference between Spain and England in their approach to their New Worlds draws the
sort of sweeping landscape that allows us to imagine a cultural topography shimmering in the map of continents that comes to mind when the Americas are evoked. In that landscape, the shoring up of religious orthodoxy and absolute monarchy on the Iberian peninsula spreads across the Atlantic in the form of post-Columbus conquistadors fueled by a conflicting mix of, on the one hand, Renaissance tastes—desires and acuities fed by art, science, and the political realism revealed over and over again in their manipulation of territory and language—and on the other a rather more singular closure of vision that promotes a universal Catholic order under the aegis of Empire, exclusive of difference. Out of that version of colonialism, millions of indigenous people die—from massacre, diseases, brutal servitude.

But the exclusion of difference also becomes a manner of constituting inclusion, one that will mark the ways in which distinct Latin American societies will form under the influence of how the Spaniards encounter the Mayan, Incan, and Aztec empires. In the Aztecs the Spaniards meet a highly organized, hierarchical society and, arguably through a complex manipulation of the signs of Aztec alterity, conquer it. Up until contact with Cortés, the Aztecs have dealt with the diversity of indigenous cultures through sophisticated theological justifications for—in the point of view of their victims—plundering and ringing into servitude surrounding tribes, a move parallel to the disposition of the Spanish Crown and Church. In a highly simplified telling of this story, the Aztecs are swallowed whole by Cortés's conquistadors, their gods having succumbed to an irrevocable silence over the question of what to do with the Spaniards. Rather than expunge the conquered, whose labor will be required for the cultivation of vast new natural resources, the Spaniards incorporate the beleaguered survivors into the construction of New Spain.
Though this pragmatic angle is fundamental to the story, with it must come the particular ways in which Aztec and Catholic theology interact. "The flight of their gods and the death of their leaders had left the natives in a solitude so complete that it is difficult for a modern man to imagine it. Catholicism re-established their ties with the world and the other world." Colonial conversion of Indians to Catholicism proved to be central to post-Conquest history, as did the complex ways in which the infusion of Catholicism with the fertile traces of indigenous belief create, within the dominant hierarchy, extraordinary cultural and national hybrids. The antiquity of Mexican mestizaje—the mixing and accumulation of cultural embraces marking a nation born of violence, submission, and over time both incremental and explosive syncretic subversions of Catholic colonialism—lives through a striking array of now-iconic images. Among them: Sor Juana writing in her convent, having left the courtly society of seventeenth-century New Spain to avoid the limits of marriage, masking herself in multiple voices bred of both indigenous and Iberian accents that transgress gendered conventions of knowledge; the 1810 grito of Father Hidalgo to the peasantry, setting off an independence revolt against colonialist Spain that re-emerged throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in such complexly driven mestizo figures as Benito-Juárez, Emiliano Zapata, and Pancho Villa, who find their counterparts in an indio-inspired grinning and pistol-skeleton on a grinning skeletal horse charging out of a José Guadalupe Posada engraving; and in Cholula, within easy reach of Mexico City, a colonial church perched atop a grassy symmetrical rise that is a pyramid grown into a hill.

The contrasting icons of forts in the wilderness, spare cottages inhabited by a pale people who scrape survival from unforgiving winters, or Hester Prynne's prison where "the rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door
looked more antique than anything else in the new world," characterize conceptual differences rooted in an ideology of individualist, yet elect, self-construction. The English version of colonization is driven by diverse economic, political and religious motives; but the lasting rhetoric that dominates popular representation of U.S. sacred/secular origin begins with orthodox Puritan dissent from the high church practices of the Anglican Church and the desire to create out of whole cloth utopian communities controlled by "visible saints," church members who were freed from the corruptions of the immediate, historical past and in direct, unmediated communication with God.

The "New Jerusalem" the Puritans hoped to create was, as Sacvan Bercovitch argues, imagined almost entirely in terms of an argument with Old World degradations that include obstructive, hierarchical intrusions between the self and God. Met with northern Indian societies organized by tribal territories absent the sort of Aztec imperialism that organizes diverse cultures into a contentious empire, the Puritans ironically "see" less of what, or who, is before them than the Spaniards, and spend far less time than post-Conquest priests investigating and interpreting indigenous religious practice to suit their own ends.

They are bent, instead, on establishing, in John Winthrop's terms, " 'a model of Christian charity' for Protestants abroad, 'a city [set] upon a hill' as a beacon to Europe." Winthrop's New World is a test and a last chance for the Old, making itself up in terms of how it provides answers to Old World questions. As opposed to the layered-over pyramid on a high plateau in Mexico, the hill upon which this city is made is assumed to be both mythic and new, primevally untouched and called into its existence by this millenial-bound second coming of the Lord's chosen. The inclusiveness of Catholic universalism which, in some sense, can be said to absorb the past, is countered in New England by a
Protestant sense of prophecy based not in the historical or geographic gains of church and empire, but in the Christian New Testament appropriation of a mythic, Old Testament Israel for use in imagining the future. Failing to convince an indifferent Europe of the wisdom of finding the Reformation's apotheosis in this vanguard America, subsequent generations of Puritans will turn radical isolation into a national quest.

The triumph of early Christianity was universalist, the self-assertion of marginal, multi-national groups of believers. The nationalist-universalist vision of New England arose out of similar circumstances. . . . [T]he Puritans proceeded to recapture Europe for themselves, rhetorically, as part of all that was not America--the benighted "Old World," awaiting its redemption by the mighty works of Christ in America. Confronted with the uncertain meaning of their locale, the Puritans discovered the New World in Scripture—not literally (in the way Columbus discovered it), as the lost Eden, but figurally . . . as the second paradise foreseen by all the prophets. New Canaan was not a metaphor for them, as it was for other colonists. It was the New World reserved from eternity for God's latter-day elect nation, which He would gather as choice grain from the chaff of Europe/Babylon/Egypt . . . [D]riven back by history upon the resources of language, the second-and third-generation New Englanders united geography, textuality, and the spirit into something genuinely new and (as it turned out) enormously compelling, a cultural symbology centered on the vision of America.14

Part of that symbology is an America hermeneutically constituted according to scripture as a chosen people's errand in the wilderness. On the one hand, this
version of Protestantism encourages a deeply inward contemplation of the individual's relation to God, promoting a sense of salvation that could be described as remarkably open to individualist progress regardless of worldly station. In this sense, the Protestant presence in America differs intensely from the closed political unity entailed in the Spanish construction of the New World. But on the other hand, the emphasis on self and its "chosenness" dwarfs the possibility of a collectivity that absorbs and interiorizes cultural differences. If one is not part of an elect predetermined by God, then one has no recourse to the progress and salvation of this or the next world. At its core, Puritan Protestantism combines a most rigorous attention to and management of self with the exclusion of contaminating others. The Indians, whose last great resistance in New England comes in 1675 when a coalition of tribal nations attempts to oust the English, are defeated and cast off, driven west in a move that inaugurates the ways in which Puritan--and subsequent strains of dominant American--ideology will attempt to exteriorize and banish a perceived interior and irredically alien other (witches, Indians, heretics, and later, ethnically and racially tinged communists, anarchists, other political dissenters) in the history to come. In the words of Cotton Mather, "Wherefore the Devil is now making one Attempt more upon us; 'a thing, prodigious, beyond the Wonders of former Ages,' a war 'so Critical, that if we get well through, we shall soon Enjoy Halcyon Days with all the Vultures of Hell Trodden under our Feet.'"  

The above discussion is no doubt a too-simplified gloss of two centuries of history, but it does set a frame for the troubling question of how a national culture--in its secularized version so manifestly interested in distinguishing its own historical image as a promised land for diverse peoples--holds as one of its stronger tendencies a kind of horror of, as well as fascination for, the cultural hybrid, for mestizaje. One way to answer the question is to consider this
tendency as always partial, and always challenged and shaped in part by the thing it despises. We might look at the revisionary potential of the other, however suppressed and oppressed, as "always already" substantive in the often violent, and persistently contested making of America.

The secularization of "choseness" in the U.S. arguably occurs over time and at the intersection between class discourse and racial/ethnic otherness. The rise of corporate capitalism in the late nineteenth century discussed in the preceding chapter mingles with Protestant rhetoric in complex moves that link Winthrop's miracled city on the hill with the splendorous White City of Chicago's 1893 World's Columbia Exposition. Conveniently located at the latitudinal center of the country, the White City promotes an America that represents a model future for the world, wherein workers of all nationalities join in happy labor to produce wealth for the corporatized nation, and for themselves, a lullingly individualized yet subordinated grasp of economic salvation. As Alan Trachtengberg notes, "a workforce tranquilized by security, by beauty of environment, and by barriers and sentries which protect it from 'unsought contact with all beyond': such is the utopia of labor implied." Ironies abound in traces of recontextualized history--the discoveries of Columbus appropriated for Columbia; an evolved Protestant utopia of corporate cities; a nation of immigrants--international workers stripped of the "contact with all beyond" that internationalism would seem to imply. Utopia exists on the assumption--made in the guise of race and class congeniality--that a nation of equals will be divided according to the subordinating mechanization of equal parts--the "hands" that turn the national, corporate wheel. Excluded from the linguistic terrain of the White City are the embodied voices of discordant "other" histories: African-Americans, Indians, and representatives of labor make their appearances either in counter-conferences outside its walls, or as absorbed
within a more primitive, yet smoothly working past suggestive of the present's "natural," progressive evolution. Women, though given a distinct exhibition building of their own, are iconized as the purveyors of feminine domestic order, an example of good national housekeeping.

The White City is a paradise of cultural uniformity imagined in spite of, or because of, the betrayal of an original promise about America. The promise that this country was a land of freedom and of material and spiritual prosperity combined with the intensification of czarist repression under Alexander III to bring waves of eastern European immigrants to its shores from the 1880s forward. Anzia Yezierska arrives among them in the 1890s, when the ironies of the Columbia Exposition are being played out in fiercely contentious labor battles, economic depression, and recurring nativist movements. Thinking about the qualities of immigrant life from the vantage point of her emergent success in the 1920s, Yezierska writes in "Mostly About Myself:"

I feel like a starved man who is so bewildered by the first sight of food that he wants to grab and devour the ice-cream, the roast, and the entrée all in one gulp. For ages and ages, my people in Russia had no more voice than the broomstick in the corner. The poor had no more chance to say what they thought or felt than the dirt under their feet.

And here, in America, a miracle has happened to them. They can lift up their heads like real people. After centuries of suppression, they are allowed to speak. Is it a wonder that I am too excited to know where to begin?17

That Russian Jews "had no more voice than a broomstick in a corner" both acknowledges and belies the manner in which Jewish culture in eastern Europe struggled to maintain its traditions amidst legal, economic, and
periodically violent persecution. Irving Howe's study of the complex tenacity of the eastern European shtetl suggests an interior world deeply engaged in manning the barricades of difference through the dual, and often conflicting, necessities of protecting cultural forms and managing the increasingly meager conditions of economic survival.

In Howe's assessment, the distinction between worldly and otherworldly concerns so fundamental to Western, Christian ethos evolved in the shtetl, or Jewish town, as a means of accommodating dominant cultural discourse in the interests of ethnic survival. Jewish ritual regarding the maintenance of a Sabbath sharply delineated from the rest of the working week, for instance, evolved as a response to the structuring of sacred and secular time thrust upon Jews by the surrounding culture. "Ideally, however, the worldly and otherworldly should be one—here on earth." Jewish scholasticism in an ideal world would be fundamental as a living path to a righteousness that did not oppose, in purist terms, the appetite for wealth in this world to consequences in the next. What happens to the ideal when it is branched with the constraints of exterior cultures and economic systems ranging from feudalism to incipient modernity tells us something of the preconditions of the eastern European immigrant experience:

Locked into a backward economy, [they] continued to act and think primarily in premodern, prebourgeois terms. The struggle for livelihood . . . occupied much time—it had to. But never was it regarded . . . as the primary reason for existence. Scholarship was, above all else, honored among the Jews . . . A man's prestige, authority, and position depended to a considerable extent on his learning . . . Women often became breadwinners so that their husbands could devote themselves to study, while householders thought it their duty, indeed privilege, to support
precocious sons-in-law studying the Holy Word . . . It was a world
dominated by an uneasy alliance between the caste of the learned
and the somewhat wealthier merchants . . . The closer this world
came to modern life, the more did wealth challenge and usurp the
position of learning . . . What preserved a degree of social fluidity
was that learning, at least potentially, was open to everyone and
not the exclusive property of any group or caste.  

In light of the above, when Yezierska writes of the necessity of giving her
own voice to "all those dumb generations back of me," one might immediately
ask, of what dumbness, silence, ignorance does she speak?  
An immediate
answer could be the lack of access to scholastic learning for women, a lack
erased both in Howe's passage and in generations of shtetl life. But along with
Yezierska, I will come to that subsequently. That the world of the shtetl also
suffered, in Howe's words, a "slow stagnation" from within as an effect of
wrenching poverty and the broad historical deprivation of legal and economic
rights is only part of the story she writes. Also resonant in that story is the
concept of "chosenness," a scriptural status freely appropriated by the Puritans
for their own variant ends, that is central to Jewish pre-modern conditions in the
diaspora. Prior to the unraveling of shtetl life under the pressures of modernity,
the idea of a Chosen People manifested itself in a society organized according
to disciplinary rituals and an adherence to a perceived covenant with God that
kept the chaos of the exterior world at bay. In ways like the Puritans, shtetl Jews
regarded history as composed of the timelessness existing between the origins
of chosenness and the coming of the Messiah. Historical time was of little use in
interpreting the profound relation between a people and God. But unlike them,
the separateness of Jewish collectivity presupposed an active, communal
engagement with God less threatened by the possibility of individual
estrangement, or the fall from transcendent access to the next world for unknown and unknowable reasons. In between the original covenant and the coming of Messiah lay the possibility of endless conversations with a responsive God, who could be reached both through sacred, learned Hebrew, and through the ever-changing, multilingually influenced vernacular of Yiddish. "Toward Him the Jews could feel a peculiar sense of intimacy. . . [One] could complain to Him freely, and complain about Him too. . . . The Jewish God, to whom one prayed in Hebrew and with whom one pleaded in Yiddish, had been humanized through experience with His people."20 Within such intimacy, modesty about and regulation of the body went forward absent the particularly Christian anxieties about the physical self and desire as inherently susceptible to visitations of evil. Regulation and ritual guiding gendered and class relations within the shtetl existed not so much as a measure against the unfolding of innate individual corruptness, but as a guarantor of communal longevity within the timelessness of exile.

But social ferment spreading across the nineteenth century thrust itself upon that timelessness in the form of interior resistances to custom as well as exterior physical, economic, and cultural assaults. The unraveling of the shtetl through the intensification of pogroms was accompanied by the movement of Jews into urban centers, the development of a nascent proletariat as well as a middle class, the secularization of intellecutal life with the flourishing of Yiddish cultural expression, the relativization of rabbinical authority, and the emergence of Zionism and socialism. "This is a period in which the opposing impulses of faith and skepticism stand poised, one fiercely opposed to the other yet both sharing a community of values."21 The shared community of values represents a deep engagement among both religious and secular Jews--and one could say for both sides it is religiously felt--in the experience of exile within which lives
the wide-ranging embodiment of what it means to survive as a Jew and, inextricably, as a person. That community carries with it a particularly acute anxiety about the survival of a culture that—given the ways culturally inscribed values could be said to maintain the individual's ties with a felt continuity larger and more lasting than the self—protects against profound alienation.

The secularization of Jewishness, the transformation of a separate chosenness into the possibility of interactive endeavor with like movements in Gentile culture, in no way easily dissolves difference into a multivalent world. The emergence of interior social fluidity among Jews in nineteenth century eastern Europe that carries over into early twentieth century America will both exhort and plague Jewish writers in their efforts to construct what "opportunity" means for themselves and others in the New World. Massive emigration from the Old World occurred alongside conflicting tendencies in the Pale that read the remaking and/or preservation of a complex Jewish culture into, on one extreme, multicultural socialist, revolutionist struggle against the Russian aristocracy, and in the other, a losing battle to maintain the incremental cultural and economic gains of a minute middle class against the coerced pauperization of Jews as a whole. Working class populism in Russia, not unlike populism in the United States, was fractured with fear and loathing of the "other," of the alien Jew who, like blacks in the U.S., represented the worst of what "a people" might be: a manipulable population that could become—was—the visible enemy in the invisible hands of monarchic, or capitalist, rule. For Jews, the problem of poverty and punishing isolation—however its causes were defined—could be revisioned and solved, it was hoped, in America amidst the flowering of civil and economic rights.

What happens when Jews actually reach America, and how their experience is told, depends a great deal on the differing ways in which the
claims of an immigrant's gender and class origin both construct hope and modify it according to various serpentine routes toward the meanings of success, failure, or mere subsistence. For Yezierska, the oft-repeated desire throughout her writing that she should "become a person" in America reflects the persistence of a demand that is by no means easily accommodated, or even understood. The expressive anxieties about the formation of an "American" self flow through her stories and novels like—say, to the sympathetic but more fastidious Anglos of her time—an ethnic hurricane, thrilling to the imagination but best thought about at a minimizing distance. The difficulty of the terrain she proposes to enter with such force has already been charted to some degree in Chapter One, and can be read variously in an array of ethnically and racially inscribed literatures that precede her.

The America she meets is dominated by a contentious mix of Anglo-Saxon nationalism and an Anglo-progressivism that understands multicultural wealth as the assimilation of "the best" of diverse immigrant culture into a forward-looking capitalist way of life. As narrated by John Higham in Strangers in the Land, racially inscribed nationalism derives from a long history of "primitive race-feelings" among white Anglos that, through both subterranean and explosive manifestations of violence, haunts American life from its origins through the nineteenth century, and that, in the corporatizing turn toward the twentieth, aligns itself with nationalist ideology:

The exaltation of white supremacy in the antebellum South had actually served to weaken national loyalty . . . . At the turn of the century, however, the Anglo-Saxon idea of American nationality was so widely popularized that the racial egoisms of the South and West could easily permeate a nationalism ideologically adapted to receive them. . . . The imperialist theory of the
superiority of Anglo-Saxons seemed to Southerners to vindicate their own regional patterns. White supremacy was becoming, in Professor C. Vann Woodward's phrase, the American Way. It was perhaps not entirely coincidental that the period of overseas expansion coincided with a general tightening of race lines within the South through disfranchisement and sterner segregation laws . . . [T]he Spanish-American War itself set the South firmly in the midstream of American nationalism. . . . The War of 1898 completed a stage in sectional reconciliation by turning the martial ardor of the Confederate tradition into a patriotic crusade, by linking all parts of the country in a common purpose.\textsuperscript{22}

If common purpose in 1898 meant raising to world prominence an America as a nationalist democratic symbolic stirring itself on the ruins of a Spanish, Old-World empire, that purpose remained striated with the flux of ongoing, apparently oppositional tendencies. Throughout the early 1900s, regional nativism as a kind of bloodline/cultural nationalism was held at bay in the northeast by periods of relative economic peace and foreign expansion. Progressivism more or less ruled the era in the rhetoric of social reform, and in the competitive wooing of immigrant votes by pro-capital Democratic and Republican Party politics away from the anti-business perils of organized labor movements, themselves caught up in a perilous dialectic between xenophobia and worker solidarity. But the perceived oppositional relations between progressivism and nativism can be understood, in the way of Columbus, as similarly plagued by the refusal, finally, to admit cultural difference. From 1910 on, the strains of renewed economic depression, the threat of war, and the implications of the burgeoning Russian revolution for international capitalism persistently incited an argument for an Anglo-inscribed America that asserts
itself through an uneven, yet characteristically on-going mix of anti-radicalism, race-feeling, and xenophobia with the "progressive" value of assimilation.

How, then, does the "other" engage America? The Melting Pot, Israel Zangwill's widely heralded melodrama first staged in 1908 at the Columbia Theatre in Washington, suggests to late-twentieth-century ears a near comic approach to the grace of self-reliant assimilation. The blossoming relation between an exiled Polish-Jewish composer and the Gentile immigrant daughter of the aristocratic Russian responsible for the horrendous murder of the composer's family during a pogrom forms the centerpiece of a play in which the violent evils of cultural caste are overcome by a willed acceptance of transcendent love—a particularly American promise. In composing his symphony for the New World, David Quixano intends to leave behind old horrors and in the process leaves behind, to his Yiddish-speaking grandmother's dismay, the rituals of the Sabbath and all other religious observance. His ultimate union with Miss Vera Revendal gathers Jew and Gentile together with this rhetorical question: "Ah, Vera, what is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all races and nations come to labour and look forward!" They will, of course, produce children and those children will "fill this giant continent" with their labor of assimilating love. 23 It is a version of populating the future reminiscent of millenial Puritanism, yet cushioned by a sense of inclusion that belies difference. The relationship of David and Vera implies a merger of bloodlines that refutes the virulence of the past. Their merger is comically echoed in the quick way the Irish Catholic maidservant overcomes prejudice to defend the sacredness of the Jewish grandmother's ways. Kathleen's tenacious delicacy in observing the grandmother's rituals of Shabbos suggests that likenesses will dominate
difference in the intersection of traditional ways—that, properly applied, Catholicism can syncretically slip into Judaism without damage.

But if Kathleen's found passion for Judaism gently urges audiences to consider the virtues of tolerance and mutual appreciation in the guise of collapsing one religion into another (and giving Judaism the edge), at the same time her zeal evades a much more complicated dynamic abroad in the culture that signals continuities of difference. Kathleen's and the grandmother's easy association will neither figuratively nor literally reproduce a new generation—that job lies with the young couple. Their credentials include the willingness, after a cathartic eruption of past horrors into the present, to let bygones be bygones in the interests of producing an American future. One might speculate that the success of this play to a progressively minded audience depends on the extent to which David Quixano is constructed according to certain refinements that clear him of overt attachments to Jewish culture: he is neither tied to religious scholarly traditions nor to more traditional immigrant occupations; he composes music out of a "free" conceptual space, or, a space that remains clear of the storiedness redolent with either the more intimate tales of the diaspora, or the violent settling of America; he is even given, in an apparently odd but purposeful eruption of information, aristocratic status by way of inherited nobility. The argument Vera makes to her Old World father for the noble trace in David’s descent from pre-expulsion Spanish hidalgos amounts to an earnest plea that reaches beyond overt rejection of old aristocracies into a covert assuagement of New World anxieties about ethnically charged class status. If his ancestry evokes the dignity of resistance to religious persecution so central to America's myth of origin, the Jewish familial rejection of Christianity is couched in a contrary thrust toward genetically transferred nobility. One can imagine this as a persuasive tactic meant, as well, for contemporary Anglo-
nationalist sensibilities in America. David Quixano is, most simply, awfully cleaned up.

It is easy from a distance to discount *The Melting Pot*’s awkward schematics, its naive effort to solve the problem of immigrant integration in one fell swoop conveniently metaphorized as a homogenizing utensil. But one need only turn to the published appendices to be reminded of what is at stake. This excerpt from a Red Cross nurse’s account of an Odessa pogrom might do:

I do wish a few Americans could have been there to see, and they would know what America is, and what it means to live in the United States. It was not enough for them to open up a woman’s abdomen and take out the child which she carried, but they took time to stuff the abdomen with straw and fill it up... It was not enough for them to cut out an old man’s tongue and cut off his nose, but they drove nails into the eyes also. You wonder how they had enough time to carry away everything of value—money, gold, silver, jewels—and still be able to do so much fancy killing, but oh, my friends, all the time for three days and three nights was theirs.24

Zangwill himself was an English Jew. He never lived in America, but headed an emigration organization that enabled thousands of Russian Jews to make their way here. As such, his vision of America arguably was fueled by good faith in the promise of refuge, a hope born of distance as well as of the terrible contingencies of Russian Jewish life. His vision found common cause with similar American immigrant texts, among them Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land*, that promoted assimilationism over difference in a move aligning them with American nativists, though for rather different reasons. Assimilationist writers made their claims from the desire to invest America with all the felt
protections of a safe harbor: "They wanted so much to demonstrate the nation's powers of absorption that they tended to treat the immigrant as a being whom America cleansed, transformed, and uplifted."  

How safe that harbor might be is a question endlessly re-formed within and against the continuously mutable conditions of lived experience. James Weldon Johnson's and Abraham Cahan's fictional autobiographies of "self-made men"—both roughly contemporary to The Melting Pot—suggest something of the violence entailed in the assimilation of self to dominant economic and racial/ethnic codes inscribed in the process of Americanization. Werner Sollors has nicely sketched the comparative territory between these two books within a broader critical move that, in many ways, makes possible my efforts here. Existing similarities in Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man and The Rise of David Levinsky point to, at the least, the interactive quality of racial and ethnic coding in a modernist, capitalist landscape. In each case the narrator increasingly foregoes interior identification with a racial/ethnic past in order to construct himself in terms of an exterior upward mobility that, it seems, can only be gained through adherence to approximated forms of Anglo-Saxon whiteness—the erasure of color, the shedding of accents, the Talmud, locks of hair, all preliminaries to the pursuit of safety in wealth. In each case the brooding narrator tallies his losses against his gains: the ex-coloured man's foreclosure of uncompromised access to the lively, spiritual richness of a black culture he partly senses, partly romanticizes; David Levinsky's eternal deferment of the scholarly pursuits marked out for him as a beloved child so that he might, first, make a business success of himself in America. In both cases the ironic distance between the lives of the narrators and the lives of their authors offer complex critiques of the ways in which assimilationism, far from solving the problem of a divided self, can be understood to crystallize that divide between
two poles: an exterior self constructed in terms of its consent to American-style capitalism; and an interior otherwise in which the self's descent is objectified as an endangerment to its participation in perceived Americanness. If the ex-coloured man and Levinsky find themselves, at last, not only safe from lynchings and pogroms but also capable of engaging in the great game of getting and spending, they do so at the cost of self-pitying alienation.

For both Johnson and Cahan, Sollors argues, the lives of their protagonists are offered as a kind of warning against the collapse of visionary potential into the realm of practical, well-heeled survival.

In [their] ironically antithetical construction, "descent" stands for those facets of self-realization which the retrospective mind of imaginary practical men perceives as the lost potential of childhood or as the sacrifice made to consent-America. It is the visionary, artistic and socially engaged quality somehow associated with descent which these characters (though not their creators) have surrendered to selfishness and practical success.26

The vision both Johnson and Cahan uphold against the weariness of their protagonists is, finally, syncretic. Posited against the narrowing confines of each narrator's fragmented and diminished self, that vision is arguably the lived experience of both authors, who succeeded in weaving their own descent identities into ongoing arguments about what consent to America could be—Johnson through his nationally known work with the NAACP and Cahan as a socialist intellectual and editor of the Jewish Daily Forward. But as I have tried to suggest in the preceding chapter, and as Sollors argues, the paradigmatic opposition between descent and consent, between a "true" ethnically inscribed and alienated self as against a homogenized, consenting American, is a
designation of conflict too bewitchingly simple to account for the vagaries of choice.

What does it mean—how is it like and unlike stories of masculine complicity and resistance—when an ethnic woman approaches this same territory? Yezierska published her novel Bread Givers in 1925, after her critically successful collection of stories, Hungry Hearts, was bought and filmed by Samuel Goldwyn's motion picture studio--its contents neutralized to Yezierska's dismay with slapstick humor and a happy ending. She went to Hollywood for about a year to write the script, was feted by famous writers, film moguls, and the popular press as, variously, the "Sweatshop Cinderella," "Cinderella of the Tenements," and "A Scrub-Woman Who Became a Great Novelist," all salable tags for a decade suffused with nativism and anti-radicalism and interested in postwar rags-to-riches stories wherein the immigrant is made over into a palatable American. That she gave herself wholeheartedly to the public construction of herself as a representative figure—highly romanticized--of both the plight and possibilities inherent in vibrant, Jewish immigrant culture, seems to be a matter of record among her biographers. Success in terms of broad public opinion, acceptance in nationally elite literary circles, and the ability to earn her way into a living meant a great deal to her. In her public persona and in her writing, however, she equally asserted a surprised and vocal disdain--perhaps a probing contempt is the better phrase--for the consequences of Americanized wealth on the cultural quality of individual life, and on the ways in which the markers of ethnic and class status bore the pressure of dissolving themselves out of being. In the economically and culturally calamitous approach to the thirties, her work fell out of vogue, variously dismissed as a sentimentalized, one-note recounting of immigrant progress, an old and simple story about the hope of Americanization.
not suited to complex times. Among her fellow immigrant writers, *Bread Givers* was found to be "cartoonish in plot and characterization, assimilationist in drive, anti-Semitic in effect if not in intent."29

In his excellent chapter on Yezierska in *Ethnic Passages*, Thomas Ferraro suggests that the renewed interest in her as a representative writer of immigrant experience suffers, in part, a repetition of older ways of regarding her as a personality whose life--marked by the rise and fall of fame, her historically tantalizing if apparently unconsummated friendship/affair with John Dewey, and the drama of abandoning her marriage and daughter to pursue an independent career as a writer--is finally of greater sociological and historical interest than is the "literariness" of the writing she left as her legacy. In undertaking to consider *Bread Givers* as a none-too-transparent investigation of "the reciprocal reshaping taking place between Eastern European folk Judaism and twentieth-century American structures of opportunity," Ferraro goes a long way toward evaluating the complexity of Yezierska's project.30 She is, his analysis amply shows, well aware of the ways in which conflicting claims of inherited European Jewish tradition and the ferocious drive toward Americanized upward mobility find modes of adaptation in the ongoing construction of the subject-self. If Sara Smolinsky, the heroine of *Bread Givers*, is hell-bent on the immigrant dream of finding for herself a station in life free from the conditions of poverty, a poverty exhaustively linked to the tyranny of her Old World father, she is also made cognizant of what her own intellectual and economic rise costs her--certainly, among other things, the "given" of communal identity.

Sara Smolinsky finds herself in turn-of-the-century New York as a young girl bearing up under the burdens of what Ferraro and others have rightly called a triple marginality.31 The urban, largely immigrant labor populations (including African-American and white migrants from the rural U.S. as well as Europe) that
she and her family join, find themselves subject to the hierarchical capitalist discourse which places them at the bottom. Though maintaining hope through the rhetoric of self-reliance and the promise of access to upward mobility, systemic capitalism also counts on maintaining a more-or-less steady underclass doubly molded by the constraints of ethnic and racial otherness. That Sara and the women of her family are additionally subject to Old and New World modes of gender indenture arguably provides the crowning protest of this book, the one most apparent in the "discovery" of an America where the shackles of servitude might be thrown off.

But throughout the course of Sara's ascendancy from gendered burden-bearer to college-educated teacherin, her substantive America remains a series of ever-dissolving and reforming borders playing across her person, borders wherein multiplying and dissenting voices pit her rigorous assertion of a self-sustaining national identity against the self-diminishing communalism of older ways. A sketch of the plot that carries those mutable borders suggests the legendary American success story: family arrives penniless; girl works hard to save family, then self, from monstrously proportioned, yet beguilingly traditional father; sisters are forced by father to marry badly in the guise of "prosperity," each to men who suggest darker versions of American opportunity (the first a pushcart-working widower with too many hungry children; the second a "diamond-merchant" dandy who turns out to be a less-than-successful scam artist; the third a man of true wealth corrupted by its excess); girl strikes out on her own away from family's hypocritical strivings for both money and Judaic status quo; meets man, thinks she loves him, then rejects him as more of the same; girl heads west to a "clean, well-lighted place"—college, where she finds herself too Jewish, too working class, too tired, too emotional for the average middle class, but wins honors anyway; girl heads home to New York, this time
equipped with a degree, her own money, some good clothes and the desire to make her way on old turf in her own, new terms; girl teaches children, slips into un-Americanized accents, is saved from them, then loved, by a kind, just man who comes from the same geographical and spiritual origins as she; girl loses mother whom she left behind and feels guilt; girl watches father fall into the greedy clutches of a widow and feels responsible; fiancé bonds with father over a reinvestment in Hebrew and traditional ways; girl plans, we suppose, to keep job, get married, move aging father into her home; poised over the horns of this new/old dilemma, girl wonders in the end what she has gained, what she has lost.

The violence wielded against the text by this quick rundown approximates, perhaps, the crudest ways in which Yezierska has been read as a melodramatic, immigrant heroine, a commodifiable prize in the impatient, competitive market for American self-creation stories. But her evocation of the classic immigrant journey bears throughout the colorings of subversive intent. The book's three sections--"Hester Street," "Between Two Worlds," and "The New World"--though suggestive of a one-way itinerary up and out from the ghetto, contain within them doubling tensions--crossings and re-crossings of borders that, in their constant regeneration, are never left behind.

Sara Smolinsky's story is told in a first person English that reflects the vexedness of a self constantly undergoing translation into an alien context. Far from being a naive representation of immigrant realism, language here effects a dramatization of the ways in which the self finds utterance against a number of simultaneous constraints. The ten-year-old Sara describes her dilemma immediately: "But from always it was heavy on my heart the worries for the house as if I was mother." The anguished "as if" carries with it both connectedness and distance, an embrace and a holding off, so to speak, of a
woman's fate in the domestic sphere of Hester Street. Immigrant English, the
strains of poverty, and the gendered sense of responsibility are all seeded here
in an argument playing out the textual engagement of gendered, ethnic, and
economic discourses. Those discourses are complicated by the narrative self's
difficulty in determining what, in practice, freedom from their constraints means.

How Sara wars over her concurrent embrace and rejection of the
domestic sphere of Hester Street constitutes a pattern of rising alienation that
continuously marks her approach to Americanness. The interior ethnicity of the
Smolinsky domicile lives through gender divisions that, taken as a whole, will a
reconstitution of the Old World in the New. The primary expression of that will
comes through patriarchal utterance, Reb Smolinsky's alternating vernacular
and oracular assertions of authority. His authority is both tested and supported
by Sara's mother, who resists and complains—"If he was only so fit for this world,
like he is fit for Heaven, then I wouldn't have to dry out the marrow from my head
worrying for the rent"—but whose resistance remains only a lively peppering of
her fundamental acquiescence to him(16). The women around Smolinsky bear
the burdens of creating the contingent space within which he might ostensibly
go on as he has, bearing a holy light that reconfigures the terrible closeness of
poverty they suffer."When the poor seek water, and there is none, and their
tongue faileth for thirst, I, the Lord, will hear them. I, the God of Israel, will not
forsake them," he chants from the Torah, his chanting coming always as a stay
against ever-present money concerns. It is the women who must translate that
stay into the language of the material world, into a wavering ability to pay rent
and buy food. And it is the daughters who, in the grander scheme, must
translate their own labor and bodies into marriages that Smolinsky, incorrectly it
turns out, deems worthy of reflecting well on his family's status, both religious
and economic. Buried in the whole-cloth assertions of his authority is the
immediate Russian-Polish past, the poverty and persecution as well as the
growing instability of Jewish family life that show its effects, particularly, in the
four daughters of this text.

Reb Smolinsky means to rule them by the language of the old ways, but it
is, in part, his misapprehension as well as his manipulation of the fluid nature of
that language that create fissures in the domestic fabric, fissures through which
the daughters all pour to varying degrees. Early in the novel he slaps the rent-
collector, herself an immigrant in the employ of a landlord, for interrupting his
prayer with the worldly concerns of overdue rent. Turning seamlessly from the
Torah to remonstrance, he shouts, "You painted piece of flesh! . . . I'll teach you
respect for the Holy Torah! (18)" and is subsequently handcuffed by the police
and hauled away. As Ferraro points out, this vivid bit of rebellion turns to his
own profit in the immigrant community. From it he gains fame as a religious hero
simultaneously engaged in defending the culture of his community against the
degradations of capitalism, lending him a status that might allow him to "enter
the marketplace as a Jewish patriarch after all, to put his new reputation to
profitable use immediately."33 He becomes, by turns, a match-maker and a
grocer, in other words a "business man" capable, at least in word, of
syncretizing religious beliefs with New World capitalism's demands for
adaptation.

What is all wrong about this for Sara and her sisters, of course, is the
distance between his version of syncretism and the emptiness it creates in their
own lives. They are neither protected by him--his assessment of his own verbal
skills in manipulating his small turf in the American market far surpasses his
actual ability to make a living--nor given the sense that their own fates
measured in terms of communal tradition will be anything but a grim
continuance of present calamities. Each daughter represents a version of the
rupture between old and new. The eldest, Bessie, bears the most haggard countenance of poverty and toil. She is, in a real sense, created out of the gendered past, a workhorse, meant to serve men and that only, the carrier of an indentured economy who can have no hope beyond the comfort that her plainness ultimately might gain her the replication of her current life in another man's house. Mashah is the pretty one, her thoughts located solely on the customized Americanization of her appearance which allows her, in consuming her gaze, to avoid—by simply not seeing—the circumstances threatening to weigh her down. Fania is stationed somewhere between Bessie and Mashah—a worker, yes, but cognizant of the possibility of her release. The text provides each of these three with a love of her own: for Bessie, a head cutter in the clothing trades who offers at least the hope of side-by-side work as opposed to blatant servitude; for Mashah, a musician of a higher class whose lyricism operates to bring out and deepen the qualities of her aestheticism; and for Fania, a poor poet, whose sole offering is a riveting love that in her mind raises her spiritually from the dread economy of material conditions.

To Sara, these are all partial versions of a transcendent love that places choice in the hands of the female desiring subject. She is interested in these suitors, and enthralled by Morris Lipkin the poet, whose love letters and poems to Fania she reads with a passion suggestive of infinite release:

"Come to me in my dreams, and then by day
I shall be well again,
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless, hopeless longing of the day
The hopeless, hopeless longing of the day." (86)

Mere adolescence, one might think, but the sentiment carries great stakes. For Sara, Fania's lover represents, perhaps, a first imagining of what it might mean
to circumvent the rigid configurations of dailiness through a timelessness provided by romantic love. That a night's dreaming will somehow "pay" for days of hopelessness suggests that love also is a kind of alternate currency with which one might buy one's way out of the excruciating constraints of the present.

Romantic love across a variety of national literatures has appeared to offer women a contingent, often disastrous, way out of particularly rigid emotional as well as material economies. Its promise in the American literature under discussion is fraught with interpenetrating discourses of class and ethnic/racial provenance all ultimately absorbed in the contentious task of producing, either straightforwardly or through degrees of irony, constitutive if fragmentary elements of an elusive American self. For immigrant women in the first decades of the century, the idea of love in America arguably offered an escape from self-diminishing ancestral traditions into a self made over by the assertion of a choice that was linked to the conditions of American prosperity. That love was understood as both a "free" choice and a concept rooted in the promise of material security became its characteristic selling point in the popular imagination. In her comments on Yezierska in *Pocahantas's Daughters*, Mary V. Dearborn refers to this phenomenon:

[L]ove often implied a new commercialism; the rhetoric of love is, after all, the rhetoric of persuasion, and in fact love was advertised in the New World as a desirable commodity... Implicit in the notion of America as a lovers' land, where a woman was free to choose her husband, was the notion that her choice could also bring her wealth and success. The connection between love and success was a complicated one, and can perhaps best be
understood in the "selling" of Cinderella marriage stories to the American public. 34

Dearborn's discussion comes in the midst of a weighty argument about the ways in which the Pocahantas legend--"one of America's most ideologically potent myths: that of the mixed marriage between a native-born white male and an eroticized and exoticized ethnic woman"--operates as a compelling metaphor, depending on one's vantage point, for either the problems or pleasures of Americanization. 35 What is read into the legend has a great deal to do with what is at stake both in defining Americanization and in manipulating the uses of gender. In Dearborn's survey, Pocahantas ranges from a promiscuous pubescent girl portrayed entirely in terms of an other's culturally and sexually inscribed language (John Smith) to a mixed-descent author whose "authentic" voice is both made and compromised by the bewildering play of dominant Anglo discourses against Indian tradition. Mourning Dove's Cogewe (1927) gives ample expression to the latter, blending recuperative traditional Indian lore with wild west discourse and hanging both on a romantic melodrama that attempts to resolve through marriage the record of searing injustice and disparateness between Anglo and Indian cultures. The book's great interest lies less in its mediative claims--in its apparent efforts to bridge cultural distance in the body of its heroine--than in the cultural dissonance inherent the novel's wildly variant narrative voice. If, as Dearborn argues in her discussion of Cogewe, the female voice-made-ethnic becomes "more interesting when it struggles against the concept of mediation than when it succumbs to it," the context in which love operates as a means toward assimilation into a desired America can begin to be re-read not only as a function of that desire, but, in its more subversive moments, as a critique, and as an acknowledgment--a recognition--of difference. 36
Dearborn's use of "America as lovers' land" derives from Yezierska's story, "The Miracle," and is uttered by Hanneh Hayyeh, who writes back to her homeland telling of the promise for women in America. "[M]illionaires fall in love with poorest girls," she writes. "Matchmakers are out of style, and a girl can get herself married to a man without the worries for a dowry." When the story's heroine Sara Reisel arrives to find the lover who will release her from the dread emptiness of her poverty, she finds instead only relentless work and Zaretsky the matchmaker who, in spite of what Hanneh Hayyeh has written, demands an account of her savings as a measure of her marriageability. Nearly crushed with disappointment, she performs an act characteristic of Yezierska's heroines: she gives herself a good talking to.

"Make a person of yourself . . . Begin to learn English. Make yourself for an American if you want to live in America. . . American girls don't run after a man: if they don't get a husband they don't think the world is over; they turn their mind to something else.

"Wake up!" I said to myself. "You want love to come to you? Why don't you give it out to other people? Love the women and children . . . the rag-picker and the drunkard . . . those whom the world kicks down you pick up and press to your heart with love." At its surface, "The Miracle" gives itself over to the conventions of the Pocahantas story. Sara Reisel remakes herself by going to night school, in ways following the traces of a Pocahantas turned Lady Rebecca who presents herself in the Court of England, a legendary event suggestive of the recuperative mainstreaming inherent in an assent to Americanness. Because Sara strives for a betterment reasonably constructed in terms of adaptation to a culture that construes success as the competent seizure of opportunity, love is made available to her. But there is a twist, albeit melodramatically rendered.
Betterment here is not understood as an assumption of class position and wealth beyond modest claims toward individual viability in the working middle class. Sara falls in love with her teacher because he represents a way toward knowledge, toward the fluid use of language as a means of intellectual exchange that renders the self as a visible, active negotiator of her own thoughts—a self who can, as her words above suggest, extend her love as a self-validating value toward others. Her teacher, a native-born Anglo-American, is first moved by her passion for learning, then, in a turnabout that adds a defining edge to the romance, falls in love with her: "You can free me," he says, "from the bondage of age-long repressions. You can lift me out of the dead grooves of sterile intellectuality. Without you I am the dry dust of hopes unrealized." What in another writer might be read as a seductive ploy becomes in Yezierska's hands the controlled enactment of a fantasy in which the Anglo other recognizes difference as the measure of his own deficiencies, surrendering himself thus to the improving love of a foreigner whose "essence" is understood to be still unmarked by the disappointments of assimilated American cultural life. That life is construed through a self-critical Anglo-mouthpiece as unproductive and, at heart, de-sexualized. Through Sara Reisel, Yezierska asserts an active desiring subject who is assimilationist to the extent that she wills herself away from the alienating gendered constraints of her native culture—assuming as she does so various clichéd Anglo terms for the eroticized, sentient, and sensuous immigrant—but who remains intent on defining assimilation as a process of mutual exchange between one self and another, rather than as the self's submission.

It is a constant in Yezierska's writing that assimilation is, or should be, a process of negotiating alienness in both the self and other. The fantasy of ideal union across cultures and class heralded in The Melting Pot and written to
various dissonant ends in the number of novels here discussed plays across the breadth of her novels and stories in a mingling of class, gender, and ethnic separatisms that persistently revisit the nexus of love and assimilation. "The Miracle" represents just that, a happy and improbable merger of the cool Anglo with the ardent Jew. Other plots float similar possibilities with results that attest to the failure of mutuality: in *Salome of the Tenements* the heroine leaves a marriage made across class and ethnic lines because her Anglo husband cannot sustain the rebellion against his own repressed nature; in "Wings" the beloved educated Anglo maintains a distance from the heroine that defines her presence in his life as a sociological experiment; in "Where Lovers Dream" the beloved is Jewish, an aspiring doctor devoted to the heroine but whose devotion disintegrates at the behest of a rich uncle, whose understanding of marriage is rather more Americanized according to the tempo of the times than that of the two young lovers. That is, it is dependent on the solidification of material wealth. In all these cases, the problem has less to do with the heroine's desire than it does with a system of values gone awry.

When Yezierska, speaking as herself, envisions an as yet unrealized America where she would "work for love and not for a living," she finally posits, I would argue, a rigorously indeterminate ideal that cannot be fixed in a paradise of ethnic or class mergers, but must always gather its life from the anxious assertion of self within and against compromises that constitute the terrain of border areas. Equally important in the structuring of that ideal is the complex relationship between love and knowledge, which Yezierska heroines tend to see as indivisible components of desire. Nowhere is this more evident than in Sara Smolinsky's progress from a love-struck teenager to an educated woman carefully adjusting herself to the claims of the past in her own fought-for present.
Her first love for Morris Lipkin derives entirely from her reading of his poetry, a reading which opens the possibility of the self's re-creation in a world magically unencumbered by familial or economic constraints. When she announces her love, Lipkin's amused response—"You silly little kid"—punctures the tableau she has so earnestly constructed of themselves immersed in each other. One could say he both sees and doesn't see her (88). That love makes her silly is likely to the extent that it does not yet allow her to gauge the limits attending her own vision, an awareness the older, first-person narrative voice understands and contextualizes within a shaping component of her love that Lipkin doesn't, or can't, see. The young Sara's pursuit of the language of love occurs in direct correlation to the hatred she begins to articulate for her verbose yet eloquent father: "I too was frightened the first time I felt I hated my father... I'd wake up in the middle of the night when all were asleep and cry into the deaf, dumb darkness, 'I hate my father. And I hate God most of all for bringing me into such a terrible house!'" (65-66). It is an utterance that contains both an absolute proclamation of self-separation and intimate complaint against a god who can be held personally accountable, certainly here for the ways in which the women of her house are so persistently oppressed. Her utterance suggests at least two possibilities: that Sara is engaged in a sort of bridge-burning iconoclasm, or, that she is enacting a well-worn tradition of vocal and informed remonstrance with both secular and religious authority. Sara's multiple resistances, I argue, are ultimately constructed by both, resulting in an assertiveness that interestingly combines a notion of her own radically self-selected chosenness with an insistence on her right to what her father already has—a traditional pursuit of a scholastic knowledge made over to fit what she imagines are the intellectual contours of American life.
Her claim of that right places her simultaneously at the center of Jewish tradition and, by virtue of gender, outside it. Equally vertiginous is her relation as a working class Jewish woman to the conflicting versions of her contemporary America as both a land of intellectual opportunity and a society driven by a suppression of ethnicities linked to the class-bound acquisition of money. What she must rely on as a means to extract herself from the interminable dilemmas of her domestic and economic life is a self-selecting difference, her version of a chosenness that begins to sound something like rugged individualism, a concept that, in a nation absorbed in the anti-communality of pluralism, harbors the tension of self-isolation. At terrible odds with her father, her first moves toward liberation begin with estrangement from the women around her:

I began to feel I was different from my sisters. They couldn't stand Father's preaching any more than I, but they could suffer to listen to him, like dutiful children who honour and obey and respect their father, whether they like him or not. If they ever had times when they hated Father, they were too frightened of themselves to confess their hate. (65)

Her sisters all succumb to their father's choices and marry men who make them miserable. Sara, her first love a failure in terms of its liberating potential, turns to the empirical and removes herself from the confines of her home, after one final battle with her father involving his failing venture in entrepreneurialism. His ineffectual—in market terms—tyranny provides the most visible cause, but Sara's trajectory is marked by an increasing pattern of alignment and difference: headstrong and set on the goals of insistent self-realization, her choices are more like his, and the sympathy she feels for her mother and sisters finally forms
itself as a stay against her having to regard herself as being in any way like
them.

The tendency of what might be called "sororophobia," to use Helena
Michie's term, is threaded into Sara's making of herself in the interstitial world of
the second section.40 For much of "Between Two Worlds" she is neither fish nor
fowl, a suspect young woman living on her own in a dark basement, working
daily in a laundry, by night studying under the dark glimmer of a gaslight, rather
than spending her time out among her peers. To her fellow workers, she is
marked by her lack of apparent family and an aloofness that suggests to them
her "ladylike" aspirations--what they interpret as her disdain for their company.
The longing she experiences for the company of her mother and sisters occurs
often when she is alone, and is made acute by hunger. In her sisters' presence,
she finds only the amplification of lessons she began to teach herself at home.
Sara's aversion to the lives they lead--two of them in working poverty and the
third in the cultural emptiness of wealth--is mirrored by the sorrow that
fragments their own lives. No one here can be said to be living the satisfaction
of communal attachments, but it is Sara's relentless focus on her own self-
determination that finally separates her: "Let's leave her to her mad education;"
one sister will say. "She's worse than Father with his Holy Torah" (178).

It is the men she meets who seem to offer versions of a tenacity that
might, in some way, complement her own. Her second and third encounters
with love occur as substantial transition points in "Between Two Worlds,"
carrying with them the accumulative weight of experience in which love's
visionary potential is persistently redefined according to the limitations of
practice. The first, Max Goldstein, woos her with his respect for the way she is
working her way up, and with the dazzling way he is able to narrate his own rise
from greenhorn street peddler to department store owner and real estate
tycoon. He is the David Levinsky of this book, an intelligent man who eschewed school to make his way in the wilds of the American marketplace. She is compelled by him, by the combination of vivid language and the sublimated sense of his sexual vibrancy. But the latter is peculiarly attached to the acquisition of money and property, of which she begins to feel herself regarded as a part. Though attracted by the ferocity of her will to stand on her own, he finally has no interest in the content of her particular passions, being driven rather more earnestly by his own: "He jerked about restlessly, telling me again of all the real estate he owned . . . . His rushing torrent of money, money beat down on me till I suddenly felt worn out" (196). Her rejection of him holds for her a complicated delight. Having sent him away for the last time, she gazes in her mirror, finding there the image of a woman who has been both desired and desiring, and who is beginning to make distinctions about the qualities of her desire. "He only excited me," she thinks. "But that wasn't enough. Even in the ecstasy of our kisses, I knew he was not my kind" (200-201). The acknowledgment here of the pleasures of sexuality goes hand in hand with a sense that what constitutes likeness must be a recognition that goes far beyond a categorical combination of physical passion, economics, or ethnic similarity--a recognition that is a function of being intimately and complexly seen.

That her father might somehow recognize in her rejection of Max Goldstein that image of herself as a woman whose renewed passion for learning carries the authority of her own clear choices is her great hope, and suggests a further complexity in her attachment to him. She longs for his presence in this amplified understanding of her own life, thinking that he will recognize in her his own love of knowledge, imparted through years of study and storytelling: "I had lived the old, old story he had drilled into our childhood ears--the story of Jacob and Esau. I had it from Father, this ingrained something
in me that would not let me take the mess of pottage" (202). The yearned-for miracle of his return at this moment in the text, however, occurs as a rout. Enraged by her rejection of what he deems to be her only appropriate function, he swamps her protesting claims for independence: "Pfui on your education! What's going to be your end? A dried-up old maid? You think you can make over the world? You think millions of educated old maids like you could change the world one inch? Woe to America where women are let free like men" (205). The pain of this rejection for Sara beyond the obvious assault has much to do with the failure of understanding from one who is inexorably both like and unlike her. Reb Smolinsky will not begin to assess in his daughter the threat of a passionate sexuality linked to intellectual pursuits that are, at the same time, removed from the intention to reproduce what he understands to be a traditional family.

Finally deprived, thinking of this last vestige of the world from which she came, Sara proceeds toward that America about which her father rails, but which she perceives less as an entity to be conquered and made over, than as the condition within which she might begin to fully articulate a freely integrated desire. "Like Columbus starting out for the other end of the earth," she fights her way to college in a town somewhere far outside the city, noting, as Columbus noted the flora and fauna of the New World, the roomy dwellings of the town's inhabitants, each with "its own green grass in front, its own free space all around . . . fac[ing] the street with the calm security of being owned for generations" (209-210). Bent on a version of discovery, she encounters this New World and herself as an alien subject within it, rebuffed over and over again in her forays toward personal contact by teachers and students who seem to be shrouded in a cold, class-burdened Anglo civility. Her third brush with love comes here in the form of Mr. Edman, her over-worked and exhausted
psychology teacher. His passing recognition of her scholarly eagerness results in a storm of excitement: "If I worshipped Mr. Edman, there would be some reason in my worship. . . . He is a thinker, a scientist. Through him I have gained this impersonal, scientific attitude of mind" (226). Having been through and discarded versions of romantic love that embraced the melodramatic transcendental (Lipkin) and commodified sexual (Goldstein), Sara proposes to find a functioning language of attachment emptied of the colorings of emotions that might enforce her submission to her father's world. The self-negating grace of an Anglo-inspired science of psychological "objectivity" is taught to her in the remove of Edman's classroom. Her attempt to manage a knowledge that requires categorizing distance, certainly between student and teacher but also between gendered and ethnic personal experience and universalizing codes regarding personality types, results in a comedy of misapprehension. She initially approaches her education as a way to eliminate those aspects of self—what she sees through the American other's eyes as her immigrant Jewishness, the messy illogic of passions that keep her circling in a netherland of unrealized hope—that threaten her Americanization. But the manner of her approach here blinds her temporarily to her own inconsistencies, and to the serious limitations surrounding Edman's circumstances as a college instructor. Seeing him as a kind of god—an Anglo-American god duly clothed in educated attire—who can be addressed at all hours most intimately, recalls similar adorations and arguments of her past. That he is a frazzled and underpaid purveyor of doctrine who has neither time for nor interest in a young woman who so clearly carries a complex nexus of foreign intellect and emotion is a condition quite apparent to the reader. It quickly becomes apparent to her as another lesson in the problem of negotiating contact between self and other, wherein both entities carry the weight of diverse and conflicting habits of discourse.
Her successful exit from college is the result of a mediative enterprise: putting aside love, she perseveres in scholarship, befriends the dean of the school who likens her progress to his own pioneering heritage, and graduates with the additional reward of writing a contest-winning essay in which she represents herself both as immigrant other and as a self making use of the American concept of self-betterment. It is, then, a properly assimilated Sara who returns to New York as a teacher of immigrant children, heralding her entrance into "The New World," the book's third section, by shopping on Fifth Avenue, eating "chops and spinach" rather than "herring and pickle," and finding an apartment that exudes "a clean, airy emptiness" (237, 240). She has become a part of the working middle class, exemplifying pioneering self-reliance without resorting to the corrupt attractions of wealth, and without succumbing to tragic desire or the trappings of marriage-enforced poverty.

But her reconstruction of self as an Americanized immigrant remains fraught with cultural and familial origins, in large part because the "beautiful aloneness" her self-started education has brought her has not erased desires woven into an early sense of self derived from both the embrace and rupture of family life. Her return to her parents' home as a visiting daughter, successful in her own terms, is eclipsed by the decline and death of her mother, whose absence is felt as a culmination of all mother and daughter wanted but were unable to do for each other. Exhorted by her mother to pick up the burden of her father, Sara assents, working care for him into the pattern of her teaching days. But Reb Smolinsky's subsequent marriage to a widow thwarts her management of him. To Sara, the former Mrs. Feinstein is nothing but a manipulative horror, a woman looking out for herself. The irony of Sara's castigating another for doing what could, and has, been said of her is complicated by the re-emergence of Sara's allegiance to her father. He remains
as resistant as ever to her version of herself as an educated woman, though he
will claim her college years as his doing if his image in the company of others is
so served. If he has become a somewhat smaller figure in her life, he has done
so by virtue of the changes she has accomplished in subverting his authority
over her. Finally, he has none that he can officially claim. What authority he has
is given by the inextricable history of her own attachment, a history that has
shaped both her pursuit of knowledge and the ways in which she negotiates,
through both rebellion and assent, her attachments to men.

The ease with which she recurs to immigrant speech patterns in teaching
children, and to a much deeper extent, the ways she cannot simply put the past
behind her form parts of the entanglements of love which close this book. In
falling in love with Hugo Seelig, a fellow professional with the same immigrant
past, she has found someone clearly her "kind:" a compassionate teacher with
"a Jewish face, and yet none of the greedy eagerness of Hester Street." He has
"the face of a dreamer, set free in the new air of America. Not like Father with his
eyes on the past, but a dreamer who had found his work among us of the East
Side" (273). In marrying him, she poses herself on the border between a
constructed sense of an old self and an emerging sense of a new self. Their
relationship is forged out of contemporary understandings that include a kinder
assessment of the past than has heretofore been available to her. But only
through Hugo will her father come to some kind of meeting with her. Only
Hugo's presence as a legitimate mate will protect the position she has fought
for, at the same time that it reinscribes her in a relation to her father she has
long sought to alter. Hugo wishes to learn Hebrew from her father, while she
finds herself implicated in filial obligation that extends well into the proportions
of her future married life. When she tentatively offers to take her father into their
home, "the problem of Father--still unsolved" returns, less as a reinscription of
old tyrannies than as a sign of a resonant sorrow in their passing. "In a world where all is changed, he alone remained unchanged--as tragically isolate as the rocks " (296). It is a curious denouement, akin in its mutedness to Hester Prynne's passing toward the end of her days as a counsellor to young, unhappy women, promoting a vision of the future which would "establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness," while living herself within the discursive and territorial confines of her sin.41 Hugo's desire to learn the sacred language of his culture from one of its more traditionally tyrannical purveyors raises the question of just how mutual happiness will be accomplished between lovers whose desire for both love and knowledge is shadowed by a revered language laced with the ambiguities of gender difference:

"Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."

The voice lowered and grew fainter till we could not hear the words any more. Still we lingered for the mere music of the fading chant. . . But I felt the shadow still there, over me. It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me. (296-97)

Who is responsible for that trouble and upon whom that trouble is wreaked suggests an argument that remains unresolved at this book's end. Also unresolved is the question of how much Sara's marriage--ideal according to her own requirements--constitutes a reinscription, albeit modernized according to American standards, of a female immigrant's gendered position in a traditional cultural asserting itself as a bulwark against radical dissolution.

This chapter began with a portrait of Columbus that suggests a man rigidly fixed in the monolingual discourse of his own conceptual presuppositions, but whose image, until recently, has been used to invoke
patriotic, solemn, and freewheeling versions of an open-ended discovery that heralded something entirely new on earth. That Yezierska should appropriate that image for herself and for Sara Smolinsky suggests something of its power, and of the depth of immigrant expectations regarding the New World's ability to eradicate old and multiple oppressions. Sara does intend a version of colonization, in which self-sustaining aspects of parent traditions emerge in recombinant, New World forms. But in Bread Givers, it is Reb Smolinsky who is really much more like the myopic Columbus, much more the Puritan father intent, marginalized as he is, on maintaining his own fixed version of the world.

It is a hybridized America, its Anglo nativisms pushed into resistance by enormous demographic changes in the latter part of the nineteenth century, that shapes and is shaped by a Sara Smolinsky whose combined resistances and assent constitute an unmaking of clear lines between hereditary loyalty and the acquired characteristics of a presumed Anglo-American superiority. I borrow from a linked critical tradition to suggest yet another possibility in re-reading assumptions behind the traditions of the American canon. In his essay "An Other Tongue," Alfred Arteaga considers the multilingual discourse of contemporary Chicano poetry in its relation to the "English only" movement.

So what does the Chicano discourse, does the Chicano poem do? First, in the common senses of language use . . . the mere presence of Chicano discourse resists Anglo American suppression of heteroglossia, much as the background noise of menials jars a social gathering. The presence of difference undermines the aspiration for an English only ethos. And inasmuch as Chicano discourse is specifically multilingual and multivoiced, it further undermines the tendency toward single language and single-voiced monologue, that is, it undermines
Anglo American monologism. It undercuts claims of prevalence, centrality and superiority and confirms the condition of heteroglossia. It draws the monologue into dialogue. In short, it dialogizes the authoritative discourse.42

Though this explicitly refers to, at least in part, the dialogic collision of Spanish and English that works to subvert a nationalist drive toward monolingual identity, Arteaga's broader argument encompasses the ways in which subjective voices interpenetrate authoritative discourses that attempt to frame and fix unequal power relations in terms of race, class, and gender. Interpenetration, of course, suggests also a self-imposed subjectification—what Arteaga calls "autocolonialism"—or the ways in which the colonized subject absorbs hegemonic discourse even as it mounts a resistance. Essential to this argument is an attention to the particular, to the diverse efforts individual texts make toward an engagement of self-alienating, hegemonic discourses that are themselves, in that engagement, subject to mutability.

Sara Smolinsky's particular foray into the condition of Americanness provides another gauge of how that identity is made. Unwilling to accept the mess of pottage that so diminishes, even as it enriches, the ex-coloured man and David Levinsky, she is more like Our Nig's heroine, Frado, disrupting cultural loyalties that are also coercive of gender in favor of precarious living within constantly reproduced border areas. In an archetypal reckoning consistent with the specters of Columbus, the Puritans, and the variously rendered Pocahontas whose Indian femaleness is constitutive of voicelessness in the North American context, both Frado and Sara, arguably along with some of the "passing" heroines of twenties African-American women's literature, are most like La Malinche, otherwise known by the Spanish name, Doña Marina. An indigenous woman of royalty enslaved under the Aztec empire, she was
captured by Cortés, made his mistress, and became the translator held responsible for bridging a cultural divide with the language of conquest. The archetypal mother of Mexican *mestizaje*, she is variously considered as either traitor or rape victim, both betrayer and betrayed, but also as the progenitor of an idea that contains the anxiety of mutability wherein culture and race exist not as absolutes, but as continuously mobile conditions of interpenetration. The figure of *La Malinche* suggests an avenue of thinking about American culture that highlights the particular negotiation of ethnic, class, and gender marginality faced by immigrant and minority women. The Old World that Sara arguably betrays and the New World she attempts to embrace are cultures that find their fluid embodiment in the volatile mix of her own assent and resistance, all-American in its hybridity.


4Anzia Yezierska, "America and I," *How I Found America*, 146.

5Ibid., 148. Emphasis Yezierska's.

6Todorov, 31.

7Ibid., 3-4.

8Ibid., 49.


10See Todorov on Aztec colonialism in *Conquest*, 58-60.

11Paz, 102.


14Ibid., 76.


16Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 211. Quote taken from Walter Wyckoff, *The Workers: An Experiment in Reality: The West* (1899), a contemporary text in which the Exposition model is praised as a paradise for workers. For background to this discussion, see Trachtenberg's chapter, "White City," 208-234.


an important companion volume that constructs, through extensive interviews of survivors, a story of immigrant women that remains, for the most part, less stated than implied in Howe's work. The full canon of Yezierska's work can be understood to live at the representative center of this story.

20 Howe, 11-12.
21 Ibid., 16.
23 Zangwill, 185.
24 Ibid., Appendix B, 191.
27 See Yezierska's own account of this in Red Ribbon on a White Horse (New York: Persea, 1987, 1950).
30 Ibid., 59. See his full chapter, "Working Ourselves Up": Middle-Class Realism and the Reproduction of Patriarch in Bread Givers, 53-86.
32 Anzia Yezierska, Bread Givers (New York: Persea, 1975, 1925) 1.
33 Ferraro, 63.

Further references will be noted by page number in the text.
36 Ibid., 23.
38 Ibid., 57.
39 Ibid., 60.
41 Hawthorne, 177.
Chapter Three

"Footholds in Unmitigated Light:" Agency and Vertiginous Worlds in Call It Sleep

The lines, unknown, dimly surmised, thundered in his heart with limitless meaning, rolled out and flooded the last shores of his being. Unmoored in space, he saw one walking on impalpable pavements that rose with the rising trees. Or were they trees or telegraph-poles, each crossed and leafy, none could say, but forms stood there with footholds in unmitigated light. And their faces shone because the light in their midst was luminous laughter. He read on.

--Henry Roth, Call It Sleep

Writing her way toward the hope of a meeting place between liberal Anglo-Americanism and the "best" brilliance of immigrant passions and traditions, Anzia Yezierska continually wrestled American English into Yiddish phrasing, making of language itself a kind of argument for the irrevocable presence of the immigrant in the evolving topography of an American linguistic terrain. One could argue that she worked to colonize English, demanding of it the kind of obeisance that would establish immigrant claims to participation in American cultural life without bleaching the resonant accents of immigrant history. The argument as it occurs in the pages of Yezierska's fiction assumes the desire for an as yet unrealized ideal world in which the intransigence of patriarchally determined cultural borders melts away, allowing a refiguring of borders as, perhaps, an open field of multiethnic virtuosity, unsubdued by the bloodless constraints of Anglo intellectualism.
The publication of Henry Roth's novel, *Call It Sleep*, nine years after *Bread Givers*, brought into American immigrant literature an approach toward language and the worlds it represents that subverted the intransigence of representative Old and New World figures. The lines drawn between father, son and mother, rabbi and student, Judaism and Catholicism, Yiddish and street English, New York and the countryside somewhere in Eastern Europe, are as vivid moment by moment as they are shifting, recombinant, and always only partially readable, in large part because the figures of opposition themselves continually re-emerge in the consciousness of a young boy with accumulative variations of meaning. Like the "impalpable pavements" David Scheurl conjures in an ecstasy of unnameable hope, the "realism" of immigrant experience is lifted into mutable realms where consciousness struggles to take the world not as a given, but as an illuminating measure of the self's own ability to create and know. Making use of the radical departures in linguistic self-representation and literary form associated with Joyce and Eliot, *Call It Sleep* also initiated a leap between ethnic narrative and high modernism.

The history of *Call It Sleep*’s literary reception is by now well known. But since it presents, in its way, a kind of cautionary tale about the manner in which literary critical trends reduce, even as they magnify, readings of novels across disciplinary categories, parts of it are worth recounting. The mostly favorable reviews that met its publication spoke of the comprehensive rendition of urban immigrant life. Writing for the *New York Herald Tribune Books*, Fred T. Marsh called the novel "the most accurate and profound study of an American slum childhood that has yet appeared," noting Roth's skill at maintaining the "detachment and universality of the artist." In *The Nation* Horace Gregory wrote that *Call It Sleep* "will not fall readily into the classification of 'proletarian' novel,"
but that it displays "more of the actual conditions of living in New York's East Side than any other book I have ever read."²

As represented in the pages of New Masses, criticism from the Left argued over its lack of an explicit ideological framework for treating working-class life. The initial unsigned review dismissed it as "introspective and febrile," a regrettable "use of working class experience" for degeneratively self-absorbed and fragmentary ends. Letters in subsequent issues defended the novel. Bonnie Lyons notes, in explicitly political terms. Among them, Kenneth Burke wrote that "insofar as children are pre-political savages, living in a world of symbolism and magic, I question whether any realistic philosophy could properly condemn a writer for reviving such a picture of childhood."³ Edwin Seaver followed, speaking of "the very genuine experience" the book gave him. "What I wish to point out," he wrote, "is the manner in which the author shows how his hero surmounts the fearful obstacles on his road to life, with the result that when we close the book we honestly feel that such a childhood can mature into a revolutionary manhood."⁴

The distance between the "detachment and universality of the artist" and a possible maturation into "revolutionary manhood" delineates one early binary opposition that in a pattern of revisions has attended readings of this novel and, in the larger field, studies of modernism into the present. The early arguments posed Call It Sleep's high modernism both within and against its proletarian subject, creating a tension over the novel's aestheticism and its relation to realism that seemed only to resolve itself in the novel's swift disappearance, an eclipse that lasted for some twenty-five years, until renewed critical attention caused its eventual reissue in the early sixties. In his 1956 The Radical Novel in the United States, Walter Rideout echoed the New Masses defenders by recasting the book as a complex rendering of childhood immigrant experience
lived out in pre-ideological circumstances, its critique of capitalist society more implicit than stated. The following year Alfred Kazin and Leslie Fiedler both lauded it as one of the great neglected books of the previous two decades. Both foregrounded ethnicity, Fiedler in particular calling the novel "a specifically Jewish book, the best single book by a Jew about Jewishness written by an American, certainly through the thirties and perhaps ever."5

Much later Fiedler revised that reading, in a move that parallels the opposition between modernist aestheticism and proletarian realism in ethnic and religious terms. In "The Christian-ness of the Jewish-American Writer," he notes the depth of Roth's stated indebtedness to T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land, particularly in regards to religiosity: "[I]t had seemed to me originally an essentially Judaic book, at the farthest possible remove from Christian mythology and theology . . . [but] in the fable of redemption which is Call It Sleep, David plays the role of the redeemer--reenacting, this time around, not the Grail quest but an imitatio Christi."6 In an essay published in a current paperback edition, Hana Wirth-Nesher's speculates that Roth's inability to produce a second novel (until the 1994 appearance of Volume 1 of Mercy of a Rude Stream) could be accounted for by the "paralyzing ambivalence of the Jewish immigrant writer in America." Calling the book a "brilliant artistic document of a cultural dead end," Wirth-Nesher argues that the alienating necessity of having to reproduce the Yiddish mother tongue into the highly lyric English that dominates this already multilingual novel marks--even as it adheres to a long Jewish literary tradition of multilingualism--the submergence of native Judaism within the Christian symbology of the host language and culture. In her reading, the scene of David Schearl's electrocution amidst the heteroglossic tumult of immigrant street English harbors the transformation of Jewish ethnicity into the rebirth of an assimilated Christ: "David becomes a
naturalized American by becoming a Christ symbol, and the English language
is experienced as a foreign tongue and a foreign culture inhabiting his
psyche."

In a 1969 interview with David Brunsen, Roth commented that the
representation of "actual conditions" of the Lower East Side Horace Gregory so
lauded were in fact appropriated from his life in the non-Jewish neighborhoods
of the mid-teens and twenties Harlem where he spent his adolescence. The
real East Side of his early youth "was helpful, communicative and highly
interrelated—in short, a community... And the Jew in those years was
optimistic and dynamic, full of the feeling that nothing was holding him back." His rupture from that community in the course of intra-urban migration and his
subsequent rebellion against Judaism, combined with his oft-remarked travels
in the secular and internationally disposed community of downtown intellectuals
and leftists during his years with Eda Lou Walton, together fuel the legendary
apparatus of Roth's life. That apparatus often attends more contemporaneous
readings of his novel, including his own.

Two significant features accompany Roth's version of his famous, multi-
decade writer's block: his ambivalent commitment to the Communist Party in the
mid-thirties and his gradual turn, provoked by the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, toward
an accommodation and embrace of Jewish identity. Having produced a novel
that, in his words, "was an anomaly," Roth's intention after Call It Sleep was to
write a book that would adhere to what he then understood as the necessity of
socialist realism in the interests of class consciousness. Call It Sleep "was
conditioned by a previous apolitical, a-economic... semi-mystical decade
espousing art for its own sake." The second novel, based on a German-
American acquaintance—an illiterate working man who came to the Communist
Party after losing his hand in an industrial accident--failed him because he
couldn't find the terms appropriate to that commitment: "Detachment, apparently, utter detachment was my only ambience. Allegiance once deeply inhaled was as lethal as carbon monoxide, and as inseparable from fancy's bloodstream."\(^{10}\) He stopped after writing seventy-five pages, eventually destroying the manuscript during the distressing approach, he has said, of the McCarthy era.\(^{11}\)

Roth's later recollections echo the polarities within which *Call It Sleep* was received by his contemporaries. He has seemed often to assume the irreconcilability of the novel's modernist aesthetic aims with a rigorous critique of social relations, in part, I would argue, because of his holding to a concept of earlier ideological divisions within leftist politics that divides subjective representation from class realism. In *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, the aging Ira Stigman--a persona both for the author and the much-revised David Schearel--interrogates the "Joycean, sordid riches" of his long ago first novel and the loss of that early aesthetic trenchancy:

> Was that [loss] the effect of Marxism? . . . He had to consider, to recognize, somehow to indicate implicitly in his writing the cruel social relations beneath, the cruel class relations, the havoc inflicted by deprivation concealed under the overtly ludicrous. No more the Olympian mix of Anatoile France's irony and pity. And that was why he rebelled against Joyce with such animosity today.

Consigning the first novel to a category of a richly written "surface perception" devoid of even implicit acknowledgment of complex social and class relations, in this passage Roth's protagonist appears to reject his earlier aesthetic as a whole cloth avoidance of the fundamentals of deprivation.\(^{12}\) It is, in many ways, a startling assessment for those of us who read *Call It Sleep* as deeply engaged in the interrogation of power and resistance.
But the merging of text and life that occurs so frequently in Roth's interviews and throughout *Mercy of a Rude Stream* suggests avenues for thinking about arguments carried on with the past—not only the writer's, but literary critics' and broader cultural movements' as well. What Roth has to say about his own work may be tangential to discussion of the work itself. Yet his post-1967 shift in the direction of an overt recognition and claiming of Jewish identity aligns with the rise of a politics of ethnic identity from the sixties forward, and in its way fashions a critique of the processes of assimilation that have maintained their force across the century. Having claimed at one time that of the many gifts Jews have offered humanity, the "last and greatest one" for Jews in America would be "orienting themselves toward ceasing to be Jews," Roth's conversion to a passion for the state of Israel signals not a personal reclamation of Judaic tradition but a "profound identification with a people in the making, in the process of becoming a people again from the shadows we were." The similarities between the latter statement and Fiedler's and Wirth-Nesher's comments regarding Christianization in *Call It Sleep* lend weight to interpretations of the book that feature alienation and fragmentation of the Jewish self as a consequence of assimilated life in the American Diaspora. Roth's remarking the calculated submergence of the "real" and vibrant communal life of the Jewish Lower East Side within the haunted world of his adolescence in Harlem furthers the idea of victimization-by-assimilation combined with the writer's conscious refusal to acknowledge an existing community. In the flurry of interviews that accompanied publication of *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, Roth turned against the notion of David Schearl's victimization, calling him a "wicked little son of a bitch" and "a victim to cover over the true me." In *Mercy of a Rude Stream* he "tried to reconcile myself with the louse I was," a comment interestingly suggestive of the writer's own sense of agency in
the childhood construction of conditions to which he was also subject.\textsuperscript{14} The "loss of identity" he defines and interrogates through the aging Ira Stigman's contemplation of the years after his first novel effects also a "loss of affirmation," both losses contained in a criticizing retrospective of intentional denials of Jewish ethnicity. Speaking of the boy who longs to model himself after heroes in books ranging from *Huckleberry Finn* to *Riders of the Purple Sage*, the narrator writes:

Ira submitted to being a Christian. What else could he do when he liked and esteemed the hero? All he asked of a book was not to remind him too much that he was a Jew; the more he was taken with a book, the more he prayed that Jews would be overlooked.\textsuperscript{15}

The David Schearl who stutters over the incomprehensibility of the meaning of utterances like "Christchin light" is "bigger den Jew light," becomes, in this passage, an Ira Stigman quite conscious of, if nevertheless compelled toward, his acquiescence to a known, secularized Christian status quo (322).

But how might Roth's revisionary readings of *Call It Sleep* suggest linkages to broader revisionary readings both of the book's modernist aesthetic and its ethnic and class stance? Thomas J. Ferraro has noted the ongoing neglect of *Call It Sleep* as a major work deserving of a position at the forefront of an ever-evolving multicultural canon. Speaking of the opportunity it provides for the combined study of high modernism and a deeply ethnic articulation of the perilous borders between assimilation and ethnic loyalty, and the unique ground it presents--given its particular history of obscurity--for an exploration of the politics and methods of canon-formation, Ferraro argues that *Call It Sleep*'s reception has continually stalled at the crossroads for reasons peculiar to the evolving history of literary critical focus:
During the postwar years when the American canon was being formulated . . . [t]oo much was at stake in the interdependent modernist notions of aesthetic transcendence and humanist universalism for critics to deal fully with the insistent Jewishness of Roth's novel . . . [But t]oo much is now at stake in the notions of ethnocultural authenticity for critics to deal with its insistent high modernism.16

The divisions between modernism and ethnic identification here echo—even as the book's "insistent Jewishness" contradicts—Fiedler's and Wirth-Nesher's (and Roth's) variant interpretations of a Christianized domination of Jewish identity. Such standoffs preclude, it seems to me, the possibility that the novel might contain more fluid, and more subversive, senses of motion and exchange between conditions traditionally deemed fixed in opposition.

In his 1983 essay, "Modernism in History, Modernism in Power," Bruce Robbins uses Call It Sleep as a starting point for reviewing the ways in which critical formulations of the term "modernism" have evolved into modernist functionings within institutions of power, particularly the mass media and academia. Noting modernism's beginnings as an ideological commitment to "the new over and against the authority of the past" (a commitment that could be made to fit across a left-to-right spectrum of political partisanship, say, from Roth to Pound), Robbins surveys modernism's resituation by a second generation of critics as a movement both completed—therefore historical—and continuous with, rather than a departure from, the literary periods that preceded it: "rupture and schism were woven into seamless continuity, the abyss that had seemed to divide modernism from romanticism was filled in, the sudden explosion was eased into a sedate tradition."17 In the last third of the century, Robbins argues, that sedate tradition has come to be institutionalized academically in
departmental predispositions toward privileging structural unities and the hermeticism of texts, valorizing their universality, and diminishing their regional and historical rootedness. The "high culture" of the past presides over the decline of cultural values in the present, an idea that represents a turnabout in the way some self-conscious modernists early in the century perceived their efforts. If mass culture has picked up the "make it new" impulse of modernism by shrouding the operations of political power in an endless replication of images and the promotion of infinite consumerism, academia engages in the sacralization of modernist high culture in its universalist, metropolitan aspects as a stay against what might be called the proliferating diversity, or in the academy's view, the "chaos" of the present. Such a stance, in Robbins's view, prevents critical engagement of "overwhelming questions about contemporary society and the possibilities of action within it."18 In this light, readings of Call It Sleep that privilege its symbolic structure and its Freudianism over David Schearl's pursuit of the meaning of power in his America, neglect the weaving of those constructs into a subjectivity that, while operating often within an assaultive fragmentation, pursues the reclamation of agency, power, and self-knowledge.

Much, of course, has happened in the fifteen years since Robbins wrote his essay. The proliferating diversity of a, perhaps still contested, national literature is represented in part by the recovery of "marginal" texts from a variety of cultural traditions, including those discussed throughout this book. In Call It Sleep's case, the novel's radical aesthetics, its psychological introspection, stream of consciousness, and polyglot experimentation, could be understood not as a blanket defamiliarization of immigrant reality and its rootedness in history, but as a recognition, in Ferraro's terms, of "how modernist breakthroughs in figuration and meaning-making could serve a second-
generation writer wishing to recover what Trilling calls the 'solid, raw, sociological truth' of immigration."19

The raw truth that continues to speak its variations out of the pages of the novel conjoins the array of polarities marking its reception in a kind of history of debates over defining discourses of this century. In Call It Sleep, the rigors of class containment, ethnic loyalty in contention with Americanization, and gendered subjectivity are densely woven into the triangle of relations between the father, mother, and son, with the burgeoning consciousness of David Schearl at the apex. In that mix of debates I return, perhaps with some nostalgia, to the optimism explicit in Edwin Seaver's early statement regarding David Schearl's revolutionary potential. His argument promotes an ideologically informed reader imperative to interpret David's drift toward sleep in the novel's final paragraph as a moment of transition, wherein the tumultuous fragmenting of self under the complex power operations alluded to during the course of the book will, by virtue of that self having in some way intuited those operations, resolve into a unified, resistant manhood. David Schearl will almost certainly become a man capable of revolutionary struggle against dominant power.

A reader in the late twentieth century will likely hesitate over such a projection, not, as in my case, for lack of sympathy or desire for optimism, but because what constitutes manhood as an identification of gender, and power as a force to be wrested from the hands of those positioned high in the class hierarchy and subsequently placed within the grasp of the masses, is no longer self-evident. Call It Sleep first came to my attention in the mid-eighties, the gift of Irving Weissman--a friend who is now in his eighties, a Jew, a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigades, a former member of the Communist Party who left it in the split over Stalin, who was incarcerated nevertheless under the Smith Act,
survived that to lead a successful life as a construction foreman in New York City, and who has remained active in left politics throughout his life. When I met him in New York we were both involved in organizing resistance to U.S. policy in Central America, Nicaragua in particular. The hands into which he pressed the book could be specified as Protestant, shaped by early Yankee training in secular, middle-class notions of self-advancement mixed with reasonable contributions to public service. In my particular journey, those notions were exploded and re-shaped by the rhetoric of late sixties sexual liberation, and active engagement in a version of seventies feminism fueled by the imperative to resist dominant, masculinist power while simultaneously creating a kind of liberated zone wherein women might be safe, unrestricted, identified with each other and, subsequently, fully themselves. My own inability to answer the question of what constitutes a unitary female self in a world striated with differences in race, class, sexual preference, and national identity (to name a few of the major distinctions) led me to a political orientation intent on embracing difference, crossing cultures, yet still resisting the operations of power as manifested from above by the state. Thus, Nicaragua, and a friendship of politically complex intersections with a man I had never expected to meet.

I use Foucault to justify my indulgence of this anecdote in a chapter concerned primarily with examining a book whose subject might seem to have nothing to do with the circumstance of my first reading it. If Seaver's reading of Call It Sleep in the thirties was guided by ideological assumptions that required an overt recognition of class warfare, my reading is fed by a consideration of the intersection of several discourses occurring at the site of the text, itself located overwhelmingly within the body and fragmenting self of David Scheerl. How power moves in relation to gender, class, religion, and ethnicity as played out within him on particularly American ground, and how or whether he finds points
of resistance, constitute, for me, the book's obvious subject. The particular reader's site I have described, a friendship situated at the intersection of our diverse relations to feminism, Marxism, secular Judaism and Protestantism, is ground where resistance, though still framed in terms of opposition to actions carried out by the state, is increasingly understood as a response to power that, in Foucault's terms, "is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian mobile relations." 20 My friend claims that Call It Sleep tells a story of immigrant life in New York City "as it really was," a story in many ways not unlike his own. His claim echoes Seaver's "very genuine experience" upon reading the book. It also suggests to me, given the book's near total narrative focus at the level of David's perceiving body, a contemporary desire to locate struggle not in categorical oppositions between oppressed and oppressor, but, post-ideologically, in the ways that power operates: not from above but from within and across the fluid boundaries of the self, "not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus." 21 To shift the focus of struggle away from a strictly ideological approach toward the location of power is not to deny the class, ethnic, or gendered abuse of power or possibilities of resistance. It is instead to acknowledge the contingent nature of power and those who "hold" it. As Robbins has suggested in his promotion of an activist critique of modernity through its institutional manifestations rather than as an ideological absolute, the recognition of the possibility of human agency against a narrowing ideological fatalism suggests the hope of diverse, palpable resistance. 22 Within the polarities recorded earlier in this discussion, the Jewish child of a working class family whose narrator allows him to submerge his class position and thwart his ethnic heritage through the embrace of a Christian-seeming martyrdom might instead become a child whose vivid yet fluid modes
of interpreting the worlds around him mount an invasion and subversion of the dominant paradigms structuring the perception of Anglo-Americanism, actively changing the way those paradigms are read.

A principle problem of this book, then, is the question of how, or even if, agency is constituted in the individual. To what extent is David an agent self prior to the experience and language that strive to name and shape him? The site where David finds himself, so to speak, occurs within a family and a domestic space itself shaped by contingencies: its relation to the New World street, to the Old World past, and to the secrecy surrounding the particular pasts of Genya and Albert Schearl, his mother and father. Each parent carries uniquely private as well as broadly shared public burdens within the context of immigration. As Ferraro has noted:

*Call It Sleep* identifies how masculine insecurities originating in Eastern Europe were exacerbated by stepwise migration (first the father, then the mother and children), by the transformation from rural stability to urban poverty-cum-mobility, and by the discordance between a boy’s formal education in Judaic guilt and his informal one in Christian redemption.23

Though located amidst similar exigencies shaping the exterior view of transitional domestic spaces of immigrant experience, these parents form a striking contrast to Sara Smolinsky’s tyrannical father and burden-bearing mother in *Bread Givers*, both of whom arrive on the scene awash in a gender divide of Old World certainties. If Reb Smolinsky’s tyranny is justified by his version of Talmudic law and the consequent appropriate place for women in the domestic economy, Albert Schearl’s household is marked by a mix of violence and impotence deriving from his tenuous hold on anything like certainty. Having been a son himself at terrible odds with his Old World father, he regards his
child with an inherent suspicion complicated by the love between mother and son to which he has no access, and by the unfolding revelations of the narrative. His position in the mobile world of the workplace is equally tenuous, casting a persistent shadow on his ability to perform the perceived task of American manhood—to provide for his family. Genya Scheari's position as mediator between father and child is complicated, in a way that Mrs. Smolinsky's is not, by her extraordinary lyric presence both as a force in her son's life and as a purveyor of both Jewish tradition and intimate family history much marked by the mingling of her own skepticism, resistance, and assent.

Significantly, we first view this family in the prologue, prior to the establishment of domestic space and in one of the few moments where all three appear as small figures in a broad landscape, on the ferry docked at Ellis Island in New York Harbor. A mythic quality attends this scene of entry onto U.S. shores that almost immediately breaks down with the meeting of husband and wife. Amid an array of immigrants described to type—"the joweled close-cropped Teuton, the full-bearded Russian, the scraggly-whiskered Jew,"—they appear dressed in American clothes, "the ordinary clothes the ordinary New Yorker wore in that period—sober and dull". That Albert has taken the "precaution" of assimilating Genya as much as possible into the visual landscape of the New World suggests his anxiety over their difference, an anxiety increased by her failure to recognize him upon their reunion (9-10). The narrative weighs the will to assimilate—through dressing in a style that attempts to separate them from the noisy heterogeneity of the other immigrants, while blending them into the already established host culture—against the physical posture of each toward the other that finally brings them under our surveillance. They are figured as bodies at odds with each other, culturally muted, a family unit in form but atomized in their specificity.
The foreignness of the child's clothing becomes the focus of this distress, particularly the blue straw hat he wears with its polka dot ribbons. It is the prettiness of the hat, the effeminacy of it, that so offends Albert, putting into play a gender anxiety that will become a major preoccupation of the son because it will remain a major preoccupation of the father. The hat marks the child as culturally other to ordinary Americanness and also as other to his father's vexed sense of appropriateness in the family relationship. The question of Albert's paternity will emerge overtly only later in the novel, as the ostensible reason for the estrangement figured here between mother and father, father and son. But I would argue that, for Roth, that is a consequence, rather than a cause of Albert's fierceness toward his son and toward the world. What constitutes his manhood has to do with conventional terms of the father's sovereign authority in relation to wife and son. But that concern derives at least in part from his troubled sense of agency within his family, within his class, and within the world where he works. Albert is verbally savage; his manner of speech anticipates the explosions of physical violence that will follow in the text. His presence here is shaped by the array of immigrant eyes that name him as culturally separated from his origins, and the "American" eyes that inscribe him, in spite of his efforts, as inherently alien. That inscription in turn elicits a set of responses that specify wife and child: Genya becomes timid and solicitous; David cowers in fright.

Husband, wife, and son are here framed in a world where the ground is fluid and uncertain. No communal sense and no continuity of extended historical tradition governs and contains them. The scene suggests Foucault's "strategic field of power relations," where the mechanisms of power that play upon these characters are ubiquitous and mobile. The boat on which they ride is itself alive with uncertainty, "drifting slowly and with canceled momentum as if reluctant," as it moves toward a shore that is in motion, unstable: "Before her the
grimy cupolas and towering square walls of the city loomed up. Above the
jagged roof tops, the white smoke, whitened and suffused by the slanting sun,
faded into slots and wedges of the sky" (16).

That inert objects appear as sentient, and often beyond David's
comprehension, is significant to the construction of the sites within which David
struggles to know who he is. The principle arenas of the novel are the domestic
space of the apartments where they live and the buildings that contain them; the
street and its social, communal life; the Hebrew school, or cheder, as a place of
religious instruction; and the alternate domestic space of his aunt's candy store.
The David who moves across these sites is plagued constantly by an
incomplete knowledge of his own body and its origins, and by the dread of
unknown and unexpected occurrences in, or encounters with, the bodies of
others. The mother, the principle figure of the domestic space, alone provides
solace. But it is solace that will become linked to dread as David moves back
and forth across the border of an already mysteriously configured home:

Standing before the kitchen sink and regarding the bright brass
faucets that gleamed so far away, each with a bead of water at its
nose, slowly swelling, falling, David again became aware that this
world had been created without thought of him. He was thirsty, but
the iron hip of the sink rested on legs tall almost as his own body
. . . Where did the water come from that lurked so secretly in the
curve of the brass? . . . What strange world must be hidden behind
the walls of a house! (17)

The world of the kitchen is figured in terms of the body, the "nose" of the faucets
and the "hip" of the sink, too tall and too distant for his reach. The sustenance
they offer is produced by a world shrouded in secrecy that cannot be
comprehended and against which David's body is too small and insignificant to
be capable of agency. It is his mother who reaches, who has the power to satisfy his thirst: "She looked as tall as a tower." The solace she provides here, though it has to do with a kindly domestic power, is also suffused with sexuality. Along with the water, David drinks in her "strong bare ankle," her "deep bosom," her "full throat in a frame of frayed lace," and her "smooth, sloping face... flushed now with her work." She has "mild, full lips... A vague, fugitive darkness blurred the hollow above her cheekbone." She stands at the faucet, "smiling obscurely, one finger parting the turbulent jet, waiting for the water to cool." She "surveys" him; he keeps his eyes "fixed" upon her while he drinks from his glass. She elicits a kiss from him, and, "sinking his fingers in her hair, David kissed her brow. The faint familiar warmth and odor of her skin and hair" (17-18).

These are not his terms, of course. They belong to the omniscient narrator, who shows at least as much concern for his readers as for his protagonist; and they describe a kind of lush presence, a sensual naming of her, that allows readers to view what David views but from the safer position of the voyeur. From the start, words possess the power to inflect their relations with a suggestion of illicitness. "When am I going to be big enough?" he asks (18). The question refers to his ability to reach the faucets, but it brings with it an anxiety over his own agency that becomes increasingly gendered. The comfort he receives from her is contingent on the limits of his own body, and on what happens to him when other relationships intercede between them.

His father provides the initial and primary intercession. Where Genya’s speech and actions toward David saturate him with a gentle and articulate elegance, Albert’s violence and hard-bitten language pull David apart. Albert’s presence in the apartment fragments the domestic space, overriding the dynamic between mother and son. David has no knowledge of the provenance
of his father's anger, but comes to an awareness of its chaotic force both
through bits of information from the outside world and through the ways it plays
upon him. At one point forced to retrieve pay owed to Albert from one of a
sequence of jobs lost through his violent eruptions, David hears himself
described by his father's co-worker as the son of a man who is crazy, capable of
killing, someone who should be locked up. The description implicates him in
incomprehensible rage. When physically directed toward him, that rage
threatens him with his own annihilation.

Like a cornered thing, he shrank within himself, deadened his
mind because the body would not deaden and waited. Nothing
existed any longer except his father's right hand—the hand that
hung down into the electric circle of his vision. Terrific clarity was
given him. Terrific leisure. Transfixed, timeless, he studied the
curling fingers that twitched spasmodically . . . pondered . . . the
nail of the smallest finger, nipped by a press, that climbed in a
jagged little stair to the hangnail. Terrific absorption. (83)
The body of the father, elsewhere in the text longed for for its strength, its
tendons and muscles that the son feels he will never have, ostensibly appears
here as the terrible means of punishment for a misdeed. But it is not the
misdeed (a scrap with the neighbor boy, Yussie) that is primary, or even
anywhere apparent in David's mind. David here excludes himself from time,
and from his own history. His body becomes "the" body, an entity stripped of the
context of the familiar. He can only perceive what is strictly in front of him, and
he perceives with a narrowed intensity that, like voyeurism, pinpoints the body
and isolates it from knowledge of itself. His father is no longer a coherent body
but a driven, spasmodic hand devoid of anything like rational discourse. In
response to his father, David institutes an interior control that fragments the
presence of self, eliminating any hope for agency or responsibility. The hand hits him, "splintering the brain into fragments of light" (83). Unable to see his father as a complex entity, David begins to disintegrate.

In the dynamic of the household, it is Genya whose embrace reconstructs him into a whole body and self. To Genya, David is the beloved, the full focus of an apparently limitless affection. But the awakening of sexual discourse as it begins to make itself apparent to David effaces both what he thinks he knows of her and what he thinks he knows of himself in relation to her. The introduction of Luter into the text for a time mutes the harshness of the father. Luter arrives as Albert's friend, a co-worker with the same cultural roots who offers the possibility of Albert's normalization within the routines of family and work. But his increasingly suspect attentions to Genya disrupt such hope. In particular, Luter's presence re-directs David's view of his mother in such a way that he, too, becomes a voyeur.

Absorbed in watching his mother, he would have paid little attention to Luter, but the sudden oblique shifting of Luter's eyes toward himself drew his own gaze toward them. Luter, his eyes narrowed by a fixed yawn, was staring at his mother, at her hips. For the first time, David was aware of how her flesh, confined by the skirt, formed separate molds against it. He felt suddenly bewildered, struggling with something in his mind that would not become a thought. (40)

In this moment, David becomes conscious of a version of his mother that we have sensed earlier. He is first absorbed in watching her scrub pots, a manifestation of her power to order a domestic space that includes him by virtue of her presence in it. The shift of glances between Luter and David re-routes David's gaze at his mother through Luter's eyes, disrupting his position within
what we might call the maternal universe. In a way comparable to the parlaying of the father's body into an isolate, threatening hand, Genya's body becomes subject to a sexualization that fractures her presence. She is designated as flesh that is separated and contained by the skirt, but more so by Luter's, and now David's, appropriating eyes. The objectification of her body distills her from her surroundings, commodifying her sexually in such a way that she might be possessed, in some sense, by the viewer. Most interesting in this passage is the effect this new way of looking has on David. If his sense of self and his self's position is dependent to a great degree on Genya's ability to include and protect him from the atomizing forces of larger, or other, worlds, the perceived isolation of her body from context, and from him, exposes him to similar isolation. The moment he subjects her to an appropriating gaze, he is, himself, subject to the same.

This is clearly seen pages later when he is enticed by the neighbor girl Annie into "playing bad" (53). What in another book might have been a domestic comedy of pre-pubescent sexual exploration, here becomes a kind of chamber of horrors. Annie herself is disfigured, both by lameness ("David could not help noticing how stiff and bare the white stocking hung behind the brace on Annie's own leg" (48)), and by the contortions of her verbal and facial expressions ("Her face writhed back in disgust" (49)): Were it not for her own pathos, her method of enticement would suggest the femme fatale plucking the innocent male bystander from a crowd and duping him into losing his virginity. She pulls him into the bedroom of her parents' apartment, then into the closet--both places that are considered secret and forbidden in the economy of his domestic life--and gets him to say he wants to "play bad." Though he hasn't the slightest idea as to what this might mean, he has, through speech,
acknowledged responsibility for the coming act. After extracting his complicity, she subjects him to a lesson in reproduction:

-Knish?

"Between de legs. Who puts id in is de poppa. De poppa's god de petzel. Yaw de poppa." She giggled stealthily and took his hand. He could feel her guiding it under her dress, then through a pocket-like flap. Her skin under his palm. Revolted, he drew back.

(53)

A number of problems might be seen to reverberate through David as he finds himself engaged in this first moment of genital exposure outside his own home. If he is the "poppa," then he must be like his father, whom he knows as a savage, threatening force, isolate and threatening in his isolation both within and outside the home. And Annie must be like his mother, though this, too, is a similarity raked with difference. The differences are striking, of course, and exist prominently in both body and speech. I have more to say about spoken language, but for the moment let me suggest that, where Genya's dialog with David is generally suffused with questions and responses that tend to broaden his investigations of the world, this exchange with Annie becomes frighteningly specific. Like the Luter's "narrowed" eyes, Annie's stealthy discourse on the mechanics of sex reduces personage to body, and body to parts. His hand becomes "it," her flesh, "a pocket-like flap." The Annie who is like his mother has in common with her a body which, like the "separate molds" of Genya's buttocks, can be disclosed piece by piece. The introduction of David's body into the "play" extends the logic of the Luter passage. If, as I have argued, the fragmentation of his mother's body implies the fragmentation of his own, we see that operation in full force here. "'I'll hol' yuh petzel.' She reached down. / 'No!' His flesh was crawling" (54). Annie, in reaching for his penis, singles him out as
identifiably separate in a body that has betrayed him by becoming pieced and alien. Worse, he is complicit in his own alienation. It is crucial that he comes to this complicity not through any prior understanding of terms, but because the terms themselves—the terms of Luter's gaze and Annie's terms for "playing bad"—reconstruct and absorb him.

How David is pushed by these ruptures away from his mother and out into the world of his contemporaries cannot be reduced to terms of gender differentiation from the mother as a necessary coming of age. A discussion that focuses on the violence of the father and the sexualizing of the mother neglects the complicated interactivity of action and constraint that informs the presences of both parents. In Genya's case, the narrative suggestion that Luter's unusual daylight return to the apartment without either Albert or David present might indeed have been a visit not unwelcomed by her unveils the possibility of agency in her own desires. David's witness of Luter's entrance into the building, his subsequent flight first into the darkness of the cellar then into the puzzling geometry of unknown streets, clearly registers his terror of her vaguely known sexuality and its other-directedness. But that acknowledgment alone runs the risk of essentializing psychoanalytic discourse as the key to reading this book. Though such discourse is usefully applied, by itself it separates the principle figures of the family unit from the diverse forces that play upon them, and in this it resembles the objectification of the mother and son described above. To suggest sexuality is at the core is to subject the narration to a similar stripping away of complex context. But neither is sexuality an aside. It is, rather, part of central linkages among discourses of gender, class, and ethnicity.

At issue is David's struggle to obtain the power of agency. A traditional psychoanalytic reading might echo a Marxist one in terms of locating power in the hands of a sovereign figure—the father, or the state—from whom or from
which power must be wrested in order to secure the agency of the subservient. In the former case, we might argue that David must finally overcome the violence and power of his father in order to know himself, securing a sense of certainty as to his own manhood. This would allow him, perhaps, to "marry" his mother, that is, put to rest his sexual quandaries because he knows who he is in relation to her. He then might proceed to a revolutionary manhood that, in the latter case, challenges dominant state power in terms of class struggle. I have sketched, of course, rather frivolous caricatures of what would be complex arguments. I use them only to suggest that power, in this book, is not absolute and does not occur as the holding of any one group or individual. The power of the state, by no means absent, is also invisible, ubiquitous, part of the texture of relations. And the father is not so much a repository of power in the family as he is an entity through which diverse forces we call power rage, violent and irresolute. In Foucault's formulation, "[p]ower is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."\textsuperscript{25} Following Bruce Robbins's reasoning, the institutions under examination here—the Jewish family, parenthood, the immigrant American street and the world of power operations within and beyond it—are contingent rather than inexorable. Under Foucault's definition, David's pursuit of agency, which I have also called power, is a pursuit of a foothold in a strategical situation striated with gender, class, and ethnic, or religious, discourses that intersect at the site of his body.

The various languages active in the text reflect to some extent the complications of this intersection.\textsuperscript{26} The mother speaks primarily in a Yiddish that comes to us in a particularly beautiful and poetic English, in sharp contrast to the first generation street English David must use among his peers. Her conversations with David are often probing. She is the transmitter of stories that
provide the most intimate link he has with his cultural heritage. When he wants
to know why his great-grandmother died, she responds with a story of a walk
she once took with that grandmother:

And so we walked and the leaves were blowing.
Shew-w-w! How they lifted, and one blew against her coat, and
while the wind held it there, you know, like a finger, she lifted it off
and crumbled it. And then she said suddenly, come let us turn
back. And just as we were about to go in she sighed so that she
shivered--deep--the way one sighs just before sleep--and she
dropped the bits of leaves she was holding and she said, it is
wrong being the way I am. Even a leaf grows dull and old together!
Together! (67)

The entire passage from which this quote is taken is a meditation in response to
David's anxious childlike queries as to the quality and meaning of death. Genya
answers by recreating a person of substance whose story about death is
simultaneously veiled and disclosed in metaphor. The metaphor resists the
literal answer David wants: "'You--you haven't told me anything!' he protested"
(68). The meaning eludes specification in a text fraught with tension over
knowledge David can, and can't, acquire. What he absorbs from the images of
Genya's story, and what her gestures, "the last supple huskiness of her voice"
convey, is the "dreamlike fugitive sadness" of persons who are at odds with the
belief systems that have, to some extent, created them (68). Neither Genya nor
her grandmother, though pious in form, adhere in belief to the Judaic version of
heaven that would redeem the dead.

They say there is a heaven and in heaven they waken. But I myself
do not believe it. May God forgive me for telling you this. But it's all
I know. I know only that they are buried in the dark earth and their names last a few more lifetimes on their gravestones. (69)

The grandmother's lament that she cannot, like a leaf, grow old coherently--capable, one might suppose, of meeting death whole in body and spirit--is echoed by the perils of David's life. Further, David, deeply afraid of the literal dark places in his environs as manifested in the cellar, is here initiated into his mother's doubt. As long as that doubt exists within the richness of his mother's articulation, he might feel himself to be relatively safe.

But the intercessions between David and Genya proceed through the text, multiplying out from the first moment of sexualization. Genya's story of her past in Austria is a complicated mix of family, sexual, and religious transgression. We hear it through David's ears as told by Genya to Aunt Bertha, in patches revealed and veiled in alternating Yiddish and Polish--"that alien, aggravating tongue that David could never fathom" (195). He knows there was a goy, that Genya was attached to him, that love before marriage had something to do with it, that she was in some way disappointed, and that this trouble in her life has gravely to do with his own origins. And it does, but not simply over the question of whether David was fathered by a goy, although this is a prominent form his anxiety takes as it plays across the surface of the text.

The problem of David's knowledge of self is refracted through the veiled sexual and religious discourses of the adult world. Genya's story provides an intersection of those discourses, but it is a story that is incomplete and, like other things of importance in *Call It Sleep*, only partially knowable.

It seemed to him, lying there almost paralyzed with the strain, that his mind would fly apart if he brought no order into this confusion. Each phrase he heard, each exclamation, each word only made the tension within him worse. Not knowing became
almost unbearable. . . . Who was Ludwig? Was that he, the goy! Why was he at funerals? . . . But still the phrases flickered on . . . the abrupt and fragmentary glimpses of a figure passing behind the brief notches of parapets. (197-198)

What he has garnered from Genya, and what he lives out in his relation to Reb Yidel and the cheder, is an absorption in the tension between cultural/religious certainty and a self-annihilating impermanence. To the coarse and routinely abusive rabbi, David is his "iron wit" (366), the shining star among his pupils whose presence in the cheder reflects so well upon his teaching. The beauty with which he reads Hebrew becomes yet another way that he is set apart in his social arrangements. Inept at the varieties of verbal and physical play of his secularly oriented peers, he finds, for a time, a precarious footing in received spiritual knowledge.

Spring had come and with the milder weather, a sense of wary contentment, a curious pause in himself as though he were waiting for some sign, some seal that would forever relieve him of watchfulness and forever insure his well-being. Sometimes he thought he had already beheld the sign—he went to cheder; he often went to the synagogue on Saturdays; he could utter God's syllables glibly. But he wasn't quite sure. Perhaps the sign would be revealed when he finally learned to translate Hebrew. (221)

The irony here occurs in his inability to extract conventional meaning from a language that gives him solace. He doesn't know what he reads, a circumstance echoing what he doesn't know of that other solace, Genya, once he begins to read her in sexually charged terms. The meaning of the language comes to him piecemeal, by chance, as does the story of the goy in Genya's
past. What he does with the fragments that are cast his way forms the culminating crisis of the text.

The religious fragment is a piece of Isaiah's revelation, as dramatically rendered by Reb Yidel in a rare moment of textual explication. Amidst the sinfulness of the Jews, Isaiah in all his uncleanness is met with the "terrible light" of God and is cleansed by a fiery coal an angel brings to his lips. The explication is disrupted by a "blast of voices"—David's cheder-mates piling into the room in cacophonous disorder—but not before David has had a chance to glean bits of information.

---Clean? Light? Wonder if---? Wish I could ask him why the Jews were dirty. What did they do? Better not! Get mad. Where? (Furtively, while the rabbi still spoke David leaned over and stole a glance at the number of the page.) On sixty-eight. After, maybe, can ask. On page sixty-eight. That blue book—Geel it's God. (227)

His pursuit of knowledge remains veiled in secret glances. He may receive the translation but he jeopardizes himself if he actively attempts clarification from his instructor. His approach to the book itself parallels a fundamentalist approach to holy texts, wherein the word is literally the word of God, and God is contained—embodied—in the text. Such belief comes from a fixed reliance on a set of religious practices.

The difference here is that David's apprehension of the literal in religious meaning is linked to the instability of his world. In that world the metaphoric and the literal are often conflated so that the closet, the cellar, the early rendering of the sink and stove—all are alive with forces that render them, and their relation to him, mysteriously empowered and threatening. Metaphor invests language with the power to disclose knowledge and to veil it, as we have seen in the grandmother's story. How David is named by Genya, Albert, and the rabbi is
itself unstable; he is variously "my child," "beloved," "wild beast," "dunce," "false son," "iron wit." To himself, he is often a disappearing subject. His pursuit of the literal is an effort, I believe, to re-route a language that both specifies him and fails to disclose him to himself. The biblical words come to him as pieces governed by a logic that, could he only understand it, would settle him literally and authoritatively in a known relation to a God who has the power to cleanse. That he knows himself to be a Jew, and that Jews here are dirty, seems to validate both the anti-Semitism he experiences in the street, and his sense of himself as complicit in the illicit sexualizing of himself and his mother.

He is, in other words, interpreting what he hears by way of his own fragmented assessment of intersecting sexual and religious dilemmas. The God David pursues is elusive, and is so in direct relation to the elusiveness of self. It is important to note here the grammar that attends the narrative's replication of David's most intimate and immediate thoughts. The sentences are abrupt, ragged, and pour out as thoughts predominantly without subject. Mostly, there is no "I," as if David were merely a rough grouping of responses incapable of forming a complete thought that would include, even assert, a subject self able to meet the power of the controlling discourses with an empowered discourse of his own.

In the final crisis David does assert a spontaneous resistance, though he is driven to it by a sequence of calamitous and incompletely understood events. I note in succession the father's violent assault on the thieving men in David's presence, the nakedness of his bathing mother bluntly described by the boys who espied her from the rooftop, David's eventual return to an apartment suffused with his parents' post-coital languidness, and his disastrous friendship with the Gentile boy, Leo. In each case there is an intensification of the plaguing isolation that has followed him throughout.
In the first, Albert blames David for the theft of a milk bottle, a theft he was too small a boy to prevent. After nearly, if not actually, killing the perpetrator, he threatens David with death should he dare to report the event to his mother. "You!" He said at last, and his words were so harsh and guttural, they barely took form. 'False son! You, the cause!'' (282) In an utterance that is all but atomized under the power of its own violence, Albert reveals his own uncertainties about all of the things that most matter to him and at the same time pinpoints David as responsible for everything, including the theft and the singular rage that controls him, while stripping him of the fragile hope of Genya's protective presence.

In the second, Genya's body is not present, as it was when David first glimpsed her sexuality through the eyes of Luter. Instead, she is re-created by a group of young boys whose language intensifies her specification and David's overwhelming shame. "Big bush under duh belly!" they say. "Fat ass, we seen! . . . An' duh hull knish! All de hairs!" (294)

--Aaa! Mama! Mine it was! Should have kicked 'em, kicked 'em and run. Go back! Kick 'em! Kick 'em in the belly. G'wan, you coward! . . . Hate 'em. And she--Why did she let them look. Shades, why didn't she pull them? Ain't none! Ain't none! And she let me look at her! Mad at her! Ow! Don't let 'em see me crying! Cry baby! Cry baby! (295)

David can neither protect his mother nor avoid seeing her as she is created by their words. Further, in his helplessness, it is she who is complicit, she who fails to hide herself from a surveillance she is not aware of; and, in another moment in the text now entirely re-figured in these terms, it is she who invites him to look at her stripped of her motherliness.
In the third, David returns to the apartment from the roof, after having fled this harrowing representation of his mother. On the roof he has, for a moment, escaped the wheeling darkness of a frighteningly populated sexuality, escaped the cellar and its resonances to reside alone under the "immense heavens of July... the shining fathom upon fathom" where the hope of some brightly vague salvation is offered, though not without blemishes: "Too pure the zenith was, too pure for the flawed and flinching eye; the eye sowed it with linty darkness" (296). How the "eye" makes use of what it sees, for better or for worse, engenders a sense that the viewer himself has a hand in the making, and unmaking, of meaning. In the apartment David finds Genya in "an obscure lassitude, a profound and incomprehensible contentment." She moves with a "peculiar, self-conscious grace as though her whole body found a relish in the very movement of her limbs, and relishing, lingered (297)." His father sleeps behind the closed bedroom door, and on the washtub are two purchases: a new whip to replace the one broken during the milkwagon beating and a set of enormous bull horns meant for hanging in the front room. The glimmerings of memory that suffuse him link the horns with his father's violence on the street, and with his mother's contentment, in a mystery he cannot yet solve. In one sense, the boy has been cuckolded by the father whose body is comparable to the "walls of flesh and strength" of the bull who once carried those horns (298). In another, the presence of the horns balances Genya's earlier purchase of a painting of corn and blue flowers, a scene reminiscent of her passion for, and abandonment by, her Old World lover. If the horns are a sign of Albert's renewed potency, they are also a clue to the as yet unrevealed darkness of Albert's past, in which he allowed his own father to be gored to death by a bull. Both objects represent stories that implicate David--the threat hanging between father and son, the question of who his real father, in fact, is, the other-
directedness of Genya's desire—at the same time that they elude his grasp. In the slow and partial revelation of his parents' pasts, he senses, as he first sensed when he could not reach the bright faucet for water, that "this world had been created without thought of him," although the idea now comes as a challenge to his ability to assert his own story, rather than seek his mother's aid(17).

The friendship with Leo replays the problem of Genya's religious and sexual transgression with Ludwig the goy, but entirely in terms of David's quest. The David who latches onto Leo in an attempt to diffuse his own aloneness, carries as part of himself the circulating fragments of other stories—Genya's, Albert's, Isaiah's. He desires Leo in ways similar to his desire for the knowledge of God; he wants a relation that will invest him with agency. It seems he can be agent only within the embrace of others who appear to be safely positioned in the world, a circumstance no longer applicable to his father and mother. It is his reach for this embrace combined with his incomplete knowledge of the discourses that govern his particular society that ensnare him in catastrophic transgression.

The sexual and the religious here are intertwined in a desire for embodiment. In Leo's apartment David sees a picture of Christ on the wall, at first as "A man, for sure now. Has to be. Only his guts are stickin' out. Burning" (321). The startling image of a disemboweled man begins to reform itself under David's gaze and Leo's explanation: "... instead of holding his bowels in his hand, he was pointing at his breast in which the red heart was exposed and luminous" (322). David learns to his distress that Jews killed Christ, and once again is engaged in a complicity that he does not understand. Almost desperate to solve that problem, David's desire magnifies as the Christ transforms from an incoherent body to coherent flesh and a luminous, centered heart. "Christchin
light," Leo informs him, is "bigger den Jew light" (322). If that is so, David wants it, and takes it in the form of the rosary, an emblem of a fleshed out God that feeds David's need to have in his hands a sense of power, rather than be, himself, handled and buffeted about by relations of power he cannot discern. In taking the rosary he commits a serious transgression of religious domain, further complicated because the rosary comes in exchange for his creating the situation whereby the Gentile Leo can sexually transgress with his Jewish cousin Esther, in the horror of which exchange, itself an intensification of the earlier rupturing scenes with Annie and Luter, we observe the ultimate fracturing of David's ability to make sense of his own place in human relationships.

Where, then, in a text rife with multiple and terrifying eruptions, are the points of individual resistance? I would suggest that the spontaneous lie David tells Reb Yidel, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the lack of premeditation, is just such a point. David's story of his origins contains fragments of all he has heard, but fragments that are intentionally re-routed into a tale he knows, or mostly knows, is not the literal truth. His mother is dead, he says. His father is a goy organist somewhere in Europe, and the people he lives with are an aunt and uncle. The question may well remain for him as to whether Albert or the organist is really his father, but, in the biological sense, he is certain who his mother is. The truth of the lie exists in the progressive alienation he has undergone in relation to his mother, and in the fact that--fractured by the discursive relations between gender, class, and religion--he feels himself to be unknown, of mysterious, mixed, impossible-to-define provenance, at once a bastard and an orphan. As a point of resistance, he has here turned on the discourses that control him, and shaped a story that tears across the secrecy
enveloping his mother and father and, in some sense, brings the house down around them both.

It is this story, combined with the revelation about Leo and Esther and the discovery of the rosary on David's person, that assures Albert that David, indeed, is not his own son and that Genya has betrayed him. Were this the primary revelation of the trouble in this family, we could, perhaps, stop here. But the lie is, after all, a lie. Albert's trouble, and David's, has not to do with biological continuity but with the complicated patterns of secrecy and disclosure that occur among them, and with the multiple forces that shape and control their identities. Driven out of the house in fear of his life, David blindly surges forward in a quest for transformative power that has variously taken the form of the coal on Isaiah's lips, the terrible light in the word of God, and the body of the bleeding Christ.

The scene at the rail parallels the book's opening, for the event takes place amidst a diverse crowd that can be thought of as representing the multiple voices of American immigrants now settled in the New World. Significantly different is the actual presence of their voices. If we first see them in the terms of a surveillance that specified them, and the Schearls among them, as to the type of person they were, we now, in fact, barely see them at all. The restrictive gaze, so problematic throughout, has been shifted in favor of sound. The viewer—the reader—becomes the listener who must close distance and become one among the many present. It is a move in the narrative brought on by the resistance David has made and by the momentary collapse of the structuring discourses around him.

It is also an assimilative move, linking a chorus of "American" voices in the observance of David's effort to, in Robbin's terms, "carry the quest for power over the heads of his parents and out into the world."27 But is assimilation
necessarily a one-way rendering of the foreign subject into an Americanist Christian paradigm? Or might the text offer, instead, a subversive reading of the gaps and fissures in the web of Christian symbology and its practice, disrupting, in a Bakhtinian move, the monologism of Christian symbols with dialogical difference? Throughout, David has been surrounded by the increasingly resonant drama of interactivity and rupture between Judaic and Christian traditions, both suffused with the intimate unfolding of familial, economic, and sexual discourses. Telegraph poles become crosses, a bleeding man the body of Christ. But in the swirl of unstable meanings at play in the textual landscape of David's perceiving mind, these transformations do not lodge in stasis.

The cacophony of voices in the street offers a mosaic of sexual and religious punning, of workers' complaining, of streetcars clanging wildly, of men drinking and talking raucously about the conquest of "a sweet pair o' knockers," of a drunken Mary detailing her abortion, and of a "kindly faced American woman" speaking of the Statue of Liberty: "you can go all the way up inside her for about twenty-five cents" (414-15). And it is in this context that David, by taking the metal dipper to the electric trolley rail, manages to combine an array of motifs in the pursuit of "unmitigated light." Thrust into the crack of the rails, the milk dipper, the tool of his father's milkman trade, crosses the symbolic sexual with the industrial, in what Robbins has called a "symbol of private potency but also of the public powerlessness of a former cow-herder in industrial New York."28 His electrocution on the rail evokes Christ's martyrdom within the context of raveling and polyphonic meanings that disrupt the givens of Christian totality. Not surprisingly, the clarifying light he seeks is no longer framed in metaphors of God:

"Dere's a star fer yeh! Watch it! T'ree Kings I god. Dey came on huzzbeck! Yee! Heel! Heel! Mary! Nawthin' to do but wait fer day
light and go home. To a red cock crowin'. Over a statue of A
jerkin'. Cod. Clang! Clang! Oy! Machine! Liberty! Revolt! Redeem!"

\textit{Power}

\textit{Power! Power like a paw, titanic power,}
\textit{ripped through the earth and slammed}
\textit{against his body and shackled him}
\textit{where he stood. Power! Incredible,}
\textit{barbaric power! A blast, a siren of light}
\textit{within him, rending, quaking, fusing his}
\textit{brain and blood to a fountain of flame,}
\textit{vast rockets in a searing spray! Power! (418-419)}

The problem of what power is, and the related problems of what constitutes
resistance to it, and/or acceptance of the forms it takes, are layered through this
passage. The multiple voices we hear are those of Gentiles, Jews, radicals, and
evangelists. Technological power, economic power, religious power, the power
of the state are evoked, along with the possibilities of redemption and of
revolution. But none of them asserts a final claim on David. They pour out in the
text with equal force and equal impotence, except for the de-personalized
 technological power of the electric rail which, stripped of all religious and sexual
discourse, finally takes his body. The move is toward self-annihilation, and it
occurs in a narrative tense with the dialectic between self-specificity and lack of
self. David's various attempts to recognize and identify himself have often been
dangerous, subjecting him to threatening surveillance of his body by himself as
well as others. If he has previously sought a power that would cleanse and
redeem him as agent within his society, the power he touches now is capable of
both atomizing and completely absorbing him: "\textit{his brain swelled/and dilated till}
it dwarfed the galaxies" (419). He becomes, for a moment, an all-seeing self who is also no self at all, as his boundaries dissolve.

His survival and subsequent reception back into the household do less to resolve the question of agency--of who the self is in relation to power--than to suggest a method of operation. His disruption of the terms of his parents' secrecy over the telling of the past--the intricacies of both Jewish tradition and their own troubled rebellions against family--causes a shift that manifests in their willingness to accede to dialogue with each other and mutual aid in regards to David. If they are subdued and diminished by David's act, they are also redeemed by their son's perilous foray into the world, and by his fracturing of fixed "verities," both of the Old World and the New, that frame their presence in America. This redemption challenges conventional notions about Christian ownership of the concept. For the assimilative move toward American tropes is arguably less an assent than a subversion of their supposed inviolability. The America of Call It Sleep's final pages itself undergoes assimilation toward the repossession of meaning by its diverse, ethnic subjects. And the self, variously constructed in terms of the discourses that play upon it, establishes agency in terms of its ability--or at least of David's ability--to move fluidly between resistance and assent.

He might as well call it sleep. It was only toward sleep that every wink of the eyelids could strike a spark into the cloudy tinder of the dark, kindle out of shadowy corners of the bedroom such myriad and such vivid jets of images . . . It was only toward sleep one knew himself still lying on the cobbles, felt the cobbles under him, and over him and scudding ever toward him like a black foam, the perpetual blur of shod and running feet, the broken shoes, new shoes, stubby, pointed, caked, polished, buniony,
pavement-beveled, lumpish, under skirts, under trousers, shoes, over one and through one, and feel them all and feel, not pain, not terror, but strangest triumph, strangest acquiescence. (441)

That he names sleep, rather than just goes to it, is an assumptive act even though it is inflected by resignation, and it repositions him in relation to his prior fear of darkness and oblivion. His slumbering vision of the teeming world allows both the specific rendering of his world's inhabitants and the acknowledgment of their blurring impermanence. The shoes he envisions move over him and through him, simultaneously respecting and dissolving the boundaries of his body. That he may have accomplished an understanding of himself as both separate from and faded into "the roar of crowds and all sounds that lay fermenting in the vats of silence and the past" (441), constitutes the sober redemption at the narrative's end. The egalitarianism suggested here by the leveling of self with others implies the possibility of an adulthood capable of diverse, multiple moments of resistance that need not be thought of as empty simply because they cannot be thought of as final.

Roth once had in mind the writing of a novel about a Jew who escaped the Spanish inquisition by smuggling himself aboard a boat of conquistadors on their way to take Mexico. "The notion of the crypto-Jew caught, as it were, at the center of a struggle between zealous Catholicism and equally zealous Aztec paganism fascinated me." He didn't write the novel, stymied by the amount of research and commitment the project would require, but acknowledged his desire to do it as an instinctive "groping toward a return to Judaism."29 The sense of entrapment between warring, if complementary, world views reiterates, in the grander scale of hemispheres, the dilemma of ethnic loyalty and assimilation, imagined here in its historically international dimensions. Roth
seemed ultimately to resolve that dilemma by interpreting his early work as a studied eclipse of Jewish identity. But in the first novel he wrote, as in the one he might have written, the contest between self-knowledge and the wrenching adaptations provoked by dominant cultures grounds the ways in which the self, fluidly inventing its own means of survival, also engages and remakes—through multiple incursions—the mutable culture to which it is subject.
1Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep* (New York: Noonday--Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991) 255-256. Further references will be documented parenthetically in the text.


10Ibid., 22-23, 47.

11Lyons, 173.


18Robbins, 241.
21 Ibid., 89.
22 Robbins, 239-240.
23 Ferraro, 89.
24 Foucault, 96.
25 Ibid., 93.

26 For thorough discussions of the way languages interact in *Call It Sleep*, see Hana Wirth-Nesher, and Naomi Diamant, "Linguistic Universes in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep,"* *Contemporary Literature* 27.3 (1986): 336-355.
27 Robbins, 245.
28 Ibid., 245.
29 Roth, *Shifting Landscape*, 172-173.
Chapter Four

Border Songs: Caballero, George Washington Gómez, and Rewriting the Past

If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of post-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past but, for all our sakes, to a modern future in which community may be imagined again.

--Raymond Williams, The Politics of Modernism

Young Texas-Mexicans are being trained in American ways. Behind them lies a store of traditions of another race, customs of past ages, an innate inherited love and reverence for another country. Ahead of them lies a struggle for equality and justice before the law, for their full rights as American citizens. . . . They are the converging element of two antagonistic civilizations; they have the blood of one and have acquired the ideals of the other. They, let it be hoped, will bring to an end the racial feuds that have existed along the border for nearly a century.

--Jovita González, America Invades the Border Towns

They still sing of him--in the cantinas and the country stores, in the ranches when men gather at night to talk in the cool dark, sitting in a circle, smoking and listening to the old songs and the tales of other days. Then the guitarreros sing of the border raids and the skirmishes, of the men who lived by the phrase, "I will break before I bend."

--Américo Paredes, With His Pistol in His Hand

The historical distance between Ellis Island and Brownsville, Texas, would seem vast, its geography marked by the forceful story of U.S. westward and
southward expansion. Within that story, New York becomes a primary point of entry, wherein willing immigrants shed both allegiances to and tribulations of other nations in favor of the difficult, but rewarding assumption of liberties under citizenship. The Southwest in turn becomes parcel to the endpoint of that entry, a last frontier of continental possession that underlines the permanence of U.S. occupancy through the establishment of fixed borders. Differences between entry and endpoint are amplified by other oppositions: metropolitan vs. rural and small town life; diverse European immigrant cultures vs. indigenous and landed Mexican cultures; and, most particularly, the circumstances of arrival in a "new" country vs. the circumstances of being already there when the "new" country arrives.

And yet, these oppositions carry overarching tensions of culture and national politics so structured as to suggest the value of rethinking the tenets of that story. The New York of *Bread Givers* and *Call It Sleep* cannot be so easily schematized as a starting place; it is rather—and markedly so—an urgently contested border area resonant with cultural interpenetration and conflict, an area within which Sara Smolinsky and David Schearlı diversely negotiate survival as a complex adaptation of terms wrested from the intricacies of ongoing ruptures and realignments that persistently destabilize the separateness of meaning in the "oldness" of the Old-World and the "newness" of the New. In the no longer self-evident terms of Americanization, neither meaning does without the other; there are no clean breaks through which the immigrant passes to inhabit freely an America unmarked by the multicultural turbulence both of its origins and its ongoingness.

The protagonists of *Caballero* and *George Washington Gómez* are, in ways similar to Sara and David, faced with difficult and mobile realignments of "old" and "new" cultures surfacing within the process of Americanization. That
the Southwest is not simply a border area limning the westward expansion of Anglo-America history, but a cultural territory "already there," harboring a turbulent wealth of indigenous Native American, Spanish conquest, Mexican and American shared histories, is a truism integral to the ways we continue to change our readings of the past. Jovita González and Américo Paredes, two intellectuals deeply absorbed in expressions of cultural conflict in an area rife with traces of indigenismo, mestizaje, and the Hispanic/Anglo manifestations of European culture, tackle in their writing the contradictory qualities of Americanization along the Texas-Mexican border from the 1846 Mexican-American War through the 1930s. Considering the historically revisionary work of Caballero and George Washington Gómez in combination with the work of the other writers dealt with here allows an exploration of what parallels might be revealed about the texture and nature of the self conceived by dominant discourse as "other" among cultures marked by conflicting religious and secular traditions and by histories of variously derived persecutions that intersect within the concept of Americanization. The parallels are uneven; but the descendant of enslaved Africans, the immigrant Jew who arrives from elsewhere, and the colonized Mexican who contends with the permanent presence of Anglo colonizers provide variant ways of looking at traditional conceptions of New World nation-building and cultural formation. All translate themselves on alienated territory—their language hybridized by prominently coercive discourses, for instance, of religious and economic difference, and the ebb and flow of Anglo-racial nationalism. The self reveals to itself by those discourses as "other" and alien arguably engenders open-ended, hybrid responses to temporally and spatially local manifestations of national power relations. The diversity of response as represented in this literature exemplifies how hard-fought the battle over capacious, as opposed to constrictive, individual and
national identity is. If early Anglo mythology has long been dependent on notions of recurrent frontiers harboring "a nation of immigrants" within a consensual state of monologic Anglo hegemony, the shifting continental borders of the U.S. along with the immensity of its ongoing demographic changes have always offered a very different model. Hybridized (Spanish/Indian) Mexican culture is a fundamental trope of post-conquest Mexico; like the polyglot nature of the urban northeast, it is also a fundamental to the dialectical formation of "America" in the Southwest.

Jovita González and Américo Paredes can be imagined, José Limón has pointed out, writing their novels around the same time and within two hundred miles of each other in the respective coastal cities of Corpus Christi and Brownsville. Rather, one must imagine González at work with her collaborator Margaret Eimer (pen name Eve Raleigh), an Anglo woman about whom, at present, very little is known. According to Limón's research, Eimer was born in 1903 in Missouri and died in St. Louis in 1978, a ward of the state with no known relatives, having apparently spent a significant amount of time in Texas. In a 1970s interview with Marta Cotera, a largely silent Jovita González and her more voluble husband E. E. Mireles allowed it to be known that a novel tentatively entitled Caballero had been written and subsequently destroyed, that Margaret Eimer had given her name to the project in order to diffuse racial and political themes that might have proved highly controversial in the segregated climate of South Texas in the 1940s, and that Eimer's major contribution had been to type the manuscript. Limón contends, however, that letters of Eimer's recovered from the Mireles collection indicate a much more extensive involvement in the book's content. For the time being I leave those considerations to further research, and follow Limón's lead in looking at
*Caballero* as a novel based in part on González’s understanding of her own ancestry and her research into Mexican-American culture along the border.⁵

Considerable contrasts exist between *Caballero* and *George Washington Gómez* that might seem to extend to the respective careers of González and Paredes. They were born eleven years apart, she in 1904 and he in 1915, she to a landed, upper-class Mexican family in Roma, Texas and he to a Brownsville family that had suffered significant losses to Anglos during the nineteenth-century land seizures. Both studied at the University of Texas, González in the 1920s and Paredes—after a varied career which included work as a Brownsville newspaper writer, novelist, singer of border music, and Pacific World War II army correspondent—in the 1950s. Both were pioneer Tejano intellectuals among largely Anglo colleagues; González, who in the early thirties served as president of the Texas Folklore Society, was one of very few women practicing in her profession. Differences in their approaches to the field of Mexican-American folklore bear the marks of disparate gender and class provenance, as well as of the varied climates characterizing the twenties and the fifties at the University of Texas.

Limón's comparative work on the two, his role along with María Cotera in the recovery of *Caballero* from the E.E. Mireles and Jovita González de Mireles Papers at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, and his expertise—as a native of South Texas, a former student of Paredes and professor of English and Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin—regarding the cultural and institutional histories from which both these intellectuals sprang, make him an important source for initial discussion of each novel's auctorial context. His chapters concerning them in *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics of Mexican-American South Texas* portray them as his primary precursors, along with John Gregory Bourke and J. Frank Dobie, in the linked
fields of Tejano literature, anthropology and folklore. If his take, particularly concerning Paredes, contains something of the heir's unmasking of a powerful progenitor's limits, it is also a compelling analysis of the ways in which an aspect of the origins of twentieth-century Chicano studies evolved in relation to conventional Anglo discourse about conditions along the border.

Briefly stated, Limón's characterization of González shows a young, aristocratic woman deeply under the influence of her mentor and friend, J. Frank Dobie, whose "pastorally overwrought ethnographic sense of the Mexicans" contained a, perhaps, condescending solicitude and nostalgia for a more romantic West in which Anglo cowboys, Mexican vaqueros and rancheros told stories about themselves and each other with unending delight. Dobie's work brought to the fore a romanticized, yet praiseworthy sense of Mexican and Mexican-American cultural life that combatted to some extent more invidious characterizations, but the essential contradiction embedded in his own culture's Anglo-fueled class decimation of the rural Mexican border culture he loved so well dogged him, and was passed onto the like, yet differing circumstances of his protégé. González's work on the recovery of Tejano lower class border culture, Limón argues, contains the contradictory tensions and repressions of a race-conscious Tejana aristocrat peculiarly situated to identify with and simultaneously distance herself from the conflicting class and racial categorizations applied both to her Tejano subjects and to her largely Anglo auditors. That she mostly avoids engaging in arguments about the political status of Mexican-Americans with her mentor and others at the university seems to have been a matter of some delicacy. In a 1981 interview with James McNutt, she recalls the period:

[Future teachers] couldn't afford to get involved in a controversy between Mexico and the University of Texas . . . but if the history of
Texas were written the way it actually was...things that happened on both sides were very bitter. So we just didn't mention them. You just forgot about it.\textsuperscript{8}

If that bitterness was forgotten or, Limón argues, "repressed" by González in the enthusiastic reception of the folklore she collected from a perceptibly benign and pastoral, masculine culture, it resurfaces in a historical novel written after her public career as a folklorist was largely over, a novel that in rather abrupt, yet complicated ways privileges the advantages assimilation might hold for gender discourse over contentious class and racial disputes.\textsuperscript{9}

While González disappeared from broad public view, Paredes emerged with the 1958 publication of \textit{With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero} as a champion of untold stories of resistance by Mexican-Americans to that same bitter history. In recovering and comprehensively analyzing the male heroic tradition of the border \textit{corrido} that flourished from the mid-nineteenth century through the early decades of the twentieth, Paredes forcefully countered a tradition headed by Walter Prescott Webb and his histories of Texas and the Texas Rangers, histories that in no uncertain terms degraded Mexican-American character as cowardly, corrupt, and no match for Anglo superiority. It is a watershed book, and Paredes's subsequent career as professor and mentor of numerous scholars who participated in the Chicano \textit{Movimiento} of the sixties, and who form much of the current élite of Chicano studies scholarship, mark him as the "proto-Chicano" he once lightly referred to himself as—or, in the view of others, a hero worthy of his own \textit{corrido}, Tish Hinojosa's \textit{"Con Su Pluma en Su Mano"} ("With His Pen in His Hand").\textsuperscript{10}

Limón observes in the undercurrents of Paredes's scholarship the extent to which his unearthing of a culture of heroic resistance is dependent on a patriarchally defined system, the meaning of which is located largely in pre-
twentieth century rural Texas before the idea of manly, armed resistance was subsumed under the domination of Texas by agro-business and attendant, atomized labor relations within an advancing capitalist political economy. Limón suggests that Paredes's subsequent studies in border folklore privilege older, modernist views of authentic resistance that used an "existentialist trope to universalize and transcend the socially and culturally defeated mexicano" --a mexicano, moreover, whose ties to the land go back generations. In Limón's critique, this reading tends to overlook the adaptive and resistant expressions of post-fifties, urbanized Mexican-American culture seeded by constantly new immigration from Mexico, which carries with it new information about working class conditions, gender discourse, and competing versions of the nature of border hegemony. One reading of both With His Pistol in Hand and George Washington Gómez might lead us to regard Paredes's work as a lament for paths of resistance no longer possible in a post-modern world. Paredes's subsequent work in fifties-forward border genres of the joke, the ballad, and popular music, Limón alleges, carries a strain of thinking about Anglo-Mexican cultural conflict that suggests "the war is almost over and the hegemonic victory of the dominants is nearly complete."11

Yet the reading I propose for George Washington Gómez suggests just how much Paredes, in ways both comparable to and distinct from González, is interested in representing and analyzing the dangers immersed in the traditional structuring of masculine heroism, in Anglo as well as Mexican cultural terms. Less a lament for the past than a warning against its misuse, the novel challenges assumptions about the viability of an older masculinity adapted to new forms in the structuring of ongoing cultural resistance. These arguments in abbreviated form suggest the larger historical arena within which contemporary debates about cross-cultural relations are formulated, inherited,
modified, reversed, and/or recuperated. That González's work as a folklorist disappeared for a time while Paredes's skyrocketed may be in part a function of both personal and public predispositions toward one gender's production over the other's. It is also certainly a function of the imminent desire--abroad in the late fifties and early sixties--for practical and critical manifestations of resistance to long-dominant subordinating cultural and racial codes. González's "disappearance" into years of teaching high school Spanish in Texas sharply contrasts Paredes's emergence as an acute scholar of anti-hegemonic discourse at the state's primary site of institutional academic power. That each writer's concerns are shaped by the weave of conditions leading into the, at the time, unsung production of their novels might be argued from the circumstances of the period. Written roughly between 1936 and the early forties, both novels were produced during a time when "the culture of segregation," as David Montejano phrases it, was at its peak of public manifestation in the class and race structuring of South Texas.12 Caballero was penned after González, in her mid-thirties, had left the world of the University of Texas, George Washington Gómez when Paredes was in his early twenties, and well over a decade before he arrived to study in Austin. Caballero concerns the period between 1846 and 1848, ten years after Texas independence and during the war which resulted in the annexation by the United States of vast areas of formerly Mexican land stretching from Texas to California. George Washington Gómez begins in the year of Paredes's own birth, during the 1915 uprising surrounding the Plan of San Diego which marked the last moment of overt armed resistance by Mexican-Americans against Anglo domination of Texas. Between them, then, the novels comment on the transformation of Texas-Mexican life from its U.S. origins to its full absorption into the class and cultural relations of modernity.
The brief sketch Montejano uses to introduce that complex history is useful here:

If a straight line were teased from an entangled web of directions, Texas border history could be interpreted in terms of a succession of class societies, each with distinct ethnic relations: (a) a Spanish-Mexican *hacienda* society undermined by the Mexican War in the mid-nineteenth century; (b) an Anglo-Mexican ranch society undermined by an agricultural revolution at the turn of the century; (c) a segregated farm society undermined by world war and an urban-industrial revolution in the mid-twentieth century; and (d) a pluralistic urban-industrial society for the latter half of the twentieth century.¹³

The ethnic relations that attend the evolution of these class societies are in some ways analogous to the broadly national stratification of race and class through the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in regards to African-Americans, yet different also in the extent to which sliding perceptions of race, class, and national origins were applied to, and applied by, Mexicans, at least early on. In those parts of South Texas without a large Anglo presence, Montejano argues, the second phase of Anglo-Mexican ranch society was characterized by an accommodation of cultures in which an Anglo-mercantile elite frequently intermarried with the landed *hacienda* class, both of whom maintained a semi-feudal relation to working class *peones* and the "independent but impoverished" *rancheros* who lived on minimal landholdings.¹⁴ Mexicanization and Americanization, then, were equally managed in certain areas according to class interests, rather than according to the often devastating--for Mexicans--interplay of class and race. It is also important to acknowledge that in those areas where such a delicate balance--
what Montejano calls a "peace structure"—was not in effect, murder, forced removal from land, and coercive subjugation by the massed Anglo population became the norm.

With the coming of agro-business in the first decades of the twentieth century, the enclosure of ranch lands and their transformation into technologically advanced farming communities, and the flood of immigrant Anglo farmers, came the demand for migrant wage labor. By the twenties and thirties, paternalistic ranch societies that relied on relatively stable and traditionally contained modes of labor were no longer the single, dominant force. Farm societies developed where water made it possible, creating radically different relations between laborers and their access to land. Farm owners used coercive and racially coded management of labor to pit mostly Anglo free and mobile wage laborers against Texas Mexicans subject to Jim Crow policies that often featured extreme violence and restriction of movement. Only after World War II did overt segregation begin to collapse with the coming of urbanization and industrialism, a collapse, Montejano says, hastened by sixties and seventies political activism in which Paredes played so important a part.

Of Montejano's four phases, _Caballero_ takes up the periods of the first two and _George Washington Gómez_ the period of the third. Paredes's subsequent folkloric work serves in a sense to bridge an understanding of those past phases with the necessary work of the fourth period in which scholars, writers and native intellectuals like Limón, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ramón and José David Saldívar, Alfred Arteaga, and Norma Alarcón among many others pick up the resonances of Chicano/a identity in a post-modern, migratory, urban-industrial world. Going back to the novel where Jovita González and Eve Raleigh begin to address the complex origins of Mexican-American identity in
the context of the thirties opens space for considering the tensions of assent and resistance as they apply within and across historical periods.

*Caballero* concerns the dissolution of a wealthy *ranchero* family with ancestral claims to ranch land along the Rio Grande (the Rio Bravo) outside Matamoros in the crucial years between 1846 and 1848, just after the U.S. annexation of Texas which helped provoke the Mexican-American War. That land, situated within disputed territory stretching south from the Rio Nueces to the Rio Grande, provides the novel a detailed terrain within which to consider larger questions of cultural and political hegemony made manifest during the period. The 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the terms of which ceded to the U.S. New Mexico, California, and all land in Texas north of the Rio Grande, continues to resonate as a lightning rod for diverse versions of history that include aggressive U.S. expansionist policies and the Mexican government’s betrayal of its people. *Caballero*’s approach considers both in terms of the asserted value of adaptation. In many ways a conventional romance replete with characters whose signature passions are often triggered through highly stylized physical characterizations (the heroine’s "limpid green eyes," for instance, or the sweep of Doña Dolores’s broad skirts as she prepares an important entrance), the novel at the same time broaches the question of disfiguring prejudices; *Caballero* throws into high relief the crippling effects of long-held, reductive hatreds fueled by inflexible adherence to outmoded tradition. Most interesting and controversial is the novel’s preference for unmasking Mexican, over Anglo, bigotry.

Above all else, *Caballero* takes to task the effects of Spanish colonialism evidenced in the patriarchal stronghold of a border *hacienda*. It does so in what María Cotera calls "an early, and important, attempt to give a voice to the Chicana speaking subject." Foremost a challenge to the domain of masculine,
hidalgo privilege, the novel signals—through the various marriages to and associations with "liberal-minded" Anglos made primarily by its female characters—González and Raleigh’s interest in recovering and assessing the liberatory possibilities of assimilation for women against what might be too thinly termed as masculinist versions of heroic Mexican resistance. They make, in ways, an argument very similar to Yezierska’s in Bread Givers, where Sara Smolinsky’s life of poverty under a tyrannical father can only be disrupted through her pursuits in the Anglo world. What differently complicates this message in Caballero are questions regarding the authority granted the Chicana speaking subject here by virtue of marriage and class status, and how well the novel’s romantic vision operates in accord with the history of Anglo-Mexican relations in Texas.

The rituals of family and class position associated with landed Spanish aristocracy parade themselves in the opening chapter through the introduction, along with sharply defining characteristics, of the inhabitants of Rancho La Palma de Cristo. The Mendoza y Soría family appears one by one during El Alabado, the evening prayer, after a foreword in which ancestral rights to the land are are proposed through the originating figure of Don José Ramón de Mendoza y Robles, surveyor for the Spanish Crown, who in 1748 had a vision of ownership standing atop a bluff overlooking "the grass-matted, undulating prairies along the Río Nueces" to the north, and "to the south the brush covered land of the Río Grande." It is a conquest vision, resonant with the habits and practices of the original conquistadores whose empire-making owed allegiance both to state Catholicism and to the amassing of personal wealth, but with the complication of a utopian desire to escape what two hundred years of colonization in the evolving politics of New Spain had wrought. "Here," he thinks, "he could rear his family and keep the old ways and traditions, safely
away from the perfidious influence of Mexico City and the infiltration of foreign doctrines; not only for himself but for the generations to come. Mendoza y Robles's view of the land makes invisible any suggestion of indigenous culture, at the same time that his planned occupation of the northern territory removes him from metropolitan political machinations as well as the dangerous range of ideas between empire-building, rationalism, and revolution that characterize the Enlightenment. This brief glimpse of him structures what will come, a playing out of an "errand in the wilderness" comparable to the purist impulse of early Anglo religious settlement, both asserting a certainty of belief that in practice weighs against inclusion of "otherness," in whatever form it appears. The likeness cannot be lost in a novel that persistently probes the relative values of Mexican and Anglo culture. The significant difference is the Don's imagination of future generations as bulwarks against the disappearance of an old, established Catholic order rather than as individual communicants attempting a new order based in a mythic appropriation of an Old Testament Israel. The Anglos whom his heirs meet in this novel have traveled some distance from the mythic, but they practice an individualism that affords them great maneuverability within the shifting borders of Texas.

In 1846 the grandson of Mendoza y Robles, Don Santiago Mendoza y Soría, bats away rumors that Texas no longer belongs to Mexico and surveys his holdings. Besides land, these include the people of the ranchero gathering for prayer, all of them rigorously defined by position: his wife, Doña María Petronilla, gliding into the room like "a black ghost" of "self-effacing meekness" and "faded thinness;" his daughters--María de los Ángeles (Angela), whose desire to be a nun shrouds her dark-haired prettiness and Susanita, whose blond hair and eyes like "limpid green water" signal both a sweetness of disposition and her status as favored daughter; his widowed sister Doña
Dolores, whose "dignity slowly propel[s] the full skirt of stiffest silk as if her feet were on rollers;" his two sons--the swaggering and spurred Alvaro whose "lustful, possessive eyes" follow the servant women, and the slight and handsome Luis Gonzaga, who "paint[s] pictures like a woman . . . An artist--insult to a father's manhood! A milksop, and his son!" Don Santiago himself is "a bas-relief of power and strength," perfectly featured, representing an inheritance that insists on the purity of wedded class and racial claims (3-6). He is of a type, the narrative tells us, a "high-bred ranchero . . . serene in the belief that his heritage of conquest was a sort of superbravery which must, inevitably, conquer again" (22-23). Within his own family and the extensive reach of the hacienda, he is the decider of fates who determines who his daughters and sons will marry, and how his wife, sister, and his servants will conduct themselves.

The overt enemy of all this is the Americano invasion, seen through Don Santiago's eyes as the onslaught of infidels, a distinctly exterior force he would like to ignore or, if necessary, eradicate through the perceived irreducibility of hidalgo superiority. That the threat might find a life within the interior of his own family is inadmissible. But the traces of individuality seeded in the opening panorama of patriarchal allegiance begin to suggest types of resistance that fuel the novel's ultimate argument for, and romance with, a kind of assimilationism that assumes an optimistic combination of American democratic tradition and Mexican folk culture. The family is initially presented in opposing pairs of acquiescence and subtle defiance. Doña María is the obedient wife, Doña Dolores the aggravating sister who takes her own time to follow his commands. Susanita is the most beloved and obedient emblem of his heritage, Angela a rebel of the spirit who prefers God to his desire that she marry. Alvaro is the masculine son in his own image; Luis is an incipient artist with no interest
in the work of the ranchero. In one way or another, for good or ill, each one emerges from the narrative through a rigorous engagement of gendered position.

The hierarchy of presentation tells us something of how the novel situates questions of class and race in relation to the gender resistance that becomes manifest. Gathered also are the house servants, their "huaraches making flapping sounds on the portico floor," and the peons, coming "on silent bare feet through the small gate from their quarters outside the wall, dozens of them." Old Paz, housekeeper and nurse who along with the aging Victorino has gained a certain seniority by virtue of age, claps her hands to bring the other servants to attention. The kitchen-maid is "sweet with the curves of young womanhood," the coachman carries his "duty with the dignity becoming to his gray hair," and the peons, the fieldworkers massed and undistinguished, show "faces branded with grief and sorrows... pitted with pox... bright with the faith of hopes and youth" (4-6). They are thought of by the Don as possessions, by Alvaro as a field for sexual conquest, and by the progressing narrative as emerging agents of cautious resistance to the Don's unyielding tyranny. In the descending order of brightness from Susanita's blond hair, Angela's cream-colored skin, to "burnt almost black" vaqueros, the visualizing of all the rancho's inhabitants accomplishes an adherence to a web of class and racial claims, from the Don's aversion to mestizaje --his complacence in the purity of his Spanish bloodline--to the stratification of household servants and peons by virtue of longheld divisions of labor (5). In the course of the narrative, how much those claims are relinquished to liberatory possibilities raises the question of what Caballero claims for the effect of Americanization on the shifting comprehension of race and class ties. For the pace of the servants' and peons'
evolving agency must be measured in terms of ruptures that occur in the class above them, ruptures uniformly brought on by contact with the *Americanos*.

Who the *Americanos* are, and how they are paired with the Mexicans, foster the novel's argument for the urgency of accommodation. Of the "good" and "bad" Anglos swarming the border, it is the "good" ones who are featured, each with a past and some vision of the future and each with characteristics that represent different aspects of the benefits possible for the future of domestic, cultural, and political life in Mexican-American amalgamation. Captain Devlin is the doctor at Fort Brown across the river from Matamoros, a widower from Baltimore with an intense and discerning interest in art. Robert Warrener is a gentleman from a Virginia plantation, and an army officer at Fort Brown. Red McLane, an entrepreneur and political "doer", hails from New York State, an escapee from his father's stern Presbyterian ministry who arrived in Texas under the tutelage of Sam Houston. Each in his way provides an answer to the inchoate yearnings of Luis, Susanita, and Angela. Their subsequent pairings amidst the sound and fury of familial dissolution emerge almost as building blocks for a vision of what could, or should, happen in Texas.

Love as the agent of cultural and political union is a convention of romance, but here it also triggers a curious playing out of cultural anxieties relating to difference and desire. That a love story could be said to exist between Luis and Devlin highlights the novel's capacity for subversion. The representation of patriarchal privilege that begins with the traditional rightness of masculine possession can be seen to disintegrate in the different trajectories of desire followed by Alvaro and Luis. The contrast between the two brothers in regards to stances of heroic manliness is from the beginning an aspect of narrative tension. Alvaro's first-born status, his conceit regarding his ability to master women, and the contempt for *Americanos* that ostensibly leads him to
join the *guerrilleros* mark him as the inheritor of his father's fiercely held domain. But as the presence of the *Americanos* begins to infiltrate family life, patriarchal sovereignty and heroism increasingly become positions of reaction. During the months-long gathering of the *rancheros* at their winter homes in Matamoros, the constant appearance of handsome, gentlemanly, and, the narrative repeats many times, distinctly *tall* Anglos amongst the riff-raff of *Americanos* begins to tear across the tightly knit fabric of Alvaro's, and his father's, pride. Warrener dares to dance with Susanita at a society gathering; Red McClane begins his attempts to persuade the *rancheros* to register their landholdings as citizens of the United States; Devlin, a Catholic, develops a close friendship with the town priest, showing up at mass with the striking Warrener at his side. And Inez, the independent-minded daughter of a fellow *ranchero* whom Alvaro deems, not the object of his love but the object of future marital possession, falls in love with Johnny White, a Texas Ranger whose potential goodness, the narrative implies, will be brought to fruition by his love of and marriage to her. When Inez rejects Alvaro's blunt and arrogant proposal to her, Alvaro turns to the best alternative his tradition offers him: he joins Juan Cortina and General Antonio Canales to become the *guerrilla* known as "El Lobo," who dallies with a succession of women and runs raids on *Americanos* camps for reasons that have far less to do with the defense of a broadly conceived Mexican cultural community than with a jealous and vengeful pursuit guided by his own patriarchal sense of class and racial entitlement.

On the other hand, Luis's love of art and his apparent lack of interest in either women or ranching, the two things required for reproducing the *status quo*, set him distinctly apart. Hovering with his drawings and paints in the irritated periphery of his father's vision, Luis wanders this text at times as a kind of outcast, unable to find himself in the future forecast by Don Santiago's will.
His difference is severely gendered, for his cultural heritage marks his desire as effeminate, and it is both dissolved and reconfigured through contact with Devlin, who himself evinces, from the outset, a passionate interest in Luis. Their chance meetings evolve into carefully arranged clandestine discussions of art that are fully laced with the language of desire. In a random visit to The Skeleton, the refurbished pulquería or saloon where Devlin has provided a decorative wall drawing of an adequate, if not inspired, grinning skeleton, Luis becomes immersed in drawing the same figure in a variant series of improvisational sketches when he notices Devlin sitting at a table with Warrener. He "felt a stir within him as the older man smiled, rose, and put a finger on the drawings lying on the table." Receiving Devlin's reverent compliment on his efforts, "the world rocked and shook for Luis Gonzaga. This man an Americano" (103)? In later sightings he "thrill[s] to the furtive handclasp and the smile of joy on the older man's face," an excitement matched by Devlin's first gaze at Luis (117):

Surely this lad was no rancher. He looked like a poet or an artist should look... on the striking black-maned dun pony, sitting the elaborately trimmed saddle with the ease of long familiarity with it, he made a picture which thrilled Devlin through and through. (48)

This is the language of an incipient coupling, comparable to the love-struck gazes across distances accomplished by Susanita and Warrener. But it makes its way carefully through the social codes of heterosexuality. They are not said to fall in love, and the progression of their contact ultimately must occur away from Texas. Yet Luis's relation to Devlin provides the first publicly tangible opening in the text through which the other Mexican-Anglo pairings might pour.

Their conversations explore likenesses and differences between Mexicans and Anglos ranging from individual desire to the politics of cultural
accommodation. Queried about what drives him to art, Luis responds with the enthusiasm of one whose greatest love has been long ignored. "That at last he could tell this to someone! But to an alien--something, he felt, was wrong, but he did not know where" (106). Rightness, here, is the sense of Luis's "different" passion being heard and recognized by someone whose gaze has already relished his particular beauty. What is wrong, this initial breaking of a command to find no sympathy or companionship with a culture deemed barbaric, is soon dispelled by Devlin's ability to tease threads of similarity out of the snarl of cultural conflict.

Devlin told them of the cities of the East; of their art and music and fine homes and gentle, pampered women. He told Luis of Maryland--Mary's land, named after the same Blessed Virgin . . . whom the Mexicans venerated. Of Lord Baltimore who founded the colony so that, in a new land, Catholics might worship free from persecution. (106-7)

To Luis's query as to why the Anglos came to dispossess Mexicans of their own nationality, Devlin responds,

That is not easy to answer, Luis. The mistake was for the Mexican government to invite settlers and give them land. Your vice-regal government did not play fair with anyone. If your people--but, no, there is too much that is wrong on the side of the Americans, much that is disgraceful. Let me simply say that we are a people who never are still. (107)

Devlin's discussion of these matters decenters the rigid insistence on Anglo-barbarism not only by suggesting to Luis the cultural affinities that exist between them, but also by de-essentializing the Anglo presence as the devil's visitation. The historical argument laced into the education of Luis's sensibilities renders
Mexican and Anglo animosities as the responsibility of both sides, hearkening to cultural difference—that Americans never stay still—as a given trait, neither good nor bad. Devlin is that unheard of thing among Anglos, a reasonable man with a love that mirrors Luis's. That love eventually draws Luis across the border of familial ties into an Americanized wandering that suits him, and suits, in ways, the purposes of the text. Luis leaves the household, both by his own will and under the banishment of his father. He goes with Devlin to Baltimore to pursue his art, and perhaps—beyond the confines of heterosexual romance—a more complex relation to Devlin. His letters to his mother will speak of his love and devotion to her, as well as trips to Europe, his entering the world of commerce through the selling of his work, and, almost as an afterthought, the cultured ladies among whom he might, someday, select a bride. He is the first to go, opening a gap in the masculine inheritance that Alvaro fills with increased desperation. But his absence also moves forward the challenge his sisters make to the coercive structures of feminine inheritance.

The deterioration of Mexican, upper-class masculinity is quickened by glimmerings of a new, more flexible maleness exhibited by the Americans that is visible to all the women. Flexibility here is really a measure of how much, in the women's eyes, these men can offer access to forms of female self-determination without entirely disrupting an ingrained Mexicana sense of class position. In this sense the "natural" way that Susanita's green eyes meet Warrener's blue ones causing them to fall in absolute love at first sight is a moment broadly supported by the narrative's construction of like Mexican and Anglo social values.

The most predictable romantic pairing of the novel, the union offers Susanita a version of what these women want—to have their ideas, desires, and aspirations considered within the marital economy. Rumors that Anglo women
have an equal voice in the conduct of domestic affairs are practically revolutionary. In Susanita's case, love through individual desire rather than marriage by edict changes her from her father's beloved and child-like possession to a woman with a mind and desires of her own. Her forbidden attraction to Warrener is a first step toward provoking movement into a world where her actions can be recognized as decisive. Her most dramatic moment of self-determination comes late in the novel, well into the progress of her romance. Her father has discovered the liaison and has wrathfully pledged her in marriage to an avuncular neighbor. Unable to bring herself to disobey her father and elope, she spends her days at the rancho in obedient, wrenching sorrow until word comes from town that Alvaro has been caught and is about to be hanged. Her father away, and finding no other recourse, she sits herself in an unlady-like straddle across a horse and rides through the night to Matamoros accompanied by the faithful peon José, to plead with the army command for her brother's release. The dangerous ride through violence-ridden territory accomplishes an awakening in Susanita of conditions in the world as urgent as her own. "It might so easily be death for them, and she suddenly saw José as more than a peon born to serve; he was a man with wife and child, loving life" (263). Her ability to see José in terms that might resemble his own merges with the remarkably new way she has of looking at herself:

It seemed to Susanita as mile after mile of moon-brushed plain met them and slipped behind that she was a different person entirely. As if the love-struck, weeping, frightened girl was still in the patio spilling tears . . . and a woman who looked like her was riding in a world that, also, was a new and different one. She had known the night only within the sheltering walls of the patio . . .
Wings were on her shoulders and she soared in a world that was free. (263)

Her action, taken without the aid of Warrener and in the earnest desire to save her family from sorrow and death, is both striking for its independence and revelatory of the radical opening it affords her understanding of what the broader world might offer her. That she is denounced by both brother and father for compromising her feminine station and the family honor by riding alone with a man through the night, and is assumed to have consummated her love with Warrener during her stay in town, makes her departure from the household inevitable. They have not understood, or they have understood too well, her action as a commitment to protecting and enhancing the lives of individuals--her own as well as theirs--rather than adhering to a rigorous and closed code of conduct.

At the same time Susanita's independence is easily matched by the novel's provision of a mate who comes from similar class standing and who harbors a number of other characteristics amenable to what Susanita, and certainly her mother, would like to see in a husband. Warrener loves music and sings like an angel, albeit a manly "baritone that rounded the low notes and danced lightly to the high with an ease and proficiency;" he is an Episcopalian, therefore close to Catholicism and willing to cross over; he is considerate, loving, and takes high account of gentlemanly honor (83). Most important in the fruitless quest to win Don Santiago's approval, he is a verifiable gentleman, heir to large landholdings, and is quite used to the customs of the upper class. That the Anglo upper class is deemed more flexible, egalitarian, and willing to pursue the advantages of intermarriage among cultures thus becomes the means through which the narrative both explores and controls the delicate negotiations of cultural mixing. In an interview with Doña María just prior to the
violent rejection of his suit by Don Santiago, Warrner argues his intentions
toward Susanita, speaking of his culture's elegant mansions and its luxurious
comforts. In a mixture of parenthetical thoughts and graceful speech, he
attempts to persuade her:

(Do I make it clear, mother of Susanita? Do you see that we have
gentle ways of living also, and that she will be a queen in the
setting I will build specially for her, whether it be here in your land
or in my own . . . ?) . . . There are negroes who do the work. I do
not think you have ever seen any . . . They are slaves very much
like your peons but in a different way. On the whole our way of
living is not so different from your own, señora, unless it be that we
give greater deference to women, and frequently the rule of the
house is shared between man and wife. (228)

The irony of this passage in a novel that elsewhere dramatizes the benefits of
peon movement from unpaid labor into the low-wage structures of new Anglo
settlement suggests just how mediated the narrative stance is by race and class
consciousness. The assent to status quo racism on both sides of the cultural
divide, and the assertion that a mixed marriage will not compromise Susanita's
gendered class status is arguably here a component of Warrener's need to
convince Doña María of his suitability. But it is also part of a larger structure of
thinking that sharply divides Caballero and George Washington Gómez over
the terms of assimilation in Texas. The prevailing defense of the female
speaking subject in Caballero is persistently accompanied by the assertion of
the value of compromise to the American way of life which includes, here, a
maintenance of class hierarchies revisioned in terms of capitalist political and
economic structures that, in the novel's ideology, would allow a perceptible
increase of individual social mobility without disrupting more traditional class
relations. *Peons* could become paid servants and fieldworkers, attain the right to vote, and have a voice in their own government. And some women could have an equal voice in domestic affairs that might influence, in fundamental ways, all aspects of communal life.

Nowhere is this ideology more clear than in the pragmatic union of Angela and Red McClane. For Angela, the transformation of her yearning to serve God ultimately takes a direction far different from the realm Don Santiago imposes. Denied the convent and told by her father that she must marry a suitor from among the *rancheros*, she considers the possibility:

> But with José Luis Carbajal who wants me—any girl at all could be his wife. I fear I cannot make myself clear. I mean I would be just the woman of the house, and there is something inside me which asks for more. (154)

That something more materializes in the form of McClane's proposal that she become his wife, and the mistress of a house in San Antonio "that will have seated at its table men who hold power and position." Envisioned as an important site of future political operations in Texas, the house will be a place from which "to guide the bewildered, to scatter light and happiness like the sun" over Mexican communities wrenched by the discord of Anglo domination. He offers her a way to help her people through the inevitable shift of power.

Many will be homeless and will need comfort. The good *padres* at the church will need money and encouragement in this their task, and it will be you who can organize groups to help them. You can go the humble homes of the poor, there will be the sick to visit and comfort. We will see that there is a school, you and me, to teach those who wish to learn. The *padres* will have true friends in us when they need friends. (211)
Seeding McClane's proposal to Angela is a complex regard for the advantages of such a union that will accrue to his political vision. With Angela holding dominion in his household, he will be able to proceed along an already well-trodden path of political persuasion, adopting Mexican ways and winning influence over a population whose votes will be fundamental to the structuring of a future state political machine. His shrewdness is not lost on Don Santiago, who, discovering Angela's defection in the final scenes, surmises and comments:

He pressed his memory for what it had retained of McLane's visit to him. Votes. He had wanted to enlist Don Santiago's help in consolidating the Mexicans for their future votes, dangling the title of magistrado before him. "Had you thought, Angela, that all this concern over the misery his countrymen are visiting upon the poor Mexicans is to further his personal ambitions? You are to be a lady of mercy so that he will have their allegiance for his schemes."

(312)

The glaring truth of these words has no purchase with Angela, who does not disbelieve them, but who understands that for herself, and for Texas, it doesn't matter. "[M]y mind is made up," she says. "They will need to give their allegiance to someone, will they not" (312)? What keeps McLane's proposal from being a cynical act is its relative frankness and his underlying certainty of the value of individual initiative in designing and proportioning the components of a new state: "He was the man, the rudder of his ship in his own hands" (70). The man that Red McClane is, an image of masculinity starkly different from Don Santiago's, understands the uses of cultural exchange and mobility in a way that has never entered Don Santiago's consciousness. In Angela, he gets a working emblem of the graceful transition possible under Americanization, one
that maintains ties to Mexican cultural life while radically revising political and economic relations. In McClane, Angela gets an avenue into the public world where her speech and actions, ever loyal to her Mexican Catholic allegiances, carry influence. It is of little importance to either that they love each other; for both, marriage is the consolidation of a fluidly operating power base in a world undergoing enormous change.

The strength of Caballero's indictments regarding the tradition of Mexican male privilege overshadows in many ways its own gray areas of race and class consciousness. The bankruptcy of Don Santiago's and Alvaro's stance is highlighted by the novel's version of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, otherwise an icon of heroic Mexican resistance to Zachary Taylor's troops and the subject, Américo Paredes points out in With His Pistol In His Hand, of early border corridos. Cortina occurs here as "squatty, red-headed," and "dirty," a low-class opportunist interested in inflaming the rancheros to fight for his own interests in blood and plunder. Similar attributes are ascribed to General Antonio Canales, who also fought against Taylor and the memory of whom helped inspire resistance to General Pershing when he crossed the border in his 1916 pursuit of Pancho Villa. Alvaro's ultimately fatal pairing with the two is suggestive of González's and Raleigh's damning critique of perceived Mexican intransigence. In moments, that critique is nearly essentialist, attributing through the voice of the town priest, for instance, a genetic account of the decline of Mexican blood evidenced in the behavior of the rancheros:

Should Susanita or Angela marry one of the boys in their circle their children will be ordinary in looks and intelligence, their tastes and tendencies downward. The elusive blond strain will not appear at all, for Nature will no longer be laboring to save a rarity
... Luis, to me, typifies the finest the blood has produced, and inevitably lost unless there is new blood, and virile blood. (158)

In a narrative where the unpleasing shortness of Mexican men is more than once measured against the new virility of the Anglos, such a speech is arguably doing more than simply expressing the priest's views. Likewise, both the careful maintenance of some semblance of class position through the marriage contract, and the transition of the lower classes into a wage relation and political hierarchy that bears more than passing resemblance to the old suggests the novel's own maintenance of race and class consciousness. At the same time, Caballero is invested in the recuperation of a slice of history wherein the combination of the best parts of an ostensibly democratic Anglo ideology and the best parts of a Mexican culture life, featuring the major contribution of no-longer-silenced women, might lead to a vital Mexicanized and Americanized cultural community. That is an argument addressed to border tensions over race and class amply continuous through the time of the novel's writing. It is also expressive of anxieties and resistances that resemble those made apparent in Sara Smolinsky's foray into Americanization. For what is at stake for women becomes a primary component of the voicing of cultural transformation.

George Washington Gómez considers the subject of Americanization from the viewpoint of the Mexican descendants of Caballero's peons, and vaqueros, as well as the descendants of rancheros who could not find a way to "deal" with the Anglos and were dispossessed of their land, and immigrants of all classes from the Mexican interior who fled the labyrinthine calamities of the Mexican Revolution. In ways as deeply absorbed as Caballero in questions of what constitutes heroism and masculinity, Gómez gauges the development of its protagonist in terms of what Americanization, by 1915, had wrought on the border. The narrative's capsule history of Jonesville, the fictional substitute for
Brownsville and the same site of *Caballero*’s Fort Brown, is sketched in terms that propose differing consequences resulting from the cultural marriages performed in *Caballero*. In Gómez, the Jonesville of the latter half of the nineteenth century maintains its Mexican character, but is modified by the arrival of "a few English-speaking adventurers" who "married into Mexican landowning families, and became a ruling élite allied with their Mexican in-laws" (36). The advance presence of Anglos here occurs as the cultural adaptation of already existing class hierarchies, a move that secures the upper-class minority of the Mexican population in a future of Anglo-domination, while giving Anglos purchase in the management of local politics and economies. At the turn of the century, that ruling élite is reasonably positioned to maneuver an influx of Anglo settlement that, combined with the arrival of corporate capitalism in the form of agro-business, restructures the economy of Texas and its attendant social relations.

Then came the railroad early in the 20th century, and with it arrived the first real-estate men and the land-and-title companies, and a Chamber of Commerce, of course, which renamed the little town "Jonesville-on-the-Grande" and advertised it to suckers from up north as a paradise on earth . . . Mexicans labored with axe and spade to clear away the brush where the cattle of their ancestors once had roamed. To make room for truck farming and citrus groves. And the settlers poured in from the U.S. heartland, while Mexicans were pushed out of cattle raising into hard manual labor. 18

Jonesville mirrors what occurs elsewhere in Texas in more extreme forms: the town develops a Mexican *barrio* separated from Anglo and Anglicized Mexican, or "Spanish," neighborhoods by divisions of labor and wealth that go hand-in-hand with racial division; it is the scene of internecine warfare among Anglo
political bosses and their Mexican operatives, a disappearing breed of Mexican revolutionists, opportunists and idealists of both cultures, and the range of people in between whose aspirations are deeply enmeshed in the terms of cultural and economic conflict.

Among them is the family of George Washington Gómez, whose childhood and coming of age amount to a study in the ways subjectivity wrestles itself into being deeply marked by the traces of cultural wars and a social history interpreted through the individual’s constant making and unmaking of his own present. His story, in one sense an old one about a young boy coming to his manhood, ostensibly concerns the demands that his Mexican cultural inheritance make on him to produce a heroism geared to communal benefit. But what constitutes the masculinity necessary for such heroism is complicated in this novel by the attention it gives to the instability of class and racial unity and to the ways in which the very different sacrifices these men and women make, by virtue of gender constraints, affect the ways he chooses to conduct of his life.

The three significant men of the generation that produces George Washington Gómez all contribute greatly to the conflicting threads that shape him, although he will only know one of them in his lifetime. Lupe and Feliciano García, his maternal uncles, and his father Gumersindo Gómez, introduce competing interpretations of the tumultuous history of the period that reflect, in an immediate way, the dangerously critical nature of border life. Lupe is a leader among los sediciosos, who from 1915 to 1917 raised what was essentially the last armed insurrection against Anglo incursions in Texas. The initiating document, known as the Plan of San Diego, called for an independent republic spanning the Southwest that would include all non-Anglo races of the region. In part desiring unification of those suffering the discriminations of Anglo hegemony, the insurrectionists, according to Montejano, also wanted to halt the
decimation of Mexican-based old ranch society by the rapid expansion of Anglo
agriculture. They sabotaged railways, bridges and other components of the
infrastructure of advancing commerce, and led raids on the properties and lives
of Anglo citizens. Their actions brought forth a virulent response from the Texas
Rangers, who during the period indiscriminately executed Mexicans in large
numbers, burned their homes, and forced their removal from the countryside
into the towns. Many fled to Mexico, where some joined the armed resistance.\textsuperscript{19}

Out of this context, however, Lupe appears not as the potential hero of a border
corrido but as a "sallow, skinny runt of a man" who is interested primarily in
revenge and the violent reclamation of power (10). He is rather like the Juan
Cortina of Caballero and is a far cry from the representation of Mexican valor
and ethnic pride Paredes recuperates in \textit{With His Pistol in His Hand}. Yet his
particular ruthlessness is arguably shaped by the history from which he comes.
Having assessed the failure of the effort to wrench a Spanish-speaking republic
from U.S. territory, he adapts, suggesting to Feliciano that they retreat to Mexico:
"It's a different war over there. . . . Really good men like you and me can get rich,
get to be generals over there." Reminded of family responsibilities brought on
by the Rangers' murder of their brother-in-law, Lupe's "face hardened
momentarily and then relaxed into its usual expression of watchful unconcern"
(25). In him here, and later when stories of his regard for his mother are told,
there is a trace of connectedness to the culture of familial, and communal
passion that disappears into a long-rigidified cynicism, the habit of violent
survival.

His brother-in-law Gumersindo is his compelling opposite. Raised in the
Mexican interior in a setting of modest plenty, his family fled the early years of
the Revolution, a flight from both violence and wealth that positioned
Gumersindo on the border as one among many impoverished laborers trying to
make their way amidst a variety of influences. His marriage to María García gains him some entry into a different history of dispossession, for the García's are several generations descended from the rancheros whose lands were taken by the Anglos, a fact in which both brothers are well schooled. Intent on learning English and finding a way to work in peace among Anglos, Gumersindo ardently resists the rebellion that has so thoroughly claimed Lupe. "What did I come here from Mexico for?" he argues with Feliciano. "Because I thought that here I could find work and peace. Why do we have to hate each other? It is a sin, I tell you" (21)! He accepts the Anglo presence as an inevitability within which Mexicotexans must slowly find their way. With a kind of optimism for the future, he names his first son George Washington Gómez whom he hopes will, like the founding father of his adopted nation, become a leader of his people. Pronounced "Wachinton" in colloquial Spanish, which becomes "Guálinto" in the mouth of the grandmother, the name immediately crosses an interlingual territory that constitutes a subtext that substantially modifies the text. What becoming a leader of people means to both Gumersindo and María remains undefined in terms of perceivable practice, except that he must "be a great man among the Gringos," like Washington a man whose military prowess is absorbed in the greater heights of political leadership, but who will in new ways be capable of advancing the level at which Mexicans participate in the benefits of U.S. citizenship (16). Guálinto's future is projected as the promise of bi-cultural political maneuver for just ends, a promise which should allow him central place in a hoped for confluence of cultures. But arrayed against that projection are the varying accents—linguistic, cultural, and historical—that tear at its proposed unity.

When Gumersindo is murdered soon after Guálinto's birth by Texas Rangers, or rinches, for the crime of being Lupe García's brother-in-law, it is
Feliciano--out on a mission with los sediciosos--who finds him. Feliciano's hatred for the Anglos causes him to join the insurrection for a time under his younger brother's command, but the quality of his hatred is complicated by attachments to family, and to an idealism about what revolution should mean for the Mexican community at large that resists Lupe's cynicism. Finding himself in hit-and-run battles that are less about the recovery of Mexican social aims than they are about immediate blood vengeance, Feliciano emerges as a man torn by shifting views of what masculine responsibility means. Framed as one of the architects of the insurrection's goals, he abhors the direction it has taken, and is challenged by Lupe's vehemence:

You needed me then! You and De la Peña with his high starched collars and highclass way of talking. There was dirty work to be done, so you needed a bandit like me. For your lands and your liberty and your pure ideals. So you could all be presidents maybe, or ministers, or something. Remember? (26)

To this, Feliciano can offer no argument. The insurrection-gone-bad is in part the cause of Gumersindo's last request to him as he lies dying in the dirt: "My son. Mustn't know. Ever. No hate, no hate" (21). Feliciano's promise never to reveal to Guálinto the manner in which Gumersindo dies weds him to a familial responsibility that also engages him in negotiations with Anglo culture directly opposed to his own dying hopes for a future of just, political, and thoroughly Mexican leadership. Positioned in the fissured terrain between Lupe and Gumersindo, he becomes the bridging character of this book, Gumersindo's replacement as the life-long male authority in María's family, and the mentor through whom Guálinto comes, in his own way, to address the chaos of cultural claims. Feliciano does so by establishing the family within the relative safety of the Jonesville barrio and suppressing his hatred of Anglos in order to work for
them--over his lifetime under Anglo political and economic sponsorship as a bartender, grocer, political organizer marshalling Mexican votes, and eventually as an independent farmer.

The irony of his position sets the stage for the dilemmas faced by the next generation as represented by Guálinto and, in ways less directly announced in the privileging of male leadership, his sisters Maruca and Carmen. Coerced both by doubts about the viability of Mexican resistance and by his sense of responsibility to the care of family, Feliciano absorbs his conflicts with another man's dream by fully entering the world of compromise that dream engenders. For Guálinto to become a figure of greatness, he must be given all the advantages of preparedness his elders can muster which, in implicit accordance with the dream, means a stable home and a good education. Feliciano bends to Gumersindo's will, and to his own doubts, by becoming all that he ostensibly fought against: a descendent of rancheros turned farmer, an idealist turned political operative, and a man who eventually prospers, in material terms, by accommodating himself to Anglo political and economic systems.

That he does so out of an urgent will to sustain a family central to his most intimate sense of culture only heightens the dilemma of the border which, in terms of his own masculine inheritance, proposes only the two choices offered by Gumersindo and Lupe. Making the one, he is ever mindful of the other:

Now Feliciano was sorry he had promised such a thing to a dying man. It would be very hard to keep such a terrible truth from this male child. Never to tell him how his father died, never to give him a chance at vengeance. That was a hard task, and it was not
fair to the boy either. For after all, what were men for but to live and
die like men. (31)
"What a man is for" in a terrain of alternating violence and accommodation is a
question, for Guálinto no less than his uncle, that is fraught with intersecting and
most intimately rendered difficulties of gender, culture, and history. He is born,
so to speak, into a loaded situation:

[A] foreigner in his native land, he was fated to a life controlled by
others. At that very moment his life was being shaped, people
were already running his affairs . . . . Nobody considered whether
he might like being baptized or not. Nobody had asked him
whether he, a Mexican, had wanted to be born in Texas, or
whether he had wanted to be born at all. (15)
Neither had anyone asked him if he wanted to be a leader of his people, yet the
ways he absorbs and resists, sometimes simultaneously, these designations as
he learns them growing up constitute the novel's assessment of the manner in
which individual choices transform, and are transformed by, the continuously
evolving history of border social relations. These two passages elucidate, in
particular, the tension between the provocations of an inscribed masculine
identity enmeshed in an intricate web of cultural conflict and the vertiginous
entry the individual subject makes into that web.

Guálinto enters a battle when he enters the world, picking up the traces
of masculine identity as they are laid for him, but the nature of the battle is
shifting, subject to diverse interpretations based upon his mutable
understanding of who the enemy is. Carried out on fronts more numerous than
the suppressed story of his father's murder, his struggle in significant ways is
shaped by the diverse routes his education takes at home, at school, and later
in the world of Depression Era employment. At home he is the featured child
both doted upon and disciplined, mesmerized by the rich world of his yard, the
ghost stories and tales told among the neighborhood men as they sit the
evenings away on the porch with his uncle, and puzzled by questions about his
own being that remain unanswered in the divergence between his uncle's
atheism and his mother's Catholicism. Frightened by a God who in his mother's
prayers could so relentlessly send one to Hell, he ponders also the Heaven she
says he came from, but that he can't remember.

And she says I was up there. Was it me? With wings? . . . Maybe it
wasn't me at all. Maybe it was somebody else. Maybe I'm
somebody else! . . . A numbing loneliness seized him and he felt
like crying out. (51-52)
The prescience of his questions as to who he is, so like David Schearl's own
concerns as to his provenance, is similarly born out in a history of conflicting
answers. As a little boy meant by his elders for a future of leadership--and
equally as a little boy putting together the hazy stories he hears about great
battles in a vaguely defined Revolution, the terrible troubles with the rinches
and the corridos of resistance--Guálito's first playful battles are imagined
precisely as the blows of vengeance Gumersindo so feared. In the banana
grove behind his house, he attacks one of the giant plants, piercing the
cowardly rinche he sees in it with his wooden dagger until the "once-smooth
stalk was a pulpy oozing mess, scratched, stabbed and cut, with patches of the
skin-like bark hanging loose" (68). The human qualities of the wounds mesh
with his fear that he has killed his uncle's plant, ruining his clothes in the
process and getting him into grave trouble with his mother. Characteristic of
typical childhood fears, the scene is also a measure of the terror that exists on
the underside of his efforts to be the manly stuff of legends.
If this early effort to replicate a particularly Mexican heroism is drawn in part from the lessons of culturally laced stories told by the elders he admires, the Anglo-inflected nature of his schooling draws him in other directions of resistance, at the same time that it complicates the problem of identifying the enemy. His own name persistently fronts that inflection, bringing it close when Feliciano takes him for the first time to register. On the wall is a portrait of George Washington:

Guálinto looked up eagerly at the portrait of his namesake.

What a terrible disappointment! He had expected a fierce-looking warrior in a medal-covered uniform. Riding a horse maybe, and holding a sword in his hand. He stared at the picture with disillusionment that was almost contempt. A face like an angry old woman. Long with hair. And that coat! What a man to be named after. (109)

The interpreted effeminacy of the visage mixes with the fact that Feliciano, suffering a moment of indecision, registers him as "Guálinto Gómez," thus effacing the anglicized, complicit weight of his given name. When asked if "Guálinto" is an Indian name, Feliciano lies by answering in the affirmative, both puzzling Guálinto and initiating him into the tense doubleness he will be living out. The Washington the boy wants to see is much more like the legends he knows of sediciosos slicing away at rinches than the pale, muted form before him. More in league now with his uncle's sense of discomfort, he largely suppresses the Anglo version of his name throughout his childhood.

Guálinto's early understanding of what it means to be manly, accentuated by his distaste for Washington's resemblance to an old woman, evolves through his own growing perception of and assent to gender arrangements, both within the construct of his family and in the broader social
world, where the awareness of class sharpens and complicates the emergence of as yet undefined desire. His position in the house as the hope of his people comes at great cost to his older sisters, whose own futures are almost never taken into account. The eldest, Maruca, appears in the text as an intermittent and hapless presence, occasionally a torment to her favored brother and a girl who does not—and is not expected to—do well in school. Carmen, on the other hand, can always be found reading, when she is not taking care of her brother or performing chores around the house without complaint. She ponders the mysteries of the universe, reading whatever she can about the stars, Atlantis, far away places. The margin she occupies in this text is suggestive of the overlooked hopes resonant in a mind occupied with the senses of escape and discovery literature affords her. When both girls eventually are pulled from school to care for their ailing mother, Maruca doesn't mind, but for Carmen it is a punishing blow she takes in silence. Guálinto, already well launched in his schooling, understands the depth of her loss and pledges to help her continue learning, a move in some ways equal to the role of one who will help his people. But that pledge is lost in the progress of his own life. The order of the house established by both Feliciano and María assumes only that the girls will eventually marry; in Feliciano's eyes whether a girl finishes school or not is of little importance. It is Guálinto's future that carries weight.

Guálinto's regard for his sisters is one kind of measure for the manner in which his male inheritance is shaped. His fate will not be theirs, solely by virtue of gender. Yet how he makes his way among women as well as the social world is marked, in ways, by what happens to them. His intense sympathy for Carmen's plight amplifies his own great and expected success in school, and is matched by his fears about Maruca's faults, by how her appearance and actions affect his status among others. The first instance of this occurs when he
is struck with a child's love for María Elena Osuna, the light-skinned daughter of a wealthy "Spanish" Mexican he first sees among his playfellows in church. Thinking of "the fine lady's little girl . . . her massive black curls and her white chubby face," he becomes "angry with Maruca because she [is] not pretty" (62). His own appearance, his hair slick with shortening rather than the coveted brilliantine, is tense with class distinctions made more painful by the teasing he receives from the other boys and the fleeting apparition of the girl.

He is schooled early in the awareness of his own class constraints. Less visible to him are the ways in which the nature of his desires--his absorption of culturally inscribed gender distinctions--are shaped by those constraints. Amidst the battles to obtain an adequate, bicultural education, he becomes another version of a warrior, fighting his first-grade teacher's terrible dislike of him first with stoicism, then open rebellion. Miss Cornelia, one of two "middle-age ladies of Mexican descent," is a problematic enemy in that her Mexicanness takes the form of an aversion to the lower classes of her own culture (117). Her efforts to teach her charges English is marked by brutal treatment of the young "Latin" boys; Guálinto's perspicacity in the classroom, suggestive of his potential to surpass the niche she has found in Americanized culture, makes him her prime target. It is by way of Miss Cornelia that he enters the crucible of his relations to the prized María Elena. When a love note he has written to her is discovered, Miss Cornelia, driven to a fury by his child-like claim on the daughter of the Osunas, parades him in front of each of the school's classes, each time reading the note aloud and beating him with a rope to the point of serious injury. When he finally butts her in the stomach with his head and runs away from school, he strikes his first serious blow for his own dignity.

The irony, of course, exists in the Mexicanness of his tormentor. The kindly teachers he meets are predominantly Anglo, women from the North with
liberal sympathies frustrated by the inadequacies of their textbooks to entertain Mexican versions of Texas history, women who are interested in hearing both sides of an argument. Throughout his secondary schooling, these are the teachers who nurture his oratory, and his defense of Mexican pride and history. His intelligence marks him for the sort of greatness Gumersindo prophesied; envied by fellow Anglo students, and well-liked among Mexican friends who warm to the sense of unity inspired by a schoolmate who can out-argue the textbooks, Guálinto is poised for leadership.

Yet the story of his relation to María Elena begins to suggest something else. She becomes his "girl" again in his junior year, but it remains an obscure coupling. Her parents wouldn't approve and are never to know of the connection, so she sees him only in school, and then largely to enlist his academic aid. His desire for her is intensified by inaccessibility; dwelling on the purity of her beauty and taking her attention to him as a sign of love rather than the pragmatic usage it is, he becomes more aware of the class-based nature of his surroundings. He doesn't want her to see his house, thinking it a measure of impoverishment rather than the prosperous abode of Feliciano's reckonings. The apparent dissolution of this relationship comes during a scene at La Casa Mexicana, a tourist restaurant in Harlingen where the class decides to hold its senior party. La Casa Mexicana, a theme park of "colorful" Mexican culture designed for northerners, does not serve Mexicans, a fact that becomes apparent when three of Guálinto's close friends are stopped at the door. Guálinto and María Elena, both light-skinned, can pass and María Elena does, separating herself from Guálinto to go inside. Guálinto's decision to stand with his friends and claim his Mexican identity enacts yet again a heroic stance.

But the field of his heroic operations begins to show the fissures of instability. Unable to possess María Elena for reasons having to do in part with
class position and cultural loyalty, Guálinto poses his heroism against an increasingly disparate sense of who or what he is. In the Depression which strikes during these events, Feliciano loses his grocery store and a good portion of his bank savings, causing him to have a serious talk with Guálinto about cutting back on extras. They are better off than others; Feliciano has been farming rented acres outside of town, and his distrust of Anglos has kept him from depositing all his money in Anglo banks. There is enough for Guálinto to finish school and go on to college. But Guálinto, fresh from his loss of María Elena and feeling guilty toward Feliciano over the shame he has exhibited regarding the relative meagerness of their home, decides to take on menial work with one of Feliciano’s competitors. That move introduces him to the grittier aspects of class position from which he has been long protected. His grades slip, causing him to lose the valedictory rank that was to be the crowning recognition of his ability to conquer the vicissitudes of Anglo institutions, yet the loss would not be so great if, in seizing greater responsibility for his own stewardship, Guálinto could turn his action into an apprenticeship on the road to cultural leadership.

That he ultimately cannot has much to do with the ways in which he responds to his complex schooling in the volatile mix of gendered and bicultural class relations. If from the start the familiar projection of his life demands his success as a Mexican in a fast-moving and contentious Anglo-dominated world, the conflicting inheritance he interpolates from a Mexicanness drawn from the contrast between hazy, heroically inscribed legends and the thoroughly day-to-day constraints of barrio life work to turn that projection into a minefield. To some extent more isolated from cares and indignities than his friends over a lifetime of Feliciano’s watchfulness, he fancies himself subject to greater sorrow when calamity strikes. To El Colorado, a survivor of terrible
childhood abuse, he says, "Well, such a thing can happen to you and it doesn't mean much to you. But to me it means a lot... you're tough, not sensitive like me. You don't feel things the same way" (251). The particular calamity under discussion has to do with the problem of wayward sisters, and it is key to understanding the ways Guálinto operates within the class and gendered construction of his "sensitivity."

Long overlooked as anything other than an unremarkable Mexican woman fated for a background role in the reproduction of domestic life, Maruca falls in love with and becomes pregnant by Buddy Goodnam, the son of a longtime "Mexican-friendly" Anglo player in Jonesville politics. When her pregnancy is discovered, Guálinto witnesses María's beating of her, seeing in his mother for the first time an outpouring of rage that crosses any heretofore known limits:

The animal sounds coming from his sister filled him with a crushing sense of shame. But it was his mother who sickened him most. He had never heard her curse before. Nor had he ever thought whether or not she knew about such words. If he had done so, he would have stopped thinking about it immediately, with a sense of impropriety and defilement. (224)

His horror harbors a complex compilation of revelations. In one sense his mother's rage invades a territory of expression he thought the exclusive domain of men; in another, his shame at Maruca's "animal sounds" indicates not only the grinding helplessness of one who can do nothing to alleviate her suffering, but also the extent to which he feels himself implicated in her condition. He is the emerging man of a family suggestively "unmanned" by an Anglo invader. When Goodnam evades marriage to Maruca by instead quietly marrying María Elena--whom rumor has it he has also made pregnant--and disappearing with
her to California, Guálinto is left to putter around Jonesville defending his 
family's reputation and his own, unmasked, as it were, of the shield of 
respectability.

That these are matters of greater debilitating concern to Guálinto than to 
any of his peers is a function of how much his view of masculinity depends upon 
a fragile sense of the entitlement due him under the long coaching of his 
superiority. His loss of María Elena, his love of whom registers a mix of a 
romanticized, nearly pristine desire with upwardly mobile class aspirations, and 
his shame at the revelation of Maruca's arguably comparable service at the 
hands of Buddy Goodnam, register his own application of a double standard 
regarding women that casts his sense of delicacy in a new light. During a night 
of wandering in which he successfully engages in a knife fight to defend both 
his sister and himself, he comes upon a baile, a barrio family dance of a kind 
frowned upon by his own family. There he meets Mercedes, a girl "very dark but 
very pretty," who "stood spread-legged in the middle of the floor, talking to her 
partner" (243). Like the suppressed Carmen and his friend Elodia, who 
whenever she appears picks up the cudgels of Mexican rights, Mercedes 
provides one of the few moments in the text where the concerns of Mexican 
women emerge on a scale clearly beyond the confines of domesticity. Most 
challenging to Guálinto here is her directness of speech, the way she talks 
straight into the faces of men, and the undisguised and unapologetic forwarding 
of her sexuality. Wounded during the fight which occurs on the street just 
outside the baile, he finds himself briefly in her embrace:

Her perfume was heavy and sweet, too sweet. But 

underneath it, when his face had been against her breasts. Had 

he imagined it? She leaned against him now, and there it was 

again, rising through the blanket of scent, a naked female smell
that set his blood pounding. Then it seemed to drain away from him, leaving him weak and spent. (245)

The semblance of orgasm he experiences signals not only the possibility of a fully realized pleasure but also, in the context of the community the baile represents, an avenue for Guálento’s entry into a perceptibly more vibrant version of the day-to-day Mexican cultural life than he has ever before experienced. Immersed as he is in the sort of double-vision that both posits him as a Mexican in that terrain and also plagues his sense that the terrain is not, for him, somehow class-appropriate, he retreats from Mercedes, promising to return but never doing so. His retreat, taken in concert with his shame and disappointment regarding his mother, sister, and María Elena, is, I would argue, a measure of the frailties evident in a masculinity composed not only of culturally produced notions of heroism, but also, concomitantly, of a persistently limited sense of the spheres within which unruly female desires and aspirations must be restrained.

The problems of his inscribed masculinity are further compounded, however, by a progression of battles in which the overt enemy of Anglodomination dissolves into a Mexican face. His knife fight with Chucho Vázquez over the gritty slurs Chucho utters in regards to Maruca recreates the childhood slaying of the banana tree/rinche in both its exultation and its dismay, the significant difference being that the once honorable vanquishing of an oppressor has become a kind of low-life warring among Mexicans who, in the eyes of the undiscerning elite, can only be expected to be at each other’s throats. In close succession, Guálento is accosted one night by an aging and apparently decrepit Mexican who tries to take his coat; Guálento knocks him out with a brick, and is subsequently hailed as a hero for having subdued “a little runt of a man” who turns out to be his Uncle Lupe, alias Arnulfo Miranda, who is
wanted by the authorities for crossing the border to kill the equally aged
*rinche* who was responsible for Gumersindo’s death.

The construction of the events surrounding Lupe’s reappearance and
demise takes Guálinto through a series of roundabout clarifications of the
nature of relations amongst his male progenitors, and it provides the novel’s
gesture toward resolution. The revelation that Guálinto has killed a relative, only
in part relieved by the fact that it is tuberculosis that carries him off, is followed
swiftly by Feliciano’s relenting from his old promise to report the way
Gumersindo died, thereby explaining both Lupe’s involvement with *los*
*sediciosos* and the reason for his murder of the *rinche*. For Guálinto, then, the
act of vengeance that in an older, masculine code should have been his is not
merely denied him. It is also turned inside out by his own hand in Lupe’s death.
Changed by the horror he feels both at this act and at his own long-fostered
ignorance, he turns on Feliciano, demanding to know where he was during the
time. “In Monterrey,” he replies, declining to discuss his own involvement, in
part as a result of a protective habit that has long disinclined him from
jeopardizing the family with the illegality of his history, and in part from a
tiredness over long-parried questions of vengeance and honor. But for Guálinto,
unsure of his own status, the questions strike with fresh force:

His uncle, who sat there, an old good-for-nothing without courage

. . . . . . who had run away to Monterrey when his father was killed,
who had not been man enough to demand an accounting of
Martin Goodnam for Maruca’s shame. How he hated him! Why
wasn’t he raised by a man like his Uncle Lupe, a man who was
really a man. (263)

The hatred that swells in him is grounded in developments—his declining
academic standing, his failures with women, and the loss of a clear delineation
of sides in the battle of cultures—that have seriously eroded his status as "a leader of his people." He is the inheritor of Feliciano's compromise, seen here as an emasculation that he, for a time, rejects outright. He will not, he thinks, fulfill his uncle's hope that he go to college. Rather, he will throw his lot as a laborer among his fellows.

When he finally learns through the intervention of his uncle's friend Juan Rubio that Feliciano had, indeed, fought with los sediciosos, had been courageous both in the physical risks he took and in the lifetime of sacrifices that he had made for the well-being of María's family, the apparent stand-off between older versions of male heroism and new possibilities for male leadership seem to be resolved. Juan Rubio positions Lupe's murder of the rinche in a more practical context: faced with a terrible, slow death by consumption, Lupe opted for a shootout, perhaps "hop[ing] to get some revenge for your family and d[ying] a quick death at the same time" (278). For Guálinto, the restoration of Feliciano's dignity both as a fighter and as a man who, in the interests of his family's survival, chooses the contingencies of compromise in order to foster the next generation's chance for a more resilient heroism, strikes a balance that ostensibly allows him clear access to the reassumption of projected leadership. The settling of accounts amongst Lupe, Gumersindo, and Feliciano suggests a broader accommodation of history: in an era when armed insurrection is no longer viable, heroism emerges as the ability to go to college and do well; to fight the enemy he must absorb the enemy's terms of success and turn them into tools of redress for his own people.

Were the novel to end here, it would remain as optimistic for its hero as Caballero is for its heroines, all of whom seem to manage somehow to navigate the constraints of a divisive past in order to fare honorably in the coalescing of cultures. But the complex tensions of bi-cultural naming, gendered uncertainty,
and class aspiration formative of Guálin to's upbringing cannot be resolved by a singular putting to rights of his masculine inheritance. The Guálin to who returns to the narrative after years of schooling in the Anglo world outside of Jonesville has remade himself into George García Gómez, a lawyer who married a very blond Anglo and who harbors great expectations of fathering a series of similarly blond, blue-eyed children. Having dropped both Mexican and Anglo versions of his name, he has adopted a more neutral Spanish moniker that elides the possibility of the Guálin to's Indianness and the George Washington's now embarrassing claims. "You look white but you're a goddam Meskin," his father-in-law, a former Texas Ranger, tells him. "And what does your mother do but give you a nigger name" (284). In short, the appeals of whiteness register as his disavowal of all visible attachments to a native culture coded as "other" in a nexus of race and class terms. His wife Ellen is a liberal sociologist demoted from frightening sensuality by virtue of the long "horse's face" that accompanies her beautiful hair. She is "serious, gentle . . . kind . . . and, above all, she listen[s] to him talk" (283). Affording him the sort of sympathetic intimacy that allows him discretion in refiguring his past, she also makes no demands on him in terms that would link desire with the embrace of a Mexicanness that implicates him in the give and take of community life. She thus becomes, finally, less a woman with her own complex history of desires than a key to his normalization within Anglo culture.

Whereas his community expects to receive him as a long-awaited son who has returned empowered to work for the betterment of his people, George García Gómez, in fact, comes from Washington D.C. on a secret assignment for the Army, engaged in serving the coming war effort as a counter-intelligence agent working the border. As an agent of the U.S. government, he is part of a security enterprise that is both nationalistic and anti-immigrant. In short, he is
engaged in modes of surveillance that reproduce, in a sense, the kind of Anglo-dominant categorizations of non-Anglos that he fought against in his youth. Feeling scornful toward his former schoolmates' efforts to forge political unity among border Mexicans, and feeling distaste for his own family--his mother's expostulations over his arrival and the dark skin of Carmen's children--he emerges as a man who, like Johnson's ex-coloured narrator, asserts a competently operating masculinity within the domain of Anglo class and race relations by willing the dissolution of complex ethnic ties.

Contact with an intimate, Mexican self comes only through a recurrent dream, in which he is the valiant commander of rancheros at the battle of San Jacinto. Sam Houston has just vanquished the dictator Santa Anna, a victory assuring Texas its independence from Mexico and heralding the permanency of Anglo settlement. But in George García Gómez's dream, the rancheros surge down a hill leading Mexican regulars not only in capturing Sam Houston, but also in hanging Santa Anna, thus delivering Texas and all the Southwest from both the Anglos and the imperialist-minded Mexicans from the interior. It is a dream worthy of Don Santiago Mendoza y Soría. For it banishes from the historical record all the raw and uneven cultural exchanges that constitute the struggles of men and women in favor of a thinly drawn, if compelling, portrait of the kind of heroism that is linked to the uncompromising circularity of Feliciano's old line, "What were men for but to live and die like men." That portrait, which so thoroughly bedevils George's waking life in the mainstream of Anglo culture, admits no life on the border of bi-cultural exchange. The dream operates as a sort of last stand for complete Mexican sovereignty. Pitted against the subsequent contingencies of cultural clashes, it shapes the precarious selves that exist in both Guálinto and George.
George Washington Gómez, in many ways like The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, lodges warnings against optimistic assertions about both the value and the viability of projects designed to achieve assimilation and those designed to maintain ethnic pride and vibrancy against the formidable circumstances of U.S. economic and cultural nationalism. The ex-coloured man's flight from a culture that could be subject to the horrors of lynching is refigured in George Washington Gómez's abandonment of a culturally complex and contingent manhood grounded not in the certainty of victory, but in the precariousness of struggle. In both cases, we can observe their authors as they engage in similar difficulties, though in a fashion very different from those of their protagonists, as they seek to claim and enlarge their careers as U.S. intellectuals, deeply engaged in the diverse manifestations of U.S. cultural history. In particular, Paredes's ethnographic recuperation of a culture of heroic resistance in With His Pistol in His Hand becomes interestingly entangled with Guálinto Gómez's battle for Americanization. Read against the arguments of Caballero, and against a broader history of the continuous making and unmaking of communities of resistance in America, George Washington Gómez contributes to a literary tradition that continues rigorously to reassess the construction of an Americanness that exists historically and in forceful detail well beyond the borders of Anglo origins.
4 From "Cuatro Caminos: Romance Narratives, National Integration and Mexicans in the U.S.," a talk given by Limón at Rice University, November 30, 1995.
5 For a complete discussion of the manuscript's history thusfar, see José Limón, "Introduction," Caballero by Jovita González and Eve Raleigh (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 1996) xii-xvii.
7 Ibid., 59.
8 Ibid., 68-69.
9 Limón's argument that González suffered not ambivalence, but repression in regards to the history of Anglo colonization of Mexican-American life is based in a reading of her career as a conscious alignment with the class and race aspirations of the dominant culture, marked by occasional eruptions of resistance figured in her folklore narratives. See Limón, 68-75.
11 Ibid., 93-94.
13 Ibid., 8.
14 Ibid., 8.
16 Jovita González and Eve Raleigh, Caballero (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 1996) xxxvi. Further references will be documented parenthetically in the text.
For a more detailed description of the period of insurrection, see
Conclusion

Among other problems of critical interest, the question of how the writers featured here contest, complicate, and/or redefine the contours of a myth regarding one-way ethnic assimilation into a perceived standard of Anglo-American national identity is primary. At stake, I argue, are the conditions of cultural resilience hammered out in the face of a rhetoric of national homogenization, conditions in many ways vexed by the elusiveness of forthright ends. How much an intimately rendered, culturally constructed subjectivity resists Anglo hegemony, and how much resistance is contained by inroads across the fissuring border of the self in a field of cultural conflict, suggest the precariousness of the project in which these writers are so thoroughly engaged. The ample and diverse terrain represented in the novels also contests the idea that a historical "America" emerged from a singular history of East to West expansion secured by the populating of the continent with an Anglo-Protestant majority. The power of that history, bred in the bone of generations of U.S. primary education, continues to pose a formidable obstacle to the repositioning of "alternative" literary traditions inasmuch as those-traditions--African-American, Jewish-American, Chicano/a, as pertinent here--have been predominantly in the difficult, if illuminating, positions of being read singly against the grain of the Anglo-American canon. They have produced what Ramón Saldívar, in reference to Chicano narrative fiction, has called a "counterhegemonic resistance to the dominant ideology at the level of various symbolic languages."¹ Considering counterhegemonic resistance in light of its plural emergences in diverse American cultures usefully decenters the paradigmatic fixity of Anglo-majority thinking about history.
Resistance manifests itself, as careful readings of texts from multiple cultural traditions show, in myriad patterns of ruptures, capitulations, and realignments of dissent that suggest the ongoingsness of arguments about American identity across aesthetic, political, and cultural boundaries. In examining historical literary works from distinct ethnic traditions in light of their comparative possibilities, I am less interested in determining likeness—and thus opening myself to the error of privileging a reductive, universalized discourse about the nature of "ethnic" American literature—than I am in helping to redraw the map of what constitutes American literary production.

Of course, likenesses there are among the writers considered here, across inter- as well as intra-ethnic lines. Within the United States, American nativism as well as pre- and post-Civil War racial coding combined with the pressures of class stratification under emergent monopoly capitalism to produce in these writings comparable themes regarding the difficulty of negotiating race and class prejudice in the dominant mainstream of Anglo-American culture. At the same time these writers both explicitly and implicitly critiqued the deficiencies of the American polity in adhering to often contradictorily stated but nevertheless broadly held ideals of equal opportunity, religious and civil liberty, government by consent of the governed, and so forth. The advertisement of America as the "golden land" that drew persecuted Jews from eastern Europe in the late nineteenth-and early twentieth-centuries also fueled skeptical and probing arguments from a number of increasingly prominent African-Americans who, long educated in fundamental discrepancies, held to the promise of citizenship and challenged their America to adjust actual practices to its avowed founding principles.

But beyond the problem of holding "America" to a popular representation of its democratic principles exists an expansive and multifaceted interrogation of
a priori assumptions about the nature and history of the American cultural community. That interrogation began long before current multicultural critical practice, and it persists not only in present U.S. political and academic environments but also in the recovery of representative historical texts that allow us to re-conceptualize the complex processes of cultural and national evolution. In considering texts from three manifestly different points of cultural entry, we can begin to see the ways in which we can rewrite a history of Puritan-fueled Anglo hegemony in terms of wide-reaching dialogical contests that suggest differing interpretations of the meaning and consequences of American individualism and its relation to different forms of regional, communal life.

Harriet Wilson's Our Nig and James Weldon Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, I have argued, investigate both the ideological construction of whiteness and the purposes that construction serves in their respective historical eras. In doing so, they take quite different paths toward localizing the ways in which racism not only penetrates regional boundaries but also invades the African-American subject; and in the process, they challenge assumptions about radical difference in the management of class-tinged race relations between North and South. Wilson's unveiling of the grueling social arrangements at play in the domestic life of a middle-class New England family throws into relief the dubious quality and sturdiness of Anglo-family values in relation to democratic beliefs. The marginalization of Frado's white mother and the terrorizing of Frado herself exist on a continuum with the coercive rigor with which Mrs. Bellmont—herself constructed by the exigencies of gender and class position—attempts to manage the social and economic arrangements of her children according to the achievement of wealth and against the exercise of individual desire. The northern "tradition" Frado is born into is marked both by the absence of African cultural traces and by
considerable ambiguity regarding the promise of consensual, as opposed to birthright, citizenship and freedom of opportunity--unambiguous, actually, in regards to women and African-Americans prominent among others deprived of suffrage. It is, I argue, precisely in relation to abolitionism and the competitively linked cause of women's rights, which were stirring the period of Our Nig's production, that Wilson's indictment of a presumed anti-slavery household in the North strikes, destabilizing core assumptions about the Northeast's position as a repository for ur-values of a contested American state. Wilson's rendering of Frado's triple marginality--as a mixed-race, poor woman in the service of middle-class whites--not only hearkens to an acknowledgment of oppressed circumstances but also holds up a mirror to the real dissonance apparent running through the dominant culture. Wilson's promotion of her book as a means of improving her own economic independence is arguably a test of that culture's accountability, and its [un]willingness to reconsider the intricate ways in which it structures the inclusion and exclusion of individuals in relation to its collective life.

Similarly, the moment in which Johnson's youthful narrator peers into a mirror in search of a beauty marked by the relativizing contrast of dark hair lightening the already "ivory whiteness" of his skin becomes, in the context of turn-of-the-century racial and class politics, a reflection of just how much the rewards of whiteness--measured by economic gain and the relative corporal safety of not being subject to lynchings or other degradations--work against the inclusion and enlargement of communal ties.² By concluding his story as a passing-for-white real estate speculator in the sophisticated, "universalized" metropolis of New York, the narrator places himself in the representative position of assuming a culturally isolate whiteness at the expense of cutting his ties to the diverse and rich, if troubled, inheritance of African-American folk
culture. He finds himself driven to choose whiteness, the condition of being "not-black," for if he acknowledges blackness he becomes heir to a rigorously complex history of oppression and degradation, however tempered that history is by individual and communal forms of vital resistance. His choice is a capitulation to an Anglo-whiteness rendered as cultural and spiritual deficiency, a state that in this text is devoid of individual and communal specificity.

The immigrant novels of Yezierska and Roth interrogate Anglo dominance from the position of new arrivals who never experienced the interiorization of Anglo cultural oppression forced upon African-Americans by a long history of legalized, coercive subordination. Yet their "newness" is qualified by a long history of assaults mounted across Europe on Jewish self-determination and cultural sovereignty, the consequences of which erupt variously in the lives of Sara Smolinsky and David Schearl. Sara's assertion of self through her partial ascension of Anglo cultural heights is first understood as an escape from the barricaded figures of familial/cultural abuse: a physically exhausted mother; sisters who succumb to repellant marriages; an abusive father whose religious practice becomes at times absurdly abhorrent in the face of poverty, gender discrimination, and his own marginalization both in Europe and America. But the critique of received "old" tradition is complicated by Sara's perception of the vacuity and evasiveness of the cultural world to which she seeks entry. The "aloneness" suggested as a consequence of living a middle-class Anglo-American life in ways echoes the ex-coloured narrator's dilemma. Her partial return to care for her intransigent father signals a longing similar to the narrator's failing pursuit of his African-American roots: a desire translated by these authors into, in part, an argument for the accommodation of the fully nuanced cultural pasts necessary to fundamentally fluid American identities.
In contrast, David Scheerl's conflicts over family, tradition, and the assertion of self occur in a markedly more bewildering entanglement of "old" and "new" worlds, in which the terms for traditional culture and Americanization remain neither stable nor separate. His race toward near annihilation of self is surrounded by splintering stories that he uses in an effort to, in a sense, "manufacture" his survival as an entity. Yet it seems to explode available senses of ritual initiation into immigrant Jewish life as well as first-generation American life. Piecing together strands of illicit familial narratives with partial readings of Hebraic language and Christian imagery, which he then combines with the raucous unveiling of internecine powers across modernist sexual and technological landscapes, he reads and hears an America that is so polyphonic and conflicted as to seem, in incremental ways, subject to rewritings even of its most fundamental archetypes. In ways that are oddly comparable to the drastically different Our Nig, Call It Sleep probes the discrepancies and violences, both subtle and not, that are at work in the dominant world they share. Consider, for instance, two passages from these texts regarding aspects of Christianity:

Next morning [Mrs. Bellmont] told Frado . . . if she did not stop trying to be religious, she would whip her to death."

Frado pondered; her mistress was a professor of religion; was she going to heaven? then she did not wish to go . . . She resolved to give over all thought of the future world, and strove daily to put her anxiety far from her.3

David had turned around to face Leo, but now he stopped, stared at the opposite wall. Directly above his chair all this time the same bearded figure had been hanging. Only this time David
recognized him. He was made of flesh-tinted porcelain, and with what looked like a baby's diaper around his loins, hung from a glazed black cross. "Dat's him?"

"Sure! Yuh seen him befaw, dintcha?"

"Some place, yea. But I didn' know he wuz rightd over me."

With a feeling of dread he eyed the crucifix. "Oncet I seen him in a 'Talian funeral store. He's a'ways wit' nails, ain't he?"^4

Frado's initial exploration of Christianity comes through the intervention of people who are kind to her. But she is not passive in her receipt of instruction; rather she bases belief on the active perception of integrity in the words and acts of the individuals who try to convert her, particularly James Bellmont, the beloved first son. When he dies and, as I have argued, abandons her without having done what might have been in his power to do, that is, without having released her from Mrs. Bellmont's charge, Frado reads carefully, then rejects, the argument of Christianity on its perceivable merits. The promise of Christianity, like the promise of America, is not ordained; to be believed, it must be engaged in mutual exchange that affects the social relations of the present, material world.

In David's case, the diapered, bleeding Christ weighs like a threat over his head, both marking his partially understood Jewishness as "other" and implicating his own, young body in the punishing terrors of the flesh. The Christ we see through his eyes simultaneously projects and distances an identification with the prevailing Christianity of the culture to which David is subject. He could be that bleeding young man. Or, because he is a Jew, he could be both saved from that fate and excoriated for being party to its cause. In some sense he accomplishes all, absorbing the image of Christ through his near crucifixion at the rail, yet temporizing that absorption with a return to the daily contingencies
of a Jewish family life now altered by his having maneuvered, among other things, intersecting Jewish and Christian relations of power. In doing so, David unveils, as Frado has done, the relativity of cultural mechanisms, suggesting not so much the overwhelming of ethnically inscribed subjects by mainstream culture as the ways in which mainstream culture is challenged and altered by the persistent, dialogical incursions of its "other" American subjects.

Between Caballero and George Washington Gómez the question of cultural relativity apparently dissolves in the harsh delineation of sides characteristic of an overt war in progress. In quite different ways, each novel contends with the singularity of a masculinized heroic image of resistance bred from intersections of cultural tradition and frontier violence. The destabilization of that image, however, is managed by their protagonists in contrasting, yet linked modes that suggest both the contingencies of culture and raw disagreements over the fate of individual subjectivity within the process of bi-cultural assimilation. In a sense, both novels take to task the burden of culturally conditioned masculinity. But Caballero does so by privileging the emergence of a female subjectivity long silenced by masculinist constraints. González's and Raleigh's heroines, along with the artistically tempered Luis Gonzaga, find voices in an Americanized Mexicanness that, in the novel's projected future, ostensibly allows them purchase as spiritually and materially prospering Mexican subjects in the New World of assimilated Anglo democracy. Yezierska privileges female subjectivity with similar force. But she does so in ways that allow us to draw comparisons between Caballero and Bread Givers. The stark portraits of tradition-bound and tyrannical fathers in both books set the terms for just how fierce the struggle must be for women who need or want to transform constrictive domestic life into an arena of dialogue and mutual participation that can encourage their ability to move freely between familial and public worlds.
Both novels end in marriages that endorse the value for women of negotiating avenues of exchange between native and Anglo cultures, suggesting the liberating possibilities that sometimes emerge out of cultural ruptures. But they also endorse the continuity of cultural norms that guide the maintenance of "appropriately" gendered spheres.

That maintenance is less a problem in *Caballero* than in *Bread Givers*, in part because the distances the former's heroines must travel in their pursuits are less complicated by the exigencies of poverty and the persistence of the subject's self-doubt. Sara Smolinsky, though differently placed in her domestic life than Guálinfo Gómez especially by virtue of the very little that is expected from her intelligence, still shares with him some aspects of the experience of paying a price for trying to work out a compromise between two cultures. Driven by her intense desire to have done with old tyrannies, Sara pursues an idea of Americanness that resonates with the banishment of the past:

That burning day when I got ready to leave New York and start out on my journey to college! I felt like Columbus starting out for the other end of the earth. I felt like the pilgrim fathers who had left their homeland and all their kin behind them and traile out in search of the New World.  

Sara's likening her project to those of Columbus and the Puritans reflects an understanding of New World discovery and settlement as a utopian promise made against Old World limits that are so well accepted as to seem almost sacred. But both Columbus and the Puritans approached an already inhabited continent mightily burdened with a concept of the "New World" constructed from diverse and entangling arguments shaped within European culture. In parallel fashion, Sara's Anglo education foregrounds for her the discursive dilemmas that arise between the unveiled limits of the "new" and richly subjective
attachments to the "old." In the end, Sara comes to inhabit a doubleness constructed from the uneasy concordance between Anglicized middle-class aspirations--which permit the partial emergence of her speaking voice at the same time that they mute the richness of Jewish communal attachments--and the patriarchally inflected marriage she makes within the evolving terms of American Jewish culture.

Similar dilemmas are posed to Guálinto Gómez, whose eventual journey to college is also projected as a liberating event. But if Sara's formal education comes about through her own, willed single-mindedness to escape the oppression of culturally gendered place, Guálinto's gendered position as a potential leader carries the weight of communal expectations that leave him haunted by a rupturing doubleness:

Consciously he considered himself Mexican . . . . but there was also George Washington Gómez, the American. He was secretly proud of the name his more conscious twin, Guálinto, was ashamed to avow publicly. George Washington Gómez secretly desired to be a full-fledged, complete American without the shameful encumbrment of his Mexican race . . . . In school Guálinto/George Washington was gently prodded toward complete Americanization. But the Mexican side of his being rebelled. Immigrants from Europe can become Americanized in one generation. Guálinto, as a Mexicotexan, could not . . . Like other Mexicotexans, he considered himself part of the land on which his ancestors had lived before the Anglotexans had come.6

What in Sara is a desire be free of old, cultural burdens that restrict and oppress her becomes in Guálinto the need to master and reconcile a shame-based history that divides him against himself. Striking the chord of difference between
European immigrants and landed Mexicans, he confronts a fundamental discrepancy between the newly arrived and the already conquered. Yet, the different doubleness that both must live out—in his case through the stark suppression of a Mexicanness that haunts him, in hers through the solemn negotiation of a self-willed independence made conditional by conflicting desires for both separateness and traditional attachments—reminds us again and again just how deeply the concept of Americanness itself is rooted in conflict, divisions, and doubleness. From the Protestant forbearers of Our Nig's northern abolitionists to Caballero's Iberian ancestors, claims for racial purity and class position are contested by ongoing incremental resistances to cultural hegemony marked by wrenching containments and conditional victories. Yet, in the contest, the borders marking what constitutes "American" cultural inheritance are revised.

In the domestic sphere, the apparent centeredness of Anglo-American cultural tradition shifts through readings of the past that complicate how we understand inheritance. Differences in family structure between the African-American and both Jewish and Chicano/a texts are prominent, and suggest, at least in part, signal differences in the ways the transmission of cultural inheritance affect the individual subject. Frado and the ex-coloured narrator come from mixed cultural and racial parentage further fractured by the tendency toward generations-long rupturing of African-American familial ties. By contrast, the families of both Jewish and Mexican origin live in the grip of cultural traditions that, although plagued by class dissonance and growing alienation under the stresses of modernity, provide a kind of continuity for cultural identity, however vexed. Yet, in different ways each of these novels addresses the fissures that mark the meeting place—the subject body and its terrain of activity—of competing cultural claims. In this, these novels share an interrogatory
landscape with the most "American" of canonical novels, among them *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The House of Mirth*, and *Absalom, Absalom*. The vivid concern with how identity negotiates both mobility and deeply embedded, yet evolving, cultural constraints is common to them all.

These novels also resituate the map that likely comes to mind when one invokes the history of the United States. Its evolving state and national boundaries, the character of the masses that move and do battle across it, the movement from the settled East to the West and Southwest, and the adamant division between North and South alter under the volatile presence of these literatures. Figuring the North and South in terms of Wilson's and Johnson's texts rewrites more canonical renderings of those regions in terms of how differently situated Americans experienced the divergences and similarities within class, gender, and racial stratification across the Mason-Dixon line. Yezierska and Roth among other immigrant novelists rewrite the metropolis of New York not only as the mythic end or beginning of cosmopolitan, universal culture but as a border site of intensely local struggle reflecting the move from often rural pasts to an urban present highly charged with a sense of territorial boundaries. In González, Raleigh, and Paredes, the Texas-Mexican border emerges within the precarious intersection of warring national cultures, the U.S. and Mexico, each of them harboring histories of class, gender and racial codings that erupt variously in the complex and urgent lives of border inhabitants. Beyond territorial definition, these borders become porous sites of a diverse and internationally inflected Americaness.

American exceptionalism, or the notion that the experiment of U.S. democracy is unique in its formation of a pluralist, secular nation-state, is both subverted and expanded in these texts. Sacvan Bercovitch's claim that the utopia the Puritans wished to establish was imagined as a negation of an Old
World Europe with which they nevertheless remained in fierce, dialogical argument suggests, in part, the extent to which assertions of a unique American culture are tempered by its ties to diverse, older traditions. In reading these novels we can amplify the meanings of that culture through an international sense of its originating linkages among European, African, and indigenous American traditions, an amplification that must include the inheritance and promulgation of coercive race and class codes that challenge optimistic and long-dominant myths about the special meaning of America. To differing degrees each of these writers gravely contests American exceptionalism in terms of the dissonance between avowed principle and the structuring of individual life. Yet, it is likewise possible to consider their texts as contributing substantively to an exceptionalism alternately construed, wherein a history of complex abuses is not discarded or suppressed, but instead engaged in lively, often painful, and certainly urgent arguments that continue to unfold about an America uniquely placed to contend with the diversity of its cultures and origins.


Bibliography


Ringer, Benjamin B. "We the People" and Others. New York: Tavistock Publications, 1983.


