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CONTENTS

i	Preface
1	"Family Values": Politics and Private Life in Twentieth-Century America
13	Erik Asard Senator Joe McCarthy and the Conspiracy Theory in American Political History
29	Jukka Ylikitti Conspiracy Theories and <i>The X-Files</i> : The Character of the Cigarette-Smoking Man as an Embodiment of Millenarian Paranoia
37	Erik Kjelland-Lund Calling Elvis: Some Icons of American Popular Culture at Century's End
51	Gunnilla Muhr The Cultural Gap as Archipelago in Disney: Land of Symphony and Isle of Jazz: War and Reconciliation in Disney's 1930s Cartoons
61	Nicholas F. Radel Perestroika? (Dis)Articulating Gay Identity in American Film and Drama at the Millennium
75	Ilka Saal The New York Mystery Play: Adrienne Kennedy's <i>Motherhood 2000</i>
87	Wai Chee Dimmock What Frederick Douglass Says to Kant, With Help from Einstein
101	Kirsi Pellomäki Resemblance and Visibility: Fred Wilson's <i>Mining the Museum</i> and the Art of Institutional Critique

<i>Maria Holmgren Troy</i>	115	"A House Divided": The Civil War in Elizabeth Stoddard's <i>Two Men</i>
<i>Anastasia Christou</i>	125	The Struggle, Success, and National Consciousness of the Greek Diaspora in America
<i>Raili Pöiksaar</i>	137	Divided Decade, Mixed Reactions: Shifts in Estonian Responses to the 1960s
<i>Marwan M. Obeidat</i>	147	American Literature in the Arab World: The Challenges and Changes
<i>Hana Wirth-Nesher</i>	157	Red Days and Black Days: Bitemporal Calendars in Jewish America
<i>Roy Goldblatt</i>	167	<i>Singerman</i> – Not Your Usual Jewish American Novel
<i>Øyvind T. Gulliksen</i>	177	Beret's Terrible Test: <i>Giants in the Earth</i> in Contemporary American Scholarship
<i>Lawrence Moe</i>	189	Carl Ben Eielson and His Poets
<i>Tore Høgås</i>	201	"A Destiny We Never Asked For": Gender and Gifts, Property and Power in Jane Smiley's <i>A Thousand Acres</i>
<i>Dorothy Kim</i>	211	Karen Yamashita's <i>Topic of Orange</i> : Postcolonial Discourse and (Re)Visions of America at the Century's Edge
<i>David Dickson</i>	231	"Through Confusion to Unshakable Knowledge": A Dialogic Perspective through Emerson on Contemporary Literary Change
	241	Contributors
	246	Series A, University of Turku, Department of Art Studies

PREFACE

The 16th Biennial Conference of the Nordic Association for American Studies (NAAS) was held in Turku/Åbo, Finland, on 11-15 August 1999, with the Finnish American Studies Association (FASA) as the principal organizer. The venue allowed scholars from the Nordic Countries, Central and Southern Europe, the Middle-East, Africa, Asia, and the United States to examine questions concerning American studies.

The seven plenary lectures and eighty-nine workshop papers covered a wide range of issues within American Studies at the turn of the Millennium. The themes of the workshops included, among others, "American Literature and Postcoloniality: (Re)Visions of America at the Century's Edge," "Identity in Ethnic American Literature," "Visual Culture/United States Culture," "Millennial Thinking and Jewish Time," "Constructing and Negotiating Ethnic Identity," "Uma(s)king the Millennium in Women's Autobiographical Practice," "Audiovisual Texts as Sites of Cultural Negotiations at the Millennium," "Understanding Cultural Identity and Language Across Cultures and Disciplines," "American Civil War: Old Voices/New Voices," "Midwestern Studies," "Determinations of Worth: Gender, Property, and Power," and "Civil Rights, Women's Lib, Flower Power: What's Left of the American 1960s for the New Millennium?" The above workshops are all represented through the articles in this collection, selected for publication by the chairpersons of the workshops.

I wish to extend my warmest thanks to all the contributors to this volume – without your work, this book would not exist! Thank you also for your patience throughout the editing process.

Many thanks go to my assistant editor, *Katri Pajala*, and *Piirjo Ahokas* for encouraging me to take on the task of editing this book – it has certainly been an experience I will never forget!

I also thank *Tuulikki Sudentuuli*, the young artist from Naantali, Finland, for designing the picture on the cover.

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Red Days and Black Days:

Bitemporal Calendars in Jewish America¹

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Recently, a friend of mine decided on early retirement and was warned by other early retirees that she would regularly be asked her age by those who would not be able to reconcile her youthful appearance with her status as pensioner. She found a very tactful way of dealing with this intrusive question: "I just tell them that I was born in *Tashtal*," the Hebrew acronym for the date of her birth on the Jewish lunar calendar. "Nobody will be able to calculate my age, but everyone will be embarrassed to admit it!"

Living in Israel means not only bilingualism (at least) for most Israelis; it also means bitemporalism. Official government, business, and university administrative documents all bear both the Jewish and Christian dates. The academic year, for example, is referred to by the date on the Jewish calendar rather than on the Gregorian one. For Israelis, and for Jews the world over, this is and is not the millennial year. Bitemporalism has the same effect as bilingualism: it calls attention to the arbitrariness of cultural signification. For Jews, living out of two temporal frames has manifested itself in many cultural artifacts, among them literary texts.

With the loss of holy space as a result of the Destruction of the Temple and the two thousand year exile from the Holy Land, holy time became the principle way of assuring collective memory and identity. "Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time," writes Abraham Joshua Heschel in his book *The Sabbath*. "Jewish ritual may be characterized as the art of significant forms in time, as architecture of

¹ This research was supported in part by a grant from the Israel Science Foundation and the Samuel L. and Perry Haber Chair on the Study of the Jewish Experience in the United States.

time" (Heschel 1951: 8). Hailed as one of the single most important books of the people of Israel, the Jewish calendar has been the chief means of solidifying in-group sentiments and of separation from non-Jews (Zerubavel 1981: 70-73). The link between place and time, however, was never entirely severed. For example, "Our masters taught: The year may be intercalated only in Judea." Leap years are another interesting case of the dependence of temporal ordering on spatial designation: "Even if the prophets are outside of the land of Israel, and the common people are in Israel, the year is officially declared a leap year by the commoners." Despite the necessity to devise calendars in anticipation of events such as the leap year, the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. As Walter Benjamin (1969: 264) notes, "The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance." Yet, every second of time in the present was "the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter."

Difference in teleology, the macro-time frame, accounts for differences in micro-frames such as the calendar and life cycle markers. The major difference in Jewish and Christian providential history is that the Christian frame measures time by the birth of the Messiah and the end of days marks his return, whereas in the Jewish frame, he has not yet arrived. The birth of Christ, therefore, has no bearing on the marking of time. Thus, Jews count time from the Era of Creation, 5760 years ago. Invoking the Gregorian calendar has been seen as a sure formula for cultural suicide. As recently as 1976, Joshua Manocha (1976: xx-xxi) wrote, "Every people has its own time, which ties it to its land and place, and in which its history and holidays are embedded. [...] Every people that has tried to separate itself from its time has disappeared and is no longer remembered among the living." Even the use of B.C. (before the common era, or in Hebrew, "before the count") and C.E. (common era or "civil date") has been condemned as a capitulation to Christian time, which, in keeping with the argument, should be replaced by the accurate time labels, "before and after the Christian count." In fact, extremely pious Jews will not even refer to the Christian count and will simply add the phrase "after their count" following the number. In Jewish tradition, anything short of that accepts the universalizing of the Gregorian calendar, of Christian time, finally adopted by non-Catholic Europe in 1700 and by Japan and Egypt in 1873 and 1875, respectively.

The annual cycle of any calendar separates holy time from mundane secular time by annual commemorations, or holidays. The Jewish year is lunar and begins in the fall with Rosh Hashanah; the Christian year is solar and begins on January 1. Each calendar year

encompasses its own distinctive holidays. These either have no affinity to each other theologically and historically but have acquired a sociological affinity, as is the case with Christmas and Chanukah in the United States. Or they do have a theological and historical affinity such as Passover and Easter, and therefore trigger cross-cultural associations. Although Jewish life cycle events may have an equivalent in Christianity, such as circumcision and baptism, or bar/bat mitzvah and confirmation, they do not occur at exactly the same time in the life cycle, nor do they signify a shared collective history or time frame. Even the marriage ceremony, identical as a rite of passage, is constituted of rituals that signal different historical narratives, the breaking of the glass, for example, in Jewish tradition, imports a consciousness of national trauma, the destruction of the Temple, into the festive inauguration of a new house among the people of Israel.

Clashes of ritual may serve to highlight clashes in time frames. One of the most poignant is related in Saul Friedlander's tender memoir *When Memory Comes*, the account of his resuming his public Jewish identity after childhood years in hiding among Jesuit priests during the Holocaust. So fervently had he internalized Catholic tradition that, at his first Passover seder after the war, he refused to eat the "piece de resistance," the meat, because it was Friday (Friedlander 1979: 152). The eating of Paschal lamb by Jews commemorates the exodus from Egypt and the liberation of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt; the abstention from meat by Catholics commemorates the Crucifixion which is to have taken place on a Friday. As Christ's Last Supper was an observance of the Passover meal, the Jewish ritual figures in Catholic tradition Friedlander's revulsion at the meat signaled the distress caused by the temporal coexistence of these rituals.

It is obvious by now that calendrical issues are symptoms of a deeper problem: that of the mixing of cultures, more specifically, the place of a Jewish minority culture in a majority Christian culture. Since religious Jews accept only one providential time, for them the two calendars pose only a technical problem, how to conduct business in practical terms without falling into terminology that would compromise their faith. They are never uncertain about Jewish dates; they are the basis of their social organization. The dual calendar is more of an issue for post-Enlightenment secular Jews, who come to operate out of two time frames, and experience the often irreconcilable clash of Jewish and Christian time. The examples that I have drawn from Jewish American literature are, therefore, the products of a secularized Jewish culture marking difference and duality.

I begin with Grace Paley. In 1959, Paley published a short story in which a woman named Shirley Abramowitz recalls an episode from her childhood in which she, the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants to America, is chosen to be the narrator of the elementary school Christmas pageant because she has "the loudest voice," the story's title. In her own astute and humorous voice, the story satirizes the annual conflict faced by the Jewish child at the Christmas season when her ambition to perform well in the American educational arena may be at odds with her Jewish group allegiance. Shirley Abramowitz is chosen to be the narrator of Christ's story because she lives in a meritocracy that awards her talent for being outspoken. "We are preparing a beautiful play," her teacher tells her. "Most of the parts have been given out. But I still need a child with a strong voice, lots of stamina. Do you know what stamina is? You do? Smart kid" (Paley 1959: 56). As the child of immigrants, Shirley earns her teacher's condescending praise for her diligence in acquiring English and for her ambition to make herself heard. Thus, the well-meaning and patronizing young American Christian teachers, Mr. Hilton and Miss Glace, find a praiseworthy venue for what, in other circumstances, is an unflattering ethnic type, the loud-mouthed Jew. They are committed to Americanizing the class of immigrant children, first through numerous rehearsals of "Silent Night," and then through the reenactment of the Christian story in the pageant. When Ira Pushkov is coached not to appear on stage until Lester has pointed to a star the second time, their roles are clear. Whereas the adult Shirley is remembering her childhood in this story, the child Shirley in the pageant takes on the (loud) voice of another famous nostalgic adult, "I remember, I remember, the house where I was born. . . ." At this point, Miss Glace yanks open the curtain and the house is revealed to be "an old hayloft where Celia Kornbluh lay in the straw with Cindy Lou, her favorite doll" (Paley 1959: 61). Shirley's loud Jewish voice has become the voice of Jesus himself. What follows is the most problematic aspect of the story, and the richest in terms of cross-cultural transmissions. Little Marty Groff, wrapped in his father's prayer shawl, is surrounded by twelve friends:

Sorrowful and loud, I declaimed about love and God and Man, but because of the terrible deceit of Abie Stock we came suddenly to a famous moment. Marty, whose remembering tongue I was, waited at the foot of the cross. He stared desperately at the audience. I groaned. "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" The soldiers who were sheiks grabbed poor Marty to pin him up to die.

but he wrenched free, turned again to the audience, and spread his arms aloft to show despair and the end. I murmured at the top of my voice, "The rest is silence, but as everyone in this room, in this city – in this world – now knows, I shall have life eternal!"

(Paley 1959: 62)

First of all, given the penchant of Americans for happy endings on stage and on the screen, this Christ manages to actually escape crucifixion without renouncing life eternal! Secondly, Judas, the arch-villain of Christian theology, betrayer and Christ killer, is performed by Abie Stock, in other words, by the stock of Abraham from whom both Jews and Christians descend. Abie Stock's name, linked with that of Judas, also draws on the anti-Semitic stereotype of the Jew as usurer and businessman, of being "in stock" and "out of stock." It is also a moment for taking stock of this Christmas play which has proceeded at an accelerated pace from the Nativity to the Crucifixion, not a common practice in American schools or churches. The average American Christian reader knows that this is out of order, the Jewish reader (and Jewish audience at the school pageant) might not. Could this be a didactic Christmas pageant designed for Jewish immigrant children as part of their Americanization? Insofar as the Christmas play is an opportunity to educate non-Christian immigrants, the teachers deviated from the conventional script in order to convey the full story. Insofar as the second part of the story, the Easter pageant, served as a catalyst for programs perpetrated by Christians inclined to violence by Easter sermons, these Jewish child performers and their parents are being subjected to a major cause of the conditions that drove them to the safety of America's shores.

As the holy days that emerge from the Christian foundational story, Christmas and Easter are vexed occasions for Jews, the former because it does not have a corresponding holy day in the Jewish calendar, and the latter because it does. As we have seen, one way to address the power of Christmas is to satirize its customs, as Paley does in "The Loudest Voice." In the same vein, Henry Roth (1991: 141) has his characters in *Call it Sleep* refer to Christmas as "Krotzmich" – Scratch me – while his immigrant children demystify American Christian folkways, "Id ain' no Senny Klaus, didja know?" (Roth, 141). Leo Rosten similarly uses accented speech to parody Christmas in "Mr. Kaplan and the Magi," in which an adult immigrant in an English class speaks on behalf of the other Jewish students as he presents his Gentile teacher

with a Christmas present. "Ven we hearink abot de beautiful thoughts of de Tree Vise Guys who were follerink a star fromin de daser! Ven pipple sayink 'Oh, Mary Chrissmas' 'Oh, Heppy Noo Yiss' [...] Den ve all got a varm fillink ind de heart for all humanity." Mr Parkhill concludes that "For all his weird, unorthodox English, Mr. Kaplan had spoken with the tongues of the Magi." (1963:141). Only a cultural sign as charged as Christmas could surface so often and in so many varieties of passive aggression. "Dear Ellen, It was very sweet of you to send me a Christmas card" (Rosenfeld 1988: 271), is the opening line of Isaac Rosenfeld's acerbic epistolary story, penned by a rebuffed lover named Joseph to his Gentile lady. "Dec. 23, 'Dear Ellen, It just occurred to me that while I wrote you at some length, yesterday, I forgot the obvious subject of our correspondence – Xmas. So I'm writing again to wish you a merry Xmas" (Rosenfeld 1988: 273). S. J. Perelman says it all in the title of his 1930 story, "Waiting for Sanly." Yet another strategy for containing a holiday so worrisome to Jews is to draw attention to its non-religious aspects as Irving Berlin does in his famous "White Christmas," or to emphasize the anthropological basis for all holidays and hence universalize them, as Shirley's father explains, "... History teaches everyone. We learn from reading this is a holiday from pagan times also, candles, lights, even Chanukah. So we learn it's not altogether Christian" (Paley 1959: 59).

Compared to the fraught atmosphere around Easter, Christmas is benign. Mutual suspicion characterizes the Passover-Easter nexus, as the Easter holiday is the only sacred time on the Gregorian calendar that is not fixed. This is because the Church Fathers' main motive for the dating of Easter as the Sunday following the first full moon which coincides with the vernal equinox was to separate it irrevocably from Passover, which is always celebrated at the full moon. At the meeting of the First Council in Nicaea in 325 C.E. ("A.D."), the practice of celebrating Easter with Passover was defined as an act of heresy. The symbolic system underlying much of Henry Roth's novel *Call it Sleep* draws on Jewish and Christian hermeneutics regarding the Passover-Easter stories. In Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*, the poet Tevkin associates the Passover seder with national liberation, "Let us drink the First Cup," he says, "This is the Fourth of July of our unhappy people" (Cahan 1960: 495).

Whereas Christian holidays may provoke passive resistance to celebration among Jews, Jewish holidays pose yet another kind of problem: they do not coincide with holidays on the Gregorian calendar, so observance requires vigilance regarding their shifting dates. In Philip

Roth's story "Defender of the Faith," a Jewish soldier during World War II exploits kinship ties among Jews when he asks his commanding officer, Sergeant Marx, for a pass to attend his aunt's seder:

"Is this a weekend pass I'm asking for? Is a seder sacred or not?" Seder! It suddenly occurred to me that Passover had been celebrated weeks before. I confronted Grossbart with the fact. "That's right," he said. [...] My aunt's willing to go out of her way -- to make a Seder a month later --

(Roth 1991: 135)

Despite his suspicion that he is being manipulated, Marx's ethnic loyalty gets the better of him and he relents, only to have Grossbart return with a momento of his evening, an egg roll. "'Your aunt served egg roll?' 'She wasn't home. I just reread the letter. Next week.'" (Roth 1991: 140).

The holiday that commands almost universal allegiance as a sign of even the most minimal Jewish American identity is Yom Kippur. The climactic moment in the founding movie of Hollywood sound, *The Jazz Singer*, features Al Jolson substituting for his dying father as cantor for the Kol Midrei service, a heroic act that does not damage his successful debut as a jazz singer in vaudeville. Filmed in the 1920s, it captures the shift from the melting pot to cultural pluralism, as expressed in Horace Kallen's and Randolph Bourne's arguments that allegiance to ethnic roots is the desired path to genuine Americanization. Because the High Holy Days are the sine qua non of Jewish religious identity in America, non-observance signals rebellion. Neil Klugman's defiant rejection of Brenda's middle class Jewish world is summed up in the last line of "Goodbye, Columbus": "[I] look a train that got me into Newark just as the sun was rising on the first day of the Jewish New Year. I was back in plenty of time for work" (Roth 1959: 97). Not only is Neil en route to work rather than to synagogue on Rosh Hashana, but both he and his author know that the Jewish new year is ushered in by the setting and not the rising sun. Some thirty years later, Rebecca Goldstein ends her novel *The Mind-Body Problem* on Yom Kippur in shul with the congregation's thunderous response: "'But repentance, prayer, and charity cancel the stern decree! Long after I ceased believing in these words, the sound of them had caused my spine to tingle and eyes to tear'" (Goldstein 1983: 274). Some recent Jewish American fiction, in keeping with ethnic writing that aims for an implied reader knowledgeable about the minority culture, refers to lesser-known holy days. The shock effect of the title of Lev Raphael's collected stories,

Dancing on Tisha B'Av, depends upon the reader's knowing that dancing on the fast day commemorating the destruction of the second Temple profanes holy time while simultaneously invoking a traditional image of Messianic time. Raphael's gay character Nat defiles the holy day after he is prevented from touching the Torah by fellow worshippers who accuse him of defiling it.

One way to step out of the loop of Jewish or Christian time is to telescope out into geological and cosmic time frames that dwarf all civilizations, as Mary Antin does in *The Promised Land* with her zeal for Darwin and natural history as a substitute religion. In contrast to the book's title and its recurring biblical references which place it within the Judeo-Christian-Protestant-American universe, the last illustration, one page from the end of her autobiography, is of the tide rushing in along the rocky New England coast, of geological, not theological millennia.

Let me conclude with one of my favorite calendrical moments in Jewish-American literature, in the first chapter of *Call it Sleep*. Five-year old David Scheer plucks off the outworn leaf of his calendar and fingers the remaining pages before his much-anticipated birthday. "Red days were Sundays, days his father was home. It always gave David a little quailm of dread to watch them draw near" (Roth 1991: 19). Although the family marks the Jewish Sabbath with the lighting of candles, the hallah loaf, wine, and a traditional meal, Albert Scheer rests when his employer does, on Sunday. David is pleased to discover that his birthday does not fall on a Sunday, but on a week-day, as he puts it: "And a black day too." His mother laughingly dispels the metaphorical and ominous overtones of the "black day" by insisting that it is black "only on the calendar, only on the calendar." So as the festivities and angst of the millennium proliferate, Jews may insist along with Genya Scheer, that for them in *Tashas*, January 1, 2000 fell on the Jewish Sabbath, a black day on the Gregorian calendar, but "only on the calendar," the calendar of the Other.

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