TEN

Voices Around the Text: The Ethnography of Reading at Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem

Jonathan Boyarin

We always stand outside the given object, whereas we are situated inside the literary text. . . instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a moving viewpoint, which travels along inside *that which it has to apprehend.*

—WOLFGANG ISER,
THE ART OF READING

It was true that I could hear only my own voice, but my own voice was the voice of the dead, for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voice of the living.

—STEPHEN A. GREENBLATT,
SHAKESPEAREAN NEGOTIATIONS

The title of this article was inspired by a piece called "Voices in the Te: by my brother Daniel Boyarin (1986). His article is a close analysis o brief example of midrash, the early genre of rabbinic literature wh: records the sages' expansions on the Bible. His title pointed to the mu vocality of the founding rabbinic texts, whose primary character is that represented dialogue. My "voices around the text" are those of myself, ı fellow students, and teachers in an informal class that has been meeting several years at a yeshiva on the Lower East Side of New York City.

The quotes from Greenblatt and Iser suggest that, despite the appar gap in time, the voices "in" and "around" these texts are mutually dep dent and coexistent. Without the text, we who constitute the class wo have no basis for dialogue among ourselves. Without us, the rabb inscribed words would remain only potential.[1] The intersubjectivism I identifies as inherent in any literary reading opens into a vast (thou bounded) number of relational possibilities when several voices togetl read several voices. The dialogism *between* reader and text identified in th quotes should not blind us to the social process *among* groups of readers c

lectively constructing given texts. Therefore this article aims to address three primary issues:

- The ways people mark themselves as distinct groups through unique recombinations of various cultural genres.
- The convergence between the concerns of anthropology and those of literary theory in the study of textual practices.
- The anthropological understanding of Judaism, insofar as founding texts are critical to the perpetual recreation of Jewish identity.

The first two points are familiar. The third has fairly recently begun to receive the attention it deserves both from literary scholars concerned with the history of reading and interpretation, and from ethnographers of Jewish life (Goldberg 1987; Heilman 1983).

Through my emphasis on the continued, creative role of texts in Jewish life, I hope to call into question a lingering antitextual bias among practitioners of cultural anthropology. This bias sometimes appears in the guise of a critique of what has been accurately called "the myth of the Judaeo-Christian tradition" (Cohen 1969). It has been suggested that the phrase "Judaeo-Christian" eradicates the specificity and autonomy of Jews in much the same way that the phrase "mankind" eradicates the specificity and autonomy of women.[2] This is a highly ideological and power-laden reduction. It is similar to the presumption of a monolithic (and alienated) "Western" culture which, in the discourse of critical scholars, usually suffers by comparison to the rich variety of indigenous cultures threatened by imperialism.

In this way, critiques aimed at the dominant Christian ethos effectively denigrate the Jewish voice. An example of this is found at the beginning and end of Dennis Tedlock's masterful *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation.* Tedlock's distortion is particularly distressing and revealing because his book otherwise constitutes an eloquent and daring exploration of dialogic oral cultures which are both threatened and precious:

> Neither Zuni nor Quiche begins the world from nothing, and neither traces it to the Intention of a single Author, that monologue artist who is so obviously alphabetically literate: "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Instead, Zuni and Quiche gods need spoken dialogue just as much as humans do. (Tedlock 1983:18)

> [In California Indian myths of "creation by will"] there is no solitary male nude saying, "Let there be this and that." (Tedlock 1983:338)

Talk about Alpha and Omega, first and last! It is precisely in a *book* like Tedlock's that the beginning and the end are made to bear the greatest illocutionary force, and these "offhand comments" are hardly accidental. It is

hard not to hear a sneer in the words "alphabetically literate," though it is not obvious after all why that is a condemnation of anything or anyone. In any case, nowhere in what Jews call the Bible does God refer to himself by an alphabetical metaphor. Nor does God refer to himself by an anthropomorphic metaphor, preferring to say "*ehiye ma she ehiye*" (usually, though problematically, glossed as "I am what I am"). Tedlock's burlesque of the "Judaeo-Christian concept of God" as a male nude refers back, in the first instance, to his discussion of Lévi-Strauss's figure of *l'homme nu*, who (as the figure of revealed Universal Man) Tedlock identifies in a confused way with the Christian biblical logos. Unfortunately again for Tedlock's thesis, in contrast to the foregoing sequence of "Let there be"s, when God is ready to create humanity the utterance is "Let us make man." The midrash interprets this as an indication of God's dialogue with the angels.[3]

This midrashic claim is simultaneously a constative and a performative speech act (cf. Austin 1962). That is, it both grounds the rabbis' implicit claim of the right to coproduce scriptural meaning (as the angels coproduced humanity), and at the same time exercises that right. Thus, drawing on imperatives inherent in the biblical text, as it were, generations living in radically changed circumstances over thousands of years have understood continuing interpretation as intrinsic to the Bible's divine character.[4] To paraphrase von Rad (1965:119), part of the task faced by each Jewish generation is in "first becoming Israel"—reliving the collective acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Interpretation is a dynamic tool enabling mediation between the realities of everyday circumstance and culture, and the impossible demands of *imitatio dei*. The range of acceptable interpretations of biblical texts is determined by the tension between the collectivizing force of the search to establish a shared identity, and the desire to identify one's unique individuality with the essence of Judaism.[5]

A recent article by Thomas Csordas on Catholic Pentecostalism addresses issues very similar to those here. Csordas calls for a scholarly effort to define empirically "the conditions under which particular genres might serve traditional authority or liberation" (1987:463). I would counter that affirmation of traditional authority and the service of liberation are not necessarily antithetical. There can be no objective or "empirical" way to identify the service of liberation, since liberation is an autonomous, intersubjective effort. Similarly, "traditional authority" is not a monolith (as the standard and still pervasive binary distinction between "traditional" and "modern" would suggest), but is as various as the groups that express loyalty to multiple sources of authority. In particular, there is no reason to assume a priori that forms of authority grounded in an interaction between text and speech are any more repressive than those which are exclusively based in orality.

Csordas also argues that

> in their ignorance of social conditions for creativity, what participants necessarily misapprehend is that, through ritual language in performance, they have created a new reality. (1987:463)

I believe, however, that far from being mutually exclusive, participation and critical awareness can and sometimes must be linked in the search for identity. This is so for any individual to the extent that she or he is dissatisfied with the founding of "modernist and post-modernist consciousness . . . on separation, on self-difference" (Docherty 1987:207). "Alienation" cannot be overcome by denying our deeply ingrained heritage of doubt. I believe, in fact, that all of the participants in my class at the yeshiva, and probably Catholic Pentecostals as well, are to varying degrees aware of the social conditions—and know that one of those conditions is a good deal of public discretion regarding the social conditions.[6] (If the converse of Csordas's claim were true, and those who are aware of the social conditions could not be participants, then the notion of participant observation truly would be bankrupt.)

Before proceeding to my discussion of the class's reading strategies proper, I will briefly discuss the neighborhood setting of the yeshiva, and the individuals who have participated in the class. This information is basic to understanding how these readers read. Also, it should imply what cannot be analyzed more explicitly here: that the strategies employed in reading are part of the general strategies of personhood in a world of multiple and conflicting cultural demands.

SETTING

Neither the Jewish population of the contemporary Lower East Side, nor the yeshiva that is located there, would at first seem to be likely places to look for cultural innovation. True, there are a number of young male rabbinical students at the yeshiva. But as one of them related to me, the *mashgiach* (dean) understands what tourists see at the yeshiva: "Old books, old benches, and old rabbis." And it is undeniable that the yeshiva and the neighborhood have been in decline for years.

Yet even in decline, Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem (MTJ) is still very much a streetwise, down-to-earth neighborhood yeshiva. The teachers and students range from Modern Orthodox to Hasidic in affiliation. There are also a number of unclassifiable individuals—"characters" in New York parlance—who contribute greatly to MTJ's consciousness of its offbeat and authentic Jewish style.

The range of styles of Jewish identity that coexist on the Lower East Side is different and in some ways more dramatic than in the flourishing Orthodox population centers in the outer boroughs and the suburbs. In a certain

sense Reb Moshe Feinstein, the revered former head of the yeshiva, institutionalized this tradition of tolerance. He insisted that all Jewish boys, regardless of their family background, could attend his yeshiva, and defended that policy by arguing that traditionally Orthodox Jews would be challenged and stimulated by the presence of non-Orthodox children.

Reb Moshe's approach can be contrasted to two others that are prevalent in the Orthodox and Hasidic world today. Some communities attempt to isolate themselves as much as possible not only from Gentile influences, but from contact with Jews whom they believe to be too involved with the Gentile world (Poll 1973 [1962]; Rubin 1972). Other communities take an opposed approach, reaching out to anyone of Jewish birth and attempting to influence her or him to follow that community's particular style of observance (Harris 1985).

Whatever may be the case at other yeshivas, MTJ certainly does not constitute a "closed society" (Helmreich 1982:x). What is remarkable about MTJ is, on the contrary, precisely the high degree to which it permits worldly discourse and simultaneously remains essentially within the standards of Orthodox values. That at least some of the participants at MTJ are aware of this synthesis was indicated by a young man who pointed out that his winter coat could be buttoned either left over right—as is the European secular male convention, followed by many Orthodox Jews as well—or right over left, as is the custom among Hasidim, following the biblical precept of maintaining distinctive differences of clothing between Jews and non-Jews. His comment—"I'm a double agent"—made explicit his awareness of his ability to fit into either social sphere.

It probably requires less social energy[7] for Orthodox East Siders to be "double agents" than it would to exclude the non-Jewish or non-Orthodox world from their consciousness. Jews are a minority on the Lower East Side now; in particular, more and more of what was formerly "Jewish territory" is occupied by East Asians. Maintaining a sense of the Lower East Side as Jewish therefore entails creatively reimagining the place. The heteroglossia freely employed in this task, examples of which I will present in the following paragraphs, will also serve as a foretaste of the strategies of textual intercourse that are my main focus here.

The yeshiva is located on the fringe of the intact center of Jewish residence, on East Broadway, a commercial street where virtually all of the businesses are now Chinese. One day, during the portion of the class in which we study the weekly Bible reading, our Bible teacher arrived at a phrase which he pronounced *shawm sawm loy* ("there he placed [gave] him," Exodus 15:25). One of my classmates immediately made a pun: "*Shawm sawm loy*—that's the Chinese store across the street, no?" His "interpretation" of the phrase was a parody of the phrase-by-phrase reading and translation process that is the method of traditional Jewish study, but its humor

came from a twofold juxtaposition: first, between the teacher's traditional European Jewish style of Hebrew pronunciation, and the contemporary pronunciation this particular student learned in Israel; and second, between the supposed sanctity, the "otherness" of Torah study and the actual proximity of an alien culture whose names are completely opaque to our interpretation, hence "all sound alike" to us. He was making a comment about the change of the neighborhood, but also staking a claim to the territory by borrowing this apt-sounding phrase from our class to ironically "re-Judaize" the neighborhood.

Another example relating to the neighborhood illustrates heteroglossia as a strategy for stretching the limits of "decent" discourse within the class, in this case by permitting an attitude of intimate familiarity toward the patriarchs that balances on the line between affection and disrespect, as one might with a parent. The text that sparked this brief exchange, Exodus 19:3, reads in the translation of the Jewish Publication Society: "And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying: 'Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel. . . .'" Our teacher explained that, by the principle of nonredundancy in the biblical text, "children of Israel" (literally *bney*, which can also mean "sons") must mean the men, and "house of Jacob" (*beys yakov*) must mean the women. For this reason, the chain of Orthodox girls' schools is known as *Beys Yakov*. There is such a school on the East Side. When the phrase was mentioned, one of the newer members of the class asked incidentally, "Where is the Beys Yakov?"

To which our teacher replied matter-of-factly: "Broome [Street] and Ridge [Street]." (This location is a few blocks up from the yeshiva.)

> I quipped: "Yeah, that's why it says he 'went up.'"
> A third participant: "Yeah, he went up to the Ridge."
> Me: "Riding on a. . . . Well, never mind. Forget I said it."
> Third participant: "You've been watching 'Bewitched' too much!"

I guess you had to be there. The point is the way the biblical text was actualized through its juxtaposition with images from popular culture on one hand (television, Halloween witches), and with the geography of the Lower East Side on the other. Moses is domesticated; a reference to popular culture, "underground" in the context of the yeshiva, is briefly shared, thus reinforcing our class's distinctiveness within the yeshiva; simultaneously, the prosaic neighborhood takes on biblical dimensions.[8]

THE CLASS

The two young rabbis who teach the class, who are described below, decided to start what they originally thought of as a *baal teshuva* ("penitent" or

"returnee") class in 1983. They never publicized the class widely and its membership has remained constant at between two and four students. Recruitment is by word of mouth. When I first attended the class in 1984, my fellow students were a jazz guitarist, an avant-garde composer, and a sculptor. During the past year of study (1987–1988), the class included a painter, a former painter turned futures trader, and a young man who had built up his own bottled seltzer delivery business, but who had formerly traveled in Asia and earned his living importing Asian handicrafts. Since the class meets during working hours, participation in the class demands a flexible schedule—an occupation outside the *balebatish* (normal, conventional, bourgeois) mainstream. At the same time, since we are not full-time students, and we neither pay tuition nor receive stipends, we do not fit as members of the *kollel*—the body of young adult males, usually married, who continue to study full time.

For reasons related to my own position as observer and participant, I have chosen not to *commit* the formal interviews that would afford the data for a comparison of the participants' respective motivations and internal rationalizations. In addition to my own self-understanding, the only information I have relevant to this question is available because one of the current members of the class, whom I will call Andrew, chose to open himself to me privately—perhaps sensing that I had already dealt with some of the dilemmas he was confronting in adopting aspects of Orthodox belief and practice.

Andrew's mother was Jewish, his father was not. He was raised with a minimal consciousness of Judaism and was not given a Jewish name as a child. Years ago, he was active in socialist movements. At a certain point, a friend of his who was a political scientist wrote a series of articles concluding that the reason for the failure of political socialism was that it did not acknowledge the existence of God. Upon reading this, Andrew decided that the argument rang true, and that, as the son of a Jewish mother, the logical conclusion was for Andrew to acknowledge the claim of Judaism on him. He began concentrating on biblical themes in his art and started attending synagogue. Eventually, he felt the need to gain competence in the Bible and Talmud, which he explains now by saying that if he was going to depict biblical scenes in his work, he needed to know "how they really happened" in detail. He has begun observing the Sabbath and would like to keep his head covered in accordance with Orthodox standards. However, his wife, who was born to two Jewish parents and raised with considerable Jewish cultural awareness, resents and resists his turn toward Orthodoxy, basing her criticisms especially on the subordinate position of women in Orthodox Judaism.

The last point in particular—a disparity between the opportunities for involvement and the enthusiasm of men in the class, and coolness combined

with exclusion experienced by their wives—is a tension several participants have felt. It seems likely, in fact, that part of the reason this particular group devotes so much social energy to mediating between liberal social standards and the tenets of Orthodox loyalty is because they are married to women who are unwilling to submit to Orthodox standards of female comportment. The one member of the present class who is not married is the most severe and uncompromising *baal teshuva* among us, and has also on occasion railed against "liberals." Referring to the strict and logically arbitrary rules laid down in a certain section of the Bible, he declared: "This is a *parshe* [section] that'll separate the liberals from the *yidn.*" Though he transposed the usual terms in his paraphrase, wasn't he also suggesting it was a *parshe* that would separate the men from the boys?

I burned and kept my mouth shut at this. I felt he had transgressed the unwritten ground rules of tolerance in the class, and could think of no reply that would be within my own conception of them; apparently, he understood the ground rules differently. Furthermore, his comment reminded me of the sometimes awkward fact that I am indeed an anthropologist, a liberal and a dyed-in-the-wool cultural relativist. Which raises a further issue: it is altogether to the credit of the class that they tolerate the presence of an anthropologist, but it is not obvious why they do so. There are several answers to this question.

First, although I introduced myself as an anthropology student when I first joined the class, I did not adopt the ethnographer's attitude until almost three years later. My involvement in the class stemmed initially from my felt need to work through, slowly and consciously, a passage from academic study toward internalized participation in religious Judaism (J. Boyarin 1988). Only when I had agreed to present a paper about the yeshiva at an academic conference did I begin keeping notes during the class. Other members of the class occasionally took notes as well, which mitigated what I had feared would be an obtrusively "clinical" effect of my recording. This did not prevent my note taking from being immediately commented on:

One day, as we were beginning a new Talmudic tractate, our Talmud teacher explained that what the rabbis were doing in the debate recorded by the text was "trying to knock each other's arguments out, like the T.V. show in the sixties—rock 'em, sock 'em robots. Remember that?"

To which one of the members immediately followed: "Rock 'em, sock 'em rabbis!"

I took out a scrap of paper to record this witticism, and our teacher laughed: "He's an anthropologist—he's gonna write about us!" The good humor of his acknowledgment reflected his own practice at observing and remarking on the distinctive, offbeat character of the Jewish Lower East Side in general, and of MTJ in particular.[9]

Our Bible teacher's acceptance was somewhat more resigned and skeptical: One day I asked his forgiveness for making him wait while I take notes. Thinking I was simply recording the lesson itself, he said that he didn't mind, because it was the only way I'd remember the Torah. I explained that I was taking notes about MTJ as well. He replied, "*Nu*—if somebody else came in, he'd write that there's a *meshugener* [madman] standing in the corner and yelling and screaming." In other words, he was willing to accept my *also* being an outsider because at least I was listening to voices, and not merely hearing cacophony.

Inherent in my own stance is a paradox between primary identification with Judaism, and an equally ingrained doctrine of cultural relativism. Given the anthropological truism that, so to speak, every language has the same word for "human being" and "member of our group [often specifically male],"[10] the only way any anthropologist could avoid this paradox is through claiming the dubious privilege of nonadherence to any particular culture.[11] Ironically, that claim actually rationalizes solid faith in academic postulates and in the rewards of observing them.

Incidents of radical discrepancy between my views (especially on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict [D. Boyarin and J. Boyarin 1989]) and the opinions of others in the class are occasional and extrinsic to the ongoing business of study. The most immediate, ongoing threat to empathy for me in the class—one which I both suppress and mediate in my own cognition—is between the principle of *toyre lemoyshe misinay* (that the Torah was given to Moses at Mt. Sinai) and the record of critical, secular biblical research. Of course this looks like a particular form of the usual tension between the "native view" and the "scientific," but there is more to be said, not least because I am a native.

The strategy that I (and perhaps other members of the class) adopt at points in the biblical reading where the seams of redaction seem particularly unavoidable is suggested by Meir Sternberg. His comments are also pertinent to the dilemmas of intercultural interpretation:

> And as long as we adhere to the text's self-definition as religious literature with such and such singularities, we need not even submit to the dictate of identifying ourselves as religious or secular readers. Those who play by the Bible's rules of communication to the best of their ability can keep their opinions to themselves; only those who make up their own rules may be required to lay their ideological cards on the table. (1985:37)

Sternberg also identifies essentially what those rules are:

> The ubiquity of gaps about character and plot [and, by extension, apparent redundancies, contradictions, et cetera] exposes to us our own ignorance: history unrolls as a continuum of discontinuities, a sequence of non sequiturs, which challenge us to repair the omissions [and other "flaws"] by our native wit. (1985:47)

Finally, and relevant to the point I just made about the culturally marked character of all academic analysis, Sternberg makes a cogent claim against all pretensions to purely "positive" source criticism of the Bible:

> Source-oriented critics often imply that they deal in hard facts and consign "aesthetic" analysis to its fate at the none too reliable hands of the literary coterie. If seriously entertained, this is a delusion, bearing the name of positivism with none of its excuses and facilities. There is simply nothing here to be positive about—no, or almost no, facts concerning the sources of the Bible apart from those we ourselves make by inference from the Bible as source. The movement from text to reality cannot but pass through interpretation. (1985:16)

These are, in essence, very convincing solutions to the problems of my position as participant and analyst in the class, helping me to explain how someone with a secular academic background can participate in a Bible study class on traditional terms; to define what those terms are; and to reveal the cultural specificity of the "secular academic" approach. However, it is worth asking what is *lost* as well as gained in "keeping one's opinions to oneself," because Sternberg's prescription implies the kind of suppression of subjectivity referred to in the introduction to this article. I do indeed "keep my opinion to myself" when I am tempted to explain a textual difficulty with reference to source criticism, yet I am rewarded for pointing out the difficulty and even more so if I can propose or solicit a resolution in accordance with rabbinic hermeneutics.

Thus my own opinions are mixed and often conflicted. As Strathern suggests, "the tension must be kept going; there can be no relief in substituting the one for the other" (1987:286). I find this tension bearable largely thanks to the tolerance exemplified by our Bible teacher's repetition of the dictum that one's students should be considered one's children. He implicitly expanded on this idea in explaining that *urkhats*, the apparently superfluous ritual washing that is part of the Passover seder, is included to arouse the children's curiosity and induce them to ask questions, so that we can relate the Passover story to them. "Now," he continued, "our closest relations in the world are our children—and isn't it sad that *sometimes* we have to relate to them?" In other words, the most important people to relate stories to are one's relatives; and by implication, one becomes related to those with whom one shares stories. In this way, the shared experience of reading fosters a nonauthoritarian intimacy that many who contrast literacy and orality (e.g., Goody 1982) implicitly deny.

THE GROUP READING

The most important story about the class is the one we invent together, in collective dialogue with the biblical and Talmud texts around which we

arrange ourselves. Or to put it in more academic terms, the core of this article is an analysis of discourse focused on texts that are themselves records of discourse. My situation at MTJ offers an opportunity not only for the application of literary theory to ethnography, but for an interrogation of social/literary theory by ethnography. As the literary theorist David Bleich complained recently:

> There has been considerable *speculation* about how people read, but the actual work done by Fish, Iser, Culler, and others has been textual analysis . . . the various models and concepts of "reader-text interaction" proceed on a highly polarized and impoverished sense of human social life: there is the individual reading experience, and there is the general collection of "others." (1986:402, 419)

Bleich argues instead for a critical practice focused not only on the text as a record of dialogue (à la Bakhtin), but even more so as an *occasion* for dialogue—in "the family, the classroom, the academic meeting" (1986:418).

Bleich's critique is forceful, but he stops short of acknowledging that the ideas of those he criticizes concerning dialogue *in* the text are indispensable for understanding dialogue *around* the text. This is especially true of Bakhtin, who, reacting against the inadequacy of the traditional narrow concept of "stylistics" in analyses of novelistic discourse, created tools for understanding discourse that are equally applicable to text and speech. Two of these tools that are critical to my making scholarly sense of my experience in the class, and that have already been referred to in this essay, are those of the constant interplay of centripetal and centrifugal (integrative and disintegrative) forces in language, and of the resulting situation of heteroglossia, intended to describe the full range of contexts which determine the meanings that a particular use of a word within a given utterance may have (Bakhtin 1981).[12] These dynamics were exploited to the utmost by the rabbis, dialogic readers par excellence (sometimes, Meir Sternberg complains, past the point of fidelity to the text [1985:50]).

The motivation of intersubjective readers such as the members of the class at MTJ to swim through the sea of meanings is suggested by Caryl Emerson, one of Bakhtin's translators: "It is the lack, the absence at the center, that keeps the outer word and our inner speech in permanent dialogue" (1983, quoted in Varenne 1984:296). It might be more to the point to speak about the *desire* for a center, or for an "identity"—a term that has already been used to mean many different things in the course of this essay, but which I will provisionally define as a sense of collective belonging without loss of individual consciousness. Perhaps in Judaism, the lack and the desire, along with the conviction that there is or can be a center, motivate the diverse phenomenon scholars call Messianism. Perhaps as well it is this

lack and desire by which the past exercises its claim on "our *weak* Messianic power" and which ensure that the "secret agreement between past generations and the present one" (Benjamin 1969:264) is fulfilled in study. Such motivations are not unique to Jews, of course. Michael Holquist notes that the elderly Bakhtin was centrally

> concerned with continuity in time, that "great time" in which all utterances are linked to all others, both those from the primordial past and those in the furthest reach of the future. (1986:xxi)

Another implication of the role played by centrifugal and centripetal forces in biblical reading is suggested in the course of Johannes Fabian's discussion of the production and internal criticism of sacred texts in a new West African religion. Fabian points out that sanctified texts both "open avenues toward understanding" and place "constraining demands" through their "rhetoric power" (1979:173). On one hand, this dual aspect of simultaneous creativity and repression cannot be denied. On the other hand, it is precisely the "rhetoric power" that also opens "avenues toward understanding."[13] Particularly in the case of an ancient, rich, and hermeneutically elaborated interpretive tradition, one in which the constraints are almost invariably enforced by the implicit threat of social marginalization rather than by the coercive force of state power, it would be both misleading and invasive to suppose that the two aspects can be clearly separated. Rather, the collective task of our class, and of all Jewish intersubjective readers, is to accept upon ourselves the constraining demands as that which makes possible avenues toward understanding. We want to be both inspired and strengthened; we need to find our common ground without losing ourselves.

In particular, because everyone in the class—including our teachers, who have been strictly observant Jews throughout their lives—has grown up with American mass culture, we collectively employ the strategy of managing and drawing on our multiculturalism, rather than denying it. Again, we are "double agents." We irreverently tease the yeshiva's pretensions to be a "closed society," yet always ultimately subordinate our "external" references (to television shows, classical music, and the like) to the unifying message of the continued binding and life-giving relevance of the holy texts.

This attitude toward American mass culture amplifies the remarks about different Jewish neighborhoods made in the "Setting" portion of this article. The strategy of simultaneous appropriation and ironic distancing is characteristic not only of our class, but of the East Side as a whole. It may be contrasted, as above, both to the studious avoidance of secular culture by some Hasidic groups, and to others' tactic of militant exploitation of American mass-marketing and public relations techniques in recruiting Jews for a uniformitarian Orthodoxy. Nor does it require a professional anthropologist

to note this contrast. Our Talmud teacher, whose ethnographic bent has already been referred to, once cited approvingly the great pains taken by one of the Hasidic groups to distance themselves from America: "We have to create our own *midber* [desert]"—implying that only when we are free from extraneous influences can we properly receive the Torah. He thus offered a countervoice to the repeated allusion to secular culture that he himself relishes and puts to great rhetorical effect. The combination of distancing and appropriation is not unique; I suppose every ethnic enclave both avoids and coopts capitalist mass culture at various times. As Fernandez (1988) warns, we should beware of exaggerating contrasts between places, especially when those contrasts flatter our own favorite places. Nevertheless, the variety of cultural registers in our class and the techniques and resources used in negotiating among them, are in any case richer than the stereotype would suggest.

The distinctive intonation patterns of oral Talmudic argument are one such resource. One day, for example, while guiding us through the record of a particular dispute, our Talmud teacher indicated that the text had reached a definitive conclusion by saying, "El Exigente approves [intonation up; pause], and the people rejoice [intonation down]." Several purposes were served by this. The daunting foreignness of Talmudic language was overcome with an immediately recognizable expression. The power of yeshiva culture to encompass and incorporate mass culture was demonstrated. Most important, since the reference to El Exigente was immediately accessible to everyone in the class, but clearly not part of the standard yeshiva oral repertoire, this idiom simultaneously enriched the repertoire of study, and marked out (as in a Venn diagram) the distinct combination of cultural competencies possessed by the class—an important form of reinforcement for adult beginners with professional ambitions and credentials in their own various fields.

Another technique is to undercut petrified standard translations through new forms of linkage. Thus, the standard English translation of the biblical verb *vayolinu*, used in regard to the Israelites' complaining against Moses in the desert, is that they "murmured" against him—a verb that has no obvious connotation of complaint in contemporary American usage. Following the example of the great commentator Rashi, who defends his interpretations of biblical words with examples of other contexts in which the word has the same connotation, our teacher[14] cited Rodgers and Hammerstein: "In 'Cinderella,' it says, 'Ten minutes ago I met you, and we murmured our "how do you dos."' So that word doesn't quite fit here." Again, the lessons are several. First, that at least some of Rashi's techniques are altogether applicable to our own work of translation and interpretation. Second, to demonstrate the possibility of his own exposure to secular culture (and, a fortiori, that of those who were not raised within Orthodoxy

at all) enhancing his grasp of Judaism. Third, to show that the work of translation is neither exhaustively nor satisfactorily contained in existing scholarship, but needs to be constantly taken up and renewed.

Such references are measured and counterbalanced by both teachers with comments about how "wholesome" entertainment was when we were children. Nostalgia for a protected, more innocent golden age of entertainment confirms the valorization of the past at the expense of the present—a deeply ingrained Jewish habit. This was made explicit when our Bible teacher proposed holding a *melave malke*—a "going away party" for the Sabbath on Saturday night—and showing an old East Side Kids movie. He would consider such entertainment—free of the violence, open sexuality and other flaws of mass media today, and furthermore reinforcing the distinctiveness of the Lower East Side—suitable for the enhancement of religious conviviality.

Because of the generally tolerant atmosphere at MTJ, it is possible for such "insider" codes of piety and belonging as do exist to be revealed as such through creative misappropriation. One member of the class—the futures trader—has made a special good-humored effort to acquire by imitation various catch phrases, characteristic Yiddish gestures and intonation patterns. Several times he heard someone say to a friend who had just rendered a small favor (such as finding change for a dollar bill), *tizke lemitzves*—"may you merit fulfillment of religious commandments." The futures trader finally spoke up: "What's he saying—'fistful o' mitzvahs?'" This was received as a *bon mot* rather than a *faux pas* by everyone who heard it. The cogent implication of his mishearing is that *they*, the world outside, go for the "fistful o' dollars" that served as the title of a famous Clint Eastwood movie, while *we* want to grab the merit and pleasure of fulfilling God's will. But the hermetic pretensions of the code phrase *tizke lemitzves* (as a substitute for a simple "thank you") are undercut by the simultaneous implication that mitzvahs are the object of "our" acquisitive instinct just as dollars are the object of "theirs."[15]

The interpretation of religious and popular culture is not the only axis of dialogic contrast in our class. Of course, the texts themselves are highly dialogic, but my topic here is not "the texts themselves." It is worth mentioning, however, that insofar as both Bible and Talmud are studied with constant reference to Rashi's commentary, printed on the same page, the printed page is "multivocal." Furthermore, there is a distinctive contrast between the modes of grounding of textual authority, and hence of the implicit or explicit rules for reading, vis-à-vis (*voix-à-voix?*) the Bible and the Talmud.

In the Talmud, where opinions are ascribed to particular, named rabbis or to "the sages" as a collective, every represented voice is an authoritative voice (though of course not all carry the day). It is the logical flow of their

debate that demands correct understanding—though even at that level, students' or commentators' interpretations may legitimately vary. In the Bible, as discussed above, every nuance (including orthography), every apparent redundancy, gap, contradiction is conventionally regarded as divinely intended, hence demanding of human interpretation. In Talmud, the halachic (legal) debates inspire more discussion and dialogue; in Bible, the narrative portions are more compelling. The Yiddish expression *a kashye af a mayse*—[what's the point of asking] a logical question about a story—applies to those who mistakenly interrogate narrative in the Talmud, not to those who appropriately interrogate biblical narrative. These differences help to shape a structural arrangement of the class—first hour Bible, second hour Talmud, the texts varying in mode of study and the teachers varying in personal style.

Without exaggerating the contrast, the kinds of story-creation stimulated by Talmud and Bible study may be illustrated with "the grapefruit" and "the *shtreimel* [Hasidic fur hat, worn only on Sabbath and holidays]." Herewith "the grapefruit":

Two advanced young scholars sat and studied for some time quite near to our class. Once one of them, a rabbi in between pulpits, was peeling a grapefruit. A member of our class, sitting with his back to the rabbi, said "Someone's eating a grapefruit."

The rabbi responded, "Just because you smell a grapefruit near me, it doesn't mean I'm eating a grapefruit. It so happens I'm *peeling* a grapefruit. You don't have the Talmudic training to grasp such subtle distinctions, but that'll come with time."

As we finished our class, he finished his grapefruit. Then I resumed: "Would we be entitled to conclude from the fact that you formerly were peeling the grapefruit, the smell of grapefruit has disappeared and there's a pile of peels on the table next to you, that you *now* have eaten the grapefruit?"

Our Talmud teacher had an answer ready: "No, we couldn't conclude that, because even if you see someone chasing someone else with a knife, and they both turn the corner, and then you see the second person bleeding and the first holding the bloody knife, he can't incur the death penalty." (In other words, according to Jewish law, there can be no death sentence based on circumstantial evidence.)

The rabbi who had peeled the grapefruit pointed to his study partner, who was bent over his book so still that he looked like he'd been drugged, and concluded, "You guys are ignoring one thing: the grapefruit was poisoned!"

No doubt this sort of banter is ubiquitous in yeshivas, but here it reinforces the ambience of tolerance, of welcome to Torah, which is part of Reb Moshe Feinstein's legacy at Tifereth Jerusalem. An assertion is made about

a trivial matter. It is disputed in an equally trivial fashion. The person who disputes the original assertion announces that he is engaging in sophisticated Talmudic logic, and clearly undercuts what is on the surface a put-down by simultaneously implying that Talmud students may sometimes admit the triviality of the issues to which that logic is seriously applied. Then, one of the "beginners" resumes the dialogue with a display of his ability to frame an appropriate question. Another credentialed participant validates the beginner's question by citing the Talmudic ruling on an analogous situation, and the contrast between the life-and-death seriousness of that analogy and the inconsequentiality of the present issue heightens the game. Finally everything is drawn together, and the joke is on everyone: on the rabbi with the grapefruit, who "confesses to a crime"; on his regular study partner, whose intense concentration is likened to rigor mortis; on the rest of us, who "fail to see the real truth" because we are uninitiated; and ultimately on the Talmud itself, which is entirely capable of considering a grapefruit as a murder weapon. This verbal play bears a message that may be expressed thus: "We are all insiders. We share the same idiom. It is worthwhile for the pleasure we derive from exercising that idiom, if for no other reason. And that idiom permits us to laugh at ourselves without fear."

And now "the shtreimel":

One day Andrew, the painter in our class, announced to our Bible teacher: "I want you to know that your shtreimel [which he had seen our teacher wearing in the synagogue] inspired me. In my new painting, Boaz is wearing a shtreimel when he goes out to meet Ruth in the field."

I noticed a discrepancy based on the fact that the shtreimel is only worn on holy days, which I wanted to point out without causing embarrassment: "Well, it certainly wasn't *Shabbes* [the Sabbath] or a holiday, because why would Ruth have been in the fields on those days? Boaz must have known he was going out to meet his bride, and he honored her by putting on his holiday clothes."

Then our teacher said: "I'll tell you a story that brings to mind. It concerns the Arugas Habosem,[16] who was from the part of Hungary called Oberland. The Jews in Oberland didn't wear shtreimlekh and long coats like the Hasidim. They dressed like Western European Jews. But the Arugas Habosem became a Hasid of the Belzer Rebe. When he went to Belz, he was the only one who wore a top hat instead of a shtreimel, but in his home, all the rabbis wore top hats. He wanted to wear a shtreimel, but he knew if he did his wife would hit the roof. So he went to the Belzer Rebe and asked for advice. The rebe told him the following: 'Next Wednesday, put on the shtreimel. Your wife will get angry. To calm her down, tell her you'll compromise with her—you'll only wear it on Shabbes!' "

Andrew had the last word: "I'm in an exactly analogous situation! I want to wear a yarmulke now, but my wife said that's the last straw—if I

start wearing a yarmulke, I'm on my way out! So maybe if I tell her I'll wear it only on Shabbes. . . ."

This exchange does not require much comment, inasmuch as it is basically a catalogue of all the dialogic techniques documented throughout this essay. There is the depiction in a contemporary art form of a biblical scene—a religious expression in a secular medium. The potential embarrassment of the artist's apparent ignorance of the fact that a shtreimel is only worn on holidays is avoided by an interpretation saving him from contradiction, just the way the biblical text is routinely "saved" from apparent contradiction through enriching narrative resolution. This, in turn, affords an opportunity for the extension of oral storytelling about ancestors, reinforcing the identification of the biblical heroes Boaz and Ruth with illustrious ancestors placed in our relatively recent history.[17] Finally, the story about ancestors at least suggests a resolution to a current practical dilemma faced by a member of the class. As Fishbane says (n. 4), we are "extending divine authority into historical time"; but at the same time we are, so to speak, locating ourselves in God's time as well.

CONCLUSIONS

Three programmatic claims about tradition, text, and time in Jewish culture grow out of my participation and analysis of the class at the yeshiva.

1. *Tradition is not a thing but a process.* As Hans-Georg Gadamer understands, there is a false dogmatism involved in "asserting an opposition and separation between the ongoing, natural 'tradition' and the reflective appropriation of it" (1976:28).[18] That observation is made as part of a critique of objectivist assumptions on the part of historians, stressing correctly that their perspectives are always culturally and historically determined. Yet Gadamer's unreflective use of the word "natural" suggests that he may not be aware of an implicit corollary which is centrally relevant here: *the means of appropriation of the ongoing tradition is reflective.* Until Gadamer's thesis is turned inside out in this fashion, it is possible for scholars to follow him through a valid self-critique without confronting their own reification of "tradition" as something exotic or innocent "out there," either unmarked by change and inquiry, or alternatively, succumbing to the irresistible disenchantment of Western capitalist sign systems. Treating tradition in a way suggested by the Oxford Etymological Dictionary's second definition of the word—"delivery, transmission"—would be more productive, and perhaps even yield more dynamic comparisons between cultures than we have achieved until now. In the light of this approach, tradition would be evaluated not as the relative completeness of some presumed primary stock of cultural traits, but as the relative possession by a group of people of the means (symbolic and institutional) to interpret their lifeworld in a way that

satisfies their desire for personal integrity, their sense of belonging to the group, their connection to past and future, and their place in the world. Of course, this is a culturally determined definition. How could it not be?[19]

According to this definition, Jewish sacred literature, beginning with the Bible, is a central means of dynamic tradition, not a "fixed text" to be "merely repeated" (as Csordas implies 1987:462). Questioning—interrogation of the authoritative text—is the essential pattern of Jewish study, along with reflection on the interaction between text and everyday life. It is *traditional* constantly to dispute and recreate what Judaism is; the loss of that capacity reflects in turn a weakening of Jewish tradition.

I am not arguing that the differences between my evaluation and Csordas's are simply differences between Judaism and Christianity. I know at least enough of Christianity to realize that the schematic contrast of the two traditions in this fashion is unenlightening. Of course, as a committed Jew and a partisan of dialogue I am flattered by Julian Hartt's claim that

> Somewhere along the line [the transition from Jewish to Christian theology] a shift is made from the "dialogical" relation of God and man to a unilaterally determined ontological relation. The Old Testament is dialogical. . . [whereas in] High Christian Orthodoxy. . . God transcends time absolutely. (1986:186)

Yet its very convenience makes me suspicious of this sweeping judgment; at any rate, Hartt is comparing the expression of theology in texts, not their reception and interpretation by readers. Judaism and Christianity should not be treated as monoliths, but rather as interacting traditions which also contain internal debate (see D. Boyarin 1990). Otherwise, a critique like Tedlock's, with which I began, reduces the dialogism inherent in Jewish textuality and reinforces the Pauline canard that "the letter killeth." In response I offer my second conclusion, to wit:

2. *Text and speech are of equal priority in Jewish study.* As Swearingen notes, "texts used in formally defined oral situations are complex mixtures of 'literate' and 'oral'" (1986:139). In the class at the yeshiva, it is bootless to attempt to specify whether the situation itself is "textual" or "oral." The voices around the text are the voices in the text; that is the point of the epigraph from Iser at the beginning of this essay. The texts not only are read as simultaneously oral and literate, but *arose* as that "complex mixture." In regards to the Bible, whether we view it as a redaction of oral traditions, or it is regarded as *toyre lemoshe misinay*—either way it is both book and speech. As to the Talmud, of course, there is no argument between religious and secular scholarship: it is a written record of dialogue.[20]

This existing rich complexity offers the trace of an opportunity for the creation of an ethnographic text that is genuinely "related" (as both story-telling and family-building). In the service of communication that tradition engages in a constant process of reverbalization and reinscription, and

ethnography should be able to become part of that process. Which seems to lead straight to the third conclusion:

3. *The task of Jewish study is to create community among Jews through time via language.*[21] A specific sense of that loaded term "community" is intended here. It is certainly not that impoverished sense in which the appellation ("the American Jewish community," "the financial community," "an adult community in southern New Jersey") is used to impute a more profound empathy to those specified as belonging to any given interest or affinity group. Nor yet does it refer to the American definition of voluntaristic community as "people joining together to create societies according to the principles they jointly produce" (Varenne 1986:211), since in Judaism, both adherence to the group and the principles of the group are almost always prior to any individual's consciousness. Rather, there is an implicit Jewish ideal of community as that which is attained in the course of the shared (so far, generally male) task of rearticulating how to be Jewish.

The normative male Jewish view of Paradise—at least for the past few centuries of European Judaism—sees a great reward in the opportunity to study with the great scholars of previous generations. One day our Bible teacher, expounding on the multiplicity of valid understandings, cited Rabbi Akiba Eger's vision of the messianic age, when all the righteous will sit and study together in a circle. The point of the image is equidistance and equal view of one another: I can see your truth and you can see my truth. A related image is that of the Tablets of the Law, which, the midrash asserts, were legible from all sides: truth can be seen from every perspective. Thus, much as the Sabbath is viewed as a foretaste of messianic peace, the conduct of our class is imperfectly guided by a polyvocal ideal, which revives voices in the past, creates a voice for the present, and seeks faithfully to await a liberated, tradition-filled future.

NOTES

This chapter first appeared as an article in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 4, no. 4 (November 1989). My thanks to Elissa Sampson for her usual editing, encouragement, and general support; to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Deborah Dash Moore, and the anonymous readers of *Cultural Anthropology* for specific editorial comments; and to Shmuel Deitel, Sholem Drucker, Richard McBee, Yosi Rosenbaum, and others for reading with me at the yeshiva.

1. Edmond Jabès writes: "You are silent: I was. You speak: I am" (1976:29), virtually compelling the reader to speak in the name of the one who is written.

2. See the preface to Daniel Boyarin's *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (1990), where he cites Julia Kristeva as the inspiration for this formulation. For an example of the way the idea of the text is almost always already understood as the Christian Bible, see Barbara Christian, attacking the jargonistic emphasis on "text"

in contemporary literary theory: "Because I went to a Catholic Mission school in the West Indies . . . the word 'text' immediately brings back agonizing memories of Biblical exegesis" (1987:55). "Bible" in this passage means, of course, the Christian Bible, not the Jewish.

3. Stephen Tyler's essay "On Being Out of Words" is a more blatant example of the totalizing, anti-"Western" bias Tedlock displays. Although he is specifically criticizing fossilized traditions of ethnographic writing, the entire "Western" tradition is implicitly attacked, and Jewish textuality once again subsumed: "Orality makes us think of many voices telling many tales in many tongues in contrast to *the inherent monologism of texts*" (1986:136; emphasis mine).

His analysis: "Our recovery of rhetoric and poetry, those writings marked by the presence of speech, signifies our discontent with plain style, with a form of writing defined by the absence of voice and the pretense of an absence of interest" (1986:135).

I beg to differ: We are indeed discontented with "the pretense of an absence of interest," but that pretense has usually been couched in scientistic, not plain style. The answer is not obscure language (Tyler's idea of rhetoric and poetry here seems to consist of Francophile language tricks, such as his neologism "origin-alienation"). Part of the answer is to move beyond addressing a privileged coterie, whether of scientists or deconstructive adepts.

Tyler's prognosis is that eventually there will come about a "new writing [which] . . . must first be disconnected not only from the voice, but from the eye as well. It must break the whole spell of representation and project a world of pure arbitrariness without representation. It must be disconnected from any world that is not built into its own circuitry and programs" (1986:137).

But a nonrepresentational language (written or oral) seems to be utterly inconceivable. If I am correct in this, then Tyler's demand for an inconceivable "nonrepresentational language" (recourse to the evidence of "nonrepresentational art" won't help, since what such art does is throw back onto linguistic conceptualization the task of creating meaning) "represents" nothing but a desperate crisis in professional cultural anthropology. This despair is expressed by Tyler as a desire to overcome difference (blamed on writing). But living with difference—living with language—is being human, and even Derrida, upon whom Tyler leans heavily, takes care to point out that writing "does not *befall* an innocent language" (1976:37).

I suppose my alternative suggestion is that we explore how writing (in its many forms) is at work around us, and how we can use it as a communicative tool in a less alienated way, without longing for the kind of "death and transfiguration" expressed in Tyler's bizarre mystic vision. I've tried to do that here.

4. This has been well formulated by Geoffrey Hartman: "The accented, promissory narration we call Scripture is composed of tokens that demand the continuous and precarious intervention of successive generations of interpreters, who must keep the words as well as the faith" (1986:17). Or again, by Michael Fishbane: "a root feature and the paradoxical task of inner biblical (as well as later Jewish) exegesis [is] to extend the divine voice into historical time while reasserting and reestablishing its hierarchical preeminence over all other cultural voices" (1986:25).

Note, however an important difference in tone: Hartman emphasizes the "de-

mands" of the text, while Fishbane seems to view the challenge to the exegete as prior to any impulses stemming from "the text itself." This is consistent with Fishbane's concern with the redactive process analyzed by biblical source criticism, a point which will be alluded to further in this article.

5. The idea that the range of interpretations is an open issue is related to Lyotard's identification of the range of acceptable questions and explanations as the stakes of the game in science (1984). This notion, along with my use of the term "heteroglossia," is also suggested by Bakhtin's discussion of the dynamics of language; more on this below. The rage for Bakhtin in the past few years seems to be an indication of the degree of loneliness suffered in the process of standard scholarly writing.

6. Csordas skirts the ways in which authority is also used by Catholic Pentecostals in a mystifying or exploitative way. Despite my point about the exclusion of women below, this essay perhaps suffers from a similar lack. In any case, as Fabian (1979:174) points out, critical statements from within the group are difficult to document.

7. This term is borrowed from Greenblatt, who writes:

> We identify *energia* only indirectly, by its effects: it is manifested in the capacity of certain verbal, aural, and visual traces to produce, shape, and organize collective physical and mental experiences. Hence it is associated with repeatable forms of pleasure and interest, with the capacity to arouse disquiet, pain, fear, the beating of the heart, pity, laughter, tension, relief, wonder. (1988:6)

Bearing in mind that we are thinking of a concept that can only be observed indirectly, it seems useful to speak of "social energy" also as that which makes possible creative mediation among different or competing cultural worlds, as here.

8. Before focusing further in the following sections on the class and its discourse, I must make explicit what has probably been assumed even by those readers who have never heard of a yeshiva: no girls or women study at MTJ. This—along with lesser repressions, such as expressed contempt for non-Orthodox Jewish denominations—must be emphasized, since it discourages both discursive community and the scope of the critical issues addressed to the tradition, and thus limits severely my entire thesis about the creative tolerance of tradition at MTJ. This point deserves more attention than I can give it here.

9. For an example of his acute ethnographic observation, see J. Boyarin (1989).

10. As a translator, I have often faced the dilemma of whether to translate *a yid* as "a Jew" or "a man." Perhaps another way to say this is that Yiddish is a Jewish language precisely *because* the two concepts can be expressed by the same word. Whatever connotations "Jew" may have in English (and it has many), it never means "man."

11. Boon (1982) purports to expand on the thesis of the mutual culturalism of the ethnographic encounter. But he shows this most graphically and persuasively when discussing the representations created out of early European encounters with the non-Eurasian world. Those Europeans seem blatantly riddled with cultural bias to us. Yet when Boon reaches Max Weber, he rehearses Weber's theories, apparently in support of his own thesis, rather than focusing on how Weber is culturally marked; he gets lost among the trees, and loses sight of the forest of theoretical symbols. Fischer (1986) offers a suggestive reading of the ethnographic content of

"ethnic writing," which is helpful in breaking down the dichotomy between professional ethnography and interested cultural representations, but this of course is not the same thing as the cultural situatedness of ethnographers. Radhakrishnan (1987) is directly relevant to this issue, though the critical force of that essay is almost totally reburied in jargon.

12. These meanings may then be "unpacked" in a manner very similar to the close analysis of poetry (albeit always in a contingent way; cf. Friedrich [1986] on indeterminacy in both poetry and linguistics). Were it not for the danger of reinforcing the stereotype of the "wandering Jew," I would be tempted to explore the metaphor of Jewish writing and reading as the repeated packing and unpacking of our cultural baggage.

13. Anthropologists, literary critics, and other scholars are exploring the paradox that lies between these two hands (which we may imagine as outstretched, palms up, attached to two shrugging shoulders, linked by a head tilted to one side, topped by a pair of raised eyebrows), saved from a pure and hence sterile cultural relativism by the idea that in different social situations, access to dialogue (hence to creativity and the opportunity to set the defining terms) is differentially distributed.

14. Remember, this is a young man who has a long black beard, *peyes* (sidelocks), and a long dark coat. The visual presentation that goes along with these cultural juxtapositions heightens the impression of audacity and creativity.

15. A peculiar hermeneutic bind may be noted here. I'm trying to suggest both an extension and a corrective to Foucault's general thesis about the incorporation of subversion into social control. If, in analyzing a particular cultural instance, I first mention the subversion and then the way it validates the general cultural assumptions, I imply (following sequential logic) that the latter point is "what counts." If I reverse the order, as here, the opposite implication is made. In this case, I would argue that the deflation of incipient sanctimoniousness "cleanses" and invigorates the overall value system rather than threatening it. But it seems worth repeating almost *ad nauseum* that while these meanings are analyzed as discrete and sequential, they are produced as unified and simultaneous.

16. "Scented furrow," a biblical allusion. From the later Middle Ages until the early modern period, it was common for rabbinic authors to be referred to by the titles of their books: they named their books, and their books named them.

17. The apparent anachronism of a biblical character in Hasidic garb is quite consistent with the Jewish cultural pattern Max Weinreich aptly calls "panchrony." He cites the example of depictions of King David eating gefilte fish (Weinreich 1980:280).

18. An unfortunate insistence on the separation between the socially determined mythification characterizing Jewish collective memory and the critical, alienated consciousness of the Jewish historian mars Yerushalmi's otherwise erudite and ground-breaking *Zakhor: Jewish Memory and Jewish History* (1982).

19. Dell Hymes anticipates the general point of this paragraph by writing, "Let us consider the notion [of the traditional] not simply as naming objects, traditions, but also, and more fundamentally, as naming a process . . . intact tradition is not so much a matter of preservation, as it is a matter of re-creation" (1975:353–355).

20. An anonymous reader of an earlier draft of this article complained that my "conclusions concerning text and dialogue do not seem to give recognition to the

priority of value bestowed on the text within the oral-textual 'encounter' of the text in Judaism." Indeed: I am explicitly *denying* that "priority of value," though I do not consider the issue closed by any means. Issues relevant to this question include the emphasis on public oral reading of the Torah in the synagogue; the difference (*differance?*) between the way a number of words are written in the Torah and their indicated pronunciation; the frequent interpretive technique of suggesting alternate vocalizations to imply new meanings; and Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak's statement that in the world to come, unlike this world, the pronunciation and spelling of the divine Name will be identical (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesachim, Folio 50:a).

21. Jewish culture has failed at this task precisely to the extent that opportunities for study have been denied to women and the poor.

REFERENCES

Austin, J. L.
1962 *How to Do Things With Words.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail
1981 *The Dialogic Imagination.* Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Benjamin, Walter
1969 *Illuminations.* New York: Schocken Books.

Bleich, David
1986 *Intersubjective Reading.* New Literary History 18:401–422.

Boon, James
1982 *Other Tribes, Other Scribes. Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Cultures, Histories, Religions, and Texts.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boyarin, Daniel
1986 "Voices in the Text." *Revue Biblique* 93:581–597.
1990 *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash: A Study in the Mekilta.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Boyarin, Daniel, and Jonathan Boyarin
1989 "Toward a Dialogue with Edward Said." *Critical Inquiry* 15:626–633.

Boyarin, Jonathan
1988 "Waiting for a Jew: Marginal Redemption at the Eighth Street Shul." In *Between Two Worlds: Ethnographic Essays on American Jews*, pp. 52–76. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
1989 "Un Lieu de l'oubli: Le Lower East Side des Juifs." *Communications* 49.

Christian, Barbara
1987 "The Race for Theory." *Cultural Critique* 7:51–63.

Cohen, Arthur A.
1969 *The Myth of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition.* New York: Harper & Row.

Csordas, Thomas
1987 "Genre, Motive and Metaphor: Conditions for Creativity in Ritual Language." *Cultural Anthropology* 2:445–469.
Derrida, Jacques
1976 *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Docherty, Thomas
1987 "Theory, Enlightenment and Violence: Postmodern Hermeneutics as a Comedy of Errors." *Textual Practice* 1:192–216.
Emerson, Caryl
1983 "The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky and the Internalization of Language." *Critical Inquiry* 10:245–264.
Fabian, Johannes
1979 "Text as Terror: Second Thoughts About Charisma." *Social Research* 46:166–203.
Fernandez, James
1988 "Andalusia on Our Minds." *Cultural Anthropology* 3(1):21–35.
Fischer, Michael
1986 "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory." In *Writing Culture*. Ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, pp. 194–233. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Fishbane, Michael
1986 "Inner Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel." In *Midrash and Literature*. Ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, pp. 19–37. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Friedrich, Paul
1986 *The Language Parallax*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Gadamer, Hans-Georg
1976 *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Goldberg, Harvey, ed.
1987 *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Goody, Jack
1982 "Alternative Paths to Knowledge in Oral and Written Cultures." In *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*. Ed. Deborah Tannen, pp. 201–215. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
Greenblatt, Stephen
1988 *Shakespearean Negotiations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Harris, Liz
1985 *Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family*. New York: Summit Books.
Hartman, Geoffrey H.
1986 "The Struggle for the Text." In *Midrash and Literature*. Ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, pp. 3–18. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Hartt, Julian N.
1986 "Theology as a Hermeneutic Salvaging of History." *New Literary History* 17:183–194.

Heilman, Samuel
1983 *People of the Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Helmreich, William
1982 *The World of the Yeshiva*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Holquist, Michael
1986 "Introduction." In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. M. M. Bakhtin, pp. ix–xxii. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Hymes, Dell
1975 "Folkloric Nature and the Sun's Myth." *Journal of American Folklore* 88:345–369.
Iser, Wolfgang
1979 *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Jabès, Edmond
1976 *The Book of Questions*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.
Lyotard, Jean-François
1984 *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Poll, Solomon
1973[1962] *The Hasidic Community of Williamsburg*. New York: Schocken.
Radhakrishnan, R
1987 "Ethnic Identity and Post-Structuralist Difference." *Cultural Critique* 6:199–220.
Rubin, Israel
1972 *Satmar: An Island in the City*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.
Sternberg, Meir
1985 *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
Strathern, Marilyn
1987 "An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology." *Signs* 12:276–292.
Swearingen, C. Jan
1986 "Oral Hermeneutics During the Transition to Literacy: The Contemporary Debate." *Cultural Anthropology* 1:138–156.
Tedlock, Dennis
1983 *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Tyler, Stephen A.
1986 "On Being Out of Words." *Cultural Anthropology* 1:131–138.
Varenne, Hervé
1984 "Collective Representations in American Anthropological Conversations About Culture: Culture and the Individual." *American Anthropologist* 25:281–300.
1986 "'Drop in Anytime.' Community and Authenticity in American Life." In *Symbolizing America*. Ed. Hervé Varenne, pp. 209–228. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

von Rad, Gerhard
1965 *Old Testament Theology.* Vol. 1. New York: Harper & Row.
Weinreich, Max
1980 *The History of the Yiddish Language.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Yerushalmi, Yosef Haim
1982 *Zakhor: Jewish Memory and Jewish History.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.