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Susan Rubin Suleiman

Irène Némirovsky and the "Jewish Question" in Interwar France

"Posthumous fame"

Hannah Arendt, introducing Walter Benjamin to an American public in 1968, wrote: "Posthumous fame is one of Fama's rarer and least desired articles, although it is less arbitrary and often more solid than the other sorts, since it is only seldom bestowed upon mere merchandise. The one who stood most to profit is dead and hence it is not for sale."[1] Arendt may have been too idealistic, since even posthumous fame can be for sale: the author's rediscovered works will benefit somebody--if not heirs, the publisher. Nevertheless, there is something truly earned (instead of merely "marketed") in the phenomenon of sudden, widespread, posthumous fame, which makes a work, and an author, suddenly stand out many years after the latter's death. This is certainly what happened to Walter Benjamin, who was virtually unknown in the United States before the publication of the book of essays whose preface Arendt wrote. And it is also true of Irène Némirovsky, a prolific and successful novelist of the 1930's who was almost completely forgotten in France and was totally unknown elsewhere when her posthumous novel *Suite Française* burst on the scene in the fall of 2004. It won a major literary prize in France, the only such prize to be awarded to a writer posthumously, and

soon became an international bestseller, translated into more than 30 languages. In the United States, it remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over two years.

What was it about *Suite Française* that captured so many readers' imagination? Here was a historical novel about the defeat of France by the German Army in June 1940, and about the occupation that followed. But historical novels about the Second World War are not lacking. The outstanding fact about *Suite Française*, which fascinated readers, was that it's not a historical novel in the usual sense, for it was written at the very time the history it recounted was unfolding. Tolstoy, one of Némirovsky's heroes and models, wrote *War and Peace* half a century after the historical events that he narrated in fictional form; but Némirovsky wrote her novel about the German occupation of France when it had hardly begun—and she didn't have a chance to finish the story. Born in Kiev in 1903, Némirovsky had been living in France since she was a teenager, but had never obtained French citizenship; she was deported as a "foreign Jew" to Auschwitz in July 1942, and died there of typhus a month later. Her husband, Michel Epstein, also a Russian immigrant to France, suffered a similar fate a few months later. If the manuscript of *Suite Française* survived and was eventually published, it was thanks to their two daughters, Denise and Elisabeth, who as children were hidden during the war and who as adults devoted a great deal of effort to bringing their mother's work back into public view.

Némirovsky's tragic death added an important extra dimension to the appeal of the book, and her publisher emphasized it by including an appendix of excerpts from her journal and correspondence, as well as her husband's frantic letters pleading for her release after her arrest. But all this, heartbreaking as it is, would not have been enough to make readers admire the novel itself. What I and I assume many other readers admire is the precision of Némirovsky's gaze and

the justness of her understanding of contemporary history: what we see with the clarity of historical hindsight, she analyzed in the midst of her present.[2]

There is, however, a question that has troubled many readers of *Suite Française*: Why did Némirovsky, who was wearing the Jewish star as she was writing the novel (the Germans imposed the wearing of the yellow star by Jews in the Occupied Zone starting in June 1942), never mention the fate of the Jews in Vichy France, and why are there no Jewish characters in her account of *l'exode* and of the year that followed? I am going to leave this question in suspense for now, but will come back to it later.

After the war, several of the works Némirovsky wrote before she died but couldn't publish during her lifetime appeared in print—but the times had changed, and her renown as a writer quickly faded. In 1992, her younger daughter Elisabeth Gille published a book of what she called "dreamed memories" about her mother, imagining herself into her mother's mind and voice.[3] That was the beginning of Némirovsky's re-emergence into public memory, but it was only after the publication of *Suite Française* that she became truly famous.

The consequence of Némirovsky's posthumous fame has been that almost all of her considerable oeuvre is now back in print in France, and much of it is being translated into English; books and articles about her life and work are multiplying. It is a phenomenal comeback, and if she cannot be here to enjoy it, at least her surviving daughter Denise Epstein has benefited from it (after a quiet and financially often difficult life, Denise Epstein became a celebrity at age 75; her sister Elisabeth died of cancer in 1996). Another consequence, however, has been that as people started reading Némirovsky's earlier work, many were shocked by what they considered as negative, or even downright antisemitic portrayals of Jewish characters. A

number of critics and journalists, both in France and in the U.S. and England, have expressed dismay and outrage at this discovery. Recently, a critic reviewing the English translation of Némirovsky 1940 novel *The Dogs and the Wolves* (*Les chiens et les loups)* in the *Times Literary Supplement* went so far as to claim that a "Nazi publishing house " intent on the "perpetuation of racial stereotypes" would have been very happy with it.[4] The reviewer was immediately taken to task by Némirovsky's translator Sandra Smith, who published a letter of defense in a subsequent issue.[5] The review was indeed extreme in its fury at the author, even as it acknowledged the "savage irony" of her tragic fate. A similarly outraged review article had already appeared in 2008 in *The New Republic*, calling Némirovsky "the very definition of a self-hating Jew."[6] Others, including a number of critics in France, have also expressed concern over antisemitic stereotypes and "self-hatred" in Némirovsky's works.[7] In fact, already in the 1930s some Jewish critics and readers in France reacted accusingly, to which Némirovsky usually responded that she couldn't possibly be antisemitic since she was a Jew and proud to be one.[8]

Why does the question of Némirovsky's supposed antisemitism and "self-hatred" arouse such strong feelings and disagreements, especially among Jewish readers? Non-Jewish critics, then and now, generally praise her work, or if they have reservations these don't bear on the question of her portrayals of Jewish characters.[9] The reason for the passion, I think, is that even though the question seems to concern the attitudes of this one writer who wrote and died many decades ago, it really touches on something much broader. It concerns ambiguities and dilemmas of Jewish identity in modern times, both before and after the Holocaust, in the U.S. and in Europe. Today's responses to her life and work, which include her daughter Elisabeth's

book about her, highlight the differences between pre-Holocaust and post-Holocaust perspectives on antisemitism and on Jewish identity.

"Self-hating Jew": analytic concept or blunt instrument?

The term "Jewish self-hatred," first developed by the German-Jewish philosopher Theodor Lessing in 1930,[10] was put into contemporary circulation by Sander Gilman in his 1986 book by that title. Gilman, a noted scholar of modern German literature and culture, analyzes what he calls the psychological "structure of self-hatred," which is not limited to Jews but can be observed in any group that is devalued in a given society, from women to foreigners to racial minorities. Self-hatred, as Gilman explains it, is a process in which the member of a devalued group internalizes the negative stereotypes by which the majority defines the group and seeks to distinguish himself or herself from those stereotypes as an "exception." Thus, in Jewish self-hatred, Gilman writes, "Jews see the dominant society seeing them and …project their anxiety about this manner of being seen onto other Jews as a means of externalizing their own status anxiety."[11] This projection is a form of splitting: the self-hating Jew seeks to make himself into a "good" or exceptional Jew who is different from the stereotypical "bad" Jew. Hannah Arendt had already analyzed the phenomenon of "exceptional" Jews in her writings in the 1930's and later, but Gilman gave a systematic account of this psychological phenomenon. While one can argue with him on specific issues, there is no doubt that he treats Jewish self-hatred as an analytic concept, not a bludgeon. In ordinary discourse, however, and even in some critical writing, "self-hating Jew" often functions as an accusation: the person accused of being a self-hating Jew is implicitly contrasted with the "non-self-hating" or "self-loving" Jew, among whom the one

launching the accusation presumably counts himself or herself. This kind of splitting recreates, curiously, the very same process that the concept of self-hatred seeks to analyze. It's as if the accuser were saying: "Némirovsky—or Franz Kafka or Gertrude Stein or Hannah Arendt or Philip Roth or Joseph Roth or Isaac Babel, among the greats of the 20th century who have been called that--is a self-hating Jew, but I am not." Such splitting excludes precisely the possibility of ambiguity and ambivalence, concepts I find more useful in discussing psychological attitudes toward Jewishness, or any other minority group identity in relation to the mainstream.

Furthermore, since the term "self-hating Jew" can be, and has been, applied to very many people (the above list could be much longer), it becomes so broad as to be almost useless. What modern, urban, educated, secular Jew has not, at one time or another, felt a sense of shame, or merely uneasiness, at the look or manners or behavior of "other Jews" that he or she recognizes as being of the same ancestry or ethnicity, yet also perceives as embarrassingly different from his or her own self or ideal? It would, I think, be dishonest to claim that one has never felt ambivalence about being Jewish, if one is a relatively assimilated Jew living among a non-Jewish majority. I believe this is true even in the United States today, where multiculturalism and minority "differences" are celebrated; and it was certainly true of both Europe and the United States in the decades before World War II, when difference was a negative word and openly antisemitic discourses were widespread and almost casual. Even among non-antisemites or anti-antisemites, Jewish "difference" and stereotypical representations of Jews were often taken for granted, both before and after the war (witness Sartre's well-meaning but stereotypical portrait of the "Jew" in his *Réflexions sur la question juive*, published in 1946). It can hardly come as a surprise if many Jews at the time wished they could give up that privilege.

Rather than speak of Jewish self-hatred, I contend that it makes historical as well as philosophical sense to speak of the ambiguities and ambivalences regarding Jewish identity and self-definition during this period; the problem concerned not only the relations between Jews as a minority and the wider culture in which they lived, but also relations between and among Jews themselves. There exists a historically rich and complex term to designate this problem: the Jewish question.

"The Jewish Question": a brief overview

What did the words "Jewish question," or *Judenfrage,* or "question juive" refer to, in the century or so before the Nazis' claim to have found the Final Solution to it discredited the term from civilized usage?[12] According to historians who have studied the evolution of this term, *die Judenfrage* entered public discourse in Germany with the publication of Bruno Bauer's book (first published as a series of essays) by that title in 1843—to which Marx responded with his own essay by that title a year later. [13] While Marx and Bauer disagreed on details, they agreed on one point: namely, that "the social and economic drive of the acculturated Jew was the real crux of the Jewish question."[14] In other words, this question could only come about after the political emancipation of Jews in Europe had opened the door to Jewish participation in national life.[15] What the "Jewish question" put into question was precisely the trustworthiness of Jews as members of the nation. Bauer claimed that even acculturated Jews didn't really want to be fully "absorbed" into the Christian mainstream, clinging to their "illusory" Jewishness, while Marx claimed that Jews represented the essence of capitalism and were therefore inimical to a just society. Either way, as Jacob Toury noted in his historical-semantic study of the term, "the

'Jewish question' as a slogan did not take root until it had established itself as an anti-Jewish battle-cry" (92). This is what enabled the virulent antisemitisms of the late nineteenth century to propagate and popularize the term, carrying it through the 1930's and beyond. The "common denominator" between earlier and later anti-Jewish uses of the term, Toury concludes, was "the insistence upon the *alien character of the Jews as a group*" (100, my italics) in relation to the mainstream.

The "Jewish question," then, in its antisemitic formulation, was not a question at all, but a declaration: "Jews, no matter how assimilated, can never be truly French."[16] Or German, or Hungarian, or Polish—any nation would do. In the 1930's, as in the 1890's, radical nationalisms combined with economic crises to create an ideal climate for such formulations, as well as for schemes to find "solutions." Thus in April 1938, the rabidly antisemitic French weekly *Je suis partout* devoted a whole issue to "La Question Juive." The "solution" proposed by the two main editors, Robert Brasillach and Lucien Rebatet, both of them notorious antisemites, was to strip French Jews of their nationality. "It is impossible, as many liberals believe, to belong to two nations, the Jewish and the French," wrote Brasillach. "We demand that Jews be returned to their condition as Jews," wrote Rebatet--which meant, for him, "stripping Jews of French citizenship, and of all the rights that go with it."[17]

By an interesting twist, however, antisemites were not the only ones to refer to the "Jewish question" in their writings. The term was also used by Jews, in a fairly wide variety of ways. Theodor Herzl, arguing for the necessity of a Jewish state, subtitled his book *Judenstaat (*1896) as *Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage* (Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question). For Herzl, the Jews had to become a separate nation, so in a sense his

assumption tallies with that of the antisemites who considered the Jews "unassimilable" in Europe. But for the many Jews who did not wish to leave their European homelands, the "Jewish question" was a different matter: they either denied its existence altogether, dismissing it as an antisemitic invention ("There is no Jewish question, or at least there should not be one—Jews are loyal citizens, and their religious practice is their private affair"); or else it became for them a question of individual identity, often experienced as a feeling of estrangement both from the non-Jewish mainstream and from other Jews, who themselves came in many varieties. As recent historiography has emphasized, the Jews of post-Revolutionary Europe were a hugely diverse and varied population, divided by class, language, degree of religious practice, ideological and political allegiances and many other factors.

To vary the examples a bit, I will cite a Hungarian one.[18] In 1917, at a time when the so-called "Golden Age" of Hungarian Jewry was already drawing to a close, the distinguished scholarly journal *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century), founded and edited by the Jewish historian Oszkár Jászi, ran a special issue on "The Jewish Question in Hungary." Of the sixty Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals who responded to the survey ("Is there a Jewish question in Hungary, and if so, what is its essence? What is the cause of the Jewish question in Hungary? What do you see as the solution to the Jewish question in Hungary?"), only a few stated that there was "no Jewish question"--these were the staunchly optimistic Jews who reaffirmed their belief in Enlightenment ideals. "According to my experience there is no Jewish question in Hungary," wrote the Director of the Budapest rabbinical seminary, Dr. Lajos Blau; "but supposing that there is, it is essentially a leftover of medieval feeling and thought in non-Jews who insist on a Jewish question."[19] Such "leftovers," Blau claimed, would disappear once people

became enlightened. Alex Bein has noted in his book on the history of the "Jewish Question" that for many Jewish leaders in Germany as well, "the Jewish question existed only in the imagination of or through the activities of Jew-baiters."[20]

The great majority of respondents to the 1917 Hungarian questionnaire, both Jews and non-Jews, stated that there was indeed a Jewish question. According to most Jewish respondents, its "essence" was antisemitism, itself a reaction to the problems and tensions of modernity. (This response is not that different from that of the notables who claimed that there was no Jewish question except in the minds of antisemites). Among the responses by non-Jews, the one by a university professor from Transylvania stands out for its tone as well as its content: yes, there is a Jewish question, wrote the professor, and its essence is in some Jews' refusal to become Hungarian, in their stubborn clinging to a "nationhood" different from the Magyars: "it's that spoiled, Germanic-dialect-speaking, orthodox, strongly Oriental-looking Jewry that in ordinary parlance is called Galizianer"(58). Such Jews, he stated, provoked the antipathy not only of Magyars like himself, but of "every other people brought up in a Christian civilization," and he urged the Jews of Hungary the "exterminate" the characteristics of this group from their midst (59). One could hardly find a more graphic evocation of the divide between acculturated Jews and Yiddish-speaking *Ostjuden* that haunted so much of late nineteenth and early twentieth century *Jewish* thinking and writing about group identity than under the pen of this Christian Transylvanian scholar—whose own geographic marginality in relation to Hungary may have made him especially sensitive to issues of exclusion and inclusion. Jewish writers and intellectuals in Hungary, as well as in Germany, France and England, were acutely and often painfully aware of the differences between themselves and the dirt-poor *shtetl* Jews of Poland

and Russia—some of whom were their own grandparents. Many wrote stories and novels about the psychological consequences of such internal divisions.[21]

Indeed, one of the most interesting responses to the 1917 survey on the Jewish side was that of the poet and artist Anna Lesznai, who insisted not on the social but on the psychological aspect of the "Jewish problem." Lesznai belonged to a wealthy Jewish landowning family, and participated as a rare female member in the leading modernist literary journal in Hungary, *Nyugat (*West). She was thus part of a successful and assimilated Jewish elite; yet she wrote in her response: "The Jewish problem exists even when a person of Jewish origin is sitting alone in his room. It exists not only in the relations between a Jewish individual and Hungarian society. The seriousness of the problem lies in that the Jew feels like a 'Jew' for himself."[22]

Is this self-hatred? Perhaps. But it also happens to have been the condition of the majority of educated, upwardly mobile Jews throughout Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Hannah Arendt, who devoted many insightful pages to analyzing the psychological pressures and contradictions faced by assimilated Jews—or those who aspired to that status—remarked that in the course of the nineteenth century "the Jewish question became an involved personal problem for every individual Jew."[23] Arendt herself did not believe in individual solutions to the "Jewish question." All such attempts ended in failure, she argued again and again, including in her quite harsh essay on Stefan Zweig, written shortly after the latter's suicide in 1943. Zweig's error, Arendt notes somewhat cruelly, had been to believe that being part of the "international society of the successful" would grant him equal rights as a Jew; he ignored the political realities around him, and when he finally saw "a world in whose eyes it was and is a disgrace to be a Jew," all he could do was to kill himself. But, Arendt concludes, "From the

'disgrace' of being a Jew there is but one escape—to fight for the honor of the Jewish people as a whole."[24] Arendt here was expressing the Zionist view on the "Jewish question," which she had arrived at on the basis of her own experience in Nazi Germany; but she also had a very keen understanding of the existential dilemmas of those she called assimilationists, and who lived the "Jewish question" as an individual rather than as a collective problem. In one of her essays from that time, Arendt referred to the "hopeless sadness of assimilationists," precisely because their hopes of assimilation had been so devastatingly crushed. The essay is titled "We Refugees," which implies that she includes herself—but since she claimed not to believe in individual solutions, she may have wanted to point up the difference between a Zionist like herself and individualists like Zweig and others who had seen their illusions destroyed.[25]

Whatever one may think of the collective solution, I believe that most Jewish writers in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, and many Jewish writers in Europe and the United States today, grapple with issues of Jewish identity in existential and individual terms. If for antisemites, the "Jewish question" was summed up as "What shall we do with the Jews?," for individual Jews the question often appeared—and continues to appear-- as a form of inner division and as a personal dilemma, most strikingly summed up in Kafka's famous question to himself: "What have I in common with the Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself..."[26] But Kafka's modernist formulation—which allowed him to envision existential estrangement in universal rather than in specifically Jewish terms in his fiction—was not the only way to formulate the existential dilemmas faced by Jews who were out of the ghetto. "What have I in common with the Jews? Do I have to marry a Jew? Must I feel solidarity with Jews who don't speak my language, don't dress like me, don't belong to my world, just because

they're Jews? And what about my fellow-citizens, the non-Jews—will I ever belong to their world, really? Maybe I would belong if I converted, so should I convert?" These were among the more banal, everyday questions that emancipated Jews in Europe could ask themselves in the early twentieth century—and some of the same questions continue to be asked today, not only in Europe. Today, we must add to them some version of "What is my relation, as a Jew, to Israel and Israeli politics?" with its myriad contested, often painful replies.

The 'Jewish question' in interwar France

Since France was the country of emancipatory rhetoric and political assimilation, French Jews for a long time shared the Republican egalitarian ideal and were largely hostile to Zionism; but neither did they need to seek total assimilation by completely renouncing their Jewishness, for they could maintain the idea that Jewishness was a purely private, religious affair that in no way affected their loyalty to France. Many Jews rose to high positions in the service of the French state under the Third Republic, including the Army, and yet kept close family and institutional ties with other Jews and observed endogamy, even if they stopped practicing Jewish religious rites.[27] Some historians have referred to the decades before World War I, when Jews could aspire to high public office even while maintaining a serene identification as Jews, as the "Golden Age" of French Jewry.[28] However, Maurice Samuels has recently shown that despite this happy moment of Franco-Jewish synthesis, the existential versions of the Jewish question were an

intense and vexed subject of discussion by Jewish writers in France throughout the nineteenth century.[29]

The hoped-for harmony between French and Jewish identities came under stress by the influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe starting in the early 1880's, a trend that continued in increasing numbers after World War I. The arrival of these "Juifs de l'Est," most of them poor, Yiddish-speaking, and either much more religious or much more left-wing in their politics than French Jews, not only elicited waves of antisemitism in France but also created problems for established French Jews who sought to distance themselves from the new immigrants. The crisis of the Dreyfus Affair in the last decade of the nineteenth century exacerbated both antisemitism and questions of French-Jewish identity. While the career of Alfred Dreyfus in the French Army demonstrated France's political acceptance of Jews as full citizens, the social and ideological reactions to his condemnation and then to the Affair itself demonstrated just how deeply divided the country was over the "Jewish question." For many middle-class and upper-class Jews who had lived with the conviction that there was no problem about being both French and Jewish, the Dreyfus Affair was a watershed-- and not all Jews chose the side of Dreyfus.

Issues of political allegiance and social class came to the fore with even more intensity in the period between the two world wars, when France was flooded by Jewish immigrants fleeing Hitler's Germany and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Hannah Arendt has some wonderfully humorous remarks about the way she and other German Jews were received in France circa 1933: "French Jewry was absolutely convinced that all Jews coming from beyond the Rhine were what they called *Polaks*—what German Jewry called *Ostjuden.* But those Jews

who really came from Eastern Europe could not agree with their French brethren and called us *Jaeckes*. The sons of these *Jaecke*-haters—the second generation born in France and already duly assimilated—shared the opinion of the French Jewish upper classes. Thus, in the very same family, you could be called *Jaecke* by the father and a *Polak* by the son."[30] The ambiguities of naming were also apparent in the major linguistic and social divide of the period, the one between "Israélites" and "Juifs." Long-established French Jews, most of whom were middle class, usually referred to themselves as "Israélites;" the more recent arrivals, wherever they came from, were "Juifs." The question of how to name oneself, or other Jews, became the theme of quite a lot of writing during the interwar years. In 1930, Edmond Cahen, who was the editor of the "reform" Jewish journal, *Archives israélites*, published a novel titled *Juif, non!...Israélite*, whose title says it all—but within the text, assimilated middle-class Jews are occasionally referred to as "Juifs," which shows how uncertain the division was. Today, "Israélite" is very rarely heard in French usage and appears slightly ridiculous; but both the opposition of the two terms and the uncertainty about their use continued into the postwar years. Thus in November and December 1945, the newly founded journal *Les Temps Modernes*, whose editor-in-chief was Jean-Paul Sartre, ran brief biographies of two "typical" Jews in France: "Vie d'un Juif" told the story of a poor immigrant from Turkey who survived the war even though most of his family was deported, while "Vie d'un bourgeois français, magistrat israélite" told the story of a Jewish magistrate whose father had been an Army officer; the father staunchly believed that Captain Dreyfus was guilty. The magistrate himself, who was a young man during the Affair, believed that Dreyfus was innocent, but he sometimes felt "repulsed" by others who shared this belief.[31]

Aside from the linguistic conundrum, the tension between "Israélites" and "Juifs" in the interwar period occasionally took on harsh political connotations, since many of the former sought to limit the number of the latter in France. Emmanuel Berl, a well-known essayist and journalist from a distinguished Jewish family, wrote increasingly hostile editorials against immigrants in the 1930's, and moved so far to the right in his desire to proclaim his patriotism that he became a speechwriter for Marshal Pétain for a few weeks in June and July 1940 (a few months later, he had to go into hiding like most other Jews in France). Berl lived long enough to look back on his own past, but he never repented his positions, though he did admit that he had underestimated the virulence of Hitler's antisemitism and that he was shocked by Pétain's "Jewish decrees" of 1940 and 1941, which forbade writers like himself to publish.[32]

Némirovsky's place in this linguistic and sociological field was untypical, though by no means unique: she was a "foreign Jew from the East," but not a "Juif de l'Est" or *Ostjude* in the usual sense, since she was wealthy, well educated, politically conservative (or at least, non-Leftist). Thus, while most "Juifs de l'Est" clearly belonged among the "Juifs" in the *Israélite/ Juif* dichotomy, she and her husband Michel Epstein (whom she married in 1926) did not. Her choice to marry someone like herself—the child of a wealthy banker, Russian, Jewish, not at all religious, wanting to live well and be assimilated in France—is significant, for it reinforced her status as a "foreign Jew;" other Russian emigrant writers, like Nathalie Sarraute or Elsa Triolet, chose French, non-Jewish husbands. Némirovsky's choice also confirmed her class allegiance: although her father , a "self-made man," came from a very poor Jewish family, her mother's family had middle-class pretentions, which explains why Irène had a French governess and apparently spoke only French with her mother as a child. As the many interviews and

photographs of Némirovsky that appeared in the press after the success of *David Golder* (1929) and throughout the 1930's attest, she lived a life of bourgeois ease and comfort; her aspiration, in literature as well as life, was to be a respected member of the establishment— her ideal was the Académie Française, not the avant-garde.[33]

Despite her class allegiance, however, which would normally have placed her among the *Israélites* (indeed, one of her close friends was Jean-Jacques Bernard, son of the famous playwright Tristan Bernard and an *Israélite* of the highly assimilated kind), Némirovsky did not really belong in that category since she was a recent immigrant to France, and not French. Why she did not request French citizenship in the 1920's, when it was easier to obtain than in the late 1930's (at that time she requested it twice and was refused both times), is one of the questions that puzzle people who try to understand her life choices. The lack of French nationality made her much more vulnerable during the war, but even before then it placed her in a somewhat ambiguous position. This in-between position lends, I think, particular acuity to her views of and on Jews—though it also skews her views somewhat, for she very rarely portrays French Jews in her fiction. With the exception of one major character I will discuss in a moment, all the Jewish figures in her fiction are more or less recent arrivals in France, having made their fortune—or trying to make it-- after a childhood of poverty in Odessa or some other city "in the East." They are at best newly rich, foreigners and outsiders who rarely have any social contact with French people, including French Jews. In her serialized 1939 novel *Les échelles du Levant* (which was not published in book form until 2004, under a different title), the main character is such a foreigner, with a heavy chip on his shoulder as he reflects on his outcast status; although he is not explicitly identified as a Jew, he is clearly portrayed as one.[34]

The "Jewish question" in Némirovsky's fiction

We can advance our understanding of both Némirovsky and of the complexities of the "Jewish question" in interwar France by reading her novels and stories that feature Jewish protagonists as explorations of the "Jewish question" *from an individual Jewish point of view.* By "individual Jewish point of view," I mean that Némirovsky was writing about her Jewish characters from the inside—sometimes observing them harshly and even unfairly, but always from a position that can accommodate our seeing her gaze as that of a Jew. Not a member of "the Jewish community" or "the Jewish people" defined in collective terms, but a Jew nevertheless, who struggled precisely with those issues of Jewish identity and Jewish belonging that defined the "Jewish question" *for Jews*, not for antisemites.

Only about a quarter of Némirovsky's stories and novels feature Jewish protagonists. But those that do are among her strongest works—and they all raise the question of Jewish identity and its contradictions, even if it is not a subject that preoccupies the Jewish characters themselves. The protagonist of *David Golder,* which remained for many years her best-known work, never asks "what does it mean for me to be a Jew?" let alone "what does it mean to be a Jew in modern Europe?" But the reader is prompted to do so, and Némirovsky's rather cruel views on that question are precisely the reason that some readers find the novel "antisemitic" (the way some readers, but not I, find Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* or Babel's *Red Cavalry* antisemitic). Her short novel *Le bal*, written around the same time as *David Golder*, is probably best seen as a mother-daughter tragicomedy, or else as a story about social climbing, though not necessarily about Jewish anxieties (in the film version, the social climbing couple are not

Jewish). Yet it too gains a significant dimension if we give full weight to the fact that the father in the story is a wealthy "self-made" Jew who has married a vulgar, socially ambitious, uneducated French woman in what turns out to be a mismatch of sought-after assimilations, the husband seeking non-Jewish Frenchness and the wife aspiring to (Jewish) wealth.

Aside from works that deal with Jewish assimilation only indirectly, Némirovsky wrote two works in the late 1930's that explicitly foreground the question of Jewish identity as it is posed by the Jewish characters themselves: the 1937 short story "Fraternité," and the novel published in 1940, *Les chiens et les loups* (*The Dogs and the Wolves*). I will focus here on "Fraternité," which is short enough to be discussed in detail and has the distinction of being the only one of her works that features a French "Israélite" as its main character.

Némirovsky made extended notes about this short story in her writing journal, and they offer some excellent insights into her frame of mind at the time.[35] She wrote the story in less than a month, in October 1936 when she was pregnant with her second child and feeling somewhat anxious about lack of inspiration for a novel. It was published in February 1937 on the literary page of the politically conservative weekly *Gringoire.* Before considering her journal entries and other contextual details about the publication of this text, I'd like to offer a close reading in light of the "Jewish question" as I have been discussing it. The story stages a brief but memorable encounter between an "Israélite" and a "Juif," on a train platform in the French countryside in "the present", roughly late 1936. The character through whose eyes and mind we observe this encounter is the wealthy banker Christian Rabinovitch, whose name is almost too transparently indicative of his inner division—and it is also a false note in the text, because French Israélites were never called Christian; they had ordinary French names that

appear in the Christian calendar, without carrying any religious connotation--Henri, Léon, Alfred--or occasionally a Biblical name such as Emmanuel, which could also be borne by non-Jews. Despite this false note, however, Némirovsky makes good use of Christian's name, which she does not reveal right away. Instead, she begins by describing him physically and emotionally: he is around fifty, a widower, thin and somewhat frail, sedentary in his ways, with a strong tendency to anxiety and worry, especially about his health and that of his grown children, and also about the future which he feels is always capable of bringing misfortune when one least expects it. His Jewishness is alluded to quite early, by means of a narrative cliché ("his lips, always dry, seemed withered by an ancient thirst, a fever transmitted from generation to generation") and bit of internal monologue ("My nose, my mouth, the only specifically Jewish traits I still possess"[36]); but only about one third of the way into the story do we learn his name (77). At that point, it has an almost comic "punch-line" effect, or else that of allegory: a man named Christian Rabinovitch cannot possibly be anything other than conflicted about his identity. Dressed in fine English wool and carrying a case with expensive hunting rifles (but we are told that he hates hunting), Christian is on his way to a country weekend at the home of an aristocratic friend; he has had a car accident, that's why he is reduced to taking the train and thus exposing himself to a chance encounter with a man he would normally never meet, a poor immigrant Jew who is sitting near him on the train platform, hugging a child whom he later identifies as his grandson.

To Christian's shocked surprise, this poor Jew from Russia is named Rabinovitch. When Christian tells him that that is his name as well, the immigrant asks him when he arrived in France. Christian asserts stiffly that both he and his father were born in France, but the other

man is not deterred: “so it must have been before your father,” he tells him, because "all the Rabinovitches come from over there.” “C’était donc avant votre père. Tous les Rabinovitch viennent de là-bas" (81). At this point Christian recoils, and asks himself the Kafka question (reported in free indirect discourse by the narrator): "What was there in common between this poor Jew and himself?” “ Qu’y avait-il de commun entre ce pauvre Juif et lui?") This is of course the question posed by the story's title as well. Are Christian's "brothers" the wealthy bourgeois and aristocrats he frequents in his work and social life (he refers earlier to "the rich bourgeois, his brothers," 77), as is promised by the French slogan of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*? Or is his brother this poor Jew with his "feverish" eyes that seem to "run from one object to another," looking "anxiously" for something he will never find?

Although the story is told from Christian's point of view, Némirovsky gives the immigrant Rabinovitch a long monologue in which he recounts his and his family's tale, and here we have in concentrated form a history of Jewish upward mobility and emigration from Russia, complete with the various choices that Jews made: one son, refusing to be a humble tailor, went to university and ended up as a Zionist in Palestine, where he died of tuberculosis; another son became a photographer and settled in Berlin, while the father left Russia after the Revolution and settled in Paris. But when Hitler came to power, the Berlin son had to leave Berlin—he came to France for a few years and now lives in Liverpool. It is this son’s child who is with the immigrant Rabinovitch on the station platform. The monologue reaches its high point with the immigrant’s reflection on exile:

> Où Dieu ne jette-t-il pas le Juif? Seigneur, si seulement on pouvait être tranquille ! Mais jamais, jamais, on n’est tranquille ! A peine a-t-on gagné, à la sueur de son front, du pain dur, quatre murs, un toit pour sa tête, qu’arrive une guerre, une révolution, un pogrom, ou autre chose, et adieu ! « Ramassez vos paquets, filez . Allez vivre dans une autre ville,

> dans un autre pays. Apprenez une nouvelle langue—à votre âge, on n'est pas découragé, hein ? » Non, mais on est fatigué. (83)
>
> Where doesn't God throw the Jew? Lord, if only we could be left in peace! But never, never are we left in peace! No sooner have we won, by the sweat of our brow, a piece of dry bread, four walls, a roof for our heads, than comes a war, a revolution, a pogrom, what have you, and goodbye! "Pick up your stuff, get out. Go live in another town, another country. Learn a new language—at your age, you aren't discouraged, right?" No, but we're tired.

Christian listens to all this without interrupting, then asks him about his "profession," to which the other replies that he does a little bit of everything. And he makes a remark that creates extreme discomfort in Christian:

> Heureux ceux qui sont nés ici. Voyez, à vous regarder, à quelle richesse on peut arriver! Et, sans doute, votre grand-père venait d'Odessa, ou de Berditchev, comme moi. C'était un pauvre homme... Les riches, les heureux, ne partaient pas, vous pensez! Et vous... Un jour peut-être, celui-là...(84, ellipses in the text)
>
> Happy are the ones who were born here. Just see, looking at you, how wealthy one can become! And doubtless your grandfather came from Odessa, or from Berditchev like me. He was a poor man… The fortunate ones, the rich ones, didn't leave, you can be sure of that! Yes, he was a poor man. And you… Maybe one day he too…"

and he points to his grandson (84). In other words, only a couple of generations separate the wealthy Rabinovitch from the poor one.

The train's arrival spares Christian from having to reply to this, but when he finds himself alone again in his first-class compartment, his earlier question returns in more virulent form:

> Misérable créature! Etait-il possible qu'il fût, lui, du même sang que cet homme ? De nouveau il pensa : « Qu'y a-t-il de commun entre lui et moi ? Il n'y a pas plus de ressemblance entre ce Juif et moi qu'entre Sestres et les laquais qui le servent ! Le contraire est impossible, grotesque ! Un abîme, un gouffre! Il me touche parce qu'il est pittoresque, un témoin des âges disparus. Oui, voilà pourquoi il me touche, parce qu'il est loin, si loin de moi... » (85, ellipses in the text).

> Wretched creature! Was it possible that he himself was of the same blood as that man? Once again, he thought to himself: What is there in common between him and me? There's no more resemblance between that Jew and me than between Sestres [Christian's aristocratic friend] and the lackeys who serve him! The contrary is impossible, grotesque! An abyss, a chasm! He touches me because he's picturesque, someone from another age. Yes, that's why and how he touches me, because he's far, so far from me…

It doesn't require much thought to conclude that Christian doth protest too much. Even as he denies any relation to "that Jew" and tries to explain away his being "touched" by him, the reader is invited to draw a different conclusion. In the only passage in the story where the narrator intervenes above the character's head, we see Christian swaying back and forth, unaware that he is replicating the swaying of his ancestors in prayer or work. But even without this narrative intervention, the reader is aware that Christian and "that Jew" have a number of traits in common, despite their enormous social distance: they are both beset by anxiety, and the narrator uses the word "inquiétude" in relation to both; furthermore, they are both devoted fathers who worry about their children: the immigrant Rabinovitch worries about his son in Liverpool and about his grandson; the French Rabinovitch worries about his son Jean-Claude who wants to marry the aristocrat's daughter—will this mixed marriage work out? Christian Rabinovitch has his doubts, for they will probably never truly understand each other. And finally, he himself concludes that the source of his disquiet is his Jewish heritage:

> C'est de cela que je souffre...C'est cela que je paie dans mon corps, dans mon esprit. Des siècles de misère, de maladie, d'oppression...Des milliers de pauvres os, faibles, fatigués, ont fait les miens. (86)

> That's what ails me…That's what I'm paying for in my body, my mind. Centuries of wretchedness, illness, oppression. ..Thousands of poor bones, feeble and tired, created mine.

When the train finally stops and his Catholic friends come to greet him, Christian abandons these bitter ruminations. But his body continues to mark his difference, since he

shivers from the cold air while his Catholic host revels in it. And we can be sure that he will have a terrible time at the hunt the next day. Hunting really isn't his thing.[37]

Is this story, which packs so much into a few pages, proof of Némirovsky's "antisemitism" and "self-hatred"? Personally, I don't think so, though I realize that it is possible to read it that way if one has a mind to. Némirovsky does not eschew stereotyping, both physical and psychological: the little Jewish boy has big ears, bright nervous eyes like his grandfather, while Christian thinks of his own mouth and nose as his "Jewish traits." On the psychological level, the anxiety and feeling of insecurity that even the wealthy "Israélite" lives with on a daily basis are attributed to his Jewishness. But was it a sign of antisemitism to suggest, in 1937, that Jews had reasons to be anxious about their security in the European world? My sense is that Némirovsky was particularly attuned, as a "foreign Jew from the East," to all the ways in which even the country of emancipation and equality for all could become a very cold place for Jews. In "Fraternité," she presents the painful self-questioning of an assimilated French Jew as he confronts what is for him a distant Jewish heritage.

The exact nature of this heritage is left somewhat vague in the story: is it biological, racial even, or is it the heritage created by a shared history of "wretchedness, illness, oppression" as Christian puts it to himself? In her journal notes for this story, Némirovsky seems to vacillate between those two views: in one entry, she writes: "the rich one is (thinks he is) totally free of his religion, but the poor one is too. Their brotherhood does not reside in religion, but in race, oh Hitler, you're not wrong." "le riche est (se croit) délivré de sa religion, mais le pauvre aussi. La fraternité ne réside pas dans la religion, mais dans la race, oh Hitler, tu n'as pas tort ." This is immediately followed by "J'ai des scrupules," which could mean something like "What have I

just said? Maybe I'm wrong." But this is in turn is followed by "And yet, there is before and above all the inalienable right to truth." "Et pourtant, il y a, avant tout, au-dessus de tout, le droit imprescriptible de la vérité ." She knows she is skating on thin ice, but she maintains the thought. A few lines later, however, she implies that the "brotherhood" and the "heritage" reside above all in history, not biology: commenting on the immigrant Rabinovitch's monologue as she plans to write it, she says: "the meaning of all these experiences is that things always end badly, in failure…to start over, and then over again, to bend your back and start over. But the one who didn't have to do that, the rich one, still has *sickening fear* [in English], that heritage." "Recommencer, et encore recommencer, plier le dos, et recommencer. Mais celui qui n'a pas eu besoin de ça, le riche, il lui reste sickening fear, cet héritage. " Below that, she writes: "In sum, what I demonstrate is inassimilability, what a word, oh Lord…I know that it's true." "En somme, je démontre l'inassimilabilité, quel mot, Seigneur… Je sais que c'est vrai. " [38]

Hers was not a happy view of Jewish existence. Her conclusion that the Jews are "inassimilable" may appear to tally with antisemitic views of the time, for antisemites also harped on this theme. But she didn't write that word in the text: the story is more ambiguous than what she writes in her notes. On the other hand, she also writes in her notes that when she submitted the story to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, its long-time editor, René Doumic (who was not Jewish) rejected it on the grounds of antisemitism! She then submitted it to the weekly *Gringoire*, which had published some of her other work and where it appeared on February 5, 1937. A few years later, Horace de Carbuccia, the paper's editor, would take risks in publishing her work under a pseudonym when she desperately needed the money. In February 1937, however, her turning to *Gringoire* was a decision fraught with problems. The paper had become

more openly antisemitic after the 1936 elections, which had brought the Popular Front to power and the Socialist leader Léon Blum (an extraordinarily cultivated "Israélite") to the position of Prime Minister. *Gringoire'*s chief political editorialist, Henri Béraud, published increasingly ugly diatribes against Blum, whom he called "Prime Hebrew" among other insulting names. Némirovsky's friend Joseph Kessel, a highly successful novelist (and another Jewish immigrant from the East—his parents were from Lithuania), who had been in charge of *Gringoire*'s literary pages for several years, wrote a letter of protest after one of Béraud's more vicious articles had appeared at Christmas 1936, and stopped publishing in the paper; by a striking coincidence, Kessel's letter was reprinted by Béraud himself, who claimed that other "Israélites" had praised him for his article, in the same issue in which "Fraternité" appeared. [39]

Némirovsky's continued participation in *Gringoire* in the years immediately preceding the war is certainly one of her most problematic career choices, and all those who write about her work have had to grapple with it. Her French biographers, Olivier Philipponnat and Patrick Lienhardt, follow her daughter Elisabeth in suggesting that the literary pages of the paper were quite separate from the political pages, which is a way of excusing her.[40] However, if one looks at the February 5, 1937 issue, one finds that the separation between literature and politics was not so clearcut. The page following the one where Némirovsky's story "Fraternité" appeared features a "historical narrative" by one Georges Oudard, titled "A Communist Experiment. Kon, aka Bela Kun." An illustration shows Kun, with thick lips, dominating the Hungarian Parliament in 1919, and the whole story purports to show how the Jews planned to take over Hungary! "To be continued," says a note at the bottom of the page.[41]

A more persuasive explanation for Némirovsky's choice to stay with *Gringoire* is that she needed the money. Both the Némirovskys and the Epsteins lost their fortunes in the 1929 crash; and after Irène's father died of a heart attack in 1932, she had no one to rely on for extra help. In many notebook entries around 1936 and later, including the notes for "Fraternité," she expresses distress over financial worries.

Angela Kershaw, whose approach to Némirovsky's career is resolutely Bourdieusian, explains many of Némirovsky's choices as part of the ineluctable logic of the literary field: once Némirovsky had staked out her position in the field—among the "establishment" writers who were both culturally and politically conservative--there was no turning back or switching course. I find this argument a bit too deterministic, cutting off the possibility of "enormous changes at the last minute," as Grace Paley so beautifully put it. And along with change, it also does away with the idea of responsibility for the choices one makes. To say that Némirovsky was responsible for her choices is not to condemn her for them; and even less is it to suggest that she was "responsible" for the fate that befell her. That responsibility lies with the iniquity of the Vichy regime and the German occupiers of France, and it would be unconscionable to suggest that her arrest and deportation were in some way her fault. But ascribing responsibility to Némirovsky for her career choices is the only way, I think, to fully recognize her as a human subject. Her choices may have turned out to be "wrong" ones in retrospect, but she made them, the way we all make choices, not knowing how they will turn out and hoping for the best.

It is impossible for us to know, exactly, how readers of *Gringoire* in February 1937 interpreted "Fraternité"; but even if they read it as a confirmation of their worst prejudices, that reading would not invalidate the one I am proposing here. Némirovsky's conclusion about

Jewish “inassimilability” is not, in my reading, a sign of antisemitism, but rather a sign of Jewish anxiety and unease—and it is important to note that Jewish writers in other hostile environments were arriving at the same conclusion.[42] For antisemites, inassimilability was due largely to the Jews' own refusal to assimilate, their clannishness in "sticking together"—whence the paranoid theories of worldwide "Jewish conspiracy." For racial antisemites, there was the added element of "blood" or "race," which would prevent Jews from properly "mixing" with the French. A sympathetic reading of Némirovsky points out, by contrast, that in her view the determining factor of Jewish inassimilibality is neither sociology nor biology, but history: centuries of persecution and exclusion have had their effect, even among Jews who are now privileged.

More importantly, as Némirovsky sees it, the impossibility of Jewish assimilation is not only the result of the Jews' atavistic inability to transcend their origins (whether you call them racial or historical); it is also a consequence of French xenophobia and class snobism. This is not apparent in "Fraternité," where the assimilated Rabinovitch seems to have only solicitous and unprejudiced Christian friends, but it is emphasized in the last novel she published in book form during her lifetime, *Les chiens et les loups*, which is her most sustained effort to examine the "Jewish question" and the last of her works in which Jewish characters appear. Her conclusions are not hopeful as far as the possibility of Jewish assimilation into French society is concerned. In one of the most dramatic moments in the novel, two Jews from Kiev, one poor and one rich, one apparently assimilated the other not, confront each other. The poor one, who this time is an actual blood relation of the rich one, his first cousin, cries out: "You who look down on us, who feel contempt for us, who want to have nothing do with the Jewish riffraff! Just wait a bit! Wait! You'll soon be labeled one of them! And you will be part of them, you who left all that behind,

you who thought you had escaped."[43] One can hardly think of a more pessimistic—or more prescient—view that the same fate awaits all Jews in Europe, even those who thought they had put the ghetto behind them.

And now, finally, we can return to the question I left hanging in the beginning of this essay: Why is there no mention of Jews or Jewish persecution in *Suite Française*? Those critics who like to see in Némirovsky an example of "Jewish self-hatred" attribute this absence to her lack of sympathy for, or identification with, Jews. She and her husband had converted to Catholicism in February 1939, and some notes in her journal suggest that her conversion may have been more than a mere survival strategy).[44] But nothing allows us to say that she had no sympathy for Jews, and even her presumed lack of identification comes up against the harsh fact that in the spring of 1942, while she was most intensely working on her novel, Némirovsky walked around the village of Issy-L'Evêque wearing a yellow star. Whether she liked it or not, she was identified as a Jew, and she made no effort to escape it (which is yet another question that readers inevitably ask about her: why did she not attempt to leave France, or at least the occupied zone, as most Jews in her situation did?).

A more plausible explanation for the absence of Jews in *Suite Française* is that, since this novel is wholly focused on the way "ordinary French people" responded to the first year of German Occupation, there was no real call to focus on Jews. One could say that by *not* showing any of her French characters as being aware of the Vichy statutes that excluded Jews from public life, or of the roundups that began as early as March 1941, Némirovsky was realistically depicting their indifference to the distress of fellow citizens, not to mention the distress of foreign Jews like herself. But this explanation overlooks a somewhat important question: if

Némirovsky wanted to depict the responses of "ordinary French people," why could she not imagine at least one "ordinary French person of the Jewish faith" as part of that category? Here we could go into some minute historical analysis, starting with the fact that in June 1940, the Jews were not yet persecuted in France so there was no point in singling them out among others on the road fleeing the German army; and when the second part of the novel takes place, between October 1940 and June 1941, the setting is a tiny French village that could be plausibly represented as having no Jewish inhabitants. But still, this explanation seems a bit weak.

I would therefore like to propose a stronger explanation, one that focuses precisely on the question of assimilation. As I have suggested, Némirovsky had arrived, by 1940, at the rather hopeless conclusion that Jews would never feel—or be—fully accepted by the French. Could this have translated into the impossibility of her representing Jews "together with" the French, as if she could not see them in the same viewfinder—or in the same story and same history? If so, then that would be the most pessimistic conclusion of all, consonant with the despair and bitterness that she felt—for good reason—as she was writing what would turn out to be her posthumous masterpiece.

NOTES

[1] “Introduction” to Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (NY: Harcourt Brace &World 1968), 1.

[2] Nathan Bracher, in his booklength study of *Suite Française*, notes that “when one compares the concrete details incorporated into her narrative with the results of the most recent historical research into the May-June 1940 exodus in France, one can only be struck by her novel’s factual and analytic fidelity to the historical event” (Bracher, *After the Fall: War and Occupation in Irène Némirovsky’s* Suite Française, Washington DC, Catholic University Press, 2010, p. 90).

[3] Elisabeth Gille, *Le Mirador*. Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1992; the book was reissued in 2000 by Stock. The modern precedent for this kind of pseudo-autobiography is of course Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). Gille, however, inserts a few occasional brief chapters (written in the third person) about her own life after her parents’ deportation.

[4] Naomi Price, "Out of the ghettto" (review of *The Dogs and the Wolves*), *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 October 2009:21.

[5] Sandra Smith, "In defence of Irène Némirovsky," *Times Literary Supplement* Letters, 11 November 2009.

[6] Ruth Franklin, “Scandale Française: The Nasty Truth about a Literary Heroine," *The New Republic,* 30 January 2008.

[7] Myriam Anissimov, a French novelist and essayist who wrote the preface to the original edition of *Suite Française*, spoke of "self-hatred" in Némirovsky (this phrase was omitted from the American edition, in which Anissimov's preface appeared as a postface); I have listened to a number of archived radio programs in France where critics came down heavily on the “anti-Semitism” of *David Golder* and some of Némirovsky’s other works.

[8] See her interview with Nina Gourfinkel in *L’Univers Israélite*, the organ of the Consistoire in Paris: "L'expérience juive d'Irène Némirovsky," 28 February 1930. A more sympathetic interview in the same paper by Janine Auscher, who defended Némirovsky’s writing about Jews, appeared on 5 July, 1935: "Nos interviews: Irène Némirovsky."

[9] See, for example, J.M. Coetzee’s article in the *New York Review of Books,* where he specifically states that he won’t touch on this issue; the question of the reception of Némirovsky’s works in the 1930’s deserves a full treatment of its own, and is addressed at least in part by Angela Kershaw: *Before Auschwitz: Irène Némirovsky and the Cultural Landscape of Interwar France* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2009).

[10] Lessing, *Der jüdische Selbsthass* (Berlin, 1930); in French, *La haine de soi: le refus d'être juif,* trans. Maurice-Ruben Hayoun (Paris: Berg International, 1990). Paul Reitter, who is completing a book on Jewish self-hatred, traces the first use of the term to even earlier, a 1921 article by the Viennese journalist Anton Kuh. (My thanks to Paul Reitter for letting me read part of his manuscript). As Reitter notes, the concept of Jewish self-hatred, if not the term itself, arose out of discussions and debates within the German Jewish community in the late 19th century, concerning Jewish identity and Jewish religious practice.

[11] Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*: *Anti-semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1986), 11.

[12] Given the contemporary associations of this term with Nazi ideology, it cannot be used without some indication of distancing. I will therefore use it only in quotation marks.

[13] Marx's essay, in two parts, with substantive excerpts from Bauer's, is in Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis; Hackett Publishing Co., 1994).

[14] Jacob Toury, "'The Jewish Question': A Semantic Approach," in *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute*, vol. 2 (London: Horovitz Publishing, 1996), 99; further page references to this article will be given parenthetically. For a massive historical study, see Alex Bein, *The Jewish Question: Biography of a World Problem*, trans. Harry Zohn. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990.

[15] Even though Jews in Germany did not gain full citizenship rights until after the 1848 revolutions, by the early decades of the 19th century many had achieved economic and professional success as well as intellectual recognition; a considerable number had even converted to Christianity in order to try (mostly unsuccessfully) to gain full integration into German society. On the history of German Jewry, see Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German Epoch, 1743-1933* (New York:Metropolitan Books, 2002).

[16] Vicki Caron,"The 'Jewish Question' from Dreyfus to Vichy," in *French History since Napoleon,* ed., Martin S. Alexander (London: Arnold, 1999). For Caron, the "Jewish question" is synonymous with antisemitism; her essay is about the historiography of antisemitism in France.

[17.] Brasillach's article, "La Question Juive," appeared on the front page of *Je suis partout*, 15 April 1938; Rebatet's "Esquisse de quelques conclusions" appeared on p. 9. A note on page 1 states that the articles in this special issue--which also contains a large number of antisemitic cartoons--were written and assembled by Rebatet.

[18] This is taken in large part from what I wrote in the "Introduction" to the book I co-edited with Éva Forgács, *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Hungary: An Anthology* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), xxiii-xxiv.

[19] See *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus* [Jewish Question, Assimilation, Antisemitism], ed. Péter Hanák (Budapest, 1984), p. 21; this volume reprints some but not all of the responses to the survey. My translation, here and elsewhere. Further page references to this source for the 1917 survey will be given parenthetically.

[20] Bein, *The Jewish Question*, 20.

[21] Among the best known of these was the British novelist Israel Zangwill, whose works such as *Children of the Ghetto* (1892), which thematized the split between traditional and modern Jews in England, were widely translated; in Hungary, Károly Pap (1897-1945) wrote some outstanding stories and novels on the same theme, as did Isaac Babel in Russia, Abraham Cahan in the United States—and Némirovsky in France.

[22] Quoted in François Fejtö, *Hongrois et juifs* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 209-10. Fejtö gives an excellent summary of the 1917 survey and of its significance.

[23] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, second enlarged edition (New York:World Publishing Co., Meridian), 1958), 66.

[24] "Stefan Zweig: Jews in the World of Yesterday," in Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 328.

[25] "We Refugees," in Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 272.

[26] Kafka, *Diaries, 1910-1923*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh and Martin Greenberg (New York: Schocken, 1975), 252; quoted in Louis Begley, *The Tremendous World I Have Inside My Head. Franz Kafka: A Biographical Essay* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2008), 63.

[27] Pierre Birnbaum, *Les Fous de la République*: *Histoire politique des Juifs d'Etat, de Gambetta à Vichy* (Paris: Fayard, 1992).

[28] Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939*. New York: Columbia U.P., 1979, chap. 2: "The Golden Age of Symbiosis,"

[29] Maurice Samuels, *Inventing the Israelite*: *Jewish Fiction in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2009).

[30] "We Refugees," in Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 270.

[31] See *Les Temps Modernes*, December 1945, 535-547; the article on "Vie d'un Juif" appeared November 1945, 338-343; no author is credited for either article. A note in the inaugural October issue of the journal explained that these "Vies" of typical individuals would be published regularly as quasi ethnographic documents, but the series does not seem to have been continued beyond the first few issues.

[32] Berl explained himself to Patrick Modiano shortly before his death in their joint book, *Interrogatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); see also the biography by Louis-Albert Revah, *Berl, un Juif de France* (Paris: Grasset, 2003).

[33] For a set of photographs and useful timeline of Némirovsky's life, see the lavishly illustrated catalog of the 2008 exhibit at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, *Woman of Letters: Irène Némirovsky and* Suite Française*,* ed. Olivier Corpet and Garrett White (New York: Five Ties Publishing, 2008). For biographical information, I have relied on the Némirovsky archives at IMEC, in Caen, and on Olivier Philipponnat's and Patrick Lienhardt's detailed biography, *La Vie d'Irène Némirovsky* (Paris: Grasset/Denoel, 2007).

[34] Némirovsky, *Le maître des âmes* (Paris: Denoel, "Folio" edition, 2005).

[35] IMEC (Institut de Mémoire de l'Edition Contemporaine, Caen France), Némirovsky archives: NMR 14.13, dossier on "Fraternité."

[36] « ses lèvres, toujours sèches, semblaient fanées par une soif millénaire, une fièvre transmise de génération en génération. 'Mon nez, ma bouche, les seuls traits spécifiquement juifs que j'aie gardés. » Némirovsky, "Fraternité," in *Dimanche et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Stock, 2000), 74; my translation. Further page references to this story will be given parenthetically.

[37] The relation of Jews to hunting is almost a topos in interwar literature and film: in Cahen's *Juif non!... Israélite*, the Jewish protagonist's "Frenchness" is shown not only by his valor as a soldier in World War I but also by his love of the land and especially of hunting; the Jewish aristocrat in Jean Renoir's film *La régle du jeu* is a refined but expert hunter. Christian Rabinovitch's dislike of hunting indicates his problematic assimilation into French society, despite his native status.

[38] Notes and draft for "Fraternité," at IMEC, NMR 14.13

[39] Henri Béraud, "Je vais te répondre, » *Gringoire*, no, 430, 5 February 1937 ; reprinted in Béraud, *Gringoire. Ecrits 1928-1937*, ed. Georges Dupont (Paris : Consep 2004), 371-74.

[40] *La vie d'Irène Némirovsky*, 284-85; cf. Elisabeth Gille, *Le Mirador* (Paris : Stock, 2000), 366.

[41] "Une expérience communiste. KON, DIT BELA KUN," Récit historique inédit par Georges Oudard, *Gringoire*, 5 February 1937.

[42] The Hungarian novelist and short-story writer Károly Pap, who called himself a "writer of the Jewish people" and who perished at Bergen Belsen, was expressing similarly despairing views in his stories of the late 1930's. Pap too was accused by some members of the Jewish community of being a "self-hating" Jew.

[43]« Toi qui nous regardes de haut, qui nous méprises, qui ne veux rien avoir de commun avec la racaille juive ! Attends un peu ! Attends ! et on te confondra de nouveau avec elle. Et tu te mêleras à elle, toi qui en est sorti, toi qui as cru en échapper !» *Les chiens et les loups [1940]* (Paris : Albin Michel, 2006), 242-243; my translation.

[44] In June 1938, as she was beginning to work on a novel she originally titled "Le Charlatan ou Enfants de la nuit" (it would eventually become *Les échelles du Levant*, which appeared in installments in *Candide* in 1939 and was published as a book in 2005 under the title *Le maître des âmes*), she made a few notations that suggest she was meditating on Christian themes: "Je mêle à tout ceci, je ne sais pourquoi, une idée de Grâce. ... Jésus n'est qu'un homme comme nous; c'est à dire qu'il est un Dieu..." and further on, writing the title "Les Enfants de la nuit, she puts a possible epigraph: "La parole de Jésus: 'Vous, soyez des enfants de lumière.'" (IMEC, NMR 14.1, dossier on *Les échelles du Levant*).