The Jewish Role in American Life

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“Farther Away from New York”: Jews in the Humanities after World War II

By Andrew R. Heinze

In the half-century following World War II, Jews played a large, even pivotal, role in the Humanities, one that was far out of proportion to their numbers in the American population. This is well known. What may be less clear is the extent to which these scholars brought anything identifiably Jewish with them into the academic arena. It is one thing to acknowledge that Thomas Kuhn is Jewish, but can we really say that his trend-setting book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* owes anything to that fact? Even as self-conscious a Jew as Sigmund Freud has left generations of scholars wondering, arguing, and even baffled about whether his being Jewish had any effect on his ideas about the human condition.

In this essay, I want to make a very tentative start—at best a preface—toward a better understanding of this question. The hypothesis I want to explore is that Jewish scholars did battle against two trends in the Humanities that were inherently dismissive of the Jewish heritage. Those trends were: 1) an overly agrarian, overly Christian perspective on American history and culture; and 2) a perceived, long-standing bias against Hebraic sources, which were often deemed obsolete or provincial. In this admittedly sketchy overview, I want to highlight several texts as examples of some of the ways in which Jewish perspectives figured into the post-World War II humani-
ties: Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Harold Bloom's *Book of J*, and Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.

Though I will not focus on the institutional dimensions of Jewish participation in the Humanities, I want to make a few brief comments about that subject. The most obvious institutional difference Jews have made in American academic life would probably be, first, the creation of Jewish Studies as a distinct field and, second, the creation of Brandeis University as a top-tier research university. There is also another, more vaguely institutional impact of Jewish scholars: the relative increase in scholarly works on Jewish topics. A database search of doctoral dissertations in the Humanities whose titles include the keywords “Jews” or “Jewish” suggests that after the mid-1960s, there was a definite increase both in the rate of production of such studies and in the academic stature of the institutions from which they issued. Most of those dissertations were in History, and Jews wrote many—though far from all—of them. By the 1980s and 1990s, histories of American Jewry outpaced those of every other minority except African Americans; and, unlike African American history, in which white scholars produced many of the field’s path-breaking works, Jews themselves produced the bulk of research in American Jewish history.¹

When we turn from the institutional to the subjective dimensions of Jews in the Humanities, we encounter, first of all, the issue of Jewish self-consciousness. Because most of the Jewish scholars in America who attained distinction in the decades after World War II were born between 1900 and 1940, it would be strange if they had lacked an awareness of themselves as Jews. This is obvious in the case of Europeans forced by Nazism to leave their homelands, but even for the American-born we can safely say that, until the 1960s, Jews and Christians generally lived in different though strongly overlapping worlds. Well-known prejudices against Jews in academia and especially in the Humanities, which were considered the scholarly territory of old-stock Americans, gave Jewish scholars plenty of reasons not to highlight their origins, not to display those “typical” Jewish “traits” described in professorial correspondence about hiring, and to prove their credibility as competent, and not identifiably Jewish, interpreters of the Western tradition. Beneath that sense of difference, whether it led individuals to mask their Jewish background or not, lay a powerful Jewish conception of America as a promised land, the first society in the history of Christian civilization that had not targeted Jews as essential nemeses (for that honor, there were Africans) and that offered a religion-blind (if not color-blind) ideal of democracy. Belief in America as a potentially cosmopolitan democracy in a world of provincial societies supported the energies of Jewish scholars and, as historian David Hollinger has observed, sometimes inspired their intellectual programs.

Hollinger ("Jewish Intellectuals"; "The ‘Tough-Minded’ Justice Holmes") established the fact that liberal Jewish intellectuals did not simply assimilate into a larger academic universe but also collaborated with liberals of Protestant background in an effort to de-Christianize the public square and thus create a truly pluralist America. Their aim
Values was to replace “the old Protestant cultural hegemony” with an elite of intellectuals from various faiths (or from none at all).²

Working toward the de-Christianization of academia was not the same as making it more Jewish. And yet, Jews could hardly forget their background when faced with overt assertions about the fundamentally Christian quality of Western culture. The most famous and germane of those assertions came from T. S. Eliot, perhaps the single most influential expositor of American humanism at mid-century.

Eliot made his claim in 1933, when he delivered the Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia. These were published as After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy. A Christian apology about the nature and destiny of American culture, After Strange Gods was, among other things, an effort to define culture by defining the kind of tradition from which culture would grow and flourish. Eliot claimed that a viable culture depended on a “homogenous” population (“where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate”). Even more important than social homogeneity, he insisted, was “unity of religious background.” Therefore, he deduced, “reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable” (18, 20).³

We can hardly avoid recognizing the gratuitous nature of that remark, which must be taken seriously precisely because Eliot was a writer whose extraordinary command of language made it a safe bet that his words were not only deliberate but rich in oblique meaning. Eliot could simply have described what he believed to be the religious core of a tradition, warned about the presence of “free thinkers” in general, and left it at that. But rather than speculate about what he meant by this infamous statement, we can glance at the immediate context Eliot himself provided. The poet opened his Page-Barbour Lecture with praise for I’ll Take My Stand, the 1930 manifesto of those writers and thinkers known as the Southern Agrarians. Noting that his visit to Charlottesville was his first to the South, and reflecting on the senescence of New England, he interpreted I’ll Take My Stand as a sign of the redemptive possibilities the South might hold for the nation.

I think that the chances for the re-establishment of a native culture are perhaps better here than in New England. You are farther away from New York; you have been less industrialized and less invaded by foreign races; and you have a more opulent soil. (Eliot 16–17)

I’ll Take My Stand defined “genuine humanism” as something “rooted in the agrarian life of the older South and of other parts of the country that shared in such a tradition.” Disenchanted with the “abstract” quality of cosmopolitan humanism, the Southern Agrarians believed in “the concrete” reality of locale and custom. In 1930, of course, those concrete forms of Southern life drew breath from a racial caste system that, as native son Wilbur Cash showed so brilliantly in The Mind of the South (1941), implicated the entire region in a corrupt code of silence. Robert Penn Warren, one of the most eminent of the Southern Agrarians, contributed to the manifesto a brief for
racial segregation and an endorsement of the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, which notably denied the value of higher education for Southern blacks. (Warren subsequently disavowed that position.) He drew a telling comparison between the “educated Negro” and “the immigrant labor leader or organizer,” both of whom displayed “a tendency toward the doctrinaire.” Accepting a dichotomy in which the rooted, authentic, simple knowledge of the South opposed the ephemeral, abstract, mechanistic knowledge of the North, Warren believed that the educated black man would inevitably go north where, like his immigrant counterpart, he will have “left the life he understood and come to this country whose life he did not wholly understand” (Rubin and Rock xvii, xxvii, 251–52).

In the critic Lionel Trilling we can locate a specifically Jewish reaction to Eliot’s challenge. His response took the form of an unexpected essay, “Wordsworth and the Rabbis.” In praising Wordsworth (author of “A Jewish Family in a Small Valley Opposite St. Goar, upon the Rhine” and of that memorable evocation of “the savage thoughts that roll/In the dark mansions of the bigot’s soul”) Trilling cleverly challenged Eliot’s entire conception of the spiritual life. Likening the “non militancy” of the Talmudic rabbis to that of Wordsworth, Trilling dismissed the mentality in philosophy and literature that insisted on violent extremes as the proper representation of the human condition and overlooked the dynamism of ordinary life. Eliot had depicted two virtuous paths of life—the heroism of the saint and “the common routine”—but, as Trilling quickly pointed out, Eliot actually saw no spiritual quality in the latter.

There is no reference to the principles, the ethical discipline, by which the ordinary life is governed . . . no reference to the possibility of either joy or glory....Mr. Eliot’s representation of the two ‘ways’ exemplifies how we are drawn to the violence of extremity. We imagine, with nothing in between, the dull not-being of life, the intense not-being of death; but we do not imagine being—we do not imagine that it can be a joy. We are in love, at least in our literature, with the fantasy of Death.

In contrast to that sensibility, Trilling praised the “normal mysticism” that he saw as characteristic of rabbinic Judaism. The rabbis’ belief in the potential richness of mundane life, though less dramatic than the path of Eliot’s saint, was, he argued, superior to it (Rubin and Rock 146).4

Jewish wrestling with Eliot, of course, hinged heavily on those events that followed in the wake of 1933 (when Hitler came to power), a year in which the Page-Barbour lectures figure as a mere footnote to the ominous. George Steiner, that versatile critic-in-exile who taught for a while in the U.S., spoke candidly about the “Eliot problem” of the Jews. Reflecting on Eliot’s Notes Towards the Definition of Culture (1949), Steiner called “acutely disturbing” Eliot’s failure to address the “phenomenology of mass murder as it took place in Europe.” Without doing so, he argued, it was impossible to produce an “analysis of the idea and ideal of culture”:
How, only three years after the event, after the publication to the world of facts and pictures that have, surely, altered our sense of the limits of human behavior, was it possible to write a book on culture and say nothing? How was it possible to detail and plead for a Christian order when the holocaust had put in question the very nature of Christianity and of its role in European history? Longstanding ambiguities on the theme of the Jew in Eliot’s poetry and thought provide an explanation. But one is not left the less uncomfortable. (33–34)

The length of Eliot’s shadow over the Jewish literary imagination (if it is possible to speak of such a thing) may be gauged by its appearance at the late date of 1994 in Harold Bloom’s grand survey, The Western Canon. There, Bloom saw fit to meditate upon Eliot’s peculiar description of Montaigne:

Montaigne, Eliot assures us, was “a fog, a gas, a fluid, insidious element,” which must surely be the oddest description of Montaigne ever attempted. The intention of Eliot’s invidious metaphor is revealed when the author of Murder in the Cathedral insists that Montaigne “succeeded in giving expression to the skepticism of every human being.”

Mindful that Eliot’s characterization of the Jewish-descended Montaigne resembled that of the insidious Jew in Eliot’s poem “Gerontion,” Bloom exalts Montaigne: “Not a fog, a gas, or a fluid, Montaigne is complete, natural man, and as such an offense to desperate implores for grace like Pascal and T. S. Eliot” (141).

The extensive (perhaps too extensive?) list of Yiddish and Hebrew books in Bloom’s canon of twentieth-century literature might be read as a final reply to Eliot, whom we cannot really imagine esteeming I. L. Peretz’s “Oyb Eikh Nisht Hekher” (“If Not Higher”) or Sholom Aleichem’s “Iber a Hitl” (“Over a Little Hat”) as much more than an unpleasant variety of folk art. (The same might be said of Bloom’s decision to include Abraham Cahan’s The Rise of David Levinsky, a book of greater historical than literary value.) (Bloom 527–28, 532)

Although we will no longer dwell on T. S. Eliot and the aesthetic revolt that, in the U.S., centered on the Southern Agrarians, its significance for understanding the perspective of certain Jewish scholars in the Humanities might also be extended into the domain of historical studies. Ultimately, our concern here is with the introduction of explicitly Jewish viewpoints into the Humanities, and for that we will soon turn to several books by Jews about the art of reading and writing. But the case of historians in the postwar decades compels us to investigate at least briefly an additional question: if we encounter a preponderance of Jewish scholars in a certain thematic field of interest, does that mean that we have come upon an “ethnic” perspective within the larger field of inquiry? The outstanding case of this would be the predominance of Jewish scholars in the “consensus history” that emerged in the 1950s. The distinguishing char-
acteristic of those scholars known as consensus historians was an emphasis on the broadly unifying elements of American society, the shared customs and beliefs that overrode the social, ethnic, regional, religious, and, at times, even racial differences of Americans. Among the different ways we might come to better understand that scholarly enterprise, one is in light of the Agrarian critique and Eliot’s Anglican (or High Anglo-American) critique of American culture.

Without its Jewish progenitors, the trend we know as consensus history might not have existed, for its cardinal texts were Richard Hofstadter’s *The American Political Tradition*, Louis Hartz’s *The Liberal Tradition in America*, and Daniel Boorstin’s *The Genius of American Politics* and *The Americans*. We can also include Oscar Handlin’s 1951 classic *The Uprooted* among the key works of consensus history because it made the bold claim that the immigrant experience of “uprootedness” was the essential American experience, one that transcended the particular ethnic differences that separated immigrants from each other and from the native-born. To account for the striking overrepresentation of Jewish voices in consensus history, we might suggest that a sense of awe about American difference gripped some Jewish scholars to such an extent that they felt an overwhelming desire to interpret it. Whether they viewed the consensus-producing features of American life in fairly positive terms, as Daniel Boorstin did, or in the more critical vein of Hofstadter and Handlin, they were aware of the contrast between the racially exclusive ideology that brought ruin to European Jewry and the culture of practical cooperation that allowed American Jews to assimilate into the social order. When Louis Hartz approvingly likened the U.S. Supreme Court to “nine Talmudic judges examining a single text,” he expressed a sentiment that resembled that behind Trilling’s “Wordsworth and the Rabbis.” Much as Trilling preferred the rabbinic embrace of daily routine to the flamboyance of the saintly path, Hartz favored the judicial moderation of Talmudism and liberalism over the flamboyance of emotion-driven political alternatives (Hartz 10).

A cosmopolitan ideal, one that developed among the New York intellectuals associated with the journal *Partisan Review* in the 1930s, underlay the Jewish consensus historians. It was no coincidence that, in the 1950s, as Terry Cooney has observed, “academics with strong connections to the New York intellectual community” had developed a distinctive scholarly critique in which “populism, ruralism, anti-intellectualism, reaction, and anti-Semitism” all combined, as they had in the *Partisan Review*, as the key elements of a fascist social psychology. (And during the interwar decades Jewish psychological authorities had perfected a moralistic critique in which the psychopathic personality was virtually synonymous with the backwoods fundamentalist, the racist, and the anti-Semite.) The consensus historians framed a powerful new conception of American society in which those who had once been outsiders became insiders of a vast middle-class citizenry. The outsiders in this scheme were the paranoid or antisocial malcontents who clustered around such demagogues as Joseph McCarthy (Cooney 598; Diggins 24–28, 200–204; Moore 393–94; on the Jewish psychological critique, see Heinze 157–64).
Hofstadter (who was Jewish on his father’s side and identified himself as a secular Jew) and Handlin (the son of immigrant Jews) lent a distinctly urban style to the postwar study of history. Compared to the older generation of historians for whom rural America was the fountainhead of indigenous values, these two highly influential scholars put a whole new set of issues on the map. Together, they opened up the hot topic of Populist antisemitism, and, in doing so, disrupted the agrarian romanticism that was in the air after the 1930s. Historian Thomas Bender has written of Hofstadter that he helped shift “the American sense of the past” toward an appreciation of “cities, their people, and their modern, secular, and cosmopolitan values” (Bender 4; vol. 11). And Oscar Handlin, as the principal founder of immigration history, produced a school of younger historians who wrote the first rigorous histories of various immigrant groups, most of them with a strong urban emphasis. His own *Boston’s Immigrants* (1941) was a model for an inspiring new approach to the study of American immigrants, and one of his students, Moses Rischin, produced *The Promised City: New York’s Jews, 1870–1914* (1962), which remains one of the most sophisticated urban histories of a Jewish population on either side of the Atlantic in the period after 1800.

While some European-born theorists—Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm—worried that the seeds of fascism would sprout in the soil of American mass culture, Daniel Boorstin, an Oklahoma Jew, spoke for and to a majority who believed, to the contrary, that an endemic force inoculated America against the virus of ideology. Boorstin rewrote the Puritans in a way that would explain how an allegedly dogmatic and bigoted group of founders actually paved the way to their own extinction by creating an undogmatic, practical, and cooperative culture. By an ingenious interpretive sleight of hand, he made the deep theological commitments of the nation’s intellectual ancestors disappear, and uncovered in their stead a knack for adapting to the New World environment, which demanded compromise, negotiation, and motion, the skill of “becoming” something new and burying all fixed identities. A people like that could not fail to produce, eventually, an open society. Just as Hartz saw a likeness between Supreme Court justices and Talmudic scholars, Boorstin compared, in a 1949 essay, the historical consciousness of Jews and Americans and argued that a synthesis of the two would magnificently enhance the national destiny (Boorstin 311–16; Diggins; Kusmer).

Did consensus history reflect a Jewish vision of the kind of America that would permit a minority, such as the Jews, to thrive? It would seem so. That America was one in which immigrants were normal and essential; urban cosmopolitanism represented the best of what the country had to offer; and the rural masses were identified as a bastion not of democracy but of bigotry. Was this vision of America shared by urban liberals who were not Jewish? Of course. But no other ethnic group embraced it as unequivocally as did the Jews.

Ultimately, though, it was Literature, more than History, that provided a venue for Jewish concerns—in particular, the concern about Hebraic and Jewish texts being
properly respected within the Western canon.

By the 1960s a new generation of American literary critics had emerged, one that contained a disproportion of Jewish scholars far beyond that found in other fields of the Humanities. We can get a quick idea of this intellectual trend by comparing two reference volumes: “Modern American Critics, 1920–1955” and “Modern American Critics Since 1955” in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. In the earlier period, one-twelfth of the listed critics were Jews; in the latter, that proportion skyrocketed to one-half.  

There is no Least Common Denominator among contemporary American Jewish literary critics, but I think it bears mentioning that they include, in Harold Bloom, E. D. Hirsch, and Robert Alter, some of the most public opponents of “deconstruction” and other interpretive strategies that reduce the importance of the author and challenge the conventional integrity of books. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy*, Alter’s *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age*, and Bloom’s *The Western Canon* stand squarely against the most powerful academic tide of the past generation. These authors form a distinct camp in the aesthetic wars of our time not only by being opponents of deconstruction, but by being non-Marxist opponents. Marxists worry that the deconstructionist assault on meaning subverts politics, but Bloom, Hirsch, and Alter worry that it subverts culture. For them, the Western literary tradition must remain in place. It is within that tradition that a new appreciation of Jewish texts, from the Hebrew Scriptures to modern Hebrew literature, must take place.  

That appreciation should be viewed against the backdrop of a long-running Christian-Jewish polemic that shaped discussions of Jewish texts for a generation after World War II. A vivid example of interfaith tension can be found in the career of philosopher Walter Kaufmann. A refugee from Germany who, during his career as an academic philosopher at Princeton, became an important editor, translator, and commentator on existentialism (and creator of an excellent textbook, *Philosophic Classics*), Kaufmann may be as well remembered today for his semi-autobiographical *The Faith of a Heretic* (1961) as for anything else he wrote. Having converted from Protestantism to Judaism in 1933 at age twelve (shortly after Hitler’s accession) only to learn afterward that all of his grandparents were Jewish, Kaufmann subsequently rejected orthodoxy but “wrote so much on religion and defended Judaism against Christian theology with such fervor and vehemence,” recalled journalist and critic Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, “that it seemed to me that Professor Kaufmann ‘doth protest’ too much” (Weiss-Rosmarin 120; Kaufmann 15–27, 219–60).

Bothered by Christian appropriations of Martin Buber, Kaufmann produced a new translation of *I and Thou* (1970) that made the Jewishness of Buber’s philosophy a polemical issue. “The book is steeped in Judaism,” declared Kaufmann in his prologue—“This is often overlooked and perhaps as often denied explicitly.” Remarking upon the failure of the original translator of *I and Thou* to render correctly the German *Umkehr* (“turning back”), which became, in the 1937 edition, “reversal” and in the revised 1958 edition “turning,” Kaufmann explicated the original Hebrew term to
which Buber referred, *teshuvah* (“return” as in “spiritual return” or “repentance”), and compared the Jewish to the Christian concept of salvation. “Paul’s elaborate argument concerning the impossibility of salvation under the Torah (“the Law”) and for the necessity of Christ’s redemptive death presuppose [sic] that God cannot simply forgive anyone who returns”; but for the Jew, Kaufmann urged, “man stands in a direct relationship to God and requires no mediator.” In *I And Thou* Buber “deals with such immediate relationships, and in this as well as in his central emphasis on return he speaks out of the Jewish tradition” (Buber, ed. Kaufmann 36–37).8

One of the most important contributions of Jewish Studies as an academic field has been to put the nails in the coffin of anti-rabbinic readings of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the early years of the century, the great British Unitarian scholar R. Travers Herford tried to restore the dignity of rabbinic thought to mainstream theology, largely through *The Pharisees* (1924), but Herford’s task remained unfulfilled until the rise of Jewish Studies in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Up through the 1970s, there were very few Jewish Bible scholars outside of seminaries working in American universities, and a large gap separated Jewish studies from biblical studies (that gap harked back to the Higher Criticism of the nineteenth century, an academic approach which devalued the spiritual significance of the Torah). After the 1970s, the rapid expansion of Jewish Studies and the incorporation of greater numbers of both Jews and women into biblical studies radically altered the field and created new kinds of cross-fertilization between Christian and Jewish scholars. Symbolic of the new academic environment was the commentary on Leviticus that Jacob Milgrom published in the 1990s as part of the Anchor Bible. Leviticus had long been considered an almost superfluous, spiritually anachronistic text, one that the Higher Criticism claimed to be a late addition from a decadent priestly era of post-exilic history. Milgrom’s Leviticus, though not the first scholarly work to revise that older view, was emblematic of a new appreciation of Torah within a Jewish context. In that framework, Leviticus turned out to be a coherent, sophisticated, theologically pregnant book (Cooper 20–23).

The closing of the gap between Jewish and biblical studies may be thought of as a *recovery*, as well as a revising, of both texts and commentaries. That process spilled over into literary studies, as illustrated by the recovery of early rabbinic commentary on the Bible commonly known as *midrash*. In his preface to the 1986 anthology *Midrash and Literature*, Geoffrey Hartman observed of midrashic literature that, for many years, “the authorized interpreters—in church and university . . . remained oblivious to its influence, ignoring midrash as a subject and misconceiving or misappropriating the Hebraic elements in our culture.”

Little by little, however, institutional resistance to the implications of midrash has worn away. For some time now, it has been understood that many profoundly ingrained habits of western reading . . . are historical derivatives of midrash—sometimes by way of
emulation, sometimes as aggressive inversions.” (Hartman and Budick x)

It is within this context—the rejuvenation of Jewish approaches to key texts of the Western tradition—that I want to examine three influential scholars: Erich Auerbach, Harold Bloom, and Leo Strauss. Through such works as Mimesis, The Book of J, and Persecution and the Art of Writing, these three found novel ways of projecting Jewish scripture and exegesis into humanistic discourse.

Erich Auerbach demands our attention here not so much for the vast impact of his masterpiece Mimesis but for its overt, though at times cryptic, Jewish valences. More definitively than anyone before him, Auerbach compelled scholars to look at the Hebrew Scriptures with fresh eyes. He rooted his dazzling interpretation of Western literature in a juxtaposition of the Torah and Homer and argued that the laconic and fragmentary quality of the Hebrew scripture (long a target for supercilious aesthetic criticism) actually generated a psychological depth and a suspenseful uncertainty about its very human characters that were intrinsically lacking in Homer. With the fully “foregrounded” Greek characters, what you saw was what there was—there was no biographical uncertainty about them and all of their exploits were clearly delineated. The Hebrew characters, however, begged for commentary and explication, and that feature of the biblical text provided the basis for the figural orientation of Western literature, beginning with the need of Christian writers to interpret Hebrew characters and scenarios typologically, as figures of future characters and events in the unfolding of Christian history. Unlike allegory, which would reduce Abraham, for example, to a symbol for something else, figura is a literary device that preserves Abraham’s integrity as a character even as Abraham takes on additional meanings. The figura exists, as Auerbach put it, “without prejudice to the power of [the] concrete reality” of the original (in this case, the figures of the Old Testament). Mimesis returned the Torah to a foundational position in Western literature, which lined up with conventional Jewish understandings of it as a deeply significant book full of its own mystery and worthy of internal readings.

Auerbach also added an important self-referential aspect to Mimesis. “It is the personal, the self-reflective, in Auerbach,” writes scholar Seth Lerer, “that late-twentieth-century readers treasure” (222–23). Not only on the verso of the cover page, where Auerbach (now famously) tells his readers that the book was written in exile in Turkey between 1942 and 1945, but at various points within the text he momentarily departs from his history and refers to the events that led to his expulsion from his position as professor and his exodus from Germany. In one of the more memorable conclusions of any book of its time, Auerbach discloses:

With this I have said all that I thought the reader would wish me to explain. Nothing now remains but to find him—to find the reader, that is. I hope that my study will reach its readers—both my friends of former years, if they are still alive, as well as all the
others for whom it was intended. And may it contribute to bringing together again those whose love for our western history has serenely persevered. (Auerbach 557)

A number of scholars have speculated that Auerbach found a precious refuge in his conception of *figura*, which became for him a means of insisting on the Judeo-Christian foundation of Western civilization at a time when Hitler aimed to excise its Jewish component. Auerbach had a deeply personal interest “in the persistence of Hebrew influence against forces that would compromise or occlude it from Western representations of reality” (Gellrich 111; Uhlig 43).

We can see in the work of Harold Bloom a similar desire to redirect our attention toward the Hebraic legacy in Western literature. Bloom commands our attention because of both his extraordinary prominence among American literary scholars and his significance as a humanist with concerns that are clearly Jewish.

Those concerns appear in the distinctive theory of literary influence he developed and in the way he, like Auerbach, reinstated the Hebrew scriptures at the heart of modern literary aesthetics. Bloom’s distinctive theory of poetic influence holds that modern writers labor, anxiously, in the shadow of overarching predecessors, of whom Shakespeare and Dante are the principals in the Western tradition. Until 1990 Bloom was content to leave Shakespeare and Dante in charge of the “anxiety of influence,” but then he added a very old predecessor named “J,” a woman whom Bloom took to be the author of the core section of the Torah. Bloom recognized that J, though not necessarily a woman, was the redactor whom biblical critics beginning in the nineteenth century had dubbed “the Yahwist” (the Hebrew “Y” becomes the English “J”), referring to the oldest version of the biblical narrative. Bloom’s *The Book of J* was a joint project of translation and commentary, in which, building on the critical insights of biblical scholars, the J-text is excavated from the whole to stand alone in fresh translation from the Hebrew, accompanied only by Bloom’s interpretation.

In one respect *The Book of J* may be seen as Bloom’s effort to get a piece of the biggest game in town, the re-reading of the foundational text on which the moral apparatus of Western civilization stands. The 1990s were remarkable for the production of innovative translations of the Torah, most notably Everett Fox’s American extenuation of the 1920s Buber-Rosenzweig project of restoring the orality of the Hebrew, and Robert Alter’s similarly inspired translation of the Five Books of Moses, begun in the 1990s and completed in 2004.

Bloom’s re-reading of the Hebrew Bible is characteristically irreverent but certainly a Jewish reading, by an interpreter who described himself as a “Jewish Gnostic.” He offered this self-definition in his 1982 lecture, “The Breaking of the Vessels,” which referred to a Kabbalistic theory of creation. In that lecture, subsequently published as a book, Bloom also made a point to favor the Hebrew over the Greek word for “word,” preferring the Hebrew *davar* to the Greek *logos* because it fused the concepts of “act” and “word” and expressed more of what he saw in the art of poetry (Bloom, *The Breaking of the Vessels* 3–4).
The *Breaking of the Vessels* prefigured *The Book of J*, as it was prefigured by Bloom’s 1975 *Kabbalah and Criticism*, the first effort by a major American critic to introduce a Jewish concept as an aesthetic model. “Kabbalah,” he argued, “seems to me unique among religious systems of interpretation in that it is, simply, already poetry, scarcely needing translation into the realm of the aesthetic.” For Bloom, the Kabbalistic thought that emerged after the Jewish exile from Spain embodied an essentially poetic striving “to be different, to be elsewhere,” which was also the desire “for an end to Exile.”

But this emphasis on interpretation is finally what distinguishes Kabbalah from nearly every other variety of mysticism or theosophy, East or West. The Kabbalists of medieval Spain, and their Palestinian successors after the expulsion from Spain, confronted a peculiar psychological problem, one that demanded a revisionist solution. . . . The Kabbalists were in no position to formulate or even re-formulate much of anything in their religion. . . . Their stance in relation to all this tradition became, I think, the classic paradigm upon which Western revisionism in all areas was to model itself ever since, usually in rather indirect emulation. For the Kabbalists developed implicitly a psychology of belatedness, and with it an explicit, rhetorical series of techniques for opening Scripture and even received commentary to their own historical sufferings, and to their own, new theosophical insights. (Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* 34–35, 52)14

In short, Bloom found Kabbalah to be an exemplary literary act because of the sophistication and boldness with which it confronted its precursor tradition. It embodied the poetic enterprise at its most sublime, by daring to present an answer to the problem of evil in a world governed by a God both good and all-powerful, and to the problem of exile as a basic condition of human existence.

Bloom’s argument found a vague parallel in the thought of philosopher Robert Nozick, which is interesting to note in passing. In *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*, Nozick offered several (characteristically) provocative observations about theology. In a discussion of “The Ideal and the Actual,” he explained that various systems of organization, such as communism and capitalism, had essentially undermined the ideals on which they were based, and Christianity served him equally to illustrate the point. Christian ideals of brotherly love and compassion for the downtrodden were “coupled with inquisitions to root out those whose faith deviates or to impose the faith on those who do not choose it, averting the gaze from (when not blessing) the monstrous crimes of those in power.” As for the most monstrous crime, the Holocaust, Nozick believed that it “constitutes some kind of rift in the universe” and accordingly demands a theology that shows a commensurate trauma or upsetting in the divine entity itself. The task of contemporary theology, Novick argued, was “to dare to speculate, as the Kabbalists did before, about a divine being’s internal existence. A daring
theory is needed to drive issues about evil deep within the divine realm or nature in some way, leaving it deeply affected yet not itself evil” (Nozick 232, 235, 280–81).

Bloom’s *Book of J* is a daring theory of literary creation at the dawn of time, so to speak. It operates on the premise that the author of the J narrative of the Bible was a poet from a literate, urban culture, probably one that flourished during the time of King Solomon, in which imaginative Hebrew narratives already existed. Bloom responds without embarrassment to conventional claims about the nature of a religious text, saying, “It is considerably more anachronistic to regard J as a historian or a theologian than as a prose poet” (Bloom, *Book of J*, 318).

By creating a bold comparison between J and Shakespeare, Bloom, like Auerbach, throws the entire Western literary tradition into a new perspective. In contrast to Northrop Frye, whose Christian readings of Shakespeare he has debated, Bloom sees the English poet as a humanist and notes the real paucity of conventional Christian imagery in his work. So, when he then takes up the ancient writer who well merits comparison with Shakespeare, he leaves us with two founders of the Western literary heritage, neither of whom is Christian in any essential way. J and Shakespeare, Bloom contends, established the pattern of human self-understanding in the West. “Our ways of representing ourselves to others,” he writes, “are founded upon J’s and Shakespeare’s way of representing character and personality.” As for the Greeks, they don’t appear in Bloom’s picture, because J’s characterizations can be compared only to Shakespeare. Like Auerbach in *Mimesis*, Bloom observes, “J’s Yahweh and her theomorphic [having the form of a god] men and women are far closer to Shakespearean characters than are the gods and humans of Homer. We listen to J relating the long agon of Jacob, from the womb until burial, and we come to know Jacob as I do not think we can come to know even Odysseus.” In one respect, Bloom found J not merely equal but superior to Shakespeare: “We see Shakespeare’s most favored figures, whether tragic or comic, at their apogee, but not advancing toward more life in a time without boundaries” (Bloom, *Book of J* 316, 319, 322).

Leo Strauss’s *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952) stands along with Bloom’s *Kabbalah and Criticism* as a bold effort to inject a religiously derived Jewish perspective into the Humanities. What is remarkable is how slow we have been to recognize this point. The book by Strauss that has elicited the most attention and debate is the 1953 *Natural Right and History*; by comparison, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* has been neglected by scholars outside of Jewish Studies.¹⁵

A central concern of Strauss was the problematic relationship between philosophy and religion. He rejected the claim that science had successfully debunked the “extreme possibility” of revelation and miracle, yet he insisted on the stern duties of philosophic rationalism. In one sense, if only one, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* is a successor to William James’ classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, by virtue of both Strauss’s intellect and the nature of the problem he set out for himself. Both James and Strauss took the academically defiant position of allowing for the possibility of the
Divine. To resolve the conflict between science and faith, James turned to psychology and explored the experience of revelation; Strauss turned to the rabbinic tradition and explored the experience of reading.

*Persecution and the Art of Writing* is remarkable in that it manages to be both a study in political philosophy and a theory of reading and writing—"reading between the lines"—that is worthy of being called strong literary criticism (with its critical model deriving from medieval Jewish texts). Written, as were his previous books, with underlying reference to the degeneration that took place under the Nazi regime, this collection of essays explores the nuances of "a peculiar technique of writing . . . in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines."

That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only. It has all the advantages of private communication without having its greatest disadvantage—that it reaches only the author's acquaintances. It has all the advantages of public communication without having its greatest disadvantage—capital punishment for the author. (Strauss 25)

This wry passage, ostensibly focusing on literature written under the fear of a despotic regime, hints at a general theory of writing and reading. For what becomes clear as one reads Strauss is that he understands the fundamental impulse of a strong creative writer (i.e., the poet and novelist) to write on at least two levels at once, always cognizant that there are at least two kinds of readers, the inquisitive and the hasty. To the average reader looking for various forms of inspiration, the text says one thing, while to the keen, close reader it says something else above and beyond the most apparent meaning, which it may compromise or even contradict.

Harking back to the example of Socrates, Strauss was equally concerned about two kinds of catastrophe facing the skilled writer of philosophy: the force of a censorious regime and the potential of uprooting the faith of the average person. Moses Maimonides provides the perfect example, not for being a Jew writing under a gentile power, but for being a rabbinic scholar who needed to talk about the rationalist ideal but needed also to protect the Jewish community from the religiously destructive potential of unbounded rational inquiry. In the keystone essay of the volume, "The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*," Strauss suggests through minute textual analysis that Maimonides designed his *Guide* for the philosophical reader ("the small number of people who are able to understand by themselves") and his code of law, the *Mishneh Torah*, for the average Jew who does not understand philosophy. Maimonides' supreme act of intellectual equivalence was paradigmatic for the ethically responsible philosopher—he (or she) pursues the difficult questions about truth but, not elevating that pursuit into a narcissistic ideal, puts himself at the service of the community, interpreting the Law by which he and they are equally bound in a universe that stands on a divine revelation beyond the reach of philosophy. Because Strauss was adept in his readings of both Jewish and general philosophic texts, he sensed in
Maimonides the tension he himself experienced. As one of his students characterized Strauss, “The powerful counterclaims of a revelation calling for obedience and a reason demanding satisfaction retained their primeval urgency for him.”

But Strauss did not invest himself in orthodoxy; rather he maintained and perhaps implicitly suggested as a model for formerly orthodox Jewish thinkers like himself a state of almost exquisite tension between Law and Reason, making sure not to allow for the catastrophic deterioration of religious morality at the hand of skeptical philosophy. The second textual analysis in *Persecution* centers on another medieval classic, the *Kuzari* of the poet Judah Halevy, which stages a debate between religion, especially Judaism, and philosophy. “The Law of Reason in the Kuzari” takes up the question of the difference between natural laws and rational laws. Natural laws operate even among “a gang of robbers” (probably an ironic allusion to Voltaire’s *Philosophy of History*, where the Jews of antiquity are so described) and evolve to establish that “minimum of morality required for the bare existence of any society.” Rational laws, however, derive from the Divine and have as their goal the “perfection of man as man.” The complexity of the Kuzari essay defies a proper summary here, but Strauss warns that the philosopher is liable to fall into an “enormously dangerous” trap by insisting there is nothing beyond natural law—“only revelation can transform natural man into ‘the guardian of his city,’ or, to use the language of the Bible, the guardian of the brother” (Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* 132). That being said, though, Strauss does not force the philosopher into orthodoxy, but rather into a state of longing and anticipation.

One has not to be naturally pious, he has merely to have a passionate interest in genuine morality in order to long with all his heart for revelation: moral man as such is the potential believer.

Strauss concluded his reflections on Halevy with the thought that, “in defending Judaism, which, according to him, is the only true revealed religion, against the philosophers, he was conscious of defending morality itself and therewith the cause, not only of Judaism, but of mankind at large” (Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* 140–41).

Rarely had Jewish tradition been distilled in such a philosophically relevant way as a post-Enlightenment option—the option being not conversion to Judaism but rather an approach to balancing Reason and Revelation at a time when philosophy said precious little about religion. Strauss’s reading of Maimonides highlighted the need for a high-level rational engagement that is grounded in a larger framework of communal morality. With his appreciation—some would say a contemptuous appreciation—of the necessity of religious belief for the majority of people across the ages, Strauss understood, perhaps more than many professional philosophers, that the layperson could not cope with a relativistic universe. Contrapuntal to American pragmatism, which accepted the relativity of truth and envisioned a specialized scientific community of truth-determiners, Strauss spoke out of a Jewish tradition that locked the sage
into the community of regular believers, whom the sage loved in the spirit of *Klal Yisrael* (the whole of Israel) even as he knew that he could discourse with only a select few of them.

*Persecution and the Art of Writing* affected the humanities in several ways: by filtering a Maimonidean and rabbinic perspective into the mix of contemporary literary methodologies; by stimulating a range of scholars to think about the Maimonidean “reading between the lines” dynamic behind certain texts; and by presenting a Maimonidean philosophical alternative to the dominant mode of American philosophy—pragmatism—which held truth to be relative and progressive and rejected the traditional religious idea that truth was found in a religious revelation from the past.17

The Auerbachian impulse, the Bloomian impulse, the Straussian impulse—which have been cited here only as evocative focal points, not as determinants of a spectrum of Jewish sensibilities—all centered on the Western literary tradition while bearing definite but different relations to Judaism and traditional Jewish ways of reading texts. It is their clear relation to things Jewish, as well as their importance in academic discourse, that forces our consideration.

To the extent that we can speak of tendencies among the most influential, self-consciously Jewish scholars in the humanities after World War II, we seem to be locating a “canonistic cosmopolitanism.” Like T. S. Eliot, such scholars as Auerbach, Bloom, and Strauss venerated tradition, but not tradition as an exclusively Christian phenomenon; they placed a premium on the canonical West, certainly including the venerable Christian texts, but adding a new appreciation for Jewish sources and constituents of the canon. Such an appreciation would probably not have developed without Jewish scholars.

Without question, Jews were strong allies of those liberal Protestant and post-Protestant progressives who made academia a more religiously and ethnically inclusive arena than it had been before the 1940s. And without question, the vast majority of Jewish scholars spoke as scholars, not as Jews. But within the confines of academic discourse, we can, I think, identify Jews reacting as Jews against attempts to harmonize humanism with Christianity. Occasionally those attempts took surprisingly overt form—T. S. Eliot defining Jews, or certain Jews, as out of culture—but more often they involved assumptions about the irrelevance of Jewish texts and viewpoints.

In one sense, as Jews moved across the land into the nation’s far-flung faculties after 1945, they fulfilled Eliot’s prediction that a humanist culture would flourish “farther away from New York.” But when they moved they did not leave behind the memory of their grandparents (if we may adapt a famous phrase from the American Jewish philosopher Horace Kallen, whose 1915 essay, “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot” originated the concept of cultural pluralism when it suggested that Jews would not simply melt away into America18). By bringing a *Mimesis*, a *Book of J*, a *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, a “Wordsworth and the Rabbis” into academic conversation about the nature of reading and writing, especially reading and writing as performed in the West, Jews were bringing something Jewish along with them.
Two conspicuous exceptions to the general rule of Jewish authorship of leading works in American Jewish history are John Higham, and David A. Hollinger.

In terms of empirical value, Hollinger’s work is a decided improvement over the brilliantly creative but highly speculative arguments of sociologist John Murray Cuddihy, who explored the possibility of an “intraethnic war” that was “encoded in various ways in the literary and ideological product of the Jewish social critics of the Diaspora” (225).

In the field of European Jewish history there is the useful notion of a German Jewish “subculture” that we should, however, avoid in American history. That idea centers on the propensity of nineteenth-century Germanic Jewry to coalesce intellectually around certain Enlightenment ideals of rationality that rapidly became outmoded with the powerful emergence of romanticism and volkish nationalism. Compared to continental Europe, though, where modernization was grudging and fitful, America—and its Jews—modernized early, rapidly, and quite completely. Indeed, to the degree that the integration of Jews into Christian society serves as a gauge of modernity, America was modern in a way Germany never managed. Without a doubt, there are certain dynamics of assimilation and anxiety that link the histories of German and American Jewry, but I think it would be a mistake to overstate them. That exaggeration would lead to a false idea of American Jews existing in a more internally cogent social and cultural world than was possible for most people of European descent in the U.S. See Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg, and David Sorkin. My assertion about Jews and other white ethnics contradicts the claims that Whiteness Studies has made about Jews, Irish and other European immigrants. For a definitive critique of the “whiteness” approach, see Eric Arnesen.

For the continuing interest in this subject, see “Eliot and Anti-Semitism: The Ongoing Debate.” For a detailed rereading that questions the assumption of anti-semitism in regard to Eliot’s most infamous Jewish references, see Patricia Sloane.

The essay “Wordsworth and the Rabbis” appears on 118–50; for Trilling’s engagement with Eliot, see especially 132–33, 145–48. On Trilling and the middle class ideal, see Mark Krupnick (104–05); and Thomas Bender.

Some of the “darker” mass culture theorists mentioned in passing in this paragraph formed a foundation for another “Jewish locus of concern” in cultural history, one that historians have not yet identified as having any particular ethnic col oration—the shift from a putative “culture of character” to a “culture of personality” in the early twentieth century. That influential paradigm was rooted in the sociological ideas of Philip Rieff, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and David Riesman and passed into historiography through Warren Susman. Though not focusing on the Jewish background of the progenitors of this model, I discuss it in “Schizophrenia Americana.”

For good vignettes of a dozen Jewish professors of literary criticism and American Studies in the postwar era—Lionel Trilling, Harry Levin, M. H. Abrams, Leo Marx, Daniel Aaron, Allen Guttmann, Jules Chametzky, Steven Marcus, Robert Alter, Sacvan Bercovitch, Ruth Wisse, and Carolyn Heilbrun—see Susanne Klingenstein, *Enlarging*
America: The Cultural Work of Jewish Literary Scholars, 1930–1990. Given the subtitle, it is a puzzle as to why some of the most influential Jewish literary scholars (especially those such as Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman, who have explicitly taken up Jewish themes in a way Leo Marx and Sacvan Bercovitch, for example, have not), do not appear in the book.

7 Hirsch; Bloom 22–23, 57, 71. See the measured critique in the introduction of Alter. Alter accepts as a tonic some of the critical energies imported into a “stodgy” Anglo-American tradition but laments the degree to which the study of avant-garde criticism has displaced the study of literature itself. “I strongly suspect that many young people now earning undergraduate degrees in English or French at our most prestigious institutions have read two or three pages of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, and Kristeva for every page of George Eliot or Stendhal” (11). There is a colorful short sketch of the interchanges between Bloom and other members of the “Yale School” of criticism about deconstruction in David Lehman (145–50). Alter provided advance praise for Lehman’s critical account of deconstruction. For a good overview of academic literary criticism, one that defends deconstruction against Alter while praising Bloom, see Evan Carton and Gerald Graff.

8 Recently, the Jewish affiliations of two prominent academic philosophers, Hilary Putnam and Martha Nussbaum, entered into a subtle Christian-Jewish tension embedded in the debate over Aristotle’s relevance to contemporary interpretations of the mind-body problem. In the early 1990s, Putnam, who identifies himself as a “practicing Jew,” and Nussbaum, who defines herself as “an Enlightenment Jew,” collaborated on a polemical reply to Myles Burnyeat. In contesting Burnyeat’s self-described “Christian view” of the mind-body problem, Putnam and Nussbaum identified their own perspective as Jewish. See Nussbaum and Putnam 51–52. For Nussbaum’s account of her conversion to Judaism and intellectual embrace of the classical Reform tradition, see her “Judaism and the Love of Reason.” See also Martin Kavka. Putnam intimates some of his Jewish predilections in the introduction he wrote to an updated edition of Franz Rosenzweig, Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God (1–20).

9 Hartman sees the submergence of the author in midrash as especially pertinent to contemporary criticism: “In midrash we have tradition and the talent of individual interpreters, but without ‘the individual talent’; without, that is, myths of private genius. How this absorption of self into text is accomplished while a startling human coloration is still preserved; how a language of universal intimacy . . . is constructed—these are among the most important questions midrash raises” (xii). See also Susan A. Handelman.

10 The quote from Auerbach comes from Mimesis 555. On Auerbach’s making a figura of Christian figuration, see Hayden White 128–29. The continuing vitality of Mimesis registers in the flurry of academic commentaries of the past few years. In one essay in a special Auerbach issue of Poetics Today, Egbert Bakker offers an important assessment of Auerbach’s reading of Homer, vindicating the essence of that reading while introducing several clarifications based on the fact that Auerbach did not know to interpret Homer as an oral phenomenon. Because of the performative demands of the
Homeric tale, it had to foreground in the way Auerbach described and could not attain the psychological depth perception of the Bible stories.

11 For a peculiar example of an attempt to reread Auerbach against himself as a Jew, see Edward Said’s introduction to a recent edition of *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Said, a Palestinian Christian, misreads and misquotes (!) Auerbach, claiming that Auerbach assigns the notion of incarnation to Abraham and thinks that only figural interpretation can recover the hidden aspects of Abraham (xx). Auerbach, of course, makes no such statements—see 15–16, where Auerbach notes that “doctrine and promise” are “incarnate” not in Abraham but in the stories, the narrative style, of the Old Testament. Auerbach considers Christian figural interpretation the most striking way of reinterpreting the Biblical claim to be universal history, but not the only or the necessary means of explicating the hidden psychological elements of biblical characters. Said writes, “Auerbach, I believe, is bringing us back to what is an essentially Christian doctrine for believers but also a crucial element of human intellectual power and will” (xxii).

12 See Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 1997), which includes a prologue in which Bloom reflects, a quarter-century later, on his theory and its reception; and Bloom and Rosenberg, *The Book of J*.

13 Parts of Fox’s translation appeared in the 1980s. See his introduction for an explanation of his effort in relation to the Buber-Rosenzweig translation (ix-xxvi). See also Alter, *Genesis and The Five Books of Moses*.

14 Bloom has referred to Gershom Scholem as “my great mentor.” See the feature on Bloom, “Ranting Against Cant.”

15 We need not concern ourselves here with the nearly hysterical debate occasioned either by “the Straussians” or by Strauss’s eccentric interpretation of Plato. That uproar has prompted one distinguished Plato scholar, G. R. F. Ferrari, to ask, “What is it about Leo Strauss that provokes sensible people to childish outbursts?” In 1985 Myles Burnyeat published a withering critique of Strauss as a reader of Plato in the *New York Review of Books*, but more recently Ferrari, who was one of Burnyeat’s students, has challenged those who dismiss Strauss prejudicially and reopened Strauss’s unorthodox argument about Plato as a “politic” writer.

16 The quotation is from Ralph Lerner, author of the foreword to Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law* (x). This is the first English translation of *Philosophie und Gesetz* (1935).

17 For a fairly recent study that finds inspiration in Strauss’s theory of exoteric/esoteric writing, see Paul J. Bagley 236, 240. Bagley notes that “Strauss’s unconventional readings . . . has [sic] incited unreasonably partisan reactions from both his detractors and his putative disciples” (240).

For an application of the Straussian idea of writing to William of Auvergne, see Alan E. Bernstein. Using Strauss’s reinterpretation of Maimonides as a jumping off point, Kenneth Stein suggests that a rabbinic, and in this case Maimonidean, approach to reading would enable literary criticism to avoid the problems that come with the tendency toward single, overriding, often anagogical approaches. Using Northrop Frye as a model of that sort of monism which subordinates all other ways of reading to the mythological, he juxtaposes Maimonides reading of Job to Frye’s. The result of that
comparison is to underscore the deficiencies of what might be called Frye’s anti-rabbinic way of reading, which is to say, his failure to attend to a range of literal and figurative meanings, and to allow for the possibility that different kinds of passages might inherently call for a literal, a rational, or a symbolic reading, or some combination thereof, rather than automatically imposing “a purely anagogical perspective” that ends up distorting the text. Maimonides method, Stein urges, offers a richer, more variegated way of reading texts in which “all the categories of interpretation remain available.” Rather than submerge literature in allegory, rabbinic methods of reading operate “on the principle of discreteness which allows for varying approaches to the text”—they offer a model of discontinuous interpretation that is truer to the discontinuous semiotics of any text. See Kenneth Stein (1151 for the quotes). Following Stein, see Handelman 102–03.

For an introduction to Strauss, see Thomas L. Pangle 659–61. See also Kenneth L. Deutsch and John A Murley, and on Strauss as a Jewish philosopher, see Kenneth Hart Green.

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