

Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University

Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Antislavery and Women's Rights

October 25-28, 2001
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

Ernestine Rose and the Emancipation of 1848

Ellen Carol DuBois

Ernestine Rose was a formidable and formative member of the first generation of American women's rights activists. Well before the Seneca Falls convention of 1848, she was the first woman to lobby on behalf of greater property rights for married women. By 1850 when she joined the movement, she was one of the most well known female lecturers in the United States and certainly the most radical. She combined an acute sense of women's oppression with a truly universal passion for social reform and individual liberty. According to the History of Woman Suffrage, she was, after Frances Wright, "the earliest advocate of women's enfranchisement in America."¹ The History of Woman Suffrage credited her with being "equally liberal in her religious opinions" and with respect to "the science of government."² She can be characterized, as much as Lucretia Mott, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton's mentor in the ways of feminism and reform.³

¹History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 3. P. 120.

²History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 52.

³Listen for instance to the language of her speech to the 1851 women's rights convention in Worcester for its foretelling of Stanton's great end-life "Solitude of Self": "like [man]]woman]"

comes involuntarily into existence; like him she possesses physical, mental and moral powers, on the proper cultivation of which depends her happiness." People ' s Sunday Meeting, p[. 5.

"Emancipation" was Ernestine Rose's watchword. "I go for the recognition of human rights, without distinction of sect, party, sex, or color."⁴ The term "emancipation" was widely used by the generation of 1848, both in Europe and America, to indicate its distinctive vision of human liberation. In the US, the term "emancipation" became identified primarily with the radical anti-slavery movement. In Europe, "emancipation" pointed to the Jews almost as thoroughly. The Jewish dimension of the mid 19th century passion for emancipation is rarely considered with respect to the United States, with its negligible Jewish population. But Ernestine Rose, was a Jew. Over the years, I have often wondered about the irony of my own scholarly immersion, as a Jew in the virtually all-Protestant world of antebellum American reform. Even so, and although I have known most of the basic details of Rose's life and career for a very long time, I paid little attention to her. Instead, I regarded Elizabeth Cady Stanton as my surrogate, entranced by the searing, critical intelligence that she brought to bear on the established Christian churches and the traditions of female piety. In this paper, I want to remedy this omission and consider not only the contributions of Ernestine Rose to the early history of women's rights but the significance of her Jewishness.

⁴ "Ernestine Rose: Her Address on the Anniversary of West Indian Emancipation," edited by Morris Schappes, Journal of Negro History, July 1949, pp. 344-55.

Rose would probably have not characterized herself as a Jew. The closest she came was, to describe herself as "daughter of . . . the downtrodden and persecuted people called the Jews, `a child of Israel.'" She decisively rejected the traditional, patriarchal world of her rabbi father in favor of modern, Enlightenment ideas. Yet, unlike the great majority of Jews who abandoned shtetl life in favor of the modern world, she stubbornly refused to convert to Christianity. "I have not abandoned the trunk," she was quoted as saying "to latch onto the branches."⁵ Nor did she follow the path of Reform Judaism.

What she rejected was not merely Judaism but religion altogether. She was a passionate freethinker, a proud atheist. Even so, I believe that her distinctive contributions to the women's rights movement can be best understood in terms of the distance she always maintained from the Protestant assumptions of even the most liberal-minded of other antebellum reformers. What follows is a reading of Rose's antebellum feminism in terms of her underappreciated Judaism.

The early years of Ernestine Rose's life seem permanently, frustratingly out of reach.. She was born in Pitrkow Trybunalski, a Polish city sixteen miles south of Lodz, population 5000 , of whom almost half were Jews. Her first name at the time is lost to us; she reported her family name as either "Sigismund" or "Polowski". Paula Doress-Worters, a dedicated Rose scholar, guesses that her father was Aharon Pieterkowski, son of a rabbi, a mathematician and Kabbalist, and director of the local yeshiva.⁶ Her education probably took place amid intensifying conflicts between Chassidism and

⁵D' Hericourt, "Madame Rose," quoted in Kolmerten, p. 9. One piece of counter evidence: The Jewish Messenger reported in 1869 that "we believe that she was baptised" (May 21, 1869, v. 14, p. 5; thanks to Paula Doress-Worter).

⁶A Tale of One City: Piotrkow Trybunalski, ed. Ben Giladi (New York: Shengold Publishers, Inc., 1991, p. 34.

Enlightenment thought, both of which were growing in strength among the Jews of Poland. Although Jewish girls were not normally educated, she probably benefitted from the special devotion of her father and also from state edicts requiring education in Prussian and/or German for Jewish children.⁷

⁷Jacob Katz observes that because girls were not obligated to study Torah, they were exposed before boys to secular education. (Jewish Emancipation and Self Emancipation, Philadelphia: JPS, 1986), p. 84.

The first dramatic episode in the story Rose told of herself was her rebellion against a marriage her father arranged for her when she was 16 years old. Rebellion against the father, especially over matters of the heart, is a basic trope in the tales of self emancipation of nineteenth century Jewish girls. Determination to make marriage a personal choice rather than a social or religious obligation became a major theme of her adult life. According to the story, Rose tried but failed to convince her fiancé to give up his claims on her, after which she went before a state court and successfully argued to have the marriage contract abrogated. There is a certain feasibility about the story as petitions to the monarch or state officials from Jewish businessmen and community leaders for equal treatment or relief from excessive taxation were common in these years.⁸ She then fled to Berlin, the center of modern, enlightened, emancipated Jewish life, keeping just enough of her mother's dowry to maintain a dignified independence⁹

From Berlin, she traveled about Europe, everywhere in the midst of revolutionary upheaval. By 1830 she was settled in London. The number of Jews there was still quite small, and there is no indication that she was acquainted with any of them. She did however make her living teaching Hebrew and German. Probably through her acquaintanceship with Quakers, she became aware of a new and growing social movement: Robert Owen's Association of All Classes and All Nations, founded in 1835.

Among the Owenites, she finally found a community of belief and the political attachments that shaped

⁸Arthur Eisenbach, in The Emancipation of the Jews of Poland (Basil Blackwell, 1991, p 143), Geladi records the story of a Piotrkow Jew who appealed to the tsar for relief from special ghetto taxes in 1821 (p. 34).

⁹She told Jennie d' Hericourt that "wealth would only embarrass and corrupt me and make me useless!" (The Revolution, September 16, 1869, p. 171).

the rest of her life.¹⁰ From the Owenite platform, she made her first public speech.

In addition to their opposition to private property and class inequality, Owenites had strong opinions on two issues which were of great importance to Rose: marriage and religion. The Owenite position on marriage was that it must be based solely on the affections and desires of the participants and be free of economic dependence on the part of the wife. Rose's adoption of the Owenite analysis of marriage formed the basis of her later women's rights convictions. Women activists in the Owenite movement had an impressive record of forming lasting, companionate marriages. In these circles, Ernestine met William Rose, a silversmith a few years younger than herself. They wed in a politically correct civil ceremony and remained deeply devoted for the fifty years of their marriage.

¹⁰Her Owenite comrade George Holyoake remained a lifelong friend and gave the eulogy at her funeral.

Religion was also a major target of Owenism. Owenism replaced Christian belief with "rational religion," a passionate, worshipful belief in human perfectibility that did not acknowledge a divine presence. Environmentalist, materialist, and hostile to any spiritual claims, Owenism provided a home to a wide range of renegades from organized Christianity. Owenites prided themselves in their refusal to attend church, to observe the Christian Sabbath, to respect the clergy, or to grant them authority to preside over their marriages or their funerals. And yet the belief structure of Owenism, by focusing so intently on the immorality of religion, reflected that which it repudiated. As Barbara Taylor has written, the Owenites' "proselytizing moral stance [was] often identical in form, if not in content, to that of the evangelical churches."¹¹

Furthermore, although Owenites spoke of the corruptions of "religion," they meant the failures of Protestantism. Given this elision of religion with Christianity and of secularism with religious reform, the position of Rose as a non-Christian had to be precarious. The freethought that Rose learned from the Owenites was the foundation of her belief system for the rest of her life. And yet, as she was to discover later, the superstitious and corrupt side of Christianity could easily be identified with its ancient and barbaric Old Testament origins, thus casting into a high profile the very marker of her Jewish otherness which she thought she had escaped.

¹¹Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (NY: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 129-30.

In 1836, William and Ernestine Rose sailed with a group of Owenites for New York where they became active in the small movement of American freethought, which overlapped with Owenite socialism. Committed to the dismantling of "religious superstition," freethinkers were fighting an enormously uphill battle as evangelical Protestantism "burned over" American society, leaving in its paths the sparks of those very reform movements B anti-slavery, temperance and eventually women's rights -- which heralded a more egalitarian social order. Lacking the residual ties to Christianity that characterized other freethinkers, Rose was eager to embrace the calumny of infidelism attached to freethought and thus deprive it of its sting.¹² She was soon the most prominent woman in this reform community. There is no indication that her Jewish origins drew any attention.

At some point in this period, Rose met Frances Wright, who had returned to the United States after several years in Europe. Wright was of course the most important woman in the Owenite movement, and Mary Wollstonecraft's successor in the world of Anglo American reform as chief spokeswoman for radicalism and female emancipation. Rose revered Wright and eventually served as the major conduit (along with Lucretia Mott) of Wright's secularist feminist ideas to Elizabeth Cady Stanton.¹³

¹²Lori Ginzberg discusses the influenced of "infidelism" on women ' s rights in " The Hearts of Your Readers will Shudder: Fanny Wright, Infidelity, and American Freethought, " American Quarterly, vol. 46 #2, June 1994, p. 198. 1845 Infidel Convention; see Kohlmerten, p. 55. In 1837, she confronted a clerical opponent for the violence of his " harangue against a class whom he stigmatized as infidels " (History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 97. This is from the Barnard biography and refers to a 1837 meeting over public education).

¹³In 1855, two years after Wright ' s death, Rose visited her grave in Cincinnati (Kohlmartin, 177). In 1869, Anthony asked Rose to write an article on Wright for The Revolution but she did not (The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, vol. II Against an Aristocracy of Sex 1866 to 1873, ed. Ann D. Gordon (Rutgers University Press, p. 200).

Another leading freethinker was Thomas Hertell, who was elected to the New York Legislature in 1836.¹⁴ Acting on the Owenite idea that wives needed to be relieved of economic dependence on their husbands, Hertell introduced a comprehensive bill "for the protection and preservation of the rights and property of married women."¹⁵ Within months of arriving in the US, Rose was going door to door to gain signatures on behalf of Hertell's law, thus becoming the first woman to campaign for married women's property rights in the US.¹⁶ Over the next years, Hertell's bill was taken up by other legislative sponsors and two other women B health reformer Paulina Wright Davis and Elizabeth Cady Stanton B labored on its behalf.

By 1848, the political will to begin reforming married women's economic status existed and in April, the New York legislature passed a law enacting a portion of Hertell's bill. Three months later, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott called their convention at Seneca Falls. As Stanton put it in her memoir, "The reflection naturally arose that, if the men who make the laws were ready for some onward step, surely the women themselves should express some interest in the legislation."¹⁷ Rose was retroactively identified with the Seneca Falls Convention, although she did not attend.¹⁸

¹⁴Hertell and Rose shared a platform in 1845 (Albert Post, Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850, Columbia University Press, 1943, p. 164).

¹⁵ rabkin p. 89

¹⁶ "Who can tell the hardships that then met those who undertook that great work! I went from house to house with a petition for signatures Why, the very name exposed one to ridicule, if not to worse treatment " (History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 692). Also see letter to Susan B. Anthony, January 9, 1877, reprinted in History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 99. She dated the beginning of women ' s involvement in the campaign for their rights from her own activism.

¹⁷ Eighty Years 150

¹⁸History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 693. She was however aware that the 1848 law was quite partial, offering rights only to propertied wives and not to " the mass of the people [who]

commence life with no other capital than the union of heads, hearts and hands." (1852 National Women's Rights Convention, History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, 239).

In trying to account for her whereabouts during this period, I was intrigued by one of the more curious incidents in her life. Sometime within a year or so of the Seneca Falls convention, Rose was in Columbia South Carolina.¹⁹ Her stated purpose to recuperate her health, which was indeed frail.²⁰ IN a Columbia hotel, she had an acrimonious conversation with a young lawyer over slavery, in which she revealed herself to be an abolitionist. The entire episode is odd. South Carolina was surely a curious place to go for health purposes particularly if one was a notorious abolitionist. But South Carolina may have had other attractions for her. Charleston was home to the first Jewish US congregation to follow the modern, rationalized, Reform order of service pioneered in Germany.²¹ In 1846, Columbia Jews followed with a similar congregation.²² The Columbia Jews had links to Philadelphia, where Rose had strong ties with radical Quakers and I imagined that she might have learned about the South Carolina Reform Jews through them. I remain quite attached to this hypothesis, although I have found no other evidence to support it.²³

¹⁹ "Secession of the South from the North," The Liberator, August 19, 1853, p. 1? In this speech she says that she was in South Carolina "six years ago."

²⁰ Later she told Anthony that "in 1847 and '48 I spoke in Charleston and Columbia" (History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 99.). She also told Jennie d' Hericourt that she had gone to South Carolina (Revolution, September 16, 1869, p., 171). She credited her ill health to the inadequacies of her early education. History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 357. Walt Whitman, who met her in the late 1850s, contrasted her "head full of brains B the amplitude of a webster" with her body B "a poor sickly thing; a strong breath would blow her away" (from Walt Whitman in Camden, vol. 7, p. 248, quoted in David S. Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America, p. 220).

²¹Schappes, History of the Jews, p. 235-46.

²²Belinda and Richard Gergel In Pursuit of the Tree of Life: A History of the Early Jews of Columbia South Carolina and the Tree of Life Congregation (

²³ The young Columbia lawyer seems not to have been a Jew but rather a man named Mr. Thompson. Rose visited him in 1854 in Washington and Susan B. Anthony gives the name in her journal of their trip.

Whatever the case, two years after Seneca Falls, Rose was in attendance at the first national women's rights convention in Worcester Massachusetts. She was not well known to the participants but her hour long speech was the most comprehensive overview of women's condition presented on a women's rights platform so far.²⁴ From 1850 on, her involvement and identification with the women's rights movement was total. Its philosophical and political impact on her was as great as that of the Owenite movement a decade and a half before. "These are not the demands of the moment or of the few," she proudly proclaimed in 1854; "they are the demands of the age, of the second half of the nineteenth century."²⁵ Women's rights moved to the center of her concerns, and there it remained for the rest of her life. She in turn was quickly taken into the heart of the young movement. Her skill and renown indeed notoriety were points of pride. "I have long esteemed her for her honest, outspoken radicalism, her discerning and discriminating mind, and her enlarged charity," Lucretia Mott later wrote.²⁶ "How safe we all felt while she had the floor," the editors of the History of Woman Suffrage recalled, "that neither in manner, sentiment, argument, nor repartee would she in any way compromise the dignity of the occasion."²⁷ Despite the reverence that Rose inspired, however, her women's rights sisters were not unaware of her difference. Many accounts of her women's rights speeches note her accent, usually misidentified as French. In his incisive history of anti-Semitism, Sander Gilman emphasizes that

²⁴In 1871, Paulina Wright Davis still believed that Rose's 1850 lecture "has never been surpassed" (A History of the National Women's Rights Movement for Twenty Years from 1850 to 1870 [New York: Journeymen Printers Cooperative, 1871], p. 19).

²⁵History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 607.

²⁶Mott to Anthony, June 6, 1869, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

²⁷History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 100.

language, rhetoric and accent were the most common marker of Jewish difference.²⁸ Rose also regularly identified herself as a "foreigner," as if to apologize for her intrusion into the politics of her adopted country.

Currently, the most prominent issue in assessing the antebellum women's rights movement has to do with the relative influence of secularism versus religious thought. Nancy Isenberg, Kathi Kern, Elizabeth Clark and Maureen Fitzgerald have each made important contributions in tracing the religious origins and continuing character of nineteenth century women's rights thought.²⁹ In this debate, I am charged with exaggerating the importance of the secular, especially with respect to the ideas of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. I think there is merit to this contention and yet I remain convinced that some of the most original and important insights of the antebellum women's rights movement were crucially shaped by ideas that in nineteenth century context must be called secular.

²⁸Jewish Self Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews, (Johns Hopkins UP, 1986)

²⁹Isenberg, Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America (University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Kathi Kern, Mrs. Stanton's Bible, Cornell University Press, 2001. Maureen Fitzgerald, introduction, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Woman's Bible, Northeastern University Press, 1993. Elizabeth Clark, "Religion, Rights and Difference in Early Women's Rights Movement," Wisconsin Women's Law Review v. 3, 1987, pp. 29-57.

Thus, I find it interesting that the role of the only non Christian in the antebellum women's rights movement, Ernestine Rose, has been largely overlooked.³⁰ Rose's republican emphasis on the Declaration of Independence as a foundational text, her early attention to the centrality of enfranchisement, her emphasis on what we would call the social construction rather than the sin of inequality, her focus on legal reform rather than moral transformation, and her insistence that marriage was a personal rather than a sacred relationship all had a tremendous impact, especially on Elizabeth Stanton. And in each case, Rose's critical distance from American Protestant culture was crucial.

The first major women's rights debate over the Christian religion occurred at the 1852 Women's Rights Convention at Syracuse. At home with her children, Elizabeth Stanton sent a letter excoriating the Protestant ministry for its role in cultivating ignorance, superstition, and lack of self respect among women.³¹ Antoinette Brown responded with the first effort on a woman's right platform to construe the Bible in feminist terms: the Bible "enjoins upon [woman] no subjection that is not enjoined upon [man]; . . . and practically recognizes neither male nor female in Christ Jesus."³² The debate that ensued

³⁰Isenberg's only extended discussion of Rose focuses on her critique of prostitution (pp. 119-22). The foremother of this critique, Elizabeth Clark, concedes this in her (overstated) critique of the characterization of antebellum women's rights as a secular and political movement. "Rose was probably the only atheist among the early feminist leaders. Much closer to the secular, European tradition which produced feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Frances Wright, Rose consistently denied any relationship between rights and duties or any particular feminist qualifications for the franchise. She had the earliest and most emphatic vision of law as a strong, positive force in shaping human thinking and behavior" (p.7). What Clark does not consider is the tremendous impact of Rose (and for that matter Wollstonecraft and Wright) on antebellum women's rights, especially but not exclusively through Stanton.

³¹History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 850. HWS says that she submitted resolutions that were passed, but I have no record of these.

³²Ibid, p. 535.

between them was extremely heated.

Rose waded into the controversy with care. "This is no time to discuss the Bible," she urged. "We have a political question under discussion; let us . . . argue it with reference to right and wrong." She was a friend and admirer of Brown, and understood the importance of abolishing the male monopoly of the ministry. Yet appealing to the Bible to provide authority for the equality of the sexes opened up the possibility that the women's rights movement would take on a more openly Christian character. The controversy may have indeed drawn attention to her non-Christianity, as references to Jews and to Rose's Jewishness abounded at this meeting. Rose characterized Brown's interpretation of the Bible as "personal opinion," that should not go out as "the doctrine of the Convention." Educated in the Talmudic tradition as a young girl, she regarded the Bible as "so obscure and indefinite as to admit of different interpretations."³³ She described the Bible as "the work of different minds, existing in different ages, possessing different degrees of knowledge and principle. . . ."³⁴ No one else on the antebellum women's rights platform came anywhere near such Biblical indeterminacy.

For Rose, the point was not to discern God's intentions for mankind, but to identify what human action and which social arrangements were most productive of social justice. She was an insistent republican feminist, for whom the first principle of reform was always the equality of all humanity with respect to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. For Rose, "woman rights" derived from the universality of human rights. She consistently cited the Declaration of Independence rather than the Bible as her foundational document. Having left behind the separate life of religious Jews in the shtetl,

³³History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 536, 539.

³⁴Quoted, from more complete proceedings, in Kohlmer, p. 106

she embraced Enlightenment universalism. She regarded the difference of gender with as much suspicion as that of religious belief. She was as consistently opposed to valorizing the distinction of sex as anyone else in the antebellum women's rights movement. "Humanity recognizes no sex; virtue recognizes no sex; mind recognizes no sex; life and death, pleasure and pain; happiness and misery, recognize no sex," she explained eloquently at the 1851 women's rights convention in Worcester.³⁵

³⁵History of Woman Suffrage, vol., p. 238.

Rather than essences, Rose turned to social practices and beliefs to explain the inequality of the sexes. Rose was a strict environmentalist, or, to use her term, "materialist". Despite an acute sense of women's oppression, she refused to blame men and their immoral ways. "Both are the victims of error and ignorance and both suffer."³⁶ And if men were not the villains, women were not only victims. They were obliged to remedy their own situation, change their circumstances, and act in order to free themselves. This reliance on social explanation distinguished Rose from those antebellum reformers who turned to the notion of sin to explain human failure or social injustice. At the 1853 national women's rights convention in Cleveland, William Lloyd Garrison took her gently to task: "Mrs. Rose . . . told us she did not blame anybody really and did not hold any man to be criminal. . . . For my own part, . . . I believe in sin, therefore in a sinner. . . . I know nothing of society. I know the guilt of individuals . . . if we are to call men to repentance, there is such a thing as wrong-doing intelligently sinning against God and man . . ."³⁷

³⁶1851 cohituate 19

³⁷History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 137 (Cleveland, 1853).

Judaism is a religion of law whereas Christianity is one of creed. In contrast to the Christian tendency to emphasize sin and repentance, Rose stressed law. "We can hardly have an adequate idea of how all-powerful law is in forming public opinion, in giving character to the mass of society," she claimed in 1851.³⁸ Flowing directly from this conviction about the centrality of law was Rose's emphasis on the primacy of suffrage. In 1856, she made the most forthright assertion of the primacy of the vote at a women's rights convention since Seneca Falls: "the main power of the woman's rights movement lies in this, . . . it has kept, steadily in view the one cardinal demand for the right of suffrage; in a democracy the symbol and guarantee of all other rights."³⁹

Rose's emphasis on the primacy of law and suffrage shaped her perspective on women's subordination in marriage. While others within the women's rights movement also attacked marital tyranny, she was notable for insisting on the civil nature of the conjugal relationship, for refusing to romanticize it, and for being unwilling to treat it as a holy sacrament. This was crucial inasmuch as all efforts to liberalize divorce laws fell afoul of Christian notions of the divinity and therefore permanence of marriage. Throughout the 1850s, the women's rights movement was not willing to consider divorce as a remedy for the unfreedom of women in marriage. At the 1860 women's rights convention, Elizabeth Stanton boldly called for support of divorce law reform and Rose supported her.⁴⁰

³⁸P. 8. Also see History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 239 (Worcester, nwr 1851)

³⁹History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 632.

⁴⁰The issue had been made especially timely by a debate in the New York Tribune between Horace Greeley, condemning divorce, and Robert Dale Owen, son of Robert Owen, speaking in its favor. Legislation liberalizing New York divorce law had repeatedly been submitted to the state legislature.

The controversy over divorce was the most contentious women's rights debate since the 1853 Bible issue. Opposing Stanton and Rose was Antoinette Brown (now Blackwell). Rose and Brown Blackwell replayed their 1853 debate over the role of Christianity in the women's rights movement now with respect to the issue of divorce. Rose identified Brown Blackwell's hostility to divorce with her ministerial vocation and Christian theology. "The Rev. Mrs Blackwell . . . treats woman as some ethereal being. . . but I tell you, my friends, it is quite requisite to be a little material also."⁴¹ In contrast, she offered her own definition of marriage: "a human institution, called out by the needs of social affectional human nature, for human purposes." Stanton and Rose lost the debate; the women's rights movement remained unwilling to challenge the Christian notion of indissoluble marriage.

It is tricky to parse out Rose's Judaism from her non Christianity from her Owenism from her freethought in accounting for the positions she took. But what is easier to establish is the hostility to which Rose was increasingly subjected because of her ineradicable Jewishness. In the 1850s, anti-Semitism, along with other forms of nativism, began to mount in the U.S. Rose had always been attacked and ridiculed as a freethinker but in the 1850s, a new, more particular note could be detected in the antagonism she generated. In 1854, Rose's Jewishness was the target of much of the opposition directed at the campaign for additional married women's property rights in New York State. The Albany Register called her a "ringleted, glove-handed exotic" who was trying "to obliterate from the world the religion of the Cross." A few months later, during a lecture tour to Washington, D.C., Susan B. Anthony noted that Rose was shut out from venues and newspaper coverage because she was not a

⁴¹729

Christian.⁴² In a letter to her sister Lucretia Mott, Martha Coffin Wright wrote that Rose had dedicated herself "to the performance of those duties commonly called Christian."⁴³ The very terms of Wright's defense indicate that Rose's ultimate offense was her Jewishness.

⁴²Diary, March 24, 1854; see Kohlmeren' s reading of the incident, p. 141.

⁴³Wright to Mott, March 28, 1855, cited in Kohlmeren, p. 173.

Radical reformers themselves also began to evidence xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Some took to distinguishing good Christianity, the teachings of Jesus, which they identified with their own goals, from the bad version, tainted with the barbarism of Old Testament Jewish practices, which they associated with the evils they opposed. St. Paul's preaching of women's subordination invited just this kind of religious splitting. "His is the noblest figure in all history, except that of Christ . . .," declared Wendell Phillips at the 1860 women's rights convention, "but he was a Jew and not a Christian, he lived under Jewish civilization and not ours, and was speaking by his own light, and not by inspiration of God."⁴⁴ An "Appeal to the Women of New York," issued by that same convention, similarly identified Christianity's injunction that women must submit to their husbands to "opinions uttered by a Jewish teacher, which alas! the mass believe to be the will of God."⁴⁵

In a rare confidence in 1854, Rose told Susan B. Anthony of, how separate and different she was coming to feel within the reform community. "No one can tell the hours of anguish I have suffered, as . . . I have been compelled to place one after another [of those I have trusted] on the list of panderers to public favor." Rose's "anguish was extreme," Anthony wrote in her diary. "I too wept, . . .to see one so noble, so true (even though I felt I could not comprehend her), so bowed down. . . ." In a heartfelt but tellingly inappropriate gesture, Anthony wrote out a verse from a hymn she loved and gave it to "my dear friend Ernestine Rose." The Christian sentiments and values that Anthony so took for granted were precisely the context that banished Rose to the margins of the movement that she loved and

⁴⁴History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 705. Phillips was particularly vitriolic in his anti Semitic rhetoric. For other examples, see also pp. 637, 674, 701, 706.

⁴⁵History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 744. Rose signed her name to this appeal.

served. "I never expect to be understood while I live," Rose told her .⁴⁶

⁴⁶Diary entry, April 9, 1854, The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, vol. 1, In the School of Anti-Slavery, 1840-1866, ed. Ann D. Gordon (Rutgers University Press, 1997), p. 269. She explicitly named Wendell Phillips and Lucy Stone.

By the mid 1850s, Rose appears to have been increasingly afflicted by a condition that came to be known as judenschmerz, "the suffering and pain involved in being a Jew, . . . the feeling of loneliness which assails a man [sic] . . . [who] has left his own people but discovers that he is not welcome among the foreigners he has sought out."⁴⁷ In 1856, in a farewell letter she wrote as she and her husband sailed to Europe, she defended the purity of her motives against charges that she had any "ulterior end to serve . . . [or] personal interest to gain."⁴⁸ Whether or not she was in truth so charged, what is important is how beleaguered and betrayed she felt. In 1860, she resentfully spoke of the heroism of the "woman who stands up for the right," meaning herself, "brav[ing] not only the enemy abroad but often that severest of all enemies, your own friends at home. . ."⁴⁹

⁴⁷Polul Borkensenius, The Chains are Broken: The Story of Jewish Emancipation (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 82

⁴⁸Letter quoted in Kohlmer p. 181.

⁴⁹History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, p. 664.

In this context of mounting anti-Semitism, Rose had to position herself with respect to the religion she had abandoned and what is interesting is that, instead of repudiating Judaism, she chose to defend it.⁵⁰ Her most open championship of Judaism came in 1863, not in response to conservative antagonists, nor to women's rights advocates or abolitionists, but to another freethinker.⁵¹ Horace Seaver, editor of the major freethinking journal and a longtime ally of Rose, wrote a series of editorials repeatedly assailing Jews as "the worst people of whom we have any account and the poorest guides to follow."⁵² The particular target of his attack was "modern" Jews. Despite their appearance of liberalism, they remained "bigoted, narrow, exclusive and totally unfit for a progressive people like the Americans."⁵³

⁵⁰As early as 1852, in defending against what she understood as Horace Mann's slander against the motherhood of Jewish women, she rhetorically conceded that the Jews were "unmerciful and stick necked, " only gleefully to insist that "a Jewish woman was the mother of *his* Redeemer" [italics mine] Review of Horace Mann's Two Lectures, . . . 1852," reprinted in Yuri Suhl, Ernestine L. Rose and the Battle for Human Rights (New York: Reynall, 1959) p. 286.

⁵¹Freethinking was by no means incompatible with anti-Semitism. See Jacob Katz, Jewish Emancipation and Self-Emancipation (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986) on Voltaire, p. 98.

⁵²P. 196, October 28, 1863, quoted in Sandra J. Berkowitz and Amy C. Lewis, "Debating Anti-Semitism: Ernestine Rose vs. Horace Seaver in the Boston Investigator, 1863-64," Communication Quarterly, vol. 46, Fall 1998, p. 457 -

⁵³P. 315, April 6, 1864, p. 315, as quoted in. Kohlmartin has this quote February 10, 1864.

Rose challenged Seaver in the pages of his journal. She sought to give an account of these modern Jews, "little known" to other Americans but familiar to her.⁵⁴ Jews, she insisted, were "governed by the same laws as human nature in general. . ." They had long been subjected to "barbaric treatment and deadly persecution." which freethinkers had the obligation to challenge, not perpetuate. Ever the environmentalist, she insisted that "they progress just as fast as the world they live in will permit them." Throughout her response, Rose tried to hold to a delicate position between separation from and identification with Judaism. She and Seaver were a "we," infidels, and "Jews" were "they." She "like[d] Judaism not one bit better than" any other religion, though "she might like some other isms a little less." If comparisons were to be made, however, she gave the Jews the advantage: they did not proselytize and worshiped only one God, not three.⁵⁵ Moreover, the superstitious beliefs of the Jews were ancient; what was the excuse of modern Christians, such as Unitarians, who had reason to know better?⁵⁶

Through several exchanges, Seaver charged Rose with "turning Jew" and being "the Jewish champion." This rhetorical tactic left Rose unwilling to identify fully and openly as a Jew. At the point at which Seaver wrote "She is more attached to Judaism than we had supposed," she drew the conflict to a halt.⁵⁷ She apparently felt she could not be a Jew and remain a freethinker, whereas Seaver's

⁵⁴Quoted in Berkowitz and Lewis, "Debating Anti-Semitism." In 1869, The Hebrew Leader, an American Jewish periodical, wrote knowingly that Ernestine Rose "blames ["those of her race"] for denying their native faith" (May 21, 1869, provided by Paula Dorress-Worter).

⁵⁵Kohlmerten, p. 239, quoted from February 10, 1864.

⁵⁶Summarized in Kohlmerten p. 239.

⁵⁷Quoted and summarized in Kohlmerten p. 240-1. For Rose's defensiveness on this point B she says that Seaver is accusing her of the equivalent of "going to the moon or to some other wonderful

identification with Christianity necessitated no such choice. Indeed, she and Seaver mended their friendship. But American Jewish newspapers followed the exchange and cheered Rose on as their defender.⁵⁸

Rose's activities in the last years of the Civil War followed the rising prospects for Union victory and the abolition of slavery. Emancipation, human rights and universal suffrage were terms which she had been using for two decades and now they were moving to the forefront of the nation's political agenda.. She was one of Stanton's and Anthony's most stalwart allies when they created the National Women's Loyal League to press for constitutional abolition. After the war, she played a similarly major role in supporting Stanton's and Anthony's effort to bring the demands for black and woman suffrage together in the American Equal Rights Association.

thing" B quoted in Kohlmerten, pp. 241.

⁵⁸Suhl, p. 224.

The fullness of Rose's commitment to women's rights is indicated by the fact that she remained solidly in their camp when, in the face of the Republican party's refusal to add woman suffrage to its black suffrage platform, they abandoned their efforts to create a universal suffrage coalition. Despite her long commitment to universal human rights (or maybe because of that commitment), Rose agreed that it was time to inaugurate a more autonomous feminist movement. It was she who called for renaming their campaign so as to make explicit the place of women in the cause of political equality. "Congress does not seem to understand the meaning of the term universal [suffrage]. . . Congress has enacted resolutions for the suffrage of men and brothers. They don't speak of the women and sisters. . . . I propose to call [our movement] Woman Suffrage; then we shall know what we mean."⁵⁹

The evidence as to Rose's personal state of mind at this point is contradictory. After more than three decades in the U.S., she became a citizen, probably because she thought that women might soon be enfranchised. And yet very soon after, she and William departed for Europe, never again to live in this country. Her receding position in reform circles may well have played a role in this decision. The narrower and more focused woman suffrage movement that she had helped to set in motion ironically accelerated the causes of her political alienation. Increasingly its focus was on women not humanity, the nation not the world, and the elite not the mass of citizens.⁶⁰

⁵⁹History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 1, pp. 396-7.

⁶⁰Although Stanton included Rose, now a U.S. citizen, in her list of distinguished women whose citizenship deserved to be acknowledged ("A Few Gentle Taps at Mr. Greeley," New York Golden Age, September 2, 1871, from The Selected Papes of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, vol. 2, Against an Aristocracy of Sex, 1866 to 1873, ed. Ann D. Gordon (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), p. 436.

Rose was still listed as an officer at US suffrage conventions and wrote letters to be read publicly through the 1870s. But no other Jewish woman was prominent in the U.S. feminist movement for another thirty years.⁶¹ In the 1880s, the movement she had helped to pioneer became much more explicitly Christian through the influence of Frances Willard and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. In 1892, Rose died. Her will prohibited anyone bringing her body into a "church or a chapel."⁶² The chronicler of British freethought, George Holyoake, said in his eulogy of her that "she had the fire of Judith in her."⁶³ Memory of her historical contribution was maintained by left-wing American Jews.⁶⁴ The first biography of her was commissioned by Morris Schappes, editor of Jewish Currents, funded by the Emma Lazarus Federation of Women's Clubs, and written and published in 1954 by Yiddishist writer, Yuri Suhl.⁶⁵

⁶¹Maud Nathan.

⁶²Last Will and Testament, reprinted in Suhl, pp. 289-90.

⁶³Quoted in Suhl, p. 274.

⁶⁴In 1927, the Forward published an article by Henry Lewis on Rose. Thanks again to the intrepid Paula Dorress-Worters for this citation.

⁶⁵Suhl, "Acknowledgments," Ernestine L. Rose and the Battle for Human Rights, pp. 291-92. Note this precedes the publication of Eleanor Flexner's Century of Struggle but reflects a similar left-wing feminist historical perspective (Ellen DuBois, "Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism," Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights [New York University Press, 1998], pp. 239-51). Personal communication from Morris Schappes to author, May 5, 1998. On the Emma Lazarus Federation, see Joyce Antler, "Between Culture and Politics: The Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women's Clubs and the Promulgation of Women's History, 1944-1989," U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays, eds. Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 267-95.

Much of Rose's perspective on women's rights lived on through that of Elizabeth Stanton. The major themes of Stanton's feminism B the importance of enfranchisement, the necessity of marital reform, and the identification of religion as a bastion of male supremacy B directly mirror Rose's concerns.⁶⁶ Nowhere is Stanton's debt to Rose greater than in her conviction that religion was the major cultural source of woman-hatred. In The Woman's Bible Stanton called on other suffragists to examine critically the movement's relation to Christianity. The price she paid for this bold challenge, public repudiation by the movement which she had founded fifty years before, is a measure of the seriousness of that challenge. The irony is that the Woman's Bible is flagrantly anti-Semitic. In insisting that the misogyny of the Bible was both evidence of Jewish barbarity and at the same time the still flourishing core of modern American society, Stanton was once again enacting the very contradiction within which Rose had been caught. Rose had provided an enormously creative perspective by which to look at the most basic beliefs of American culture as they affected women, but she had done so from a position which that culture could not tolerate. Without taking into account her Jewishness, neither the magnitude or the limits of her contributions to the American women's rights movement can be adequately appreciated.

⁶⁶ The philosophical capstone of Stanton's career B "Solitude of Self," written in 1893 B eerily echoed Rose's oratory, forty years before, that "like [man, woman] comes involuntarily into existence; like him she possesses physical, mental and moral powers, on the proper cultivation of which depends her happiness; like him she is subject to all the vicissitudes of life; like him, she has to pay the penalty for disobeying nature's laws . . ." ("An Address on Women's Rights Delivered before the People's Sunday Meeting in Cochituate Hall, October 19, 1851," Boston: J. P. Mendum, 1851, p. 5).