In her novel *Who Would Be Free* (1924), Marian Spitzer depicts her protagonist, Eleanor Hoffman, a young woman from a Reform Jewish background who rebels against her family to begin a career and achieve cultural and financial independence. Eleanor explains, “I’m not leaving home for any of the reasons that girls are supposed to leave home. I’m leaving home for one very simple reason. I want to.” In these few lines, Spitzer denies all the conventions that her readers might expect to find in a novel of a young modern woman’s rise to independence: the protagonist is not motivated by love or by art, but by pragmatism and independence for its own sake. This is emblematic of Spitzer’s work throughout her career – in which self-awareness was both the tone and subject of her work, alongside the dynamism of the modern woman’s opportunities and lives. *Who Would Be Free* is highly referential of the cultural atmosphere in which Spitzer lived, from descriptions of the work of press agents (she herself was one), to criticism of magazine literature and its depiction of the “younger generation,” which must have “been invented by a middle-aged woman who wrote Sunday stories...as an easy way of earning money.” Spitzer writes within and about the cultural world she also sells and produces. Slipping between different kinds of work within popular cultural production she offers a

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2 Ibid., 253.
profoundly defiant sensibility and offers insights into American Jewish literary history at its popular, commercial, and pragmatic margins.

Marian Spitzer (1899-1983) began her career as a writer for the Brooklyn Times and the New York Globe, served in the publicity department of the Palace Theater, and later wrote five novels and memoirs about women with careers and about show business, as well as writing several screenplays in Hollywood. She was a member of the story board at Allen studio and the first woman ever to become an assistant to a producer of motion pictures, and in her capacity as a successful Hollywood writer she also labored as an anti-Nazi activist. Her career spanned genres of cultural production as she covered, fictionalized, and participated in the entertainment world. Spitzer’s writing, characterized by fast paced, understated wit, and an unrelenting criticism of hypocrisy and of women’s displays of silliness or weakness around romantic affairs, often exhibits an ironic tone toward the values she held most dear: women’s rights to a vibrant, productive working life. Her self-dismissive writing allows her to easily slip under the historical radar, as she devalued her own work as the stuff of middlebrow magazine fiction, and her own activism as fueled by the frivolity of social interactions. This is consistent with the way self-presentation was often articulated in popular modernism in this period, in which the self was

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“defined by irony, urbanity, and humor,” but it unfortunately tends to obscure the value of the writing because the style so relentlessly insists it is not worthy of high regard. The tone is part of Spitzer’s craft, creating an approachable persona through which she could guide readers, as though an intimate friend, through her professional world. It allows her and her characters to appear as less of a threat to the social order, even as they entered the formerly all-male worlds of college, office, and writer’s room. In this paper, I attend to the career of journalist, novelist, short story writer, publicist, and screenwriter Marian Spitzer, reading her work as exemplary of urbane, Jewish, middlebrow feminist writing of the early- and mid- twentieth century.

Writers like Marian Spitzer, who came from a fairly well-to-do Reform Jewish background, have a tendency to be swallowed up between competing assumptions about American Jewish women’s lives in this period – Reform Jewish women as upwardly mobile wives involved in the groundbreaking public work of clubs and sisterhoods on the one hand, and Eastern European Jewish women as working-class immigrants making their way up through the “ghetto” of urban immigrant neighborhoods on the other hand. This latter narrative has held particular fascination for scholars of American Jewish literature, who have gravitated toward authors like Anzia Yezierska, a contemporary of Marian Spitzer’s whose working-class Yiddish-speaking immigrant characters more readily fit into the category of “ethnic studies” than someone like Marian Spitzer. As Lori Harrison Kahan has noted in reference to another understudied Reform Jewish woman writer, Emma Wolf, “Jews with money rarely qualify as ‘ethnic.’” Marian Spitzer is therefore located in something of a double blind spot, not quite

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“ethnic enough” to be considered alongside Anzia Yezierska, and not quite enough a member of the Reform Jewish establishment and its norms to be considered alongside figures like Sadie American, a founding member of the National Council of Jewish Women. These blind spots within American Jewish literary history and historiography are only compounded, in Spitzer’s case, by a broader tendency of American literary studies to overlook the cultural register of popular or middlebrow modernism in which Spitzer produced her body of work.  

This paper examines Spitzer’s experience and expression of Jewish identity as she shifted from her early work, writing explicitly about Jewish characters and settings – a sort of local color realism of the Upper West Side Reform Jewish world – to what Nina Miller has referred to as “the transcendent urbanity that defined the Algonquin Roundtable, [which] took much of its force from the suppressed Jewish identity of a large portion of its members.” An examination of Spitzer’s career demonstrates that she not only continued to associate with a professional and social world thickly populated by Jewish cultural producers, but that she also was an anti-Nazi activist long after she had displaced the specificity of her ethnic upbringing with what Miller terms “the modern transcendence of the ‘madcap personality.’” Although a cursory examination of Spitzer’s life and work, from growing up in a Jewish environment, to writing about Jewish characters, to marrying a non-Jew and moving away from thematizing Jewishness

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8 The fact that Marian Spitzer has never before received scholarly attention is due not only to the considerations of Jewish ethnicity I outlined above, but also to a general disregard for the middlebrow and for the “frivulous public” understood to be reading this kind of writing (coded as female), as well as the expectations critics had at the time for women’s lives in relation to their writing. In assessing Spitzer’s work, H. L. Menken writes, “Spitzer was a young and handsome Jew who... showed a lot of promise, but soon afterward she married a well-heeled Christian, settled down to connubial bliss, and disappeared from the groves of Athene.” (I am pulling the phrase “frivulous public” from Anita Loos’ A Girl Like I (New York: Viking, 1966) in which Loos describes H. L. Menken using the term to refer to female magazine readers (267).) Rather than keeping track of her rather impressive career, Menken makes the assumption that through marriage, Spitzer transitioned out of writing altogether, and perhaps these kind of assumptions are part of what rendered Spitzer invisible. (see H. L. Menken, My Life as an Author and Editor, 382.)

9 Miller, Making Love Modern, 7.

10 Miller, Making Love Modern, 8.
in her writing, might suggest a simplistic unidirectional narrative of “assimilation,” such a
description would not fully account for her lifelong friendships with Jewish figures who emerged
from similar backgrounds or her political activism.

My goal with this paper (which is still in very early form - apologies) is to suggest that an
accounting of Marian Spitzer’s life and work sheds new light on what we think of as American
Jewish literature in this period in several key ways: it brings attention to cross-media
interdisciplinarity within middlebrow literary production, offers an assessment of the place of
Reform Jews within the commercialization of ethnicity in popular literature of this period, and
pushes back against a unidirectional approach to the process of “assimilation,” and does all this
through the figure of an independent-minded and career-driven woman.

Marian Spitzer grew up on New York’s Upper West Side, amongst what she dismissed as
the “prosaic purlieus of Washington Heights”,11 with the privileges of modest wealth and
education.12 From an early age she was enamored by the cultural life in lower Manhattan, a
subject which became a lifelong love. She writes of going to tea with her father at the
Knickerbocker Hotel (“We called it tea, but my father had coffee and I had hot chocolate”), and
of how thrilling she found it to walk through the theater district and discuss celebrity gossip with
her father.13 Spitzer describes her teenage years as rebellious, noting that she would “sneak away

12 Spitzer was raised in an upwardly mobile community, but did not see herself as well off. She writes of her
family’s continual troubles with regard to financial affairs. In one recollection, there was a doll she wanted terribly
for Christmas and expected that her family would try to procure it for her, along with “a pram just like the big ones
wealthy babies rolled around in.” Her father apologized for not purchasing the gift for her, explaining “I just
couldn’t afford it,” and she recalls feeling that he had let her down. (Spitzer, I Took It Lying Down, Random House,
1951, 160).
from high school” to see vaudeville performances on Wednesday afternoons, and this rebelliousness matured into her feminist-oriented writing and career.\textsuperscript{14}

Spitzer found her way into her career in part through her own passion and gusto for writing and for the world of the theater, and in part out of economic necessity. She explains, “My father, never exactly affluent, now found himself in serious difficulties. So if I wanted to finish college – and I did – I would have to work my way through the last two years.”\textsuperscript{15} She worked as a cub reporter for \textit{The Brooklyn Times} while studying journalism at New York University.\textsuperscript{16} It appears that in addition to her journalism she worked as a salesgirl, and then later landed a job as a reporter for the \textit{Evening Globe}, although she lost that position when she would skip assignments to “go riding on the Staten Island ferry with the object of my affections, a man named Harlan Thompson,” who she would later marry.\textsuperscript{17} Having established connections at the Palace Theater through some interviews she conducted there as a journalist, she landed a position on the theater’s publicity staff, where she had opportunities to interview Vaudeville stars for the press releases she composed and moved in and out of rehearsal rooms and offices, reveling in the intimate backstage access to theater life.\textsuperscript{18} She gloried at the notion of being an insider to glamor and fame. “I was in a constant state of exhilaration… to be a modest part of this wonderful, magical Palace… was the headiest kind of excitement…and the strongest feeling

\textsuperscript{14} Marian Spitzer, \textit{The Palace}. New York: Aheneum, 1969. viii
\textsuperscript{15} Marian Spitzer, \textit{The Palace}. New York: Aheneum, 1969. 62
\textsuperscript{16} This is a detail she returns to later in her fiction, for instance in one story a young woman faced with family difficulties, “didn’t whine… didn’t brood,” but instead “took a good look at the situation, and …went out and got [her]self a job.” It’s clear from this writing that Spitzer’s self-reliance was a point of pride. See: Marian Spitzer, “Memo to Maggie Brown,” \textit{Good Housekeeping}: October, 1942 (Volume 115, Number 4), pp. 22, 114-116.
\textsuperscript{17} Martin Golde, “Gossip and News of Jewish Personalities,” \textit{The Sentinel}, March 21, 1930; Marian Spitzer, \textit{The Palace}. New York: Aheneum, 1969, 64. At this time, she also served as the New York Manager of the \textit{Women’s National Journalistic Register}.
of being on the inside.”

She describes her excitement not only for writing about and observing the work of the theater, but also the social life of the theater and the literary world alongside it, dining with actors at the St. Regis Café or the Somerset Coffee House, which she describes as “a favorite eating place for most of the Palace people,” where they would pepper their conversation by testing out new gag lines.

After the Palace, she went on to work at the Shuberts, and then for Edgar Selwyn, all while writing for magazines.

Spitzer’s nostalgic writing about the ’20s in New York, as she reflected upon them decades later, bubbles over in enthusiasm: “It was great to be alive and in New York those years. Everything was wonderful fun especially at the Palace, where that same cornucopia of money and talent was spilling its treasures on the broad stage for all New York to see.”

In her catalogue of what made those years a delight, Spitzer includes not only theatrical culture but also the print culture in which she herself also took part: “It was the heyday of Smart Set and the start of The New Yorker,” she explains.

Spitzer’s name appears among lists of literati who dined together in notable locales like the Algonquin, such as a description of one evening in honor of publisher Horace Liveright, at which Spitzer was spotted seated at a table with notables such as famed producer Edgar Selwyn, Dr. Ludwig Lewisohn, Anzia Yezeriska, playwright Alice Kauser, publisher B. W. Huebsch, and Theodore Dreiser.

She breakfasted with literary critic Burton Rascoe and kicked a hole in his new straw hat when dancing at a raucous “intellectual evening” while doing the splits with actress Fania Marinoff.
Spitzer was published regularly in popular middlebrow bohemian outlets, such as the *Smart Set* and *American Mercury.* She wrote several short stories in *The Smart Set* and elsewhere depicting romance between young Jewish women and Christian suitors and criticizing the marriage practices of Upper West Side Reform Jews, which she finds parochial and hypocritical. Each of these stories follows a teenage Jewish woman from a similar upper middle class, Reform Jewish, New York background as she negotiates her relationship with her parents through love and marriage. Her writing on this theme culminated in her novel, *Who Would Be Free* (1924). Like many exemplars of “New Womanhood” or, perhaps more precisely, of bohemian, Greenwich Village, womanhood, in middlebrow women’s fiction of the period, the protagonist Eleanor Hoffman navigates obstacles in professional and domestic life as she struggles to free herself from the confines of traditional women’s roles, and she does so through a series of romantic relationships that take her further away from her Reform Jewish parents’ expectations, as well as by gaining financial and physical independence by pursuing a

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26 Her stories for the *Smart Set* are referenced below. For American Mercury she wrote, “Morals in the Two-a-Day,” *The American Mercury*, September 1924, pp. 35-39.
28 Likely, each of these stories reflects, in some way, Spitzer’s relationship to her own parents and her budding romance with a non-Jewish newspaper reporter, Harlan Thompson, to whom the novel is dedicated. Marian Spitzer met Harlan Thompson when they were both on the staff of *The Globe* (likely in 1922). Thompson, a theater and film director, screenwriter, lyricist, and film and television producer, was raised in Missouri and attended the University of Kansas, where he studied chemical engineering. He became a reporter and editor for *The Kansas City Star* and the *Kansas City Post*, and came to New York to work for the *New York World* following his service in the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I. In 1925, Spitzer and Thompson were married in secret, and as *Who Would be Free* was written during their courtship, it seems likely that the hesitations about intermarriage, and about marriage in general, expressed in the novel are related to Spitzer’s own life circumstances and choices. See “Writers Wed in Secret.” *The New York Herald, New York Tribune* (20 June, 1925).
career in theater publicity and renting her own studio apartment in Greenwich Village.\textsuperscript{30} Eleanor is unable to define the freedom she seeks, but she know that it has to do with escaping both “the religion” (the intellectual and faith component of her Jewishness) and “the Sunday school crowd” (the social aspect of her confining Jewish life).\textsuperscript{31} Though these stories were set in a particular ethnic milieu, they also captured one of the primary preoccupations of American magazine fiction in general in the early twentieth century, “the subject of women’s proper place as a site of dynamic change and redefinition of the self.”\textsuperscript{32} Who Would Be Free, which ends with a woman who has refused marriage in order to preserve her ideal of freedom, clings to one of the tropes of New Woman fiction – a woman who sticks with her career goals and therefore must suffer consequences in the form of an unsatisfying personal life – but does so in the specific context of the Reform Jewish community, with an emphasis on rebellion from an ethnic enclave that the author represented as be parochial and narrow-minded.\textsuperscript{33}

I want to pause here to note the ways that Spitzer’s work was read within and without the Jewish world as a Jewish text, not dissimilar to the writing of Anzia Yezierska, who made good on the rise of the commercialization of ethnicity in American popular culture. While Yezierska’s career “depended on the promotion of the author as a young single immigrant fresh from the

\textsuperscript{32} Maureen Honey, “Feminist New Woman Fiction in Periodicals of the 1920s, Middlebrow Moderns, 87-109, 87.
\textsuperscript{33} As Nina Miller notes, “the average fictional bohemian woman still ends her search for fulfillment in marriage,” but a significant subset of the genre of fictional bohemian writing, what Miller terms “Free Lover” narratives, center on women who maintain their “independent symbolic status” because of a “highly exalted bohemian equation of love with art” in which, in the economy of love and art, one must choose either the value of freedom and art OR love and marriage, but cannot have both. Nina Miller discusses this in the context of Floyd Dell’s portrayal of Edna St. Vincent Millay in Love in Greenwich Village (1926). Other novels with failed New Woman heroines include Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s The Story of Avis (1879), Ellen Glasgow’s Phases of an Inferior Planet (1898), Grant Allen’s The Woman Who Did (1895) and Edith Wharton’s The House of Mirth (1905).
tenements,” Spitzer – who traveled in similar circles – was touted as an example “proving that it is possible to be great in the world of art in America without coming over in the steerage.”

Spitzer includes specific details of the religious and ethnic world out of which she emerged, including a pivotal scene of adolescent rebellion that takes place during the protagonist’s Confirmation ceremony at a Reform temple. The book situated the protagonist’s development squarely within the Reform Jewish world, which is represented as insular at best. Speaking to a literary critic about the book, Spitzer explained that she believed the German Jews among whom she was raised to be “stolid; they make a fetish of system; fond of money, contemptuous of all Jews that did not originally come from Germany, lack the human touch, despise ideals, are without the spark of genius, and are prepared to grovel in the dust before any Gentile.” In treating her German Jewish background with disgust, and in characterizing it as having specific parochial sensibilities, Spitzer further “ethnicizes” it as a community to be derided alongside the other ethnic communities parodied in Vaudeville “Hebrew impersonations,” a community with specific quirks to be exposed to a curious readership.

The attention to this setting yielded an enthusiastic Jewish reading audience. It seems that Jewish readership contributed to the commercial success of the book: most of the reviews I found of Who Would Be Free were in Jewish periodicals. Who Would be Free was hailed

34 “Famous Jewish Women in Drama and the Arts,” The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle (Milwaukee, Wis., September 7, 1923). Like Spitzer, Yezierska was offered a screenwriting position in Hollywood, but while Yezierska was asked to represent herself as a Jew in a way that she felt came close to caricature, Spitzer entered Hollywood to produce work glamorizing non-Jewish subjects.

35 Nathaniel Zalowitz, “We Call them Yahudim; They Call Us Kikes,” Forward, November 23, 1924, p. 3 [The English Page]. Despite these critical words about the environment she was raised in, Spitzer later wrote tenderly about “my mother, who had worked so hard and sacrificed so much for me when I was young; my father, whose warmth and love had brightened my childhood; my sister whose companionship and understanding had always meant so much to me.” Spitzer, I Took it Lying Down, 75.

36 Incidentally, my personal copy of the book is inscribed in Yiddish to Perl from Y. Rosenberg, dated 1924.
within the Jewish world as “a fine delineation of our modern Jewish life, taken… from [the circles of] the fashionable Reform.”37 This was an environment that reviewers felt was overdue for treatment – even when other writers such as Edna Ferber in *The Girls*, had taken it on, “perhaps for selling purposes” they had avoided applying the “Jewish label” to the characters overtly.38 These reviewers viewed the book primarily as one about “Jewish-American society of the better sort,” rather than about feminist freedom. It was a freedom that was ethnically delineated, assessed as a rebellion against an overbearing Jewish mother so complete that it ended in disaster. As one critic opined, “so frenetic has been the heroine’s struggle to make of herself an entity independent of the family existence that she overshoots the mark…she has become the victim of a compulsion that any psychiatrist would jump at the chance of explaining.”39

The book caused some controversy within the Reform Jewish world because of its critique. In response to the novel, Rabbi Jacob Singer of Temple Mizpah in Chicago delivered a sermon on the subject, “The Blessings of Parents,” presumably chiding any readers who would be sympathetic to the narrator’s rejections of her parents’ faith and Jewish social circles.40 Rabbi Louis Newman, Rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, argued that “Miss Spitzer has drawn an impossible mother and a still more impossible daughter… she exaggerates her thesis in order to impress it upon her reader.” Rather than rejecting the novel outright, he cautions that “Whatever merit her book possesses, lies in the stimulus she gives Jewish mothers and daughters

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37 Review of *Who Would Be Free*, *B’nai B’rith Messenger*, March 13, 1925; see also a similar review in *The National Jewish Monthly (B’nai B’rith Magazine)*, vol 39 (October 1924-September 1925), p. 112.
40 *The Sentinel*, January 23, 1925, p. 15.
to analyze their relationship in an endeavor to understand and enrich it.” He goes on to criticize Jewish mothers and daughters alike for not attending to their relationships to one another.41

But even in this novel so richly situated in and carefully read by the Reform Jewish community, Spitzer’s protagonist quickly eschews the ethnic enclave of the Reform Upper West Side for an equally place-specific description of the vivacious life of a Greenwich Village working girl. This provides a direct contrast to Yezierska’s protagonists, like Sonya Levien in Salome of the Tenements, who rejects avenues of escape in order to assert her ethnic identity as a Jew. Spitzer writes her protagonist into a trajectory that would become her own – acceptance within the “slick utopian sameness” of mass-mediated American popular culture that was written adjacent to, and as a counterpoint to, the immigrant cultures it was surrounded by.42 As Nina Miller notes, that style “carried this immigrant presence within itself” rather than outwardly admitting to it – and it is this embedded, more subtle approach to Jewishness that Spitzer would later rely upon.43

While some paid close attention to the Jewishness of the book, others read this context as an ethnically specific variant of broader themes of intergenerational conflict and feminist rebellion. As one critic explained, “the background is Jewish bourgeois family life in New York City” but the “story is the struggle of a girl to win freedom,” a more universal theme.44 The novel was adopted as a mainstream middlebrow feminist text, with the commercial trendiness of Greenwich Village feminism – it reached outside of conversations about the Reform Jewish community and into the worlds that Spitzer was beginning to occupy. For instance, Diane

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42 Miller, Making Love Modern, 91.
43 Ibid.
Warwick, writing for *Life* magazine, flippantly wrote, that *Who Would Be Free* “Has probably had a greater influence on my life than any book I ever read, because… [I] went out and had my hair bobbed” in response to the text.  

As Marian Spitzer herself wrote in an article about women’s hair fashion, “bobbed hair is… a tangible symbol of woman’s recently acquired independence,” as well as an important component fueling the “new industry in motion” of hair care and commercialized beauty. Such a response, directed more toward the descriptions of Eleanor Hoffman as a working girl in the novel’s second half than as a daughter straying from her Jewish home, a struggle that occupies the first half of the book, demonstrates the crossover appeal of the novel. Tied in this way to the new industries of women’s self-representation (like the beauty industry as well as the popular magazine industry in which Spitzer wrote), Spitzer’s novel appears to have much more in common with the writers of the Algonquin Roundtable who saw themselves as “articulators of modernity for the modern mass” in general, rather than having a particular ethnic constituency that they served.

Despite her rebellious, aggrieved portrayal of her Reform Jewish background, Marian Spitzer’s trajectory into middlebrow publishing was supported by publishers who were themselves Jewish, such as Horace Liveright, even when the content of her work was not overtly Jewish. Liveright, who himself had begun moving at this point out of his publishing ventures with Boni & Liveright publishers (the publisher of *Who Would Be Free*) and had embarked on a career in stage production, was a natural fit to publish Spitzer’s second novel, *A Hungry Young Lady* (Horace Liveright, 1930), which featured a narcissistic housewife convinced of her own star quality who tries, and fails, to achieve fame on the stage. The housewife’s parochial

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47 Miller, *Making Love Modern,* 147
community echoes the background of Eleanor Hoffman in *Who Would Be Free*, but mention of Jewishness is removed. Spitzer, it seems, continued to write about Jewish characters within a community that included many Jewish cultural producers, without naming her characters as Jewish, and therefore universalizing them as representative of modern women within the intrinsically flawed experience of modern love. In this way, Spitzer performs what Michael Kramer has described as the “achievement” of Jewish American literary texts representing assimilation, the “imaginative success” of creating and asserting a narrative in which Jews and non-Jews appear to be interchangeable. Put differently, there was no need at this point for Spitzer to describe her characters as specifically Jewish, because she was part of a literary circle in which a shared “Jewishness” or expression of “assimilation” had become fully integrated into “the modern style.”

*A Hungry Young Lady* is notable for its blithe attitude toward a career-desiring woman, its sympathetic but exasperatingly un-self-reflective protagonist, Juliet Hays, who wields her feminine attractiveness to earn bit parts on the stage while denying her indiscretions and attributing her meager successes to talent. In the novel, Juliet Hays, who “always felt it was foolish of me just to stay home and be a housewife” and who is convinced of her potential as a

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49 See Miller 108 for a description of Modern Love discourse in the Algonquin Round Table literary circles. Notably, only one Jewish character makes an appearance in this novel, Lewis Freedlander, the “slender young Jew” who runs the Brooklyn studio for Invincible Pictures, a major Hollywood production company. When the protagonist, Juliet, meets him, toward the end of the novel, she is already hardened to the expectation that the only way to find work as an actress is through insinuating herself as a potential sexual object for a man in power. Freedlander, however, seems not to notice or be interested in her advances. When he offers to arrange for a screen test for Juliet, she thinks to herself, “Arranged? What did he mean by that?... Men were all alike.” But Freedlander only matter-of-factly gives her instructions, offering her no additional favors and accepting none of her flirtation. Here we have a hint of Spitzer’s affinity toward her Jewish characters as potentially more upright than the rest of the lascivious show business world she depicts. This is the only overt interest in Jewish subjects that she gives in a text otherwise fully occupied with what would become her primary concern as a writer – women’s dynamic roles in personal and professional spheres. (*A Hungry Young Lady*, 282)


51 Miller, *Making Love Modern*, 92
performer, scoffs at the gender conventions she encounters both in her husband’s world of banking, where her role is to stay contentedly at home and supervise the preparation of dinners, and of the world of theater, in which even famous producers casually remark that “my wife gave up a very promising career when she married me and I’ve never heard her say she regretted it.”

After attempting a career on the stage, Juliet ultimately returns to amateur theatricals, claiming that she is giving it up for her husband’s sake, when in reality housewifely duties excuse her from the fact that she hadn’t met with the success she had envisioned for herself. The narration makes light of these missed opportunities, suggesting that Juliet lacks training, skill, and tenacity, and she is the butt of humor in the text as she has an overinflated sense of her importance on the stage. She appears to be among the class of women that one unsavory character ruefully refers to as “career-chasing debs who are Tired of It All.”

Nevertheless, despite the tone of witty dramatic irony at her expense, the novel fiercely upbraids the gender conditions that, her own potential talent or lack thereof aside, make her success impossible, including that the theater world rewards women who grant sexual favors to men in power and punishes those who are “prudish.” The novel includes several shocking scenes in which men force themselves upon her against her will, and these scenes cut through the mocking wit of the narration and expose Juliet as a victim worthy of pity in at least equal measure to the reproach she receives. Ultimately, the novel seems to weigh in approvingly at the notion that women should have roles outside of marriage, and that those roles should not be determined by positioning women as sexual objects, even as it suggests that *this particular woman* might do best to content herself as a housewife.

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52 Spitzer, *A Hungry Young Lady*, 19
53 Ibid., 131
54 Ibid., 296
Despite Spitzer’s mocking tone about her career-hungry protagonist, she remained committed to forging her own path as a working woman, even as she and her husband Harlan Thompson together made the move to Hollywood to follow their careers in writing for the theater industry as popular entertainment increasingly went the way of the screen. Spitzer first worked as a Los Angeles correspondent for the drama desk of the *New York Times* before working inside the film industry itself.\(^\text{55}\) She writes of herself as a well-known writer by this time: “I had made a success of a career in writing which depended on wisecracks and brisk dialogue.”\(^\text{56}\) Spitzer extolled the virtues of Hollywood for career-oriented women in particular. She writes, “Of course, there are all over the world …women writing books on the desirability of having a room of one’s own, or lecturing to other women at professional women’s clubs on how to treat one’s new equality with men. But they are still writing and lecturing about it.”\(^\text{57}\) She scoffs at women’s ability to actually live out the possibility of equality anywhere but the radical world of Hollywood, and notes that she knows about the potency of anti-feminist approaches to women because “woman’s place is still more in the home than not, and stories that keep her there are easier…to sell than stories that take her out of it, to the biggest circulating women’s magazine.”\(^\text{58}\) Her own work as a career-oriented woman must cater to this marriage-centered, antifeminist environment of entertainment fiction, even as she tries to live outside of it.\(^\text{59}\) As a pragmatic writer with a desire to reach popular audiences, Spitzer at times felt the need to dial

\(^{55}\) Spitzer, *I Took it Lying Down*, 127.


\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) She notes, however, that in Hollywood, wives who do not work have the lowest social status. As she explains, “in other countries the wife of a visiting lion gets a lot of the attention for herself,” but that simply isn’t the case in Hollywood, where a wife without a career of her own is treated as “a person of no importance.” Marian Spitzer, “Hollywood Wives,” *Saturday Evening Post*, January 31, 1933, pp. 8-9, 63-65.
back the feminism as well as the overt Jewishness of her earlier writing to give her work broader appeal and build her career success.

Spitzer’s observations about the atmosphere of greater career opportunities for women Hollywood seem to have been born out in her own career trajectory. Working under Harold Hurley at Paramount, she was the first woman appointed aide to a film producer, an executive position that involved reading material, revising, and supervising pictures.60 Meanwhile, her career also involved a significant amount of independent travel, as she moved between the theater and magazine worlds of New York and her Hollywood base, acquiring stories for film production.61 Her independently minded career was a direct consequence of her egalitarian marriage. In her fiction, Spitzer describes a marriage such as her own, in which both spouses work and are excited about their careers without jealousy: “She kept on working because she liked it, but didn’t let it hurt her relationship with her husband.”62 She expands on this theme elsewhere, describing a couple who “loved each other terribly, but they were still individuals, and respected each other as such. It must be remembered that they were married in the middle ’20’s, when everybody was dedicated to living desperately, and personal freedom was the slogan of the era.”63 In addition to providing information about the couple’s dedication to Spitzer’s independence, Spitzer’s marriage to her a Christian husband, and her somewhat removed experience of childrearing – her children were in the care of childcare providers while she worked and maintained a demanding social calendar – give us clues about where scholars might look to find her attitudes toward Jewishness. She was unlikely to have taken up the mantle of

60 “First Woman Appointed to Aide Film Producer,” Los Angeles Times, August 12, 1935.
63 Marian Spitzer, “Six Hundred Seconds,” Saturday Evening Post, July 6, 1940, pp. 16-17, 58-62.
maintaining Jewish identity in the home that has been taken to a more typical trajectory for Reform Jewish women, in contrast to men’s more rapid integration into Christian society through professional work.\textsuperscript{64} One must look instead to her writing and her social life to find expressions of Jewish identity and concern, however implicit these concerns may be.

In Hollywood, Spitzer found herself at the center of a social world of high-profile parties, under the limelight of gossip columnists, and this world was in many ways one populated by Jewish figures. Although it was a new social environment, in many ways it was also continuous with the New York world she had left behind because so many middlebrow cultural producers of the Algonquin Roundtable set, like Spitzer herself, were making their way to Hollywood. To give just a few of the examples that the generously namedropping Spitzer mentions in her writing, Spitzer recalls having flirted with Howard Dietz, publicist for MGM and songwriter known for his collaborations with Arthur Schwartz, when he was a Columbia University student and she a wide eyed student at the Wadleigh High School for Girls.\textsuperscript{65} Viola Brothers Shore,\textsuperscript{66} a writing mentor and friend she first met in Joyce Kilmer’s poetry class at NYU, lived for a time in Los Angeles writing screenplays; Producer and composer Lewis Gensler was “an old friend from New York, who’d come to Paramount and written scores with Harlan.”\textsuperscript{67} In this way, not only was her work in the film industry was continuous with her magazine writing and theater publicity and journalism, but her social connections, including those from her high school and the world of her Reform Jewish upbringing, were also continuous with her Hollywood social life. She leaves hints in her stories of the densely Jewish nature of her professional and social

\textsuperscript{64} See Paula Hyman, Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History. University of Washington Press, 1997.
\textsuperscript{65} Marian Spitzer, I Took It Lying Down, 117.
\textsuperscript{66} https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/shore-viola-brothers
\textsuperscript{67} Marian Spitzer, I Took It Lying Down, 126.
connections. Her characters are rarely overtly Jewish, though some betray their Jewish origin through their names or accents, such as when a manufacturing furrier named Fiegenspan insists in Yiddish-inflected English, “I want you should let me do something,” or when an agent praises an actress’s beauty by saying “With her appeal she could talk like a Galiziana and it wouldn’t matter.”

Though this may have more to do with the fact that so many Jews were involved in the film industry than any particular affinity toward representing Jewishness in her writing, it demonstrates the continuity between her earlier writing about Jewish characters and her later writing in which the Jewishness of her characters takes on only incidental roles.

Spitzer’s life was an exhausting and invigorating whirlwind. She describes herself as “the iron woman, the girl who could work all day and play all night” and explains that she was “trying to…run a house and hold a job, be a wife, a working girl, a crusader, a mother and a merrymaker, all at once.” Her position at Paramount involved significant responsibilities for scouting, rewriting, and scripting for films, including her screenwriting credits for The Dolly Sisters (1945) and Look for the Silver Lining (1949). In addition, she was still writing furiously for magazines. She describes her stories of that time dismissively, “[the stories] were nothing to be ashamed of but I took no great pride in them, either. They were never as good as I wanted them to be.”

Because this social world was so filled with Jewish individuals, the writing often engaged implicitly with a social sphere that might be characterized as Jewish, even though Jewishness is rarely mentioned as such. A more explicit and near constant theme was that of woman’s independence: Spitzer published several stories that relied on the notion of insider

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68 Marian Spitzer, “The Ermine Coat,” The Saturday Evening Post, June 1, 1935; Marian Spitzer, “Minor Engagement,” Saturday Evening Post, October 5, 1933.
69 Marian Spitzer, I Took It Lying Down, 1.
70 Marian Spitzer, I Took It Lying Down, 105.
Hollywood gossip, many of which center on women gaining their independence from men.\textsuperscript{71} As one of her characters claims, “there’s one thing even more important than love, or keeping family together. And that’s human dignity. I’m going to have a try at that now.”\textsuperscript{72} Her characters are consumers of popular culture as well as figures within the film industry, and often make references to the literary world in which Spitzer took part – for example one character chides another “stop acting like a girl in a Dorothy Parker story” and leave the object of her admiration alone.\textsuperscript{73}

Spitzer’s career ebbed and flowed as opportunities and challenges presented themselves: In 1937 she spent a year on bedrest, under treatment for pulmonary tuberculosis. In her 1951 memoir \textit{I Took it Lying Down} she chronicles the strenuous gaiety of her Hollywood career and social life, and also its unraveling as she fought tuberculosis by undergoing a rest cure. Once she had returned hesitantly to work, having made an initial recovery from tuberculosis (she suffered several relapses) she soon left her position and took to writing short stories from home, only to find that one story led to a radio series, for which “the hours were longer, the fun more furious, and the tensions far greater than they had ever been at the studio…it was like working on a newspaper again.”\textsuperscript{74}

In 1938, as Hitler rose to power, Marian Spitzer turned her energies toward politics, although she downplays her political efforts as performed in the context of her socialite lifestyle.


\textsuperscript{72} Marian Spitzer, “This Time It’s Different!” \textit{The Saturday Evening Post}, June 8, 1940, pp. 412-420.


\textsuperscript{74} Marian Spitzer, \textit{I Took It Lying Down}, 203.
This is consistent with the social experience of Hollywood that Nancy Lynn Schwartz describes: “In a town of isolated residences and little cultural activity outside movie making, political involvement provided a connection for Hollywood castaways.” Organizing around politics allowed them to “meaningfully channel” their social activities, playing poker or attending dinners to raise money for leftist political causes. Such a social motivation is not however a reason to dismiss Spitzer’s efforts, it merely indicates that she put her significant social talents and clout to use toward a cause she held close. It is particularly significant to note her leadership in anti-Nazi activism in this period because it occurred precisely at the moment in her life when she was almost incapacitated due to repeated bouts of pulmonary tuberculosis.

Spitzer appears to have extended significant efforts toward bringing the tools of the film industry to bear on the fight against Nazism, at home and abroad. She served as vice-chair of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (formed in 1936), working alongside Donald Ogden Stewart and Allan Campbell, husband of Dorothy Parker. The organization, which was dismissed by the press as the politicization of the former Algonquin Roundtable Members because of their vague feelings of “sympathy for the underdog” rather than some rigorous political critique or aim, proposed to “combat Nazism and its agents in the United States by literature, meetings, discussions and the dramatization of anti-Nazi material” and raised thousands of dollars “to aid victims of Nazis in Germany.” In that capacity, she also defended the organization against inquiries by the House un-American activities committee, who argued that the League was supporting communism. Spitzer was also involved in organizing the Motion Picture Guild, Inc., a venture to produce “films of a controversial and documentary character” supported by “a

number of Hollywood liberals who have been drawn together by their interest in the several nonconformist movements that are enjoying momentary popularity.” The group operated under the table, with an anonymous production board whose names were withheld to avoid accusations that their work violated the terms of their studio contracts, and technical workers paid in cash. Among the first films that the group aimed to produce was Erika Mann’s *School for Barbarians*, a documentary about education under the Nazi regime. The group also issued a publication, “News of the World,” publishing exposes of asserted Nazi activities in Los Angeles and the vicinity. These political efforts are a further manifestation of Spitzer’s continued Jewish motivation and affinity in her work, as well as demonstrating the breadth of her career, which extended outside of the written word and the glamor of social life and into the political sphere.

At a time when anti-Semitism seemed “too provocative a topic to be treated…for mass consumption,” as Rachel Gordan explains in her analysis of the challenges facing Laura Z. Hobson in writing her novel *A Gentleman’s Agreement* in World War II era America, Spitzer and other like-minded, largely Jewish, creators of popular culture worked outside of mainstream channels to fight against fascism and combat antisemitism. This is particularly remarkable given the “paralysis” that plagued many Jews as they considered projects on the topic of antisemitism while working in a context in which antisemitism was pervasive and on the rise.

79 “Nazism in L.A. To be Exposed in New Publication,” *B’nai B’rith Messenger*, March 19, 1937, p. 1. Through her work with the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, Spitzer exposed herself to accusations that she had contributed to the Communist cause, and her name appeared in ‘Red’ inquiries. She later served as a member of the Hollywood Democratic Committee and because of her political involvement she was identified by testimony before the Special Committee on Un-American Activities as an important Communist leader in the cultural field. I have not found direct evidence that this blacklisting impacted her career. See: “Congress Opens Hearings on Hollywood ‘Reds,’” *Box Office*, March 10, 1951; “*Un-American Propaganda Activities*,” United States. Congress. House. Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 1940.
In the meantime, as the world plunged into war, Harlan Thompson became a major in the Signal Corps, stationed in Astoria, Long Island, making training films, and Marian Spitzer moved in with him in a small apartment on East 48th Street, where she “hurled [herself] into the role of war bride.” She explains, “I cooked and cleaned and marketed and laundered and did a number of other housewifely chores that were in no way unusual but for the fact that I had never done them before and that I did them with the most impressive ineptitude.” At the same time, unwilling to settle down only to a domestic role, Spitzer volunteered to do editorial work for the Writers War Board, an unofficial propaganda arm of the government.

After the death of her husband in 1955, Spitzer devoted herself to working for the Friends of the Theatre Collection of the Museum of the City of New York, and penned her 1969 volume *The Palace*, an “affectionate” history (or, as one reviewer dubbed it, “glowing memory book”) of the Palace Theater, which was celebrated as “a book to nourish nostalgia and settle arguments and to keep theatrical mythology honest.” In this work, as in her 1951 tubercular memoir, she returns to memories from her youth, here and there marking herself as having grown up in a Jewish milieu (in one anecdote she describes trying to climb down a drainpipe to sneak out of the house and perform as Esther in a Purim play when her parents told her she still needed to rest from a fever), without dwelling on this background as a determining factor in her temperament or work (in the way that Yezierska does, writing her memoirs around the same time period).

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82 Marian Spitzer, *I Took it Lying Down*, 208.
84 Marian Spitzer, *I Took it Lying Down*, 209.
She exhibits a comfort with her Jewish background, which she describes as fully integrated with her involvement in the world of theater and entertainment, the latter of which is her great love. A photograph in *Look* magazine of Spitzer at the Museum of the City of New York, posing in front of Palace Theater Memorabilia, offer lasting evidence of her lifelong affection for this world that inspired her creative literary output across genres and media.87

Marian Spitzer’s work has since descended into obscurity, perhaps because of the limited attention that middlebrow writing receives after the moment of its popularity. Among the most recent references that I found for the writer was a description of *A Hungry Young Lady* sitting unread on a shelf in a family-style restaurant where “the titles become an unforgettable, if purely decorative, part of the dining experience. Kind of like parsley.”88 Nevertheless, I suggest that revisiting Spitzer’s career could offer significant interventions for the field of American Jewish literary studies by filling in scholarly gaps, particularly with regard to popular or middlebrow writing, career women, and women of German or Reform Jewish backgrounds in the early twentieth century.