CHAPTER SIX

JUDAISM, SEXUALITY, AND THE NATION IN FRANCISCO GOLDMAN’S THE DIVINE HUSBAND

Ariana Vigil

Set in mid-nineteenth-century Guatemala, Francisco Goldman’s 2004 novel The Divine Husband introduces important issues of sexuality and reproduction alongside considerations of immigration, nationalism, and liberal politics. The novel purports to tell the story behind the year that José Martí spent in Guatemala and behind the love affair that inspired Martí’s Verso Sencillo IX—“La niña de Guatemala.”1 Between 1878 and 1879 Martí lived in Guatemala City, where, among other things, he taught composition classes at the academia de niñas de centroamérica. One of his students was the daughter of the ex-president of Guatemala, Maria García Granados, who had an unrequited crush on Martí and, if you believe that she is ‘la niña de Guatemala,’ died of heartbreak. Despite the role that Martí and his poem played in Goldman’s inspiration for the novel, Martí “does not emerge as the central figure” of The Divine Husband.2 Instead, Goldman uses this historical background and adds to it, making the fictional character of María de las Nieves Moran also Martí’s pupil and telling the story of Martí, Granados, and another historical figure—Francisca ‘Paquita’ Apario—through their interactions with Moran. To these fictional and historical figures Goldman adds a host of other characters—including several suitors of Moran; her eventual husband, Mack Chinchilla; and half a dozen minor characters, many of whom are Jewish. In using fictional characters to tell the life stories of historical figures and vice versa, The Divine Husband challenges the boundary between history and literature, while exhibiting a commitment to telling the stories of those

1 See José Martí, Versos sencillos, trans. and intro. Manuel A. Tellechea (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1997).
most often overlooked by history—women, immigrants, working-class subjects, and ethnic and racial minorities.

The following essay explores how the relationship between Jewish characters and issues of familial and national reproduction present a unique perspective on Jewish sexuality, heteronormativity, and national and transnational identity. As I will illustrate, male Jewish characters support the strengthening of heterosexist ideas and institutions (male sexual privilege and marriage, respectively) while themselves never fully participating in or reaping the benefits of these institutions. This simultaneous convergence and divergence is linked to Jewish characters’ relationship to the Guatemalan nation-state. That is, the novel links the consolidation of political power in the nation with the consolidation of sexual power in marriage and scripts Jewish male characters in such a way that they support these consolidations yet never fully participate in them. As such, *The Divine Husband* presents a uniquely nineteenth-century perspective on the ways in which Jewish male identity moves between insider and outsider status in relation to the nation-state. While this perspective reflects anti-Semitic characterizations of Jewish people as insidiously, intangibly ‘different,’ Goldman’s decidedly transnational text also challenges traditional notions of citizenship and belonging to suggest that those individuals who live outside recognized political and geographic boundaries have nonetheless significantly impacted national and transnational developments.

**Sexuality, Ethnicity, and the Nation: Don José**

In introducing issues of sexuality and ethnicity alongside important moments in the formation of the nation-state, *The Divine Husband* speaks to how gender and sexual politics are interwoven with issues of nationalism. National groups construct themselves in relation to the other and, “despite the national discourse of internal unity,” stratify the national ‘us’ along lines of gender and sexuality. Pointing to the sexual and gender politics behind Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as an ‘imagined community,’ Adi Kuntsman writes, “Nations are often imagined and constituted through normative femininities and

---