

1950, and moved to San Francisco in 1955. He died there in 1967, never having completed the second novel to follow *Jews Without Money*. Measuring Gold's achievement through his one published novel misconstrues his output, as his newspapers columns alone run in the thousands of pages. Literary criticism has forgiven many a writer for fascist sympathies, but to a large degree it still marginalizes Gold for his communist convictions.

At the end of his life, Gold was neither bitter nor despondent about his personal situation or the state of the world. This may seem surprising, as at the end of *Jews Without Money* he speaks to a revolution that "will destroy the East Side when you come, and build a garden of the human spirit" (316). And yet for Gold it was the Jewish East Side itself that was the garden of the human spirit, and "he must stay in the tenement and make a new and truer [art] there." Here was the central dilemma for Gold: the success of revolution he so desired would destroy the world that made him who he was.

SEE ALSO: The City in Fiction (AF); Farrell, James T. (AF); Naturalist Fiction (AF); Social-Realist Fiction (AF); WPA and Popular Front Fiction (AF)

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Gordon, Mary

DAVID W. MADDEN

With the publication of her first novel, Mary Gordon emerged as a serious, confident, outspoken voice in contemporary American fiction. An impeccable stylist, she explores the twisted coils of familial and domestic experience. Although she shuns the attention, she is one of the most incisive writers of Catholic life in America, as well as being an important feminist voice.

Mary Gordon was born on December 8, 1949 on Long Island, New York. The only child of David and Anna Gordon, she grew up in a devout Catholic family and attended Barnard College and Syracuse University. She married anthropologist James Brian and, after that marriage ended, married Arthur Cash, with whom she has had two children. She held a number of temporary teaching positions before being named the Millicent C. McIntosh Professor of English at Barnard.

Final Payments (1979), her first novel, presents Isabel Moore, a 30-year-old woman who has devoted her life to an ailing father who dies and leaves his daughter adrift in the world. Isabel enters two ill-fated relationships, and out of a sense of penance for the failure of those liaisons, she once again relinquishes her freedom to an older person who cannot appreciate her. *The Company of Women* (1980) examines some of the same issues and reveals the quintessential Gordon themes of self-sacrifice, devotion, and claustrophobia. Developing a more complex narrative structure of multiple points of view, Gordon follows the maturation of Felicitas Taylor and the intimate circle of adult women who nurture and encourage her independence. Like Isabel Moore, Felicitas submits herself to an exploitative partner and suffers ostracism when she becomes pregnant. Once again, obedience to church and men and a desperate attempt to escape confinement define her character.

Men and Angels (1985) represents a departure from an overt Catholic perspective, yet Gordon's concern with the Christian obligation to love others, even the seemingly unlovable, prevails. This novel is built on a complex series of parallels and oppositions of characterizations, structure, and themes. In the figures of Anne Foster and Laura Post, Gordon pits maternity against religiosity, devotion against rejection, and independence against subjugation. The experiment with multiple points of view is taken further as the novel revolves around ruminations, journals, letters, and accounts of the lives of the principal and secondary characters.

The Other Side (1989) and *Pearl* (2005) offer intricate examinations of Irish American experience. The first is Gordon's most complicated work, a chronicle of five generations of a family involving 20 characters and stretching from Ireland to New York. The central characters—Vincent and Ellen Costelloe MacNamara—are émigrés from an Ireland that had grown inhospitable. Whereas Vincent is a kind, forgiving, and patient man, his wife is bitter and intolerant, damaged by a feckless father and a hostile homeland. They present unsentimental reactions to the myth of cheerful Irish who assimilated easily into the American mainstream, and their uneasy legacy is traced through three generations. *Pearl* centers on Pearl Meyers, a foreign exchange student in Ireland who chains herself to an embassy flagpole and is dying of a hunger strike; her mother, Maria, who tries to save her; and a surrogate father, Joseph, who seeks to aid them both. Once again the themes of self-sacrifice and maternal devotion are carefully developed, as is a modern parable of the Holy Family (note the names) and the act of martyrdom. Intense subjectivity further defines the characters and the narrator, the latter a foregrounded voice that assumes various postures and often addresses the audience directly.

Spending (1998) is an audacious examination of gender roles and individual freedom. Monica Szabo, a moderately successful painter, meets "B," a wealthy commodities broker who admires her work and submits himself as a patron who wishes to advance her career and financially support her. B also becomes both muse and model for a series of paintings based on Renaissance depictions of

the dead Christ, though these are postcoitally recumbent figures. The paintings launch her visibility and draw the ire of religious right-wingers. Except for these references to religion, issues of faith and devotion give way to pure physical pleasures and Gordon's most sustained piece of erotica.

Along with two collections of short fiction, she has also written three important works of non-fiction: *Good Boys and Dead Girls: And Other Essays* (1992), which collects 28 essays on a variety of subjects; and a pair of memoirs—*The Shadow Man* (1996) and *Circling My Mother* (2007)—that explore the known and the less well-known aspects of each of her parents' lives. Besides three honorary doctorates, Gordon has earned a number of awards, including the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize (1979 and 1981), the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award (1992), the O. Henry Award (1983, 1997, 1999), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1993), and the Edith Wharton Citation of Merit (2008–10).

SEE ALSO: Gender and the Novel (AF);
Social-Realist Fiction (AF)

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