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BIFOCAL LENSES: MEETING SPACES OF JEWISH-AMERICAN AND "MAINSTREAM" AMERICAN LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

This dissertation critically examines the concept of Jewish-American literary hyphenation, analyzing its historical and theoretical consequences (chapters one and two), then applying the results of that analysis to three pairs of texts: Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912) and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) (chapter three); Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) and William Dean Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) (chapter four); and Anzia Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) and John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) (Chapter five). My thesis is that Jewish-American writers working at the turn of the twentieth century negotiated a space for themselves inside of the American literary mainstream and that their reception currently continues to be defined by confining systems of literary hyphenation.

Chapter 1

Introduction:

Jewish-American Transnationalism

A friend of mine used to tell me that she recognized the influences of the Jewish oral-tradition on my writing style. “Everything with you starts with a story,” she would laugh. She may very well have been right, for by way of introduction to the scholarly genesis and goals of this project, I would like to tell a story. At the Society for the Study of American-Women Writers (SSAWW) conference held in 2004, a handful of us presented papers on Jewish writers—I talked about Emma Lazarus. Although we were certainly made to feel welcome, the organizers dispersed us between different panels as if not sure how we fit into the larger context. At the meeting held in 2009, we boasted not one, but three Jewish-American women writers’ panels. My presentation this time was about Anne Schlezinger, the first Jewish woman appointed as judge to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Her diary had been discovered, edited, and was about to be published for the first time.

At the end of the presentations, a fellow graduate student sitting in the audience raised her hand and asked, “But why are you all presenting this at an American literature conference?” In addition to my discussion of Schlezinger’s diary, my fellow panelists talked about Mary Antin, Martha Wolfenstein, and Thyra Samter Winslow (a

satirist). The three of us exchanged glances before answering as follows: The writers we discussed might be Jewish but they also wrote in, and about, the United States. In all of our respective cases the authors considered themselves Americans dealing with American subject matter. Why would their work not fit into an American-literature frame?

That graduate student's question highlights an important point, namely Jewish-American writers' peripheral position in relation to a mainstream tradition. On the one hand, there is a way in which Jewish-American literature is part of an American literary tradition. On the other hand, it is often interpreted as not belonging to the mainstream corpus, a corpus understood to define a centrally American literary identity. Jewish-American writers often find themselves oscillating between exclusions from an American literary identity and exclusions from a Jewish literary identity. The tension appears in the space between a genuine wish on the part of contemporary English departments to include ethnic or hyphenated literatures into the curriculum and a lingering sense that though allowed in, they are still outsiders.[1] Jewish Studies in this country, meanwhile, relegates many Jewish-American writers to the periphery of the discipline based on a perception that they focus on non-Jewish American themes and are therefore not "Jewish enough."

This dissertation critically examines the concept of Jewish-American literary hyphenation, analyzing its historical and theoretical consequences (chapters one and two), then applying the results of that analysis to three pairs of texts: Mary Antin's *The*

[1] It is important to emphasize that many ethnic writers mean to retain a separate status. The issue, rather, is that their hyphenated status seems to translate to marginality at times in English Departments.

Promised Land (1912) and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) (chapter three); Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) and William Dean Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) (chapter four); and Anzia Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) and John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) (Chapter five).[2] My thesis is that Jewish-American writers working at the turn of the twentieth century negotiated a space for themselves inside of the American literary mainstream and that their reception currently continues to be defined by confining systems of literary hyphenation.

The statement that assimilationist writers like Mary Antin or Emma Lazarus participated in American cultural production may seem self evident in light of current efforts to broaden the spectrum of literatures taught in contemporary English departments in this country. In practice, however, these writers have been read according to a context that subordinates their Jewishness. If we compare, for example, the works of Abraham Cahan, William Dean Howells, and Henry James, we find that they participated in a widespread American concern over the fate of a hero operating in an increasingly modern world. Yet, of the three only Cahan would be introduced into the discussion using hyphenation (Jewish-American). In addition, rarely does critical discussion compare Cahan with Howells or James (though that is changing recently which is a good sign).

Other hyphenated literatures find themselves negotiating an insider space while remaining outsiders. A colleague related a similar experience that had occurred at a

[2] I will define what I mean by hyphenated literatures and then by extension unhyphenated literatures—African-American or Jewish-American. My idea of hyphenation relies on the work of Rey Chow. She discusses a process whereby a hyphenated work is marginalized when it is compared with an unhyphenated work.

conference dedicated to English literature where she presented on Irish writers. She was asked why she was presenting on an Irish writer at an English conference. The assumption underlying the question was that Irish writers should not be presented in English conferences. There is, nonetheless, a historical specificity to the Jewish diaspora situation. This first chapter is dedicated to outlining the historical and cultural circumstances which give Jewish literature in its hyphenated and in its non-hyphenated versions historical specificity —"Jewish-American literature" being an example of the hyphenated form and "Jewish literature" being an example of the non-hyphenated form. The specific circumstances that need to be taken into account include the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish communities. Furthermore, they include the relationship between those Jewish writers advocating participation in the mainstream literary milieu and those inside the community who believed Jews were a modern nation and therefore advocated for a "national" literary allegiance.

It is important to note that asking about the nature of non-hyphenated Jewish literature proves highly complicated. For that reason, I begin to unravel what a centrally Jewish literature is in order to position Jewish-American works written in English in relation to it. Non-hyphenated Jewish literature pertains to literature understood by Jewish Studies' critics to be dealing primarily with Jewish concerns. The field prides itself on establishing Jewish oriented programs where Jewish culture and religion occupy the central research foci. In his introduction to *Arguing the Modern Jewish Canon* (2010), Hillel Halkin, a noted Jewish Studies critic, recreates for his readers Ruth Wisse's career, recalling that she taught the first Yiddish language and literature course in a western academic setting. Her *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero*

(1971) marked the beginning of institutional acceptance of the Jewish literary tradition in North America (15).

Sholem Rabinowitz (Sholem Aleichem), I.L. Peretz, and other East-European, turn of the twentieth-century writers inhabit the core of the central Jewish canon over which critics like Wisse preside. Still, the canon is far from stable due to the very nature of Jewish dispersion across the globe. The identity designation "Jewish" almost always comprises the "ethnic" rather than "mainstream" aspect of most national identities. In other words, most Jewish writers describe themselves using a hyphenated identity which in essence marks their difference from the dominant national identity. There are Jewish-French writers, Jewish-English writers, Jewish-American writers, Jewish-Argentinian writers, to name a few. Jewish-Israeli writers continue, especially the older generation, to collapse the terms "Israeli" and "Jewish." They consider "Jewish-Israeli" a redundant hyphenation because in Israel, they maintain, the non-hyphenated, cultural designation is the Jewish one.[3]

The term "mainstream," as I use it here, refers to major literature works taught in English departments until well into the 1960s. Using "mainstream" in place of "canonized" helps better emphasize the distinction between central texts and peripheral texts, the definition of which is decided by what a given critic accepts as the authentic core of a particular national literature. Furthermore, I prefer the term "mainstream" to "canon" since the latter suggests an aesthetic judgment rendered by supposedly impartial experts. Over the last thirty years, literary scholarship has shown how such judgments resulted in a persistent neglect of a variety of texts. In my discussion of

[3] Their belief in their own centrally is not accepted by many critics outside of Israel as my discussion of Bryan Cheyette and Ranen Omer-Sherman's work will demonstrate.

Jewish non-hyphenated literature, I will use the term "Jewish canon" to associate a specific type of Jewish literary criticism with types of judgments derived from what we have come to term literary Modernism. In this regard, as I will detail further later, I follow the lead of contemporary Jewish critics who, like their non-Jewish counterparts, seek to open the canon.

The definition of hyphenation I am using resembles Rey Chow's in *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002).[4] She defines hyphenation "as the coupling of two separate identities, one culturally particular, the other presumably ideologically universal" (30). Such literary hyphenation implies that African-Americans, Irish-Americans, Asian-Americans, and everyone else on the "ethnic" side of the hyphenation belongs to the United States. The very exercise, however, creates a dichotomy between a center or an ideologically dictated universal and a periphery allowed a proximity to the center. In turn, only texts perceived as occupying the core can be understood to belong to the American literary system. The aforementioned graduate student espoused this view in its extreme form. In her mind, a conference defined in an unhyphenated, centrally American fashion could not accommodate the Jewish writers we presented.

Perhaps "AfricanAmerican" or "JewishAmerican" would work better than a graphic barrier like hyphenation. It would suggest a way in which the two categories overlap, creating a kind of third space where both receive prominence. As it stands, hyphenation distances the imagined unmarked or unhyphenated American from those

[4] Rey Chow mentions Judaism in her book in passing only. The fact that she does make sure to mention the Jewish condition testifies to the fact that she does recognize that there is a similarity in the position of the "ethnics" she talks about and the Jewish people.

not connected to the "original" group which landed on Plymouth Rock.[5] For that reason, the announcements of Jean Toomer or Philip Roth that they are Americans rather than hyphenated Americans (Toomer objecting to being called a "Negro-writer" and Roth objecting to being called a "Jewish-writer") were interpreted as provocative. They were outsiders proclaiming room inside the central space. [6]

The tension inherent in the hyphenation system, specifically regarding the Jewish case, remains at the heart of my dissertation. Hyphenated literatures in the United States share many aspects of marginalization at the same time that they each inescapably bear the marks of particular historical and cultural circumstances that establishes their experiences also as unique. This chapter will emphasize the relevance of African-American theoretical conversations to the Jewish-American case, meanwhile stressing that though they have much to say to each other, there are also specific contexts to be considered in the Jewish case. Mary Antin (1881-1949), Abraham Cahan (1860-1951), and Anzia Yezierska (1880-1970)—the subjects of chapters three, four, and five, respectively—are three case studies that highlight different responses to immigration and assimilation from a specifically Jewish perspective. Antin responds to Zionism as much as she does to assimilation, Cahan participates in Realist literary projects in order to describe the immigrant, and Yezierska criticizes assimilation attempts. At the heart of each of their works lies an awareness of a Du Boisian "double consciousness" (Antin will even use the term in her

[5] Warner Sollors' article, "National Identity and Ethnic Diversity: Of Plymouth Rock and Jamestown and Ellis Island" (1994) illustrates how the original Plymouth Rock arrival myth has come to define what it means to be a real American.

[6] The two writers, Toomer and Roth, are both famous and relevant examples. For more on Toomer, refer to Gioia, Mason, and Schoerke's *Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, p. 319. For more on Roth see Ruth Wisse's *The Modern Jewish Canon* p. 3.

autobiography). On the other hand, Pogroms and anti-Semitism, both in their European and in their American manifestations, hover sometimes latently and sometimes explicitly in each of their works discussed here.

There are three main tensions implied in Jewish-American hyphenation. First, mainstream criticism resists labeling these writers as both Jewish and American. Second, Jewish Studies resists dealing with outside disciplines. They aim for "Jewish" to remain primarily an unhyphenated identity, resulting in a historical disregard of American Studies. American Studies, meanwhile, relegates Jewish-American literature to a subcategory within it, one that is not quite equal to its central pillars because of its hyphenated status. What I noticed is that even famous, well-established examples of the Jewish-American repertoire have been generally ignored by critics. The writers dealt with in this study all achieved fame for a brief period before their works were dismissed as lesser hyphenated literature. It is as if some critics feel required to "choose sides" due to prevailing contemporary analytical tools. A text is expected to embody characteristics that will establish its belonging into *one* literary category. Both American and Jewish Studies critics are beginning to search for ways to expand the conversation, however. Some are beginning to see that "Jewish-American" can be understood to fuse the two sides of the hyphenation. They are beginning to argue for the interconnected nature of the two cultural identities, rather than seeing them as two mutually exclusive cultural and national identities. The issue at hand is not whether they are not two distinct identities but rather that they can and do interact inside of literary works previously read primarily through one of these cultural and literary lenses.

It is not the case that identities currently are read exclusively using a "filtered lens," which minimizes multiple identities. In the seventh, shorter edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature,* two poems by Emma Lazarus appear: "The New Colossus" and "The Jewish Synagogue at Newport".[7] Each of these poems by Emma Lazarus represents one major aspect of her personal and literary identity, the Jewish and the American. There is a difference, nevertheless, between knowing that an anthology should represent the full, diverse range of a person's work and knowing from whence to retrieve, in the Jewish-American case, the relevant Jewish context. In essence, we are faced with a situation where Jewish Studies focuses on the Jewish-cultural aspects of the works while American Studies focuses on the American or American-immigrant experience aspects, leaving a gap in the middle. Another of this dissertation's goals, for that reason, is to help critics in both fields to get better acquainted with the full range of theoretical conversations submerged within these writers' texts. Understanding Antin, Cahan, and Yezierska means understanding also the way Jewish nationalism developed into a literary force that made its way into their writing almost in spite of the writers themselves. Though usually submerged within these works, the increasing pressure to define oneself using Jewish-nationalist loyalty paradigms makes its presence known. These writers, then, negotiated their place inside of American mainstream culture with Jewish national pressures closing in on them.

American and Jewish theoretical frameworks will both play a decisive role in this discussion in order to achieve this double view of the works in question—Marry Antin's *The Promised Land*, Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsk*y, and Anzia

[7] The latter is a poem she wrote in response to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's earlier "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport." I discuss the two later on.

Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements*. I will discuss them together using current theoretical frameworks that reimagine literary borders in more porous ways. My literary analysis will rely heavily on Paul Gilroy's term "bifocality," which he uses in *The Black Atlantic*. He develops W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" to argue that a text does not necessarily need to be read as embodying a single, isolated cultural identity. A text can, in his words, "face in two (at least) directions at once" (3). Although his construction was intended for Anglo-Black literary analysis, it works well in describing the Jewish condition, too. Bifocality becomes a crucial tool for a conversation over the ways Jewish and American literary identities coexist.

The following section, section two, will begin by outlining briefly the attitudes Jews met with in the non-Jewish world. It will then shift to discussing the ways Jews typically dealt with both non-Jewish attitudes towards them and with practical or political Zionism. Section three will review key historical events and intellectual Jewish conversations during the turn of the twentieth century in order to provide necessary background for the upcoming chapters comparing Jewish and non-Jewish literary works. The fourth section, along with supplying further historical context, will point to a few Jewish reactions to the above theory. More specific examples will help to establish some of the ways that writers, even the most assimilated of writers, dealt with their status as "Jew" in a non-Jewish world. This section will include a brief personal reflection supplemented by some remarks on the works of A.B. Joshua, and other contemporary writers. The final and shortest section, section five, will outline each of the dissertation chapters.

(2) The Meeting of Two Traditions

In their efforts to assimilate into American mainstream or dominant literature, many Jewish writers made their Jewishness as invisible as they could or presented Jewishness as the less desirable, less modern (hence less sophisticated) option. Yezierska, for example, in *Salome,* continually has her alter-ego and protagonist, Sonya Vrunsky, refer to herself as a "savage" in comparison to her American-born husband, whom she describes as "civilized." However, Vrunsky emerges by the end of the novel as the one with the deeper understanding of the ways that her husband's society fails in dealing with immigrants. Vrunsky's second husband turns out to be the kind of transnational, cosmopolitan man who never forgets his Jewish identity. It is this final choice in husbands that lends the work its transnational or cosmopolitan flavor. The result is a text that discusses the relationship between mainstream America and the Jewish immigrant, creating a bifocal effect.

The theoretical framework arguing for a dual-national presence in a single text should sound familiar. Critics such as Gilroy have theorized for some time that national boundaries, literary or otherwise, could no longer (and never could in essence) be considered hermetically sealed. Amy Kaplan and, more recently, Anna Brickhouse use, as Gilroy does, Randolph Bourne's 1916 term, "transnationalism," to describe an American identity shaped inexorably by its empire building.[8] It is shaped by ethnic outsiders in the United States. They successfully demonstrate that culture in the United

[8] Randolph Bourne published his seminal "Trans-National America" in 1916 following Horace Kallen's "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot" just a year earlier. The term, Transnationalism, appeared in this 1916 publication. My second chapter delves into Bourne's article in depth.

States was influenced by these outside forces on which the US exerted its own cultural influence.

Entering Jewish culture in a transnational relationship with the United States raises specific challenges, however. Including Jewish-American literary production in a transnational discourse means first understanding how a submerged or highlighted Jewish consciousness in a text might count as transnational. How can a group known for its displacement count as a modern nation? Can Jews enter a transnational relationship with other nations? Can Jewish literature, literature created by a group whose core population does not reside in its historic homeland, be treated as entering a transnational conversation with American literature (or any other literature for that matter)?

Critics utilizing transnational approaches usually deal with groups whose modern, western status fits into known western paradigms. While Zionism makes use of these paradigms, there are also particular divergences from its basic premises that are imperative to keep in mind before proceeding. For example, the basic articulation is that one either belongs to the American nation or to a European nation or one belongs to a colonized nation. One is either a modern, rational westerner or an ethnic, third-world outsider. Anna Brickhouse in *Transamerican Literary Relations* (2004) lauds literature written in Spanish and French by people whose homes have historically been colonized. Amy Kaplan similarly talks about American colonialism in the Philippines. In *Anarchy and Empire* (2002), she shows how American literary discourse sought to control outside cultural influences introduced by American expansion. Secular Jewish literature developed alongside Zionism before mass emigration into Palestine began in

earnest. Therefore, Jewish literature's interaction with a transnational conversation with non-Jewish literatures needs to be delineated while taking the specific historical context into account. These Jews did not come from "one" country, but were dispersed across Europe (and the world). As has often been the case involving Jews, non-Jewish culture perceived a threat to their nationhood arriving from within their country, from the Jewish population. It was Jewish immigration and what seemed like the sudden presence of so many East-European Jewish immigrants that threatened American cultural hegemony.

From a Jewish perspective, immigration to this country coincided with the height of Zionist insistence on the establishment of a modern Jewish national consciousness. For that reason, it is important to understand the ways Jews thought about American reactions to their presence. Understanding Jewish-American identity in this country means understanding the difference between the Jewish community before and after Zionism. Before Zionism, Jerusalem was less a physical destination and more an idea one prayed for. For this reason, nationalism as a concept resonated for Jews much differently than it did for non-Jewish westerners. Jews writing in this country usually drew from this earlier conception of nationalism, a more metaphorical idea of what nationalism meant to them, rather than from the later Zionist one.

As Benedict Anderson observed in his seminal *Imagined Communities* (1984), westerners assume nationality is universal so that "in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender," as if by definition, nationality is sui generis" (4). Literary Modernism, at its core, assumed a national structure out of which national literatures must emerge. The critique that comments on

the centrality of the nation-state offered new tools with which to think about cultural interaction. [9] Homi Bhabha picks up the phrase "imagined community," using it often in his now seminal *Location of Culture* (1991). [10] He shows that the so called "natural" national form proceeds to assert dominance over third world countries assumed by westerners to be less sophisticated. Modernist literary analysis, following this general ideological paradigm, glorifies western texts over other texts produced by presumably less sophisticated cultures.

Bhabha described the ongoing critique of this ideology by asserting that we are busy projecting the past into the future in an attempt to reconstruct it. Literary Modernism, as it was expressed by T.S. Eliot, advocated reconceiving the past so that a new, highbrow literature could develop. Post-Modernists are interested in a hard and honest look at the ways Modernist Literary scholarship excluded and then essentialized "others" as part of what they considered neutral, pseudo-scientific interrogations of literature. For the last twenty years, critics have obsessed with Literary Modernism, reaching back into it constantly in order to expand it beyond the elitist core which had defined it at one time. Bhabha calls it "a form of cultural re-inscription that moves *back to the future*" (361). According to Bhabha, this is best evidenced by the designation "post." We are *post* colonial, *post* modern, etc. Our present is haunted by our past. We are constantly looking back to rewrite, or reimagine modernism's systematic and often violent exclusionary constructions based increasingly on the modern conceptualization of the nation.

[9] As seen in Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Empire* (2000).
[10] See for example his discussion on page 25. He argues that the novel and the newspaper are both crucial developments that sustain and perpetuate the imagined community myth. He mentions Anderson also on page 361.

An inquiry into the place Jewish-American writers occupy inside a complex matrix of transnational literary production, Jewish and American, should accordingly begin with an inquiry into the special relationship between Jewish culture and the very gentile concept of nation prior to the advent of Zionism. As my historical review will show, Jews constitute, on the one hand, a kind of genetically cohesive group with a belief in a sui generis, autochthonous beginning. On the other hand, Jews around the world before Zionism mostly accepted their pseudo-foreigner status despite having resided in their respective countries for generations. They saw themselves, for example, as Russians but Russians who wish to live a Jewish life. The two-millennium displacement did not translate for most into national longing but neither did it translate into assimilation into gentile society. For many Jews it still does not. It is not hard to see, therefore, that for westerners the Jews next door would not seem like third-world peoples described sometimes by western travelers as "savages," but neither would they be considered part of the dominant culture. Describing the Jewish presence in Europe and consequently in the United States would require a different set of definitions. Jews moving to the United States carried over with them two-millennia of theological and historical tensions between themselves and European Christian society. Christian theologians and intellectuals argued about the place of Jews in a post-Pauline world since the time of the New Testament. There are volumes upon volumes of historical research on this subject. Robert Michaels puts it simply and well when he says, "The degree of historical antagonism to Jews among average Christians and among even the greatest of Christian thinkers brings to the researcher's mind a sharp sense of the monumental tragedy that has taken place over the last two millennia" (101). The

Enlightenment and its Jewish Emancipatory project which meant to open up Christian society to allow Jewish participation could not release Europeans from prejudices aimed against the Jewish population. America, with a history of relative religious tolerance, did not free itself from these prejudices, either.

By the nineteenth century, despite historic assimilation, science contributed to racial anxiety by asserting the inferior status of non-whites. Despite openness to Jews, anxiety developed associated with fear that Jews (or non-whites) would sully European blood through inter-marriage. George Eliot, for example, warned against the dangers to English national purity from outsiders while also creating a most sympathetic Jewish English gentleman in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Likewise, in Matthew Arnold's "Hebraism and Hellenism" (*Culture and Anarchy* 1868), Arnold seeks to explain to his Christian readers what he considers Jewish culture's contribution to the development of Christian thought. He held that both modes of thought or "forces," Judaism and Hellenism (the latter, in his telling, Christianity inherited) had played crucial parts in developing English culture. He accepted the racial anxieties of his time, submitting that Jews were racially inferior, which to him was "made visible to everybody." He concluded, nevertheless, that ultimately "nothing more strongly marks the essential unity of man than the affinities we can perceive, in this point or that, between members of one family of peoples and members of another" (104-105). He held that the English, and their "descendants," the Americans, were united "in some special sort of genius and history" with the "Hebrew people" (105).

This brand of tolerance made it generally possible to negotiate one's Jewish heritage and to participate in modern life as equal citizens. But a new set of

possibilities also brought home a new set of internal tensions. Does adherence to Jewish traditions negate in some way one's efforts to become a modern citizen of the western world? For some Jews, the answer was clear. Considering that Jewish tradition did not require a national identity in ways that modern nations did, there should be no contradiction between remaining traditionally Jewish and entering the modern, non-Jewish world. James Loeffler, in "Between Zionism and Liberalism" (2010), discusses the movement known as Diaspora Nationalism, a movement which Loeffler describes as "transnational." In its American form, the movement attempted to reconcile American Jews' loyalty to the United States with their need to support a Zionist cause. Citing Oscar Janowsky's model for Diaspora Nationalism, Loeffler defines the movement as "the easy and necessary reconciliation of these [Zionist and American] distinct political objectives." Loeffler adds that "[h]is [Janowsky's] case highlights the elastic character of American Zionism, in which two political foci not only coexisted but also actively complemented each other in a harmonious vision of global Jewish nationhood" (292). In other words, Diaspora Nationalism wanted to capitalize on the openness demonstrated by western nations and specifically by the United States toward Jews. Janowsky's version drew, and this is the key, on Jewish ability to inhabit two spaces at once in an attempt to create this double political focus.

Loeffler summarizes his article by explaining that Janowsky's "American vision of Diaspora Nationalism" was intended to expand on both "the notion of Jewish political life in Palestine and the United States," giving legitimacy to Jewish identity outside of political Zionism's demands (300). What Janowsky and other Jews in the United States, including the writers I focus on in this dissertation, drew on in their

encounters with political Zionism was that Jewish identity had for centuries idealized Jerusalem, but had never before needed to immigrate massively there in spite of its importance to the culture.

Jewish prayers reiterate constantly the yearning for Zion without specifying a physical need to return until Messiah returns. The belief was (and in many religious circles still is) that the Messiah will lead Jews everywhere back home. To illustrate what pre-Zionist devotion to Palestine versus Zionist attitudes were like, here is an example from the millennia-old Jewish wedding ceremony. Before breaking the glass, a Jewish groom traditionally recites the following words taken from Psalms 137 5-6:

אִם-אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ יְרוּשָׁלִָ֫ם-- תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי.

תִּדְבַּק-לְשׁוֹנִי, לְחִכִּי-- אִם-לֹ֣א אֶזְכְּרֵכִי

אִם-לֹ֣א אַעֲלֶה, אֶת-יְרוּשָׁלִַ֫ם-- עַל, רֹ֣אשׁ שִׂמְחָתִי.

For centuries Jewish grooms have been repeating: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy" (Psalms 137 5-6). Yet most of the world's Jewish population before World War II and even after the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 resides outside of Israel with no intention to "return home" (and not necessarily because they are waiting for the Messiah).[11] Abraham Cahan's characters typically wrestled with the implications of "becoming" American in terms of their Jewish identity. Anzia Yezierska's characters wanted desperately to enjoy the benefits of assimilation but struggled with their responsibilities

[11] See Aviv Caryn and David Shneer's *The New Jews* (2005) for an example of two scholars' insistence that Jews do not need to feel any connection other than to their non-Jewish nation. They do not call the United States their "host" nation or a Diaspora but their true home.

toward fellow immigrants. As some Jews managed to secure a place among non-Jews, they had to contend with relatives and friends who either refused to assimilate or that did not succeed as they did, raising questions regarding Jewish solidarity. Other writers, like Mary Antin, solved the tension by announcing a rejection of national pressures in favor of complete assimilation. She suffered harsh criticism because she was read as having dismissed all responsibility toward her fellow Jews. She went as far as rejecting the call to "remember Jerusalem."

There were other intellectuals, the ones that would come to be known as the political or practical Zionists, who argued that assimilation was not possible. For them, tragic, violent history would repeat itself so long as Jews continued to reside alongside non-Jews. For these political thinkers, there would be no other choice but to relocate the dispersed Jewish nation, gathering them in a single geographic location. Pressing for the national revival of the Jewish people via insistence on the revival of literary national identity became part and parcel of the nationalist political conversation. At the same time that Cahan, Antin, and Yezierska contemplated American assimilation, other Jewish authors asserted that it was a Jewish responsibility to contribute to the establishment of a national secular literature.

What Jewish intellectuals meant by an exclusive, national, secular Jewish literature was a literature created by Jews describing the Jewish condition. They conceptualized a literature modeled on European standards. The languages originally proposed for such a Jewish pursuit were either Hebrew in a modern, secular

reincarnation (Israel's official language now) or Yiddish.[12] No less central to the literature was a demand that Palestine be treated as "home" and anywhere else be treated as exile or at least displacement with the characters drawn, inevitably, toward Jerusalem. It is no surprise therefore, that Ruth Wisse declares George Eliot's proto-Zionist *Daniel Deronda* the greatest Zionist novel ever written. Its protagonist, Daniel, is raised to become an English gentleman by an English Lord. The journey on which he embarks upon learning that he was Jewish leads him to embrace Judaism. He not only marries a Jewish woman at the end but also leaves for Palestine. However, Wisse excludes the novel, finally, from the Jewish canon because Eliot herself was not Jewish, and the essential requirement for candidacy must be the author's Jewishness. Sholem Rabinowitz was born and raised Jewish. His works, especially *Tevye the Dairy Man*, have come to exemplify what a highbrow, nationalist Jewish literature should be like. In spite of its "folksy" feel, it has achieved the status of a classic, much in the manner of Mark Twain's work. Accordingly, Rabinowitz occupies a central place in the Jewish secular tradition. The series of short stories, first published in 1894, follow Tevye's life. A dairyman from the fictional Jewish town (*Shtetl*) of Anatevka, Tevye keeps the Jewish religious traditions as closely as he can. Meanwhile, his daughters follow modern secular trends. Tsaytl marries for love rather than confer with the matchmaker. Hodl marries a non-Jew. Tevye's traditional world is thus turned upside down until he receives a chance to move to Palestine. Ever the proper, pious man, he

[12] Jewish responses to nationalism in the United States were vastly varied. Stephen Katz explains that there were writers who wrote in Hebrew during a brief flourish of Hebrew literature written in the United States. They were not all, he stresses "dyed-in-the-wool Zionists, ready to emigrate from the Golden Land…for the Jewish state-in-the-making" (3). They were ardent Hebrew writers who separated themselves from "any Zionist program to which the Hebrew language became a consort by nearly unanimous consent" (3).

accepts the semi-forced emigration reminding himself that seeing the Holy Land was a blessing in itself.[13] In the end, Tsaytl's beloved husband, Motl, passes away or as Tevye explains: "my son-in-law…gets it into his head to go to bed well and wake up dead in the morning" (118). Tevye forgoes the trip to Palestine so he can help support Tsaytl and his grandchildren. Though the reader is supposed to recognize Tevye's naiveté, he or she is also expected to recognize the cultural paradigm that Russia is, and always will be, the Diaspora.

Rabinowitz sought actively to create literature equal to non-Jewish one at the time, but also befitting a new national literature as evidenced by his earlier publications. In Rabinowitz's, *The Judgment of Shomer* (1888), he criticized the writer Shomer in the name of developing a more sophisticated Jewish literary project. Nachum-Meir Shaykevitsh (Shomer) published popular, sentimental fiction in Yiddish starting in 1876. By the time *Judgment* was published, Shomer had published over fifty Yiddish romances. It is highly likely that Mary Antin read several Shomer novels. She describes her uncle's vast Yiddish fiction library, most of which she devoured. That fact coupled with Shomer's popularity at the time almost guarantees that his books counted among her uncle's collection and her reading diet. Though she does not mention him by name, she does describe what she calls "romances" lacking in "literary qualities" which she read at her uncle's house (125). Remaining critical of these lesser literary creations, she declares they were unsuitable for her and refers to her youth as her "wild" reading days (125). Unlike Rabinowitz who saw them as a degradation of

[13] Tevye's secular son-in-law wants to remove Tevye whom he sees as an embarrassing, uneducated, religious fool. Tevye understands this fact but decides to go see the Holy Land instead of fighting with his son-in-law.

Jewish literary revival, Antin saw them as lacking literary merit from a western perspective. In *Judgment,* at any case, Rabinowitz imagines a court case where Shomer's *shund* or *shundroman* as some called his literature (literally meaning trash) is placed on trial (Justin Cammy 85). Popular literature in Yiddish, even Yiddish versions of popular non-Jewish novels, had existed for centuries. The time was ripe for Shomer's tremendous popularity to coincide with a trend toward the highbrow.

Unlike Rabinowitz, Abraham Cahan's or Mary Antin's characters' plots almost always remained loyal to the historic opportunities found in the United States.[14] They felt at home in this country and did not plan to move anywhere else. That is at least one reason why Jewish literary critics have tended over time to treat them as secondary rather than central to the mainstream literary corpus. Anzia Yezierska has suffered doubly. She has been called both an ethnic, lesser writer and a *shund,* sentimental, female writer. Leah Garrett's recent work, particularly "The Kvetcher in the Rye: J.D. Salinger and Challenges to the Modern Jewish Canon" (2010), represents one of the new critical voices complicating Jewish literary definitions (a discussion that has not come close to a resolution between Shomer's and Rabinowitz's time and today). What Garret points to is the shift in focus recently taking place amongst some in Jewish literary studies. She described her misgivings as she collected material for a modern, Jewish literature course. Most relevant to my discussion here, she writes: "To my surprise, however, in teaching the class [Modern Jewish Literature] I discovered that there existed virtually no critical examination of American Jewish literature that

[14] Cahan's *The Imported Bridegroom* is an exception. Asriel leaves in the end for Palestine from the United States but the reader gets the impression that he is trying to make up for something that he cannot makeup for. His leaving is his failure rather than the ultimate or the ideal trajectory.

included J.D. Salinger" (646). It seemed obvious to her that he represented the post-war Jewish experience in the United States. Similarly, it seems obvious to me that Antin, Cahan, and Yezierska face in two directions simultaneously.

(3) Historical Forces

It is ultimately self defeating to attempt to understand the community already in the US and their reaction to the new immigration without remembering several basic historical facts. A more complete understanding of Emma Lazarus' poetry can be achieved if one understands her American upbringing and her Sephardi background. Without her Sephardi Jewish background, one leaves out a substantial part of what made her the poet that she became. Understanding Levinsky's "rise" or Cahan's hidden and not so hidden criticism of both Jewish cultural and American cultural issues also requires understanding of the inner workings of the Ashkenazi community when it met Jewish-Americans whose families had lived in the United States for close to two hundred years.

A second purpose of the review is to unravel further what including Jewish culture in a transnational conversation involves, a task begun in the last section but deserving further development. Delineating Jewish Enlightenment or *Haskala* from mainstream Enlightenment emphasizes the entrance of Jews into modern-literacy. As Homi Bhabha has commented in regard to his own experience with western culture, one immediately experiences tension upon entering into a relationship with a culture whose literary creations have excluded if not out-right rejected you. As is the case for non-whites in other countries, Jews find it impossible not to want and to join western

culture but find an "unhomely world," which excludes them (*Location of Culture* 27). Jews entering modern societies following the Enlightenment's call for inclusion both wanted to assimilate and felt pressured to assimilate. They felt forced to accept the non-Jewish consensus regarding what constituted culture and found their own Jewish origins often excluded from the said definition.

Marc Caplan explains in "The Smoke of Civilization: The Dialectic of Enlightenment in Sh. Y. Abramovitsh's *Di Klyatshe*," (2008) that there were "pressures placed on Jews by modernity," and that literature played a decisive role "in mediating between Jews and the dominant culture" (446).[15] For that reason, *Haskala*'s goals included entering mainstream society promised by the Enlightenment and grappling with specific Jewish difference from it. Reaction to rising anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century began appearing in journals that began in Hebrew, Yiddish, and other languages to discuss secular matters. The same outpouring of publications that expressed allegiance with the Enlightenment was used also to express Jewish discord with it. It became apparent quickly within the Jewish community that there were differing answers to the question of how to solve the "Jewish Problem."

The answers and even the formulation of the questions regarding the fate of the Jewish community tended to focus on a singular vision of Judaism dominated by Ashkenazi culture. One of Anderson's basic arguments in *Imagined Communities* is that communities are never the cohesive entities they imagine themselves to be. This is true for Jewish culture, too. A closer look reveals fissures in the story assumed to be, as

[15] His article appeared in Arguing the Modern Jewish Canon. In the article he compares Abramovitsh's story with a work by Theodor Adorno and Mark Horkheimer. He points to the ways that "a comparison of these works indicates" the resistance to the pressures to conform to a western, non-Jewish set of premises that Jewish thought did not necessary agree with (446).

Rey Chow said, universal to all members of the group. My work here might seem to equate Ashkenazi traditions with the whole of the Jewish experience by talking about the first and second generation immigrant tradition (Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth). One of my complaints (and I am not alone in this) is that Jewish Studies has the tendency to do just that. Ashkenazim might comprise the dominant and even the largest group but by no means does their work represent the full gamut of Jewish experience.

A contemporary literary example will make this point well. The Sephardi, French writer Joann Sfar in his graphic novel, *The Rabbi's Cat* (2005), introduces his readers to Reymond Rebibo, an Algerian Jew who moved to France in the 1930s. The novel's central character, Rabbi Abraham, meets Rebibo (his nephew) in Paris. Rebibo takes Rabbi Abraham to see his street performance where he dresses in traditional Algerian garb and sings and dances like an Algerian. His uncle, surprised, asks why Rebibo pretends to be an Arab. Rebibo answers: "To play a Jew you have to have a Polish accent, and I don't know how to do it. Playing a North African Jew just doesn't work, people aren't interested, it's too complicated for them" (122). Tellingly he adds that, "The public, Uncle, doesn't like things that are complicated" (122). Rebibo's statement demonstrates to the reader what Sfar assumes that world Jewry begins and ends with Ashkenazi culture.

Jews around the world identify in two main ways, as Ashkenazim or as Sepharadim. Sephardi Jews (deriving from the Hebrew word *Spharad* or Spain) lived in Spain and Portugal until the Spanish expulsion and inquisition of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Afterwards, Sephardi Jews settled in North Africa in

other Arab countries, establishing Jewish-Arab populations in countries Algeria, Morocco, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Egypt (among others). They carried with them many of their Spanish customs, developing cultures influenced by their new home (food, dress, etc.). Many Sephardi Jews fled into Holland, establishing a thriving community there. For example, Rembrandt's famous seventeenth-century painting, "The Rabbi," (1665) depicts a Sephardi and not an Ashkenazi Rabbi. [16] Consequently, the first Jews on the American continent were Sephardi Jews arriving on Dutch West India Company's ships. There were even several Jews included on the Dutch West India Company's board of directors. There is a fascinating petition included in the *Norton Anthology of Jewish Literature* (2001) dated 1656 and addressed to "the Honorable Director General and Council of New Netherlands" asking for equal rights for Jews in the colony (24). One of the co-signers and authors was Abraham De Lucena, a resident of the colony who, along with other authors, was a major merchant in Holland. This Sephardi Jew was also one of the first Jewish people on this continent.

The next group to arrive on the continent in large numbers was German Jews who immigrated during the decades of the nineteenth century. In New York, as elsewhere in the United States, from the south to the west coast, Sephardi Jews assimilated into American life, accepting the Germans into their midst easily. The German Jews lived similarly assimilated lives and had much in common with the Sephardi Jews already in the country. They, too, were professionals, members of mainstream non-Jewish life. German Jews did not consider themselves per se Ashkenazi Jews mainly because of their German heritage. They, too, wrote in Hebrew

16 Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669), the Dutch, seventeenth century painter.

as a secular, Jewish pursuit and did not view their use of Hebrew as fostering nationalism. To German and Sephardi Jews, the newly arrived East Europeans appeared backwards, uneducated, and naively-religious. The very idea that the immigrants' "primitive" culture would reflect poorly on them disturbed them deeply.

David Levinsky's *The Rise of David Levinsky* becomes as much about the religious Ashkenazi community coming out of its Talmudic-isolation to discover the secular world as about immigration. Abraham Cahan returns to that theme in his stories, such as in *The Imported Bridegroom,* where Shaya, the Talmudic genius must leave his religious devotion and religious study for the "richer" intellectual treasure of secular study. Consider David Levinsky's following contemplation: "I often convict myself of currying favor with German Jews. But then German American Jews curry favor with Portuguese American Jews, just as we all curry favor with Gentiles and as American Gentiles curry favors with aristocracy of Europe" (528). Levinsky maps the historical transition from Sephardi and German-Jewish economic and cultural dominance to Ashkenazi dominance.

Looking at Ashkenazi Jewry, therefore, one sees the Jewish political power play and the way that the immigration in the late nineteenth century transformed perceptions of Jews. Today, Jewish-American and Yiddish influences seem indistinguishable, but it is important to understand that this cultural dominance did not begin until the great Ashkenazi immigration (1882). Ashkenazim are Jews who in the Middle-Ages lived along the Rhine River in northern France and western Germany. It was this community along the Rhine that developed the Yiddish language. They migrated eastward, establishing their core geographical home in Eastern Europe

(mainly in Poland and in the Russian Pale of Settlement). The name itself, Ashkenazi, means Germany and can therefore be misleading. It refers to the group's origins. The geographical origin point for Yiddish also explains why Yiddish derives from German with some French grammatical influences. Yiddish, nevertheless, remains a German dialect more than anything else, though it has a substantial percentage of Hebrew words (*meshugane*, *shalom,* and even the word *rabbi*).

The Ashkenazim suffered in the late nineteenth century from a series of violent attacks or pogroms. The attacks were aimed primarily at East-European Jewish populations in Russia and Poland. It was these unusually vicious attacks that drove so many to the United States, Palestine, and South America. Irving Howe in his classic *World of Our Fathers* explains that in 1870 there were around 60,000 Jews in New York, most of them Sephardim. By 1880 the population was estimated at 80,000 and by 1910, there were over a million Jews in the city, most of them East Europeans (xix). More Jews turned to Palestine and elsewhere (like South America) when the United States closed off its borders following immigration law-reform beginning in the 1920s. What is less well known is the fact that in the years leading up to the Third Reich in Germany, most of the world's Jews lived in Eastern Europe. With this in mind, one can better grasp why the Holocaust had such a devastating effect on world Jewry. [17]

For that reason Ashkenazi Jews revel in the sense that they are closely related to each other. Most of the Jews living today in the United States and Israel came from the same general area in Europe. The bulk of the Jewish population in the United States had families that either moved to Palestine or remained in Europe. Currently, according

[17] See Emanuel S. Goldsmith's *Modern Yiddish Culture* for a detailed history of the development of Yiddish and Ashkenazi culture (for example see pages 29-30).

to the Israel Bureau of Central Statistics, there are just under 13.5 million Jews remaining in the world, persons who self-identify as Jews (http://www.cbs.gov.il). For that reason, many Jews find deep satisfaction in all and any forms of data, scientific or experiential which furthers this view of Jewish unity. Experiential moments occur all the time. A few years ago my grandmother, the sole-survivor of the large Terteltaub family in Poland, told me that in her retirement center she met a woman remotely related to our family back in Poland. Once again it proved to her that the Jewish people are one big community, even one big family. [18]

To complicate matters further, Ashkenazi Jews comprise different sub-groups that did not always get along. It was common practice for Jews to from the different European countries and even from the dame town to congregate together. Even their Yiddish differed slightly. One of my favorite stories is how my husband's paternal and maternal grandparents (in essence good friends) argued over Yiddish pronunciation. His paternal grandparents spoke what was considered the lower Polish Yiddish ("Voos is doos" or "what is this"). Meanwhile, his maternal grandparents spoke with the more highly valued Lithuanian accent and felt themselves speaking, therefore, more "correctly" ("Vos is dos"). There were also, however, profound political differences between the two groups. *Haskala* developed around the same time that Chasidism did in the eighteenth century. Whole families were torn apart by the two movements and

[18] Then there are research groups like the group working out of New York University. The NYU team published in *The New Scientist* in June 2010 that "a study of over 200 Jews from cities in three different countries found all of them descended from a founding community that lived 2,500 years ago in Mesopotamia" (Coghlan par. 2). Harry Ostrer, a researcher on the team, likened the world's Jewish population to "a series of genetic islands spread across the world" (Par 3). Add to that historic Jewish emphasis on marrying inside the community, and indeed there is strong support that an overwhelming majority of Jews in the world are closely connected.

their diametrically opposing premises: Chasidism was a version of what has come to be known as ultra-orthodoxy while *Haskala* was a secular movement. Later, when socialist ideas reached the Jewish community, further chasms appeared.

Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska, and Mary Antin all came from traditional, religious Ashkenazi families. Cahan became a socialist revolutionary, and Yezierska and Antin turned secular (Yezierska and Antin were not socialists). The families also differed greatly, which is relevant for the women-writers with which I deal, in the educational opportunities given to women. Traditionally, women received very few educational opportunities. They were considered educated "enough" when they could write basic Yiddish and read basic Hebrew to enable them to read in the Hebrew prayer books. This was true for Sephardi women, as well.[19] Mary Antin's father brought home from his business trips new ideas like secular education. It was very difficult in Russia at the time to send Jewish children to receive a secular education. Antin's family fought for her to study outside the Jewish community and managed to do so for a brief period. The very fact that she, as a woman, received secular education indicates how relatively open-minded her parents were. Anzia Yezierska's Sarah Smolinski in *Bread Givers* (1925) works her way through college to become a teacher in New York despite her parents' disapproval. Though her mother can better accept her choice, her father, the rabbi, characterized by his Ashkenazi dedication to the "old ways," refuses to talk to Sarah for years because she strays into secular, modern womanhood rather than opting to become a good Jewish housewife.

[19] I have known in my lifetime several women, Moroccan and Yemenite in my case, who were never taught to read.

Haskala and secular ideas had a profound impact on European Jewry. Lois Dubin explains in her concise history of the *Haskala* that Jewish Emancipation in Europe, beginning in the eighteenth century, opened up opportunities aimed at allowing Jews an equal place in the modern nation; the supreme belief was in "universal human rationality" which helped usher Jews into modern Europe (636). One important change that accelerated Jews' ability to participate in mainstream culture was that Jewish and non-Jewish leaders mutually agreed that it would be beneficial to teach Jewish children the dominant culture's language. In Germany in 1782, Emperor Joseph II called for Jewish children to be taught mathematics, German, geography and history, in an attempt to make Jews "more useful" (Dubin 648). For many Jewish intellectuals, the question became not how to assimilate completely but rather how to incorporate Emancipation into Jewish culture. Thus, the *Haskala*, born of the European Jewish Emancipatory movement, was born. Dubin summarizes the *Haskilik* paradigm shift thus: "dare to know something beyond Talmud, dare to know something beyond Torah and Judaica, dare to learn to function in this finite, practical gentile world" (646). Modern Jewish secular involvement in non-Jewish culture began—from Emma Lazarus' weekend participations in New York literary salons to Mary Antin and her siblings' education in American schools, or Abraham Cahan's opportunities to publish in English.

At the same time, Jewish *Haskala* advocated developing a separate Jewish Enlightenment consciousness alongside a Jewish language that would facilitate intellectual Jewish conversations. Hebrew was thought by many to be able to fulfill that role. For some Jews, neither Hebrew nor a Jewish Emancipation project held any

interest. Emancipation made it possible to assimilate into non-Jewish culture. For others, end of the nineteenth-century pogroms proved that such assimilation was a grave mistake. Jacob Klatzkin (1882-1948) was a Zionist thinker who adamantly insisted Jews could have no future in Europe. He considered himself a modern, western philosopher and in true *Haskala* fashion, he wrote both in Hebrew and in German. In the sarcastically named "Assimilation is Possible," (1921), he argued that "Assimilation is infecting ever greater segments of our people and its impact is becoming ever more profound. It has not yet obscured our national identity nor has it solved the Jewish problem" (321).[20] Klatzkin argued that assimilation threatened Jewish unity without offering Jewish communities relief from prejudices.

The persistence of European anti-Semitism is a central to understanding the development of the Zionist movement out of the Emancipation and the *Haskala* movements. Even in the United States every Jew felt that anti-Semitism was both alive and dangerously well. Material began appearing in newspapers and journals arguing in favor of exclusion. For example, an 1879 publication reported: "Jewish Patronage not Welcomed at Manhattan Beach…" (*Coney Island and the Jews* Semper 19-20). The *Forward's* famous *Bintl Briev*, or Bundle of Letters section, which dispensed advice over its pages in answer to letters from its readers, regularly received letters reporting anti-Semitism experienced by workers in the factories. It became suddenly acceptable in the community to change your name to "pass" in order to avoid discrimination. In show business, Jews regularly changed their names. A few famous examples include Danny Kaye who changed his name from Daniel Kaminski or Tony Curtis who was

[20] See Arthur Hertzberg's *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (1997)

born Bernard Schwartz (or Woody Allen who changed his name from Allen Stewart Konigsberg). Leah Garrett describes how writers like J. D. Salinger and Arthur Miller hid their Jewishness or downplayed it as much as they could to "pass" into mainstream culture during the war and the post war years.

Cahan would hold until the end of his days that despite it all there was no comparison between American openness to Jews and European hatred. In his autobiography, *The Education of Abraham Cahan*, he wrote:

> And what value there was in political freedom! Here, one was a human being. Our children …They knew nothing of persecution and felt equal with the gentiles. Even now, when anti-Semitism has spread in various forms, the feeling of equality persists…But the mass of Jewish immigrants remained almost completely unaware of the existence of anti-Semitism in America. (401)

This enthusiastic statement highlights well the potency of America's democratic promise. It was this sense of promise that prompted so many Jews not to support Zionism. Cahan did not support claims like Klatzkin's that Palestine held the only answer to the "Jewish problem," that only a physical return to the historical homeland would free Jews from perpetual displacement and anti-Semitism.

In a series of articles in *The Forward*, Cahan detailed his objections. Written during and after an official visit to Palestine in 1925, he wrote that he left Palestine with deep feelings of appreciation and with the warmest feelings toward the Zionist leadership (Goldstein 122). The "local Socialist or Communist farmer, or Anarchist farmer," as Cahan described them, impressed him with their "sacrifice" for their "ideals" (37). He summarized that despite his sympathies, and though it appeared that

Palestine would remain a Jewish center" or "will at any rate not disappear," it would never play more than a minor role (40). However, after the פרעות or pogroms of 1929, violent attacks against the Jewish population in Palestine, Cahan began demonstrating sympathetic support.

European intellectuals, especially Zionist intellectuals such as Klatzkin, tended to interpret world events differently. For them, Jewish presence anywhere among gentiles needed to end or would lead to more violence against them. Instead of seeing the potential in the secular world, like many Jews did, they saw the prejudice as a rising tide destined to overtake Jews. Perez Smolenskin, for example, who devoted his life to *Haskala* ideals, identified "a recurrent cycle in Jewish history of attempted assimilation followed by violence against Jews" (Aberbach 46). Similarly, Leo Pinsker warned that the Russian pogroms (1881) were but a prelude to "the slaughters to come" (Aberbach 46). [21]

It is important to reiterate that it is not the case that Jewish Americans lived in ignorance, not realizing what was happening around them. On the contrary, the very fact of mass immigration testified to what was happening in Europe. Cahan and fellow American Jews knew about the violence and about rising anti-Semitism. The Yiddish press across the country reported extensively on European Jewish affairs. To celebrate Cahan's one hundred and fiftieth birthday, *The Forward* republished articles he had written. One of the few they chose to translate into English from Yiddish was his

[21] Leo Pinsker was the founder of *Hibat Zion*, whose Zionist vision included a physical homeland and a kind of Declaration of Independence for the Jewish people. Known as the "Auto-Emancipation," the pamphlet announced Jews a modern nation, deserving equal status equal to other modern European nations.

response to the Dreyfus affair. [22] Cahan editorialized about it. The mainstream media reported on Jewish matters, as well. Old-stock (American-born) Jews and non-Jewish Americans, therefore, also received reports on a regular basis on matters having to do with European Jews.

Mark Twain, for one, reported on Jewish affairs during his time in Europe in the late nineteenth century. On a trip to Europe, he accepted a special invitation to observe the October 1897 session of the Austrian Parliament, the Reichstag. [23] In an article for *Harper's* in March of 1898 titled "Stirring Times in Austria," he reported what he witnessed. A heated argument erupted concerning the suggestion to replace German with Czech as the official language. A few of the delegates were Jews. They were not there to argue for Jewish autonomy. These were regular attendees, representing their geographical areas. As Twain watched, a "bedlam" (in Dan Vogel's words) broke out where non-Jewish representatives insulted each other and the Jewish delegates using "cliché" epithets about Jews" such as "You Jew, you!" (64). In addition, as Twain reported, the verbal violence in the parliament translated into violence in the streets where Jewish shops and homes were destroyed. The article circulated widely. In an article published a year later, "Concerning the Jews," Twain shared with his readers that following his Austrian report he received many letters from (among others) Jewish-Americans asking for his opinion on what made Jews, assimilated Jews at that, still a target for so much hatred. The letters written to him by Jewish-Americans all seemed to focus on what it was about Europe that made it so dangerous to Jews.

[22] See "The Dreyfus Trial. In His Own Words" The Jewish Daily Forward. May 28, 2010. August 28, 2010
[23] See Dan Vogel's study Mark Twain's Jews p. 63.

Another case that Twain covered while in Europe, the magnitude of which cannot be overstated in relation to Jewish national consciousness, was the Dreyfus Affair. Across both sides of the Atlantic, Jews and non-Jews followed the case. Newspapers around the world reported on the "affair" that for many pointed again to anti-Semitism's ongoing noxious persistence. [24] It signaled to intellectuals like Smolenskin and Theodor Herzl[25] that medieval anti-Semitism thrived still. In 1864, a supposed spying plot against France for Germany was uncovered in the French military. Alfred Dreyfus, a secular, Jewish officer came under suspicion. Though it was never said in so many words, it appeared clear he was being targeted not because he was guilty but because he was ethnically Jewish. During his secret military trial, he was not allowed to examine the evidence against him, for example. He was later stripped of his rank in a humiliating ceremony and sent to prison. Right-wing newspapers in France such as *La Libre Parole* used the case to warn against the Jewish threat to the French nation. An unapologetic anti-Semitic chief of intelligence reexamined the case a few years later but suppressed evidence that could have exonerated Dreyfus. Catholic leadership used the case to warn France against its Jewish citizens' so called treachery. Dreyfus was eventually exonerated, but not until 1906, some forty two years later.

[24] An interesting side-note: Raphael Moster posits in the July 27th, 2010 issue of The Forward that the Tour de France came into being following a somewhat bizarre set of circumstances resulting from the Dreyfus Affair. He claims it began at the culmination of a fight between pro-Dreyfus president Emile Loube (the same president who pardoned him in 1899) and the anti-Dreyfus Count de Dion, "one of France's major bicycle and auto manufacturers" at the time. The Tour came into being apparently as a way to appease the anti-Semitic De Dion.

[25] While in Europe, Dan Vogel adds that Theodor Herzl and Mark Twain had the occasion to meet on Twain's European trip, a very interesting fact.

(4) Theory Makes It Personal

Over a hundred years after Dreyfus' reinstatement, over sixty years after the end of the Second World War, one thing remains clear: Jewish critics and authors are haunted by Jewish history. Issues pertaining to definitions of Jewish identity and to how that identity fits into a larger western context continue to be debated. Jewish literature is often preoccupied with pondering possible consequences of assimilation into non-Jewish societies. Does assimilation make anti-Semitism worse or does isolation? Are Jews utterly different or can they easily slip into a western, non-Jewish mode. At the end of the day, there is a sense (and Jews and non-Jews agree on this point) that as Jonathan Freedman put it in *The Temple of Culture* (2000):

> The Jew is also that border or boundary figure, or cultural identity…one who can image the very possibility of existing within a society or a nation or an ethnic identity without being completely subsumed by it. (279)

This concise summary of what the *Haskala* movement in essence tried to create also explains comments such as Lionel Trilling's. Trilling described the experience of living as a Jew in the United States as follows: "Being a Jew is like walking in the wind or swimming: you are touched at all points and conscious everywhere" (Wisse 17). He described not only his own sense of difference from non-Jewish society but also non-Jewish society's response to him. As he explains in "The Changing Myth of the Jew":

> When the Jew, at the Emancipation, entered into the life of the Western world, he found the myths awaiting him. Sometimes he fought them, sometimes he accepted them to his own advantage. Often he went off and contemplated them

> in great confusion of mind. When he came to write of himself he was not able to free himself from them. (35)[26]

This idea of "freeing" yourself or rather constantly living trapped, as it were, inside of the set of myths drove both first and second-generation writers to construct Jewishness in their works in distinctive ways. In this study, I interrogate some of these constructions.

Zygmunt Bauman's term, "allocentrism" proves the most overarching, slightly tongue-in-cheek way of encompassing the diverse responses Jewishness elicits from non-Jews. The term sets out to summarize various remarkable reactions toward European Jews over the centuries, which had been conceptualized for centuries as "something or someone disquieting through otherness and unfamiliarity" (144). In Bauman's view, terms such as "philos-Semitic" and "anti-Semitism" fail to describe the full extent of the phenomena. He writes:

> The area delineated and separated by the notion of 'antisemitisim' (the cutting criteria being *hostility* to Jews and hostility to *the Jews*) is too narrow to account fully for the phenomenon the notion intends to grasp; it leaves aside quite a few socio-psychological realities without which the understanding must remain inconclusive if not faulty. (143)

Coined originally by the Jewish-Polish literary historian and critic Artur Sandauer, "allocentrism" emphasizes Jewish difference to such a degree that a separate set of concepts become necessary, concepts with which to describe or to begin to comprehend Jewish alterity (143).

[26] He wrote "The Changing Myth" at the age of 24, in 1931. His wife agreed to allow its publication in Commentary three years after his death, in 1978.

Bauman's view of Jewish difference might sound extreme but consider the types of novels released in the last seven or so years in the United States, novels written by the most assimilated Jewish-Americans. The tension between freedom to assimilate and exclusion from the dominant culture is one way of explaining what I term Jewish-American writers' "panic attacks." Philip Roth exemplifies such panic in his novel, *The Plot Against America* (2004), where he imagines an America in which the anti-Semite and Nazi sympathizer Charles Lindbergh is elected president. Though not an American, philosopher and atheist Jacques Derrida also had his moment of panic in *Anti-Semitism to Come* (2004) where he not only shared for the first time his memories of war-time Algiers but also the hatred he and his family personally experienced, hatred aimed at the Jewish population. In the piece, he communicates his deep concern over how such anti-Semitism continues to thrive.

Most recently, contemporary author, Michael Chabon, suffered from a mild case with his *Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007). In this detective-noir novel, the modern state of Israel never came into political being. Zionists in Palestine were slaughtered in 1948, resulting in two refugee waves heading to the United States, from Europe and from Palestine. In the wake of the Holocaust and the Palestine slaughter, the United States leased Alaska to Jewish leaders to manage autonomously for sixty years. The novel begins at the end of the sixty-year period. It opens with a murder which takes place in a hotel. Key here is the final resolution where the reader and the main characters discover that the murdered man was none other than the Jewish Messiah, for whom the Jewish people had been waiting, according to tradition, to redeem them and return them to a state of pure at-homeness in the ancient homeland.

The tragedy for the Jewish people is thus compounded from every angle. It is quite literally a Jewish nightmare scenario for both secular and religious Jews: for secular Jews who advocate the modern secular Jewish state and for religious Jews awaiting the Messiah's redemption before immigrating to Israel.

Despite these panic attacks (if one could indeed call them that) none of these writers, Trilling, Roth, or Chabon, argues against a Jew's place in the United States. Rather, they point to uniqueness present in the meeting space between the two cultures that can be exhilarating at times and frightening at others. How a Jewish person fits into a non-Jewish society, in other words, remains an issue many Jews contemplate. In another, more recent example of scholarship asking about Jewish Studies' position amongst mainstream academic disciplines, Leslie Morris in "Placing and Displacing Jewish Studies" pondered the place or "displace" as he calls it of Jewish Studies. He asks if perhaps it might not be the "perennially homeless" department. He asks if perhaps Jewish Studies needs to be dislodged from the mainstream university setting. If it does not fit into any "discipline or department" then perhaps it should "instead be wandering metaphorically through fields we sometimes might have no idea how to plow" (764). His quietly tentative tone reverberates with the old insecurities regarding Jewish presence inside academia.

The question of where Jewish Studies departments fit in a larger non-Jewish academic world reflects on how Jewish literature should be studied. If, as Jonathan Culler has posited, "[t]o ask "what is literature" is in effect a way of arguing over how literature should be studied," then what does Morris' article have to say about Jewish literary belonging inside a mainstream, modern university? ("The Literary in Theory"

277). What place other than that of a floating outsider can Jewish-American writing achieve in this kind of articulation? Asking if Jewish studies should not, in fact, remain a floating displaced entity inside of the mainstream university reiterates Jewish culture's "misplace," to use Morris' term, rather than "place," in that system.

For someone like myself, a person who grew up inundated with Zionist paradigms, such pondering is strange and fascinating. I was brought up to believe that only Israel defines Jewish belonging. I now understand, of course, that Jewish national history reaches much deeper into Jewish-world consciousness in its older forms than do the new Zionist musings. For this reason, Jewish literature written outside of Israel and in a language other than Modern Hebrew fascinates me. The Jewish-Americans I work on all emerged from the same geographical area, from the same world events as my family. I share their Jewish cultural and historical Ashkenazi context meaning that they could have easily been my great-grandparents who fled the Russian Pogroms (as Anzia Yezierska's and Mary Antin's family did and as Abraham Cahan did). My work developed to a large degree, I realize, out of my own Israeli perspectives.

At this point I would like to interrupt this scholarly narrative, therefore, and briefly share some of my family's history to explain how I found myself writing a dissertation on Jewish-American literature from a transnational perspective. When I finished my undergraduate degree in Israel and came to the University of Oklahoma to begin my Masters degree, I could not wait to leave behind me both Israel and anything Jewish. I was eager to read the canonized American authors that I had glimpsed at the University of Haifa. To me, they were mainstream, meaning aesthetically elite. I thought that Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Edgar Allen Poe, and

Walt Whitman exemplified literary transcendence. Following some of my older professors who in turn followed the criticism of Harold Bloom, I thought that they were great because their high-culture, psychological sophistication endured the ages as no other writing could. In retrospect my Jewish literary education (all through grade school and high school) taught me to value canonized works in a similar way: reading Sholem Rabinowitz, I. L. Peretz, and S.Y. Agnon. It did not take long, however, for me to wonder about the voices excluded. It also did not take me long to hone in on what would become my major preoccupation: Jewish-Americans as characters and as writers during what became my favorite time period, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Edith Wharton, Willa Cather and Djuna Barnes, Ernest Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald fascinated me but their sometimes latent, sometimes overt anti-Semitism was also disturbing. I began asking about specific Jewish-American literary production during the time period when these writers worked. My professors introduced me to a host of Jewish writers from Cahan to Antin, and from Bernard Malamud to Philip Roth.

What struck me initially about these writers was the uncanny cultural resemblance to my own family alongside the great differences in their experiences. I recognized the characters as if they were my own family members. My paternal great-grandmother, Chaya, arrived in Palestine from Russia in 1921. The pogroms began in the 1880's, but not every Jewish person in East Europe who wanted to could leave during that time. One of my great-grandmother's sisters did make it to the United States but her other two sisters were already in Palestine, and they offered to support her, her husband Chayeem (who passed away on the journey), and my grandfather,

Avram (five at the time). My paternal grandmother arrived in Palestine in 1945, the sole-survivor of a large family from Lublin, Poland.[27] My maternal great-grandparents fled Russia in the latter years of the nineteenth-century, settling in South America. This is the family I grew up with, the family I knew—Russians and northern-Polish. I was lucky enough to know my paternal great-grandmother who lived to 105 years of age. My paternal grandmother is still living.

For these reasons, the characters in works by immigrants to this country are familiar to me. I recognize everything from their Yiddish-influenced speech patterns to their abrasive personalities. American-specific experiences or not, I recognize these cultural types.

The questions at hand about the tensions inside Jewish-American works over Judaism's place in the world stem from the experiences the authors underwent personally, in immigrating to the United States from pogrom-struck Russia. For many Jewish-American writers being Jewish was about a floating type of nationality. For Zionists it was about a strong, national consciousness with roots deeply embedded in a promised land. The Jew as the eternally displaced who yet found a place in America and the Jew insisting on his or her national consciousness are crucial for conceiving what Abraham Cahan, Mary Antin, Anzia Yezierska, and others do in their writings. Their decisions to immigrate to the US, rather than the many other choices they had available affected the types of arguments they made concerning assimilation. The transnational approach taken here deals with works in which the underlying theme is a

[27] Also Issac Beshevis Singer's hometown.

staunch belief in Jewish assimilation and those works that question the possibility of assimilation.

This dissertation moves from old-stock, assimilated writers, to immigrant assimilated writers. The full range of work that I deal with in depth or in passing might seem to threaten turning a bifocal reading into a splintered kaleidoscope. A.B. Joshua's description of a shared imagined national consciousness has assisted me in pulling much of my theoretical background above into a more cohesive picture.[28] In a collection of his articles titled *Homeland Grasp*, published in Israel and in Hebrew (2009), he explains at length what he terms "Jewish nationalist virtual existence." He describes Judaism's spiritual life as existing in a virtual space, a term he appropriates from the technological arena. Jewish people share what he metaphorically refers to as a space that powerfully influences participants' lives. Jewish nationalism underwent a process where the physical, political reality of the land was replaced by a virtual space. The beginnings of the shift can be traced, according to him, to the book of Esther and to the Babylonian exile, long before Emancipation or the *Haskala* movements. He writes:

"רק בגלות בבל נמצא המרכיב הנוסף, מערכת חיים יהודית בטריטוריה זרה ובתוך רקמת עמים זרים" (30).

"During the Babylonian exile the Jewish nation developed for the first time the additional component which would come to define it: Jewish life woven into the fabric of a foreign nation."

[28] Abraham Joshua, known as A.B. Joshua, is an award winning Israeli author and public intellectual. His books have been translated into English, among many other languages.

Joshua argues that Israel, the physical territory along with Jerusalem, the physical capital, was transformed into a symbol and began to function as a metaphor as part of prayers and religious texts. Transposing physical nationhood into a set of religious metaphors, he continues, extended into transposing religious metaphors into Zionist secular frameworks. In other words, frameworks aimed at defining the very essence of "the Jew" are based on a set of highly metaphorical, abstract ideas floating in a virtual space comprised of generations of Jews living sometimes thousands of miles (not to mention thousands of years) apart. It is extremely difficult if not downright confusing to rely on this set of virtual national elements because they have been translated and interpreted repeatedly. "אלמנטים לאומיים וירטואלים אלו," "these virtual national elements" will inevitably entangle any social-scientific, political or even literary exploration of its essences (33).

Joshua answers Benedict Anderson's argument by arguing that the virtual element impacts Jewish culture in ways that other nations will find hard to identify with or to understand (32). His point of contention is that Anderson and his fellow critics cannot comprehend the complexities of Jewish nationhood. Joshua stresses emphatically, as some Jewish and Israeli intellectuals tend to do, the complete uniqueness found in the Jewish case. They tend to go too far in their insistence since complicated identity matrixes are not unique to Judaism. African-Americans can identify with a sense of displacement intertwined with a sense that the physical homeland and the historical homeland no longer hold stable meanings. Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanism attempted to establish a black-African sense of nationhood which seems very similar to Jewish nationalist terms in that a group living in exile tries

to connect using nationalist terms with a group elsewhere. Paul Gilroy discusses the plight of the black-Anglo writer who finds his literary home neither in Africa nor among Anglo-literary traditions. These similarities between, in this case, the Jews and Anglo-blacks, allow me to draw from Gilroy and Du Bois for my purposes.

Still, Joshua's essay helps to shed light on the complexity inherent in a project of this kind. In literary studies, we have long relied on imaginative, qualitative interpretations. Post-theoretical, post-social-movement scholarship no longer imagines itself part of an objective search for a text's "truth" or clearly identifiable core. Joshua introduces the idea that Jewish nationalism for centuries had been built on an imagined space, a virtual space, with different rabbinical, philosophical, and secular traditions all weighing in with their own interpretations, their own emphases. The fact that many Jews resisted Zionism's demand that they redefine in physical fashion their Jewish identity speaks to the variety of Jewish responses. It speaks to the tremendous range of answers to what it means to live as a Jew both inside and outside of Israel or inside and outside of the Zionist paradigm.

(5) Chapter Outline

Each of the writers in the following chapters imagines his or her connection to the grand Jewish tradition differently. The second chapter departs most from the Jewish interrogation. It focuses on the ways bifocality connects between the two traditions, the mainstream American and the Jewish, but it differs in that it stresses the ways American literature developed early in the nineteenth century in an effort to distinguish itself from European or specifically English influences. The chapter will discuss

intellectuals like Walter Channing and Ralph Waldo Emerson who sought to find an authentic American literary voice. The chapter also discusses later nineteenth-century literary definitions in order to point to the ways the literary center had increasingly more to do with responses to America's growing empire and growing immigration.

The second chapter also outlines the scholarship of Bryan Cheyette and Ranen Omer-Sherman scholarship both of whom draw on Homi Bhabha-like explorations of cosmopolitanism, and Du Boisian double-consciousness. Both resist, in Cheyette's words, the "reduction of Jewish history to the question of a single national culture," leading me to insert bifocality into the equation (On Being a Jewish Critic 35). It will conclude with a brief look at Emma Lazarus, a woman who embodies well the issues at hand: she lived as an assimilated Jew, an American, and her poetry reflected both of these identities.

The third chapter will stress Zionism or national literary definitions and resistance to these. In a way comparable to American national literary development, Zionist intellectual leaders worked hard to define what they believed to be an authentic, elite Jewish national literature. A juxtaposition of Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912) and the earlier *Daniel Deronda* (1876) highlights further the complex relationship that Jewish authors writing in English maintained with the emerging national Jewish conversation. The chapter uses Antin's autobiography because it has come to be accepted as the classic Jewish-American successful immigrant assimilation story. By contrast, *Deronda* is accepted as a proto-Zionist novel adhering to the eastward trajectory to Jerusalem. What stirs controversy among critics is that at the end

of her novel George Eliot, the English, gentile writer, removes Daniel, her Jewish character, from England, sending him to Palestine to work for his people.

Many critics interpret the novel's final expulsion to mean that Eliot did not view Jews as a "natural" part of the British nation. Similarly, if in an opposite fashion, Antin declares her Jewish self dead in the name of a discourse hinged on national purities. She participated in defining an authentic American devoid of Jewishness and like Eliot suffered harsh criticism. Many in the American Jewish community were disappointed by her declaration that supposedly Jewish and American cultures were incompatible. Yet, Zionists were upset with her, too. She had managed in the space of her short autobiography to reject all their major principles. This chapter will, for that reason, include a section dedicated to outlining Jewish literary nationalism. Antin might seem disconnected from Jewish literary tradition but the reactions to her show, rather, that she was not exempt from being viewed as part of the conversations of her day. A bifocal view of her work requires, for that reason, a Jewish literary contextualization alongside an American one.

The fourth chapter will focus on Abraham Cahan, one of the most prolific writers and thinkers of the East-European immigrant generation (publishing the bulk of his work in Yiddish rather than English). I will juxtapose Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) with Howells' earlier *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), a work that inspired Cahan's later novel. Cahan is recognized as one of the first writers to describe in English immigrant Jewish experiences inside of the United States. For him, assimilation was a complicated and imperfect thing. His characters reach the end of their narratives confused rather than successfully Americanized. *Levinsky*, nonetheless,

remains also the work that engages mainstream American cultural concerns, concerns Howells voiced in his novels dealing with big-city sweatshops and corporate greed.

Cahan seems to critics too Jewish and hence too different from mainstream American writers to be seriously considered alongside them. A scholarly review will show that until relatively recent times, he was read exclusively from within Jewish theoretical sphere isolated from the rest of American literary tradition. His East-European characters live inside the Jewish ghetto, speak heavily accented English, and deal with issues pertaining first and foremost to their Judaism. As fruitful as it has been to read him from this perspective alone, a bifocal approach uncovers expanded possibilities in the novel.

Anzia Yezierska and her work, *Salome of the Tenements,* is the focus of the fifth chapter. Critics repeatedly read Yezierska's prose as simplistic, her stories as melodramatic, and decidedly "feminine." She could easily have been writing in the nineteenth century's "sentimental" mode which Howells and other intellectuals mistrusted deeply. Her reintroduction, particularly into the English departments, has not done much to improve the general reception of her work. While it is considered interesting, it is also discussed mainly as minor, experiential literature. What I challenge through a bifocal reading is the failure of critics to explore the novel's serious intellectual engagement with mainstream American literary production. The longing to belong to America manifests itself in the wish to be surrounded by the same richness of color and beauty enjoyed by upper and middle class Americans. Not the first to do so, I emphasize her Jacob Riis- type journalistic concerns with over-crowded, unaired spaces, peeling walls, and lack of cleanliness. What Riis never says

outright, Yezierska does: aesthetic degradation, from squalid tenements to ugly, worn-out clothes, translates into mechanisms of exclusion from the American dream.

I argue that supposed superficial preoccupation with beautiful clothes constitutes a criticism of John Dewey's progressive educational agenda. That she worked with Dewey (and even engaged in a year-long affair with him) is discussed widely by scholars. But few have taken the time to explore *Salome of the Tenements*' (1923) direct relationship to Dewey's philosophy as it appears, for example in *Democracy and Education* (1916). What emerges is that Yezierska knew his philosophy well, choosing to fashion her critique in the form of novels and short stories. What she refuses to do, as Delia Konzett argued in *Ethnic Modernisms* (2002), is to submit to modernist, highbrow literary pressures. Like Zora Neale Hurston, who drew on southern black vernacular, her home language, Yezierska utilizes Yiddishized English to respond to, and resist, the period's so called objective social-scientists..

Chapter 2

Apparitions in Hyphenations and the Role of Bifocality

As we saw in the first chapter, Jews entering mainstream societies dealt with two rival forces, the Enlightenment and modern racism. The Enlightenment brought with it generous gestures aiming at including minorities in the dominant cultures. By contrast, modern nationalism emerged coupled with scientific discourse that explained biological differences using racist paradigms in which whites were found scientifically superior to other races.[29] These political and scientific developments created an anxiety among white Europeans and Americans over purity: the purity of their body and the purity of their body-politic. Transnational cosmopolitanism, like Randolph Bourne's, for that reason, met with mixed responses—there were those who lauded such sentiments and others who rejected it. Nationalism, more generally, produced among leading intellectuals a search for an authentic identity. In the United States, especially earlier in the nineteenth century, the focus was on defining literature that would be in some way exclusively American. Hyphenating, for that reason, becomes crucial to examine since it graphically represents the diversity found in the American nation. Hyphenation embodies well the tensions present in an environment where the nation is occupied with delineating the centrally American from the "outsider"

[29] It is well known that these so called scientific conclusions were disproven. They were motivated by prejudice. As Alexandra Shufor reminds her readers in *Feminist Epistemologies and American Pragmatism*, scientific, objective, social theorizing "is anything but neutral, aperspectival, ahistorical, and transcendent" (2).

tolerated in the name of democratic ideals. In it, the conflict between Enlightenment beliefs in individual merit and authentic national identity is most apparent.

This chapter will focus on the American conversation regarding hyphenation especially as it relates to the formation of an American national literature. A historical review will show that nineteenth-century attitudes toward so called "outsiders," toward minority literatures, linger still and are reminiscent of twentieth-century nationalist attitudes. Insiders, or "non-hyphenated Americans," did not mean actual indigenous peoples of the North American continent. Rather, the dominant culture understood it to mean mainly people of English descent, especially if these could prove ties with the first Puritans.[30] Hyphenation suggests multiple definitions for belonging in the American nation, a multiplicity that Ralph Waldo Emerson felt uncomfortable with. In the early twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois emphasized multiple identities in order to interrogate them and insist on the importance of releasing the tensions inherent in them. He would articulate the tensions inherent in hyphenation, African-American in his case, in such a sophisticated fashion that it reverberates today, underpinning the work of recent critics grappling with these same issues.

This discussion will present his and other critics' ideas (including critics working from within Jewish Studies) in order to establish the primary tools for the literary analysis performed in the following chapters. Another important critic, besides Du Bois, on whom my dissertation builds is Paul Gilroy, one of the many critics who use Du Bois' works to inspire their own. Du Bois' "double consciousness" and

[30] Non-hyphenated Americans could also be Protestants, Northern Europeans, and to a degree, Catholics.

Gilroy's "bifocality" offer ways to circumvent traditional politics that haunt hyphenation. Jewish scholars have discovered the usefulness of such articulations for Jewish Studies. Bryan Cheyette and Ranen Omer-Sherman, who use contemporary ideas to theorize about Jewish-Anglo identity, both stress that Jewish-English-language literature is comparable to other ethnic writings in that they, too, straddle both dominant cultural conventions and Jewish cultural ones.

Omer-Sherman uses the life and works of Emma Lazarus to build on the idea of simultaneous identities, Jewish and American, operating within a single author. Like many Jewish-Americans today, Lazarus perceived her identity as both American and as Jewish. Toward the end of her life the relative ease with which she negotiated the two identities was replaced by anxiety. Anti-Semitism rose in her native New York City. Hotels began excluding Jews, for example, and more and more articles began appearing in major newspapers with editorials attacking Jewish character, especially East-European Jewish character. In addition, she heard of the horrors in Europe and saw the frightened Jewish refugees that were arriving.

Lazarus for years has been read through a lens that emphasized these forces (anti-Semitism and first-generation immigrant experiences) with which she contended exclusively during the latter years of her life. The prevailing attitude toward her has been, therefore, that she was not centrally a Jewish writer. Her sister, Josephine, famously did her best to frame Emma's work using an American context, actively discouraging connections between her and the Jewish community. This further fed into the relative marginal association of her work with in the Jewish canon. She is a useful example for the tensions inherent in hyphenation also because she exemplifies the full

range of Jewish experience at this time, the latter half of the nineteenth and during the twentieth centuries; there were decades when the tensions between Jewish and American identities eased and decades when they heightened. Thirty years after her death, the nationalist project would begin pressuring Jews to identify primarily as Jews and not, in the American case, as Americans. Surviving hyphenation tensions for twentieth-century Jews meant also dealing with an additional forceful pull at the hyphenation itself, the demand that Jews pull away from the dominant culture in favor of a singular, Jewish, authentic national identity. Mary Antin would feel pulled apart, a few decades after Lazarus' death, by Jewish nationalist demands for loyalty and by the rival American demand that she forgo her ethnic particularities for a chance to join the American nation.

The following section, section two, will discuss the tensions implicated inside the American hyphenation system and will supply historical background. The third section will focus specifically on turn-of-the-century America. The fourth section will demonstrate how Jewish scholars infuse into Jewish Studies Du Bosian duality or Bourne-like cosmopolitanism. For the purpose of expanding on the idea of Jewish-American bifocality, the last section in this chapter, section five, will discuss Emma Lazarus. It will include a short analysis of two of her poems: "The Synagogue at Newport" (1867), which answers an earlier poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow describing an abandoned synagogue, and "The New Colossus" (1883).

(2) United Literature and Ethnic Duality

Du Bois' "double consciousness" cannot be presented simply. Critics revisit the passage describing "double consciousness" because of the complex possibilities it presents. It is an early example of what has become indispensible for contemporary scholarship, the concept of a fractured identity. Poststructuralism has become part of our discourse and "double consciousness" has become an indispensable poststructural articulation, by which I mean that it has become integral to counter modernist paradigms insisting that identities are united and singular. One might say that Du Bois operates in a proto-Derridian mode or it might be more precise to say that Derrida appears to build on Du Boisian proto-deconstruction. At its heart, double consciousness establishes that an individual body or in our case an individual literary work, can and does contain more than a single identity. Fractured identities or dual identities cause harmful tensions that can result in psychological damage. Much of Du Bois' other writings elaborate on the consequence of this doubling inside of a single African-American. The short passage which introduces the concept is rich with meaning and internal tension. It is not only beautifully written but beyond that offers an early example of a work that refuses to simplify an issue of enormous complexity.

In *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1991), Paul Gilroy picks up on Du Bois' useful concept. He reinterprets it by adding a visual metaphor, bifocality, which takes the internal doubling found in consciousness and injects it into literature. Gilroy defines bifocality as a text's ability to look in two directions at the same time (3). Working on Anglo-African texts, he argues for a type of heteroglossia in the Bakhtinian sense, which also resists attempts to reduce a text to

a singular identity. [31] As Gilroy explains: "striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness," of the kind that does not reduce identities to a simple either/or (European or black) epistemology (2). Striving to inhabit dual identities (European and black, American and Jewish) then means "occupying the space between" the two identities "or trying to demonstrate their continuity" (2). Like Du Bois before him, Gilroy, too, searches for a common space not defined exclusively as the purview of one particular identity, a space in which two identities can coexist. He is looking for a way to relieve the tensions between the two categories to which a text belongs: in his case African and Anglo cultural categories.

Because understanding texts' abilities to occupy more than a single cultural space is still a challenge for many readers, such moves are considered sometimes "provocative" or an "oppositional act of political insubordination" (2). Gilroy wishes to diffuse such reactions by demonstrating the viability of a dual position straddling two seemingly politically divergent identities. In a very useful way, he stresses the simultaneity people experience on a regular basis, a point Du Bois emphasized as well. A person of black and European heritage understands European culture and black culture. It is the world around her that forces perceptions of difference or rather forces the view on her that the differences should be conceived of as incongruities. Du Bois describes in emotional terms the day that he realized he was black by which he meant that he realized that others perceived him to be different from them; they were white

[31] M.M. Bakhtin's term from his *The Dialogic Imagination,* originally published in 1975, becomes useful to revisit at this point. Bakhtin defines heteroglossia as "*another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intention but in a refracted way," creating special kinds of "*double-voiced discourses* [author's stress]" (324). An author navigates language, positioning him or herself in a way that "expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author" (300).

and he was not included in that category (*The Souls of Black Folks* 44). Similarly, Jewish-American texts have been read too often as primarily Jewish or primarily American. One way to defuse the tensions presumed to exist between two identities in a text is to utilize bifocality which insists on viewing cultural spaces as overlapping each other. What Gilroy insists on, following Du Bois, is that such a view enriches reading a text because it reveals multiple cultural aspects embedded deep within its pages.

Bryan Cheyette and Ranen Omer-Sherman use the model of double-consciousness to argue for an open-ended version of Jewish identity. Similar to Gilroy, they point to the existence of an in-between space from which a text can look in two directions at once. They contend that approaches insisting on Jewish identity's hermetic, singular cohesion have limited individuals' ability to identify inside of a complex Jewish identity matrix. They challenge two master narratives concerning Jewish identity that had developed during the nineteenth century: the first is that Jews long for Palestine and view themselves necessarily as living in exile. The second narrative asserts is that Jews can never achieve mainstream status in a dominant culture. Cheyette protests against this pervasive attitude that views Jewish literature in a standardized way, all of it predicated on the Jewish State as ultimate center. "What is most depressing about this reading of literature," he writes in his seminal "On Being a Jewish Critic" (2010) is not just the circular loop between literature and history but also "the implied reduction of Jewish history to the question of a single national culture." (35). Cheyette insists that more than a single historical-political agenda can operate inside a single Jewish text. For him, the role of a Jewish critic eventually

comes down to celebrating "cosmopolitanism …wherever it may flourish" (49). Cosmopolitanism, he holds, permits the non-Jewish world to influence Jewish cultural paradigms in useful ways. Similarly, Omer-Sherman argues that the general difficulty in talking about Emma Lazarus lies in an inability to see her inhabiting Du Boisian "double consciousness," as both a Jew and an American. The usefulness of Gilroy's bifocality, then, becomes apparent. Lazarus' texts are difficult to define in an environment where national categorical terms dominate theoretical discussions.

No doubt, English departments are more inclusive than they have ever been before. At the same time, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries bequeathed us a nationalist state of mind. Areas of literary study are still largely based on the old premise that nations have unified cultures that produce a unified literature. That is not to say that the current practice should necessarily be discontinued; it is only to observe that it remains the central way to read national boundaries: this study recognizes the increasing number of courses offered where a transatlantic view or cosmopolitan approach is taken. It is these types of changes that this study wishes to encourage.

There is a lingering sense among some, nonetheless, that national literary borders, especially dominant cultures' borders, need to be guarded. The danger lies in the assumptions that accompany such gestures, as Rey Chow explains well: "Moreover, as we know in the case of most boundaries, the dividing line between an inside and an outside is never just that; it always simultaneously carries meaning of hierarchy … presumptions of superiority and inferiority" (28). In other words, older pre-1960s structures coexist in English departments with post-1960s inclusion agendas. Hyphenation's purpose has been essentially to balance both sides of the

dividing line. Thus, a minority group retains its particular characteristics while retaining also a secure place within the mainstream national consciousness. English departments, then, empower minority groups by dividing their subject matter into such categories as "African-American," "Jewish-American," or "Native-American." The problem begins when those seeking a centralized, non-hyphenated American identity use the hyphen as a line of division rather than a line through which both identities can meet.

In was during the eighteenth century that American mainstream literature coalesced, normalizing a white, mainly English-descended, New-England center. While the colonies imported their literature mainly from England, the British were developing the concept of "literary merit" based on a text's ability to transcend time. [32] In 1765 Samuel Johnson declared William Shakespeare had done achieved the status of a great, literary ancient having "received new honours at every transmission." [33] He adds:

> The poet, of whose works I have undertaken the revision, may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit. (*Selected Writings* 354)

What transformed Shakespeare into a revered writer, Johnson asserts, was time itself, at least in part. It was that he remained relevant to the dominant culture that proved he deserved the honors time had bestowed on him.

[32] There were American versions circulating of major English novels like Samuel Richardson's 1748 *Clarissa*.
[33] From Johnson's introduction to his 1745 edition of Shakespeare's works.

For Americans, this type of literary discussion has proven difficult. Americans' admiration for English culture, their reliance upon it for their own cultural imagination, presented an obstacle to a national literary project. For example, in Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), Levinsky, a student of American culture, complains that:

> Americans who boasted descent from the heroes of the Revolution boasted, in the same breath, of having spent an evening with Lord so-and-so; it was their avowed ambition to acquire for their daughters the very titles which their ancestors had fought to banish from the life of their country. (380)

One of Abraham Cahan's most memorable characters remains David Levinsky. Having emigrated from Russia to the United States, Levinsky begins by intending to take advantage of American education. By novel's end he agonizes over his decision to go into business instead. He had become one of the richest garment manufacturers (as he calls it) of his day. One of Levinsky's biggest dilemmas is his insecurity among American-born Jews or Americans of English descent. Cahan uses this passage to criticize those who dismissed his own fascination with European intellectual traditions and with American dominant culture.

More so, he reminds Americans that while they criticize him for assuming a place among mainstream Americans, desiring equality where they see none, they desire equality with European elites. Cahan touched a nerve with the passage because by the time his novel was published, American dominant culture had spend over fifty years articulating in the most definite terms what *its* literature might look like independent (as they understood it to be) from English and European literature which

they so admired. Washington Irving, one of the first major American writers, for example, borrowed much of his material from German folk-tales, setting them in New England. He was relying on a tradition that was more ancient and well-established because at home, in America, there was no such literary tradition as yet. Literature such as his, though it might have proven popular, relied on European folk-traditions and therefore would be considered excessively influenced by these outsiders. This point becomes clear once one begins reading early nineteenth-century intellectual discussions over "authentic" American-produced literature.

Ralph Waldo Emerson advocated a literature rooted wholly in the United States, defining for future generations one of the key attributes of authentic American literature. In his lecture at Harvard given to the graduating class of 1837, he announced that "confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar." He declared that the "long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close" (59). And although he generally praised the intellectual and "universal mind" (as he does elsewhere in his writing), he also concluded that Americans "have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe" (59). German folk-tales were part of what he called a universal (western) intellectual tradition, as was English literature, but it was time to look for the American version of such universality. In dramatic terms, he added that a "nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men" (59). He calls for an end to reliance on "old books" from Europe to be replaced by literature inspired by the land and people the young graduates see around them in New England and elsewhere inside the

sovereign boundaries of the United States. Thus, he issued the call for a definition of an American national literature, a literature he believed should reflect inherently what it meant to be "American." It is interesting to note that a few decades later the Zionists would similarly seek an authentic national literature reflecting what they believed a Jewish national identity meant. [34]

Recently, in a fascinating book, *Emerson's Ghost: Literature, Politics, and the Making of Americanists* (2007), Randall Fuller demonstrated the continuing influence Emerson holds over American literary studies. In a fashion similar to Johnson's admiration for Shakespeare, Fuller admires Emerson's ability to, in Fuller's words, "exert tremendous imaginative influence" over so many readers and to still hold sway over contemporary scholars and readers in general (3). Calling upon Derrida's work on spectrality, Fuller argues that we are haunted by Emerson's influences (23). Unsurprisingly, he focuses on Emerson's "The American Scholar," as I do here. One way of better understanding the tensions operating inside of American Studies is to take a closer look at the full implications of Fuller's argument. What becomes clear is that while we are haunted by Emerson's influence, we are also haunted by what we can call today his prejudices. Emerson, after all, talked to a group of male students for a reason. His worldview, very much after the fashion of his time, favored male writers. His speech presented ideas of the "universal" human to a class of graduating men. For

[34] The difference between the Jewish-American version of what it means to write in English in the United States and Jewish-Israeli theories of a national Israeli literature will prove essential to understanding the ways Jews fought to fit into mainstream American identity.

Emerson, it was white men, Harvard educated and less so women or minorities who held the promise of creating the kind of American literature he envisioned. [35]

Moreover, Fuller's use of Derrida's notion of haunting points to some of the hidden implications involved in Emerson's influence on American Studies. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida describes Marx's idea that commodities can haunt the contemporary world. "It is a great moment at the beginning of *Capital*," he writes, when "Marx is wondering in effect how to describe the sudden looming up of the mystical character of the commodity… Marx means to demonstrate that the mystical character owes nothing to a use-value" (149). Derrida enjoys Marx's sense of wonder at the change an object undergoes sometimes in the market. A wooden table sold for kitchen use, years later finds itself transformed into an antique. It no longer is worth the wood plus so many hours of work. Now, it has taken on a mystical element:

> This table has been worn down, exploited, over-exploited, or else set aside, no longer in use, in antique shops or auctions rooms. The thing is at once set aside and beside itself. Besides itself because, as we will soon be surprised to see, the table is a little mad, weird, unsettled, "out of joint." One no longer knows, beneath the hermeneutic patina, what this piece of wood, whose example suddenly looms up, is good for and what it is worth […] it is the example of an apparition. (149)

The table has transcended simple everyday use, taking on almost supernatural properties. It is not a matter of getting rid of it but a matter of finding a new way to

[35] William Apess, a Pequot Indian published his own autobiography in English, for example, in 1831, only three years before he gave his speech. Though it has been rediscovered and reprinted, no one since Emerson's time to today has seemed to regard him as relevant to the development of an American literary tradition.

think about it. It is not the case that it is worth less but rather that it is worth more. Most importantly, although it no longer will be used in the same way, it will also not be turned aside and forgotten. Moreover, what it used to be continues to influence tables that remain in use and even new ones being produced. Derrida likens the role and function of Marxism to an antique table, arguing that although the influence of Marxism has generally waned, it retains its identity as "that table" at the corner of the room that has now taken on spectral, haunting aspects. It is "out of joint" in the world, yet we are unable to conceive of our world without it.

Emerson, as Fuller effectively illustrates, remains a powerful presence. Those of us training today, as well as for those who have been at this for a while, find ideas of pure central national identity "out of joint." The idea that a class of educated, white, American men share a manifest responsibility to define what it means to be American, has been largely replaced by a plurality of voices. Intentionally or not, Fuller's book points to the fact that enjoying the influence of Emerson's imaginative, inspiring visions for American potential come with another kind of spectrality; we are still haunted by the New-England writers and by the canon-based, myth oriented, fixed view of American Studies. In the classrooms, introducing Emerson means introducing also the difference between the realities of his time and ours. Although Emerson expressed complete disagreement with the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) in his lecture of the same name (1854), he nevertheless addresses himself exclusively to male, Christian audiences. He supported equality among men but privileged the male gender. For that reason, we experience him as "out of joint" with contemporary visions of how America should operate.

He writes in “The Fugitive Slave Law” that the institution of slavery causes “rot” to spread quickly inside the country: “And when one sees how fast the rot spreads… I think we demand of superior men that they be superior in this—that the mind and the virtue shall give their verdict... the progress of civilization” (790). Civilization is contingent on male citizens, which belong in turn to western civilization. That is the superior culture Emerson conceives of in his grand “universal” project. In *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (2004) Anna Brickhouse demonstrates that many such contradictions existed in Emerson’s works. She points to the establishment of the *North American Review* in 1815 as the moment when the elite began conversing over that virtual, yet all meaningful space which will be defined as American highbrow culture. Contributors ranged from William Cullen Bryant early on to Henry James and William Dean Howells later (17). The distinguished *Review* proclaimed “their mission as nothing less than the shaping of a national tradition in literature,” in an effort to “bring a glorious end to what Channing himself led the way in condemning as ‘the literary delinquency of America’” (Brickhouse 17). Brickhouse notes that another famous contributor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, also counted famously among those calling for an American literature that would be thoroughly and authentically American.

Brickhouse further demonstrates by using binocularity that Emerson suffered from partial blindness in order to explore the ways Emerson could see clearly the evils of slavery but also call for an exclusionary, white-centered definition of American literature. “In 1844 Emerson’s canonical essay “The Poet” called for an emergence of national bards to effect “emancipation…dear to all men.” And there was “ample

geography," national scenes, on which to base American poetry. Brickhouse emphasizes Emerson's lines: "Our logrolling… our fisheries… our Negroes, and Indians, our boasts, and our repudiation… the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon, and Texas…" (Brickhouse 18). Emerson turns the items on the list into raw materials meant for the hands of the expert American bard who can use these objects to create the authentic American poem. At the time, the government was about to annex Texas, propelling the United States into the Mexican-American war (18). The list Emerson presents his readers, Brickhouse reminds her readers, lends "support to the nation's expansionist vision of itself…" (18). She is able to show a gap generally overlooked by much of current American Studies' scholarship. Emerson, the genuinely liberal scholar who wished to further human dignity, also inadvertently celebrated American white dominance alongside American imperialism.

By the end of the nineteenth century, American intellectual elites had defined mainstream authentic literature in what Philip Fisher calls mythic terms. Fisher defines an identity myth as a "fixed, satisfying, and stable story that is used again and again to normalize our account of social life, which in the American context came to mean a 'culture of Puritan mission, frontier, wilderness, garden, and innocence'" (*Redrawing the Boundaries* 232, 233). All those writers that could not center their writing on these core experiences found themselves excluded from the mainstream definition of the authentically "American." Between the two world wars, literature moved into the domain of the modern literature departments where the mythic American was celebrated and the regional outsiders were sifted out. Emerson alongside others

entered a newly formed American-university led canon of American writers excluding writers like Sarah Orne Jewett, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Cahan.

Between contemporary English departments and their earlier versions stand the 1960s social-movements whose scholarship began questioning what had been understood in a Johnsonian way as a seemingly stable definition of literature. Previously, the canon had been established on two main premises: first, that the literary merit and artistic qualities of a text were the literature department's main focus; second that white, Christian males produced the most sophisticated highbrow literature. Mirroring different social movements' political demands for equality, such as those of women and African-Americans, literature departments began accordingly making room at the table. In *Cultures of Letters* (1994) Richard Brodhead explained that "[w]e live in the presence of a new wish toward the literary. The wish, not to be found in significant concentrations before the modern Civil Rights movement, is that literature be no party to the play of social discrimination, indeed that literature be the exemplary social institution open to the human in its full range" (107). Although reminiscent of Emerson's use of a universal man, a term used extensively in other Enlightenment discourse, in its post-1960s version it nevertheless reflects the impulse toward a thoroughly prejudice-free environment for literary studies.

The assumption among scholars is that overall we have overcome the old system of exclusion when in fact it lingers still, haunting us. American mythic construction of literature might be outmoded, but it continues to be valued as the pinnacle of American literary achievement. Again, in a Johnsonian mode, the old, canonized American texts have achieved a stability, suggesting that here lies truly

American examples of literary merit. Johnson insisted that time's passage, although not sufficient, remained an important tool for ascertaining a work's literary value: "to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientifick, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem" (354). In contrast, with all the best intentions, works written by formerly excluded communities and introduced in the last thirty years into the university curriculum (including works written a hundred or more years ago) generally are not seen as able to embody that older, privileged literary value. Most often, these works are not taken as creations of literary genius but as the ethnographic work of a minority suggesting that such work could be intriguing without quite equaling older works. That is, I am suggesting, the main problem at the heart of the haunting, at the heart of the hyphenated existence of American literatures. Not that anyone tries (mostly anyway) to push hyphenated literatures out of English departments. The impulse is currently an overall positive one. However, there is a way in which many take for granted democratic discourse without fully internalizing the hierarchy still woven into the hyphenated system.

The above discussion of aesthetic literary value always proves the hardest to deal with. How do we describe high aesthetic literary achievements? The idea that there are books worth reading for the "cultural work" they perform, as Philip Fisher and, earlier, Jane Tompkins, argued, bypasses the issue of literary worth. [36] We are risking reintroducing a canon motivated by dominant cultural values, which might return us to an American literature based on mythic, stable, white historical discourse.

[36] In her 1984 seminal *Sensational designs: the cultural work of American fiction, 1790-1860* (1986)

In *Pleasure and Change* (2001) Frank Kermode discusses at length the idea of the canon, aesthetic aspirations, and the necessity for change. His examples range from Milton to Coleridge and to T. S. Eliot, reminding his readers how easy it is to return to *that* white-centered conversation whenever the words "aesthetic" and "literary merit" are conjured. As Barbara Christian once said, the fact that these same western scholars who uphold poststructuralist, antifoundationalist sentiments "always harkened back to the masterpieces of the past," points to the problem. They are "again reifying the very texts they said they were deconstructing. Increasingly, *their* ways, *their* terms, *their* approaches remained central and became the means by which one defined literary critics…" ("The Race for Theory" 20). Though Christian was not talking specifically about Kermode, he nevertheless exemplifies what she admonishes in her article. He does in an ironic way call on works conceived of generally as having proven their longevity in order to supply examples for a discussion on the need for expanding the western canon.

What has generally been accepted is that different literary areas deserve to carve out specific ways to talk about their specific literature. The appearance is that coming up with a separate set of criteria by which to judge different literatures splinters the aesthetic-value conversation into what appears like thousands of tiny islands. Before, there was one set of overarching set of criteria by which to judge literatures' aesthetic value. There are not many who would argue now against Henry Louis Gates' complaints that mainstream theorists expected minority theorists to use their white-centered discourse. They criticized minority critics for developing their own theoretical conversation. Gates wrote in 1991 that if "anyone suggests that the

paradigms that govern our critical discourse are in need of alteration" heard "a chorus of voices advising that we leave well enough alone" (747). He humorously compared the assertion that dominant theory should be useful for everyone with the idea of a "one-size-fit-all suit." Such a suit would fit, obviously, those used to measure it to begin with. The metaphor of the "ill fitting suit" is identical to Derrida's "out of joint" experience. In turn, Gates and Derrida's best describe discussions over Jewish-American literary identities because they turn the focus inward, into the internal consciousness of the texts themselves, reminding us of double consciousness' ever shifting possible uses. Both approaches are similar, stressing the idea that it takes multiple dimensions to understand them, something that historically dominant culture had resisted. Before presenting Jewish perspectives involved in this theoretical conversation (in chapter three), it will prove helpful to lay out the construction of the older, one-size-fit-all, American-mythical literary definition system that continues to haunt us.

(3) Turn-of-the-Century America

From the start, the conversation over mainstream, Anglo-dominant definitions of American culture was self-aware. There were always voices advocating for inclusion while other voices insisted on the need for exclusion. David Goodmen Croly, for example, posited in 1888 that "We can absorb the Dominion…for the Canadians are of our own race… but not people in Mexico or Central America" He concludes that the "white race is dominant and will keep their position, no matter how numerous the negroes may become" (Sollors 93). Though aimed at "dark bodies," his remarks

nevertheless stem from the ever-present anxiety at the time concerning neighbors and others considered foreigners interacting with the American nation. In 1916, in one of the earliest challenges to the mythic cohesion, Randolph Bourne published his seminal "Trans-National America."[37] In it he railed against the ways the dominant culture defined "melting pot" to really mean "that the alien shall be forcibly assimilated to that Anglo-Saxon tradition which they unquestionably label 'American'" (266). The conversation regarding immigrants in the country during his time, he continues, oscillated between complaining that immigrants refused to assimilate and jeering "at patriots like Mary Antin who write about 'our forefathers'" (266). An immigrant writer like Antin dealt with two types of reactions to her autobiography: those who applauded her assimilation and others who expressed shock at such assimilation.

Bourne further suggested that the experience of the Mayflower can be reinterpreted. In place of equating arrival on the Mayflower with authentic American identity, he suggests thinking of the American forefathers as having come also "upon the Maiblume…Fleur de Mai…Fior di Maggio"" or the דער מיי בליען, the May Bli-en, as we might say in Yiddish.[38] By translating the Mayflower into these languages (German, French, Italian) he rejected the prevailing notion of "authentic" American identity at the same time that he argued for inclusion, literary as well as social, of a myriad of voices, all of whom deserve to be considered Americans in equal measure. Other writers of the time who called for inclusion demonstrated the great difficulty in avoiding the center versus periphery dynamic. The impulse to draw attention to what they saw as horrific inequities ironically stressed the immigrants' outsider status.

[37] Following Horace Kallen's "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot," just a year earlier.
[38] In this case, it would be said identically in German.

Jacob Riis, for example, in his efforts to advocate for the poor immigrants, titled his book *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), literally naming the immigrants as "others." [39] It is as if he had called his book: "those who do not fit into our one-size suit." He reiterated the obvious, that the experiences of immigrants were completely different from those of middle-class Americans or, relevant to this study, that of wealthy, old-stock Jewish-Americans whose families have been in the US for generations.

In 1907, Henry James published a collection of essays in which he shared his impressions from a visit to his place of birth, the American continent. He is shocked by the enormous change. He describes visiting Ellis Island, the immigration port through which all Jewish immigrants passed. In third person, he described how one might only think that he can comprehend that force exerted on America known as the immigrant: "[he] had thought he knew before, thought he had the sense of the degree in which it is his American fate to share the sanctity of his American consciousness, the intimacy of his American patriotism, with the inconceivable alien" (426). His description of New York's immigrant quarters might seem far from welcoming or sympathetic. What the above passage stresses, nevertheless, is the sense of utter shock and complete inability to comprehend the foreignness New Yorkers and other Americans found themselves suddenly faced with.

And it would have been hard not to feel taken aback by the heart-wrenching poverty of the new immigrant ghettos filling New York City. Many immigrants arrived penniless to New York, needing to be shown how to operate a faucet, not to mention an elevator. William Dean Howells' *Hazards of New Fortunes* (1890)

[39] Amy Kaplan makes a similar point in *The Social Construction of American Realism* (47).

demonstrates well the sense of deep shock at the poorer parts of New York. Basil and Isabel March, the protagonist and his wife, move to New York from Boston. In a lengthy passage, the reader follows their search for an apartment, a search that brings them to one of the overpopulated, poor-immigrant neighborhoods. What they witness proves so outside of their understanding of reality, that they experience it in a detached manner, as if it were not real at all. Similar to Riis and to Henry James, they are not only horrified but feel disconnected. Kaplan explains in relation to Howells' scene that "[v]oyeuristic intrusions into the homes of the poor allow the Marches to externalize these "interiors" as mirrors of their own genteel values. Observed through these windows, "'the other half,' in effect, disappears" (51). In other words, what the Marches see seems so incongruous with their reality, so radically different than any other neighborhood they had seen before, that they become incapable of comprehending it on a meaningful level. Isabel March says at one point during their tour, "I'm beginning to feel crazy… I don't believe there's any real suffering—not real suffering—along those people; that is, it would be suffering from our point of view, but they've been used to it all their lives and they don't feel their discomfort so much" (*A Hazard of New Fortunes* 60). It is not that Isabel is incapable of sympathy. It is simply that the level of poverty she witnesses for the first time goes beyond her mental ability to absorb and digest.

One solution might be to reject the hyphenation system in its entirety and argue that Antin, Cahan, and Yezierska can be read in non-hyphenated terms. This study, however, does not ask that we take that path. Hyphenation fulfills a crucial function for the members of the different communities in the United States. It stresses their

viability as political participants in American life. In addition, these communities, such as Native-Americans, African-Americans, or Jewish-Americans can participate in defining their version of American identity in place of being coerced by the old American melting-pot. Not removing the hyphenation stresses that Jewish-American writers are just that, Americans with a specific tradition that does not plug into white, non-Jewish history in this country and does not need to in order to be included under the American banner. The problem with removing the hyphenation, therefore, stems from what Randolph Bourne identified early in the twentieth century, that when mainstream Americans wave away linguistic signifiers of ethnicity they seem to want to do so at the expense of the minority's cultural heritage.

Although mindful of Bryan Cheyette's warning against reducing Jewish identity to a singular, supposed authentic core, this study relies on the specific history and culture of a Jewish community. It relies on the existence of a definable American national identity and a definable Jewish identity. Scholars who deal with dominant cultural theory (as opposed to specifically minority-focused theory) have usually been the ones warning against the dangers inherent in relying on absolutist definitions of any single culture. Fisher's article points to the ways that the nineteenth-century's definitions of the American community excluded so many. Meanwhile, African-American scholars work to define African-American literature as a viable literary category. Jewish-American scholars premise their work on a Jewish community they can define against non-Jewish cultures.

Henry Louis Gates Jr., Barbara Christian, and Catherine John are among many African American scholars who remind their readers that the loudest voices against the

intellectual viability of communities' ability to produce community-specific literature are white. In *Clear Word and Third Sight* (2003), John poses unabashedly that "[i]n the last twenty years, within the context of academically produced intellectual discourse, increasingly heated exchanges have occurred concerning the notion of "authenticity" as it relates to definitions of culture and cultural identity" (3). Her passionate response is similar to my own: the people who had been asked to wear the ill-fitting suit of theoretical national-disintegration are also the "people whose previous identities were systematically crushed and denied, but whose survival depended on their ability to both resist and remember" (5).[40] Her words eerily describe the experience of many different minority communities, including those of Jews.

Yet, not one of the above scholars intended to argue that cultures or communities exist other than in an imagined capacity controlled by elite cultural legislators. In place of a conversation aimed at dismantling boundaries, critics in both American Studies and Jewish Studies are attempting to define an intermediary space where boundaries are not completely dismissed. Instead, they opt for an approach highlighting an active attempt to relinquish complete control more in tune with Zygmunt Bauman's interpreters and legislators. Bauman stresses in *Legislators and Interpreters on Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (1987) that at heart what we deal with is the fight against uncertainty. Religion, philosophy, science, in fact all intellectual pursuits can be linked, he argues, to this basic human preoccupation. At one time, small communities could regulate themselves but with the onset of

[40] She disagrees with Paul Gilroy on several points, but her insight here about the importance of retaining the African part of the hyphenated equation, importantly echoes my own insistence of viewing the Jewish without losing it under an American literary banner.

modernity and growing cosmopolitanism, a new kind of instability entered societies (42). Indeed, if one thinks about it, early twentieth-century legislative frenzy aimed at keeping foreigners out of the United States stemmed from white Americans' fear that their society, mostly homogeneous to that point, was changing. "Foreigners" moved physically into their spaces, destabilizing many aspects of their life.

In an article for *The Nation* provocatively titled "Democracy or the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationalism," (1915), Horace Kallen contended that "Americans of British ancestry find that certain possessions of theirs, which may be lumped under the word "Americanism," are in jeopardy" owing to the influx of immigrants (1). These immigrants, in Bauman words, represent the modern condition, that of the "rootless and masterless" person. That rootless expatriate, the cosmopolitan man, after all, came to symbolize early in twentieth-century modernism where community-based control lost, in other words, its efficacy (43). The Puritans encouraged neighbors to be responsible for each other thus encouraging self legislation. New York at the turn of the twentieth century was not the small Puritan town.

Bauman's criticism of the modern state's legislative control acts in opposition to approaches like Bourne's and Kallen's. Unlike their tolerant views, legislators stressed the power of the state and its ability to protect the nation and its culture from what it understands as foreign invaders. The power of the state was replayed in the dominance of the education system and the arts. The terms "vulgar" and "noble," once legislated by the aristocracy using, for example, the artist-patronage system, were

shifted to the responsibility of the state.[41] In Bauman's words: "…the power of the educated, sophisticated, sublimated, refined elite to proffer binding aesthetic judgment, to segregate the deserving from the non-deserving, or non-art, was always expressed in acts of militancy aimed at judgments…" (135). As he points out further, the militant legislative authority of the educated worked "because they were interiorized by the victims of the elitist attacks" (136). Fear of being branded vulgar, of failing at one's attempts to mimic elite aesthetics kept their power to legislate unchallenged up to the time of post-modernity.

Although we seem as far away from such elitist controls of aesthetic merit as can be in a post-modern environment, one still needs to account for the fact that no one has seriously compared Abraham Cahan's work with William Dean Howells'.[42] Despite having been called repeatedly a classic immigrant American writer, the "immigrant" aspect of Cahan's identity has pushed him out of the realm of possible comparison with Howells. Discussions of Cahan tend to gravitate to the immigrant experience, experience which, as we have seen, had been legislated by American, white middle-class as lesser and more vulgar than refined. Despite the two novels' nearly identical title (*The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1884) and *The Rise of David Levinsky* 1917), not one in-depth scholarly work has investigated the American conversation inherent in Cahan's work. We are haunted by nineteenth century's insistence that

[41] Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* illustrates well the ways music halls and theater, the opera, developed into their elite forms in direct response to immigrant or working class theaters. See for example p. 34- his discussion on Shakespeare's play as the intellectual property of elite institutions.

[42] Susan Mizruchi in 2008 came closest when she described *Levinsky* in cosmopolitan terms compared with Lapham in *The Rise of Multicultural America*. Her discussion is brief, as her focus is broader.

minority identities need to be presented inside of a prescribed hierarchy where American, mainstream identity remains supreme.

Essentializing the Jewish community by over-generalizing its major components proves necessary in order to achieve the above comparison between Cahan and Howells or others. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's by now famous "strategic essentialism" comes into play in an attempt to create a porous boundary where a Jewish coherence can be compared to an American one, even if in a somewhat imperfect manner. What is important to keep in mind is that those of us choosing to work from within a minority group base our work on historical as well as literary theoretical analysis, meaning we rely on intellectually rigorous and by now well-established components. Double consciousness or a bifocal reading positioning a Jewish writer between two cultures can operate only if one can successfully assume essentialist identities. A testament to its ongoing efficacy lies in the way Du Bois' double consciousness has become so heavily relied on by so many scholars.

W.E.B. Du Bois remains a profoundly influential voice in minority theoretical discussion. Of all his prolific writings on history, society, and spirituality, his articulation of double consciousness and the visual metaphor of the veil have remained most prominent. He describes the spiritual and social conditions of blacks using the metaphor of a veil: "The negro is born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world –a world which yields him no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (*Souls of Black Souls* 45). He begins by asserting that at the heart of the "being" black experience, at the heart of living life day to day in what he called a "dark" body rests an out of joint experience.

A black person at the turn of the twentieth century has only a marginal understanding of himself or herself, he argues. People view themselves as though they are staring into a mirror that only reflects dominant white-cultural attitudes back to them. For that reason, Du Bois holds, conclusions regarding African-American potential is completely dominated by white mainstream views—with the assumption being that not only are blacks inferior, but also incapable of participation in the dominant culture.

Du Bois' response begins with the idea of double-consciousness. "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (45). The tape-measure metaphor enabled Du Bois to press the idea that standards are culturally specific and blacks are constantly being measured using white standards. Like the "ill-fitting suit," which is like the "out of joint experience," Du Bois' metaphor of the tape measure means to emphasize that dominant culture imposes its standards on the minority and expects the minority to mirror back that they have internalized the same standards, even if they do not work in encompassing for the minority community their own experiences.

In the next section of his text, however, a change occurs and Du Bois takes the concept in a different direction: "One ever feels this twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (45). The change occurs when Du Bois suddenly turns and suggests a kind of "authentic" core to the black consciousness. There are two "ideals" suggesting at the very least alternative values. Inside a single black consciousness two consciousnesses exist at once. So far,

Du Bois seems to be saying, however, that both consciousnesses preclude black communities from defining for themselves their versions of consciousness since the black ideal is obscured by a veil placed upon it by the white dominant culture. The passage's summary raises the most exciting theoretical possibilities. Du Bois writes, "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost" (45). Writing your own history puts you at odds with the mainstream, certainly in Du Bois' case. Yet, he insists, part of that history involved the retelling of the double-self, the twoness and the struggle to retain both identities. When he describes striving to merge the double self, he does not mean internalizing white-culture at the expense of the black. He means, and this is the important point, that striving to resolve the tension means finding a way to incorporate both identities in a single individual.

This short passage offers theoretical resistance to the haunting I have been discussing. Du Bois held on to his own "blackness" at the same time rejecting entirely the premise that African-Americans could not acquire mainstream education, or other mainstream institutions. He reminds his readers that an impoverished, abused person (though he uses "man"), a former slave, denied the most basic educational opportunities could hardly be expected participate in post-bellum life. He has the potential to do so but must be allowed to acquire the right kind of education. That a person will always have his or her experiences as a slave, will always be an African-American, will always remember the songs, the family history, etc. was a given. But, race dictated only unfair treatment, a judgment focusing on the wrong issue, on history

rather than on potential.[43] For him, the university has to act as "the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life" (117). By "real life" he meant that a university education prepared one for more than the job market. A university must do more for her students (he refers to the university as feminine), she must offer "that broad knowledge of what the world knows and knew of human living and doing which she may apply to the thousand problems of real life" (117). At Atlanta University in the early twentieth century, Du Bois did his best to offer his students exactly such an education. It meant the curriculum had to aim at lifting the veil and developing theoretical approaches that will allow blacks to understand themselves directly without white dominated "distortions" of who they are as a culture.

Brad Evans in *Before Cultures* (2005) demonstrates that Du Bois presented the concept of culture in the plural—cultures—similarly to Franz Boas, whom Du Bois knew. Boas even accepted an invitation from Du Bois to speak at Atlanta university in 1906. Evans connects Du Bois' interest in Boasian anthropology particularly Boas' articulation of culture, with German Jewish *Völkerpsychologie* of the time.[44] *Völkerpsychologie* was established by Heyman Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus, two Jewish-German social-scientists. Their new folk-study meant to stress that though someone might be "racially" different, it did not follow that they did not have the inherent potential to "rise" to cultural sophistication equal to the as they explained,

[43] Or as Du Bois also puts it: "The problem on the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line…" (54).
[44] I use the German spelling for their folk-psychology.

with "true-blooded" Germans (163).[45] European culture as well as American culture was highly valued and its attainment was viewed as a worth-while goal. Attainment by "outsiders" was often described as a "rise" from supposedly inferior folk traditions. Literature written in the United States often used this paradigm to describe African Americans. Frances Harper's 1892 novel named *Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted* is one example. The plot follows the life of Iola, a woman who discovers her mother's black ancestry, turning Iola and her brothers to slaves. Iola's story takes readers on a journey through black experience before and after the Civil War. Iola, who was educated in an elite, white boarding school, teaches former-slaves in the South in an attempt to "uplift" them, in her words.[46] Du Bois and many of his contemporaries did not dispute the sophistication, the complexity, and the value they found in white culture. What he, along with the *Völkerpsychologeists,* advocated was a place at the table and for white culture to accept more equally participants who had formerly been marginalized.

Boas, *Völkerpsychologiests,* and Du Bois all pushed a crucial conceptual change that challenged dominant views of culture up to that point. Boas argued "not for the psychological unity of mankind but for an understanding of universality in terms of the psychological differences between peoples resulting in historical factors" (Evans 164). Many tenets that held the nineteenth century's so called racial-scientific facts together had been unraveled, exposed for the fallacious, prejudiced work they are. But, as Gilroy describes succinctly in *Black Atlantic*, (and as Rey Chow had

[45] Du Bois even met both these scientists on a trip to Germany (Evans 164).
[46] Assertions that "there will be a far higher and better Christian civilization than our country has ever known…And in that civilization I believe the Negro is to be an important factor," are reiterated throughout the novel by different characters (255).

argued) knowing that there is no human difference on which to hang superior or inferior rhetoric never stopped people from continuing to enforce cultural hierarchies.

Double consciousness encapsulates the tension inherent in the condition of the veil and the "twoness" in a powerful manner. What remains less clear in the articulation is how the said tension might be released. Bifocality steps in to help fulfill Du Bois' striving to relieve the tension. Gilroy usefully suggests envisioning Anglo-African texts (and many other texts) as "trying to face (at least) two ways at once" (3). The way he put this sentence together exposes how difficult a move like this can be. One can but *try* to face in both directions. The act is far from perfect but is nonetheless viable one through which to accept and deal with Du Boisian twoness. The metaphor affords us a way of looking at cultural boundaries and the ways they had been demarcated. In effect, the essence of the both/and can be found in the twoness, where a single individual text, just like a single individual body, can and does hold two cultures in a single moment. Instead of viewing the world through a single lens, two lenses can be imagined. Each lens highlights a different culture's history and aesthetic sensibilities. A productive moment occurs at the junction where the two lenses overlap. Together, they project an image that necessarily and in equal measure shows two cultures. The key to understanding the extent to which bifocality helps rearticulate the seemingly inescapable hierarchical imperative is in learning to read the subsequent overlapping space.

(4) Jewish Double Consciousness

Understanding the overlapping space involves looking at the space in which marginalized identity comes into contact with dominant reality, with real-life situations. These real life experiences need to inform theoretical pursuits, as Du Bois insisted. The biggest difference between the practices of high-theory and minority practices is still hinged often on the way each responds to experiential data. If sophisticated culture is equated with access to higher education, then what happens to bodies of knowledge collected by a community that has traditionally not had access to the same? What about Jewish culture, for example, that until the eighteenth century had been influenced by secular tradition but had not secular literature or art to speak of. There was no Jewish literary or artistic tradition that could compare to non Jewish-thinkers. Mary Antin describes in detail the difficulties Jews in Russia met with in their attempt to participate in public or in private education, on a primary or secondary level.

Patricia Collins famously made a similar point in regard to African-American women's experiences in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990). Bell Hooks' work, which remains influential, bases itself on this idea. Du Bois, Collins, and so many others argue that a community that experiences life in a periphery must be listened to carefully when they recount experiential knowledge. Stories of personal reflection and family history inform and build precise visions of the ways the periphery works in the face of a dominant culture. English departments have to a large degree internalized that message and professors

include in their syllabi in growing numbers novels written by such authors as Zora Neale Hurston and Anzia Yezierska.

To help make my point, I would like to briefly share an experience which crystallized for me African-American theoretical relevance for Jewish-American theoretical issues. I once compared experiences in the classroom with an African-American colleague and friend. In a graduate seminar, we had been discussing the difference between a white man teaching and a woman of color teaching. A white person, especially a white male, seems to the students a disembodied brain, filled with wonderful knowledge, the most valued (white cultural) knowledge around. When a woman, and even more so a black woman stands in front of a classroom in a university (where the majority of students are white), she becomes a physical body. Her gender and the color of her skin become a presence more powerful than her intellectual presence. In my translation, a white man may teach without the assumptions of hyphenation. My friend agreed with what we had read and discussed, having experienced it herself. My first reaction was to feel I had learned something about an experience foreign to me. But that feeling did not last long before another realization set in: the difference between a black person teaching and a Jewish person teaching is that a Jewish person can presume they are non-hyphenated more easily. When I walk into a classroom, I can tell my class that my name is Sally rather than Orit without disclosing that I am not a Christian. In my classrooms, I do identify as Jewish (mainly because we usually miss one class a semester due to a Jewish holiday). More often than not, I am the first Jewish person my students meet in their lives. I can see the change come over students when they realize that a “Jew” is teaching them. They

almost universally react with curiosity and not with any negativity. Nonetheless, I would have "passed" for non-Jewish if I had not mentioned my Judaism.

In their introduction to the collection *Modernity, Culture, and 'the Jew'* (1998), Laura Marcus and Bryan Cheyette lament:

> Instead of bringing together post-colonial and post-Holocaust revisions of the West, the academy, usually for narrow institutional reasons, has largely excluded Jews from current definitions of ethnicity. This misguided dismissal reflects the attempt by westernized Jews to 'whiten' themselves as to avoid the worst excess of anti-Semitism. (2)

For critics like Marcus and Cheyette, both post-colonial and post-Holocaust criticism has presented an argument often overlooked, an argument that needs to take into account, at least to a large degree, that Jews can be involved in current conversation over ethnic otherness in addition to discussions focusing on Jewish-specific issues like anti-Semitism. Post-colonial critics try to look at places around the world where white culture dismissed local culture, where local traditions were trampled and human rights violated. Post-Holocaust critics ask about basic human dignity in the face of human violence. They ask why humanity so often finds a need to resort to mass killings and dehumanizing techniques. Marcus and Cheyette draw on post-colonial and post-Holocaust scholarship to show that the Jewish population, like colonized cultures, needs to be allowed to express fully their Jewish-specific differences in a non-Jewish setting free of anti-Semitism and prejudices. The way they see it, post-colonialism and post-Holocaust revisions are applied liberally to all but to Jews.

Marcus and Cheyette, also the editors of the collection, invited Homi Bhabha to contribute the collection's forward. He writes that he was not invited because he is Parsi (who are also known as "the Jews of the East") but because of his "interest in the perverse and productive fate of 'difference'" (xv). "The Jew," he continues, "stands for that experience of a lethal modernity, shared by histories of slavery and colonialism, where the racist desire for supremacy and domination turns the ideas of progress and sovereignty into demonic partners in a *danse macabre*" (xv). And to an extent, I am utilizing Bhabha here for the same reason. The editors begin their collection with one of the strongest cards they can, with one of the most respected critics dealing with "ethnicity" because they anticipated rightly the argument that Jews have assimilated to such a degree that many of them enjoy white privilege. For this reason, I began my dissertation with a first chapter dedicated to reiterating and commenting on Jewish history. Those of us who deal with Jewish culture from inside the academy find that we need to defend the sense that Jews are also minorities despite historical assimilation. After all, on forms requiring racial identification, a Jewish person simply marks "white" to describe their ethnic identity.

This discussion means to emphasize finally that early Jewish-American works employed whatever strategies they could to prove their mainstream status, to show that they had "risen" and had internalized the American myth and its culture. What emerges, to return to the argument at the core of this dissertation, is that Mary Antin, Abraham Cahan, and Anzia Yezierska had to "sell" their ethnic difference to the dominant culture in order to get published. Bifocality, a direct descendant of Du Boisian double-consciousness, outlines the complex ways in which these writers

engaged what Fisher called mythical constructions directly and simultaneously engaged their own, Jewish communities.

To understand more fully the pressures on Jewish double-consciousness in this country, it is necessary to understand the Jewish theoretical context in addition to the "general," dominant American one. First, however, it is useful to extend the discussion at hand to the Jewish-Anglo uses of Du Bois in the last ten to fifteen years. Specifically, I will outline "On Being a Jewish Critic" by Bryan Cheyette and the literary analysis of Ranen Omer-Sherman, two leading scholars who are expanding Jewish-Anglo studies. Cheyette will receive the most attention since his theoretical argument will further illuminate the issues at hand, issues of double-consciousness versus appearance of authentic, stable identities. "On Being a Jewish Critic" was given as a lecture in 2002, then republished in 2004. Consequently, it was reprinted in *Anglophone Jewish Literature* (2010), a collection on the most current trends in the field. The article additionally remains relevant because it echoes Bauman's sense (along with other minority scholars already mentioned here) that the big fear of dominant power structures remains the uncertainty to their legislative territories, literary and otherwise.

Cheyette rallies the cry to embrace uncertainty: to question literary territorial stakes rather than fear their instability. He challenges Ruth Wisse who can be understood as representing one of Jewish Studies' supreme legislative bodies. The haunting found in hyphenation system in the United States, then, accounts only for one set of pressures in regard to possible reception of immigrant writers like Cahan or Yezierska. In addition, another legislative force, one insisting on the primacy of

Jewish identity is at work. Cheyette laments that the fear of destabilizing Jewish identity too often leads to discourse over purity (33). “The one thing that we can say with any certainty about Jewish identity,” he provocatively asserts, “is that it is always in dispute and open to redefinition and reinterpretation (whether religiously, ethnically, culturally, nationally)” (33). Ruth Wisse, Hana Wirth-Nesher, Leah Garrett and others agree that defining Jewish identity is far from simple. Cheyette is provocative because he insists that reducing Jewish identity to a singular coherence is an oppressive act. He summarizes his point in the following way: “It is my role as a Jewish critic, I firmly believe, to celebrate such cosmopolitan impurity wherever it may flourish” (49). His declaration is inspiring, daring us to stop fearing the fact that boundaries, Anglo or Jewish, are inherently porous and “impure.”

However, I believe that Cheyette ventures too far in his article in the direction of critics who dismantle communities. His insistence on the porous borders outlining identity politics brings him to the brink of erasing all claim of his own Jewishness, something I embrace in my own work. He celebrates poetry coming from “subversive margins across seemingly incongruous domains,” and similarly praises scholars who “refuse to participate in the current academic fashion of declaring one’s personal identity” (33, 34). Nevertheless, his declaration that Ruth Wisse’s construction of a Jewish canon “subdues everything that is ambiguous and impure” creates the opportunity for me to present my specific approach: bifocality. Although his use of “cosmopolitan” raises another specter, the specter of literary modernism, he means to present himself as an interpreter of cultures rather than as a legislator.

Ranen Omer-Sherman's work to Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) exemplifies well the type of approach used in this dissertation. Without using bifocality, Omer-Sherman insists on Lazarus' ability to occupy two identities at the same time. Using Du Bois' double consciousness, Omer-Sherman insists on the American aspects of Lazarus' writings. She never thought of herself as anything other than American, first and foremost. She and Sholem Rabinowitz or Aleichem (1859-1916), though more or less contemporaries--Rabinowitz even lived the last twenty years of his life in New York—chose nevertheless completely different paths when it came to dealing with their Jewish identity in relationship with their modern-day citizenship. Rabinowitz wrote almost exclusively about Jewish culture and Lazarus lived as an American and wrote mostly about American culture.

Within the central, mythic, coherent understanding of Jewish literature, where Israel-or-Diaspora master narratives reign supreme, every choice transforms into a declaration of alliance with the master-narratives or a rejection of them. Omer-Sherman asserts, for example, that for American writers, "The American republic, not Palestine, was the true fulfillment of the prophet's dream" (meaning the dream of return to the homeland) (64). In the next chapter, I will outline the Jewish master narratives and their development in the nineteenth century. Before I do, I will focus for a moment on Emma Lazarus whom I have mentioned several times throughout this and the first chapter.

(5) The Case of Emma Lazarus, Best Known "Ethnic" Jew

Emma Lazarus represents an interesting case study because she is accepted generally as a writer privileged enough to have set aside her Jewish identity and have lived an assimilated American life. It is generally supposed that she belongs to an American literature canon more so than she does to a mainstream Jewish one. A closer look, however, reveals a writer whose Judaism was never far from her consciousness. Bifocal approaches and other approaches "celebrating impurity," as Cheyette calls them, benefit Lazarus scholarship since it allows her subdued Jewish content to appear more easily. Like other assimilated Jews who had participated in dominant culture, she, too, felt a small current of tension accompanying her life and her work. Though not precisely similar to later writers who experienced this more acutely, she nevertheless and to a large degree negotiated dominant culture through a veil of Jewishness. Arguably, Du Bois would approve of her life choices considering that she tried to manage her relationship with mainstream culture despite the veil. The veil could potentially obstruct the view also of the dominant culture attempting to look at the minority figure in addition to it obstructing the view of the minority figure looking out. Lazarus, her life indicates, tried to balance both of these. She presented herself in an American mainstream environment, demanding to be heard as an equal. She would not allow people like Ralph Waldo Emerson to ignore her. And though he does refer to her as the "Jewess" in a few of his letters, he also accepted her into his home. Lazarus' insistence testifies to her ability to demand that people around her get to know her despite their possible prejudices, which are based on the image reflected back from her Jewish identity.

Though my study focuses on first-generation immigrant writers, I have always found Lazarus' life especially poignant within the American conversation. Especially significant is her quasi-regular appearance among mainstream anthologies like the Norton. In 1874, Emerson left Lazarus out of a poetry collection he published called *Parnassus*. Most recently, Ester Schor published her simply named *Emma Lazarus* (2005), the most comprehensive biographical account of her life. She describes how this omission brought an abrupt end to a correspondence between the two of them (Schor 301). Leslie Pockel added her "New Colossus" in a collection aptly named, *100 Essential American Poems* (2009). Lazarus would be pleased to know that at least now she is widely used in anthologies such as these and the Norton. She negotiated the two identities in a way that signaled the beginning of a great transformation in American literature, according to Schor. She argues that Lazarus did nothing less than mark "a watershed in the definition of American culture, which was ceasing to be defined by the Concord heirs of the Puritans… [and was becoming] an amalgamation of colliding cultures, regions, and classes" (64). A different way of explaining Lazarus' contribution is to stress that she was among very few Jewish-Americans "capable of viewing her vocation as an American poet as a birthright," but without relinquishing her connection to her ethnic identity (65).

Consequent immigration dropped over her an additional veil, one that stressed a double-consciousness for Jews and that obstructed Jewish life from mainstream Americans, making them seem unknowable. Lazarus' work (and other integrated, American-born Jews of her generation) found themselves defined by Ashkenazi-immigrant culture and by emerging nationalist-literary ideas. For years to come, critics

(Jewish as well as mainstream) would inevitably read her through such a lens; Ranen Omer-Sherman explains, "[t]here were years in which the Jewish poet Emma Lazarus came close to transcending her eventual canonical fate as a marginal figure in America's Protestant literary culture" (Diaspora and Zionism 49). The generally limited approaches taken in reading her can be explained by the general inability to employ what Omer-Sherman calls "imaginative responses" to her dual identity. The responses necessarily meant looking closely and realizing that for her, the two identities coexisted in a relatively peaceful manner. The great change from modernism to postmodernism was the change from accepting a unifying national vision for literature to accepting products where multiple visions and multi-cultural perspectives are visible. Theoretical moves of that kind, like bifocality have made it possible to understand Lazarus as both an American mainstream poet and a Jewish one.

There is no reason to continue viewing her position inside of Jewish-American history as uncertain. She saw herself belonging in America and she wrote about issues concerning Jews. It was after her death that her sister, Josephine Lazarus, began to fashion her sister's memory. After Emma's death, Josephine strove to ensure that her sister's place in an American canon. At a time when the American literary establishment concerned itself with defining insiders and outsiders, Josephine wanted to ensure her sister be remembered as an insiders. Schor criticizes Josephine for offering "her mainstream readership a decidedly Christian narrative of her saintly sister's life" (247). It was also Josephine who published a collection of her sister's poetry and decided to separate the Jewish themed-poems from others: specifically she divided them into "narratives, lyrics, dramatic" poems in volume one and kept all the

Jewish-themed poems for volume two. Josephine even went so far as to argue that before the immigration of poor, suffering Jews from Europe during the latter years of the nineteenth century, also Lazarus' last years of life, she had no interest in Judaism at all which, as Schor also says, "was patently untrue" (246). Is it any wonder, therefore, that as Omer-Sherman describes: "[a]long late twentieth century scholars, Lazarus's role in Jewish-American history remains uncertain" (49)? She insisted that, as she wrote in the margins of her copy of *Epistles to the Hebrews*, "[t]here is not the slightest necessity for an American Jew, the free citizen of the republic, to rest his hopes upon the foundation of any other nationality" (Diaspora and Zionism 56). She meant that there was no reason for a Jewish person to go anywhere else. She translated poetry from Hebrew as a young woman and as the case will be with many other Zionists, she later supported a Jewish homeland for her East-European brothers and sisters. She never felt that she belonged anywhere other than the United States.

Schor emphasized her American identity by showing that she preferred Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Longfellow over Shalom Rabinowitz or Mendele Mocher Sefarim (15). She and her sisters received an education that matched their social position, including studies of Latin, Italian, and German. The family also possessed a large library of books that included such authors as Edgar Allan Poe, Alexander Dumas, and others (Schor 15). Schor describes Lazarus' secular or non-practicing Jewish life by pointing to the fact that she visited literary salons rather than the synagogue on Friday nights (40). At the same time, she points to the fact that Lazarus studied Hebrew as a young woman. She knew Hebrew well enough to

translate works by Yehuda Ha Levi, a twelfth-century Jewish poet (among others). The two identities lived in her as a complex matrix of intersecting moments.

It is useful to reiterate that Josephine's campaign to have her sister be remembered as an American poet through minimalizing her Jewish identity was based on a literary discourse seeking an authentic literary American voice, a discussion that included the issue of language. National literary belonging was understood to lie in language as well as in subject matter. In September 1815, Walter Channing wrote in the *North American Review* that the connections between nations in modern times, are so "multiplied, that intellectual originality may justly be regarded as one of the greatest phenomena in nature" (Brickhouse 15). Channing was linking intellectual originality, which he highly valued, with modern reality standing in its way: multi-cultural influences. How were her contemporaries and twentieth century scholars inheriting this overall approach to understand Emma Lazarus in light of such rhetoric? She was an American who wrote in English. But there was also the Jewess who dabbled with Hebrew. Channing proceeds to criticize the "bareness" of American national literature and has this to say about a national language: "National literature seems to be the product, the legitimate product, of a national language" (15). Americans had a linguistic inheritance from their "mother country," England, but they sought to use it to create a unique American voice.

Dabbling in Hebrew, as Lazarus did, was evidence of her solidarity with a different national group. Critics working mainly with the dominant culture and Jewish critics working mainly with Jewish culture would have to decide where to place Lazarus. Josephine made a decision that impacted how her sister was read for years.

Judaism was dead to Lazarus, she wrote, just as Hebrew had been a dead language for centuries. Why would Jewish intellectuals searching for authentic Jewish voices, look toward Emma Lazarus? There was no reason to consider her at all as part of the developing national literature. She did not work toward renewing Hebrew nor did she speak Yiddish, two languages at the epicenter of the national literary discussion.[47] At any rate, Yiddish was considered a low form of street language which women used mainly to correspond with family and to make grocery lists; and every other language was a foreign, inauthentic medium for Jewish literature per se (including English). Taking their example from American and European discourse over national coherence, there were dominant voices in the Jewish movement that insisted on Palestine and on Hebrew as the soul legitimate sources for a national revival equal to those they observed occurring in their "mother countries" in Europe.

But Hebrew, revived during the *Haskala*, still had relatively few followers around the world. Years later, Emmanuel Levinas wrote of Hebrew: "Here is a living, modern language, but one whose birth was a resurrection, a raising up from the depths of Scriptures, a life emerging from the frozen swirl of letters fixing oral discussion and traditions" ("Poetry and Resurrection: Notes on Agnon" 8). The idea of a fixed language holding in its grasp the whole tradition is literarily and metaphorically the point. The stress forever is on the static nature of that language upon which the whole tradition is established. T.S. Eliot, in his efforts to move away from his predecessors did not need to worry about resurrecting English. He had to focus on using it in new

[47] Instead of creating original Hebrew works, such translations magnify cultural cosmopolitanism or multiplicity by allowing English, a foreign language, to interact with the Hebrew. The emergent advocates for Hebrew would ask why Lazarus did not translate Longfellow into Hebrew or why she did not use her knowledge of Hebrew to further Jewish nationalism by writing Hebrew poetry

ways in order to evoke ideas in new ways. The language was there, seemingly stable. By contrast, writing in Modern Hebrew at the turn of the twentieth century meant you had to deal with both resurrecting it and learning new ways to utilize it.

Emmanuel Levinas expresses that sense of double danger well, the need to deal with renewing a language as well as wanting to join mainstream modernity that prided itself on defying old literary conventions. Levinas asks a poignant question in regards to S. Y. Agnon's Hebrew literature[48]: "There is an ambiguity or an enigma about the Hebrew word. Long before Agnon, this was one of the resources of the *melitsah*: the sentence would use biblical turns of phrase, achieving a rhetorical effect…" (9). [49] How can you understand the new secular literature developing and growing quickly when the original biblical language was ancient, its connotations half mysterious? Then, adding to it a new set of resonances in the making fills Levinas with a sense of wonder. His essay articulates his struggle to grasp the enormity of the cultural task. For Levinas, nothing less than a "breaking-away from a certain ontology" occurs at such a juncture (9). The very nature of knowing what it might mean to exist in a world alters with this linguistic shift. He is enamored with the ability to create complex poetic possibilities in this uncertain, paradigm shifting linguistic challenge. Because achieving a complex, highbrow literary creation under such circumstances is so difficult, Levinas admires Agnon since Agnon's use of Modern Hebrew is as ground breaking as James Joyce's or Virginia Woolf's is in English. Further, he asks:

[48] The official site of the Nobel Prize offers a basic, comprehensive biography of Agnon. Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888-1970) received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966 (http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1966/agnon-bio.html)

[49] The translator here translates this as the "turn of phrase." I would add, the layering of meaning possible as in poetic language, by using a single word which can raise different cultural meaning.

> Does Agnon belong to the world of the Jewish tradition to which the best-known and most admired part of his work is devoted? Or does he, on the contrary, bear witness to the breakdown, the end of that world, and consequently (to use an already popular phrase) is he 'seized by the anguish of the modern world?' (8)

Is the literature he wrote trapped in the earlier ancient literature, resisting modern impulses in order to break with older traditions or, asks Levinas, is Agnon using Hebrew in a new fashion, struggling with its complex historical antecedents in an attempt to break out and recreate it?

Emma Lazarus never attempted to embrace Hebrew other than as an academic exercise while studying it as a young woman. English was her native language and it worked well both for Jewish and for mainstream poetic purposes. Is it any wonder that as Omer-Sherman argues, it takes imaginative responses to understand her part in a Jewish literary tradition considering that the last eighty-odd years have been dominated by a literary nationalist-view? Embracing Hebrew, Levinas argued, meant delving into such Jewish depths, such that it can define anew the very meaning of Hebrew written language. Lazarus waded into those depths. She connected but preferred to belong to the English part of the equation, the part counted as foreign to Jewish literary aspirations. Resurrected Hebrew was beautiful. Reading S.Y. Agnon and some of his contemporaries can only be equated, in my mind, with the first time that I read Woolf or Joyce. There is a deep sense of wonder at what language can make you see and feel. That sense of wonder felt by early nationalists caused them to turn their attentions to those creations in Hebrew and writers like Lazarus who

expressed their relationship to Judaism in English were left behind. When the primary lens became, and this happened rather quickly in the nationalist movement, Hebrew literature or Yiddish literature like Rabinowitz's, then there were no tools left to help deal with English writers like Lazarus.

Lazarus' roots were planted firmly in the United States. From her father's side of the family, Lazarus was fifth generation, from a large Sephardic family whose ancestors arrived in the mid-seventeenth century (Schor 5). Her mother emigrated from Germany from whence Jews began emigrating early in the nineteenth century. Her family had been involved in trade in the United States, then part of mainstream life for generations. A relative, Moses Seixes, had even written and gotten a response from George Washington on the occasion of his visit to the Touro Synagogue in New Port, Rhode Island in 1790.[50] In the letter, he echoed Lazarus' sentiments in her *Epistles*:

> Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty […] behold the Government, erected by the Majesty of the people—a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance—but generously affording all Liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship… (Schor 7)

Her family's dedication and outspokenness in defense of the community had been a legacy that she continued. In 1867, at the age of eighteen, she wrote a poem responding to Longfellows' 1854 poem, "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" (Schor 17). Longfellow had written it at a time when the Newport Jewish community had

[50] The Touro Synagogue is the oldest, still operating synagogue in the United. It was built in 1764 and stands still on its original site in Newport, Rhode Island. See tourosynagogue.org.

dwindled. His poem relegates Jews in America to the past ("… all the great traditions of the Past") (Schor 17). Lazarus, who spent summers often in Newport in her family's home there, knew the Touro synagogue and knew her family's connection to it. In her response she answered his declaration that the "backward" Jews are now just a "[l]egend" and were now "dead" (Schor 17). "In the Jewish synagogue in Newport" she describes a visit where her "footsteps have a strange and unnatural sound" raising "mournful echoes through the empty hall" (Eiselein 49).

At first glance, Lazarus seems to concur with Longfellow's sense of an impeding end to the tradition. The last stanza alludes to this end, yet replaces it with a sense that holiness remains. While she knows the synagogue has generally been deserted, she seems also to exhibit a strong reverence for it. Her poem offers in place of Longfellow's dismissive sense that the synagogue "shall never rise again," the following (Schor 17):

> Nathless the sacred shrine is holy yet,
> With its lone floors where reverent feet once trod.
> Take off your shoes as by the burning bush,
> Before the mystery of death and God. (Eiselein 51)

Schor describes the sense of reverence and devotion as a "residual aura of devotion" (19). She calls Lazarus' demand for respect at a site she deems the site of the burning bush (*Exodus* 3.5), a "startling demand" because of her assumed "indifference to prayer" (19). What Schor cannot reconcile is Lazarus' overall secularism and assimilationism with the tremendous sense of awe that she relates in the poem. Schor retreats into a kind of bifurcated view of Lazarus' American identity versus her Jewish

identity. Why could Lazarus not have appreciated her heritage deeply and at the same time that she chose not to participate in the religious traditions? With lapses such as these in her otherwise extensive biography, Schor disproves her own claim that Lazarus is no longer such a riddle. As Omer-Sherman has observed, there is still a sense that critics are not always sure what to make of her. Such poetry, demonstrating her reverence for Judaism or at least for her Jewish ancestry is still a far cry from the type of nationalist rhetoric that later became the defining attribute for Jewish literary belonging.

Lazarus is a riddle also because it is difficult to talk about someone who immersed themselves in dominant American culture. The fact that she wrote "The New Colossus," identifying so closely with American culture, only furthers the confusion. The two seem out of joint. Either she wrote the poem or she wrote Jewish literature. How do you talk about a person who did both? The poem, adorning The Statue of Liberty since 1886, contains one of the most quintessentially American declarations. These words meet the many visitors to "The Statue of Liberty":

> "Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door!..."

More than any other words, poetic or otherwise, Lazarus' have become synonymous with one of America's most enduring myths, the myth of welcoming the oppressed and homeless with open arms into freedom. With these words she echoes those of her

uncle in his letter of address to George Washington. It is interesting to note that the words float, detached from the general context of the poem, yet are presented in quotation marks. The words, as the use of quotation marks show, are in the process of being spoken at that moment, but by whom? It remains unclear. The speaker or speakers are absent. At the moment of their absence, however, they become apparent. The assumption is that representatives of the United States share in uttering the words. It is a way of naturalizing, of assuming something to be so basic, so much a given, that there is no need to mention it. Not mentioning it exposes the system in which it lives. At the moment of the utterance, the speaker is an American as if such a national category exists in an authentic, American form.

Assimilating themselves into the collective, invisible "we" was one way for minorities to gain a sense of belonging inside the American nation. From Emma Lazarus to later generations of writers, writers would be judged by the ways that chose to navigate that belonging in relation to both Jewish and American cultures. The picture will become more complicated still, however, when later Jewish nationalism enters the ideological conversation concerning assimilation possibilities or even concerning the desirability of assimilation. Lazarus lived on the cusp. She wrote at a time immediately before the nationalist conversation entered fully into the literary arena. The genuine marvel at Hebrew literature's possibilities, the genuine excitement over national revival, colored not only the literature that was to come but also retroactively infiltrated the ways that we read writers like her. Bifocal possibilities, celebrations of cosmopolitan impurities, then, allow us to slowly retrace our steps in order to reexamine the writers who were trampled under that earlier fervor.

Chapter 3

The Promised Land, *Daniel Deronda*, and American Zionist Realities

Though born only a few decades apart, the experiences of Emma Lazarus and Mary Antin as Jews in Gentile culture were profoundly different. Lazarus was born and grew up in New York during a relatively tolerant time and to a wealthy family. She felt equally at ease in the exclusive, upper-class, literary salons as she did in the Reform Temple. By the time that a Jewish nationalist conversation began in earnest in Europe, she was already an adult; by the time the conversation reached the shores of the United States, she was gone (Lazarus died in 1887). Had she lived twenty years longer, she would have had to endure, as Antin did, constant reminders that her responsibilities were to Jewish people's national unity. In contrast, Antin grew up in the Russian Pale, where she experienced poverty and anti-Semitism. Following a long period in which her parents were ill, the family immigrated to America. At the very age that she wanted nothing more than to assimilate into American society, Zionists were declaring that she had to choose loyalty to Jewish nationalism over assimilation. Is it any wonder, therefore, that Antin's famous autobiography also contains a strong rejection of Zionist anti-assimilationist rhetoric?

As if it were not difficult enough to achieve her dream, that of assimilating into American society, Antin's life was made more difficult by Zionist arguments that Jewish assimilation into mainstream western societies was a mistake. There were

Zionists who adamantly held that there was no place for Jews among the *Goyim*, or non-Jews, as Jacob Klatzkin argued in "Assimilation is Possible." "Assimilation" was published in 1914 under the title *Boundaries* (תחומים).[51] Echoing the rhetoric of the time, Klatzkin was convinced that Jews must remove themselves from the midst of non-Jews and congregate elsewhere. As he bluntly put it, "the Judaism of the Galut [of the Diaspora] is not worthy of survival" because it will distort and corrupt Jewish national character. He went further still, arguing that continued existence in Diaspora will corrupt "our human character and dignity" (322, 323). Klatzkin's warnings against *Galut* involvement of Jews in non-Jewish life did not sit well with Antin, for whom assimilation was an all-consuming goal. It is important to remember, moreover, that Antin was among many other Jews in the United States, in Europe, and elsewhere, who were dissatisfied with rhetoric such as Klatzkin's.

Therefore, while it appears as if her autobiography, *The Promised Land* (1912), deals with American assimilationist rhetoric, she is in addition participating in a Jewish world-wide conversation during that time. Antin's popular autobiography managed to send messages simultaneously to her American-born readers arguing for her successful assimilation and to her Zionist readers voicing her rejection of ideas such as Klatzkin's. Her book does not shy away from declaring her love affair with American culture. Equally it does avoid engaging the Zionist arguments of her day, arguments that continued well beyond her lifetime. Antin does not offer her response to Zionism on the surface level of her narrative; the narrative is dedicated to her assimilation. Her response is found in the scaffolding of her narrative, in everything

[51] The definition of *Goyim* is "nations." It comes from the Hebrew. In the Bible is used to mean nation or nations, yet it was adopted into Yiddish to mean "Gentiles" or non-Jews.

from her chapter titles to her metaphors. Mostly, however, as I will show, it is found in the examples that she uses to argue that she has been assimilated. What is easy to overlook in the narrative is that underneath the surface lies a direct response to Zionist ideology. Her response operates simultaneously with her American assimilation narrative. *The Promised Land* looks in two directions at once, engaging both American and Jewish concerns of her day.

The two epistemological systems that she undertakes to include create an unresolvable tension, exemplifying what Du Bois meant when he explained that dual identities resulted in a trauma to the person in which the tension gathers (Du bois saw the doubling as both a trauma and as a gift meanwhile Antin saw only trauma). He describes it as a "peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (45). The tension for her resides in the incongruity between viewing herself through American eyes as a Jew and viewing herself through Zionist eyes as an assimilationist. The tension can be observed in her work in her sympathetic description of her early life in the Russian Pale and her dismissal of it, presenting it as a dead past that she gladly relinquishes. Antin is aware of the tension and even of the doubling that it creates: she describes Jewish existence in Russia as split into a "dual conscience," which she terms a "spiritual deformity" (23). Trying to survive in the Russian Pale while retaining one's Jewish core was difficult; it left "you wondering that the Russian Jews have not lost all semblances to humanity," she writes (23).

Her autobiography begins by describing a fissured consciousness, a result of survival tactics undertaken under harsh discriminatory Russian practices. The conceit

that her readers are to accept is that Americanization solved the tension, relieving it by allowing her assimilation. What emerges, instead, is a woman who tried to heal her double consciousness "deformity" by surgically removing the Jewish part of her identity.

Perhaps for that reason contemporary reviewers compared her to a diversity of writers from Jacob Riis to W.E.B. Du Bois (Sollors xxxii). One can hardly imagine, however, Du Bois being satisfied with her autobiography. Although the "dual conscience" that she speaks of is comparable to Du Bois' double consciousness, unlike Du Bois, she relinquishes her hyphenated identity for an unhyphenated one (*Promised Land* 23). The unhyphenated identity she constructs adheres to the image Americans taught her to admire, an image that relied on demeaning her Jewish identity. In Russia, the identity reflected back to her was the way non-Jews saw her, as a pariah. In the United States, the reflection was a participant in American civil life, which, in fact, she was. One could argue that she never achieved what Du Bois hoped for, a reconciliation of the two identities within a unified self.

Critics have long since identified assimilation into American mainstream society as the main theme dominating Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912). A secondary, yet major goal of this best-seller was keeping American borders open for immigration at a time when restrictions were being implemented. Her own immigration experience retold in the book provided evidence in support of her successful attainment of this goal. As is well known, she emphasized that her assimilation had succeeded to such a degree that it is as if she had been physically

reborn. Accordingly, articles and books written about her tend to utilize phrases such as "successful assimilation" and "Americanization."

Critics are drawn to the powerful words with which she opens *The Promised Land*: "I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over" (1). [52] She adds, "I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell" (1). Werner Sollors begins his introduction to the autobiography's Penguin edition (1997) by addressing the dramatic declaration. He calls it "the psychological chronicle of the spiritual development of a religious child who … becomes a freethinking student of nature" and a "sociological account of the transformation of an East-European Jewish immigrant into an American citizen…" (xii-xiii). His comments raise several questions: Why must this religious child experience a death in order to develop? How does her insistence on her Americanization, at the cost of her Judaism, free her? Why does she understand the transformation into an American citizen in such absolute terms? Antin's account differs from those of Cahan and Yezierska in substantial ways, beginning with the fact that she idealized America, and that she dramatized her transformation in almost absolute terms.

Antin's narrative moves quickly through the stages which have become conventional in early twentieth-century assimilation accounts. The formula calls for reiteration of the terrible circumstances back in Europe, arrival on American shores, which signals salvation; and a process in which the immigrant sheds old-world,

[52] For recent examples see the two articles used here: Nancy Miller's "I Killed My Grandmother" (2007) (321); Jolie Sheffer's "Recollecting, Repeating, and Walking Through: Immigration, Trauma" (2010) (141).

"backwards" ways in favor of American modern life. One need only remember the countless photos, films, and stories, all of which reproduce the image of the European immigrant gazing from a ship to the Statue of Liberty. The image has come to be accepted as a quintessential one for the proverbial nineteenth-century immigrant. Antin's autobiography stands out as the most idealized version of this convention especially when compared with other famous Jewish accounts including Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky,* Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers,* or Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*.[53]

For this reason, Antin might appear the least likely to be brought into a bifocal, transnational analysis. What could Mary Antin's assimilation narrative possibly have to say to the Jewish-nationalist literary conversation developing at the time, one might ask? Her narrative focuses on American literary conventions, from Harriet Beecher Stowe-like insistence on domestic values to vocal adoration of American democratic promises. There appears little relationship between Antin's work and the works of contemporary Jewish writers who discuss Jewish nationalism or Jewish literary developments in the wake of its evolving paradigms.

A closer look at Antin's rhetoric, however, reveals that her work actively engaged questions regarding possible relationships with a literary mainstream and a Jewish literary tradition. American-Jewish reactions to her work show that she was not exempt from being viewed as part of the conversation of her day. Simply put, Jewish intellectuals would not have displayed such strong reactions to her work if they did not

[53] Abe Cahan's *Rise of David Levinsky* is not autobiographical. Nevertheless, it reflects Cahan's personal experiences with the people around him in the Jewish ghetto. Here and there, Levinsky's experiences are drawn from Cahan's life. Yezierska's *Bread Givers* especially is considered semi-autobiographical.

find it directly relevant to their ideology. A bifocal view of her work requires, for that reason, a Jewish literary contextualization alongside an American one. Antin continually insisted she inherited and connected to American culture. By contrast, Chaim Nachman Bialik, one of the most influential Zionist poets and intellectuals of his day, lamented in 1911 that he had no Hebrew language, no literary, secular tradition on which to layer his own contributions. [54] Secular Jewish literature had not existed in any organized form, by this time, for just over seven hundred years. By way of responding to him, Antin lists American writers who had inspired her. In essence, she argued that all Bialik had to do was let go of his search for a Jewish literary tradition since there were so many other available ones he could draw on.

The most direct challenge to Zionist arguments can be found in Antin's title, *The Promised Land.* At a time when Zionist discourse increasingly stressed transforming the metaphorical homeland into a physical and political reality, Antin utilizes Zion as a metaphor for her place inside the American nation. That alone dismissed Klatzkin's brand of Zionism. For him and his co-nationalists, Zion had to be rescued from its metaphorical status and made into a political reality. For this reason, it becomes useful to compare what Antin does in her book with George Eliot's account of Jewish national sensibilities in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). *Deronda*, a proto-Zionist novel, embraced a conversation already beginning to fill the intellectual ether at the time it was written, that of a Jewish national return to a physical home at a time when

[54] Bialik (1874-1934) is Israel's national poet. His poems are studied in Israeli schools. I have been given, after the birth of my children, at least two different collections of his children's poetry. My grandmother, my father, I, and my children all grow up with these poems. His influence on the Jewish literary scene, therefore, cannot be overestimated.

Jews in Europe were more assimilated than ever before.[55] Regardless of whether Antin read *Deronda* or not, her autobiography could not be more diametrically opposed to the argument in it. [56] Deronda's story represents in its purest form the kind of Zionist return to a full national embrace of one's identity even if one is completely assimilated. The works epitomize the two most extreme and therefore opposing responses to Jewish nationalism.

Reviewing *Deronda's* reception among Jewish critics will explain why *The Promised Land* is taken to belong squarely in an American literary context, an ethnic hyphenated one. The comparison will emphasize the narratives' diametrically opposed nationalist trajectories in order to highlight the ways that the two nonetheless reach similar conclusions in regard to Jews in non-Jewish societies. The comparison will show that Eliot managed to create a liminal space, a third space where the Jew and the English share the English space, even if that moment is fleeting. Eliot removes Deronda from England, sending him to help his Jewish brothers and sisters in Palestine. The romance, though it is temporary, presents the possibility for a shared space in an extended manner, which is more than Antin can imagine in her autobiography.

The following section, section two, illustrates the ways in which Antin dismantles Zionist discourse in a systematic, if subterranean fashion. The third section compares Antin's autobiography with Eliot's *Deronda* in order to emphasize the

[55] There have always been individuals who wrote about and longed for Jerusalem. Moses Hess published in 1862 a collection that signaled the conversation that Political Zionists will engage in later in the century. *Deronda* in 1867 was one of the first literary examples of what would become Political Zionism (see Arthur Herzberg's *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*).

[56] And I have not been able to discover if she had in fact read it or not. The novel was not widely read in the United States. We know Emma Lazarus read it (see Esther Schor's *Emma Lazarus p.* 62-3).

extent to which her book can be read in opposition to quintessential Zionist narratives. The fourth and final section reviews briefly Zionist nationalist literary conversations in Antin's time and afterwards in order to more precisely situate Antin inside a specifically Zionist framework. The review ventures beyond 1912 in order to stress the transnational kind of Jewish-literary trajectory that her book foresaw.

(2) Reading Assimilation

Antin's assertion in her autobiography that she had assimilated into American culture was extremely well received at the time. Evelyn Salz, in her introduction to a collection of Mary Antin's letters (2000), begins with Theodore Roosevelt's declaration that she was "an American in whom [he] deeply" believed and that he "should be sorry" not to include a photograph of her, an "ideal American," in an autobiography he was planning at the time. It was, Salz continues, "the pinnacle of Mary Antin's successful assimilation and recognition as a noted American autobiographer" (xiii). After the book's tremendous success, Antin became a much sought-after lecturer. She was sought after to such an extent that she found it necessary to pay an agency to manage all the requests coming in for personal appearances and lectures. The subject of her lectures was mainly her successful assimilation, but also included advocacy of immigration reform.

Yet, *The Promised Land* is filled with her old traumas from her Russian home. In her discussion of Antin's work, "The Jewish Ghetto and the Americanization of Space" (2010), Maria Karafilis reminds her readers about restrictive immigration policies, including the 1911 Dillingham Commission report, "which told a story of

degeneration and decline in the quality of the newcomers" from places such as Eastern Europe (129). Karafilis focuses on the character of Miss Dillingham, Antin's idealized school teacher. Antin named her teacher after the commission report in order to rewrite its negative spirit using a positive figure. Mrs. Dillingham believed in immigrant students and in their potential. She was never discouraged by her students' difficulties and was always ready with a smile: "It was her way to say only a little, and look at me, and trust me to understand" (168). Antin uses the name Dillingham to rewrite the original, lengthy commission report filled with anti-immigrant sentiments by presenting her readers with a teacher who uses love instead of exclusionary tactics.

Karafilis' central argument is that Antin used the autobiography to blur the boundaries "between the ghetto and other spaces of the city, complicating the direct relationship often posited between the space a body occupies and the sociopolitical identity assigned to that body" (130). Karafilis helpfully uses the image of Antin's body because it is Antin who claims to have been reborn, suggesting that her body has undergone a change. Key here is Antin's argument that the Jewish body can turn into an American one. Her argument, involved more than rewriting her idea in relation to its physical surroundings (i.e. immigrant neighborhoods in Boston). It involved describing in fiction a physical space and a physical existence that needed to be translated and transformed in her readers' imaginations into a different body removed from immigrant space. The reassignment meant to simplify for her readers her claim to Americanization by severing the foreign element in her body from her newly acquired American identity.

In “Recollecting, Repeating, and Walking Through: Immigration, Trauma” (2010), Jolie Sheffer develops further the death-and-rebirth theme when she notices Antin’s emphasis on death rather than rebirth. Her essay shows that “*The Promised Land’*s rosy-hued vision of America as a paradigmatic example of the assimilation narrative,” conceals what lies beneath it. Specifically, it hides a “traumatic break created by immigration” (141). My interest in this autobiography begins with this point. Critics agree that she aimed to advocate for immigrants’ potential to assimilate. Nevertheless, the sheer number of pages dedicated to sympathetically and sadly describing life in Russia leaves the reader feeling that young Mary is traumatized and that her past continues to haunt her. It leaves an opening for understanding her book as more preoccupied with her past than has been previously acknowledged. Her immigration experience has more to do with the tragedy of change than she admits.

In the provocatively titled “I Killed My Grandmother,” (2007), Nancy Miller explicates Antin’s trauma further by delving into the possible meanings behind the three names through which Mary navigates in her autobiography: Malke, Mashke, and Mary. Miller observed that in Antin’s earlier manuscript, written in her late teens, she called herself “Malke,” while in the later manuscript she uses “Mashke.” “Why this change from the manuscript to the published text?” asks Miller (325). In the final, published work, Antin describes Mashke as her Hebrew name. It was Hana Wirth-Nesher who pointed out in *Call It English* (2006), the obvious, namely that Mashke was her Yiddish, not her Hebrew name, which was Malke. Why does Antin use Mashke in the final version, while mis-identifying it as Hebrew? (70). Why, since she clearly knew the difference, did she need this misdirection? Miller answers by noticing

that the change presents Antin "as *already* Russianized," which in turn would position her to be better Americanized, "rather than being identified by the name closer to her origins" (325). Antin felt that the Hebrew sound would alienate her readers. A more "*goyish*" or non-Jewish name would position her one step closer to acceptance by non-Jews inside a non-Jewish context. But why position herself as the Russian in this small way even though she shared her Jewish experiences in Russia in the opening chapters of the autobiography? In what way would it benefit her argument for successful assimilation?

The answer to this seemingly trivial detail regarding her name highlights the way Antin understood the mainstream American conception of Jewish identity as well as her response to Zionist ideology. Antin assumed that her non-Jewish, American readers would agree that Jewish and American identities did not overlap. They would respond to melting-pot ideology where the immigrant is made-over into an Anglo-American. Pretending that her Yiddish name (Mashke) is her Hebrew name seemed to her to further that goal. Meanwhile, displacing her Hebrew name contradicted a movement that encouraged Jews to adopt their Hebrew names instead of their Yiddish or otherwise non-Jewish names. For example, Sholem Rabinowitz adopted the pen name Sholem Aleichem (peace be upon you) and Sholem Abramovich adopted the pen name Mendele Mocher Sefarim (Mendel the book seller). Mary preferred, as other Jews did at the time, to anglicize her name to help her blend in with her American-born counterparts. Mary was given two names, as was often the case (a tradition followed also in certain Jewish-American communities today). She received a Hebrew name, which she used mainly in religious-specific rituals. Upon marriage, for

example, the rabbi would refer to the couple using their Hebrew names. Their marriage contract or *Ktuba* would often record their Hebrew names. In her day to day interactions, however, her Yiddish name would be used.

In any case, Mary Antin, was born Mashke or Malke in 1881. She arrived with her mother and siblings in Boston in 1894, three years after her father made the trip alone to get established. “We crept,” she describes, “nearer and nearer to the coveted shore, until, on a glorious May morning…our eyes beheld the Promised Land, and my father received us in his arms” (142). In America she felt that “she grew all the faster,” in opposition to Russia where she was “so cramped” (151). “The [Russian] world,” she explains, “was divided into Jews and Gentiles” (8). “This knowledge came so gradually that it could not shock me,” she adds (8). From an early age she was aware of the limitations placed upon her family and her community. Russia was divided by an invisible line, a line as effective as a physical border-line (the Pale and the rest of Russia): “There was no time in my life when I did not hear and see and feel the truth—the reason why Polotzk was cut off from the rest of Russia. It was the first lesson a little girl in Polotzk had to learn… We must not be outside the Pale because we were Jews” (7). But in Boston she thrived. Embracing the name Mary over her previous names expressed that freedom, as did cutting away the doubling she had felt before, a doubling that multiple names (such as Mashke, Malke, and Mary) represented.

When she discovered Hale House, Boston’s settlement house at the time, she took full advantage. She became acquainted with Dr. and Mrs. Hale personally and she joined classes such as the nature society, a class where young women were able to learn a natural science, a subject that a traditional Jewish education would not allow

(certainly to women). As a smart, talented youngster, she counted among her acquaintances other prominent Bostonians and New-Yorkers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, such as Josephine Lazarus (Emma's sister) and the philanthropic Bostonian Hechts. She corresponded with legendary Jewish-English journalist, author, playwright and Zionist activist Israel Zangwill, who was also persuaded to write the forward to her earlier *From Polotzk to Boston* and to the later, expanded *Promised Land*.[57] He made sure to keep in contact with American social services and Jewish immigrant-help organizations in the big cities. One such connection brought to his attention some letters written by Antin. Zangwill was moved, according to Meri-Jane Rochelson, by her description of her life back in Russia and in Boston (21). Her cordial correspondence with him culminated with a meeting on one of his trips to the United States. They met in the home of Philip Cowen, editor of the *American Hebrew* (and a man who also knew the Lazarus sisters, Emma and Josephine) (Rochelson 152).[58]

[57] Meri-Jane Rochelson describes how his fiction appeared in periodicals in the United States in journals like *Cosmopolitan, Atlantic,* and *Harper's* all around the turn of the century (35).

[58] Zangwill's ideas over Jewish nationalism were his own. He began by joining Herzl's movement but broke off to develop a separate organization. Max Nordau, a colleague of Theodor Herzl's, introduced Herzl and Zangwill in 1895. Zangwill joined the cause, but later separated himself from him when he begun to consider for relocation areas in the world other than Palestine. He helped thousands of Jews to immigrate to the United States and established the ITO, the International Territorial Organization in an effort to save Jews from East Europe. Zangwill was famous, and that fame helped him push a Jewish national cause. He was able, for example, to introduce Herzl to other famous or rich (or both) Jewish-English families. The New York performance of his play, *The Melting Pot,* a play about a Jewish-Russian survivor of the 1905 Kiev pogroms who immigrated to the United States, was a hit. [58] Rochelson notes that Bernard Shaw attended the play's London showing. In the United States, critical reviews of his plays were less positive. They were called sentimental and too ideologically belligerent. Everyone reacted well, however, to Zangwill's flattering portrait of America as the home of the free. Theodore Roosevelt attended one of the performances in the United States. Advertisements proudly pronounced that he had enjoyed the play (Rochelson 181).

It is not clear what to make of Zangwill's support of Antin. He became famous as a Jewish-English author writing about Jewish matters, about Jews in Russia, in England, and the United States. It is there that the connection must have been the strongest. It was his concern particularly with Russian immigrants' plight and with the importance of English and American immigration opportunities for Jewish refugees that would have connected him to Antin. As Salz and Rochelson both point out, a break in their relationship did occur briefly. She met a doctoral student named William Amadeus Grabeau and married him. She lost many Jewish friends who saw her marriage to a non-Jew as further evidence of her betrayal of Jewish solidarity. Her autobiography did little to improve relationships with many of these same people who already disapproved of her behavior. Zangwill resumed his correspondence with her for a time, though, especially following her request that he allow his introduction to adorn her 1912 *Promised Land*. It appeared evident by his subsequent epistolary silence that he, too, reacted negatively to her direct rejection of Judaism, particularly as it was expressed in her autobiography.

Following the success of *The Promised Land,* Jewish intellectuals such as Horace Kallen approached her about taking on the Zionist cause. Antin was "maligned by some Jews for her views," Salz writes, despite the fact that she devoted attention to Jewish concerns, as her correspondence with Kallen and others testify. Salz credits Horace Kallen's influence with having introduced her to Zionism and with having convinced her to attend the 1914 Jewish American Zionist Conference in New York. She wrote in a letter to him that same year: "I want to thank you for the inspiration I received at the Zionist Convention. I doubt if I should have thought of attending it, if it

had not been for what you said to me at Madison" (71, 81).[59] Despite attending the conference and despite including Zionist rhetoric in some of her lectures, she could not embrace Zionist ideals. On September 29th, 1916, she signs a letter to Kallen thus: "With best wishes for the New Year [New Jewish Year], which should be a great year for Zionism, I Am Cordially Yours…" (81). Zionism was not a subject she discussed in that letter. Rather, she fashioned out of it a polite signatory salutation, one that she knew would please Kallen.

Consistently, her letters do not demonstrate a passion for Zionism in any of its many manifestations. Evidence suggests that at most she acquiesced to pressures from famous Jewish intellectuals of her day. Her letters reveal a young woman finding it hard to refuse an intellectual such as Kallen rather than a woman suddenly consumed with a Zionist zeal. Salz found in reading Antin's letters that she warmed up to Zionism especially in the years following her autobiography when the movement's popularity rose in the United States more generally (xix). There is no doubt, however, that her first loyalties remained to the Progressive Movement. She was much more concerned, as her autobiography testifies, with immigrant rights.

It is no surprise, therefore, that her autobiography worked in an extraordinarily systematic manner to reverse Zionism's central myth, which hinges on its particular interpretation of the biblical story of Exodus. Zionists insisted that the Jewish Bible be read as a geo-political manifesto. For them, Exodus was less about discovering God and his laws and more about the moment when a community of oppressed slaves in exile came together under Mt. Sinai to be reborn as a viable nation. Political Zionists

[59] At the time, Kallen worked as a philosophy professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

inserted themselves into the narratives in the role of the oppressed slaves who similarly needed to be taken out of their bondage in the *Diaspora* and be brought home, to freedom. For Zionists, Canaan became the physical embodiment of an ancient home where once a great political nation reigned. Joshua represented for them a historical example of a general who transformed a down-trodden people into a powerful military force. Zionists wished nothing more than to replay this historical heritage in a modern nationalist vein, military might and all. With this in mind, the following words by Antin can only be taken as an affront to the powerful mainstream faction of Zionist thought. She writes:

> But the story of the Exodus was not history to me in the sense that the story of the American Revolution was… Except in moments of abstraction from the world around me, I scarcely understood that Jerusalem was an actual spot on the earth, where once the kings of the Bible, real people, like my neighbors in Polotzk, ruled in puissant majesty. (178-179)

For a Zionist sympathizer, for a Jewish person politically active in establishing the viability of Biblical Israel as a geo-political home, passages such as these were outrageous.

America, as her autobiography almost shouts using everything from straightforward explication to the allusions in her chapter titles, was the true home, the real Promised Land. The following example comes closest to directly countering the nationalist movement: “As to our future, we Jews in Polotzk had no national expectations; only a life-worn dreamer here and there.” Though they sang during prayers “Zion, Zion, Zion, Holy Zion, not forever is it lost,” they “did not really

picture Judea restored…" (179). Two different interpretations of her words are possible. Either a strong Zionist chapter existed in Polotzk and she ignored it, or there may have only been a few weak supporters as she suggested, a few "life worn dreamers" (179). Understating Zionist support back in Russia worked better for her argument without a doubt.

Non-Jews were aware of the Zionist movement and its rapid growth during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Her message could have resonated in their ears just as strongly. But she does more than that for her Jewish audience. Her chapter titles reveal a particularly meaningful tale. Rather than describe her death as a Jew and her rebirth as a New Jew embracing the ancient homeland, she describes her death as Jew and rebirth as an American. The point of reiterating this is to stress that such an articulation was constructed in direct opposition to Jewish return to Zion.

Beginning with her fifth chapter, the chapter titles are: "I Remember," "The Tree of Knowledge," "The Boundaries Stretch," "The Exodus," and "The Promised Land" (65, 90, 110, 130, 143).[60] These chapters tell, in order, the story of her release from religious sentiments and about her Exodus to freedom, to Boston. The chapters following are titled "Initiation," "My Country," "Manna," and "Burning Bush," all of which describe sacred moments in the desert leading to the final, climactic home-coming (163, 175, 207, 251). The most deeply ingrained holiday, resonating with the deepest religious sentiments for Jews around the world, is Passover. It is on Passover that Jews commemorate the story of the exodus from Egypt. In fact, the story is so central to Jewish thought that it is mentioned more times in the Torah than any other

[60] The first four chapters are titled "Within the Pale," "Children of the Law," "Both Their Houses," and "Daily Bread" (5, 26, 36, 50).

event. As is well known, Jews believe the Torah to have been dictated to Moses by God and then delivered to the people directly. The rest of Jewish thought bases itself on this belief.

The Jewish faith centers around the five books with the *Talmud, Mishna*, *Shulchan Aruch*, and other subsequent writings dedicated to translating or explicating what the Torah means regarding different issues. The Jewish Enlightenment's call to dare to know something beyond Torah emanated from Jewish-religious belief that a Jew needed no other knowledge outside the Torah since the divinely-inspired text already held everything one needed to know. Receiving the Torah was the moment when God himself was believed to have descended. And though Exodus 19 describes Moses separated from the people while receiving the Torah, there is also an oral tradition that tells that every man, woman, and child standing at the foot of the mountain heard God talk directly to them[61] Using her chapter-titles, Antin framed her story as one that directly challenged Exodus' trajectory in addition to challenging its usefulness as a historical source. Most importantly, she rewrites the eastward trajectory into Palestine, creating a substantial tension between traditional Jewish teachings on Exodus and the secular, assimilationist turn of her own story.

Her reworking of Exodus and Zionist tenets are based on limited knowledge since she was not educated in theology, neither in Boston nor back in Russia. Her parents were especially indulgent in that she and her sister studied with a Rabbi, Reb Lebe, who "began to reveal the mysteries" of Hebrew and Jewish traditions based on the Torah and its teachings (91). Unlike Abraham Cahan, for example, who attended

[61] Chabad.org is a good source for hundreds of years-old traditional Jewish beliefs. The Chasidic organization summarizes on its website these beliefs.

Cheder and later studied *Talmud*, she was not well versed in the more complicated arguments regarding Jewish theological traditions. "A girl was "finished" when she could read her prayers in Hebrew" (91). If a girl could sign her name in Russian, "do a little figuring, and write a letter in Yiddish to the parents of her betrothed, she was called *wohl gelehrent*-well educated" (90). This was not true of women elsewhere in the Pale. There were rare occasions when women received a chance to be educated, women who were accepted to Russian schools. [62] Antin was not one of these, however.

Although she was not theologically sophisticated, she did demonstrate mastery of the traditions and great control of American mythic elements. Using the story of Exodus was a well-established convention. The Zionists used Exodus for their nationalist aims, as we have seen. A reinterpretation of the story was also utilized at the time by Jewish socialists. David Edelshtat, a communist anarchist, used Exodus in his poetry hoping to move readers toward his cause. Jewish socialists, according to Ori Kritz, used the story in a way that stressed economic oppression in Egypt and freedom under a socialist political banner (*The Poetics of Anarchy* 135).

Early on in her book Antin clearly states that "Russia was another Egypt" (9). The most important religious imperative mentioned in the *Agadah*, or the booklet used to guide the Passover meal, was the imperative to remember the story of Exodus to the point of feeling that you, too, were there. Announcing Russia was Egypt and calling one of the chapters reminiscing about her childhood there, "I Remember," sets her

[62] In *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Levinsky meets a young woman who goes to such a Russian school. She is fluent in Russian, German, she studies geography and other secular subjects. Anecdotally, Alan Velie's paternal aunt, Sarah Veileshanski, was privileged enough to attend a Russian school in Kiev. His paternal grandparents were even allowed to leave the Pale and reside in Kiev for the duration of her studies.

autobiography up as a kind of personal *Agadah*, her own book on remembering the miracle of her particular Exodus. The miracle will be rewritten almost as a mirror image of the original. The nationalist take on what is seen as the greatest story of God's devotion to the Jewish people is transformed into the story of a little girl learning that religion is a superstition and that, in addition, secular America is the site where the true Holy Land stands.

Her chapter titled "Tree of Knowledge" is especially significant for understanding the bifocal effect the chapter titles achieve (90). The original story in Genesis described an Eden where God walked among his two creations, Adam and Eve, immediately punishing them for disobeying him for eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. In this chapter, in contrast, Antin asks about God's existence rather than rejoicing in his blessings and presence. "Three of Knowledge" reverses the story. First, her version takes place not in a place where God's protective arms surround her, but in Egypt, the place where God allowed his people to suffer without intervening for hundreds of years. Furthermore, the original story's lesson of immediate and fantastic godly repercussions for betraying his word is replaced with the realization that God is silent or simply absent.

She begins the chapter by sharing with her readers that "words such as freethinking and apostate… were the names of men who had forsaken the Law in distant times or in distant parts, and whose evil fame had reached Polotzk" (98). Freethinkers were persons following *Haskala* intellectualism or even political-Zionists, who translate the Bible in a secular fashion. *Haskala* was valued by those who left religious life. Religious communities back in Russia (and elsewhere)

disapproved most vehemently of such secular interpretations of the Torah. Antin, with this phrase, establishes that the community in which she lived and her family were part of that religious Jewish world that resisted secular ideology. After establishing the extent to which secular ideas were rejected, Antin proceeds by sharing her first violation of the Sabbath, one of the gravest sins possible. Intending "to put God Himself to the proof," she picks up a handkerchief and carries it in her pocket into the silent street, thus violating the Shabbat restriction on carrying objects.

Like Adam and Eve, she describes feeling "that she was in direct communication with God," for her an "awful thought" (98). Unlike naïve Eve, she was not hiding her violation from God, but rather daring God to see her and to react. "Would there be a storm?" she asks, "would a sudden bolt strike her" in response to her sin? (99). Nothing happens. There are no lightning bolts. Tellingly, she narrates the story of her indiscretion against God in the third person. She transforms, in that instant, her personal reflection into a fable with an important moral; God was silent, absent, or not interested. From that point, she felt like a dishonest person. For the sake of her family she went through the motions of religious practice, but felt it was pointless if not right down mistaken to continue adherence to the ancient traditions. She became, as the early frame for the story sets up, a sinner, somewhat of an evil person. Her experiences placed her in that same category. Regardless, she remains honest to the new truth that God was absent and that Judaism was wrong about so many things.[63]

[63] Choosing Exodus rather than Eden for her extended metaphor further testifies to the fact that her intended audience was Jewish, particularly Jews who prescribe to Zionism. For Christians, it is fall from grace, the moment of original sin that necessitated Jesus' sacrifice.

The chapter, “Exodus,” opens with the family receiving their tickets to board the steamer to America. The journey through the desert is replaced with the journey over the ocean. Leaving Russia was now assured and the time of exile would be over (130). The following chapter is aptly named “The Promised Land” (143). In this chapter, Antin’s central theme is freedom, a theme she borrows from the *Agadah*. God continues to be marked by his absence in this chapter and soon the whole family sheds their old-world religiosity. Egypt, meaning Russia, was the place where the family lived a religious life and now, ironically, in “The Promised Land,” they are released from what to Antin appeared the heavy burden of religious traditions. Her only faith was now in America (156).

In America, education was free, and it was education that helped her transform herself into an American. In this chapter, inside of her “Promised Land,” she undergoes the most substantial change, the change into an American. “In America, then,” she writes, “everything was free; the streets were as bright as a synagogue… Music was free… education was free” (148). It is important for her to stress how easy it was to join school: “No application made, no questions asked, no examinations, rulings, exclusions… The doors stood open for everyone one of us” (148). Young Mary felt overwhelmed by the ease with which she entered school. Zionists declarations that Jews must return to Hebrew and their insistence on equating authentic Jewish national identity with the land, the language, and the literature, did not concern Antin who could see nothing, but English and America as markers of freedom for Jews.

She cites her progress in English at school as proof that "the Russian Jew" can adopt and use the "adopted language" in order to demonstrate his or her internalized Americanization (148). Mastering English becomes an indicator for belonging. Education, release from Jewish tradition in the name of modern American society, represented her freedom from *Galut* or exilic oppression. The constant repetition of her new English abilities is intended to strengthen the second half of her argument that only in America it "came to pass" that, as she says, she could finally "know what *my country* could mean to a man" (179). She admits that the words "next year, may we be in Jerusalem," the words with which Jews all over the world concluded the Passover meal, were recited by her in Hebrew, "but without their hope and longing" (178). In Hebrew, she insists, she uttered the word freedom, but it did not resonate within her.

Reaction to her autobiography was mixed. Many Jews railed against it. Michael Kramer attributes *The Promised Land*'s less than enthusiastic reception from within the Jewish-American community to her disavowal of Judaism. "Antin was shunned," Kramer explains, "because, even in a community where assimilation is the norm, she was perceived… to have transgressed the defining boundary of Jewish identity" (126). They recognized that there was a message relevant to them, namely that they were holding on to outmoded ethnic if not religious loyalties. A non-Jewish reader could easily overlook her dismissal of Zionist aspirations. For many Jewish intellectuals of her day and afterwards, scholars such as Ludwig Lewisohn, the disavowal was difficult to accept.

Lewisohn was not against assimilation as was Klatzkin. He wrote about his deepest yearning to be counted among mainstream Americans: "I was passionately

Anglo-American in all my sympathies, I wanted above all things to be a poet in the English tongue, and my name and physiognomy were characteristically Jewish" (*Jews in the American Academy* 95). Like Antin, as well as Lazarus before her and others both American-born and immigrants, he wanted to assimilate. Like Antin, in addition, he felt his "physiognomy," his physical appearance contrasted in some essential fashion with his yearning to be American. Unlike Antin, he felt there was a Jewishness to his physical body from which he could not escape. The "English tongue" he wishes to be a part of can be read to mean both a literary, but also a physical tongue, raising again the specter of the Jewish difference. Yet, it was one thing to bemoan what you considered your Jewish "physiognomy" and quite another to utterly dismiss your Jewish affiliation. Lewisohn, among other Jewish critics (such as Joseph Jacobs) condemned Mary Antin's *Promised Land* for "a betrayal of the Jewish people," for abandoning her Jewish birthright. Horace Kallen felt that Antin was too busy flattering Americans, too busy sounding more American than an American, showing not that she had transformed herself into one, but that she was hiding "her essential Jewish self" (found in Michael Kramer 134). What they identified in addition to her betrayal of "Jewishness" is also her rejection of the idea that Jews such as themselves could legitimately negotiate two national loyalties. As we have seen, Lewisohn, at least, was sensitive to such assertions.

Furthermore, identifying with and supporting the Zionist cause became a kind of Shibboleth test for solidarity with or even loyalty to the Jewish community. To a large extent, this still holds true today. Salz finds it necessary to defend Antin by, among other things, reminding her readers that Antin held firmly that assimilation was

a choice at the same time that "it in no way abrogated the Jewish people's right to a homeland" (72). Her book's unequivocal rewriting of Zionist ideology does overshadow Antin's own views which appear to have been less extreme. Ironically, Antin's belief that leaving Judaism was a choice was a naïve one. As is often the case with famous Jewish figures (and less famous ones), the Jewish community holds on to their own, even in the face of their own insistences to the contrary. Antin has been appropriated into the Jewish-American canon and marginally into the non-hyphenated Jewish canon. The strongest argument against her assertion that she has been reborn as a non-Jew arrives from a Jewish (and non-Jewish) insistence that there is no such thing as a writer who was born Jewish and who does not reflect on Jewish culture. As Ruth Wisse insightfully stated, "she remained interesting to others, and to herself, not as the integrated American citizen she became, but as the Yiddish speaking child she had once been" (*Modern Jewish Canon* 269). There is something incurable in being born Jewish and the Jewish community is often the first to remind you of that fact.

Nonetheless, Antin trudges forward, aiming her narrative also at the dominant, culture of America. She presents herself as having transformed herself into a genteel woman with whom any middle-class American would identify. Antin's family, at a low point, had to move from one neighborhood to a worse one. As an adult, she returns for a visit, but describes how she did so accompanied by a man, showing that she no longer belonged to the unruly and foreign immigrant class. "Many years after my escape from Wheeler Street I returned to see if the place was as bad as I remembered," she begins the passage (209). "The grocery store in the basement of Number 1—my father's old store—was still open for business; and in the gutter in

front of the store, to be sure, was a happy baby, just as there used to be" (209). It is important for her narrative to establish that the place itself had not changed. In order to establish that she no longer belonged there, she needed to be able to show that it was she who had changed. The immigrants are the same but her association with them had ended. As a fourteen year-old resident, she tells her readers, she found no fault with the street. Now, as an adult, she knows better: "I was not alone on this tour of inspection. I was attended by a trusty escort" (209). As a child, still the immigrant, she could walk the streets in the poor part of town, but now as a young woman she cannot.

The difference was that the narrator, the one leading her readers through Wheeler Street, reminiscing about it, is also trying her hardest to convince her readers that she had completely internalized American middle-class culture. She is a proper lady equal to Mrs. March of Howells' *A Hazard New Fortunes*, and like her she requires male supervision on excursions to that immigrant-run street. In *Hazard*, Mrs. March is convinced that the dirt and poverty did not bother the residents of the poorer parts of New York City.[64] She cannot comprehend their poverty and relegates it to a difference between people. Mrs. March holds that the immigrant-poor are different than she is. They do not need cleanliness and genteel surroundings such as she does because they do not share her aesthetic sensibilities. Antin is only too aware of this attitude. She adds that though she had a trusted escort, she went further still and "brought soap and water with" her to help her wash off any dirt that may have stuck to her during her visit. She goes as far as to add: "I am applying them now" (209). She

[64] On her particular trek, she is accompanied by her husband, Basil March. Like Antin, she too would not venture into such neighborhoods without proper male companionship.

now occupies the position of the middle-class and looks through the windows at the poor like Isabel.

Daniel Deronda, in George Eliot's novel, was raised into the kind of privilege that Antin could only imagine. What Antin ferociously fought to achieve, that non-Jews will view her as one of their own, Deronda took for granted. Deronda is positioned at the opening of the novel as a non-Jew who discovers later that he is Jewish. Many Jews were inspired by this privileged young man who chose to turn his attentions to Jewish national revival. What has been less discussed, however, is the fact that for other Jews his idealization proved to be a nuisance. The nationalist movement loved Deronda's epic journey to self-discovery. For Jews such as Antin, the novel's popularity coupled with the popularity of its message further propagated the belief that Jews should be separate from non-Jews. Antin dismantles the quintessential nationalist narrative as it is represented in *Deronda* in her autobiography as part of her efforts to rewrite that myth. Not all Jews wanted to align themselves with their Jewish brothers and sisters. Antin's declaration that she had died as the Jew and had been reborn as a non-Jewish American is her way of reacting exactly to the type of rhetoric Eliot represents, a rhetoric that proposes to support Jewish nationalism at the same time that it exposes non-Jewish ambivalence and border-line anti-Semitism.

(3) Opposing Narratives—Eastward Versus Westward Trajectories

Jewish scholars have obsessed over *Daniel Deronda* (1867) as much as non-Jewish scholars have. What has been often described as Deronda's illusive lure is triggered by the novel's clashing genres—the English and the Jewish. Critics have

sought since the novel's publication to make sense of the plot, which maintains two divergent strands. They have not been able to resolve the tensions created when the domestic-English story and the story of the Jew are brought together. *Daniel Deronda* focuses on two characters, Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda. Harleth is a young, middle class English woman who learns a valuable lesson about vanity and family responsibility when she marries a heartless man. She begins her plot a spoiled spindrift and emerges from it a woman who learns that her real responsibilities are to her family. Meanwhile, Daniel Deronda's story describes the trials of a young English gentleman discovering that though he was raised to become an English noble, he was in fact Jewish. The two plots, referred to more often as the two parts, are connected via a developing romantic relationship between Harleth and Deronda.

As often observed, Deronda at novel's end reveals to Harleth not only that he is Jewish, but also that he decided to leave England for the purpose of reconnecting with other Jews in order to help them:

> I am going to the East to become better acquainted with the condition of my race in various countries there […] The idea that I am possessed with is that of restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again […] such as the English have […] I am resolved to devote my life to that. (688)

The passage concludes Deronda's long journey of self-discovery. From an orphan wondering about his place in the world he turns into a dedicated ethnic (if not religious) Jew who embraces his new-found identity. Harleth tries to change his mind,

telling him: "You are just the same as if you were not a Jew" (687).[65] He cares for her, but decides to marry Mirah, the Jewish young woman whose life he saves at one point in the story. Scholars obsess over this last part of the novel not because he finds his way to an authentic Jewish home, but also because he removes himself from the possibility of marrying an English woman. What does Deronda's journey mean for the possibility of Jews assimilating into western societies? Was Eliot an early Zionist ally sending her hero to Palestine, part of the pro-Semitic element found at the time in English society, or was she disguising under her nationalist rhetoric anti-Semitic sentiments? Both are true of Eliot. She cannot but reveal her unease generally with Jews, showing that prejudices against Jews ran deep. At the same time, her novel genuinely aimed at humanizing Jews.

Accordingly, the novel's reception has been mixed. It inspired many Jews to become active in what would quickly develop into a Jewish national project. In Europe, Alie'zer Ben Yehuda, considered the father of Modern Hebrew, read the novel. In the United States, Emma Lazarus read the novel. They both found it inspirational, a call to Jews such as themselves to become active advocates of Jewish nationalism. Critics, such as Ruth Wisse, furthermore, have declared the novel to be the greatest Zionist novel ever written. Critics such as Lionel Trilling found Deronda's underdeveloped character to mean that Eliot, too, could not view Jews as fully human but as mythological creatures ("Myth of the Jew"). Overall, however, the reaction to the novel was positive. Once again, George Eliot was hailed for her literary genius.

[65] She can bravely overlook the fact of his Judaism. What is meant to show her transcendence of his ethnicity highlights her inability to do so.

The critical question that has dominated discussions of the novel has been how to reconcile the two parts, the Jewish and the English. Henry James, for example, in his review of the novel following its publication described it as "a looking glass which had fallen upon the floor broken, and was lying in fragments" (Leavis 250). For him, the "Gwendolen part" was a "masterpiece" and the "best thing in the book" (Leavis 252). While James recognized the literary quality of the novel, he also believed that Harleth's character was substantially better developed than Deronda's. James pointed to the aesthetic incongruity between the two plots. F. R. Leavis attached James' review to his seminal *Great Tradition* (1948). He echoed James, reiterating that Harleth's character was better developed, "known, felt and presented, psychologically, all together in a grand manner." Meanwhile, according to Leavis, Deronda makes overall a "very pretty" picture, but a picture not of a person" (254-252). Leavis and James' readings correctly identify the idealized position Deronda has in the story, reminding the readers that Eliot essentialized Deronda to a large degree.

Deronda reminds Cynthia Chase of eighteenth-century, chivalric epics. It demonstrates, she believed, that Deronda's story was also quintessentially nineteenth-century English. In "The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double Reading Daniel Deronda" (1978), Chase noted that the plot unfolds much as Oliver Twist's plot does. A young orphan undergoes a long journey of discovery to learn about his true parentage. She points out that the big difference between the English convention and Deronda's story occurs "when the evidence reveals, not that the hero's parentage is 'good'" as in Oliver Twist's case but that it is "Jewish" (223). The question that remains to be asked is whether the discovery of Jewishness rather than "good" English

parentage excludes Deronda's plot from the category into which Chase places him, that of the nineteenth-century English novel. Subsequently, it does seem to exclude Deronda from the English categories of nation and literary genre.

In *The Ends of History* (1991) Christina Crosby held that the two parts of the novel can be thought of as "an ideal world-history [epic] half (the Jewish half), and an experiential, psychological, domestic half (Gwendolen Harleth's half) (13). Her suggestion is appealing because it strives to rescue Deronda's plot from being thought of as the novel's aesthetic weakness. She offers viewing the Jewish part in keeping with the epic genre, a genre known for less developed characters and more for grand, dramatic gestures. Her approach means to answer not only James, but also Jewish critics such as Lionel Trilling who contended in "The Changing Myth of the Jew" (1978) that Deronda "grows, he develops all the burning nostalgic passion …in place of blood or money or lust, that now so often comes to characterize the Jew in fiction" (33). He holds that Deronda "becomes not quite a person of this world: the implication is that the prophetic touch is on him" turning him and the other Jewish characters in the book (such as the Cohen family) "largely mythical" (33). But in Crosby's telling, the mythic aspect is an aggrandizing one because the literary gesture at work is the epic.

The above sample of scholarly work on *Deronda* demonstrates that critics have been asking about ways of categorizing Deronda's plot. If it is a Jewish plot, what is it doing alongside an English one? Viewing Deronda's plot in terms of epic or English-orphan conventions assigns Deronda an identity that circumvents Jewishness. The attempt has been, in so doing, to argue that Deronda's plot can be read as other than

primarily Jewish. Such an approach holds, at heart, that the two parts do fit together. The problems begin when we realize that the implicit assumption underlying these approaches are that the Jewish and English stories do not fit together. James' comment was a general one regarding the novel's aesthetic qualities. Conversation since has tended to place the two parts in an adversarial paradigm, pitting western and Jewish genres against each other.

The political and social assertion that Jews are utterly different from their non-Jewish counterparts operates behind approaches that seek to reconcile the two parts of the novel by reassigning Deronda's Jewishness. The idea that Jews could participate in civil life, but were also outsiders, was an accepted paradigm in nineteenth-century, non-Jewish western culture.[66] Matthew Arnold was not the only one who demonstrated the duality whereby he admired Jewish culture and history on the one hand but was also repelled by the physical presence of a Jewish person. In "The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!" (1878) Eliot shows a similar ambivalence. On the one hand, she expresses admiration for the "triumphant struggle of the Maccabees, which rescued the religion and independence of the nation" (149). Eliot voices her concern, in the same tract, about the "fusion with immigrants of alien blood," revealing that she, too, suffered from anxiety over her English nation's purity (158).

[66] Benjamin Disraeli's life in English politics is a good example of this ambivalence. Disraeli enjoyed a long political career in the nineteenth century as a parliamentarian and as the British Prime Minister. Though his father had him and his siblings baptized (he was twelve), he was still referred to as "the Jew" when he entered politics. His colleague, Lord George Bentick, known for his gambling problems, and he were called by their political opponents the "jockey and the Jew" (Hibbert 183).[66] His Jewish ethnicity remained an issue throughout his career despite becoming Prime Minister. In some basic way, the tension between his English life and his Jewish background could never be reconciled.

As mentioned previously, there is sufficient evidence that Eliot's intention was to humanize as well as to express support for Jewish people. She visited synagogues, taking her research seriously. Ruth Wisse mentions that her biographers "single out her friendship with the Talmudic scholar Rabbi Emanuel Deutsch (1829-1873)" (*Modern Jewish Canon* 239). In his recent article, "Writing the Philosemetic Novel: *Daniel Deronda* Revisited" (2008) Alan Levenson maintains that "an apologetic intent lies at the center of the novel, *Daniel Deronda*. Specifically, the lauding of Ashkenazi Jewry, the affirmation of a Jewish future, the praise of intra-Jewish loyalties, and a generous view of Jewish authenticity" (129). For that reason, he considers the novel a "landmark in the rehabilitation of European Jewry" (129). Critics such as Levenson stress the importance of viewing the novel for what it is, namely a complex set of attitudes held by a single person. Some of the attitudes smack of the period's prejudices, but the effort to counter these attitudes deserves to be more readily recognized.

Alongside remarks that "Deronda could not escape (who can?) knowing ugly stories of Jewish characteristics and occupations," Eliot reminds her reader that Jews are people. When Mirah reveals she is Jewish, she asks Deronda not to despise her for it because there are, as she says, bad Jews in the world. Deronda, who believes at this point in the novel that he is an English gentleman replies: "So are many Christians. But I should not think it fair for you to despise me because of that" (164). Jews and Christians, as she describes the two groups, are not that different. She created a space where the English Harleth interacted in what amounted to an uncomplicated fashion with a Jewish character. Though the aesthetic disparity between the two parts is clear,

the story-line follows the two characters rather simply. They are bound to their respective plots by way of their romantic involvement. The romantic plot presents us with a plausible reconciliatory place where the two characters can meet as equals. Granted, the space Eliot molds is tenuous at best, dissolving by novel's end. The complication in accepting their congruity, the one affirming Jewish nationalism and one affirming strong, English womanhood lies with the disjointed feeling created when the reader learns that Deronda is Jewish. Before learning that fact, does the relationship between the two seem complicated? The answer is that it does not. To a certain extent, Eliot challenged rather than accepted Jewish alterity.

In a telling moment, Gwendolen's mother, Mrs. Davilow, agrees with her daughter that Deronda is a "striking young man." (281). She adds that he reminds her of an Italian painting: "One would guess," she says, "without being told, that there was foreign blood in his veins" (281). Only a few pages earlier, Gwendolen remembers that Deronda sometimes thinks of himself a Caliban, conjuring Shakespeare's indigenous "savage" from his late play, *The Tempest*. Does Deronda look foreign, undercutting a possible apologetic intent on Eliot's part? Harleth's mother undoes her own assertion that she could tell immediately by his features that he was a "foreigner" by birth (by which she means not English). When Gwendolen asks her about this alleged "foreign blood," her mother answers: "Mrs. Torrington says so. I asked particularly who he was and she told me that his mother was some foreigner of high rank" (281). She did need to be told. There is little evidence that he "looked" different from non-Jews around him. On the contrary, no one around him seemed to think him anything but a relation of if not the son of Sir Hugo. The lines between domestic and

foreign are very often drawn in one's own prejudiced imagination, the passage suggests.

Readers' reactions to the novel echo both the author's own ambivalent response to Jews and her characters' differing reactions. Helena deKay Gilder, one of Emma Lazarus' friends, read the novel the year it was published, in 1876. She wrote to her husband, Richard, regarding Deronda's marriage to Mirah that she "can't bear him [Deronda] to marry from pity, which is really what he does" (62). Another friend, Molly Foote, agreed, adding that Deronda is not "uplifted or enlarged by his devotion to the Chosen People… It was the fact of being one himself that confirmed him, & I think he narrowed himself" (62). For Foote, the fact that he turned from marrying Harleth to marrying Mirah proves that his Jewish nature caused him to "lower" himself socially by aligning himself with other Jews. Esther Schor, author of the comprehensive *Emma Lazarus* (2006) explains that Lazarus felt her friends' disgust with Deronda's "Jewish fate," as she calls it. Lazarus' later story, "The Eleventh Hour," Schor shows, is based on her friends' but especially Helena's prejudices. [67]

For every passage in *Deronda* exposing prejudice, a reader can find passages which present Jews in less than flattering ways. Deronda meets a particular class of religious, poor Jew in London in his search for Mirah's family. Jews in England were part of different social strata. Some families were assimilated such as Benjamin Disraeli's family. Deronda, however, visits the poorer Jews of London. He sees "queer looking Israelites," particularly men with what he calls a "chosen nose." Most

[67] See Schor's *Emma Lazarus* page 61.

disturbingly, he is disgusted at what Eliot describes as “the aberrations of Jews” (309). Still, Eliot’s efforts throughout the novel to rise above such rhetoric deserve emphasis.

We meet Deronda when he sees Gwedolen Harleth for the first time and helps her. Harleth has gambled too much, and had lost too much money. To pay her debts, she needs to pawn a necklace. She curses “these Jew pawnbrokers [who] were so unscrupulous in taking advantage of Christians unfortunate at play!” (14). Yet, the necklace is restored quickly to her by, as the note accompanying the letter proclaimed, “[a] stranger who has found Miss Harleth’s necklace” and “returns it to her with the hope that she will not again risk the loss of it” (14). The word “stranger” resonates with meaning. This passage occurs early on in the story and neither Harleth nor Deronda know that he is, in a sense, a stranger: he is a Jew. Moreover, her attack on the Jewish man to whom she sold the necklace to begin with is clearly uncalled for. It is not that he is Jewish, but rather that she does not know when to stop gambling.

The opening scene establishes, in addition, that Deronda has a good heart and a developed sense of justice. Eliot goes to great lengths from beginning to end to demonstrate Deronda’s kind nature. He had a “hatred of all injury,” the narrator later on explains to the reader (151). And though he hated confrontations, “ …it was not Deronda’s disposition to escape from ugly scenes: he was more inclined to sit through them and take care of the fellow least able to take care of himself” (152). Going further still, she tells us that “[t]o Deronda this event of finding Mirah was as heart-stirring as anything that befell Orestes or Rinaldo” (175). It resembled a Greek tragedy or one of George Handel’s operas.

He was deeply moved by sorrows around him and had a particular weakness for damsels in distress. Sir Hugo tells him: "You are always looking tenderly at women… You are a dangerous young fellow—a kind of Lovelace who will make the Clarissas run after you instead of your running after them" (304). Sir Hugo taunts his beloved ward by comparing him to Samuel Richardson's villain from *Clarissa* (1748). What he means is that Deronda is a saint, rather; someone whom women trust. The reader is hardly surprised, therefore, that Deronda jumps into the river to save a drowning stranger, or that he continues watching over Harleth. Deronda not only saves Mirah's life, but he also directs her to a kind family, the Meyricks, who watch over her. The Meyricks are eager to help him because they have also benefited from his never-ending largess.

Mirah is a Jew escaping her father and in search of her brother and mother. Serendipitously, Mirah's brother is revealed to be another acquaintance of Deronda's, the dilapidated, consumptive Mordechai (also named Ezra), who had chosen Deronda as his intellectual heir. It is Mordechai who talks to Deronda about, among other things, Jewish nationalism. In fact, both he and Mirah describe national aspirations to him. It is his nature, his inability to stand injustice and others' pain that lead him not only to his future wife but to his "true identity." It is that goodness coupled with his newly discovered Jewishness that has him become by novel's end "possessed" with the idea "of restoring a political existence to [his] people" (688). No one can doubt his sincerity by that point. He had helped Gwendolen, proven himself a veritable angel on earth, and now he will help the Jewish people, his people.

The word "restore," however, raises a central challenge. Eliot stops in her idealized take on the Zionist project where Zionist problems began. A sequel, if Zionists were to undertake writing one twenty to forty years later, would reveal Deronda struggling to comprehend the complexities that updating a two-millennia-old nationalism involves. How do you restore a secular national political reality to a people who had not lived as a nation for so long? Most of them had never been to nor planned on visiting their historic homeland and, most importantly, had not spoken the national language, nor had used it for secular pursuits such as for the enjoyment of secular literature for centuries. Deronda would have to learn all these complications. What he would have learned during his years at prestigious, elite, English educational institutions is that England had a respected, highly sophisticated literary history. There will be no Jewish equivalent, but a tremendous void staring into the faces of Jewish intellectuals setting forth on such a national quest. They would have to build a national literature almost from the ground up and base it on texts that are religious and thousands of years old in origin or on a small collection of examples dating back to Jewish glory-days in Spain (during the time of Yehuda Halevi or Maimonides). And how is Mary Antin to situate herself in a world thus bifurcated between foreigner-Jew and Anglo-insider?[68] Who is then further bifurcated between a Jew who represents goodness and is loyal to Jewish solidarity and an assimilated Jew? Even assimilated

[68] The English nation was much more defined by the idea of a single national identity based on the unity of the people. America was founded on the idea of freedom, an idea that new immigrants always pressed upon Anglo-Americans who increasingly saw themselves as authentic Americans. Immigrant preferred to think about American democracy as an idealized form presented, for example, in J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*: "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men" (70). What England and America had in common, however, was that "the new race" was imagined by the dominant, Anglo culture as mirroring them.

Jews such as Josephine and Emma Lazarus were reminded often that they did not, when all was said and done, belong in non-Jewish society.

(4) Jewish Nationalist-Literary Demands

Eliot and Antin present two opposing attitudes toward Jewish nationalist discourse. Eliot worked hard to reaffirm the Jewish eastward trajectory, from west to east. Antin's autobiography responded by reversing the trajectory. While still moving in a sense from east to west, she rewrote the core aspects of the narrative. It is generally supposed that Antin's work is best contextualized by American immigration narratives, narratives in which such a move is conventional. It is not hard to see, however, that she manages also to counter Jewish national discourse, a discourse that overwhelmed the intellectual ether around her.

A conversation about the desirability or even about the possibility of developing a national literature under nationalist paradigms inundated Jewish newspapers. Antin must have felt surrounded by tracts, articles, and opinion editorials written by hosts of different intellectuals, all with a diverse range of reactions to the national movement. There were European and American Zionists; there were those who pretended to defy Zionism only to emerge with a more extreme nationalist-Jewish agenda, and those who warned against moving too quickly into the political realm. According to him, Judaism needed to remain connected to Palestine on a spiritual level for a while longer. He argued similarly that Jewish literature would not be able to develop into a fully viable, highbrow literature for a while longer because the Hebrew

language had too recently turned from a dead language used only by a handful of intellectuals to a modern spoken language.

Antin entered the conversation from an opposing stand. There certainly can be assimilation, her book claimed, easy and happy assimilation. Jews can write and feel at home in more than Hebrew or Yiddish. Both Jews in the United States and non-Jews welcomed Jews writing in different languages, she argued. She wished to have no part in a search for authentic Jewish literature. If Hebrew and Yiddish were emphasized as the only Jewish languages worthwhile of Jewish literature, then let her literature be no party to Jewish national development. In this regard, she echoed writers such as Abraham Cahan. He used the platform he had, the *Daily Forward,* in order to argue against nationalist pressure.

Similarly to Emma Lazarus a few decades earlier, Louis Brandeis did not understand Zionism to mean that all Jews needed to move to Palestine. Many American Jews felt uncomfortable with that version of Zionist ideology (which is why Zionist did not spread in the United States as quickly as it did elsewhere). In 1915 Brandeis wrote: “Let us bear clearly in mind what Zionism is or rather what it is not. It is not a movement to remove all the Jews of the world compulsorily to Palestine…It is essentially a movement to give to the Jew more, not less, freedom” (Hertzberg 517). His declaration meant to mitigate the severity of Zionist discourse. Nevertheless, Brandeis had little patience for those who were not dedicated to helping to further the Palestinian cause. Antin in her autobiography goes further, declaring that she has little patience with those who insist that Jews needed to dedicate themselves to the Palestinian cause.

The extremist Zionist articulation could be found at every turn. The Yiddish press was inundated with articles debating a place for a national literature in the face of outside influences, especially influences perceived as *shund* or trash. For example, from 1887 to 1888, seventeen issues of St. Petersburg's *Yiddishes Folksblat*, a Jewish journal dedicated to promoting highbrow, Jewish culture, discussed the matter of highbrow versus lowbrow literary production (Cammy 85). Jewish communities in the United States received on a regular basis Yiddish newspapers and journals (from Europe and from inside the United States such as the *Daily Forward*) and the Antin family accessed all these easily during the time that her father owned a grocery store. Even afterwards, Yiddish newspapers were easily found wherever a large Jewish community gathered. The type of Zionist conversation she reversed methodically in *The Promised Land* would have been available for her to hear and read everywhere.

In addition, the disagreements between the factions would have added further to the sense of urgency of discussions concerning Jews around the world. Jews were being killed in Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism was rising, and solutions needed to be presented promptly. The voices generally brought forward to represent Zionism currently tend to tell of confident men with clear visions for the future. Reality (as it often proves to be) was more complex. There were endless discussions, endless disagreements.[69] Klatzkin, Ehad Ha'am, and Brandeis all voiced their differing views as part of an ongoing disagreement over the growing nationalist-movement's purpose and major goals. Disagreements moved from inside intellectual circles to living rooms, all worrying over what a national rebirth would and could mean. One can imagine that

[69] There is an old joke that whenever you have two Jews in a room, you also have three opinions.

the early days bespoke just as much of confusion and uncertainty as of confidence and excitement over the possibilities for the new movement. Is it any wonder Antin chose the American potential for a stable, quiet life? America meant stability and acceptance in place of further idealism that only seemed to work when it reminded the world that Jews were different. Antin raised her voice to add to the conversation what to her made perfect sense and to others seemed a horrifying conclusion: Jews can abandon Jewish nationalism for a chance at assimilation into non-Jewish society.

Perhaps the most extreme form of nationalism to emerge from these early conversations, the type of rhetoric bent on insuring Jewish national purity against which Antin reacted so strongly, was what came to be known as the Canaanite Movement, a title bestowed upon them by the author Abraham Shlonsky in order to deride them. [70] If Klatzkin announced that there is no future for *Galut* assimilationist culture, this group would take it a step further and declare that there was no national viability whatsoever to *Galut* Zionism or even for *Galut* Jews. Members such as Uri Ornan and Yonatan Ratosh would spend years defending their ideals, well into the 1960s. Calling themselves the "עברים צעירים" or Young Hebrews, this highly controversial group of artists (painters, sculptures, authors, etc.) declared a complete rejection of Zionism and Judaism. The movement began in the 1930s, much later than *The Promised Land* yet it reacted to the ideas that begun circulating during that time in regards to so called Hebrew-national authenticity.

[70] And Shlonsky (1900-1973) would take such a movement as an affront. He advocated translations of non-Hebrew texts into Hebrew for the general public, seeming to contradict a movement looking for literary purity in the name of a national purity.

They announced that Judaism was a religion and not a national identity. Only by replanting themselves into the historic land, and then tapping into ancient Canaanite civilizations, only then, they believed, would they achieve that true Hebrew core they sought. Such a move would result in a restoration of the original grand-civilization on which Judaism later based itself. The movement focused intensely on what they felt remained unsolved by Zionism, an autochthonous national connection. Furthermore, any effort to find a connection emanating from the *Galut* was bound to fail because it was, by definition, not authentically Hebrew. Uri Ornan, for years a lecturer at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, described the movement thus: [71]

ההרגשה שאנחנו, בני ארץ-ישראל, לא קשורים ביהודים הפזורים על-פני העולם, היתה המניע להתארגנות.

"The feeling that we, the sons of Eretz-Israel, are not connected to the Jews that are dispersed across the world was the motive behind the organization" (3rd parg). Ironically, many in the movement were not born in Palestine, a fact most of them conveniently ignored.

The question of language was a central one for Jewish culture and literature. For the Canaanites, Hebrew was central, an idea they took from earlier Zionist figures. Antin's choice to write in English, therefore, communicated her break with the ideology. Zionist discourse in English had always had a strong political element, to the same degree that writing in Hebrew did. "Thus the return "home" to the Promised Land has always meant a return to Hebrew," explains Hana Wirth-Nesher (15).

[71] Snunit, the Israeli student online portal established in 1994 by a Hebrew University Professor, Nava Ben Zvi, made available online a seminal interview with Uri Ornan from 1994, where he outlines the group's original ideological agenda. The interview appeared in the Israeli journal *סביבות, Svivot* 33, 1994.

Jewish-American literature, she adds, has been filled with American Jewish alienation from Hebrew. Nonetheless, Yiddish and English shared a common fate. They were both major languages spoken by millions of Jews around the world who were made to feel inferior by the dominant Zionist paradigms. For the purpose of national rejuvenation, Zionists advocated Hebrew not only for everyday interactions but also for the new developing secular literature.

Ba'al Makshavos is the pen-name of Israel Isidore Elyashev, accepted generally as the earliest writer of Yiddish literary criticism. In 1918, he wrote that finally there are "among us" writers who are writers all year round and not just "on Mondays and Tuesdays" (*What Is Jewish Literature?* 69). For him, the prospect of an emerging, secular literature written by Jewish writers dedicated to the task of Jewish literature was an exciting one filled with possibilities. He wrote: "This new type has made a firm commitment to produce literature. His eyes see only whatever has the marks of a literary theme. His heart beats only when it is moved by a literary impression upon it…" (*What Is Jewish Literature?* 69).[72] Just as Ralph Waldo Emerson searched for American literature written by what he would define as "authentic" Americans decades earlier, Ba'al Makshavos searched for literature written by Jews dedicated to producing Jewish literature of the highest quality, equal to the kind found among the European nations.

Ba'al Makshavos worked to reconcile the Yiddish and Hebrew factions by declaring that:

[72] See *What is Jewish Literature* by Wirth-Nesher (77) and *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement* by Emanuel Goldsmith where he describes Nathan Birnbaum's efforts to champion Yiddish. He is credited with initiating the first Yiddish language conference in Bukovina in August of 1908. It was known as the Czernowitz conference (111).

> Jewish literature is not going under—Heaven forbid. It is *one* and its name is *one*. It simply comes before the reader in two forms which, like pans of a scale, swing in opposite directions. Just as nothing is absolutely balanced in nature, so the scales move up and down: sometimes one is at the top, sometimes the other. Today Brenner comes to us in a Yiddish garment. Tomorrow Sholem Aleichem comes in a Hebrew one. When they asked I. L. Peretz which of his collected volumes of work, the one published in Hebrew or the one published in Yiddish was the real one, he answered "modestly that the sparks of his spirit were scattered in both…" (*What Is Jewish Literature?*70)

He mentions everyone from Yoself Haim Brenner, to Sholem Rabinowitch (Aleichem) to I. L. Peretz in his conciliatory attempts. Jewish literature and in turn Jewish nationalism had to see that both languages would prove crucial, he believed. At least Yiddish, even if it was dripping with old-world, exile-Jew mentality, had accompanied Jewish culture since the eleventh century. Modern Hebrew was relatively new.

Contemporary critic, Uzi Shavit, one of the original founders of the Young Hebrews, describes succinctly the literary challenge facing Hebrew-language literature. In *בעלות השחר, Ba'a lot Hashahar: "Haskala Poetry and Modernity"*(1996) he explains that what has been called השירה העברית החדשה or "new Hebrew belle letters" was born at the same time as the *Haskala*, (7). The big difference, he reminds his readers, between Renaissance and Modernist literature is that Renaissance literature reached back into the past for its knowledge-base while even proto-Modernist literature, at the heart of Jewish secular literary birth, looked forward, believing in the never ending development of knowledge (7). Major *Haskala* figures

such as Moses Mendelssohn experienced Jewish modernism via the experience of a "lack." Breaking away from the old required a tradition against which to work. Jews looked backwards and saw pain and oppression in Europe. Authors dedicating themselves to Jewish secular literature also saw a literary emptiness. In Yiddish, there were some journals, there were translations of some non-Jewish works, and there were the relative new books of Shomer. There were no extended highbrow creations.

Parallel with Channing and Emerson, Ehad Ha'am argued that there is a natural connection between an original literary creation and language.

"משהתחילה לשוננו הלאומית להשתכח מפי עמנו, חדלה גם רוח השירה לשרות עליה" argued Ehad Ha'am: "The moment our national language [Hebrew] began being forgotten by our people, poetry's spirit ceased to dwell over her" (*The Complete Works of Ehad Ha'am* 34). More than six decades before Emmanuel Levinas marvels over Shmuel Yosef Agnon's literary achievements in Hebrew, Ehad Ha'am warned that the road to poetic promise was still far in the future. Literature in Hebrew, as far as he was concerned, was at the turn of the twentieth-century trudging along in a series of "mechanical pushes" and that was not good enough (34). Writers will be embittered, he knew, by his words, but the truth could not be helped. Uzi Shavit claims that Chaim Nachman Bialik's literature was stunted to a degree by these discouraging words written by Ehad Ha'am.

Voices stressing Hebrew or national literature for Jews, such as the Canaanites, did so stressing its connection with the land. In an essay from 1956 titled "Safrut Yehudit BaSafa HaIvrit," or "Jewish Literature in the Hebrew Language," Yonatan Ratosh declared:

"הברירה שלפני ספרותנו היא בעצם הברירה בין שתי מערכות ערכים אלו: בין ערכי הפזורה היהודית ובין ערכי האומה העברית" (48).

Ratosh writes that the choice "before us" is between a literary system emanating from Diaspora where Jews live as outsiders, writing in a physical space that does not belong to them historically, and Israel, where language, territory and history unite, according to him, organically. Yes, he argues, Jewish literature in the Diaspora has achieved great literary triumphs, but not authentically Jewish ones. Israeli literature had to rebuild itself on the old home and could not, not really, rely on that Diaspora literary base (47).[73] Antin would, under that definition, never be considered a Jewish writer because of her decision to write in English in a Diaspora environment. She embraced that description of herself to the same extent that Philip Roth would decades later when he would announce that he was an American writer who happened to be Jewish and not a Jewish writer living in the United States.

It would take Cynthia Ozick's lecture "America: Toward Yavneh," delivered in English and in Israel in 1970, to offer a famous and enduring example of resistance to Jewish literary exceptionalism. By exceptionalism I mean that Israeli prevailing belief dominant still among older-generation writers that they represent for all Jews everywhere what it means to write authentic Jewish literature. She delivered her provocative lecture at one of Israel's most prestigious scientific institutes, the Weitzman Institute. Ozick told her audience that Jewish-Americans were "after all, the first Diaspora in two millennia to exist simultaneously with the homeland" (*What is*

[73] For him, Israeli literature and Jewish-Israeli literature are the same thing. Only recently has there begun a change and Arab-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli taken hold. Hyphenation is beginning in Israel, meaning to equalize between the mainstream, Ashkenazi-Jewish dominance and other communities who are minorities.

Jewish Literature 31). She added that "we do not yet know what the full consequence of this simultaneity can be" (31). Next, she seemed to echo Ratosh and his counterparts by stating that "there are no major works of Jewish imaginative genius written in any Gentile language, sprung out of any Gentile culture" written by Jewish writers, not major works that could be added to a Jewish canon (32).

She defines Jewish literature simply as literature that touches upon liturgy. It does not need to have direct religious signification, she continues, only religious resonance. "Spain was for a time Jerusalem Displaced; psalms and songs came out of it. And Jerusalem Displaced is what we mean when we say Yavneh" (31). How can Jews in the United States create literature "where all the Jews speak a Gentile language and breathe a Gentile culture?" (31). She surprised her audience by declaring: "My answer is this: it can happen if the Jews of America learn to speak a new language appropriate to the task of a Yavneh" (32). How can such a "fantasy," as she calls it, be possible? It would necessitate a Jewish language and is not that language already, in its most authentic form, Hebrew?

"My answer is that I am speaking it now, you are hearing it now, this is the sound of its spoken prose. Furthermore, half the Jews alive today already speak it" (33). One can only imagine the stunned silence in the room. Cynthia Ozick had declared that English-speaking Jews speak a Jewish language, a language that is in a sense a truer Jewish language, one that promises to preserve Jewish genius, literary and otherwise. She calls it, "New Yiddish." "Only twenty percent of us are Hebrew-speaking," she lectured her audience. Most Jews in the world were then and are currently residing in the United States, and they speak English.

Ozick sought in 1970 a way to talk about Jewish literature inside of the paradigm of authentic Jewishness by reiterating the core definition. She meant to restore to Diaspora Jewish culture centrality. The United States needed to be allowed to acquire that special status inside the larger historical story of Judaism, alongside the historic return to the homeland. Ozick reclaimed a position for Jewish-American production inside the larger, Jewish conversation. Her revision of Jewish literature and its definitions opened doors for the work today of Ranen Omer-Sherman and Bryan Cheyette, who celebrate the diversity available in Jewish literature in its global reality.

Though Diaspora Zionism, along with Jewish-Americans such as Emma and her sister Josephine Lazarus or Horace Kallen, Abraham Cahan and many others refused the bifurcated view of the world, they nevertheless found themselves displaced in favor of the more extreme nationalist interpretations of literature. For her part, Antin created a document that pandered to Americans, hitting all the markers of assimilation, beginning with tremendous love and devotion, patriotism as it is called, toward her new country. The document at the same time refused to negotiate with the Zionist view. Before Ozick, she insisted that Diaspora Judaism deserved a space.

Internalizing the modernist conversation around her, she proclaims her former self—her memories, her past—too little for her, too constraining, and herself in need of liberation from them. “I am grown too big” she declared. The proclamation is read to mean that she has outgrown her ethnic, lesser Jewish identity and has developed into a “civilized” American. Comparably, Ozick’s American, English self has grown larger than the Zionist visions for Jewry. They imagined a Jew reduced to a singular essence. For Antin, that definition was constraining and misleading. As “the youngest

of America's children," she felt America was as much her inheritance as it was others'. In a modernist vein, Antin sought to discover the potential inherent in America's literature so she could become a part of its future, part of its "wide spaces," its possibilities (286). Her provocative message was that she would rather turn her back on her past identity than negotiate with extremist nationalist Zionists.

"Obscurity and illness marked Antin's last years," laments Evelyn Salz (119). She suffered from a mental illness that was not understood during her life-time (there is some evidence that she may have suffered from a manic-depressive disorder) and she was generally abandoned by friends from her youth. She neither wrote nor lectured for very long after publication of her autobiography. Her marriage fell apart and she slowly pulled back from public life. That latter part of her story receives less commentary perhaps because it muddles the assured tone she delivers in *The Promised Land*. It is tempting to blame her confusion on having turned her back on her heritage. A Zionist-influenced reading of her life would contend that Klatzkin was right. She was depressed because she could not assimilate and be accepted in the ways that she described. Furthermore, a Zionist reading would translate her depression to mean that as so many of her critics claimed, Antin hid her true Jewish self until it drove her mad. Her assimilation failed, as it was bound to, because she was a Jew.

There is evidence pointing, however in a different direction. Psychologically, immigration left its marks on her as it potentially does on any immigrant regardless of her religion or ethnic affiliation. Mental illness is a pan-human phenomenon. One thing remains certain: she carefully fashioned a story that would turn the Deronda-nationalist certainties, the absolute sense that Jews needed a solution that will deliver

them from Diaspora, on its head. Simultaneously, her story reinforced the American myth that so many Americans wanted to believe, the myth that Americans welcomed those who were willing to come join the melting pot.

Chapter 4

The Rise of David Levinsky and *The Rise of Silas Lapham*

Criticism on Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) has a complicated history. It began with critics relegating his work to the special case of a poorly written immigrant narrative authored by an East European Jew. Later critics realized that the work demanded more thoughtful readings due to the complexity of the social and ethical issues it raises. A significant change took place in 1977 with the publication of Jules Chametzky's *From the Ghetto: The Fiction of Abraham Cahan*. In this critical analysis, which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter, Chametzky argues that the significance of Cahan's work is not limited to its ethnic content but that it engages with classic American social concerns found in the works of writers such as Stephen Crane and Charles Chesnutt (30). Even in post-Chametzky criticism, however, traces of the earlier condescension remain. There is a lingering sense that Cahan's work is not equal in quality to what I have been calling "unhyphenated" American literature: that Cahan's preoccupation with Jewish characters and the Lower East Side brackets his work within confining categories that excludes the far-ranging moral commentary usually attributed to mainstream American literature.

Cahan's book is as American as it is Jewish. The tension the character experiences between his two identities, immigrant and American, has been too readily interpreted as a sign of his failure in America. My reading insists that Cahan intended to show that his Jewish character, though experiencing tension because of his two identities, embraces both. His novel is an American Naturalist one to the same degree

that it is an immigrant narrative. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* needs to be added to the list of American novels informed by the journalist experiences of their authors, journalists who had seen and had often felt the depths of poverty and deprivation, writers such as Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and Theodor Dreiser. While William Dean Howells was a fellow journalist, he nonetheless opted for a kind of nineteenth-century pseudo-romantic happy ending more in line with the novels of Charles Dickens or George Eliot. The Naturalist writers did not aim at resolving the plot in a neat fashion for their readers in the same way. Their and Cahan's works tends to conclude in a less-than happy manner, as *The Rise of David Levinsky* does, in order to more closely reflect the untidy manner in which real people experienced it.

Abraham Cahan offers the readers of *The Rise of David Levinsky* a character who seems strikingly different from William Dean Howells' titular character in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). David Levinsky is a Russian Jewish orphan who immigrated to New York whereas Silas Lapham is a family man who grew up in the north eastern United States. Howells presents Lapham as a nostalgic reminder, a representative of an "authentic" American, a man who was educated by his mother on the values of the Old Testament and Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac*. In comparison with Lapham's American identity, Levinsky appears to be the alien who neither speaks the language nor understands the culture. There is a tendency to treat Cahan's work in the same limiting ways that his characters are treated: he is treated like a foreigner whose fictional concerns centered on the community he knew. Cahan (1860-1951) immigrated to New York from Russia. He lived in the Lower East Side and wrote primarily in Yiddish. His short English-writing career included a few years

as a journalist, a few short stories and one longer novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, after which he wrote exclusively in Yiddish. His massive five volume 1931 memoir, *Bleter Fun Mine Leiben* (*Pages from My Life*) was published in Yiddish. Only the first two volumes of this remarkable work have been translated into English (titled *The Education of Abraham Cahan*).

On the other hand, William Dean Howells (1837-1920) grew up in rural Ohio and "rose" to become a leading figure in American literary culture: he was known as the Dean of American Letters. Such a designation established him as the purveyor of a kind of unmarked American center, one that defines itself as "purely" American. Writers identified primarily as hyphenated, as oppositional, were expected to differentiate themselves from the center. Silas Lapham appears to resemble his creator in that he is an American insider, unhyphenated. He appears to be quintessentially American. The result has been that critics have spent little time asking about possible thematic connections between the two novels due to the hyphenated categorical disparity. When Cahan wrote his English-language novel, he chose a title practically identical to Howells'. It appears as if Cahan did so as part of his homage to Howells to whom he was greatly indebted (Howells encouraged him to write and publish in English). Juxtaposing the novels emphasizes that Howells created a character as much outside urban, American high society did Cahan, conducting a similar conversation regarding "authentic" Americans and "outsiders."

For both characters America is "home" complicated by the fact that the modern city rejects them. Silas Lapham appears as the quintessential American, but emerges as a quintessential rural-American, one who cannot assimilate to urban realities. It was

during this time that American cities developed, displacing the rural American to a peripheral cultural relic. New York and Boston, especially, were seen as the centers of modern American cultural influence.

In spite of his rejection by city society, Lapham does not, for example, consider emigrating from the United States. There is no question in regards to his return "home," to Vermont. His excursion west, which took place before the plot begins, remains the extent of his adventures beyond established American borders. In the same way, Levinsky's rejection by high-society urbanites never alters his conviction that the United States was home. Even if, and Cahan stresses the point throughout the novel, "home" proves a complicated concept for Jewish immigrants, the United States remains their home.

A bifocal approach highlights that the novel is about Jewish-immigrant alienation to the same degree that it is about realities outsiders faced approaching upper-class American society. Rather than view the two novels conventionally, as an immigrant ethnic novel paying homage to the more sophisticated American piece, the critical lens of my examination will transfer its focus to Cahan's and Howells' characters, both of whom are outsiders interacting with the privileged city-dwellers who perceive themselves culturally superior. Cahan used his novel to contribute to the ongoing discussion over the new "risen" Americans, a class of the newly rich described also by Henry James, for example, in *The American* (1877). Cahan converses with Howells (and James, for that matter) using *Levinsky*, seeming to say: "here are the similarities and here are the differences between your American outsider and mine." Interwoven into the social-class framework is the central moral lesson that

concerned both Cahan and Howells: abandonment of business ethics for the sake of capital gain. The two central characters deal with capitalist pursuits differently but both do so in the name of social mobility. The similarities are highlighted through the characters' particular histories and in the conclusion regarding the high price the soul paid when financial success was placed above moral considerations.

An extended comparison between the two characters highlights the extent to which David Levinsky resembles the earlier Silas Lapham. Both arrived from American peripheries in an attempt to enter the upper echelons of American urban society based on their financial success. Their reaction to their respective immigration is similar: both realize the importance of external signifiers to their attempts at assimilation (dress, rich dwellings, etc.). In addition, they both face financial ruin. The most glaring difference between the two is the manner in which they approach their business affairs. Lapham loses everything because he finds himself incapable of acting immorally and Levinsky follows his immoral choices and becomes exceedingly rich. The crux of the similarities lies in both novels in the conclusions the authors draw regarding the high price paid by the soul when financial success is placed above moral consideration.

Lapham finds himself with a difficult choice. In order to protect his finances, he must conduct a calculating business transaction which would amount to fraud. His former partner, Rogers, asks him first to hold and then to sell land for him. The land had lost its original value, a fact the would-be buyers are not aware of. For that reason, Lapham hesitates to sell. The result is that the would-be buyers turning elsewhere which in turn bankrupts Rogers and Lapham. Howells sacrifices the Lapham family's

fortune and their residence among elite Boston society for the sake of teaching his readers a moral lesson. He wrote his novel to battle what he recognized as disturbing consumer-oriented, monopoly driven economic structures that were taking over smaller, domestic economies: "a fall from prewar simplicity into postwar capitalism," as Paul Bove explained ("Helpless Longing" 30). Lapham's roots are rual, in an earlier, simpler domestic economy. He exhibits a noble inability to explot others, to pursue ruthlessly profit at any cost.

Levinsky, in contrast, is ruthless in his pursuit of profits, thanks to which he becomes exceedingly rich. He enjoys thinking about his business proficiency in Darwinian terms. Discovering social Darwinism in Herbert Spencer's writing makes him conceive of himself as one of the "fittest" financial survivors (282). Levinsky is nostalgic not for "prewar simplicity," as Lapham is, but for pre-modern, traditional society that, like Lapham's rural society, has been sheltered from late nineteenth-century's corrupting modernizing forces. Levinsky, too, pays a high price for his blind capitalist drive. Tellingly, neither the man who sought money regardless of the consequences (Levinsky) nor the man who sacrificed it in order to act honorably (Lapham) achieved his main goal: acceptance in urban high society.

This chapter focuses on Abraham Cahan and on his character, David Levinsky, in order to interrogate the complex matrix of identities with which he lived, all the while stressing the parallels with Lapham. Cahan straddled different identities: Jewish intellectual, Jewish immigrant, hyphenated writer, and American Realist writer. For that reason, the following section, the second section, reviews scholarship on Cahan in order to characterize him as a cosmopolitan writer situated among his unhyphenated

colleagues. The third section delves into Cahan's biography and begins to compare the two titular characters, David Levinsky and Silas Lapham. The fourth section continues the comparison on the basis of what Howells would consider "an ideal man," an educated, privileged, refined person. The fifth and final section will address the moral lesson that each character comes to represent.

(2) Cahan and his Writing

Abraham Cahan has long since been established as one of the first Jewish, East-European authors to publish in English. Accordingly, he has also been established as the first to describe Jews who deal with entering mainstream American culture represented for this argument by the mainstream publication milieu (like *McClures, Scribners, The Century,* etc). His subject matter with literally one exception featured the immigrants of the Lower East Side for an English speaking, mostly non-Jewish audience. [74] His best-read short stories, *Yekl* and *The Imported Bridegroom* published together in 1897 in his first collection describe the first-generation immigrant's experiences in America. His stories dealt with the struggle between external pressures to assimilate into American culture and adherence to old-world religious traditions.

For example, in his well-known story, *Yekl*, Jake (who changed his name from the Yiddish Yekl to mark his successful assimilation) deals with tensions between his home culture and what he believes to be his Americanized self. Jake is not aware that

[74] He wrote a novel about a Russian revolutionary that did not do well – *The White Terror and the Red*: *a Novel of Revolutionary Russia* (1905). It centers "upon the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II and its aftermath" (From the Ghetto 115).

he is far from assimilated: he has, for example, a very thick accent that Cahan transliterates for his readers. Nonetheless, he is embarrassed when Gitl, his wife, arrives in New York from Russia. He had finally saved enough to reunite with her and with their three year-old son, Yosl. Jake finds himself impatient with his wife's religious adherence, which he attributes to "greenhorns" who have not yet been Americanized.[75] When Gitl stops Jake from boarding a horse-drawn carriage on the Shabbat, Jake loses his temper with her and "fiercely commanded her not to make him the laughingstock of the people on the street" (38). As the carriage carries them to Jake's apartment, the two look at each other. What strikes them both is the difference between Jake's secular dress and shaven face and Gitl's long dress and head-cover.

The scene describes in ethnographic fashion a moment that replayed itself among Jewish immigrants. The specificity with which Cahan details his characters' dress, their biographies, their emotions, and their speech shows that he invested in their development and wanted to avoid romanticizing them. He wrote about his community, using Realist conventions (i.e. to describe life in a social-scientific mode). The psychology of the characters, their inner thoughts, and motives became the basic building blocks of Cahan's literature.[76]

Nathan Glazer declared in 1956 and again in 1975 that "If one had to select a single person to stand for East-European Jews in America, it would be Abraham Cahan" (*American Judaism* 68). A few years before, in *Commentary* (1952), Isaac Rosenfeld published "The Fall of David Levinsky." In it, he admitted that he avoided

[75] It was often the case that, as with the Antin family, the father would travel first to the United States and then send for his family.
[76] He shared his passion for realism with Leo Tolstoy, Henry James, and Emile Zola.

reading the novel for years since he expected a badly written "account of immigrants and sweatshops" (*Preserving the Hunger* 152). Having finally read it, he expressed his surprise that Cahan's fiction was written in "proper English." Rosenfeld was so impressed, in fact, that he declared *David Levinsky* "one of the best fictional studies of Jewish character available in English" (152). He expected to find a local-color piece culturally subordinate to the "great works" of the time and discovered what he considered a well-written literary work.

By the 1960s, critics established that Cahan's work consistently focused on Jewish culture and Jewish alienation. Sanford Marovitz drew on Glazer's and Rosenfeld's writings by highlighting in Cahan's works themes of quintessential Jewish alienation. In "The Lonely New Americans of Abraham Cahan" (1968), Marovitz interprets Cahan's realism by passing it through a Jewish themed lens. Cahan advocated novels focusing not on emotional sensationalism but on social realism. Marovitz explains in *Abraham Cahan* (1996), that Cahan would refer to sentimentalism as "gross sentimentalism" (198). "Will it not do well for this Nation," Marovitz quotes Cahan in this book, "if strong, new American writers arise who will give us life…give us what in my Russian day we called the *thrill of truth*? [Cahan's stress]" (198). Marovitz explains that for Cahan the "*thrill of truth*" meant "also the immigrant Russian Jew's estrangement in the New World. Marovitz continues, "[a]lienated from his homeland by increasing waves of anti-Semites…the immigrant Jew, like Cahan himself, either quickly became secularized and attempted to escape from his East Side tenement, or he turned inward to the faith of his fathers" (198). The problem with this articulation is that it reduces Jewish sociology into pre and post-

American immigration, failing to acknowledge that Cahan's remarks were meant to reflect on realism generally.

A different interpretation presents itself when we consider that Cahan meant to laud the Realist genre. By bracketing Cahan's remarks inside a Jewish-specific context, Marovitz overlooks the implications regarding the Realist genre. Cahan sought to distance himself creatively from tales of adventures, quests, and the supernatural, in the same way that his Russian, French, and American Realist counterparts did. For them, as for Cahan, realism's aim was to report in an almost methodical fashion about society. Cahan advocated realism as Howells did in both its Russian and its American manifestations. He sought to retain the integrity of the communities and the languages, especially in terms of their speech patterns and mannerism. Zora Neale Hurston or Anzia Yezierska would later do the same but unlike these two writers, Cahan's and Howells' tone communicates superiority over some of the characters in their narrative.

Cahan's speech on Russian and American realism before the New York Labor Lyceum on March 15, 1889, further testifies that he intended to broach broader issues relating to realism.[77] The speech praised and described in sophisticated detail the underwriting principles of realism as Cahan understood them: "That there is a natural imitating instinct in man… proven by the pleasure we derive from the discovery of similarity." Cahan felt that there is an extent to which human experience is universal, experience that transcends identity politics. Cahan adds: "Tolstoi [author's spelling] the greatest of realists, affords us more pleasure by the pedantic truthfulness and

[77] The lecture was published in the Workman's Advocate on March 16, 1889

impartiality of nature than of any polished sifted novels…Mr. Howells…merely at the bidding of his realistic instincts" is able to raise the novel into what Cahan called "high relief" (par 4). The writers he admired thought that their job was imitate or recreate life and they believed that they achieved an impartial neutrality in their literary imitations. Cahan participated in the process and believed himself a writer with instincts that allowed him to describe psychological truths.

Inevitably, yet understandably, quoting Cahan to establish prototypical Jewish-immigrant tropes has become prevalent. For example, in his article "Cultural Production in the Labor Narratives of Rose Schneiderman and Theresa Malkiel" (*American Quarterly* 2005), Peter Kvidera uses Abraham Cahan's *Yekl* to establish that many texts of the period talked about heroes who "struggle between old world duties and new world desires" (1131). It benefits Kvidera to compare his writers' themes of Jewish alienation to those found in Cahan's fiction. Associating the less-known authors he works on with Cahan establishes that they also represent the Jewish-American experience.

Kvidera evokes the quintessential book about Cahan: Jules Chametzky's *From the Ghetto: the Fiction of Abraham Cahan* (1977). Though Chametzky's book lends itself to reading Cahan through exclusively Jewish-ethnic lenses, it is also one of the few books that early on presented a more complex view of Cahan, proving itself a landmark in Cahan studies. Critics have come to rely heavily on this book in one way or another and it is, therefore, quoted in a majority of Cahan criticism. [78] Chametzky

[78] Here are a few examples of works that rely on *From the Ghetto* or on Chametzky's introduction to *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1992) which theoretically mirrors the book: Sanford Marovitz's *Abraham Cahan*; Sara Blair's "Whose Modernism Is It?"; Stephanie Foote's "Marvels of Memory"; Hana Wirth-

features the idea that Cahan should not be read exclusively though a Jewish lens. He begins his book with the following words: "Abraham Cahan's lifework was the great Yiddish newspaper, *The Jewish Daily Forward*, which he helped to found in 1897 and of which he was senior editor from 1903 until his death in 1951" (vii). That is not, however, the sole concern of his book. Rather, he sets out to outline Cahan's "uniqueness as an outstanding journalist-writer mediating between various sensibilities, languages, cultures—Yiddish-Jewish, American-English, Russian—and his importance as an American-Jewish writer" (vii). At the opening of his book, therefore, he presents Cahan as a man who understood American culture, and a man who belonged to the Jewish masses.

"Cahan's is" Chametzky declares dramatically, "a complex Jewish sensibility standing at the very beginning of the development of a significant American Jewish literature" where the "duality of Jewishness and Americanism" is thoroughly explored, as in the fiction of "every consciously Jewish writer in this century" (viii). Chametzky opens his seminal work by declaring Cahan a kind of grand patriarch of Jewish-American consciousness in the US. Concluding that same paragraph, Chametzky writes about *The Rise of David Levinsky*: "he [Levinsky] proved a richly articulated treatment of an experience that is a central cultural fact in a nation of immigrants" (viii). In a bold critical move for the time, he posits that Cahan achieved in *Levinsky* something more than a local-color, ethnic literary product relevant exclusively to the community he described. He argued, in addition, that the novel is "a classic of

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Nesher's *Call It English*; Peter Kvidera et al; Ruth Wisse defines Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* as "[t]he master broker of the marriage between the Yiddish-speaking Jews and English America…" as well as an American classic similarly to Chametzky (Modern Canon 25).

American literature" (viii). He summarizes his analysis of *The Rise of David Levinsky* thus: it "chronicles Levinsky's rise" while in the process "much of the social history of Jewish immigrant life is made vivid" (128). The chronicle is made vivid since Cahan was a good writer who knew how to translate Jewish experience into American terms, stressing the American-cultural relevancy for his readers.

Chametzky focuses his critical attention throughout the book on Cahan's professional and literary career, including analyses of his literary works and not on the reasons why he views Cahan's work relevant for an American literary conversations (and not just for a Jewish one). *David Levinsky*'s influence in English Departments has been felt, nonetheless, steadily gaining respect as an important Jewish-American work. Harold Bloom predicted in *The Western Canon* (1994) that *Levinsky* might enter the mainstream canon eventually or rather inevitably. Bloom presents his readers with a lengthy list of works he predicts will gain mainstream acceptance, but adds that he is "not confident about this list" (640). He stands firm that the list deserve acceptance, a statement which is promising for the mid-nineties. It also speaks well for *Levinsky* when we consider Bloom's brand of elitism. Along with Cahan, Bloom included Bernard Malamud, for example, and Saul Bellow, writers that have arguably already gained a certain level of mainstream acceptance. He sees these writers as creating "art" rather than writing unsophisticated local color. [79] Bloom's favorable impression of *Levinsky* and his reluctance to prophesize in absolute terms its entrance into a

[79] See his discussion of the difference between true, aesthetic art and "bad poetry" being always "sincere" as Oscar Wilde said (16, 549).

mainstream American tradition reflects Cahan's general reception over the years. He is accepted by most critics to be "good enough," but he also appears to be too Jewish.

Subsequently, Bernard Weinstein built on Chametzky's argument, in "Cahan's David Levinsky: An Inner Profile" (1983), published in *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* (*MELUS*). He writes that "[a]ctually, David Levinsky transcends nearly all Jewish-American immigrant literature" (47). This short article's forceful claim relies mainly on Chametzky's book. *Levinsky*, Weinstein wrote, is not only "a profound meditation on the American dream but a work of intense psychological realism" (47). Weinstein praises Chametzky's insight that in "literary matters Cahan was from first to last a Realist" (*From the Ghetto* 29). Weinstein's article was not published in a journal dedicated to mainstream American literature such as *American Quarterly* or *American Realism,* but in a journal dedicated to ethnic literature, creating an ironic tension.

In "Whose Modernism Is It? Abraham Cahan, Fictions of Yiddish, and the Contest of Modernity" (2005), Sara Blair shows that in spite of the lingering sense that Cahan created ethnic, sincere (as Bloom would say) rather than artful literature, he nonetheless, contributed directly to the development of an avant-garde Modernist-literary writing style in English. Quoting Modernist's wish to recreate literature out of fragments of the old, Blair argues that Cahan took fragments of Yiddish and English to present Americans with new possibilities for American literature. She laments that "[s]cholars have typically dismissed these [literary, modernist, avant-garde] effects by subsuming them to a monolithic history of native literary realism" (261). Blair's insight prepares Cahan to be received as a cosmopolitan writer who could talk about

America, resembling Henry James whose works expanded the literary borders for Americans by introducing meetings between Americans and Europeans.

Haunted in the New World (2005) is among the first comparisons of Cahan with mainstream writers. [80] In this book, Donald Weber compares in this book David Levinsky with Henry James' Christopher Newman, the central character in James' *The American*. Weber highlights Newman's "ease" with his "American manners" in opposition to Levinsky's constant anxiety acquiring the same (18). The comparison is compelling because it recognizes the similarities between the characters. They both begin their journeys orphaned and poor and both work hard to gain vast amounts of wealth (though Newman is tempted to employ dishonest means, he resists and acquires his through honest means). The connection is also a somewhat painful echo of Ralph Waldo Emerson's type of proud exceptionalism. A comparison between *The American* and *Levinsky* emphasizes that though American intellectuals have been proudly parading their national literary achievements, they have also been vying for acceptance among European aristocracy. Cahan talked in *Levinsky* about the transnational aspect present in his struggle to join American high society when he compared his "rise" with Americans who strive to belong among Europe's aristocracy. Levinsky complains that "Americans who boasted descent from the heroes of the Revolution boasted, in the same breath, of having spent an evening with Lord so-and-so" (380). Cahan equates his situation with an Anglo and European system where striving for upward social mobility is the norm.

[80] One of the most impressive if brief comparisons can be found in Susan Mizruchi's *Multicultural America (2008)*. In it, she shows that the two can be discussed in an equalizing way. See page 218, for example.

In *The American,* a European aristocratic family will not permit Christopher Newman's marriage into their ranks in spite of their desperate need for money and his considerable wealth. They acquiesce at first to the marriage of the young Madame de Cintré to Newman but cannot reconcile what they view as his rootlessness, his American lack of connection to European pedigree. Accordingly, they refuse to sully their blood-line. By novel's end, they dismiss his accusation that they had treated him badly. They consider him so far beneath them, that even apologizing seems loathsome. "Come," Newman says, "you don't treat me well; at least admit that" (261). In response, Madame de Bellegarde "looked at him from head to foot and in the most delicate best-bred voice" told him: "I detest you" (261). His recent rise to wealth, his lack of pedigree and his inability to show his link to generations of social privilege before him meant he was still unrefined and unproven and therefore unacceptable. Metaphorically, American mainstream literature acts often like the Bellegardes toward its ethnic writers or other newer American writers, products of American working-class or immigrant families.

The earliest of critics writing about Cahan (such as Isaac Rosenfeld) agree that Cahan understood well his position and the position of his fellow East-European Jews. He immigrated to the United States in 1882 from Russia along with great numbers of Jews escaping East-European pogroms. He arrived in Philadelphia, a trip that he details in his autobiography. [81] He describes seeing a cat when he embarks off the boat in the US. "I almost cried out, 'Look, a cat, just like at home'" (*The Education of Abraham Cahan* 217). The cat was an indication "that America was in the same world

[81] In his case, he was also escaping the police for his revolutionary activities in Russia

as Russia" (*The Education of Abraham Cahan* 217). The episode speaks to his belief that East-European Jews and Americans had much in common.

(3) Foreigners in The Big City

Abraham Cahan quickly settled into socialist activism in his new home, which is not surprising considering that he arrived in the United States a radical socialist (a view that would be mitigated over the years). Within a year, he was teaching English to fellow immigrants and working as a journalist. When he did publish, he focused on social issues, highlighting Jewish experiences in the United States and Europe. In 1903 he published an article titled "Jewish Massacres and the Revolutionary Movement in Russia" in *The North American Review*, one of the oldest, most prestigious journals in the United States. In the article he explains, in an authoritative, objective tone, the political background of the attacks against the Jews, asserting unequivocally that the Russian Jewish population were political scapegoats for the Russian government.

As the legendary editor of *The Jewish Daily Forward*, Cahan helped his readers by means of his advice column, "A Bintel Brief" (a bundle of letters), responding to countless letters over the years. A letter from 1907 begins, "I am eighteen years old and a machinist by trade. During the past year I suffered a great deal, just because I am a Jew…and once, when we were leaving the shop, a group of workers fell on us like hoodlums…" (63). In his response, Cahan suggests that she turn to the unions for help, summarizing that "it is noted that people will have to work long and hard before this senseless racial hatred can be completely uprooted" (64). He could identify with the workers because he had started out working in the factories

himself when he first arrived in the country. From standing long days in a factory feeding tin plates into a machine to working in a cigar factory where he handled tobacco all day, Cahan had shared the backbreaking experience of the sweatshops (*The Education* 231). When he finished the manuscripts for a collection of short stories in English, even William Dean Howells had a difficult time finding Cahan a publisher due to anti-Semitism.

When the editor of *McClure's* magazine turned to him asking for sketches of a Jewish success story, Cahan began writing about the fictitious life of a garment worker turned mogul. The shorter sketch developed slowly into his most acclaimed work and only long novel in English, or as he called it in his autobiography, "מיין ענגלישען ראמאן" or "my English novel" (*Fun Leiben* 286). In his autobiography, Cahan recalls receiving the offer following an operation in Presbyterian Hospital for ongoing back pain from which he had suffered. He felt hopeful and ready for a new project (286). Articles about successful immigrants laced with anti-Semitism appeared in *McClure's* prior to the request. It is not clear if Cahan knew about such articles, but it is clear that negative sentiments against Jews were common and unavoidable.

It was for that reason that a friendship with William Dean Howells meant so much to Cahan. In a world that proved often hostile to him, it was good to have such influential and kind supporters. Rudolf and Clara Kirk wrote the article still held as the most comprehensive description of the friendship between Howells and Cahan.[82] The Kirks write: "one can readily understand his [Cahan's] feeling when, walking in 1892

[82] Jules Chametzky relies in his seminal book not only on his own extensive, impressive research but also relies heavily on this article from 1962. The Kirks translated several sources that are currently not only extremely difficult to acquire, but that are available still only in Yiddish. Only the two first volumes of his autobiography, for example, have been translated to date.

from his editorial duties at the *Arbeiter Zeitung* [Workman's Advocate] he was handed a note from William Dean Howells, in which the novelist...had come to the café expressly to meet Cahan…" (29). Cahan described vividly his arrival at Howells' home for the first time: he arrived, pulled the brass bell "and in a few minutes was reciting to Howells his carefully composed speech introducing himself" (30). One can imagine Cahan rehearsing his introduction speech before meeting such an influential man.

Howells was surprised by Cahan when he first met him. He expected an unsophisticated immigrant and met, instead, an educated man. He first sought Cahan for research on his upcoming book. A Jewish grocer whose shop Howells frequented directed Howells to Cahan. When they finally met, Howells was flattered that Cahan had read many of his works, had translated a few of Howells' shorter works into Yiddish, and had even lectured on Howells in Yiddish. Howells had his hand at one time or another during his long career in either editing or publishing in all the major journals and newspapers of his day, including in the *Atlantic, Cosmopolitan, The Century* and *Scribner's*. He helped establish the careers of authors such as Henry James, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Charles Chesnutt, to name a few. He did his best to launch the careers of those he deemed worthy. Alongside these writers, Howells also initiated Cahan's short but literarily-significant excursion into English-language publication.

The two men shared many views on life and on literature. That Cahan would base the main character in his major novel on a character from one of Howells' novels, therefore, is hardly surprising. What has been neglected is the extent to which

Levinsky and Lapham are similar, a resemblance that does not dismiss Levinsky's Jewish identity, but builds on it. To begin, despite the characters' financial gain, the two find they are displaced in the urban setting. In Levinsky's case, the displacement is represented when at novel's end he lives in a hotel with no prospects for a home. In the case of the Lapham family, the displacement is physically represented when their Boston home burns down. "Well, Persis, our house is gone! And I guess I set it on fire myself," Lapham sadly tells his wife (276). The admission operates symbolically since his irresponsible speculating and his earlier morally dubious ousting of his partner converged upon him to result in his financial ruin. Lapham heads to New York to try and salvage his business, "more than ever determined to show them, every one of them, high and low, that he and his children could get along without them…" (278). By the time he returns to Boston his financial ruin seems inevitable:

> …he thought ruefully of that immense stock of paint on hand, which was now a drug in the market, of his losses by Rogers and by the failures of other men, of the fire that had licked up so many thousands in a few hours; he thought with bitterness of the tens of thousands that he had gambled away in stocks, and of the commissions that the brokers had pocketed whether he won or lost. (281)

The house fire marks the beginning of his financial downfall and Howells uses that point in the story to seal Lapham's return to his Vermont farm. "For himself, he owned that he had made mistakes; he could see just where the mistakes were—put his finger right on them…but most importantly, he had come out with clean hands" (318).

Returning to Vermont, therefore, symbolizes for Howells not a defeat but a moral triumph.

There was another reason for Howells to return Lapham to Vermont. Howells does so for the sake of controlling the otherness that he represented. As Amy Kaplan argued in regard to *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, "Howells struggles to contain the centrifugal force" that exists in "the rapidly changing urban space" of the late nineteenth century (*The Anarchy of Empire* 47). It is exactly the entrance of outsiders like Lapham and Levinsky that catalyzes the change in the landscape. Removing Lapham allows Howells to present his "otherness" in a safe, contained temporal space. The character is introduced into Boston and then removed to release his readers from having to contend with this outsider for any longer than they need to. The characters share many of their experiences in the city despite their dissimilar backgrounds, a point that would be important for Cahan to highlight. Cahan begins his novel by describing David Levinsky's Russian life. He was born and raised in Antomir, Russia. There, he lived in abject poverty with his mother. He lost his father when he was a toddler and then, in his teenager years, his mother was murdered by anti-Semites. She toiled to provide for him, but they often went hungry. She used her meager earnings to send young David to the *Cheder* (religious day school for boys) where he studied Hebrew and Torah. Levinsky recognized and quickly internalized his mother's wishes for him that he become an educated Jewish boy. Levinsky explains

that "A Talmudic education was until recent years practically the only kind of education a Jewish boy of old-fashioned parents received" (28).[83]

Wishing nothing more than to please his mother, he would struggle against his teachers when they tried to expel him due to an unpaid bill. When a teacher and his wife, he reminisces, tried "to oust" him because his mother lagged with the payment, he "would clutch at the table and struggle sullenly until they yielded" (16). When he graduated from the *Cheder,* he entered the nearest synagogue in which he could pursue Talmudic scholarship as an independent scholar. Pleasing his mother was a priority in his life and his mother wanted him to have a traditional Jewish education. He devoted much of his life to the Talmud mainly to give his mother *naches* (comfort, satisfaction). He writes:

> My mother usually brought my dinner to the synagogue. She would make her entrance softly, so as to take me by surprise while I was absorbed in my studies. It did her heart good to see me read the holy book. As a result, I was never so diligent as I was at the hour when I expected her arrival with the dinner-pot. Very often I discovered her tiptoeing in or standing at a distance and watching me admiringly. Then I would take to singing and swaying to and fro with great gusto. (33)

Similarly to Lapham's mother, Levinsky's mother was an important role model. She was a source of strength and the driving force behind his early education. The difference between the two characters lies in the fact that Lapham's mother made sure

[83] He writes "until recent years" at the end of the nineteenth century because it was during that time period that parents sent their children to receive secular education in increasing numbers.

he received education valued by the larger American republic. Levinsky, in contrast, would have to learn himself about American culture.

Cahan would need to translate Levinsky's early life for his readers. He would have to explain life for Jews in Russia in detail before he could begin to establish his assertion that experiences in the United States were similar for the different outsiders. And, as has been established in relation to Cahan, his aim was to introduce Jewish characters to non-Jewish Americans. For that reason, Cahan decided to fill the first half of his novel with ethnographic-like detail of East-European Jewish culture alongside young Levinsky's first-person account of his life. Furthermore, considering the importance he placed on Realist character study and on this particular character's morality, it was crucial for Cahan that his readers get acquainted with Levinsky's particular experience. It allows the readers to better appreciate the transformation Levinsky undergoes from a religious Russian Jew to an American capitalist.

Cahan has Levinsky attest to America's transformative powers: a "whole book could be written on the influence of a starched collar and a necktie on a man who was brought up" as Levinsky had been (110). The quote seems to indicate that it was assimilation pressures in the United States that influenced young Levinsky and the line is often read as further proof that Levinsky was overwhelmed by assimilation forces in this country. The terrible tag one received as a "greenhorn," Levinsky reports, pressured him to want and transcend. Becoming American meant donning the right clothes and demonstrating a good grasp of English. The importance of proper dress could be rivaled only by the importance of learning the language. It was, as Levinsky

explains, “an essential step toward shedding one’s “greenhornhood, an operation every immigrant is anxious to dispose of without delay” (105).

Hutchins Hapgood begins *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902) by announcing that “[t]he Jews are at once tenacious of their character and susceptible to their Gentile environment” (9). Hapgood continues that “accordingly, in enlightened America they undergo rapid transformation though retaining much that is distinctive” (10). In America, the “high order of civilization” deeply influences these immigrants, but their imagination and their life remains “in the old world” (10). In what might seem a surprising turn, the Coreys, representatives of urban high society and American old-money nobility (or the closest thing to European nobility Americans have) describe themselves superior to Lapahm in parallel terms. Bromfeld Corey’s (and the rest of the family’s) major complaint against the Laphams is their lack of refined manners and lack of “proper” English. The Coreys understood that the family’s lack of refinement is due to an adherence to their Vermont country ways. If Levinsky is trapped in the old world, according to the stereotype of the East-European Jew, then the Laphams similarly remain in their “old” world.

Hapgood divides Jewish immigrants into two categories: religious Jews in the old-word and Jews in the new world where secular ways seep into their consciousness. A second look at the passage above, where Levinsky’s mother arrives to watch him studying, offers an additional interpretation, one that properly downplays reading Levinsky’s arrival in New York as the primary secularizing force. It poignantly situates the secularization process in a larger, western context. In place of the entrenched Jew arriving in America only to be overwhelmed by America’s powers of

modernization, Cahan describes a secular environment that began encroaching on the Jewish community in Europe. In the passage also quoted above, he admits to studying more diligently when his mother watched him. “It did her heart good to see me read the holy book. As a result, I was never so diligent as I was at the hour when I expected her arrival with the dinner-pot” (33). He would “take to singing and swaying” with greater “gusto” at that time (33). The dedication he projects into his studies is a direct result of his wish to please his mother and not a result of deep felt communion with God. The immense crack that appeared in Levinsky’s religious faith, his doubts as to leading the life of a Talmudic scholar appear immediately following his mother’s death, before he considers emigration. He would experience “bursts of piety” that would last for about two weeks before a “period of apathy” set in (39). His feeling would oscillate continually between loving “Him [God] as one does a woman” and a distinct lack of interest in religious studies (38). It was not New York that turned him from religious old-world Jew to a modern citizen of the world. New York facilitated a change that began back in Russia.

Cahan introduces secularizing forces using the character of Naphtali. As a young boy, Naphtali proved a gifted Talmudic student whom Levinsky deeply envied. One day as they study together, he asks Levinsky “Do you really think there is a God?” (55). Naphtali pronounces that the Talmud over which Levinsky pretends to be pouring was nonsense adding, “don’t be shocked” (55). Dumbfounded, Levinsky asks why Naphtali is still reading the Talmud. Naphtali replies: “[b]ecause I am a fool,” adding, “[b]ut you are a bigger one,” suggesting that studying the Talmud out of the piety Naphtali attributes to Levinsky makes him a fool (55).

Naphtali does not realize that the first crack has already occurred in Levinsky's faith by that point. A page later, Levinsky reports that his "communion with God" became increasingly rare (56). In place of conversations with God and Reb Sanders, a father-figure who urges Levinsky to remain diligent in his Talmudic studies, Levinsky converses with Naphtali about the different secular books Naphtali reads. "Study the World of God, Davie dear," Sanders would say to him, "there is no happiness like it" (31). "What is wealth?" Sanders would continue, answering that it is "a dream of fools" (31). Reb Sanders talks about Talmudic study in opposition to acquiring wealth because a Talmudic student in Russia would so often be very poor. At this point, however, Levinsky finds that he prefers Naphtali's brand of sour skepticism. One particular book Naphtali shows to Levinsky becomes important later in the plot. Naphtali tells Levinsky about a secular poet, Abraham Tevkin, to whose daughter Levinsky offers marriage in New York.

Cahan effectively seals any hope that Levinsky will remain a traditional religious man when Levinsky is next invited to stay with Shiphrah, a wealthy, Jewish woman who takes care of Talmudic scholars. Matilda, after whom the fourth "book" is named (and Shiphrah's daughter) plays the next, important part in Levinsky's move toward secular sensibilities.[84] She, Levinsky knows, received her early education in a boarding school in Germany and was taught by Russian tutors at home. No less shocking for Levinsky, she plans to attend university. Matilda says to him in one of their earliest conversations, "besides, the idea of a young man like you not being able to speak a word of Russian! Aren't you ashamed at yourself?...Why don't you try to

[84] the novel is divided into sections he calls "books."

study Russian, geography, history?" (71). She berates Levinsky for speaking one language, Yiddish, a language she viewed (as did other secularized Jews) as the language of uneducated, religious Jews who refused to join the modern world.[85]

Levinsky is completely enthralled by her: she is beautiful, direct, and knowledgeable. She kisses Levinsky at one point, immediately afterwards commenting ironically: "There is a pious soul for you!" He allows the kiss even though a religious man over the age of thirteen is not allowed to touch a woman not his immediate relative (much less kiss one unless she is his wife) (75). She realizes that his interest in her and his willingness to kiss her testify to the beginning of the end of his religious devotion. "When you are in America you'll dress like a Gentile and even shave," she foretells his future, "then you won't look so ridiculous. Good clothes would make another man of you," she adds, referring to his long black coat, his long side-locks, and other external markers of his religious life (75). Her ability to see what will occur only a few months into the novel's plot is about more than powerful assimilation pressures inside of the United States.

America will supply fertile ground on which to proceed. Cahan has taken meticulous care, structuring the early "books" in a fashion that allows two simultaneous readings. Anyone reading through an exclusively Jewish lens would see the Jewish aspects. These would be the readers that understand Matilda's prophecy to mean that America and Levinsky are antithetical to each other, one modern and the other a relic of Middle-Ages Judaism endemic to Eastern Europe. There is, nonetheless, a bifocal effect that reveals the limits of that monolithic myth through

[85] Cahan, incidentally, knew Yiddish and Hebrew but also read Tolstoy in Russian and knew some German, too. He was more like Matilda than he was like Levinsky.

which Lower East Side Jews were often understood. The story is both one of American assimilation and of Jewish cultural changes from religious to secular sympathies.

Cahan separated his novel into two sections: the first introduces his character's Jewish background and life in Europe, all as a way of educating his English-reading audience about Jewish life back in Russia; the second introduces life for Jews in the United States. Cahan teaches his readers about Jewish customs, pausing in his plot to intercede with short explanations regarding Jewish culture. At one point early in the novel he pauses to introduce the Talmud to his readers, dedicating a whole paragraph to the task: "What is the Talmud? The bulk of it is taken up with debates of ancient rabbis…" (28). These interludes and especially their placement in the beginning of the novel contribute to the sense that he focuses on Jewish identity and culture. At the same time, as we have seen, Cahan finds a clever way of undermining the prototypical story his readers might expect.

(4) The Ideal Man and the Outsider

Howells faced different challenges in introducing his character to his readers. In one way, Howells' Silas Lapham seems to embody inordinately well the mythic elements identified by Philip Fisher, elements that defined for the nineteenth-century (and the early twentieth-century) an "authentic" American: New England intellectual and pastoral traditions; frontier, westward expansion; commerce; and self-cultivation (*Redrawing the Boundaries* 234). It is enough for Howells to supply several well-placed cultural cues in order to explain the tropes from which Lapham's character

emerges: he is the man who "pulled himself up by his bootstraps," a pastoral New-England farmer, a man who had ventured out to the frontier (and whose brothers remain there to settle the west). The short interview at the opening of the novel between Lapham and Bartley Hubbard suffices to inform the reader about Lapham's background.

Hubbard is a central character in Howells' *A Modern Instance* (1882). He is an unsympathetic newspaper man and a villain. His selfish, callous character is meant to alarm readers that sensationalist news reporting is overtaking responsible news reporting. Hubbard wants to make money, he wants to report in an amusing fashion, and violating ethical journalistic practices will gain him these. Lapham's rural ways (his accent, his brashness, and his rolled-up sleeves at the office) amuse Hubbard and he makes no attempt to hide his disdain toward Lapham. For contemporary readers and for readers of the time the two men sitting across from each other during the interview contrast each other: one is a sophisticated but heartless journalist and the other is an honest, direct, if less sophisticated rural man.

Howells was aware of the fact that his urbanite readers would understand Lapham as an unsophisticated rural outsider. Nevertheless, he pressed them to accept Lapham not as the encroacher unto their urban landscape, but as an example of a socially responsible citizen. Furthermore, the opening interview and the novel's continued emphasis on Lapham's moral fiber provocatively positioned the urban reader alongside Hubbard, the villainous cynic. Readers needed to shift their sympathies to the outsider in order to remain on the side of the hero. Such a move challenged many of his readers' class-sensibilities. Demonstrating an allegiance with

different marginalized groups was commonly found in Howells' novels or as Sophia Forster explained in "Americanist Literary Realism" (2009), Howells' novels and critical writings "were seen as radical, even dangerously so, as his insistence on Realist representations of "plebeian characters" threatened the new urban middle class" (223). [86] The kind of sympathetic commitment Howells required of his readers, in other words, proved challenging for them, to say the least.

Amy Kaplan complains that Howells' Realist project of social justice fails primarily because of his treatment of Lapham. Howells presents himself as the one who can recognize "common people" and portray them well, (their mannerisms, etc.) to his readership (*Social Construction of Realism* 22). The result, as Kaplan held, is an "othering" of the "common." The third person narration communicates that Lapham cannot tell his own story to members of patrician Boston: "he proves incapable of making himself known," continues Kaplan. Howells believed that the Realist narrator, who is part of the educated elite, was able to make Lapham "familiar and unthreatening," yet the third person, presides over Lapham condescendingly (41).

A closer look at Howells' description of an "ideal man" further complicates his support for Lapham's character. Looking at his "ideal man" further reveals that Howells himself condescended to the less educated. In 1876, Howells published in the *Atlantic Monthly* a reaction to a fair he visited. Howells, annoyed, described the language used to introduce an exhibition of George Washington's clothes. Paul Abeln, in *William Dean Howells and the Ends of Realism* (2005), explains that Howells is

[86] Howells wrote an open critique of the way the anarchists caught after the Haymarket bombing (1886), a move that resulted in a back lash against him. He was seen as aligning with dangerous, communist and anarchist agitators.

critical of the language used on the signs describing the clothes. Instead of "high waistcoat, breeches, and pantaloons," the sign read, "Coat, Vest, and Pants of George Washington" (7). "The attempt," Abeln continues, "to make Washington accessible to fairgoers strikes Howells as not merely slapdash but dangerous" (7). What was considered educated English, therefore, was a must for Howells. For him, the ideal man was, as Abeln summarizes, "in short, a fine reader of books and of human beings, and this skill emerges not primarily from education or station but rather from energetic exchange between "business" and "intellectual achievement" (37). Abeln argues that one such example of a Howellsian ideal man is Basil March, the main character in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). Silas Lapham would not notice the problem in the language describing Washington's pants nor would Levinsky but March would, being the sophisticated Bostonian who arrives in New York to open a newspaper.

There is a strong argument in Howells' defense. Having come from rural Ohio, and having then "risen" in the literary elite world of Boston and New York, made him particularly sensitive to his social position. Geordie Hamilton in "Rethinking the Politics of American Realism" (2009), and I both want to turn the tide of opinion back in Howells' favor. In opposition to Kaplan, he argues that *Lapham* is artfully designed and remains "a rhetorical communication of a moral message" (14).[87] As Cahan also knew, asking for an educated readership's sympathy was much easier when the narrator could resemble them. For that reason, his narrative voice worked to align him

[87] See Kenneth S. Lynn's *William Dean Howells, An American Life,* chapter 1 for more on the ways that by the 1970's his work had been left by the wayside of literary discussion.

with his privileged readers. It was intended to establish him as that voice of cultured society that can also explain the "common people".[88]

Making Lapham known to middle and upper class city-readership depended, he also held, "upon his maintaining and regulating the boundaries between them," beginning with separating himself from his lower-class hero (Kaplan 41). Cahan, who came from "the other half," and needed to be "made known" had this to say about Howells after his death in 1920 (published in *The Forward*): "He was a modest man in the finest and truest sense of the word. And although he belonged to aristocratic society, his interests always drew him to the poorest people" (Kirk 43). Cahan, for one, had been convinced that Howells' efforts were aimed at genuinely making a difference with his literature.

The same accusation aimed at Howells, that he sat on his elitist perch and patronized "poor" characters, can also be leveled at Cahan. He considered himself superior to uneducated immigrants at the same time that he fought for them. In the name of their intellectual growth, he printed what he considered highbrow literary pieces translated into Yiddish in *The Forward*. The immigrants he supported (helping them and looking down at them) were the same ones the Marches gaped at during their safari-like trek through the city in search for an apartment. Cahan needed to demonstrate that he shared mainstream's cultural values when facing mainstream English publishers and intellectuals. When he faced working-class immigrants, he was the final word on what American culture was like and he expressed his privileged position in relation to them.

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[88].

As Nina Warnke showed in “Yiddish Music Halls, the Yiddish Press, and the Processes of Americanization” (1996), Cahan along with other intellectuals “regarded themselves as the immigrants’ cultural and political educators, as guardians of morality and as guides on the road to cautious Americanization” (323). She describes how Cahan, for example, warned his readers against music halls and theaters that showed raunchy plays and vaudeville (324). Cahan found himself berated by fellow intellectuals for translating literature into the worker-Yiddish, an Americanized Yiddish considered especially low, a Yiddish spoken by working-class immigrants living in the ghetto. Cahan remained undeterred, however. Chametzky presents Cahan’s answer to the charge that he “lowered himself to the masses instead of lifting them.” His response was that “if you want to pick a child up from the ground, you first have to bend down to him” (19). Cahan envisioned a hard-working immigrant coming home and spending the late hours of the evening or Shabbat mornings reading Tolstoy, Howells, or James in his newspaper. Making these accessible to his readers, he hoped, would inspire them to pick up the originals and work through the original texts.

The didactic nature of Cahan’s and Howells’ novels was central to their writing. For that reason, it is telling to compare Levinsky and Lapham on the basis of Howells’ concept of an ideal, “civilized” American. Cahan demonstrates having internalized in his writing Howells’ ideal since a comparison of Levinsky with Lapham reveals the former better fit the definition than the latter. Levinsky first strove for a college education and a professional career as a doctor or lawyer before he turned to his business pursuits. In contrast, Lapham did not continue his education beyond the small rural school and did not intend to continue studying. Levinsky abandoned his

college dreams for business, but became a life long reader. Early in the novel Levinsky enrolls in evening school, noting: “I threw myself into my new studies with unbound enthusiasm” (129). He felt right at home in secular “book-learning,” due to his rigorous Talmudic training (129). Lacking the economic freedom to pursue his secular studies, Levinsky would alternate work and college courses. When he had saved sufficiently to pay for a few college courses, he would abandon work and study with what he describes as “religious devotion” (133). When notions of beginning his own business emerge, however, he deserts school entirely. “So you have thrown that college of yours out of your mind, have you?” asks Gussie, a fellow factory worker (196). He replies that he can read at home.

Though Levinsky continues reading for the sake of his intellectual growth, he will also violate the ideal. The ideal man must adhere also to “noble” codes of behavior. Though Levinsky will continue reading academic as well as highbrow literature for the rest of his life (crucial for the ideal man) he does so while employing less than honest business practices. Levinsky feels guilt at having abandoned his college education, but feels little guilt over his business decisions. “I found myself in the vicinity of City College. As I passed that corner I studiously looked away. I felt like a convert Jew passing a synagogue,” he says (207). Levinsky equates leaving college with converting from Judaism, an act that left the person dead in the eyes of his fellow, religious Jews. In contrast, he excuses his shady dealings by arguing that they were survival tactics, suggesting that he had no other choice and that they were justified.

Both characters make the mistake of initially confusing external markers for belonging with moral behavior. First, they understand that the need to dress and speak the right kind of "American," is crucial. Second, and here the full import of Levinsky's violation of the Howellsian ideal man comes into full light both are blinded by the thrill of acquiring large amounts of money. Levinsky describes the pleasure that money affords him:

> No matter how absorbed I might have been in my work or in my thoughts, the consciousness of having that wad of paper money with me was never wholly absent from my mind. It loomed as a badge of omnipotence… When I walked through the American streets I would feel at home in them, far more so than I had ever before. (174-175)

Accordingly: "A working-man, and everyone else who was poor, was an object of contempt to me—a misfit, a weakling, a failure, one of the ruck" (283). Levinsky is rather more like the despicable Bartley Hubbard since he considers himself superior for having the "guts" to "do what it takes" to "rise" in the world. Cahan's thesis (considering the novel's didactic function for a moment) is that Levinsky did not have the moral fortitude with which to face American capitalist temptations. Lapham, in the same way, knows that "city folks" do not view him as an equal, but he is aware that his money affords him an opportunity to meet with them. During Hubbard's interview with Lapham, Lapham asks, "so you want my life, death, and Christian suffering, do you young man?" Hubbard replies, "That's what I'm after" (3). Hubbard tells Lapham in no uncertain terms that he is "one million times more interesting to the public"

because he has money: “There’s no use beating about the bush” (3). The only reason the journalist sits in Lapham’s office is his money.

The pleasure the characters take in their financial success and in their subsequent hopes for joining high society provide the novels’ dramatic tension. Acquiring money does not translate into an ability to easily acquire genteel manneris. Lapham cannot help his own ignorance of genteel behavior because he lacks self-awareness, horrifying his wife and especially his daughters.[89] For years, the family had lived in an unfashionable part of town without being aware of it. Once they realize the situation, they rush to find a more “fitting” neighborhood.[90] Silas and his wife, Persis, decide upon the move mainly because they are worried that the girls would not be able to secure advantages marriages. For these reasons, they begin building a new home in the fashionable Bay area. One afternoon, as the family examines the progress on the construction of their new house, they are visited by Tom Corey. Lapham invites young Corey to enter the structure, proceeding to boast no end about the new home. Lapham primarily emphasizes to Corey the tremendous amounts of money that he is spending on the house and boasts about further extravagances that the architect had convinced them to add (47-48). Lapham proceeds that there will be no “second best” in his house: “There ain’t going to be an unpleasant room in the whole house, from top to bottom” (49). The girls, Penelope and Irene, are painfully aware of his breach of conduct. They stare in horror as even they know that one does not mention ones’

[89] The Lapham women recognize better socially appropriate behavior even if they are far from mastering such behavior

[90] In an earlier draft of the novel, the family realizes that the Jewish family next door marks the neighborhood as lesser-socially acceptable. They have nothing against the Jewish family but they strive to live in a neighborhood that will lead them into the “right circles” (see Editor Don Cook’s *Silas Lapham*, Norton Critical Edition page 344).

expenses. Boasting about having money was a sure sign of one's nouveau riche status. "I wonder what papa is going to say next," Irene asks Penelope under her breadth. She introduces their mother before she had fully emerged unto the first floor in an attempt to stop their father from speaking further (49).

Later in the novel, the Coreys invite the Laphams to a formal dinner at their house. Lapham fumbles during the dinner because he is unaccustomed to the dress-white gloves he is forced to wear. He drinks and talks too much, embarrassing his family. While preparing for the dinner, Lapham is terrified, anticipating that he will inevitably prove a disgrace. Deciding on gloves, a hat, and the rest of his attire becomes unbearable: "Drops of perspiration" gathering on his forehead "in the anxiety of the debate" (162). At one point he considers asking Tom Corey in affected nonchalance, "Oh, by the way, Corey, where do you get your gloves? But Lapham found that he would rather die than ask this question, or any question that would bring up the dinner again" (162). He is painfully aware that he is ill equipped to socialize with the Coreys.

Levinsky's efforts highlight his inability to assimilate into high society in a similar fashion. After years in New York, after years of perfecting his English and working on his manners, Levinsky still at heart feels insecure in the upper class milieu. He explains: "At the bottom of my heart I cow before waiters to this day. Their white shirt-fronts, reticence, and pompous bows make me feel as if they saw through me and ridiculed my ways. They make me feel as if my experience, clothes, and ways ill become me" (515). He feels alienated even though he had been rich for years and knows which fork to use at the table. When Cahan can stop translating his character's

foreign Jewish culture for the reader, he has his character repeat how out of place he feels. Levinsky has more self-awareness than Lapham. At the moment of his faux pas, Lapham remains oblivious while Levinsky seems to agonize at every moment. Lapham can be compared in this regard to James' Christopher Newman, at ease, as Weber also pointed out, in his American ways.

An additional instance that illustrates Levinsky's basic insecurity within the American urban elite can be found in his encounters with a man simply introduced as Loeb. To further grow his business, Levinsky begins traveling to cities other than New York. He takes the train, the modern, efficient means of transportation taken by other, successful traveling salesmen. Realizing the importance of social smoking, Levinsky decides to adopt the habit. He "would watch American smokers and study their ways, as though there were a special American manner of smoking and such a thing as smoking with a foreign accent" (326). Levinsky understands that even mundane gestures such as smoking expose him as the outsider and is determined not to expose himself in that fashion.

Loeb, an American-born Jew of German descent more often than not leads sessions of ridicule at Levinsky's expense on these train trips. Loeb presses on Levinsky's most vulnerable spot, his insecurities surrounding exposing himself as a foreigner: "One of the things about which he often made fun of me was my Talmudic gesticulations…It was so distressingly un-American" (327). If his own hyper-awareness of his mannerisms did not prove painful enough, there was Loeb ready to point out what was foreign about him and ready to do so in front of the same Americans he worked so hard to emulate:

> One afternoon…Loeb entertained a group of passengers of which I was one with worn-out stories of gesticulating Russian Jews… "By the way Levinsky, you never use a telephone, do you?" "Why? Who says I don't?" I protested timidly" Because it's of no use to you," he replied." "The fellow at the other end couldn't see your hands, could he?" (328) [91]

In "Race and Ethnicity" (2004), Catherine Rottenberg complicates the relationship between the two characters by highlighting that Loeb's own insecurities emerge when he finds himself flanked by a group of unmarked or unhyphenated Americans and the Eastern European Jew (310). He is Jewish and therefore an outsider even if his descendants did arrive from Germany rather than Eastern Europe. He cannot completely adopt an unhyphenated American identity. For Loeb, ridicule efficiently shows the gentile Americans on the train that he identifies with them rather than with Levinsky. The ridicule goes a long way toward trying to point out to them that he considers himself culturally superior to the East Europeans. Hence, Loeb's ridicule works to send a coded message to the Americans on board the train that he is an Americanized Jew and that his alliance lies with them.

Levinsky meets Loeb for a final showdown a few years after he begins his regular train trips around the country. In another of Cahan's instructional moments, he has Levinsky explain that while his business expanded, Loeb had lost his lucrative job: "It was the passing of the German Jew from the American cloak industry" (372). The scene is set for a dramatic encounter between the two characters. Levinsky and Loeb meet in an lavish hotel lobby, which Loeb is vacating and Levinsky is lounging in

[91] This joke is still in circulation almost one hundred years later. Many Jews retain the cultural marker of speaking and motioning with their hands. It is a stereotype that endures.

after another lucrative business venture. Loeb confronts him, shouting that he is a "Division Street manufacturer" by which he means an East European foreign invader. "The drift of his harangue," Levinsky summarizes, "was that "smashing" prices was something distasteful to the American spirit, that we were only foreigners, products of an inferior civilization, and that we ought to know our place" (374). Levinsky, in Loeb's rendering, is not only a foreigner but an "inferior" one that drags down the rest of the urban upper and middle class because of his commercial success. Even in a moment of triumph, Levinsky is reminded his success does not translate automatically into acceptance.

Levinsky explains to his readers his community's role from a larger historical perspective:

> The old cloak-manufacturers, the German Jews, were merely merchants. Our people, on the other hand, were mostly tailors or cloak operators [like himself] who had learned the mechanical parts of the industry…In proportion as we grew we adapted American business ways. (374)

Defending himself to his reader, Levinsky explains that Russian Jews had an advantage that made them successful. They knew the organizations they were heading better since they started by occupying the lowliest positions in the trade. Many immigrants ascended from working on the simplest machine in the factory. At the end of their argument, Levinsky offers Loeb a position, working for him as a salesman. Loeb accepts the offer, cementing Levinsky's take on the business that the East European manufacturers were gaining the upper hand.

As is the case for Lapham, Levinsky's hard work and success is recognized in the city and is rewarded financially, but not socially. There is a particular merchant Levinsky describes to be on friendly terms with. He addresses him in friendly manner as "Dave," but it was always accompanied by a note of condescension. Despite any admiration for Levinsky's business aptitude, the merchant treated him as his "inferior, all the same—a Jew, a social pariah" (502). But the rural man, Lapham, is also a kind of social pariah. The elder Corey, Bromfield, berates Tom for his association with Colonel Lapham, as he calls him. Lapham had fought in the Civil War and so receives at least this honor from the elder Corey. When Tom tries to excuse Lapham's so-called lack of manners and "poor" grammar, arguing that it is unfair to judge everyone by their standards, Bromfield dismisses what he sees as his son's over developed sense of liberal tolerance.

"Money buys position at once," he tells his son and that was the problem. That is why, he continues, Bostonians should never leave Boston. It puts ideas in their heads. Only remaining in Boston can rightly show a Bostonian aristocrat, as Bromfield sees himself, that "there can *be* no standard" other than his. He continues to lecture Tom by declaring Lapham vulgar, adding that the very thought of Tom marrying into the Lapham family was revolting. "We shall never have a real aristocracy," he laments, "while this plebeian reluctance to live upon a parent or a wife continues the animating spirit of our youth" (59). "Tom," he says finally, "I supposed you wished to marry the girl's money, and here you are, basely seeking to go into business with her father" (59). Bromfield has no profession other than practicing to be a Bostonian gentleman by which he means a man who relies on old-family money and position

rather than an occupation. Tom, "the youth" Bromfield complains about, admires the plebeian Lapham (as Tom inevitably would if he had met Levinsky) for building his empire through hard work. For Bromfield, the thought is outrageous.

(5) The Moral High-Road Sometimes Taken

Looking at both characters reveals that they struggle with what their authors viewed as American moral deterioration. Sander Gilman holds that in Cahan's literature "America itself is the cause of deterioration of the spirit among" the immigrant characters, resulting in "moral disaster" (*Jewish Frontiers* 162). Howells resolves Lapham's conflict when by strips him of his wealth and returns him to his "rightful" place, Vermont. There is no state of "at-homeness" for him in the city anymore than there is one for Levinsky. Meanwhile, Levinsky cannot resolve his conflict and never turns away from his immoral business practices. That he resorts to unsavory tactics as in his early days building his business does not mean that he would not resort to them once again given the right situation. The two men have different ways of dealing with their struggles, but their authors use both to teach readers a similar lesson regarding the acquisition of wealth.

At a particularly low point when he is hungry and practically homeless, Levinsky runs into Gitelson, the tailor with whom he arrived in New York from Russia. Gitelson asks him, "But why don't you learn some trade?" (149). He accepts the offer of help and finds himself employed successfully in a factory: "I shall never forget the day when my capital reached the round figure of one hundred dollars" (166). From that point he embarks on his adventure. He "envisioned himself a rich

man," but admitted that as much as the money lured him, the "adventure" lured him, too, or what he called the "game of life" (180). He later adds, "There is plenty of money in cloaks, and I am bent upon making heaps, great heaps of it…" (200). He is a dedicated hard worker enjoying the adventure of it all and he is proud of the amounts of money with which he gets to play at the end.

Establishing his business allowed him to feel he was becoming a "real" American by which he meant the "right" kind of American, a rich, city dweller. Mrs. Nodelman, his landlady early on, worried when her son pushed Levinsky into business. "He is an educated man," she argued, "and he doesn't care for money" (180). [92] Her son replies, "What is a man without capital? Nothing!...Money talks as the Americans say" (180). Levinsky takes the advice to heart, that without money (as Lapham similarly hears from Hubbard) he exists as a non-entity in what he considers the "right" social circles. As in Lapham's case, Levinsky knows that his tale finds an American readership only because he is one of the richest garment manufacturers in the United States. His story would not be interesting to the readership, the "right" kind of American readership, had he no money and there is "no beating about the bush" as Hubbard would say (3).

He takes the lesson to heart, not Mrs. Nodelman's lesson, but her husband's and her son's. For example, he feels great pride in understanding the financial column. It stood as a symbol of his belonging into the exclusive club into which he worked so hard to find access: "the financial column was followed by me with a sense of being a member of a caste for which I was especially intended, to the exclusion of the rest of

[92] Interestingly, she is the one given the responsibility of voicing the concern that Levinsky will violate the Howellsian-like ideal.

the world" (267). To achieve the positions they did, each man had to engage in morally questionable behavior. Levinsky explains that early on he had no choice but to employ "subterfuges that could not exactly be called honorable" (238). For example, he would send two different contractors each others' checks claiming he mixed them up in the mail in order to buy for himself time to raise the money he owed both. He continues to explain that "Indeed, business honor and business dignity are often luxuries in which only those in the front ranks of success can indulge" (238). Fighting your way up from poverty, therefore, meant using less than honest means and Levinsky saw no way around it.

One of the unsavory tactics both men indulged in during the early days of their businesses related to their partners. Levinsky hinged the success of his cloak factory initially on the talent of Mr. Chaikin, a tailor in the employment of the factory where Levinsky was also employed as a machine operator. He convinces Mrs. Chaikin, an overbearing, suspicious, obnoxious woman, that their best interest lies in placing Mr. Chaikin's and her future in the hands of Levinsky's new factory scheme. She agrees before beginning to suspect, however, that Levinsky has much less money than he originally promised (which was true) and she forces her husband to leave Levinsky in spite the fact that the fledgling factory's business began, if somewhat unsteadily, improving (289). The already tittering business receives a great blow when Chaikin left, but Levinsky single-handedly led the business on to success without his partner.

When Mrs. Chaikin realizes the mistake she had made, she appears in Levinsky's office demanding to rejoin the company. She demands of Levinsky: "and who fixed up this whole business? Who did not sleep nights to get it all along? And

whose styles got the business started and gave it the name it has?" referring, naturally, to her husband (343). Levinsky pretends not to understand what she means since he has no intention of allowing her and her husband to return as partners. He had worked hard to stabilize and grow the company after they left and the prospect of having to deal with the awful woman again was far from appetizing. "Poor fellow," she mocks him, "he has no head on his shoulders, poor thing. But what's the good beating about the bush, Levinsky? I am here to tell you that we have decided to come back and be partners again" (343). Up to that moment, Levinsky could avoid a confrontation by pretending he did not understand that she wanted to rejoin, but at that point she leaves him no choice but to stop "beating about the bush." "That's impossible, Mrs. Chaikin…the business doesn't need any partner" he tells her (343).

She verbally assaults him in an attempt to change his mind. Her character is described in such uncomplimentary terms that the reader cannot but congratulate Levinsky for being rid of both her and her husband. At this point Levinsky reveals, however, that one of the reasons that he does not need Chaikin is because he has been stealing his designs since the latter had left (374). He survived Chaikin's departure from the company and had done well since by paying an employee of the company currently employing Chaikin to secretly copy his designs and bring them back to him. Levinsky finally reaches an agreement with Mrs. Chaikin whereby he takes him back as an employee. The reader, however, must recognize that Chaikin deserved better especially considering that Levinsky had been exploiting his designs for years by stealing them.

A comparison of the two novels reveals that Cahan and Howells related differently to their characters' business plots. Cahan focused on Levinsky's business plot continually describing, often in minute detail, the machinations of his success while Howells focused on Lapham's family life. The only insight into Lapham's early days in establishing the factory arrives when Rogers, his former partner, enters the plot. Howells does not detail the exact circumstance surrounding Lapham's ordeal with his partner. Early on in the novel, the reader meets Mr. Rogers when the Laphams run into him in Boston. The reader learns that Lapham wronged Rogers when he forced him out of the business during those early days. Lapham "had been dependent at one time on his partner's capital" though the reader never gets to hear in what way he depended on it (44). Instead, Howells summarizes for Lapham by stating that "[i]t was a moment of terrible trial" (44). The reader cannot but be curious to why it was such a terrible ordeal.

Lapham blames Persis, for pushing him into taking a partner in the first place, yet admits he needed his capital desperately. Eventually, Lapham ousted his partner, justifying it with his love for his paint which he describes as his "passion" (44). He simply could not, he says, share that passion with anyone else (44). The excuse is a weak one and the reader grows more suspicious when his wife presses him about what she calls his "wrong doing" and, as Patrick Dooley noted in his seminal "Ethical Exegesis" (1999), Persis is Lapham's conscience in the novel. When Lapham angrily asks her to stay out of his business, she exclaims, "I *will* meddle when I see you hardening yourself in a wrong thing" (42). She raises the issue in the beginning of the novel, telling her husband and the readers that he had wronged the man. In the

conclusion, Lapham enters into new business dealings with Rogers to help him financially and to try and make amends. It is this final transaction with Rogers and its disastrous outcome that pushes Lapham's finances, already stretched thin by that point in the novel, into complete ruin.

In "Ethical Exegesis," Patrick Dooley proclaims *The Rise of Silas Lapham* the "high point" of Howells' "forceful goal: moral suasion" (363). He differentiates between two plots in the novel; a domestic plot dealing with Lapham's family (and with a romantic triangle involving Penelope, Irene and Tom Corey) and a business plot. In the dramatic climax of the business plot Lapham finds that if he sells property he held for his former partner, Rogers, they will be saved financially. Lapham hesitates selling because he does not feel at ease with what would amount to dishonesty (295). When Rogers discovers Lapham failed to act and in fact seems inclined against selling he cries out, "You've ruined me! I haven't a cent left in the world! God help my poor wife!" (295). "This was his reward," Lapham thinks to himself about the situation, "for standing firm for right and justice to his own destruction: to feel like a thief and a murderer" (295). Lapham is trapped between financial ruin, his own and Rogers' and acting morally, the same situation Levinsky found himself in following Chaikin's departure from the fledgling company.

To further introduce moral ambiguity, Howells has Lapham involve himself with Rogers a second time also because of his weakness for real estate speculation. Holding on to the land for Rogers potentially meant a quick and highly profitable turnaround. Like Levinsky, he is entranced by the promise of increasing his "wad of money," which he imagines expanding using high risk speculation. When the moment

of truth arrives, the moment when he must either sell or lose everything, Rogers asks Lapham: why not just lie. Why adhere suddenly and at this crucial juncture in both their financial futures to such high moral ground? Rogers asks where that conscience was when he originally forced him out of the business. As Persis reminded him earlier in the novel, he knew what he was doing, what he was costing Rogers when he pushed him out and took his shares (42). The answer is that two wrongs do not make a right. Lapham refuses to allow wrong doings to accumulate.

The resolution of each of the plots marks, as in other places of comparison between the two novels, a great similarity and a great difference. Howells removes Lapham home onto his Vermont farm while Cahan situates Levinsky inside of a hotel room in New York. It is possible to view Lapham's return as a symbolic nostalgic gesture on Howells' part. True morality remains out in the country where the residents adhere to old values taught to them by the bible and the founding fathers. The city, in opposition, is a place where the price of doing business successfully is the price of your morality. There is too much corruption inherent in a system that revolves around accruing money. That means that Lapham went home to the heart of some kind of pure American place that still remembers how to be good. This leaves Levinsky in the position of the Jewish alien, the foreigner who has not managed to find his place in the modern city. Levinsky appears to have transformed into the Jew destined (or perhaps cursed) to hover on the outskirts of mainstream belonging without gaining access. There is another reading, however. As we have seen, the stories of both men are also about arriving from the peripheries and about the tensions between urban sophisticates and outsiders in the city.

The difference reveals Cahan's conversation with Howells' novel. Once we use Lapham as a backdrop to Levinsky's moral dilemma, we find Cahan's American yet particularly Jewish bifocal moment. Lapham leaves the city or one might say is almost expelled from the city. The house, the literal and metaphorical space for the Laphams in the city is destroyed. Though Penelope and Tom Corey are to wed at novel's end, Lapham and his wife, the first generation immigrants as it were, must be removed. [93] David Levinsky closes his autobiography by stressing the degree to which he feels out of place in America. Rather than at home with all the success and money he had, Levinsky feels that in some way he remains young David, the Talmudic scholar back in Antomir. Levinsky repeats often throughout his novel that he misses "home," that he misses Antomir. Though the outsider, he chooses to remain. Levinsky could opt for a life in Europe. He could travel to Paris and England, rent an apartment there and spend the rest of his life out of New York in the same way that Christopher Newman does (though Newman returns to the United States). Why does Levinsky not choose any of these options? Why does he remain in New York pining for a home he cannot have? Alternatively, why does Cahan not end his novel with a similar expulsion of his character out of the city-scape?

The unresolved feelings Levinsky experiences toward his past are a direct result of his Jewish history, transforming the novel into a thoroughly American one dealing with American social conventions concerning business ethics and Jewish. It is not subordinate or even substantially different from the American story Howells tells. The Jewish immigration story occurs without rivaling the American story in the novel.

[93] Cahan takes pains to describe second generation Jewish Americans, too. For them, the possibility of belonging is greater. He is the one who cannot overcome his outsider status.

This is best witnessed in the words that frame Levinsky's novel. The novel begins thus:

> I was born and reared in the lowest depths of poverty and I arrived in America—in 1885—with four cents in my pocket. I am now worth more than two million dollars and recognized as one of the two or three leading men in the cloak-and-suit trade in the United States. (3)

Cahan has Levinsky begin with a Horatio Alger-type convention, pulling oneself up from one's own bootstraps. He ends his novel with the following words:

> I can never forget the days of my misery. I cannot escape from my old self. My past and my present do not comport well. David, the poor lad swinging over a Talmud volume at the Preacher's Synagogue, seems to have more in common with my inner identity than David Levinsky, the well-known cloak-manufacturer. (530)

The self-divisiveness explored in the frame signals not, like Antin's autobiography does five years earlier, the death of his former self and emergence of an American self. Rather, as the reader learns from the first page and again at the novel's closing, all the money in the world could not drive away what he defines as his "former self," a self that remains in some essential way tethered to his Jewish, East-European childhood. The division calls upon Du Bois' "double consciousness." What Levinsky longs for is what Du Bois describes as attaining "self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (*Souls of Black Folk* 45). He yearns for a way to reconcile the duality, not for a way to rid himself of one of the other.

The frame represents the tension found in Jewish-American hyphenation for Levinsky. That is ultimately the difference between him and Lapham. Lapham is left disappointed but somehow whole at the novel's end. His experience of duality, rural and urban American, appears to have resolved himself when he discovers that his rural identity is in fact the dominant identity. Levinsky's bifocal moment or experience of duality emerges from his position as Jew. The conditions are different when one enters into an equation where ethnic otherness and cross-Atlantic immigration play a part. Like many other first-generation immigrants, Levinsky cannot escape the disparity between his former life in Russia during his childhood and his current life in the United States. Unlike Lapham, they are both an integral part of him.

Levinsky's concluding words have been shown to mean that his tale is a Jewish one, pertaining to Jewish-immigrant concerns. A juxtaposition with Lapham shows that Cahan interlaced into the Jewish story an American story of moral obligations in the face of an urban reality that actively protects what it sees as its borders. Neither Lapham nor Levinsky are wanted in the city at the turn of the twentieth century. "The difference between your outsider and mine," we can imagine Cahan saying to Howells with the help of this novel, has nothing to do with being Jewish and everything to do with being Jewish. Cahan found cats on the dock in New York when he disembarked, a fact that illustrated to him that the United States and Russia where on the same planet. The strangeness of the new land and the familiar experience of watching a feral cat are a good image with which to end: it symbolizes for Cahan American newness and the possibility that as different as Jewish

experiences are, they are also similar to other Americans who live in the periphery of the large city.

Chapter 5

Critical Pragmatism in *Salome of the Tenements*

Mary Antin in her autobiography (1912), Abraham Cahan in his fiction and final long novel (1897-1917), and Anzia Yezierska's work in the twenties present us in chronological order the first three decades of the twentieth century. They present three types of literary responses to assimilation pressures. Antin's autobiography, *The Promised Land*, offered an idyllic vision for assimilation. Cahan embraced literary realism as part of his concern with introducing the new Jewish arrivals to non-Jewish Americans. Anzia Yezierska, who was known in her time as "the sweatshop Cinderella," appears at first to resemble Mary Antin in her modestly presented story. In actuality, Yezierska anticipates aspects of post modern literature by challenging assimilationist paradigms. Antin presented in her autobiography a conventional story of assimilation. Yezierska subverted the convention in *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) by manipulating the expected happy ending. Instead of ending the plot with Sonya Vrunsky's marriage to her "prince charming," it ends with Vrunsky having left Manning for another man.

Salome is mainly concerned with the cold and emotionally detached manner with which charity work proceeded in immigrant neighborhoods. The novel is dedicated to responding to such methods of dispensing charity by using the outward appearance of a sentimental novel. *Salome* presents an uneducated, immigrant woman who asserts herself with emotional and sexual intensity. Yezierska used her Salome to challenge the "rationalism" of empiricist epistemology, showing that it could not, in spite its claims, "truthfully" interpret the world. She maintains that scientists, who tended to be men, privileged gender-based models and methods of understanding the world.

Yezierska was labeled emotional and non-rational for three mains reasons. To begin, those who critiqued empiricism and pragmatism would often find themselves labeled "non-rational" and "emotional." Yezierska, aware of this fact, embraced these labels by using the sentimental trope that was attributed to women writers. Her fiction was therefore and accordingly conceived of in these terms. Third, she was a Jewish Russian immigrant, a community viewed as ignorant and non-rational. Looking closely beneath the surface of *Salome* reveals that Yezierska refuses to accept that her gender and her

immigrant-status exclude her from critiquing the "higher ups," as she calls them. She insists throughout her novel that though well-meaning, radical educational reformers such as John Dewey were overly invested in defining their own privileged position in relation to what they viewed as primitive emotionalism. According to Yezierska, the elitism they embody reflects disrespectful, if not dehumanizing, attitudes toward the very people, especially immigrants, whom the educational philosophers meant to help.

Feminist writers and philosophers (of our time and Yezierska's) had to contend with such rationalist epistemologies, or ways of creating knowledge about the world, from which women and others were often excluded. Women were emotional and not, it was generally believed, theoretically oriented. In the words of feminist philosopher Susan Bordo, the Cartesian rationalist model insists that "detachment, clarity, and transcendence of the body" operate as key requirements for rationalism (*Feminist Epistemologies and American Pragmatism* 17). The construction of a rational subject capable of conceiving of the physical and metaphysical world (conceptualizing reality) is an Enlightenment subject, which was presumed to be a masculine one. [94] Although of limited education, Yezierska understood this critique intuitively and positioned herself in her fiction as a correcting force to Deweyan pragmatism.[95]

John Dewey held that we gain knowledge about the world through our interactions with it.[96] His practical approach to education roots itself in this epistemological paradigm: students will learn best when their classroom experiences reflect their life experiences, which in turn depends on their social

[94] Educated women were in some cases accepted as able to transcend, as it were, their gender's limitations. Dewey's friend, Jane Addams, offers an example. Her education and her time spent with immigrants at Chicago's Hall House combined experience and scientific research.

[95] Rita Felski shows, in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), that modernity has been defined in masculine terms. Early in her book she discusses Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in which they likened the Enlightenment's concept of masculine and feminine to Odysseus tied to the mast while listening to the sirens' song. Though she is critical, ultimately, of their analysis, arguing that they do not proceed far enough with their insights, she accepts the effectiveness of the metaphor. In "ordering the sailors to bind him… so that he cannot respond to the seductive song of the sirens, Odysseus epitomizes the disciplined male bourgeois individual" against which women are perceived. Women are seen as immersed in pleasure, sexuality, and animal aggression (5). Such creatures cannot rely upon to empirically or rationally construct knowledge.

[96] For a helpful discussion on the link Dewey saw between society and the individual see D. Micah Hester's "Situating the Self: Concerning an Ethics of Culture and Race" found in *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race* edited by Bill Lawson and Donald Koch. Dewey and George Herbert Mean after him, held that our notion of self develops not in isolation of but in interaction with community (79).

context. The weakness in his system remains the top-down approach where the curriculum is decided upon by the educated few and then dispensed to students. This approach has been termed "the banking concept" in education because students are treated as though they are an empty bank vault into which a teacher can deposit knowledge. The banking concept suggests to students that their responses to the material is unnecessary, discouraging their participation. Yezierska identifies the contradiction between pluralist ideology laid out by Dewey and its implementation, which tended to favor banking.

Yezierska's critique of empiricist scientific discourse and Dewyean pragmatics primarily centers on its neglect of spiritual or emotionally-based human experiences, which are hardest to quantify using scientific methodology. Any natural fact or experience that cannot be measured by scientific or social scientific tools is not taken into theoretical consideration, or as Paul Taylor explains, "the Deweyan naturalist holds that nothing is in principle inexplicable or inaccessible to the methods of science" ("Pragmatism and Race" 165). There had to exist a measurable, quantifiable consequence with which to work and on which to base conclusions regarding effective results. Accordingly assistance to students and immigrants focused on what was deemed useful for them. Yezierska argues that the severe environment pressed on immigrants in the settlement homes and schools overlooked the importance of beauty.[97] Outsiders stressing usefulness for the residents in the ghetto repeatedly fail to comprehend the crucial role beauty plays in people's lives. Focusing on the practical dismisses too easily that in the ghetto, too, individuals with a highly developed artistic sensibility could be found, a crucial point for her.

A pragmatic attitude, as it was implemented by institutionalized charities of Yezierska's time, accepted that aesthetic "decorations" were not useful. It was generally held that poverty could to be solved by observing its causes and offering relief and possible solutions. Yezierska finds this conclusion fallacious. To her, such a conclusion exposes a basic inability to empathize with the same people these institutions set out to help. Conclusions such as these are a result, Yezierska insists, of prejudice and elitism, which, most disturbingly, charity workers and privileged social classes are not always aware of.

[97] The "Lost Beautifulness" tells the heartbreaking story of a woman who dares to paint her kitchen white, in an attempt to enjoy beauty the way her middle-class employer does. This, as more than a few of her stories do, reiterates this point.

For that reason, Yezierska centers her novel on three characters. Sonya Vrunsky is the heroine. She is an emotional, poor, Russian Jewish immigrant with a highly developed artistic sense. She acts as the readers' tour guide. She is the one who gains insight into the privileged point of view, and can therefore, see the larger picture. She falls in love with the representative of the intellectual, American-born, well meaning philanthropist, John Manning. He acquires a building in the heart of the Jewish ghetto and turns it into a settlement house. To demonstrate the extent of his dedication to his project, he moves into the building himself (while keeping his family's Manhattan home, of course). It is there, in his office in the ghetto, that Vrunsky and he first meet.

The third central, if less developed, character is Fifth Avenue couture designer Jacques Hollins. Although the novel is conventionally read as revolving around the relationship between Vrunsky and Manning, it proves limiting to do so. Vrunsky leaves Manning for the immigrant turned designer, Hollins. Her final choice, and the final dramatic meeting between her and Manning after she has decides on Hollins, reveals to the reader a possible interaction between the American and the Jew that begins with finding communication channels not mediated by stereotypes. Hollins' represents an alternative resource for immigrants, a man who understands both cultures and can communicate effectively with both.

Hollins' character represents, in addition, that for many a consequence centered view is a devaluation of spiritual issues such as aesthetic enjoyment. "Aesthetic deprivation," as I call it here, is identified in *Salome* as gravely debilitating for many immigrants. At the end of the novel, Yezierska is obsessed with the idea of offering women in the ghetto access to Hollins' fashion house. Beautiful clothes should belong to those who "love beautiful things," she says (177). She does not regard aesthetic pleasure as a one size-fit-all balm that should be forced on the community from outside of it, but offers it freely respecting the autonomous humanity of those who might choose to frequent the new shop. Building on Dewey's philosophy, she retains the aim of assisting newcomers, but felt that as a member of the suffering community she can better identify what is needed.

The novel follows Sonya Vrunsky's attempts to manipulate John Manning into marrying her. She falls in love with him at first sight and sets out to capture his attentions at any cost and with blatant disregard for others around her. For example, her self-involvement keeps her from recognizing that her

former employer, Mr. Lipkin, the editor of a local newspaper, is in love with her. After her marriage to Manning, she emerges out of her self-contained cocoon and is able to see the suffering around her, to see that she is not the only one suffering. The lessons she learns directly relate to the missteps taken by her husband, Manning, a man who decides on measures to enact in the settlement house based on research. He does not trust her or anyone else's feedback regarding his work at the house. If it is not written in a scientific report, then it cannot be accurately depicting reality.

Manning believes wrongly that he is treating ghetto residents as equals. His absolute belief in the superiority of his scientific empiricism blinds him to its weakness, namely that he cannot purport to valorize individual experience when at heart he labels immigrants as socially inferior. Manning spouts democratic ideology that class difference is artificial and meanwhile has no understanding of the realities which poor, working-class immigrants experience (outside of his pies and charts). It is not enough to establish a settlement house, *Salome* shows, even if you choose to live among the immigrants, if you cannot accept those who frequent the house as fully human. Assuming immigrant inferiority at the outset will not be useful in the search for what the community most requires. The settlement house cannot "fix" their lives without considering their needs as they themselves perceive them to be.

When all was said and done, Yezierska believed in pragmatic education's potential. She wished to further it by harshly criticizing its "banking" aspects. Insisting on including those whom the institutions propose to help in the decisions over curricular content, she argued, achieves two important goals: it acknowledges that their experiences are valid forms of knowledge rather than subordinate to research-based knowledge produced by the controlling institutions. Second, personal reflection and family history tell about the way that a community sees itself and its priorities.[98] This chapter briefly juxtaposes *Salome* with critical pedagogical approaches typified by the work of W.E.B. Du Bois (as they had been presented in the second chapter) and the work of Paulo Freire. Though Freire worked among indigenous tribes living under feudal rule in the 1960s in Brazil, comparing them shows that the ideas that Yezierska held in the 1920s in New York were not only radical, but also far reaching. She

[98] Patricia Collins argued similarly about the importance of valuing a community's oral tradition in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990).

was part of a larger, socialist conversation that began before her time and continues after her, a conversation focused on the importance of the voice of the oppressed.

It becomes consequential to review Yezierska's path to publication while looking at the way that she constructed her identity as an author. Her experiences working with John Dewey at Columbia, it is well known, contributed greatly to her comprehension of the ways that the middle-class saw her. The second section of this chapter focuses on this issue in order to outline the extent to which she understood the publication machine and its treatment of women and immigrants. The third section demonstrates Yezierska's understanding of and response to specific ideas Dewey presented in *Democracy and Education* (1916). The fourth section looks more closely at her argument is regards to aesthetic deprivation. The fifth section focuses on her decision to leave Manning and fall in love with Hollins. It provides final evidence that Yezierska conceived of an ideal man as a kind of ethnic Deweyan, one that is more in line with Du Bois' and Freire's politics.

(2) Yezierska-Her Life and Literary Voice

Anzia Yezierska (1880-1970) was born in a Russian *Shtetl,* in the Pale of Settlement, where there were no birth records kept and so her exact date of birth is unknown even to herself. In 1890, the year the family arrived in the US, she must have been between eight and ten years of age. Still too young to work when they arrived, she received an opportunity to go to public school for a few precious years. The moment she was deemed old enough, however, she was taken out of school and put to work in the sweatshops. Yezierska described her parents much like she described Sarah Smolinsky's parents in *Bread Givers* (1925). Her mother worked hard and struggled to put food on the table while her father, a Biblical scholar, did not work. He expected his family to support his studies as they had done back in the Russian Pale. Louise Levitas Henriksen, Yezierska's daughter, hypothesizes in her book, *Anzia Yezierska, a Writer's Life* (1988), that it was during those public school years that her mother acquired "that dangerous bit of learning…that gave her the critical, rebellious eye" (14). Yezierska's life, like her novels and short stories, was filled with radical and rebellious acts. She left young Louise, for example, with her father in order to concentrate on her career. Her behavior was far from that of the domestic

angel, from the mother who remains at home to oversee the upbringing of her children. She was violating that code of behavior, one that dominated the cultural imagination well into the 1960s.

The most profound difference between Yezierska and Mary Antin lies in the way that each author fashioned her narrator. Antin wrote an autobiography and Yezierska wrote fiction, but Yezierska marketed the autobiographical elements of her fiction to gain readership. Antin described her family and herself as appropriately middle-class. She presented her family and her own life in accordance with conventional middle-class values, describing her sister as a domestic goddess and herself as the sensitive poet. Antin's narrative masks the successful career she sought when she emphasized her marriage and these domestic images. Furthermore, Antin avoided radical rhetoric. There were no overt political speeches nor did she openly discuss sexual desire, which Yezierska will do in *Salome*. She was not adversarial in her approach and, in fact, avoided feminist rhetoric completely. She criticized immigration policies (closing American borders to refugees) by sentimentally describing how she was saved by feminine American kindness in the form of her teacher, Mrs. Dillingham.

Dalia Konzett, in *Administered Identities and Linguistic Assimilation* (1997), was one of the first critics to show that readings which stress "the overpowering narratives of Americanization and Anglo-conformity" reduce "Yezierska's work to a biography illustrating successful assimilation" (598).[99] Konzett was focused on Yezierska's work and did not mean to belittle Antin's achievements, yet it is not hard to see that Konzett's pronouncement could be taken to mean that Antin's work conforms to Anglo-values and is hence less sophisticated. What emerges from comparing the two novels is that the two authors had different rhetorical aims in mind. Yezierska wanted her novel to be controversial in order to raise the issue of life in the ghetto. Meanwhile, Antin wanted to argue strongly that Jewish immigrants were capable of integrating into Anglo-American society. In terms of its relationship to middle-class American culture, there is no doubt that Yezierska's *Salome of the*

[99] Konzett continues to develop the idea in *Ethnic Modernism: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (2002). She combines in her book ethnicity and "dislocation" relatively to the dominant culture as a "key feature of modernism" (4).

Tenements proves the more radical. She intends to challenge her readers both by embracing a radical feminist agenda and by critiquing her American readership.[100]

Critics have described her work over the years in uncomplimentary terms, claiming that she neither writes well nor brings to her novels complex characters. Knozett responds to these accusations against her by stating that "to be sure, Yezierska's work lacks neither skill nor insight, as some critics have claimed" (598). She confused critics with her mixture of resistant feminism and sentimental romance, for which they wrongly branded her a bad writer. *Salome* appears to be a conventional melodramatic narrative on its surface. The romance, however, is but a thin film that conceals the social-critical aspects.

The reason many readers find it difficult to see complexity in her work has to do with her defiant femininity and her ethnic "Jewish" identity. Nineteenth-century's search for an authentic, national American literature, as we have seen, was defined both in masculine and in geographical terms. An American writer typically came from the north eastern United States, was descended from, or could show ties to, the first English settlers, and was an educated man. William Dean Howells' "ideal man," described in the previous chapter, builds on this earlier Emersonian ideal (which I have called American "unhyphenated"). Yezierska was not educated, she was an immigrant foreigner, and she was a woman who appears on the surface to write in the "gross sentimental" manner, which writers such as Cahan, Howells, and Henry James dismissed.

The resistant rather than conformist aspects of Yezierska's works have been explored since her time. Recently, Lisa Botshon, in "The New Woman of the Tenements: Anzia Yezierska's Salome" (2010), protested that Yezierska remains marked by her ethnic identity, unable to receive the full appreciation that she deserves as a feminist. Arguing that Yezierska is haunted by nineteenth-century's attitudes toward women, she writes that contemporary reviewers continue to discuss this particular

[100] Antin, as we have seen, emphasized the indicative nature of her name change from Mashke to Mary. It signaled her rebirth as an American. Yezierska was given, as many immigrants were, an Americanized name in Ellis Island, Hattie Mayer, a name she later rejected for her given name, Anzia (Wilnetz xv).

novel "solely as an immigrant narrative written by an immigrant author," unable to see underneath the surface of her narratives (235).[101]

For this reason the biofocal approach I employ here proves fruitful. Stressing Yezierska's engagement with social commentary shows that Botshon, Konzett before her, and others who defended her are correct in arguing that she achieves critical and literary excellence, as well as complexity. Yezierska's fiction takes upon itself a feminist agenda found also in earlier American fiction, some of it written more than sixty years before her. A bifocal approach makes it possible to identify her concern for immigrants and her feminist contribution to a larger American feminist tradition. She joins other American women who expressly aimed to shock readers. She expressed her independence, critiquing patriarchal society around her, in the same way that Charlotte Perkins Gilman did, for example, in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), or Kate Chopin did in *The Awakening* (1899).

Comparing Yezierska to a writer widely popular in the 1850s, Sarah Payson Willis, known more widely under her pen name, Fanny Fern, helps to contextualize Yezierska's feminist sensibilities. Fern criticized her father and brother publicly in her novel *Ruth Hall* (1855), which is based on her life. Though Fern renamed her characters, her case and her brother's identity (an editor) were well known. Her attempts at disguising their identities were, finally, a measure of her good taste rather than significant in hiding their identities. Yezierska, too, masks her characters loosely. The distance between Vrunsky and Yezierska herself was not a great one. It was a case in which Yezierska took advantage of the way that she sold herself and counted on readers to make the connection based on the promotions for her books which advertised the autobiographical nature of her work.

In *Ruth Hall,* Fern describes in particular detail the hardships she endured as a result of a societal insistence on keeping women in a child-like state of subservience to men. Her biggest challenge in the novel becomes maturing from a dependent wife to an independent bread-winner. Like Sonya Vrunsky, Hall begins her journey as a self-centered and naïve woman blinded to larger machinations around her. She comprehends reality in new ways following her husband's untimely death, and after she

[101] Mary Antin had to deal with this issue, as well. Her intention was to write conformist narrative that played upon codes of women's behavior. By demonstrating an adherence and even an appreciation of these values, she avoided much of the same criticism.

has to fight for custody of her children and fight to provide for them. She realizes that the men around her whom she trusted were keeping women from growing as equal citizens. Fern, explains Susan Belasco Smith, "takes some of the events in her own life and uses them to make visible the experience of one who is not a wife—through no fault of her own—and to order that experience as normative" (xxxvii). Yezierska employs the same strategy. In the name of making her argument, she retells a story that is based on, but not completely reflective of her life. Furthermore, the two writers play on the romantic convention in women's writing by empowering the female characters to break away from women's literary conventions—a young woman, usually orphaned and alone, overcomes hardships, and finds happiness in the end in an advantages marriage, a convention begun with Cinderella and then reiterated in classics such as *Jane Eyre* (1847). Halls' story works counter to the grain of this convention when she begins married and emerges by its conclusion a single mother who supports her children with her successful writing career.

Vrunsky begins by dreaming of marrying the rich Anglo-American and concludes her tale living with another man before her divorce is finalized. She refuses to conform to Anglo-values and transform into an obedient wife. Her fight is to emerge from being a woman who followed convention and married in order to be saved, into a woman who, like Ruth Hall, will save herself. She realizes following her marriage, that there is a way in which the settlement house intended to support young immigrant women was, in fact, teaching them to lower their expectations because they were lower-class. Settlement homes kept their clients poor, either at home cooking for their husbands or working as domestics in middle-class homes.

It is hard not to react to the excessive melodrama in the opening pages of *Salome*. In an Antin-like overflow of emotion toward America, Vrunsky describes Manning when they first meet: she "felt the kindness of his spirit brush against her very heart-strings. She longed to throw herself at his feet and weep. Ach! American—God from the world! Ach!" (3). A reader can, following such a monologue, imagine Vrunsky and her author as immigrant who worship American society and culture. Beginning the novel in this manner assisted Yezierska in constructing an image of the obedient immigrant woman. It also made the process of finding a publisher easier. She cloaked her scathing social commentary in romantic conventions to better coat her bitter-criticism. In other words, her declaration of adoration for

Manning and his culture coupled with her aspiration to live as he does are strategic conventions aimed at softening and even at veiling to a degree the full impact of her commentary. Her characters, however, are bold, and they emerge as women who, though striving for middle-class comforts, will reach these under their own conditions.

The boldness her characters demonstrated was taken from her life. In 1920, for example, in a desperate attempt to have her work read, she marched into the office of Dr. Frank Crane, a Protestant minister with a syndicated newspaper column. In the brief meeting, Yezierska played the part of the ethnic, inexperienced immigrant, and described to him her hardships (Henrikson 148). Later, she wondered if she should not have insisted on "talking to him as one human being to another and eliciting sympathy" (148). While she knew that it was costing her dignity, she knew also that she would at least, in this manner, capture his imagination. Yezierska realized that stressing her immigrant experience would sell him her most marketable trait, her ethnicity. In an article Dr. Crane wrote following their meeting, he described her as follows: "She walked straight into my office and brought the Old World with her…Here was an East Side Jewess" (Henriksen 149). As she predicted, performing the stereotype, peaked his interest.

The resistant aspects of the female characters and radical social content drew the attention of early Second Wave Feminists in the 1960s. During that time, a handful of critics began a recovery project, searching for forgotten texts.[102] Yezierska became a fitting candidate for their scholarly interests. In the late sixties Yezierska's daughter, Henriksen, began receiving an increasing number of requests from scholars for information about her mother and her work. To the requests they often attached information they had unearthed in their research, information which often surprised Henriksen: "They surprised me with photocopied documents about Anzia that didn't fit her life as I knew it" (6). She describes receiving, "A Columbia University transcript showing that, although she was supposed to have been a primitive who had forfeited her youth in sweatshops and who wrote without knowing how, she had in fact graduated from Columbia's Teachers College in 1904" (6). She also attended the socialist Rand School (Botshon 233). As more and more of these revelations became known, Henriksen reached what to her appeared a surprising conclusion. She writes, "It should have been obvious that to

[102] One of my favorite stories from the period is Alice Walker rediscovering Zora Neale Hurston.

write as she did in the guise of an untutored immigrant took a certain amount of sophistication" (6). Henriksen recognized that her mother's supposed "exaggerated and sentimental" style was a tool with which to pose her arguments rather than an inevitable result of her mother's artlessness (6).

On the contrary, her mother wove into her narratives immigrant rights, feminist rhetoric, and a sharp critique of the settlement movement. America's democratic promise remained central in her writing. She firmly held that the United States offered Jews unrivaled opportunity, a belief she shared with earlier, American-born writers such as Emma Lazarus and contemporary ones such as Abraham Cahan and Mary Antin. American democracy presented Jews with freedoms that could be found no where else on the globe. It is not hard to see that Yezierska's heroines press philanthropists and social reformers to more fully realizing the potential that lies in the American system. Social reformers, such as John Dewey, saw educational opportunities as key in the development of active citizenship in the United States. Pragmatists agreed that democracy was the key ideal under which education should proceed. The problem, as she saw it, was that institutions run by Americans were humiliating immigrants by viewing their strivings to live a middle-class life presumptuous.

(3) John Dewey and Social Justice

Yezierska's wish to belong to American society and her demand to be heard, brought her to march into John Dewey's office in 1917 after reading that he "had just made a stirring speech to a mass of schoolteachers" (Henriksen 85). "Anzia said boldly she had come to give Dewey the chance to practice what he had been preaching," which was to help immigrants advance (Herinksen 86). As an immigrant other, she argued she was excluded from possibilities of work as a teacher and therefore needed his assistance. Dewey agreed to watch her teach. After observing her, he told her she should probably stop teaching, but he encouraged her to continue her education and invited her to join a seminar he taught at Columbia.

It has often been noted that John Manning must represent John Dewey. The connection, especially once their relationship had been discovered, seemed evident. Between 1917 and 1918, the two were involved in a relationship which would have remained hidden had it not been for a crucial piece of corroboration, the discovery in Columbia University's archives of a handful of crumpled papers

with love poems written in Dewey's handwriting to Yezierska. The poems were discovered in 1958, but would not be published until 1977, when Jo Ann Boydson would begin her extensive work on Dewey. Since then, critics have brought the relationship to bear on Yezierska's work. Julian Levinson quotes from a poem by Dewey in *Exiles on Main Street* (2008). Carol Schoen connects their relationship to the development of her writing in *Anzia Yezierska* (1982), as would Louise Levitas Henriksen in *A Writer's Life* (1988). These are but a few examples. In *Love in the Promised Land: The Story of Anzia Yezierska and John Dewey* (1988), Mary Dearborn maintains that Dewey's interest and consequent work on aesthetics was inspired by more than Albert Coombs Barnes (a former student, inventor and art collector) or Harold Taylor (the president of the Sarah Lawrence School). Yezierska's interactions with Dewey, their conversations and the letters they exchanged, had an important influence, as well.[103]

Research has revealed that Manning could also have been inspired by James Phelps Strokes. Her friend and fellow immigrant Rose Pastor Strokes married the well-known philanthropist.[104] *Salome* was published in 1923 and Rose divorced Strokes in 1925, leaving Dewey as the most probable inspiration for the character. Mary Dearborn echoes Yezierska's description of the relationship between Manning and Vrunsky in her description of Dewey and Yezierska. Dearborn writes that "when Anzia Yezierska met John Dewey, the immigrant met the American, and the American met the immigrant" (4). Yezierska begins *Salome* with an interview Vrunsky conducts with Manning in which Vrunsky, in her simple English, tells Manning that meeting him reveals "what it means America" and she has Manning tell Vrunsky that she "has the burning fire of the Russian Jew" in her (1, 3). The resemblance between the two depictions (and Dearborn's description is characteristic) demonstrates the extent to which the romantic involvement between Dewey and Yezierska and the social disparity between the

[103] There is also the fact that Yezierska wrote a story during the year when they were involved called "The Miracle," and it is quite clear that she writes about Dewey. Once the relationship came to light, different passages in her works seemed to suddenly make more sense. For more on this see Mary Dearborn's *Love in the Promised Land* (108).

[104] Two sources for more on Rose Pastor is found in Carol Schoen's *Anzia Yezierska* (1982) (see page 38) and in Gay Wilentz's introduction to University of Illinois' *Salome* (1995) (see page xii-xiii).

two has become germane to interpreting her work.[105] This study expands the comparison by directly applying Yezierska's work in *Salome* to Dewey's writing.

Yezierska's work in *Salome* in particular should not be read as a response to the full range of Dewey's philosophy. She was not privileged to higher education and would not have known necessarily the intricacies of his work. She conversed with him sufficiently and heard him lecture often enough to be able to reflect on it, however. During her time at Columbia, Dewey invited her to attend his seminars. In addition, he invited her to participate in an ethnographic research that was conducted among Philadelphia's Polish community. Dewey presided over the research from a distance, leaving the day to day management of it in the hands of his student, Albert Barnes (Henriksen 86-95). Barnes was not convinced that this brash, basically uneducated immigrant woman belonged in the field with him. As part of his efforts to convince Barnes, Dewey sent him, in 1918, a short story that Yezierska had written with his editorial help called "Soap and Water and the Immigrant." The story described a teacher Yezierska had known who had once admonished her for personal hygiene. He had told her, "Soap and water are cheap. Anyone can be clean" (Henriksen 94). In the story, Yezierska describes her toil as a laundress, and challenges the teacher, whose clothes she imagines washing, to remove the smell of the "steaming laundry" from his clothes, if he would have been in her position. Barnes found the story sentimental, agreeing to include Yezierska, finally, only due to Dewey's absolute insistence.

During her time in Philadelphia, Yezierska disagreed repeatedly with Barnes' methods. When Barnes created a questionnaire aimed at soliciting information from the Polish residents in the neighborhood, Yezierska informed him that it was a mistake. Part of her job was to get acquainted with the isolated community and she knew they would not take kindly to it. The questionnaire enraged her because it, in Henriksen's telling, "reminded her of the cold condescension of the social workers who in her youth had humiliated her family and neighbors in its so called scientific approach" (98).[106] Barnes

[105] The two certainly could be seen as representing physical otherness. Mary Dearborn, perhaps more than other scholars, sees it "necessary to read their lives concurrently, as stories set against each other" (5). She explains that "Yezierska saw in their relationship an insistent paradigm of the division between immigrant and native-born America, a paradigm Dewey took up as well" (5).

[106] For another account of her time working in Philadelphia, see also Dearborn's *Love in the Promised Land* (101-105).

dismissed her comments, arguing that her job was to communicate with the neighbors and not to criticize scientific content she could not understand. After this encounter, Barnes would complain in letters to Dewey that Yezierska remains in her room writing and participating only minimally in the ongoing research (which for reasons Barnes could not comprehend was making negligible headway).

Yezierska experienced the stress that institutions placed on "turn of the century domestic science," which set out to teach immigrant women useful, domestic skills. The prevalent belief was that teaching immigrants to wash clothes, clean house, and cook dishes for the middle-class, would give them employable skills (Dearborn 43). What Yezierska felt was that an immigrant woman who did not aspire to be a domestic for the middle-class, but to be educated so she could live a middle-class life was seen as unappreciative and presumptuous. It is at this juncture that the somewhat surprising relationship between the texts, *Salome* and *Democracy and Education* becomes apparent. Yezierska appears to directly reply in *Salome* to some of Dewey's passages. He writes, for example, that "the right kind of education" can help individuals achieve "a greater diversity of personal capacities" (101). Yezierska admired this type of rhetoric greatly, but felt discouraged after having attended institutions like The Clara de Hirsch Home where she was pressured into studying "domestic science." The right kind of education, Yezierska maintained, was class-based—poor immigrants to taught how to embrace their poverty rather than how to advance financially. Immigrants were not conceived of as capable of anything but the most basic, menial tasks.[107]

Dewey talked about how crucial it was for education to bridge the gap between institutions and everyday life experiences of students in their home environment. A school system needed to be aware that in a certain neighborhood students were from poor immigrant families where English was the second language. A school that proceeds without addressing its students' home realities would cause an "undesirable split" between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school" (11). Yezierska held that it was scientists like Barnes and by extension Dewey who were incapable of bridging a gap, that of thinking about immigrants outside of tropes and stereotypes. Too often, they attributed to immigrant culture ignorance and deprivation.

[107] Yezierska's *Arrogant Beggar* (1927) focuses on a settlement home for women where they are taught domestic science.

An additional point Yezierska raises in *Salome* in relation to settlement homes and in relation to what she had learned from Dewey, was that their belief in the general ignorance of the immigrants was a result of an inability to trust the information immigrants supplied about their own experiences. Immigrants might have suffered from ignorance as to the workings of American society, but reformers suffered from, Yezierska felt, an inability to listen to what immigrants like herself learned by living in the ghetto. For that reason, she has Manning tell Vrunsky in one of their first meetings: "I am a puritan whose fathers were afraid to trust experience" (37). With this declaration, Yezierska built on what she saw as Dewey and his fellow reformer's naiveté. They assumed that without having to involve immigrants directly in decisions making, they could assist them. Observing in a neutral, detached manner creates a gap for the reformer between his scientific knowledge and reality in the ghetto, argues Yezierska.

Dewey writes also, in *Democracy and Education* that institutions "by various agencies, unintentional and designed… transform uninitiated and seemingly alien beings into robust trustees of its own resources and ideals" (12). Yezierska saw that such articulations, which were common, began with the premise that she was not a rational individual with the abstract ability to conceptualize western philosophical ideas. She was seen as the uninitiated outsider who needed to be patronized, and who needed to be instructed and controlled. Her home culture occupied an inferior position, a condition that would be remedied by Americanizing institutional influences. Yezierska was not the only one to raise the point. One extreme critique, offered by Clarence Karier, suggested that "Dewey viewed ethnic and religious differences as a threat to the survival of society," which he did not (Wilentz xiv). The contrary was true for Dewey who, in Mary Dearborn's words, "found explicitly ideological Americanization efforts highly problematic… and he was deeply disturbed by such blatant attempts at "social control" (106).[108] His distaste for forceful assimilation further testifies that Yezierska correctly identified a gap that existed between the philosophies and their implementation.

For Yezierska, the endless debates, criticisms, and intellectual discussions could not quickly enough reform the reformers: could not react to the reality on the ground, where immigrants were

[108] Randolph Bourne's objection to "melting pot" ideology, in "Transnational America" published the same year as Dewey's *Democracy*, in 1916, was an example of a critique of social control-ideology.

pushed everyday into domestic jobs, were humiliated, and were taught to assimilate into a working-class American whose job it was to support the middle-class. In one of her first introspective monologues she asks if "educated people ever really fall in love" (109). "I mean," she adds, "does it ever shake them to the roots of their being? Does it tear through their body and consume their brain?" (119). Immediately following, Vrunsky and Manning, newly wed, discuss the differences in their social class. Manning dismisses her assertion that there are differences between them; "He would not let her intrude the differences of their background into the harmony of their home" (119). His opulent, sterile home made Vrunsky feel small and insignificant. His friends looked down at her as if she were a simpleton. Worse still Manning proved incapable of listen to her thoughts on his settlement project inside of the ghetto from which she had just emerged.

Manning invites New York socialites to his home for the purpose of show-casing his immigrant wife. Vrunsky senses that the party's purpose is to show how democratic he is for having brought an immigrant to his house. He dismisses her astute insight to insist that "this is *our* reception my dear-our opportunity to show the world that all social chasms can be bridged with human love and democratic understanding" (120). The reader is expected to recognize Manning's' hypocrisy. Yezierska takes no chances, however, and has Vrunsky answer as follows: "Democratic understanding?... Don't talk over my head in your educated language. Tell me in plain words how can there be democratic understanding between those who are free to walk into steerage and the steerage people who are not allowed to give one step up to the upper deck?" (120). The metaphor aims to emphasize that Manning's philanthropic descent into immigrant quarters and even his marriage to an immigrant does not equalize the world.

Dewey believed that a democracy was, in his words, "more than a form of government" (*Democracy and Education* 101). Democracy expressed an equality for which a society should strive, specifically "the breaking down of these barriers of class, race, and national territory [while] widening the area of shared concerns" (101). In *Salome*, Yezierska takes aim at one specific issue which Dewey's philosophy, filled with pragmatic austerity, fails to address, resulting in a continuation in disparity between the classes rather than breaking boundaries in the name of democratic promise. Immigrants suffer greatly, she says in *Salome,* from a lack of color, flavor, and aesthetically pleasing surroundings.

Dewey or Manning's blind spot remains a misunderstanding of the importance of aesthetic pleasure, an issue that they relegate to frivolous necessities which the poor do not require. If they knew how to ask for immigrants' opinions on the matter, they would learn that for many the issue was pressing.

(4) Middle-Class Aesthetic Morality

Yezierska spent her whole writing career arguing that accessing those aspects of American culture that she and her fellow immigrants admired was far from simple, especially with a dominant mode of thought that the poor need so little and that aesthetic considerations were not useful for them. That middle-class Americans held these attitudes regarding immigrants was well-known. Mary Antin appears to internalize that message in her autobiography, as we have seen.[109] Antin works to sever in her readers' minds the image of her immigrant childhood, wanting to replace it with the image of her as a member of the American middle-class. It was crucial to rhetorically position her narrative persona alongside her readers' for her assimilation argument. Contrarily, Yezierska positions herself as the foreign-outsider in relation to her readers.

This is the reason that in Yezierska's early short story, the one that she gave to Dewey to read, the woman character does not learn how to apply soap (as Antin testifies to having done), but rather shows the impossibility of staying clean when you are working-class. Early on in *Salome*, Vrunsky declares: "Give me only the democracy of beauty and I'll leave the fight for government democracy to politicians and educated old maids" (27). Political discussions regarding the essence of American democracy were extremely important to her. Vrunsky's insistence that she would not care about politics whether she lived in Bolshevik Russia or capitalist America so long as she could wear silk from Paris is, therefore, misleading. She is expressing her concern over excluding "beauty" from the conversation regarding the essence of democracy. In *Salome of the Tenements*, Yezierska is concerned with the hypocrisy of withholding aesthetic pleasure from poorer members of society, on the one hand, and

[109] As I argued in the third chapter, Antin emphasizes for her middle-class readers that she is other than the immigrants they imagine or have seen. She used the "soap and water" trope differently than Yezierska in the passage describing her visit to Wheeler Street: she tells readers that she "brought soap and water" to remove the filth, adding, "I am applying them now" in order to suggest that the residents are dirty because they do not share, as she does now, middle-class aesthetic sensibility (209).

defining them by their supposed indifference to it, on the other. She held that Aesthetic deprivation had to concern the reformers who preached breaking down barriers in the name of equalizing society.

In the first chapter, Yezierska accentuates the difference between Manning and the ghetto environment in order to emphasize the economic and aesthetic disparity. After their first meeting, Manning and Vrunsky step unto the street together. "His finished grooming stood out all the more vividly in this background of horrid poverty," Vrunsky notices (2). He, at the same time, does not notice the extent to which his quality silks and custom tailored elegance stand out. Manning and Vrunsky are engrossed in each other, "oblivious to the squalid humans that swarmed about them, indifferent for the moment to the myriad needs that drove the crowds…" (2). Vrunsky proves to be the character that is able to transcend her self-centered oblivion and empathize the suffering around her (not just her own). Unlike her, Manning remains oblivious to the disparities, especially the aesthetic ones, while tragically convinced that he is advocating equality.

What Vrunsky understands and Manning cannot is that poverty creates the deepest and harshest suffering. There is a hunger brought on by the scarcity of food and there is hunger that is brought on by the scarcity of beauty. The tragedy in poor immigrants' life is compounded, in Yezierska's view, since they suffer from both. She forces her readership to face fully the horror that is the physical and aesthetic deprivation suffered. A central lesson for her readers lies in closely scrutinizing the difficulty with which Vrunsky attains small amounts of "beauty" for her apartment. When John Manning, following their first date in a ghetto diner, invites himself to visit her in her apartment, Vrunsky becomes determined to hide from him its squalid condition. She is convinced that he would be revolted by her dirty walls and sparse, broken furniture, if he saw them. Vrunsky's efforts to have her landlord white-wash her walls, the maneuvering required to attain a few small items for her apartment such as a few simple pillows, and the fact that she had to use all of her meager savings and accrue debt, are contrasted with Manning's underestimation of these efforts.

When he enters the refurnished apartment, he looks around and summarizes, "Little is needed to create beauty. All that is needed is selective taste" (72). Vrunsky replies, trying not to answer him directly, that expensive taste complicates matters. Manning misses her point, but the reader cannot: Yezierska detailed Vrunsky's extraordinary efforts at bringing about the small changes to her dwelling.

Manning, meanwhile, assumes that Vrunsky's apartment is better furnished because she is demonstrating an awareness that others around her do not have rather than realizing that aesthetic improvements require disposable income, a rare situation for people who can barely afford food. He cannot comprehend that the prospect of his visit encouraged her, among other things, to beg and obtain debt she would never have otherwise done.

One of the most emotionally charged scenes involves her acquisition of a handful of roses. She clutches the roses on her way home, overwhelmed by their beauty and by their scent. Flowers, not to mention roses, are scarce in the ghetto. As she approaches her tenement apartment building, a group of children run to her. They begin yelling "Lady, give me a flower" (72). Her first response is to refuse the children. They will, she decides, only destroy them with their indelicate play. Out of the corner of her eye, though, she notices a young girl whose eyes express that she is famished for beauty: "Lanky, self-conscious, she stood farthest away of the crowd but her eyes devoured the red roses. The need for beauty, the famine for bright color cried to Sonya out of that girl's eyes" (72). Vrunsky recognizes that the girl is a kindred spirit, someone for whom human existence means flavors, smells, and rich colors. She gives her one of the precious roses, leaving the girl "too overwhelmed to answer" (72). The girl can appreciate the rarity of the flower in the ghetto and the enormity of the gift she is given.

The children overwhelm the girl, grabbing the flower and destroying it. Vrunsky, in her first selfless act, leads the young girl around a corner and gives her the last rose. Ironically, the children, too, yearned for the pleasure the rose offered. Their mishandling of the delicate bloom expressed their need for it, demonstrating that they too, in their simple, coarse way yearned its beauty. The roses could have been replaced in the scene with a loaf of bread. A scene where hungry children grab lustily at bread is not foreign to readers. Replacing the bread with a rose means to communicate two points: first, that assuming that poor individuals have no use for beauty is categorically misguided; second, it establishes that there is in fact a hunger for beauty in the ghetto, regardless of the rough manner in which it is expressed.

Yezierska connects the deprivation of beauty directly with the physical body. A body is adorned either in rags or in beauty. A set of social characteristics is then associated to the person based

on their dress. The issue was a well know one. Jane Addams, for example, discussed the matter in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902). She wrote:

> But the working girl, whose family lives in a tenement, …who has little social standing and has to make her own place, knows full well how much habit and style of dress has to do with her position. ..But if social advancement is her aim, it is the most sensible thing she can do. She is judged largely by her clothes. (19)

Vrunsky decides that, as Addams says, that Manning will not enter into a relationship with her unless she is appropriately dressed. For that reason she heads to Jacque Hollins' store. To bypass his assistant, she hints that she knows his former name, Jake Solomon. The Lower East Side immigrant saved money, traveled to Paris and returned after reinventing himself as a designer for New York's elite society, or as he describes himself, "the new Oracle of Fifth Avenue fashion" (20). Vrunsky sets out to convince him to make for her a one of a kind, couture creation for free. She relies on their shared experiences as ghetto Jews to convince him.

Vrunsky arrives at his shop literally with her last penny in her pocket. After begging him for a dress, she is reduced also to asking him for money with which to return to the ghetto. Vrunsky humbles herself upon meeting Hollins, presenting to him a mixture of her confidence and determination and "womanly" submission. She calculates that one of these might appeal to him. Hollins, however, is not interested in her performance. Instead he asks her, "Tell me Sonya, what started the hunger in you—so you had to come to me?" Her reply is:

> What makes any woman want clothes more than life?...
>
> Poets when they're in love they can write poems to win their beloved.
>
> But a dumb thing like me—I got no language—only the aching drive to make myself beautiful. (30)

Vrunsky talks about herself as an uneducated simpleton, using her immigrant English. It is Vrunsky's apparent hunger or "ache," as she says, for beauty that appeals to the artist in Hollins. He, in a democratic impulse, reacts to her need for beauty, forgetting for that moment from his other rich clients. For this reason, there is no one better suited than Jake Solomon, the artist, to make her dress, a man who experienced aesthetic deprivation as she had.

Vrunsky uses the dress in the simplest way, but the awareness that she exhibits of the way in which dress operates in fashioning her identity is complex. After her first meeting with Manning, Vrunsky approaches her landlord wearing her new dress in an attempt to convince him to white-wash the dirty walls of her apartment. He glowers at the waiters around him at the restaurant when she approaches him for not immediately bringing her a chair. Since they had never met face to face, he mistakes her for wealthy woman. "They got no respect for class," he tells her after she sits across from him, but "I know what is a lady on the first look" (50). Vrunsky accentuates her body language and Rosenblat, the landlord, hangs on her hook. She knows she looks beautiful and she knows that he is interested, tantalized—his voice turns "throaty," and "husky" (51). In this way, Vrunsky lures him to her apartment. Once he sees that she lives in his dirty building, once he sees her poverty, he becomes furious. As long as he thought that she was what he considered "a lady," her propositioning him seemed legitimate. Once he sees the apartment, he is enraged because he decides that she must be a prostitute. "I must keep my houses respectable," he mumbles to himself as he climbs the stairs to her apartment (53).

He threatens to evict her, unconvinced by her insistence that she was not a prostitute. She counterattacks by pointing out that he changed his attitude toward her because she is poor. Yezierska's scene effectively makes the case that the conversation between the two whereupon Vrunsky receives the opportunity to strong-arm her landlord into painting her apartment was made possible by the dress. Without the dress, she knows, the landlord would never have spoken to her. Yezierska implicitly asks what chance other immigrants have with their landlords.

During Manning's and Vrunsky's first conversation, in which Vrunsky is donning her new dress, the two are busy repeating stereotypes: "Your American women! I couldn't be like them if I stood on my head!" (37). Further on she states in regards to herself, "I am a Russian Jewess, a flame—a longing. A soul consumed with hunger for heights beyond reach" (37). Her dress is one such "height beyond reach." The question of why the two are sitting at the same table or even why the relationship continues is explained by the dress. This fact is evidenced by Manning's first reaction to Vrunsky in the new dress: "If Sonya had planned to arrest and astonish Manning she certainly succeeded, for he started at her—she could have sworn—without at first recognizing who she was" (33). As has become the

trope, beginning with Cinderella herself, a man would fall in love immediately given the right dress on a woman, even a woman whose outlook on life and social position was completely other than his own.

At the end of their date, Vrunsky asks herself a question which is the key to her development from her desire to marry to a rich man into a woman who demands more from the man she is with, beyond his being a rich American. "Why is it that I in my ignorance can see through him and all his high education?" she asks, "and why can't he with his high education see through the working of my plain mind?" (36). Her manipulation of the exquisite dress in ways that Manning reacts to (as well as the landlord) demonstrates that she has, as Du Bois held, a special kind of double vision, a gift, a potential to see herself and her oppressor, understanding both in ways that Manning cannot. The fact that Vrunsky had not accessed higher education does not translate into ignorance or into an inability to interpret events around her in complicated ways. By asserting that Vrunsky can see a larger picture than Manning can, Yezierska emphasizes the importance of valuing the knowledge she had gained through living the life that she had. Sometimes, she insists, the traumatic experience allows the gift of "second sight," which can prove more useful than the scientific community studying the same traumas.

The scene in which Vrunsky tours the settlement house after her marriage is intended to establish this point. Vrunsky attempts to involve herself in the running of the house, but Manning rebuffs her, suggesting that she walk around and visit the classes, instead. She does, stopping at the entrance of the difference classes to listen. She happens upon a class where women are taught to make cheap, tasteless desserts. A shy girl timidly asks, "Teacher, without milk, without butter, without eggs, what strength is there in the cake?" (135). The teacher "crushingly admonishes" the young girl by lecturing that a cheap dessert is better than no dessert at all. Vrunsky, who leads us through the sites and sounds of the settlement house, expresses outrage. "The poor also got a palate in their mouth!" she declares (135).

According to Yezierska, the problem is that any participation in the richer "flavors" is construed as a violation of charity structures, a point she illustrates in many of her stories.[110] In *Salome*

[110] For example, in "My People," which appeared in her collection *Hungry Hearts* (1920), a family's charity assistance is canceled after they are "caught" with a small cake the father had received as a

Yezierska has a teacher at the settlement house tell Vrunsky how she exposed a "fraud," by catching a woman cooking a chicken. The teacher is outraged because the woman should not have money for such delights (100). The problem with this point of view, explains Yezierska using Vrunsky, is that it becomes a crime to crave and spend ones hard-earned money on butter, eggs or chicken. If you are caught with such items, you are punished and charity is promptly withheld. The message communicated to the poor immigrants is that they must define themselves in opposition to middle-class and not strive to eat, dress, or live in an environment resembling that of "higher ups." Yezierska wants her readers to feel that the teacher should have rejoiced that a family had managed to secure a piece of chicken.

(5) The Greater Work: Du Boisian and Freireian Critical Consciousness

In the first scene, the interview scene, Vrunsky says that Manning for her is as "the sun is for the earth—light–life. He is the breath of all that is beautiful. Ach! How I could love him! I'd wrap my soul around him like a living flame" (5). Such comments regarding her admiration of him are often framed by Manning's admiration for Vrunsky. Manning says to her in the same scene:

> You have a greater work to do than I…You have the burning fire of the Russian Jew in you, while I am motivated by a sickly conscience, trying to heal itself by application of cold logic and cold cash. The real liberation of your people must come from within—from such as you. (3)

These lines tell the reader about Yezierska's philosophy in regard to how best to serve immigrants, namely her unequivocal assertion that top-down structured assistance will not succeed. Accordingly, Manning tells Vrunsky that she is the one best able to help her community. The passage presents Vrunsky's "burning fire" or passionate dedication to immigrants in contrast to Manning who is led by the wrong motivation. Guilt and cold cash cannot bring about "real liberation." *Salome* begins by foretelling the ending. Vrunsky will learn that Manning's depiction of the situation during their first conversation was true. She will break through her blind admiration and realize that he cannot see reality on the ground as she does. At the end, Vrunsky, with Hollins' assistance, takes matters into her own hands.

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gift. The representative from the Social Betterment Society charged him "with intent to deceive and obtain assistance by dishonest means" (246).

Her idea of empowering immigrants and of involving them in the charity process is revolutionary for her time because it asserts the value of individual knowledge and experience in a community that is mostly illiterate. The ideas she presents under the surface of her plot are as groundbreaking as Du Bois' insights were two decades before her. Disenfranchised people, Yezierska shows through her protagonist, Vrunsky, are imbued with a gift as a result of their oppressed situation. They have what Du Bois called a "second sight in this American world –a world which yields him no true self consciousness, but only lets [a person] see himself [or herself] through the revelation of the other world" (*Souls of Black Souls* 45). Though the way a marginalized community sees itself is influenced by the dominant culture, it is possible for them to transcend this view. When they do, they achieve a truer consciousness, one that reveals to them the causes of their oppression.

It is then that the curse of double consciousness is transformed into a useful gift--Mary Antin experienced double consciousness as a curse, while Yezierska experienced it as a gift. Not that her life was easier by virtue of this fact. Rather, she felt that her "second sight" placed upon her the responsibility to voice what she had been able to learn about the machinations of charity in her neighborhood. It is a burden and a gift to realize, as Du Bois had, that there is a dominant culture which believes that it is using neutral, scientific measurements with which to comprehend your community, using such analysis to assert its own dominance. Du Bois explained that dominant white culture was measuring the black community "by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (45). Yezierska tried to communicate the same notion to Dewey, in regard to her community, when she witnessed Barnes conducting his research in a humiliating way in Philadelphia.

The disenfranchised cannot effect change in their situations without the support of the dominant institutions around them just as, Du Bois and Yezierska both would argue, well-meaning reformers cannot constitute change without including them in the process, without a dialogical process. Individuals were needed with the ability to face in two directions at once. It would be up to such individuals to conceptually traverse the gap between reformers and oppressed communities. They could initiate the dialogical process by reminding all stakeholders, black, white, or immigrant that they were required to participate equally if a project of liberation and advancement was to take place. It has to be a

dialogue that begins with both sides accepting that race and social class did not translate into biological inferiority. The inferiority, rather, was learned and could therefore be unlearned.

The economic and institutional control was firmly in the hands of the dominant culture (which included in the Lower East Side old stock Jewish-Americans, those Sephardi Jews whose families had been in the US for a century or more). Du Bois wanted institutions and intellectuals willing to step up to the challenge, to join him in helping illiterate, downtrodden former slaves. For him, the university had to act as "the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life" (117). At least a decade before Dewey, Du Bois explained that it should be an educational system's goal to encourage a symbiosis between educational materials brought into the community and people's reality. In that way, beneficiaries of the system would be better able to develop both an expanded understanding of their situation and become better equipped to deal with dominant cultural demands and codes of behavior. An additional, central goal for intellectuals like Du Bois and Yezierska was that the process would not presume that assimilation into Anglo-culture at the expense of the home culture was the solution.

It proves useful to introduce at this juncture and in this context an influential social activist from South America, a man whose work features prominently inside of American academia, Paulo Freire.[111] Kim Díaz, in "Dewey's and Freire's Pedagogies of Recognition" (*Pragmatists in the Americas* 2011), defines Freire's work thus: "Freire's method of critical pedagogy not only taught peasants how to read and write, but, most important, they also learned about themselves and their reality" (288). Freire continues the work done by Du Bois and like him, searches for ways to empower oppressed communities, in his case South American feudal farmers. Freire's work complements well a founding ideal in the United States, the ideal of civil equality. His views resemble the strong positions of both Du

[111] Paulo Freire was born to a middle-class family in Brazil. His family came upon hard times and at a young age, Freire experienced poverty and hunger. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* remains a seminal work for academics searching for a guide on critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy in the universities aims at encouraging students to step outside of their often privileged life as undergraduate students on campus and venture out into the community surrounding the university. They are encouraged to volunteer in the surrounding community. How to do so is critical pedagogy's central question. The goal becomes teaching privileged eighteen year-olds to communicate with rather than condescend to people in community who are often far less privileged than they are. Freire's experiences in Brazil during the 1960s and 1970s assist teachers and academics to think these issues over.

Bois and the later Yezierska in his contention that equality means bilateral respect and communication. In his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1977), he writes:

> Scientific and humanist revolutionary leaders…cannot believe in the myth of the ignorance of the people. They do not have the right to doubt for a single moment that it is only a myth. They cannot believe that they, and only they, know anything—for this means to doubt the people. (135)

Vrunsky says as much to Manning when she admonishes him for talking down to her rather than with her: "Democratic understanding?... Don't talk over my head in your educated language" (120). Whenever she attempts to conduct a conversation concerning injustices inherent in the charity system which he oversees, he begins spouting ideological platitudes. As far as she is concerned, these reveal his inability to escape his belief that at heart, she was ignorant and her that her comments were, therefore, invalid.

A second, major theme in Freire's work is that "it is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors" (56). Du Bois and Yezierska in their work argued the same thing (former slaves in Du Bois' case and immigrants in Yezierska's). This corresponds to Yezierska's point in regard to the responsibility immigrants have in taking matters into their own hands, insisting on teaching the dominant culture the insight they have gained as people who are able to look in two directions at once. This process is difficult for the privileged dominant culture to comprehend and it is therefore the responsibility of the oppressed to enlighten them. *Salome* concludes with a dramatic meeting between Manning and Vrunsky, a meeting in which Manning is freed from his elitist blinders. The process that enables such a breakthrough for him is initiated by the experience of pain, an experience that he shares with Vrunsky due to the disintegration of their marriage and Vrunsky's prompt commitment to another man.[112]

[112] Hollins asks Vrunsky to commit to him. She is reluctant to do so because she and Manning are still legally married. "Your marriage with Manning was never real love, that it should bind you so," he tells her (176). She replies that they do belong to each other and takes his hand, suggesting strongly that she entered into a committed relationship with him before an official divorce (177).

A review of *Salome of the Tenements'* concluding scene exemplifies the above point. Vrunsky mourns her marriage to Manning despite having made a commitment to Hollins. Sitting with Hollins, whom she loves deeply, she asks herself:

> I have found the man with whom I can be my own free self.
> With him I can work. With him I can play. Whether I speak
> or whether I'm silent, from his eyes flows understanding. Then what
> is the matter with me? (179).

Her self-reflection signals that she has yet to resolve emotionally her marriage to Manning. His platitudes and obtuseness have not made it possible for them to speak openly about the failed marriage. At this point, there occurs what the chapter's title refers to as Manning's "Revelation." The revelation allows Manning to be released from his paralysis, from his inability to look at her and understand her as an equal. In this last chapter, Manning and she share their first candid dialogue. In place of conversations where he exclaims that she is "the Russian Jewess," a description he repeats throughout the novel, he now looks into the eyes of his wife and asks what had gone wrong (3, 74, 37).

This final conversation takes place after Manning finds Vrunsky in Hollins' arms. He bursts out, angry and jealous, and for a moment she feels triumphant. His lust and want for her makes her feel as if for the first time he has invested not only his educational philosophy, but in his emotions and in their relationship: "for the first time in her life she was a woman" rather than, a stereotypical sweatshop Cinderella, or the immigrant; "for it was not the gentleman, not the arrogant Anglo-Saxon who stood before her. It was a human being—suffering—wounded—despised and rejected in his hour of need" (182). She continues to describe the way his expressed emotions allowed their eyes to meet "with no shields" (182). "For one instant they were to each other not gentleman and East Side girl—not man and woman, but human beings driven by bitter experience" (182). The experience answered her earlier question: "All that wealth was like an armor that she could not pierce to reach the *real man*. But was he a *real man*? Were rich people ever real?" (46). The final scene answers that he was a real man, for whom, for the first time, his immigrant wife was a real person.

Tellingly, a romantic relationship, the most intimate relationship most people experience outside of their birth family, becomes the site through which the two finally talk as equals. The pain

Manning experiences after the marriage ends enables him to transcend his condescension. Yezierska shows that it takes, to put it simply, love and pain to create an environment for an honest conversation. In what appears like an uncritical, irrational point, Freire, too argues that "dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people…Domination reveals the pathology of love because loving is dialogical" (89). Dominance does not allow dialogism. Freire and Yezierska both talk about such required mutual respect. They express their resistance to empiricist and rational paradigms using a word that conjures irrationality and emotionality, love.

What Yezierska offers for her readers' scrutiny is a husband who cannot love Vrunsky because he cannot, though he tries, view her as an equal. In spite of his efforts to live among the immigrant-poor, he can only go as far as "rationalizing his guilt through paternalistic treatment of the oppressed, all the while holding them fast in a position of dependence," in Freire's words (49). Manning enjoys the power structure, where the poor look up to him for their salvation and he cannot look back down at them with anything other than the categories he had reviewed in his textbooks and research results. The people who frequent his settlement house are not, to him, individuals whom he might get to know, but statistics filling his file cabinet.

Salome is centered on Manning and Vrunsky, but it would become a different novel had Hollins not been added. Economic and institutional control lies in the hands of men. For a working class immigrant woman such as herself, opportunities to move up the social ladder are firmly in the hands of the men with whom she would align herself. Yezierska lived independently of men her whole life, but she also lived in relative poverty most of her life. In *Salome*, she aligns her heroine with a man who understands her and who shares her dream of equality based on respect at the same time that he gives her financial stability. Hollins is Yezierska's ideal man because he came from the ranks of impoverished immigrants, was able using hard work to escape to a better life, without ever losing sight of both his immigrant and Americanized identities and without losing sight of the needs of his immigrant community. Similarly to Howells' ideal man (found in the image of the educated, hard-working Basil March from *A Hazard of New Fortunes)*, Hollins respects intellectual pursuits (signaled by his study in Paris) and he is sensitive to aesthetic deprivation. He agreed, after all, to create a one of

a kind dress for a penniless stranger, Sonya Vrunsky, because he recognized her hunger and appreciation for beauty.

Hollins' character allows Yezierska to stress an additional point. Her choice to love him reflects her move away from rhetoric such as Mary Antin's. She cannot embrace American, Anglo-culture and forsake Jewish immigrant realities. For her, looking in both directions at the same time, with all its challenges, is inevitable. *Salome* positions Vrunsky at the beginning of a journey as trapped in Du Boisian "double consciousness," in "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (45). Vrunsky, the readers are invited to see, is able to comprehend with time her own reality and Mannings'. Her final choice symbolized a merging of her identities into a single, truer self. Her history, as it is expressed in this book, exhibits the wish, the "longing to attain self-conscious [womanhood] to merge [her] double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, [she] wishes neither of the older selves to be lost" (45). By inserting Yezierska into this quote by Du Bois regarding the wishes of the black man, Yezierska's full complexity emerges. She wished to participate in social-critical arguments regarding respectful attention to the home culture of underprivileged immigrants. At the same time, she did so from a profoundly feminist perspective, infusing into her narrative feminine desires and declarations of empowerment rather than of submission.

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