

Returning to the Open Cage—  
The Lower East Side Ghetto as Anzia Yeziarska's Place

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## Contents

### Introduction

1. Biography	1
2. Critical Reception	4
3. Space and Place	7

### Chapter I: Space or Place?

1. Introduction	14
2. Russian Poland: Space	14
2-1. Within the Pale of Settlement	
2-2. Russian Obsession: <i>All I Could Never Be</i>	
2-3. Departure and at Sea	
3. The Filthy Lower East Side Ghetto: Cage	19
3-1. Poverty: <i>Salome of the Tenements</i>	
3-2. Exploitation: "How I Found America"	
3-3. Male Dominance: <i>Bread Givers</i>	
3-4. Language Barriers and Homelessness: "Wild Winter Love"	
3-5. Self-Sacrifice of Jewish Mothers and Ruptures between Parent and Child: <i>Arrogant Beggar</i> and <i>Bread Givers</i>	
4. Conclusion	36

### Chapter II: Trial—Getting Out of the Cage

1. Introduction	39
2. Education in English	40
2-1. Articulation in English: "Soap and Water"	
2-2. Education: Max and Father in <i>Bread Givers</i>	
2-3. Ceaseless Quest for her Mentor, John Dewey: "The Miracle"	
3. Successful Models Giving Don Quixote Arms: <i>Salome of the Tenements</i>	47
3-1. Doctor of Beauty: Jaky Solomon	
3-2. The Sensual Tyrant: Rosenblat	
3-3. A Stingy Pawnbroker: Honest Abe	
4. Ambition, or Upward Mobility: "Wings"	55
5. Conclusion	57

### Chapter III: Space—Outside of the Ghetto

1. Introduction	60
2. Doubt on the Value of Charity in “The Free Vacation House” and the <i>Arrogant Beggar</i>	60
3. Puritan Manning’s Mansion as Space: <i>Salome of the Tenements</i>	67
4. Impossible to Return to the Old World: Fania in <i>Bread Givers</i>	68
5. The Crucial Difference: <i>All I Could Never Be</i>	71
5-1. Perspectives from the Higher and the Lower Ranks	
5-2. Flesh and Blood	
5-3. Reality is Hard to Change	
5-4. A Tremendous Stillness: Epilogue	
6. Failures out of the Ghetto: Captive Incapable Birds	80
6-1. Men Who Does Not Love Only Her: “Wild Winter Love”	
6-2. Unsatisfied with the Space as Well as the Cage: “Fat of the Land”	
7. Crazy Ambition to Remain a Writer: <i>Red Ribbon on a White Horse</i>	86
7-1. Effusiveness Originated Space Russia and the Emptiness of Display	
7-2. The Profane Caricature Kintzler	
7-3. In New England	
8. Conclusion	92

### Chapter IV: The Return to the Open Cage

1. Introduction	95
2. A Unique and Significant Character in the Ghetto: <i>Arrogant Beggar</i>	96
2-1. A Mysterious Old Woman, Muhmenkeh	
2-2. Music and Resurrection	
2-3. The Return to the Charming Ghetto with Fairytale Aspect	
3. Jewishness in <i>Red Ribbon on a White Horse</i>	105
3-1. Profane and Sacred Shlomoh	
3-2. As a Jew and a White Horse	
4. Don Quixote Transformed from Salome	110
5. Family in <i>Bread Givers</i>	111
6. The Place to Return: “Free Vacation House”	114
7. Conclusion	116

Conclusion	120
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Bibliography	124
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### Abbreviations of the Titles of Anzia Yezierska's Works Cited

*AB Arrogant Beggar.* 1927. Burham: Duke U. P., 2004.

*AIC All I Could Never Be.* 1932. Brewere, Warren & Putnam, 1932.

*BG Bread Givers.* 1925. New York: Persea Books, 1975.

*CL Children of the Loneliness.* 1923. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1923.  
(Reprinted Tokyo: Honnotomosya, 1991)

*HH Hungry Hearts.* 1920.

*HIF How I Found America: Collected Stories of Anzia Yezierska* (including stories in

*Hungry Hearts*, stories in *Children of Loneliness* and uncollected stories)

New York: Persea Books, 1991.

*OC The Open Cage: An Anzia Yezierska Collection* (including stories in

*Hungry Hearts*, stories in *Children of Loneliness*, chapters in *Red Ribbon on a*

*White Horse* and uncollected stories) New York: Persea Books, 1979.

*RR Red Ribbon on a White Horse.* 1950. New York: Persea Books, 1987.

*ST Salome of the Tenements.* 1923. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

## Introduction

### 1. Biography

Anzia Yezierska was born around 1880 in the Russian-Polish village of Plotsk, also known as Plock, Plinsk, or Maly Plock, which is located near Warsaw. According to her only daughter, who was also one of her biographers, Louise Levitas Henriksen, Anzia Yezierska “invented a new name for the village each time she wrote about it”(13).<sup>1</sup> She was the daughter of Pearl (Shana Perl) and Bernard (Baruch) Yeziersky. Her parents had 10 children and Anzia was the seventh child. Her father, Bernard, was an Orthodox rabbi and a *melemed*, a Hebrew scholar and teacher, and he directed a *cheder*, or religious school, out of his home. However, at that time, Jewish religious instructions were illegal, and the family was fined and threatened by the Cossacks. Subsequently, the Yezierskys sold all their possessions to purchase tickets for a ship bound for America. The family’s “life in Polish Russia and their immigration to the United States were not documented except in her fiction” (Dearborn: 34).<sup>2</sup> It is only through her “semi-fictional autobiography and semi-autobiographical” fictions, as Gay Wilentz calls her novels, that readers can see a glimpse of her early life.<sup>3</sup>

Around 1890, when Anzia Yezierska, at eight to fifteen approximately because even her birth year is not clearly determined, and her family arrived at Castle Garden in New York, they changed their family name from Yeziersky (male) and Yezierska (female) to Mayer. Anzia’s oldest brother, Meyer Yeziersky, had reached America a year or two earlier and had adopted the name Max Mayer. Following his lead, Anzia Yezierska became Hattie Mayer.

During that time, Jews were immigrating to the United States (U.S.) from Eastern Europe and Russia in large number. They were often sent steerage tickets by the male members of their families who had already migrated to the U.S. Between 1882 and 1924, Jews of Eastern European origin (Ashkenazim) came to the Lower East Side (New York, U.S.); approximately 1.5 million Jews crossed the Atlantic

Ocean. Meanwhile, the male Jewish migrants, who had already migrated to the U.S., gathered money and arranged accommodation to facilitate the immigration of the rest of their family. Rose Cohen's *Out of the Shadow* explores this common practice. In Yezierska's "How I Found America," the narrator's father figure is "the only man in the village who could read" (110).<sup>4</sup> As Alan Robert Ginsberg points out, men like Yezierska's father were "simultaneously revered as holy men and disdained as ineffectual dreamers" (71).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, "his powerful presence scarred Anzia" (Ginsberg 70). Henriksen recollects that after she moved past the word "Mama," she learned to call her mother Anzia. At about 28 years of age, Hattie changed her name back to Anzia, which was around the time her first story was published. Henriksen perceives this event as "taking on the persona of the artist writer" (Henriksen 67).

Many of her life events can be found in her writings. After Yezierska arrived in the U.S., she lived in "a dark airless tenement railroad flat" on Hester Street (Henriksen 14) with her sisters and parents. She felt uncomfortable in that flat because the standard of living was not what she had imagined it would be. This is the reason why most of her works on the Lower East Side ghetto life are portrayed from the perspective of a poor woman. Her father adhered to his old-fashioned way of life and did not change his attitude and his stances. In a short story by Yezierska, "The Lord Giveth", a character wonders about another character, Reb Ravinsky, who seems to resemble Yezierska's father. "Such a lazy do-nothing! All day in the synagogue. . . . Why don't [sic] he go to work in a shop?" (237).<sup>6</sup> Just like this character, Reb Yezidersky behaved in a way that people in America could not understand. On the other hand, Yezierska's sisters found work in sweatshops and her mother continually complained and cursed, as is portrayed in *Bread Givers*. Unsurprisingly, Anzia Yezierska's ambitions began to grow and she decided to leave her ghetto on Hester Street. Yiddish being their first language (*mame loshn*), she had to attend the night school at the Educational Alliance to learn English, while working as a domestic worker, a seamstress in the sweatshops, a laundress, and an assembler.

Anzia Yezierska eventually moved out and found a room of her own. This was not typical in Jewish culture as decent Jewish girls only left their families when they got married. In 1899, the Clara de Hirsch Home for working girls offered her a room and also gave her a four-year education at Columbia University. Those life events are portrayed in her *Arrogant Beggar*. At Columbia, Yezierska was trained to be a home economics teacher; however, she had little interest in that subject. Yezierska did not have a strong motivation for studying practical sciences, but rather she was attracted to the arts of self-expression. Therefore, as a way to express herself, she began writing stories, which was not limited to the physical performance of acting. Some of her early short stories convey the circumstances and reasons for her writing.

Yezierska married a Jewish man named Arnold Levitas, the father of Louise Levitas Henriksen. However, this marriage was not officially recognized and was only done in a religious ceremony after a grave mistake with his friend, Jacob Gordon, a German Jew: for Yezierska and Gordon were actually married for a little while. Yezierska gave birth to her daughter in 1912, but the family life did not suit Anzia. As readers, we can draw conclusions about the failure of her marriage with Levitas from her *Salome of the Tenements*. Yezierska eventually left both her husband and daughter so she could devote more time to her literary pursuits.

Later in 1917, Yezierska met John Dewey. They provided each other with emotional support, and Dewey, in secret, would write passionate poetry about her. Under the name of Anzia Levitas, she took part in his research of the Poles in the U. S., where she was an interpreter, a translator, and a researcher on conditions affecting family life and women (260).<sup>7</sup> However, they abruptly broke off their relationship after being together for less than a year, and this sudden rupture is portrayed in *All I Could Never Be*. Although she had suffered sorrow at parting, she followed Dewey's advice and continued writing.

Yezierska became known as the "Sweatshop Cinderella" when her book *Hungry*

*Hearts* was adapted into a silent film with the same title in 1922. The book was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1920 because one short story (“The Fat of the Land”) was voted the Best Short Story of 1919. For the film adaptation, the plots of “Wings” and “Lost Beautifulness” were primarily used. In Hollywood, she was able to experience the luxurious lifestyle she had long dreamed of but soon discovered that the high life was not what she needed. Indeed, in that world too, she felt out of place. In 1923, she met George Bernard Shaw, Israel Zangwill, Joseph Conrad, and Gertrude Stein in Europe. Dearborn regards Yeziarska as “clearly a literary lioness at this time” considering the fact these men and a woman of letters found time to see her (114).<sup>8</sup> She returned to New York in the same year and began residing in Greenwich Village. Accordingly, most of her works on her ghetto were not written while she was living in the Lower East Side but in other places. She spent the years 1828–30 in Arlington and Vermont on a Zona Gale Fellowship. She applied for relief and took on a WPA (Work Project Administration) Federal Writers Project. However, neither participating in the WPA nor a scholar’s life in New England agreed with her, as is described in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, her last novel. Following this, she ceased to be a novelist and instead became a reviewer for *The New York Times Book Review* for about a decade, beginning in February 1951, as well as wrote short stories concerning old age.

Yeziarska continued writing even in her old age. One of her last short stories dealt with her as the motif for returning to her ghetto. The ghetto or the Lower East Side represents a cage and signifies a “place” that simultaneously provides her with security and restriction.

## 2. Critical Reception

The transition of appreciation of Yeziarska’s works is described hereafter. Just after the adaptation of *Hungry Hearts*, Yeziarska was dubbed as the “Sweatshop Cinderella” in articles of popular magazines and journals, and quickly gained a



reputation. Her novel *Salome of the Tenements* was also adapted into a film, and the promotion of the first film boosted the sales of the book. Both books—a short stories' collection and a full-length novel—were received positively and negatively by the public. Those who supported assimilation praised the works, while, Jews disliked them because of her humorous descriptions and characterizations of Yiddish that gave the latter negative connotations to cheap laughs and cartoons. The second novel *Bread Givers* is discussed most frequently and has been rated highly, followed by the *Arrogant Beggar*.

With the arrival of the Great Depression, Yeziarska's stories and novels on immigrant life were no longer in demand, and she and her work were soon forgotten. In 1950, after 18 years of silence, owing to *All I Could Never Be*, she published *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, her autobiography written as both a writer and daughter, which included elements of fiction. Shortly after, she became an obscure writer again and passed away in 1970.

In the early 1970s, scholars such as Alice Kessler Harris, a sociologist, and Mary Dearborn, a scholar and biographer, rediscovered Yeziarska to be the epitome of the American Dream. Jo Ann Boydston's discovery of John Dewey's love poems about Yeziarska followed the rediscovery of Yeziarska. In addition to American criticism, in 1984, Shigeo Hamano introduced Anzia Yeziarska to Japanese readership in *The Departure of Jewish American Writers*, where he recognized the value of Yeziarska's works and life as a pioneer who sublimated her level of daily life into indomitable spirit.

Recent scholars also discuss that the Americanization Yeziarska deals with in her works encompasses topics like ethnicity, language, charity, and education. Janet Handler Burnstein refers to this as the "the manifold self" of Yeziarska's young female protagonists.<sup>9</sup>

On the topic of ethnicity, Jo Ann Paveletch's article titled "Anzia Yeziarska, Immigrant Authority, and the Uses of Affect" mentions that in the 1920s, WASP

(White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) middle-class values were imposed on poor and working-class immigrants. Yezierska, against this unjustified situation, “manipulates the figure of the emotionally intense Jewish female immigrant in order to establish the immigrant woman as an especially important figure in the US culture precisely because of her effusive emotions” (81).<sup>10</sup>

Thomas J. Ferraro, the author of *Ethnic Passages*, critiques Yezierska’s *Bread Givers* “for undermining Jewish ‘tradition,’ and turns out attention toward the past and away from Sara’s [the heroine’s] increasingly prosperous circumstances” (67–68).<sup>11</sup> He, however, observed that patriarchy is also supported by mainstream culture and is adapted. According to Ferraro, the critiques should not risk to limit the capacity for cultural criticism that was facing near extinction. His point is that “the Old World/New World dichotomy [should be] challenged by the eerie correspondences of patriarchal persistence” (Ferraro 68).

Concerning language, Delia Caparoso Konzett objects to the theory on Yezierska’s optimistic Americanization. Dealing with the writer’s “Immigrant English, with its pathetic and clichéd interjections, its clumsy syntax and grammar, [. . .] its departures from standard English,” Konzett claims that Yezierska “properly expresses the hybrid situation of the new immigrant, depicting a new vision of America as seen from the Lower East Side”(615).<sup>12</sup> Her works are positively criticized in an attempt to look into W. E. B. Dubois’s “two-ness,” or Homi Bhabha’s “double narrative movement.” Konzett regards that the significance of Yezierska’s works’ is not on their realization of the American Dream but on their creation of “Ethnic Alternative.”

With regards to charity, the Japanese scholar Atsuko Honda, published her doctoral thesis under the title of “Givers in Exile: Americanization, Gender, and Reciprocity in the Works of Anzia Yezierska” in 2012.<sup>13</sup> The thesis adopted the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss’s theory and analyzed texts from “Giving and Reciprocity.” The “Old World,” that is, the Jewish tradition has a cultural and

religious custom of giving, or *tzedakah*. On the other hand, the “New World” is a world of reciprocity. The thesis points out that the transition from giving to reciprocity is attributable to the Americanization of Jewish people and upward mobility; however, the concept of *tzedakah* (the giving tradition) can be Yeziarska’s values supporting her sense of belonging as a Jew.

As for education, Chip Rhodes points out John Dewey’s influence on Yeziarska’s ways of viewing education in “Education as Liberation, in *Bread Givers*.”<sup>14</sup> Education is believed to rise above ethnicity, class, and gender and creates an “egalitarian promise.” When Yeziarska used “education” as an alternative to Americanization prescribed by the WASP culture, she revised the ethnically biased system.

In each article, Yeziarska’s ethnicity is given weight by discussing her perspective on different issues of Americanization. This thesis, however, is not intended as an investigation of Yeziarska’s ideology. The purpose here is to explore a little further into her source of emotional support as a compelling creative force.

### 3. Space and Place

The Hebrew word *makom* is used to signify “place” and is also a synonym for “God.” Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, searches the place of his own and eventually finds it as where he is close to God. Barbara Mann considers the works of S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970) for her discussion on “space” and “place”.<sup>15</sup> Agnon was a Nobel Prize laureate writer who was born in Polish Galicia and later immigrated to Palestine. Agnon’s *From Lodging to Lodging* recounts his journey to find a place of his own for health related reasons. Although the narrator arrives at the “Promised Land,” he cannot feel comfortable and searches for a more decent place to live, traveling from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. He finally finds a comfortable place to live because the landlord seems to be a good man and that he was eventually led by the guide of God (*ha-makom*). Mann connects “*makom*” with the notion of Yi-Fu Tuan (1930–), considering the two sides of both notions. According to Tuan’s *Space and Place*, “If

you think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (6).<sup>16</sup> Place is considered to be created by a human's experience and a "pause" on the time flow by Tuan. Place is connected with security as the object of flight. One creates a place in the space, on the other hand, place is where cut off from space. Tuan later replaces "place" with "hearth"; however, here the definition of "place" is appropriate to discuss.

According to Henriksen, Yezierska "wrote and rewrote" the story "The Open Cage" "for two or three years," although during her lifetime "she couldn't sell it to any magazine" (Henriksen 289). The apartment where the narrator of this story lives is in a miserable state, and she does not call it a "home" but a "prison" (*OC* 246). A wild bird comes to her window and knocks on it. The elderly narrator is delighted with this visit of an unexpected tiny visitor, and she tries to keep it in her apartment. She, however, is persuaded by her neighbor to let it go and reluctantly releases her short-term friend. The narrator returns to her "own cage," in other words her apartment (*OC* 251). The title of her work "The Open Cage" is in itself somewhat paradoxical. Although it is unlikely that Yezierska placed any special meaning to it, the title of this, or one of last stories, which was published posthumously, may symbolize the writer's own life and works.

In the Russian-Polish village of her birth, young Anzia Yezierska was frightened and threatened by Cossacks like a captive would be. Accordingly, Russia represented a space for her since her impression and experience of that country was less substantial than that of America since she was only 8 to 15 when she went across the Atlantic. "When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place" (Tuan 73). There are even less positive descriptions of Russia than America; thus, when she arrived in the US, she may have felt "like a bird in the air, from sky to sky, from star to star" (*HIF* 113). Upon arriving in the Lower East Side ghetto, Yezierska was bitterly disappointed and had her "first doubt of America" (*HIF* 113). She began to learn her way around New York and was in search for any opportunity to escape

from the ghetto. In Hollywood and New England, she may have felt that she was no longer in a “cage”; nevertheless, she was not satisfied with her status as an outsider.

In many of Yeziarska’s novels, returning to the ghetto is a motif. The narrators of her stories are initially ambitious to become respectable Americans and gradually notice the significance of their own family backgrounds and the Jewish tradition. Yeziarska’s roots lie in the Lower East Side Jewish ghetto, represented by Hester Street. She felt nostalgic for her ghetto while simultaneously feeling aversion and shame toward it. This ghetto could be characterized as an open cage as aforementioned. In this “cage,” the narrators are not free from the Jewish tradition; nevertheless, it was “open” in the free country of America, meaning Yeziarska could flee it if she wanted, unlike Russian Poland that she had left behind. On the other hand, “enclosed and humanized space is place” (Tuan 54). While the narrators return to the ghetto, the writer does not go back to live there. The difference between fictitious endings and the reality should be inspected.

This thesis provides an approach to an interpretation of Yeziarska’s life and works. Tuan’s theory on space and place and the symbolic title of the story “The Open Cage” are more discussed in-depth below. The “Old World,” Russian Poland in this context, is space, where Yeziarska or the Jews were not cared for. The treatment of the Jews depended on the whims of the Cossacks and “the ukaz of the Czar” (*HIF* 109). The restricted circumstances of the Jewish people had the same effect as if they were in a cage but they were not treated like pet birds. They were not fed but had to be self-sufficient and were compelled to accept being treated as the lowest level of society. At that time, in the Pale of Settlement, the Jews were always filled with apprehension that there might be another pogrom. In America, the heroines of Yeziarska’s stories can only work their way out of the ghetto, as Yeziarska herself did, because even in a free country, it was important to follow convention and tradition; indeed, the filthy streets were expected to remain an object of disgust for young respectable women. Like wild birds, the heroines in Yeziarska’s fictions try to enjoy

freedom; however, this can only be a momentary joy as they are not really wild birds. Returning to the ghetto eventually means returning to the “open cage” of the Lower East Side. The significance of the ghetto to the writer is shown in how it is examined in each work and how this theme forms the main subjects.

Yeziarska's narrators frequently express their feelings about the ghetto and its streets: Hester, Delancey, Essex, Division, Grand, Allen, and Forsyth Streets. In “Dreams and Dollars”, Rebecca Yudelson, the heroine, gains a sense of reassurance when she returns to her ghetto from Los Angeles, “in beauty and plenty” (*HIF* 219).

She knew now why she had come back home again—back to the naked struggle for bread—back to the crooked, narrow streets filled with shouting children, the haggling pushcarts and bargaining housewives—back to the relentless, penny-pinched poverty—but a poverty rich in romance, in dreams,—rich in its very hunger of unuttered, unsung beauty. (*HIF* 232)

To fully grasp Yeziarska's shifting perspective on the ghetto, this thesis deals with the motif of a “cage.” In the first chapter, the writer's life and work on *shtetl* in the Pale of the Settlement of Russian Poland as space is examined. The Lower East Side, the “Old World” in the U.S., as the seemingly “closed cage” that is in fact open is discussed in the same chapter. The second chapter is on the narrators/heroines' challenge to get out of their “cage.” The challenge is attributed to the mentors, especially the Anglo-Saxon male figures, and the upward mobility they instill in the heroines. Outside of the ghetto, or the sky for a bird, there is space and the narrators are allowed to enjoy their freedom. In the open sky, however, the narrators have to be directly confronted with dangers and the mainstream of American society where they are complete outsiders and struggle to survive. The space alludes to the future and invites actions, according to Tuan. To examine this “space,” the descriptions and plots of Hollywood and New England are dealt with in the third chapter. The

romances between narrators and Anglo-Saxon men or German Assimilated Jews are also investigated. In the last chapter, the return to the ghetto, or “open cage” is discussed. The cage is the place that is filled with magnetism: such as attractive characters, humor, family and relatives, and happy endings with coreligionists or immigrants. The place can be a significant “place” for Yeziarska in the flow of her time as a significant pause.

## Notes

- 1 Louise Levitas Henriksen, *Anzia Yezierska A Writer's Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U.P., 1988).
- 2 Mary V. Dearborn, *Love in the Promised Land: the story of Anzia Yezierska and John Dewey* (New York: The Free Press, 1988).
- 3 Gay Wilentz, Introduction, *Salome of the Tenements*, by Anzia Yezierska (Urbana and Chicago: U. of Illinois P., 1995).
- 4 Anzia Yezierska, "How I Found America", *How I Found America*, (New York: Persea Books, 1991).
- 5 Alan Robert Ginsberg, *The Salome Ensemble* (New York: Syracuse U.P. 2016).
- 6 Anzia Yezierska, "The Lord Giveth", *HIF*
- 7 John Dewey, *The Middle Works 1899-1924 Volume II: 1918-1919*. (Southern Illinois U.P. 1982).
- 8 Mary V. Dearborn, "Anzia Yezierska and the Making of an Ethnic American Self" *The Invention of Ethnicity* ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford U. P. 1989).
- 9 Janet Handler Burnstein, "Translating Immigrant Women: Writing the Manifold self", Chapter 1, *Writing mothers, writing daughters: tracing the maternal in stories by American Jewish women* (Urbana and Chicago: The U. of Illinois P. 1996).
- 10 Jo Ann Paveletch, "Anzia Yezierska, Immigrant Authority, and the Uses of Affect" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19-1 (2000).
- 11 Thomas J. Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1993).
- 12 Delia Caparoso Konzett, "Administered Identities and Linguistic Assimilation: The Politics of Immigrant English in Anzia Yezierska's *Hungry Hearts*" *American Literature* 69-3 (1997).
- 13 Atsuko Honda, *Givers in Exile: Americanization, gender, and reciprocity in the works of Anzia Yezierska*, diss., Nagoya U, 2012.



14 Chip Rhodes, "Education as Liberation: The case of Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*." *Science & Society: A Marxian Quarterly* 57:3 Sep. (1993).

15 Mann, Barbara E., "Space and Place", *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Jewish Cultures*, ed. Laurence Roth and Nadia Valman (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

16 Yi-Fu, Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota P., 1977).

## Chapter I: Space or Place?

### 1. Introduction

The narrator of Yeziarska's one of last short stories "The Open Cage" is an old woman and readers can identify the narrator with Yeziarska herself. The apartment building, where many more people live than the maximum number allowed, is far from a pleasant home even though it is on Riverside Drive, which is not part of the Lower East Side ghetto. The residents hardly have any personal privacy, moreover, the smell of cooking emanating from the neighbors' homes is intolerable and the narrator has to open windows even during the winter in New York. The bathrooms are unclean by late in the evening; besides, if you take a bath early in the morning, one particular resident appears to hide the plug for the bathtub lest the noise of water should wake him up. The smells, the crisp air, the appearance of the bathrooms and the sound of the shower vividly appeal to readers' senses.

The narrator regards her apartment not as a home but as "a prison where the soul dies long before the body is dead" (*OC* 246). Her final abode is a rough one and the narrator's curse even in her old age "Damn them all!!" (*OC* 246) reminds us of the writer's gushing emotion common in earlier texts. In the first chapter, as a place to leave, Russian Poland and the Lower East Side ghetto are examined. Although both seem to be unpleasant places to live, they are not described with substantial circumstances in common. Russian Poland is, on the one hand a space, on the other hand, the Lower East Side ghetto is a place in light of Tuan's theory. Poverty, oppression by a strong, male dominance, the language barrier, homelessness, together with mothers who are looked down on and make self-sacrifices, all present a concrete reality and develop the sense of location.

### 2. Russian Poland: Space

#### 2-1. Within the Pale of Settlement

In the Pale of the Settlement, most Jewish people used to barely exist in their *shtetle*. Their life is explained in full detail in Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*. Mary Antin (1881–1949) is from Polotzk, thus Yeziarska's hometown may be Plotzk in English by chance, which is sometimes translated from Polotzk. This means that Antin and Yeziarska came from the same town (Ginsberg 70). According to Antin, the Czar ordered the Jews to stay within the area known as the "Pale of Settlement" and there was a fence around Polotzk. They were not to be found outside the Pale. Their captivity was not, in the strict sense of the word, in a "ghetto," a system that was originally used in Europe. Louise Wirth, however, regards "pale" as a kind of "ghetto" in Eastern Europe after the walls of the ghetto had been broken in Western Europe. Pale Jews in Russia, Poland and a certain part of Romania are different from Western European Jews. Western European Jews maintained their contact with commerce and the financial center of Christian society; on the other hand, the ghettos of pale Jews were self-sufficient and people lived in fear of frequent pogroms.<sup>1</sup> There had been such dreadful practices in Europe especially in areas where Jewish families lived. Vicious rumors spread that Jews were said to murder Christian children as part of their Passover ritual. Frequent compulsory conversions to Christianity, exorbitant taxation, and military enrolments were all features that were not authorized but happened even in the lowest class in society. As targets of hatred and attack, Jews were persecuted and terrified by frequent pogroms. Just like "prisoners" they were confined in the Pale, and for Yeziarska, this was not a home but a prison where the soul dies long before the body is dead. They were not given a place to live but were literally confined to the Pale for the sake of convenience; this was not discrimination but religious persecution.

Yeziarska depicts her family life in the first part of "How I Found America" as mentioned in her brief biography in the introduction. Yeziarska does not look back on her homeland with nostalgia. In Russia, the narrator says "you feel yourself a stranger in the village where you were born and raised—the village in which your

father and grandfather lie buried” (*HIF* 113). On the other hand, for instance, Rose Gollup Cohen (1880–1925) does not necessarily describe Russia as a purely negative place. She does give pastoral and nostalgic descriptions of her hometown. She feels a sense of relief as she recollects her homeland, Russia, although she is also Jewish and later emigrates to America, just like Yeziarska. Also, the educated class of ghetto women who derive their culture and ideas from socialism and from advanced Russian ideals never cease to love the land of their birth.<sup>2</sup> Yeziarska’s further sentiments regarding Russia can be seen in the fourth novel *All I Could Never Be*.

## 2-2. Russian Obsession: *All I Could Never Be*

The unaccepted and difficult life of Jews in Russia is associated with the narrator’s wretched situation. The distant bitter memories that are hard to forget are inextricably linked to clandestine life in Russian Poland. There are two episodes involving the heroine Fanya Ivanowna. One happens in Warsaw and the other is the time in America when she was seventeen years old. When Fanya was seven, with a beggar’s bag hanging around her neck, she was sent on an errand to Warsaw where her wealthy relatives lived. After losing her father, Fanya and her mother were likely to live in a *shtetle* a long way from Warsaw, as a neighbor says to Fanya’s mother “How can you send a child so far away, alone?” (*AIC* 11) She is excited to visit a comfortable house, which seems like Heaven to her. She wears rags to stir pity among others and is taken to the bath to be cleaned. Then her braided hair is let down, and lice are found in her hair, so she is made to go home and given charity as an impoverished mother and child. Negative memories are presented, which account for the formation of Fanya’s personality. Even after her emigration, her humiliating experiences continue.

When she is seventeen years old, she loses her mother and goes to live in the United States. Since the sweatshop is closed and she cannot work, Miss Farnsworth gives Fanya a temporary job at a department store. She is invited to go to

Farnsworth's home, and their house is filled with the aroma of rose. Farnsworth and her mother celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas with servants; thus, Fanya regards them as superior to herself because of her poverty but she forgets all about it in their company. Fanya later writes an effusive letter since they have hinted at a further invitation which made her very happy. She no longer receives their invitation because of the passionate letter, which began with a greeting to Mrs. Farnsworth where she called her "Madonna."

Fanya witnesses "serene" wonderful worlds, but she is an unwelcome guest to them; moreover, undesirable consequence is common to these two experiences. Superior position's static stability and Fanya, or the receiver's "unstrained show of emotion" are obvious contrast. Yeziarska's heroines, as well as the emotional nature of Russian Jewesses, are often given emphasis as explained in detail in Paveletch's article and *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (Hapgood 77). The juxtaposition of the two episodes in Warsaw and New York are symbolic. Her effusive and passionate letter, which is the reason for her no longer being invited, can be compared to the episode of the lice being found in her hair. Although she is temporarily accepted in both cases, she is later rejected. "Russian Jewess, a flame—a longing" (*ST* 37) as the heroine Sonya introduces herself. The stereotypical name includes feelings of humiliation and self-hatred as well as defiance. Russia is a space where she was not accepted as a decent citizen and always suffered poverty and fear. Her nature which developed in this country is also disgraceful and detested. Consequently, they lost everything except for the steerage tickets. Jewish people, including the Yeziarskys, barely escaped with their lives in order to obtain their place. Iska Alter points out that most of the heroines in Yeziarska's novels are orphans.<sup>3</sup> The author resolves to be accepted in America and to be an "American" by severing ties with her own roots, Russian Poland. Also, this solitude leads to heroines' homelessness later dealt with.

Also, in recollecting "The Open Cage" a wild bird, a visitor from an "abstract," "undifferentiated" space (Tuan 6) frightens the narrator but is later welcomed, and

the apartment it visits is described as a “prison”. The exact reverse is the case in these episodes. The visit of the bird animates the recipient while Fanya’s visits from space to relatives in Warsaw and to the Farnsworths are loathed by the recipients. Space, Russia, signifies menace for young Fanya, and the lice or her demonstrative expressions originating from her poor Russian livelihood are repugnant to others as well as to herself. It is completely different from the background of the bird, space, being out of the cage, where the narrator in the filthy apartment longs to be. In this case, space “lies open, it suggests the future and action. On the negative side, space and freedom are a threat” (Tuan 54). Russia can be defined as being out of the cage and exposed to constant menace without protection.

### 2-3. Departure and at Sea

After their narrow escape from Russia, the place where they arrived is not what they imagined it to be. In addition, the journey in third class is unbearable. “You can’t be an immigrant twice” as Yeziarska says in *Children of Loneliness*. In 1923 she traveled to Europe to meet some famous writers. She was interviewed by the *New York Tribune* syndicate about her experience when she returned to America (Henriksen 197). She tried to stay and eat in the third class section but she was put off because of “squalor and dirt and seasickness” (CL 263) and so she did not stay there. Unlike the sea trip about 30 years ago, the writer this time can compare the circumstances in the second and third classes.

“Classes seem natural on land and the people of the different classes are so far apart they hardly know of each other. But in traveling at sea, when we are so near to the ocean and sky, and all there is is ocean and sky, the rank injustice of classes and the power of money strikes one’s soul with chill”. (CL 266-67)

For the writer, Yeziarska, after her success in 1923, the steerage represents the

intensification of approaching America as well as “nothing but the squalor and dirt and seasickness” (*CL* 263). There is only one line in “How I Found America” published in 1920 that depicts the wretched circumstances of the steerage and the narrator “saw and heard nothing of the foulness and ugliness around” her on account of her excitement of arriving in America (*HIF* 112). The squalor in the steerage effectively emphasizes the young narrator’s ardent hope of seeing some improvements in her life. The bigger her hope grows, the bigger her disappointment with American life becomes. The steamboat itself was, whether the heroine noticed or not, the obvious evidence of disparity among the classes. The fact that Yeziarska could not bear to stay in the steerage for long indicates that she has climbed the social ladder and that it was impossible for her to go back there as long as she could afford better circumstances.

### 3. The Filthy Lower East Side Ghetto—Cage

Even if the fear of the pogrom had gone, worries and discontent with life did not disappear in New York’s Lower East Side. The awful physical conditions did not end in steerage but continued in the ghetto. The narrator’s first impression is not as wonderful as the vision she used to have before she actually arrived in America.

I looked about the narrow streets of squeezed-in stores and houses, ragged clothes, dirty bedding oozing out of the windows, ash-cans and garbage-cans cluttering the side-walks. A vague sadness pressed down my heart—the first doubt of America. (*HIF* 113)

The noises and clutters of the ghetto are emphasized and appeal to the eyes and ears. In addition, the exploitation of the sweatshop industry and oppression by the strong are problems facing the newcomers, or “greenhorns”. The difference in language use is the problem faced by immigrants. The theme of articulation in her short stories

must be examined here. Symbolically and practically, immigrants could not speak for themselves. Lastly, Jewish traditions meant that their family relationships were different to those of middle-class Americans. Ruptures between parents and children and the ensuing homelessness, together with the self-sacrifice made by Jewish mothers are themes for examination. These particular circumstances mentioned above encouraged Yezierska's protagonists to escape from the ghetto, or the cage.

### 3-1 Poverty: *Salome of the Tenements*

Superficially, the love between Sonya and Manning is the crux of the plot, but Sonya's mingling with Jewish people is one of the important aspects of *Salome of the Tenements*. Although immigrants are poor, their pure and simple daily life is vividly depicted. Sonya's colleagues are those who first examine Jewish immigrants in this text. Though Sonya says "I have no one. No father, no mother, no money, no friends" (ST47), she is always observed by Gittel Stein who appears at the important turning points in Sonya's life, such as Sonya's encounter with Manning, their wedding reception, and the breakup of their marriage. In other words, Gittel witnesses Sonya's entrance and exit of the cage. As she is jealous of Sonya and wishes her ill, Gittel is described simply and is depicted as being older than Sonya and wears thick-lensed glasses (ST5).

"Failure is my religion," announced Gittel with apostolic fervor. "I accept failure in love and in life. The deeper, the finer you are, the more you realize the vulgarity, the sordidness of success". (ST94)

The metaphor of "apostolic" is used in this case to mean sour grapes. Later, the narrator, in a harsher fashion, calls her "Champion of defeat" (ST 94). Gittel is sarcastic because success is represented by vulgarity and sordidness while there are several successful characters who play an important role for Sonya as well as for the



text itself. Lipkin, whom Gittel loves, appears in the plot as an amateur poet clad in rags and is fond of Sonya.

“Bitter and sweet it is to love the moon,” he quoted wryly. “You make me tired always making poetry out of everything you feel.” Lipkin felt as though he were under Sonya’s feet and she were trampling on him. But even at that moment of anguish he grasped at the futile hope of touching her by offering some new tribute of his own creation. (*ST*68)

Though Sonya worships Manning, as if she were throwing herself at his feet, on the other hand, she looks down on Lipkin as if she were kicking him. Lipkin meanwhile strolls about reciting his poetry. At the beginning of the text Manning is like a God for Sonya, and unlike Manning, Lipkin reminds us of an unfortunate man, *shlimazel*, or deity of poverty.

Gittel and Lipkin, who observe Sonya, are caricatures and bystanders. In the introduction of *Salome of the Tenements*, Gay Wilentz points out “As in most comic novels, stereotypes are often used to make social points, and in this novel, Yezierska exposes the foibles of her community and the dominant culture to sharpen her social criticism” (*ST*xxi). Wilentz introduces the wedding reception scene as one of the best examples; moreover, through several Lower East Siders, the writer creates a vivid picture of the ghetto. The characters who symbolize the ghetto’s negative aspect are dealt with here; however, there are successful people, even in the ghetto, and these characters are dealt with later in Chapter II.

The designation “Salome” in the title is used in Chapter One entitled “Salome Meets Her Saint” and it is the byname for the passionate and beautiful heroine Sonya. Salome in the Bible dances sensually when invited to the celebration of King Herod. Salome fascinates the guests and the king finally tells her that she can have anything she wants as a reward. She asks her mother Herodias and requests the

head of John the Baptist since John blames Herodias and thus she avoids him. Obligated to keep his promise, the king has his servant put John's head on a tray and held out in front of Salome. The title *Salome*, which is also famously associated with Oscar Wilde's drama, enables readers to understand the metaphors for the characters. Sonya is compared to Salome; moreover, Manning's indifference is likened to a bloodless and unemotional man, John the Baptist in several descriptions (*ST*96).

Sonya is a poor immigrant reporter for *Ghetto News* and lives in a tenement. Since Manning is too busy to accept her interviews, Sonya waits for him in front of the settlement house, which he had established and tries to persuade him to meet her again. In front of Manning, Sonya feels as if she had thrown herself at his feet and thinks to herself.

As if by magic, the force of her will had materialized her desire into flesh and blood. Here, in the teeming Ghetto, among haggling pushcart peddlers, in the dirt and din of screaming hucksters, stood John Manning, millionaire, philanthropist—the man of her dreams, talking to her, inviting her to lunch with him. (*ST*3)

A contrast can be seen between the tumult of the Jewish ghetto, which is depicted as Sonya's background, and the philanthropist Manning, as a representative of the Puritans. Although Sonya is able to make an appointment with Manning, her outfit comprises a "threadbare jacket," "heels turned down" "gloves full of holes" and a "shabby coat." This wretchedness is emphasized across several pages. It is to comic effect to show Sonya's shabbiness and innocent naivety as she is in love with the millionaire Manning. Equally, it provides an elaborate description of immigrants' poverty. The niece of King Herod, Salome, puts on her beautiful dress and dances sensually at the sumptuous feast. Sonya, on the other hand, is a poor news reporter

clad in rags. The metaphor indicates not only Sonya's innocence but also her surroundings not in the least matched to Manning.

The byname "Salome" is used in the scenes where Sonya longs for superficial and material wealth and dreams about philanthropy. She sympathizes and agrees with noble Manning; moreover, she hopes to be his wife and to take part in his plan—this is all part of her magnificent dream. The fact that Gittel calls her Salome summarizes the first half of the text and epitomizes the plot for the bystanders. Collaborating with the narrator, Gittel points out Sonya's naivety and exaggeration.

"You stop a man in the middle of the street, and begin to call him 'Benefactor of humanity,' 'Savior of your soul,' so he had to invite you to lunch." . . . "Then you storm a Fifth Avenue store and get another strange man to dress you up from head to foot like a Delilah; then you vamp a landlord; hypnotize a helpless honest Abe; turn the whole world upside down to get the setting for your man. And if you did catch on to him," . . . "it's only because you're a heartless Salome and you don't care if you get your man dead or alive, as long as you get him." (*ST* 95)

The "setting" according to Gittel is described in detail in Chapter II, for example the colorful characters who enhance Sonya's strong presence. The poverty of the Lower East Side ghetto is meticulously depicted and brings out a contrast between the place of Sonya's origin and Manning's abode. On account of these wretched colleagues and the awful poverty, it is seen as natural that Sonya wants to escape the community of poor immigrants; moreover, the narrator's effective irony can be readily detected. Gittel and Lipkin are Sonya's hidden motive for approaching Manning, to whom she is attached since their poverty, but their submissive way of accepting their plight or defeat is not acceptable to Sonya. These two characters who are symbolic of the ghetto remain in a modest fashion in the depth of the cage and regard their captivity

as natural. Their territory is Essex Street and their lives are confined within a narrow range and a smaller area than that of Sonya. They never confront trouble or danger; moreover, they never know what Sonya obtains in exchange for the hardships and difficulties that she experiences. According to Tuan,

The street where one lives is part of one's intimate experience. The larger unit, neighborhood, is a concept. The sentiment one has for the local street corner does not automatically expand in the course of time to cover the entire neighborhood. (Tuan 170)

While Gittel and Lipkin cling to Essex Street and continue their lives of failure and poverty, Sonya tenaciously adheres to her success. They experience the opposite of each other and only Sonya experiences the larger unit.

### **3-2. Exploitation: "How I Found America"**

Just like poverty, the wretchedness of the ghetto that is controlled by the strong is obvious in Yeziarska's stories. Later some of those people are eventually punished and others are laughed at, but in initial short stories, the weak are compelled to bear their problems in silence, even near the ends of the stories. In "How I Found America," the boss at the narrator's sweatshop has a "hard, red face with pig's eyes" and a "fat belly" (*HIF* 115) and he decides to lower the wages. When the narrator remonstrates against his decision, she loses her job. After she meets Mrs. Olney, who recommends that she learn a trade such as sewing-machine operating or cooking, and is disappointed, she finds her family evicted for unpaid rent. The narrator's mother, "defiant of disgrace," goes "on with the ceremony of the Sabbath" (*HIF* 122) on the sidewalk. With this Jewish traditional ritual, she expresses her protest against the strong.

Evictions often occur and can be seen frequently in Yeziarska's stories, such as

*Bread Givers*, “A Bed for the Night,” or “The Lost ‘Beautifulness’.” Although it is extremely rare for Yeziarska, “A Bed for the Night” deals with a prostitute as the only savior of the heroine as a way of portraying bitter sarcasm. Most of the strong in these texts are not WASP but assimilated German Jews. According to Ewen, “If the landlord or his agent was a member of the same ethnic group as a tenant, the sting was especially severe” (118).<sup>4</sup> In 1904, tenants organized a protest against landlords/ landladies since they had raised the rent. Residents tried to refuse to pay and it was regarded as rent strike. The leading members of this campaign were said to be women.

The narrator of “How I Found America” is, at first glance, impatient and passionate; nevertheless, she casually notices that the boss of her sweatshop was “once a machine slave,” his “life in the hands of” his boss (*HIF* 117). Although the heroine loses her job because of her protest, she does not jeopardize her life as she did in Russia. Possibilities open up in America, unlike in Russia, and she is allowed to climb the social ladder without rejection. In the ghetto, rich people in the upper class, the bourgeoisie, as well as poor immigrants and greenhorns, are depicted from weak or poor people’s points of view. Although in Russia they had no choice but to remain living in poverty, as their grandfathers and fathers had endured, there can be a way out in the United States. Unlike the submissive passivity that Gittel and Lipkin display, the narrator of “How I Found America” searches for a way out of the difficulties.

Goal is a place in space, the promised land on the other side of the ocean or mountain. Months may lapse before the emigrants will reach their destination; however, what seems daunting to them at the start of the trip is not the time but the space that has yet to be traversed. (Tuan 180)

Although the narrators do not appear to find their ultimate goal as soon as they land

in America, their destination is suggested to them; as a first step, out of the cage.

### 3-3. Male Dominance: *Bread Givers*

In “How I Found America,” girls in a sweatshop are called “hands” and exploited and dismissed by the boss with “pig’s eyes” (*HIF* 115). In *Bread Givers*, there is a husband who has a “piggish face” and he is portrayed as one of the strong. The sisters of the protagonist, Sara, are reluctantly obliged to marry undesirable men because their father, Reb Smolinsky, forces them to refuse favorable offers. The historical background of the lives of immigrants in those days reveals itself especially in the marriage of Marshah, the second daughter.

At the beginning of *Bread Givers* Mashah is introduced as an “Empty-head” (*BG* 3). “It was like a law in the house that nobody dared touch Mashah’s things, no more than they dared touch Father’s Hebrew books” (*BG* 5) since even she doesn’t have any food to eat but is quite vain and tries to dress in shabby clothes. The description shows that not only Marshah’s clothing but also her father’s Hebrew books are obstacles to family peace for the narrator, Sara. Marshah is devoted to her vanity as much as Reb Smolinsky is immersed in religion. She falls in love with a pianist, Jacob Novak, whose father is wealthy. As soon as his father visits their tenement, Jacob stops coming to see her. Even though Jacob is trying to see Mashah again, Reb Smolinsky’s anger originated in Jacob’s slight on both his daughter and the Sabbath and so he expels him and thus Mashah gives “in to Father’s will” (*BG* 64). Instead, the man Reb Smolinsky finds as her suitor is Moe Mirsky. He is a salesman in a jewelry store but pretends to be a diamond dealer and brings Mashah different diamonds every day (*BG* 83). After the wedding, he loses his job because he has let her wear the diamonds that were for sale. Even as a shoe clerk, he shines “like a prince of plenty” while Mashah cannot pay for her babies’ milk and her “face was so black with want” (*BG* 145).

And there was Moe Mirsky, Mashah's husband, in a new checked suit, with a carefully folded, blue-bordered handkerchief sticking out of his breast pocket. His freshly ironed trousers were turned up at the bottom, showing his silk socks and new patent-leather shoes. (*BG* 144)

We had no sooner finished washing up the dishes when the bread giver came in, smiling, carefree, blowing his chest with pride and pleasure in himself. The sight of his piggish face and new-bought clothes got me so mad that I fled to the next room. "How you look!" Moe's voice was full of disgust. "The janitress is more decently dressed." . . .

He drew a cigarette from his silk vest, lit it, and then, through the smoke, he eyed her coldly. "You're nothing but a worn-out rag."

"How can I take time to look decent, with all the work and worry on my head?" (*BG* 150)

The United States in the 1920s lived in a pleasure-seeking age, as *The Great Gatsby* published in 1925 revealed. Flappers, released from corsets, are walking along the street. Mirsky, Marshah's husband, is depicted as a member of the popularized labor force. Jewish immigrants in those days were a plentiful source of labor to the garment industry, and extensive consumption was fueled by mass production. On the other hand, Mirsky's wife, Marshah is a symbol of extreme poverty in the city, one aspect of the existing social problems. Marshah, who was a very vain girl, turns into "a worn-out rag" because of her miserable marriage to the man with "the [sight of] piggish face and new-bought clothes." In particular, low-income households and sweatshop industries were exploited by the system. The husband enjoys an affluent lifestyle while his wife struggles against poverty. This is different to the case of the Fitzgeralds' in which both husband and wife lived a luxurious life. In Mirsky's case, the extravagant husband forces his notions

of male superiority on his wife. Popularization and destitute circumstances were the issues affecting urban living in those days. Sara evinces a strong desire: “I’d want an American-born man who was his own boss. And would let me be my boss” (BG66). The National Industrial Conference Board reported that, in general, Jews apparently wanted to be their own bosses. As Yeziarska perceives the relation of master to servant: boss to workers in sweatshops and husband to wife, the author let Sara decide to be her own boss. “Bread giver” refers to Mirsky as well as to Sara’s father as a form of tyranny. Yeziarska’s bitter sarcasm is fully apparent because neither of the bread givers give their wives bread at all. The subtitle “A struggle between a father of the Old World and a daughter of the New” sometimes misleads the readers, but the predominance of men over women and patriarchy is also supported by the New World as Ferraro points out.<sup>5</sup> Although even in the ghetto gradually lives are modernized, Mashah is obliged to stay in the cage-like state.

#### 3-4. Language Barriers and Homelessness: “Wild Winter Love”

A short story where Yeziarska got an idea from Rose Cohen was published in *Century Magazine* in 1927, long after the second collection of short stories, *Children of Loneliness*. The readers of the semi-fictional autobiography *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* should not consider everything as actual fact as will be discussed later; equally, the story of Rose Cohen does not offer actual facts, either. There is an article in the *New York Times* about Rose Cohen’s attempted suicide on September 17th 1922. Cohen was rescued and taken to Bellevue Hospital. Besides, when it comes to the plot, the motive for her suicide is the collapse of the relation between the Jewish heroine and a puritan lawyer, the conjecture: not the actual episode but the motif of romance with Dewey-like figure is used, seems to be appropriate. Henriksen also suspects that the story is not fact but fiction as her mother repeatedly depicts the romance with a man who resembled John Dewey.



“This is a story with an unhappy ending” (*HIF* 270) are the first words in this story, and the narrator, one of same tenement neighbors and an observer, reported over several years on the short life of Ruth Raefsky, the real-life model of Cohen. While Yeziarska learned English before her marriage, Ruth, as well as Cohen, goes to night school and her talent is recognized after her marriage and the birth of her child. Ruth’s husband, who is affectionate to start with, gradually hates watching his wife studying and writing every night after she has finished taking care of her child.

Her tightly clenched hands trembled with nervousness. I’ve seen the dumb who wanted to say something, but were too confused to know what they wanted to say. Here were brains and intelligence. Here was a woman who knew what she wanted to say, but was lost in the mazes of the new language. And more than the confusion of the new language was the realization that she was talking to strangers, to whom she always felt herself saying too much, yet not enough. To cold hard-headed Americans she was trying to make clear the feverish turmoil of the suppressed desire-driven ghetto. (*HIF* 272)

Yeziarska adopts the disguise of Ruth in order to show the strain of writing in non-native language for “cold hard-headed Americans.” Ruth cannot help writing, although it is not easy for her to write in English as the quotation clearly indicates her agony, so it is only their child that holds their marriage together. Sympathizing with her, the narrator observes and describes the condition.

I felt the cold chill that comes to you when you enter a house where the man and woman live under one roof yet live apart. It was only the love for their child that held them together in spite of the growing chasm between them. (*HIF* 273)

Ruth's life saps her vitality. She tries to bridge the chasm between immigrants and American-born people, two groups from different backgrounds, even though there is a growing chasm between husband and wife who share a common background. Chasms are all around Ruth; besides, she has neither roots to rely on nor a place to live unless she writes, so she tries in vain to make progress with no particular destination in mind.

“I’m a woman without a country. I’m up-rooted from where I started; and I can’t find roots anywhere. I’ve lost the religion of my fathers. I’ve lost the human ties that hold other women. I can only live in the world I create out of my brain. I’ve got so that I can’t live unless I write. And I can’t write. The works have stopped in me. What will be my end?” (*HIF* 274)

As is often the case with Yezierska, heroines declare that they have no homeland. Their homelessness is attributed to their immigration from the prison-like space of Russia. Her inability to articulate leads to her becoming dependent; however, she has nowhere to go and no place to return to. The feeling of alienation in the ghetto also renders them homeless.

### **3-5. Self-Sacrifice of Jewish Mothers and Ruptures between parent and child: *Arrogant Beggar* and *Bread Givers***

As mentioned above, the Lower East Side ghetto preserves many Jewish customs even in the United States. Husbands work in sweatshops and children go to school, however, mothers are kept away from English culture and are regarded as inferior as they only speak in Yiddish (Ewen 96). According to “Mostly about Myself” Yezierska’s own mother gradually learns to read “the signs of streets” in English and the mother is straightforwardly delighted at her ability (*HIF* 135). Different from

most of Yeziarska's heroines, some mothers agree to these conditions and follow the tradition in a rather positive manner.

Such a typical Jewish mother is in *Arrogant Beggar*. What the heroine Adele experiences in the ghetto is just like the Old World in Eastern Europe or Russia. Adele Lindner is eighteen years old, and her father died eight years ago and her mother four years ago. Her parents are from Poland and Adele was born in New York. She works at Bloomberg's Bargain Store thirteen hours every day and is paid only nine dollars a week. She has to share the kitchen in the lodgings and she is nervous because she is clumsy. She can only rely on Mrs. Hershbein and her son who is a student called Shlomoh. He is going to become a Doctor of Philosophy at Columbia College. The mother heaps praise on her son and is proud of him although they are poor and he contributes a column to an educational magazine for no pay. Mrs. Hershbein is a typical Jewish mother who frequently boasts about her son finishing his Doctor of Philosophy course.

The origin of the word "education" is "educare 'lead out'" in Latin and the typical Jewish home education "leads out" children's ability. After the Industrial Revolution, each country in Europe rapidly established a national education system to provide children with knowledge and cram it into their heads in order to produce large numbers of good workers for the nation. On the other hand, Jewish people who were persecuted across various regions of Europe did not lose their educational tradition of leading out each child's talent just like the origin of the word indicates. Jewish home education "leads out" the child's ability as the mother encourages her son to study harder by giving frequent effusive compliments.

On the other hand, Adele has a calm premonition that Shlomoh is going to be just like his late father and says, "he'll never be anything but a *Melamid* like his father, who spent his days poring over old, musty books, learning and learning—for the next world" (*AB* 14). Due to the fact that Adele is attracted to the New World, she wants to get out of Essex Street without a moment's delay, and she doesn't agree

with his way of life. Shlomoh's words impress Adele, "I'll work to make things better" (AB 15), but she knows better than to be whitewashed as she is a poor lonely orphan, and tells herself, "I respect you too much" (AB 59). According to *the New Joys of Yiddish* by Leo Rosten, Shlomoh is *luftmentsh*: definition 3. A dreamy, sensitive, poetic type (Rosten 210).

In the respect of Jewish tradition, Shlomoh and his late father also belong to the Old World even in the United States. In a short story "How I Found America," a father figure appears in the text. As he is scared of persecution by the Czar, he teaches children of neighbors at a *Chadir* and his character reflects Yezierska's own father. In *Bread Givers*, Reb Smolinsky is the heroine's father and does not have a job because of immersion in religious study and therefore relies on his daughters' wages. Adele is filled with feelings of awe and is occasionally ashamed of herself for finding no comfort in the institution since Shlomoh has no ambition and cares neither about his shabby clothing nor making money (AB 15). Mrs. Hershbein is in awe of the situation of her husband and son and serves them. They devote themselves to study venturing his life, pleasure and fortune. The husband, wife and son can all be considered as proud possessors of the spirit of self-sacrifice. Adele, who is the first person narrator, looks at the mother and says "I loved her because she gave up so much of herself. But I knew I could never, never be like that" (AB 16).

If Shlomoh, who lives in the Old World in the United States, marries Adele, she can still not expect freedom. There is a friction between an independent heroine and her own father in *Bread Givers*; in the same way, Shlomoh's way of life does not attract Adele's attention. So, there is little possibility of Adele becoming a self-sacrificing Jewish mother. Adele is immature before her experience and education among people in the institution and in Muhmenkeh. Adele tastes the fear of the institution and sees it as a factory of mass-producers, so she moves to Allen Street in the Lower East Side.

In *Bread Givers*, the mother figure is seen as a wife of Mr. Smolinsky, a tyrant-

like father of the heroine Sara. Sara Smolinsky, who is the narrator of this novel written in the first person, is ten years old at the beginning. The duration of the narrative is from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. The Smolinsky family has six members: Sara, her three elder sisters, father and mother. Their tenement is small and dark, moreover, they can barely pay the cheap rent. Reb Moisheh Smolinsky is a nuisance as far as Sara is concerned because he exercises tyranny in being her father, or a male dominator. The small apartment is filled with Reb Smolinsky's holy books, and although there is only bland food, the few nutritious and tasty parts are saved for him. Reb Smolinsky is always quoting features of male chauvinism, which is convenient for him, from the Torah. According to Reisdorfer, "Reb Smolinsky can be seen as the sum of obvious threats to American manhood. He dressed and spoke differently; he displayed his emotions publicly, like a woman; and, like middle-class white women, he demanded to be taken care of financially".<sup>6</sup>

In the Old World, Rabbis were treated with respect, so they did not make money; they simply studied holy books and were proud of their poverty. Inhabitants of a *shtetl*, or a Jewish community, willingly take care of rabbis financially in order to have access to an intermediary with God. Reb Smolinsky has sailed to America, and he is no longer a rabbi in the Old World. It's usual for a father to get a job and support his family financially in American society, so the landlady calls him "The dirty do-nothing" (*BG* 18), and orders him to stop singing prayers and to go to work himself to earn money for rent. Berel Bernstein, a potential employer and a suitor for Bessie, the oldest daughter, suggests that he should go to work because "In America, they got no use for Torah learning. In America everybody got to earn his living first. You [Smolinsky] got two hands and two feet" (*BG* 48). Bessie earns the highest wage and spends the least. If Bernstein were to marry her, Smolinsky says it would be "as good as taking away from me [Smolinsky] my living—tearing the bread from my mouth" (*BG* 46), so Smolinsky drives away Bernstein and brings the

arrangement to an end.

The character of Reb Smolinsky is a caricature, emphasized by his innocence. Also, he is a *shlemiel* and a *shlimazl* as Yeziarska wants to have a traditional atmosphere of Jewish culture using characters and expressions derived from the Yiddish language. *Shlemiel* and *shlimazl* are characters born as unfortunate losers, so they can be intelligent as Leo Rosten explains (Rosten 344). If the Smolinskys had not chosen to leave Russia in order to escape the Czar, he would be on safe ground as a respected rabbi, however, he unfortunately lives in the New World, in America. Different from Ruth in "Wild Winter Love," however, Reb Smolinsky is not distressed about his homelessness. According to Tuan, for the "Chosen People," "earthly places were all temporary, at best stages on the way to the ultimate goal. Religions of transcendental hope tend to discourage the establishment of place" (Tuan 180). For him this world should be simply a transit point; therefore, he does not necessarily have to worry about where to live. He is not, in a strict religious sense, different from the narrator's father in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*. Several episodes involving Reb Smolinsky are related in a mocking way as Sara is amazed by his folly. Sara is always pursuing an ambition to be a "person," *mentsh* in Yiddish, unlike her father who is a *shlemiel* and a *shlimazl*. The concept of *mentsh*, which reflects the tradition of the Old World, has nothing to do with success, wealth or position; on the contrary, it means virtuous and noble. Sara's youthful ideals are not as vulgar as her father thinks since her ambition is even originated in Jewish conventional concept. It is considered that Jewish people narrowly survived disastrous hardships throughout history by laughing at themselves. *Shlemiel* is regarded as one of the typical conditions that can set off laughter or humor. A gentile mentor John Dewey advises Yeziarska to laugh at herself. She was upset because Dewey pointed out her "damned Slavic seriousness" (Henriksen 91), but later realized what he was trying to say and encouraged Reb Smolinsky in his humor.

Sara exhibits both extremities: respect for her father as a rabbi in the Old

World and disappointment in him as he does not earn their living. Reb Smolinsky, on the other hand, is occasionally virtuous but deeply disappoints those around him due to his extreme way of deliberately distorting the original meaning of passages in the Torah. In making a caricature of him, the text shows how both traditional and new values can pose problems. Without doubt, constant strife between the father and his daughter is given special emphasis; nevertheless, the narrator shows neither a denial of traditional values nor an admiration for the new materialistic way of understanding, which enables the text to have several interpretations. Interestingly, *Bread Givers* was published in 1925 just when *The Great Gatsby* hit the market.

Sara's mother, or Reb Smolinsky's wife, Shenah is always complaining. This is a part of her complaint toward her husband. "If I were only a widow, people would take pity on me. But with you around, they think I got a bread giver when what I have is a stone giver" (*BG* 127). Shenah persuades Sara that she should respect her father even if she was a daughter of a "drunkard and a card player" and calls him "the light of the world," and "a man innocent as a child and harmless as an angel" (*BG* 130). Shenah accepts her husband with profound love as her sense of value is based upon the Old World's point of view, which is completely different from her daughter's logical and reasonable viewpoint. Even on her deathbed, Shenah worries about her husband and asks Sara "to take good care of Father" (*BG* 246). Although Sara feels "Mother's soul enter" (*BG* 252) her soul like a miracle and talks to herself, "she's in me, around me" (*BG* 253), she defies Jewish tradition and refuses to cut her clothes with a knife as a proof of mourning. Viewed in the light of Sara's disapproval of Shenah's sacrifice for her husband, her refusal is unequivocal and leveled against her father who exploits this tradition.

Ruptures between parent and child, or between the Old World and the New World is a theme that is scattered throughout Yezierska's short stories such as "Children of Loneliness" in which the parents and child argue over their table manners. The gap between a man in the New World and his brothers in the Old

World is described in “Brothers.” Likewise, the difference between a conservative man who resembles the writer’s father and his wife who has to support and to defend her children is introduced in “The Lord Giveth.” The fundamental rupture with economic advancement and historical differences in culture and language may be typical characteristics of the ghetto. These factors lead to characters becoming homeless since they cannot have a comfortable nest; thus, equally they cannot help but stay in an inappropriate and inescapable cage that is actually open.

#### 4. Conclusion

As a cage to leave, the significant standing of Russian Poland, steerage and the Lower East Side ghetto are dealt with in this chapter. These three locations are classified as places that protagonists and their creator should leave; however, they can be divided into two categories.

Russian Poland is sometimes described as a better location than the ghetto; nevertheless, the description is made on the assumption that Russia is disastrous. What Jewish people experience is not discrimination but persecution and Yezierska considers Russia to be not home but prison; therefore, protagonists hardly look back with nostalgia. According to Tuan, in terms of place, the sick and the injured rest and recover at a place called home and this is unique to human beings among primates. For certain biological needs human beings pause and “place is a pause in movement” (Tuan 137-38). Russia can’t be categorized as this kind of place since Yezierska, as well as heroines, are very scared and cannot find comfort in the country of the Czar. The steerage endured in order to leave this space is also later described by the author as a way of reaching America. Its wretched inhabitants are depicted and it is seen not as a place to pause but just a transit point.

The filthy ghetto has its unique characteristics: hand-to-mouth subsistence, exploitation, oppression by the strong, male dominance, homelessness from a gap between the generations and the classes, and a self-sacrificing disposition. The



situation induces shame and humiliation in immigrants and narrators. Each of the above can be seen as reasonable reasons to leave for independent heroines and narrators, although for others, these characteristics are not reason enough to get out of the ghetto. Some value the comfort found in other worlds more than this one; therefore, they put up with their miserable plight as Mrs. Hershbein and Reb Smolinsky do. As a result of these characteristics, the protagonists are subject to restrictions on their freedom; in other words, they are in a “cage.”

Just like the River Side apartment in “The Open Cage,” the Lower East Side is also vividly described with sensory memories: sights, smells, sounds and tactile sense, different from the monotonous fear of Russian Poland. What is regarded as inferior can be sublimated owing to the experience of the subjects.

An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind. Long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience. (Tuan 18)

The filthy ghetto should be the place where Yezierska achieves concrete reality. Although narrators and heroines detest the fundamental attributes of the ghetto, it is possible to see the attributes in an intimate way after seeing it from the outside and reflecting upon the experiences. The so-called cage can be open and regarded as a significant place as seen from an outsider’s point of view.

## Notes

- 1 Louise Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956) 88-95.
- 2 Hutchins Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto: Studies of the Jewish Quarter of New York. 1902* (New York: Schocken, 1966) 82-87.
- 3 Iska Alter, "The World Well Lost: Women and the Problematic of Assimilation in the Fiction of Anzia Yezierska" *Immigration and Ethnicity* ed. Michael D'innocenzo (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992) 149.
- 4 Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side 1890-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985).
- 5 Thomas J. Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages* (U. Chicago P: 1993) 68.
- 6 Kathryn Reisdorfer, *Naming the Father* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000) 178.

## Chapter II: Trial –Getting Out of the Cage

### 1. Introduction

Some narrators and their creator Anzia Yezierska are from Russian Poland, and in Yezierska's works their memories are somewhat obscured owing to trauma and their young age at that time. Even Hanneh Breineh, in "The Fat of the Land"—who is proud of her ancestors and thus frequently prefers to look back to the past—refers to life in Poland as "black life" (*HIF*94). The depiction of Russia is also obscure owing to the status of space afforded to Yezierska.

Space and freedom are a threat. A root meaning of the word 'bad' is 'open'. To be open and free is to be exposed and vulnerable. Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed." (Tuan 54)

Jewish people within Russia were in fact in an enclosed space, "The Pale of Settlement"; however, they ordinarily did not see the border. Instead, they were themselves exposed to the dangers of the pogrom; therefore, they were vulnerable in open spaces, which were filled with potential threats yet like a blank sheet.

After arriving seasick in the United States, they become disappointed with their new life although they are, now, largely physically safe. They are seized with humiliation and the thought for escape. The Lower East Side Ghetto is full of thoughts of escape: filthiness; poverty; oppression by the strong; male dominance; inarticulateness; and tradition of female self-sacrifice. For heroines with lofty ideals, such restrictions are used in the analogy of them being akin to being trapped inside a cage. The means of escaping this imprisonment, however, are: articulation in English; education; mentors; role models; and ambition.

## 2. Education in English

### 2-1. Articulation in English: “Soap and Water”

According to Yeziarska, “Soap and Water” is the first short story written. The author wrote to an editor “This was the first thing that I tried to write and it’s more real to me than the other stories” (Henriksen 130), and requested that the editor include this significant text in *Hungry Hearts*. On the other hand, according to Henriksen, it is “written under Dewey’s direction” and is “accepted by the *New Republic*, for which he served as roving editor and contributor” in 1918 (Henriksen 121). Besides, Dewey made Albert C. Barns read it to persuade him to accept Yeziarska as translator in Dewey’s project, it being evidence of her intelligence. Barns considers this text somewhat abnormal, but the episode also communicates Dewey’s enthusiasm in defense of her. Yeziarska created and published several stories before she met Dewey, so it is a contradiction that Yeziarska regards it as her maiden work. Many, including Carol Shoen, recognize that Yeziarska “revised” some information “to suit her need to appear” (Shoen 129). Consciously or unconsciously, in any case, it is true that “Soap and Water” is very important to her.

The title originates from what Miss Whiteside, the Dean of the narrator’s college, says to the narrator: “Soap and water are cheap. Anyone can be clean” (*HIF* 71). Because of the narrator’s shabby appearance, the Dean withdraws her recommendation as a teacher. The narrator works in a laundry from five to eight in the morning, barely going to school, and works in the same laundry from six to eleven at night. Being exhausted, she has neither the desire nor energy to take a bath, indeed, she does not have bathtubs in her house. Ironically, the Dean’s clean shirts are washed due to her labors. The narrator’s poignancy is enough to make readers surmise the dreariness and wretchedness of her life.

There are only three ways to avoid the evil effects of this exhaustion, and these are listed in the following quote: “madness, suicide, or a heart-to-heart confession to someone who understood” (*HIF* 75). The abnormality highlighted by Barns might be

appropriate. The third solution, in the form of an understanding teacher, appears 10 years later and is reified when the narrator shouts as “America! I found America” (HIF77). The ending is anticipatory of later stories: it might be considered as an etude of “How I Found America”.

The narrator is determined to go to college when she is working in a sweatshop at the age of sixteen. She encounters a poem “The Machine” written by Rosenfeld in Yiddish, and the desire for self-expression arises in her mind. Morris Rosenfeld (1862–1923) is an immigrant poet in Yiddish and published *Songs from the Ghetto* in English (1899). According to Irving Howe, “no Yiddish writer before Rosenfeld had touched so closely the intimate experience of his audience, all the buried anger of the immigrant’s days, and for that he was celebrated in the shops and the halls, wherever Jewish workers reflected on their condition” (421).<sup>1</sup> In the poem “In the Factory”, the hardship of sweatshop labor is displayed. The English translation, available in the markets, is completed by Helena Frank and by Rose Paster Stokes, who is the heroine’s model of *Salome of the Tenements* and Yeziarska’s friend in real life.

Like a spark thrown among oil rags, it set my whole being aflame with longing for self-expression. But I was dumb. I had nothing but blind, aching feeling. For days I went about with agonies of feeling, yet utterly at sea how to fathom and voice those feelings—birth-throes of infinite worlds, and yet dumb.” (HIF73)

The narrator must read Rosenfeld in Yiddish; nevertheless, she adds a new twist to an old example of Rosenfeld. She considers it impossible for an ignorant Russian shop-girl, the narrator herself, to create poems in English as well as go to college. She has second thoughts about this, however, and her new idea “the impossible was a magnet to draw the dreams that had no outlet” (HIF73) becomes the very reason

nonetheless to at least try to go to college. For her, “the dream of the unattainable was the only air in which the soul could survive” (*HIF* 73), so she begins and continues going to school for six years to prepare for entrance into college. She regards college as “the place where I should find self-expression, and vague, pent-up feelings could live as thoughts and grow as ideas” (*HIF* 73). What allows her soul to survive is a dream. Even at a loss, the dream is drawn by the magnet of impossible. Instead, remaining in her place, she extricates herself from her own cage. Motivated by Rosenfeld’s poetry she manages to uplift herself with no-one’s assistance. She actually enters college and finds “the solid wall of the well-fed, well-dressed world—the frigid whitewashed wall of cleanliness” (*HIF* 73), as the Dean’s name Whiteside symbolizes.

Regarding the text with both the author’s and Dewey’s emotional attachment, it is significant for the narrator to find a mentor, Miss Van Ness; moreover, Yeziarska’s idealistic creation of narrator’s identity can be found in the narrator’s desire for “self-expression” in English. She is metaphorically “dumb” since she is an immigrant who only speaks Yiddish in America; nevertheless, she learns English and becomes “American” in the linguistic sense at least. The narrator’s initial agony, owing to her inarticulacy, is relieved, thanks to the literature and going to night school in a six-year preparation period in order to enter college. Her effort and perseverance make it possible for her to encounter the mentor who she can speak to in English without reservation.

Dewey actually sent Yeziarska poems, and the writer alters them to some extent and quotes them in her novel, *Arrogant Beggar*. The distinction between moral right and wrongness is not dealt with here; nevertheless, Dewey’s understanding of Yeziarska’s necessity for self-expression as an immigrant is detected.

Generations of stifled worlds reaching out

Through you  
 Aching for utterance, dying on lips  
 That have died of hunger,  
 Hunger not to have, but to be. (4)<sup>2</sup>

Shoen refers to Yeziarska by the name “spokeswoman”. The fact that she obtains her own new language, English, is the narrator’s means of finding America as well. The narrator “had come as a refugee from the Russian pogroms”, and she saw weary faces all around her light up with thrilling tales of America, before she “was old enough to speak” (*HIF* 75). Surrounded by yearning for America she was nurtured in Yiddish, *mame loshn*, and she manages to reach a decision to go to college through reading of Rosenfeld’s Yiddish poems. At a considerable distance, she finds “the mountain-tops” (*HIF* 77) of America “not in the least intimidated by her high office” (*HIF* 76), although Miss Van Ness had risen to a professorship, high office. The first key required here to open the invisible cage is articulate expression in English. Speaking only in Yiddish, some people are obliged to stay in the ghetto, just like the Jewish People in the Pale of Settlement even after the immigration. For her the meaning of finding America is the ability to speak in English. Acquisition of English can function as a vehicle to get out of “dumbness” or escape the silence of the exploited.

## 2-2. Education: Max and Father in *Bread Givers*

In *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, Yeziarska’s detailed sentiment and attitude is appropriately dealt with, fluctuating between traditional and materialistic values. In *Bread Givers*, in considering a decent man’s proposal of marriage, the narrator Sara notices the hollowness of worldly pleasures and turns down his courtship. Fania, who is the only sister wealthy enough to live a luxurious marital life, introduces her youngest sister, Sara, to Max. He is not educated but is shrewd in business, which enables him to hire and fire people who have a higher standard of education. Max’s

success is all the more striking when he invites her to Broadway. They enter a vaudeville theater, which has a chorus of dancing women and a comedian (*BG*192), see a dazzle of lights and brightly colored walls, and hear the fiery rhythm of jazz (*BG*193); these specifically are typical examples of mass culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although Sara *knows* Max loves her and almost marries him, her suspicion toward his materialism prevents her from doing so. “He [Max] could buy everything. To him, a wife would only be another piece of property” (*BG*199). Ironically, Max impels Sara to learn and to keep her books close to her breast as though they are living things in place of a possible partner. Consumption and education are at opposite ends of the spectrum from education here. Her refusal of Max’s proposal and resolution for learning reminds her of her father.

He [Reb Smolinsky] had given up worldly success to drink the wisdom of the Torah. He would tell me that, after all, I [Sara] was the only daughter of his faith. I had lived the old, old story which he had drilled into our childhood ears—the story of Jacob and Esau. I had it from Father, this ingrained something in me that would not let me take the mess of pottage. (*BG*202)

She eventually recognizes her father, however, as exactly the caricature of a secular and as a mercenary who accuses her of ungratefulness when she declines the offer of a wealthy suitor. In understanding his noble attitude to sacred life, once Sara is ready to accept any compromise to establish a better relationship with her father, he becomes like a laity and only quotes selective interpretations of the Torah which are convenient for his claims, and he does so incoherently. On her deathbed, her mother asks Sara to take good care of her father, feeling pity for him: “I’m leaving him in his old age when he needs me most. Helpless as a child he is. No one understands his holiness as I” (*BG*245). Reb Smolinsky is not a



mighty patriarch who feminists could accuse of discrimination, but in reality is nothing more than an innocent, childish bluffer who should be under the protection of women. He cannot deal with practical business but regards his daughters' support as a given and expects it defiantly. If they were in the Old World not America, it would be a different matter of course. The transition from space to place is crucial in this case. As Bessie, the eldest daughter, earns him the biggest wages, he gives Berel Bernstein (*BG*45) a flat refusal but finds her the widower, Zalmon, an old fish-peddler, with six children (*BG*94). His daughters are thin because of lack of food and need warm coats for the winter but cannot afford them, since he always gives a tenth of the children's wages to charity (*BG*89). According to Evelyn Avery, a pious Jewish scholar, Reb Smolinsky "shows neither for the women in his life, actually defying the concept of the Torah family; his destructive matchmaking contradicts Jewish guidelines of *shadchanism* (matchmaking)" (37).<sup>3</sup> As his wife complains, he selfishly and childishly exploits his religion for his insistences as well as placing high value on Old World traditions. Sara uses the expression "innocent craziness" to describe her father and portrays him as embodying the gap between the Old and the New World, thus making a caricature of Yeziarska's actual father. Sara, who grows up in the New World, can be conscious of her resistance to tradition and the inheritance of convention. Chip Rhodes points out "the replacement of the church by the school as the dominant ideological practice" (Rhodes 311) and advances in education are significant to Yeziarska. Under the influence of Dewey's Progressivism, she considers that education brings equality to the economic situation: the means for leaving her cage is education. Sara, who has intended to be a person and has been given "a sense of selfhood" via college education, says: "Sara Smolinsky, from Hester Street, changed into a person" (*BG* 247).

### 2-3. Ceaseless quest for her Mentor, John Dewey: "The Miracle"

Jewish immigrants were sent tickets of steerage by male family members, who had gone ahead of the rest of the family to America, as mentioned in the introduction. In “The Miracle”, published in the *Metropolitan* in 1918, an ambitious heroine, Sara Reisel, no longer residing in Savel where affectionate parents and a brother and a sister live, comes to America on her own to find a lover to marry. She doesn’t rely on male family members but makes a passage to America without her family. She is still immature but is confident that with her looks and brain she will succeed. Yet the reality of life in America is different from what she had heard from Hanneh Hayyeh, who had written a letter and reported that she would marry “the boss from the shirtwaist factory, where all day she was working sewing on buttons” (*HIF* 51). The letter does not necessarily convey facts since the sender wants to boast and thus embellishes her American life; however, as an indication of their yearning, people in Russia easily, perhaps naively, believe what she writes. The people in space, the Russian ghetto, are desperate enough to believe the message from “the promised land” without skepticism.

After the refusal, saying to her “not young, not lively, and without money” matchmaker, Mr. Zaretsky of Delancey Street, she notices “American girls don’t go to matchmakers” (*HIF* 57). In the ghetto (as in a cage), old Jewish traditions remain as they were in Russia; nevertheless, her early enlightenment leads the heroine to education here, too. She tries to compensate by saying “Make a person of yourself” (*HIF* 57), and this declaration is a phrase of Yeziarska’s which occurs frequently. Sara goes to school in order to hopefully meet an idealistic male teacher who will say “I am bound by formal education and conventional traditions. Though you work in a shop, you are really freer than I” (*HIF* 59) and confess his love for her. Namely, Sara pursues an escapist fantasy in order to escape her daily reality. Yet, paradoxically, the education by which she can be released from her cage is the very thing which can ensnare him. Sara at the same time parts from cultural tradition of employing matchmakers and meets him whose conventional traditions are ironically binding

him. The key to open her cage such as education and liberation from tradition can be bondage for the Anglo-Saxon out of her cage.

Thinking about Dewey Yeziarska writes this text “Miracle”, which even superficial readers notice. She uses phrases which seem to quote from Dewey’s letter: “You are fire, water, sunshine and desire” (*HIF*60) and she also quotes them in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (*RR*112). There are numerous male characters created that more or less reflect Dewey. Some of them are lawyers and others are teachers or researchers and, at the same time, some of them are Anglo-Saxon while others are assimilated German Jews of the Upper-Class. The Dewey figure who is the closest to the actual John Dewey is later dealt with in the chapter of *All I Could Never Be*. The text, like a report that Yeziarska should have submitted to Dewey, shows her tendency to use his figure as one symbolizing American-born people who esteem scientific facts over human behavior. The Dewey figure sets a high value on her description of the ghetto as full of all kinds of human behavior, i.e., flesh and blood, rather than scientific facts. He might unconsciously detect the perceptual power latent within her narrative. In the short stories “To the Stars”, “Wings” and “Hunger”, the narrators pursue mentors or men in the upper classes. These quests are one of many trials necessary to escape the ghetto. The narrators or heroines remain hungry both physically and mentally while in their ghetto; nevertheless, with the guidance of Dewey-like male characters, although some of the mentors could be female, heroines seize opportunities to widen their visions.

### 3. Successful Models Giving Don Quixote Arms: *Salome of the Tenements*

#### 3-1. Doctor of Beauty: Jaky Solomon

According to Rottenburg, Sonya and Jaky Solomon’s performing, upward mobility is an important aspect that deals with class discourse in the United States.<sup>4</sup> She points out that Yeziarska portrays its society with clear class stratifications, but in it individuals are capable of changing their location within the hierarchy. Since

the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, the United States increasingly has emphasized the formal equality of all of its citizens. The American Dream, with its central tenet of upward mobility, depends both on the emphasis of individual rights and on the formal recognition of individual equality (Rottenberg 55-56).

To conquer Manning and to get away from the poverty of the ghetto, Sonya employs three successful Jews including Jaky. According to Gittel, Sonya gets a “strange man to dress you [her] up from head to foot like a Delilah”; then she vamps “a landlord; and hypnotizes “a helpless Honest Abe; turn the whole world upside down” (*ST* 95). Turning the world upside down as she does, as Gittel comments, Sonya prepares to ascend the class ladder.

Sonya is regarded as Salome in the main title, but there is another nickname for her in the beginning: Don Quixote. Her colleague Gittel is insinuating that when she says “Sonya, it’s Don Quixote you make me think of. Only, he tilted at windmills, but you, you got the sense to land the solid things” (*ST* 8) because in spite of her being poor, Sonya innocently believes that she can get new clothes and a hat prepared for the lunch with Manning. Don Quixote, as well as Salome, gives readers a vivid image of her character. Then Sonya is unsettled and doesn’t fix her eyes on reality; thus, exclamation marks are often added to her remarks, which the narrator sarcastically refers to as “exuberance” (*ST* 8).

Sonya hastens to the shop of Jacques Hollins on the Fifth Avenue in New York as she hears his rumor at a neighboring hat shop. In Chapter Three of *Salome of the Tenements*, between the tense of her encounter with Manning and their lunch, Jaky Solomon’s past is narrated separately from Sonya’s plot. Looking for an employer who appreciates his taste, Jaky goes from one sweatshop in Division Street to another with the aim of going to Paris. The episode recounts a situation where he was head-hunted by a rich guest: “The Jew in him measured her. The rapacious greed of his race for money, power, leaped up in his dark eyes. Paris—ach, Paris!” (*ST* 20). The third-person narrator is probably set as a Jew and does not interfere

with Sonya's episodes here. The narrator mocks his Jewish self and makes readers smile wryly. Realizing that his education is complete, Jaky returns to New York with his new name, Hollins. Although, according to Wilentz shown above, "For some readers today, the fact that he has had to change his name to become renowned may diminish that success . . ." (*ST* xxii). His explanation that changing his name is in order to give "art to the world unhindered by racial prejudice" (*ST* 28) was an unavoidable reality in the field of fashion in New York where the WASP was the main customer as well as the Jewish upper-class, thereby implying that the above-mentioned Nineteenth Amendment seems to be ineffective. Concerning names, his last name Solomon is evocative of an important character, Shlomoh. Yiddish name of Solomon is Zalmon, and the first-name Shlomoh, and the name is used for some supportive men who expand and enhance heroines' personalities. There are Zalmon Shlomoh in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* and Shlomoh in *Arrogant Beggar* although the latter is declined by Adele bluntly. Yeziarska does not seem to use characters' names intentionally but uses them rather arbitrarily. There might be a determinate law, however, Solomon is set as the supportive character.

In Chapter Four of *Salome of the Tenements*, the narrative viewpoint returns to Sonya as she enters Hollins' (former Jaky's) atelier, she informs him of her necessity to have suitable attire and manages to persuade him of her plight.

"You from the East Side, you know how the greatest doctors come to the clinics to heal the poor free of charge. I too am sick dying from the blood poison of ugliness!". . . "You doctor of beauty! Why shouldn't you save a poor girl's life with your life-giving power to make beautiful? But if money you got to have, then just add the cost to your rich customers' bills. There's enough money in America to give me the clothes that are me myself". (*ST* 23)

Sonya's egoistic, exaggerated empty theory reveals not only her desperate hunger for

beauty, but also her “rapacious greed” shared by the same (Jewish) Jaky. Her seemingly arrogant and self-centered behavior is seen as a touching outcry by Jaky because he understands the importance of beauty, and so gives her a dress. Okonkwo highlights Jaky’s genius at veiling the customer’s physical “differences”: such as bust size; and breadth of shoulders. These differences are suggestively described as a resistant “problem”. According to Okonkwo, “Americanization sees this difference as inauthentic, and hence it must be repressed with a dress” (134).<sup>5</sup> With her new dress, which represses the wearer’s “difference” as a “problem” and makes them Americanized, Sonya advances her scheme. Besides, Jaky expects her underwear to be a coarse cotton, so he unobtrusively prepares her lingerie, silk stockings, and shoes (*ST*27). The “Doctor of beauty” conceives her underwear as minimally as her outfit.

The tension before the meeting with Manning is relieved, and as Salome dressed in rags, Sonya reveals her inner common trait with “doctor of beauty” Jaky Solomon Hollins while Sonya is penetrated her plain underwear. Nevertheless, Sonya gets ready for the fight as Don Quixote since she obtains her dress as arms from this Jewish man.

### **3-2. The Sensual Tyrant: Rosenblat**

Manning suggests that Sonya’s tenement would be a good place to discuss the plan for his settlement house since their lunch meeting turned out to be fruitful. She manages to control her desire to invite him immediately, and the narrator describes her inward struggle as follows:

Woman’s instinct prompted her to put off his calling on her. How could she possibly receive him in her room the way it looked? She veiled with playful hesitancy the exasperation she felt at the necessity of delaying his coming. (*ST*39)

Her being both shrewd Salome as well as Don Quixote is indicated and Sonya fluctuates between two characters. At the suggestion of Sonya, they postpone the meeting for two weeks. Sonya visits the landlord, Mr. Rosenblat, who is a notorious tyrant in the community, in order to have the tenement's horrible interiors improved. Sonya is refused bluntly by the landlord, who then approaches Manning's mansion dependently. Sonya, however, notices that it is not different from a beggar's act, that she asks him for charity in such a manner, and only then does she fully appreciate the significance of his visiting her house. Accordingly, she changes her strategy to argue Rosenblat down.

Yes, he had insulted her, but she would not admit defeat. She would have to think out a different angle of approach. She realized she had been too direct in her request. . . . She realized that she had a weapon in her hand. Leaping out of bed she slipped into her outfit of conquering beauty designated by the divine Hollins. She moved her wall mirror up and down to see every angle of herself. From her silk stockings to her winged toque the reflection met with her own approval. The sleek, sumptuous feeling of her finely fitting silk underwear flowed into her being like wine. It was her hour of battle. And she felt she could win. (*ST*48)

As Sonya maneuvers, Rosenblat doesn't notice the well-dressed woman is actually his tenant Sonya for whom he refused to reform the room the previous day. Rather, his head is turned by the sight of the pretty woman. Sonya usually wears worn serge suits, on the other hand, the customers of the Fifth Avenue at that time displayed their wealth as a leisured class by wearing dresses which clung to their alluring postures. According to Anne Hollander, "by 1920, women's clothes not only showed women's structure, they also began to suggest how the female body actually felt to

its owner, and how it might feel to the touch of others” (99).<sup>6</sup> Thus, Rosenblat in the 1920s appears to have perceived Sonya’s sexual appeal more than modern readers may imagine.

Addressing Sonya, who should not be wearing a dress obtained from Fifth Avenue and who (at that moment) didn’t look like an immigrant, Rosenblat states: “Those immigrant waiters, . . . They got no respect for class. With me it’s different; I know what is a lady on the first look” (*ST* 50). When Sonya asks him, “Will you promise me anything?”, and Rosenblat answers, “Anything, little witch” (*ST* 51), he reminds us of King Herod in the Bible, who promises his niece to give her anything she wants, and who demands, at the request of her capricious mother, the head of John the Baptist. Rosenblat, then, is lured toward Sonya’s tenement, of which he is also the landlord: “This place ain’t fit for a classy little queen like you. You don’t have to live in a dirty tenement good enough for kikes and immigrants. I’ll get you the swellest little flat” (*ST* 53). Rosenblat knows full-well his tenement is dirty as he is saving money by refusing improvements, and thus he recommends another place, thereby unwittingly contradicting himself. Rosenblat, who is labeled a tyrant, nonetheless assumes the responsibility of acting as a president of a synagogue and a chairman of charitable ventures, something which is delivered as keen sarcasm. Defending himself, Rosenblat consents to freshly paint her room, otherwise Sonya threatens these posts and tells Manning on him. He says to her, “Thank you, little witch, for not asking for more” (*ST* 55). The lewd Rosenblat is one of appropriate Jewish caricatures who injects this text with humor.

Chapter Seven’s title “Sonya Stoops to Conquer” is undoubtedly the parody of Oliver Goldsmith’s (1728–74) *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), and it indicates that her strategy is to use her sexual charm to take advantage of the vulgar Rosenblat. As an interval between the tense scenes featuring Manning (his dreary mansion description and his visit to her tenement), Rosenblat counterposes an earthy and obvious humor. Moreover, the symbol of the battle evoking Don Quixote’s windmill



is effective. The cage to leave, or Sonya's tenement, is improved but she is not satisfied because her ultimate goal is to marry Manning and thus obtain his mansion. The newly painted tenement is merely a transit point.

### 3-3. A Stingy Pawnbroker: Honest Abe

From olden times, pawn-broking has been a typical Jewish occupation, e.g., Shylock. Indeed, a pawnbroker, Honest Abe (Abraham Levy), is one of the most important characters in *Salome of the Tenements*. Sonya tries to borrow some money from Abe in order to complete her renovation of her room and Gittel ridicules the reckless Sonya as usual: "That miser? He'd steal the whites out of your eyes. He'd suck the blood from a baby's fingers. . . ." "He's got no blood in his veins. Only gold flows in his body." . . . "We'll see if you can squeeze blood out of a stone" (*ST*58). Gittel tells Sonya, who listens in amazement, one exquisite metaphor after another. The terrifying Abe, who manages to keep others well away, nonetheless winces at Sonya who is full of self-confidence, even though she intends to borrow 100 dollars, having nothing to pawn but future hope:

"Solid dollars on airy hopes?" "My hopes are more solid than dollars." The words shot through him like anvil beats.

Ripples in the dark pool of memory began to break through the hard surface of his being. "Hopes more solid than dollars?" he kept repeating. Dim voices, vague shapes, echoes long forgotten began to stir within him. Ach! Ages and ages ago, there had been a time long buried in his youth when hopes and dreams were more solid than dollars.

. . . Who was this girl? What was this girl? Her eyes, big, fearless, unwavering, were not just eyes. They were the magic mirror of his whole past. (*ST*60)

He reflects and remembers his old days when he used to move an audience with his

voice as a cantor of a synagogue. He almost lost his voice because his tonsils were swollen. A throat specialist examined him, and said he needed an operation. Without a thousand rubles, Abe must go to the charity hospital where he can get a free operation. His tonsils are removed but with them also his golden voice. Poland, here, is also a space of negative connotations which are connected to disaster and loss. Because of that incident, he becomes obsessed with money and, in America, he chooses a pawnshop as his workplace, and eventually he acquires this store. Following the episode of Jaky Solomon, this recollective episode of Abe's also takes great advantage of third-person narration. His pathway to success is rarely told; nevertheless, another type of changing positions within the social hierarchy is introduced. He might be full of spite; however, he does not resign himself to his fate and motivates himself instead. Relying on Sonya, who beats Rosenblat and approaches Manning, Abe grants her a loan of 100 dollars without collateral, nevertheless, according to their contract Sonya has to pay back 500 dollars after her marriage to Manning. Abe tells himself the following: "*Gottuniu!* Honest Abe lends a whole hundred dollars on airy hopes," he mumbled, wagging his head cryptically, thinking of the days forever lost when he, too, had been a dreamer and an artist (*ST* 64). Abe is described not only as a stingy villain but also as the former artist, and readers discover a humorously unretouched portrait of him. The depiction of a stereotyped pawnbroker, Abe, who is daunted by Sonya, discloses his multifaceted character with pathos and humor. Although the old days were lost, even cold-blooded Abe is stirred by Sonya's tenacity as a former dreamer and artist.

These successful people are characterized by a mixture of positive and negative aspects. They eventually support Sonya by turning the world upside down, or by giving a costume, renovation of her room, and lending her money while the Anglo-Saxon Manning in a higher social position helps to elevate Sonya. They have also achieved their own goals by ascending their own personal Jacob's ladder from the bottom of the pile as it were. They have transformed their lives since they now

experience and have obtained a permanent place. In the light of Tuan, the fundamental goal is a place in space, so they offer Sonya the opportunity and the key to cage. As Rottenburg points out, Sonya and Jaky have respectively ascended class ladders; nevertheless, even Abe and Rosenblat themselves have similar experiences. The ghetto includes potential for dreamers and artists, and they may ascend the class hierarchy although they cannot change their race and gender.

Rosenblat indicates that an upper-class Jew who is totally involved in his way of life in the ghetto (manifested by tradition and religion), may judge Sonya superficially, according only to her appearance, and thus may be deceived and offers benefits and support that he otherwise would not. On the other hand, Abe indicates that even he used to be a dreamer and an artist in Poland. The bitterness of this leads him to a higher but more spiritually contemptible life in the ghetto. As for Jaky, who watches eagerly for a chance to get out of the ghetto to Paris, he experiences space in Paris and comes back to the Lower East Side. These three people who give Sonya the necessary arms to attack Manning in stages illuminate the different aspects of the ghetto. They potentially and eventually guide her on the path from the ghetto, cage, to a Puritan Manning's space and back to the ghetto or significant place, again.

#### **4. Ambition or Upward Mobility: "Wings"**

Shenah Pessah is the heroine of both "Wings" and "Hunger" in *Hungry Hearts*. This immigrant woman has been in America for two years. She "was living with strangers even in Russia" in a town called Savel because she became homeless when she was eight years old. She lives with her uncle who sent her the travel ticket. She has never been to night school; nevertheless, she learned English with a Jewish English reader and a book some boarders left her. She says, "I learned myself English" (*HIF* 6), and it is the direct translation of "Ikh hob lern zikh English" in Yiddish. The language she speaks reveals her unfamiliarity with America.

The Dewey-like character, John Barns notices Shenah's remark about Olive Schreiner's book is pitifully incorrect. According to her, the book lifts her "on wings with high thoughts". "Her lack of contact with Americanizing agencies appalled him" (*HIF*6), and he takes her to a public library and shows her around. This triggers her ambition and allows her to notice the next stage. Shenah pawns the feather bed, the one thing her deceased mother left her, in order to buy a dress and a hat to wear when visiting the library. The pawnbroker Zaretsky gives her ten dollars instead of the five dollars he intended, since he is seized by an onrush of generosity, or sympathy for Shenah, an orphan. This pawnbroker also makes up a humorous aspect of the story as with Honest Abe (above). The clothing purchased serves as a reminder of her native Russia although the gaudiness conveys a touch of irony. The cherries on her hat bring "back to her the green fields and orchards" and she picks out a green dress which "she craved". Shenah's internal shift from space Russia to place substantial America is obvious. The feather bed inherited from her mother is pawned in tears and instantly she notices "her desire leaping upon desire" (*HIF* 11). At the library she notes "the librarian's simple attire" and the difference between the librarian's well-kept hands and her own: calloused and rough with dirty finger-nails. It is the moment when innocent Shenah realizes that she too is living in a cage.

Dealing with Yezierska's "Wings" and *Salome of the Tenements*, Mikkelsen argues that a shift from higher sympathy to lower, horizontal empathy transpires.<sup>7</sup> Barns regards her as a specimen for experimentation, yet at the same time human sympathy makes him call her "poor child", just as Dewey called Yezierska. He later gives her an impulsive, sympathetic hug but he regrets his behavior. It also might be the reconstruction of Dewey and Yezierska just before their separation, as Dearborn points out (Dearborn 126). Mikkelsen observes that in Shenah's last remark, "After all, he done for you more than you could do for him. You owe it to him the deepest, the highest he waked up in you. . . ." her fractured grammar ironizes native American claims to cultural superiority. According to Mikkelsen, that decision

shows Shenah's desire to give voice to a new, culturally hybrid subjectivity, thus subject and object are dissolved, which eventually produces the afore-mentioned shift from sympathy to empathy (Mikkelsen 372-73).

Shenah's monologue after her short-term sorrow at losing Barns when he left her is worth mentioning. "Show him what's in you. If it takes a year, or a million years, you got to show him you're a person. . . . by day and by night, you got to push, push yourself up till you get to him and can look him in his face eye to eye" (*HIF*16). The socially higher Barns have lifted her up; however, in her mind, it is she who should push herself up instead. Her independence leads to ambition and thus upward mobility. The last sentence of this particular story, "He opened the wings of your soul" (*HIF* 16), is optimistic and the encouragement belongs to the heroine, or to Yezierska herself. The heroine probably acquires proper English by expanding her cultural horizons and later going to night school. In "Hunger", the encouragement is given to Sam Arkin who vainly confesses his love for Shenah: it is "only the beginning of the hunger that will make you from you a person who'll yet ring in America" (*HIF* 29). Without suppressing, but rather being conscious of "hunger", they expand their "wings" and launch out into the wider world, out of their cage.

## 5. Conclusion

Yezierska's heroines and narrators obtain both cause and motive to get out of their cage, the ghetto, whether spontaneously or with assistance of others. In Yezierska's posthumous work, "The Open Cage", the narrator's neighbor Sadie Williams fulfills a significant role as a releaser of the bird. The narrator does not want to let it go; nevertheless, the wild bird has to be free since it's too frightened to eat. The shrunk bird in the cage is saved by Sadie who knows how to deal with birds because her hobby is keeping parakeets. Although the narrator grumbles in her mind, "she knew so much about birds and so little about my feelings" (*OC* 250), the bird is only narrowly saved from death. On the other hand, some heroines in the ghetto are

released by both direct and indirect assistance from mentors. These male characters, who resemble Dewey, are not necessarily the “releaser”, just like Sadie Williams. The protagonists are sometimes orphans who grow up in the ghetto and are not given proper education. Some heroines from Russian Poland are native speakers of Yiddish and need to learn English to live out on the Lower East Side. As the trigger and vehicle to get out the cage, they obtain English-speaking abilities, education, and the ambition to climb up the ladder. If they did not have the requisite determination and perseverance on their own, they would remain in the ghetto forever.

Released from the bondage of humiliation and occasional ignorance, the heroines and narrators out of the Lower East Side Ghetto enjoy freedom in space. The releaser and liberator, Sadie and the narrator, feel immense relief in addition to those they have emancipated.

I felt myself flying with it, and I stood there staring, watching it go higher and higher. I lifted my arms, flying with it. I saw it now, not only with sharpened eyesight, but with sharpened senses of love. Even as it vanished into the sky, I rejoiced in its power to go beyond me. (*OC* 250)

Dewey-like characters also gain the benefits from the assistance they gave to the heroines. That might be the shift from sympathy to empathy in Yeziarska’s contexts as Mikkelsen claims. The successful people in the ghetto in *Salome of the Tenements* give the arm-like cause to Sonya, Salome, or Don Quixote, the fighter; nevertheless, those who appeal to arms are not the givers, but it is Sonya, herself. The manifold phases of space or outside the ghetto are examined in the next chapter.

## Notes

1 Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

2 John Dewey, *The Poems of John Dewey* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (London and Amsterdam: Southern Illinois U.P., 1979).

3 Evelyn Avery, *Modern Jewish Women Writers in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

4 Catherine Rottenberg, *Performing Americanness* (Hanover and London, Dartmouth College Press, 2008) 53-69.

5 Christopher N. Okonkwo, "Of Repression, Assertion and the Speakerly Dress: Anzia Yezierska's Salome of the Tenements", *MELUS: Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 25 (1) (2000).

6 Ann Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1994).

7 Ann Mikkelsen, "From Sympathy to Empathy: Anzia Yezierska and the Transformation of the American Subject", *American Literature: a Journal of Literary History, Criticism and Bibliography* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010 ) 361-388.

### Chapter III: Space— Out of the Ghetto

#### 1. Introduction

In the Lower East Side ghetto, heroines and narrators are obliged to obey fathers, husbands, or bosses. If they abandon or defy the conventions, they have to accept harsh treatments. Following the acquisition of English and education, through the guidance of mentors, witnessing successful models or through having personal ambitions, heroines and narrators try to get out of the Lower East Side. Even if the ghetto is filthy and full of poverty, they do not jeopardize their lives as they did in the Pale of Settlement since in the United States they are not prosecuted or segregated as lower-class people.

The narrators in space, or out of their cage, are examined in this chapter. They flee from captivity; nevertheless, they do not seem to enjoy themselves much due to the difference in their social status and background.

#### 2. Doubt on the Value of Charity in “The Free Vacation House” and the *Arrogant Beggar*

Mary V. Dearborn describes the meaning of cleanliness for Yezierska in *Love in the Promised Land*, which deals with the fateful relationship between Yezierska and John Dewey.

In her fiction she describes her desire for self-expression, her desire to write but in her early years in America she longed mostly to become an American, to sever herself from her immigrant past. An insistent theme in her work is her awe of “American” cleanliness, her desire to live in a clean, uncluttered, and sunlit “room of one’s own.” (Dearborn 37-38)

In addition to the fact above, there is a meaning of whiteness as symbolizing



assimilation in the United States. Brodtkin in *How Jews Become White Folks* argues that America once regarded its immigrant European workers as something other than white in association with her being Jewish. Although Jewish people look white, the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon races did not consider them as white (nor colored races). Upper-class people vary from WASPs to assimilated Jews originally from Germany in Yezierska's texts; nevertheless, the whiteness appears to symbolize superiority or predominance of middle-class to working class (25).<sup>1</sup>

The protagonist and first-person narrator of the very first story published in *Forum* in 1915, "Free Vacation House" is a tired housewife with a large family. She is exhausted by her poverty and too much housework and her son's teacher recommends she rest in the country. However, she must go through a humiliating procedure of the Social Betterment Society and inform them of her difficult circumstances in order to gain their charity. The narrator is sensitive to the word "charity" and feels uncomfortable since she has pride even in poverty. Her monologue is as follows:

"For so long I lived, I didn't know nothing [sic] about the charities. For why should I come down among the beggars now?" . . . "Which was worser [sic], to land in a crazy house, jump from the window down, or go to the country from the charities?" (*HIF* 45)

The protagonist finally manages to get into the train bound for the accommodation and is delighted with beautiful natural scenery out of the train window after the long absence. Her momentary joy, from being released from the drudgery of the kitchen, is taken away by the illusory conductor who comes to check her ticket and says: "Oh, you are only from the charities" (*HIF* 47).

It is true that in natural settings (rather than the dirty and cramped ghetto), not having to prepare for dinner, the narrator obtains a sense of relief. However, her

freedom is restricted with rules and regulations and is monitored like prisoners by rich patronesses who administer the home.

I never yet seen such an order and such a cleanliness. From all the corners from the room, the cleanliness was shining like a looking-glass. The floor was so white scrubbed you could eat on it. You couldn't find a speck of dust on nothing if you was looking for it with eyeglasses on (*HIF* 47).

There are exaggerations of whiteness in succession: "pure-white oilcloth," "girls with white starched aprons" (*HIF* 47) and "lady in white, with a teacher's look on her face" (*HIF* 48). The contrast between the clean facility and the shabby ghetto is illustrated clearly. Also, in Yezierska's cliché, the Polish-Russia is depicted as black. The upcoming white space provides a great contrast to bygone black space with great cruelty. However, it doesn't take much time for the narrator to notice that cleanliness is shown off to the visitors and the residents are looked down on as prisoners.

At the beginning of *Arrogant Beggar*, Adele yearns to enter the institution for immigrant girls, which is not only for Jewish immigrants. She wants to live in a clean and simple room in the splendid building. The home is administrated by a German Jew, Mrs. Hellman. In *Jews without Money* (1930), Michael Gold (1893–1963) depicts poverty in a ghetto more negatively than Yezierska does. The poverty in Yezierska's ghetto rather averts readers' eyes from the terrible sight using humor. In such wretched immigrants' life, charity is worthwhile since it defends immigrant girls against the danger of turning their hands to undesirable occupations such as prostitution.

Miss Simon is in charge of the first interview and says, "We are very systematic here. All our cases are filed, numbered, and card-cataloged. We keep a record of all our applications" (*AB* 12). The strict administration and supervision of the institution is obvious. According to June Dwyer, short stories in *Hungry Hearts*,

especially “The Free Vacation House” and “Soap and Water” re-enact and respond to the rhetoric of immigration law and the eugenics movement. The narrators are restricted and looked down on, and they suffer a series of painful rejections because inferiority is ascribed to their bodies (105-14).<sup>2</sup> This boarding school is not an educational institution in the strict sense of the word. However, the disciplined life is sought, giving vocational training if needed. Just after the admission to the Home, Adele expresses her excitement since she doesn’t have to use her damp inherited featherbed but can use a clean white sheet: “Heaven must be a white place like a clean white sheet . . .” (*AB* 26). She feels “the fear” and is “scared” of the various smells and the clutter when she temporarily goes back to Essex Street, where she used to live, in order to buy a cheap pair of socks sold by pushcart peddlers. Out of her cage-like ghetto, she is involved in the facility’s system and gradually being decolorized.

Adele loses her job and her means of paying expenses because of the store’s unilateral convenience. She is encouraged to take part in “Domestic Science Training” and mutters to herself. She doesn’t want to be a servant which means being reduced to a lower rank, but eventually accepts their suggestion reluctantly.

I—a servant? Even in our worst poverty in Poland none of our people had ever been servants. Tailors, storekeepers, but never a servant. Should I be the first to go down? (*AB* 37)

Adele’s inner conflict is dire. The identity she has built up is obliged to degenerate since she has to live like another person. The lab is “huge, white, glittering kitchen . . . almost empty” and the teacher, Miss Perkins, wears “her white, starched uniform, reminded me of the head doctor in a hospital” (*AB* 38). Although the space is white and clean, the wretchedness of her downfall makes her regard for white cleanliness a cruel and coldhearted symbol. Friends gradually putting on a distant air;

nevertheless, Adele is determined to be stronger.

Suddenly, I raised my chin, high over their heads. “I’m not begging. I’m not asking charity. Honest work. Work that has to be done. If housework can’t lift me, I’ll lift housework. I’ll fight for the right of servant girls to receive their boy friends in the parlour. . . .” “I’ll show you in America all work is respectable. In America, dishwashers and hod-carriers can also be citizens with the same rights as the President.” (*AB* 39)

It is a plain fact that her consciousness has changed and moved from the Old World to America; nevertheless, her circumstance remains degrading by her sense of humiliation. She cannot concentrate on cooking, is half day-dreaming, and relates “This learning to be a cook—what did it mean? Did I really want to spend every day of my life on nothing more important than cooking things that you eat up anyway?” (*AB* 40). Adele feels the qualms of conscience since her own lack of enthusiasm is reported to Miss Simons. After Adele spends the whole night scrubbing the lab, by compromise she can be accepted by others as well as by herself and learns to concentrate on training.

After the training, she obtains the position of the Hellmans’ servant and gradually grasps the reality of the institution. Mrs. Hellman says “Have we the right to give our girls luxuries they can’t afford when they’re out of our care?” (*AB* 62) and tries to reduce their budget. Mrs. Gessenheim emphasizes the importance of efficiency and says, “We ought to conduct the business of the Home the way an efficiency expert runs a factory” (*AB* 64). They want reporters to visit the Home to get information for newspapers. Thus, they try to do everything that draws the attention of journalists. They grumble over their weight indulging themselves in luxury and eating strawberries in winter. Adele’s wages are lower than standard and they give her clothes handed down from Miss Hellman when she wants to throw

them away. The Home's central purpose is to get the young residents to marry husbands of the working class. They deal with the girls as a mass uniformly and efficiently. As a result, the residents try to lead a frugal life and become like tamed animals. The young girls should achieve decent results, so in case of need, they give the girls vocational training. The process to produce laborers' wives or workers can be the cause of their profit, or ostentation as precedence. As a proof of their hypocrisy and display, there is a statement of one woman made among administrators: "I've always said the best pleasure you can buy for your money is to help the poor" (*AB* 67). Adele feels out of place and gets uncomfortable, and leaves the Home. She has been deprived of her spiritual comfort in the space of the institution:

"Thank God I'm not a lady, so I can tell you to your faces in my own language what I think of you! Hypocrites! Shaming me before strangers—boasting of your kindness—because I had no home—I had no friends—I had no work. Feeding your vanity on my helplessness—my misfortune. Right before the whole world—you had to pull the dirt out of the ash can. You had to advertise to all—'Remember, beggar, where you would have been if it hadn't been for us!'

"Shylocks! A pound of flesh you want for every ounce of help—worse than Shylocks! Shylock only wanted the man's flesh. You want his soul. You robbed me of my soul, my spirit. You robbed me of myself. When I hated you, I had to smile up to you, and flatter you—" (*AB* 86)

Katherine Stubbs, in the Introduction to *Arrogant Beggar*, compares Adele with the Jewish tradition and Mrs. Hellman, an assimilated German-Jewish-American, who loses her spirit as a Jew, refers to *tzedakah* (justice) as a Jewish traditional concept. According to *The New Joys of Yiddish*, it is considered to be a Jewish moral duty and religious obligation to donate to *shnorrers*, beggars. To spare embarrassment, the

charity is thought to need to be done anonymously. The highest form of charity is to help someone to help himself, as Maimonides said (Rosten 413).

According to Stubbs, the title of the text suggests that beggars can be arrogant because without beggars people cannot give in charity. Practicing charity to beggars, people can expect God's blessings. The idea here is that Adele is the arrogant Shylock. It is true that Adele is dependent and says "Give them [girls in the Home] a finger and they want your whole hand. . . . The worst thing about being poor—thinking always of yourself" (*AB* 52), humbling herself. It is also true, thanks to the Home, that Adele finds her vocation due to the technical training of cooking and cleaning. Adele, however, has a complicated sense of gratitude, in the same way as Jean Rachmansky, who is obliged to leave Hellmans but does not forget his sense of gratitude (*AB* 139).

The givers' simplicity threatens Adele and her pride since they expect reward for demonstrative charity. The threat is cruel and coldhearted just like the simple white room (a symbol of superiority of the middle-class compared to the working class). Superficially, the title has a tone of self-mockery; nevertheless, Yezierska turns her strict gaze upon uptown assimilated Jews and shows contempt for Shylock who takes even beggars' spirits away. The pure white space is the inhuman world ruled by Give-and-Take system. Moreover, it bleaches diverse girls uniformly. To obtain superficially better circumstances and to get out the Lower East Side ghetto, the Essex Street, Adele belongs to the Home. She at least intends not to be like Mrs. Hershbein, a self-sacrificing mother. Moreover, Adele hasn't found her vocation yet but is actually dependent on the Home in spite of feeling contempt for it. Even out of the cage-like ghetto, Adele cannot find any home. She tries to avoid the self-sacrificing way of life; on the contrary, she becomes a victim of circumstance (the space full of the assimilated upper-class woman's vanity and pride). According to Tuan, "when space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place" (Tuan 73). Adele in this phase finds her place neither in her ghetto nor in the Home. In the

fourth chapter in this thesis, the turning point leads her to the discovery of both her vocation and place.

### 3. Puritan Manning's Mansion as Space: *Salome of the Tenements*

The heroine Sonya in *Salome of the Tenements*, thanks to the assistance of coreligionists in the ghetto, successfully gets out of the Lower East Side to the brownstone district where Manning lives. As she obtains 100 dollars and makes her room beautiful, Sonya carries on a psychological war of love against uncertain Anglo-Saxon Manning. Sonya as Salome appears even in Manning's dream, and finally the two declare their love to each other. The new residence after their marriage is Manning's mansion and is prison-like tied to the tradition and long-standing formalities. Jewish successful people in the ghetto have only what they establish. However, Sonya abruptly gains Manning's wealth and estate as a Puritan.

"Maybe the house is beautiful for those who know the cost of these rich things, this deadly durability of the furniture," thought Sonya. But it hasn't the warm, soft coziness that makes the feeling of home." (112)

She was no longer seemed the hostess. She was an outsider in her own house. She was lost among Manning's people like a stranger in a strange land. (122)

The much longed-for place is not what she can be accepted as an insider. Responding to her desire to escape from abundant but isolated surroundings, Honest Abe unintentionally helps the escape of her. To extend her repayment date, since Sonya signs up the contract to pay back 1000 dollars, she has to suffer from Abe's shadow and the loan bond. Yielding to Abe's threat, Sonya hands her Diamond engagement ring to Salome instead of the 1000 dollars. If she wants to get it back, Sonya will have to pay 1500 dollars to a cunning Abe. The reason Abe loans her "solid dollars on airy hopes" is that he recollects that "there had been a time long buried in his

youth when hopes and dreams were more solid than dollars” (*ST*60). As a success in the ghetto far ahead of her, he appears to invite her back where they are. There seems to be no doubt that he acts craftily; nevertheless, a string of his maneuvers offer her a chance to get out of where she cannot be.

Sonya also notices the reality of untrue charity and the hypocritical settlement house as well as Abe’s threat. Consequently, Sonya loses her vigor and collides with Manning. She madly cries out her confession that her original and ultimate intention was to get Manning just for the aim of gaining money and she offers assistance for settlement work. The confession reminds readers of Salome who intently asked for the head of John the Baptist and just as the dead John’s head, what Sonya gets is what came from the past and will be extinct in the future. Listening to her confession, Manning grumbles “My name in the hands of that Jew!” and because of the “his hidden hate of the Jew” (*ST*156) the marriage breaks down. Sonya leaves the mansion and is rejected by Gittel and Lipkin, and starts again with nothing. The strenuous efforts Sonya exerts upon returning the ghetto are examined in the next chapter in this thesis.

#### **4. Impossible to Return to the Old World: Fania in *Bread Givers***

In *Bread Givers*, the flight from the cage-like ghetto is dealt with through Fania, the third daughter of Reb Smolinsky’s *Bread Givers*. She once adored a poor poet, Morris Lipkin, but he couldn’t offer resistance to Reb Smolinsky, so Fania forsakes him. According to Sara’s calm consideration, Fania wants to get married so she can “run away from our house, where there would be no more Father’s preaching” (*BG* 79). Abe Schmukler’s intention is clear for her, too. He comes “from Los Angeles, at the other end of America, to buy cloaks and suits for his stores and get himself a wife” (*BG*79), so he gives Fania various gifts to invite her to quickly become his wife. Fania confesses her lingering affection for Lipkin and real motive to Sara.



“[E]ven if Abe Schmukler was a rag-picker, a bootblack, I’d rush into his arms, only to get away from our house. . . . If I seem so excited about Los Angeles, it’s only because it’s a dream city at the other end of the world, so many thousands of miles away from home.” (*BG* 80)

Fania leads a rich life free from cares that Marshah is obliged to have. Although Marshah’s husband is a fake upstart, Fania’s is a real success. Getting together later in the story, among Sara’s sisters Fania is a person in gorgeous attire. Her original family seems to be unimaginable. By means of marriages, the author establishes the contrast of characters and their situations. Fania moves from poverty to materialism, while Marshah starts from vanity and ends with extreme poverty. During the sisters’ humiliating confessions, Sara penetrates the negative meaning of Fania’s expression. She doesn’t have any friends, but only plays cards with acquaintances. She looks well only because she has fat on her (*BG* 175-76).

According to custom in the Old World, the Smolinskys help and support Reb Smolinsky. Disagreeable and unacceptable aspects of their family are emphasized for women and daughters. However, positive aspects also exist. The family suffers the bitter poverty in Lower East Side as mentioned above. According to *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), written by Stephen Crane (1871–1900), the ghetto offers the highest probability of a person being reduced to prostitution. The daughters of Smolinsky, however, help each other and support their parents in spite of the complaints against their preaching father. The father’s arrogance asserts its influence over his daughters for better or worse. When Sara is seventeen, an argument breaks out between father and daughter as follows:

“A young girl, alone, among strangers? Do you [Sara] know what’s going on in the world? No girl can live without a father or a husband to look out for her. It says in the Torah, only through a man has a woman an existence. Only through

a man can a woman enter Heaven.”

“I’m smart enough to look out for myself. It’s a new life now. In America, women don’t need men to boss them.” (*BG* 136-37)

Proving herself to be right, Sara leaves home and lives on her own as a single woman although it was rare for women at that time to live alone. Ironically, from the New World’s point of view, it is not Sara but her father who needs to be taken care of. Although their tradition doesn’t encourage women to learn, Sara is absorbed in acquiring knowledge. Sara maintains a moderate attitude, and rejects Max’s proposal which is not unfavorable when viewed objectively. Yezierska also finds value in life without ostentatiousness, although she has a yearning for beautiful things. In *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, there is an impressive episode in Hollywood, where the narrator takes part in a party with other writers. Among women in evening dresses, the narrator is the only one who is wearing a simple outfit on purpose. In the biography by Louise Levitas Henriksen, Yezierska always puts on serge suits and concentrates her energies on her writing in a simple room without interior decoration similar to a nun’s around the 1920s. The writer is resentful of the tradition represented by her father. At the same time, she deals with it carefully to avoid materialism. Going out home and trying to study alone, Sara recalls the family in the past and notices: “This was the first time I ate by myself, with silence and stillness for my company” (*BG* 156).

Before her marriage, Sara has the opportunity to look back on the importance of family. Fania, however, may not be able to go back home because she successfully “escapes” from home on Hester Street and her father to get married. Moreover, if Los Angeles is at the other end of the world, she continues vainly to look for close friends. Successful immigrants also experience distress because of superficial affluence and vanity. In *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, Yezierska realizes the impossibility of returning to poverty when she loses the ability to endure physical discomfort. The

narrator of the story gives “up the car” and rides in the trolley and bus. However, she becomes exhausted and confused soon after she experiences the odor, the noise, and the mob (*RR* 69-70), and eventually takes a taxi. Physical comfort is closely and deeply connected with class. Fania in this case and Yezierska herself have climbed the ladder of class. Consequently, they vainly try to descend it physically: [T]he more people get, the more they want. . . . And more and more we wanted more things, and really needed more things the more we got them (*BG* 29). Having realized her American Dream, Yezierska has fled from the Old World, and what she had imagined has come to pass. The writer is afraid of being a rootless person since she has lost the virtue and purity of the Old World. In *The Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, Yezierska expresses apologies for her disobedience everywhere, especially to her father.

In California, at the other end of the world, Fania is completely out of the cage-like ghetto. Even a fur coat can hardly relieve her isolation. Out of the ghetto, as an isolated space open to a threat is obvious.

## **5. The Crucial Difference: *All I Could Never Be***

### **5-1: Perspectives from the Higher and the Lower Ranks**

As mentioned in the first thesis chapter, Russia can be defined as space, exposed to constant menace without protection. Humiliation originated in Russia, and these are engraved in Fanya’s memory and told to Henry Scott, who is a Dewey-like figure in the text. The motif of Heaven and being denied after the entrance is repeated steadily throughout the text. In the main story, the Heaven Henry gives Fanya, and the refusal to enter Heaven due to their break-up is described. Fanya is obliged to notice the demonstrative and crucial difference between Henry and herself, even in person outside of the cage-like ghetto.

The relation between Fanya and Henry does not bring agreement any closer, even in the private aspect as lovers as well as in the social aspect as both teacher

and student. When Fanya describes the above-mentioned episode in America, Henry laughs it away.

“What is it you’re laughing about?” she demanded.

“How can I help laughing at your damned Slavic seriousness? In your passion for tragedy you make a mountain out of a molehill. It hurts your vanity to realize that you’ve been a fool to let yourself be wounded by the Farnsworths, so you strike out blindly at them and attribute to them motives unworthy of your intelligence. Do you remember the time you took me to your Ghetto, and one of little roughnecks, splashing in the fountain, took off his shirt and threw it in my face, spattering mud all over me? What would you have thought of me if I had become angry? I laughed it off. You must learn to laugh. Fanya—”

“I can’t laugh. I won’t laugh. I’m the product of abused generations that had laughter squeezed out of them.” (*AIC* 76)

Henry laughs at Fanya’s humiliation as an exaggeration. Adele in *Arrogant Beggar* cries out because Mrs. Hellman ostentatiously manages a home for working girls for immigrant young women. Anglo-Saxon John Manning, the heroine Sonya’s husband, in *Salome of the Tenements*, expresses hatred hidden in his heart against a Jew. Despite his hatred, he established a settlement house for immigrant charity. These plotlines attribute the author’s over-sensitiveness against people who give charity as a higher rank.

Henry understands immigrants and explains that Fanya should not humiliate herself because the Farnsworths are just surprised and frightened by Fanya’s emotional attitude. According to Henry, he is not angry although a child acts disrespectfully, so Fanya should also be generous. The laughter at the rude child, however, is Henry’s generous attitude as a superior position as well as Miss and Mrs.

Farnsworth's feelings about inviting Fanya. Even if Fanya laughs at them, her laughter is completely different from Henry's. This is because she was bestowed a favor and later rejected. The object of Henry's laughter, on the other hand, is a child's mischief, thus, Henry's understanding is unavoidably regarded as superficial. The laughter the abused obtain diverges from the one the superior gives as forgiveness. The sides of giving and taking are thoroughly opposed.

There is another conflict between Henry and Fanya. Fanya deifies him but Henry finds a flesh-and-blood woman in her:

Why had he never invited her to his home—introduced her to his wife, his sons, his daughters? He befriended her on the side. He wrote her a wonderful letters—divined poetry, but when it came to taking her into his home—accepting her as a social equal—he, too, had his reservations. Even he had for her only a cruel kindness, like the Farnsworths. (*AIC*76-77)

The discrepancy between Fanya and Henry is obvious. For Henry, Fanya is someone he must hide from his family, but Fanya believes that Henry is so cruelly kind that he tries to deal with her as a social equal and doesn't know why he won't invite her. Fanya attributes his reservations to views on social class, but in fact it is psychological factors that contribute to them. In short, Henry is romantically attached to her. Because of this, he cannot invite or introduce her to his family.

Dark barriers rose inside her. They welled up in her heart—the sorrow—the disillusion! . . . Instead of a god, here was a man—too close, too earthly. She wanted from him vision—revelation—not this—not this. (*AIC* 101)

This is the conclusive scene, and as a consequence the two do not become lovers. Henry later becomes somebody different and persists in his refusal to listen to Fanya.

The truth that Henry is not God-like but just a common man gives Fanya a shock; nevertheless, Fanya temporarily rejects him here and the rejection eventually leads to their breakdown. The Heaven of their Platonic involvement refuses their entrance. Both socially and privately, Henry and Fanya have a difference in outlook. Consequently, they cannot achieve a unity.

## 5-2: Flesh and Blood

Although she respects and thanks Henry for his generous attitude and regards him as a “symbol of all she could never be” (*AIC* 28), Fanya longs for his humane warmth in spite of his theoretical investigations and discourses. Fanya rejects him with an ambivalent attitude. At the same time, the text itself repeats the theoretical aspect without warmth. Fanya, as a writer, speaks about her experience in front of the audience.

“Suicide seemed the only logical end to my misery. But before taking my life, I felt before long one of my books would ‘go over big’ and I would be famous. He [an editor] had told me there was a grim humor in all my stories. My tragic characters were all funny people who made him laugh. And I had decided to go to him and ask which would be funnier, to jump off some skyscraper, or fling myself down from Brooklyn Bridge.” (*AIC* 118)

There is a great discrepancy between the way an editor views humor and the way Fanya does. This very point contributes to the monotony and the low estimation of *All I Could Never Be*. The humor the editor indicates is what Yezierska tries to write about people in the ghetto as an insider and what reveals itself in the texts. For example, in “How I Found America,” Gedalyeh Mindel is innocently delighted to experience gas lighting in America, even though the tenement is so dark without sunshine that he has to use it. In *Salome of the Tenements*, a style of caricature is

used. Gittel Stein and Lipkin, for instance, are the deities of poverty, Mr. Rosenblat is sensual and Honest Abe is a miser. The characters are vividly depicted and their vibrant daily lives is one appealing feature of the text. In this text, Henry says “I shall always see your Ghetto more vividly because of you. And you more vividly because of your Ghetto.” (*AIC* 56) Fanya’s charm is pointed out as complementary to the immigrants’ community, or to the ghetto’s attractiveness.

Fanya, the narrator originates from Yeziarska, doesn’t understand the editor’s evaluation correctly and grasps that people of a higher social class ridicule people of a lower social class. The words “laughter squeezed out of them [abused generations],” clarifies Fanya’s bitter humiliation. According to Fanya, “tragic characters” are regarded as the object of scornful laugh, or “all funny people.” This is why the sarcastic inquiry “which would be funnier, to jump off some skyscraper, or fling myself down from Brooklyn Bridge” is made as if Fanya had vented her strong anger. The difference between higher and lower social classes prevents the narrator from noticing her own attractiveness and understanding the way to perceive different types of humor is a good example of this.

The readership of *All I Could Never Be* are disappointed because the heroine is an orphan and the trial to be assimilated in America is described continuously so the text lacks a description of the immigrants’ community. No matter how Henry praises the ghetto, his description lacks specificity and realism due to his being an outsider. The immigrants’ society with obvious sincerity which heroines just like the author or narrators tell readers are completely different from the world no matter how positive and sincere these views are.

Henry’s investigation of Polish immigrants’ community is too scientific, and he seems to ignore the immigrants in front of him doing nothing but reading prominent writings in the field. Fanya protests against his attitude as follows: “But it seems to me to read about people you want to know is as different from knowing them, as looking at the picture of an apple is different from the taste and feel of a real apple.

Go out and meet the Poles—” (*AIC* 81) This text of Fanya and Henry is created, making actual Dewey appear to be pushed to the front. If the risk of confusion of the fiction and the history, on account of this fact, is minimized, the followings discussion of Yezierska should be applied. “Unfortunately, Professor Dewey’s style lacks flesh and blood. It lacks that warm personal touch that would enable his readers to get close to him” (497)<sup>3</sup>. The author’s emotional attachment for Dewey or Henry is pushed to the front, and as a result, the text makes Fanya feel alienated from her immigrant community. She adopts Dewey’s point of view which “lacks flesh and blood.” It is impressive that repeating the mistake of Dewey, Yezierska lacks flesh and blood in *All I Could Never Be*.

### 5-3: Reality is Hard to Change

Henry affirms that, in order to solve problems, reason and not emotion is needed. Fanya, however, argues that it is essential for writing to have love and affection since data and reason are not enough to know others. “In your books you are an intellect talking to scholars. In your letters you are—you are—St. Francis, loving the poor—Christ on the mountain. Blessing the multitude” (*AIC* 72). In correspondence between Fanya and Henry, Henry is the “Saint” just as Fanya hopes him to be. In Fanya there is ambivalence in attitude toward Henry in the first part of this chapter although she asks for “flesh and blood” and claims that the apple should be tasted and felt as well as seen (as in a picture). For Fanya, Henry is not a “lover” but a “Saint” or teacher; thus, the relation between Henry and Fanya (who does not want to be touched by him) is severed. Their positions are reversed at the chance to bring agreement after pursuing parallel tracks. When Henry yearns for “flesh and blood” in their relation, Fanya cannot give it, saying that it is “too close, too earthly” (*AIC* 101). In the second part, the fact this text itself lacks “flesh and blood” was made clear. In the same way, Henry’s superior “stillness” and Fanya’s “motion” are temporarily reversed.



There again is the motif of heaven and the rejection of people who are in a superior position after the temporal turnabout between Fanya and Henry pursuing parallel tracks. Fanya has not learned her lessons and acts boldly as her heart dictates. After alienation from Henry, Fanya is told to return his letters. She dares to send the letters back, however, no reply comes to her and she dares to go confirm and sees just his signature of receipt (*AIC* 190). Fanya, on an impulse, takes Henry's jacket, regrets her behavior and burns it (*AIC* 199-200). The combustion symbolizes her irrepressible passion for him. She finally secures a promise to meet him in his office, however, Henry behaves indifferently toward Fanya. She contributes her first published book to him; nevertheless, the book does not have the indication he has opened it (*AIC* 201). While Yeziarska actually sends Dewey her first published book, the narrator's imagination seems to work briskly. Despite numerous rejections, Fanya proceeds to the Plaza Hotel to watch the unveiling and presentation of portraits at Booth Theater. As she once told Henry to "go out and meet" the Poles, she actually takes herself to his space again and again.

Searching for chances to come in contact with heaven, moving around immovable Henry and receiving his rejection, Fanya is obliged to accept unpleasant facts as they are without arriving at a conclusion. At the end of the main story, Fanya decides to go back to her ghetto with her father's memory in Poland. The trial of her assimilation to America and Henry's rejection as a symbol of it encourage her to return to her immigrant community. The significant theme of being on the inside of an immigrant community emerges from the return of Fanya, or Yeziarska.

#### **5-4. A Tremendous Stillness: Epilogue**

Fanya says farewell to the struggle and exhaustion of New York and moves to a small village in New England through the introduction of her acquaintance here. The abrupt plot development gives the readership an impression of a mere addition; nevertheless, two episodes in epilogue have a symbolic meaning, and this is a

significant factor in this text.

While Fanya is happily surrounded by the villagers, she has doubts about the fact that an old woman Jane is ostracized by them. Jane sells milk as a dairy farmer, however, no villagers buy her milk because she lives in a filthy house. Jane sells milk that is sold in cities and that fact, along with her being deaf, makes Fanya feel pity for Jane. When she visits Jane, “the cows, the milk-pails, the barn were immaculate” (*AIC* 227). Fanya tries to persuade the villagers that they should buy her milk and “draw her out of her isolation” (*AIC* 229). This is because Fanya was also isolated from intelligent colleagues when she once worked as an interpreter: “There’s no excuse for dirt,” maintained the immaculate Miss Tracy. “Soap and water are cheap. Anyone can be clean” (*AIC* 230). Here again the clean space where filthy people are cut off from the other members is displayed. Jane is, however, satisfied with the knowledge of the world she has acquired through reading newspapers, and she accepts her situation as it is. The existence of Jane makes Fanya notice Jane’s resignation to her fate staying out of villagers. Jane does not obtain any improvement in her life. Fanya rather learns to become attached to villagers who look down on Jane, accepting and smiling on insignificant people with her compassion.

The motif of being dumb is used both in “Water and Soap” and “Wild Winter Love.” Immigrant narrators find the way to get out of being dumb by acquiring English and finding ways to express themselves. Moreover, they are frequently pointed out as being filthy in their ghetto. Because of her deafness, Jane’s “voice had the hollow, metallic sound of the deaf” (*AIC* 227). For Yezierska in the 1930s, deafness is physical deformity and thus inevitable. The acceptance of the deformity as characteristic is obvious. Reflecting on her own life after obtaining establishment status enables Yezierska to admit inevitability without humiliation. According to Zaborowska, who regards the narrator’s writing as a queer refusal to follow the town’s conventional rules, “Fanya finds peace in comprehending that she is not the

only strange and alienated person in the world” (160).<sup>4</sup> Compared with the prologue, dealt with as an obscure space accompanying her humiliation, this village in New England provides an objective space for the narrator or Fanya as an outsider on an equal footing. The humiliation is originated from the difference of higher and lower, or generous superior and the recipient of their sympathy and mercy. Fanya realizes out of the cage-like ghetto at a small village in New England, Jane does not need any condescending sympathy as well as herself in her past space.

The following episode follows a poor youth, Vladirir Pavlowich, who is wandering the village since quitting his job as a commercial artist. Fanya and Pavlowich are looking for his place to stay for a while but are rejected by villagers. They eventually have dinner at Fanya’s house and he falls asleep in her living room. Although he is not a Jew but a Russian Pole, and refused a stay, he does not blame the villagers. While he sees his own situation objectively from others’ points of view, Fanya struggles to adhere to her own point of view: “A tremendous stillness, a tremendous peace held her excitement in an ocean of quiet. All she had ever longed to be, had been secretly rowing and ripening in her breast” (*AIC* 255-56). Differing from the romantic ending of Yezierska’s novels, this is an open ending with the conclusion of a quiet relationship between the heroine and the artist. Up to the epilogue, Fanya is described using moving images, i.e., of being “effusive, unrestrained,” and rejected by the “superior,” “serene” people in the prologue and the main story. Through the lessons by Henry in the main story, Fanya objectively witnesses the social ostracism against filthy Jane and the refusal to outsider Pavlowich. Trying to help Jane and Pavlowich, Fanya uses the means of resignation, accepting the circumstances, rather than blaming them. The “tremendous stillness” is completely different from the relatives in Warsaw in Prologue, the Farnsworths, and Henry who gives her charity in main story, rather than their original stance. The stillness is acquired through Fanya experiencing Henry’s superior “stillness” and Fanya’s “motion” being temporarily reversed. The humor or laughter Henry

suggests to her is transformed into a quiet smile and is substantially acquired and achieved.

The tranquil description of emotional momentum is, in Yeziarska's words, highly controlled. It is partly the cause of insufficiency as Carol Schoen calls it "passive." Nevertheless, it can be the harbinger of the following highly-rated *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*. Schoen points out the following: "Yeziarska's increased control of the form of the novel shows her most effectively in the use of the prologue and epilogue which focus the reader's attention on one of the central themes" (Schoen 93). Yeziarska produces short stories in large quantities, setting the theme of being a credible American through assimilation and putting idealistic Dewey-like characters in the early stage. After creating three full-length novels, Yeziarska's position as a novelist seemed to be unshakable. Nevertheless, before and after contact with Hollywood, Yeziarska experienced a lack of economic and mental stability. The groping for *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* has begun, reflecting the relationship with Dewey and producing the etude after maturity.

Gradually it is becoming clear that the perpetual difference is between two parts (i.e., to give and to receive) and there is another magnanimous world without suspicion or mistrust. Through discord with people regarded as superior, Yeziarska begins to become fascinated with immigrants' community, the Lower East Side ghetto. This text "lacks blood and flesh"; however, in fact, the attitude to accept unchangeable reality and smile is aroused by the etude. That is the significant sign seen newly in *All I Could Never Be*.

## **6. Failures out of the Ghetto: Captive Incapable Birds**

### **6-1. Men Who Do Not Love Only Her: "Wild Winter Love"**

Although the narrator has heard the confession of Ruth, i.e., her homelessness and inarticulate condition, the narrator later happens to see Ruth and she looks vital and like a different person. The cause of her transformation is a new romance. The

narrator, in the morning, after about three years, finds an article of Ruth's suicide. While those around Ruth gossip about her, the narrator knows the inside affairs and concludes the story.

A lonely losing fight it was from the very beginning. Only for a moment, a hand of love stretched a magic bridge across the chasm. Inevitably the hand drew back. Inevitably the man went back to the safety of his own world.

In the fading of this dazzling mirage of friendship and love, vanished her courage, her dreams, her last illusion. And she leaped into the gulf that she could not bridge. (*HIF* 278)

Rose Cohen, an actual writer, leaves at least five stories except for a full-length autobiography. One of them, "Natalka's Portion" was selected as "The Best Short Stories" by an editor, Edward J. O'Brien, in 1922. As a writer who shares similar circumstances (as a Jewish immigrant from Russia with a daughter), Yezierska expresses habitual thoughts directly as well as her sympathy. Only their love for their child tied the chasm between her husband and herself securely while Yezierska loses her matrimony after her daughter was taken back by her husband. The romance with Dewey, which she obtains in her loneliness, ends after a short time, since Dewey "drew back" his hand to go "back to the safety of his own world." Not only Yezierska, but also Ruth in the text, have neither their loving family nor peaceful homeland. On the other hand, older Anglo-Saxon men have their free native country, America, as well as their family with their wives and children. The narrator surmises that, because of the "lonely losing fight" Ruth felt desperate and commits suicide without the "magic bridge across the chasm." To cold hard-headed Americans" (*HIF* 272), Yezierska is constantly making trials of stretching magic bridges across the chasm. In the ghetto as an insider the narrator does not have to leap into the gulf. In "Open Cage," the narrator is reluctant to release the bird, so

the neighbor Sadie suggests she should buy a parakeet who will love only the narrator. The bird from the sky cannot stay in the cage as well as it cannot love only the cage owner. Ruth's partner (with whom she has an affair) has an origin beyond her imagination. He is a man who does not love only her. Ruth, feeling homeless, vainly tries to grope for another place to call home outside of the cage, but finds only merciless death.

## 6-2. Unsatisfied with Space as Well as the Cage: "Fat of the Land"

"The Fat of the Land," published in *Century Magazine*, was selected as one of "The Best Short Stories" by the editor Edward J. O'Brien in 1919. O'Brien began to select "The Best Short Stories" annually in 1915. The third-person narrator, Hanneh Breineh, records her experience over several years and describes her past, and then her anger and sorrow as her children become adults. Hanneh is from Savel in Poland, and she might be from a respectable family since she frequently refers to this fact. Hanneh always complains about her wretched life with too many children in Delancey Street in the Lower East Side, because in Poland she was not "a nobody." When one of her children was in trouble and exposed to danger, Hanneh was very angry about it. If her children complain of hunger, she calls them gluttons. Hanneh laments her misfortune as a poor person and also berates herself for not being dependable enough to fill their stomachs. She ends up being jealous of a mother who lost her child because the woman does not have to worry about her child's hunger or potential danger anymore. Mrs. Pelz, a friend and an observer of Hanneh's, tries to comfort her, saying "The world is a wheel always turning, . . . Those who were high go down low, and those who've been low go up higher" (*HIF*79). On another occasion she says, "In America children are like money in the bank." (*HIF*87), but Hanneh turns a deaf ear to her.

Her late husband gives her a deposit of five hundred dollars and every child finds success. Consequently, just as Mrs. Pelz had said, Hanneh leaves Delancey

Street and wears luxurious clothes. Not satisfied with being rich, Hanneh complains that she does not have her own place and says, “The servant is away for this afternoon, and we can feel more comfortable there. I can breathe like a free person in my kitchen when the girl has her day out” (*HIF* 86). Although she does not like to be looked down on by the servant, an employee, Hanneh, who should be free as an employer, regards her kitchen as the only place where she can breathe like a free person. This idea amazes Mrs. Pelz as well as the readers. Different from her experience in her homeland, Poland, Hanneh cannot adapt to American life in the upper class. Her children are so embarrassed by their mother, who once used to live in Delancey Street in the ghetto, that she speaks with sorrow about the fact that there is a rupture between parent and child, or between the Old World and the New World.

“You know they say a cow has a long tongue, but can’t talk.” . . . “My children give me everything from the best. . . . When I asked for dove’s milk, they would buy it for me; but—but—I can’t talk myself out in their language. They want to make me over for an American lady, and I’m different.” . . . “When I was poor, I was free, and could holler and do what I like in my own house.” . . . “If she [the servant] sees I eat on the kitchen table, she will look on me like the dirt under her feet.” (*HIF* 88)

Although she thinks that she is from a respectable family, Hanneh cannot speak in English well and does not know how to eat with proper table manners. Servants, who are in a lower class than she, laugh at her and look down on her. According to Tuan, “A rich man is surrounded by servants, yet they do not crowd him, for their low status makes them invisible—part of the woodwork” (Tuan 59). Hanneh cannot get used to her sudden high status, which is not intrinsic, but has come from her husband and children. Owing to her sense of inferiority that originated in the ghetto,

the existence of others who are not from the ghetto has a strong impact on her. Hanneh's situation is more complicated than it first seems to be because not only is she from the ghetto, but also from a higher class in Poland. She does not expect to be looked down on by the servants. The difference in the social mores of the country automatically makes her class less privileged.

This sort of episode can also be seen in *Salome of the Tenements*. When Sonya and Manning are at the dinner table on their honeymoon, "The masked-face butler silently, but significantly, placed the correct fork in front of her. The blood rushed to her cheeks" (*ST* 113). Sonya, of her own choosing, has been suddenly elevated by Manning; nevertheless, she frequently becomes bewildered.

Hanneh's daughter Fanny, who lives with her, complains that she has to hide her mother from her friends in the upper class:

"I dressed her in the most stylish Paris models, but Delancey Street sticks out from every inch of her. Whenever she opens her mouth, I'm done for. You fellows had your chance to rise in the world because a man is free to go up as high as he can reach up to; but I, with all my style and pep, can't get a man my equal because a girl is always judged by her mother." (*HIF* 90)

A girl is always judged by her mother, so Fanny dresses her mother in order to hide her mother's past as an immigrant. The daughter shifts the responsibility onto her mother's vernacular as well as onto the difference of gender among siblings. Moreover, Hanneh is obliged to move to the new residence with a small kitchenette and a dining service because she does not get along well with the servants. Without proper table manners, she has to eat in front of others. Besides, her own place, a big kitchen, is taken away and she feels "robbed of the last reason for her existence" (*HIF* 91). After she finishes shopping on Delancey Street, she is not allowed to take her purchase up in the elevator with her, so she protests against the uniformed



doorman. During the argument, her daughter Fanny and her friend Mrs. Van Suyden come across her, and Fanny turns on her mother. “You want me to love you yet? . . . You knocked every bit of love out of me when I was yet a kid. All the memories of childhood I have is your everlasting cursing and yelling that we were gluttons” (*HIF* 93). Because of Fanny’s heartless words, Hanneh runs away from home. Although Mrs. Pelz, whose husband wants Hanneh’s son to employ him, is still poor, Hanneh asks if she can stay in Mrs. Pelz’s room, saying that she does not have a place where she can take refuge.

“Why don’t the children born of American mothers write my Benny’s plays? It is I, who never had a chance to be a person, who gave him the fire in his head. If I would have had a chance to go to school and learn the language, what couldn’t I have been? It is I and my mother and my mother’s mother and my father and father’s father who had such a black life in Poland; it is our choked thoughts and feelings that are flaming up in my children and making them great in America. And yet they shame themselves from me!” (*HIF* 94)

When a parent cannot speak the same language as their children, the latter do not want to speak the same language as their parent. For Hanneh’s children, Yiddish simply reminds them of being shouted at. Although Hanneh shares the same language as Mrs. Pelz, her house is full of disgusting smells, and the bed has a mattress which is “full of lumps and hollows” (*HIF* 95). In addition, there are “creeping things on the wall” (*HIF* 95). Mrs. Pelz’s tenement is not appropriate for Hanneh in her fur coat, and she admits that she cannot stay there one more night. Thus, she has absolutely no place to stay. Hanneh begins to laugh and cry at the same time after she mutters “the fat of the land!” which is in Genesis 45:18. Mrs. Pelz had admonished her the previous day for living on the fat of the land, and told

her to go back home and thank God. Successful children are free and are their own persons, but Hanneh is a “nobody” and is unable to eat in front of people. She realizes the limitations of her situation and that she should be free from financial worries and laughs at her contradiction.

Unlike Ruth in “Wild Winter Love,” Hanneh has her homeland and can remember it to maintain her pride. She might still have had her pride if she was in Poland, although she calls her life there “a black life,” which is rarely mentioned in this text. The phrase “choked thoughts and feelings” quoted above reminds us of Yezierska’s spokesperson. Benny appears to complete a play, which the President of the United States comes to watch. This son, Hanneh’s favorite, is expected to keep on writing scripts that no American-born child can complete. His mission is to write the American stories that he could not write if his mother was not an immigrant. Just like Benny, Yezierska sees the worth in being an immigrant writer who does not abandon Yiddish. There are insiders and outsiders of the ghetto. The former is Mrs. Pelz and the latter are her children. Hanneh is simultaneously the ghetto’s insider (Delancey Street sticks out from every inch of her) and its outsider (living on the fat of the land), and at the same time she is perhaps neither an insider nor an outsider. It is possible to tell if a person is a resident of the ghetto by their use of language, their table manners, their rough way of life or their clothing. Returning to the ghetto can be hard in some cases. Yezierska and some of the narrators in her fiction try to become successful, but as Hanneh admits, she “never had a chance to be a person.” Although the cage, or the ghetto, is always open, it is possible that she had neither the energy nor the courage to launch out into the wider world. It is much easier for American-born children to live in America, or the wilderness of the New World. In spite of having a few material comforts, all homeless Hanneh can do is entrust the role of spokesperson to her son, Benny.

## 7. Crazy Ambition to Remain a Writer: *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*

*Red Ribbon on a White Horse* was written when Yeziarska was in her 50s and 60s. The writer in her 30s and 40s repeatedly declares her resolve to be a person, or a real American, who is her own boss in writing. In her cage-like ghetto she has to remain an immigrant as an insider of characteristic location. Yeziarska actually becomes a real American, climbing to the status of a novelist and reflects on how her position as an author enabled her to get out of the ghetto.

### 7-1. Effusiveness Originated Space Russia and the Emptiness of Display

The narrator, who visits Ohio University as a writer and lecturer, tears her prepared notes in front of the female students and tries to give truthful answers to questions. This episode offers a glimpse of the narrator's latent desire to give others dramatic effects as Yeziarska actually used to go to the facility for the training of professional actors. When the narrator began writing in poverty, she took food from her sister's children's. The following dialog occurred between siblings when she was too hungry to restrain her appetite to eat something her sister had prepared for her children.

“‘A mother has a right to steal to feed a hungry child. I have a right to steal to finish my story—’

“ Who gives you the right? Your craziness gives you the right?”

“All right, then, I'm crazy. . . .” “But every step of my writing career was a brutal fight, like the stealing of that oatmeal from hungry children.” (*RR* 133)

In the lecture, describing her continuing progress as a writer, she compares her own stories to her children. She eventually notices that “[t]he truth with which I wanted to shock them had been only the vanity of the injured showing off scars” (*RR* 134) and reflects that she has wanted others' sympathy and empathy. Harsh expressions of the truth do not necessarily have good results. On the contrary, they lead to the

exhibition of scars for others to avoid. The narrator exaggerates, due to a passion that is interpreted as craziness. The necessity of acceptance and showing things as they are without depending on exaggeration and the dramatic effects are narrated in detail in Part III in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*.

As the narrator's mother says, deploring “[y]our father works for God and His Torah like other fathers work for their wives and children . . .” (*RR* 39), he sometimes sacrifices the comfort of his wife and daughters for his sacred duty, leaving worldly affairs. On the other side, the narrator concentrates on the pain of birth pangs, or writing, and takes away the comforts of sister’s children. The narrator’s passion is surely not sacred but profane.

As I learned English, I learned to piece together thoughts and feelings about the people around me. After the only day at the machine I could not rest, I could not sleep, till I unburdened on paper the ache of my confusion. I wrote half in Yiddish, half in English, feeling my way in the new language.

Everything that happened to me was a challenge that drove me to write. I turned to my writing the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night—as Father had turned to his prayers. (*RR* 77)

Writing and prayer are juxtaposed, and ritual custom is identified with the narrator’s soothing writing habit. Although this passage might be a blasphemous act for her father, she regards her impulse beyond her control as pure and noble as her father’s strong faith. Her father likens Torah to daily bread. On the other hand, the narrator tries to fill her hunger both physically and mentally with her writing. Her father stubbornly maintains the old life before coming to the United States, and gains nourishment. On the contrary, his daughter devotes herself to assimilation, writing in newly acknowledged language and self-expression. She is looking for benefits in the New World. They accordingly seem to be two sides of the same coin.

## 7-2. The Profane Caricature Kintzler

In Part III of *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, the narrator spends time among fellows of the Writer's Project of WPA, Works Progress Administration, or a social welfare project for artists during the Great Depression in New York. In fact, Yezierska's wealth originated in Hollywood, having received a severe blow by the Depression. Yezierska needed less support than other writers; nevertheless, she belonged to the section which supplied more compared with others (Henriksen 261). Companions, including Richard Wright, are depicted objectively in this Part for which the author decently holds back her emotions. Jeremiah Kintzler forms a distinctive feature observed from the viewpoint of *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* as a fiction. Kintzler is Jewish, respects Spinoza and is given worldly comical aspects, and the narrator's father instead is barely exempted from being a caricature (like Reb Smolinsky in *Bread Givers*).

Joe Gould, an "ex-Boston aristocrat" who graduated from Harvard, is described as the model of Kintzler (Henriksen 263). Wearing a shirt with safety pins to hold and shaking his cane, Kintzler always spoke on his ability and his low evaluation by others in public. The briefcase he always holds, including it as a product of his product of his efforts and manuscripts on Spinoza according to Kintzler. Kintzler describes himself as the best Spinoza scholar and demands improvement of project conditions, and then dies vomiting blood. The narrator vainly brings his briefcase home and notices that it contains only chaotic pieces of paper. Kintzler's first name "Jeremiah" may derive from the Prophet Jeremiah of the Lamentations. Kintzler, as the Prophet Jeremiah, "laments" his hard life such as his poverty and low evaluation and tries to get money. Consequently, he is depicted as if the discriminative caricature of a vulgar Jew was looked at from a non-Jewish point of view. Kintzler identifies himself as a reincarnation of Spinoza, as well as being associated with the Prophet of Jeremiah. He describes his feeling as "When I wake up in the middle of

the night, I sometimes feel that *I'm Spinoza!*" (RR 160) God is the absolute for the narrator's sacred father, on the other hand, Spinoza points out the contradiction of God as He is recognized to be appropriate only by the Jewish race. He was excommunicated by Judaism and expelled by the Jewish community. "Poor Jeremiah! His face had been a danger signal. The sight of him had sent people scurrying out of his way. I fled him, but it was no use" (RR 193). In the chapter titled "Jeremiah's 'Dybbuk'," the narrator detects inferiority in Jeremiah as she found it in herself when she was avoided by young men of her generation. She empties not only Jeremiah's briefcase into the ash can, but also her boxes of manuscripts. The purpose is to mingle her wasted years with Jeremiah's (RR 197). In Part III, the surrounding comrades of WPA are not only Jews but also Gentile poets and writers including Richard Wright. The completely different existence of Kintzler itself plays a role of the mirror reflecting the narrator and makes her notice the emptiness of reliance on display and dramatic effect, providing a self-tormenting Jewish humor. Being created as Jewish characters in the same generation, the contrast between the narrator's father's sacredness and Kintzler's profaneness are outstanding. In Chapter I of this thesis, Russia without intimacy is defined as a space in which one can leave. This can also be understood as being outside of the cage and exposed to constant menace. The effusiveness of the heroine keeps others as well as the Farnsworths away as lice do young heroine Fanya's hair. The narrator created by the author in her 50s and 60s, introspects about the reasons for her plight and moderately accepts out of the cage-like ghetto. The transit between classes allows Yezierska to express objectivity.

### 7-3. In New England

The narrator, who cannot square herself with fate, has opportunities to come in contact with conservative non-Jewish people and to reflect on her own origin and background objectively. The narrator wants to start her new life and migrate from

the ghetto in New York to New Hampshire. Her motivation is described as follows: “I wanted to write again with the honesty I knew when I lived on Hester Street. I wanted to make a new start away from the market place where I had lost myself in the stupid struggle for success” (*RR* 199). Yeziarska was actually friends with female writers of WASP, and the narrator in this text is taken care of by the writer, Marian Foster. She stays in a peaceful but conservative village. Differing from the business-like treatment of WPA’s, Foster provides hearty hospitality to the narrator: “For hundreds of years the homeless of Europe had dreamed of home. Home in America. And here at last I had found it. This was it. This gift of home” (*RR* 202). Greatly impressed with the reception, the narrator soon notices her own loneliness among the exclusive villagers in the countryside, differing from the urban empathy each lonely New Yorker experiences. After the rapid development of her life in Hollywood, the narrator as an onlooker observes her fellows in New York. Experiencing each event as an American, she encounters discrimination against Jewish Americans in the country in New England and recollects as follows:

With a sudden sense of clarity I realized that the battle I thought I was waging against the world had been against myself, against the Jew in me. I remembered my job-hunting, immigrant days. How often when I had sought work in Christian offices had I been tempted to hide my Jewishness—for a job! It was like cutting off part of myself. That was why there was no wholeness, no honesty, in anything I did. That was why I always felt so guilty and so unjustly condemned—an outsider wherever I went. (*RR* 212)

“The place was beautiful, but the sky wasn’t my sky, the hills weren’t my hills. It was a beauty that pushed me back into my homelessness” (*RR* 213). Even after the narrator obtains renown and wealth by the adoption of Hollywood movies, becoming independent as a result, she accepts her father’s blaming her for not being a good

Jew and fluctuates once in a while. Even if she assimilates herself to America and becomes a seemingly successful American, she is unsatisfied with extrinsic reward. She finally explains the truth of the inner hump she has wanted to cut off (detailed in Chapter IV of this thesis).

The villager Mrs. Cobb wanted to be a poet but has remained in the village to realize her love, and the narrator is informed of her past confidence. The narrator discovers the similarity between Mrs. Cobb and her own father though they look dissimilar. They share common features such as “purity” and “truthfulness” (*RR* 215). At her superficial sight, the narrator doesn’t notice the resignation of Mrs. Cobb, who has experienced both conflict and conquest. As Mrs. Cobb, her own cruel tyrant-like father might have some conflict or might not. At any rate, she resolves to go back to New York, and realizes that it is not easy to defend tradition, as well as Mrs. Cobb’s homemade dishes.

## 8. Conclusion

Narrators and heroines in Yezierska’s works find it difficult to escape the cage-like ghetto; nevertheless, they dare to get out of it. Moreover, they gain a broader perspective on space because of their experience. Those who do not take notice of their plights stay in the ghetto accept them as what to be expected. Protagonists who feel acutely conscious of their difficult situations attempt resistance against unpropitious circumstances and successfully get out of the cage.

Even if the bird that narrates “The Open Cage” enjoys the open space it returns, and if the release eventually rejoices the narrator, she has to return to the prison-like apartment in the story. Although she reluctantly goes back to where she lives, other narrators and heroines notice that the ghetto is the proper place to return to.

Different from black memory of Polish Russia, some space out of the ghetto is clean, abundant and even beautiful. Protagonists in the open space, however,



prove to be restless due to those very characteristics. The next chapter winds up this discussion on space and place detected in Yeziarska's life and works.

## Notes

1 Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks & What that Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U. P., 2004) 25.

2 June Dwyer, "Disease, Deformity, and Defiance: Writing the Language of Immigration Law and the Eugenics Movement on the Immigrant Body" (MELUS: Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, 2003) 28(1) 105-121.

3 Anzia Yezierska, "Prophets of Democracy" *The Bookman* 52 (Feb. 1921) 497.

4 Magdalena J. Zaborowska, *How We Found America: reading gender through East European immigrant narratives* (The U. of North Carolina P. 1995).

## Chapter IV: The Return to the Open Cage

### 1. Introduction

Later in full-length novels, the ghetto is transformed into a different setting, such as the place of fairytales, romance, dreams, and beauty. After their experience of space, or outside of the ghetto, heroines or narrators start to emotionally recreate the ghetto or even return there for emotional security.

In Western industrial society, working-class families are known to tolerate a much higher residential density than do middle-class families. And the reason is not simply because workers have little choice. Proximity to others is desired. . . . Human proximity, human contact, and an almost constant background of human noises are tolerated, even welcomed. (Tuan 62)

The intimacy attributed to the close acquaintance among the co-religionists is characteristic of the ghetto. The realistic fictions that Yezierska creates acquire a different stylistic aspect of fairytales to dramatize them. Allegorical figures such as Muhmenkeh in *Arrogant Beggar* and Shlomoh in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* provide an intimate atmosphere for the ghetto. The place to leave eventually turns out to be where the antagonists should return. Even when Yezierska lives outside of the ghetto (e.g., the Greenwich Village or Riverside Drive), she has recollections of it and conveys the special fascination with the ghetto as an outsider. In addition, Yezierska's descriptions of the ghetto can be considered prescient of the ghetto pastorals, a genre later established in the American literature in the 20th century. According to Denning, Yezierska was the earliest ghetto pastorals' writer whose works were read "as tales of its exotic other side".<sup>1</sup> Yezierska's stories and novels on the ghetto display originality having not only nostalgia but also irony. The theme returning to Lower East Side is limited to fictional characters; moreover, it is

impossible for the author herself to go back the ghetto. The theme, however, includes several aspects such as resurrection, Jewishness, and family ties.

## 2. A Unique and Significant Character in the Ghetto: *Arrogant Beggar*

### 2-1. A Mysterious Old Woman, Muhmenkeh

Jewish people who practice a traditional Jewish concept, *tzedakah* (justice), as mentioned above, are depicted in the latter part of the text after Adele leaves Hellman's Home for Working Girls. Adele initially avoids various aspects of ghetto life but gradually notices their value at Home. Muhmenkeh is the benefactress that Adele encounters at a restaurant as a dishwasher after she rushes out of Home without money. Young Adele is dependent on Home with a lighthearted feeling; on the contrary, Muhmenkeh lives independently as a 76-year-old peddler. Her tenement on Allen Street is filthy because of the broken wallpaper and the low ceiling with cracks and stains of leaking pipes. Although Muhmenkeh does not know who Adele is, she gives her a lodging. Compared with this basement, the room of Shlomoh and Mrs. Hershbein on Essex Street looks more comfortable just as a heaven (AB 94), although Adele did not approve of it when she was in the ghetto. Stubbs regards Muhmenkeh as the most idealistic mother figure in Yeziarska's novels and stories (AB xxxi). Evidently, Adele is reminded of her own long-forgotten mother when she sees Muhmenkeh washing dishes (AB 94), and so she naturally respects her.

The person who assists and educates Adele is neither Mrs. Hellman, the lady from the wealthy class, nor the self-sacrificing Jewish mother, Mrs. Hershbein. Rather, it is the dishwasher and peddler, Muhmenkeh. As Adele narrates above, "In America, dish-washers and hod-carriers can also be citizens with the same rights as the President" (AB 39).

Adele and Muhmenkeh understand each other, although they are neither relatives nor companions who talk much; moreover, they can feel at home and

peaceful even when their tablecloth is a newspaper (*AB* 96). Adele says she wasted her “young years trying to catch on to the false shine of the rich—only to come back to the beginnings” (*AB* 97). The beginnings here refers to the crowded ghetto she used to hate; however, the buildings are shown newly in front of Adele in a new psychological light, and everything, or all forms of life, seems to be closer to her.

The home itself feels more intimate in winter than in summer. Winter reminds us of our vulnerability and defines the home as shelter. Summer, in contrast, turns the whole world into Eden, so that no corner is more protective than another. Unique to human beings among primates is the sense of the home as a place where the sick and the insured can recover under solicitous care. (Tuan 137)

The intimacy between Adele and Muhmenkeh, attributed to her struggle against middle-class assimilated German Jews, forms within her a close attachment to the ghetto as a real home. This manifestation is in contrast to the impersonal coldness that is white and clean. Later, a nurse in a “spick-and-span uniform” (*AB* 106) makes Adele, who has the flu, fearful of her because the white uniform reminds her of her bitter past.

Muhmenkeh steadily collects coins in a used can to get her granddaughter to come to America; nevertheless, when Adele is struck down by an illness, Muhmenkeh puts the coins together and pays for her necessary expenses. She once in a while talks about Rabbi Akiba; however, she basically shows her way of life as a woman of moral fiber, supporting Adele without giving instructions and lets her learn on her own as a result. The crucial part of Muhmenkeh’s teaching is not the charity to lose receivers’ power to be their own bosses, but the support to arouse them power and use it. Adele accepts Hellman’s Home dispenses; however, it is certain that she nearly loses her individuality.

As Adele calls her, “funny, strange old Muhmenkeh” (*AB* 99) figuratively dies when she imagines the old woman’s life from various angles. Unlike other old Jewish women, she has visible relations with “no wigs”, “no Sabbath candles”, or “no praying in synagogues” (*AB* 121). As soon as Adele comes to realize that the light that people yearn for exists around Muhmenkeh and that it resembles the light experienced through religion, she attends Muhmenkeh in her death and mourns her. Adele comes to think that she encounters Muhmenkeh’s spirit in the center of the evenly filthy tenement (*AB* 115). A series of episodes with Muhmenkeh assume the aspect of a fairytale. Muhmenkeh’s light and the extremely filthy surrounding are depicted as symbols of the ghetto. Yezierska’s literature is generally accepted as realistic fiction; moreover, the unrealistic characters associated with the ghetto create artistic merit. Another profane yet sacred character can also be seen in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*. According to *Encyclopedia of Literature* more sophisticated type of “fairy tale” narrative has “a whimsical, satirical or moralistic character” (401).<sup>2</sup>

Also, in “Mostly about Myself”, an essay produced as a preface of *Children of Loneliness* published in 1923, Yezierska sets forth her concept of beauty.

. . . I had discovered that beauty was anywhere a person tries to think out his thoughts. Beauty was no less in the dark basement of a sweatshop than in the sunny, spacious halls of a palace. So that I, buried alive in the killing blackness of poverty, could wrest the beauty of reality out of my experiences no less than the princess who had the chance to live and love, and whose only worry was which of her adorers she should choose for a husband. (*HIF* 135)

Bringing out the contrast between her theme and fairytale, Yezierska demonstrates where and how her beauty exists. To dramatize her ghetto Yezierska employs this rhetoric. The tenement has various stains since the landlord originally built it for himself; however, since then, it has become a tenement variously transformed into a

pawnshop, laundry, and residences for many families while being kept away from light and wind. Adele sets about stripping useless wallpapers and finds the real walnut walls buried underneath. According to Adele, “The acid paint remover ate the skin off my hands, left my fingers raw and red” (*AB* 126), and she is exhausted because of the operations; nevertheless, the process can be interpreted as a motif of resurrection. The image of casting off of skin in the form of wallpaper but also from Adele herself has a strong message. Devising effective interior decoration and using late-Muhmenkeh’s samovar, she completes the preparation of “Muhmenkeh’s Coffee Shop.” This process of renovation is more emotionally significant to her as a form of spiritual and emotional gratitude than having attended Muhmenkeh’s deathbed. Muhmenkeh must feel relieved because Adele spontaneously finds her vocation and is willing to take action while Muhmenkeh always watches over her even after her death. Adele says, “I see her before my eyes, I feel her in my arms and fingers” (*AB* 127). The comment resembles Sara’s in *Bread Givers* when she loses her own mother. Adele serves Jewish traditional dishes and sweets, and what she had learned as the trainee at Hellman’s Home assist her with the cooking. The tasteful interior reminds guests of Paris. According to Stubbs, although Adele has never been to Paris, the experience she creates for the Hellman’s comes in useful (*AB* xxxii). Adele’s talents, accrued from both Hellman’s Home and Muhmenkeh, are demonstrated by the establishment of the Coffee Shop.

Seeing the reality of upper-class assimilated Jews with her own eyes, she instead learns from Muhmenkeh while in the poverty among Jewish people from Eastern Europe and comes to demonstrate the results of her achievement. The Coffee Shop turnover promises profits enough to live in the ghetto, although mothers could let their children eat a lot for a small sum since the customers’ bills depended upon their economic situation (*AB* 31). A *pushke* is a can to collect coins for charity in Jewish homes. The simple payment system resembles a *pushke* and embodies the spirit of *tzedakah* because customers pay as much as they like without letting others

know the price. The poor diners' burden is lightened without injury to their pride, while rich guests get to make an anonymous contribution to the shop's operation. Here, a facet of the Jewish education system whereby people's talents are used efficaciously yet not under compulsion is produced seemingly by accident. The training Adele obtains at Home is the means while the Jewish spirit (*tzedakah*) transmitted by Muhmenkeh is the goal of her Coffee Shop, or rather the sum achievement of the educations Adele has gained along the way. Leaving Home of assimilated Jews is symbolized by coldness and whiteness and represented by simple, rational give-and-take relations, Adele learns generous charity (i.e., *tzedakah* noticeable to God) from Muhmenkeh. This poor old woman is surrounded by light of a sort that people similarly yearn for from religion; it is thus symbolic, and the fact that Muhmenkeh is not depicted as an old "religious" woman adds to the effectiveness. She might be described as a completely independent woman since she does not reside in a home with her family, despite having a granddaughter and no God to devote herself blindly. This is somewhat different from the case of Ruth in "Wild Winter Love," who laments over her homelessness and irreligious state (*HIF* 274). In addition, the system here, which avoids humiliation via anonymity is due to Adele's disgraceful experiences at Home as transpiring in a "harsh" space.

## 2-2. Music and Resurrection

In association with symbol, Adele's father's education is dealt with here, although he died when she was 10. While Anglo-Saxons mainly engaged in the economic development in a high level of economic growth from the 19th to the 20th century in America, Jewish people engaged in trivial industries, such as theaters, newspapers, publishers, and entertainment. Adele was born in New York while her father was a tailor when he was in Poland and came to America to be a singer. By cutting down on food expenses, he takes his daughter to operas and concerts on Saturday nights and explains to her the meaning of songs as if she were an adult.



This education begins when Adele can barely learn to walk by herself, so it is strongly retained in her memory. When Adele has an interview to enter Hellman's Home, she cannot help recalling this memory to the interviewer. Her father could not give her direct instructions of singing or playing instruments because he was ill and poor. Yet, he had managed, latently, to give her considerable artistic influences and idealistic circumstances, for example, by getting a second-hand phonograph and listening to his favorite pieces in his dying days.

Adele is invited and excited even as a waitress to the studio where Arthur Hellman, Adele's ideal, holds a party. In the quiet and relaxing atmosphere, she notices Arthur's generous support to Jean Rachmansky, a pianist, different from the restrictive support offered by his mother, Mrs. Hellman. Jean Rachmansky, whose father was a *Klezmer*, traveled steerage to the United States. He unconsciously entered the first-class cabin to play the piano; moreover, he was encouraged to give a concert on board by Arthur Hellman. The melody Rachmansky plays reminds Adele of her father, and she says to herself, "Memories of Father. The way he took me to operas and concerts. Waiting on a long line for hours, in the rain and snow, only to get standing room" (AB 73). Furthermore, she obtains a sort of revelation: "Life was not what you put in your stomach, or wore on your back, or the house you lived in. It was what you felt in your heart and thought in your mind" (AB 73). Her late-father's education returns to life, and Adele's talent is taken out because of the piano tune Rachmansky plays; moreover, the potential power of music leads to their mutual understanding.

Arthur is one of the typical "Godlike" men yearned after by the heroines in Yezierska's texts. Each man reflects Dewey, a fact familiar to Yezierska's readership. There are some endings where the heroine's love for this sort of man comes to fruition; however, in *Salome of the Tenements*, the heroine Sonya's marriage to WASP John Manning fails because they cannot recognize their remoteness until they enter into matrimony. The third full-length novel's stability originates in Adele's self-

analysis and her refusal of Arthur's offer. Looking for the missing Adele after she leaves Home, Arthur finds her at Muhmenkeh's place, but he is turned down his offer he takes out her to the more hygienic room. He brings her roses, fruits, and chicken soup and then tries to help Muhmenkeh with errands. Out of kindness, he tries to buy everything Muhmenkeh peddles: roughly a few weeks' merchandize. At his suggestion, Muhmenkeh tells him not to give her charity, but to buy a few teabags and some coffee. Adele's view of the world has gradually and obviously changed from when she wished for Arthur's love.

Adele notices that she "was only in love with the idea of being in love with a man of your kind [assimilated German Jew]" (AB 116) when she leaves her sickbed and at the moment of Arthur's courtship which used to be her dream come true. Instead, she actually feels exhaustion and disappointment. Adele thinks it is Arthur's condescending way, that he tries to do whatever he can with his wealth. She analyzes her relations with others and tells Arthur the following: "When I sit and eat with Muhmenkeh I'm among my own. My feet on the ground of the real world I know. With you I'm walking on stilts" (AB 117). If wealthy people support the needy materially and then stop supporting them, all efforts are in vain because the "stilts" no longer work. Eventually, Adele's stability emerges as different from other heroines such as Sonya in *Salome of the Tenements* and Sara in *Bread Givers*. This is attributed to Muhmenkeh's spirit. The restrained narration beyond the author's autobiographical facts generates a calm atmosphere. In addition, the symbolic meaning of Muhmenkeh for the ghetto is significant.

When the Coffee Shop is running smoothly, Rachmansky, who leaves Arthur behind, comes to Adele, who is looking at the young lovers enviously. Among Yezierska's texts, only this novel has a musical score, and incidentally it is played by Rachmansky. This fact indicates the significance of music in this text. Rachmansky tells Adele that he was a piano teacher from Warsaw, who was drafted for service and released after oppressed days and met Arthur en route to America. Rachmansky,

before and after the draft for World War I, wanted to express through music the idea that struggling people are trying to get out of this world in spite of everything that makes a stay on the profane ground just like Signorelli's picture *Resurrection [of the Flesh]*: "In this painting the people are shown struggling up out of the black earth—a foot, a hand, a whole figure. I wanted to express in music that struggle up out of the earth. The urge to break through the earthy things that hold us down. . . ." (*AB* 141). She gets out of the ghetto and experiences the profane Home or space; however, she comes back to the Lower East Side and goes through her own internal resurrection. The symbolic meaning of casting off of skin, not only wallpapers but also of Adele herself, is an effective visual metaphor when Adele meets Rachmansky once again and can thus be interpreted as a motif of resurrection. On another occasion, as she says "I am a different person. I've lived with Muhmenkeh. I've died with her, and I'm born again" (*AB* 127), she experiences resurrection just like Rachmansky does. In other words, she drifts away from the relation she only receives and the others only give.

When she reflects on her experience at the Hellman's, as with Rachmansky's, she discovers that she shares a mutual musical potentiality living in the ghetto and wonders if she was an ungrateful person. Rachmansky answers as follows:

"They gave us what they thought we ought to have. But we wanted something that no individual could give. Something that we ourselves must wrest from life. The amazing thing to me is that we expected so much from them and were hurt because it wasn't humanly possible for them to live up to our expectations. Just because they were kind to us, we demanded friendship, love, understanding, the very things they, with all their wealth, lacked". (*AB* 140)

The relation between givers and receivers in charity or education is well summarized in his statement. Adele and Rachmansky wish for mutual developing

relations, where there is a conviction if givers pass away and thereby receivers can live and grow by themselves. Because of the conviction, Adele can surely inherit musical potentiality her father bestowed.

### **2-3. The Return to the Charming Ghetto with Fairytale Aspect**

The third full-length novel *Arrogant Beggar* is written with a restrained writing style about returning to the ghetto in spite of the common aspects of the heroine's getting out of the ghetto. When Adele enters and gets to know the reality of the institution, there is a description of education that uniformly manages and trains young women who are prospective wives of working-class laborers. Shlomoh and his mother indicate a negative self-sacrificing aspect as well as the education to lead out a child's talent. Given the limitations of first-person narrative of an immature heroine, the benefit of the conviction parents obtain or the positive aspect that God alone knows their good deeds is not found in Mrs. Hershbein's education.

Getting back to the ghetto, Adele mingles with the local people, including a mysterious old woman surrounded by lights, casts off her old self, and meets a real sympathizer. This plot and the symbol, or resurrection, have fully matured. Several forms of Jewish education that lead out each child's idiosyncratic talents can be seen, just like the word origin indicates, as well as the spirit of *tzedakah* (i.e., God intervenes). The heroine, who leaps into the pure white world, becomes aware of the emptiness of simple relations only for efficiency's sake and then goes back to the ghetto and comprehends the spirit of charity and education, casting off her old self. The novel ends with a turning point, the scene of welcoming for Shenah Gittel, who is the late-Muhmenkeh's granddaughter. Although little attention has been paid to the point, in *Arrogant Beggar*, the ghetto has an added aspect of fairytale style owing to Muhmenkeh's symbolic existence. The filthy crowded ghetto Adele detested transforms into the place full of beauty due to whimsical and moralistic character surrounded by light Muhmenkeh.

### 3. Jewishness in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*

#### 3-1. Profane and Sacred Shlomoh

In *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, the most important fictional character is a hunchbacked fish peddler on Hester Street, Zalmon Shlomoh, who appears in Part II, which is the narrator's recollection. The narrator tells him her ambition to be a writer, surprising him.

"If you want to know what hell is, I'll tell you. Hell is trying to do what you can't do, trying to be what you're not—". . . "A writer?" He gave me a long, sparkling glance. "A young girl like you! For what do you need yet to write?" "*Oi weh!* I don't know myself." I sighed as he wrapped the fish in a newspaper and there was no longer any reason to linger at the pushcart. "Time is flying. I can't bear to be left out of life an old maid. Tell me, why do I have to write? When will I live?"

In Zalmon Shlomoh's eyes was such a naked look of comprehension that it silenced me . . . "God sends always to the spinner his flax, to the drinker his wine, and to a *meshugeneh*, a crazy one like you, an answer to your own *meshugass*. If I weren't old enough to be your father, I'd take you away to the end of the earth where we could both go crazy together; but you deserve a young man your own age. Your red hair and white skin cry out for youth."

"I hate young men! They say I have a *dybbuk*, a devil, a book for a heart. They laugh because I want to be a writer." (*RR* 102-3)

Given the fact she is not understood by young men, and the severity of choosing a way with many hardships, the narrator's recklessness, but also her avidness is emphasized.

"Always whenever I saw Zalmon Shlomoh I would feel that I too was a cripple.

It leaped out of my eyes like the guilt of secret sin, that devouring hunger in me. People ran away from it as from a deformity. Only Zalmon Shlomoh, the hunchback, could feel and see the wild wolves of that hunger and not be frightened away” (*RR* 103).

After the separation from John Morrow, a WASP, she sets a high value on her short stories on life in the ghetto and encounters Shlomoh and describes her sense of identification as follows: “Startled, I looked at him, and I saw myself as in a mirror. I saw my own hump of inferiority” (*RR* 118). Just after the incident, she decides to write about her neighbors in the vulgar place. Because of the sad separation from a WASP man, she begins to assume a posture of acceptance, not turning away her eyes from her own hunger as well as Shlomoh’s hump. She tries to accept her origins and family background, although her mother dismisses the narrator’s birthday celebration as unrealistic. Then, she approves of her community and the people who live there. The gradual reception of the narrator’s surroundings has symbolic images that spread like ripples.

Deformed in terms of external appearance, Shlomoh is a mild and unselfish person, who makes the narrator listen to his jokes and regain stability. On the other hand, the narrator’s metaphorical hump resides within herself; hence, she has to continue being confused and struggling because she does not know the reason why she is avoided by others. She, however, understands how to manage the problem, for she knows her agony is soothed by her writing. Although the romance with Morrow has been broken off, she obtains success and fame, the relation with him triggered, and this episode is narrated in Part I. She attains her initial ambition to be a person, *mentsh* in Yiddish, since she is generally accepted in America and is blessed with material wealth. Her situation seems to be able to appease her hump derived from her hunger. She meets Samuel Goldwyn to discuss the film adaptation and recollects: “You’ve made a fool of yourself again! I wept inwardly, sick with self-disgust . . . [m]y

obsession with my murderous ego, which had driven people from me in Hester Street, now was catching up with me in Hollywood” (*RR* 73).

Even in Hollywood where she obtains success and fame, she notices remnants of greed and hunger for acceptance among writers as well as by the general public. She was just asked about the coming story’s plot by Goldwyn, but she tells him of her homelessness and the regrets she has about having left her parents. This attitude indicates that her hunger cannot be appeased even if she attains her desire, such as her worldly success and ample income. Staring at extreme worldliness in Hollywood, she follows spontaneous motivations of hers, or pure impulses to write. She knows the hollowness of worldly pleasures, or the extrinsic motivations, such as fame and income, thanks to her father’s preaching against ordinary greed. On the other hand, the fact that she gains a large amount of money by writing stories about a poor ghetto brings with it a guilty conscience, which makes things more complicated.

Whether a person like Shlomoh existed or not in reality is not certain; nevertheless, he symbolizes nostalgia for Hester Street, or the ghetto. He is a pushcart fish peddler with a fish smell, whose sweater has scales of fish, and he is as old as the narrator’s father. He gives the narrator serenity by means of his jokes and favorite gramophone music, Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*. His character is emphasized with sensory descriptions—sight, smell, and hearing—and by the hump on his back, his fish smell, and Beethoven’s melody. Shlomoh gives the narrator comfort and is more familiar to her than her own conceptual father who tends to argue against her and who has less reality for her. Shlomoh has also no experience of leaving the ghetto such as the narrator’s father and sisters. He acquires a livelihood as a worldly fish peddler. He neither denies nor hides his own hump given by God, and he trusts God by accepting it, as a spinner is given flax. Different from the narrator’s pious father, he shows her his own religious temperament.

### 3-2. As a Jew and a White Horse

It is the unrenounceable Jewish identity that is common among Shlomoh, Kintzler, and her own father even after she has assimilated herself within America. According to Spinoza, because of the hostility to Jewish people by non-Jewish communities, Jewish people retain self-identity as Jewish (Deutscher 62). The “red ribbon” in the motto, remarks by her father and others, and the title of this text, is neither ornament, armor, nor reward, but nearly the haunted sorrow of being Jewish. As the chosen people, white horses are prominent, so the further manifestation with a red ribbon indicates the pride they have in themselves. The narrator can find only negative aspects of the “red ribbon” remaining to conceal the fact that she is also a white horse.

“Poverty becomes a wise man like a ribbon on a white horse” (*RR* Motto).

“Poverty was an ornament on a learned man like a red ribbon on a white horse” (*RR* 91).

“Poverty becomes a Jew like a red ribbon on a white horse” (*RR* 217).

Jewish people in Eastern Europe had survived in poverty yet preserved their traditions. On the other hand, the narrator is struggling in unbearable poverty while in the process of assimilating herself into the American cultural and economic life. She continues to advance, revealing her scars once in a while because she thrust herself into the large world or space out of the ghetto. She does not have to be troubled so much if she secludes herself to her own room as her father does. She writes every day as a soothing habit, trying to tame the wolf, her own hunger, as Shlomoh’s hump keeps him away from others. The narrator is also shown to be one of the homeless, starved, expelled Jews because she could survive her poverty in her own way.



“I was plagued by doubts and uncertainties, the conflict between what I was and what I wanted to be, the consuming fear that I was nothing, nobody—and the inordinate craving for approval. . . . I had abandoned the God of my fathers and had not found my own. And because I was so lost without God, I had such deep need for people.” (*RR* 206-7)

Although she cannot be obedient to her father, the narrator is obsessive about his teachings, and as a result she finds the cause of her hardships in her lack of sacredness.

The narrator, who is assimilated to the life out and away from the ghetto and who has almost forgotten Shlomoh because of the tumult of Hollywood and WPA, is handed over Shlomoh’s lodge money, 800 dollars, his records and phonograph. Shlomoh, as he used to tell her, holds out the money he has never needed to the narrator who has never lost her dream.

“God sends always to the spinner his flax, to the drinker his wine, and to a Jew his wailing wall.” With his Yiddish humor he hid his sorrow and squared himself with fate for his deformity. (*RR* 199)

Shlomoh extends financial assistance to the narrator on behalf of her own father, who did not intend to offer it. God sends her financial assistance just when she needs it, as Shlomoh used to tell her. Shlomoh exerts a hidden influence on her even after she moves to New England, thanks to his legacy. As mentioned above, Muhmenkeh, surrounded by light and the filthy ghetto, can be considered symbolic and her episodes produce the atmosphere of a fairytale. In a similar way, the character Shlomoh reminds the narrator of their mutual interest in music (and deformity or hump, literal or otherwise) and encourages her to reflect on her life in the ghetto. He is one of several imaginative and fictional characters in addition to Muhmenkeh,

although Yeziarska's literature, which has an autobiographical nature, owes a great deal to real people. There is a marked visual emphasis on Muhmenkeh; however, the smell and hearing senses are distinctive. They evoke nostalgia and attract Yeziarska to the ghetto: indeed, the author makes her heroine and narrator return there.

#### 4. Don Quixote Transformed from Salome

At the end of *Salome of the Tenements*, there is an affectionate call for Sonya, "my crazy Don Quixote" (ST 178), by Hollins, who watches over Sonya from the beginning when he gave her a dress. Sonya, as Don Quixote, meets Hollins again after she leaves Manning, returns to the poverty, and creates a dress for herself without using Salome-like female sex appeal. The nickname Don Quixote includes positive aspects of parting from the past because Sonya realizes the truth, reflecting back upon her behavior, and is thus enlightened.

*Don Quixote* is a parody that opposes tales of chivalry. Tales of chivalry deal with heroes; however, Cervantes by *Don Quixote* creates an antihero and thus satirizes the trend that was prevalent at the time of writing. Translator Nobuaki Ushijima explains as follows:

"Cervantes, under the guise of the hero-worshipping age of his native country at the time, imagined a parody of an itinerant knight in the tales of chivalry, the embodiment of order and virtue. Cervantes ostensibly denies himself and the past of Spain, Don Quixote, but in fact with a smile approves the beauty of his pure passion" (738) (my translation).<sup>3</sup>

Yeziarska, or the narrator, with a smile approves the beauty of Sonya's pure passion, as well as Ushijima's valuation on Cervantes, although the narrator satirizes Sonya's rashness in pushing forward vigorously and greedily. Behind Sonya is Jaky, Rosenblat, and Abe as ardent counterparts in the ghetto. Sonya with the

humiliating designation, Salome, turns into a Don Quixote figure as a friendly earnest dreamer and is given to greed and innocence and, as a result, becomes a pleasant and fascinating character. Making use of Ushijima's words again, Yezierska "denies, at the same time confirms" (598)<sup>4</sup> Sonya and her fellow Jewish men. Wearing Hollins' dress, leading Rosenblat by the nose, and spurring Abe to a long-forgotten memory, young Sonya's ambition is full of passion and self-confidence and thereby influences her surrounding Jewish fellows. Each Jewish fellow who succeeds in each field shares greed, passion, and humor with Sonya, different from the Anglo-Saxon Manning who she cannot understand.

Episodes concerned with Manning do not continue evenly; yet, on the other hand, humorous episodes are arranged as interval breaks. Jewish aspects as narrative relaxations replace the tense scenes with Puritans at periodic intervals as Sonya's battles with slapstick-like comedy. The settlement work is full of unnatural smiles and make-believe charities, although Manning cannot perceive the minute differences. It is like a castle in the air, the windmill, to which Don Quixote stands up, but Sonya eventually establishes herself as a creator of beauty standing firmly on the ground. According to Rottenberg in *Performing Upward Mobility*, "the motives and the way in which a person transforms him/herself are important" (59)<sup>5</sup>. Sonya and Jaky reject "mass production and the homogenization" by seeking "individuated beauty" (Rottenberg 68). Sonya returns to the Lower East Side ghetto, to express herself refusing Manning who is a slave to convention and hypocrisy. Without successful Jewish fellows, it is doubtful whether the vigorous Sonya can sustain herself during the continuous tensions. Sonya distributes the beauty she used to "starve for" (*ST* 23) as her own form of philanthropy on Grand Street in the Lower East Side. "Triumphant, she rose" (*ST* 184) at the last scene. Sonya bears both the irony and the affection of Yezierska. The Lower East Side also harbors poverty and dreams, but they are completely suited to Sonya's fresh start followed by her perseverance. Returning to the ghetto is the appropriate denouement for the

unyielding heroine.

### 5. Family in *Bread Givers*

Carol B. Schoen enumerates conflicting tensions—"the wish to become part of America versus the pull of tradition and family," "a woman's desire for self-fulfillment versus the wish for home, husband and children," and "the desire for material comforts versus the demands for intellectual achievement" (Schoen 62)—and sets a high value on Yezierska's expression in *Bread Givers*. Sara, however, places nothing at either extreme. Sara is "part of America," becoming a teacher in the ghetto. At the same time, she cannot resist "the pull of tradition and family," so she eventually accepts her father who is the personification of the Old World. Reb Smolinsky undoubtedly is "part of America," although he seems to be an outsider among the New World. It is not necessary for immigrants to abandon their tradition in order to live in the New World; besides, Sara's future husband, Hugo, makes an offer to take care of Smolinsky and to hand down their traditions.

For Sara, "a woman's desire for self-fulfillment" is to "be my boss," and thus she ultimately attains her aim. If she had not refused the wrong suitor and had not gone away from her family, the goal should have been different. She might realize her "wish for home, husband and children" without fail. The realization leads to "the pull of tradition and family." Sara's future husband is not "the American-born man" she has dreamed of; however, Hugo is a prime example of immigrant children and clearly is "his own boss." Dewey and Smyth, with whom Yezierska met and fell in love, are Puritans; nevertheless, Hugo is set to be Jewish because of the strong race consciousness that requires that they carry on their traditions.

Concerning the last conflict, "the desire for material comforts versus the demands for intellectual achievement," there is a typical vivid description written by a writer who experienced a terrible hunger.

“My [Sara’s] portion depended on her mood of the minute. If I’m lucky to strike her when she feels good, then the spoon will go deep down into the pot and come up heaping full. If she feels mean, then I get only from the tip of the spoon, a stingy portion. God! She holds in her hands my life, my strength, new blood for my veins, new clearness in my brain to go on with the fight. Oh! If she would only give me enough to fill myself, this one time!” (*BG* 167-68).

It is not important for Sara to have abundance, but it is necessary for her to have just enough in her poverty without daily provisions. At the same time, the existence of Fania only with material comfort indicates that it is essential for them to maintain composed attitude, such as virtue and purity, deprived from the Old World.

Sara is fully developed, with diverse, conflicting factors as an American, and she and Hugo accept Reb Smolinsky who used to be an object of aversion. The last phrase is the famous quotation in the feminism-gender criticism. “I felt the shadow still there, over me. It wasn’t just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me” (*BG* 297). The weight of the generations, as well as Reb Smolinsky’s, is the weight of the “*Bread Givers*” of this text’s title. Bread might be a tradition and convention of the Old World. Daily bread is necessary for life; however, it can be constraining when Sara is absorbed in acquiring knowledge. Yossef Goer points out that the title “*Bread Givers*” is the translation of “broit [broyt] gibbers” in Yiddish. The translated title, from Yiddish to English, is rated as bitter irony and realism by Schoen. “*Bread Givers*” has a clear implication of the relation between givers and receivers; “Bread Winners” does not. Selfish Mirsky gives his wife only negative aspects of “bread” as conventional conjugal relations. Another “Bread Giver,” Reb Smolinsky’s notion is something Sara cannot admit, although his wife takes it for granted. Sara certainly becomes *mentsh* observing her mother and sisters, declining Max, and retaining her beliefs without being a victim of the

circumstances. This is why Sara can bear the weight of the generations without fleeing from the negative aspects and can tread her path to the future in the New World.

Yeziarska does not like her father's dominance or his nuisance of marriage; however, she did not step into the New World too far either. She struggled with her loneliness and bore the tradition and her duty as a member of her family. Because of the author's effort, Sara can embody diverse characteristics that are not limited to binary oppositions. Characters that are the opposite but resemble each other, Sara and Reb Smolinsky, generate the attraction of *Bread Givers*. It is not too much to say that Yeziarska's feeling of alienation and homelessness could bring out the superiority of *Bread Givers*. Her homelessness originated in the conflict with her own traditional father; nevertheless, the emotional dynamics lead to a text with diversity and richness.

## 6. The Place to Return: "Free Vacation House"

Yeziarska wrote down her sister Annie's story in Yiddish, although Yeziarska reconstructed it for "Free Vacation House" in English. Annie is two or three years older than Anzia Yeziarska and gets married when she is 18 years old. Even after frequent childbirth and in poverty, she "worked to gain social benefits for all of them" (Henriksen 21). Annie began working at a sweatshop when she was 14, so she could tell Yeziarska the story only in Yiddish. The original story was totally different from the text after Yeziarska writes and puts details again and again. The text is full of dramatic factors, injected with stronger feelings, and harsher invented incidences. As soon as the narrator returns home to her husband and children after two weeks away, which were just like a prison term, she gets "so happy and thankful" and describes the following:

How good it was feeling for me to be able to move around my own house, like I

pleased. I was always kicking that my rooms was [sic] small and narrow, but now my small rooms seemed to grow so big like the park. I looked out from my window on the fire-escapes, full with bedding and garbage-cans, and on the wash-lines full with the clothes. All these ugly things was grand in my eyes. Even the high brick walls all around made me feel like a bird what just jumped out from a cage. And I cried out, "Gott sei dank! Gott sei dank!" (*HIF* 49)

This text's heroine is different from other later heroines in terms of her feelings toward the ghetto. Although she calls her house "small and narrow" and her own place "ugly," she expresses her joy at coming back to the ghetto honestly and straightforwardly even after a short term of two weeks away. The phrase "the high brick walls all around" reminds us of European ghettos that were originally established to isolate Jews from Christians. Although the vacation house is "free" (it is not only free of charge but also free from the drudgery of the kitchen and childbearing), it binds her to their rules and a sense of humiliation because of the charity she receives. The original story was narrated by her sister Annie, so the origin of the story is Annie's experience and her emotions; consequently, it is completely different from other, later texts. Following their conventional father, Annie marries Katz, a Jew, and establishes a happy household (Henriksen 22). Returning to the ghetto, the narrator feels "like a bird what jumped out form a cage" and cries in her mother tongue even if she sees "ugly things," which is different from later heroines who consider the ghetto a cage to be left. Although Annie's sister, Anzia Yeziarska, bears Arnold Levitas a daughter, Louise, in 1912, with the baby, she leaves for California, where another sister lives. After the baby was taken back to the husband's house, Yeziarska begins living by herself. Yeziarska's attempt to build a family life collapses and she was supported mentally as well as physically by writing, eventually creating *Hungry Hearts*.

What Yeziarska wrote, according to her sister's experience, may be in fact the

microcosm of her literature. The narrator in her literary life has actually known the significance of the ghetto. The narrator has her origin Annie who also remains in the ghetto and is self-fulfilling just like Muhmenkeh and Shlomoh.

## 7. Conclusion

In *Arrogant Beggar*, Adele barely escapes from an incomprehensible space like Home; moreover, she encounters the embodiment of the ghetto, Muhmenkeh. She is independent and gives Adele generous and willing cooperation. The mother-like figure shares her characteristics with Shlomoh in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*. As Rottenberg points out, capitalist mass production produces homogeneity and commonality: Yezierska's characters stress "the importance of individual self-reliance and accomplishments" (Rottenberg 69). Not only Adele, Muhmenkeh, and Shlomoh but also Sonya as well as successful Jewish characters in the ghetto are self-sufficient in the end. Sara, in *Bread Givers*, after acquiring college education, returns to the ghetto and to her family except for the regretful runaway, Fannie, and attains the magnanimous ideal that is explained beyond simplistic binary oppositions. She has to write in English and sometimes translates the notion of Yiddish for "Free Vacation House" into English to sell on the American marketplace; however, this does not mean she renounces Yiddish and completely leaves the ghetto in order to influence upon WASP. Her temporary departure from the ghetto has originality because her wanderings cherish her Jewish birth and her thoughts as remaining Yiddish. As Tuan affirms, "it takes time to know a place" (Tuan 179).

According to Zaborowska, the happy endings in Yezierska's stories seem "superficial and hardly credible when compared to the 'realistic' descriptions of the hardships and disillusionments" (129).<sup>6</sup> The reality of the ghetto, as mentioned in Chapter I, is not satisfactory for immature heroines and narrators; nevertheless, the fairytale romance or happy endings as well as allegorical characters—Muhmenkeh, Shlomoh, and the successful Jews in *Salome of the Tenements*—or the embodiment



of the ghetto creates an intimate atmosphere in the Lower East Side. According to Tuan, “[h]uman places become vividly real through dramatization. Identity of place is achieved by dramatizing the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life” (Tuan 178). Due to Yeziarska’s rhetoric: fairytale mentality and happy endings, the ghetto is described vividly and real.

According to the last paragraph of “Dreams and Dollars,” as quoted above, the narrator knows “now why she had come back home again... back to the relentless, penny-pinched poverty—but a poverty rich in romance, in dreams—rich in its very hunger of unuttered, unsung beauty” (*HIF* 232). The factor of fairytale gives the filthy poor ghetto romance, dream, and beauty. According to Tuan, to know a place intimately, seeing from the outside and reflecting our experience as well as long residence are needed. Due to the reflection, place achieves concrete reality as it is quoted above. Yeziarska, who got out of the ghetto, actually does not go back to the Lower East Side to live; nevertheless, she describes the ghetto as a place from the outside. As Rottenberg points out, race and gender are immutable and are considered as a “difference” rather than as good/bad or high/low. However, class *is* changeable given its hierarchical nature. The writer Yeziarska has climbed the ladder of success and is physically incapable of returning to the ghetto: as shown by her inability to use the trolley and bus in California and the fact that she cannot stay in steerage after she became a successful author. The author, however, compares the ghetto to an open cage where you can be independent whether you are from the working-class or the middle-class. After experiencing the dominant world, space, narrators and heroines come back to the cage with poverty, filthiness, smell, and noise, accepting their ethnicity and gender, and they notice the beauty of the place. The entrance and exit of the cage-like ghetto is what identifies and establishes them.

In light of Yeziarska’s life, she did not return to the open cage; however, the irony of her situation saves her stories and novels from being ordinary. The platitude of being simple pastoral stories is inappropriate in this case. Uniqueness

of Yezierska's works exists in the fact she made the place full of fantasy, romance, dream, and beauty, through realistic descriptions of actual matters: poverty, filthiness, and noisiness.

## Notes

1 Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2010).

2 *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1995).

3 *Unabridged Dictionary on World Literature* (Tokyo: Shueisha, 1997).

4 Nobuaki Ushijima, Commentary by the Translator, *New Translation Don Quixote: Part I* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999).

5 Catherine Rottenberg, *Performing Upward Mobility* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2008).

6 Magdalena J. Zaborowska, *How We Found America: reading gender through East European immigrant narratives* (The U. of North Carolina P., 1995).

## Conclusion

“The Open Cage” is the name of one of the last stories written by Anzia Yezierska and it symbolizes her ghetto. The Chutes, who Yezierska met for the first time in January 1962, “hired a temporary secretary, who brought a tape recorder. . . . A few days later the Chutes handed her the typed transcript of their conversation” (Henriksen 289). Yezierska’s eyesight was failing. According to her daughter Henriksen, Yezierska wrote and rewrote this parable for two or three years, although she couldn’t sell it to any magazine in her lifetime until 1970. The tape remains at Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center in Boston University. This episode of the bird, a chickadee according to old Yezierska, is recounted with her usual effusiveness. When her narration comes to her release of the chickadee, she recites the last stanza of a poem in a tearful voice:

He, who, from zone to zone,  
 Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,  
 In the long way that I must trace alone,  
 Will lead my steps aright.

The poem is written by William Cullen Bryant and is titled “To a Waterfowl” (1818). Yezierska says that she could hear the poem from the bird and she recites it more than once in the tape even edited and cut what is unsuitable for the preservation. Although in “The Open Cage,” the poem is left unquoted for the sake of restrained narration, the intense impression and the message the bird conveys emphasize a significant motive of Yezierska.

This thesis focuses more on the open cage than the bird itself to show the significance of place to the writer. The bird comes from the sky, gets into an empty cage and is revived but cannot be fed; consequently, it is released into the sky. The

narrator or Yeziarska traces the bird but is led properly, as the poem indicates, to return to her cage-like apartment. Her rooming house in Riverside Drive resembles the Lower East Side ghetto in terms of the odor, noise, and inconvenience the roomers suffer and endure.

Originally, the ghetto was the Jewish community surrounded by high walls in Europe and the purpose of the area was to isolate Jews from Christians. In Russian Poland there were no such ghettos, but Jewish people lived in and stayed terrified by the pogroms because they had to live in *shtetles* in the Pale of Settlement following the Diaspora. The Lower East Side ghetto in America, however, has no such walls, but anyone visiting the area would notice the difference in the residents: the hygiene, odor, and noise.

In light of Tuan's theory, Russian Poland is space—it has both the openness and threat. Similar to the birds who try to escape and find sanctuary, the narrators or Yeziarska arrive at the ghetto in the United States caring nothing for the uncomfortable steerage. At first glance, the impoverished and humiliating marketplace diminishes their confidence and eagerness to live. Assimilated Jews and WASPs consider the insiders of the ghetto inferior; nevertheless, most of Yeziarska's heroines do not lose their desire and rather attempt to conquer their hunger. Some of them cannot speak English, so they go to school, learn to speak English, and find "America" metaphorically; they find a way to express themselves in the U.S. and get out of the cage while other heroines rely on other people for their escape. The repugnance, the sense of inferiority, and the hunger are the driving forces that make a leap and soar upward to the sky.

Outside of the ghetto, in places such as California and New England, the protagonists find even the scenery artificial: "The sky is too blue. The grass is too green. This beauty is all false paint, hiding dry rot" (*HIF* 230) (on California in "Dreams and Dollars"). They can recognize the beauty but they still experience discomfort: "the sky wasn't my sky, the hills weren't my hills. It was a beauty that

pushed me back into my homelessness” (*RR* 213) (on New England in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*). The space out of the ghetto heroine’s experience means the release from poverty and financial difficulties; the middle class manage to live on their own. Some of them, however, wonder about it because the release was not made by their own power or will while others exhaust their resources. Assimilated Jews’ institutions or Anglo-Saxon husbands only give them protection in condescending and patronizing ways. They gradually notice the significance of the place and return. The heroines eventually obtain a means to be independent and return to the ghetto.

They return to their cage of their own volition since the seemingly closed cage is actually open. Having challenged their assimilation, they realize the importance of a place that cannot humiliate them. Originally, the ghetto in the memory of Yezierska was a shameful and inferior place compared to mainstream American society because before the self-realization, she could only repeat her WASPs’ or Assimilated Jews’ prejudice. The place connected with security and repose is needed in the middle-class mainstream. After the experience of space, protagonists try to think things out in their own middle-class people’s heads as equals and accept the place. The entrance and exit of the place is the turning point for narrators and heroines as well as for Yezierska herself. The place is the pause or the turning point when she tries to assimilate herself to the New World.

The theme of the return to the ghetto adopts the insiders’ perspectives; at the same time, Yezierska repeatedly and positively writes from the perspective of the outsider. After the entrance and exit of the open cage, the Lower East Side ghetto, Yezierska’s protagonists can be independent and established, accepting ethnicity and gender. By virtue of their accomplishments they share education, beauty, and tradition instead of condescending charity. Self-sufficient or successful characters in the ghetto give heroines a different perspective and the open cage provides a different setting. The ghetto full of poverty, filth, odor, and noise is transformed into a place of romance, dreams, and beauty. The protagonists are intimate with every

aspect of the ghetto, and the intimacy renders the Lower East Side ghetto as an irreplaceable place. In the light of Tuan's notion, Yezierska creates the ambivalent place because of her unique experience.

Anzia Yezierska was called the "Sweatshop Cinderella" not because she left her ghetto in order to be accepted by WASPs or the establishment. From searching for her original glass shoe—the ambivalent place, the ghetto, or the open cage—she cuts out her place in the immense space of America.

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