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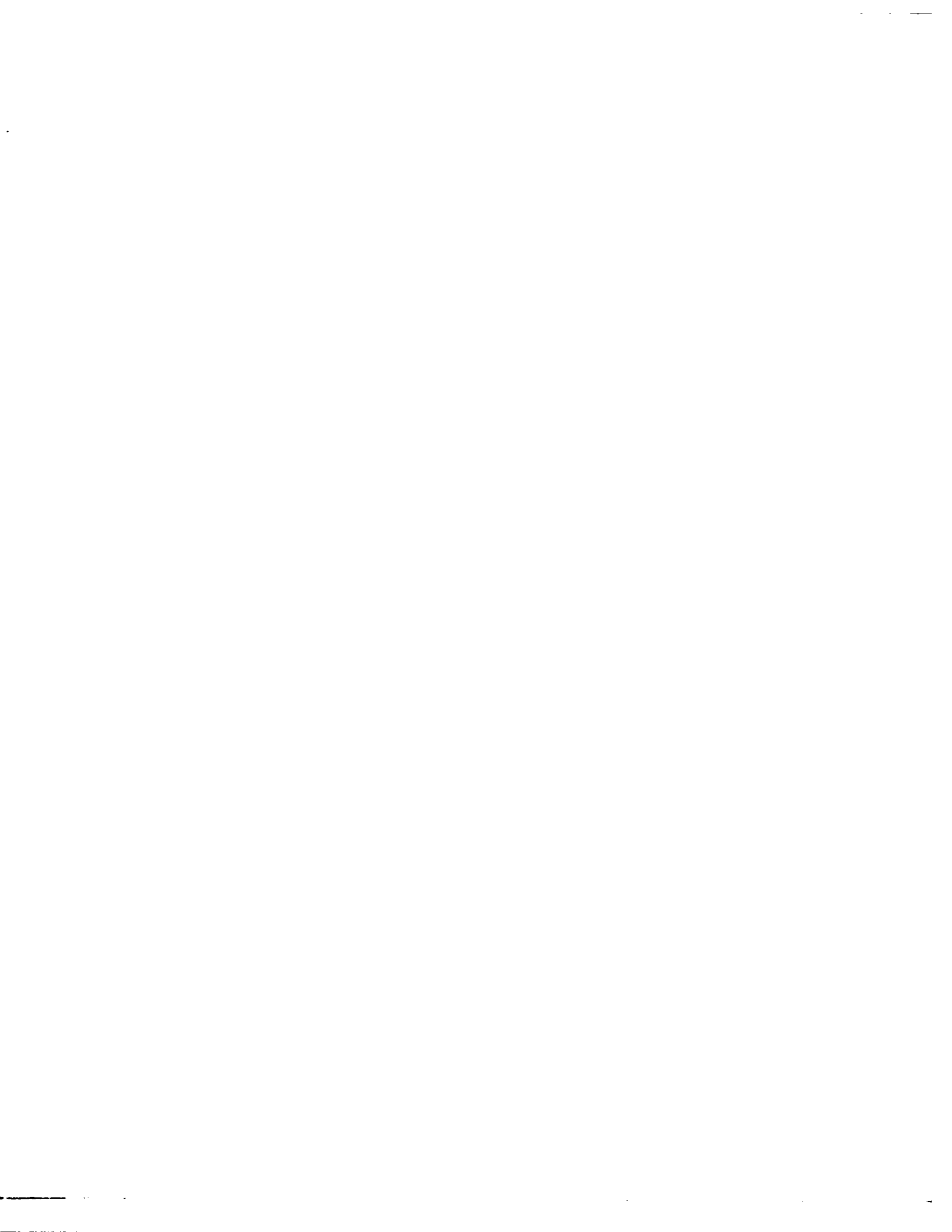
**The polemics of the heart: A study of the complete works of
Anzia Yezierska**

Meer, Esther Faygale, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1987

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THE POLEMICS OF THE HEART: A STUDY OF
THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ANZIA YEZIERSKA

by

ESTHER MEER

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
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Preface and Acknowledgements

The story of Anzia Yezierska is the story of an immigrant who refused to let her background stifle her. Faced with the dual handicap of being a woman and an immigrant, Yezierska was able to transcend her circumstances in order to create. She did, however, pay a price for her independence. Here is the story of the successful yet ultimately forlorn artist to whom success came too abruptly and too transiently. Yet her story is also one of courage and indefatigable will, of a woman who never abandoned her struggle to "become a person."

In this critical study, I will discuss Yezierska's presentation of the theme of alienation as it related to various groups of which she was a member -- immigrants, women, people in the twentieth-century -- and as it related to her as an individual. Essentially all of her works deal with this theme. Yezierska is an outsider in her family (in Bread Givers), in her community, in various types of communities (All I Could Never Be, Red Ribbon on a White Horse, Salome of the Tenements) and in the universe as a whole (Red Ribbon on a White Horse). In some works she is presented as a loner in school or at work; in others she is shown as being outside her religious and/or cultural background. Through a series of learning experiences she comes to trust in herself, in her own uniqueness and goodness. At this point she achieves a sense of tranquility. Thus, her own growth as an artist and as an individual

informs the content of all of her writings. As one critic has noted, she had but one story to tell, and she told it in many different ways.

I would at this point like to thank all of the individuals who have helped me to "become a person." It is of course virtually impossible to mention all of the professors, colleagues and friends who have inspired me, encouraged me and lent me support during the course of my educational career. However, I feel it is necessary to mention a few of those individuals who have helped me along.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my great debt to my late father, Joseph Meer (Peppi) who loved and supported me throughout his life, and who showed me what it means to be a "person." To him I owe my interest in the humanities and in humanity as a whole. His gift of love carried me through many a dreary period. This work is dedicated to him.

Secondly I am most grateful to my mentors, Morris Dickstein, David Gordon and Katherine Rogers, whose keen critical judgement and interest in my project helped make this dissertation a reality. In addition to being my advisors, they have also been friends and supporters, and I thank them for that.

I would like to warmly thank my friend, Tamí, who stood by me and encouraged me during periods of doubt and anxiety. His confidence in me far exceeded my own at times; he has shown me the meaning of true friendship.

I am grateful to all of my friends and colleagues in the English department at the City University Graduate

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Lastly, I should like to acknowledge my debt to the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. This organization helped me financially with a generous dissertation grant.

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Backgrounds: The Immigrant and the Woman in American Society

"The history of immigration is a history of alienation and its consequences," writes Oscar Handlin in his classic study of the immigrant population and its adjustment crises, The Uprooted. According to Handlin, the immigrants who came to America suffered innumerable psychological and sociological problems as a result of their entry into a new culture, a culture which differed enormously from the cultures they had left behind. They had to find a new meaning to their lives, often under harsh and hostile circumstances. Emigration had taken them out of their traditional accustomed environments.¹

According to Irving Howe, coming to America with inflamed hopes, some of the Jewish immigrants, especially, became demoralized and others permanently undone: they suffered from spiritual confusion and found it hard to practice the rituals of traditional Judaism in urban America.²

The pressures of the city and city life certainly did not promote religious faith in the immigrant, Jewish or otherwise. Immigrant literature reflected this fact. For example, the protagonist of Samuel Ornitz's novel Haunch, Paunch and Jowl (1923), Meyer Hirsch, is elated at his Bar Mitzvah only because this day marks the end of his cheder (Hebrew school) days. As he tells us,

It is like saying good-bye to the bug-bear of religion, the religion that everlastingly thunders--fear, beware, be warned, be afraid of the God of Vengeance; a God eternally sitting in judgement. A mysterious, unseen, unseeable,

unknowable and fearful thing--God. No wonder this religion is disagreeable, and unbelievable to us--pagans of the city wild. Little wonder we rebelled against our daylong studies of Biblical lore with emphasis on the raw curses and chastisements, the subtle Apocryphal enlargement of the portrait of the God of Vengeance; the endless Rabbinical rules and rites and laments to appease that insatiable monster--God of Vengeance. No beauty. Nothing spiritual. You may vanquish or seduce a pagan with beauty; but fear--a pagan laughs at fear. This is how I translate today my feeling towards my religion, but on my confirmation day I simply felt, -- I can't swallow that bunk; I puke it right back. (Part One, Chapter IX)

The immigrants were uprooted, and it was not easy to establish new roots in a strange country:

In transplantation, while the old roots were sundered, before the new were established, the immigrants existed in an extreme situation. The shock, and the effects of the shock, persisted for many years; and their influence reached down to generations which themselves never paid the cost of crossing.

No one moves without sampling something of an immigrant's experience ... But the immigrant's alienation was more complete, more continuous, and more persistent. Understanding of their reactions in that exposed state may throw light on the problems of all those whom the modern world somehow uproots.³

Perhaps then, as Handlin suggests, there is a connection, albeit a tenuous one, between the immigrant's experience of alienation and modern man's feelings of alienation and existential "strangeness." But we should not carry the connection too far because the difference between the immigrant's sense of "strangeness" and modern man's is that the former is literally a stranger in a new world; he is a part of an older, more coherent society. Modern man, on

the other hand, feels alienated in society as a result of intangible, often inexpressible factors.

The immigrant was part of what is frequently referred to as the Old World, and he had to adjust somehow to a New World, a world of different values and mores, a world in which his traditional values held little or no sway. Figuratively, the immigrant found himself between two worlds. As Handlin tells us, for weeks, and often for months, the immigrant was in suspense between the old and the new,⁴ literally in transit.

Even when he found himself successful in the New World, he frequently felt guilty about his success, and sometimes could not quite accept it:

For success, whether at first hand or second, put a distance between the immigrant and the ideals of his former life. One way or another he probed this consequence of separation from Europe: that to live in the old way was to court failure and hardships, while success brought the pangs of unsettled, unrooted values.⁵

Abraham Cahan tells us in the second part of his autobiography, The Education of Abraham Cahan, "I was torn between the pleasure of new achievement and the longing for home. Sometimes, in my restlessness, I didn't recognize my old self."⁶

And Cahan's fictional character, David Levinsky, in The Rise of David Levinsky is also a perfect example of the successful immigrant who feels empty in spite of his success because he has abandoned his old values and aspirations. Levinsky's success does not bring him happiness or self-

fulfillment, and he tells us in the closing chapter of the novel that he somehow yearns for the time when he was poor:

Am I happy?

There are moments when I am overwhelmed by a sense of my success and ease. I become aware that thousands of things which had formerly been forbidden fruit to me are at my command now. I distinctly recall that crushing sense of being debarred from everything, and then I feel as though the whole world were mine. One day I paused in front of an old East Side restaurant that I had often passed in my days of need and despair. The feeling of desolation and envy with which I used to peek in its windows came back to me. It gave me pangs of self-pity for my past and a thrilling sense of my present power. The prices that had once been prohibitive seemed so wretchedly low now. On another occasion I came across a Canal Street merchant of whom I used to buy goods for my push-cart. I said to myself: "There was a time when I used to implore this man for ten dollars' worth of goods, when I regarded him as all-powerful and feared him. Now he would be happy to shake hands with me." ... At this moment, as these memories were filing by me, I felt as though now there was nobody in the world who could inspire me with awe or render me a service.

And yet in all such instances I feel a peculiar yearning for the very days when the doors of that restaurant were closed to me and when the Canal Street merchant was a magnate of commerce in my estimation. Somehow, encounters of this kind leave me dejected. (David Levinsky, pp. 525-26).

In Red Ribbon on a White Horse, Anzia Yezierska experiences a similar feeling of uneasiness in the glittering Hollywood world of the 1920's. She has ambivalent feelings about her new-found success.

Leaning against the cushions of the car that was taking me to the home of Rupert Hughes, I caught sight of my straggling hair in the mirror. I smoothed it back as best I could. I looked down at my plain blue serge skirt, my thick-soled sandals. Why had I never dressed like other women? It wasn't just a matter of being poor. The poorest shopgirl with her mind on style

managed to look as smart as other shopgirls. I never could or would fit into the up-to-date clothes that everybody else wore. Even now when I no longer had to search through bargain basements, now that I had money enough to shop at the best stores, perversity made me cling to my pushcart clothes. Even in Hollywood I wanted to be myself--whatever that was.

But you're no longer scrubbing floors or punching a machine, I told myself. You're on your way to meet who's who in Hollywood, about to be initiated in the sacred circle of "eminent authors." I looked at my hands, bitten with the sharp red and gray of work. Why didn't you celebrate the great event, treat yourself to a manicure? Do you have to look like a yenteh from Hester Street to be yourself?

Immediately the other side of me protested. What's wrong with looking like Hester Street? I am Hester Street. Why should I be afraid to be what I am? Why should I dress up to meet them? Would they dress down to meet me? The familiar feel of the creases in my blouse, my unpolished shoes, the shine of my old skirt reassured me that with all the change around me, I was still unchanged. I was still myself.

But can you be yourself with the money from the movies tucked safely in the bank? You're afraid to spend your money and you're afraid to give it up. You're afraid to plunge back into the poverty and dirt from which money has saved you. Yet you fear what money may do to you. You want to be a person of importance. You want to be a success--and yet you can't give up what you were when you were nobody. You want too much. (Red Ribbon, pp. 56-57).

Therefore, as we can see, success posed problems for the immigrant--but, obviously, so did failure. When the immigrant was unsuccessful, as was often the case, he began to think that the best way to live was to look back to the past, and as the "good old days" receded farther and farther into the dim past, the immigrant looked back to the old days instead of ahead to the future. He fell back upon tradition.

In this world the notion of improvement is delusive. The best hope is that matters grow not worse...The peasants look back (they remember they lived through yesterday; who knows if they will live through today?) and their fancy rejoices in the better days that have passed, when they were on the land and the land was fertile, and they were young and strong, and virtues were fresh...In this world then, as in the Old Country, the safest way was to look back to tradition as a guide.⁷

Some peasants, then, lived in the New World, but practiced the lifestyles of the old; for them tradition was still sacred. This was not always true of their children, though. These first generation Americans saw adaptation and acculturation to the New World as necessary ingredients of success. This is what led to the inter-generational conflicts between immigrant parents and their children. There was a real generation gap between parents, who wanted to hold on to tradition themselves and imbue their children with traditional values and beliefs, and children, who refused to accept the old way of life.

As the young matured and discovered wills of their own in school and in more frequent worldly contacts, they...were rebellious and refused to be bound. In the end, all was tinged with vanity, with success as cruel as failure. Whatever lot their sons had drawn in this new contentious world, the family's oneness could not survive it. It was a sad satisfaction to watch the young advance, knowing that every step forward was a step away from home.⁸

Somehow the older immigrants felt that the only way to survive as a group was to separate themselves from the dominant culture, but surely this type of existence proved a costly one in terms of the immigrants' emotional and

psychological well-being:

The old folk knew...they would not come to belong, not through their own experience nor through their offspring. The only adjustment they had been able to make to life in the United States had been one that involved the separateness of their group, one that increased their awareness of the differences between themselves and the rest of society. In that adjustment they had always suffered from the consciousness they were strangers. The demand that they assimilate, that they surrender their separateness, condemned them always to be outsiders. In practice, the free structure of American life permitted them with a few restraints to go their own way, but under the shadow of a consciousness that they would never belong. They had thus completed their alienation from the culture to which they had come, as from that which they had left.⁹

Pictures of separation abound in immigrant literature. For example, Anzia Yezierska asks in Red Ribbon on a White Horse, "Is it the fear of being a foreigner that makes me want to explain myself so much?" (p. 61). Throughout her work she conveys her feelings of "strangeness," her sense of not quite belonging to American society.

In immigrant fiction, characters are separated from those around them by various factors, such as their appearance, their ideas, their speech patterns. In the classic immigrant novel, Call It Sleep, the young protagonist, David Schearl, experiences a sense of differentness when he finds himself communicating in three languages, English, Yiddish and Hebrew. Like David, many other fictional immigrants have bilingual and even trilingual backgrounds, and this also sets them apart from the general population and creates uncertainty in their minds as to which world they are

actually living in. In Yeziarska's Bread Givers, Sara's voice is Yiddish-English, and many of her idioms are literal translations of Yiddish expressions which use Yiddish syntax: "It began dancing before my eyes, the twenty-five pennies, like a shower of gold into my mother's lap. I cried, 'Now will you yet call me crazy head? Give only a look what 'Blood and Iron' has done.'" (pp. 22-23). Thus, language also creates barriers.

But the barriers that separated immigrants and native Americans were mostly created by the reactions of native Americans to the steady influx of newcomers into the country. Although some happily welcomed the new arrivals, others were not as quick to accept them. The man who thought himself an Anglo-Saxon found proximity to the other folk just come to the United States uncomfortable and distasteful, and in his own life sought to increase rather than to lessen the gap¹⁰ between his position and theirs.

The immigrants often found American public officials unwilling to empathize with them, to understand their individual problems. Of course, there were some very understanding public officials, but it seems that the behavior of many of them did not meet the needs of immigrants, and the immigrant literature of the late 1800's and early 1900's frequently details cases of indifference.

His [the immigrant's] particular enemies were the officials charged with his special oversight. When misfortune drove him to seek assistance or when government regulations brought them to inspect his home, he encountered the social workers, made ruthless in the disregard of his

sentiments by the certainty of their own benevolent intentions. Confident of their personal and social superiority and armed with the ideology of the sociologists who had trained them, the emissaries of the public and private agencies were bent on improving the immigrant to a point at which he would no longer recognize himself.¹¹

As regards the Eastern European Jew, even his fellow Jews, the native-born and German Jews (known as the "uptowners" because they tended to live in the uptown sections of New York) found his presence irksome. As Moses Rischin tells us,

At a time when established Jews were becoming acutely sensitive to the opinions of their fellow New Yorkers, they were faced with the prospect of a mass migration of coreligionists from Eastern Europe, whose coming seemed to threaten their hard-won respectability. German Jews had shed the tradesman's mien and were acquiring the higher mercantile manner. As they became Americanized, their ties with the German community in New York became less pronounced and they, along with Jews of American origin, were discovering a common identity as Jews that they had not known earlier.

Yet in the days of the great Jewish migration, to be identified as a Jew became more and more irksome. The hosts of uncouth strangers, shunned by respectable New Yorkers, seemed to cast a pall upon all Jews. Disturbed native and German Jews, heirs to the age of reason and science, condemned everything that emanated from the downtown quarter...German Jews devised comprehensive schemes to divest downtown brethren of the marks of oppression and to remodel them in the uptown image.¹²

Thus, from all sides, the immigrant faced the problem of losing his own identity and cultural uniqueness. He was expected to assimilate and adopt the behavior and manners of his new country, yet this often meant losing part of his own traditions and cultural values. Many immigrants were not

willing to pay this price. They did not want to "melt" into the melting pot, as America was coming to be considered. (The term itself is derived from Israel Zangwill's 1908 melodrama The Melting Pot.)

De Witt Clinton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman all glorified the fusion through immigration, of a mixed and still developing people. Herman Melville gave this cosmopolitan belief its noblest expression: "We are the heirs of all time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance. On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and peoples are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearthstone in [an American] Eden."¹³

This idea, although attractive, also led to the implication that the product of many different ethnic groups, rather than the groups individually, was important. The melting pot concept was soon connected to Darwin's idea of natural selection and it was believed that "the peaceful blending of many nationalities has resulted in the survival of the fittest."¹⁴

Certain groups fared better than did others in regard to the impressions they left upon native Americans. For example, the peoples of Britain and the Anglo-Canadians met so ready an acceptance that contemporary observers scarcely noticed their coming.¹⁵ Jewish immigrants, however, were one of the groups that did not blend into American society well. Interestingly, as Higham tells us, the Jews lost in reputation as they gained in social and economic status:

Alone among European immigrant groups, the Jews...met a distrust that spread along with their

increasing assimilation. The nativistic criticism of Jewish loyalty that had risen during the Civil War vanished as soon as the war ended, but in its place there emerged during the 1870's a far more tenacious pattern of social discrimination. ...The Jew, it now appeared, was not only mercenary and unscrupulous but also clamorously self-assertive --a tasteless barbarian rudely elbowing into genteel society ... In an age of parvenus the Jew provided a symbol of the parvenu spirit. Anti-Semitic discriminations subjected him to a discipline that native Americans could not so easily impose on themselves.¹⁶

Therefore, the Jewish immigrant in particular, but other immigrants as well, found they had to be twice as scrupulous to avoid or at least to lessen the hostility of native Americans. The spirit of American nativism took hold long before the term was coined around 1840 and had its deepest impact long after the word had dropped out of common parlance.¹⁷

Yet despite the many hardships he had to face, the immigrant also found much of value in his newly adopted country. As Meredith Tax tells us, life in the United States had much to offer the new immigrants, especially the women.¹⁸

Many of them came from countries that were largely agrarian, where women were servants or farm wives. Factory work had liberating aspects for them, despite appalling working conditions, discrimination and disorientation. Middle and Southern European peasants stepped over centuries of historical development when they crossed the Atlantic. Customs such as matchmaking and arranged marriages, chaperones, shaved heads and veils, black floor-length dresses, and enforced female illiteracy broke down before the needs of U.S. capitalism. Escaping from these feudal forms of patriarchal control, earning their own money and the right to an independent voice, seemed a great step forward to these women.¹⁹

A step forward, but not far enough. Women immigrants still found they had to overcome discrimination from two fronts: they were discriminated against both by native Americans and by their own male compatriots. Even working women found they could not easily overcome their subordinate position in society:

Although a wage envelope sometimes gave a woman more power within the patriarchal family, it did not completely transform her social position. Rather, her subordinate position in the home and in society at large was reinforced in the workplace, where employers were able to grossly underpay her and thus derive large profits from her labor. A Senate commission that carried out a monumental survey of the working conditions of women and children in the United States found that in 1910, as today, there was a division of labor by sex: "Ordinarily the occupations involving skill, training and responsibility were in the hands of men, while the work of women was apt to be at best only semi-skilled and in many cases purely mechanical. Under these circumstances the difference in earnings of the sexes was very marked."²⁰

Women, especially immigrant women, found that they had to fight back, and they did so by organizing unions. The history of the labor movement in the United States and the woman's involvement in it is a long and complex one; it is well documented by Meredith Tax in her study, The Rising of the Women.

It is important to note that as early as the first decade of the twentieth century, there were women who formulated a very forceful response to what they viewed as the woman's subservient position in modern society. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was an influential leader of the

Industrial Workers of the World, a powerful union founded in 1905 which sought to create a revolution (in the form of a general strike) that would free America's poverty-racked and exploited workers--who were often immigrants and/or women--from wage slavery by removing the capitalists from power and placing in the hands of workers the means of production and distribution. In a 1911 speech she made the following statements; as Tax asserts, the speech clearly shows her sympathy with the struggle for women's liberation as well as the class struggle:

Multitudes of wives and mothers are virtually sex slaves through their direct and debasing dependence upon men for their existence, and motherhood is all too often unwelcome and enforced, while the struggle for existence even in homes where love and affectionate understanding cast their illuminating rays is usually so fierce that life degenerates into a mere animal existence, a struggle for creature comforts, no more, and it is impossible for love to transcend the physical. The mental horizon of the average housekeeper is exceedingly limited, because of the primitive form of labor in the household, the cooking, cleaning, sewing, scrubbing, etc. for an individual family. How can one have depth or mental scope when one's life is spent exclusively within the four walls of one's individual composite home and workshop, performing personal service continually for the same small group, laboring alone and on the primitive plan, doing work that could be better done by socialization and machinery, were not women cheaper than machines today.²¹

Flynn's comments are by no means original. Her ideas can be found in the writings of other feminist thinkers who were considering the "woman question" long before she was born. Her insights were later to find expression in Anzia Yezierska's unpublished "Rebellion of a Supported Wife."

Yeziarska, as we will see, had to grapple with the very problems touched upon by Flynn, woman's financial dependence upon men and the constricting effects of motherhood on the working, or even non-working, woman.

According to Kate Millett, author of Sexual Politics, women, by virtue of the fact that they are members of a subordinate class in society, have to compensate and work doubly hard in order to make up for their inferior societal position. Within a patriarchal society there is a well-defined class structure which operates to create conflicts among the women themselves:

One of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another, in the past creating a lively antagonism between whore and matron, and in the present between career woman and housewife. One envies the other her "security" and prestige, while the envied yearns beyond the confines of respectability for what she takes to be the other's freedom, adventure and contact with the great world. Through the multiple advantages of the double standard, the male participates in both worlds, empowered by his superior social and economic resources to play the estranged women against each other as rivals. One might also recognize subsidiary status categories among women: not only is virtue class, but beauty and age as well.²²

In the works of Anzia Yeziarska, this conflict within the woman is vividly expressed. For example, in Bread Givers, Yeziarska's most popular work, the protagonist, Sara Smolinsky, finds that after she has found a niche in the working world, she still experiences a feeling of emptiness, a feeling that she is missing something in her life: the love, security and prestige that come with marriage. Sara

tells us that in order to achieve her career goals, she had to forfeit the sense of well-being which is a necessary corollary of membership within a coherent family unit, whether it be the nuclear family or the extended family. And she misses this sense of belonging to a closely knit family. When she comes home from college, she wants to reestablish ties with her family:

Till now I had no time to be human or enjoy sociability with people. Now I felt like a prisoner just out from a long confinement in prison. Love ached in me more than if I had been with them all the time. It was like a secret wound that I had kept covered for six years. And now that I bared it, it hurt (p. 242).

But Sara finds that her mother is dying, and soon after her mother's death, her father marries a conniving, greedy widow who wants no part of her. Sara is still alone and experiences feelings of emptiness:

The goal was here. Why was I so silent, so empty? All labor now--and so far from the light. I longed for the close, human touch of life again. My job was to teach--to feed hungry children. How could I give them milk when my own breasts were empty? Maybe after all my puffing myself up that I was smarter, more self-sufficient than the rest of the world---wasn't Father right? He always preached, a woman alone couldn't enter Heaven. "It says in the Torah: A woman without a man is less than nothing. No life on earth, no hope of Heaven." (pp. 269-70).

It turns out that a career is not enough for Sara. She needs, and finds, a lover as well. In this way, Yeziarska, who led a far from conventional life herself, turns her fictional heroine into a conventional Cinderella (rags to riches)

figure who is able to find both a vocation and a beau. Unlike most women of the period, Sara is able to have it all.

Although the ending of Bread Givers is somewhat contrived, unrealistic and sanguine, the beginning of the work is quite true to life. In point of fact, the life of the fictional Sara Smolinsky is very similar to the lives of real women who lived in the early twentieth century, women such as Yeziarska herself and Clara Lemlich, a leader in the New York shirtwaist maker's strike of 1910-11. Tax narrates Lemlich's story.

She came to this country as a young girl and had to go to work to support her family. She studied when she could, often after working eleven hours a day. She recalled later: "All week long I wouldn't see the daylight. I remember once, when things were slow, they let us out in the middle of the day. 'What!' I said, 'Are all the people on strike?' I had never realized that there were so many out during the daytime."²³

From the details of Clara's life we can see that many working women aspired to lives which would take them away from the drudgery of both home and workplace, which in many cases were just two forms of the same evil, and in both of which women were virtual slaves.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn clipped and pasted in her scrap-book a poem expressing the sentiments of many women of the early twentieth century who desired to be freed from the drudgery of housework:

From a kitchen, good Lord, deliver me!
 And from sweeping and scrubbing dirty floors,
 Rescue me, O Lord, from eternally washing dishes
 and baking little paltry messes!
 From building little insignificant stove fires,
 and churning with an insignificant churn O
 save me!
 And from dusting useless furniture! And moving
 around other useless property! And doing
 things on a small scale.
 Lord, I would fain give all this work to
 machinery, and of what that cannot do I will
 do my share!²⁴

Certainly conditions in the sweatshop were little improvement over conditions in the household and over women's domestic duties; according to Tax, the worst conditions for women occurred in industries where work was done on a small scale at home: the garment industry, cigar manufacturing, nutpicking, and various luxury trades.

In the sweatshop everybody worked--young children, invalids, the aged--on jobs like stringing beads, sewing buttons, or plucking feathers to make feather boas. Such work got minimal pay--five or six cents an hour was the average wage--and the health hazards were immense; filth, disease, and death were the inescapable consequences. The workroom spread into the kitchen and bedroom. Many people were crammed together in rooms where they both lived and worked, with no heat, no windows, no hot water. There was never enough space or air. Lint, dust, bits of cloth, and dirt permeated the air, the food, the water and the bed. Such places were breeding grounds for tuberculosis (the "sweaters' disease"), smallpox, glaucoma, diphtheria and other diseases of the very poor.²⁵

Therefore it is little wonder that no matter which way they turned, to matrimony or to the workplace, women, especially immigrant women, who formed a large part of the

work force of the sweatshop and of the factory (in the famous New York shirtwaist makers' strike of 1909-10, for example, 79% of the strikers were women, 70% Russian Jewish women, 6% Italian women, and 3% native born women²⁶), found life in America hard and unfulfilling.

The problems of the immigrant woman, and the ways in which she adjusted or failed to adjust to American society, form the theme of most of the works of Anzia Yezierska, one of the few writers to explore seriously the experiences of the Jewish female immigrant in our society. As Alice Kessler Harris tells us, Yezierska had the unparalleled ability to bring life to this neglected aspect of Jewish culture, plunging us directly into the woman's experience of immigration. Women were no longer creatures of male sexual imagination, or romanticized and sentimental beings as in Mary Antin's The Promised Land. They were, in Yezierska's fiction, independent and self-willed women who suffered the psychic pain of their sacrifices.²⁷

Anzia Yezierska's own life mirrored some of the conflicts faced by the independent, self-willed Jewish immigrant woman. Her beginnings are similar to those of Clara Lemlich; she too was born in the latter part of the nineteenth century (the exact date of her birth is unknown) in a small town near the Russian-Polish border, and she too emigrated with her family to the United States (in 1898).

Her family was large--there were nine children--and her parents poor. Her father, A Talmudic scholar, had chosen, Yeziarska later wrote, "to have his portion in the next world." The family lived off the neighbors' contributions of food and clothing and the mother's occasional earnings from selling small items in the local market. But her father was a learned man who spent his days in Talmudic study and religious discussion. Since the community honored a wife and children who supported such a man, poverty was a source of pride as well as of hunger and cold...When Yeziarska left home at the age of seventeen, rejecting her parents' attempt to mold her into acceptable roles, she wanted most of all to become a "person." Education seemed the plausible route, so she worked in sweatshops and laundries, living in dark and smelly hall rooms until she had learned enough English to begin writing. At first, she paid a janitor's little daughter to teach her the lessons from her school books. Around 1910 she married an attorney: the union lasted only a few months before it was annulled. Almost immediately, she married again. This time, wary of legal complications, Yeziarska chose to have only a religious ceremony and the child born of this match had to be adopted by its father to legitimize it. Yeziarska did not take well to cooking and housekeeping. Marriage proved too restrictive for her explosive personality and after three years she left, taking her daughter with her. It was not long before the pressures of earning a living became too great. Reluctantly she surrendered her child to its father and thereafter lived the independent life she wanted.28

She began writing stories around 1912. Her first short story "The Free Vacation House" (1915), was published in Forum, and in 1919 she wrote another, "The Fat of the Land," which won the Edward O'Brien Award for the Best Short Story of the Year. In 1920 her stories were collected in one volume entitled Hungry Hearts. Next came her first novel, Salome of the Tenements (1922). Her other major works are

Children of Loneliness (1923), a collection of short stories; Bread Givers (1925), a novel; Arrogant Beggar (1927), a novel; All I Could Never Be (1932), a novel; and Red Ribbon on a White Horse (1950), a fictional autobiography. After 1950 she wrote a number of essays, short stories and book reviews. She died in 1970.

Her writings can be divided into two categories, corresponding to her two periods of literary activity: from 1912-1950, when she wrote her seven major works (novels and short stories), and from 1950-1970, when her minor works and autobiography appeared. The major works deal predominantly with the American Jewish immigrant experience as seen through the eyes of a woman. They take place for the most part on New York's Lower East Side.

The Lower East Side, as John Higham tells us, was the cultural capital of New York for Jews, and the thirty-year period from the mid-1880's to the First World War was the great age of the Lower East Side. Russian and Polish Jews had preempted certain streets before the Civil War, but the settlement was small and unimportant until 1880. From then until 1914 it grew by leaps and bounds. ²⁹ Northeast from the tip of Manhattan, a mile from the point where the immigrants landed, the Jewish East Side of New York began. By the turn of the century, it extended northward from Henry Street to Tenth Street and eastward from the Bowery almost to the East River. Within these teeming blocks, some of them the most

crowded in the world, 150,000 Jews lived.³⁰ Yeziarska was able to capture the spirit of the Lower East Side, via her dialogue and character portraits, as few writers (aside from Abraham Cahan) could.

During her other period of literary activity she wrote short stories and narrative essays dealing with the problems of the elderly; many of these works can be found in an anthology entitled The Open Cage. Yeziarska began writing these works when she was in her seventies, and they reflect her growing concern about a group in American society who, like the immigrants, felt alienated from the dominant culture.

Although she dealt with different subjects during her two periods of literary activity, in essence Yeziarska was exploring a similar theme: the hopelessness and despair of the alien in American society. Her other major concern was the woman's search for a vocation and for a fulfilling lifestyle.

Alice Kessler Harris tells us in her introduction to Bread Givers that Yeziarska's works are "suffused with the unending trauma of adjustment, with the psychic stress of adaptation, with alternating currents of exhilaration, weariness, fear, self-doubt, self-loathing, and quiet acceptance that were all part of every individual's entry into America." Thus, "Yeziarska's great gift was her ability to capture the ambiguity created by America's consistent temptations."³¹

Anzia Yeziarska and the Immigrant Novel

Yeziarska's forte was the immigrant novel. This genre takes many forms, but in the hands of Yeziarska it became a "return-to-roots" novel, which called for an appreciation of one's own roots and one's own traditions; it did not stress assimilation into the dominant culture. In her novels she attempted to show that a total separation from one's background is impossible, and even if it were possible, would only lead to a separation from self. Many of her characters find themselves "between two worlds," the Old and the New, and their disjointedness causes them much pain and suffering. Only when they return to their roots do they acquire a sense of tranquility and wholeness.

In Send These to Me John Higham tells us that the first full-fledged immigrant novel in English was Abraham Cahan's Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto, which appeared in 1896. After the publication of this work, the immigrant novel continued to flourish and culminated in Cahan's classic work, The Rise of David Levinsky. As a writer concerned with the lives of American immigrants, Anzia Yeziarska wrote in the tradition of Abraham Cahan and Mary Antin. Her first published story, "The Free Vacation House," appeared in 1915, midway between two landmark works of American Jewish literature, The Promised Land (1912) and The Rise of David Levinsky (1917).

Charles Angoff characterizes Mary Antin's autobiography, The Promised Land, as the last and best statement of gratitude to the American ideal.¹ David Fine, who examined various immigrant novels of the period, argues that in Antin's autobiography (as well as in the works of other writers of the period such as Elias Tobenkin, Ezra Brudno and Edward Steiner), "the psychological complexities of acculturation are evaded in favor of overly enthusiastic affirmations of Americanization."² This statement certainly seems to be an accurate assessment of Antin's The Promised Land. Antin, who came to this country while still a young girl, only tells of the goodness she found in America. Her teachers were encouraging, her neighbors friendly, her education enlightening. America is presented as a modern Utopia where anything is possible, where one can rise to prosperity if one works hard enough.

Abraham Cahan's The Rise of David Levinsky stands in direct contrast to this type of optimistic assimilation literature. The novel details immigrant acculturation, but here we find an ambiguous mixture of material success and spiritual failure, as Fine aptly puts it. The hero, David Levinsky, rises but loses his spiritual heritage:

Levinsky's rise in America is an ironic one, for it is achieved at the expense of what is deepest and truest in him. He has realized the American dream of material success, but the victory is hollow. His life has been a dismal failure, he recognizes from his millionaire perspective,

because his outer achievements fail to satisfy his inner hunger.³

While Mary Antin's work ends with the optimistic statement, "America is the youngest of the nations, and inherits all that went before in history. And I am the youngest of America's children, and in my hands is given all of her priceless heritage, to the last white star espied through the telescope, to the last great thought of the philosopher. Mine is the whole majestic past, and mine is the shining future," Cahan's work ends with Levinsky's statement that "the gloomiest past is dearer than the brightest present." He continues,

My sense of triumph is coupled with a brooding sense of emptiness and insignificance, of my lack of anything like a great, deep interest. I am lonely. Amid the pandemonium of my six hundred sewing-machines and the jingle of gold which they pour into my lap I feel the deadly silence of solitude...I can never forget the days of my misery. I cannot escape from my old self. My past and my present do not comport well. David, the poor lad swinging over a Talmud volume at the Preacher's Synagogue, seems to have more in common with my inner identity than David Levinsky, the well-known cloak manufacturer (David Levinsky, pp. 526-30).

Yeziarska took a philosophical stand which is midway between Mary Antin's unqualified optimism and Cahan's pessimism concerning the validity of the American dream. On the one hand, she accepts the fact that America is a land of promise; on the other hand, she explores the loss of identity and feelings of alienation that come about as a result of the

process of Americanization. In her collection of short stories, Children of Loneliness, both sides of the story are presented.

The first narrative essay of the collection, "Mostly About Myself," is Yeziarska's introspective analysis of her life as a writer and as an immigrant. Regarding the latter, she writes:

When I first came to America, the coldness of the Americans used to rouse in me the fury of a savage. Their impersonal, noncommittal air was like a personal insult to me. I longed to shake them out of their aloofness, their frozen stolidity. But now when I meet an Anglo-Saxon, I want to cry out to him: "We're friends, we're friends, I tell you! We understand the same things, even though we seem to be so different on the outside." ("Children of Loneliness," p.19).

In this essay Yeziarska also tries to analyze her own writing, to tell us why it is so emotional and intense. She attributes her subjective writing style to the fact that in America she had to use her hands rather than her mind:

I am aware there is a little too much of I-I-I, too much of self-analysis and introspection in my writing. But this is because I was forced to live alone so much. I spent most of my youth at work I hated, work which called for only the use of the hands, the strength of my body--not my heart, not my brain. So my thoughts, instead of going out naturally to the world around me, were turned in upon myself ("Children of Loneliness," p.12).

She continues,

I wanted order, order in my head. But then I was too mixed up with too many thoughts to put anything in its place. In a blind sort of way, in

groping for order I was groping for beauty...I was always digging, digging for the beauty that I sensed back of the dust and the disorder ("Children of Loneliness," p. 17).

In this essay Yeziarska also tells of her thwarted desire to have the things that other, richer children had (butter on her bread, a birthday party) but which she could only dream about. In other words, in "Mostly About Myself" she chronicles her disappointment in America. However, in a unique turnabout, the essay ends with a positive statement in which Yeziarska tells us that she has nevertheless found America to be a unique and promising country:

There's no going back to the Old World for anyone who has breathed the invigorating air of America. I return to America with the new realization that in no other country would a nobody from nowhere--one of the millions of lonely immigrants that pour through Ellis Island--a dumb thing with nothing but hunger and desire--get the chance to become articulate that America has given me ("Mostly About Myself," p.31).

In another essay in this collection, "America and I," the narrator again arrives in America only to encounter a series of disappointments. She works for an American family that refuses to pay her any wages; following this she works in a dark sweatshop. She longs to do something with her mind, but can only complain, "All day long only with my hands I work."⁴ She continues to search for "her" America, but cannot find it. Then she begins to read about the Pilgrim fathers, and only at this point does she realize that she

must build America for herself. In writing about the ghetto,
⁵
 she finally finds America.

In a short story in the same collection, "To the Stars," Sophie Sapinsky, who longs to be a writer, is repeatedly told to give up her dream and remain a cook. She speaks to several individuals in a college, such as a dean and an English professor, but they both discourage her. Ultimately she goes to the president of the college and finds a friend in President Irvine, a kindly father figure (who is modelled on John Dewey). He asks his secretary to type up one of her short stories, and he even invites her to speak at a luncheon when she wins a prize for the story. Sophie knows she has found a friend when President Irvine tells her of his plans for a new school for immigrants, and in gratitude she thinks to herself, "After all, it is 'to the stars through difficulties. A meshugeneh like me, a cook from Rosinsky's Restaurant burning her way up to the President for a friend!" (p. 98). The implication here is that only in America could such a friendship have taken place. The biographical aspects of this story are evident. Almost all of Yezierska's stories contain characters who are models of her, projections of her or images of her as she would have liked to be; as she herself said, her stories are filled with self-analysis and introspection.

In "Soap and Water" and "How I Found America" in Yezierska's other collection of short stories, Hungry Hearts,

the young heroines "find" America when they encounter sympathetic and understanding native Americans (a chemistry teacher and a high school teacher) who exemplify the promise of American kindness and understanding. In the first story, the young protagonist, who is a college student, at first encounters a series of heartless college officials (whom she terms "icebergs of convention") such as Dean Whiteside, who says she cannot allow the young woman to become a teacher because of her dirty appearance. She begins to feel that appearance determines position, and if an individual looks different, he or she is unlikely to get ahead:

I wanted the whole world to know that the college was against democracy in education, that clothes form the basis of class distinctions, that after graduation the opportunities for the best positions are passed out to those who are best-dressed, and the students too poor to put up a front are pigeon-holed and marked unfit and abandoned to the mercy of the wind ("Soap and Water," p.172).

The girl is very disillusioned with American society, especially its educational system, until she meets the sympathetic Mrs. Van Ness, her old chemistry teacher. Mrs. Van Ness takes an interest in her and shows her that not all native Americans are cold human beings. The young girl comes out of Mrs. Van Ness's office singing, "America! I found America!" (p. 175).

In "How I Found America" the protagonist longs to learn and receive an academic education, but she is constantly steered in the direction of trade schools and told to be content with manual labor. This short story, which is divided into two parts, opens with the narrator's family, hearing of the good luck of one of their neighbors in America and selling everything it owns in order to come to America. In the second part of the story, the young narrator finds herself in America, working in a sweatshop. Her dreams of America's educational opportunities are shattered. One day she hears about a school for immigrants, but it only turns out to be a trade school. Then at the point at which she is almost totally disillusioned, her sister tells her about her kind-hearted high school teacher; she goes to speak to her, finds a listener who understands her, and feels optimistic again about her future. Like the protagonist in "Soap and Water" this young girl also finds America in an individual with a sympathetic ear.

This story is filled with clichés. Its plot elements--the family selling everything to come to America, the hard life the young woman finds here--can all be found in other works about immigrant life. The same holds true for another tale in this collection, "The Miracle." Here too we find the by-now clichéd theme of the dream of American life giving way to the reality, the American dream gone awry.

"The Miracle" is the story of a young girl from Poland who comes to this country because she has heard that in America millionaires marry poor girls. At first she is unsuccessful in meeting anyone. She works in a shirt-waist factory, and goes to a matchmaker, but he has no matches for her except for an old peddler. However, she begins to attend night school, and here finds the man of her dreams, her teacher. She describes him as a god; he is one of the many "divine" male figures that Yeziarska presents in her fiction, as we will see later on:

My teacher was so much above me that he wasn't a man to me at all. He was a god. His face lighted up the shop for me, and his voice sang itself in me everywhere I went. It was like healing medicine to the flaming fever within me to listen to his voice. And then I'd repeat to myself his words and live in them as if they were religion ("The Miracle," p.135).

The teacher falls in love with her, and in his love the narrator says she has found the miracle of America. This story is somewhat of a Cinderella tale, one which again points to the notion that in America miracles are still possible. The myth of the poor girl marrying a millionaire is only alluded to here, but it will be treated more fully in one of Yeziarska's novels, Salome of the Tenements. Here this idyllic myth, which is based upon a real life event in the Lower East Side, will be exposed as a fairy tale which does not necessarily have a happy ending.

The theme of most of Yeziarska's optimistic stories is the fulfillment of the impossible dream, while the theme of her pessimistic stories is the impossible dream invalidated and shattered. She tells us in "Mostly About Myself" that she had but one story to tell and she told it in many different ways (p.18). However, I believe that Yeziarska had two stories to tell: of America, the land of promise and of America, the land of broken promises.

Yeziarska's works are very modern in the way they detail the spiritual journey undertaken by the immigrant, whose ultimate goal is not assimilation, but the preservation of his cultural identity and separateness from the dominant culture. In her study of the post-Holocaust novel, Immigrant Survivors, Dorothy Seidman Bilik tells us that the early immigrant novel depicts the successful Americanization of the immigrant, while what she terms the "new immigrant novel" focuses on the preservation of cultural identity that is implicit in the retention of Yiddish and Hebrew.⁶ The new immigrant novel is far more concerned with spiritual accounting than with material assets and problems of communication.⁷ Yeziarska's works share some of the characteristics of the new immigrant novel in that most of her characters suffer spiritually as a result of their attempts to become Americanized, and it is the spiritual as well as the material deprivation of her characters which concerns Yeziarska.

But before we make a clearer distinction between the early and late immigrant novels, it may be helpful to characterize the immigrant novel as a separate genre. William Q. Boelhower, author of "The Immigrant Novel as Genre," classifies certain texts as "immigrant novels." He describes the typical formula of the immigrant novel as follows, "an immigrant protagonist(s) representing an ethnic world view, comes to America with great expectations, and through a series of trials is led to reconsider them in terms of his final status."⁸ This paradigm, simplistic as it is, is an apt starting point for the examination of the immigrant novel. We must, however, be careful not to pigeonhole Yezierska's novels into any category or analyze them solely on the basis of any set theory or paradigm. Her works are immigrant novels, yet they are more than that: some are also religious allegories, social tracts, bildungsromans and so on. Nevertheless, if we examine her novels from the perspective of the immigrant novel, we can measure other works of this category against hers.

Boelhower tells us that "the poles of tension that ground the structuring of the fabula are OW (Old World) and NW (New World), both as locations and as sets of mental categories. Its three major moments are EXPECTATION (project, dream, possible world), CONTACT (experience, trials, contrasts), and RESOLUTION (assimilation, hyphenation, alienation)."⁹ Certainly these three points,

expectation, contact and resolution, can be found in other novels besides the immigrant novel. For example, one can also find them in the bildungsroman; and the immigrant novel does in fact share with the bildungsroman some important characteristics. Like a child, the naive immigrant comes to a new country with great expectations of finding his dream world, his utopia. However, he is soon faced with the reality of the new country, and it is not always a pleasant one. Like the hero in a picaresque novel, the immigrant undertakes to go on a journey, either literal or symbolic. He must experience various trials and tribulations, and come to an understanding and acceptance of himself, usually through a revision or a lowering of his initial expectations. Like the heroine in Wouk's bildungsroman, Marjorie Morningstar, who starts out with high ideals and expectations, but ends up, like her friends, a suburban housewife, the immigrant also unrealistically believes that he will reach heights in America which he could reach nowhere else, but usually (not always) ends up disillusioned. He soon learns that he must revise his dreams or face disillusion and despair.

The Old World and the New World are indeed important concepts in the immigrant novel. If a novel is truly a novel of acculturation, then, as David Fine tells us, there could take place "either the shedding of Old World customs and the absorption of native habits or the broader melting pot fusion of Old and New World culture." Rarely did cultural pluralism, or "cosmopolitanism"--the idea advanced by Horace Kallen that America existed as a confederation of

culturally-distinct national and ethnic groups--play a part in the fiction written by the first generation immigrant, except as an idea to be rejected: the writer's own experience had moved in an opposite direction.

If the account of Americanization is an optimistic one, then, using Boelhower's model, the expectations of the protagonist are wholly or partially realized, there is a minimum of trial, and the protagonist becomes happily assimilated. In other words, the process of acculturation is relatively painless. This is Mary Antin's story.

On the other hand, we find within the genre of the immigrant novel the maladjusted hero, the individual for whom acculturation is a far from positive experience. This hero is embodied in the characters of Abraham Cahan or the heroines of Anzia Yezierska, whom A. H. Greenberg in his 1956 dissertation characterizes as a "frustrated Mary Antin." Regarding Cahan's heroes, David Fine makes the following observation:

His heroes are painfully aware of their exile, and whatever outer success they achieve in America, they are never permitted to forget what they have lost...As Cahan's heroes outwardly assimilate into American life, they become increasingly alienated from themselves. The outer self comes into conflict with the inner self, which cannot and will not be stilled. The result is loneliness, ennui, and guilt. In the no-man's land in which Cahan's heroes reside, there are no enduring loves or happy marriages. There are no unions with native-born aristocratic Gentile women to symbolize the melting pot blending of Old and New World. Nor are marriages or friendships from the Old World permitted to continue in the New.¹¹

Another typical convention in the immigrant novel, in addition to the Old World/New World dichotomy, is the convention of the conflict between immigrant parents and their children. In "The Stranger and the Victim: The Two Jewish Stereotypes of American Fiction," Irving Howe characterizes the second generation novels as following a common pattern: a conflict between orthodox father and Americanized son in the midst of which is trapped the faithful, perplexed mother.¹² (This is the exact pattern followed by Yeziarska in many of her works, most notably Bread Givers, except that in her case the Americanized daughter is substituted for the son.)

The immigrant novel usually contains a series of other clashes or conflicts that take place between individuals or ideologies, such as uptown against downtown, capital against labor, native born against immigrant, older (German and Irish) against newer (Russian and Italian) immigrant.¹³ Anzia Yeziarska utilized all of the aforementioned conventions--the Old World/New World dichotomy, the conflict between generations, the conflicts that take place between uptown and downtown Jews, capitalists and workers, native-born Americans and immigrants, and German and Russian Jews.

Her works are not optimistic accounts of assimilation. Although there is an attempt on the part of her heroines to intermarry, or at least to establish meaningful relationships with native Americans, usually Gentiles, frequently the women fail to connect with these individuals, or if they do manage to establish a relationship, it is stormy and short-lived.

Just as Cahan's characters cannot achieve unions with native-born aristocratic Gentile women, Yeziarska's characters cannot successfully relate to native-born aristocratic Gentile men. As Fine puts it, for Cahan and Yeziarska becoming an American is fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty. Their protagonists seek New World mates but they are denied. The failure of love for their young immigrants symbolizes the failed fusion of the old and new selves. ¹⁴ He continues,

Urban loneliness, alienation, isolation--the themes of Cahan, Yeziarska and the immigrant authors who followed them--have become the standard themes. In the modern setting the victim or marginal figure has become the central, symbolic figure. The outsider is the insider in an age of anxiety. Separation and disconnectedness, the absence of love and of strong, fulfilling community ties--these have become the basic motifs of modern urban literature.¹⁵

In almost all of Yeziarska's works we find a young heroine who seeks to become a part of American society, but who finds that even when she has superficially become acculturated, either through receiving an education or through material success, she still inwardly feels like a stranger and an outsider in American society. As Babbett Inglehart describes this phenomenon, throughout her own life and those of her heroines, Yeziarska is confronting and moving towards an acceptance of the old self, finding that the reality of her soul lies in the unassimilated, immigrant self, and here her creative energies have their source. ¹⁶

This theme is most clearly articulated in two short stories, "My Own People" and "The Song Triumphant," and in

five longer works, Bread Givers, Salome of the Tenements, Arrogant Beggar, All I Could Never Be and Red Ribbon on a White Horse, but it finds expression throughout her work.

In Bread Givers, Sara Smolinsky returns to her immigrant environment after a series of trials and failed attempts to lose her status as a "stranger" and "immigrant" in the New World. At the end of the novel she decides to teach in her old neighborhood, and it is here that she meets Hugo Seelig, who represents the best of both worlds, the Old and the New, as Inglehart tells us. Because he is an Americanized Jew, Seelig combines the Old and the New World and thus satisfies Sara's longings for Americanization.¹⁷

But the ending of the novel is far from optimistic. Although Yezierska presents one of her many "fairy tale endings" (i.e. endings that are contrived and that do not seem entirely credible within the context of the work), the novel still contains an ambiguous denouement. While it is true that Sara ends up much better off than her sisters, there is also contained within the novel the idea that she too will never fully be able to shake off her Old World fetters; and even though she becomes partially reconciled to her heritage, we still sense that she feels burdened by the weight of her past. There is a tone of ambiguous acceptance of her burden in the last few lines of the book: "But 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." As Inglehart tells us, the conflict for the

immigrant woman in this novel is that as an American she must repudiate her father's values in order to assert her own independence and thus risk disapproval from the Old World father.¹⁸

In Salome of the Tenements, one of Yeziarska's earlier novels, Sonya Vrunsky finds out, as Sara Smolinsky never does, that in seeking to mingle with the "true Americans," as personified by John Manning, she has been reaching out to "false gods" and has become a "torn and twisted thing." She finds out that her entire life has been a lie.¹⁹ Salome of the Tenements is the story of a young Jewish girl who falls in love with and seeks to marry a Gentile philanthropist, John Manning. In order to do so, she must use her feminine wiles, and does in fact stop at nothing to win Manning's love. Once she is married, however, she realizes that she never had, and never would, fit into Manning's world. She also cannot come to terms with Manning's coldness and reserve, being herself a creature of vitality and "fire." This novel is loosely based upon the story of the real life East Side heroine Rose Pastor Stokes and her famous "Cinderella marriage." It falls into the familiar pattern of what I term Yeziarska's "return to roots" novels, which speak of the spiritual development of young heroines who come to realize that their place is in their own backyard, that is, within their native traditions and cultural backgrounds.

At the end of the novel Sonya falls in love with Jacques Hollins, a well-known and successful designer who has worked his way up to the top. He can be seen as a male

counterpart of herself. He too represents, as does Hugo Seelig, the best of the Old and New Worlds. Hollins has become successful, but he has nevertheless retained enough of his immigrant sensibility to be able to identify with Sonya's needs, such as her need for beauty. He has not forgotten his immigrant past. In accepting Hollins as her mate, Sonya demonstrates her need to retain a part, albeit a small one, of her immigrant heritage. The story of Jacques Hollins' rise parallels Sonya's own rise, her own Cinderella story. Jacques Hollins (born Jaky Solomon) is said to be a prince of the ghetto who rose from "out of the crucible of privation and want":

As Zangwill emerged from the abyss of London's East Side, as Heifetz strove for self-expression on the violin, and Pinsky wrestled in his Bowery printing shop with the ghosts of his future dramas, so Jaky Solomon struggled blindly in a sweatshop as a designer in the dress trade to create clothes that would voice his love for color and line (Salome of the Tenements, p. 33).

Solomon's creativity is not accepted in the garment district, which is described as very materialistic. He is able to go away and learn about design in Paris, and when he comes back to New York, Yezierska tells us that "he saw himself the new Oracle of Fifth Avenue fashion--Jacques Hollins" (p. 38).

Sonya learns of his background and feels a kinship with him; when she needs a dress to wear for a date with Manning, she goes to Hollins and says, "I felt that you, a Russian Jew, would understand this great, consuming passion for beauty that drove me to you...Jaky Solomon! You alone know

what it is to be driven by day and by night--not to eat--not to sleep--not to rest--to feel only one longing--to know only one dream--Beauty--and the dazzling, shimmering shine beyond reach. And...I who feel so burningly the quiver of every line, the breath of every shade of color, I must wear this hideous ready-made stuff...There are people who will sympathize with a girl starving for bread, but only an artist like you can sympathize with a girl starving for beautiful clothes" (pp. 41-2).

She talks Hollins into designing a dress for her:

A pleading thing of youth and flame reached up to him. Her hands fluttered up and down his arm like antennas of rapacious famine. It brought back to him the thrill of his own emotion when he first touched fine silk. It was irresistible (Salome of the Tenements, p. 43).

Hollins sees his own hunger in Sonya, whom he calls a "Ghetto Princess"; she is his mirror image, his alter ego. Both he and Sonya represent the ghetto, and, like it or not, they must return to it someday. Sonya figures out how they can return. She tells Hollins,

To think that you make beautiful clothes for that fat thing [Mrs. Van Ordin, a client of Hollins] only because she has the money to pay for them...I'll never be content to work with you only for the rich. Beautiful things should be for those who long for beauty. There are millions on the East Side dying for a little loveliness, and they can never, never have it (Salome of the Tenements, pp. 280-1).

Hollins soon agrees with Sonya and promises her that he will open a second shop on Grand Street for those who love beauty

but cannot afford it. Upon hearing this, Sonya cries out, "Ach, that's understanding! I never burned for something in my life like I burn for this. In the midst of the ready-mades of Grand Street, a shop of the beautiful--that's to be my settlement!" (Salome of the Tenements, p. 282).

Many other characters in Yeziarska's fiction learn that they cannot escape their heritage. Even when they become successful, they are haunted by their past. This is the leitmotif around which Yeziarska's fictional autobiography revolves, and it seems that this was the central problem in her own life. She had to learn how to confront her past and to integrate it into her present life. Whether or not she ever fully achieved this integration remains to be seen. But this is the problem which she tried to work out in her "return to roots" novels and short stories.

Another character who comes back to his heritage is Berel in "The Song Triumphant," a short story in Children of Loneliness. Berel is a writer and a dreamer. He believes that he is too good to associate with the "unenlightened" and mundane working world, and so he depends upon his brother to support him. One day he meets an old shipmate who needs a lyricist to write words for his music, and he agrees to take the job. But he soon finds out that the musician is changing his words and persuading him to sign his name to inferior material. He feels guilty about having sold out and laments, "I took my virgin gift of song and dragged it through the mud of Broadway." ²⁰ In other words, he has succumbed to material success and has sold his soul for money (the selling of one's

soul is another prevalent theme in Yeziarska's works).

When Berel comes back home he finds that his brother has left, and he must now support himself. He finds a job as a machine hand, and it is at this job that he finally discovers the beauty of his own people. He learns that everyone in his shop is also searching for beauty, even Sosheh the finisher, who is saving to buy a red feather for her new spring hat. He learns that there is music to be found in even the dingiest sweatshop, if one only looks for it. He cries out, "God, what a song to sing! The unperishable glamour of beauty, painting the darkest sweatshop in rainbow colors of heaven, splashing the gloom of the human ant-hill with the golden pigments of sunrise and sunset!" Berel has finally found beauty and music in his own people.

Sophie Sapinsky in "My Own People," a short story in Hungry Hearts, has an experience which is similar to Berel's. She finds that in writing about her own people she is able to overcome her writing block. She cries out at the end of the story, "At last it writes itself in me--it's their cries--my own people--crying in me! Hanneh Breineh, Shmendrik, they will not be stilled in me, till all America stops to listen."²¹

Both Berel and Sophie find that in returning to their heritage they are able to stimulate their creative energies. This is because in seeking to escape their past, they have escaped themselves. Rebecca Yudelson in "Dreams and Dollars" (Children of Loneliness) also learns that she can find her true self in the poverty-ridden ghetto, rather than in the

wealthy but meaningless world of her sister. Rebecca goes to visit her sister Minnie in Los Angeles, and finds her sister's world a "desert of emptiness painted over with money."²² Minnie, Rebecca tells us, has sold her soul for money. Rebecca goes back to the ghetto, marries the lover her sister has abandoned (he is an idealist and a poet) and finds that this is the world in which she belongs:

She knew now why she had come back home--back to the naked struggle for bread--back to the crooked, narrow streets filled with shouting children, the haggling push-carts 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 ("Dreams and Dollars," p.203).

The heroine finds unsung beauty in the ghetto, which is vibrant and lively. It is contrasted with the dead and meaningless world of her affluent sister. Yeziarska's writing style, as seen above and in various other places, evokes a feeling of tenseness and crowdedness, two qualities that can also be found in the ghetto.

In two of Yeziarska's longer works, Arrogant Beggar and All I Could Never Be, the protagonists' return to their roots is also clearly a positive step for them. The first work, Arrogant Beggar, is the story of a young orphan, Adele Lindner, who moves from a rooming house to the Hellman Home for Working Girls, which she initially calls an "oasis in the desert."

In real life, the Hebrew Institute was hailed as a "center of sweetness and light, an oasis in the desert of

degradation and despair" (Moses Rischin, The Promised City, p. 101). The Hebrew Free School, the Young Man's Hebrew Association and the Aguilar Free Library merged into one large center located in a building on East Broadway, and the Educational Alliance was born in 1889. It was a curious mixture of night school, settlement house, day-care center, gymnasium, and public forum. Founded by Americanized German Jews, known as the "uptowners", its goal was to civilize the uncouth and unkempt Russian and Polish Jews, the "downtowners." As the embodiment of the paternalistic efforts of the German Jews, the Educational Alliance was both praised and attacked by social critics as well as by downtowners. Moreover, the uptowners were stricken by a fear that identification with the uncouth East Side would threaten their social position. This was echoed in the Anglo-Jewish press, where the Russian Jews were sometimes referred to as "wild Asiatics", a term which carries racist overtones:

Are we waiting for the natural process of assimilation between Orientalism and Americanism? This will perhaps never take place (American Hebrew, Dec. 6, 1889).

The thoroughly acclimated American Jew...has no religious, social or intellectual sympathies with them [the Russian Jews]. He is closer to the Christian sentiment around him than to the Judaism of these miserable darkened Hebrews (Hebrew Standard, June 15, 1894).²³

In Arrogant Beggar Adele comes to associate with the founder of the home, Mrs. Hellman, and her son Arthur, whom she regards with awe. Her struggle with the Hellmans can be seen as the incarnation of the struggle between the uptown

and the downtown Jew. Mrs. Hellman and her son represent the German-Jewish philanthropists whose aim it was to remodel the Eastern European Jew in the uptown image. Adele represents the downtown Jew who refuses to be "civilized". Initially she calls Arthur "the most thrilling man on earth;" however, later on she realizes that Mrs. Hellman is not really as philanthropic as she had seemed, and that her son is also not as exciting as he had seemed at first. She finds that she cannot escape from the ghetto, and therefore will never really fit into the Hellman world.

Within the Hellman circle and the circle of pseudo-philanthropists who dominate the first half of the novel, Adele is an outsider. Their charity is false charity; when they hire girls from the home to serve food at a party, they are exploiting them because they are paying them less than what they would have to pay regular servants. They are using them for their own benefit.

When Adele finally escapes from them, friendless, she finds true charity in a surrogate mother figure by the name of Mumenkeh. When Mumenkeh dies, Adele feels that she has been transformed and "resurrected" through Mumenkeh's influence. She says at one point, "I am a different person. I've lived with Mumenkeh. I've died with her, and I'm born again."²⁴ The way in which Adele is transformed is that she can now accept her ghetto environment and can even open up a coffee shop in the ghetto. It is here that she meets Jean Rachmansky for a second time and falls in love with him. Jean is also a poor immigrant who has rejected the patronage

of Arthur Hellman. Adele and Jean decide to remain in the ghetto. Like Sonya Vrunsky, Adele has married a character who is in many ways her male counterpart.

In All I Could Never Be we meet a heroine who longs to escape from the ghetto but is rejected by the native Americans to whom she is attracted. First she is spurned by her rich relatives, who give her money but send her away in disgust upon finding out that she has lice. Next she is rejected by a series of native Americans, the first of whom are the affluent Farnsworths. After she sends them a somewhat overemotional poem in which she pours out her gratitude to them for having invited her to dinner and given her a bunch of red roses, she never hears from them again. She decides that because she has "humbled herself, exposed the famine of her soul to strangers" (p. 24), she has been rebuffed.

Finally, and most importantly, she is rejected by Henry Scott, a professor whom she first meets when she attends a lecture at the ghetto Settlement House. When Scott makes sexual advances toward her, she spurns him, and it is at this point that their relationship comes to an end as far as he is concerned. (Scott is modelled upon John Dewey, with whom Yeziarska apparently had an affair). But for many years Fanya continues to feel empty without Scott. She holds various jobs in an attempt to forget him, but the memory of him cannot be erased. Finally she goes to speak to a librarian friend of hers, Helena Hoffman, who, she learns, is not in the library, but at home. She becomes worried,

thinking that Helena is ill, but upon visiting her at home she is embarrassed to learn that it is Yom Kippur and this is the reason for Helena's absence from the library. She realizes that she has almost totally forgotten her heritage. She tells Helena,

All these years I have gone about a little bit ashamed of my manners, my background. I was so eager to acquire from the gentiles their low voices, their calm, their poise, that I lost what I had--what I was...I was clutching so greedily at the rainbow that I lost the reality. Why, the mere thought of my father is ground under my feet, a sky over my head (pp.194-95).

Helena tells her, "Now that you have found yourself in your father you have found something real and abiding. Roots to hold you. Soil in which to grow."²⁵ Later on Fanya will learn that this is not quite true. She has not really found herself in her father, but rather in her acceptance of herself and of her ghetto background. (Interestingly, Henry Scott had also told Fanya in one of his letters that she "is" already, and that she suffers unnecessarily from striving, but it is only now that Fanya really begins to understand what he had been trying to tell her.) She suddenly becomes aware of her father's undying spirit in her, "the going on in her of his race, which was her race."²⁶

She now feels that in setting up Scott as her god,²⁷ she has abandoned the god of her fathers. She decides to return to the ghetto. There she hears the chant of an old rabbi and is reminded of her father's symbolic explanation of the meaning of Hanukah: "From the beginning of time there

have been wanderers who have strayed away from the fold, worshipping the false gods of the countries about them. But the few who keep God in their hearts keep the holy light burning."²⁸

In worshipping Scott as her new god, Fanya had in effect set him up as her idol, but he was a false god. Upon discovering this fact, Fanya is able to return to the ghetto and to her origins.

In the epilogue to the novel, however, Fanya is again out of her realm, and she is again rejected by the community to which she wants to belong. In effect, her alter egos are the alienated Jane and the homeless Vladimir, both of whom are not accepted into the Oakdale community, and with whom she identifies.

In this novel Yeziarska seems to be telling us that it is only in Fanya's traditional community, among her own people, that she can be accepted. In seeking out false gods, in this case the love of those who could not or would not accept her, Fanya has brought about her own alienation.

The theme of the pursuit of false gods is reiterated in Yeziarska's semi-fictional autobiography, Red Ribbon on a White Horse. In this work the protagonist is again following a false god, this time in the figure of Mammon, the deity of material success.

Red Ribbon on a White Horse is divided into three sections, each one exploring a different kind of success in America. In the first part of the book we are shown that the dream of material comforts in America is a mirage.²⁹ Just as

David Levinsky loses his real self when he finally attains material success, so too the fictional Anzia loses her creativity in Hollywood because she is separated from her ghetto environment. Schoen describes the symbolic interpretation of Anzia's Hollywood adventure:

In the opening section, the incidents are chosen for their symbolic value. The narrator...has pawned the last remaining relic of her heritage, her mother's shawl, and travels through an arid desert, frequently described as an ocean, to the glittering wealth and glamour of Hollywood, only to discover a world lacking in humanity and destructive to art. In the search for wealth, all spiritual values have been destroyed. The parallel between the immigrant's journey from Europe to America and this trip is obviously intentional, and the narrator's sense of confusion and disorganization provides a new perspective on the immigrant's adjustment to America. All the incidents in this section are chosen because they deal with the belief that security and happiness are achieved through material success. The literal and spiritual journey in this section from the poverty-stricken ghetto life on the Lower East Side to security and peace through material success is shown to be a failure.³⁰

Anzia finally learns that in order to be successful she must accept herself first. Just as Fanya in All I Could Never Be had worshipped a "false god" (Henry Scott), so too Anzia finds that "with the ardor of a convert to a new faith" she had repudiated her true self in her quest for riches.³¹ Anzia is also similar to Fanya in that she too is plagued by doubts and uncertainties, "the conflict between what she was and what she wanted to be, the consuming fear that she was nothing, nobody--and the inordinate craving for approval."³²

Whether Anzia's rendering of her Hollywood adventure is autobiographically accurate or not, the fact that Yeziarska

chose to represent her experiences in such a manner is the important issue here. She was saying something about herself by portraying herself as a "lost sheep" in Hollywood. Perhaps she wanted to equate herself with Fanya and with her other "lost" heroines.

Unlike the heroine in All I Could Never Be, however, Anzia cannot return to her father and accept his world. When she does return to him, his "Old World preaching" alienates her even more from him and she flees in anger and resentment. However, she finds her escape futile:

But it was no use. I could never escape him. He was the conscience that condemned me...Again and again at crucial turning points of my life, his words flared out of the darkness. "He who separates himself from his people buries himself in death...Can fire and water be together? Neither can godliness and the fleshpots of Mammon... Poverty becomes a Jew [like a red ribbon on a white horse]..." He didn't feel himself poor. Poverty had never starved him as it had me. Having nothing only drew him closer to God. Homelessness, hunger, exile---Jews had survived them for thousands of years. What was there to fear in a shabby coat? He walked the earth knowing that the "kingdom, the power, and the glory" were in his own heart, and no worldly prizes could swerve him from his chosen path. But this singlemindedness, this immunity to the changes around him--this strength was also his limitation. He ignored the world I had to live in and compromise with. Centuries yawned between us (Red Ribbon, pp. 217-18).

One day when Anzia does return to the ghetto, she expresses her feelings of ambivalence concerning her past and the "ghost" of her father:

I had been part of this scene--I had looked on hundreds of times when I was in it. Now I saw it with new eyes. Strange how one can love and hate at the same time. I loved and hated the noise,

the dirt, and the foul air from which I had fled. In every bearded old Jew I passed on the street I saw my father--ghosts of the people I had abandoned to "make of myself a person in the world." And now I looked across the gulf, consumed with homesickness and longing for my own kind (Red Ribbon, p. 94).

At the end of Red Ribbon, although Anzia does decide to return to the ghetto, she is not really returning to the world of her fathers. Rather she is returning to herself, to the part of herself that will always be ensconced in the ghetto. As she delineates the situation:

The ghetto was with me wherever I went--the nothingness, the fear of my nothingness...I had sought security in the mud and in the stars, sought it in the quick riches and glory of Hollywood and in the security wage of WPA. I sought it everywhere but in myself. Suddenly I felt like that shipwrecked sailor who had been picked up, dying of thirst, unaware that the current into which he had drifted was fresh water...I did not have to go to far places, sweat for glory, strain for the smile from important people. All that I could ever be, the glimpses of truth I reached for everywhere, was in myself (Red Ribbon, p. 220).

There seems to be a movement in Yeziarska's works towards an optimism tempered with knowledge. From Sara Smolinsky, who still carries the burden of her father's world on her shoulders, we arrive at the fictional persona of Anzia herself, who now has sufficient self-knowledge, self-confidence and courage to be able to construct her own world. She can take wisdom from the Old World, yet accept the limitations of this world and of her father's world view. She can explore and etch out her own frontier.

Going back to Boelhower's model of the immigrant novel as distinct type, we can see that each of Yezierska's characters described thus far has undertaken a spiritual journey into a strange new world, the world of the native American. She has, however, usually found this New World to be lacking in some essential quality or qualities, and thus has been forced either to return to her roots (i.e. the Old World) or to construct a world of her own, using the knowledge she has acquired on her journey. Boelhower describes the process of the protagonist's reevaluation of his expectations concerning the New World after he has undertaken his spiritual journey:

At the moment of EXPECTATION, which may already be set in the New World, the RESOLUTION is considered an ideal reality, while the Old World is viewed as a negative reality. As the protagonist moves along the CONTACT axis, a descending movement, the process of reconsideration begins and, through Old World-New World contrasts, implies the de-idealization of the New World. At the same time, as the protagonist discovers America firsthand, he is separated from the Old World. Ultimately, this leads the protagonist to idealize the Old World--either through an attempt to preserve his Old World culture, or through a stiff criticism of an alienating set of experiences in America.³³

In other words, only after experiencing the New World, a false paradise, can the protagonist realize that his own world was not so bad after all. Then the protagonist begins to idealize the Old World, seeing now the value of his former way of life and his past traditions.

From this analysis, it would appear that in order to come to terms with reality, a character must accept either the Old World or the New World. But what would happen, one may ask, if one were unable to accept either? This is the crisis faced by many of Yeziarska's characters. A large number of her protagonists find themselves "between two worlds" and belonging to neither one.

In her first published work, Hungry Hearts, Yeziarska presents this conflict; Shenah Pessah, the protagonist of both "Wings" and "Hunger," falls in love with John Barnes, a sociologist who is interested in her mainly as a specimen of the Russian Jewish community he is attempting to study and categorize. When Sam Arkin, a symbol of the ghetto and of her own world, offers Shenah his love, she cannot accept it because she is still in love with John Barnes. On a symbolic level, Shenah can be seen as vacillating between the New World, the one she wishes to enter and into which she is not accepted, and the Old World, the world that will accept her, but which she ultimately rejects.

In another short story in this collection, "The Fat of the Land," we again meet a character, Hanneh Breineh, who cannot fit into either the Old World of the ghetto (the world of poverty, but also of energy and activity) or the New World of upper middle-class America (which is presented as an environment of sterility, uselessness and ennui). Hanneh is able to move to an expensive apartment when her children grow up and can provide for her. But when her old

neighbor, Mrs. Pelz, comes to visit her, she is surprised to learn that Hannah misses the Lower East Side and that she is unhappy because her children are now ashamed of her. They feel that she is a relic of the Old World, an anachronism in the modern world. As one of them words her own predicament, "the trouble with us is that the ghetto of the Middle Ages and the children of the twentieth century have to live under one roof."³⁴ When Hannah's children arrange for her to move to an apartment on Riverside Drive, where she becomes a totally useless creature, she is even more unhappy than before and decides to run away and sleep at Mrs. Pelz's apartment. However, she finds that she can no longer tolerate the poverty of the ghetto, and so she returns to her Riverside Drive apartment, a lost woman, belonging to neither world.

This story is thematically similar to a true life experience in Yeziarska's life, which is described in an interview with Yeziarska included in Children of Loneliness.³⁵

As Inglehart describes the incident:

Yeziarska recollects a painful experience aboard a transatlantic ship, a voyage made twenty years after her original crossing. Attempting to relive the immigrant experience, she decides to go steerage class but finds herself sickened by the dirt, coarse food, and table manners of the poor. Guilty over her own material success, finding in the immigrants an aliveness that is in strong contrast to the dull sophistication of first and second class travellers, she is nonetheless too much the new American to repudiate the "refinement and daintiness that naturally come through cleanliness," and despite her recognition of the injustice of classes and the power of money, she is painfully aware of the need in herself for the

civilization, culture, and service that money can provide her with.³⁶

In essence, Yeziarska herself has been caught between two worlds in this revealing episode from her own life.

Another one of her characters, Rachel Ravinsky in Children of Loneliness, is a young girl who cannot tolerate the table manners of her parents after she returns home from college. She articulates the feelings of the "floating immigrant" when she describes her feelings of isolation and loneliness upon breaking away from her parents and from their world:

I have broken away from the old world; I'm through with it. It's already behind me. I must face this loneliness till I get to the new world...I must hope for no help from the outside. I'm alone; I'm alone till I get there. But am I really alone in my seeking? I'm one of the millions of immigrant children, children of loneliness, wandering between worlds that are at once too old and too new to live in ("Children of Loneliness," p. 123).

The above sentiments describe the central predicament of the questing character in the immigrant novel: he must find a niche for himself in the world, and in order to do so, he usually either looks back to the past or looks forward to the future. He is not always able to look straight ahead or in both directions. In other words, he cannot always reconcile the old and the new.

This is one of the many spiritual conflicts presented in Yeziarska's fiction. Unlike the easily assimilated characters of such writers of immigrant fiction as Samuel

Ornitz, whose main character in Haunch, Paunch and Jowl, Meyer Hirsch, is driven by ambition and rejects the Jewish education his parents offer him for the more exciting life of the New York streets, and becomes, in David Fine's words, a "flashy, Americanized, and self-satisfied success-figure,"³⁷ Yeziarska's characters cannot easily come to terms with their desire to leave behind the world of their fathers. Their efforts to do so are accompanied by feelings of guilt, alienation and even despair.

Her characters must assess and reassess their lives continuously, and as Dorothy Seidman Bilik, describing the post-Holocaust immigrant in the new immigrant novel, tells us, such characters are separated from others by their experience of suffering; they cannot and perhaps will not erase the differences that separate them from those around them.³⁸

Yeziarska's characters, as well as those of Abraham Cahan, exhibit an added character trait which is unique to them as characters of the early immigrant novel: they remain ambivalent towards change and still unconsciously desire to hold on to tradition, even in the midst of their apparent assimilation. One example of such a character is Sara Smolinsky in Bread Givers. Even though she outwardly appears to adapt to American society and seems to be Americanized, she still needs to have a past and a tradition. By becoming a teacher she is in some way following in her father's footsteps, because it is he who has taught her and her sisters to honor education and he who has instilled in them the idea

that much honor is due a learned man. Sara even acknowledges this kinship with her father at one point in the novel. Yet she still strives to break away from him, and this is partly due to the fact that she needs to live up to her own standards, those of independence, freedom and self-determination.

Taken as a whole, Yeziarska's characters can be seen as archetypal figures. As Bilik tells us, the Jew is conventionally the representation of twentieth-century man, embodying homelessness, exile and alienation.³⁹ Yeziarska's characters can likewise be seen as modern Every-men, wandering in a world they cannot quite comprehend or come to terms with.

Inwardly alienated, not simply because of their immigrant status, poverty, or living conditions, they feel "lost" in the modern world.

For example, the fictional Anzia in Red Ribbon, who has finally arrived in Hollywood and "made it," feels like an outsider in this world. She suffers from feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, a sense of the futility of life in Hollywood, and, perhaps, of life in general.

Likewise, Sara Smolinsky feels lonely within the college community which she so desperately wants to be a part of:

I watched the gay goings-on around me like one coming to a feast, but always standing back and only looking on...Even in college I had not escaped from the ghetto. Here loneliness hounded me even worse than in Hester Street. Was there no escape? Will I never lift myself to be a person

among people? (Bread Givers, pp. 218-219).

Immigrant alienation resembles modern alienation in that both are without remedy. You cannot lose your immigrant status just as you cannot lose your status as a modern, hence alienated, man. The existentialists posited the belief that alienation is an essential element of man's condition.

As Camus describes it: in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.⁴⁰

Many of Yeziarska's characters, especially her fictional persona in Red Ribbon, experience this feeling of absurdity, although they are incapable of expressing it properly or naming it as such. Yeziarska comes closest to expressing this feeling when she has her fictional persona read the fragments of Kintzler's notes. The fictional Anzia fails to understand the notes, believing them to be "chaotic" and incomprehensible. Actually they may be expressing some of her own feelings: "...in the body of time I'm a transitory nothingness...Spinoza rips me out of the sockets of my emotional, passional life, and leaves me panting in a disincorporate universe without star landing...There's the person I think I am, the person others think I am. But who is the real me? Who am I?" After reading these fragments Anzia says, "I could not stand any more chaos. I stuffed the notes back into the brief case and hurried out of the house

for air" (Red Ribbon, pp. 191-92). The chaos she is referring to could just as well be situated within her own mind as within the jumble of notes that she has found. And, taking into consideration Anzia's chaotic and disturbing experiences as presented in this work, this is probably the case. In fact, the fictional Anzia tells us several times in the book that she feels "empty, homeless--outside of life" (p.74) and that she has the consuming fear that she is "nothing, nobody" (p. 206).

Thus, this character, although she experiences the feelings of existential absurdity and nothingness throughout the novel, has not the insight to realize what she is feeling. And we get the impression in Red Ribbon, especially, but in Yeziarska's other works as well, that the feelings her characters are experiencing are universal and not unique to the particular character she is writing about, or even to the situation of the immigrant.

W. H. Auden, referring to Red Ribbon on a White Horse, does in fact describe the universality of Yeziarska's works. He says of this work that it is literally the story of an early twentieth-century immigrant but it also has a "deeper and more general significance today when, figuratively, the immigrant is coming more and more to stand as the symbol for Everyman, for the natural and unconscious community of tradition is rapidly disappearing from the earth."⁴¹

Thus Yeziarska's writings can be seen as prefigurations of the new urban immigrant novel as described by Bilik because it is not a literature praising assimilation.

Rather, its emphasis is on the universality of the Jew's (i.e. modern man's) predicament. As Isaac Rosenfeld tells us in "The Situation of the Jewish Writer" in An Age of Enormity:

As a member of an internationally insecure group he [the Jew] has grown personally acquainted with some of the fundamental themes of insecurity that run through modern literature. He is a specialist in alienation...alienation puts him in touch with his past traditions, the history of the Diaspora; with the present predicament of almost all intellectuals, and for all one knows, with the future conditions of civilized humanity. Today nearly all sensibility--thought, creation, perception--is in exile, alienated from the society in which it barely managed to stay alive.⁴²

Yeziarska's novels and short stories carry the accoutrements of the modern work of art in that they describe the ambivalence, loss of identity, and "orphaned" status (many of her characters are literally and/or figuratively orphans) of modern man. Her characters are outsiders, and as such they are modern figures, the "strangers" one is likely to encounter in modern existential novels or absurdist plays rather than in the immigrant novels of the early twentieth century, works which characteristically sang the praises of assimilation and acculturation.

The Polemics of the Heart: Language, Rhetoric and Emotion
in the Works of Anzia Yezierska

Although her writings have a feminist thrust and slant, Yezierska's feminism is incidental rather than integral to her writings. She places her female characters in situations which impel them to become independent and creative. She shows the options (outside of marriage) which are open to the woman, yet many of her characters still feel incomplete without a man. They can never wholly accept their independence, and they almost always feel that they are paying a price for their solitary station in life.

The problems of her characters mirror some of the actual difficulties encountered by Jewish women in this country. As Baum tells us in The Jewish Woman in America, the history of the American Jewish woman and her emancipation follows the same basic pattern as that of the gentile woman. The Jewish tradition embraced the Victorian ideal of the woman as the pillar of the family, the source of morality and noblest feelings, because this concept meshed with that aspect of the tradition which stressed the importance of family life for Jewish strength and survival. However, fragility and delicacy were not stressed as ideal traits for a woman.¹

Jewish women who came to this country from Eastern Europe were strong and financially competent. But in America these traits were seen as masculine; when a woman arrived here she soon learned that she was expected to behave "like a lady." In literature, especially modern literature, the

strong-willed "Jewish mother" type was denigrated because her characteristics of financial competence and aggressiveness were no longer the ideal.

From lives lived at the stage center they [Jewish women] have been removed to the periphery, where their primary role is to adorn men's lives.²

Although many women rebelled against the role they were expected to play, they did pay a price for their rebellion. For example, women in the trade union movement of the early twentieth century, such as Rose Schneiderman, like most of the women who distinguished themselves in the movement, did give up some of the pleasures of a conventional family environment and security as well. Schneiderman died alone in a nursing home in New York.³ And even though many of the union women who remained single may have chosen to do so, they were still regarded by many men to be marriage rejects or failures.⁴

Many women joined the Bund, a workers' movement which stressed the perpetuation of Yiddish culture. Baum states that Jewish women were probably drawn to this movement and to other revolutionary movements because they promised women equality and offered them leadership which was denied them by the traditional Jewish community. As Baum tells us, by joining the Bund, they were able to escape assigned roles and the second-class status with which they were dissatisfied, and express their rebellion against a patriarchal religious system which had not adapted itself to the realities of most women's lives (The Jewish Woman in America, p. 87).

Other women joined the anarchist movement and came to believe in free love, an ideology propounded by revolutionaries such as Emma Goldman. In her convincing essays "The Traffic in Women" and "Marriage and Love" Goldman states that marriage is primarily "an economic arrangement" and she likens the economic exploitation of women to that of prostitutes.

But, as a general rule, most women did not take such a bleak view of their situation.

For example, Mary Antin, who examines the traditional female Jewish roles in The Promised Land, indicates that a form of antifeminism prevailed in Europe, but not in America. She describes the male-dominated environment in which the European women had to live and details the education of the Eastern European child, commenting upon the fact that girls did not receive an academic education at all:

There was nothing in what the boys did in cheder that I could not have done--if I had not been a girl. For a girl it was enough if she could read her prayers in Hebrew, and follow the meaning by the Yiddish translation at the bottom of the page. It did not take long to learn this much,--a couple of terms with a rebbetzin (female teacher), --and after that she was done with books.

A girl's real schoolroom was her mother's kitchen. There she learned to bake and cook and manage, to knit, sew and embroider; also to spin and weave, in country places. And while her hands were busy, her mother instructed her in the laws regulating a pious household and in the conduct proper for a Jewish wife; for, of course, every girl hoped to be a wife. A girl was born for no other purpose. (The Promised Land, p. 34).

Antin had introduced this journalistic account of the woman's role with the ironic statement, "It was not much to be a

girl, you see. Girls could not be scholars and rabbonim."

Yeziarska, on the other hand, never tells us outright that women occupied an inferior position in the Old World tradition of European Jewry; rather, she lets us experience for ourselves the world of the woman. When we bear witness to the verbal and psychological abuse that daughters receive at the hands of their fathers, or that wives receive at the hands of their husbands in such works as Bread Givers, or when we listen to the antifeminist rhetoric voiced by her male characters, we are able to infer that women did indeed occupy an inferior position in the society described by Yeziarska.

Yeziarska may not have been consciously thinking in feminist terms when she wrote her works, but the emphasis in her writings on the position of women points to the fact that she was concerned with their role in a traditionalist society. She was also concerned with the way men viewed women in this type of society, and how women could fulfill their own destinies without the help of men.

Reb Smolinsky in Bread Givers is certainly the foremost voice of male chauvinism in Yeziarska's work. In fact, his position is so clear and his character so predictable that many of Yeziarska's critics have seen him as a cardboard figure. As Nicholas Karl Gordon states, "In the early chapters the Father's tyranny and gullibility are so extreme as to be ludicrous rather than oppressive."⁵

However, Reb Smolinsky should not be viewed as a totally unbelievable character or as a caricature. We are

meant to see him as a pertinacious believer in male superiority, a figure who will never change his viewpoint. In a sardonic and resentful tone of voice, Sara describes her father's opinion of women:

The prayers of his daughters didn't count because God didn't listen to women. Heaven and the next world were only for men. Women could get into heaven because they were wives and daughters of men. Women had no brains for the study of God's Torah, but they could be the servants of men who studied the Torah. Only if they cooked for the men, and didn't nag or curse the men out of their homes; only if they let the men study the Torah in peace, then, maybe, they could push themselves into Heaven with the men, to wait on them there (Bread Givers, p.9).

Reb Smolinsky says at one point, "women were always the curse of men, but when they get older they're devils and witches. That's why it says in the Torah that a man has a right to hate an old maid for no other reason but because no man had her, so no man wants her."⁶

After Sara has refused to marry Max Goldstein, a wealthy suitor and certainly a good match in her father's eyes, her father lectures her on her mistake, telling her that a woman has no identity without a man:

It says in the Torah: what's a woman without a man? Less than nothing--a blotted out existence. No life on earth and no hope of heaven...It says in the Torah, Breed and multiply. A woman's highest happiness is to be a man's wife, the mother of a man's children. You're not a person at all (Bread Givers, pp. 205-206).

Is it any wonder that later on Sara will continue to have doubts about her identity and place in the world?

Reb Smolinsky can be viewed as the archetype and epitome of the patriarchal, chauvinistic male figure; but although Sara's mother and sisters are certainly not pleased with his treatment of them, they do not attempt to go against his wishes or refute his views. Sara's mother can only comment helplessly, "Woe to us women who got to live in a Torah-made world that's only for men."⁷

Sara is different; she is a rebel. When she finds out that she can no longer look to her father for sympathy, she states, "I no longer saw my father before me, but a tyrant from the Old World where only men were people. To him I was nothing but his last unmarried daughter to be bought and sold."⁸ Since she refuses to play the role her father has set out for her, she must escape from home, from the stifling atmosphere in which she grew up and in which women are treated only as objects to be bought and sold. She realizes that she does not want a husband who is going to boss her and treat her in the same way that her father treated her mother. She does not want to perpetuate the cycle of male dominance that her sisters have already fallen prey to:

No! No one from Essex or Hester Street for me...I'd want an American-born man who was his own boss. And would let me be my own boss. And no fathers, and no mothers, and no sweatshops, and no herring! (Bread Givers, p. 66).

Sara does escape the ghetto by going to college, but she must pay a price for her independence. The price is to live a lonely life, feeling cut off from those around her.

Knowledge was what I wanted more than anything else in the world. I had made my choice. And now I have to pay the price. So this is what it cost, daring to follow the urge in me. No father. No lover. No family. No friend. I must go on and on. And I must go on--alone (Bread Givers, p. 208).

The theme of the importance of knowledge for a woman, her need to educate herself in order to fulfill her destiny and "to become a person" (to use Yeziarska's phrase) occupied the pages of other Jewish women writers who wrote during and after Yeziarska's time, such as Alix Kates Shulman. Sara Smolinsky believes that only after she has become "somebody" will she be able to marry the man of her dreams. When her mother tells her that she would rather see her getting married than becoming a spinster school teacher, Sara replies, "Don't worry. I'll even get married some day. But to marry myself to a man that's a person, I must first make myself for a person." ⁹ Almost fifty years later, Shulman has her fictional persona, Sasha Davis in Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen, express an almost identical viewpoint:

I would be somebody. I would be fastidious in my choice of "environment," vigilant in my cultivation of habits. Thanks to my mother's looks and my father's books, I already had a good start. But a start, I knew, was not enough. It was the end that mattered. If, as the girls always said, it's never too early to think about whom to marry, then it could certainly not be too early to think about who to be. Being somebody had to come first, because, of course, somebody would get a much better husband than nobody (Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen, p. 78).

Although Shulman's tone is more ironic throughout than Yeziarska's, we learn from both authors that self-fulfillment

and achievement are as important for women as they are for men. Sasha Davis must feel that she is "somebody": she must be happy with herself and with her place in society before she can even consider love and marriage.

Like Sara, Sasha seeks freedom through knowledge. She buries herself in the study of philosophy, becomes an avid reader and one of the best students in college. She finds herself in various relationships, has one bad marriage, but finally settles down permanently and has two children. However, she does not live happily ever after. There is an ironic twist at the end of the novel, because instead of reading philosophy books, the domestic Sasha now ends up reading Dr. Spock. Her studies are forgotten when she becomes a mother and must occupy herself with the practical and sometimes trivial aspects of life.

At the age of thirty one, sitting under a dryer in a beauty salon, she realizes that she has settled for a mundane life, devoid of much if any meaning. She comes to this realization when her hairdresser asks her, just as he would ask any other housewife, if she would like a magazine, and she chooses the Ladies' Home Journal.

Oh, why had I neglected to bring a book? The truth was, years had passed since I had read a book. I had looked things up and read reviews on Sundays, had even browsed in bookstores on Eighth Street with Willy after the movies. But in my daily life of clutter and climax my attentions had been so splintered, my concerns so manifold, that the concentration required to read a book through had evidently atrophied in me, and except for survival manuals like Dr. Guttmacher's and Dr. Spock's, never intended for reflection anyway, books were but titles to me, like lovers' names,

documents of my biography...It was all coming startlingly clear. The hot air waves bombarding my head and burning my ears were no doubt transmitting cosmic messages. In the Ladies' Home Journal at last I began to see the necessary connection between causes and effects that had eluded me in all my study of philosophy. Perhaps every stimulus, as Dr. Watson testified, had its response and every act, as Spinoza maintained, its consequences given from the beginning of time, but the responses and the consequences were not those I had grown to expect...To find myself at thirty locked under a dryer eagerly studying ads in magazines while I worry about the sitter and my husband is away on a business trip; now, after my schemes and triumphs, my visions and dares, to be, without income or skill, dependent on a man and a fading skin--it can only be the fulfillment of a curse! (Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen, pp. 264-66).

Shulman seems to be commenting upon the eventual futility of higher education for women, especially married women. In *Yeziarska* we do not know whether or not Sara Smolinsky will make use of her education after marriage, but the outlook for her is brighter than for Sasha. Sasha's prospects for a fulfilling life become increasingly slim after her marriage and the birth of her children. Therefore, even though both authors begin by telling us that knowledge and education are the key ingredients for happiness, there is a fatalistic undertone in Shulman's work which is absent from *Yeziarska's*. Sara will probably work after marriage, Sasha does not.

Creativity and self-fulfillment are the goals of all of *Yeziarska's* characters, and the road to achievement is via a vocation. Work plays a vital role in the lives of her female characters. *Yeziarska* tried to show that women on their own, frequently without the help of family or friends, could

establish themselves in the working world if they had enough drive and will power.

In Salome of the Tenements, for example, Sonya Vrunsky finds that she can put her love of beauty to work as a dress designer, and she finally experiences self-fulfillment at the end of the novel when she attains a vocation as well as a lover. Carol Schoen finds another feminist thread in the novel in that Yeziarska allows Sonya to challenge conventional feminine restraint in order to capture the man she loves.¹⁰ She feels, however, that Yeziarska is not going all the way in portraying Sonya's "emancipation" because the happy ending, replete with marriage, seems to deemphasize Sonya's finding of a vocation. She feels that at the beginning of the work Yeziarska resisted writing the kind of fairy tale in which "the sentimentalized poor but virtuous immigrant girl captivates and marries the kind American millionaire and lives happily ever after." Rather, she chose to show that in real life the "Cinderella" character will not automatically live happily ever after, but, more likely end up in the divorce courts.¹¹ Later on, however, Yeziarska subverted her own realistic mode of writing, when she suddenly revived all the fairy tale elements of the Cinderella story which she had rejected at the beginning.

The silent lover of the opening chapters miraculously appears, captures the heroine, and they live happily ever after. The only remnant of the artistic dream that remains is the fact that Sonya continues to work after her marriage.¹²

The fact that Sonya will work after marriage distinguishes this novel from other novels in which the heroine marries and inevitably loses contact with the working world and with her past.

As in Salome of the Tenements, the protagonists in Bread Givers and Arrogant Beggar are able to have both marriage and vocations, and this is why they stand apart from the other female characters in Yeziarska's works, the ones who believe that marriage is the one important event in a woman's life.

As we have already seen, through perseverance and despite many hardships, Sara Smolinsky achieves her dream of becoming a teacher. And even though she does also manage to find a potential husband at the end of the novel, she has literally made the journey from illiterate young woman to professional and financially self-sufficient woman on her own. Her meeting of Hugo Seelig is a happy circumstance in her life, but he is an adjunct to, rather than a cause of, her happiness and social status in American society. The central focus in the novel is, it seems to me, Sara's finding of a vocation, rather than her finding of a husband.

In Arrogant Beggar, Adele Lindner also needs to and does find a vocation. She works her way up from being a dishwasher to becoming the owner of a successful Lower East Side coffee house. She rejects the marriage offer of a rich, male "savior", Arthur Hellman, who is willing to provide for her, just as Sonya Vrunsky in Salome of the Tenements ultimately rejects Manning's financial support when she

divorces him and decides to find a vocation. Even though the ending of Arrogant Beggar is weak and not well-developed, Yezierska does present a portrait of a woman who can make it on her own.

Schoen believes that Adele's marriage at the end of the novel destroys the potentially feminist impact of the work because Yezierska did not believe that her characters could be happy unless they were married off at the end of the work. Jean Rachmansky is a shadowy "savior" character and his love affair with Adele is hardly developed. The ending seems contrived and gives the book "the tasteless quality of a cheap novel."¹³ Doubtless the novel is weakened by its ending, but the ending certainly does not subvert the underlying message of the work, which is that only by being independent can Adele achieve a sense of self-worth and fulfillment in life.

Adele achieves independence by running away from the Hellman Home, by refusing Arthur's offer of marriage and ultimately by opening her own business. She does need Jean Rachmansky to fulfill her, but like Hugo Seelig in Bread Givers, Jean contributes to, rather than brings about her happiness. As is true of Sara, Adele feels incomplete without a man. Most of Yezierska's characters have not learned to enjoy their own company.

When she sees couples walking in and out of her restaurant, Adele begins to feel lonely.

My eyes wandered over the room, rested on a young couple who came for their dinner every Wednesday. I used to await their coming with a loving jealousy, an aching gladness that all my absorption in my work could not shut out.

When they came in, they seemed not to touch the earth. Young gods flying triumphant over the rest of the world. Untouched by the hurts and needs that ate into the lives of others. Safe and secure in each other...

It was hot and stuffy that night. She made a motion to push back the scarf she wore. With the quick eagerness of the lover, he was at her side, his hand gently smoothing her shoulder as he removed the scarf.

How beautiful was that tender gesture! It made everything around unimportant. Quite suddenly, I felt a little ache in my heart.

All at once I saw that the happy young people were moving in couples. Why had I not noticed this before?

I felt overwhelmingly alone.

Lonelier and lonelier, as one after another finished their dinner and hurried out.

The place grew terribly big and empty...

The Coffee Shop --the work -- the people-- it was a great adventure. But not enough to fill my life. I was young. I wanted love as much as all those other young people (Arrogant Beggar, pp. 243-46).

The tone of this passage is one of sadness and regret; Adele realizes at this point that she does not yet have it all.

Conveniently, and rather implausibly, Jean Rachmansky walks into the coffee shop just as Adele is contemplating her loneliness. He could be anyone; he is the Anyman figure that Yezierska frequently introduces at the end of her novels in order to marry off, or at least to pair off her characters, and this is what Schoen objects to. There is in effect no reason for Adele to marry Jean, except that he is a male and arrives when Adele is most vulnerable.

There is, however, a switch of plan in Yezierska's next two novels. In All I Could Never Be and Red Ribbon on a

White Horse we find the unattached woman learning to be independent and accepting her single status. Even though Fanya's love affair never reaches fruition, she arrives at a meaningful discovery when she learns that she had been unhappy because she had sought escape from what she was instead of trying to develop her own potential.¹⁴ When she learns to accept herself, she is able to accept others, and she no longer needs Scott to make her complete. In the epilogue to the work she can even seek acceptance for two strangers, Jane and Vladimir. As Schoen describes the ending, Fanya is now willing to remain quietly passive,¹⁵ waiting for events to determine their own course. She manages to find happiness at the end of the novel because she has learned the secret of fulfillment: "all she had searched for so fiercely all her life had come unsought to her own door--within her own heart."¹⁶

In Red Ribbon the heroine has a similar kind of epiphany at the end when she discovers that "the power that makes grass grow, fruit ripen and guides the bird in its flight is in us all. At any moment when man becomes aware of that inner power, he can rise above the accidents of fortune that rule his outward life, creating and recreating himself out of his defeats."¹⁷

In neither novel does the heroine get married at the end. In both an unhappy love affair is portrayed, the heroines suffer, but they are eventually able to overcome their pain and go on with their lives on their own. In All I Could Never Be Fanya welcomes a stranger into her house

and shows him charity, but there is no indication, as some critics contend, that Vladimir represents a potential mate. In Red Ribbon Anzia begins and ends alone, but because she has undergone a series of experiences and journeys in the novel, she comes out wiser, more self-sufficient and more secure.

All of the characters we have discussed thus far achieved a sense of well-being and security when they found a vocation as well as a love interest. They rejected the efforts of people in their lives to mold them or shape them into their conceptions of the ideal woman. This is the point at which Yeziarska's feminism comes in, and also the point at which she establishes a link between the trials of the woman and those of the immigrant. Her heroines, both as women and as immigrants, struggle to establish their own identities and keep themselves from blending into their environments, whether it be through assimilation, marriage or education.

Yeziarska's heroines constantly find themselves alienated from the dominant culture. For example, Sara Smolinsky goes away to college and meets some "true Americans," but finds that she is a total stranger in their world; because of her appearance and internal make-up, she is a conspicuous outsider in this environment. Yet, unlike the easily assimilated characters in the early immigrant novels we have discussed, she refuses to conform. She would rather retain her individuality than become a part of the crowd.

Likewise, the narrator in Red Ribbon also feels a stranger in the affluent Hollywood society in which she finds

herself and in the New Hampshire artists' community in which she would like to settle; therefore, she decides to leave both places. Whether consciously or subconsciously the "characters" in both works, Bread Givers and Red Ribbon, (really one and the same character, a projection of Anzia) desire to retain their "stranger" status, and just like the immigrant in the post-Holocaust novel discussed earlier (the character who cannot and perhaps will not erase the differences between himself and those around him), Yeziarska's characters need to maintain a distance between themselves and the native Americans who surround them.

From a feminist standpoint, we can see that her characters, predominantly women, also struggle to retain their identity when faced with the loss of their true selves in a love affair or marriage. For example, in Salome of the Tenements, Sonya Vrunsky wages a fierce battle to keep her independence and true identity when confronted by the forces of change in the person of Manning (who is representative of Anglo-Saxon reserve, snobbery and elitism). Manning, we are told, is puritan restraint, while Sonya is fire and passion.¹⁸ He wants Sonya to exhibit the restraint that is characteristic of his background, but Sonya refuses to change in order to suit his tastes. She finally realizes that theirs is an incompatible marriage.

Till now she had felt that behind the rich, still curtain of his puritan austerity was waiting for her a great revelation--a flame of a soul higher and finer than hers. At last the curtain was down. There was no revelation, no flame and only the pale flicker of a burnt-out star, only the

winter coldness of a sterile race. She had been too blind to see till now the furious animosity of temperaments that clashed as theirs clashed. But as she watched him sleeping there beside her with his calm, saintlike face, she knew that just as fire and water cannot fuse, neither could her Russian Jewish soul fuse with the stolid, the unimaginative, the invulnerable thickness of this New England puritan (Salome of the Tenements, pp. 231-32).

Sonya, the "East Side savage forced suddenly into the straitjacket of American civilization,"¹⁹ escapes from her confinement and makes use of her creativity. On a symbolic level this break can be seen as representing the immigrant's refusal to acculturate, thereby losing his own cultural identity. In feminist terms, Sonya's escape from Manning is the woman's refusal to change in order to suit the male, whether he be her husband, boyfriend or father.

In Bread Givers, Sara decides to break away from Reb Smolinsky because she does not want to be forced to conform to his idea of what a woman should be, dependent, subservient and unquestioning of male authority. As we saw earlier, Sara also refuses to conform to college life and become a carbon copy of the native American, even though she does prize some of the traits of the young Americans she meets, such as their desire for quiet, solitude and cleanliness. Even though Sara is reconciled to her father at the end of the work, she now comes to him on her own terms, having accomplished what she had striven to do.

In Arrogant Beggar Adele has also resisted the attempt of a male figure to change her, in this case by saving her from a life of poverty. She sees Arthur's interest in her

and his desire to marry her as the desire of a "Sir Galahad" to come to the rescue of a damsel in distress, rather than the love of a man for a woman.²⁰

In All I Could Never Be we are again confronted with a young female protagonist who is not accepted into the dominant society because she does not quite live up to the expectations and the standards of the people surrounding her. She is rejected in turn by the Farnsworths, by the members of the research project in which she is a translator and by Henry Scott. In each case the individuals reject her because she is different, because she does not act the way they expect or would like her to act. The members of the research project, for example, ask for her dismissal from the project because she is, as one member characterizes her, "just one, red hot fire of emotion."²¹ Her behavior is very different from the cold, scientific manner of the other project members. Her emotionalism is also the reason why the Farnsworths reject her. Henry Scott, however, has a more complex reason. Even though he has always told her that she suffers from striving and must learn to be herself, he spurns her because she does not live up to the image he has created for her--that of the sensual creature who lives by instinct alone. Moreover, he cannot deal with her rebuff of his sexual advances, and so decides that she is not really the woman for him. At the end of the novel Fanya learns to be herself, and in this way is able to overcome the feelings of loss caused by Scott's rejection.

Each of the women we have discussed thus far refuses to fit into the mold that the male or society has set for her. She also refuses to be changed by the educational system.

Yeziarska shows us that education in the ghetto functions as a tool by which the educated members of society keep the uneducated in line. It is also a tool of acculturation; the native American uses it to teach the immigrant to copy his ways, his behavior and attitudes, and thus become assimilated. The American school system of Yeziarska's time did not cultivate originality and uniqueness. Her heroines rebel against the noncreative education of a school system which they find oppressive and restrictive. They refuse to dispose of their own ideas (what Yeziarska frequently refers to as their untamed "fire" or passion) and blend into the crowd. As Oscar Handlin tells us, the schools in Yeziarska's time continued to cling to uniformity as an ideal in order to contain the "flood of imported barbarism" that was invading the "whole upper strata of society."²² The classroom was arranged to reflect this desire for uniformity, with the teacher's lessons encrusted by habit, the seats arranged in formal rows and the rigid etiquette, all of which emphasized the difference between school and life.²³

This idea is reiterated by Yeziarska in "How I Found America," with reference to night school for immigrants. The heroine says, "They [night schools] were all the same. A dull course of study and the lifeless, tired teachers--no more interested in their pupils than in the wooden benches

before them--chilled all my faith in the American schools."

In one scene from Salome of the Tenements, Sonya overhears a teacher in Manning's settlement house showing her impoverished students how to make a "milkless, butterless, and eggless cake." This teacher wants to teach them to settle for what is readily available to them, and not to aspire to heights which she believes them incapable of reaching. Sonya is furious, and it is at this point that she begins to realize that Manning's settlement house is not all that it could be or that she had hoped it would be. She sees that it is just another tool of the system for breaking in new immigrants. Yeziarska was against the idea that one should settle for less and not aspire to great heights. As the title of one of her short stories in Children of Loneliness suggests, she thought that one should always try to look up "to the stars."

She believed that an education could save immigrants from a life of bleak unfulfillment, yet she found the American educational system inadequate because it frequently did not meet the creative and emotional needs of the immigrant. It was too stifling and inflexible. Likewise, marriage and the traditional Jewish family life proved too stifling for women. Yeziarska felt that there was a relationship between the two, and she shows how the Jewish immigrant woman was hurt by both her family and society.

In Arrogant Beggar, Adele is forced to study domestic science (an allusion to Yeziarska's own course of study in this country) because she is unable to receive any other type

of education. She is repeatedly told by her benefactress, Mrs. Hellman, that "the joy of living consists in serving
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 others."

Mrs. Hellman wants to indoctrinate those she is "helping" with a few simple ideas, some of which she enumerates in the following passage:

It is almost a religion with me, this mission of teaching the masses that there is no such thing as drudgery. There are no menial tasks if you bring to your work the spirit of service and the love of honest toil...If only women could bring into their homes this self-sacrificing attitude towards life. Isn't it just as satisfying to the soul to feel you have scrubbed a floor faithfully as to be mistress of the house? In doing your cheerful, conscientious best, in your humble sphere, you are doing your just part toward the harmony and perfection of the whole universe (Arrogant Beggar, p. 77).

These statements have a twofold significance. First, they show the convoluted logic and hypocrisy characteristic of the charity workers and other social welfare officials presented in Yeziarska's works; on a deeper level, this argument sounds very much like the rhetoric heard by countless women through the ages, utilized by their male counterparts as a justification for their subservient position in society. Interestingly, the idea that in serving others (i.e. men) the woman could achieve fulfillment in life was usually presented to the young girl by her older, and supposedly wise, guardian, frequently her mother. In this novel Mrs. Hellman functions initially at least as a surrogate mother figure (since Adele is an orphan). Mrs. Hellman was modelled upon Mrs. Henry Ollesheimer, who seems to have served as a

mother figure towards whom Yeziarska displayed ambivalent feelings (resentment for needing her help and gratitude for receiving it).²⁵ Adele is also torn between her feelings of loyalty to Mrs. Hellman and her feelings of anger and resentment.

In Yeziarska's works, immigrants and women, treated similarly in many ways--patronized and condescended to, in other words, treated like children--have many of the same obstacles to overcome and the same barriers to cross. In some of her works (such as Salome and Bread Givers), the woman's emancipation is the central focus of the tale, while in others (such as "How I Found America") the immigrant's refusal to become what American society wants him or her to become, a pair of hands in a sweatshop, is the main focus.

In her writings, the woman or the immigrant (or both) pays a high price if he or she opts for assimilation. If Yeziarska's heroine seeks to be transformed by the American male hero into an American woman, she must leave the ghetto and take on the coloration of America: repression of emotion, coldness, indifference, rejection of family and culture.²⁶ She must lose her real identity or creativity, but sometimes she refuses to pay this price; she has seen through the system,²⁷ and through the lover.

Therefore we have seen that in linking the problems of the immigrant, who wants to retain his own cultural identity, to those of the woman, who wants to retain her individuality and separateness from husband and lover, Yeziarska was able

to expose the problems of society and the "system" as well as propose possible solutions. Yeziarska can therefore be viewed as a social critic; through what I have labeled a polemic of the heart she is able to show us her side of the argument using emotional rather than intellectual or rational arguments and tactics.

Her solution to the "woman question," as it came to be called, was for the woman to achieve a sense of independence and self-worth through an education and a vocation. And, looking around her, Yeziarska saw that these goals were being pursued.

Historically, it seems that Jewish women did in fact avail themselves of various educational opportunities, especially in New York. We know this thanks to a study entitled Working Girls in Evening Schools, conducted in New York City during 1910 and 1911 under the auspices of the Russell Sage Foundation. Some of the facts uncovered are quite significant:

Single working women, or women preparing themselves for the job market, made up the bulk of first-generation Jewish females attending evening school. Foreign-born Jewish women made up the second largest group of those attending evening schools--about 15 percent of the students. As a group they were exceeded only by women who had been born in America. Even so, approximately 25 percent of the American-born women were the daughters of Jewish immigrants--second-generation Jews. Therefore, according to this study, about 40 percent of the women attending evening schools

in New York were Jewish. Although many of the women were taking vocational courses or attending evening trade schools, still the enormously high proportion of Jewish women in the evening school system signifies both their eagerness to advance themselves economically and the extent of their desire to take advantage of educational opportunities available in America that were denied to them in the old country (The Jewish Woman in America, p. 129).

Thus we can see that prospects for the Jewish-American woman were not as bleak as is often supposed. Yeziarska's optimism and her stress upon the value of education seems to be founded in the historical realities of the time. This writer, who pointed out the alternatives available to women in early twentieth-century society, was at the least one of the first pre-feminist, if not feminist, Jewish-American women writers.

Saviours and Saints: The World of Religion in the Works
of Anzia Yezierska

Yezierska never fully emerged from the world of her forefathers. This is a world permeated by the Jewish religion and its traditions. She utilized its symbolism in her writings, though she also used that of the Christian and pagan worlds. Ultimately, her works contain a strange admixture of all three worlds, yet her themes are uncomplicated and often redundant. In novels such as Arrogant Beggar, Red Ribbon and Salome of the Tenements, Yezierska attempts to show the difference between false and true prophets, illusory revelations and real ones. In effect, therefore, many of her works, which can be viewed as religious allegories, concern themselves with the difference between appearance and reality, the false and the true.

In "Zion as Main Street" Leslie Fiedler points out that "the very notion of a Jewish-American literature represents a dream of assimilation, and the process it envisages is bound to move toward a triumph (in terms of personal success) which is also a defeat (in terms of meaningful Jewish survival)" (p. 70). Many critics likewise equate the theme of cultural assimilation to American ideals with the theme of the Jew's loss of "Jewishness" or Jewish identity. The fact that a Jewish-American, rather than a Jewish literature, can exist at all, Fiedler tells us, shows that the assimilated lifestyle of the American Jew was seen as a viable alternative to traditional Judaism. Of course, as the Jew became

assimilated, he also began to neglect his religious practices; he wanted to be more and more inconspicuous, to hide his Jewishness more effectively.

In Anzia Yeziarska's works one finds what can be referred to as a "secularization of religion," in which Jewish and non-Jewish religious terminology is utilized often, usually to designate or refer to secular ideas. However, the religious associations are not far behind. Words and phrases that are standard parts of everyone's terminology acquire new meanings within the context of her works. For example, when Yeziarska uses the word "saint" in its secular context to refer to a virtuous individual when another term would be just as or even more appropriate, perhaps she wants us to consider the word's religious connotation as well as its secular meaning. Similarly, when she has one of her characters refer to her lover as a "god," she is denoting the fact that this character "worships" the man in question, perhaps in a somewhat religious fashion, as we will see later on.

By using religious and biblical references Yeziarska seems to be trying to resettle her characters in the world of their forefathers, a world which posits a belief in divine intervention and a causal universe. Perhaps she is also trying to show that the timeless concepts of religion still have relevance in modern-day society. A third reason that she sprinkles her writing with so many religious allusions could be that, like it or not, she herself never fully emerged from the world of her fathers.

Of course, on the surface Yeziarska's own connection to her religious background was tenuous. She was not a practicing Jew, and had in fact rejected Jewish belief and behavior early on in her career; later in life she delved into other religions, becoming for a while a follower of Christian Science, Hindu mysticism and so on. But in her writing she seems to have had a need to show her characters in a traditional religious milieu. By employing religious phrasing she is in some slight way retaining her characters' connection to their religious identity and preserving fragments of their Jewish or at least religious background.

For example, Shenah Pessah, the protagonist in "Wings" and "Hunger," still believes that divine intervention has caused Mr. Barnes to come to her door. His "coming" is said to be a miracle, and he is called a "god" several times.¹ He functions as Shenah's saviour or messiah. The religious terminology in these two stories alone is too widespread to be dismissed as coincidental or unintentional.

In these two stories Yeziarska tells of a lonely young immigrant girl, Shenah Pessah, who lives with and works for her uncle as a janitress. He has spent fifty dollars to send for her from Europe and wants to "have a little use from her."² Her life is one of drudgery and hopelessness. When a young sociology instructor who is preparing a thesis on Russian Jews appears at her door, we are told that she looked up at him with "wistful worship in her eyes."³ When he spoke we are told that "Shenah Pessah drank in his words with a joy that struck back as fear lest this

man--the visible sign of her answered prayer--would any moment be snatched up and disappear in the heavens where he belonged." ⁴ Barnes is obviously seen in an unrealistic light. One day he takes her to the public library, and when he kisses her outside, she runs away from him; this is the first in a series of similar encounters, perhaps autobiographically based, to which Yeziarska returns several times in her fiction. She cannot accept the sexual advances of this godlike creature. The psychological significance of these encounters is that the godlike creature is a patriarchal figure with whom Shenah (perhaps a projection of Anzia) cannot have a close relationship. He represents her father and her god, both of whom she ends up rejecting.

In the two other encounters, which are almost identical to the one above (in All I Could Never Be and Red Ribbon), the man, who has previously been seen as a "god," is taken off the pedestal and shown to be a human being, replete with the lusts and desires of an ordinary mortal. In "Hunger," however, which was written at an early stage in Yeziarska's career, Shenah cannot denude Barnes of his divine status, and she therefore cannot accept another lover, Sam Arkin, who represents reality and earthiness. She still believes that Barnes is somehow, figuratively at least, a supernatural creature:

It was all a miracle--his coming, this young professor from one of the big colleges...If he would have been only a man I could have forgotten him. But he was not a man! He was God himself! On whatever I look shines his face! ("Hunger," pp. 35-36).

From a psychological perspective, Yeziarska cannot yet at this early point in her life reject the father/god figure that Barnes represents.

Interestingly, when Barnes meets Shenah she is reading a book called Dreams by Olive Schreiner,⁵ which is a collection of dream allegories; he tells her to put this book away, and he will introduce her to more sensible books. Three of the dream sequences in Dreams seem to have direct relevance to Yeziarska's character, Shenah Pessah.

The first, sixth and eleventh dreams pertain to Shenah Pessah, for whom only the ideal world, not the real one, is acceptable. The first dream, entitled "The Lost Joy," tells of Life, who is sitting and waiting all day until Love arrives. This is exactly what Shenah Pessah does. When Love finally takes shape, it does not live up to Life's or to Shenah's expectations. The sixth dream, "A Dream of Wild Bees," tells of an unborn child in its mother's womb whose reward is that the ideal will always be real to him. This is what Shenah Pessah's reward (or punishment, depending upon one's perspective) also seems to have been. At the end of the eleventh dream, "The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed," the dreamer sees hordes of people walking in the streets and they are all shouting, "We are seeking, we are seeking--we are seeking." And a broken barrel organ sobs, "The Beautiful--the Beautiful--the Beautiful!" The dreamer cries out, "Love! -- Truth! The Beautiful! -- The Beautiful!" (Dreams, pp. 162-63). Shenah Pessah is also a seeker after love, truth and the beautiful.

In "Wings" and in "Hunger", Shenah Pessah is, like the characters in Schreiner's work, living in a dream world; as will be the case with the ninth child in "A Dream of Wild Bees," for Shenah the ideal world is the only real one. And just as the people in "The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed" are seeking the Beautiful, so too Yeziarska's character (and many of her other fictional characters as well) is constantly looking for the Beautiful in the world. Even Shenah's name means "beautiful one" in Yiddish. If she cannot have the ideal in love, she wants no love at all, and thus she rejects the lover who represents reality, Sam Arkin.

Some of Yeziarska's characters in later works are able to settle for less than the ideal, and they are also able to see their "gods" for what they actually are, human beings. In this way they are able to return to reality. In Salome, Arrogant Beggar, All I Could Never Be and Red Ribbon, the male "god" is removed from his pedestal, and it is usually at the expense of the heroine's love for him. Once the heroine sees that her loved one is only a man, not a divine being, she refuses to accept his love. But Shenah cannot discard her ideals; she is therefore unlike Yeziarska's other, more adaptable characters.

In Salome, for example, Sonya Vrunsky is quickly disillusioned and loses respect for Manning. When she leaves the "Garden of Eden" (Greenwold, Manning's estate, is labeled "God's own Eden" in Chapter XV) and comes back to reality, she begins to see through Manning. Just like Adam and Eve, Sonya and Manning must be expelled from Eden, and

also like Adam and Eve, they end up expelling themselves.

Initially Sonya worships Manning just as Shenah worships Barnes. But soon she realizes that her life with Manning is a lie, and she calls him a "faking saint--⁶ bloodless higher up." In actuality Manning never claimed to be a holy individual or a saint. It was only in Sonya's eyes that he appeared as such. In other words, she has projected certain qualities she was looking for unto him. From a psychological perspective, for some reason she needed to find a saint, and so when Manning came along, he became her saint. Later on when she sees Manning for what he really is, a human being, she still thinks that he has the tendencies of a martyr. She believes that "she was the cross on which he bled."⁷ Her god has almost come down to the level of a human being, but not entirely--he is now a Christ figure, half man, half god. Hollins represents for Sonya a complete man, and at the end of the novel she can accept him, because she no longer needs to find a saint.

In Yeziarska's other works, the divine male figure is totally reduced in stature from god to human being. As Boydstan explains, Yeziarska used John Dewey as the model for many of her older, male, god-like characters; and in All I Could Never Be and Red Ribbon we find two exactly parallel accounts of the near-final climactic scene between the Dewey and Yeziarska figures in which the female rebuffs the male's sexual advances. Yeziarska shows each time that her own desire to make him more godlike than human leads to a confrontation and break between them.⁸ In both versions of the

same episode, the female almost immediately regrets resisting the man's embrace, but when she tries to talk to him about it the next day, he is remote, "his face a mask, his voice a monotone" (All I Could Never Be, p. 102).⁹

In a letter of July 7, 1975 Yeziarska's daughter Louise Henrikson says that, although her mother was flirting with Dewey and did desire the consummation of their love, it was also to her an unthinkable act which would be incestuous (Dewey as father figure), irreverent (Dewey as God), and adulterous (Dewey was a married man). Henrikson also states that Dewey expected Anzia to respond sexually, but she was only playing a role. "In other words, she was emotionally an adolescent" (Henrikson to Boydstan, 9 July 1975).

Of course, it is not known whether the event Yeziarska describes actually occurred or was just another one of the autobiographical fictions that Yeziarska was known to create. Yeziarska's daughter suggests that if this scene actually happened, Dewey was as much disappointed in himself as in her when the magic ended (Boydstan, p. xlv). But as Boydstan tells us, whatever happened to estrange Yeziarska and Dewey, she continued to love him to the end of her days.

In both fictional versions of the incident, the "god" has been seen as a man, and the character can no longer accept him because her "ideal" man has been reduced to the "real" man. In Red Ribbon Yeziarska writes, "I had not dreamed that God could become flesh." Perhaps she is using this Christological allusion in order to relate the events of the modern world to those of the past, a past filled with

religion and miracle. In All I Could Never Be we are told concerning Scott, "Instead of a god, here was a man--too close--too earthly. She wanted from him vision--revelation--not this--not this."¹⁰

Fanya's worship of Scott conflicted with her worship of the god of her fathers. She says at one point that she has been "Israel in the wilderness making a false image"¹¹ and at another point that she had abandoned the God of her fathers, setting up Henry Scott as her new god.¹² (The psychological dimension and significance of the Scott/Morrow/father figure will be further examined in a subsequent chapter.)

Towards the end of the novel Fanya goes back to the ghetto at Chanukah time and hears a familiar chant coming from somewhere: "O Lord, my God, I cried unto thee and thou hast healed me." This passage is a citation from Psalms 30, verse 3; it is appropriate in Fanya's case because she too has been healed, and the sickness from which she has been healed can be seen as either idol worship or simply unrequited love.

Fanya then hears the same rabbi chanting, "O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave, thou hast kept me alive that I should not go down into the pit." These lines are the next verse in Psalms 30; they are also interesting in that the second part of the prayer, "thou hast kept me alive that I should not go down into the pit," is an inverted form of Jonah's prayer in Chapter 2 of the Book of Jonah: "Yet thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God" (Jonah 2:7). Like Jonah, Fanya attempted all of her life to

flee from the true God, but she found that she was unable to do so.

After hearing the old rabbi's chants, Fanya recalls her father and his explanation of the symbolic meaning of Hanukah. At the end of this second section of All I Could Never Be Fanya decides to return to her roots and go back to the ghetto, the representation of her Jewish spiritual and religious heritage. But she does not fulfill her promise and ends up in foreign territory again, in Oakdale. Like Jonah, she has failed to learn from her mistakes.

In Red Ribbon, the fictionalized Anzia worships Mammon, the personification of riches, avarice and material gain. There is a religious dimension to Anzia's worship of Mammon: we are told that in her longing for success she was similar to a "convert to a new faith."¹³ Her father constantly warns her that just as fire and water cannot mix, so too godliness and ease cannot fuse, but she rejects his warning saying,

Your godliness is for the dying...I'm young. I'm going to have all that the poor never had. I'll be at ease in Zion. I'll have riches, fame, success--all the fullness of the earth--and heaven too (Red Ribbon, p. 59).

She soon finds out, however, that the material world cannot satisfy her spiritual needs. One can in fact view the entire work as Anzia's "attempt to assay her successes as a part of the eternal problem of materialism as a snare to
¹⁴
to the spirit."

The worship of Mammon, we are told in the New Testament, precludes the love of God because "no man can

serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" (Mathew 6: 24, Luke 16:13). Anzia finds that she wants to serve neither. The material world does not satisfy her, but she does not have a religious outlook or world view. Towards the end of Red Ribbon she contrasts her religious faith (or rather lack of it) to that of Mrs. Thompson in the Fair Oaks community: "she was anchored in the God of her fathers. But I had abandoned the God of my fathers and had not found my own." ¹⁵

Just as Sara Smolinsky and many of Yeziarska's immigrant characters belong to neither the Old World nor the new one, so too Anzia belongs to neither the religious world of her forefathers nor to that of her American neighbors. She too is a drifter "between two worlds." ¹⁶

The two worlds are those of the Jew and the Gentile, which Yeziarska tells us at various points in her novels are mutually exclusive. In All I Could Never Be, for instance, we are told,

No two people ever really touched each other. Mother and child--the nearest and dearest born of one flesh, never quite merged. There must be a reason for the impassable profundities between race and race. Something unripe, unfinished in Gentile and Jew keeps them from fulfillment--except in art--except in dreams (All I Could Never Be, p. 206).

Likewise, in Salome constant reference is made to the incompatibility of the Jewish and Gentile temperaments of Sonya and Manning. Even during one of their first meetings we are made aware of the contrast between them. Sonya

describes herself as follows:

I am a Russian Jewess, a flame--a longing. A soul consumed with hunger for heights beyond reach. I am the ache of unvoiced dreams, the clamor of suppressed desires. I am the un-lived lives of generations stifled in Siberian prisons. I am the urge of ages for the free, the beautiful that never yet was on land or sea (Salome of the Tenements, p. 65).

This is a rhetoric filled with passion and idealism. Manning, on the other hand, describes himself in a controlled, journalistic tone of voice.

I am a puritan whose fathers were afraid to trust experience. We are bound by our possessions of property, knowledge and traditions. Traditions have been the heaviest millstones about our necks. In Russia, it's youth, inexperienced youth that leads the elders. With us, dried-out professors are the priests. Our colleges are temples of Moloch into which youth is poured to come out, stamped and moulded in the old forms--cheated of its ardor for the sake of sanity, prudence and material success (Salome of the Tenements, p. 65).

Sonya and Manning, we soon learn, cannot fuse because of their disparate backgrounds, which are, of course, represented stereotypically. In trying to conform to Manning's expectations, Sonya becomes a "torn and twisted thing, reaching out to false gods."¹⁷

Religious allusions such as the above are numerous in this novel. They all point to the fact that, just like Fanya in All I Could Never Be, Sonya has followed the wrong path; she too has sought false gods, but she will learn from her mistakes. After giving up her false messiah, John Manning, Sonya returns to the fold and receives a true "revelation" in

the last chapter of the book.

We are introduced to the world of religion in the very first chapter of the novel, which is entitled "Salome meets her Saint." When Sonya has an interview with Manning he says to her "you have been a revelation to me." This statement will in fact prove true later on in the novel. The revelation that Sonya will bring to Manning is the fact that he is a carnal and sensual creature just as she is; this revelation takes place in chapter XX, a chapter which also contains a revelation for Sonya, who now realizes that Manning's soul, which she had believed to be a curtain of flame, is only a pale flicker of fire. Sonya's epiphany is abrupt. Her change of mind comes about quite quickly, and within the context of the novel it is a little implausible. In fact, many critics have noted that in general the novel contains too many implausible scenes and unrealistic characters.

The architectural imagery in Salome is also pervaded by the world of religion. In Chapter II, for example, we are told that while Sonya is thinking about Manning's words to her ("you have been a revelation to me"), she walks outside and "every tenement roof became a gilded spire throbbing heavenward with the great Miracle in her heart."¹⁸ Just like Shenah Pessah in "Wings" and "Hunger," Sonya believes at this point that her acquaintance with Manning is a kind of miracle. Even the ghetto takes on a religious aura, with the roofs becoming churchly in appearance. Sonya says, "It's my worship of him [Manning] that lifts me out of myself."

The fourth chapter of Salome is entitled "The Inner Temple of Fashion" and in this chapter Jacques Hollins' shop is more than a business establishment in Sonya's eyes; it is a temple of fashion. When Jacques agrees to design for her, he is taking on the role of a priest of fashion.

Chapter Eighteen is entitled "The Crumbling Temple," and it is at this point in the novel that the entire superstructure of Sonya's illusory world begins to fall apart. Perhaps the title also contains an allusion to the destruction of the Temple in Jewish history. This destruction came about, according to the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as a punishment for Israel's religious and moral transgressions. Even though, literally, the ancient temple was destroyed, in a metaphorical sense it crumbled from within because its destruction was a result of Israel's spiritual disintegration. Likewise, perhaps Sonya's "crumbling temple," her broken marriage, was a punishment for her sin of marrying outside of her religion and overleaping many moral bounds in order to do so.

Sonya herself is referred to as a priestess, a priestess of the religion of beauty,¹⁹ and a priestess of romance²⁰ when she inspires passion in Manning. Her function as a priestess of romance is in fact tied up with her role as the Salome figure to Manning's John the Baptist. The idea of Sonya as a Salome figure is first introduced by Gittel, Sonya's co-worker. Gittel sarcastically tells Sonya (after hearing her plans for painting her apartment even though she has no money), "You should be a Christ-child in a manger and

then maybe your wise man will come to you with his presents of perfumed riches." Then when Sonya tells of her plans to borrow one hundred dollars from Honest Abe, the parsimonious pawnbroker, Gittel calls her a "'meshugeneh Salome' who with her crazy dances is trying to get the head of John the Baptist."²¹

Later on Manning actually dreams that he is John the Baptist "loving with a self-destruction the white-fleshed loveliness of Salome, who lured and drew him with the dazzling color of her voluptuous dancing." We are told that after the dream Manning "awoke in a dripping perspiration from the battle that waged within him."²²

The idea of Manning as a John the Baptist figure is significant. Yeziarska is actually changing the Biblical story in order to portray Manning both as a victim of his own lust and as a figure of martyrdom. According to the Biblical tale, which is found in Mark 6: 21-28, Herod's wife, Herodias, held a grudge against John the Baptist because he did not approve of Herod's marriage to her on the grounds that she was Herod's brother's wife. As a favor to her mother, Salome dances for Herod, and he says he will grant her anything she desires. She asks her mother what she should ask for, and her mother tells her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. She does so, and John is beheaded. Therefore, in the Biblical version of the tale Salome desires John's head because she wants to please her mother, and she has no motives of her own for desiring his destruction.

In Oscar Wilde's play, Salome, however, we get a different version altogether of the Salome story. In this work, Salome desires Jokanaan. She says at one point, "Jokanaan, I am amorous of thy body."²³ Jokanaan rejects her, and so Salome decides that if she cannot kiss his mouth while he is alive, she will do so after his death. After dancing for Herod, who it seems desires Salome for himself, Salome asks him for Jokanaan's head and she is granted her request.

Sonya is an anti-heroine, and so is Salome.²⁴ But neither in the Biblical tale nor in Wilde's play is there any mention of John the Baptist lusting after Salome's body, which would make him (i.e. Manning) a sinner as well as Salome. So why does Yeziarska transform the story in this manner? Why does she combine Manning's role to be both that of the Herod figure (the luster) and that of the John the Baptist figure (the innocent martyr and victim of Salome's wiles)?

It seems that by having Manning dream that he is John the Baptist lusting after Salome and thus bringing about his own destruction, Yeziarska was able to foreshadow the scenes in which Manning actually begins to feel a sexual desire for Sonya (Chapter XX, where Sonya is said to be a priestess of romance, and Chapter XXVI, the last chapter, in which we are told that Sonya is the cross on which Manning bled). In these two chapters the two sides of Manning are revealed: he is both carnal creature and martyr. If Yeziarska had presented Manning as a wholly innocent martyr, as John is

presented in both the biblical tale and in Wilde's play, she could not have portrayed him as a sinner who is destroyed by his own sexuality. In other words, she could not have reduced him in stature from divine figure to mortal human being. And I believe that it was important she do so in order that she could portray Sonya's awareness of his mortality, his subsequent reduction in stature in Sonya's eyes, and Sonya's psychological need to project onto a mortal being the traits of a god. At the end of the novel, Yezierska shows that Sonya realized her mistake; she now saw that Manning was a passionate human being just like herself.

She saw how men and women helplessly and unknowingly destroy themselves and each other in the blind uprising of brute passion which lies like a sleeping dog within the consciousness of the divine soul (Salome of the Tenements, p. 289).

Sonya, as the seductress, is still the cause of his destruction and her appellation, priestess of romance, is a pejorative one. In fact, according to Leslie Fiedler in "Zion as Main Street," the Jewish girl is characteristically represented as a seductress figure in American literature:

The American imagination does not permit the Gentile hero to get the Jewish girl in a blithe Shakespearean ending...The trouble is that the Jewish girl is thought of not in terms of Mary, but of Lilith, and becomes one with all those dark ladies (otherwise Latin) who are paired off against the fair, Anglo-Saxon girl: the former representing all the Puritan mind most longs for, and fears, in passion; the latter standing for a passionless, sexless love.²⁵

(This is a characteristically male stereotype. It is interesting that Yeziarska should be making use of it.)

Sonya is described at one point as walking in the manner of a "joyous pagan" whose only god is love.²⁶ Later on, upon reaching the lowest point in her life, she speaks of the "gods" (instead of God) having punished her, thus confirming her status as a pagan heroine:

Where in this whole world can I turn to? Even the gods are against me, because I couldn't stand the mean luck to which I was born. Because I wanted to grab by force love, power, the place higher up, the gods got jealous of me" (Salome of the Tenements, p. 256).

Interestingly, the chapter from which the above passage is taken is entitled "For the Truth They Burn You," perhaps indicating that Sonya herself has in some way taken on the role of a martyr (in the vein of Joan of Arc) through the act of leaving Manning.

In this novel the secular world of popular culture is permeated with religious symbolism and terminology. For example, Mona Lisa is described as Sonya's patron saint²⁷ and the chapter in which this occurs is entitled "The Temple of Serenity."²⁸ At this point Sonya is working in the Manning settlement house, and silence pervades her life. Before she had always been steeped in noise. She decides that she wants to be like the silent, mysterious Mona Lisa, and "in imitation of her new patron saint, she folded her hands and assumed a cryptic, impersonal smile" (Salome of the Tenements, p. 138). She hopes that in this way she can

lure Manning, making him believe that she is part of his world.

In this novel Yeziarska is attempting to differentiate between the true and the false gods that Sonya has followed. Manning has turned out to be a false messiah who could not even save himself from his own passions. Sonya learns this before it is too late, and she is thus able to save herself at the end of the novel.

Like the little urchins in Chapter X who grab at the roses which Sonya gives to a little girl, even though they are stung by the thorns and bleed, Sonya and Manning have tried to reach out to one another, but they too are stung by thorns (their own separateness) and they too bleed. The thorn imagery evokes the theme of martyrdom as well, a theme which pervades the novel.

At the end of the book we find out that through their suffering the love of Sonya and Manning has remained intact; it will live on forever and ever. The book ends with the idea that "it's only we who die, but the spark of love, the flash of beauty from eye to eye, the throb from heart to heart goes on and on forever." This is a popular quasi-mystical religious concept, and a hopeful ending to an otherwise bleak novel.

Arrogant Beggar also ends on a note of hope. The work concerns itself with the theme of resurrection, not the immortality of love, but the rebirth of love.

In the beginning of the novel Adele Lindner falls in love with Arthur Hellman, who, like the other male figures we

have discussed, is seen by her as a god. Hellman, the son of the aristocratic but ultimately uncharitable Mrs. Hellman, is, according to Adele, "Unapproachable. A god, standing in a museum, with the sign, 'Don't touch.' Looking out with his cool gaze at the crowd around him."²⁹

Hellman's cool gaze is reminiscent of Manning's coldness and the coldness of many of Yeziarska's other male characters. When Adele ultimately realizes that the charity and feelings of concern which she believed were genuine at the Hellman Home for Working Girls were actually self-serving and hypocritical gestures, she breaks away from the Home as well as from Arthur.

Before she makes the speech exposing the home, she feels like a spectator watching her own funeral: "As time went on, I became aware of two people in me. One Adele, cringing, truckling--to get on. The other, watching her own funeral--cold, critical."³⁰ Finally, Adele has learned the true meaning of love, and whereas before she had thought of herself as a "heroine in a story book,"³¹ now she is able to see reality. Arthur Hellman was a character out of a romance; thus she could not accept him. She has seen the truth, and it has set her free.

After Mumenkeh's death and her own illness (which is a symbolic death), Adele tells Dr. Sirowich (the ghetto doctor) that she has been born again. Not only is Adele born again, but her ability to love is also resurrected. When she meets Jean Rachmansky for the second time, she can now express her real love for him.

The theme of resurrection is reiterated when Rachmansky tells Adele that his music was inspired by a picture of the Resurrection by Signorelli:

I had once seen a picture of the Resurrection by Signorelli...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...I had just begun my composition when the war broke out. I was drafted. All music stopped in me. After the release--I fled to America. On the boat, the silence, the sea, the sky. Suddenly, the whole vision of the Resurrection burst upon me (Arrogant Beggar, p. 257).

Perhaps this vision is not a religious one. Rather the idea of resurrection serves as a metaphor for Rachmansky's rebirth after his arrival in America, which marked the beginning of a new life for him. At the end of the novel he breaks away from Arthur Hellman, and this is also a rebirth because he is thus able to begin his life anew, with Adele.

Love is resurrected in both Adele and Jean. After Mumenkeh's death, Adele dies symbolically and is reborn, and now she is truly able to love another human being. She no longer worships her lover; rather, she attempts to understand and accept his weaknesses. She sees Rachmansky's arrogance and unsympathetic impulses, but she is still able to love him. She no longer needs to see her lover as a god; she can now see his human side, his weaknesses and his shortcomings.

Even Mumenkeh's charity is resurrected in Adele's adoption of Shenah Gittel, Mumenkeh's grandchild, who arrives from Europe. Through this act of charity Adele is in some

way perpetuating the cycle of true charity which Mumenkeh had originated.

The novel can be seen as a religious allegory in which various forces operate upon Adele and seek to control her: Mrs. Hellman represents false charity, while Mumenkeh represents true charity; and Arthur represents false love, while Jean represents true love. As in any allegory, the figures are very cut and dried, black and white. There is little character development here. The same holds true for Salome of the Tenements, though it has more of a sense of character development and delineation. In both novels the characters learn from their experiences, and the good, life-sustaining forces triumph over the evil (or rather, inappropriate) ones, as is the case in many religious allegories.

Thus, many of Yeziarska's characters--Shenah Pessah in "Wings" and "Hunger"; Sonya in Salome of the Tenements; Fanya in All I Could Never Be; Anzia herself in Red Ribbon on a White Horse and Adele in Arrogant Beggar--began their quests either by following false gods or messiahs or by believing in specious revelations. All of these characters, except Shenah Pessah, who cannot relinquish the love of her "deity," Mr. Barnes, are able to see the error of their ways and find true revelations or truths, thus achieving self-actualization.

Therefore, the religious imagery in Yeziarska's works illustrates certain key ideas about the illusory nature of truth and the difference between appearance and reality.

The lovers of many of Yeziarska's heroines appear to be "saints" or "deities", but this is only because the women have projected these qualities onto them. As is the case with the unborn child in Dreams, the ideal world appears real to Yeziarska's characters until they acquire true expectations and dreams. It is only after they receive a true revelation that they are able to see life as it really is. Of course, they must become disillusioned; they must leave the Garden of Eden--the world of impossible perfection--in order to find truth, but they will in the long run benefit from their epiphanies.

In her use of religious imagery Yeziarska is in some way connecting her characters to their spiritual and cultural heritage, but not necessarily to their religious heritage; her imagery comes from the Christian and pagan worlds as well as from Jewish tradition. Through a secularization of religion she is able to create a cosmic panorama of experience in which the symbols of the religious world transcend the sphere of religion and relate to the everyday experiences and perceptions of her characters.

But even though Yeziarska's terminology is borrowed from the Judeo-Christian world, her ideas come from other sources, other religions and alternate religious experiences she delved into and became familiar with. Early on in her life Yeziarska rejected traditional Judaism and found spiritual sustenance in Christian Science and books such as The Little Locksmith and The Fountain. She was also to develop an interest in Hindu mysticism and was particularly drawn to

the teachings of Krishnamurti, whose lectures she attended. (Sullivan, pp. 122-23). All of the movements that Yezierska explored had similar themes: the acceptance of self, and the importance of self-exploration and self-knowledge.

One such movement is the Bahai movement, founded in 1817 in Teheran, Iran. It is a syncretistic and universalist religion. It aims to establish a unity of the human race, of all religions and of science; it advocates universal education, world peace through social equality and opposition to all forms of prejudice, equal rights for the sexes, and, in general, world unity. The universalist aspects of this religion must have appealed to Yezierska, who in her own writings tried to show that salvation is indeed possible for everyone, and that self-knowledge is the key to salvation.

In Christian Science self-knowledge is seen as the route to salvation, to spiritual and even physical well-being.

Fundamental reality is spiritual, created by God and consistently good. Thus, man, as the image and likeness of God, had a birthright of harmony and perfection. The ills that beset humanity, such as sickness, sin, fear, death and poverty, are not part of God's spiritual creation but result from the failure of the human mind to understand and obey God perceptively. To the degree that humans do understand and follow his precepts unswervingly, their lives are regenerated, they experience healing, and their thinking is spiritualized. The degree to which they may not be healed is a result of their limitations in understanding and loving God.³²

Thus, in this religion knowledge plays a very important role. Jesus' statement, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth

shall make you free," has more than a symbolic significance for the Christian Scientist: it is a literal reality. The followers of the Christian Science movement regard Heaven and Hell, not as localities, but as states of consciousness experienced by individuals in terms of their own spiritual progress or lack of it. This concept also has relevance to Yeziarska's beliefs: she shows her characters undergoing transformations in such works as All I Could Never Be, Salome, Arrogant Beggar and Red Ribbon, and thus metaphorically travelling from hell to heaven. Many of her characters learn to know themselves and thus begin to accept themselves. Some even become resigned to their fate in life.

According to Jiddu Krishnamurti, an Indian mystic and philosopher known to Yeziarska during the 1920's, resignation and acceptance of one's limitations are the roads to salvation. Krishnamurti regards life as a voyage of self-discovery in which self-doubt, uncertainty, and self-criticism are inextricably related to spiritual transformation.

The human problem begins with the "I--process"--an insatiable self-generating and all-consuming greed which is manifest not only in personal selfishness and in the social and historical instances of man's brutality to man, but also in conventional morality filled with expediency, self-satisfaction and subtle self-pride...Fear and anxiety, obsession with security, self-assertion, and aggression (the "appearance of courage") are all forms of frantic self-affirmation...Spiritual maturity and enlightenment come only with a radical breakthrough to deeper levels of man's psychic resources which then obliterate the debased superficialities of the ego state. This takes the form of a direct intuition and an inner transformation. It is not the result of simple moral striving but of critical self-reflection, doubt and final enlightenment and self-knowledge,

complete and therapeutic. This, in turn, leads to the integration of the human personality, freedom and love in pure, selfless compassion.³³

Many of Yeziarska's characters, most notably Anzia in Red Ribbon, experience fear and anxiety and are obsessed with financial security until they undergo spiritual transformations which leave them psychically "free."

Krishnamurti also tells us in one of his books, Think on These Things (1964), that happiness does not come when you are striving for it. In Red Ribbon the narrator realizes this at the end of the book and tells us,

I had tried to be happy, but this happiness now came unbidden, unwilling, as though all the hells I had been through had opened a secret door. Why had I no premonition in the wandering years when I was hungering and thirsting for recognition, that this quiet joy, this sanctuary, was waiting for me after I had sunk back to anonymity? I did not have to go to far places, sweat for glory, strain for the smile from important people. All that I could ever be, the glimpses of truth I reached for everywhere, was in myself (Red Ribbon, p. 221).

Krishnamurti believed that truth, as well as happiness, arrives when the mind is quiet, free of all striving:

Happiness is strange; it comes when you are not seeking it. When you are not making an effort to be happy, then unexpectedly, mysteriously happiness is there, born of purity, of a loveliness of being...Truth is not something to be achieved. Truth comes into being when your mind and heart are purged of all sense of striving and you are no longer trying to become somebody; it is there when the mind is very quiet, listening timelessly to everything that is happening...As long as you are afraid of anyone or anything, there can be no happiness. There can be no happiness as long as you are afraid of your parents, your teachers, afraid of not passing examinations, afraid of not making progress, of

not getting nearer to the Master, nearer to truth, or of not being approved of, patted on the back. But if you are not really afraid of anything, then you will find--when you wake up of a morning, or when you are walking alone--that suddenly a strange thing happens: uninvited, unsolicited, unlooked for, that which may be called love, truth, happiness, is suddenly there (Think on These Things, pp. 39-40).

Yeziarska shows these principles at work many times in her fiction. In All I Could Never Be, for example, Fanya constantly fears rejection; she is afraid of not being approved of. When she finally accepts herself, and no longer needs the approval of others, then and only then, does she begin to know happiness.

Krishnamurti believed that "the ultimate answer, is to see things as they really are, unclouded by the deceptions of self-concern. To accomplish this one must be empty of all preconceptions and all teachers." The universal is to be found within the individual self only by direct experience, and outside helps are in reality only crutches at best and cages at worst. "Truth is a pathless land" said Krishnamurti. "You cannot approach it by any religion, any sect." Truth can only be experienced directly, the moment it happens. "The truth comes from within, by seeing for yourself."

Krishnamurti's and perhaps Yeziarska's ultimate statement about religion seems to have been that any religion which leads to direct experience is good, but a religion which asks its adherents to follow its tenets solely and only depend upon its teachings for salvation is imperfect and

should be discarded. In other words, the best spiritual teacher is experience and the self.

Yeziarska's relationship to the "self" will be more fully treated in the following chapter; I will attempt to show that many of her heroines are able to achieve freedom through self-knowledge--and through her characters' experiences she herself achieved a vicarious freedom, a cathartic release from her paralyzing anxieties, fears and doubts.

Autobiography and Ideology: Yeziarska's Acceptance of Self

Yeziarska's life story played an important role in her fiction. We cannot attempt to understand her writing until we understand her. When we do begin to see what she was all about, we can see that her own needs and desires found expression in her works and she was able to exorcise some of her pain and despair by writing about it. Since she herself felt cut off from the community, she wrote about characters who were outcasts. When they learned to accept themselves, then, through them, her own life was in some way validated.

In most of her novels and short stories the characters stand outside of society, detached from their surroundings. They feel that circumstances beyond their control (i.e. birth, poverty, immigrant status) are ruling their lives; they believe that their alienation is caused by society's rejection and does not come from within themselves. In Red Ribbon on a White Horse, however, the main character senses that she is estranged from herself, from her own feelings, as well as from the society around her. Her character foreshadows the lonely old women characters Yeziarska was to present later on in her career.

Even Yeziarska's early works deal with alienation, a feeling of not belonging, of being cut off from one's community. In "Wings" and "Hunger", Mr. Barnes embodies the American ideal, the type of self-assured person Shenah Pessah would like to become. She exclaims at one point, "God from the world! I'm nothing and nobody now, but ach! How

beautiful I would become if only the light from his eyes would fall on me!" ("Wings," p. 11). Mr. Barnes represents Americanization, and if his light would fall on Shenah Pessah, she too would become a part of American society.

In another short story in this collection, "The Miracle," the young protagonist falls in love with her night school teacher, who, like Mr. Barnes in "Wings" and "Hunger," is called a god. It is Americanization that is holy to the young woman. By marrying her teacher, she is able to become literally and figuratively immersed in American society; besides falling in love with her teacher, she has also fallen in love with America, and she will be united to both.

In "Soap and Water," the character's isolation is presented in a unique manner. The young laundress states,

I, soaking in the foul vapors of the steaming laundry, I with my dirty, tired hands, I am ironing the clean, immaculate shirt-waists of clean immaculate society. I, the unclean one, am actually fashioning the pedestal of their cleanliness, from which they reach down, hoping to lift me to the height that I have created for them ("Soap and Water," p. 167).

In a tone of intense anger and disappointment, the narrator insists that she feels excluded from the "in" group at college because she must work to pay her way through school. She is therefore not a member of the "leisure class" which most of the other college students belong to. She is resentful and bitter, and metaphorically sees herself as a ritually "unclean" member of society who must be ostracized from the community until she is "purified" (Americanized).

She says of Dean Whiteside, "she could see nothing in people like me except the dirt and the stains on the outside."

The implication is that in America education is open only to those individuals who are "clean," that is, socially and culturally assimilated.

This theme of the dirty outsider also brings to mind one of the ways in which the uptown Jews tried to assimilate the downtowners: by giving them, as Howe relates, "rapid lessons in civics, English and the uses of soap."¹

Only when the laundress meets a mediator (in Yeziarska's tales there are several such characters) between herself and the "true Americans," Mrs. Van Ness, can she truly sing the praises of America. Thus the young heroine's partial acceptance of self has come about through another person's kindness. She, like the other two characters discussed thus far, must continue to seek approval from others.

In Yeziarska's second collection of short stories, Children of Loneliness, loneliness and alienation are the leitmotifs around which the entire work revolves. Here Yeziarska refers to loneliness as a type of hunger, a "love hunger." In "Mostly About Myself," a narrative essay in this collection, she tells us that all of human life is the story of man's hunger, either his "bread hunger" or his "love hunger":

But is not all of human life the story of our hunger, our loneliness? What is the root of economics, sociology, literature and all art but man's bread hunger and man's love hunger?

When I first started to write, I could only write one thing--different phases of the one thing only--bread hunger. At last I've written out my bread hunger. And now I can write only the different phases of the one thing--loneliness, love hunger, the hunger for people ("Mostly About Myself," p. 18).

It is evident that many of Yeziarska's stories do indeed center around people groping for the affection of other people, people who are "love hungry." The characters in many of the short stories in Hungry Hearts embody this hunger, as we have already seen. Shenah Pessah's eagerness and evident love hunger, for example, are mistaken by Mr. Barnes for overaggressiveness, and he thinks to himself, "There it is. The whole gamut of the Russian Jew--the pendulum swinging from abject servility to boldest aggressiveness" ("Wings," p. 10). Barnes sees Shenah Pessah as a type; he classifies, rather than tries to understand her, and he is not at all aware of her "love hunger" and loneliness.

In "An Immigrant Among the Editors," another narrative essay in Children of Loneliness, the narrator, a young female writer, goes to three different editors with her work, desiring approval and acceptance of her writing. She wants to be encouraged to express herself, but the editors do not understand her needs; one editor even gives her an edition of "The Psychology of Madness," believing that she is somewhat deranged. Describing her writing, the young woman tells us,

And when I'd really work out a thought in words, I'd want to say it over and over a million times, for fear maybe I wasn't saying it strong enough...The real thing I meant remained inside of me for want of deeper, more burning words than I

had yet found in the cold English language ("An Immigrant Among the Editors", pp. 56-57).

This essay details the predicament of the artist, who, even when he does not have to confront a language barrier, often finds himself isolated because of his inability to communicate. Frequently he finds himself employing clichés and formulaic phrases, and presenting stereotypical situations and characters instead of using original language and characterization. (Yeziarska herself confronted this problem--many of her characters are either "good" or "bad," sirens [e.g. Salome] or saints [e.g. Mumenkeh], heroes or anti-heroes; moreover, her language is often filled with clichés.) Sometimes the artist cannot express his true feelings in his own words. And besides an inability to communicate, the artist is also frequently faced with the predicament, or even tragedy, of not being able to find an audience. Yeziarska's own style, intense and passionate, harmonizes with and reflects her view of herself as the fiery, passionate immigrant who must continually struggle with the cold, reserved Anglo-Saxon (whose writing style is also cold and concise).

When the young writer in this tale finally achieves success, she forgets her own struggles, and when she meets a hungry young writer, she treats him in the same manner the three editors had treated her. He asks her to look at his manuscript, but she refuses. He then says he had it printed himself, and she tells him, "Then it must not be any good."

Even though she soon realizes her mistake, she still has managed to perpetuate the same cycle of neglect which she herself had been caught in.

In the title story of Children of Loneliness, Rachel Ravinsky, who is wandering between two worlds, the old and the new, is also lonely and alienated. She does not fit into her parents' world, but neither does she fit into the modern world. Her boyfriend, Frank Baker, cannot help her; she realizes that she must seek a new life on her own. Only through her own achievements can she free herself from her sense of alienation and uprootedness.

In Bread Givers the theme of isolation is introduced early in the work, and it seems to be the concept around which the entire work revolves. Sara's isolation and her inability to conform to the standards of her parents and her tradition cause her much pain. She cannot live like her sisters, obedient to her father's will and in conformity with the rest of the Jewish community's norms. Her independence and strong will make her stand apart; and she finds that eventually she is able to enjoy her own company and to live without society's approval. As Virginia Woolf had pointed out, she finds that a woman needs more than anything a room of her own. When she does get her own room despite many difficulties, she is finally able to be at peace with herself. Even earlier, while sitting alone in a bakery for the first time, she had begun to appreciate the peace of solitude:

As I sat there, in the stillness of the morning, I realized that I had yet never been alone since I was born. This was the first time I ate by myself, with silence and stillness for my company...How strong, how full of life and hope I felt as I walked out of that bakery. I opened my arms, burning to hug the new day. The strength of a million people was surging up in me. I felt I could turn the earth upside down with my littlest finger. I wanted to dance, to fly in the air and kiss the sun and stars with my singing heart. I, alone with myself, was enjoying myself for the first time as with grandest company (Bread Givers, pp. 156-57).

At other times, however, Sara feels like a stranger, and in one chapter of the novel, entitled "Outcast," Sara's alienation is vividly portrayed. At this point, Sara, who now works in a laundry, feels separated from the other girls in her workplace:

I was shut out like a "greenhorn" who didn't talk their language. When they planned any picnics or parties, I was left out.

Hurt to the bone, I sank into a shell of stiff pride. I pretended not to see, not to hear the slights heaped on me. Lunchtime I was always apart in my corner, my head buried in a book. But often when I seemed to be reading, I longed to throw myself at the feet of the girls and cry out to them, "Say anything you like. Do anything you like. All right--hurt me. But don't leave me out. I don't want to be left out!" (Bread Givers, p. 180).

Sara is torn between her feelings of wanting to belong and her need to be set apart from the crowd.

In the school environment, as well as in her workplace, Sara feels isolated:

Even in school I suffered, because I was not like the rest. I irritated the teachers, stopping the lessons with my questions. A bored weariness fell over the whole class the minute I started to speak. They'd begin to nudge each other by the sleeve and whisper, "Oh Lord! That bug! Again showing off her smartness!" They didn't hunger and thirst for knowledge, they weren't excited about anything they were learning, so it jarred on them that I was so excited. To them I was only a selfish grabber of their time because I was so crazy to know too much (Bread Givers, p. 180).

One day she decides that she really wants to be accepted. In order to be like the other girls in the laundry, she thinks she must look like them, so she buys make-up and applies it, thinking this will bridge the gulf between herself and the others:

I looked in the glass at the new self I had made. Now I was exactly like the others! Red lips, red cheeks, even red roses under the brim of my hat. Blackened lashes, darkened eyebrows. Soft, white lace at my neck. Ah! What a different picture! No old maid here! A young girl in the height of her bloom!...But my excited happiness soon sank down. I felt funny and queer. Something was wrong. As if my painted face didn't hang together with the rest of me. On the outside I looked like the other girls. But the easy gladness that sparkled from their eyes was not in mine. They were a bunch of light-hearted savages who looked gay because they felt gay. I was like a dolled-up dummy fixed for a part on the stage.

"No--no! I will be like them!" I cried. "I'll go like this to work. I've as much right to be gay and draw men as they."

But next morning, when I got into the street, I grew panicky with self-consciousness. Everybody seemed staring at me. I felt shamed and confused with my false face. It was as though the rouge had turned into a mask, and I could not breathe through the cover. I sneaked through the streets like a guilty thing. When I got to the laundry I hurried into the cloakroom to tear the roses off my hat and wash the paint off my face. But before I knew what or how, the girls crowded around me.

"Give a look, only! The lady!"

"Done it with a shovel!"

"So scared, she's got to scrape it off!"
 I turned to my work, raw with the shame that
 I had tried to be like the rest and couldn't
 (Bread Givers, pp. 182-83).

As was the case with David Levinsky, Sara's outer self could not coincide with her inner self. She could manage to look like the rest, but she could not feel like the others. She feels superior to the other girls, the "light-hearted savages" who had little to worry about except beaux, dances, or the latest styles. She knows she is not like them, and is afraid that with her make-up she will turn into a "dolled-up dummy." This latter phrase has a double significance: she will become a dummy, that is, an unfeeling and inarticulate creature, or she will become like the rest of the girls, a decorated, but unthinking being. Sara does not want to hide behind a mask of make-up and become like the crowd, ordinary; she feels a need to be different and special. Her sense of isolation is pronounced until she accepts the fact that she is unique, and that she can live with her own uniqueness. As Alice Kessler Harris tells us, Yeziarska came to a similar acceptance of self in her own life:

Yeziarska, like Sara, opted for self and built her life around her own authentic needs. She freed herself from a tradition few of her countrywomen could ignore in that first generation, and she did it against the heaviest odds. But she paid an enormous price. This book was part of her attempt to seek absolution (Bread Givers, Introduction, p. xvii).

The novel All I Could Never Be can be seen as another attempt at absolution, or catharsis, for Yeziarska. The

poem Fanya sends the Farnsworths describes the loneliness and desolation she has already experienced in her young life:

Madonna! Mother-spirit!
 Beautiful one of the snow-white hair--friend of
 the red roses!
 Let me warm my lost, homeless heart on your
 breast.
 I'm so cold, so starved, so maddened with
 loneliness,
 All my life I've been choking with tears;
 Always driven back upon myself.
 No one wanted the love I burned to give.
 Cast out--homeless--in a city of a million homes.
 Oh, Beautiful One of the snow-white hair--friend
 of the red roses!
 Take me in your arms and kiss me, and hold me
 close;
 And in your loving warmth, close against your
 breast, let flow my tears (All I Could
 Never Be, Prologue).

Fanya feels that she has been rejected by the Farnsworths because she has "exposed the famine of her soul to strangers" (p. 24). In other words, by revealing her loneliness, she has constructed an even greater gulf between herself and others.

In the main story of the novel, Fanya is first accepted by the members of the research group led by Scott, but soon they find her fiery temperament too hard to deal with. The chairman of the group wants to dismiss her because he believes that her overemotionalism renders her observations scientifically inaccurate.

Scott also accepts Fanya initially, but when she fails to live up to his expectations, he becomes cold and ultimately rejects her. This last rejection, that of Scott, is the hardest for Fanya to handle, and she must first come

to terms with herself, by accepting her past, before she can get over this hurtful experience.

Carol Schoen describes the connection between the novel's prologue, main story and epilogue: in each of the incidents the main figure is permitted a brief entry into a brighter, more beautiful and richer world, but is ultimately rejected because she has offended the sensibilities of the "in" group.²

By setting the main story within a frame of a prologue and an epilogue, Yeziarska is able to render dramatically the immigrant's sense of goals that seem reachable, but which are snatched away just as it seems they are about to be obtained.³

The main story of All I Could Never Be portrays most clearly this theme of goals snatched away. Fanya's unsuccessful relationship with Henry Scott represents her inability to overcome her isolation and connect with another individual at this point in her life. It is only in the epilogue to the novel that she learns to conquer her loneliness and isolation by relating to others, namely to Jane and Vladimir.

Fanya understands the sense of alienation felt by Jane, an old woman in Oakdale who has become deaf and has been cut off from the community. She goes to visit her and buys milk from her, but when she tries to get the other people in the village to follow suit, they become suspicious of Fanya and grow "mean and hard and airless" (p. 231).

Remembering the episode of her aunt thrusting her out of her house, Fanya also identifies with Jane's uncleanliness and the disgust that the neighbors feel toward her:

In Jane's ostracism Fanya saw her aunt thrusting her out of the house because her head was dirty, the disgust the gentle Farnsworths must have felt at her letter, the fear that made Henry Scott flee from her uncivilized emotions (All I Could Never Be, pp. 230-31).

By accepting Jane, and later by bringing Vladimir into her home, Fanya is able to overcome her own alienation; she is doing what she would have liked others to do for her. In other words, if she is Jane or Vladimir and they are accepted, then she (Fanya) is also vicariously being accepted into the community. Fanya learns that only by accepting herself can she ultimately find the happiness which she had been trying to obtain through the approval of others. And maybe this is Yeziarska's message to herself.

The autobiographical Red Ribbon on a White Horse is similar to All I Could Never Be in that it too jumps from episode to episode with no obvious connection between episodes. But here too, as in All I Could Never Be, the connection between the parts is subtle and revealing. This work is Yeziarska's strongest statement concerning isolation in modern society.

The fictional Anzia's obsession with her past haunts her even when she has found success in Hollywood. Her success bothers her; she cannot quite come to terms with it. During her Hollywood adventure, she goes to visit Will Rogers at his ranch, and he tells her to accept success and stop fighting it:

"Gal, you're like a punch-drunk fighter, striking an opponent no longer there. You've won your fight and you don't know it ..."

"How long has it been since you were poor?" I asked.

"Not so long ago," Rogers retorted. "But I gave them what they wanted. You did too. Lap up the cream while the going's good"

(Red Ribbon on a White Horse, pp. 68-69).

Yet despite her respect for Will, she cannot take his advice and accustom herself to the Hollywood way of life. She keeps trying to explain herself to others, to justify or rationalize her success, but always finds herself misunderstood or plainly inarticulate.

For example, one day when she is having lunch with Sam Goldwyn, she tries to explain the plot of her next work to him, but ends up telling, to Goldwyn's dismay, the story of her life:

He flicked the ash off his cigarette. "Well, get to the point. What's the plot?"

"The plot is the expiation of guilt."

Under Goldwyn's silent gaze I paused uncomfortably, groping for the explanation. "I had to break away from my mother's cursing and my father's preaching to live my life; but without them I had no life. When you deny your parents, you deny the ground under your feet, the sky over your head. You become an outlaw, a pariah."

I pushed away the coffee. It spilled on the tablecloth. Throwing my napkin over the brown stain, I went on: "They mourned me as if I was dead. I am like Cain, forever bound to the brother he slew with his hate."

Goldwyn squashed his cigarette. He looked at me from far away, hiding behind his unsmiling business eyes, and yet I could not stop talking. The words that I could not write now rushed from me without control.

"And now, here I am--lost in chaos, wandering between worlds--"

I saw in Goldwyn's face how mad I sounded. He simply had asked me for the plot of my next story and I had turned it into an intimate confession.

"When you get it set in your mind, let me know," he said, standing up. "Come and see me

next Monday." And he fled.

I watched his retreating figure, feeling empty, deflated, slapped in the face with my own folly. It was as though I had punched a hole in myself and let part of me spill into the sand (Red Ribbon on a White Horse, pp. 72-73).

Yeziarska says that her "murderous ego," which had driven people from her on Hester Street, was now catching up with her in Hollywood. Her isolation stems from the fact that she cannot make herself understood. She is perhaps the archetypal artist who cannot find an audience, but, more specifically, she is the highly emotional, artistic writer who cannot adjust to the money-making aspects of writing for the movies. Her art is personal, and she refuses to exploit her life story by making it lucrative.

When she had arrived in Los Angeles from Hester Street, she was met by a group of curious reporters who, she says, "stared at me as if I was some strange animal on the way to the zoo" (Red Ribbon, p. 36). She was taken to the Miramar Hotel, and there actually found herself in "alien territory," like an animal taken out of its natural habitat:

I walked into the bedroom. More flowers. I touched the bed. Clean, soft, smooth. I lifted the bedspread, feasting my eyes on the white sheets, the wool blankets. Who could lie down and disturb this delicate perfection?

Another door. Bathtub, washbowl, toilet. My own. White-tiled walls. Sunlight streaming in through clean glass windows. Racks with towels-- towels big as blankets, bath towels, hand towels. Bath salts in crystal bottles. Soap wrapped in silver foil. Toilet paper, canary-colored to match the towels.

I looked down for the imprint of my shoes on the white-tiled floor. How could I desecrate the cleanliness of that tub with my dirty body? I thought of the hours I had to stand in line at the

public bathhouse before Passover and the New Year--and the greasy tub smelling of the sweat of the crowd. The iron sink in the hall on Hester Street. One faucet for eight families. Here were two faucets. Hot water, cold water, all the water in the world. I turned on both faucets and let them run for the sheer joy of it (Red Ribbon, p. 37).

Here again Yeziarska uses the imagery of "clean" vs. "dirty" to describe herself in opposition to the rest of the community. She is afraid to desecrate the cleanliness of the tub with her dirty body. She still feels that she belongs in the ghetto, and asks herself, "Could I ever get used to living in such comfort? Could I enjoy such affluence unless I could forget the poverty back of me?" (Red Ribbon, p. 38). Initially the answer is no.

Forget? The real world, the tenement where I had lived, blotted out the sun and sky. I saw myself, a scrawny child of twelve, always hungry, always asking questions. It was soon after we had come to America. We lived on Hester Street in a railroad flat that was always dark. One morning my mother was in the kitchen, bent over the washtub, rubbing clothes.

"When was I born?" I asked, pulling her apron. "When is my birthday?"

She gave no sign that she had heard me.

"Minnie, the janitor's daughter, will have a party. A cake with candles on it for a birthday. All children have birthdays. Everybody on the block knows her age but me." I pounded the table with my fist. "I must have a birthday like other children."

"Birthdays?" Mother stopped washing and looked at me, her eyes black with gloom. "A birthday wills itself in you? What is with you the great joy? No shirt on your back--no shoes on your feet--not a penny in the house to buy bread--and you want yet birthdays? The landlord's daughter can have birthdays. For her, the music plays. For her, life is a feast. For you--a funeral. Bury yourself in ashes and weep because you were born in the world."

Like a driven horse feeling the whip behind

him, she rubbed the clothes savagely.

"Have you a father like other fathers? Does his wife or his children lay in his head?" Mother wiped the sweat from her face with a heavy hand. "Woe is me! Your father works for God and his Torah like other fathers work for their wives and children. You ought to light a black candle on your birthday. You ought to lie on your face and cry and curse the day you were born!" (Red Ribbon, pp. 38-39).

In this novel Yeziarska constantly switches back and forth in time. These literary flashbacks serve to emphasize her constant struggle with her past; she wants to forget her former poverty, but she cannot. She tells herself, however, that she will try to live in the present:

But that was long ago. Now the sun was shining, laughing at my fears. For the first time in my life I had every reason to be happy. I had pushed my way up out of the darkness into light. I had earned my place in the sun. No backward glances! I would shed the very thought of poverty as I had shed my immigrant's shawl. I had learned to abase myself; now I would learn to lift up my head and look the world in the face (Red Ribbon, p. 39).

Yet Yeziarska cannot shed her immigrant shawl, and neither can she forget her past, as is evidenced by the scene in which she feels compelled to tell Goldwyn her entire life story in brief.

Moreover, she always seems to identify with characters who are on the outskirts of society, such as Zalmon, the fish peddler, and Jeremiah Kintzler, the authority on Spinoza. Zalmon Shlomoh, the hunchbacked fish peddler from the Lower East Side, is a friend she identifies with because she feels that they both belong to the "shadowy company of those who were withdrawn from their fellows by grief, illness, or the

torment of frustration" (Red Ribbon on a White Horse, p. 103). She speaks of the bond that connects her to Zalmon, the fact that both of them share feelings of hunger and loneliness:

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 (Red Ribbon on a White Horse, p. 103).

One day both of them go to hear Caruso in Paqliacci, and as Yeziarska describes it, "the grief of the clown reached up to us in the gallery. That glorious voice cried out the ache of our own un-lived lives" (Red Ribbon, p. 104).

Yeziarska also identifies with the scholar Jeremiah Kintzler. "Kintzler" means artist in Yiddish, and Kintzler can be seen as the archetypal artist who is misunderstood and isolated. When he dies, Anzia literally discards his manuscripts, thus metaphorically pointing to the inexpressibility of the artist's thoughts and ideas. One character in the work says of Kintzler, "Jeremiah's the symbol of all of us here--deformities struggling to be gods" (p. 170). Earlier on, Kintzler had been described as "a skeleton in rags with a brief case who looks like the Ancient Mariner with the dead albatross on his neck."

Kintzler is the lonely artist, who, like the Ancient Mariner, must expiate his sins, and can only do so through self-expression. Like Anzia, doomed to tell her story to

Goldwyn who does not want to hear it, Kintzler is doomed to write, but his audience is likewise non-existent. He is also like the Biblical Jeremiah, a prophet of doom. Jeremiah, the Hebrew prophet, warned the Judeans of the calamities that would result from their iniquities and their willingness to follow false prophets. For his warnings Jeremiah was persecuted. Kintzler warns the members of the WPA of the dangers that will ensue if they continue to pursue Mammon, but they only laugh at him and consider him an old fool.

Working on a magnum opus about Spinoza, Kintzler is ridiculed by everyone. He can be seen as Yeziarska's alter ego, the part of herself that she is afraid to face. She too fears ridicule and perhaps is afraid that she will one day end up like Jeremiah, old and worthless, an object of pity.

The fact that Kintzler's book deals with Spinoza is also significant. Kintzler, the outcast, is writing a book about Spinoza, another outcast, who was actually excommunicated from the Jewish community in 1656 for heresy. (Did Yeziarska also see herself as an outcast from the Jewish community? Her father does refer to her as an apostate.) Spinoza, like Kintzler, lived out his life poor and withdrawn. A rationalist, he has been seen as the first Jewish philosopher after Philo to construct a world view involving no principle based on divine revelation; therefore, he has been called the first of the modern philosophers. During his lifetime he was attacked by both Jews and Christians. And just as Spinoza cut himself off from his community by expressing heretical views, Kintzler cut himself

off from the society around him because he refused to fit in with the WPA group.

At one point in the work Kintzler makes an ironic comment in which he says that after his death his words will be remembered, and therefore he will have achieved immortality, the dream of every artist:

When I'm dead, people will not remember the clothes I wore, or the room I lived in, but what I thought and felt. When they open my Spinoza, they'll lick their fingers from my words. Jeremiah Kintzler will be a name to remember (Red Ribbon, p. 180).

Of course, Jeremiah the writer ends up forgotten after his death, now that Yeziarska has discarded his manuscripts. Only a few people, Yeziarska among them, will ever know that he had even existed.

The members of the WPA think that he is "a clown who had exchanged a pushcart livelihood for a Mad Hatter's dream of authorship" (p. 193). Perhaps Yeziarska feels that this statement could apply to her as well. She must bury his work because only by doing so can she symbolically destroy the part of herself that is ridiculed and rejected by society. In other words, she can destroy her alter ego, Jeremiah Kintzler. She describes this moment of release as follows:

On my table was Jeremiah's briefcase spilling over with chaos. The despair of all aborted effort yawned out of that tattered, greasy bag. Writers whose stories had never found release in words, actors whose roles had never reached the stage, painters whose pictures had never materialized on canvas, lovers whose love had led only to loneliness. The passion, the ambition, the wasted lives!

Suddenly, roused from the nightmare of waste and loss, I picked up the brief case, carried it downstairs and emptied it into the ash can.

Like a sleepwalker, I returned to my room, gathered all my notes, my boxes of manuscripts, and carried them down to mingle my wasted years with Jeremiah's (Red Ribbon, p. 197).

By destroying the contents of Jeremiah's brief case, and some of her own work as well, Anzia is able to exorcise a few of her own demons, feelings of worthlessness and memories of wasted opportunities.

However, when she goes to live in the New Hampshire artist's community, Fair Oaks, she again begins to experience isolation and "foreignness":

Living a new life in a new place wasn't what I had thought it would be. It called for a self-confidence that I lacked. I had the old feeling of insecurity, trying so hard to please that I antagonized people.

In the city, for a nickel cup of coffee, or a ten-cent sandwich, I could walk into a cafeteria and see a continually changing current of faces. Some smiled and started talking to you at the counter, across the table. There was a fraternity of aloneness in the city. It was part of the common lot to be alone. But to be alone in a place like Fair Oaks was to be an outsider, a stranger, and separated you from the others (Red Ribbon, pp. 204-5).

She decides that because she has denied her Jewishness, she has cut herself off from a part of herself, and has thus arrived at this state of loneliness:

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 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 (Red Ribbon, p. 212).

(Yeziarska says she is "unjustly condemned" in several other places--in "Take Up Your Bed and Walk", and in "What \$10,000 Did to Me." In the latter essay she tells us that by becoming rich and famous she was cut herself off from the world of the poor and the world of the ghetto. Thus, even good fortune proved to be a mixed blessing for her.)

Yeziarska comes to an understanding of herself, and through this understanding she is able to overcome some of her feelings of alienation. As a writer, Yeziarska has come full circle from her earlier works such as Hungry Hearts, in which her main characters needed to be united to native Americans in order to become what they wanted to be, fulfilled human beings. Even in Bread Givers, Sara can only come to accept herself fully after she has accepted the traditions of her community (i.e. marriage and the burden of her father). In Red Ribbon on a White Horse, however, Yeziarska has brought the Jewish woman full circle, because Anzia is now able to accept herself without benefit of the traditions of the past. (It is true that she needs an identity, that of a Jew, but she does not need a secure past history.) As she tells us, an individual can rise above the accidents of fortune that rule his outward life, creating and recreating himself out of his defeats. By doing so, he becomes whole and no longer feels estranged from himself.

In The Sane Society, Fromm tells us that alienation is a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien:

He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his own acts--but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced: with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively (The Sane Society, p. 120).

If the alienated individual is one who is controlled by his acts instead of vice versa, then indeed the earlier Yeziarska, who cannot control her urge to tell her story to Goldwyn, is that type of individual. She has been taken over by her need to repeat her story in the manner of the Ancient Mariner.

Fromm continues, alienation is "that state in which man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished 'thing,' dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance" (The Sane Society, p. 124) If this is the case, Anzia overcomes her alienation at the end of the work because she has realized that she can depend on her own powers, and she can control her own destiny.

Thus Red Ribbon on a White Horse can be seen as Yeziarska's "portrait of the artist as a young woman." It is a bildungsroman in which Yeziarska learns through experience

the potentialities and opportunities for the individual, as well as for the artist, in modern society.

The individual cannot wholly live by himself, however, and if he must live with others, there are always conflicts and difficulties to be overcome. By portraying her affair with John Dewey, which she depicted in several of her works, Yeziarska was able to show the limitations of the individual, especially in regard to love relationships. She shows us that complete understanding between two individuals is never wholly possible. John Dewey, the embodiment of all that was unattainable in American culture, also represented for her the unattainable in human relationships. Generally the Dewey figure is a positive influence upon the Anzia character. In Yeziarska's works, the Dewey-like characters provide strong support and understanding to the Anzia-like characters,⁴ and Dewey is at times for Yeziarska a father, a Pygmalion and a god.⁵

However, the Dewey figure can also be cold at times. He embodies all the traits of the Anglo-Saxon that Yeziarska considered negative. As Boydstan tells us, this figure is often depicted as an Anglo-Saxon or Gentile struggling to overcome the Puritanism that makes him "cold in the heart, clear in the head."⁶

Yeziarska criticized Dewey's writing style in her fiction as well as in real life. She described it as "cold and intellectual" rather than warm and earthy. As Boydstan explains,

In her 1921 review of Democracy and Education in Bookman, an article that marks the only time Yeziarska referred to Dewey by name in print, she says, "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. He thinks so high up in the head that only the intellectual few can follow the spiraling point of his vision." Later, the same comment--about the same book--is put in the mouth of Fanya Ivanowna in All I Could Never Be: Fanya tells Henry Scott, "Your book on 'The Meaning of Democracy' belies the title. It's written in such undemocratic language nobody but a handful of college people can make head or tail of it" (p. 70). She has Sophie Sapinsky tell President Irvine, "Your language is a little too high for me to understand what you're talking about" (p. 96).⁷

One Dewey-like character created by Yeziarska is John Barnes in "Wings" and "Hunger." Like Dewey, he is a scholar, and he too is interested in the immigrant population. But he is a cardboard figure who really cannot see beyond the stereotype of the Russian Jew. His outlook is very narrow, and he ends up hurting Shenah Pessah because he can never accept her as a complete individual.

In "The Miracle," the young narrator's night school teacher, another shadowy Dewey figure, is in effect saved by his young student. He tells her one day:

I am a prisoner of convention...True, I do not have bosses just as you do. But still I am not free. I am bound by formal education and conventional traditions. Though you work in a shop you are really freer than I. You are not repressed as I am by the fear and shame of feeling. You could teach me more than I could teach you. You could teach me how to be natural ("The Miracle," p. 136).

At the end of the story, the teacher comes back and tells his young student that she can save him from his repression. In his love, the young woman exclaims, she has found the miracle of America. This tale represents a wish fulfillment for Yeziarska. Only here does she ever achieve a successful romantic union with the Dewey character.

In "To the Stars" in Children of Loneliness, Sophie Sapinsky does not end up marrying President Irvine, but she does receive support and understanding from him. He is moved by Sophie's freshness and vitality, just as the night school teacher in "The Miracle" is moved by his student's naturalness and John Manning is moved by Sonya's vitality:

President Irvine had the sensation of being swept out of himself upon strange, sunlit shores. The bleak land of merely intellectual perception lay behind him. Her ardor, her earnestness broke through the habitual restraint of the Anglo-Saxon ("To the Stars," p. 96).

This story is another example of a wish fulfillment tale for Yeziarska. Sophie is positively influenced by President Irvine, and this type of mutual understanding between the two figures is not repeated afterwards in her fiction. In Salome of the Tenements, All I Could Never Be, and Red Ribbon on a White Horse the Dewey-Yeziarska affair is portrayed as a painful experience for both.

In All I Could Never Be, Henry Scott is a mixture of fire and ice. At first he is portrayed as warm and supportive. He even sends Fanya a poem, inspired by a few lines she has sent him, in which he shows his sensitivity to

her hunger for expression:

Generations of stifled words, reaching out through
 you
 Aching for utterance, dying on lips
 That have died of hunger,
 Hunger not to have, but to be.

Generations as yet unuttered, dumb, inchoate,
 Unutterable by me and mine
 In you I see them coming to be,
 Luminous, slow-revolving, ordered in rhyme,
 You shall not utter them; you shall be them.
 And from out thy pain
 A song shall fill the world.

And I, from afar shall see
 As one watching sees the star
 Rise in the waiting heavens,
 And from the distance my hand shall clasp yours
 And an old world be content to go,
 Beholding the horizon
 Tremulous with the generations of the dawn.

This poem is an actual poem written by John Dewey, with a few minor changes (for example, the first line in Dewey's poem uses the word "worlds" instead of "words") inserted by Yeziarska. In The Poems of John Dewey Boydston carefully details the significance of Dewey's love poems, two of which he showed to Yeziarska. Many of them seem to have been written to or about her.

After she has resisted his embraces, Scott begins to grow cold toward Fanya, and their relationship, which seemed a promising one, is never consummated. At one point after their separation, when Fanya has arranged an appointment with him, she finds that he is really a stranger to her, and quickly wants to get out of the room "to escape alive from the horror, the unreality of two ghosts making dead conversation" (All I Could Never Be, p. 205).

If the Dewey figure is indeed a father figure for Yeziarska, he represents the father who had always been a stranger to her, who ultimately refused to understand or accept her. In Bread Givers, Sara becomes reconciled to her father, but in All I Could Never Be Fanya is moving farther away from her father. She is told at one point by Helena Hoffman that she has found herself through her father (pp. 194-5), but this is not quite true, as is evidenced by the fact that in the epilogue to All I Could Never Be we meet a somewhat wiser, but still alienated, Fanya, who must accept herself (not her father) in order truly to find herself.

In reality, Yeziarska could never wholly accept or be accepted by her father and his traditions, and this fact is brought to light again in Red Ribbon on a White Horse. In this work Morrow is depicted as a father figure for Yeziarska. Even though she obviously loves him, saying at one point, "John Morrow was more my own than my mother and father," she cannot accept his embraces. She states,

I had the same fear of drowning in his arms that I had of drowning in the river. His overwhelming nearness, the tense body closing in on me was pushing us apart instead of fusing us...Sensing my unyielding body, he released me. Our walk home was an agony of confusion. Old fears bred into me before I was born, taboos older than my father's memory, conflicts between the things I learned and those I could not forget held me rigid (Red Ribbon, p. 113).

What were the old fears that kept Yeziarska from yielding to Morrow? Obviously there are various possibilities, but perhaps the taboo that Yeziarska is referring to here is that

of incest. Maybe Morrow is too similar to her father for her to be able to accept him as her lover. Just like Scott, who reminds Fanya of her father as he might have been in a new world (Part I, Ch. II), Morrow is, in Yeziarska's fantasy, her father. He is her father as she would have liked him to be, warm and sympathetic to her needs. Yeziarska's real father, who is also depicted in the book, is a cold, unrelenting tyrant. Instead of taking pride in her success, he berates her throughout the work.⁸ At the outset he calls her a "Daughter of Babylon" who has polluted her inheritance and is therefore destined to wander in darkness (Red Ribbon, p. 53); at the end of the work he labels her a meshumeides, an apostate, an enemy of her own people whom even the Christians will hate (Red Ribbon, p. 217). Though she flees from him in anger and resentment, she realizes that she will never be able wholly to escape him.

Thus we can see that Yeziarska had ambivalent feelings toward her father. Even though she very much wanted to accept him and to be accepted by him, she always felt that there was a gulf that separated them. Even in her most optimistic novel, Bread Givers, the father figure is a burden to Sara, one with whom she will have to live her entire life.

The older Dewey figures (Scott and Morrow) are presented as Anglo-Saxons so as to obscure the fact that a relationship between Yeziarska and these figures would be a somewhat incestuous one. After all, the gulf between Yeziarska and these characters does not really stem from their disparate backgrounds, which actually seem to complement one

another, but rather from her inability to handle a sexual relationship with them. Thus the older Dewey figure, Yeziarska's imaginary "American" father, is someone whom she could never get really close to. This figure always became cold to her, just as her father had been.

But in contrast to the cold father figure, the mother figures whom we meet in Yeziarska's works are, for the most part, nurturers. They give support, comfort and understanding to Yeziarska's young heroines. As Ellen Golub tells us:

The mother in Bread Givers is actually an important landmark in American Jewish literature, for here is the first real portrait drawn of the Jewish mother in America. She, unlike her husband, is the one who feeds; therefore she is virtuous. Though she "licked up father's every little word like honey," she disobeys him to bring her starving daughter Sara some food...in the middle of the coldest night in winter.⁹

Two other such nurturing mother figures are Mumenkeh in Arrogant Beggar, and Helena Hoffman in All I Could Never Be.

Mrs. Hellman initially represents for Adele the nurturing mother she never had. Adele calls the Hellman Home for Young Girls an "oasis in the desert" and the people who run it, benefactors of humanity and saviors of her soul. Later, when she learns the true nature of Mrs. Hellman, her friends and the employees of the home, she feels betrayed, and returns to her orphaned, lonely state; she runs away from the home and finds she has nowhere to go. She says at this point, "I was at the bottom, when the outcome of things up there, in the world, no longer mattered" (Arrogant Beggar,

p. 161).

When she meets Mumenkeh and Mumenkeh takes her in, she learns that charity is a matter of giving from the heart, even if the giver has little to offer but love and understanding. Mumenkeh becomes Adele's nourisher, her new mother figure.

Thus the novel might be said to be another wish fulfillment novel for Yeziarska, whose characters were constantly seeking love and kindness from strangers.

In All I Could Never Be Helena Hoffman can be seen as Fanya's surrogate mother. In the prologue, Fanya tries to turn the elderly Mrs. Farnsworth into a nurturing, maternal figure. She calls her "Madonna" and "Mother-Spirit" in the poem she sends her, but Mrs. Farnsworth refuses to accept the role assigned her. Later on, we meet Helena Hoffman, who is referred to as Fanya's friend, but she turns out to be more than a simple friend; she also takes on the role of Fanya's mentor and advisor. When she tells Fanya that she has found herself in her father (i.e. in her tradition and roots), Fanya accepts this interpretation of her experiences even though it is not entirely accurate. Helena is one of the only characters in the novel Fanya can totally trust.

Various other women characters in Yeziarska's fiction, Mrs. Van Ness in "Soap and Water," Hanneh Breineh in "My Own People," the high school teacher in "How I Found America," and the prostitute in "a Bed for the Night" all give advice or lend support to Yeziarska's female characters, but they are such shadowy figures, and so undeveloped that it is

difficult to theorize about them except to say that they are "figureheads" of the nurturing female characters who almost always seem to come to the aid of Yeziarska's protagonists.

Why do Yeziarska's characters require so much support and guidance? The alienated individual is dependent on powers outside of himself because he does not believe in his own powers, according to Erich Fromm. And many of Yeziarska's characters, such as Shenah Pessah in "Wings" and "Hunger," Fanya in All I Could Never Be, and Anzia in Red Ribbon on a White Horse, all feel at first that their well-being depends upon the good graces and the approval of others. Although Fanya and Anzia ultimately learn to depend upon their own powers and to believe in their own abilities to control their destiny, Shenah Pessah never really learns to believe in herself, and thus, when Barnes rejects her, she feels inadequate and worthless.

Moreover, what has been referred to in modern times as the "Cinderella complex" may also be operating upon Yeziarska's women characters. As Collette Dowling defines the term, the Cinderella complex is a "network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that keeps women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity. Like Cinderella, women...are still waiting for something external to transform their lives."¹⁰ Shenah Pessah's is a good example of this type of attitude; she wants the light of John Barnes to shine upon her rather than to go out and create her own light. Sonya and Fanya also share this attitude until they learn through experience

that they must rely upon themselves, not upon the men in their lives.

The clinging dependent love felt by Shenah Pessah, Sonya and Fanya, is not, according to Fromm's definition of love, real love, because love should be "a union with somebody, or something, outside oneself, under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self." Fromm tells us that everyone needs a sense of self and sometimes this need is even stronger than the need for physical survival (The Sane Society, p. 63). The alienated person tries to conform to society and thus loses his own identity. He feels secure in being as similar as possible to his fellow man. His paramount aim is to be approved of by others; his central fear, that he may not be approved of; and it is this craving for conformity which produces insecurity (The Sane Society, p. 197). This is what happens to Yezierska's characters: they are always insecure because they are not sure whether they are conforming to society adequately. Then they realize that they do not need the approval of others to be happy. Through them Yezierska vicariously experiences a release from her own doubts and fears.

Culmination: Freedom and Immortality

Louise Levitas Henrikson tells us that her mother wrote in order to explain her experiences to herself. This is certainly true of all of Yeziarska's works, but it applies especially to her later period of literary activity, when she dealt with the aged and their problematic relationship to modern society. Speaking of her mother, Mrs. Henrikson tells us:

She was ... the loneliest person I knew. That was part of what drove her to write. In writing, though it required an excruciating search for words that could match her feelings, she found the release and consolation she could not find from people because she demanded too much. She wrote to explain her experiences to herself. Always struck by the wonder of the events in her life, she remained youthful in her reactions to them, as freshly indignant, appreciative, excited as a child might be. That is why the stories she wrote in old age, I think, have the same vigor of emotion, surprise or outrage, as those she wrote in her youth.¹

Before we consider Yeziarska's cycle of stories concerning the elderly, it is important to look at one story which she wrote earlier on, "Wild Winter Love" (1927). This story, which has never been included in any anthology, is a significant piece of writing because of its biographical and psychological relevance to the middle period of Yeziarska's life, the period in which she was married and had a child. It bridges the gap between her stories of youth and her stories of old age. Although she wrote various works dealing with her childhood experiences and early years in America, or

dealing with her relationship with John Dewey, she rarely alluded, directly or indirectly, to her marital relationship with Arnold Levitas, the father of her daughter. "Wild Winter Love" is her only fictional recreation, perhaps exploration, of this experience. (According to Yeziarska's daughter, the real-life model for the story, with whom Anzia felt a close connection, was Rose Cohen, the author of Out of the Shadows.)

Yeziarska was married twice, once to Jacob Gordon, and later to Arnold Levitas. Both relationships ended unsuccessfully because Yeziarska, it seems, was not emotionally equipped to handle a marital relationship. She did not want to give up her freedom.

As Ralda Meyer Sullivan tells us, Anzia received her first taste of publicity when two pieces appeared in The New York American in late May of 1911 which featured her as the defendant in an unusual separation suit. According to the first story, which appeared on Tuesday, May 23, 1911 under the headline "Asks Separation from Spirit Wife," on November 9, 1910, Yeziarska had married Jacob Gordon, a young lawyer, without telling him her views on marriage until the evening after the wedding. She considered her husband a soul-mate only. When asked if she knew what the duties of a wife were commonly regarded to be, she replied that she believed "a man and a woman should just maintain a spiritual relationship, for the usual marriage relationship was 'degrading.'" In a later news story (of May 25, 1911) entitled "'Mental' Bride's Views on Wedlock" she admits that

her views are somewhat unusual, and adds that now she knows the difference between friendship and love, and will remain single until "mad, overwhelming love" takes hold of her.²

Yeziarska obtained a separation from Gordon, and married his friend Arnold Levitas in 1911. As Sullivan tells us, Hugo Seelig in Bread Givers was modelled upon Arnold Levitas, a dark, handsome, poetic looking man who also had literary interests and wrote essays. Perhaps he was drawn by Anzia's vitality and beauty and she by his stability.³

But this marriage was likewise destined to fall. When Yeziarska became pregnant "she recoiled from accepting her dependency on Levitas and hence the common lot she shared with her mother and sisters."⁴ As Sullivan writes,

One can surmise about the nature of the domestic tensions that developed. As a providing husband, Levitas probably expected his wife to run the home in conventional ways. Resistant to the housewife's role which she saw not only as demeaning and consisting of annoying details and standards not worth bothering to meet, but also as frustrating to her drive for self-expression, Anzia found it difficult to carry through the routines involved in housekeeping, looking after a husband and tending a baby ... Anzia was probably also influenced at this time by feminist views such as those expressed by her mentor, Henriette Rodman. In April 1914 according to the New York Times, Rodman saw the care of children, particularly those under four or five years of age, as the greatest obstacle to a woman's freedom. She believed, however, that a woman could be freed to pursue her career by turning the daily mothering over to someone willing to do that sort of work without seriously threatening her relationship with her child because what really counts in child-rearing is "an intimate spiritual relation between mother and child which enables the mother to give to the child all that she has gained from life, so that a new generation is started in advance of the old."⁵

In an unpublished essay, entitled "Rebellion of a Supported Wife," Yeziarska herself presented her views on the plight of the financially dependent wife, who remains unemancipated because she must always rely upon her husband for sustenance. Yeziarska argues grimly that the inequalities in their economic power bring out the worst qualities of husband and wife. The wife is put into the demeaning position of being a suppliant; she loses her self-respect and is "driven on by one overmastering instinct -- self preservation." A woman who has once known the pleasure of being independent and earning her own living would not stand to be dependent upon her husband unless she has a baby, in which case "her hands are tied."⁶

Yeziarska's need for self-expression, her need to write, took precedence over every other need, and so after taking possession of her daughter for a short time, and bringing her to California, she decided to return to New York and leave Louise with Arnold and his mother.

In breaking out of the role of wife and mother and setting out to be a writer, Anzia had taken a bold step from which ensued emotional consequences. She had crossed a Rubicon.⁷ The guilt she felt about leaving her daughter would continue to plague her for the rest of her life.

One of the works in which she attempts to come to terms with this guilt is "Wild Winter Love." In this story, the only means by which the heroine Ruth Raefsky can expiate the sin of leaving her family is by committing suicide. She is

the only one of Yeziarska's heroines to resort to such drastic measures to escape her feelings of guilt and isolation, but she is not the only one to leave her family in order to pursue a career. Her ultimate goal is freedom, but she finds that she can only achieve this freedom through death. Later on Yeziarska's heroines will be able to gain freedom through creativity, but Ruth is yet unable to accomplish this.

Ruth Raefsky is the wife of a tailor, and she has a baby daughter. She stands apart from the other women in the neighborhood because her mind is on things other than the immediate. She has, like Yeziarska, an urge to write her life story, and in order to do so, she decides to attend night school. However, her frustration in night school is similar to the frustration of the narrator in "How I Found America," because neither woman can become interested in old writers :

Every evening this week they were reading in my class how Washington crossed the Delaware. Here I'm burning with the crossing of my own Delaware. And I have to choke down my living story for a George Washington, dead a hundred years. All that waste, only to get the teacher's help for a few minutes after the class.

Ruth's marital situation is similar to Yeziarska's own. As Sullivan describes it, as a result of her obsession with writing, domestic troubles develop. Her husband resents the time and psychic energy Ruth devotes to writing. The narrator reports hearing an argument through the windows of the apartment building. He wants a full-time wife and

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resents her being a writer at his expense. At one point, Ruth finds that she can no longer write, and she tells the narrator of the story:

I'm a woman without a country. I'm uprooted 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 I can't live unless I write. And I can't write. The works have stopped in me. What will be my end?...My writing began with my love for Dave. But I've gone on only in my brain. I've gone too far away from life. I don't know how to get back."¹⁰

Her predicament sounds like that experienced by Yeziarska in Hollywood. Ruth has obviously been devastated by her loss of creativity. In fact, some of her problems are familiar ones in the Yeziarska canon: she speaks of her rootlessness, her loss of the religion of her fathers, and her inarticulateness. She feels that her inability to write is worse than the agony of death: "To feel, to see, to know--and to wither in the sight of it all--stifled and dumb!"¹¹

She decides to live alone (just as Yeziarska decided that she must live apart from Levitas) and falls in love with a Dewey-like character. She seems to be happy for a time, but later on the narrator learns that she has committed suicide. It seems that after her lover deserted her, she found life unbearable: "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."¹²

This story can be seen as Yeziarska's epitaph on herself as a writer. "Wild Winter Love" presents Anzia as she saw herself in Ruth Raefsky.¹³ Like Jeremiah Kintzler, Ruth represents the part of Yeziarska that she feared--the writer who could have no private life, and could only live through her writing. Ruth's imagination dried up, and therefore she could no longer live. Ruth has not achieved immortality, and this was Yeziarska's greatest fear about herself. She is Yeziarska's alter ego, the failure that Yeziarska was afraid to become.

Later on in her works, Yeziarska would not only deal with the mortality of the writer, but also with the mortality of the human being. In her stories about old age the central question which occupies her is asked by the narrator of "One Thousand Pages of Research": "How are we going to live until we die?" This is the question which all of her old women characters are trying to find the answer to.

Yeziarska had dealt with exiles and outsiders throughout her career--almost all of her young characters are outsiders. Now she was to deal with the elderly person in our society, who is also an exile. As Simone de Beauvoir tells us, Jonathan Swift was one of the first writers to deal with the theme of the "exile" which accompanies old age (in Gulliver's Travels).¹⁴ This feeling has subsequently been expressed by many elderly people. Fairly recently, in a senior center in Brooklyn, a seventy-five-year-old woman was asked "How is the loneliness of old age different from the loneliness of youth or middle age?" She answered "It's more

isolating than the loneliness I have known at any other time in my life." ¹⁵ And Yeziarska felt this loneliness herself; it is the loneliness which she so poignantly depicts in her tales of the elderly.

She has, in fact, in her small output of stories dealing with old age, touched upon many of the universal themes and issues related to this subject, such as the theme of the elderly person's lack of productivity and his resultant "non-entity" status, his physical decrepitude, his concern with money (as a symbol of power), his loneliness, and what Simone de Beauvoir terms a near tautology, old age and poverty.

Infirmity and decrepitude are the first and the most visible signs of superannuation. The "curse" of old age has been lamented through the ages. In the West, the first known text that speaks of old age draws a gloomy picture. It is an Egyptian manuscript written by Ptah-hotep, a philosopher and poet, in 2500 B.C.:

How hard and painful are the last days of an aged man? He grows weaker every day; his eyes become dim, his ears deaf; his strength fades; his heart knows peace no longer; his mouth falls silent and he speaks no word. The power of his mind lessens and today he cannot remember what yesterday was like. All his bones hurt ... (The Coming of Age, p. 92).

As concerns money and property, the position of the elderly individual is a precarious one. As we see from King Lear, there is the problem of dividing and/or distributing wealth amongst one's children. (In one of her

stories, "A Chair in Heaven," Yeziarska deals with this issue in her own unique way.) The old person is often exploited by his own children, who are eager to gain a share of his wealth and therefore prey upon him in his helpless state. The old person becomes, sometimes justifiably, parsimonious, and he will do all he can to hold on to his only source of power, his wealth.

On the other side of the coin, there is the problem--by no means a recent one--of poverty, which oppresses and cripples the old individual. As Harrington states in The Other America, the millions of old people who live in poverty are the victims of a downward spiral. As they become ill, they begin to avoid all social contact and thus suffer from solitude as well. Bad health, poverty and solitude plague them (quoted by Simone de Beauvoir, The Coming of Age, p. 245).

As non-producers, the elderly are considered non-entities in today's materialistic society, and most of them end up lonely, isolated, virtual exiles in their own communities.

These are some of the problems Yeziarska deals with in six of the stories in her "old age cycle", all of which have as their protagonists old and alienated women characters: "The Lower Depths of Upper Broadway" (1954), "A Chair in Heaven" (1956), "One Thousand Pages of Research" (1963), "Take Up Your Bed and Walk" (1964), "A Window Full of Sky" (1964), and "The Open Cage" (first published 1979).

During the last twenty years of her life, after Red Ribbon was published, Yeziarska at first found herself the center of publicity, but soon her popularity began to dwindle. (Her financial situation had also steadily worsened from 1932-1950. She moved to shabbier and shabbier dwellings during this period.) It seems that Yeziarska's works, which dealt with the Jewish immigrant experience, were no longer of much interest to American readers. She wrote a number of book reviews for the New York Times during the 1950's, but essentially her period of productivity seemed to be coming to an end. She was living in poverty and despair, and she felt abandoned by her friends, many of whom had either died or no longer wished to know her now that she was once more an obscure writer.

Then she began to write her stories of old age. They seem to have been of cathartic value: like so many writers before her, she needed to express her outrage and despair at becoming old and at being neglected.

During the 1960's she started to develop eye problems and had to find people (usually students) to assist her with the typing of her manuscripts. In 1964 she went to live with her daughter in Indiana. In 1966 they moved to Ohio and in 1969 to California.

During this whole period Yeziarska felt cut off from those around her. Her meteoric fame had come and gone like a dream. After having been touted as the "Sweatshop Cinderella" when Hungry Hearts was made into a Hollywood movie, she was once more neglected and virtually ignored as a

serious writer.

In her old age stories Yeziarska's style changed slightly: these stories focus somewhat less on self-involved ambition than on compassion and a demand for social justice (The Open Cage, p. xi). Moreover, Yeziarska's failing health and her need to rely more and more on the help of others (during the last year of her life she had to depend exclusively on her daughter) influenced her writing, which now dealt with the themes of frailty, ill health and impending death from the point of view of an elderly person. She often felt despair and depression during these last years.

She died on November 21, 1970 and had a simple memorial service in the Henrikson living room, attended by about a dozen friends and relatives. In her last writings we find an admixture of despair and hope as she translated her feelings about her own life into her fiction.

The Lower Depths of Upper Broadway

In this short story Yeziarska tells of the decay of an Upper West Side residence hotel. Here she first uses the "crumbling building" metaphor for the physical deterioration of the older individual. The idea that the body's physical deterioration is an uncontrollable and irreversible process occupied Yeziarska's thoughts throughout the latter part of her life. Her concern about her own physical health became more pressing as she grew older and more debilitated. Just as the building in which the narrator lives becomes older, more run down and more neglected, so too Yeziarska felt

herself becoming more and more neglected and isolated as a result of her advanced age and deteriorating health.

However, the narrator of the tale is eventually able to find peace and quiet in a new location, in a "room of her own":

Like a shipwrecked sailor who has found an island in the center of the storm, I have found a room, a roof over my head. It is clean and quiet. It has a door I can shut. I can work again in peace and privacy. After the noise, the crowdedness and debasing filth of the "Residence Hotel" I have recently moved out of, the clean quiet of my new found room is overwhelming.¹⁶

This is a hopeful story in that the woman finds that she can escape the deterioration of her building (i.e. her own body) by retreating into her own world of solitude and tranquility. Her deteriorating health turns out to be a handicap, but not an insurmountable one. Yeziarska refuses to let it defeat her.

A Chair in Heaven

In "A Chair in Heaven" Yeziarska again speaks about herself when she writes of Sara Rosalsky, a feisty and vain old woman. The narrator of this story, who is also an old woman, is hired as a companion to Sara. She soon learns that Sara's children are waiting for her to die so that they can inherit her fortune. They want her to act as a spy for them, to find out how much Sara is worth. She refuses, but she also deserts Sara in the process. When she comes back, Sara is on the verge of death. The guilt that Sara Smolinsky in

Bread Givers feels about deserting her mother, and that Yeziarska herself felt about leaving her mother and later her daughter, is embodied in the guilt felt by the narrator in "A Chair in Heaven."

The narrator begins to identify with Sara, and sees that she too is a helpless victim of old age. When she describes Sara right before her death, she is in effect describing herself and the majority of elderly people in our society:

She was in bed, propped on pillows. Her face was gray; sweat gathered in the deep furrows of her forehead. She looked uprooted in the alien hotel room. A terrible sadness was in her eyes. It came from long ago. The unloved, unwanted child persisted to the end -- naked, alone, facing death ("A Chair in Heaven," p. 228).

The above passage, interesting in its own right, becomes even more significant and revealing when we consider the metaphor of the old person as an unwanted child. The treatment accorded the woman and the immigrant in Yeziarska's world is very similar to the condescension of the adult toward the child; likewise, the elderly individual is also treated like a child. (Old age accompanied by senility is frequently termed "a second childhood.")

But Yeziarska's characters are not only children; they are unwanted children, as were many of her young characters (usually women) in her earlier works. Her older characters are figuratively rootless and orphaned, while her young characters are literally as well as figuratively orphaned. By making most of her characters orphans, Yeziarska seems to

be indirectly commenting upon modern man's "orphaned" status (even pre-modern writers such as Charles Dickens often chose to write about orphans) and his inability to find roots in modern society. She was also evidently commenting upon her own sense of being orphaned, cut off from family and friends in the obscure little New York apartment in which she was living.

Both Yeziarska's young and old characters are trying to connect with others: the young heroines try to find husbands or lovers to fill the void in their lives, while the older characters are trying to connect with anyone, friends, relatives, even social welfare officials. In both cases there is a clear absence of significant family ties. As the narrator in "A Chair in Heaven" relates,

I'd wake up in the middle of the night and, in a sudden burst of clarity, hear Sara Rosalsky's voice: "Take a good look at yourself!" As in a dream I saw that Sara Rosalsky was myself, the shadow that I had left behind me, the shadow of father, mother, brothers and sisters--the relationships I had uprooted in my search for the life I had never found ("A Chair in Heaven," p. 226).

This statement can apply as much to Yeziarska's younger characters (such as Sara Smolinsky) and to Yeziarska's own life as it does to the narrator in "A Chair in Heaven." As Sullivan tells us, in her last years Yeziarska seemed to be dominated by her feelings of isolation and her efforts to overcome them.

The narrator of this story is the alter ego of Sara Rosalsky, who is in turn the alter ego of Yeziarska herself.

That Sara and Yeziarska shared many of the same experiences and were in fact mirror images of one another is clear. First of all, there is the rise from virtual beggar to rich woman on the part of both Sara Rosalsky and Yeziarska. Sara says to her companion, "Me, president of the United Sisters! And once I nearly starved to death! Such a story could go into the movies." This is an allusion to Yeziarska's own meteoric rise to fame and fortune as the "Sweatshop Cinderella." Secondly, Yeziarska has Sara tell her companion, "Now you see who I was! And I'm still not yet dead!" (p. 214). This statement could be seen as Yeziarska's own declaration to the world that she is still alive and productive.¹⁸ Thirdly, we are told of Sara that "the tone of her voice was like a dog's licking of your hand, panting for affection" (p. 217). Yeziarska herself always had an inordinately deep and compelling need for affection, and she translated this need onto many of her characters. Moreover, we are told of Sara that there was about her an "ageless, elemental force hard to define" (p. 217). The term "ageless" and "vital" are two words that were frequently used by people to describe Yeziarska. For example, her daughter speaks of her "extraordinary, driving will" and refers to her as an "emotional volcano."¹⁹ Sara says of herself, "It burned in me to do something, to work myself up in the world!" (p. 218). The same thing could be said of the young, ambitious Yeziarska, and of the many characters who turned out to be projections of her.

Therefore, we can see that Yeziarska identified with Sara Rosalsky. But to make the situation more complex, we also have a narrator in this story who is a mirror image of Sara, and she says so at various points in the tale. For example, she says at one point, "For a long moment she [Sara] looked at me in silence. In that silence I saw myself in her eyes" (p.217). Later on the narrator says of Sara, "She had a way of looking at me, seeing only herself" (p. 221). Of course, this statement could refer to Sara's selfishness, which manifests itself several times in the story, but perhaps it is also an allusion to the shared identities of Sara and the narrator. Still further on in the story, the narrator tells us that she and Sara are one and the same person when she says, "If I abandon her, I abandon myself" (p. 226).

This equation of the narrator with Sara and of Sara with Yeziarska serves three purposes. Firstly, it allows Yeziarska to portray, and perhaps to exorcise her guilt over leaving her family (especially her mother and daughter); secondly, it allows her to get some distance on herself, thereby permitting her to view herself and her past more objectively; and thirdly, the portrait of Sara and of her plight provides us with a very poignant and vivid picture of the neglect to which old people in our society are subjected.

One more interesting detail in the story is the fact that Sara is wealthy. It connects this tale to the universal body of literature (of which Shakespeare's King Lear is a notable example) which deals with the old father's handing

over or dividing his wealth amongst his children. Many old people have an almost perverse attachment to their material possessions, and in modern society especially, to their money. As Simone de Beauvoir delineates the situation, money is their only source of power.

In fact, money is synonymous with power; it is a creative force and the old person identifies himself with it on a magical plane. He feels a narcissistic pleasure in gazing at and handling his wealth in which he recognizes himself and in which he also sees the protection he needs so badly...Thanks to his possessions the old person assures himself of his identity against those who claim to see him as nothing but an object.

But here again his system of defense is imperilled in the world. Others may take away his money; they may extort it from him. Avarice becomes a mania; it takes on neurotic forms because the property in which the old person seeks refuge against anxiety becomes the object of his anxiety. While on the one hand it is a defense, avarice is also a form of aggression against others. The old person revenges himself upon his children by refusing to help them financially, or if they are dependent on him, by obliging them to live at a wretchedly low level; it is the only kind of power left to him, and he takes an ill-natured pleasure making them feel it.²⁰

In this story, Sara Rosalsky's children are only concerned with how much money she has and how much she is going to leave them, and therefore her cupidity is a reaction to their obviously venal motives for attending to her "welfare." Their falsity and greed place them in an almost archetypal mold and highlight Sara's vulnerability and isolation as an old person in a sometimes corrupt society where money is indeed equated with power. Ultimately her money is the only weapon Sara possesses, and she wields it against her children at the end of the story by giving away

her entire fortune to charity.

Yeziarska's final picture of the dying Sara Rosalsky, who for all her feistiness and vitality ends up an unloved, unwanted old woman acutely afraid of death, provides the perfect climax to Yeziarska's most condemnatory story about modern society's callous attitude toward the aged and about the exploitation which the elderly may be subjected to, even at the hands of their own children.

One Thousand Pages of Research

With "One Thousand Pages of Research" Yeziarska continues to paint a bleak picture of what the future holds in store for its elderly members--feelings of worthlessness and despair. Her daughter tells us that it is a report on a project she initiated at Columbia University.

In this story the narrator, Yeziarska, decides that something must be done to aid and rehabilitate the elderly in the city who are just "killing time, waiting for death" (p. 60). She tells of her own experiences and how she came to realize that old age was upon her:

I grew up at the turn of the century, before child labor laws or compulsory schooling. Brief night school courses in English had only sharpened my hunger for education. Then (could it have been forty years ago?) I stumbled into writing--novels about my experiences in sweatshops of the Lower East Side. A brief incredible success in Hollywood was followed by long years of groping, trial and error, and finally silence. Suddenly, shocked, I found that old age was upon me. Editors who had encouraged me were dead. My stories had faded into period pieces. A new generation of writers was creating a new literature.²¹

The old woman goes to speak to several individuals who may be interested in helping her and others like her, and finally meets a psychologist, Professor Sidney Stone, who is willing to help her by starting a workshop on aging. She brings together a small group of women, Professor Stone runs a tape recorder, and the seminar begins.

One of the topics discussed in the seminar is the inability of the old person to feel fulfilled because of the fact that he does not work, or rather, he will no longer be paid for his work. The narrator is angry about this situation: "Was our work then worth nothing? Why should we volunteer? Just because we're old? The very thing we needed was the self-respect that comes with getting paid for working" (p. 62).

Simone de Beauvoir comments upon the position of the aged person in our modern capitalistic society:

By the fate it allots to its members who can no longer work, society gives itself away--it has always looked upon them as so much material. Society confesses that as far as it is concerned, profit is the only thing that counts and "humanism" is mere window-dressing...Society cares about the individual only insofar as he is profitable.²²

This idea is iterated by Vivian Gornick in "For the Rest of Our Lives, Things Can Only Get Worse". Gornick tells us that America is one of the worst countries in the world in which to grow old. This is a country in which the only value of a human being is the ability to produce. If you can produce, you are respected and have power; if you can't you are

despised and shunted aside.

In Yeziarska's story the narrator says that although Professor Stone was a "plump, middle-aged man with a fringe of graying hair around his bald spot," he represented to the older women "youth, charm, the opportunity to work [*my italics*] and live again" (p. 60).

During the seminar many questions are raised and debated. Professor Stone asks each of the women, "When does old age begin," and the answers are varied. The narrator says that feeling old is not a matter of years, and one of the other women, Rose, agrees by defining old age as "the time where there is nothing to look forward to" (p. 61).

Yet, although they do arrive at some important answers and interesting conclusions, the narrator feels that the sound of the professor's tape recorder, the trailing off of the discussion into abstractions and the professor's words, which "sailed too high above the heads of the women" caused the seminar to be less effective than it could have been. She says at one point, "If we could only stop talking, I thought sometimes, and meet in silence as the Quakers do, then maybe he would finally understand" (p. 62).

At the last meeting of the seminar, the subject of death is brought up. The narrator wonders, "Why are we wasting time talking about death...How are we going to live until we die?" This is the central question which Yeziarska tried to answer in all of her tales about the aged.

But the question is never answered in "One Thousand Pages of Research." At the end of the story one of the women

asks the narrator why they had talked their heads off, and the narrator replies, "For a thousand pages of research." One of the women says, "We were only statistics to him...dots on a graph." The women feel used, still isolated and lonely. The narrator asks, "Where do we go from here?"

Professor Stone (another John Dewey figure) comes to be seen as a man who has a tape recorder wired to his heart (p. 63), just another representative of the professional who takes only a professional or academic interest in his subjects and does not become, or does not allow himself to become, personally involved with them.

In terms of form, this story and the stories that follow can be seen as hybrid works of literature. They combine autobiographical sketches, polemical passages and fiction. For example, this story, in addition to being a piece of fiction, can also be seen as a diatribe against society's neglectful attitude toward the aged, who just want to be counted, to feel productive and wanted.

The old women in the story are Yeziarska's representatives; she puts into their mouths her own feelings of frustration and anger at the treatment she is accorded because she is old. Yeziarska seems to want to write fiction, but always ends up writing either argumentative essays or personal sketches or both. The form of her writings is significant because it brings the reader closer to her: we hear a distinct narrative voice telling us what it is like to become old, but we also enjoy the fictional elements of her writings, such as the characterization, plot

development and denouements.

A Window Full of Sky

Another cold professional, similar to Professor Stone, appears in "A Window Full of Sky." He is Mr. Rader, the man in charge of Welfare at a nursing home. He is described as an "unseeing, unfeeling creature" who does not care at all about the people he is interviewing.

In this tale an old woman is waiting to occupy a room in an old age home because she is too ill to live on her own. She tries to connect with anyone she can find, even a social welfare official. She thinks she has found a friend in the admissions officer of the home, Miss Adcock: "I looked at Miss Adcock, and it seemed to me that her offer to visit me was the handclasp of a friend. I was hungry for hope" (p. 231). Miss Adcock says that she will come to visit her in her apartment.

When the old woman returns to her own apartment, she feels revitalized upon seeing the view from her window, and she says of her room:

It was in need of paint and plumbing repairs. But the afternoon sun that flooded the room and the view across the wide expanse of tenement roofs to the Hudson and the Palisades beyond made me blind to the dirty walls and dilapidated furniture... During my illness I had been too depressed to look at the view. But now I returned to it as one turns back to cherished music or poetry. The sky above the river, my nourishment in solitude, filled the room with such a great sense of space and light that my spirits soared in anticipation of sharing it with Miss Adcock (p. 232).

In this little "room of her own" the old woman is able briefly to forget the bleakness of her outer surroundings, her tiny, dingy top-floor apartment, and feel a sense of elation and transcendence. This room is contrasted with the room she is waiting to occupy in the nursing home, which she describes as "a narrow coffin, with a little light coming from a small window" (p. 235).

By taking the room in the home she would in effect be preparing for her own death: "I suddenly realized that it would be hopeless to go on. Perhaps the coffin-like room and the darkness were part of the preparation I needed" (p. 235). But she also realizes that to live alone, without constant care, would present a hardship for her. At the end of the story she sees herself as the soldier in War and Peace who, upon being told by Napoleon that he is a noble hero, can only exclaim, "Please! Please! You are blotting out the sky."

This story ends on a somewhat ambiguous note: either transcendence or despair is possible for the old woman. The resolution of the tale is never given; we will never know whether she will be admitted to the nursing home or not, or whether she will choose to leave her own room and enter the "narrow coffin" if she is in fact admitted. However, the resolution is almost irrelevant and insignificant; the fact that the old woman has reached a point in her life in which she needs to be taken care of because of her deteriorating health is the poignant and sad reality that Yeziarska is attempting to portray. Unlike the old woman in "The Lower Depths of Broadway," the protagonist here can no longer

escape from her deteriorating building (her body) into a world of tranquility and creativity.

However, the next and final two stories in this "old age cycle" by Yeziarska clearly end on more optimistic and hopeful notes.

Take Up Your Bed and Walk

"Take Up Your Bed and Walk" is more an autobiographical sketch about Yeziarska's life than a short story. In this work Yeziarska, speaking in her own voice, says that after she wrote "A Window Full of Sky" she received various letters from her readers, but these letters only "seemed like flowers on a grave, lovingly tendered but powerless to rekindle the spark of life" (p. 237). Then she received a letter from a young man from the New York Theological Seminary, inviting her to speak about growing old in New York. Although she wanted to oblige him, she was afraid that she would forget a word or a name because of her failing memory.

She calls up the young man and asks him to visit her, but when he fails to come for several days, she believes he is never going to arrive. She says at this point,

When you're old, it's no use wishing for anything else than what happens. He won't come, and I'm glad he's not coming. I no longer exist. Man is but a thing of naught. His day passes away like a shadow... (p. 238).

At that moment the doorbell rings, and when the young man comes in, he is described as being a source of light and

radiance (like Barnes in "Wings"):

Youth appeared in the doorway. Eyes filled with light, eyes that possessed the sky, walked in ahead of him...He was so radiant I could only gape at him like a deaf-mute, gulping swallows of tea (p. 239).

When the young man leaves, Yeziarska tells us:

I walked over to the gas plate and picked up the pot. It looked brighter than it had ever been before. The elan of his youth was still in the air where he had stood. He had scoured the dinginess out of my room and left behind his joy of being alive (p. 239).

Yeziarska was going to read "A Room Full of Sky" to the seminary audience, but she says that now "the story of a frightened old woman begging to die in an old people's home-- was no longer me. I wanted to live again. I wanted to be born again. But where was there a place in the world for an old woman to make a start?" (p. 240).

She believes that the young man has in effect told her, "Old woman! Wake up and live! Take up your bed and walk! You have work to do before you die!"

Later on, when the young man brings his girlfriend to see her, Yeziarska says that she rushed to meet them "too excited to care that her old face was still in her old clothes."

They were not aware that the gas plate was rusty and caked with grease, that the battered tea kettle was stained with soot. Nor did they see the wornout wreck of a human being whom they had beguiled with the magic of their youth (p. 240).

Soon the overemotional Yeziarska begins to express her enthusiasm and embarrasses the couple, just as many of Yeziarska's other characters alienate people by appearing overeager and "clutching." She says to the young couple, "This feast of communication, this flow of soul which you youngsters have steeped into my tea, I'll remember as long as I live" (p. 241). Then, in spite of their embarrassed smiles, she rushes on,

Your first visit...might have been out of curiosity. At best, it was a business visit to settle the date of my talk. But bringing your girl to meet me--God on earth! With the whole world before you, how did you have time to visit me? (p. 241).

The young woman extricates her arm from Yeziarska's grasp and is a little embarrassed by Yeziarska's zealousness.

Soon Yeziarska is telling them about herself; and, in the midst of their conversation, she is reminded of the time when, during a talk at the Theta Sigma sorority at Ohio State University, she began to feel very self-important until a telegram brought her back to reality:

I felt the self-importance, the pride born of fear as the applause mounted. There was something to being famous, after all. Success was worth all it cost to achieve. If I were a nobody, they would never have listened to me. But because I had become somebody, I was able to give them something to think about.

I was handed a telegram which I put underneath the others. More congratulations. More good wishes. Another invitation to be the guest of honor at a charity drive. A cocktail party for a celebrity from England. I opened the last telegram casually and glanced at the words, "Mother is dying..."...Memory has cut away

everything until I was face to face with mother's dying eyes. Those eyes holding the depths of a soul that I had never before taken time to see.

My earliest dream of becoming a writer flashed before me. My obsession that I must have a room with a door I could shut. To achieve this I left home. And so I cut myself off not only from my family, but from my friends, from people. The door that I felt I must shut to become a writer shut out compassion, feeling for pain and sorrow, love and joy of friends and neighbors. Father, Mother, sisters and brothers became alien to me, and I became an alien to myself (p. 242).

This is almost a paraphrase of the narrator's statement in "A Chair in Heaven" in which Sara's companion says that she had uprooted her relationships with her mother, father sisters and brothers in her search for a life she had never found. In both "A Chair in Heaven" and "Take Up Your Bed and Walk" Yeziarska is speaking in her own voice and giving utterance to her guilt over her desertion of her family. Likewise, in almost all of her fictional works, especially in Bread Givers and "Wild Winter Love," she is attempting to come to terms with this guilt, from which it seems she was never fully able to absolve herself.

At the end of "Take Up Your Bed and Walk" the old woman tells the young pair:

When I was young, I was the world within myself. Writing was the life of my life. It was my way of being born again...Last night I could not sleep. I could not rest. And when I read what I had written the last years, I was horrified at the lifelessness of so much labor which ended in nothing. A new generation of writers has risen. They have no more need of me than I had need of the old when I was young (p. 243).

Yeziarska is telling her visitors that writing was her path to resurrection; through her writing she was figuratively able to circumvent death. However, lately she has begun to feel that her labor has ended in nothing. Thus, she feels that she has actually become Jeremiah Kintzler, the scholar whose efforts ended in the dust bin, leading to naught.

In the middle of her speech, Yeziarska's false teeth become loose, and she is very disconcerted: "In my panic I felt as if my false teeth had exposed the naked skeleton of my dying body" (p. 243). The young people leave, but later on the girl sends Yeziarska a box of imported tea with a brief note telling her that she enjoyed her afternoon with her.

The ending of the story is somewhat ambiguous. The narrator believes that the false teeth show her decrepit state as it really is, and dim the young people's fantasy, so that she now feels "guilt" and "the pain of the unjustly condemned" when they insist on leaving. The narrator felt "the joy of being alive" for a brief time, but then she fell right back into her state of despair.

Yeziarska's daughter has called "Take Up Your Bed and Walk" Anzia's admonition to herself, a final victory over old age and approaching death.²⁴ However, I believe that only in the story published after her death, "The Open Cage," was Yeziarska truly able to depict her victory over old age and death by speaking therein of the immortality of the artist and his ability to transcend death.

The Open Cage

This story is literally about an old woman who briefly transcends her bleak surroundings while watching a young bird that has been released from its cage fly away to freedom. But it is also the story of the artist, who can, through his works, escape the cage of death.

In this tale an old woman who lives in a room in an old and dilapidated rooming house (which is again a symbol of her deteriorating physical condition) constantly finds herself losing things. One day when she has misplaced her glasses, she becomes furious, hating herself for being old, weak and absent-minded:

In that moment of fury I felt like kicking and screaming at my failing memory -- the outrage of being old! Old and feeble-minded in a house where the man down the hall revenges himself on his neighbors, where roomer hates roomer because each one hates himself for being trapped in this house that's not a home, but a prison where the soul dies long before the body is dead (p. 246).

The prison referred to by the narrator is both the rooming house and her own body. When she goes into the bathroom she finds a tiny bird "wings hunched together" who is fluttering helplessly. The helplessness of the bird is emblematic of her own helplessness, her own inability to do anything about her weakness and approaching death. She comments upon the lot of helplessness and rootlessness that she shares with the bird:

Why did I never dream that anything so wonderful as this bird would come to me? Is it because I

never had a pet as a child that this bird meant so much to me in the loneliness of old age? This morning I did not know of its existence. And now it has become my only kin on earth. I shared its frightened helplessness away from its kind (p. 248).

She is told by her neighbor Sadie Williams that the bird is a wild bird and has to be free in order to survive. Sadie tells her that she should buy herself a parakeet, but the narrator refuses:

"A bought bird?" I was shocked. A bird bought to love me? She knows so much about birds and so little about my feelings. "My bird came to me from the sky," I told her. "It came to my window of all the windows of the neighborhood" (p. 250).

She believes that there has been some type of divine intervention which brought the bird to her as a sign or an omen. But she does eventually agree to let the bird go free, and in the bird's freedom, she (hence Yeziarska) finds her own freedom:

I cried out, "Look it's flying!" My frightened baby bird soaring so sure of itself lifted me out of my body. 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 (p. 250).

At the end of the story the narrator says, "We were leaving the bird behind us, and we were going back into our own cage." The cage that the old women are returning to is the cage of their own bodies and of their imminent death. But the bird, which represents Yeziarska's creativity, is

free, and it will outlive her. (Perhaps the bird also represents Yeziarska's daughter, whom she had abandoned, but who is now free and would also outlive her.) Yeziarska will be able to escape the cage of her mortality by leaving her works behind. Thus her immortality is embodied in the bird, which does not have to remain in its cage, but can leave and go beyond her.

Old age is a cage, Yeziarska tells us, but it can become an open cage if one is able to transcend one's mortality through the power of creativity. By being creative, one can "recreate" oneself.

"The Open Cage" is Yeziarska's final victory over death. The answer to the question which plagued her throughout her later years, "How are we going to live until we die?" is answered in this tale. By looking within ourselves and utilizing our own creative energies, what Yeziarska referred to as "inner powers," we are in some way able to transcend death, thus escaping the cage that imprisons us all.

Concluding Remarks

Camus has written that "in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity."¹

As I have tried to show, all of Yeziarska's works deal with alienation. Her young characters are "deprived of the hope of a promised land" since America has not proven to be a land paved with gold. They feel alienated in the modern setting, divorced from their traditions and unsure of their future. Their predicament is exactly that described by John Murray Cuddihy in The Ordeal of Civility. Referring to the secularized Jewish intellectual who suffered the trauma of culture shock, Cuddihy writes, "unable to turn back, unable completely to acculturate, caught between 'his own' whom he had left behind and the Gentile 'host culture' where he felt ill at ease and alienated, intellectual Jews and Jewish intellectuals experienced cultural shame and awkwardness, guilt and the 'guilt of shame.'²"

Yeziarska's older characters, devalued senior citizens in urban America, also feel alienated. They face the predicament of having little to look forward to in life; they are in effect "divorced from their lives" and their future is a bleak and hopeless one.

Yeziarska was able to capture the moments of pain and despair experienced by the immigrant, the woman and lastly, the senior citizen, in our society; however, she brought a note of hope to her readers by pointing the way to salvation: through self-knowledge, self-acceptance and creativity.

Epilogue

In the December-January 1963-64 issue of Modern Maturity a piece entitled "I'll Fly Again" appeared. In it Yeziarska tells how she finally forced herself to board an airplane in spite of the fact that she had a lifelong fear of flying. When she turned to look out of the window, she saw the brilliant blue sky:

That vast sunlit sky unbound me from the prison of my body...Now I was in the sky, looking down at clouds below. Long forgotten lines flashed out of the blue: "Only the finite suffers and struggles. Within us, the infinite lies stretched in smiling repose."

At the end of the flight, the stewardess brought her coat to her and joked, "We are back on earth." Yeziarska replied, "On earth? But I am no longer of earth."

Notes

Backgrounds: The Immigrant and the Woman in American Society

- 1 Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951), p. 5.
- 2 Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York: Bantam, 1980), pp. 67-8.
- 3 Handlin, p. 6.
- 4 Handlin, p. 62.
- 5 Handlin, p. 93.
- 6 Abraham Cahan, The Education of Abraham Cahan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), p. 244.
- 7 Handlin, p. 109.
- 8 Handlin, pp. 257-8.
- 9 Handlin, p. 285.
- 10 Handlin, p. 274.
- 11 Handlin, p. 282.
- 12 Moses Rischin, The Promised City (Cambridge, 1962; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 95-7.
- 13 John Higham, Strangers in the Land (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 21.
- 14 see Higham, Strangers in the Land, p. 22.
- 15 Higham, Strangers in the Land, p. 25.

- 16 Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 26-7.
- 17 Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 3-4.
- 18 Meredith Tax, The Rising of the Women (New York: Monthly Review Press), p. 28.
- 19 Tax, p. 28.
- 20 Tax, p. 30.
- 21 Cited by Tax, pp. 154-5.
- 22 Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1970), p. 38.
- 23 Tax, pp. 207-8.
- 24 Cited by Tax, p. 144.
- 25 Tax, pp. 29-30.
- 26 Tax, p. 211.
- 27 Alice Kessler Harris, Introd., Bread Givers, by Anzia Yezierska (New York: Persea, 1975), p. xvi.
- 28 Alice Kessler Harris, pp. vi-x.
- 29 John Higham, Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America (New York: Atheneum, 1975), p. 89.
- 30 Higham, Send These to Me, p. 88.
- 31 Harris, p. xii.

Anzia Yezierska and the Immigrant Novel

- 1 Charles Angoff, "Jewish Literature in America," in Jewish Life in America, ed. Theodore Friedman and Robert Gordis (New York, 1955), pp. 197-203.
- 2 David M. Fine, "Attitudes toward Acculturation in the English Fiction of the Jewish Immigrant, 1888-1917," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, 63, 1 (1973), 56.
- 3 Fine, "Attitudes toward Acculturation," p. 53.
- 4 "America and I" in Children of Loneliness, p. 44.
- 5 "America and I" in Children of Loneliness, p. 51.
- 6 Dorothy Seidman Bilik, Immigrant Survivors: Post-Holocaust Consciousness in Recent American Fiction (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), p. 9.
- 7 Bilik, pp. 34-5.
- 8 William Q. Boelhower, "The Immigrant Novel as Genre," MELUS, Vol. 8, Number 1 (Spring 1981), 5.
- 9 Boelhower, p. 5.
- 10 Fine, "Attitudes toward Acculturation," p. 45. See, in addition, A.H. Greenberg, "Ethnocentric Attitudes of Some Jewish American Writers: Educational Implications" (Diss, Yeshiva University, 1956); Greenberg states that there are four possible forms of adjustment that an immigrant can undergo.
- 11 Fine, "Attitudes Toward Acculturation," p. 54.
- 12 Irving Howe, "The Two Jewish Stereotypes of American Fiction," Commentary (August 1949), 147-56. Cited by Bilik, p. 24.
- 13 David M. Fine, The City, The Immigrant and American Fiction, 1880-1920 (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1977), p. 143.

- 14
Fine, "The City, The Immigrant and American Fiction,"
p. 147.
- 15
Ibid.
- 16
Babbett Inglehart, "Daughters of Loneliness: Anzia
Yeziarska and the Immigrant Woman Writer" in Studies in American
Jewish Literature (Winter 1975), 6.
- 17
Inglehart, p. 6.
- 18
Inglehart, p. 7.
- 19
Anzia Yeziarska, Salome of the Tenements (New York: Boni
and Liveright, 1923), p. 276.
- 20
Children of Loneliness, p. 245.
- 21
Hungry Hearts, p. 249.
- 22
Children of Loneliness, p. 198.
- 23
Milton Doroshkin, Yiddish in America (Rutherford:
Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), p. 129.
- 24
Anzia Yeziarska, Arrogant Beggar (New York: Doubleday,
Page and Co., 1927), Ch. XVI.
- 25
Anzia Yeziarska, All I Could Never Be (New York: Brewer,
Warren and Putnam, 1932), pp. 194-5.
- 26
All I Could Never Be, p. 194.
- 27
All I Could Never Be, p. 203.
- 28
All I Could Never Be, pp. 216-17.

- 29
Carol Schoen, Anzia Yezierska (New York: Twayne, 1982), pp. 104-5.
- 30
Carol Schoen, "New Light on the Sweatshop Cinderella," MELUS, 7, iii, (1980), 9.
- 31
Anzia Yezierska, Red Ribbon on a White Horse (New York: Persea, 1950), p. 59.
- 32
Red Ribbon, p. 206.
- 33
Boelhower, p. 5.
- 34
Hungry Hearts, p. 209.
- 35
"You Can't Be An Immigrant Twice" in Children of Loneliness.
- 36
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- 37
Fine, The City, The Immigrant and American Fiction, p. 141.
- 38
Bilik, pp. 34-5.
- 39
Bilik, p. 7. See also Isaac Rosenfeld, "The Situation of the Jewish Writer" in An Age of Enormity (New York: World Publishing, 1962), pp. 67-9.
- 40
Adams, p. 10.
- 41
W.H. Auden, Introd., Red Ribbon on a White Horse, by Anzia Yezierska (New York: Persea, 1950), pp. 18-19.
- 42
Isaac Rosenfeld, "The Situation of the Jewish Writer" in An Age of Enormity (New York: World Publishing, 1962), p. 69.

The Polemics of the Heart: Language, Rhetoric and Emotion in
the Works of Anzia Yezierska

1

Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman and Sonya Michel, The Jewish Woman in America (New York: New American Library, 1975), p. 28.

2

Baum, p. 202.

3

Baum, p. 158.

4

Baum, p. 160.

5

Nicholas Karl Gordon, "Jewish and American: A Critical Study of the Fiction of Cahan, Yezierska, Frank and Lewisohn," Diss. Stanford University 1968, p. 92.

6

Bread Givers, pp. 95-6.

7

Bread Givers, p. 95.

8

Bread Givers, p. 205.

9

Bread Givers, p. 172.

10

Schoen, Anzia Yezierska, p. 46.

11

Schoen, Anzia Yezierska, p. 39.

12

Schoen, Anzia Yezierska, p. 47.

13

Schoen, Anzia Yezierska, pp. 86-7.

14

All I Could Never Be, p. 203.

15

Schoen, Anzia Yezierska, p. 93.

16
All I Could Never Be, pp. 255-6.

17
Red Ribbon, p. 220

18
No doubt this "fire and ice" dichotomy utilized by Yeziarska is part of the age-old typology in which the female is classified in terms of passion and the male in terms of reason. This is a mythic opposition, but here it is additionally tied up with the representation of the freshness of the immigrant versus the stolidity and rigidity of the native American.

19
Salome of the Tenements, p. 209.

20
Arrogant Beggar, p. 210.

21
All I Could Never Be, p. 96.

22
Oscar Handlin, John Dewey's Challenge to Education
(Westport: Greenwood Press, 1959), p. 26.

23
Handlin, p. 42.

24
Arrogant Beggar, p. 77.

25
Ralda Meyerson Sullivan, "Anzia Yeziarska," Diss.
Berkeley 1975, p. 43.

26
Inglehart, p. 4.

27
Inglehart, p. 4.

Saviours and Saints: The World of Religion in the Works of Anzia Yezierska

1 "Hunger" in Hungry Hearts (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), p. 35.

2 "Wings" in Hungry Hearts, p. 13.

3 "Wings," p. 5.

4 "Wings," p. 9.

5 Olive Schreiner, Dreams (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1915). There was a Yiddish translation of Dreams published in N.Y. in 1910, which makes it possible -- from a standpoint of realism -- for Shenah Pessah, an immigrant with a limited knowledge of English, to have read this work. In addition, Yezierska herself may have read the Yiddish translation of this book.

6 Salome of the Tenements, p. 240.

7 Salome of the Tenements, p. 288.

8 Jo Ann Boydston, ed., The Poems of John Dewey (Carbondale: Southern Ill. University Press, 1977) p. xlv.

9 Boydston, pp. xlv-xlvi.

10 All I Could Never Be, p. 101.

11 All I Could Never Be, p. 194.

12 All I Could Never Be, p. 203.

13 Red Ribbon, p. 59.

14 A.H. Greenberg, "Ethnocentric Attitudes of Some Jewish American Writers: Educational Implications," Diss. Yeshiva

University 1956, p. 70.

15
Red Ribbon, pp. 206-7.

16
Inglehart, p. 9.

17
Salome of the Tenements, p. 276.

18
Salome of the Tenements, Chapter II.

19
Salome of the Tenements, p. 109.

20
Salome of the Tenements, pp. 230-1.

21
Salome of the Tenements, pp. 96-7.

22
Salome of the Tenements, p. 163.

23
Oscar Wilde, "Salome" in Plays (New York: Penguin, 1982),
p. 327.

24
Schoen, Anzia Yezierska, p. 39.

25
Leslie Fiedler, "Zion as Main Street," in Waiting for the
End (New York: Stein and Day, 1964), p. 77. In his classic study
Love and Death in the American Novel Fiedler divides women into
the Rose or the Lily, that is, into either the dark-haired,
sensuous, unsubmitive female or the pure, fair-haired maiden;
Sonya certainly fits into Fiedler's first category.

26
Salome of the Tenements, Chapter XVI.

27
Salome of the Tenements, p. 138.

28
Salome of the Tenements, Chapter XIII.

29
Arrogant Beggar, p. 52.

- 30
Arrogant Beggar, p. 102.
- 31
Arrogant Beggar, p. 73.
- 32
"Christian Science," Catholic Encyclopedia.
- 33
"Krishnamurti," Encyclopedia of World Biography.

Autobiography and Ideology: Yeziarska's Acceptance of Self

1
Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1976), p. 235.

2
Carol Schoen, Anzia Yeziarska (New York: Twayne, 1982), p. 93.

3
Carol Schoen, "New Light on the Sweatshop Cinderella," MELUS, 7, iii, (1980), 8.

4
Jo Ann Boydstan, ed. The Poems of John Dewey (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), p. xxxix.

5
Boydstan, p. xl.

6
Boydstan, p. xlii.

7
Boydstan, pp. xliii-xliv.

8
Rose Kamel ("Anzia Yeziarska, Get Out of Your Own Way" in Studies in American Jewish Literature, no. 3, "Jewish Women Writers and Women in Jewish Literature." Ed. Daniel Walden. [Albany: State University of N. Y. Press, 1983], p. 44) tells us that Reb Smolinsky is clearly a God figure who can absolve or refuse to absolve his prodigal daughter.

9
Ellen Golub, "Eat Your Heart Out: The Fiction of Anzia Yeziarska," in Studies in American Jewish Literature, no. 3. (Albany: State University of N.Y. Press, 1983), p. 56.

10
Collette Dowling, The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence (New York: Pocket Books, 1981), p. 21.

Culmination: Freedom and Immortality

- 1
Louise Levitas Henrikson, Afterword, The Open Cage.
ed. Alice Kessler Harris (New York: Persea, 1979), p. 255.
- 2
Ralda Meyerson Sullivan, "Anzia Yeziarska, An American
Writer," Diss. University of California, Berkeley 1975, pp. 57-8.
- 3
Sullivan, p. 60.
- 4
Sullivan, p. 61.
- 5
Sullivan, pp. 61-2.
- 6
Sullivan, p. 63. I have not seen this manuscript. It is in
the possession of Yeziarska's daughter, Louise Levitas Henrikson.
It is, Sullivan believes, one of Yeziarska's earliest attempts at
writing.
- 7
Sullivan, p. 66.
- 8
Sullivan, p. 212.
- 9
Sullivan, p. 213.
- 10
Anzia Yeziarska, "Wild Winter Love," Century, February
1927, p. 488.
- 11
"Wild Winter Love," p. 489.
- 12
"Wild Winter Love," p. 491.
- 13
Sullivan, p. 216.
- 14
Simone de Beauvoir, The Coming of Age, trans. Patrick
O'Brian (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), p. 191.

15
Vivian Gornick, "For the Rest of Our Days, Things Can Only Get Worse" in The New Old, ed. Ronald Gross, Beatrice Gross and Sylvia Seidman (New York: Doubleday, 1978), p. 31.

16
Anzia Yezierska, "The Lower Depths of Upper Broadway," The Reporter, (January 1954), p. 26.

17
Sullivan, p. 138.

18
cf. The story of the old apple tree in Barbara Myerhoff's Number Our Days (p. 280). This tree, saved from being cut down, says, "You see I'm not dead yet. Another season, and I'm still good for something. O God, you break me down, then in your mercy, you let me live again. I'm still here. With my leaves, I'm still here, shining and green." This is a favorite story of one of the old women in the book who is confined in a convalescent home after a stroke. Clearly she sees herself as the old apple tree.

19
Louise Levitas Henrikson, Afterword, The Open Cage, p. 254.

20
Simone de Beauvoir, p. 470.

21
"One Thousand Pages of Research," Commentary, December 1956, p. 60.

22
Simone de Beauvoir, pp. 542-3.

23
The New Old, p. 29.

24
Louise Levitas Henrikson, p. 262.

Concluding Remarks

1
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(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), p. 10.

2
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