

JEWISH WOMEN AND THE SPECTER OF THE OLD WORLD IN JEWISH IMMIGRANT FICTION

by

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This thesis examines three Jewish-American authors and how they portray the main female character in relation to the main male character to expand the research of gender discourse in literary analysis. There was a wave of Jewish immigration to the United States from the late 19th century through the mid-20th century as Jewish populations sought refuge from persecution in their country of origin. There were conflicting ideas surrounding what the ‘American Dream’ meant for this ethnic group. Orthodox Jewish men dreamed of opportunities to continue the patriarchal societal structure that American society also reflected; however, the illusion of opportunities in America led many Jewish women to dream of finally pursuing things long denied, such as an education. The Jewish immigrant women who attempted to realize their dreams were met with heavy opposition from both Orthodox Jewish enforcers and American society, causing many Jewish women to settle for their traditional gender role/identity. Because Jewish women are not well documented in the historical record, Jewish immigrant fiction is used to identify the Jewish immigrant women’s experience with facing the problems with the myth—that is also known as the American Dream. The works used in the literary analysis are *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896) by Abraham Cahan, *The Assistant* (1957) by Bernard Malamud, and *Bread Givers* (1925) by Anzia Yezierska. What emerges in the literary analysis is that Jewish-American male authors present Jewish women as incapable of melding Jewish and

American ideas, whereas Yeziarska portrays a Jewish woman as bold and capable against the specter of the patriarchal hegemony. All of the Jewish women surveyed depict the struggle with hybrid identity development; however, the only Jewish woman who seems comfortable with how her identity has evolved to become Jewish-American is Yeziarska's character, Sara. Both Cahan and Malamud's female characters' stories end with a hesitation and fear because they are unable to meld the Jewish and American aspects of their lives.

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FICTION

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my three biggest supporters and motivators, who continuously infuse me with encouragement, belief in my ability, immense love, and understanding. My husband Brian consistently encouraged me to carve out a place for my educational dream despite the aspiration not being previously thought of or expected of me. My mother instilled in me the belief that I could do anything by her example of believing that idea first. She is always there to help with her understanding nature. To my most faithful friend Isis Diamond, for choosing me over everyone else, and being a loyal companion throughout all my educational endeavors—No amount of written words sufficiently expresses my love and appreciation to each of you. Simply put: you all are the best, and I am forever thankful for the impact each of you have made (and will continue to make) to my life!

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Introduction: Jewish Women and the Specter of the Old World in Jewish Immigrant Fiction

From afar, the United States sparkles with idealistic opportunities for a better life, enticing immigrants to its shores to seize their personalized dreams. However, many Jewish immigrant women faced a bitter reality immigrating to America in the late 19th through mid-20th century: that the patriarchal culture they hoped to leave behind in their country of origin also existed in American society, and the dual oppression created a specter that haunted their dreams of opportunity in America. Tension ensued in the lives of Jewish immigrant women as they vocalized and pursued their own desires in America. The tension is the conflict between the Jewish immigrant women's educational desires and the Old World ideologies regarding gender roles that permeated both Jewish and American culture. Hyman's research concludes "[there is] significance to the concept of gender...As a crucial and analytic tool for exploring the historical experiences of women" (121). The gender of the author is an important factor to examine because by considering the gender of the author presenting the perspective, readers have an opportunity to understand how the cultural influences specific to gender may impact the author's written record. Baskin and Hyman explain, "The historical experience of ordinary [Jewish] women...has been retold from the vantage point of Jewish men. It is the perceptions, achievements, and institutions of men which defined the historical record of American Jewry" (312). Because men are the main contributors to the historical record, the experience of women is presented with a male interpretation. Marovitz observes "the most important theme [in Jewish-American literature] by far explores the question of identity," and it is crucial to be cognizant of the gender of the author (315). Deeply ingrained cultural attitudes and beliefs may be woven by the author into the literary characters, and consequently influence how the characters are portrayed.

If the women from Old World Jewish culture are considered inferior to their male counterparts, then it is reasonable to consider how male authors may have an inclination to present readers with female characters who demonstrate the inability to live independently from men. Baum, Hyman, and Michel assert “there are undoubtedly Jewish women we ought to know about and celebrate, but their lives have gone unrecorded... The anonymous Jewish woman has been portrayed in a form that only obscures her real history” (14). The obscurity of Jewish immigrant women in the male-dominated recording of historical record presents the problem of connecting with an accurate picture of Jewish immigrant women. If the men recording history believed women were inferior, and therefore unworthy of recognition, then the women who are worthy of celebrating and remembering would be blotted out, and intentionally overlooked. Since “many of the early novels and stories are merely loosely fictionalized semi-autobiographical works,” Jewish-American literature is an approach to gain insight about the Jewish women immigration experience in America (Baum et al. 191).

Awareness of the author’s gender is paramount in literary analysis as it sharpens the focus of the analysis by considering the author’s possible gender bias that may heavily influence character development. Baskin and Hyman explain the importance of demonstrating “sensitivity to the different forms of discourse about gender... [Because] it is necessary to prevent the homogenization of experience which is all too common in the history of immigrant women in America” (313). By dissecting the male influence in Jewish-American literature, readers attempt to connect with the real immigration experience of Jewish women. Wilentz asserts, “Using female-centered discourse to expose Jewish immigrant experience, we can discern how intricately that experience was tied to the immigrant’s gender” (33).

Before delving into literary analysis that focuses on how the gender of the author may influence the portrayal of Jewish immigrant women; a brief historical overview of women's struggle for equality in America during the time that the literary works were published depicts that women challenging the barriers imposed by a patriarchal society has been a continuous struggle. Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* was published in 1896 when the majority of women remained under the control of men as Edwards reports that "In 1896 women had full suffrage in only three states;" suggesting that the movement for gender equality had barely started. When Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers* was published in 1925, women were actively pushing for equality. Chafe explains the challenge for women during this era because there was an illusion that women could pursue careers and assert independence; however, the "world-wide depression [that is on the horizon in 1929] accentuated the traditional male role of breadwinner and the supposed threat to that role [because of] female employment" (15). This illusion of equality continues to taunt women because when Bernard Malamud published *The Assistant* in 1957, women were still challenging the patriarchal societal structure, and this is documented by McCabe in her research that noted, "The first woman lawyer hired at Skadden was in 1957... [And] it was a debate whether it would ruin the firm to have a woman lawyer". The time period for each novel is distinct; however, what remains consistent over time is the struggle for gender equality. Surveying Jewish immigrant fiction will depict the evolving challenge that has a constant theme: Jewish immigrant women struggle with hybridity because they constantly feel a sense that their cultural identification must be all-or-nothing—either all Jewish or all American as opposed to a blending of both.

The purpose of this thesis is to present three Jewish women characters and their relationships with the main male characters in Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York*

Ghetto (1896), Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant* (1957), and Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925) to examine how the women in Cahan and Malamud's writings compare to the woman in Yezierska's novel. The comparison serves to demonstrate how the gender of the author influences how Jewish immigrant women are represented in the literature. What emerges is the contrasting portrayals of how Jewish immigrant women fared with their American Dreams and Old World ideas (a specter in their dreams), and how the conflicts they faced reflect the challenges with developing a hybrid identity.

CHAPTER 1: JEWISH WOMEN, THE AMERICAN DREAM, AND THE OLD WORLD SPECTER

In Old World Orthodox Jewish society, women were servants to their family and often received little education based on a popular belief that education was unnecessary for the specific role women fulfilled. Baum et al. assert that in Orthodox Jewish communities, “[Jewish women] were deemed intellectually inferior to men, so they were not treated as independent, responsible adults in Jewish law” (6). However, the idea of women inferiority is not limited to traditional¹ Jewish culture because there was also a patriarchal societal structure in America, and women had strict roles in both cultures that required their complete dedication to serve their fathers, husbands, and children. Women were not bred to aspire to, or pursue anything beyond the boundaries of daughter, wife, and mother. This hierarchy ensured that women remained intellectually inferior and governed by men. Alter discusses how the rigidity of a woman’s role accomplishes the continuity of male control because “Eastern European orthodoxy—narrowly defined a woman’s identity through her behavior as daughter, wife, and mother...Her value was nevertheless still measured in the theologically sanctioned terms dictated by these categories”. In other words, Old World societal structure immediately reduces a woman’s identity to that of a servant to her father, husband, or children with no consistent opportunity for personal enrichment through education.

However, Jewish society did value education, although women were often excluded because of their confined duties to home and family. Gordon confirms that “Jewish families more often sent sons to college than daughters”. Baum et al. expands on Gordon’s observation, concluding that “as far as we can go in our history, it was the woman’s primary responsibility to

¹ The terms “traditional” and “Old World” are used interchangeably throughout this research and both refer to patriarchal societal structures that deem women inferior to men.

attend to family needs as they arose. . . [However] the Jewish ideal [did promote] scholars, but the scholar was a man” (4-5). Because women were viewed as inferior and needed no education to fulfill their purpose of servant to their family, women were rarely prepared or encouraged to pursue formal education or life outside the home. However, American culture presented an illusion that women could receive an education through the public school system. The word “illusion” is used because of the patriarchal societal structure in America that resisted women seeking education. Because of the fictitious belief in the minds of the men controlling society that women were intellectually inferior and incapable of becoming educated is a reason for the resistance—the men wanted the women to remain oppressed. Todd concludes, “Although women were an integral part of America’s early development, their opportunities were restricted by the patriarchs of their society” (4). The classification as intellectually inferior was a common judgement by both Jewish and American men, and this shared idea severely reduced opportunities for women

Understanding the gender specific roles and expectations in Old World Jewish society and American society is important to recognizing the immense challenge women faced in the event they desire a life contrary to the societal norms—such as an interest in education. Baum et al. summed up the challenge for Jewish women, “These traditional Jewish attitudes, then as now, shaped a woman’s self-image and the way in which men perceived her and related to her” (3). Since men controlled much of what took place outside of the home, even women with the tenacity to venture away from oppression within the home, and exercise their capability outside the home fell under heavy scrutiny from a society that echoed the same patriarchal ideas. The general consensus was a relentless belief in women’s inferiority, and the pressure would coerce

many women who desired pursuits outside of the home to settle for a submissive identity that was dictated by patriarchal societal guidelines.

The inferior self-image was not limited solely to the Jewish community because the inferiority translated to how other cultures viewed Jewish women when they ventured outside the confines of their culture. It is when the opportunity to immigrate to America arose and Jewish immigrant women were introduced to the illusions of equal opportunities in American culture that this societal consensus became evident. Howe and Libo confirm that “for girls in the immigrant Jewish neighborhoods there were special problems, additional burdens. Both American and Jewish expectations pointed in a single direction—marriage and motherhood” (265). While Jewish immigrant men faced prejudice in America because they were Jewish, Jewish immigrant women in America faced a two-fold prejudice: they were Jewish, and also women. Wilentz expresses the additional challenges that Jewish immigrant women face in America because “the price of Americanization was high...For the Jewish woman immigrant, the conflict of culture took on an added dimension, not only was she forced to deal with the prejudices of the dominant culture but also with the patriarchal traditions” (34). Wilentz alludes to the dual prejudice that many Jewish immigrant women faced living in America. The continuation of the attitude that Jewish women are inferior and were only suited for marriage and motherhood sheds light on the ghost lurking in their American Dreams.

The term “American Dream” is a common phrase and is open to individual interpretation and that is the essence of why the concept of an American Dream is problematic. For the scope of this research, the American Dream is a “set of values, beliefs, and traditions of freedom, democracy, equality, and republicanism that are known as the American Way and give America a unique identity in history” (Girgus 3). A way to weave together key ideals in Girgus’

definition is to contemplate why a dream would be labeled “American”. The label “American” suggests that the dream is homogeneous, and includes the values and beliefs commonly associated with ideas that define America: freedom and equality. As persecution in their country of origin persisted, Jewish men and women sought freedom and equality, and America inspired dreams that suited these desires. However, the values, beliefs, ideas of freedom, and equality are subject to individual interpretations of what the American Dream is. The variety of individualized American Dreams inevitably leads to conflicting ideas. Between 1881 and 1924, two million Jews left their homes in Eastern Europe to seek a “better life in a new land [The United States],” and it may be surmised this equals two million ideas of what the American Dream is (Weinberg 74). However, the equation is not complete: after arriving in the United States the immigrants realized there are countless previously established ideas from current residents regarding what the American Dream should be, and it often did not include the Jewish culture or gender equality.

Although each individual’s vision of America may slightly differ, Jewish immigrant women share a common theme in their American Dream that included equality and educational opportunities. In the American Dreams of Jewish immigrant women, Fine states how the “very sound of America had a magic to it,” and they envisioned the chance to pursue new opportunities, such as receiving an education (16). Weinberg’s interviews with Jewish immigrant women note similar ideas of opportunity noting “many young women...chose to emigrate because they longed for something they believed they would only find in America...Fannie K. reminisced. ‘That was our dream—in the small towns, almost everyone wanted to go [to America]’” (72). The patriarchal structure of Orthodox Jewish culture was so deeply ingrained in their home country that Jewish women felt venturing to a new world may be a possibility for

freedom. Frieda M. recalled “‘America was the land where fantasy reigned’ and she looked forward to going to the fabled country where ‘gold grew on trees’, and Mildred L. expected to ‘find money in the streets’” (Weinberg 73). The use of these metaphors communicated a vision of American abundance and opportunity that is not restricted by gender. Jewish women aspired to achieve their own American Dreams, and they viewed education as the key that would unlock the door to a fulfilling life in America. However, for Jewish immigrant women to seize their dreams they had to endure tension in America as they pushed against the patriarchal hegemony that was evident in both Jewish and American culture.

The endless variety of interpretations of the American Dream created tension in every aspect of the Jewish immigration experience because as Jewish immigrant women attempted to make their version of an American Dream materialize, it conflicted with the ideas of others. Rosenberg comments “it was this ‘variety of American experiences’ that gave the country so many faces. Because of the variegated and composite nature of its population, each group had the right to view all of America from its own angle and vision” (8). The idea of “America’s visionary promise of individual worth, which stirred all levels of Jewish society, challenged the rigid determinants of gender performance,” and many Jewish women had a specific goal of pursuing education; an interest that had long been denied in Orthodox Jewish culture (Alter). Weinberg explains why education was the focus of many Jewish immigrant women, because “achieving education was limited in Eastern Europe, but in New York the free public school system...made such a dream appear within reach” (108). The free and public school system in America presented an illusion that Jewish immigrant women would be free to pursue an education. The freedom to go to school was an integral component of Jewish immigrant women’s American Dream; as Fine confirms “western thought had been circulating...since the

eighteenth century, challenging orthodoxy and encouraging a receptivity to new ideas and a belief in the possibilities of a new life” (16).

Since thoughts of challenging orthodox beliefs had been circulating, immigrating to America filled Jewish women with the hope that opportunity and education would materialize in the new land. The desire for education in the hearts of Jewish women is not simply born from immigrating to America, and Baskin and Hyman comment how “the longing of many girls for an education in the United States did not represent a new expectation as much as it did an old dream that was more easily fulfilled in this country” (151). The gender roles in Eastern European Orthodox Jewish society prevented women from expressing and pursuing their long-standing hope, but the dream of an education remained nonetheless. The tension between Old World ideologies and perceived American Dreams lead Todd in her research to conclude “part of the myth of America had been the idea of acceptance of all peoples, of equality, of treatment and opportunity. Instead, immigrants in general found discrimination and exclusion” (6). The word “myth” may be an accurate description of ideas surrounding America that incited what was perceived as dreams.

Although the Jewish women immigrate to America and education *seemed* attainable, the Orthodox Jewish men who immigrated to America were not supportive of women receiving education. Hyman describes Jewish women’s hopes for education in America:

[Jewish women] saw in education the key to the freedom that America symbolized...Many immigrant Jewish women, therefore, had the opportunity to acquire the secular education of which they had been deprived by a combination of economic conditions and governmental discriminations in their countries of origin.

Although the dream of education was not new for Jewish women, immigrating to America resuscitated a longstanding desire that Jewish women felt would not be attained in their country of origin. Image 1 is a night school classroom that has standing room only, and it provides an image of the strong demand and desire of Jewish immigrant women from the Lower East Side to earn an education.



15. Jewish immigrant women at night school on the Lower East Side.
New York City Board of Education Archives, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College,
Columbia University

Image 1: Jewish immigrant women at night school on Lower East Side.
The World of Our Mothers. Weinberg

Jewish women immigrated to America and expected challenges because of the significant cultural shift that would occur by expanding their role in society. Weinberg expands on the Jewish immigrant women's hopes of life in America:

Education was the great dream of many young people who came to America from Eastern Europe... These young women came to America knowing that they would have to work to support themselves and their family. But they also wanted to enlarge their horizons and breach the barrier that had kept all but a few of them from entering the world of learning in Eastern Europe (182).

Jewish immigrant women would soon realize that their dreams of opportunity and education in America would be haunted by the patriarchal specter that they were desperately trying to escape through immigration. While Jewish immigrant women knew that great effort was required to assert their worth as capable members of society, they may have underestimated the amount of perseverance required to break the barriers because gender inequality existed across both cultures. However, immigrating to America caused an upheaval because of the exposure to a different culture that created a struggle with hybrid identity² development, because of the challenge immigrants faced with the initial response of an all-or-nothing attitude.

American society did not want to embrace the Jewish immigrants because Jewish culture was very different from American culture, and many Orthodox Jewish immigrants refused to assimilate³ to American culture because it would compromise their religious beliefs. For Jewish women immigrants who attempted to acculturate⁴ so they might obtain education and independence, there is an internal struggle with an all-or-nothing attitude. In other words, they felt that they had to be immersed in everything American (which aligns more with assimilation); or they had to remain completely connected to Jewish culture (which would not afford them the opportunities they believed could be had in America). Friction and unsettledness is the result because of the challenge in developing a comfort with relating to both cultures simultaneously; that is where hybridity is cultivated.

To exacerbate their exclusion from American society, Jewish immigrant women continued to face gender inequality from within the confines of their culture, pushing many Jewish immigrant women back and forth with their all-or-nothing attempts to be accepted into

² When the term “hybrid identity” is used in this research, the idea suggests an individual who reflects a composition of two or more distinct cultures, and is comfortable with navigating within and between them.

³ The term “assimilate” is intended to mean the forceful conforming to the cultural practices of different culture.

⁴ For the scope of this research the word “acculturate” means the process of adopting the traits of another culture that an individual chooses to implement into his or her life.

American or Jewish society. The reason the concept of the American Dream is problematic and creates these collisions from different American Dreams is confirmed in Girgus' explanation: "within the context of the rhetoric and ideology of America as the symbol of redemption, renewal, and revolution, the most influential Jewish writers of the past century constructed a narrative structure for the myth of America" (17). For Jewish immigrant women, the myth of America was the illusion that there were opportunities outside the long standing boundaries of daughter, wife, and mother. Baskin and Hyman share a similar conclusion: "within the Jewish community women found their situation defined and limited primarily by their gender and class, while in the society at large they confronted the additional disability conferred by their ethnicity" (313).

In an attempt to combat the Old World specter from both cultures, Jewish immigrant women displayed an all-or-nothing attitude that created varied experiences. Some Jewish immigrant women clung to traditional Jewish values, hesitant and apprehensive about American culture, and refrained making any changes to their familiar identity. The hope is remaining connected to the familiar and rejecting the "other"⁵ as an attempt to remain comfortable with clear expectations about cultural behavior. Other Jewish immigrant women wanted to pursue ambitions that aligned with perceived opportunities in America, and attempted to relate completely with American culture and deny their Jewish culture, leaving those who denied their Jewish cultural connection unfulfilled. Often times, Jewish immigrant women realized their identity could not all of one culture and nothing of the other culture; and they tussled with melding both cultures and develop a hybrid identity that afforded them comfort in their multicultural life. Although some Jewish immigrant women faced heavy criticism about their aspirations, they remained steadfast, and developed identities that reflected their chosen aspects

⁵ The term "other" refers to a foreign culture.

of Jewish and American culture that would comprise their hybrid identities. Motley discusses why the struggle of Jewish immigrant women in America is dynamic:

Scholars of Jewish assimilations in America have noted the important dynamic of gender in Jews' relationship to America... This increased attention to gender as a fundamental dynamic of cultural assimilation addresses a crucial point that has often been overlooked: existing gender roles, and each immigrant encountering American society brings established gender codes from his or her native culture that mix, and often conflict, with evolving American gender codes (5).

Essentially, Jewish immigrant women struggled to ascertain their identity in America because of the multitude of patriarchal charged dynamics that dictated their lives.

Jewish immigrant women had not been prepared for life outside their circumscribed identities of daughter, wife, and mother. The ones who openly pursued their educational dreams were often torn between their traditional gender roles and their perceived American opportunities because they struggled to comfortably navigate within and between both cultures.

The trouble with relating to both cultures is noted in Brown's observation that while the number of women enrolling in college courses was increasing, administrators could count the number of Jewish women students "on one hand" because the typical woman enrolling in college courses came from middle-class America (134). The disproportion of Jewish women students in relation to non-Jewish women suggests that while women in general were taking advantage of educational opportunities, Jewish immigrant women specifically were not pursuing education en masse. It is not because they lacked desire for education; rather they wrestled with the confines of their cultural beliefs and American society's similar beliefs that did not advocate their education. In other words, American culture may have given an illusion that women were

accepted in society to pursue college aspirations, but American society at large held a similar belief with traditional Jewish culture that echoed women were intellectually inferior—particularly women from other ethnicities. The friction between American culture and Jewish culture is the crossroads of opportunity for Jewish immigrant women to break the specter’s imposed boundaries, and determine what aspects of each culture they would identify with—and ultimately develop a hybrid identity.

Jewish immigrant fiction serves to reveal the challenges that Jewish immigrant women faced after arriving to America. The core of the struggle is to ascertain a hybrid identity that reflected the desired balance between Jewish culture and American aspirations. Weinberg explains how Jewish immigrant women “had to determine what balance to strike between adopting American ways and retaining their own language and customs. This was no simple task... [because] of different interpretations of what ‘Americanization’ meant” (105). As Jewish immigrant women adopted certain American characteristics to weave into their Jewish cultural practices, each woman produced a Jewish-American identity unique to their experience and preference. Landis advises that “there is a palpably heightened awareness of the price America continually demanded: surrender of ethnic and moral identity—the bill tendered by the land of the free for the freedom it allows” (156). As a multifaceted challenge, hybrid identity development is difficult because of outside influences that try to dictate how (or if) cultures should be melded. Baum et al. determine that:

Literature provides a rich resource for answering such questions [about the struggle with hybrid identity development], if not absolutely, at least as a perspective from which to view a people’s way of defining itself. In the fictional representation of reality, there is often a good deal of information about intangible

matters such cultural ideas and assumptions, matters which are especially important in attempting to understand the process of assimilation (190).

Jewish-American literature serves as a paradigm of Jewish immigrant women's experience in America because it is a reflection of attitudes of the Jewish culture about their experience in America, and how the different cultures collided to create tension, but eventually aligned so that Jewish immigrants may develop comfort navigating within and between Jewish and American culture.

Literary works have loosely non-fiction or autobiographical inspirations that influence fictional writing. Although readers often cannot differentiate the truth from the author's imagination, readers may survey several literary works to note emerging trends. These emerging trends are worthy of examination; and Fishman expands on the importance of surveying Jewish immigrant literature:

American Jews have been the paradigm of an immigrant/ethnic group responding to and being transformed by the opportunities provided by the American Dream. Thus, by studying changing depiction of women in American Jewish fiction, one learns not only about the developments in the lives of women but also a great deal about the social history of American Jews (2).

By comparing Jewish immigrant women characters in Jewish immigrant fiction, readers can see the struggle with hybrid identity development. Even if the Jewish immigrant women are not the main character, they are worthy of critical literary analysis to detail how they struggled to balance the connection with Jewish culture while acculturating to the new culture.

However, when researchers examine Jewish immigrant fiction it is paramount to be cognizant of the gender of the author as "the quest for identity...May be interpreted from a

gendered lens, since the dominant writers are usually males” (Antler 196). As researchers consider the Jewish women characters in Jewish-American immigrant fiction, attention focuses not only on the main male characters that the women characters closely relate to in the literature, but also consideration of the gender of the author is important to connect how that may influence the hybrid identity that emerges in the women characters. Antler concludes, “If American Jewish writing owed its popularity to the coincidence of traditional Jewish angst...with that of most other Americans, who were also caught in the vise of modernization then understanding the sexual and gendered representations of that angst would seem to be requisite” (191). The gender of the author has a remarkable influence on how Jewish immigrant women are depicted in Jewish-American fiction. Male authors may tend to present women as unsettled, fearful, and incapable of navigating between multiple cultures. Female authors may present women who are resilient, tenacious, and capable of enduring hardships to realize their goals. The stark contrast proposes the difference between how Jewish immigrant women were perceived and dominated by the male hegemony; and what Jewish immigrant women were capable of.

CHAPTER 2: CAHAN'S PORTRAYAL OF A WOMAN'S STRUGGLE WITH ASSIMILATION

Gitl Podkovnik is the wife of the Americanized⁶ Jew Yekl (who not surprisingly prefers the more American sounding name Jake) in Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), and her story demonstrates a struggle to assimilate because she cannot distance herself from Old World Jewish culture to meet her husband's incessant demands for her to conform to his Americanized desires. Motley's research notes, "Cahan was at the center of the tenuous relationship between Jewish identity and Americanization" (4). The volatile nature of hybrid identity development is personified in the tension between this Jewish immigrant couple. Yekl is an example of the all-or-nothing attitude that assumes an all-American identity because he embraces American culture to the extent of denying his past Jewish culture. Gitl symbolizes an ideal Jewish woman whose all-or-nothing attitude reflects apprehension toward American culture because she identifies with Jewish culture. Both display discomfort in America as seen in the dissolution of their marriage because of their conflicting attitudes regarding melding cultures.

Yekl's dream conveys that he cannot deny his past cultural influences, despite his attempts to forge an all-American identity: "His [Yekl] Russian past appeared to him a dream and his wife and child, together with his former self...Which he was neither willing to banish from his memory nor able to reconcile with the actualities of his American present" (Cahan 28). Gitl as an embodiment of Old World Jewish culture hence Yekl's struggle to fit Gitl into his dream of an Americanized life. As a result, tensions mount between them because regardless of Yekl's pressure on Gitl to assimilate to American culture, both characters remain conflicted because they feel forced to adapt cultural traits they don't necessarily want. Motley argues, "Through Jake's [Yekl's] relationship to Gitl, Cahan is illustrating the difficulty of divorcing

⁶ The term "Americanize" refers to the absorption and assimilation to American culture.

oneself from an established identity” (10). Readers see how the inability to meld American culture with Orthodox Jewish culture is two-fold because both characters struggle with acculturation because of their all-or-nothing approach.

Yekl and Gitl have the same challenge at opposite poles of hybrid identity development. For Yekl, he has embraced American culture so much that he struggles to remain connected to Jewish culture, and Gitl remains rooted in Jewish culture and is unable to accept aspects of American culture that are distinctly different from Jewish culture. For immigrants in America, there is no definitive guide to developing a multicultural identity, rather there are forces of assimilation to create a homogenous identity—and the pressures overwhelm immigrants on how to meld cultures so that a chosen hybrid identity emerges.

Motley suggests that staying connected to Old World ideologies leads to a more fulfilling life in his exploration of the “paradox of Americanization” in how “the immigrant who most consciously and vigorously pursues an American identity, Jake [Yekl] is left feeling disconnected from both” (13). Gitl clings to Jewish culture and symbolizes the ideal Jewish woman according to Old World standards. She has no interest in American culture, because she continues to relate her identity to Orthodox Jewish gender roles. When she first arrives to America, Yekl is embarrassed by her greenhorn⁷ appearance and insists that she remove her wig, which was a remnant of the Orthodox Jewish culture that Yekl expected her to leave behind for American culture. Gitl protested to her husband that she was not comfortable with his request for her to remove her wig, but she obeys and “bade him to face about and screen her, so that neither he nor any stranger could see her bareheaded while she was replacing the wig with the kerchief” (Cahan 39). Gitl remains uncomfortable with the cultural shift, but she demonstrates

⁷ A term used to describe an immigrant who has recently arrived to a country and/or is unfamiliar with the country’s culture.

her level of devotion by appeasing her husband despite her personal preference—presenting a submissive nature that was desirable trait of women according to patriarchal principles.

However, because Yekl relates more to an American identity and has lost his connection to traditional values, he continues to comment about Gitl's dress and her "unattractive appearance made him sick with shame and vexation" (Cahan 52). In other words, Gitl's appearance is symbolic of the Orthodox Jewish culture that Yekl had abandoned.

Gitl is uncomfortable with changing her appearance to reflect American culture. The discomfort with American culture alludes to her identifying with traditional Jewish culture to the extent she feels incapable of melding American culture into her identity. Although Yekl is repulsed at the sight of Gitl wearing a wig, which reflects an aspect of Orthodox Judaic culture, Moss (2014) explains: "the hair covering was never intended to make a married woman look ugly...Jewish tradition encourages modesty; not to detract from beauty, but rather to channel our beauty and attractiveness so it be saved for where it belongs—within marriage." However, Yekl has become Jake, an Americanized Jew, and "the symbol [of Gitl's wig] is lost on her Americanized husband" as he no longer appreciates the Old World ideas (Schreier 25). Yet, Gitl attempts to please her husband and changes to her appearance that Cahan describes: "she wore a skirt and a loose jacket of white Russian calico...Her dark hair was only half covered by a bandana of red and yellow. This was Gitl's compromise between her conscience and her husband" (42). Gitl doesn't feel a sense of urgency in changing her identity just because she has immigrated to America. In both instances of the wig and clothing, Gitl is demonstrating submissive behavior to her husband's incessant demands, solidifying her subservient role.

The subservient personality that saturates Gitl's character is evident in her desired lifestyle in America. Gitl's preference for tending to home and raising her son with Yekl

immediately emerges as her desired life in America. Cahan describes Gitl as “spotless purity, and...the face of her being the model housewife, undiverted from her duties by any thoughts of balls or picnics” (47). Her aspiration to continue with Old World gender defined duties in America serves as a model in Cahan’s description, and his choice of the word “model” is no coincidence.

Gitl’s portrayal of an ideal Jewish woman adhering to traditional gender roles is supported in the opinion of Mrs. Kavarsky when she admonishes Yekl, “Another man would consider himself happy to have such a wife...Such a quiet, honest woman! And such a housewife...Do you think a stylish girl would make you a better wife? If you do, you are grievously mistaken” (Cahan 73). Mrs. Karvasky plainly compares Gitl, the model Jewish immigrant woman, to the generalized category of stylized Americanized Jewish women. She blatantly exclaims the Americanized Jewish women are not better than the submissive Old World Jewish women. Yet, despite Cahan’s portrayal of Gitl as an idealized Jewish immigrant woman, Yekl is unhappy because he has chosen to divorce himself from his Jewish culture, and past cannot be denied. His promiscuous lifestyle with Americanized Jewish women prior to Gitl’s arrival—and his relationship with Mamie in particular—are contrary to the family life that Orthodox Jewish culture advocates for a married man.

The conflict between Americanized Jewish women like Mamie and Gitl’s Old World embodiment is clear when Mamie shows up at Yekl and Gitl’s home unannounced. Before his wife and child arrived to America, Yekl was often out late, frequenting dance halls with brazen women. Yekl compares the Americanized Jewish women to Gitl when he soliloquizes, “I would not exchange her [Gitl] little finger for all the American ladas...Comparing Gitl in his mind with the dancing-school girls of his circle. It now filled him with disgust to think of the morals of

some of them” (Cahan 34). Although his soliloquy places Gitl in high regard, Yekl is completely infatuated with American culture. Hence, Yekl was assumed a single man completely engulfed in a bolder, more liberal American identity that was far removed from Jewish culture. Hence Gitl’s arrival to America challenges his alter ego. Although Gitl could not completely understand the conversation in English between Yekl and Mamie “the poor thing [Gitl] sat pale and horror-stuck. Mamie’s perfume somehow terrified her” (Cahan 54). Gitl did not have to understand English because Mamie’s flagrant appearance and body language toward Yekl was enough to give Gitl a glimpse into the Americanized Jewish woman that Yekl desired. Gitl displays fear and apprehension because she has no desire to mimic Mamie’s haughty persona, and she realizes her steadfast devotion to preserve traditional Jewish culture to her Americanized husband is in vain: Yekl no longer affiliates himself with Old World Jewish cultural values.

Yekl and Gitl both illustrate the challenge of developing a hybrid identity, and Girgus makes a poignant observation: “the immigrant appears trapped between wanting to be American and not wishing to betray her background and ties” (110). Despite the fact that Cahan presents Gitl as an ideal Jewish woman, Yekl did not want to remain in their marriage. She represented Jewish ideas that Yekl no longer identified with because he was trying to relate strictly to American cultural practices.

American ideas often conflicted with Jewish religious practices, and Motley explains “the act of assimilation was extremely complicated for Jews because of the indistinguishability of traditional Jewish cultural identity from Jewish religious faith” (4). Yekl’s interest is adopting an American lifestyle that diminished Jewish traditions whereas Gitl wanted to continue with her role as wife and mother based on traditionally defined gender expectations. Because of the deep rooted religious influence in Jewish culture, it was too much for Gitl to agree to abandon her

servitude nature. For Gitl to succumb to Yekl's demands for complete assimilation to American culture would be the equivalent of her denying religious beliefs that are significant to her. Cahan writes of Gitl's internal debate, "she panted to yield to Jake's [a.k.a. Yekl] demands completely, but could not nerve herself up to going about 'in her own hair, like a Gentile woman,'" and her debate epitomizes a conflict between Orthodox Jewish religious beliefs and American fashion (42). However, Gitl does eventually strike a balance and acculturate to some American ideas because at the divorce proceedings Cahan describes her as having a "general Americanized make up" (89). But, the reason Gitl's Americanization does not salvage the marriage with Yekl is because Yekl embraced different aspects of American culture that Mamie embodied.

Marovitz and Walker observe how "both [Yekl and Gitl] are subjects and products of Americanization in that America gives them the opportunity to live and develop according to their individual inclination" and since they chose different paths of acculturation their marriage dissolved (80). The individual opportunities for each of them to carve out an identity after immigrating to America is what ultimately leads to Yekl and Gitl's divorce because they placed importance on different Jewish and American cultural practices that competed against each other. When Yekl sees Gitl during the divorce proceedings Cahan writes that Yekl was "nettled" from realizing, "the rustic, 'greenhornlike' expression was completely gone from her face...[Gitl had the look] of peculiar self-confidence with which a few months' life in America is sure to stamp the looks and bearing of every immigrant" (88). Gitl was no longer a strict representation of the Old World because she had assimilated to some aspects of American culture in her quest to please her husband; but ultimately, she did not conform to the aspects of American culture that Yekl was smitten with. His uneasiness during the divorce proceedings alludes to how Gitl's

cultural choices are different from Yekl's expectations of an Americanized Jewish immigrant woman.

Yekl was fascinated with the independent air surrounding Mamie, whereas the idea of venturing outside the boundaries of caring for home and family frightened Gitl. She did not focus on achieving independence from her inferior role: it was simply not part of her vision of life in America. Despite the acculturation to American dress and learning English, Gitl remains with a sense of defeat because conflict remains between American and Jewish culture. Because she did not adopt the lifestyle of late night flamboyant dancing that captivated Yekl which leads to their divorce, Gitl exclaims "America has made a mountain of ashes out of me" (Cahan 70). However, Gitl is not ashes. She must find a man whose identity cherishes the traditional Jewish lifestyle and wants to include them in his American Dream, and she finds that in Bernstein.

Bernstein appreciates a Jewish immigrant woman who is content at home in her traditionally defined gender role as it was in their country of origin. Gitl has plans to marry Bernstein and start a grocery store once the waiting period from her divorce from Yekl is completed. Michel recognizes a "recreation of an old-country pattern" because Gitl remains connected to the diluted identity of wife and mother despite opportunities in America for a different identity to cultivate (145). Gitl could have pursued an education or ventured outside the confines of her previous identity, but she did not desire that from her immigration to America. She simply wanted to continue life as it was in her country of origin.

Cultivating a hybrid identity to incorporate American culture would require a tenacity that Gitl does not have because of how she demonstrates an all-or-nothing attitude that clings to Old World ideas. Yet, that is not to assume Gitl would not find happiness in America. Marovitz and Walker determine "Gitl and Bernstein seem to be on their way to happiness and probably

prosperity by virtue of realizing the American Dream as many immigrants before them had conceived it” (81). Cahan shows that for Gitl, her identity in America is to embrace her traditional role as a wife and mother. Developing a hybrid identity that reflected comfort in both Jewish and American culture was more than Cahan wanted Gitl wanted to achieve; so she remains faithfully complacent serving a man.

CHAPTER 3: MALAMUD'S PORTRAYAL OF A WOMAN'S IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

Helen Bober is the daughter of the Jewish immigrant grocer Morris Bober in Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant* (1957), and her character depicts the inability to meld her Old World cultural obligations with her American aspirations of education. She disregards the expectation of marriage by showing no concrete interest in Jewish suitors Nat and Louis, or the non-Jewish suitor Frank. She is a malcontent character because she is unable to balance her expectation of advancement through education in America with her obligation to serve her father, and what becomes apparent is her romanticized idea attending New York University (NYU) full time. Because she is required by Old World expectations to work during the day to provide financial support to her family, the only way she can attend college is at night. Since she would rather attend full time during the day and cannot, she stops attending college altogether. Malamud alludes to Helen's discontent in his description: "her expression was discontented, and her mouth a little drawn. She seemed to be thinking of something she had no hope of ever getting" (63). Helen has an urge to attend college with the belief it will give her a sense of identity in America in lieu of adhering to Old World expectations of marriage. Consequently, her character represents irreconcilable differences because she is unsuccessful in finding a balance between supporting her family and projecting herself into college. Fishman observes, "All people suffer... [Such as Malamud's] portrait of Helen, as she struggles to find and maintain her own moral guidelines" and the theme of suffering heavily saturates Malamud's fiction (299-300).

The struggle is redefining her moral guidelines as a Jewish daughter that allows her educational opportunities in a manner that melding of American and Jewish culture complements Helen's desires rather than create friction in her life. Working in textiles leaves little energy to

focus on educational pursuits, and Helen's imbalance is the all-or-nothing attitude where she thinks that she must either support her family or go to school. Helterman points out, "[Malamud's characters] always find themselves morally linked to each other" and Helen will not pursue her dreams because of the sense that she is morally responsible to financially support her family according to traditional Jewish expectations (8).

For Helen, "America had become too complicated," and she remains with an unfulfilled dream (Malamud 206). Weinberg argues:

Despite the belief of many parents that girls did not need an advanced education, there was usually no real opposition if the family did not need their income...[However, some] parents still opposed their daughters' getting an education, and some young women seem never to have forgiven them this attitude. Parents discouraged ambitious daughters from fear...That too much education would make marriage impossible (174-176).

Helen's parents needed her income because Morris' grocery business was not profitable enough to support the family, and that discouraged Helen's pursuit of her educational dreams. Her character represents a struggle with hybridity because attending college seems an insurmountable task because the obligation to serve her family takes precedence over her personal goal.

Weinberg explains, "Individual goals or achievements counted for little unless they helped the family as a whole," and Helen's educational aspirations did little to alleviate the Bober's immediate need for money to pay bills (113-114). *The Assistant* (1957) is saturated with Helen's perpetual discontent as she remains tied to her obligations to support her family that prevent her from attending college the way she envisioned she might in America.

Fass asserts, “the young are, of course, the most vulnerable to change. They are pliant, alert, and eager. And they exist at a splendid crossroad where the past meets the future” (5). However, Helen’s hesitation at the crossroad seems morbid, not splendid as Fass suggests. To venture away from the familiar to pursue a new endeavor (acculturating) is a challenging component with hybridity, and causes her hesitation at the crossroad. Helen’s struggle to determine which way to go at the crossroad is evident from the onset, and Malamud plainly states that Helen is distressed and worried for her future “because she wanted a college education but had got instead a job she disliked” (Malamud 9-10). She settled for an unsatisfying job because she could not meld her American aspirations into her existing Jewish identity. Her metaphorical crossroad symbolizes the all-or-nothing attitude because Helen approaches the crossroad as an either/or decision instead of a decision of melding together the cultural components that she desired for her life.

Malamud cleverly presents Helen’s unhappiness at the crossroads clearly when she reflects, “I had to help my mother and father out... so I couldn’t go [to college] either. I’ve taken courses in NYU, at night...and I’ve added up about a year’s credit, but it’s very hard at night. My work doesn’t satisfy me. I would still like to go full time in the day” (97). The weight of the unspoken obligation Helen carries from her all-or-nothing mentality prevents her from cultivating her educational aspiration. In other words, Helen feels that she either supports her family or attends school, but she could have balanced both and developed a hybrid identity that is comfortable with both Jewish and American ideas.

Unless Helen could quit working to pursue her educational dreams full time, she consistently suggests that she will remain dissatisfied. Malamud describes Helen’s American Dream as a “miracle of miracles—when Helen Bober was enrolled here [NYU], not just a

stranger on the run, pecking at a course or two at night, and tomorrow morning back to Levenspiel's Louisville Panties and Bras" (106). The collision of Old World gender expectations with young Jewish immigrant women's educational desires may be why Malamud refers to Helen's full time educational hopes as a "miracle." After all, a miracle is something unexplainable because it was not considered possible—and so it is with Helen's dream.

Weinberg explains that Jewish women "could not attain the goal of an advanced education because of the economic hardships of immigrant life" and economic hardships are evident for the Bober family (170). Helen had to help support her family in America which is similar to Old World expectations as "she took out her paycheck and handed it to her father... [and] without saying a word, [he] slipped it under his apron and into his pants pocket" (Malamud 18). While her father does not object to Helen's receiving an education, he does not encourage or push his daughter to venture out in America and assert her independence as demonstrated by the ease in the familiarity of taking her paycheck.

The friction that develops as Jewish immigrant women strive to push past Old World boundaries is the root of the struggle with the all-or-nothing attitude, and explains why Helen is unfulfilled in working in textiles to give her meager earnings to her father. There is a constant air of discontent because Helen wanted "to be doing something that feels useful—some kind of social work or maybe teaching. I have no sense of accomplishment in what I'm doing now" (Malamud 99). Although she does not know what she wants to do with her life, Helen believes an education would pave the way for opportunities to make her feel useful, and she believed that feeling would cultivate a sense of accomplishment in America.

Gordon discusses how "schooling has allowed girls and women to imagine, and sometimes realizes, possibilities beyond their appointed sphere," and Helen dreams of a life

beyond her experience with the struggling family grocery business. However, she cannot have an identity that ignores the culture from her country of origin, and to push *beyond* Jewish culture as Gordon suggests is to leave the cultural connections in the past. Yet, to leave the familiarity of Jewish culture and be immersed in American culture is uncomfortable because it denies important elements of her heritage. This friction leaves Helen with an internal imbalance as she tries to acculturate according to her preferences.

Helen's most influential outside influence is her father and it is seen in the way she mimics his idea that education would provide opportunities. Morris confesses, "I didn't have the patience to stay in night school, so when I met my wife I gave up my chances. . . [Yet] without education, you are lost" (Malamud 83). Like her father, Helen stopped attending night school because she wants to devote herself to pursuing education full time, but she cannot focus solely on education because of the burden bearing demands as a Jewish daughter of a struggling family. Knopp suggests that Bober's character symbolizes perpetual loss noting that "Morris' history is one of loss...Buying a grocery store, he lost opportunity for education, later he lost his small son [Ephraim], and now in danger of going bankrupt and losing the store" (110). Helen emulates Morris' melancholic character in the way she does not want to restrict herself by Old World expectations, but she is unsure how to meld her Jewish and American cultural interests. The uncertainty causes her to miss opportunities that may be considered traditional and modern aspirations. Both father and daughter show an "influence [from] the New World, and therefore places a great deal of importance in education as the key to achieving the American Dream," so both see education as a key to unlock more opportunities, but Malamud presents both characters falling short (Todd 127).

Both Helen and Morris are both ambitious in their American Dreams, but ambition does not equal success. For Helen, her dreams are laced with the inability to meld her Jewish cultural practices with American opportunities. Her inability to find balance and navigate both cultures prevents her from attending college full time as she desired. When her father passed away Helen spent time reflecting how Morris “had made himself a victim. He could, with a little more courage, have been more than he was” (Malamud 230). In her reflection she realizes that her father did not have the courage to meld Old World Jewish cultural practices with American culture, and how that prevented him from developing a hybrid identity he was comfortable with. Malamud expresses “she [Helen] felt she must do something for herself, accomplish some worthwhile thing or suffer his fate” (234). Helen understands that she must meld her American aspirations with her Jewish culture so she is comfortable and content with her life pursuits navigating within and between both cultures. Helen already felt that her life was “a bad dream symbolized by the nightmarish store” considering it was the unprofitable family business that bullied her to feel obligated to serve as a burden bearer for her family that prevented her exploring her educational interests (Malamud 192-193).

Fishman notes that “very often [in Jewish-American literature] the intelligent, ambitious daughter feels that she has more in common with her father than with her mother” and this idea alludes to the shared suffering from lack of educational pursuits seen in Helen and Morris (38). Since immigrating to America prompts thoughts of opportunities, it may be surmised that Morris intended to create a better life in America, but was unable to manifest his American Dream. As it is also with Helen because the story ends with a strong sense that she remains unfilled. Todd explains:

Because women had so few choices, they were often forced to follow their husbands or their fathers as they pursued their dreams and...Because she [Helen] is influenced by Jewish tradition, Helen is unable to disregard the loyalty she feels for her family, and, ironically, it is because of her ties to her community that Helen's dream is a nightmare (128).

She wants to fulfill her role as a Jewish immigrant's daughter, but that is not rewarding for her the way she envisions an education might be. She wants to attend school full time, but to do that would be perceived as a flagrant disregard of family duties and conflict with previously established expectations, making her desire seem sinister.

Helen realizes that "her own life...was much like her father's, restricted by his store, his habits, hers" and alludes to the idea that Helen would have to change if she wanted to break free from the specter (Malamud 104). The change Helen must make to realize her American Dream is daunting: she must balance and find comfort navigating within and between aspects of Old World Jewish culture and her educational interests that reflect perceived American opportunity. Because acculturation is unique and based on each Jewish woman's perspective and preference of cultural practices, it is often easier to cling to the familiar expectations even if they are oppressive, rather than map out uncharted territory of a Jewish-American hybrid identity.

In Helen's mind the store is a manifestation of her American nightmare, but this is fallacious thinking on Helen's part because the store fails to explain the process of melding cultures. Wilentz observes "many immigrant Jewish women and their descendants, the desire to disassociate oneself those generation and that historicity is impossible," so for Helen to view the store as the root cause of her failure is inadequate (40). In order to pursue her dream of education, Helen had to be willing to broaden her horizons from a single culture, and be open to

a multicultural existence. That existence is the Jewish-American hybrid identity that shows comfort with both Jewish and American cultural ideas.

The problem for Helen, as Abramson notes is that “she does not wish to relinquish anything” and is the crux of her continual state of dissatisfaction (29). In desperation to meet the financial needs and expectations of her family to support them, she tries working by day and then attending school. But that doesn’t work because one overrides and ultimately detracts from the other. In other words, it is like looking in the rear view mirror while driving forward. The driver is not comfortable with forward progression because the driver has their attention in the rear view mirror and cannot see where they are going—so the forward movement makes them uneasy. Malamud comments “her [Helen] constant fear, underlying all others, was that her life would not turn out as she had hoped, or would turn out vastly different. She was willing to change, make substitutions, but she would not part with the substance of her dreams’ (134). Helen refuses to abandon her dreams of forward progression that she believed the American opportunity of education would provide, but she was not willing to change her gaze from the past gender roles/responsibilities (rear-view), and focus on moving forward.

Helen could not ascertain the boundaries of her American Dream because she was unwilling to let go of the past she identified with and be open to the possibilities that came with living in America. Rosenberg suggests that “the new American must forget [the past] or else his American Dream would be impossible. But can he? Can he always remember to forget? . . .He tries, but cannot fully succeed” (4). To pursue an education full time, Helen had to be willing to separate herself from the Old World defined duties as the daughter of a struggling Jewish immigrant. As long as she entertained the specter, she would remain committed to providing financial support to her family that would be at the expense of the full time education. The

statement is not suggesting that Helen forsake her family, but for Helen to balance helping her family while actively pursuing her personal goal of attending college full-time. Nat confronts Helen about her imbalance and comments “you’ve [Helen] got some old-fashioned values about some things. I always told you that you punish yourself too much. Why should anybody have such a hot and heavy conscious in these times? People are freer in the twentieth century” (Malamud 109). Although Nat refers to their intimate encounter, his statement extends beyond their relationship to serve as a generalization of Helen’s character flaw.

Weinberg’s research concludes “young women often had difficulty reconciling the two halves of their lives” and Helen’s struggle with acculturation will ensure she remains in a state of discontentment (119). Until Helen finds a balance that reflects her Jewish and American interests, she will remain hesitant at the crossroads; the intersection that would allow her to create a hybrid identity by choosing her own path to compose an identity that was comfortably Jewish and American. American Dreams may be more appealing from afar. After arriving in America the dreamer quickly understands that real life does not easily mirror dreams. It is after Morris dies that Helen realizes she must change and be willing to endure the volatility as she strives to strike a balance between her Jewish identity and American aspirations. However, Malamud ends the story without confirming if Helen is successful.

CHAPTER 4: YEZIERSKA'S PORTRAYAL OF A WOMAN MADE OF BLOOD AND IRON

Sara is the youngest daughter of the Orthodox Rabbi Reb Smolinsky in Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925), and her conflict is a constant friction between her father's Old World ideologies and her American ambitions to become a teacher. Not all Jewish immigrants sought to change their cultural practices; rather for some, the appeal of immigrating to America was the opportunity to continue practicing the Jewish culture as it was, but in a new land free from persecution. So, when a Jewish household is a combination of Orthodox Jewish culture advocates and American Dreamers, sparks fly from the friction of the different cultural attitudes. The friction is what determines if assimilation or acculturation takes place. Fishman asserts, "Yezierska captures the intense intergenerational conflicts that erupted in many immigrant Jewish families... [She] depicts the hunger of second-generational American Jews to become 'real' Americans" (175-176). Sara develops a determination to live independently after witnessing her older sisters married off as property, and the conflict between her desire and Reb's patriarchal ideologies is the conflict that *Bread Givers* (1925) delves into with great detail. Sara believes she will fare better if she pursues American opportunities, but she discovers that life outside of the Jewish community of Hester Street holds many of the same prejudices. To achieve her goal of education that ultimately leads to her Jewish-American identity, Sara must implement the same unrelenting grip on her dreams that her father has regarding traditional gender roles.

Reb is an Orthodox Rabbi, and he serves as the epitome of the Old World Jewish culture, creating conflict for Sara's aspirations. Fass discusses how "traditionalists looked to church authority to stop the world from changing, and to control, not express, human needs," and Reb's household serves as a testament of resisting Americanization (45). Throughout the story Reb

echoes a message that he may word differently and use in a variety of contexts, but his philosophy is loud and clear: “Heaven and the next world were only for men. Women could get into Heaven because they were the wives and daughters of men. Women had no brains for the study of God’s Torah, but they could be the servants of men” (Yeziarska 9). If Reb believes women are not of intellectual capability to study God’s Torah, then he certainly does not have faith in women to study any other subject.

For Reb, women have no identity outside of their servant role, and he consistently communicates his beliefs that women are a curse. He feels a great burden in his life and exclaims “woe to a man who has females for his offspring” (Yeziarska 82). Reb demonstrates the depth of his belief when he blames his wife for his lack of judgement purchasing a failing grocery store as he screeches at Shenah, “I got a million burning ideas flying through my head. But I’m cursed with a wife who hangs like a stone on my neck... [Who] blots out my sunshine” (Yeziarska 133). It is a rare occasion he refers to his wife by her name, Shenah, because the majority of the time he simplifies her identity by referring to her as “woman.” Reb clearly establishes himself as the head of the Smolinsky household. As Reb persists with his damnation of women, Sara concludes that she “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” (Yeziarska 205). Because of all the clamorous strife that Reb’s forceful ideologies create within their family, Sara dreams of a better life.

Sara witnesses the struggles of poverty: how unhappy her mother is yet remains a faithful servant to her father, and how her sisters are married off unhappily under his control. As she hustles to sell herring to help carry the shared family burden Sara ponders “more and more I began to think inside myself, I don’t want to sell herring for the rest of my days. I want to learn

something. I want to do something. I want some day to make myself for a person and come among people. But how can I do it if I live in this hell house of Father's preaching and Mother's complaining" (Yeziarska 66)?

Her character displays a rare quality for Jewish immigrant women: she believes that she is capable, hence her nickname "Blut-und-Eisen"⁸. [Because] when she begins to want a thing, there is no rest, no let-up till she gets it" (Yeziarska 20). She believes that she deserves more than a servant role; that has proven four women in her family unfulfilled. The strength of iron in her blood is the foundation for the courage to pursue her dream.

Because the only culture Sara had witnessed was Old World Jewish culture and it seemed a never-ending tumultuous existence, she dreams that American opportunities of education and working as teacher will bring her peace and fulfillment. The reason American culture is so distinct in Sara's mind is because of her father's fierce domination over their household that resisted Americanized ideas. Yeziarska conveys the strong hand Reb maintains in her description, "In a world where all is changed, he alone remained unchanged—as tragically isolate as the rocks. All that he had left of life was fanatical adherence to his traditions" (296). The fanatical manner in which Reb holds onto Orthodox Jewish culture is what Sara emulates when she moves out and asserts herself as an independent woman. The dual obstinacy results in their estrangement as their ideas about the role and ability of women stand in stark contrast to each other.

Sara mimics the blood fused with iron attitude that her father has demonstrated and declares her intent to attend school, and Reb jeers "a young girl, alone, among strangers? Do you know what's going on in the world? No girl can live without a father or a husband to look out for her" (Yeziarska 136-137). A battle of wills ensues: Sara's aspirations are in stark contrast of

⁸ English translation: Blood-and-iron.

Reb's expectations. She asserts, "I'm smart enough to look after myself. It's a new life now. In America, women don't need men to boss them...I've got to live my own life. It's enough that Mother and the others lived for you" (Yeziarska 137). There are instances that her mother and sisters have disagreed and been most unhappy with Reb's decisions; however, they never dared to resist his wishes. They were trapped in their oppressed existence. Reb rebukes her by asserting his male authority and declares Sara is committing, "the crime of crimes against God—daring your will against your father's will. In olden times the whole city would have stoned you" (Yeziarska 137)! Yet, Sara does not stand down in her belief that she is not "from the old country" and asserts her identity as an "American," leaving behind her Jewish culture for life in America (Yeziarska 138). Her all-or-nothing attitude that voluntarily immerses her into American culture is not an easy street paved with gold.

In the first moments that Sara left her father's tyranny behind, she confesses that she "walked the streets, drunk with my dreams," but then sobers up to a hard realization (Yeziarska, 155). Instead of the blissful dream she envisioned: Sara is smacked in the face by American culture that simulates the exact Old World ideologies that she had fled from. She struggles to find a place to rent because she is a woman, alone, in search of housing (Yeziarska 157-158). The harsh gendered-bias judgment continues when she waits in a line for stew and questions why the server gave the man in front of her more meat when they are both paying customers, and an agitated voice yells "don't you know they always give men more" (Yeziarska 169)? Even though Sara is demonstrating the same stubborn nature as her father that seemed to work for him in maintaining his role as head of the family, that blood and iron persona seems to get Sara little respite—or respect. Wilentz makes a poignant observation that "America exposes us to the double bind of the Jewish woman, whose freedom from the rigid structures of traditional Jewish

culture left her rootless and thrust into a hard and prejudiced world which always kept her a stranger” (34). Although the public school system in American culture would allow Sara to attend school and earn the education she seeks, her experience would not be a fantasized dream of equality and acceptance. The strength of the iron in her blood would be tested.

Sara’s American Dream is problematic because she is not accepted into American culture with open arms as she envisioned. Sachar concludes that Yeziarska “confronts and re-creates the struggle of acculturation related not only to tradition-bound parents but to the unique trauma of the Jewish woman seeking fulfillment equally within the family and within a larger, male-dominated culture” (384). She is not accepted among her co-workers because of her Jewishness and her soliloquy is saturated with her desperation for acceptance when she exclaims, “Say anything you like. Do anything like. All-right – hurt me. But don’t leave me out. I don’t want to be left out!” (Yeziarska 180). She did not feel she belonged in the Old World Jewish culture her father enforced; she sought acceptance in American culture, but does not feel she belongs there either. Although she idealizes the college grounds and people on the campus and is excited to finally be attending school, Yeziarska confesses at a school social “the whirling of joy went on and on, and still I sat there watching, cold, lifeless, like a lost ghost. I was nothing and nobody. It was worse than being ignored. Worse than being an outcast. I simply didn’t belong” (219). Her isolation in the midst of her American college education symbolizes the quirk of dreams—that dreams do not disclose what must be endured before arriving at the high point in the dream.

Sara’s isolation in American college life leaves her feeling like a ghost because her identity is temporarily lost by her attempt to be all-American and deny her Jewishness. Girgus determines that Jewish immigrant women like Yeziarska who lashed out against patriarchal defined gender expectations to pursue opportunities contrary to those expectations had to “fight

to realize such ideals [and this] makes her truly exceptional because she had to overcome both Jewish and American hostility to her ambitions” (111). In other words, the odds are highly stacked against Jewish immigrant women in Sara’s situation considering both Jewish culture and American culture did not advocate the advancement of Jewish women in either culture. These adversaries were inexorable, and compelled many Jewish immigrant women to try immersing themselves in American culture to find acceptance, but that does not work. Hybridity only emerges by staying connected to the origin culture, melding components of the other culture in a way that expresses the desires and interests of the individual, and being comfortable with the composition.

The dingy apartment Sara rents is symbolic of the weight of her adversaries as she fights to determine how she will navigate Jewish and American culture. She comments how all she wants is “a little light for the eyes, only a clean window such as Mashah has in her blackest poverty” (Yeziarska 163). The reason Mashah has a clean window and light is because she is on the well-worn path of Old World gender roles and serves her husband. Despite the hardness of poverty, there is light in Mashah’s defined role because it is a familiar existence. For Sara, she is blazing a new trail for Jewish immigrant women by demonstrating the capabilities of a Jewish immigrant woman to assert independence against the oppressive nature of the patriarchal societal structure.

While living in her desolate apartment place she has many visitors, and all of them chide her, except her mother who simply misses her daughter. The dreariness of Sara’s apartment symbolizes the great burden she carries for daring to be different because she does not fit in with American society, and she is now an outcast from Hester Street—her all-or-nothing attitude has literally left her with nothing! When her sisters come to visit, it becomes disconcerted and Fania

yells “‘You hard heart!’ Fania threw up her hands at [Sara]. ‘Come, Bessie. Let’s leave her to her mad education. She’s worse than Father with his Holy Torah’” (Yeziarska 178). Her relationship with Max ends because Sara comes dangerously close to losing herself in the relationship. Max seemed more interested in corralling her back to the Old World Jewish culture when he asks “‘what for should you waste your time yet with school anymore? You’re smart enough the way you are. Only dumbheads fool themselves that education and colleges and all that sort of nonsense will push them on in the world’” (Yeziarska 199). Then Reb visits and delivers the most venomous attack in his lecture:

Woe to America where women are let free like men. All that’s false in politics, prohibition, and all the evils of the world come from them...Schlang! Toad! Wild animal! Thing of evil! How came you ever to be my child? I disown you. I curse you. May your name and your memory be blotted out of this earth (Yeziarska 205, 207-208).

Objection is the general consensus to Sara’s dreams, and she is openly ostracized by those closest to her for daring to be different. The choice she made to pursue American ideas greatly distances her from Hester Street and her family because her aspirations have catapulted Sara beyond the boundaries of impoverished Hester Street, into middle-class America college life.

Sara is left with an overwhelming sense of the great sacrifices to reach her American Dream as she realizes that does not fit in with middle-class America, but she has abandoned her community. She ponders how to find balance within and between the two cultures when Yeziarska writes, “‘knowledge was what I wanted more than anything else in the world. I had made my choice. And now I had 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” (208). Sara realizes that her personality is in the likeness of her father and exclaims, “All my selfishness is from you...What have you ever done for your wife and children but crush and break them” (Yeziarska 207)? Reb does not serve or support his family because he feels that he is rightfully devoted to his study and Sara emulates the same behavior. The difference between Reb and Sara is that Reb embodies the dominating force as a man in Old World Jewish culture, and the Old World societal structure affords him a wife and daughters to serve and support him while he pursues his study of the Torah. Whereas Sara is an unfavorable minority in both Old World Jewish culture and American culture because she is a Jewish woman, hence she is alone and seeks a place where she feels that she belongs. Neither culture encourages her aspirations and so her American Dream is problematic in every facet. However, Sara’s blut-und-eisen spirit will prove that she has the tenacity to develop comfort navigating in both Jewish and American culture, and withstand the nay-sayers that exist in both.

Her eventual love interest, Hugo represents a hybrid Jewish-American identity and is an example of the multicultural identity that Sara eventually develops. Yeziarska describes Hugo as “a Jewish face, and yet none of the greedy eagerness of Hester Street any more. It was the face of a dream, set free in the new air of America. Not like Father with his eyes on the past, but a dreamer who had found his work among us of the East Side” (273). Like Hugo, Sara aspired to develop comfort navigating both Jewish and American culture, and a hybrid identity is where that comfort emerges. However, as a woman it may be surmised Sara endures harsher criticism for her choice to pursue her American Dream, and it is a testament to the strength of her character to achieve her goals.

She becomes a teacher and reconnects with her family. Hence, Todd declares that Sara “demonstrates that one need not be completely Americanized to live the dream; one can be an

American success while maintaining some of the values of the Old World... It is because of her newly formed hybrid ethnicity that Sara's achievement of the American Dream is indeed a true success story" (116). The successful hybrid identity is able to incorporate aspects of different cultures into their existence, and be comfortable living with a multicultural identity. Yet, Sara's story ends in a constrained manner that leaves readers contemplating if she arrived at that place of comfort with her identity when Sara confesses that, "I felt a shadow still there, over me. It wasn't just my father, but the generation who made my father whose weight was still upon me" (Yeziarska 297). That immense weight is a heavy burden, and although Sara blazed a trail for women—she remains a burden bearer as she continues to define herself as Jewish-American. The weight that came from Sara realizing her American Dream is because she is a pioneer who successfully pursued her dream. In other words, there were not many Jewish immigrant women at the time who exercised the tenacious spirit to push against and challenge the pressures of the patriarchal hegemony. Hence Sara felt a burden remained on her shoulders.

At a moment of great uncertainty, Sara doubts if she would ever belong among the educated as she hoped, and it is during this time that the dean of the college becomes an influential factor; symbolizing an American man who is supportive of Sara's aspirations. His encouragement combined with her relationship with Hugo and his Jewish-American identity became the lights that shine through her dingy, dark window. Realizing the doubt and burdens that Sara carried the dean explained:

'All pioneers have to get hard to survive', he said. He pointed to a faded oil painting of his grandmother. 'Look! My grandmother came to the wilderness in an ox cart and with a gun on her lap. She had to chop down trees to build a shelter for herself and her children. I'm more than a little ashamed to realize if I

had to contend with the wilderness I'd perish with the unfit. But you, child—your place is with the pioneers. And you're going to survive' (232).

Hummer explains “the main quality that pioneer women in the fields needed was courage to withstand social and professional ostracism” and the courage required to persevere was more than most Jewish immigrant women could muster (49). The dean recognizes Sara's tenacious spirit and infuses her with a perspective that invigorates her to continue down the path she has courageously blazed despite the hauntings of the Old World specter that culminate at the end of the story with Sara's pensive reflection.

Sara demonstrates the ability to achieve independence, but her story depicts the volatile process because she temporarily her connection to family while pursuing her American Dreams. Her father berates her relentlessly for thinking she is capable of existing without a man to guide her. She thrusts herself into American society, and lands with an initial thud because American society did not welcome her. Sara represents a Jewish woman who can weather the storm and demonstrates the capability to establish herself as a Jewish-American woman. She also shows the ability to have American culture as part of her life as seen in her education and job, but then she reconnects with her father at the end to show her continued connection to traditional Jewish culture. The ability of Sara and her father to reconcile their differences and reconnect demonstrates how Sara attained hybridity as a Jewish-American woman; because she arrives at a place where she is comfortable identifying with and feels accepted both cultures.

Although Sara ultimately relates as both Jewish and American, Yeziarska shows how a hybrid identity emerges at a high price because of the stress and friction that Sara endures when she reconnects with her Jewish family and friends on Hester Street. When Sara attends her

mother's funeral and refuses to participate in Keriāh⁹ because she needs her suit for work, she feels "a hundred eyes burned on me their condemnation. 'Look at her, the Americanerin' (Yeziarska 255)! Sara reflected a Jewish-American identity and Konzett expands, "many immigrants did not buy blindly into the American Dream. Instead they consciously selected and discarded elements from both their new and old cultures" (30). Although Sara was comfortable with her identity, she faced resistance because she refused to assimilate to the expectations of *either* culture, and her hybrid identity reflects her choices. After accomplishing her American ambitions, Sara is left pondering the value of her struggle considering at that point in history—the patriarchal societal norms were still deeply rooted in Jewish culture, and in American culture. Her melancholy tone whispers the concern if her fellow Jewish immigrants in America would ever arrive at a place of embracing both cultures so they meld instead of grind against each other.

⁹ Rending of garments during funeral service is a Jewish expression of grief. For further explanation see: http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/281558/jewish/Keriah-The-Rending-of-Garments.htm

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

For many, America has symbolized opportunities, hence the common term “American Dream.” Jewish immigrant women arrived in America, and they envision the venture as a chance to pursue things that have long been denied in their country of origin—such as an education. What they realize after arriving is that the dream is not going to ease its way into existence. Jewish immigrant women’s educational dreams were certainly met with resounding rejection from the Old World Jewish culture, but also American society because patriarchal norms dominated both. However, America has long served as a platform for change if the dreamer can be cognizant of and avoid pitfalls.

Orthodox Jewish society was unquestionably a patriarchal hegemony, and the societal structure diminished the self-esteem of Jewish women. Because of this, Jewish immigrant women struggled internally to muster the courage to believe in their own ability. If Jewish women have been told they are inferior for a long time, and then attempt to demonstrate ability to be independent—their attempt is very fragile as the slightest resistance will shatter their aspiration. Jewish women were working to build up their self-esteem to find a sense of fulfillment—not just to prove their worth to the men who had long dominated them, but to themselves as well. However, before the Jewish immigrant women can assert an independent and capable identity, they must destroy the barriers imposed on them by the fictitious judgement of inferiority by the patriarchal hegemony.

Immigrants came to America with their own dreams, and different dreams compete, creating specters that haunt ideas that extend beyond the familiar boundaries from their country of origin. The competition swirling around what the “American Dream” means is a dynamic scenario that grinds against previously established societal norms, and pushes for either: assimilation or acculturation in shaping identities. The challenge with acculturation is the variety

of competing ideas that are *between* cultures, but also *within* cultures that pressure for assimilation. What exacerbates the situation for Jewish immigrant women in their pursuit of acculturation and ultimate hybrid identity development is that they think they have escaped the clutches of patriarchal control only to be met with the same prejudice in American society. The double prejudice would quickly destroy the already fragile idea; that Jewish immigrant women can be capable members of society outside the home, if given the opportunity. The Old World specter is everywhere for Jewish immigrant women: from the Jewish faces that have long deprecated them to the American faces who did not openly accept them. It is the uncanny strength of the deeply rooted male-dominated control that extinguishes any dream that might disrupt, and incite changes to the patriarchal ideologies—one of those ideologies being women inferiority.

It is a romanticized notion that everyone achieves their dreams, but not everyone is strong enough to endure adversarial pressures. Some Jewish immigrant women willingly gave up on their dreams while others gave in to the forceful opposition. A tenacious spirit is required to come to America, and develop a hybrid identity that challenges the patriarchal societal norms. It was easier for Jewish immigrant women to remain oppressed because it was a familiar existence. The courage required to insist change that is starkly different than the societal norm is a rare characteristic of Jewish immigrant women because of the inferiority complex deeply embedded in their minds. The reluctance that co-exists with change is great, so it becomes clear that a tenacious spirit is the key ingredient in working toward melding different cultural elements to successfully develop a hybrid identity.

Jewish-American literature provides insight to the experience of Jewish immigrant women and the American dream; however, there is a caveat—the gender of the Jewish-American

author and their personal perception has tendency to permeate character development.

Therefore, literary analysis must account for how the gender of the author may bias the story and its characters; if the analysis is to substantiate a historical inference. Because the patriarchal culture believed in women inferiority, any strong-willed Jewish immigrant women would be intentionally excluded from the records written by Jewish men; historic or fictional. Any Jewish immigrant women who displayed independence or intelligence would not be recorded because the masculine hegemony deemed it unfavorable; perhaps from fear that it would inspire more Jewish immigrant women to explore perceived independence and opportunity in America. The exploration of ideas that might entice changes to the existing societal structure is something neither Old World Jewish culture nor American society advocated. If Jewish immigrant women became educated and capable of independence, it might upset a longstanding belief that the patriarchs dominating between both cultures did not want changed.

A determined spirit is evident in the main male characters of Cahan, Malamud, and Yeziarska; so an obstinate nature is not a trait that is absent in Jewish culture. Yekl was quite determined to be an Americanized Jew, hence the hesitation, frustration with, and ultimate divorce from his Old World wife, Gitl. Morris' story is saturated by loss; however, he lived and died by his cherished principles of Judaism, demonstrating a determination despite his hardships. Reb was fierce in his devotion to studying and enforcing his interpretation of the Torah; regardless of how that desire had a negative impact on his family. These men, while their lives are distinctly different, are all undeniably determined in their own right. But, that determination does not translate to all the female characters because Gitl and Helen are haunted by the men who wrote their stories.

Struggle is a theme that emerges and proves a formidable challenge for all three Jewish women. Gitl tries desperately to balance her husband's demands for an Americanized life with her desire to stay connected to traditionally defined gender expectations. Helen struggles to balance her defined duty as a daughter who supports her father with her college aspirations. Sara struggles navigating between Jewish and American culture because she gets the education and job she wanted; however, she must reassert her connection with her Jewish family. Although each story is distinct, the common thread that binds the Jewish women in the literature together is the quest and struggle for identity.

Guttman succinctly sums up the shared challenge of Gitl, Helen, and Sara in his explanation, "assimilation is, of course, a complicated process of give and take," and these women all contemplate what parts of American culture and what parts of Jewish culture define who they are (225). Gitl and Helen make up the majority of what happened to Jewish immigrant women: they were unable to find a comfortable balance between the cultures that afforded them the life they dreamed of in America. Rather, both women settle in contrasting fashion for a multicultural affiliation that is not the identity they wanted: Gitl wanted to stay connected to Old World Jewish culture and Helen wanted to meld more aspects of American ideas into her life. Sara; however, develops a hybrid identity that shows the balance between her Jewish and American cultural influences because she realizes her educational aspirations, and reconnects with her family—symbolizing her comfort with hybridity. The reason Gitl and Helen remain unsatisfied in how their identity developed is because they both remained entrapped in meeting patriarchal demands. Gitl was forced to assimilate to aspects of American culture to try to please Yekl, and Helen was compelled to sacrifice her ideas about acculturation to provide support her family. However, the unhappiness of these Jewish women characters is irrelevant to Cahan and

Malamud. What matters is how both women display an inability to exercise independence, and remained faithfully bound to patriarchal expectations. Yeziarska, on the other hand, demonstrates how a woman could persevere and attain a multicultural identity that suited her desires.

Gitl, Helen, and Sara display three different attitudes: apprehension, hesitation, and determination. The apprehension and hesitation melding American culture into the Jewish immigrant women's identity illustrates the inferiority long enforced by the Old World gender roles. The determination portrays the courage to prevail against the oppressive force of the patriarchal hegemony in both Jewish culture and American culture. Gitl's American Dream is to simply continue Orthodox Jewish life in America, and she is content serving in her traditional gender role because American culture frightened her. Helen aspires, but hesitates to boldly pursue her education because she felt a deep obligation to serve as a burden bearer for her family. While their lives are different representations of the Jewish immigrant women experience in America: Gitl and Helen both portray an inability to meld traditional gender expectations with American ideas to establish a hybrid identity because both are apprehensive and unsettled. Instead, America is overwhelming for them, and perhaps Cahan and Malamud wanted it that way for their female characters. The overwhelming apprehension and hesitation serves to instill fear that would keep Jewish immigrant women faithful servants to the patriarchal hegemony. Yet Sara desires an education, and a life different than what is expected of her as a woman in Jewish society—and she succeeds. Sara identifies with both American and Jewish culture in the ways she intended, and part of her success was to deny the submissive nature that was expected of her as a Jewish woman.

Cahan portrays Gitl as a woman who is very comfortable and accepting of her traditional gender role; therefore, she resists Americanization. She is fearful of Mamie, and her fear of the presumptuous female behavior is symbolic of her apprehension. Although she changes her dress, overall Cahan portrays her as the one who is terrified of the assimilation forced on her by her husband, but she remains a faithful servant in her attempts to meet his demands. Gitl's immense angst and quiet servitude nature illustrate the expectation that Jewish women are best suited as wife and mother. Gitl is clueless regarding what she wanted from life in America, and she gave in to the specter and sought the familiar in serving a man according to Old World gender roles. Her persona remains overshadowed by the domination of the patriarchal hegemony, and she is completely comfortable with that fact. Hence her arranged marriage to Bernstein following her divorce from Yekl, signifying that she is incapable of being independent.

Malamud saturates Helen with an unsatisfied desire. She works and gives her paycheck to her father which depicts a long-standing practice that an unmarried daughter supports her father, whereas if she had kept her paycheck, then she may have used it to afford school. The strong hold of familiar practices makes Helen's American aspirations more a pipe dream because she cannot pursue an American Dream if she hesitates to take bold steps towards her hopes of education and strive to develop the hybrid identity she imagines. She gave up to the specter by remaining bound to the obligation of supporting her family to the extent that it prevented her from realizing her American Dreams. Hence, Helen has a constant air of discontentment because she did not want to settle—but she did. Therefore, she exemplifies Old World gender expectations because she settled according to the reduced identity of a daughter rather than assert herself according to her personal goals and ideas regarding a fulfilling life in America.

Gitl and Helen remain subservient to the men in the story and both settle for identities that is a reflect dictation of Old World gender roles, and both female characters are born from the minds of two Jewish male authors. If the purpose of the story was just about triumph over hardships and navigating life in America—then why are Gitl and Helen not painted as resilient as the main male characters? Perhaps the influence of male authors Cahan and Malamud are inclined to portray Jewish immigrant women through the lens of a patriarch's perspective that suggests women are better under the control of men; hence the frailty that embodies the idea of inferiority in Gitl and Helen.

Cahan and Malamud weave residual Old World Jewish cultural ideologies into the female characters Gitl and Helen. Gitl waits to marry with the intent to serve her new husband. Helen is left at the crossroads, hesitating if she will make a change in her life. The specter is the driving force of Gitl's and Helen's outcomes. Women inferiority is a deeply rooted belief in the minds of many traditional Jewish men (even if it is subconsciously). It is a fictitious judgment that has imposed a barrier; otherwise, Gitl and Helen's story may have turned out differently if it had been penned by a female.

Yeziarska presents a unique character trait for a Jewish immigrant woman that Cahan and Malamud do not, and that is the blood and iron combination to withstand heavy scrutiny. It is Yeziarska's female voice and characterization of Sara that depicts a woman with the tenacious spirit who is capable of planting Jewish roots in America, and developing a hybrid Jewish-American identity. Her bold steps led to the fulfillment of her American Dream, and she inadvertently rids herself of the specter.

Sara dissipates the specter by exposing the contradictions of the Old World societal structure that had long oppressed Jewish women. In her passionate argument with her sister

Mashah's husband Moe, Sara blatantly exclaims "you married Mashah because she was beautiful, then you piled your children on her neck, starved her, wore her out. You spoiled her beauty. Then you blame her for losing it" (Yeziarska 151). The impassioned declaration is that Jewish women are beautiful and capable spirits, but the male-dominated societal structure that enslaves women to men disintegrates the self-esteem of the women. Yet the patriarchs who enforce the dictatorship insist the Jewish women are the ones to blame. Yekl serves as a perfect example of the irritation in his ever-building frustrations with Gitl for not metamorphosing into the Americanized Jewish woman he wanted. When a Jewish woman literary character like Sara is recorded and shows the resolve to establish her independence; she emerges as an exceptional individual who has balanced Jewish and American culture the way *she wanted to*. Sara serves as a strong example of an obstreperous Jewish woman who refuses to let the specter dictate her dreams.

Gitl, Helen, and Sara all provide examples of Jewish immigrant women who struggle with acculturation because of the patriarchal dominance that over-shadowed both cultures. The inferiority complex that was deeply embedded in the mentality of women would give the patriarchs a strong hold that proved tough for women to conquer. Helen's constant state of dissatisfaction is a crucial observation of the one of the biggest challenges for Jewish immigrant women struggling with acculturation: because it suggests she could not find a balance in melding American and Jewish culture together in a way that made her comfortable with her multicultural existence. She wanted more for herself, but she was too hesitant and fearful. Like Gitl, she embodies the inability to make a decision that was independent of the main male character. Cahan and Malamud's fictional representation of the Jewish immigrant women experience acculturating to America accentuates Old World ideologies: women were best suited as servants

to men because they could not handle the pressure that came from struggling to establish a hybrid identity. If the patriarchal ideals were not a dominating force guiding their pens, Cahan and Malamud may have presented readers with Jewish women who are ambitious and capable.

Yeziarska is a woman's voice and presents a woman who is capable, daring, and was resilient against the Old World specter who tried to dissuade her. She perseveres against the prejudices and establishes herself as a Jewish-American woman, and became a pioneer to encourage other women through the inspiration of her character, Sara. It would take a tenacious woman, like Yeziarska to express belief in the ability of women because the reduced identity imposed on women by the patriarchal society clearly shows that men did not believe in the capabilities of women—even in the fictitious world.

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