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“The Representation of Jewish Immigrant Life in the United States by European Immigrant Authors Anzia Yezierska and Ludwig Lewisohn”

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Tijana Andric

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1. Introduction

Jewish immigration into the United States saw its peak between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The immigrants were forced to adopt an American identity, which was not an easy task especially with nativist sentiments rising in the light of increased immigration.

These experiences were quite vividly captured in a variety of autobiographies of Jewish American writers who sought to become American. Stanley F. Chyet remarks that "[b]efore the dawning of the twentieth century, one cannot speak of an American Jewish imaginative literature. […] [It] is only with the 'mass' influx of East European immigrants in the closing years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century that a significant American Jewish fiction begins emerging - slowly". (32) The very first Jewish American autobiography may have been Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto,* published in 1896.

Israel Zangwill's widely acclaimed play *The Melting Pot* (1908), depicting America as a nation emerging from the interplay of ethnicities and cultures, is said to have "encouraged American publishers to abandon their reservations concerning the publication of Jewish-American narrative prose and made the appearance of a large number of autobiographies of Jewish authors possible" (Zacharasiewicz 462).

Indeed, the first few decades of the twentieth century saw a spate of Jewish American autobiographies, Jewish writers willing to share their painful process of assimilation. Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912) or Lillian D. Wald's *The House on Henry Street* (1915) are but a few examples of Jewish-American autobiographical writers.

The authors chosen for this thesis are Anzia Yezierska and Ludwig Lewisohn. Both émigrés from Europe, Yezierska was born around 1880[1] and moved from Poland to

[1] Yezierska's exact date of birth is not known

New York in the early 1890s, Lewisohn left Berlin with his family in 1890 and settled in America's South.

Jewish life in the ghettos of New York differed vastly from the Jewish immigrant experience in the Southern states. The great majority of Jewish newcomers settled in New York, clustered together in the ghetto of the Lower East Side. The South , in fact, represented the core of Jewish life prior to 1800, yet the numbers remained relatively small and the population never exceeded the form of clusters.

This very experience is mirrored in Yezierska's and Lewisohn's fiction. Yezierska's novels and short stories, almost always semi-autobiographical, feature female protagonists who struggle to reconcile the values of the Old World, represented by the tyrannical father and Talmudic scholar, and the New World. The heroines break free and through education, love, work, and self-realization they strive for assimilation. Yet, they come to realize that complete abandonment of the Old World in exchange for the New World is not possible. Lewisohn, in contrast, wrote about themes that were much more complex than Yezierska's. His first memoir *Up Stream* (1922) very successfully captures Lewisohn's struggle for assimilation, a process accompanied by the adoption of several identities. Finally, his embrace of Judaism and Zionism seems to satisfy his pursuit of belonging.

In order to contextualize the authors and their fiction to a satisfactory extent, a compact history of Jewish settlement in the United States will be provided. Subsequently, the memoirs of both authors and one novel by each will be analyzed to identify patterns of assimilation. Considering that Yezierska and Lewisohn settled in different regions of the United States, the analysis will show that their immigration experience differed accordingly. The differences and similarities will finally be contrasted after.

2. History of Jewish settlement in the United States of America

Between 1830 and 1939, there were steady flows of European emigration and the United States of America accounted for a great deal of the total percentage serving as the host country. 40 million of 60 million European emigrants made their way across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States. During this period, the Jewish population in the United States experienced an immense increase as well due to underlying factors that accelerated this development. (Strauss 62)

The beginnings of Jewish immigration to the United States can be traced back to 1624, when the first group, consisting of 23 Sephardic Jews, arrived in New Amsterdam (what later became Manhattan). By 1880, the Jewish population had reached an estimated 250,000, and in the following decades it continued to rise further, with 4,2 million Jews having reached the country by 1924. (Goren 571) Due to restrictions of immigration that were established in the US in the 1920s, the inflow of newcomers was strictly regulated henceforth. This trend saw its peak in the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, according to which an annual quota of immigrants was limited to a maximum of 153,774. (Strauss 65).

As the Jewish population settling in America over the decades arrived from diverse cultures and countries (Israel was only established in 1948), their first languages differed accordingly and thus served as “one index of this diversity” (Goren 571). The aforementioned first group of Jewish settlers in America spoke Spanish and Portuguese (they were referred to as Sephardim). Ashkenazic Jews (Central and Eastern European Jews) spoke German and Yiddish, the regional dialects of the latter allowing for some distinction. (Goren 571) In social and economic terms, German Jews were quicker to acculturate in the US and become members of the middle class than Jews from Eastern Europe. In fact, from a more recent retrospective view, Hagit Hadassa Lavsky argues that German Jews have acculturated and adapted to the American way of life so well, that it is hard to find

traces of their German-Jewish heritage. The author mentions the German-Jewish newspaper ‘Aufbau’ as an example to illustrate her argument. The newspaper was established in 1934, and with an already limited readership, it was discontinued in 2004. Apart from few minor contributions like these, weaving the German-Jewish Americans together, there “are no visible efforts to emphasize or to foster accounts of the German-Jewish element as a unique component within pluralistic American society.” (Lavsky 12) Eastern European Jewry in contrast, who mostly arrived a few decades later, “joined the industrial labor force or became supplier of consumer goods in the immigrant neighborhoods” (Goren 572).

2.1. Demographic representation of European Jewish migration

As the Jewish population had been scattered across nations due to the fact that Jews had no homeland until the establishment of Israel in 1948, the purpose of this section is to illustrate the patterns of Jewish migration, focussing on the European continent. To understand the reasons behind continuous Jewish migration, a look into history is recommendable.

Despite the differing social backgrounds of the Jews, Jewish life was built around a sense of group cohesion, as suggested by a Jewish polity. The adherence to this life was prompted by benefits that were granted to these communities, such as autonomy in different aspects of life (e.g. taxation). This led to a conceived image of separation by the rest of the Gentiles - people who were not Jewish[2] - eventually leading to them turning against Jews. Many prohibitions were put into practice, Jews were no longer allowed to own land and restrictions in their occupational life led them to business that was rather avoided by Gentiles, either because these occupations were seen as risky or because they were looked down upon, such as collecting taxes, which in turn further fueled animosities towards Jews. In addition to that, the Christian population demonized the Jews as “Christ killers” (Goren 572) and this depiction in literature eventually led to Jews being even executed or at least expelled

[2] see: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gentile (acc: 10 Feb 2021)

from the country, first in England at the end of the 13th century and then in France in the 14th century. However, the first great expulsion happened in 1492 in Spain, leaving the Sephardic population with two options: They had to convert to Christianity if they wished to stay in Spain, or they had to leave the country. 200,000 Jews were affected, three quarters of whom chose exile while one fourth converted. Ashkenazi Jews were drawn towards the East - half a million Jews living in Eastern Europe by the year 1600 - and settled in nations where their skills were of use. Poland appeared as a welcoming country and its tolerant regime towards Jews was responsible for the fact that Poland became the center of European Jewish settlement. (cf. Goren 572 f.)

The prosecution of Jews in Eastern Europe continued in the 19th century, the last two decades in particular bringing about uproar and massive migration. Multiple reasons contributed to this development, one of them was the fact that Eastern Europe - regions that were held by Russia - restricted the lives of Jews. Being confined to so-called pales - designated areas separated from the country surrounding them[3] - Jews (with the exception of few whose privilege exempted them) were not allowed to live in rural areas. This was paralleled by a massive increase of the population in the Jewish Pale, from 1,5 million Jews in 1800 to 6,8 million one century later. This development was propelled by a high birth rate paired with a low death rate. Further factors that encouraged departure were the changes in society and economy. In 1881 a new regime followed after Tsar Alexander II had been assassinated, a regime that increased violence against Jews and resulted in pogroms in 1881 and 1882, which set off a hostile environment for Jewish people for the next 30 years. Not only were they expelled from villages, but in the cities they were additionally faced with restrictions in their trades. More pogroms (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kishinev etc.) followed at the beginning of the new millennium and resulted in mass departure. The United States experienced a great influx of refugees during these times. While 200,000 Jews arrived in the US during the 1880s, the figure increased by half for the following decade, followed by a total of 1,5 million newcomers between 1900 and 1914, a large percentage of whom were family members that followed earlier immigrants into the country, the father typically being

[3] see: https://www.britannica.com/topic/pale-restricted-area (accessed 10 Feb 2021)

the first member to have emigrated and the rest of the family following later. Data taken from this period showed that the immigrants were mostly young people, many of them skilled and with intentions to become permanent residents. This development was also reflected in the distribution of Russian Jewish youths. 70 percent of those who emigrated to the US during that period belonged to the age group 14 to 40, whereas this age group made up only 47 percent in Russia. (Goren 572 ff.)

Jacob Lestschinsky's survey 'Jewish Migration for the Past Hundred Years' from 1944 considers immigration numbers from 1840 to 1942 and, while this period particularly relevant for this thesis is limited to the third migration, for the sake of completeness the survey will be discussed in its entirety.
Table 1 shows the distribution of Jewish immigrants by countries of destination and serves to illustrate the importance of the US as a destination country for European Jewry.

Years	United States	Canada	South America	Other American Countries	South Africa	Palestine	All Other Countries	Total
1840-1880	200,000	1600	2500	1000	4000	10,000	2000	221,100
1881-1900	675,000	10,500	26,000	1000	23,000	25,000	4000	764,500
1901-1914	1,346,400	95,300	96,364	3000	21,377	30,000	10,000	1,602,441
1915-1920	76,450	10,450	6503	5000	907	-15,000	5000	89,310
1921-1925	280,283	14,400	49,852	7000	4630	60,765	10,000	426,930
1926-1930	54,998	15,300	62,387	10,000	10,044	10,179	10,000	172,908
1931-1935	17,986	4200	29,055	15,000	4507	147,502	20,000	238,250
1936-1939	79,819	900	33.066	15,000	5300	75,510	60,000	269,595
1940-1942	70,954	500	11,500	2000	2000	35,000	10,000	131,954
1840-1942	2,801,890	153,150	317,227	59,000	75,765	378,956	131,000	3,916,988

Table 1
Distribution of Jewish immigrants by Countries of Destination, 1840-1942[4]

The figures in Table 1 show that between 1840 and 1914, the vast majority of Jewish immigrants were admitted to the United States. No country attracted nearly as many immigrants during the 19th century, which finally made it the country with the largest number of Jews. More broadly speaking, during World War I, the North American and

[4] Data taken from Lestschinsky *Jewish Migration for the Past Hundred Years p.8*

South American continents accounted for more than 100% of all admissions of Jews, taking into consideration also the departees leaving Palestine during this period. However, the war and the introduction of quotas had an effect on emigrating Jews, forcing them to also settle in countries where Jewish communities had not yet been established as successfully, including regions with "for the most part fewer than 50,000 Jews in one country where Jews may easily lose their ethnic identity" (Lestschinsky, *Migration* 9). The number of Jewish immigrants in the US plummeted after World War I, then rose between 1921-1925 only to plunge again as a result of the Immigration Acts taking effect. The table further reveals the increasing role that was bestowed to Palestine after World War I. To illustrate this development in more obvious terms, Table 2 is provided to show a summary of Jewish immigration in the US compared to Palestine between 1840 and 1942:

Years	Admissions to the US	%	Admissions to Palestine	%	Total admissions
1840-1900	875,000	88,8	35,000	3,6	985,000
1901-1925	1,703,000	80,4	76,000	3,6	2,119,000
1926-1942	224,000	27,5	268,000	33,0	813,000
1840-1942	2,802,000	71,5	379,000	9,7	3,917,000

Table 2
Jewish Immigration in the US and Palestine in %[5]

Clearly, Table 2 reveals the significance Palestine gained throughout the decades. (Lestschinsky, *Migration* 6 ff.)

In 1928 Lestschinsky published another survey 'Die berufliche Zusammensetzung der jüdischen Einwanderung in die Vereinigten Staaten 1900-1925' which gave insight into the immigrant Jewish population in the US during the first quarter of the 20th century, with a focus on the occupational aspect of the newcomers. The data

[5] Data taken and adapted from Lestschinsky *Jewish Migration for the Past Hundred Years* p. 8

showed that the unemployment rate rose in the years after World War I, which could be attributed to the remaining family members who left the old world to join those who had emigrated in the years before, thus stressing the family character in Jewish families. Another deduction that can be drawn from the survey was that, in comparison with non-Jews, the number of intellectuals (rabbis, musicians,..) immigrating after the war ended was much higher for Jews than non-Jews, indicating that the former felt more threatened in their existence if they stayed in their home country than the latter. In addition to that, an overall pattern could be observed according to which, in times of crisis (pogroms etc.), the country saw an influx of an economically active population, while 2-3 years later the percentage of inactive elements, represented by the wives and children, grew accordingly. (Lestschinsky *Berufliche Zusammensetzung* 164 ff.)

According to Goren, of all Eastern European Jews arriving in America during the 15 years before World War I, skilled workers constituted 64%. As the percentage for immigrants as a whole only amounted to 20% in contrast, the conclusion can be drawn that the immigrating Jewish population had intentions to partake in the American economy, most commonly in the clothing or mercantile trades among Russian Jews. (Goren 581)

1.2. Defining American identity

As hostile sentiments towards immigrants grew throughout the early 20th century, it is advisable at this point to address the question what exactly an American identity is. The term ‘identity’ was given its significance in connection with America only in 1950, hardly being used prior to that, when Erik M. Erikson stated that “[w]e begin to conceptualize matters of identity at the very time in history when they become a problem. For we do so in a country which attempts to make a super-identity out of all the identities imported by its constituent immigrants” (Erikson qtd in Gleason 31). Extending the word identity with the adjective ‘super’ in front of it conveys a sense of doubt on Eriksons’s part with regard to America’s tolerance towards the existence/ maintenance of immigrant identities. He maintained that problems were the catalyst

that urged people to discuss matters of identity, clearly implying a negative sentiment towards immigration.

In the late 18th century up until 1815, the idea of forming an American identity was largely based on an ideological way of thinking and could be obtained by adhering to three necessary steps. The first step required the acceptance of the “abstract ideals of liberty, equality, and republicanism” (Gleason 32) and was open to anyone determined enough to take on an American identity, regardless of the language or culture of the immigrant. This idea, however, was flawed due to its irreconcilable idea of inclusion, namely by excluding minorities such as Blacks, Indians and later other minorities, who were not seen as fully human. The second step which constituted an American identity was by breaking ties with its European past, which was accelerated by the “establishment of a unified government in the 1780s” (Gleason 32) among other events such as the Declaration of Independence. And the third and final step, similar to the second, lay in the perspective of the future. Gleason refers to J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur here, who stated that “[h]ere individuals are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world” (Crèvecoeur qtd. in Gleason 33). For Crèvecoeur ethnicity was not an important factor in the establishment of an American identity but rather something that, through the process, would be moulded into an American identity. (Gleason 31 ff.)

While reservations towards immigrants during the 18th century made way for stricter regulations, obtaining an American citizenship was relatively easy in the 19th century, its requirements being at least 5 years of residence in the United States, forsaking one’s hereditary titles in the home country and pledging allegiance to the Constitution. In a broader sense, the formation of an American identity relied largely on the adherence to political ideologies, the notion of an ‘American identity’ was an ideological one, and its realization was simplified during these times given the circumstances that immigration in the United States was manageable until the first third of the 19th century, with roughly 250,000 immigrants entering the country between 1776 and 1815. Thus, due to the low number of newcomers it was possible to monitor this development. (Gleason 31 ff.)

With the increased influx of immigrants and, accordingly, an increase in various cultures and ethnicities changing the dynamic of the country, this development sparked much controversy, discussion and cultural theories across the nation in the course of the 19th century. The following section examines two popular conceptions with opposing viewpoints: ‘cultural pluralism’ and the ‘melting pot’.

1.3. Cultural Pluralism versus Melting Pot

The theory of “cultural pluralism” stands in contrast to the belief in a homogeneous Americanized nation. While the term ‘cultural pluralism’ caused much controversy in the 20th century, mostly used to represent an image of a harmonious society in which ethnicities and minorities could live peacefully with majorities, it also entailed a defensive character as it implied that minorities are not subject to assimilation but are entitled to living their culture, thereby rejecting the process of Americanization. The Jewish philosopher and lecturer Horace M. Kallen was the first to address the issue of cultural pluralism in his article *Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality* in 1915. While Europe was constituted of diverse nationalities, America stood for unison and discouraged the formation of groups of ethnic identities. The outbreak of World War I saw a further increase in fear and a more radical rejection of traces of unassimilated immigrant life, resulting in an intensified outcry that demanded homogeneous Americanism. This was the starting point from which Kallen formulated his theory, according to which the American identity was the product of the coexistence of different ethnic groups and that the very notion of unity required the interplay of various ethnic groups, rather than a mass of individuals. Despite America being a democracy, Kallen perceived its demand for assimilation as an imposition and he maintained that a society could, as a matter of fact, become more fruitful if the different ethnicities were granted the freedom to contribute to society, rather than being forced to give up their cultural identity. He insisted that ethnicity “was an enduring psycho-physical inheritance” and “emphasized the primacy of culture and the right of an ethnic group to be different” and thereby “the group transcended the individual”. (Fishman 157 ff.)

Kallen also made distinctions between nationality and citizenship. He viewed citizenship as something one agreed to voluntarily, people benefitted from such an agreement by receiving certain privileges while in turn also accepting that they had to adhere to obligations that come with the agreement. Nationality, then, differs in that it is not based on free will, but that is inherited and forms the link between a group of people and an individual. While citizenship can be revoked at any times, nationality cannot be shaken off. Kallen illustrated his argument with the following example:

> Men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religion, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent: They cannot change their grandfathers, Jews or Poles or Anglo-Saxons, would have to cease to be, while they could cease to be carpenters or lawyer without ceasing to be. (Kallen 220)

By making a distinction between nationality and citizenship, Kallen added a political dimension to the issue, which he expanded with his argument drawn from the Founding Fathers. Kallen argued that in the Declaration of Independence the passage indicating that all men were equal did not imply the literal meaning that all humans were the same with no differing cultural backgrounds, but that they were equal in front of the law, granting each individual the same amount of protection, opportunities and rights. (Fishman 163)

While cultural pluralism pleads for the maintenance of various ethnicties, the idea of a ‘melting pot’ visualizes the American society as a hybrid, merging different nationalities together, finally resulting in a new race. This cultural theory goes back to Israel Zangwill, a British Jew, and his play ‘The Melting Pot’ in 1908. The following excerpt serves to illustrate Zangwill’s standpoint:

> Here you stand . . . in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won’t be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you’ve come to – these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians – into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American . . . The real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the crucible, I tell you – he will be the fusi on of all races, the coming superman. (Zangwill 37f.)

Although Zangwill acknowledges the different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, he envisioned a nation whose identity would be formed in the future and emerge as a result of the many ethnic influences, finally revealing the ‘real’ American identity. Zangwill’s play was met with approval by many, among them former President Theodore Roosevelt. However, many critics discredited the play’s message and claimed that no homogeneous race could emerge from the mixing of many ethnicities. (Taubenfeld 499 f.)

Thus, it can be concluded that for more than a century the United States were a haven for immigrants but that, with the influx of newcomers, nativist voices grew louder. The newcomers were confronted with hostility if they refused to assimilate to American culture. That assimilation and acculturation was not always an easy task, however, will be the focus of the following chapters where the struggles of acculturation in Jewish immigrant literature will be analyzed.

2. Authors and Text Analysis

This section offers an in-depth analysis of elements of the Jewish immigrant authors' quest for acculturation and assimilation in the United States in both their (fictionalized) autobiographies, and one selected novel by each.

While both authors emigrated from Europe during the same period (Lewisohn emigrated in 1890, Yezierska in the 1890s), Ludwig Lewisohn's and Anzia Yezierska's literary work differs greatly in their experiences, due to geographical/demographic reasons but also due to the fact that the immigrant experience of a Jewish woman represents an additional burden than that of a Jewish man. Today, Yezierska - together with her contemporaries such as Mary Antin or Emma Lazarus - is dubbed a foremother of American Jewish literature, a position that was previously occupied by male writers. (Zierler 421)

Interestingly, however, their fiction contains significant parallels on how the pursuit of assimilation from the perspective of the immigrant is perceived. Thus, apart from elements of Jewish immigrant life such as education, language and religion, the differences and similarities between Yezierska's and Lewisohn's fiction will be analyzed as well.

Ethnic immigrant literature, autobiographies in particular, serves as signposts documenting the process of assimilation and acculturation of immigrants, including the struggles that come with it. The immigrant in America is confronted with the dilemma of two conflicting cultures, encompassed by the pursuit of one's identity within the dominant culture which can be a painful process. Accounts of immigrants' acculturation experience written down in autobiographies typically follow one of two most common patterns: The complete and successful assimilation of the immigrant to the dominant culture and thus the abandonment of one's past, or the refusal to confirm the dominating norms through negation thereof or through adherence to an alternative of that culture. The immigrants' quest for acculturation with all its burdens, including oppression and marginality, finds its most unmediated and direct form of expression in the genre of immigrant autobiography. (Tiefenthaler 37 f.)

The Jewish experience, however, in contrast to that of immigrants of other cultural backgrounds, expanded the process of transformation from one cultural identity to another by adding another dimension to it, one that C. Bezalel Sherman refers to as the “duality of Jewish culture”:

> The need to adjust to conditions of life in a strange country first became a problem for other groups only in America; for Jews, it was a problem they had had to face uninterruptedly for many centuries. Others came to their new country with one culture; the Jews came with two, and frequently more than two, cultures. (Sherman qtd. in Tiefenthaler 47)

Yezierska and Lewisohn were both carriers of such a dual identity in their home countries. Coming to America they were faced with the additional task of exploring their third identity. While immigrants were often subject to rejection and marginalization, Lewisohn’s experience differed from most immigrants’ accounts. In an attempt to acculturate as an American, he not only faced rejection in his life because of his Jewish heritage, but also because of his German identity: He was confronted with anti-German hysteria reaching America in the War and in its aftermath I. In order to put the authors’ fiction into context, their biographies will be presented first, followed by an analysis of their fiction.

2.1. Yezierska’s biography

Anzia Yezierska was born in the Polish town Plinsk that belonged to the Russian Empire, close to Warsaw, between 1880 and 1885 as the youngest of 9 children. Yezierska and her family immigrated into the United States in the early 1890s. It remains uncertain what year exactly Yezierska was born in, not only due to the fact that Yezierska did not know her specific birth date but also because her daughter Louise revealed that her mother often altered and reshaped her history in interviews. Often the author would also lie when it came to her age, as compensation for starting a writing career at such a relatively late age. Yezierska’s oldest brother was the first member of the family to move to the United States. His name was Americanized into Max Mayer by immigration officers and when the rest of the family followed a few years

later, all of them were renamed Mayer, and Anzia's first name was changed into Harriet, short Hattie. Years later (probably when she was 28) she reclaimed her name. Living in a small apartment in Manhattan's Lower East Side, the financial burden affected the family. Yezierska's father, Baruch (Bernard), was a Talmudic scholar, who devoted all of his time studying the Torah and did not have a job that gained him a salary while her mother Pearl provided for the family working menial jobs. Yezierska attended elementary school only for two years before she was forced to seek employment in sweatshops and in a laundry in order to support her family. Her brothers studied pharmacy and became teachers and army colonels. Her relationship with her father was problematic due to conflicting world views, in Yezierska's opinion her father's lifestyle, characterized by full devotion to religion, could not be reconciled with an American life and therefore posed a barrier to assimilation. In order to get an education, Yezierska left her parents' home at the age of 16 and went to live in the Clara De Hirsch Home for Working Girls in New York. She showed iron will in her pursuit and went so far as to forge a high school education when she applied to Columbia University to enroll in the teacher's program while still working menial jobs to secure a living. Yezierska taught in an elementary school for a short while between 1908 and 1913 and attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. In 1913 Yezierska finally began writing fiction. (Horowitz[6]) During her trip to Europe in 1923 Yezierska sought the company of distinguished personalities such as Israel Zangwill, George Bernard Shaw and Gertrude Stein "to discover the secrets of their writing." (Hefner 187)

The writer's rise to fame was only short-lived. She wrote for magazines and newspapers and her first story collection *Hungry Hearts,* published in 1920, brought her success in Hollywood when the book was adapted 2 years later. (Cohen 197) She received 10,000 US dollars for the film rights for *Hungry Hearts*. By 1919, major magazines such as *The Metropolitan, Harper's, Cosmopolitan,* and *The Nation* accepted Yezierska's short stories for publication and in 1920 her short story *The Fat of the Land* was chosen as the best story of 1919 by the editor of *The Best Short Stories Series*, Edward J. O'Brien. Yezierska published five more books between 1922 and 1932,

[6] Horowitz made Yezierska's biography accessible on https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/yezierska-anzia, thus no page number is indicated here

including *Salome of the Tenements* (1922), for the film rights of which she received 15,000 US dollars by Twentieth Century Fox. (Zierler 416)

In 1921 Yezierska moved to Hollywood but it did not take long before she moved back to New York, stating that she was unable to write as successfully as she did in the Lower East Side. However, readers lost interest in her writing over the years as they did not want to constantly be reminded of their own poverty, which was a theme present in all of Yezierska's stories. Her career came to an end in 1935 and the author lost her savings and her stories kept being rejected by publishers. Finally, in 1950 she published her fictionalized autobiography *Red Ribbon on a White Horse.* However, she only received renewed appraisal for her work only posthumously in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the new generation initiating a sexual revolution and the Vietnam War setting off a change of perception in the society, the facade of a conventional American life slowly starting to crumble. Alice Kessler-Harris was also largely responsible for the republication of Yezierska's novels by the publishing house Persea in the 1970s. Kessler-Harris even wrote a foreword and introduction for *Bread Givers*. (cf. Cohen 197 f.) Since her rediscovery in the 70s, great emphasis in scholarship has been put on ethnicity, gender and class, and critics have even included her in studies of Yiddish literature despite the fact that Yezierska never wrote Yiddish texts. (Hefner 188)

Yezierska understood that she could elicit sympathy from influential people in her quest to become successful in America by embellishing her life story and thereby winning people over. This way she was able to obtain a full scholarship for Columbia Teachers College after impressing the Trustee at the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls. Similarly, Dr. Frank Crane, a syndicated columnist, exalted Yezierska and her novel *Hungry Hearts* in his column after she had sought him out in his office unannounced and told him an enhanced story of her life in order to elicit sympathy and, in turn, to boost the initially poor sales for her novel. It was this very column that influenced Samuel Goldwyn in his decision to acquire the movie rights to *Hungry Hearts*. (Zierler 415)

In 1910 Yezierska married the lawyer Jacob Gordon, but the marriage was annulled as Yezierska valued their friendship over the physical aspect of marriage. A year later she married teacher and textbook writer Arnold Levitas whom she divorced in 1916. They had one daughter, Louise Levitas Henriksen, who was born in 1912. In 1916, together with her daughter, Yezierska moved to San Francisco where she found employment as a social worker. Louise, however, was sent back to New York to live with her father a year later because Yezierska was unable to sustain both herself and her daughter. Their relationship remained close yet troubled. (Horowitz)

“The most spectacular chapter in [Yezierska’s] tale”, as Zierler (416) refers to it, was her relationship with philosopher, psychologist and reformer John Dewey which only became public after she passed. Yezierska and Dewey met in 1917 when she barged in his office at Columbia University to complain about her unjust treatment for her teaching license was withheld because of her ungroomed appearance and she was only assigned substitute positions that paid badly, despite the hard work that she had put into her education. Hoping to appeal to Dewey’s progressive approach to education, Yezierska invited him to observe one of her lessons, which he did. His advice to her, however, was to quit teaching and pursue a writing career instead as, after having read two of her published stories that she had given him, he realized that her talent as a writer was more promising than her talent for teaching. Thus, an instrumental role can be ascribed to Dewey as a catalyst for Yezierska’s writing career. Their romance, “symbolic of the coming together of the immigrant and American” (Zierler), lasted into 1918 and was a source of confidence and creativity to the writer. When their relationship came to an abrupt halt, Yezierska was left heartbroken but used the painful experience as fuel to establish herself as a writer, but the great love she experienced with Dewey would leave a lasting and central imprint on her work. (Zierler 416)

In 1970 Yezierska passed away after a stroke in Ontario, California. (Horowitz)

2.2. Yezierska's Fictionalized Immigration Experience

Before analyzing Yezierska's texts, which will be the focus of the subsequent sections, it is helpful to put her life into the context of the fictionalized immigration experience.

The autobiographical fiction Yezierska wrote largely dealt with the protagonists struggling to become Americans, their yearning for education serving as a means to reach the goal. Becoming educated ultimately represents the protagonists' break from their people, a society characterized by its backwardness and oppression of women. The parents in particular are portrayed as oppressive and expect a domestic life of their daughters. However, the stories end tragically when the harsh reality settles in that the immigrant daughters will never be able to shed their ethnic skin. (Cohen 197) Yezierska's stories are deeply embedded in the setting of the crowded Lower East Side, the Jewish ghetto. Zierler attempts to give reasons why Yezierska kept resorting to this repetitive pattern of plot in her stories when she remarks that "throughout her career she doubted her talent" and that her "obsessive return to the same subject over and over again" was "evidence of her fear that she could never get it quite right" (422).

In addition to this, her fiction, although often regarded as autobiographical, cannot be seen as such and the assumption is often a misconception. Yezierska incorporated elements from her personal life, but also from her friends's and family's lives, and she combined them with fictionalized incidents in order to create the contrasts and tensions she wanted to highlight in her stories. Yezierska never corrected false assumptions between the truthfulness of her life and her fiction and it is in part due to this that Yezierska was dubbed the "Sweatshop Cinderella" who suddenly transformed into a successful writer. (Schoen 3 f.)
Another crucial feature of Yezierska's fiction is her "stubborn adherence to the past" (Cohen 196) which the author consistently employs in her stories to highlight the fact that the Jews are doomed to remember their heritage and thus cannot assimilate completely and successfully.

The acclaim she received for her writing in the 20s, however, could not withstand the course of time. Horowitz writes that “[c]ritical assessment of Yezierska’s work has fluctuated since her earliest publications. Initially lauded as an authentic voice of the tenements—Cinderella of the sweatshops—by the 1940s, Yezierska had fallen into obscurity. Seen by the American mainstream as “too Jewish,” within the Jewish community her writing was offensive to both immigrant and Americanized Jews who felt mocked and exposed.”

In addition to that, her style was seen as inferior to other Jewish American writers of the time who wrote about their assimilation experience. While the rawness of her writing was appraised by many, her artistry was regarded as limited and her use of the stock characters was eventually perceived as overused and lost its appeal. (cf. Horowitz)

2.3. *Bread Givers* and *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* - An Analysis

As a female Jewish immigrant writer, Anzia Yezierska gave a voice not only to the Jewish immigrants of the early 20th century in the United States, but also to the female immigrants in particular who were faced with the additional burden of being a woman in a foreign country, thereby having to adhere to a set of principles of the new country as well as to the set of the Old World. Sepp L. Tiefenthaler writes that “her search for a cultural and personal identity was not only influenced by her status as an immigrant who tests and discards her understanding of American values but also by the fact of her Jewish heritage and (in close connection with this) her status as a woman.” (45)

Susan Gubar notes that “Jewish-American women writers take as their most resonant subject the tensions and ironies implicit not only in their own but in the very concept of ‘hyphenated’ identities” (232). Though not a true autobiography, *Bread Givers* (1928) contains various struggles of female Jewish immigrant life, which also reflect

the burdens Yezierska had to carry throughout her life. Poverty, marriage, education and the search for oneself are the core elements of the novel, just like in most of Yezierska's other stories. The time span covered by the novel represents the protagonist's (loosely resembling Yezierska's own life) childhood and ends at the beginning of Sara Smolinsky's career as a young woman. Yezierska's fictionalized autobiography[7] *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (1950) portrays her life in her fifties and mostly deals with her rise to fame in Hollywood and her move to New Hampshire. Thus, an analysis of both books covers her youth as well as her years as a mature woman and will illustrate Yezierska's struggle for acculturation in America.

2.3.1. Clothing as assimilation

2.3.1.1. American fashion as assimilation

An American sense of fashion as a sign of adaptation was an important symbol for immigrants at the turn of the century and was one of the first indicators that showed their willingness to blend in with Americans and ultimately represented a way for the Jews to become *American* Jews [emphasis added]. Barbara Schreier argues that only the acquisition of the English language was a more important objective than clothes in the Jewish immigrants' search for their American selves. During the period of the third migration, Eastern European Jews were so aware of the significance of clothing in America that they already started getting adjusted before they took on the journey. Letters from émigrés were sent to their loved ones at home and stories were told of beautiful clothes. In Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912) this issue is also brought up when Mashke's father, writing to his wife from America, tells her to not bring the wig with her to the New World as to avoid revealing herself as the outsider right upon entering the country. While other immigrant groups were equally committed in their quest to become assimilated through their clothing, the approach of the Jews differed as they were much more exposed to the latest fashion trends

[7] Some major events were omitted by Yezierska in her autobiography, such as the birth of her daughter Louise, and therefore one cannot rely on complete truthfulness of the rest of the story. Louise also confirmed that some facts were fiction.

since the Eastern European Jews dominated the garment industry. Furthermore, garments were particularly paid attention to on holidays as well as the Sabbath in the Jewish culture. Those days were honored with special outfits and new clothes were worn for these occasions. Given the fact that, compared to other immigrants groups, the Jews were the most likely to refrain from repatriation, abandoning their religious garment, such as the sheitel (the wig) further demonstrated their determination to stay in the country. Schreier is certainly right for mentioning Mashah as an example for this Americanization process: “For Masha, […] it only took ten cents worth of pink paper roses purchased from a pushcart on Hester Street to make her look ‘like a lady from Fifth Avenue.’” (29) (cf. Schreier 25 f.) However, it would not do Yezierska’s intention justice to limit the discussion to Mashah’s character and will thus be analyzed in thorough detail in the following section.

2.3.1.2. Clothes in Yezierska’s fiction

In *Bread Givers* as well as in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, clothes serve as a metaphor to represent Yezierska’s ties with her Jewish heritage that the author had always tried to distance herself from. Yezierska incorporates clothes as a recurring theme that reemerges throughout the course of the stories.

In RRWH[8], at the beginning of the book, Anzia[9] pawns a shawl that belonged to her late mother to which much emotional memory of Yezierska’s childhood is attached. It was a wedding present she received and her mother wore it whenever she went to the synagogue. The shawl was, in fact, so special that the other women were “outshined” and no other woman in Poland possessed such a unique cloth article. (26) Its significance is without a doubt exaggerated in the conversation between Anzia and the pawnbroker, who refuses to give her the dollar that she demands for the shawl: “People’s lives are woven into it.” (27) Most probably the protagonist does overstate the value of the shawl, however, it does reveal the immeasurable weight

[8] From this point on, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* will be abbreviated as RRWH

[9] The protagonist in RRWH will be referred to as Anzia to distinguish between the author Yezierska and the character in the novel as to avoid confusion.

intertwined with memories of her childhood the piece of cloth holds. That her past and her heritage are nothing special or even considered shabby through the lens of an outsider is reinforced by the words of the pawnbroker who does not see a shawl “rarer than diamonds” (27) but a rag that is not even worth a dollar. Ironically, however, the pawn represents her apparent break with her Jewish past for by pawning her mother’s shawl she receives a quarter which enables her to make the phone call necessary to close the deal for her movie rights, making her a rich woman. It comes as a presentiment then that when Yezierska, who just received a cheque over 9000 dollars, goes back to the pawn shop to recover her pawned item, the shawl had been sold. It seems that clinging to the past while at the same time venturing into the New World is irreconcilable. Schoen refers to this anecdote which “has been revised from melodrama to metaphor” as “one to prefigure the spiritual journey that the Hollywood experience becomes” (7).

In the same chapter, when Anzia is reminded of the letters she used to receive from her former boss John Morrow and takes a look at them, she hides them away at the bottom of the box, right next to her old clothes. As the affair ended tragically, she does not want to be reminded of it and the symbolic ‘bottom of the box’ represents the suppressing of those memories. It is the same place where her past in the form of her clothes was banished and, thus, is suppressed. Again, this is an allusion where the old clothes serve as a reminder of the past.

In a later passage Anzia recalls a memory of the short time when she went to an American school. Not only did the English language which she did not understand distinguish her so obviously from the rest of her classmates, her clothes exposed her just as much: “I felt like the village idiot in my immigrant clothes so different from the clothes of the other children.” (RRWH 39) Anzia was not only tied to her Jewishness on the inside through her family who clung to traditional Old world values so fervently, but also on the outside. The young girl is so aware of her alienation that she describes her appearance as resembling that of a ‘village idiot’.

In *Bread Givers*[10], Sara Smolinsky has such high hopes of blending in with the other students when she enters college. She is in literal awe of her peers, describing them as “born lucky ones”. An entire paragraph is dedicated to highlight Sara’s awareness of her alienation from those born lucky ones:

> What a sight I was in my gray pushcart clothes against the beautiful gay colours and the fine things that those young girls wore. I had seen cheap, fancy style, Five- and Ten-Cent Store finery. But never had I seen such plain beautifulness. The simple skirts and sweaters, the stockings and shoes to match. The neat finished quietness of their tailored suits. There was no show-off in their clothes, and yet how much more pulling to the eyes and all the senses than the Grand Street richness I knew. (BG 212)

The words Yezierska uses to describe the other girls as “plain”, “simple” or expressing “quietness” can be understood as deliberately calm, they reveal a great deal of power to express the clash of two worlds, just like the contrast gray - gay colors, depicting Sara as apparently lifeless. In addition, Sara’s fate figuratively sticks to her outer appearance since her “pushcart” clothes expose her working class self as those are the clothes she used to wear when she sold herrings in the Lower East Side. The stoic description of the American girls can further be put in sharp contrast with the loudness and turmoil that prevails in Hester Street: “My voice was like dynamite. Louder than all the pushcart peddlers louder than all the hollering noises of the bargaining and selling, I cried out my herring with all the burning fire of my ten old years.” (BG 21) The image of the busy and loud urban street is emphasized in Schreier’s description of the setting of Jewish ghettos as “a scene of rapacious consumerism with overflowing crowds of pushcarts” (27). The noise and tumult that is ever so prevalent in the Jewish ghetto clashes with the calm plainness of the Americans and Sara is committed to remove this marker of alienation in her life.

The motif of clothes returns when Sara, with a cast iron will, finishes her studies and becomes a “teacherin”, an accomplished, assimilated woman. Working hard towards reaching her goal, Sara worked menial jobs to sustain herself as she had left her parents’ home and could not rely on any help. Step by step, she was able to buy herself those things that would make her outer appearance resemble the American

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[10] From this point on, *Bread Givers* will be abbreviated as BG.

girls, such as “a pair of gloves, a pair of shoes with stockings to match” or a “plain felt hat like those college girls wore”. (BG 221) Sara finally returns to Hester Street and the first thing she does is renew her wardrobe with the finest articles of clothing, which she can now afford as a teacher. Always having to pinch pennies while growing up, she could splurge for the first time on Fifth Avenue. That her years in college made her a changed woman can be gathered from the passages where Sara chooses simplicity - a characteristic that was previously used to describe the American girls - when it comes to buying a new suit and decorating the room of her new apartment in New York.

When her mother dies, the leitmotif comes full circle when Sara, in front of the mourning people, refuses to let the undertaker cut a piece off her suit with a knife which is a Jewish tradition at funerals. Not only does she thereby cause outrage among those present who reproach her and make her Americanization responsible for the decay of her Jewish values, but this gesture also very much demonstrates her alienation from her own race.

That Sara’s ‘obsession’ with new, fine clothes has to do with her yearning for her place in an American society and, thus, win acceptance becomes evident considering the fact that her desire for new clothes only appears after she leaves home for schooling. Living in Hester Street, she was never conscious of her ‘Jewishness’ represented by her clothing, she was only among other Jews in her neighborhood and seeing other people in their pushcart clothes was part of her reality. Hester Street gave her no reason to be self-conscious about her gray pushcart clothes. Therefore, seeing the college girls walking around campus in their simple yet beautiful clothes holds up a mirror to herself and ultimately sparks in her a drive to eliminate this obstacle between her and the American world.

Yezierska employed in both BG and RRWH clothes as a metaphor to represent the clash of worlds, the Old world and the New world. As trivial as something like clothes may appear, it does succeed in creating a boundary that apparently cannot be overcome that easily. While Sara at the end does seem to have completed a transition into a more American self to some extent, the price that she has to pay appears to be that she has now become an outcast of her own people in Hester

Street. However, as she is not a fully accepted member of the New world either, she is doomed to be ever so trapped between the two worlds.

2.3.2. Language

When dealing with Jewish immigrant literature, the analysis of language must not be left out as it carries plenty of weight in the identification process that the author goes through. According to socio-linguists, “too often in the acculturation process -- one that frequently involves relinquishing one's native language -- individuals relinquish their group or ethnic identity without acquiring a substitute feeling of identity for the host culture.” (Kraver 4) The motif of language serves to point to the duality of the protagonists. Zierler asserts that, similar to Abraham Cahan and Henry Roth, Yezierska “employs immigrant dialect as an authentic means of probing the hearts of her characters and recording their impressions of the American Promised Land.” (Zierler 417)

Furthermore, Hefner points out Yezierska’s choice to reject narration from a first-person perspective, a perspective frequently employed in autobiographies which emphasizes the narrator’s status of assimilation and also creates a distance between storyteller and protagonist. By choosing not to adhere to this convention, she “demonstrates her peculiar aesthetics that aim to alienate readers from a language they should feel some affinity with”. (191 f.)

As Yiddish was the common language of the vast majority of the Eastern European Jews while English served as the national language in the United States, it makes sense to analyze Yezierska’s use of the two languages separately.

2.3.2.1. Yiddish

Yezierska’s body of work contains quite a great deal of Yiddish expressions and thereby “takes advantage of her own relationship to language to denaturalize the written word and destroy the naive trust of language in realist writing” (Hefner 190). Similarly,

Amy Dayton-Wood proclaims that “[t]he back-and-forth movement between Standard English and Yiddish-inflected working-class vernacular reflected the ‘in-between’ status of characters like Sara. But Yezierska’s use of vernacular language is also a way of asserting the value of immigrants’ lived experiences.” (221)
In BG Yiddish expressions are mostly uttered by the parents, which makes sense given the fact that Sara was born to parents who fled from Poland. Although Sara was born in Poland, her most shaping years are spent in America. Hefner argues that the author’s “hyper-awareness of how language constitutes her characters as they simultaneously constitute their language out of fragmentary snatches of English and Yiddish” is what marks “Yezierska as a vernacular modernist”. (193)

In general, most Yiddish expressions uttered throughout the novel appear in context of wonder or mischief, such as “Nu?” and “Ach”, or to express anger and fury, for example “schnorrer” or gazlin” , or when talking about food, for instance, about “gefülte fish”. By interjecting snatches of Yiddish, the author highlights the ethnic dimension of the Smolinsky family.

Interestingly, while Sara seldomly makes use of Yiddish in her speech, one passage stands out in particular where she does so, namely when she talks to Hugo Seelig and they are astounded to find out that they share the same past, the same burden. Coincidentally, they both cry out “‘Landsleute’ in one voice” (BG 27). In a world full of misunderstanding, rejection and loneliness, it seems almost like a miracle that Sara finally does manage to find a like-minded counterpart. And while Sara always sought to flee her roots and her doomed heritage, her counterpart happens to be one with whom she shares this very fate that stubbornly follows her like a shadow. It is important to stress the function of the expression being uttered in Yiddish. Had it been spoken in English, countrymen, it would not have had the same effect. They were “breathless” when it dawned on them that they were alike, and in a moment of sheer surprise the word that connected them and made them one was a word from the Yiddish language. Hefner asserts that frequently the experience of Yezierska’s protagonists “can only be rendered in the abstract, experimental vernacular of the immigrant” (191). This passage thus reinforces Yezierska’s intention to point out the hopeless

quest of escaping where one comes from for your fate will always catch up with you. While meeting Hugo Seelig was a blessing in Sara's life, it still supports this claim as, after all her fighting against it, she is drawn back to her own kind.

2.3.2.2. English

The analysis of the English language in BG is very revealing of the characters. While Sara is fascinated by learning and the English language, both Bessie and Mashah display a very colloquial use of speech. When Berel Bernstein tries to persuade Bessie to run away with him and get married, she does not have the heart to do it and she says to him: "But you see, Father never worked in his life. He don't know how to work." (BG 50) and adds that she "couldn't marry a man that don't respect my father." (BG 51). As education among girls was not encouraged in Jewish ghettos, it is only to be expected that such errors would occur in colloquial speech.

Similarly, Mashah displays the same tendency for a vernacular speech style: "If I take my lunch money for something pretty that I got to have, it don't hurt you none." (BG 3) To Mashah it is certainly more important to look pretty and buy beautiful clothes than to adhere to rules of the English grammar. Despite the fact that a vernacular style may have been the norm in Hester Street, or their whole neighborhood for that matter, the comparison between the sisters is very telling. Sara is the only member of the Smolinsky family to pursue an academic education and it is reflected in her linguistic behavior. Katie Ahern asserts that Yezierska employed literacy as "the transformative effect […] literacy and education had on [her] self-belief and on [her] personhood and individuality" (198).
This insight can be expanded to represent a bigger picture. The sisters' ignorance of the English grammar represents their acceptance of their Jewishness and the impossibility of escaping this world. Admittedly, they never utter their dissatisfaction with their life in Hester Street or the desire to flee from this world (except from Reb Smolinsky's tyranny). Nevertheless, they do not stand up to Reb Smolinsky's plan of marrying the girls off. While there is turmoil when it comes to the men they should marry, all of whom the father selected himself, all sisters cave in and finally surrender to their father's will. Although their marriages turn out to be everything but peaceful and

free of burden, they still urge Sara to find a husband instead of wasting her life away pursuing her teaching degree.

However, the English language is often represented in a derogatory way and is made responsible for the evil that America stands for. In RRWH when Anzia and her female coworker refuse to take on an (unpaid, of course) night shift, her coworker wanting to meet up with her lover and Anzia wanting to use the free night to attend her classes at night school, their boss is everything but happy to hear about their 'rebellion': "Out you go! Out of my shop! I want no fresh-mouthed *Amerikanerins*! Greenhorns! The minute they learn a word English, they get flies in their nose and wanna be ladies. I don't want no ladies here!" (*RRWH* 104) What the boss, speaking in a vernacular style himself, in principle implied is that he wouldn't tolerate independent women who stick up for themselves - an *Amerikanerin* - and through the acquisition of the English language the doors were certainly more open for a Jewish girl to get a taste of the real world and step out of the confining boundaries that the Jewish ghetto in the Lower East Side stood for. The word *Amerikanerin* has negative connotations and implies that a woman with a voice equals trouble and high maintenance, traits a Jewish girl could not live up to because she knows her place in society and will not challenge it.

The word "Americanerin" also comes up in *Bread Givers* with the same negative touch to it. At her mother's funeral Sara refuses to cut off a piece of her clothes (which has already been mentioned in the section on clothes). This refusal does not go unnoticed: "A hundred eyes burned on me their condemnation. 'Look at her, the *Americanerin*!" In order to become American and live life in an American way, the Jewish neighbors, friends and acquaintances are convinced that Sara had to give up her Jewish values and morals and that her disrespectful behavior is the result of her Americanization.

For the heroines however, the mastering of English is depicted as a highly gratifying experience. Young Anzia feels a spark of delight when she can convince Minnie, the janitor's daughter, to teach her synonyms. Anzia offers Minnie money in exchange for her lessons despite the fact that money was tight in the Smolinsky household and Sara's mother relied on her weekly wages. After a while Anzia raises the tuition fee

herself and remarks that “[w]hen it came to learning, I loved to pay with a full hand.” (RRWH 77) This moment is remembered as the beginning of her education and lets Anzia reap the fruits of her work when she learns English and “learned to piece together thoughts and feelings about the people around me” (RRWH 77). Just how much weight the mastering of English carries is further pointed out when Anzia goes to watch the rehearsal for *Hungry Hearts* and Anzia comes in at the scene where Sara cries out in tears “Some one’s going to teach me! Teach me English! I’ll learn to be an American!” (RRWH 53) What this exclamation conveys is that being American is something that can be ‘taught’. You don’t have to be born an American but you might just as well through the acquisition of English learn how to be a member of the American society.

However, that this process of assimilation through language acquisition is not as simple can be observed in BG when Sara experiences a moment of bewilderment when she corrects the errors and mistakes of her students who “murder the language as I did when I was a child of Hester Street” which seems an “almost hopeless” task (BG 271). One of her students receives the task to write ‘isn’t it’ a hundred times in order to eliminate the boy’s habit of saying ‘ain’t it’ which was very common in the Jewish neighborhoods. The lesson continues with spelling exercises and, with Hugo Seelig present in the classroom, for a moment Sara becomes a child of Hester Street herself:

> “You try it again, Rosy. The birds sing-gg.”
> “Sing,” corrected Mr. Seelig softly.
> There it was. I was slipping back into the vernacular myself. In my embarrassment, I tried again and failed. He watched me as I blundered on. The next moment he was close beside me, the tips of his cool fingers on my throat. “Keep those muscles still until you have stopped. Now say it again,” he commanded. And I turned pupil myself and pronounced myself and pronounced the word correctly.

Hefner argues that Yezierska’s “characters, always striving to become American, find themselves drawn back to their Lower-East-Side, Jewish roots, even in the syntactical construction of their language” (193). Not only does Sara slip back into the vernacular, she does so in the classroom that faces the very street that shaped her life forever. The teacher who intended to teach the children who “murder the language” the right pronunciation, has to be corrected by Mr. Seelig, a Jewish man himself, and

puts Sara in the “embarrassing” position of a student. Despite having spent years at college trying to knock the language of the ghetto out of her, she is pulled back into her old habits once she returns to her ‘new old world’.

2.3.3. Influence of the Teacher

Edmund James pointed out that the public school teacher often exerts a strong - if not the strongest - influence on the development of immigrant children. The teacher depicts a source of inspiration for the children when it comes to outer characteristics such as clothes or their speech manners. Their influence can, however, affect the children from the inside as well, resulting in them adopting the teacher’s behavior. In the context of the immigrant family, the teacher represents the counterpart to the immigrant parents, especially the immigrant mother due to the parents’ inability to immediately incorporate the values and deportment typical of the New World. Girls in particular have the inclination to find in the school teacher a role model. (James qtd. in Kraver 4)

In BG Sara finds herself to be drawn to her teachers. On the one hand there is her school teacher whom she admires and looks up to as a young girl and whom she aspires to become like one day, which she in fact does when she pursues a teaching career. Her admiration for her teacher is remembered in retrospection when Sara stands in front of her class now a teacher herself: “How thrilled I felt if I could brush by Teacher’s skirt and look up into her face as she passed me. If I was lucky enough to win a glance or a smile from that superior creature, how happy I felt for the rest of the day!” (BG 269) Sara describes the woman as ‘superior’ and while not more of the teacher’s character is revealed, the reader can assume that Sara’s fascination is limited to the sole fact that being a teacher puts her on a pedestal. Also, by “looking up” into her face, Yezierska most likely did not only refer to the actual differing size of the two individuals, a child and an adult, which would naturally result in a height difference, but the sheer gesture of looking up to someone to face them supports the argument that young Sara idolized her teacher.

On the other hand, in her later years at college the teachers exert such an impact on Sara that she takes it as a personal offense that they are not approachable for interaction with her on a friendly basis. In contrast to the admirable teacher of her school days, Sara no longer thinks that the hierarchy between her and her teachers exists and that she has found like-minded company. In fact, she is so convinced of herself that she even thinks herself superior to some men because life had put her to the test in a much more character-shaping way than it had the men her age: “I knew more of life as a ten-year-old girl, running the streets, than these psychology instructors did with all their heads swelled from too much knowing.” (BG 231) While it is undisputed that her childhood in a Jewish ghetto must have been much more trying than a protected childhood of American children, this utterance can also be seen as a defense mechanism in an attempt to justify - while simultaneously keeping her dignity - why men her age, Mr. Edman in particular, rejected her.

2.3.4. Haunting Ghost of the Past

> “Yezierska had a deep relation to the past. It was an inspiration for her. The past bewitched her and ended her life. Yezierska was lost in the past.” (Wassermann qtd. in Cohen 196)

Yezierska draws upon the past very heavily in her fiction as can be observed both in BG and RRWH. It is the fate of the Jews to remember their history; especially for diaspora communities a corporate memory is much more significant for the preservation of a people than territorial space. (Sorin XI) Thus, the theme of the past shall not be excluded from the analysis of the representation of Jewish immigrant life in Yezierska’s fiction.

In the Jewish immigrant experience, the past represents a painful burden and was a theme often employed by Jewish American writers. Mary Antin in *The Promised Land* for example writes: “I long to forget. […] It is painful to be consciously of two worlds. The Wandering Jew in me seeks forgetfulness. I am not afraid to live on and on, if only I do not have to remember too much.” (Antin qtd. in Wald 53)

Priscilla Wald further elaborates that “nostalgia finds expression in the work of East European Jews often indirectly, emerging in an isolated memory” and this “sense of loss, an experience typically described in the language of melancholy, infuses the experience of assimilation”. (Wald 53)
It is clear that Reb Smolinsky’s character, unwilling to exchange his Old World values for the New World values, acts as the greatest reminder of the past in BG and has been thoroughly discussed in scholarship. However, this section will rather focus on the concrete instances in Sara’s and Anzia’s lives where the protagonists find themselves being reminded of their burden.

In RRWH Anzia steps into the world of the rich and the successful. However, she is unable to fully enjoy the experience due to memories of the past being evoked, despite the fact that she found herself in Hollywood, with a check that had been handed to her that guaranteed her a life in luxury. The title of the second chapter “Tiled Bathroom of my Own” already insinuates Anzia’s modest character who deems a tiled bathroom worth mentioning. Upon entering her hotel room in Los Angeles, Anzia thinks to herself: “It was too big, too beautiful. Could I ever get used to living in such comfort? Could I enjoy such affluence unless I could forget the poverty back of me? Forget? The real world, the tenement where I had lived, blotted out the sun and sky.” (RRWH 38) Anzia’s first reaction to never seen before luxury immediately takes her back to her Hester Street days and a guilty conscience ensues which she tries to dismiss when she attempts to convince herself that she earned her place through hard work. She vows that she will grant “[n]o backward glances” and will “shed the very thought of poverty as I had shed my immigrant’s shawl” (RRWH 39) However, she breaks her resolve only a bit later when she goes to dinner in a fancy restaurant and, again, memories of poverty are evoked when Anzia had to bargain for stale bread among crowds of poor people all trying to save a penny wherever they could, whereas now Anzia is asked to just “choose!” (RRWH 40) whatever she craved from the gilded menu, with a waiter waiting to serve her. As Anzia is unable to shed the skin of the past and cannot make California her home, she leaves Hollywood to return to New York. Although she moves into a luxurious hotel apartment in New

York, on Fifth Avenue, and spends three years there, her soul is still not at peace and “an overwhelming nostalgia” (RRWH 101) pulls her back to the East Side.

Zierler stresses Yezierska’s symptomatic development of the plot in her fiction and asserts that “Yezierksa’s experience of America followed a plot-line very similar to many of her stories - from poverty to an uncomfortable spate of success to obscurity” (418 f.) Similarly, thus, the past represents for Sara Smolinsky a burden that reveals itself as persistent and stubborn as well. Various situations in her quest for self-fulfillment remind her of where she comes from, be it regressions in the classroom teaching pronunciation, her sisters reminding her that marriage is what a Jewish girl should strive for, or her gray clothes setting her apart from the college girls. It is, however, the bigger picture that makes it clear just how strong the force of the past is: Sara’s journey sets out in Hester Street which she has to leave to find herself. A misfit during her college years, Sara is left with no other option than to return to her past. Despite her alienation from her heritage, from the pushcart peddlers, from the smells and the noise in Hester Street that evoke negative memories, her Americanization is only completed once the educated Sara returns to the Lower East Side.

2.3.5. Social Ties

2.3.5.1. Women

As a female Jewish immigrant writer, Yezierska depicts her heroines as strong, proactive women who work for their money and provide for their families. Kevin Piper argues that Yezierska employs “Jewish immigrant women who give of themselves to support one another as well as their families. […] The Smolinsky women, along with neighborhood women such as Mumhenkeh […] invert this gendered division of labor as the novel reveals them as the true providers.” (112)

While Yezierska's fiction succeeds in conveying the message that in the Jewish tradition the role of the woman is in the household, caring for the family and working domestic jobs, her characters are capable of much more than just that. The female fringe characters are presented equally powerful and dominant such as street peddler Muhmenkeh in BG who offers Sara, ten years old at that time, to sell her some squashed herring which Sara can in turn sell for a higher price to make a profit and support her family financially. In contrast, the male characters are exposed as disappointing and not living up to their promises, e.g. Mashah's husband Moe Mirsky who invests his money in his appearance while his wife and children live in poverty and don't have enough money to pay the milkman.

In RRWH Anzia's character is even elevated to eye-level with men when her talent for writing grants her access to Hollywood and to her very own office. Anzia is struck with surprise when she is told that a secretary will be glad to assist her whenever she needs a helping hand: "'Secretary for me?' I blurted. 'I thought secretaries were only for men in business.' 'In Hollywood, writing is business.' Lenz laughed." (RRWH 43) Irving Lenz, chief of Goldwyn's publicity department, thus confirms for Anzia that her talent paved the way for her to sit with influential people, something Anzia always doubted and needed reassurance of. She finds herself among men of power who come to seek *her* out in *her* office to discuss *her* screen adaptation. Not only does her successful writing gain her a mighty cheque, but all the rich men involved in the realization of the adaptation profit off of her as well. That she never quite fits into this society cannot be attributed to the fact that as a woman she is inferior to the powerful men, but to Anzia's troubled expectations of how she is supposed to internalize (Americanized) ideals and values.

2.3.5.2. Family

The Smolinsky family represents the picture of a typical Jewish family with the father as the head of the family who is devoted to his holy books, the mother as the carer and the daughters Fania, Bessy, Mashah, and Sara. Interestingly, no son is born to

Reb Smolinsky and his wife and thus the readers can only judge Reb Smolinsky's parenting when it comes to his daughters. Given the fact that Jewish sons were granted more rights and access to education, it would certainly have been very telling if Yezierska had employed a male character as an addition to the plot. BG being considered a semiautobiography, it may indeed have been a deliberate decision by Yezierska to omit sons, considering that Yezierska herself had brothers. This may have been done in order to foreground the female experience in her quest for assimilation. This claim is supported by Carol Schoen's remark that "the absence of sons [was one of her contrivances], employed to sharpen her focus" as "spokeswoman for the immigrant Jewish woman" (7).

Turning to the characters, it becomes evident that all three sisters represent a certain personality demonstrating "typical responses of the immigrant experience" (Schoen 7). The comparison between Sara and Mashah is particularly striking and reveals much about their characters. Cohen remarks that "[l]ike Yezierska herself, the [protagonists] deny themselves food and housing for the sake of the education that immigration to America has made accessible to them." (Cohen 197) Passages in BG can be found where both Sara and Mashah consider refusing to eat in order to attain something they desire. However, their motivation behind it could not be more different: "Mashah pushed up her shoulders and turned back to the mirror, taking the hairpins carefully from her long golden hair and fixing it in different ways. 'It ain't my fault if the shops are closed. If I take my lunch money for something pretty that I got to have, it don't hurt you none.' Worry or care of any kind could never get itself into Mashah's empty head." (BG 3 f.)

Not only did Mashah not bother to find a job, an additional salary being so desperately needed in the Smolinsky household, but she spent her lunch money on "something pretty that she got to have". Clearly, Mashah prioritizes her looks and possessions over the wellbeing of her family. Her prioritizing herself, in fact, does hurt the family because their struggle has to continue.

Sara, on the other hand, crunching the numbers trying to figure out all possibilities how she can sustain herself while attending college, thinks to herself: "What is there left for food? Two dollars and forty cents. That means thirty-four and two-sevenths

cents a day. How could I have enough to eat from that? But that's all I can have now. Somehow, It's got to do." (BG 165) To Sara it goes without saying that she will abstain from filling meals for the sake of her education. The persistent hunger and her daydreaming of her mother's delicious cooking is responsible for her absentmindedness at the laundry which results in a penalty of 3 dollars after she scorches a piece of clothing she was ironing. Nevertheless, Sara does not for one second consider giving up her education due to the hardships she has to face, but instead resolves that she will simply "have to live on dry bread to make up the loss." (BG 166)

Reb Smolinsky is the often employed personification of "Yezierska's relationship to the Jewish tradition", which was "not without its difficulty", and through the tyrannies of the pious father, "traditional Judaism is scathingly indicted". (Sol 219) Sara's father, once a respected Talmudic scholar in his hometown in the Old World, is unwilling to let go of the traditional Jewish values because in America he is robbed of his status. Goren states that while "[r]eligious study was required of every male child, urged upon every male adult" it was "rewarded by status in society" in Europe. (572) However, status was not bestowed upon rabbis in America as Jonathan D. Sarna points out: "In America, organized Jewish communities on the European model did not exist and congregationalism ruled supreme" which resulted in the fact that "[m]en devoid of learning and piety, even boorish hand laborers who in their native lands would likely have received scant attention, now felt themselves to be the rabbi's equal" and, consequently, "[p]recisely for this reason, many a rabbi and scholar describes America as an 'upside down world' and recoiled from it." (160 f.)

Indeed, Reb Smolinsky curses America and its failure to deliver the promised dream. He paints America as the root of all evil, yet he praises it whenever it suits his needs, such as the divorce laws when he exclaims: "Thank God, some laws of America are yet made by men!" (BG 265) Sara realizes that her father cannot adjust in the New World and her own alienation from these beliefs is expressed when she compares her father to hell: While Reb Smolinsky is regarded as holy by Mrs. Smolinsky, Sara thinks to herself: "For seventeen years I had stood his preaching and his bullying. But

now all the hammering hell that I had to listen to since I was born cracked my brain." (BG 135)

Reb Smolinsky is a weak character. In his marriage, he is condescending and dominant towards his wife, relentlessly reminding her of her place that was restricted to the domestic sphere and stressing his leading role in the family. Although his wife was the one keeping the family together and running the household as well as the finances throughout the years, he only comes to this realization when she is on her deathbed: "Doctor! Save my wife! […] Since she's sick my house is in ruin […] No one looks after me." (BG 249) It is, however, not genuine worry for his wife that causes this exclamation, but the fear of being alone and exposing his helplessness to care for himself. This selfishness peaks when Reb Smolinsky leaves his dying wife to go to prayer in the synagogue after she begs him to stay with her: "Well, what can I do? I'm no doctor. But if I run quicker to pray, God will at once hear me, and send you a cure." (BG 243) Even his business failed due to his gullibility to which he reacts with "innocent eyes" (BG 123).

2.3.6. Education

When discussing and analyzing Yezierska's body of work, one must not omit the theme of education that is ever so prevalent in her stories, typically following a similar pattern identified in the heroines of her book: The protagonists seek refuge from their milieu and through the acquisition of an education they hope to escape their hopelessness at home. Waldemar Zacharasiewicz asserts that the early Jewish autobiographies "show that the road towards the distinct identity and towards success leads normally through the school […] and, if possible, through college" (459).This is certainly true for BG as Sara Smolinsky is a character with seemingly unstoppable ambition in her quest to escape poverty and her father's tyranny. She is determined to go to college to become a teacher and, ultimately, an American woman.

However, Sara's idea of education seems to be flawed as, although Sara idealizes education and its ability to make a change in her life, her argumentation lacks substance and is ignorant of the fact how exactly getting an education will affect her in a wider social sense. (Rhodes qtd. in Shiffman 63) It is certainly correct that Sara's character lacks depth when she talks about education and how exactly it can change her life for the better, which is also highlighted by the absence of the essay that won Sara an award at college. Neither does the reader find out the content of the essay, nor how much effort was put into the composition which strikes one as odd since Sara stressed several times how important education is to her.

This yearning is already evident when Sara states that she does not want to sell herring on Hester Street anymore: "I don't want to sell herring for the rest of my days. I want to learn something. […] I want some day to make myself for a person and come among people." (BG 66) Sara has the belief that education has the ability to turn 'someones' into people without further substantiating her argument. However, when she later moves out of her parents' home and focuses on her studies, she actually feels dissatisfied in a moment when she thinks that she is missing out on life for the sake of getting educated: "All education was against life. I wanted to live and stupefy myself with geometry." (BG 187) It therefore gives the impression that Sara contradicts herself to a certain extent as to what her expectations and intentions with regard to education are, but it also further reinforces the claim that Sara's idea of education is not entirely thought through.

Shiffman argues that education alienates Yezierska's characters too much from the Jewish ghetto so that they cannot return home. (62) It is true that Yezierska's character feels a sense of alienation that was created through education for in college she becomes aware of her outsider role both in Hester Street as well as in college: "I felt stranger to them than if I had passed them in Hester Street." (BG 214) While she doesn't fit in yet with the college girls, she also no longer fits into the Lower East Side. However, I believe that the transformed character of Sara does gain more insight of life as an educated woman. Although the reader is left in the dark as to how

Sara's teaching career will develop and change her life in the long run as the novel comes to an end at this point, it is revealed that Sara returns to teach in the very same neighborhood "where seventeen years ago I started out my career selling herring". (BG 269) Despite all the bad and all the misfortune she had to tolerate her entire youth living in the Lower East Side, becoming an established woman has made her realize that she is drawn back to her home that oddly never felt like home to her. She is aware that teaching will never be able to fulfill her in the way she had always anticipated and after all the effort she put in, she will never be able to shake off the chains of the past like she had hoped to, although the conversation with Hugo Seelig does make the reader think so at first: "As I talked my whole dark past dropped away from me." (BG 278) For a moment there is hope that Sara has finally found her place in the world and can let go of her past. However, the very last sentences that conclude the novel emphasize the impossibility of ever breaking out of her fate: "But I felt the shadow still here, over me. It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me." (BG 297)

One can therefore conclude that, although concrete elaboration on the effects of education on Sara's part is lacking throughout the novel, becoming an educated woman did make her strong enough to face her burden more fiercely and to return to where she has always belonged and where she will forever belong. This fate was not handed down to her by her father only, but also by the "generations who made her father".

2.3.6.1. Education as erotic

Shiffman refers to Yezierska's pursuit of education as "erotic" and claims that her representation of Eros is thwarted. (62) Yezierska's short-lived relationship/affair to American philosopher, psychologist and reformer John Dewey is echoed in her various stories, disguised as characters such as John Morrow in RRWH or Mr. Edman in BG and demonstrates the incompatibility of the Jewish heroines and their WASP men they so admire. However, although it is a recurrent theme in Yezierska's

fiction, love is not the most important element but mostly just another barrier in the heroine's quest for acculturation.

In BG, Sara first realizes her admiration for the opposite sex in the character of Morris Lipkin, the poet who falls in love with Fania but is rejected by the father. Interestingly, her admiration is not aroused by what one would call a typically childish interest, which would usually stem from superficialities. Instead, she is drawn to the poet because of the love letters he sent to Fania, which Sara secretly read until she knew them by heart. While being a poet does not necessarily equal education yet, the meeting point where their paths cross is the library, a place associated with education. Amy Dayton-Wood adds that "all of the romantic relationships in *Bread Givers* are mediated through language" with language being a powerful tool as the "essential step in [the immigrants'] pursuit of upward mobility." (221) However, the flame of the naive crush is extinguished when Morris Lipkin rejects the "little kid" (BG 88) while bursting into laughter. The poet's reaction is hard to stomach for the girl and her disappointment is exaggerated with the words: "I felt I stamped for ever love and everything beautiful out of my heart" (BG 88).

Sara's crush on Mr. Edman remains just as unrequited and painful. Shiffman points out that "Yezierska's depictions of the cultural abyss between striving ethnic protagonists and various Anglo or Americanized teachers melodramatically underscore the desire of immigrant Americans, and specifically women, to be heard, accepted, and treated compassionately, not socially contained within class boundaries or belittled by the highly educated." (60) While Mr. Edman takes slight interest in Sara's academic progress, she assumes this interest will be extended to their private life and pursues him in quite a literal sense: She rents a room in the same building where he lives. Although Sara abandoned her religion, a leap of faith is awakened in her and she makes God responsible for this seemingly fortunate turn of events: "And people doubt that there's a God on earth that orders all the events of our lives?" (BG 227) Her crush is on the brink of obsession, she brings him, for example, some hot milk after she hears his cough coming through his door which echoes into the staircase, and yet again her naive and obsessive crush has to be

stopped in a direct and unapologetic way: "'Miss Smolinsky, you mustn't bother so about me. I don't like it.' His tone of annoyance hit me like a blow." (BG 229)

Standing in for John Dewey, this awkward relationship with Mr. Edman shows that a relationship to an educated WASP man is doomed to fail. The character is admired and idolized for his knowledge, even made responsible for the heroine's own (apparent) character development: "Through him I have gained this impersonal, scientific attitude of mind." (BG 226) There is, however, no evidence of the protagonist displaying such behavior to confirm her claim. Although up until her college years there were only two proper crushes that rejected her (Max Goldstein she rejected herself), Sara reproaches herself for such silly feelings: "Stupid *yok*! Always wasting yourself with wild loves. I'll put a stop to it. I'll freeze myself like ice. I'll be colder than the coldest. I'm alone. I'm alone." (BG 230) This reaction seems harsh and punitive given the fact that her love interests were rather unrealistic from the beginning for Morris Lipkin was much older than her and Mr. Edman was her professor. In addition to that, Sara's thoughts as depicted by the narrator were mostly consumed with doubt, her yearning for belonging, work and studying and it is rare that the reader hears about her romantic feelings.

Adam Sol mentions that the "[c]haracters of Anzia Yezierska […] experiment with cross-cultural romance, but ultimately find that their lasting comfort and happiness depends on another member of their ethnic group who shares their memories, experiences, and challenges". (Sol 215) Indeed, Sara's first requited love interest is found in principal and teacher Hugo Seelig. Similar to Mr. Edman, he is a man of knowledge and authority. In contrast to Mr. Edman however, he is not a WASP man but a Jew himself, one of Sara's kind. Although Sara meets him when she is a teacher, the reader can still sense a hint of hierarchy in their relationship when Hugo Seelig corrects Sara's pronunciation, putting her in the inferior position of a student. This might be one of the reasons for her interest in him considering that Yezierska typically employed the unattainable, superior and admirable man in her stories. This is in accordance with Kathie Ahern's observation that "Sara is seduced by [Hugo

Seelig's] ability to help her sound like her idealized American self, and begins to fall in love with the americanized, scholarly Hugo." (207)

Having graduated from college and returning to New York as a teacher, Sara exclaims: "Sara Smolinsky, from Hester Street, changed into a person!" (BG 237) Implying that she only became a person once she reached her academic goal, it can be argued that Sara did not feel worthy of love as a 'half person'. In hindsight, the relationships to Morris Lipkin, Max Goldstein and Mr. Edman were doomed to fail because Sara had not yet established herself as a person and could not enter a relationship - let alone a marriage - unless she had gained enough confidence in herself which she ultimately attained through her teaching degree.

When she discusses marriage with her mother during her college years, Mrs. Smolinsky tells her that she would prefer if her daughter got married instead of pursuing a career as a teacher, to which Sara counters: "Don't worry. I'll even get married some day. But to marry myself to a man that's a person, I must first make myself for a person." (BG 172) Wald adds that Sara's devotion to become a person "registers the extent to which the characters experience their very personhood as contingent upon the remaking that is taking place in the New World" and this quest of self-expression replaces "the external goals - financial success, the unattainable love object" allowing Sara to "take pleasure in the hunger itself and in the quest to express it". (Wald 63)

In this aspect, Sara stands in sharp contrast to the image of the typical Jewish woman and all her sisters who did not question their role in society but accepted what was expected of them. This observation in turn reflects the author's personal convictions of education and love, as Yezierska, a two time divorcee, clearly sought self fulfillment in life and made this her lifelong quest.

2.3.7. Location

Hester Street formed the core of the Jewish ghetto in the Lower East Side during the periods of migration, a district of Manhattan that served as a haven for immigrants. Setting her stories in the Lower East Side fulfills the function of leading “readers inside the hearts and minds of the ghetto folk - a people and lifestyle they knew little about” at a time “when urban immigrant populations were steadily increasing” while “Americans were growing steadily suspicious of strangers within their midst”. (Zierler 417) Their suspicions were only further intensified by the “cliché of the Eastern European Jew incapable of assimilation and integration” who lived in the “densely populated ghetto” on the Lower East Side, which accommodated 500,000 people in an area of about one and a half square miles. (Zacharasiewicz 445)
Naturally, Yezierska's protagonists are confronted almost exclusively with people of their kind during their years spent in the ghetto. Accordingly, both stories of BG and RRWH have the title of the first chapter in common: Hester Street. This rightfully raises the question whether a search for oneself as a fully accepted member of the American New World can be successful if it is restricted to the Jewish neighborhoods of New York. It seems only natural therefore that Hester Street symbolizes only the starting point of the heroines’ development which will lead the protagonists to places, where in their loneliness they are forced to shape their characters. In Sara’s case this is a college in New York while Hollywood becomes Anzia’s residency for a while and later New Hampshire.

BG is split into three books: “Hester Street”, “Between Two Worlds” and “New World”, and already the reader is able to predict to a certain extent the outline of the character’s development. The first book, as has already been mentioned, takes place in the Lower East Side and encompasses the daily lives and duties of the Jewish people, characterized by hard work and poverty. The protagonist is surrounded by poor, dirty people and a family that imposes traditional Old World values. In the second book, Sara shifts from these familiar boundaries to a world of independence. She meets teachers and students, but the New World remains a lonely experience where she does not feel welcome either. She is stuck between two places: the Old

World, a shadow that forever sticks to her and which she seeks to forsake, and the New World to which Sara so desperately wants to belong. The title of the third book “New World” finally suggests that the protagonist has found her place in the New World, however, Sara’s New World is a blend of the Old and the New World. A career as a teacher and a relationship with Hugo Seelig constitute the parts of the New World; her physical return to Hester Street as well as Reb Smolinsky, who will move in with Sara and Hugo after accepting their offer, constitute the Old World. In this sense, it indeed is a New World that Sara faces. However, this world only emerged as a result of the impossibility to ‘shut the doors’ (the first chapter of the second book is titled “I Shut the Door”) of the Old World and set foot into the New World.

Shiffman argues that education alienates Yezierska’s characters too much from the Jewish ghetto so that they cannot return home. (62) In RRWH Yezierska expresses this incompatibility of returning to her community when she tries to find Reb Mayer whose letter initially evoked a sense of longing for her home but is later crushed when she finds herself in the midst of a world she no longer fits into: “And all I could feel was disgust - revulsion - escape. […] The hotel room was not far enough away. I could not put enough space between me and the squalor, the noise, the smells I fled.” (RRWH 97) Anzia’s emotional distance to her community does not suffice to establish a gap between her and the ghetto, she needs to physically flee to her hotel room to bear the pain of poverty that was oh so familiar to her and which she can no longer stand.

2.4. Ludwig Lewisohn - Biography

Ludwig Lewisohn was born in Berlin on May 30, 1882, to secularized German Jews who identified with German culture and traditions, his father even opposing Jewish beliefs. In his autobiography *Up Stream: An American Chronicle* (1922), Lewisohn mentioned that already his grandfather, who had rabbinical functions, had assimilated his outer appearance to the Germans as he wore no locks and no garment typical for rabbis. (Nilsen 60 f.)

The Lewisohns moved to the United States in 1890 and unlike Eastern European immigrants who mostly settled in urban ghettos, they moved to the South. They first arrived in St. Matthews, South Carolina and 2 years later they moved to Charleston, South Carolina. (Benjamin 218 f.) What further distinguished the Lewisohns from Eastern European Jewry was that the German Jews had not been exposed to such radical discrimination in their home country as was the case for the Jews in the Russian Empire. Having arrived in America, the Lewisohns felt a greater sense of belonging to their sophisticated American neighbors rather than to their less educated Jewish neighbors. However, Lewisohn described his family, his mother in particular, as trapped between two countries, not being a full member of either community. (Nilsen 61)

During his years at high school and at the College of Charleston, Lewisohn developed his admiration for Anglo-Saxon literature - and also assimilated to Anglo-Southern culture. However, despite the fact that his peers respected him, he was never a fully accepted member of society. In 1902 Lewisohn entered Columbia to get a teaching degree to teach English in college for which he was denied a position between 1904 and 1910 - constituting the first case of Jews being excluded from tenured positions as English professors, which led Lewisohn to teach German literature from 1910 to 1918 first at the University of Wisconsin for one year and then at Ohio State University. During those years he also wrote scholarly books that defended naturalist theater and published an anthology, finally became “known as a literary scholar who advanced modern ideas and literature” and received praise for

his works as a theater critic and literary commentator for the journal *The Nation*. Lewisohn's memoir *Up Stream: An American Chronicle,* which was widely acclaimed by contemporary writers such as Anzia Yezierska herself and remembered by Israeli President Chaim Weizmann in 1948, was published in 1922 by Boni & Liveright, a publishing house owned by the acculturated Jews Albert Boni and Horace Liveright. Several setbacks throughout his life, such as being excluded from a fraternity at the College of Charleston, being denied a teaching position and a doctoral fellowship at Columbia University, and rising anti-German hysteria, as well as conversations with Chaim Weizmann and Kurt Blumenfeld, both Zionists themselves, resulted in Lewisohn's embrace of Zionism in 1924. (Benjamin 218 ff.)

Lewisohn, living a rather secluded and solitary life, also engaged in a few relationships with men. His most intense relationship was with George Sylvester Viereck, a German-born poet. Their breakup was paralleled by Lewisohn's thesis rejection and the news that he as a Jew would not find employment as a college teacher in America, and made him seek comfort in the company of the much older English-born woman Mary Arnold Crocker who would later become his first wife, a mother of four daughters who was not yet divorced when they met. (Kessner 180)

Lewisohn and Crocker's marriage failed and they separated. Crocker, however, would not grant Lewisohn a divorce until 1937 which caused great pain both for Lewisohn and singer Thelma Spear with whom the writer began a romance in 1921 or 1922, Spear being 22 at that time. The impossibility of dissolving the marriage under the law of the state of New York formed one of Lewisohn's various disappointments in American society. (Klingenstein 121)

In 1924, Lewisohn and Spear left for Europe where they spent several years, years that would leave a lasting imprint on Lewisohn's search for identity. First settling in Paris, the writer chose not to associate with other expatriates, except for a few select ones, for he was convinced that he shared no common interests with them. When Lewisohn paid a visit to Berlin, he realized that the Northern city which he had emigrated from could never become his permanent residence. This observation gave

way to Lewisohn's subsequent embrace of Zionism, as the element of "soil" in his "tripartite matrix of self, formed by soil, sex, and spirit" (Klingenstein 126) could be shifted now and was immediately fixed on Palestine: "I had a vision of palms and tawny hills and the dark Mediterranean tide upon the shore of Palestine" (Lewisohn *Mid-Channel* 92). A fortunate turn of events made it possible for Lewisohn to travel to Palestine (and Poland) as he was asked to write a series of articles for *The Nation.* Lewisohn's impressions of this journey were published in *Israel* (1925) which he wrote in Vienna, the city greatly impacting the outcome of the book as "Freud's city harbored the two great foes against whom Lewisohn conceived his book (and simultaneously his new Zionist self): anti-Semitism and assimilation." (Klingenstein 127) This was a decisive period in Lewisohn's life as from then on he called himself a Jew. (Klingenstein 121 ff.)

In 1934 Lewisohn, Spear and their son James, who was born in Paris in 1933, returned to America. They moved to Burlington, Vermont, into the house of Thelma's mother, which they inherited after her death in 1935 and which they then sold. The couple used the money to finally settle the divorce between Lewisohn and Crocker in 1937. The same year they moved to New Rochelle, New York where Lewisohn started to write for *The New Palestine* and functioned as the paper's editor from 1943 to 1948. The end of the relationship with Thelma Spear in 1939 was highly publicized by the sensationalist press, and involved a long custody battle for their son, for whom Lewisohn finally gained custody in 1944 (the custody battle included Spear's kidnapping of their son). In 1940 Lewisohn married Edna Manley, whom he 'divorced' in 1944 to 'marry' Louise Wolk. However, the divorce from Manley was not officially finalized before 1947. Finally, Lewisohn and Work married in 1948. The same year he was appointed a professor of comparative literature at Brandeis University, and in 1955 appointed university librarian. The same year Lewisohn died of a heart attack in Miami, Florida. (Klingenstein 131 f.)

2.5. Lewisohn's Fictionalized Immigrant Experience

Lewisohn's immigration experience differs from the majority of the contemporary American Jewish writers, such as Abraham Cahan or Anzia Yezierska, in that his family did not settle in large urban cities but in the South, specifically South Carolina. By the time of the family's arrival, Charleston had been home to a small yet flourishing Jewish community for centuries, a community who through Reform Judaism already taking shape in the early 19th century had achieved full integration. Jews were, in fact, granted full citizenship by South Carolina as the first colony. (Zacharasiewicz 437) Klingenstein further points out that up until the Civil War, the centre of American-Jewish life was in the South rather than the North (92). However, despite the fact that Charleston, and the South in general, had a long history of Jewish immigration, there was a great misbalance in the representation of Jewish life in the ghettos versus in the South. Zacharasiewicz describes the representation of the Jewish life in the South as "overshadowed by the epic story of the fate of millions of Jewish immigrants in the urban ghettoes in the North, the acculturation of the younger generation and their social, economic, and cultural advancement" (Zacharasiewicz 426).

Given the considerably long history of Jewish settlement in the South, the sense of belonging was largely dependent on the extent to which the Jews were rooted and were met with acceptance by their community. (Zacharasiewicz *South* 427) It can certainly be said that, at some point in his life, Lewisohn seemed to have found a great sense of belonging in South Carolina. Werner Sollors refers to Lewisohn's "mental southernization" as "intense" stressing that Lewisohn "read and identified with white southern literature" and "[n]o matter how much the Lewisohn of 1922 wanted to play this phase down as the inauthentic one, the Lewisohn of 1902-1904 was a true local patriot of Charleston who had made the southern cause his own". (201) Lewisohn found a public outlet for his southernization, expressed in his antagonism to New England and racism against blacks, in a series of articles titled *Books We Have Made* which he wrote for the *Charleston News-and-Courier.* (Sollors 201) Lewisohn joining the Methodist Church, which he would later abandon, was just another one of his deliberate steps to complete his assimilation.

Lewisohn's life and also his fiction, however, is characterized by his many shifts of identity, which were the result of his rejection in society, especially in the academic world, and the disappointment that was thereby caused. Susanne Klingenstein calls it a "sequence of turnarounds: from Anglo-Americanism (its Southern version), to Germanism, to Zionism, to Freudianism, to hasidism." (86) The writer does point out, however, that "these 'conversions' do not involve changes in the structure of Lewisohn's thinking" at whose center was "an ardent desire for self-realization". (Klingenstein 86)

Lewisohn was often criticized in his writing for generalizing his personal (often frustrating) experiences and projecting it onto the vast public. Jacob Zeitlin, for example, argues that Lewisohn was everything but moderate, a claim he saw confirmed in the fact that Lewisohn exaggerated the exclusion of Jews from tenured positions in academia and that Lewisohn's discontent with America should be attributed to his "own spiritual organization". (Zeitlin qtd. in Klingenstein 114) Sidney Hook, who was a student of John Dewey, presents yet another experience at Columbia: "It would be wrong to say that Columbia was overtly anti-Semitic in its practices or that we experienced the atmosphere as perceptibly anti-Semitic. For us it was normal atmospheric pressure." (Hook qtd. in Klingenstein 112) Zeitlin's attitude was one shared by many of his contemporaries, an attitude Klingenstein refers to as a "cult of gratitude" (113), which implies that many Jews in academia of this period appreciated the opportunities they were given. Alfred Kazin adds to this discussion by asserting that Lewisohn "was never a 'simple' figure, and his worst qualities represented the exaggerations of a mind which was in itself indispensable to the growth of a mature criticism in America". (273)

An oppositional stance was characteristic of Lewisohn as a writer, and Gordon Hutner refers to his self-pity as one of the "severe limitations" of the thinker Ludwig Lewisohn. (392) Lewisohn expressed his disappointment and fury he most severely experienced during his schooling years with "a fierce resistance to any constraining value systems or narrowly defined sources of knowledge" which was "central to Lewisohn's personality and the basis of his attack on 'home-town' America". (Shiffman

98) As his career progressed, Lewisohn grew increasingly dismissive of assimilation and, as a result, “[a]t all events the rejection of assimilation gets more impatient and polemical in his later novels.” (Zacharasiewicz 440)

The theme of religion plays a crucial role in Lewisohn’s fiction. Lewisohn depicts the abandonment of one’s religion as bringing about the destruction of one self, whereas associating oneself with one’s community ensures contentedness and purpose. (Lainoff 47) Seymour Lainoff further proclaims that

> “[a]pparently, the psychic wounds Lewisohn had suffered - the rejection he felt he had suffered at Columbia University; the years of unhappy marriage and the prolonged legal entanglements thereafter; the ten years of expatriation; the difficulties of getting books that might offend published - left him with an acute sense of displacement. […] [A]ll this might explain his the fervor of his return to Judaism.” (48)

Lewisohn dealt with this issue in great depth in *The Island Within* (1928) which will be discussed in a later section of this paper. Intermarriage, however, is another element often employed in his fiction. Certainly drawing from personal experience, intermarriage is presented as fatal to the Jewish man and his identity. *The Case of Mr. Crump* (1926), endorsed by the distinguished Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann or Sinclair Lewis, is the most representative account of Lewisohn’s frustrations experienced during his unhappy marriage to Crocker, but shall not be discussed at this point as it is not within this paper’s scope.

Speaking in broader terms about intermarriage in Jewish American fiction, Adam Sol remarks that this theme “represented all of the potential joys and dangers of complete entrance into American culture.” (215) While Lewisohn experienced intermarriage in real life, intermarriage among American Jews was not as common yet. Shanks stresses that “the sociologist must be amazed at the low rate of intermarriage in the face of an otherwise high degree of assimilation” (Shanks qtd. in Sol 218). Writing about intermarriage, “Lewisohn joined earlier American Jewish writers who had used intermarriage as a test of Jewish identity” (Benjamin 230).

2.6. Up Stream - An Analysis

This section will analyze Ludwig Lewisohn's identity shift that he underwent up until his forties when *Up Stream* (1922) was published. This will in turn form the basis for the subsequent analysis of *The Island Within* (1928) as Lewisohn's gradual embrace of Judaism and Zionism can be detected in this novel.[11]

In his memoir Lewisohn "presents himself as a man with a dazzling variety of identity choices. He attributes some of his character traits to his German brackground, others to his tenuous Jewishness, and still others to his southern upbringing or to his voracious reading." (Sollors 195) Indeed, US captures the writer in a stage where he subsequently adopts several identities. Thus, the analysis of his first memoir will shed light on how the Methodist Church, literature, and his Judaism affected his development, but will also include a section on his criticism of America, which represents his ultimate break with his pursuit of assimilation.

2.6.1. The Methodist Ludwig Lewisohn

The young Lewisohn strongly identifies with the Methodist church in his hometown Charleston[12]. This should not come as a great surprise to the reader for "[e]verybody belonged to either the Baptist or the Methodist church" (US 42). The episcopal church indeed has a long history in the Southern states of the United States and shall be illustrated at this point.

Dickson D. Bruce Jr. writes that "[t]he people of the old South […] were the creators of unusually vital and distinctive religious traditions" (399). The two major religions prevalent in the South in Lewisohn's days, both drawing on evangelical Protestantism, were the Methodist and the Baptist churches. While the churches had already

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[11] Hereafter references to *Up Stream* and *The Island Within* will be referred to by the abbreviations US and IW

[12] Charleston was renamed Queenshaven in *Up Stream*

been established before the Civil War, they gained the majority of their members only after 1800. Although the two organizations showed some differences that distinguished them, they did share the same core messages which were, firstly, the conversion and salvation of the soul of the individual and secondly, the convert's hope to receive a place in heaven. (Bruce Jr. 399 f.)

Joining the Methodist church therefore was only a logical step for a Jewish immigrant who sought to become American. Lewisohn also provides an explanation for joining the Methodists as opposed to the Baptists: "The Methodists were, upon the whole, more refined, had better manners than the Baptists and were less illiterate." (US 42) Yet, more importantly, "they were liberal" which was noticeable "by the position of the Jews in the village" who, as Lewisohn paints them, were "aliens in speech and race and faith" (US 43). Lewisohn describes the relations between the Southerners and the few Jews as "hearty and pleasant and consolidated by mutual kindness and tolerance" (US 43). Subsequently, Lewisohn was introduced to the Baptist minister of Charleston and, after he convinced young Lewisohn to attend his Sunday School, the young boy also found acceptance among his Baptist peers who "asked the quaint little boy to come again and again and never teased him but were, in what must have been their amusement, unfailingly gentle and considerate" (US 46). A brief phase of Catholic worship followed, yet he was led back to the Methodist church, the return certainly inspired by the admirable presence of the principal of the High School of Queenshaven. The acceptance Lewisohn met with in these circles finally gives him enough reassurance and confidence to exclaim that "at the age of fifteen, I was an American, a Southerner and a Christian" (US 85).

Bruce Jr. points out that the conversion patterns for Methodists and Baptists were constant: "Everyone began with a life of sin, was brought to conviction, converted by the power of the divine and thus given the assurance of his salvation. […] Under conviction the potential saint was not only aware of his own sinful nature but was also aware of his inability to do anything about his situation." (Bruce Jr. 403). Just how ingrained Lewisohn's faith at that time was shows the following passage: "I attended a Methodist Church. I was a member of the Epworth League. Naturally I

soon fell into a wretched conviction of sin and tried to double the zeal of my religious exercises." (US 81) It is evident that at this point Lewisohn had internalized the morals of the Methodists. Adhering to the Methodist way of life subsequently urged him to "[bury] the rebellious things in [him] deeper and deeper - sex and doubt." (US 87) Despite the fact that Lewisohn seemed to have found in the Methodist church his entrance into American society, he abandons it for the members, the parties, the pastor begin to repel him with their "sheer weakness, well-mannered and yet incurably ill-bred." (US 102) However, it is also true that he did not find complete and absolute acceptance among his fellow Methodists, which may have accelerated his departure.

To make up for the lack that resulted in Lewisohn's life out of his rejection of Methodism, he became even more immersed in literature. Considering the great impact literature in fact had on him and also mirrored the stages of his assimilation, the next section will deal with literature as a means of assimilation.

2.6.2. Literature

Based on the literature (and also the language in which he read the books) Lewisohn dealt with, one is able to draw conclusions with regard to his assimilation process.

As a child growing up in Germany he was first drawn to Grimm, Andersen, and "fairytales of all peoples" (US 21). Immigrating into America naturally affected his choice of literature, just as it did his father, and soon, turning to writing poetry and prose himself, he completely abandoned his native language which marked a significant moment in Lewisohn's development:

> So I stood and wrote - for the first time - verse and prose: tales of disaster at sea, of ultimate islands, of placeless wandering. […] It was all instinctively done in German. And I emphasize this fact in the development of an American since that childish outburst marked the first and last time on which I used my original mother-tongue in writing as a matter of course[.] […] Perhaps the shifting from one language to another caused this, perhaps a momentous change in my inner life which now took place. (US 50 f.)

Helge Norman Nilsen points out that “before he became a critic of America, Lewisohn as a young man developed into an Anglophile, an admirer of English literature”. (62) Indeed, in US Lewisohn includes a vast enumeration of poets and writers he read and was inspired by. He was reading Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Rider Haggard, and John Milton just to mention a small fraction.

It can be argued that literature became a sort of substitute for Lewisohn’s lack of faith. In US he writes: “So on my thirteenth birthday, which was but a few weeks distant, my parents gave me a plain three-volume edition of [Thomas Macaulay’s] Essays. I was intensely happy.” (US 77) Interestingly, Klingenstein points out that on the shabbat after a Jewish boy’s thirteenth birthday he is “called to the Torah” (93). This did not happen in his life and thus quite obviously marks the Lewisohns’ distance from their own culture.

It is evident that Lewisohn felt immensely inspired by English romanticism, typical of the South and thereby “he gave his Americanization the finishing, aristocratic touch by cultivating a deep reverence for England and its literature” which “culminated in an ‘Ode to England’ written when he was eighteen” (Klingenstein 93). Nilsen adds that “[a]lways looking for the right answer, he found it for a while in the British tradition, even in the idea of the Empire.” (62)
Lewisohn’s temporary fanaticism with the British Empire can also be detected in his renaming of Charleston to Queenshaven, as the first compound “Queen” most certainly alludes to the Queen of the British Empire. In addition to that, Lewisohn makes frequent use of the expressions “lad” and “lass” in his memoir, terms which have their origins and are most often used in Great Britain. Indeed, Lewisohn refers to himself as “a Pan-Angle of the purest type”[13] (US 98) and the title of the fourth chapter of his memoir “Making of an Anglo-American” immediately reveals young Lewisohn’s fascination with the British Empire.

[13] Klingenstein adds that it “may have meant nothing more than that he loved all things English and Anglo-American.” (94)

Yet, US also captures Lewisohn's later aversion from America, most likely brought about by the letter explaining the reasons for rejecting Lewisohn as a candidate for a fellowship which, according to Seymour Lainoff, "proves the climax of Up Stream" and "crushed Lewisohn" (7). Immediately Lewisohn becomes aware of his "melancholy eyes, [his] unmistakably Semitic nose….An outcast." (US 143) There is a shift in Lewisohn's memoir from this moment on and there are no longer attempts to try to fit in with the Gentiles, regular comparisons of himself with them and the subsequent realization that he can "find no difference between my own inner life of thought and impulse and that of my very close friends whether American or German" (US 146 f.).

Indeed, in 1903 Lewisohn became engrossed in German literature which can be attributed to his friendship and relationship with George Sylvester Viereck[14], and Dan Shiffman points out that "[t]he fact that the Lewisohn of 1922[15] still describes having found his 'natural' self in German poetry seems to be at least in part affected by the author's defiant dissent against the pervasive anti-German spirit during World War I" (203). In addition to that, Regina Rosenthal asserts that "the more the pressure for political conformity, nationalism, and Anti-German agitation increased in the United States, the more Lewisohn identified with German literature [and] thought" (26). If one considers his biography, it is clear that Lewisohn was indeed confronted with anti-German hysteria.

An explanation for Lewisohn's affirmation of German literature can also be found in the fact that modern German literature to Lewisohn represented "liberation of the individual from all those external forces (rules of constraint in the academy and in marriage) which dominated much of his life" and, as Lewisohn was opposed to America's "dissociation of the physical from the spiritual realm", which led to inhibitions about one's self-realization, he found refuge in Germany as the land of the free. (cf. Klingenstein 118 f.)

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[14] Lewisohn's relationship with Viereck is mentioned on p. 46

[15] Lewisohn wrote *Up Stream* over the course of several years and finally re-published it in 1926 with an updated Introduction dated July 16, 1926.

Towards the end of his first memoir Lewisohn expresses these changed sentiments, and now German literature, “the poems of Claus Groth, the Low German Burns” and “the books of Fritz Reuter”, stands for the preservation of honor and wisdom as opposed to “the colored Sunday supplements of the yellow press” (US 288) representing American culture and implying the loss of morals. Although Lewisohn no longer identifies with the Gentiles, he does not discredit the contributions of the great English poets and novelists for he writes: “And I need but think of my Queenshaven youth or of some passage of Milton or Arnold, or of those tried friendships that are so large a part of the unalterable good of life, to know that I can never speak as an enemy of the Anglo-Saxon race.” (US 147)

In US, Lewisohn’s teachers play a significant role in his shaping process, his Latin teacher perhaps the greatest, as depicted in the following passage:

> We were repeating a passage in unison. Suddenly he swung on his heel and pointed his finger straight at me: 'That is the only boy who has a natural ear for verse!’ he cried. A keen, strange quiver went through me. I realized the meaning suddenly of that constant scribbling which I had been impelled to during the preceding months. I had a gift for literature! I knew it now; I never doubted it again. My fate had found me. (US 75)

Although Lewisohn had already discovered his excitement for literature at this point, for German literature first and then deriving pleasure from English literature, and had begun writing prose and verse, he still needed the teacher to point out the obvious for him to realize that, indeed, he was gifted for literature. Doubting his talent at times, young Lewisohn was determined to master his skill on his own and, not being satisfied with Milton’s interpretation of a particular poem by Horace he set about producing his own rendering of it, which he eventually gave to the teacher, up to this moment still unsure if his work was worthy at all. But the “admirable” Latin teacher, as Lewisohn described him, praised his interpretation in front of the class, telling him that he “will go far” (US 79). Once he identified his talent, Lewisohn indeed grew reassured of his abilities.

2.6.3. Critique of American Society

It goes without saying that US needs to be read as Lewisohn's critique of the American society. Already the title is an indicator thereof and "suggests a salmon swimming upstream, against the current, to discover his breeding grounds" (Lainoff 1). Although Lewisohn spent most of his adolescent years trying to assimilate to the dominant culture of the South, it is most evident that he dismisses any further attempts as the autobiography progresses.

Rosenthal asserts that Lewisohn fought "conformity in favor of dissent and assimilation in favor of difference" and he "writes his autobiography to perform the cultural work of creatively contributing to the idea of America" (27). Indeed, such a stance can be observed for Lewisohn who, at the beginning of the autobiography, detested everything Jewish and German, now postulates the following:

> The doctrine of assimilation, if driven home by public pressure and official mandate, will create a race of unconscious spiritual helots. We shall become utterly barbarous and desolate. The friend of the Republic, the lover of those values which alone make life endurable, must bid the German and the Jew, the Latin and the Slav preserve his cultural tradition and beware of the encroachments of Neo-Puritan barbarism[.] (US 290)

By that time, Lewisohn has come to the realization that assimilation and Americanization will not bring him peace and a sense of belonging as he had thought, and that the Puritanism prevalent in America of the twentieth century equals barbarism. Instead he argues in favor of diversity which will ultimately make up America. His advocacy for cultural diversity reminds the reader of Horace M. Kallen's cultural pluralism[16], however, later in his life Lewisohn would also reject the idea of assimilation in favor of Zionism (his second memoir *Mid Channel* (1929) showed a clearer tendency of his embrace of Judaism and Zionism than US). While Lewisohn's later works were more radical in terms of the acknowledgement of Judaism, US, as Lainoff remarks, "more pressingly […] raises a battle cry against 'Puritanism', the conventionalism of the American scene, and the genteel tradition in American letters." (1)

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[16] see discussion p. 10

David F. Singer mentions two factors that were responsible for Lewisohn's encounter with anti-Semitism being so painful. Firstly, his awareness of his abilities emerged in the form of egotism. In US Lewisohn writes: "[M]y friends, the professors ladled out information. Poor men, how could they help it? I thought in those days that all graduate students knew what I and a small group of my friends knew." (US 124) Based on these utterances, Lewisohn may have been of the opinion that "America owed it to him that he be a success" (Singer 324). Secondly, Lewisohn's close bond with his mother urged him all the more to become successful in America as to his parents it had always been clear that they would support their son in his pursuit of an academic career. In addition to that, Mrs. Lewisohn never overcame the family's departure from Germany, which prompted the Lewisohns to leave behind an upper-middle-class life in Berlin in exchange for a modest life in South Carolina, a pain that Ludwig Lewisohn felt for his mother, too. Thus, pursuing a career in America was not only a personal objective, but one he devoted to his parents, and especially his mother, as well. (cf. Singer 323 f.)

Indeed, in the Introduction to US from 1926, Lewisohn admits that his mother's death left him devastated which affected the writing process of his first memoir: "I thought that the early chapters showed too plainly the shattered state in which my mother's death had left me and that everywhere there stained through the necessary suppression of my domestic wretchedness…." (IX) As a consequence, his unhealthy emotional attachment to his parents may have affected Lewisohn's own relationships in his later years, which included a number of divorces and scandals. (cf. Singer 324)

To Singer's argument that Lewisohn's awareness of his abilities resulted in egotism, it can be added that "at times his critique verges on arrogance" (Shiffman 98). On one occasion a woman, for example, praises his lecture to which he thinks to himself: "She probably lied and I felt like asking her what my lecture was about. Instead I had to grin over my abominable ice-cream and say with the proper intonation: 'So nice of you to have come to it.'" (US 225) Lewisohn criticized the American education system and showed disappointment in its shallowness and the fact that college

students studied in order to get a degree, rather than to use the opportunity to be shaped by academia.

Finally, in order to distance himself from his earlier views and beliefs that left a lasting impression on his years as a youth in the South, he “significantly puts the focus on the narrating self, stressing the narrative distance and his dissociation from the immature, repressed youth of fundamentalist outlook” (Zacharasiewicz 439) in his memoir. Creating a distance from the protagonist was a “conversion formula so familiar from immigrant autobiographies” (Sollors 202), and Werner Sollors further adds that Lewisohn’s true self “emerges out of defiance against the inauthentic (nearly ‘brainwashed’) southern Christian self - in which, however, he clearly and confidently believed during much of his adolescence and early manhood” (202).

2.6.4. Jewish Traditions

The first pages of Lewisohn’s memoir already depict the Lewisohns as secularized, assimilated German Jews. Immigrating into America, they set the same objectives in becoming assimilated Americans. Hutner writes: “Just as they were pleased to see themselves, in Germany, as Germans first and Jews second, the Lewisohns tried very hard to be assimilated in America; that urgency, reflected in Lewisohn’s youthful participation in Protestantism, was fairly commonplace, for many haute bourgeois German Jews arriving in America wished to be seen as Americans first, Germans second, and Jews only among themselves (and even then to be distinguished from the eastern European peasantry).” (394)

Despite the fact that apart from them a small number of other Jewish families lived in Queenshaven, Jacques and Minna Lewisohn chose not to associate with them for “culturally [the Lewisohns] really felt closer to the better sort of Americans in the community” (US 45). In fact, Mr. Lewisohn is even regarded as suspicious by the members of his community because “he did not perform the external rites of the Jewish faith and, upon entering a fraternal life insurance order, he smiled and hesita-

ted when asked to affirm categorically his belief in a personal God." (US 43) Historically speaking, the situation of the German Jew in the South was complicated. Although the South was open-minded with regard to immigrants during the nineteenth century, the beginning of the twentieth century, paralleled by an increase of immigration, brought about a shift in acceptance, especially when it came to Eastern European Jews. For established German Jewish families this meant one of the following two reactions: "While some German Jews in the South affirmed their racial solidarity with the East Europeans - glorifying the spiritual unity of Israel, expressing race pride in the immigrants' industriousness and rapid rise - others adopted attitudes of racial disparagement toward the greenhorns." (Rogoff 211) Clearly, the Lewisohns identified more with the latter by choosing to distance themselves from the less prestigious Jewish families. However, as they were not met with anything but friendly acceptance by their neighbors who refused close friendships the Lewisohns were forced to live a life in isolation.

Despite the fact that Minna and Jacques Lewisohn chose to avoid other Jewish families and to not perform any Jewish rites, it must be added that they "were not disloyal to their race" (US 11). Klingenstein remarks that Lewisohn thereby most likely meant to say that his parents never converted. Considering that conversions among Jews in the South were not rare especially in the rise of anti-German hysteria, it is remarkable that they chose to remain loyal to their Jewish faith. (Klingenstein 89; 225)

Turning back to the religious practices of the Lewisohns, it is important to mention that, not only did the Lewisohns not observe Jewish traditions, but memories of Christian holidays in Lewisohn's childhood evoke a sense of comfort in him as the following passage illustrates very well:

> It is Christmas Eve. I look out through the dark pane and across the street. Ah, there, behind an uncurtained window, a tree with candles. Quickly I turn my eyes away. I do not want to taste the glory until it is truly mine. And at last, a bell rings. The folding doors open and there - in the drawing room - stands my own tree in its glimmering splendor and around it the gifts from my parents and my grandmother and my uncles and aunts - charming German toys and books of fairytales and marchpa-

> ne from Königsberg. And my mother takes me by the hand and leads me to the table and I feel as though I were myself walking into a fairytale… (US 12)

Immediately after this lovely memory, he tells the story of a visit to the temple on the Day of Atonement which was “a little weird and terrifying and alien” to him while “the first [scene] was native and familiar to the heart” (US 13).
However, the narrating self does reveal that these grounds are subject to change: “My psychical life was Aryan through and through. Slowly, in the course of the years, I have discovered traits in me which I sometimes call Jewish. But that interpretation is open to grave doubt.” (US 146) In his edited version of 1926 he adds an asterisk here and writes: “No longer (1926.)” (US 146) Thus, by 1926 Lewisohn had clearly taken a clearer stance towards his identification with Judaism, which would become gradually clearer to him throughout his later life.

2.7. Impact of Lewisohn’s Identity Shift on *The Island Within*

Benjamin stresses the novel’s success “at a time when Jews were rarely dignified in fiction and when the literary scene had livelier offerings” as remarkable considering its focus on Jewish assimilation. The novel received much praise from contemporaries and laudatory reviews, and even entered the *New York Times’* bestseller charts. (217) It is evident that Lewisohn’s own embrace of Judaism shaped the novel to a very large extent. However, not only is his newly discovered obsession echoed strongly in the novel, but also his failed marriage to Mary Crocker.

The novel is divided into nine books and each book is preceded by an essay on Jewish history. Nicholas Karl Gordon argues that, while the purpose of the book is to show how Jewish assimilation results in “the inner destruction of personality” (228), the essays relate to the history of the Levys “within the context of several thousand years of Jewish experience” and “[supply] the reader with a wider perspective, reminding him that the Jewish tradition, even the tradition of the ghetto which most American Jews at that time were anxious to forget, was of incalculable value” (229). This message was certainly conveyed in other autobiographical fiction as well, but

what sets Lewisohn apart from other Jewish immigrant writers, is with how much passion and effort this was done. (Gordon 228 f.) Benjamin further points out that in the essays, “Lewisohn emphasized a natural rather than a moralistic idiom to justify Jewish self-identity” and consequently vaguely resembled Kallen’s approach to American culture. (Benjamin 226 f.)
In IW, Lewisohn “crafted a generational family history to represent the loss of Jewish assurance in a non-Jewish world. This generational progression […] fit Lewisohn’s personal experience and his Zionist readings of Jewish assimilation” (Benjamin 227).

2.7.1. Rediscovery of Judaism

Lewisohn put his quest for assimilation to rest, evidently recorded in his autobiographies, and eventually called himself a Jew. A similar identity shift shapes the life of protagonist Arthur as well. Shiffman argues that “through his Columbia University-educated protagonist Arthur Levy, Lewisohn attaches himself to Judaism as a guarantor of freedom, integrity, and social consciousness”, and Arthur’s educational journey “like Lewisohn’s own, leads him back to an intellectual and ethical Judaism, which appears to give him a sense of peace, wholeness, and security, including a more secure distance from the ‘real America’ that disgusted him.” (108)

Young Arthur, the descendant of a Jew who emigrated to America, was conscious that he was a Jew since “as far back as the awakening of consciousness” (IW 78). However, despite the fact that his family did not observe Jewish traditions, his Jewish identity was a source of pain for years. From classmates bullying him, the memory of which “clung in spite of the fact that Arthur and George got to know each other very well” (IW p. 79 f.), to the painful realization that “his father talked with a foreign accent, as did his grandmother Oberwarter and Joe’s father” (IW 87). Even his father’s appearance that is typically Jewish causes fury in Arthur.
Lewisohn employs the character of young Arthur as the illustration of the Americanized Jew who naively believes that the assimilation to American culture and the avoidance of his own heritage will bring the Jew satisfaction and a feeling of adherence.

Attending college subsequently gives Arthur a feeling of security and “of being at home in the world” (IW 94). Evidently, just as was the case for Lewisohn himself, academia seemed to offer Arthur the opportunity to unfold his personality and find his purpose. He found company in his Gentile friends, but as much as he tried to convince himself that he was equal to them and although he adopted their manners, it could not be denied that, in truth, he was still an outcast among his friends, partly due to his own inhibitions and fear of being rejected once they were allowed insight into his home. However, Arthur remains intent on bridging the gap between his Jewish self and the Gentiles and Adam Sol asserts that Arthur’s “chances at complete assimilation reach their peak when he meets and eventually marries Elizabeth Knight” (226). Quickly, though, Arthur realizes that intermarriage in fact does not solve his identity problem, but rather magnifies it. Unlike him, Elizabeth does not have to fill a void because “[she belongs] somewhere and in fact everywhere” (IW 208) , and this realization only seems to enlarge Arthur’s own void. Subconsciously then, Arthur’s transition into a Jew takes shape gradually: “[H]e arose and strode up and down with this hands behind him and realized dimly beneath his stormy preoccupation of the moment that he was walking up and down, like his father, in the characteristic way of Jewish men when agitated.” (IW 172) Although this “perception faded” (IW 172) quickly, his metamorphosis could not be stopped and soon Arthur feels shame for knowing so little about Jewish subjects when he orders books:” It was shame partly of his own ignorance.” (IW 217)

Lainoff remarks that, ultimately, the “bankruptcy of assimilation”(49) is revealed to Arthur, just as it did for Tobias in Germany when he cried out ‘Shmah Yisroel!’ which were ‘words he had not heard in fifty years’ (IW 51). Additionally, not only does Arthur rediscover his own Jewish identity, but he “embraces the dual task of revaluating his Jewish descent and of building self-respect in the future generation” (Rosenthal 30) and of instilling Jewish beliefs in his son: “He must try to save his son’s heritage for him, his incomparable spiritual heritage. […] His son should have too much pride to need to be proud.” (IW 261)

Nadia Malinovich sees Arthur's discovery of his Judaism not so much motivated by "the soul nagging its owner to recognize the Jew within" but rather by the "'push' of Anti-Semitism, or rejection from the outside" (37). Indeed, before Arthur was openly confronted with anti-Jewish hostility for the first time, he did seek to assimilate as much as possible. The countless rejections, not only his but also very much his sister Hazel's which did not escape his notice, gradually, and most likely subconsciously, made him seek refuge in a rediscovery of Judaism.

Finally, traces of Zionism can certainly be identified in Arthur's development for towards the end of the novel the narrator proclaims that "[t]he more freely Jewish one was, the less consciously and agonizedly Jewish one was forced to be", a perception that was so simple that if left Arthur astonished. (IW 232)

2.7.2. Marriage

In the course of the novel, Arthur Levy's rediscovery and embrace of Judaism does not only affect his identity but also his marriage to Elizabeth, a Gentile woman who, similar to Arthur before he identified as a Jew, did not care for her religion. Both parties, though aware of the discrepancies in society, did not see their differing religious backgrounds as a reason to end their relationship.

However, as time progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to bridge Arthur's and Elizabeth's differences. The readers can already anticipate the end of the relationship with clues scattered throughout the text. Arthur, for example, compares his marriage to "parallel lines than can never meet" (IW 205). It seems that regardless of the love and appreciation the lovers have for each other, it is impossible for them to become one entity due to their very nature that will never allow them to come together at one point. Jacob Levy predicted their downfall when Arthur delivered the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy: "But you von't be heppy and she von't be heppy and ven you heve children you'll be more miserable den ever. Now you can bring her here ven you like ent ve vill treat her like a daughter. Ent it vill do no goot." (IW 117)

The complete and irreversible alienation between husband and wife becomes clear when Elizabeth is utterly repelled by Reb Moshe's hat, a religious symbol in Judaism, which he does not remove upon entering the home of the Levys. Despite the fact that up until this moment Elizabeth was entirely unfamiliar with the article of clothing, and thus ignorant of its religious significance, she associates it with Arthur: "That black hat loomed to her as the sudden symbol of something infinitely alien and dangerous and rancorous and terrible of which her husband was a part." (IW 238) To Elizabeth the black hat is "dangerous" and, even after its removal, Reb Moshe's head is still covered "by a round little cap of black silk" (IW 238). The hitherto non-religious woman sees the pious man as "a Christ-killer" and immediately, though most subconsciously, becomes anti-semitic as she even "winces ever so slightly at [Arthur's] use of [a] Yiddish expression" (IW 238 f.). This change in Elizabeth's attitude towards Judaism seems particularly odd when one considers that she gave her consent when the topic of their son John's circumcision came up. Elizabeth justified her agreement from a medical point of view, "[a]ll modern doctor recommend it as a matter of health", however, she adds that "John's name is Levy" (IW 194 f.) after all, alluding to his obvious Jewish surname. Thus, people would only expect a boy called John Levy to be circumcized. Seeing how much the issue burdened Arthur, she exclaims "I didn't know you were so Jewish in your feelings." (IW 195) Clearly, at this point Arthur's gradual embrace of Judaism began to surface perceptibly and, simultaneously, to bother Elizabeth.

Arthur's and Elizabeth's marriage finally comes to an inevitable end. To both it is clear that Arthur will decide in favor of his journey to Romania to assist his brethren in the diaspora. This turn of events is confirmed by Sol's observation that "Jewish writers of this period looked on intermarriage with considerable ambivalence, and often portrayed their characters as ultimately rejecting the benefits of complete assimilation in favor of continued identification with their ethnic heritage." (215)
The failing marriage between a Jew and a Gentile is juxtaposed to the crumbling marriage of Hazel and Eli. While Arthur needed Elizabeth to give him a home, Eli required the same characteristically Jewish traits of a wife from Hazel, who painfully

sought to assimilate to American culture.

It seems that for Hazel and Eli, it is their Americanized way of life that causes trouble in their home and it is right upon entrance into their house that Arthur already perceives a lack of life. To him, the interior has “a simplicity that blended in with the New England” (certainly meant in a negative way since at this point Arthur’s reconciliation with his Jewish heritage had already gradually begun) and radiates a sterile coldness and “had not been broken into any love or even familiarity” (IW 203). He concludes that Hazel and Eli “had no home; their child had no home” (IW 203).

This is observation is continued at dinner where only typically American dishes are put on the table: “Everything was icily correct and dead. Chicken. French ice-cream. Salted almonds. The food was rather tasteless and meager. […] They all ate this flat American food without pleasure; they seemed impelled by a sense of duty.” (IW 203) Hazel’s refusal to visit Eli’s parents only further reinforces her devotion to become American as she explains to her brother that she “couldn’t stand those greasy, old-fashioned messes” that "were so frightfully fattening” while Arthur observed how she “looked critically at her dry bit of roast chicken”, which confirmed to him “that poor Hazel suffered perpetual hunger for the sake of her American conformity and an American silhouette” (IW 204). Just like Masha Smolinsky, thus, Hazel denies herself food (Masha denied herself food for material possessions whereas Hazel rejected fattening, Yiddish food) for the sake of her Americanization.

It is certainly no coincidence then that the subsequent performance of “Kol Nidre” played on the Victrola possesses the power to bring life into the house, “for a few minutes” (IW 204) at least, for “Kol Nidre” is an Aramaic “prayer sung in Jewish synagogues at the beginning of the service on the eve of Yom Kippur”[17]. This only further intensifies Lewisohn’s attempt to portray Judaism as the savior of the Jewish soul.

The facade of Hazel’s and Eli’s flawless Americanized marriage finally begins to crumble when Hazel suspects Eli of associating with other women behind her back. However, it is Hazel’s ‘un-Jewishness’ that was responsible for Eli’s dishonorable be-

[17] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kol-Nidre-Judaism (accessed: 10.02.2021)

havior: “[T]here’s no use our trying to live together unless Hazel agrees to sell the house in Brookline and move to a Jewish neighborhood and associate with my friends and-and have some more children-I’d like a son-and-and oh well, be a Jewish wife same as her mother or mine. That’s all.” (IW 224) Similar to Arthur, Eli craves a wife who proudly goes about her duties as a Jewish housewife instead of the American woman that Hazel wants to represent.

2.7.3. Language

2.7.3.1. Yiddish

In IW Lewisohn portrays the character of Jacob Levy as an Americanized man with a German-Jewish heritage, who displayed contempt for the language of his people: “But he disliked people who spoke Yiddish; he felt the immigrants of the later period to be curiously alien from him.” (IW 67) This very utterance reveals not only the contempt Jacob Levy feels for the language of his people, but it also relates to a phenomenon that American Jews experienced. Goren wrote that the established American Jews who were part of the middle class and had undergone a process of assimilation did not welcome the Eastern European Jews fleeing the Russian Empire with open arms, but saw the new immigrants as a burden threatening their own status that they had proudly established. (585) A shared history thus does not evoke in the younger Jacob Levy a sense of group identity but rather repulsion.

Lewisohn employs traces of hostile racism against his own people in the character of Jacob Levy who ironically resorts to Yiddish expressions himself sometimes, for example when he grumbles about the Freefields, an acquainted couple of Jewish descent: “What I don’t like is Jews who pretend they’re something else. […] Mortimer Freefield! Moses Friedenfeld is his name. The *ganev*.” (IW 74 f.) Jacob Levy reproaches the Freefields for pretending to be something they are not which seems paradoxical as Jacob obviously does not practice his Jewishness either. It is out of anger that he then calls Mr. Freefield a ‘ganev’, a Yiddish expression for “thief”, “Gauner” in German. In general, Yiddish expressions are scattered throughout the novel, mostly

to express rage, as evident in the example above, or to refer to dishes common in the Jewish culture, such as “lokshen pudding” and “schmorbraten” (IW 72).

2.7.3.2. English

What immediately catches the reader’s attention is Jacob Levy’s accent in his English speech, which Lewisohn did not neglect to depict in a way that makes it clear to the reader without needing to hear how much German affects Jacob’s speech. Although Jacob does not insist on observing any traditions from the Old World, his everyday speech is a daily reminder of who he actually is. It has already been discussed how negatively the adolescent Arthur perceived the German accent of his father, surely because he was aware what it stood for. For this reason, young Arthur also rejected learning German himself: “Was it some dim sense that German belonged to that past of his family from which, consciously or not, he wanted to flee that had kept him from studying it?” (IW 102) While it is obvious that Arthur preferred English to German, this was also true for his parents, or particular for Gertrude at least, who admired the Freefields and their pure English, with the same motive as her son.

2.7.4. Society

2.7.4.1. Jews

It is evident that in the novel Lewisohn - for the most part - employed Jewish characters who see themselves as perfectly assimilated. Lainoff argues that the “Goldmann and Levy children think they are typically American, though they are sheltered in the strictly German-Jewish circle in which they are brought up.” (50)

The Freefields set an example of what successfully assimilated Jewish life looks like, especially to Gertrude who admires their lifestyle and she imagines how in a few years, she might be able to host elegant parties like Mrs. Freefield.
Arthur's friend Joe Goldmann is not only a Marxist, but he also proclaims that Jewishness needs to be destroyed.

The family history of the Levys begins with Reb Mendel, a Judaic scholar in Vilna in 1840. However, "to compensate for the lack of depth of the characters, Lewisohn sketches the intermediate generations" in terms of "mini-documentaries" (Benjamin 227). Centering around Arthur Levy, Arthur and his sister Hazel are born to the secularized Jews Jacob and Gertrude, who do not observe any Jewish traditions and want their children to grow up American. To them it "was perfectly clear that [Arthur] was going to study medicine" (IW 118), which, however, could also be seen as a characteristic of Jews since education was something the Jews have valued for generations.

2.7.4.2. Gentiles

Benjamin asserts that "the primary gentile characters of *The Island Within* displayed high intellect, idealism (including wartime patriotism), and a moral growth that made them sympathetic to Jewish self-understanding." (226) In general, it can be said that all Gentile characters Lewisohn employed serve to illustrate the writer's point that the Jews will find true happiness only among their own kind. Some characters are more overtly hostile towards Jews, or towards Arthur in this case, and with some the protagonist cultivates friendly relations.

Elizabeth Knight is a character who "represents a compound of two kinds of American woman whom Lewisohn deplores. She combines the puritanical and the 'liberated' woman." (Lainoff 50) It is not so much the Puritanism per se that tears her and Arthur's marriage apart, the insurmountable differences can rather be attributed to the liberated woman, who was unwilling, perhaps even unable, to give Arthur the

home he so fervently desired of her. Elizabeth was too obsessed with the feeling “to feel free, unbound, unrooted” for “[s]he felt at home everywhere and so had no need to localize the feeling of home.” (IW 197) Admittedly, her liberation may very well have its roots in Puritansim as Arthur concludes that “opposed to her conception of marriage was the old sex-slavery of the Puritans with its cruel subjection of woman, its denial of divorce, its fierce and ugly repressions” and “[i]t was no wonder that the women of her race and her tradition had rebelled and were now at times tempted into extremes.” (IW 196) It then comes as no surprise that the relationship between the liberated woman and the Jew cannot work as the discrepancy of a missing home cannot be bridged.

Another crucial set of Gentile characters through which young Arthur tries to find entrance into the American society is his friends at Columbia: Goddard, Heller, and Dawson. It is true that this friendship gives Arthur a sense of reassurance as he considers them his real friends. However, their friendship does not last and only ends up giving Arthur an increasing feeling of the outcast.

Finally, the third noteworthy group is represented by Arthur’s colleagues in the women’s department at the Hospital for the Insane on Drew’s Point, Dr. Kirke, Dr. Duval, Dr. Lowden, and Dr. Hopkins. It is no secret to the doctors that Jewish patients are represented disproportionately in the psychiatric ward, yet this causes an uncomfortable situation between Dr. Kirke and Arthur: “‘But then all these uh-uh-these people are neurasthenic themselves.’ […] ‘Why didn’t you say ‘Jews’, Doctor? I wouldn’t have been offended. There *is* a high percentage of nervous and mental disorder among Jews.’ Kirke gave a little relieved laugh. ‘Right you are, Doctor, we’re fellow-scientists.’” (IW 139) Evidently, Dr. Kirke’s biased personal attitude towards Jews forms the basis of his argument which does not escape Arthur’s notice.
Hostility to Jews reaches its peak at the hospital when Arthur is proclaimed “nuts on nuts” (IW 142) behind his back by Dr. Lowden and Dr. Duval for taking a stand against the violent behavior of a doctor and nurse towards the Jewish patients. On the basis of these characters, one can conclude, therefore, that Lewisohn demonstrated his argument that, although education does bring purpose to one’s life, it does

not bridge the cultural differences between the Jews and Gentiles. However, Benjamin asserts that “overall, relative to *Up Stream* and *Israel*, *The Island Within* was much more relaxed in its treatment of the divide between American gentiles and Jews” (226). US, in contrast, considered an attack against America, was written from a much more agitated approach than IW.

2.7.5. Jewish Traditions

It has already been mentioned that the Levys do not observe Jewish traditions. However, this alienation from Judaism could already be observed in the previous generations. The formative years of Arthur’s uncle Tobias Levy were spent in Germany and in order to contextualize his experience, the fate of German Jews needs to be addressed at this point first. Gordon states that “[t]he special tragedy of the German Jews was that although they had thoroughly Germanicized themselves, they were shut out of German life. Their speech, their education, even their childhood memories were German, yet they themselves could not be German.” (232) For Tobias, who “felt no exile” (IW 43) this was particularly tragic and painful for he showed utter allegiance to Germany with several passages in the novel confirming this claim.

At Königsberg, for example, Tobias feels ashamed of the “few dark heads” (IW 43) among the East Prussians with blond hair. Instead of taking pride in the academic achievement of his fellow Jews, he perceives their Yiddish accent as repulsive. When Tobias is recruited for the war to fight for Germany, he is overwhelmed with such pride for he feels that this is proof that he is a true German after all. Germany is his fatherland and he has to “force back the tears of joy and consecration” (IW 46).

This inclination to substitute one’s Jewish identity with the dominant culture is subsequently passed down to Jacob Levy. The memory of his ancestors “remained wholly inactive in his consciousness” (IW 67). This is in accordance with Stanley F. Chyet’s observation of second generation immigrant writers for whom “Europe is definitely

passé" and it "rarely intrudes on them as writers with any normative force. They know they are Americans - but what are they to make of themselves as Jews?" (34)

If the argument is expanded to include not only Jewish writers, but the Jewish people as a whole then, indeed, Jacob fits this description. Him and Gertrude avoid talking about the European past, partly also due to the fact that the children Arthur and Hazel are pained by these stories and do not wish to find out more about their ancestors. Gertrude's ignorance of her Jewish heritage is also obvious when Arthur asks her what a 'mezuzah' is: "At luncheon Arthur suddenly asked his mother what a *mezuzah* was. His mother thought a little. 'I believe, sonny, that it was a sort of a little metal case with the Ten Commandments in it that old-fashioned people used to nail to their doors and kiss when they entered the house." (IW 98) The mere fact that Gertrude begins her explanation with the words "I believe" is evidence that shows how unfamiliar she is with Jewish traditions. In addition to that, "old-fashioned" acts as a further marker of her own distance from her race for she is apparently not familiar with the traditions of the Jews.

The Sinzheimers, on the other hand, can be seen as "compromise figures who could balance an interest in living a modern life with a continued allegiance to Jewish identity", something Jewish immigrant writers often employed in their writing (Sol 215). Unlike Gertrude and Jacob Levy, they were happy to live in America and yet openly celebrate their Jewishness as the following conversation between Arthur and Eli reveals:

> [T]hey were talking about the more and more intense anti-Jewish feeling in Boston. They had no Gentile friends; their neighbors on both sides ignored their existence. […] It was terrible. Arthur asked Eli whether his parents felt the same way. Eli smiled, 'Well, no. They live in what is virtually a ghetto and father is president of a congregation and they have a swell time.' Suddenly there was something handsome and natural about the man. 'They have magnificent Passover celebrations and guests every Friday evening, and Dad still fasts and weeps on the Day of Atonement. They don't give a damn.' (IW 204)

Eli's parents act as a role model to him, so much so that Eli, who admits that he does not believe much himself, expresses his fervent wish for his children to be raised as observant Jews. In contrast to Gertrude and Jacob, who chose Sunday as the day of

togetherness and thereby reveal their degree of Americanization, the Sinzheimers celebrate the Sabbath.

Evidently, Lewisohn employed the Sinzheimers as a reminder that the observance of Jewish traditions brings contentment to the lives of the Jews in America, which captures Lewisohn's personal sentiments as by the time IW was published, he had come to accept his Jewish heritage. While it may be argued that Gertrude and Jacob Levy might be just as happy in their lives, it is clear that they have not arrived at the place where they would like to see themselves in society. This is most evident in Gertrude's admiration for the Freefields who host elegant parties and Gertrude hopes that Jacob's career will make such progress that soon she will be able to host her very own parties.

Even Hazel, who may have been tortured the most by her Jewishness and even more than Arthur, finally gives in and agrees to her and Eli joining a congregation in order to save her marriage. After all, Hazel might have come to embrace her Jewishness, as well.

3. Differences and Similarities in Yezierska's and Lewisohn's Fiction

After having introduced the authors and having analyzed their fiction, comparisons can now be drawn to highlight similarities and divergences between Anzia Yezierska and Ludwig Lewisohn.

Where the two writers diverge perhaps most notably is how they handle their Jewish identity, which both sought to abandon at one point in their lives.
Yezierska's approach to her heritage can be described as non-confrontational. Although she grew up in a strictly observing household, Judaism, or faith in general, had no value or impact on her life and was never foregrounded in her fiction. In order to break free from the restrictions at home, she metaphorically but also quite literally ran away from her parental home and made education the objective that would complete her Americanization process.
However, it is clear that this quest failed but the ending of her autobiography alludes that Yezierska found the solution to her identity problem: "I had sought security in the mud and in the stars, sought it in the quick riches and glory of Hollywood and in the security wage of W.P.A. I sought it everywhere but in myself. […] All that I could ever be, the glimpses of truth I reached for everywhere, was in myself." (RRWH 219 f.) So Yezierska comes to realize that the peace she sought in vain could only be found in herself.

Lewisohn's pursuit of acceptance in contrast is much more willful and deliberate. The thesis has shown that Lewisohn underwent a few conversions in his pursuit of acceptance before he finally embraced his Jewish heritage, and even then it was only sufficient for him once it was realized in the form of Zionism. It is true that Lewisohn shedded many adopted identities and remained unsatisfied for many years of his life. However, Lewisohn may have taken personal offense in matters that were not meant as an attack against his persona, and this subsequently may have caused an even more agitated response by him. Lewisohn's writing, US just being one example thereof, is an attack on America, Puritanism and America's society.

Yet, it seems to be true for both Yezierska and Lewisohn that a Jew cannot live happily if he decides to abandon his roots and his heritage, so the autobiographies and the selected novels of both authors present the Jewish immigrant experience as having come full circle only once the Jewish immigrant returns to his true self, his Jewish self.

Tiefenthaler asserts that "[i]nstead of creating a new self, a New World self, through a process of one-way assimilation to standard norms and values provided by the Anglo-American Christian cultural inventory, these […] autobiographies tried to achieve a cultural identity of their own either by renegotiating their initial assimilatory attempts, or by an act of rejection of and resistance to such smooth assimilation." (49)
Indeed, Yezierska shows resistance to assimilation when she leaves Hollywood to return to New York because she could not write if she was away from her familiar, Jewish surroundings. Lewisohn rejects the Methodist Church, which gave him such a great sense of belonging and acceptance at one point in his life, making way for his (re)discovery of Judaism.

In addition to this, both writers reject the idea of intermarriage. Lewisohn, who experienced failed intermarriage himself, advocates for marriage between Jews as a guarantor for content. Yezierska employs the unattainable WASP man in her fiction, yet the heroines find their true love in the Jewish man who fills their void.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the texts of Anzia Yezierska and Ludwig Lewisohn has shown how two Jewish-American writers approach the adoption of an American identity.
Tiefenthaler notes that Yezierska's and Lewisohn's autobiographies "are not only the result of cultural discontinuity and displacement but are also reflections of the process of cultural merging backward and forward, and as such they are new cultural creations" (49).

Yezierska's approach foregrounds the female immigrant experience, her assimilation being restricted by the tensions inside the Jewish family, yet her heroines find a degree of liberty after they strive for self-realization. For Yezierska, to achieve this objective, it is necessary to break free and "make" for oneself a person. Sara Smolinsky returns to the Lower East Side a changed woman. Although the shackles of her past still cling to her, she is ready to continue life in the Lower East Side as an American-Jewish woman.

Lewisohn's Arthur Levy mirrors his own struggle for acceptance. Reminders of his Jewishness cause him pain and he winces at the very sound of his father's Yiddish accent. Yet, the rejections he was confronted with throughout his life urge him to turn to his own people and find comfort among his kind, which indeed provides him with comfort and results in the end of his marriage to the Gentile woman Elizabeth Knight, their lives proving to be so fundamentally different that a life together is impossible, despite the genuine love they have for each other.

In general, adopting an American identity, or at least attempting to do so, is a painful process for both writers. Lewisohn takes a much more aggressive stance in his attack on America. Yezierska in contrast lets the heroines fight the battles within themselves in order for their new personas to emerge.
Yezierska and Lewisohn both abandoned their quest to complete their Americanization and seemingly found true happiness once they allowed their Jewish identity to flourish.

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Abstract

Several factors prompted the immigration of European Jews into the United States during the late 19th and early 20th century, such as the pogroms in Eastern Europe, restricting the lives of the Jews. The authors Anzia Yezierska (1880?-1970) and Ludwig Lewisohn (1882-1955) were Polish and German Jewish emigrés, respectively, who moved to the United States with their families before the First World War. Their works are characterized by the search for acculturation and serve as examples for immigrant autobiographies. Lewisohn and Yezierska made their Jewishness the primary focus of their autobiographies as well as their novels, which reveal autobiographical traces, too. Both authors have in common that their quest for acculturation remains unsuccessful and is replaced by the acceptance of their true Jewish self. In *Up Stream* (1922), Lewisohn is initially on a quest to find his new American identity. However, several setbacks throughout his life lead to his final realization that he will never be able to abandon his Jewish heritage and become a fully accepted American. Eventually Lewisohn becomes a Zionist. This shift in identity is reflected in *The Island Within* (1928) for the novel centers around Arthur Levy who finds true self-fulfillment once he embraces his Jewish identity. Yezierska, as a female immigrant author, expands the narrative of the immigrant autobiography by giving a voice to the female immigrant. The core of her works is built around the struggles of a young Jewish woman who seeks to forsake her heritage and her parental home in an effort to complete her transition as an American woman, which is perceptible in *Bread Givers* (1925) and her autobiography *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (1950). Yezierska's heroines are at peace once they establish themselves.

Abstract

Mehrere Faktoren begünstigten die Einwanderung europäischer Juden in die Vereinigten Staaten im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert, wie die Pogrome in Osteuropa, die das Leben der Juden einschränkten. Die Autoren Anzia Yezierska (1880?-1970) und Ludwig Lewisohn (1882-1955) waren polnische bzw. deutsch-jüdische Emigranten, die vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg mit ihren Familien in die USA zogen. Ihre Werke zeichnen sich durch die Suche nach Akkulturation aus und dienen als Beispiele für Autobiografien von Immigranten. Lewisohn und Yezierska machten ihr jüdische Identität zum Hauptaugenmerk ihrer Autobiografien sowie ihrer Romane, die auch autobiografische Spuren aufweisen. Für beide Autoren bleibt das Streben nach Akkulturation erfolglos und wird durch die Akzeptanz ihres wahren jüdischen Selbst ersetzt. In *Up Stream* (1922) ist Lewisohn zunächst auf der Suche nach seiner neuen amerikanischen Identität. Mehrere Rückschläge in seinem Leben führten jedoch zu seiner endgültigen Erkenntnis, dass er sein jüdisches Erbe niemals aufgeben und ein voll akzeptierter Amerikaner werden kann. Schließlich wird Lewisohn Zionist. Diese Veränderung der Identität spiegelt sich in *The Island Within* (1928) da der Roman sich um Arthur Levy dreht, der wahre Selbstverwirklichung findet, sobald er seine jüdische Identität annimmt. Yezierska erweitert als Immigrantenautorin das Genre der Immigranten-Autobiographie, indem sie den Einwanderinnen eine Stimme gibt. Der Kern ihrer Werke basiert auf dem Kampf einer jungen jüdischen Frau, die versucht, ihr Erbe und ihr Elternhaus aufzugeben, um ihren Wandel als Amerikanerin zu vollenden, was in *Bread Givers* (1925) und in ihrer Autobiografie *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (1950) zur Geltung kommt. Yezierskas Heldinnen finden Frieden, sobald sie sich als Frauen in der Gesellschaft etabliert haben.