

Jewish Women Writers:
Autonomy, Community,
+ the American Myth of
Success

Susan Zeiger
51 Dimick St.
Somerville, MA.
666-2343

The Most Beautiful Women in Vilna

In the seventeenth century, in the middle of Europe, a small miracle occurred. A Jewish woman, not the king's daughter, not the wife of the greatest Rabbi in Germany, but a woman almost like any other, sat down to write her life. Her name was Gluckel, and working for nearly thirty years, from the age of forty-four to the age of seventy-three, she composed her Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln.¹ The miracle is revealed as such when Gluckel's autobiography is held up to the theoretical framework which Georges Gusdorf devises in his essay, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." In his historical and sociological analysis, Gusdorf suggests that the phenomenon of autobiography is tied to a cultural moment:

Autobiography becomes possible only under certain metaphysical preconditions... humanity must have emerged from the mythic framework of traditional teachings and must have entered into the perilous domain of history... humanity, which previously aligned its development to the great cosmic cycles, finds itself engaged in an autonomous adventure. 2

As a Jew in the seventeenth century, Gluckel wrote her autobiography from within "the mythic framework of traditional teachings," inside a world of obligations and beliefs based on traditional and community norms. While premodern culture was sustained within the community by Torah, it was reinforced from without by Christian fear and anti-semitism. The isolation of Jews in ghettos is the most extreme example of externally imposed collectivity. Dominant Christian culture, which viewed the emerging market economy with suspicion, designated Jews as

agents of the market; at the same time, Jews were excluded from participating in the autonomous society generated by this new economy. The "autonomous adventures" of Jews like Gluckel and her husband, adventures in banking and trade, did not lend support within the Jewish community to the idea of individualism.

The fate of the individual and the fate of the group were one, and this community of belief merged in the one law, the Torah. Gluckel emphasizes the importance of Torah in the introduction to the Memoirs, reminding her children, "put aside a fixed time for the study of Torah, as best you know how" (2). The collectivity of Jewish tradition is also reflected in its circular concept of time, time which is viewed not as the progress of individual lives, but as a single cosmic history. The coming of the Messiah ushers in the completion of the cycle, the return to Israel and the redemption of all humanity. The seventeenth century witnessed an increase in mystical piety and Messianic belief. Gluckel lived during the rise to power of Sabbatai Zevi, the most influential Messianic pretender of Jewish history. In one chapter, Gluckel recalls the large casks of dried food and linens which her father-in-law packed for the trip to the Holy Land; and the delirious joy of her community over the prospect of redemption: "Many sold their houses and lands and all their possessions, for any day they hoped to be redeemed... But the Most High pleased otherwise... Nevertheless, what Thou, Lord God, hast promised, Thou wilt like a gracious king fulfil" (46 - 47). In such an intellectual environment, it is difficult to imagine the individual placing much impor-

tance in posterity and personal destiny.

Gluckel's ability to record her life should have been further impeded by her sex, to the extent that a sense of autonomy is crucial to autobiography. As a Jewish woman, the parameters of Gluckel's life were determined by halacha, Jewish law, in which wifeness and motherhood are inevitably related. A husband, for example, is expected to divorce a wife who cannot bear children. In 1690, Gluckel had borne fourteen children. Again according to law, every woman, even the wealthiest, is required to perform specific domestic duties, including washing her husband's hands and face and making his bed.³ Far from having any privacy or autonomy, Gluckel was always surrounded by crowds of children, servants, relatives and guests, and expected to satisfy the needs of others. One might assume that all of these responsibilities for others would exhilarate at least the very young mother, giving her confidence in her own capabilities. But Gluckel was initiated slowly into the responsibilities and the competencies of Jewish womanhood. Marrying at the age of fourteen, she experienced a long period of dependency, during which she was even relieved of domestic obligations. Gluckel discusses her emotions after the wedding:

Immediately afterwards my parents returned home and left me... alone with strangers in a strange world. That it did not go hard with me I owed to my new parents who made my life a joy. Both dear and godly souls, they cared after me better than I deserved. What a man he was, my father-in-law, like one of God's angels! (25)

In spite of her extreme youth, the language of Gluckel's state-

ment is jarring; unable to pose in the role of wife or woman, she retains the role of child, one who is even ungrateful or inadequate. Gluckel goes to the extreme of transferring the wife's loving feelings for her husband onto her father-in-law. In fact, Gluckel does not use the word "husband" until two chapters after the wedding.

If marriage is not a decisive maturing event, then one would certainly expect childbearing to be one. But again, it is the daughter persona which dominates the experience of Gluckel's first birth, and it is the figure of Gluckel's mother who dominates the scene in its written form. Gluckel and her mother become pregnant at the same time. Gluckel's mother rules the birthroom, even controlling her own labor, or so Gluckel thinks, in order to deliver Gluckel's daughter. The mother then appropriates Gluckel's baby: "because I was still young, my mother would not suffer me nights to take my child away with me. I therefore left the baby in our common room... my mother bade me not to worry" (36). Adulthood for Gluckel was not a decisive break with the past, but a series of responsibilities added to a set of dependencies.

How does Gluckel begin to think of herself as a self, in the midst of such a web of relationships and obligations? One way to answer this question is to look at what type of autobiography The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln is. It is clearly not a self-absorbed odyssey of the soul, like a Puritan autobiography, nor is it the story of a career, like Napoleon's memoirs. On one level, Gluckel's autobiography is the story of her commu-

nity, the Jews of Europe. She is a storyteller, a local historian, and a spokesperson for the community. Her memoir is full of local lore, tales of blood accusations, highway robberies, financial disasters and sensational trials. Far from being self-absorbed, Gluckel is highly informed on legal and political matters which pertain to the Jews. Rather than rejecting her obligations, Gluckel affirms them in her memoir.

Nonetheless, the essence of Gluckel's memoir is clearly herself, her experiences and her perceptions. The substance of the book is the flow of domestic events which usually fills a woman's life: weddings, births, illnesses and deaths. These events have been regarded throughout history as an inevitable rhythm, without order or change, a pattern taken so entirely for granted that it would not have occurred to anyone to write it down. In fact, part of a woman's competency in running a household is the silence and seamlessness with which she does her work, turning the life of the home into that very flow of events which society regards as a gift from God or nature. In her autobiography, Gluckel displays this type of competence in managing the affairs of her household. So the mystery returns once more: how and why did Gluckel write her memoirs? The answer, being neither historical nor sociological, must belong to the realm of the personal. Gluckel offers two explanations in her introduction, one unconscious and one intentional. At the beginning Gluckel states, "in my great grief and for my heart's ease I begin this book the year of Creation 5451 (1690)... I began writing it, dear children, upon the death of your good

father" (1). The death of her husband is the impetus for the memoirs. Here is the crucial maturing event, not marriage, not childbirth, but the death of her husband, which isolates Gluckel and forces her into a confrontation with herself. For a woman in Gluckel's position, the death of a husband would necessarily have been a transforming event, even a liberating one in the sense of release from a special kind of dependence, the subsuming of the self in the needs of an other. Her husband, Gluckel writes, was "a faithful shepherd," (1), a caretaker and protector; in the traditions of Biblical poetry, shepherd is an image used to describe God. The death of her husband represents the birth of a new woman, a woman alone: "I sit to this day and date at my own table, eat what I relish, stretch myself at night in my own bed, and have even a shilling to waste, so long as the good God pleases" (84). The death of her husband also means a new set of responsibilities for Gluckel, including a debt of 20,000 Reichsthalers, and the necessity of marrying off eight more children. The psychological disruption caused by her husband's death may well have been sufficient to make Gluckel think of herself in an entirely new way. Widowhood certainly granted her new authority as matriarch, the actual head of the household.

This break with the past, for Gluckel, is an occasion for taking up the pen. Gluckel finds that writing soothes her grief: "I began writing... in the hope of distracting my soul from the burdens laid upon it, and the bitter thought that we have lost our faithful shepherd. In this way, I have managed

to live through many wakeful nights, and springing from my bed shortened the sleepless hours" (1). Gluckel has decided to set down her life: "I am not writing this book in order to preach to you but... to drive away the melancholy... So far as my memory and the subject permit, I shall try to tell everything that happened to me from my youth upward" (5). Then Gluckel's memoir is not a bid for fame, but self-expression for the joy and comfort of it. In writing about the autobiographies of several British and American women, Patricia Spacks makes an observation which is readily applicable to Gluckel: "What is striking in the work of virtually all women writing about themselves... is the degree to which writing is itself a solution to their most pressing problems."⁴ Writing about her life allows Gluckel to grasp it, understand it, and make order out of the flow of time: "If God wills that I may live to finish them, I shall leave you my memoirs in seven little books. And so, as it seems best, I shall begin now with my birth" (5). In two sentences, Gluckel has defined life and death, the beginning and the end. As a Jew and as an avid reader of secular and religious Jewish texts (as evidenced in her book), Gluckel must have been aware of the power of language. The miracle of her book is that she takes some of that power for herself, by telling her life.

As an individual embedded in a community of belief, what mode of expression can Gluckel give her story of the self? She appropriates the Jewish folk tale tradition for her memoir, interweaving her life with myths and tales which are the collective property of her culture and her community. In a sense,

these stories belonged to Gluckel even before she wrote them down, and especially so because she was a woman. Within the Jewish community, there existed a clear hierarchy of languages: Hebrew, the sacred language reigned at the top; the native language of the country, in Gluckel's case German, was at the bottom, and was used for interaction with gentile culture; and Yiddish, the language of daily communication, held the middle position. Yiddish was also the literary, and sometimes the religious, language of women. Male authority within the ghetto feared that women would be led astray by German romances and stories; as a result, an extensive literature of "edifying" prayers, readings and stories was translated into Yiddish for women. The Mayse-bukh (1602), the most popular book of stories, is a combination of tales adopted from the Talmud and oral folk tales of European Jewish and gentile origins. The title page of the original edition addresses its female audience directly:

Dear men and ladies, come and peruse this beautiful story book. In this volume are over three hundred stories adapted from the Gemarah, stories from the Rabbis, even from Rabbi Jehuda the Hasid; none are missing. Therefor, dear women, you can see that all truth is contained herein, and certainly everything to be found in the German books.⁵

Gluckel would certainly have been raised on the stories of the Mayse-bukh, and it may well have been the source for the tales in her autobiography. She imposes her imagination on the stories which she borrows in two ways. First, Gluckel acts as an interpreter, an exegetist, by applying a story to a situation in order to give it a message. In the opening of the first book,

for example, Gluckel tells the story of a father eagle and the lesson he teaches his babies about the proper relationship between parent and child. Gluckel poses this story in the middle of an address to her children, in which she sets forth her authority, and explains her position as head of the house. It is significant that Gluckel chooses a story which compares her to a father, rather than a mother, eagle. The second way that Gluckel makes these stories her own is by imagining and filling in the conversations between characters. In book five, Gluckel relates a long local tale, a murder intrigue that occurred in another city: "About this time, something terrible happened in Hamburg" (184). Although Gluckel could not possibly have known what these Jews in a distant city had said to each other, she creates their conversations with intricate and dramatic detail: "When Reb Lipmann reached his house, he said to his wife, 'What think you of this? The wench... wanted him to go home with her. I fear me that the little fellow did as much, and it cost him his life.' Then his wife struck her head and said, 'By my sins! I remember now this wench once came to me!'" (186). Writing enables Gluckel to appropriate and personalize culture, granting her participation in her culture as a teller of tales.

In historical time, Gluckel belongs to the seventeenth century. But in literary history, she belongs to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln was published first in Yiddish in 1896, and in German and English in 1910 and 1932. As a public document, Gluckel's memoir is contemporary with the autobiographical writings of a group of Jewish American women: Polly Adler's autobiography,

A House is Not a Home,⁶ Mary Antin's The Promised Land,⁷ and the novelist Anzia Yezierska's autobiography, Red Ribbon on a White Horse.⁸ Yet there is an essential difference between these autobiographies. Gluckel writes within a premodern framework of history which is cyclical and transcendent, shaping her life story out of the traditions which determined it. Redemption for Gluckel is contained within this structure of time, in the domestic cycles of a woman's life, in belief, and in the ultimate redemption of the community. In contrast, Adler, Antin, and Yezierska structure their lives in linear form, as stories of change, and even progress. For these women, redemption is not granted simply through participation; it must be recovered instead through the autonomous journey.

On one level, these autobiographies reflect a quintessentially American form of literary expression, the "rags to riches" memoir which is most often associated with Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. For Franklin, life is a journey leading to success, a journey in which all obstacles are overcome by the hero. The personality of the hero is crucial to this formula; he must be an American optimist, confident, expansive, and ambitious. The narrator persona in Franklin's autobiography is a wise old man who sets down his life as an example to others:

Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world, and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the concluding means I made use of... my posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them... fit to be imitated. 9

Yet as an autobiographer, Franklin has been far more often imitated by minority Americans than by fellow white Protestants; Henry Adams and F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, overlook Franklin's model and seek to establish entirely different ways of writing about the self.¹⁰ Ben Franklin has instead been the mentor for generations of assimilationist-minded "outsiders." Booker Washington in Up From Slavery,¹¹ clearly utilizes Franklin's model, and Norman Podhoretz, in his autobiography Making It, presents himself as a kind of Jewish Franklin: "the story I tell here resembles the traditional success story in tracing the progressive rise of a young man up from poverty and obscure origins."¹²

The Franklin success story, as a specifically male model, becomes problematic for Antin, Adler and Yeziarska at a certain point. These women autobiographers also relied on female models of success, invoking in their writing two characters in particular: Cinderella, and her Jewish sister Rose Pastor, an immigrant who married the socialist millionaire James Stokes. Yeziarska uses the image of Cinderella throughout her autobiography as a metaphor for her own success: "I glanced at the headlines: 'Immigrant Wins Fortune in Movies.' 'Sweatshop Cinderella at the Miramar Hotel.'" (RR, 40). Rose Pastor Stokes, who began as a garment worker, was an important phenomenon in the culture of the Lower East Side,¹³ a Jewish folk heroine. Aunt Gertrude, in Norma Rosen's novella Green (1967) repeats this ghetto fairytale for her nieces:

Poverty she [Gertrude] had learned from life; wealth she studied faithfully in the newspapers. She would spread the News... on the kitchen table ... "You see what a smart girl does?" Rap! with an arthritic finger against the paper. "What was she? A ditchdigger's daughter, an immigrant's daughter, like you Muriel, Esther, Sophie! Married to a millionaire!... What homes she'll have, what clothes, what... what" Aunt Gertrude had groped for the opulent word -- "What vacations!"¹⁴

Marrying "up" for women was already a part of Jewish culture in Eastern Europe; Sholem Aleichem describes the pressures placed upon young women in the marriage market in his "Tevye" stories. But in the United States this common experience became mythologized in the figure of Rose Stokes, perhaps because the stakes were so much higher.

Yet these female models of success raise problems which are highly suggestive for a study of women's autobiography. Cinderella and Rose Pastor both succeed because they "fit the shoe," because they conform to the standards of the prince and his culture and class. Cinderella is a character who is defined as the "other", who achieves identity solely through the approval and action of a man. Cinderella and Rose Pastor leave home, family, friends, and their own history in order to "make it"; this is a process which Adler, Antin, ~~Goldman~~ and Yeziarska all describe in their autobiographies. Success is complex for these Jewish women autobiographers, and it takes its toll in hidden injuries which are often unstated. In the following two sections, I will examine the autobiographies of Polly Adler and Mary Antin, and contrast images of success and sacrifice, limitation and mastery. In the third section, I will discuss the

fiction of Anzia Yezierska, and her creation of a myth of personal redemption for women.

In A House is Not a Home, Polly Adler writes:

I found a room on Second Avenue and Ninth Street which I rented for ten dollars a month, payable in advance. Did I say room? It was a windowless hallway leading to the basement flat occupied by the janitor and his family. But I bolstered my morale by remembering what the teacher in night school had told us about Ben Franklin -- how as a mere boy he had arrived alone in Philadelphia without a penny in his jeans and almost no contacts. And here was I starting out thirty-nine dollars more solvent than Ben, plus the rent paid for a month (29).

Here Adler consciously creates a comparison between herself and Franklin. Though in many ways, A House is Not a Home is the immigrant version of the classic American success story, it reveals the price that a woman pays in pursuing that success. Born in Yanow, Russia in 1900, Adler arrived in the United States alone at the age of thirteen. Although Polly's family planned to join her shortly, world history forced her to fend for herself; in 1914 when the war began, the Adler family cancelled their passage. Polly moved to Brooklyn and found a job in a corset factory. By the middle of the 1920s, Polly Adler was rich and famous, the sole owner and proprietress of New York's most infamous brothel. Crying on the shoulder of a former Russian nobleman, Adler expresses the wonder of her rise: "Who am I, Mrs. Vanderbilt, that I've got princes and famous celebrities sitting around watching me blow my nose on a piece of Kleenex?" (329).

If A House is Not a Home is a Franklinian success story,

then its central character must be a Franklinian heroine. The passage in which Franklin is referred to directly is particularly revealing of Adler's self-confidence; in it, she invokes Franklin, one of the major figures of ^{the} American literary canon, and then demonstrates her superiority in financial planning. Adler establishes her own credentials for the part in this description of herself at the beginning of her autobiography: "I have inherited many of my father's traits -- his restlessness and quick temper, his adventurous and inquisitive spirit, his stubborn refusal to be satisfied with second best" (10). These traits are echoed in the writing of Adler's autobiography; her humorous, down-to-earth style projects a practical and optimistic persona. Hard times are to be laughed at through the distance of success; they are instructive, but always temporary and always under control: "My capital had dwindled to fifteen dollars... so I economized by restricting myself to one-course meals (choice of stale rolls, spoiled fruit or peanuts), which I ate either chez moi... or al fresco... if I was too hungry to hold out until I got home" (30). Further, through the analogy, Adler has ordered and even mythologized the events of her life, choosing the move to Ninth Street as the beginning of her journey up in the world, the great trip uptown to Riverside Drive and the fulfillment of dreams. motif

Although Adler presents herself as a Franklin figure shaping her own destiny through ingenuity and initiative, her autobiography reveals that the central struggle of her life is not for success as Franklin defines it, but a struggle to gain control

over her life choices. Adler's triumph is her ability to turn constraints into advantages. She begins her life story by distinguishing herself from other women:

at a quite early age I began identifying myself with my father -- if by identifying is meant preferring a role in life which would not confine my activities to cooking, sewing, scrubbing, and childbearing. I did not want to be the perpetually quiescent one, forever overshadowed and pushed into the background. I wanted to get out and see the world... and have my say about what went on (10).

As a girl in Russia, Adler pinned her hopes of success on education; at the time she left she was waiting to hear about a scholarship, for which she had been the first Jewish female applicant, and a strong contestant. Adler, however, is told by her father that she must leave for America: "A husband's word, of course, was law, and my mother's tears, her protests that I was only a baby, cut no ice with father. At first I was upset with the thought of leaving home, but once I grew used to the idea, I was excited and eager to be on my way" (11).

The most explicit and most brutal example of the loss of self-determination in Adler's autobiography is when she is raped by the foreman of her sweatshop. In this sequence, the process of objectification is made complete: she is knocked unconscious, symbolically killed, her ability to "have a say" stolen away from her. Adler's career is launched at the initiative of a man: a gambler acquaintance rents an uptown apartment for Polly, on the condition that he can use it for assignations. Adler transforms this situation into a fabulously profitable business venture.

In spite of Adler's aspirations to male characteristics and power, the limitations of women's social position still applied to her. Clearly there are sacrifices which she makes in her life, and conflicts which she doesn't resolve. First, in becoming a madam, Adler loses her family. Unable to tell them about her career, she conceals her real life from them:

I spent time with my family, but I began to dread these visits more and more... I had to suspend being my real self -- leave it, so to speak, on the doorstep... I loved my parents but there was no longer any real communication between us. There couldn't be. The only way I could express my feelings was by showering them with gifts and money (150 - 151).

For Adler, the dream of success is accompanied by a nightmare:

I had a bad conscience when I thought of my parents, and I used to have terrible nightmares in which my father would chase me down the streets yelling, "Kirva! Bliad!" ("Whore! Bum!") (43).

This short passage is rich in significance. In this vision, Adler sees herself defined by her father, given a name by him, a name which she clearly would not have chosen for herself; by extension, she is defined in this way by all male authority. When Polly finds success, she also finds herself outside of the social contract; after her rise to fame, the book becomes an endless recitation of vice raids, bookings, and trials. Adler reveals her attitude toward prostitution early in the book: "Abe pointed out the hustlers, and I eyed them covertly, embarrassed even to be caught looking at them. I wondered how any woman could sink so low" (30). There is no comment following this statement, suggesting that Adler's attitude toward prosti-

tution remains unresolved.

Finally, in taking on this identity, Adler surrenders her right to her own emotions. A madam is charming, good natured, accommodating, sensitive to the needs of others, in many ways the perfect hostess and lady. The buoyancy and humor of her prose often deny or gloss over the dismal situation she is describing: even though "my recollections of this period are of the stench and sourness and dirty-grayness of poverty... it doesn't mean that the sun never shone for me... I am one of those people who just can't help getting a kick out of life, even when it's a kick in the teeth" (31). Although this kind of self-control is a source of power, a survival mechanism, it is also a form of alienation. Adler expresses this feeling in the last chapter of her book. She has left her life in New York and moved to California to work on her autobiography: "sometimes -- especially at night -- time hung heavy. I lived alone, and I was living with a stranger -- a woman whose sudden crying spells bewildered me, whose bitterness unnerved me" (363). The hurt, bitter Polly is a stranger to the Polly of newspaper fame. The divided self cannot be a resolved personality; success comes to Adler at the expense of a complete identity. There is, however, a kind of resolution at the end of her book, a completion and wholeness which she finds in her move to California. In order to write her book, Polly decides to go back to school, and she attends college. This experience is deeply satisfying, even redeeming for her: "The remedy, when finally it dawned on me, was breathtakingly simple. I'd go to school

and learn how to express myself! All my life I'd been yearning for an education" (361). In a sense, this experience brings her full circle, back to her dream of learning in Russia.

II

For Mary Antin, self-expression is itself success, and her journey is from speechlessness to articulation. Ruth Wisse describes the impetus for Jewish writing in America as "the collective unconscious of American Jewry, the repressed trauma of its passage from the old world to the new" (Commentary, June 76, p. 44). The theme of the journey to America is the structuring feature of Mary Antin's The Promised Land. But Antin interprets the journey in a particularly American way. It is not just a geographical and cultural displacement, it is a journey up and out:

I have already described... the way an immigrant child may take from the ship through the public schools... dragging through the slums the weight of private disadvantage, but heartened for the effort by public opportunity; welcomed at a hundred open doors of instruction, initiated with pomp and splendor and flags unfurled; seeking in American minds the American way... striving against the odds of foreign birth and poverty, and winning, through the use of abundant opportunity (360).

This passage ceases to be a description of a little girl going through the Boston Public School system, and becomes a heroine's tale of courage. The summer that Antin spent reading Horatio Alger had an effect on her; the rags to riches aspect of her experience is expressed in these statements, "That I who was born in the prison of the Pale should roam at will in the land of freedom was a marvel... that an outcast should become a privileged citizen, that a beggar should dwell in a palace" (343). For Antin, Americanization and assimilation are not neutral

processes but outright triumphs, examples of the human will struggling to free itself.

Yet Antin's naive patriotism distracts attention from a second success story in her autobiography, her quest for self-expression. The theme of mastery over language is an important source of continuity between Antin's work and the works of other Jewish-American writers; in Henry Roth's Call It Sleep and Alfred Kazin's Starting Out in the Thirties, the problems of bilingualism and the acquisition of language are fundamental. Antin's struggle to become a writer, her attention to the relationship between language and identity, make her Anzia Yezierska's most direct literary godmother; it is not surprising that The Boston Transcript, the paper which published Antin's poem about George Washington, compared Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers to The Promised Land in a 1925 review.¹⁵ The belief in the transforming power of words, a favorite theme of modern Jewish writers, can be traced to Judaism itself. Jewish mysticism and Jewish folk religion place great emphasis on word magic. These beliefs were still alive in Eastern Europe at the turn of the century; Antin writes, "My mother nearly died of cholera once, but she was given a new name, a lucky one which saved her" (175). In the United States, mastery of English was in a very real way the key to success, both financial and psychological.

Antin establishes her belief in the efficacy of language early in her autobiography. She refers to the beginning of her own consciousness as "the time I began to distinguish words from empty noises" (4). Similarly, the end of consciousness also

depends on the word: "even if I live so long that I cannot tell my name" (198). In her description of the passage to America, the inability to speak is equated with powerlessness: "The phrases 'we were told to do this' and 'told to do that' occur again and again in my narrative, and the most effective handling of the facts could give no more vivid picture of the proceedings. We immigrants were herded at the stations, packed in the cars, and driven from place to place like cattle" (172). When Antin's mother regains her voice, she regains control of the situation: "When my mother had recovered enough to speak, she began to argue with the gendarme, telling him our story and begging him to be kind... Moved by our distress, the German officers gave us the best advice they could" (171). Here language, common spoken language, is a tool of the weak; by pleading and storytelling, two traditionally female forms of address, the woman gains the sympathy of male authority.

But a writer, a controller of words, is able to tap their full power and effectiveness. Antin, who was deeply influenced by Emerson, adapts the transcendentalist concept of self and the authority of the subject:

I remember... beyond the curtain a view of a narrow, walled garden, where deep red dahliahs grew... Concerning my dahliahs I have been told that they were not dahliahs at all, but poppies... but I retain the right to cling to my own impression. Indeed, I must insist on my dahlias, if I am to preserve the garden at all... my illusion is more real to me than reality. (81)

For Antin, words are power and writers are powerful. In her

book, Antin struggles, not simply to establish her identity, but to establish a very specific identity, a sense of herself as a writer. Antin points to the moment in which she first thinks of herself in this way; Antin has just seen her essay "Snow" published in an educators' magazine,

My own words, that I had written out of my own head -- printed out clear black and white, with my name at the end! Nothing so wonderful had ever happened to me before. My whole consciousness was suddenly transformed. I suppose that was the moment when I became a writer... I stared at my name: MARY ANTIN... Why, it meant that I could write again and see my writing printed for people to read. (213)

"Snow" is published as an example of grammar school teaching method, and not of literary style. But any inclination to laugh at Antin's statements is stifled by her earnestness. Her consciousness is changed because she is given a new identity: her name is now the name of a writer. The importance of the name "writer" is again expressed in this passage: Antin describes her perusal of the encyclopedia, "Oftenest of all I read the biographical sketches of my favorite authors... I could not resist the temptation to study out the exact place in the encyclopedia where my name would belong. I saw that it would come not far from 'Alcott, Louisa M.'" (259). Today Antin's name is in the encyclopedia with the word "writer" beside it. And her book is the culmination of her struggle to become a writer.

But even as The Promised Land completes Antin's journey, it raises questions about the nature of her success. Franklin's

autobiography is the record of his life; his life and his success exist independently of the autobiography and are untouched by it. But if The Promised Land is the story of a writer, then Antin's book, her one book, is essential to her life; Antin's completed life does not really exist prior to the book, or outside of it. Antin thus places herself in a highly vulnerable position; she puts herself in the hands of the public, to be affirmed by them: "Had I no better excuse for writing, I might still be driven to it by my private needs. It is in one sense a matter of my personal salvation" (xxi). Another Cinderella, Antin must be approved of and defined by others.

Who is the Mary Antin set before the reader for evaluation? She is a girl becoming an American, and a girl becoming a writer. But there is a self conspicuously missing from Antin's program: she is never a girl becoming a woman. Antin's omission is more noticeable in the context of her tradition. Adler,^{Emma} Goldman, and Yeziarska all write very openly about the specific factors involved in the growth into womanhood: the onset of sexuality, early romance, love, the marriage market, the decision to have or not have children. Antin is suspended in the limbo of little girlhood; in her most triumphant and decisive moments she is poised on the threshold of a classroom or a high school, not at the door of her own home. At the time of publication, Antin had been married for eleven years; in fact, in chronological time, the book even overlaps with her love affair and engagement, but her husband is never directly mentioned. It is impossible to determine why Antin chose to make herself a child in her auto-

biography: maybe the subject of her love was indelicate and embarrassing to her; perhaps she was insecure in the role of woman, or perhaps her Romantic leanings attracted her to the child, that innocent experiencer of the world. In any case, her choice constitutes an extreme form of self-limitation, for she places herself in the role of the small and powerless. The claims that Antin makes for herself as an authoritative voice are undercut by her portrait of herself, "a starved-looking girl with eyes ready to pop out, and short dark curls" (205).

When Antin's autobiography is compared to her biography, the ambiguity of success is made even more explicit. The publication of The Promised Land was indeed a great accomplishment for Antin, and she became nationally known almost immediately. Yet as Oscar Handlin writes in his introduction, "Success brought rewards, but also heavy costs for Mary Antin" (xiii). The most immediate cost was her health. As a result of six years of lecturing on patriotic subjects, Antin had an attack of neurasthenia and suffered from nervous illness for the rest of her life. History seems always to have had its ironical eye on Mary Antin; Antin's Americanism was one form of the patriotic and xenophobic madness which forced her husband, Amadeus Grabau, an American of German descent, to leave the country in 1920. Grabau took up residency in China, where he lived until his death. The ultimate price of becoming an American for Antin was the loss of her culture. In the context of The Promised Land there would seem to be no conflict in this respect. Her autobiography is a clear rejection of Jewish immigrant culture,

a rejection of the "despised immigrant clothing", the "impossible Hebrew names" (187), the entire life which the Jews brought from Europe. Antin even marries a Lutheran, an act which her community undoubtedly disapproved of; one is tempted to think her choice was ideological as well as romantic. In Antin's vision of America, ethnicity is not an option. It is interesting that her husband was so courageous in his defense of German-American rights. But even assimilation was made difficult for Antin. History intervened in her life once again, and Antin lived just long enough to hear reports of the Nazi atrocities against the Jews. Antin was shaken into publishing a statement on Jewish identity, breaking a silence of twenty-seven years.¹⁶ A woman of steadfast convictions, Antin does not retract any of her earlier attitudes. In "House of the One Father" she reaffirms her belief in the fundamental unity and sameness of cultures and religions: "I have found my wider world of the spirit... I will pray for the world's restoration to sanity sometimes in a bare New England meeting house, sometimes in a serene Jewish temple, sometimes in a glowing cathedral interior".¹⁷ But there is a note of discomfort in Antin's essay:

At the present moment, under the shocks of the Hitlerian object-lesson on the fruits of intolerance, we are all doing a job of reviewing our attitudes and practices... For decades I lived cut off from Jewish life and thought... Today I find myself pulled by old forgotten ties, through the violent projection of an immensely magnified Jewish problem... I can no more return to the Jewish fold than I can return to my mother's womb... The least I can do, in my need to share the sufferings of my people, is declare that I am as one of them (41).

Certainly Antin is motivated by guilt to review her ties to her culture. But there is perhaps also a sense of cultural alienation and loneliness motivating her essay; in it, she pictures herself "cut off" from Judaism, while Jewish culture is "a fold", her "mother's womb", a commitment of relatedness and belonging. Antin's success, she suggests, was bought at the price of this belonging.

III

Mary Antin had a sister whose name was Frieda Antin. Antin discusses her sister only briefly; Frieda is a shadow woman, a fragmentary reminder of the nearly endless traps and possibilities for failure which are available to women. Antin writes:

Frieda came to America too late to avail herself of the gifts of an American girlhood. Had she been two years younger she might have dodged her circumstances, evaded her Old World fate... She would have gone to school... she might have clung to her girlhood longer instead of marrying at seventeen... it has always seemed to me a pitiful accident that my sister should have come so near and missed by so little the fulfillment of my country's promise to women (277).

While the little Antins are sent to school, Frieda is sent to the sweatshop. After work and on Saturdays, Frieda, the older, more responsible daughter, does the "lion's share" of the housework (255). For years of factory work she receives no wages herself, all her money going to the family. And at seventeen she is reluctantly released from her family responsibilities so that she can marry. Antin is vaguely aware of Frieda's pain: "I cannot believe but that her sacrifices tasted as dust and ashes to her at times; for Frieda was a mere girl, whose childhood, on the whole, had been gray" (252). It is not surprising that Antin rejects this model of behavior, distancing herself from it; Frieda, Antin writes, "developed a talent for vicarious enjoyment which I never in this life hope to imitate" (252). Standing at the pinnacle of success as she defines it, Mary Antin can look down and see how easily she herself could have

been Frieda, if she had been a little older, if she had been more self-sacrificing, or if she had not done as well in school. Antin comforts herself with the dismayingly egotistical thought:

When she [Frieda] took her place at the machine her lot was glorified to her; for the girls, the foreman, the boss, all talked about Mary Antin, whose poems were printed in an American newspaper ... And so partaking of her sister's glory, what Frieda Antin would not say that her portion was sufficient award for a youth of toil? (253 - 254)

The irony of this last statement, and the obvious answer to her question, are not evident to Antin. Antin cannot reconcile her sense of her own success with her sister's selfless and wearying existence. Like Adler's anecdote about her early disdain for prostitutes, Antin's story of Frieda is left dangling in the narrative, a small sad rebuke. Frieda Antin might well have disappeared into the literary obscurity of women's experience. But Frieda found someone to tell her story in Anzia Yezierska. Yezierska's characters Shenah Pessah, Bessie Smolén-sky, and Hanneh Hayyeh are all Frieda's soulmates, women who never had a chance to participate in the American dream of success. For Antin, the fact of failure, in spite of hard work, in spite of a strong character and a desire to succeed, is an unresolved problem. For Yezierska, the failure of the American dream, the dream of freely available education, financial independence and security and satisfying work, is the starting point of her writing. America had broken all its promises to Yezierska by the time she wrote her first story in 1915. Leaving her immigrant family at the age of seventeen, Yezierska worked in a

sweatshop, a laundry and a restaurant, while struggling with English at night school. She married and separated twice, moved to California with her infant daughter Louise looking for better work, moved back to New York where she had a brief love affair with the much older and married John Dewey. When she began to write in 1915, she was still starving for love and support, and most terribly, for food. She writes in her autobiography,

After I sold my first story for twenty-five dollars, I gave up my job and decided to live or die by my writing... I was in the throes of my second story, and I was starving. I went to my sister. She had nine children. They never had enough to eat... The children were in the street when I arrived and my sister was next door... A pot of oatmeal was boiling on the stove. I seized the pot ... and began wolfing it. The whole pot of oatmeal only whetted my hunger. There was a loaf of bread in the breadbox. Just as I started to break off a piece, the children stormed in, and seeing me at their bread, tore it out of my hands (Red Ribbon, 132).

Yeziarska's first book reflected this physical and mental starvation in its title, Hungry Hearts,¹⁸ and in its contents, stories about mothers exhausted from the struggle to feed their children, about factory workers numbed by noise and boredom, and always about bright and desperate young women hungry for love, education, and recognition.

Then recognition came to Yeziarska after all, and with it, independence, independence, wealth, and the ability to earn her living doing what she loved, writing. In 1919 Yeziarska won the prestigious Edward O'Brien short story award for "The Fat of the Land," and in 1920, Sam Goldwyn bought Hungry Hearts for \$10,000. Yeziarska was asked out to Hollywood and offered \$200

a week for script writing. Throughout the 1920s, her popularity continued; her five books were praised by the critics, and she became a darling of the media, the "East Side Jewess" who made it good in the Golden Land. The financial security that came with literary popularity was a profound relief to Yeziarska, although she never recovered from the anxious feeling that accompanies poverty: "Poor people who had escaped from poverty as I had, feared it, hated it, and fled from it all their lives" (Red Ribbon, 88).

Yet in spite of this fear of being poor, Yeziarska remained disdainful of the gospel of money: "Rich and poor, educated and ignorant -- straining-straining-wearing out their bodies for the possession of things -- money, power, position... throughout America, the dollar fight... still goes on in times of plenty" (Ch. of Loneliness, 26).¹⁹ The young female protagonist in "How I Found America" recognizes the seductive appeal of material comfort, but she resists it: "How glad I was that I had not stopped at the husk -- a good job -- a good living -- but pressed on through the barriers of materialism" (H.H., 298). Yeziarska was undoubtedly exposed to the Jewish radical culture of the Lower East Side; one of her heroines, Sonya, is a reporter for the "Ghetto News," and Yeziarska offers a lovingly humorous portrait of a Jewish socialist daily. Yeziarska promotes collective action by the workers in several of her early stories: "In the street I found I was crying... A moment before our togetherness had made me believe us so strong -- and now I saw each alone -- crushed -- broken" (H.H., 272); and again, "weary

years of struggle passed before the workers emerged from the each-for-himself existence into an organized togetherness for mutual improvement" (H.H., 288). Yeziarska can envision factory work as decent work: "Gradually I became a trained worker. I worked in a light, airy factory only eight hours a day. My boss was no longer a sweater and a blood-squeezer. The first freshness of the morning was mine. And the whole evening was mine" (Ch. of L., 43).

But there are other aspects of the American myth of success which are not so easily rejected by Yeziarska. At the core of her stories and novels is a struggle between the ethos of the individual and ^{vs.} the ties of community and collectivity. In all her books, women strive to realize themselves as autonomous, thinking, feeling human beings; these women are often writers, and they always search for meaningful, self-supporting work, and space and time for themselves. Coming from a traditional, patriarchal immigrant community, and without the support of an organized feminist movement or network, Yeziarska's heroines face terrible stress and isolation. On the other end of this tug-of-war are a set of commitments: the family, with its clearly defined roles for daughter, sister, and wife; and Judaism, with its ties to an ethnic and working class culture, and to a history of oppression and of strength. These commitments give Yeziarska's heroines a relatedness and a social legitimacy which women on their own lack.

The struggle between independence and belonging balances out differently for Yeziarska at different moments in her writing

career. In Children of Loneliness she states confidently, "My eyes will always turn back with... longing for the old faces and old scenes... But... there's no going back to the Old World" (31). In Bread Givers, the darkest of her novels, the long arm of patriarchy draws the heroine Sara back from her hard won autonomy: "I felt the shadow still there, over me. It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me" (297).²⁰ Ultimately, Yeziarska's brilliance is her resourcefulness, her talent for mythmaking on her own terms. Yeziarska finds strength in relationships with women and teachers, in feminism and community, in ethnicity, and finally, in writing. She transforms the myth of success which Antin and Adler subscribe to, the journey up in the world, into a new vision of success derived from classical Jewish sources, the myth of exile and return. In Yeziarska's works, the trip uptown is a journey to a world of strangers, a trip which is both alienating and self-defining. When Yeziarska and her heroines make the trip back downtown, back to the ghetto, they return in triumph in a new role, not as wives or daughters, but as women artists, storytellers for the community.

Since redemption for Yeziarska is found through writing, it is necessary to return to the question of the power and significance of the act of writing. In many ways, Yeziarska shares the needs and perceptions of Antin and Adler. Like Antin, Yeziarska sees writing as a triumph over inarticulation and the paralyzing and speechless experience of immigration. "Must I always remain buried alive in the black prison of my dumbness?" Sophie Sapinsky

asks in "To the Stars"; "dumbness" is a word which Yeziarska uses repeatedly in her early books to describe the newly arrived immigrants. After the simple mastery of English, the more complex need for self-expression arises; the heroine of "Soap and Water" explains, "One day, when I was about sixteen, someone gave me Rosenfeld's poem "The Machine" to read... it set my whole being aflame with longing for self-expression... Suddenly there came upon me this inspiration. I can go to college! There I shall learn to express myself, to voice my thoughts" (H.H., 168). Yeziarska believes that writing allows her to order and control her life:

Sometimes I'd see my brain as a sort of Hester Street junk-shop, where a million different things ... were thrown around in bunches... if I struggled from morning till night all my years I could never put order in my junk-shop brain. Ach! If I only had an education... It seemed to me that educated people... had their hearts and their heads settled down in order (C of L, 56).

Like Antin and Adler, Yeziarska views writing as a method of appropriating the world of education and intellect: "I was so crazy to reach all those who had had all that book-learning from school in their heads that I was always dreaming of the wonderful educated world that was over me... If I could only write out all my wonderful thoughts... I'd get myself a first place in America" (C of L, 57).

But strong as these similarities are, there is a crucial difference between Antin, Adler, and Yeziarska, a difference in the form of their writing: Yeziarska is a writer of fiction. There are endless theoretical discussions of the difference

between autobiography and fiction. Yet in formulating a discussion of a woman's writing, it seems appropriate to give less attention to what male critics have said about literature by other men, and pay close attention instead to what Yeziarska understands to be the purposes of fiction. There is in fact a wealth of information on this subject in her stories about struggling young authors and in her autobiographical writings. In "Mostly About Myself", an introductory essay in Children of Loneliness, Yeziarska reveals that, for her, writing is a role, a life, a crucial identity: "Writing is ordinarily the least part of a man. It is all there is of me... I burn up in this all-consuming desire my family, friends, my loves, my clothes, my food, my very life" (C of L, 14). Yeziarska's editor had asked her to write an autobiographical sketch, probably expecting some more of the heart-rending ghetto experiences which were so popular with the media. But in writing "mostly about herself", Yeziarska chose to write exclusively about her life as a writer. Here is one of the essential differences between autobiography and fiction: an autobiography is a project, one that is traditionally undertaken at the end of one's life; fiction writing is a career in economic terms, a role in social terms, an ongoing imaginative process. Although writing her autobiography may have been the most psychically satisfying event in Polly Adler's life, it is still true that at 15, 35, or 50 years old, Adler would not have described herself as a writer. Moreover, the authority for writing an autobiography is inherent in one's life; I know this, the autobiographer can say, because I lived it. In con-

trast, a fiction writer must create authority for herself in her writing, the authority of the imagination. For a woman, this declaration of authority requires that she take a risk. Yeziarska belongs to a tradition of Jewish women who found satisfaction in writing, a type of satisfaction which they could not attain in their other, primary lives as working women, mothers, daughters, or wives. Yeziarska, however, is the rebel in this group; too single-minded and independent, and too prolific to accept the safe role of autobiographer, Yeziarska declared herself a writer, a writer of fiction.

In her autobiography, Red Ribbon on a White Horse, Yeziarska introduces another aspect of writing which is related to the experience of being a woman:

It was just after Bread Givers was published. I felt I had justified myself in the book for having hardened my heart to go through life alone. I described how my sisters... spent themselves childbearing in poverty. I too had children. My children were the people I wrote about. I gave my children, born of loneliness, as much of my life as my married sisters did (216).

Women writers from Anne Bradstreet and Mary Shelley to Adrienne Rich have used the metaphor of writing as childbearing. This is of course a perfectly natural, or even self-evident metaphor, for both writing a piece of literature and giving birth to a child are profound acts of creation; the association is in fact so deep that male writers have appropriated the metaphor. But this image has a second set of meanings which is not immediately evident. Historically for women there has been a great deal of guilt related to writing, a sense that a woman who writes is not

a "real" woman, and is not attending to the prescribed activities of females, especially childbirth and child rearing. A woman's commitment to writing is interpreted as selfishness, self-indulgence, and a refusal to cooperate. The painful aspect of the metaphor is clear; the time a woman spends on her "literary babies" is time she robs from her real ones, or the ones she chooses not to have. From Yeziarska's statement, the reader would assume that she was childless. Actually, she had a daughter who she did not raise and who she does not mention in her autobiography. Yeziarska meant it literally when she wrote that her devotion to writing consumed all of her love. However, as a woman, Yeziarska was not free to devote herself to her craft without suffering from guilt and the fear of social condemnation.

The resourceful Yeziarska finds an outlet for her feelings in social responsibility. "My children were the people I wrote about" she explains; she adopts "her people", the struggling, starving, surviving people of the Lower East Side:

For ages and ages, my people had no more voice than the broomstick in the corner... All the starved, un-lived years crowd into my throat and choke me... My mother who dried out her days fighting at the push-carts,... to get food for her children... the lost and wasted lives of my brothers and sisters... are crying in every breath of every word that itself is struggling out of me (C of L, 10).

All of her stories about writers come to the same conclusion, that the writer must be the storyteller of the ghetto: "Beauty is everywhere, but I can sing it only of my own people... I, in this life, must be the poet of the factories -- of my own East

Side" (C of L, 257). In "My Own People", Sophie Sapinsky has writer's block when she tries to take her inspiration from the "stiff and wooden" Emerson; she begins to write when she listens to the voice of the people around her: "Ach! At last it writes itself in me... It's not me -- it's their cries -- my own people -- crying in me! Hanneh Breineh, Shmendrik, they will not be stilled in me until all America stops to listen!" (H.H., 249). There is a contradiction in Yeziarska's analysis of her own writing. Yeziarska's favorite topic is herself, the young woman freeing herself from the bonds of tradition, while her second favorite topic is the people, the people who live in and uphold the very tradition she rejects. This paradox is related to the larger problem of the conflict between the self and the community. It is significant, however, that in her stories about women writers, Yeziarska advocates a strategy which she herself does not adopt. Her women writers decide to devote themselves to writing about others, while Yeziarska is busy composing stories about young women writers discovering themselves. A woman cannot legitimately state that she is going to concern herself with herself; she finds legitimation in caring about others.

Yeziarska writes about the Jewish ghetto for personal reasons, from a sense of responsibility, and because the ghetto is what she knows: "As a writer, the experience of forcing my way from the bottomest bottom gave me the knowledge of the poor that no well-born writer could possibly have" (C of L, 24).

Yeziarska chooses to use neither sociology nor journalism, the

two literary forms which have most often been used to write about the bottomest bottom of American culture. Yeziarska is in fact disdainful of sociologists. Her unflattering portrait of the sociologist John Barnes, with his scientific inquiry, his cool head, and his feet planted firmly on the earth (HH, 7 - 9), demonstrates what she perceives to be the difference between a supposedly objective account of Jewish working class culture and a fictional one. Barnes can only record what he sees; his thesis is on the "Educational Problems of the Russian Jews", and he is shocked by the protagonist Shenah Pessah's ignorance. What he cannot see are her "high thoughts... the gleam of the visionary -- the eternal desire to reach out and up" (HH, 7). Likewise, the discipline of sociology is incapable of understanding the dreams of working class people, the visions of ghetto dwellers. Fiction is the literature of envisionment. Yeziarska writes of the beautiful things that people have, and the beautiful things that they could have. She writes of alternatives, of ways out: trade unions, night schools, romances, community cooperation. This concept of writing is related to her political views; fiction for Yeziarska is a tool of social change:

I clenched my hands and swore that I would hold my dream of America -- and fight for it. I refuse to accept the America where men make other men poor... I cry out in the wilderness for America, my America -- different from all other countries. In this America, promised to the oppressed of all lands, there is enough so that man [can] ... work with man, building the beauty... -- beautiful homes -- beautiful cities -- beautiful lives reaching up for higher, ever higher visions of beauty (C of L, 27).

Yeziarska's language in this statement is reminiscent of Emma Goldman's writing; "the beautiful" is a key expression in Goldman's autobiography Living My Life. If Yeziarska does not share Goldman's political convictions, she believes nonetheless that as a writer she has a role to perform in transforming America.

Yeziarska's other use of fiction, fiction as ritual, reflects upon her position as a storyteller, and the role of the story in traditional society. In Children of Loneliness she writes, "When I'd really work out a thought in words, I'd want to say it over and over a million times, for fear maybe I wasn't saying it strong enough" (56), and "Critics have said that I have but one story to tell and that I tell that one story in different ways each time I write. That is true" (18). Yeziarska then argues for the universality of her subject matter. But what the critics were probably referring to is the limited number of plots and events which Yeziarska repeats in her stories and novels. These are scenes from her own life, but they speak to the experience of her immigrant culture: standing up to an exploitative boss and losing her job; a friendship with a respected and beloved American teacher; the confrontation with her tyrannical father; and narrowly escaping the clutches of the matchmaker. Yeziarska's repetition of events is not due to lack of imagination; she repeats them in order to make them stronger, to invest them with significance, in the same way that motifs and patterns are repeated in a folklore tradition. Similarly, Yeziarska repeats a set of names again and again in

her books: Moisheh the earnest greenhorn, Zalmon the fishseller, and Hanneh Breineh, the name for every landlady, kind or stingy. In using this technique, Yeziarska creates a set of stock characters for the ghetto, mythologizing the people she had known. The use of repetition is related to another mode of communication which she employs in her writing, prayer. In Bread Givers, Sara's father speaks in two voices, the angry unreasonable voice of a petty tyrant, and the transcendent and moving voice of prayer. Yeziarska quotes passages from the Bible directly: "His voice flowed into us deeper and deeper. We couldn't help ourselves. We were singing with him: 'Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth... for the Lord hath comforted his people.'" (BG, 16). In her autobiography, Yeziarska makes explicit the connection between her need to write and her father's need to pray: "I turned to my writing the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night -- as Father had turned to his prayers" (RR, 77). In the story, "Children of Loneliness", Yeziarska draws a comparison between prayer and art: "The shelter from the storms of life that the artist finds in his art, Yankev Ravinsky found in his prescribed communion with God" (CL, 104). In traditional society, prayer and storytelling originate from the same impulse to share an emotion, idea or experience as a group; in Bread Givers, Sara explains that she and her sisters cannot help but join their father in prayer.

Although Yeziarska adopts certain modern conceptions of the place of writing in society, in other ways she approximates the role of storyteller in its traditional sense, the sense in which

writing =
prayer

Gluckel was a storyteller. In the modern world, the story is a commodity, judged for its originality and selling-power. In traditional society, the story is judged for its responsibility and value to the group. Through her commitment to her community, and her mythologization of the ghetto world, Yeziarska aligns herself with the traditional function of storytelling as a form of communication for the community.

Yeziarska's understanding of the complex interactions of gender, class and culture evolved over the thirty years in which she wrote her major works. Yet in spite of the fact that she had no well-defined political and literary program when she began to write, nearly all of her later themes are contained in her earliest stories in various stages of development. In many ways, "The Fat of the Land" is the prototype for Salome of the Tenements²¹ and Arrogant Beggar.²² In "The Fat of the Land," Yeziarska first presents the theme of exile and return. Hanneh Breineh is a mother whose children buy her way up in the world to the mythic Riverside Drive. Disgusted with the sterility and boredom of her life and the crudity and cruelty of her children, Hanneh returns to her friends in the ghetto, dressed in a fur coat which "alone would feed a whole family for a year" (H.H., 218). Hanneh Breineh's imagination is severely limited; she does not know her own value, just as she does not understand the value of her coat. Because she cannot think of anything to do with herself in the ghetto, she returns to Riverside Drive "with a piercing pain in her heart" (H.H., 227). Hanneh's return is a failed redemption. In the years between writing "The

"Fat of the Land" and Arrogant Beggar, Yeziarska explores the resources which are available to a woman in Hanneh's situation, gives her strength and self-knowledge, and develops the system of relationships which can sustain a woman in her own community.

To understand the eventual return of the heroine, it is necessary first to trace her departure. Yeziarska uses the image of the rise in the world, perhaps partly because Manhattan so conveniently corporealizes this myth in its cultural geography, with its impoverished downtown and affluent uptown, and also because her own life was so often described in this way, "The publicity for each new book had repeated the Cinderella rise from rags to riches" (RR, 122). In Salome of the Tenements, Yeziarska writes, "Her youth cried in her, 'Escape! Escape! Push-push-up-up-up where the higher ups live! Up where the worry for rent and bread doesn't exist! Up where there's life and love and beauty'" (244). What Sonya strives to escape from is the "trap" of the ghetto; "she saw herself a living thing caught in a trap" (Salome, 244). Yeziarska pictures the brutal economic exploitation of daughters and wives in Bread Givers, the same relationship which Mary Antin describes in writing about Frieda. There is another type of exploitation of women based on love and responsibility. Mrs. Hershbein is working her son's way through Columbia; "I loved her because she gave so much of herself. But I could never, never be like that" (AB, 19). Like Antin, the heroine of Arrogant Beggar rejects the self-denial which is expected of women. Escaping from the ghetto means getting all the things which women are denied, or which

they deny themselves, beginning with selfhood. The dream of Yeziarska's heroines, which is the cornerstone of all other dreams, is the desire to become: "there is something -- a hope -- a help out... the hunger to make from myself a person" (H.H., 64) says Shenah Pessah, and Sara Smolensky repeats, "I want someday to make myself for a person" (BG, 66). This crucial phrase, "to make from myself a person", is derived from an idiomatic Yiddish expression, "menschlichkeit" or personhood, a state of being which includes integrity, moral strength, self-confidence, independence and generosity derived of self-possession. Yeziarska appropriates this concept and gives it special meaning in a new context of the women's struggle for liberation and self-definition. In Arrogant Beggar, Adele recites her favorite poem, which is on this very subject: "Bear up, bear out, bear onward, / This mortal soul alone / -- To selfhood" (AB, 49). To be a "mensch", to achieve selfhood, is more difficult and more significant as a woman's goal of success because it requires that she repossess herself, and the act of repossession demands that she break with the secure world which held her back.

The paths to success, the various means of becoming, are different for Yeziarska's different characters. Yet the "life higher", the alternative culture which they strive to enter, is pictured in a strikingly consistent way. From the perspective of the Lower East Side, the uptown world of Riverside Drive, or Anglo-American culture, is difficult to imagine. For Yeziarska's characters, this world is in fact a blank, a place something like a dream hospital or monastery: "Heaven must be a white place

like a clean white sheet" Adele declares (AB, 38). Yeziarska literalizes this blankness of imagination, setting up an anti-ghetto aesthetic which represents, for her heroines, the ideal of beauty and their mythical vision of uptown culture. Heaven for these women is whatever is different from the dirt, noise, crowds, poverty, and the restrictions of the ghetto. Stillness, whiteness, space are the attributes, or non-attributes, which they prize. Thus Hanneh Hayyeh achieves this "beautifulness" in her kitchen: "Grand ain't the word for it! What a whiteness! What a cleanliness! It tears out the eyes from the head" (H.H., 73). Yeziarska uses the money from Hollywood to create the same blank beauty for herself:

I had spent a lot of time and money choosing the furnishings that had transformed the overstuffed hotel apartment into its present austerity. The bare, unpainted floor, scrubbed to show the grain of the wood, pale-gray walls, plain unpainted furniture... There was a coolness and aloneness about the room. Except for the flowers, it might have been a nun's cell (R.R., 120).

Sonya is enchanted by the silence which surrounds Manning, her Anglo-American lover, in his office: "Till she met Manning, all the people she had ever known had been steeped in noise. Silence was like the color to which they had been blind. Now she perceived that silence was eloquent" (Salome, 128). In this statement Yeziarska echoes her own technique of making a negative quality into a positive virtue. For Adele, the longed for beauty is composed of air and space: "A place where a girl had a right to breathe and move around like a free human being. Everything I longed for and dreamed of... Light, air, space" (AB, 3).

In several of Yeziarska's stories, important moments of freedom and becoming occur out in the open, on the roof of a tenement or near the harbor. The dream of freedom and success is never a dream of a middle class commodity culture of cars, refrigerators, and an elegant townhouse or home in the new suburbs. In Salome of the Tenements Yeziarska expresses a basic suspicion and dislike of things: "at every turn, she felt herself sinking into an unknown world. Her every step was silenced in thick red carpets. Her every glance was entangled by mirrors, paintings and tapestries" (179); "I hate things" Sonya complains (181). For Yeziarska, things are another type of restriction; freedom for her heroines is release from homes, dishes, and ^{obligations} commitments.

The alternative culture is often approached through education, which is seen as the intellectual equivalent of cleaning out the cluttered room, bringing light and order to the mind; "I came to college because my whole being clamored for more vision, more light" (H.H., 170). Related to the idea that education is a way out of the old world is the idea that intellectual work, especially work which engages the beautiful and the true, is elevating. Shenah Pessah tells the sociologist, "It's all the same what I do with the hands. Think you not maybe now, I could begin already something with the head?" (H.H., 26) and later, "I got to work myself up for a person. I got a head. I got ideas" (H.H., 60). For some of Yeziarska's characters, being educated is an end in itself: "it's the chance to think thoughts that makes people" (H.H., 282), one heroine states. For Sara in Bread Givers, an education is a means to another end,

And then it flashed to me. The story from the Sunday paper. A girl -- slaving away in the shop. Her hair was already turning gray... Then suddenly she began to study in the night school, then college. And worked and studied on and on, till she became a teacher in the schools. A school teacher -- I! I saw myself sitting back like a lady at my desk... I was like looking up to the highest skyscraper while down in the gutter (155).

Not unexpectedly, Yeziarska's heroines view education as a powerful tool of self-development.

There is a second process by which the new world can be attained. Sara Smolensky says,

And with seventy-eight dollars... coming in every day, we'll soon be able to buy a piano and I'll begin to take piano lessons. And if I were a piano player instead of a shop hand, I wouldn't have to marry myself to a common man like my sisters. I'll try to catch on to a doctor, or a lawyer, or maybe an actor on the stage. And if my husband were an actor, then I could go to the theater free every night (BG, 118).

← This vision of Sara's is very different from her other dream of success through teaching. In this scenario, the woman making it alone is replaced by the woman whose success is measured by her husband. There is a tension in Yeziarska's stories between the ideal of the single woman and the ideal of the couple. Both complete autonomy and sexual and romantic love are attractive to her characters; Yeziarska has an awareness of the liberating power, or supposed power, of both of these options. The choices that her heroines make in relation to men are usually determined by their past experience. For many of her female characters, the relationship to male authority is oppressive and must be destroyed for personal development to take

place. Other protagonists, most notably Adele and Sonya, start out as women alone; both characters are orphans, living by themselves at the beginning of the novel. For these women, a relationship with the right man is itself a form of personal success. They are Cinderellas, hoping to free themselves from their culture by marrying out and up. Salome of the Tenements is in fact based loosely on Rose Pastor's marriage to John Stokes. Sonya and Adele are not social climbers in a materialistic sense; marriage for money or social status is not success for a Yezierska heroine: "What's money anyway but dead metal?" Sonya declares (Salome, 19). A romantic relationship is genuinely liberating for Yezierska's characters in several ways. The idea of a romantic union, especially when the woman selects and pursues the man, is oppositional to the male power structure within the Jewish community. In Yezierska's generation, the arranged marriage was still the sanctioned, if not the most common, social experience for women. The devastating, life-destroying marriages of the sisters in Bread Givers represent the worst type of domination of women by men, domination which denies women a right to choose their own lives. Sonya and Adele, far from being forced into marriage, pursue and conquer men of their own choosing.

In Salome of the Tenements, Yezierska explores liberation through sexual awakening. Sonya's dream of self-completion is based on sexual fulfillment: "Sonya Vrunsky headed for Essex Street... Earth and air and sky blazed with vision crowding upon vision... John Manning kissing her lips, clasping her in his arms... his being flowing into her being until she swooned in

blinding bliss" (Salome, 25). On the morning that she leaves her husband, Sonya explains to him the significance of sex to her: "Last night, how I wanted you to love me! But not love as you know it. I wanted to be you and you to be me. I wanted from you life" (Salome, 237). It is not surprising that one reviewer was shocked by Salome, writing, "'Salome' is an unwholesome book... Sonya exhibits a depravity of spirit... that rivals the degradation of Balzac's villains."²³ A woman like Sonya who seeks wholeness, sexual or spiritual, is unwhole-some.

Marriage to the ideal man is an entrance into that vaguely pictured, anti-ghetto world which Yeziarska's heroines dream up. Adele says, "Arthur Hellman is the most thrilling man on earth ... The first man of the other world. The first man I must know. But how can I open that shut door?" (AB, 53). The ideal man is refined, sensitive and educated, a man who "lives only for thinking and learning" (H.K., 5). Like Dewey, the paradigm for most of these mates, the beloved is an intellectual, "intellectual" in Yeziarska's stories meaning coolheaded, organized, and rational. Sonya declares to her lover, "You got a head. I got only feelings... You understand so much. You got to save me... with your wisdom, maturity, poise" (Salome, 66). Yeziarska has again set up a downtown-uptown dichotomy. Her emotional flamboyant heroines of the ghetto focus their desire on men who can give them what they do not have, quiet calm, the absence of feelings, blank lovers from a blank world.

For other heroines, education or marriage are not suffi-

ciently forceful tools of liberation and self-possession. Sara Smolinsky in Bread Givers, and Shenah Pessah in "Wings," each initiate their journey into personhood through an angry confrontation with the father, a confrontation with patriarchy. The casting off of the oppressive relationship to the father, or for Shenah, to an uncle who is a father-figure, is crucial to both characters. Shenah's "compassion was swept away in a wave of revolt that left her trembling... 'It's the last time you'll holler on me!' she cried. 'You'll never see my face again if I got to begging in the street.' Seizing her shawl, she rushed out" (H.H., 40). Sara describes her break with her father and his world: "'My will is as strong as yours... I'm going to live my own life. Nobody can stop me'... I leaped back and dashed for the door. The Old World had struck its last on me" (BG, 138). This dramatic exit, out of the door of the father's house and into the "new world" is followed by a sense of strength and freedom. Sara expresses the exhilaration of being alone for the first time:

As I sat there in the stillness of the morning, I realized that I had never yet been alone since I was born. This was the first time I ate by myself ... How strong, how full of life and hope I felt as I walked out of that bakery. I opened my arms, burning to hug the new day. The strength of a million people was surging up in me... I, alone with myself, was enjoying myself for the first time as with grandest company... I began to look for a room where I could be alone (BG, 157).

This statement is reminiscent of Gluckel of Hameln's, "I sit to this day and date at my own table, eat what I relish, stretch myself at night in my own bed." Both Gluckel and Yeziarska have

related the sense of completeness that a woman can derive from being alone. In "My Own People," Sophie's break with her father has occurred prior to the action of the story, but like Sara, Sophie is seeking a room of her own, in this case for writing: "'It has a door to lock... I'll take it,' she said, handing her the money... 'I got to be alone to get my work done,' ... Alone in her room -- her room, securely hers" (HH, 227).

Shenah and Sara later undergo a test; both women are offered love and protection by a man, and both turn down the offer, temporarily opting for independence and self-development. Shenah is loved by Sam Arkin, an earnest and affectionate self-made man who represents "Home, husband, babies, a breadgiver for life" (HH, 61). But Shenah's hunger for Sam is only the desire for bread and stability, and marriage to Sam is for Shenah a step backward, not a step forward and up into "the life higher" (HH, 61). Similarly, Sara turns down an offer of love from Max Goldstein. The structure of Bread Givers underlines the trial and temptation aspect of this episode. The heroine has recently left home, initiating her journey of self-discovery, when Max arrives from the distant land of California. Max is like a wizard, one who fills Sara with "irresistible gladness" (BG, 198), who "bewitches" her with happiness (BG, 194). Yet Max is an obstacle to Sara's goal of education and career: "He shoved aside the books that piled my table. 'What for should you waste your time with school any more?... Only dumbheads fool themselves that education and colleges... push them on in the world. It's money that makes the wheels go round'" (BG, 199).

Max's vision of success is antithetical to the beliefs of Yezierska's heroines; marriage to Max is a tempting, but a false choice for Sara. For the time being Sara decides to go "on and on -- alone" (EG, 208).

The imagery of blankness, silence and aloneness with which Yezierska's heroines form their dreams is a double edged symbol system. The closed door, the shut off room where the self can thrive, shuts out the rest of the world, everything that is security and feeling for the woman, and inspiration for the artist. Aloneness turns to an isolation which is self-destructive. And the heroine soon discovers that the life of the "higher ups," even that gained through education, is a culture in its own right, an alien culture with its own symbols, actions and obligations. The beautiful blank world she dreamed of is empty of personal meaning. The heroines' disillusionment, their realization that their original dream of success is false, is based on these two experiences: deracination, the loss of culture and history and the sense of foreignness and rootlessness; and isolation, the loss of validation as a woman which occurs when the woman strives to become a person.

Disillusionment is the pivotal experience in Yezierska's myth of exile and return. She evokes disillusionment in her stories through an ironic use of language. In Red Ribbon on a White Horse, Yezierska writes, "I saw that 'success,' 'failure,' 'poverty,' 'riches' were price tags, money values of the market place which had mesmerized and sidetracked me for years" (219). In this process of disillusionment, the labels which we use to

guide our lives melt away into meaninglessness. Yezierska disillusion the reader by turning the labels on their heads, and showing things for what they are. In Arrogant Beggar, this re-seeing of things is literalized; Adele has been deeply insulted by her benefactress Mrs. Hellman: "As I sat again in the reception room, waiting for Mrs. Hellman, I looked around with cold eyes at the things that inspired me the day before. The flowers, the rugs -- the room itself had lost its magic, its beauty" (AB, 84). The model for all other ironies, the contradiction that calls all beliefs into question, is that success is really failure. In Bread Givers, a moment of seeming completion is transformed into a moment of despair; Sara must enter the classroom and take her place as the teacher before she can see the falseness of her original dream: "I had it ingrained in me by my father, this exalted reverence for the teacher. Now I was the teacher. Why didn't I feel as I had supposed this superior creature felt?... Where was the vision lost? The goal was her. Why was I so silent, so empty?" (269). The failure of success is also expressed in the inversion of the imagery of success, the image of the rise, the "life higher". Adele struggles to the top, achieves success uptown, only to find that she has in fact struck bottom: "All that night... torrents of tears kept pouring down my cheeks, washing away... the lost dream of the Home, of Arthur Hellman... My burning ambitions were dead. I was at the bottom" (AB, 161).

Yezierska uses several additional pairs of contradictions to support the inversion and failure of the success myth. One

of the crucial goals of the journey uptown is freedom and the end of all restrictions. The heroine finds, however, that she has traded one set of restrictions for another. "When I was poor, I was free, and could holler and do what I like in my own house," Hanneh Breineh complains. "Here I got to be still like a mouse... Between living up to my Fifth-Avenue daughter and keeping up with the servants, I am like a sinner... thrown from one hell to another" (HH, 203). After several months of marriage, Sonya begins to see her husband's mansion as a jail: "What have I got? A house like a prison. Servants like jailers ... not all the marriage rites in the world... can keep me in this prison a moment longer" (Salome, 242). While the reappropriation of the self is one of the central conditions of success, Yeziarska finds that success engenders a loss of self: "I wanted to make a new start away from the market place where I had lost myself in the stupid struggle for success" (RR, 199). One of the major themes of Red Ribbon on a White Horse is that public life imposes a web of myths and mystiques upon a woman and robs her of her essential being. The writer William Phelps laughingly tells Yeziarska that she has been appropriated by the male literary market, just like a piece of property: "only seven cities claim to be the birthplace of Homer. See how many editors have staked a claim on you!" (RR, 125). Yeziarska finds she is a stranger to herself: "There was a picture of me above those captions, but I couldn't recognize myself in it, any more than I could recognize my own life in the newspapers' stories of my 'success'" (RR, 40).

The theme of being a stranger is crucial to Yeziarska's writing in another sense. For the epigraph of her autobiography, Yeziarska uses this poem by John Wheelock: "Not in the flesh, not in the spirit even... / The answer and the truth are found, but where / Deep at the very core, the stranger bides --" (RR, 22). The obvious meaning of the poem is clear: look within you and know yourself in order to know the world. But on another level, Yeziarska suggests that her essential self is a stranger, a being who is always in unfamiliar situations where she is not known, a stranger to herself precisely because she is a stranger to others. The dominant persona of the autobiography is the individual who is out of place and not at ease, a wanderer, a rootless woman in search of a home. Yeziarska structures Red Ribbon on a White Horse non-chronologically in order to frame it with two scenes of non-belonging. In the chapter "Important People," Yeziarska is invited to a high society Hollywood party; she panics on the way in:

The chauffeur turned the car up a graveled drive lined with exotic tress... I walked up to the porch, and then paused in sudden doubt of myself. All my instincts cried: Don't! Don't go in! Run! Make your escape before anyone sees you. You don't belong here... I hid behind a rosebush and looked in. Men in tails and women in low-necked evening gowns stood around talking... Never had I felt so hopelessly out of place (58).

Near the end of the book, thirty years later on the other side of the country, there is a scene identical in spirit. Marian Foster, Pulitzer prize author and a patroness of the arts, has invited Yeziarska to live and work in her quaint New Hampshire town. Yeziarska is as out of place here as she was in Holly-

wood. "It was at Marian's dinner to celebrate the Pulitzer for her novel Common Ground that I finally saw the futility of all my attempts to become a Fair Oaks villager" (RR, 210). One of the dinner guests mentions a play that he has seen: "'Loyalties!' the theme of the play flashed through my mind -- what happened to a Jew who tried to get into English society. What would Zalmon Shlomoh say if he could see me here?... I could almost hear his laughter... 'Jew! Jew! Where are you pushing yourself'" (RR, 211). She now realizes, Yeziarska sums up, that she has always felt herself to be "an outsider wherever I went".

Yeziarska's characters experience similar feelings of discomfort and strangeness in their new lives and "new Worlds," the term Yeziarska uses in Bread Givers to refer to the adopted culture and class. "Sonya walked uncertainly about the room... Stranger to her self in this strange world, she found her bewildered hands tracing the outlines of animals carved deeply in the backs... of ancient chairs. Her fingers seemed caught in the mouths of these fantastic beasts" (Salome, 179). Yeziarska writes in the language of difference, of separate worlds and groups: "Remembering... when she had been full of hate for the heartless rich as she watched his social set walk up the carpeted steps... she thought: 'Am I one of them now?... Will his people accept me?" (Salome, 178).

Yeziarska's heroines discover that the answer to Sonya's question is "no." Anti-semitism and class prejudice are major barriers to assimilation. One character, a student in teaching school, is told that she will not be placed as a teacher because

of her oily skin and unmanageable hair (HH, 163). Yeziarska explains in her autobiography that in order to get stenography jobs, Jewish women were forced to wear Christian crosses around their necks (RR, 214). The impersonal and intangible barriers of culture are equally prohibitive. There are expectations for behavior in the new world which Yeziarska's characters cannot, and do not want to meet; "They want to make me over for an American lady, and I'm different" (HH, 203), cries one woman. In several stories, Yeziarska uses rules as a metaphor for culture, for cultural expectations and agreements which the newcomer neither knows nor understands: "Then she began like this: We dassen't stand on the front grass... We dassen't come in the front sitting room... We must always listen to the bells... If I tried to remember the endless rules, it would only make me dizzy" (HH, 108). For Sonya, rules are replaced by her husband's Puritan family history, a history of power and wealth: "Manning showed her the different wings of the house and dwelt at length on the ancestral portraits that dominated every room ... 'This is my great-great-grandfather. He helped to found Yale University...' The ancestors seemed to follow her even when she took a stroll that afternoon" (Salome, 184). Sonya finds that this strange world is impenetrable: "Sonya was exhausted, extinguished by an attitude and its language, which was not only alien but antagonistic to her. Her lover, her husband, had suddenly become one with the people below" (Salome, 204).

To the extent that the new world is experienced, the heroines find it profoundly unsatisfying. This "world of the higher-

ups" is arid, empty of life, and provides no sources of joy or creativity. Hanneh Breineh is even stripped of her reason for living: "The new Riverside apartment... was for the habitually active mother an empty desert of enforced idleness. Deprived of her kitchen, Hanneh felt robbed of the last reason for her existence" (HH, 210). The sustenance which the new culture provides can barely keep her alive: "In that swell restaurant is nothing but napkins and forks and lettuce-leaves... it's nothing but straw in the mouth. I'm starving, but I can't swallow down their American eating" (HH, 218). Characters who once burned for the life and joy they would find in the new world, now describe that world as a dead place. "As time went on, I became aware of the two people in me. One Adele, cringing, truckling -- to get on. The other watching her own funeral, cold, critical" (AB, 102). For the Sonya of the ghetto, Manning is life itself, and everything that she needs to live. Uptown, Sonya discovers that Manning is not life, but death: "You dead lump of self-righteousness! ... bloodless higher-up... you're as dead in your stony goodness as those in their graves" (Salome, 240). And for Yeziarska, attainment of the higher world, the world of order and articulation, means that she has nothing to be articulate about, having cut herself off from her source of inspiration: "I could buy everything I wanted except the driving force I once had to inspire my work. Bitterly I told myself that I had never found any one among the literati as real as Zalmon, the fish peddler ... or Hanneh Breineh ... But now they no longer came to see me as friends" (RR, 120).

The second source of disillusionment for the heroine is the realization that success and womanhood are considered mutually exclusive categories. Once a Yeziarska heroine can identify what she wants, or succeeds by her own rules of success, or has an idea or criticism of her own, she is condemned as a madwoman, or told that she is not a woman at all. Yeziarska shares this awareness with the nineteenth century female writers of fiction. Like Yeziarska, Sara Sapinsky and several unnamed protagonists, the female narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" wishes to write; as a result, her husband-doctor tells her she is sick and locks her in a room. For Polly Adler, this social condemnation reveals itself in the dream of her father, chasing her and labeling her "whore." In Yeziarska's stories, these moments of labeling or "diagnosis" are quietly piercing, moments of silent but profound damage. In the setting of her flamboyant writing it is easy to miss them. Yet it is clear from their persistence in her fiction, and from the way in which they haunt her autobiography, that these events are vital to an understanding of disillusionment. An accusation of insanity is difficult to counter, for it undermines one's authority to speak. Figures of power and authority hand out this label. In "Immigrant Among the Editors" the narrator, an aspiring writer, seeks a job on a magazine and is interviewed by the editor:

He cut short the interview by... taking down a book which he handed to me... 'This will help you to think.' Out in the street I gave a look at the book. It was Genung's "Psychology of Madness". It grew red and black before my eyes. So it's madness to want to give out my thoughts to the world? They turn me down like a crazy beggar only because I come to them with new ideas (C of L, 63).

Acts of ambition or independence on the part of a woman are the signs of insanity. When Sonya tells Manning that she is leaving him and that his work is hypocritical and useless, his initial response is, "Poor child! ... You are nervously overwrought" (Salome, 235) and later, "You're insane, Sonya." (Salome, 237). Adele's stunning speech to the Hellman Home board of directors and assembly, in which she blasts their condescension and class prejudice, is greeted with the same response, "She's gone crazy!" (AB, 155). Mrs. Hellman rushes up to Adele afterward and feels her forehead: "This is delerium. The girl is burning with fever" (157). Yeziarska's heroines are not locked up physically, as the "madwoman" in the nineteenth century was. But the "madwoman" in Yeziarska's stories is a social outcast, an isolate who is locked out, or who locks herself out, of her adopted culture.

In "Soap and Water" the protagonist is censured by the dean of her college: "Miss Whiteside... withheld my diploma... She said that she could not recommend me as a teacher... She told me that my skin looked oily and my hair unkempt. She told me that I was utterly unmindful of the little niceties of the well-groomed lady" (HH, 163). Certainly this is an incident about class prejudice and anti-semitism. But it is also about feminine identity. The narrator's crimes are that she worked too hard and placed too much importance on her dream of success; in trying to become a person, the narrator finds she has lost her place in her gender. Sara Smolinsky is challenged in the same way by Max Goldstein, the lover she turns down: "You're so

different. You're so cold. You're only books, books, books. I sometimes wonder, are you at all a woman?" (BG, 197). If she is not a woman, and she is certainly not a man, then Sara is in danger of being a non-person; it is ironic that the act of struggling to find her self threatens to leave the woman without a socially accepted self, an accepted and clearly defined female identity. Or the heroine has become a partial person, one who finds that in playing the success game, she has sacrificed all the warm nurturing parts of herself, because they are not appropriate in the market, or because no one will have her as a wife or mother. Max accuses Sara of coldness and unfemininity because she is interested in learning. Sara's father accuses her of unfemininity because she turns down Max's offer of marriage:

"What's going to be your end? A dried-up old maid?... It says in the Torah, What's a woman without a man? Less than nothing -- a blotted out existence" (BG, 205). For Sara, the answer to this problem is seemingly simple: at the end of the novel she is loved by and marries a man of whom her father approves, and thus affirms her capacity for love. But it is not always possible to fit back into this partial self referred to as "woman", and in examining the either-or ultimatum given to them, some women choose independence over femininity. Yezierska writes of herself:

The telephone rang... It was a man's voice, asking for Miss Young... Her job was only a temporary stop-gap. Marriage was waiting for her. She would have all the things which should come naturally to a woman... the human relationships that fill a woman's life. But I wanted the im-

possible of life, of love. And so I stood empty, homeless... not a woman -- not a writer (RR, 74).

Finally, there is the situation in which the woman is robbed of all choice, kept from doing what she wants and needs to do because an ambitious, successful or non-conformist woman is considered by society to be an "unfit" woman. This charge is most often leveled against these women when they want to be mothers. Yeziarska tells such a story about herself. After losing all her money in the stock market crash, she looks for work. One employment ad attracts her attention: "WANTED, RESPONSIBLE WOMAN CARE FOR CHILDREN... I cut out the ad. I'll take that job, I decided. I had always been drawn to children; now chance led me to work I would love to do." The children's mother is skeptical and inquisitive in the interview; Anzia looks too old for the job, she explains. Then Yeziarska is asked about her previous employment. "You like stories?" she asks the children. "I'll tell you a story. I'm a storyteller ... you see, I was a writer." This career, she finds, invalidates her as a woman, and especially as a substitute mother: "I need some one young and strong who can keep the children clean... I need a nursemaid, not a writer" (RR, 143 - 144). In trying to become a person, a man can only enhance his manhood; but the harder a woman tries to become a person, the more "less than nothing" she becomes.

In the end, it is not the dream of success which is false, but its object, the goal and desire of the dream. Yeziarska never repudiates the impulse to break away from the old world

and become a person. Even the false dream of assimilation into a new world is necessary; it must be realized and broken before a true, radically new vision can be formed. From the bottom point of despair, the heroine thinks that she cannot go on: "I could never feel again. Never get excited about anything. Never again be glad... My burning ambitions were dead" (AB, 161). The process of return and renewal begins with the heroine re-learning how to care and how to dream, and her teachers in this art are women.

In terms of her own life and work, Yeziarska too chose women as teachers. It is clear that Yeziarska was familiar with women's fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and she turned to women as role models early in her literary apprenticeship. In the essay, "Mostly About Myself", Yeziarska self-consciously creates a female literary canon of her own:

I am learning, as I grow older, to be tolerant with my own inadequacy. I am learning slowly to stop wasting myself in trying to make myself over on the pattern of some better organized, more educated person than I. I no longer waste precious time wishing for the brains of a George Eliot, or the fluency of a George Sand, or the marvelous gift of words of a May Sinclair (C of L, 11).

Yeziarska ingeniously and ingenuously promotes these women writers, claiming that her own writing skills pale in comparison to their polished techniques. In turn, by celebrating women writers, Yeziarska finds validation for her own chosen career. In *Hungry Hearts*, Yeziarska identifies a personal female literary mentor. When John Barnes questions Shenah Pessah about her intellectual background in "Wings," Shenah tells him about the

wonderful book, the only book, that she has; "One of the boarders left me a grand book. When I only begin to read, I forget I'm on this world. It lifts me on wings with high thoughts" (HH, 7). The book is Dreams by Olive Schreiner,²⁴ a South African feminist and novelist of the generation before Yezierska's. In using Schreiner's name in "Wings," Yezierska again asserts a women's literary history. But Schreiner is far more to Yezierska than a name from a feminist past. Hungry Hearts is a dialogue with Dreams, and Yezierska draws inspiration from Schreiner. Rhetorically, the works could not be more different. The "dreams" are a series of short allegories; the art nouveau decorations of the original edition reflect the stylized, airy, seemingly escapist quality of Schreiner's writing. Yet thematically, Dreams and Hungry Hearts are closely linked.

Yezierska's "Wings," the story in which Schreiner is named, is clearly intended to be a retelling of Schreiner's allegory, "Life's Gifts." In Schreiner's story, a sleeping woman is visited by Life, a female figure, who offers her a choice of two gifts, Love and Freedom. The sleeping woman chooses Freedom; "Thou hast well chosen. If thou hadst said, 'Love,' I would have given it thee, and I would have gone and returned to thee no more. Now, the day will come when I shall return. In that day I shall bear both gifts in one hand" (Dreams, 116). Shenah Pessah is the counterpart of the sleeping woman, and she is offered the same choice: "Ach! To be loved as Sam Arkin ... Home, husband, babies, a bread giver for life! And the other -- a dream." Shenah chooses freedom, "You can't make me

for a person. It's not only that I got to go up higher, but I got to push myself up by myself, by my own strength" (HH, 61). By linking her story to Schreiner's, Yeziarska privately projects the conclusion of Shenah's life beyond the end of the story and into a happy future.

The feminist perspective of the two collections is the most obvious common element. Schreiner appropriates a writing style which is associated with religious and moral fiction for women, and uses it to convey an anti-hierarchical, anti-patriarchal message:

I thought I stood in Heaven before God's throne, and God asked me what I had come for. I said I had come to arraign my brother, Man... I said, "He has taken my sister, Woman, and has stricken her, and thrust her out into the streets; she lies there prostrate. His hands are red with blood. I am here... that the kingdom be taken from him, because he is not worthy, and given unto me" (Dreams, 127).

The gist of this story is that woman must help her sister, and approach the seat of power hand in hand with her; only then does woman have the power and the right to indict man. Yeziarska writes on similar themes of male domination, women's self-development and women's cooperation in her collections. It is significant that Yeziarska chose as her model, not only a woman, but a feminist, writer.

As in Schreiner's book, the stories in Hungry Hearts are about dreams: "Like all people who have nothing, I lived on dreams," says one narrator (114); "the Other -- a dream -- a madness that burns you up alive" another woman describes her vision of the future (61). The language of Yeziarska's dreams is also derived from Schreiner's. "Love drew Life up to him.

And of that meeting was born a thing rare and beautiful -- Joy, First Joy was it called" (Dreams, 14), Schreiner writes. Life, love, beauty, soaring on wings to the higher world, these words are eccentric in the mouths of Yeziarska's destitute and exploited janitors and factory workers; and her stories depend on the gap between social reality and expectation or envisionment. Yet when Dreams is read in conjunction with Hungry Hearts, the dreams of the heroines take on a new significance; Yeziarska is in a sense passing on to her heroines the dreams which she learned from Schreiner. Schreiner is Yeziarska's muse, a teacher with whom she converses, across time, on questions of women's freedom.

Even before she began writing, Yeziarska had found strength in relating to women, in reading and learning from other women, although it was an abstract unity, an intellectual and one-sided relationship. In her stories, Yeziarska transfers her own need for female friendship and guidance to her heroines. The search for a teacher is the theme of two stories in Hungry Hearts. In both stories, the heroine is a social "misfit", who yearns and wishes and cannot understand the strong sad feelings inside her. At the end of these stories, the protagonist has a conversation with an older woman, an Anglo-American teacher, and everything is suddenly right and reasonable. The anti-climactic effect of the stories is telling; the reader feels impatient with them, the stories seem incomplete. Yet for Yeziarska, this single conversation, a conversation which is not even recorded in "Soap and Water," is a revelation, an event significant enough to be a completion in itself and the ending of the heroine's search:

"Miss Van Ness unbound and freed me and suffused me with light ... I was changed and the world was changed. My past was the forgotten night. Sunrise was all around me" (HH, 177). What is the significance of this encounter? The conversation is, first, the end of a terrible isolation: "Often I felt like crying out ... 'Oh, please be my friend. I'm so lonely.' ... I had begun to think that my only comrades in the world were the homeless and abandoned cats and dogs in the streets" (HH, 176). The protagonist in "How I Found America" describes her ecstasy in the physical and intellectual contact with another woman: "She opened her arms to me and breathlessly I felt myself drawn to her. Bonds seemed to burst. A suffusion of light filled my being. Great choirings lifted me in space" (HH, 298). But the isolation is not simply from other human beings; it is the special isolation of being a woman outside of woman's sphere: "Sundays and holidays when the other girls go out to enjoy themselves, I walk around by myself-thinking-thinking" (HH, 295). For these young narrators, Miss Van Ness the chemistry professor and Miss Latham the high school teacher are role models; both single career women, they affirm the heroines' search for self-sufficiency.

Because Miss Van Ness and Miss Latham are well-educated teachers, and members of the powerful dominant culture, they are authority figures. They are women to learn from, to admire, to emulate. But while they are sympathetic to the heroines, they do not give love or friendship. In "A Bed for the Night," Yeziarska presents another picture of women's friendship, a

loving encounter between female peers. "A Bed for the Night" is about sisterhood in a way that the other stories could not be, because of barriers of power and culture between the heroine and the teacher. The friendship in "A Bed for the Night" is between two women who are down and out, both of whom live outside of the margin of normative society. The narrator is an outsider because she is homeless and penniless; returning from the free ward of the hospital after a long illness, she discovers that she has been evicted from her room. The friend that she finds is a prostitute, who describes herself as an outsider: "the first time I got into trouble, instead of helping me, they gave me the marble stare and the frozen heart and drove me to the bad" (C of L, 175). The prostitute finds the narrator sobbing on a park bench and takes her home to her apartment. The protagonist experiences a feeling of sisterhood and belonging with this woman: "There was no pity in her tone, but comprehension, fellowship. From childhood I'd had my friendships... But this woman, without a word ... had sounded the depths of understanding that I never knew existed" (172). When she wakes in the morning, "It was more than gratitude that rushed out of my heart to her. I felt I belonged to some one, I had found a home at last" (174). The two bases for this friendship are a generosity which is not condescending, and a deep understanding derived from common experience. The prostitute is contrasted in the story with a series of social workers, for whom giving is a way of exerting power over the heroine and others like her. But she has no qualms about taking from her new friend: "Ah! The magic of love! It was only tea and toast... she offered, but she offered it with

the bounty of a princess" (173). The similarity of their lives, the experience of being women "despised and rejected of men" (176), makes their friendship possible: "'Down on your luck, kid? I've been there myself. I know all about it.' She knew so well, what need had she of answer? The refrain came back to me, 'Only themselves understand themselves and the likes of themselves" (173).

positive heroine

Female knowledge and female giving are combined in the figure of Muhmenkeh, Adele's friend and guide in Arrogant Beggar. Muhmenkeh is a wisewoman, a healer, a storyteller, a teacher of girls, a ghetto dreamer. She is a woman alone, a self-supporting woman, and a vital member of the community, although she rejects the female roles which the community provides. Like Yeziarska's other women teachers and friends, Muhmenkeh finds the heroine at her desperate moment, at a moment of symbolic death, and brings her back to life, both physically and spiritually. Having "hit the bottom" through disillusionment, Adele finds her way back to the ghetto and into a dishwashing job. Exhausted after her first day of work, starving and without a place to sleep, Adele is taken home by Muhmenkeh, an aged co-worker. Adele and Muhmenkeh find that they need each other, and they form a household, living together until Muhmenkeh's death. Adele describes her feeling of coming home: "There flowed over me a sense of peace, of home coming. Here was the real world I knew. The familiar things that made me feel secure, the washtub, the boiler of clothes... And over it all, Muhmenkeh" (AB, 174). Muhmenkeh is for Adele a bridge to a history of women's strength, and a bridge to her

Jewish culture and past.

Adele describes Muhmenkeh, "She's sort of a godmother, grandmother of lost ones" (190). Yeziarska employs the folk motif of the fairy godmother to help conjure up a more complex character, the wisewoman who is a guide to the questing heroine, the teacher who shares her house with the young woman and initiates her to her ways. Yeziarska again reaches back to the literary and mythical history of women by making Muhmenkeh a storyteller, a teller of tales like Gluckel of Hameln's:

Muhmenkeh rocked herself back and forth gently. She fell again into a silence... When she spoke again, she drew my hand into the astonishing warmth of her two little gnarled old hands. "Listen only -- child what you are -- with your cry on wasted life. Take only into your young head this old, old Bube Meise that my grandmother used to tell me" (175).

A tale about Rabbi Akiba follows. Muhmenkeh contributes to the tradition of women's wisdom which Yeziarska develops in the novel by explaining that she learned the story from her grandmother, another Jewish woman storyteller; "Bube Meise" means grandmother story, and is the Yiddish expression for a folk tale. Muhmenkeh is also a healer, who proves her skill by nursing Adele through a terrible illness. The doctor calls Muhmenkeh "the best nurse to be had on the East Side" (193). Like a true godmother - healer, Muhmenkeh administers to Adele her own ethnic folk cure, chicken soup (183).

Again in describing Muhmenkeh, Adele says, "You can't tag her or pigeonhole her into this or that" (AB, 190). Muhmenkeh has invented a new way of being a woman within a Jewish commu-

nity; she is for Adele a living example of the feasibility of creative alternatives. Muhmenkeh is financially independent, and proud of her ability to support herself:

she pointed to a basket with packages of coffee and tea. "My little pushcart," her arms encircled her wares... She looked about the room with shining thankfulness. "God is yet good. With what bitter sweat I struggle for each cent... but it's all my own -- this place." I just stares. Seventy-six years old and standing on her own feet (174).

Her independence does not require a cold heart, does not isolate her. Muhmenkeh's function in the community is to be a transmitter of culture, women's culture and Jewish culture. Yezierska shows how Muhmenkeh is connected to women in the past and into the future through a succession of knowledge and caring. Muhmenkeh was guided by her grandmother, who taught her stories. In turn, Muhmenkeh loves and helps to sustain Shenah Gittel, her granddaughter, and is saving money to bring her to America. In the present, Muhmenkeh is a center of wisdom and caring for women in the community, young women like Adele, older women like her next door neighbor who brings her fried herring and onions, and a baby girl who she watches while its mother is at work. Like the female godmother that she is, Muhmenkeh places this blessing on the baby: "Long years on her! All she needs is a little bit of luck" (177).

Yezierska demonstrates Muhmenkeh's relation to Jewish culture and Jewish community by making her the embodiment of certain crucial, life-sustaining elements of Judaism. "She had not the religiousness of the old Jewish woman of the ghetto. No wig.

No Sabbath candles... But her light -- don't people run to synagogues looking for it" (219). The wig and the candles are the objects of Jewish culture which are exclusively for women. Muhmenkeh casts off these required symbols of commitment, just as Yzierska's heroines reject the symbols of a woman's obligation to a man and a marriage, the home and its domestic trappings. Muhmenkeh selects her own symbols and imbues them with meaning. When Adele first wakes up in Muhmenkeh's home, she is handed Muhmenkeh's "Sabbath towel": "the ironed out towel with the fresh clean smell was... the only whole thing in that house." Adele protests that the towel is too good to be used on a weekday; "Too good! Look only what's telling me too good! I'm in this house yet the missus... Not every day falls on me the pleasure -- a young girl for my guest" (169). Here she has chosen her own Sabbath, and it is different from God's and man's.

Even more than being a symbol-maker, Muhmenkeh herself becomes a symbol. On that first morning, on Muhmenkeh's "Sabbath", Adele says, "There flowed over me a sense of peace, of homecoming," from the presence of Muhmenkeh; here Muhmenkeh embodies the Sabbath with its secure and peaceful spirit. Later, Adele describes how Muhmenkeh celebrates Purim, and gives that joyful holiday to the children of the neighborhood:

Purim morning. Muhmenkeh's holiday "feast of cake and wine for the little people." Mrs. Mirsky's children living next door, children from neighboring tenements on the block, for blocks around... waves of children surging around Muhmenkeh... That frail bent old thing making of her nothing a feast of plenty... The way she stood at the centre of them, holding out her apron full of mohn kuchsens, in the other

a glass of "red wine"... Muhmenkeh sent them away thrilled and filled to the brim (226).

Muhmenkeh is not a marginal member of the community; for many, she is the centre and the spirit of their culture.

Yeziarska reintroduces the inversion of success and failure, the idea of stripping away old ways of seeing, at this point of the journey. However, the act of reinterpretation is now a source of power, rather than a cause for despair. Muhmenkeh serves once again as a symbol for a feminist revision of the values of the dominant male culture. When Adele first meets Muhmenkeh, she sees her as an old hag: "The shrivelled old woman bent over the pile of greasy plates gave me the creeps... I couldn't bear to have her touch me... The shrunken toothless mouth. Wrinkles knotting into wrinkles" (166). But later, when Adele grows to love and be loved by Muhmenkeh, Adele sees below the ugliness to beauty: "From that moment, the old woman dropped away. I saw only her eyes. That gentle unworldly gaze. Something kept drawing me to her, making me feel underneath the things she said and did" (172).

A similar process is at work in the story, "My Own People." Sophie, an aspiring writer, first perceives Hanneh Breineh as an ignorant immigrant, a gossip and a drudge, whose words are "chatter" (227 HH). Later, Sophie learns to see Hanneh's courage, integrity and wisdom, and Hanneh's words become beauty and literary inspiration: "If I could only write like Hanneh Breineh talks! ... Her words dance with a thousand colors! Like a rainbow it flows from her lips" (HH, 242). With these incidents, Yeziarska

initiates a feminist aesthetic. Women have been robbed of each other by the dominant culture, which hands out labels like "indecent," "ignorant" and "useless," according to the needs of the market. Yeziarska suggests that it is the role of the new woman, the heroine of her stories, to strip away these false ways of seeing and uncover the internal strength and beauty of the women around her, her foremothers, the women who gave her life and share her world. In choosing Hanneh and Muhmenkeh as models, Yeziarska and her heroines are placing themselves in unity, not only with their gender, but with the women of their class and culture. In reviewing Muhmenkeh's life, Adele declares, "In loneliness, in silence, she learned to give out her thoughts. Learned to give love, give sympathy, give understanding. Giving was really living -- if you didn't give you didn't live" (AB, 217). Yeziarska expands her feminist aesthetic into this statement of a feminist politics. Success, she declares, is not privatization, living for the self, subjectivism, nor even finding a voice, if that voice is used to speak of nothing but the self. Living is giving, when giving and responsiveness are voluntary, and come from a wholeness of being, a position of self-possession and understanding.

Muhmenkeh and her message are the heart of Yeziarska's concept of redemption. The heroine, having entered this radical vision, must take up the task of negotiating ways of giving and living within the community. Here Yeziarska can only offer suggestions, tenuous propositions for the future. In her last two novels, Yeziarska borrows and transforms a pattern of Jewish

women's lives in Eastern Europe, giving it to her heroines as Muhmenkeh gives her Sabbath towel, with irreverent delight. In the Jewish ghettos and shtetls of Europe, the ideal life for a man was one devoted exclusively to religious study. In order for this ideal to be realized, the woman was expected to take on all the functions of breadwinning, in addition to her work as mother and housekeeper. The woman would run a small business, a shop, or quite frequently, an inn. The wife of the Hasidic leader, for example, was an innkeeper, and supported her husband in his religious life. (In Arrogant Beggar and Salome of the Tenements, Adele and Sonya return to the East Side and follow their foremothers into business,) Adele opening a coffeehouse or tavern, and Sonya, a dress design shop. But these women are not supporting husbands; Adele opens the coffeehouse to support herself, while Sonya is in business partnership with her husband Jaky Hollins, who does exactly the same work that she does.

These new ways of dividing labor between the sexes require a new relationship with men, a genuinely egalitarian two-career marriage. Yeziarska seems to have had some trouble imagining how an egalitarian marriage might work in daily life; Salome of the Tenements ends before the second marriage even takes place. But the outlines of her solution are clear. The heroine's partner must represent and understand her culture and experience. The relationship with John Dewey, John Stokes, or another man from the other world, is unworkable; it can never be a partnership because the balance of power always comes out in his favor. An important moment of unity between the heroine and her new

partner occurs when the lovers share their tales of childhood and immigration, and find the "common ground" which the heroine does not have with Marian Foster or anyone else from her world. In Bread Givers, Yeziarska writes,

We got to talking about ourselves, our families, the Old World from which we came. To our surprise we found that our beginnings were the same. We came from the same government in Poland, only villages apart... For a moment we looked at each other, breathless with the wonderful discovery. "Countrymen!" we cried, in one voice, our hands reaching out to each other (277).

The man who Adele marries shares with her a central life experience; he is another ex-protege of the Hellman family, who also became disillusioned with them. The heroine must be careful not to pick a man so representative of her past and her culture that he takes the place of her father; the return must not be a return to subordination to a man. Sara Smolensky makes this mistake and slips back into the very role from which she fought loose: Hugo is treated by Reb Smolensky like a son, a young projection of himself, and Sara senses this; "Hugo's grip tightened on my arm and we walked on. But I felt the shadow still there, over me. It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me." (BG, 297).

Yeziarska's new ideal is a relationship between soul mates, a sororal relationship in which gender differences are swept away by the likeness of the partners. Jaky and Sonya have this conversation: "'Which part did you do and which part did I? Where did I begin, and where did you end? It's as if one mind did the whole thing.' 'One mind did,' he smiled... 'Toge-

ther we work as one mind'" (Salome, 276). In Arrogant Beggar, Adele and Jean understand each other so deeply, they speak without words: "We were quiet, voiceless. Silence like a hidden bond of communication between us" (AB, 258). This partnership of souls is also a partnership of work: "Is there anything in the world so real, so thrilling, as real work?" (Salome, 276), Sonya asks her lover; Yeziarska seems to agree, showing Sonya and Jaky on their knees, side by side, pinning a gown, and Jean and Adele, together performing the domestic tasks necessary to prepare their home for Shenah Gittel, Muhmenkeh's granddaughter. Yeziarska was concerned about how the equality of this relationship could be maintained over time, and she guarantees equality, in a subtle and perhaps unconscious way, by inventing men who are not male authority figures. The names of these new husbands are Jaky and Jean, names which are ambiguously masculine. Yeziarska depicts Jaky as a slightly effeminate man: "Sonya looked at the artist's narrow face, with the hair... brushed back fastidiously; the full-lipped sensuous mouth, the nose with quivering nostrils" (Salome, 41). And Jean is an impoverished artist, who has no authority either as a man of wealth or as an employer. Once again, Yeziarska's fear of the Dewey figure and her father requires that she create a somewhat weak man as a counterbalance.

* Finally, the heroine gives back to the community the thing which she desired for herself from the beginning, beauty. Pondering the meaning of Muhmenkeh's life, Adele forms this resolve, "Right here -- in the heart of the tenements, where everything is so ugly and alike, this was the place to start something with

Muhmenkeh's spirit in it" (AB, 226). She opens a cafe that is as beautiful as Paris (230), a place of joy and light. In Salome of the Tenements, Sonya discusses the idea of beauty for the people: "Beautiful things should be for those who long for beauty," Sonya declares. "There are millions on the East Side dying for a little loveliness... Beauty should be... not only for those who can buy it" (Salome, 281). Sonya and Jaky arrive at this decision: "We'll open up a little shop on Grand Street -- see how it will work out -- beauty for those who love it, beauty that is not for profit" (Salome, 282). Beauty is no longer an abstract ideal, nor does it belong to an intellectual elite world; it is art, a woman's art, which consists of any beautiful thing she can make or do. This conclusion depends on a broad conceptualization of art, which Yeziarska develops in her story "The Lost Beautifulness." Hanneh Hayyeh, who works as a laundress, is one of the foremothers of Sonya and Adele:

Mrs. Preston followed with keen delight Hanneh Hayyeh's every movement as she lifted the wash from the basket and spread it on the bed. Hanneh Hayyeh's rough, toil-worn hands lingered lovingly, caressingly over each garment... 'Hanneh! You're an artist! ... You do my laces and batistes as no one else ever has... as if you breathed part of your soul into it ... You are an artist-laundress (HH, 76).

The "beautifulness" of the title is Hanneh's kitchen, which she transforms into a shining white and golden artwork, using only paint and women's crafts. In her autobiographical sketch, she compares the process of writing fiction to housework: "Like the woman who makes the beds or sweeps the house, and lets the rest go, so I took hold of one idea at a time and pushed all the

other ideas out of my head" (C of L, 17). And in Bread Givers, she celebrates the artfulness and creativity of making a trousseau: "Nobody in all the villages around had a dowry like mine ... So full of down were my pillows that you could blow them away with a breath.. My curtains alone took me a whole year to knit... But the most beautiful thing of my dowry was my hand-crocheted tablecloth... All the colours of the rainbow were in that tablecloth." (BG, 32). Yeziarska's definition of art enables Sonya and Adele to find a valued role for themselves in relation to the community.

The woman artist has a second responsibility, which makes her art much more than a gift: she uncovers the beauty that is within her people, and gives it back to them. Like Muhmenkeh and like Gluckel of Hameln, she makes herself a collector and transmitter of culture, a reflector of the community and its spokeswoman. Adele takes on the role of collector in a literal sense; her coffeehouse becomes a center for Jewish culture, a gallery for East Side painters, a meeting place for poets and a hall for concerts of traditional Jewish music: "Again and again he played, and they kept clamouring for more. Ancient Hebrew melodies, folk tunes, chords that struck at the very root of their long-forgotten past. Weeping at a funeral, dancing at a wedding" (AB, 264). Adele's coffeehouse is a place where community is forged and affirmed.

As fiction allows, Yeziarska gives to her heroines solutions and resolutions which never were available to her in her own life. Throughout her career, Yeziarska remained torn between

her need to articulate herself and her desire to speak for others: "I am the mob at a mass meeting, shouting with their hands and stamping with their feet to their leader: 'Speech! Speech!' And I am also the bewildered leader struggling to say something and make myself heard" (C of L, 10). Ultimately, Yeziarska finds she must tell her own story over and over, a story about a woman trying to free herself, turning her life into a tradition from which she draws her stories and from within which she writes. At the end of her autobiography, Yeziarska makes peace with her aloneness: "A warm wave of happiness welled up in me... All that I could ever be, the glimpses of truth I reached for everywhere, was in myself" (RR, 220).

Yet the ultimate truth for her heroines is not the self alone. Yeziarska's writer-heroine Sophie Sapinsky comes to a very different point at the end of her journey than her creator does. In "My Own People" the conflict between the self and the community is embodied in a split of voices, the voice of the narrator, a proper, sometimes even scholarly voice, and the voice of her characters, a rich, idiomatic, and ungrammatical Jewish dialect: "Hanneh Breineh, in a friendly manner, settled herself on the sound end of the bed, and began her jeremiad. 'Yosef, my man, ain't no bread giver... One week he works and nine weeks he lays sick.'" (HH, 231). At the end of the story, Sophie is possessed by the second voice, the voice of Hanneh Breineh and her culture:

Sophie stole back to her room. She flung herself on the cot... For a long time she lay rigid,

clenched -- listening to the drumming of her heart like the sea against rock barriers. Presently the barriers burst. Something in her began pouring itself out. She felt for her pencil and paper -- and began to write... "Ach! At last it writes itself in me!" she whispered triumphantly. "It's not me -- it's their cries -- my own people -- crying in me!" (HH, 249)

The woman artist, possessed by and possessor of, a powerful communal voice, as powerful as the sea, becomes a seer, a sayer for others, an interpreter of her community to itself and to the world.

Two myths of personal success have dominated American culture: ^① the linear, progressive journey of Ben Franklin, in which success is defined as the movement from one point to a different, more desirable one; and alternatively, ^② the Odyssean journey, the model for Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, in which the hero leaves home to find himself, and then brings his new-found knowledge back to his point of origin.

These are clearly male models of success. "Succeeding" is what men are supposed to do, and to that end, adolescent boys are sent out in the world, educated, apprenticed, trained, with the support of father and community. Booker Washington is helped by his brother, encouraged by his mother, and sent away to school with the blessing of his community: "Perhaps the thing that touched and pleased me most...was the interest that many of the older people took...Some would give me a nickel ...or a handkerchief."²⁵ But success for a woman is staying where she is, learning not about herself, but about how to deny herself in the service of others. The adolescent girl who follows the boy's path out of the family, out of the community, loses that community, as Mary Antin loses her Jewish identity, and loses the family, as Polly Adler and Anzia Yezierska do.

The man who succeeds can sing the gospel of individuality, the praises of the self and making it on one's own. At the same time, he has the respect and admiration of community, the love and support of parents ^{and} siblings, even when they are left far behind, the love and friendship of wife and children.

The woman, whose success is attained truly on her own, finds herself completely alone, without love, support or acceptance: Polly Adler, alone in California without lover, husband, or child; Mary Antin, alone in a big house in Scarsdale, without children or husband; and Anzia Yezierska, ending alone and poor, living by herself in a single room.

The Odyssean journey is equally inappropriate as a woman's model of success. This journey is a training period for the hero, and the journey is expected of him, just as his return is expected. His training enables him to uphold the world as it is, as a hierarchy in which he is the ruler/king.

The autonomous adventure of the male individual depends upon the activity of another person, the female. This linear and progressive journey of mankind is supported by the cooperation or submission of womankind. Like Penelope, woman is ^{the} home, and must stay at home in order for Odysseus to begin and complete his journey. In the same way, women must raise children and run the home if the market is to sustain itself; and Frieda Antin and Bessie Smolinsky must submit if the Jewish patriarchy is to maintain itself in the new world. Anzia Yezierska understood the significance of the heroine's flight; the heroine's departure is the unravelling of the ill-woven fabric of society.

When a woman sets off on this journey, she does not expect to come back as ruler/queen, for in leaving, she has destroyed the structure of ruler and ruled. In her stories and novels,

Yeziarska begins to develop alternative structures for the society to whci she returns, relationships of mutuality and equality, new structures founded, not on power and submission, but on caring and responsibility. For new models of success, Yeziarska draws on her past, on Gluckel and Olive Schreiner, and on the imagined future. The final, and most striking difference between autobiography and fiction is demonstrated here. Yeziarska gives to her heroines the kind of success and wholeness which she could only envision; like Polly Adler and Mary Antin, Yeziarska must settle in her own life and autobiography for the flawed and badly fitting success bequeathed to her by male culture.

NOTES:

1. Gluckel,The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln,Harper and Brothers, New York,1932.
2. Georges Gusdorf,"Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in James Olney,Autobiography,30-31.
3. Charlotte Baum,Paula Hyman,Sonya Michel,The Jewish Woman in America, 8.
4. Patricia Spacks,"Reflecting Women,"34.
5. Mayse-bukh,frontpiece. Translated by Hyman and Bernard Bloom and Hannah Bloom Zeiger.
6. Polly Adler,A House is Not a Home, Rinehart and Company, New York,1953.
7. Mary Antin,The Promised Land,Houghton Mifflin,Boston,1912.
8. Anzia Yezierska,Red Ribbon on a White Horse,Charles Scribner's Sons,New York,1950.
9. Benjamin Franklin,The Autobiography of Ben Franklin,6.
10. Robert Sayre,"Autobiography and the Making of America," in James Olney,Autobiography,146-168.
11. Booker T. Washington,"Up From Slavery," in Three Negro Classics, 29-205.
12. Norman Podhoretz,Making It,xii.
13. Charlotte Baum,The Jewish Woman in America,220.
14. Norma Rosen,Green,12.
15. Boston Transcript,September 12,1925,2. Quoted in Book Review Digest,1925.
16. Antin did publish one earlier piece, a mystical essay,"The Soundless Trumpet"(Atlantic Monthly,May 1937) but it contained no political or cultural references.
17. Mary Antin,"House of the One Father," in Common Ground,41.
18. Anzia Yezierska,Hungry Hearts,Houghton Mifflin,1920.

NOTES: (cont.)

19. Anzia Yeziarska, Children of Loneliness, Funk and Wagnalls, 1923.
20. Anzia Yeziarska, Bread Givers, Doubleday, 1925.
21. Anzia Yeziarska, Salome of the Tenements, Boni and Liveright, 1923.
22. Anzia Yeziarska, Arrogant Beggar, Doubleday, 1927.
23. Nation, June 6, 1923, 300. Quoted in Book Review Digest, 1923.
24. Olive Schreiner, Dreams, Little, Brown, 1900.
25. Booker Washington, "Up From Slavery," 53.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Primary Sources-

1. Anonymous, Mayse-bukh, 1602. Translated Moses Gaster, 1947.
2. Adler, Polly, A House is Not a Home, Rinehart and Company, 1953.
3. Antin, Mary, "House of the One Father", Common Ground, 1940.
4. Antin, Mary, The Promised Land, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1912.
5. Franklin, Benjamin, The Autobiography of Ben Franklin, New American Library, 1961.
6. Gluckel, The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln, Harper and Brothers, 1932.
7. Goldman, Emma, Living My Life, Knopf, 1931.
8. Podhoretz, Norman, Making It, Random House, 1967.
9. Rosen, Norma, Green, 1967.
10. Roth, Henry, Call It Sleep, Cooper Square, 1934.
11. Schreiner, Olive, Dreams, Little Brown, Boston, 1900.
12. Washington, Booker, "Up From Slavery," in Three Negro Classics, Avon, 1965.
13. Yeziarska, Anzia, Arrogant Beggar, Doubleday, 1927.
14. Yeziarska, Anzia, Bread Givers, Doubleday, 1925. Republished Persea Books, 1975.
15. Yeziarska, Anzia, Children of Loneliness, Funk and Wagnalls, 1923.
16. Yeziarska, Anzia, Hungry Hearts, Grosset and Dunlop, Chicago, 1920.
17. Yeziarska, Anzia, Red Ribbon on a White Horse, Charles Scribner, 1950.
18. Yeziarska, Anzia, Salome of the Tenements, Boni and Liveright, 1923.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: (cont.)

Secondary Sources-

1. Baum, Charlotte, Hyman, Paula, Michel, Sonya, The Jewish Woman in America, New American Library, 1975.
- ② Gusdorf, Georges, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in Olney, James, Autobiography, Princeton University Press, 1980.
3. Howe, Irving, World of Our Fathers, Simon and Schuster, 1976.
4. Rosenfeld, Alvin, "Inventing the Jew," Midstream 21(1975), 54-67.
5. Roskies, David, "Yiddish Popular Literature and the Female Reader," Journal of Popular Culture, 1975, 852-858.
6. Sayre, Robert, "Autobiography and the Making of America," Olney, James, Autobiography, Princeton University Press, 1980.
7. Spacks, Patricia, "Reflecting Women," Yale Review 63(1973), 26-42.