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**“How Fares the Fairer Sex?”:
Genya Schearl of *Call It Sleep* and the Smolinsky Women of *Bread Givers***

Although many of those who enjoy Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep* generally laud the novel for its significant readerly attentions on its precocious protagonist David Schearl, it would be worthwhile to shine some more interpretive light on his mother, bringing her into sharper focus within the context of her fictional peers—such as some of the female immigrants in Anzia Yezierska’s *Bread Givers*. Indeed, we may discern some strikingly similar patterns between *Call It Sleep* and *Bread Givers* with regard to the subjugation of certain female characters to their fathers, spouses, lovers, or sons—and with regard to the psychological idiosyncrasies that surround this subjugation of women in both novels.

Yet before we proceed, it should be acknowledged that many have cited good reasons for refraining from reading Genya Schearl’s experiences alongside those of other fictional immigrant women in the Jewish American literary canon. Donald Weber notes that “*Call It Sleep* consciously resists the sentimentalized stereotypes found in much early twentieth-century Jewish American fiction and film” (Weber 83). Ruth R. Wissinger expresses a similar caveat about the uniqueness of Roth’s novel, registering her contention that

Genya Schearl

is not the typical immigrant mother, nor the embodiment of Jewish old-country virtues, but an outcast who had already overthrown the tradition and forfeited the trust of her community before leaving for America. [Albert] Schearl is likewise marked by the unprosecuted charge that he was implicated in the death of his father. Thus, banished by their families, David’s parents live like fugitives within the great immigrant community, a self-imprisoning family that is divided against itself by suspicion and guilt (278).

Weber cites some of this argument of Wisse's within his own discussion of *Call It Sleep*. Yet if we may extrapolate a bit from the logic of Weber's own claims about *Bread Givers*, we might begin to imagine that there could be a way to see past the sharp distinctions between the women's experiences in these two novels:

By critical consensus, *Bread Givers* stands out as Yeziarska's most important work, in part because in it she alters the site of conflict from the *ur*-story of gentile-ethnic relations to the matter of Jewish family life and religious authority in general, and in part because the story of Sara Smolinsky's ... journey out allows Yeziarska to survey and critique the various options—or lack of options—available for the second generation in the 1920s (38).

Even if Roth's characters generally defy more conventional "stereotypes," and even though Genya Schearl is not a second-generation immigrant like Yeziarska's protagonist Sara Smolinsky, and even if the narrative in *Call It Sleep* transpires a few years before the story in *Bread Givers*, the harsh "lack of options" and the domestic "conflict" that David's mother faces in her "Jewish family life" in America and Austria alike might nevertheless be said to constitute two of many points of correspondence that may be discerned between Genya and various Smolinsky women. Indeed, it is significant to observe that despite the above-mentioned distinctions between *Call It Sleep* and *Bread Givers*, and despite the admittedly arguable position that Roth's novel is not primarily a work about immigration or immigrants in the usual sense, there are nevertheless many intriguing correlations to be discerned between the details of Genya's experiences and those of the women in *Bread Givers*—especially Sara, Bessie, and Shenah Smolinsky.

In both *Call It Sleep* and *Bread Givers*, women's lives are negatively affected by males' selfish desire to fill what they perceive as an actual or potential void in the areas of wealth,

erudition, or family status (*yichus*).¹ In Yeziarska's novel, Sara's mother Shenah acquiesces to the selfish interests of her own father—that is, Sara's grandfather—a man who has wealth but feels self-conscious about his lack of “learning” (and the “honour” that would come with it), and is eager to fill that perceived void through Shenah's marriage match. Shenah describes this family history to her own daughters:

“When I was fourteen years old, the matchmakers from all the villages, far and near, began knocking on our doors, telling my father the rich men's sons that were crazy to marry themselves to me. But Father said, he got plenty of money himself. He wanted to buy himself honour in the family. He wanted only learning in a son-in-law. Not only could he give his daughter a big dowry, but he could promise his son-in-law twelve years' free board and he wouldn't have to do anything but sit in the synagogue and learn.

“When the matchmaker brought your father to the house the first time, so my father could look him over and hear him out his learning, they called me in to give a look on him, but I was so ashamed I ran out of the house. But my father and the matchmaker stayed all day and all night. And one after another your father chanted by heart Isaiah, Jeremiah, the songs of David, and the Book of Job.

“In the morning Father sent messengers to all the neighbors to come and eat with him cake and wine for his daughter's engagement that was to be the next day” (Yeziarska 31-32).

Although this match achieves the personal objective of Shenah's father, it turns out devastatingly for her when circumstances change. Shenah explains that when “the Tsar of Russia” wanted to draft her husband, the family lost much of its wealth in the effort to “buy him out of the army” (33). It is at this point that the foolishness of the father's insistence on “want[ing] only learning in a son-in-law” becomes painfully apparent to Shenah:

“Then, suddenly, my father died. He left us all his money. And your father tried to keep up his business, selling wheat and wine, while he was singing himself the Songs of Solomon. Maybe Solomon got himself rich first and then sang his Songs, but your father wanted to sing first and then attend to business. He was a smart salesman, only to sell things for less than they cost.... And when everything was gone from us, then our only hope was to come to America, where Father thought things cost nothing at all” (Yeziarska 33-34).

¹ It is delightful to note that the *Oxford English Dictionary* has entered “yichus,” defining it as “Honour, prestige, status,” and also noting its definitional origin in the Hebrew word for “pedigree.”

Thus, after acquiescing to the selfish interests of her own father, Shenah starts to experience what will become many years of suffering on account of her husband's "rigid and selfish devotion to faith," in the words of Weber (38).

Call It Sleep also depicts more than one situation in which a man's preoccupation with filling a socioeconomic void leads to a tragic situation in the realm of mate choice—and causes a woman to suffer. First, Genya suffers because of her gentile lover's selfish interests. Although Moisheh Smolinsky has almost nothing in common with Genya's paramour Ludwig, both are seen as desirable mates because of their erudition; in the case of Ludwig, this fact is revealed in Genya's conversation with her sister Bertha: "Even if he was educated,' [Bertha] exclaimed heatedly, 'and even if he was an organist, he was a goy!'" (196). The phrasing of this sentence clearly implies that Ludwig's status as "educated" and his occupation as "an organist" are recognized as facts which make a palpable contribution to his desirability as a mate. Like Shenah's father, Ludwig thinks strategically about marriage as an opportunity to fill the perceived void that exists for him—in this case, in the area of wealth. Like Shenah, Genya ultimately suffers deeply as a direct result of this strategic thinking. Genya recounts Ludwig's explanation to her of why he intends to marry another, "older" woman, supposedly for some merely temporary period:

"She's rich; she has a dowry. Her brother is a road-engineer, the best-known in Austria. He'll provide the rest. As for me, I'm poor as the dark. All I could ever hope to be is a threadbare organist in a village church. And I refuse. Do you understand? Surely you yourself wouldn't wish that fate on me!" (Roth 200).

Ludwig's claims about his fiancée's affluence are vividly and painfully confirmed for Genya sometime later:

"I was standing in the road one afternoon when I saw a yellow cart coming toward me. It had two yellow wheels—The kind the rich drove in those days. And I knew even before I could see who was driving, that it was the brother of his

betrothed. He drove in it often to where the men were working on the new road. I hid in the corn field nearby. It wasn't the brother-in-law this time, but Ludwig himself and the grand lady beside him" (Roth 203).

This is not the only instance in which such strategic thinking on the part of a male brings suffering to Genya. Indeed, she is also victimized in this way by her father—and by her mother, who simply goes along with him—who reacts to his daughter's failed interfaith romance in an utterly selfish way, displaying concern for no one but himself and for his other children.

Genya's father has a conspicuously self-concerned attitude about what he regards as her misdeed. This self-centeredness is exhibited in part through his conviction that his daughter's shameful infraction cannot but be a divinely-administered punishment for some sin *of his own*: "Suddenly, he fell into a chair and covered his face with his hands and began rocking back and forth. Alas! Alas! he moaned. Somewhere, in some way I have sinned. Somehow, somewhere, Him I have offended. Him! Else why does He visit me with anguish great as this?" (202).

Genya's father forgives her "[i]n his fashion"—in a way that keeps "his" concerns first in mind (203). He seems primarily interested in protecting the reputation of his family—especially the pedigree (or *yichus*) that may be enjoyed by his other daughters; even the potential imperilment of those other daughters' marriages is framed in his mind as a tragedy which *he* will face. Genya describes her memories of this scene:

"Now you may see what you have wrought my daughter, said mother, Was your heart of iron? Had you no pity on a Yiddish heart? No pity *on your father*? I wept—what else was there to do. Not only is she herself ruined, said father, Let *her* be! Let *her* die! But *me!* *Me!* And *my* poor, young daughters and the daughters to come. How shall *I* marry them? Who will marry them if this is known? And he was right. You would all of you have been on his hands forever. Well, *he* wished *himself* dead. Hush, said mother, none will speak; none will ever know. They will! They will, I say! Foulness like hers can never be hidden! And who knows, who knows, tomorrow another goy will find favor in her eyes. She's begun with goyim. Why should she stop? And he began shouting again. I tell you she'll bring *me* a 'Benkart' yet, shame *me* to the dust. How do you know there isn't one in that lewd belly already..." (Roth 202; emphasis added).

This conspicuously self-concerned attitude of Genya's father is eerily reminiscent not only of the mindset of Shenah Smolinsky's father, but also of the display of victimhood with which Moishe Smolinsky reacts to what he regards as Sara's sinful refusal to marry the well-heeled Max Goldstein: "He drew back like a deposed king who had been wounded and dishonoured. There was a hurt, a sorrow in his eyes that hurt me and made me weak with guilt against him" (Yeziarska 205). It is in a similarly self-centered spirit that Moishe reacts to Sara's decision to leave home: "'Is this your thanks for all your father did for you?' he pleaded.... 'Now, when I begin to have a little use from you, you want to run away and live for yourself?'" (137).

Genya acquiesces to her father's selfishly-framed wishes by marrying Albert Schearl, choosing him simply because her father wants her to marry a Jew (and presumably because he also wants her to avoid the danger of a scandalous out-of-wedlock pregnancy that could tarnish the social status of the rest of his unmarried daughters). As we see in the above passage, Genya even submits to her father's logic, at least in the context of her conversation with Bertha: "Who will marry them if this is known? And he was right. You would all of you have been on his hands forever" (202). The issue comes up even more explicitly later in this conversation: "'And you defended him before!' Aunt Bertha reproached her. 'Well, I wasn't entirely innocent'" (Roth 202). They continue:

"Did he finally forgive you?" Aunt Bertha asked.

"Oh, yes! In his fashion. He said, may God forgive you. If you ever marry a Jew I'll take it as a sign. You see I married one. It was about six months later I met Albert."

"I see," Aunt Bertha said. "That's how it played itself out?" (Roth 203)

The quick sequence of terse, efficient sentences ("If you ever marry a Jew I'll take it as a sign. You see I married one. It was about six months later I met Albert.") through which Genya traverses the distance between her father's statement and her marriage to Albert suggests a

straight line leading directly from that commanding statement to her obliging action: he had expressed his desire that she marry a Jew, and she had married one whom she met soon after.² This expressionless efficiency illustrates the notion, expressed not long before this moment in the conversation, that Genya's senses and her will had become somehow shriveled or enervated: "I shrank" (201). This emotional vacuity, to which she openly attests herself, is accentuated by the narrator's description of how, during her conversation about Ludwig, her "voice became curiously flat and monotonous as though she were enumerating a list of items all of equal importance" (202).

It is in a very similar spirit that Sara Smolinsky's eldest sister Bessie bows to their father's selfishly-framed will in matters of matrimony, in this case agreeing not to marry Berel Bernstein simply because Moishe Smolinsky prefers a son-in-law who would agree to support *him* as well as Bessie. Bernstein pleads with her: "What will you have by living with your father? All your life you'll have to give away your wages, and he'll suck out from you your last drop of blood like a leech...." But Bessie remains subservient to her father's will: "I couldn't leave my father. He needs me...." Sara witnesses the episode and records Bessie's words: "Bessie shook her head, and tears began coming down her cheeks. 'I know I'm a fool. But I cannot help it. I haven't the courage to live for myself. My own life is knocked out of me'" (Yeziarska 50).

There are some striking resemblances between this description of Bessie's submission to her father's will and Genya's description of her own acquiescence to her own father. The latter daughter recounts the experience to her sister Bertha: "Then nothing mattered. Suddenly nothing

² It is intriguing to note that the deeply unfortunate nature of Genya's and Shenah's respective marriages is expressed in uncannily similar terms in both novels: just as Aunt Bertha poses "her usual, disgusted query of why her sister had married such a lunatic," Sara Smolinsky asks her mother, "How could you have married such a crazy lunatic as Father?" (Roth 191; Yeziarska 130).

mattered. I can't tell you how, but all pain seemed to end. I shrank. I felt smaller suddenly than the meanest creature crawling on earth. Oh, humble, empty! His words fell on me now as on the empty air" (Roth 201). Genya continues to develop this motif of shrinking: "And so it went until my mother took me by the arm, and said, she will kneel before you Benjamin, she will weep at your feet, only forgive her—Shrunk, I say, less than nothing" (Roth 202). These emphases on apathy ("nothing mattered"), emptiness ("His words fell on me now as on the empty air"), and diminution ("I shrank") are all echoed in Bessie's words, and also in Sara's uncannily similar observations of the moment when her eldest sister digests the bitter fact that she has completely given in to their father's tyrannical will: "Bessie stood very still. She looked after Berel Bernstein till she couldn't see him any more. Then, very still, she walked into the house. She didn't say anything. But I could see her sink into herself as if all the life went out of her heart and she didn't care about anything any more" (Roth 201-202; Yeziarska 51). This sense of emotional vacuity or apathy is further expressed by Genya in the context of her attempts to rebuff what she interprets as a lascivious advance on the part of Albert's smarmy friend Luter:

"You don't seem to have any of the usual womanly instincts."
"Don't I? it seems to me that I keep pretty closely to the well-trodden path."
"Curiosity, for instance."
"I had already lost that even before my marriage" (45).

Such poignant articulations of listless resignation are common to Genya and Bessie alike, each of whom loses a promising romance and suffers a passionless life as a result of her father's self-centered wish.

Although Genya, Bessie, and Sara all suffer at the hands of the selfish males in their lives, we might say that—in purely sociological terms—David's mother is most comparable to Shenah Smolinsky, simply because she is of the generation of women who had become married mothers before their emigration to America. Genya is like Shenah in that she remains at home

all the time, and hence never achieves any significant comfort level with areas outside her own immediate neighborhood. Janet Handler Burstein describes the sociological role that is assumed by those like Shenah and Genya alike:

...married women withdrew from the marketplace to the home. Unfamiliar with the new language, they were insecure in streets beyond the neighborhood. They were also barred by the proprietary sexual protectiveness of their husbands from work in factories and shops—marketplaces of the new world that accelerated their children's and husband's cultural adaptations (20).

Although Burstein's entire book makes not one mention of Henry Roth or Genya Schearl, the above description applies perfectly to David's mother, especially in the scene where she ventures out to retrieve her lost son from the police station:

"T-tanks so—so viel!" she stammered.

"Oh, that's all right, lady. Glad to have a visitor once in a while. It's pretty quiet here."

"And lady," the helmeted one came up, "I'm thinkin' ye'd best put a tag on him, fer he sure had us up a tree with his Pother an' Body an' Powther! Now ye spell it bee—ay—"

"T'anks so viel!" she repeated.

"Oh!" He smiled crookedly, nodded. "Yer acquainted with it."

The other man rested the corner of a grin on his finger nail (106).

"Unfamiliar with the new language" and "insecure in streets beyond the neighborhood," Genya fits right into Burstein's description of the typical immigrant wife and mother (Burstein 20).

But there are also some striking differences between Genya Schearl and Shenah Smolinsky. The idealized past for which Shenah harbors nostalgic feelings is far less dramatic—and far less unconventional—than Genya's past and present. At least in terms of the complexity of her life and character, Genya seems far more comparable to Sara Smolinsky. Genya is more similar to Sara in that both lead lives which may be characterized by a complex intermingling of independence and acquiescence. Both think differently and act against the grain of the conventions which surround them, yet both also have a tendency to seek some sort of approval or

acceptance from their respective fathers; furthermore, both ultimately remain loyal wives to their husbands or fiancés, and loyal daughters to their fathers.

Unlike Bessie and the other Smolinsky sisters, Sara breaks free from many of the constraints and burdens that their father had been imposing on his daughters: in Weber's words, "Sara arrives as a proto-feminist, a young woman whose hard-won clarity of vision saves her from her sisters' unhappy matrimonial fates" (39). In contrast to Shenah, who remains under the thumb of her father, and then under the thumb of her husband, Sara aspires to the sort of unmediated relationship with the world that is enjoyed by her father by virtue of his maleness. Yet Sara does not break entirely free: her independence remains intermingled with certain significant elements of her mother's female subservience. Indeed, even within the fiery Sara there lurks a bit of Shenah. In the words of Burstein, "This daughter knows herself to be her father's child and thus a subject in the world beyond the family, but that knowledge is not secure until her father confirms it"; in this way, Sara ultimately proves to be not entirely unlike her mother, who perennially demonstrates a neediness for her husband's acknowledgment and attention (Burstein 30).

The closing scene of *Bread Givers*, in which Sara delightedly notices how "[t]he old dream look came back into [her father's] glowing eyes," seems not altogether discontinuous with the moment much earlier in the book when her mother had reveled in that same glow: "He shook her gently by the shoulder, and smiled down at her. At Father's touch Mother's sad face turned into smiles. His kind look was like the sun shining on her" (293, 11). In what Weber terms "[t]he problematic ending of *Bread Givers*—Sara's apparent capitulation to her father's authority," the effect of her contradictory internal impulses is illustrated by the closing image of her walking out of her father's home with Hugo Seelig, a man who has been selected by Sara

herself (an “independent woman choosing the man and career that she wants,” as Gay Wilentz puts it) without any of her father’s grotesque efforts at matchmaking—yet a man who nevertheless resembles her father as a figure of erudition and authority, and whose “grip tightened on [her] arm” as she feels what Weber describes as “the palpable ‘shadow’ of the past hovering over her”: “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” (Wilentz 38; Weber 40-41; Yezierska 297).

Considering the similarly complex intermingling of freethinking and acquiescence that characterizes Genya Schearl’s inner life, this woman seems far more comparable to Sara Smolinsky than to Shenah Smolinsky. In Genya’s case, this intermingling is a function of her atypically extensive experience of the wider world, as emblemized by her youthful penchant for “German Romances,” and by her passionate relationship with the church organist Ludwig (165). In a conversation with her sister Bertha, Genya reveals the extent to which she continues to keep that bygone sense of romance—and what Wisse terms “her yearning for love ‘somewhere else’”—buried deep within her interiority even in the midst of her uninspiring and acquiescent existence with Albert (Wisse 278):

“Ach! Pt! Do you believe in love?”

“I?” His mother smiled. “No.”

“No! Tell that to your grandmother there in her grave. You’ve read every German Romance in Austria. Do you know?” She looked at her sister as if a new thought had struck her. “I’ve never seen you read a book since I’ve been here.”

“Who has time even to read a paper?”

“They were bad for you.” Aunt Bertha continued after a moment of reflection. “They made you odd and made your thoughts odd. They gave you strange notions you shouldn’t have had.”

“So you’ve told me. And so did father—scores of times” (165).

Just a few moments later, Bertha succeeds at getting her sister to become just a bit less guarded about her innermost feelings:

“I know you’ve been in love, but when I ask you whether you believe in it, you answer no.”

“Very well, I do. Listening to you convinces me. But what has that to do with it?”

“You see? Now you do! You’re exactly what father said you were! You were gentle of heart, but only the devil understood you...” (166).

Like Sara Smolinsky, who rejects Max Goldstein, a younger and more overtly romance-minded Genya Schearl had once made a practice of rejecting even the most apparently reputable suitors that her father would present for her consideration: “Always a cloudy look! Not a suitor they brought you would you accept” (165).

Although it is obvious that Sara ultimately enjoys a significantly greater degree of outward freedom than Genya in America, it is significant to observe that both women continue to experience a perennial and complex intermingling of independence and acquiescence. Just as Sara ultimately emerges triumphant with a college degree even as she continually “fe[els] the shadow still there, over [her],” Genya avers that at least the core of her interiority remains fully intact despite its bombardment by such emotionally harrowing experiences: “You can’t imagine how awful I felt. I can hardly talk about it even yet, it afflicts me so. But fortunately no shadow ever broke a rock, and one can ask himself why he lives a thousand times and yet never die”; Sara’s and Genya’s analogous use of the word “shadow” elegantly accentuates this correspondence between them (Yeziarska 297; Roth 203).

Although she has clearly not ceased to “believe in” love, Genya stifles her sense of independence and romance, instead allowing herself to become dependent upon the males in her family in various ways (Roth 166). She becomes needy for her father’s forgiveness and acceptance, for her husband’s contentment with her (and for his contentment with a limited knowledge of her past), for her son’s affection—“Whom will you refresh with the icy lips the

water lent you?”—and even for her son’s protection: “With troubled eyes David looked first at Luter, then at the coin. Beneath the table a hand gently pressed his thigh. His mother! What did she want?” (18, 44). Wisse observes not only how Genya demonstrates her neediness for her son’s affection, “designating him as the mainstay of her love,” but also how she renders herself dependent upon him as a protector: “...held under suspicion by her husband, she often exploits David’s presence to save herself” (Wisse 278). Thus, like Sara Smolinsky, Genya’s interiority is no less complex than the contradiction between her demonstrated capacity to act or at least think independently on the one hand, and on the other hand, her neediness for males’ acceptance or protection.

Both Genya and Sara experience some very deep loneliness as a result of their unconventional independent-mindedness. Despite her acquiescence to her husband and her adherence to her father’s will, Genya continuously lives in a very individualized interior world of personal secrets and memories of bygone romance—including a secret about her son (a boy with “white German skin” whose hair “was browner when [he was] very young”) that ties him to that romance, and contributes to the oedipal nature of their interactions (41, 179). The outward expression of romantic love seems so incongruous within the context of Genya’s essentially passionless existence with Albert that when she discusses this emotion in conversation with Bertha, David senses the presence of something that is so intriguing precisely because of its utter divergence from anything he is accustomed to:

Her voice took on a throbbing richness now that David had never heard in it before. The very sound seemed to reverberate in his flesh sending pulse after pulse of a nameless, tingling excitement through his body. “Day grew worse than darkness. I welcomed the light only when some Polish townsman died—You recall the ... funeral procession that went through the town? Ludwig was always in the train, chanting the services. I could watch him then as he went by, follow with the others a little ways, stare at him unafraid, Love—” (197).

As Genya explains to her sister, this private inner world of secrets and memories is poignantly lonely for her: “‘There are only three people who know,’ she began with an effort. ‘Mother, father, myself of course, and—and another—in part’” (195). It is significant to observe that Sara Smolinsky also faces a deep aloneness, as a result of the experiences that cannot be shared with sisters who have remained within the bounds of conventionality that she has traversed: “The loneliness of my little room rose about me like a thick blackness, about to fall on me and crush me” (Yeziarska 186). Considering Genya alongside Sara, it is intriguing to note that in the case of each of these two women, her loneliness results somehow from her attempt to grasp at some sort of idealistically-informed universalistic sentiment—whether in the form of the purely romantic love that Genya seeks irrespective of religious difference, or in the form of the Americanization that is sought by Sara; it is in this vein that Wilentz observes that “Americanization ... is seen in [*Bread Givers*] as a denial of a community of women supporters” (37).

In the context of this discussion of loneliness, we might observe once again how the experiences of Sara’s sister Bessie seem strikingly comparable to Genya’s life. Although she has lost her early romance and now lives with a man for whom she harbors little if any passion, it is clear that Genya finds a unique contentment—and even solace—in the company of her son David. The oldest Smolinsky sister loses her relationship to Berl Bernstein and becomes disillusioned with romance, but then she stifles that side of herself in acquiescence to her father—and, later, to her husband Zalmon the fish peddler, for whom she feels no real love. But as in Genya’s world, Bessie’s loneliness is tempered by the presence of her son—in Bessie’s case, her stepson Benny: “The child seemed to put new life into her. A young, rosy look came into her gray face, as though all the frozen ice in her heart melted in the sunshine of a new

spring” (Yeziarska 107). Thus, in both novels, a son—or a stepson—constitutes a coping mechanism for a subjugated wife and mother.

Thus we see that there is much room for productive juxtaposition of the respective characters and experiences of Genya Schearl in *Call It Sleep* and of certain Smolinsky women in *Bread Givers*. Furthermore, the very fact that such rich comparisons may be drawn between Genya and more than one of the daughters in *Bread Givers* is itself uniquely illustrative not only of the specific ways in which David’s mother remains distinct from her sociological counterpart Shenah Smolinsky, but also of the specific ways in which “*Call It Sleep* consciously resists the sentimentalized stereotypes found in much early twentieth-century Jewish American fiction and film,” as Weber puts it (83). Indeed, the very fact that a married wife like Genya may be so extensively compared with the younger and unmarried Sara is itself illustrative of how unique it is for Genya to harbor such an unconventionally freethinking attitude even “before leaving for America,” in Wisse’s words (278). Whatever angle we may choose to adopt in examining the rich correspondences between Genya and the women of *Bread Givers*, it seems clear that David is not the only member of the Schearl family who deserves to bask in the reader’s interpretive spotlight.

A wonderful, nuanced, feminist reading of these two foundational texts. I kept a copy for my files.

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