

Shipping the Self to America: The Perils of Assimilation in Glatshteyn's and Shapiro's Immigration Novels

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Much of the critical evaluation of United States immigration novels has overlooked the multitude of works that are written in languages other than English. In fact, with the exception of a few recent and notable books, discussions of immigrant narratives rarely include any non-English writings.¹ By considering these overlooked works, the way we understand America shifts from the perspectives of those who have, linguistically, assimilated successfully to those whose narratives challenge the monolingualistic "melting pot." For multilingual authors, the decision to write in a native language is often a political one that lays a claim for the primacy of the ethnic voice over the Americanized one. Choosing to write of their experiences in native languages, these authors assert a resistance to linguistic assimilation that is often matched by highly critical portrayals of the United States. To read and analyze non-English immigration writings is to bring neglected voices into the American conversation on immigration and assimilation.

This essay will consider two Yiddish narratives written by authors who chose Yiddish over English: Lamed Shapiro's 1910 *Oyfn yam* (*On the Sea*) and Jacob Glatshteyn's 1938 *Ven Yash iz geforn* (*When Yash Went Forth*). Both authors were adept at English but made the decision to use the native language, I believe, as a means to communicate specifically with a Jewish, Yiddish-speaking audience.² The readership either still lived in Eastern Europe or had immigrated to the United States. The novels document the pressures Jews face, or will face, in the United States, and show ways for Jewish readers to retain their ethnic and religious

identity against these pressures. As is typical of other Yiddish immigration works, the hazards of assimilation are the focus, and Yiddish, a language resistant to assimilation, a tool to fight the pressures of Americanization.³

As Matthew Frye Jacobson has suggested, a question that comes to the forefront in non-English narratives is how much the author writes from the perspective of an emigrant rather than an immigrant (110). By remaining linguistically housed in the original language and writing for like language users, the narratives speak as much about the community and place from which the immigrant originates as about the specifics of Americanization. Therefore these narratives not only offer neglected perspectives on America, but also expand our understanding of the lands and communal systems of different immigrant groups.

In American Jewish immigration novels written in English, Americanization is frequently a hazardous process filled with struggles to find a secure identity that incorporates both Jewish and American cultural influences. The dilemmas of Americanization are played out in a variety of forms: struggles with parents who are representative of "Old World" values (See Yeziarska, Schneider, and Levin), disillusionment that economic success is not matched by personal fulfillment (See Cahan and Ornitz), and intermarriages with Christians that offer an outward sign of assimilation accompanied by family discord.⁴ Most Jewish works in English before the 1920s, though marked by ambivalence, were nevertheless fairly optimistic about the process of assimilation.⁵ In the late 1920s and 1930s, a shift occurred matching the rise of nativist pressures, and a number of writings appeared that challenged the American dream and the virtues of Americanization (see Fine, "American-Jewish"). Examples include Ludwig Lewisohn's 1928 novel *The Island Within*, which documents the discriminations faced by Jews in America, even those most overtly assimilated, and Michael Gold's 1930 proletarian novel, *Jews Without Money*, which portrays the abuse of poor immigrants on the Lower East Side by greedy capitalists and corrupt leaders.

Jewish immigration novels in English by Yiddish-speaking natives offer important insights into how linguistically assimilated immigrants understand the tensions of acclimation. Often written years after arriving, these novels frequently show how the process

of assimilation has been remembered and incorporated into the author's current identity. In contrast, those Jewish writers who knew English but chose to write in Yiddish fought to continue the Jewish language against pressure to Americanize. In an era marked by anti-immigration sentiment, they were stubbornly asserting their right to fight for their own cultural, literary, and linguistic sphere in America.

The transatlantic passage

I have chosen to focus on Shapiro's *Oyfn yam* and Glatshiteyn's *Ven Yash iz geforn*, among many Yiddish immigration narratives, because they both use the transatlantic journey as a motif of immigrant acculturation. Assimilation pressures and the "melting pot" are denoted by a ship where a group of individuals have all come together by accident (Glatshiteyn, *Ven Yash iz geforn* 129), much like a group of immigrants in the new land of America. In Lamed Shapiro's novella, a young male immigrant is on a transatlantic voyage to the United States. The novella ends with the narrator's arrival at Ellis Island. In contrast, Glatshiteyn's autobiographical novel takes place on a transatlantic voyage from America back to Poland. In Glatshiteyn's novel, during the journey, the autobiographical narrator Yash recounts his original trans-Atlantic passage from Poland to America where he felt extremely hopeful about America and his own future. By the time of his return voyage to Poland, the narrator has become a mature, acculturated American and is no longer a "greenhorn." The return voyage is a time to ruminate on what it has meant for him, as a Jew, to become an American. In Lamed Shapiro's work, the narrator hopes to find a way fully to root his identity in his East European childhood before facing the challenges of living in America. Where Shapiro's work concerns a young man beginning his process of Americanization, Glatshiteyn's work is about an Americanized Jew discovering how much the process of Americanization has cost him.

Although to embark on a lengthy transatlantic journey means to enter a realm where one is in a wild and new landscape, the ship is nevertheless basically a safe vessel holding a community of passengers united in a lengthy voyage across the ocean. A ship is thus a literary vehicle on which to create a closed reality in some ways

matching that of the shtetl at the very time that the shtetl was in decline as a literary setting (Roskies, *Against* 109-110). Much like the ideal "melting pot," and unlike the typical shtetl, the ship's closed world is inhabited by a people from a variety of ethnic, religious, and socio-economic groups.

The ship is an image of order in the disorder and "uncontrolled arena" of the ocean (Hutchinson 159). All the eye can see on a ship's deck is nature in its vast intensity. The voyage offers a strange combination, on the one hand, of feeling alone on a vast sea while also feeling enclosed in a setting from which there is no escape (Foulke 9). The simultaneous feelings of freedom and imprisonment are juxtaposed over the "built-in directionality and purpose" of the transatlantic journey (Foulke 10). The tensions between the societal and the natural, the individual and the communal, become central binaries which, as I will show, the narrators of *Oyfn yam* and *Ven yash iz geforn* seek to balance into a coherent and stable perspective.

In *Oyfn yam* and *Ven Yash iz geforn*, immigration and the journey are employed to explore larger issues of Jewish diaspora and displacement. The ocean setting is the place on which to negotiate one's understanding of one's dual Euro-American self as a preparation to step onto the "unrestful" shore where there will not be the time, or the poetic space of the sea, with which to delve so deeply into these issues. The sea, a symbol of the creative realm, is the ideal space in which to recreate one's self. For the Jewish immigrant in these works, life matches the ocean realm where they are in a state of permanent movement without arrival upon a firm shore. On the ocean, both immigrants learn that to live as fully integrated Americans they must maintain spiritual ties to the Jewish land of their childhood. The path of integration, like the path of the ship, begins in Europe and ends in America. Yet according to these authors, to be a mature American is to be ever in transit between the dual shores of America and Europe.

Although written in Yiddish, these works are emblematically American tales. To become American is not to land and "mature" into a new and fixed identity. Instead, I wish to assert, the novels present an alternate vision of Americanization. For these authors, to become a mature American is to create an identity that incorporates, and accepts, one's childhood memories as building blocks

for maturation. These authors are suggesting that by becoming too stable, too grounded, one represses the movement of memories. Shapiro and Glatshteyn are showing their Yiddish readers that the flux of transit is positive, symbolizing an acceptance of the full processes of life. In contrast in an assimilationist model, growth often only begins from the first steps on the new shore of America. The Jewish audience for whom they were specifically writing, I would suggest, understood that by likening Americanization to an ocean journey, the "landed" assimilationist model was replaced by one of the voyage, moving from pressures to repress one's Old Country identity to a fluid acceptance of the unique past of each immigrant. Moreover, a fluid vision of Americanization matches the linguistic resistance to assimilation, and the immigrant-audience focus, of writers who chose their native tongue over English.

Oyfn yam

Lamed Shapiro's novella *Oyfn yam* [*On the Sea*] was first published in Warsaw in 1910. *Oyfn yam* is about an unnamed narrator's voyage through the Atlantic to New York.⁶ The five sections of *Oyfn yam* are titled : nakht [night], shvaygn [silence], der ayz-barg [the iceberg], helshtern [bright star], and der reyakh fun land [the scent of land]. The ocean is the landscape for the existential crisis that occurs within the narrator during the journey, as he states in the closing of the novella: "Yam, o yam, oyf dir hot der mentsh badarft geborn gevorn" (229). [Ocean, oh ocean, on you we are reborn.] Throughout the collection, the ocean will symbolize a zone of creation where the narrator confronts the most elemental aspects of himself and experiences a rebirth from which he discovers how important his Jewish roots are. *Oyfn yam*, I wish to suggest, asserts the importance of maintaining a strong Jewish identity while Shapiro's choice to use Yiddish conveys a message of resistance to linguistic and social assimilation.

Lamed Shapiro (1878-1948) was an influential Yiddish writer who along with other "second-generation" Yiddish authors such as Jacob Glatshteyn, shifted the focus of Yiddish literature from the external descriptions of Jewish life (of the "first-generation" of Yiddish writers: Mendele Moycher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, and Y. L. Peretz), to the internal workings of the psyche. Steeped in

modern Russian and European literature, the "second-generation" of writers experimented with a variety of techniques, from stream-of-consciousness prose to expressionistic poetry.⁷ Shapiro developed the impressionist style in Yiddish literature, using symbolic vocabularies to express the internal reality of his characters. He mostly wrote short stories, highly polished and tightly written, in the vein of Chekhov (Howe and Greenberg 82).

Shapiro immigrated to the United States in 1905, returned to Europe in 1906, and settled permanently in the United States in 1909. The rest of Shapiro's life was marked by frequent moves, alcoholism, and depression.⁸ *Oyfn yam* (1910) was followed by a period when he published his best and best-known stories which utilized impressionistic techniques to convey the horrors of pogroms.⁹ V. Tsukerman points out that Shapiro would have likely continued writing in the romantic vein of *Oyfn yam* but for the constant pogroms of the period which forced Shapiro to focus his examinations on anti-Jewish violence (19).

As was typical of this generation of Yiddish writers, Shapiro combined genres to express the inner workings of the psyche. In *Oyfn yam* the romantic journey, where the journey is a means to externalize internal explorations of selfhood (Gifford 18), becomes the framework for expressing the alienation of the modern artist. To show this alienation, he presents a series of images of individuals searching for a personal voice: a fellow passenger telling the narrator about an artist who went crazy and began speaking to the sea (202-203); a young, female passenger, desperately seeking her own voice (206-207). Yet to appropriate fully a romantic perspective was difficult in an industrial age where the transatlantic journey took place on a steamer (Raban 17). Shapiro makes the ship a combination of both a sailboat and steamer to overcome the disjunction between the reality that a steamer ship is the boat of the immigrant and his desire to use a romantic narrative style necessitating a sailing ship: the steamer's foghorn sounds over the ship (196), and the wind makes sounds as it blows through the masts (194).

Shapiro leaves the direction of the ship unclear so the journey seems like an unspecified romantic quest. Only during the final section of the work does the reader discover that it is a ship of immigrants heading to Ellis Island (229). The journey and the narra-

tive tools used to express it represent a tale of modern alienation and the recovery of direction. At the same time, the novella also describes an individual male Jewish immigrant heading to America. Shapiro craftily manipulates the disjunction between the archetypal and the specific, the concrete and the poetic, to make the process of immigration a symbol for the search for meaning of the modern man or woman. This tie between the artist and the immigrant, both on unstable footing, is brought up at different points in the narrative: first when the narrator watches a ghost ship pass by in the middle of the night with a person standing on its deck, dressed like an immigrant, but who represents the confusing dualities of the artistic search for the meaning of life (196); later, during a stream of consciousness section, the suicide of a fellow immigrant passenger is tied to a story of a painter who has gone mad: "Ikh hob gekent a moler, flegt er moln dem yam, iz er meshuge gevorn. . . . gerufn hot men im Yanko Ravitsh" (203). [I knew an artist, he used to paint the ocean, he became crazy. . . . people called him Yanko Ravitsh.] Both the immigrant and the artist must face the madness that can arise in the search to find a secure foothold in life. The narrator, who is both an artist and an immigrant, thus stands between two worlds during the journey. As an immigrant he moves between the shores of Europe and America; as an artist his ocean journey is into the unconscious, dark reaches of the soul.

Before the ending specifies the voyage, the ship moves through a nameless ocean, going nowhere and everywhere (193). When the ship pulls into New York harbor, I believe the reader must re-think his or her understanding of the piece. It is not exclusively a consideration of art and madness and death, but a story about the processes of exile and migration of the Jews, where the ocean journey becomes the place for the immigrant to delve into his or her true identity and to discover the importance of his or her roots in the Old Country. Upon arrival in America, the pressure to assimilate is more easily resisted by an immigrant with a strong connection to his or her ethnic identity.

In the opening paragraph of *Oyfn yam*, the narrator states that the ocean is the formless setting for the dark forces of the world (and the unconscious) through which a symbolically lost ship creeps:

Khmarne, umetik oyfn yam. . . . es dukht zikh—nokh hot got di velt nit bashafn. Tsvishn dem koytikn himl un der vister oyberflakh funem vaser, oyf der gantser breyt funem veltlekh toyevoye, shvebt arum der gayst fun almekhtikn got—a shtrenger, umfrayndliekher un shverfarzorgter gayst. Umruik shlaydern zikh eyne oyf di tsveyte di tunklgedikhte veltn mit di groy shoymkep. Shver iz der umet fun fartroy-ertrn yam un groys iz zayn oyfregung. Mentshl, vuhin krikhstu! Mentshl, vuhin rukstu zikh! Oyf a shol fun a nisl hostu zikh gelozn iber di mekhtike vasern. Akh, du nebekh-nebekhl! (193)

A frothing ocean—as if God hadn't yet created the world. Between the overcast sky and the desolate plane of the water, in the full breadth of the chaos, hovered the spirit of almighty God—a strict, unfriendly and apprehensive spirit. The dark dense world restlessly slammed itself against the grey frothy heads: harsh is the gloom of the mournful sea and great is its agitation. Little man, what are you creeping towards? To what are you moving yourself? You've set off over the mighty waters in a transport as fragile as the shell of a nut. Oh, you poor wretch!

The fragile romantic ship moves over this stormy, unformed ocean, reflecting Genesis 1.2 and the typical association in literature with the sea as the stuff of creation (Bender 4). The immigrant is lost on the sea of creation, suggesting the existential anxiety inherent in a passage from a secure perspective to the void of creation. I wish to propose that Shapiro is using a setting where the stability of land is replaced by the flux of the ocean, and fluidity replaces fixedness, to focus on an individual's identity free from fixed social pressures as signified by landed life. Interestingly, in a setting free of Jewish communal pressures, the narrator will discover that his basic identity is rooted in his Jewish background.

In this lost landscape disconnected voices lose sight of "reality" as they enter the landscape of dreams about the ship. The disconnected voices represent the polyphonic landscape of the ship, and the "melting pot" model, where voices mingle and collide, and where away from nations and homes different accents are the mark of nationality, be they Scottish, Italian, or otherwise. Each voice marks a different national song, and for the narrator the song with the deepest resonance, his "beloved song," is the song tied to the ocean, of "Eicha," Lamentations:

Italyenishe gratsyeze melodyes, ongezap mit zunenshtaln un heyse blikn nakht-shvartse froyenoygn. "Got bless di ship." Iz mispalel der gezaltsener, mit yam vaser durkhgeveykter breyt mit a shtarker, nideriker shtim. . . . Un bislekhvayz vert di shtim veykher, di tener—nideriker un bahartster, un a tifer, farboregner tsiter shvindlt unter di verter: "Ikh bet dikh, kler-oyf mayne oreime brider". . . . o, mayn liber eykhe—ikh derken dikh! In fremde verter, in farshidnste melodyen shnaydstu zikh a veg, du eybiker, unshterblekher leytmotiv. (194-95)

Graceful Italian melodies absorbed with sunbeams and hot night-black women's eyes: "Got bless di ship" as the saltiness is worshiped and the ocean-water drenched wide with a strong, low voice. . . . And gradually the voice becomes gentler, the tones lower and bolder, and a deep, hidden shiver emanates below the words "I beg you, enlighten my poor brothers". . . . Oh, my beloved song of Lamentations—I recognize you! Through strange words and different melodies you cut yourself a road, you eternal, immortal leitmotiv.

In this "melting pot" of voices, the author asserts that a specific tune, or national voice, rises above the din: that of Jewish lamentation. Rather than becoming merged into the chorus, or fused into the melting pot, he seeks out his Jewish voice and clears a space for a specifically Jewish perspective. Moreover, I believe that by stressing the individual's connection to this Jewish voice, the author is subtly validating his choice of a Jewish voice, Yiddish, for his writing.

At the border between night and day, as the ship awakens, memories arise in the narrator as he recalls dawn in his childhood shtetl when the men rushed off to the morning prayers. While he stands on this vessel moving away, perhaps forever, from the place of his youth, at the same moment life in his shtetl continues as usual. The border between night and day matches the collision in him between his present, alone on the distant ocean, and the memories of his past. Yet no matter the distance he has covered in his journey, Shapiro's narrator admits that he cannot escape the memories of the shtetl he has left:

Tsu mayn oyer dergreykhn etlekhe klep fun unzer altn shames' hiltsernem hemerl, —klangen, vos zaynen geboyren gevorn, ven ikh bin nokh a kind geven, hobn mikh yorn lang arumgezikh't iber der velt un yetst hobn zey mikh ongeyogt in mitn broyzen'dn yam. (197)

Several strokes of our old beadle's wooden gavel reached my ears. Sounds that were born when I was just a child, for years had searched me out across the world, and now they caught up with me in the middle of the sparkling ocean.

His Jewish past is an unavoidable part of his current identity and is thus woven into his process of rebirth. While the immigrant journey is one of dangling on a chaotic void of creation, the narrator is specifying himself against the multitude of voices. Rather than allowing himself to become fused with the other national voices of the passengers surrounding him, the narrator has been forced to reconnect with his Jewish identity and now sees images of his Jewish childhood floating all around the ship (198).

As the day comes and brings to a close the "umruike nakht" [unrestful night] and its border reality, the clipped, disconnected voices transform into passengers. The day brings the building of borders: a conscious landscape, out of the vague, indefinite, borderless night as matched symbolically by the vague, indefinite, borderless ocean. After the long dark night of the soul, the day thus seems to herald rebirth and renewal: "Di velt-geshikhte hot zikh ongefangen oyfsnay fun same onhoyb" (199). [World history started anew from the very beginning.]

A fellow passenger, in the fresh morning moments after the chaotic night, chooses to commit suicide. A young male Yugoslavian jumps overboard, literally merging into the void of the ocean, and showing the readers the profound difficulties of the immigrant passage (200). By voiding himself, the suicide can be seen as representing the pressures on immigrants to void parts of their identity. This is suggested when the narrator ruminates over the tragedy of Yanko Ravitsh dying without anyone knowing anything about him other than that he is a young, male, Yugoslavian immigrant. Who he is as an individual is a "terrible secret" that they can not penetrate (201).

The final chapter of *Oyfn yam*, 'Der reyakh fun land' [the scent of land], marks the culmination of the narrator's quest for an identity and his realization that it must incorporate his shtetl past. The chapter opens with a feverish vision of a 'Feye' (fairy) arising out of the clouds:

A blas, gutmutik ponim iz aroyfgeshvumen oyfn himl, un a blase shayn hot zikh tsegosn ibern yam. (225)

A pale, good-natured face emerged in the sky and her pale beauty flowed out over the ocean.

The Feye is a positive amalgamation of women from the narrator's shtetl childhood whom he is pleased to meet again (225). The narrator asks the Feye what she has seen on the land of his childhood that he has now left. She offers him a series of three images of the past, each reflecting a state of extreme unrest where the participants do not know if the next moment will bring extreme disappointment and heartache or improvement of their condition: a baby crying for its mother, a young couple walking along and not speaking to each other after a lovers' quarrel, and an old man tenderly watching his sick daughter sleep.

Each image is a painful moment of awaiting a change for better or worse. And each vision is a peak moment in three stages of life: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. In the first, childhood, the help will (or will not) come from a parent; in the second, from a lover; and in the third, from one's child. The three moments of "unrest" reflect on the narrator's present state, where he too stands at a point between his past in Europe and his future in America. After presenting each image, the Feye asks the narrator whether he can relate to the pain in each image. She phrases the question by asking if he is child enough (the first image), young enough (the second), or old enough (the third) to feel the anguish of those in the images. In other words, does he still have a deep enough connection with his own past and the stages of his life to relate to those suffering the same hardships of the life cycle? This question is particularly important for an emigrant leaving the Old World, for it points to the necessity of holding on to one's past in the move to recreate oneself in the New World.

Throughout the journey the narrator has been searching to understand what his self is.¹⁰ He realizes now that the sound, memories, and stories from his past are the basic stuff of selfhood, as he states: "mayses, mayses mayn ikh (227)" [stories, stories my I]. With this moment of realization, he can now finally arrive at the new land. He has safely undergone the ocean journey and learned that on the ocean, like on the new shore of America, while there

are possibilities to recreate oneself fully, one must nevertheless keep hold of an identity rooted in the Jewish past. By not doing this, the self can literally disappear, as happened with the fellow immigrant Yanko Ravitsh. For him, and the Jewish readership whom Shapiro was specifically addressing, the Jewish cultural memory is the locale for a solid identity. For instance, he asserts that he will never forget the night in which the memories of the shtetl arose in him while standing on deck (198), and he states that "all of life is nothing more than my father's long (Jewish) coat" (225). By writing the book in Yiddish, moreover, Shapiro uses a central tool of Jewish cultural identity, thus linguistically building a foundation for himself and his readers to resist the forces of assimilation.

As the ship pulls into New York harbor, the "unrestful" wind of land sweeps over the ship: "In der luft hot arumgeshvebt der umruiker, basheftigter gayst fun land" (229). [In the air hovered the restless spirit of land.] The passengers are awakening from the seascape onto the harsh reality of the landed world. Moving from the poetic/symbolic realm into the real brings profound anxiety. Suddenly, out of the unrest arises another vision of a massive, hovering woman (like the Feye). However, unlike the first vision of the Feye which was imaginary, this vision is real: it is the Statue of Liberty: "A rizike froyenfigur mit an oyfgehoybner hant hot zikh opgetseykhnt links" (229). [A giant figure of a woman with an up-raised hand drawn leftward.] Lady Liberty is now to be met by an integrated self that arose from the long dark night of the sea passage. As he states in the closing words, the ocean is the realm in which he has become reborn (229).

The journey not only reveals an artist seeking his voice, but an immigrant seeking to order his inner world before stepping onto the unrestful shore. Taken as a whole, *Oyfn yam* expresses the profound uncertainty of the immigrant during the voyage to America and offers to Yiddish readers a way to resist the pressures they will undergo when they land. Yet rather than expressing this in straightforward, autobiographical discourse, Shapiro uses a romantic and symbolic vocabulary to express the deep unrest caused in the soul by the transatlantic passage. By turning a tale of immigration into a romantic journey, Shapiro shows that this basic event of Jewish life could be the stuff of high art, a representation of what immi-

grants will face, and a lesson about how they can overcome the anxiety of becoming Americans.

Ven Yash iz geforn

Jacob Glatsheteyn's 1938 *Ven Yash iz geforn* [*When Yash Went Forth*], suggests the same lesson: to live as a fully integrated American one must reckon with one's past, rather than reject it as so many Jewish immigrants were want to do in their effort to stop being "greenhorns" (195).

Jacob Glatsheteyn (1896-1971) was at the forefront of modern Yiddish poetry in America.¹¹ He was a leader of the *Inzikhistn* [Introspectivist] movement, which sought to create a "consciously modernist poetics" that would express the junction between the individual in a modern urban world and his or her internal, chaotic reality (Harshav and Harshav 36). Glatsheteyn and the *Inzikhistn* group were dedicated to unsentimental expressions of modern reality, using experimental, harsh, free verse poetry to show the kaleidoscopic nature of the modern world. Members of the movement were highly influenced by European modernist movements, from Futurism to Expressionism (Harshav, *Meaning* 175-86).

*Ven Yash iz geforn*¹² is an autobiographical account of the poet's 1934 return to his hometown, Lublin, Poland, twenty years after first traveling to America. The purpose of the trip is to visit his beloved mother who has fallen very ill. The bulk of the novel describes the voyage to Europe, with short sections in France and during the train ride through Germany to Poland. The account ends as the train arrives in Lublin, Poland. The moment of reunion with the mother (or *motherland*) is omitted to stress that the focus of the book is the journey, rather than the arrival, and to show that no return home is possible for a Jew in antisemitic Poland.¹³ In this novel, the modernist ethos with which Glatsheteyn was so involved in the 1910s and 1920s in the *Inzikhistn* group confronts the challenge of Jewish history. Traveling to and through fascist Europe, Glatsheteyn comes to understand that the internationalist, modernist ethos he embraces is built on tenets that exclude Jewish specificity.¹⁴

During the journey, the narrator faces similar questions as in *Oyfn yam* about how to straddle the two worlds, Europe and America, that represent his past and his future. As with *Oyfn yam*, a ship

is the setting within which to express the state of transition of the immigrant. However, where Shapiro's journey is a romantic quest in the framework of a consideration of modernist exile, Glatshiteyn's journey employs modernist narrative techniques to construct a polyphonic vision of Jewish selfhood (Garrett 207-23). In both works the trip marks a rite of passage for the narrator as he learns the importance of asserting the primacy of a Jewish identity over an Americanized one. And again, in addressing a specifically Jewish readership, the content of the writing and the language used express the importance of resisting assimilation.

In his original introduction to *Ven Yash iz geforn* (*In Zikh* 179-80), Glatshiteyn asserts that his novel is a counter-model to the type of immigrant autobiography exemplified by Louis Adamic's 1934, popular, pro-American *The Native's Return: An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia and Discovers His Old Country*. Glatshiteyn states that his journey and writing differ from Adamic's in three ways: no grand reception awaits him upon his return; descriptions of shtetl life will not seem exotic to his readers since it had already been so thoroughly described by other writers, as will Adamic's descriptions of Yugoslavia; and most importantly, Glatshiteyn was never tied to Poland, as Adamic was to Yugoslavia. Glatshiteyn's return is not that of a native son, but that of a Jewish outsider. Though born in Poland, as a Jew he was never fully accepted into the culture. His work exemplifies the strange, problematic return to a home that was never really a home because he was on the Jewish margin.¹⁵

Ven Yash iz geforn challenges idealized notions of return, reconnection, and the synthesis of the Old World with the New. In this novel, the return home is not a return to a place, but to being placed as the Jewish Other. Instead of discovering a home, Glatshiteyn discovers a new concept of selfhood that he would later liken to the hidden status of the Marrano.¹⁶ Years after the trip Glatshiteyn would assert: "Historically Jews have lived a double life, like Marranos, even in the freest countries. It's a matter only of sensitivity. . . . But we are all Marranos. Even in America we are Marranos" ("Conversation" 44-45). The self as Marrano not only means a homeless (or nation-less) self, but also a self in which permanent fissures exist between the public and the private. This fissure is expressed by Glatshiteyn's use of a polyphonic nar-

rative style in which the autobiographical voice is muted while other voices predominate.

Ven yash iz geforn, like *Oyfn yam*, takes place entirely in the public realm in encounters between characters. This puts the narrative focus on the external pressures that influence individuals. Further, I would assert that the public setting reflects both Shapiro's and Glatshiteyn's interest in the external assimilationist pressures that immigrants face. Moreover, a polyphonic style resists univocal concepts of selfhood, which posit the self as knowable and unified. Instead, the self as Marrano is the meeting point of a constantly shifting relationship between one's private reality and how one is defined as a Jew by the ever-changing outside world. For Glatshiteyn, to discover that in America he is a Marrano means that in America he is pressured to hide his true Jewish identity. To become American means to emulate the Protestant Anglo-Saxon model, rather than to be Jewish and American. The voyage expresses Glatshiteyn's newfound conception of what Americanization really means for Jewish immigrants.

The voyage to Europe is a symbolic and literal journey of selfhood between the dual locales of the United States and Europe. For each of the characters whom the narrator encounters and describes the ship is a zone for self-metamorphoses and the place for examinations of how identities are constructed since the passengers are seemingly free from their backgrounds and can recreate themselves (10). On the ship, as in America, there is seemingly no dominant voice or national type: as Yash sarcastically states, it is an "international paradise" (37). Each person is a microcosm of self and nation. I believe the ship can thus be seen as a mini-America in the idealized sense of a pluralistic melting pot. However, as the narrator discovers through his journey, on the ship, as on the American shore, while in the guise of a pluralistic environment, certain cultures predominate while other cultures are suppressed. For Glatshiteyn, Jews are pressured to hide their unique cultural traits in order to be accepted into the broader culture.

The contrast between the narrator's current understanding of America and his youthful optimism is manifested in a flashback to his immigration journey from Poland to America (148-72). The memory serves to build a dichotomy between the current trip to a Europe marked by fascism and his more optimistic youthful jour-

ney. It also spotlights the naivete of a youthful Jewish man, filled with unbridled hope about the Golden Land, which upon arrival in America seems ridiculously optimistic: his first moments in America are filled with heartbreak as he discovers that the uncle who was supposed to meet him has not shown up. He is suddenly and totally alone (171). According to Glatshteyn, this optimism was the catalyst for many Jewish immigrants to assimilate completely. Yash thus tells an Amsterdam Jew, who believes adamantly that Jews should assimilate into the cultures where they live, that when they both look in the mirror, they are both still Jews (47). In response, the passenger states that Holland Jews are firstly Dutch, secondly Jews (48). The extremely negative portrayal of the self-hating Holland Jew, I believe, expresses Yash's awakening belief that assimilation is a deluded, self-denying form of growth.

The journey teaches Yash that America offers unique difficulties for Jews because it impels many to hide or repress their Jewishness in the idealistic hope that they will be allowed to assimilate equally with other immigrant groups. One after another, the passengers demonstrate that even when they assimilate, they still meet with discrimination. For example, Yash describes his encounter with a young male passenger:

Er dertseylt mir az der tate zayner iz a doktor in a kleyn shtetl in West Virginia. A mol hot er gemakht gor a sheyn lebn, ober haynt iz shoyt vayt nisht vi a mol. Hinter dem tatns pleytses geyt on a shtiler boykot, di merste kristn geyen tsum tsveytn doktor in shtetl, oykh a krist.

(143)

He told me that his father is a doctor in a small town in West Virginia. In the past his father was able to make a good living, but now things weren't what they used to be. You see, behind his back, his father was undergoing a kind of boycott, in which the majority of the residents would only go to the other doctor in the town, who, like them, was a Christian.

Where the other passengers have dual European/American selves, such as the woman who in America is a low-paid teacher but every summer comes to Paris to be a bohemian (101), the Jewish passengers do not have the freedom of choosing a self.

Once the ship lands in Europe, Yash boards a train to Lublin, Poland. Unfortunately, the train first passes through Hitler's Germany. In Yash's memory of his journey to America, everything was through the forward-looking, idealistic perspective of a young immigrant. Now that he has returned to Europe, Jewish travel means confronting terror. The ship was the vessel of redemption; the train the vessel of fear. No wonder that on the European train among Jewish passengers laughter and joy are wholly lacking (183), a stark contrast to the voyage to America when he was surrounded by happy Jewish passengers who looked optimistically toward their future (171).

Yet although America has offered Jews physical safety, nevertheless there are still many problems generated from antisemitism and the pressures of assimilation. In one of the most simple yet deep statements on Jewish travel, Glatshteyn writes:

Vuhin fort a yid? Keyn Poyln, keyn Rumanye. Vos? Keyn Tshekholavakay. . . keyn. . . keyn. . . keyn. (185)

Whither travels a Jew? To Poland, to Romania. What? To Czechoslovakia! To. . . to. . . to.

Yash has come to believe that for Jewish travelers in a state of permanent exile, travel is not from a home in point A to a place in point B, but a permanent state of passage through different locales of flux. This statement matches the title of the book *Ven Yash iz geforn* [*When Yash Went Forth*] in that his journey exemplifies an archetypal Jewish journey: ever moving while never truly arriving. Moreover, as Yash will come to learn during the course of his journey, when he is forced over and over again to acknowledge widespread American antisemitism, even in America he has not fully arrived.

While on the ship, the narrator seeks out his real brothers: not the idealistic internationalists, but the hidden Jews throughout the ship. Yash's search for fellow Jewish passengers begins with the arrival of a newspaper with a report on Hitler. Before the newspaper's arrival, Yash seems to be like most of the other passengers in second class. With the arrival of the newspaper, Yash's "Jewishness" is awakened:

In dem dozikh internatsyonaln gan-eydn oyf der shif iz di Hitler-nays geven dos ershte vos hot mir derlangt dem patsh iber mayn yidish-kayt. . . Ikh hob derfilt eynzam. Ikh hob zikh gefilt baleydikt far der ersht-klasiker nays, vos geyt in nivets un vos vert oyfgenumen azoy kalt un glaykhgiltik. Ikh hob gezukht a "varim yidish harts" vos zol mir helft lakhn, veynen, ober alts mit dem yidishn trop. Un khotsh der bakser hot zikh baklogt oyf di yidishe besteds, vos bahaltn zeyer yidishkeyt, hob ikh, efsheer unter dem druk fun di Hitler nays, onge-hoybn zen etlekhe yidn. Es kon zayn az zey hobn tsulib der zelibiker urzakh genumen aroyskrikhn fun bahaltenishn un zukhn kompanye.

(37-38)

In the international "eden" of the ship, the news about Hitler was the first thing to deliver an awakening slap to my Jewishness. I felt lonely. I felt myself hurt by the news that went uncommented on, and that was received so unemotionally and indifferently. I searched for a "warm Jewish soul" that would help me to laugh or cry—as long as it was with a Jewish stress. And although the Boxer had complained about the "Jewish bastards" that hide their Jewishness, under the pressure of the Hitler news I began to see a variety of Jews. It could be that for the same reason as my own, they too began to creep out of their hiding places and seek out company.

For the non-Jews, the voyage is a bridge to a Europe that they will tour (a group of musicians), pass the summer in (a Wisconsin teacher who takes an annual summer break in Paris), visit the "old country" (a Polish-American passenger), or return "home" (a group of Soviet students who spent time studying in the United States).¹⁷ For the Jewish passengers, the ocean trip marks a bridge to a different Europe. For them, Europe signifies the ascendancy of Hitler that they can either actively choose to ignore, like an assimilated Amsterdam Jew, or approach nervously. The only exception to the non-Jew's general lack of interest in the rise of Hitler is an American-born German doctor who forcefully challenges the antisemitism of an American fellow passenger and argues passionately against antisemitism of all types (133). The image of the tolerant German-American, a sharp contrast to the German Yash will meet later on the train who does the "heil Hitler" in front of him, is a reminder that all Germans can and should stand up to antisemitism. Of course, it is easier for the German-American to dis-

avow antisemitism on the ship than it will be for him to do in Nazi Germany.

Europe will force the American Jews to focus on their Jewishness, an aspect of themselves many have unsuccessfully sought to sublimate in America.¹⁸ For the Jewish passengers, the freedom to be whoever they want, to be “new men,” is thus not open to them because, once off of the international capsule of the ship and in the national spaces of fascist Germany and antisemitic Poland, their identities are defined from the outside as the Jewish Others. However, as Yash fully grasps during the train ride through Germany when Nazi youth enter the train (208), unlike many other ethnic minorities, assimilated Jews can hide their Jewishness, as many on the ship do. He can have two identities: a Jew and an American. It is his ability to hide his Jewishness that brings to Yash’s attention the false role he has constructed as a free American. This becomes clear when his interest shifts from pretending to be a bourgeois, assimilated American (12) to gaining a newfound and total respect for a Jewish passenger who does not try to hide his Jewishness (38). The encounter with the dignified Jewish passenger reminds Yash of the quiet Sabbaths he spent with his parents in Poland and allows him to reconnect with suppressed memories of his childhood.

The potential to hide one’s Jewishness and be like a Marrano becomes for Yash/Glatshteyn a central aspect of what it means to be a Jewish American. The false comfort Glatshteyn had previously gained in America based on his equal status with all other people was an illusion. As soon as he leaves American soil, the notion of equality for all is challenged (181-82). However, I would suggest that the problems of American Jews are clearly of a different sort than other American minorities such as African Americans and Chinese-Americans. Not only is the racial hatred toward African Americans and Asians generally more overt, and certainly more violent, but assimilated American Jews have an option not open to these other racial minorities: they can pass themselves off as other assimilated immigrant groups.¹⁹ *Ven Yash iz geforn* thus subtly establishes for the reader a specific construct of the Jewish immigrant: one who encounters discrimination when seen as a Jew, but one who can choose to hide his/her true ethnicity. The possibil-

ity of hiding one's true self is the special mark of what it means to be a Jew and offers its own unique problems.

The trip to Lublin has decentered the American from his role as spectator into the role of participant in the multi-voiced dialogue of the journey. He has moved from an outsider into an awareness of his positioning as the Other. Where in America there was the choice to hide his Jewishness in an attempt to assimilate, in Germany there is no real choice: he must hide who he is to protect himself from physical harm. According to Glatshteyn, for the Jewish passenger there is no arrival home and the journey is everything since antisemitism has marked every locale as a point on an endless journey (183). Even in America, where he thought he had finally arrived, during the trip he comes to understand how deeply antisemitism is a part of the American scene.

Glatshteyn's use of a dual motif of travel, the ship and the train, serves as a sophisticated means to take to task standard notions of home, travel, and return. In the novel, Glatshteyn uses the contrast between ship and train travel to render a Jewish image of homecoming in which "homecoming" means not a return to a homeland, since he perceives Jews to be excluded from nationalistic longings (206), but to an acceptance of one's deep, inextricable, intercontinental Jewish self. The novel challenges outright the American immigration model of successful assimilation. Glatshteyn had thought he had become a full American and was unaware of how much it had actually cost him. By riding on the ship, and likening the pluralistic guise of the ship to American culture, he realizes that pluralism does not allow for Jewishness. He has been wearing a mask in America that has sublimated his true self, history, and culture (195).

If in America, as on the ship, each immigrant is a microcosm of a culture, then his culture is firmly Jewish. By writing in Yiddish, the novel is making a space in America for a specifically Jewish voice. By so doing, the credo of internationalism, so popular at the time, like the pressure to Americanize, is shown to be a construct generated by the powerful as against the culturally weaker. The ideology of equality and liberty for all does not include Jews as true "brothers and sisters" and so is an ideology particularly hypocritical for Jews to embrace. He sarcastically describes a Communist Jew:

Bin ikh vider mekane mayn bafraytn bruder un ikh vil trinken mit im tsuzamen a tost far dem nayem yidn, vos ruft zikh nisht op krenklakh in moskve, ven men shlogt yidn in alzhirye. A tost for dem nayem yidn! (105-106)

I am in turn jealous of my liberated brother, and I wish to join him in a toast to our "new Jews," who don't scream blue murder in Moscow when the Jews in Algeria are being beaten up. A toast for the "new Jews."

Instead of the American or Russian "new man," equally derided, Glatshiteyn seeks to make a place for the marginalized and oppressed.

Conclusion

In these Yiddish novels, the reader is given tools of resistance and shown the dangers of assimilation that wipes out the ethnic identity of the immigrant. In American immigration novels of the last twenty years the trend has been to challenge the model of assimilation and to show the hazards of Americanization.²⁰ These Yiddish novels of the first part of the century are neglected by history's tendency to characterize the period as assimilationist (Fine, "In the Beginning" 15-34). And, in English, it was. However, much earlier than is generally understood, writers were creating works critiquing the assimilationist model. Yet unfortunately by only speaking to a narrow audience, the works have all but disappeared from the literary history of American immigration. This essay has sought to bring those narratives into the conversation of Americanization and to suggest that, as literary critics, there are probably numerous other works by immigrants, written in a variety of original languages, that we have overlooked because the authors did not speak the language of assimilation.

Notes

1. See Sollors and Knippling.

2. When Shapiro wrote *Oyfn yam* he was fluent enough in English to translate writers such as Dickens, but nevertheless chose to continue composing in Yiddish (Leviant ix-xvii).

Glatshsteyn was a leading political Yiddishist who throughout his career asserted the aesthetic and cultural importance of Jewish American authors continuing to write in Yiddish. Late in his career Glatshsteyn summed up his view of the mixed blessing of only writing in Yiddish in his poem "Di freyd fun yidishn vort" ("The Joy of the Yiddish Word") from his 1961 book *The Joy of the Yiddish Word*:

Oh, let me through to the joy of the Yiddish word.
Give me whole, full days.
Tie me to it, weave me in,
Strip me of all vanities.
Send crows to feed me, bestow crumbs on me,
A leaking roof and a hard bed.
But give me whole, full days,
Let me not forget for a moment
The Yiddish Word. (Harshav, *American Yiddish* 364-65)

3. See Asch, Halpern, Raboy, and Shapiro (*Nuyorkish*).

4. Immigrant works that focus on intermarriage include the paradigmatically idealistic image of intermarriage in Zangwill. Novels that use intermarriage to point out the problems of assimilation include Tobenkin, Brinig, and Ferber. For a fine consideration of how marriage to a Christian woman became a means to mark out the hazards and triumphs of assimilation, see Jahar.

5. Fine discusses this. For a brief consideration of how anti-immigrant sentiment influenced immigrant narratives in general, see Payant (xiii-xxvii). For a discussion of the history of American nativism, see Daniels (265-84). For a collection of documents and essays on the anti-immigrant sentiment of the nativist years, see Gjerde (133-68).

6. There is no English translation; all the translations are my own.

7. Harshav's *Language* discusses the shift in Jewish literature after the pogroms of the 1880s and the move towards experimental, modernist prose of the "second generation." See in particular Part I. For a further, fine consideration of the "second generation" of writers, see Harshav's *Meaning* (139-86).

8. Roskies composed a thorough biography of Shapiro in the *Leksikon* (533-36). Also see Leviant and Frank. In Wolf (67-80), there is a bibliography of Shapiro's works and criticism that may be useful for those interested in researching Shapiro.

9. *The Jewish Government and Other Stories* includes many of his pogrom stories such as "The Kiss" and "The Cross." For an excellent analysis of Shapiro's pogrom stories, see Novershtern.

10. Examples include his discussion of the unrestful ways of weak humans (195) and attempts to come to terms with the shortness of human life versus the eternity of the sea (212-13).

11. For the most thorough biographical information in English and an excellent bibliography of Glatsheteyn's writings, see Hadda. Additional biographical information on Glatsheteyn in English can be found in Harshav (*American Yiddish* 204-206). There is also a fairly thorough biographical citation in *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* ("Jacob Glatsheteyn"). For biographical information in Yiddish see the *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literature* (Diamant). Recent important discussion of the novel includes Miron's epilogue to his translation of *Ven Yash iz geforn* into Hebrew, titled *KesheYash nasa*. For a general discussion of the *Inzikhistn* with some detailed focus on Glatsheteyn, see Harshav (*Meaning* 175-86).

For an excellent, comprehensive collection of Glatsheteyn's poetry translated into English, see Harshav and Harshav (208-385). Other translations include *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*, (Howe 425-77) and *Selected Poems of Yankev Glatsheteyn*, ed. Fein.

For a consideration of the autobiographical aspects of *Ven Yash iz geforn*, see Schwarz (162-223).

12. The English translation, *Homeward Bound*, leaves out nearly all the sections which relate antisemitic encounters, as well as large portions of the novel. All the translations into English will thus be my own.

13. Glatsheteyn followed *Ven Yash iz geforn* with *Ven Yash iz gekumen*, which describes Glatsheteyn's stay in a Polish sanatorium following the burial of his mother. The English translation, *Homecoming at Twilight*, does not do full justice to the Yiddish original.

14. For a compelling discussion of how Glatsheteyn challenged the doctrines of international modernism during the 1930s, see Wisse (137-43).

15. While Adamic's accounts of the Yugoslavian peasants he meets on his return are highly sentimental, he does explicitly show the brutal regime of the government. Yet his portrayals of the government serve throughout as a means to contrast how wonderful America is compared to Yugoslavia, which is in the grips of a totalitarian regime.

16. Marrano is a word (that originally had an extremely negative connotation) to describe the Jews of Spain in the late fifteenth century who outwardly converted to Christianity, but continued to secretly practice their Judaism. The term is also used for the descendants of converts living outside Spain.

17. Clifford labels this type of travel as the "good travel" that is so prevalent in European and American literature. Overlooked, however, tend to be the "other" travelers such as servants.

18. For an excellent consideration on the dual selfhood of American Jews, and how their perceived ability to hide their Jewishness became an excuse for American antisemitism, see Itzkovitz. Also, for an examination of how many American Jews have internalized the need to "hide" their Jewishness and the often extreme actions to which this may lead, see Gilman.

19. An example of a perceived difference between Jews and blacks from the perspective of a black man is found in the following passage written originally in the late 1950s by Frantz Fanon: "All the same, the Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics he can sometimes go unnoticed. . . . The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance.

"I move slowly in the world, accustomed not to seek any longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro!" (325).

20. For a fine anthology that shows how recent immigrants have been more critical of America, see Brown and Ling. For the demarcation between more recent immigration novels critical of America and earlier ones, see Payant and Rose.

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