

## Abstract

This BA thesis deals with the acculturation and assimilation of East European Jewish immigrant women in the pre-WWI United States, as represented in the selected works of Anzia Yeziarska (“Wings,” “Hunger,” “The Free Vacation House,” “The Fat of the Land,” “How I Found America,” and *Bread Givers*). The source of the conflict in the texts is the discrepancy between the immigrant ideals of America as the land of their dreams, and the Americanizers’ demand for Anglo-conformity. Operating with definitions of assimilation by Robert Park and Arnold Rose, and Milton Gordon’s concept of intrinsic and extrinsic cultural traits, this interdisciplinary analysis approaches the conflict on two levels. Firstly, as the clash of the Jewish and American traits, identified in the representatives of each culture. Secondly, as the confrontation of the first and second generation immigrants, whose differing visions of America influenced their attitude towards acculturation and assimilation, determining its efficiency.

The thesis debates whether formalized Americanization, as represented in the primary texts, enables complete assimilation on both the intrinsic and extrinsic levels. Since the texts frequently place the Jewish and American traits in polar opposition, the thesis explores whether assimilation, as the replacement of one set of traits with the other, is depicted as desirable. Following is the final question of the Americanized characters’ ability to relate to their Jewishness without compromising the American self.

Initially (Chapter 2), the analysis deals with the differing expectations of America. While the first generation’s vision of material success quickly results in disenchantment and reluctance to acculturate, the second generation’s metaphorical ideal of equality and self-expression opens them up to Americanization. The Jewish traditions of high learning and linguistic hierarchy are explored as a means of subordinating women, and their connection of Yiddish and the Jewish secular culture becomes clear (3). Subsequently (4), a parallel discussion of the Americanizing efforts reveals a restrictive and therefore inefficient approach, promoting acculturation without connecting the intrinsic and extrinsic cultures. Later (5), through the use of Standard English in the educational context, it is shown that English is the carrier of the American culture as well as the liberated language of the metaphorical America; it can mediate between the intrinsic and extrinsic culture, enabling successful acculturation and subsequent assimilation. The discussion progresses to the teaching profession which enables the protagonist of *Bread Givers* to become an Americanizing force and affirm her American self.

The final chapter (6) returns to the generational aspect of the conflict, exploring the second generation's rejection of the parent culture as the result of the notion of WASP superiority. Secondly, the first generation's response is analyzed; to regain self-respect, they revert back to the traditional Jewish stereotypes, which only widens the generational and cultural gap. The final section explores Yeziarska's suggestions of possible reconciliation of the protagonists' Jewishness and Americanness by either by marrying an Americanized Jew, or connecting the two by using English as the new "mother tongue" in place of Yiddish. However, the positive outcome of either remains questionable.

**Key words:** acculturation, assimilation, Americanization, Jewishness, Americanness, Yiddish, English, education, women