



FACULTY OF ARTS  
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

**OPPONENT'S REPORT  
BA THESIS**

**Finding America: Issues of Acculturation and Assimilation in the Works of Anzia  
Yeziarska**

Dagmar Jegerová

In Ms. Jegerová's words, the objective of her thesis is to "discuss the effectiveness of organized Americanization, the desirability of complete assimilation, and the impact it has on the protagonists' relationship to their Jewishness, as depicted in Yeziarska's works" (3). After an informed overview of scholarship on Yeziarska's writing, Ms. Jegerová offers a detached, factual analysis of Yeziarska's fiction in the context of contemporary immigration waves and organized "Americanizing" practices. Above all, she objects to forced assimilation and acculturation efforts, which she considers damaging particularly for the first generation of immigrants, who often respond defensively by clinging to their old habits and values. Moreover, it is argued that even the second generation does not remain completely assimilated, although it is partially "Americanized" as a result of aforementioned efforts.

On the whole, Ms. Jegerová's thesis is a well-researched, clearly-structured and eloquent text. Her reading of *Bread Givers* and Yeziarska's stories could have been more detailed and systematic, paying greater attention to specific episodes. Much space is given to the critique of what Ms. Jegerová calls "organized Americanization" carried out through various educational institutions, charities and other agencies that aimed to assimilate the newly-arrived to the United States. It is argued that even the most democratic of these efforts failed. Speaking about participants in the Settlement house movement, for example, Ms. Jegerová argues that "despite their arguably good intentions and reasonably enlightened ideology, these reformers could not avoid a number of the same pitfalls that hampered the efforts of organized Americanization" (39). Likewise, adult-learning institutions are criticized for their treatment of the newcomers as passive, ignorant Others in need of being educated. "Self-education" (49) and "liberation of the self" (64) are then viewed as more viable approaches. Yeziarska's fiction is interpreted as a critique of this "organized Americanization" and a defense (albeit uncertain) of "individualistic idealism" (64), which does not seem always convincing to me. Although her protagonists often criticize their "adopted" culture, they work through it, together with others, towards changing it. In fact, the rhetoric of assimilation and acculturation, which the thesis adopts, implies an absorption of an existing ideal, but the point of "How I Found America" is not "finding" but "founding," creating "America." Somewhat naive and mindless of the dark history of the continent's colonization, such a view of "America" nevertheless describes it as a process to which everyone may contribute and not as a static set of ideals designed by the Founding Fathers.

Proposed grade: Excellent or Very Good (1 or 2)

Pavla Veselá, PhD.  
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