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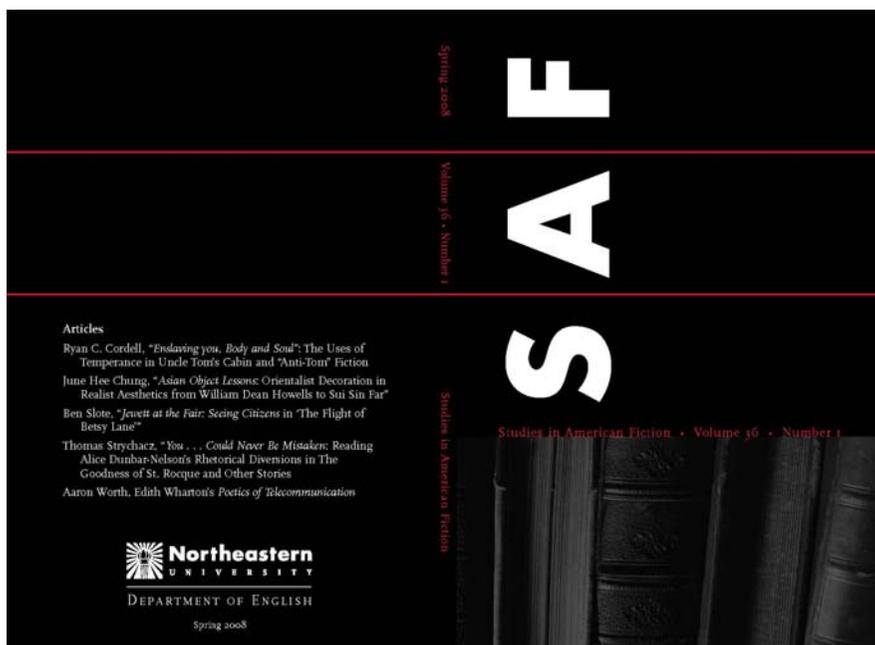
The political dimensions of desire in Anzia Yeziarska's "The Lost 'Beautifulness'" and Salome of the Tenements

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**THE POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF DESIRE
IN ANZIA YEZIERSKA'S
"THE LOST 'BEAUTIFULNESS'" AND
*SALOME OF THE TENEMENTS***

Douglas J. Goldstein
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She woke from the dream exalted, believing it was a vision of
her inmost being more real than reality.

Anzia Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements*

Early on in Anzia Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), Sonya Vrunsky, a poor immigrant living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, bursts into the exclusive Fifth Avenue shop of the designer Jacques Hollins and demands that he design her a new wardrobe. In a rage of passion and fury, she explains that the ready-made garments that she can afford blot out her personality; she wants the kind of sleek and delicate hand-crafted outfits that will allow not only the curves of her body but also her individuality to shine forth. Sonya appeals to Hollins—born Jaky Solomon (he later changed his name) and raised in poverty on the Lower East Side—by pointing to a shared Jewish racial inheritance. She declares, "I felt that you, a Russian Jew, would understand this great, consuming passion for beauty that drove me to you."¹ Sonya's tactics work, as Hollins immediately views her as kin and as a younger version of himself, a Jew overwhelmed by a desire for beauty. What most strikes Hollins about Sonya, however, is her sheer gumption, something that he again defines as a racial trait. Sonya simply refuses to take into account the cost of her desires. She has separated, in her own mind, aesthetics from commerce, and she believes that she and all the poor are entitled to beauty, regardless of the cost. Rather than dismiss this as a selfish or foolish viewpoint, however, Hollins reaches out to Sonya as someone who is "a living expression of his [own] ideas and ideals" (25). He too had once sought access to beauty regardless of the cost, and, as a famous designer, he has been frustrated by how the marketplace interferes with his ability to create beauty. Designing clothing, free of charge, for Sonya will allow him finally to ignore monetary considerations and to instead create works of art "for the sheer joy of it" (27).

The understated outfit that Hollins creates allows Sonya's "free,

individual self" (26) to come shining through. What is particularly interesting about this "individual self," however, is that it is also defined in terms of innate, biological traits. Consuming gorgeous outfits above her means does not so much enable Sonya to recreate herself as it allows her "inherent" Jewishness to emerge. Her clothing attests to her passion, her desire for beauty, and her refusal to recognize market considerations, traits that the novel repeatedly depicts in racial terms. Even though Sonya uses the clothing to attract a millionaire Protestant suitor, her clothing highlights the ways in which she is inherently different from John Manning and the fact that the marriage will not last. Clothing and desire do not allow for assimilation in this novel; rather, they point to a desire and passion that hold Jews apart. Although critics tend to view Yeziarska as mitigating the differences and pointing to common ground between Jews and Americans, I view her as emphasizing key differences in order to highlight the unique contributions that Jews can make to the rest of the country.² Yeziarska presents Jewish immigrants who dress like well-bred Americans not to escape their own pasts or to enter into the mainstream but, rather, to add a Jewish perspective to national dialogues. At a time of virulent anti-immigrant fervor, Yeziarska makes a case for allowing Jews to continue coming into the country by pointing to the particular ways that Jews, with their unique values and perspectives, can help Americans to live up to American ideals of equality and justice.³

In building the case for a Jewish contribution to America, Yeziarska, in her short story "The Lost 'Beautifulness'" (1920) and the novel *Salome of the Tenements*, explores whether Jewish desire and passion are socially-engaged and politically-relevant impulses or merely hedonistic retreats into the self. Can Sonya's desires help anyone other than herself? Can they actually play an active role in promoting democracy? When Sonya imagines a new life of self-expression and individuality for herself, is she presenting a political vision that others can pick up on or is she indulging in a fantasy that denies the severity of the conditions that she and her fellow immigrants face in America?

Yeziarska's works suggest she entertained doubts regarding the political role and utility of desire and of writing about desire. In the short story "The Lost 'Beautifulness,'" the protagonist's yearnings for both comfort and political rights are crushed by a cruel and indifferent landlord and judicial system. In *Salome*, Sonya attains her dreams, but she does so in a seemingly far-fetched manner that challenges its

own credibility. It is as if Yeziarska suggests that desires can come true only in a make-believe world. The ending of the novel, however, also points to Yeziarska's unwillingness to give up on desires that she recognizes are unrealistic.

Sonya's response to the receipt of Hollins' gown illustrates Yeziarska's suspicions about the political (and literary) utility of desire but also presents us with a new way to begin to interpret Yeziarska's work. In a state of rapture, Sonya declares, "Talk about democracy . . . All I want is to be able to wear silk stockings and Paris hats the same as Mrs. Astorbilt, and then it wouldn't bother me if we have Bolshevism or Capitalism, or if the democrats or the republicans win. Give me only the democracy of beauty, and I'll leave the fight for government democracy to politicians and educated old maids" (27). On the one hand, Sonya revels in her new beauty and possessions; she cannot stop admiring herself. She has attained what she wants, knows that she is on the way to winning Manning's affections, and is now willing to turn her back on the needs of her fellow immigrants. On the other hand, Sonya is keenly aware that her interactions with Hollins are entirely different from her other experiences of charity, in which she was given used goods by people who held her in contempt and who expected her to be overwhelmed with appreciation for their inadequate gifts. Sonya is also aware that what she has received from Hollins far exceeds the kind of help offered to other residents of the Lower East Side. Perhaps it is her awareness of the uniqueness of Hollins' generosity and the need for its widespread replication that leads her, unprovoked, to bring up the political connotations of desire and beauty. Her notion of a "democracy of beauty" is radical in that it imagines a scenario in which not just she but, rather, all people can satisfy their cravings and in which financial considerations do not hold anyone back from pursuing his or her ideals.

Also, Sonya insists that she will not quietly accept her place now that she has experienced the ecstasy of putting on well-made clothing. Rather, grasping Hollins' arm, she "impetuously" declares, "You made me look like Fifth Avenue-born. Only—I don't want to have the tied-up manners of a lady" (26). Sonya thinks of American ladies as excessively restrained and self-controlled. She would prefer to be passionate, to say what is on her mind, and to pursue her whims, regardless of the consequences. It is exactly this embrace of the spontaneous, the irrational and the ideal that makes her such a potentially unsettling and even dangerous character. Sonya refuses to accept the status quo or to settle for the hand-outs provided by charity organizations. Rather, she has her own vision of what it means to

lead a productive life and of the possibilities available to her as an American citizen. The last thing she wants is to voluntarily agree to stop herself from pursuing this vision.

Finally, Sonya's concept of a "democracy of beauty" also points to her own ability to offer creative and perhaps fantastic solutions to seemingly intractable problems. She does not deny or ignore the inequality and injustice that surrounds her. Rather, she acknowledges the odds against herself and other immigrants but then imagines ways of getting around these difficulties. Throughout the novel, Sonya repeatedly calls attention to the needs of the urban poor without allowing these overwhelming needs to prevent her from pursuing her own desires. In other words, she is a character who is comfortable with the dislocations and contradictions that surround her. Sonya's character points to Yeziarska's efforts to reimagine realism as a literature of the possible rather than the likely, one that presents creative solutions to the chaos and complexity of twentieth-century life.

In "The Lost 'Beautifulness,'" which first appeared in Yeziarska's collection of short stories *Hungry Hearts* (1920), Yeziarska also presents a protagonist overwhelmed by a "consuming passion for beauty."⁴ Many of the stories in this collection feature impoverished Jewish immigrants who find themselves unable to attain the kind of beauty and freedom that they had envisioned for themselves in America. Yeziarska depicts how something as seemingly innocuous as beauty actually reinforces hierarchies of race, class and gender, marginalizing immigrants who fervently believe in American ideals of democracy and justice but who do not have the means to look or dress like their social betters. These other stories highlight just how remarkable it is that Hanneh Hayyeh, the struggling protagonist of "The Lost 'Beautifulness,'" can appropriate exclusive standards of taste for herself.

Like Sonya Vrunsky, Hanneh Hayyeh is determined to attain quiet and simple sumptuousness, regardless of the cost. She too believes in separating aesthetics from the marketplace, that all Americans should have access to understated elegance. Just as Sonya's belief in the purity of aesthetics draws forth Hollins' "ideas and ideals," Hanneh's ability to overcome the ugliness and squalor of the Lower East Side "lifts [her] with high thoughts" (45). These high thoughts have to do with democracy, the other thing, besides beauty, that Hanneh declares has "got me on fire" (45). She associates her own ability to pursue and attain her passion for beauty as synonymous with the spread of democracy. Central to Hanneh's (and Sonya's) conception of democracy

is the notion that all people will be able to afford beauty, that tasteful accoutrements will no longer be the province solely of the wealthy. Hanneh views her ability, after months of taking on extra work and saving every penny, to paint her kitchen a sparkling white that dazzles the eye and transforms her apartment as a step forward not only for herself and the other residents of the Lower East Side but for the nation as a whole.

What separates Hanneh from Sonya is her willingness to sacrifice beauty on behalf of democracy and justice. If Sonya will do virtually anything to acquire the clothing that she associates with democracy, Hanneh eventually risks losing her gorgeous kitchen in order to affirm her principles. That is, Hanneh views beauty not as an end in itself but as a symbol of something she holds more dear, namely the ideals of America. Although she also conceives of the pursuit of desire as a socially relevant and politically engaged act, she insists that there are certain points at which the political process must be addressed in more direct and forceful ways.

After Hanneh transforms her apartment into a beacon of brightness and cheer amidst the squalor of the Lower East Side, her selfish and cruel landlord, figuring that he now has a more valuable property, twice raises her rent. Faced with overwhelming housing costs, Hanneh comes to the realization that she cannot cut back any further on her spending on food and other essential items and that she stands in jeopardy of losing the apartment and the beauty she so craves; at this point, she goes for help to the woman for whom she works as a maid. Hanneh expects Mrs. Preston, whom she idolizes and whose aesthetic standards she seeks to emulate, to join her in a crusade for justice, to help her fight against a system that allows wealthy landlords to take advantage ruthlessly of their tenants. Mrs. Preston, however, prefers a more direct and, in many ways, more sensible solution. Acknowledging the injustice of the situation, Mrs. Preston still urges Hanneh, whom she clearly admires, not to fight against forces far more powerful than she. Instead, Mrs. Preston immediately offers to raise Hanneh's pay so that she can keep the apartment. Hanneh turns down this seemingly generous offer. In Hanneh's mind, accepting extra money from Mrs. Preston would turn her into a mere beggar. Instead, she wants to fix a socioeconomic system that forces the poor to accept hand-outs from the rich.

Denouncing Mrs. Preston's proffered salary increase as "hush money" (56), Hanneh vows to pursue justice by taking her landlord to court. She tells Mrs. Preston, "I'll fight till all America will have to stop and listen to me. You was always telling me that the lowest no-

body got something to give to America. And that's what I got to give to America—the last breath in my body for justice. I'll wake up America from its sleep" (57). That she loses her case and ends up "huddled, cowering, broken" (61) raises the question of whether, given the hurdles that Yeziarska depicts, the pursuit of beauty, despite all its flaws, is not in fact the most realistic path to democracy. If Hanneh cannot achieve true justice and equality for herself and her neighbors, should she settle for a "democracy of beauty" as a step in the right direction?

Hanneh may have no choice but to posit herself as an impoverished outsider committed to fixing a broken system. Although she has adopted a scaled-down version of the refined tastes of her well-heeled employer and manages to surround herself with the quiet elegance of a native-born American, her language skills call attention to her foreignness and to her marginalized status. The awkward syntax and the grammatical errors that permeate her speech undermine any possibility of the kind of seamless and unnoticed assimilation that her aesthetic standards might otherwise allow. One reason that immigrants chose consumerism as a path to assimilation is that looking like an American took far less time than mastering a new language.⁵

Despite a lack of discretionary income, Jewish immigrants in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries turned to consumerism as the fastest and easiest means of establishing an American identity.⁶ As Barbara Schreier explains, "[Jewish] immigrants exchanged the garments of the Old World for the fashions of the New World with the passion of individuals intent on self-transformation."⁷ Since few Jews had any intention of returning to Europe, they sought out American consumer goods, particularly clothing, as a way of proclaiming their commitment to their new country.⁸ Andrew Heinze argues that historians have erred in viewing the Jewish community as reluctant consumers interested mainly in saving for the future and as committed to 'middle-class' values of thrift and self-restraint. Rather, he shows that Jews aggressively engaged in consumerism from the moment they stepped off the boat.⁹ Nevertheless, although Jewish immigrants eagerly sought out American clothing and aesthetics, they had little choice but to do so, as native-born Americans demanded that all newcomers hide any sign of their foreign background.¹⁰ Although Hanneh does not purchase items such as shoes or parlor furniture, she still engages in an act of consumerism, assiduously saving her money so that she can buy paint that she fetishizes as a means to a new identity and to full citizenship.

Hanneh's example reveals, however, how immigrants could show

their commitment to their new country not simply by adopting American standards but also by challenging them. Hanneh's simultaneous embrace and defiance of proper etiquette calls to mind the narrator of Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*, who aspires to dress and act like a native-born American but who, as a designer and manufacturer of clothing, actually plays a significant role in defining what it means to look like an American in the first place. For all his talk of assimilation, Levinsky and his peers in the garment industry help to set the standards toward which all Americans have to aspire. For her part, Hanneh not only reminds Americans of their stated commitment to democracy but expands notions of citizenship to include immigrants such as herself. The image of America that Hanneh holds up as the ideal is not necessarily one that people such as Mrs. Preston would recognize.

Hanneh would not have been alone in using her knowledge of and desire for beauty as a political tool. Jewish immigrants had a far more complicated relationship with consumer capitalism than the consensus-oriented rhetoric of the 1920s would imply.¹¹ The longing for material goods and the identity these goods conferred made Jewish workers that much more aware of everything that they did not have and gave workers an added incentive to fight against low wages.¹² The most common way that Jewish immigrants turned consumer goods into a means of protest was by appropriating and exaggerating the fashion sense of middle-class ladies. As historian Nan Enstad concludes, "Working women did not simply dress for respectability; indeed their flamboyant styles regularly offended the middle class. Rather, they staged a daily carnivalesque class inversion by appropriating a key expression of class privilege for women: fashion and adornment."¹³ Jewish (and Italian) immigrants engaged in the practice Enstad refers to as "ladyhood" by wearing hats with a dozen plumes rather than the expected two or three, shoes with several-inch heels, and brightly colored clothing in jarring combinations.

These women sought to expose and challenge clothing's status as a sign of taste and leisure and therefore as a tool for enforcing static hierarchies of class and race that marginalized female laborers, in part by labeling them as masculine. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the spread of ready-made clothing spurred anxiety among affluent Americans that boundaries of class were disappearing. The well-to-do particularly feared that working-class women could use inexpensive but well-made garments to hide their true identities and to claim new rights and privileges, especially in regards to marriage. The figure of the haute couture designer—represented by

Hollins—emerged at exactly this historic moment to reimpose standards of exclusivity and immutable class difference.¹⁴

The kind of public protest depicted by Enstad calls attention to how much Hanneh, despite her passion and vehemence, actually tries to work from within the system. In her argument with Mrs. Preston—“You was always telling me that the lowest nobody got something to give to America”—she twice declares that her act of protest is, in fact, her effort “to give to America.” Unlike the working-class women who mocked the taste and pretensions of the middle-class, Hanneh is careful not to offend anyone. She depicts herself not as trying to bring about radical change but, rather, as seeking only to make a contribution and thereby fulfill her duties as a citizen. She claims to fight not on behalf of immigrants and outsiders but, rather, for the nation itself. She will strengthen America by helping it to realize its own (reconstituted) ideals of justice. Hanneh suggests that Americans have fallen asleep, meaning that they have turned a blind eye to conditions and inequalities that they previously would not have tolerated. In bringing attention to this fall from duty and principle, Hanneh is helping Americans to remain true to themselves and to the ideals upon which the nation was established rather than imposing foreign values that are not welcome. Her act of defiance thereby accomplishes what her pursuit of beauty could not do: it presents the poor and marginalized immigrant as the protector and guarantor of established American values. In the process of condemning American injustice, Hanneh turns herself into the consummate insider, one who can come to the aid of her nation without threatening or upending it.

Hanneh also sounds remarkably like Yeziarska herself, who, in describing the beginning of her career as an author, declared, “What had I with my empty hands and my hungry heart to give to America? I had my hunger, my homelessness, my dumbness, my blind searchings and gropings for what I knew not. . . . I had to give to America the dirt and the ugliness of my black life of poverty.”¹⁵ Yeziarska’s statement makes Hanneh appear all the more politically astute. The character, unlike the author, knows what she wants, and she manages to pursue it in such a way as to call attention to how much she already fits into her new country. While Yeziarska claims to offer hunger, homelessness and dumbness, Hanneh presents a knowledge and appreciation of American traditions and ideals. Hanneh, unlike Yeziarska, depicts herself as fighting only for the democracy that Americans already hold dear.

Nevertheless, she fails to convince a judge that she has any rights as a tenant, and she ends up getting tossed out onto the streets. Three

recent critics (none of whom deal with Yeziarska directly) remind us that such failure in the face of inspiring ideals is a central part of the project of realism. The work of Brook Thomas, Richard Kaye and William Morgan encourages us to focus on the long odds against characters such as Hanneh and on the way that realism espouses a kind of social justice that it recognizes is beyond reach. Thomas depicts realism as celebrating the possibility of a more equitable or democratic social order—one in which people overlook issues of race, class and gender to deal with one another as individuals—at the same time that it asserts that such a state of affairs is ultimately not possible under current conditions.¹⁶ Kaye argues that realist fiction both encourages and portrays as illusory the notion that desire is attainable: realism allows for the brief exploration of unsanctioned sexuality and experimentation but quickly works to reaffirm order and stability, represented most forcefully by courtship and marriage.¹⁷ Morgan portrays realism as resigned to failure in its insistence on social engagement and generosity in a world increasingly dominated by an exploitative economic system that has no place for such altruism.¹⁸

These depictions of realism as embracing radical possibilities of equality and heterogeneity mark a significant departure from the seminal framework provided by Amy Kaplan, who portrayed realism as an ideological commitment to imposing order by containing the very conflicts of class, race and gender that Thomas, Kaye and Morgan highlight. Kaplan provides a means for rethinking her own framework, however, by pointing to the difficulty of this project, to the ways in which, even in fiction, marginalized citizens do not voluntarily allow themselves to be depicted as aliens and relegated to the sidelines.¹⁹ In her acknowledgment of forgotten or silenced voices, Kaplan paves the way for a generation of critics to imagine a realism that, whatever the odds against such a project, actually sought to give expression to the yearnings and desires of the American underclass.

Within the realist tradition, Hanneh comes across not so much as a savvy insider but rather as, at best, a sacrificial lamb, someone who foolishly sacrifices herself on behalf of a crusade that has no chance of succeeding. Given the odds against her, Hanneh would be far better off settling for the kind of vacuous and superficial “democracy of beauty” seemingly embraced by Sonya Vrunsky. The problem with this framework, however, is that neither Hanneh nor her closely-aligned author appears aware of the grave odds against her or willing to throw herself over for the greater good. Rather, both character and author ardently believe that they have a substantial gift to offer the nation and that their voices will be heard. Both are determined to

turn Jewish passion into a means of social betterment, and neither is willing to accept defeat.

Without reconciling Hanneh and Yeziarska's idealism with unforgiving social conditions, Georg Lukács, in *The Theory of the Novel*, offers us a way to imagine how the two extremes can coexist in the same work. As the title of his work implies, Lukács is writing about the genre of the novel, but his framework also provides insights into the short story. He portrays the novel as a genre committed to the pursuit of the unattainable but one that does not recognize or embrace failure. Rather, the novel presents an ongoing battle between contrasting visions (the real and the ideal) and readily accepts its own inconclusiveness and prolonged sense of flux. That is, the novel portrays reality as triumphing over idealism but, at the same time, insists that the ideal is superior and will never accept defeat.²⁰

According to Lukács, the epic does not have this sense of chaos because the epic hero, with the backing of God, knows that he can impose his visions on the outside world. The novel, on the other hand, begins with the premise that God has abandoned man. The individual must now overstep his own boundaries and take God-like action in a "demonic" effort to impose his ideals (or "soul") on an indifferent outer world. This effort is bound to fail, but the novel insists that it would be equally hopeless to give in to reality. Lukács' construction of the novel as a site for fighting without resignation, as embracing chaos and dislocation, separates him from more recent critics of realism and helps to explain how Hanneh and Yeziarska can be so passionate about a battle that they have no chance of winning. Following Lukács, we might say that Hanneh and Yeziarska are excited about the fight itself. They know that they have nothing to lose and no reason not to give themselves wholeheartedly to the cause of recreating both themselves and their nation. The contradictions and dislocations they face only make the battle that much more worth fighting.

Lukács' framework encourages us to rethink the ending of "The Lost 'Beautifulness'" and to question whether Yeziarska has, in fact, sacrificed her heroine to a lost cause. Although Hanneh ends up "huddled, cowering, broken," the ending is not necessarily a tragic one. The reason for this is that Hanneh finds other people to carry on her fight. Her quest for both beauty and justice becomes a communal undertaking, one that will continue without her and that does not have a clear outcome. Hanneh's passion not only leads her to confidently take on forces far stronger than herself but inspires others as well; we do not know where this process will lead, but we have a sense that further challenges to an unjust status quo are on the way.

The pursuit of beauty is just the beginning of a broader political movement that will have unknown repercussions.

For starters, Hanneh's passion startles and overwhelms her employer Mrs. Preston, bringing the latter out of her shell and making her question the fairness of the system by which she herself has prospered. Spurred on by Hanneh's desires and troubles, the formerly placid socialite suddenly experiences, for the first time in her life, outrage and shock. Yeziarska, setting the stage for *Salome*, depicts this transformation in racial terms, with the white woman imbibing the Jew's natural passion and thereby overcoming her own racial inheritance of extreme self-control. Even if Mrs. Preston does not immediately take the kind of defiant action that Hanneh demands, she is a character who has been unleashed. Her political initiation has begun, and it is hard to imagine her quietly accepting the status quo, even one that serves her own immediate interests, for much longer.

Hanneh has also found common ground with her neighbors on the Lower East Side. When Hanneh first paints her kitchen, her neighbors dismiss her, as her husband does, as someone who has an inflated sense of her own worth and possibilities. By the end of the story, however, these same neighbors now view Hanneh as a spokeswoman for themselves, as someone who is fighting what amounts to a collective battle. Overcoming their own callousness and insecurity, they reach out to Hanneh, treating her with compassion and kindness. The one character who still dismisses Hanneh is her husband, and he is banned by Hanneh from the apartment and by Yeziarska from the end of the story. When, in the concluding paragraphs, Hanneh's son returns from the army to find his mother on the sidewalk, his father is nowhere to be found.

Significantly, Hanneh herself is almost secondary to these final paragraphs. Rather, the final paragraphs are about the son, a decorated soldier in World War I who, on a 24-hour leave, comes home to his mother with the confidence, self-assurance and jaunty step of a native-born American. The story does not end with Hanneh's defeat, then, but rather with her son Aby's successes. The torch has been passed down to the next generation, and, we imagine, it is children such as Aby who will carry on the fight begun by their parents. This fight will extend far beyond access to beauty, but Yeziarska has shown how raising questions about aesthetics can have far-flung and potentially shocking consequences. Hanneh has not so much settled for a "democracy of beauty" as issued a call to arms.

Shortly after Hollins designs one of his coveted outfits for Sonya Vrunsky, the protagonist of *Salome of the Tenements*, she wears it on a date with John Manning, a wealthy philanthropist. Sonya had originally met Manning when she interviewed him for an article she was writing for a small Lower East Side newspaper. Upon seeing Sonya for the second time, Manning is overcome by her beauty. Although Manning and Sonya schedule this lunch rendezvous to discuss further his philanthropic work, each has a romantic interest in the other. In addition, Manning views Sonya as someone who can teach him to overcome his inherited self-restraint and help him to articulate the passions buried beneath “centuries of inhibitions” (36). Much like Hanneh Hayyeh, however, Manning does not allow himself to pursue his desires and passions for their own sake. Rather, he imagines a relationship with Sonya as facilitating his efforts to spread democracy to the Lower East Side. The narrator explains:

Till now, he had been sterile—impotent. This woman of the people was the divine finger of God toward the realization of dreams of service as vast as humanity and its problems. A vision of all the world’s wrongs flashed before his eyes: the diseases and crimes of poverty; landlordism; the greed of capital, under the guise of patriotism propagating wars and race hatred; people relying on leaders who use the people for their own ends. . . .

This woman would be a divine force for righting all social wrongs. Their combined personalities would prove a titanic power that would show the world how the problems of races and classes, the rich and the poor, educated and uneducated, could be solved. (38)

Manning’s convoluted declaration of love for Sonya, expressed through his vision of social reform, helps us to rethink Hanneh Hayyeh’s own fight for justice. Here, desire is no longer just a tool of last resort, something clung to by immigrants who have nothing else with which to assert themselves. Rather, Yeziarska turns desire into a common American attribute, something that brings together the rich and the poor. Manning goes to live among Jewish immigrants so that he can, among other things, gain access to the emotions and “spiritual response” (37) that have been bred out of him. It is up to desperate immigrants to show their social betters how to reconnect with their genuine inner selves, to teach them, in Sonya’s words, to “be real” (38).

Of course, what Manning thinks of as his embrace of his underlying emotions is also a retreat from that very passion. He declares his love for Sonya by outlining the social problems he wants to solve. In

many ways, he is just as inarticulate as he has always been. This is a character who, in times of heightened passion and emotional crisis, foolishly plucks at the lapels of his coat, dumbfounded as to what to say. This inarticulateness has not only prevented Manning from living a full life, however, but has also interfered with his program of social reform. His lack of warmth and habit of hiding behind facts and figures have put up a wall between him and the very people he seeks to help, making them wary of him and precluding him from truly understanding the conditions of the Jewish ghetto. Manning hopes that Sonya, by helping him to express his own desires, will enable him to reach out to and form coalitions with what he and Sonya describe as the naturally exuberant residents of the Lower East Side.

At the same time, however, that Manning attributes to Sonya “the power to make articulate his life’s purpose” (32), he remains skeptical that the problems of the world will disappear should people simply give in to and pursue their desires. Unlike Sonya, Manning still believes that the way to solve social wrongs is first to catalog them and then to draw up a plan of attack. His method of careful and controlled analysis clashes with her impassioned desire, an approach that she insists is more “real” because of its spontaneity and emotional investment. Although Sonya and Manning assert that they can find some kind of common ground, this melding of opposites appears unlikely. Neither character truly wants to compromise by giving up what each associates with his or her racial inheritance. Further, in seeking to tackle prohibitive problems of poverty and racial discrimination, Sonya and Manning have placed overwhelming stress on their relationship. From the beginning, their relationship serves as a laboratory for examining what role desire can play in righting social wrongs and what kind of language will most facilitate this process.

In her depiction of Sonya and Manning’s third meeting (their second date), Yeziarska appears to take Sonya’s side, highlighting how Manning’s reliance on that which he can see and record—on facts, figures and seemingly objective truth—misleads him. In doing so, the author points to the limitations of knowledge and reason as the starting points for any genre of literature or program of political reform. This date takes place, at Manning’s insistence, at Sonya’s apartment so that he can see how the poor actually live. For her part, Sonya has spent the two weeks between the lunch (the second date) and this afternoon visit furiously transforming her apartment from a dirty and dark dungeon into a sparkling testimony to understated simplicity. Although she considers allowing Manning to see how she actually lives, she recognizes that doing so will scare him off by labeling her an

object for charity. Sonya can afford to redecorate her apartment only by borrowing the enormous sum of \$100 from a ruthless pawnbroker. Manning, for his part, has no idea how much time and money Sonya has spent transforming her home into a model tenement. At the same time that Manning pontificates about the “unscheming naturalness” of the Lower East Side, “he settled himself luxuriously into the cozy corner which had taken the girl so many days and nights of ceaseless planning, the painstaking persistence of the most studied artifice” (73). The philanthropist desperately wants to believe that teaching the poor lessons in restraint and good taste is in itself a sufficient social program for helping those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Sonya’s apartment seemingly illustrates that even the most marginalized citizens have access not only to the necessities of life but also to beauty as well, should they simply stop wasting their money on extravagant and “gaudy” items.

Not only can Manning not see the evidence before him, but he is quick to lecture Sonya and make absurd plans based on his faulty assumptions. With his head “thrust . . . out with the tense earnestness of a reformer about to preach to an audience” (75), Manning comes across as the kind of misguided liberal who would be depicted in the coming decades by Lionel Trilling. For Trilling, the problem with liberalism is that it, like realism, relies solely on facts and figures as a means of understanding the world. What begins as a program dedicated to freedom and liberation ends up approaching life as something that can be first comprehended and then controlled through rules and regulations. Trilling warns, “We must be aware of the dangers which lie in our most generous wishes. Some paradox of our nature leads us, when once we have made our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion.”²¹ Trilling helps us to remember that it is Manning’s good intentions, particularly his belief that he can make other people do what is best for them, that make him so oppressive. He truly wants to help the residents of the Lower East Side, but the result is that he pursues a program of social reform that ends up forcing those with little to make do with even less. One solution, Trilling points out, would be to privilege compassion over reform.

A second solution would be to come to terms with that which we do not know. Such a step would include expanding our conception of the real to include the possible and the imagined. Trilling suggests that one uncovers truth not merely by collecting and interpreting data but, rather, by first imagining various possibilities and only then conducting experiments to verify these creative hunches.²² For Trilling,

literature and criticism highlight the mysteriousness and chaos of the world. By pointing to that which we cannot fully understand and catalog, they encourage creative responses to seemingly intractable problems.²³ In endorsing an imaginative engagement with everyday life, one that takes into account all of the possibilities and varieties of human existence, literature takes on what Trilling conceives of as a public and political role.²⁴ He applauds the modern novel, in particular, for focusing not on overwhelming social forces that deny any meaningful role for the individual but, rather, on the kind of moral decisions made by ordinary people on a daily basis. For Trilling, these seemingly insignificant moral decisions illustrate how humans shape their own lives and resist regimentation.²⁵ Replacing the category of realism with that of “moral realism,” Trilling envisions a creative mind that has the capacity to reimagine its own possibilities, constrained only by the limits of the “moral imagination.”²⁶

Trilling’s framework echoes Sonya Vrunsky’s own assessment, which may initially seem dubious, that she is not so much deceiving Manning in radically transforming her apartment as giving expression to her true inner self, the person that she has always been under her layers of poverty. Sonya’s actions illustrate how an individual need not be hindered by material conditions, how each person has the capacity to take matters into his or her own hands and to come up with creative ways of dealing with the world. Nevertheless, although Sonya’s desires enable her to win Manning’s affection, they cannot change the man upon whom she places her aspirations. Yeziarska suggests that, at least in this instance, there are clear limits to Sonya’s efforts to reimagine her surroundings. Throughout the third date, Sonya experiences quick and radical shifts in perspective, at one moment viewing Manning as her liberator and the next recognizing his foolishness and naiveté. When Manning nestles into the corner of her couch that reflects “the most studied artifice,” Sonya is “unconscious of any subterfuge.” And yet, she cannot help but mock his absurd conviction that beauty need not cost a lot of money. Here, the irresolvable conflict between desire and fact does not so much propel the narrative forward—as Richard Kaye suggests in his discussion of nineteenth-century realism—as bring it to an impasse.²⁷

Rather than move steadily toward an expected resolution, the narrative gets enmeshed in the kind of ambiguities and irreconcilable contradictions that Trilling posits as central to contemporary life. On the one hand, we recognize that Sonya has bought into a system of social reform that, she has convincingly shown us, does not work. She agrees to go work for Manning at a settlement that denies the poor

even the most basic pleasures. It is hard to imagine from Sonya's interactions with Manning how her desires will benefit anyone other than herself. On the other hand, there is no reason why Sonya's co-workers could not follow her model, imagining for themselves new possibilities and then aggressively pursuing these visions. The reader has no doubt that characters such as Limpkin and Gittel Stein, Sonya's editor and co-worker at the Lower East Side newspaper at which she is working when she first meets Manning, spell their own doom by passively accepting and even reveling in their tragic fates. Yeziarska is not yet ready to follow Manning in viewing strategically placed flowerpots as a way to transform alleyways, but she is also unwilling to give up on desire as a constructive agent of change.

Although Sonya manages to surround herself with beauty and to win the heart of a millionaire, she never, at least during her marriage to Manning, find a means of overcoming his "icy aloofness" (180). Starved for emotional sustenance, Sonya leaves Manning in his Manhattan mansion and returns to the more passionate Jewish community of the Lower East Side. Here, she turns her love of elegant yet simple clothing into a successful career, quickly working her way up from a shop-hand in the garment district to a coveted designer. As a worker, she finally succeeds, at least in her own mind, in separating aesthetics from monetary considerations. Rather than view her work as a means of earning a living, she revels in the creative opportunities that it presents. For Sonya, "every detail in the making of a dress was . . . a sublime discovery" (168). In fact, Sonya's experiences in the workplace have an erotic quality; she discovers a pleasure in making clothing that borders on the orgasmic. As a designer, Sonya also attracts the attention of Jacques Hollins, who, it turns out, has had a crush on her from the moment she first entered his shop but who lost track of her upon the dissolution of her marriage. Hollins convinces Sonya first to come work for him and then to marry him.

Sonya believes her desires enable her not only to attain what she wants for herself but also to enact meaningful political and social reform as well. She and Hollins plan to open up a second shop, this one a non-profit "settlement" that, according to Sonya, will defy the marketplace by giving the poor sumptuous outfits at discount prices. This settlement will presumably highlight the benefits of a more compassionate approach to philanthropy. Ignoring financial considerations, Sonya seeks to encourage the poor to pursue not what current economic and political institutions offer them but, rather, what they themselves passionately want. She fervently believes and hopes to convey that all Americans have at their disposal the means of attaining their

desires, that considerations of race and class need not hold back anyone. Her program of social uplift depends upon teaching the poor to pursue their desires with sufficient urgency.

Christopher Okonkwo suggests that Sonya acknowledges the repressive demands of Americanization but undermines their hierarchical nature by making comfort and beauty available to all women.²⁸ For Katherine Stubbs, however, "Sonya's transgressions of class are not decisive; her stated preoccupation with the aesthetic dimension of clothing ultimately displaces the potentially politically radical implications of her clothing philosophy." According to Stubbs, Yeziarska herself gets wrapped up in ideals of beauty, forgetting the prohibitive cost of understated wardrobes. The problem is not simply that beauty is out of reach for most people but that a focus on aesthetic standards detracts attention from an exploitative labor market that accumulates money in the hands of the few and then allows these wealthy elites to use possessions such as clothing to justify and maintain their social position. To expose these inequalities and make a meaningful political statement, Stubbs suggests that Yeziarska must show "the historical realities of regimented labor in the garment industry."²⁹ Although Sonya believes that, in pursuing her desires, "now everything she did pulsed with reality" (174), Stubbs argues that Yeziarska has merely facilitated erotic escape on the part of character and reader alike.

Roland Barthes reminds us, however, that erotic texts confront rather than merely circumvent that which is unpleasant. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes uses the sexually-explicit term "blissful" to depict texts that do not so much offer resolution between the old and the new or between the banal and the shocking but, rather, point to and embrace the conflicts between the two.³⁰ He refers to bliss as existing at the "edge" between the status quo and a more exalted existence: "Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so. The pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely *novelistic* instant so relished by Sade's libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss."³¹ Writing after the failure of the student demonstrations of 1968, Barthes imagines a more personal and idiosyncratic means of resistance, one which those in positions of authority would be helpless to stop. He presents the erotic quality of literature not as a retreat into the self but as a social impulse that reminds us of the greater pleasures that we want to achieve collectively.

Barthes helps us to reimagine the conclusion of *Salome* not so much as a celebration of unfettered desire but, rather, as a call to arms.

The erotic and pulsating quality of the novel derives less from what Sonya has managed to accomplish than from our realization of what remains to be done. The unfinished nature of the text, the “edge” between Sonya’s vision for the nation and the realities of life for those at the margins, pulls the reader in, allowing him or her to experience first-hand the ecstasy of dreaming of a better future.

Although Sonya believes that she has achieved her vision of pursuing art for art’s sake, Yeziarska reminds us of the numerous hurdles that stand in her way. Sonya may think of her work as a means of creating art of lasting value, but her original boss in the garment industry views her creativity merely as a source of income for himself. He seeks to exploit Sonya’s talents by tying her up in long-term contracts that do not begin to reflect her value to his shop. Hollins admires and is inspired by Sonya’s idealism, but he also recognizes that the marketplace affords him only so much flexibility. Although he proposes to Sonya that they open up a not-for-profit clothing store so that Sonya can “try out” her “wild dreams,” he is skeptical that separating the aesthetic from monetary considerations is either practical or productive. When Sonya refers to such a project as a “settlement,” thereby inadvertently invoking Manning’s plan for providing beauty to the poor, the reader joins in Hollins’ skepticism.

Such awareness—on the part of other characters, the reader and the author—of Sonya’s illogic and of the problems with her plan does not, however, amount to a rejection of desire as a social and political entity. Rather, Yeziarska is presenting an unfinished project, one which acknowledges and embraces its contradictions and complexities. The author’s comfort with the inconclusiveness of her text provides a new perspective on the realist novel. Critics have depicted how the contorted conclusions of realist texts highlight limitations of the form itself. For instance, Amy Kaplan suggests that the multiple and overlapping endings of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* remind us of the narrative fragmentation that realism is trying so hard to hide and contain.³² Richard Kaye asserts that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century realist novelists call attention to the ways in which their endings do not work to protest the expectation, which they simultaneously meet, that their works provide a coherent moral lesson.³³ Following Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Peter Brooks speculates that narratives consume themselves in satisfying the reader’s yearning for wholeness, a desire which is itself a death wish.³⁴

Because Yeziarska never seeks such wholeness, she does not have to make the kind of sacrifices, particularly of narrative and moral ambiguity, that it demands. Instead, she embraces the multiplicity of her ending, the fact that neither she nor the reader knows just how far desire can propel Sonya or what kind of impact it can have on the nation as a whole. Rather than fully celebrate or reject fantasy, Yeziarska settles for brief and inconclusive triumphs. One such incomplete victory occurs in the concluding scene, when Sonya finally inspires Manning with Jewish passion. Manning will soon go back to his own people, and Sonya will marry Hollins, but “for one moment” she finally manages to cut through his layers of restraint and education to expose a “hungry” person, a being who is “real” because he is impulsive.

In momentarily unleashing Manning’s suppressed emotions, Sonya also enables him to overcome his crushing inarticulateness. Here, Yeziarska provides an alternative to Peter Brooks’ notion, derived from Lacan, that narratives can avert their own death wish by pursuing that which they can never articulate. Brooks discusses how novels perpetuate themselves and their desires by moving “toward” a meaning that, like the “perpetual sliding or slippage of the signified from under the signifier,” can never be pinned down or captured.³⁵ Nevertheless, at the end of *Salome*, Manning finally manages to speak aloud the desires that he has previously worked so hard to hide from himself and others. His declaration of passion does not spell his doom, however, but rather makes clear that he is beginning a new life. With Sonya’s help, Manning moves beyond an “educated” but “empty” and “meaningless” language of facts and figures, thereby opening up infinite new possibilities for himself and his social work. It is just as likely, however, that he, like Sonya, will be engaged in a perpetual battle to bring his desires to fruition. Barthes reminds us that this battle may be as exciting as any actual triumph.

Yeziarska’s novel *Bread Givers* (1925), however, points to the downside of such perpetual battle. Here, the author presents an immigrant woman who, unlike her sisters, has the “grit” to defy the expectations of the people around her and to will her way out of the poverty of the Lower East Side. Early on, Sara Smolinsky learns that the poor have to be tough and ruthless in the pursuit of their dreams. In particular, they must sacrifice simple pleasures such as buying nice clothing or spending time with family and friends so that they can attain their long-term goals, which for Sara include getting an education and pursuing a profession. Faced with severe obstacles at every turn, Sara has no choice but to become the kind of plotting and me-

thodical figure that Sonya Vrunsky would detest. The problem is that Sara understandably begins to think of reason and restraint not so much as means to an end but, rather, as ends in themselves. Even as she attains her goals and now can begin to indulge her whims, she loses the Jewish passion that makes life worth living. Instead, worn down by constant struggle, she begins to embrace the kind of “graceful quietness” and “clean emptiness” that Sonya, in *Salome*, idealizes. Here, Yeziarska portrays Sonya’s aesthetic not as erotic but, rather, as barren and frugal.

Sara escapes her self-imposed loneliness and tedium when she meets a man who no longer has the “greedy eagerness” of the Lower East Side but still has “the face of a dreamer.”³⁶ Providing a model for Sara and Sonya, Hugo Seelig pursues his ideals, but he does so in a calm and thoughtful way that protects him from disappointment and manipulation. He no longer needs to be ruthless, but he also cannot forget the obstacles that he has had to overcome. The end of the novel makes clear that Sara, too, is not yet in the clear, that her efforts to become a lady have not removed the burdens and stigmas of her own former poverty. Although she can begin to enjoy the fruits of her success, she will have to continue to fight on behalf of her aspirations and ideals. This ending also suggests that, despite the seemingly happy conclusion of *Salome*, Sonya Vrunsky still has more unpleasant battles in front of her.

The reader of *Salome* experiences more than the in-betweenness, no matter how blissful, depicted by Barthes. When Sonya declares, “Give me only the democracy of beauty and I’ll leave the fight for government democracy to politicians and educated old maids” (27), we root for her to attain the beauty that she so desperately craves. Her desires become our own. At the same time, however, we also want her to pursue the kind of engaged political agenda that she at times appears so willing to leave to others. That is, our desires transcend those of the protagonist. The fact that Sonya is willing to settle for less than the reader thinks she should changes our relationship to both the protagonist and the novel; now, we become active participants, taking over where the text leaves off, wanting to pursue that which Sonya has suggested, if only in rejection, might be possible after all. If the incompleteness of the novel puts the onus on the reader to explore just how far desire might lead Sonya and ourselves, we still remain dependent on the text to chart the path that we will follow. As much as this search for possibility is an act of the imagination, it is

also fundamentally a textual one. The ability to imagine new possibilities, Yeziarska shows us, depends upon coming up with a language that transcends the world in which we actually live.

Sonya's impact on others depends on her ability to teach them to think and speak as she does. This is a slow and painstaking process, one that depends upon intimate interactions between people who already know one another. In the course of the novel, Sonya convinces one person—John Manning—to embrace his buried passions and to articulate what he really wants. Just as Sonya rejects mass-produced clothing for hand-crafted pieces that call attention to her individuality, so too do she and Yeziarska resist viewing desire as a mass political movement, as one that will immediately attract hordes of followers. Rather, desire, for both character and author, allows for an idiosyncratic and creative means of engaging with the world, a way of life that can, through patience and perseverance, be passed on to former lovers and to select readers.

Notes

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¹ Yeziarska, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923; repr. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1995), 22. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

² Alice Kessler-Harris writes, in her introduction to Yeziarska's novel *Bread Givers* (1925; repr. New York: Persea, 1975), that Yeziarska "lays open the woman's experience of immigration, revealing ways in which Jewish women encountered the new world and tried to reconcile it with the old" (v). Similarly, Mary Dearborn describes, in "Anzia Yeziarska and the Making of an Ethnic American Self," *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), how the author "came to feel that her mission was to mediate between her culture and the dominant culture of America" (112). Advancing this notion of Yeziarska as committed to bringing together seemingly alien peoples, Thomas J. Ferraro asserts that she "saw her duty as going beyond immigrant protest; she needed to investigate the reciprocal reshaping taking place between Eastern European folk Judaism and twentieth-century American structures of opportunity." *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 59. Finally, Delia Caparoso Konzett, in "Administered Identities and Linguistic Assimilation: The Politics of Immigrant English in Anzia Yeziarska's *Hungry Hearts*," *American Literature* 69 (1997), suggests that Yeziarska presents a vision of "cultural exchange and mingling" that has a "cross-

fertilizing effect" (605) on all participants.

³ On efforts to depict immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe as racially inferior and therefore as incapable of adapting to America's "Nordic" culture and political institutions, see Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Scribner's, 1918), 17; Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Scribner's, 1920), 303–4; Stoddard, *Re-Forging America: The Story of Our Nationhood* (New York: Scribner's, 1927), 95–96, 101–2. On the popularity and impact of nativist discourses, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (Westport: Greenwood, 1963), 262; Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1998), 28–29; Gerald Early, "Pulp and Circumstance: The Story of Jazz in High Places," *The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature, and Modern American Culture* (Hopewell, New Jersey: Ecco, 1994), 184–85; David Levering Lewis, "Parallels and Divergences: Assimilationist Strategies of Afro-American and Jewish Elites from 1910 to the Early 1930s," *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews*, ed. Jack Salzman with Adina Back and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin (New York: George Braziller, 1992), 24; Jeffery A. Clymer, "'Mr. Nobody from Nowhere': Rudolph Valentino, Jay Gatsby, and the End of the American Race," *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 29 (1996), 163.

⁴ Anzia Yezierska, "The Lost 'Beautifulness,'" *Hungry Hearts* (1920; repr. New York: Penguin, 1997), 50. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁵ Barbara A. Schreier, *Becoming American Women: Clothing and the Jewish Immigrant Experience, 1880–1920* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1994), 50.

⁶ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1986), 63.

⁷ Schreier, 50.

⁸ On Jewish immigration patterns, see Andrew Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1990), 41. On the importance Jews placed on clothing, see Heinze, 90.

⁹ Heinze, 10–11; see also Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (Boston: Beacon, 1981), 92.

¹⁰ Christopher N. Okonkwo, "Of Repression, Assertion, and the Speakerly Dress: Anzia Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements*," *MELUS* 25 (Spring 2000), 131–32.

¹¹ After the war, the business community, seeking to replace military orders with consumer durables, took the lead in recasting consumerism as a patriotic duty that united all citizens and gave them a stake in their nation. See Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997), 149; Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of*

Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875–1940 (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1992), 146; John Erwin Hollitz, “The Challenge of Abundance: Reactions to the Development of a Consumer Society, 1890–1920” (Ph.D. diss, Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison, 1981), 177, 280–81; Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: The Business Bourse, 1929), 4–5. Not surprisingly, however, economic realities did not live up to this new rhetoric; throughout the 1920s, even skilled laborers lacked sufficient wages, job security, confidence in their future prospects and access to credit to indulge their consumer desires. See Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 103–04; Frank Stricker, “Affluence for Whom?—Another Look at Prosperity and the Working Classes in the 1920s,” *Labor History* 24, no. 1 (1983), 8–10, 31–32.

¹² Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), 164–65. Paula Hyman asserts, in “Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902,” *American Jewish History* 70 (1980), that consumer boycotts such as the one against kosher meat in 1902 helped spawn workplace activism later in the decade (105).

¹³ Nan Enstad, “Fashioning Political Identities: Cultural Studies and the Historical Construction of Political Subjects,” *American Quarterly* 50 (1998), 749–50. Kathy Peiss suggests, however, that such appropriations of middle-class taste may have been more “playful” than oppositional, one of many ways that Jewish immigrants tried on new identities (65–66).

¹⁴ Katherine Stubbs, “Reading Material: Contextualizing Clothing in the Work of Anzia Yezierska,” *MELUS* 23 (1998), 161–63.

¹⁵ Anzia Yezierska, “Mostly about Myself,” *How I Found America: Collected Stories of Anzia Yezierska* (New York: Persea, 1991), 142.

¹⁶ Brook Thomas, *American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 5–7, 14.

¹⁷ Richard Kaye, *The Flirt’s Tragedy: Desire without End in Victorian and Edwardian Fiction* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2002), 1–2, 4, 15–16, 38.

¹⁸ William Morgan, *Questionable Charity: Gender, Humanitarianism, and Complicity in U. S. Literary Realism* (Durham, New Hampshire: Univ. Press of New England, 2004), 205.

¹⁹ Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 5, 8–11, 54.

²⁰ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (1920; repr. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 85–86.

- ²¹ Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Scribner's, 1950), 221.
- ²² Lionel Trilling, "The Princess Casamassima," *The Liberal Imagination*, 63–66.
- ²³ Jonathan Arac, "Lionel Trilling: The Key Text in Context," *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 125.
- ²⁴ Trilling, "Preface," *The Liberal Imagination*, xv.
- ²⁵ Harvey Teres, *Renewing the Left: Politics, Imagination and the New York Intellectuals* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 96–103.
- ²⁶ Trilling, "Manners, Morals and the Novel," 222.
- ²⁷ Kaye, 1–2.
- ²⁸ Okonkwo, 133, 138.
- ²⁹ Stubbs, 169.
- ³⁰ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 6–7.
- ³¹ Barthes, 7.
- ³² Kaplan, 61.
- ³³ Kaye, 12.
- ³⁴ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 50–52.
- ³⁵ Brooks, 56.
- ³⁶ Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, 273.