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**JEWISH WOMEN'S PLACE OR DISPLACEMENT IN BREAD
GIVERS AND ROMANCE READER: ESCAPING OTHERNESS BY
OVERCOMING THE FAMILY BOUNDARIES**

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ÖZET

ABD'deki Yahudi göçmenler iki tür "ötekilik"ten yakınmışlardır. Kıta'daki ilk "ötekilik" duygusu Amerikalıların, Yahudi kültür ve düşünce yapılarını tanımayan tutumları yüzünden gelişmiştir. Bu bağlamda "ötekilik" problemi o dönemde yaşamsal önemi olan Amerikalılaşma süreci içinde aşılmıştır. Diğer anlamda "ötekilik", kadının zeka kapasitesini görmezden gelen ve onlara sadece kız evlat, eş ve anne rolleri vermenin yanı sıra, ailelerini ve erkeklerin dini çalışmalarını destekleyen emekçilik görevini veren Yahudiliğin ataerkillik düzeninden kaynaklanır. Aile, ataerkilliğin cinsel rollerinin benimsetildiği, korunduğu ve savunulduğu ilk kurum olduğu için cinsiyeti ve etnik kökeni ile "öteki"leşmek istemeyen kadın bağımsız bir birey olmak için çareyi aileyi terk etmekte bulur.

Yeziarska'nın Bread Givers adlı eseri babasının zorbalığına isyan eden Yahudi göçmen bir ailenin kızını anlatır. Ataerkil düzene boyun ermiş annesinin ve ablalarının mutsuzluklarına ve çaresizliklerine tanık olan kahraman kendisine öngörülen geleneksel rolleri red eder ve sadece erkeklere ayrılmış olan öğrenciliği seçer.

Abraham'ın The Romance Reader adlı eseri kendini bütünü ile yabancı etkilerden izole etmiş Yahudiliğin bir alt kültürü olan Hasidik toplumunda geçer. Öykü yabancı toplumu sadece

romantik kitaplardan tanıyıp, ona ulaşmak için Hasidik toplumun kısıtlamalarından kaçırmaya çalışın bir kıızı anlatır. İki öyküde de kahramanlar "ötekilik"ten kaçmak için ailelerini terk ederler ama başarı şansları, güçleri ve yaşam deneyimlerine bağlantılıdır.



ABSTRACT

The Jewish immigrants in the USA have suffered from two kinds of "otherness". Their first sense of "otherness" in the Continent has developed by the Gentile attitude of nonrecognition towards their culture and mentality. This problem of "otherness" have been overcome partly by a process of Americanization which has been essential to their survival. The other sense of "otherness" lies in the patriarchal order of Judaism that ignores the women's mental capacity and only allocates them the roles that they can perform as daughters, wives and mothers and as well as "bread givers" who earn a living in order to support their family and the Torah studies of men. As these patriarchal gender roles are firstly imposed and preserved in the family, the woman who does not want to be "other"ed with her gender and ethnicity should escape from her family to be an autonomous individual.

Bread Givers by Yezierska is about the youngest daughter of a Jewish immigrant family who revolts against her father's tyranny. By witnessing the sorrows of her mother and her elder sisters who submits to the patriarchal order, she rejects the traditional roles given to her and chooses the path of learning which is only allocated to the men. The Romance Reader of Abraham takes place in the Chassidic society which is completely segregated from any

Gentile influence. The story is narrated by the oldest daughter of a rabbi, who wants to get away from the restrictions that block her way to the romantic world of the Gentile. In both stories, the protagonists leave their families so as to escape the "otherness" but their chances of success is closely linked to their experience and strength.



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Introduction

The literature of USA, based on the country's yet short history, is small in quantity when compared with those of the other countries that had once housed old civilisations in it. Although there is to a certain extent, the influence of the oral literature and artistic works of Indians on the written literature that emerged afterwards, the experience and the expectations of the newcomers of the Newfoundland were so different than the original inhabitants that they produced their own art and literature. People who had been living in the Old World left it for good for the new since they realised that the lands where they had grown up were far from offering them a promising future. The rediscovery of the New Land was a valuable opportunity for those people who had nothing to lose behind. The New Land was so charming that it was like a reemergence of once-sunken Atlantis with all its prosperity.

These immigrants of various backgrounds and aspirations came together on a common ideal of America without having lost their essences. In this melting pot, their efforts to adapt themselves to the New Land conditions with their different backgrounds, their

relationships among themselves as well as with the other communities, their mobility and development created a culture and literature so original, so unique that it could be found in no other folklore or literature of any other nation. However their need for recognition has been largely ignored among the hard circumstances of America and although the feeling of being ignored led to the obligation of a more rapid assimilation--which sounds like a positive influence--, it cost them a high price. Thus, the immigrants of non-Anglo-Saxon suffered from an identity crisis, which had radical effects on their tradition, religion and culture, and their painful transformation has been a rich source of various works of literature, sociology and anthropology.

Charles Taylor defines the concept of multicultural identity, as "a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being" (75). He notes the relation between the identity and recognition:

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.

Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.

Therefore, besides fighting for survival in very poor conditions, the immigrants struggled for their recognition, which was only possible by assimilation and, during this assimilation process, they conflicted with their original identity. This led them into such a vicious circle that their fight for recognition, in most cases, turned into a feeling of self-hatred, which cost them the threatening of their identity.

Among these immigrants with different backgrounds, there is a unique community of people: Jewish immigrants facing the same identity crisis, worked hard in order to survive in a society dominated by the WASP standards of judgement. However, the Jews differ from the other groups of immigrants as Adrienne Baker states that Judaism is both an ethnic and a religious identity, and the Jews are a people and a religion with a history of persecution. Therefore, in fully taking on the religious aspect of its identity, a full acceptance of the apart-ness of the Jew from other people is acknowledged. " To become Orthodox is to estrange oneself from the dominant culture and to embrace a different set of values, rituals and way of life" (118). However, the Jews in the New Land have been obliged

to make a vital choice between their ancient culture-- which was the only thing they had saved from the persecutions for centuries-- and, the necessity of assimilation to the Gentile culture for survival. Having seen that their values would not be recognised in the New World and would not lead them to success, they had to submit to the process of acculturation at the expense of their Jewish identity. The first generation Jews mostly resisted the prevalent Protestant culture, but the following American-born generations conflicted with their parents who appeared as obstacles that blocked their road to the Americanization.

Within the Jewish community there was a group people suffering under the burden of "otherness" much more than all the rest. They were the Jewish women, who were alienated from the world of Gentiles with their ethnicity, as well as from the patriarchal Jewish world with their gender. As Baker states that Jewish culture is male-defined in its the religious laws, allocation of roles and status, and its language, symbols and myths (2). The Jewish women were greatly disadvantaged in religious law. Besides, the division of labour in the families allocated the realm of the spiritual to the men who dedicated themselves to their studies of Torah whereas women contributed to the family materially by working in order to

make a living and by doing the household chores. Since their husbands were mostly studying Torah, the women were the ones who had to deal with the Gentile employers as cheap labour force. The efforts of Jewish women for the survival of their families cannot be underestimated when one considers their inadequate level of English and their educational background, which did not meet the New World standards. As Ewen mentions: "Instead of receiving a formal education, they were trained in sewing, spinning, cooking-- the skills of life" (32). What the mother and daughters gained in return was something they never deserved: underestimation of their worth, the way that was entailed by their Torah-based culture. Although their intelligence and personality traits were sharpened by their daily struggles, their futures were determined by the male members of the family whose ways of practical thinking had not developed at all. Yet, the Jewish women who lived in the metropolitan cities of America found the chance to examine their status within the family, within the community and in the New World by comparing themselves with their American counterparts. Not all of them dared to voice their individual need for recognition clearly due to the patriarchal expectation that they should be silent, but some of them went far enough even to establish the institution of Jewish feminism. Although their Jewish

identity has been threatened by this need for recognition, they somehow managed to prove that they could be "person"s both in the male-defined world of Judaism and in the Gentile world.

If there is something more difficult for a woman than living in a Jewish community, that is, definitely, living by the Chassidic norms of Judaism in America. Chassidism is a subculture within a subculture in ultraorthodox Judaism and is even segregated from the other orthodox Jewish groups in the New Land. *Chassid*, a Hebrew word, literally means "the pious one" (Baker 108). In Chassidic communities, the roots of patriarchy have been established more deeply and the system requires stricter obedience in than the other Jewish groups and, as its name suggests, with an extreme dose of pioussness. The Chassidic women share the destiny of the secluded society of Chassidim by being secluded from the men's world. The men study Torah, whereas the women, paradoxically, are only "educated" to be "ignorant"(Tamar El-Or). As the Chassidim rejects all elements of modernity and secularism, everything offered by Gentile world is *goyish* to them. On the other hand, the women transgressing into the realm of the men are also treated as *goyish* and excluded from the community since they are not considered capable enough to make decisions concerning life.

Literature, as it has always been the voice of the ones who cannot be politically represented, once again served to this purpose in the Jewish context. Two Jewish female authors, Anzia Yezierska and Pearl Abraham who lived in and around New York City, were inspired by their surroundings and based their stories almost on their autobiographies; therefore, they reflected the problems of their society and difficulty of being a woman, especially a Jewish woman in a Jewish family, more accurately and impressively than any other Gentile observer could. Stressing the importance of the fictional representation of reality, Baum mentions that in fictions there is often a good deal of information about indefinite issues such as cultural ideas and beliefs, issues which are particularly important in seeking to understand the course of assimilation (190). In this case, these Jewish writers mirror back to readers the shifting images of themselves which reveal a group picture of life as well as their individual progress.

Bread Givers by Yezierska is about a typical Jewish family of the Lower East Side, N.Y., living in a typical Jewish community and about their youngest daughter who struggled for being an individual whereas the other female members of the family did not prove to be as "fit" as her in their struggle against her father whose only power came

from having been born as a man. On the other hand, The Romance Reader by Abraham is about a girl named Ruchel who grows up in the Chassidic society. As the eldest daughter of a Chassidic rabbi, she is expected to set a good example for society by following in her mother's footsteps both in appearance and morality. However, she is curious about the life beyond Chassidim and the only key to grasp the values and manners of the Gentile world lie in the books written in the *goyish* language that led to her "enlightenment" and alienation. As a romance reader, she learns about the things considered taboos for the Chassidim such as freedom, love and passion which are only allowed to be experienced within the bounds of an arranged marriage.

What these stories hold in common is that the wishes of the two heroines to become an independent individual rather than merely a woman could not become realized since they are destined to be the "other". What made them the "other", are the values that their conformist families imposed upon the heroines' own, and their demand to determine the destinies of their children by their standards. This leads to the alienation of each as a Jew, as a woman, and in Ruchel's case, as well as a Chassid. They are as alienated as the prisoners who are locked up in social cages guarded by their families. As soon as they reach a certain awareness of the social restrictions in

deciding for their lives, they start digging a tunnel in order to see the daylight that would lead them to their own new world where their individuality would be respected. The only way to break free from this cell is to leave home to see if they could fly with their own wings.

Sara in Bread Givers emerges victorious from this fight of survival in economic terms by financing her living and studies with hard work. Having received her college degree, she commences working at a school as a woman who has gained her economic independence and self-confidence. But the life she has left behind never stops following her. Her family ties still haunt her. The authority of the strong father never leaves her both mentally and materially. The preparation of Ruchel in The Romance Reader for the Gentile world depends merely on books she reads in secular language and in her circumstances, she hopes marriage can be a way to get out of her family circle. However, her marriage experience only leads to disappointment when she realises that her family boundaries that she wanted to break free, are again in her life, only in a new social form. Her father succeeds in dominating her husband who is impotent both sexually and personally. As she perceives that as long as she remains in a family circle defined by the codes of Chassidism, she can find no way to fulfil her individuality with human passions.

Finally, she ends up with leaving her husband in search of a life she perceived through romance books. Whether she will succeed or not has been left to the readers' imagination.



Chapter 1

"Other"ed as a Woman

Women have always been the ones who suffered most by the burden of "otherness". As Baker quotes of Simon de Beauvoir "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being ... He is the subject...she is the other" (212). In Bread Givers and The Romance Reader, these are two heroines who aim to survive as autonomous beings in a male-dominated world. Even their sacred books, such as Torah, seem to have been written by a male God -usually gendered as "He" in most languages. The mission to share and spread this divine wisdom is again given to the male prophets surrounded by male apostles. The fathers of the heroines, being the most recent representatives of this heritage, have devoted all their time to studying Torah, financially sustained by women in the family. As Baum mentions in The Jewish Woman in America, in that period, women protect their families against the consequences of their husband's inefficiency (191). The female contribution to support the studies of the men and to make the household's living, ironically, leads to the decrease of their own worth, since, all through the Torah, women are regarded as inferior beings to men, and, therefore, the roles assigned to women by the male-defined society,

involve only carrying out menial work such as serving and obeying the male authority in the family and in the community. The burden of being a woman is most apparent in the case of both heroines since each of them is the daughter of a rabbi and therefore, they are supposed to set proper examples in society, as well as, in the family.

Ruchel in The Romance Reader is the eldest daughter of a Chassidic rabbi. At the beginning of the story she feels honoured to take over the temporary job of motherhood as her mother leaves for giving birth to her seventh child. When children start wondering whether the baby is going to be a boy or a girl, David, the eldest boy comes up with the idea that it should be a boy since their "father would not allow" (6) a majority of girls in the family. Although his reasoning sounds naive and almost humorous and the father's reaction towards the arriving baby girl sounds neutral ("A healthy child, that's what's important" (7)), David's comment foreshadows the general outlook of the Chassidic community towards the female population. Ewen explains the discriminating attitude towards children in Jewish culture: "Jewish patriarchy deemed boy children more valuable than girl children. Boys were encouraged to study and great sacrifices are made for their sake" (43). Tamar-el-Or exemplifies such thinking with the sages of Rabbi Vezner "women were not commanded to study Torah for genetic

reasons. Women are made in such a way that their brains are unable to absorb Torah and in-depth interpretations of it" (77). Therefore, women were deprived of any intellectual facilities for centuries and although they were praised as skilled housewomen and childbearers, having a son was a more glorious event than having a daughter. As it says in the Torah: "Woe to a man who has females for his offspring!" (Yeziarska 95).

The discriminating attitude that favors boys starts back during childhood and leads to a kind of polarization between the sexes that can even cause enmity between the brothers and sisters. When Rachel helps her father working on a tune, she receives this remark: "If you were a boy, I'd keep you near me during services. You could help me" (44). Although she is able to help her father, she is not considered as capable as a boy to lead or participate in the synagogue services. It leads to confusion in her mind: "I don't know how to answer this. I'm a girl. Should I wish I were a boy?" (44). Maybe her father meant that she was not so privileged and, therefore, so valuable or pure as David to absorb the wisdom of Torah. The study of Torah, which is assigned to men in Judaic law, is denied to women, furthering the discrimination against them. Moreover, women meet severe resistance and sanctions if they transgress the boundaries that limit their active

participation in religious life. When Baum defines this prevalent Jewish attitude toward education for woman, she quotes from Rabbi Eliezer's statement in the Talmud: "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah, teaches her obscenity" (5). Since the synagogue is the first "men's club" in history, any interest by a woman in the synagogue services and the products of Judaism, such as Torah and Talmud, is considered an "obscenity," just like watching a man's sexuality.

The alienation within the family reappears when the mother leaves for Israel as a reaction to the father's insistence to build a synagogue. When, afterwards, children debate on who is right at the argument, David takes his father's side. He compares her mother with his rabbi's wife who "respects his husband . . . knows who is the man in the house. . . Never raises her voice" (120) and accuses the girls--who feel empathy towards their mother, of being "as bad as her already" (121). Girls criticize David for "being like father," doing "everything he does," like he doesn't "have a mind of [his] own" (121). Ewen explains this conflict through the sexist upbringing of the children: "Fathers trained their sons to dominate their sisters -this practice would turn sons into proper husbands" (34). Benjamin children are here at a stage of "otherness", each sex blaming the other for imitating

his/her parent of the same sex. David, as a student in yeshiva, has already formed his models that he will follow in the future. His values are shaped according to the teachings of Talmud so he already speaks like a future rabbi and a future father to the whole family. Although he is not taken seriously by his sisters, causing remarks such as "He never sounds like a scholar or a great man. He's just David"(120), he starts giving the first signs to his sisters that they are "the other"s.

While Ruchel's mother is still away in hospital, she observes Tom who has been working in the construction of their house. Tom is an embodiment of the handsome men that she has read about in romance books. His wife Julie is indeed far from the image of a Jewish woman in the way she looks and acts. She is casual in appearance. Instead of cooking lunch, she buys ready-made sandwiches. She can drive. She can marry a regular man, rather than a pious one, and she can kiss him in public. Ruchel is definitely confused: "I wonder what non-Jewish wives do all day. Julie doesn't look like a wife. She's married, but she looks regular, good, like a girl." (The Romance Reader 16). Since the wives she has met so far in her environment, including her mother, all have shaven hair, wigs, and kerchief and a very modest way of dressing, she is impressed by the way Julie looks. Next day, Ruchel's

father reminds his daughters of his expectations for their future: "It's good for you girls to practice keeping house ... You'll need it to do it soon enough for your own families"(16). Ruchel, however starts questioning such future expectations in her own thoughts, which are slowly being shaped. She has doubts about having a family. She'd rather buy sandwiches instead of cooking. She doesn't want to "breed and multiply" as opposed to Torah (Yezierska 206) and look as "good" as Julie. (Abraham 16). As an adolescent, Ruchel is naturally in search of her identity as a maturing woman and has been looking for a female model to follow, and she is much more willing to follow a Gentile, independent and natural woman figure like Julie, rather than the traditional type of a Jewish woman like her mother, who is too conventional to be natural and whose independence is limited within her household and the neighbours'.

David does his first serious job, as a potential rabbi, such as exorcising Ruchel's **dybbuk** (54), he proves that Ruchel is not "the only [potential] sinner" (63) in the family, however. When he is caught with non-kosher foods such as Wrigley's gum in his pockets, he is beaten by his mother. The punishment he is given is very significant. He is sentenced to spend the night in the synagogue with no food and warmth in order to "get a taste

of [his] father's life"(65). Although the girls send David food, he spends a tough00 night due to the cold. Then, he is found at the back door "crying . . . not grinning any more, he's crying, and he seems younger. Cold can turn anyone into a baby" (69). When he departs a bit from the straight and narrow, he is imprisoned by a woman at a place where she and her kind may not enter, and only through the other women, is he saved from starvation and cold and is able to survive. His manly pride has been wounded at his own ammunition by a woman, her mother. Ruchel is again confused: "I have a hard time falling asleep, thinking about David in trouble, about me liking him in trouble" (71). Although these feelings do not lead to hatred among the brothers and sisters, they are the first buds of conflict and alienation between the sexes.

Another form of alienation occurs in the relationship between the mother and the elder daughters, Ruchel and Leah. In the absence of their mother, they enjoy "doing things without asking"(130). Since their father is away selling his books most of the time, girls take over the management of the family. They spend their money to please everyone, get dressed as they wish and take life-guarding courses. The fact that their mother is about to return might mean the loss of their freedom that they have now been relishing. Thanks to the life guarding courses, they

have learnt to save others' lives, but with their mother back home, they would not even control their own. In the courses, they have learnt to pay attention and take care of their bodies, but they have been taught by their mother to be ashamed of theirs and their natural functions as Mrs. Benjamin admonishes her daughters: "Wouldn't you be embarrassed for everyone to know [that you have your period] ? "(143). At the Sea Gate, where they had been for a vacation, her mother had not even taken off her black stockings on the beach. "She's worried about someone seeing her"(84). Ruchel was not allowed to swim in a bathing suit: "Without clothes on, I will be naked Eve in the garden before the sin" (85), which was not the case for her father and brother: "But they are men, and they're not ashamed of their bodies. They are not the sinning Eves we are"(85). Ruchel does not want her mother's critical eyes on her that made her feel distressed and "sinful." Her anxiety goes far enough to wish "only she [her mother] were dead" in a plane crash. As long as her mother remains as a reminder of the Chassidic limitations at home, this generation gap would cause a poor and unnatural mother-daughter relationship. The fact that the same problem is not apparent in a father-son relationship--despite the same generation gap--is very significant since the boys are much

more willing to follow the example of their fathers in a patriarchal orthodox Jewish world.

"Otherness," on another level in the mother-daughter relationship, is visible when Ruchel is considered mature enough to get married. In fact, she has been hurried to get married in order to make it possible for David to marry his rabbi's daughter. David is about to join his rabbi's family that he has idealised for a long time and looks willing to follow his father. Ruchel is expected to follow her mother, but for Ruchel, marriage is a means of getting away from her family and enjoying the pleasures of the life written in romances, such as love, passion and freedom.

"Married, I'll do and wear what I want. I'll be who I am"(204). The clash between Ruchel and her mother starts as soon as they talk privately on the marriage issue.

Ruchel wants a husband who earns a living, rather than a scholar. Her mother does not agree with her: "Let him study for a few years ... I also wanted your father to get a real job, bring in a salary. But not right away"(206). Her mother's disappointment in the past is very clear since her husband has never aimed to get a "real job" ever since. With a husband as a rabbi, she has suffered from counting pennies for years while raising the children, but as a contradiction, she insists on her daughter's making a similar marriage, to a scholar, with a destiny not

different from her own. According to her, Ruchel's husband should have a "head like [her] father" (198). What Ruchel wants on the other hand, is a "better head" (199) than her father's, the one that does not care about "Chassidic dynasties and about rabbonis," the one that does not think about "women's stockings" (199). Although Ruchel's mother declares her complaints about her husband's rabbinical head very often and does not even want to be called a "rebbetzin," she is not willing to offer another choice to her daughter, instead she starts the marriage process and ignores Ruchel's personal worries and expectations as if she is deaf. The fact that the two are of the same sex does not create a mutual understanding since when the traditions matter, her mother is on the side of the patriarch. She is moulded by the patriarchal system that withheld a sufficient school education and other opportunities for self-development. "Females were expected to be pious, but not learned" (Weinberg 48) and therefore, she is unable to take rational decisions, enough to change at least her daughters' fates. Since Ruchel is born into the heart of this system, she is expected to follow the same beaten path.

When Ruchel gets married, she suffers from disappointment and the strongest sense of "otherness." The day following the wedding her mother appears at her door,

ready to shave her hair. This very important task should be done in order to keep Ruchel away from a "scandal" (254), make her like "the Jews in concentration camps" (256). On the other hand, her husband, Israel, happens to be too compliant and manageable by Ruchel's family and so does not prove to have "a better head" than her father. "Your father warned me... That you would want to be modern. I gave him my word that I would stand firm" (261). Instead of being on Ruchel's side, he remains "within Father's grasp" (262). Even her sister Leah, who has been Ruchel's most devoted confidante and her comrade with whom she had revolted against social pressures, seems to be far from understanding her " You always want what's impossible. Concentrate on what you can get" (211). When Ruchel shows regret about her marriage, Leah reacts as she agrees with Elke, who has shared with Ruchel the first experiences against the conformism, such as breaking fast on Yom Kippur or having sensual pleasures with each other. Elke ends up with being a traditional, conventional wife who enjoys every minute and every detail of his marriage, such as shaving off her hair, cooking and serving all day long and expecting her baby. Leah lets Ruchel down, as she desires to be like Elke, rather than her sister. She leaves Ruchel alone in a world they have built together on romance books. It is a world that Leah practically gives up because it is

out of reach and it is a world where Ruchel longs to live, but, towards which she is not given right directions. Her marriage with Israel is far from offering her the pleasure in romances and her husband is much more willing to belong to the Chassidic world, than the romantic one that Ruchel longs for. Although in appearance, she is like a Jew, she feels like the "other" in the world of Chassidim, alienated from her community, from her family and from her female friends.

Sara Smolinsky in Bread Givers is also trapped in "otherness" as a woman in Jewish world. In their small house, where they can hardly find space, her father has a study room full of books where they are not allowed to enter. Of course, "if God had given Mother a son, Father would have permitted a man child to share with him his best room in the house" (9). Since Judaism does not allow the daughter to say prayers after their father's death, sons are received with more pleasure than the girls who would need to be required with a dowry in the future. A Yiddish proverb explains it: "Many daughters, many troubles, many sons, many honours" (Weinberg 34). As Yezierska explains the fact right in the first chapter of her story, heaven and the next world belonged only to the man. Women could only enter heaven, right beside the men, as their wives and

their daughters. So both in this world and in heaven, men are privileged and superior and women are at their service.

The truth of the matter is Sara's father could never "spread the light of the Holy Torah" (46) without the contribution of his daughters. His wife and daughters do not only work home but are also the "bread givers" of the family. They supply "the best eating of the house" and the luxury of "study[ing] the Torah in peace" (10) for the father. Yet, their efforts are simply taken for granted rather than appreciated. Bessie, the eldest daughter and what his father calls a "burden bearer" (50) hears some appreciation for the first time on that very day she invites her first suitor, Bernstein to meet her father. In the dialogue with Bessie's father, he explains his criteria: "I like a plain home girl that knows how to help save the dollar, and cook a good meal, and help me yet in the shop" (45) Bessie obviously fits this picture. However, with her high qualifications as a home girl and a bread giver, she is also indispensable to her father. "When she gets married, who'll carry me the burden from this house? She earns me the biggest wages . . . With Bessie I can be independent...If you marry her, you are as good as taking away from me my living - tearing the bread from my mouth" (45-46). The two bargainers keep praising Bessie's qualities and what she means to them, while poor

Bessie is only seen as an object of negotiation. Bernstein has to leave Bessie since he does not want to give the payment demanded by her father so that he can "get along without [her] wages" (48). Later on, Zalmon the fish peddler, who is a recently widowed middle aged man, asks Bessie's hand in marriage and another bargaining starts. Zalmon looks for a girl who can cook for him, clean the house and look after the children and who "must be good-looking . . . mustn't be lazy and mustn't curse" (93). Now that Bessie is an "old maid" (94) and tortures his father's life with "her crankiness" (95), she is no longer wanted, and so she can be replaced for some money for him to start himself in business. Bessie, on the other hand, agrees to marry Zalmon, not because of his dead wife's lodge money or any other riches offered but when she, by coincidence, meets Benny, Zalmon's orphan child who suddenly falls ill and she is drawn to Zalmon's house with her maternal instincts. Bessie, who is praised to be as "quiet as dove" is submitted to change her residence quietly only to "carry the whole burden" (96) of another house. She is expected to be thankful to her father who saves her from being an old maid since, as he quotes from the Torah, "A man has a right to hate an old maid for no other reasons but because no man had her, so no man wants her" (95-96).

When Bessie's two younger sisters bring home the men they love and wish to marry, they face the first real disappointment and sorrow of their lives. Their father drives the men away one by one with bitter insults and humiliation and marries the girls off to the men of his choice so as to get rid of a "houseful of females on [his] neck" (72). Just like Ruchel in The Romance Reader, who experiences the first feelings of sexual alienation with her brother, David, Sara feels the same way with her father as her and her sisters' hearts are broken with his tyranny. Sara's respect for her father is replaced by hatred. "I too was frightened for the first time I felt I hated my father. I felt like a criminal. But could I help it what was inside of me?" (65).

Yeziarska felt that a man who lived completely off the drudgery of his wife and children was being unjust to them, no matter what his spiritual qualifications. In Bread Givers, as well as her other novels, "she takes a critical tone toward impractical men like her father. But she also censures the misguided wives who encourage men to remain parasites by revering them, indulging their tastes (literally, giving them the food from their own mouths), and failing to demand that the man go out to work" (Baum 199). Sara's mother is a typical example for the

"nourisher" type of a Jewish wife who almost spoonfeeds her husband.

Weinberg offers two solutions for the daughters of very rigid and authoritarian fathers like Sara's: "either make a virtue of obedience [like Sara's elder sisters] or leave home" (133). Seeing her sisters' sorrowful life with the men they do not love, Sara chooses the latter, just like Yezierska herself who was once driven from her parents' home by distressing fights with her father. Sara leaves home in order to break away from her "black life" (136) and leaves behind her father's preaching voice: "No girl can live without a father or a husband to look out for her." As he quotes from Torah, "Only through a man has a woman an existence. Only through a man can a woman enter Heaven" (137). In fact, Sara is in search of her own sense of "Heaven," where "women don't need men to boss them," where she would "become a person". Sara desires to be "somebody great" (155), and having a respectable career such as a schoolteacher requires a lot of time and effort. Besides the night school she attends, she reaches an awareness that the tyrannical male authority that has depressed her spirit and blocked the development of her individuality in the past has been all around in her life and still keeps consuming "the best eating." At the restaurant, she cannot even take a fair portion of food for

herself and she is reminded that "they always give men more" (169). The patriarchal mentality that produces the father and others like him does not only remain in the household, but everywhere in life, so while making her survival possible in other ways, Sara also has to struggle to "exist" in a male-defined world at large. Thus, her body as a woman that is able to seduce men, give birth and nurture children and perform the domestic work does not count since her brain that she nourishes with her learning at school is essential in this fight for existence. Therefore, she oversteps the limit of being a woman in a patriarchal world and breaks into the men's realm.

As Sara succeeds in living on her own with strong will and hard work, her mother and her sisters, who have as much suffered from Father's overwhelming authority and have been led to undesirable futures, ironically, do not approve of Sara's newly-gained autonomy, her courage and self confidence to live without a man's will. They are like Ruchel's mother who wants her daughter to submit to an arranged marriage with a religious man despite her own disappointment and suffering with her pious husband. Although Ruchel and Sara have different attitudes and expectations concerning life, based on their different level of experience and maturity, they both long for a life free from patriarchal values and pressures. They know that

they are classified as the "others" by both men and, the women who are victimized to the will of men like animals sacred but ritually sacrificed, or like "a goose being fattened for the kill" (Romance Reader 267). When Sara's mother pays her daughter her only visit, besides giving her warmth and affection, she tells her she would be happy to see her get married and does not look impressed by Sara's aspirations for the future: "What's a school teacher? Old maids--all of them" (172). Ewen explains the reasoning behind her worries: "Patriarchal attitudes . . . led to the fear that education might prevent the daughter from getting married" (194). The reaction of her sister Fania, who has been a book-worm before marriage and who does not look so fulfilled in her present luxurious life among the *nouveau riche*, does not sound very different from her mother: "For what does a girl need to be so educated?" (174). As they see the Sara's devotion to her studies, they compare her with another learned man that they all have suffered from: "She is worse than Father with his Holy Torah" (178). When, Sara meets Max, who is a rich businessman fixed for her by Fania. Sara does not fit into his sense of woman who cannot be identified with a book reader: "You're only books, books, books. I sometimes wonder, are you at all a woman?" (197). Max is attracted to her but not to her desire to learn. "Only dumbheads fool themselves that

education and colleges and all that sort of nonsense" (197). If Sara married Max, it would be like the marriages arranged by her father in order to make a profit, only in a more civilized form. Later, as a reaction to her refusal of Max, her father shows up to scold her for missing the "good catch" (199). Ewen indicates that fathers often actively discouraged their daughters' pursuit of education, feeling that girls were "meant to take care of the home, cook and get married" (194). There, Sara's father exposes the fact of "otherness" that polarizes man and woman like the Great Wall of China, which is visible even from up Space. "You think millions of educated old maids like you could change the world one inch? Woe to America where women are let free like men. All that's false in politics, prohibition, and all the evils of the world come from them" (205). In fact, he accuses the women who "have long hair and small brains" of daring to enter the "men only" areas such as learning, politics, and other social activities (122). In order to do away with the enemies who keep claiming rights in their "off-limits" area, men, first of all, must break women's self-confidence. The most ancient and effective weapons to accomplish it are the ancient books narrated by the wisest of them. Sara's father is an expert in using this weapon skilfully: "It says in the Torah: What's a woman without a man? Less than nothing--a

blotted-out existence. No life on earth and no hope of Heaven"(205). Ruchel and Sara search for their independence "on earth", and "Heaven" will be where they achieve it.

If we turn that former question around, what then is a man without a woman? Sara's mother replies this question, when she is asked what can be done for her on her deathbed: " Be good to Father...Helpless as a child he is...Only promise me that you will take good care of him, and I can close my eyes in peace"(245). Her father confirms this answer, wailing on her death: "My burden bearer gone! Who will take care of me now? Who will cook me my meals? Who will wash me my clothes?"(253). The picture of a childlike, "helpless" father who is in need of care and attention contradicts the one who, with his patriarchal authority, has destroyed the lives of others. In fact, he is not as "helpless" as he looks since the sacred book, Torah, always provides solutions for a man in misery and destitute. In a month following the death of his wife, he quotes from Torah: "It says no man needs to wait more than thirty days after his wife's death to marry again"(259). Torah justifies this reasoning as a wife keeps a man pure. "Otherwise his eyes are tempted by evil." As women are seen sources of evil, man needs a "dutiful" wife to keep him away from seduction. As a result, in the patriarchal Jewish standards of

judgement, women are only appreciated for how much they care for their household, how well they cook, and to how many sons they give birth and how they carry this entire burden with complete silence and obedience. In case of a loss, they are like refillable objects. Women have been left alone by their husbands with their own kind, just like Sara's mother who begs her husband not to leave her alone on her deathbed Men. Just like Sara's father, who leave their wives alone on the eve of their death, hide behind Torah or any other written or unwritten codes which ease the road of men but render women as "others".

Chapter 2

"Other"ed as a Jew

The Jewish race has a different position among all other nations in the U.S.A., as well as in the world because they established numbers of communities in a lot of countries. Since the beginning of Christianity, they have suffered from external threats against their unity. However, their culture that has witnessed anti-Semitic movements, pogroms, and even concentration camps and genocide, did not loosen and eventually disappear, on the contrary, their communal ties were strengthened, so wherever they lived in the world they managed to maintain their integrity and preserve their culture, traditions and the value systems. For most of the newcomers, as well as the Jews, America was "the new golden country, where milk and honey flow free in the streets" (Bread Givers 9). After their arrival in the New Land they saw that nothing "flow(s) free" anywhere and money is the most indispensable element for survival, even essential to Americanization.

Jews, especially the families like in Bread Givers who escaped the poverty and persecution by Czarist Russia had no intention of returning and as Weinberg mentions: "If America was to be their permanent home they had to determine what balance to strike between adopting American ways and retaining their own language and customs" (105).

Assimilation in the New World was necessary, which might mean changing of attitude, language, clothing, and even morality; otherwise the American Dream which offers more than the means of survival and which is strongly related to the social mobility would be unattainable as a social utopia. Theodore Roosevelt's credo reflects the attitudes of most educators who raised Americanized generations: "We have room for but one language here that is the English language... and we have room for but one sole loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people" (112). As the American mentality was based on the WASP standards of judgement, the first generation American Jews perceived the new values as a threat to their cultural integrity and resisted Americanization as much as they could. The following generation refused to be the "greenhorns" since it is the most visible stigma of being "the other".

Masha is the most Americanized daughter of the family in Bread Givers. She does not live in the reality surrounding her: "Father's preaching and the Mother's cursing no more bothered her than the far away noise from the outside street" (4). While the other sisters look for work to support their family, she is busy with her style. She refuses to be part of the dirt and gloom surrounding her. Fifth Avenue, by the turn of the 20th century, at the heyday of immigration "dominated the economic and cultural

life of the city" together with Wall Street (21). Looking "like a lady from Fifth Avenue" meant a lot to an immigrant girl living on The Lower East Side on her way to Americanization (Yezierska 2). As Ewen quotes from the words of social worker Lillian Wald, "words 'East Side' suggested an alarming picture of something strange and alien, a vast crowded area, a foreign city" (21). As one's clothing is the first thing that forms an impression, the "greenhorns" were stigmatized to be the "other" with their old-fashioned clothing that gave away their foreign background and poverty. Masha does not want to belong to Hester Street, which is located not far from the 5th Avenue, but offers nothing but poverty. Although the eldest sister, Bessie calls Masha, a "heartless thing" because she is carefree, her attitude must be examined considering the reactions the early Jewish immigrants received from Americans. As Ewen explains, Americans made fun of their Old World clothing in the streets or in school, and some garment manufacturers refused to employ women dressed in "un-American" clothing. However, since the Jewish immigrants could not afford to buy better items with their insufficient wages, they bought the cheapest but the stylish from peddlers and shops in the neighborhood, and in Masha's case "from a pushcart on Hester Street" (2). Masha spends her lunch money in order to buy things that

will make her look like an American woman and that will not make her an "other." Therefore, she wants to belong to her surroundings just as much as "the painted lady looking down from the calendar on the wall"(4). Masha is interested in the stories of rich people's homes where they had silver knives, forks and toothbrushes, separate, for each person. Masha is also in search of her individuality, which is part of her Americanization process. She can achieve it partly by keeping part of her wages to spend on her own needs, such as a toothbrush and a separate towel (6). Ewen explains Masha's attitude by pointing out the reality of the Lower East Side that contains the "vital old-world institutions and the most modern cultural offerings." While most daughters, like Masha's sisters, respected the family economy, and turned their wages over to their mothers, "others", like Masha, demanded the right to be "American" and keep some of their wages for themselves (16). As she is the one who is the most willing to be an *Americanerin*, she finds a lover with whom she can share her love of beauty and art. This young musician is attracted to Masha; however, Masha's father does not like him because he does not conform to some basic Jewish principles, since he is "a man who plays on the Sabbath" (60). Her father finds Jacob's Gentile attitude repugnant and Jacob's father with "the cash-register look in his eyes"(59) finds their

poverty propulsive. As Ewen suggests "Moral philanthropy perceived poverty as a character flaw, a problem of bad habits or intemperate behavior. Regeneration was possible if the poor would adopt the Protestant ethic: hard work, discipline, order, punctuality, temperance and 'clean Christian living'" (78). Jacob's father has been conformed to the Protestant ethic and he raised a son with those principles that would make him a famous pianist some day. He can not tolerate any "other" partner to devalue his quality of life. "Other" world has nothing to offer him compared with his riches: "The riches from his grand clothes so much outshined all the little riches that we shined up for him that in a minute it shrank into blackness the white tablecloth and with white napkins" (Bread Givers 58). Up to then, being an *Americanerin* has not been a vital case for Masha's family in their fight for survival. However Masha has been rejected and humiliated due to being the "other" by an Americanized man who confirmed to the prevalent Protestant ethic: "The reward of Americanization is upward mobility. And if he cannot Americanize, he will remain within the army of cheap labor, demoralized and dominated by the past" (14). Jacob's father has made his choice for the favor of Americanization that brought him riches and he wants his son to walk on his path. Therefore, he removes all the obstacles that belong to the

"other" one by one and Masha is wasted on his way to social mobility and her father's resistance to the values of the New World.

Bessie's suitor, Berel Bernstein, in his dialogue with her father about his intentions to marry Bessie, shows his Americanized Jewish identity. He does not only need a "plain home girl" (45), but he needs someone to "help [him] in the shop" (45). As Bessie is considered the main work force of her family, she is in the position of a money-spinner for both sides. Her father, who belongs to the old Jewish world, does not, in favor of himself, make concession of the way a Torah-learner should be, but, since "Money was the secular God of the new metropolis" (Ewen 23) and therefore essential to their survival,--mainly through Bessie's efforts by working by working for a living-- he finds power to "hold up the flame of the Holy Torah" (Yezierska 48). Berel Bernstein adapts to the New World conditions by working hard and finds his way to social mobility. His reaction to Bessie's father, who demands money in order to get rich without beating about the bush, shows the values of the New World versus the Old: "In America they got no use for Torah learning. In America everybody got to earn his living first... I got to sweat for every penny I earn. I'm no greenhorn" (48-49). Bessie's father does not want to "work like a common thickneck" (48)

whereas Berel Bernstein does not want to be a "cow [he] can milk" (49). In this case, Bessie is victimized by the capital system of the New World where she is treated like a profitable enterprise. Berstein, as an Americanized working man, wants Bessie, by taking into account her New World qualities such as her diligence and ability to make money and the Old World qualities such as her domestic performance. Her father wants to keep Bessie so that he can be independent enough to study Torah. So he considers her getting married and having her own family until he meets Zalmon who accepts his offer to exchange Bessie in return to some money. Although he seems to resist American values, he knows that, in order to work for God, one needs to work for the money which is "the secular God of the new metropolis" (Ewen 23). Bessie is, unfairly, destined to be the "other" in both the world of her father where she is sentenced to the undesirable status of being an "old maid" and that of Berstein where she is excluded for her devotion to her father as obliged by Jewish values.

Reb Smolinsky takes a step toward social mobility when he receives the money from Zalmon. Thinking that it is a bargain, he buys a store, which turns out to be an aborted enterprise. He can not cope with the New World practices even in his attitude to the customers. When a customer asks for a "breakfast-food bran" (133), Sara's father

begins preaching: "Such things you only hear in this crazy America. By us home, Shnipishock, they gave bran to the horses and cattle. But Americans are such fools, they make eating out of it. This is a sensible store. We don't keep such nonsense." Ewen mentions the schools and the settlements that taught children of immigrants to exchange their parents' manners and morals for those of Americans. The parents were uncomfortable with the fact that what they had formerly held sacred came to be despised, such as their traditional food or learning of Hebrew. Ewen quotes from Leonard Covello who went to a Charity School :

Once at school, I remember the teacher gave each child a bag of hot meal to take home. This food was supposed to make you big and strong. You ate it for breakfast. My father examined the stuff, tested it with his fingers. To him, it was the kind of bran that we gave to pigs in Avigliano. 'What kind of school is this?' he shouted. 'They give us the food of animals to eat and sent it home to us with our children (88).

As it is clear from Covello's words, his immigrant father shares the worries of Sara's father. Although eating bran is not an essential matter for assimilation, in Smolinky's case, it leads to a professional failure as the customer leaves the shop without getting what he wants. It

reveals the fact that what is true for a newcomer is the values and traditions he has brought from the world he left behind. An immigrant is not expected to preserve his values in the New World. Success is directly related to one's ability of adaptation; otherwise, living in the New World still trying to hold on to old traditions only leads to the feeling of "otherness" which brings together a sense of failure and inferiority.

Sara leaves home to "become a person" but suffers from the feeling of otherness in her relationship with her work mates at the laundry. She can not be understood by "others" because of the unconventional way of life she has chosen without a family or hope of a marriage. Besides, as a greenhorn, she is left out of the conversations as she does not have any idea of "beaux, or dances or latest styles" (180). It is a world she has never had any means of access. As she lives all alone, without her family, her exclusion by her work-mates hurts her deeply: "Say anything you like. Do anything you like. All right - hurt me. But don't leave me and I don't want to be left out!" (180). Her suffering increases as she faces the same alienation at school. When she shows her ambition to learn, she becomes an object of ridicule. She realises that the reason for her suffering is herself, her Jewish identity that is still considered a greenhorn yet. "Maybe if I could only live

like others and look like others, they wouldn't pick on me so much," (181). She feels "shamed and confused"(183) as she puts on some make up to "look like others" because this colourful appearance does not reflect "the hunger and the turmoil of [her] ghetto years" (211).

This conflict between her appearance and inner self once again causes her being ridiculed by her work-mates. As she gets back to her former look of an "old maid," she feels "raw with shame that [she] tried to be like the rest and couldn't"(183). Her failure in being like "others" makes her long for "the educated world, where only the thoughts you give out count, and not how you look." Her failed attempt to assimilate into the world of "light hearted savages" (183) whips her ambition to "become a person" and rise in the world of learning. She starts college, afterwards, which she has thought that would be a heaven where her desire for learning would be appreciated and which is free from prejudices, but this experience, too, turns out to be another disappointment for her as she once again feels her "other"ness. She does not view her being different as a privilege because the "others" smelled of "the soap and the bathing" (212), which makes her feel dirty and stinky. Therefore, she has such an illusion that her former Jewish ghetto background has been penetrated into her appearance like a distinct, long-lasting odour.

She feels she stands out like a couch grass in any occasion she participates in at the campus, and before she is excluded by the rest, she withdraws herself into her shell. At one dance party at school, her sense of belonging nowhere is at its peak: "I sat there watching, cold, lifeless, like last ghost. I was nothing and nobody. It was worse than being ignored. Worse than being an outcast. I simply didn't belong. I had no existence in their young eyes" (219). In her school life, she feels a stronger sense of loneliness than she had in Hester Street. In Hester Street, she had suffered from being a young woman who refused to surrender to patriarchal Jewish values. At school, she suffers from her poverty as an extension of her Jewish immigrant background as if it is a flaw. She partly overcomes the feeling of otherness by being friends with the elder professors, such as the dean, who shares her desire for learning and there she sees "the beginnings of wider places, newer light" (231).

Being back home for a visit, Sara is received with reproach by her family due to her absence and indifference for the past six years. She has been indifferent to strong family ties, which is a part of Jewish identity. Her gentile style that she is proud to put on, is despised by her sister, Fania, who says she looks "like a regular old maid" (247). The only person in the family who does not

criticise her, is her mother. As she has suffered until her death as a woman in a patriarchal society, and as a Jew in a Gentile society, she dies happily to see that at least one of her daughters has not chosen the traditional path. After her death, unlike her father and her sisters, Sara does not let the undertaker tear her only suit. She is disapproved because of her rejection since tearing one's clothes is a Jewish tradition after death. Her looking neat and proper contradicts the view of others "screaming, tearing their hair, and beating their breasts." (254). Her reaction against the condemnation of her calm attitude signifies that she has already absorbed American rationalism: "I don't believe in this. It's my only suit, and I need it for work. Tearing it wouldn't bring Mother back to life again." (255). Sara, who has not wished to show off her sorrow hysterically like her family and their neighbours, is more alien to the mentality prevalent in Jewish culture, than the widow Mrs Feinstein, who has wailed and shed crocodile tears over her mother's coffin, soon to marry her father.

Sara's appearance and her independent life style suggest that she has completed the process of assimilation. Yet the past is not so easy to erase; her new Gentile attitude has been combined with her Jewish identity and her past that dates back to her childhood in Hester Street

where she sold herrings to buy bread for her family.

Although she is assimilated to the Gentile society with her economic independence that brings forth a Gentile way of living, mentality and manners, she is always in touch with her Jewish soul that possesses her time to time. As her stepmother sends a reproachful blackmailing letter to her school asking for her wages for her father in need, she reaches an awareness that she belonged neither to the old world, nor will she belong to the new. Even when she thinks she overcomes the difficulties of being a poor immigrant girl by succeeding in life, her poverty in the past always follows her, strengthened even more by her mental attachment to her family. On the other hand, she is attracted to the principal, Hugo Seeling who has a "Jewish face, and yet none of the greedy eagerness of Hester Street any more. It was the face of a dreamer, set free in the new air of America" (273). This is the first time Sara identifies herself with another man who shares with her the same background, culture, hopes and ambitions. For Sara, except for the lack of worries concerning money, things do not really change as she works at a school that "face(s) the same crowded street where seventeen years ago [she] started out [her] career selling herring"(269) and, loves a man who is of the same blood.

As she overcomes the "otherness", she also overcomes her isolation. However, she cannot overcome the uneasiness in her heart, which prevents her enjoying every minute of her new phase of life. Although she seems to have completed the process of "becom[ing an American] person" which, as Ewen suggests, means "to equate independence and freedom with upward mobility, with leaving the community behind in order to become a successful individual" (205), she cannot enjoy the pleasures of her new life. She realizes the source of this uneasiness as she meets her father in great misery. Seeing that he is "neglected" and "like a poor orphan with a stepmother", she decides to take him under her wings, thanks to Hugo who never begrudges his support and understanding --as he is of same blood--, Sara submits to take care of her father and replace the beautiful stillness of her home with his preaching. Sara, by being a Jewish offspring, has no right to be selfish and, respecting the words of Torah: "Honor thy father", she gives up her dreams of independence and is convinced to "keep lighted the flickering candle of his life for him" (296).

Chapter 3

"Other"ed as a Chassid

It is suggested by various authors that "Jewishness in America is found on a fragmented archipelago of arenas not in a cohesive community" but this is not the case for the more traditional groups of Jewish people (qtd. in Zenner 140). The Jew who belonged to the modern Orthodoxy view the secular world as an important compartment even if they must move between it and the world of the sacred on a daily basis. But this dichotomy may cause conflicts between the sacred and the secular worlds. Ruchel's family belongs to the world of Chassidim that abstains from any possibility of a union with the wider society considering its potentially "immoral" influences. They attempt to cut their community off from the outside world as far as possible, and different Chassidic sects have entirely attempted "self-segregation and the creation of a parallel communal structure" (140). However, various Chassidim are not uniform in their way of achieving this task while living in a extremely urbanized world. Belcove-Shalin, quoting from Poll, outlines four main features that all Chassidim share: "a particular appearance, value system, ecstatic ritual behavior, and devotion to a rebbe" (196). By these four characteristics, the Chassidim are even distinguished from their non-Chassidic ultra-Orthodox

brethren. The main difference between them is their way of approaching God. The non-Chassidic ultra-Orthodox approach God through Torah study and prayer, whereas the Chassidic, through the intensity of their prayers. (109). The most important concept of the Hasidism is *tzaddik* that is a "wise man, who can bless, comfort and enlighten and who acts almost as an intermediary between God and the members of the community" (109), today the *tzaddik* stands for the Rabbi who is the mystic and charismatic leader of each Chassidic sect.

Ruchel's feeling of "otherness" has much more intensity than any Jew living in a Gentile society since she belongs to the extremely conservative society of Chassidim that even considers all the rest of the Jews as "others." Besides that, she is the eldest daughter of a rabbi which means she is supposed to obey the rules of Chassidic way of life with all the attention of the other Chassidic members on her, judging her how a rabbi's daughter should be.

She observes the Gentile world through romance books whereas she experiences the Chassidic world, with a certain objectivity, through the eyes of "others". Her mother, even in such an emergency case as giving birth to a baby, cannot make concession concerning the rituals of Sabbath. She can hardly take a taxi and does not even hand the money

directly to the taxi driver. The question of the taxi driver sounds like coming from the other world. "Can you do anything on your Sabbath?" (4). Tom, who works at the construction of their house, defines the Chassidic people as "very religious Jews" (13). Although he shows respect for the title of Mr Benjamin, Tom mentions as if he is an alien. "You should see that man at work. His clothes keep getting in the way. Every time he uses a hammer, his beanie goes flying and he goes after it. I don't know how he even gets any work done, dressed that way" (13). The pious image of her father contradicts the one that Ruchel desires to have in her life. She wants someone like Tom whom she idealised through the romantic books she has devoured secretly. As the books she has read in *goyish* language are forbidden to her, a man like Tom that belongs to the *goyish* world is someone she must never expect to be with. The dialogue between Tom and Julie about the "very religious Jews" (13) highlights the difference between the two worlds, how each party observes the other with astonishment. Ruchel's father, who symbolizes the pious world of the Chassidim with his exotic outer appearance, is even criticized by his wife who yearns for his appearance in the past: "He looked so good when I first met him. A *mensh* in a nice wool suit, long pants, and a long jacket. But your father has to be a *rebbele*." Now that he wears "short

pants" and a black hat like a rebbe should, she feels more pious, more "other" than anyone else. Since she describes his outlook when they first met as "good"—*mensch* means a good person in Yiddish--, her allusion of his present appearance is almost negative. Although she is religious and conservative, she feels such an extreme appearance is bothering, and, as for Ruchel, it is embarrassing.

As the language is one of the most essential factors that builds a society, strengthens its ties and preserves its integrity, Jewish communities in America paid a great deal of attention to protect their language, Yiddish, that they brought all the way from Eastern Europe, against the secular language of the New World. Since learning English might cause a rapid Americanization, especially for the Jewish youngsters, the parents tried to prevent them from communicating in anything but Yiddish. Weinberg exemplifies this problem by referring to one of her interviews with a Jewish American, Ida Richter. Her mother forbade her children to speak English at home at the expense of upsetting her children. Since her house was a Yiddish house, she did not let her children speak any Gentile language (106). Chassidic values require more attention not to mingle with the foreign elements. As Janet S. Belcove-Shalin quotes from the work of Poll: "Hasidim eschew the language of the people whom they

perceive as a threat to their religious integrity" (198). Similarly, Ruchel in Romance Reader is not allowed to read anything but the Yiddish texts. The books in English that she has read lead her to question the Chassidic values and arouse feelings to participate in the *goyish* world of excitement. There lies the mentality behind banning the books written in a foreign language: Ruchel would never carry non-conformist thoughts if she did not read that much of English books. Then, when she goes to the library to get a library card, she feels embarrassed by the reaction of her father who tells the librarian that Ruchel is there "without permission" (Abraham 38). Ruchel, being a member of the strict world of the Chassidim cannot explain the reaction of her father to the librarian. Her father is definitely against any English books, "written by someone [one does not] know, some evil, dirty mind" (35). Ruchel feels so sorry to be the "other" that she almost wants to be "adopt"ed by the librarian. When she is back home, her father preaches her "It is the prophet's warning to the people of Judea. The words speak of destruction, pestilence, and plague. They speak of the sin of assimilation, of trying to be like other nations, of wanting to be liked by them, and of never succeeding" (34). Later, during a visit from the yeshiva, David, as a student who absorbed the wisdom of Judaism, confirms this attitude

by saying that one becomes "less Jewish" by reading *goyish* books (118). Her father's words following his preaching signify the sense of "otherness," between the Jews and other races that has become insurmountable throughout history: "A Jew is never liked by other nations. A Jew reads only Jewish books and must remain separate"(34). Then Ruchel understands the unfriendly attitude of the bus driver, who does not respond to her greeting, and who, she thinks, feels hatred toward her. The difference between her and the blond girl in a McDonald's uniform lies in Ruchel's looking Jewish and the latter's looking WASP--that makes an American in its full sense. The blond girl, fitting better in the mainstream American type, deserves being saluted by the bus driver whereas Ruchel, being dark and Jewish, is ignored. Ruchel seems to be convinced of her destiny: "I can't wear a McDonald's uniform and expect the bus driver to like me. I am a Jew and will remain hated"(34). When her mother is back home, having already learnt about her secret book readings, she does not let Ruchel to help her with the dishes since her hands touched the "dirty books." Ruchel as a "guilty" and "assimilated American Jew" in Chassidic clothing, is excluded from both the Chassidic and the Gentile world.

Ruchel's awareness of being the "other" in racial and religious sense develops fully on their vacation at the Sea

Gate. Even when his car breaks down, her father is not willing to trust a Gentile mechanic. He prefers someone "who speaks Yiddish, a religious mechanic who won't cheat him"(75). On the road to the Sea Gate, her father's clothing is enough to cause the "anti-Semitic" drivers to laugh (76) and his attitude while driving, which is so laid back, so slow and so indifferent to the flow of the traffic—that he even reads a psalm book at the stoplights,—which leads to the anger of "others". Therefore, Ruchel's sense of "otherness" becomes one with the feeling of ridicule and embarrassment. When they finally arrive at their destination, her father comments on the gate that separates Sea Gate from the rest of Brooklyn. "An excellent thing. It makes Sea Gate safe"(77). This shows that her father treats any kind of Gentile influence as an epidemic disease and any Gentile people to be quarantined. Since the Gentiles are more numerous and, therefore, cannot be quarantined, the healthy ones—Chassidic people—should establish their own colonies and should build Gentile-proof castles and gates—not always visible—to avoid the spreading of the disease.

Later when they walk past the summerhouse of Satmar Rebbe, they see that it is "the ugliest one" in the block (81). When her mother criticizes demolishing an old beautiful house to build a new ugly one, she ends up

saying, "Chassidim have no taste"(81). Although the beauty itself is a relative subject, it is judged by the dominant taste of society, and, in this case, the taste of Chassidim is doomed to stay apart and, usually, look "ugly". On the way back home, Ruchel's mother starts a monologue complaining about how isolated is their present residence, Ashley, compared to Williamsburg, full of Chassidic people and that she does not want to live "where [she is] always a stranger" (99). Her father corrects her, saying that she is not the stranger but "The others are. They're the ones who are not living the right way". Her father's point here signifies how he, as a Chassidic leader, regards his values superior to the values of all others. In his standards of judgement, the concept of "others" does not only comprise the Gentiles, but the other Orthodox Jews and even the other Chassidic sects as her mother always says: "Every Jew in America has a little pig in his stomach"(142). Ruchel is very well aware that "If you're the only one who's different, you're the stranger"(99).

As Ruchel and Leah are carried away by the freedom they achieve in their mother's absence, such as wearing socks without seams and reading more *goyish* books, they are once again sentenced to hear their father's preaching. He says "the Jews escaped slavery in Egypt because of three things. Name, dress and language"(137) and he criticises

their calling each other by their *goyish* names, speaking in a *goyish* language and dressing in a *goyish* way. In order to be convincing, he quotes from the history. It signifies that he, as a Chassidic leader, does not accept any development that would change the Chassidim towards Gentile society. A Chassidic should always stand apart with his Chassidic name, in his special clothing and speak Yiddish so as to "escape slavery." This point of view, which attempts to preserve the integrity and the continuity of the Chassidim, sounds like an act of passive resistance against the "imperialist" Gentile influence, whether it be Christianity or modernity in any form. Ruchel and Leah could only be saved from what they call a *dybbuk*—a representative of the devil that can be avoided by walking on the Chassidic path—through keeping their names, their language and clothing unprofaned from any Gentile influence.

Walking on the Chassidic path would render Ruchel as an "other", not only in the eyes of the Gentile, but in her own community as well. Girls' conflict between their parents over wearing the bathing suits for swimming "like normal people" (142) is a problem created by the followers of another Chassidic sect called Viznitzer. Since Ruchel is the daughter of a rabbi, she should be a good model for the whole society so as not to disgrace her father against

the other group of Chassidim. While her father is criticized for working to build a synagogue in his neighborhood, Ruchel is used as a chance for them to destroy her father's reputation. The wife of Viznitzer seems to be surprised at Ruchel's wearing a bathing suit "since she has a mother who wears black socks and a father in short pants"(175). So "other" followers manage to humiliate Ruchel's parents which causes a big conflict between the parents and the daughters. As the girls refuse the restrictions to wear bathing suits, they are sentenced by their mother to "show the world what [they have] got. Like a whore"(183). Although Ruchel is not a "whore," she feels as lonely, as disgraced, and as "other" as a whore does. She is embarrassed by her mother who makes a surprise attack on Ruchel when she is at the pool in bathing suits and leaves her "feeling ugly, disgustingly grown-up and naked, fat and ugly"(185). Ruchel's self-hatred of being an "other" appears as a dislike for her maturing body.

Although Ruchel does not want to conform to the Chassidic rules, she is made willing to submit to an arranged marriage. As she is not considered "so desirable"(200) in Chassidic standards of judgement due to the rumors that she is "modern," her parents are ready "to be satisfied with whatever comes"(204). As she does not

assimilate to the expectations of the Chassidic society, she does not seem to be fit ,in the future, into the ultraorthodox definition of "a woman with good values" as the " one who helps others; who minimizes her own importance and her needs, including her economic needs; observes the rules modesty; and in general accepts the established definition of her position as a woman without doubting or deviating from them" (Tamar El-Or 63). Then, Ruchel, as she has not been given a chance to choose, is convinced to marry the first man she meets. On the day of her wedding at the hairdresser's, she suffers from the thought that it would be her last visit there as her hair would be shaven the next day onwards. If she confided in the hairdresser, "he wouldn't understand; people who aren't Chassidic don't"(239). She knows for sure that a shaven head with a wig and kerchief is the trademark of a married Chassidic woman. She hides her Chassidic identity so as not to give away her "otherness." As the hairdresser dolls her up, she feels like a ram soon to be sacrificed to receive the blessing of God and the whole community who cannot wait to embrace her. When she leaves the hairdresser's, he tells her that "next time" he will ask questions and she will answer. As he does not know she is an "other," he is not aware that there is never going to be a "next time"(240). For Ruchel the "next time" only means

the next day when her mother would show up with an electric razor in her hand, only to make her look like all the "others."

The marriage experience, for Ruchel, proves to be worse than being single. Even in her wedding night, she realizes that she does not belong to the world of Chassidim at all. Since they first met, she is not physically attracted to her husband, Israel. Compared to the strong men she had met in books, Israel cannot be even counted as a "man." In the world of the Chassidim, youngsters are married off when they are still boys and girls, not men and women, as her father says, "a boy should be under the canopy before he's eighteen" (223). Although Ruchel gets married at a traditionally proper age, she has already found out from the romantic books she had read so far, that a romantic and passionate relationship between a couple could really exist. In their wedding night, Ruchel as a mature woman who is aware of her expectations comes face to face with Israel, as a "boy" who treats her nervously in bed as if he was given directions by an adult. For Ruchel, it is far from romantic to hear someone saying "I love you" in Yiddish as an introduction (251-252). From time to time, Ruchel feels sorry for her husband who has thought that he married a Chassidic girl and who is, therefore, as disappointed as she is, and she feels sorry

for herself because she cannot get her share of the happiness of living with a man as Elke and "others" of her kind do. When she finds a chance to leave him, she ends up in a hotel room making love to a non-Jewish man as narrated in romances, no matter whether it has actually happened or is just a fantasy. When she is back home, she is likened to the moon, in her father's *kiddish* that claims to be larger than the sun and is "still ashamed to this day...[and] doesn't like to be looked at" (296). She realizes that her claim to be above her community and God's will has led her to the feeling of shame and isolation. Ruchel is lonely just like the moon that is shrunk by God's will and doomed to appear only at night, and although there are some stars to accompany her in her solitude, they are out of reach. Ruchel can only do away with the shame imposed on her, by changing the orbit of the rabbinical society and shine like the sun with her potential energy in another solar system, somewhere in the vast universe.

CONCLUSION

The Jewish women who both endured being a Jew in a Gentile land and being a woman in the patriarchal Jewish society suffered from the established value systems that rendered them "others" by their ethnicity and gender. While most of them were content with their highly praised feminine qualities as "dutiful daughter," "skilled home makers," "honorable wives," "fertile mothers" and "bread givers," there were some women, who by observing the Gentile society, dared to challenge their devalued status compared to the Gentile women outside and Jewish men inside.

In Bread Givers the major force against which Sara has to fight is her father who represents an extreme form of male chauvinism, sustained by his sermons and quotations from Torah. Sara's mother, a member of the early generation, grew up in the Old World, without having a chance to question patriarchal values, so she also raises her daughters in accordance with Jewish culture's expectations from women. In this novel, having experience and role models plays an important role: Although Sara's three elder sisters are aware of a life alternative to their traditional upbringing, they surrender to the authority of their father and follow in their mother's

footsteps. Sara, however, takes advantage of being the youngest in the family. Having seen her sisters suffer under her father's domination, she seeks a way to break through the boundaries that would otherwise condemn her to a life no different from her mother's and sisters'. The way to her freedom and self-realization is only possible by crossing the line into the society at large. As long as she stays with her family, she sees that she will give into the crushing forces that loom longer than life.

Similarly, Ruchel in Romance Reader, suffers as a daughter of a Chassidic rabbi since not only does she have to satisfy the demands of patriarchy imposed on every Jewish woman, but also because she has to set a good example to society. Since she lives in a strictly controlled world of Chassidism, it seems impossible for her to attain the love and freedom that she associates with the Gentile world. The restrictions she has to face as a youngster that prevent her from any chance of assimilation and her obligation to marry someone of her parents' choice are unbearable for her. In her case, her mother, unlike Sara's more supportive and loving mother collaborates with her husband in controlling Ruchel's life and moulding her to fit their standards. The Benjamin family has created such a closed system that Ruchel's illegitimate ways of escape give her only a limited and often idealised view of

the world outside. Therefore, with her limited knowledge and skills concerning the Gentile world, she does not seem to be ready to experience a world outside her community whereas she dislikes being restricted by the male defined codes of Chassidism.

Both Sara and Ruchel are "other"ed by the values of the patriarchal Jewish society and the Protestant Gentiles. Their families that have conformed to the-prevalent Jewish mentality tend to ignore and underestimate the mental capacity of the women. Therefore, family, which is held sacred in Jewish culture as well as other patriarchal systems, appears as a barrier that prevents any access to more liberated Gentile values as well as to the "holy" world of men. So, Ruchel and Sara experience the first sense of "otherness" at home since they are both conscious of a culture outside which offers various avenues to women for self-fulfilment and freedom. Each, in her own way, tries to overcome the barriers set by her family in order to provide for herself choices that are not allowed or even mentioned in their communities. Their struggle is towards finding an environment, which will mirror back to them an image of themselves that will satisfy their intellectual yearnings and liberate them from the expectations and gender roles that they have to traditionally perform. They also rightfully see that the stigma of the "other" that is

attached to them is caused by their family and the values that they present. Therefore, breaking through the family barriers represents for the two protagonists a major step in overcoming the "other" and "greenhorn" status that they are regarded to carry through the lenses of the people outside.

As Sara's "otherness" is closely linked to poverty, which is an extension of being a Jewish immigrant, she aims at being a schoolteacher, which is a position that promises her a regular income, a decent way of living and respectability. Since does not agree with her father who says "poverty is an ornament on a good Jew, like a red ribbon on a white horse" (Yezierska 70), she works hard to get an education that would "make [herself] for a person" (172). Sara is strong enough to endure the poor conditions that require hard work, because ever since her childhood, she has been used to working hard to save her family from starvation. In this case, she seems to have sufficient qualities to live on her own, like "a person," but, in fact, from time to time, a longing for her family, even for the preachings of her father, possesses her. Since she is used to sharing in her family, she cannot enjoy her solitude. In her new-found better conditions, she feels like "one sitting down to a meal while all the people around him were howling hungry" (281). At times, she feels

so homesick that she cannot concentrate on her work. Although she overcomes the physical hardships of life, she can hardly handle a life without sharing. She is happy, but her happiness is "so hard to be enjoyed." Even though she completes the process of assimilation to the outer world, she cannot get out of the ghetto in her mind. Therefore, she overcomes the "otherness" in two dimensions both as a Jew and as a woman, however her physical hunger in the ghetto turns into be a spiritual one and that is the cost she pays for her leaving the family.

Ruchel feels the "otherness" in its deepest sense since she belongs to a subculture within a subculture, which is entirely segregated from the Gentiles. It seems like she lives on an island that rejects any access to the mainland against the threat of colonization. Ruchel is interested in the life in the mainland through the romance books that reach her like a message in the bottle. As these messages are just a romantic reflection of life, they cannot prepare her for the competitive life in the mainland. Within the boundaries of her society, marriage seems like boat to take her to a land where she can enjoy the freedom mentioned in the books but it proves to be a failure when she realizes that the captain is her father and she herself is among the crew. As she demands to take over the rudder of the boat which is safely anchored so as

not to sail away, her marriage is doomed to sink because she is not licensed to manage it. If she leaves the boat by her free will, she does not have the strength and experience to swim across the mainland and if she can manage to reach there, her chances of adaptation to the new climate are unsure.

As metaphorically explained above, in her efforts to get away from "otherness", Ruchel uses the marriage, which is not the right choice because it is arranged by her family only to keep her in the world of Chassidism. All the decisions taken by Ruchel's parents concerning her future serve to her growing sense of "otherness". So Ruchel's struggles against her parents for earning only a little bit of freedom have to be won and won also against her husband. Then, Ruchel leaves her husband to "live in a world with no men: with no fathers, no husbands; a world free of men" (286). Since Ruchel takes her lessons concerning the life outside, from the romanticized facts of the books, the spontaneous way she leaves her husband—while he falls asleep in the bus—sounds like a romantic attempt to change her life all of a sudden without taking into account the consequences.

Family, in general, as the nucleus of the society, is the first and the most responsible environment that serves for the education of the children. This education

prepares children for their adaptation to the established values of society. However, in patriarchal societies, the family serves as a school where children get their first sense of discrimination, the superiority of men's intellect over women. As they are aware of this unfair attitude, Sara and Ruchel try to find means to escape these gender roles that render them "others" among the men and among the Gentiles. Sara, having been born and brought up in harsh conditions, manages to survive and becomes "a person". Although she cannot fully enjoy the beauty and the peace offered by her new life, she, somehow partly cures this uneasiness with the love of Hugo and by caring for her father. Ruchel, in contrast, is never allowed to experience the life outside so she is carried away by the romantic illusions that her favorite romance books depicts on the lives of Gentiles. Besides those romances that she uses as the means of escaping from the pious world, she literally breaks free twice from the family circle—once through marriage and once through divorce--the attempts that take her back where she has started. Therefore, "otherness" that is imposed by the family institution can be overcome by breaking free from the family only if, like Sara, one is immune to the life conditions, otherwise, the romanticism which blocks the immunity, especially in an

isolated society, as in Ruchel's case, leads to a stronger sense of "otherness".



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