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Martina Permanyer Rodríguez

"Navigating Two Worlds: Duality, Americanization and the Road to Becoming a Person in Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925)"

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Abstract: This paper analyses Anzia Yezierska's depiction of the Jewish American immigrant family in *Bread Givers* (1925), as well as the main character's fight for independence in her journey to become a self-sufficient member of the American society. I will argue that Yezierska's choice to offer a representation of the hazardous life of the Jewish American immigrant young woman suggests the presence of a cultural duality between the traditions of the Old World, principally represented by the protagonist's father, –an Orthodox rabbi who keeps the modernity of the New World out of his home–; and the aforementioned New World, that, to Sara Smolinsky– the main character of the novel– speaks for the independence that she longs for during her youth. As she herself proclaims, she aims to "become a person" (Yezierska 50), an expression she uses to express her wanting to assert herself as an independent member of the American society, consciously accepting that she will have to face the challenges that exile and patriarchal patterns entail (Bančić 24), but willing to do so in order to become a "real American."

Keywords: Immigration, Jewish American, Americanization, culture, independence, duality.

Martina PERMANYER RODRÍGUEZ

Navigating Two Worlds: Duality, Americanization, and the Road to Becoming a Person in Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925)

0. Introduction

Set during the 1920s on New York's Lower East Side, Anzia Yezierska's novel *Bread Givers,* first published in 1925, tells the story of a young woman, Sara Smolinsky, who lives in a poverty-stricken household with her parents and her three older sisters. The setting of the novel was not foreign to Anzia Yezierska, who partly models Sara's journey on her own experiences growing up on the Lower East Side. As pointed out by Ivana Bančić, the fact that the novel is partly autobiographical makes it particularly suitable to develop a greatly detailed character analysis (28). In connection therewith, I would suggest that the autobiographical aspect of the narrative is also especially relevant to establish an accurate socio-cultural description of the environment in which the action of the novel takes place.

In the novel, we are able to watch a character grow, struggle, and find her own sense of being in a specific time period filled with change, which undoubtedly helps us understand the period through the prism of personal experience while also providing us a needed distance, since this is ultimately a work of fiction (28). We can recall this story not as an account of specific events, but as a realist piece that can truly makes us understand, even from a distance, the complexity of the events surrounding the life of the Eastern European Jewish immigrant community of New York in the 1910s and the early 1920s.

In this paper, I aim to briefly describe the social and cultural struggle of the process of becoming *Americanized* that the main characters of the novel, and more specifically Sara, experience; Sara's feeling of loneliness that appear as a consequence to her not wanting to accept her traditional family and culture; and her seek of independence and self-worth, that heavily contrasts with the destiny accepted by her mother and three older sisters, who are portrayed as imprisoned and dominated by an overbearing and tyrannical father (Carter 25). Of all her sisters, Sara is the only one who attempts to free herself from the burden she is supposed to carry as a woman in a household ruled by an orthodox Rabbi in the early 20th century. Regarding this, I will examine some of Sara's father Reb's statements in order to highlight another of the reasons why the main character feels the imperious need of living her own life, away from the demands of her patriarchal father, who imposes multiple burdens upon her and her sisters (25). To summarize the paper, in the first chapter I will cover the state of permanent loss that the immigrant experience entails. About this experience, I will suggest that any optimistic analyses of experiences of exile would not consider the real struggle of leaving a community to enter a new one that is not welcoming nor understanding of the conditions of immigrants. This chapter will be followed by a description of the process of acculturation of the Americanized Jewish community of the Lower East Side of the early 20th century. The third chapter will deal with the specific process of Americanization as it is described in *Bread Givers*. In relation to it, I will identify a "permanent state of strangeness", as I have called it, that does not really let immigrants adapt to their host culture until they

fully embrace their hybrid identity. As for the fourth and last chapter, it will focus on examining the experience of the protagonist of the novel and the ways in which the patriarchal cultural and societal norms of her community, further perpetuated by her father, constrain her.

1. The immigrant's construction of an identity

As expressed by Edward W. Said, modernist interpretations of migration usually result in a positive and productive representation of the process (173). However, I argue that such a reading cannot be applied to the migration movement of the Eastern European Jewish community as observed in *Bread Givers*. One of the main reasons why this community exiled themselves from their countries of origin is that they wanted to improve their living conditions. In this regard, an optimist interpretation of exile would trivialize the wounds of the communities who had no other option but to leave their entire world behind and to immerse themselves in a new society that was initially not welcoming to them nor understanding of their situation (173). In addition, we should not forget the fact that this situation was permanent for most of the people who decided to migrate.

To Said, exile becomes a condition of terminal loss, which is absolute (173). Immigrants developed a permanent state of unrootedness and strangeness, as well as a cultural and social duality, that made difficult for them to fully belong to the new culture. However, at the same time they did not want to relinquish the culture in which they had grown in. This state of unrootedness, I argue, probably resulted in a metaphorical disfigurement of their own identity. In the case of young people, it could be said that this state allows them to develop their identity, as it happens with Sara, who, after years of feeling like a stranger in the modern US society, claims her place as an independent and self-sufficient being who –even if she might always feel like she does not quite belong in America– does no longer feel like an outcast and is content with her situation.

2. The acculturation of the Americanized Jews

As Bančić considers, *Bread Givers* successfully depicts the complexity of the social situation of the immigrant Jews living in New York at the time (25), who were not only dealing with the loss of the only home they had ever known, but also exploring the New World and trying to delve into the specifics of the American society, including how people needed to behave, the gender roles that they had, and even aspects such as when was their rent due. The learning of all these aspects was definitely not easy for some of them who were very used to being essential pillars in their old communities and had a hard time accepting that, in the New World, they were still nobody. Reb Smolinsky –Sara's father– is actually a great example of this trouble accepting the new reality of life in America. As he is an Orthodox rabbi, he considers himself something similar to God on earth, and his main (and almost only) daily activity consists in studying the Torah. This occupation, in America, is not perceived as "saintly" as it was perceived in Eastern Europe at that time, but as a lazy occupation that is not a real job, because it does not make money nor contributes to the continuity and stability of the American

economic activity. In a country where high productivity and materialism are valued, there is no place for an Orthodox rabbi who does not earn money with his occupation.

In *Bread Givers*, the relationship between Sara and her father clearly illustrates the issue that many immigrants faced when they were not able (nor tried) to assimilate the culture of the society they were now living in, but their children did. As Gay Wilentz points out, it is when Reb chooses to strictly adhere to his old habits, transplanted from Europe, that arguments between father and daughter appear (34). The result from those arguments is Sara's realization of her exclusion from the family, as well as her unrootedness from her own community (Bančić 30). In relation to this, we can better understand Reb's impossibility in adhering to the unwritten rules of America by exposing the fragmentation of the Jewish society in the United States. In the novel, this social fragmentation appears in the characters themselves. For example, in characters such as Max Goldstein, a young man who travels to New York from California especially to meet Sara and, should everything work out, marry her. Goldstein is an established businessman and represents the Americanized fraction of Jews of the United States. In that sense, for the present analysis it is relevant to consider Delia Caparoso Konzett's account on the subject in relation to the novel:

> The Jewish community included two fractions: The Western European Jews, who had become established in America by the end of the 19th century, and the Eastern European Jews; two fractions contrasted in the novel. (Caparoso Konzett 25 qtd. in Bančić 25)

Another example of the first fraction we find in the character of Berel Bernstein, a young man who intends to marry the eldest of the Smolinsky sisters, Bessie. However, Reb, Bessie and Sara's father drives Bernstein away by claiming the family's need for Bessie's wages to live. As Reb does not work himself, he relies on the economic support of his daughters. And this is indeed not well seen nor understood by Bernstein, who belongs to the fraction of already Americanized Jews who adhere to the rules and customs of the New World. This fraction is a clear example of the phenomenon of cultural adaptation, which is a result of an amalgamation by which the characters of Yezierska's novel –who present a hybrid identity– legitimate their Jewish background while participating in the American lifestyle (Campos 90). Bernstein is apparently a self-made man, as he owns a shop, which allows us to see him as someone who understands the functioning of the American economy and society. Seeing this, Reb demands his economic support, explaining that, if Bernstein supports him, he will not need Bessie's wages anymore and he will let her marry him. Nevertheless, Bernstein refuses, stating:

> I'm marrying your daughter—not the whole family. Ain't it enough that your daughter kept you in laziness all these years? You want yet her husband to support you for the rest of your days? in America they got no use for Torah learning. In America everybody got to earn his living first. You got two hands and two feet. Why don't you go to work? (Yezierska 48)

As for Reb's answer, he states that we won't "work like a common thickneck" (Yezierska 48) and thus expressing that he considers himself a superior individual in comparison to Berel Bernstein, who represents the aforementioned Americanized Jewish community. The fact that immigrants are not familiar with the functioning of the country of the host culture results in disorientation (Bančić 32). And actually, Reb Smolinsky is confused when things do not go as he has planned. For example, when he apparently finds a bargain in the newspaper and, without consulting his wife, buys a grocery shop before even examining it. As a result, the family starts working in the shop and soon finds out that they have been cheated, since the shop is absolutely empty. Reb Smolinsky's difficulty in adhering to the rules of the New World, combined with his stubbornness and inflexibility, greatly hampers the family's opportunity to thrive in America. He shows to be absolutely incapable to manage the family's finances and to earn a living wage to support them, but he still wants to decide how the money is spent and continuously loses it in meaningless shenanigans, such as the grocery shop. In relation to this, I argue that it is his pride, more than his disorientation, what makes him unable to accept that there is a lot that he needs to learn in order to be able to pursue business endeavors in America. In addition, even if his wife and daughters are the ones who earn money for their living expenses, as opposed to him, he still ridicules them and considers their physical characteristics (such as their long hair) as hindrances to their work. In addition, he regards the female brain as "small" and thus useless for business.

In order to conceptualize how the fraction of non-Americanized Jewish immigrants perceived the ones that were adapting better to the customs of the United States culturally, socially and economically, there is actually a term, *Americanerin*, that appears not only in *Bread Givers*, but also in other stories by Yezierska, which frequently represent the identity that newcomers adopt to emancipate from the Lower East Side (Campos 85). As Rebeca E. Campos very well identifies, in the novel, Sara is referred to by this term by Zalmon, the fish peddler, an Eastern European immigrant who forces his wife, Bessie, Sara's older sister, to remain within the domestic sphere. We can observe this in the following example: I got enough trouble on my hands with my own girl going wild! I don't want another *Americanerin*[1] in my house (Yezierska 144). As Zalmon complains about Sara acting "too American", we can find another example here of the cultural differences between the Jewish tradition and the modern American world, personified in Sara's attitude towards her sister's freedom of choice (Campos 85–86).

3. The immigrant's permanent state of strangeness

In order to understand the meaning of what it meant to be an immigrant in America at the time, and also as a wish to legislate immigrant policy, the subject known as "the immigrant

[1] It should be noted that, while Yezierska uses "c" instead of "k" in *Americanerin*, the correct spelling is *Amerikanerin*, as the word comes from the German language and it derives from *Amerikaner*, which is the masculine for *Amerikanerin* and means "American woman". Even if the word is used to convey a derogatory meaning in *Bread Givers*, the German word is not derogatory in any way.

experience" would be picked up and institutionalized by many historians of immigration in the second half of the 20th century. These historians argued that the immigrant experience was central to –and even constituted– America, and that each generation of immigrants reinvigorated the spirit of the nation (Wald 176). In relation to the understanding and description of the immigrant experience, there were two separate sources of information when it came to collecting their realities. On one hand, the emerging literary genre describing the so-called "immigrant experience" and, on the other hand, the actual experiences of the people who had immigrated. Even so, they shared the primary intention to bear witness to the struggle of adjusting to a new place and the ambivalences of doing so, as well as the common desire to depict the often-painful struggle to negotiate two cultures and to demonstrate their cheerful conformity with the terms of Americanization (177).

This "cheerful conformity" is a central element in many of the immigrant narratives depicting the struggle of a young woman looking for her place in the New World, as her main motivation is usually becoming a real American. As Sara herself states in *Bread Givers*: "I'm going to live my own life. Nobody can stop me. I'm not from the old country. I'm American!" (Yezierska 138). Sara believes herself to be an American because she knows that she is smart enough to look out for herself, and independence is, of course, an American ideal that the citizens of the nation want to live for. As Alice Kessler-Harris discloses in the novel's introduction, Sara Smolinsky takes America at its word and tries to live by its ideals (19). I would even go as far as to venture that, actually, Sara's ideals are already the American ideals, because she goes after the American ideology of success, which, at least theoretically, included women in the road to a life of opportunity and accomplishments. It is true, though, that the Jewish way of life did have in mind the importance for women to receive an education, and, when the sons had already gone to school, the families made sure that their daughters could be educated as well and even go to college, if this is what they wanted and it was possible. But, as exposed by Kessler-Harris:

> "[…] at its extreme, when a woman's autonomy involved the search for personal fulfillment, it became nothing short of revolutionary. It violated a basic tenet of Jewish family structure: that women were merely the servants of men, the extensions of their husbands." (20)

Reb Smolinsky's words when Sara expresses her will to leave home to fend for herself and pursue independence actually confirm this subordination of women:

> A young girl, alone, among strangers? Do you know what's going on in the world? No girl can live without a father or a husband to look out for her. It says in the Torah, only through a man has a woman an existence. Only through a man can a woman enter Heaven. (Yezierska 136-7)

As for Sara, she promptly answers that she is now American, and thus she needs no one to look out for her, because she is smart enough to do it herself. However, according to Bančić, Sara's decision to exclude herself from her Jewish upbringing does not only leave her without

a community, which is the one she was brought up with, but also leaves her excluded from the American society (30). Having grown up in a traditional Jewish household, Sara cannot really escape the ways of the Old World, whose culture imposes limitations on women who wish to be free and to live as Americanized citizens (Carter 26). In *Bread Givers*, Sara is unable to escape and she continues to carry the burden of providing for the patriarch of the family, seemingly forever (26). At the end of the novel, Sara accepts her father under her roof to take care of him in his old age, as she is seemingly in a better financial position than her three older sisters. Her burden, after all she has been through to achieve independence, and become a self-sufficient and educated citizen, lives on. As Sara herself states: But I felt the shadow still there, over me. It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me (Yezierska 297).

As Carter notes, this statement echoes the imagery of the beginning of the novel, when Sara is described as someone who carries a heavy load upon her heart at only ten years old (34). Even if the heroine seems to reach the end of her journey when she finds a place in American society, this connection between the beginning and the end of the novel makes us inevitably wonder whether she will remain in this state of strangeness that arises from her immigrant status till the end of her days. Still, this immigrant status, although in *Bread Givers* it seems so, does not completely isolate Sara in the American society. The New World was consisting of a large immigrant population coming from different areas of the world, so, I argue that, as a matter of fact, Sara was not alone in her struggle. Nevertheless, when Sara decides to leave her home, she finds herself completely lonely in an unfamiliar setting. Some examples of this can be found during her time working at the laundry and during her college years, where she feels isolated despite being surrounded by fellow students who represent the one thing that Sara most admires: the American ideal. Even though she goes to college to pursue higher education, what she most notices about the "real Americans" that study with her and what she finds more appealing about them is their physical appearance, including their clothes, hair, and cleanliness:

> What a sight I was in my gray pushcart clothes against the beautiful gay colours and the fine things those young girls wore. […] never had I seen such plain beautifulness. […] And the spick-and-span cleanliness of these people! It smelled from them, the soap and the bathing. Their fingernails so white and pink. Their hands and necks white like milk. I wondered how did those girls get their hair so soft, so shiny, and so smooth about their heads. (Yezierska 212)

In connection therewith, I would suggest that the view of the "real Americans" is what ultimately brings her closer to her pursuit of the "ideal lifestyle" that she is after. Taking this statement further, the physical appearance of her fellow students seems more important to Sara than the education or profession she chooses, as her main motivation to study to become a teacher is to achieve her dream to "become a person" (50), meaning that she wants to become a self-sufficient member of the American society. As Amalia Sa'ar suggests, Sara is attracted to the consumerist lifestyle, since it is when she succeeds to take a walk down Fifth Avenue dressed like a "real American" when she finally feels like a person (687).

However, I agree with Sa'ar's statement that there is always a price to pay for a member of a minority community that decides to start following the dominant group: the minority history should be left behind (687). If she wants to be part of the American society and be Americanized, Sara finds that she must relinquish her traditional family and culture (Carter 25). In the novel, the main character is presented as a female immigrant who makes choices (Wald 184). Apparently, not to detach herself from her culture, but to achieve something –in her case, an education and, subsequently, a real opportunity to find a position that will support her financially without ever having to suffer hardships in that sense. Because of her road to independence, she displays a heroism that attests to her fitness not just to become American, but actually to embody and reproduce America (184). Sara epitomizes the idea of America in the way that she succeeds in achieving her personal and financial independence. Hence, she is an accurate representation of the self-made citizen. Both the American dream and the self-made man are deeply rooted ideas in the imaginary of America, and both concepts are clearly present in the narrative of *Bread Givers* in the way that Sara trusts in the American dream and succeeds in her road towards independence.

While this might convey the feeling that this novel represents the triumph of the American ideal, we should consider Blythe Tellefsen's comment on the depiction of the American dream in American literature centered around the immigrant experience: "it calls attention to itself as a myth, as an artificial construct, a fiction within a fiction in the most self-conscious of ways" (230). Therefore, *Bread Givers* does not represent a story of success by displaying how the answer to all the problems that immigrants go through is in the process of Americanization: it shows how they can succeed in spite of the hostile environment in which immigrants find themselves in.

4. The rules of womanhood in *Bread Givers*

According to Wilentz, not only did Jewish immigrant women undergo through the loss of their culture and traditions, but also, they were doubly disadvantaged in comparison to Jewish immigrant men (34). They had to fight against Anglo-American prejudices related to the Jewish race and religion, while they also had to stand up against the very strict rules of the patriarchal cultural and societal norms of the time. Especially considering that, in the orthodox Jewish community of the time where many Jewish women, such as Sara, found themselves in, women were usually considered to be servants of men. And especially in this context, where the five women of the Smolinsky household are at Reb Smolinsky's mercy. They have to obey him, cook, clean, and work for him, and even let him have the best piece of meat and the fat in the soup broth every day; after all, he is the man of the house. However, as Sara attempts to free herself from the burden she carries for being a woman, Yezierska creates a sense of hope and determination in Sara's fight for independence and self-worth (Carter 25).

At the time, families were universally perceived as the custodians of ethnic and religious tradition, but it was in the primal conflicts between fathers and sons that the Jewish struggle toward modernity was at its most intense (Homberger 134–45). Growing up in such an oppressive environment, it is no wonder that American-raised children of Eastern European Jewish families exhibited an ambition and self-confidence that, unknown to their ghetto-born

parents, was actually a staple of what would be the Jewish culture of the early 20th century, as stated by Homberger (134–45).

Going back to the specific case of Jewish young women at the time, as Reb Smolinsky lets her wife and daughters know in *Bread Givers*, women meant nothing without their fathers and husbands. They were merely an extension of them. In contraposition, they bear the economic burden of the household on their shoulders. In this sense, the novel depicts two contradictory demands placed upon women in the Jewish community: to be the ones who work and earn a living for the whole family, but also to accept their secondary position within the institution of marriage and the entire community (Bančić 33). These societal obligations for women, in addition to the economic struggle that the Smolinsky family faces, force Sara to work since she is only ten years old. Even at that age, Sara's burden is the same as her mother and sisters'. As she herself states in the novel: "I was about ten years old then. But from always it was heavy on my heart the worries for the house as if I was mother" (Yezierska 1).

This omission of the male voice clearly reinforces the implicit privileges of men within the traditional Jewish family (Carter 26). In Reb Smolinsky's household, a hierarchy is established, placing women in a far more inferior category than men. While men can be intellectuals, and dedicate their lives to the study of the Torah, as Reb does, women have to "struggle with the everyday business of survival" (Shapiro 81), meaning that they have to focus on finding work, food, and shelter. These occupations are, to orthodox Jewish men of the time, degrading occupations, as they feel entitled and refuse to let go of their privileges as intellectual and religious men of the Old World.

Therefore, Sara's wish for independence goes hand in hand with her desire to escape the rules of womanhood that have greatly affected her, not only in her personal development, but also, and more specifically, her opportunity to have a normal childhood. Yet after everything Sara goes through as she leaves home, struggles to find work and food, and in her subsequent process of achieving an education, she still has to face her feelings of loneliness and even of guilt for wanting to be self-sufficient. To Sara, her wish to become independent is too much to ask, since she comes from an upbringing where she would have never been good enough simply because she had been born a woman. When she achieves her goal of becoming a teacher and finding a position in a school, she states:

> The goal was here. Why was I so silent, so empty? All labour now—and so far from the light. I longed for the close, human touch of life again. My job was to teach—to feed hungry children. How could I give them milk when my own breasts were empty? Maybe after all my puffing myself up that I was smarter, more self-sufficient than the rest of the world—wasn't Father right? He always preached, a woman alone couldn't enter Heaven. "It says in the Torah: *A woman without a man is less than nothing.* No life on earth, no hope of Heaven." (Yezierska 270)

Because of her being deeply conditioned by her upbringing under her father's strict and irrational rules, Sara still feels beneath other people and seemingly unsatisfied because she does not have a husband nor children. We see that when she states that her breasts were empty and that, according to what she learnt from her father, "a woman without a man is less

than nothing" (Yezierska 270). In this sense, the role of Jewish women does not differ that much from the Anglo-American requirement that women had to be wives and mothers, even if they were forced or allowed, depending on their families' thoughts on the matter, to also earn a living (Howe qtd. in Wilentz 35). They were nonetheless first and foremost bound to get married and to take care of their household and, naturally, they were socially inferior to men, to whom they owed obedience.

Connected to this, I would consider the acknowledgement from the American society in *Bread Givers* to be essential for Sara in her road to adopt the American identity (Campos 90) and to feel comfortable in America as an Eastern European immigrant. I would suggest that it is especially what Campos calls "the male approval", what Sara longs for the most after she has achieved her main goal of becoming a teacher. As previously exposed, this desire comes from her upbringing, but even years after she has freed herself from her father's control over her life, she still wishes for his approval despite knowing that his rules were oppressive and completely wrong.

The male approval is, indeed, closely related to the rules of femininity in America. As we have previously seen, Sara admires her fellow students during her time at college mostly because of their clean appearance. They represent the "real Americans" and bring her closer to her wish to "become a person" because they are beautiful in her eyes (Yezierska 50). In connection therewith, Sara's parents also consider appearances the most important aspect when, for example, choosing her daughters' husbands, or when deciding who is trustworthy and who is not. Appearances are (almost) everything in a poverty-stricken household and, as a consequence, appearances will continue to have an essential meaning for a young woman who refuses to perpetuate the rules of the Old World and defines herself as American. In that sense, the quest for identity undertaken by Sara is related to the effectiveness with which she reproduces American femininity (Campos 90). Also, according to Campos, as long as she assimilates to any of the American female archetypes, Jewish women could gain access to the public sphere and pass themselves off as American. Nevertheless, the heroine of *Bread Givers* never seems to completely erase her culture of origin, especially when we consider how she finds her place working in the Lower East Side, which is where she spent her childhood. And, in the end, it is a man who contributes to her reconciliation with the traditions of the Old World of her childhood: Hugo Seelig. As he represents a modern perspective on the union of both worlds, Sara finally finds her purpose and she is presented as an empowered heroine who has accepted herself as someone with a hybrid identity. To sum up, Sara's journey is a successful one even though a complete Americanization might not be possible because of the main character's cultural duality that she has to accept as what defines her.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has described Anzia Yezierska's depiction of the Jewish American immigrant family in *Bread Givers* in order to demonstrate the existence of a permanent cultural duality between the Old World and the New World, that the main character is not able to neutralize but rather learns to accept as the principal characteristic of her being and as something that shapes her reality from childhood to adulthood. By examining the difficulties

that the Jewish American immigrant community experienced in the process of adapting to the rules of a new culture, I have tried to emphasize the relevance of fiction writing in order to better understand the immigrant experience. In this case, through the literary work of someone who was herself a testimony of what it meant to live in the Lower East Side of Manhattan as a Jewish American immigrant from Eastern Europe.

Another element that I have illustrated throughout this paper is the social and cultural struggle of Americanization, a process that divided the Jewish immigrant community of New York in the 1910s and the early 1920s into two fractions, and entailed a disorientation among the members of the community that included feelings of unrootedness and isolation. In analyzing how the Americanization process is perceived in the novel, I have identified a status that I have called a "permanent state of strangeness" that does not allow immigrants to experience the symbolic rebirth they long for, as Campos calls it (90).

By appreciating the road to independence of a young woman, Sara Smolinsky, we have observed how, in the way to become a "real American", Sara is unable to feel fulfilled until she fully embraces herself as a hybrid individual. And she achieves her purpose despite her having been conditioned to always depend on a man. Even if it is Hugo Seelig who finally helps her find closure and a reconciliation with her upbringing in a Jewish orthodox household, on a final note I would like to acknowledge how Sara succeeds on her own in freeing herself from the burden she has carried since her childhood simply for having been born a woman. While being a story of how hope and determination contribute to the realization of one's purposes, we can observe how the story is not a direct representation of the triumph of the American dream; as Tellefsen addresses it, the American dream might be a myth. As contemplated in *Bread Givers*, the only triumph appears when the main character accepts herself in her duality.

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Bioprofile of the author:

Martina Permanyer Rodríguez is a graduate student in the field of American Studies at the Complutense University of Madrid with a Master's Degree in Medical and Healthcare Translation from Jaume I University. Her main areas of academic research include Modern and Contemporary Anglophone Literature with a focus on the novel, Migration Studies, Gender Studies, and the Medical Humanities, with a special interest in motherhood and illness narratives. She has worked as a Spanish language assistant in Germany, as an intern translator at the EU Commission, and is a recipient of the Fulbright scholarship.

Contact: <mperma01@ucm.es>