

# Of Science and Excess: Jacob Riis, Anzia Yeziarska, and the Modernist Turn in Immigrant Fiction

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The beauty of looking into these places without actually being present there is that the excursionist is spared the vulgar sounds and odious scents and repulsive exhibition attendant on such personal examination.<sup>1</sup>

Jacob Riis's description of the "vicarious adventure" offered by photo-journalistic jaunts into the tenements of New York's Lower East Side provides insight into his unique brand of sensory tourism in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). Riis's best-selling text—a thorough and sweeping documentation of urban poverty and an influential call for housing reform and urban development in New York at the turn of the century—also serves as perhaps the nation's earliest form of "embedded" journalism. From midnight raids and candid photos to conversations and walks through pubs, alleys, and dark tenement hallways, Riis uses his curiously come-hither prose style and raw amateur photography skills to lead his middle-class American readers from the comfort and safety of their hearths to the darkest corners of the urban ghetto.<sup>2</sup>

A firm believer in "organized, systematic charity upon the evidence of my senses," Riis adopts the tone of a tour guide leading a group of excursionists. But his language hardly spares readers from "the vulgar sounds and odious scents and repulsive exhibition attendant upon such a personal examination."

On this journey, readers are addressed as if they are walking alongside Riis on Cherry Street. They are commanded to mind their step, to look out for the children, to listen to the odious sounds of the tenement—hacking coughs that threaten contagion, squeaking hydrants unable to quench the “great thirst” of the tenement dwellers. Suddenly, amidst the warmth of American middle-class firesides, there are obstacles, there is darkness and disease, there is thirst and the wailing of children—the tenement has entered.<sup>3</sup>

Jacob Riis serves not only as a guide through these tenements, but also as a native informant. It is through his own immigrant perspective—as a native of Denmark who once lived in the slums he describes in his work—that readers are able to penetrate this world, not just as onlookers observing from a safe distance, but as participants who allow it to seep into their cognitive space. The ghetto, translated and made visible through the prose and photographic evidence provided by the authenticating presence of Riis, awakens readerly sensation and experience. By smelling, tasting, and feeling with his body the things readers cannot feel with theirs from such a “safe distance,” Riis serves as a sensory translator of the tenements. Through the use of prose and photographs that reach across the cultural divide by capitalizing on the universal affective bonds of cognitive and bodily perception (the sound of a cough, the smell of stale bread, the sight of a small child playing), Riis humanizes this “other half,” the very people he describes as living in the most *inhuman* conditions.

This transport, this kind of sensory stirring, is of course one of the most vital and successful components of Riis’s unique call for social reform. As readers “picture” how the other half lives—how “these people” smell, how they sound, what they eat, what they look like, how it might feel to rub up against them in the street—they are no longer as far removed as they were before reading Riis’s document. The other half has made its way from the tenement into the private, domestic space of the white, middle-class American reader.

Riis’s narrative also serves as an assimilationist rite of passage of its own, bringing Riis from those darkened outskirts of American tenement culture from which he, too, emerged, into a position of cultural and professional expertise, an “anti-conquest” hero on American soil. Mary Louise Pratt famously coined this term to describe the curious position of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century western traveler who goes abroad to name and tame uncharted territory, not in the name of war or empire, but for the noble and lofty aims of science and progress—yet armed with the same rhetoric of adventure, discovery, and authority and often with similarly devastating consequences for the local populations he or she came to study.<sup>4</sup> By documenting the tenements as he does, Riis, too, names and claims them, no longer from a position of solidarity within but from a position of authority without. By leading readers through the interior hallways of his own American chrysalis, Riis secures a unique place within the narrative of American conquest and manifest destiny, showing that he, too, can expand western influence in the “foreign territory” of the East Side. In so doing, he

straddles a once-impassable gulf between native informant and professional observer and moves, through his work, from foreigner to proud son. Time and again, Riis is dubbed by his good friend Theodore Roosevelt—that otherwise harsh critic of hyphenated Americanism—as the closest exemplar of an “ideal American” as Roosevelt had ever known.<sup>5</sup>

Although Riis’s work is most often categorized as sociology or photojournalism, its rich literary, ethnographic, and religious qualities belie easy generic classification. As a reporter for the *Indianapolis News* stated about Riis, in a review of his 1901 autobiography *The Making of an American*, Riis was a man who “knew how to put scientific and sociological truths in such a way as to make one think he was reading romance.”<sup>6</sup> The lyrical, luring quality of his prose in all of his works—especially when paired, as in a text like *How the Other Half Lives*, with his stark photographic images—imbue Riis’s style with a hybrid quality, making it stand, like tenement culture itself, in a liminal space within the national cultural and literary discourse between domestic and foreign, self and other, science and romance.<sup>7</sup>

This article examines, in part, the difficulty of categorically situating Riis’s work in order to reveal the broader anxieties surrounding the classification and documentation of immigrant experience itself—an anxiety that is compulsively performed by Riis’s own words and photos and that rehearses the very cultural and disciplinary hybridity it seeks to contain. Riis’s analysis works at the interstices of sociology and literature, the scientific and the picaresque, revealing the vexed position of the immigrant writer (and subject) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who is caught between a desire to provide empirical evidence of successful assimilation into American culture and a desire to present a convincing and authentic account of cultural difference.

Only a few decades later, Anzia Yezierska’s own emergence from the Jewish ghetto of Riis’s Lower East Side into the exoticizing gaze of Hollywood literary stardom traces a similar journey from poverty to fame, as loosely chronicled in her autoethnographic novel *All I Could Never Be* (1932) and her memoir *Red Ribbon on a White Horse: My Story* (1950). This “Sweatshop Cinderella”—as the press quickly dubbed her on the Hollywood adaptation of her short story collection *Hungry Hearts* (1920) into a Goldwyn Pictures film in 1922—also honed her own sociological and artistic skills in the darkened halls and teeming streets of the Lower East Side.<sup>8</sup> Yezierska’s work likewise grapples with the difficulty of traversing the margins of tenement life and middle-class American life and of navigating the dual role of native informant and professional expert. Unlike Riis, however, Yezierska does not extol the redemptive virtues of middle-class charity, nor does she don the heroic gaze of science in her own drive toward cultural inclusion, uplift, and change. Instead, she offers a scathing critique of the cold mistranslations of scientific language and its fixed ambition to define and contain immigrant groups without attempting to learn about what motivates them—their passions, their hopes, their love for

one another, their own ambitions for prosperity and success in a new world. An interesting foil to Riis's own emotionally charged but order-seeking documentary style, Yeziarska's language, throughout her stories, novels, and memoirs, reveals a similarly passionate desire to perform social activism through the emotional appeal of language. But while Riis relies on language and images to bring scientific credibility and order to his narrative, Yeziarska uses language instead to disrupt the scientific ideal of a standard immigrant type that could be measured and made to pose for the camera. Instead, cries Yeziarska in all her prose, the passion and struggle of a laboring immigrant population, "burning up with a million volatile ideas," could not be neatly packaged into a still image or measured according to a standardized formula for progress written by the "cold hearts and clear heads" of American scientists.<sup>9</sup>

This uncontainable excess has long been a defining feature of melodramatic writing, as discussed by critics like Peter Brooks and Susan Gillman. Excess, of course, builds dramatic tension and emphasizes the expressivity of certain characters. But melodramatic excess also serves as a powerful strategy in allowing the narrative and its characters to "utter the unspeakable." In this sense, as Gillman elaborates, melodramatic writing "produces an excess of meaning in defiance of social and psychic repression."<sup>10</sup> Yeziarska, then, rather than treating excess as a pathological drive or as a form of escapist entertainment, employs it as a literary, cultural, and political strategy of translation and legibility. Deploying excess in this way, within an emerging modernist period and Jazz Age marked by a willful embrace of chaos, fragmentation, and performance, Yeziarska sutures literary and scientific forms of expression to animate the duality and displacement of immigrant life. Immigrant writing, linked as it was to both sentiment and ethnography, already worked to tie affective, melodramatic language to realist conventions and scientific practices, as evidenced in Riis's turn-of-the-century writings. But Yeziarska, in the new century, transforms these dual conventions of immigrant writing into a singular, hybrid modernism that rejects both the exoticized literary fascination with racial and immigrant "others" and the calculated, scientific readings of "the urban primitive."<sup>11</sup> By making the concerns and emotions of immigrant struggle the central, inescapable focus of her literary ethnography, Yeziarska brings science and affect together to help introduce and naturalize a new generation of US voices onto the American cultural scene.

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As already introduced, Jacob Riis—through the use of images and heightened sensory language—created a text that simultaneously emphasized and encouraged narratives of both identification *and* distance for his readers. Reviewers of *How the Other Half Lives* repeatedly refer to the perceptual intensity of the reading experience, highlighting both the identificatory and the distancing effects of Riis's sensory language: how the "graphic presentation" of the

“seamy side of tenement life” is of “shuddering interest” and how each photo “reeks” with “horror.” Poet James Russell Lowell writes to Riis that he was so moved by the book that he found it hard to sleep after he had been reading it. One writer even states that the book is so “thrilling” that “it is a *self-denial* to stop writing about it.”<sup>12</sup> Readers seem both enthralled by engaging in this act of looking and moved to pity and disgust through this heightened level of contact with tenement life.

On the other hand, one might argue that Riis tones down the penetrative quality of his prose and photographs through his compulsive attempt to classify and demarcate the groups he presents, dividing his chapters into racial types and geographic locations. Scholars like Nancy Armstrong, Nicole Fleetwood, and Nicholas Mirzoeff, in their studies of the rise of photography as a grounding force in nineteenth-century narratives of culture and race, view such demarcation as vital to the emerging “visual order” that photographic technology made possible. This new visual order worked to determine and prescribe certain codes of living in the modern world, such as the way a city ought to look, how one ought to live, and “who could not possibly belong to one’s kin group.” The birth of the cultural stereotype, according to Armstrong, and the “photographic indexicality of race,” according to Mirzoeff, are linked to this expanding visual order, representing a paramount shift in the depiction and study of cultures and races in the new century. Visuality, in some ways, forced authors and readers to express and name the importance and anxiety of cross-racial encounter. But the narrative translation of this visuality from engagement to representation represses the very recognition it invites by reducing the act of encounter to an act of spectacle.<sup>13</sup>

Riis’s own contribution to this visual order through archival documentation does not seek necessarily to eliminate the ghettos by waking the communal consciousness of his readers, but rather seeks to remake them, to “shape them into more useful components of the economic system.”<sup>14</sup> His solution is not to relocate the tenement-dwellers to better neighborhoods nor to integrate them into mainstream society, but rather, to order and situate them properly so that the fumes, cries, and coughs of these people would not eventually waft into the spacious homes on the other side of the tracks. Through his rigorous documentation and classification, then, Riis hopes to ensure that neither the vagabond, the pauper, nor the criminal “type” would wander aimlessly or deliberately into wealthy neighborhoods looking to beg, steal, or lure away young, impressionable, Anglo boys and girls (like those already tempted by Jewish “Fagins” and Chinese opium addicts, as the stereotype insisted, and as Riis perpetuates in his writing).<sup>15</sup>

Despite his emphasis on methodical categorization, Riis does rely on “the evidence of his senses” far more than he does on any statistical facts or analysis. In fact, Riis has a great mistrust of statisticians whose scientific authority reigned supreme in his day. Scholar Cindy Weinstein argues that it is his dissatisfaction with the instability of numbers that led Riis to photographic repre-

sentation in the first place. Riis finds numbers misleading, contends Weinstein, “because of specific tenement conditions, like overcrowding and hidden living spaces.” But he also finds them “ideologically suspect” because they contributed to the “erasure of individual identity.” He counters this instability with his own firm belief in “the indisputable static realism of the photograph.”<sup>16</sup> Riis’s work, then, in the midst of fin de siècle anxieties over proliferating bodies and boundaries, differs from the universalizing corrective and strict visual order offered by photojournalism, realism, and sociology. Riis’s writing and images, instead, straddle lines of objectivity and art *through* photography to reveal—sometimes even against his own utopian wishes—just how unquantifiable difference actually is. This is not to suggest, however, that Riis does not rely on evidence; rather, his evidence is always tinged, like Yeziarska’s narratives, with the language and feeling of excess. Despite his best attempts to contain that excess and distance himself from the returned gaze of his photographic subjects, the body—as Riis’s primary article of evidence—always performs an ineradicable kinship with the viewer.



**Figure 1:** Jacob August Riis, *Prayer-Time in the Nursery, Five Points House of Industry*, 1889. Gelatin silver print, printed 1957. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Museum of the City of New York.

For example, the photo *Prayer-Time in the Nursery—Five Points of Industry* [Figure 1] portrays one of the strongest visual depictions of the children of poverty.<sup>17</sup> A group of young white children, all dressed alike in white



nightgowns, are kneeling in prayer at the foot of their beds in two orderly rows facing one another. The aisle of floor space between these two rows should be a clear empty line, but instead the children in the far corners of the room have turned to face the camera, their bodies creating a closed, U-shaped curve instead of the two ordered lines they would have naturally made without the presence of a camera. The housemother surveys the scene from a distance, almost commanding the children's obedience from afar—an interesting mirror to Riis, who stands on the far opposite corner with his camera. The children are trapped within the space of these two opposing, commanding gazes—the housemother's cold, dark glare behind them and the bright glare of the camera in front of them. Both the light and the darkness work together to obscure the faces of most of the children: the blinding light of the camera blots the faces of those in the foreground and the darkness of the room casts a shadow on those farthest away. In the distance, a small closet filled with seemingly identical white gowns solidifies the metaphors of entrapment and permanence.

However, the text that accompanies this photo fills in some of the narrative gaps that elude the camera and attempts to breathe hope and mobility into an otherwise static scene. Riis describes this orphanage as a place of refuge and salvation, a haven that reaches “the lives of the poor with sweetening touch.” This chapter, aptly titled “Waifs of the City's Slums,” then closes with the following lines: It is one of the most touching sights in the world to see a score of babies, rescued from homes of brutality and desolation . . . saying their prayers in the nursery at bedtime. Too often their white night-gowns hide tortured little bodies and limbs cruelly bruised by inhuman hands.<sup>18</sup>

Riis's intimate knowledge of this space, both personal and professional, surpasses and even supplants the “raw truth” (or pose) of the photograph, as readers are allowed access not only to the inner rooms of tenement houses but also to the bruised bodies *underneath* the very gowns of these small children. By channeling tactility through the visual experience, Riis plays with readers' sense of distance and distinction from the other half by providing contradictory images that provoke a sense of underlying peril amidst a surface safety and that demand a very careful maneuvering from identification (empathy) to action (charity).

What Riis and his distinctively American readers did not realize is that his best-selling incitement of fervor for urban reform, with its sensory-loaded images, had taken the first step in creating the very thing he claimed could not be found among the tenements: a brand-new “distinctively American community.” In this narrative, which serves, in part, as a warning about the dangers of inassimilable immigrants to America, Riis has inadvertently written an ethnography of immigrant life and started the naturalization process for this very group: through the wide circulation of his sensory language, a new generation of Americans is born.

Ethnography, then, becomes another generic convention employed by Riis, shifting the interpretive possibilities of his language from moralistic to peda-

gical. Instead of always adhering to categories of “vice and virtue,” explains scholar Keith Gandall, Riis often uses terms like “ways,” “customs,” and “fashions” and “uses traditionally ethical terms, such as ‘habit’ in new, ethnographic ways.”<sup>19</sup> But through this ethnographic angle, Riis also discovers “a new source of urban exoticism,” one that ties him most convincingly to modernism.<sup>20</sup> Riis’s depictions of the ways and customs of the immigrants he studies are decidedly modernist in their primitivizing style that disrupted the “documentary fidelity” of realist conventions.<sup>21</sup> His style has also been referred to by critics as a kind of “sociospiritual cubism” that encouraged audiences to see “social evaluation, judgment, empirical data—even sense-based epistemology—as a flattening out or ‘materializing’ of reality’s double dimension.”<sup>22</sup>

It makes sense to situate Riis’s diverse study within a modernist discourse, in part because of the work’s tension between chaos and situatedness and, most tellingly, because of its insistence on affect that ties it to all the other genres already mentioned: sentimentalism, naturalism, realism, journalism, sociology, and ethnography. All of these genres come together in Riis’s work through “affect-saturated tropes” like starving waifs, sacrificing mothers, and disease-ridden children<sup>23</sup>—tropes that, once again, serve to instantiate distance while simultaneously disrupting it.

The tension between distance and proximity is a particular bind for immigrant writers, as scholars like Mary Jacobus have detailed, as their literary aspirations are always tied to the social reality from which they emerge or to which they aspire.<sup>24</sup> This bind both troubled and emboldened immigrant authors like Jacob Riis and Anzia Yeziarska, who worked consciously from within it in order to assert a unique literariness that came not at the expense or sacrifice of immigrant social reality but rather through a unique Americanization of that experience. Through the manipulation of American literary conventions and primarily through the use of affect—including sensory and sentimental language—as both a literary and an ethnographic tool of study and critique, these authors worked not only to reveal the feeling of otherness to American middle-class audiences, but also to translate or convert that feeling into a distinctively American experience. It is through this subversive power of manipulating and speaking from within the language of the majority, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “deterritorialization,” that Yeziarska and Riis were able to assume control over scientific and literary conventions, “imprinting” them with their own “minor forms and ideas.”<sup>25</sup> Both Jacob Riis and Anzia Yeziarska occupied this deterritorialized space as cultural commentators and literary figures who experienced Americanization firsthand. Both also had a special relationship to the literary strategy of affect as a result of their immigrant status. While early twentieth-century American culture valued realism over sentiment and reserve over expressiveness, the immigrant had the privilege to speak from a body and an experience that required translation and was therefore granted a certain poetic license for emotional excess.<sup>26</sup>



Jacob Riis's act of narrative distancing from his immigrant kin, for example, is, in part, a testament to his "successful" Americanization, an act that required the shedding of all prior allegiances.<sup>27</sup> One might argue that such narrative distancing, coupled with his entry into the professional world of sociology, aligned him with social Darwinists who clamored, as Riis himself does throughout his study, about the impending threat of "young vagabonds" who would emerge as the "natural offspring" bred by the brutal "home" conditions of new immigrants.<sup>28</sup> But once again, Riis's investigative methodology, reliant as it is on the stark emotion conveyed by his own transformative immigrant experience and translated through his use of photography and perceptual language, departs from the detached and elitist objectivity of the social scientist. Instead, Riis's vexed motivation to improve the living conditions of the poor, imbued though it is with a necessary repression, self-denial, and nativist performance required of all "successful" immigrants (and certainly of successful scientists of this period), is also inspired by an unconscious act of remembrance, as it stems from his own sentimental journey from indigence to success, from "alien" outsider to American authority, that mirrored the trajectory of many of the groups he portrayed.

For Riis's Americanization is complete only when he learns to reconcile his nostalgia for Denmark with his new love for America. Despite his espousal of Rooseveltian notions of Americanism and his harsh critique of the "queer conglomerate mass of heterogeneous elements" that crowded the ghettos he studied in *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis recognizes on a very personal level the cost of relinquishing his originary ties and sees American identity and patriotism as a complex dual loyalty that comes through cultural practice and a weaving together of old and new. As he confesses in his memoir *The Making of an American* on his return visit to Denmark, "Alas! I am afraid that thirty years in the land of my children's birth have left me as much a Dane as ever. I no sooner climb the castle hill than I am fighting tooth and nail the hereditary foes of my people who it was built high to bar. Yet, would you have it otherwise? What sort of husband is the man going to make who begins by pitching his old mother out of the door to make room for his wife? And what sort of wife would she be to ask to stand it?" Riis conjoins family with nation here, making both countries members of a single, unified family that is responsible and accountable to all its members. This analogy is strikingly different, as scholar Aviva Taubenfeld has discussed, from Roosevelt's adulterous interpretation of this dual affiliation, as he pronounces that "a man who loves another country as much as he does his own is quite as noxious a member of society as a man who loves other women as much as he loves his wife."<sup>29</sup>

Riis nevertheless resists his good friend's interpretation, telling King Christian of Denmark that the Danes in America "were good citizens, better for not forgetting their motherland and him in his age and loss."<sup>30</sup> In fact, it is on this return trip to Denmark that Riis experiences a moment of self-actualization that reconciles his love of homeland (Denmark) with his love and longing for

home (America). Staring out the window from his bed, just outside Elsinore, while in a feverish delirium from a serious bout of malaria, Riis sees an image of a US ship along the shore, “flying at the top the flag of freedom.” It is this vision—perhaps hallucination—that Riis marks as the culminating moment of his Americanization. Loyal as he remains to his native land, he now embraces his Americanism, realizing “that my children’s home was mine, indeed; that I also had become an American in truth.”<sup>31</sup> He walks through Denmark, then, as he walks through the tenements—with a sense of accountability, responsibility, and an excess of emotional feeling that must be properly channeled—all the while with an assured knowledge of his position as belonging outside the window frame, as an assimilated American.<sup>32</sup>

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Jacob Riis allies himself with both the cultural experience of immigration and the economic new world experience of the growing American middle class. By allowing the latter group to “gaze upon misery” in this way, Riis reminds the new middle class of their (and, most important, his own) difference from “the Other Half they viewed.”<sup>33</sup> Yet Riis still does not allow his voyeuristic audience to thumb safely through his pages. He declares over and over again that these ghettos, these “nurseries of crime,” if left untended, will begin to “touch the family life” with moral contagion and actual disease. Thus, Riis’s entire narrative is organized around this brilliant weaving of fear and distance. Through his call for social reform, then, Riis offers his readers a chance to secure their distance through charitable contributions while still preying on their fears of what might transpire without their assistance.

Charity plays a vexed role in the work of immigrant authors, as it is advocated as an avenue for national amelioration for current citizens and held up like a promise of national belonging for needy newcomers. It also feeds the fetishistic, self-congratulatory logic of American elitism that keeps the immigrant in the space of orphaned, exotic Other who is a source of perpetual entertainment and pity. By the 1920s, the United States had officially embraced consumer culture and created an urban and professional landscape that prioritized rationality, expertise, and class mobility over passive charity. The creative landscape, on the other hand, resisted this mechanized structure, relying on “culture makers,” many of them women, who resisted—through performance, artwork, critical commentary, and even consumption—the class hierarchies and “scientific charity” that tried to keep the culturally invisible masses in their places, much as Riis’s sociological ordering had tried to do in earlier decades.<sup>34</sup>

Anzia Yeziarska provides a look from the other side of the mirror of Riis’s call for charitable assistance. The protagonist of her final novel, *All I Could Never Be* (1932), the young shop girl Fanya Ivanowna, is so taken by the charitable treatment she receives as a guest at the home of the wealthy Farnsworth family for Thanksgiving dinner that she feels she has finally been embraced

as a peer among new American friends. They treat her with such warmth and welcome, and she is in awe at how “they who shine in the light . . . sympathize with those in the dark.”<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, Fanya makes the egregious error of misconstruing their charitable act for love and belonging and writes an overly effusive thank-you in the form of a poem in which she expresses her gratitude toward the elder Mrs. Farnsworth for inviting Yeziarska to “let me warm my lost, homeless heart on your breast.”<sup>36</sup> She is ashamed and hardened by their lack of response to her, as “she had humbled herself, exposed the famine of her soul to strangers. In her loneliness—her social famine—she had mistaken a little friendliness, a gesture of politeness, for personal response.”<sup>37</sup> Fanya learns the crucial distinction between charity and belonging even younger than this, when her wealthy relatives dismiss her with disgust from their company when one of her cousins, while playing with Fanya’s long tresses, discovers lice. They send her home immediately but not before thrusting money into her beggar’s bag with “aloof, shivering fingers.”<sup>38</sup> It is a distinction she learns again in her professional life, again through acts of failed affective engagement, when she struggles against colleagues who wish to practice a particular brand of academic charity—sociological studies of immigrants that are steeped in objective facts and devoid of the feelings and emotions that feed the rich inner life buried in this “world of woe.”<sup>39</sup>

Yeziarska’s narrative effusiveness functions on a very different level than Riis’s affective strategy. While Yeziarska’s use of affect also increased the marketability and authenticity of her texts, landing her an eventual ticket to Hollywood, she used it to create a sense of kinship between *all* immigrants and readers, not to hold herself up as an exceptional case. In so doing, Yeziarska succeeded, as scholars like JoAnn Pavletich have argued, in creating a space “in which changing relations between affect and culture” could be made clear and in that space “rearticulated.”<sup>40</sup> Unlike the allegedly urban primitive subjects of Riis’s study, who are denied the level of artistic and intellectual sophistication that would grant them entry into the professional literary marketplace in which they circulate only as objects of depiction, Yeziarska’s characters instead gain access to this world through a manipulative embrace of the role of the urban primitive by donning an affect that initially seduces by inviting stares but eventually requires a reciprocal gaze.<sup>41</sup>

Anzia Yeziarska immigrated to America as a young child with her family in the 1880s, operating pushcarts and working in the garment factories alongside the same tenement dwellers of the Lower East Side captured in Riis’s text and photographs.<sup>42</sup> She rose to fame after her second published short story, “The Fat of the Land,” won the Edward O’Brien Best Short Story Award in 1919, resulting in the publication of a short-story volume, *Hungry Hearts* (1920), and the subsequent purchase of its film rights by a major Hollywood studio. At the age of thirty-nine, Yeziarska had achieved national notoriety as a living embodiment of the American Dream and was referred to as “the recognized mouthpiece of New York’s Jewish East Side.”<sup>43</sup>

Yeziarska's use of affect as a means of offering cultural and political critique was often lost on her critics not only because she emerged on the literary scene on the brink of a twentieth-century turning away from emotional expressivity but also in large part because of her very persona as the "Sweatshop Cinderella,"<sup>44</sup> which rooted her more to the status of immigrant Other than American literary aspirant. Yeziarska's deliberate manipulation of sentimental convention was misread as naively Old World and provincial, as a betrayal of her position as literary novice and of immigrant passing as American author—two identities viewed by some as mutually exclusive. Reviews of her novel *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), and her second collection of stories, *Children of Loneliness* (1923), ranged from criticisms of its "exaggerated" style to its "illogical, hysterical" and "native" cries and "protests" that are "at times shrieks."<sup>45</sup>

But Yeziarska's strategy is much more subtle and versatile than her critics understood. She manipulates the dual literary conventions of the Victorian sensation novel, which "takes social problems and presents them as affective problems," and elements of the American sentimental novel of the same tradition, in which transcendence of social problems is achieved, for the heroine, through affective relationships. By working both within and beyond these conventions, Yeziarska's texts engage readers, as Jane Tompkins has explained, with a "cultural form and rhetoric that operates to make the position of the immigrant, typically an 'othered' position, appear conventional and familiar, even as the form of the sentimental is revised through the development of a Jewish protagonist."<sup>46</sup>

Yeziarska borrows from American literary conventions only to disrupt them, departing both from the realist tradition of the Americanization novel that Riis so readily espoused and from the typical trajectory of the sentimental domestic novel that ends in marriage.<sup>47</sup> While Riis's autobiographical story of Americanization can be told in "no other way" than as a love story, for Yeziarska, the opposite holds true. In all of her works, the failure of Americanization and the failure of traditional romance are metaphorically paralleled. Her novels never end with the heroine's successful marriage to the American hero (always loosely based on education reformer and psychologist John Dewey, her real-life failed love interest). Yeziarska's protagonists idealize their American love interests not for the romantic affection they promise but for the national belonging they offer and are always disappointed by the failure of these men to deliver this mythical gift of belonging. Yeziarska's heroines must always pass through this mourning rite—the struggle and failure of conventional American ideals of romance and assimilation—in order to discover their own place in America, one in which emotion and intellect come together through professional success, namely, literary endeavor.<sup>48</sup>

For Yeziarska, the parallel failures of romantic love and the American Dream are also simultaneously set up as symbolic exemplars of the failures of a scientific view of immigrant life. The men of science to whom Yeziarska's heroines are romantically drawn—John Barnes of "Wings" (1920), John Manning

of *Salome of the Tenements* (1922), and Henry Scott of *All I Could Never Be* (1932), among others—do not understand the subjects they study in their professional careers. As Fanya Ivanowna (the protagonist of *All I Could Never Be*, introduced earlier in this article) asks Henry Scott in one of their first meetings, “How can Americans with their cold hearts and clear heads ever come to know people burning up with a million volatile ideas?”<sup>49</sup> Scott’s answers always come in the form of reason, intelligence, data, and reports. “Our code,” he explains, “is to subject feeling to reason.”<sup>50</sup> For Fanya, reason and facts without emotion and passion are simply words, “grand words, but nothing back of them.”<sup>51</sup> The democratic principles of equality and access are achieved, according to Fanya, not through cold scientific language, but rather through intense affective engagement. Fanya takes her intimate experiential knowledge of the bodies she is asked to study and attempts to present them in a manner that might actually spur others into social activism and engagement.

Yeziarska, then, through her literary endeavors, utilizes affect ethnographically, a power that only she, as “Immigrant Other,” can wield. For the Anglo scientists and love interests in Yeziarska’s novels, an indulgence in affect, emotion, and passion leads to a loss of rationality, an almost vampiric desire to consume this otherness and, in so doing, to *become* other, as when John Manning’s desire for Sonya Vrunsky results in “an overwhelming madness to thrust civilization aside, tear the garments that hid her beauty from him, put out his hands over her naked breasts and crush her to him . . . he was terrified at his own relapse to the primitive.”<sup>52</sup> For the immigrant artist-ethnographer, on the other hand, the indulgence in affect is not exactly an act of letting one’s guard down, but more accurately, a vital tool of expression, authority, or control that has its own transformative effect. It is not an uncontrolled, naïve embrace of Americanism, but a cautious act of incorporation. For it is through the strategic use of affect that Yeziarska weds America on her own terms, making readers feel the immigrant experience through a process that she herself has undergone and that only she can translate and animate for them. Unlike the American John Mannings, who must “fight” their urge to “go native” through the distancing and redeeming lens of scientific inquiry, the immigrant Fanyas learn to channel their impulses to “go American” by channeling their emotions into their work, embracing the duality of their experiences and allegiances.

It is in her final novel that Yeziarska narrates this process in a most interesting manner. What separates this piece of fiction from some of her other stories is that it utilizes a uniquely scientific lens: *All I Could Never Be* is a fictional ethnography *about* the autoethnographic process.<sup>53</sup> By using fiction as her venue for this metacommentary on the failures of scientific objectivity, Yeziarska forces readers to consider, through the process of reading about the immigrant experience alongside the pitfalls of ethnographic study how, as Thomas Ferraro has stated (in his elaboration of the challenges posed by the then-contradictory term of “ethnic literature”), “sociological inquiry and literary inventiveness

serve one another . . . and which strategies of minority-culture self-representation and majority-culture literary forms undergo reciprocal transformations.”<sup>54</sup>

Yezierska’s plot follows the typical trajectory of a sentimental bildungsroman. The poor heroine, Fanya Ivanowna, grows up in the New York ghettos, working as a shopgirl and factory worker. After a series of disappointing encounters with charitable relatives and potential patrons, she finds success, belonging, and cultural access through the intellectual patronage of a university professor, Henry Scott, with whom she has a brief and unsuccessful flirtation. It is through Scott that Fanya is invited to join a sociological study with the Polish research bureau of Chicago.

Fanya’s journey is a fictional retelling of Yezierska’s own work as a translator with a group of John Dewey’s graduate students who were conducting an ethnographic study of Polish immigrants in Philadelphia in 1918.<sup>55</sup> Through a similar experience in the novel, Fanya grapples with the problems of being both a contributor to the ethnographic study and the object of scrutiny and criticism by the study leaders. In a letter of complaint to Henry Scott, the other group leaders write that Fanya’s methodology is “destructively critical,” as “she colors all she observes with her own overemotionalism so much that we feel we cannot depend on her observations as scientifically accurate. We fear she would infect the whole study with her persecution mania, her unfortunate psychosis.”<sup>56</sup>

Infection is precisely Fanya’s aim. She fights ardently against study leader Miss Foster’s belief that “a scientific research must be impersonal, objective,” devoid of “emotional ecstasy” and dependent instead on “facts of wages, occupations, housing conditions.” Fanya insists instead that “you must feel first what people love and admire—to know them,” and Yezierska’s literary fame stands as documentary proof of the success of this strategy.<sup>57</sup>

Although I am pointing, as other critics have done, to Yezierska’s successful use of affect in ethnographic work, it is important to note that she had serious reservations—in both literary and ethnographic endeavor—of the power of words in general of effecting any real social improvement in the lives of immigrants. Even in *All I Could Never Be*, which I present as a successful example of how literature provides a unique angle through which to both utilize and criticize scientific method, Yezierska’s protagonist is harshly critical of the palliative, masking effect of words, which serve most often to hide or manage problems and absolve the guilt of the overeducated instead of actually improving lives.

“What you don’t know—” cries the angry Fanya in her final, heated conversation with Henry Scott at the Chicago bureau, “what you don’t understand you cover up with words. It’s a blasphemy of God in people to carry on studies in that spirit. The beauty, the madness, the pain and the grandeur that make up the song of life—all the hidden things that can’t be put into words—are lost to you.”<sup>58</sup> There is something about experience and sensation that is linguistically inexpressible and thus lost to science. It is, in the end, the futility of all gestures of expression—scientific and literary—to properly depict cultural difference



that Yeziarska's text seeks to address—not to resolve but, rather, simply to confess and perform.

\* \* \*

If words alone cannot perform social activism, then what is the proper strategy for ethnographers and writers who wish to bridge the distance between immigrants and Americans, experience and narration, and observation and documentation? Critic Delia Konzett places Yeziarska's work within a modernist aesthetics of dislocation that allows her to express the "alienating experience of uprootedness" as the foundational basis of American identity, thereby shifting the definition of cultural belonging from "an invented tradition of Anglo-American nationalism" toward one that does away with such impossible totalizing concepts of identity and accounts instead for rootlessness, emotionalism, and the untranslatability of individual experience.<sup>59</sup> By bringing science and sentiment together to debunk the myth of a universalizing concept of American identity, Yeziarska opens the door for a new form of social activism and democracy for the twentieth century, one that takes John Dewey's particular strain of social reform (which focused on social democracy and activism through education and philanthropy) and rearticulates it through what Konzett refers to as an emerging ethnic avant-gardism: a call to action that "bracketed tradition and descent" and instead made room for diverse expressions of ethnic immigrant life that would reach beyond "a homogeneously defined consent that underlies modern American identity."<sup>60</sup>

Instead of attempting to fashion themselves as "anti-conquest" travelers and scientists, Yeziarska's characters cleverly inhabit and then transform their feelings of displacement and loneliness to *make* themselves native in this new land, in part through such acts of narrative interpellation, in other words, by carving out a home through the language of displacement. Instead of claiming this space as colonizers or as fully assimilated citizens (as Riis did and as he demanded of those he documented), Yeziarska's characters ask, as curious strangers might, "what is this wilderness in which I am lost?"<sup>61</sup> Perhaps Yeziarska, too, expresses and markets the terms of alienation through the assimilative language of "anti-colonialism," but she does so not as one who has the power to mark and name her new territory, but rather as a displaced inhabitant whose new home is, in essence, an illegible, unrecognized *elsewhere* within the established nation. For Yeziarska, this deterritorialized identity becomes a source of empowerment and visibility. It is through this manipulation of Henry Scott's assimilationist terms that Yeziarska's characters engage in a narrative of cultural recognition and rebirth—of naturalization through language.

In this way, Yeziarska's writing is more closely aligned with African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age, whose stories also focused on the struggles of community members who fought to escape the exoticizing scrutiny of cultural tourists and whose own acts of cultural perfor-

mance—of passing over into the white world, like the protagonists in the works of Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset, and James Weldon Johnson, among others, tried to do—often led to disillusionment and a longing for home.<sup>62</sup> Scholars from Mary Douglas to Michael North have discussed the importance of “mongrelization” and cultural hybridity in the 1920s, as both immigrants and native-born racial “others” had to find a way to make themselves legible as *both* racialized and American. W. E. B. Du Bois, of course, had named and identified this “double consciousness” at the start of the century, correctly prophesying its impact on the coming century. Yeziarska’s characters, by embracing this duality, force readers to understand that the “other half” already lives among them, not as carriers of contagion and difference, but as mothers, sisters, and brothers in the American struggle for recognition and success.<sup>63</sup>

Yeziarska’s writing thus reveals a very different strategic approach to that of her predecessor Jacob Riis. Emerging from, but moving away from, a *fin de siècle* focus on eugenics and realism, Yeziarska’s work reflects a shift in focus for both science and literature, as writers moved to the other side of the lens, from objects of the gaze to those who could direct an audience’s vision on their own terms, wielding the cameras that had once pointed to them.

Gender and ethnicity are undoubtedly major factors in the role played by both Riis and Yeziarska in this colonial drama of trespass and territorialism of the Othered spaces of immigrant America. While Yeziarska calls on Judaic traditions of rootlessness and American literary traditions of sympathy to evoke a recognizable response from her readers, Riis instead seems to have followed the traditional masculinist logic of his time, embracing Roosevelt’s dictum that men had to be vigorous and strong to help ensure America’s national and global position in the world.<sup>64</sup> Riis’s authoritative language, steeped as it is in sentiment and motivated though it is by a democratic impulse for reform, has a colonial resonance that resembles, according to Susan Ryan, “that of the English settlers of North America, who strove to claim American soil before the French and Spanish could take over and corrupt the natives with their ‘popish’ religion.”<sup>65</sup>

As Yeziarska’s writing reveals, such masculinist strategies of assimilation, like those advocated by Riis and Dewey, only intensified the desire of immigrants to *look back* at their European roots with a competing nostalgia for the way things were that conflicted with the parallel desire of those who wished to “steamroll” them into an amnesiac American citizenship.<sup>66</sup> While Yeziarska’s language employs the already feminized melodramatic strategy of excess to authenticate immigrant spaces as enclaves of a new and growing American diversity, Riis’s language works to steer and contain this excess, perpetuating an image of the Lower East Side as a foreign territory that must be recolonized and made American by an older, more established stock.

Thus, the study of the literary and ethnographic projects of Americanization in the realist and modernist periods of Riis and Yeziarska must necessarily be considered transnational projects, for to examine the inauguration of

American modernity through discourses of race and ethnicity that remapped the American landscape and to examine immigrant literature beyond just “a ritual enacting Americanization,” one must look to other narratives of imperialism, evolution, and, of course, kinship stories that move within and beyond “national archetypes” and the stories of “Anglo-Protestant” forefathers.<sup>67</sup>

Although the strategic use of affective language might ultimately fail in fully achieving social reform and recognition as both Riis and Yezierska imagined and hoped it could, this kind of expression does take the first step in offering what Homi Bhabha calls “an act of cultural translation,” revealing “the heterogeneity of a population,” that driving threat of an inherent and essential foreignness which is the foundation of all ideologies of nation formation.<sup>68</sup>

## Notes

1. Jacob Riis, “Visible Darkness: New York’s Under Side Flashed on the Camera,” *New York Morning Journal*, February 12, 1888.
2. David Leviatin, “Introduction: Framing the Poor,” in Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, ed. Leviatin (Boston: Bedford, 1996 [1890]), 29.
3. Jacob A. Riis, *The Making of an American* (New York: Macmillan, 1913 [1901]), 11.
4. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992). Pratt uses the term “anti-conquest” to refer to “strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (9). The “seeing-man” of such narratives, like Riis and his camera, uses his “imperial” vision as a passive colonial strategy, possessing through the act of looking out and reporting back (9).
5. As Roosevelt proclaimed in the obituary remarks he wrote for Riis in 1914, which were reprinted in the second edition of Riis’s autobiography, *The Making of an American* (1928 [1901]), “He did not come to this country until he was almost a young man; but if I were asked to name a fellow-man who came nearest to being the ideal American citizen, I should name Jacob Riis.” Roosevelt, “Jacob Riis” (obituary), *Outlook* 107 (June 6, 1914): 284. See also Theodore Roosevelt, “Introduction,” in Jacob Riis, *The Making of an American*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1928 [1901]), 256. For Roosevelt’s critiques of hyphenated Americans, see Theodore Roosevelt, “True Americanism,” *The Forum*, April 1894. See also Theodore Roosevelt, “International Duty and Hyphenated Americanism,” *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, vol. 18, ed. Herman Hagedorn (New York: Scribner’s, 1926), 280–81.
6. *Indianapolis News*, in review of Riis’s *The Making of an American* (1901). Quoted in Keith Gandal, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.
7. For a more elaborate discussion on the links between science and sentiment in Riis, see Aviva F. Taubenfeld, *Rough Writing: Ethnic Authorship in Theodore Roosevelt’s America* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), and Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996). As both Taubenfeld and Wald have argued, Riis’s conjoining of affect and nationalism are brought together most convincingly in his memoir, in which “the love story” between Riis and his wife Elisabeth “is inseparable from the love story about him and America” (Wald, 279). Riis makes this clear in the opening pages of *The Making of an American*, when he directly ties the story of his courtship with Elisabeth to the story of his Americanization, asking readers in a playful yet earnest tone to read the story that follows as both archive and romance: “And is this going to be a love story, then? Well, I have turned it over and over, and looked at it from every angle, but if I am to tell the truth, as I promised, I don’t see how it can be helped” (Riis, 2). By linking his American love story with his personal love story, argues Taubenfeld, Riis is able to “feminize and domesticate Danishness in order to bring it safely home to America.” This “combination of sentimentalism and realism—of telling a love story in order to tell the truth—proved a successful strategy” (Taubenfeld, 54). Riis’s focus on children and the poor was also shot through a lens that blurred the discussion between “the old and new genres of sentimentalism and journalistic realism,” allowing him to capitalize on the interests of “a middle-class audience in the process of shifting its literary expectations” (54). For more examples of Riis’s sentimental style throughout his vast oeuvre, readers should also consult his other texts on children and on tenement life as well as his Christmas stories, for example, *The Children of the Poor* (New York: Scribner’s, 1892), *Nibsy’s Christmas* (Freeport, ME: Books for Libraries Press, 1969 [1893]), *Out of Mulberry Street: Stories of Tenement Life in New York City* (New York: Century, 1898),

*Children of the Tenements* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Gregg Press, 1970 [1903]), *The Battle with the Slum* (New York: Dover, 1998 [1902]), "Children of the Danish Heath," *Century*, July 1912, 449–54, and *Christmas Stories* (New York: Macmillan, 1923).

8. See *Hungry Hearts*, directed by Mason E. Hopper (Hollywood, CA: Goldwyn Pictures Co., 1922). See also Lisa Botshon, "Anzia Yeziarska and the Marketing of the Jewish Immigrant in 1920s Hollywood," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 287–312. As Botshon discusses, "the public taste for the immigrant narrative . . . meant that Yeziarska's career depended on the promotion of the author as a young single immigrant fresh from the tenements. In this guise, Yeziarska appealed as a 'real-life' romantic heroine" (291). While headlines worked to construct this persona with tags like "Immigrant Wins Fortune in Movies," "Sweatshop Cinderella at the Miramar Hotel," or "From Hester Street to Hollywood," Yeziarska herself became increasingly disillusioned by Hollywood's co-optation of her story. There was always "a picture of me above these captions," she writes in her 1950 memoir *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, "but I could never recognize myself in it, any more than I could recognize my own life in the newspapers' stories of my 'success'" (Yeziarska, quoted in Botshon, 293). See also Anzia Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse: My Story* (New York: Persea Books, 1987 [1950]), 40, and Anzia Yeziarska, *All I Could Never Be* (New York: Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1932).

9. Yeziarska, *All I Could Never Be*, 37. See also Thomas J. Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 54; Anzia Yeziarska, "The Immigrant Speaks," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1920, 20–21; Anzia Yeziarska, "The Struggles of an Immigrant Author," *Literary Digest International Book Review* 1 (September 1923): 17–21; Anzia Yeziarska, "Mostly about Myself," in *Children of Loneliness: Stories of Immigrant Life in America* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1923), 9–31; and Anzia Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, 40.

10. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 4; Susan Gillman, *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 16.

11. For more on primitivism and modernism, both in the United States and on the global stage, see Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995); Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Laura Doyle and Laura Winkel, eds., *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); and Richard Lehan, *Literary Modernism and Beyond: The Extended Vision and the Realms of the Text* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012).

12. These comments were taken from postpublication reviews of Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* in November and December 1890 from papers like the *New York Evening Sun*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago Times*, and *Photography Magazine*. Many of these reviews are excerpted in Leviatin's introduction to Riis's text. One interesting critical review, also excerpted by Leviatin, seems to voice the current critical debates about the problems with Riis's text: "[This] book is literally a photograph, and as such has its value and lesson, but also its serious limitations. There is a lack of broad and penetrative vision, a singularly warped sense of justice at times, and a roughness amounting almost to brutality. The 'heathen Chinese,' and the Russian Jew fleeing from persecution in his own land, finds no mercy in Mr. Riis's creed." *Critic*, December 1890, quoted in Leviatin, "Introduction," 9.

13. Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3, 12; Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 57; Nicolas Mirzoeff, "The Shadow and the Substance: Race, Photography, and the Index," in *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: International Center of Photography/Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 112.

14. Reginald Twigg, "The Performative Dimension of Surveillance: Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives*," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 12 (October 1992): 310.

15. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 115, 123–24.

16. Cindy Weinstein, "How Many Others Are There in the Other Half? Jacob Riis and the Tenement Population," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24, no. 2 (June 2002): 195–98. Weinstein explains that "statisticians possessed 'facts' that bestowed the imprimatur of scientific authority upon the 'user' of them, whose identity as professional was then on *terra firma*." She points to comments made by nineteenth-century economist Francis Walker in an 1889 lecture, "Growth of a Nation." In it, Walker proclaims that "the power of the statistician to predict the number of acts or events of a certain character, even where the human will apparently reign supreme . . . always savors of magic to those who are unfamiliar with his methods." As Weinstein summarizes, "[W]here the amateur sees magic, the professional sees method." See Francis Walker, "Growth of a Nation," *Discussions in Economics and Statistics*, ed. Davis Dewey, vol. 2 (New York: Henry Holt, 1899), 195–96.

17. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 186.

18. *Ibid.*, 186–87.
19. Gandal, *Virtues of the Vicious*, 32.
20. *Ibid.*, 63.
21. Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, 11.
22. Gregory S. Jackson, “Cultivating Spiritual Sight: Jacob Riis’s Virtual-Tour Narrative and the Visual Modernization of Protestant Homiletics,” *Representations* 83, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 139.
23. *Ibid.*, 149.
24. Mary Jacobus argues that to assume “a one-to-one causality between text and social reality” is to erase the “unconscious” or “literariness” of text or, more specifically, “the way it knows more than it knows.” Jacobus, “An Unnecessary Maze of Sign-Reading,” in *Reading Women: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986), 229.
25. Gille Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16. See also Gina Masucci MacKenzie, “Under-Writing: Forming an American Minority Literature,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 26, no. 3–4 (Spring 2003): 1–11.
26. For further discussion on this shift away from “emotion culture” in the United States from the early part of the twentieth century to World War II, see Jo Ann Pavletich, “Anzia Yeziarska, Immigrant Authority, and the Uses of Affect,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 81–104. Pavletich takes the term “emotion culture” from historian Peter Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: New York University Press, 1981). See also Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in the Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). It is also worth noting an observation from Michael Elliott’s *The Culture Concept* that discusses ethnographers’ turn away from sentiment as a way of distancing themselves from the white imperialist agenda that continued to rely on sentimental ideology to ignore and justify racist violence in the service of cultural preservation and nostalgia. Elliott calls on the work of Laura Wexler, writing that “ethnographic writing and the literature of American realism shared a stated bias against sentimental forms. . . . This turn against sentimentalism mattered not only because of its role in the formation of ethnographic writing as a professional practice but also because of the ties so convincingly explicated by Laura Wexler between the sentimental mode and the project of domesticating difference in the late nineteenth century. Wexler shows how, even as the practice of sentimental literary strategies declined during this period, a sentimental ideology persisted that enabled white Americans to ignore the violence of imposing U.S. imperial power on people of color at home and abroad. Culturalist writing produced by professional observers of difference could be pressed into service by this reform program of Americanization; however, by emphasizing their break with the logic of sympathy and sentiment, literary realists and anthropologists could distance themselves from that agenda.” See Michael A. Elliott, *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xv.
27. Again, see Roosevelt’s “True Americanism,” *The Forum*, April 1894, in which he discusses at length the requisite shedding of past allegiances that allows full entry into American citizenship.
28. Riis, 14. For more on the emergence and influence of social Darwinism and the eugenics movement on fin de siècle American culture and scientific thought, see Sander Gilman and Nancy Stepan, “Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism,” in *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Dominick La Capra (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). Jo Ann Pavletich also uses Gilman and Stepan to discuss the logic of detachment that accompanied the logic of racism in scientific and social discourse at this moment—a logic that I believe immigrant writers like Riis and Yeziarska actually worked to overturn through a deliberate engagement with affect. Pavletich explains that Gilman and Stepan elaborate the ways in which “‘claims of scientifically established inferiority were pressed most insistently by the mainstream scientific community,’ as social scientists in particular provided the ‘official’ discourse with which immigrants were analyzed, categorized, and contained. The assumption of the validity of the social sciences was founded in large part upon methodology, which in turn was understood by many to be rational, detached, and objective—that is, devoid of emotion.” Pavletich, “Anzia Yeziarska,” 90.
29. Riis, *The Making of an American*, 5; Theodore Roosevelt, “Monroe Doctrine,” *The Bachelor of Arts*, March 1896, reprinted in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, vol. 13, ed. Herman Hagedorn (New York: Scribner’s, 1926), 172. See also Taubenfeld, *Rough Writing*, 53.
30. Riis, *The Making of an American*, 429.
31. *Ibid.*, 443.
32. Taubenfeld, *Rough Writing*, 63–68. In a fascinating explication of Riis’s manuscript version of *The Making of an American*, Taubenfeld shows how Riis carefully controlled his rhetoric in depicting his “final statement of Americanization.” A closer look at the deleted phrases reveals his struggle and confusion over how to phrase his transformation and his loyalty to his new nation. As we can see and as Taubenfeld discusses at length, Riis chooses the strongest declaration of Ameri-



can patriotism he can despite his atypical hesitation in drafting these lines: "I have told the story of the making of an American. There remains to tell how I found out that in me he was made at last, and finished the task completed at last and finished and finished at last. It was when I went my roots dug deep in the Danish soil. They burrow there yet after thirty years back to see my mother once more." Strikethrough text is as it appears in Riis's original manuscript version.) See Riis, *The Making of an American*, manuscript page 498, Riis Collection, New York Public Library, Box 4, quoted in Taubenfeld, *Rough Writing*, 66–68. Taubenfeld also engages with Priscilla Wald's well-known reading of this famous scene as a conversion narrative in which Riis is healed and born again on his vision of the American flag. See Wald, *Constituting Americans*, 250–51.

33. Leviatin, "Introduction," 30.

34. See Amy Koritz, *Culture Makers: Urban Performance and Literature in the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 1–9. Koritz writes that women, in particular, had to be persuaded to buy the newest fashions, to decorate their homes with color-coordinated bath ensembles, to emulate film stars, and seek consumption advice from magazines. In fact, as the dominant buyers of consumer goods, women became the primary target of retailers and their advertisers" (9). Yeziarska also emphasizes the importance of female consumers in the marketplace in her own work and rejects, throughout her stories and essays, the practice of charitable giving, which she finds hypocritical and manipulative. "For Yeziarska," explains Koritz, "those qualities that enabled social service organizations to survive the business-oriented, expert-obsessed decade of the twenties were most damaging to their credibility among those they sought to help" (230). See also Anzia Yeziarska, "The Free Vacation House," *The Forum*, December 1916, 706–41; Anzia Yeziarska, "An Immigrant among the Editors," *Literary Digest International Books Review* 1 (March 1923); and Anzia Yeziarska, "The Immigrant Speaks," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1920, 20–21.

35. Anzia Yeziarska, *All I Could Never Be*, 21.

36. *Ibid.*, 23.

37. *Ibid.*, 24.

38. *Ibid.*, 14.

39. *Ibid.*, 15.

40. Pavletich, "Anzia Yeziarska," 81.

41. Pavletich also points to the popularization of Freudian thought in American culture as a vehicle for the theorization and cathartic release of the taint of European overcivilization. By making the id the "repository for 'the primitive mind,'" explains Pavletich, twentieth-century Americans revived "the Romantic notion of the noble savage." By donning the role of the participant-observer who partakes, even if temporarily, in the simple "primordial existence" of the primitivized Other, the Anglo Saxon could "reinvigorate his own overcivilized existence." Pavletich, "Anzia Yeziarska," 84.

42. For more biographical information on Yeziarska, see Mary V. Dearborn, *Love in the Promised Land: The Story of Anzia Yeziarska and John Dewey* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Louise Levitas Henricksen, *Anzia Yeziarska: A Writer's Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Carol B. Schoen, *Anzia Yeziarska* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982); and Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse: My Story* (New York: Persea Books, 1987).

43. William Lyon Phelps, "How the Other Half Lives," *Literary Digest International Book Review* 2 (December 1923): 21. For more on relevant transatlantic histories of the Jewish experience, see Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of "The Jew" in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); Sander Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, eds., *How We Lived: A Documentary History of Immigrant Jews in America, 1880–1930* (New York: New American Library, 1979); Laura Wexler, "Looking at Yeziarska," *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*, ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 153–81; and Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York: Pantheon, 1991).

44. Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, 40.

45. W. Adolphe Roberts, "Review of *Salome of the Tenements*," *New York Tribune*, December 17, 1922, 26; Dorothy Scarborough, "Review of *Children of Loneliness*," *Literary Review*, November 24, 1923, 279.

46. For more on the strategic role of sentimental fiction in the examination of social problems, see Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), and Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

47. Natalie Friedman, "Marriage and the Immigrant Narrative: Anzia Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements*," *Legacy* 22, no. 2 (2005): 176.

48. Pavletich, "Anzia Yeziarska," 92; Riis, *The Making of an American*, 2. For more on Riis and his "love story" of Americanization, see complete quotation in note 7 above.

49. Yeziarska, *All I Could Never Be*, 37.



50. *Ibid.*, 45.
51. *Ibid.*, 37.
52. Anzia Yezierska, *Salome of the Tenements* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1923).
106. Natalie Friedman elaborates on this scene and the effect of Sonya's primitivism on John Manning. "He must reform her and Americanize her," she writes, "or else she threatens his own sense of civilization through her sexual desirability and her ethnic emotionalism" (180).
53. Lori Jirousek elaborates on this in a cross-reading of Yezierska and Zora Neale Hurston in "Ethnics and Ethnographers: Zora Neale Hurston and Anzia Yezierska," *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 28.
54. Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages*, 3.
55. Dearborn, *Love in the Promised Land*, 103–4.
56. Yezierska, *All I Could Never Be*, 93–94.
57. *Ibid.*, 81. Lori Jirousek interestingly parallels Yezierska's comments with those of Zora Neale Hurston, who remarks in a 1934 Rosenwald fellowship application that a successful ethnographic collection "must be done by individuals feeling the material as well as seeing it objectively. In order to feel and appreciate the nuances one must be of the group." Quoted in Carla Kaplan, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 165. Jirousek points to these similarities to show that "both writers suggest that overemphasizing objectivity can prevent successful ethnography." Jirousek, "Ethnics and Ethnographers," 20.
58. Yezierska, *All I Could Never Be*, 111.
59. Delia Caparoso Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 23.
60. *Ibid.*, 22, 48. See also Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
61. Anzia Yezierska, "America and I," in *The Open Cage: An Anzia Yezierska Collection* (New York: Persea, 1979), 25–26.
62. For more on the African-American influence in the writings of Yezierska, see Lori Harrison-Kahan, "'Drunk with the Fiery Rhythms of Jazz': Anzia Yezierska, Hybridity, and the Harlem Renaissance," *Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 416–36. See also Nella Larsen, *Quicksand and Passing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986 [1928–1929]); Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999 [1929]); and James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (New York: Knopf, 1927 [1912]).
63. See Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*; George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999 [1903]).
64. Theodore Roosevelt, "Men: In Answer to the Oft-Asked Question: Why You Not Have Just One Page for Men in the Home Journal," *Ladies Home Journal*, October 1916–October 1917. For more on Roosevelt and masculinity, see Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender & Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Taubenfeld, *Rough Writing*, 92–97.
65. Susan M. Ryan, "'Rough Ways and Rough Work': Jacob Riis, Social Reform, and the Rhetoric of Benevolent Violence," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (September 1997): 208–9. Ryan goes on to historicize Riis's work within an American military context of engagement in the Spanish-American conflict of the 1890s. She quotes Vicente Rafael, who writes that "colonization as 'assimilation' was deemed a moral imperative, as wayward 'Orphans of the Pacific' cut off from the Spanish fathers and desired by other European powers would now be adopted and protected by the compassionate embrace of the United States." Within the context of the Philippines, continues Rafael, "the measured use of force was deemed consistent with the tutelary aims of colonization: that of making native inhabitants desire what colonial authority desired for them"; this process, explains Ryan, involved "constant surveillance of the colonial population." Vicente L. Rafael, "White Love: Surveillance and Nationalist Resistance in the U.S. Colonization of the Philippines," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 185–86. It is also important to note that one of the reasons Theodore Roosevelt excused Riis's insistence on retaining his home identification is because, as Aviva Taubenfeld elaborates, "in the founding mythology of many native-born Americans, including Roosevelt, Danes were part of the original mixed white northern blood that created the United States, set its race 'mould,' and established its ideal" (61). Roosevelt often described the original American frontiersmen as "Vikings, using the analogy to both rationalize and celebrate American expansionism" (63). See also Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning the West*, Presidential ed., 1889–1896, 4 vols. (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1995). For a more recent treatment of the history of racial identity and immigration in the United States through an examination of nativist

literature and commentary on Scandinavian Americans and their role in the hierarchy of whiteness and American national characteristics, see Jørn Brøndal, "'The Fairest among the So-Called White Races': Portrayals of Scandinavian Immigrants in the Filiopietistic and Nativist Literature of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 5–36.

66. See John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 247–49. Higham describes some of the “steamroller” techniques employed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by those involved in the “One Hundred Percent Americanization” movement, which set out to “stampede immigrants into citizenship” and into “unquestioning reverence for existing American institutions.” Natalie Friedman elaborates that “after the first World War, the effort to Americanize became solidified under the leadership of certain Progressive-era figures such as Henry Ford and Frances Kellor, the founder of the National Americanization Committee, who led the drive to coerce immigrants into assimilating coincided with a desire to expunge the difference and ‘otherness’ of ethnic newcomers, which culminated in the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act.” Friedman, “Marriage and the Immigrant Narrative,” 181. For more information on the restrictive quota system enacted by the 1924 Act, see Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Ali Behdad, *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Louis DeSipio and Rodolfo O. de la Garza, *Making Americans, Remaking America: Immigration and Immigrant Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998); and Mae M. Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (June 1999): 67–92.

67. Thomas Ferraro insists on this broader view in *Ethnic Passages*, offering a gentle and measured critique of Sollors’s portrait of immigrant writing and the work that remains for scholars who hope to build on his important work: “In *Beyond Ethnicity*,” explains Ferraro, “immigrant writing, like all ‘ethnic’ writing, is understood as a ritual enacting Americanization. Rather than being assessed as efforts to come to terms with the dilemmas of specific groups and of immigration in general (cultures in conflict, cultures in transitions), the icons and stories in the repertoire of immigrant writing (the melting pot, exogamous romance, the battle of the generations) are revealed as reproducing national archetypes. Rather than being read as responses to the circumstances of disparate immigrant groups, these archetypes are shown to have originated in the literatures of the Anglo-Protestant forefathers (who fled religious persecution and colonized the continent); they are also shown to structure the literatures of U.S. minorities (who were forcibly removed, incorporated, enslaved, and interned). The ‘problem’ lies, then, not so much in what Sollors does as in what he leaves for others to do” (*Ethnic Passages*, 2).

68. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 163.