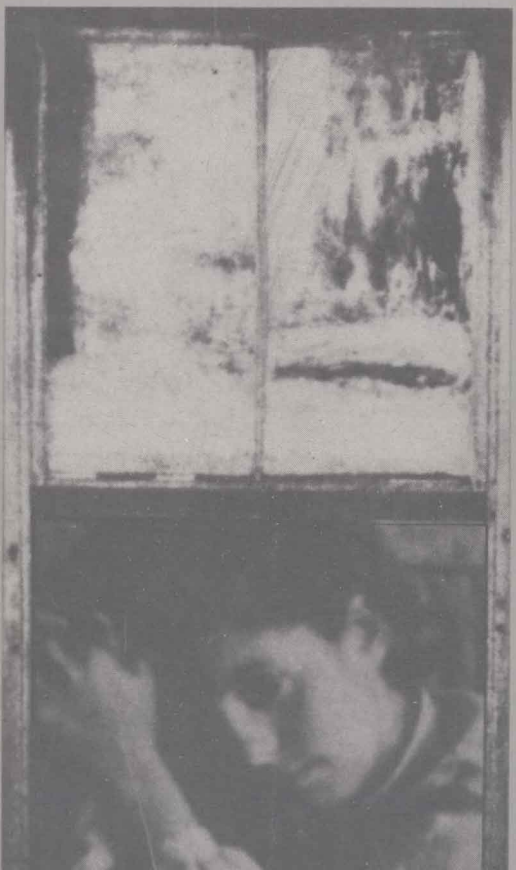
Bread Givers

A struggle between a father of the Old World and a daughter of the New

ANZIA YEZIERSKA



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A NOVEL

BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ALICE KESSLER HARRIS

PERSEA BOOKS
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TO

CLIFFORD SMYTH

TO WHOSE UNDERSTANDING CRITICISM
AND INSPIRATION I OWE MORE
THAN I CAN EVER EXPRESS

I should like to thank Louise Levitas Henriksen for her generous help in reconstructing the details of her mother's life, and Joy and Marchette Chute and Rose Goldberg for sharing their memories of Anzia Yezierska with me. Karen Braziller and Jane Ross were instrumental in rescuing this novel from the world of "out-of-print" books.

A.K.H.

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INTRODUCTION

"There wasn't anybody who didn't know Anzia Yezierska," commented a woman recently of the 1920s. Today, there is hardly anyone who does. An immigrant, desperately poor and often hungry, Yezierska wrote realistic stories of Jewish immigrant life on New York's Lower East Side. Her tales paved the way to success and adulation: she became the American dream come true. And her fiction illuminates the meaning of the dream.

All of the six books Anzia Yezierska published between 1920 and 1932 are in some sense autobiographical, but none more so than *Bread Givers*. Her constant themes are the dirt and congestion of the tenement, the struggle against poverty, family, and tradition to break out of the ghetto, and then the searing recognition that her roots would always lie in the old world. If in her other work Yezierska offers glimpses of the language and culture of immigrant Jews at the turn of the century, in *Bread Givers* she opens the door wide and leads us through the days of her childhood to the impetuous decision to reject her parents' home. Along the way, she lays open the woman's experience of immigration, revealing the ways in which Jewish women encountered the new world and tried to reconcile it with the old.

Yezierska's old world was like that of many turn-of-the-century immigrants. She was born in a small town—probably a *shtetl* called Plinsk—in Russian Poland about 1885. The exact date of her birth

went unrecorded, for her family was large—there were nine children—and her parents poor. Her father, a Talmudic scholar, had chosen, Yezierska later wrote, "to have his portion in the next world." The family lived off the neighbors' contributions of food and clothing and the mother's occasional earnings from selling small items in the local market. But her father was a learned man who spent his days in Talmudic study and religious discussion. Since the community honored a wife and children who supported such a man, poverty was a source of pride as well as of hunger and cold.

For the shtetl wife, poverty meant constant work and continuous sacrifice for husband and children. Although women complained often and bitterly, Jewish faith provided both solace and rationalization for their hard life. Only men could study the Torah. Their wives and daughters were destined to smooth the path. A woman's virtue was measured by how well she helped her husband to live a pious existence, free from daily worry and encouraged by her orthodox observance of ritual in the home. To serve her husband and father should be a woman's highest wish, and it was, in any event, her only hope of heaven. In the name of religious duty, husbands who were otherwise entirely dependent on their wives and children, tyrannized them. "It says in the Torah," says Sara Smolinsky's father in *Bread Givers*, horrified that his daughter might live alone, "only through a man has a woman an existence. Only through a man can a woman enter Heaven." Most shtetl women were therefore married in their teens to men chosen by their families. If love came at all, it came afterwards.

Religious injunction encouraged sexual intercourse, and women began to bear children soon after marriage. Mothers coddled each baby until the next appeared. Their daughters were quickly put to work caring for younger children and doing household chores. Unlike their brothers who spent their days in religious instruction, most girls went to school only long enough to learn the rudiments of Hebrew letters and to become literate in Yiddish. After that they learned by following their mothers' examples. Too much learning, even for the well off, was frowned upon, for a girl who developed a "man's head" would not make a good wife.

If she had been well provided with a dowry or her husband was wealthy a woman might have a servant to help with household tasks. But most women not only cared for house and children alone, they

also helped to sustain the family economically. Wives and husbands worked together in small shops; women peddled produce or goods in the marketplace. Their husbands spent long hours in the synagogue and, contemptuous of non-Jews, dealt with them as little as possible. Women, unrestricted by the fetters that bound their husbands, frequently developed greater familiarity with the worldly ways of the marketplace than did their husbands. Paradoxically, though intended to produce submissive and retreating women in the domestic sphere, exclusion from most religious activity placed major economic burdens on many women and encouraged them to develop aggressive and articulate roles in the larger world.

Not accidentally, many young women broke out of their confined spheres even in Russia. A long tradition of exciting and alive Jewish women—a bit eccentric and marvelously self-willed—testifies to the emerging contradiction between the reality of women's economic contribution and their low status. Emma Goldman, the famous anarchist, insisted on joining her sister in America. Rose Pesotta, later to become a labor union leader, said she had left her Russian village at the age of seventeen because she "could see no future for herself except to marry some young man and be a housewife." In contrast with the restricted options of the shtetl, America seemed to offer boundless opportunities even for girls. Some of Yezierska's best-known stories are about young girls who dream of America as a place where they can freely meet the ideal lovers who surely await them.

If women in the old country were beginning to chafe at restrictions and to become aware of new possibilities, their conflicts multiplied enormously in America. When Yezierska came in the 1890s, she was one of a hundred thousand Jews who each year sought security and prosperity in the new world. Like most other Jews, Yezierska disembarked at Ellis Island and went to live with relatives in Manhattan's crowded Lower East Side. There Jews tried to reconstruct the old world in the landscape of the new. But in America pious poverty earned no approbation. Most Jews quickly shed their traditional garb and, drawing on shtetl-nurtured talents for business and learning, began their rapid march to upward mobility. A few, Yezierska's father among them, clung resolutely to old paths, spending their days in holy study and remaining untempted by money.

For many women, the transition to America aggravated the ten-

sion between their religiously enjoined subservience and their actual economic importance. In the old country strong community sanctions and religious edict kept women in their place despite their economic activity. But now, without the protective cloak of persistent religious observance, women's secondary position in the new world seemed anachronistic: a matter of outmoded custom and tradition. A new world demanded a new rationale for keeping women down. It found it in the strong family structure sustained by women's developing economic dependence.

Most immigrant women, of course, never considered these questions. The ghetto that seemed so full of life and color to casual observers meant for them a constant battle against bugs, dirt, and poverty. Their economic contribution was as necessary on the Lower East Side as it had been in the shtetl, and they quickly wore themselves out caring for boarders, sewing at home, or husbanding the family's little income. As levels of prosperity rose, however, women who believed their lives derived meaning from family service found themselves with time on their hands and diminished economic importance. In *Bread Givers*, Zalmon the fish peddler gleefully reports that he can make his new wife "a lady with nothing to bo but stay home and cook for me and clean the house and look after the children." Women who wanted to break out of these old patterns violated not only the expectations of their own immigrant community, but also American social prescription that confirmed dependent roles for women at the turn of the century. Some women, nevertheless, found new outlets for their aggressive energies. Most continued to live their lives through husbands and to sacrifice for children. In the absence of a vital economic need, this became a narrowing pursuit whose results can sometimes be seen in the overly-concerned and child-centered woman we have come to know as the American version of the Jewish mother.

Daughters of immigrants, nursed on family tradition, often fell into these patterns, but a few objected from the very beginning. Socialist or trade unionist activity stimulated many young women to rebel. Yezierska lived at the socialist Rand School for a while. Other immigrants, like Sara Smolinsky in this novel, took America at its word and tried to live by its ideals. At least in theory the ideology of success offered opportunities for women to make the most of their capacities. Here women could choose their husbands—could marry for

love. And if, in Yezierska's words, "they don't get a husband, they don't think the world is over, they turn their mind to something else." The ability to earn one's own living was in one sense only an extension of what Jewish women had been doing all along. Jobs and education that contributed to family life were applauded. After their sons had been educated, families sacrificed to keep their daughters in school and even to send them to college. But 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.

Anzia Yezierska was, in that sense, a revolutionary. Passionately convinced that her life was her own, she deliberately rejected traditional home and family roles. There is no evidence that she knew any of the "New Women" who populated New York's Greenwich Village in the decade surrounding World War I, but she seems to have shared many of their ideals. She was fiercely independent: an individualist who did whatever she wanted to do. Sympathy with the oppressed and outrage at tyranny of any kind came naturally to this child of a tyrannical father. Traditional notions of marriage discomfited her, yet she sought out male companions and lovers. Contemptuous of the ordinary and impatient with the unimaginative, she could not conform to social convention for its own sake. She was never bored—never did anything by halves. Aggressive, dynamic, demanding and forceful, she sought and created a satisfying, self-directed career. It was not so much that she was a feminist, her daughter said of her later: she was just herself.

When Yezierska left home at the age of seventeen, rejecting her parents' attempt to mold her into acceptable roles, she wanted most of all to become a "person." Education seemed the plausible route, so she worked in sweatshops and laundries, living in dark and smelly hall rooms until she had learned enough English to begin writing. At first, she paid a janitor's little daughter to teach her the lessons from her school books. Then she went to night school, and finally attended college lectures. Around 1910 she married an attorney: the union lasted only a few months before it was annulled. Almost immediately, she married again. This time, wary of legal complications, Yezierska chose to have only a religious ceremony and the child born of this

match had to be adopted by its father to legitimize it. Yezierska did not take well to cooking and housekeeping. Marriage proved too restrictive for her explosive personality and after three years she left, taking her daughter with her. It was not long before the pressures of earning a living became too great. Reluctantly she surrendered her child to its father and thereafter lived the independent life she wanted.

All the while she describes herself as having a "burning eagerness" to become an American: to look and dress with the assurance of the native born. She felt something different, she recalled later, so different that it had to come out. In 1922 Yezierska described her efforts to write as her contribution to making an America that was not yet finished. She wanted, she wrote, "to build a bridge of understanding between the American-born and myself . . . to open up my life and the lives of my people to them." Miraculously, she says, in writing about the ghetto she found America.

The miracle had only begun. The *Forum* printed her first story, "The Free Vacation House," in 1915 and other publications followed. In 1919, "The Fat of the Land" won the coveted Edward J. O'Brien awarded for Best Short Story of the Year. In 1920 her tales were collected in a volume called *Hungry Hearts*. Then came a Hollywood contract. The book was purchased by Sam Goldwyn and the studio wanted her to help write the script: a $10,000 purchase price, a $200 a week salary. Fame. Praise. Success. Riches beyond her wildest dreams. What more could a poor immigrant want? All the Sunday magazines featured articles on the "Rags to Riches" girl. The literati competed for the honor of discovering her: she was a realist, her book was full of color and action, out of her simple words burst tremendous emotional energy. But Yezierska's soul was not appeased. Her heart was still empty.

It was not that fame did not appeal to her but that her muse lay in the ghetto and without it she could not write. In her semi-fictional autobiography, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, written when she was 65 and long after her fame had passed, Yezierska described her longing for her own people. Money removed her from Lower East Side life and from old friends who now came to see her only to beg. She was, she wrote, "without a country, without a people. . . . I could not write any more. I had gone too far away from life, and I did not know how to get back." Caught between two worlds, the muse faltered and

she could not write. Within a year, she gave up the wealth of Hollywood to return to the East.

Yezierska continued to publish steadily through the 1920s. First came *Salome of the Tenements* in 1922, then *Children of Loneliness* in 1923. *Bread Givers* followed in 1925 and *Arrogant Beggar* in 1927. In 1932, she published *All I Could Never Be* in which, presciently, her major character explained, "I don't believe that I shall ever write again unless I can get back to the real life I once lived when I worked in the factory." After that her voice was curiously quiet. Magazines occasionally published her stories and book reviews appeared regularly. But she published only one more book length manuscript: *Red Ribbon on A White Horse* which appeared in 1950.

Perhaps Yezierska had said her piece, spoken her mind—or the muse had simply deserted. She wrote, and destroyed, two unfinished novels in these years, and when she died many short stories remained unpublished. Possibly her tales of people living in poverty and struggling to rise above it ran counter to the anxious pessimism so prevalent in the depression years. In the thirties she found work on the WPA Writers Project. In the forties and fifties she was out of vogue. *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, the final volume of this once famous writer, found a publisher only with difficulty. Poor again, she lived most of the time in a single room stretching a meager income from royalties and the earnings of her pen. Still fiercely independent and still writing, she began in the last years of her life to publish stories about old age. The burning eagerness had not diminished. A friend who knew her in 1961 describes her then as "literally strangling" to get out the story that was inside her. She must have been about eighty years old when people began to discover her work again. Students invited her to lecture. She accepted delightedly. Less than three years before she died she wrote "What makes writing so difficult? Isn't it the blind craze to say too much?"

Perhaps the nostalgia of an old woman distorted her perspective. In any event, Yezierska ended her life convinced that her obsession to lift herself out of material poverty had resulted in poverty of the soul. Perennially lonely, she spoke of the barren road of her success. She saw rebellion against her father as an attempt to be like him: to search for a vocation as strong as his. Because she was a woman, that was sinful. She had rejected family life and violated cherished Jewish

tradition. In what may be a tribute to the power of cultural heritage, as well as to the folly of chasing after the American dream, she acknowledged finally the truth of her father's conviction that fire and water would not mix. "Hell," she wrote, "is trying to do what you can't do, trying to be what you're not." But she never wavered from the conviction that had guided her life: "The glimpses of truth I reached for everywhere, all that I could ever be was in myself." She died in 1970, an old woman with failing eyesight, still a marvelous teller of stories and, by her daughter's account, "an explosion to everyone."

If Anzia Yezierska was not typical of immigrant women, neither was she unique. Her struggle, in lesser proportions, went on everywhere. A stubborn and unrelenting father, more firmly rooted in old world traditions than most, and a willful daughter, convinced of her own right to make choices, merely highlighted tensions implicit in the transition to the new world. Yezierska's great gift was her ability to capture the ambiguity created by America's consistent temptations. She could write about the warmth and closeness of the immigrant community as she rejected the dirt and poverty that accompanied them. She could describe the pull of prosperity and the urge for adequate food as she warily watched for the trap that the marketplace surely laid. She condemned the endless toil and incessant anxiety that bound America's workers, but she remained eternally optimistic that its promise would be redeemed. She offered no answers, but she was sure that America somehow had them. Her reviewers used to say that she wrote about "life." And she did. Deceptively simple in plot and structure, her work is suffused with the unending trauma of adjustment, with the psychic stress of adaptation, with alternating currents of exhilaration, weariness, fear, self-doubt, self-loathing, and quiet acceptance that were all part of every individual's entry into America.

In his introduction to Yezierska's autobiography, W. H. Auden wrote that the book was "an account of her efforts to discard fantastic desires and find real ones." I prefer to see her work as an attempt to reconcile American ideals with Jewish culture. For what seemed to Auden fantastic desires were for Yezierska only the wish to take the promise of America literally. America offered two things, both equally unattainable for the shtetl woman and, Yezierska was con-

vinced, simultaneously available in America. America held out the possibility of love and of satisfying work. Yezierska's task was to find out if they could be achieved without giving up the best of the old culture and without the dreadful pangs of rootlessness that would follow.

Life in America did not begin and end with marriage. It offered the opportunity to reject old roles—to be unlike the women she knew. Thus, her heroine responded in *Arrogant Beggar* to the pride of a neighbor woman who had spent her life serving her husband and son. "I loved her because she gave up so much of herself. But I knew I could never, never be like that." Work could be a satisfying alternative. "Don't take pity on my years," shouted the heroine of one of her short stories to an uncle who wanted to marry her off. "I'm living in America not in Russia. I'm not hanging on anybody's neck to support me. In America if a girl earns her living she can be fifty years old and without a man, and nobody pities her." And so she set out, like many of Yezierska's heroines, to "make herself for a person," to rise out of poverty and find a satisfying life by her own efforts.

The road to becoming a person lay through the dangerous territory of Americanization. Yezierska is at her best when she describes the anguished journey. Americans were clean, so immigrants had to get out from under the dirt. But tenement apartments were crowded and dark. Few had running water. Soap cost money and washing took precious time away from sleep or studies. Americans were neat and stylish. But what immigrant girl had the money for clothes? Or the time to remake hats and learn new manners? Americans were soft spoken and educated so the struggle to learn English, to finish high school, even to attend college, became a single-minded obsession for those who wanted to shed the greenhorn image. A jumble of emotions assaulted the poor immigrant who tried to absorb these rules all at once. In her short story, "When Lovers Dream," Yezierska reflected on the cost of the process for a girl trying to live up to the image of her medical student boyfriend of what she should be.

> David was always trying to learn me how to make myself over for an American. Sometimes he would spend out fifteen cents to buy me the 'Ladies Home Journal' to read about American life and my whole head was put away on how to look neat and be up-to-date like the American Girls. Till long hours in the night I used to stay up brushing and pressing my plain blue suit with the white

> collar what David liked, and washing my waists, and fixing up my hat like the pattern magazines show you. On holidays he took me out for a dinner by a restaurant, to learn me how the Americans eat, with napkins, and use up so many plates—the butter by itself and the bread by itself, and the meat by itself, and the potatoes by itself.

She didn't make it. David, afraid she would burden him, took the advice of a rich uncle and left her.

Americanization brought self-assurance and a change in personality that would transform the crude immigrant into a suave native. The tall Anglo-Saxon male appears repeatedly in Yezierska's work. To the immigrant girl he is an inspiring figure. Older and infinitely more sophisticated than she, he appears as the measured and calm epitome of her aspirations. To her, he represents reason and civilization. To become like him, she strives to get away from the Yiddish language and to suppress her displays of feeling. Yet it is precisely these qualities that he admires. To his Anglo-Saxon imagination, she seems, in her roughness, the essence of life. Her emotional energy and excitement draw him. He is captivated by the color and vitality of the immigrant community. His romantic vision of the ghetto leads her to see beyond its poverty and to recognize that her roots lie in the community she is trying to escape. In *All I Could Never Be*, Yezierska explores the conflict between reason and emotion in a love affair modeled after a sad experience of her own. For a while the lovers complement each other. In the end, however, they seem irreconcilable and immigrant and WASP part.

On the way to successful Americanization lay another kind of anguish. Becoming an American cut women off from their culture and their past. It brought the fearful recognition that they were adrift in the world. "I had gone too far away from life and I did not know how to get back," lamented Yezierska. One of her characters, an immigrant's college-educated daughter, echoed the cry: "I can't live in the old world and I'm yet too green for the new. I don't belong to those who gave me birth or to those with whom I was educated." Yezierska offers some possibilities of solace. The educated daughter of immigrants could return to the ghetto in a spirit of love for her people. Together they might forge a new world out of her book knowledge and their knowledge of life.

The best part of America was freedom. As she was obsessed with her own need to be free, she gloried in the country that made it possible. This was a place in which all could aspire to the "democracy of beauty," she wrote in 1922. Yet she saw clearly America's failure to live up to its potential. In the midst of the depression she wrote sadly of her fellow immigrants, "We foreigners are the orphans, the step-children of America. The old world is dead behind us, and the new world—about which we dreamed . . . —is not yet born." And again, "How many get the chance to give to America the hope in their hearts, the dreams of their minds?" Greedy landlords and bosses shared the blame for poverty's distortion of the dream. Still her faith remained intact. Friends described her late in her long life as a woman instinctively opposed to "oppression of the spirit."

Many of these themes, of course, are present in the work of other first generation Jewish immigrants and their children. Poverty, Americanization, family tensions, the ambiguity of success are the painful realities of which immigrant drama was made. The pain surfaces in great novels like Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep*, in forgotten entertainments like Samuel Ornitz's *Haunch, Paunch and Jowl* and in rediscovered sagas like Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* and Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money*. In Fannie Hurst's thinly disguised didactic stories, the process of adaptation finds a picturesque frame. Everywhere there is the degradation of poverty mediated by a caring community and redeemed by a vibrant hope for the future.

Yezierska shares with her fellow immigrants the ability to evoke vividly the religion and tradition of the shtetl which she rejects. The intensity of her rejection contributes to the liveliness of her memories. Her heroes and heroines are in constant motion. They do not meander through the streets of the Lower East Side like Ornitz's street gangs. They rush headlong, hunting for a way out and pausing, like Michael Gold, to dwell on the distortions that poverty creates in the personalities of the people they pass along the way. Gold, like Cahan in *Yekl*, comments on the disjuncture between husbands who have found the way to the new world and wives who hang back, comfortable in their old patterns. Yezierska offers another and no less real syndrome: the wife who pleads, threatens, and nags her husband into American ways. Samuel Ornitz's Meyer Hirsch, who became a corrupt lawyer, and Abraham Cahan's David Levinsky, a

wealthy cloak manufacturer, take their place alongside Yezierska's Sara Smolinsky as vivid warnings of the abject emptiness of lives lived to someone else's tune. David and Meyer, rich and dissatisfied, fall into the yawning chasm between two worlds. Sara, for whom success was not measured by money alone, is saved by making her peace with her immigrant childhood and her father.

If Yezierska has none of Ornitz's sense of humor or Gold's sense of the absurd, she may more accurately represent the way Jewish immigrants managed to struggle out of the Lower East Side. Relatively few became socialists, like Gold, or petty gangsters. Many nourished themselves on hope while they slaved to educate themselves and their children. And if Yezierska has neither the symbolic depth of Henry Roth nor the epochal power of Abraham Cahan, she offers unparalleled ability to bring life to a neglected aspect of Yiddish culure, plunging us directly into the woman's experience of immigration.

When women appeared at all in the novels of her fellow-writers, they were likely to be creatures of male sexual imagination, manipulative and overly protective mothers, or dependent wives made fearful by their helplessness. Mary Antin's romanticized and sentimental *The Promised Land* provides no antidote to this view. Fannie Hurst occasionally offers glimpses of autonomous women but their freedom is bounded by severe moral constraints. Yezierska, in contrast, offers independent and self-willed women, and she does not hide the psychic pain of their sacrifice. The struggle out of poverty, never easy, posed for women a unique problem. Those who shared the mobility aspirations of a larger society had to violate family and community tradition in order to achieve them. Most women brave enough to risk transgressing drifted towards radical activity where they could more readily find support. Even so, their lives were filled with conflict.

We find bits and snatches of rebellious womanhood scattered in the literature of Jewish labor and socialist leaders. Pauline Newman and Fannia Cohn, who worked for the Jewish International Ladies Garment Workers Union in the period when Yezierska was writing, complained bitterly of their lonely and rootless existences. Autobiographies like Rose Cohen's *Out of the Shadow*, Lucy Robins Lang's *Tomorrow is Beautiful*, Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*, Rose Pesotta's *Bread Upon the Waters*, Rose Schneiderman's *All for One* offer poignant testimony to the pain of women who rejected the in-

junction to marry and rear families as their major responsibility. They indicate that the current of discontent ran deep. Yezierska speaks for all of them and nowhere more fully than in *Bread Givers*.

She later commented of this novel, "I felt I had justified myself in the book for having hardened my heart to go through life alone." Perhaps, in the end, it is the need for self-justification that invests *Bread Givers* with its powerful emotional force. Anzia Yezierska and Sara Smolinsky, the novel's narrator, are emotionally interchangeable. Sara, as a small child, watches her self-righteous father successively drive off the suitors of each of her three sisters, and marry off his daughters to men of his own choosing. The horror and injustice of her sisters' broken lives leads her to vow that she will not become a fourth sacrifice to his rigid conception of Jewish womanhood. So she escapes. But her father's curses ring in her ears and memories of her mother's boundless and forgiving love mock her own self-centered life. Sara, repeating Yezierska's own experience, struggles upward. She drives herself through night school and college, thrusting out of her mind questions about what she was doing and why. Successful at last, she visits her parents, teacher's diploma in hand, to hear her unrelenting father proclaim: "She's only good to the world, not to her father. Will she hand me her wages from school as a dutiful daughter should?" Is there then any reconciliation between the legitimate search for self-fulfillment and duty to family? Yezierska, like Sara, opted for self and built her life around her own authentic needs. She freed herself from a tradition few of her countrywomen could ignore in that first generation, and she did it against the heaviest odds. But she paid an enormous price. This book was part of her attempt to seek absolution.

In the light of the emerging women's movement, *Bread Givers* has become more meaningful than ever. When it was first published in 1925, reviewers praised its blistering intensity, and translucent prose. They talked about its "crisp" quality, its vitality. "One does not seem to read," commented critic William Lyons Phelps. "One is too completely inside." Today these qualities are enhanced by Yezierska's scrutiny of issues that are the subject of wide concern. In her life and in this book, Yezierska questioned the limited roles offered to women by traditional families. She rejected the constraints that community pressure imposed on her freedom. She presented the possibility of men and women who could acknowledge each other's legitimate needs.

Bread Givers makes no judgments of people who choose other paths. For freedom is at the pivot of this book as it was the driving force of Yezierska's life. Half a century after she wrote, the power and intensity of her message remain intact.

Alice Kessler Harris

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