

## JEWISH MEN AND THE EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN CODE OF MASCULINITY THROUGH ETHNIC LENSES

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The study of masculinity has recently bloomed as a serious scholar enterprise especially under the stimulus of feminism (Traister 280) and as a reaction to the tendency of considering the issue of manhood as a settled one (Pugh XV). Ever since these early stages, there has been an interest in assessing the complexity of the field. For instance, when defining the scope of his study *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel highlights the complicated history of masculinity as best revealed in the relation between hegemonic and subordinated groups:

A history of manhood must, therefore, recount two histories: the history of the changing 'ideal' version of masculinity and the parallel and competing versions that coexist with it", [...] [a] tension between the multiplicity of masculinities that collectively define American men's actual experiences and this singular 'hegemonic' masculinity that is prescribed as the norm [...] Yet, in another sense, it is at least indirectly the story of marginalized 'others' – working class men, gay men, men of color, immigrant men – how these different groups of men and, of course, women were used as a screen against which those 'complete' men projected their fears and, in the process, constructed this prevailing definition of manhood. (6)

In accord with Kimmel's idea of complex masculinity above, my essay sets out to investigate the relation between mainstream and marginal masculinity in early twentieth-century America by focusing on the case of one particular ethnic group—Jewish Americans. Other studies have had a similar focus, and this essay owes an intellectual debt to Sander Gilman, Mary-Ellen Prell, Michael Biberman and Ted Merwin<sup>1</sup> who have not ignored the issue of masculinity when

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<sup>1</sup> The works I refer to here include: Sander Gilman's *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories, and Identities*. (Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Mary Ellen Prell's *Fighting to Become*

discussing Jewish American identity. My goal is to see how this relation was recorded in first-generation Jewish American prose writings by considering the differences and similarities characterizing men and women writers, their attitudes vis-à-vis the mainstream position and each other. This essay therefore also makes a contribution by looking beyond the simple interethnic issue of masculinity, as a code prescribed by the dominant WASP culture on a marginal group like the Jewish one which has most often been the subject of existing studies on the history of American masculinity and Jewish men. Instead, I link the interethnic dimension with the intra-ethnic one and probe into the way in which Jewish men and the code of masculinity were rendered by Jews themselves. In this way one can determine the sharpness of nativist prejudices as well as American Jews' profoundly gendered encounters between tradition and modernity.

More precisely, I mean to postulate and investigate the dynamics of the faulty masculinity associated with early twentieth-century Jewish American men in the time's Jewish American prose. As already mentioned above, I argue that this dynamics is brought to life by the inter-relation between interethnic and intra-ethnic representations of the place occupied by Jewish American men in relation to the idea of masculinity. I will start from the main features of masculinity in mainstream America of the early twentieth-century: physical vigor, palpable achievements and lack of emotionalism. To be added, as indicated by Amy Kaplan, aggressiveness as performance rather than aggressiveness as actualized violence becomes the prop of American masculinity at the time.

My interest is to show how this outside imposed prescription triggered different gender reactions inside the Jewish community per se and as exemplification of this I use the literary works of Marcus Eli Ravage and Anzia Yezierska. I will show how Jewish American men and women writers alike posit performance as a hallmark of American masculinity in the early twentieth-century. If this identification allows Jewish men easier access to American culture, for Jewish women it becomes the trigger for changing their negative attitude against the weakness of Jewish men; this is made possible by their discovery of fakeness behind Gentile masculinity.

Thus, I argue that Jewish American men record their paradoxical relation to the norm of American masculinity as different from their

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*Americans. Assimilation and the Trouble between Jewish Women and Jewish Men* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Michael Biberman's *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism and Early Modern Literature: From the Satanic to the Effeminate Jew* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004); Ted Merwin's *In Their Own Image. New York Jews in Jazz Age Popular Culture.*

traditional values but also as a relevant path to Americanization by its very departure from the values of their own ethnic community. By contrast, Jewish American woman writer Yeziarska manages to carve out the space for the impassioned intellectual as an alternative to the indifferent intellectualism promoted by mainstream masculinity and hereby offers the solution of a different masculinity characterizing Jewish American men.

### **Emasculated Jews and American Masculinity**

The genuine American recognized but one distinction in human society – the vital distinction between the strong, effectual, ‘real’ man and the soft, pleasure-loving, unreliable failure. (Ravage 211)

This excerpt from a book originally published in 1917 and entitled *An American in the Making* records the 1910 experience of narrator-protagonist Max, an immigrant Jewish American student at the University of Missouri, and whose experiences closely resemble those of the Romanian-born author Marcus Eli Ravage. His affirmation at once identifies that what lies at the core of American culture is a strong sense of masculinity understood as highly dependent on aggressiveness. In fact, among the early twentieth-century Jewish American prose authors, I am aware of only this one writer who explicitly tackles the dominance of masculinity in the American society of the era. His account of what masculinity means for mainstream Americans thus becomes a precious tool for understanding the clash between the hegemonic and marginal claim to masculinity and the positioning of the marginal man in relation to mainstream masculinity.

Thus, in recording the significance of manhood for mainstream America, Ravage singles out its characteristic features as physical vigor and palpable achievements. To be added, the idea of masculinity also takes shape by negative definition, i.e. by pointing to what prevents a person from qualifying as manly. In this respect, Ravage indicates the realm of emotions as a certain disqualifier of manliness.

In fact, Ravage’s position vis-à-vis masculinity closely corresponds to the findings of the era’s historians. Concerning this, it is worthwhile mentioning Amy Kaplan’s study of the relation between masculinity and American imperial power in the 1890s. Kaplan identifies the elements constituting the norm of masculinity at the time, noting that this was the time for redefining “white middle-class masculinity from a republican quality of character based on self-control and social responsibility to a corporeal essence identified with the vigor and prowess of the individual male body” (223). In other words, the

central feature of masculine identity in the 1890s was “the muscular robust physique” (222), an idea also developed by Bryce Traister in his brief overview of the stances of masculinity throughout time, in which he describes the early twentieth-century masculine image as emphasizing “aggressiveness and domination” (288).

Yet, in order to understand what the aggressive muscleman model stood for in the early twentieth century one of Kaplan’s observations is particularly useful, namely that the athletic field became the new site of masculinity from the 1890s onwards. As a consequence of this, Kaplan makes another important statement in stressing that during the same period performance replaces primitive violence as the trigger and redeemer of one’s masculinity. In other words, in the changed context in which college replaced war as the site of expressing one’s manliness, the early twentieth-century man is one for whom aggressiveness no longer refers to physical violence but to a valorization of sports as a national icon to the American mind. Aggressiveness as performance rather than aggressiveness as actualized violence is the direct result of such a situation.

Indeed Max, the narrator of Ravage’s book, identifies athletics as the primary conversation topic at the University of Missouri and at the same time doubts its relevance as a suitable academic pursuit: “the hero worship bestowed on the overgrown animals who won the battle irritated me. I could not see what place this sort of thing had in a university” (215). Thus he names once more the characteristic features of American masculinity which he had previously stressed in the passage earlier cited: on the one hand, we have the physical vigor implied by the heroic image of “overgrown animals” and on the other hand, the palpable success associated with the winner. However, in contrast to the previous neutral assertion, this time we also find reference to his positioning vis-à-vis the code of American masculinity. The outsider position becomes obvious thanks to his using the phrase “overgrown animals” which implies depreciative connotations in the choice of a noun designated for non-humans used to identify humans. It would seem that the Jewish perspective on the American masculine norm highlights its negative function.

The dehumanizing image is completed in considering the place ascribed to emotions within American masculinity. Two episodes are worth considering from this perspective. First, there is Max’s expertise in learning languages: “In particular, I was taking effective hold of the work in languages, so much so that my English instructor had twice read my themes to the class without (thank goodness!) divulging my name” (213).

The use of “thanks goodness” represents the key element here and sets one thinking, why should divulging the name of the best student put Max in a bad light? The reason comes a little later in the book, when Max talks about his American room mate’s hidden passion for playing the fiddle: “My friend [Harvey] was [...] ashamed of his talent” (247). A little later on he notes, ‘He said, “It is thought a bit effeminate for a man to care for music”’ (248). It ensues from here that any activity associated to the arts was labeled as effeminate and, through the voice of Max, his protagonist, Ravage goes on to indicate the wide scope of such a mindset by suggesting its effects on the curriculum of art classes:

The mania was having its effect on the course of study and the whole life of the university. The departments of the arts were thrown on the defensive. The professor must adopt an apologetic tone for being interested in such unmanly things as poetry, music, or painting. Sentiment being tabooed as effeminate, it followed inevitably that whatever in the curriculum addressed itself to the emotions must be avoided like a plague. (249)

Thus, in making the above claims on Max’s proficiency in emotional arts, Ravage points to the effeminate Jew; in also recording American Harvey’s hidden passion for music he manages to problematize the American code of masculinity. More precisely, thanks to Harvey’s ambiguous stance, the authenticity of manliness is questioned and, in keeping with Kaplan’s findings, its primary performative role becomes highlighted:

It was the fashion, you see, to be masculine in Missouri, and when a thing becomes fashionable it ceases to be genuine. Those whom nature had endowed with the virtue made a fetish and a self-conscious pose of it, and those who lacked it became obsessed with the desire to imitate it. The final insult to a Missourian was to suggest that he was ‘sissified’. There was something like a panic among the more refined of my fellow-students at the mere mention of effeminacy. Even the girls dreaded it. (248)

This insistence on manliness as performance enables Ravage to point to the inauthenticity of the American code of masculinity, less a real accomplishment of the individual than an advertised pose. To a certain degree, this unmasking of American masculinity as a parade of a more or less mimed masculine attitude helps us better grasp the complexity of the issue, even if on the surface level the situation seems to be straightforwardly simple. At the same time, however, Ravage does not mean to expose its limitations in order to counteract the faulty image of the effeminate Jew which it had helped create. As a marginal man in America, in his position of a 16-year-old Romanian-Jewish immigrant reaching the U.S. in 1900, his main interest is that of assimilating to the new hegemonic culture rather than that of oppos-

ing it. Consequently, Jewish American masculinity emerges as less a reaction to perceived threats to its stability than as the occasionally gradual and often rebellious appropriation of prohibited masculine positionality. In this respect, the discovery of the performative function of American masculinity not only counts as negative inauthenticity but, by this very characteristic of being inauthentic, it enables Jews to more easily adopt the American masculine norm.

In this respect, I believe that it is by learning about American Harvey's double position, as an American strong 'man' in public and a sensitive art-drawn soul in private, that Max finds a way to bridge the gap between the overtly sensitive behavior of a Jewish man and the public coldness associated to an American man.

The inauthenticity of American masculinity in its performative character thus becomes the means by which the immigrant Eastern European Jew manages to take up the normative code and appropriate it. Indeed, Max's final image in Ravage's book is not that of the effeminate Jew but of the American 'man'; in the transition to this latter posture a central role is given to the rags-to-riches story. From Harvey's life story Max learns of the poverty-born hero worshiped as an epitome of American masculinity because of the implications of financial independence from one's family. On these grounds, Max's life of immigration and his jobs in America (peddler, bar-tender, sweat-shop worker and college student) make him the perfect manly hero for an American audience.

Furthermore, on Max's return to the Jewish ghetto in New York, the emphasis falls on the distance he has acquired in relation to his kin; as proof of this, we note his checked emotions as opposed to the affective outburst of his brother:

There was Paul faithfully at the ferry, and as I came off he rushed up to me and threw his arms around me and kissed me affectionately. Did I kiss him back? I am afraid not. [...] I had become soberer. I carried myself differently. There was an unfamiliar resolve, something mingled of coldness and melancholy, in my eye. (259-260)

The image of the cold-hearted man seems to have gradually taken hold of the former Jewish greenhorn and to draw him closer and closer to the mainstream norm. At the same time, the empowering masculinity of the young scholar is interdependent on the disempowered effeminate figure of relatives who have remained in the New York ghetto, a traditional transplanted enclave of kindred immigrants and fellow-citizens who only experienced extremely limited contact with what Ravage terms "the America of the Americans": "I needed sadly to readjust myself when I arrived in New York. But the incredible thing is that my problem was to fit myself in with the people of Vaslui and

Rumania, my erstwhile fellow-townsmen and my fellow-countrymen. It was not America in the large sense, but the East Side Ghetto that upset all my calculations, reversed all my values, and set my head swimming” (61). In other words, the Jewish man’s masculinity is sanctioned by contrast with the tradition-preserving community to which the student returns during the holiday.

All in all, Jewish American men record their paradoxical relation to the norm of American masculinity as different from their traditional values but also as a relevant path to Americanization by its very departure from the values of their own ethnic community.

Focusing on issues similar to the above-mentioned tension between Americanization and ethnic preservation, Ted Merwin’s recent book on Jewish image in the 1920s popular culture, entitled *In Their Own Image: New York Jews in Jazz Age Popular Culture* needs to be mentioned at this point. Though only fleetingly mentioning the issue of masculinity, one of Merwin’s indisputable merits is to supplant the discussion on Jewish masculinity with that on Jewish femininity. In this respect, in referring to popular culture, Merwin indicates the change of theme undertaken by women characters in post-1920 popular entertainment: if up to that moment, what dominated was their complaint against a hostile elite society, by the 1920s the complaint was directed against “the ill treatment they received from men” (49). As a consequence, not only Jewish femininity but also Jewish masculinity got complicated at the time. Yet, most scholarly studies ignore the situation of Jewish masculinity and only pinpoint the complexity of Jewish femininity which resulted from the negative gender stereotypes that Jewish males projected on Jewish females in the anxiety to assimilate to the materialistic anti-Semitic mainstream culture, a thesis amply documented in Riv-Ellen Prell’s *Fighting to Become Americans. Assimilation and the Trouble between Jewish Women and Jewish Men*. Instead Merwin identifies this limitation and completes the above thesis by illustrating the equal relevance of Jewish women’s emasculated stereotypes of Jewish men: “Jewish men were viewed as indecisive, unmanly, and unable to provide for their women. If Jewish men were not ‘100 percent American’ according to the mainstream culture, then to Jewish women they were often less than 100 percent men” (Merwin 51). In analyzing this attitude of Jewish American women, my focus, in contrast to Merwin, is not on vaudeville representations but on Jewish American women’s prose and my aim is to determine the correspondence between Merwin’s popular culture findings and the case of literature best featured by Anzia Yezierska’s love stories.

## Gentiles, Jews, and Masculinity through Jewish American Women's Lenses

Sonya and Manning, tricked into matrimony, were the oriental and the Anglo-Saxon trying to find a common language. The overemotional Ghetto struggling for its breath in the thin air of puritan restraint. An East Side Savage forced suddenly into the straight-jacket of American civilization. Sonya was like the dynamite bomb and Manning the wails of tradition constantly menaced by threatening explosions. (Yeziarska, *Salome* 132)

This excerpt is emblematic as the main coordinate characterizing Anzia Yeziarska's literary representation of masculinity is the binary opposition between Jewish affect and American reason. In fact, the study of the characters' affective natures informs the existing scholarly literature on Anzia Yeziarska, among which I only remember the works of JoAnn Pavletich and Lori Harrison-Kahan both sustaining the rhetorical value of affect in a context of racialized discourse and cultural hybridity. While for Harrison-Kahan emotions are only a subsidiary prop to the broader multiethnic and modernist milieu of the Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance, Pavletich foregrounds the case of affect in Yeziarska's short stories and specifies the writer's aim in manipulating the image of the emotionally intense Jewish female immigrant so as to establish the immigrant woman as an important figure in U.S. culture precisely because of effective emotions. Using Pavletich's observations as a point of departure, I develop the discussion of Anzia Yeziarska's uses of affect on two levels: first, I expand the scope of Pavletich's analysis beyond the writers' short stories by concentrating on her subsequent novels; more importantly, I analyze the way in which Yeziarska correlates the uses of affect with men, in contrast to Pavletich who only concentrates on affect as a womanly characteristic.

First of all, as also shown by the two critics mentioned above, affect serves as the differentiating factor between Jewish American women and Gentile men, accounting for the tension between the denigrated emotional expressivity of the marginal woman and the valorized emotional restraint of the hegemonic manly culture. This has been already indicated in the opening excerpt of this section from Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements* with the phrases "overemotional Ghetto" and "puritan restraint." It is Harrison-Kahan who interprets this emotional gap between Jewish American women and Gentile men as a matter of racial power relations in asserting that "Whiteness, as a position of power, often becomes inextricably entwined with masculinity and is thus unreachable for Jewish heroines" (422). Just like Jewish American male immigrant writers, Jewish American



women also consider mainstream masculinity as a necessary step on the path to assimilate to the new culture.

Moreover, at the heart of Jewish American women's encounter with mainstream masculinity there is the primitive vogue of 1920s America, a decade that saw an unprecedented interest in the primitivism of ethnic minorities as recorded by Harrison-Kahan. As a result, ethnic women were objectified and stereotyped as exotic and sexually free. For instance, in *Salome of the Tenements* Manning, the rich philanthropist of the East Side, sees in the Russian-Jewish Sonya "the primitive fascination of the oriental," "the intensity of spirit of the oppressed races" (101); likewise, for his family and kindred Gentiles the Russian Jewess is labeled as "a creature of sex" (128), emphasizing passion and over-emotionalism as features of an inferior civilization. Obviously, as also indicated by Friedman, Manning's fear that he will succumb to the hidden inner "primitive" reflects the time's national paranoia related to the "rising tide" of ethnic immigrants and the threat they posed to the imaginary, Puritan ideal of American behavior—stoicism, temperance, civilized manners (Friedman 180). The relation between masculinity and Jewishness then continues scholarly analyses of the early twentieth-century American context as the time of nativist rhetoric and the eugenics movement cohering towards prejudiced laws that featured catalogues of negative attributes of the immigrant body and considered the effects of 1891-1924 immigrant statutes on the regulation and repression of the immigrant body. If such positions emphasized the inassimilable character of new-comers because of the mental and physical inferiority of the immigrant body, as discussed by June Dwyer, the rhetoric of masculinity as affect-free broadens the discussion of assimilation to the realm of emotions and race. In relation to this, Harrison-Kahan goes on to affirm that interest in the opposite sex has little to do with heterosexual romance and more to do with the desire to wed one's self to America: "Recognizing this connection between masculinity and whiteness, several of Yeziarska's protagonists pursue other means of Americanization. If they cannot be men, so the logic goes, they can, at the very least, have men" (Harrison-Kahan 422).

Though pertinent in her remark, what Harrison-Kahan and the other critics fail to consider in order to demonstrate such a claim is that Yeziarska's writings also feature the relation between affect, Jewish-American men and Jewish-American women and the relation between affect, Jewish-American men and Gentile men, relations I mean to analyze in the following pages.

As transpires from the following excerpts of Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements*, the two categories to be considered in view of under-

standing the relation between affect and the early twentieth-century American code of masculinity are gender and ethnicity:

[Sonya Vrunsky:] “A woman should be youth and fire and madness – the desire that reaches for the stars. A man should be wisdom, maturity, poise. John Manning has everything I need to save my soul. He can give me the high things of heaven and the beauty and the abundance of the earth.” (Yeziarska, *Salome* 7)

In Sonya’s opinion above, gender determines one’s relation to affect and what she means to say is that affect is a natural characteristic of women in contrast to men being associated with reason. John Manning supplements the criterion of gender with the equal relevance of ethnicity, suggesting that affect can be a cross-gender feature in the case of certain ethnic groups such as the one to which Sonya belongs:

[John Manning:] “You have the burning fire of the Russian Jew in you, while I am motivated by a sickly conscience, trying to heal itself by the application of cold logic and cold cash.” (Yeziarska, *Salome* 3)

Indeed, early in the book, one notices that gender differences animate protagonist Sonya Vrunsky, affect being the domain of women and tempered reason men’s territory. While sanctioning the binary perspective of the woman, Manning adds the category of ethnicity to the discussion in conjoining over-emotionalism not with one gender but with one ethnic group—Russian Jewry. Thus the outset of Yeziarska’s novel offers a grid of interpreting masculinity on whose basis will be judged Manning, Lipkin and Hollins, the three men in Sonya’s life. According to this grid, masculinity resides in a valorized emotional reserve and a denigrated emotional expressivity. It is by means of this grid that Sonya initially considers the men in her life. Following this very same logic, she rejects Lipkin, the Russian-Jewish poet because of his overflowing emotionalism: “You get me tired always making poetry out of everything you feel” (68); “That’s why I never could love a Jew or a Russian, because they let loose their feelings too much” (69). In contrast, Sonya praises the indifferent intellectuality of Manning, his “austere saintlike face—calm—aloof from the desires of the earth”, with “frosty blue eyes—impersonal, miles away from her” (70).

Moreover, Manning himself reveals the denigrated over-emotionalism of poet Lipkin, being bewildered by the degree to which the Jew is lost in his own thoughts: “Those Jewish intellectuals—those chaotic dreamers are a mystery to me” (81). While the problem of the impossibility of understanding is the one tackled here, Sonya further identifies weakness as a characteristic of Jewish men making them faulty in point of masculinity: “All I have for him [Lipkin] is pity. And a

man that rouses pity don't deserve even pity. A man who lets himself be crushed by anything or anybody is not a man worth saving" (93). In other words, lack of physical and moral strength corresponds to the faulty masculinity of the Jewish American man in the eyes of the Jewish American woman.

However, the situation is more complicated than this and Manning's assertion above, which suggests the possible case of misunderstanding an ethnic group or another provides the keyword which will allow the reversal of this initial positioning of affect-free masculinity as a positive Gentile posture which Jewish men lack. This is represented by the danger of inter-ethnic misunderstanding which rouses Sonya's doubts: "Will I set him on fire with my nakedness or drive him from me in disgust? Who knows? Men of my kind—they would understand. But he and his kind, what do they know of life—of love!" (99). In contrast, the strong affective penchant of Jewish men permits an easier contact with women.

Furthermore, after marrying John Manning, Sonya discovers that Gentile masculinity not only triggers misunderstanding the gender and ethnic other, but it is also mainly performance, a characteristic that Ravage had also indicated in his book:

The Anglo-Saxon coldness, it's centuries of solid ice that all the suns in the sky can't melt. Nobody can tell what that frozen iciness is, except those that got to live with it. Think of the bloodless inhumanity of it, when we hate each other like poison, when our eyes stab each other like daggers, *he wants me to stay with him yet under one roof, for the sake of his puritan pride that there was never a divorce in his family!* (Yeziarska, *Salome* 157, my emphasis)

As suggested above, saving face as a happy couple before the outer world is the only impulse which drives Manning's actions. Sonya discovers the egoism behind all this, realizing that Manning's only interest is to clear his name ("His name, that's all he cares about" 157). In that, she discovers that the masculinity of Manning as the model domestic husband boils down to make believe, to protecting a false image of a superior, caring and providing man. His letter to Sonya after her fleeing away from his house back to the ghetto proves beyond doubt that Gentile masculinity is primarily performance: "Your rash flight laid us both open to disagreeable publicity, but I have been able to silence the newspapers. Nothing has appeared in print about our domestic problems, and if you will return at once, even my friends and relatives need never know" (Yeziarska, *Salome* 166).

A kindred situation is also featured in Yeziarska's *Arrogant Beggar* in point of the relation between the poor Jewish immigrant Adele Linder and Arthur Hellman. Though he agrees that she should es-

cape from the Hellman House for Working Girls and comes after her, Adele discards Arthur's advances for his egoism and performance of masculinity: "You couldn't rest until you righted the wrong that had been done to me? You *are* Sir Galahad. It's not *me* you're interested in. You're only interested in being Sir Galahad" (Yeziarska, *Arrogant Beggar* 116). This time the performance of masculinity is rendered by Yeziarska's use of the Sir Galahad posture, the knightly figure renowned for his purity and chastity, therefore itself a version of the model domestic husband.

So, Jewish American men and women writers alike posit performance as a hallmark of American masculinity in the early twentieth-century. If this identification allows Jewish men easier access to American culture, for Jewish women it becomes the trigger for changing their negative attitude against the weak Jewish men and for reconsidering their worth by contrast to the fakeness behind Gentile masculinity. Thus, what we finally get in Yeziarska's stories is a case of three possible male typologies: the over-emotional Jewish American immigrant man who highly clings to Jewish traditions, the affect-free Gentile man whose position of power is affected by his primary identification with performance, the sensitive Jewish American immigrant man who has carved a new life in America at quite a distance from Jewish traditions. Indeed, the two novels I have considered are structured around the relation of a woman-protagonist with three men aligned to the above positions. In *Salome of the Tenements* Sonya Vrunsky is courted by Lipkin, John Manning and Jacques Hollins; in *Arrogant Beggar* Adele Linder is disputed by Shlomoh Bernstein, Arthur Hellman and Jean Rachmansky.

The best instance showing how Gentile man's masculinity is discarded because of its performative function occurs at the end of *Salome of the Tenements*, when Manning visits Sonya one last time and passionately discloses his love for her in the safety of privacy:

"You – you – you're mine. You belong to me. You're part of me. Mine. I want you. I can't live without you. I dream of your lips – your eyes – your hair. I'm hungry for you. Oh, my beautiful maddening Jewess."

Custom, tradition, every shred of convention, every vestige of civilization had left him. He was primitive man starved into madness for the woman. [...]

But her triumph over him died as it was born, for it was not the gentleman, not the arrogant Anglo-Saxon who stood before her. It was a human being – suffering – wounded – despised and rejected in his hour of need. (Yeziarska, *Salome* 181-182)

Thus, the restrained Gentile man can become as weak and pitiful

as the over-sensitive Lipkin. The difference is that the latter would do so in public, and henceforth risk his status of strong manhood, the former would only reveal his sensitive side in privacy in order to maintain his superior status. However, for the woman to whom he unveils his true nature he becomes even more spiteful because of the fakeness of his posture.

Therefore, Gentile masculinity as indifferent, reasoned intellectualism declasses itself as make-believe in Yeziarska's fiction. The question that ensues is what happens to the Jewish man's masculinity? We have already seen how Yeziarska renders it problematic because of its over-emotionalism. Even after unmasking the fake pretenses of Gentile masculinity, Jewish men like Lipkin and Shlomoh remain unsatisfactory because of their lives circumscribed to Jewish tradition. Lipkin, for instance, rejects Sonya as a betrayer of the Jewish race, following her marriage to a Christian. As for Shlomoh, the PhD student from Columbia College, he is unfit for Adele because of his Melamid and schlemiel postures. As a melamid, he places himself in the traditional lineage of his ambitious father by merely replacing religious education with secular learning. Just as his father had previously lived on his wife's earnings his total dependence on the mother is what renders such a partner undesirable in Adele's eyes: "If his mother forgot to feed him, he'd forget to eat. If she didn't put the shoes on his feet, he'd go barefoot and never know it. Even when he is a Doctor of Philosophy, he'll never be anything but a Melamid like his father, who spent his days poring over old, muster books, learning and learning for the next world!" (Yeziarska, *Arrogant Beggar* 14).

This traditional learned man so much praised by Jewish standards is on a par with the Gentile indifference for human outreach and understanding, so both types finally are more similar than would have been expected at first sight. Not only in learning does Shlomoh prove his misunderstanding but also in love, as when Adele rejects him and he returns like a schlemiel to ask for cab-fare money. Like the traditional Jewish ignorant fool, in his action, Shlomoh proves incapable of love. Unaware, he is close to the performance stance of the Gentile, trying to find in Adele the needed wife who would materially upkeep him.

Should we conclude that Jewish men's masculinity is as unsatisfactory as the Gentiles'? Not really, as in both Yeziarska's novels there is another Jewish man who finally becomes the accepted lover of the heroine. In *Salome*, this is Jacques Hollins, the tailor who shares the overt emotionalism of the other Jews, also reflected in his job—that of an artist. He becomes the superior man thanks to his humanity, "an artist with a born understanding for crazy people like me" (155). This

is “the man who had dressed her so divinely for the love of beauty, who had valued her for the very things that Manning hated” (156) —a person for whom an ideal can be as relevant as the real. In *Arrogant Beggar*, Jean Rachmansky the pianist is the better man for his music speaks of the voiceless, the hungry, the hopeless—born out of mutual understanding. Through these men Yeziarska manages to carve out the space for the impassioned intellectual as the alternative to mainstream masculinity, one who offers the solution for an oppressed and marginalized group like the Jewish one.

Through the above analysis, I show how both Jewish American men and women writers of the early twentieth century question the authenticity of the American code of masculinity by stressing its performative function. In this sense, I believe that bringing together the perspectives of both men and women writers has been essential in attempting to offer a comprehensive, true-to-fact picture of the relation between Jewish men and American manliness, thanks to their disparate positions in the matter (with men as directly concerned and women in a more objective, detached position). More precisely, thanks to the different perspectives of Jewish American men and women writers as to the relation between affect, Jewish American men, Jewish American women and Gentile men, these authors’ emphasis on manliness as performance has exposed the inauthenticity of the early twentieth-century American code of masculinity as non-emotional and has identified affect as representing, in truth, an essential part of one’s manliness, though mainly delegated to one’s privacy at the time. In this way, the Jewish American ethnic lens has proven to be instrumental in revising the American norm of masculinity as more complex than the official mainstream version of it and has shown how Jewish American men’s paradoxical relation to it can be overcome by undertaking an alternative affect-based version of masculinity.

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