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Diplomová práce

Motivy imigrace a asimilace v dílech Abrahama Cahana

Themes of Immigration and Assimilation in the Fiction of Abraham Cahan

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Abstract

This diploma thesis aims to analyze the varied aspects linked with the themes of immigration and assimilation in the fiction of the Jewish-Lithuanian immigrant writer Abraham Cahan. The protagonists of his fiction are all Jewish immigrants struggling to adapt to the American cultural life economically, but also linguistically, socially, as well as in appearance. The thesis examines struggles such as alienation from and suppression of many cultural features of the old country, and analyzes one novel (*The Rise of David Levinsky*), two novellas (*The Imported Bridegroom* and *Yekl, A Tale of the New York´s Ghetto*) and four short stories ("A Providential Match", "A Sweatshop Romance", "Circumstances" and "A Ghetto Wedding").

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce si klade za cíl analyzovat nejrůznější aspekty spojené s tématy imigrace a asimilace v beletrii židovsko-litevského spisovatele Abrahama Cahana. Protagonisté jeho příběhů jsou všichni židovští přistěhovalci, kteří usilují o přizpůsobení se americkému kulturnímu životu ekonomicky, ale i jazykově, společensky a také svým zevnějškem. Práce zkoumá jevy jako odcizení a potlačení mnohých kulturních prvků staré vlasti, a analyzuje jeden román (*The Rise of David Levinsky*), dvě novely (*The Imported Bridegroom* a *Yekl, A Tale of the New York´s Ghetto*) a čtyři povídky ("A Providential Match", "A Sweatshop Romance", "Circumstances" a "A Ghetto Wedding").

Contents

1. Introduction

This diploma thesis focuses on the literary work of Abraham Cahan, the writer and editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* which had a very high circulation and was written in Yiddish. It centers around his well-known novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), but it also deals with a collection of two novellas and four short stories, *The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories* (1898).

Abraham Cahan is considered one of the most powerful narrative voices of the Jewish immigrant fiction in the context of Americanization. After all, who else would be more fitted to speak of the struggles of an ordinary Jewish immigrant in America at the break of the 19th and 20th century than such an immigrant himself? Having experienced most of the inner and outer struggles himself, he provides a vivid, and, in the discourse of realism very plausible depiction of what it was like to leave everything behind – family, possessions, but most importantly one´s culture and religious faith – and start a completely new life in a country that, at least at that time, could not compare with any other for its competitiveness.

Cahan´s voice stepped above the others also mostly because he did not address the immigrants exclusively. His works aimed at non-Jewish readers, for he was very well aware of the necessity to provide America with an insight into its Jewish ghettos. As many literary critiques admitted, he succeeded in his attempt. Johnathan Mahler acknowledges this in the biography written by Seth Lipsky when he says that Cahan´s Yiddish language paper *"did not simply cover events; it changed the course of them."* (Lipsky, 2013)

This thesis therefore deals with the Jewish immigrants´ struggles to adapt into a new culture, as seen and often experienced by Abraham Cahan himself, who carefully included some serious identity crisis with mechanisms of repression of the old culture into the background of his protagonists. At many occasions and in many ways they resemble the author himself. This can be particularly seen in some aspects of the character of David Levinsky, whose process of Americanization was initiated in a way too conveniently similar manner as Abraham Cahan´s and is rather remarkable since it is often an unflattering account of an Americanized Jewish immigrant. Shortly after they

arrived to the New World, both of them were given a helping hand by a stranger, who helped them transform their looks, because he knew how important it was *"to do in Rome as Romans do."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 70)

2. Abraham Cahan

Abraham Cahan, considered a leading author of Jewish-American immigrant literature, but also a socialist, newspaper editor and novelist, was born in Podberezye near Vilna, Lithuania, on July 7, 1860 into a rather orthodox Jewish family. Despite being brought up in a traditional religious environment and thus being expected to become a Rabbi by his parents, Cahan eventually chose his own path and became a teacher in 1881. According to Daniel Walden, Cahan

> *at the same time became deeply involved in radical, underground anti-czarist activities. Forced to flee, he joined a group of immigrants bound for America and arrived in Philadelphia on June 5, 1882. The next day he reached New York, where his religious training proved useless and secular success beckoned. In 1890 he became editor of the weekly Arbeiter Zeitung, the paper of the United Hebrew Trades. Using the pseudonym "Proletarian Preacher" he wrote columns that mixed Russian fables, Talmudic parables, and Marxist ideas to convey his socialist critique of capitalism.* (Walden)

All of this can be also, to some extent, seen in his works which sometimes conspicuously resemble the author´s life.

Although his novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), is interlaced with factory settings, the author himself spent only a brief period of time working in such a place after he came to America. Yet we can still consider this experience a very strong one since the main character of his first book tries so hard to escape the “factory worker life” and climb as high as possible on an imaginary social ladder. Abraham Cahan continued his career as a teacher of English, journalist, editor and he also became politically active in Russia as well as in the United States. A resemblance connected with the involvement in political life can be also noticed in *The Rise of David Levinsky*, although Cahan came through a rather radical phase in Russia to be an American socialist, which cannot be said about the narrator, David Levinsky.

One aspect of the novel, though, very much differs from the author´s life and that is the sexual and love life of the main character. Unlike David Levinsky, Abraham Cahan married an educated woman with whom he stayed for some 60 years. This fact makes the narratology of the novel all the more extraordinary when we consider the main character, so different from the author´s personality in this aspect, alone without

a proper partner for the most of the story and sometimes even miserable because of his failures in love.

Daniel Walden calls Abraham Cahan *"a successful and enterprising Americanizer and interpreter of the Jewish immigrant experience"* (Walden, 1992 p. 76) which seems to be perfectly suitable term for a person who spent his life writing about, and also experiencing himself, the Jewish life in America in the New World. As a journalist and editor he went through an internship at a small Yiddish paper, wrote for the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, worked as a reporter for Lincoln Steffens at the *New York Commercial Advertiser* and operated as editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* which he was forced to leave due to a stroke he suffered in 1946; after World War I. he became active as a member of the American press delegation to Versailles in 1919 (cf. Walden 1992).

If we agree that *The Rise of David Levinsky* contains many similarities with the author´s life, we almost certainly have to acknowledge it as well in his first novel, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), where he narrates his own struggle of getting to America from unstable Russia. Cahan´s *Imported Bridegroom, and Other Stories* written in 1898 establishes another important part of his literary writings, although *The Rise of David Levinsky* is still considered his greatest novel. Despite many parallels between David Levinsky´s and Abraham Cahan´s lives, we cannot look at this novel as the author´s autobiography for, as Bernard Weinstein suggests, *Leaves from My Life* (1926-1931), his actual autobiography, would be more than enough (cf. Weinstein 1983).

There is no doubt about Cahan´s great contribution to American Jewish literature and Jewish communities in America since his works create an important part of not only the curriculums of the American schools but also the Universities today, and simultaneously the *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper is still being published even though it´s cofounder and most prominent editor has been long gone. According to Weinstein, Cahan´s contribution can be also seen in the influence he has exerted on other Jewish authors, such as Anzia Yezierska, Samuel Ornitz and Michael Gold (cf. Weinstein 1983).

1.2. On his works

As we have already stated above, Abraham Cahan contributed to the Jewish-American immigrant literature not only with his novels and short stories but also with his newspaper articles and columns. In general, the topics of his works could be summarized as everything that deals with one´s immigration followed by the struggle for assimilation with a new culture and life. The word struggle seems to be essential here because all of Cahan´s characters are hindered by obstacles sooner or later, be it while striving to realize their potential or simply trying to fit in the community in the host country. However, as Gordon Hunter suggests in his introduction to *The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories*, among all these problems with assimilation, one question remains the most fundamental: To which extent could the immigrants pursue happiness and still maintain their collective identities as Jews? (cf. Hunter, 1995) Coming to America with certain religious or spiritual values and having to survive in such a materialistic and challenging environment certainly forces one to change one´s perspective on life. Simultaneously these changes may also clash with the old habits and ways of the immigrants. Therefore naturally there has to be some sacrifices made in order to meet the expectations of the New World.

Considering the fact that one of the main points of Cahan´s work is immigration, which means a major change on its own, we can find many contrasting features in his stories. Generally all these opposites result as an outcome of the clash between the old former and the new host cultures. These contrasts include life goals such as education or business achievements resulting with material rise and spiritual decline, love or self-loathing, longing for revenge and moving on at the same time, Hunter also suggests that it includes the struggle to balance the freedom of individualization with the social and religious requirements of Jewish life. (cf. Hunter, 1995)

The undeniable feeling of loss, inner dissatisfaction and sentimental longing for something unreachable are spread through the stories despite all the seemingly satisfactory material achievements that Cahan´s characters had accomplished. The reason for such feelings of imperfectness may be found in certain dual identities that the protagonists built over time spend in the new culture, and with each of

the identity longing for something fundamentally different, they could never reach complete satisfaction and fulfillment.

3. The Rise of David Levinsky

As stated above, *The Rise of David Levinsky* is considered the most significant work by Abraham Cahan in terms of the struggles with adaptation to the American cultural life. The story is narrated by David Levinsky as an older man who is remembering in retrospective the events of his early childhood, the time before his immigration, his *greenhorn* period after arriving in America, his slow yet systematic climb up the social and economic ladder and ultimately expressing rather bitter mixture of emotions as he reaches his dreams and becomes a prominent manufacturer. As Weinstein suggests, the author might have chosen the first person narrative purposefully to *"allow him the full field for self-revelation"* (Weinstein, 1983 p. 47), which can be one of many autobiographical features of the book, and it *"[…] permits David to reveal his multidimensionality and complexity, while offering the author´s own mordant comment on the American dream."* (Weinstein, 1983 p. 53) Even though David Levinsky could be considered as the perfect example of a fulfillment of the American dream, Cahan provides a much wider and thought-provoking conception of this phenomenon through this complex character. David Levinsky is ultimately hugely immoral, which was the most shocking aspect of the novel, as read by the readers of Cahan´s time. Let us now have a closer look at some of the aspects that helped to shape David Levinsky into a successful Americanized businessman.

3.1. Identity Crisis

Many Jewish immigrants lost their former identity in order to assimilate through Americanization. Some immigrants, like David, lost their own *race* to befit to be Americans. However, what does it really mean to be an American? Historically speaking, the whole American population consists of immigrants to begin with; therefore claiming that the immigrants became completely different in terms of their culture would not feel entirely correct. *"Cahan equally shows the allure of American assimilation and the pain of losing traditional Jewish culture. Thus, many of his fictional immigrants are unfulfilled whether they resist assimilation or give up their traditional Jewish identity"* (Motley, 2011 p. 4). This struggle between a traditional culture and a desire to assimilate into a new one makes the key point of Cahan´s novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*.

America being the youngest, yet in Cahan´s times the most progressive country, hosted many more individuals who, as much as David Levinsky, strove for prosperity in the New World. *The Rise of David Levinsky,* as much as many other early-twentieth-century novels, partially deals with the discourse of America being formed by the instant inflow of immigrants, thus creating an imaginary melting pot where all the different nations would blend together and create a brand new culture. However, the concept of a melting pot does not seem to be entirely accurate for it presumes a flawless and complete assimilation of the immigrants, yet in reality only passing through Ellis Island does not suddenly make one an American. In many cases the immigrants kept at least a part of their old culture and elaborated on it with the American spirit. Therefore it is perhaps more suitable to speak about a discourse of *"trans-nationalism"*, as Bourne calls it in his *Trans-National America*, where various nationalities would integrate with each other rather than being *"washed out into tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity."* (Bourne, 1916)

David, like many other immigrants, had to go through many alterations, specifically economic, linguistic, social, religious and visual, in order to become *Americanized.* However, does it really mean accepting a new culture and all that comes with it as a complete new identity for an immigrant or is it possible to keep one´s old cultural background besides the new one at the same time? In the case of David Levinsky, at many moments throughout the novel, it seems he is forgetting his old self in the process of becoming an American, yet at the end he admits that he has never forgotten *the poor lad* that he once was. In the light of Bourne´s idea of trans-national America, we have to agree that David´s journey to success, despite all the efforts, did not entirely change him. One cannot certainly say that he became a completely different person and integrated himself fully amongst already adapted immigrants, thus Americans, leaving everything behind. He rather assimilated to the American way of life, he changed his looks, learned a new language and worked on his self—esteem in order to be accepted as a serious man of business. It is even admitted by himself at the very end of the novel where he is clearly thinking about the present being affected by his past:

> *I can never forget the days of my misery. I cannot escape from my old self. My past and my present do not comport well. David, the poor lad swinging over a Talmud volume at the Preacher´s Synagogue, seems to have more in common with my inner identity than David Levinsky, the well-known cloak-manufacturer.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 372)

All these feelings of melancholy, sadness and loneliness prove that David Levinsky went far from being a Russian Jew, yet he did not quite reach a complete *Americanness* either. Therefore we can see him as a character persisting somewhere between these two concepts, as *"an cautionary example of the ethnic self in declension, tragically reaching for an inauthentic identity based on American ideals."* (Weber, 1995 p. 734)

From his narration we can definitely tell that despite all the changes he underwent he still values the memories he possesses from the time before immigration, as if this sentimentality helped him in maintaining his dual identity. The fact that he says that *"the dearest days in one´s life are those that seem very far and very near at once"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 1) gives evidence to that. Even though he tells the story as an older man who has changed himself to achieve his goals in life, there is no doubt about his strong connection to the person he used to be and perhaps therefore the whole book breaths undeniable sadness and regret from the beginning until the end. The reason for such a melancholic climax of the book can be perhaps given by the sense of loss and distress which, according to Weinstein, was triggered by several events in David´s life, such as *"the loss of his mother, the rejection by Matilda, his first love, the lamented abandonment of his spiritual and cultural heritage, signified by the abandonment of beard and earlocks, the sacrifice of his dream of education on the altar of business success, the rejection of his ardor by Dora, the woman in whose house he is a boarder, the further and more crushing rejection by Anna Tevkin, whose genteel breeding and intellectual family background seem like a bright beacon, drawing him away from the vulgar world of commerce."* (Weinstein, 1983 p. 48)

The recollection of the past days is visible mainly in the first chapters of the book where the main protagonist mentions several seemingly insignificant details about his poverty permeated childhood in Russian Antomir. Despite the fact that his father died when David was only three years old, this loss seemed to influence his personality since he was basically raised only by his mother, who perhaps unconsciously projected her sadness onto him. He remembers her as *"an orthodox daughter of Israel"* (Cahan, 2002

p. 3) who used to call him all kinds of unusual names which, as much as not having a father, differentiated him from the other children of the neighborhood. *"Sometimes, when she seemed to be crushed by the miseries of her life, she would call me, "My poor little orphan." […] "Come here, my comfort." […] These words of hers and the sonorous contralto in which they were uttered are ever alive in my heart, like the Flame Everlasting in a synagogue."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 2) The fact that he grew up without a father and later experienced an even more terrible loss, that is his mother being killed by Gentiles, paradoxically formed him into somebody very self-sufficient with a strong sense of determination.

Struggling to make his American dream come true, David developed a permanently dissatisfied dual identity featured by a certain eagerness for fulfillment that never truly arrives. Simultaneously, the more David tries to feed this hunger for fulfillment, *"the more his character is tormented by the insubstantiality of his success. […] Levinsky remains driven by both a need to preserve the hunger – because it shapes his identity – and a desire to hunger no more, to be relieved of the heavy burdens of galut (exile). In this respect, The Rise of David Levinsky is a profound portrait of modern homelessness; not even the promised land of America can provide a familiar, heimisch resting place for the wandering soul."* (Weber, 1995 p. 740) This parallel with homelessness seems to be quite accurate considering the ever-lonely and dissatisfied climax of the novel. As Weber says, it occurs as if homelessness, exile, and alienation are the modern condition of immigration. (cf. Weber, 1995) Even though David Levinsky succeeded in the end, he did not really win the race against himself, against his Old-World character.

The Rise of David Levinsky soaks with opposing concepts, such as orthodox and free thinking tendencies, social liberation and personal anxiety or self-hatred and pride, which can be perhaps considered a side effect of immigration (as much as the aforementioned homelessness); a situation when an individual is brought into a different world and suddenly the old starts to clash with the new - causing dualities. However, are not these dualities a part of the American culture as we know it? Individuals such as David Levinsky and many others only give proof to Bourne´s theory of trans-nationalism in America. Possibly, these obstacles helped David to become so

successful or perhaps it was David´s childhood that shaped him into the goal-directed individual that he grew up into. Perhaps he would have never reached so high had it not been for his challenging and painful upbringing, his later economic and social struggles as well as the desperate attempts in his love-life. As Weinstein says, almost as if all his material achievements contrasted with emotional deprivations and defeats (cf. Weinstein 1983).

3.2. Social Adaptation

In terms of being a new Jew in America, Catherine Rottenberg talks about so-called *in-between status,* a status saying that David Levinsky is a Jew on his way to becoming an American, yet his Jewishness stands in the way of being accepted as one even by other Jews and Gentiles, because race has a great effect on a person´s chance in prosperity in progressive America (cf. Rottenberg 2004). Throughout the book David lets us know via his narration of several events that he is very much aware of his a priori categorization into the in-between status because of his Jewishness. He shows this right at the beginning when he is remembering his father´s funeral and subsequently parallels the gloominess of the event with the faith of his whole race: *"There is a streak of sadness in the blood of my race. Very likely it is of Oriental origin. If it is, it has been amply nourished by many centuries of persecution."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 2) It is perhaps this prejudice that makes David so anxious about his social position. His appearance, language and Talmudic gesticulations create an undeniable feature of his orthodox past which is no longer desirable.

Another good example of this struggle for, as Weber calls it, *"out-greening"* (Weber, 1995 p. 735) can be seen in the section where David is travelling by train with other Jews and Gentiles and meets the American-born Jew, Loeb, who takes advantage of David being the youngest arrival to America among the travelers in the train and keeps making fun of his Talmud gesticulations. David himself is very much aware of this habit, which he considers a physical defect, as he says:

> *It was so distressingly un-American. I struggled hard against it. I had made efforts to speak with my hands in my pockets; I had devised other means for keeping them from participating in my speech. All of no avail. I still gesticulate a great deal, though much less than I used to.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 226)

Though obviously offended by these jests, David laughs with the rest of the gentlemen as he is trying to fit in. In this situation we can clearly see the only seemingly similar people divided into groups within groups. Though they are both Jews, Loeb´s behavior shows his attempt to differentiate himself from the new-arrivals whereas David´s acceptance of Loeb´s jokes points to his desire to be admitted as an American, just like Loeb is. In a way David sees Loeb as an inspiration that initiates him "*[…] into the dominant "white" society, showing him what needs to be done in order to gain not only admittance but also acceptance into the hegemonic culture."* (Rottenberg, 2004 p. 311) Rottenberg is suggesting that the author is also making a parallel here between the "white" race being superior to any other race as it was not only in the times of slavery and Americans, or American-born Jews, being superior to the others in the times of mass immigration. Although David clearly disagrees with this categorization on the inside, he accepts it on the outside in order to learn from it and push himself one step closer again to integrating himself amongst the group of people he so much desires to be part of. Though David managed to become a successful businessman in the end, the anxiety from not being able to fully out-green himself ultimately created some very opposing feelings to his accomplishments – shame, repression and self-hatred.

Positioning himself in this in-between status, where he cannot go back to his old ways yet is not able to continue any further in the process of Americanization, creates a conflicted ego that tries to shake off the Old-World-like features and on the other hand longs for home-like comforts which can be visible on so many occasions of David´s longing for the old life with a sense of irretrievability.

3.2.1. High Expectations

America, was considered a kind of promised land providing with better life conditions and prospects of the future for anyone who was brave enough to sail overseas. Likewise, the United States also came with great expectations in the minds of the immigrants, with David Levinsky being no exception to this phenomenon. As Weber says:

> *For the immigrants themselves, the new land proved to be a world of both opportunity and danger, of attraction and threat. They arrived with dreams of paradise […]; but the country´s promise was often illusory […]. Characters in immigrant/ethnic fiction are often immobilized by a yearning for the villages left behind; they find sustaining visions only in the residues of the past, in fragments of Old-World styles of dress, food, and religious ritual.* (Weber, 1995 p. 733)

As soon as David meets the first Americans when he steps onto American soil, he begins to realize that the image of the place and the people´s hospitality he created in his head are far from the reality.

> *The harsh manner of the immigration officers was a grievous surprise to me. As contrasted with the officials of my despotic country, those of a republic had been portrayed in my mind as paragons of refinement and cordiality. My anticipations were rudely belied. .[…] These unfriendly voices flavored all America with a spirit of icy inhospitality that sent a chill through my very soul.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 60)

It was here, at the very beginning of his journey to start a new life, which David Levinsky realized that Jews were not welcome with open arms as easily as the rumors in Russia had him believed.

David suffered a cultural shock, though, paradoxically, he found himself amongst the people with the same or similar cultural background as his. The only difference seemed to be in the length of their stay in America and the extent of their adaptation. As David was discovering more and more his new home to be, especially the Jewish East Side, he recognized certain features of places and characters that were supposed to be the same as back home, yet David sensed something utterly foreign about them, as he notes:

> *The well-dressed, trim-looking crowds of lower Broadway impressed me as a multitude of counts, barons, princes. I was puzzled by their preoccupied faces and hurried step. It seemed to comport ill with their baronial dress and general high-born appearance. In a vague way all this helped to confirm my conception of America as a unique country, unlike the rest of the world.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 62)

Let us say that the people were covered with a coat of ambition, capitalism and every man for himself policy. David, a student of Talmud, having come from a place where one could freely spend a night in a synagogue or rely on other people´s help in need, found himself completely lost and isolated in this unfamiliar place. One of the things that startled David the most at the beginning seemed to be the complete

oppositeness of perceiving religious duties and values. For example reading the Talmud was considered a high privilege of men and those who practiced this highly appreciated school of thought were admired and cherished by the rest of their families. Yet in America reading the Talmud was not esteemed a good business, therefore people learned to invest their time into more prosperous activities and attending synagogues became subsidiary. At first, this expel of religion strikes David as something unacceptable as he says: *"Can´t a fellow be a good Jew in America?"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 64), yet soon he too becomes a part of this race for success as if entering America meant being infected with ambitions and eagerness.

Perhaps we could consider this self-centered behavior of the "Americanized" people a kind of social Darwinism by which David became fascinated later possibly just because of his early experience as a fresh immigrant. His first encounters with the rushing ambitious people helped him realize that only the strongest ones could survive in such a competitive place. This concept is even enhanced by the fact that only the strongest of the emigrants made it over the ocean at the first place and thus achieving individual American dreams among such a selection of stark opponents seems to be reasonably challenging.

"America is not Russia – there is no pity here, no hospitality. […] A man must make a living here." (Cahan, 2002 p. 66) This quotation perfectly expresses the American understanding of self-sufficiency, which persisted into today´s characterization of America as a nation.

3.2.2. Poverty

In this novel, poverty is represented by a much bigger and deeper meaning than just in the sense of economic station. Without a doubt, David suffered from a difficult financial state, however poverty here can be understood as a parallel between David´s attempt to reach a certain level of Americanness amongst the other immigrants who lay down the stakes. From the beginning David was poor in the utmost sense of the word, he came to America with literally nothing nor had he left any material possessions back in Antomir; simultaneously he also felt the poverty in different levels of his struggle - appearance, language and general lack of knowhow about American ways.

After arriving in America, David quickly realized that he should start working on out-greening himself, meaning getting rid of his former customs and all the aspects that made him non-American. Everything in America had a different standard to the one in Russia, even poverty. Therefore, David measured himself according to these standards, according to people who had been in America longer than him. An interesting fact remains that all the people that called him green one had once been green too, David was certainly fully aware of it, yet at the same time he was startled by how many different levels poverty can have. The more he observed people around him, be it the poor or the rich, the more he concluded that there seemed to be a big difference between being poor in Russia and being poor in America. At the beginning of the novel, David describes the kind of poverty he and his mother lived in when he was just a boy:

> *Antomir, which then boasted eighty thousand inhabitants, was a town in which a few thousand rubles was considered wealth, and we were among the humblest and poorest in it. The bulk of the population lived on less than fifty copecks (twenty-five cent) a day, and that was difficult to earn. A hunk of rye bread and a bit of herring or cheese constituted a meal. […] Rubbers were worn by people "of means" only. I never saw any in the district in which my mother and I had our home. A white starched collar was an attribute of "aristocracy". Children had to nag their mothers for a piece of bread.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 4)

This was the definition of poverty David remembered from where he came from. However in America the ones belonging to a lower and poorer class could be easily considered rich and a part of the higher social class in Russia. For a considerable amount of time David was startled by the shift of boundary between the lower and higher social class. The author also manages to transfer this wonderment onto the reader by forethoughtfully placing the description of David´s poor background at the beginning of the novel and then depicting the completely different level of poverty in America in contrast with David´s former woeful lifestyle. The fact that *"the poorest looking man wore a hat, a stiff collar and a necktie, and the poorest woman wore a hat or a bonnet"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 63) only enhanced David´s image of America as a gold country where being poor did not seem so painful because of a completely different standard of living.

3.3. Religious Adaptation

Many Jews that immigrated to America at the break of the 19th and 20th century came from orthodox backgrounds with a strong sense for their religion; David Levinsky was no exception in terms of the orthodox background, mediated through his mother, yet, he did not have such a strong connection to the Jewish faith as it may appear. The reason why David Levinsky was the best at studying the Talmud may have made him look also the most pious boy, yet as his later behavior shows, he did not feel as one. Therefor a natural question arises here: Was David Levinsky ever really religious? So much of his childhood learning was dedicated not to knowing about God but about knowing the most. He learned in order to beat the competition in what was that society´s most esteemed activity - reading the Talmud.

The reason why adaptation for Jews was extraordinarily challenging may be perhaps the inseparability of Jewish cultural tradition from the religious faith. As Clay Motley says, *"for many Jews who came from a shtetl, Talmudic law was the only law, religious study was the most prestigious calling imaginable for young men, and daily life moved to the rhythms of the synagogue"* (Motley, 2011 p. 4). Naturally coming from such a background and trying to assimilate into such an intimidating, capitalistic and rather secularizing environment sounds very complicated. Some Jews therefore abandoned the idea of assimilation completely and stayed isolated, keeping their culture, traditions, religions and customs exactly as if they had never left their homes, although most of them *"struggled to come to terms with what it meant to be a Jew living as an American and an American living as a Jew"* (Motley, 2011 p. 4).

Accordingly, many of these Jews withdrew from their attachment to Judaism or lost it completely due to their adaptation with the New World. In his *Note on the Liebman Thesis, David Levinsky´s Fall*, David Singer writes about forces of secularism which were shattering the Orthodox consensus of the East European Jewish communities; he writes about political views, such as Zionizm or Marxist socialism, yet he also argues that specifically those Jews who came to America early in the first wave of immigration were expected to be more willing to surrender to secularization

> *since they were willing to uproot themselves from home and family. Among the evidence that Liebman cites in support of this contention is*

> *the significant fact that leading Rabbinic authorities such as the Hafetz Hayyim, warned their fellow Jews not to endanger their Judaism by leaving home.* (Singer, 1967 p. 697)

These features, both willingness toward secularization and a warning against emigration, can be seen in Cahan´s novel.

3.3.1. Orthodoxy

Among orthodox Jewish families in Europe, America was considered impure, the land where *"one becomes a Gentile"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 42), which were the warning words of David´s friend from the synagogue, Reb Sender, who reacted as if David had told him he was going to go to hell. David´s definite resolution to go to America is described in the chapter *I Lose my Mother*, which could be in a way also understood as partial loss of faith, therefore a natural turn to a change – to emigration.

At the beginning of the novel, David narrates mostly his memories of his birth town Antomir and his very orthodox mother, who raised him on her own. Perhaps it was the fact that she had to do everything on her own whereas in other families there were two people for raising a child, that made her turn to God. Therefore she considered religion the most important heritage David could get from her. Naturally, not having much materially and not being able to educate herself even in the Jewish religion (they were so poor she did not own a prayer book so she only mumbled her prayers) made her want to provide her son with what she herself was missing; therefore she worked extra to get him into school for religious instruction, where he obtained the necessary knowledge of God.

> *Sending me to work was out of the question. She was resolved to put me in a Talmudic seminary. I was the "crown of her head" and she was going to make a "fine Jew" of me. Nor was she a rare exception in this respect, for there were hundreds of other poor families in our town who would starve themselves to keep their sons studying the Word of God.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 16)

Reading the Talmud, which is the highest and only education a Jew could get, therefore became the natural next step for David. Yet as we have already stated above, after his mother´s death David was slowly losing his faith and interest in reading Talmud;

his former enthusiasm was suddenly replaced with a simple need to provide himself with food and shelter.

> *My interest in the matter was not keen, however, and soon it died down altogether. Nothing really interested me except the fact that I had not enough to eat, that mother was no more, that I was all alone in the world. The shock of the catastrophe had produced a striking effect on me.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 38)

This notion that Talmud did not seem as the most important thing in his world, as it had probably been more important for his mother than for him, perhaps brought him closer to the idea of emigration, which scared and excited him simultaneously because from the words of Reb Sender he understood that going to America could mean putting religion aside, which was something he could not of course let himself say out loud, yet when he

> *was about to board ship, Reb Sender made a final plea that David "not forget that there is a God in heaven in America as well as here [Antomir]. It is thus clear that when David spoke of America as a "far-away land" he had something much more profound in mind than mere distance* (Singer, 1967 p. 703).

Considering the fact that David Levinsky immigrated to America with no material possessions and since the loss of his mother he became even poorer and dependent on other people´s help than ever before, we could see his motives to emigrate as more social, economic and self-assertive than religious. According to Singer, Liebman also considers these motives when trying to determine why the immigrants failed to keep their orthodoxy:

> *Liebman´s strongest argument, however, is the evidence he cites to show that the East European Jews failed to create those institutions which were necessary for the maintenance of an Orhthodox community; [...] their primary purpose was cultural and social, rather than religious.* (Singer, 1967 p. 698)

A lot of parallels in the novel support this argument that religion was no longer a number one priority to Jews after coming to America; for example the synagogues being attended only on Sundays, closed at night and not functioning as a temporary shelter for Jews in need.

Also reading the Talmud, something so supported and precious in East Europe, started to suddenly be undesirable for its enormous time-consumption and lack of

economic benefits. After encountering several individuals freshly after his arrival to America, seeking and habitually expecting help from them, David finds out about these differences between being a Jew in America and in Russia in regard to religion.

> *He went on to show how the New World turned things upside down, transforming an immigrant shoemaker into a man of substance, while a former man of leisure was forced to work in a factory here. In like manner, his wife had changed for the worse, for, lo and behold! Instead of supporting him while he read Talmud, as she used to do at home, she persisted in sending him out to peddle. "America is not Russia," she said. "A man must make a living here."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 66)

We could look at David´s transformation in two ways: the inner - spiritual, and the outer - the change in appearance, with those two being unbreakably connected together. Levinsky´s out-greening in this sense is initiated by a makeover by Mr. Even, who teaches him one of the many lessons about being an American as he says that *"one must look presentable in America [...] and must do in Rome as the Romans do"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 70), as if he tried to justify, this back home seen as disrespectful transformation, by quoting from the Talmud. The initial transformation in appearance could be considered as a symbol, a certain gateway to the path of a final abandonment of the orthodox Jewish religion. The cutting of his earlocks and shaving his beard, the two most significant features that determine his Jewishness at the first sight, mean that he is ready to alter himself in order to become less green. Although with every minor change he is also alternating how the public sees him, as les religious and more American, he thus starts to consider himself differently as well. This is how his Americanized appearance transfers onto his inner understanding of Jewish customs. Yet, as Singer aptly suggests,

> *are we to believe that a "learned and pious" yeshiva student is so unable to distinguish between the essentials and nonessentials of Judaism, that the surrender of these customs becomes the decisive factor in his complete alienation from traditional norms?* (Singer, 1967 p. 700)

As already mentioned, Levinsky´s lack of faith was initiated much earlier when he still lived in Europe, lost his mother and started to critically doubt the Talmudic teachings; therefore blaming the beginning of his loss of orthodoxy completely on the physical makeover would seem rather superficial.

However, beside losing his mother and actually changing himself physically, there can be another and perhaps even more important aspect found that changed the course of David´s piety long before he emigrated. His alienation from the Jewish religion comes hand in hand with his sexual awareness, as Singer says:

> *While the sexual theme of the novel becomes increasingly important as Levinsky grows older, it is of major importance even in the earliest stage of the plot, for, at a moment of crisis in his life, Levinsky was in the midst of a sexual awakening that was shaking his psychological balance.* (Singer, 1967 p. 701)

This realization of his own sexual desires begun with a girl called Red Esther whom David loathed at first, yet after some time he started to regard her differently:

> *I still hated her [...] but, somehow, she did not seem to be the same as she had been before. The new lines that were developing in her growing little figure, and more particularly her own consciousness of them, were not lost upon me. A new element was stealing in to my rancor for her – a feeling of forbidden curiosity. [...] The worst of it was that these images often visited my brain while I was reading the holy book.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 23)

Here we can see the beginning of David´s confusion over his religious believes, that he has been taught for so many years, and his urges that he assigned to Satan, for he was taught that *"in the eye of the spiritual law that governed my life women were intended for two purposes only: for the continuation of the human species and to serve as an instrument in the hands of Satan for tempting the stronger sex to sin."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 29) The fact that Cahan placed these memories of David´s early sexual awareness into a chapter called Enter Satan lets the reader anticipate a change in Levinsky´s inner regard towards the orthodox question of men and women. Jewish religion, and even more Levinsky´s upbringing, completely suppresses natural human sexuality and interest in the opposite sex. Even thinking about women in a sexual context was considered a great sin and the fact that these sinful thoughts came to David at times particularly inappropriate indicates that somewhere inside he never truly claimed religious faith, even if only at a subconscious level at that time:

> *I would portray my engagement to some of the pretty girls I had seen, our wedding, and, above all, our married life. The worst of it was that these images often visited my brain while I was reading the holy book. Satan would choose such moments of all others because in this manner he would involve me in two great sins at one; for in addition to the*

> *wickedness of indulging in salacious thought there was the offense of desecrating the holy book by them.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 30)

This confusion over his sexuality could be later drawn onto a bigger concept of David´s confusion over his whole new and old identity in America. Even though he was sure he hated Esther, yet he was impelled to kiss her. He was attached to his old background, searching for a woman that would remind him of his old Jewish customs, yet at the same time resenting this old sentiment of his.

Additionally all of this was supported by his closest friend Naphali becoming an atheist at the time when David needed to lean on him the most after his mother was murdered. Naphali, whom he admired for his piety, represented another nail into Levinsky´s coffin with religion in it. Yet as Singer suggests, the fact that his closest friend became an atheist did not strike David as hard as the realization that he himself had *"nothing clear or definite to put forth"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 38) against Naphali´s statement that there was no God.

The bottom line of all the determining aspects above lies in David´s desire for a change, his upcoming journey to America, as he says: *"I was thirsting for an appetizer [...], for some violent change, for piquant sensations"* (Cahan, 2002). As a conclusion to this concept Singer points out that it was not for David´s economic situation or religious persecution that he decided to emigrate, but rather for his estrangement from his previous lifestyle. *"America appealed to him precisely because it was not Antomir, because in his mind it represented an entirely different pattern of existence"* (Singer, 1967 p. 703).

The part of the story where David is sailing to America and feels homesick, uncertain and full of anxieties at the same time aptly shows Cahan´s aim to draw a black line between the old and the new. David Levinsky parallels entering New York to his rebirth, thus suggesting that he is prepared to leave his old life behind and pursue a new one. Yet, as Singer indicates

> *if Levinsky´s journey from Antomir to the United States had a corrosive effect on his psyche, the New York environment offered him little emotional relief. Having undergone the anguish of the ocean voyage, Levinsky was now forced to cope with the sense of isolation and inferiority that resulted from his being a green horn in the New World.*

> *Here, indeed, is the final factor in David´s alienation from Orthodoxy* (Singer, 1967 p. 705).

3.3.2. Greenhorns and Americanization

Though it would seem logical to presume that David´s process of Americanization was initiated by his arrival in the New World, and from the bigger part it certainly was, we cannot forget a certain family that showed him the door to modern life while he was still in Antomir, thus preparing David for what was about to come next. David was taken in by a modern, rather extravagant, yet religious, older woman called Shiprah Minsker, who pitied him when his health betrayed him because of long-lasting hunger. Even though this family represented something between non-orthodox Jews and Gentiles, because of their modern style of living, David became very fond of them, especially Matilda, Shiprah´s daughter, who introduced him to some of the modern ideas and thoughts, such as abandoning the reading of Talmud and studying at a university, that *"at earlier time [...] would have appeared to Levinsky as sacrilegious, but now Matilda´s ideas seemed perfectly reasonable"* (Singer, 1967 p. 704). As a culmination of the death of his mother and subsequent decline in his standard of living, he found himself in the state of emotional instability and confusion. Staying with this almost Gentile-like family helped David establish a good foundation for his upcoming Americanization in the New World, where he arrived as not so orthodox as some of the other immigrants, yet still a green-one.

Before David was even able to understand English enough to know that somebody was making fun of his not so American ways and appearance, he had had a completely different social status that differentiated him considerably from the others. He was a *green one* or *a greenhorn*. Although he did not exactly understand this expression, he resented it because he rightly sensed that it categorized him instantly into a lower social group.

> *Some of the passers-by would call me "greenhorn" in a tone of blighting gaiety, but these were an exception. For the most part it was "green one" and in a spirit of sympathetic interest. It hurt me, all the same. Even whose glances that offered me a cordial welcome and good wishes had something self-complacent and condescending in them.*

> *"Poor fellow! He is a green one," these people seemed to say. "We are not, of course. We are Americanized."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 64)

Perhaps we could safely say that these first moments defined all the changes David had to undergo from the moment he started to realize he did not quite fit in. The more he compared himself to the Americans, the more he understood the nature of being a green one in America. This realization made him slowly comprehend the difference between closed and open societies and the divergent hierarchies within them.

Interestingly, we can also find hierarchies within the new arrivals themselves. For example, we can distinguish between different levels of greenness when comparing David to his companions from the boat that brought them overseas. At first it might have seemed as if David had a certain advantage in being more confident and straightforward unlike for example Gitelson, a shy immigrant that decided to stick with David because he thought of him as more assertive. To an outsider Gitelson might seem much greener than David even though they were exactly in the same situation. However, as David himself soon discovered, though timid and uneducated, a tailor such Gitelson was much more precious in America than any student of the Talmud at that time. Unfortunately for David, this is where he loses his former and maybe only ostensible advantage and becomes redundant for his lack of economic value and utilization because, as one of the first encounters he meets in the street remarks, *"[reading Talmud] is no business in America."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 62)

As Donald Weber says, there can be many other characters found in the early-twentieth-century immigrant literature in America who are straining to mask their innocent greenhorn-like style in the process of Americanization, which he considers the labor of shaking off Old-World traces of clothes, accent or gesticulation; the desire to get rid of the raw, green foreignness from their alien being. (cf. Weber 1995) The parallel between the new arrivals to America and aliens seems to be more than accurate considering the extent to which most of the immigrants feel left out and estranged with nothing to go back to and only a growing desire to fit in, to adapt, to Americanize. However despite all the efforts, David Levinsky never reached a complete assimilation with the American culture as he still misses something that would make him ultimately

happy and fulfilled. *"The inability to "out" the foreignness completely, to erase the traces of one´s Old-World self […] results in the „melancholy reality" of one´s inescapable „greenhorn" self."* (Weber, 1995 p. 726) This greenhorn self that Weber suggests seems to be omnipresent in David´s character the whole time and, especially at the beginning, lets itself show up to notify of David´s disguise. David struggles intensively against it in order to Americanize, yet unfortunately everything about his old culture seems to be standing in the way of doing so.

Initially, getting rid of his earlocks and beard seems as a natural step in looking less green, as we have already described in the previous chapter. Unfortunately, only changing the way David looks does not help him in a complete transformation into a proper American, yet it serves at least as a facade for the contemptuous looks of the passersby.

However, as we have already stated above, trying so hard to out-green himself transforms David into someone who in a way resents his own old cultural background and becomes intolerant towards everything that reminds him of it. Paradoxically this hatred towards his old culture slowly grows into a judgmental attitude to everything that resembles the non-American Jewish style. Later in the story when David considers himself an Americanized gentleman, he as if having forgotten all about his background, is quite quick to judge orthodox and old-fashioned Jewish style of furnishing in the house of Kaplans, the family which he was supposed to marry into.

> *It was drearily too large for the habits of the East Side of my time, depressingly out of keeping with its sense of home. It had lanky pink-and-gold furniture and a heavy bright carpet, all of which had a forbidding effect. It was as though the chairs and the sofa had been placed there, not for use, but for storage. Nor was there enough furniture to give the room an air of being inhabited, the six pink-and-gold pieces and the marble-topped center-table losing themselves in spaces full of gaudy desolation.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 275)

Weber aptly points out here that *"Levinsky´s "American" tastes are here offended by the "gaudy," parvenu style of the Kaplans; he convicts them for their bad furniture manners, which, newly Americanized gentlemen that he is, he cannot tolerate."* (Weber, 1995 p. 735) In situations such as these it seems to be apparent that David Levinsky is no longer so insecure about his Americanness and puts himself into a higher social group

which allows him to assess the extent of Americanization of other immigrants. This resentfulness towards the Jewishness of the Kaplans seems to be again caused by the increased old-world intolerance. It is apparent that this resentfulness does not come from the outside factors that influence him. Nevertheless, it seems to be leaking within himself as the Kaplan family reawakes shameful memories that remind him strongly of his old self, that he so much desires to detach from, and thus causes a clash between his new Americanized identity and old green one. This opposing new and old identity can be described as *"a reaction between the desired ideal self, reflected in and by the dominant culture, and his inner, socially marginal "descent" identity, which appears in his mind to tarnish by its very presence the world in which he seeks acceptance"* (Weber, 1995 p. 736)

The feeling of anxiety from being exposed to judgmental looks of the Americans whenever he feels like his knowledge of American manners is not strong enough pervades the whole story and especially his memories of such situations are described in great detail, which only adds on the importance of this issue. For example he feels intimidated by a high class standard of a restaurant where he meets a ´full-blooded Anglo Saxon businessman´:

> *The immense restaurant, with its high, frescoed ceiling, the dazzling whiteness of its rows and rows of table-cloths, the crowd of well-dressed customers, the glint and rattle of knives and forks, the subdued tones of the orchestra, and the imposing black-and-white figures of the waiters struck terror into my Antomir heart. The bill of fare was, of course, Chinese to me, though I made a pretense of reading it. The words swam before me […]. The worst part of it all was that I had not the least idea of what I was to say or do. The occasion seemed to call for a sort of table manners which were beyond the resources […] of a poor novice like myself.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 179)

These situations when David feels overwhelmed by the American high class civilization show not only the downside of having to adapt to a new culture, but obviously also depicts his desire to be an integral part of and accepted by such an elevated world.

A great parallel to his early experience in the restaurant is placed in the second part of the novel when David invites Gitelson to a similarly high class place to celebrate with him the 25th anniversary of their arrival in America. Only now it is as if David was

seated on the other side of the table back in his *green* days and watched his old self in Gitelson´s reflection:

> *Gitelson was extremely bashful and his embarrassment infected me. He was apparently at a loss to know what to do with the various glasses, knives, forks. It was evident that he had never sat at such a table before. The French waiter, who was silently officious, seemed to be inwardly laughing at both of us. At the bottom of my heart I cow before waiters to this day. Their white shirt-fronts, reticence, and pompous bows make me feel as I they saw through me and ridiculed my ways. […] I realized that I had made a mistake – that I should have taken him to a more modest restaurant. But then the chasm between him and me seemed to be too wide for us to celebrate as ship brothers in any place.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 361)

This encounter with his former ship brother provided David with sort of a window to the past through which he could see his old and new selves next to each other, making him feel somewhat empathetic and overwhelmingly disgusted at the same time. The social gap between him and Gitelson was too vast as much as was the gap between the David 25 years earlier and the successful businessman he has become. As Weber says

> *the intimidating presence of the waiter exposes the despised yet inescapable greenhorn self beneath the layers of denial and flight. The resulting dialectic of revulsion and nostalgia – the tension between self-loathing and unfocused, insatiable longing for the past – defines Levinsky as Cahan´s representative ethnic self: he is bound by the dialectic´s determining powers, helpless before the New World´s cultural authority. Yet in this Old-World "Antomir heart," David Levinsky dreams of overcoming his "commercial" self to recover his "inner identity," the gesticulation, promising young Talmud scholar passionate about his vocation and unembarrassed by the unselfconscious expression – spiritual and physical – of piety.* (Weber, 1995 p. 740)

Despite his wealth and power, David, aware of his inability to un-green himself fully, is left with constant shame and vulnerability.

In encounters with David´s former acquaintances, we can easily observe the features of intolerance and shame of his orthodox and foreign background, yet in the above-depicted situation this intolerance seems to be enhanced by the fact that these are David´s own memories and his mother tongue that disgust him. He became alienated from his own identity at the cost of Americanization, as it is aptly remarked in

a 1908 letter in the *Bintel Brief* of the Yiddish *Forward*: *"America makes one forget everything."* (Metzker, 1971 p. 81)

3.4. Women

In *The Rise of David Levinsky*, gender and its roles represent a significant part in terms of adapting to a new culture. As Motley notes, there is no established American identity in general that would be independent of existing gender roles, *"and each immigrant encountering American society brings established gender codes from his or her native culture that mix, and often conflict, with evolving American gender codes"* (Motley, 2011 p. 5). Due to the fact that American culture has been shaped by immigrants of various predominantly European cultural backgrounds, this New World remains a mixture of many and more gender roles variously modified according to others, created as the immigrants interacted with each other. Similarly, Jews immigrating to America brought their ideas of gender roles with them, when leaving their home country, as they had those archetypes of gender roles saved within them. However, sooner or later, the immigrants who are trying to make a difference in their life, hoping to come closer to achieving their American dream, realize that these gender roles that worked for them back home are clashing with the American ways.

> *For Cahan Jewish immigrants, performing these gendered customs – ritualized performances involving dress, diet, and other activities – could identify someone as a Jew or a Yankee. Although cultural categories such as American and Jewish are imprecise, ever evolving, and in no way exclusive of one another, many immigrants felt that to "act American" was in a sense to not "act Jewish."* (Motley, 2011 p. 6)

As Motley says, the desire to become an American overreaches the desire to stay Jewish at some point, and that is where the immigrants start to change in order to fit in with the majority.

If we agree that one of the features of Americanness is being non-orthodox, we can see the character of David Levinsky was a priori predisposed with certain American attributes even before immigrating to America. These attributes are mainly represented by his relatively early sexual interest in women. At first, David perceives this sexuality as an act of Satan upon him, trying to divert him from the holy path. However, he does not

seem to respond to these feelings of passion all together negatively. Here the holy learning starts to clash with David´s nature, resulting in confusion and curiosity about Satan who represents all the unholy desires and urges.

As already mentioned, the whole novel is interlaced with contrasts and opposing sensations, yet in the passages where David describes his confusion caused by Satan, we can feel these opposites the most; almost as if the reader could see the typical cartoon image of an angel on one shoulder of the indecisive character and a devil on the other. Reb Sender is a representative of the angel in this context because of all the *"exhortative talk"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 27) that he gives to David in a fatherly manner as an attempt to make him a righteous and pious man. Satan, on the other hand, represents the opposing side to all of the religious duties of a good Jew. Satan can be understood as a sort of inner self in David that was able to express exactly what David´s desire was to the fullest when he was *"intoxicated by the novelty of yielding to Satan,"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 84) after he started assimilating to American life. Women account for a significant part of these desires that ultimately allow David Levinsky´s otherwise suppressed inner cravings come to life.

David´s perception of women was given by his orthodox upbringing teaching him that *"women were intended for two purposes only: for the continuation of the human species and to serve as an instrument in the hands of Satan for tempting the stronger sex to sin [, and that] marriage was simply a duty imposed by the Bible."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 29) In this concern David was taught how to feel about women in general. Yet, when he reaches puberty and starts to yield to temptations, perceived by him as satanic, it seems as if he was never meant to be pious at the first place.

The very first mention of women comes at the beginning of the novel when David remembers the days of his elementary education and narrates about *"the heroine of [his] first romance"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 14), Sarah-Leah, whom he perceived as equally renegade as himself because of her social status. Even though David does not speak about Sarah-Leah in a sexual way, she can clearly be considered his first female encounter who was dear to him in a non-family context. This cannot be said about the previously mentioned Red Esther, thanks to whom David discovered that *"the word "girl" had acquired a novel sound for [him], one full of disquieting charm."* (Cahan, 2002

p. 23) It is obvious that David was aware of this change in perception of women around him, and narrating the story in retrospect can be seen as a realization that this moment, meeting Red Esther, represents the trigger point of his sexual desires, driving him further away from his piety.

Without a doubt, the woman who can be seen as the center of David´s confusion of perceiving women sexually and focusing on his religious education is Matilda, the wealthy sophisticated divorced young woman. Her beauty did not impress him: as he says, *"She was singularly interesting, but pretty she certainly was not."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 46) It was her dissimilarity and a certain exoticness that breathed from her name that attracted David the most about her. Though Jewish, she lived her life as a Gentile, in a modern confident manner that was often in the center of the town´s gossip, which did not seem to bother her and only added to her attractiveness. Spending so much of his time in her company, David becomes influenced by her advanced and modern ideas, especially those concerning Gentile education, and as Weinstein suggests, *"it all serves to fuel his self-image of a potentially worldly man."* (Weinstein, 1983 p. 49) This growing desire to become as sophisticated and educated as Matilda occupied David´s mind the most ever since he decided to emigrate.

According to Weinstein, we can observe the same egocentrism and bloodlessness in David Levinsky´s relationship with women as we can find throughout the whole journey to his prime. (cf. Weinstein 1983) One of such self-oriented behavior is obvious in the intentions that David had with a girl named Gussie. As David himself explains, romantic relationships between co-workers are not common in factory settings because these are *"the battle-fields in [their] existence, where [they] treat woman as an inferior being, whereas in civilized love-making [they] prefer to keep up the chivalrous fiction that she is [their] superior."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 107) The subtext of this quotation also suggests David Levinsky´s attitude towards women in general; a woman actually is an inferior being, yet in the sense of making her attracted to a man she needs to gain the exact opposite impression, however fake. In the same spirit, David had intended to marry Gussie for her savings, hoping that this money would cover the cost of his education. He does not try to hide his rather selfish plan as he openly admits it to the reader: *"I was too passionately in love with my prospective alma mater to care whether I could*

love my fiancée or not." (Cahan, 2002 p. 123) Perhaps we can see a certain parallel between this self-gain oriented attitude towards women and the way David Levinsky proceeded in making business. In this concern, David mostly takes only his own personal benefits into consideration, be it while dealing with women or business partners.

Slightly different feelings, perhaps comparable to those he had for Matilda, are shown in his relationship with Dora, his landlord´s and friend´s wife, whom he claims to be intensely in love with. However, is it really love that he feels or is it just a desire to have someone he can never be with? Moreover, Weinstein suggests that his affair with Dora can be seen as another opportunity to show himself as a sophisticated man he had so much desired to become.

> *Knowing of Dora´s frustrated passion for Americanization, he nevertheless taunts her for her ignorance of English with his own mastery of the language, and he aggravates her feeling of imprisonment in a loveless marriage with the strutting pose of a free-spirited man of fashion.* (Weinstein, 1983 p. 50)

Appearing educated and worldly to Dora, he attracts her and thus feeds his own ego that only grows in a company of such an insecure woman, who, in addition, sees David Levinsky as exactly the kind of confident and rakish man that he himself wants to be.

When considering love, it is interesting to observe the contrasts between the American and Russian way of understanding this concept. In this issue a vast oppositeness is visible on the kind of love Dora feels towards David. Due to a rational way of thinking about relationships between a man and a woman, love in the Russian sense of the word is maintained through matchmaking, whereas in America love gains a coat of passion and irrational attraction between two people. Dora had not known this kind of love before she met David, therefore she is suddenly convinced about her inner feeling of happiness that she had not even noticed to be missing before. However deep and true David´s feelings to Dora may seem at the beginning, after she pours her heart out to him, admitting her passionate love with a willingness to suffer for him, David has lost interest a bit, as he notes: "*I was somewhat bored."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 194) Almost as if the fact that Dora finally gave in to the affair slowed down David´s normally eager drive towards anything he had set his eyes on. The reader gets the impression that their

love is being fed mostly by the mysteriousness and secrecy which is now the source of excitement for David.

This avidity for going after everything he desires seems to be easily practicable in the world of business for David than in the world of pleasure, love or sustainable personal relationships because there is always more money to be made. On the contrary, with women or a potential bride, David seems to be rather picky, always searching for something a bit more to reach his high expectations of the future Mrs. Levinsky. Weinstein calls this *"a vague objectification of an ideal,"* (Weinstein, 1983 p. 50) which depicts perfectly the material and sort of superficial way of David´s thinking.

As David becomes older and financially more successful, the reasons for getting a life partner change as he starts seeking for a bride to give him an heir for his business. Before, he strived for love, someone who would fill in an imaginary empty space that was created in the process of becoming prosperous and rich, whereas now *"marriage mattered far more than love".* (Cahan, 2002 p. 262) By marriage, David means an old-fashioned kind of matrimony which offers security, stability and persistence unlike unpredictable and inconsistent love.

> *Odd as it may appear, my romantic ideals of twenty years ago now reasserted their claim upon me. It was my ambition to marry into some orthodox family, well-to-do, well connected, and with an atmosphere of Talmudic education – the kind of match of which I had dreamed before my mother died, with such modifications as the American environment rendered natural.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 262)

Fanny Kaplan seemed the perfect candidate to satisfy David´s needs in the aforementioned quotation, because she met all the expectations of an orthodox bride in an American environment. However David´s inner desires for wanting always more than was right in front of him once again came to the surface when he met Anna Tevkin who did not show any signs of interest in him, yet he still immediately abandoned Fanny for not even a promise of a mutual future. Just as the reader thinks that David came to his senses by getting engaged with Fanny, he proves again his egocentrism and rather shallow attitude towards women when he chooses to pursue his interest in Anna. On top of that he treats his split up with Fanny with incredible disrespect and coldness.

> *Throughout the novel David´s dealings with women emphasize a worship of appearance and surface values, a desire to excel in*

> *conquest, and, above all, an emotional impotence that bars his ability to [connect] with the deep feelings of one for whom he professes to care.* (Weinstein, 1983 p. 50)

As Weinstein notes above, David Levinsky failed to find a proper life partner due to an overdone focus on the materiality of relationships and his mobility to relate to a person on an emotional level. As a result he finds himself lonely, unfulfilled and full of self-pity, despite all his personal achievements in business. This feel of loss ultimately spreads even on his relationship towards America itself when he feels despised by American society as if it were to blame for his own failures in his love-life. *"My business life had fostered the conviction in me that, outside of the family, the human world was as brutally selfish as the jungle, and that it was worm-eaten with hypocrisy into the bargain."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 264) Ultimately, he sees the world, which he had so much desired to be a part of and invested his whole life in making a difference in such a competitive place, as something bitter, false and unfulfilling.

3.5. Education

Education, be it Talmudic or one via a University, constituted a great deal of David Levinsky´s aspirations. The importance of studying was coded in him through the traditional Jewish upbringing which perceives the Talmudic scholarship as the most exalted kind of education a Jew can possibly have. Since he was a little child, David himself felt the urge to educate himself as much as he could, even though some aspects of education, like writing, were not financially available to him. Yet David, proving his goal-directness even at a young age, found a way to secretly teach himself to write against the rules, being labeled an *"ink-thief"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 12) afterwards. Even at this early stage of his education we can observe a certain eagerness to step out of the shadow of his social class and strive for more than what was preassigned to him by society.

Reb Sender functions as a kind of religious mentor who encourages David to study the word of God; and he can also be perceived as the father David never had, since he treats him like his own son, giving him all sorts of advice: "*You are like a son to me, Davie. Be good, be genuinely pious; for my sake, if for nothing else. Above all, don´t be double-*

faced; never say what you do not mean; do not utter words of flattery." (Cahan, 2002 p. 21) In this quote we can also observe how much David became estranged to his former self, that took such recommendations seriously as he says: *"And I would listen, thrilling, and make a silent vow to be good and to dedicate my life to the service of God."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 20) Although David at first saw Reb Sender as *"a dreamer with a noble imagination, with a soul full of beauty,"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 20) in retrospect he perceives him as *"a yearning, lonely man"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 21), which only shows the incredible difference in David´s perception of anything that has something to do with his former religious and naïve self. The competitive and uncompromising American environment made David into the exact opposite of his former seemingly pious and good-willed self; as a street peddler he made his way towards money through, by Reb so warned against, lying and flattery. Yet, the basis for his success was his drive to the best. From a young age, David strived to be the best at absolutely everything; be it at the Cheder or when studying the Talmud. He was driven by the desire to kill his competition, which later becomes even more obvious when he becomes a part of the business world.

When David reaches the age of 16 and finally, as a proper young Jew, joins the Talmudic seminary as an independent scholar, he perceives himself as an adult devoted to God, prepared to dedicate his life to piety. Yet it is also a time when he starts to be tempted by Satan, as he calls the confusion of his sexual impulses and natural subsequent diversion from God. Since studying Talmud is considered the best and only education a Jew can receive, we can consider David´s pullback from religion as a stepping stone to non-religious or Gentile education, which he starts to be attracted to also partly due to his absolute admiration of Matilda, who introduced the idea of the gentile education to him and since he had already been inclined to the idea of emigrating, studying at the University became his next desire:

> *She cited the cases of former Talmudists, poor and friendless like myself, who had studied at the universities, fighting every inch of their way, till they had achieved success as physicians, lawyers, writers. [...] "It´s a crime for a young man like you to throw himself away on that idiotic Talmud of yours, she said, pacing up and down the room fiercely. All this sounded shockingly wicked, and yet it did not shock me in the least.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 50)

3.5.1. Language Adaptation

Naturally, adopting a new language seems as an incredibly hard thing to do for any immigrant, especially in adulthood. David´s first encounters with English language were, of course, intimidating since he could not understand anything at the beginning. However, he started to learn quite quickly, as the description of him as a young child, *"a good head"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 12), suggested he would. Also, his incredibly difficult, and for a non-Jewish reader almost unimaginable, education in Cheder, where he had to master foreign language (Hebrew) at a very young age, trained his brain so well that learning English did not strike him as so intimidating.

The very first English word that David acquired was *´all right´,* produced by a contractor on David´s first day in America. Perhaps the fact that the contractor "*uttered it so many times that the phrase engraved itself upon [his] memory*" (Cahan, 2002 p. 62) is not the only reason why David was able to remember it. The meaning of this first word could be seen as a contrast to David´s feelings of abandonment and hopelessness which he felt directly after the contractor had left with David´s companion, Gitelson, whose shyness and cluelessness had paradoxically been increasing David´s courage in the unknown surroundings.

> *I was left with a sickening sense of having been tricked, cast off, and abandoned. I stood watching the receding public vehicle, as though its scarlet hue were my last gleam of hope in the world. When it finally disappeared from view my heart sank within me. I may safely say that the half-hour that followed is one of the worst I experienced in all the thirty-odd years of my life in this country. The big, round nostrils of the contractor and the gray forelock of my young steerage-fellow haunted my brain as hideous symbols of treachery.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 63)

It is possible that these unpleasant feelings helped David in remembering the first bits of the English language, as people tend to remember very happy or very displeasing situations more clearly. Simultaneously, this parallel between an abstract promise of a more positive future, which can be seen behind the word *all right,* and David´s current uncomfortable situation serves as a hint of the following events in the novel for the reader.

At first David dived into studying English on his own by noting the most important words into his notebook because *"[he] felt [it] was an essential step toward shedding*

one´s "greenhornhood", an operation every immigrant is anxious to dispose of without delay" (Cahan, 2002 p. 72). Later, he even started cutting pieces of text from newspapers and keeping them in his pockets until he came across somebody who would explain their meaning to him. Acquiring the language became one of the priorities for David at that time since his material and economic security depended mostly on out-greening himself, so that he would be able to sell more effectively as a peddler. As this passage suggests, the more American-looking and sounding he appeared, the more likely he would make a living in America:

> *I was quick to realize that to be "stylishly" dressed was a good investment, but I realized, too, that to use the Yiddish word for "collar" or "clean" instead of their English correlatives was worse than to wear a dirty collar*. (Cahan, 2002 p. 72).

Speaking English, then, represents an important factor in David Levinsky´s adaptation to the American cultural life.

However, learning a foreign language as an adult comes with many obstacles that seem even stronger, seen from the reader´s present-day perspective. At first, David Levinsky could not take the advantage of dictionaries, literature or interaction with a native speaker; the English he learned was mostly something we could call an "immigrant English" for it was mediated through other non-native speakers. Naturally, however correct this kind of English sounded to the immigrants, whose listening skills were not yet at such an advanced levels so that they could tell the difference, it still lacked certain aspects of Americanness though, that distinguished the immigrants from the Americans.

Mrs. Dienstag could be seen as David´s first teacher even though she was just a landlady. She provided David with his first bits of English language which he carefully wrote into his notebook. "*I wrote down the English words in Hebrew characters and from my landlady´s dictation, so that "never mind," for example, became "nevermine"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 72). Mrs. Dienstag was not a native English speaker, meaning that she once had to learn the language the same as David, therefore she unknowingly taught David her learned mistakes or mispronunciations. Since immigrants spent most of their time in their ghettos or communities, they hardly ever interacted with native speakers to come across proper English; their language acquisition thus became a sort of recycling process

and with each person passing the language to another one, some changes or alternations appeared. Therefore the waves of immigration in the 19th and 20th century can be seen as the reason for different accents in America. New York city, thanks to its business opportunities, attracted the biggest number of Jewish immigrants and that is why today the city is inhabited by the highest number of Yiddish speaking communities in the world.

After the initial struggle with peddling, David managed to sign up for an evening class of English taught by a German-English teacher, Bender, who was the first native speaker with whom David had frequent and more intensive conversations; that provided him with the chance to finally learn English without mistakes. David became very enthusiastic and eager about studying English, for above-mentioned reasons, but we could also say that he had a natural competitive personality that made him always wanting more, and constituted a significant factor of his eventual success, as he says:

> *Some of my classmates had a much better practical acquaintance with English than I, but few of these could boast the mental training that my Talmud education had given me. As a consequence, I found things irksomely slow. [...] I would hang on [the teacher´s] lips, striving to memorize every English word I could catch and watching intently, not only his enunciation, but also his gestures, manners, and mannerisms, and accepting it all as part and parcel of the American way of speaking*. (Cahan, 2002 p. 88)

As a good observer, he kept watching and comparing himself to other students, trying to learn from every single situation, for he knew that handling the English language would bring him closer to the *"people [...] born to speak English [who he saw as] superior beings"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 122).

As it was mentioned in the quotation in the previous paragraph, learning a language can never be enough if it is learned separately, without the accompanying features such as gestures and manners. David noticed this close connection and was able to assign importance to it right from the beginning because he could see this feature from the Americans´ perspective: "*One can tell the nationality of a stranger by his gestures as readily as by his language. In a contact with some American-born Jews whose gesticulations, when they spoke Yiddish, impressed me as utterly un-Yiddish"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 88). David strove to acquire the English language wholly, as he wanted to come

closer to being an Americanized immigrant, therefore he *"studied Bender´s gestures almost as closely as [he] did his words"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 88).

In many ways, his former Talmudic training assisted David in learning English; his brain is trained to remember an enormous amount of information which enables him to learn new words quicker than the other students, and he is also accustomed to singing different melodies therefore tackling pronunciation did not represent such a difficulty.

The *"unsmiling smile"* (Cahan, 2002 p. 88) can be considered as another distinguishing typically American feature connected to the gesticulations that David was, at first, fascinated by, yet later used it with remarkable ease while negotiating business deals with his customers.

> *I often saw it on Bender and on other native Americans. [...] In Russia, among the people I knew, at least, one either smiled or not. Here I found a peculiar kind of smile that was not a smile. It would flash up into a lifeless flame and forthwith go out again, leaving the face cold and stiff. "They laugh with their teeth only," I would say to myself [...], on Americans I instinctively learned to discern the smile of mere politeness from the sort that came from one´s heart.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 88)

However, as easy as acquiring the American smile was for David, all the more difficult was it for him to get rid of his typically Jewish gesticulations while speaking. An incredible thing to notice here is the fact that David was able to see this Jewish habit on himself and tried really hard to correct it. He often mentions how he had to stick his hands into his pockets while negotiating business in order not to be tempted to gesticulate. This can be considered another way of suppressing his old country features in order to assimilate with American society.

To David´s immigrant eyes, American behavior could seem rather dishonest and pretentious, seeing those stiff smiles around him, yet over his stay in America he discovered the benefits behind this habit, which may be considered a result of a nation living under competitive business-oriented conditions.

Another aspect which we can consider a part of the language David had to acquire is flattery. After David Levinsky learned enough of English that he felt comfortable using it fluently, he discovered a sort of a weapon in flattering people so that he could direct them exactly where it was convenient for him. First, he practiced this art of flirtation on

his landlady, whom he did not even like; as if he just wanted to find out whether he can flatter women into doing him favors. Partially, he learned this skill of pretentious love from the prostitutes to whom he frequently paid visits after he stopped resisting Satan and finally "*gave him a free hand."* (Cahan, 2002 p. 84) After acquiring enough of the flattery and love simulation, he managed to apply a similar law in his business.

> *Many of these women would simulate love, but they failed to deceive me. I knew that they lied and shammed to me just as I did to my customers, and their insincerities were only another source of repugnance to me. But I frequented them in spite of it all, in spite of myself.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 85)

In this part we can also observe David expressing a certain self-hatred and disgust towards himself. Nevertheless he understands these negative feelings as a part of his ambitious American self, whose striving for success is more important than his moral values.

Adapting the language seemed as perhaps the biggest challenge for David, because since the first day in the New World he desired to behave, look and speak exactly like Americans. Naturally then, when he mastered the English language and was even praised for it by his former teacher, Bender, to whom he randomly came across in the street, he felt incredible pride on himself.

> *My narrative was interspersed with such phrases as, "my growing credit," "my check," "in my desk," "dinner with a buyer from Ohio," all of which I uttered with great self-consciousness. He congratulated me upon my success and upon my English again. Whereupon I exuberantly acknowledged the gratitude I owed him for the special pains he had taken with me when I was his pupil.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 216)

With this encounter though, comes an undeniable proof of David´s changing personal qualities and attitude towards people he used to know. Suddenly, Bender does not occur as a role model for David, because David is not the insecure former Talmud student from Eastern Europe anymore. Contrarily he feels socially above him and, be it from the need to reward Bender for his help or from the need to show off as a successful businessman, he offers his former teacher a position at his company.

However David is not alone in using language as a source of pride and boasting in front of other immigrants. He experienced this sort of behavior when interacting with others and even after finally being comfortable in using English as a second language he

came across people who let him know about his gaps. One´s language expressions change with one´s social position; for David it was the business world that altered his turn of phrase, yet in the case of encounters in other environments that David met in America, the change was caused by their surroundings and lifestyle. For example even when David Levinsky considered his language skills almost perfect, he found himself perplexed by the way of speech of a Gipsy:

> *Much of what he said was lost upon me, for, although he knew that I was a rank outsider, he used a jargon of nicknames, catch-phrases, and allusions that was apparently peculiar to the East Side Boheme. He was part of that little world, and he was unable to put himself in the place of one who was not. I subsequently had occasion to read one of his articles and I found it full of the same jargon. The public did not understand him, but he either did not know it or did not care.* (Cahan, 2002 p. 317)

Language acquisition seems to be one of the most important parts of David Levinsky´s assimilation to the American culture. As manipulative as he is, without a proper knowledge of English he would never be able to convince all those people upon whom the success of his business depended to trust him and cooperate with him. English language works as a sort of weapon in the novel; it allowed David to become a prominent personnel in a place that once seemed as "*the midst of a jungle"*. (Cahan, 2002 p. 61) Additionally, proper use of American English aids greatly in salesmanship.

4. The Imported Bridegroom

In this short novella Abraham Cahan introduces an older immigrant, Asriel Strone, who managed to make a fairly good living in America and decided to find a proper Jewish husband for his American-born daughter, Flora. However, as readers may expect, Cahan shows a society of contradictory attitudes towards a young woman´s aspirations for her future. These contradictions are mediated through Asriel, who grew up in a small Polish village and thus represents an older generation of immigrants, and his daughter who constitutes a new generation of young American Jews.

4.1. Identity

Just as in *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Abraham Cahan deals with a crisis of Jewish-American identity in *The Important Bridegroom* (1898). David Levinsky came from a rather pious period in his upbringing in Russia through discovering his life aspirations resulting in his immigrating to America. There he transformed his lifestyle into one which resembles more of a Gentile than Jewish one. On the contrary, Asriel Stroon´s story opens on him appearing to have assimilated into the American way of living into such an extent that he no longer knows much about his former religion which only appears to be a part of his life as a moment of inertia from his old life. Performing religious customs thus seems a bit pretentious and superficial. As we do not know much about Asriel´s past, we are left with what the omniscient narrator reveals through the character´s feelings, reactions and general behavior. We can for example observe Flora´s reactions to her father´s rather renewed interest in his Jewishness:

> *When supper was over and Asriel and Tamara were about to say grace, Flora resumed the reading of her novel. "Off with that lump of Gentile nastiness while holy words are being said!" the old man growled. Flora obeyed, in amazement. Only a few months before she had seldom seen him intone grace at all. She was getting used to his new habits, but such rigor as he now displayed was unintelligible to her, and she thought it unbearable.* (Cahan, 1996 p. 22)

In this short part we can clearly observe Flora´s surprising reaction to her father´s sudden change in behavior compared to what we can only guess was his ´normal´ Americanized Gentile-like standard. As the narrator changes Asriel´s and Flora´s points of view, it becomes clear that Asriel´s retreat to Jewishness is driven by similar feelings

of loss and a certain cultural sustainability as David felt on the verge of his success. What makes a difference between these two men is the fact that Asriel has an heir to whom he can leave not only his possessions but also a cultural heritage which he appears to have neglected at the expense of becoming rich. With increasing age, Asriel sees his life diverted from the Jewish culture and perceives it suddenly as sinful and in need of redemption. Yet, as it appears to be too late for him, he decides to ´save´ his daughter by providing her with the most pious pure and non-American groom he can find, hoping to make up for his former sins and recapture his Americanized life as a Jewish one.

Philip Joseph suggests that *"American Jews who embraced their adopted country as a site of political freedom and economic opportunity also feared it for its capacity to deprive them of spiritual authenticity."* (Joseph, 2002 p. 8) Asriel´s medicine for this feeling of loss is the perfect groom, the Talmudic student Shaya, who serve as a replacement and souvenir. (cf. Joseph 1996) If we omit the absurd way of ´purchasing´ such a valuable groom, which may seem rather disturbing for a modern reader uninformed about the Jewish matchmaking customs, the idea of pure pious Shaya staying unaffected and completely distanced from the American influence seems even more unrealistic. After all, to Asriel´s disappointment, he realizes it himself soon enough when he finds out that his daughter has no intentions of marrying such a greenhorn.

Asriel Stroon placed his hopes of returning into his own Jewish identity into Shaya as a way of securing a place in heaven for his sinful Americanized soul. Unfortunately he did not expect Shaya, so uncontaminated by anything non-Jewish, to be influenced by the New World even under his own supervision. Shaya becomes the perfect example of a Jewish immigrant changing his identity in order to Americanize himself. As Joseph states, *"Cahan poses the question of Jewish identity in America by constructing his benchmark immigrant as a whimsical character, free of any governing idea about his own destiny."* (Joseph, 2002 p. 9) In Pravly, Asriel´s hometown where he went to win his dreamt-of son-in-law, Shaya appears to the reader as an educated person in the Talmudic sphere yet otherwise plain and rather empty. His indifference towards his own future and a total submissiveness makes him seem as a grey tabula rasa waiting to be filled with American colors.

Despite all of Asriel´s efforts to maintain Shaya as pure as he was in Pravly, the groom becomes swallowed more and more by Gentile books which opened his mind to new potentials. Flora, who dreamt of marrying a doctor and did not even consider living a life other than the American one, sees this change in Shaya´s personality and seizes the opportunity to get what she wants, that is an educated gentleman as her future husband, by shaping the docile Talmudic student into an Americanized medical doctor.

A paradox between Asriel´s Jewish identity, at least what has been left of it, and his Americanized business-like one arises in the story. The story of David Levinsky closes with him being alone, without a partner or an heir to inherit his business and all the material accomplishments from him. Even though *The Imported Bridegroom* is older than *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Asriel Stroon can be perhaps perceived as a symbolical continuation of David Levinsky´s fate as a married man, for the longing for something lost from their former culture pervades in both of the stories. Despite David Levinsky finding a perfect bride from an orthodox Jewish background, he failed in marrying one because such a match ultimately crashed with his Americanized identity. In a similar manner, Asriel did not manage to maintain Shaya´s identity in the imaginary Talmudic bubble. In both cases the failure is caused by a collision between aspects of the New and the Old world, ultimately causing a disappointment in what the main characters hoped their future to be. Asriel expected Shaya´s pure presence in his life to make up for his sins and thus *"make him native in his final home, [after life]. He begins the process of adapting to the next world by attempting to repossess the Old World in the New."* (Joseph, 2002 p. 10)

The failure in keeping Shaya absorbed in the Talmud comes not only from the new context that he finds himself in, and accordingly acts on, but also the fact that he is to marry Flora, an American girl with a completely different vision of her fiancé. As Asriel raised his daughter in America, in what could easily be perceived as a gentile manner, he cannot force her into such a traditional matrimony. Therefore at least some necessary changes in appearance and language have to be made in order to make Shaya attractive to Flora:

> Asriel lived in the hope that when Shaya had learned some English and the ways of Flora´s circle, she would get to like him. […] He provided him with a teacher, and trusted the rest to time and God. "Just fix him up in English and a little figuring, and that´s all […], but mind you, don´t take him too far into those Gentile books of yours. He does not want any of the monkey tricks they teach the children at college." (Cahan, 1996 p. 59)

Asriel´s fears Shaya coming across anything remotely gentile which might thwart his plans of making him just Americanized enough to be fit to marry an American girl like Flora. However, this rather naïve plan could never work as the process of Americanization spreads onto Shaya with every minor change he undergoes, be it new clothes or learning English. The more Shaya adapts to American ways the more Flora falls for him and vice versa.

However Flora´s identity is not as clear as it may seem. She was born and raised in America, dreams of marrying an American gentleman, enjoys reading gentile books and hardly ever speaks Yiddish; and when she does she does so with a thick and strange-like accent. One might easily jump into a conclusion that there is almost nothing Jewish about her except for her father´s background. However, as Joseph aptly suggests, she fell for Shaya for an ethnic reason. *"What appeals to her about Shaya, it seems, is not merely his potential to become an American Gentleman, but an American gentleman with Jewish origins. The doubleness of the affiliation makes all the difference to her […]."* (Joseph, 2002 p. 15) It appears as if she, as well as her father, wanted to preserve at least a bit of her Jewish heritage; and that makes her struggle between two aspects of different identities despite of her unquestionable Americanness.

Flora suffers a bitter disappointment caused by her high expectations of marrying Shaya when it is revealed to her right after their secular wedding that he no longer aspires to become a doctor. Rather, he will indulge himself in a reading group of shaggy intellectuals. Flora seems to perceive this group as something she herself would never be interested in, yet at the same time feels jealous that she is not included in it and that her new husband expresses more interest in it than in their new marriage.

> *Flora becomes, much like her father, displaced by the process that she herself has abetted, as Shaya finds both the options that confront him, the resurrected Old World community and the Jewish domestic one, incompatible with the reality to which he must adapt.* (Joseph, 2002 p. 18)

Despite the rather open ending of this novella the reader can sense that none of the characters gained what they aspired for and that Shaya is about to enter the intellectual circle to search for the way to ally his new and old identities together as well as other immigrants before him.

4.2. Homesickness

The theme of homesickness can be considered as one of the main ones in all of Cahan´s immigrant fiction. As well as David Levinsky, Asriel finds himself lost somewhere between America and Poland with no specific place he could relate to. As well as David, he has changed so much from being an East European Jew yet still has some Jewishness in him that keeps him from feeling truly at home in America; and just like David, he feels lost the most on realization that his life passed too quickly. As a result of this restless feeling, he returns to his hometown only to feel like a stranger there and homesick for America. Due to the process of Americanization, *"the coveted home for Asriel is neither the New World nor the Old, but rather the Old within the New, a place in Cahan´s imaginings that belongs to the category of romance and short duration."* (Joseph, 2002 p. 11) It seems that Asriel endeavors to keep a little bit of something in him from the Old World while living fully in the New one and simultaneously he ports something from the New World to the Old one while visiting his hometown. *"The combined attractions and deprivations of America have condemned him to the fate of a perpetual stranger, thwarted by all places of settlement in his quest to have new and old together and untouched by one another."* (Joseph, 2002 p. 12) This indecisiveness of his personality and holding on to the parts of his identity relating to either the new or old part of himself paradoxically keeps him from feeling fulfilled and thus he becomes alienated from both of his homes.

It becomes obvious that Asriel himself is aware of the crisis of his identity when he asks himself *"Who are you?"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 27) in the middle of the ride through his hometown. He feels excited, exclaiming names of familiar places, yet he seems to sense something new there:

> *[…] everything was the same as he had left it; and yet it all had an odd, mysterious, far-away air – like things seen in a cyclorama. It was Pravly and at the same time it was not; or, rather, it certainly was the same dear old Pravly, but added to it was something else, through which it*

> *now gazed at Asriel. Thirty-five years lay wrapped about the town.*
> (Cahan, 1996 p. 29)

On another occasion he meets people he used to know. Some of them do not even recognize him and those who do seem to have troubles accepting his higher position, as he is remembered as being one of the poorest of the town. During a verbal affray at Sabbath he confidently demands what he believes is to be his, whereupon someone calls out: *"If he can´t behave in a holy place let him go back to his America!"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 35) The possessive pronoun ´his´ symbolizes a way broader concept than it may at first appear. It gives the reader a confirmation of how Asriel is perceived by his former neighbors – as a rich American stranger.

4.3. Language

In the plot of *The Imported Bridegroom* certain differences between generations of Jews in America can be observed. These differences are of course caused by the level of assimilation in appearance, cultural customs and language. The generational gap between Flora, as a representative of a generation of Jews born and raised in the New World, and Asriel, a representative of a parent of a first Jewish-American generation, can be specifically observed in terms of the language these two prefer to use when interacting with each other. As it was already mentioned, Flora does not seem confident using Yiddish. It feels like her second language in comparison to English. She therefore chooses the English language even when speaking to her father who mostly responds in Yiddish:

> "Just coming from the synagogue, papa?" she greeted him affectionately, in English. "This settles your fast, don´t it?"
> "It is not so easy to settle with Him, my daughter," he returned, in Yiddish, pointing to the ceiling. (Cahan, 1996 p. 21)

The author chooses intentionally to let the reader know about the different language choices between Flora and her father as means of pointing out the characters´ priorities. This seemingly minor choice in language can be perceived as symbolic for the whole inclination towards either the New World or the Old one. Flora naturally inclines to speak English as she was raised in the New World and English was spoken to her more than Yiddish. However, it would also be natural to suppose that since she was used to

speaking Yiddish at home from her young age, she would continue to do so in her adulthood as well. An interesting question arises here: Is there a reason for Flora, who can understand as well as speak Yiddish, not to use Yiddish in her father´s presence, other than English being a more comfortable choice? Perhaps the answer can be found again in the struggle of either the Old World´s (Asriel´s ways) or the New World´s (Flora´s ways) dominance. Flora knows her father´s stubbornness very well, as she says he *"has never been the man to yield"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 20) when she is considering her options after she learns her father´s plan to engage her in a traditional Jewish matrimony. However, her father probably allowed her to answer him in English instead of Yiddish, and that is why she became a passive speaker of English, who can understand, yet does not use the language actively. Flora, and probably all of her peers, finds Yiddish unfashionable in America. Thus, by choosing to speak to him in English she expresses her revolt against her Jewish origins and the subtext of every English sentence uttered by her can be understood as the declaration of her Americanness.

5. Yekl, A Tale of the New York Ghetto

Yekl, A Tale of the New York Ghetto (1896) tells a story about a young Jewish man who came to America with the purpose of earning money to bring his wife and infant child over as soon as possible. However, this plan was postponed due to the process of Americanization as the main character, Jake, enjoys his new kind of freedom. He leads a life that would be unacceptable in his hometown. He enjoys leisure time full of female acquaintances, inappropriate dancing or sports events and he spends money on vanities inappropriate for a proper Jew. As a consequence, there has to be a conflict once he finally manages to bring his estranged wife and child to America, escalating in hatred where once love and genuine affection were. After a series of hasty decisions on Jake´s part, the story ends with a divorce, a phenomenon considered rather uncommon and very disappointing among traditional Jews.

5.1. Identity

It is obvious that all of Cahan´s characters more or less battle a certain confusion as a consequence of dual identities caused by Americanization. However, in Yekl we can observe a more complex and vivid division of one´s mind, sometimes even with what some could consider almost schizophrenic symptoms. As Stephanie Foote says, *"the conflation of a past self with an inner self creates the present immigrant self as a shadow or an image of an unreal, even a nonexistent person."* (Foote, 2000 p. 34) Jake, indeed, sometimes seems as an unreal person because of his contradictory feelings, struggles between what he wants and what he should do as a result of his two identities fighting for dominance. According to Sanford E. Marovitz, Yekl is a commencement of the two main themes that later occur in all Cahan´s fiction: *"the realistic portrayal of ruthless sweatshop labor and the spiritual hunger of the estranged immigrant Jew in America."* (Marovitz, 1968 p. 197)

Considering his struggles for relating to just one dominant identity, the main protagonist of this novella can be compared to David Levinsky because he also experienced some duality in this aspect even before his immigration. Yekl, or Jake as he later anglicized his name in the American custom, grew up in Russia, a country that

started to express more and more hostility towards its Jewish inhabitants in the 19th century, making it hard for them to feel at home there. After failing to assimilate into the Russian culture, which put Jews into the lowest levels of the hierarchy, many of them begin to reconsider their idea of home and put their hopes into migration. Jake´s family experienced similar unpleasantness. Therefore, Jake already suffered, be it knowingly or not, a certain rapture in his identity even before coming to America, as he was disappointed by Russia - the country that was supposed to be his home.

> *Alienated from his homeland by increasing waves of anti-Semitism, with no money to live and work outside the ghetto, the immigrant Jew, like Cahan himself, either quickly became secularized and attempted to escape from his East Side tenement, or he turned inward to the faith of his fathers.* (Marovitz, 1968 p. 198)

However accurate Marovitz´ idea of the immigrant either secularizing or turning to his/her original faith may seem, in case of Jake we can see these two options blending together throughout the story as the main character appears rather indecisive about his dominant identity. Despite his often occurring catchphrase "Dot´sh a kin´ a man I am!", which would suggest a rather steady and unchanging personality, Jake changes his mind oftentimes and in turns appears to desire two opposing lives – one with his Old World wife as a traditional Jew and the other as an American whose main priority is his freedom from restrictions of all sorts. Both of these options attract him and frighten him at the same time which results in the character´s indecisiveness, instability and inner unease. This inner unease is caused not only by being able to decide between the two identities but rather by the fact that they are not able to coexist together. Jake seems to be very much aware of this as it can be seen in the following quotation where Jake considers how can his wife and child ever live in harmony since they grew so different from one another:

> *He wished he could both import his family and continue his present mode of life. At the bottom of his soul he wondered why this should not be feasible. But he knew that it was not, and his heart would sink at the notion of forfeiting the lion´s share of attentions for which he came in at the hands of those who lionized him.* (Cahan, 1996 p. 191)

When considering the distance between Jake and his wife, it is important to analyze several changes that lead to this division. Changing his Jewish name Yekl into

the Americanized Jake can be considered as the initial trigger for his cultural Americanization. It can also be considered a dual identity feature, as throughout the story either Yekl or Jake takes the initiative, and as is also referred to by the narrator according to the given situation. Jake´ s process of Americanization seems rather rapid as the narrator says:

> *Soon after his arrival in Boston his religious scruples had followed in the wake of his former first name; and if he was still free from work on Saturdays he found many another way of "desecrating the Sabbath." Three years had intervened since he had first set foot on American soil, and the thought of ever having been a Yekl would bring to Jake´s lips a smile of patronizing commiseration for his former self. As to his Russian family name, which was Podkovnik, Jake´s friends had such rare use for it that by mere negligence it had been left intact.* (Cahan, 1996 pp. 177-178)

However it is not only the narrator and Jake´s actions who reveal his double identity. After she meets his husband after three years, Gitl, Jake´s wife, perceives him as two people in one body: *"She was getting used to her husband, in whom her own Yekl and Jake the stranger were by degrees merging themselves into one undivided being."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 206)

Jake himself seems aware of his divided mind which is apparent when he remembers his three years in America as much more lifelike than all his previous years in Russia combined:

> *During the three years since he had set foot on the soil, where a "shister [shoemaker] becomes a mister and a mister a shister," he had lived so much more than three years – so much more, in fact, than in all the twenty-two years of his previous life – that his Russian past appeared to him a dream and his wife and child, together with his former self, fellow characters in a charming tale, which he was neither willing to banish from his memory nor able to reconcile with the actualities of his American present. The question of how to effect this reconciliation, and of causing Gitl and little Yosselé to step out of the thickening haze of reminiscence and to take their stand by his side as living parts of hid daily lie, was a fretful subject from the consideration of which he cowardly shrank.* (Cahan, 1996 p. 191)

Jake here clearly expresses the wish to be able to live a double life where despite having a Jewish wife and a child he still manages to enjoy the benefits of a Gentile life in America. As it has become his habit, though, he decides not to bother his indecisive mind with it and rather chooses to continue his life in a sort of in-between state where he is

married, yet feels single because of the distance, and enjoys his American life ostensibly to the fullest. Yet, something inside of him constantly reminds him of his unfinished past.

At the beginning of the novella we first meet Jake, a confident egoistic cavalier with no patience for greenhorns as he himself says: *"One must not be a greenhorn. Here a Jew is as good as a Gentile."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 171) He spends money on "Gentile" activities, such as dancing, instead of saving for a ticket to bring his wife over. The idea of his greenhorn wife serves as a reminder of his past life, of the life with commitments that are no longer desirable once he has gotten to know the freedom America offered him. At times he even expresses jealousy and regret of being married so soon without properly knowing his options, for which he blames nothing other than Russia and his Jewish roots.

Although it is not specifically said in the story why Jake moved from Boston, where he was more or less known as the man who would soon bring his wife and child over, it may be assumed that New York simply offered better opportunities to make more money. However, considering Jake´s increasing Americanization and tendencies to run away and start over whenever any unpleasantness occur, the conclusion can be reached that his motives were rather selfish, with an emphasis on his own personal freedom. Moving to another city meant a fresh start as an already Americanized immigrant with the option not to mention his marriage to anybody, thus maintaining his freedom. This freedom, as he bitterly realizes, is soon taken away from him by the arrival of Gitl and their son to whom he no longer feels any resemblance and is ashamed for their un-Americanness:

> *For a moment the sight of her [...] precipitated a wave of thrilling memories on Jake and made him feel in his own environment. Presently, however, the illusion took wing and here he was, Jake the Yankee, with this bonnetless, wigged, dowdyish little greenhorn by his side!* (Cahan, 1996 p. 201)

As he could no longer go back to being a proper traditional Jewish husband to her, nor could he enjoy his extravagant life, he started to resent his wife – blaming her for his misery and wishing she was dead. As Marovitz aptly states, *"anticipating David Levinsky, Jake sees no possibility of bringing together the charming dream of the past*

with the painful and banal activities of the present" (Marovitz, 1968 p. 200) and thus fails miserably in his marriage and his especially vague effort to maintain his Jewishness.

Perhaps the biggest instability that we can observe in Jake´s personality is the spiritual hunger he feels in spite of his American selfconfidence. This hunger for his former Jewish faith lets itself on the surface when Jake´s father dies and he suddenly feels *"himself a child, the only and pampered son of a doting mother. He was overcome with a heart wringing consciousness of being an orphan […]."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 196) This feeling of self-pity, similar to David Levinsky´s, renewed his interest in his Jewish self by once again praying in the synagogue and finally withstanding to his promise to bring his wife and child to America. However, as mentioned previously, this mood for Jewishness was temporary and did not last very long due to the ambivalence in identities, and ultimately, as Clay Motley says, his loss of Jewish identity while failing fully to acquire an American one. (cf. Motley 2011) Finally, the outcome, as much as in other Cahan´s stories, lies in un-fulfilment and feeling of loss.

When reading Yekl, the reader gets instantly pulled into the heterogeneous atmosphere of the story thanks to Cahan´s own personal experience as an immigrant. As Sara Blair suggests, the pages breathe the author´s knowledge of the opposed contexts of Yiddish and English, immigrant and native, cosmopolitan and exceptionalist. (cf. Blair 2005) As a consequence of this very specific, interconnected narrative through experience *"the reader is confronted […] by what we might call the typography of mutual mediation: […] vernacular variants, italicized renderings of English-language phrases used (and misused) by Yiddish speakers, quintessential Yiddishisms rendered in English, and the unstable argot of the American metropolis."* (Blair, 2005 p. 261) Due to the dualistic narrative of the novella, the division between the identities and inner struggles of the main character become more obvious and comprehensible to the reader.

5.2. Language

Out of all the mentioned works by Cahan, Yekl is perhaps the most interesting in terms of its language. As it was previously mentioned, the very nature of the New York´s ghetto immigrants´ speech provides the reader with a deeper insight into what it really means to be at home in two very different countries and yet homeless at the same time. A parallel between the imperfect language and striving for a perfect life in America is visible here as these two concepts are inseparable.

Americanized Yiddish and Yiddish-ridden English, as Sara Blair calls it, dominate basically all of the novella´s dialogues. (cf. Blair 2005)

> *"good-evening, Mamie!" he said, bowing with mock gallantry.*
> *"Rats!"*
> *"Shay, Mamie, give dot feller a tvisht, vill you?"*
> *"Dot slob again? Joe must think if you ask me I´ll get scared, ain´t it? Go and tell him he is too fresh," she said with a contemptuous grimace…*
> *"Vot you kickin´ aboyt, anyhoy? Jaw don´ mean notin´at ull. If you don´ voted never min´, and dot´sh ull. It don´cut a figger, shee?" And he feignedly turned to go.* (Cahan, 1996 pp. 184-185)

Together with Cahan´s description of the New York´s ghetto, this modern Yiddish-influenced English gives an opportunity to think about the Jewish immigrants in America as a brand new nation with its own Yiddish pidgin variety of English and much loosened lifestyle than its predecessors in Eastern Europe. Blair also states that this kind of speech insists on a certain cultural mobility of the immigrants, however awkward they may sound to the natives. (cf. Blair 2005)

Although the novella provides only very little of Jake´s process of Americanization, as we can observe more the result of it in Jake´s behavior, it definitely shows the initial encounters of a Jewish immigrant with English on the case of Jake´s Old World wife, Gitl.

> *"You must be hungry?" he asked.*
> *"Not at all! Where do you eat your varimess [dinner]?"*
> *"Don´t say varimess," he corrected her complaisantly; "here it is called dinner."*
> *"Dinner? [Thinner?] And what if one becomes fatter?" she confusedly ventured an irresistible pun.* (Cahan, 1996 pp. 203-204)

By making this linguistic joke right after she went through Ellis Island, she narrowed the imaginary gap between Yiddish and English, between her old and new culture and initiated the process of Americanization.

Furthermore, Yekl, being Cahan´s early fiction, may be also considered a testimony of the Jewish Lower East side as hybrid culture. It is important to speak about ´testimony´ specifically targeted for a non-Jewish reader, an American speaker of English. Abraham Cahan, being an immigrant himself, perhaps comparable to Jake or other characters, chose to speak to his readers in English rather than taking the easier option - Yiddish, which indicates a need to spread knowledge about this newly forming culture of *"the Ghetto of the American metropolis, and, indeed, the metropolis of the Ghettos of the world"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 179) further behind its borders. Cahan´s dialogues serve as a confirmation of English and Yiddish influencing each other and can be read as a truly high literary naturalism, realism, or modernism. (cf. Blair 2005) In conclusion to this subchapter, it is perhaps suitable to refer to Blair´s statement about the Jewish Ghetto´s speech as something that creates itself on the basis of its surroundings:

> *However lofty his own tone as narrator, the polyglot exchanges Cahan orchestrates between protagonists like Yekl, Gitl, and Mamie serve to remind American readers just how responsive "the omnivorous Jewish jargon" is to the project of self-creation and the demands of a newly diasporic, metropolitan cultural life.* (Blair, 2005 p. 264)

6. Short Stories

Even though Abraham Cahan´ s short fiction has always fallen more or less in the shadow of his well-known novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, we owe the establishment of this author´s career as one of the best-known writers of Jewish-American immigrant fiction exactly to these short stories, which comprise his early work and thus mark up his field of expertise. After all, after debuting with "A Providential Match", Abraham Cahan did not get invited by William Dean Howells, a literary critic, to his home for nothing else than being encouraged to write, as he said to him: *"It is not a serious thing. But it convinced me that you must write. It is your duty to write."* (Sollors, 1998)

As Joan Zlotnik says in his study, *Abraham Caham, A Neglected Realist*, the characters of Cahan´s short stories are mostly ordinary people of the extraordinary, yet contemporary, setting of Jewish ghettos, with essentially comic stories, however tragic, in the end. (cf. Zlotnik 1971) Zlotnik further notes that *"[Cahan] modified the convention of happy endings and poetic justice. He created complex characters, heroes not wholly admirable and villains not without charm."* (Zlotnik, 1971 p. 34) Indeed, the readers must admire Cahan´s characters that are, in the light of realism, complex and often ambiguous. Nevertheless, they also express ordinary problems that go far beyond the limits of religion, time or place. We can find a man who is dissatisfied with his looks and would like to get rid of the traces of smallpox on his face ("A Providential Match"), and there is a girl who hopes for a magnificent wedding ("A Ghetto Wedding"). A young man dreams about his female coworker ("A Sweatshop Romance") while a young lady rejoices in having her article printed in a newspaper ("Circumstances"). As Zlotnik points out *"these people need not have been Jewish immigrants living on New York´s Lower East Side at the turn of the century, but, in conformity with the literary principles held by Cahan, they were."* (Zlotnik, 1971 p. 41)

Furthermore, Cahan´s narrative tone is, in comparison to the one in *The Rise of David Levinsky*, rather comic, no matter the often tragic outcomes of the tales. The difference is of course given by the point of view of the narrative; David Levinsky tells his story from his perspective alone, therefore he can offer only his subjective opinions and when expressing his feelings, he can be even deceiving. However, Cahan´s short stories are

recounted from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, who offers unquestionable insights.

6.1. "A Providential Match"

This tale of a Jewish immigrant, Rouvke Arbel, whom America provided with a chance of stepping out of the shadow of his former low poor social class became financially secured. However, as in the case of David Levinsky and other Cahan´s characters, Rouvke suffers from loneliness because even though he managed to Americanize himself, he still remains single. He desperately longs for someone to love, yet as he is rather socially awkward around women, he welcomes the help of a match-maker who arranges a providential match with, in Rouvke´s eyes, a perfect Jewish girl, Hanele. Unfortunately, his misery, self-pity and loneliness are amplified when Hanele comes to America with a different man, with whom she fell in love during her long journey by ship overseas. With this unexpected plot twist, Cahan leaves the reader with a disclosure *"that providence works more easily in the moonlight on the ocean […] than it does through tradition-bound arrangements and negotiations."* (Nagel, et al., 1997)

Abraham Cahan managed to portray a grotesquely pitiful personality in the main protagonist and once again proved the final desolation of his characters, providing a realistic picture of the inner and outer struggles of Jewish immigrants in America. Right at the beginning of the story, the main character is described in light of the story behind his name, Rouvke – meaning sleeve, as he used to be *"in the habit of assigning to the sleeves […] such duties as generally devolve upon a pocket-handkerchief."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 87) We learn the meaning of Rouvke´s name right at the beginning of the story, which indicates Cahan´s intention to emphasize the division between Rouvke Arbel, the simple obedient Russian Jew and Robert Friedman, the well-dressed Americanized man.

Cahan often puts his Americanized characters in his works in order to contrast them with the pictures of their former selves, and he generally does so by encountering them with their acquaintances from their former life, whose reactions are comparable as they always comprise of unconcealed awe over the immigrant´s change in appearance and

behavior. In the case of Rouvke, this contrast is mediated by his mother, whose *"first impulse was to spit at the portrait and to repudiate it as the ungodly likeness of some unknown Gentile"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 87) at the sight of her son´s photograph that was sent to her. By her reaction, Cahan also reveals Rouvke´s background, which must have been orthodox, assuming that seeing her son´s radical change in appearance was enough for his mother to take him for an ungodly Gentile.

Even though Rouvke was *"a stranger to the feminine world"* (Cahan, 1996 pp. 91-92), he did not let his singleness bother his head, so long as he was occupied enough by making business. However, once he reached a certain financial stability, he, as well as David Levinsky, started to feel lonely and strive for his next achievement, business non-related, yet maintained in a similar manner – through matchmaking. *"[…] when he actually had over three thousand dollars in bank deposits and twenty-five summers behind his back, his heart somehow resumed its old stretching process."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 92) Cahan´s characters often longed for something or someone from their old country even though they were no longer religious, nor kept to any Jewish traditions. Rouvke Arbel was no exception as he aspired to marry Hanele, the object of his desires since the time he was a servant at her father´s house. Nevertheless, another question arises here: Why such an affection and sudden desire for this specific girl? Rouvke could have had himself matched with any other Jewish girl, even though he *"could get for a wife the daughter of some Division Street merchant with two or three thousand dollars into the bargain,"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 100) yet he vehemently longed for Hanele, who knew him from before his emigration. Perhaps the answer is again in another desire, comparable by its intensity to the one for marriage: the desire to show off his success, to let his former socially superior acquaintances know he is now equal, if not better, than them. In support of this argument, a certain satisfaction can be detected when Rouvke finds out that Hanele´s father has gone bankrupt:

> *Rouvke was moved with profound pity for his old employer, who had been kind to him, and to whom he had been devoted. But this feeling of commiseration was instantly succeeded by a vague sense of triumph. "What have I lived to see! […] I am now richer than Reb Peretz, as sure as I am a Jew!" And at this he became aware of the bankbook in his breast pocket.* (Cahan, 1996 pp. 95-96)

Furthermore, he later imagines himself meeting the whole Peretz´ family, presenting himself *"in his stylish American dress, his businesslike manners and general air of prosperity"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 97), which also adds to the notion that his motives to marry Hanele are not purely about love.

However, if fleeing from Russia because of a bad position in its hierarchy means establishing a better one in America, it certainly also means being a part of another hierarchy, only amongst Rouvke´s fellow immigrants *"who had studied the Talmud in Russia, and having, therefore, some mental training, found no trouble in picking up some crumbs of broken English in its written form, would often rally him on the "iron head" he must possess […]."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 93) These jests together with the fact that *"ladies have nothing but sneers for a gentleman who does not know how to read a newspaper,"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 93) motivated him to study the English language and Americanize himself as much as it was in his power. Nevertheless, it seems that it was not Cahan´s intention to portray Rouvke as an American gentleman. From the beginning until the end of the story, the reader feels pity for the character and perceives him as someone who has never really changed inside, in spite of the fancy clothes or modern haircut. This becomes particularly clear at the very end of the story, which is supposed to be Rouvke´s big triumph, when he picks up his beautiful bride, a "true daughter of Israel", at the harbor. Yet it becomes the exact opposite when he does not handle her rejection very well. Instead he behaves just like a small *"child when suddenly robbed of its toy"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 110), Rouvke made a scene about wanting his money back and calling the police, which only resulted in his public humiliation as the onlookers made jokes at his expanse. By such a grotesquely dramatic ending, Cahan managed to portray Rouvke´s desolation which ultimately resides in prioritizing money and wanting to marry out for all the bad reasons, but not for love.

Another motive in this short story, and also other Cahan´s works, is a sort of high expectation when it comes to choosing a bride or a groom. A great example of this is Hanele´s father who breaks engagement after engagement because *"nothing sort of a king would have suited his ambition."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 96) As a consequence, his daughter grows apathetic and unconcerned about her suitors as she was not even allowed to talk to them. Yet, however shocked she is when learning who her final

husband is, she agrees because the desire to get out of her hometown, where she had spent her whole not so adventurous life, becomes far more important than caring about who her husband is. The important issue for her remains that he lives in America:

> *In her reveries she now frequently dwelt on her girl friends who had married out of Kropovetz, and then her soul would be yearning and longing, she knew not after what. With all the tender affection which tied her to her family, with all her attachment to her native surroundings, her father´s house became dreary and lonely to her; she grew tired of her home and homesick after the rest of the world*. (Cahan, 1996 p. 105)

In conclusion, it seems that a major motive of this particular short story lies in the exploitability of marriage for achieving ulterior motives. For Rouvke, it is the feeling of repayment or satisfaction from being able to show how well he has been doing in his life, particularly to those for whom he used to work as a servant. For Hanele, it is the chance to free herself from the routine of her mundane life in Kropovetz, even though she ultimately does not end up marrying Rouvke.

6.2. "A Sweatshop Romance"

"A Sweatshop Romance" is a story about a love triangle of Jewish immigrant workers working in a New York sweatshop. The story also depicts the nature of working in the garment industry and ridicules the stuck up owners as well as some personal qualities and stereotypes of a Jewish immigrant. Among the protagonists´ interactions, the timid Beile, the righteous David and the cowardly Heyman, motives such as the need for encouragement and assertiveness in one´s decisions are depicted. The sorting out life priorities of these characters is again mediated through the voice of the omniscient narrator who guides the plot throughout each of Cahan´s short stories.

However, according to Earl S. Wynn, the most important critique this tale provides is *"the reluctance to seize the moment, to act on impulse, guided by the heart or the passion an individual feels."* (Wynn, 2009) This feature is perhaps most visible in the character of Heyman who is the embodiment of a well-known Jewish stereotype that Cahan ridicules in this fable. The urge to pinch every penny is mostly emphasized amongst Heyman´s personal qualities, as he *"has a reputation of being a niggardly*

fellow, who overworked himself, denied himself every pleasure, and grew fat feasting his eyes on his growing savings bank book." (Cahan, 1996 p. 114) Heyman originally dated Beile, yet after being hesitant for much too long with the proposal and after failing in standing up for Beile when she was treated as a lowly servant by her boss, he loses her and is ultimately the victim of loneliness, which is Cahan´s favorite faith for his characters. Unlike other Cahan fiction, "A Sweatshop Romance" does not provide the slightest insight into the inner lives or external circumstances of the protagonists before emigration. Therefore the level of their change after coming to America may only be surmized. It would be reasonable then to argue that perhaps Heyman´s penny-pinching originates from an initial struggle as a fresh immigrant for providing himself with such basics as food and shelter. It is likely that, as well as David Levinsky, Heyman is driven to earn as much money as he can in order to climb higher in his position. What is criticized here by Cahan is the poor choice of priorities in Heyman´s, and many other of immigrants´, life, that puts money on the first and most important position. This misguided sense of obligation to keep however ruthless the type of work because of a one´s fear of poverty is ultimately the cause of the immigrants´ misery.

Furthermore, Heyman´s motivation for this drive to work is also the desire to marry Beile one day, but only after he has worked enough to possess an amount suitable for marrying a beautiful woman. This motive puts money as a major condition for marriage, whereas love should be foremost; this is also already known from the previous short story, "A Providential Match", and can be considered another Cahan´s critique of Jewish habits.

This story may be considered an example of the standard working conditions of an average Jewish immigrant in America of the period around the turn of the century. It is best seen right at the beginning of the tale where Cahan explains the meaning behind the word ´sweatshop´:

> *Dangling against the door or scattered among the bundles, there were cooking utensils, dirty linen, Lipman´s velvet skullcap, hats, shoes, shears, cottonspools, and whatnot. A red-hot kitchen stove and a blazing grate full of glowing flatirons combined to keep up the overpowering temperature of the room, and helped to justify its nickname of sweatshop in the literal sense of the epithet.* (Cahan, 1996 p. 112)

An interesting feature of this particular issue is how lightly and in a comic way Cahan managed to ridicule the immigrants´ despair issuing from their low wages, when he described a worker´s day as one that has twelve coats instead of twenty-four hours.

> *"They read the Tuesday Psalm in the Synagogue this morning, but I should have read the Monday one."*
> *"Why?"*
> *"You see, […] here I have still two coats to make of the twelve that I got yesterday. So it´s still Monday with me. My Tuesday won´t begin until about two o´clock this afternoon."*
> *"How much will you make this week?"*
> *"I don´t expect to finish more than four days´ work by the end of the week, and will only get eight dollars on Friday […] I´ll call it Wednesday, see?"*
> *"When I´m married […] and an old woman asks me for Sabbath expenses, I´ll tell her it is only Wednesday – it isn´t Friday – and I have no money to give her."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 116)

By ridiculing their hard-working conditions this way, Abraham Cahan perhaps wanted to call out to all the hard-working immigrants, as well as their employers, to make them realize how blindly they rush themselves after meaningless labor for even less meaningful wages.

Another theme that Wynn emphasizes, and one which perhaps originates from Cahan´s sense of socialism, is one *"of taking pride in our ideologies, of defending our morals and believing whole heartedly in what we know is right while guarding ourselves against mistreatment."* (Wynn, 2009) This theme is embodied in the character of David, who, unlike Heyman, did not hesitate to speak up for Beile and encourage her to stand up to her employer, thusly winning her heart. This character is put into contrast with Heyman to emphasize the huge difference between their personalities. It can also be viewed as a smaller picture that mirrors the social situation in America concerning factory workers laboring for minimal wages and consequently a socialistic movement. Cahan´s aim here is to point out two different kinds of immigrant workers: the brave and confident, like David, and the insecure and cowardly, like Heyman. Through his characters, Cahan seems to be addressing ordinary workers to empower themselves against the often very bad working conditions and the mistreatment of employees.

Cahan criticizes a certain pretense in the already assimilated and well-provided immigrants. Despite being an immigrant herself, Mrs Liepman has no sympathy for her

workers and treats them as her inferiors. Moreover, she does so in front of new incomers from her old country as a way to show her success and to meet her personal needs for satisfaction and trivial recognition. However, when she goes too far in her boasting and tries to make Beile look like her servant, not she is humiliated by David revealing her true intentions:

> *"Your friends see through it, anyhow, don´t you?" he addressed himself to the newcomers. "She wanted to brag to you. That´s what she troubled you for. She showed off her parlor carpet to you, didn´t she? But did she tell you that it had been bought on the installment plan, and that the custom peddler threatened to take it away unless she paid more regularly?"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 123)

Cahan´s message from the climax of the story seems clear. David and Beile leave the sweatshop as proud individuals who gained love and freedom from the conflict, whereas Heyman remains there with only his *"machine to smother his misery"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 123) as a punishment for being a coward without ideals.

6.3. "Circumstances"

Cahan´s "Circumstances" also deal with East-European immigrants´ struggles in America. However, it can be considered rather unconventional in comparison with his other short stories. The reason is that the main protagonists, Tatyana and Boris, did not change over from the poverty in Russia to financial prosperity in America like many of the characters in Cahan´s other works did. It was the other way around for them. They are both educated and suitable for higher positions were it not for the unstable political situation in Russia that complicated lives of many Jews at the break of the century. After a year of constant endeavors to find a position in forensic fields, Boris took his wife and together they immigrated to America, where he found a job in a factory as a common Jewish immigrant worker.

Nevertheless, we can observe a lot of themes in "Circumstances" that all the stories have more or less in common. One theme is an immigrant´s change in appearance in order to fit in with the majority. Boris had to undergo some changes in his dressing habits:

> *Boris´s shabby working clothes, his few days´ growth of beard and general appearance of physical exhaustion vainly combined, as it were, to extinguish the light of culture and intellectuality from his looks; they only succeeded in adding the tinge of martyrdom to them.* (Cahan, 1996 p. 130)

Unlike David Levinsky or other Cahan´s characters who did much better in America in comparison to their former life across the ocean, Boris had to adjust to his surroundings – to his circumstances – in order to be accepted as one of the workers in the factory. Even though little is revealed about his former life, except that he probably comes from a higher social intellectual class, the division between who he was and who he is now is clearly hinted by the narrator´s voice, when he says his character has "*the tinge of martyrdom*." (Cahan, 1996 p. 130) Despite the fact that this change affects only his clothes, which seems unimportant and completely negligible for his intellectuality, Cahan clearly wants to emphasize that the tailor makes the man when it comes to adapting to a new culture. Subsequently, he accordingly implies that such a change does not necessarily have to occur in the traditional order – that is from poverty to prosperity. Boris himself seems to be aware of the fact that his circumstances appear rather paradoxical, as he says:

> *Every shop clerk, who at home hardly knew there was such a thing as a university in the world, goes to college here; and I am serving the community by supplying it with pearl buttons for six dollars a week. […] People who hang about pawn shops have no right to ´interesting points´ and Guy de Maupassant and that sort to of luxury. Poverty is a crime!* (Cahan, 1996 p. 132)

However, this decline in Boris´s looks is not the only and most apparent reason for his wife´s detachment, at least not essentially, as she says at the beginning of the story that his looks *"would move her to pity and quicken her love for him."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 130) It was only when Boris was put into contrast with Dalsky, a student of medicine and a teacher of English who came to live with them as a boarder. Dalsky can be considered an intellectual doppelganger to Boris´s character since he is succeeding in education, work and also looks like a gentleman.

Nevertheless, the opposing features of the two men in Tatyana´s life are not the main cause for the change in her affections. The primal reason for it must be sought for in a specific personal quality that can be found in most of Cahan´s female characters. The quality can be defined as a sort of superficial inclination towards men with a good

reputation and gentlemen-like behavior, rather than searching for love. This tendency to treat love and marriage as a reasonable investment is a common feature of Jewish communities. Perhaps that is why Cahan chose to enrich his female characters with it, to point it out as a divergent factor from Americanness. Tatyana herself admits this as she reflects over the reasons of her marriage with Boris:

> *He was far from being what Russian college girls would call "a dear little soul"; for he was tall and lank, awkwardly nearsighted, and rather plain of feature, and the scar over his left eyebrow, too, added anything but beauty to his looks. But for all that, the married young women of his circle voted him decidedly interesting. Tanya was attracted by his authoritative tone and rough sort of impetuosity upon discussing social or literary topics; by his reputation for being one of the best-read men at the university, as well as a leading spirit in student "circles, "and by the perfect Russian way in which his coal-black hair fell over his commanding forehead.* (Cahan, 1996 p. 128)

It is no wonder, then, that when Boris, formerly intellectual yet now rather shaggy in appearance, is put into contrast with Dalsky on a daily basis she inevitably has to be attracted by Dalsky. They took a boarder in as a means of getting out of their heavy financial situation, yet ultimately this decision set them apart.

In this short story a clash of two opposing worlds constitutes the basis of conflict as well as the characters´ effort to maintain a part of their old world in their new hybrid lives. In case of Boris and Tanya, it is the desperate clinging towards intellectual reading and its subsequent discussion or, as they call it, ´interesting points´. It is apparent that this small piece of their old life is keeping them happy at the beginning, yet as they assimilate into their new American life more and more, it starts to have an opposite effect on them:

> *"Besides, I am sick of these ´interesting points.´ They have been the ruin of us, Tanychka; they eat us up alive, these ´interesting points´- the deuce grab them. If I cared less about ´interesting points´" – he articulated the two words with venomous relish – "and a little more about your future and mine, I might not now have to stick in a button factory."* (Cahan, 1996 p. 131)

Similarly as in the other tales, the opposing features of the double lives of the protagonists conflict with each other so that it ultimately becomes clear that they cannot exist simultaneously without damage. Boris slowly changes into a morose as

the *"hard, uncongenial toil was deepening its impress upon him"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 138) and as consequence, Tanya drifts more and more apart from him.

Even though Tanya and Dalsky do not proceed with their affair, the situation leaves a scarf in the main protagonists all the same. In terms of Tanya´s perspective, Dalsky may be understood as a symbol of Americanization, of something that does not quite fit in with her life, yet she longs for it desperately. When he moves out, he leaves only a flower behind, which serves as a reminder of him.

> *She avoided looking at it, lest it should thrill her with a crushing sense of her desolation, of her bereavement, as it were. Yet, when she was about to remove it, she had not the heart to do so. She strayed about like a shadow, and often felt as though it were enough to touch her to make her melt away in tears.* (Cahan, 1996 p. 143)

In this part a symbolic parallel between Tanya´s contradictory feelings about the flower and the contradictory feelings of many other protagonists´ in their process of Americanization is depicted. Most of Cahan´s characters do their best to remove their old country features, yet they want to keep some of them at some level as well. These contradictions ultimately cause hopeless and tragic endings to their stories with a sense of stagnation coming from not being able to move forward nor go back.

Lastly, it is also very interesting to analyze why this short story carries such a name. Over the course of the story, it becomes clear that Tanya and Boris found a certain comfort in hiding behind their circumstances which are to blame for their difficult life situation. A kind of buck-passing is expressed that allows the main protagonists not to blame themselves, as Boris often repeats to his wife: *"Cry to our circumstances, not to me. Circumstances, circumstances, Tanya!"* (Cahan, 1996 p. 135)

6.4. "A Ghetto Wedding"

In "A Ghetto Wedding" Nathan and Goldy, a Jewish couple, struggle to make sufficient amount of money for their wedding and an apartment of their own. Even though they both work, the sum they put together every month is not sufficient for both the wedding of Goldy´s desires and a new apartment. Trying to save as much money as they can only results in endless circulation of costs and expenses without any extra cash

to save, due to which they put off the wedding many times. Finally, they decide to go with a rather risky plan: invite as many guests as they can to their big fancy wedding and from received wedding gifts equip their new big apartment. In this way they achieve one goal without having to sacrifice the other. However, as they later discover, the reality does not always meet the expectations, which results in a bitter disappointment.

A certain profligacy of Goldy´s character appears, when she seems to care more for the ´respectable wedding´ than for the love for her partner which it represents and what should be much more important - marriage itself:

> *"One does not marry every day," she argued, "and when I have at last lived to stand under the bridal canopy with my predestined one, I will not do so like a beggar maid. Give me a respectable wedding, or none at all, Nathan, do you hear?"* (Cahan, 1996 pp. 148-149)

Another feature that closely relates to Goldy´s vanity is her need to flaunt her American success to her family and friends in Russia, even though there is no success. That is also the reason why she insisted on a ´respectable wedding´ at the first place; she is hoping to gain respect from it.

Perhaps as punishment for her vanity and extravagance, her wedding is a disaster when almost no guests attend it, and the ones that do appear bring only lame gifts. As the bard sings a horrifying song, which was as if this whole failure was thrown into Goldy´s face, the atmosphere even worsens:

> *Wail, bride, wail!*
> *This is a time of tears.*
> *Think of thy past days:*
> *Alas! They are gone to return nevermore.*
> *[…]*
> *And thy good mother beyond the seas,*
> *And thy father in his grave*
> *Near where thy cradle was rocked,*
> *Weep, bride, weep!*
> *Though his soul is better off*
> *Than we are here underneath*
> *In dearth and cares and ceaseless pangs,*
> *Weep, sweet bride, weep!* (Cahan, 1996 p. 158)

The bard here serves as a reminder of her old self, which perhaps with plainer surroundings was plainer itself and did not long for superficial things. Subsequently, he

also notes that her past is never going to return, which is a symbol for losing her old country to America. Yet, she is not happy with the outcome, even though it appeared to be something she really desired. Consequently the whole ceremony feels more like a funeral than a wedding, which effects Goldy so much that she suffers through the rest of it as in a hypnosis. This state of lethargy can be paralleled to almost every immigrant´s experience after coming to America with great expectations of a better life and afterwards being disappointed, as they stagnate into a low paid job and thus live from hand to mouth.

Furthermore, Nathan´s and Goldy´s wedding can be understood as a symbol of the New World, which the two protagonists are yet not prepared to be a part of, because it is far greater and more demanding than what they are used to. All of this and their big new, yet empty, apartment work as a parallel to the immigrants´ empty lives when they leave their home country. In the end, Goldy ended up with only a couple of pieces of various furniture which did not fit into the big apartment, the same way as the traces of her old culture do not go together with the new Americanized identities of the immigrants of Cahan´s world.

Nevertheless, "A Ghetto Wedding" ends rather exceptionally in comparison to other Cahan´s works, as it has somewhat uplifting outcome.

> *[…] they felt a stream of happiness uniting them, as it coursed through the veins of both, and they were filled with a blissful sense of oneness the like of which they had never tasted before. So happy were they that the gang behind them, and the bare rooms toward which they were directing their steps, and the miserable failure of the wedding, all suddenly appeared too insignificant to engage their attention – paltry matters alien to their new life, remote from the enchanted world in which they now dwelt.* (Cahan, 1996 pp. 162-163)

This ending symbolizes a new life for them. Lessoned by their experience they have no further vain materialistic desires and can rejoice in having only one another. The narrator´s voice also suggests better future prospects for them, as he lets the nature speak for him*: "[…] a rustling tree – a melancholy witness of its better days, […] an old tree whispered overhead its tender felicitations."* (Cahan, 1996 pp. 162-163)

7. Conclusion

This diploma thesis focused on further analysis of the literary work of the Jewish immigrant writer and editor Abraham Cahan. Generally, the thesis was concerned with his well-known novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), but it also dealt with a collection of two novellas and four short stories, *The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories* (1898). The thesis analyzed the varied aspects linked with the themes of immigration and assimilation in the New World, as was America often referred to during its periods of massive immigration waves.

Initially, Abraham Cahan is one of the most powerful writers of the Jewish immigrant fiction in the context of Americanization. This introduction reflects Abraham Cahan´s personal experience as a young Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe and puts his literary fiction into a wider discourse reflecting the reality of mostly New York´s Jewish Ghettos. Simultaneously, the main focus of his whole literary career is summarized into motives and themes dealing with the immigrants´ struggles with adapting and assimilating into a brand new host culture. There is an emphasis on the mechanisms of suppression of many cultural features of the old country, resulting in creation of a hybrid dual Jewish-American identity. In the component chapters and subchapters, this duality and its features were further analyzed as the core of Cahan´s fiction.

David Levinsky serves as the first example of this dual identity, as it was examined in the early chapters of this thesis. The main focus of the chapters concerning *The Rise of David Levinsky* is in his struggle to climb up the social and economic ladder to become a prominent businessman. He mainly struggled with the mechanisms of suppression of his old country´s features, such as social customs, religion, but mostly language and connected features concerning communication. The individual chapters pointed to some of the important details that contributed to the process of out-greening David Levinsky, his manipulative management of business as well as his controversial dealing with women he was involved with over the course of his life. However, the most essential battle was fought within his own personality, as he strove to become Americanized, yet simultaneously was not able to completely abandon some of the Old World´s features, which is the ultimate reason for the overall sense of un-fulfillment and

desolation of the novel, as the outcome of the chapters dealing with the character of David Levinsky states.

In the chapters devoted to *The Imported Bridegroom*, a similar struggle in terms of the immigrant´s identity appears as with the case of David Levinsky. This chapter aimed to analyze the process of the Americanization of an immigrant student from Eastern Europe, who at first was untouched by American culture, yet later the Americanness infiltrated his personality just like in the case of other Cahan´s characters. Furthermore the chapter came to the conclusion that many of the characters mentioned in Cahan´s work were leading their lives in a Gentile style by traditional Jews. The outcome of such a lifestyle can be seen in the loss of one´s religion, or at least a proper true relationship towards it, and also partial loss of active knowledge of the mother tongue of the second generation of Jewish immigrants in America.

Another theme that was further analyzed in the chapter dealing with *The Imported Bridegroom* is homesickness, which more or less occurs in all of Cahan´s mentioned stories. We have discovered that all the characters, who struggle with their two opposing identities, at some point in the story find themselves lost somewhere between their Old World and the New. However, this does not concern only the first generation of the immigrants but also their children, who are completely Americanized, yet seem to long for something of their parents´ heritage, as was shown in the example of Flora in this novella.

Another work that was looked into was *Yekl, A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, where some features concerning a dual identity of the main protagonist are the center of focus as the outcome of his Americanization. As stated in this chapter, the duality of the main character of this story seems as the most obvious one from all of the mentioned works of fiction, as he acts very indecisively and seems to be battling this dissension every day. Simultaneously, the main motive that spreads through this story is the feeling of freedom, seen as a feature of the New World´s way of life.

Just as important as the inner struggle of the dual identities is the language of the protagonists which was further analyzed in this chapter as well, as it is a defining feature of the Jewish immigrants in the New York Ghetto at the time of Cahan´s stories. In this

subchapter we analyzed the specific way Cahan attempted to convey the immigrants´ hybrid pronunciation. Simultaneously, we established that the people of the Jewish ghettos deliberately created a new language, a Yiddish pidgin, as a specific kind of Yiddish influenced English.

The final part was concerned with Cahan´s short fiction and its close analysis in relation to the whole discourse of the thesis. Cahan´s characters are quite ordinary individuals with everyday problems and desires. However, they are also immigrants carrying their own characteristic features from the Old World and they similarly struggle to tame their Jewishness in the American context.

In the "Providential Match" the main protagonist´s struggle to find a partner was analyzed. Due to the disappointment coming from too high expectations and a consequent state of misery, the character was perceived in parallel to David Levinsky. As stated further, the feature of unfulfilled life can be found throughout all Cahan´s mentioned short stories, although some of them have rather uplifting end. "A Sweatshop Romance" provided, an insight into a Jewish immigrant´s work as a realistic mirror to the American customs of the 19th century. Cahan´s critical voice provides the readers with a rather comic way of perceiving the immigrants´ everyday struggles, as seen in "A Ghetto Wedding", where the characters, again, suffer from unfulfilled and way too great expectations of America as a country of prosperity. Mostly, Cahan´s narrative voice here calls for honesty and ordering one´s values. Furthermore, as mentioned in the subchapter about "Circumstances", the process of Americanization of Cahan´s protagonists does not concern only the cutting off of ear-locks, getting better-looking clothes and learning a new language; seen on the main protagonist of "Circumstances", Boris, the immigrant´s change is mostly dependent upon his surroundings, therefore his process of Americanization involved a sort of decline in appearance as well as intellectual interests, which we ultimately established as one of the a sources of the despondency of the story.

In conclusion, we can perhaps define Cahan´s works as the ultimate clash between two different cultures, which are, however, undividedly interconnected through migration and subsequent influence of the people with divergent customs, language and overall backgrounds.

Abraham Cahan´s contribution to the Jewish-American literature remains unquestionable, as thanks to him America received a valuable insight into its own identity. As Gordon Hutner says in the introduction to the 1996 collection of Cahan´s short stories: *"Not only do these tales illuminate something eternal in the lives and loves of immigrants, but they also tell the story of how twentieth-century America came into being."* (Hutner, 1995) The essence of this quotation is carried through all of the mentioned Cahan´s works.

8. Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřila na podrobnější analýzu literárních děl židovského přistěhovaleckého spisovatele a editora Abrahama Cahana. Obecněji se práce zabývala jeho známým románem *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), ale také sbírkou dvou novel a čtyř povídek *The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories* (1898). V práci byly analyzovány nejrůznější aspekty spojené s tématy imigrace a asimilace v Novém světě, jak na Ameriku bylo často odkazováno během období masivních imigračních vln.

Nejdříve se práce stručně zaměřila na Abrahama Cahana jakožto jednoho z nejsilnějších spisovatelů židovské přistěhovalecké beletrie v souvislosti s amerikanizací. Tento úvod odráží Cahanovu osobní zkušenost jako mladého židovského přistěhovalce z východní Evropy a chápe jeho literární díla v širším diskursu odrážejícím realitu povětšinou Newyorských židovských ghett. Hlavní pozornost celé Cahanovy literární kariéry by se dala shrnout do motivů a témat souvisejících s úsilím imigrantů přizpůsobit se zbrusu nové hostitelské kultuře. Důraz je kladen na mechanismy potlačení mnohých kulturních prvků staré vlasti, což vede k vytvoření hybridní dualistické židovsko-americké identity. Tato dualita byla podrobněji analyzována v dalších kapitolách a podkapitolách jako jádro Cahanových děl.

David Levinsky slouží jako první příklad této dvojí identity, jak bylo zkoumáno v počátečních kapitolách této práce. Hlavním cílem kapitol týkajících se díla *The Rise of David Levinsky* je podrobnější analýza úsilí hlavní postavy docílit sociálního a ekonomického vzestupu, aby se stal prominentním podnikatelem. David Levinsky zejména bojoval s mechanismy potlačování svých starých rysů z domovské země, jako jsou společenské zvyky, náboženství, ale hlavně jazyk a gestikulace. Jednotlivé kapitoly poukazují na některé z důležitých detailů, které přispěly k procesu amerikanizace Davida Levinského, jako jeho manipulativnost nebo kontroverzní styky se ženami. Nicméně k nejdůležitější bitvě došlo uvnitř jeho vlastní osobnosti, když se snažil plně začlenit do americké společnosti, ale zároveň nebyl schopen úplně opustit některé prvky své dřívější kultury, což je konečný důvod pro celkové pocity nenaplnění a opuštěnosti, které prostupují celým románem.

V kapitolách věnovaných novele *The Imported Bridegroom* vidíme podobný boj, pokud jde o dvojí identitu, stejně jako v případě Davida Levinského. Tato kapitola je cílena na analýzu procesu amerikanizace přistěhovaleckého studenta z východní Evropy, který byl zpočátku nedotčen americkou kulturou, ale později některé americké prvky infiltrovaly jeho osobnost, stejně jako v případě dalších Cahanových postav. Kromě toho kapitola dospěla k závěru, že mnoho z protagonistů Cahanových příběhů vedlo své životy v sekulárním stylu, který neodráží ortodoxní židovské tradice. Výsledkem takového života je ztráta židovského vyznání a také částečná ztráta aktivní znalosti mateřského jazyka druhé generace židovských přistěhovalců v Americe.

Dalším tématem, které bylo analyzováno v kapitole zabývající se dílem *The Imported Bridegroom*, je stesk po domově, který se více či méně vyskytuje ve všech Cahanových zmíněných dílech. Zjistili jsme, že všichni protagonisté, bojující se svou duální identitou, se v určitém okamžiku ocitnou ztraceni někde mezi jejich starým a novým světem. Nicméně toto se netýká pouze první generace přistěhovalců, ale také jejich dětí, které jsou zcela amerikanizované, ale zdá se, že touží po něčem z kultury jejich rodičů. Toto se týká například postavy Flory v této novele.

Další novela, kterou se tato diplomová práce zabývala, je *Yekl, A Tale of New York Ghetto*, ve které jsou středem pozornosti některé aspekty týkající se dvojí identity, jakožto výsledek procesu amerikanizace. Jak je uvedeno v této kapitole, dualita hlavní postavy této novely se jeví jako nejvíce zřejmá ze všech uvedených děl, což je vidět na nerozhodném chování hlavního protagonisty. Dalším důležitým motivem je pocit svobody, který se šíří celým tímto příběhem a je vnímán jako specifický rys způsobu života v Novém světě.

Stejně důležitý jako vnitřní boj dvojí identity je jazyk protagonistů, který byl dále analyzován v této kapitole. Jazyk je určujícím znakem židovských přistěhovalců v Newyorském ghettu v době Cahanových příběhů. V této podkapitole jsme analyzovali specifický způsob, kterým se Cahan pokusil zprostředkovat hybridní výslovnost imigrantů. Současně jsme si stanovili, že lidé z židovských ghett nevědomky vytvořili nový jazyk tvořený prvky jidiš a angličtiny.

Závěrečná část se zabývá Cahanovými povídkami a jejich podrobnou analýzou ve vztahu k celému diskurzu práce. Cahanovy postavy jsou docela obyčejní jedinci s každodenními problémy a touhami. Jsou to však také imigranti, kteří si s sebou nesou své vlastní charakteristické rysy ze Starého světa a snaží se tak zkrotit své židovství v kontextu americké společnosti.

V povídce "Providential Match" se hlavní protagonista snaží najít partnerku, která by odpovídala tradičním židovským parametrům. Vzhledem ke zklamáním pramenícím z příliš velkých očekávání byl hlavní hrdina tohoto příběhu vnímán souběžně s postavou Davida Levinského. Jak je uvedeno dále, motiv nenaplněného života lze nalézt v celém souboru Cahanových povídek, i když některé z nich mají spíše povznášející konec. Povídka "Sweatshop Romance" poskytuje realistické zrcadlo amerických zvyklostí 19. století v kontextu typické práce židovského imigranta. Dále autorův kritický hlas poskytuje čtenáři poněkud komickým způsobem popis každodenních bojů přistěhovalců, což je vidět na příkladu povídky "A Ghetto Wedding", kde hlavní protagonisté opět trpí nenaplněním svých příliš velkých očekávání od země, kterou považovali za zemi nekonečných možností a prosperity. Podtext tohoto vyprávění většinou volá po poctivosti a uspořádání žebříčku životních hodnot. Dále, jak je uvedeno v kapitole zabývající se povídkou "Circumstances", se proces amerikanizace Cahanových protagonistů netýká pouze změny vzhledu, nákupu nového oblečení a osvojení si nového jazyka. Jak jsme mohli vidět například na hlavní postavě této poslední povídky, Borisovi, jeho změna je závislá na okolí, ve kterém se ocitá. Jelikož je zaměstnán jako řadový pracovník, jeho proces amerikanizace spočívá spíše v jakémsi poklesu týkajícím se jak vzhledu, tak i jeho intelektuality. Tento pokles je konečnou příčinou celkové sklíčené atmosféry příběhu.

Na závěr můžeme snad definovat Cahanova díla jako střet dvou odlišných kultur, které jsou však neoddělitelně propojené prostřednictvím migrace a následného vlivu lidí s odlišnými zvyky, jazykem a celkovým původem.

Abraham Cahan bezpochyby přispěl velkou měrou k židovsko-americké literatuře, protože díky němu Amerika získala cenný vhled do své vlastní identity. Gordon Hutner říká v úvodu ke sbírce Cahanových povídek z roku 1996: *"Nejen, že tyto příběhy osvětlují něco věčného v životech přistěhovalců, ale také vyprávějí příběh o tom, jak se zrodila*

Amerika dvacátého století." (Hutner, 1995) Podstata této citace nás provází všemi zmíněnými díly Abrahama Cahana.

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