

SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN THE JEWISH AMERICAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

The increasing interest in the ethnical American literature is not accidental – the literature of American immigrants depicts specific issues which are characteristic namely for a particular ethnic group. However, in many cases the complexity of the painful breach from the old tradition, the challenges that the immigrants encountered while entering the new society, the painful and ambivalent memories of their native-speaking childhood are common to a lot of immigrants from East European countries. This article describes the ways resorted to by the immigrants to get into the mainstream US society and in order to find their new identity at the same time rejecting their old selves. The article also attempts to disclose the aftermaths of these processes. All the inferences are drawn from the authentic texts by Jewish American writers.

KEY WORDS: ethnicity, immigrants, challenges, loss of the old identity, search for the new identity, mainstream US society, alienation, marginal man.

Anotacija

Didėjantis susidomėjimas etnine JAV literatūra nėra atsitiktinis: Amerikos imigrantų literatūra atskleidžia savitas problemas, kurios būdingos tam tikroms tautinių mažumų grupėms. Tačiau skausmingas atotrūkis nuo senosios tradicijos, naujosios JAV visuomenės iššūkiai imigrantams, besitengiantiems į ją patekti, priešaringi jausmai bei skaudūs vaikystės prisiminimai vienija daugelį imigrantų iš Rytų Europos šalių. Šiame straipsnyje aprašoma, kaip imigrantai stengiasi įsilieti į JAV visuomenę, sąmoningai atsisakydami savo prigimtinio tapatumo ir ieškodami naujo, amerikietiškojo. Remiantis autentiškais JAV žydų kilmės autorių tekstais, straipsnyje nagrinėjami „amerikonėjimo“ procesų poveikiai literatūros kūrinių veikėjams.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: tautinės mažumos, imigrantai, iššūkiai, tapatybė, JAV visuomenė, susvetimėjimas, marginalai.

Introduction

The 20th century literary works of American ethnic minorities and immigrants comprise a most valuable resource of authentic evidence concerning painful and in most cases tragic search for identity by the immigrants of all over the world whose major objective was to become equal members of the US mainstream society, i.e. to get “americanized”.

However, it is acknowledged by the literary criticism, that literature is not a mere reflection of social reality, or transcendental manifestation of truth. Yet, the relations of literature with the social environment, the surrounding world cannot be so categorically and unambiguously denied since any literary work is a “dialogue with one’s own history” (Eagleton, 2000, p. 81)¹. Moreover, the history of modern literary theory is part of political and ideological history as literary analysis presents not only an intended intellectual research, but also reveals an attitude towards the present day social and historical epoch since any attempt to comprehend humanistic values, feelings and experiences inevitably intervene with the broader and deeper convictions, associated with the origin of an individual and society as well as interpretations of historical past (cf.: Eagleton, 2000, p. 202).

Furthermore, the American new historicism and British cultural materialism – the two major modes within contemporary criticism – in order to bring to light the political dimension of literary texts, often read them “in connection with non-literary texts and with reference of the dominant discourse or discourse of a given period” (Bertens, 2003, p. 190). This allows us to admit that literary texts are “time – and place – bound verbal constructions” (Bertens, 2003, p. 177), which reflect very intermingled relations between the representatives of ethnic minorities i.e., the historical, political, social,

psychological, religious, cultural aspects that were transferred from their homelands to the new continent, moreover it should be emphasized that the clashes of each ethnic minority with the US society bear a specific character.

The present paper endeavours to describe the features of the search for identity by the Jewish immigrants the way they are described in the Jewish ethnical literary texts, i.e. the work is based on the authors who amply reveal all the hopeless absurdity of the ambivalent existence in the alien US mainstream society not infrequently verging on tragedy which is very often compensated by return to the native roots and heritage.

Significance of the article: the Jewish literature has been chosen not accidentally – some of the authors were born in Lithuania (Abraham Cahan was born in a small village near Vilna, Lithuania) (Pinsker, 1992, p. 2), on the other hand, the Jews mainly had emigrated from eastern Europe (Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, Poland etc.), where the mass emigration of Russian Jews followed the assassination of Russian Tzar Alexander II in 1882 as a consequence of political persecution and impending arrests. The painful wrenching from Old World tradition to a tentative accommodation with American values can indeed be viewed as a compelling vision of the majority of the Eastern European immigrants’ fate-possibly Lithuanians’ as well. So these authors set themselves a task to tell their own story, common to the majority of East European immigrants, the story of the loss of their old identity and search of the new one. And here literature is a perfect and unique mode to cover the experience of entire generations or even a “unique instrument to discern something that is not immediately discernable” (Daujotytė, 2001, p. 17)².

¹ Translation by the author of this article.

² Translation by the author of this text.

At the same time, literature is a peculiar mode of being as it is a “created being, virtual being” (Daujotytė, 2001, p. 17)³. Here, a famous H. G. Gadamer’s idea could be provided saying that “from everything with what we contact in nature and history it’s namely a piece of art that speaks to us most directly. It breaths a mysterious closeness, ... as if in general any distance does not exist at all and every touch with a piece of art is a touch with oneself” (Cf.: Gadamer, 1999, p. 56).

One more point which makes this article urgent and significant today is the fact that recently the American literary canon is being revised, i.e. much rightfully deserved attention is devoted to the ethnical authors representing the rich experience of diverse American ethnic groups – be it African, European or Asian – the literary heritage of which reveals the new essence of American identity being forged by all these people – the immigrants. Ultimately, nowadays, the immigration to this country hasn’t yet ceased – it is also a phenomenon of our day, even with endless numbers of our compatriots – Lithuanians – anxiously lined up at the gate of the US embassy in Vilnius in wait of the long coveted visa, so the aim of the present paper is also to shed some light on the issue of what it meant to „become an American“ for our fathers and forefathers. This article attempts to present an understanding of becoming an American in all its complexity, emphasizing that this is a perpetual „business“, that America is for ever „in the making“ (Jeziarska, 1994, p. 1872), to which immigrants from our country will also contribute their own share.

The purpose of the work is:

1. to analyse the authentic texts of Jewish immigrant writers;
2. to describe the complexity of the painful breach from the old tradition;
3. to define the challenges that the immigrants encountered;
4. to reveal the means and ways resorted to by the immigrants to get into the mainstream US society;
5. to disclose the aftermaths of the process and attempts of one’s search for identity.

To perform these tasks the authentic literary texts by Jewish American authors were analysed and they form the basis for making conclusions: Anzia Jeziarska „America and I“, Mary Antin „The Promised Land“, Michael Gold „Jews without Money“, Albert Maltz „The happiest Man on Earth“, Abraham Cahan „Yekl“, „Rise of David Levinsky“, Irving Howe „A Margin of Hope“, „World of Our Fathers“, some more recent texts by Grace Paley „The Expensive moment“, „Good-bye and Good luck“, Bernard Malamud „The Magic Barrel“ where the writers vividly and authentically depict the search for the „Promised Land“ by their characters, moreover, in many cases these experiences are autobiographical. The majority of these texts are published in “The Heath anthology of American literature“ (vol. 2

edited by P. Lauter). Furthermore, it should be noted, that „writers of fiction may include true and historical accurate details in their works, but they create their main stories not because of a wish to be faithful to history but rather because of a hope to say something significant about life“ (Roberts, 1989, p. 51).

The methods applied are as follows:

1. Positivistic – the relations of causality are emphasized and a possibility of at least partial explanation of each literary work is admitted.
2. Sociological – the connection of literature and society is accentuated. The motivation and social interpretations are resorted to.
3. Hermeneutic – which admits philosophical and ontological relation between humanistic motivations and the issues of human world (Modernios literatūros teorijos žinyas, 1998, p. 108).

The latter method is also viewed here as “the possibility of interpretation of literature“ (Webster’s Dictionary, p. 632), which includes both the extent to which the reader possibly creates the meaning of the texts and also the one the author intended (Peck, Coyle, 2002, p. 156–157). Thus the inadequacy of the writer’s intention and the individual understanding as well as all interpretations of the author of this article is also included.

This article is focused on assumptions of the American new historicism and the British cultural materialism which admit that literary texts are absolutely inseparable from their historical and cultural context. Furthermore, literature is viewed not simply as a product of history, it also actively makes history, and frequently serves as a vehicle of power (Cf.: Bertens, 2003, p. 177–190).

1. America – the Promised Land

Since its early days the United States has welcomed immigrants in numbers that swelled to the hundreds of thousands who inevitably carried in their heads and hearts their own old worlds of tradition, memory, historical experience, skills, knowledge, beliefs. „The Coming of the Old world made America truly new to everyone involved: the Europeans, the Africans and tens of millions of people already there“ (Countryman, 1996, p. 3). Their inextricable entanglement, their living in a different world – so many kinds of people in a shared place with a vast diversity of experience intertwined their fates so that over a long period of time they ultimately came to share an identity as well.

However the history of each ethnic group should be described in different terms. Whereas the white English speaking immigrants could tell „a triumphant story of colonization, independence, expansion, republicanism and capitalist development“ (Countryman, 1996, p. 24) the East Europeans would „circle around a mixture of hope and disappointment“ (Countryman, 1996, p. 241), in other words, it might be a story of loss, on the one hand, and gain, possibilities and perspective, on the other.

Despite the tempting hopes and perspective one would encounter with a complex task to unambiguously provide a direct answer to the question, as to why

³ The same.

namely America – in those times still the unknown and unexplored land has become and still is a country of attraction, the Promised Land of Fulfillment, the Land of American Dream for those seeking freedom, democratic rights, personal happiness, possibilities for realization of such expectations as becoming rich and affluent, obtaining land and wealth. A classification of these motives into political, social, religious, personal, etc. could be drawn, however this is not an objective of the present paper. But it should be mentioned that no matter what the motives might have been, people all over the world would eagerly venture a dangerous ocean journey and great hardships of settlement.

What were the motives and expectations that drove the Jewish people from their countries of residence, what were the reasons of their diaspora?

Wordsworth Henry Longfellow in the poem called „The Jewish cemetery at Newport“ suggests some ostensible reasons:

*How came they here? What burst of Christian hate,
What persecution, merciless and blind,
Drove o'er the sea...*

*They lived in narrow streets and lanes obscure,
Ghetto and Judenstrass, in mirk and mire;
Taught in the school of patience to endure
The life of anguish and the death of fire*

Mary Antin also describes how unsettled and insecure their family felt in Russia: „I was used to going away from home, and “America“ did not mean much more to me than “Kherson“ or “Odessa“ or any other names of distant places“ (1994, p. 996). The author goes further to describe that the Jewish community in Russia – the country of their former residence – was supposed to strictly obey the rules that encumbered their living: „In Polotzk we had been trained and watched, our days had been regulated, our conduct prescribed“ (1994, p. 996). Mary Antin's father was inspired by a new vision – just the same as many other nations all over the world – vast numbers of Jewish families were enticed to test themselves and find their own secure place in the United States of America.

The Biblical image of the Promised Land had been a driving force already in modern times when Jews migrated widely round the world. The unbearable life-long ethnical oppression and hardly tolerable life conditions led to an intensification of emigration from Eastern Europe. Plenty of Jews escaped almost a certain death by coming to the United States. It is estimated that between 1880–1920 about 2 ½ mln. Jews immigrated here, where they expected to find their Promised Land.

For immigrants America was the land of hope, opportunity and freedom with „the golden door“ open to all, where they came to start a new better life and enjoy the opportunity and affluence. But more important, Jews went to America hoping to live as human beings should, namely, with freedom and dignity. Mary Antin's father Israel in her autobiographical novel „The Promised Land“ embodies the main hopes of all Jews, who came

to America at that period and presents a truthful account of a Jewish family odyssey from an essentially medieval life in Russia to a modern life in America. Father Israel came to America not only in search of bread for his hungry family, but also in search of freedom: human, economical, political, religious because „the boasted freedom of the New World meant to him far more than the right to reside, travel, and work wherever he pleased, it meant the freedom to speak his thoughts, to throw off the shackles of superstition, to test his own fate, unhindered by political or religious tyranny“ (1994, p. 946). Thus, Israel came to America to become a human being, capable of using all human rights, having left all his wealth in Russia, in the land where he had had few of the rights of the poorest peasants, where his family was restricted in terms of religious options.

2. Challenges of americanization

However, Jews as all other immigrants, found out that it was extremely difficult to get used to a strange country, its culture and society, because they had to learn so many different things, to get rid of their own traditions and accept the new American ones. So soon Jews, as well as people from all over the world who poured to America, discovered, that happiness and fulfillment were not ready made in store for them awaiting just to be enjoyed.

Anzia Jezierska in her autobiographical essay „America and I“ exults: „America was a land of living hope, woven of dreams, aflame with longing and desire. Choked for ages in the airless oppression in Russia, the Promised Land rose up-wings for my stifled spirit,.. freedom to me in my prison“ (1994, p. 1865). However after her first fruitless steps she exclaims: „The America that I sought was nothing but a shadow, an echo-a chimeria of lunatics and crazy immigrants“ (1994, p. 1871).

So, it was evident that the expectations of the immigrants could come to realization, but through persistent efforts and unceasing endeavour. The first difficulties awaited the immigrants directly after the landing in America as they had to find housing and work, moreover, that at this period immigrants were especially vulnerable and needed to rely on others. However, newly arrived immigrants were sometimes exploited by the earlier immigrants from their own groups. Anzia Jezierska's story „America and I“ reveals this problem: a young Jewish girl still dizzy from her high visions and golden hopes has to put her feet down on earth, as she finds a job in an americanized family, where she is exploited. They offer her a comfortable bed to sleep, three meals a day and an association with „Americans“. But is it enough for a poor girl possessed by far-seeking dreams who came to the „land of flowing opportunity“? On the other hand, earlier immigrants frequently were the ones to offer support and encouragement. In „The Promised Land“ Mary Antin with pleasure enumerates the people who assisted their family in many important matters. „The kind of people who assisted us in these matters form a group by themselves in the gallery of friends. <...> I must begin with those who came to us on

Wall Street and taught us our first steps. To my mother <...> the woman who showed her how to make the fire was an angel of deliverance. A fairy godmother to us children was she who led us to a wonderful country called „uptown“ <...>“ (1994, p. 943–944).

Even after the Jews had settled, namely in or around New York city, they found life more difficult, their first experiences far more bitter, because the quality of life often contrasted sharply with what many of these people had expected. As many Jews arrived in poverty, they found themselves on the bottom of social and economic scale, consequently, they were forced to live in bad conditions, in crowded apartments in tenement buildings where sanitation, heat and even light or water were at a premium. Such horrible living conditions are depicted in „Jews without Money“ by Michael Gold. He describes the tenement which is nothing more „but a junk heap of rotten lumber and brick“; the tenement, with the plaster always falling down, with the stairs broken and dirty, with no drinking water for days; the tenement, with narrow airshafts instead of windows. Other immigrants didn't have a room at all. The girl from „America and I“ didn't even have a bed, and she „slept on a mattress on the floor in a rat-hole of a room occupied by a dozen immigrants“ (1994, p. 1868). Michael Gold describes only one tenement, but there were thousands in America at that time. Often the landlords, who lived at a safe distance from these structures, could remain comfortably oblivious of the conditions inside them. In Michael Gold's story, landlord Mr. Zunzer, who has already found his place in the American society, doesn't care about the conditions his tenants live in.

As a matter of fact, was it all what the promised land had to offer to immigrants? Did they find the work, which they were dreaming about? Most immigrants found jobs, but the conditions they worked in were also substandard, as they were forced to work in overcrowded, unpleasant and sometimes dangerous sweatshops without adequate sanitation facilities, and low wages for long hours was the common situation. In Anzia Jezerska's story, the main character works in the sweatshop. The only job she does from morning till night is sewing on buttons and the only contact she gets with America is handling dead buttons. However, the wages she gets is not enough even for bread and rent. Such surroundings could only ruin a person, therefore immigrants began to lose their hopes. If after the arrival, they had their strong bodies, their eager hands and inextinguishable hope, as the girl from „America and I“ who says: „My young, strong body, my heart and soul was pregnant with the un-lived lives of generations clamoring for expression“ (1994, p. 1965), so now they are disillusioned, and, furthermore, feel marginalized to the American mainstream society.

The Great Depression which burst in 1932 also added to the disappointment. By this year the Americans were confronting the worst economic depression they had ever had. People lost their jobs, farms, businesses. It is estimated that in 1933 about 13 million Americans were out of work. The collapse of economy had ruined the

plans and destroyed the dreams of many immigrants. Albert Maltz, writing about the period of depression, expresses the feelings marginal to the American mainstream society, such as: undercurrent anger at injustice and suffering in „The Happiest Man on Earth“. Jesse, the main character, represents millions of immigrants who roamed the country, hoping to find any kind of job, who were ready to sacrifice their lives in order to provide their families with essentials, who suffered materially and morally. „I just can't live like this any more. Is my life worth anything now. We're just starving at home, <...> I ain't got no hope. I ain't done right for Ella, Ella deserved better. This is the only chance I see in my whole life to do something for her I've just been a failure“. The character of Jesse represents the stoic struggle for self-realization, his viable human attempt for a better life, for spiritual liberation and, at the same time, the triumph over the forces of repression. He is eager to take up a highly risky job of driving nitroglycerin trucks for which he's payed a dollar a mile. However, there's always a possibility of an unexpected blow, and there will be „no truck, no bridge to give any evidence, no corpse, there's nothing. „That's what you get for your God damn dollar a mile“ (1994, p. 1771), exclaims his brother-in law.

The same desperate situation we see in Michael Gold's „Jews without Money“: „Here was a panic on Wall Street. Multitudes were without work, there were strikes, suicides and food riots. The prostitutes roamed our street like wolves; never was there so much competition among them“ (1994, p. 1758). „People are turning into wolves!“ (p. 1758–1759). Many families lost their homes and became beggars and their life meant freezing and hunger.

Therefore, those who were strongly determined to survive and follow their dream to grasp the chimera they were running after, were ready to cope with all the hardships and barriers, set for them in America. Lost in such wilderness, the immigrants started thinking that the only key of success in the USA was to become americanized.

3. Ways of americanization – the loss of the old identity and search for the new one

One of the ways to assimilate into the American society was first of all to accumulate capital and become rich. Jesse from „The Happiest Man on Earth“ by Albert Maltz was ready to die in order to earn money for his family, because wealth allows people to live a normal life and enjoy it. He says he would like to buy a pair of shoes, to make cigarettes, to buy some candy for the kids, to eat some himself. „Yes, by God, I want to eat some candy. I want a glass of beer once a day. I want Ella dressed up. I want her to eat meat three times a week, four times maybe. I want to take my family to the movies“ (1994, p. 1773).

The Jewish woman from „America and I“ by Anzia Jezerska, considers wealth also one of possible ways to independence and freedom. „Now I'd have money. My own, earned money, free money in my hands. My dol-

lars that I could spend like a free person. My dollars that would make me feel with everybody alike!“ (1994, p. 1867). However, wealth was not the only joy in the immigrants' lives. On the contrary, it not infrequently made people get disappointed when they realized that money wasn't the only indicator of their degree of americanization. Here's the example from „Jews without Money“ by Michael Gold: „Mr. Zunzer was a rich person, but money didn't bring happiness to him. He was hungry for them. He would cry at night thinking about them“ (1994, p. 1763). He formed the habit of saving money, that was horrible and made him crazy. Though Mr. Zunzer owned a pawnshop and rented tenements, he still lived on dry bread, saved pennies like a miser and, moreover, lost his closet people: wife and children. „His children grew up hating him for miserly ways. One by one they left him. The eldest boy became a thief. The second boy joined the U.S. Army. The girl disappeared“ (1994, p. 1763).

Another important way to become part of the American society was education. The Immigrants knew there was no surer way to their advancement and happiness. The father from „The Promised Land“ by Mary Antin, who had had no opportunity to acquire education in his native country Russia, expects his children to become students in America and fill the house with books and intellectual company. Children also considered education to be a serious matter. Going to school was their greatest joy, pride and ambition. It was especially significant, that education was free in America – „the essence of American opportunity, the treasure that no thief could touch, not even misfortune or poverty. No applications made, no questions asked, no examinations, no exclusions, no machinations, no fees. The doors stood open for every one of us“ (1994, p. 943).

One more step to break out from the pitfall of the marginal consciousness for the immigrants was the acquisition of the language. The English language helped get rid of the disgusting name „greenhorn“ or „hyphenated“ Americans, but, on the other hand, mere knowledge of the language didn't make the immigrants real Americans. The main heroine from the story „America and I“ says: „Every new world made me see new American things with American eyes. I felt like a Columbus, finding new worlds through every new word. But words alone were only for the inside of me. The outside of me still branded me for a steerage immigrant and in my heart the emptiness still hurt. I knew now the American language. And I knew now, if I talked to the Americans from morning till night, they could not understand what the Russian soul of me wanted. Between my soul and the American soul were worlds of difference that no words could bridge over“ (1994, p. 1871).

If the knowledge of the English language did not suffice to ensure the comfort of the soul and thus let the immigrants feel themselves as part of the American society, some other ways of integration had to be sought for, i.e., not only their inside world, but also an appearance had to be changed. In Abraham Cahan's „Yekl“ we can observe the appearance of the Jewish woman who

has just arrived in the USA from her native country and her husband Jake has come to collect her with their son, born while he, the father, was already in America. The wife's Jewish appearance strikes by that time americanized husband: „His heart had sunk at the sight of his wife's uncouth and un-American appearance. She was slovenly dressed in a brown jacket and skirt of grotesque cut, and her hair was concealed under a voluminous wig of a pitch-black hue“ (1994, p. 894).

The Jewish immigrants had to be dressed up in American clothing from head to foot in order to feel comfortable in their environment. It can be proved by Mary Antin's words from „The Promised Land“: We exchanged our hateful homemade European costumes which pointed us out as „greenhorns“ to the children on the street, for real American machine-made garments, and issued forth glorified in each other's eyes“ (1994, p. 944).

With their despised immigrant clothing, Jews also shed their impossible Hebrew names. In Mary Antin's novel „The Promised Land“ we read: „A committee of our friends several years ahead of us in American experience, put their heads together and concocted American names for us all. Those of our real names that had no pleasing American equivalents they ruthlessly discarded, content if they retained the initials. My Hebrew name being Maryashe in full, Mashke for short, Russianizes into Marya, would hold good in English as Mary...“ (1994, p. 944). In such a way, new-comers became more dignified personalities and felt themselves of a higher self-esteem.

Perhaps the most heartless and inhuman was to reject their own intrinsic traditions, customs, mode of behaviour and accept the new American ways. It was even more painful for the reason that if a human-being loses its inside world, he becomes a dull, shallow personality.

There's a good example from „Jekl“ by Abraham Cahan: the Jewish immigrant Jekl, called Jake, has been already assimilated into American society. Jake's appearance was perfect American: „He was freshly shaved and clipped, smartly dressed in his best clothes and ball shoes and, in spite of the sickly expression of shamefacedness and anxiety which distorted his features, he looked younger than usual“ (1994, p. 894). Jake spoke fluent English, he had renounced all Jewish traditions and religious norms by divorcing his Jewish wife and taking up a new, American one. Finally, he felt even ashamed of being a Jew. On the one hand, Jake was really successful, but on the other – he turned into a defeated winner, as he had lost everything: dignity, pride, his Jewish soul and its originality by completely abandoning his Jewish roots: „Instead of a conqueror, he had emerged from the rabbi's house the victim of an ignominious defeat“ (1994, p. 899).

Another means of facing the painful and heartless reality and overcoming the barriers was self-irony. The ability to treat tragic things ironically, helps not only to retain optimism, but also to laugh at the private misfortunes. Although the characters of the Jewish writers are placed in varying settings and situations, they are pre-

sented as reflecting, tormented and suffering people who struggle to understand and control their grim environment. At times the characters are even comic, when their immigrant Jewish background mingles with American experience, and their situation is a synthesis of history and phantasy, comedy and tragedy, whereas all of them are persistent students of life who learn the importance of being human, struggling to survive with dignity and humanity.

In Grace Paley's story „Good-bye and Good luck“ the heroine Rosie is capable to evaluate her own situation with self-irony, as she laughs at the misfortunes and failures in her unhappy private life, and accepts the reality with a smile on her face: „I'm good natured <...> fat people are like that-kind“ (Roberts, 1989, p. 503).

Telling her life story to niece Lily, Rosie openly and ironically mocks the credulousness and fruitless dreams of her own youth which now seem at least funny to the grown up Rosie. Her mother „married who she didn't like, a sick man, his spirit already swallowed up by God. <...> His teeth fell out, his hair disappeared, he got smaller, shriveled up little by little, till goodbye and good luck, he was gone and only came to Mama's mind when she went to the mailbox under the stairs to get the electric bill. In memory of him and out of respect for mankind, I decided to live for love“ (Roberts, 1989, p. 503). However, he turned out to „have a wife, children, the whole combination“ (Roberts, 1989, p. 504) and would frequent Rosie's innocent shelter to refresh himself in the midst of an agonized life (Roberts, 1989, p. 504).

Another Grace Paley's story „The Expensive Moment“ suggests the theme of the irrepressible life force underlying the daily lives of New York working class men and women, their courage in the face of aging and loss. In this story Faith, a middle-aged, single parent tries to raise her precocious sons Richard and Tonto during the politically violent upheavals of the 1960–1970s. In doing so she has allied herself to women friends like Ruthie, whose young daughter, Rachel chooses „the expensive moment“ of this story's title „when everyone is called, but just a few are chosen by conscience, passion to smash the citadels of institutional power: military arsenals, banks, prisons. As a result, unlike Faith's young adult sons, Rachel has become a hunted political refugee whose name appears in newspaper headlines or occasionally on television. Faith and Ruthie share their maternal concern, whether in violent and dangerous times they have raised their children to be resilient, compassionate and responsible human beings. The ability to treat such serious tragic things ironically helps the characters never give up their optimistic world outlook and survive the hardships that they encounter, as for instance, the following remarks suggest: „he wished he had a new dog or new child or a new wife. He had none of these things because he only thought about them once in ten days and then only for about five minutes“ or „it's an anti-agist coalition of New Left pie throwers and Old Left tomato throwers“ (1994, p. 2523), etc.

Bernard Malamud's story „The Magic Barrel“ presents the situation of a single Jewish rabbi looking for a wife. Does it seem real to call in a matchmaker to find a wife? Of course, it seems funny even to Leo Finkle, the main character of the story himself, however, still he gets involved into this activity. Facing a number of unlucky dates and meetings, Leo finally understands the insanity of searching a wife in this way. Developing the character of the young rabbi Leo, Bernard Malamud discloses absurd attempts of such kind of people who try to avoid responsibility in their private lives, who are afraid of the results of their failures and misfortunes. The wish to transfer the responsibility on other person's shoulders is ironically mocked by the fact that the cards of the fortune seekers are so abundant in number, that „the drawers are already filled to the top, so I keep them now in a barrel“ (1994, p. 2543).

4. The aftermaths of americanization

As a matter of fact a number of immigrants not only with difficulty made their own way into the mainstream society but they also envisaged it as a purpose of their lives to help others achieve the long coveted for aims – Abraham Caham, for instance, the immigrant from Lithuania, Vilnius region became a fixture at meetings, lecturing and writing for various radical groups; he studied English at night and ultimately was chosen as „Jewish Daily Forward“'s first editor. Being a passionate socialist and a writer with a considerable talent for propaganda, he was also very much his own man „simultaneously educating masses of immigrants in Yiddish culture and tearing them away from it in behalf of American fulfillment“ (Pinsker, 1992, p. 3).

However, though with the understanding and support from the compatriots, the loss of one's identity was not an easy task – actually it implies the eradication of one's native half of the hyphenated Jewish – American identity. Abraham Cahan describes his hero's David Levinsky's dual nature by confessing that he cannot “escape” from his old self: “David Levinsky, 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” (Pinsker, 1992, p. 4).

The immigrant writers thus have created a new social type – Irwing Howe's term “the lost young intellectual: a marginal man, twice alienated” (Pinsker, 1992, p. 42) can best and most authentically depict the status of people who could no longer teeter on the brink of their origin which they could not accept under the transformed circumstances of a completely different society and a desired status they were not able to attain.

Furthermore, the alienation extended itself through generations, i. e. the entire generation of Jewish – American sons and their immigrant fathers: „...my father would come to call for me. He would shout my name from afar, giving it a yiddish twist: „Oivee!” I would always feel a sense of shame at hearing my name so mutilated in the presence of amused outlookers. I would always run ahead of my father as if to emphasize

the existence of a certain distance between us” (Howe, 1983, p. 173).

The younger generation loses their parents’ identity already from early childhood, the writers speak about the strains as well as the estrangement that Yiddish caused spoken in their parents’ kitchen and the king’s English in the public kindergarten.

I. Howe in „World of Our Fathers“ describes how the humiliated five – year – old consigns Yiddish forever to the ash of history:

„Like many other Jewish children, I had been brought up in a constricted family environment, and at the age of five I really knew Yiddish better than English, when in the kindergarten the child uttered a Jewish word – the whole class burst out laughing at me... That afternoon I told my parents that I had made up my mind never to speak Yiddish to them again“ (Howe, 1976, p. 141).

To sum it up, not all immigrants successfully took roots in America. Those who were strong, willing, determined and had definite goals, managed to achieve a lot. However, there were no mistaken paths any more, no more doubts – America is no Utopia. It was obvious, that first, every new comer must become efficient in earning a living before indulging in the poetic dreams, thus, the reply to the urgent demand „I want America to want me!“ was to show, that every comer had something special for America before America would need him. The first Pilgrims, the ones who had settled on American shores, expected to make America, build America, create their own world of liberty. It’s impossible to find it ready made.

Only the indomitable spirit of persistence could be the guide and lead on the lonely, untrodden path through which every seeker of the new world had to pass by himself and in his own way. And there came a light – a great revelation!“ They saw America – a big idea – a deathless hope – a world still in the making. <...> it was the glory of America that it was not yet finished“. So every „last comer, had his share to give, small or great, to the making of America“ like those pilgrims who came in the „Mayflower“ (1994. p. 1972).

So, as Mary Antin presents it in „The Promised Land“: “the heart sore immigrant forgets exile and homesickness, and ridicule and loss, and estrangement, when he beholds his sons and daughters moving as Americans among Americans“ (1994, p. 995).

Conclusion

1. Great numbers of Jewish immigrants reached the USA from the East European countries thus the experience described by the Jewish American writers is treated as common to the East European immigrants, as well as Lithuanians, as Jews, being our compatriots, also emigrated from Lithuania, then part of the tsarist Russia. That is why the authentic evidence revealed in the works by the above mentioned authors is relevant from the perspective of our reader.

2. The evidence and vivid literary descriptions of personal experience of the challenges that the immigrants had to face and cope with provide an insight of life conditions, exploitation, shortage of employment, low wages, the scornful attitude of the prior immigrants, in general, a multifaceted struggle for survival in an alien society.
3. The authors also elucidate the ways and means of becoming part of the „mainstream“ American society, i.e. „americanization“. In a number of authors’ works we read about the necessity for immigrants to change their original names, their everyday clothes, manners, behaviour, the mother tongue was replaced by the English language, but what was most painful and tragic was the need to eradicate their beliefs, ethnical traditions, national customs, religious faith, system of values. The immigrants had to acquire new ways of at least public behaviour norms and values accepted in the American society. However, this didn’t help the first generation immigrants feel genuine citizens of the USA: they felt marginalized, i.e. without a sense of belonging, in other words, they didn’t belong either to their former country or to the new one.
4. The aftermaths are also ostensible: the majority of the characters suffer from the dual (or double) consciousness phenomenon, i.e. the characters do not feel satisfied by the status of „green-horns“, or „hyphenated Americans“ which they have achieved, but, on the other hand, they do not feel pleasure in secretly cherishing their original values either. This alienation extends itself even between the generations of fathers and American – born sons, who are already ashamed of their ethnical heritage. However, those who have managed to „americanize“ quickly and seemingly successfully still have a sense of a „defeated victor“, or „twice alienated intellectual“ as the renunciation of the original values, namely of one’s „inner self“, doesn’t bring joy or pride.
5. However, the loss, moral deprivation of the old tradition by the fathers paved a solid path for the next generation. The former immigrants helped their descendants not only to learn about their roots and heritage, but by their personal example they assisted in rejecting those values and accepting the new ones while organizing meetings, lecturing and writing for various radical groups, publishing newspapers. On the one hand, painful as it was „the American fulfillment“ came as a realization that America was not a mere dream – every new comer had to find his place and contribute his or her share in the process of building, and creating America.

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AMERIKIETIŠKOJO TAPATUMO PAIEŠKOS JAV ŽYDŲ ETNINĖJE LITERATŪROJE

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Santrauka

Gyvenimo pokyčiai verčia nauju žvilgsniu peržvelgti ir amerikiečių literatūros normas. Vis daugiau teisėtai pelnyto dėmesio skiriama etniniams autoriams, aprašantiems autentišką skirtingų Amerikos etninių grupių patirtį, skausmingai ieškančių savo vietos pagrindinėje Amerikos visuomenėje. Šis literatūrinis paveldas prasmingas, bandant atskleisti amerikietiškojo tapatumo, kurį sudaro visos į Amerikos visuomenę įsiliejusios kultūros, esmę.

Žydų etninėje literatūroje vaizduojama autentiška patirtis JAV yra aktuali ir Lietuvos skaitytojui, nes daugelis straipsnyje minimų autorių emigravo iš Rytų Europos (tuometinės carinės Rusijos imperijos, kurios dalis buvo ir Lietuva) ar net iš pačios Lietuvos (pvz., Abraham Cahan iš Vilniaus apskrities). Kita vertus, mūsų tėvynainių patirtis gali būti vertinga ir šiandien, kai tiek daug Lietuvos piliečių laukia vizos eilėje prie JAV ambasados.

Straipsnio tikslai: atlikti gausios literatūros (JAV žydų autorių autentiškų tekstų) analizę ir jos pagrindu aprašyti sudėtingus atotrūkio nuo prigimtinės tradicijos procesus, aptarti imigrantų patirtus sunkumus ir jų mėginimus įsiliesti į JAV visuomenę. Analizė padėjo atskleisti, kaip migracija paveikė literatūrinių herojų likimus, jų gyvenimus svetimose jiems visuomenėse.

Šiame straipsnyje, remiantis JAV žydų autorių kūriniais, nagrinėjami sudėtingi, skausmingi ir jaudinantys literatūrinių herojų (dažnai autobiografiniai) žingsniai išsivadant savo prigimtinės esmės, tradicijų, religinių apeigų. Autoriai neretai mini priežastis, kodėl atvyko į JAV: tai ne tik politiniai, religiniai, socialiniai, asmeniniai, bet ir tautiniai motyvai – būtent šioje visuomenėje žydų imigrantai tikėjosi būti laisvi, orūs, nežeminami, nevaržomi, neribojami religinės tironijos. Dažnai imigrantai ieškojo galimybių tiesiog tapti visaverčiais žmonėmis. Straipsnyje pateikiamais literatūriniais vaizdiniais paremti iššūkiai, kuriuos imigrantams teko priimti, aprašoma, kaip jie stengėsi juos įveikdami kuo greičiau asimiliuotis, įsiliesti į JAV visuomenę, kitaip tariant, „suamerikonėti“. Imigrantams teko įveikti nemažai sunkumų: nedarbas, išnaudojimas, konkurencija, nepakečiamos darbo ir gyvenimo sąlygos. Naujoji visuomenė naujus narius pasitiko nedžiūgaudama: Amerika – ne utopijos šalis, ne vienam atvykusiajam teko skaudžiai nusivilti ir suvokti, kad kiekvienas šiai šaliai bus reikalingas tiek, kiek Amerikai jo reikės ir atsižvelgiant į tai, ką galės jai pasiūlyti. Taigi žydų rašytojai aprašo, kaip jų herojai asimiliuojasi JAV visuomenėje: jie sunkiai dirba, kad sukauptų pinigų, leisiančių jiems naudotis laisve, mokosi anglų kalbos, jų vaikai lanko nemokamas mokyklas, jie pakeičia savo išvaizdą – „suamerikonėja“, nusimeta atsivežtus namų darbo drabužius, „susiamerikonina“ savo vardus, sudėtingose situacijose pasitelkia saviironiją, optimizmą, išsivada savo paveldo, kalbos, religijos, net šeimos.

Ar visada tai atneša siekiamą laimę? Deja, dažnai rašytojai vaizduoja, kaip jų herojai ilgisi savo tradicijų, religijos, religinių apeigų. Nagrinėjamos ir nelauktos amerikietiškojo tapatumo paieškų sukeltos moralinės pasekmės: kartų susvetimėjimas, dvigubos sąmonės ar asmenybės susidvejinimo fenomenas, pralaimėjusio nugalėtojo ar prarastojos intelektualo įvaizdžiai. Visi teiginiai paremti citatomis iš JAV žydų rašytojų tekstų.

Vis dėlto, remiantis išnagrinėta literatūrine medžiaga, galima teigti, kad pirmosios ar antrosios kartų imigrantų auka padėjo ateinančioms imigrantų kartoms pasijusti amerikiečių visuomenėje visaverčiais nariais.