c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

2

"Not a Word for Little Girls!": Knowledge, Word, and Image in Leela Corman's *Unterzakhn*

Tahneer Oksman

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

In his introduction to Mary Antin's famous autobiography, *The Promised Land* (1912), Werner Sollors points out that although Antin claimed to have written a book representing the experiences of thousands of immigrants, in reality "her story does not even resemble that of her own sister" (Sollors xv). The key difference between Antin and her sister Frieda, both born in a *shtetl* in the Russian Pale, was that Antin received an education in America, inevitably leading her to become a successful writer, while Frieda labored in a sweatshop in large part to support Antin's career. Sollors points out that the frontispiece to the book, featuring an image of a young Antin beside Frieda, emphasizes that significant omission: the disparate yet interconnected path that Frieda trod, a path that had to be silenced in order for Antin to frame her narrative as a "success story."[1]

In his more recent essay on *The Promised Land*, Babak Elahi focuses on what he views as this crucial subtext of the book, that is, the interrelationship of Antin's and her sister's life paths. Elahi reads several passages in *A Promised Land* as exposés revealing Antin's reliance on Frieda, and Antin's "uncomfortable realization that it is her … sister (literally and figuratively) who makes her own assimilation possible" (45). For example, in one scene, Frieda sacrifices the fabric of what was supposed to be her wedding dress to make a graduation dress for Mary. Elahi sees the inclusion of this and other scenes as Antin's way of subtly but unmistakably fusing together what might otherwise be identified as a "division of agency along lines of labor and consumption" (46).[2] In effect, Antin's text, if read in this manner, is a story of the communal education and work of the Jewish and female immigrant rather than one of an individual's striving and achievement. Mary's story, the story of an immigrant who joins the literate and educated middle class, *is* Frieda's story, the story of a garment industry worker who spends her life as part of the laboring class, even if Frieda's voice is never directly heard.

Leela Corman's graphic novel *Unterzakhn* (2012), set mostly in the 1910s and 1920s, traces the lives of sisters Esther and Fanya as they grow up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. *Unterzakhn* can be read as a retelling of Antin's narrative, this time as a fictional tale told through the comics medium, with Frieda's point of view incorporated directly into the visual narrative.[3] Read in this way, Corman's work reveals how the graphic medium can visualize, in a literal sense, the interconnectivity

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

of this Jewish immigrant community and especially the interdependent, though often invisible, community of women.

Unterzakhn threads together the life story of Fanya, who receives something akin to a formal education, with that of her sister Esther, who survives, and in some ways thrives, without one. While neither sister goes to public school due to their mother's insistence that they do not need "goyish schooling" (33), Fanya, the "smarter" sister, is taught how to read by the local "lady doctor," Bronia, and eventually becomes her apprentice. Fanya transmits some of her learning to her sister, including the ability to read, but Esther additionally experiences a very different form of knowledge while working in a brothel and later in a burlesque theater, where she eventually becomes a star. Instead of a narrative of schooling as "success"—a plotline that emphasizes individual strivings and achievements—this graphic novel examines the various non-traditional avenues of education open to the young immigrant woman, whether or not these avenues were sought out by her or arrived at through her consent. The text emphasizes the informal transmission of knowledge as the mode by which the characters' most powerful and influential education occurs. Although in the end, this informal education cannot save the sisters from their somewhat inevitable fates, it contrasts with the isolation of the domestic sphere, as well as with the solitude of the rare turn-of-the-century immigrant woman's acquisition of a formal education.[4] The urban setting binds the sisters to each other and to other women, for better or worse. Through its emphasis on unconventional modes of knowing and telling, of interactions that take place between and among women, the book openly confronts the limited options available to most immigrant women at the time and stresses the relational nature of each and every seemingly individual trajectory.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Corman's graphic novel contains various formal strategies to reflect this communal theme. The structure of the book plots the sisters' stories alongside one another, sometimes without formal transitions. This format reflects how each life path is embedded in the other, a dynamic that often plays out through illustrations as well as words. The story of the uneducated Esther, a character somewhat analogous to silenced Frieda in Antin's memoir, plays a key role in Fanya's story, and in the end neither sister's narrative stands alone. The cover of the book immediately signifies this relational narrative configuration.[5] The title, *Unterzakhn*, is portrayed in large red letters contained within a black rectangle, which divides the page. At the top of the cover, there is an image of the young twins, drawn at the age depicted in the opening of the book, and a large close-up of their matured faces fills the bottom half of the page. The two sets of drawings of the nearly identical sisters—made that much more similar by the simple black and white coloring—stress the way their faces and, by extension, their stories lay claims on one another. The top depiction shows their faces huddled close together, with similarly prominent noses and short hair styles, as well as nearly identical neutral expressions. The main feature that differentiates them is Esther's birthmark. This mark is significant for the reader early on in the story, when the sisters are young and there are no other visual distinctions to differentiate one from the other. In the larger image of the sisters at the bottom of the cover, they are more readily distinguishable. Esther's face is prominently featured, with her sister, Fanya, portrayed in profile, this time with the left side of her face fully visible, clearly lacking any birthmark, and with one eye aimed at her sister. The mole on Esther's face is more

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

obvious in this second depiction of the pair and serves, along with her heavy eye make-up, lipstick, and bold haircut, to distinguish the two of them, reflecting their divergent life paths. Yet, even in this second image, in which their faces now point in different directions, their heads still merge to form one encompassing mass. The unreciprocated look from Fanya to Esther reinforces this visual affiliation between the two women, even as it reveals that there cannot ever be an easy connection between two people whose lives, at least for a time, splinter off so dramatically one from the other.

In addition, on this cover, both sets of the characters' faces are juxtaposed against a background of buildings, a visual synecdoche for the city of New York. The incorporation of these drawings of the two sisters against the same tenement backdrop unites their stories with those of the various immigrant communities existing and moving through the Lower East Side over time. In an interview, Corman herself stressed the importance of the setting of the book: "I'm interested in any part of New York that's gone through so many changes, with so many people living there. The imprint of those people is still there, and not just the Jews, but everyone who lived here."[6] The city represents a unifying force in the lives of these two individuals, as well as in the many other varied communal and individual histories, both real and fictional, that take place within its streets. There is not always a clear division between the so-called educated and laboring classes in *Unterzakhn* because the lines between the two are often revealed to be hazy and indistinct for immigrant women, who remain on the margins of both communities. Instead, through the framework of animated city streets, the voices of a vast network of women, who contribute to and influence the sisters' life paths, are woven visually and verbally into the storylines of the two main characters, thereby allowing the narrative to trace the journeys of countless related subjectivities. The graphic format of the book, and especially its visual emphasis on the multidimensionality of street life, locates the pivotal experiences of immigrant women in often unexpected encounters with others. Incorporating New York City into the comic as a constant, thriving, and interactive presence, *Unterzakhn* is a book that graphically foregrounds the communal nature of the story that Antin's *The Promised Land* only indirectly addresses.

With the tops of tall buildings hinting at the worlds of activities resonating within them, the images on the cover also reflect the novel's attention to what happens below the surface, as the title of the book, "unterzakhn," which can be translated to mean "underthings," similarly suggests.[7] The fates of the sisters are dependent not primarily on whether or not they have access to a formal education in America, a causal relationship that Antin and other immigrant writers of the early twentieth century, such as Anzia Yezierska, tended to focus on.[8] Instead, a more informal and often overlooked, though equally significant, form of knowledge holds the key to determining their futures. This knowledge of the everyday, which is both withheld from them and offered up to them at various points in their stories, emerges from their experiences on the streets of New York City and, more specifically, from the visual and verbal worlds that they encounter there. The telling of the immigrant story through the medium of comics in this way reinforces the significance of how much power there was in what could be seen and heard in everyday life, and how seemingly insignificant characters could withhold, concede, or generally abuse access to such knowledge.[9] To be aware (or unaware) of the "inner life" of the streets—the complex economic and sexual forces compelling the behaviors of friends, family, and neighbors—was a determinant of the trajectories that

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

these women's lives would follow. Through its focus on the vernacular, on everyday encounters with oral and visual forms of knowledge, Corman's graphic novel therefore reflects how comics can emphasize aspects of those experiences that have yet to be fully explored or reflected: the unmentionable—and unofficial—schooling that took place in the day-to-day, and which in many ways is most effectively and powerfully conveyed through images as well as words, and especially through the intersection of the two on the page.[10]

From its opening scene, the book is focused on such often illegitimate transmissions of knowledge that occur as the sisters engage with the city around them. The novel begins by tracking a monumental incident that Fanya witnesses on the street. She is accompanying her mother, a corset-maker (creator of literal "underthings"), on a trip to pick out new fabrics when they chance upon a woman who is fallen, in both senses of the word: her body lies across the pavement of the sidewalk with her hair splayed and a large pool of blood staining the back of her dress and the ground beneath her. When Fanya's mother, Minna, directs her—"Fanya, go get Bronia the Lady-Doctor!"—it is the first time we are told either of the sisters' names. Fanya stands, wide eyed, behind her mother, grasping at the roll of fabric she has been assigned to carry. This image associates the material labor of the immigrant woman, the fabric that Fanya's mother will make into a corset, with the knowledge of the street that will eventually pull Fanya away from the laboring class and unsteadily and precariously into the educated middle class: she herself will become a "lady doctor."[11] The incorporation of the bottom half of other bodies into the scene, some standing and observing, others merely going on with their lives, situates Fanya as one of a larger crowd, even as she is singled out as the only child witnessing the scene, a symbolic representation emphasizing how this particular occurrence will play a paramount role in the direction of her future. The exaggerated size of her eyes—an impressionistic visual tactic that differentiates comics from other ways of telling—also reflects the importance that the encounter assumes within the rest of the narrative. As witness to this street scene, a chance occurrence, Fanya's life story is, in a single moment, dramatically differentiated from that of her sister. She starts out on a path that will unravel and distance her from Esther, just as, for the reader, she has been named while her sister's presence has, as yet, only been hinted at with her silent and immobile inclusion on the cover. The sister who is not marked literally—on her face—becomes the sister who is figuratively marked by what she sees as a young girl.

Fanya's moment of witnessing introduces her to a whole new cast of characters. One of these characters is the "pickle lady," a peddler who forces her way into Fanya's story by way of her interruptions. "For what you're looking?" she asks a frightened and anxious Fanya, who wanders the streets in search of Bronia. In this panel, which is the first time we are introduced to the pickle lady, only her words, and not her body, are presented to the reader, in the form of a speech bubble. The accidental collisions and intrusions of street life are thereby conveyed on the page, as per this example, through a visual architecture particular to comics. The pickle lady's speech bubble reflects the lurking presence of strangers, prepared to intrude on the girls' lives at any point in time, even as it emphasizes the general invisibility of such potential presences. In this way, the comic makes evident what is hidden or "under the surface" of city life. The pickle lady appears several pages later, once the incident with the fallen woman is over. This

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Figure 2.1 Leela Corman, *Unterzakhn*, p. 22. Courtesy Leela Corman.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

time, she takes on the role of a knowing mentor or of a teacher imparting knowledge to one of her students. In the first of two panels set side-by-side in the middle of the page, Fanya sits beside the pickle lady, looking up at her as she explains: "That Bronia, she's a pritze. You stay away from her and you'll be better off" (Figure 2.1, 22). The peddler's words here evoke the close association of disparate members of the community and the open channels of gossip—of judgment and common knowledge—that join that community together. "We all know from Bronia," she asserts in an earlier panel, summoning an imagined community of women in order, in part, to initiate Fanya into that world. The creation of a "we" also brings to the surface, and makes audible, the presence of a community without borders—a group of Yiddish speakers without a clearly defined separate or distinct space to call their own, whose interactions and street talk are rooted in a scattered and unpredictable urban life.

As the pickle lady's "student," Fanya, arms folded and at attention, is not satisfied with the warning that she stay away from Bronia. Instead, she pushes the matter, asking: "What's a pritze?" This desire to know more is rejected by the pickle lady, who chases Fanya from the scene, cutting the lesson short and leaving the girl with more questions than answers. She directs her finger off to the side: "Not a word for little girls! Now gey a veg!" prompting Fanya to seek answers elsewhere, perhaps on other street corners. Beside her pointed finger, various tiny shapes and figures can be seen in the panel, indicating new potential pockets of knowledge hidden in the shadows and waiting to emerge.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

The Yiddish word "pritze"—a derogatory term for women roughly translated as "whore"—remains uninterpreted, hanging in the air, as Fanya mutters to herself: "Oy! That pickle lady is crazy!"[12] The word crops up at various points throughout the text, often, though not always, when women are speaking of Bronia. For example, when a woman who works at a brothel comes to try on dresses in Minna's store, and Minna sees her talking to Esther, she tells her daughter (in private): "You stay *away* from her and pritzes *like* her unless I *ask* for your help!" (25). Later on in the novel, discussing Bronia, Minna tells her friend that "[s]he's just a pritze who likes to mix in!" (36). Fanya's early interaction with the pickle lady and, more generally, both of

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

the girls' encounters with the derogatory Yiddish word "pritze" at various points in the text highlight a theme that persists throughout the book: namely, the lack of practical knowledge about sex and birth control available to women at the time, and the general disdain applied to people, like Bronia, who were interested in providing such information. By using one Yiddish term to label women who (relatively speaking) overtly engaged in a wide range of sexual "practices"—from sex workers to a "lady doctor"—the word comes to stand for an entire underworld of knowledge about sex and the economy of sex as it was rooted in everyday tenement life. Fanya's particular introduction to the word, as something uttered but not defined, exemplifies the sisters' initiations into this underworld as somehow both inevitable and uncertain. While such street knowledge—specifically, information about the realities of sex and women's lives—unavoidably transforms the sisters, it does not free them from the confines of the shadows that are cast around women who openly challenge the rules of propriety that have been put into place. For these sisters, then, while sex and sexual knowledge are a means of escape from the conventional domestic futures outlined for them by their community—of growing up to become Jewish wives and mothers whose lives are rooted in the home—they also determine their limitations, the economic, social, and cultural realities that make it impossible for them to completely make their own choices, to leave such predictable and confining domestic fates behind.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Throughout the course of the novel, the word "pritze" and the sexual transgressions that it implies comes, ironically, to be associated with the secret lives of both sisters, however divergent those worlds seem on the surface. Fanya becomes Bronia's apprentice, and even surpasses her mentor in her desire to free women from what she comes to view as the binds of marriage and the consequences of sexual naiveté/ignorance. Esther goes to work at a brothel for a woman named Miss Lucille, and, with her help, eventually transforms into a burlesque theater star who flatters men in order (at least in part) to help her career. She becomes Miss Lucille's protégé, just as Fanya becomes Bronia's. The informal education of the two sisters—each obtained from an older woman in an informal setting—therefore reveals how their lives are similar and interdependent, despite the fact that they seem to be following autonomous and contrasting paths.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

This connection between the sisters is exemplified in two panels that picture the girls talking to one another, as young girls, in the privacy of their bed. These illuminating panels are featured just before they each pursue their divergent careers. In the intimacy of a single bed, looking at one another as their hands touch, Fanya tells her sister, "Esther, I'm never gonna have babies." Fanya's declaration is likely based on what she gleans from the scene she witnessed early on in the novel, introducing her, though surreptitiously, to the horrors of an unwanted pregnancy and a deadly abortion. Esther agrees with her sister but then adds that "Babies make you ugly. I wanna be pretty forever!" (50). This vital declaration that each of the sisters makes—the decision not to have children—is what inevitably unites them, even as they come to it for very different reasons. It is a significant and improbable option for girls whose life circumstances make it much more plausible that they will follow in the footsteps of their mother, who is clearly unhappy with her role as both a mother and a wife. The sisters here re-envision their individual though ultimately interconnected fates in the private space of their bed, even as their domestic rebellions are rooted in the city streets.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

By the end of the novel, it becomes apparent that the desire not to have children is never a real choice for women under these circumstances. Rather, it is a privilege tied not only to whether or not a woman has basic access to certain information and materials (as the fallen woman that Fanya encountered on the street most likely did not) but also to whether a woman is capable of and willing to navigate the contradictory expectations thrust on her by those invisible presences around her, especially in the face of her own needs and desires. At the novel's conclusion, Fanya, the sister with the means and knowledge necessary to prevent an unexpected pregnancy, ironically ends up with an unplanned child. Hers is a fate narrowly avoided by Esther, whose sex work often leaves her unprotected and highly vulnerable, and who deals with an unwanted pregnancy early on in the novel with her sister's help. "Maybe I'll just throw myself down your staircase," Fanya unhappily tells Esther, once they have been reunited and the reality of her pregnancy finally hits her (191). Fanya's sexual knowledge ultimately cannot save her from this destiny; indeed, as the ending of the story reveals, nothing could have prevented a fate that is as tied to her as the history that she shares with her sister.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* famously begins with the narrator intoning: "I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over" (1). For Antin, the person that she was before her immigration to the United States, and her subsequent assimilation, is someone else completely. "I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell," she continues. How, one wonders, does Frieda fit into this narrative? Is she also other than the person that she once was? Has she too experienced a "second birth," even though she never gets the opportunity to tell her own story? In *Unterzakhn*, Fanya and Esther both experience transformations, but, as the cover of the book illustrates, their stories remain forever entwined both in the same present and over time. Despite its somber conclusion, the end of the book is redemptive in the sense that the sisters inevitably find themselves in each other's company. Fanya moves into Esther's home, and before she dies the sisters share a bed once again. There are no suppressed narratives in *Unterzakhn*, and Fanya's death is neither the end nor the beginning of Esther's story.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

This communal ending contrasts with the conclusion of Antin's autobiography, in which she describes visits to her sister's home in East Boston. As she explains, after her sister's husband and baby go to bed for the evening:

> Frieda took out her sewing, and I took a book; and the lamp was between us, shining on the table, on the large brown roses on the wall, on the green and brown diamonds of the oil cloth on the floor, on the baby's rattle on a shelf, and on the shining stove in the corner. It was such a pleasant kitchen—such a cosey, friendly room—that when Frieda and I were left alone I was perfectly happy to just sit there …
>
> I read aloud from Longfellow, or Whittier, or Tennyson; and it was as great a treat to me as it was to Frieda. Her attention alone was inspiring. Her delight, her eager questions doubled the meaning of the lines I read. (263)

In this passage, Antin's close attention to the details of Frieda's domestic life—the baby's rattle, the stove—reveals her desire to portray a life that she is estranged from, to convey

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

herself as a tourist in relation to such an environment. In reading aloud to Frieda, Antin attempts to bridge this gap between their worlds, and perhaps even unite their stories. Instead, the act serves to enhance the distance that has emerged, over time, between the two women, Frieda attentive, docile, and fully domesticated, and Mary Antin the lone storyteller, the "I" of the story. Soon after this passage, she writes of feeling "ashamed to remember all of the beautiful things I had and did not share with her" (263). This reflection at the end of the book reinforces the one-sidedness of Antin's *The Promised Land* and the remorse that must inevitably accompany what had to be silenced in order for her to tell that story. Blind to the reality of the lives of so many immigrant women like her sister, Antin relegates Frieda's roles, as mother, wife, and domestic worker, to the margins in order to focus on the ins and outs of her own life, her assimilation into a new world, free from the ties that bind her to other women including Frieda.

The end of *Unterzakhn* finds these sisters, too, paired together, as one reads to the other (Figure 2.2, 192). Esther reads aloud from *The Odyssey*, a book that is part of

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Figure 2.2 Leela Corman, *Unterzakhn*, p. 192. Courtesy Leela Corman.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

their family legacy, passed on to the women by their father. Unlike Frieda, Esther has been taught to read by her sister early on in the novel, and she now uses this knowledge to reinforce their connection to one another. The distance forged between the two women melts away as they sit together, soaking, in the intimate space of the bath. The sisters have each managed to escape isolation; here they are, together, asking questions and relying on one another mutually and completely. With her pregnancy, Fanya has not escaped her mother's life, and, with her domestic partnership with her agent, Meyer, Esther has not either. However, in sharing a home, even under less than ideal circumstances, these sisters collectively take on the role of storyteller—an undertaking that turns their narratives into a shared tale belonging to a community of women whose stories have remained, for too long, untold.

Notes

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

1 Betty Bergland discusses the photographs in Antin's memoir, including, very briefly, this frontispiece, in her essay, "Rereading Photographs and Narratives in Ethnic Autobiography: Memory and Subjectivity in Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*." Additionally, over the past decade or so, many critics have written about Antin's work not simply as a story of the "success" of assimilation, but rather as a more complex text that criticizes even as it praises the immigrant experience in the United States. Some of these essays and book chapters (besides Sollors's introduction) include Lori Jirousek's "Mary Antin's Progressive Science: Eugenics, Evolution, and the Environment," Jules Chametzky's "Rethinking Mary Antin and *The Promised Land*," and Hana Wirth-Nesher's "Linguistic Passing: Mary Antin." The publication by Evelyn Salz of the *Selected Letters of Mary Antin* also shed light on Antin's personal history, in many ways in contrast to her published autobiographical works.

2 Antin writes most directly about this topic when describing her first day at school after her family has immigrated to Boston. She recognizes that her older sister must have been as disappointed as Mary was excited on that first day of school. "Whose hand was in mine, as I stood, overcome with awe, by the teacher's desk, and whispered my name as my father prompted? Was it Frieda's steady, capable hand? Was it her loyal heart that throbbed, beat for beat with mine, as it had done through all our childish adventures? Frieda's heart did throb that day, but not with my emotions. My heart pulsed with joy and pride and ambition; in her heart longing fought with abnegation" (157).

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

3 This is not the first time a contemporary work of literature about immigration has been read in some way as a revision of Antin's seminal autobiography. For example, in Steven G. Kellman's essay, "Lost in the Promised Land: Eva Hoffman Revises Mary Antin," he reads Hoffman's memoir, *Lost in Translation*, as a revision of *The Promised Land*. For Kellman, Hoffman's book is a more overtly critical version of the immigrant story than Antin's, one that focuses on the process of assimilation as always "tenuous and incomplete" (152).

4 Most immigrant women at the time did not have the opportunity to obtain the advanced formal education that Mary Antin received and then wrote about. In Sydney Stahl Weinberg's *The World of Our Mothers*, she devotes an entire chapter to education and the Jewish immigrant woman at the turn of the century and beyond. See Chapter 9: "Education: Dream and Reality," pp. 167–183. As Weinberg attests,

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

"most young immigrant women could not attain the goal of an advanced education because of the economic hardships of immigrant life. If they were able to attend school at all, only a few lucky ones could afford to remain until they reached fifteen or sixteen, when they usually graduated and went to work" (170). Susan A. Glenn's *Daughters of the Shtetl* includes a chapter that focuses on the alternative forms of education that women received in their work environments, a crucial factor given that many of them wanted to but could not receive formal schooling. See, for example, Chapter 4: "'All of Us Young People': The Social and Cultural Dimensions of Work," pp. 132–166, and especially the sub-chapter, "The Factory as School," pp. 154–159.

5 Reading the cover images of graphic novels created by a single author/illustrator can tell us a lot about the works contained within, as the cartoonist generally has more command in determining the design of the cover than authors of works of prose. At the very least, the central image on the cover of a graphic narrative is almost always drawn or designed by the cartoonist herself.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

6 The association between comics and the city of New York was recently emphasized at a two day conference presented by Columbia University Libraries, entitled "Comic New York: Cartoonists & Scholars Talk NYC Comics." Organized by Jeremy Dauber, Danny Fingeroth, and Karen Green, the symposium took place on March 24–25, 2012, at Columbia University.

7 This definition comes from Yiddish scholar Eddy Portnoy, who pointed out to me that there is no such single word ("unterzakhn") in Yiddish. The definition here comes, instead, from the juxtaposition of two separate words. As he explained over email, the actual word for undergarments is "untervesh," although "unterzakhn" could easily "imply that it represents the underside of things."

8 In her stories and novels, Yezierska's characters often emphasize the potential for education to transform their fates, or, in the words of the character Shenah Pessah from the short story "Hunger," education is what would allow someone like her "to make from myself a person" (29). As another example of the importance of education in Yezierska's works, when registering for night school and asked what she wants to learn, the main character in *Bread Givers*, Sara Smolinsky, replies, "I want to learn everything in the school from the beginning to the end" (162). This "hunger" for learning is matched by the desire of these main characters to become entangled (romantically or otherwise) with men who are educators or at least highly educated in formal institutions of learning. Mary Antin similarly idealizes educators in *The Promised Land*.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

9 *Yiddishkeit*, edited by Harvey Pekar and Paul Buhle, calls attention to the link between comics and the vernacular (in this case, the link between comics and Yiddish language and culture). As Neal Gabler argues in its introduction, "Yiddishkeit seems to luxuriate in its own lack of elegance and its own marginalization, which is why a book of comics art, another outsider form, seems especially appropriate to describe it …" (9).

10 The works of the famous Jewish American cartoonist Will Eisner also focused on the often graphic (in both senses of the word) lives of those living in immigrant neighborhoods. See, for example, his well-known set of books, *The Contract with God Trilogy: Life on Dropsie Avenue (A Contract with God, A Life Force, and Dropsie Avenue)*. These graphic novels all deal with tenement life in the Bronx.

11 While acting as a "lady doctor" was by no means a respected or officially recognized position (and, in fact, would have resulted in the disparagement of this title holder),

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

it allowed these women access to a way of life that would have affiliated them more closely with a middle, rather than a laboring, class.

12 The word "pritse" literally translates to a landowner's wife, or a lordess. In a vernacular context, the word has come to be used as a derogatory name for a woman who thinks she can act like a wealthy woman and be served. For example, the expression "zany a prits/pritse" translates into "to be vaInglourious." Additionally, the word often also implies immorality and can refer to what are deemed to be immodest behaviors. I thank Agi Legutko, Eddy Portnoy, and Zipporah Oksman for their help in translating the word. The simplified translation that I use in this article comes from the "*Unterzakhn* Guide to Yiddish," which can be found on the Pantheon Books website.

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

c5122de3ece7dd2f8fbd918c4ed22ee1
ebrary

Royal, Derek Parker. Visualizing Jewish Narrative : Jewish Comics and Graphic Novels (1). London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 17 August 2016.
Copyright © 2016. Bloomsbury Academic. All rights reserved.