American Jewish Foodways in Modern Literature: Navigating Old World and New World Identities

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Luca Jansen

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Supervisor: Dr. Frank Brandsma

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Figure 1: “Challah bread” (Cottonbro)

Abstract

This study is an exploration of the usefulness of food studies for mainstream literature studies. Through a case study of American Jewish foodways it is demonstrated how literary analysis could benefit from analyzing food. Building on existing work from the fields of literature and food studies and (American) Jewish food studies, it asks: What is the function of food within the literary American Jewish narrative? Selected literary works from various genres are analyzed in order to see how American Jewish foodways are relevant for both the story and the audience in those texts.

Three themes, which are recurring features in the works discussed here, are analyzed. The first theme is that of immigrant struggles with balancing loyalty to traditions from the Old World and adapting to society in the United States. The second theme deals with coming to terms with an identity that is both American and Jewish. The third theme explores food as a means to reconnect with lost or neglected heritage.

The results indicate that food has a multitude of functions in the literature on, by, or related to American Jews and enriches our understanding of American Jewish identity, while at the same time it brings to light universal experiences such as food as power and food as communication. This is relevant because this confirms the potential of food as a widely used factor in literary analysis.

Keywords: Foodways, Jewish food, literature, literature and food studies, The United States, American Jewish, immigration.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Ashkenazi	Jews whose ancestors' heritage traces back to communities around the Rhine river (Eastern France and Western Germany) but spread across Eastern Europe. Their cuisine is rooted in a climate that was not suited for year-round cultivation of crops (Koenig 10).
Challah	A type of bread traditionally served on Shabbat. It is recognizable by its intricate looks, as it often comes in the shape of a braid that is constructed out of four or more strands (MyJewishLearning) (See figure 1 and Appendix A).
Foodways	In the context of this thesis, the aspects of food that are examined could best be described by the term foodways. According to the Merriam-Webster foodways are: ‘the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period’ (“foodways”). Furthermore, it is understood here to also include the trade of food.

Gefilte fish	Ground fish mixed with matzah meal and other ingredients and rolled into balls or cylinders, which are then poached or boiled. Traditionally served on Passover and Shabbat (MyJewishLearning) (See Appendix A).
Greenhorn	A recently arrived immigrant. A person that stands out in society because of their naivety and because they are inexperienced with the new country's customs.
Hamantaschen	Triangle-shaped cookies traditionally served on the Purim holiday. Traditionally, they have a jam filling, although modern versions can also be filled with a chocolate spread or dulce de leche (MyJewishLearning) (See Appendix A).
Kashrut / Kosher / Kasher	Kashrut is the set of Jewish dietary laws. If something is kosher, it is in adhering to Kashrut. *To Kasher* means to make something kosher, this can refer to food, but also to cookware or the space of a kitchen.

Kugel	A sweet or savory baked casserole usually made with some type of starch (often noodles or potatoes), eggs and a type of fat (MyJewishLearning) (See Appendix A).
Matzo ball soup	The Matzo balls are big dumplings that are made of matzah meal and are unleavened. These balls are mostly served in clear, broth-like chicken soup (MyJewishLearning) (See Appendix A).
Shabbat	Day of rest. For observant Jews this means abstaining from driving, using electricity, and the preparation of food (Koenig 12). However, it is not a day of fasting. In other words, foods for Shabbat are often prepared the day before and eaten cold or prepared in a way that they keep warm on a heat source that has been ignited before the start of Shabbat.
Shepardic	Jews whose heritage traces back to the Iberian Peninsula. After the Spanish inquisition, many resettled in Mediterranean countries. Their cuisine is shaped by warm climates and easy access to fresh ingredients (Koenig 10).

Tenements	Apartment buildings that meet minimum standards of sanitation, safety, and comfort and usually located in a city, designed to house a great number of people ("tenement house"). In the case of New York these buildings were concentrated around the Lower East Side and were home to a large population of Jewish immigrants.
Treif or Treyf	Meaning not kosher and therefore prohibited under Kashrut.
Yom Kippur	A holiday that falls around September or October. It is also known as the Day of Atonement. During this holiday Jews spend a 25-hour period fasting while requesting forgiveness for any wrongdoings (Koenig 12).

Introduction

American food blogger Molly Yeh from the blog *My Name is Yeh* is a successful self-made chef. In addition to keeping up her blog she has written two cookbooks and is the star of her own TV cooking show *Girl Meets Farm*. In her cooking, her Chinese-Jewish heritage is omnipresent. According to her, the dual heritage encourages her to explore her roots, but also to be creative with the traditions. Her memories of her youth are filled with the delicacies that were served on the dual celebrations of both Jewish and Christian holidays. While she was studying music, she lived in New York and here the absence of her mother's homemade food got her cooking started. She spent a lot of time cooking for her friends and started to share her recipes. With her unique blend of heritage to build on, Yeh has certainly developed her own style. Yet, many of her dishes are still recognizable as inspired by American Jewish cuisine. The latkes, challahs, hamantaschen, and lox bagels that Yeh gives a modern twist to are clear examples of what many people think to be the staples of authentic American Jewish food (See appendix A).

Although Yeh describes herself as being not very religious, she is fond of Jewish traditions and considers it important to carry them on. Her way to express this is through cooking, and her signature style literally and figuratively spices things up. Her recipes are decorated with an abundance of sprinkles, she teaches us that marzipan can be combined with nearly anything and that Chrismukkah, a combination of Christmas and Hanukkah, is a reason for a big celebration. Yeh would be considered a secular Jew, but by interacting with food she keeps her connection to her Jewish heritage alive. In doing so, and by sharing her experiences through a blog, books, and TV shows, she demonstrates how food is a means to connect with religion in a non-traditional way.

The case of Yeh is just one example of the many people who have in some way documented or expressed the importance of food for American Jews. Cultural Anthropologist

Claudia Roden clearly encapsulates what makes the case of American Jews particularly interesting:

> The story of American Jewry is the story of a modern Golden Age of Jewish life – of full integration in the economy, of involvement in the process of government and participation in scientific and artistic endeavors. It is also a story of loss of culture, of assimilation and acculturation, and of rediscovery and renaissance of a heritage. (69)

In the story of American Jewry food has an important role, and it has proved to be an excellent tool to describe specific challenges and triumphs they have encountered over the years.

Although it is not possible to determine the exact number of Jews living in the United States, there are several research institutions that have produced estimations of the numbers over the years. In 2018, the *American Jewish Year Book* estimated the number of Jews living in the United States as 6,925 million (Sheskin & Dashefsky 251). As the total population of the United States is about 328 million, American Jews constitute by no means a majority. Nevertheless, the United States are home to the largest, or the second largest population of Jews, depending on which estimates are used.

When studying American Jews, it is impossible to disregard the history of Jewish immigration, as so many American Jews or their ancestors have come to the United States as immigrants. Jewish immigration to the United States took place in four periods: the Sephardic period, German immigration, Eastern European immigration, and modern immigration (Sheskin & Dashefsky 258). During the last two periods, which covers the time frame from 1880 till the present day, Jewish immigration to the United States grew exponentially. From the Eastern European immigration period, the majority of Jewish people living in the United States had a heritage that could be traced back to Eastern Europe, and a majority of these people had lived in

what is nowadays considered as Russia (Sheskin and Dashefsky 259). The Jewish people that originate from Eastern Europe are considered to be Ashkenazim. The Ashkenazi people are well known for their language, Yiddish, but have also had a profound impact on what we now consider as authentic American Jewish food.

The large number of Ashkenazi immigrants that came to the United States brought with them their traditional and defining dishes such as gefilte fish, challah, and hamantaschen (See appendix A). In the United States, these dishes, like the people to whom they belonged, underwent the process of loss, assimilation, and acculturation. The same dish might not taste the same nowadays as it did a hundred years ago, yet it has survived in some for form and continues to live on as a part of Jewish heritage. Eventually, the Ashkenazi cuisine was so well known that it became representative for the entirety of American Jewish food.

When examining food in a particular medium, it is not just eating or cooking that is interesting. Rather, all aspects related to the preparation or consumption of food and its symbolic meanings are relevant. Together all of these meanings and activities that surround food in a specific cultural setting are described under the term *foodways.* It is the intention here to examine which elements of American Jewish foodways have found their way into literature. The rich history of American Jewish foodways, and the large number of literary texts that in some way cover this topic make it an interesting case study. The focus will be on the 20th and 21st century as this period saw the influx of Ashkenazi immigrants, with their defining influence on what is considered to be American Jewish food. Furthermore, there is a practical aspect to choosing this period: literature that was produced during or this time is plentiful and widely available. The research in this thesis is concerned with the question: what is the function of food within American Jewish literature?

In order to answer this question, the first chapter will seek to outline how this research can be positioned in a broader academic context, and how other scholars have dealt with the topic of literature and food, Jewish food studies, literature studies on American Jewish foodways, and other specific relevant topics. The second chapter presents the methodology and gives a literature review of the chosen primary texts for this research. The third, and final, chapter covers the analysis of the representation of American Jewish foodways in the chosen literary texts. This is done in three sub-chapters covering the topics 'The Old World and the New World', 'Finding One's Identity in America', and 'Rediscovering Culinary Heritage'. The conclusion outlines the findings of this study and identifies its limitations as well as possibilities for further research.

Chapter 1. Theoretical framework

The field of food studies is an interdisciplinary research field that revolves around the critical study of food in all possible contexts. It is a broad field that has only become wider over the years as more interactions with other disciplines are explored. One of these subfields, that emerged during the last few decades, is that of literature and food studies. Introducing food studies to the field of literature studies allows us to 're-evaluate, rethink and (re-)discover the importance of food and eating in understanding the ways we live and communicate' (Piatti-Farnell and Lee Brien, introduction n.p.). In other words, looking at food literature can enrich our understanding of the texts in question. Food has an all-encompassing role in real life: obviously its most logical function is nourishment to people, but beyond that it also has important cultural functions. For that reason, it seems logical that the representation of food in literature has the potential to teach us about both personal and universal experiences.

Literature and food studies is a broad field because of its interdisciplinary nature. Since its emergence, it has been criticized and labeled as "scholarship lite", by scholars with reservations about the legitimacy of food as an object of academic analysis (Shahani 9). Nevertheless, theorists in the field have persisted and the publication of several lengthy and compelling volumes such as *Literature and Food Studies* by Amy Tigner and Allison Carruth, Gitanjali Shahani's *Food and Literature*, The *Routledge Companion to Literature and Food* by Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Donna Lee Brian, and Anita Mannur's *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*. These works, as well as various other publications, have demonstrated the boundless opportunities that the field has to offer both in breadth and depth. In doing so they ensured recognition for literature and food studies as a fully developed interdisciplinary subfield.

Tigner and Carruth emphasize that they 'contend that food studies invites a redefinition of the objects of literary study to include not only poetry, drama, and narrative — the three major

forms of literature with a capital "L"—but also what we term *vernacular literary practices*' (Tigner and Carruth 3). By this, they mean a broad variety of texts such as memoirs, handbooks, gardening books, protest writings, cookbooks, recipes, and various others. Similarly, Mannur acknowledges that we can study food in a variety of different texts. She provides various examples of texts in which she found merit in studying their interactions with food, even though, 'none of these works fall within the genre of "food writing"' (Mannur 14). She recognizes that 'food emerges as a vital textual modality,' or in other words, food is an essential mode of expression within a text, regardless of what genre the host text belongs to (Mannur 14). Food could then be seen as 'a means of articulating one's sense of ethnic or national identity' (Mannur 14). Furthermore, Mannur proposes that foodways in literature are to be regarded as 'an alternative register through which to theorize gender, sexuality, class, and race' (Mannur 19). Shahani gives further attention to this point made by Mannur. According to her, it is vital that literature and food studies scholarship seeks to embrace a critical attitude and intersect with, likewise critical, studies of race, queer, gender, and feminism (Shahani 17). Shahani believes that by doing so the literature and food studies field can draw from interdisciplinary methods, as well as 'simultaneously [creating] their own methodologically consistent ways to approach the culinary text' (Shahani 17). Like Tigner, Carruth, Mannur and Shahani I believe that literature and food studies offer a broad range of possibilities for research, and that we should seek to use this to ensure that the field is diverse and inclusive.

The next academic field on which this research builds is that of Jewish food studies. As the history of Jewish food is an incredibly long and extensive one, it has regularly been the subject of academic research. However, most of the existing research has been conducted with a primary focus on theological and/or historical perspectives, rather than sociological or literary

perspectives. This is exemplified by Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, a Rabbi and religious scholar, whose work combines historical and theological perspectives.

Brumberg-Kraus argues that studies that focus on Jewish food studies can be separated into two different types of studies: those that adopt a text-centered approach and those that rely primarily on the study of performance. The text-centered approach focuses on the constructed meaning of Jewish culinary culture by the author, this meaning often being idealized and prescriptive. The texts that prescribe meaning to which Brumberg-Kraus refers are almost exclusively (derived from) religious texts. The performative centered approach studies the actual rituals of consumption and its regional or timely variations. Thus, this performative approach operates from a more sociological and cultural-historical approach. According to Brumberg-Kraus, this causes that: ‘We typically distinguish between what classic Jewish literary traditions *want* Jews to do with food and what Jews *actually do* with food, which complicates much of the discussion of identity construction in Jewish food history writing’ (121, author’s emphasis). If we move beyond the two types of study and turn our focus to literary (and often secular) texts we could focus on other aspects, by looking at the role of food in the construction of Jewish identity, thus, referring back to Brumberg-Klaus, we could be looking at what food *means to* Jews.

Another relevant contribution comes from Aaron Hahn Tapper, who draws attention to the diversity of Jewish religion and identity in his book *Judaisms*. Hahn Tapper elaborates on the idea of a communal narrative, a way of survival for a community’s collective memory, as a ‘master narrative’ that is told and retold over the course of tens of generations (Hahn Tapper 13). These communal narratives are based on truth, which ‘can be related to facts, but more often than not they are shaped according to interpretations rather than precise historical evidence’ (Hahn Tapper 14). The problem with this is that most people are so convinced in their loyalty to their own truths that they are unwilling to accept other truths. Within a community there usually

is a dominant communal narrative that is repeated over and over again. With each repetition, people become more convinced of this narrative's truth. As this happens, the status of the dominant communal narrative is further affirmed, which marginalizes other non-dominant narratives. Hahn Tapper gives the example of Passover. Passover, or Pesach is one of the major Jewish holidays that is celebrated by Jewish communities all over the world. The exact rituals that are performed to celebrate Passover vary from region to region. Hahn Tapper argues that the rituals surrounding the holiday in the United States have become 'Ashkenazi-fied' over time. As this happened, Ashkenazi Judaism became the dominant cultural force shaping the worldview of the Jewish community in the United States. For them, each year as Passover is celebrated, the rituals they perform become normalized as being the 'true' Jewish way of doing. Or as Hahn Tapper puts it: 'with each retelling, Jews' dominant stories gain strength, creating internal, Jewish-centric storylines that play in a loop' (Hahn Tapper 27). Eventually, this can result in many people believing that their own way of practicing Judaism is the only right way. This, of course, is problematic as it could lead to 'the withering and expunging of subordinate identities and practices' (Hahn Tapper 25). Hahn Tapper emphasizes that there is no single way of performing the Jewish Passover rituals, as there has never been 'one Judaism, only Judaisms; never one type of Jew or Jewish identity, only Jews and Jewish identities' (Hahn Tapper 27).

To exemplify his arguments Hahn Tapper brings up the case of how not only the holiday of Passover, but the broader American Jewish narrative is dominated by the experiences of (white) Ashkenazi Jews. As the Ashkenazi narrative became dominant, differences between various Ashkenazi subgroups became less apparent, to the extent that most young people who consider themselves to be Ashkenazi can no longer identify differences between various subgroups. Further, Hahn Tapper mentions that another element of Ashkenazi dominance within the United States is that of their transition to whiteness. According to Hahn Tapper, the

Ashkenazi Jews 'were not born into whiteness but gradually transitioned into this position as their Americanness (and Europeanness) became increasingly accepted' (21). He explains that generally speaking, white people have had more power and privilege in the United States than any other group. The result was that 'once Ashkenazi Jews were perceived to be white, their power increased in turn, particularly in the spheres of academia, government, media, and popular culture' (Hahn Tapper 21). This then further reinforced their narrative as the dominant communal narrative for all American Jews.

As Hahn Tapper's case study has brought us to the topic of American Jews, the next subfield that warrants discussion is that of Jewish food studies with a particular focus on America. Claudia Roden, whose work was already mentioned in the introduction, wrote an extensive cookbook on Jewish food that features much additional content about its context. In her section on American Jewish foods Roden speaks about the Americanization of later generations of Jewish immigrants:

> By the 1940s, when a second generation began to prosper, and they found themselves thrown into the same melting pot, the two assimilated, and their Americanization began. For the most part, the second generation rejected their Jewish heritage. For many of the third generation, the Eastern European heritage became irrelevant, for it was no longer even a memory. It had become an echo of the distant past, without meaning, while the merger of different cultures in the country created a new symbiosis and a vial and dynamic new society of which the Jews, like everybody else, craved to be part. (Roden 73)

According to her, later generations of Jewish immigrants lost touch with their heritage, as the memories of their ancestors who had once lived far away became less tangible. For some people

this led to a desire to be able to identify with their ancestors in some way. Roden recognizes this returned interest in this heritage during later years:

> [...] there have been stirrings of interest - a kind of Jewish cultural renaissance. It has to do with the new generation's nostalgia and yearning for roots, a need for identification to fill a cultural vacuum. Whereas some look for anchorage in religious orthodoxy, others rediscover the cultural heritage in the kitchen. There are all kinds - Yiddish gourmets, purists, followers of kosher 'nouvelle' and eclectic creators. (Roden 73)

According to her, one of the ways these people seek to reconnect with their heritage is through food. Although several years have passed since the publication of Roden's cookbook, the reinvention of American Jewish (Ashkenazi) cuisine is still a recent popular phenomenon as we have explored through the example of Molly Yeh.

Other invaluable contributions to this subfield have come from Rachel B. Gross. As the author of various articles relating to the topic, Gross has proved to be a pioneering figure on American Jewish foodways. Two of her articles are especially relevant for setting up the foundation of the research in this thesis. In "'An Unjustified S(ch)mear Campaign': Narratives of American Jewish Food," Gross discusses the concept of a declension narrative. Such a declension narrative represents the idea that the rise of mass manufacturing and convenience foods is damaging, because they inevitably mean a decline in quality and authenticity (Gross, "Narratives" n.p.). Gross explains that this narrative induces a sense of nostalgia and calls for a return to traditional methods of food production which will then lead to tastier food and a better connection to 'communal and familial histories' (Gross, "Narratives"). Furthermore, I believe that narratives like the declension narrative lead to struggles between American Jewish people, or more specifically intergenerational struggles. However, what distinguishes Gross is that she

does not fall for the trap of the declension narrative. Rather, she puts great focus on the aspect revival. She recognizes that foodways do not have to return to exactly the way they were generations ago in order for them to strengthen ties to this particular heritage. She celebrates attempts to elevate American Jewish food to a higher culinary level and embraces modern interpretations that seek to diversify it. She concludes with the statement that 'engaging with the declension narrative of Jewish food and the nostalgic adaptations of the Jewish culinary revival allows American Jews to reflect upon their communal pasts and create community in the present' (Gross, "Narratives"). I believe that this statement encourages us to regard food as a way to come to terms with heritage, while at the same time strengthening modern-day communities.

The second relevant article by Gross is titled "Table talk: American Jewish foodways and the study of religion" in which she presents a precise overview of the existing research in the subfield of American Jewish foodways, its potential, and its shortcomings. In this article Gross sets out several areas in which she thinks a focus on food studies can benefit the field of Jewish studies: who count as religious leaders, where does religious activity occur, the relationship between Jewish history and its American religious contexts, and what is considered to be "Jewish" (Gross, "Table Talk" 2). For each of these areas, Gross explains the potential assets of incorporating foodways into Jewish studies and points to issues that have not yet been addressed by scholars. Gross believes that looking at food will lead to more recognition for women's religious activity and will challenge the idea of a synagogue as the only 'legitimate' site of religion. One of the examples that she gives for this relates to the holiday of Yom Kippur: 'Traditional observance of Yom Kippur does not include a ritual meal, but as Rubel finds, the post-fast meal has become a Jewish ritual in its own right, a home tradition created primarily by non-Orthodox American Jewish women' (Gross, "Table Talk" 3). By recognizing the defining impact rituals such as the Yom Kippur meal have had on the Jewish religion we come to new,

more diverse, understandings about religious authority figures and religious sites. A further remark Gross makes in relation to sites of religion is that: ‘Like scholarship on American Jewish history and religion more broadly, work on American Jewish foodways has an overwhelming focus on New York’ (Gross “Table Talk” 4). Historically, New York was the first city many immigrants arrived in, and the city still is home to a large Jewish population today. Therefore, it makes sense that New York has a significant place in both literary works and scholarly research. However, the amount of studies whose geographical interest lays outside of New York is almost negligible, and it would be desirable to widen the geographical scope in the coming years. I believe that the focus on New York is a logical one, but that we should seek to diminish this bias in the future.

Lastly, Gross discusses what we can regard as ‘Jewish.’ The reader is challenged to think about what makes Jewish cuisine, which in most cases actually refers to Ashkenazi cuisine, still ‘Jewish’ when it becomes more and more incorporated under the broader label American cuisine. Gross thinks that studying foodways encourages us to ‘narrow our claims about Jewishness to particular times and places under study, rather than making universal claims’ (Gross “Table Talk,” 5). Ultimately, Gross concludes that the research field of American Jewish foodways deserves further research that does more to diversify the field and specifically requests more research into the representation of Jewish food in popular media. Like Gross, I believe argue that popular media, or in this case literature specifically, can enhance and diversify our understanding of American Jewish foodways. This is because literature, film, and television have an extensive role in how American Jewish Foodways are perceived.

Before turning to the next chapter, we need to look at one final aspect that is imperative for a literary analysis of American Jewish foodways and deserves further clarification: the

stereotype of the overbearing Jewish mother. Sylvia Fishman, who wrote about the images of women in American Jewish fiction, declares that:

> Jewish male writers often portrayed Jewish women in a grotesque mirror image of the proverbial Woman of Valor. These fictional Jewish women had their own ideas and tried to conquer their husbands and sons; they used food, hygiene, and guilt as weapons of domination. (Fishman 35)

According to Fishman, the image of strong Jewish women has always been present. From biblical portrayals (the Woman of Valor) to more recent portrayals, such as the Jewish mother trope. However, the way they are depicted has changed over the years and most likely will continue to do so. Fishman elaborates that ‘the aggressive, verbal, clever Jewish woman was often caricatured as pushy and unattractive compared to the refined, polite, domestic, docile and ornamental image of the “real” American non-Jewish woman’ (31). The Jewish mother trope referred to in the citation above surfaced during the 19th century and remained widely used in popular culture until the early 20th century, but still survives up until today. It sets out the Jewish mother as strong and manipulative, food being one of her instruments in this. Understandably, this had an impact on the relationship between such a character and her children. Fishman mentions the relationship between mothers and daughters in particular. In referral to these daughters, Fishman argues that: ‘Many women find themselves caught, [...] between feelings of loyalty to their traditional Jewish mothers and attraction to their gentile lovers; that conflict is a vivid and graphic symbol of the pull of the past and the lure of the new’ (Fishman 37).

Each of the theories discussed here should was included to broaden our understanding of how American Jewish foodways function in literature. This started broad with the theories of literature and food scholars such as Mannur and Shahani, and the Jewish food studies by scholars

as Brumberg-Kraus and Hahn Tapper. Eventually, the theory was narrowed down to more specific topics, such as the work of Gross on the declension (and revival) narrative and Fishman's work on the portrayal of Jewish mothers in literature. After having demonstrated how the topic of this thesis interacts with, and connects different academic research fields, the next section sets out the chosen methodology and elaborates on the primary literary texts which will be analyzed for their portrayal of American Jewish foodways.

Chapter 2. Methodology and Corpus

2.1 Methodology

In order to analyze how foodways function as a signifier of American Jewish identity, a selection of literary texts will function as the primary source for this research. As discussed in the theoretical framework, Tigner and Carruth advocate that we analyze food in a broad range of texts. They use the term 'vernacular literary practices' to describe those 'modes of writing that develop within specific historical contexts and that intermix rhetorical and aesthetic craft with the dissemination of applied knowledge that is variously empirical, sensory, instructive, interactive, and intergenerational' (Tigner and Carruth 3). Within literature studies the concept of genre is a core tool to navigate different kinds of texts, and Tigner and Carruth encourage us to use genres as a mode of navigation within the 'vernacular literary practices' they refer to. Whereas literature studies generally tend to look at three main genres, that of poetry, drama, and narrative, analyzing food should encourage us to look at a broader range of narratives. The analyzed texts within this thesis belong to the genres of novels, biographies or memoirs, and cookbooks (both non-fiction.

As stated above, food and literature studies should seek to analyze a broad range of genres, but this does not mean that mainstream genres should be neglected. Rather, the accessibility of these genres, in particular that of narrative, makes it a good place to start our analysis. Memoirs and biographies form another genre whose literary merit has been well established. For many American Jews who immigrated to the United States, food was an important factor in life. This has translated to a large number of memoirs that focus both on American Jewish identity and food. Cookbooks have an obvious link to food studies but have also been looked at from a literary perspective more frequently in recent years. This is a direct result of the fact that:

> Today's cookbooks come packed with stories in long narrative prefaces, chapter introductions, and recipe headnotes. The reader may be the protagonist of the recipe, but the cookbook author provides pages and pages of autobiographical narrative and anecdote. (Tippen)

Together, this makes cookbooks a logical choice to demonstrate how 'vernacular literature' can shape our understanding of the functions of food in literature.

The selected texts will be studied through close reading in order to extract those elements that pertain to food. Furthermore, the intent is to analyze if there are patterns between these texts and the way they employ food as a thematic instrument. It is important to note that the research conducted here is explorative in scope. There are many different genres left out of this research, and for the genres included, there are only two texts analyzed per genre. Thus this does not offer a complete representation of the entire genre. Nor does the analysis conducted here cover all aspects of the texts but looks only at the narrative of interest for food and literature studies. As this is a relatively new field of interest, the research conducted here should encourage fruitful discussion about how food studies can enrich literary analysis.

2.2 Literature Review Corpus

This research focuses on six primary sources, from three different genres. This selection was made to represent a broad slice of the available texts that deal with both American Jewish identity and food. The selected texts consist of two novels, *Bread Givers* (1925) and *Modern Girls* (2016), two memoirs, *Famous Nathan* (2017) and *My Fat Dad* (2015), and two cookbooks, *The Jewish Cookbook* (2019) and *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes* (2017). Another factor in the selection of these texts is their time of publication. All of the texts were published during the 20th and 21st centuries, a time that is significant given the large number of Jewish immigrants that settled in the United States, many of whom documented their experiences in writing.

While summarizing the content of the two novels, it is easy to overlook the importance of food. This is demonstrated in the extensive summaries of both novels that can be found in the appendix to this thesis (Appendix B). The first of the two novels and the oldest book of the selected texts is Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*. In some editions, the book is given the more elaborate title *Bread Givers: A Novel: A Struggle between a Father of the Old World and a Daughter of the New*. It was published in 1925 and is set in an unspecified year during the 1920s in New York's Lower East Side. The book tells the story of a poor immigrant family, the Smolinsky's. The narration in *Bread Givers* is in the first person through the character of the youngest Smolinsky daughter, Sara. The family is poor, and the father is unwilling to make a contribution to the household as he deems it his task to devote all of his time to his religious studies. This leaves the Smolinsky girls and their mother in charge of bringing in money, making sure they are fed, and keeping house. As food and money are scarce, Sara has known periods of hunger to the extent that her physical appearance is described as scrawny. Her hunger acts as a catalyst in the unfolding events of the story.

Yezierska's writing style is characteristic because of its autobiographical elements, as she draws on her own experiences as a Jewish immigrant in the United States in most of her works. These autobiographical elements are perhaps most explicit in *Bread Givers*. Much like the characters in this novel, Yezierska lived with her family on the Lower East Side during her teenage years. Her own father's devotion to religion was similar to that of Reb Smolinsky.

The second novel, *Modern Girls* by Jennifer S. Brown, is set in 1935, about ten years after the setting of *Bread Givers*. The novels describe a relatively similar environment. Both sets of characters live in New York's Lower East Side, which is consistent with reality, as the Lower East Side was predominantly home to Jewish immigrants between the 1920s and 1960s. Unlike Yezierska, Brown wrote *Modern Girls* in retrospect, as it was published in 2016 and Brown, not having lived during the 1930s, relied on extensive research rather than her own experience for its setting.

In *Modern Girls*, it is the Krasinsky family that takes the stage. Like the Smolinsky's they originate from what is now Russia, but unlike the Smolinsky children, the Krasinsky children were born after their parents had immigrated to the United States. Dottie is the eldest child and only daughter amidst several brothers. Thus, it is expected of her to participate in domestic chores when she is not at work. However, her mother recognizes Dottie's resentment to this and therefore does not force her to do so all the time. Although the apartment of the Krasinskys is small, they do not have to rely on external income from lodging one of their rooms to boarders, unlike the Smolinskys in *Bread Givers*. While the family certainly is not rich there has always been enough money to buy food and ensure the entire family is well-fed. As Dottie, who is still unmarried, and her mother, who has reached the age of 42, find themselves pregnant at the same time, both of the women are faced with the struggle with how to be a modern woman and how to reconcile that with their traditions.

The third text is *Famous Nathan*, written by Lloyd Handwerker who is Nathan's grandson, is the story of the life of Nathan Handwerker. Central to Nathan's life was his business: the restaurant chain Nathan's Famous, well known for their hotdogs. As an immigrant from what is now known as Poland, Nathan came to the United States in 1912. He came from a poor and big Jewish family, where it was not uncommon that there was not enough food to feed the 13 hungry children. His first job, when he still was a young boy, was at a small bakery. Arguably, this instilled a passion for food in him that would later lead him to start his Frankfurter business. Upon his arrival in New York, Nathan soon found a job in a factory that paid decent wages. It did not take long for Nathan to realize that he did not want to work in a factory. Nathan took on a lower-paying job at a luncheonette, where he learned everything he needed to know before opening a store of his own in 1916. His business was to specialize in affordable Frankfurters, more commonly known today as hotdogs. Nathan's business was conveniently located at Coney Island, as subway access to Coney Island was realized a year before its opening. This allowed Nathan to serve a crowd that consisted of millions of people that escaped to Coney Island on their day off.

Although *Famous Nathan* is marketed as Nathan's biography, at times, its content extends beyond the context of his own life and elaborates on the experiences of his family members, employees, and customers. Nathan's Famous was more than a means to make a living to Nathan. The business was a way to make sure that his family – not only the immediate but also the extended and the adopted (his customers) – were always taken care of.

The fourth text, *My Fat Dad*, is a memoir written by Dawn Lerman about her life while growing up in Chicago, during the 1970s. During this time, both of her parents had highly distorted relations with food. Her heavily overweight father had been dieting ever since Dawn was born, and with her mother eating only a single can of tuna a day, Dawn usually ate only

those foods that fitted her father's current diet. Neither of her parents were really concerned with whether their daughter was eating at all, let alone whether what she was eating was good for her. Fortunately for Dawn, there was one person in her life who cared more about her than anyone else – her maternal grandmother Beauty. Beauty happened to be a great cook and an avid believer in the nourishing qualities of good food. Every weekend of her youth was spent at her grandmothers' house where Dawn was fed properly and learned how to cook. Beauty was a Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe, who moved to the United States during her younger years. She passed some of her Jewish traditions on to Lerman. Although Lerman generally associates Jewish food with high quality and nourishing food, not all traditional dishes suited her taste. For Lerman this did not mean that she would completely abandon these foods, rather she became passionate about adapting recipes in order to make them suit her taste.

The fifth text is *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes: the life, art & cookbook of Cipe Pineles*, a special cookbook as its manuscript was created 72 years before its eventual publication. When illustrator Wendy McNaughton found an illustrated manuscript at an antiquarian book market in 2014, its spectacular drawings of food immediately drew her attention, and when she asked to see the work up close, she determined that it was not a reproduction, but rather an original manuscript dated from 1945. McNaughton's friend and magazine editor Sara Rich was equally enthusiastic about the book, and together they did some quick research on their phones. It turned out that the author of the book was Cipe Pineles, a woman once famous for her work as a graphic designer and art director of several well-known magazines. The two wondered why they had not heard of her before, as they felt that they ought to have, as they both worked in the same industry in which Pineles once was a trailblazer, as the first female art director for several well-known magazines.

Born in Austria, to orthodox Jewish parents, Pineles and her family moved to the United States in the early 1920s. She received a good education, and her first job was as a teacher at an art school, but she went on to become an influential designer and director in the magazine business in New York. In 1945 she wrote and illustrated the manuscript for *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes,* which was left unfinished and (possibly purposefully) unpublished. It was a collection of recipes for traditional Jewish dishes which she considered an integral part of her heritage. McNaughton and Rich bought the manuscript with the intention of getting it published. In the three years that followed, they did extensive research into Pineles' life. The end result became *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes: the life, art & Cookbook of Cipe Pineles*. As the original manuscript did not have as many recipes as a modern-day cookbook would have, they added a section in which some of her recipes are revisited. Furthermore, the book contains nine chapters that together form a lengthy prelude to Pineles' own material, in which her history, achievements, and love for food are discussed as well as the connection the editors felt to Pineles.

The sixth and final text is *The Jewish Cookbook*, a cookbook published in 2019. The book has a broad focus, positioning Jewish food as a global cuisine that has developed differently according to the region of origin of the immigrants, and thus goes beyond the context of American Jewish foodways at times. Nevertheless, including *The Jewish Cookbook* was a deliberate choice. The author, Leah Koenig, is American and has spent the last decade writing about Jewish food. During this time, she recognized how immensely vast the Jewish Cuisine is, as Jewish food is cooked all over the world, but also how unique local variations on Jewish food were. *The Jewish Cookbook* is an attempt to bring to light how the global phenomenon of Jewish food is constructed out of vastly different regional and local variations.

In terms of its size *The Jewish Cookbook* is a hefty collection of recipes, as the book spans over 400 pages. The recipes are divided over eleven sections, mostly categorized by types of food, such as 'Soups & Stews' and 'Dumplings, Noodles & Kugels' (See appendix A). Not all of the recipes are accompanied by a picture, as there are photos for about one in two to five recipes. However, every single recipe has a short introduction that tells the reader something about the context, history, or specificities of the recipe in question, as well as several lengthier prefaces on certain topics, such as 'Challah and the Shabbat Table.' Another interesting aspect of the book is the inclusion of several recipes by acclaimed chefs (See appendix A). The value of *The Jewish Cookbook* lies in its unwavering attempt to demonstrate how local Jewish foodways such as the American Jewish cuisine are all unique, yet simultaneously have so much in common. This positions the American Jewish foodways within a broader framework of Jewish food, and demonstrates how they connect with one another, and how food is not static, but dynamic. In light of the declension narrative, as explained in the theoretical framework, American Jewish cuisine in the United States is seen as suffering under external influences that are presumed to have a detrimental effect. However, like Gross I do not agree with this as in Gross explains that:

> The best of work on Jewish foodways understand that Jewish religion and foodways, like the religion and foodways of other peoples, have always been influenced by their surroundings and acknowledge change over time without falling prey to declension narratives. (Marks in Gross, "Table Talk" 6)

This confirms the ideas put forward by Koenig in *The Jewish Cookbook.*

In the next chapter, an in-depth exploration of these texts will bring to light the particular nuances of how these books portray American Jewish foodways, in the context of the existing research discussed in the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3. Analysis

The analysis of this corpus will consist of three subchapters that will each deal with a different theme. Not all of the texts will be discussed in each section, as not all of the themes are predominantly present in every text. The three themes are separate yet interconnected, together they are intended to highlight how foodways are used to illustrate the struggles of various generations of American Jewish immigrants.

The first part will discuss how the texts covered immigrant's struggles with accommodating their habits and traditions from the Old World in their new home country. The events and experiences here pertain mostly to first-generation immigrants. People for whom the 'Old World' still was a tangible memory, often found it difficult to part with their old ways of living, and this directly impacted their children. This section shows how sometimes it was difficult to adapt to life in America. Not everybody was able or willing to embrace aspects of American culture. It explores the struggles of immigrants who were not able to shift their focus from the Old World to the New World: the Old World being their home country, and the New World being the United States.

The second part covers the experience of American Jewish people coming to terms with the American aspects of their identity. If the first part is about standing out and refusing, this second part is more focused on blending in and accepting. This section will focus on the different experiences of negotiation between the Jewish and the American parts of one's identity. The experiences that fit with this section could be those of second-generation immigrants, and first-generation immigrants who came to the United States at a young age. It is about the experiences of those people who feel ties to both the Old World and the New World.

The third part is about rediscovering culinary heritage. This section covers the desire to reconnect with heritage expressed through a returned interest in authentic foods. For these

people, American Jewish foodways are about cooking, eating and engaging with foods that are deemed authentic as a way to feel closer to Jewish aspects of their identity. The elements relevant to this section mostly are experiences of latter generation immigrants, who might not even actively affiliate with their history of immigration or their Jewish heritage.

3.1 The Old World and The New World

The first theme is that of the contrast between the old and the new world. The old world represents the traditions of the countries, regions, or areas where the Jewish immigrants were living before settling in the United States. Upon their move, most people were forced to give up a lot. Friends and family were left behind and English replaced immigrants' mother languages, as names were anglicized, and public conversations were held almost exclusively in English. Despite the fact that there were plenty of illiterate immigrants, for whom this was extra challenging, the abandoning of native tongues in favor of English was a way to ensure to stand out as little as possible, with the aim of making life slightly easier. Food was one of the few elements of cultural identity that people could take with them. That is, to a certain extent. What they were eating was not always a matter of choice, but rather of survival. For many, the United States did not turn out to be the promised land that many had envisioned it to be. Women and children were needed as part of the workforce in order to make a living and many people still lived in poverty. In order to be successful in the New World, it was necessary to adapt. This section sets out how this often led to friction between generations. Older generations felt strong ties to the 'Old World,' whereas this was significantly less the case for younger generations.

In the texts that are analyzed here, food is an important indicator of the struggles that Jewish immigrants faced in making their compromises between the Old World and the New World. This is important, because this relates, to a certain extent, to the ideas of Gross as expressed in the theoretical framework. Gross talks about the declension narrative but does not elaborate on when or how this notion came into the world. She argues that under the declension narrative, mass manufacturing and other modern conveniences lead to an inevitable decline in the quality of American Jewish foodways. However, this chapter builds on textual experiences that are mostly set before technological advancements that enabled mass manufacturing came

into being. My argument here is that even before the time of mass manufacturing, sentiments existed that were similar to those captured by the declension narrative.

Bread Givers centers around a family of whom the father, Reb Smolinsky, is a difficult man. His infatuation with his religious studies makes him ignorant of societal problems and of the hardships his wife and daughters are facing. Before their move to the United States, the family was able to live off the mother's inheritance and the charity of those who deeply respected Reb's religious devotion. However, once they have moved the family can no longer rely on such an established support network, and they are suddenly on their own. Furthermore, Reb's ideas about the United States before their move already foreshadow how their situation is going to change for the worse:

> When we came to America, instead of taking along feather beds, and the samovar, and the brass pots and pans, like other people, Father made us carry his books. When Mother begged only to take along her pot for *gefülte* fish, and the two feather beds that were handed down to her from her grandmother for her wedding presents, Father wouldn't let her.
>
> "Woman!" Father said, laughing into her eyes.
>
> "What for will you need old feather beds? Don't you know it's always summer in America? And in the new golden country, where milk and honey flows free in the streets, you'll have new golden dishes to cook in, and not weigh yourself down with your old pots and pans. But my books, my holy books always were, and always will be, the light of the world. You'll see yet how all America will come to my feet to learn." (Yezierska 8-9)

Once settled in the United States, Reb does not seem to realize that milk and honey flow far from freely. In their new home, there is an entire room for Reb where he spends time with his holy

books, and which his wife and daughters are not allowed to enter. The youngest daughter, Sara, remarks that this would have been different if she had a brother. According to Reb's orthodox religious perspective, men and women are different. Where men are given the noble task of studying the Torah, women cannot do so and are meant to provide the men with food and take care of domestic chores, even in life after death:

> The prayers of his daughters didn't count because God didn't listen to women. [...] Women could get into Heaven because they were wives and daughters of men. Women had no brains for the study of God's Torah, but they could be the servants of men who studied the Torah. Only if they cooked for the men, and washed for the men, and didn't nag or curse the men out of their homes; only if they let the men study the Torah in peace, then, maybe, they could push themselves into Heaven with the men, to wait on them there. (Yezierska 9-10)

Although paternal figures as tyrannical as Reb Smolinsky might not have been the norm, the role of Jewish women as the manager of the family was quite normal. Annie Polland argued that the transition of migration and adapting to American life proved more difficult for men as: '[...] the Jewish male's work responsibilities often directly conflicted with the traditional male ideal of scholarship and, in many cases, daily and Sabbath prayer' (Polland 277). It is clear that Sara is not convinced by Reb's logic. While her father isolates himself in order to spend time with his holy books, Sara is a witness to the family's misery. To her, it might appear that her father is consciously ignoring that situation.

During the start of the novel, the Smolinsky daughters are out of, which means that there will not be any money to buy food. As her sisters are out looking for work, the youngest daughter Sara is still at home. Sara does her chores as she awaits the return of her sisters, hoping that they will bring good news. When her second oldest sister returns, Sara immediately knows

that she has not succeeded: ‘One look at her, and I knew she had not yet found work. I went on peeling the potatoes, but I no more knew what my hands were doing. I felt only the dark hurt of her weary eyes’ (Yezierska, 1). Sara, clearly upset by the family’s misfortune, is at a loss. She desperately wishes for the situation to change but is unable to have any significant impact herself as she was considered too young to work up until now.

Distracted by their misery, Sara continues peeling the potatoes no longer fully aware of what she is doing. When their mother comes home and sees Sara’s poor job of potato peeling, she gets enraged:

> “*Gazlin! Bandit!*” Her cry broke through the house. She picked up the peelings and shook them before my eyes. “You’d think potatoes grow free in the street. I eat out my heart, running from pushcart to pushcart, only to bargain down a penny on five pounds, and you cut away my flesh like a murderer.” (Yezierska 7)

With no money left to buy new food, the potatoes might be the family’s last meal for the foreseeable future. The mother, as ‘family manager’ is very skilled in bargaining to make sure that the little money they have to spend will get them the most food possible. When she comes home and sees how her daughter carelessly peeled away the potato flesh with the peels, this instantly undoes her hard work. Not being able to understand how Sara could have been so careless drives her to despair and anger. Sara, devastated by how her mother is disappointed in her, desires to be of better use to the family.

Sara starts working as a herring peddler and although the work is far from pleasant, it gives her satisfaction to be able to make money and play a role in providing for the family. Now that Sara is contributing to the family’s upkeep, it becomes even clearer to her how the privilege

given to her father at home is alike to the privileged position men enjoy in the Torah according to her father:

> And so, since men were the only people who counted with God, Father not only had the best room for himself, for his study and prayers, but also the best eating of the house. The fat from the soup and the top from the milk went always to him. [...] With watering mouths and glistening eyes we watched Mother skimming off every bit of fat from the top soup into Father’s big plate, leaving for us only the thin, watery part. We watched Father bite into the sour pickle which was special for him only; and waited, trembling with hunger, for our portion. (Yezierska 10-11)

The amount of food the Smolinskys have is not enough to satisfy the hunger of each family member. For Sara, the feeling of hunger becomes extra painful at the realization that she is less deserving of nourishment according to her father's interpretation of the Torah. The mother occasionally tries to plead with her husband for his contribution to their upkeep, but never successfully. She is easily swayed by her husband’s sermons, shares his beliefs, and regards him as if he himself possesses a certain holiness. Sara is less convinced, linking her hunger to the unwillingness of her father to adapt to the American economy. To her, his refusal to adapt signifies that his love for the Torah is greater than that for his daughters.

In the ten or so years between the fictional settings of *Bread Givers* and *Modern Girls*, the situation of the immigrants living in the tenements of New York’s Lower East Side had slightly improved. The main characters in Brown’s novel, the Krasinsky family, still live in a relatively small apartment, but they no longer need boarders in order to be able to pay the rent and can afford enough food for the whole family. The parents are both first-generation

immigrants, but they met after their arrival in the United States, and all of the children were born there. The narration in *Modern Girls* is alternated between the perspective of Rose and her daughter Dottie, or put differently, it varies between the perspective from a first-generation and a second-generation immigrant.

Of the two women, Rose spends the most time reminiscing about the Old World. She does so consciously as she reflects on how her thoughts, ideas, and behavior are shaped by her ancestors throughout the book. Initially, Rose sees this history as imposed on her, like a static factor. Her traditions and beliefs are given to her by her own mother, and even when she starts questioning them, she cannot do away with these habits. After having had a bad thought about her pregnancy she unconsciously reacts by uttering the words "Puh Puh,"' a figurative interpretation of the Jewish custom of spitting three times to prevent the bad event from becoming reality (Brown 70). After having done so, Rose realizes that: 'It was silly of me, I knew the way I stood at the crossroads of my past and the present, wanting to rid myself of the old customs, but unable, in moments of weakness, to let go of the beliefs that had been fed to me since I was in my mother's womb' (Brown 71). This attachment to a particular way of doing things, as taught by family members, becomes decidedly clear in the context of kosher eating: '"*Knishes! Bagels*!" Called the foodmen. Other carts held kitchenwares and trinkets. Good thing I had already eaten. The smells of the freshly baked items were tempting, but I didn't trust the food in this unfamiliar neighborhood' (Brown 162). It does not matter if the knishes and bagels mentioned here are kosher. Rose' her experience has taught her that it is easy to make mistakes with the preparation of food that will result in food becoming treif.

Although Rose might financially be able to enjoy the luxury of having her meat kashered for her, Rose prefers to do this herself also because this allows her to save some money. Food is no longer as scarce for her as it was in Russia, but Rose continues to shop and cook

economically. She has consciously been saving money for nineteen years with the intention of giving it to her daughter. Before her marriage, Rose was passionately involved in socialist activism, but once she had children, she found it impossible to combine this with her domestic responsibilities. Although Rose bears her duties without resentment, she keeps wondering how she could have contributed to her beloved socialist cause if she was not tied to the kitchen as the family's prime caretaker. The opportunities to buy ready-made kosher food that Rose encounters, symbolize the opportunities that life in the United States have brought her. Even though she is not yet ready to make such choices for herself, she hopes that this will be different for Dottie and that the money she saved for her daughter allows her to make most of the opportunities that she will encounter.

Dottie is the Krasinsky's eldest child and only daughter, who went to school and has a job at an accountancy firm, and even plans to go to college in the foreseeable future. Although Dottie gives a significant part of her wages to her parents, she is left with enough money to spend on fashionable clothes and fun activities with her friends or boyfriend. Going to work at the 'office' allows Dottie to escape the Lower East Side, as the firm is located in Midtown Manhattan. Yet, she is never able to really shake the Lower East Side's influence, and the girls at the office are always able to find something that singles Dottie out and marks her as an 'other,' or in this case specifically as a greenhorn:

> On her way to the door, Florence wrinkled her nose at the food on my desk. "What in heaven's name is that?" The sandwich looked particularly unappetizing. But I coerced a smile and said, "Pickled calf's tongue." "Ew. Is that Yid food?" The girls behind her giggled. "It's scrumptious," I said, keeping the smile plastered on my face. (Brown 6)

Dottie never goes out with the other girls for lunch, she tells them it is because she would rather spend her money on clothing or accessories, but her real reason for this is that none of the places for lunch around the office offer kosher food. In this context, food serves as a representation of her Jewish identity, and thus, her otherness. This passage clearly illustrates how this otherness isolates her.

Although Dottie would like to blend in with the other girls, she is not willing to do so at the cost of giving up the tradition of kosher eating. Her food has always been kosher and she has not yet encountered an occasion that led her to abandon this habit. This aspect of Jewish life, keeping kosher, is so ingrained in her daily life, that: ‘I could no more fathom mooning over a non-Jew than I could imagine eating a ham sandwich’ (Brown 8). Two things that might seem more than normal from an outsider’s perspective are incomprehensible from Dottie’s insider perspective. The Krasinsky’s acknowledge that not everyone in the family practices their religion in the same way, yet there is a shared spirit, and they all see themselves as being actively Jewish. Nevertheless, they do make clear distinctions between themselves and other Jews who practice their faith in a different way, and therefore are not automatically trusted to get it right. Even amongst the Jewish immigrants, there is a tendency to avoid those who speak, eat, and live differently. Mingling with non-Jews, other than the casual interactions Dottie has with her non-Jewish female coworkers is completely out of the question.

As has become clear by now, the focus on kosher eating is much more visible in *Modern Girls* than it is in *Bread Givers*, which is reflective of the actual historical perspective of the 1920s versus the 1930s. At the beginning of the 20th century kosher was the norm for the Jewish community in the Lower East Side. It was not explicitly mentioned, but it was assumed that restaurants exclusively served kosher foods (Polland 283). Several years later, stores and restaurants started to advertise with signs that they were strictly kosher or in some cases kosher-

style, suggesting that there also were establishments who did not follow Kashrut. In fact, not all American Jews did eat kosher. By the 1930s there was a renewed focus on eating kosher, but the labeling of businesses as kosher-style was equally important for another reason that is covered in the biography of Nathan Handwerker.

In *Famous Nathan* it is explained how Nathan and his siblings were sent over to the United States by themselves, without being accompanied by an adult. Only when the last and youngest siblings were sent over, they were joined by their mother, who unfortunately died during the journey. Their father was supposed to come but was forced to remain behind in Europe because of an infection. When he finally made the trip, he was the last of their family to do so. This meant that his children were completely independent when establishing their living in the United States. During this time Nathan set up a business that served kosher-style food. This attracted customers that were non-Jewish or did not adhere strictly to Kashrut. This was part of Nathan's success as 'in the public mind - even in the non-Jewish public mind - "kosher" was always associated with "quality"' (Handwerker 94). Establishments that served kosher-style food benefitted from this perception. Lloyd gives the impression that things were similar during the Handwerker's home meals. They considered themselves Jewish, but from the details given in *Famous Nathan*, it appears that they did not strictly adhere to Kashrut laws.

The relationship between Nathan and his father Jacob had never been excellent, but after he followed his children to the United States, a difference of opinion on kosher eating drove them further apart:

> Jacob's presence in the New World provided a symbolic reminder of the Old. Nathan and Jacob never seemed a good fit, always seeming to butt heads. Jacob remained an extremely religious figure and because of his adherence to dietary rules would not eat in his children's

> homes, only drinking water. He never got to taste the source of his son's success, a Nathan's Famous frankfurter. (Handwerker 113)

Here, the Nathan's Famous hotdog symbolizes how Nathan has successfully managed to adapt to life in the United States. Although his father made the physical transition to the United States, he is unable to readjust and unable to let go of his old-world customs. This experience is reflective of Yezierska's portrayal of Reb Smolinsky. For some people, food was the last direct connection to their homelands, that they refused, or were unable, to give up.

In some ways, the struggles of Jacob Handwerker and Reb Smolinsky appear to be alike. However, there are some important differences. Reb Smolinsky's decisions have a profound impact on his direct family members, who, at a certain point, are on the verge of starvation because of his unwillingness to contribute to their upkeep. It appears that Jacob Handwerker, on the other hand, was no longer providing for his children. Nathan in particular had secured enough financial means to live comfortably and support other family members while doing so. In comparison, the consequences of Jacob's actions therefore might be less severe than those of Reb's. Nevertheless, Jacob's refusal to eat in his children's homes damaged their relationships, especially in the case of Nathan, for whom it meant that his greatest accomplishment was left unacknowledged by his father.

In *My Fat Dad*, the struggles people had with reconciling Old-World values and their life in the United States are described from the perspective of a third-generation immigrant. The author, Dawn Lerman, her parents, and both sets of grandparents each had unique and difficult relationships with food that characterized the family's interactions. In the case of Lerman's father, this meant an obsession with dieting and his inevitable return to eating too much or eating unhealthily and the origins of his struggles can be traced back to his youth. The relationship

between Lerman's paternal grandmother, Bubbe Mary, and Lerman's father, Al, was one in which food was the only way they knew how to connect: 'Not knowing how to relate to him, she fed him constantly. Bonding over roast tongue, pickled herring, and rolled cabbage made both of them feel closer to each other' (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 47). They did not speak about the challenges or problems they faced, but only about the food they enjoyed. The consequence of this was that Al became overweight at a young age and would be so for many years to come. Being a heavy child meant that it was not easy to connect to other children, and Al was frequently the victim of bullying:

> When he was in the sixth grade, my dad got beat up by a bunch of bullies who jumped him from behind, hitting him with lead pipes until he was unconscious. "Fat mama's boy. Fat mama's boy," they taunted. The beating was so bad he spent a week in a coma and the doctors didn't know if he would live.
>
> Helpless, Bubbe Mary cooked all day and all night, praying for his recovery, hoping the smells of her mushroom barley soup, stuffed peppers, and sponge cake, which she schlepped to the hospital, would revive him. When he awoke, Bubbe was standing there with a banquet, fully believing in the healing powers of Jewish food. My Bubbe fed my father bite after bite while he was in the hospital - feeding him but never telling him that she loved him. (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 48)

Lerman makes a connection between her father's weight and his mother's inability to communicate with him. This comes to a climax when Al ends up in the hospital, and his mother starts cooking excessively, as her way of coping with the situation. The lack of communication and the abundance of food both continue to characterize their relationship, but as Al got older he desired to be thin, which led him to start dieting. During these diets the distance between mother

and son grew even bigger: ‘he felt like he was betraying my grandmother and dissolving the one bond they shared. My dad felt that if they were not talking about food, the room was silent, so he made jokes - most of which Bubbe did not understand - to break the silence’ (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 48).

Even after the birth of Dawn, their relationship was not mended. Al still loved his mother’s cooking, yet they rarely went to visit her outside of Jewish holidays. Lerman recalls a single instance where she went to her Bubbe Mary by herself, for the sole reason that her other grandmother was not available during that weekend. What was intended to be a sleepover lasted only a couple of hours. During dinner, her grandmother kept on giving her more food and Dawn was afraid to decline. Both her father and her other grandmother had told her how much it meant to Bubbe Mary to feed her family with traditional Jewish dishes. Her father and Beauty had told Dawn that Bubbe Mary really appreciated it if people complimented her on the food she had prepared. Not wanting to insult her grandmother, Dawn was too scared to refuse the additional servings her grandmother gave her after her compliments. Bubbe Mary was oblivious to Dawn’s discomfort and only pushed more food on her. After their dessert, Bubbe Mary told Dawn she was to watch television in a different room, because she had friends coming over for a game of bridge. Dawn told her that she would rather stay with her grandmother, even if it was only to observe their game. Bubbe Mary would not hear of this, as she was convinced that her granddaughter would be a nuisance. To keep Dawn occupied she was given more desserts. Again, Dawn felt compelled to eat it. In the end Dawn was so overstuffed that she threw up over Bubbe Mary’s new couch. Bubbe Mary then responded by calling Beauty, who was supposed to be unavailable that night, to come and pick her up as she no longer could or wanted to deal with the child, that in her eyes had misbehaved.

This moment presented the unique opportunity for Dawn and her grandmother Bubbe Mary to bond. However, Bubbe Mary prevented Dawn from physically being able to interact with her, by putting her away, rather than letting her remain in the same room while her friends came over for a game of bridge. Furthermore, Dawn was refused what she asked for, and given what she did not ask for. The sleepover is another instance, where Bubbe Mary tried to use food as a substitute for communication. Although her intentions were good, she was oblivious to Dawn's anxiety about refusing food and ignored her request to communicate separately from food.

In each of these texts, food serves as a reminder to the reader how difficult it is to adapt to life in a new country, where traditions from places left behind did not fit in. In reality, food was often the single heritage aspect that immigrants could recreate in the United States and it was a painful experience to lose that too. Although this result was extracted from the texts that focused on the American Jewish context, it is in a sense a universal experience, and might as well pertain to the experiences of immigrants elsewhere.

Different variations of the experience of trying to keep up with culinary traditions in a completely different environment can be found in the discussed texts. A refusal, such as that of Reb Smolinsky or Jacob Handwerker, to part with tradition could be seen as a desperate attempt to cling on to the memory of the Old World, or in other words, strong feelings of nostalgia. In some cases, this sentiment behind this nostalgia was so strong that it led to estrangement from family members who did succeed at adapting to life in the New World. It becomes evident that this positions food as a means of communication. Once, younger generations started to diversify their diets, no longer kept a strict kosher diet, or gave in to the convenience of ready-made (fast) foods, it was as if they spoke a different language.

Rose in *Modern Girls* was more aware of her ties to the customs and habits from the Old World, that outed themselves in the form of a distrust to have her food kashered by anyone other than herself. A part of her traits was passed on to her daughter, who simply could not imagine eating treif foods at the beginning of the novel. In the text, these habits make the Jewish elements of their identity stand out and dominate. Finally, in *My Fat Dad* the author reflected on how the relationship between her, her father, and her paternal grandmother was damaged because of her grandmother's attachment to food of the Old World. Bubbe Mary did not know how to communicate with her son and granddaughter, other than by feeding them her homemade foods. Although she tried her best, it was not enough to bridge the growing cultural distance, as she could not understand the needs of her son and granddaughter.

By analyzing these texts, this chapter has set out how ties to the Old World impacted how immigrants were able to accommodate their lives in the New World, and how this could cause intergenerational conflict. In this we recognize aspects of what Gross has termed the declension narrative. Although the declension narrative focuses on the period in which mass manufacturing and other modern conveniences had become mainstream, the ideas and sentiments that it signifies can already be found earlier. Food has the power to represent a world left behind, or a world far ahead of times. Because of this, it is also central to the struggles people experience while trying to accommodate to life in a new country. Even in the cases where families remained close, food was a constant reminder of what was left behind and how lives had changed.

3.2 Finding One's Identity in America

Eventually, most immigrants accepted that their lives were to play out in the United States and engaged with how this would shape their identity. Therefore, the second significant theme is that of identifying with being American. This has to do with identity and the departure from certain traditions alongside the accumulation of others. After immigrants had completed their actual journey to the United States, they, and their descendants, went on a metaphorical journey to find a sense of belonging or blending in. As they became a part of America, America became a part of them. In some cases, this meant that people started to identify more with being American than with being Jewish or to the nationality of their home country. There are of course many differences between the various experiences of immigrants, and even within families people could have a vastly different perception of what it meant to them to be American Jewish.

In *Bread Givers*, Sara is the character most engaged with the search for a sense of belonging in her new country. As described in the previous chapter, Sara saw her father as unwilling to participate in the society their family was now living in. This had a significant impact on the quality of her own life. Furthermore, Sara felt frustrated by the family's poverty and her own inability to earn money for them. This frustration becomes Sara's motive for her further actions. From one of their kind neighbors, Sara gets a barrel with a few herrings and advice on how to sell them. The girl sets out onto Hester Street where she starts yelling about her wares. Yezierska eloquently describes the power behind this experience:

> My voice was like dynamite. Louder than all the pushcart peddlers, louder than all the hollering noises of bargaining and selling, I cried out my herring with all the burning fire of my ten old years. [...] I was burning up inside me with my herring to sell. Nothing was before

> me but the hunger in our house, and no bread for the next meal if I didn't sell the herring. (Yezierska 21-22)

The passage above was also cited by Polland in her chapter in the book *Global Jewish Foodways*, where she writes how 'Yezierska did not focus on the herring's taste or its preparation, rather she showed how raw human energy transformed bottom-of-the-barrel fish into the cash desperately needed for the family economy' (Polland 268). Even if it was only marginally, selling the herring allowed the ten-year-old Sara to become a part of the American economy. Even if she was not making much money, peddling provided her with an opportunity to contribute to the family's upkeep. During the family's most desperate days Sara was able to make a difference. In reality, there were many women and children like Sara working to ensure their families would meet ends. In fact, at the time that the United States garment industry thrived on the labor of men and young adults, there was a food industry in which tenement women were the driving force, but which is less often remembered (Polland 267).

Soon after, all of the Smolinsky sisters find new jobs, and Sara continues peddling herring. Their economic situation improves, and they are able to buy a new table, plates, and utensils. This is reflected in the change of meals that occurs:

> Once in a while we even had butter on our bread. And when eggs were cheap and Mother got a bargain at a pushcart, a lot of cracked eggs, then we had eggs for breakfast just like the boarders. Now all of us had meat for the Sabbath - not only Father. (Yezierska 29)

It appears that things are better now, obviously because there is more food in general, but also because the food is more equally distributed amongst the family members.

Eventually, Sara, the only child still living at home, and her parents move away from New York City. Conflict between Sara and her father heightens, and their economic situations

deteriorates. At a certain point, she has endured so much of her father's tyranny that she cannot take it any longer. Sara goes back to New York and finds a room of her own to live at. While working as a laundress, she also takes classes in order to fulfill her goal of eventually being able to go to university. Her days are long and hard and leave little time for socializing, but for her, the worst part is that she is constantly lonely and hungry:

> One day in the laundry, while busy ironing a shirt, the thought of Mother's cooking came over me. Why was it that Mother's simplest dishes, her plain potato soup, her *gefülte* fish, were so filling? And what was the matter with the cafeteria food that it left me hungrier after eating than before?
>
> For a moment I imagined myself eating Mother's *gefülte fish.* A happy memory floated over me. A feast I was having. What a melting taste in the mouth! (Yezierska 165-166)

For a while, Sara cannot make sense of this. She was so charmed by the modern idea of having a cheap and quick meal at a cafeteria that 'kind, rich ladies had opened it for working girls, to have their meals in beautiful surroundings and cheap' (Yezierska 161). Yet, the cafeteria meals leave her unsatisfied. It is not clear to her what makes these meals different from the meals at home with her parents. Even though the portions at home used to be meager it comes to her as quite the shock that when paying for a meal, this does not guarantee a portion equal to those of other customers. The ladies serving food at the cafeterias regard her as a small girl who certainly cannot be as hungry as the big man behind her in the line. Eventually, Sara comes to realize that even though the food might have been scarce at home, there was a certain unconditionality to it. No matter how little they had, at least it would be shared, and although her father's share was usually bigger, each family member bore the burden of their shared hardship. When Sara is on her own, she realizes that eating is not simply for nourishment:

> I glanced at the boiling pot … I don't have to share it with anyone … That's what made it so hateful. A longing came over me for the old kitchen in Hester Street. Even in our worst poverty we sat around the table, together, like people. Even Father's preaching and Mother's worrying made mealtimes something higher than mere eating and filling the stomach. (Yezierska 173)

Now that Sara is on her own, she realizes the importance of being part of a bigger whole. With her family there was a sense of belonging to others, no matter how difficult their lives were, they were part of a community. Although Sara was committed to gaining her independence, she now recognizes its cost.

After Sara has lost contact with her father for quite some time, the two reconnect at the end of the novel. During the time that they were out of touch, Sara pursued a teaching degree and married the headmaster of her school while her father married a new woman after the girls' mother passed away. Her father's new wife is not willing to take care of him if he does not contribute to their upkeep. This results in Sara literally finding her father in a gutter. Overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, Sara starts to reconsider whether she ought to invite her father to come and live with her and her husband. Her father is not eager to accept this offer as he states that: '"[...] I cannot have my eating contaminated with your carelessness."' (Yezierska 295). He does not have much trust in his daughter keeping a kosher household. Even though his situation at that point appears to be far from allowing him to adhere to Kashrut, he is utterly convinced that this will be even worse when living with Sara. Only after Sara has given her promises that she will respect his wishes, Reb is willing to consider her offer.

After this conversation, Sara comes to a realization about her father: 'In a world where all is changed, he alone remained unchanged - as tragically isolate as the rocks. All that he had left of life was his fanatical adherence to his traditions' (Yezierska 296). Sara has harbored

feelings of frustration towards his unwillingness to adapt to their new lives for a long time but now acknowledges that it might not be that he is unwilling, but rather that he is unable to change. Furthermore, she realizes that taking care of her father is what was expected of her all along. He no longer has a wife that is willing to take care of him, but it is perfectly in her power, as his only daughter without children to do so. It hits her that the burden she sought to be free from was never something she could escape from as: 'the shadow of the burden was always following me' (Yezierska 295). Whether or not she is going to take her father in, the burden will manifest itself either in the form of guilt and pity or in the form of suffering under her father's tyranny.

During a final moment of epiphany, Sara states that: 'It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me' (Yezierska 297). She understands that despite her growth she cannot fully separate herself from the Old World but acknowledges that this is not a bad thing. Ultimately, Sara understands that she can adapt, but she cannot erase her past. As she accepts that, she comes to terms with the fact that her identity is inextricably linked with both the Old World and the New World. Where she clearly saw, from a young age on, that Reb was unwilling or unable to accept the New World, and that this limits his functioning in society, it is only now that Sara becomes aware that her rejection of the Old World also had an effect on her own functioning in the New World. Now that she recognizes how her existence is inextricably tied to both the Old and the New world, Sara starts to come to terms with her identity. It is clear that Sara's continuous interactions with food have given both her and the reader the necessary insights to experience such an instance of epiphany.

In *Modern Girls,* it is stressed from the beginning of the book how the Krasinsky's daughter Dottie wants to be regarded as a modern girl. She dresses according to the latest fashion and wears perfume in order to 'not to bring the stink of the East Side into [the] Midtown office'

(Brown 25). When she finds out that she is pregnant her world is turned upside down. Soon it becomes clear to the reader that her boyfriend Abe is not the father of the baby, but Dottie desperately wants him to think that he is. The couple has been dating for an extended period, yet Abe shows no signs that he is about to propose marriage to her. She tries to seduce him into sleeping with her, but he adamantly refuses. Next, Dottie tries to argue with him about marriage when Abe is working at his parents' grocery store, but again without success, as Abe tells her that he has not saved enough money and remains vague about when he will be ready.

Between Abe and Dottie, Abe is the one with a more conservative attitude towards religion: 'Abe appreciated the traditions' (Brown 51). Besides working at the store of his parents, Abe devotes his time to studying the Torah, which he takes extremely seriously. The store is a symbol for Abe's faith that, unlike Dottie's, is unblemished. Because of their store, Abe's family always had plenty of kosher foods available to them, whereas others would have to actively go out to acquire the right foods. For Abe and his family, adhering to Kashrut is logical nature rather than an active choice they make over and over again. Due to the family's position, there is plenty of time and space for their son to remain at home while studying the Torah. Time outside the sheltered environment of his parents' home is limited for Abe, as is his contact with non-Jewish people. Or, as Dottie argues: 'his parents' store protected him from the harsher aspects of the lower East Side with which Izzy and I were all too well acquainted' (Brown 49-50). Dottie and her siblings roam all over the Lower East Side, as their apartment is small and often crowded. In doing so they come in contact with lots of different people, and not only those that belong to their inner social circle that consists of Jewish immigrants that originate from the same region as their parents. Hence, they have a better understanding of the multitude of ways in which Jewish people express their religion.

Even within the Krasinsky family, not everyone practices their religion in the same way. Father *Tateh* goes to the synagogue but appears to believe more in the cause of socialism, than in Judaism. It is described how his wife sends him to the synagogue: 'all it took was one fierce glance from Ma, and *Tateh* would be scurrying off to *shul*' (Brown 51). Furthermore, it appears that he does not strictly follow kosher laws: 'I once spied *Tateh* eating a sandwich with his pals on Yom Kippur when they were supposedly praying. That night he came home and pretending he'd fasted the entire day, he forced himself to eat the lavish spread Ma had prepared for him' (Brown 51). Rose, on the other hand, rarely goes to the synagogue. When Dottie mentions to her mother that she is going, and Rose replies that she is coming along, Dottie is almost in shock: 'Ma didn't go to *shul*. She sent *Tateh* while she cooked and cleaned. She went for the holidays, but even then she didn't stay long, hurrying home to prepare the house' (Brown 62). Keeping kosher is the way Rose actively practices her religion, and her family follows because of her influence. This offers a welcome alternative to the ideas of Reb Smolinsky in *Bread Givers* who sees Judaism as something entirely masculine, as studying the Torah is the only thing that matters for him, and women are not allowed to do so. Rose, on the other hand, regards Judaism as something more all-encompassing that is not only expressed through prayer, or the study of holy books but manifests itself through everyday activities and shared heritage.

To return to the issue of Dottie's pregnancy, knowing that Abe will no longer want to associate with her once he learns of her pregnancy, Dottie resolves to seek out the child's father, Willie Klein, whom she spent a night with a few months earlier during a visit to Camp Eden, a Jewish summer camp. Willie is Jewish, but his family became rich due to their successful business allowing them to move to a big and luxurious apartment in a different part of the city. After their move to the Upper East Side, the Klein's started going to a different synagogue: 'Willie and his family belonged to the big *shul* uptown, the German one. The Reform one. Their

rules were flexible, and *treif* didn't exist for them' (Brown 172). Keeping kosher is associated with being devout, whereas abandoning the dietary rules is a sign of rejection of the Jewish religion. In *Modern Girls*, Brown uses this to set out a stark contrast through Dottie's two love interests, her boyfriend Abe and Willie.

For the reader, it is not immediately clear who the father of Dottie's child is, only when she goes for lunch with Willie things slowly start to fall in place: 'Ma would be mortified if she saw me sitting here with Willie, a pile of shellfish waving beneath my nose. My situation, the treif - I suspected the sins were equal in Ma's mind' (Brown 172). The plate of shellfish, which is considered treif under Kashrut law, is used as a metaphor to imply that Dottie's situation, her illegitimate pregnancy, is equally unacceptable according to Jewish customs. On the one hand, Dottie feels bad, because she is convinced that her situation is sinful according to her mother, and unacceptable to the broader Jewish community. Yet, on the other hand, Dottie becomes more aware of her own feelings towards her unborn child. She desperately wants to be a mother someday and knows that having an abortion comes at the cost of possible infertility. Ultimately, Dottie makes the decision to deal with her situation in the way that she thinks is best. This means that Dottie refuses to end her pregnancy, the solution pushed by her mother and Willie. Rather, Dottie plots to marry Willie, whose reputation is controversial according to members of the Jewish community Dottie belongs to. Nevertheless, this would still be preferable than having an illegitimate baby.

Although the Klein family and the Krasinsky's each have a different conception of what it means to be Jewish, which is the source of their disagreements and their mutual disregard for each other, they still have a shared root of 'Jewishness' that ultimately surfaces. When Dottie goes to see Willie's mother, Molly, to inform her about her illegitimate pregnancy, she is very nervous, and Molly does not appear to be willing to comfort her. That is until she sees a marriage

between Dottie and Willie as a means to keep her son from going to Europe. She offers Dottie a slice of cake: '"Eat, eat," she said, gesturing toward the plate in my hand. The words relaxed me ever so slightly. Mrs. Klein may have been an uptown woman, but she was still a Jewish mother at heart, and I knew she'd want what was best for her son' (Brown 233). Food represents a form of unspoken communication here. The gesture, no matter how small, of Molly offering the cake to Dottie is one that speaks of acceptance and recognition. At this moment, Mrs. Klein comes to the insight that arranging a marriage between Dottie and her son might be in line with her own interests for him, as she thinks that marriage will prevent him from going to Europe. The way Molly is portrayed here is highly reminiscent of the stereotypical portrayals as described by Fishman in chapter 1. As a good Jewish mother, Molly Klein loves her son dearly, and literally wants to keep him close. When he does not want to abandon his plans for the sake of his mother, she resorts to manipulative tactics in a final attempt to keep him from going to Europe.

While she is eating the cake, Dottie comes to some conclusions about her own life. It is a moment of reflection and transformation:

> I realized I was ravenous, having skipped dinner last night and breakfast that morning. I took a bite of the cake. It was soft and airy, not like the dense loaves Ma baked. I felt guilty, as if I were betraying Ma, but as lovely as her cakes were, they suddenly seemed old-fashioned and Old World, with a heaviness this American cake didn't hold. I longed to devour the slice but compelled myself to take slow, small bites. (Brown 233)

This becomes a turning point for Dottie in the novel. She no longer chases the idea that she has to meet certain conditions to be considered modern. Neither does she give in to the more traditional idea of being an obedient Jewish girl. Rather, from here on she sets out in her own direction, seemingly no longer having strong feelings about what other people think of this.

In *Famous Nathan*, food was a means to become successful in America for Nathan Handwerker. He lived in poverty and hunger during his younger years in Galicia (Eastern Europe) and after his move to the United States, he made the conscious choice to work in the restaurant industry, as this would ensure he would always have access to enough food: '"I always knew I was going to be in the restaurant business," he said later. "There's always food there, I grew up so poor that this was a way of guaranteeing that I'd never be hungry" (Handwerker 36). Furthermore, when Nathan came to the United States, he was illiterate and even in later years he only acquired enough literacy skills to be able to grasp the newspaper's front page. Even when living in a new country with a language foreign to him, food was something he understood.

After having secured a job at a luncheonette, Nathan started to dream even bigger and wanted to establish his own business. The success of Nathan's Famous was big enough not only to feed Nathan and his direct family, but also the extended family, and could do so for many future generations to come. For this reason, Nathan liked to include his extended family members as employees of the store:

> "I always want to have all the Handwerkers together," Nathan said. "I want to create a business where all the Handwerkers can work together as a big family."
>
> The founder of the store cherished a vision for it. Nathan thought a great deal about his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He hoped that the business would go on forever in the family, so he surrounded himself with successive circles of relatives. (Handwerker 119)

The younger generations of the Handwerker family, including Nathan's own children, were born in the United States, and did not share the experiences of Nathan and his siblings growing up in Galicia. Their dreams, ambitions, and opportunities were different from those of their parents,

and later grandparents, as first-generation immigrants. Furthermore, for Nathan's direct family, their socio-economic situation had much improved: 'Like a lot of first-generation immigrants, Ida and Nathan yearned to give their children opportunities they themselves had not had. As Leah, Murray, and Sol grew up during the '20s and '30s, the family found itself with enough disposable income to be considered well to do' (Handwerker 173). When his sons were old enough to fully join the business, it became clear that they did not agree on the future of the business, and especially disagreed with Nathan's vision for it.

Nathan's vision was that this store would also provide for his two sons if they were willing to work in the business. According to his reasoning, the high-quality food of Nathan's Famous could provide economic safety and comfort, with the reasoning that you could better have control over a single restaurant and focus on making that highly successful. Unfortunately for Nathan, both of his sons, Murray and Sol, had different ideas for Nathan's Famous's future. The sons had a strong focus on expansion, although so different from each other that it led to a falling out between the two. Lloyd relates this to a changing mentality of Americans in general: 'Americans increasingly subscribe to the jackpot mentality. The American dream used to be that if you worked hard, you would wind up with a little something. But by the late sixties, the dream had morphed into wanting it all' (Handwerker 273). For Nathan's sons, operating a single business that could provide for them and their families was not desired, because they preferred to be independent of each other.

Furthermore, it appears from the text that Nathan's desire to provide for extended family, was not shared by his sons. Lloyd Handwerker stresses that this initially caused Nathan grief, but it seems that he later accepted this fact. Eventually, this led to the sale of the company years later to someone outside of the Handwerker family. The new owner successfully brought Nathan's Famous as a brand to the supermarket and established several chains throughout the United

States. In *Famous Nathan,* Lloyd concludes that although the sale ensured the survival of Nathan's Famous up until today, it also took 'Nathan' out of Nathan's Famous. In other words, Nathan's ability to embrace and adapt to American culture was what ensured the success of his business, but eventually this also caused his sons to distance themselves from the business.

In *My Fat Dad*, the author's mother, Phyllis, and maternal grandmother, Beauty, have an important role. Beauty raised her children, including Phyllis, during the Great Depression, and like many Jewish immigrants, they were very poor. Beauty and her husband operated a soda shop, which meant that Beauty spent long days at the business cooking hotdogs and fries. During these days her child, Phyllis, was taken along, but she was left neglected as Beauty was so busy with work that there was never time to give her any attention. Eventually, their financial situation became much better, and Beauty stayed at home more with her children. Her husband was away for long days and often came home late. Yet, Beauty always managed to have done her utmost when it came to preparing meals, and they would be ready at the exact moment her husband came home: 'her hair was done up in a perfect beehive, and warm, delicious, homemade food was on the table - potato latkes, or a cholent, or chicken soup with matzo balls' (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 13) (See appendix A). Thus, Phyllis saw Beauty nearly always in the kitchen and never in the outside world exploring what else life had to offer.

Having seen her mother spend all of her time in the kitchen Phyllis became determined to spend as little time as possible in there. She developed a deep aversion against cooking that had an impact on her own children. Lerman does not hesitate to make clear how far her mother's dislike against cooking went:

> For all her virtues, my mom hated to cook, and she relied on packaged and frozen meals to make dinner as speedy and painless as possible. She would constantly tell April and me [...] that my grandmother Beauty wasted her whole life cooking old-fashioned food, which to my

> mom meant anything made with fresh ingredients, especially vegetables. My mom said modern food came in a can, a box, or a foam take-out container. She boasted that she could get dinner on the table in just a few minutes, and since everything was disposable, including our plates, cutlery, and cups, there was no cleanup, so no one would have to waste the night doing dishes – especially her. (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 164)

It is as if her mother wanted to make up for the time that Beauty spent preparing food. It was her goal to spend as little time possible eating, but especially preparing and clearing away food.

Her mother detested cooking to the extent that Lerman and her sister were regularly not given anything to eat for dinner. This meant that the girls would go hungry or were left to make dinner for themselves from a young age on. Beauty was the solid presence in Lerman's life, on which she could always depend for food, and thaught her how to cook. Although Lerman does not state so explicitly, it becomes clear that it must have been painful for her mother to see how close her daughter and her own mother were. Beauty and Lerman were able to bond their shared passion for food in a way that Beauty had not been able to do with her own daughter. Where Beauty believed that her traditional Jewish food could do good, Phyllis only saw the negative side of it: the time that it took to make food was time that was not spent with her. As a result of that, Phyllis took her kids all around the cities that they lived in, in order to make up for all the missed activities that she would have liked to undertake with her own mother. Phyllis believed that it was important for her children to become 'cultured' individuals, which meant that they went to places like museums, theaters, and thrift stores.

This brings us to the first cookbook to be discussed, *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes*, which is particularly interesting for that it might not have been published at all if it were up to the author. Pineles was a well-known graphic designer and many of her illustrations were used in

famous magazines. The style in *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes* is clearly recognizable as Pineles signature style, and this style even won her an Art Director's Club prize for an illustration of potatoes (Scottford 70-71). Yet, only a few of the illustrations in manuscript were ever made publicly available, with her drawing of wild rice being the most well-known of those. This is noteworthy, as her recipe for wild rice arguably is more American than Jewish in nature.

Figure 2. Wild Rice in Cipe Pineles a Life of Design and Leave Me Alone with the Recipes (Jansen)

Most of Pineles' work that featured food 'reflected the culinary trends of mid-century New York, with French and other international influences' much like the food she served guests who came to her house for dinner parties (Rich 4). Because her family immigrated to the United States, Pineles was able to enjoy a creative education, which formed the foundation for her successful career as an artist. Nevertheless, Pineles knew how difficult it would be to become

successful in her industry, even more so because she was a woman. Therefore, she created a carefully constructed personal image of herself to show the outside world.

Her Jewish heritage, and her ways of holding onto this heritage were not part of Pineles her public image. Yet, she celebrated Jewish holidays with her family, and continued to do so after her brother, who was the family member most actively practicing religion, died. Furthermore, Pineles took the time to create her manuscript, which was a lengthy project, given that it was all drawn and lettered by hand. The result was a deeply personal collection of recipes, that just as well could be a collection of memories. In one of the prefaces in *Leave me alone with the recipes*, Rich reflects on a conversation she had with Pineles' adopted daughter. The daughter confirmed that the food in the manuscript was not food that Pineles would serve to guests. Rather, it was the food of her family, the food Pineles grew up with. She associated these foods with comfort and her heritage rather than with entertaining and her creative identity (Pineles 4). When she wrote the recipes down it was almost as if she was writing in a diary, about aspects of her life that were not part of her public image yet constituted an important part of her identity.

Pineles did not actively pursue publication of her manuscript for unknown reasons. For a long time, it survived in private, until it came in the hands of Rich and her friends. These women eventually ensured that the manuscript would be published 72 years after Pineles had created it. It is easy to dismiss their publication as an attempt to profit from Pineles' artistic success. However, I would argue that this is not the case. Their contributions speak of a sense of recognition. For them, the dishes Pineles wrote down were not at all exclusive to her family. Rather they spoke of a shared experience of Jewish heritage, that they could all relate to. It would be interesting to see this further explored through the notion of cultural memory (See Erll). The editors were ecstatic with their discovery, because they could both relate to her creative work, as the editors themselves worked in the creative industry, and to her way of

celebrating heritage. They reckoned that there would be many more people to whom Pineles story and recipes could provide comfort. Rather than publishing only the full manuscript they added several introductory pieces, through which the reader gets a better understanding of what being American Jewish meant to Pineles regardless of whether this was part of her public image.

The five books discussed in this section have demonstrated how food can be used as a means to emphasize the struggle of multiple generations of immigrants having to come to terms with their identities. None of these experiences are, obviously, alike. Yet, there is a shared search for feelings of belonging. This theme examines the process of how people come to identify not only with the Jewish part of their identity, but also the American part.

In *Bread Givers* the main character Sara comes to accept that her identity is tied to both her Jewish heritage and to her life in the United States. Although this epiphanic moment itself does not have the strongest connection to foodways, all of Sara's experiences that contributed to this moment are rooted in the more universal experiences of food as power and food as communication. Dottie in *Modern Girls* had a similar realization. She understood that the image of what she should ideally be like according to her community was not the same as how she wanted to be. Eventually she became confident that doing things differently than other people did not mean she was not entitled to her religion. *Famous Nathan* focuses, again, on the dynamic between food and communication, as food was the only means of communication the illiterate Nathan understood in a foreign country. Later it became a source of disagreement with his family members. In *My Fat Dad* an account is given of the intergenerational consequences of living with the 'burden' of American Jewish heritage. Finally, in the analysis of *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes* it was brought to light how heritage can be of great importance to people, even if they do not publicly interact with it.

Like the previous theme, the search for identification with a new culture, is explained through the highly specific example of American Jewish foodways but touches upon a much more universal experience. Foodways could help us understand this experience in other contexts too.

3.3 Rediscovering Culinary Heritage

Rediscovering culinary heritage is about later generations of immigrants. As discussed in the theoretical framework, it is argued by scholars such as Roden and Gross that there has been a decline in the interest in American Jewish cuisine over the years, but that there is a certain turning point in this. But Gross also stressed that this led to discussions about the authenticity of American Jewish foodways under the declension narrative. This clearly holds up in some of the analyzed texts. We can witness a returned interest in the American Jewish Cuisine that is documented in literature. The reason for this return is often a desire to connect with one's heritage. The texts that are discussed here are *My Fat Dad*, *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes*, and *The Jewish Cookbook*. These books each portray a different way of how food was a means to people to (re)connect with Jewish religion.

The intergenerational friction that many Jewish immigrants experienced as a result of the compromise between keeping up with the memory of the Old World while at the same time fitting in in the New World had an impact that went beyond the first and second-generation immigrants. In *My Fat Dad*, the author recounts how this has also impacted her as a third-generation immigrant. Both of Lerman's parents had problematic relationships with food and were not in the least concerned with how their daughter was eating. In her memoir, Lerman traces back her deeply rooted interest in 'good food,' while at the same time making insightful links to how her parents' troubled relationships with food are rooted in their identities as second-generation Jewish immigrants.

It is obvious to see that it must have been difficult for Lerman, while growing up, to understand how her mother and grandmother had become so fundamentally different in this aspect. However, it is clear that she developed this understanding once she became older. In 'My

Mom Makes Dinner,' one of the chapters in her book, Lerman recounts an important remark of her mother on the issue:

> My mom always thought I preferred being with my grandmother. "I know you like Beauty more than me," she would always say. "She dotes on you excessively, and no matter what you do, she thinks it is great. You will see when you are grown up, there is more to life than cooking and cleaning. You will be glad that I dragged you to museums, and plays, and thrift shops. I am the one that has made you an interesting cultured child." (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 169-170)

Although it is harshly put, this quote speaks of Phyllis' desire to fulfill different ambitions than her own mother, Beauty, which she carried on to the upbringing of Dawn and her sister. It is hard, if not impossible, for a child to fully grasp such a desire. In a case where the child idolizes one of the adults to the extent as Dawn did with Beauty, it might be even harder.

The process of writing *My Fat Dad* provided Lerman with a way to share this experience with other people who experienced their own struggles with food, family, or both. However, even during the writing process the difficult relationship between Dawn and her mother, and in turn the relationship between her mother and grandmother surfaced. In the chapter about her mother, Lerman writes: 'I never noticed before how young and beautiful my mom was or realized that she needed love in the same way I needed love. *I had never really understood my mom and often compared her to my grandmother, but she was different*' (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 169, emphasis added). Lerman also wrote columns for The New York Times, about her experience growing up with her dysfunctional family. In one of her columns, that was published after the publication of her book, she wrote about her relationship with her mother. The column was similar to the chapter 'My Mom Makes Dinner' but there are some subtle differences: 'I had

never really noticed how young and beautiful my mom was or realized that she needed love in the same way I needed love. *In that moment, I wanted to grab my mother and hug her and tell her I adored and appreciated her, but I stood frozen*' (Lerman, "Fat Dad: Mom Makes Dinner," n.p. emphasis added). In these two citations, there is some nuance in what the realization, that her mother required love in the same way as she, did to Dawn. In her column Lerman describes the feelings she experienced during this realization, and how she was unable to act in that moment. In the book, she makes a more reflective statement that links the relationship between Lerman and Phyllis to that of Phyllis and Beauty.

If Phyllis and grandmother Beauty represent opposite ends of a spectrum, Lerman herself ended up somewhere in the middle. She is an avid cook, but modern times have allowed her to pursue other things as well. Unhappy with the lack of meals at home, she devoured her grandmother's cooking lessons. There she learned the value of food beyond mere nourishment and gradually came to understand how food played a role in emotional connections.

> My home life was never going to be the fantasy I often played out in my mind - my life was only going to be as good as I made it. [...] I had often believed that if I tried hard enough, I could keep my family together. If I tried hard enough, I could meet their needs, their longing, their hopes, and then, one day, in turn, my longings would be met. But the truth is, like oil and water, some ingredients are not meant to be combined. (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 287-288)

The Jewish dishes that both of her grandmothers served were an account of her family history, and throughout *My Fat Dad* it becomes apparent how grateful Lerman is for her chance to explore this legacy. However, she does so by making her own contributions. Her personal interest lies with healthy foods, and from a young age on she started to explore how she could substitute certain ingredients for healthier alternatives. In the end, *My Fat Dad*'s value lies in its

account of how heritage and tradition are not a burden, but rather a rich source of material with which one can shape one's own identity. In the memoir Lerman manages to shed light on the fact that no one comes into this world being able to feed themselves, rather we depend on others until we have learned how to feed ourselves. Even after we are able to feed ourselves independently the influence of those who have fed us stays around. Yet, we have the power to choose how these influences define us. After Dawn had healed from the trauma caused by the dysfunctional relationship with her parents, she understood that: ‘I was ready to create the recipe of my life, mixing in new ingredients, tasting and adjusting, finding the right balance to discover what nourished me’ (Lerman, *My Fat Dad* 288). For Lerman, celebrating her Jewish heritage through food is a way to keep the memory of Beauty alive. At the same time, altering traditional recipes has become a way for her to come to terms with her own identity.

As was explained before *Leave Me Alone with the Recipes* features both Pineles’ original recipes and new content added by the editors. There are 25 recipes that were left completely unaltered, including her vibrant drawings that adorn them. After the recipes comes a chapter in which these 25 recipes are revisited and expanded with more detailed instructions for modern cooks. Furthermore, this section has three additions: *Hamantaschen*, which was one of the recipes that Pineles painted in her manuscript, but which was left without instructions, chicken stock, and vegetable stock, as they are required ingredients in almost all of her recipes. Editor Sara Rich argues that although she is rewriting Pineles’ recipes she intended to ‘preserve the intention and integrity of the original dish’ (Pineles 87) (See appendix A). Rich continues by explaining that during the time Pineles was writing her dishes were well-known to Jewish immigrants and that Pineles, therefore, assumed a certain familiarity of her readers with dishes, ingredients, and methods of preparation.

This assumed familiarity was common for cookbook authors that had American Jews as a target audience during the early half of the 20th century. However, at a certain point in time, the foodways of American Jews had changed to the extent that the intimate knowledge about traditional (Ashkenazim) Jewish dishes was lost to later generations of cooks. Furthermore, the modern eater has a different understanding of what is tasty than that of an eater in the early 20th century. In the revisited recipe for chicken soup, the editors added frozen peas, and suggest a broader variety of herbs that would go well with the soup, whereas the peas are absent from the original recipe, most likely because frozen vegetables were not a common staple during Pineles' time of writing, and Pineles is distinct on that the soup must be served 'always with parsley,' according to customs of that time (Pineles 37). In featuring the revised recipes alongside Pineles' original versions, the editors gave new life to her work, while at the same time preserving the integrity of the manuscript as a personal diary of Pineles. Furthermore, this opened up the possibility of new readership.

By making the recipes suitable for modern cooking they are accessible to a more diverse audience. At the same time, this breaks the stigma of 'authenticity' that often surrounds American Jewish cuisine. Adapting dishes to suit modern taste and contemporary cooking techniques does not automatically make them less worthy of the label American Jewish. Rather, if this means that they will be cooked and eaten many years from now, this is a way to ensure continuity of American Jewish heritage. As people who have lost touch with this heritage, or have never even been in touch, are allowed to reconnect with it, thus keeping heritage alive.

The final text to be discussed is *The Jewish Cookbook*. Big cookbooks that contain many recipes are often easily seen as 'collections of recipes,' that, not unlike manuals, only consists of individual instructions for each dish. This is not always the case and especially modern

cookbooks often contain additional text that makes them interesting for literary analysis. In the case of *The Jewish Cookbook*, Koenig made sure that all the individual recipes are part of a whole, tied together by a carefully constructed narrative on Jewish foodways. This book is not solely about the preparation of food but is just as much about its consumption. The consumption of food goes beyond the act of eating in order to nourish oneself. Food is social, food is political, and food is economical.

An important contribution made by Koenig's book is that on the topic of gefilte fish (See appendix A). In the other texts discussed here gefilte fish might simply be the food of the old world, perhaps not particularly enticing to modern eaters. It is there and has been there for a long time, and its existence is not given much thought. This is in line with Gross's argument on the role of manufacturers in the declension narrative. According to her they 'standardized expectations of what Jewish food tasted like, making it more homogenized and centered on certain recognizable, iconic dishes such as matzah balls and gefilte fish' (Gross, "Narratives"). Koenig, however, elaborates on how it is a true Ashkenazi staple, but has developed differently in various parts of the world. She links the fried version of gefilte fish that is popular in the United Kingdom back to Sephardi origins: 'The practice stems back to the seventeenth century when Sephardi Jews settled in London, bringing their penchant for frying fish with them' (Koenig, *Cookbook* 117). Furthermore, she provides not a single recipe, but three: the baked version that is popular in the United States, a version where the fish is made into classical Eastern European quenelles, and the United Kingdom's fried version. By doing so, Koenig makes her readers aware of the context of a certain food, and the multitude of ways in which foods can be (American) Jewish.

It appears that the genre of cookbooks is particularly suited for setting out the rich context of 'American Jewish cuisine,' as it is hard to bring across the diversity of this cuisine

within a single narrative. Although none of the texts consists of a singular narrative, as the focus is always on the position of an individual within a familiar context, they all tell a single story, that of the Ashkenazi immigrant experience. In *The Jewish Cookbook*, the magnitude of American Jewish cuisine becomes clearer, precisely because Koenig sets out how it is not a single entity, and how Jewish cuisine has evolved differently in other geographical areas. This makes the Jewish Cookbook immensely valuable as a reference work for anyone interested in Jewish foodways in the United States and beyond. Making the reader aware of the diversity of narratives that exist under the umbrella term American Jewish is the first step towards achieving greater diversity within literature on American Jewish (foodways).

In an interview, Koenig explains that the chefs who wrote recipes for *The Jewish Cookbook* often had a broad and bold interpretation of the Jewish cuisine (Koenig, "Interview"). The result was that their recipes are innovative, daring, and often the opposite of traditional. To contrast this, Koenig kept her own recipes more sober and traditional, although they are still far from boring. We could view this in terms of the private and public sphere. The public setting, establishments like restaurants, deli's, or bakeries, produces foods that are to be 'explored' as they are refreshing, or new. The private setting, on the other hand, is about the foods that are produced at home. These are associated with feelings of familiarity and tradition; they are meant to induce a sense of comfort and acknowledge the long history of such a dish. By making this contrast, Koenig assures her readership that innovation and adaptation do not endanger the 'authenticity' of American Jewish food. Rather, the American Jewish cuisine as an entity could benefit from it as it makes people curious and encourages them to explore what else there is, and ultimately tells us that both traditional and modern foodways are both equally deserving of the label American Jewish.

This chapter, more so than the previous chapters, explored American Jewish foodways in a modern context. Important aspects here are a returned interest in heritage, signaled by an increased interest in American Jewish foodways. According to Roden, this is because people seek to fill a cultural vacuum or have a need for identification. The focus here was on what Gross has termed the revival aspect of the declension narrative. Rather than giving in to the trap that wants us to believe American Jewish food would lose authenticity if foodways do not accurately resemble foodways of earlier times, Gross helps us understand how reinventing, adapting, and modernizing these foodways makes them more accessible and diverse.

In the case of *My Fat Dad*, Lerman wrote an account of how food was a means for her to reconnect with her Jewish heritage. She also documented how in combining the traditional recipes from her grandmother with her own passion for healthy foods, she was able to really accept it as a part of her. In *Leave Me Alone*, the group of editors emphasizes how much the discovery of the manuscript meant to them. For them, it was the discovery of a timeless treasure and they wanted other people to be able to experience this as well. Yet, they understood that it was not really practical in its original state. By rewriting the recipes for a modern audience, adding new contributions, alongside Pineles' original recipes they were able to reach a whole new audience beyond the American Jewish community. The editors traced the history of Pineles' dishes while at the same time allowing ample space for modern interpretations. Finally, the analysis of *The Jewish Cookbook* showed how the seemingly straightforward genre of cookbooks can make important contributions to the diversity of the American Jewish foodways. The book shows its readers that there is no fixed entity of American Jewish cuisine. Rather it constantly develops and reinvents itself.

Conclusion

Although a relatively large number of known studies has focused on food and literature studies, it has not been accepted as a mainstream area of analysis within the field of literary studies. In order to demonstrate, this thesis provided an exploration of how studying foodways in a particular context could advance the conducted analysis. As a case study American Jewish foodways were chosen, because of their rich culinary traditions, and large number of available texts.

The analysis was split into three parts. In the first part it was analyzed how the selected texts dealt with balance between ties to the Old World and to the New World. This showed how food was used to represent the struggles people had with leaving behind most of the culture they had before immigrating. A theme that clearly touches upon a more universal experience. It was clear that people had to adapt to life in the United States to some extent, but not every individual could cope with this, which often led to a clash between different generations, and certainly made American Jewish people stand out compared to Americans without a dual cultural identity. This was also the case in the discussed texts. In *Bread Givers*, *Famous Nathan*, and *My Fat Dad* the focus was more on the effect this had within families, whereas *Modern Girls* set out how this made its main character Dottie stand out amongst the non-Jewish girls she worked with. The experiences discussed here pertained mostly to first generation immigrants, even though the consequences of these experiences also had an indirect effect on later generations.

In the second part analysis was conducted on how the theme of becoming American was represented in the text through food. Here it became apparent that each individual experiences this process differently. But, that ultimately the realization that one’s identity did not have to live up to expectations of others, often provided closure and ensured acceptance. In each of the texts that were discussed the journey towards self-acceptance of an individual, several individuals,

was central. Extracted from this is that there was a shared search for belonging. The experiences discussed here pertained mostly to first-generation immigrants that came to the United States at a young age, or second-generation immigrants. Like the first theme, the effects of these experiences also rippled on to later generations.

Finally, the third section set out how texts documented a returned interest in Jewish heritage amongst later generations of American Jews. Roden recognized that this returned interest came forth out of a cultural vacuum or general need for identification. One of the ways in which such a returned interest expresses itself is in the form of engagement with foodways. This was the case in all three of the texts discussed in this section. Gross noted that renewed interest in American Jewish foodways brought forth discussion about the authenticity of said foodways. She referred to the declension narrative under which traditional methods of preparation would undoubtedly lead to tastier foods and are thus to be preferred. Thus, this brought up the issue of a supposed loss of authenticity, that occurred when traditional recipes were adapted or modernized. According to Gross, such a narrative of declension does not hold true. She recognizes that authentic does not mean that foods have to be made and eaten exactly the way they used to be. Rather, innovation and change allow us to reflect and come to terms with heritage. Based on the texts discussed here, I argued that there was no such thing as a loss of authenticity as all three of the books discussed here had unique ways of showing how innovation and change of foodways keep American Jewish heritage alive, and even make American Jewish cuisine accessible to a more diverse public.

In general, it became apparent that there are intergenerational differences in the struggle with the dual identity of being both American and Jewish, but that the specifics of these struggles differed according to individual experiences. Looking at foodways can help us see these

struggles more clearly. This shows that food within American Jewish literature functions as a signifier of fundamental and universal experiences and helps us make sense of those experiences.

Although the research was conducted as thoroughly as possible, there were some limitations. Only three different genres, with two texts per genre could be analyzed. A selection intended to give a representative overview of some of the unexpected ways text engaged with American Jewish foodways. Nevertheless, this meant that many other interesting texts, even other genres, were left untouched. Further research should aim to expand on this, both texts within these genres, and the incorporation of further genres that were not discussed here. Based on the discussions here, further research is needed to broaden our understanding of American Jewish foodways in literature. Such further research could go into the specifics of individual narratives that diverge from the dominant communal narrative. This would bring more diversity to the research field in order to more accurately reflect what is happening in the discourse. Texts that deal with narratives that do not belong to the dominant communal narrative, that of white Ashkenazi American Jewish foodways, might be less widely available, but they exist. Including them in our research will enrich our understanding of American Jewish foodways.

The research done here, has taught us that American Jewish foodways in literature function in a multitude of ways, such as: food as a representation of power or communication, food as a means to uncover the experiences of human struggling, and food can make us more aware of stereotypes, like the Jewish mother trope, as explained by Fishman. It has been demonstrated how studying food as a part of literature studies both broadens and deepens our analysis and understanding of texts. The themes that were uncovered in this thesis, such as food as power and food as communication, are universal themes, that would be equally interesting and relevant in a context far beyond that of the American Jewish setting. There have been a considerable number of studies that aimed to introduce the field of literature studies to foodways

as an element of interest. Yet, discussion about the seriousness of such studies has prevented it from becoming a mainstream area of interest within literary analysis. Once more, I would like to emphasize that foodways are too important, as well as too interesting, to ignore, as possibilities for research are endless and the topic of foodways is, and will remain, a universal experience.

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Appendix A - Images of American Jewish dishes

Figure 1 - "Bakery Style Challah" (Frances)

Figure 2 - "Salmon and Cod Gefilte Fish" (Simpson)

Figure 3 - "Jewish Hamantaschen Cookies" (Rolek)

Figure 4 - "Sweet Noodle Kugel" (Gore)

Figure 5 - "Chicken Soup with Whole Wheat Matzo Balls" (Samuel)

Appendix B - Summaries of Selected Novels

The following section summarizes *Bread Givers* and *Modern Girls*, the novels analyzed in this thesis, without paying attention to the aspects of foodways. This is intended to demonstrate that these elements can easily be ignored but including them in the analysis of literature provides interesting insights and further depth.

Bread Givers by Anzia Yezierska

Bread Givers is a novel about the young Jewish immigrant Sara Smolinsky and her family. They have come to the United States from Poland as a family. Although the mother lived in relative riches back in Poland, this changed after her marriage to Reb Smolinsky, the family's father. Reb considers it his destiny to devote his earthly life to studying the Talmud, which leaves him no time to work. When an attempt was made to recruit Reb as a free soldier for the Russian Tsar the couple paid off the *pogromschicks*, but after a failed attempt to take over the business of Mrs. Smolinsky's father after his death, the couple found themselves in poverty. When Mrs. Smolinsky recounts their history to her daughters, she explains their decision to go to the United States: '"when everything was gone from us, then our only hope was to come to America, where Father thought things cost nothing at all."' (Yezierska 34). After the family has arrived in the United States, they settle on the lower east side in New York and soon face the reality that is, of course, nothing like Reb's expectations. Yet, Reb still refuses to work and seizes a whole room in their small apartment just for his religious studies.

Meanwhile, the mother and the four daughters, Bessie, Mashah, Fania, and Sara, face the harsh reality of their existence in which they have to slave away to provide for the family and pay the rent as the family is in debt with many local vendors. Over the years that the family's lives are described the three eldest sisters all find someone they are willing to marry, despite the

fact that they are all without a dowry. Bessie, the eldest daughter brings home a man named Berel Bernstein who is a head cutter at the clothing store Bessie works at. During a visit to the Smolinsky home, Berel is interrogated by Reb about his intentions of marrying Bessie and opening his own store. Eventually, Berel leaves Bessie, deeply offended by Reb, who argues that he should be compensated for losing the daughter that most selflessly hands over her income for his support. Infuriated by Reb, Berel speaks to Bessie alone and proposes to go on with the marriage regardless of her parents' support. Unable to abandon her father, Bessie declines and remains at her parents' house unmarried. The second daughter, Mashah, finds herself fancied by the son of a rich businessman who plays the piano. Although her suitor, Jacob Novak, initially is deemed acceptable by Reb because of his rich father, he eventually changes his mind because Jacob plays the piano during Sabbath. Not unlike the situation with Bessie and her suitor, Reb forces Mashah to choose between him or Jacob. Like her sister, Mashah finds herself unable to abandon her father and remains with her family. Fania, the third daughter, has a suitor who is a righteous yet poor man, who aspires to be a poet, Morris Lipkin. Once Reb intercepts a letter from Morris to Fania the issue is brought up with the family, and once again Reb sees reason to meddle in his daughters' affairs. When Morris comes over to the family home, he is entirely ignored by the father who has brought a matchmaker and leaves the house for good. The father resolved to bring the matchmaker because he deems his daughters incapable of finding suitable matches themselves. Insolently he declares that it will take him no time to find men that better suit his taste. Father manages to find three men willing to marry his eldest daughters and is delighted at their display and promises of wealth. Although reluctant, Mashah and Fania accept their fate, if only to finally get away from their tyrannizing father. Not soon after it becomes apparent that their father was misguided about the men, and both girls set out to lead an unhappy life. Realizing that his eldest daughter, Bessie, is becoming an old maid, the father marries her

off to Zalmon the fish peddler who is an old widower with five children from his previous marriage, in exchange for a general sum of money. Although Zalmon is an honest man, Bessie is unwilling to agree to this match, but like her sisters, eventually concedes as to get away from Reb. Sara, who is at this point still a young girl, vouches never to let Reb interfere in her marriage. She is determined to become independent before she will find a husband for herself.

After having made what he considered such excellent matches for his daughters, he feels this surely must mean that he is a capable businessman. With the sum of money that he received from Zalmon for his marriage to Bessie, Mr. Smolinsky sets out to purchase a store. When the family sees an advert in the paper for a grocery store in Elizabeth for a favorable price, Mrs. Smolinsky urges her husband to let her come along, but he is of the opinion that he does not need the advice of his wife. Although the reader is aware that Mr. Smolinsky most likely has no practical experience of business affairs, and therefore is not aware of the details that he should be looking at, he is headstrong that this is something better done by himself. Nevertheless, he promises his wife that he will not finalize the purchase without her. Later that day Mr. Smolinsky calls over Mrs. Smolinsky and Sara to Elizabeth. When they arrive there, they find the damage has already being done. Hurried by the sight of other possible buyers, Mr. Smolinsky has already finalized the purchase of the Elizabeth' grocery store. Soon after the seller leaves, Mrs. Smolinsky and Sara find out that most of the stock consists of empty packaging, and that the store was only busy that day, because of unrealistic prices. The family moves to Elizabeth to live at the store. During this time Sara alone has to bear the burden of her father's sermons, and she misses the busy life in New York. Eventually, when her father gets upset about a small thing, the two have a fight and her father accuses her of not having faith and Sara decides to leave and go live by herself in New York while studying for college.

During her time alone in New York, Sara makes long days at work and spends several hours studying afterward. She barely manages, but for the first time, she is completely independent, with a room of her own. Years go by, and Sara makes it into college. Although she never really feels like she belongs, Sara manages to graduate and wins an essay contest with prize money of 1000 dollars. Upon her return to New York, where she has found a teaching position, she finds that her parents have returned there as well. Sara, now convinced that her newfound independence does not fully make up for the loneliness of her existence without her family, intends to reconcile with her parents. Unfortunately, she finds that her mother is very ill and is expected to die soon. Meanwhile, Mr. Smolinsky finds himself without the support of his wife who is now bedridden and takes his meals with an upstairs neighbor, the widow Mrs. Feinstein. Unfortunately, the mother dies not long afterward, and within thirty days Mr. Smolinsky is married to Mrs. Feinstein. The newlywed couple soon finds themselves without money and Mr. Smolinsky's new wife speaks to Sara and her sisters and demands that they support the couple. Against her will, Sara finds herself out of touch with her father again. Things seem happy for a while as Sara enjoys her job and grows closer to the headmaster of the school where she is teaching. The former Mrs. Feinstein attempts to discredit Sara by sending blackmail to the headmaster. Fortunately, this only brings the two closer together, and the two eventually get married. After a change of heart Sara decides that she cannot bear it to see her father in such misery and she picks up taking care of him again. The book closes with a scene during which Sara contemplates whether she should take in her father to live with her and her husband.

Modern Girls by Jennifer S. Brown

Modern Girls is set in New York and takes place during the timespan between the 16th of August and the 12th of September 1935. The two protagonists, mother-daughter duo Rose and

Dottie are both Jewish women that struggle with the concept of being modern women. Rose, born in Russia, is a first-generation immigrant. Already when she was a young girl back in Russia, Rose was interested in socialism. She went to protests and gradually became more involved in their political cause. During one of the protests that got out of hand, she was nearly trampled and left with a leg injury. At this, her father became so mad that her mother decided that it was better to send Rose to America.

After her move across the ocean, having settled in at New York's Lower East Side, her passion for socialism did not just disappear. The foundation of her existence in the United States was derived from her involvement in social activism, attending rallies, protesting evictions, and union meetings. It was during one of the union meetings that she met her husband. Her husband Ben, an auto mechanic, came from a similar background: Jewish and an immigrant from Eastern Europe. Once the couple had children it became harder for Rose to stay involved, as bringing them to protests turned out to be dangerous, and her friends without children were always able to achieve just a bit more. This led her to put her activism aside and focus on her home and family. The couple had a total of five children together, and throughout their years together, one of the children died of polio, and Rose experienced several miscarriages. Then, Rose finds herself pregnant again, a good number of years after her previous pregnancy. The timing is inconvenient, her youngest child is finally starting to become independent, which allowed Rose to slowly start thinking about getting involved in the socialist movement again.

The eldest of their children is named Dottie, or Dorothea in full and Dottala in Yiddish. Dottie is a smart girl that works in an accountant office. Her performance in the office is phenomenal as she is very gifted with numbers, hence she is soon offered a promotion to head bookkeeper. Not unlike other teenagers Dottie enjoys spending time with her friends, would rather avoid helping out at home, and also puts her math talents at work to calculate exactly how

much of her wages she can spend on fashionable clothing. She has been together with her boyfriend Abe, a devout young Jewish man who works as an assistant in his parent's kosher grocery store, for several years. Almost immediately at the beginning of the novel, Dottie and the reader find out that she is pregnant. Not much later it is revealed that Abe is not the father of her child, but that she is willing to risk a lot to give him the impression that it is his.

Once Dottie realizes that she is pregnant, she gets caught up in emotions and is not sure what she should do. In the days that follow she desperately tries to seduce Abe, thinking that if they sleep together, he will assume the baby is his and will marry her. Unfortunately, Abe does not give in to temptation, and Dottie realizes that this will most likely mean the end of their relationship. Then her mother finds out about Dottie's pregnancy, whilst at the same time keeping her own pregnancy a secret to Dottie. Rose tells Dottie that she cannot keep this baby, as the shame for the family will be too big and makes an appointment for Dottie to have an abortion. Although Dottie sees some reason in this, she maintains doubt about whether this is the right decision. With growing doubt over the next few days, Dottie seeks out the father of her baby, Willie Klein. Although the Klein family shares a heritage similar to that of Dottie and her family and are related to friends of the Krasinsky family, they have done very successful business in the United States that made them rich. This allowed them to move to a big apartment on the Upper East Side and lead a completely different lifestyle. Although they still consider themselves Jewish, they go to a reform synagogue.

Like Dottie's mother, Willie thinks it is best if Dottie gets rid of the baby and gives her money for the procedure; devastated Dottie returns home. To make things even worse, she learns that he will be leaving for a job as a journalist in Europe soon. Despite the pressure that other people place on her, Dottie becomes more and more convinced that she does not want to lose this baby and comes up with a final idea to solve her problems. She sets out to meet with Willie's

mother with the intention of arranging a marriage for herself. There she learns that she is not nearly the first girl that Willie has been with to find herself in this position. Yet, circumstances make her a favorable match in the eyes of Willie's mother, who states that: '"You are not my choice. But you are sturdy and Jewish and come from a decent family, and to call it as it is, you are white"' (Brown 234). The marriage is scheduled to take place that evening. At the same time, Rose is waiting for Dottie at the abortion appointment, already suspecting that Dottie is not going to show up. At the last moment, Rose decides that she will take the appointment herself, as she is unable to reconcile with the idea of having another child.

The next morning Dottie returns to her family's home to inform her parents about the marriage that has already taken place. Her father informs her that her mother has had another miscarriage and is sick in bed. Dottie immediately goes to her and soon realizes that it was no miscarriage, but rather that her mother took her appointment. The two have a good talk and make peace over the issues that they are both dealing with. In the days that follow Rose and Dottie grow closer over the preparations that are being made for the departure of Dottie and Willie to Europe. A whole new wardrobe for Dottie has to be sewed and the Krasinsky's must meet with the Klein's. Then comes the day that Dottie and Willie are to depart, and it is a sad goodbye. Yet, both Dottie and Rose are now confident that they, as modern women, are not defined by their heritage, but rather that it helps them navigate the challenges they face.