Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **15**, 1 (2023) 1–16

DOI: 10.2478/ausp-2023-0001

Nostalgia and Creative Urge as Double-Edged Swords in the (Auto)Biographical Writings of Rose Gollup-Cohen

Irina RABINOVICH
Holon Institute of Technology (Holon, Israel)
Multi-disciplinary School
irener@hit.ac.il
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4801-7365

Abstract. While some Jewish immigrant autobiographies have received broad critical attention, a few important autobiographical endeavours have been underrepresented or almost forgotten. Autobiographies written by Jewish female writers who immigrated to America from Russia, Poland, or Galicia often draw a bifurcated picture of their struggles in callous New York sweatshops, or, on the contrary, they exalt the Jews' notable success while blending in the American melting pot. Scarce studies, however, have been devoted to the dislocation and uprootedness of female immigrants and to the nostalgic feelings they have experienced during their absorption into American reality. This paper intends to resuscitate the forgotten voice of a Jewish immigrant female writer, Rose Gollup-Cohen. Moreover, using primarily psychoanalytical methodology and a feminist theory, the paper focuses on the nostalgic feelings that immigrants reverted to. Finally, it deals with both the therapeutic and the destructive powers of compulsive writing and shows how the writing process assists an immigrant writer when coping with distress experienced in her new homeland, but, on the other hand, it also demonstrates how compulsive writing may lead to obsessive behaviours, resulting in losing awareness of one's surroundings, neglecting one's family, and even to depression and suicide.

Keywords: nostalgia, immigration, autobiography, Jewish female writers.

> "The selves we display in autobiographies are doubly constructed, not only in the act of writing a life story but also in a lifelong process of identity formation of which the writing is usually a comparatively late phase" (Eakin 2019, IX).
>
> "Every act of rebellion expresses nostalgia for innocence and an appeal to the essence of being" (Camus 1984, 14).
>
> "The twentieth century began with utopia and ended with nostalgia" (Boym 2007, 7).

Autobiographies and memoirs have been popular practically as long as history has been chronicled. Nevertheless, autobiography was not classified as an independent genre until the late eighteenth century, and, as such, it missed an important testing ground for critical controversies about an array of ideas, including authorship, selfhood, representation, and the distinction between fact and fiction. Robert Southey coined the term "autobiography" in 1809 to describe the work of a Portuguese poet (Berryman 1999, 71). Since then, intense literary disputes have arisen regarding the genre's definition and its characteristics. One definition that has gained a relative consensus among literary critics is that of Philippe Lejeune, who defines autobiography as "a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life: in particular, on the development of his personality" (Lejeune 1982, 193).

The Jewish immigrant autobiography forms a particular sub-category within the immigrant autobiography sub-genre, which has recently received quite an extensive critical attention. Dozens of literary studies were dedicated to Abraham Cahan's novel *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), in which *Levinsky*, as some other Jewish immigrant writers, does not entirely succeed to bridge the gap between Europe and America. Quite wide-ranging research was also devoted to autobiographical works of Jewish female immigrants such as Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912), Leah Morton's (pen name: Elizabeth Stern) *I Am a Woman – and a Jew* (1926), and Anzia Yezierska's semi-autobiographical work *Bread Givers* (1925) and her later autobiographical novel *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (1950). Nonetheless, several less known but probably not less significant Jewish immigrant writers' voices have received very scarce critical attention, if at all.

The Jewish immigrant autobiography sub-genre seems to present quite a dichotomous picture of either compassionately depicting immigrants' suffering, dreadful experiences, and harsh conditions in New York sweatshops and tenements or, conversely, extolling the remarkable success of Jewish immigrants while merging into the American melting pot.[1] Not much research, however,

1 YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute), established in 1925 in Vilna, Lithuania, relocated its activity to New York in 1940. In 1942, it organized a competition for the best autobiographical sketch by Jewish immigrants in America. The organizers asked the participants to write a piece

has been dedicated to the displacement and uprootedness of young Jewish female immigrants in America and to the nostalgic feelings they have carried for many years in the process of their not always successful acculturation and/or assimilation into American reality.

The goal of this paper is hence threefold. First, it intends to revive a forgotten voice of a Jewish immigrant female writer, Rose Gollup-Cohen, whose autobiography describing her childhood in Eastern Europe and a later life phase in America has not entered the literary canon. Moreover, employing mainly psychoanalytical methodology as well as feminist critique, the paper is aimed at delving into the nostalgic feelings such writers have been experiencing throughout their adult life in America, yearnings that frequently have been dismissed as overly sentimental or even neurotic. Finally, the paper addresses both the therapeutic qualities and the destructive powers of compulsive writing, and demonstrates how the writing process, in general, and that of producing autobiographical prose, in particular, helps an immigrant to cope with anxiety and distress experienced in the new homeland. It seems that Gollup-Cohen uses writing in the attempt of reconstructing her imagined "idyllic sphere" whose essence, she feels, is crumbling and vanishing. On the other hand, however, compulsive writing may lead to obsessive behaviour, resulting in losing awareness of one's surroundings, neglecting one's family and depression. The biographical sketch written by Leonora O'Reilly (1919) about Rose Gollup-Cohen, and Anzia Yezierska's (1927) semi-(auto)biographical/semi-fictional story "Wild Winter Life" based on Rose's life will shed additional light on the latter's nostalgic yearnings, deep sorrows, and her compulsive writing spree.

While many Jewish immigrants in America just briefly refer to their former life in Russia or Poland, or at times shortly and often dolefully record their and their families' misfortunes in their native land, a few writers such as Rose Gollup-Cohen (1880–1925) and Lucy Robins Lang (1884–1962) provide a much more detailed and every so often a nostalgic record of their childhood's formative years in Eastern Europe.

on the theme "Why I left Europe and what I have accomplished in America." Although the organizers encouraged the contestants to write about their former life in Eastern Europe, most of the 223 submissions (just 20% of which were written by women) deal with the writers' "accomplishment in America," almost totally disregarding their childhood or youth in Russia, Galicia, or Poland. The importance of the project is undeniable in terms of archiving personal documents and letters and sharing the communal hardships during the first years of adjustment. Some critics, including Daniel Soyer (who edited and published together with Jocelyn Cohen in 2008 some of the winning autobiographical works of YIVO 1942's competition), maintain that the formulation of the theme "Why I left Europe and what I have accomplished in America" facilitated "descriptions of the social dislocation that first caused, and then was exacerbated by the migration process itself" (Cohen and Soyer 2006, 225). Nevertheless, it seems that this, as some other initiatives organized by Jewish bodies, encouraged or even pushed immigrants into writing "bootstrap narratives" that rather than centring on individual experiences, including traumatic ones, or offering support, celebrate and endorse the competitive ideal of success.

Nostalgia, according to Filiberto Fuentenebro de Diego and Carmen Valiente Ots, is a term that "was first proposed in 1688 by Johannes Hofer [...] It referred to a state of moral pain associated with the forced separation from family and social environment" (Fuentenebro and Ots 2014, 404). Since then, numerous medical, psychological, and sociological studies were dedicated to studying the symptoms and outcomes of the condition.[2] Nostalgia was often considered as the incapacitating claim to preserve ideals and principles that are about to become outdated in the name of progress. While some researchers, particularly those writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, and often confounding nostalgia with homesickness, treated nostalgia as an "immigrant psychosis" (Frost 1938, 801), claiming that immigrants "found themselves the victims of social forces they could neither understand nor alter" (Frost 1938, 807), more recent research repeatedly, though not unanimously, distinguishes between nostalgia and homesickness, and views the former as having positive ramifications. Krystine Irene Batcho, after performing several important studies on the nature and effects of nostalgia, concludes that:

> the largely negative picture of a fearful, unhappy, dependent person which had dominated many years of nostalgia theory is replaced by a more positive image of an individual with the capacity to feel intensely and for whom other people are a high priority. This view suggests that the nostalgic person is neither trapped in the past nor afraid to live in the present or for the future. (Batcho 1998, 430)

Svetlana Boym, the author of several influential studies on nostalgia, similarly to Batcho, does not see nostalgia as the enemy of progress. Boym shows that progress and nostalgia are "doubles and mirror images of one another" (Boym 2007, 7), as both are tied to modernism. For her, nostalgia marks the rapports between individual biography and the collective biography of groups or nations. With that same thread of thought, Gollup-Cohen's nostalgic writing reflects the collective yearnings of a whole generation of Jewish immigrants in America (Boym 2007, 9).

Rose Gollup-Cohen's Nostalgic Longings

Rose Gollup-Cohen immigrated to the United States in 1892 with her young aunt, Masha, while her mother, sisters, and brothers remained in Belarus, waiting for Rose's father to send tickets and money required for their travel. The father

2 The definition of nostalgia has been significantly altered over time. Subsequently to its Greek roots *nóstos* and *álgos* meaning 'homecoming' and 'distress,' respectively, nostalgia was considered for centuries a potentially incapacitating and at times even deadly medical condition conveying extreme homesickness and anxiety. Castelnuovo-Tedesco, for example, refers to nostalgia as

escaped his native country due to compulsory enlisting to military service in the Tzar's army, arrived in New York in 1890, and managed to save the funds necessary to pay travel fare for his daughter and younger sister, working as a presser in a textile sweatshop. In 1918, Rose published her autobiography, *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side*, which has been widely read by American readership, translated to several languages, and gone through several editions, but, oddly, it has received scarce critical attention.

Upon arrival to New York, Rose, the dreamy, sensitive girl who used to play in the fields and woods of her village and vividly envision imaginary sights and friends lost her fanciful childhood fantasies and abruptly became a hard-working sweatshop labourer. Her memories about her childhood in a Belarusian village, populated by a mixed Jewish and gentile population, include heartfelt longings for the bygone past. While barefoot, at times shabbily clothed and scarcely fed, she remembers how

> as soon as I sat down [in the fields], the twigs and flowers turned into fanciful girls and boys who adored me. I named each one of them and myself I called Dena. And then we went romping about in the fields. I was extremely happy among these imaginary companions […] Among these companions there was one who at first was just a name I liked. But after a while at the thought of the name I saw a vision of a tall, dark, handsome youth […] So real did this imaginary brother become that when I found myself alone in the dark, trembling with fear, I would call out "Oh, Ephraim, where are you?" [...] Then my two hands would clasp each other, and I seemed to feel safer (Gollup-Cohen 1995, 25–26).

Rose's (then, Rahel's) nostalgic memories include not just her joyful play in Nature and the happy time she spent with her siblings, playing by the lake or planting vegetables in their little garden, but she also recollects the affection and heartiness of her blind grandmother, who taught her how to spin and to pray and told her numerous biblical stories and folktales. The grandfather, a more reserved and less pious man than the rest of the family, pampered the grandchildren with occasional treats brought from a neighbouring town. Rose's childhood was never an idyllic one, since the Jews in Belarus as well as in Russia and Poland time and again suffered from pogroms, persecution, and forced enlisting of husbands and fathers to the army.[3]

"a regressive manifestation closely related to the issue of loss, grief, incomplete mourning, and, finally, depression" (Castelnuovo-Tedesco 1980, 110).

3 According to historians, the murder of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and the pogroms it brought about produced a mass immigration of Jews from Russia, Belarus, Poland, and the Pale of Settlement that lasted for more than three decades. According to Van Onselen, "A drop in the cost of rail fares and a sharp fall in the price of steerage passages on over-traded international

Nevertheless, when roaming about the countryside, hearing "the echoes which seemed to come from the dense mysterious looking forest across the lake," and when dancing in the fields clasping "hands with the children […] spin[ning] around and around until [they] fell breathless and dizzy" (Gollup-Cohen 1995, 42), Rose feels as the happiest child in the world. Before departure to New York, she suffers deep regret at leaving her homeland and particularly her grandmother, who, due to old age and poor health, is to remain behind.

Leaving home and arriving to the dreary, deprived, and threatening New York tenements populated by strangers from various countries, on occasion suffering from anti-Semitic remarks and often abused by greedy employers, Rose loses her childhood at the age of twelve. The father works from dawn to late evening, and when asked by Rose whether everyone "in America live[s] like this? Go[es] to work early, come[s] home late, eat[s] and go[es] to sleep?" (Gollup-Cohen 1995, 74), he replies that eventually Rose will get married and be freed from the hard daily drudgery. The choices that stand for a young and poor female immigrant are limited: either being employed as a domestic aide and residing with her wealthy employers or getting married and either working partially as a seamstress or tending her husband's shop or, in case the husband is able to provide for the family, becoming a homemaker. Schooling was no option, but ironically, due to Rose's failing health caused by hard physical labour followed by long-term hospitalization, while in infirmary, she manages to learn to read in English and is allowed to proceed with her education.

Ruth's (Rose's) nostalgic yearnings seem to act as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they allow her to withstand the harsh immigrant reality as memories provide some repose and temporary elation. Batcho suggests that under certain conditions, "nostalgia can help the individual to maintain a sense of connectedness with parts of self over time, and with other people throughout life. Such connectedness could help to foster a firm sense of continuity of self and to sharpen one's sense of identity within a network of personal relationships" (Batcho 1998, 430). For Gobodo-Madikizela, "the fundamental role of nostalgia is to restore a sense of continuity in identity" (Gobodo-Madikizela 2012, 256), which in Rose's case is of significance, as for her the immigration process does not fare well, breaking down her old world without offering a viable alternative.

On the other hand, tragically, the nostalgic reminiscence of her childish playfulness and bliss are unattainable, hence leading to depression, and eventually to suicide. Drawing on the work of Karl Jasper and referring to Freud's studies of hysteria, Elisabeth Bronfen maintains that "the nostalgic suffers from pleasurable memories she would like to re-enact, but which she cannot because she has been displaced from the one site promising such a satisfying fulfilment" (Bronfen 1998,

shipping routes saw two to three million Jews flee central and eastern Europe to join the great migration west in the 'Age of capital'" (2007, 120).

272). In psychoanalysis, nostalgia is viewed not just as yearning for the past but also as a process of romanticizing the past. Freud refers to "screen memories" as a combination of many different memories; an inaccurate account of the past in which feelings are contained or missed after their actual occurrence. Freud also conjectures that childhood memories are essentially memories of memories and that memories actually provide a twisted sense of the past. Accordingly,

> it may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all from our childhood […] Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, emerge; they were formed at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves. (Freud 1899, 322)

Such screen memories relate to the way memory operates and to how it may be distorted. According to Boren, "Freud's screen memories lend credence to the notion that nostalgia is often a psychological defence; that it derives from falsehoods and uses these misinterpretations of the past as the foundation for future behaviours" (Boren 2013, n. p.). Tragically, Rose may be trapped in either nostalgic yearnings of her past or in her screen memories that, on the one hand, provide her with a sense of security, defend her from social hostility and harsh existence, and allow her to sustain a temporary sense of connectedness with her former self but, on the other hand, keep her grounded, consequently preventing her adjustment to and assimilation in her new country. In "Wild Winter Love," Ruth despairingly cries: "I'm a woman without a country. I'm uprooted from where I started; and I can't find roots anywhere. I've lost the religion of my fathers. I've lost the human ties that hold other women. I can only live in the world I create out of my brain" (Yezierska 1927, 488). Heightened sensitivity and developed imagination may be a blessing for a writer, but when they feed an obsession, they are a curse.

Ruth's (Rose's) heightened sensitivity, paired with empathy, and developed sense of justice (organizing labour protests and helping to manage trade schools for poor girls) may also lend themselves to Rose's nostalgic reminiscences. Batcho conjectures that "perhaps it is the capacity to feel more intensely or to be sensitive to affective triggers which results in the nostalgic individual's greater likelihood to feel both the 'bitter' and the 'sweet' which constitutes the characteristic mixed affect of nostalgia" (Batcho 1998, 420).

In a rare article published in 1919 about Rose, Leonora O'Reilly (1870–1927), an American feminist, suffragist, and trade union organizer, who met Rose in 1897

(when the latter was seventeen), testifies that Rose was "like a peasant girl-woman. Shy and wise […] She did things well […] She talked very little. She listened very intently […] Rose set to make things attractive. Her hands are tools when she has no others, when she has others, she knows how to use them" (1919, 103–104). After her long illness, Rose was referred by Lillian D. Wald[4] to work at a sewing workshop established by O'Reilly for immigrant women. This place offered much more humane working conditions than the textile sweatshops usually managed by Jewish employers, where Rose had been previously employed. In 1901, Rose helped O'Reilly to open and manage a trade school for girls aimed at saving them from the "horrors of the present and past where workers are hands and hands only […] stimulate ambition in the young working girl […] give her a sense of the dignity of labour and a self-respect" (O'Reilly 1919, 104).

Shortly after her release from the hospital, Rose married Joseph Cohen, a tailor with whom she had a daughter, Evelyn. She then stopped working but continued her education, attending classes at Breadwinners' College at the Educational Alliance, the Rand School, and University Extension at Columbia University and assisting Leonora O'Reilly's at a girls' trade school. Though busying herself as a mother, wife, and O'Reilly's aide, it seems that Rose's main ambition was centred on writing her autobiography. O'Reilly testifies that Rose admitted that the book "was spelling out of her, Joseph and Evelyn ate burned supper. The voice of the book was calling her […] they [the whole family] had read its every word over and over again. Joseph had laughed and cried" (O'Reilly 1919, 105).

Strangely, though, the autobiography records neither Rose's married life nor the birth of her daughter nor her writing career. It ends quite abruptly with Rose's father buying a small grocery shop and proudly relates what seems the family's greatest achievement – her brother's enrolment to Columbia University and winning a prestigious academic prize. Since there is no record in Rose's autobiography of the writing process, the struggles she went through when writing, rewriting, and then publishing the work, there is a sense of her humility but probably also that of self-effacement.

The Therapeutic and Destructive Powers of Writing

Seemingly, writing the story of Rose's younger self, recalling and reinstating her childhood bear both therapeutic and traumatic ramifications. The book consumed Rose's entire existence, and she spent several years writing and rewriting

4 Lillian D. Wald (1867–1940) was an American nurse and social worker who founded the internationally known Henry Street Settlement in New York City in 1893. According to Emma Rothberg, "beyond her work with the Henry Street Settlement, Wald was a tireless advocate for the rights of women, children, immigrants, and laborers. She helped start the United States

it. The struggle she goes through when writing is quite evident in Leonora O'Reilly's account, which, while hinting at Rose's changing moods and certain obsession, somehow admiringly shifts the focus from Rose's compulsive writing thrust to her kindness and skilfulness. In a poetic passage, O'Reilly maintains that "life has taught her (Rose) to write. Nature cast her in the mold," but, nevertheless, society "may crash her kind to earth" (O'Reilly 1919, 105), as people of Rose's sort are susceptible to criticism and hurt, being "the peasant people of all lands, singers of songs, tellers of tales" (O'Reilly 1919, 105) whose dreamy makeup makes them ill-prepared for social violence and brutality. O'Reilly repeatedly refers to Rose as "a peasant girl" (O'Reilly 1919, 105) implying Rose's innocence, her melancholia, and her nostalgic yearnings for her childhood landscape.

Rose's continuous struggle to adapt to American culture both psychologically and socio-culturally without losing her original self is at the heart of her writing, aimed at both reinstating her native identity and proving herself as a capable American mainstream writer. On the one hand, Rose's writing undertaking fills her with enthusiasm, alertness, and a state of high energy and provides her with gratifying engagement. According to some studies, reliving one's autobiographical memories (AM) has strong therapeutic powers leading to emotion regulation and identity functions such as improving current mood states and maintaining a coherent identity. Bluck, Alea, Habermas, and Rubin maintain that autobiographical memories offer "directive (planning for present and future behaviours), self (self-continuity, psychodynamic integrity), and communicative (social bonding) functions" (Bluck et al. 2005, 93). Moreover, the autobiographical genre lends itself to serving as a form of self-reflexive and hence positive criticism since it often uses the writer's experience as a lens through which to view an absent community, and it calls for changeability and self-fulfilment. According to Linda Park-Fuller, "in acts of telling, speakers often come to understand events in new ways – in ways of their own construction – and such self-generated knowledge can serve to liberate them from the diseases they suffer" (Park-Fuller 2000, 24).

On the other hand, Rose's wish to excel in everything she does, including in writing, turns her literary endeavour to an obsession. "Compulsive writing" disorder, "Graphomania" or Hypergraphia, lately referred to by psychiatrists and psychologists as an irresistible pathological urge to write a lot,[5] may be responsible

Children's Bureau, the National Child Labor Committee, and the National Women's Trade Union League. She supported and worked for a women's right to birth control and was a part of the women's suffrage" (Rothberg 2020, n. p.).

5 According to Alice Flaherty, "neurologists have found that changes in a specific area of the brain can produce hypergraphia — the medical term for an overpowering desire to write" (Flaherty 2004, 16). Though the neuro-psychoanalytic causes of hypergraphia and the discussion of how obsessive writing is connected to the wiring of our brains is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that recently lots of research have been done in this area. For additional

for Rose's depression and eventually for her suicide. In "Rahel and 'Out of the Shadow,'" O'Reilly insinuates that everything Rose did was accomplished faultlessly; for instance, when taking care of the workers' children in camp, Rose's "ability to take infinite pains is a sign of genius" or when summarizing Rose's continuous effort, O'Reilly says it was "a 24-hour-a-day piece of work" (O'Reilly 1919, 104). The same is true when Rose devotedly attends to her sick husband or to her baby daughter's needs.

This perfectionism both as a labourer and later when joining the union and taking care of her fellow workers at the sweatshops and workers' children in camps and trade schools accompanies Rose also as a writer. When writing, she is wholly immersed in the experience, neglecting her family and her basic needs. She stops eating, she almost does not sleep, and she almost loses contact with the outer world. Rose confesses to Leonora O'Reilly that "the book was spelling out of her […] The voice of the book was calling her" (O'Reilly 1919, 105). She feels that she is compelled to write it even though "Joseph and Evelyn ate a burned supper" and in spite of the sleepless nights and the heavy toll writing takes on her physical and mental health. Rose is constantly anxious about who will publish the book in the first place, and, if published, who will read it (O'Reilly 1919, 105). O'Reilly reports that while writing, Rose's hair became grey and her cheeks lost their roundness, but she could not stop writing as "[n]ature cast her in a mold that compels her to do whatever she does well," including writing (O'Reilly 1919, 105).

Without pathologizing Rose, it is quite clear that her obsessive writing derives from a fervent internal force, maybe a sense of gratification, a wish to boost her self-esteem or nostalgic yearnings for the past, rather than from outer pressures. Alice Flaherty claims that compulsive writing "usually has themes that are highly meaningful for the author, often philosophical, religious, or autobiographical" (Flaherty 2004, 22).

Rose Gollup-Cohen died in 1925 at age forty-five under uncertain circumstances. Thomas Dublin in his introduction to the 1995 edition of Cohen's biography speculates that she might have committed suicide, jumping into the East River in New York (Dublin 1995, XV). He also maintains that her siblings and nephews refused to relate to her tragic death. In 1927, Anzia Yezierska, whose semi-autobiography, *Bread Givers*, was published several years after Gollup-Cohen's *Out of the Shadow*, decided to write a short story based on Rose's life, entitled "Wild Winter Life," which was published in the well-reputed *The Century Magazine*. Doubtlessly, Yezierska was being acquainted with Rose, possibly admired her and was inspired by the latter's writing. It may be speculated that Cohen's tragic and untimely death at the age of forty-five under uncertain circumstances led Anzia Yezierska to write this autobiographical but possible

materials related to the above-mentioned topic, see Peter Van Vugt, et al. (1996), Charles Brenner (2004), and Lennard J. Davis (2005, 2008).

also semi-biographical[6] story ending in the protagonist's suicide. The story's heroine, named Ruth Raefsky, is so consumed with her wish to write a book that "she seemed wrapped up inside herself. Not seeing, not hearing anything around her" (Yezierska 1927, 485). The husband, a tailor, fully supports Ruth's wish and encourages her to attend evening writing classes and devote her time to writing. Ruth describes how the writing process tears her "flesh in pieces for every little word" and "a consuming passion flared up in her eyes […] Her tightly clenched hands trembled with nervousness […] Here were brains and intelligence. Here was a woman who knew what she wanted to say, but was lost in the mazes of the new language" (Yezierska 1927, 486). Ruth feels estranged, as the "cold-hearted Americans" cannot understand her story or sympathize with her "feverish turmoil" (Yezierska 1927, 486).

In this story, Anzia Yezierska impressively affirms Rose's compulsiveness, mentioned in a subtler way in O'Reilly's account, describing "those years of toil by day and night, tearing up by the roots her [Rose's] starved childhood, her starved youth, trying to tell, in her personal story, the story of her people" (Yezierska 1927, 491). Yezierska, who, similarly to Rose, wrote her autobiographies after leaving the Jewish ghetto, may understand Rose's physical and temporal displacement. No longer living in the ghetto at the time when they write, the ghetto nonetheless continues to be an integral part of Anzia's and Rose's identity, as is their native land. Asking a hypothetical question: "How could they [people outside the ghetto and/or the gentile public] understand the all-consuming urge that drove her to voice her way across the chasm between the ghetto and America" (Yezierska 1927, 491) regarding her and Rose's breached identity, Yezierska neatly summarizes the personal struggles immigrants face. For the Jews in the East Side New York ghetto, Rose is "the Other," a writer and a woman who moved out to join the goyim (the gentiles); the American public, however, cannot understand Rose's "urge" to tell her story, as it is a tale of "a Russian Jewish peasant" (O'Reilly 1919, 105) with whom they can hardly sympathize, as for them, as an immigrant, a woman, and a Jew, she is a foreigner. In an extremely powerful and gloomy passage, O'Reilly summarizes well the chasm between Jewish immigrants and the American "society, we, you and I, life as it is lived today, may crush her and her kind to earth, wring their hearts with the horror of it all, wash our hands till they are white and soft in the sweat of their toil" (O'Reilly 1919, 105).

Seemingly, society awards a female writer the right to attain improved opportunities; nevertheless, at the same time it refuses such claims. The gap between the type of woman she imagines herself becoming and the outer reality results in the feeling of loss and confusion. When she chooses writing

6 In "Wild Winter Love," Yezierska actually retells her own relationships with John Dewey, a Columbia University philosophy professor, intertwining it with her own tragic love affair with the editor Clifford Smyth and with Gollup's-Cohen's wretched relationship with her gentile lover.

over motherhood and marriage, the decision shakes her whole life and instils hesitation and unease.

During the tedious writing process, Ruth almost stops functioning as a mother and wife, skips meals and hardly sleeps, until she suffers a nervous breakdown. The book's publication and subsequent success brings neither happiness nor repose to her ailing soul. Ruth leaves her daughter and husband and rents an apartment where she lives on her own until she meets a married gentile lawyer, who becomes her mentor and lover. She feels that this man is the only one who understands her without judgment; being with him is "like traveling in foreign countries. He excites my [her] imagination and releases my [her] imagination" (Yezierska 1927, 490). With this man, she can nostalgically recount her past, pouring herself "out at his feet, in poems of my [her] people, their hopes, their dreams" (Yezierska 1927, 490). Ruth's (Rose's) nostalgic recollections, which were dismissed by her Jewish friends, incite her lover's admiration as he listens to her "with the wonder of a child listening to adventure. It's all so fresh and new to him, my [her] world, that it becomes fresh and new to me [her]" (Yezierska 1927, 490). Sadly, Ruth's romance does not last long (just one "wild winter," as the story's title indicates). Her lover, a middle-aged man, fearing a public scandal, terminates the affair. Ruth (Rose), though at that time a popular writer, cannot withstand the shock, and she commits suicide.

Immigrants' Name/Identity Changing

Assimilation and acculturation, though often highly cherished by American society, seem to pose a threat to people of Rose's kind. The pressure to leave behind aspects of who she is in favour of a new, assimilated identity by changing her name, giving up on religious practices she valued as a child, and conforming to the rigid working practices of a sweatshop overwhelm her. While Mary Antin and Anzia Yezierska (in most of her literary oeuvre) convey the immigrant's desire to live the American Dream,[7] Rose feels that giving up her former identity uproots her from the familiar things of her past. When working in a sweatshop, the owner's wife, Mrs Nelson, kindly but resolutely suggests that Rahel (Rose's Jewish name) changes her name to Ruth, claiming that "every loafer who sees a Jewish girl shouts 'Rachel' after her. And on Cherry Street where you live there are many saloons and many loafers" (Gollup-Cohen 1995, 82). Eventually, although

7 Over the last two decades there, has been renewed interest in the work of Yezierska by sociologists and literary critics, mainly thanks to her documentation of women's experience of immigration and sweatshop labour. In the late 1980s, Mary Dearborn writes: "By and large, however, the immigrant endorsed the agenda of Americanization […] Yezierska wished fervently to make herself over as an American" (Dearborn 1988, 40).

it is not mentioned in Gollup-Cohen's biography, she decides to change her name to "Rose" rather than to "Ruth," probably as she feels that it sounds less Jewish. Interestingly, though, Rose still keeps her last maiden name, perhaps as the only remnant of her past/lost identity.

When discussing the common practice of name changing among immigrants in the first three decades of the twentieth century, in the attempt of immersing themselves into the American "melting pot," Watkins and London suggest that "naming patterns are but one of a bundle of markers of a distinctive culture. Because personal names are relatively easy to alter, they are likely to be a leading indicator of culture" (Watkins and London 1994, 197). Carneiro et al. rightfully assert that although "an American name provides a change in one's social identity, making integration easier […] adopting names that are common in the dominant culture may not necessarily imply a change in one's outcomes" (Carneiro et al. 2020, n. p.). Changing one's name, especially under pressure, and while living in an unreceptive environment, may be detrimental to one's personality. Her name is part of Rose's self-concept, and it also gives her a sense of security and protection, as it was selected by her parents and used by her beloved grandparents, and hence bears a valuable nostalgic meaning. Avner Falk claims that "names, which form so important a part [sic] from the very beginning of life, when the mothering person addresses the baby by his name, or 'name of affection' […] come to symbolize the identity of the person" (Falk 1976, 651). Accordingly, changing her name is undeniably a blow to Rose's self-perception, and it may be one of the reasons that undermine her confidence, leading to a sense of estrangement, anxiety, and despair.

Interestingly, Leonora O'Reilly's in her biographical account about Rose entitled "Rahel and 'Out of the Shadow'" – written quite late in Rose's life, after the latter gained a reputation of a writer and published under the name "Rose" –, refers to Rose as "Rahel" (the name's Hebrew version, not even the anglicized rendering – "Rachel"). It may be speculated that as the relationships between these women were close, O'Reilly, daughter of Irish immigrants belonging to the low working class, a social worker, and a suffragist, was sensitive to the emotional harm changing one's name can bring about, and thus uses Rose's original name. In Yezierska's "Wild Winter Love," the protagonist is called "Ruth," probably echoing the name Rose's employer, Mrs Nelson suggested that she adopts. In this case, though Yezierska veils the biographical source of her tale, she still alludes to its disguised protagonist autobiography in which Gollup-Cohen describes the attempt of Mrs Nelson at changing the former's name. Certainly, changing her name was of importance to Rose, as in "My Childhood Days in Russia," a short story Gollup-Cohen publishes in the *Bookman Literary Journal* in 1918, the incident of name changing is retold almost in the same words as in her autobiography.

Conclusions

Rose Gollup-Cohen's almost forgotten autobiography voices the hardships many young Jewish female immigrants experienced when arriving to America at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Such women often had to endure their families' and communities' demands and expectations when toiling in textile sweatshops to help pay for the remaining family members' passage to America. Simultaneously, they were required to maintain home culture and adhere to Jewish values (such as early marriages to candidates chosen by the father, keeping a kosher kitchen, etc.).

Education and artistic endeavours were "luxuries" such women were not entitled to. Rose Gollup-Cohen, though physically sickly and of a highly sensitive nature, manages to overcome the destitute lot of the meagre immigrant existence in New York's East Side tenements, gain education, and become a well-read writer. Nevertheless, such an extraordinary achievement has come with a heavy price. Rose, at once haunted and elated by the nostalgic memories of her past in Belarus and driven by an irresistible and overwhelming desire to become a writer at all costs, suffers from depression, which tragically leads to self-destruction and suicide.

Works Cited

Antin, Mary. 1969. *The Promised Land*. 2nd ed. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press.

Batcho, Krystine Irene. 1998. "Personal Nostalgia, World View, Memory, and Emotionality." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* vol. 87, no. 2: 411–432.

Berryman, Charles. 1999. "Critical Mirrors: Theories of Autobiography." *Mosaic* vol. 32, no. 1: 71–84.

Bluck, Susan, Nicole Alea, Tilmann Habermas, and David C. Rubin. 2005. "A Tale of Three Functions: The Self-Reported Uses of Autobiographical Memory." *Social Cognition* vol. 23, no. 1: 91–117.

Boren, Zachary. 2013. "The Nature of Nostalgia." *Contemporary Psychiatry* vol. 5, no. 1: n. p.

Boym, Svetlana. 2007. "Nostalgia and Its Discontents." *The Hedgehog Review* vol. 9, no. 2: 7–18.

Brenner, Charles. 2004. "Creativity and Psychodynamics." *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* vol. 73, no. 2: 511–515.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. 1998. *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents*. Princeton: Princeton UP.

Cahan, Abraham. 2001 [1917]. *The Rise of David Levinsky*. New York: Modern Library.

Camus, Albert. 1984. *The Rebel*. New York: Vintage Books.
Carneiro, Pedro et al. 2020. "Please Call Me John: Name Choice and the Assimilation of Immigrants in the United States, 1900–1930." *Labour Economics* vol. 62: n. p.
Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Pietro. 1980. "Reminiscence and Nostalgia: The Pleasure and Pain of Remembering." In *The Course of Life: Psychoanalytic Contributions toward Understanding Personality Development*, vol. III*: Adulthood and the Aging Process*, eds. Stanley I. Greenspan and George H. Pollack, 104–118. Government Printing Office.
Cohen, Jocelyn and Daniel Soyer. 2006. *My Future Is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Jewish Immigrants*. New York: NYU Press.
Davis, Lennard J. 2005. "Never Done: Compulsive Writing, Graphomania, Bibliomania." *Fictions* vol. 4: 1–16.
2008. *Obsession: A History*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
Dearborn, Mary V. 1988. *Love in the Promised Land: The Story of Anzia Yezierska and John Dewey*. New York: The Free Press.
Dublin, Thomas. 1995. Introduction. In *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side*, iv–xxii. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.
Eakin, Paul John. 2019. *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.
Falk, Avner. 1976. "Identity and Name Changes." *The Psychoanalytic Review* vol. 62, no. 4: 647–648.
Flaherty, Alice. 2004. *The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Freud, Sigmund. 1899. "Screen Memories." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* vol. 3: 301–322. London: The Hogarth Press.
Frost, Isaac. 1938. "Homesickness and Immigrant Psychoses." *Journal of Mental Science* vol. 84: 801– 847.
Fuentenebro, Filiberto de Diego and Carmen Valiente Ots. 2014. "Nostalgia: A Conceptual History." *History of Psychiatry* vol. 25, no. 4: 404–411.
Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla. 2012. "Remembering the Past." *Peace and Conflict* vol. 18, no. 3: 252–267.
Gollup-Cohen, Rose. 1918. "My Childhood Days in Russia." *Bookman* vol. 54: 591–608.
1995. *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.
Lejeune, Philippe. 1982. "The Autobiographical Contract." In *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov, trans. R. Carter, 192–222. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP.
Morton, Leah. 1926. *I Am a Woman – and a Jew*. New York: J. H. Sears & Co.

O'Reilly, Leonora. 1919. "Rahel and 'Out of the Shadow." *Life and Labor* vol. 9, no. 5(May): 103–105.

Park-Fuller, Linda M. 2000. "Performing Absence: The Staged Personal Narrative as Testimony." *Text and Performance Quarterly* vol. 20, no. 1: 20–42.

Rothberg, Emma. 2020. "Lillian Wald." *National Women's History Museum*. *https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/lillian-wald* (Last accessed 1 January 2023).

Soyer, Daniel. 1999. "Documenting Immigrant Lives at an Immigrant Institution: Yivo's Autobiography Contest of 1942." *Jewish Social Studies* vol. 5, no. 3: 218–243.

Van Onselen, Charles. 2007. "Jewish Police Informers in the Atlantic World, 1880–1914." *The Historical Journal* vol. 50, no. 1: 119–144.

Van Vugt, Peter et al. 1996. "Increased Writing Activity in Neurological Conditions: A Review and Clinical Study." *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry* vol. 61, no. 5: 510–514.

Watkins, Susan Cotts, and Andrew S. London. 1994. "Personal Names and Cultural Change: A Study of the Naming Patterns of Italians and Jews in the United States in 1910." *Social Science History* vol. 18, no. 2: 169–209.

Yezierska, Anzia. 1925. *Bread Givers: A Struggle between a Father of the Old World and a Daughter of the New*. New York: Persea Books.

1927. "Wild Winter Love." *Century Magazine* vol. 113(February): 485–491.

1987. *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*. New York: Persea Books.