

Aufgabenstellung

1. Summarize the narrator's experiences in the old and in the new world.
2. Examine how the narrator's attitude towards the USA is reflected in her language.
3. "I was in America, among the Americans, but not of them." (l. 20) Explain to what extent this statement applies to Candido and his wife.
4. After months of living in poverty and being exploited in a sweatshop and a factory the narrator defines what America means to her:

"I saw America – a big idea – a deathless hope – a world still in the making. I saw that it was the glory of America that it was not yet finished. And I, the last comer, had her share to give, small or great, to the making of America, like those Pilgrims who came in the Mayflower."

Discuss in what ways this statement can be related to aspects of American identity studied in class.

Material: Excerpt from Anzia Yeziarska's short story "America and I" (1923)

As one of the dumb, voiceless ones I speak. One of the millions of immigrants beating, beating out their hearts at your gates for a breath of understanding.

Ach! America! From the other end of the earth from where I came, America was a land of living hope, woven of dreams, aflame with longing and desire.

- 5 Choked for ages in the airless oppression of Russia, the Promised Land rose up – wings for my stifled spirit – sunlight burning through my darkness – freedom singing to me in my prison – deathless songs tuning prison-bars into strings of a beautiful violin.

I arrived in America. My young, strong body, my heart and soul pregnant with the unlived lives of generations clamoring for expression.

- 10 What my mother and father and their mother and father never had a chance to give out in Russia, I would give out in America. The hidden sap of centuries would find release; colors that never saw light – songs that died unvoiced – romance that never had a chance to blossom in the black life of the Old World.

- 15 In the golden land of flowing opportunity I was to find my work that was denied me in the sterile village of my forefathers. Here I was to be free from the dead drudgery for bread that held me down in Russia. For the first time in America, I'd cease to be a slave of the belly. I'd be a creator, a giver, a human being! My work would be the living job of fullest self-expression.

But from my high visions, my golden hopes, I had to put my feet down on earth. I had to have food and shelter. I had to have the money to pay for it.

20 I was in America, among the Americans, but not of them. No speech, no common language, no way to win a smile of understanding from them, only my young, strong body and my untried faith. Only my eager, empty hands, and my full heart shining from my eyes!

God from the world! Here I was with so much richness in me, but my mind was not wanted without the language. And my body, unskilled, untrained, was not even wanted in the factory. Only 25 one of two chances was left open to me: the kitchen, or minding babies.

My first job was as a servant in an Americanized family. Once, long ago, they came from the same village from where I came. But they were so well-dressed, so well-fed, so successful in America, that they were ashamed to remember their mother tongue.

30 "What were to be my wages?" I ventured timidly, as I looked up to the well-fed, well-dressed "American" man and woman.

They looked at me with a sudden coldness. What have I said to draw away from me their warmth? Was it so low from me to talk of wages? I shrank back into myself like a low-down bargainer. Maybe they're so high up in well-being they can't any more understand my low thoughts for money.

35 From his rich height the man preached down to me that I must not be so grabbing for wages. Only just landed from the ship and already thinking about money when I should be thankful to associate with "Americans."

The woman, out of her smooth, smiling fatness assured me that this was my chance for a summer vacation in the country with her two lovely children. My great chance to learn to be a 40 civilized being, to become an American by living with them.

So, made to feel that I was in the hands of American friends, invited to share with them their home, their plenty, their happiness, I pushed out from my head the worry for wages. Here was my first chance to begin my life in the sunshine, after my long darkness. My laugh was all over my face as I said to them: "I'll trust myself to you. What I'm worth you'll give me." And I entered their house 45 like a child by the hand.

The best of me I gave them. Their house cares were my house cares. I got up early. I worked till late. All that my soul hungered to give I put into the passion with which I scrubbed floors, scoured pots, and washed clothes. I was so grateful to mingle with the American people, to hear the music of the American language, that I never knew tiredness.

50 There was such a freshness in my brains and such a willingness in my heart that I could go on and on – not only with the work of the house, but work with my head – learning new words from the children, the grocer, the butcher, the iceman. I was not even afraid to ask for words from the policeman on the street. And every new word made me see new American things with American eyes. I felt like a Columbus, finding new worlds through every new word.

55 But words alone were only for the inside of me. The outside of me still branded me for a steerage immigrant. I had to have clothes to forget myself that I'm a stranger yet. And so I had to have money to buy these clothes.

The month was up. I was so happy! Now I'd have money. My *own, earned* money. Money to buy a new shirt on my back – shoes on my feet. Maybe yet an American dress and hat!

60 Ach! How high rose my dreams! How plainly I saw all that I would do with my visionary wages shining like a light over my head!

Source: Paul Lauter (ed.) (2002): *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company: 1729 – 1730.

Annotations

- 6 stifled – here: oppressed, silenced
- 11 sap – here: energy
- 15 drudgery – hard, boring work
- 29 to venture – to say sth. in a careful way in order not to upset s.o.
- 55 to be branded – to be marked as
- 56 steerage immigrant – poor immigrant (having come to the USA by choosing the cheapest fare on a ship)

Hilfsmittel

Den Prüflingen stehen einsprachige sowie für den schulischen Gebrauch geeignete zweisprachige Wörterbücher der Allgemeinsprache (Deutsch-Englisch/Englisch-Deutsch) zur Verfügung.