

# Recollecting, Repeating, and Walking Through: Immigration, Trauma, and Space in Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*

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I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over. Is it not time to write my life's story? I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell.

—Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (1)

With these lines, Mary Antin begins her best-selling 1912 immigrant autobiography and establishes immigration as an experience akin to death and resurrection. The language of new beginnings is familiar to readers of the bildungsroman, immigration narratives, and autobiographies.<sup>1</sup> However, what is remarkable here is Antin's emphasis on the *death*, rather than birth, of her identity. Antin alludes to the losses and psychological ruptures that divide her life "before" and "after" the immigration journey—between living in an eastern European shtetl and in urban Boston, between the subject positions of immigrant and American, and between the temporalities of past and future. Immigrant autobiographies are commonly structured around this rupture. Yet while critics have usually focused on *The Promised Land's* rosy-hued vision of America as a paradigmatic example of the assimilation narrative, this essay shows the significance of the incommensurable, and hence traumatic, break created by immigration and Antin's attempt to create psychological coherence out of that trauma through the related practices of autobiographical narrative and spatial orientation.

Published at the height of America's great immigration boom,<sup>2</sup> *The Promised Land* tells a now-familiar story through its text and photographs. Due to worsening economic and political conditions for Jews in Russian territories, at age thirteen Mary Antin immigrates to Boston with her mother and siblings, where they join Antin's father, who had come to America three years prior. The family struggles to gain an economic foothold in the US, moving frequently in search of cheaper rents and better business opportunities. Owing to her intellectual abilities, immature physical development, and her father's favoritism, Mary goes to school instead of work; her older sister is not so fortunate.<sup>3</sup> As is typical in immigrant autobiographies, Antin emphasizes how she distinguishes herself

academically, winning a scholarship to a prestigious private high school. In the book's final chapter, Antin triumphantly recounts going to Barnard College, earning money from writing, and learning to speak without an accent. The autobiography thus contrasts the political, economic, and social restrictions that defined life for Jews in eastern Europe with seemingly unlimited opportunities in the United States for those with the wit and will to succeed. America is Antin's Zion, the "Promised Land" of the autobiography's title,<sup>4</sup> and Antin is the "heir of the ages," the ideal citizen worthy of American freedom and opportunity (Antin, *Selected Letters* 55).<sup>5</sup> In many ways, *The Promised Land* reinforces the idea that America is truly democratic and meritocratic, a place where every immigrant can create his or her own destiny.

This assimilationist arc has been the primary focus of criticism of the autobiography in recent decades. Mary V. Dearborn is typical when she claims that "*The Promised Land* seems to lack any alternative, protesting voice" (42). Sarah Blacher Cohen is more damning; she asserts that "the autobiography lacks depth. The conquest it describes seems too rapidly won and too unqualifiedly successful. . . . [I]t certainly prevented her from becoming a profound writer of Jewish-American literature, or for that matter, any kind of literature" (31-32). Michael P. Kramer, a more sympathetic reader, nonetheless insists that for Antin, "the process of Americanization is wholly *unproblematic*" (128), and that "the assimilationism of *The Promised Land* is more characteristic of American Jews than critics care to admit" (123). Matthew Frye Jacobson, however, reads Antin's assimilation as a rebuke to contemporary critics of immigration—nothing less than "the core principle in a quiet politics of antinativism" (206). Yet even this nuanced account fails to acknowledge the autobiography's deep ambivalences. *The Promised Land* is stalked at every turn by the effects of trauma—rupture, loss, and disorientation. Oscar Handlin describes the transatlantic crossing as "a succession of shattering shocks," of "traumatic experiences" (38-39). Despite its assimilationist arc, Antin's autobiography reveals an immigration experience not incommensurably different from that which Handlin depicts. Rather, *The Promised Land*, paradigmatic assimilation narrative that it is, contains within it a counter-narrative revealing the terrors of immigration and the difficulties of adjusting to American life. Far from being a simple celebration of nationalist clichés, Antin's autobiography is a record of a particular form of historical and psychological trauma that has been all but forgotten in the age of celebratory (and even critical) multiculturalism.

Although the complexity of Antin's autobiography has been overlooked, *The Promised Land* has been understood as a typical immigration narrative of the period. Like her contemporaries Abraham Cahan and

Anzia Yezierska, Antin focuses on education and mastery of English as crucial to social citizenship.<sup>6</sup> Her first language was Yiddish, but writing in English was a way to reach the literary mainstream and thereby achieve greater recognition, material comfort, and cultural legitimacy in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Throughout *The Promised Land*, Antin posits herself as “unusual, but by no means unique”—an exemplary case who is representative of millions of new Americans (2). This tension between individual and collective experience expresses itself through Antin’s struggle to make her story conform to generic expectations of progress, acculturation, and upward mobility. The autobiography’s most important contribution lies in the intersection of these narratives, when Antin is torn between acting the good citizen and faithfully chronicling a traumatic ordeal. At these points, a darker story emerges, which complicates and enriches the deceptively simple tale.

Antin stakes her claim to representativeness through reliance on the bildungsroman plot. Ethnic literature frequently follows this pattern, with an immigrant child learning the ways of the world while learning the ways of America. Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), Yezierska’s *Bread Givers* (1925), Michael Gold’s *Jews Without Money* (1930), and Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep* (1934) all follow Jewish immigrant children or adolescents obtaining their educations on American streets and in schools. Each of these texts traces an urban immigrant child’s development that occurs within the American cityscape.<sup>8</sup> Thus, while this essay focuses on one Jewish American writer’s expression of those anxieties, works such as *The Promised Land* speak to experiences common to a large percentage of immigrants. The autobiography reveals immigration to be a traumatic experience, even as it submerges that story under the familiar incorporation narrative. By attending to the particular forms and expressions of trauma in Antin’s story—and their relationship to the autobiography’s obsession with spatial orientation—we not only acknowledge the losses inherent in immigration, but also expand our definition of trauma and reexamine commonly held notions of American identity. Indeed, the stakes of this project are some of the most sacred tenets of the American intellectual, political, and literary imagination.

*The Promised Land*’s story of psychological and spatial development contrasts the restrictions of the Pale to the pleasures and possibilities of life in America. However, Antin’s up-from-the-ghetto plot is contradicted by the family’s failure to secure upward mobility and establish a stable home in Boston. Throughout *The Promised Land*, Antin struggles to make her story conform to generic expectations and fulfill her own desire to fit within a national narrative of progress and inclusion. Some changes are signs of vanity and wishful thinking: Antin did not actually graduate

from high school, since her marriage to Amadeus Grabau, eleven years her senior, precluded her finishing; her college experience was limited to night courses and she never completed a degree. Other revisions and elisions, particularly those relating to the emigration journey and the spatiality of her new home locale of Boston, reveal the difficulties of finding a place in America and the omnipresence of a traumatic past. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson point out, autobiography is “an intersubjective process that occurs within the writer/reader pact, rather than as a true-or-false story” (13). In this light, *The Promised Land*’s fictionalizations, omissions, and repetitions are at least as revealing as verifiable facts, and we cannot properly appreciate the autobiography without attending to those submerged issues.<sup>9</sup> These anomalies tell an alternative history of the traumatic nature of immigration and assimilation.

For Antin, narration is an act of geographic and social orientation, a very personal process of construction and spatial configuration. When she tries to articulate the experience of coming to America and the difficulties of remembering and representing those events, she relies on spatial metaphors to explain her writing practice. Recalling her memory of a beloved site from her childhood, she writes:

Concerning my dahlias I have been told that they were not dahlias at all, but poppies. . . . Indeed, I must insist on my dahlias, if I am to preserve the garden at all. I have so long believed in them, that if I try to see *poppies* in those red masses over the wall, the whole garden crumbles away, and leaves me a gray blank. . . . And so do we often build our world on an error, and cry out that the universe is falling to pieces, if any one but lift a finger to replace the error by truth. (66)

The presiding metaphor that structures Antin’s autobiographical project is that of fragile (re)construction. Memory is built in the mind, but may easily disintegrate if its details are questioned. *The Promised Land* as a whole is built upon silences, losses, revisions, and failures; Antin’s insistence on “dahlias” is her way of shoring the fragments of her life into a coherent narrative of progress, even as these “errors” are also evidence of an entirely different story.

The most important feature of her experience, to which she returns throughout the autobiography, is her sense of freedom and prohibition as marked by place. Antin describes her pre-emigration self (Mashke, not yet Mary) as intuitively knowing that social place is limited, and even imprisoning. As narrator, Antin explains:

There was no time in my life when I did not hear and see and feel the truth—the reason why Polotzk was cut off from the rest of Russia. It was the first

lesson a little girl in Polotzk had to learn. But for a long while I did not understand. Then there came a time when I knew that Polotzk and Vitebsk and Vilna and some other places were grouped together as the “Pale of Settlement,” and within this area the Czar commanded me to stay, with my father and mother and friends, and all other people like us. We must not be found outside the Pale, because we were Jews.

So there was a fence around Polotzk, after all. The world was divided into Jews and Gentiles. This knowledge came so gradually that it could not shock me. It trickled into my consciousness drop by drop. By the time I fully understood that I was a prisoner, the shackles had grown familiar to my flesh. (7)

From a young age, Antin felt the barriers erected for social control. In the Russian Pale of Settlement, she was imprisoned by the geographic segregation of space that limited her as effectively as fetters. Neither fully Russian nor an independent political zone, the Pale was a no-man’s-land where Jews were barely tolerated as perpetual foreigners. Nearly five million Jews, ninety-four percent of the total Jewish population in Russia, lived within this region, which spread from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea (Howe 5). Antin uses the vocabulary of incarceration and exclusion to describe the physical conditions and state of mind created by this geography. This language takes on greater significance in her account of the confinement she experiences during immigration.

The specter of imprisonment haunts Antin’s descriptions of cultural life within the Jewish community. The wall that surrounds the Pale is matched, according to Antin, by the “wall within the wall,” behind which the Jewish community places itself in order to maintain religious and cultural traditions. This wall, Antin writes, is “the religious integrity of the Jews, a fortress erected by the prisoners of the Pale, in defiance of their jailers; a stronghold built of the ruins of their pillaged homes, cemented with the blood of their murdered children” (26). While this image of a religiously separate space may sound like a safe haven for Jews—a “stronghold” that provides a meaningful alternative to political exclusion and terrorism—it nevertheless defines itself through segregation. Moreover, Antin depicts religious law as further structuring and restricting daily life for Jews: “[W]e lived by the Law that had been given us through our teacher Moses. How to eat, how to bathe, how to work—everything had been written down for us, and we strove to fulfil the Law” (27). Judaism, in Antin’s view, is the Law of the Father as communicated by his emissary Moses, with religious rules nearly as absolute and confining as the laws of the czar.

Accordingly, while religious life offers a sphere of meaning and self-determination for Jews, it does so along patriarchal lines that exclude women from education. Antin bristles at the unequal treatment of girls and boys:

If the family were very poor, all the girls might go barefoot, but the heder [religious school] boy must have shoes; he must have a plate of hot soup, though the others ate dry bread. . . . No wonder he said, in his morning prayer, "I thank Thee, Lord, for not having created me a female." It was not much to be a girl, you see. Girls could not be scholars and rabbonim. (28-29)

Like Sara Smolinsky in Yezierska's *Bread Givers*, Antin is obsessed in America with surmounting this gendered barrier to education.<sup>10</sup> Since the only education available to Jews in the Pale is religious, thus limiting girls' access, in America Antin willingly trades religion for education. In the American persecution-to-freedom Exodus plot, the family's liberation from czarist Russia is paralleled by Antin's liberation from patriarchal religion.<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Antin's father is her greatest supporter. But she is careful to distance him from patriarchal religious tradition, describing him as a free-thinker who encourages her intellectual development in both Polotzk and Boston.<sup>12</sup>

Importantly, while Antin sees the social and political worlds of Polotzk as confining, the affective world of her childhood feels limitless and inviting. This contrast is most evident in Antin's depiction of the geography of her childhood. She first describes the layout of her village as a vast, uncontainable space: "I saw the houses in the streets below, all going to market. The highroads wandered out into the country, and disappeared in the sunny distance, where the edge of the earth and the edge of the sky fitted together, like a jewel box with the lid ajar" (69). Here the landscape itself is the enclosed and protected jewel. Despite the limitations imposed by politics and religion, the geography of Polotzk feels open and uncontained, reflecting a rich emotional world of childhood memory that exceeds the limitations of words. Yet the genre of the immigrant autobiography (and its relationship to the traumatic immigration journey) requires Antin to reduce and reshape that three-dimensional space into something more manageable and familiar. Thus, Antin continues, "But although my geography may be vague, and the scenes I remember as the pieces of a paper puzzle, still my breath catches as I replace this bit or that, and coax the edges to fit together" (69). The box and the paper puzzle are both images of containment, but experience exceeds any attempt to capture it, while her autobiographical remembrance of that life is a mere paper puzzle that she must manipulate to make cohere. The process of narrating her past requires Antin to limit lived experience and exclude most of the positive aspects of her Polotzk childhood. An entire dimension disappears (the three-dimensional box becomes a flat puzzle) as Antin repeatedly reduces complexity and irregularity to fit a narrative shape not her

own. *The Promised Land* reveals a pattern of reduction and conformity: the character Mashke/Mary Antin sheds her religion and ethnic culture in America, just as the authorial Antin redacts her experience to fit the form of an immigrant autobiography. At every turn, the narrative is structured by loss.

### **The Traumatic Form of Immigrant Autobiography**

While the bulk of Antin's autobiography concerns itself with the two "home" locales of Polotzk and Boston, *The Promised Land* is misunderstood if the single chapter titled "The Exodus" is overlooked. Sandwiched between seven chapters about her life in the Pale and twelve chapters about growing up in Boston, "The Exodus" details the emigration journey itself. This period of transition and transportation shapes the entire narrative and reveals the importance of space to Antin's conception of citizenship and national identity. Brief in length but provocative in its import, "The Exodus" tells a story of radical discontinuity and loss that the narrative as a whole seeks to disavow, yet repeatedly and compulsively enacts. For this reason, *The Promised Land* should be read as a trauma narrative, an effort to work through the experience of immigration.

In using the term trauma, I refer to the work of critics such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dominick LaCapra, and others, who join clinical studies of trauma with the study of its literatures, particularly with regard to traumatic events such as the Holocaust, sexual abuse, and African American slavery. However, trauma has become an increasingly vexed term in the last decade. Critics frequently use the term loosely as a metaphor for modern life; for example, as "a strategic fiction that a complex, stressful society is using to account for a world that seems threateningly out of control" (Farrell 2). Within the study of the literature of immigration, only a handful of critics use the term trauma, and most use the term imprecisely, simply indicating that immigration is a difficult and disruptive experience.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, I use the term "trauma" to diagnose the text according to the definitions of trauma created first by Freud and Joseph Breuer, and more recently by Caruth, Felman, and others. Acknowledging the trauma of immigration neither minimizes large-scale traumas such as genocide and war nor necessitates a slide into generalized claims about our "post-traumatic culture." It does, however, demand we reinvestigate that clichéd trope of the United States as a melting pot and "nation of immigrants." The critical interventions of postcolonial theory, critical race theory, and feminism challenge (and largely discredit) these narratives as national fantasies, yet they typically do not address either the enduring appeal of the melting-pot myth to immigrants themselves or the traumatic

nature of the immigrant experience. To call immigration a traumatic event demands we reevaluate not only the meaning(s), but also the form(s) of immigrant texts. Such a reevaluation forces us to consider the effects of immigration on those who experience it, as well as on the national culture that makes immigration central to American identity. To call immigration a traumatic event is thus to begin to attend to the complexity and disruption of relocation and to consider how multiculturalism as a concept is structured around unacknowledged losses.

Antin begins the “Exodus” chapter with the same cheerful, humorous tone she uses to narrate much of the text.<sup>14</sup> She describes the festive atmosphere accompanying the arrival of the tickets that will reunite the family with their father in America: her mother becomes “the heroine of Polotzk,” her brother skips school, and her sister neglects household chores while lost in daydreams of America (130). Antin herself feels “delight in the progress of the great adventure” (132). Yet this excitement is tempered by uncertainty. A neighbor worries that people lose touch in America, such as one relative who “vanished, as if the earth had swallowed him. . . . Lost, as if in the sea!” (131), and Antin’s mother is “full of grief at the parting from home and family and all things dear” (132). Anticipation turns to real anxiety once the family commences their journey, traveling by train to Germany to board a steamship for Boston. At the final station on the Russian side, they are questioned by policemen, examined by a German physician, and finally told that they may not continue unless they pay a surcharge; the authorities take their passports and tell them they will be sent back to the Pale.

We were homeless, houseless, and friendless in a strange place. . . . [We] had parted with those we loved, with places that were dear to us in spite of what we passed through in them, never again to see them. . . . And now we were checked so *unexpectedly* but surely, the blow coming from where we little *expected* it, being, as we believed, safe in that quarter. When my mother had recovered enough to speak, she began to argue with the gendarme, telling him our story and begging him to be kind. The children were frightened and all but I cried. I was only wondering what would happen. (135, emphasis added)

In this passage, Antin describes the shock, speechlessness, and fear that result from the family’s dislocation and displacement. In this moment of homelessness, Polotzk is remembered fondly—despite the pogroms that occurred there—precisely because it represents home, house, and friends. In the context of emigration, Polotzk is familiar and familial, the village a landscape of domesticity. However, at least as frightening as their homelessness is the surprising cessation of their progress and the disruption of the temporal narrative. Antin, the adult narrator, textually stutters over the

word “expect,” slowing the progress of the story by emphasizing unpredictability and loss of control. Accompanying this verbal repetition is Antin’s description of young Mashke/Mary’s absence of affect. Whereas her siblings cry, she describes her own failure to react. The inability to respond emotionally in the moment is a feature of the hysteric response, and this inability to react is one reason the affected subject remains haunted by previous events. As Freud and Breuer explain, “recollections without affects are almost utterly useless” (4). According to trauma theory, the traumatized subject replays the event until he or she learns to create a narrative of the experience. In this light, *The Promised Land* functions as more than just Antin’s attempt to write herself into American generic traditions; it is also an attempt (not always successful) to work through the trauma of immigration by creating a complete, uninterrupted narrative of the experience.

The drama grows increasingly terrifying as the immigrants are further displaced, dehumanized, and treated like animals: “herded at the stations, packed in the cars, and driven from place to place like cattle” (137). The family’s loss of their humanity is manifested as the loss of agency and personal space. The terror and confusion escalate after the train delivers them to a lonely location where the men and women are separated:

This was another scene of bewildering confusion, parents losing their children, and little ones crying; baggage being thrown together in one corner of the yard, heedless of contents, which suffered in consequence; those white-clad Germans shouting commands, always accompanied with “Quick! Quick!”—the confused passengers obeying all orders like meek children, only questioning now and then what was going to be done with them.

. . . Here we had been taken to a lonely place where only that house was to be seen; our things were taken away, our friends separated from us; a man came to inspect us, as if to ascertain our full value; strange-looking people driving us about like dumb animals, helpless and unresisting; children we could not see crying in a way that suggested terrible things; ourselves driven into a little room where a great kettle was boiling on a little stove; our clothes taken off, our bodies rubbed with a slippery substance that might be any bad thing; a shower of warm water let down on us without warning; again driven to another little room where we sit, wrapped in woolen blankets till large, coarse bags are brought in, their contents turned out, and we see only a cloud of steam, and hear the women’s orders to dress ourselves,—“Quick! Quick!”—or else we’ll miss—something we cannot hear. We are forced to pick out our clothes from among all the others, with the steam blinding us; we choke, cough, entreat the women to give us time; they persist, “Quick! Quick!—or you’ll miss the train!”—Oh, so we really won’t be murdered! They are only making us ready for the continuing of our journey, cleaning us of all suspicions of dangerous sickness. Thank God! (138-39)

These paragraphs contain images that now seem hauntingly familiar when discussing trauma. Railroad cars with people packed in like cattle. Families separated. People stripped of their belongings. German medical authorities treating their human subjects like vermin. Frightening group showers. People made nameless and silent, ordered about against their will or understanding. A story of cultural and community victimization is narrated by a young Jewish girl struggling to make sense of world-scale events. If these words had been written several decades later, they could fit seamlessly into a Holocaust memoir. Antin's description illustrates the intense disorientation and terror of the experience. Immigration, particularly under conditions of poverty and political uncertainty, is accompanied by the loss of physical and psychological moorings. Through this utter dispossession, the immigrant is no longer treated as human. Immigration during this historical period (and often still today) is marked by the medicalization, systematization, and rationalization of human bodies, erasing family names and geographic histories.<sup>15</sup> For immigrants, refugees, and other displaced persons, these bureaucratic systems feel like chaos and disorder, irrationality and namelessness. Through the loss of physical and social place, meaning goes missing. The immigrants become bystanders in their own lives.

In this passage, Antin reveals that a major feature of her terror was the surprise accompanying every step. Verbal repetition continues with her descriptions of the immigrants' hurried movements, and the exclamation "Quick! Quick!" Not only is the command itself a repetition, but the phrase is reiterated three times in the short space of the passage. The combination of surprise and repetition, with all of the travelers commanded to simultaneously perform for state authority, mark this as a traumatic event. Trauma theorist Caruth describes trauma as an event that "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4). Mashke/Mary's surprise prevents her from reacting to the experience, both in the scene and in Antin's retrospective narration. An immigrant writer's silences with regard to the journey or its emotional effects should not be understood as evidence of easy incorporation; to the contrary, such lacunae may in fact be evidence of profound dislocation.

The extended passage also exposes the traumatic spatiality of immigration. Antin characterizes the train journey as "a long imprisonment," the end of which, by comparison, feels like "freedom." The "heedless" way their baggage is "thrown together" and "turned out" on the floor mirrors the uncaring manner in which the human subjects are treated, as they are

lumped together and shuffled along. The loss of personal belongings and the impersonal manner in which their precious few remaining objects are handled indicate a loss of identity and an erasure of status. The elision of culture, class, and geographic distinctions between immigrants compounds the sense of chaos. Even the boundaries of their bodies are violated, as the travelers are stripped, showered, and fumigated by medical authorities. The location of this traumatic encounter is a house, mocking any expectation of comfort and intimacy and offering only dehumanization. The immigrants are “homeless, houseless, and friendless,” indeed. All markers of identity and place—clothing, family, personal items, and geography—are systematically stripped away through the process of immigration. It is little wonder that in the second half of her immigrant narrative, Antin displays an overwhelming concern with claiming American identity through access to its spaces.

The syntax in this passage grows increasingly unstable, indicating the collapse of the distinction between adult narrator and childhood persona. While recounting the escalating trauma, Antin seems to lose control of her narrative. The series of semicolons creates a paratactic structure that renders all violations equal. Each item in the catalogue of horrors gets equal textual space, but no organizing principle or causal relationship is discernible. The immigration process denies the claims of humanity and consciousness, collapsing divisions between adults and children, people and objects, humans and animals. Antin’s autobiographical “I” collapses into the family “we,” until the family “we” is indistinguishable from the collective “we” of all the immigrants. Antin effectively loses her individuality and voice. In a text intent on claiming authorship and individual agency, this narrative collapse highlights the traumatic violence of immigration.

At the level of speech, passive verb tense (“only that house *was to be seen*,” “our things *were taken away*”) gives way to incomplete verb phrases in which action is only implied (“strange-looking people driving us,” “children we could not see crying,” “our clothes taken off”); these incomplete verb phrases give way, in turn, to present tense narration (“we see . . . and hear”).<sup>16</sup> Antin’s syntactical shifts indicate traumatic shifting of subject to object, individual identity to group anonymity, and conscious thought to mindless action. The reader experiences with the traumatized subject the sensory bombardment of sights, sounds, and touch. While Antin obviously is capable of describing these events, she does not narrate them in a way that retrospectively creates order and meaning. The reader experiences this disorienting event as though it is occurring in the present.

The bulk of *The Promised Land* is Antin’s attempt to turn this untellable story into a coherent narrative of progress. Psychoanalytic critic Felman

describes the treatment for traumatized subjects as learning to “testify”—to narrate the traumatic events in order to regain a sense of agency, to rediscover “one’s own proper name, one’s signature” (53). Proper names and public speech are especially important antidotes to immigration, which is defined by profound loss: the past, family and friends, names and places are left behind, probably forever. Antin’s autobiography is therefore a public refusal to be silent or anonymous, for in publishing her story, she calls attention to her personal experience and her name as author. The immigrant autobiography is a performative utterance, an attempt to work through the traumatic experience of immigration and an object lesson in the difficulties of doing so. Put another way, *The Promised Land* illustrates what Jacques Lacan calls the “conquest” mode of human experience, whereby “the subject engages in a quest, and repeats his quest indefinitely until he rediscovers this object” (100). Understood in these terms, Antin’s autobiography traces her quest to conquer her traumatic experience and give it meaning; the purgative urge to write her story is an attempt to work through trauma. Antin projects onto this quest the desire to become a representable and “representative” American citizen in both narrative and spatial terms.

The symptomatic nature of the autobiography is also evident in other ways. The traumatic scene occurs in a geographic no-man’s-land relative to the autobiography’s two defining locales—the familiar landscapes of Polotzk and metropolitan Boston. The cheerful tone and uplifting message that Antin seeks to present throughout *The Promised Land* are interrupted by a frightening interlude of incarceration, silence, and bewilderment—a period that is, in effect, the “middle passage” of immigration and, quite literally, the middle passage of this text. More crucially, whereas the rest of the autobiography is narrated from the adult Antin’s perspective, events in “The Exodus” are communicated largely through documentary evidence; Antin quotes extensive passages from a letter she wrote during her first few months in America.<sup>17</sup> She explains at the beginning of this chapter that “Memory may take a rest while I copy from a contemporaneous document the story of the great voyage” (134).<sup>18</sup> Antin has translated her letter, but she has not transformed it into narrative. Instead, Antin and her readers experience the events in Germany primarily from the perspective of the child to whom they just occurred (and are occurring), without the mediating distance of time. The quintessential symptom of trauma, the past here recurs in the present, virtually unchanged in almost twenty years. Her autobiography thus reveals that Antin has yet to fully process the trauma of immigration.

Antin acknowledges the rupture immigration causes to her story in her introduction to the autobiography, with which I opened this essay: “I was

born, I have lived, and I have been made over. . . . I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell" (1). Antin's language of death and rebirth mirrors Caruth's claim that traumatic stories fundamentally address "the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). Antin's failure to narrate retrospectively proves the psychic and social death she experienced, while the autobiography as a whole is evidence of her survival. In this light, Antin's immigrant "success story" reveals a life whose parts are incompatible, even as the demands of the genre—and her own longing for meaning—require that this story of radical uncertainty and group trauma be transformed into a tale of individual triumph over adversity and of American inclusivity and opportunity.

It is little wonder that the progress narrative is so desirable to Antin, since it offers narrative resolution where lived experience does not. Yet perhaps the hollowness of this forced resolution is not entirely lost on Antin. This chapter about the emigration takes as its title the book of the Hebrew Bible in which Moses leads the Jews out of slavery into the Promised Land. Antin posits herself as the heir of Moses, the next-generation Jew claiming her rightful place in America's Zion. "The Exodus" is an appropriate metaphor for the immigrant's journey from persecution to freedom, from being "wretched refuse" to a member of the chosen people. Yet Moses himself never entered the Promised Land to which he led his people. "Exodus" thus contains within it a story of unfulfilled promise, homelessness, and exclusion. Particularly in its attention to space as an indicator of belonging, *The Promised Land* reveals both the desirability and impossibility of its title.

### **Redefining Repetition**

Although Antin does not successfully narrate her traumatic experience, she redirects those energies via her investment in local spaces and celebration of personal mobility. These features are compensation for the forced mobility and loss of home that accompany immigration. Accordingly, the uses and meanings of space differ in the first and latter halves of the book. The chapters set in Polotzk establish the role of place in shaping community identity and belonging; Antin describes and includes photographs of the wood, meat, and bread markets, as well as the Dvina river, Hebrew school, and her grandfather's house. In these images, communal sites of commerce and daily chores are populated by figures who are (or stand in for) neighbors, family, and community members.<sup>19</sup> Subjects address the camera, asserting trust and familiarity with the photographer (see Figure

1). Doors stand open, inviting our glance, but darkness prevents us from seeing inside. The reader is welcome as a viewer, but is not given complete access, and meaning remains defined by the inhabitants. Importantly, many of the images highlight segregated spaces: women washing clothes in the river, men at the wood market, and boys in Hebrew school. As in Antin's characterization of "the wall within the wall" structuring Jewish identity, the Polotozk photographs reveal the primacy of segregated space in the creation of social life and community identity within the Pale.



Figure 1: "The Meat Market, Polotzk"

In contrast, the chapters about Boston emphasize nonsegregated public spaces and the physical geography of buildings, neighborhoods, and streets. Here, Antin's text and photographs assert her *personal* mastery over the new landscape, focusing on places rather than people, the urban landscape instead of community institutions. She describes in detail each of the neighborhoods in which her family resided (Union Place, Crescent Beach, Arlington Street, Wheeler and Dover Streets, and Harrison Avenue) and more than a dozen additional locales: the West End, North Boston, the South End; Wall, Hanover, and Washington Streets; Mystic River, East Boston Creek, the Boston Harbor, and the Atlantic Ocean; and the towns of Everett and Revere.<sup>20</sup>

Betty Bergland, one of the few critics to discuss *The Promised Land's* photographs, argues that the Boston photographs offer a critique of American life that is disavowed by the written narrative; the Boston photographs “evok[e] the emptiness of the American spaces in the promised land; these are not only spaces that the autobiographical subject does not occupy, but also spaces in which the reader would have difficulty locating the autobiographical Antin” (56). The photographer captures rather than participates in the scene, subjects do not address the camera, and we see depopulated urban spaces rather than communal scenes of shared endeavor. The photograph of Union Place (see Figure 2), for example, features a littered dead-end alley connecting three tenement buildings. A single child peers out from the far left corner. On the opposite side of the frame, a horse is partially revealed, indicating the proximity of either commerce or police surveillance. In contrast to the intergenerational cohesion of communal life in Polotzk, this photograph exposes the alienated social landscape of Boston. In the Boston photographs, the child frequently is the only human subject, the exemplary bildungsroman figure standing in for Antin’s autobiographical persona. The image of a solitary child in an empty alley highlights the loosening of family and community ties.



Figure 2: “Union Place (Boston) Where My New Home Waited for Me”

Antin returns to her earlier experiences of segregation and incarceration by illustrating unfettered access to public space in Boston, even as that access is achieved at the near-total exclusion of human bodies. The caption's ironic promise of a "new home" echoes the inhospitable house in Germany used as a medical inspection station. Antin's crisis of survival is evident in these images of depopulated space, in which physical incarceration has become social and psychological alienation. She is once more homeless, houseless, and friendless. Her catalogues and photographs of evacuated space do not signify upward mobility. Rather, they mark the circularity of the immigrant text as "a symbolic relation" to trauma (Freud and Breuer 2). America does not provide an escape from trauma; it is the locus where Antin's internalization of trauma is manifested in new ways.

Antin's physical mobility, which was restricted in the Pale and controlled during immigration, functions as a corollary to her linguistic and rhetorical identification with America. Her first public claim to citizenship is her poem in honor of George Washington, "the Father of his Country," in which she glorifies Washington in the language of religious piety: "[S]acred's the hand / That this blessed guide to man had given" (181). Antin shifts God's blessing from biblical Jews to American founding fathers; the United States is Zion, the place where "we weary Hebrew children at last found rest," the "nest" for its "homeless birds" (183). Antin's identification in the poem with America is reinforced by her taking the poem to a newspaper to have it published. She explains: "From the ferry slip to the offices of the 'Boston Transcript' the way was long, strange, and full of perils; but I kept resolutely on up Hanover Street, being familiar with that part of my route, till I came to a puzzling corner" (183-84). Boston temporarily becomes a foreign landscape until another urban denizen transfers *his* geographic knowledge to her: a newsboy "piloted me across, unraveled the end of Washington Street for me . . . and with much pointing out of landmarks, headed me for my destination, my nose seeking the spire of the Old South Church" (184).<sup>21</sup> Her trip is occasioned by perceived "success" at writing in English and internalizing the foundational myths of American history, but it is legitimated by her free movement through city space, whereby she becomes a latter-day herald of the American Revolution. The desires to communicate freely and move freely are linked responses to the traumas precipitating and accompanying immigration. Antin repeats this pattern a few chapters later when she recounts a period of intense melancholy and alienation from family, friends, and classmates. The remedy for her depression is to meet with her favorite American teacher on Boston Common (215). Once again, Antin responds to the psychological pain occasioned by immigration by identifying with US history through key Boston locales.

Antin's insistence on her citizenship through her invocation of American literary and historical figures highlights her eagerness to belong to an "imagined community," in Benedict Anderson's terms, where nationality and cultural identification are coterminous. In her drive to find that sense of home, she frequently abandons her own biography, with its incommensurable losses and frequent setbacks, in favor of another national convention—the Horatio Alger progress narrative. The conventional plot reflects the moment of its production. Antin wrote her autobiography at the same time the Dillingham Commission recommended restricting immigration, and her narrative served to justify immigration in a time of increasing hostility.<sup>22</sup> But nativism alone cannot explain Antin's shift at the end of the autobiography to emphasize effortless acculturation; nativism does not adequately address the contradictions within the text or the cost of such identifications. Indeed, LaCapra asserts that "narrativization is closest to fictionalization . . . when it conveys relatively unproblematic closure" (15-16). The text and images that make up the last chapters of *The Promised Land* seek to resolve Antin's story of trauma and celebrate her entrance into the rarefied world of philosophy and science represented by Unitarian Reverend Edward Everett Hale and the Natural History Club of Boston.<sup>23</sup> The generic turn and selective remembering in the autobiography's Boston chapters fulfill the expectation for a narrative of upward mobility, but they also serve to cover traumatic traces in the text.

Trading experience for abstraction in both text and photographs, Antin moves from personal knowledge and pedestrian mobility through immigrant neighborhoods to objective vantage points, elite institutions, and conventional plots. In Dover Street, the limitations of the slum apparently overwhelm its possibilities. Antin now dismisses the idea that her local living conditions define her: "Dover Street was never really my residence—at least, not the whole of it. It happened to be the nook where my bed was made, but I inhabited the City of Boston. In the pearl-misty morning, in the ruby-red evening, I was empress of all I surveyed from the roof of the tenement house" (265). Antin here distinguishes the location of her body from the landscape of her mind. She experiences a kind of schizophrenic split that alienates her not only from any sense of community, but also from her own corporeality. Reality gives way to fantasy, as the "jewel box" of her beloved Polotzk landscape is exchanged for the pearls and rubies of hyperbolic imagination. Her authority is no longer based in her experiences as an immigrant girl, but as a fantastical figure of royalty with unlimited authority. She has removed the historical Antin from the scene. Instead of working through trauma via personal narrative, Antin turns to fiction. Despite her desire to distance her intellectual development from

her impoverished surroundings, the gap she claims between her psychological space and her physical location again recalls the emigration journey, which destroyed the relational ties to place and community that had previously defined her.

The narrator's changing conceptions of place and her role within the immigrant enclave are illustrated by the photographs. In the same chapter in which the above quotations appear, Antin includes a remarkable image that is captioned, "I Liked to Stand and Look Down on the Dim Tangle of Railroad Tracks Below" (see Figure 3). This photograph overlooks a railroad junction, the hub of modern, rationalized mobility.<sup>24</sup> Instead of being incarcerated in trains, Antin surveys the entire railroad network, claiming textual space in proportion to urban space, marked by the expansive caption that has grown into a complete sentence with the authorial "I" dictating the view. However, the specter of trauma emerges yet again, for the railroad hub is a "dim tangle"—nonlinear, hopelessly knotted, and endlessly circling back on itself. Moreover, this moment echoes Antin's description early in the autobiography of railroad and river in Polotzk as similar symbols of movement and uncontainability, for "the Dvina went on and on, like a railroad track" (6). At the autobiography's end, as Antin celebrates the modernity and possibility of Boston vis-à-vis its railroads, the text recalls those earlier railroad scenes in Polotzk and Germany, yet again revealing all that the immigrant has lost.

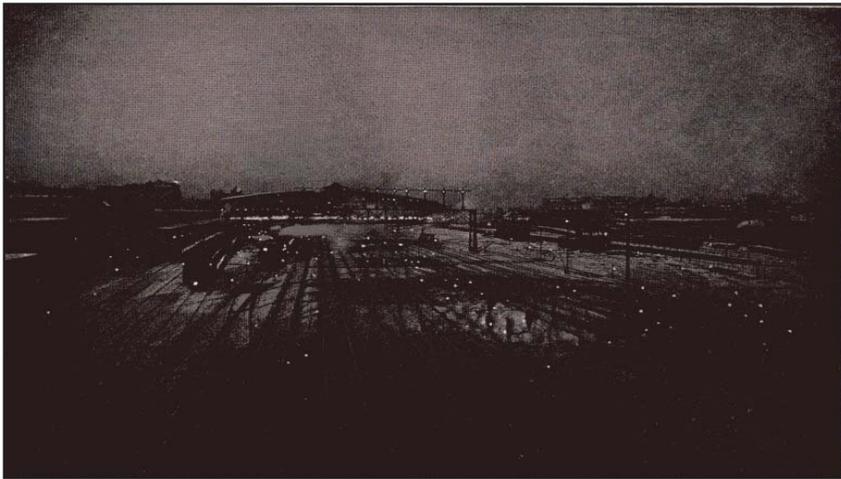


Figure 3: "I Liked to Stand and Look Down on the Dim Tangle of Railroad Tracks Below"

Despite the shadow of trauma and loss that lingers in the text, Antin continues to craft a tale of upward mobility. According to the logic of the

progress narrative, Antin's personal success must be mirrored by the end of her family's wanderings in the desert of Boston. And so it is:

But we found a short-cut—we found a short-cut! And the route we took from the tenements of the stifling alleys to a darling cottage of our own, where the sun shines in at every window, and the green grass runs up to our very doorstep, was surveyed by the Pilgrim Fathers, who transcribed their field notes on a very fine parchment and called it the Constitution of the United States. (279)

This happy ending merges fairy-tale tropes such as short-cuts and pastoral landscapes with one of the foundational documents of American social thought, the US Constitution. Antin effectively grafts her own immigration story to that of the nation's founding. No longer one of the "Hebrew children" of her patriotic poem, she is the heir of the (Christian) Pilgrims, predating even the American Revolution. Moreover, she aligns herself with patriarchal authority, which she so chafed against in Polotzk, and subscribes to the American religion of private property, with the "darling cottage *of our own*" the most palpable symbol of this identification. The final chapter of the autobiography finds Antin fully co-opting the gendered, nationalist rhetoric of American freedom and equality of opportunity, even as her justification ("we found a short-cut!") is both unconvincing and counter to the ideology of American "pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps" individualism to which she earlier subscribes. This ending is itself a short-cut, a narrative cheat, since Antin does not explain the family's rise, whether due to hard work, luck, external aid, or shrewd maneuvering.<sup>25</sup> In the absence of autobiographical experience, Antin turns to fiction to create the narrative coherence she desires. *The Promised Land* is remarkable for its internal tensions between competing stories, as Antin struggles to make her personal experience the basis of a national narrative and to provide psychological closure to the traumas of immigration.

In the autobiography's final paragraph, Antin once more attempts to master her experience through sheer force of will and generic convention. She takes the panorama to a new level, moving out beyond bodies, neighborhoods, and cities; beyond nation and globe. Even time comes under her control:

No! it is not I that belong to the past, but the past that belongs to me. America is the youngest of the nations, and inherits all that went before in history. And I am the youngest of America's children, and into my hands is given all her priceless heritage, to the last white star espied through the telescope, to the last great thought of the philosopher. Mine is the whole majestic past, and mine is the shining future. (286)

Antin claims not only America's prehistory and future, but also cosmic time and space. At the conclusion of Antin's autobiography about an immigrant coming to an American metropolis, both the immigrant and the city have disappeared. She simultaneously insists on her role as America's heir and distances herself from Jewish and immigration history. The central experience that makes her story both "typical of many" and "unique"—immigration and its traumatic effects—is abandoned, although its traces remain (2). As an act of testimony, the autobiography is incomplete, and immigration remains incommensurable, disruptive, and unnarratable. For those interested in the biographical connections between the author and her text, it may be of interest that Mary Antin suffered a mental collapse in 1918 when her husband sympathized with Germany during World War I. Perhaps Grabau's identification with Germany provoked painful memories of her experiences there, resulting in yet another replaying of the traumatic event.<sup>26</sup> In any event, if *The Promised Land* marked Antin's arrival into the American literary-cultural scene, it also marked the limit of her influence. Her next book, a pro-immigration tract titled *They Who Knock at Our Gates: A Complete Gospel of Immigration* (1914), lacked the ingenuousness of her earlier work, and was a critical and commercial flop. The war in Europe cooled support for immigration, ending Antin's writing and public-speaking careers.

Yet, even as Antin faded from public view, her work continued to find new readers, particularly among immigrants. In *Lost in Translation* (1989), a memoir about another young woman's painful immigration from Eastern Europe to North America, Eva Hoffman responds to and updates Antin's narrative, comparing their experiences as Jewish immigrants at two different historical moments: one at the peak of second-wave immigration to the US and the other in the wake of the Holocaust. Hoffman's sense of affiliation with Antin supports Victoria Aarons's description of Jewish literature as having a shared cultural ethos and "bearing witness to history—the disintegration of the shtetls, the devastation of the Holocaust, the dislocation of the immigrant" (61). Jewish or not, immigration narratives are historical documents that attempt to bear witness to political, economic, or social upheaval around the world. *The Promised Land* should be read as a consummate text of immigration, revealing as it does the contradictions of the experience; it is a record of painful experiences and idealistic wishful thinking, incalculable losses and inchoate longings.

The complexity of immigration has been largely forgotten amid late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century celebrations of assimilation, adaptation, and multiculturalism. Ethnic fiction is more popular than ever, but readers and publishers continue to emphasize incorporation, famil-

ial resolution, and redemption, as with popular literary blockbusters from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) to Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003). Such blinkered readings further privatize immigration and leave unchallenged the national fantasy of effortless assimilation. Antin's autobiography is revealing as a document of an immigrant's longing to believe in America's promise and of the failure of that promise. It is also a key text of America's ongoing belief in the mythology of the immigrant's painless adaptation. As Paul Antze and Michael Lambek remind us, "[W]ho people are is closely linked to what they think about memory, what they remember, and what they can claim to remember" (xxi). Who we are as Americans, as the proverbial "nation of immigrants," is inseparable from what we remember and what we tell about our familial and national pasts. If read with attention to trauma, Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* reminds us of a history we have largely forgotten. For our own national sanity, such remembering is long overdue.

## Notes

I am grateful to Eric Lott, Susan Fraiman, Caroline Rody, Victoria Aarons, Steven G. Kellman, and Patsy Yaeger for their careful reading and helpful suggestions. I thank the reviewers at *MELUS*.

1. William Q. Boelhower outlines the trajectory of immigrant rebirth into the American context, arguing that "all immigrant autobiographies tell a single story, project a network of paradigmatic relations, and reveal a homogeneous cognitive system" (7).
2. Between 1820 and 1924, an estimated thirty-five million immigrants came to America from Europe and Asia Minor (Handlin 3). Nearly three million of these were Jews from eastern Europe, the vast majority of whom arrived after 1880, in response to unfavorable conditions in the Russian Empire (36). Economic changes displaced Jewish tradespeople already marginalized by political exclusion, and Russian pogroms and anti-Semitic violence drove Jews to emigrate in droves. For more on immigration patterns and estimates, see Oscar Handlin and John Higham.
3. In Antin's story "The Lie" (1913), which fictionalized the event, a father changes his son's age in order to ensure longer compulsory education. For more on the relationship between Frieda Antin's textile labor and Mary Antin's textual labors, see Babak Elahi.
4. Immigrant and minority writers employed a variety of religious mythologies in order to forge a future in America, including the story of Exodus as an allegory for immigration and the enslavement of African Americans, John the Baptist's "errand into the wilderness," and Messianic redemption (Sollors 39-54; Sundquist 559).

5. Antin's original title was to be "The Heir of the Ages," but due to another book's use of the title, she chose "The Promised Land."
6. For more on education and assimilation, see William A. Proefriedt.
7. Kellman discusses the role of language in the autobiographies of Mary Antin and Eva Hoffman (whose *Lost in Translation* self-consciously responds to Antin's earlier immigration narrative), arguing that *The Promised Land* deliberately "obscures its author's ordeal of translanguaging" (149).
8. Later Jewish writers such as Alfred Kazin, Grace Paley, and Irving Howe continue Antin's concern with urban space as constitutive of identity, while nearly all Jewish writers of the last fifty years respond in some way to the collective trauma of the Holocaust.
9. Leigh Gilmore discusses how autobiography and memoir should not be defined by factual fidelity since "testimony refers not only to bearing witness, but to the protocols in which it must be offered"; one of those protocols is the burden of representativeness, which "operates both to broaden and to constrict testimonial speech" (130).
10. Two photographs in the autobiography highlight the gendered limitations to education in Polotzk. In "Heder (Hebrew School) for Boys in Polotzk," twenty boys are seated closely around a table inside the synagogue, studying under the watchful eyes of three rabbis. In "Twoscore of my Fellow Citizens—Public School, Chelsea," more than fifty boys and girls pose outside their school; their teachers may or may not be among those photographed.
11. Sarah Blacher Cohen argues that Antin's alienation from Judaism is a personal, moral failing, a "breach of promise," since Antin "docilely accepted the inferior role relegated to her within Judaism" (33).
12. In the Boston chapters, Antin's father is notable as a failed breadwinner. Antin effectively renounces all family and cultural ties in favor of America's Founding Fathers, much as Anzia Yezierska's heroine does in *Bread Givers*.
13. See Farrell's use of the term, quoted above, for an example of nonclinical usage. Mary Esteve discusses trauma's effects in the novels of Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska, and Henry Roth; Michelle Satterlee discusses trauma in Asian American fiction; and Susan Fanetti describes Hoffman's experiences as traumatic only in general terms.
14. Steven J. Rubin discusses the book's shifts from irony to nostalgia, arguing that they reveal Antin's "unresolved feelings about her new identity" (42).
15. Henry James, hardly sympathetic to new Americans, noted the systematization that defined immigration. He was repulsed by "the terrible little Ellis Island," where immigrants "stand appealing and waiting, marshalled, herded, divided, subdivided, sorted, sifted, searched, fumigated, for longer or shorter periods—the effect of all which prodigious process, an intendedly 'scientific' feeding of the mill," is beyond description (66).
16. Freud and Joseph Breuer describe Anna O.'s hysteria in similar terms: "[S]he no longer conjugated verbs, and eventually she used only infinitives, for the most part incorrectly formed from weak past participles" (16).

17. Antin quotes her own English translation of the letter, which was originally written in Yiddish. This letter was the basis of her first book, *From Plotzk to Boston* (1899); the publisher misspelled “Polotzk.” In neither autobiographical work does she narrate the experience from a retrospective point of view.

18. In a letter to Ellery Sedgwick, editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Antin argued that the section on the voyage was “disproportionately abbreviated” (*Selected Letters* 56). Although Antin desires full disclosure, she does not achieve it.

19. None of the images is credited in the text or in Antin’s published letters. With the exception of several family portraits, all of the images may have been taken during Antin’s 1910 trip to Polotzk.

20. The autobiography includes photographs of Union Place, Wheeler Street, and Harrison Avenue. The remaining photographs in the Boston chapters are of the railroad junction, the Boston Public Library, a public school class, Reverend Hale’s study, and two outdoor scenes. While some of these photos feature people, they are dwarfed by their surroundings and seem unaware of the camera. The only exception is the class photo, which is more institutional than communitarian; Antin is not identified in the image.

21. Such scenes of “cognitive mapping” occur throughout the Boston chapters, with Antin recording the psychological territory of her life through urban geography (Jameson 277-87). Antin’s interest in pedestrian mobility, physical sensation, and quotidian times and locales call to mind Henri Lefebvre’s and Michel de Certeau’s theories of the everyday. Importantly, Antin’s sense of place relies on the exclusion of other minorities. While she establishes pan-ethnic solidarity with Irish immigrants (204), she expresses interracial rivalry with Chinese immigrants (204) and African Americans (155, 207).

22. Notably, in the autobiography Antin names her favorite teacher Miss Dillingham, which may be a rebuke to the anti-immigration Dillingham Commission.

23. The last four photographs in the autobiography show this new emphasis: “The Natural History Club had Frequent Field Excursions,” “Bates Hall, where I spent my Longest Hours in the Library,” “The Famous Study, that was fit to have been preserved as a Shrine,” and “The Tide had rushed in, stealing away our Seaweed Cushions.” What Antin most valued about the Boston Public Library—its availability to working-class people like her—was what elites such as Henry James most despised. See John F. Sears’s introduction to the 1994 edition of *The American Scene* for James’s response to the library. For more on Antin’s interest in science, see Mary E. Wood.

24. For more on the changing perspectives created by and visible in photography of the period, see Peter Hales and Alan Trachtenberg.

25. Antin highlights the fiction when she reveals that before they found “a short-cut,” they were, in fact, downwardly mobile: “[A]fter Dover Street came Applepie Alley, Letterbox Lane, and other evil corners of the slums of Boston, till it must have looked to our neighbors as if we meant to go on forever exploring the underworld” (279). Antin here judges her own family for their failure to succeed, assuming the critical perspective of neighbors who presumably stay in one place or move up the social ladder.

26. Sollors quotes letters Antin wrote to Mary Austin, describing her “nervous break-down” as a result of her “failure to adjust” herself during World War I when her husband sympathized with Germany (introduction to *The Promised Land*, xli). Kellman describes Antin’s “chronic, debilitating neurasthenia that required intervals of hospitalization” (150). Grabau’s subsequent move to China no doubt echoed Antin’s own emigration.

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