

Will the real Sheyna-Shendl please stand up?

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A+

In his study entitled *A Sampling of Menakhem-Mendl*, Dan Miron states that although Menakhem-Mendl in SA's novel of the same name, has traditionally been interpreted as an archetypal character, nevertheless, valid grounds exist in the work for also interpreting him as a fictional, fully realized human being. This is because the text can yield at least two different interpretations of character depending upon how the critical reader approaches the work. Miron approaches it through the language and structure of Mendl's first letter to his wife. That method discloses a young Mendl in his early twenties and only recently off kest who is oppressed and dominated by his wife and her mother. When the story opens, MM has failed at the first responsible task given him by the family, namely to collect a 1500-ruble ~~npdn~~ deposited earlier with an uncle. As a result he is afraid to write home or to return and so remains in Odessa. After several weeks of wandering about and observing how the metropolis functions, Mendl becomes convinced that an opportunity for financial success exists for him in the stock market. Acting independently for the first time in his life, he purchases some shares, and becomes intoxicated not only with the possibility of large future earnings, but also with the autonomy and social redemption money would bring him. For behind the long accepted archetypal character who measures everything in terms of money, is a fictional young man who seeks to establish his value as a mensch in the eyes of people who have heretofore ignored and dehumanized him. A sense of expansive hope colors his vision and provides the impetus which enables him to slip out of old social, religious, and psychological bonds which bind him to Sheyna-Shendl and his old life in Kasrilevke. This new sense of self is reflected in content and the tone of his subsequent, long delayed letter home, which Miron says, is a declaration of independence.

There are problems with Mendl's new found freedom, however. for since he has neither a realistic notion of himself nor of the world about him, when he is finally able to separate from his family, he loses all contact with everything except his fantasies and becomes an alienated person.

The two contradictory interpretations of MM give the reader improved insight into the complexity of the character and a greater appreciation for the artistry of the SA. Miron points out: "In this character, SA seemed to be able to do something and its opposite at one and the same time.....underneath the archetype (which is undoubtedly in the text) there is

also another MM, the hurt young man who flees his limited existence into the hollowness of fantasy." (p. 32)

SS also exists on two levels in the book which explains why she can loom larger than life as an archetypal figure yet simultaneously possess fictional human qualities which arouse the reader's sympathy and affection. Like MM, she also has been traditionally interpreted along symbolic or representational lines and construed variously as (1) a reality-oriented counter^Cpart of Sancho Panza, wed to a quixotic MM; or (2) as an aggressive, domineering shtetl yid^gzene married to an ineffectual ^{shlemiel}shlemiel; or (3) as a symbol of traditional shtetl values doing battle against various modern urban secular influences represented by her husband. Yet, as with Mendl, an alternate reading of the text based upon structure and language establishes that she also exists in the book as a life-like individual with subjective needs. The object of this paper is to disclose how both dimensions of the character, archetype and individual, can exist in the text simultaneously and function together to expand the reader's understanding of Sheyna-Shendl's character.

First, a few words about the structure and language of the letters in this remarkable epistolary novel. A stylized formal opening and closing straight out of the br^{ev}ynshteller school of composition, frames the body of each letter. Every br^{ev} from SS to her husband opens like this:

Hebrew salutation: To my dear, esteemed, renowned, and honored husband, the wise and learned man, may his light shine forever, MM:

First paragraph greetings: Ersht^gns kum ikh dir tsu m^gelden, az mir zenen ale got tsu danken in best^gen gezunt, geb got dos nemele^{the} fun dir tsu hern af vayter nit erger.

SS's "real" letter begins in paragraph 2. It always immediately contradicts everything in her formal opening, for it would be difficult to find a husband less esteemed by his wife; less renowned or honored by his community; or (as ^{his} letters reveal) less wise and learned than MM. Indeed, were a light ever to shine from MM it could only arise as a reflection of Odessa burning to the ground beneath him, ignited at last by SS's combustible curses.

nice!

The br^{ev}ynsteller frame serves several functions. Though it has no relationship to the body of communication, the couple use it because in Kasrilevke it is an established tradition which they believe confers a mark ^{of} refinement and education upon them. Sholem Aleykhem uses it throughout

the book to poke gentle fun at the two unsophisticated main characters who remain oblivious to the incongruity between the form and content of each of their letters. In this way he also surreptitiously criticizes the irrelevancy of this and other obsolescent entrenched ideas and observances which enclose and restrict Jews in real life. In his book, he reveals a basic duality toward the shtetl world as he dramatizes how people in Kasrilevke cling to honored, outmoded, no long ^{relevant} customs, which even as they provide for stability, also often serve to make life difficult. (This is particularly true with respect to the laws which restrict the marriage of agunas; the custom of arranged marriages; and the entire concept of marriage in general) SA's ambivalent, covert criticism is an important thematic concern in the book.

Why is this mentioned here?

2.0 Structure and Language: What SS says:

Unlike MM, SS has no personal adventures to relate to her husband in her first letter, for --as she points out--while he has been gallivanting around Odessa, she has been waiting at home for him. She has been worried, wondering where he might be, when he would return. When she finally does hear from him, she is shocked to learn that not only is he wildly enthusiastic for Odessa, but that he has been hoodwinked by his uncle and yet carries on as if he triumphed in the encounter.

Her letter in response is emotional and loud. She is angry and has a lot to say. The letter is so charged with emotion and meaning that in order to examine its structure and language it became necessary to approach it incrementally. First an attempt was made to arrive at the letter's structure and basic units of communication by stripping the language to a minimum. Next the letter was re-examined with its language restored. Lastly, discrete sections of the letter were subjected to an additional re-examination. Here are the findings.

2.1 (Step 1). Bare-bones Outline of Facts

Part 1. MM's old business ventures

She is sick again (1)(for)

his uncle has cheated/tricked him out of the 1500 ruble ~~note~~ which MM was sent to get. (2).

Her **mother's** thoughts about this (3).

Probably, for clarity's sake, the numbers should come 1st

She (SS) would not have taken the worthless promissory notes that he took in lieu of cash. (4)

He will never see the remainder of the money. (45)

Her **mother** does not know about this. (6).

Part II. MM's new business ventures

She and her family are pleased that he is earning a profit in Odessa. (7)

What merchandise is he dealing in, and how is it sold? (8)

How did he make a profit so soon? (9)

Her mother's thoughts on his profit. (10)

Why doesn't he sell out? (11)

What are his living accommodations like, and what does he eat? (12)

He acts as if she were not his wife but merely a mistress. (13)

Her **mother's** thoughts on this subject. (14)

He should return home with his money and open a business in Kasrilevke. (15)

She links her ague to confusion about his business in Odessa. (16)

What tentative conclusions may we draw from this minimal outline?

First, the structure belies one's initial impression that the volatile SS has flown off the handle in all directions. In fact, as we see above, her letter is well organized.

(1) It is chronologically ordered and deals first with MM's old business ventures in the recent past, and then with his new financial involvements in the present.

(2) It is also aesthetically ordered. *too loaded a phrase - implies intentionality* We can see that a nice balance exists between the first and last sentences, for each links SS's health to MM's business dealings.

(3) A sense of unity and focus is enhanced by the entrance of Mother at regular intervals to link the beginning, middle, and end.

We must conclude, then, that even when distraught, SS thinks clearly and logically. It is the bounty of meta-language she ornaments her statements with which distract the reader from a realization of that fact.

Further analysis of the contents shows that it contains 16 basic units of communication, which in turn may be categorized into 3 areas of concern:

(1) SS's health (2) MM's business dealings (3) their personal relations.

Quantitatively, SS's major concern appears to be her husband's financial affairs for she ^edevotes 12 out of 16 units to that topic. Yet it is interesting to note that despite the unity and organization of her letter, she interrupts her apparently overwhelming interest in MM's business affairs (*1-11, 15-

16) to discuss personal concerns, i.e. his living arrangements in Odessa, (11) and their marital relationship. (12-14). These are curious digressions in an otherwise well organized letter. and raise several questions.

1. Why did SS not complete new business before taking up personal business?
2. Why did she not begin with personal business since she had not heard from MM for a long time and obviously had questions to ask?
3. Why, in fact, were personal affairs left almost until the end of the letter?

In order to address these questions, the letter must be re-examined, for while Step 1 may disclose its underlying structure and its units of communication, and may even point out interesting matters of priority and ordering, it does not begin to deal with all that SS has to say.

Clearly, along with the bare facts of communication, the letter also contains a multiplicity of signs, codes, and messages which transmit additional communication like a second language over and beyond the bare facts. The additional language appears in the form of proverbs, curses, interjections, and unfinished thoughts; real questions, rhetorical questions, questions posed as answers, and plain answers; formulas, allusions, connotations, and interjections; insults, threats, suspicions, advice and belittlements. Augmenting it all is an array of punctuation which controls tone and voice: nine exclamation marks, nine question marks, 3 non-complete sentences marks (...), 5 periods, and 1 semi-colon

2.2 Step 2. What she says re-considered again.

PART 1.-OLD BUSINESS

- 1 **Health report:** My previous spasms have returned and
(curse:) I wish them onto your uncle Menasha for having given you a false account of the 1500 kreplekh ^{nodn.}
(interjection:) aza yor, aza mazi !
- 2 **Mother says: (proverb)** If you sent a cat with the sh^aplekh-mones...."-
3. **Rhetorical question: What SS would have done**
I take promissory notes from him !
4. **Answer:** I would as soon take illness from him !
5. **Answer** (Or) Fever for five months !

6. **Prediction:** *Listen,*

you will never see the rest of the money,
anymore than you see those two ears of yours
which you have carried away all the way to Odessa.

7. **Threat.:** It is lucky Mother doesn't know about your promissory notes or
there would be a calamity !

PART II

8 **Positive Statement:** And that which you write, Mendi, that you are
earning

(interjection) thank God,
money, is very welcome news to all of us

9. **Question:** So then why ?

10. **Curse :** (My enemies should have 80 bad years)

Advice when you finally do write,

Insult at least be a mensch !

11. **Question** Why don't you write exactly what kind of merchandise you are
dealing with

12. **Question:** What does it sell for a yard ?

13 **Question:** Or perhaps it is sold by the weight ?

14 **Question:** I don't have the slightest idea what it is and with what one
eats it !

15 **Statement** Also I don't understand, you said you bought merchandise and
you already have a profit....

16 **Question :** What kind of merchandise is this that grows so fast for you ?

17. **Mother Says: (proverb)** Even mushrooms need rain.!

18 **Advice:** If there is a profit why don't you sell already ?

19. **Question** *What are you waiting for?*

20 **Answer posed as a question:** *A shortage?*

++

21 **Question** Why don't you write where you are living and what you eat?

22 **Statement:** It is almost as if I were a stranger not a wife for
120 years but a woman of pleasure,

(interjection) excuse the expression....

23 **Mother says:(proverb)** When a cow leaves the herd it forgets to say
goodby.

++

24 **Advice:** I think if you want to take my advice you should sell as soon
as possible and come home with your little bit of money and you will
find better business here than what you have...

25 **Health report** I should know as little about the ague
as I know about what your business is !

(Closing) **Formalese** Be well , wished from my deepest heart , your

true, loyal wife, SS

good
right!

The second outline shows that after paying lip service to form and propriety with "bestn ge^zunt" in formalese Yiddish, SS turns to everyday Yiddish to hurl the angry truth at MM. Her aim is two-fold: (a) she wants to vent her anger and to assert that he and his uncle are responsible for her illness; (b) she wants also to establish blame, so that MM can feel guilty from the moment he starts reading, if not sooner. Since his uncle is beyond her reach, she punishes him with a curse. The interjections which follow, aza yor, aza mazi, suggest a larger sense of frustration, and despair related to both MM and to fortune in general. For in addition to orthodox religious faith, SS has a deep pessimistic belief in external fate and fortune. Following upon that, she calls on her mother to validate her opinions since she is young and still lacks the authority of age and experience. Her mother affirms SS's judgment by declaring that if one sends an inappropriate creature (such as a cat or MM) to carry out a taskand the conclusion, that the job won't get done, is so self-evident that the sentence trails off unfinished.

yes!

Having weighed MM, found him guilty, and punished him, SS begins his educational rehabilitation. She hopes to teach MM how to become a man by modeling himself after her. Her lesson begins ^{with} What She Would Have Done in the Same Situation. (3) Her rhetorical question (posed as a statement) requires no answer, but she answers it anyway, to make clear just how foolish he has been. (4.5) Then, because she knows that when she talks, MM often tunes her out, she calls him to attention with her stdu, forgetting or ignoring the fact that he is not listening to her but reading her letter instead. Her incorrect use of language and malapropisms are amusing but also function on a serious level to illustrate how poorly she communicates with MM (and he with her) - a thematic concern in the book. This is an interesting subject beyond the scope of this paper.

SS wraps up the old business of the nodn with a prediction of MM's future failure, another reality instructional device that she often uses. Her prediction (6) takes the form of an odd, extended comparison between the money he will never get, and the ears he never sees, which all, somehow, end up in Odessa. The prophecy is followed with a coded message (7) concerning

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✓ her most powerful weapon, Mother, and the threat of dire consequences if/when *she* finds out about his failure.

Having vented some anger, instructed MM in The Truth, and threatened him with her ultimo, SS turns to new business and makes the only unequivocally positive statement to him in the entire letter(8) However, she immediately negates the compliment with a qualification, a curse, some advice, and an insult, apparently because he failed to describe the merchandise he is selling:(9,10) By this she means that he should have detailed concrete specifics about his product(11-20)

Mother re-enters to emphasize how well founded her daughter's suspicions about his profits are.(17) SS follows up with another demonstration of her lack of confidence in her husband's ability, by telling him exactly what to do, adding a gratuitous bit of sarcasm to keep him on track(18-20).

It is at this juncture (marked with ++ in the outline,) that SS makes the interesting digression to personal affairs. She interrupts the subject of profits and business to ask about his living arrangements(21) and to remind him of their marital relationship.(22) This is an important point that I will come back to later. She does not dwell on personal questions for long, however. Mother makes her last entrance (23) and SS resumes the topic of business and health.(24,25) In her last sentence she returns to ^{the}formalese Yiddish of frame.

The punctuation reveals SS's feelings. Part 1 of the letter is dominated by such strong emotions that she requires the use of five exclamation marks. While there are 4 exclamation marks in part 2, there is, at the same time, a significant change in tone marked by 9 question marks. From angry assertions in the first part of the letter, SS turns toward questions in the second part.-another point I shall return to later.

2.3 .Affirmation of the archetype.

The full letter provides grounds to support the several symbolic or representational views of SS discussed earlier, i.e. (1) the practical Kasrilevke woman coping with the dreamer husband.; (2) the demanding selfish yiddene who makes the life of her shlemil-husband miserable in the kleyn ~~stetle~~ ^{shtetl} or (3) the symbolic representative of the shtetl who seeks

(rightfully or wrongfully) to protect traditional, conservative values from the encroachment of modern secular urban influences (represented by MM). In all these interpretations, SS functions without conflict as an apt disciple and younger version of her formidable archetypal parent, The Shtetl Wife/Mother, who appears 3 times in the letter, the magic number of myth, romance, and fairy tales.

Brilliant

Like the Jewish God in the Bible leading his children out of the desert wilderness, Mother's disembodied voice hovers authoritatively over the shtetl text. Although she performs a similar function, her language, mode of expression, audience, and the sources of her authority differ from God's. While He speaks in sonorous Hebrew prose and usually to men, she speaks in Yiddish proverbs and addresses her remarks largely to women. Her enormous knowledge and power which rival His derives from the oral folk tradition of proverbs, lore, and tribal experience. She functions as the mythic Wise woman and benevolent parent to protect SS (and by extension, all women), to validate her judgments, and to expand upon the scope of her young daughter's still limited vision. It is important to note that unlike Tevye's God, she is never punitive or remiss as a parent figure.

Mother has significantly shaped SS's values and beliefs. She has instructed her in all the practical aspects of mothering, marriage, men, and money. Her teaching is geared to survival in Kasrilevke, where cash is short, children are plentiful, and men are regarded both by their wives and by themselves, as second class citizens. She plays a vital role in the protection of traditional values and warns continuously against the lure of ~~friend~~ big city ways where ever present dangers tempt Jews from the path of righteousness. Odessa, with its strange religious practices, loose sexual morals, peculiar forms of parnose, and air of easy self indulgence, is the mortal enemy of Mother and, therefore, of SS and Kasrilevke, too.

In general, Mother assumes that marriage is an unsentimental, economic relationship focused on parnose, work, home, and children. Her regard for men in general, and MM in particular, is small. She steadfastly points out that women must keep their spouses on firm leashes and never allow them to get the upper hand. She teaches SS by word and deed that husbands can be easily controlled through the power of a vituperative, shrill tongue.

SS thinks the world of her mother's teachings:

shmad? 3NE
di mame ^z take a khakhome! zi taynet mit mir kseyder az a man tor
men nisht nokhgebn di shmed, az me badarf a man haltn in di hent
azoy, az er zol *filn* az er hot a vaybl!(p. 61)..

She listens carefully and respectfully to all her mother says, because a woman's lot in Kasrilevke is difficult. Most women must attend to large families ~~and~~ or assume the full or major share of responsibility for support while husbands either study full time or work at poorly paying jobs. Often women die young in childbirth, and then their men reveal an indifferent past attachment for when the prescribed short mourning period is over, husbands stop crying all too easily, betake themselves to the city, and soon find young nineteen-year-old-girls to take to bed (never overtly mentioned in SA's shtetl) and board as second wives. SS (and Mother) seldom, if ever, consider any subject from the male point of view.

SS learns well. As a good yidishe tokhter, she does not think to rebel against her mother's conservative teachings. As a good Jewish wife SS prides herself on being getray and dependable. She may loudly rebuke her husband, but she believes that the way in which she communicates with her spouse is less important than her loyalty. She knows that the strong language she uses is necessary, because men are foolish and impractical and women have their best interests at heart. She observes correctly that her sharp tongue is not so different from that of the other women in the shtetl.. In fact, compared to Blume-Zlateh, her verbal aggression is moderate. (ikh kon nit zayn azoy grob vi blume zlate; ikh kon zikh nit sheltn, araynleygn a man in der erd arayn, azoy vi zi, ikh kon nit!! zolst hobn blume-zlaten, far a vayb, volst ^{du} shoyne gevust vos far a got mir hobn!)

Unlike the honey-tongued Odessa women she has heard about, she is never capricious, flirtatious, or sexually provocative. She does not measure ^g love and loyalty by words or promises, as she tells MM repeatedly, but by actions. She shows her affection and loyalty by caring for him, his house and children, by showing a concern with what he eats; by sending him money when he is broke; and by hoping he will come home. She spends little money on herself, and her wardrobe is limited, sturdy, and without frills. She works hard, is practical, and saves for the rainy day, which, pessimist that

she is, she expects without fail. If given a choice, she asks for useful gifts such as strong cloth to sew with or linens and flatware for the house. She wants no broaches or diamonds for herself, but loving daughter that she is, for her mother she requests velvet for a special dress.

Outside the home, SS learns from observing other shtetl women, especially that luminous role model, Blume-Zlate, the woman SS loves to hate. BZ has achieved eminent success by using Mother's methods: i.e., her husband works like a horse and she keeps him under control without reins merely with a flick of her glance. Proof of BZ's success, SS notes, is the rope of pearls she wears as a gift from the self-same husband. And not to lose an opportunity to instruct him in truth and reality, SS points out to MM that BZ's husband's gifts are real, not merely intentions or words.

SS also observes that Mother is right when she says men must be kept in harness. She is very aware of other husband's who have run away to America and left their wives agunas, never able to marry again. The problems of such women and the absence of her husband is a constant worry and a frequent topic in later letters to her husband.

This paper set out to examine the overall structure and language employed by SS in her first letter in an attempt to disclose the two dimensions to SS's character. What has been developed so far, affirms only her fictional existence as a symbolic or representative type. She is educated into that role by Mother who represents conservative Khasrilevke values, and she appears to operate on automatic pilot, so to speak, as a shtetl wife. To find the individual SS, it is necessary to look more closely at several specific areas noted earlier, and associated with unanswered questions.

3.0 (Step 3). SS, the fictional, psychologically realized woman behind the archetype:

One reason SS begins with business rather than with personal affairs has already been established. She is justifiably angry with the contents of MM's letter. It is maddening not to have heard from him for weeks, and then to discover that he has bungled the job he was sent to do and is, moreover, on a giddy spree in Odessa, twirling his cane as he promenades along the boulevards. (stetl dir for, ikh gey mir aroys mitn shtekl in gretsk arayn-^e

subject?

p.34) In addressing business matters first, SS's purpose is to unload well deserved anger for his foolishness, and to cut through all his superfluous language in order to call his attention to practical, important matters: the fact of his failure .

✓ However, another reason she begins with business matters is that she has noticed a new tone and independent sense of self in MM's letter. She is angry and frightened by the implications of that and of the fact of his new residence in Odessa. While she does not repress her feelings on the subject, she does not give full, immediate voice to her concerns. Perhaps she thinks to let sleeping dogs lie for the time until she can better assess the situation. Perhaps this is a can of worms she fears to open. Whatever her reasons, her resolve to hold back falls apart when she comes her prediction(6). Something unusual happens in the extended, forced simile about money and MM ears. Once it begins, the comparison seems to roll on and on without a stop until the hated word "Odessa" is finally verbalized. It is as if strong feelings SS sought to deny or hold back centered on "Odessa" demand to be asserted against her will. A sense of outrage which she can neither control nor halt propels the comparison forward and indeed spills over into the threat of Mother (7), whom she brings in as a coda.

Re-examining the beginning of the letter, it now seems clear that there are two levels to SS's anger . True, she is upset by MM's financial failings. She is a practical woman and money is a serious issue. He has lost a large amount the family can ill afford to lose. She begins with that topic and devotes three-fourths of her units of communication to the subject of money. But there is another, even greater anxiety than the money which percolates through her letter and which she has difficulty facing or handling. It centers on MM's new separate residence in Odessa. SS may not be educated, but she is intelligent. She has observed that M's letter says nothing about coming home and SS can recognize a declaration of independence when she reads one. The implications for her future and the future of her children, are overwhelming. .

As noted, SS knows a good deal about agunas. All her mother's teachings and her own observations tell her that when men abandon their wives without a divorce those unfortunate women are left without financial and/or emotional support and in perpetual religious limbo, unable either to obtain a divorce or to wed again.

For all her dazzling meta-language, noise, bluster of the archetype, there is also the individual SS who is not the most secure woman in Kasrilevke. The verbal abilities, aggressiveness, combative stance of that SS are not merely learned archetypal responses but reflect the defensive posturings of an emotionally dependent personality, immature, proud, inclined to a hysteria she cannot control, and unsure of herself as a woman. The individual SS lacks the authority and power of her overwhelming mother who steps in too quickly and too often and robs her daughter of the chance to grow and to function on her own. That SS lacks the confidence and sure hand (and prized pearls) of Blume-Zlate. The individual SS senses that she cares for MM more than he cares for her. (How could he wait so long to write, she asks.) She has heard for years about the free women of Odessa who are more attractive than she. She may be practical and responsible, but no one praises her for her beauty or allure or (really) buys her jewels.

SS has had plenty of time to think about the new situation she finds herself in. Unfortunately she is not the only one with the same thought. Mother is worried and at any moment the shtetl women who know just what cooks in every tepl will also know and begin to point her out as an abandoned woman. She will need help from her mother in handling shtetl busy-bodies who will offer her gratuitous advice. As SS has gossiped and gloated over the misfortune of others, she knows "they" will now gloat over hers. *split!*

We first see into the individual SS's deeper level of feelings in the comparison which she has difficulty ending until she can acknowledge her rage at MM's presence in Odessa. After that eruption, SS regains her equilibrium for a brief time and is able to say something complimentary to MM. But the rise of meta-language following the complement -- the qualification, curse and insult -- and the change in tone, signal that her equilibrium crumbled almost as soon as she turned to talk about profits, for that topic merely recalled again that the profits originated in Odessa. So she hurls a long series of questions at him in an effort to regain equilibrium. The questions only stop when she gets to the subject of the selling off of his profits. (af vos varstu? af a yakrys?) Perhaps those two small questions, which were meant to pierce the consciousness of the farkholmt Mendl, rikosheyed and by thought association invaded her own mind. Was she not also waiting? Was she not also short a husband? Or perhaps the mere

process of bombarding him with questions about business gave her the momentum needed to ask the questions she was truly preoccupied with.

nice

What^{ever} the trigger, her deeper fears, more profound than her concerns with money and business, assert themselves and she interrupts the talk of business, to ask MM about his new life: *un far vos shraybst du nit, vu du shteyst-ayn un vos est du?* Once the terrible fact of his separate residence has surfaced, SS is able to press closer to a verbalization of her greatest fear. In the most indirect manner she can employ, she hedges her question as a hypothetical, tentative observation: *epes glaykh vi ikh volt dir zayn a fremde, nit keyn vayb biz hundert tsvantsik yar, nor epes a palaybovnitse l'havdil...* and her thought trails off incompleting, signifying there is much more to be said and thought and reflected about the meaning of his residence in Odessa and his relationship to her.

check this
should be:
vos du est

why this
Slavic word, do
you think? It
takes over the
sentence.

Mother minces no words when she re-enters for the third time. Like a prophetess of doom she expands upon SS's oblique, hesitant observations: *az a ku geyt avek in tsherede fargest zi dem gesunt.* This sounds ominously as though MM has left home for good and that thought is so frightening to SS that she returns to the safer subject of MM's business affairs, accompanied by a significant change in tone and voice. She speaks more softly, employs the subjective mood, and abandons the voice of imperative demand. Without derision or sarcasm she suggests that he return home: *mir dakkht, du zolst mikh veln folgn valstugezen oyshandlen zikh vos gikher un kumen beser aheym mitn bisl mizumms, vest du dir gefinen shenere geheftn vi ot dos dozike...* and her voice again trails off into thoughtfulness. A suggestion, presented as a possibility, indicates how worried SS is. The difference in punctuation between the two parts of the letter noted earlier now takes on added significance. As her letter ends, she is able to remove the mask of anger she often wears to hide anxiety, which dominates the first part of her letter, and to disclose her underlying sense of confusion, insecurity, and fear. *ikh zol azoy visn fun kedokhys vi ikh veys vi me ruft es (his business).*

In her final formal closing, although she reverts to Yiddish formalese, the sentiments SS expresses reflect her true feelings. Despite her negative comments, insults, et al. she is attached *fun tifn hartzn* to her young husband and looks upon herself as his *bemes getraye wife*. While the concept of being romantically in love with her husband, either before marriage or after, is *remot* to her, she is, nevertheless, deeply bonded to him. He is her

use English here

connect this to
Polobovnitse
above

first and only intimate physical relationship, and in her value system, that relationship is hallowed and for life. She may amuse the reader when she reminds MM over and over that she is his wife for 120 years but she is very worried that he is learning different values about marriage, real loyalty, and responsibility in the sinful city of Odessa where women look at life in a different way, and he appears to have noticed that fact.

That she shows him little display of affection has nothing to do with the depth of her feeling for him. Her undemonstrativeness merely reflects her upbringing and the Kasrilevke culture, which is repressed in this area and does not encourage in any way an outward demonstration of love.

Though she wants him home, she does not say so. All she can ever manage is to ask in behalf of the children: kum tsu forn aheym, vest du zayn, ~~am mirts a-~~ ^{mertse hem} shem a gast *bay di kinder*. (my italics)
(p. 62)

good

4.0 Kasrilevke marriage.

✓ Miron states that the order of MM's letter shows efforts toward diplomacy and a wish to please his wife. That accords with MM's passive-aggressive personality; he displays no open anger and wants no conflict with the wife whom he fears. He gives expression to his submerged emotions by quietly leaving SS and pretending to himself, and to her, that he hasn't. The individual SS is the flip side of the coin, his dialectical opposite. The idea of diplomacy seldom enters her mind. She is an uninhibited, direct, emotional young woman, aggressive and assertive by learning and by nature. She handles conflicts and emotions which threaten to overwhelm her equilibrium ^{by} uninhibited venting of her feelings. Unlike MM she has no automatic repressive mechanism and there is no subtlety or deviousness to her character. While he relies upon his legs to escape from conflict, SS tries to cope with conflict and anxiety by jumping into the fray. In that mode her voice is angry, shrill, accusatory, sarcastic, belittling, and ~~let~~ corrective. When her anger is vented, it's over for her, but unfortunately not for the recipient of her verbal abuse. She does not perceive that fact.

: Ay, vos, ikh khap zikh aroys a mol mit a harb vort? ~~iz~~ dos nor makhmes grizote un nit af lang. vi zogt di mame? a shvebele tsint zikh gikh on un vert bald farloshn... (p. 68)

good | Because she discharges her negative emotions rather than harbors them, she is seldom depressed and never has suicidal thoughts like MM.

As partners in a marriage they are pitifully mismatched, not only unable to communicate to each other as the letters amply demonstrate, but unable to understand each other's emotional needs. It is a sad human situation which SA sets forth impartially, blaming no one. There was no doubt an arranged marriage and probably neither had anything to say in the choice of partner. The marriage feels better to SS than to MM for she is on home ground and she has the support of her family and friends. Also, and importantly, she has the comfort of Kasrilevke tradition. He, on the other hand, has little if any depth of feeling for anyone, either ^{for her} she or the children. Having been swallowed whole by her family and Kasrilevke, what he wants most is to get away. What she wants most is to have their life restored as it was, and for a long time as the letters go back and forth, she ^{and he} hopes ~~and~~ thinks that that is possible. For she likes her world and her role in it. It suits her non-adventurous, non-imaginative disposition. Her principle is to play it safe, retreat, look low, take less. The height of her ambition is for MM to rent a store in Kasrilevke and become a kremier. What more could he want, she asks him. She certainly does not want to live on air and promises, as he does in Odessa. She simply wants him to return and to be a mensh., as she defines the word.

That he might prefer exotic, expensive Odessa grapes [?] over plentiful and cheap Kasrilevke plums is an absurdity. All his dreams ^{OK} are targum-loshn to her, for she is unable to see him as a separate person who exists apart from her and with needs of his own. So when he does not conform to her demands or expectations, she simply drives over him like a steam roller. Since he can not cope with her confrontations, his only recourse is to be devious, to appear passively acquiescent, to act without her knowledge and finally to escape, leaving her confused, disoriented, frightened and angry.

SS's means of coping with her problems self-destruct. Her curses, insults, reproof, advice, lessons in truth and reality, which help to relieve her anxiety actually boomerang and serve only to drive away the man she wants to keep. For all her self-justification she knows that the way she speaks to him is a problem. She feels guilty, even apologizes for her verbal excesses, but cannot modify her behavior for long. She does not understand that her need to control him robs him of independence and self worth. She

has no sense that the last thing he wants to hear is that he should give up his dreams of autonomy and a new life and return to her. Everytime she suggests that he should stop and cash in on his spiraling Odessa funds, return with whatever money he has and invest it in a business at home, MM manages conveniently to lose his money. That is no accident. It makes it possible for him never to have to openly acknowledge to himself or to her that he has decided never to return home. As long as he is unsuccessful and without money he has a reason for remaining away; there is always a killing to be made somewhere in some area of business, and he can pretend to himself that it is for the benefit of the family.

Though she cares for him deeply in her limited way, there is also evidence of ambivalence toward him. She writes often about other women who go after their wayward men and rope, drag, shlep them home, yet she never manages to begin that journey. Even Mother says that in the same situation, she would have gone after a missing spouse. Perhaps, SS is afraid to force a show-down, for she knows he would merely pick up and travel to another town. Perhaps she finds that, after a while, she does well enough without him. Whatever the reason, though she loves him, she does not pursue him but ~~instead begins soon~~ (Book 2, *Fapiern*, letter #2) begins to ask regularly for a divorce so that she will not be left an aguna.

The letter shows that she has considerable strengths and weaknesses which arise from a combination of outside forces and inner drives. Her mother's instructions shape her into a mini-archetype who acts without remorse as she has been taught to act. But her confusions, insecurities, vulnerabilities and guilt make her human and reveal the fictional individual behind the symbolic figure. She is a dependent personality who manages well for the present because she has financial and emotional support from her family. However, her volatility, need for control, inability to exercise emotional restraint, self-centeredness presage problems for her in the future. In addition, her actual situation is a most unhappy one. She is married to a man who, it seems certain, will someday disappear leaving her in the ambiguous marital state she so fears. While some of her behavior and modes of coping with problems are more admirable than others, in general the reader is able to respond to her with warmth, for in her character the clearly positive and negative attributes of the archetype are informed and fleshed out by the more complex strengths and vulnerabilities of a fictional

1. Her blessing, curses, hopes, fears voice :

In her first letter SS shows an awareness of the larger and mysterious universe filled with a vast potential for good and evil.that James A Matisoff writes about.so well. Accordingly she lets no opportunity pass to wish good for her family (Mother, long life to her), friends and self, and to express her gratitude for good things (And the money you are earning, praise the lord); to recognize and lament her troubles'(aza yor aza mzl); to use magic and formulas to to ward off evil (God forbid, no evil eye), to separate the sacred from the profane (l'havdil); to appease the dead or to call down death and disease or other troubles on her enemies:(they should enjoy 80 lean years-; her spasm on M's uncle); magic words to ward off evil(keyn-n-hora- and vast array of oaths with a variety of functions.,e.g. In her second letter she swears to the truth of something by wishing an evil on herself in order to convince MM of her veracity.(ikh zol azoy visn fun kedokhus, vi ikh veys vi me ruft es(his business) (p 38)

2.Catalogue voice.

She sometimes imitates MM lyrical voice with one essential difference. Whereas his voice rises in exhilaration toward an upper infinity (says Miron) hers rolls out horizontally or even descends to a nadir in a catalogue of disbelief or disapproval.

(A)e.g. regarding his jobs-- 3-16:(p 134) du vest azoy makhn zavodlekh punkt azoy vi du host gemaackh velder, imenyas, hayzeer un tsuker-----

(B) eg regarding responsibility 3/6 ikh darf hobn tsu ton mit zayne kinder, mit doktoyrim, mit roykhus, un mit shodim, un er, her goldshpiner--gor nisht! er flit-arum fun odes keyn yehkupets keyn boyberik! vos iz! a gdule af im, its: paperleih! transportn! portefeln! !(p72)

(C) eg rhyme of disbelief,;epes iz bay dir fortn gelt,shmelt,hefkr tsibele

3 Repetitive voice

Contains her standard topics: such as predictions, warnings, threats, mark my words, what I would do, Mother says, what he should have done, what she would have done, I told you so,

4. Yiddish discourse voices

Proceeds thru bombardment of one question after another: what does it cost, how is it sold, is it eaten. And of course she answers her own questions.

5. Malapropism voice in which she makes disparate comparisons/similies, or joins incongruous items with no awareness that she is doing so, and this is a source of much humor e.g. even if you were to chop my head off i wouldnt undertand This may be because according to Harshav, the Jewish universe is made up of one universal discourse, so that everything is related. onions and socks and pimples and hot fudge sundaes.

6. Reality instruction voice determined to educate him by destroying his ego, independence, initiative; confidence. She thinks of him as child who must be guided every step of the way. This voice tends to be shrill, admonishing corrective. destructive. Closely related to voice # 3- standard repetoire.

7. Practical advice voice. In this voice, she tells him to give up his dream, to come home, to open a small busness there, to settle down, to look down not up, to become slave to family needs. Closer to gossipy voice, so maybe it belongs below

B. Dramatic Voices:

1. Relaxed gossipy friendly wife voice

We see this friendlier tone in the first letter in the compliment she pays him and in the calmer tones she uses as the letter closes and she urges him to return home. This is the voice she uses when she relates what is going on in the shtetl with others or tells of her interaction with others. It is like the dramatic mode of MM., although she does not repeat dialogue as he does. Instead she tells what other said and did. eg fire, marriage, girl who reads romances, etc. It opens her up and we learn a lot about her from what she tells us about others. She really enjoys gossiping about other's difficulties. This voice, which starts in book 2 with the P.S's widens our picture of Kasrilevke and complements/contrasts with MM's picture of Odessa.

This voice probably needs to be subdivided. When I have time....

3. Combination of dramatic and hysterical.

Third person voice. Very distraught I place it with dramatic because she talks about him in third person as tho she is on a stage and addressing an audience which is clearly in agreement with her.. She obliterates him by turning her back on him, so to speak, and addressing the multitudes. Here's an example : I have to worry myself sick over his children, run to doctors and all kinds of devils and sorcerers, while he, my gold spinner- nothing worries him! He keeps flying from Odessa to Yehupetz, and from Yehupets to Boiberik! What's all the excitement about? Oh, he found a treasure trove: "Papers"! "Transports"! "Potfolios"! He talked it into himself thaat one can get rich overnight. ...(P 60)

Well, if the voices are somehow to be integrated, you must return to your point about "aesthetic" symmetry. Can you chart the emotional valence on a graph? Is there a predictable rise-and-fall pattern? Does she depend on the letter-writing formula to bail her out?