Modern Yiddish Literary Studies: A Shifting Landscape

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Abstract   This introductory essay maps significant contributions to the study of modern Yiddish literature over the past two decades. Studies of Yiddish modernism have tended to focus on three aspects of this literature: continuity through the use of traditional, mythic, and ethnographic sources; rupture expressed through alienation in modernity; and the intersection and dialogue with models of modern literature in a comparative context. Furthermore, Max Weinreich's contention that the process of fusion in Yiddish language formation did not stop with its creation but is continuous and cumulative, is also evident in recent studies of modern Yiddish literature that pay close attention to linguistic dimensions of Yiddish writing. This is exemplified by the subjects that have engaged scholars of modern Yiddish literature over the past two decades: canon formation, translation theory and practice, "postvernacular" language, and multilingual poetics. A brief overview of the essays in this special issue demonstrates the unique historical, linguistic, and literary features of Yiddish that offer new opportunities for exploring translation, poetics, hermeneutics, literary history, reading practices, commemorative sites in print, and intercultural relations.

The field of Yiddish studies in recent years has been galvanized by two features of the language: its recent history, marked by restriction, erasure, and loss, and its composition, marked by boundary crossings, invention, and creative appropriation of its Hebraic sources and its surrounding languages and cultures. The elegiac mode may not be conducive to scholarship, but it is inevitable when the object of that scholarship is a language that was nearly annihilated within the span of six years, when most of its speakers became the victims of genocide. "Of what other language can it be said that it died a sudden and definite death, in a given decade, on a given piece of soil?": so a struggling Yiddish writer in New York reflects after World War II in Cynthia Ozick's (1971: 42) story "Envy; or, Yiddish in America." But the death he lamented came not only in that decade or on that piece of soil. On the eve of that war, more than eleven million Yiddish speakers worldwide provided a readership and audience for various forms of literature, journalism, theater, art, and scientific writing (Jacobs 2005). Nazism was responsible for the brutally swift extermination of Yiddish communities throughout Eastern and Western Europe, but from the 1930s to the 1950s Stalinism also erased a vibrant Yiddish literary and cultural world in the Soviet Union. In the United States, assimilation at an accelerated pace among the children of immigrants and their fierce commitment to English as a passport to success in the professions, in business, and in the arts spelled the virtual ruin of Yiddish culture in America. Much the same applies to other communities of Yiddish speakers scattered around the world, for whom French, Spanish, or other languages became substitutes for Yiddish.

Therefore, postwar Yiddish study has had a sense of urgency about it, from the taping and documenting of the survivors of Yiddish civilization in Europe to the monumental efforts to create archives, libraries, and electronic databases of the writings produced in worlds erased by violence, neglect, or indifference. The period of rescue that aims to store, map, catalog, and document is gradually coming to an end, now that the majority of Yiddish books ever printed are available electronically from the National Yiddish Jewish Book Center and work proceeds apace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to catalog all signed articles in the Yiddish press in the Index to Yiddish Periodicals.[1]

Although this indispensable mapping of Yiddish textuality as both a scholarly and an ethical project is as yet incomplete, it has become clear that the time has come to pose questions that go beyond the imperative to preserve. We need, besides, to focus on Yiddish within the discourse of current literary

1. Directed by Avraham Novershtern, so far the database comprises 200,000 entries, with around 15,000 new entries added every year.

and cultural studies, to discover what Yiddish can contribute to theoretical debates about literature.

Such inquiry builds on landmark studies that have already demonstrated the theoretical challenges posed by the linguistic features of Yiddish, both its component elements and its diverse roles in Jewish multilingual culture that has always been its matrix. Max Weinreich's *History of the Yiddish Language* (1980) introduced the concept that has proved to be seminal in Yiddish research, namely, that Yiddish is a "fusion language" made up of four stock languages as components: Hebrew, La'az (or Loez), German, and Slavic. Yiddish emerged around the beginning of the second millennium when Jews migrated to the Rhine area from northern Italy and France, where they had developed an oral language, La'az, from two variants of spoken Latin combined with Hebrew. In this new linguistic terrain, they forged a written language out of the La'az which they had brought with them, the German of their neighbors, and *loshn-koydish*, the "holy tongue" of Hebrew and Aramaic, whose lexicon was derived primarily from the scriptural, hermeneutic, liturgical, and legal texts that comprised Jewish civilization. The most visible and intriguing feature of this new fusion language of Yiddish was its written form, as it transcribed Middle High German and La'az into the Hebrew alphabet.[2]

Once this language had been created by crossing the speech of neighboring tongues with the alphabet of Judaic culture, it began to traverse geographic and social boundaries. Yiddish became the lingua franca of Ashkenazi Jewry, *Ashkenaz* meaning German in Hebrew and referring to the European Jewish culture that evolved and continued to spread eastward. Insofar as it is phonetically and lexically derived primarily from Middle High German and alphabetically from Hebrew, it is the sound of one language in the letters of another. The sociolinguistic effect of this fusion is that Yiddish facilitated spoken communication between Jews and their neighbors so long as they remained in German-speaking areas while simultaneously reinforcing internal Jewish communal life by its unique script. Thus, it was both portal and barrier.[3] This incongruity between the language's spoken and written expressions has left its trace in many Yiddish works, from the fathers of classic Yiddish literature—Mendele Mokher Sforim (Shalom Abramovitsh),

2. For a detailed study of the evolution of Yiddish, see Weinreich 1980. Weinreich (ibid.: 20) identifies the "correlative concepts" that make up Yiddish as a fusion language: "stock language, determinant, fusion, and component." For an account of the development of Yiddish that traces it back to Aramaic-speaking Jews in Germany, see Katz 1985. For an overview of the history and cultural dynamics of the language, see Harshav 1990.
3. For a sociological study of Yiddish, see Fishman 1981.

I. L. Peretz, and Sholem Aleichem (Shalom Rabinovitsh)—to the contemporary poetry of Avraham Sutzkever.

From the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Yiddish writing often bore the mark of acute self-consciousness about its role in Jewish multilingual culture. Yiddish was associated with spoken, domestic, quotidian, and bodily existence and Hebrew with religious, liturgical, textual, and divine spheres (Seidman 1997). In the nineteenth century, Yiddish was almost never the first choice of Jewish writers, for the Enlightenment (the Haskalah, as it was referred to in Jewish culture) favored Hebrew over the language of the masses, though its adherents wanted to expose the Jewish masses to modernity. For that purpose, they resorted to a language for which they had little respect (Miron 1973). The father of modern Yiddish literature, Abramovitsh, known by his pen name Mendele, set the tone by referring to the shift from Hebrew to Yiddish by bilingual writers of the nineteenth century as promiscuity, an affair with a strange woman, and to literary works in Yiddish as the illegitimate issue of that shameful union (ibid.: 14). Within a short time, however, Yiddish literature became more than a strategy for modernizing the folk, as the writers themselves embraced this vernacular to forge a language of great artistry. So, despite the troubled status of Yiddish and the stigmas attached to it in this period, an impressive body of Yiddish literature developed that was multifaceted, drawing on a repertoire of genres, modes, and styles. Within that corpus, self-awareness about Yiddish as a medium—in theme, voice, speech, or register—was widespread.

Scholarship on modern Yiddish literature has often paid attention to its linguistic fusion, so that an author's preference for Hebraic or Germanic components, for example, can serve as an indicator of characterization, narrative point of view, or attitude toward readership.[4] How did writers represent these stock languages out of which Yiddish was constituted? What was the attitude of the diverse communities in Europe toward this hybrid fusion language? Dan Miron (1973: 49) has raised the central question facing modern writers of Yiddish: "How could one write aesthetically in a language that was considered the quintessence of deformity?" Enlightenment thinkers, starting from Moses Mendelssohn, had deemed Yiddish a corrupted form of German: a dialect and jargon unfit for belles lettres, with the exception of satirical parody that could enlighten the masses in the popular jargon that they understood. Bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish authors often hid their identities as the creators of Yiddish works by resorting to pseudonyms. Miron laid bare

4. For a list of recent significant publications in the field of Old Yiddish literature, including the work of Shlomo Berger, Jeremy Dauber, and Chava Turniansky, see the annotated bibliography "Recent Scholarship in Yiddish Studies" in this issue. This special issue deals with modern Yiddish literary studies.

these masks, the multilingual personae, and the narrative voices out of which a poetics of disguise was forged among the founding authors of modern Yiddish literature. In his account of the multilingual historical and cultural context of the Eastern European Jewish experience, Miron brought collective as well as personal identity to bear on the question of authorship and narratorial point of view.

The tension between Hebrew and Yiddish in Europe was intensified in Israel, where the revitalization of Hebrew as a national language marginalized Yiddish. A turning point for Yiddish literary scholarship in Israel was a special double issue (Even-Zohar and Harshav 1986) of the journal *Hasifrut* (*Literature*) devoted to the bilingual foundations of modern Yiddish and Hebrew writing. Edited by Itamar Even-Zohar and Benjamin Harshav at the Porter Institute of Poetics and Semiotics at Tel Aviv University, the issue included discussions of the place of Yiddish within a Hebrew-Yiddish polysystem (Even-Zohar), the bilingualism of the Hebrew national poet Chaim Nachman Bialik (Ziva Shamir) and the American Hebrew poet Gabriel Preil (Yael Feldman), the function of Yiddish literature in Hebrew children's literature (Zohar Shavit), and Yiddish modernism in America (Miron) and Eastern Europe (Avraham Novershtern). This issue was followed by Harshav's (1990: 91) model of a "semiotics of Yiddish communication" in *The Meaning of Yiddish*, namely, "a second level of language, built above its [Yiddish] vocabulary, morphology, and syntax, that is the 'language' of communication accepted by the speakers of a community. . . . It comprises a whole network of signals, rules of conversation, encapsulated formulas and labels, allusions to codified and richly connotative life situations." According to Harshav (ibid.), "Yiddish internalized and schematized some essential characteristics of 'Talmudic' dialectical argument and questioning, combined with typical communicative patterns evolved in the precarious, marginal, Diaspora existence," and authors like Sholem Aleichem, Moyshe Leyb Halpern, and Saul Bellow exemplified this principle.

Since the publication of the *Hasifrut* special issue on Yiddish and Harshav's identification of a semiotics of communication in *The Meaning of Yiddish*, there have been three major approaches to the study of Yiddish literary modernism over the past quarter of a century. One emphasizes the continuity of Yiddish expression by employing ethnography to demonstrate how new artistic forms were derived from folk, mythic, and traditional materials. Another emphasizes rupture to demonstrate how authors respond to the dissolution of community in their artistic themes and strategies. And a third questions the models of modernism in literary study that have generated a canon that precludes voices that do not conform to its tenets. The first approach, the entanglement of ethnography and modern poetics, has been

one of the mainstays of Western constructions of modernism going back to the influence of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1900) on such canonical modernists as T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and Thomas Mann (Bell 1999: 15). Mythic patterns of destruction and renewal as evident in folk tradition is the organizing principle of David G. Roskies's *A Bridge of Longing* (1995), which studies the appropriation and invention of folk tradition as the dynamic of modern Yiddish writing. The shift from oral storytelling to written text, which he locates in the works of Nahman ben Simha of Bratslav in the early nineteenth century, is the starting point of a modern Yiddish literary history marked by the invention of "authentic" folklore. This "creative betrayal," as Roskies calls it, served to rescue a religious folk culture by relocating it in secular modern literature. The writers he discusses, among them Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, Itsik Manger, and Isaac Bashevis Singer, inhabit a middle ground where their aim to synthesize old and new involves a modern awareness that a particular usable folk past is never merely a return to an original folk source (ibid.: 5) but always also a construction of a folk past within a larger mythical frame.

While critics like Roskies affirm continuity, others have focused on rupture as the dominant theme and the appropriate response to the literature that emerged from the tumultuous events and clashing ideologies of the first half of the twentieth century. Novershtern, in his Hebrew book *Kesem hadimdumim: Apokalipsa umeshikhut besifrut Yiddish* (*The Lure of Twilight: Apocalypse and Messianism in Yiddish Literature*) (2003), traces the themes of apocalypse and messianism among Yiddish writers such as Anna Margolin and Yankev Glatshteyn, who have represented fragmented and disintegrated worlds and nightmarish visions in their works. In his research, Novershtern taps into the accounts of modernism that have made alienation its signature trait.

Whereas the first two approaches regard Yiddish literature within a Jewish literary system, the third approach seeks to make a place for Yiddish literature on a map of Western modernism with its canonical figures in major languages. This is best exemplified by Chana Kronfeld's *On the Margins of Modernism* (1996). Drawing on Raymond Williams's (1989: 34) formulation that modernism is a narrative of "unsettlement, homelessness, solitude and impoverished independence," Kronfeld argues that if modernism is indeed famous for the marginal and the exile, it must look beyond major language writing to alternative traditions. Her aim in the book is to call attention to the way that both modern Hebrew and Yiddish literatures exemplify international modernism by their self-aware marginality and their linguistic practices, which she illustrates in the works of Halpern, Simon Markish, and Avraham Sutskever, among others. The effect of constructing the major through minor language writing, she argues, would be not only a less ex-

clusionary model of modernism but also a new understanding of minor literature beyond Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's formulation, where she observes slippage between the "modern" and the "minor." Kronfeld (1996: 6) opposes their claim that minor writing is restricted to oppositional writing in a major language because it "precludes any alternative modeling of an international literary trend such as modernism on its 'non-major' linguistic practices."[5] The multilingual Jewish culture in Europe out of which Yiddish language and literature emerge questions the single lens that designates a literature as major or minor.

A point of departure for these groundbreaking studies of Yiddish is multilingual Jewish life in all its diverse forms, as delineated by Harshav in *The Polyphony of Jewish Culture* (2007), as modern Yiddish writers who are the subjects of these studies have related to Yiddish as one venue for expression among other languages in their social, cultural, and textual milieu. In most cases, Yiddish was not a "natural" choice; it was fraught with issues of self-presentation, religion versus secularism, educational practices, and social interaction both within the Jewish world and with Gentile neighbors. Similar to Weinreich's contention that the process of fusion in Yiddish language formation did not stop with its creation but is "continuous and cumulative" (1980: 30) we can conclude from the research of the first decade of the twenty-first century that the multilingual dimension of Yiddish literary study has also been continuous and cumulative. This is evident in the subjects that have engaged scholars of modern Yiddish literature over the past two decades: canon formation, translation theory and practice, "postvernacular" language, and multilingual poetics.

In *The Modern Jewish Canon* (2003), Ruth Wisse makes the case for a specific canon of modern Jewish literature, admittedly within the bounds of Ashkenazi Jewry and its descendants, drawing on theories of nation and folk that emphasize language, from Johann Gottfried Herder to Benedict Anderson. Not only does she include authors who wrote in Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Russian, and English, but she also pairs authors across languages in her chapters, such as Glatshteyn (Yiddish) and S. Y. Agnon (Hebrew) or Yosef Haim Brenner (Hebrew) and Franz Kafka (German). For her, modern Jewish writing begins with the Yiddish author Sholem Aleichem, whom she treats as the progenitor of that canon. On the one hand, Wisse (ibid.: 7) claims, "politically anomalous Jews generated a multilingual literature unlike

5. For a collection of essays dedicated to the impact of Kronfeld's work on Yiddish literature as part of her general contribution to the study of Jewish literature, see the introduction by David Shneer and Robert Adler-Peckerar (2014) in the special issue of the *Journal of Jewish Identities* in honor of her work.

that of any other modern nation," as is evident in the diverse languages represented in her canon. On the other hand, a result of the Jews' attitude toward language has been the antipathy of some of its writers to the "inferior" language, Yiddish, as discussed above. "The Jewish people and the Yiddish language share almost the same fate," Wisse (ibid.) quotes from the social philosopher Chaim Zhitlowsky (1955 [1904]: 112). "Both are first required to prove their legitimacy: the Jewish people, that it really is a people and the Yiddish language, that it really is a language."

By contrast, Miron (2010: 275) has recently argued that there is no one modern Jewish literature but rather "a complex, multifarious entity consisting of different connected, semi-connected, and unconnected particles." For Miron, Sholem Aleichem is not the starting point for a modern Jewish literature, as Wisse claims. Instead, as the title of one of the chapters of his recent book *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* suggests, he is interested in "How Kafka and Sholem Aleichem are Contiguous" (ibid.: 351). Miron argues that continuity is an outmoded and ineffective concept in discussions of Jewish literature and it should be replaced by contiguity or tangency. In this model, studies of Yiddish literature would reflect the intersection of specific Yiddish literary works with works in other languages, points of contact that are occasional, mobile, and transitory (ibid.: 276).

Yiddish writing in America has shown one such interesting contiguity that extends the boundaries of both Yiddish writing and Jewish American culture. Anita Norich's book *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and Jewish American Culture during the Holocaust* (2007) challenges the historical relationship between Yiddish and English-language Jewish culture in America. According to her, "Yiddish and English are generally seen on a continuum, inhabiting different, occasionally overlapping, but basically sequential spheres. . . . First there was Yiddish . . . then Yiddish was replaced by English" (ibid.: 4). Resisting the popular notion of a reified Eastern European past that gave way to assimilated Jewish American literature in English, Norich attempts to establish "a different canon of American Jewish letters." She argues that Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish literature "overlap more frequently and more significantly than is commonly supposed" (ibid.). The poet Glatshteyn and the novelist Sholem Asch, both highly controversial writers for very different reasons, play a major role in her argument. Yiddish literature in America, Norich claims, belongs to both transnational Yiddish literature and American literature, just as Harshav had argued earlier in his extensive introduction to the landmark

volume *American Yiddish Poetry* (Harshav and Harshav 1986) that this corpus was an integral part of American literature.[6]

Coming to Yiddish literature from the perspective of American writing, Lawrence Rosenwald also argues for the inclusion of Yiddish writing in America in the American canon, placing his emphasis on multilingual writing strategies and poetic choices. In *Multilingual America: Language and the Making of American Literature* (2008), Rosenwald calls attention to English as linguistic "other" in the works of Yiddish writers in the United States. He provides a "portrait of American English in American Yiddish literature" (ibid.: 84) grounded in the language practices of the day and in the artistic choices about language representation made by the authors he examines, among them Leo Kobrin, Moyshe Nadir, and Abraham Cahan. Rosenwald offers an astute reading of Sholem Aleichem's celebrated American work *Motl, the Cantor's Son* (1916), which he singles out for its dramatization of the encounter between English and Yiddish. In contrast to Rosenwald's treatment of English in Yiddish, my own work on this subject in *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (2006) studies the representation of Yiddish in literature written in English in the United States from the end of the nineteenth century to the present using a variety of poetic strategies, among them speech representation, eye dialect, transposed syntax, bilingual wordplay, and intertextuality. Such traces of Yiddish in English writing by both immigrant and native-born American authors capture the way in which artists negotiate between languages that they evade, repress, transgress, mourn, resist, deny, translate, romanticize, and at times also reify. Among the authors are Cahan (who published novels in English as well as Yiddish), Henry Roth, Bellow, and Ozick.

These literary encounters between Yiddish and English require taking a close look at translation strategies within each work. Another approach to the topic of translation is Naomi Seidman's (2006: 3) recent book *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation*, where she analyzes the translation of entire works, "the movement of history on the stage of Jewish-Christian translation" from the Bible to the fiction of Singer. Acknowledging her debt to postcolonial translation studies, Seidman (ibid.: 2) explores the power relations that are integral to translation, "the contingent political situations in which translation, and inevitably, mistranslation arise." Her goal is to expose and analyze "the asymmetrical relations between cultures rather than essentially symmetrical relations between languages"

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6. Norich (1992) extended the corpus of Yiddish literature from a gender perspective in her introduction to *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*. New gendered readings of Yiddish language and literature can be found in Hadda 1992; Hellerstein 1992; and Seidman 1997.

(ibid.: 7). In short, who is translating what for whom and why. In her study of Singer's much anthologized debut story in English translation "Gimpel, the Fool" (1953), she argues that the translation from Yiddish for a non-Jewish readership resulted in expunging the Christian elements in the original text that might offend the dominant and powerful Christian culture. Seidman also draws attention to the way that at times the very use of Yiddish in a cross-cultural encounter takes on a performative quality, that Yiddish itself becomes a form of signification.

This association of Yiddish and performativity in today's revival of Yiddish is Jeffrey Shandler's subject in *Adventures in Yiddishland* (2006), a study of what he labels "postvernacular Yiddish." Invoking Harshav's semiotics of Yiddish communication, Shandler claims that "what most distinguishes postvernacular Yiddish is its semiotic hierarchy," where "the language's secondary, symbolic level of meaning is always privileged over the primary level." In other words, in postvernacular Yiddish, "the very fact that something is said (or written or sung) in Yiddish is at least as meaningful as the meaning of the words being uttered—if not more so" (ibid.: 22). According to Shandler, postvernacularity characterizes other languages as well, "whose 'native' communities have grappled with language maintenance" in the face of "various social, political, and cultural" challenges, such as Ainu, Irish, and Navajo (ibid.: 23). Furthermore, he points out that nonvernacular languages have been a vital part of the Jewish past since the Babylonian exile, with Judeo-Aramaic functioning as a postvernacular language for hundreds of years. Shandler's concept has implications for our current notions of what constitutes a speech community and accounts for some of the Yiddish activities that are currently attracting participants worldwide, among them Yiddish summer programs and retreats, new journals for Yiddish creative writing, and Internet sites.[7]

Finally, in this brief mapping of recent scholarship on Yiddish, Marc Caplan introduces the concept of "peripheral modernisms" as a tool that accounts for the literature produced in societies whose entry into the world of modernity was belated as a result of being under the influence of empires. In *How Strange the Change: Language, Temporality, and Narrative Form in Peripheral Modernisms* (2011), Caplan compares nineteenth-century Yiddish literature and twentieth-century Anglophone and Francophone African literatures for the similar ways in which they were caught between imperial global languages and stigmatized native vernaculars.

7. Yiddish continues to be spoken as a vernacular language among Ultraorthodox Jews, but their practice is not relevant in discussions of modern Yiddish literature, with which they have no contact.

In the spirit of this new scholarship on Yiddish, the essays in this special issue approach Yiddish literature from diverse perspectives current in literary criticism and theory. Ken Frieden addresses the cross-fertilization of German and Yiddish in his analysis of the impact of German literature on Yiddish sea narratives at the start of the nineteenth century. Translations of Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Die Entdekkung von Amerika* (1781–82) into Yiddish, Frieden argues, influenced both maskilic writers (adherents of the Enlightenment) and Hasidic writing, most notably the work of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav. In this essay, Frieden traces how key works in one language have influenced literary and cultural history in another. Thus, Campe's German text was extraordinarily influential in Yiddish literary history.

In addition to German, the other language that has an equally complex relationship with Yiddish is Hebrew. Although Yiddish is written in the Hebrew alphabet, contains many Hebrew words, and produces literature often steeped in Hebrew textuality, the relationship between the languages has often been highly charged. The language wars between Hebrew and Yiddish in the European Jewish communities up to World War II expressed two major approaches to Jewish collective identity, apart from mass immigration to America. The Zionist movement was fervently committed to the revival of Hebrew and deemed Yiddish a diasporic liability that posed an obstacle to the creation of a unified society of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland. On the other hand, advocates of Yiddish, such as Weinreich, a known linguist and the intellectual force behind the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in Vilna, favored autonomy for Jews in Eastern Europe, with Yiddish as their national language. At the Czernowitz Conference on Jewish language in 1908, Yiddish achieved parity with Hebrew when it was declared *a* language of the Jewish people. Three decades later, the Yiddish critic Shmuel Niger (1941: 11) put it concisely: "One language has never been enough for the Jewish people."

Despite this recognition, the language wars continued in Israel in the years following political independence, resulting in the triumph of Hebrew and the stigmatizing of Yiddish as a language of Jewish vulnerability and weakness, now superseded by the language of state sovereignty. Yiddish was systematically marginalized. Despite this attitude toward Yiddish, argues Shachar Pinsker, the language maintained a strong presence even in Israeli modernist poetry and fiction during the early years of the state. In his essay, he traces the parallels between Hebrew and Yiddish literary expression in that period in the Likrat and the Yung Yisroel movements, respectively, and in the prose of Yossl Birshtein and Ya'akov Shabtai.

The topic of Yiddish in relation to other languages and cultures is at the heart of several other essays in this volume. Insofar as translation into Yiddish

was always aimed at a Jewish readership, the translation of the New Testa-
ment, often the work of Jewish converts to Christianity, was a strategy to
attract new converts and therefore was received with suspicion. In Naomi
Seidman's essay, "A Gift for the Jewish People," she focuses on twentieth-
century translations of the New Testament that emphasized the Hebraic
component of Yiddish and received a positive response from secular Yiddish
writers. They regarded such translations as a Hebraizing of Jesus, or as
another translated landmark of world literature that enriches the existing
repertoire available for cosmopolitan Yiddish authors. The poetic and socio-
linguistic issues that arise in the stylized representation of Yiddish in Polish
writing are examined by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska in her analysis of the
works of the Jewish Polish writer Julian Stryjkowski. She takes a close look at
the syntactic, semantic-lexical, and phonetic-orthographic levels of his styl-
ized representation of Yiddish and at how it functions as a form of commem-
oration through deformation. My own essay in this volume, "Yiddish as
Voice and Letter in Post-Holocaust Literature," is also dedicated to traces
of Yiddish in non-Yiddish writing, specifically in post-Holocaust literature,
where Yiddish is often represented as a commemorative site. Yiddish as a
fusion language, with its phonetic, alphabetic, lexical, and boundary cross-
ings, becomes an analogue for the boundary crossings portrayed in the worlds
of two literary works concerned with the fate of Yiddish and its speakers in
the Holocaust: Gilles Rozier's novel *L'amour sans resistance* (2003) and Daniel
Mendelsohn's American memoir *The Lost* (2006). In both of these books, the
dramatic moments in the narrative are produced by alphabetic ruptures in
the text, which enact the highly charged dynamic of Hebrew and German as
components of Yiddish.

David Roskies's essay "Call It Jewspeak: On the Evolution of Speech in
Modern Yiddish Writing" offers an innovative overview of modern Yiddish
writing by identifying spoken language as a central feature of this corpus.
According to Roskies, the representation of speech in modern Yiddish writ-
ing was never intended to be ethnographic but rather replaced "the old
orality with the new." He identifies four historical phases of this orality,
ending with the post-Holocaust phase: there, the vocal strain moved from
the periphery to the center of Yiddish literary culture, becoming "Jewspeak:
an essential expression of the once-living folk."

Although the essays in this volume discuss modern Yiddish literature from
a variety of approaches, genres, and periods, all of them address Yiddish
textuality, its production and its reception, in a multilingual context. The
unique historical, linguistic, and literary features of Yiddish offer new oppor-
tunities for exploring translation, poetics, hermeneutics, literary history,
reading practices, commemorative sites in print, and intercultural relations.

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