

Dos eygene Daytshland: Anthologizing Jewish Multilingualism
in and beyond the Habsburg Empire

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

For the past century, anthologies containing German poetic texts in Yiddish translation have appeared in and beyond the former Habsburg Empire. Broadly conceiving translations as a series of “unfinished” published and unpublished texts that appeared before and after the Second World War, this dissertation traces the circulation in and beyond Central Europe of German-language poetry in Yiddish, and points to a relatedness between two seemingly disparate Jewish language groups that fell victim to marginalization, genocide, and displacement. In so doing, this dissertation maps contiguities “between” the languages used by Yiddish readers, writers, and translators. Furthermore, these contiguities destabilize traditional definitions of Ashkenazi Yiddish-Hebrew bi-/multilingualism within Eastern European Jewry, by noting the prolonged engagement with German and German Jewish culture across space and time. What emerges instead, is a longer, still-unfolding history of multilingual, communal, Jewish textual memory (*i.e.*, translation). Often overlooked in the monolingual environs of North America and Israel, these texts have the ability to challenge English- and Hebrew-language hegemony that continues to render encounters with Yiddish and other languages obsolete, to instead provide resilient, multilingual, and diasporic Jewish cultural models.

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION, TRANSLATION OF SOURCES, AND PLACE NAMES:

The reliance on a singular orthographic system in a dissertation such as this one is all but impossible, and would in many ways undermine the spirit of this project. I thus adhere to several standard practices throughout:

When referring to operative, historical, or definitive terms significant to Yiddish culture, I adhere to the YIVO standard spelling of Yiddish script or transliteration.

If common renderings of well-known authors and political figures exist in English, I revert to those spellings (i.e., Sholem *Aleichem* instead of the more phonetically accurate Sholem *Aleykhem*). If bibliographical data differs from these more common spellings (when systems of transliteration across multiple countries and languages are not constant), I retain the spellings in the bibliographical data for ease of future research.

When citing translations from the German, I explicitly note whenever possible any deviations from proscribed norms that the translators used in their works. This added textual layer pays homage to seismic cultural shifts, under which the authors and translators in question found themselves (and often had a hand in shaping).

I also avoid using monolithic terminology such as “German(s),” “Jew(s),” “Russian(s),” “Pole(s),” etc. and instead use terms that linguistically ground the discussion such as “Yiddish speaker(s),” even if such terms also inadequately reflect the multilingual, multimodal, and intertextual realities that form the center of this dissertation.

Place names also pose challenges, as they are inherently political in nature. Cities commonly known in English as Vienna, Detroit, and Tel Aviv elide in their naming and hegemonic usage the multilingual and multidirectional histories of these locales. Furthermore, categorization systems like the ones used by the Library of Congress often defer to contemporary spellings (i.e., the hegemonic norms that likewise do not reflect the fraught politics of naming). When warranted, I use multiple place names simultaneously (Lviv/Lwów/Lemberg/Lemberik, Kyiv/Kiev, etc.), especially at points where Yiddish history has been erased. I also realize the inconsistencies and failures of my own system when using a single place name for locales in North America and the Middle East. This inconsistency serves as an opportunity to further engage with the politics of naming in future projects.

Unless otherwise noted, any translations from German, Yiddish, and Hebrew into English are my own.

FRADEL SHTOK

by Irene Klepfisz

*They make it sound easy: some disjointed
sentences a few allusions to
mankind. But for me it was not
so simple more like trying
to cover the distance from here
to the corner or between two sounds.*

*Think of it: heym and home the meaning
the same of course exactly
but the shift in vowel was the ocean
in which I drowned.*

*I tried. I did try.
First held with Yiddish but you
know it's hard. You write gas
and street echoes back
No resonance. And—let's face it—
memory falters.
You try to keep track of the difference
like got and god or hoyz and house
but they blur and you start using
alley when you mean gesele or avenue
when it's a bulevar.¹*

¹ Irene Klepfisz, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue: Poems Selected and New* (Portland: The Eighth Mountain Press, 1990), 228-29. About the poem's namesake: Fradl Shtok (1890-1990) was born in Galicia in 1890, and emigrated to the United States as a teenager. A prolific writer in both Yiddish and English, Shtok's life reflects the fraught histories of gender, migration, and language with regard to modern Yiddish literature. She published little after the 1920s, and not much is known about her later life. *From the Yiddish Provinces*, an anthology of Shtok's writings in English translation completed by Jordan D. Finkin and Allison Schachter, appeared in 2022 with Northwestern University Press.

Introduction: From the Transnational to the Contiguous

The birth of modern Yiddishism (i.e., the formation of cultural paradigms in and for Yiddish) consists of multiple complex phenomena, full of competing cultural moments within and beyond East Central Europe. As is still stubbornly the case, however, most studies of Yiddish culture quickly confine themselves to a singular place and time. Given the tumultuous history of Yiddish culture, it is not surprising that temporal and geographical parameters quickly become operative and determined markers seemingly easy to quantify. Furthermore, while ruptures and changing borders provide convenient roadmaps for later, nationalized histories, they do not work well for deterritorialized languages and cultures. Thus, the romantic urge to nostalgize and essentialize particularities means marginal(ized) figures, modes, and ways of being in literature fall into obscurity. Yiddish is no exception.

One such dominant example is Russian literary and cultural history's hold on Yiddish culture. It is certainly worth mentioning that many Jewish intellectuals from various walks of life sought to define a Yiddish nation at a time of great social, economic, and political upheaval before and following the Russian Revolution, and the geopolitical legacy of 20th-century Russia on Jewish culture thus became one such signifier for Yiddish studies. Tracing this history is also not difficult. In Czarist Russia alone, where the majority of Yiddish-speaking Jews resided, a series of events became the basis for radical Yiddish politics: the 1881 assassination of Alexander II by *Narodnaya Volya*, the

illegal founding of the Jewish Labor Bund² in an attic in Vilna (Variant of the Yiddish: Vilne; present-day Vilnius) in 1897, the failed 1905 revolution, and (not to mention) the Russian Revolution itself profoundly shaped, and were shaped by, Jewish subjects in the Pale of Settlement's quickly radicalizing urban centers. How apt that individuals like Abraham Cahan (1860-1951), active in *Narodnaya Volya* before founding the *Forverts* in New York), Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), S. An-Ski (1863-1920), and the three *Klasikers* of Yiddish literature—Sholom Aleichem (1859-1916), Y.L. Peretz (1852-1915), and Mendele Moykher-Sforim (1836-1917) the pen name of S.Y. Abromovitsh—all hailed from the Russian Empire, and shaped Yiddish cultural and political narratives through the interwar and post-World-War-II periods.

² See Daniel Blatman, "Bund," in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (2010). <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bund> (accessed March 30, 2022). *Der Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln, un Rusland* (i.e., the Bund) emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as a political movement, consisting of working-class, Yiddish-speaking Jews (who had quickly become a sizable minority in the Russian Empire's western urban centers), and upper-class, assimilated Jews, who had received modern educations in Russian. The early goals of the Bundists were to incorporate the Yiddish-speaking masses into the larger revolutionary movements taking hold in Russia, and to radicalize Jewish workers fighting for greater economic, cultural and political rights. Following the Bolshevik absorption of the Bund and the founding of the Soviet Union, Poland became the Bund's interwar center, where a nascent Yiddish school system, youth movement, and other cultural activities promoting Diaspora Nationalism developed. During the Second World War, Bundist leaders were targeted and executed by the Nazis and the Soviets, and many Bundists involved in various uprisings did not survive the war. Bundist Holocaust survivors founded various initiatives in the postwar era, continuing for as long as possible many of the activities that blossomed during the interwar period. As such, the Bund's history generally falls into three eras, all of which are generally tied to specific spatial and temporal windows: Imperial Russia (pre-1917), interwar and World War II in East Central Europe (1918-1945), and post-1945 Bundism within a larger Jewish diaspora. As its early, middle, later periods suggest, the Bund's relationship to language is complicated. For one, the Bund was inherently a multilingual organization, even if Yiddish became the de-facto language due to its use among the Jewish working class (e.g., assimilated Jewish elites among the Bund's early proponents learned Yiddish as adults). Second, the Bund's promotion of the Yiddish language put it at odds with Zionist and (both Yiddish-speaking and other) Communist movements during the interwar period. And lastly, the Bund's political and cultural marginalization following World War II, the creation of the State of Israel, and further repression in the Eastern Bloc countries, forced its surviving members to adapt new strategies for cultural survival. Today, the Bund's history remains an important, albeit highly-romanticized and heavily-nostalgized, part of Yiddish cultural history. As the case studies in this dissertation will highlight, the life and afterlife of the Bund and its members are just one of several complicated threads weaving throughout 20th- and 21st century Jewish politics and memory.

Narratives such as these (largely perpetuated by the post-World-War-II Bund), however, highlight only a small section of a broader, more complicated picture of Yiddish culture as it emerged within a multilingual milieu of writers and thinkers; modern Yiddish textuality took more complex, multidirectional turns.³ Needless to say, transnational turns in History and Textual and Media Studies fields have long illustrated the ways national borders and corresponding politics poorly reflect more comprehensive stories of cultural movements. However, many transnational (as its name suggests) narratives still rely on nationalistic (i.e., continuous) constructs of singularity and cohesion of some kind.

For example, even if disparate events often collide in scholarly discourse to demonstrate the geographic, political, and cultural diversity of Ashkenazi Jews at the turn of the 19th century and into the 20th, transnational networks often (over)rely on coterminous events. 1897 (the year of the Bund's founding) also became associated with Zionism and the first Zionist Congress that took place in Basel of that year. Across the ocean in New York, former revolutionaries founded the *Forverts* in New York City in 1897. The Bund went on to shape modern Yiddish culture in interwar Poland and elsewhere. The *Forverts* went on to become the largest Yiddish daily in terms of overall circulation, and arguably situated American Yiddish literature as an avant-garde center well into the interwar period. Certainly, Zionism's complicated legacy persists today both

³ As Marc Volovici notes in his book, *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism*, Russian was hardly the only majority linguistic and cultural framework with a complicated legacy. When taking this complex network of code switching into account, it quickly becomes apparent that the use of any language (Jewish or otherwise) could be read as reactionary or political in environs where multilingualism made the "option of choosing" possible in the first place. This also becomes apparent in the environs where German was itself a marker of multilingualism. "German thus occupied a profoundly ambivalent role, reinforcing opposing currents in Jewish nationalism." (7)

in Israel Palestine and abroad. But even the linking of coterminous events falls into two additional traps that plague transnational approaches.

For one, watershed moments also elide long-standing trends for the sake of “newness” and rupture, a continuing problem that plagues many histories of social and cultural movements seeking legitimacy and visibility with rich usable pasts. And second, a dominant narrative inevitably threads itself throughout such a mapping that, in the context of Jewish literature and culture, privileges certain languages, place, as well as latent trends that confirm rather than complicate our understanding of the past and its role for the present and future. Even with numerous “Yiddish revivals” (that arguably relied heavily on surviving speakers and artists active within their ranks), Isaac Bashevis Singer’s 1978 Nobel Prize, and the many ways Yiddish speakers and their descendants shaped broader culture, Yiddish as it existed before and after the Holocaust tends to persist in a singular idyllic time and place, one that many secular Yiddishists continue to pine for. Today’s audiences and producers of Yiddish culture are anything but dead, outmoded, irretrievable, or immune from scrutiny, but often the modes of reading that rely on the lachrymose, nostalgic, and the elegiac persist, and are part and parcel of Yiddish’s postwar placement as worthless to outsiders or worse: dead.

Contiguities of Jewish Multilingualism

Yiddish culture (even today) reflects more complicated facets of Jewish multilingualism, translation, and textuality that emerged with modern Jewish cultures more than a century ago. This mode of languaging, still alive and well in spite of its critics and status as an endangered language, often unearths previously silenced archival subjects. This is important for several reasons. The use of Yiddish among secular

audiences, even if used in “postvernacular” contexts, varies the usage of Yiddish, and reflects linguistic, political and geographic pluralism that (albeit on a smaller scale) one would have witnessed in the 1930s and prior. Jews, non-Jews, Jews by choice, etc. are part of this community, which, again reflects the linguistic and cultural usages of Yiddish among various neighboring groups prior to the Holocaust. Do debates around Yiddish—namely around secularism, language, place, and time—shape modern Jewish culture today as much as they did in Eastern Europe starting in the 1860s?

The short answer is an absolute yes, but more critical interventions that grapple with archival silences also point to the ways Yiddish further represents both the divides as well as the porousness of cultural ruptures. On the one hand, the continued presence of Yiddish and other other minoritized Jewish languages certainly complicates triumphalist Zionist and assimilationist narratives in Israel and abroad.⁴ On the other hand, Yiddish is also a language of multiplicities at the ambivalent crossroads of modernity—situated between the secular and religious, the Jewish and the non-Jewish, national and the deterritorialized, hegemonic and the marginalized. It is this continued ideological, social, and cultural openness that temporally echoes the struggles that faced modern Yiddish culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Whether successes or failures, even today Yiddish speakers almost always allude (and sometimes ambivalently so) to the inherently multilingual timing of its usage. Can temporality thus become a more complicated

⁴ Liora Halperin, *Babel in Zion* 228ff. As Halperin’s groundbreaking study makes clear, multiple languages have long played an ambivalent, complex role for Zionist state-building. In particular, multilingualism (promoted by both Jewish Zionists and British colonial forces) helped shape Jewish attachment to the Zionist project. As such, Halpern complicates any of the lingering, overarching, and triumphalist narratives regarding the Hebrew language, which have long shrouded the linguistic realities within Israel-Palestine.

marker than place, and situate Yiddish literary activity within larger structural and societal realities that remain overlooked in archival sources?

The notions of temporality at the center of this dissertation are the ways in which languages become simultaneously in use. And in turn, the distinctions between “Jewish” and the “non-Jewish” languages (and language usage) become blurry, as do any Jewish or non-Jewish markers distinguishing Yiddish, Hebrew, or Aramaic from the German, Russian, English, etc speakers from one another. This is not to say simultaneity is a “successful” paradigm in rectifying linguistic or cultural marginalization or structural inequalities. Simultaneity is nevertheless a persistent, destabilizing mode.

This is where I turn to Dan Miron’s *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking*. Miron argues that, for a culture without a singular “canon” of texts in one language, multiples emerge and take on lives of their own. Countering what the Hebrew writer Baal Makhshoves’ (1873-1924) coined “two languages [Hebrew and Yiddish], one literature,” Dan Miron reframes as, “one text: two or more entirely separate literatures.”⁵ Not only does multilingualism define Jewish experience, more recent examples that try to undermine this history (as found in interwar Palestine and post-1948 Israel with Hebrew, in the Soviet Union with Russian, assimilation into American whiteness via English monolingualism, etc.) We therefore must look to other models of reading Jewish literature that do not rely on notions of continuity but contiguity.⁶

⁵ Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 224.

⁶ Miron’s book is a groundbreaking provocation in multiple ways. For one, Miron largely destabilizes Israel-centric readings of Jewish culture that have, both in and outside of the country, become the de-facto norm in many areas of Jewish studies. It is Miron’s own ability to operate in multiple languages that makes this more comprehensive reading of modern Jewish culture, historiography and literature possible, and it is something that cannot be taken for granted in either American or Israeli (and even: European) scholarly spaces. Sadly, Miron largely grounds his study in historical trends that shy away from American Jewish culture which, though understandably a topic of its own, creates more questions than answers. Miron largely ignores American Yiddish literature and culture for world literary paradigms. Instead, he grounds

Contiguity, Miron argues, stems from traditional and secular Jewish education occurring in multiple languages, the resulting study of multiple literary traditions, the fierce ideological stakes writers refused to shy away from, and the reading audiences in dialogue with writers.

Although a topic as broad and all-encompassing as Jewish multilingualism is beyond the scope of a singular project, I still must address the topic and its effects on Jewish textuality, translation, and Ashkenazic Jewish cultures the world over. From the origin myths found in the Hebrew Bible, to numerous periods of exile in both the ancient and modern world, Jewish experience continues to shape and be shaped by multiple languages simultaneously. Even taking into account only Hebrew and Aramaic (itself a bilingual system that emerged following the Babylonian Exile), or certainly when casting a wider net to demonstrate (especially with the development of modern Yiddish culture) that Jewish multilingualism extended into majority languages, classical languages, etc. the flexibility of this simultaneity meant it has existed in some form for millennia. It is this simultaneity as mediation that defines the reading of texts, as well as the engagement with other peoples in daily life.

Simultaneity also points to the instability and porous nature of Jewish multilingualism, at times often rigidly defined by gender norms and hierarchies that

his readings in the works of Sholem Aleichem and Kafka. In so doing, Miron also glosses over Yiddish literature and culture on the margins of Eastern Europe in Habsburg Austria. Not only did American Yiddish literature and culture before World War I go on to shape interwar Yiddish modernism in Europe, the United States and Canada remained central to postwar Yiddish culture. In addition, English-speaking American Jewish culture would have benefited greatly from this model of contiguity when taking into account American Jewish erasure, suppression, etc. of its own multilingual pasts. Thus, Miron sometimes falls into a “centering” of his own that, is not Eurocentric per se, relies heavily on the fraught terrain Eurocentrism produces. Although he posits the need for similar studies on Hebrew-Arabic or Hebrew-Ladino contiguities, his own discussion of these issues, however, awaits the reader in his concluding remarks. As such, Miron’s exhaustive study is simply a starting point for much larger initiatives that need to take place.

(although critically important to subvert and critique) did not always reflect reality. For example, it is commonly assumed (and still often taught) that Yiddish, as the vernacular, received a lowly status in comparison to the Holy Tongues (*loshn-koydesh*) of Hebrew and Aramaic, languages associated with religious texts and learning reserved for men. Although this gendered binary existed (i.e., men privileged enough to devote their time to religious study gained this fluency in Hebrew/Aramaic in addition to Yiddish), women were not necessarily illiterate in the *concepts* found in Hebrew/Aramaic texts (pointing to other forms of textual literacy), nor were the majority of men actually versed in Hebrew/Aramaic. As scholars such as Naomi Seidman have argued, these rigid male/female distinctions only solidified with modern Jewish literature and the ensuing language wars between Hebrew and Yiddish that intensified in the early 20th century.⁷

As much as modern Yiddish and Hebrew cultures shaped modern understandings of multilingualism via their respective language politics, it is also important to note the more complicated multilingual engagement with texts at the heart of Ashkenazi Jewish literacy: the language of the holy texts (written in Hebrew and Aramaic) and the use of Yiddish as the exegetical language. In fact, “language wars” are as old as the Yiddish language itself. Even if mass print allowed for reading audiences to emerge in Yiddish across a variety of genres, Yiddish nevertheless was an intermediary between the sacred and profane in such a way that, due to the geographic diversity of Ashkenazi culture in and beyond Europe, semiotically imbues it with nuance, complexity, and irony few other languages came to possess in Jewish history.

⁷ Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven*, 15-17.

Furthermore, Seidman importantly takes into account the much longer history of coded usage of both languages side by side, pointing to the necessity of more than one language at play at any given moment. Even if most readers over time were ultimately unable to read texts in both Yiddish and Hebrew, we know that this simultaneity continued and remained important for Jewish literary theory in both languages. Shmuel Charney in the United States and Bal-Makhshoves might have maintained a program of “two languages, one literature” for both Yiddish and Hebrew letters respectively, but that had had begun with the first major Yiddish and Hebrew writer, Mendele Moykher-Sforim. Miron updates to “one text: two or more literatures.” Even if some Yiddishists were critical of the Hebrew (and Zionist) project, or Zionists sought to elide all mention of Yiddish from the *ouevres* of nascent Hebrew literature, it is near impossible to ignore the cultural realities of Jewish literature and culture past and present. Simply looking at Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, and in locales bursting with political activity of all sorts, any given community was actively engaged in multiple languages. Even with further displacement during two world wars, genocides, and top-down language policies, spoken multilingualism persisted in the ways it had for centuries.

Lingering Multilingualism: A History of Yiddish Culture⁸

⁸Although scholarly works that trace the life and afterlife of Jewish multilingualism in and beyond Central Europe, similarly important projects have recently pointed to the belated break between Hebrew and Yiddish, further complicating the narrative that posits the First World War as the final point of departure. Naomi Brenner, in *Lingering Bilingualism*, offers a crucial intervention in this discourse. Brenner, countering Dan Miron, argues that the contact between Hebrew and Yiddish continued well into the interwar period, as the development of both Hebrew and Yiddish literatures took unexpected spatial and linguistic turns. I am deeply indebted to Brenner’s intervention, while I also seek to highlight the ways any “lingering” engagement also occurred with the majority European languages spoken by Eastern European Jews.

Yiddish emerged as the distinct vernacular of Ashkenazi Jews in the 10th and 11th centuries in what is today Southeastern France and Western Germany. A product of Middle High German, Romance languages, as well as Hebrew and Aramaic (i.e., together in Yiddish known as *loshn-koydesh*, or the “Holy Tongue”), what became known as the Western variant of Yiddish reflected the complexities and nuances of Ashkenazi Jewish life. This fusion element of Yiddish also signifies one of the central tenets of Ashkenazi culture: external and internal multilingualism. Ashkenazi Jews, as a minority in Christian-majority Europe, usually used majority languages to interact with their non-Jewish neighbors; this is an example of external bilingualism. Internal bilingualism is much more complex, and speaks to the historically central role of multiple languages in Jewish life. Basic literacy (the ability to decipher and write the letters of the Hebrew alphabet) was quite high. As the spoken vernacular of all in-group members, Yiddish (i.e., the *mame-loshn*; “mother tongue” or native language — the term itself being a linguistic amalgam of Slavic and Hebrew words) was the most common language, followed in theory by *loshn-koydesh*: Hebrew and Aramaic. Although Hebrew/Aramaic took on greater prestige in the patriarchal realms of traditional Judaism thanks to religious and legalistic study, and Yiddish became associated with domestic life (i.e., the purview of women and less-educated men), these divisions were nevertheless quite porous in addition to the complex role of the majority languages spoken. This blurring of distinctions and demarcations of language persisted throughout Yiddish cultural history, and by the time modern Yiddish culture emerged in Eastern Europe (and across the globe) in the 19th century, centuries of linguistic diversity had long created a vibrant print culture and poetics in and for Yiddish.

Hasidism, which emerged out of the immediate aftermath of false messiahs and the Chmielnicki Massacres, strove to connect common people to God. As such, Hasidism placed specific emphasis on Yiddish (as the language of the general population), to serve as a middle ground between the sacred and profane. And as a result, it was used for both religious and larger social rituals. Hasidic songs and storytelling, as well as folk melodies and drinking songs in Yiddish, had a direct impact on the development of various literary genres across centuries. Yiddish thus became an elevated medium of both the particulars of Jewish life and the universal, which became further apparent with other intellectual and religious trends. The *Misnagdim* (those against Hasidism) ultimately acquiesced to the necessity of Yiddish, even if they sought to preserve more elitist, traditional linguistic hierarchies and religious study (i.e., via Hebrew and Aramaic). And later, the *Maskilim* (adherents of the *Haskole*, or the Jewish branch of Enlightenment thought), although viewed the language as *zhargon*, quickly realized their ideas would not reach the masses without rendering them into a language all could understand. These resulting changes were two-fold: the mass popularization of ideas in Yiddish, and the development of a reading culture caught between multiple languages. These trends directly went on to shape internal politics in and for Yiddish for generations to come.

By the late nineteenth century, and with the gradual development of a Jewish middle class in Eastern Europe, these political and cultural trends coincided with larger forces affecting the Jewish population. One of the most pressing: what language(s) should Jews use? Many faced pressures of acculturation, and the dire conditions facing many Jews in Czarist Russia did not simplify matters, even for those with greater

mobility and secular education. Because industrialization in Russia led many Jews to major cities within the Pale of Settlement, Yiddish became a language for radical politics among the working classes. In addition, with the rise of a reading public, better access to education, and the rise of Zionism came the revival of Hebrew as a spoken vernacular.⁹ And within these two larger categories (Yiddishist and Hebraist/Zionist), there existed a diversity of political, social, and cultural paradigms that persisted well into the twentieth century. To reiterate from an earlier point of reference, the founding of the Jewish Labor Bund in Vilna, the first Zionist congress in Basel, and the founding of the largest Yiddish newspaper in New York (and the United States), the *Forverts*, all took place in 1897. This geographical, political, and linguistic map of Jewish culture at the turn of the twentieth century both represents and foreshadows the internal and external conflicts to come.

However, it is all too easy in hindsight to see tensions forming between battling groups vying for larger audiences, but prior to the First World War Ashkenazi Jewish writers wrote in more than one language by default. This “simultaneity,” or what Miron coins “integral” bi-/multilingualism, denotes equal standing given to multiple languages, and differs from the more common “differential” (i.e., diglossic) bi-/multilingualism: two or more languages used by one community but assigned specific societal roles. Most studies on integral bi-/multilingualism center around Ashkenazi Jewish writers in the late 19th century, who wrote in Yiddish and Hebrew—for two equally emerging national literatures. Even if Yiddish was the language of the Ashkenazi Jewish masses, and therefore came to address the material and cultural concerns of a demographic increasingly dispersed due to pogroms, emigration, and the First World War, Yiddish

⁹ Miron also notes that these class developments among Jews in Eastern Europe helped forge a new multilingualism that included modern Hebrew texts.

readers by default were not monolingual, and therefore engaged with words and ideas in multiple languages.

It would be shortsight to understate the effects of the First World War, which brought about massive change to the Jewish populations of Europe as well as unintended cultural foment. The regions that had been a part of the historic Pale of Settlement lay on the eastern front, and had thus been ravaged by constant destruction and occupation. Nevertheless, occupying German and Austrian forces sought to undermine the Russian war effort as much as possible by promoting Hebrew and Yiddish culture among Jewish activist groups. Following the war, when Yiddish received greater minority visibility and status in interwar successor states, many of the subversive acts that began in the years (and even decades) prior led to a cultural renaissance across East Central Europe. From the founding of YIVO in interwar Vilna, to the establishment of Soviet-sponsored Yiddish schools and institutes, war-time activity ultimately led to a variety of initiatives that helped spur this renaissance.

By the 1920s, Yiddish culture had already spanned the globe for several decades, and in cities across Poland and beyond, the Jewish population continued to make its presence known via (an albeit waning) Yiddish language and culture. Warsaw's Jewish population was still approximately 30% of its total, and was the home to a vibrant Yiddish press, theater, literary PEN club, and every other facet of high and low culture one can imagine. Soviet Yiddish culture building continued in cities like Kyiv/Kiev, Moscow, and Minsk, as well in the Soviet Far East in Birobidzhan. School systems developed among various political and cultural groups, each of which used Yiddish as a medium to disperse education as well as ideology. Most importantly, even if these groups,

networks, and spaces (for a time) sometimes adhered strictly to ideological boundaries, Yiddish speakers running Bundist schools in Lodz worked closely with their colleagues to the north in Vilna, or in far-flung places like New York and Buenos Aires. Interwar Yiddish culture was thus transnational, diverse, and vibrant.

Interwar Yiddish culture was also one of multiple crossroads. In addition, the war led to the exile of many Yiddish speakers in cities like Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, where they faced new challenges concerning cultural and linguistic belonging. Interwar Poland, Romania, etc. were still home to multilingual environs that had existed prior to the First World War, but began violently splintering along nationalist lines. In the United States, where the majority of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the Americas resided, Yiddish culture reached its zenith in the twenties and thirties at the very moment American-born children of Yiddish speakers abandoned the language for assimilation into white American culture. In Palestine, Yiddish remained a viable language for multiple waves of immigrants prior to and following the Second World War, but was violently suppressed by ideologues and public figures alike. In the Soviet Union, Stalinist purges in the thirties led to the end of earlier efforts to promote Soviet culture in and for Yiddish. Each of these trends also occurred alongside competing ideological factions, including assimilation and acculturation into majority cultures, Hebraic Zionism, etc. What began with westernization and modernization in the 19th century, and led to a cultural renaissance, was ironically at the root cause of Yiddish being deemed “obsolete.” As such, Yiddish was newly and consequently marked in multiple ways that led to waning usage prior to the Holocaust.

Nevertheless, it was in fact the mass murder of approximately 4.5 million Yiddish speakers (roughly half of the total number of speakers at the time) in its localized populations that led to its greatest decline. The Nazis annihilated not only two thirds of the European Jewish population, but they also destroyed a cultural medium spoken by the majority of its Jewish victims. This sad irony elides the profound loss that Yiddish itself came to reflect. The usage of the term *Khurbn* (loshn-koydesh for “destruction”) was also used for the destruction of the First and Second Temples. By connecting the ancient destructions, displacements, and dispersal of Jewish groups, Yiddish is central to our continued study of the Holocaust and its aftermath from the perspective of its victims.

Although Yiddish culture was destroyed in much of Europe, and the remaining speakers in the Soviet Union were “discouraged” (i.e., largely banned) from passing on the language to their children, some in fact did. Even in the State of Israel, many Yiddish speakers continued to produce and promote the works of their peers. In countries such as Argentina, Canada, and Australia, Holocaust survivors were able to create postwar centers for Yiddish activism. However, the number of secular speakers greatly declined, and mirrors similar trends among linguistic and cultural groups that fall victim to genocide. Yiddish, like many languages, has also lost out to majority languages as the vernacular used within and outside of Jewish spaces by Ashkenazi Jews, and further declines and prejudicial thinking led to marginalization of its speakers.

Hasidic Yiddish culture, however, continues to flourish in various ways. From newspapers and board games to online chat rooms run exclusively in Yiddish, Hasidic speakers are at the center of their own linguistic narrative that continues onward.

Although Hasidim have little use, or regard for, the modern Yiddish culture that emerged

in the 19th and 20th centuries, the diversity of Yiddish usage among Hasidic speakers is important to note.

As this brief dive into Ashkenazi multilingualism suggests, it is fair to assume that educated Yiddish readers committed to *Yiddishism* were familiar with the same canonical works (both religious or secular) by the 20th century, within Yiddish-speaking milieus there was a variety often ignored today as a result of this linguistic diversity. Regrettably, studies often confine themselves to specific geographical or philological traditions (e.g., Anglophone culture in North America, Russian culture, etc.). For example, Yiddish prose originated in Tsarist Russia, and attesting to this are the three aforementioned *klasiker* of modern Yiddish literature. Yiddish theater emerges in largely decentralized locales in (what is today) Romania, and becomes further popularized in sites of immigration (such as New York). With further waves of new immigrants to almost every continent on the planet, Yiddish theater migrated alongside them.

Dos eygne Daytshland: Translation and Yiddish Culture in Habsburg Galicia and Bukovina

Even more disparate is Yiddish poetry, which not only developed along routes of migration, it also reemerged in Central and Eastern Europe anew over time. More so than prose or theatrical works, Yiddish poetry appeared alongside revolutionary politics on the Lower East Side of New York before emerging in aesthetically-driven poetics just prior to the First World War. Poets such as Moyshe Leyb Halpern (1886-1932), himself Galician-born and educated in Vienna before leaving for New York, and Moyshe Nadir (1885-1943) are two examples of this multidirectional poetics, on both sides of the Atlantic, and influenced by the works of Heine and Rilke. As such, in its multidirectional

movement, Yiddish poetics arrived with Jewish immigrants to North America only to return aesthetically to Central Europe and shape the poetry of Young-Galicia poets at the forefront of Yiddish verse in Europe prior to the First World War. Not only did the experience of the War then shape their modernism, they saw the need for Yiddish poetics to enter a much larger conversation about peoples and place.

Yiddish literature thus reflects different strands of multilingualism, even as Yiddish cultural centers shifted over time. The constant is in fact this never-ending movement; displacement alongside a rootedness in textuality transforms Yiddish across time and space. The external languages that shaped Western Yiddish (Romance languages, Early Modern Dutch and German, etc.) before its eventual decline and extinction looked entirely different from the majority of the languages (mostly Slavic) that left their mark on Eastern Yiddish: Polish, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Russian, etc. Due to multilingualism, the fusion elements of Yiddish were much more apparent to its users, and provided a flexibility that only speakers of multiple, internal/external usage of the language(s) could provide. This openness leads many to this day out of racialized, nationalistic purposes to render the language incomplete, a reputation Yiddish speakers and writers have satirically used against its accusers for generations. Nevertheless, it is this openness that allowed for modes of translation to emerge alongside the development of modern Yiddish literature in the Austro-Hungarian borderlands.

In the Habsburg Galician city of Lemberg (today's Lviv) a group of neo-Romantic Yiddish writers had discovered both the works of American Yiddish poets as well as earlier American writers such as Walt Whitman (whom they translated). This new network of poetics and poets began with Shmuel-Yankev Imber (1889-1942?), who first

published his verse texts in the *Tshernovitser vokhnblat* in 1905, and would later continue publishing and writing in Vienna and Krakow until his disappearance and likely murder following the German occupation of Lviv. Imber, in his fairly short life also formed a literary group from the Galician provincial capital: *Yung galitsye*. The group was indebted to the neo-Romantics and earlier generations of German Jewish writers suddenly appearing in Yiddish translation both locally and internationally. As many of these writers (similarly to their Russian Yiddish peers) had been products of religious and secular educations in languages other than Yiddish (i.e., Hebrew, Polish, and German), their “choice” of Yiddish reflects not only a political and aesthetic move; it also points to the inevitable multilingual scope of their literary oeuvre. This discovery, along with their indebtedness to Heine and Rilke, went on to shape Yiddish poetics in Habsburg Austria before and after World War I.¹⁰

The larger question, however, remains: what shape did that multilingualism take if not purely a Yiddishist one? Whether discussing the *Haskole's*¹¹ indebtedness to German thought, the 48ers' effects on Yiddish socialism a generation later, or Diaspora

¹⁰ See Armin Eidherr, *Sonnenuntergang auf eisig-blauen Wegen : zur Thematisierung von Diaspora und Sprache in der jiddischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Armin Eidherr's work, which has (on the whole) not appeared in English translation, offers crucial interventions that decenter more traditional writings of Yiddish cultural history. One important departure that this dissertation takes from Eidherr's scholarship, is noting how there is a longevity of this decentering, which extends beyond the geographical borders of the former Habsburg Empire, and takes on new forms in postwar Paris, Tel Aviv, Montreal, Detroit, and elsewhere.

¹¹ See Immanuel Etkes, “Haskalah,” in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Haskalah> (accessed March 30, 2022). The *Haskole*, often coined the Jewish branch of Enlightenment thought, refers to various social and intellectual movements that sought to define Jews' connections to majority European cultures, and to universalist norms emerging at the time. The *Haskole's* relationship to Yiddish is paradoxical. The *Maskilim* (adherents to the *Haskole*) largely denigrated Yiddish by cementing gendered attitudes about the language and dismissing Yiddish as a non-viable, “non-language” incapable of becoming a national medium (in contrast to Hebrew or European majority languages). These tropes persist to this day. However, *Maskilim* often reverted to Yiddish, as it was the only way to spread Enlightenment ideas to the Jewish masses. In turn, the *Haskole* inadvertently shaped modern Yiddish culture by injecting secularized, politicized forms of speech into everyday life.

Nationalists' using Herderian notions of peoplehood through language, the complex and often fraught relationship between German and Yiddish has only recently emerged.¹² Most discussions remain grounded in the “language wars” between Hebrew and Yiddish, the negative attitudes toward German following the Holocaust, or the transnational trends leading to “post-vernacular” usage of Yiddish. The cultural legacy at the heart of this dissertation, however, centers Habsburg Yiddishist notions of multilingualism for Yiddish-speaking audiences, who were versed in the works of various German writers and thinkers before and after the Holocaust, and for the remainder of the 20th century and into the 21st.

The Yiddishists in question were less interested in the legacy of Germanized (*daytshmerish*) Yiddish, or the assimilationist attitudes toward Yiddish that led to Western Yiddish's extinction by the late 19th century in German-speaking Europe. In so doing, both the Yiddishists in question (and with this project, I) counter numerous reifying and lingering stereotypes. For one, modern Yiddish and modern German might have common ancestors, but are generationally coterminous. Breaking apart this often-familial but biologically and racially determined moniker placed on Yiddish (i.e., that it is a bastardized, non-language descended from the “real” German), also avoids later Zionist tropes about Yiddish: that Yiddish was simply “good enough” because of its relation to a proud “national” language like Hebrew (or, even German, the native tongue of many

¹² Although Volovici rightfully grounds his argument as a historical one, and counters many of the polemics against Yiddish for the political motives many of their adherents embodied, it is important to not rely on stereotypes as forms of truth. For example, although it is true that Yiddishists perhaps never escaped the etymological relatedness between German and Yiddish, and the historical roots tying one language to another are apt there are, however, much more productive, much more fruitful yet contrasting views among Eastern European Jews regarding Yiddish and Jewish multilingualism more broadly.

Zionists).¹³ On the contrary, although Yiddish faced similar challenges that other language and cultural groups encounter following genocide, anthologies of Yiddish point to a longevity of usage that persists today. Furthermore, it is a language existing alongside other languages, often doing little to elide or obscure its connections to inevitably multilingual environs of minoritized and displaced groups.

The title of this dissertation, “*Dos eygne Daytshland*,” is a term I use to denote the anthologizing of Yiddish translations of German poetry over the course of the twentieth century. With the aftermath of the First World War, there emerged a reinvigorated poetics of translation in formerly Habsburg lands that then continued across the globe to North America, the Middle East, and in other postwar centers of Yiddish culture. Beginning with Melech Ravitch (1893-1976) and Albert Ehrenstein’s (1886-1950) planned anthology, *Dos andere Daytshland*, their (as well as my) title hints at a supposed centrality of “*Daytshland*” in this constellation of texts and languages. However, it is this lack of centrality that defines this paradigm. Ravitch in his memoirs wrote that this was not the Germany of *Pickelhauben* and militarism, technology, the proud German history of Leftist politics, nor is it the Germany that fears being shaped by Jewish culture (*yidische hashpoe*).¹⁴

¹³ Furthermore, the persistent notion among German speakers and Germanists that Yiddish is simply a broken form of German is a historically false and prejudicial attitude toward Eastern European Jews, as they had already fled Central Europe for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 13th and 14th centuries. Even this stereotype is of a more recent extraction: philo-Yiddish views formed during the First World War, as German Jews and non-Jews sought affinity with oppressed peoples living under the Czar.

¹⁴ Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh*, 512. [It is not the Germany of the *Pickelhaube* and canons, not the German of technology, nor the Germany of the 1848ers—and above all: it is not the Germany that feared influence from Jewish culture, because ‘all people are comrades,’ with that being said—the other Germany’, the true Germany, one that Ehrenstein had dreamed up.] Also of note is the ambiguity of translation between “Yiddish” and “Jewish” regarding the word װײַז / *yidish*

What, then, is the connection to a “Germany?” For Ravitch, it is simply the *andere*, a Germany without political borders, armies, antisemitism, or ideology squarely defined, but rather a Germany of constant mediation and subjectification. And significantly, *Dos andere Daytshland* serves as a break from pre-war and 19th-century aesthetics in name. Ravitch and others no longer wanted to associate with the term “*yung*,” which, by the interwar years had also come to mark the poetics of the Yiddish writers in the United States known as *Di Yunge*. And significantly: this disavowal of “young” also distinguishes the new aesthetics from *Junges Deutschland* (and that of Heine).

Ravitch, in his quest to create a poetics for Yiddish verse that both distances, while also grounds, this new paradigm in and with German(y) via translation, creates a framework that is (theoretically) divorced from overarching political, cultural and social ideologies at the time, but is inevitably indebted to it simultaneously. Although Ravitch quickly left for Warsaw in 1921, after he had returned from the front to Vienna to ironically situate himself and his poetics away from the center of Yiddish culture, he nevertheless continued to shape other contemporaries in this quest to frame anew a “both and” inherent in translation from German into Yiddish.

This attempt at refashioning Yiddish high culture through two or more modern languages did not occur in a vacuum, and Ravitch was not the only figure to rework Yiddish poetics in Europe in the interwar period via German literature. And similarly, others did not necessarily fail per se, but quickly sought out these paradigms as they moved from place to place. Ezra Korman (1888-1959) found himself in revolutionary Kyiv/Kiev, then Berlin, and later Detroit, Michigan. Through each of these stations,

Korman remained associated with his work with the *Kultur-Lige*, which tried to reconcile calls for Jewish autonomy in Ukraine by separating Jewish culture from politics (both internal to the Jewish community as well as external). The *Kultur-Lige* wanted to sever any and all ties that Jewish culture retained to religious law (and Hebrew), and base the new democratic Jewish culture in the language of the masses (i.e., Yiddish). Severing all ties to Jewish religious textuality and history proved futile, but it also enabled a search for other cultural affinities in and beyond post-revolutionary Ukraine.

This search continued even after the Second World War among Holocaust survivors, who had not been content with the assimilationist policies toward Yiddish in the United States and Soviet Union, or the Hebraism of inter- and postwar Zionist Palestine (and later, Israel). One such figure was Morkhe Litvin (1906-1993), who had been active in interwar Berlin prior to the Nazi seizure of power, and had escaped death during the war in France. In postwar Paris, as a prolific translator of Baudelaire, as well as other French, German, and Russian poets, Litvin outlined his theories of translation in several works, including a forty-page essay alongside his authoritative anthology of French verse in Yiddish translation. What is striking about Litvin's essay, is the Yiddish language's own ability to illuminate, compliment, and forge ahead in the latter half of the 20th century. Litvin advocates for translation—for Yiddish, from Yiddish, and lastly: in/to Yiddish, all of which are historically central to the role of Yiddish for Ashkenazi Jewish culture. Litvin is thus adamantly opposed to the lyrical becoming an absolute entity ("lyric power does not simply mean a power from heaven"), because (although not dependent on) it is the lyrical itself that is shaped by language usage.¹⁵

¹⁵ Litvin, 7. לירישער ציטער הייסט ניט סתם אַ ציטער מן השמים.
...*Lirisher tsiter heyst nit stam a tsiter min hashamayim.*

This then begs the question: how does the doubling nature of translation pertain to multilingualism? Litvin notes that the doubling (of texts in one language giving rise to texts in another), allows readers in the other languages to understand *something*, and also leads to a doubling *if* the reader can “[already] meet/get to know” the original.¹⁶ Simply stated for Litvin: a doubling also occurs for multilingual speakers, who, like the translator, can take it upon themselves to *fareygenen* a text out of multiple languages.¹⁷ This in many ways echoes popular theories of translation today, which stipulate that the reader should not have illusions about the translation ostensibly being its own (*eygn*) work, and should therefore somehow evoke the text being translated.¹⁸ But for Litvin, it is the *process* of translation (*fareygenen* - to make one’s own as it is linked to something else), out of which a text emerges.

Dos eygne Daytshland also applies to the anthology as a form. Anthologies, according to Marc Caplan, “are always an exercise in public relations, calling attention not just to individual authors but to a collective, in order to make a claim, by whatever means the anthology has been organized, for their essential unity and distinctive significance...They are simultaneously an assertion of strength and a sign of vulnerability...How does this collection represent the relationship between power and

¹⁶ Litvin, 7. קאָן עס לייענען אין אַריגינאַל באַקענען.
kon es leyenen in original bakenen.

¹⁷ Litvin, 7. See also footnote 23 that echoes, “*oyf...eygenem oyfn*”

¹⁸ Litvin, 28.

ד“ה דער לייענער זאָל נישט האָבן קיין אילוזיע, אַז דאָס איז פלומרשט אַן אייגן ווערק, נאָר תמיד אָנטרעפֿן ביים לייענער דערמאָנגען וועגן אַריגינאַל...אַזוי אַרום שאַפֿט דער איבערזעצער, פֿאַרגעוואַלדיקנדיק צומאָל זיין אייגענעם לשון, אַ מין באַזונדערן דיאַלעקט, נישט בנמצא מחוץ פֿון דער געגעבענער איבערזעצונג, אָבער אַ פֿאַרשטענדלעכן פֿאַר די טרעגער פֿון דער שפּראַך, וואָס פֿון איר איז ער געשאַפֿן

D”h der leyener zol nit hobn keyn iluzye, az dos iz kloymersht an eygn verk, nor tomed ontrefn baym leyenen dermonungen vegn original..azoy zarum shafn der iberzetsen, fargevaldikndik tsumol zayn eygnen loshn, a min bazundern dialekt, nit benimtse mekhuts fun der gegebener iberzetsung, ober a farshtendlekh far di treger fun der shprakh, vos dun ir iz er geshafn. Litvin uses the sexually loaded term *fargevaldikndik* (violating) to describe this action.

vulnerability [that characterizes the Jewish experience] in and of modernity? Perhaps with as much ambiguity or indecisiveness as every other anthology.”¹⁹ The roles played by anthologizing are many, but according to this theory they are fragmentary, *verspätet* (delayed, latecomers), and yet: they amplify, double, and attempt to reconceptualize retrospectively certain trajectories and norms.

Dissertation structure

This dissertation traces the complex role of German-language poetry in Yiddish translation in and beyond Habsburg Central Europe, and explores how multilingualism and multiple literatures—beyond nascent Hebrew and Yiddish—existed simultaneously for many Jewish writers in and beyond Habsburg Austria. I lay the groundwork with the short-lived idea among pre-World-War-I proponents of an internally bilingual Yiddish and Hebrew literature emerging in East-Central Europe, that the use of a singular language could never represent the entirety of Jewish experience in times of massive political upheaval.

The result of this “simultaneity” of languages, or what Dan Miron coins “integral” bi-/multilingualism, is the equal standing given to multiple languages that differs from the more common “differential” diglossic bi-/multilingualism (i.e., the use of two or more languages used by one community but assigned specific societal roles). Appearing alongside this Yiddish-Hebrew simultaneity were emergent trends in Yiddish poetics that, apart from major outpourings in the United States, were largely centered in Habsburg Galicia among Yiddish neo-Romantics. Lemberg/Lviv Yiddishists had turned the poetry

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https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-undying-half-life-of-yiddish/?fbclid=IwAR1Sm1epJ--zopld9Zp1xLdnKg-UPI-yHyxk9rmiTZUB7JXR XO_byzZ47wY

of Heine and Rilke in translation into anthologized forms that in turn became vital to the continuing intersections of German Jewish and modern Yiddish literature in the twentieth century.

With the breakup of the Empire in 1918, calls for a new mode of Yiddish writing neither at home in, nor ultimately away from, Central Europe became more widespread. The first chapter, “Emerging Contiguities beyond Czernowitz: Reimagining Habsburg Centerlessness with Interwar Yiddish Modernism,” addresses the role of translation for various avant-garde literary journals under the editorship of the Habsburg Yiddish writers, which appeared in Vienna, Warsaw, and Czernowitz shortly following the First World War. The journals in question were some of the first to place contemporary German literature in Yiddish translation alongside Yiddish-language works. Melech Ravitch (1893-1976), working with the Austrian writer Albert Ehrenstein, translated works by Else Lasker-Schüler, Georg Trakl, Georg Heym, and Franz Werfel (as well as works by Ehrenstein). This assemblage of German-Jewish poets into Yiddish became known as דאָס אַנדערע דײַטשלאַנד (*Dos andere Daytshland - The Other Germany*). Although never published in its entirety, the translations that did appear, and undertaken by two Austrian-Jewish authors--one writing in Yiddish and the other in German--who in turn situated their works within a discourse opposing assimilation and the erasure of Jewish cultural pluralism, highlight the ways in which both authors were at home in “the other Germany.” Similar translations were printed elsewhere. Czernowitz-born Itzik Manger (1901-1969) also published his renderings of Trakl, Lasker-Schüler, and Rilke that were set to appear in anthologies but were initially published in his self-funded periodicals. Building on existing scholarship that situates Manger as the exemplary, “European”

Yiddish writer—combining his love for folk traditions with his admiration for world literature—I show how Manger both directly and indirectly cited Ravitch as fundamental to his work as translator.

Other interwar translation projects were outgrowths of internationalist politics and poetics, providing textual homes that countered emergent nation-states and monolingualism. In the following chapter, “Midvest-Mayrev - German ‘Jewish’ Anthologies of Ezra Korman,” I turn to two major anthologies of German-Yiddish translation, created by the Yiddish poet Ezra Korman (1888-1959) in his adopted home of Detroit, Michigan. Korman began anthologizing Yiddish verse prior to his emigration from Soviet Ukraine as a member of the communist-leaning *Kultur-Lige*. In doing so, he sought to preserve minoritized Jewish multilingualism and cultural pluralism among the working classes—thereby countering multiple decades of Jewish immigration to, and assimilation in, North America upon his immigration. His interwar anthology, פֿון דײַטשע דיכטער (*Fun dayshe dikhter - From German Poets*), maps the broadening reception of German-language literature among Yiddish speakers in North America prior to the Holocaust. Even after the Second World War and the murder of half of the world’s Yiddish speakers, Korman managed to complete another, pared-down volume, פֿון אַנדערע שפּראַכן (*Fun andere shprakhn - From Other Languages*) that includes revised translations of his earlier renderings, as well as additional translations from the English and the Russian. Even if eliding any further mention of “German” in the title, Korman’s postwar output demonstrates that translations of German literature continued to resonate among Yiddish émigré poets and readers, who still viewed translation (and anthologizing) as a revolutionizing force for Yiddish culture regardless of its location.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, in both Europe and the Middle East, Yiddish writers continued anthologizing their translations while also exposing the fragmentary nature of their source text(s) following the Holocaust. The final chapter, “Selective Memory: Postwar Anthologies and Doubling of Fragments,” shows how translations decouple poems from a singular source and instead views them as extensions of the individual, multilingual reader and translator. The translations of the third chapter largely stem from Mortkhe Litvin (1906-1993). Most well-known for his translations from the French (including the works of Baudelaire), Litvin was also responsible for rendering Goethe, Hölderlin, Rilke, Celan, Bachmann, and others into Yiddish for postwar audiences. Although Litvin’s translations from the German appeared posthumously in Paris in *פֿון דער וועלט-פּאָעזיע* (*Fun der velt-poezye* - From World Poetry), an earlier but central theoretical essay on translation found in his *פֿראַנצייזישע פּאָעזיע* (*Frantseyzische Poezye* - French Verse) illuminates these latter works from the German.²⁰ Also included in this final chapter are other Yiddish translations of Celan, completed by Bukowina-born Alexander Spiegelblatt (Yiddish: Aleksandr Shpiglbat, 1927-2013), as part of his multilingual compendium *אין געלן צווישנליכט פֿון ערבֿ רעגן - לידער* (*In geln tsvishnlikht fun erev regn - lider* - In Yellow Twilight Before the Rain - Poems). Interwoven into a volume consisting of more than a half dozen languages, the translations point to their affinities to, and unmooring from, the German language and instead reside within the linguistic constellation of the translator himself. Other projects include the volumes of translations, completed by Czernowitzers, highlighting the works of their German-speaking peers such as Rose Ausländer and Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger.

²⁰ See Mortkhe Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye: iberzetsungen un komentarn* (1968; 1986) and *Fun der velt-poezye* (2003).

This rich, complex history also coincided with the rise of a global Yiddish print culture. In spite of the censors and crackdowns in Russia, Yiddish publishing had largely emerged abroad by the end of the nineteenth century, and with a discernible Yiddish reading public that was no longer limited by a lack of press freedoms. As others like Jeffrey Grossman and Tony Michels have well researched, proletarian Yiddish poets forged new paradigms for politics and verse via the press and alongside their immigrant neighbors. Although the time and setting of these cultural crossovers made for significant cultural breakthroughs, a vibrant yet complex language politics was at play. The aforementioned events and places depict an outwardly mobile, revolutionary population that was first and foremost interested in politicizing their minoritized and repressed status. Although that is certainly the case for Yiddish-speaking Jews, their migration and positionality shifted over time, and translation both highlights while also serves as a way of questioning these continued emphases on marginalization.

We live in and through translation, but something else happens when readers and their translators both live in and through multiple languages being translated, and that creates challenges for the terminology around translation itself: is a translation still a translation, and what of the methodologies that often un/moor the translator to one text or another, especially when the reader has a sense of that process of translation (knows its potential, limits, etc)? This question of lineage, and whether anthologies in their modality are successful, play out in real time among Yiddish translators. Why would Yiddish writers look to these texts as sources to render into Yiddish and away from German? It's clear that Ravitch and Manger, Korman, Spiegelblatt, and Litvine were all men (gender here, is important when Yiddish literature never met gender parity) who were inspired by

revolution, and who nevertheless turned to more liberal notions of affinity and togetherness regarding power in language and literature. In other words: were these anthologies an attempt to transform Yiddish into something, and was it successful? I argue that they attempted, albeit disparately and not necessarily successfully, to convince themselves and others that Yiddish and German were somehow linkable, not linguistically, where Yiddish needed to exit the world of marginality (and a radically imbued poetics) to instead harken toward a larger mythologized and idealized forms of multilingualism via world languages.

Chapter One: Emerging Contiguities beyond Czernowitz — Reimagining Habsburg Centerlessness and Interwar Yiddish Modernism

By the early twentieth century Yiddish's function as a worldwide vernacular of the Ashkenazi Jewish masses that had migrated to every corner of the world, transformed the language into a literary medium at the forefront of Jewish literature. As such, Yiddish was for some an embodiment of a nation. But for others, Yiddish was far from being definitively contained—linguistically, culturally, or geographically. Divergent trends emerged from the rising Jewish middle class in Eastern Europe that in turn coincided with larger cultural schisms taking place across the continent at large. Some Jewish intellectuals were acculturating and assimilating into surrounding majority cultures, while others were gravitating toward Hebrew and nascent Zionism, and thereby promoting a centuries-long Hebrew renaissance that lasted in Eastern Europe until the First World War and Russian Revolution.

Those left out of the assimilationist and Hebraist Zionist milieus were writers publishing in Yiddish. By the early 20th century, many Yiddish writers were (primarily) still publishing in Yiddish by necessity, and were ambivalent about transforming Yiddish into a literary medium in and for the long-term. Some writers and thinkers even went far enough to say that Yiddish, even if spoken by upwards of 90% of Jews worldwide at the time, was just one of many “Jewish” languages attempting to gain an elevated status. Subsequently, the promotion of a distinctively Yiddish culture would bring Eastern European Jewish civilization to its downfall by destroying the historically

bi-/multilingual aspirations of Ashkenazi Jewry.²¹ Doomsday pronouncements such as this one, where Ashkenazi Jewry would have to solely rely on a Yiddish language incapable of fully expressing an individual or collective, shows how certain Jewish enlightenment tropes persisted in both the Habsburg and Russian Empires regarding the viability of Yiddish.

Nevertheless, even if conflicting viewpoints point to the deeply entrenched ideological camps emerging at the time, the uncertain status of Jewish multilingualism by the end of the nineteenth century became a fruitful rallying point for many writers of diverse linguistic backgrounds. When taking into account the nationalisms promoting acculturation, place-based self-determination in Palestine, and everything in between, creating a cultural paradigm in, and for, Yiddish unmoored from a nation state real or imagined, was no simple task, but one that many strove to be part of. Multilingual layers emerged, and away from nascent Zionist, the assimilationists, and (practically speaking) the Russian censors and police. In Czernowitz, Cracow, and Vienna—beyond the Odessa, Warsaw, and Vilna often at the center of most literary surveys of Yiddish—was precisely a pluralistic milieu (and a specifically Habsburg one), where an albeit-overlooked program for Yiddish culture emerged. It is also during this historic shift in East Central Europe, before and following the First World War, that a modernist mode of Yiddish writing came to fruition in Habsburg Galicia and Bukovina.

Held in a city on the far reaches of the Habsburg Empire and situated in the empire's peripheral borderlands with Tsarist Russia (i.e., the major center of Yiddish-speaking Jewry) was the 1908 Czernowitz Conference. According to the

²¹ Naomi Brenner, *Lingering Bilingualism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 7.

organizers, the conference marked the moment when Yiddish became *a* (although not *the*) national language of the Jewish people. Although the Czernowitz Conference's role remains far from definitive today, and polemics around language usage plagued the conference's reception immediately following its adjournment, this uncertainty highlights more complex symptoms of a "placing" a placeless modernism that flourished in East Central Europe globally.²²

This Yiddish modernism took hold in (and ultimately, beyond) Central Europe over time, and outside of the Soviet Union and the avant-garde circles of Yiddish poets in North America and interwar Poland. It was both modern yet deeply rooted in Jewish memory, and promoted an inherent subjectivity alongside, and yet independent of, Jewish and non-Jewish place-based nationalisms of the time. It was a modernism that played with historical categorizations of "German" (ruling Austrian culture), "Yiddish" (folklore and Jewishness), and even "Hebrew" (national myths and religion), fluctuating between and ultimately transcending these categorizations. This in turn led to a longer-lasting effect on Central European and global Jewish literature that remains to this day.

Departing from often one-sided comparisons of German-/Jewish and Yiddish-speaking milieus during the interwar period, and existing "in between" German- and Yiddish-speaking cultural paradigms, multilingualism resides within the contiguous model put forth by Dan Miron that erases the boundaries between two supposedly enigmatic and competing circles of Jewish writers---in this case: those writing in German and those writing and translating into Yiddish. Miron describes this notion of contiguity as:

²² Marie Schumacher-Brunhes, "Peretz's Commitment to Yiddish in Czernowitz." In *Czernowitz at 100*, eds. Kalman Weiser and Joshua A. Fogel (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 47.

“the state of being borderline, of being in contact with something, or the position of a straight line or plane that touches a curvature at a point but if extended would not cross it at that point; which when used metaphorically points to a relatedness, a touching, which does not involve overlapping or penetration; a diminished form of relatedness [tangentiality].²³”

Two multilingual, Habsburg Yiddish writers at the forefront of these new paradigms were Melech Ravitch (1893-1976) and Itsik Manger (1901-1969). A Yiddish culture reinvigorated by the Czernowitz language conference had unmoored them from assimilating into German, Polish, or Romanian milieus, and yet their engagement with Habsburg German/-Jewish culture distinguished them from many of their peers. Ravitch and Manger, who were at home in the former empire’s literary culture, kept the legacy of Czernowitz alive by promoting cultural autonomy within a predominantly, diverse, urban, Jewish milieu that became increasingly centerless, translatable, mobile, and modal in the 21st century. As such, diaspora also becomes less about “place,” and functions as a temporal construct.

I. The Case of Melech Ravitch

In the summer of 1920 the Austrian poet Albert Ehrenstein addressed a telegram to Melech Ravitch. In the note he included a meeting place and a list of authors. The place: Vienna’s Cafe Landtmann, and the authors in question: Franz Werfel, Georg Trakl, Georg Heym, Ehrenstein himself, and Else Lasker-Schüler. Although the details of their meeting are unclear from the telegram, Ravitch had been living in Vienna for almost a

²³ *Ibid.*, 305-306.

decade and working for *Kval farlag* and *Di Kritik*, a Yiddish publishing house and its respective literary journal.²⁴ Writing in German, Ehrenstein was also busy anthologizing poetic texts from across German-speaking Europe. In September of that same year, Ehrenstein wrote again to Ravitch that Else Lasker-Schüler was presenting new work, and Ehrenstein urged Ravitch to contact her. Although Ehrenstein and Lasker-Schüler were close friends, it is unclear if Ravitch ever followed through with Ehrenstein's request. In a subsequent letter dated the 19th of October, 1920, Ehrenstein asked Ravitch for an update, saying that he would not be in Vienna again for quite some time.

This seems to be the last surviving record of correspondence related to their short-lived collaboration. Just a few months later, Ravitch published his first volume of modernist poetry before abruptly and permanently leaving Austria. Except for brief vignettes in Ravitch's later autobiographical writings completed after the Second World War, little else about his project with Ehrenstein appears in secondary source material or the Ravitch archive. In addition, *Di kritik* ceased publication after 12 issues, and few surviving copies remain. The project, however, was meant to be the "first step of Yiddish literature toward the great union of peoples through verse,"²⁵ and would include one volume of poetry translated from the German into Yiddish with a second volume containing Yiddish verse appearing in German translation. This short-lived project was in reality a set of Yiddish translations, mostly of German-Jewish writers for a planned anthology titled *Dos andere Daytshland*.

²⁴ *Erenshayn, Albert*. In Melech Ravitch Archive, National Library of Israel.

²⁵ *Der ershter shrit fun der yidisher literatur tsu der groyser farbriderung fun die felker durkh dem lid...* (Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn*, 512)

This Ehrenstein/Ravitch partnership was in many ways part of a larger, utopian project. Ravitch hints at this shared vision via the language he uses in his memoir. As he recounted in his hyper-stylized memoirs, Ravitch and Ehrenstein probed the history of German literature to conjure up the name for the anthology, *Dos andere daytshland*.²⁶ The anthology characterized the newness of post-WWI poetry, while also representing a specific aesthetic singularity of both the old and the new within German verse. For example, use of the term יונגע (*yunge*) was not possible, due to the prominent American Yiddish poetry group with the name, די יונגע (*Di Yunge*). Furthermore, Ehrenstein and Ravitch did not wish to (at least overtly) echo or derive lineage from *Junges Deutschland*.²⁷ As such, Ravitch credits Ehrenstein with the agreed-upon *Dos andere daytshland*, noting that it is not the German of modern warfare, nor the Germany of technology, or even the Germany of the once-strong German Left.²⁸ Significant within this pronouncement is Ravitch's allusion to the history of leftism in Germany, and by inserting Yiddish into the mix Ravitch and Ehrenstein assert the role that Jews have played in shaping modern German culture. Nevertheless, it is this very (but doubly) "other" found within this same literature that they are seeking to highlight via translation.

The role of the anthology in this new era begins to take shape, also. A major component of Jewish memory and literature across millenia (and central to an understanding of Jewish textuality as a whole), anthologies and the resulting critical discourse around this mode of collecting enabled Jewish communities to "remember"

²⁶ Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn*, 512.

²⁷ Ravitch refers to the group as דאָס יונגע דייטשלאַנד (*dos yunge daytshland*)

²⁸ *Es meynt, az dos iz nisht dos daytshland fun di pikl-hauben un kanonen, nisht dos daytshland fun der tekhnik, nisht afile dos, demolt shtark aktive linke daytshland — un nor dos daytshland vos hot nisht moyre far yidisher hashpoe, vayl "ale mentshn zenen brider," mit eyn vort — take dos andere daytshland, vos iz dos emese...azoy hot ehrensteyn gekholmt* (Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn*, 512)

while mediating and creating reference points to guide people forward. As such, Ravitch also noted that *Dos andere daytshland* was not going to be any ordinary anthology, where the list of names and poets translated would broadly encompass the poetic landscape of German language verse at the time. Instead, Ravitch ironically posits that this will include “all [of the]” representative voices necessary, i.e., a select few who are deep within their works promoting this “other” Germany.²⁹ Ravitch and Ehrenstein decided on just five authors: Else Lasker-Schüler, Georg Heym, Georg Trakl, Franz Werfel, and Ehrenstein himself.

Although the publisher and translators abandoned this particular translation project at the last minute, and Ravitch left for Poland shortly thereafter to begin yet another chapter of his long career, these translations of poems into Yiddish from the German by Else Lasker-Schüler and Albert Ehrenstein exist in the ephemeral world of Yiddish avant-garde publishing in Vienna. Ravitch ultimately published only three of Lasker-Schüler poems and two of Ehrenstein’s for *Di Kritik*. However, a closer look at these translations provides insight into this albeit ephemeral but significant moment for Yiddish culture in Vienna, when Ravitch attempted to bridge a gap between German/-Jewish and Yiddish audiences via translation. The translation (and the journal itself in which they appeared) also shed light on other translation projects completed on the geographical peripheries of Yiddish literature during the interwar period.

It is important to note that, unlike other Yiddish translations from the decade prior, that transform the texts into Yiddish *for* a Yiddish audience with ornate religious and cultural references (such as the translations of Heine’s poetry by Berlin-based Dovid

²⁹ Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh*, 512.

Frishman, the influential *Yunge* poet Moyshe Leyb Halpern in New York, or even S.Y. Imber's translations), Ravitch's renderings are much more sparse and plain. For one, the utilitarian aspect of the translations, not infused with German-inflected (daytshmarish) Yiddish, nor the embellished styles found in the previous generation of German-Yiddish translation, perhaps highlights the Yiddish spoken in the Austrian capital at the time. It instead points to a newly forming register of Yiddish, one that is grappling with contradictory forces at play. And it is here that we can see yet another dimension of Ravitch's early work, as it emerges at this productive moment for German-Yiddish translation and for Yiddish modernism at large. Lasker-Schüler and Ehrenstein were contemporaries with divergent styles, some of which echo the symbolist and impressionist forms Ravitch and later generations of Yiddish poets sought to disavow. Nevertheless, it is here that we can see yet another dimension of Ravitch's early work as it emerges at the very moment he is coming into his own via Yiddish modernism.

Although the American Yiddish paradigms ironically appeared at the very moment when assimilation and xenophobic sentiment spurred a decline in Yiddish readership, the geographical margins of Yiddish modernism became the prime stomping ground for Yiddish poets in the early years of the interwar period. Although Warsaw, Vilna, and (now Soviet-controlled) Kyiv/Kiev became central sites of the Yiddish avant garde, ultimately, North America, Palestine, and the Soviet Union also became linked in a web of migration and circulation of texts in numerous languages. At the time when a revolutionary Yiddish modernism took hold in the United States following the First World War, writers in Central Europe were enacting and exacting their own modernist paradigms for Yiddish verse.

I. *Nakete Lider*: Melech Ravitch's Transnational Modernism

Before investigating the translations further, it is important to examine both Ravitch's early contributions to modernist Yiddish poetics that informed his translation projects and subsequent interwar activity. Ravitch was born in 1893 in the Eastern Galician town of Redem/Radymno to a rapidly assimilating Jewish family. The family spoke Polish and German at home in addition to Yiddish. After the Czernowitz conference in 1908, and with Yiddish literature's semi-official recognition as a national medium, Ravitch moved to Lemberg/Lwów/Lviv, becoming part of the Neo-Romantic poetry circle *Yung Galitsye* (Young Galicia). Yung Galitsye's founder was S.Y. Imber,³⁰ who had looked to modern German poetry of Heine for inspiration, and ultimately translated Heine's *Buch der Lieder* into Yiddish.³¹ It was at this particular moment in Galicia, that of competing Jewish cultural revivals in and from multiple languages (i.e., German, Polish and Ukrainian cultural activity, Yiddishism, and Hebraist Zionism), that Ravitch ultimately decided to write in Yiddish. And yet, as we see with his anthology and collaborative effort with Ehrenstein, he promoted an aesthetic paradigm that never completely centered one language over another.

Ravitch moved to Vienna in 1912, and following a brief stint in the Austrian imperial army during the First World War, he returned to Vienna where he remained until

³⁰ Born in 1889, Shmuel Yankev Imber was one of the central figures responsible for creating a "center" of Yiddish poetry in Habsburg Galicia at a time when European Yiddish writers were mainly known for prose writing. The son of a *maskilic* writer, and nephew of Naftali Herz Imber (the poet who wrote what later became Israel's national anthem), Imber was nevertheless shaped by his reading of German literature (notably Heine and Rilke). After World War I interrupted his studies by being drafted, Imber eventually completed his doctoral training in interwar Krakow. Throughout the interwar period, Imber continued to write for major Yiddish journals, even as his popularity became eclipsed by other writers. He did not survive the Second World War; it is believed he was murdered by Ukrainian Nationalists after the Nazi invasion of Soviet-held Ukraine in 1942.

³¹ Although Imber's translation of *Buch der Lieder* never appeared in its entirety, an abridged collection was published by *Nayland farlag* in Vienna in 1920. One of the few remaining versions was found in the YIVO archives, albeit incorrectly cataloged under the name of another translator.

1921. Ravitch experienced and contributed to the blossoming of Viennese modernism in Yiddish, publishing his own volumes of verse before departing for Warsaw. His first three collections he published prior to the First World War had spoken to the Neo-Romanticism of his Galician contemporaries (such as Imber), and although not entirely disconnected from the Yiddish poetry of his past, Ravitch sought to forge a new experimental style. Indebted to more “naked” (נאַקעט - naket) forms not yet seen in Yiddish verse, Ravitch sought to reconcile (*oysglaykhn*) the differences between individuals to forge a new, collective spirit.³²

Although the Yiddish Introspectivists in New York developed a far more encompassing political program than Ravitch, Ravitch nevertheless provided a break with the past. Heightened alienation and the hyperfocus on subjectivity were certainly not unique to Yiddish modernism, but Ravitch refashioned the relation between his readers and the text via the *medium* of Yiddish outside of Yiddish poetry’s center of New York.

In the *hagdome* (preface) of *Nakete lider*, the poet states the aims of aesthetics in methodical and repetitive speech: “I am not greater than you, I am not lesser than you, no more, no less clever than you...I belong, like you, to the never-ending expanse, to the never-ending thought, to the never-ending *death*.”³³ The narrator continues by stating:

Look at the prosaic consciousness that has the power over
what little I have to call my own in this world, and realize
that I in any case know the value of my poetry. You will not
surprise me [by saying the obvious], because I also realize
its worthlessness, and its limits, better than you. The world

³² Melech Ravitch, *Nakete lider* (Vienna: Kval Farlag), pp. 8-10.

³³ Ravitch, *Nakete lider*, 8. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are my own.

is as a matter of course reconciling the difference between individuals, and with time our collective spirit will also be reconciled.³⁴

The current collective found in the writer's own world has left him with little of value following the destruction of the war, and in another sphere of consciousness lie the (albeit worthless) poems he continued to write up to this point. Striking in this excerpt quoted here is its resonance with translation more broadly. Grappling with difference, and in time the possibility of reconciliation among a larger (reading) collective, are two persistent tenets of translation theory. Whether Ravitch was successful in achieving these goals in the long run is debatable. Nevertheless, the poet's hopeful embrace of a new era and increased sense of self (found in this subsequent collection of poetry written in Yiddish in Vienna) worked to displace the writer from his earlier work.

As a means to break from previous projects that were "safe in form" (i.e., the ones prior to 1914), and to disavow the helplessness "of average intellectuals [like himself]," the poet also writes, "Our greats, the prophets, have gone silent or have fled, -- and alone, without a leader, we in our insanity have fallen into the hands of lucid Christianity."³⁵ Even in this short passage, the indictment of past figures (referring to the prophets, both biblical and modern) is significant on multiple levels. Prophets fleeing from responsibility is not just a biblical trope. The topic of "lucid" Christianity, and the draw to rational positivism and assimilationist paradigms, which either erased one's Jewishness through the process of conversion or at the very least altered Jewish life through assimilation, hints at the lingering violence and disillusionment the poet faced at the time.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

Adding another dimension to the dialectics around conversion and assimilation (and the role of the imposter) is the notion of the text: toward what does the narrator intend to turn in this new volume and epoch of defiant poetics? From the optimistic, relentless, identifiable (*derkent*) world, the poet dives into a highly individualized modernism, one inherently new—dogmatically and textually. The narrator in turn outlines this new poetic paradigm, a paradigm that becomes ambivalently linked to city life and the urban landscape of the present:

I am entirely in these poems laid bare; not my actions, but my *nature*, not my work, but my *self*. My fever and my contentment, my optimism and my pessimism, my relation to the world and to individuals. My exposed urban soul, the small-town canvas of my healthy yearning wraps itself around me. My conscience and that, which others around me call: feeling. My sadism, my asceticism, my belief in the revolution, and my elementary, deeply painful exclamatory resentment toward any type of religiosity.³⁶

The narrator's poetics stem from the two words italicized above: the first is *loshn-koydesh*—מִהוּרַת - *meyus* - nature or essence, and the other: קֶעֶרן - *kern*. It is a poetics that possesses the futile desire to wrap around the exposed (also perhaps worn down) urban soul longing for revolution with or without any messianic pretexts (assimilation, Christianity, and even Zionism). It is also perhaps an indictment of the narrator's oeuvre

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

up to that point; the neo-Romantic Galician poetry of the pre-war age differed from the work now being produced in other urban centers.

It is important to reiterate how strikingly similar Ravitch's introductory remarks are to what the Yiddish Introspectivists (אינזיקיסטן - *Inzikhisten*) in New York City proclaimed around the same time: the creation of a national paradigm, albeit without nationalism.

We, the Introspectivists, want to convey life, the true, honest, and exact, just as it is mirrored within ourselves, and becomes a part of us...This is the true life of the individual [a complicatedly-built labyrinth], the life that develops in the current time in the metropolis, and in the great variety of situations we find ourselves in, life becomes thousandfold more complicated, enmeshed to the point that we, the Introspectivists feel it necessary to convey and express this [complication].³⁷

Shifts in urban life, and the need to express the resulting complications of that life and its subjectivities, in a language wishing to be both unique in poetic style while not necessarily nationalistic, was also at the heart of the Introspectivist project. Both Ravitch and his Introspectivist counterparts reacted to the trauma of war, word (of direct experience) of pogroms in the shadow of revolution, and subsequent xenophobic policies enacted in both Europe and the United States toward newly visible Jewish minorities. The similarities between the two poetic visions thus mark Ravitch's *Nakete lider* as part of a

³⁷ Yankev Glatshteyn et al. "Introspektivizm," in *In zikh: a zamlung fun introspektive lider*, (New York: Maisel Farlag, 1920, pp.7-8.

larger paradigmatic shift, even if it remains in the shadow of the more well-known New York circles of writers active at the time.

To return to Ravitch's poetics once more, the new material stemming from, and developing into, a new political and revolutionary mode also has the potential for a violent rebirth. The reader sees this realization when the narrator states:

In these poems I am naked, laid bare, scalped. With
*Spinoza*³⁸ I was finished with God. And with Marx—with
the evil master: human beings. I have already witnessed the
enveloping bite of corporeal and spiritual happiness--both
actually. I am already--to sum it up: the crude element of
the future human being.³⁹

This echoes the turbulence and violence found in this paradigmatic shift in the narrator's poetry, and in the world he sees around him.⁴⁰ To take the gruesome metaphor one stop further, the literal flesh of his argument and raw feeling of the intended poetics is evident in this passage; Ravitch sought to draw out a level of consciousness not yet seen in Yiddish poetry. It is also here that he makes clear his departure from other politics and poetics of the present to instead "expand, add, write, and change" (*nokh dergentsn*,

³⁸ In addition to this passage referencing the great Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza, the poet is also referencing Ravitch's volume of poetry by the same name published before the war.

³⁹ Ravitch, *Nakete lider*, 10.

⁴⁰ Samuel Spinner in *Jewish Primitivism* (Stanford University Press, 2021) points out that violent metaphors such as this one (i.e., being scalped) were common in early twentieth-century Yiddish, Hebrew, and German literature written by Jewish authors. They functioned as a way to both illustrate the questioned safety of Jews in Europe, who were facing antisemitic violence and accusations that placed them outside of "civilized" Europe, while also blurring the (already diminished or shifting) boundaries between the colonized and colonizers in Jewish culture via migration to other parts of the world.

tsushraybn, tsudikhtn, endern) the landscape of Yiddish poetry via a more raw, individualized experience.⁴¹

It is a way that this operative mode of writing also gets to the heart of Ravitch's desire for Yiddish modernist verse that will inevitably influence subsequent interwar writers. This will arrive not via a reworking of Hasidic folklore (like the Yiddish *Klasiker* of previous generations, such as Y.L. Peretz), with resurrecting the Hebrew language as a spoken vernacular, or through the Marxist politics coming into fruition in the Soviet Union. This disavowal coincides with what the Introspectivists also said about *Di Yunge* (their own predecessors in the United States) in a far more biting and explicit critique than the one coming from Ravitch.

The language of our local "*Yunge*" results in the creation of *shtimmung*. The poet, according to this view, also needs to express and provide this *shtimmung*. How exactly? In a concentrated and well-rounded manner. The resulting concentration and well-roundedness are then perceived as necessary conditions, even pre-conditions, without which the poet's *shtimmung* cannot possess, or even provide, universal or *eternal* value [found in the works of older poets].⁴²

The Introspectivist countering of *shtimmung* (creating mood through form) is clearly evident in this passage. This methodology, they argue, is then cut off from "truer" forms, and as a result rely on more "unified, neat, well-rounded, and concentrated" (*fareyntselte*,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴² Glatshetyn, "Introspektivizm," 7.

opgetokte, farrundelte un kontsentriert) styles.⁴³ Against this backdrop is the need for a new future or mode; a break from a set of works adhering to these older styles and of a collective past for a more subjective, individualized future. “If we shall characterize their [*di Yunge’s*] contribution, it is that they provided the interim, a bridge to a new poetry, a poetry more autonomous, bolder, deeper and truer both in content and in form.”⁴⁴

One problem remained for the Yiddish modernists (both Ravitch and his contemporaries in Central/Eastern Europe and those elsewhere): the increasing indebtedness to language, language that either exemplified Jewish difference and subjectivity or one that uniquely and specifically could fall victim to nationalism. Do these pronouncements necessarily promote a place-based or linguistically monolingual national tradition? “People and works,” “Content and form” remained complicated, humanistically-based themes for both Ravitch and the Introspectivists, as they departed from the Neo-Romantics (and the legacy of Heine’s poetry) while writing in interwar Vienna and New York, both major centers for minority Yiddish cultures.

Just as the Introspectivists argued, the poet in the introduction to *Nakete lider* gives a brief nod instead not to languages, but to the literature and the “mother tongue” (both the homage to Yiddish and the essence of the text) that brought him to this point, and to forms not yet seen:

To our literature, to which my luck and my mother tongue
have bound me, I will give away more than my body and
my spirit. It needs people and works, not just poems and

⁴³*Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 25.

poets. Additional forms rage within me and carry me.

Limitless thoughts, stand by me!⁴⁵

New content, forms, people, and works—body and text—are for Ravitch, working in Vienna, the embodiment of a modernism inevitably political in nature as it departs from a cultural project past its stage of maturation. It is to this particular style of Yiddish language and literature, outlined in Ravitch's and the Introspectivists' manifestos, and in the resulting poetry written in free verse revolving around secular themes, to which Yiddish literature adhered throughout the interwar period.

II. The Contiguous Poetics of Centerlessness

Ravitch and the Introspectivist contemporaries in the United States stand as examples of a positive contiguity; two independent strands of Yiddish modernism working on the geographical peripheries (i.e., away from the centers) of Eastern European Jewish culture to forge new paradigms. Yiddish in New York, however, reached its zenith on the eve of the 1924 immigration restrictions that halted Jewish migration to the United States. Nevertheless, American Yiddish poets' outsized role in shaping Yiddish literature has received considerably more attention than the Yiddish poetics on the margins in Europe at the time. Ravitch has largely remained forgotten, even though his complicated (and oftentimes, problematic) oeuvre finally received attention from scholars.⁴⁶ For this reason, however, Ravitch's translation projects also remain within an obscure corner of Yiddish cultural history, and upon further

⁴⁵ Ravitch, *Nakete lider*, 11.

⁴⁶ Even a terrific new [web series](#) by the Yiddish Book Center completely omits Vienna from the landscape of Yiddish modernism. Even if Ravitch and others did not remain in Vienna throughout the entirety of the interwar period, there were in fact Yiddish poets and writers who remained until 1938, and had varying degrees of activity and success following the Second World War. This alone merits continued investigation.

investigation, I expose another model of contiguity that continued through the rest of the 20th century and into the 21st: the role of German poetry in translation for Yiddish culture.

Ravitch, born in Galicia to a family that was part of an emerging Jewish middle class, spoke not only the Yiddish of his youth and primary religious schooling, but also the Polish and German his parents had wished for him to acquire and cultivate. A conflict between “hereness” (*doikayt*) of Jewish culture and “elsewhere” (the placement of Jewish culture somewhere else (*ergets vu*)) played a vital role for the development of Yiddish literature in Austria, and its writers developed heavily mythologized notions of centerlessness (*tsenterlozikeyt*) that are also inherent in both German- and Yiddish-speaking Jewry over the course of the twentieth century. Following the 1908 Czernowitz Language Conference, and traversing the spaces between developing nationalisms and their corresponding institutions in Habsburg Austria and elsewhere, translation offered a roadmap of the various contiguities between languages such as Yiddish and German, and namely: the ways in which Yiddish writers such as Melech Ravitch (and Iztik Manger) complicated the moniker of “Yiddish writer” post-Czernowitz while working in/with multiple languages including German.

III. (De)centering Habsburg German Jewish Culture in Yiddish Translation

Albert Ehrenstein’s poem “Wanderers Lied” first appeared in *Die Fackel* on February 18th, 1910, at the height of Ehrenstein’s visibility as an early expressionist poet. The fact that Ravitch also translated two of Ehrenstein’s poems (for this project) perhaps comes at no surprise. Not only was Ehrenstein co-editor of this anthology, his own radical

strand of expressionism was anything but subtle when read by the small but significant Yiddishist movement located in Vienna during the interwar period.⁴⁷

The speaker in “Wanderers Lied” laments the lack of conviction among those around him before lamenting the rejection of a woman. The toxic masculinist blend of resentment and longing evident in this poem lead to the speaker reflecting on his supposed state of homelessness.⁴⁸ “Ich kenne die Zähne der Hunde, in der Wind-ins-Gesicht-Gasse wohne ich” follows the speaker’s wish to dance on the heads of those he knows. Combining the mental vacuum with physical altercations with both the elements and others transforms the senses into something monstrous *within* the speaker.

Wanderers Lied

דעם וואַנדערערס ליד

Meine Freunde sind schwank wie Rohr,
auf ihren Lippen sitzt ihr Herz,
Keuschheit kennen sie nicht;
tanzen möchte ich auf ihren Häuptern.

Mädchen, das ich liebe,
Seele der Seelen du,
auserwählte, lichtgeschaffene,
nie sahst du mich an,
dein Schoß war nicht bereit,
zu Asche brannte mein Herz.

Ich kenne di Zähne der Hunde,
in der Wind-ins-Gesicht-Gasse wohne ich,
ein Sieb-Dach ist über meinem Haupte,
Schimmel freut sich an den Wänden,
gute Ritzen sind für den Regen da.

ווי דאָס ים־גראַז וואַקלען מיינע פֿריינד,
אויף זייערע ליפּען זיצט זייער האַרץ,
פֿון קיין צניעות ווייסען זיי נישט:
אויף זייערע קעפּ
אוי, וואָלט איך געטאַנצט
מיידעל דו, וואָס כ׳האַב דיך ליב.
נשמה פֿון משמות דו

אויסדערוועהלט, ליכט־באַשאַפֿענע,
קיינמאָל האָסטו דיך צו מיר נישט צוגעקוקט.
און גרייט איז נישט געווען דיין שוים,
אויף אַש האָט זיך פֿאַרברענט מיין האַרץ.

די הינטישע ציינער קען איך גוט,
אין דער ווינט־גלייך־אין־פנים־גאַס וואוּן איך,
און ס׳איז אַ זיפֿ־דאַך איבער מיין קאָפּ,
צולאָזט האָט זיך שימעל אויף מיינע ווענד.
און גוטע שפּאַרעס לאָזען דעם רעגען אַרײַן.

⁴⁷ Ravitch, translating/reading Lasker-Schüler, who in turn is reworking, adapting, and breaking down the assemblages found in the Hebrew Bible, is an excellent representation of Miron’s contiguous/tangential model put forth for the study Jewish literary thought.

⁴⁸As we will also see in the later translation by Itzik Manger, Rilke (and another contemporary of Ehrenstein and Lasker-Schüler) addresses similar themes in *Der Wahnsinn*.

»Töte dich!« sprichte mein Messer zu mir.
Im Kote liege ich;
hoch über mir, in Karossen befahren
meine Feinde den Mondregenbogen.⁴⁹

„טהו אן דיר אַ מעשה!“ רעדט דאָס מעסער צו מיר.
אין דער בלאַטע וואַלגער איך זיך;
און הויך איבער מיר, אין ווילדע עקיפּאַזשן
פֿאַהרען אַרום מינע שונאים
אויף דעם לבנה־רעגענבויגען.⁵⁰

It is only in the final stanza that the speaker’s mental state becomes more apparent, as a knife beings speaking to say, “Kill yourself!” Lying in excrement, below the carriages carrying the speaker’s enemies as they drive over the “Mondregenbogen.” Here, another parallelism of natural elements occurs: between the rain in the third stanza, to one of its other effects: the *rainbow* found in the last line of the poem.

Even at first glance, the stanzas’ structures in the Yiddish version differ from the version of the poem appearing in *Die Fackel*, and in the critical edition of Ehrenstein’s work. But that is only the beginning. The newly-elongated first stanza reads more like a reprisal, and the male gaze in the German is even more pronounced. *Rohr* in Ehrenstein’s poem becomes “*yam-groz*” in Ravitch’s translation, uncovering the more obscure nature of the grass(es) found in the German version.⁵¹ *Schwank wie Rohr* becomes “[*Vi dos yam-groz*] *voklen*,” emphasizing the action as opposed to its state or description. *Keuschheit* becomes *tsnies*, a gendered Yiddish term still relevant today to describe “virtue, modesty, chastity,” of observant Jewish women. Although the speaker addresses an unnamed woman that is the object of affection in the German poem’s second stanza, it

⁴⁹ Albert Ehrenstein, “Wanderers Lied,” in *Werke, Band 4/I*, ed. Hanni Mittelman (Grafrath: Klaus Boer Verlag, 1997), 63.

⁵⁰ Albert Ehrenstein “*Dem vanderers lid*.” Melech Ravitch trans., In *Di Kritik*, Heft 4 (dated) (October 1920): 21. YIVO Archives, New York, New York, USA.

⁵¹ Ravitch had by this point published an homage to Leaves of Grass, full of similarly suggestive motifs and politically subversive content just as Whitman’s work had done decades earlier, and it is here that Ravitch picks up similarly political and polemical themes in his colleagues work.

is important to note how the choice of translation into Yiddish makes the stanza more jarringly laden with gendered hierarchies, but as they pertain to traditional Judaism.

The *lichtgeschaffene*, and more noticeably in the Yiddish via its rendering as *likht-bashafene*, echoes the first lines of the Hebrew Bible.⁵² The word *shoys* appears in two translations by Ravitch completed for *Kritik*: in this poem by Ehrenstein and in Lasker-Schüler's "Abraham und Isaak" (discussed later in this chapter). Ehrenstein's poem is a violent one, and speaks to a level of resentment that transfers across the linguistic and cultural boundaries between German and Yiddish into this translation. The "canine teeth," the "siv-roof" (metaphorically exposing the speaker to the elements), and the mildew all make it into Ravitch's more literal Yiddish rendering.

Interesting to note, however, is the imagery of the mildew itself—happy to be on the walls, generically speaking in Ehrenstein, are indeed on "my" (*mayne*—the speaker's own) walls in the Yiddish version, where ironically the *shpores* (supports—not the *Ritzen*) let the rain in—inside to the speaker. Ravitch dives deep into the idiom of Yiddish, transforming the "Töte dich!" to "Tu on dir a mayse!" that translates into English as: "put on a story/pageant/play, write yourself into the story, i.e., get it over with." *Blote* in Yiddish can be the equivalent of the German *Kot*, but there are far stronger words available in Yiddish that represent the role that defilement plays in regulating Jewish culture and tradition. In addition, the speaker in the Yiddish poem lies

⁵² Translated out of Hebrew into German as *schuf* (Luther), and into Yiddish as *bashafen*; one of the most significant translation projects from the interwar period, Yehoash (the pen name of Shloyme Blumgarten) released the entire Hebrew Bible in accessible modern Yiddish for mass audiences. It remains the standard translation of the Hebrew Bible today. Yehoash was also an important figure beyond his translations—to both modernist Yiddish writers in Europe and in North America—for the Introspectivists, who cite his work in their manifesto often quoted in this dissertation.

around in the excrement, wallows, and is also “homeless,” i.e., wandering about. And all are acceptable meanings for the Yiddish *valgern zikh*.

Regarding the use of *tsnies* (a highly-gendered term often referring to “modesty”) found in the first stanza, I ask myself: is this translation *tsniesdik* for a Yiddish audience? And, if not, is it due to its lack of ornamentation but clear imagery, in addition to exposing the work of Ehrenstein to Yiddish literature and a broader Yiddish audience than the emergent intellectual class of Yiddishist at the time? One way to answer this is to examine the Yiddish orthography itself. Writing out “...*In vilde ekipazshen / fohren arum mayne sonim / oyf dem levone-regenboygen*” might at first glance illustrate non-standardized (and even German-inflected) Yiddish popular at the time, but it also contains something stylistically richer than usual. (*Vilde*) *Ekipazsh(e)n* can mean carriage, coach (just as *Karosse* does in Ehrenstein’s German), but it can also mean workforce or crew, which gives further meaning to the presence of the adjective *vild*; all is chaotic as the speaker wallows underneath. The use of the *loshn-koydesh soyne/sonim* for “enemies” carries additional weight than just using the word *faynd* (something more linguistically familiar to modern German). Beautifully parallel in both versions are the opening and closing lines of this poem, where the speaker’s friends are “bent”, and his enemies are also literally “bent” as they ride over him on the “moon-rainbow.”

In his translation of “*Dem vanderers lid*,” Ravitch takes a dark poem about despair and further reduces it and its speaker to the emotional burdens of depression. Similarly, while creating this equally “faithful,” yet dynamic translation, Ravitch poses other question to the reader with his rendering of Ehrenstein’s *Verzweiflung*, or יאָוּשׁ/*Yiesh*

in Yiddish.⁵³ The opening lines in transliterated Yiddish are: “*Eynzam leb ikh, fartruknt un oyssenogt. keyn shterndl tsvitshert in himl-bloy. Shtarbn vilt zikh azoy.*” The speaker has withered, dried up, and has been discarded, spit out. After being gnawed at, and drained of its value, the speaker also inserts an ironic tinge, contrasting the twinkling of the stars with blue skies, further concealing what time of day that the speaker is referring to.

Structural elements of the translation are also noteworthy. The translation consists of three four-line stanzas, but looks can be deceiving. The translation has a lengthened meter in most lines, and the Yiddish functions “in-between” the German and more standardized forms of the language that were developing at the time of the translation’s publications. “Am Himmel zwitschert *kein Stern*” carries over into Yiddish “keyn shterndl,” even if more standard forms of negations in Yiddish exist elsewhere in the translation. Spellings also coincide with German orthography from time to time (although not consistently). Many would posit the pre-World-War-I penchant for *daytshmerish* (i.e., modern German-inflected) Yiddish among literary circles and (notably) journalism. However, the structure and even the word choice found in the German version instead serve as landmarks.

Verzweiflung

יאוש

Wochen, Wochen sprach ich kein Wort;	שוין וואָכענלאַנג האָב איך קיין וואָרט נישט געזאָגט:
Ich lebe einsam, verdorrt.	איינזאַם לעב איך, פֿאַרטרוקענט און אויסגעטאָגט.
Am Himmel zwitschert kein Stern.	קיין שטערנדל צוויטשערט אין הימעל-בלוי,
Ich stürbe so gern.	שטאַרבען ווילט זיך אַזוי.

⁵³ *Yiesh* is also a talmudic term for a Jew, who has lost an object, and has released the object into the public domain, thereby relinquishing ownership of the object. This relinquishment also relieves the new owner of an object from any obligation to return what has been lost.

Meine Augen betrübt die Enge,
Ich verkrieche mich in einen Winkel,
Klein möchte ich sein wie eine Spinne,
Aber niemand zerdrückt mich.

די ענגשאַפֿט באַטריבט מיינע אויגען,
איך בין אין אַ ווינקעל פֿאַרקראַכען,
קליין וואָלט איך זיין געוואָלט – פֿונקט ווי אַ שפּין.
אַבער קיינער צוקוועטשט מיך נישט.

Keinem habe ich Schlimmes getan,
Allen Guten half ich ein wenig.
Glück, dich soll ich nicht haben.
Man will mich nicht lebend begraben.⁵⁴

קיינעם האָב איך קיין שלעכטס נישט געטהון,
די גוטע אַפֿילו געהאַלפֿען אַ ביסל.
גליק, – דיך וועל איך קיינמאָל נישט האָבען.
לעבעדיק וויל מען מיך דאָ נישט באַגראַבען.⁵⁵

Here, I would also like to point out a subsequent translation of the poem found in a post-World-War II publication by Ravitch. Ravitch, who left Poland and lived in Australia for much of the thirties, ultimately settled in Montreal where he remained until his death in 1976. He remained a central figure for Yiddish culture in Canada and throughout the rest of the world.⁵⁶ Later in his career, he published autobiographical collections of stories in multiple volumes under the title, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn*

⁵⁴ Albert Ehrenstein, “Verzweiflung,” in *Albert Ehrenstein: Werke, Band 4*, Hanni Mittelman ed., (Grafrath: Klaus Boer Verlag, 1997), 142.

⁵⁵ Albert Ehrenstein, “*Yesh.*,” (Melech Ravitch trans.), in *Di Kritik*, Heft 4 (dated), Oktober 1920: 22. YIVO Archives, New York, New York, USA.

⁵⁶ Apart from his postwar translation of Kafka, brilliantly researched in Amy Blau’s dissertation, “Afterlives: Translations of German Weltliteratur into Yiddish” (2005), much of Ravitch’s larger oeuvre remains understudied. Geography plays a large role in this, as do certain norms and trends within Yiddish studies. Ravitch moved from Poland in the mid-1930s to Australia, and later to Montreal, then pre-1948 Palestine/after Israel, and back to Montreal. However, constant movement also to more astute researchers belies the more complex legacies of Yiddish nationalisms. For example, Ravitch had been active in the *Fraylandbavegung* (translated into English as “territorialism”), which consisted of various offshoots of Diaspora Nationalism (i.e., the belief minoritized Jewish populations have a right to cultural autonomy wherever they reside—often non-Zionist in outlook). Such territorialist groups, however, called for Jewish autonomy of place (albeit outside of Palestine). Notable examples are cooperatives that emerged in pre- and post-World-War-I southern Ukraine. As time passed, and migration of Jewish refugees to other parts of the world increased, so, too, did these political aspirations among territorialists, which have problematic legacies dovetailing with colonialism. Ravitch, for example, traveled throughout Australia from his home base in Melbourne, seeking out locations for a possible Yiddish “colony” in the Australian outback. Ravitch might have failed at finding such a locale, but he nevertheless thoroughly documented his travels both in writing and in his use of photography. Anna Epstein’s “Melekh Ravitch: The Eccentric Outback Quest of an Urbane Yiddish Poet from Poland” offers a needed critique often missing from Yiddish cultural history. Even if Ravitch was not working on behalf of a state, his racialized othering of Aboriginal Australians in both his writing and in images of the time are finally attracting critical attention. These interventions are part of a long-overdue task to broaden the scope of Yiddish studies.

(The Book of Life Stories). They amount to thousands of pages of work, and have not appeared in English translation in their entirety.

Significantly, included are brief remarks about his time in Vienna, and his work with Ehrenstein on their German-Yiddish anthology. He also includes a second version of his translation, which remains the only poem out of the five with a published second version. Condensing the three stanzas into one and placing it within a larger body of text about the authors' past(s). Ravitch pointed out that, at the end of his meeting with Ehrenstein at cafe Landtmann to discuss the anthology, Ehrenstein and Ravitch wrote down this version of the poem:

יאוש

וואָכן, וואָכן, האָב איך קיין וואָרט נישט אַרויסגעזאָגט,
איינזאַם לעב איך - פֿאַרדאָרט און אויסגענאָגט,
אויפן הימל צוויטשערט נישט קיין איינציקער שטערן.
איך וואָלט געשטאַרבן - אַזוי גערן.
מיינע אויגן פֿאַראומערט פֿון ענגשאַפט,
אין אַ ווינקל בין איך פֿאַרקראַכן,
קליין ווילק איך זיין ווי אַ שפּין אַ קליינע,
אַבער קיינער וויל מיך אַפּילו נישט צערעטן.
זאָגט, וועמען האָב איך זען בייזגעטאָן?
אַלע גוטע - אַפּילו געהאַלפן צוביסלעך
גליק מיינס - דיך וועל איך קיינמאָל נישט האָבן.
און קיינער וויל מיך נישט לעבעדיק באַגראָבן.⁵⁷

Ravitch's translation of Ehrenstein's "Verzweiflung," which he translated into the Yiddish with additional weightedness inherent in the title "Yiesh," adequately conveys Ehrenstein's well-known rejection in the poem of Viennese bourgeois values as seen from his working-class origins in the district of Ottakring. In addition, Ravitch notes in his

⁵⁷Albert Ehrenstein, "Yiesh," (Melech Ravitch trans.), in *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn: fun di yorn 1908-1921 (Band tsvey)* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-Farband fun poylishe yidin in Argentine, 1964), 514-15.

memoirs how Ehrenstein was drawn to the “sounds of the [Yiddish] words, that were and were not foreign to him, and the ‘iker’ of the letters, that were at the time completely foreign to him.”⁵⁸ The now-revised translation Ravitch cites in his postwar volume also hints at the instability and unreliability of memoir to convey past experiences through memory, while also highlighting something significant about the role of translation: it is ongoing, and always in a state of incompleteness. Ravitch’s translations thus opens up a dialogue between the numerous languages spoken by Jews in Vienna, and within Viennese modernism to include the Yiddish language.⁵⁹

Else Lasker-Schüler, the Poet: German? Jewish? Austrian? Yiddish?

Yiddish translations from the decade prior to World War I, such as the translations of Heine’s poetry in both North America and Europe by Dovid Frishman, Moyshe Leyb Halpern and others, transformed the texts into Yiddish *for* a Yiddish audience at a time of cultural and political upheaval, and employed ornate religious and cultural references that spoke directly to traditional Jewish life. As Yiddish arguably reached global audiences by this time, translators moved away from earlier attempts to prop up the language for the sake of its literature to instead focus on less noticeable but more radical affinities, countering any rising nationalism and further uncertainty for Yiddish culture in and beyond Europe. Ravitch’s translations are, for example, much more sparse and plain, almost banal in their lack of ornamentation or changes in register between the many linguistic elements making up the Yiddish language (Germanic, Romance, Slavic, Hebraic, Aramaic, etc.). These differences mark the sudden and swift changes to Jewish

⁵⁸ Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn*, 515.

⁵⁹ The second poem to appear in this collection is none other than the Wanderer’s Lied, one of Ehrenstein’s more well-known poems that originally appeared in Karl Kraus’ *Die Fackel* (Issue 296-297, 18 February 1910, 36)

bi-/multilingualism as modern Jewish cultures emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A foundational core knowledge of religious texts and religious ritual in general (regardless of gender) made way to modern school systems and instruction in both Yiddish and majority languages by the interwar period. Although secular schooling portended a move to monolingualism (i.e, Polish, Ukrainian, German, Russian, Hebrew, etc), I argue for a more complicated approach when Yiddish is involved. Monolingual (or passing as monolingual) might very well have been the case among assimilationists, but it bears repeating: Yiddish, even into the interwar and post-World-War-II periods still denoted multilingualism.

Ehrenstein's poetry appears in multiple anthologies (not just this one co-written with Ravitch), which is not surprising considering his role as an early Jewish modernist poet. Alongside Ehrenstein is another significant body of work by Else Lasker-Schüler, whom Ravitch coined the "greatest poet and personality from the German-speaking regions of Germany and Austria."⁶⁰ Lasker-Schüler, a poet whose work has often served numerous Jewish groups across political, national, and linguistic divides, is also a predictable choice. At the same time, Lasker-Schüler's poetry serves as a reminder in itself that "the text" always consists of multiple sources and linguistic modes, thereby destabilizing any concept of monolingual languaging. In the translations of Lasker-Schüler's "Ein Lied," "Abraham und Isaak," and "Jakob und Esau" one can still further gauge the connections Ravitch and Ehrenstein sought to forge between German Jewish and Yiddish writing in interwar Austria. Lasker-Schüler's poem and Ravitch's translation:

⁶⁰ Ravitch, *Mayse bukh fun mayn leben* 513.

Ein Lied

א לייד

Hinter meinen Augen stehen Wasser,
Die muß ich alle weinen.

טייכן-וואסער שטעהען הינטער מיינע אויגען,
זיי מוז איך אויסוויינען אלע.

Immer möchte ich auffliegen,
Mit den Zugvögeln fort;

אין יעדער רגע וואלט איך אויפגעפלייגען,
מיט די וואנדערפלייגאלעך אוועק.

Buntatmen mit den Winden
In der großen Luft.

פארביג אטעמען מיט ווינטען
אין דעם גרויסען אויר.

O ich bin traurig....
Das Gesicht im Mond weiß es.

א, מיר איז אזוי אומעטיג — —
דער לבנה'ס פנים ווייסט עס גוט.

Drum ist viel sammtne Andacht
Und nahender Frühmorgen um mich.

(דאפאר) איז סאמעטנע קדושה
און נאָהענטער פרימאָרגען אַרום מיר.

Als an deinen steinernen Herzen
Meine Flügel brachen,

אַז מיינע פליגלען האָבען
צובראָכן זיך אויף דיין שטיינערן האַרץ,

Fielen die Amseln wie Trauerrosen
Hoch vom blauen Gebüsch

זענען די קאס-פלייגאלעך געפאלען
ווי אומעט-רויזען הויך פון די בלאַע קוסטעס אַראָב.

Alles verhaltene Gezwitscher
Will wieder jubeln,

אַל די איינגעהאלטנע שירה
ווייל ווידער קלינגען אין שומחה,

Und ich möchte auffliegen
Mit den Zugvögeln fort.⁶¹

און איך וואלט אויפגעפלייגען
העט ווייט, מיט אלע וואנדערפלייגאלעך.⁶²

Here the Yiddish points to the *taykhn-vaser* (river water) that the perfective *oysveynen* of the Yiddish more explicitly signifies.⁶³ In every *rege* in the second stanza

⁶¹ Else Lasker-Schüler, "Ein Lied," in *Else Lasker Schüler: Werke und Briefe - Kritische Ausgabe* (Nördlingen: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996), 193.

⁶² "A lid." Translated by Melech Ravitch. In *Di Kritik*, Heft 4 (dalek) (Oktober 1920): 19-20. YIVO Archives, New York, New York, USA.

⁶³ A common grammatical phenomenon in Slavic languages, perfective verbs note an action completed, as opposed to one in the process of being completed. In Yiddish, the differences between a perfective and imperfective verb can either be subtle or clearly marked as such. More explicit examples involve various prefixes (i.e., *kokhn* "to cook" vs *oyskokhn* "lit. to outcook" but "to be done cooking", *lernen* "to learn/study" vs. *oyslernen* "to have an exhaustive understanding of a subject")

(loshn-koydesh word for “moment”, and the rendering of the German word “immer”), the speaker wishes to fly away, breathing colorfully with the wind and the *groysen oyer*, an English cognate with “air” not often seen in Yiddish. The speaker is not *troyerik* but *umetig*, and the (tender) devotion becomes a “sacredness” (*kedushe* - loshn-koydesh when God’s holiness is acknowledged). Ravitch maintains the use of *umet* (sad) in the stanza where in the German *Trauerrosen* appears. In the penultimate stanza, Ravitch’s use of *shire*, translates from Gezwitscher, is also an interesting choice. *Shire* (from loshn-koydesh) ultimately made its way into modern Hebrew to describe all verse texts, biblical or modern, while in Yiddish the term remained grounded in the biblical songs of praise to God—both rooting the poem in the divine and in the Jewish. Echoing the use of *shire* is the use of *simkhe* in the final line, a word that denotes praise, joyfulness, and celebration.

The inclusion of this poem, and alongside Ehrenstein’s “Wanderers Lied,” is notable for numerous reasons beyond the thematic similarities. We must also go beyond posterity’s sake, even as Lasker-Schüler’s legacy has far outpaced that of Ehrenstein (and Ravitch’s for that matter). Furthermore, even if her work might have been utilized to make *Dos andere Daytshland* more visible, Lasker-Schüler’s place within a modern Yiddish canon of translated texts only became clearer over time, as we shall see in subsequent interwar and postwar translations of Lasker-Schüler’s work.

However, here, too, we should depart from simplistic ethnographic or cultural affinities and instead point to the larger connections being made between poet and text, translator and reader. Below is Lasker-Schüler’s Abraham und Isaak. The poem, written in 1913 and part of Lasker-Schüler’s *Hebräische Balladen* creates for the reader an origin

story of the connection between the Jewish people and god, but also in this vein the origins of poetics itself.⁶⁴ The fact that the poem itself appeared in 1913, a year before the outbreak of war, and to appear again in Yiddish in 1921, as Ravitch began to formulate a new path for his own poetics via German literature, gives further weight to Lasker-Schüler's poetry, and to her "Yiddish" voice in translation.:

Abraham und Isaak (Dem großen Propheten St. Peter Hille in Ehrfurcht)	אַבְרָהָם און יִצְחָק
Abraham baute in der Landschaft Eden Sich eine Stadt aus Erde und aus Blatt Und übte sich mit Gott zu reden.	אַבְרָם האָט געבויט אין דער מדינה עדן אַ שטאָט פֿון ליים און בלאַט, און האָט געחזר'ט זיך ווי מיט גאָט צו רעדען.
Die Engel ruhten gern vor seiner frommen Hütte. Und Abraham erkannte jeden; Himmlische Zeichen ließen ihre Flügelschritte.	גערען האָבען די מלאכים פֿאַר זיין פֿרום געצעלט גערוהט. א יעדען האָט אַבְרָהָם שוין דערקענט אין פנים. און ס'האָבען זייער פֿליגעל־שריט אין סאַמך געלאָזן הימליש סמנים.
Bis sie dann einmal bang in ihren Träumen Meckern hörten die gequälten Böcke, Mit denen Isaak opfern spielte hinter Süßholzbäumen.	ביז איינמאָל האָבען זיי אין זייער באַנג מלאכים־טריימען געעהרט דאָס מעקען פֿון געקוועלטע צאַפֿעס, וואָס יצחק האָט געשפּילט מיט זיי זיך אין קרבנות אונטער לאַקריין־ביימער.
Und Gott ermahnte Abraham; Er brach vom Kamm des Meeres Muscheln ab und Schwamm Hoch auf den Blöcken den Altar zu schmücken.	גאָט אָבער געוואָרענט: אַבְרָהָם, אַבְרָם!! און דער האָט רוהיג פֿונ'ם ים־ברעג זיך אָנגעבראַכען פֿיל מייַערקעפלעך, שוואַם. דעם מזבח אויף די פֿעלזן מיט זיי אויסצושמיקן.
Und trug den einzigen Sohn gebunden auf den Rücken Zu werden seinem großen Herrn gerecht -- Der aber liebte seinen Knecht. ⁶⁵	און געבונדן דעם בן־יחיד און געטראָגן אויף זיין רוקען, צו טהון פֿאַר זיין גרויסען האָר דאָס רעכט — דער אָבער האָט אים ליב געהאַט, זיין קנעכט. ⁶⁶

The first stanza alludes to the beginning of the 18th chapter of *Breyshes* (Genesis) as Abraham finds three men near the entrance of his tent, and goes on to treat his guests

⁶⁴ Sigrid Bauschinger, *Else Lasker-Schüler* 175-176.

⁶⁵ Else Lasker-Schüler, "Abraham und Isaak," in *Else Lasker Schüler: Werke und Briefe - Kritische Ausgabe* (Nördlingen: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996), 157-158.

⁶⁶ Else Lasker-Schüler, "Avrom und Yitzhok" (Melech Ravitch trans.), in *Di Kritik*, Heft 4 (daled) (Oktober 1920): 20. YIVO Archives, New York, New York, USA.

with respect and dignity afforded to strangers in the Hebrew Bible. The speaker in Lasker-Schüler's poem states that Abraham "baut in der Landschaft Eden / Sich eine Stadt aus Erde und aus Blatt / Und übte sich mit Gott zu reden." The Yiddish maintains the notion of *Landschaft*—not garden—as *medine*, a *loshn-koydesh* word often referring to place but in the abstract, or even administrative notion of the term. "*Un hot gekhazert zikh vi mit got tsu redn.*" The use of *khazern* to denote "üben," suggests the religious obligation to repeat something in order to learn it. Of course Abraham recognizes the messengers sent from god, and in turn, precedes the line where the wings leave behind their heavenly signs. Ravitch maintains a rhyme scheme that does not entirely mirror the German, but the rhyme scheme itself is significant. The final two lines of the second stanza read, "[*a yeden*] *hot avrom shoun derkent in ponim, / in s'hoben seyre fligl-shrit in zamd gelozen himlishe simonim.*" The Yiddish further signifies the connection that Abraham makes with the visit of these angels/messengers to his tent.

That is one segment of the biblical narrative concerning Abraham and the birth and life of his son Isaac, to whom Sarah gives birth a year after. As the poem, too, jumps ahead in time to the moment at which Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, the Yiddish translation opens up other questions about the verse. "*Biz eynmol hoben zey in zeyer bang melukhim-treymen*" speaks of something more than just *khaloymes* (the *loshn-koydesh* and more typical usage for "dreams") to what ultimately becomes the climax of the poem: god urging (German: *ermahnen*) Abraham to not sacrifice his son, who will go on to become the patriarch of many nations. *Ermahnen* in Yiddish appears in Yiddish more literally as the verb *vorenen*, after which the translation hints at the change that has already occurred between G-d and Abraham through a name alone: The Yiddish reads:

“*Got hot ober gevorent: Avraham, Avrom!*” The ironic line to follow, where in the Yiddish it says, “*Un der hot ruhig fun ’m yam-breg zikh ongebrokhn vil meyerkeplekh, shvom, / dem mizbeyakh oyf di felzen mit zey oystsushmiken.*” Quietly or peacefully, the sacrificial altar became covered in seafoam and mussels, and Abraham takes his bound son to instead become what will become his paternal legacy.

In his memoirs while writing about Else Lasker-Schüler, Ravitch cites two of Lasker-Schüler’s contemporaries: Karl Kraus and Peter Hille. Kraus famously (i.e., polemically) stated that he would trade one poem by Lasker-Schüler for all of Heine’s works. Hille (cited by Ravitch) said, “She is the black swan upon the eternal waters of Israel.”⁶⁷ Although the friendship between Hille and Lasker-Schüler was legendary, the inclusion of this poem in Ravitch and Ehrenstein anthology appeared in print is also significant; the German version of the poem remains eternally dedicated to Hille in its subheading, which also provides an important intersection between German, Jewish, and Yiddish in the early twentieth century. Linked in turn to the story of Abraham, and various episodes throughout the life/history of a major origin story in the Hebrew Bible, the poem itself as it appears in Yiddish for the first time takes on additional significance as the birth of a new poetry that Ravitch sought to create in translation.

The last of the three poems that appear in *Kritik* by Lasker-Schüler, “Jakob und Esau” is perhaps one of the most significant reworkings of biblical source material from Lasker-Schüler’s *Hebraische Balladen*. There are many directions in which to take a reading of this particular poem. The psychoanalytic valences in much of the imagery, and the expressionist style of the poem itself, speak to the possibility of multiple rereadings

⁶⁷ Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn*, 514.

and reworkings of the biblical narrative in question.⁶⁸ Further possible readings for Lasker-Schüler's poems stem from their renderings into other languages via translation.

Two versions of the poem:

Jakob und Esau

יעקב און עשו

Rebekkas Magd ist eine himmlische Fremde,
Aus Rosenblättern trägt die Engelin ein Hemde
Und einen Stern im Angesicht.

רבקה'ס שפחה איז אַ פֿרעמדע, קומט פֿון הימעל, פֿון די געטער,
און דאָס מלאך-מיידל טראָגט אַ העמד פֿון רויזענבלעטער,
און אין פנימעל אַ שטערען.

Und immer blickt sie auf zum Licht,
Und ihre sanften Hände lesen
Aus goldenen Linsen ein Gericht.

און צום ליכט אַרויף קוקט זי אַזוי גערען.
איהרע הענד, די זאַנפֿטיג־זיסע קלויבען
גאַלדנע לינזען. ס'וועט אַ הימליש מאַכל ווערען.

Jakob und Esau blühn an ihrem Wesen
Und streiten um die Süßigkeiten nicht,
Die sie in ihrem Schoß zum Mahle bricht.

יעקב און עשו, ביידע בליהען אַרום איהר, וואַקסען, ווערן גרויס,
און האָבן קיינמאָל קיין מחלוקה אָנגעהויבען
ווענען יענע מעדנים, וואָס זי גרייט פֿאַר זײַ אין שוים.

Der Bruder läßt dem jüngeren die Jagd
Und all sein Erbe für den Dienst der Magd;
Um seine Schultern schlägt er wild das
Dickicht.⁶⁹

דער בכור גיט אַב דעם יונגערען אין אַווענט אַל זײַן טאָג-געיעג,
און זײַן ירושה לאָזט דער שפּחה ער פֿאַר די געדינטע טעג.
און מיט די אַקסלען זײַנע ברעכט ער ווילד די קוסטעס דורך.⁷⁰

In the Hebrew Bible, Jacob tricks his blind and ailing father (Isaac) in order to legally become the heir to his father's *yerushe* (inheritance) in place of his older brother, Esau. Sibling rivalry is of course not uncommon in the biblical texts (and throughout

⁶⁸ In her book, *Strange Cocktail: Translation at the Making of Modern Hebrew Poetry*, Adriana X. Jacobs surveys the instability of modern Hebrew verse in groundbreaking ways by mapping the history of translation. Translation, she argues, coincided with the "secularization and vernacularization" of Hebrew, which (as I have argued in this dissertation) occurred both rapidly and alongside Yiddish (at least in its earlier decades in the nineteenth century). Furthermore, Jacobs critically expounds on Hayim Nahman Bialik's notion of "translated Judaism," Jews living out their lives in "foreign" tongues (40). The irony in Bialik's notion rests with the instability of any language, which often gets taken for granted among speakers of majority and state-based languages. Furthermore, Bialik's own attempts to draw secularizing and nationalizing Jewish into the fold of modern Hebrew, as Jacobs highlights, was done via translation. Jacobs' scholarly research, which includes both monographs and critical translations of Hebrew poets on the margins today, is central to understanding Hebrew's (albeit different) trajectory with regards to this project.

⁶⁹ Else Lasker-Schüler, "Jakob und Esau," In *Else Lasker Schüler: Werke und Briefe - Kritische Ausgabe* (Nördlingen: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996), 163.

⁷⁰ Else Lasker-Schüler, "Jankev und Eysev." Translated by Melech Ravitch. In *Di Kritik*, Heft 4 (daled) (Oktober 1920): 20-21. YIVO Archives, New York, New York, USA.

literary history for that matter), and these various plot elements were certainly not lost on German or Yiddish readers of the poem, who were familiar with various sources. It is the subject matter of the Jacob/Esau feud as reimagined and then translated into Yiddish that highlights the greater role of translation of Yiddish poetry in Central Europe and beyond. Imagery from the Genesis story appears throughout the four-stanza poem, from Rebekah's maidservant, to the centrality of food and hospitality. Even in the first stanza, the poet alludes to the phenomenon also hinted at in *Abraham und Isaak / Avraham un Itskhok*: someone's countenance alone pointing to their divine guidance. Lasker-Schüler also ends the poem with a level of benevolence not found in the biblical text. As such, the reworking of this poem, particularly in light of emerging gender and feminist discourses at the time, is profound; Rebekah (the mother of Jacob and Esau) through her generosity and along with the presence of her maidservant, transforms the domestic space into a space lacking the traditionally masculinist-laden outcomes found in the Hebrew Bible, and which are rather explicit in the Jacob/Esau story.

Even the title in Yiddish points to ways translation (as a medium) illuminates Lasker-Schüler's verse. "Jakob und Esau" translates in the Yiddish to "Yankev un Esey," a consonance not found in the German, and when written in Hebrew script (as Yiddish almost always is) is just one re-working that places the poem into renewed dialogue with Jewish texts; Esau's name meaning rough, and Jacob's name coming from the same root as the verb "to go around" or "circumvent," describe the intrinsic nature of these figures that lead to a rivalry, and yet their names in translation appear with an equalizing vocalization that indeed corresponds to the subject matter as reworked by Lasker-Schüler. Indeed, Lasker-Schüler's reworking of biblical texts central to Jewish religious literacy,

and this “reworking of the reworking” of biblical texts into German verse by Lasker-Schüler that are then translated into Yiddish by Ravitch, fits quite well into the development of Jewish literature at a time when language, culture, and place were being constantly renegotiated.

Ravitch’s translations signify a complex relationship between the two languages (or more) at play: German and Yiddish, as well as the many fusion components easily visible in the latter. Of course, there are many elements of the poems found in the German that make their way into the Yiddish translation by Ravitch, but moving beyond notions of “faithfulness” to the original (and to reiterate what I previously mentioned about translations of Lasker-Schüler), something else inevitably emerges through Ravitch’s own reading: a sophisticated discourse of reworking Jewish religious and cultural traditions during this time, while also radically displaying commonalities between two languages and cultures seen to be at odds with one another.

Uncharted Legacies

Although the publisher abandoned the translation project at the last minute, and Ravitch left for Warsaw shortly thereafter, these translations of poems written by Else Lasker-Schüler and Albert Ehrenstein exist in the ephemeral world of Yiddish avant-garde periodicals popular in Vienna and elsewhere after the First World War. Lasker-Schüler, one of the leading German expressionist poets of the time (and one of the few women), who engaged so deeply with the stories found in the Hebrew Bible, perhaps was an unsurprising choice to include in a volume meant to bring together contemporary German-Jewish and Yiddish literature.

On the other hand, Lasker-Schüler's reworking of biblical texts central to Jewish religious literacy, and Ehrenstein's own radical strand of expressionism are anything but subtle. More importantly, it is this "reworking of the reworking" of biblical texts into German verse that are then translated into Yiddish that fits quite well into Miron's notion of contiguity found within the "Jewish literary complex," which took place in the small but significant Yiddishist movement in Vienna during the interwar period. Ravitch, translating/reading Lasker-Schüler, who in turn is reworking, adapting, and breaking down the assemblages found in the Hebrew Bible, is an excellent representation of Miron's contiguous/tangential model put forth for the study Jewish literary thought.

Similarly, the translations themselves largely mirror the German. The utilitarian aspect of the translations, not infused with German-inflected (*daytshmarish*) Yiddish or the embellished styles found in the previous generation of German-Yiddish translation, perhaps highlights the Yiddish spoken in the Austrian capital at the time. However, it was also perhaps, as a project started by two Austrian-Jewish writers wishing to situate the works of their contemporaries within a discourse opposing total assimilation and erasure, highlights the ways in which this discourse was at home in an "other Germany." The interwar Austrian Republic, a state attempting to be "continuous," would in the two decades following these poems' publication, transform into a militarized, fascist power. However, in Central Europe, the contiguities between many languages and peoples in such an expansive space did not vanish overnight.

As previously mentioned, Ravitch's own memoirs that he published in the postwar period included various anecdotes concerning this project with Ehrenstein, and also hint at the moment in which Ravitch was probing the depths of his past for these

stories. He writes that this re-engagement with the project occurred around the time of the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem, both as he recollected the events and put them to writing. “Is there relevance (shaykhes) [to the trial]? Perhaps, yes, and perhaps, no, not really. I myself do not know. But certainly, it is a lonesome/sad moment, sad like the poem by Albert Ehrenstein.”⁷¹

Ravitch’s contribution is indeed significant, insofar as it stands as examples of a positive contiguity among two different strands of Yiddish modernism working on the geographical peripheries. All the more striking, as one source of contiguity (i.e., Ravitch) has largely been forgotten. This is yet another reason the contiguity model sheds light on Yiddish literature’s legacy in Habsburg studies.

Furthermore, one cannot overstate Else Lasker-Schüler’s place within this project, Ravitch’s translations of Lasker-Schüler and Ehrenstein were groundbreaking interventions at a time when German-to-Yiddish translation largely centered on more established, canonical literature (i.e., and fewer contemporary writers). Lasker-Schüler’s appearance in this anthology was ultimately one of the earliest examples of her work in Yiddish translation, and she became a central fixture in later translations projects that appeared throughout the twentieth century. Lasker-Schüler’s poetry in this collection hints at the long-term trends for both the translation of German literature into Yiddish that in turn situates rather than obscures German-Jewish writing in multilingual contexts.

Itsik Manger’s Poetics Laid Bare - Translations of Rilke, Trakl, and Büchner

Itsik Manger resided over a poetic landscape in Yiddish literature that rivaled few other Yiddish writers, and his archive fortunately survived the Second World War. Born

⁷¹ Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh*, 517.

in the same year as his fellow Czernowitzer, Rose Ausländer, Manger was only a child when the first Yiddish language conference took place in his hometown. But by the time he reached adulthood, and had “lived in” and read the literature of the German-speaking Jewish milieu in Bukovina, Manger also witnessed the explosion of Yiddish as a medium for a culture forging ahead against all odds, and without statehood to give it legitimacy.

Manger became a more prolific poet than Ravitch, and readers today still consider him to be an exemplary, “European” Yiddish writer—combining his love for folk traditions with his admiration for world literature into uniquely modern works of prose and verse. What makes Manger significant, however, for this project, is that his work became a locus of memory—memory of his birthplace in Habsburg Czernowitz, a topos denoting the hybrid space and temporality of Jewish culture. And like Ravitch, Manger tried to reconcile competing notions of a cultural “centering” that was fiercely dividing other Yiddish poets. Through his own experiential understanding of linguistic and geographic centerlessness, Manger argued that the atmosphere of Yiddish poetry is not a singular place in the world but the world at large.⁷²

Manger worked with the paradoxical and conflicting aspects of Yiddish culture in his native Romania during the interwar period, especially as Romania descended into authoritarianism. Yiddish, although becoming a language on the decline thanks to acculturation, assimilation, and repression in the country, was paradoxically bound for a renaissance among an increasingly global network of authors and readers. This painful irony that Yiddish writers both succeeded and failed in countries of origin, finding resources in various metropolitan centers around the world at a time of declining

⁷² Efrat Gal-Ed, “Itzik Manger and the Autumn Landscape” 32.

readership and discrimination, renders much of Yiddish modernism with an elagiac quality that Manger embraced.

Manger's later entrance into the Warsaw literary scene came eight years after Ravitch's in early 1929, and (like Ravitch with Austria) he began to depart from, while also remained grounded in, the extraordinary values of the "local" in Yiddish literature he had cultivated in his earlier years. The Romanian (and earlier Habsburg) cultural and urban landscape no longer included the Romanian (or German) language following this shift to the Polish capital, and Manger almost exclusively relied on the German literature of his youth to create a center in its own right. Manger thus de-centers Yiddish by placing the de-centered German culture of Bukovina onto the cultural paradigms that currently circulated in Yiddish Warsaw.⁷³

"Ruth" by Else Lasker-Schüler, translated by Manger, is a three-stanza poem that appeared in an unpublished collection, written alongside Manger's early works—coinciding with Ravitch's publication of the translations he completed with Ehrenstein. It is a modern love poem, and homage to someone lost to time, whose memory lives on in the form of verse. The translation lends itself well to Manger's attempts at traversing the space between his (arguably, native) German (and the language of his limited formal education), and his choice of writing in his (arguably, native) Yiddish. Although biblical allegory abounds in the three-stanza poem, the name Ruth only appears once in the entire piece: in the final line.

⁷³ Another contemporary of Manger's was Isaac Bashevis Singer who, in his early years, was also an avid translator of German literature—including Thomas Mann, Erich Maria Remarque, and Stefan Zweig.

(Der Leila: Lucie von
Goldschmidt-Rothschild)

Und du suchst mich vor den Hecken.
Ich höre deine Schritte seufzen
Und meine Augen sind schwere dunkle
Tropfen.

צווישן די גארבן זוכסטו מיך
איך הער ווי ס'זיפצן דינע טריט
שווערע טונקלע טראָפנס זענען מינע אויגען —

In meiner Seele blühen süß deine Blicke
Und füllen sich,
Wenn meine Augen in den Schlaf
wandeln.

אין מיין נשמה בליען דינע בליקן
און ווערן פול אויבערפול
ווען מינע אויגען וואַנדלען דורכן שלאָף

Am Brunnen meiner Heimat
Steht ein Engel,
Der singt das Lied meiner Liebe,
Der singt das Lied Ruths

אין מיין בלאָער היים
שטייט אַ מלאך ביים ברונען
ער זינגט דאָס ליד פֿון מיין ליבע
דאָס ליד פֿון רות.

In the final stanza where the translation “wanders” away from the German, but unsurprisingly echoes the trajectory of German-Jewish and Yiddish poetry in the interwar period and onward. Lasker-Schüler’s stanza begins with “Am Brunnen meiner Heimat.” Manger translates “Heimat” as “*In mayn bloer heym...*”⁷⁶ We see this for example in the poem *Zol zayn* (may it be) written by the Litvak/South African/later Israeli Yiddish poet Yoysef Papirnikov (Papyernikov) on the loss of his home: “*In troyem iz mir heler, in troyem iz mir beser, in kholem der himl — nokh bloer fun blo.*”⁷⁷

(Everything is better and brighter in dreams, in dreams the sky is more blue than

⁷⁴ Lasker-Schüler. *Gesammelte Gedichten*, 19.

⁷⁵ *Rus*, Folder 2, Manger Archive, National Library of Israel.

⁷⁶ I once received feedback at a conference that the translation alludes to a connection between this poem and Lasker-Schüler’s *Blaues Klavier*, but I argue this more clearly resonates with some of Manger’s Yiddish contemporaries and Yiddish literature in general.

⁷⁷ Papyernikov, *Frukht fun vint*, 30.

anything). The adjective blue, the color of melancholy, is the symbolic hue (“team color”) of the ambivalently Yiddish *luftmentsch*, whose ambivalent place and reception in society relates not to the earth beneath but to the expansive, placeless sky above. Manger’s translation of Lasker-Schüler works well in this regard.

It is this notion of the center that is also an ambivalent one when eclipsed by a constant state of translation and transition. Iasi was the site for Manger’s early encounters with German literature, and from 1920 to 1928 Manger lived between Czernowitz, Bucharest, and Iasi (further pointing to the Romanian and German linguistic territories and politics Manger traversed throughout this period) before moving to Poland. He had tried his hand at translating Heine, Dehmel, and Lasker-Schüler. Only the manuscripts survive in Manger’s archive at the National Library of Israel, and no record of them having been published could be found.

Two translations, however, did appear in print, in Manger’s own publication. Manger’s self-published journal, *Few Words* (*Getseylte verter* - געצײלטע ווערטער), was a four-page anomaly. The brochure-shaped journal (4.75 in x 13 in) offered readers a glimpse into Manger’s strained dialogue with readers while “surveying modern Yiddish literature, modern Yiddish theater, and modern Yiddish art and its relation/connection to the world.”⁷⁸ It was Manger’s one-man show—as a self-edited conversation between Yiddish literature (which to him was a global conversation) and himself.⁷⁹ We see from the title of the journal Manger textually disavows himself from the cultural epicenter of Warsaw and returns to Czernowitz (with Krakow and Riga as secondary directional

⁷⁸ *Getseylte Verter* 2. August 1929, p. 1 “Mir viln mestn di moderne yidishe literatur, dos moderne yidishe teater in di moderne yidishe kunst in zeyer shaykhes tsu der velt.”

⁷⁹ Efrat Gal-Ed, *Niemandssprache* (Jüdischer Verlag Im Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016): 227

markers). Manger, along with the other contributors, worked to produce works of high-end criticism, journalism, and literature in a competitive arena of voices with dwindling readership and shifting national support.⁸⁰ But in the year following Manger's move to Warsaw, *Getseylte verter* became just one of several projects he ultimately abandoned. In its twelve brief issues, the journal attempted to anthologize and record ("surveying") certain German contemporaries "*in shaykes*"⁸¹ with Yiddish. *Getseylte verter*, a title noting both the "few," "the counted," "the limited," even "borrowed," hints at temporality. Again, diaspora is not simply about place. It is about time, and the time (even if limited) devoted to moments of crossover.

One of Manger's translations appearing in *Getseylte verter* is of Rilke's early poem, "Der Wahnsinn," which had appeared in the *Book of Images*. The title becomes "Shgoen" in Yiddish. The title's *loshn-koydesh* rendering resonates on a different register of language due to related English and German cognates. The Yiddish *meshuge* (adj. crazy), *mishegas* (adj. craziness), and *mishugene/r* (the adjectival noun; crazy person) are all related via the same root. As such, *Shgoen* appears far less often in Yiddish than these other forms that have since traveled into other languages such as German, modern Hebrew, and English. At a time when many Yiddish poets had already looked to Rilke for inspiration, Manger was suddenly, in the years immediately following Rilke's death, searching for ways to connect to German verse texts, and written by the poet responsible for influencing Yiddish poets the generation prior.

⁸⁰ Many of Manger's contributors had already created similarly avant-garde, self-published journals of their own, while also eking out a meager existence for themselves writing for the major literary journals in larger venues around the world.

⁸¹ *Shaykhes* is a *loshn-koydesh* term loaded with familial connotations (relation, connection)—and hierarchical conditions (elder, origin)—meaning, Manger's conscientious homage to German literature sheds light on the term's usage to suggest his continued engagement with German as "elder, original, related" language, while working in Yiddish.

The Yiddish (con)text, as others have pointed out, was for a while longer a workable possibility.⁸² In August and September of 1929 (in two of the journal's early issues), Manger published these translations. Both writers and their works correspond to Manger's own rendering of Jewish themes into Yiddish on a transcendent level, and enter into a dialogue with the globalizing Yiddish culture—a culture that is more quickly than ever before becoming a political actor through its own politicization. The Yiddish literary world was shifting from the traditional centers in interwar Poland to overseas locations, only to die out within a generation, and yet this created a polemic for Manger: to engage with the world of letters in translation.

Despite the editing errors, the first stanza of Rilke's "Der Wahnsinn" / "*Shigoen*" plays with the registers of Yiddish, between "*malke*" (loshn-koydesh for "queen") and "*kinigin*", a far less common utterance in various dialects of Yiddish. The dialogue interlays itself among the lines of the stanza, which Rilke and Manger both forge in rhymed verse. But to reiterate, Manger's notoriously poor editing is evident in the first stanza, where bistu appears as biztu. It is a layer of these translations that are significant for their overall reception.

Der Wahnsinn

ראַינער מאַריאַ רילקע.
שגעוון

Sie muß immer sinnen: Ich bin ... ich bin ...	זי טראַכט און טראַכט: איך בין ... איך בין.
Wer bist du denn, Marie?	
Eine Königin, eine Königin!	ווער ביסטו מאַרי?
In die Knie vor mir, in die Knie!	אַ מלכה בין איך, – אַ קיניגין, פֿאַלט פֿאַר מיר אויף די קני!

⁸² Gal-Ed, "The Local and the European," 35.

Sie muß immer weinen: Ich war... ich war ...
 Wer warst du denn, Marie?
 Ein Niemandskind, ganz arm und bar,
 und ich kann dir nicht sagen wie.

זי וויינטט: איך בין געווען...געווען.
 וואס ביסטו געווען מאַרי?
 אַ הפּקר-קינד, דערשלאָן און קליין,
 און בלייך און דערשראָקן מיין בלי.

Und wurdest aus einem solchen Kind
 eine Fürstin, vor der man kniet?
 Weil die Dinge alle anders sind,
 als man sie beim Betteln sieht.

געוואָרן איז פֿון דעם בעטלער-קינד
 אַ מלכה, פֿאַר וועלכער מען קניט.
 ס'איז אַנדערש די גאַנצע וועלט אַצינד,
 ווי ביים שיין פֿון בעטלער-ליד.

So haben die Dinge dich groß gemacht,
 und kannst du noch sagen wann?
 Eine Nacht, eine Nacht, über eine Nacht, –
 und sie sprachen mich anders an.
 Ich trat in die Gasse hinaus und sieh:
 die ist wie mit Saiten bespannt;
 da wurde Marie Melodie, Melodie ...
 und tanzte von Rand zu Rand.
 die Leute schlichen so ängstlich hin,
 wie hart an die Häuser gepflanzt, –
 denn das darf doch nur eine Königin,
 daß sie tanzt in den Gassen: tanzt! ...⁸³

דיך האָט דער חלום גרויס געמאַכט.
 דערצייל, ווי איז דאס געשען?
 אַ נאַכט, אַ נאַכט, אַ ווונדערליכע נאַכט.
 און אַלע האָב איך אַנדערש דערזען...
 די גאַסן ווי פֿידלען צעצויגן אַרום.
 איך טאַנץ אַ באַרוישטע...איך פֿלי,
 די אויגן פֿאַריסן צו די שטערן אַרויף.
 מאַרי, מעלאָדי, מעלאָדי...
 די מענטשן דערשראָקענע ביי די ווענט,
 די אויגן מיט פּחד פֿאַרגלאַנצט -
 אַזוי גרויס איז דאָך נאָר אַ קיניגין,
 וואָס טאַנצט איבער גאַסן און טאַנצט.⁸⁴

The rhyme scheme in the next stanza illuminates Manger's admiration of Rilke's masterful verse. The translation renders "Sie muß immer weinen" into "Zi veynt," only to rhyme the third line of the stanza "kleyn" with the past participle "geven" - *geveyn* aurally appears in some dialects of Yiddish, but is not a common utterance. *Geveyn*, however (slightly different spelling from *geven*), is a slippage into the act of crying that opens this particular stanza of the poem. Here, Manger's "*hefker*" appears in the form of the *Niemandskind*. Although Manger also famously described Yiddish as "*hefker*" (a

⁸³ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Der Wahnsinn", In *Das Buch der Bilder* (Berlin, Leipzig, Stuttgart: Axel Juncker Verlag, 1906), 17.

⁸⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Shgoen" (Itzik Manger trans.), *Getseylte verter* (9 August, 1929: Czernowitz), 2.

legal status from the TaNaKh denoting something that belongs to nobody) and himself as the adjectival *hefkerdik*, there is nevertheless a defiant coupling that occurs via Manger's translations. It is not that Yiddish simply faced dwindling numbers of readers and speakers, or that German literature was somehow the gateway into a more expansive Yiddish idiom for Manger and others. Translation spoke to the particular of Austrian Yiddish speakers that in turn did not surrender to the paradigms of German *Bildung* after the First World War, nor did they acquiesce to the styles emerging in far-off urban spaces of the Soviet Union or the United States (or in Central and Western Europe for that matter, which were anathema to Yiddish creativity for what they embodied as majority cultures). Yiddish was only going to survive in/with translation, a translation that was not one-directional.

This second stanza is startlingly unmoored from Rilke's German. The final two lines: "*A hefker-kind, dershlogn un kleyn, un bleykh un dershrokn mayn bli.*" An orphan, depressed/dejected, small/little/young, and pale and frightened/timid/fearful my lack." There is also a slippage from "bli" to "blossom." Manger is nevertheless asserting something into his version of the poem not entirely absent from Rilke's, but it is in this somewhat opaque set of lines that the poem breaks open, and Manger enters into Rilke's world via a Yiddish that is unbound from the German, and perhaps ambivalently and ironically the German of Manger's past.

The third and final four-line stanza also departs from Rilke thematically. The Präteritum of Rilke becomes the sole form of the past tense found in Yiddish, but that is not where the divergence actually begins. "*Furstin*" becomes "*Malke*", both echoing the earlier stanza and distancing the translation from another (*loshn-koydesh*) word found in

Yiddish for Duchess: *dukse*. Extraordinarily, Manger retains the rhyme scheme and little else from Rilke, departing instead into other *Bilder*. “*Weil die Dinge alle anders sind / als man sie beim Betteln sieht*” becomes “*S’iz andersh di gantse velt atsind, vi baym shayn fun betler-lid.*” Both conjure up images of “begging”, but one explicitly captures the lyrical element of begging, and it is not the German of Rilke. Breaking free from what is left unsaid in the German is suddenly out in the open in Manger’s translation. “*Di gantse velt atsind,*” the entire world at present hints at the temporal for the reader far more heavily than Rilke.

“*So haben die Dinge groß gemacht, und kannst du noch sagen wann?*” in Yiddish: “*Dikh hot der kholem groys gemakht / dertseyl, vi iz dos geshen?*” Manger continues with the rhyme scheme but continues to verge away from the content of the German by switching right into the first person--found in the fifth line of the last stanza in German, while in the Yiddish the monologue begins a line earlier--further blurring the narrator/speaker dynamic/dialogue/binary. The lines, “*Ich trat in die Gasse hinaus und sie: die ist wie mit Saiten bespannt*” becomes “*Un alts hob ikh andersh derzen...di gasn vi fidlen tsetsoygn arum*” are beautifully translated, but what follows expose something else in Manger’s poetics that are concealed in Rilke. “*Ikh tants a boroyshste...ikh fli, / di oygn farisn tsu di shtern aroyf.*” Although a strict adherence to rhyme scheme might in fact make a more “faithful” translation difficult, Manger adds imagery and substance that does not appear in the German, and to what end? “*Ikh fli...di oygn farisn tsu di shtern aroyf.*” [Relates to Manger’s published works from this same time period.]

In the last four lines of the poem, “*die Leute schlichen so ängstlich hin, wie hart an die Häuser gepflanzt,*” becomes in Yiddish: “*di mentshn dershrokene bay di vent, di*

oygn mit pakhed farglantst.” The Yiddish imperfective “*farglantst*” — began to shine — and the German “*gepflanzt*” contain the rhyme, even though the imagery in each version of poem does not remain constant between the two languages. The poem ends: “*denn das darf doch nur eine Königin, / daß sie tanzt in den Gassen: tanzt!* Only a queen, one answering to nobody, is permitted to move about in this way.” The Yiddish: “*azoy groys iz dokh nor a kinigin, vos tantst iber gasn un tantst.*” The permissive tone of the German lingers in the Yiddish, albeit barely, and yet the figure of the queen simply continues dancing without additional emphasis brought forth by the speaker of the poem. The Rilke poem in particular speaks to his hesitancy in his early days of being part of intellectual movements not entirely compatible.⁸⁵ Rilke’s work exemplified a constant state of questioning aesthetic and political norms at a time when modernist norms were so rapidly changing and morphing. The same friction Rilke found through his poetic voice, Manger finds in himself, and in Rilke--translated into Yiddish in *Getseylte verter*.

As the translation suggests (as it often the case with translation), there are affinities between the two languages that appear somewhat unsurprisingly. Going beyond mere suggestions that Manger moved between German and Yiddish to find his own poetic voice, striking instead is an in-between space that he never left. I argue that this cannot merely be represented within a term such as “European,” a term loaded with anachronistic characterizations regarding Jewish culture and Yiddish. It is here that I counter earlier arguments that Manger begrudgingly chose Yiddish once it appeared the language could rise to the occasion that German and other “European” languages could.

⁸⁵ For another example comparing the work of Rilke to that of Manger, see “The Local and the European: Itsik Manger and his Autumn Landscape” in *Prooftexts* 31 (1-2), 31-59. Efrat Gal-Ed compares Rilke’s poem “Herbst” from *Buch der Bilder* to Manger’s “*Harbstike landshaft*”

Manger, as a deeply subversive and ironic writer of brilliant poetry, was of course choosing his language of his poetics wisely. Conversely, he was an unpredictable and sometimes violent figure not entirely immune from controversy, and was not exactly prone to embracing anything entirely for better or worse—including biblical or overtly Jewish motifs.

In an issue discussing topics such as world theater performed by the Vilna Troupe and *Habimah*, a poem by Trakl appears at the end of the first issue. The Yiddish does more than speak German when Manger turns “*Sommer*” into Trakl’s *Zumer*:

SOMMER

געאָרג טראַקל
זומער

Am Abend schweigt die Klage
Des Kuckucks im Wald.
Tiefer neigt sich das Korn,
Der rote Mohn.

אָוונט פֿאַרלעשט דאָס געוויין
פֿונם קוקו אין וואַלד,
טיפֿער בויגט זיך דער קאָרן,
דער רויטער מאָן.

Schwarzes Gewitter droht
Über dem Hügel.
Das alte Lied der Grille
Erstirbt im Feld.

איבערן בערגל
וואָרנט אַ שוואַרצער וואַלקן,
דאָס אַלטע ליד פֿון דער פֿגרייל
שטאַרבט אָפּ אין פֿעלד.

Nimmer regt sich das Laub
Der Kastanie.
Auf der Wendeltreppe
Rauscht dein Kleid.

דער קאַשטאַן-בויים
שווייגט, שטייט, ניט באַוועגט.
אויף די שוואַרצע טרעפּ
רוישט אַרויף דיין קלייד.

Stille leuchtet die Kerze
Im dunklen Zimmer;
Eine silberne Hand
Löschte sie aus;

אין טונקלען צימער
פֿלאַמט אויף אַ ליכט;
אַ זילבערנע האַנט
מעקט אָפּ דאָס ליכט.

An entirely surprising choice becomes unsurprising in its singularity of evoking premonition and loss, and Manger's brave selection of a German-language poet for the inaugural issue of his journal speaks volumes to his infinity to other Austrian poets working in similar registers of language. The sounds of the natural world go mute, and even the plant life shies away from the darkness. And what is just over the hill is a blackness that slowly drowns out the sound of the crickets. The spiral staircase appears after and opposite the foliage of a chestnut tree before a candle illuminates a dark room. A silver (aged, old) hand extinguishes the candle in the "*windstille, sternlose, Nacht*." Trakl's handwriting points to a "*Ein Blitz zuckt durch die Nacht*" and "*Ein Blitz erfüllt windstille, sternlose Nacht*." The summer motif seen immediately in the title gives way to something ominous to come in the succeeding stanzas.

Die Klage has the agency as the subject of the first two lines rendered in German by Trakl, but Manger's Yiddish rendering of Trakl's German takes on a different register. Part of a long series of events in Manger's life where German literature and, even world literature as a whole played a role in Manger's work via German translation, Manger returns the favor by rendering Georg Trakl into Yiddish, allowing Yiddish to speak in the idiom of Trakl and in the idiom of Manger simultaneously. The Yiddish version of Trakl's poem appears at the very moment he leaves the Romanian arena of his youth and early work for the epicenter of Yiddish modernism. It's also fitting to note that, at a time of

⁸⁶ Georg Trakl, "Sommer", in *Sebastian im Traum* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1915), 68.

⁸⁷ Georg Trakl, "Zumer" (Itzik Manger trans.), (*Getseylte verter* September 13, 1929, Czernowitz), 4.

uncertainty for the Yiddish language and culture of the region, Yiddish culture was indeed both *epigonal* and revitalizing itself.

In the Yiddish translation, it is less clear what is “silencing” in the first line. “*Ovnt farlesht dos geveyn*.” The word order could very well be mirroring Trakl’s German, but the reader does not have an “*in ovnt*” to mark that it is an adverbial time of day. Instead, “*ovnt*” is ambiguously extinguishing “*dos geveyn*”, creating a much more foreboding scene as the reader enters the poem. Arriving in the second stanza, the metaphors also slightly shift, away from a “*Gewitter*” to a “*shvartser volkn*”, a singular black cloud. The singularity and the particularity parallel the singular/particular of the cricket’s sound, which also echoes to the sound of the kuckuck of the opening two lines. The Yiddish variant Manger uses for the chestnut tree (*Kashtn*) also departs from Trakl’s “*Laub der Kastanie*,” which instead of never “stirring up itself again” is simple “silent, stands idly, immobile/not moving.” Furthermore, the Wendeltreppe becomes “*shvartse trep*,” mirroring the “*shvartse volkn*” in the previous stanza. Manger creates through his translation, a more explicitly suggestive poem, and in the third stanza in particular. “*Auf der Wendeltreppe / Rauscht dein Kleid*” becomes in Yiddish, “*Oyf di shvartse trep / roysht aroyf dayn kleyd*.” *Aroyfroyshn* often refers to a brusquely lifting up a body part.

The conservative translation of the final stanza betrays itself by echoing in ways what Manger had already done to Trakl’s poem in the first stanza. The conventional word order of German and Yiddish, requiring the verb to be in the second position of a main clause or declarative sentence, becomes the source of ambiguity in Trakl while Manger clarifies this with a new, albeit somewhat newly-concealing construction in the Yiddish translation. “*Stille leuchtet die Kerze im dunklen Zimmer*,” appears in Yiddish as “*In*

tunklen tsimer flamt oyf a likht;” The Yiddish makes clear what is flaring up and illuminating the dark room. Although nothing stops us from reading “*die Kerze*” as illuminating the silence in the dark room of Trakl’s poem, the *Stille*, however, remains absent in the Yiddish, and we are made to wonder what is being left unsaid. The punctuation in the final stanza of Trakl’s version, a series of semi-colons, braces us for the final line that in turn serves as the resulting end of the overtly dark poem. The “night” remains on its own, connected only to the adjectives translated from the German via prepositional phrases that merely illuminate in the darkness the nothingness. Manger ends his version with a period, making finite a stanza that begins on a hopeful note, only to end abruptly before the reader comes across, “*Nakht, on shtern, on vint.*”

Vintloze, shternloze nakht could also be a suitable translation for this line, a parallel rendering of sorts, but the parallels we have in the translation are not so clear. I return to Trakl’s use of *Stille* and how it is noticeably absent from Manger’s version, both in the first line of the fourth stanza, but also in the *Windstille* found in the final line of the poem. This omission, just like the wordplay taken up by Manger that echoes Trakl’s (referring again to the first and fourth stanzas), picks up the foreboding ambiguities of Trakl’s poetry in general that Manger attempts at least to capture in his Yiddish.

Others such as Efrat Gal-Ed have noted that Manger finds his way to his poetry through the constant relay between his German and Yiddish cultural backgrounds, but Manger is also not simply transfiguring or reconfiguring his work by translating Trakl.⁸⁸ He is reconfiguring and transfiguring German literature by prolonging the engagement with Austrian writers working in German. Important to note, is that the talk of Manger’s

⁸⁸ Gal-Ed, “The Local and the European” 31.

Yiddish as “local” says more to the “local” of the German being translated: from Rilke’s own status on the margins, and Trakl’s premature death on the Eastern Front during the First World War. It is both a de-centered, but also localized and isolated expression of poetics rendered into Yiddish. Ravitch, in *Dos andere daytshland*, was also enamored with Trakl’s poetry, and said, “He was a tender and sensitive poet — his words were as thin as a spider web and similarly tragic...his soul ultimately got entangled in the spider-web. Born in 1887 — in 1914 — as an officer in the Austrian army he committed suicide in a Cracow hospital at 27.”⁸⁹ The fragmentary sketch points to the role Trakl played in Ravitch’s planned volume, also.

Shedding further light on Yiddish and German as *Sondersprachen* are these German literary texts in Yiddish, translations that appeared in and beyond the former Habsburg Empire—as the world’s remaining Yiddish speakers faced political, social, and cultural marginalization after the Nazi genocide. Yiddish translations from the German, symptoms of a defiant and resilient multilingualism among Yiddish speakers often equally at home in the German of the “original,” contrast the English and Hebrew monolingualisms in North America and Israel that rendered (and still render) encounters with Yiddish obsolete and invisible. As a trend that continued into the 21st century, and appearing in geographical, cultural, and linguistic areas often neglected by both German and Yiddish studies, interwar and postwar translations hint at a much longer lifespan of interaction between two major cultural groups of Habsburg Jewry. German and Yiddish, even if dis/similar, marked as Jewish and thus targeted by nationalism and antisemitism in East Central Europe and beyond, re/iterate via translation a relatedness between

⁸⁹Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn*, 514.

Yiddish and German literatures operating within the “open yet finite spaces”⁹⁰
geographical and textual.

What if certain German poems are indeed speaking Yiddish all along? The goal of translation, I argue, is (in this case) not to simply render invisible the differences between German and Yiddish as earlier paradigms of translation studies had hoped for, and more current paradigms (rightfully) counter. But what if there are messier theories of translation that can take into account the strained relationship between German and Yiddish, while seeking to find in the German language a German that “speaks a Yiddish” (i.e., *a yidish vort*) that one never thought existed? It is here that I am reminded of the Yiddish translators who continued to render works from German into Yiddish well into the postwar era—refusing to entirely reject the German language, nor fully embrace the increasingly dominant forms emerging after 1948 in modern Hebrew.

Conclusion: Yiddish, or The Problem of “Transhumance” and “Transgressive Circulation”

To close out this chapter, I will suggest two recently published treatises on translation for further reading, and how they might help/hinder our approaches to this question of *Sondersprachen*. In *Translation as Transhumance*, French author Mireille Gansel notes that displacement takes place in and through translation, and is a form or nomadism in search of richer grass.⁹¹ This conceptualization of translation denotes necessity, and hints at the ways displaced refugees are often forced to speak the language of their oppressors while also having to navigate the violence inherent in the

⁹⁰ See Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 307. Similarly, I question a common pronouncement in the writing of European, Israeli, and American Jewish literary histories: that a single, continuous (i.e., inevitable) strand stretches across the Jewish past that rejects multilingualism as a diasporic, non-viable medium.

⁹¹ Disavowing the violence of the language of the oppressors is something Lauren Elkin argues. “Foreword,” in *Translation as Transhumance*, trans. Ros Schwarz (New York: Feminist Press, 2017), ix.

majority/dominant language in question.⁹² Gansel, whose parents were Jewish refugees from Budapest, treats language and the language of her parents as one and the same: a medium of the silent⁹³ that majority speakers cannot fathom (even if it is) in their own native tongue, and which questions place and nationalism.⁹⁴ Citing a poem by the East German poet Reiner Kunze, Gansel also argues that what is universal is always shifting, and harkens back to her translation of the German adjective *sensibel*—a term she initially renders as “fragile” before changing it to “sensitive.”⁹⁵ The process of finding this inner, ever-changing language is not singularly, but nevertheless vital to, translation and its enduring power—echoing Benjamin and others, who say that the poetic is something outside of language itself.

Although this is the reason (according to Gansel) that new translations emerge over time while others feel dated, I want to push back somewhat against some of these formulations with additional examples from Gansel’s essay. Writing and translating at the height of the Cold War, she notes that translation “reaches the shores of the language of the soul.”⁹⁶ Even if in response to the Iron Curtain between East and West (“Germany”), Gansel still works within a framework of imperial expansion. Instead, she/we perhaps can see translation as a form of visitation, something temporary, and temporal, making note of its effects on multiple parties simultaneously. And furthermore, when thinking of the common adage that translations appearing in language *y* (the language operating as medium for another) speak language *x* (the language translated into *y*), we ought to avoid

⁹² *Ibid.*, x.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30ff.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

reifying the imperialistic by rendering invisible the oppressive linguistic structures found in normative language usage. And to briefly return to my (probably faulty usage, translation if you will of) mathematical terminology: should it not be the other way around? Are we better inclined to support the work of translators rendering a linguistic norm into something else, and thereby altering power dynamics? Is this even possible?

I also want to push back ever so slightly on some of Gansel's more hopeful musings about translation, namely they act as "riches that transcend borders"⁹⁷ or "unconscious"⁹⁸ forms of language, which uphold native speaker paradigms, and often exclude the role of multiple languages in forming a singular translation. Indeed, even Gansel echoes a contradiction in this regard: that colonial languages and literatures (in this case, French) can also be weaponized by an empire's former imperial subjects, enabling them to write in their own idioms by subverting dominant paradigms in language.⁹⁹ Although I want to believe that "salvaged language" (Gansel's term) resides in "an area without borders, belonging to an entire people, to all peoples,"¹⁰⁰ we at least should note that what is salvaged is ultimately anthologized, which in turn circulates in uncontrollable ways. It is here that translation provides helpful blueprints: anthologies reflect on this notion of visitation and inconsistency/failings in translation.

The second theoretical text regarding translation is Johannes Göransson's brilliant collection of essays, 'Transgressive Circulation.'¹⁰¹ The circulation of fragmentary translations appearing in peripheral spaces of Central European and Yiddish modernism:

⁹⁷ Gansel, *Translation as Transhumance*, 65.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰¹ Johannes Göransson, *Transgressive Circulation*, 15.

Vienna, Czernowitz, Detroit, and Tel Aviv both prior to and following the Second World War that, for a variety of reasons, were not entirely successful, but they circulated nonetheless in unexpected ways.¹⁰² Appearing in short-lived avant-garde journals or concealed in archives, translators at least sought to ‘destabilize’ the German and therefore destabilize the traditional readership of German literature.¹⁰³ By anthologizing, and therefore ‘salvaging’ (to haltingly use Gansel’s term from above), Yiddish also takes on further significance beyond the (often Habsburg, and if not, Jewish emigre) German. The notion of the fragment – central to anthologizing – amplifies these ‘individual voices...circulating clandestinely.’¹⁰⁴

After the outbreak of the Second World War, Manger was stateless and was left without a conceivable way out of Europe. Manger began reflecting on his life’s work up to that point, and on the state of the Yiddish language in a series of letters to three major Yiddish poets: Jankev Glatshteyn, H. Leivick, and Melech Ravitch. In a letter addressed to all three, he wrote:

I announce openly and happily that 1. All that I have written is terrible, trash, filth, and 2. that I will no longer write in this awful jargon. The charade of Yiddish disgusts me. Despise me and spit at me all you want. All of its petit-bourgeois speakers will help you. I had the worst luck to have the genius and temperament to tolerate it.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Göransson, *Transgressive Circulation*, 90. Göransson critiques Robert Frost’s often-cited dictum from ‘Conversations on the Craft of Poetry’ that poetry is what is untranslatable, by instead highlighting that translation exposes the inherently unstable nature of texts.

¹⁰³ Göransson, *Transgressive Circulation*, 69.

¹⁰⁴ Gansel, *Translation*, 56.

¹⁰⁵ *Gal-Ed, Niemandssprache*, 422.

Contrary to this pronouncement, Manger nevertheless continued to write in Yiddish until his death in 1969. With no delusions concerning the war or impending Nazi genocide, however, Manger is indirectly lamenting and resenting the loss of his audience and livelihood. One needs to look no further than this correspondence between Manger and these three writers to see the emergence of his own decentered yet “centered” postwar writings.

The rupture that Manger witnessed was severe, due to Manger’s long-time attachment to the German language, a language equally deemed “Jewish” in much of East Central Europe following the First World War.¹⁰⁶ In another letter, Manger describes the nightmares he endured while waiting for his transit visa. These nightmares included images of Goethe and Kant in Nazi uniforms which, though bordering on the comical, point to a betrayal with which Manger grappled in his future works: the betrayal of the German-language literature that brought him to his art in the first place.¹⁰⁷ It is clear that, after being declared stateless and an enemy alien, and to then be deemed by the Nazi invaders as subhuman, exile sent Manger searching for other poetic styles. Although other styles arguably never emerged, Manger of course mirrors other Czernowitz writers, who saw German as the language of the perpetrators and Yiddish as the language of the victims.¹⁰⁸

Manger even went as far as to intertextually echo Ravitch’s poetics. When Manger’s home became lost to the past and retrievable only textually, he wrote that he no

¹⁰⁶ Marianne Hirsch, “1945: An official Soviet Stamp permits the official exportation of cultural documents...”, in *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996*. Eds. Sander Gilman and Jack Zipes. (New Haven: Yale UP: 1997), 629.

¹⁰⁷ Gal-Ed, *Niemandssprache*, 422.

¹⁰⁸ Alexander Spiegelblatt, “Bemerkungen zu Itzik Mangers Czernowitzer Umfeld,” in *Zwischenwelt (Band 8): Jiddische Kultur und Literatur aus Österreich*, Armin Eidherr and Karl Müller eds. (Vienna: Drava Verlag, 2003), 139.

longer recognized Poland as familiar after much of his readership had been destroyed. But what the author has left, is to lay bare the stylistic workings of his literature:

We live in a phase of chronicling - either of a *bare* chronicling or nothing at all. Chronicling can, or perhaps must also be, an intermediary. Yiddish literature, the literature, must chant and play the human motifs of the living among them. The dead will still demand their rights from yiddish artists.¹⁰⁹

Manger's echoing of Ravitch's earlier work is not entirely coincidental. Manger, as did Ravitch two decades earlier, wished to carry out a cultural paradigm for Yiddish, not connected to a national entity, but one that was far more interior, subjective, and yet inevitably in need of a collective, real or imagined. The "bare" (in Yiddish: *naket*) indeed hints at the "*naket*" found Ravitch's earlier volume of poetry. Both Manger and Ravitch ultimately became chroniclers of a past lost to war and nationalism. Both called for a new mode of Yiddish writing at home in, and ultimately away from, Central Europe.

There had emerged in the modern period a third way for many writers in both Yiddish and Hebrew that had equally contiguous outcomes: acculturating texts written in majority languages by contemporaries for the newly expanding and global reading publics.¹¹⁰ Both Hebrew and Yiddish sought to achieve similar end results from opposite

¹⁰⁹ Gal-Ed, *Niemandssprache*, 526.

¹¹⁰ Additional examples and possible directions for continuing this project, and to perhaps show why critiques of Deleuze & Guattari's "Minor Literatures" have yet to be completely exhausted, point to the uneasy divide that formed between Yiddish and Hebrew, and within their respective circles, after the First World War. Both remained "minor" literatures in their own rights, as Chana Kronfeld points out in *On the Margins of Modernism*, but their relations to power were dramatically shifting. Again, this makes for additional interventions regarding not only Hebrew, and its spatial shift to Palestine following the First World War, but also Yiddish; North America, Palestine, and Europe remained cultural centers, even as national, cultural, and linguistic turns, further complicated the status of Yiddish.

sides of a spectrum. Hebrew needed to regain a vernacular status after two millenia, while Yiddish had to outgrow its vernacularism in order to be taken seriously by a wider literary world. Translation in turn played a crucial role for many of the writers reading and writing between German, Yiddish, and Hebrew, and it becomes clear when viewing Yiddish translations of German poetry more closely, the line between German-Jewish and Yiddish culture becomes far more blurred and complicated than usually assumed.

For the Jewish generation leading up to the Czernowitz Conference Yiddish had begun to compete with Hebrew and major languages audiences in an era of increasing assimilation and monolingualism. Although many Jewish writers operating under a Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism at the end of the nineteenth century continued to do so until the outbreak of the Second World War and beyond, that assimilationist and nationalist ethos seeped into the study of Jewish culture. Only recently scholars such as Dan Miron have begun to move beyond using a monolingual lens to study overlooked interactions between (supposedly) distinct communities of readers, writers, and speakers of multiple languages.¹¹¹ The writers working in/with Yiddish following the Czernowitz Language Conference, and who nevertheless ardently translated from the German into Yiddish, exemplify German-Yiddish interactions, and map interwar continuities from Czernowitz onto the “contiguities” of “German” (and often German-Jewish) literature. Each built into their *ouevres* a complex web of text and memory to create a Habsburg Yiddish culture of their own—the result of an ultimately lifelong engagement with German literature.

¹¹¹ Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 287.

It also becomes clear that the life and afterlife of the Habsburg Jewish culture in Yiddish did not stagnate following the First World War, nor was Czernowitz unique insofar that Yiddish culture remained a significant, albeit deterritorialized language with a corresponding literature. Although one might argue that Czernowitz is as much a part of the Eastern European constellation of cities that includes Odessa, Kyiv, and Warsaw, I try to avoid the “continuities” that Miron warns about. Few researchers have actually addressed the peripheral status of Habsburg capitals like Vienna as sites for Yiddish culture before and after the First World War. Much of the scholarship on interwar Yiddish culture in German-speaking Europe focuses on Weimar Berlin due to the many Yiddish writers who sought refuge from war and political unrest, and due to the city’s status as a short-lived publishing center before the 1923 currency reforms. Although it is certainly true that others have noted Austria’s place in the development of Yiddish culture due to figures like Nathan Birnbaum and others, who orchestrated the first major language conference for Yiddish in Czernowitz, Vienna’s (albeit inconsistent) place as a site for Yiddish modernism remains under-studied and largely ignored in the English-speaking world.¹¹²

Departing from a certain structuralism that entertains the notion of Hebrew’s imminent renaissance and Yiddish’s imminent downfall, we can finally move to spaces that intersect with the plethora of European languages in use in Habsburg Austria—including Yiddish and its often-dismissed voice that could otherwise illuminate Central European literature. By exploring these opportunities for comparative study only

¹¹² Shachar Pinsker thoroughly chronicles Hebrew modernist fiction in Central Europe as it developed in cities such as Vienna. For scholarship in German that addresses Yiddish culture in Habsburg and interwar Austria, Brigitte Dalinger, Armin Eidherr, and Thomas Soxberger (the latter two are cited elsewhere in this dissertation), are the most prominent.

now being pursued, it also becomes clear that Austrian-Jewish writers of German were not the only ones playing a significant role in creating a modern Jewish culture in a language deemed by its writers as “Jewish”—by both insiders and outsiders—and in a city with a significant legacy for its Jewish culture.

Following Austria’s defeat in the First World War, and the economic precarities Ravitch faced, it was not long before he decided to move to Warsaw, *the* center of Yiddish culture in interwar Poland. He was able to form new literary groups and co-edit *Literarishe bleter*, the premiere Yiddish journal at the time. However, the move to Warsaw further exacerbated his financial instability, and the ephemeral nature of his respective literary circles led Ravitch to continually grapple with various notions of the Yiddish modernism he had developed in Vienna well into the twenties and beyond.

In a frequently-cited piece from *Literarishe bleter* in 1926, Ravitch spoke to these challenges facing (his) Yiddish literature—at a time when Yiddish culture arguably reached its zenith in interwar Poland. Ravitch’s somewhat muddled indictment of his present moment is striking. He writes:

It has become clear to me, that a literature with no center must in fact take up the search for its center in the centerlessness...The individual, searching for an interior, free of *form* (*leyvush*) and nationalism, is a form and nothing more. [But] in this searching for human essence there is a deeper sense of expressionism, one that looks for the deepest interiority that can neither be national nor nationalistic. I of course am speaking of the truest and best

type of expressionism, one not yet experienced but only beginning and blossoming. Ethnic expressionism is an absurdity. Universal expressionism is a natural phenomenon.¹¹³¹¹⁴

The re-established Polish state, with one of the largest Yiddish-speaking populations in the world, and home to many avant-garde, political movements founded by Yiddish writers and intellectuals—including Ravitch’s own literary circles and journals—was increasingly becoming a “place” of an ethnic (i.e., national) expressionism. And yet, this rejection of any national expressionism, even after Ravitch himself had moved to Poland from Vienna to find such a national center, instead points to a literary form not yet realized: one against nationalism, but one still deeply connected to the individual struggle of interiority and subjectivity. In other words: a Yiddish literature that works against national borders both political and spiritual, and yet one that sits firmly within the realm of the Jewish multilingual, translatable, and textual realm that was central to modern Jewish culture in the twentieth century. This is a literature without a center that must nevertheless be in search of a center in the centerlessness.¹¹⁵

Although Ravitch does not refer to it by name in the aforementioned piece from *Literarishe bleter*, the 1908 Czernowitz Yiddish Language Conference, had been hailed as a watershed moment for the creation of a modern Jewish culture in, and for, Yiddish for similar reasons almost two decades prior. Yiddish had embodied *a* national

¹¹³ Melech Ravitch “Di Idee, vos felt,” In *Literarishe Bleter*, 10. Dec. 1926, pp. 822-823.

¹¹⁴ To reiterate from the opening pages of this dissertation, translations into English are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹¹⁵ These pronouncements also resonate with the inherently political nature found within Deleuze & Guattari’s definition of a minor literature as inherently political, as well as the great lengths to which a writer will go to rid a language of its territorializing function to represent universal themes

embodiment of a people, a people increasingly scattered and dispersed. However, two decades later “Czernowitz” looked less definitive and more symptomatic of the struggle for the Yiddish language to define itself as *a* national language with a distinct rationale for its continued usage during a time of increasing nationalisms—both Jewish and non-Jewish—and increased Jewish acculturation into majority languages and state building. This of course coincided with a rise in antisemitism in the successor states of the German, Austrian, and Russian Empires. Ravitch’s pronouncements, in both their ubiquity and desperation, published in a time and place that arguably stood at the center of modern Yiddish culture, thus mark a hesitant continuation of Ravitch’s aesthetic program that was both Habsburg in its grounding as both Central European and Yiddishist, and always indebted to what began in Czernowitz in 1908.¹¹⁶ It is here that I turn to a set of translations completed by Ravitch around the same time *Nakete lider* appeared, and before he left for Warsaw.

Manger and Ravitch do not necessarily reflect the post-war trajectories of many Yiddish writers in North America and elsewhere. Additional affinities between the two Habsburg Yiddish cultural *tuers* (activists) exist through the textual turns and returns that ultimately defined their legacies, and defined Yiddish modernism in ways that up to this point have remained under-studied. Manger ultimately settled in Israel, where his work was warmly received by Yiddish speakers at a time of great hostility toward diaspora languages and cultures. Ravitch lived in Montreal until his death, a major postwar center for Yiddish culture, where he continued to publish a variety of works. One might argue

¹¹⁶ Rachmiel Peltz, “The Success of the Czernowitz Yiddish Conference,” in *Czernowitz at 100: The First Yiddish Language Conference in Historical Perspective*, eds. Kalman Weiser and Joshua A. Fogel (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 144

that both Manger and Ravitch, both living in various states of exile from Galicia, Bukovina, Europe, and their readership for much of their adult lives, were in fact continually rejecting their pasts and the cultural legacies of Habsburg Austria for the largely Polish model of Yiddish cultural autonomy. It is clear both had moved to Poland to take part in this model, but both faced such immense challenges politically and artistically that this simplistic trajectory requires further scrutiny. The ambivalence, to be European but without a place, was of course exploited by antisemitic movements right and left over the course of the century. It also stood in opposition to the multi-lingual landscape of the urban spaces that defined Habsburg Jewish culture . What was “local” for Yiddish writers like Manger and Ravitch, was not the concrete landscapes exploited for place-based nationalist movements, but the portable landscapes, the landscapes on the move, the landscapes of language.¹¹⁷

I do not wish to compare the German-speaking and Yiddish-speaking milieus, but rather push for a model where these distinct circles (albeit perhaps only intermittently) mutually benefited from, and even interacted with, each other in overlooked ways as they inhabited the same space, a space both geographical and textual. Paul Celan, Rose Ausländer and many others considered the Habsburg Bukovina to be their homeland both geographically and textually, Yiddish writers likewise built into their conceptualization of “Czernowitz” a legacy of their own. However, it was rooted not necessarily in the dialectics of assimilation found in a majority culture there or elsewhere. It was a framework that promoted cultural autonomy of a different kind, found not only within a

¹¹⁷ Hirsch, “An official Soviet Stamp...”, 629

predominantly urban, Jewish, Central European society but also in a centerless place in a language that to this day is without a “center”.

To conclude by echoing sentiments found in Deleuze and Guattari’s writing on minor literatures, translation for Ravitch was perhaps a form of justice interminable or unobtainable in interwar Austria and Poland, and ultimately became a constant undertaking for the rest of his life. Ravitch, with the exception of the brief time spent in Israel during the fifties, spent the rest of his post-war years in Montreal where he continued to write in Yiddish. There, he not only completed a major Yiddish literary lexicon and his own multi-volume autobiography, he also--in his sixties--translated Kafka’s *Trial* into Yiddish with the same Yiddish literary publishing house that had been based in Vienna prior to 1938. Even after the destruction of Eastern European Jewish life, the need to study contiguities in works such as these persist today. It is also how Yiddish translation by writers from, living in, and later in exile from the Habsburg Empire and its successor states shed light on the decentering role of translation for the development of Yiddish literature, the study of which is (à la Miron) also in need of further de-centering. By undertaking this task of finding contiguities we can perhaps highlight the ways Yiddish and German used in peripheries of their respective cultural spheres, have far more in common (at least stylistically and textually) than is still often assumed.

Perhaps one of the pitfalls in placing Ravitch’s works and translations (and those completed by other Habsburg Yiddish writers) into a dialogue with German-Jewish literature, is the risk of creating an overly simplistic paradigm and erasing more complex interactions between these two worlds. Comparative analyses that cast a wider net onto Eastern European Jewish literature do not always exist (and certainly those that

incorporate Yiddish source texts). In some ways, this need for further academic study is of the utmost importance when working with texts written by authors such as Ravitch: born in Galicia, fluent in Yiddish, German, Polish, and probably French and Hebrew by the end of his life, and whose archive is now located in Jerusalem. Even when taking into account the fragmented publishing history of his work (most of which has never been translated), and the minor status he holds within literary studies, making connections between German and Yiddish literature is still a long-term project.

By also moving across and beyond Central Europe, translation projects such as this one demonstrate how German/-Jewish and Yiddish writers mutually benefited and interacted with each other in complex ways, and as such translation illuminates contiguities between writers, readers, and texts. Affinities such as these are hard to ignore in translations intended for a volume entitled *Dos andere Daytshland*, a work meant to bridge the gap between German-Jewish and Yiddish writings, languages and cultures not always amicable. In closing, I must also mention another contiguity: although never published in its entirety, this translation project undertaken by two Austrian-Jewish authors--one writing in Yiddish and the other in German--who in turn situated this project and their works more broadly within a discourse opposing assimilation and the erasure of Jewish cultural pluralism, highlights the ways in which both authors were at home in “the other Germany.”

The need to study contiguities, such as those between Habsburg German and Yiddish cultures, persists. Although genocide and subsequent exile of survivors pose a complicated web of text and memory, Manger and Ravitch’s works demonstrate that Czernowitz before the Holocaust was an equally contentious space among the many

demographics living in and around the city for centuries. Just as other scholars have questioned the deeply entrenched conceptualizations and legacy of Yiddish culture in North America, the same must occur in Central and Eastern European literary studies' approaches to Yiddish literature. Czernowitz, even if a wholly Jewish environment, was always a world of translation from and into other languages considered Jewish.¹¹⁸ By undertaking this task of finding contiguities we can perhaps highlight the ways Yiddish and German used in peripheries of their respective cultural spheres, have far more in common (at least stylistically and textually) than is often assumed. The Mironian model of contiguities can thus be the starting point for seeing that writers like Ravitch, Manger, and others are part of parallel worlds, not only living alongside of, but also involved with shaping, a literary cosmos only recently discovered.

This call for a contiguous, post-national collectivity as found in the works of Melech Ravitch and Itzik Manger, are important examples of Yiddish diaspora writing, a literary mode promoting a possibility for a national culture with no center, one that remains inextricably linked to the language and to places and spaces speakers inhabit or inhabited. Manger, from Czernowitz, and Ravitch from rural Galicia, were both from the same generation of writers who ultimately redefined modern Yiddish verse, and yet their *ouvres* are often placed within interwar Yiddish avant garde styles that leave little room for overlap. It is this particular literary form for Yiddish that directly relates to not only Czernowitz, but of forms similarly echoed by Habsburg Jewry more broadly.

¹¹⁸ Mordkhe Litvine, "Translations into and from Yiddish" (Helen Beer trans.), *The Eighth Annual Avrom-Nokhem Stencl Lecture in Yiddish Studies*, 20 August 1990, 5.

Chapter Two: *Midvest-Mayrev* — The German “Jewish” Anthologies of Ezra Korman

Even if Yiddish “centers” rarely acknowledged the contributions of Eastern European Jews who settled in the industrial cities of the American Midwest, Yiddish-speaking immigrants contributed immensely to a global Yiddish culture. In addition to theater and journalism, poets, too, left their mark in cities from Cleveland to Milwaukee, and although largely unknown or unread today, we see fruitful attempts at contextualizing, visualizing, and pushing the boundaries of “one text: one or more separate literatures” in expansive ways. More importantly, when taking this more geographically expansive view, we can both complicate Yiddish cultural history while also grappling critically with Yiddish cultural production taking place away from its North American center in New York.

Ezra Korman, who had settled in Detroit in the 1930s, was born in Kyiv in 1888. Korman, like many Yiddish emigres to the Midwest, arrived in the United States following the First World War, and before the immigration restrictions put in place by the United States government in 1924. While in Warsaw and Berlin, Korman created multiple Yiddish anthologies, which would set in motion one of several strands of his literary productivity. In some ways, placing Korman’s oeuvre within this project is both vital and complicated. While Korman published several well-received volumes of poetry in Europe and the United States, Korman’s anthologies make up the canonical segment of his reception today. At the same time, his prolific activity as an anthologizer meant that

many of these collections never saw (at least a complete) publication. To make matters more complex, Korman's archive is fragmentary. Before taking a closer look at Korman's anthologies and translations of German verse texts, I will address both the reception of his anthological output as well as what the archival records articulate (and what they do not).

It is also impossible to engage with Korman's later work he completed in the United States without placing it within the larger framework of revolutionary activism that began when Korman was a teenager. By the time he was eighteen (i.e., by 1906) Korman was publishing in dailies and journals in Kyiv and Odessa, which at the time were centers for both nascent Yiddish and Hebrew literatures. The complex standing of the cities within Ukrainian Jewish history is relevant for several reasons. Kyiv and Odessa were the third- and fourth-largest cities in the Russian Empire. Odessa had been founded by Catherine the Great, and had a reputation as the site of both internal and foreign migration. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Black Sea port city was home to a large working-class population, and within that demographic was a significant Jewish minority. At 30-40% of the cities' total populations, Jews spanned every social strata, which fueled class and national debates among young artists and revolutionaries. This is also the world in which Korman entered both Yiddishism and political communism, a world increasingly entrenched in revolutionary zeal, plagued by state violence, and debates surrounding Jewish minority rights.

Although biographical records are inconsistent, Korman's time in Kyiv came at a significant point. The mutiny on the battleship Potemkin took place in Odessa in 1905, which set off the First (albeit failed) Russian Revolution. Additionally, from a Jewish

perspective, the city had infamously become the site of pogroms, the worst of which also occurred in 1905 and spurred numerous waves of Jewish migration to the United States and Palestine. Korman eventually emigrated, also—first to Warsaw and then to Berlin—before finally settling in the United States in 1923. However, following the First World War, and the civil wars that rattled Ukraine that preceded the Peace of Riga in 1921, Korman co-founded the communist-aligned *Kultur-Lige*. The group eventually included major figures of interwar Yiddish culture, including Soviet Yiddish writer Dovid Bergelson (whom Korman certainly knew while both lived in Berlin), and Nachmen Mayzl, who later worked with Ravitch to form *Literarishe bleter* in Warsaw.¹¹⁹

After falling out of favor with Soviet authorities in Ukraine in 1924, most of the group's remaining members left for interwar Warsaw by 1924. Nevertheless, it is Korman's work with the *Kultur-Lige*, and during the group's pivotal years in Kyiv between 1917/18 and 1921, that provides another significant blueprint for Jewish cultural autonomy following the First World War.¹²⁰ It is certain that Korman helped draft the group's founding documents that I highlight in this dissertation, and notably: how the cultural organization (even if short-lived) competed with few other cultural organizations at the time to forge Jewish cultural autonomy in Yiddish.

It is clear from “*Di grunt oyfgabn fun di Kultur-Lige*,” the *Kultur-Lige* certainly wanted to sever any and all ties that Jewish culture retained to religious law (and Hebrew), and base Jewish culture in the language of the masses (i.e., Yiddish). However,

¹¹⁹Bergelson and Mayzl, although significant figures in their own right who have been the subject of numerous studies and translation projects, point to further notions of relatedness between Korman, the German Jewish environs that shaped their work, and their convergent and divergent political activities. Fruitful points of departure remain for later scholarly projects, even if they are difficult to trace due to archival silences.

¹²⁰ Kazovsky, Hillel. 2010. Kultur-Lige. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kultur-Lige>

even as these communist-adjacent paradigms are clear in the Kultur-Lige's program, one must not forget that there already was a cultural precedent of dismissing Hebraic elitism. A Yiddish populism had existed since the early days of Hasidism, and this paradigm shift therefore stands on a longer cultural history. The Kultur-Lige certainly knew of Hasidism's role, as Ukraine is geographically located in the strongholds of the Hasidic movement in the southern half of Yiddishland. It is thus clear that, from the beginning, the group struck (or tried to strike) a balance between a modern, communist revolutionary understanding of Jewish history on the one hand, and the often antagonistic facets of Jewish life that had been the source of folk and cultural traditions on the other.

In addition to Hasidic cultural affinities both inevitable and elective, Kyiv and Odessa had been centers of (both secular Hebrew and) Yiddish culture and publishing by the turn of the century. As such, many Jewish intellectuals had their sights on Kyiv/Kiev in the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution, when a Russian Bolshevik takeover dashed the hopes for Jewish cultural autonomy in Ukraine.¹²¹ The Kultur-Lige, co-founded by Korman, in this brief window of time between late 1917 and 1920, sought to remain communist in orientation, but always with an eye to what revolution might portend for Jewish (and especially Yiddish cultural) autonomy. Although it is challenging

¹²¹ It is crucial that I mention: the term "Bolshevik" has in 2022, and at various flashpoints since 1917, surfaced as an anti-Leftist and antisemitic dogwhistle. I very carefully use the term here, to denote the ultimate takeover of power by the Bolsheviks that occurred in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917. This takeover coincided with subsequent civil wars that broke out across the former Russian Empire, including the 1917-1919 wars fought between Russia and Ukraine. The ultimate absorption of Ukraine into the Soviet Union by 1922 (at least officially) put an end to localized political activity that diverged from Soviet ideology. As is the case today, Jewish politics varied considerably across national and political lines, but this variability was nevertheless exploited for antisemitic reasons throughout this period. Brendan McGeever's *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) profoundly shaped my understanding of antisemitism in the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution. In turn, I would like to further emphasize that this dissertation centers Yiddish cultural activists who, often under the banner of socialism or communism, sought to reconcile their politics with the minority rights for which they subsequently fought. It meant Jewish citizens, who were formerly Russian imperial subjects, suffered at the hands of both Russian Bolshevism and Ukrainian Nationalism, in their attempts to forge a Yiddish future.

to avoid a retroactive reading of the Kultur-Lige's aims in light of 1917-1919 Russian Bolshevik and later Stalinist political shifts, Korman's own role in the Kultur-Lige's political manifestos make these texts central to Korman's later activity in the United States.

Kultur-Lige

"To make our masses intellectuals and our intellectuals 'Yiddish,' this is the goal of the Kultur-Lige."¹²² Breaking down the paradoxes in this statement alone is an arduous task, but in summation: there is a conflict between Jewish elites and Jewish masses (still largely proletarian at the time of this Kultur-Lige publication in late 1919). The implication that "Yiddish" refers to both something cultural and political seems to hint at a failure of keeping culture and politics separate. What is important to stress, however, is how Jewish history constantly belies the ways in which culture and politics are inseparable. I argue that the Kultur-Lige members knew this, and found it a moot point. What the Kultur-Lige was in fact seeking to distance itself from was a linkage between the *majority* culture. What they sought instead: a politicization of Jewish culture as minority culture, and in light of the massive economic and social changes that occurred in Eastern Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These changes included mass migration to urban centers due to increased economic precarity in the shtetl, state violence and reprisals (and the forced exile of revolutionaries), and the emergence of Hebraism and Zionism (and other nationalisms), all of which drove the Jewish masses away from cultural literacy and the immediacies of the present.¹²³ Hebrew, with its

¹²² Rabinovitch (trans), *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*, 141

¹²³ The Kultur-Lige lists many of its adversaries in the manifesto, and all of which have historical precedent against secular Yiddishism: "Zionists, the rabbis, and the assimilationists" (Rabinovitch trans., 149).

connotations to the religious and the elite (stretching back in modern times to the *Maskilim* support of Hebraism), cannot serve the masses due to its role in promoting cultural stasis set in the past.¹²⁴

Instead, the Kultur-Lige advocates a “new Yiddish culture” *alongside* Jewish democracy, one where the masses in their struggle for autonomy can begin building anew; it is here politics and culture are in fact intertwined, but not with the majority. This is in part due to the features of this culture, namely its language (i.e., Yiddish), and something more amorphous: the culture’s democratic and secular nature.¹²⁵ Where this democratic and secular nature originates is even harder to pinpoint. The authors of the manifesto clearly see democracy and secularism located within the masses, but *why* they see it in the masses is undoubtedly linked to their larger political worldview, shaped by communism and the global events occurring at the time. I stress this last point, in order to emphasize the group’s position within post-World-War-I avant-garde history, while also keeping in mind the ways minoritized groups often become “indebted” to larger trends (and thereby forgotten or deemed minor). This certainly happened to the Kultur-Lige by the Bolsheviks in 1918-1919, and later Jewish and non-Jewish historians in the United States and Israel seeking to erase the contributions of Yiddish radical thinkers (especially if they had Communist leanings). It is thus important to continuously remember and

¹²⁴ Under the subheading of “The Founding Tasks of the Kultur-Lige: the New Hebrew and Yiddish Culture,” the authors of the manifesto note how the variety of historical events caused Jewish culture to be cut off from the masses, and as a result these masses could not grapple fully with Jewish textuality. Interestingly enough, there is both a disdain for religious texts such as the *shulkhn orekh* (a legal volume that remains an authoritative text for governing Jewish daily life), as well as a necessity to understand (and thereby consume) them. Yiddish, therefore, and *not* Hebrew (i.e., modern, biblical, or the medieval of the *shulkhn orekh*), is the key to understanding the present moment. See Rabinovitch trans., “Jews and Diaspora Nationalism” 143.

¹²⁵ Rabinovitch trans., 143.

grapple with these complications and contradictions, especially as they play out in archives and historiography.

It is thus all the more striking that the Kultur-Lige creates a historiography of its own, almost as if the group realized how political repression in pre-revolutionary Russia still shaped Jewish cultural activism in the present. For example, the group's leaders knew that the lack of a free press under the czar caused political and cultural repression. As such, the Kultur-Lige's central tenets were twofold on this account: to not only politicize the masses, but also to show the Jewish minority's place *culturally* in the surrounding polity following the overthrow of the czarist regime.¹²⁶ In turn, the Jewish minority across greater Eastern Europe could (in theory) consist of numerous organizations such as the Kultur-Lige, working alongside political entities of the state to assure secular culture could thrive.

The lofty goals of the Kultur-Lige stood in contrast with the political reality fomenting at the time. For one, and in the way the group mentioned, the Jewish masses were not at all cohesive, and the post-World-War-I make-up of nation states and alliances permanently fractured many of these efforts to unite Yiddish-speaking minorities. Nevertheless, the Kultur-Lige stands apart from both the nascent Bundists in Poland (who were socialist, not communist, and who more overtly took from nationalist models for their politics), and from the later Soviet Yiddishist movement that emerged by the early 1920s that was distinctively tied to state building.

¹²⁶ "Fearful of every free word, every free expression of the human spirit, the tsarist government brutally harassed the 'alien' non-Russian cultures and the languages of all 'alien peoples residing in Russia." Rabinovitch, 143

The Kultur-Lige by contrast strove for a cultural renaissance to emerge from *within the community* (i.e., not out of a new state, and not out of a political party). More importantly, it was to serve the masses. The Kultur-Lige clearly bemoans the attempts in pre-revolutionary Russia at founding Jewish schools, and the Zionists don't fare any better.¹²⁷ It is thus certainly easy to become weighed down by the polemics for which the Kultur-Lige advocates. It is important, however, to remember the cultural moment in which this appeared, and the violence many Jews faced in the aftermath of war and revolution.¹²⁸ Similarly, readers of the manifesto can sense the political challenges the group faces from the right and the left. The Kultur-Lige is either "too Jewish" (i.e., nationally oriented) or "too Yiddish" (not nationally viable). Not only does the Kultur-Lige seek to prove them wrong, the manifesto affirms a major tenet of their cultural paradigm that is popular and not elitist: "the popular is not vulgar; bringing culture to the masses means not bringing what they themselves do not value."

At first glance there are, however, striking similarities between the Kultur-Lige and the Bund, especially after the Bund gained further political and cultural autonomy in interwar Poland (having been largely outlawed in its first two decades under the czar). It is important to note that not only did the Kultur-Lige advocate for and create teacher

¹²⁷ Regarding Zionism, the Kultur-Lige notes, "the Zionist, rabbinic tarbut... is thoroughly Hebraist and Israel-oriented. This organization claims a land where Jews do not live as our land, and holds a language that Jews do not speak as our language" (Rabinovitch trans. 147-148). In this attempt to politically distinguish themselves from Zionism, the Kultur-Lige figures also ellide the Jewish populations that had historically been living in Palestine, who before the advent of Zionism and subsequent waves of European settlement in Palestine spoke Arabic. Arabic-speaking Jewish populations in Palestine were also grappling with political and social upheaval at this time following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and ascendant British colonial rule. The linguistic and cultural crossovers between Arabic-speaking Jews are also in need of further scholarly examination.

¹²⁸ The manifesto does not skirt around this reality: "The Kultur-Lige has existed a mere one and half years. These have been the most difficult and painful years. A time of unending upheaval, of the wildest pogroms and slaughters the Jewish people have experienced. A time when cities were isolated for months on end, when death lurked on the roads, and the sword hung over the throat in the city: everyone was in turmoil, hungry, and exhausted." (Rabinovitch trans. 148).

seminaries, schools, and the foundation of a modern Yiddish university (never to be fully realized) before the Bund or Yiddishists in Vilna did. This was (even if short-lived) a call to implement a full-scale *politicized* educational system for a minoritized Jewish population in Eastern Europe.

Had the Kultur-Lige's activities not been cut short by the Bolshevik takeover of Ukraine in 1919, there certainly would have been greater visibility (i.e., and competition, namely with the Bund) of the group tasked with leading a new cultural paradigm in and for Yiddish. The Kultur-Lige knew that in spite of the lack of legal status afforded to Yiddish, and the guarantees state status might have provided to Yiddish culture, that a Yiddish culture could still exist *internally*.¹²⁹ It is this backdrop that allowed Korman to begin anthologizing—beginning with Ukrainian revolutionary poets, then poetry written by women active in Yiddish literature before finally attempting to anthologize works translated from the German in the final decades of his life.

I stress how Korman's creative output resonates on multiple levels within and beyond this dissertation, and provides further breadth and depth of a culture that resisted confinement within state or internal borders. In addition, the placement of a Midwestern, industrial city such as Detroit within the scope of a German Jewish and Yiddish studies dissertation project offers the possibility for Yiddish culture to rightfully decenter more oft-recognized metropolitan regions of the country and beyond.

Also a significant marker for Korman and many Yiddish *kultur-tuers* outside of Eastern Europe and the American eastern seaboard, where making a living from Yiddish

¹²⁹ Rabinivitch trans., 150. The manifesto concludes with the current state of politics in Ukraine, and the instability stemming from the civil war between Russia and Ukraine. Many of the political advancements among the Jewish minority were suddenly in flux (and later shelved) due to the Russian Bolshevik takeover.

was impossible: his profession as a call operator for the local Jewish community.¹³⁰

Although he did not (nor could not) make a living solely as a translator and editor upon his emigration to the United States, his output and that of many of his contemporaries becomes that much more complex when placed under a lens that chronicles Korman's life; for Yiddish writers with extraordinary talent, who worked in trades or service industries to make a living, their collections of published and unpublished work continue the legacy of earlier generations of American Yiddish poets, even if obscured by scholarly norms.

Midvest-Mayrev: Anthologizing Jewish Multilingualism in North America

By the time Korman began compiling anthologies, he had already been a published translator for some time. Besides S.Y. Imber (whose literary protege was Melech Ravitch), Korman was one of the first European-based Yiddish translators of Heine, which appeared with Kyiv's kunst-ferlag in 1917.¹³¹ Appearing almost coterminously with the Heine volume was Korman's anthology he published on the eve of the revolution: *In fayerdikn doyer - zamlung fun revolutsyonerer lirik in der nayer yidisher dikhtung fun ukrayne* (*In Fiery Duration: Collection of Revolutionary Lyrics in the New Yiddish Poetry of Ukraine*). The volume was later republished in Berlin as an expanded version under a new name, *Brenendike brikn* (*Burning Bridges*) in 1923, on the eve of Korman's departure for the United States.¹³²

¹³⁰ Michael Yashinsky, "Ezra Korman of Detroit: Life and Afterlife of a Yiddish Poet," 80.

¹³¹ Similarly the case with Imber's translation, few extant copies remain. The Yiddish Book Center has made available a digitized version.
<https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yiddish-books/spb-nybc205379/heine-heinrich-korman-ezra-lieder>

¹³² See Mikhl Yashinsky, "The Signs and Symbols of Ezra Korman."
<https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/language-literature-culture/yiddish-literature/signs-and-symbols-ezra-korman-detroits-soulful>

Once in the United States, Korman began anthologizing an entirely new body of works. Korman's role in the anthology *Midvest-Mayrev*, a collection of poetry by Yiddish writers hailing from the far-off corners of the United States, centered on writers who escaped notoriety from the Yiddish circles on the coasts. The anthology served as a memorial to the *Yunge* Yiddish poet Moyshe Leyb Halpern (born in Habsburg Galicia who originally wrote in German before switching to Yiddish), also served as an homage to the urban spaces in the center and western regions of the country. It was also one of the last volumes of work (published in 1932) to include original, unpublished work by Korman himself.

Korman's storied (and yet albeit still obscure) productivity with anthologies hints at the defining role the medium played throughout his career. One exception to this, and the volume for which he is most well-known today for self-financing and publishing, is the first anthology of Yiddish women poets: *Yidishe dikhterins*.¹³³ Published in Chicago, the anthology mapped both the newly-emerging terrain of Yiddish modernism as represented by women, and the longer trajectory of women's Yiddish literary activity stretching back to the early modern period.¹³⁴ In doing so, Korman also helped connect

¹³³ [The book's materiality](#) is extraordinary; single columns of text appeared alongside photographs of the poets themselves. Even with a print run of only 1500, printing the volumes was clearly a financially exorbitant undertaking. The volume was largely panned for sexist reasons, and many of the writers appearing in the anthology faced harsh, and deeply gendered criticism for their visibility in the Yiddish press for decades. Writers like Melech Ravitch and others criticized women's writing with an entire slew of epithets, some of which appear in Ravitch's later lexicon published in 1945. Additional criticism came from Yiddish writers who were women (such as Malka Haifetz Tussman), who lukewarmly viewed Korman's anthology on account of not wanting to be distinguished solely because of her gender at the expense of her literary merit. Just as one can argue the defining and/or limiting role of anthologies to shape the reception of literature (as Korman's in fact did), a way of complicating this discourse is to focus on the materiality of the anthology, which speaks to both Korman's (largely self-financed) efforts, and the imperfect attempts at inclusion and visibility.

¹³⁴ See Faith Jones, "Problematic, Fraught, Confusing, Paralyzing—and Fantastic: A 1927 Anthology that Gave Female Yiddish Poets Their Due." <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/language-literature-culture/pakn-treger/problematic-fraught-confusing-paralyzing-and-fantastic>

contemporary writers to the longer arc of Yiddish verse, and notably women's central role in shaping Yiddish authorship and readership since the dawn of print.¹³⁵ Beyond the anthology's physicality, it is significant to note that many of the major writers of Yiddish literature are still read today, serving as a successful attempt by Korman to anthologize literature for Yiddish audiences. Korman's anthology also served as a response to other anthologies appearing in North America, which, even with their transnational readership, further perpetuated a cultural and gendered status quo, and did not reflect the richness of Yiddish writing in and beyond Eastern Europe.¹³⁶

Forgotten Literary Translations in the Upper Midwest

Korman's notable contributions to literature outlined in the previous section are a testament to his revolutionary attitudes that emerged while still in Kyiv, and which clearly continued to influence his literary activity for the rest of his life. It comes as no

¹³⁵ Kathryn Hellerstein in "Canon and Gender" brilliantly maps Korman's anthology by comparing it to an earlier attempt by M. Bassin that largely excluded women. Hellerstein notes the generous inclusions Korman made, while also pointing to the inevitably political terrain of anthologizing poetry written by women. Korman's project was in some ways a response to another challenge of reception: the (albeit false, but persistent) reputation of Yiddish falling within the purview of women's speech and writing. Korman (falsely) argued that modern Yiddish poetry written by women, and Yiddish devotional texts (a genre with a far longer historical arc largely targeted to women), operated independently of one another. And yet, many of the texts included in Korman's publication, Hellerstein notes, are imbued with religious motifs, and therefore inadvertently link the Yiddish women writing in Yiddish to centuries of textual history in the language. Korman, like his predecessors, had an extensive philological and lexical corpus to work with, and Korman chose to use his knowledge to center the work of women who continued to be ignored.

¹³⁶ See Hellerstein, "Canon and Gender," 148. Yiddish writers, scholars, and activists have addressed this issue at length for generations: the outsized role women played in the history of Yiddish literature for centuries, and the development of transnational models for Jewish culture and politics that later were erased by male critics and publishers. Although Yiddish literary circles in Europe never reached gender parity, publishing and literary criticism in the United States was even more masculinist and exclusionary. Reasons for this are numerous. In addition to the blatant sexism women faced, increasingly restrictive and xenophobic cultural norms that governed Jewish cultural activity by the interwar period in the United States privileged elite men. Many radical Jewish women in prose and verse speak of being disillusioned by both the death of politically radical activity in the United States, and by the state of publishing that sidelined women's writing upon immigration. Hellerstein points to the obvious limits and trajectories anthologies like this set up, while also noting the breadth and depth of the volume, pointing to (today) largely unknown poets appearing in anthology, to whom Korman gives significant space for (albeit forgotten) canonization. Hellerstein's intervention is also archival; archival materials make clear various edits and revisions the translator made between manuscript, typed copy, and beyond.

surprise that Korman viewed translation as vital for understanding modern culture more broadly. Although his contemporaries quickly forgot many of Korman's earlier contributions to Yiddish literature besides *Yidishe dikhterins*, his "lack" of publication also proved to be misleading. Between the early thirties, with his final published volume of poetry, *Tseykhns un tseyrufim*,¹³⁷ and the late fifties (just before Korman's death), no other volume of his poetry would appear.¹³⁸

And yet: Korman was busy at work on two additional anthologies, both of which focus on German-language poetry. Before and after the Second World War, Korman was busy compiling and translating an entirely different set of works from German literature. The first anthology included several dozen writers from across the canon of modern German verse. And although his initial attempts at anthologizing remained incomplete, or (at the very least not all translations have survived to the present day), Korman's mapping of modern German poetry provides evidence of engagement occurring locally in the American Midwest with German literature, as read by Eastern European Jewish intellectuals and readers.¹³⁹

Before diving into the volumes themselves, it is important to reiterate the double role of anthologies as well as their limits: anthologies function similarly as compendia of translations, and are products of a specific time and (non-)place. Simultaneously, anthologies created in the early and mid-twentieth century also look vastly different from

¹³⁷ Korman's title, *Tseykhns un Tseyrufim*, hints at the role of Yiddish poetry in Jewish textual history. Published just before Korman's death and appearing with the *Perets-farlag* in Tel Aviv, the collection straddles the *tseykhns* (signs) and *tserufim* (lit. symbolics) of what it contains. *Tserufim* have a weighted meaning for kabbalistic study, where the arrangement of letters have mystical power, and it is a concept that lends itself well to the study of poetry and translation.

¹³⁸ Yashinsky, "Ezra Korman," 81.

¹³⁹ An appendix listing the authors appearing in Korman's anthologies is available at the end of this dissertation

one another, not only as literary style and norms shift, and because Yiddish readership has vastly shifted. Many of the writers appearing in Korman's early volume are no longer read, regardless of their politics (Korman's reason for excluding or excising much of his earlier canon after the war). Nevertheless, they illustrate important trends then and now: including or excluding should not be about "value" (an arbitrarily political choice), but should instead be about memory, knowing how "tastes" adapt, evolve, and hopefully become more varied over time. As we will see with Korman, traumatic events complicate this trajectory in insightful ways.

Antologye fun daytshe dikhter - fun arno holts biz ivan gal

In the thirties, Korman highlighted some of the authors that Ravitch, Manger, and others had been eager to translate in the aftermath of the First World War. Korman included two poems by Albert Ehrenstein that appeared in *Die weiße Zeit*. Coincidentally or not, this particular volume published in Munich also included Ravitch's source material for the translations he completed for *Di kritik*. Korman translates Ehrenstein's "Blind" into Yiddish:

Blind

Tag um Tag
stirbt — ich bin?
Wo geht meine Zeit denn hin?

טאג נאך טאג¹⁴⁰

טאג נאך טאג
שטארבט — איך בין?
וואו קומט דען מיין צייט אהין?

¹⁴⁰ Although Korman mostly maintains YIVO orthography in these manuscripts, a standardized system that was emerging in popularity at this time, he does not use vowel- and other diacritical markings in the typed manuscript. I have tried to retain Korman's own formatting (including his errors) in the examples cited throughout this chapter; when read without vowels, and when taking into account other structural liberties Korman took in his translations, there emerges another personalized (and perhaps mysterious) style that became common among many Yiddish writers living through stages of cultural transition on various continents.

Traum versank,
Nacht ist Spiel,
Schlaf das Gut,
Tod das Ziel.

טרוים – פארווייט.
נאכט איז שפיל.
שלאף – דאס גוטס.
טויט – דער ציל.

Erde, Stern
klingt nur so,
Ort ist Ort, wer weiß wo?¹⁴¹

ערד און שטערן
קלינגען-צו –
ארט איז ארט, ווער ווייסט וואו?¹⁴²

The Yiddish title comes from the first line of the poem: “Day by Day.” The speaker sets the passing of time against one’s dubious existence. The poet senses that time and death do not correspond with the “I” of the poem, as the reader notes in the meter and rhyme of the second stanza: “Nacht ist Spiel” (Night is a gamble) sets up an almost parallel structure in the following two lines: “Schlaf das Gut, / Tod das Ziel.” Literally: “Sleep the good thing, Death the aim.” Korman decides, by rendering these lines into Yiddish, to make even more explicit the utterances appearing in the poem by substituting the hyphen for the commas. The dream “engulfed” in the Yiddish, for example, takes on a much more heightened literal form: *farveyen* - to pass like the wind, or to be buried by the wind (under sand or snow). The ubiquitous hyphens close to the end of the poem, soundless “sounds” to denote something not said, conveys visually a link between sleep and death. This (lack of) utterances appear again in the final stanza of the Yiddish translation, in the line: *klingen-tsu*. Whether this hyphen is one of Korman’s typos or not (i.e., this is not a standard spelling), *klingen-tsu* is also followed by yet another hyphen, thereby emphasizing the Yiddish verb, to accompany (with sound).

¹⁴¹ Albert Ehrenstein, “Blind,” in *Albert Ehrenstein: Werke, Band 4/1*, ed. Hanni Mittelman (Grafrath: Klaus Boer Verlag, 1997), 36.

¹⁴² Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

Where the two poems also diverge along with punctuation, is in the second line of the poem. What ends as a question in the German, Korman marks with a *pintl* (a period). The literal questioning of existence in the German thus becomes a declarative fact in the Yiddish. It then begs the question (literally) that follows: “Wo kommt meine Zeit denn hin? / *Vu kumt den mayn tsayt ahin?*”). In the second stanza, commas, too, become periods, creating closed statements within an already truncated poem. When reaching the final stanza in the Yiddish, the reader sees that all attempts at maintaining the punctuation were lost causes. “Erde, Stern”, earth and stars, the heavens and the earth in their most discernible forms, resonate similarly (both aurally and semantically) between the German and the Yiddish: *erd un shtern (klingen-tsu)*. Korman makes a choice to omit any *loshn-koydesh*, perhaps loaded terms to use in such a translation project. In doing so, he also takes steps to closely maintain the meter of the German version. The locational, temporal, and directional elements of the poem in both German and Yiddish thus resonate together against the backdrop of the poem’s deceptively simple structures. Words like “Zeit/tsayt” and “hin/ahin,” “Ort/ort,” and “(wer weiß) “wo/ver veyst vu” illustrate the deceptive intelligibility between German and Yiddish.

In another Ehrenstein translated by Korman, the German title “Leid” also appears with a title in a different register, in a more colloquialized title in Yiddish: “*Ot azoy*”:

Leid

אט אזוי

Wie bin ich vorgespannt
den Kohlenwagen meiner Trauer!
Widrig wie eine Spinne
bekriecht mich die Zeit.
Fällt mein Haar;
ergraut mein Haupt zum Feld,
darüber der letzte Schnitter sichelt.

אט אזוי בין איך איינגעשפאנט
אין דעם קוילן-וואָגן פֿון מיין טרויער;
עקלדיק, ווי אַ שפּין,
באקריכט מיך די צייט.
ס'פֿאלן אויס מיינע האַר,
גרױ ווערט מיין קאפּ, ווי אַ פעלד,
גרוי ווערט מיין קאפּ, ווי אַ פעלד,

Schlaf umdunkelet mein Gebein.
Im Traum schon starb ich,
Gras schoß aus meinem Schädel,
aus schwarzer Erde war mein Kopf.¹⁴³

וואו דער לעצטער שניטער
גייט דורך מיטן סערפ.

שלאף נעמט פינצטער ארום מיין געביין.
אין חלום בין איך שוין געשטארבן.
גראז האט ארויסגעשפראצט פון מיין שארבן.
פֿון שווארצער ערד איז געווען מיין קאפ.¹⁴⁴

By rendering another poem about the anguish that arises from temporality and the speaker's psychologically-pained response to it, Korman translates another of Ehrenstein's poems with a certain care to the Yiddish. The construction "vorspannen + Dat." turns into its Yiddish equivalent: *ayngeshpant in*, both of which have such a singular usage. "Ekldik" in Yiddish is an adjective used for something revolting or disgusting, but its perhaps more explicit meaning (even more so than "widrig") also works alongside Korman's rendering "bekriecht" into its Yiddish cognate: *bakrikht*. The verb *bakrikhn* in Yiddish is Korman's own neologism (the better semantic equivalent in Yiddish would simply be *farkrikhn*). Whether this is Korman's attempt at literal translation is unclear, and whether he is "successful" is a tedious question at best. The semantic layers found between the Yiddish and the German are far too sophisticated and complicated to be deemed "failures" in translation. For example, although not used in verbal form, *ba + krikhn* is closely related to the adverb used when something is ridden with vermin: *bakrokhn*. It is far more likely that Korman was alluding to this when translating the above poem.

¹⁴³ Albert Ehrenstein "Leid" In *Albert Ehrenstein: Werke, Band 4/1*, ed. Hanni Mittelman. (Grafrath: Klaus Boer Verlag, 1997), 45.

¹⁴⁴ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

Other, more noticeable changes occur in the sixth line, where Korman links the hair loss mentioned in the preceding line with the hair's own graying on the speaker's head. The German is less explicit, only noting the loss of hair, and the graying of skin more broadly. The skin then lends itself better to the comparison to a field once lush and now almost barren. The understated beauty/horror in the line takes on new meaning when examining the two versions more closely. We see something else at play entirely.

Ergrauen in German most often refers to gray/graying hair, and its (although not necessarily) biologically-determined symbol of aging and change. The German links this image to the metaphor of harvesting a field which, combined with an image of the grim reaper (and sickle), that slippage forms the literal center of the poem. Inevitably, the poem ends as sleep surrounds the speaker's bones with darkness. Dying while dreaming, grass grows (or, literally: shoots) from the speaker's skull already made of (i.e., not presently in the process of becoming) black earth/soil.

The poem addressing the passing of time into death is more gradual in the Yiddish. For one, Korman's translation appears in three separate stanzas (compared to Ehrenstein's single-bodied text). Structured more like a late Romantic poem than a fragmentary, expressionistic *Leidlied*, the Yiddish version in its use of *ot azoy* ("just like this") better conveys the inevitable pain of the poem's more formulaic structure. And yet, it's a poem that foreignizes in Yiddish what are often words borrowed from Hebraic and Aramaic source texts, as life cycle events are often denoted by *loshn-koydesh*. As such, Korman's register for this poem and for German-Yiddish translation operates outside of this textual space. And in this sense, the poem remains somewhat distant or estranged,

never becoming completely subsumed within the linguistic constellations of the Yiddish language.

Ezra Korman and Else Lasker-Schüler

Just as Manger and Ravitch found inspiration in her work, Lasker-Schüler also became a central figure in Korman's anthologies, and the choice to include her poems expands her works' reach into Yiddish literature. It's as if Lasker-Schüler's poetic voice speaks *a sheyn yidish*. Lasker-Schüler's first poem appearing in the anthology is "O Gott":

O Gott

א, גאט

Überall nur kurzer Schlaf
Im Mensch, im Grün, im Kelch der Winde.
Jeder kehrt in sein totes Herz heim.

אומעטום בלויז קורצער שלאף:
אין מענטש, אין גראז, אין בעכער פונעם ווינט.
יעדער קערט זיך אום אין זיין טויטן הארץ אהיים.

—Ich wollt mein Liebster wär' ein Kind—
Er wußte noch vom ersten Atem zu erzählen.

כיוואלט וועלן ס'זאל די וועלט נאך זיין אַ קינד
און וויסן פון דעם ערשטן אטעם מיר צו דערציילן.

Früher war ein große Frömmigkeit am
Himmel,
Gaben sich Sterne die Bibel zu lesen.
Könnte ich einmal Gottes Hand fassen
Oder den Mond an seinem Finger sehn.

פריער איז געוועזן שטארקע פרומקייט אינעם הימל.
די שטערן פלעגן זיך געבן די ביכל לייענען.

געקאנט אננעמען אמאל גאט'ס האנט,
אדער די לבנה אויף זיין פינגער זען.

א, גאט, א, גאט, ווי ווייט בין איך פון דיר!¹⁴⁶

O Gott, O Gott, wie weit bin ich von dir!¹⁴⁵

The first noticeable change is in the title of the poem itself, where Korman has added a comma—to slow down the utterance of "*O, Got*" (something that will also occur in the final line of the translated poem), and away from *oy* (a more common rendering of "O" into Yiddish). Korman's addition of a colon at the end of the first line almost magnifies the irony found in both the German and the Yiddish regarding what is/is not

¹⁴⁵ Else Lasker-Schüler, "O, Gott," in *Else Lasker Schüler: Werke und Briefe - Kritische Ausgabe* (Nördlingen: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996), 172.

¹⁴⁶ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

being said to the object of the poem. “Überall” and “nur” hint at the extreme to come, but in the Yiddish we see this rendered as “*Umetum bloyz*.” Bloyz also denotes bareness and emptiness. What begins as a poem of extremes or, perhaps contradictions, is a play on words that Korman wisely chooses to highlight in this translation.

Other examples from the Yiddish are striking in their complexities. *Kelch* in Yiddish would most likely be a *loshn-koydesh* term, as the German already denotes its religious usage. But this leads to the question for the translator: should one render a religious (i.e., in this case, often non-Jewish) term from the German into an equally salient term (כוס, or *kos*, for example, meaning a goblet used for blessing wine on holidays) in Yiddish? This was certainly common in the latter years of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Or, does one keep a distance between the German and the Yiddish by inserting “something else”? Does this distance hint at other “distances” emerging from within, and into, Yiddish culture at the time Korman translated these poems? Korman goes with the latter decision to stay clear of religious symbolism, and renders *Kelch* as *bekher*. A generic term that certainly coincides with the German text, *bekher* adds while also avoiding any religious significance. This might be a way to distance Jewish from non-Jewish ritual, or simply serve as a departure from earlier norms in Yiddish translation. Nevertheless, it is one of the many ways in which Korman plays with the reading of Lasker-Schüler’s poem (and her larger oeuvre), as both distinctly “Jewish,” rendered from one Jewish idiom into another.

Even more noticeable is Korman’s rendering of *Bibel* as *bibl*, which is a term in Yiddish that is rarely (if ever) used to describe the Hebrew Bible; instead, it is reserved for its Christian counterpart. It is in this third stanza of Lasker-Schüler’s poem that

Korman also decides to divide the four verses into couplets, thereby creating a singular moment in the poem where this rendering of *Bibel* into a clearly Christian reference as *bibl* stands alone. In what is already a complex poem, and one that is full of conditionals, following the opening stanza are lines that denote an encapsulation: “Jeder kehrt in sein totes Herz heim.”

The poem makes other radical departures when in Yiddish translation. “—Ich wollt mein Liebster wär’ ein Kind—” becomes more explicit: “*kh’volt veln s’zol di velt* (world) *nokh zayn a kind.*” *Liebster* often becomes “the world” in English translations of the poem, also. What appears as affectionate longing for knowing the ways the world becomes is in essence the inability to return to a world outside of the poem. There are echoes of (or silences resulting from the absence of) prophetic texts, as the speaker, wishing to convey something via the written word, is instead merely illuminating the futility and powerlessness of the modern writer compared to those that came before. When considering the weight this poem carries, both before and after the genocide of European Jewry, Korman unsurprisingly includes Lasker-Schüler’s poem in both intewar and postwar anthologies.

The following poem by Lasker-Schüler also appears in Korman’s anthology:

Mein stilles Lied

מיין שטיל ליד

Mein Herz ist eine traurige Zeit,
Die tonlos tickt.

מיין הארץ איז טרויעריקע צייט,
וואס טיקעט שטומערהייט.

Meine Mutter hatte goldene Flügel,
Die keine Welt fanden.

מיין מוטער האָט געהאט גאלדענע פליגלען,
וואס האבן קיין וועלט נישט געפונען.

Horcht, mich sucht meine Mutter,
Licht sind ihre Finger und ihre Füße wandernde
Träume

הערט, מיך זוכט מיין מוטער.
ליכט זיינען אירע פינגער און אירע פיס – וואנדערנדע
טרוימען.

Und süße Wetter mit blauen Wehen

און ווייכע ווינטן מיט בלויזען אטעם

Wärmen meine Schlummer	ווארימען מיינע דרימלען.
Immer den Nächten, Deren Tage meiner Mutter Krone tragen.	שטענדיק דורך די נעכט, וועמענס טעג טראגן מיין מוטער'ס קרוינען.
Und ich trinke aus dem Monde stillen Wein, Wenn die Nacht einsam kommt.	און איך טרינק פון דער לבנה שטילן וויין, ווען די נאכט קומט איינזאם.
Meine Lieder trugen des Sommers Bläue Und kehrten düster heim.	מיינע לידער האבן דעם זומער'ס בלוי געטראגן, און טרויעריק זיך אומגעקערט אהיים.
—Ihr verhöhntet meine Lippe Und redet mit ihr. —	— איר האט פארשוועכט מיינע ליפן און רעדט מיט איר. —
Doch ich griff nach euern Händen, Denn meine Liebe ist ein Kind und wollte spielen.	דאך, איך האב אן אייערע הענט זיך געקלאמערט, ווייל מיין ליבע איז א קינד און האט געוואלט זיך שפילן
Und ich artete mich nach euch, Weil ich mich nach dem Menschen sehnte.	און איך בין ענלעך געווארן צו אייך, ווייל כ'האב נאך דעם מענטשן געבענקט.
Arm bin ich geworden Von eurer bittenden Wohltat.	אַרים בין איך געוואָרן פון אייער בעטלערישער צדקה
Und das Meer wird es wehklagen Gott.	און דער ים וועט עס פֿאַרקלאַגן פאר גאט.
Ich bin der Hieroglyph, Der unter der Schöpfung steht.	איך בין דער היראגליף, וואס שטייט אונטער דעם באשאף.
Und mein Auge Ist der Gipfel der Zeit;	און מיין אויג איז דער שפיץ־בארג פון דער צייט:
Sein Leuchten küßt Gottes Saum. ¹⁴⁷	זיין שיין קושט דעם זויס פון גאט'ס קלייד. ¹⁴⁸

The way “Mein stilles Lied” echoes “O Gott,” also resonates with Lasker-Schüler’s poems translated by Ravitch and Manger. Korman’s translation stems from a later (1917) version of a poem that Lasker-Schüler had revised from 1905.¹⁴⁹ In this way, Korman’s version doubly rewrites the poem: first by only translating the lines that Lasker-Schüler retained from the earlier version, and then secondly by rendering it into Yiddish.

¹⁴⁷ Else Lasker-Schüler, “Mein stilles Lied” in *Else Lasker Schüler: Werke und Briefe - Kritische Ausgabe* (Nördlingen: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996), 94-96

¹⁴⁸ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun dayshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

¹⁴⁹ The 1905 version is 18 lines longer, with certain stanzas appearing in place of others that the author excised; the earlier version is included in the appendix of this chapter

In the second and third couplets, Korman seems to, however, be literally translating the poem. But then: something new comes out of the process of translation. And time and time again, it is remarkable how Korman manages to breathe a rhythm into the Yiddish, while also keeping the Yiddish translation from being a mere carbon copy. In the fourth stanza, Korman renders “süße Wetter” into “veykhe vintn” (mellow, gentle, mild winds) which nicely echoes the very action found in the German with (Wehen). And further into the poem (in the ninth couplet—”Doch ich griff nach euern Händen”), we are reminded of the childhood days being longed for in “O Gott”, and the theologically (and Jewishly) charged impulse to return to another time and place no longer accessible.

Turning to the third-to-last stanza, the word “Hieroglyph” makes an appearance, and in a German-language poem that has now been rendered into Yiddish—a language using Hebrew characters—hieroglyphs and their valances take on syllabic, logographic, and alphabetic life forms of their own.¹⁵⁰ Although editors of Lasker-Schüler’s works are right to note additional theological references in her works that are not entirely grounded in Judaism, it is also significant that the poem isn’t necessarily religious, theological, biblical, etc. insofar that it extends beyond the biographical.¹⁵¹ Looking at one couplet in particular:

Und ich artete mich nach euch,
Weil ich mich nach dem Menschen sehnte.

און איך בין ענלעך געווארן צו אייך,
ווייל כ'האב נאך דעם מענטשן געבענקט

¹⁵⁰ The Egyptian use of images to represent characters of written text certainly lent itself well to their being called “words of god” (the meaning of the term “hieroglyph”). There are, however, orientalist dimensions to these allusions.

¹⁵¹ See Samuel Spinner, “Lasker-Schüler’s Languages: Hebrew and Hieroglyphics,” in *MLN* 132, no. 3 (2017): 701–19 for needed correctives on Lasker-Schüler’s complex relationship to the Hebrew language. Much of Lasker-Schüler scholarship in *historisch-kritische Ausgaben* (e.g., see Frankfurt: 1996), rightfully or not, still links her work to more essentialist notions of Jewishness.

The German “sich arten nach” becomes something more colloquial in Yiddish: “ikh bin enlekh gevorn tsu”, because as the “I” of the poem says, “I yearn for the human.” The Yiddish *benken* is a term for longing, and so eloquently represents in the Yiddish language a weaving in and out between the sacred and profane, but it does not solely become a term of religious longing, exile, etc.

Moving on to the next poem in the collection, the reader encounters “Mein Liebeslied:”

Mein Liebeslied

Wie ein heimlicher Brunnen
Murmelt mein Blut,
Immer von Dir, immer von mir.
Unter dem taumelnden Mond
Tanzen meine nackten, suchenden Träume,
Nachtwandelnde, fiebernde Kinder,
Leise über düstere Hecken.
O, Deine Lippen sind sonnig....
Diese Rauschedüfte Deiner Lippen....
Und aus blauen Dolden, silberumrint
Lächelst Du ... Du, Du.
Immer das schlängelnde Geriesel
Auf meiner Haut
Über die Schulter hinweg —
Ich lausche
Wie ein heimlicher Brunne
Murmelt mein Blut ...¹⁵³

מײן ליבע־ליד

ווי א פֿאַרבאָרגענער ברונים
מורמלט מײן בלוט:
שטענדיק פֿון דיר, שטענדיק פֿון מיר.
אונטער דער שווימענדער לבנה
טאַנצן מײנע נאַקעטע, זוכנדע טרוימען,
בלאַנדזשענדיקע, פיבערדיקע קינדער,
שטיל איבער פינצטערע פֿלויטן.
א, דינע ליפֿן זײנען זוניק...
אט די שיכורע ריחות פֿון דינע ליפֿן...
און, זילבערדיק אַרומגערינגלט מיט בלויע
שירעמס,
שמיכלסטו...
דו, דו.
שטענדיק דאָס שלענגלדיקע ריזלען
איבער מײן הויט,
איבער די אַקסלען אַריבער —
איך הער זיך צו: —
ווי אַ פֿאַרבאָרגענער ברונים
מורמלט מײן בלוט.¹⁵²

Here, the “taumelnder Mond” becomes in the Yiddish a swimming or floating (shvimende) *levone* (loshn-koydesh for “moon”). And while the dreams do not become “*khaloymes*” (also *loshn-koydesh* and the most common word for “dream”), they are

¹⁵² Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

¹⁵³ Else Lasker-Schüler, “Mein Liebeslied” in *Else Lasker Schüler: Werke und Briefe - Kritische Ausgabe* (Nördlingen: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996), 99.

straying silently over *ploytn* (Korman's translation of Hecken). Linguistically, Hecken lies within the larger constellation of translations appearing in this project; it appears in another translation of Lasker-Schülers poetry: "Ruth" (*Rus*) as translated by Itsik Manger (the subject of the first chapter). Manger translates "Hecken" as *garbn*, which also resonates with the term as it appears in "Mein Liebeslied." The sexual imagery of the poem as rendered into Yiddish also dovetails with biblical poetics, harkening to the Song of Songs, where the gendered euphemisms are a stand-in for much more explicit themes. For example, the line "Diese Rauschedüfte Deiner Lippen" becomes "*di shikere reykhesh fun dayne lipn.*" Although Yiddish has no genitive case, and forming the possessive often falls to the use of *fun* (the preposition "of") — or the slightly-outdated reliance on the dative—the Yiddish nevertheless blurs what is taking place. The "intoxicating scents of/from your lips" breaks open the structure of the Yiddish poem, and away from the German with an example of fusion languaging the Yiddish does so well. Further illuminating the intoxicating aside uttered in is the breaking of two lines from the German into three:

Und aus blauen Dolden, silberumringt	און, זילבערדיק ארומגערינגלט מיט בלויע שירעמס,
Lächelst Du ... Du, Du.	שמייכלסטו... דו, דו.

What is also striking about the fracturing of these two lines, is its mirroring of the trickling imagery that appears in the following lines, and in turns its connection to the eavesdropping alluded to in the third-to-last line of the poem ("Ich lausche..."). The Yiddish uses a reflexive, intransitive verb to describe this phenomenon instead: *tsuheren zikh* (to listen attentively to sth.).

Although Korman's surviving archival records are sparse, his ability to work intertextually was blatantly clear. What appears in Lasker-Schüler's *kritische Ausgaben* as "Täubchen, das in seinem eigenen Blute schwimmt", a poem with a quotation for a title:

„Täubchen, das in seinem eignen Blute schwimmt“

דאס טייבעלע, וואס שווימט
אין אייגענעם בלוט +)

ריכארד דעמעל'ן

Als ich also diese Worte an mich las,
Erinnerte ich mich
Tausend Jahre meiner.

ווען כ'האב צו מיר אט די ווערטער געלייענט,
האב איך זיך דערמאנט
אן מיינע טויזנט יארן.

Eisige Zeiten verschollen – Leben vom Leben,
Wo liegt mein Leben –
Und träumt nach meinem Leben.

איזיקע צייטן פארשוואנדן – לעבן פון לעבן.
וואו ליגט מיינ לעבן
און טרומט פון מיינ לעבן ?

Ich lag allen Tälern im Schoß,
Umklammerte alle Berge,
Aber nie meine Seele wärmte mich.

כ'בין אלע טאלן געלעגן אין שויס,
ארוםגעקלאמערט אלע בערג,
אבער מיינ נשמה האט מיך קיינמאל נישט
געווארימט.

Mein Herz ist die tote Mutter,
Und meine Augen sind traurige Kinder,
Die über die Lande gehen.

מיינ הארץ איז די טויטע מיטער,
און מיינע אויגן – טרויעריקע קינדער,
וואס גייען ארום איבער דער וועלט.

„Täubchen, das in seinem eigenen Blute schwimmt“ ...
Ja, diese Worte an mich sind heiße Tropfen,
Sind mein stilles Aufsterben.
„Täubchen, das in seinem eigenen Blute schwimmt“ ...

(+ אזוי האט ריכארד דעמעל
אנגערופן די דיכטעריין¹⁵⁵

In den Nächten sitzen sieben weinende Stimmen
Auf der Stufe des dunklen Tors
Und harren.

Auf den Hecken sitzen sie
Um meine Träume
Und tönen.

Und mein braunes Auge blüht
Halberschlossen vor meinem Fenster
Und zirpt. –

„Täubchen, das in seinem eigenen Blute schwimmt“ ...¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Else Lasker-Schüler, "Täubchen, das in seinem eigenen Blute schwimmt" in *Else Lasker Schüler: Werke und Briefe - Kritische Ausgabe* (Nördlingen: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996), 85-86.

¹⁵⁵ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

The question of the footnote (as denoted by the parentheses and “+” in the Yiddish version) leads the reader to question what the opening lines could be referring to. The explicit reference to Richard Dehmel, and the opening lines explicitly linking memory to a millenium of time, etc. also implicate the reader as they take on the action “an mich lesen”. This temporality that is in turn mapped onto the poem does not provide the “I” with solace, nor a sense of place, and the metaphors of the third stanza lead the reader to both an additional explanation and further questioning. There is an exilic motif throughout the poem, but Dehmel’s own voice dispersed throughout in the form of the poem renders some of this exilic nature moot for a slew of more subjective, personal themes found in other poems by Lasker-Schüler. “Mein Herz ist die tote Mutter, / Und meine Augen sind traurige Kinder, Die über die Lande gehen.” Another example is in line fourteen of the German, “Ja, diese Worte an mich sind heiße Tropfen,” which also echoes Lasker-Schüler’s notion of the *Geriesel* from “Mein Liebeslied.”

The parallelism between the penultimate stanza and the one preceding it render this notion of the inter/textual echo more clearly. “Und harren,” “Und tönen,” and (in the last stanza) “Und zirpt” — also reiterating (echoing) the title of the poem.

Korman translated other poems by Lasker-Schüler written as an homage to close friends. “Paul Zech” alludes to Zech’s own play on dialect and German etymology:

Paul Zech

פּויל צעך

Sing Groatvatter woar dat verwunschene Bäuerlein
Aus Grimm sinne Märchens.

זיין זיידע איז געווען דאָס פאַרכישופטע פּויערל
פֿון גרימ'ס שיינע מעשהלעך.

Der Enkelsonn ist ein Dichter.
Paul Zech schreibt mit der Axt seine Verse.

דאס אייניקל איז א דיכטער.
פּויל צעך שרײַבט מיט דער האק זיינע פּערזן.

Man kann sie in die Hand nehmen,

מ'קאָן זיי נעמען אין דער האנט,
אזוי הארט זיינען זיי.

So hart sind die.

Sein Vers wird zum Geschick
Und zum murrenden Volk.

Er läßt Qualm durch sein Herz dringen;
Ein düsterer Beter.

Aber seine Kristallaugen blicken
Unzählige Male den Morgen der Welt.¹⁵⁶

זיין ליד רעדט פון גורל
און צום מורמלענדיקן פאלק.
ער לאזט טשאדן דרינגען דורך זיין הארץ
אַ מרה־שחורהדיקער בעטער.

אבער זיינע קרישטאלענע אויגן זעען
אנצאליקע מאל דעם מארגן פון דער וועלט.¹⁵⁷

The poem, in its artificially antiquated German, becomes alongside a modern Yiddish “double” completely bound to, yet ultimately severed from, the etymological riddles of Lasker-Schüler’s text. In the first line, *Groatvatter* becomes *zeyde*, and *verwunschene* becomes the common Yiddish word (albeit from *loshn-koydesh*) *farkisheft* (similar words include *kishef-makher* - magician, *maksheyfe* - witch, etc.). The dialogue between the Yiddish and the German, and the reference to the Grimms (whose etymological project took on more sinister connotations over time), creates another layer of nuance to this poem.

The fourth stanza also opens up the text to further interpretation, insofar there is a textual play between the German and Korman’s choices of Yiddish translation. *Geschick* becomes *goyrl* (*loshn-koydesh* for destiny, fate), and *murrend* becomes *murmlendik*, a word that almost borders on a neologism if it weren’t for the etymological motifs at the center of the poem. We see other changes as well. *Düsterer* becomes *moyre-skhoysredik* (itself a “neologism” coming into Yiddish from *loshn-koydesh*: *moyre* for fear, and *skhoysre* from the same root for *shokher* - the color black). And in the final line, *ontsolik*

¹⁵⁶ Else Lasker-Schüler, “Paul Zech” in *Else Lasker Schüler: Werke und Briefe - Kritische Ausgabe* (Nördlingen: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996), 148.

¹⁵⁷ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

(for countless) matches the German more closely at the expense of standard Yiddish. And yet the poem's subversive, personal, and etymological aspirations (all trying to represent the truth) point to the role of translation itself.

Korman also included one poem by Paul Zech in his earlier anthology. Paired with Lasker-Schüler's poem, complexity ensues due to Korman's own rendering of a difficult poem into Yiddish:

Der Wald

דער וואַלד

סאַנעט

Reißt mir die Zunge aus: so habe ich noch Hände
zu loben dieses inselhafte Sein.
Es wird ganz Ich und geht in mich hinein,
als wüchsen ihm aus meiner Stirn die Wände,

רייסט מיר דעם צונג ארויס, האב איך נאך הענט
צו לויבן אט דאס וואונדערלעכע זיין.
עס ווערט אינגאנצן איך און שטראמט אין מיר אריין,
ווי ס'וואלט אין אים געוואקסן פון מיין שטערן ווענט,

wo war die Berge zu den Wolken steigen.
Ich will mit dem gerassten Licht
ins Blaue malen das noch nie geschriebene Gedicht
und es in alle Himmel klar verzweigen.

וואו קלאָר די בערג טון צו די וואלקנס שטייגן.
איך וויל מיט אַט דעם אויסגעלייטערן ליכט
אין בלויזן מאלן דאס נאך קיינמאל נישט-געשריבענע געדיכט,
און עס אין הימלען קלאר פאַרצווייגן.

Denn hier ist Eingang zu dem Grenzlosen;
hir ward die Welt zum zweiten Male Kind
aus den gezogenen weißen und den schwarzen
Losen.

ווייל דאָ איז דער אריינגאנג צו דעם גרענעצלעזן:
דא ווערט די וועלט צום צווייטן מאל א קינד
פֿון גאלד פֿון זונפלעקן אויף גרינענדיקע גראזן.

Tritt ein, der du verwandert bist und blind!
Wenn einst in Träumen laut war hohes Rufen
um Gott — : die Bäume sind zu ohm die Stufen.¹⁵⁸

טרעט דו אַריין, וואס איז פֿאַרוואגלט און איז בלינד:
איז ווען געווען אין חלום, זאג, צו גאט א שטארקער רופֿן?
די בוימער פֿונעם וואלד זיינען צו אים די שטופֿן.¹⁵⁹

The poet links speech (tongue) to hands used to write, and the paradox that stems from seeking in oneself the sources of inspiration. Zech's poem resonates in similar ways to other early modernist writers (Melech Ravitch comes to mind), with the allusion to walls currently enclosing the artist pushing the boundaries of their medium to enter a realm

¹⁵⁸ Paul Zech, "Reißt mir die Zunge aus: so habe ich noch Hände..." in *Der Wald* (Dresden: Sibyllen-Verlag, 1920), 19.

¹⁵⁹ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

beyond. Zech does not appear in Korman's later, postwar anthology, although he, too, was forced into exile by the Nazis and spent the rest of his life in Buenos Aires until his death in 1946.

Rilke

Rilke's inherited position as "Yiddish" poet for multiple generations of translators makes his appearance in Korman's first anthology, *אנטאלאגיע פון דייטשע דיכטער* (*Antologye fun daytshe dikhter*) unsurprising. Furthermore, Rilke serves as an important bridge between early interwar and later postwar attempts at translation. The Rilke poems in Korman's *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*:¹⁶⁰

Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?	וואס וועסטו טון, גאט ¹⁶¹
Vorgefühl	איך בין ווי די פֿאן
Herbsttag	הארבסט־טאג
Eingang	ווער זאלסטו נישט זיין
Ernste Stunde	ווער ס'וויינט
From "Vigilien"	פון די וויגיליעס
Herbst	די בלעטער פאלן
Und meine Seele ist ein Weib vor dir	און מיין נשמה
Ich habe viele Brüder in Soutanen	פון, דאס בוך פֿון פרושדיקן לעבן" א
Wir dürfen dich nicht eigenmächtig malen	פון, דאס בוך פֿון פרושדיקן לעבן" ב
Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen	פון, דאס בוך פֿון פרושדיקן לעבן" ג

Most poems appeared in Rilke's *Das Buch der Bilder* (1902) or *Das Stundenbuch* (1905). In an act typical of Korman, some poems appear with a more literally translated

¹⁶⁰ Note: not all translations into Yiddish include titles; I include the titles for reference)

¹⁶¹ Although Korman owned a Yiddish typewriter, his drafts of the translations lack the cantillation marks typical of certain vowels and consonants. To retain this the body of this chapter, and because most of Korman's writings adhere to YIVO standard orthography in other respects, I have decided to adhere as closely as possible to Korman's drafts and not add any additional markings to the transcriptions.

title, while other titles are more varied, taking on the lines of the first stanza that are themselves products of translation and adaptation.

The Rilke poems also hint at the unfinished nature of Korman's work; some poems are marked as part of specific Rilke volumes, while others from the same collections of works appear as standalone translations. Korman's small collection of archival materials at YIVO provides few clues as to what the intended venue, audience, etc. of these translations were. What Korman's translations, however, do provide, when reading through poem by poem, translation by translation, is a sense of the deep engagement he had with the Austrian writer--enough to create a diverse set of translations in Yiddish. And similarly to Manger's early translations that appeared almost coterminously, Korman's own renderings point to Yiddish literary affinities with Central European poetry.

Also important to note: compared to Ravitch's translations of Lasker-Schüler and Ehrenstein, Korman's renderings are upon closer inspection indeed poor examples of "literal" translations. Korman's style hints at both the struggle and ensuing departure from any attempt to remain literally grounded in the German texts (as if that were possible to begin with).

Furthermore, Rilke's complicated status as a "religious" poet also gets turned on its head by the Detroit-based Yiddish translator, who takes poems from *Das Stundenbuch/Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben* and transforms even the volume's title: *Fun "dos bukh fun poreshdikn lebn."* Considering the fact that a Jewish "monk" is anachronistic, Korman still manages to mine the depths of the Yiddish language for an acceptable equivalent of *mönchisch*. He manages to find: פרושדיק - *poreshdik*. An

adjectival form of the noun פֿרױש (poresh), someone who devotes their entire waking hours to the study of sacred texts, and who for religious reasons lives apart from a spouse, becomes part of the title for three of Rilke's poems: "Ich habe viele Brüder in Soutanen," "Wir dürfen dich nicht eigenmächtig malen", "Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen."

One other poem included in the anthology also belongs to *Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben*: "Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?" It is unclear why this poem appears separately from the others at the end of the section. Whether Korman used this anthology as an miniature archive of his own, collecting and compiling the many translations he completed over the course of his career, or because the poem's positioning simply hints at a re/working, unstable process of the project itself, the poems provide metaphorical weight to Korman's translations of Rilke's "*poreshdike lider*."

Although unremarkable to some, who see Yiddish as (incorrectly) intelligible to the German ear, Korman attempts to maintain a semblance of Rilke's rhyme, even if it means maintaining certain German elements in the Yiddish. Korman provided minor edits to his own translations (mostly related to meter and word order), as seen from the corrections on the printed page. It is at these moments in the text that readers get a glimpse of his successes and failures in translation. For example:

Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?

וואס וועסטו טון, גאט

Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?
Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)
Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)

וואס וועסטו טון, גאט, ווען איך וועל שטארבן?
איך בין דיין קרוג (ווען כווער א שארבן?)
איך בין דיין טרונק (ווען כוועל פֿארדארבן?)
איך בין דיין קלייד און ווערק, דיין ארבן,
אן מיר פארלירסטו גאָר דיין זיין*.

Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,
mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.

Nach mir hast du kein Haus, darin
dich Worte, nah und warm, begrüßen.
Es fällt von deinen müden Füßen
die Samtsandale, die ich bin.

Dein großer Mantel lässt dich los.
Dein Blick, den ich mit meiner Wange
warm, wie mit einem Pfühl, empfangen,
wird kommen, wird mich suchen, lange -
und legt beim Sonnenuntergange
sich fremden Steinen in den Schoß.

Was wirst du tun, Gott? Ich bin bange.¹⁶²

אן מיר האָסט נישט קיין הויז, דערין
דיך ווערטער, נאָנט און וואַרים, זאלן* באַגריסן.
עס פאלט פון דיינע מידע פיס צעריסן
די סאַמעטענע סאַנדאַליע, וואס איך בין.

דיין גרויסער מאַנטל גליטשט זיך דיר אַרויס.
דיין בליק, וואס מיט מיין באק האב אויפגענומען,
ווי מיט א קישן ווארים, ער וועט קומען
און וועט מיך זוכן לאנג, צעשוואומען –
און בעת דער שקיעה וועט שטומען*
אַנידערלייגן זיך אין פרעמדן שטיינער־שוים.

וואס וועסטו טון, גאט? איך גיי אויס.¹⁶³

Korman's endeavor nevertheless points to the poetics he found in both languages.

For example: lines 4 and 5 in both German and Yiddish of “Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?”/ “*Vos vestu ton, got*”:

4 Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,	4 איך בין דײַן קלייד און ווערק, דײַן אַרבן,
5 mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.	5 אָן מיר פֿאַרלירסטו גאָר דײַן [זין]

Korman wanted to rhyme the fourth line (ending with *arbn*) with the preceding three, and he does so beautifully (*shtarbn*, *sharbn*, *fardarbn*). But he does so by adding an additional element to the line (i.e., *arbn* - inheritance). The translation already includes *kleyd un verk* (a poetically inspired translation for Gewand und [dein] Gewerbe), but nevertheless also includes this notion of inheritance. Thematically, this *Germanic* addition adds richness to the Yiddish translation of a German poem by Rilke (instead of using *yerushe* - ירושה - inheritance), all while Korman maintains a rhyme scheme (i.e., a fidelity of a certain

¹⁶² Rainer Maria Rilke, “Was willst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?” In *Das Stundenbuch* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1918), 27.

¹⁶³ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

kind) explicitly hints at the broader themes of the poem—artistic inspiration and legacy, mortality, and the inevitability of fragmentation.

What also turns out to be an extraordinary piece of evidence for the working aspect of translation is Korman's "error(s)" (marked by asterisks in the transcription above) he made in the fifth line. *Sinn* begins yet another series of rhymes in Rilke's version of the text, but in Yiddish: זין (*zin*) is not a word (although זינען - *zinen* indeed is). The translator/reader thus faces a challenge as evidenced by the scribble found on the page when the rhyme in the following four lines is as follows:

derin...bagrisn...tserisn...bin.

Leaving this difficulty aside for a moment, let us return to the fourth line, and read the line "as is" on the page. Rilke's line: "mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn" becomes in Yiddish: *on mir farlirst gor dayn [zayn]*. Although this might have indeed been a typo, but the bracketed text hints at the translator's uncertainty (and mine as a reader) to render the line as such; *zayn* works in Yiddish. Not only does this translation then hint more explicitly at what happens when the artist dies, *Gott/got* also faces a loss, i.e., the faculties as a whole: his *zayn*. We can of course assume the translator was in the process of rhyming line 4 with the lines to come, but remaining with the poem in draft form (albeit briefly) speaks to an inner working of this particular translation.

Korman's urge to rhyme in accordance with Rilke's German does not keep up for long, and other poems attest to a freer style of translation.

Vorgefühl

Ich bin wie eine Fahne von Fernen umgeben.
Ich ahne die Winde, die kommen, und muss sie leben,
während die Dinge unten sich noch nicht rühren:
die Türen schließen noch sanft, und in den Kaminen ist Stille;

איך בין ווי די פאן

איך בין ווי די פאן, וואס מיט ווייטן זיך גריסט!
דעם אנפיל פון ווינטן דערפיל איך דערפרישט,
בעת נאך פון אונטן קיין זאך טוט זיך רירן:
עס שליסן זיך שטיל נאך די טירן

die Fenster zittern noch nicht, und der Staub ist noch schwer.

Da weiß ich die Stürme schon und bin erregt wie das Meer.
Und breite mich aus und falle in mich hinein
und werfe mich ab und bin ganz allein
in dem großen Sturm.¹⁶⁴

און אש אין קאמין לעשט דעם פלאם;
נאך ציטערט קיין שוויב,
און שווער נאך דער שטויב.
נאָט כּיפּיל שוין די שטורעמס, און בין ווילד ווי דער ים;
און ברייט מיך אויס ווייט,
און אין זיך פאל אריין,
און ווארף מיך פון זיך אפ,
און בלייב איינער אין גרויסן שטורעם!¹⁶⁵

Korman's translation lengthens the German poem by several lines, while also shortening and altering the German poem's structure to achieve this aim. In a way, this elongation anticipates a premonition found in Rilke's texts. Rilke's title *Vorgefühl* does not take a similar form in the Yiddish as a literal translation. Instead, part of the Yiddish translation becomes its title. This deceptively easy substitution turns out to be the first of many additional layers found in the translation of what is an already complicated poem.

For example, *Umgeben* becomes *grist* (from *grishn*-to greet), *ahne* appears as *derfil* (which, in comparison to *ahnen* does not resonate in the same way), *leben* as *derfrishn*, *sanft* as *shtil*, and so on. These are not simple substitutions or literal translations of the German poem, and instead they represent an entirely different engagement via translation of the work in question. Korman does not maintain Rilke's nine-line, two-stanza structure. Instead, he consolidates the poem into one longer verse text by adding three lines, and recoupling the parts of the penultimate and ultimate verses. Further playing with the task of translation, Korman's stylistic choices explicitly link one version of the poem to the other. *Sanft* becomes *shtil* in the Yiddish, because (the German) *Stille* appears in the same line of the German version. Korman (perhaps not wanting to use the same word twice) thus creates a metaphor to avoid this repetition: *ash in kamin lesht dem flam*

¹⁶⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Vorgefühl" in *Das Buch der Bilder* (Berlin/Leipzig/Stuttgart: Axel Verlag, 1906), 55.

¹⁶⁵ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

(literally: ash in the chimney puts out the flame). Although unsurprising for a skilled poet and translator of multiple world literatures, Korman's ability to create original translations that play with elements of "faithfulness" is beyond remarkable. It is all the more poignant when so much of his work remains under- or unacknowledged today.

Moving on to the Yiddish version of Rilke's *Herbsttag*:

Herbsttag

הארבסט־טאג

Herr: es ist Zeit. Der Sommer war sehr groß.
Leg deinen Schatten auf die Sonnenuhren,
und auf den Fluren laß die Winde los.

גאט, ס'איז צייט; דער זומער איז געוועזן אזוי גרויס.
דיין שאטן אויפן זונען־זייגער טו פארשפרייטן
און אויפן פעלד און בייטן די ווינטן לאָז אַרויס.

Befiehl den letzten Früchten voll zu sein;
gieb ihnen noch zwei südlichere Tage,
dränge sie zur Vollendung hin und jage
die letzte Süße in den schweren Wein.

באַפּויל די לעצטע פרוכט איצט פול צו זיין,
גיב נאך צוויי ווארימע זיי צו מעסלעסן,
יאג זייער רייפקייט־צו און טו פארפרעסן
די לעצטע זיסקייטן אין שווערן וויין.

Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr.
Wer jetzt allein ist, wird es lange bleiben,
wird wachen, lesen, lange Briefe schreiben
und wird in den Alleen hin und her
unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben.¹⁶⁷

ווער ס'האט קיין הויז איצט נישט, ווען וועט ער דאס שוין בויען?
ווער עלנט איצטער איז, וועט שוין אזוי פארבלייבן,
וועט וואך זיין, לייענען, לאנגע בריוו איצט שרייבן,
און אומרויק אין די אלעען לאנגע שעה'ן
וועט וואנדערן, ווען די בלעטער וועלן ווינטן טרייבן.¹⁶⁶

This particular translation displays similar embellishments found in Korman's other Rilke translations. In the third line of the first stanza, where Rilke's German "Herr" lets loose the winds on the fields (*und auf den Fluren laß die Winde los*), we see something change in the Yiddish. The action of the second line in the Yiddish also extends into the action found in that third: *dayn shotn oyfn zunen-zeyger tu farshpreytn un oyfn feld un baytn di vintn loz aroys*. The shadows not only spread across the sundial (shortening the days) and effecting its governing of time, but also: the shadows roll across the wind-swept fields.

Meanwhile, Korman also manages to (almost) maintain the rhyme scheme found in Rilke's poem, with one half-rhyme occurring in the 8th and 11th lines (*boyen* - build,

¹⁶⁶ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

¹⁶⁷ Rainer Rilke, "Herbsttag," in *Das Buch der Bilder* (Berlin/Leipzig/Stuttgart: Axel Verlag, 1906), 48.

and *sho-en* - hours). The rhyme lends a richness to the translation, when *Tage* in Rilke becomes *Mes-lesn* (*loshn-koydesh* for one 24-hour cycle that Korman spells phonetically as מעסלעסן instead of using the Hebrew spelling מעת-לעתן).¹⁶⁸ Korman's religious underpinnings of a poem that begins in the German with "Herr" are amplified by his use of *Got* (instead of *har*, or the numerous other words found in the Yiddish language denoting someone similarly powerful).¹⁶⁹

Rilke's poem also ruminates on the cyclical nature of time, and the inevitability of change on something with value that nevertheless does or does not have permanence.

This question of permanence and poetry can also be found in the Yiddish poet Avrom Sutzkever's famous postwar elegy: ווער וועט בלייבן? (*Ver vet blaybn?*):

Ver vet blaybn, vos vet blaybn, blaybn vet a vint,
blaybn vet di blindkayt funem blindn vos farshvind.
Blaybn vet a simen funem yam: a shnirl shoym,
blaybn vet a volkndl fartshepet a boym.

Ver vet blaybn, vos vet blaybn? blaybn vet a trof,
Bareyshesdik aroystsugrozn vider zayn bashaf.
Blaybn vet a fidlroyz lekoved zikh aleyn,
Zibn grozn fun di grozn veln zi farshteyn.

Mer fun ale shtern azsh fun tsofn biz aher,
blaybn vet der shtern vos er falt in same trer.
Shtendik vet a trofn vayn oykh blaybn in zayn krug,
Ver vet blaybn, got vet blaybn, iz dir nit genug?

ווער וועט בלייבן, וואָס וועט בלייבן? בלייבן וועט אַ ווינט,
בלייבן וועט די בלינדקייט פֿונעם בלינדן וואָס פֿאַרשווינד.
בלייבן וועט אַ סימן פֿונעם ים: אַ שנירל שוימ,
בלייבן וועט אַ וואָלקנדל פֿאַרטשעפּט אויף אַ בוימ.

ווער וועט בלייבן, וואָס וועט בלייבן? בלייבן וועט אַ טראָף,
בראַשיתדיק אַרויסצוגראָזן ווידער זײַן באַשאַף.
בלייבן וועט אַ פֿידלרויז לֵכֹוֹד זיך אַליין,
זיבן גראָזן פֿון די גראָזן וועלן זי פֿאַרשטײַן.

מער פֿון אַלע שטערן אַזש פֿון צפֿון ביז אַהער,
בלייבן וועט דער שטערן וואָס ער פֿאַלט אין סאַמע טרער.
שטענדיק וועט אַ טראָפֿן וויין אויך בלייבן אין זײַן קרוג,
ווער וועט בלייבן, גאָט וועט בלייבן, איז דיר נישט גענוג?¹⁷⁰

In this oft-discussed poem, "Who will remain? What will remain?" becomes an echo, repeated throughout. What in fact does remain? The answer is clear: only traces. The

¹⁶⁸ It is unclear whether Korman's politics evolved, shifted, or stayed somewhat constant over the course of his life. Although active as a revolutionary in pre-Soviet Kyiv/Kiev and later in interwar Berlin, the phonetic spellings of *loshn-koydesh* occur far too seldomly to say with certainty if he adhered to Soviet Yiddish orthography decades later. However, it serves as an interesting reminder of his ideological stances.

¹⁶⁹ The English "Lord" appears in the translations of *Das Buch der Bilder* by Edward Snow. Similarly, Snow translates the first line of the final stanza as "Who has no house now, will never build one" (79), something also mirrored in the Yiddish: "*ver s'hot keyn hoyz itst nit, ven vet er dos shoyn boyen?*" Here, the Yiddish language's legacy of powerful, rhetorical questioning.

¹⁷⁰ Avrom Sutzkever, "Ver vet blaybn, vos vet blaybn, blaybn vet a vint..." in *Lider fun togbukh* (Tel Aviv: *Di goldene keyt*, 1977), 16.

blindness of the blind person, the ribbon of foam in the sea, a cloud “caught” on a tree, and a syllable “re-sprouting primevally as its own creation.” The speaker in Rilke’s poem commands the Herr to usher in the change of seasons meteorological and metaphorical, who will also witness this change of state. In Rilke’s texts, whoever is without a home, whoever remains alone, will also remain alert, continue reading and writing lengthy correspondence, and: wander the streets as the leaves fall. All that is deemed permanent are traces, which are witnesses to changes.

The opening poem of Rilke’s *Buch der Bilder* is “Eingang,” a poem that Korman also rendered into Yiddish with a reworked title (of sorts). This fragmentation largely adheres to the German aurally and structurally, while also pushing the boundaries of German-Yiddish translation. The title: “Ver zolst nisht zayn!” - “Whoever you may be/are!” is the most direct translation (of Korman’s translations). It certainly mirrors the first line of Rilke: “Wer du auch seist...” But looking more closely at the structure of the poem, we see something else at play:

Eingang

Wer du auch seist: am Abend tritt hinaus
aus deiner Stube, drin du alles weißt;
als letztes vor der Ferne liegt dein Haus:
wer du auch seist.
Mit deinen Augen, welche müde kaum
von der verbrauchten Schwelle sich befreien,
hebst du ganz langsam einen schwarzen Baum
und stellst ihn vor den Himmel: schlank, allein.
Und hast die Welt gemacht. Und sie ist groß
und wie ein Wort, das noch im Schweigen reift.
Und wie dein Wille ihren Sinn begreift,
lassen sie deine Augen zärtlich los.¹⁷²

ווער זאלסט נישט זיין

ווער זאלסט נישט זיין!
אין אוונט גיי ארויס פון הויז פון דיין,
וואו אלץ איז דיר באוואוסט.
ווי ס'לעצטע פאר דער ווייטקייט ליגט דיין הויז.
ווער זאלסט נישט זיין!

ווער זאלסט נישט זיין!

מיט אויגן דיינע, וואס מידע קוים
פון שוועלן אפגעריבענע זיך ערשט באפרייען,
הויבסטו פאמעלעך אויף א שווארצן בוים
און שטעלסט אים פארין הימל: שלאנק, אליין.
און האסט א וועלט באשאפן, און זי איז גרויס.
און ווי א ווארט, וואס נאך אין שווייגן רייפט.
און ווי דיין ווילן זייער זינען איצט באגרייפט,
די אויגן דיינע צערטלעך לאזן אפ זיי פֿריי...¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

¹⁷² Rainer Maria Rilke, “Eingang,” in *Das Buch der Bilder* (Berlin/Leipzig/Stuttgart: Axel Verlag, 1906), 9.

Korman is still concerned with rhyme, even if the rhyme scheme is disjointed and inconsistent. The imperatives found in Rilke's opening lines also appear in the translation (*gey aroys fun hoyz fun dayn*), and the “*drin*” of Rilke's text is marvelously rendered as “*vu*” (a relative pronoun that also hints at the ambiguity of knowing and place). Korman also chooses to create a refrain, adding to the repetition found in Rilke, by including yet another “*ver zolst du nisht zayn*” at the beginning of an original second stanza.

Dwelling on this line and seeing its utterance for a third time in the translation, one can't help but notice the unidentifiable figure (“who/ever”) first and foremost becoming the main signifier in the Yiddish of the poem. For example, in the fifth line of Rilke's German is the mention of figure's eyes, which will ultimately play a role in the final line of the poem. In the Yiddish, in a poem that now exists in two parts, the description of the eyes does not appear in the fifth line but in the seventh—in the newly-created second stanza with the first line consisting of the translator's added “*Ver zolstu nisht zayn!*”. This separation, made in the Yiddish poem, becomes both a structural departure—and yet a grounding—in a poem's incapability from departing from the opening line. What ends with a period at the end of the fourth line is in the Yiddish a continuation.

Because other portions of the translation largely adhere to the structure of German, the reader might fail to note what else differs: namely, the poem's final line(s), where the translator and poet remind the reader of the “eyes” imagery found in an earlier line. The translation: “*un vi dayn viln zeyer zinen itst bagrayft, di oygn dayne tsertlekh lozn op zey frey...*” Ellipses appear in both versions, but the Yiddish includes this final

word (*frey*--fragmented version of *freyen*, *freylekh*, etc. to mean joyous or happy). These two lines are, however, are puzzling for other reasons. Whether the uncompleted manuscript highlights “errors” in the translation or not (e.g., *zeyer* means “their”, but *viln* is a singular noun in Yiddish; the plural is *vilns*), these final two lines end on an even more hopeful note than the German, or do they? Does the fragmentary, additional “*frey*” perhaps echo the additional “*ver zolstu nisht zayn*” earlier in the poem?

It is important to further note Korman’s tendency to depart from the titles given to the German versions. Korman’s changes obscure and illuminate the works in question. For those seeking to find the German text, changes like these create confusion, further distancing the poem from its “source.” And yet, with the reader’s awareness of the German poems, either as standalone texts or in the form of another medium (German), the translations open up other possibilities and notions of readership/authorship. For example, Korman begins his following translation with similar stylistic changes as seen with Rilke’s “*Eingang*”. “*Ver s’veynt*” comes from the opening lines of Rilke’s “*Ernste Stunde*”, which in turn becomes the title of the translation.

Ernste Stunde

ווער ס'וויינט

Wer jetzt weint irgendwo in der Welt,
ohne Grund weint in der Welt,
weint über mich.

ווער ס'וויינט איצט ערגעץ אין דער וועלט,
וויינט סתם אזוי אין וועלט,
וויינט איבער מיר.

Wer jetzt lacht irgendwo in der Nacht,
ohne Grund lacht in der Nacht,
lacht mich aus.

ווער ס'לאַכט איצט ערגעץ אין דער נאַכט,
לאַכט סתם אַזאַ אין נאַכט,¹⁷³
לאַכט פֿון מיר.

Wer jetzt geht irgendwo in der Welt,
ohne Grund geht in der Welt,

ווער ס'גייט איצט ערגעץ אין דער וועלט,
גייט סתם אזוי אין וועלט,

¹⁷³ Edward Snow’s translation (101) does not retain “night” in the English version of the poem; instead, he chose to render “Nacht” as “world,” in order to mirror the other stanzas.

geht zu mir.

גייט צו מיר.

Wer jetzt stirbt irgendwo in der Welt,
ohne Grund stirbt in der Welt:
sieht mich an.¹⁷⁵

ווער ס'שטאַרבט איצט ערגעץ אין דער וועלט,
שטאַרב סתם אזוי אין וועלט,
קוקט אויף מיר.¹⁷⁴

Two (or perhaps, more) choices made over the course/task of translation become quickly apparent. The first appears in place of the repetitive use of “ohne Grund” in the German with the *loshn-koydesh* adjective סתם (stam). Apart from a few, special circumstances, the Yiddish usage most often refers to something “ordinary,” “just any” of some entity, etc., a meaning that also reflects one of its many usages in Hebrew.

There is however, a more literal meaning in Modern Hebrew (that Korman would have also known): “without reason,” often used when something simply takes place. It’s an extraordinarily concise, compact choice for a translator to make, and one that seamlessly glides between the German, Yiddish, and emerging Hebrew of the time. Also beautifully rendered is the slight difference in register between “*ergets in der velt*” and “*veynt stam azoy in velt*.” The omission of the definite article is common in Yiddish when referring to general occurrences or common truths, a grammatical structure that does not exist in standard German. Other attempts at a “faithful” translation (if faithfulness is indeed possible in translation) occur in the third lines of each stanza, where the idiomatrics of Yiddish prepositional verbs transform what is a repetitive yet concise poem.

Veynen iber [emetsn], (op)lakhn fun [emetsn], geyen tsu [emetsn], kukn oyf [emetsn].

Korman also translated some of Rilke’s early works, as this excerpt of *Vigilien* attests:

¹⁷⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Ernstes Stunde,” in *Das Buch der Bilder* (Berlin/Leipzig/Stuttgart: Axel Verlag, 1906), 59.

¹⁷⁵ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

Vigilien (I)

פֿון די וויגיליעס

Die falben Felder schlafen schon,
mein Herz nur wacht allein;
der Abend refft im Hafen schon
sein rotes Segel ein.

די טונקעלע פֿעלדער שלאפן שוין,
מיין האַרץ אַליין נאָר וואַכט;
זיין זעגל־רויט דער אָוונט שוין
אין האַפֿן האָט געבראַכט.

Traumselige Vigilie!
Jetzt wallt die Nacht durchs Land;
der Mond, die weiße Lilie,
blüht auf in ihrer Hand.¹⁷⁶

אַ, טרוים־שטילע וויגיליע! [!]
די נאַכט דורך פֿעלדער ציט –
און לבנה – ווייסע ליליע –
אין הויכן הימל גליט.¹⁷⁷

This poem is a wonderful example of Rilke's early works, with its simpler rhyme, meter, and thematics compared to those found in later works. Again and again, Korman plays with the Yiddish and renders the poem anew.

The adjective *falbe* can, in addition to meaning “fallow” (fields), describe a certain hue, which is significant to mention when taking into account Korman's translation of *falben*: *tunkele* (dark) that echoes other aspects of the temporality found in German and Yiddish versions of the poem.¹⁷⁸ But where Rilke found an easy rhyme with “*schon*,” “*allein*” with “*ein*,” “*Land*” and “*Hand*”, Korman's translations take things one step further. In the final two lines of first stanza, Korman maintains two lines rhyming with “*shoyn*” while also creating a new rhyme between “*vakht*” and “*gebrakht*”. Also significant is Korman's usage of *troyim* (in *troyim-shtile* found in the second stanza), a word less common than the ubiquitous *loshn-koydesh* “*kholem*”. *Troyim* in Yiddish has an idealistic valence (more so than *kholem*).

¹⁷⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Vigilien (I),” in *Sämtliche Werke, Band I* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1955), 48-49.

¹⁷⁷ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

¹⁷⁸ Fallow fields resonates with the Jewish concept of שמיטה (*shmite*—lit. “release”) where, coinciding with remitting of debts every seven years land is supposed to lie fallow.

Only when rendered in more standard speech, however, does Korman's translation more closely mirror Rilke. For example, the final two lines of the first stanza rearranged to mirror colloquial speech: "*Der ovnt hot shoy'n gebrakht in hafn zayn zegl-royt.*" Although this speaks to Korman's own abilities as a poet and translator, Korman also renders only part of Rilke's cycle of four *Vigilien* poems (of which these two stanzas make up a fraction) into Yiddish. Nevertheless, Korman's rendering hints at the more somber mood of the cycle in its entirety in the final lines of the translation: the strong contrast made between the solitude of the speaker against the personified night, as contrasted by the image of darkness illuminated by the brightness from the moon. The final half of, "*Der Mond, die weiße Lilie, blüht auf in ihre Hand*" falls away, replaced with "*Un levone — vayse lilie — in hoykhn himl blit.*"

Korman's tendency to further embellish and make more compact and explicit Rilke's verse continues with "Herbst":

Herbst

די בלעטער פאלן

Die Blätter fallen, fallen wie von weit,
als welkten in den Himmeln ferne Gärten;
sie fallen mit verneinender Gebärde.

די בלעטער פאלן, פאלן ווי פון ווייט,
ווי ס'וואלט אין די הימלען וועלען ווייטע גערטנער,
זיי פאלן מיט פארקלעמטן פיין.

Und in den Nächten fällt die schwere Erde
aus allen Sternen in die Einsamkeit.

און דורך די נעכט פאלט די שווערע ערד
פון אלע שטערן אין דער איינזאמקייט.

Wir alle fallen. Diese Hand da fällt.
Und sieh dir andre an: es ist in allen.

מיר פאלן אלע. אט די האנט דא פאלט.
און קוק די צווייטע אן: עס איז אזוי מיט אלעם.

Und doch ist Einer, welcher dieses Fallen
unendlich sanft in seinen Händen hält.¹⁷⁹

און דאך איז איינער דא, וואס אט דאס פאלן
אומענדלעך צארט אין זיינע הענט ער האלט.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Herbst," in *Das Buch der Bilder* (Berlin/Leipzig/Stuttgart: Axel Verlag, 1906) 51.

¹⁸⁰ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

The opening line in the German and Yiddish contain the similar word order and meter, and Korman, to adhere to Rilke, shortens and obscures the often quite “wordy” conditional, using a more elevated construction that is extremely uncommon in Yiddish. “*Als welkten in den Himmeln ferne Gärten;*” becomes in Yiddish: “*vi s’voltn in di himlen velkn vayte gertner.*” The few times a past participle does not need to appear with a form of *volt* (the auxiliary verb for the subjunctive in Yiddish) to make a conditional, is in certain relative clauses such as this one.

Korman also idiomatically renders into Yiddish other parts of the poem, while also departing from Rilke, to voice something entirely original in translation:

verneinender Gebärde	פארקלעמטן (sic) פֿיין
in den Nächten	דורך די נעכט
Diese Hand	אט די האנט
Und sieh dir andre an; es ist in allen	און קוק די צווייטע אן: עס איז אזוי מיט אלעם.
Einer	איינער דא

Farklemt has entered the American idiom via Yiddish as a somewhat incomplete (or mis/) translation—to mean someone who is at a loss for words, gripped by/with something, choked up, etc., which hints at Rilke’s, albeit with a different resonance.¹⁸¹ Although German *Gebärdensprache* also comes to mind, what appears in the German poem is the opposite: *Gebärdensprache* that is *verneinend*.

The break also occurs in the the third stanza, where the narrative voice moves from third person into first (we), and echoes the leaves and the earth falling in the

¹⁸¹ See Edward Snow, *Book of Images* (New York: North Point Press, 1991), 85. Snow translates “sie fallen mit verneinender Gebärde” as “they fall with gestures that say ‘no.’”

preceding stanza, and ends with: “Und sieh dir andre an: es ist in allen.” The imperative mood has a slightly different valiance in Yiddish: “look at the others: it’s the same for them.” When viewing the Yiddish translation in this light, the final stanza in turn reads differently than Rilke’s. A rather literal translation of the Yiddish: “but there is one, who holds the falling tenderly in his hand.” Is the Yiddish referring to the same *Einer*, which in English is often rendered as “One” (with a capital “O”)?¹⁸² Korman seems to make this *eyner* do more ambivalently positioned, not as a divine being above but someone among the “we”.

Rilke’s “Und meine Seele ist ein Weib von dir” is, similarly to other poems translated by Korman, from Rilke’s groundbreaking *Das Stundenbuch* (“*Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft*”). Here, the translator retains Rilke’s rhyme scheme while also departing from other conventions of Yiddish pronunciation and orthography, and thereby transcending common limits of translations between German and Yiddish. The poem:

Und meine Seele ist ein Weib vor dir

און מיין נשמה

Und meine Seele ist ein Weib vor dir.
Und ist wie der Naëmi Schnur, wie Ruth.
Sie geht bei Tag um deiner Garben Hauf
wie eine Magd, die tiefe Dienste tut.
Aber am Abend steigt sie in die Flut
und badet sich und kleidet sich sehr gut
und kommt zu dir, wenn alles um dich ruht,
und kommt und deckt zu deinen Füßen auf.

Und fragst du sie um Mitternacht, sie sagt
mit tiefer Einfalt: Ich bin Ruth, die Magd.
Spann deine Flügel über deine Magd.
Du bist der Erbe...

Und meine Seele schläft dann bis es tagt

און מיין נשמה איז אַ ווייב פֿאַר דיר.
און איז ווי נעמי'ס שנוט, ווי רוטה (=).
זי גייט בייטאָג אַרום דיין גאַרבן־הויף
ווי אַ דינסט, וואָס פֿרומע טואונג טוט.
אַבער צו אַוונט־צו גייט זי באַרוט
צום טייך זיך באַדן, און קליידט זיך גוט,
און קומט צו דיר, וועגן אַלעס אַרום רוט.
און אומט און דעקט דיין צוקאַפּנס אויף.
און פֿלעגסטו זי אום האַלבע נאַכט, זי זאָגט
אין טיפֿער פּשטות: איך בין רוט, דיין דינסט.
פֿאַרשפּרייט דינע פֿליגלען איבער דיין דינסט,
דו ביסט דער יורש...
און מיין נשמה שלאָפֿט אַיין דאָן ביז עס טאָגט
ביי דיין צופֿוסנס, וואַרים פֿון דיין בלוט.

¹⁸² See Edward Snow, *The Book of Images*, 85.

bei deinen Füßen, warm von deinem Blut.
Und ist ein Weib vor dir. Und ist wie Ruth.¹⁸³

און איז אַ ווייב פֿאַר דיר, און איז ווי רוטה.¹⁸⁴

(= רות.

The common pronunciation of רות (Ruth) in the Yiddish is *Rus*, where the final letter is not pronounced like the English, Germanic, or Hebraic “t/h” but as a syllabant “s” (ת - sof). Although some might view this choice by Korman to alter the spelling as being an impoverished attempt at translation, rendering Ruth’s name as רוטה (ruth) is both a playful and brilliantly transgressive strategy when other portions of the poem diverge in structure from the German.

The translator includes new elements in the Yiddish, as seen in the Yiddish “*barut*” at the end of the fifth line (in place of the rhyme caused by the German “*Flut*”). This is an interesting choice, as it echoes the the *ruht/rut* found in a subsequent line, and also the subject/objectified figure in the poem (i.e., Ruth). Korman also renders “mit tiefer Einfalt” (deep simplicity/naivete/singularity) as: אין טיפער פשטות (*in tifer pashtes* - from the *loshn-koydesh* for simplicity, whose root coincides with plainness, simplicity, ordinaryness, etc.).

Korman also maintains the parallelism in Rilke, with rendering “*Magd*” as “*dinst*”, and translates “*Erbe*” as יורש (“*yoyresh*”) - a masculinist term that in Hebrew only denotes male heirs expecting an inheritance, but in Yiddish is also linked to ירושה (“*yerushe*” - legacy, heritage, etc.). Rilke’s final stanza, “Und meine Seele schläft dann bis es tagt,” largely appears in Yiddish in parallel fashion. However, Korman still manages to make a few changes by inserting additional meaning into the penultimate

¹⁸³ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Und meine Seele ist ein Weib von dir,” in *Das Stundenbuch* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1918), 58

¹⁸⁴ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

line. *Seele* appears in Yiddish throughout the poem as נשמה (“*neshome*”) — the most common equivalent to the English soul. *Neshome*, however, has a wide variety of meanings stemming from its biblical Hebrew origins: breath, spirit, essence, as well as more nuanced meanings in the colloquial registers of other Jewish languages that have adopted the term.¹⁸⁵ Korman, in the place of *Füßen*, inserts ציפוסנס (tsufusns), a plural form of a noun most often referring to the foot of something (a bed, a mountain, etc.). This abstraction appears before the final line, where the translator also obscures Ruth by using the variant spelling to end the poem.

Korman ends his translations of Rilke with three other poems from *Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben*, beginning with “Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen.”:

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen

פֿון דאָס בוך פֿון פרישדיקן לעבן

א

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,
die sich über die Dinge ziehn.
Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht vollbringen,
aber versuchen will ich ihn.

איך לעב אויס מיין לעבן אין וואַקסנדע רינגען
וואָס איבער די זאַכן זיך ציען.
כיוועל אפשר דעם לעצטן רינג נישט פֿאַררינגען,
אַבער דאָס טון וועל זיך מיען.

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,
und ich kreise jahrtausendelang;
und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm
oder ein großer Gesang.¹⁸⁶

איך שוועב אַרום גאָט, אַרום אוראַלטן טורעם,
און שוועב יאָרטויזנטער לאַנג;
און כיוויס נאָך נישט: בין איך אַ פֿאַלק, צי אַ שטורעם,
אַדער אַ גרויסער געזאַנג.¹⁸⁷

In lieu of a standalone title, Rilke lends the opening line to the name of the poem, and also includes the “book” of poems from which these hail: *Dos bukh fun poyreshdikn lebn*.

¹⁸⁵ According to Sephardic sources (i.e., literary sources that also influenced modern Hebrew usage, as well as the development of modern Yiddish and Jewish literatures elsewhere), נשמה can also have a meaning closely related to “darling,” which, if combining Hebrew etymology and a critical contextualization of this poem, its meaning takes on additional weight when compared to its use in Yiddish here.

¹⁸⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,” in *Das Stundenbuch* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1918), 7.

¹⁸⁷ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

Interestingly, these three poems at the end of this section do not appear in Korman's postwar anthology that nevertheless includes Rilke's poetry.

The Yiddish continues to serve as an illuminating/obscuring force for Rilke's verse. The German *Dinge* is replaced by the more encompassing/ambiguous *zakhn* (the Sache/Dinge distinction in German simply does not exist in Yiddish). Korman also makes the choice to render *vollbringen* as "*farringen*", a neologism with prefix *far-* (making a verb less transitive and more imperfective) that hints at the process of creating a full circle. Other choices made in the second stanza point to Korman's skill working between the two languages. The German phrasal verb "kreisen + um" coincides beautifully with the Yiddish "*arumshvebn*" (to float around, hover), and Rilke's final two lines, "bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm oder ein großer Gesang" are linked together by the Yiddish *tsi*, a conditional participle often used in elevated, literary speech.

The poem marked "ב" (beys, II) in the cycle hints at similar challenges Korman faced when rendering Rilke's Christian imagery into Yiddish:

Ich habe viele Brüder in Soutanen

כגככפון, דאָס בוך פֿון פֿרישדיקן לעבן

ב

Ich habe viele Brüder in Soutanen
im Süden, wo in Klöstern Lorbeer steht.
Ich weiß, wie menschlich sie Madonnen planen
und träume oft von jungen Tizianen,
durch die der Gott in Gluten geht.

איך האָב אַ סך ברידער אין סוטאַנען
אין דרום, וווּ אין קלויסטערס לאָרבער שטייט.
איך ווייס ווי מענטשלעך פֿון מאַדאָנעס זיי אַנען,
און איך חלום אָפֿט פֿון יונגע טיציאַנען,
דורך וועמען גאָט אין פֿיבער גייט.

Doch wie ich mich auch in mich selber neige:
Mein Gott ist dunkel und wie ein Gewebe
von hundert Wurzeln, welche schweigsam trinken.
Nur, dass ich mich aus seiner Wärme hebe,
mehr weiß ich nicht, weil alle meine Zweige
tief unten ruhn und nur im Winde winken.¹⁸⁸

דאָך, ווען צו זיך איך טו זיך אויך נויגן:
מיין גאָט איז טונקל און ווי אַ געוועב
פֿון הונדערטער וואַרצלען, וואָס שוויגעוודיק זויגן.
און, אַז פֿון זיין וואַרימקייט איך וואַקס אַרויס,
מער ווייס איך נישט, ווייל אַלע מיינע צווייגן
טיף אונטן רוען און נאָר אין ווינט זיך בויגן.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Ich habe viele Brüder in Soutanen" in *Das Stundenbuch* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1918), 8.

¹⁸⁹ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

The Yiddish word for “monastery” is מאָנאַסטיר (monastir), a word with Christian connotations that has no *loshn-koydesh* equivalent. Korman’s goes with the term “*kloyster/s*” (specifically for a Catholic church), which might seem to be an unsurprising choice for a gifted translator. Other renderings, however, are further evidence that Korman faced some difficulties with this particular cycle of poems. “Doch wie ich mich auch in mich selber neige:” appears in the Yiddish as, “*Dokh, ven tsu zikh ikh tu zikh oykh noygen.*” *Zikh tuen noygen* is a variant of *ton/gebn* + infinitive (a similar construction in English is take a look), but reading through the transliterated Yiddish above, we realize this is not Korman’s best attempt at translation in his anthology. At any rate, the literal translation of the Yiddish, “And yet, when [in] toward myself I also turn myself” illuminates both the reflexiveness (that also appears in the German), as well as the interiority that comes with “in mich”.

Korman uses the far less common *shvaygevdik* (reserved, taciturn) instead of *shvaygndik* (silent, tacit) for *schweigsam*, and also translates *trinken* as *zoygn* (to suck or suckle).¹⁹⁰ “Nur, dass...” and the acknowledgment to follow appears in Yiddish as, “Un, az...” mirror each other. Korman maintains the punctuation and meter in what could have simply been rendered as the Yiddish “az”. *Aroysvaksn*, generally used for plant life, appears here as the speaker is nourished by the drink he consumes from the hundreds of roots instead of *heybn*, which more closely adheres to the German. But again, rhyme overrules this “faithfulness” to translation to create a faithfulness of the translator’s own doing.

¹⁹⁰ See Edward Snow, *The Poetry of Rilke* (9), where *schweigsam* is translated as “soundlessly”

The following poem is the last of a cycle. It is unclear whether or not Korman intended to complete more translations of Rilke's "Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben."

Wir dürfen dich nicht eigenmächtig malen

פֿון דאָס בוך פֿון פֿרושדיקן לעבן

ג

Wir dürfen dich nicht eigenmächtig malen,
du Dämmernde, aus der der Morgen stieg.
Wir holen aus den alten Farbschalen
die gleichen Striche und die gleichen Strahlen,
mit denen dich der Heilige verschwieg.

מיר דאַרפֿן זיך ניט אייגנמעכטיק מאַלן,
דו, דעמערנדע, פֿון וועמען דער מאָרגן איז אַרויס.
מיר נעמען פֿון די אַלטע פֿאַרבן־שאַלן
די גלייכע שטריכן און די גלייכע שטראַלן,
מיט וועלכע דער הייליקער שווייגט דיר אויס.

Wir bauen Bilder von dir auf wie Wände;
so dass schon tausend Mauern um dich stehn.
Denn dich verhüllen unsre frommen Hände,
sooft dich unsre Herzen offen sehn.¹⁹¹

מיר מויערן בילדער פֿאַר דיר אויף די ווענט,
אַזוי אַז טויזנט מויערן שוין אַרום דיר שטייען.
ווייל דיר פֿאַרהילן אונדזערע פֿרומע הענט,
ווי אָפט דיר אונדזערע הערצער אָפֿן זעען.¹⁹²

Rilke's poem is an homage to artistic inspiration as personified by the dawn (addressed in the 2nd person as *du*), and when night gives way to morning, providing both sunlight and the needed strokes of color required for a painting. The iconographic (and mimetic nature of painting) become "like walls," obscuring and blurring subject/object distinctions when vulnerability is apparent. Graven images of the divine are prohibited in Judaism, and this Yiddish translation attests to a certain transgressive impulse that both Jewish and non-Jewish artists strove for at the time Rilke (and Korman) were writing. Korman's singular adherence to the word order and rhyme scheme of Rilke is remarkable, even when maintaining through replacing—such as the substitution of *stieg/verschweig* with *aroys/oys*.

Fun andere shprakhn - A Postwar Attempt at Anthologizing

Following the war and the annihilation of European Jewry, Korman stated he had no further interest in publishing his anthology, "having nothing more to learn from

¹⁹¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Wir dürfen dich nicht eigenmächtig malen," in *Das Stundenbuch* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1918), 8.

¹⁹² Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

German literature.” And yet, Korman paradoxically compiled a new anthology from fragments of writers and works from the older collection. Korman selected his translations of Werfel, Ehrenstein, Rilke, Lasker-Schüler, Alfred Mombert, and (Stefan) Zweig to appear alongside Russian and American writers in a new anthology: *Fun andere shprakhn*. Korman distinguishes all but Rilke as Jewish writers that he translated from the German, using the term “yidish-daytsh” to denote German-Jewish authors. The slippage from “yidish-daytsh” into “yidish-taytsh”, the historical term denoting works written in Yiddish for lay audiences (but often gendered and targeted to women and men without sufficient knowledge or access to Hebrew and Aramaic literacy), nevertheless became a stand-in term for “translation.” The postwar anthology in its selection of writers further “translates” and circulates the works of those Korman deemed acceptable following the genocide of European Jewry. Korman’s inclusion of several additional writers, Carl Sandburg and Maria Shkapskaya, also attests to the ways Korman cast a wider net following the war to include a new set of voices for Yiddish culture. Although Korman was by no means the first Yiddish translator to bring together multiple languages, Korman’s placement of German literature (and mostly written by Jewish authors) into a dialogue with works from other languages speaks to an emerging defiance following the Holocaust toward accepting a certain fate for Yiddish.

The Case of Alfred Mombert

Alfred Mombert is one of the few poets whose works appear in both Korman’s early and later anthologies. Mombert, who had been expelled from the Prussian Academy of Art along with others (such as Alfred Döblin and Thomas Mann), had fled to Switzerland after being interred in Gurs after the outbreak of World War II and the Nazi

invasion of France. His archive and personal effects are currently scattered throughout Europe—in Switzerland, Germany, and Russia. The poems included by Korman speak to these traumas, and are a fitting addition to his pre- and postwar attempts at salvaging a form of German for Yiddish audiences. For example, Mombert's early poem "Die Wogen steigen auf zu der Terrasse":

פֿון בוך, „דער דענקער“

Die Wogen steigen auf zu der Terrasse

Die Wogen steigen auf zu der Terrasse,
jeder erscheint vor mir,
sie nennt einen Namen,
und sinkt hinunter.
Und alle Namen schreib' ich in ein Buch
unter großem Brausen,
und durch die Blätter weht es fern und kühl.
Ich bin ein Greis, und stütze ein glänzend Haupt,
das ganze Seele ward im großen Brausen.
Des Meeres Hüter bin ich.
Niemand weiß, was ich in der Seele wahre;
ich hab Alles miterlebt.
Mit mir stirbt die Größe des Meeres.¹⁹³

די כוואלעס שטייגן אויף צו דער טעראסע.
יעטוויידע דערשיינט פֿאַר מיר.
זי פרופֿט מיין נאָמען אָן,
און שווימט צוריק.
און אַלע נעמען שרייב איך אין אַ בוך אויף
אין מיטן ווילדן ברויזן,
און דורך די בלעטער גייט אַ ווינט אַדורך.
איך בין אַ זקן,
און האַלט אַ קאָפּ אַ רייכע אונטער,
וואָס איז נשמה בלויז אין גרויסן ברויז געוואָרן.
פֿון ים דער היטער בין איך.
ס'וויינט קיינער ניט וואָס היט איך אין נשמה.
כ'האָב אַלעס בייגעלעבט.
מיט מיר שטאַרבן אָפּ די גרויסקייט פֿון דעם ים.¹⁹⁴

Korman's title hints only at the original volume in which this poem by Mombert appeared: "Fun bukh 'der denker.'" And the title also harkens back to Rilke's volumes of poetry (*Buch der Bilder*, *Stundenbuch*, etc.). And indeed, Mombert's poetry is coterminous with Rilke's. With the inclusion of this poem in the postwar anthology, one cannot help but be reminded of the devastation in Eastern Europe after reading the Yiddish rendering. A lone figure encounters literal waves of names, only to recede back into the ocean of memory, a memory the geriatric figure claims to protect. There is also an irony present: nobody knows just what this essence of memory looks like, as it is only

¹⁹³ Alfred Mombert, "Die Wogen steigen auf zu der Terasse," in *Der Denker: Gedicht-Werk - Neu-Ausgabe* (Leipzig, Insel-Verlag, 1920), 19.

¹⁹⁴ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

preserved by someone, who has experienced what others have not. The vastness of memory (embodied by this ocean), as contained in the individual, will ultimately die out.

Subsequently Korman translates Mombert's "Das Licht" and it, too, appears in the postwar anthology:

Das Licht

בין-השמשות

's ist Dämmerzeit. Ich steh' am Fenster
und schau' ins Pfründnerhaus hinüber.
An jedem Fenster ein Mütterchen.
Das Eine webt mit seinem Schädel.
Das Eine ringt die welken Hände.
Das Eine stützt das scharfe Kinn.
Und mählich flort die Dämmerung
um all die seltsamen Gestalten,
und schlürft sie auf. Und es ist Nacht.
In einem Zimmer wird es Licht.
Das Wärtermädchen bringt die Lampe
und stellt sie schraubend auf den Tisch.
Im nächsten Zimmer so. Und weiter.
Es ist das Totenhaus beleuchtet.
Von jedem Fenster trippelt jetzt
ein Mütterchen zu seinem Licht...¹⁹⁵

ס'איז בין-השמשות. איך זיין ביים פֿענצטער
און קוק אין מושב זקנים קעגנאיבער.
ביי יעדן פֿענצטער – אן אלטיטשקע.
איינע שאקלט מיטן שארבן.
איינע ברעכט די הענט די דארע.
איינע - אנגעשפאָרט אויף פֿשארפֿן קין.
און ביסלעכווייז זיך פֿרעסט דער בין-השמשות
ארום די זעלטענע געשטאלטן, און שלינגט זיי איין.
און ס'קומט די נאכט.
אין איינס א צימער שיינט אויף ליכט.
א פֿרוי – די ווארטערין – ברענגט א לאמפ
און לאזט אראפ אים אויפן טיש.
אזוי אין צווייטן צימער און אויך ווייטער.
דאס מתים-שטיבל איז אבלייכטן.
אין יעדן גענצטער שלעפט זיך איצט
אן אלטיטשקע צום ביסל ליכט.¹⁹⁶

Beynashmoshes, the *loshn-koydesh* term for twilight, literally means “between lights”, and it appears as the Yiddish title of Mombert's “Das Licht.” The different resonances between “twilight” and the literal meaning of the German title evoke other complicated meanderings concerning Korman's later, postwar life. Korman worked as a phone operator for a nursing home in Detroit, an experience with aging and dying, an in-between space between living and departing in this world. It also eerily hinted at the state of Yiddish following the genocide of European Jewry.

¹⁹⁵ Alfred Mombert, “Das Licht,” in *Tag und Nacht* (Leipzig: Minden i.W., J.C.C. Bruns, 1902), 7.

¹⁹⁶ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

The transition between day and night certainly holds significance for Jewish ritual and practice, and becomes an important motif for temporality and departure. Even less surprising are the number of words referring to this temporal moment in the poem, as they are expressed in *loshn-koydesh* (שקיעה, *shkie* to name another). There are also Slavic and Germanic words functioning in the same way (שאַרע־גאָדזשינע - *share-godzshine* & *demerung* - דעמערונג), both of which Korman would certainly have been familiar with due to his multilingualism. It's thus fitting that he uses the *loshn-koydesh* term here to sanctify the poem (if one may call it that) about the in-between space of tradition, culture, and language.

Similar in-betweenness appears in Korman's third and final translation of Mombert's poetry. A poem that decenters the individual and one's relations to surroundings, other people, and even language, "Es ist so still im Saal. Und die weißen Lampen" also takes on heightened meaning by appearing in both of Korman's anthologies.

Es ist so still im Saal. Und die weißen Lampen

ס'איז שטיל אזוי

Es ist so still im Saal. Und die weißen Lampen,
die heißen Lampen hängen über mir.
So drohend! Hangen sie mir über meinem
stummen Haupt,
so nah und immer näher! Hängen sie über
meinem gesenkten

Haupt...

Ist niemand da, doch Alles schaut auf mich,
man lauscht auf mich, man fragt mich, jeder fragt
mich,
ich bin der Mittelpunkt von allem Ringsum,
und alles ist so ernst und weiß und feierlich ...

ס'איז שטיל אזוי אין זאל –
און ווייסע לאמפן, הייסע לאמפן הענגען איבער מיר.
שרעקלעך, ווי זיי הענגען איבער מיין קאפ אזוי;
אזוי נידעריק און אלץ נידעריקער
לאזן זיי אראפ זיך איבער מיין אראפגעלאזטן קאפ.
נישטא דא קיינער ניט, דאך אלעס קוקט אויף מיר:
מ'הערט זיך - צו צו מיר, ס'פֿרעגט מיר, יעדער פֿרעגט מיר, –
איך בין דער מיטלפונקט פֿון אלץ ארום.
און אלץ איז אזוי ערנסט און ווייט און יומטובֿדיק...
ס'זאל עמעץ פֿראוון רעדן; נאר ס'איז שטיל.
אזוי שטיל אינעם זאל... און ווייסע לאמפן, הייסע לאמפן
לאזן זיך אראפ אלץ נידעריקער און נידעריקער
איבער מיין שווארצן קאפ.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

Wenn einer Sprache! — doch es ist so still,
 so still im Saal...und die heißen Lampen,
 die weißen Lampen hängen immer näher über
 meinem schwarzen

Haupt.¹⁹⁷

We see a split in the German version; the first stanza describes space (sensory, visual, and psychological, racialized). In the second stanza, the “I” notes simultaneous solitude and simultaneous exposure, making the reader question whether the “I” is indeed alone, and whether it is indeed as “still” as it seems. At first glance, it is clear Korman altered the structure of the German version of the poem—opting for (at least visually) a truncated poem that departs from Mombert’s. Korman also subsumes the premature premonition and tension in the German found in the first stanza by subsuming the additions of “Haupt” (found in both the middle and end of the German version) into the preceding lines. The Yiddish grammar found in Korman’s translation, however, somewhat heightens the mood of the poem, and in doing so picks at some of the tensions in the German. The construction “...*Alts nideriker*” is best translated as “lower and lower”, which visually then becomes coupled (doubled?) with Korman’s use of “*aroplozn*” both as a verb, and as an adjective (Korman’s rendering of *gesenkten*) in the subsequent line.

In the second half of the Yiddish poem (starting in the sixth line), we see similar changes and patterns. In the seventh line, *sich lauschen* becomes a riddle in Yiddish: “*m’hert zikh — tsu tus mir*”. “*Vos hert zikh*” is a colloquial way of asking, “What’s up?”. Here, a hyphen partitions that saying, but following it comes: “*tsu tsu mir....*” This is Korman’s ingenious way of rendering the act of *sich lauschen* into Yiddish: “One listens

¹⁹⁷ Alfred Mombert, “Es ist so still im Saal. Und die weißen Lampen,” in *Der Glühende* (Leipzig, Minden i. W., J.C.C. Bruns, 1902), 26.

— in on/to me.” In many ways, this is the turning point of the poem. Suddenly, the reader encounters another image: someone surrounded and yet nobody says anything, it’s festive (feierlich, *yontefdik*), but if only someone would speak!

Stefan Zweig also appears in both anthologies. His death from suicide in Brazil during the Second World War makes this a fitting memorial, and with the inclusion of an early sonnet in Yiddish, which is made even more foreign by the fact few writers embraced the sonnet as a form for Yiddish verse. The motifs of departures, impending darkness, and the (super)natural are certainly common for Austrian fin-de-siecle writers, but Korman’s use of the poem as it is rendered in/visibly into Yiddish.

Herbstsonett

האַרבסט־סאָנעט

Die Tage stiegen längst die goldne Leiter
Des Sommers nieder. Spätglanz wärmt das Land
Die Schatten wachsen früh und fallen breiter
Von allen Bäumen in des Abends Hand.

עס שטייג לאנג אראפ שוין מיטן גאלדן־לייטער
די זומער־טעג, און ס'ווארימט שפעטער גלאנץ דאס לאנד.
די שאטנס וואקסן פֿרי און פֿאלן ברייטער
פֿון אלץ בויער אין דעם אוונט'ס האנט.

Im Laube glänzt noch, wie vom Wind verschlagen,
Manch reife Frucht. Der Felder Brust liegt bloß
Und Wolken, die sich westwärts überjagen,
Machen den Himmel ernst und ruhelos.

עס גלאנצט אין בלעטער וואו, ווי פֿונעם ווינט פֿארטראגן,
נאך רייפֿע פֿרוכט, און נאקעט ליגט די פעלדער־ברוסט.
און וואלקנס, וואס צו מערב־צו זיך יאגן,
דעם הימל מאכן ערנסט און אזוי פוסט.

Über die Wälder, die sich rasch entblättern,
Zittert schon unrastvoll der Schwalben flug.
Und all Dies mahnt: Nun sei dem Herbst bereit.

און איבער וועלדער, וואס שטייען באלד אן בלעטער,
אן אפרו ציטערט שוין אין פֿלי דער שוואלבען־שנור.
און אלץ דערמאנט דיר: איצט צום הארבסט זיי גרייט.

Beugst Du Dich morgen zu der Landschaft Buch,
So blinkt vielleicht schon aus den bunten Lettern
Des Lebens liebste Wort: Vergänglichkeit.¹⁹⁹

און בויגסטו מארגן זיך צום בוך פון דער נאטור,
שיינט דיר ארויס שוין פֿון די בונטע לעטער
דעם לעבנס ליבסטע ווארט: פֿאַרגענגלעכקייט.²⁰⁰

Wien

Stefan Zweig

Zweig’s poem echoes Rilke’s appearances in these anthologies quite nicely. These notions of departure, dying, decay, etc. are central to late Habsburg literature, but when rendered in Yiddish before and after the Second World War, the poem’s echoes broaden.

¹⁹⁹ Stefan Zweig, “Herbstsonett,” in *Die gesammelten Gedichte* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1924), 67.

²⁰⁰ Korman, *Fun andere shprakhn*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

Battling inevitability and impermanence might be futile, but in the interim all is still not lost. It also hints at similar motifs found in the well-known poem by Aaron Zeitlin, *zeks shures* (particularly in the final three lines):

It's true - this audience no longer needs me:
Me, begging for words in the Yiddish graveyard.
Who needs a poem - and certainly in Yiddish?

כ'ווייס: קיינער דארף מיך נישט אויף אַט דעם עולם,
מיך, ווערטער־בעטלער אויף דעם ייִדישן בית־עולם,
ווער דארף אַ ליד — און נאָך דערצו אויף ייִדיש?

(Only) Utter hopelessness on earth is beautiful,
What is divine must simply pass on,
Humility is rebellious.²⁰¹

נאָר בלויז דאָס האָפּענונגסלאָזע אויף דער ערד איז שיין,
און געטלעך איז נאָר דאָס, וואָס מוז פֿאַרגיין,
און נאָר הכנעה איז מרידהיש.²⁰²

Franz Werfel

Werfel's inclusion in Korman's translations are twofold: Werfel's poetry appears in translation, and Korman also translates Else Lasker-Schüler's poem using Werfel's namesake as the title. To conclude this chapter, I will place Werfel's poetry alongside those of the other writers included in Korman's postwar anthology, and also demonstrate how Lasker-Schüler's poem entitled "Franz Werfel" works toward the corrective Korman was aiming for with his collection.

How fitting that Werfel's first poem in the volume is, "An den Leser." Even with its racialized tropes, it is an ode to the spaces of affinity between poet and reader:

An den Leser

Mein einziger Wunsch ist, Dir, o Mensch, verwandt zu sein!
Bist Du Neger, Akrobat, oder ruhst Du noch in tiefer Mutterhut,
Klingt Dein Mädchenlied über den Hof, lenkst Du Dein Floß im Abendschein,
Bist Du Soldat oder Aviatiker voll Ausdauer und Mut.

Trugst Du als Kind auch ein Gewehr in grüner Armschlinge?
Wenn es losging, entflog ein angebundener Stöpsel dem Lauf.
Mein Mensch, wenn ich Erinnerung singe,
Sei nicht hart und löse Dich mit mir in Tränen auf!

²⁰¹ The translation is my own.

²⁰² Aaron Zeitlin, "*kh'veys: keyner darf mikh nisht of ot dem oylem*," in *Ale lider un poemes: lider fun khurbn un fun gloybn, band tsvey* (New York/Tel Aviv: Bergen Belsen Memorial Press, 1967), 214.

Denn ich habe alle Schicksale durchgemacht: Ich weiß
 Das Gefühl von einsamen Harfenstimmen in Kurkapellen,
 Das Gefühl von schüchternen Gouvernanten im fremden Familienkreis, Das
 Gefühl von Debutanten, die sich zitternd vor den Souffleurkasten stellen.

Ich lebte im Walde, hatte ein Bahnhofsamt,
 Saß gebeugt über Kassabüchern und bediente ungeduldige Gäste.
 Als Heizer stand ich vor Kesseln, das Antlitz grell überflammt,
 Und als Kuli aß ich Abfall und Küchenreste.

So gehöre ich Dir und Allen.
 Wolle mir, bitte, nicht widerstehn!
 Oh könnte es einmal geschehn,
 Daß wir uns, Bruder, in die Arme fallen!²⁰³

צום לייענער

מיין איינציקער ווונטש צו דיר, א, מענטש, איז אייגן זיין;
 ביסטו נעגער, אַקראַבאַט, אָדער רוסטו נאָך אין טיפּער מוטערטראַכט.
 קלינגט דיין מיידל-ליד אין הויף, טרייבסטו דיין פליט אין אָונט־שיין,
 ביסטו סאָלדאַט, צי לופט־פליגער, פֿול מוט און אויסשטאַנד־קראַפֿט.

האַסט אויך אַלס קינד אַ ביקס אויף אַרעם־באַנד געטראָגן?
 און אויסגעשאַסן – פליט דער קאַרק אַן אָנגעבונדענער אַרויס.
 מיין מענטש, ווען איך נעם זינגען פֿון די קינדער־יאָרן,
 נישט זיי דו האַרט, און ברעך מיט מיר אין טרערן אויס.

ווייל איך האָב אַלץ פֿרוואָוון דורכגעמאַכט. איך ווייס
 דאָס געפֿיל פֿון איינזאַמע האַרפֿיסטינס אין די קור־קאַפּעלעס.
 דאָס געפֿיל פֿון שעמעוודיקע גואווערנאַנטנס אין פֿרעמדן משפּחה־קרייז,
 דאָס געפֿיל פֿון דעבֿיטאַנטן, וואָס פֿאַרן סופּליאַר־קאַסטן ציטערנד זיך שטעלן.

האַב געלעבט אין וואַלד, געהאַט אויף אַ וואַקזאַל אַן אַמט,
 געזעסן איינגעבויגן איבער קאַסע־ביכער, און באַדינט אויסגעוולדיקע געסט.
 אַלס הייצער בין פֿאַר קעסלען געשטאַנען, דער פנים העל צעפֿלאַמט,
 און אַלס קולי האָב געגעסן אַפֿפֿאַל און דאָס קיכן רעשט.

אַזוי געהער איך דיר און אַלע;
 באַוויליק, איך בעט, מיר ניט ווידערשטיין;
 אַ, ווען ס'זאָל קענען אַמאָל געשיין,
 אַז מיר זאָלן זיך, ברודער, אין די אַרעמס פֿאַלן.²⁰⁴

Werfel's "verwandt sein" becomes "eygn zayn", one's own, which also resonates with kin or kindred spirits. The poem, however, makes its way into Yiddish via the complicated thematics found in the German. In the first stanza, the neologisms in both languages (aviation had not been in existence for very long), is combined with the sentimental

²⁰³ Franz Werfel, "An den Leser," in *Gesänge aus den drei Reichen: Ausgewählte Gedichte von Franz Werfel* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1917), 4.

²⁰⁴ Korman, *Fun andere shprakhn*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

imagery of a child playing with a toy gun and holster. Another change made in the Yiddish: “Erinnerung” becomes “*kinder-yorn*,” itself a popular mimetic device in Yiddish poetry and song over the course of the 20th century, notably due to the song with the same title by Mordechai Gebirtig. Although the two poems might seem thematically disparate, both Werfel’s (and now, Korman’s) and Gebirtig’s poems deal with the distance between the poet and the poet’s readers, who are either lost to memory (and after two world wars: displacement and genocide), or have been separated over great distances both geographical and temporal. Even the ever-so-slight resentment felt toward the poet’s destiny reduced to choir recitals, governesses, and debutants becomes linked to the poet’s own list of jobs, from railway attendant, to stoker, to a pen itself.

Werfel’s “Wir nicht”, written in the simple past form (*Präteritum*) counters the Yiddish past tense in form, and we again encounter Korman’s choice of translating “lauschen” as “*tsuhern zikh tsu*”, closely listening on the border of eavesdropping the response: “*nokh-nit*”. The silent “pause” from the hyphens interspersed (mostly) with the responses also acts as a play between the ich and the other, the German and the doubling that comes with listening and hearing, writing and reading, the German and its Yiddish translation side by side on the page:

Wir nicht	מיר - ניט!
Ich lauschte in die Krone des Baums; - da	כ'האָב צו דער קרויען פֿון בוים זיך צוגעהערט -
hie es im Laub:	האָט זיך פֿון בלעטער־גערױש דערטראָגן:
Noch - nicht!	נאָך - ניט!
Ich legte das Ohr an die Erde; - da klopft's	כ'האָב צוגעלייגט מיין אויער צו דער ערד -
unter Kraut und Staub:	האָט זיך דערהערט פֿון צווישן גראַז און שטויב:
Noch - nicht!	נאָך - ניט!
Ich sah mich im Spiegel; mein Spiegelbild	איך האָב זיך אין מיין שפיגל אָנגעגוקט -
grinste:	
Du - nicht!	

Das war mein Gericht
 Ich verwarf mein Lied,
 Und das lüsterne Herz, das sich nicht
 bescheid.
 Ich trat auf die Straße. Sie strömte schon
 abendlich.
 Auf der Stirne der Menschen fand ich das
 Wort: Wir nicht.
 Doch in allen Blicken las ich
 geheimnisvoll ein Lob,
 und wußte: Auch ich, vom lauen Trug
 entstellt,
 Werde nochmals begonnen, weil neu ein
 Schoß mich hält
 Wie all dies Wesen um mich. Da lobte ich
 den Tod,
 Und weinen pries ich allen Samen in der
 Welt.²⁰⁵

האַט מײן שפּיגל-בילד אויסגעשטירעט די צײן:
 דו - נײַט:

דאָס איז געווען מײן געריכט.
 כ׳האַב פאַרוואָרפֿן מײן ליד
 און דאָס גלוסטיקע האַרץ, וואָס האָט זיך נײַט
 געשטילט.
 כ׳בין אַרויס אויף דער גאַס. זי האָט געשטראָמט
 שוין אַוונטלעך.
 אויף די מענטשן-שטערנס האָב איך געפֿונען דאָס
 וואָרט:
 מיר - נײַט!
 דאָך, אין אַלע בליקן האָב איך סודותפֿול געליינט אַ
 לויב,
 און כ׳האַב געוויסט: אויך איך, פֿון לויערנדיקן
 פֿאַנטאַם צעקרימט,
 וועל נאָכאַמאָל ווערן, ווייל ס׳האַלט מיך אַ נײַעם אַ
 שוויס,
 ווי אַלידאָס וועסן אַרום מיר. האָב איך געלויבט דעם
 טויט,
 און וויינענדיק געבענשט אַלע זאַמען פֿון דער
 ערד.²⁰⁶

The “I” is listening in on the crown of the tree that answers back, before putting an ear to the ground and a face to a mirror. All sources of inspiration for the poet are not yet ready to become part of a poem. And even the people on the street, itself in an evening (romantic?) light, are not going to be the poet’s muses. And yet, that is exactly what happens; the poem in the past tense reflects back onto itself as the product of the poet’s previous encounters with the subject matter. All the more poignant when the poem appears in Yiddish both before and after the Second World War in anthologized form.

Werfel also appears as another namesake of a Lasker-Schüler poem, which Korman in turn translates for his two volumes.. There are multiple layers not only due to

²⁰⁵ Franz Werfel, “Wir nicht,” in *Der Gerichtstag: in fünf Büchern* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1919), 297

²⁰⁶ Korman, *Fun andere shprakhn*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

the translation itself, but also because Werfel and Lasker-Schüler are part of a continued engagement between German(-Jewish) poetry in the postwar era with Yiddish culture.

Franz Werfel

פֿראנץ ווערפֿעל

Ein entzückender Schuljunge ist er.
Lauter Lehrer spuken in seinem
Lockenkopf.

אן אנציקנדער תלמיד איז ער.
לויטער טורה רוישט אין זיין לאקן-קאפ.

זיין נאמען איז אזוי בכיוונדיק:

Sein Name ist so mutwillig:
Franz Werfel.

פֿראנץ ווערפֿעל

שטענדיק שרייב איך צו אים בריוו,

Immer schreib ich ihm Briefe,
Die er mit Klecksen beantwortet.

וואס ער באענטפערט מיט טינט-פלעקן.

אבער מיר האבן אים אלע ליב

Aber wir lieben ihn alle
Seines zarten, zärtlichen Herzens wegen.

צוליב זיין צארט-צערטלעכן הארצנס וועגן.

זיין הארץ האט עכא,

Sein Herz hat Echo,
Pocht verwundert.

פולסירט פֿארווינדערט.

און פֿרום ווערן זיינע ליפן

Und fromm werden seine Lippen
Im Gedicht.

אינעם ליד.

אן אנדער(ם) טראגט א שטויביקן טורבאן.

Manches trägt einen staubigen Turban.
Er ist der Enkel seiner eigenen Verse.

ער איז דאס אייניקל פֿון זיינע אייגענע פֿערזן.

דאך איז אויף זיין ליפ אויסגעמאלט

Doch auf seiner Lippe
Ist eine Nachtigall gemalt.

א נאכטיגאל.

מיין גארטן זינגט,

Mein Garten singt,
Wenn er ihn verläßt.

ווען ער פֿארלאזט אים.

פֿרייד פֿארשפרייט זיין שטים

Freude streut seine Stimme
Über den Weg.²⁰⁷

איבער'ן וועג.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Lasker-Schüler, *Die gesammelten Gedichte von Else Lasker-Schüler* (Munich: K. Wolff, 1920), 154.

²⁰⁸ Korman, *Fun andere shprakhn*, RG 457, YIVO Archive

I end with the discussion of Korman with this poem to point out some of the rarities springing forth from this translation. Korman, unlike with Lasker-Schüler's other poems, more strongly judaizes the figure in this particular verse texts. Its gendered slant is also significant, when referring back to Lasker-Schüler's other poems appearing in translation that Korman rendered with a certain amount of distance to *loshn-koydesh*. Here, the reader immediately sees a difference, as "Schuljunge" becomes "*talmid*" in the Yiddish, and "mutwillig" becomes "*bakivendik*" ("intentional", from the *loshn-koydesh* root - כ - ו - י that makes up other words with similar meanings related to intent).

Conclusion

After spending much of his adult life in the United States, Korman died in October of 1959. His gravestone (Yiddish: *matseyve*) in Machpelah Cemetery north of Detroit includes two poetic inscriptions, written by both Ezra and Khane Korman:

כיוועל אַוועק ווי גישט געווען דאָ
כיוויס ס'וועט בלייבן נאָר אַ קלאַנג
פֿון מיין קערן זיך און ווענדן
פֿון מיין ייִדישן געזאַנג²⁰⁹

שטיל אָן טענות און באַשיידן
פֿון דעם ערדישן יאַריד
וועל איך, ווען באַשערט, זיך שיידן
מיט מיין לעצטע טרוים און ליד
(פֿון די לעצטע לידער)

I go as if I had never been here,
I know only a murmur will remain
Of my very essence and embrace
Of my Yiddish lyric voice

Quiet, without complaints and resolutions
from the earthly tumult
I will, when fated, depart
With my final dream and poem
(From the Final Poems)

These epitaphs not only seek to move the visitor, who might or might not happen to be a reader of Yiddish; they also speak to the paradoxical nature of anthologizing. What illuminates, directs, and shapes a work's continuing reception is the fragmentary, the ephemeral, and the obscure(d). Korman's poetry, and his work as one of the major

²⁰⁹ Grave of Ezra and Khane Korman

anthologizers of Yiddish literature, remains in a fragmentary, ephemeral, and obscure corner of Yiddish textual history, even if his biography reflects Jewish migration to North American before and after the First World War.

What is unique, however, is Korman's active role in shaping Yiddish literary memory, from his early years in revolutionary Ukraine, to his time in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, and following the genocide—with the attempts to situate what was left of one literary world alongside another that (in wholly different ways) fell victim to National Socialism. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I piece together several attempts by Yiddish translators in the post-World-War-II era to grapple with this further.

Chapter Three: Selective Memory — Postwar Anthologies and Doubling of Fragments

This chapter will highlight several notable projects that included the works of Bukovinian writers and their translators. Postwar Yiddish translators faced additional challenges beyond simply erasing Nazis and their sympathizers from the canonical German literary sphere. When countless peers of their own had been murdered, and the Yiddish language itself faced existential peril before, during, and after the Holocaust, anthologizing German verse in Yiddish translation was itself a second doubling of an already fractured doubling: layers upon layers of rubble only salvageable or usable as such. Simultaneously, acculturated German Jewish and non-Jewish writers openly struggled to divorce themselves from the very linguistic centers that had a hand in destroying Yiddish language culture.²¹⁰ Yiddish thus took on an additional layer of significance, whereby simply using Yiddish following the Nazi genocide became a set of defiant speech acts in comparison to German.²¹¹

The Bukovina-born Alexander Spiegelblatt (Yiddish transliteration: Alksandr Shpiglbat) was widely known for his concise poetics and later assistant editorial voice under Avrom Sutzkever, but his work as translator is often left unnoticed. Similarly, Morkhe Litvin, who became active in the postwar Yiddish literary scene in Paris, also stands out--as a translator of German literature. Although both writers were multilingual

²¹⁰ Alexander Spiegelblatt, "Bemerkungen zu Itsik Mangers Czernowitzer Umfeld," in *Zwischenwelt (Band 8): Jiddische Kultur und Literatur aus Österreich*, edited by Armin Eidherr and Karl Müller (Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag, 2003), 143-153.

²¹¹ Marianne Hirsch, "1945: An official Soviet Stamp permits the official exportation of cultural documents..." in *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996*, edited by Sander Gilman and Jack Zipes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 632.

to the highest degree (both fluent in at least five or six languages), their legacy as part of a fragmented, postwar community of Yiddish speakers has yet to fully take into account their role for providing readers with translations of their contemporaries, from Paul Celan to Ingeborg Bachmann.

Alexander Spiegelblatt

Spiegelblatt's biography makes clear that he was a poet from an early age. As was often the case with many writers from Bukovina, he recorded his mother tongue as German, insofar it was one of many languages he learned at a young age that also included Romanian, Russian, and not to mention: Yiddish. The many registers of the languages, which he used from his childhood in Bukovina onward, resonated differently following the Second World War. Spiegelblatt sought to re/build a form of the Yiddish language from the ground up that was both part of the larger modernizing project of Yiddish culture, but one that was firmly rooted in this particular corner of Europe that had been home to Itsik Manger and others.

In one of Spiegelblatt's later volumes of work, *In geln tsvishnlikht fun erev-regn, lider 1964-1997*, Spiegelblatt calls his collection of translations a *papirene asife* (פאַפירענע אסיפה), which not only points to an "assemblage, meeting, or gathering," but also to the very physicality of paper. In turn: the work also metaphorically becomes associated with the *papirene brik*.²¹² This connection to the *papirene brik* ushers in a messianic reading that complicates the often-less-hopeful imagery that emerged in this postwar landscape of Yiddish literature. It is as if Spiegelblatt is saying: this gathering of texts are all we have left of this civilization, of this language, and of the millions of people destroyed by

²¹² (Paper bridge), the notion that when the messiah comes Jews will cross into paradise across a paper bridge usually made from religious texts sustaining the Jewish people.

genocide, and yet... He writes that the volume is a “gathering of words picked over and sifted through [which were gathered over four decades].”²¹³ This assemblage might not provide a clear pathway “back” to an irretrievable past or “forward” to a future. Instead, Spiegelblatt confines this collection to the temporality of his current moment, and to his act of memory.

Spiegelblatt’s Yiddish was famous for its eloquence, and his postwar career as a lecturer of Russian literature before moving to Israel in 1964 was a prelude to the later academic writing he would publish in Yiddish in Tel Aviv. It comes at no surprise that terms such as *papirene-asife* appear in his work, which also make for notoriously dense textual layers of meaning. Spiegelblatt also describes works such as *In geln tsvishnlikht* as *bikher-akhsanyes* (ביכער־אכסניאות), or literally “book inns,” to note that the collections of works he published in Tel Aviv (and in shorter versions in *Di goldene keyt*) as “stashed away in drawers that are now under one roof.”²¹⁴ This book in particular thus becomes a locus for a brief sojourn of assemblage—a printed volume of text before it moves onward and outward to other readers. This imagery of the inn as a place of respite is also, according to Spiegelblatt, the rationale for the volume’s title, translated on the book’s title page as “In the Yellow Twilight before the Rain - Poems.”²¹⁵ Spiegelblatt explains: “[These works] will now sojourn together, under one roof, in the yellow twilight of evening rain, at a time when the hands on a drowsy clock face slowly slide toward an hour that shimmers in a twilight color.”

²¹³ Alexander Spiegelblatt, *In geln tsvishnlikht fun erev regn* (Tel Aviv: Yisroel-Bukh, 1998), 5. “*a gezeml fun ibergeklibene un ibergezipte verter, vos hobn zikh ongezaml in meshekh fun karge fir yortsendliker.*” The Yiddish word *karg* is almost untranslatable. It denotes adequacy but in effect something insufficient for its purposes.

²¹⁴ Spiegelblatt, *In geln tsvishnlikht*, 5.

²¹⁵ אין געלן צווישנליכט פֿון ערב רעגן - לידער - *In geln tsvishnlikht fun erev regn - lider* is the title in Yiddish. In Hebrew: באור הביניים הצהוב של ערב גשם - Be-Or Ha-Baynaim Ha-Tzahuv Shel Erev Geshem.

The reader also learns more about Spiegelblatt's relationship to language(s). He writes:

May I therefore conceive this collection as part of a sum
(*sakhakl*) from my *hey mishn* debt to the *alef-beys*, while I
trace back to the lowest line, recalling three poetically-led
encounters that led me to this very game of chance in
poetry, revealing to me the holy *takhles* of absurdity.²¹⁶

How does one translate without allowing some of the Yiddish words to imbue the passage with the instability it belies?²¹⁷ Even translating *kheshebn* (חשבון - a bill, account, expense) as “debt” doesn't seem adequate, but *kheshebn* can also mean “calculation.” A calculation with the *alef-beys*, the letters constructing the Yiddish language and its poetry (as well as the building blocks of multiple languages), sets up the structure of this volume of more than a half-dozen languages. The *farblondzsheter leyener* (פֿאַרבלאָנדזשעטער לייענער - the reader who is lost), Spiegelblatt's intended audience, shall find both virtues and faults in the traces of the earlier, important encounters, as well as in the encounters themselves.

Spiegelblatt recounts specific encounters that ultimately lead him to completing translations from the German. The first involved Spiegelblatt's early immersion into Bukovinian Yiddish poetry, namely via the works of Elye Paner. Paner in turn introduced Spiegelblatt to what became the second major encounter with (Yiddish) poetry: the works of Itsik Manger. Spiegelblatt's notes his indebtedness to Manger's poems and

²¹⁶ Spiegelblatt, *In geln tsvishnlikht*, 5. „מעג איך על-פֿן באַטראַכטן דאָס געזעמל ווי אַ שטיקל סך-הכל פֿון מיין היימישן, וואָס חשבון מיטן אַלף-בית, און בעתן ציען די אונטערשטע שורה, זאָלן אויך דערמאָנט ווערן דרײַ ליטוויזערישע באַגעגענישן, וואָס האָבן מיך געפֿירט צו אַט דער אַזאַרטשפּיל אין פּאָעזיע און מיר אַנטפלעקן דעם הייליקן תכלית פֿון אומזינקייט. *Meg ikh alkeyn batrakhtn dos gezeml vi a shtikl sakhakl fun mayn hey mishn kheshebn mitn alef-beys, beysn tsien di untershte shure, zoln oykh dermont vern dray livayzerishe bagegenishn, vos hobn mikh gefirt tsu ot der azartshpil in poezye un mir antplekn dem heylikn takhles fun umzinikeyt.*”

²¹⁷ Rendering this formulation completely into English poses challenges.

ballads—such as the “The Golden Peacock.”²¹⁸ Spiegelblatt writes, “in my mind [Manger’s poem] has remained to this day the *urim-vetumim* [a biblical reference to the breastplate worn by the high priest to denote divination] in the temple of Yiddish/Jewish poetry.”²¹⁹ The poem of Manger’s that comes to mind is “The Song of the Golden Peacock.”²²⁰

The third encounter (or perhaps: era) was coming to Israel in 1964 and meeting Avrom Sutzkever.²²¹ Spiegelblatt points to himself as a *shutef* (שותף - partner) to Sutzkever’s own editorial work with *Di goldene keyt* (Spiegelblatt served as assistant editor for decades). Spiegelblatt even coined Sutzkever’s work (and indirectly, his own) as *gebentshter evoyde* (געבענטשטע עבודה - sanctified, religious work). The Hebraic word for work and agricultural labor becomes re-linked to the marking of religious observance via *gebentsht*. It is not surprising based on Spiegelblatt’s own style of writing, which he labels *liderishe ranglenishn* (לידערישע ראנגלענישן - poetic wrestlings or wranglings), that Sutzkever played a central role in Spiegelblatt’s *oeuvre*, taking great to ensure that his poems enter the public domain.²²²

Spiegelblatt’s indebtedness to Manger also becomes an indebtedness to Paul Celan. Appearing in this unwieldy volume of numerous languages, each weaving in and

²¹⁸ *Di goldene pave* - די גאלדנע פאָווע

²¹⁹ Spiegelblatt, *In geln tsvishnlisht*, 6. איז עדהיום געבליבן פֿאַר מיר דער אור־ותומים אין היכל פֿון ייִדישער פֿאַעזיע. *In adhayem geblibn far mir der urim-vetumim in heykhl fun yidisher poezye*.

²²⁰ Itsik Manger, “*Dos lid fun der goldener pave*,” in *Lid un balade* (New York: Itsik-Manger-Komitet), 433-434. The peacock, a symbol of Jewish folklore, appears in many of Manger’s poems, as well as in the poems of many other Yiddish poets such as Anna Margolin.

²²¹ Spiegelblatt, citing Manger as Manger translates Rilke, brings Manger’s encounters with Rilke full circle with Spiegelblatt’s own translations.

²²² Spiegelblatt says that Sutzkever, „האַט מײַך געלאָזט זײַן אַ שותף צו זײַן געבענטשטער עבודה אין די גאלדענע קייט און, „[Sutzkever] hot mikh gelozt zayn a shutef tsu zayn gebentshter evoyde in *Di goldene keyt* un oykh gezorgt az mayne liderishe ranglenishn zoln zikh dershlogn tsu a reshus-horabim. Spiegelblatt uses the loshn-koydesh *reshus-horabim* to denote the public domain, which also denotes the space in which one is not permitted to carry items during the Sabbath.

out from others, Shpiglblatt published multiple translations of Celan's poetry, including "Der Gast."

Paul Celan

Der Gast

דער גאַסט

Lange vor Abend

לאַנג נאָך פֿאַר אָוונט

kehrt bei dir ein, der den Gruß getauscht mit dem
Dunkel.

קומט ער צו דיר, דער וואָס האָט זיך באַגריסט
מיטן חושך.

Lange vor Tag

לאַנג נאָך פֿאַר טאָג

wacht er auf

איז ער וואָך

und facht, eh er geht, einen Schlaf an,
einen Schlaf, durchklungen von Schritten:
du hörst ihn die Fernen durchmessen
und wirfst deine Seele dorthin.²²³

און טוט, ווער ער גייט, אַ ווייַע מיט שלאָף,
אַ שלאָף מיט אַפּקלאַנג פֿון פֿוסטריט:
דו הערסט ווי ער מעסט די מרחקים
און וואָרפֿסט דיין נשמה אַהין.

Von Schwelle zu

פֿון דייַטש אין
²²⁴(Schwelle

Spiegelblatt renders *Lange vor Abend* into the poetic *lang nokh + far ovnt*. In Yiddish, a similar (but lofty) term, *far tog*, refers to pre-dawn. *Far ovnt* would be late afternoon, but gets at the poetics of the German to further illuminate while also obscuring the temporal nature of the opening line. *Nokh* has to be there, to not only differentiate it structurally from the German, but also to distinguish the time of day, a time of day that in Yiddish almost always refers to a change in ritual. The German could of course contain the reference to Jewish ritual time, but the Yiddish contains a more explicit term in the following line with the use of *khoyshekh* for darkness, a darkness that isn't just temporal but existential and foreboding. This pairing of terms, going between the Germanic etymology of Yiddish and its *loshn-koydesh* component continues, as the translator further upacks the poem for a Yiddish audience. *Schritten* becomes *fustrit*, an

²²³ Paul Celan, "Der Gast," in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 70.

²²⁴ Alexander Spiegelblatt, "Der gast," in PSALM" in *In geln tsvishnlikht fun erev regn* (Farlal "Yisroel-Bukh," 1998), 234.

over-determined rendering that neither standard German nor standard Yiddish are in need of using, before more *loshn-koydesh* appears. *Fernen* can be either “distances” or “faraway places,” and *neshome* gets to the psychological weight of the German *Seele*. “Er wacht auf” becomes adjectival in Yiddish: *iz er vakh* denoting a state of being compared to the act of awakening.

PSALM

Niemand knetet uns wieder aus Erde und Lehm,
niemand bespricht unsern Staub.
Niemand.

Gelobt seist du, Niemand.
Dir zulieb wollen
wir blühn.
Dir
entgegen.

Ein Nichts
waren wir, sind wir, werden
wir bleiben, blühend:
die Nichts-, die
Niemandrose.

Mit
dem Griffel seelenhell,
dem Staubfaden himmelswüst,
der Krone rot
vom Purpurwort, das wir sangen
über, o über
dem Dorn²²⁵

PSALM

דער קיינער קנעט אונדז ווידער פֿון ערד און פֿון ליים,
קיינער רעדט נישט פֿון אונדזער שטויב.
קיינער.

געלויבט זיי דו, קיינער,
דיר צוליב ווילן
מיר בלייבן.
דיר אַנטקעגן.

גאַרנישט
געווען מיר, זענען מיר, וועלן
בלייבן, בליינדיק:
די גאַרנישט, די
קיינעמסרויז.

מיט דעם פעסטל ליכטיקייט,
דעם הימלויסטן פֿעדעמל,
דער רויטער קרוין
פֿון פֿורפֿלואַרט, וואָס מיר האָבן געזונגען
וועגן, אַ וועגן
דעם דאָרן.²²⁶

פֿון דייטש אין ²²⁷Die Niemandrose
(235)

²²⁵ Paul Celan, “Psalm,” in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 132-133.

²²⁶ Transliteration: *Der keyner knet undz vider fun erd un fun leym, / keyner redt nit fun undzer shtoyb. Keyner. / gelaybt zey du, keyner. / Dir tsulib viln / mir blien. / Dir antkegn. / Gornisht / geven mir, zenen mir, veln, / blaybn, bliendik: / di gornisht-, di / keynemsroyz. / Mit dem / pestl likhtikeyt, / dem himlvistn / fedeml, / der royster kroyn / fun pirlpulvort, vos mir / hobn gezungen / vegn, o vegn / dem dorn. / Fun daytsh in Die Niemandrose*

²²⁷ Alexander Spiegelblatt, “PSALM” in *In geln tsvishnlikht fun erev regn* (Farlag “Yisroel-Bukh,” 1998), 235.

To return to the title of this particular translation, Spiegelblatt makes a non-Yiddish word *faryidisht* (i.e., made Yiddish): מיזמור - *mizmer*

Fernen²²⁸

מרחקים²²⁹

Aug in Aug, in der Kühle
Laß uns auch solches beginnen:
gemeinsam
Laß uns atmen den Schleier,
der uns voreinander verbirgt,
wenn der Abend sich anschickt zu
messen,
wie weit es noch ist
von jeder Gestalt, die er annimmt,
zu jeder Gestalt,
die er uns beide geliehen.

אויג אויף אויג, אין דער קילקייט,
לאָמיר אויך פֿרווון אַזעלכעס:
אין איינעם
אַטעמען לאָמיר דעם שלײער,
וואָס טײלט אונדס ביידן פֿונאַנד,
ווען דער אָוונט גרייט זיך צו מעסטן,
ווי ווייט עס איז נאָך
פֿון יעדער געשטאַלט וואָס ער טראָגט זי,
צו יעדער געשטאַלט
וואָס ער האָט אונדז ביידן אַנטליען.²³⁰

פֿון דיטש צו דיטש אין Von Schwelle zu Schwelle

1954

The lines, “wenn der Abend sich anschickt zu messen, wie weit es noch ist” resonates with other poems by/translation of Celan, but also poems by Rilke that made it into Yiddish.

Mortkhe Litvin

In 1991, at the Oxford University summer Yiddish program, the Yiddish writer Mortkhe Litvin noted in his preamble to a lecture made in honor of Avrom-Nokhm

²²⁸ Paul Celan, “Fernen,” in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 67-68.

²²⁹ Alexander Spiegelblatt, “Merkhokim,” in *In geln tsvishnlikht fun erev regn* (Farlag “Yisroel-Bukh,” 1998), 233.

²³⁰ *Merkhakim: Oyg oyf oyg, in der kilkeyt / lomir oykh pruvn azelkhes: / in eynem / otemen lomir dem shleyer / vos teylt undz beydn funand, / ven der ovnt greyt zikh tsu testn / vi vayt es iz nokh / fun yeder / geshtalt vos er trogt zi, / tsu yeder geshtalt / vos er hot undz beydn antlien / Fun daytsh in Von Schwelle zu Schwelle*

Stencl²³¹ that he was nonplussed by the pervasive “shtetl” discourse in postwar Yiddish literature and culture circles. This was a notable point, considering it took another generation for the Yiddish world to overcome what was certainly overarching in North America following Irving Howe and others’ depictions of Eastern European Jewish life. Litvin was, however, due to this politics and experience in interwar Berlin less nostalgic about the shtetl, and the material realities most Jews faced.

Although Litvin was (as his name perhaps suggests) born a *Litvak* (a Lithuanian Jew), and therefore did not grow up in the Galician and Bukovinian environs of many other translators whose works appear in this dissertation, his life and work are central to this project. His entry in the *Leksikon fun yidishe shraybers* is a brief but rich look into his life. He spent much of the interwar period in Weimar Germany, and due to his political activity had been imprisoned by the Nazis from 1934-1937. He fled to Paris, and following the Nazi invasion went underground and lived as a partisan. Following the war, he returned to Paris, where he was active in leftist and Communist Yiddishist circles, publishing his own works in affiliated journals and newspapers. After the Soviet Union revealed the enormity of Stalinist crimes, Litvin began to drift away from Communism.²³²

While at this point in his political and literary career, Litvin worked as a prolific translator, rendering many of the classics of French verse and prose into Yiddish for the large emigre community in Paris. Like many other postwar Yiddish writers, he received the Itsik Manger Prize in 1973. His translations from the French were so noteworthy that

²³¹ Avrom-Nokhm Stencl was a Yiddish poet, who settled in Whitechapel (East London) after escaping the Nazis in 1936. In the interwar period, Stencl had lived in Berlin and had traveled throughout Central Europe, meeting with Yiddish and German-speaking writers, from Franz Kafka to Arnold Zweig.

²³² *Leksikon fun yidish-shraybers* (Biographical dictionary of Yiddish writers) (New York, 1986), cols. 331-32.]

the jury pointed to them in their rationale: “M. Litvin has created for us an illusion, that we are not confronting professional translations, but the actual source, the original, a Yiddish creation itself.”²³³

In his 1991 Stencl lecture at Oxford, Litvin highlights his erudition of Jewish culture and translation, noting its centrality to Jewish spirituality (Litvin’s terminology) for millennia, but also its role in the development of modern Yiddish culture. How these developments were still playing out in the nineties is palpable in Litvin’s remarks. He credits Max Weinreich for simplifying Wilhelm von Humboldt’s theories of translation by saying that every language is a separate world containing smaller worlds, which are constantly in flux.²³⁴ Furthermore, translation is required not only *for* a literature but also *of* a literature, and Litvin sees this as ever more necessary (even if antithetical) with the “accelerating exchange of material amongst people, and the tendencies towards distinction and differentiation strengthen.”²³⁵

Reading this speech three decades later, it is striking to see that Litvin still heavily relies on Jewish multilingualism to define both paradigms of translations into and from Yiddish, and also an understanding of Jewish history in general that is replete with episodes of translations for Jewish audiences *in need of* translation (i.e., not only into but also from Hebrew or Aramaic). As such, Litvin notes the centrality of Hebrew via translation. In so doing, Litvin also points to the centrality of languages (including Yiddish) that operate in a state of “permanent translation.”²³⁶ Litvin ultimately uses the

²³³ *Leksikon fun yidish-shraybers* (Biographical dictionary of Yiddish writers) (New York, 1986), cols. 331-32.]

²³⁴ Litvine, Mordechai. “Translations into and From Yiddish.” Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, translated by Helen Beer 1991, 2ff.

²³⁵ Litvine/Beer, Stencl Lecture 4.

²³⁶ Litvine/Beer, Stencl Lecture 5.

word “transpositions” that ultimately occurs between *loshn koydesh* and Yiddish, which in turn has governed the usage of both for centuries (and important to note: even to this day among Yiddish-speaking Hasidim communities).

Litvin makes other major claims about Yiddish translation. For one, many texts from Russian literature reached Yiddish audiences via translation than the English translation made available to English readers.²³⁷ As Yiddish translations were appearing, so were modern Hebrew versions, reflecting competing national paradigms for Eastern European Jewish culture that reached their zenith in the interwar period.²³⁸ Most importantly, translation from Yiddish far outpaces translations *into* Yiddish from other literatures prior to the First World War. The Holocaust undoubtedly reversed these trends, even though (as is the subject of this chapter) translations into Yiddish continued. Litvin notes this as simply the continuation of millenia-old trends: that translations are serving segments of the population who “no longer” know a particular language. It is here that Litvin exposes another fundamental trend in Jewish translation: how often translation serves utilitarian purposes for Jewish culture.

Placing the practical implications for postwar Yiddish translation aside, also striking are the postwar trends that demonstrate not only the enormity of the Holocaust, but perhaps more hopeful are the ways interwar output continued even following the genocide. Litvin undertook a preliminary study where, upon consulting YIVO, the National Library of Israel, and the Medem Library in Paris, he noted the overarching

²³⁷ Litvine/Beer, Stencl Lecture 7

²³⁸ Although Litvin hints at the development of Yiddish and Hebrew school systems throughout interwar Eastern Europe (and in the case of Yiddish: the USSR), this emergent trend that began with the First World War under German and Austrian occupation of the Pale of Settlement was a major shift; the networks of teachers and schools that emerged in interwar Poland and elsewhere undoubtedly shaped Yiddish translation from other languages, which made a variety of texts available to large audiences of readers of all ages.

trends. Prose translations into Yiddish, for example, fell over time (from 161 holdings present from prior to the First World War, down to 145 in the interwar years, to 25 in the decades following the Holocaust). Poetry translations increased during the interwar years, and although declined following the Holocaust, were still above the rate of pre-World-War-I translation.²³⁹ The most popular languages in descending order: Russian, French, English, and German. Litvin of course knows that the archival holdings are incomplete, and he omits holdings found in Canada, Argentina or Australia that are perhaps broader in scope. Apparent to the reader of his speech in the 21st century, is the way (even if stunted after the Holocaust) prolific episodes of translations into Yiddish continued, and they continued throughout the world in sites of immigration for the world's remaining Yiddish speakers. Also significant is the drastic decline in translations from Yiddish into other languages (except perhaps English, which by the 1970s was also in steep decline).²⁴⁰

These trends point to the ways translation is multidirectional, and does not privilege one trend over another; if translations into Yiddish are declining, so are translations from Yiddish into other languages. Litvin is cognizant of this, and also points to the ways that quantity is not necessarily representative of quality. As my dissertation makes clear, many exquisite translation projects were only partially (if ever) published for a variety of complicated reasons, which speaks to the trajectories of Yiddish writers and translators in the twentieth century. And unsurprisingly, certain languages have their moments in the sun compared to others (i.e., English following the Second World War,

²³⁹ Litvine/Beer, Stencl Lecture 11.

²⁴⁰ Litvin/Beer, Stencl Lecture, 12ff.

the dominance of Russian translations of Yiddish literature, the stability stemming from Yiddish-Hebrew language debates, etc.).

The historicized role of Yiddish, as a means to an end of translation for Jewish audiences (i.e., better suited to translate from other languages), are also undeniably gendered. Without question the desire to translate from/into the Yiddish thereby remained marginalized regardless of output. However, it is hard to deny the creative role of Yiddish translation among many of its writers who, in addition to possessing traditional Ashkenazi bi-/multilingual abilities with Hebrew/Aramaic, spoke multiple majority languages *natively*. To place those majority languages outside of (or: mutually exclusive from) the Hebrew/Aramaic/Yiddish is at best anachronistic, and at worse: unreflective of larger realities often kept obscure about the internal and external hierarchies of language that translation attempted to break down. Litvin cites the Russian poet and translator of German, Vasily Zhukovsky: “the translator of prose..is a craftsman, that of poetry is a rival.” Litvin disagrees to say that translations are only modest attempts that, while creative in scope, are paradoxically a “double adventure” - an experience of the translator of someone else’s poetic craft that in turn spurs “necessity and freedom” in another language.²⁴¹

It is striking to see (and as will become more apparent by elucidating other writings and translations of Litvin’s in this chapter) that he weaves his own biography as translator into this speech. Litvin clearly saw himself (rightfully so) as both poet and translator simultaneously, taking from French verse translations he completed as examples of these theories of translations he so powerfully illuminates. *Wordmeaning* and

²⁴¹ Litvin/Beer Stencl Lecture, 20.

wordcreation must inevitably strive to create standalone translations that do and do not rely on fidelity.²⁴² It is not that prose texts lack *poetics*, but rather: the *process* of translation is never stable, nor does it cease. It is here that translations from other languages into Yiddish will continue as long as Yiddish itself (like every other source language) remains unstable like the text itself.²⁴³

Litvin's Theory of Translation

The first volume of *French Translations and Commentaries*²⁴⁴ appeared in 1968 (with a second published in 1986). The introductions to the French translations provide the reader of his other anthologies with a rationale regarding the term “anthology,” about which Litvin writes extensively (namely, on the limitations of the term, especially with regards to this particular volume). He writes:

The classification [anthology] says it all — to provide most important, essential, and representative number, arranged according to a definitive category: nationality, time period, sensibility, and often...the profession of the editor. An anthology is, consequently, is always an assemblage dependent on specific principles of classification. The *translations* in front of me for readers, are not arranged according to such principles, not classified according to a

²⁴² Litvin/Beer, Stencl Lecture, 20.

²⁴³ See Litvin/Beer Stencl Lecture, 21. Litvin includes as an addendum to his speech the instability to which he refers. Paul Verlaine's “Chanson d'Automne” appears alongside Russian, German, Hebrew translations completed by F. Sologub, Stefan George, Zeev Jabotinsky, and Litvin respectively.

²⁴⁴ פֿראַנצײזישע איבערזעצונגען און קאָמענטאַרען. *Frantseyzische iberzetsungen un komentaren*

specific marker. The collection does not claim to, nor ascribe to the name “anthology.”²⁴⁵

Litvin elicits the typical elements of a poetry anthology with the title, “*Frantseyzishe poezye - iberzetsungen un komentarn*.” So the question remains: what is an anthology if not something produced at the expense of including certain authors and their works over others? Why gloss over certain centuries or literary genres at all? For Litvin, it is a matter of centering, shaping, and molding this particular volume, and Litvin makes clear that the theme around which the entire work depends is Baudelaire.²⁴⁶

Litvin’s indebtedness to Baudelaire is twofold: Baudelaire’s place within the canon of European poetry is indisputable, and in addition: Baudelaire’s work relates to the *structure* of this particular assortment/selection.²⁴⁷ Litvin says as much, but he also posits that the genre of anthology itself is at the heart of translation: “its conceptualization rests within the translator...from the *inzikhvelt* from the translator...and arouses a lyrical feeling in the language of the translator.”²⁴⁸ This is striking for several reasons: that the

²⁴⁵ See Litvin, *Frantseyzishe poezye; iberzetsungen un komentarn*, 1-2. *Der nomen gufe (sic) zogt es shoyen — vil ibergebn dos vikhtikste, dos ikerdikste, dos same representative fun skhum shafungen, opgeklibn vedlik a festn simen: lender, epokhes, rikhtungen, suzshetn, tsi afile tsumol...di profesye fun di mekhabrim. An antologye iz, bekheyn, tomid an opklayb loyt a bashtimtn printsip fun klasifikatsye. di iberzetsungen, vos mir leygt do far dem leyener, zaynen nit grupirt arum aza printsip, nit klasifitsirt vedlik a bashtimtn simen. di zamlung kon deriber nit pretendirn — un predendrin oykh nit afn nomen antologye.*

דער נאָמען גופא זאָגט עס שוין – וויל איבערגעבן דאָס וויכטיקסטע, דאָס עיקערדיקסטע, דאָס סאַמע רעפּרעזענטאַטיווע פֿון אַ סכּום שאַפֿונגען, אָפּגעקליבן וועדליק אַ פֿעסטן סימן: לענדער, עפֿאָכעס, ריכטונגען, סוזשעטן, צי אַפֿילו צומאָל...די פּראָפּעסיע פֿון די מחברים. אַן אַנטאָלאָגיע איז, בכּן, תּמיד אַן אָפּקלייב לויט אַ באַשטימטן פּרינציפּ פֿון קלאַסיפיקאַציע. די איבערזעצונגען, וואָס מיר לייגט דאָ פֿאַר דעם לייענער, זיינען ניט גרופּירט אַרום אַזאַ פּרינציפּ, ניט קלאַסיפּיצירט וועדליק אַ באַשטימטן סימן. די זאַמלונג קאָן דעריבער ניט פּרעטענדירן – און פּרעטענדירט אויך ניט אויפֿן נאָמען אַנטאָלאָגיע.

²⁴⁶ Litvin, *Frantseyzishe poezye*, 2.

²⁴⁷ Litvin, *Frantseyzishe poezye*, 3.

יוצא מן הכלל, וואָס איז ראשית אין הסכּם מיטן פּלאַץ, וואָס דער דאָזיקער דיכטער פֿאַרנעמט – לויט דעם איבערזעצערס מיינונג – אין דער פֿראַנצייזישער פּאָעזיע. והשנית – וואָס מיט דעם איז אויך געגעבן דער שליסל, וועדליק וועלכן ס'איז געמאַכט געוואָרן דער גאַנצער אָפּקלייב. וואָרעם אויב בִּפְרוּש ניט קיין אַנטאָלאָגיע – אָפּקלייב איז עס פֿאַרט!

vos iz reyshes in heskem mitn plats, vos der doziker dikhter farnemt — loyt dem iberzetsers meynung — in der frantseyzisher poezye. Vehesheyne — vos mit dem iz oykh gegeben der shlisl, vedlik velkhn s'iz gemakht gevorn der gantser opklayb. Vorem oyb befeyresh nit keyn antologye — opklayb iz es fort!

²⁴⁸ Litvin, *Frantseyzishe poezye*, 3.

lyrical voice emerges not only via the “translator” (i.e., the act of translating), but also that it evokes the translator’s *mame-loshn*, here explicitly mentioned as Yiddish. And yet, the reader gets to ask: what is “Yiddish” in this case, and what role does it play for translation (if any)? For Litvin, Yiddish (in this case) does precisely what he says it does: evoke the lyrical poetics found elsewhere and simultaneously from within.

Furthermore, he derides poets, writers, and critics who claim that it is impossible to render what appears in one language into another, or that translation is simply a prosaic instrument to render meaning (*verter-taytsh*).²⁴⁹ Rather, Litvin hints at the “*nit-iz loshn*” where form and content are one and the same; form is not lost in translation, as some would like to think.²⁵⁰ Litvin does not, however, think he is alone in saying the opposite, that through translation one can find the *lebnskvaln* (life sources). This echoes what Paul Valéry (and Mireille Gansel, Benjamin, et al.) attempts in their understanding of translation across multiple languages and epochs: word illumination (albeit ignited by a

ס'איז אַ צונויפֿשטעל פֿון פֿראַנצייזישע פּאָעטישע שאַפֿונגען, וואָס צוליב וואָסער ס'זאָל נישט זיין סיבות, צי געלעגנהייטן, האָבן זיי גענומען קלינגען אין דער אינויכוועלט פֿונעם איבערזעצער, אַרויסגערופֿען אין איר לירישע עמאַציע. און קלינגען אין זיין – דעם איבערזעצערס – שפּראַך, אין זיין מאַמע-לשון, אין ייִדיש.

S'iz a tsunoyfshtel fun frantseyzishe poetishe shafungen, vos tsulib vosere s'zol nit zayn sibes, tsi gelegnhaytn, hobn zey genumen klingen in der inzhkhvelt funem iberzetsers, aroysergerufn in ir lirishe emotsye. un klingen in zayn - dem iberzetsers - shprakh, in zayn mame-loshen, in yidish.

²⁴⁹ Litvin, *Frantseyzishe poezye*, 4-5. *Mir zogn dem zinen, dem siper hamayse, dem verter-taytsh, nit dem inhalt. vorem inhalt in poezye iz dokh nit optsuteyln fun der shprakhlekher geshtaltikung gufe. Tsi iz es nit take ot di nit-aroystsuzogndike, nit tsudefinirdndike gantskeyt, vos makht fun verter, yo, fun verter fun a voser nit-iz loshn — azoyns, vos iz nokh nit geven. nit der verter-zinen, nayert di verter-magye, der yesh-hameayin.*

מיר זאָגן דעם זינען, דעם סיפור המעשה, דעם ווערטער-טייטש, נישט דעם אינהאַלט. וואָרעם אינהאַלט אין פּאָעזיע איז דאָך נישט אַפּצוטיילן פֿון דער שפּראַכלעכער געשטאַלטקונג גופּא. צי איז עס נישט טאַקע אַט די נישט-אַרויסצוזאָגנדיקע נישט-צודעפֿינירדיקע גאַנצקייט, וואָס מאַכט פֿון ווערטער, יא, פֿון ווערטער פֿון אַ וואָסער נישט-איז שפּראַך — אַזוינס, וואָס איז נאָך נישט געווען. נישט דער ווערטער-זינען, ניערט די ווערטער-מאַגיע, דער יש מאין.

²⁵⁰ Litvin, *Frantseyzishe poezye*, 5. The brilliant metaphors in reference to the nature of poetry, where form and content are one: *nit-tsetylevdik — eyn organish-gegebens*, inseparable — one organic given, *moykdem vemoykher* (a term used to describe the torah as having neither a beginning nor an end), *yoder un sholehkhts*

foreign fire), a complimentary line here or there, or more simply stated — the creative second act.²⁵¹

For Litvin, the translations themselves are not the highlight; the process of getting to the translation is. Litvin gets to the heart of what many in translation studies and theory have pointed to via Baudelaire, Benjamin, and others: that translation has no beginning nor end, and within this unbounded state, a truism of translation emerges. What is so striking about this, is that within this essay, full of the Yiddish language's own ability to illuminate, compliment, and forge ahead, Litvin advocates for translation—for Yiddish, from Yiddish, and lastly: in/to Yiddish. Litvin is also adamant about the lyrical not becoming an absolute entity ("lyric power does not simply mean a power from heaven"), because (although not dependent on) it is shaped by language.²⁵² That is also where the role of the translator becomes more heavily involved as both reader and writer, and where Litvin returns to Valéry: "And is the translator first and foremost par excellence — a reader? But the relation remains merely subjective — between poet and translator — and yet, also objective — between languages, tongues. The translator thus detects, and prolongs what the poet alleges in a differing [albeit in one's own] way."²⁵³ This then begs

²⁵¹Litvin, 6. *Di "verter-iluminatsye" (hagam ongetsundn durkh a fremdn fayer...) di "geshenkte shure". Oder posheter gezogt — dem shaferishn akt 2).*

די ווערטער-אילומינאציע (הגם אָנגעצונדן דורך אַ פֿרעמדן פֿייער...) די „געשענקטע שורה“. אָדער פשוטער געזאָגט דעם שאַפֿערישן אַקט 2).

²⁵² Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 7. לירישער ציטער הייסט נישט סתם אַ ציטער מן השמים. ...*Lirisher tsiter heyst nit stam a tsiter min hashamayim.*

²⁵³ The word *eygen[em]* (אייגענעם) is poetically ambiguous. It implies subjectivity and individual agency, and yet it also implies sameness. For translation, what is one's own in one's own language is also identical to someone else's in their languages. This distinctly, simultaneously "identical, yet other" is something that Litvin points to in the following lines:

דער איבערזעצער דערשפירט, לעבט איבער דאָס פֿונעם דיכטער געמיינטע אויף פֿאַרשידענעם, אייגענעם אופן. אין לושן אָבער, אין יעדן לושן, זינען לכתחילה געגעבן אַלע אופנים פֿון מיינען.

Der iberzetseder dershpirt, lebt iber dos funem dikhter gemeynte oyf farshidenem, eygenem oyfn. In loshn ober, in yedn loshn, zaynen lekhatkhile gegeben ale oyfanim fun meynen."

the question: how does the doubling nature of translation pertain to multilingualism? Litvin notes that the doubling (of texts in one language giving rise to texts in another, ones which readers in the other language can now understand) also leads to a doubling *if* the reader can “[already] meet/get to know” the original.²⁵⁴ Simply stated, for Litvin a doubling also occurs for multilingual speakers, who, like the translator, can take it upon themselves to *fareygnt*.²⁵⁵

Noting the relationship between the necessity and the freedom of poetic translation, Litvin points to a dualism between the former and the latter as *farzikhik* (self-interested) and the *inzikhik* (introspective).²⁵⁶ “Translating poetry — [that which] demands language from the original, because of the fact it contains within itself all universal possibilities from every language. The more one can *translate from it*, the richer it becomes.”²⁵⁷ Likewise, this also demands from the language (into which something gets translated) a certain potentiality: more translations rendered means a richer language.²⁵⁸ And in turn: this creates a demand from a text. Litvin uses both *farlangen* (a word imbued not only with demand and desire, but also belonging) and *betn* (denoting urgency) to denote the demands of poetry to be translated; through the complexity and subjectivity comes a rendering of what multiplies and makes versatile in itself the transformative.²⁵⁹ The reproducibility stemming from the act of translation plays

²⁵⁴ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 7. קאן עס לייענען אין אַריגינאַל באַקענען. *kon es leyenen in original - bakenen*.

²⁵⁵ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 7. See also footnote 238 that echoes, “*oyf...eygenem oyfn*”

²⁵⁶ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 8.

²⁵⁷ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 8. איבערזעצן פאַעזיע – דאָס פֿאַרלאַנגט די שפּראַך פֿונעם אַריגינאַל, מחמת זי טראָגט אין – אַלץ רייכער ווערט זי. זיך אַלע אוניווערסאַלע מעגלעכקייטן פֿון יעדער שפּראַך. וואָס מער מען איבערזעצן פֿון איר – אַלץ רייכער ווערט זי.

“*Iberzetsn poezye — dos farlangt di shprakh funem original, makhmes zi trogt in zikh ale universale meglekhkeytn fun yeder shprakh. Vos mer men iberzetsn fun ir — alts raykher vert zi.*”

²⁵⁸ Litvin, 8-9.

²⁵⁹ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 9.

a pivotal role for Litvin, who in turn cites various theories of translation from the Western canon, including Cervantes, Voltaire, Shelley, and others.²⁶⁰ The “original” is no more a “beginning” than the poetic translation—also a work in itself. And furthermore, as some have the urge to write poetry others must translate.²⁶¹ What one wants to accomplish, and what one can accomplish is the rivalry within every translator (here, Litvin quotes the Russian writer Vasily Zhukovsky who, according to Litvin, said, “Translators of prose are technicians (specialists); translators of poetry are rivals,” *khapn klep* (to receive punches) is the metaphor that Litvin arrives at to describe poetic translation.²⁶²

Litvin is also quick to point out that, although the translator’s imagination often comes through the work of the poet(s) being translated, there is a drawback to this: the translations fare better when the translator takes note of what a poem conveys before creating substance out of something else that the translator is nevertheless bound to.²⁶³ Litvin reiterates Paul Valéry’s “gifted (*geshenkte*) and re/constructed (*konstruirte*) *ferzn*.” the poet “gifts” and the translator is obligated to re/construct, leading the gifted line back to the *shoyn doike* (already *placed*) construction of the poet’s.²⁶⁴ “[Torment to select] is not so much the assortment, but the dismissal [of other options]. The art of translation is above all abandonment (*mevater zayn*) and sacrifice (*makrev zayn*).” In quoting Valéry (and Rimbaud), Litvin hints at the “translation as loss”²⁶⁵ dictum, but also exposes the

²⁶⁰ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 9.

²⁶¹ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 10-11.

²⁶² Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 10.

²⁶³ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 11.

²⁶⁴ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 12. „ווי אָפֿט זיי זאָלן זיך נישט בייטן מיט די ערטער, זיי מוזן תמיד בלייבן אינעם, געגעבענעם פֿאַעטישן קרייז.”

The use of the adjective *doik* is an important marker. Often cited within the world *doikayt* (and further broken down to reveal the world *do*), *doik* hints at something of/in place, locality. “*Vi oft zey zoln zikh nit baytn mit di ertter, zey muzn tomed blaybn inem gegebenem poetishn krayz.*”

²⁶⁵ Litvin is especially interested in word choice in translation: meaning and sound, and how *avoyde* (loss) ensues, which nevertheless takes translations in new directions.

eynem/eygen paradox he is trying to reconcile in poetic translation: a word's meaning has a *singular* or unifying position in a poem, which is to represent multitudes within the word itself, as well as within a stanza and within a poetic text.²⁶⁶

The translator, however, creates an entire new set of paradoxes, multitudes, etc. if they indeed ever reach this theoretical starting point of their own translations, where meaning from one form of the text to another resides both beneath (*unter*) and among (*tsvishn*) the lines of the poem.²⁶⁷ Mattering less than rhyme and meter are these more nuanced streams of thought pulsing through a poem. This is also, according to Litvin, a theorem formulated by Heine that translation consists of a *visnshaft* in its own right, newly emerging each time in its creative and destructive potential.²⁶⁸ Victor Hugo and Paul Éluard demonstrate this according to the translator himself: Hugo's rhyme, flowering language is far simpler to translate than Éluard's unrhymed free verse that causes the translator to emerge bruised and torn apart.²⁶⁹ Litvin coins this difficulty to render verse as getting to the *nakete vort*, a term eerily similar to Ravitch's similarly titled volume of modernist verse, that points to whether one can disguise or not the inability to render the extraordinary but ruthless (*umberakhmonesdik*), severe, and immense bareness.²⁷⁰

But there is a possible catch-22. A poet like Éluard might, according to Litvin, be difficult to translate due to his poems' exactness and sparseness, but other challenges persist when ambiguity and connectedness arise, and across languages (as Litvin sees

²⁶⁶ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 12 ff. According to the Litvin's footnotes, he had translated Valéry in the fifties. It is obvious that in addition to Boudelaire, Valéry is central to Litvin's theories of translation.

²⁶⁷ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 16.

²⁶⁸ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 16

²⁶⁹ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 17.

²⁷⁰ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 18.

happening in Baudelaire's work).²⁷¹ The ability then, to create multiple meanings from one text point to the limits of translation representing a whole, as each new translation is just a fragment of many possibles (Litvin calls this potential/limitation the *andershprakhikn kosmos*), and the source of greatness as well as servitude for the translator.²⁷² At least [translators] can delight in translated works by diving deeper into works that evoke the lyrical, even if they sometimes miss the mark.²⁷³ Litvin's notion of the *iberdikhtet* (something translated, or given poetic form) becomes multifaceted; all translations become valid, by nature of their existence, when they capture the tonality of multiple idioms, not just of one language or another.²⁷⁴

This in turn echoes many popular theories of translation today, which stipulate that the reader should not have illusions about the translation ostensibly being its own (*eygn*) work, and should therefore somehow evoke the text being translated. Citing Johann Heinrich Voss, the 18th century translator of Homer into German:

ביי באדלערן ווירקן אבער די ווערטער און ווערטער־אסאָציאַציעס ניט דורך זייער אויסטערלישקייט, צי דורך דער אומגעריכטקייט פֿון זייער פֿאַרבינדונג, ניערט דורך זייער נישט־אויסמעסטלעכער טיפֿקייט, וואָס גרייכט ביז אין די סאַמע אונטערגרונטישע, ד'ה אורייגנסטע, בלוטיקסטע קעמערלעך פֿונעם לעבעדיקן געוועב פֿון לשון. Litvin writes, "*Bay Bodlern vikh ober di verter un verter-asotsiatsyes nit durkh zeyer oysterlishkeyt, tsi durkh der umgerikhtkeyt fun zeyer farbindung, nayert durkh zeyer nit oysmestlekher tifkeyt, vos greykht biz in di same untergruntishe, d'h ureygnste, blutikste kemerlekh funem lebedikn geveb fun loshn.*"

²⁷² Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 19.

²⁷³ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 19.

„לכל הפחות האָבן זיי די פֿרייד דורך דער איבערזעטזונג טיפֿער אַרטינצודרינגען, בעסער צו פֿאַרשטיין, שלמותדיקער זיך אָנצואייגענען די שאַפֿונגען, וואָס האָבן אַרויסגערופֿן אין זיי דעם לירישן ציטער.“

Lekhol apoykhes hobn zey di freyd durkh der iberzetsung tifer arayntsudringen, beser tsu farshteyn, shleymesdiker zikh ontsuaygenen di shafungen, vos hobn aroysgerufn in zey dem lirishn tsiter.

See also Litvin, 20 ff. Among the many French poets Litvin cites (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Valéry, Rimbaud, Éluard, and others), it is also significant that he inserts into his theories of translations the works of other Yiddish writers engaged translations of French literature across time. Leyb Naydus (1890-1918) and Avraham Liesin (1872-1938) both translated Paul Verlaine's *Colloque Sentimental*, and both (according to Litvin) faultily translated the lines into Yiddish. Nevertheless, Litvin takes great pain to point out that, even by providing what he deems to be a superior translation, Naydus' and Liesin's efforts are still part of a larger constellation Litvin had alluded to earlier when taking translation into account.

²⁷⁴ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 28.

The reader should not be under the illusion that the translation is ostensibly a work of its own doing, but instead should always encounter through reading reminders of the original...the translator works around this principle, sometimes even violating his own language, with a type of dialect if you will, that isn't available beyond the translation at hand. And yet, it is still understandable in the eyes of the carriers of the language, which he is using to translate.²⁷⁵

Even more remarkable is how Litvin places this argument within the work of a translator moving between French and Yiddish: when Yiddish is able to take form and meaning from the French and transform it into a Yiddish idiom, the end result that come out is “better” (*besser*) through the Yiddish idiom than the French.²⁷⁶ Litvin emphasizes that he means what is “better” is a specificity that could be said about any translation from one language to another (i.e., each language is imbued with its own fragmentary, multidirectional etymologies), but uses this to note how Yiddish is indeed a language with a rich idiomatic voice; those who complain Yiddish does not have at its disposal the ability to reflect the nuance from other (notably, major European) languages needs to

²⁷⁵ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 28.

ד"ה דער לייגענער זאל נישט האבן קיין אילוזיע, אז דאס איז פלומרשט אן אייגן ווערק, נאר תמיד אנטרעפן ביים לייגענער דערמאנונגען וועגן אריגינאל...אזוי ארום שאפט דער איבערזעצער, פארגעוואלדיקנדיק צומאל זיין אייגענעם לשון, א מין באזונדערן דיאלעקט, נישט בנמצא מחוץ פון דער געגעבענער איבערזעצונג, אבער א פארשטענדלעכן פאר די טרעגער פון דער שפראך, וואס פון איר איז ער געשאפן

D"h der leyener zol nit hobn keyn iluzye, az dos iz kleymerst an eygn verk, nor tomed ontrefn baym leyenen dermonungen vegn original..azoy zarum shafn der iberzetsen, fargevaldikndik tsumol zayn eygnen loshn, a min bazundern dialekt, nit benimtse mekhuts fun der gegebener iberzetsung, ober a farshtendlekh far di treger fun der shprakh, vos dun ir iz er geshafn. Litvin uses the sexually loaded term *fargevaldikndik* (violating) to describe this action.

²⁷⁶ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 29 ff.

look into the impoverishment not *of* Yiddish, but of *one's (own)* Yiddish.²⁷⁷ Litvin's reputation as a translator from the French points to his success in his own Yiddish, and he sums up the success of the translator as such: "The joy in enabling oneself to [this act of Yiddish translation] navigate through the text precisely toward this [other language]."²⁷⁸ It is this directionality that Litvin strives for, not an exactness, which also leads the reader to sense (at the very least) the tone a reader in the "original" would encounter.²⁷⁹

Litvin's musings about translations make the introduction to this volume of translations from the French a central text to postwar Yiddish literature. Furthermore, it is both his insights into the process of his own work, but the *arrangement* of it that also furthers the study of Yiddish translation for postwar Jewish culture. Alongside the works Litvin translated are brief sketches of the authors' lives and works, which Litvin also stresses are only vignettes and not fleshed-out profiles in their entirety. Unlike the poetic texts in translation that had mostly not appeared in other publications, his writings on formative French writers had indeed been published before, and here they are made to stand alongside the poems in questions to help illuminate this process of translation.²⁸⁰

Baudelaire takes center stage in Litvin's concluding remarks, noting that Baudelaire, more than any other writer, was what led the translator to *faryidishn* French poetry, which in turn become part of a larger metaphor about seafaring.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 34.

²⁷⁸ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 36. די הנאה צו קאנען זיך אין דעם פֿאַל לאָזן פֿירן דורכן וואָרט דווקא אַט אַהין.
Di hanoe tsu konen zikh in dem fal lozn firm durkhn vort dafke ot ahin.

²⁷⁹ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 40.

²⁸⁰ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 40.

²⁸¹ Litvin, *Frantseyzische poezye*, 41. Litvin captures the urge to translate beautifully when he says,
„זינט דעם הערט דער איבערזעצער נישט אויף אַרומצושניפֿן זיך אויפֿן דאָזיקן ים, וואָס איז אָפֿט פֿול מיט סכנות, אונטערמישע
פֿעלדזן, שטורעמס, וואָס וואָרפֿט זיין שיפֿל אַהין און אַהער. אָבער ער ווײַסט, אַז דאָרט שפּרייט זיך אויס צומאָל דיאַצינטענע
האַרײַזאַנטן און אין די טיפֿענישן רוען אַזוי פֿיל קלינגעוודיקע אַוצרות.“

Fun der velt-poezye

Although his translations of French prose and verse texts are most widely remembered today, Litvin was also actively moving between German, Russian, Polish, and other languages throughout this career. According to the introduction to the anthology published after his death, and compiled by Yitskhok Niborski and Vera Solomon, Litvin had been deeply shaped by translated Baudelaire into Yiddish. Furthermore, Litvin's engagement with French verse and its history as it spanned centuries comes to light in the many commentaries and notes that often appeared alongside his translations.²⁸² The editors of this volume, published posthumously, also use terms from Talmudic study to describe the work of the translator. However, they also use words related to movement and trade, as then tragically linked to the decline of Yiddish as a mass idiom just as the language was becoming more linguistically complex and rich from trends such as translation, and it was through this that Litvin maintained the utmost care regarding Yiddish translation.²⁸³

In the 1990s, after his early successes with Yiddish translations from the French spanning multiple decades, Litvin decided to compile a new anthology (or, at least in the way anthologies are a form of renewal). Alongside French translations were also Russian and German poems that Litvin had translated at various points in his life. Litvin died

Zint dem hert der iberzetser nit oyf arumtsushifn zikh oyfn dozikn yam, vos iz oft ful mit sakones, unteryamishe feldzn, shturems, vos varft zayn shif ahin un aher: Ober er veys, az dort shpreyt zikh oys tsumol hiatsintene horizontn un in di tifenishn ruen azoy fil klingevdike oytsres.

²⁸² Litvin, *Fun der velt-poezye*, 11.

²⁸³ Litvin, *Fun der velt-poezye*, 11.

זיין ליבשאַפֿט צום פּאַעטישן וואָרט און זיין ליידנשאַפֿטלעך זוכעניש נאָך דעם פּולסטן, ניוואַנסירטסטן און אַנפֿלעקערשטן ייִדיש־פּאַעטישן אויסדרוק שפּיגלען זיך אָפּ אין זיינע הונדערטער איבערזעצונגען.

zayn libshaft tsum poetishn vort un zayn laydnshaflekh zukhenish nokh dem fulstn, nyuansirtstn un onplekerishstn yidish-poetishn oysdruk shpiglen zikh op in zayne hunderter iberzetsungen.

before completing his work, and as such this volume became an anthologized anthology—appearing posthumously with a separate introduction by yet another set of arrangers, editors, and Yiddishists versed in the language’s multilingual realities. Although the order, including the table of contents and the languages themselves, are Litvin’s arrangements alone. And when looking more closely, one notes that Litvin arranged the texts chronologically. This last organizational tactic is remarkable, considering the statement it makes about Yiddish verse, and the inclusion of postwar German writers such as Celan and Bachmann alongside Schiller and Hölderlin.

These pairings might not be surprising to those familiar with the history of German verse, but they are also remarkable when taking into account the postwar landscape of Yiddish poetry, which by the 1990s was severely truncated by a lack of language transmission as well as state and culture repression. To enter the world of Yiddish verse through the works of Rilke, Celan, or Bachmann at the end of the 20th century, was to enter the world of Yiddish speakers that had witnessed two world wars, a genocide, and the founding of a Jewish state that had no room for Yiddish.

Litvin was born in Shavl (Siauliai) in Lithuania, and spent his childhood years experiencing war. He lived in Eastern Ukraine during the war with his family, after fleeing from Lithuania. He would remain in a Russian-language gymnasium until he was 15 (i.e., until 1921) when he moved back to Lithuania (and this time, to Kovne/Kaunas) with his family. Continuing his study of Russian in the newly-declared Lithuanian capital, he published in Russian in various Jewish newspapers. Although the anthology does not mention this, Litvin spent several years in Berlin in the Weimar era, where he presumably

learned German and knew other Yiddish intellectuals that still lived in Germany following the currency reforms of 1924.

Before the Second World War, Litvin had been in France as a student.²⁸⁴ After the war broke out, he lived in Paris before fleeing to Montpellier. Later, he hid in a village thanks to a local priest before joining a resistance group where he was the only Jew. Litvin credited his mental stamina during those years to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* that he carried with him, which also became a second set of struggles: to render into a Jewish idiom the works of a great poet.²⁸⁵ After the war, Litvin began working as a journalist for communist journals and newspapers, which also happened to be where he published many of his early translations and the criticism.

Jonathan Boyarin, in his work on Polish Jewry in Paris, places the French capital as a major center (as do Niborski and Solomon) for Yiddish culture—at least for a while—following the Second World War.²⁸⁶ Many Yiddish writers from pre-war Romania lived in France, as did some of the surviving members of *Yung-Vilne*. What also played a role in Litvin's postwar poetics, however, was the continued production of Yiddish verse by writers from Manger to Molodowsky to Sutzkever. Yiddish poetry was not dead or dying, and because of this truth Litvin set forth to write essays and criticism that paved

²⁸⁴ Although not directly pertinent to the time period, in which Litvin completed his translation in postwar Paris, it is important to note that the French capital had been in the decades prior to the Second World War a site of refugee resettlement from Eastern Europe. Included in this demographic was a sizable population of Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews who, unlike their fellow refugees in Berlin and Vienna, found a better quality of life in France. This led to many Jewish refugees permanently settling in Paris, and becoming involved with Leftist political activities in the interwar period. Nick Underwood's groundbreaking book, *Yiddish Paris: Staging Interwar Community in Interwar France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022) sets the stage for needed Yiddish studies scholarship focusing on Paris as a central site for Yiddishist activity that extends to the present day.

²⁸⁵ See *Frantseyzische poezye*, 15 “...er varft sich arayn mit layb un lebn in a tsveytn gerangl: der farmest tsu faryidishn di lider fun dem groysn poet.”

„ער וואָרפֿט זיך אַרײַן מיט לײב און לעבן אין צווייטן געראַנגל: דער פֿאַרמעסט צו פֿאַרײַדישן די לידער פֿון דעם גרויסן פּאָעט.”

²⁸⁶ See Jonathan Boyarin, *Polish Jews in Paris - The Ethnography of Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991)

the way for postwar Yiddish aesthetics. It is within this set of networks and echoes that Litvin's translations rest.²⁸⁷ Another important factor in Litvin's biography that makes his work all the more nuanced, is his professional career. Not only did it become difficult to rebuild what was lost to genocide, many Yiddish leftists grew disillusioned after Kruschev's revealing of Stalinist crimes. He gave up his editorship after 1958, and became a guide for Russian and German-speaking tourists.

Like many other Yiddishists, his move away from Communism highlighted how many in the Yiddish world that survived slowly moved away from the idealism that defined their earlier works to embrace more liberal notions of cultural and linguistic work. What is striking, however, about Litvin's criticism and productivity, is his constant referencing of Russian, German, and French literature (internationalizing of Yiddish, even as many others looked toward the State of Israel for a form of Jewish nationalism that Yiddish could salvage). Even if publishing about Yiddish writers in *Di goldene keyt*, or in other central organs of Yiddish culture after the Holocaust, Litvin maintained many pre-war sensibilities about Yiddish criticism that were tied to a Jewish multilingualism that he based on the multitude of postwar Jewish linguistic realities (18).

Rilke appears in Litvin's collection of translations, and it quickly becomes clear why. Here is Rilke's "Herbsttag" in Yiddish

Herbsttag

רײַנער־מאַריאַ רילקע
האַרבסטאָג

Herr: es ist Zeit. Der Sommer war sehr groß
Leg deinen Schatten auf die Sonnenuhren,
und auf den Fluren laß die Winde los.

גאָט: ס'איז צײַט, דער זומער זאָל פֿאַרגײַן.
שפּרײַט אויס דײַן שאַטן אויף די זונען־זיגערס,
און שיק אַרויס די ווינטן אויפֿן פֿליין.

²⁸⁷ Translations, Litvin argues, are "*Boyer fun briken tsu ale antplekungen fun undzer kultur.*"
"„בייער פֿון בריקן צו אַלע אַנטפּלעקונגען פֿון אונדזער קולטור, „ See *Frantseyzische poezye*, 15.

Befiehl den letzten Früchten voll zu sein;
 gieb ihnen noch zwei südlichere Tage,
 dränge sie zur Vollendung hin und jage
 die letzte Süße in den schweren Wein.

הייס די לעצטע פרות פֿול ווערן מיט זאָפֿט;
 טו זיי נאָך צוויי דרומדיקע טעג באַהערן,
 טרייב צום צייטיקן, און אינעם ווין דעם שווערן
 יאָר אַרײַן די אַלערלעצטע זיסע קראָפֿט.

Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr.
 Wer jetzt allein ist, wird es lange bleiben,
 wird wachen, lesen, lange Briefe schreiben
 und wird in den Alleen hin und her
 unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben.²⁸⁸

ווער איצט איז אַן אַ היים, ער בויט ניט מער קיין היים;
 ווער איצט איז עלנט, ער פֿאַרבלייבט אזוי אויך שפּעטער;
 אויפֿזיין, לייענען, בריוו לאַנגע שרייבן וועט ער,
 און אומרוק אַהין אַהער דורך די אַלייעס גיין,
 וווּ ס'טראָגט דער ווין די געלע בלעטער.²⁸⁹

Litvin maintains the rhyme scheme found in Rilke's version, and renders into Yiddish the poetic verse of the German in extraordinary fashion. *Herr* becomes *Got* in the Yiddish, which firmly roots the poem in a way the Yiddish *har* (earthly lord/master) would not. "Der Sommer war sehr groß" becomes something more strongly wishful in the Yiddish: *zol fargeyn* (ought to depart). The final line of the first stanza, rhyming with the opening line of the poem, ends with a noun in the Yiddish, unlike a separable prefix in the German, thereby connecting the imperative from the second line with the general distancing needed to distinguish Yiddish and German syntax (most Yiddish phrases will not end with a separable prefix). The end result is far more poetic: *un shik aroys di vintn oyfn pleyen*. It also connects to the imperative found in the first line of the following (i.e., second) stanza, where the Yiddish also reveals something extraordinary about the German of Rilke. *Befiel* becomes *heys* (from the verb הייסן - *heysn*, to call/proclaim), and *südlich* in Yiddish always contains the *loshn-koydesh durem/dik* (דרום/דיק). Then comes the fleeing temporality of the words *Vollendung* and *tsaytik*. *Tsaytik* in Yiddish within the context of agriculture refers to ripeness, but here, it also connects a fleeing temporality to the natural world.

²⁸⁸ Rainer Rilke, "Herbsttag," in *Das Buch der Bilder* (Berlin/Leipzig/Stuttgart: Axel Verlag, 1906), 48.

²⁸⁹ Litvin, Mortkhe, "Harbstog," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 188.

Before commenting on the last stanza of Rilke/Litvin's poem, it is important to recall that Korman also included this very poem in his anthologies.. The fleetingness, and the painful reality of the final stanza that whoever loses their home does not build a new one, reemerges after the war as an echo from the German into the Yiddish across both time and space; Litvin working from Paris, and Korman from the Midwestern United States. Below is Rilke's ultimate stanza as translated by both Korman and Litvin:

Korman (Pre-WWII Translation)

ווער ס'האט קיין הויז איצט נישט, ווען וועט ער דאס שוין בויען?
ווער עלנט איצטער איז, וועט שוין אזוי פארבלייבן,
וועט וואך זיין, לייענען, לאנגע בריוו איצט שרייבן,
און אומרויק אין די אלעען לאנגע שעהן
וועט וואנדערן, ווען די בלעטער וועלן ווינטן טרייבן.²⁹⁰

Korman (Post-WWII Translation)

ווער ס'האט קיין הויז איצט נישט, וועט מער אַזאַ נישט בויען;
ווער ס'איז אליין אַצינד, וועט לאַנג אַזוי פֿאַרבלייבן,
וועט וואָך זיין, לייענען, און לאַנגע בריוו איצט שרייבן,
און אומרויק אין די אלייען לאַנגע שעהן
אַרומגיין, ווען די ווינטן בלעטער טרייבן.²⁹¹

Litvin

ווער איצט איז אַן אַ היים, ער בויט נישט מער קיין היים;
ווער איצט איז עלנט, ער פֿאַרבלייבט אַזוי אויך שפעטער;
אויפֿזיין, לייענען, בריוו לאַנגע שרייבן וועט ער,
און אומרויק אַהין אַהער דורך די אלייעס גיין,
ווי ס'טראַגט דער ווינט די געלע בלעטער.²⁹²

Litvin adheres more closely to Rilke with "*Ver s'hot keyn hoyz itst nit*," in terms of meter, but as in the Litvin translation we see something else afoot. The "houselessness" into a state of being; *hoyz* (house) becomes *heym* (home): "*Ver itst iz on a heym...*" Korman provides his own literary translation, with adding abstractions that Litvin conversely retains. For example, the adverb *lange* found in Rilke Litvin coins as *shpeter*, but Korman *shoy'n azoy* (thus always). Litvin also renders "hin und her" found in Rilke to the cognate *ahin un aher*. But it is the last two lines of Rilke's poem and the subsequent

²⁹⁰ Ezra Korman, *Antologye fun daytshe dikhtung*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

²⁹¹ Ezra Korman, *Fun andere shprakhn*, YIVO Archives, RG 457.

²⁹² Litvin, Mortkhe, "Harbstog," 188.

translations that point to the mastery of translation as well as the potential found already within the German. The Yiddish versions in transliteration, followed by Rilke's:

Korman 1: *Un umruik in di aleen lange sho 'n / vet vändern, ven di bleter veln vintn traybn.*

Korman 2: *Un umruik in di aleen lange sho 'n / arumgeyn, ven di bleter veln vintn traybn.*

Litvin: *Un umruik ahin aher durkh di aleys geyn / vu s'trogt der vint di gele bleter*

Rilke: *Und wird in den Alleen hin und her / unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben*

Both Korman and Litvin maintain in the Yiddish the glimpses of German from Rilke.

Another example of doubled translation, and the role German poetry continued to play in the work of Yiddish readers and translators involves Celan's "Der Gast":

Lange vor Abend
kehrt bei dir ein, der den Gruß getauscht mit dem Dunkel.
Lange vor Tag
wacht er auf
und facht, eh er geht, einen Schlaf an,
einen Schlaf, durchklungen von Schritten:
du hörst ihn die Fernen durchmessen
und wirfst deine Seele dorthin.²⁹³

Below are the Yiddish translations from Spiegelblatt (below; left) and Litvin (below; right), and it becomes quickly apparent how their translations diverge and yet echo one another throughout:

דער גאַסט	דער גאַסט
לאנג נאך פֿאַר אָוונט	לאנג פֿאַרן אָוונט
קומט ער צו דיר, דער וואָס האָט זיך באַגריסט מיטן חושך	קומט צו דיר דער וואָס האָט זיך באַגריסט מיטן טונקל.
לאנג נאך פֿאַר טאָג	לאנג נאך פֿאַר טאָג
איז ער וואָך	וואַכט אויף
און טוט, ווען ער גייט, אַ ווייע מיט שלאָף,	און איידער ער גייט צעבלאָזט ער אַ שלאָף,
אַ שלאָף מיט אָפקלאַנג פֿון פֿוסטריט:	אַ שלאָף פֿון טריט דורכגעקלונגען:
דו הערסט ווי ער מעסט די מרחקים	דו הערסט אים דורכשפּרייזן מרחקים

²⁹³ Paul Celan, "Der Gast," 70.

(פֿון דײַטש Von Schwelle zu Schelle)

The Germanic *gast* (גאַסט) is more commonplace than the *loshn-koydesh oyrekhn* (אָרעך), and yet the absence of the Hebraic is nevertheless palpable alongside the fleeting intimacy of Celan's poem. Shpiglblatt's opening line, with the emphasis on the temporal/adverbial (*lang nokh far*) and Litvin's (perhaps more "faithful") *farn*, set the stage for complimentary renderings of the poem into Yiddish.

While Spiegelblatt conjures up a more experiential rendering of the poem, Litvin chooses to adhere more closely to the meter and structure of Celan's German while nevertheless preserving a Yiddish voice in each line. Spiegelblatt's more active rendering, *er*, obscures Celan's more ambiguous singular use of *kehren* that only explicitly points to the subject in the relative clause, Litvin translates this as *kumt tsu dir der* (*vos...*). But then, following a Germanic/*loshn-koydesh* difference between the translation (*tunkl* vs. *khoyshekh*) comes a doubling between the translations; the third line of each version is identical. Spiegelblatt repeats the construction found in the opening line of his translation, while Litvin introduces it for the first time. It is here the reader begins to notice how Litvin (and to an extent, Spiegelblatt) structures the following lines to match their earlier choices of translations. Another *er* appears in Spiegelblatt's version, while Litvin sticks to the elision of the earlier lines, thereby pushing his translation "forward" toward Celan but in a seemingly different way.

²⁹⁴ Spiegelblatt, "Der gast," 234.

²⁹⁵ Mortkhe Litvin, "Der Gast," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 194.

The final four lines of each translation also strike up different yet echoing conversations with Celan's poem. Spiegelblatt again emphasizes the temporal/imperfective with the use of *ven* (he goes - at the moment of leaving, and an action is underway), while Litvin uses *eyder*, the adverbial "before" in Yiddish. The sleep either contains "echoes" of footsteps (Spiegelblatt), or (as in Litvin's version) is "imbued" with them, thereby more closely adhering to Celan. Litvin, intoning the Yiddish verb *shprayzn* (to pace, stride) as *durkhshprayzn* creates a deceptively colloquial image corresponding to the English construction, "You hear him drudging through." And yet, drudging through what? *Merkhokim* (מרחקים), the *loshn-koydesh* word we have encountered before in other Celan translations into Yiddish. Hearing distances either being measured or gauged (Spiegelblatt) or drudged through, leaves traces of one language in another. Whereas Spiegelblatt places the separable prefix at the poetic closure of the poem, which is not much of a closure at all, Litvin adds "dort" to his translation, echoing Celan's *dorthin*, emphasizing locality and a trace.

Litvin's rendering of Celan, in comparison to other postwar translators of Celan's works, are varied in a way that echo earlier translations from the German completed by Korman. A poem becomes unmoored by its own life force, and without strictly adhering to the German in meaning retains a form within languages that becomes the echo. Celan's use of *gekannt* becomes *geant* (suspected, had the premonition, etc.), maintaining rhyme but departing from meaning. However, this play with form sometimes obversely reflects the syntactical differences between Yiddish and German, as the reader finds in the first line of the second stanza: the Yiddish double negative gives way to a single *keyne*,

thereby corresponding to the meter of Celan's German while only partially negating (i.e., omitting *nit*) in the Yiddish translation.

What Litvin alters in meaning from time to time contrasts other choices of translation that are nothing short of extraordinary. Celan's "So bist du denn geworden," the poem's opening line, emerges instead in the Yiddish present tense, with the German "so" becoming "[*du verst*] *vi s'iz bashert dir...*" ([You become] as destined to you...). The term *bashert* (also used as an adjectival noun) plays a significant role in traditional Jewish matchmaking, as if a good match was meant all along. Here, in this love poem, one doesn't change/morph as much as they were this way from the start. There is no beginning, middle, or end; just "*s'iz*."²⁹⁶

Perhaps that is why, even as Litvin takes liberties with the opening lines of the poem, what follows in subsequent stanzas is precise yet original, and completely attuned to Celan's imagery. The line, "wo Wasser quillt zum Scheine..." becomes "*Vu vaser shaynt af reyne*," where the Yiddish adjective *reyn* (on its own a cognate of the German *rein*) coupled with a preposition "mirrors" the German *Schein* (*af reyn/e* - a fair copy). Another example of exquisite translation from the German, is how *ersonnen* becomes *oysgefunen* (to invent, devise, etc.):

So bist du denn geworden...

So bist du denn geworden
wie ich dich nie gekannt:
dein Herz schlägt allerorten

דו ווערסט ווי ס'איז באַשערט דיר,
ווי כ'האַב דיר נישט געאַנט;
עס קלאַפּט אין אַלע ערטער

²⁹⁶ See John Felstiner, "So you are turned — a Someone" in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 42. Felstiner's English translation of the poem: So you turned--a Someone / As I had never known— / Your heart a drum that summons / Through Lang where Wells once flowed / Where no Mouth drink—and nothing / Will cleave where Shadows form— / Where Water wells to Seeming / and Seeming falls—to Foam / You rise in every Wellspring— / Through every Seeming—run / You've conjured up a Playing / That begs—Oblivion

in einem Brunnenland,

wo kein Mund trinkt und keine
Gestalt die Schatten säumt,
wo Wasser quillt zum Scheine
und Schein wie Wasser schäumt.

Du steigst in alle Brunnen,
du schwebst durch jeden Schein.
Du hast ein Spiel ersonnen
das will vergessen sein.²⁹⁷

דין הארץ אין ברונענלאנד,

ווי קיין מויל טרינקט ניט, קיינע
געשטאלט די שאַטנס זיימט;
ווי וואַסער שיינט אויף ריינע
און שיינ ווי וואַסער שווימט.

דו שטייגסט פֿון יעדער ברונעם,
דו שוועבסט דורך יעדער שיינ;
אַ שפּיל האָסט אויסגעפֿונען,
וואָס וויל פֿאַרגעסן זיין.²⁹⁸

Litvin also plays with similar distinctions between Yiddish and German in his translation of Celan's "Die Krüge," where *loshn-koydesh* words from the Yiddish more strongly situate the pathos found in the German. *Shikern* (שיכורן) is usually not the most transitive of verbs in the Yiddish language; one gets drunk "on" something or, as one finds in translations of biblical sources, the related *onshikern* (אַנשיכורן) when referring to getting someone intoxicated.

Die Krüge

An den langen Tischen der Zeit
zechen die Krüge Gottes.
Sie trinken die Augen der Sehenden leer und die Augen der
Blinden,
die Herzen der waltenden Schatten,
die hohle Wange des Abends.
Sie sind die gewaltigsten Zecher:
sie führen das Leere zum Munde wie das Volle
und schäumen nicht über wie du oder ich.²⁹⁹

די קריג

ביי די לאַנגע טישן פֿון דער צייט
שיכורן גאָטס קריג.
זיי טרינקען די אויגן פֿון זעיקע אויס און די אויגן פֿון בלינדע,

²⁹⁷ Paul Celan, "So bist du denn geworden..." in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 46.

²⁹⁸ Mortkhe Litvin, "Du verst vi s'iz bashert dir," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 192.

²⁹⁹ Paul Celan, "Die Krüge," in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 45.

די הערצער פֿון שאַטנס וואָס הערשן,
 די איינגעפֿאלענע באַק פֿונעם אָוונט.
 זיי זינען די געוואַלטיקסטע טרינקערס:
 זיי פֿירן צום מויל דאָס ליידיקע פונקט ווי דאָס פֿולע
 און שווימען ניט קיין מאָל אַריבער די ברעגעס ווי דו אָדער איך.³⁰⁰

Nevertheless, Litvin uses the term as a way to mirror *zechen*. And while the nominal form, *Zechen* appears later in the poem, Litvin decides to drop any additional use of ש-כ-ר words to simply use *trinkers* (טרינקערס), much less explicitly implying drunkenness. Then, in the final line of the poem, perhaps this change becomes more apparent: the negation in the German becomes more absolute in Yiddish: *nit keyn mol* (ניט קיין מאָל) - *never*.

When considering Celan's last poem he wrote before committing suicide, there is a poignancy that emerges with its appearance in a posthumous anthology of Litvin's translations. In addition, the subject matter takes on an additional valence in Yiddish, as the motifs ambiguous in the German are equally (or if not more so) interminable in the Yiddish. *Rebleute*, literally "vine people" or sometimes rendered into English as "vinegrowers"³⁰¹ appears in Yiddish as *vaynflantsers* (וויינפֿלאַנטסערס). The switch the narrative "I" takes from addressing the third person to the second in the fourth line is more abrupt in the Yiddish as both a standalone line and in a departure from meaning. The German "lesen" when used to denote the harvesting of grapes does not "yield" the same meaning when using the Yiddish *leyenen*. Etymological fragments stemming from the same root in Yiddish are found with "leyz" (vintage), but not from the currently prescribed verb for "reading," *leyenen*. And the literalness of meaning continues with the

³⁰⁰ Mortkhe Litvin, "Di krig," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 193.

³⁰¹ See John Felstiner, "Vinegrowers dig up..." in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 376.

following three lines made into a stanza by Litvin: *der umzeiker ruft / dem vint aroys / tsum kamf* (the unseen challenges the wind to fight), which is far clearer than the metaphorical German *in die Schranken* denoting struggle or a challenge.

It is also a much more direct action than in the German that uses the introductory *es*, which happens to be quite common in colloquial Yiddish. This negotiation between languages and the notion of meaning continues through the rest of the poem. The Yiddish “ofn” is used metaphorically, not as literally “open” but blunt, outspoken, even exposed, “half open.” This act of recognition on *shabes*, and the struggle preceding it, is inevitable, and the question then becomes: what comes next? The Sabbath marks the division of time between itself and the rest of the week, and yet it occurs within a span of time both terminable and interminable, repeated and marked. Marking that in this poem is the preposition “um,” coincidentally marks specific times in German via the cognate. The preposition appears seldom in Yiddish, except to mark off holidays or other significant events to be observed, at which point the preposition becomes unnecessary, dwarfed by the object itself.

Rebleute graben
die dunkelstündige Uhr um,
Tiefe um Tiefe,
du liest,
es fordert
der Unsichtbare den Wind
in die Schranken,
du liest,
die Offenen tragen
den Stein hintern Aug,
der erkennt dich,
am Sabbath.³⁰²

וויינפֿלאַנצערס גראָבן אום
דעם טונקל־שעהדיקן זייגער
אָפּגרוינט נאָך אָפּגרוינט.
דו לייענסט.
דער אומזעַקער רופֿט
דעם ווינט אַרויס
צום קאַמף.
דו לייענסט.
די אָפּענע טראָגן
הינטערן אויג דעם שטיין,

³⁰² Paul Celan, “Rebleute graben,” in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 368.

At times, the translations mirror the German of Celan to the point that a normal reader of both languages might wonder what differs between the two versions, and ask: is translation necessary? As in Celan's *Zähle die Mandeln*, the Yiddish in this vein highlights not the sameness, but the echoes and distance between the two languages in which Celan's poem appears. And as with many of Celan's early poems, many of which were dedicated to his mother, his work also enters into the realm of love poetry that, although is millenia-old in Jewish textual history, links itself to Yiddish erotic verse that started to appear a generation before. The German and the Yiddish versions:

Zähle die Mandeln,
zähle, was bitter war und dich wachhielt,
zähl mich dazu:
Ich suchte dein Aug, als du's aufschlugst und
niemand dich ansah,
ich spann jenen heimlichen Faden,
an dem der Tau, den du dachtest,
hinunterglitt zu den Krügen,
die ein Spruch, der zu niemandes Herz fand,
behütet.
Dort erst tratest du ganz in den Namen, der
dein ist,
schrittst du sicheren Fußes zu dir,
schwangen die Hämmer frei im Glockenstuhl
deines Schweigens,
stieß das Erlauschte zu dir,
legte das Tote den Arm auch um dich,
und ihr ginget selbdritt durch den Abend.
Mache mich bitter.
Zähle mich zu den Mandeln.³⁰⁴

צייל אויס די מאַנדלען,
צייל וואָס איז ביטער געווען און געהאַלטן דײַך וואָך,
צייל צו מיך צו דעם:

כ'האָב געזוכט דײַן אויג,
ווען האָסטו געפֿנט און קיינער האָט
אויף דיר נישט געקוקט,
כ'האָב געשפּינט דעם באַהאַלטענעם פֿאַדעם,
אויף וועלכן דער טוי פֿון דיר דער געטראַכטער
האַט אַרונטערגעגליטשט זיך ביז צו די קריג,
וואָס אַ זאַג,
צו קיינעמס נישט האָרן אַ דערגרייכטער, באַהיט זיי.

ערשט דאָרט ביסטו גאַנץ אינעם נאָמען אין דינעם אַרײַן,
געשרפּינט צו זיך מיט אַ זיכערן טראַט,
די גלאַקנצונגען פֿרײַ זיך צעשווינגען אין דײַן שווייגנס קאַמפּאַנילע,
דאָס אונטערגעהערט צו דיר זיך געגעבן אַ שטופּ,
דאָס טויטע זײַן אַרעם געלייגט אויך אויף דיר,
און איר זאָלבע דריט זײַט אַוועק דורכן אָוונט.

מאָך ביטער מיך.
צייל מיך צווישן די מאַנדלען.³⁰⁵

³⁰³ Mortkhe Litvin, "Vaynflantsers grobn um," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 196.

³⁰⁴ Paul Celan, "Zähle die Mandeln," in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 53.

³⁰⁵ Mortkhe Litvin, "Tseyt oys di mandlen," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 195.

As we have seen throughout, the process of translation becomes most apparent when the translator wishes to assert a voice into the rendered text that echoes but does not copy/mimic the other text in question. The Yiddish *konverb* (verb with a separable prefix) *tsutseyln* closes out the opening three imperatives of the poem: *oystseyln* (count - perfective), *tseyln* (count, contain), *tsutseyln* (count out, charge - i.e., money). The Yiddish literally becomes “took a look at you,” which is apparent in the German “*ansah*.”

Sprich auch du	רייד אויך דו
Sprich auch du, sprich als letzter, sag deinen Spruch.	רייד אויך דו, רייד דער לעצטער, זאג דיין וואָרט.
Sprich - Doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja. Gib deinem Spruch auch den Sinn: gib ihm den Schatten.	רייד - נאָר צעטייל נישט דעם ניין פֿונעם יאָ. גיב דיין זאָג אויך דעם זינען: גיב אים שאַטן.
Gib ihm Schatten genug, gib ihm so viel, als du um dich verteilt weißt zwischen Mittnacht und Mittag und Mittnacht.	גיב אים שאַטן גענוג, גיב אים אזוי פיל, ווי דו וויסט ס'איז פֿאַרטיילט אַרום דיר צווישן מיטערנאַכט, מיטטאָג און מיטערנאַכט.
Blicke umher: sieh, wie's lebendig wird rings - Beim Tode! Lebendig! Wahr spricht, wer Schatten spricht.	קוק זיך אַרום: זע, ווי לעבעדיק ווערט עס אין קרייז - אַזוי וואָר ווי דער טויט: זיי לעבן! אמת רעדט דער, וואָס רעדט שאַטנס.
Nun aber schrumpft der Ort, wo du stehst: Wohin jetzt, Schattenentblößter, wohin? Steige. Taste empor. Dünnere wirst du, unkenntlicher, feiner! Feiner: ein Faden, an dem er herabwill, der um unten zu schwimmen, unten, wo er sich schimmern sieht: in der Dünung wandernder Worte. ³⁰⁶	נו, אָבער שרומפט אַין דאָס אָרט וווּ דו שטיסט: וואָהין אויסגעטאָן איצטער פֿון שאַטנס, וואָהין? שטייג, טאַפּ זיך אַרויף, ווערסט דראַבנער, אומקענטלעכער, דינער! דינער: אַ פֿאַדעם, אויף וועלכן אַראָפקומען וויל ער דער שטערן פדי אונטן צו שווימען, אונטן, וואָ ער זיך גלימצערן זעט אינעם אָפֿפֿלייך פֿון ווערטער אויף וואַנדער. ³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Paul Celan, “Sprich auch du,” in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 85.

³⁰⁷ Mortkhe Litvin, “*Reyd oykh du*,” in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 197.

The third stanza of Celan's "Sprich auch du" transforms itself via the Yiddish: The exclamatory "Beim Tode! Lebendig! Wahr spricht, wer Schatten spricht" sets off a play on words in the Yiddish-- between the Germanic *vor* (etymologically related to "wahr") and the *loshn-koydesh emes* (אמת), a word most commonly associated with the Golem stories. On its own the spelling contains a gematria³⁰⁸ that denotes beginning, middle, and end (of the alphabet, of time), and in meaning: truths countable and uncountable (the literal meaning of *emes* is truth). *Mes* (when the first letter of the word is removed), means "death." The Yiddish: *vor vi der toyt: zey lebn! Emes redt der, vos redt shotns.*" The Yiddish illuminates the paradox between death and the living in the German, while also reconciling the inner workings of the Yiddish language between Hebraic and Germanic, and within meaning itself. Both of which are central to the performance of translation.

When the German speaks a Yiddish that then appears in the translated version of a poem, the question then becomes one of directionality: away from, within, or parallel to the German. Celan's "Stimmen" becomes שטימען (*shtimen*), as opposed to the more common, *loshn-koydesh* derived קול / קעלער / קולות (*kol / keler / koyles*). Litvin chooses the Yiddish equivalents for various German words, while avoiding false friends (e.g., the Yiddish *veg* does not have the same meaning as the German *Weg*).

Stimmen

שטימען

Stimmen, ins Grün
der Wasserfläche geritzt.

שטימען, אינעם גרין
פון וואסערפלאך צעקריצט.

³⁰⁸ Developed by practitioners of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), *gematria* is a numerological system, in which each Hebrew letter is represented by a numerical equivalent. According to Kabbalistic practice stretching back to the 2nd century CE, harnessing the knowledge found within the Hebrew alphabet meant harnessing the power of creation itself.

Wenn der Eisvogel taucht,
 sirrt die Sekunde:
 Was zu dir stand
 an jedem der Ufer,
 es tritt
 gemäht in ein anderes Bild.
 *

Stimmen vom Nesselweg her:
 Komm auf den Händen zu uns.
 Wer mit der Lampe allein ist,
 hat nur die Hand, draus zu lesen.
 *

Stimmen, nachtdurchwachsen, Stränge,
 an die du die Glocke hängst.
 Wölbe dich, Welt:
 Wenn die Totenmuschel heranschwimmt,
 will es hier läuten.
 *

Stimmen, vor denen dein Herz
 ins Herz deiner Mutter zurückweicht.
 Stimmen vom Galgenbaum her,
 wo Spätholz und Frühholz die Ringe
 tauschen und tauschen.
 *

Stimmen, kehlig, im Grus,
 darin auch Unendliches schaufelt,
 (herz-) schleimiges Rinnsal.
 Setz hier die Boote aus, Kind,
 die ich bemannte:
 Wenn mittschiffs die Bö sich ins Recht setzt,
 treten die Klammern zusammen.
 *

Jakobsstimme:
 Die Tränen.
 Die Tränen im Bruderaug.
 Eine blieb hängen, wuchs.
 Wir wohnen darin.
 Atme, daß
 sie sich löse.
 *

Stimmen im Innern der Arche:
 Es sind
 nur die Münder
 geborgen. Ihr
 Sinkenden, hört
 auch uns.
 *

Keine
 Stimme – ein
 Spätgeräusch, stundenfremd, deinen
 Gedanken geschenkt, hier, endlich
 herbeigewacht: ein

ווען דער אייזפויגל זיך טונקט,
 זשושעט די סעקונדע:
 וואס געשטעלט זיך צו דיר
 האט אויף איטלעכן ברעג
 קומט
 אפגעקאסעט אין אן אנדער בילד אריין.

 שטימען פון קראפּעווע-שטעג:
 אויף די הענט קומט צו אונדז.
 ווער ס'איז אליין מיטן לאַמפּ
 האט צו לייענען בלויז פון דער האַנט.

 שטימען, נאכט־דורכגעוואקסענע, שטריק,
 אויף וועלכע דו הענגסט אויף די גלאַק.
 געוועלב זיך, וועלט:
 ווען די טויטנמושל שווימט אַריין,
 וויל עס דאָ קלינגען,

 שטימען, פון וועמען דיין האַרץ
 אין האַרץ פון דיין מאַמען צוריקגיט.
 פון תליה־בוים שטימען אַהער,
 ווו שפּעטהאַלץ און פריהאַלץ זיך ביטן
 און ביטן מיט זייערע רינגען.

 שטימען, קעלקאַפיקע, אין זשוויר,
 ווו אויך דאָס אין־סופיקע סופּלט
 (האַרץ־)
 שלימיקע רינווע.
 קינד, לאָז דאָ אַראָפּ פון די שיפּלעך,
 וואָס איך האָב באַמאַנשאַפּט.
 ווען דער ווינטשטויס דעם פּאַלובע־מיטן באַהערשט,
 די קלאַמערן אַלע צוזאַמען.

 קול יעקב:
 די טרערן,
 די טרערן אין אויג פֿונעם ברודער.
 איינע איז הענגען געבליבן, געוואַקסן,
 מיר וווינען אין איר.
 אַטעם,

Fruchtblatt, augengroß, tief
geritzt; es
harzt, will nicht
vernarben.³⁰⁹

זי זאָל זיך באַפֿרייטן.

שטימען אין תיבה:

עס זינען
די מילער
געראַטעוועט בלויז. איר,
וואָס פֿאַרזינקט,
הערט אויך אונדז.

קין

שטימע – אַ

שפּעטער רויש, צו שעהען פֿרעמד, פֿאַר דינע
מחשבות געשאַנקען, ענדלעך

אויפֿגעוואַכט: אַט דאָ אַ

פֿרוכטבלאַט, גרויס ווי אַן אויג, טיף

צעקריצט; עס

סמאָליעט. וויל ניט

פֿאַרשראַמען.³¹⁰

One of the most striking translations in Litvin's oeuvre is his translation of Celan's 'Hawdalah.' The Yiddish is less "faithful" to its own syntax to become more closely aligned with the aural and the structure of German. The reader first encounters this in the fifth line of the poem with the preposition אין (in) preceding a non-dative article דאָס - *dos* (all objects of prepositions across Eastern Yiddish variants are in the dative case). The poem largely retains the meter and structure of Celan's German, almost to the point of wondering whether the Yiddish translation is in fact doubling something else entirely. The poem's ultimate line "zu Ehren" becomes לכבוד - *lekoved*, both the literal meaning of *zu Ehren* and also in turn further elevated via its *loshn-koydesh* origins. In Yiddish, *lekoved* is often used in a prepositional phrase, noting "in honor of," or "in praise of."

Hawdalah

הבדלה

³⁰⁹ Paul Celan, "Stimmen," in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 91.

³¹⁰ Mortkhe Litvin, "Shtimen" in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 198.

An dem einen, dem
 einzigen
 Faden, an ihm
 spinnst du — von ihm
 Umsponnener, ins
 Freie, dahin,
 ins Gebundne.

אויף דעם איינעם, דעם
 איינציקן
 פאדעם, אויף אים
 שפינסטו — פון אים
 ארומגעשפינט — אין דאָס
 פרייע, אַהין,
 אין דאָס געבונדענע.

Gross
 stehn die Spindeln
 ins Unland, die Bäume: es ist,
 von unten her, ein
 Licht geknüpft in die Luft-
 matte, auf der du den Tisch deckst, den
 leeren
 Stühlen und ihrem
 Sabbatglanz zu — —

גרויס
 שטייען די שפינדלעך
 אינעם אומלאַנד, די ביימער: ס'איז,
 פון אונטן אַהער, אַ
 ליכט פאַרקניפט אין דער לופט-
 מאַטע, וואָס אויף איר דעקסטו דעם טיש, די
 לידיקע שטולן און זייער
 שבת-גלאַנץ —

לפָּבֹד.³¹²

zu Ehren³¹¹

As the translations grapple with the reception of Celan's later poetry, poetry that becomes even more sparsely strewn with explicit meanings and form, the Yiddish also takes on neologistic and abstract forms. *Denk dir* becomes *bakler nor*, a more drastically situated imperative that does not even bother with a dative pronoun. The *loshn-koydesh lehakhes* (להכעיס - to defy) takes the place of the German preposition "wider." *Afirgelitn* describes something left after being handwritten, like a verse of poetry "maintaining the world." The Yiddish resonates with the way Celan's German is barely hanging on. For example, the Yiddish draws out further meaning from the line, "für immer, vom Unbestattbaren her" with *Af tomid, fun dem vos iz nit mekaber zayn, tsu*: Everlasting,

³¹¹ Paul Celan, "Hawdalah," in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 149.

³¹² Mortkhe Litvin, "Havdole" in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 201.

from that which is not suitable to inter (and here, the Yiddish makes clear they are referring to Jewish burial).

Celan's "Jerusalem poems" offer yet another layer to the Yiddish reader and translator of the Czernowitz poet's work. Litvin's translations of the poems appeared with one of Tel Aviv's premier Yiddish publishing houses, at a time where many of the language's speakers from Eastern Europe were dying off, and the outposts of/for/in Yiddish were ceasing their activity in the Jewish state.

Nevertheless, it is important to note how at home Celan's work was in Yiddish translation, just as Yiddish culture was "translated" for audiences beyond the boundaries of Yiddish for the nascent state's citizens who were all too desperate to adopt Hebrew with limited success. Sholem Aleichem himself, a Zionist by the end of his life, never made it to Palestine before his death, and yet imagined for his readers a world that in 1916 (the year Sholem Aleichem died) was inconceivable. That inconceivability became part of the translations, as the state's grip on Yiddish faltered with the age of the language's speakers, and its transformation into a post-vernacular language in the state of Israel among non-Orthodox speakers. Other translations of Celan completed by Litvin include:

Denk dir

Denk dir:
der Moorsoldat von Massada
bringt sich Heimat bei, aufs
unauslöschlichste,
wider
allen Dorn im Draht.

באַקלער נאָר:

דער זומפּסאַלדאַט פֿון מצדה
ער ברענגט זיך היימלאַנד, אויף
סאַמע ניט מער אויסצולעשן
צו להכעיס
אַלע דערנער אינעם דראַט.

Denk dir:
die Augenlosen ohne Gestalt

באַקלער נאָר:

führen dich frei durchs Gewühl, du
erstarkst und
erstarkst.

Denk dir: deine
eigene Hand
hat dies wieder ins Leben empor-
gelittene
Stück
bewohnbarer Erde
gehalten.

Denk dir:
das kam auf mich zu,
namenwach, handwach
für immer,
vom Unbestattbaren her.³¹³

די אָנאָיגיקע אָן שום געשטאַלט
פֿירן פֿריי דורך געווימל, דו
ווערסט שטאַרקער
שטאַרקער.

באַקלער נאָר: דיין
אייגענע האַנט
דאָס ווידער צום לעבן
אַפֿירגעליטענע שטיק
פֿון באַווינלעכער ערד
האַט געהאַלטן.

באַקלער נאָר:
ס'איז צו מיר,
נאָמענוואַכטיק, האַנטוואַכטיק,
אויף תמיד
פֿון דעם, וואָס איז נישט צום מקבר זיין,
צו.³¹⁴

Es stand...

Es stand
der Feigensplitter auf deiner Lippe,

געשטאַנען איז
דאָס פֿייגל־שטיקל אויף דיין ליפּ,

es stand
Jerusalem um uns,

געשטאַנען איז אונדז אַרום
ירושלים,

es stand
der Helkiefernduft
überm Dänenschiff, dem wir dankten,

געשטאַנען
דער העלער סאָסנעס־ווילגערוך
איבער דער דערנישער שיף, וואָס מיר האָבן
געדאַנקט,

ich stand
in dir.³¹⁵

איך בין געשטאַנען
אין דיר.³¹⁶

³¹³ Paul Celan, "Denk dir" in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 262.

³¹⁴ Morkhe Litvin, "Bakler dir..." in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 202.

³¹⁵ "Es stand," in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 262.

³¹⁶ Morkhe Litvin, "Geshtanen iz...", in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 203.

Die Pole

Die Pole
sind in uns,
unübersteigbar
im Wachen,
wir schlafen hinüber, vom Tor
des Erbarmens,

די פאלוסן
זינען אין אונדז
ניט צום אַריבערגיין
וואַכיק,
מיר שלאָפֿן זיי אַריבער
פֿאַרן שער־הרחמים.

ich verliere dich an dich, das
ist mein Schneetrost,

כ'פֿאַרליר דיך פֿאַר דיר, דאָס
איז מיין שניי־קער טרייסט,

sag, dass Jerusalem ist,

זאָג, אַז ירושלים איז,

sags, als wäre ich dieses
dein Weiss,
als wärst du
meins,

זאָג עס, ווי וואָלט איך געווען אַט
דיין ווייס,
ווי וואָלטסט דו געווען
מינס,

als könnten wir ohne uns wir sein,

ווי וואָלטן מיר אָן אונדז געקאָנט זיין מיר

ich blättere dich auf, für immer,
du betest, du bettest
uns frei.³¹⁷

איך בלעטער דיך אויפֿעט, לנצח,
ביסט מתפלל, דו בעטסט, דו בעטסט אויס
אונדז פֿרייע.³¹⁸

Es wird etwas sein, später
das füllt sich mit dir
und hebt sich
an einen Mund

ס'וועט עפעס וואָס זיין, שפעטער,
דאָס פֿילט זיך אָן מיט דיר
און זיך הייבט
צו אַ מויל.

Aus den zerscherbten
Wahn
steh ich auf
und seh meiner Hand zu,
wie sie den einen
einzigen

אינעם צעשערבלטן
וואַר־חלום
שטיי איך אויף
און קוק אויף מיין האַנט,
ווי די ציט דעם איינעם
און איינציקן

³¹⁷ Paul Celan, "Die Pole," in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 362.

³¹⁸ Mortkhe Litvin, "Di Polesn," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 204.

Ingeborg Bachmann

In Ingeborg Bachmann's "Dunkles zu sagen," the speaker compares themselves to Orpheus, the musical, prophetic, and poetic voice that could animate both humans and nature. And in the poem, the "ich" plucks at death, only to recognize the darkness in both the natural and human body (the eyes, and the beauty of the earth). The German *Erde* appears in Yiddish as *erdkoyl*, which extends beyond the Yiddish *erd* (for ground, earth, etc.). Both physical entities in Yiddish echo the German, but blur the boundaries between the celestial and the earthly. Other instances of blurring occur throughout the poem. The "ich" of the first stanza turns to the "du" of the second, and we see this second person personified in natural phenomena. This personification is not simply conflation (with the actions of the "ich,"); it is also accusatory: "Vergiß nicht, daß auch du..." (don't forget that you, too...) saw the dark river. The allusion to the River Styx, of the underworld, and the "turn" made by Orpheus' toward his wife, Eurydice, slowly emerge out of this poem only to retreat in the same way Eurydice does as she gets pulled back to the depths of Hades.

Dunkles zu sagen

זאָגן דאָס טונקעלע

Wie Orpheus spiel ich
auf den Saiten des Lebens den Tod
und in die Schönheit der Erde
und deiner Augen, die den Himmel
verwalten,
weiß ich nur Dunkles zu sagen.

איך שפיל אַזוי ווי אָרפעוס
אויף די סטרוניעס פֿון לעבען דעם טויט,
און אין דער שיינקייט פֿון ערדקויל
און פֿון דינע אויגן, וואָס זיי פֿירן אָן מיטן הימל,
נאָר ס'טונקעלע ווייס איך צו זאָגן.

³¹⁹ Paul Celan, "Es wird etwas sein, später," in *Paul Celan: Die Gedichte, Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), 363.

³²⁰ Morkhe Litvin, "S'vet epes vos zayn, shpeter," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 205.

Vergiß nicht, daß auch du, plötzlich,
an jenem Morgen, als dein Lager
noch naß war von Tau und die Nelke
an deinem Herzen schlief,
den dunklen Fluß sahst,
der an dir vorbeizog.

Die Saite des Schweigens
gespannt auf die Welle von Blut,
griff ich dein tönendes Herz.
Verwandelt ward deine Locke
ins Schattenhaar der Nacht,
der Finsternis schwarze Flocken
beschneiten dein Antlitz.

Und ich gehör dir nicht zu.
Beide klagen wir nun.
Aber wie Orpheus weiß ich
auf der Seite des Todes das Leben
und mir blaut
dein für immer geschlossenes Aug³²¹

פֿאַרגעס נישט, אַז פֿלוצעם אויך דו
אין יענעם באַגינען, ווען ס'איז דיין געלעגער
נאָך געווען נאָס פֿון טוי און געשלאָפֿן
די נעגלבלום איז אויף דיין האַרצן,
דערזען האָסט דעם טונקעלן טייך
פֿאַזע דיר אין זיין שטראָמען.

די שטרונע פֿון שווייגן
געשפּאַנט אויף דער כוואַליע פֿון בלוט
האַב איך פֿון דיין האַרצן דיין קרייזל
אין שאַטנהאַר איז פֿון דער נאַכט,
און די פֿליטערלעך שוואַרצע פֿון חושך
האַבן דיין פנים באַשנייט.

און איך, איך געהער נישט צו דיר.
קלאַגן מיר ביידע אַצינדער.
נאָר אַזוי ווי אַרפּעס אויך איך
אויף דער זייט פֿונעם טויט ווייס דאָס לעבן,
און מיר בלויט
דיין אויף תמיד פֿאַרשלאָסענע אויג.³²²

The juxtaposition between the source of life's musicality being death, and as a result the basis of life itself, lies in the poetics of translation. The interplay between "night" (*Nacht*) and "darkness" (*Finsternis*) in the Yiddish becomes *nakht* and *khoyshekh*. Also related to the Yiddish פֿינטערניש (*fintsternish*), *khoyshekh* implies as the equivalent of the poem in German, a gloominess or force of dark energy in the possessive. "Verwandelt ward deine Locke ins Schattenhaar der Nacht," is the transformation within the poem and between languages. Not only does the genitive case in German become a mere echo in the Yiddish (Yiddish has no defined genitive case), the *ikh* doubles in the final stanza to establish that the *I* nevertheless is separated from any belonging illuminated in the preceding lines.

³²¹ Ingeborg Bachmann, "Dunkles zu sagen," in *Ingeborg Bachmann - Werke* (München/Zürich: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1978), 32.

³²² Mortkhe Litvin, "Zogn dos tunkele," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 206.

How fitting that Litvin would translate Bachmann's "Paris." Published in 1952, the poem (and its namesake) becomes—via translation—a central site for both Yiddish and German-speaking Jewish exile following the Second World War:

PARIS

פאַריס

Aufs Rad der Nacht geflochten
schlafen die Verlorenen
in den donnernden Gängen unten,
doch wo wir sind, ist Licht.

אויפֿן נאַכטראָד געפֿלאַכטענע
שלאָפֿן די פֿאַרלאָרענע
אונטן אין גענג דונערדיקע,
דאָך, וווּ מיר זײַנען, איז ליכט.

Wir haben die Arme voll Blumen,
Mimosen aus vielen Jahren;
Goldnes fällt von Brücke zu Brücke
atemlos in den Fluß.

די אַרעמס האָבן מיר פֿול בלומען,
מימאָזעס פֿון אַזוי פֿיל יאָרן,
גאָלדיקס פֿאַלט פֿון בריק צו בריק
אַנאַטעמדיק אין טײַך.

Kalt ist das Licht,
noch kälter der Stein vor dem Tor
und die Schalen der Brunnen
sind schon zur Hälfte geleert.

קאַלט איז דאָס ליכט,
נאָך קעלטער דער שטיין פֿאַרן טויער,
און די ברונעמער-בעכערס
זײַנען שוין האַלב אויסגעליידיקט.

Was wird sein, wenn wir, vom Heimweh
benommen bis ans fliehende Haar,
hier bleiben und fragen: was wird sein,
wenn wir die Schönheit bestehen?

וואָס וועט זײַן, ווען מיר פֿונעם היימוי
באַנומענע ביז צו די האָר די צעווייטע
דאָ בלייבן און פֿרעגן: וואָס זשע וועט זײַן
ווען מיר האַלטן אויס דאָ די שיינקייט?

Auf den Wagen des Lichts gehoben,
wachend auch, sind wir verloren,
auf den Straßen der Genien oben,
doch wo wir nicht sind, ist Nacht.³²³

אויף די וועגענער ליכט אויפֿגעהויבן,
אויך וואַכיק, מיר זײַנען פֿאַרלאָרן,
אויף די גאַסן פֿון געניוסן אויבן,
דאָך, וווּ מיר ניט זײַנען, איז נאַכט.³²⁴

It is easy to draw parallels to this postwar moment, where Bachmann (and Celan) found refuge in the dichotomies that so explicitly appear in the opening and final stanzas. The “resolution” to come in the closing lines only confirms that the speaker is one of the “Verlorenen.” Also striking are the ways in which Litvin sees linguistic parallels (or

³²³ Ingeborg Bachmann, “Paris,” in *Ingeborg Bachmann - Werke* (München/Zürich: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1978), 33.

³²⁴ Mortkhe Litvin, “Pariz” in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 208.

contiguities) between Bachmann's poetic German and the "poetic" in vernacular Yiddish. "Aufs Rad der Nacht geflochten" turns into "*Afn nakhtrod geflokhtene*," noting a common speech act whereby the speaker places the declined attributive adjective following the noun it is modifying. Litvin also renders, "Was wird sein," the powerful rhetorical question at the center of this poem, almost nonchalantly into Yiddish that nevertheless takes on a similarly existential uncertainty: "*Vos vet zayn?*" In the penultimate stanza when the speaker twice poses this question, the poem hints at what "staying here and asking" (hier bleiben und fragen) this question means. In the Yiddish, we don't just have the simple repetition of "*Vos vet zayn?*," we have an amplification: "*Vos zshe vet zayn?*" It is as if the Yiddish takes this question a step further in this postwar moment. To really pose this question, and to ask in Yiddish what it means to "*oyshaltn*" (which also extends beyond the meaning of "bestehen" to almost exclusively referring to "enduring [by abiding]").

Bachmann's "Ihr Worte" (Yiddish: Ir Verter) is the only poem from this set of Litvin's translations that did not appear in Bachmann's *Die gestundete Zeit* (1952). The poem's dedication to Sachs, where "in Verehrung" is marked in Yiddish by "לפְּבֹד" (*lekoved*), hints at what is to come: a reworking and a reimagining of what is already a complex intertext.³²⁵

Ihr Worte

איר ווערטער

Für Nelly Sachs, die Freundin, die
Dichterin, in Verehrung

פֿאַר נעלי זאַקס,
לפְּבֹד דער פֿרײַנדִין און דער דיכטערין

Ihr Worte, auf, mir nach!

איר ווערטער, הייבט זיך אויף

³²⁵ Bachmann's poem inevitably points to Celan's "Zürich, zum Storchchen," a work that he, too, dedicated to Sachs.

und sind wir auch schon weiter,
zu weit gegangen, geht's noch einmal
weiter, zu keinem Ende geht's.
Es hellt nicht auf.
Das Wort
wird doch nur
andre Worte nach sich ziehn,
Satz den Satz.
So möchte Welt,
endgültig,
sich aufdrängen,
schon gesagt sein.
Sagt sie nicht.
Worte, mir nach,
daß nicht endgültig wird
- nicht diese Wortbegier
und Spruch auf Widerspruch!
Laßt eine Weile jetzt
keins der Gefühle sprechen,
den Muskel Herz
sich anders üben.
Laßt, sag ich, laßt.
Ins höchste Ohr nicht,
nichts, sag ich, geflüstert,
zum Tod fall dir nichts ein,
laß und mir nach, nicht mild,
noch bitterlich,
nicht trostreich,
ohne Trost
bezeichnend nicht,
so auch nicht zeichenlos -
Und nur nicht dies das Bild
im Staubgespinst, leeres Geroll
von Silben, Sterbenswörter.
Kein Sterbenswort
Ihr Worte!³²⁶

און קומט מיר נאך!
און זינען מיר שוין ווייטער
צו ווייט געגאנגען, גייט ווייטער
נאך א מאל, צו קיין שום סוף ניט גייט.

סע העלט ניט אויף

דאס ווארט
וועט דאך בלויז
אנדערע ווערטער נאך זיך ציען,
א זאץ דעם זאץ.
אזוי וואלט וועלט געוואלט
זיך ענדגילטיק
ארויפדרענגען,
שוין זיין געזאגט.
טא זאגט זי ניט!

ווערטער, קומט מיר נאך,
אז ס'זאל ניט ווערן ענדגילטיק
— ניט אט דער ווארטבאגער
ניט זאג און קעגנזאג!

לאזט א ווילע
קיין געפיל איצט ריידן,
דעם מוסקול הארץ
זיך אנדערשדיק טרענירן.

לאזט זאג איך, לאזט.

אין העכסטן אויער ניט,
גארנישט ניט, זאג איך, אריינגעשעפטשעט,
צום טויט ס'זאל דיר גארניסט אינפאלן,
לאז, און גיי נאך מיר, ניט מילד
ניט ביטערדיק,
ניט טרייסטנדיק,
אן טרייסט
און ניט באצייכענענדיק
ניט אן צייכן פארט.

און בלויז ניט איינס: דאס בילד
אין שטויבגעשפין, א פוסטער קרייזל
פון טראפן, ווערטער שטארביקע.

³²⁶ Ingeborg Bachmann, "Ihr Worte," in *Ingeborg Bachmann - Werke* (München/Zürich: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1978), 162.

קײן שטאַרביק וואָרט נײַט קײנס,
איר ווערטער!³²⁷

The poem's base(s) are the many references to speech itself. However, that same speech is replete with negations. The *I* of the poem attempts to build on the preceding words with each subsequent line, as if to reiterate something that the poem encapsulates in what is left unsaid.³²⁸ The speaker, uttering the word *Welt*, leads me to Sachs' poem, "Chor der Waisen," another work that plays with ideas of concealment and loss in language.³²⁹

Litvin also published a version of Bachmann's "Im Gewitter der Rosen."

Im Gewitter der Rosen

אין רויזן-געוויטער

Wohin wir uns wenden im Gewitter der Rosen,
ist die Nacht von Dornen erhellt, und der Donner
des Laubs, das so leise war in den Büschen,
folgt uns jetzt auf dem Fuß

וואוּהין מיר קערן זיך נײַט אין געוויטער פֿון די רויזן,
איז אויפֿגעהעלט די נאַכט פֿון דערנער, און דער דונער,
פֿון געבלעטער, וואָס געווען איז אַזאַ שטילער אין די קוסטעס,
גײט נאָך אונדז איצטער טריט בײַ טריט.

"*Im Gewitter in Rosen*," widely known via Hans Werner Henze's musical composition, and through Anselm Kiefer's³³⁰ painting that borrowed the title, is a short, one-stanza poem that shrouds its "wir" in cosmic themes, as if what surrounds the poem itself are not only the landscapes of a newly configured world, but the muted landscapes of language at the heels of the poem's subjects. *Nacht* and *Donner* juxtapose words such as *Laub*, *Büsche/n*.

³²⁷ Mortkhe Litvin, "Ir verter" in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 209.

³²⁸ Litvin was not the only translator of Nelly Sachs in Yiddish, but arguably one of the more nuanced. Meyr Shtiker translated various works by Sachs in a volume titled, *Geklibene lider: oykh bilder fun der dramatishe poeme 'Eli'* (Tsiko Farlag: 1967). Little commentary appears with the translation, except for a somewhat critical account of Sachs' life (in particular the class dimensions of her upbringing in Berlin).

³²⁹ See Nelly Sachs, "Chor der Waisen" in *Fahrt ins Staublose* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1961).

³³⁰ A 2015 exhibition in Salzburg exhibited various works by Kiefer, and placed Bachmann's text in dialogue with Vogelweide's "Unter den Linden" and Rimbaud's "Le Dormeur du val."

“Salz und Brot” only echoes similar themes, insofar the “ich” and the “wir” face what becomes in the final two lines of the poem a shared destiny.

Salz und Brot

זאלץ און ברויט

Nun schickt der Wind die Schienen voraus,
wir werden folgen in langsamen Zügen
und diese Inseln bewohnen,
Vertrauen gegen Vertrauen.

שוין שיקט דער ווינט פֿאַרויס די רעלסן,
מיר וועלן נאָכקומען אין פֿאַמעלעכדיקע באַנען
און באַווינען אָט די אינדזלען,
געטרוינג פֿאַר געטרוינג.

In die Hand meines ältesten Freunds leg ich
mein Amt zurück; es verwaltet der Regenmann
jetzt mein finsternes Haus und ergänzt
im Schuldbuch die Linien, die ich zog,
seit ich seltener blieb.

אין דער האַנט פֿון מיין עלצן פֿרענד לייג איך
מיין אַמט צוריק; עס פֿירט דער רעגנמאַן איצט
אַן מיט מיין פֿינצטערן הויז און דערגאַנצט
אין בוך פֿון דער שולד די ליניעס, וואָס איך האָב געצויגן
זינט זעלטענער בין איך געוואָרן.

Du, im fieberweißen Ornat,
holst die Verbannten ein und reißt
aus dem Fleisch der Kakteen einen Stachel
das Zeichen der Ohnmacht,
dem wir uns willenlos beugen.

דו, אין פֿיבער-ווייטער ריאַסע,
יאָגסט די פֿאַריאָגטע אָן און רייסט
פֿון קאַקטוס-לייב אַ שטעכלקע אַרויס
— דער צייכן פֿון דער אומקראַפֿט,
וואָס מיר בייגן זיך פֿאַר אים אָן ווילן.

Wir wissen,
daß wir des Kontinentes Gefangene bleiben
und seinen Kränkungen wieder verfallen,
und die Gezeiten der Wahrheit
werden nicht seltener sein.

מיר ווייסן,
מיר בלייבן פֿונעם קאָנטינענט געפֿאַנגען
און אונטערגעוואָרפֿענע ווידער די קרענקונגען זיינע,
און אָנפֿלייזן און אָפֿפֿלייזן פֿון אמת
זיי וועלן ניט זעלטענער ווערן.

Schläft doch im Felsen
der wenig erleuchtete Schädel,
die Krallen hängt in der Krallen
im dunklen Gestein, und verheilt
sind die Stigmen am Violett des Vulkans.

שלאָפֿט דאָך אין פֿעלדז
דער ווינציק דורכליכטיקטער שאַרבן,
די קרעל הענגט אין דער קרעל
אין טונקעלן געשטיין, און פֿאַרהיילט
סיינען די סטיגמעס ביים פֿיאַלעט פֿון די ווילקאָנען.

Von den großen Gewittern des Lichts
hat keines die Leben erreicht.
So nimm ich vom Salz,
wenn uns das Meer übersteigt,
und kehre zurück
und lege auf die Schwelle
und trete das Haus

פֿון די גרויסער געוויטערס פֿון ליכט
האַט קיינס ניט דערגרייכט צו די לעבנס.
טאָ נעם איך פֿונעם זאלץ,
ווען עס שטייגט אונדז אַריבער דער ים,
און קער אום זיך צוריק
און לייג עס אַרויף אויף דער שוועל
און גיי אַריינעט אין הויז.

Wir teilen ein Brot mit dem Regen,

מיר טיילן איין ברויט מיטן רעגן,

There are so many striking choices of translation. *Gezeiten der Wahrheit* becomes in Yiddish somewhat more idiomatic: אָנפֿלייז און אָפֿפֿלייז פֿון אמת (*ebb and flow* of truth). Litvin translates *Schuld* in the last line as התחייבות (*hiskhayves*), a word that truly gets to the numerous meanings of the word in German (unlike the Yiddish שולד - *shuld*, which—though similar—is largely confined to blame, fault, etc.)

Addendum (and in lieu of a conclusion): What about Rose Ausländer?

These translations of Celan and Bachmann in Paris by Morkhe Litvin serve as central texts for this engagement between both literatures. In addition to Spiegelblatt's translations of Celan, they point to (albeit marginalized) interactions among Yiddish readers and translators with postwar German literature. However, this discussion of postwar translations from German into Yiddish would not be complete without drawing these poems back into the world of Habsburg Central Europe, notably of Czernowitz. Czernowitz, a city that resonates across the history of postwar German poetry thanks to Celan and the massive body of scholarship attached to his work, has an equally complex legacy for German-Yiddish translation. Positioning a circulation of texts within larger temporal and geographical spaces would not be complete without highlighting the Czernowitzers translating other Czernowitzers—and the texts pointing to the interactions between multiple, circulating threads of Jewish cultures across multiple languages.³³³

³³¹ Ingeborg Bachmann, "Salz und Brot," in *Ingeborg Bachmann - Werke* (München/Zürich: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1978), 57.

³³² Morkhe Litvin, "Salts un broyt," in *Fun der velt-poezye* (Jerusalem: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 2003), 212.

³³³ See Leslie Morris, *The Translated Jew: German Jewish Culture Outside the Margins* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 162. "In other words, the task is to 'translate' paradigms of diasporic thought into a poetics of diaspora, seeing in the interplay between the once- Jewish city of Czernowitz and

In the opening sentence of Freyd Weininger's (1915-1988) edited volume of Rose Ausländer's (1901-1988) poetry, he renders the poet's name directly into the Yiddish *רױזע* (*Roze*), not the *Reyzl*, *Royzele*, etc. that one often saw when encountering Ausländer's work in Yiddish translation by other peers from Czernowitz.³³⁴ Weininger (born in Czernowitz) notes that not only was Ausländer partially responsible for placing Czernowitz on the map as a secular, humanist, literary, and artistic center, she also did this for Yiddish. And even more striking, he notes that even as Ausländer relates to Celan, Shperber, and Weissglass, who all largely produced works in German, their paths of wandering and suffering also connect her to Yiddish contemporaries and their fate.³³⁵ Whether this is in part due to Ausländer's second emigration to the United States in 1946 (like many other Yiddish Holocaust survivors fleeing to the United States or North America in general), Weininger attaches metaphors of destruction of Eastern European Jewish life to Ausländer's work: "her country was one filled with burned-down cities and towns, her house did not have a door nor windows."³³⁶

I argue that there is more here than simply "Giving the Yiddish reader a brief (cursory?)" look into Ausländer's poetry in Yiddish, so that Yiddish readers will be able to experience her work.³³⁷ Weininger himself asks: "Is Rose Ausländer really a poet in

the vanished traces of this Jewishness not a nostalgic or elegiac recuperation of loss, but rather the forever provisional, indeterminate nature of Jewish text that exists as part of a system of translation that carries the echoes, dispersed, of previous texts."

³³⁴ Itzik Manger, in his correspondence with Ausländer, referred to her as *Royzele*. Ausländer translated several of Manger's poems into German, including "Die Ballade vom Kränzlein Sterne," "Die Ballade vom weißen Brot," and "Folgt mir nicht nach, mein Bruder."

³³⁵ See Vayninger, *Shotns in shpigl* (Tel Aviv: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 1995), 5-6.

כאַטש איר גאַנץ לעבן און אויך אירע וואַנדער- און ליידנסוועגן איז זי טיף פאַרבונדן מיטן גורל פֿון אירע ייִדישע שוועסטער און ברידער, - מיט די וואָס זענען אומגעקומען אויף קידוש השם, און מיט די וואָס האָבן זיך געראַטעוועט נאָכן חורבן.
...khotsh ir gants lebn un oykh ire vander- un laydndsvegn iz zi tif geven farbundn mitn goyrl fun ire yidishe shvester un brider, — mit di vos zenen umgekumen af kidish-hashem, un mit di vos hobn zikh geratevet nokhn khurbn.

³³⁶ Weininger, *Shotns in shpigl - lider* (Tel Aviv: H. Leyvik-Farlag, 1981), 5.

³³⁷ Weininger, *Shotns in shpigl*, 7

German?”³³⁸ It is notable Weininger does not say “a German poet,” and instead places her within the same category of postwar literature as Nelly Sachs, who is on the “Eastern Wall” (*mizrekh-vant* - the direction of prayer) of *yidishn shafn* (Yiddish/Jewish creativity). It is this blending of the adjectival Yiddish as Jewish in “*yidishn shafn*,” and the slippage into “Yiddish” that emerges from the German of Rose Ausländer, and how her poetry therefore serves as a mode of translation in itself.

More specifically, Weininger says, “[Ausländer] *created* in German, but her heart cries in Yiddish, and she searches for a key to the house that she can no longer find.”³³⁹ Indeed, Weininger also stresses that the lack of a physical, bordered space created an impossibility for Ausländer’s reception as a poet. To Weininger, Ausländer seems both unplaceable and provincial, too German for Jewish (Yiddish?) audiences and not German enough in the antisemitic environs of postwar German-speaking Europe. In what brief records exist about Weininger’s own impressions of Ausländer’s postwar productivity, Weininger credits Itzik Manger’s longtime friendship with Ausländer for the insight it provided him as a translator. Although Manger’s own relationship to the past, his place of birth, and to language itself did not always coincide with Ausländer’s, their correspondence points to the complex role of text and language in this postwar moment.

For example, Manger viewed Ausländer’s poetry as part of a larger Jewish history of Czernowitz that included numerous languages, even as their postwar receptions

³³⁸ Weininger, *Shotns in shpigl*, 7.

³³⁹ See Weininger, *Shotns in shpigl*, 7.

איר לאַנד איז אַ לאַנד און פֿאַרברענטע שטעט און דערפֿער, איר הויז האָט קיין טירע, קיין פֿענצטער, זי שאַפֿט אויף דײַטש, אָבער איר האַרץ ווײַנט אויף ייִדיש, און זי זוכט אַ שליש צום הויז וועלכעס זי קען מער נישט געפֿינען.
Ir land iz a land fun farbrente shtet un derfer; ir hoyz hot keyn tire, keyn fentster. Zi shaft af daytsh, ober ir harts veynt af yidish, un zi zukht a shlisl tsum hoyz velkhes zi ken nit gefinen.

diverged.³⁴⁰ Even as Ausländer wrote in German of a world lost to the past—in the form of free, unrhymed verse, lacking punctuation, and often deceptively simplistic in form—Manger had a similarly disjointed relationship with place and language. This similarity causes Weininger to pinpoint Ausländer's oeuvre (and her relationship to Czernowitz) in this way: pointing to the existence of her work in multiple languages, across multiple epochs, stemming from a city that physically still exists albeit in an entirely different form today than in the decades prior.³⁴¹

For Weininger, however, it was only necessary to create a volume of Ausländer's work in Yiddish translation. This self-reflexivity that Weininger displays as a Czernowitzer, going from German into Yiddish, is, in some ways, an echo of the self-translations made by Ausländer herself. It becomes all the more poignant as the reader learns that the poems are appearing in Yiddish with help from Ausländer and her publisher.³⁴² Although it might be easy for the reader of Weininger's introduction to also

³⁴⁰ Manger's own relationship to Bukovina had been textually inscribed and reinscribed just before and after World War II in his magnum opus, *Di vunderlekhe lebnshashraybung fun Shmuel aba abervu: Dos bukh fun gan-eydn* (English: *The Book of Paradise: The Wonderful Adventures of Shmuel Aba Abervu*). Published in Warsaw in 1939, few pre-war copies of the book still exist. The book would not receive acclaim until it was later reprinted from a surviving copy. This is important to note, as Manger's own "exile" from his childhood home and landscape had occurred even prior the Second World War and the death of family members. The work itself centers around the memories of an exilic narrator who had grown up in Bukovina—a place referred to in the text as *Gan-eydn* (i.e., the Garden of Eden; Paradise). Manger was famous for using biblical themes, and adapting them onto modern Yiddish prose and verse.

³⁴¹ Leslie Morris, in her book, *The Translated Jew* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), writes: "Indeed, Czernowitz has come to stand in for an elegiac place of remembrance, and not a current city in the now bleak (and no longer Jewish) landscape of east-central Europe. Thinking in Jewish, and thinking and reading tangentially, [I] turn to Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, a pivotal text about the interplay between city spaces and poetic spaces, to explore the contours of Czernowitz as city, text, place, and non-place. Czernowitz is a 'non-place' that embodies what Calvino calls the 'redundant' because it repeats itself and, in the repetition, creates the echo of memory so that 'the city can begin to exist.' My point of departure is a provocation: namely, that Czernowitz has emerged in popular and literary discourse about vanished Jewish life in the former Habsburg lands as an invisible city. Like Calvino's exploration of the imaginary and constantly reimagined spaces of Venice, Czernowitz comes into being within a textual matrix that has shaped and constructed its meaning in the years since 1945 and after 1989," 157.

³⁴² Weininger, *Shotns in shpigl*, 7. Weininger does not explicitly reference much of Ausländer's larger biography, and instead imparts a more open interpretation of her work. However, Weininger in his

note his reliance on Ausländer's biography (and in turn her supposed "place" within Holocaust literature), the reader is nevertheless able to engage with Ausländer's work in new ways. Unlike Manger's postwar reception in his adopted country of Israel, which took on an almost institutionalized life of its own, the translation of Ausländer's poetry in the 1980s highlights further questions of place for the coterminous translation projects I cite in this chapter.³⁴³ The Paris of Litvin, or the Tel Aviv of Spiegelblatt or Weininger as they translate Celan and Ausländer, almost anticipate the contemporary examples within the Jewish Diaspora where similar activity draws on the contiguities of Jewish culture—necessitating that the translator find the contiguities across multiple languages important to Jewish culture.

introduction fails to take into account Ausländer's deep knowledge of Anglophone literature—another multidirectional element of the poet's larger oeuvre.

³⁴³ See Rachel Rojanski, *Yiddish in Israel: A History* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020). Rojanski offers an important intervention into Manger's reception (albeit mostly of his dramatic works) in Israel by the 1960s.

Conclusion: Staging Jewish Contiguities in Contemporary Berlin

German literature (alongside other literatures) rendered into Yiddish, appearing before and in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust, points to simultaneities (à la Dan Miron) that link Yiddish translators of the past with the present. However, questions I often receive: how does the wish to translate from German into Yiddish take into account the decline of *secular* Yiddish speakers? Furthermore, does this productivity in Yiddish (if it still exists) actually breathe new life into Yiddish culture, or is it another form of circulation entirely?³⁴⁴

Translation, in rendering meaning anew, while also fracturing meaning to open it up, relates to vital questions about Jewish history and memory today. Can histories of genocide, settler/colonialism, and racism be made visible via translation? Here, too, are non-questions, as if translation or multilingualism alone are successful against structural oppression. However, to conclude this dissertation, I attempt to sit with these questions by profiling two contemporary examples that take us in new directions, directions in which these modes of translation are heading in German-speaking Europe today.

Daniel Kahn's *Tradaptations*

³⁴⁴ Jeffrey Shandler's *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) offers new ways to conceptualize how Yiddish as a language circulates beyond the reductive, marginalizing stances that often plague discussions around Yiddish in American, Israeli, and (arguably) in Germanophone contexts as dead or dying. At the same time, I argue (as does Shandler to an extent in the final chapter of his book) that Yiddish productivity (i.e., use of the language in secular spaces) also extends beyond the postvernacular, in part because of the complex role Yiddish has historically played as just one language of many used by the language's speakers. It is here that the *temporal* and the *spatial* parameters in which scholars and speakers often place Yiddish are more extensive than commonly thought.

Detroit-born Daniel Kahn lives in Berlin, and with his band, *The Painted Bird*, performs “tradaptations,” uniquely arranged renderings of popular songs from English, German, Russian, and other languages, often weaving in and out of the different idioms in the same song while often “translating” the lyrics into Yiddish.³⁴⁵ For Kahn, translating creates fractions of meaning, from which other questions arise (namely, around performance), and he has even coined his style of performance *Verfremdungsklezmer*.³⁴⁶ This nod to Brechtian alienation is two-fold: it builds on the provocation of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, while also making serious light of the ever-evolving role of Klezmer (and by extension: Yiddish song and text) today as not only a serious but also political medium.

Whether performing songs by Bob Dylan, Bertholt Brecht/Kurt Weill, Kurt Tucholsky, or Leonard Cohen alongside (or in) Yiddish, and in turn: when the Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, English, German, etc. renderings appear together in the same performance, it frees both Kahn as an artist and the viewer as a consumer of a singular translation. Instead, multiple renderings and new meanings circulate simultaneously. This is what Kahn refers to as “tradaptation.”³⁴⁷ Kahn notes that German and Yiddish, which are false friends to begin with, literally play on the term in German denoting false cognates (i.e., *falsche Freunde*).³⁴⁸ On his album, *Partisans & Parasites* (2009), Kahn includes tradaptations of songs such as Kurt Tucholsky’s “Rosen auf den Weg gestreut,” as well as his own songs that blend verses in English, Yiddish, and other languages. This

³⁴⁵ See Windsperger, Marianne, “Between Translation and Tradaptation; an Interview with Daniel Kahn, Berlin 2017.” <https://ingeveb.org/blog/between-translation-and-tradaptation-an-interview-with-daniel-kahn-berlin-january-2017>

³⁴⁶ Kafrissen, Rokhl. “Partisan or Parasite?” In *The Forward* (May 13th, 2009).

³⁴⁷ Windsperger, Marianne, “Between Translation and Tradaptation.”

³⁴⁸ *Ibid*

linguistic and genre blending results in a varied repertoire, from rock songs, to folk, to ballads.³⁴⁹

Kahn's treatment of (German, Yiddish, and English) folk music traditions in particular hint at his role as a translator; it is his style of performance of the translations (and for whom he performs) that plays an outsized role. In an interview with the Yiddish studies journal, *In Geveb*, he relays an anecdote:

"I like American folk music, English folk music, Yiddish folk music, German folk music... I like it all, because this is the way human beings communicate over long periods of time with each other. This is an amazing thing! Now, your treatment of it, how you use it or how you approach it, that tells us more about you than it tells us about it, so if what you are using it for is some "Heimatsgefühl Revue," then I am not interested in that, because it's superficial and kitschy, but certainly there are ways of singing this song, of using this song in the way you build relationships with other people. And that's what you do as a performer: you are building temporary relationships with a stranger. You are in a darkened room with a bunch of people who may not even know each other and you are communicating with them and you have that very special opportunity to speak to them and to give things to them. And so you can recontextualize..."³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ In 2020, Kahn and Svetlana Kundish shot a music video at Gutshof Dahlewitz in Brandenburg for their song, "Mentshn-freser." A tradaptation of Solomon Small (Smulewitz's) song of the same name, the lyrics reflect the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic as it mirrored tuberculosis over a century ago. The song has many layers. From archival footage of tuberculosis treatments, to the on-site filming of the music video in the Brandenburg countryside, the song via its lyrics addresses lapses in leadership during the pandemic, as well as the highly-politicized terrains of pandemic mitigation playing out in both Germany and the United States. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaYmQNgCtnQ>

³⁵⁰ Windsperger, Marianne, "Between Translation and Tradaptation."

For Kahn, audience is crucial, as is context and form. When performing a song in upwards of three or four different languages, and considering his fan base many listeners likely engage with his music in at least two or more of the languages he uses, Kahn understands translation is not a hindrance; translation confronts historical contingencies.

Kahn and Russian artist and songwriter, Psoy Korolenko, released the song “Erets Thuringen.” The song’s title is a play on multiple layers of the the Hebrew word “ארץ / Erets / land.” *Erets-Yisroel*, a charged term for Palestine and used in Yiddish to refer to the biblical lands of Israel (as opposed to *Medines-Yisroel* to refer to the post-1948 State of Israel). In addition, and due to Zionism, Erets/Ha-arets (i.e., land/the land) has become a term laden with belonging and ties to (contested) land.

The song also happens to be a musical adaptation of Franz Schubert’s Lied, “Aufenthalt” (with the text by Ludwig Rellstab). The lyrics to both songs:

Rellstab’s Text from Schubert’s Lied

Rauschender Strom, brausender Wald,
 Starrender Fels mein Aufenthalt.
 Wie sich die Welle an Welle reiht,
 Fliessen die Tränen mir ewig erneut.

Hoch in den Kronen wogend sich’s regt,
 So unaufhörlich mein Herze schlägt.
 Und wie des Felsen uraltes Erz
 Ewig deselbe bleibt mein Schmerz.

Yiddish Transliteration of Erets Thuringen from the album insert:

Eynem a tog, kh’ve! oyle zayn
 In Erets-Turingen arayn
 Erets-Turingen, Erets-Turingen
 Erets-Turingen, vu bistu?

Eynem a tog, kh’ve! soykher zayn
 In Erets-Turingen arayn
 Ay ay ay - in Erets-Turingen arayn
 Ay ay ay ay ay ay

Es fort a poyezd vos nemt undz avek
 Keyn Medines Vaymar tsu freylekhe teg
 Erets-Turingen, sheyninke land
 Ver vet undz firn ahin bay der hand?
 Ay ay ba bay ba ba bay
 Tra la la la la

Eynem a tog, kh’ve! oyle zayn
 In Erets-Turingen arayn
 Erets-Turingen, Erets-Turingen,
 Ikh benk nokh dir!

Ikh benk nokh dir!
Ay ay ay ay ay ay ay ay³⁵¹

The side-by-side comparison of the lyrics makes clear: translation might be a loose term for this example. However, the themes of *Lieder*, and the fraught legacy of *Heimatkultur* for Jewish audiences make this satirical commentary on Schubert (who holds a complicated legacy due to his popularity among pre-Holocaust German-speaking Jews) all the more noteworthy. This is a departure of multiple dimensions, and also a provocation that decenters Zionist ideology for a satirical plan among Diasporists to relocate to a Jewish state in Thuringia, while also complicated the legacy of German-speaking Jewry by supplanting the German “original” with the Yiddish language.

Kahn’s most famous tradaptation is his rendering of Leonard Cohen’s Hallelujah:

*Geven a nign vi a sod,
vos Dovid hot geshpilt far got,
nor dir volt’s nisht geven aza yeshue
me zingt azoy a fa, a so,
a mi-shabeyrekhn heybt a kol,
der duler meylekh veybt a haleyluyeh.*

געווען א נישט ווי א סוד,
וואס דוד האט געשפילט פאר גאט,
נאר דיר וואלט’ס נישט געווען אזא ישועה.
מע זינגט אזוי: א פא, א סא,
א מי-שאבערעך הייבט א קול
דער דולער מלך וועבט א הללויה.

*Dayn amune iz gevorn shvakh,
Bas-sheve bodt zokh afn dakh,
ir kheyne un di levone dayn refue.
zi nemt dayn guf, zi nemt dayn kop,
zi shnaydt fun dayne hor a tsop,
un tsit fun moyl arop a haleyluyeh.*

דיין אמונה איז געווארן שוואך,
בת-שבע באדט זיך אויפן דאך,
איר חן און די לבנה דיין רפואה,
זי נעמט דיין גוף, זי נעמט דיין קאפ.
זי שניידט פון דינע האר א צאפ,
און ציט פון מויל אראפ א הללויה.

*O tayere, ikh ken dayn stil,
ikh bin geshlofn af dayn dil,
kh’hob keynmol nisht gelebt mit aza tsnue.
ikh ze dayn shlos, ikh ze dayn fon,*

א טייערע איך קען דיין סטיל,
איך בין געשלאפן אויף דיין דיל,
כ’האב קיינמאל נישט געלעבט מיט אזא צנועה.
איך זע דיין שלאס, איך זע דיין פאן,

³⁵¹ Daniel Kahn and Psoy Korelenko, *The Fourth Uninternational*, 2020, CD.

*a harts iz nisht keyn meylekhs tron,
s'iz a kalte un a kalie haleyluye.*

א הארץ איז נישט קיין מלכס טראָן,
ס'איז אַ קאַלטע און אַ קאַליע הללויה.

*Oy vi amol, to zog mir oys,
vos tut zikh dortn in dayn shoys,
to vos zshe darfst zikh shemen vi a psule.
nor gedenkt vi kh'hob in dir gerut,
vi di skhine glut in undzer blut,
un yeder otem tut a haleyluye.*

אוי ווי אַמאָל, טאָ זאָג מיר אויס,
וואָס טוט זיך דאָרטן אין דיין שוויס,
טאָ וואָס זשע דאַרפסט זיך שעמען ווי אַ בתולה.
נאָר געדענק ווי כ'האָב אין דיר גערוט,
ווי די שכינה גלוט אין אונדזער בלוט,
און יעדער אָטעם טוט אַ הללויה.

*Zol ayn mayn got iz gor nishto
un libe zol zayn kol-mum-ro
a puster troyim tsebrokhn un mekhule
nisht keyn geveyen in mitn nakht
nisht keyn bal-tshuve oyfgevakht
nor an elnte kol-koyre haleyluye*

זאָל זיין מײַן גאָט איז גאָר נישטאָ,
און ליבע זאָל זײַן פל־מום־רע,
אַ פוסטער טרוים צעבראָכן און מכולה.
נישט קיין געוויין אין מיטן נאַכט,
נישט קיין בעל־תשובה אויפגעוואַכט,
נאָר אַן עלנטע קול־קורא הללויה.

*An apikoyres rufstu mikh
mit shem-hevaye lester ikh
nor meyle, ikh dervart nisht keyn geule
nor s'brent zikh heys in yedn oys
fun alef, beys, gor bisn sof
di heylike un kalye haleyluye*

אַן אַפיקורס רופסטו מיך
מיט שם־הווייה לעסטער איך
נאָר מילא, איך דערוואָרט נישט קיין גאולה
נאָר ס'ברענט זיך הייס אין יעדן אות
פֿון אַלף, בית גאָר ביזן סוף
די הייליקע און קאַליע הללויה

*Un dos iz alts, s'iz nisht keyn sakh
Ikh makh dervayle vos ikh makh
ikh kum do vi a mentsh, nisht keyn sheluye
khotsh alts farloyren say vi say
vel ikh farloybn adoynay
un sharyn vi lekham haleyluye*

און דאָס איז אַלץ, ס'איז נישט קיין סך
איך מאַך דערוויילע וואָס איך מאַך
איך קום דאָ ווי אַ מענטש, נישט קיין שילוייע
כאַטש אַלץ פֿאַרלוירן סײַ ווי סײַ
וועל איך פֿאַרלויבן אדני
און שריין ווי לחיים הללויה³⁵²

What is striking about Kahn's notoriety and creativity, is that his oeuvre and its reception extends beyond Berlin to various locales across the Jewish diaspora—from his adopted home of Berlin. What does it mean for arguably the most famous song written by Leonard Cohen, the descendent of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants to Montreal, to appear

³⁵² Daniel Kahn, *Haleyluye*, on *Word Beggar*, Oriente Musik, 2022, CD.

in Yiddish as a tradaptation by an American Jewish musician in Berlin?³⁵³ A gifted actor in several acclaimed ensembles in the German capital, Kahn's career and reception (similar to the multidirectional trajectory of Yiddish poetics since the late 19th century) might have begun in the United States as a student at the University of Michigan, but has taken a uniquely American Jewish Diasporist (i.e., non German Jewish or Zionist) approach to the history of Jews in Central Europe.³⁵⁴

Hybrid Calligraphy of Ella Ponizovsky Bergelson

Dovid Bergelson, mentioned briefly in chapter 2, was an acquaintance of Ezra Korman's, and is known today as the "fourth *klasiker*" (i.e., the fourth Yiddish writer with an outsized influence over Yiddish letters; the other three being Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Y.L. Peretz, and Sholem-Aleichem). Although arguably the most famous of the "Soviet Yiddish" writers, Bergelson spent much of the interwar years in Berlin, and was one of the few among his peers to only return to the USSR following the rise of the Nazis. Bergelson had been a staunch supporter of the Soviet project, albeit from afar, and he fell victim to the August 13th, 1952 "Night of the Murdered Poets," when Stalin ordered the execution of 13 Jewish intellectuals. Bergelson's fate was not officially acknowledged for decades.

Ella Ponizovsky-Bergelson, the great-granddaughter of the writer, grew up in Israel-Palestine and is fluent in numerous languages in addition to Hebrew and Arabic. This alone is a testament to Ponizovsky-Bergelson's worldview, in a state that does little

³⁵³ Kahn's translation of his Yiddish version, see the closed captioning on the Youtube video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XH1fERC_504

³⁵⁴ Also notable, is that Kahn is not alone. Although it is true that tens of thousands of Jewish Israelis, many of whom have received German citizenship through a right of return (and thereby have complicated Zionist narratives by leaving the Jewish state), Israelis make up just one of several large populations of Jews in Germany today.

to support Hebrew-Arabic bilingual education. As an adult, she moved to Berlin, and works as an artist creating public installations that have appeared in both the German capital and all around the world. Her familial lineage is often the subject of her work, which also highlights the works of central figures of Yiddish culture who were women, namely Kadya Molodowsky and Dvoyre Fogel, the latter of which was an enigmatic poet from Habsburg Galicia. Fogel was known for incorporating bright colors and imagery into her verse texts, and Ponizovksy-Bergelson channels this “aggressive” imagery into her public installations that merge the historical with the contemporary, and the past with the present, to which she says:

There is no difference [between the rage felt about injustices now or in the past]. When you dig under the surface, very little has changed and perhaps only superficially. Life in Berlin seemed very bright and beautiful to me, also because of the hard past. [I used to think] this was truly an emancipated nation, because they have made *all* the possible mistakes and now, they are learning. But then, eventually, living here and being part of this system...I work here, I have love relationships here, I have friendships here, and I realized ...there’s still a lot of work to do.³⁵⁵

Ponizovsky-Bergelson’s 2019 exhibition included a three-part title: *The Blue-Inked Quill - Berliner Grandfathers. Image. Language. Script / Die Tintenblaue Feder - Berliner Großväter. Bild. Sprache. Schrift. / די פֿאַרבלויטע פֿעדער - בערלינער זיידעס*. Arabic appears prominently in many of the artist’s works, and the elision here is not necessarily noteworthy. However, the anthology emerging from within

³⁵⁵ Mersiha, Bruncevic. “Yiddish Poems in Arabic Script Make a Surprising Appearance in Berlin.” <https://www.heyalma.com/yiddish-poems-in-arabic-script-make-a-surprising-appearance-in-berlin/>

this installation, created by the artist herself, emphasizes the very multilingualism, as well as the various pitfalls, of German *Wiedergutmachung*. This includes the erasure of other groups, and the forms of solidarity and affinity that could emerge with said groups if the reality were different. It's a sentiment that applies to Germany, and to Israel-Palestine. The exhibition highlighted the work of Kadya Molodowsky, one of the most prolific Yiddish writers in the 20th century. The only woman-editor of a major Yiddish literary journal, Molodowsky also was one of the few women to actively publish throughout the course of her life, a stark outlier within a sea of albeit extraordinary but nevertheless capped careers of other prominent Yiddish-speaking women (including Fogel, who was murdered in the Lwów Ghetto in 1942). Yiddish writers such as Molodowsky play a prominent role for post-World-War-II Yiddish culture, due to the fact Molodowsky survived the war after emigrating to the United States in the late thirties, and her persistence in battling sexism in Yiddish circles. It is thus striking that Molodowsky appears so prominently in an installation titled "The Blue-Inked Quill: Berliner Grandfathers. Image. Language. Script." Molodowsky becomes both a *zeyde* (grandfather) in both ancestral and textual terms. Molodowsky's famous poem, "Papirene Brik" (Paper Bridges) appears in English, German, the Yiddish, and in ancient Hebrew typography, something Ponizovsky-Bergelson notes the public is just as "unreliable" with deciphering as Yiddish today.³⁵⁶

The metaphor that serves as the poem's title, referring to the moment when the messiah comes and Jews cross into paradise over a paper bridge, hints at the utopian longing found within Jewish history. Ponizovsky also hints at the love affair between Bergelson and Molodowsky while the two still lived in Odessa, before Bergelson went to

³⁵⁶Ponizovsky-Bergelson, <http://www.ellaponi.com/murals#/the-blue-inked-quill-1/>

Berlin and Molodowsky to interwar Warsaw. What exists today is a *papirene brik* between viewers of the texts in public spaces, and the past. If only for an instant that people encounter these works on the streets of Berlin, the reminder of this past (and the layers of the past), which is not always apparent in archival records or official histories, comes to light.

These are the messy layers, to which Kahn also refers as a performer by alluding to the canons of multiple languages in his repertoire. And it is here, with Ponizovsky-Bergelson, that Jewish textuality and images, received through—and in—numerous languages *as necessity*, have a future in German-speaking locales and places across the diaspora. It is what Spiegelblatt referred to when naming his anthology an assembly or gathering (Yiddish אָסִיפֿה: *asife*), and it was Korman's postwar inclusion of Russian and English poets to make up for (parts of) a language lost to National Socialism — only to still include Rilke and the German Jewish writers from his interwar collection. It speaks to the attempts after the destruction on the Eastern Front, where Yiddish writers attempted to enact *another Germany* that, even if unsuccessful, exposed moments of possibility that were circulating. These are moments of possibility that are still circulating today.

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Appendix

Transliterated Index of Ezra Korman's Anthologies:

פֿון דײַטשער דיכטונג

Arno Holz

- a. Ikh bin der raykhster mentsh (oyf der velt - Korman, presumably in his handwriting*
“fun bukh “Phantasmus” (Ich bin der reichste Mann der Welt)
- b. In mayn shvartsn taksus-vald (In meinen schwarzen Taxiswald)*
- g. In tirgartn oyf a bank (Im Tiergarten, auf einer Bank)*
- d. Oyf a bagildtn blumen-shif (Auf einem vergoldeten Blumenschiff)*
- h. A shtibl kleyn mit griner tir (Ein kleines Haus mit grüner Tür)*
- v. Untn in dorf (Unten im Dorf)*
- z. Iber der bet in a reml (Übern Bett, eingerahmt, hängt der Myrthenkranz)*

Gustav Falke

- Di levone shaynt (Fromm - Der Mond scheint auf mein Lager)*
- Baynakht-tsu (Nachts in der träumenden Stille)*

Isolde Kurz

- Shlumer-Pliakhes (Schlummerflocken)*

Peter Hille

- Vald-shtim (Waldstimme)*

Johannes Schlaf

- Harbst (Herbst)*

Richard Dehmel

- Dem dikhters arbet-lid (Dichters Arbeitslied)*
- Shnit-lid (Erntelied)*
- Regn (Dann)*
- Nokh a regn (Nach einem Regen)*
- Shtil (Nacht für Nacht)*
- Kum tsu mayn fayer (Komm an mein Feuer, mein Weib)*

Cäsar Flaischlen

Es regnt azoy (So regnet es sich langsam ein)
Traystloz, troyerik (Totensonntag)

Ricarda Huch

Mit verter uralte (Uralter Worte kundig)

Hugo Salus

Shure's on trayst (Trostlose Zeilen)

Max Dauthendey

Oyf dayn gezikht (In deinem Angesicht)
In shtiln oyg

Stefan George (Translated Shakespeare sonnets...) NOTE: Translation lost/not in the YIVO archive

Tsum toytfarloztn park (Komm in den totgesagten Park)

Christian Morgenstern

Ershter shney
Ovnt

Carl Busse

Onhoyb harbst (Herbstbeginn)

Alfred Mombert

Fun bukh "Der denker" (Poem #8 of Der Denker: Die Wogen steigen auf zu der Terrasse)
BEYNASHMOSHES (*Das Licht*)
S'iz shtil azoy (#23 in *Der Glühende*: Es ist so still im Saal)

Hugo von Hofmannsthal (Also: look to the Hofmannstahl translation in *Milgroyim*)

Balade fun oysern lebn

Rainer Maria Rilke

Vos vestu tun, got (Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?)
Ikh bin, vi di fon (Vorgefühl)
Harbst-tog (Herbsttag)
Ver zolstu nit zayn (Eingang)
Ver s'veynt (Ernste Stunde)

Fun di vigilies (Die falben Felder schlafen schon)
Di bleter faln (Die Blätter fallen, fallen wie von weit)
Un mayn neshome (Und meine Seele ist ein Weib vor dir)
Fun "Dos bukh fun poreshdikn lebn" (Vom mönchischen Leben)
 a. *Ikh leb oys mayn lebn* (Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen)
 b. *Ikh hob a sakh brider* (Ich habe viele Brüder in Soutanen)
 c. *Mir darfn dikh nit* (Wir dürfen dich nicht egenmächtig malen)

Else Lasker Schüler

Fartift (Verinnerlicht)
O, Got (O, Gott)
Mayn shtil lid (Mein stilles Lied)*
Mayn libe-lid (Mein Liebeslied)
Dos taybele, vos shvimt (Täubchen, das in seinem eignen Blick schwimmt)
Frants verfel (Franz Werfel)
 Paul Tsekh (Paul Zech)
 *Only in the first anthology

Herman Hesse

Bay nakht (In der Nacht)
Tsu shpet (Zu spät)

Stefan Zweig

Harbst-sonet

Paul Zech

Der vald (part of a larger cycle of sonnettes - IX Reißt mir die Zunge aus: so habe ich noch Hände)

Albert Ehrenstein

Tog nokh tog (Blind) - I/36
Ot azoy (Leid) - I/45

Franz Werfel

Tsum leyener
Mir - nit

Kurt Heinecke

Gezang

Fun shlakhtfeld

Yvan Goll

Dem dikhter's toyt

*Der variete-n**er* (perhaps place this critically within Korman's Frilingdzshez poem)

Far a nayer mitologie

Der shtrayk

Max Bruns

Shtrikeray

Idilye

Franz Liudke

Fartog

Frits Filipi

Mir dakht zikh

פֿון אַנדערע שפּראַכן

Carl Sandburg

Gut morgn, amerike! (Good Morning, America!)

Ikh hob batrakht di erd

Meshuselekh hot gezen a sakh repetirungen

Efn di shtal-tir

Milkh vayse levone

אַאַמבאַ (transliteration unclear)

Efsher

מאַרדע (transliteration unclear)

Rats-retenishn

A libe-briv tsu Hans Kristian Andersen

Maria Shkapskaya

Es mest got bloyz eyn mol di blutike

Du hitst di shoen op fun dem fargeyn

Ven ikh vel zayn an alte

Forn nokh forn - der man mitn vayb

*Unter di trit farhartevete, vogike
Ikh gloyb dir, got, nor helf in dem
Altitshke muter*

Franz Werfel

*Tsum leyener
Mir - nit*

Alfred Mombert

*Bin-Hshamoses
S'iz shtil azoy
Fun bukh "Der denker"*

Ehrenstein:

German versions: *Albert Ehrenstein Werke* (Boer Verlag, 1997)

*Tog nokh tog (Blind) - I/36
Ot azoy (Leid) - I/45*

Stefan Zweig

Harbst-sonet

Lasker-Schüler:

German versions: *Else Lasker-Schüler Werke und Brief* (Jüdischer Verlag, 1996)

*O, Got (O, Gott)
Fartift (Verinnerlicht)
Frants verfel (Franz Werfel)
Paul Tsekh (Paul Zech)
Mayn libe-lid (Mein Liebeslied)
Dos taybele, vos shvimt (Täubchen, das in seinem eignen Blick schwimmt)*

Rilke:

German versions:

*Ikh leb oys mayn lebn (Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen)
Ver s'veynt (Ernste Stunde)
Vos vestu tun, got (Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?)
Ikh bin, vi di fon (Vorgefühl)*

Mayn neshome (Und meine Seele ist ein Weib vor dir)

Harbst-tog (Herbsttag)

Ver zolstu nit zayn (Eingang)

Fun di vigilies (Die falben Felder schlafen schon)

Bleter faln (Die Blätter fallen, fallen wie von weit)