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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

I have transliterated Yiddish sources according to the guidelines of the YIVO Institute and with reference to Isaac L. Bleaman's "Guidelines for Yiddish in Bibliographies: A Supplement to YIVO Transliteration," *In geveb* (2 July 2019). However, I have attempted to preserve the spellings used in the source text even when they deviate from YIVO standards. I have also cited numerous transliterations that do not follow these guidelines. Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are mine.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation shows how the intersection between German and Yiddish became an important but largely forgotten site of literary production in the long twentieth century. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, German and Yiddish came to be associated with divergent trajectories of Jewish modernity and were often understood to represent either side of a series of charged dichotomies, such as West and East, Germanness and Jewishness, assimilation and dissimilation. This project complicates this history of divergence by recovering a countertradition of writing in two languages, which, despite their linguistic proximity, have most often been considered apart. I assemble a diverse corpus of archival materials and published texts that reveal the widespread use of these languages in conjunction. I turn particular attention to practices of exophonic ('nonnative') writing, translation, transliteration, and commentary in the work of Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, Malka Lee, Franz Kafka, Bertha Pappenheim, Paul Celan, Shloyme Bikl, Yoysef Bernfeld, Freed Weininger, and Chava Rosenfarb, among others. In analyses of their work, I elucidate how their writing practices re- and disarticulate the relationship between German and Yiddish, often in experimental and formally inventive ways. In so doing, I demonstrate how this specific linguistic relationship came to matter in various contexts, including in the development of Yiddish modernism, in feminist efforts to recover women's history, and in debates about the future of Jewish cultural production in the wake of the Holocaust.

Committee: Na'ama Rokem and Eric L. Santner (co-advisors), Margareta Ingrid Christian, and Sunny Yudkoff

Keywords: German, Yiddish, German-Jewish Studies, Yiddish Studies, multilingualism, translation

INTRODUCTION

*a strange and intimate juxtaposition*¹

In 1947, the Jewish writer Rose Ausländer pens a poem to her “friends in Bucharest.” Born in Czernowitz—what is now Chernivtsi, Ukraine—in 1901, Ausländer “was brought up,” as she once phrased it, “in the German language.”² It was in this language, moreover, that she wrote the preponderance of her literary work, though she frequently stressed the multilingualism of the milieu in which she was raised, “the quadrilingual Czernowitz [...] an artistic city” (“[d]as viersprachige Czernowitz [...] eine musische Stadt”).³ She stressed, in particular, the copresence of German- and Yiddish-language writers in the city, which “brought forth the most important Yiddish poet, Itzik Manger, and two generations of German-language poets. The youngest and most important was Paul Celan, the oldest Alfred Margul-Sperber” (“[s]ie hat den bedeutendsten jiddischen Lyriker Itzig Manger und zwei Generationen deutschsprachiger Dichter hervorgebracht. Der jüngste und wichtigste war Paul Celan, der älteste Alfred Margul-Sperber”).⁴ While Ausländer had immigrated to the United States in the early 1920s with her then husband, she led an itinerant existence after the dissolution of her marriage and lived, for various periods of time, in New York and Bucharest. She also frequently returned to Czernowitz, then part of Romania, to care for her ailing mother and to publish her first book, *Der Regenbogen (The Rainbow)*, in 1939.⁵ It was during one of these trips that she also became, as she euphemistically put it, “caught in the war.”⁶

¹ The phrase “a strange and intimate juxtaposition” (“seltsame und vertraute Nebeneinander”) is taken from Gustav Landauer’s “Sind das Ketzergedanken?” in *Vom Judentum: Ein Sammelbuch*, ed. Hans Kohn (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1913), 250-257.

² Rose Ausländer, *Die Nacht hat zahllose Augen. Prosa* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2001), 152. See also Carmen Reichert, “Czernowitz und טשערנאָוויטץ: ein ‘mythe croisé’ und seine deutschen und jiddischen Bedeutungen am Beispiel von Rose Ausländer und Chaim Gininger,” in *Celan-Perspektiven*, eds. Bernd Auerochs, et al. (Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2021), 129-145.

³ Ibid., 92.

⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁵ Rose Ausländer, *Der Regenbogen* (Czernowitz: Verlag Literaria, 1939).

⁶ Ibid., 152.

During the Nazi occupation of Czernowitz, Ausländer was confined to the Jewish ghetto and took refuge in writing and, as she phrased it, “in dream-words, our traumatized home in the homelessness.”⁷ After the liquidation of the ghetto, she was forced into hiding and, under extreme conditions, survived. In August 1946, in the aftermath of the war, “she traveled to Bucharest from where she emigrated to New York the following month in the hope of also obtaining a visa for her mother, her brother, and his family.”⁸ She would soon learn, however that her mother had died in Satu Mare in 1947. It was in this pressurized context that Ausländer composed a poem to her “friends in Bucharest,” which she wrote, remarkably, not in German but in Yiddish (albeit in Latin rather than Hebrew letters). The first three stanzas of the poem, titled “Zu di Chavejrim in der Wait” (“To My Friends in the Distance”), read as follows:

»Of a schtejn, of a schtejn«
sitz ijch troirik un alejn.
Di Chavejrim senen wait
un es jukt an flit di Zait.

»S'tanzt a rejtach mit a chrejn«
sing ijch schtil zu mir alejn.
Kimt a brwil fun der Wait,
lach ijch un ijch wejn far fraid.

»Ijch bin oichet dort gewejn«
in di Jurn gut un schejn.
Efscher Kimt Meschiach's Zait
un er brengt ejch fun der Wait.⁹

“On a rock, on a rock”
I sit melancholy and alone.
My friends are distant,
and time flits and hastens.

“A radish dances with a horseradish”
I sing silently to myself alone.

⁷ Quoted in Kirsten Krick-Aigner, “Rose Ausländer,” *Jewish Women's Archive*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/auslander-rose#pid-11144>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Rose Ausländer, “Zu di Chavejrim in der Wait,” *Schattenwald. Gedichte, Gesamtregister*, ed. Helmut Braun (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2010), 15.

A message comes from the distance,
I laugh and I weep with joy.

“I was also over there”
in the good and beautiful years.
Maybe Moshiach’s Time Has Come
and he will bring you all from the distance.

Each stanza of this poem begins with a line from another poem by the Yiddish writer and educator Eliezer Shteynbarg.¹⁰ Included in his book *Alef-beys (Alphabet)*, which was designed, in part, to teach children how to read and write Hebrew letters, Shteynbarg’s poem recounts the fantastical meeting of “a radish with a horseradish” (“a reytekhn mit a khreyn”) on a rock.¹¹ When the two vegetables begin to dance, they attract the attention of nearby children, who take their dancing as a sign that the Messiah has come and, in response, “we[ep] with joy” (“me hot far freyd geveynt”).¹² In her poem, however, *Ausländer* does not depict two vegetables sitting on a rock but rather the speaker sitting alone. “The rock transforms,” as Carmen Reichert remarks, “from a place of encounter to a place of solitude” (“Der Stein wird also vom Ort der Begegnung zum Ort der Einsamkeit”).¹³ The speaker, “troirik un alejn,” hums silently to herself in remembrance and perhaps in mourning of her far-off friends; she does not witness but instead dreams of an impossible encounter. In light of *Ausländer*’s biography, the poem conveys the loneliness of exile and her desire and even desperation for closeness with those in the distance. Furthermore, in its very language, the poem reflects not only *Ausländer*’s biography but also her “bio-*graphy*,” to adopt a critical distinction made by Nelson Moe, which indexes “the process by which certain historically determined formations of personal

¹⁰ Reichert, “Czernowitz,” 140.

¹¹ Eliezer Shteynbarg, *Alef-beys* (Czernowitz: Bukhdrukeray ‘Orient,’ 1921), 124. The poem also circulated as a popular song; see Itzik Gottesman, “Af a shteyn zitst a reytekhn mit a khreyn’: Performed by Khavre Rosenblatt” (2017), *The Yiddish Song of the Week*, <https://yiddishsong.wordpress.com/2017/11/20/af-a-shteyn-zitst-a-reytekhn-mit-a-khreyn-performed-by-khave-rosenblatt/>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 124.

¹³ Reichert, “Czernowitz,” 140.

experience come to structure the field of possibilities for the practice of writing.”¹⁴ The language of the poem testifies to Ausländer’s apparent need, in the wake of the Holocaust, to turn away from German, at least for a time, and to embrace the expressive possibilities of a language that had not been contaminated by Nazi use—to find respite, moreover, in a language that she read and perhaps spoke but in which she rarely wrote.

In its linguistic details, Ausländer’s poem also explores the simultaneous closeness and distance between Yiddish and German. It is a poem that is about these languages as much as it is about the experience of exile. Lital Levy explains that “language is not just the raw stuff of literature but can also be a literary topos, an object of representation, in its own right; as Mikhail Bakhtin would have it, language in literature is always both *represented* and *representing*.”¹⁵ By writing her poem in Yiddish, however, Ausländer turns language into “an object of representation” in a way that sets it apart from most other poems. She draws attention, that is, not only to matters of figuration, intertextuality, rhythm, and word choice but also to the fact that the poem is written in one language and not in another. In this regard, as already noted, she attunes the reader, in the wake of catastrophe, to the different expressive possibilities of Yiddish and German and thus to their distance—to the “abysses” between them.¹⁶ In her use of Latin letters, however, she also harnesses the closeness of these languages and makes her poem, at least to a certain degree, accessible to both a German- and Yiddish-reading audience.¹⁷ But there is also a degree of knowing irony in her use of

¹⁴ Nelson Moe, “At the Margins of Dominion: The Poetry of Amelia Rosselli,” *Italica* 69, no. 2 (1992): 185. Also quoted in Amelia Rosselli, *Loco Motrix: Selected Poetry and Prose of Amelia Rosselli*, ed./trans., Jennifer Scappettone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 2.

¹⁵ Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4. See also Mikhail Bakhtin, “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

¹⁶ Paul Celan, *»etwas ganz und gar Persönliches« - Briefe 1934-1970*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019), 427.

¹⁷ In referring to “a German-reading audience,” I build on the terminology of Marc Volovici. In his book *German as a Jewish Problem*, Volovici argues that “[e]xploring the presence of German across borders makes it important to draw a distinction: the use of the category ‘German-speaking Jews’ can be misleading because it assumes a level of knowledge and active use that usually did not apply to those living outside German-speaking areas. Instead, this book points to the category of ‘German-reading Jews,’ a geographically broader group, ranging from Russia to the Americas and to

transliteration, as she repeatedly cites verses from a book quite literally about the Hebrew alphabet. In these complex and often contradictory ways, the poem inhabits the intersection between Yiddish and German and reveals it as a dense, intimate, and tense space. It is a space that *Ausländer*—and a remarkable number of other Jewish writers—explored not merely to ‘problematize’ or to ‘thematize’ language but rather to orient themselves and to find a way to speak amid the pressures of twentieth-century history.¹⁸

In this dissertation, I uncover a countertradition of texts that, like “Zu di Chavejrim in der Wait,” inhabit the fraught intersection between Yiddish and German. I demonstrate how this intersection served as a concentrated space for literary experimentation and reflection throughout the long twentieth century. My focus lies primarily on the poetry and prose of modern Jewish writers for whom language use itself proved contentious. In central and eastern Europe, these writers typically wrote in Yiddish or Hebrew or in the regional vernacular, such as German, Polish, or Russian—languages that were subject to aesthetic, affective, and ideological discord. In recent decades, scholars working within a transnational or diasporic framework have done much to reconstruct this multilingual field and to acknowledge the multiplicity of a writer’s literary (and other) affiliations, which are, as Chana Kronfeld remarks, “partial, potentially contradictory, and ambivalent.”¹⁹ However, within this larger field, we still lack a sufficient account of the complex

Palestine, and including individuals who acquired German at some stage of their lives without it necessarily being central to their self-understanding.” Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 7. While *Ausländer* grew up speaking German and, of course, used the language actively, we cannot assume that her “friends in the distance” or the other imagined audiences of her poem were equally fluent in German and Yiddish.

¹⁸ I draw here from Peter Waterhouse’s reading of Paul Celan’s “Wolfsbohne”: “Sprache in diesem Gedicht wird aber nicht angesprochen, um sie zu ‘problematisieren’ oder thematisieren, sondern um eine Sprache zu finden und zu sprechen.” Peter Waterhouse, “Un, an, Amen, atmen, Deutschland: Versuch über Paul Celans Gedicht ‘Wolfsbohne,’” *Text+Kritik: Zeitschrift für Literatur* 53/54: Paul Celan (2002): 38

¹⁹ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

relationship between German- and Yiddish-language literature, despite the intimately entwined histories of these languages (often operative within a single family) and despite the fact that their linguistic closeness enabled the creation of uniquely hybrid forms (e.g., the extensive use of transliteration in place of translation). Indeed, the mutual intelligibility of both languages, however limited, meant that their meeting was dialectically complex in ways distinct from other forms of bi- and multilingualism.

Before the age of emancipation and the onset of the Haskalah, or the Jewish Enlightenment, in the late eighteenth century, Yiddish was spoken widely by the Jewish population across Europe, including “in central and western Europe,” where, as Max Weinreich notes, Jews “were attached to Yiddish not by a formulated ideology, but because it was their own indigenous possession.”²⁰ In the late eighteenth century, however, the linguistic practices of Ashkenazic Jews began to transform in dramatic fashion and to fracture—though never absolutely or neatly—along geographical lines. In central and western Europe, the use of and ‘attachment’ to Yiddish was confronted not only with the impact of acculturation but with “a concentrated attack” by the state and, as Weinreich accentuates, by “a newly risen Jewish intelligentsia that spoke loudly in the name of universal culture against the backwardness of the ghetto.”²¹ While Yiddish never disappeared from central and western Europe and “merely retreated to a rear line of defense under the onslaught of hostile forces,” the Jewish population in this region increasingly adopted German as their primary language—not merely as a means to participate in commerce and higher education but as the language of culture and the home.²² The ramifications of this linguistic shift were far-reaching and remain only partially understood. As the historian Aya Elyada notes, “the language shift from

²⁰ Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, Volume 1, ed. Paul Glasser, trans. Shlomo Noble, with the assistance of Joshua A. Fishman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 280.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 281.

²² *Ibid.*, 282.

Yiddish to German, which took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was likely the most crucial development in the cultural history of German Jews, at least since the late Middle Ages.”²³ In eastern Europe, by contrast, Yiddish remained the everyday language of most, if not all, of the Jewish population and increasingly became a source of national identification. It was also in this region that an institutional infrastructure for modern Yiddish culture was first built, which included, as David E. Fishman notes, “the daily and periodical press, publishing houses, libraries, theaters, literary and cultural associations, schools and academies.”²⁴

In this light, beginning in the late eighteenth century, German and Yiddish came to be associated with divergent trajectories of Jewish modernity, and their relative value became the object of intense debate. The two languages were often understood to represent either side of a series of charged dichotomies, such as West and East, Germanness and Jewishness, assimilation and dissimulation, or, at the level of script, writing from left to right and right to left, in the Latin and Hebrew alphabets. While I highlight texts that challenge or complicate these dichotomies, I contend that the intersection between Yiddish and German became a productive site of literary production precisely because it was beset by these tensions. In the twentieth century, after the linguistic transformations of the preceding centuries had already become entrenched, a surprising number of writers explored the fraught relationship between these languages as a means to rethink and resist the ideological categories that had come to structure modern Jewish life and culture. While these writers often reaffirmed rigid understandings of these languages, they also tarried with their aesthetic, emotional, and material qualities and, thereby, with their “ideological excess.”²⁵ They were concerned, that is, with the transformative potential of the German-Yiddish encounter—not merely

²³ Aya Elyada, “Introduction: Yiddish in German and German-Jewish Culture,” *Nabaraim* 10, no. 2 (2016): 169.

²⁴ David E. Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), vii.

²⁵ Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem*, 39.

with the representation and management of their social situation, but, to extend an insight of Eve Sedgwick, with the “experimental, creative, performative” force of language and literature.²⁶

In this dissertation, I thus aim to broaden and deepen our understanding of the relationship between German- and Yiddish-language literature in the long twentieth century and, in turn, to contribute to a growing body of scholarship on the multilingual histories of modern Jewish literature and to the larger effort to expand, in “temporal, spatial, and vertical directions,” the history of global modernism.²⁷ As a result of extensive archival and bibliographic research, I identify a number of disregarded or overlooked texts that expand our knowledge of how these languages have been brought together in and through literary writing.²⁸ While I organize the three main chapters around the work or the reception of Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886-1932), Bertha Pappenheim (1859-1936), and Paul Celan (1920-1970), I also consider a range of texts by both well- and lesser-known figures, such as Shloyme Bikl (1896-1969), Yoysef Bernfeld (1893-1972), Nathan Birnbaum (1864-1937), Martin Buber (1878-1965), Abraham Coralnik (1883-1937), Franz Kafka (1883-1924), David Kaufmann (1852-1899), Malka Lee (1904-1976), Avrom Reyzen (1876-1953), Chava Rosenfarb (1923-2011), Ludwig Strauss (1892-1953), Avrom Sutzkever (1913-2010), and Freed Weininger (1915-1988), among others. In delineating loose networks of writers across time and space, I focus less on direct encounters between writers than on shared practices of reading and writing at the

²⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” *GLQ* 1 (1993): 4.

²⁷ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, for instance, note that the new modernist studies is characterized by its “expansive tendency.” They note that “[w]ere one seeking a single word to sum up transformations in modernist literary scholarship over the past decade or two, one could do worse than light on *expansion* [...] all period-centered areas of literary scholarship have broadened in scope, and this in what we might think of as temporal, spatial, and vertical directions.” By the vertical expansion, they refer to how the “once quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered; in which canons have been critiqued and reconfigured; in which works by members of marginalized social groups have been encountered with fresh eyes and ears; and in which scholarly inquiry has increasingly extended to matters of production, dissemination, and reception.” Mao and Walkowitz, “The New Modernist Studies,” *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (May 2008): 737-38.

²⁸ I also build on the finding of earlier bibliographic studies, such as Amy Blau’s “Afterlives: Translations of German *Weltliteratur* into Yiddish.” Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005. Thomas Soxberger is also completing a bibliography on Yiddish publications in Vienna. See his forthcoming »Gründen wir einen jiddischen Verlag!« - *Jiddische Bücher und Broschüren aus Wien (1915-1938)*.

nexus of German and Yiddish, such as exophonic (or ‘nonnative’) writing, translation, transliteration, and commentary. I have collated a motley group, but it is one that speaks in its very diversity to the breadth of efforts to write and think these languages together—even if these efforts often resulted in conclusions that emphasized difference and incommensurability.

In addition to the empirical work of identifying and assembling scattered texts, both published and unpublished, this dissertation is animated by the question of how to read texts that think and experiment across languages. In an attempt to account for their complexity and import, I dwell on seemingly minor details of language and style and try to unpack how these details register and respond to the pressures and possibilities of modernity. In so doing, I combine historical and formalist approaches and build on the methodological innovations of scholars, such as Craig Dworkin, who read closely and contextually. In a recent study, for instance, Dworkin argues that “attending to the material forms of language can reveal significations not accessible through conventional reading strategies” and that doing so need not be “segregated from political concerns and social conditions.”²⁹ In similar fashion, in the chapters that follow, I draw attention to the materiality of multilingual texts and consider how they use and think about different alphabets, orthographies, and even phonemes not as ends in themselves but as a means to reflect and, more importantly, to resist the contexts in which they emerged.

While I aim to uncover and unpack the productive work that took place at the intersection between German and Yiddish, I am also attuned to the fact that most of this work has either been disregarded or considered as a failure. On the one hand, in assembling a large and diverse corpus of

²⁹ Craig Dworkin, *Radium of the Word: A Poetics of Materiality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 1. Dworkin notes that his goal is “to take up the challenge of Veronica Forrest-Thomson’s admonition that ‘the best way to restore value to poetic artifice is to find ways of discussing it that do not presuppose the subservience of form to extended meaning.’” *Ibid.*, 1-2.

texts, this dissertation reveals that such work took place throughout the twentieth century and in multiple and transnational contexts; in what follows, I analyze texts that were produced, for example, in Berlin, Cleveland, Czernowitz, Montreal, Neu-Isenburg, New York, Paris, Tel Aviv, and Vienna. But these texts were, on the other hand, not always widely received or even published, and they were not necessarily representative of their author's work as a whole. This does not mean, however, that they are unworthy of sustained attention. Building on recent scholarship, especially in queer studies, that affirms the critical potential of failure, Elizabeth McHenry avers that "[l]iterary history seldom privileges that which is unsuccessful, whether in terms of writers and texts never recognized by publication, or projects that remained incomplete or unfulfilled."³⁰ "But," as she underlines, "these writers, texts, and projects are no less a part of literary history."³¹

"Zu di Chavejrim in der Wait" is a case in point. While *Ausländer* remained in contact with Yiddish writers throughout her life and translated a small number of Yiddish poems, she only composed—at least as far as I know—this one poem in Yiddish. She composed the remainder of her literary work in German and, for a period of time in the aftermath of World War II, in English. In this regard, one might consider her Yiddish poem as an experiment that failed. I would contend, however, that despite or even because of its anomalous status, the poem provides insight into foreclosed possibilities that deepen our understanding of what she and other writers were trying to do with language and into the manifold challenges that they faced. It is a poem that withstands, in the very strangeness of its language, the degradation and violence that conditioned its production. In 1953, A. E. Friedmann sends a letter that limns these conditions. He writes to Ilana Shmueli, a Hebrew- and German-language writer and close friend and interlocutor of Paul Celan. Friedmann

³⁰ Elizabeth McHenry, *To Make Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 5. See also José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); and Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

³¹ McHenry, *To Make Negro Literature*, 5.

reports to her about their mutual friend Chaim Ginninger, an important Yiddish linguist, whom Shmueli had befriended in Czernowitz. In his letter, written in English, Friedmann paints a dark—and arguably distorted—picture of the linguist’s life in exile and, more generally, of the effects of war and displacement on the culture of “the quadrilingual Czernowitz.” He writes:

Poor Ginninger. I met him on the boat when I picked my mother up. [...] I saw him again later when I made it a point to go [...] to a speech [*siz*] that he was giving in a class of a jewish [*siz*] public school in New York, in a neighborhood that roughly corresponds to the Synagogengasse in Czernowitz. He had an appointment for a while to teach yiddish [*siz*], but it is here a dying culture. He looked almost pathetic speaking about something that is as dead here as a doornail. All of us were listening politely, but there was no real interest. Only Rosa Auslaender and a few of the faithful participated in any sense. The yiddish [*siz*] culture has returned whence it came, into the slums, and it is being chased even from there.³²

Friedmann focuses his remarks on the fate of Yiddish culture, which he demeans as the property of “the slums,” but the very language of his letter also bespeaks the abasement, if not the ‘death,’ of German culture. Born in Dresden, Germany, Friedmann fled to Czernowitz after the rise of National Socialism and, not long after, survived internment in the ghetto and in forced labor camps before escaping to Palestine.³³ He eventually immigrated to the United States, where he found a job in Chicago and where, as he phrases it in his letter, he lived in the midst of “refrigerators, automobiles and television sets.” By writing to Shmueli in English, rather than in German, their shared mother tongue, he intimates that he has already left the languages of the “Synagogengasse” behind. It seems that, for him, German, in addition to Yiddish, has become obsolete. While Friedmann’s letter reflects his own biases, it also points to the difficulty and isolation of the position that *Ausländer* occupies when she writes her poem to her “friends in the distance.” It also bespeaks, against the grain of its intention, the resistance of that position. In the face of indifference, *Ausländer* affirms the perspective of an ostensibly “dying culture;” in related ways, the writers that

³² Letter from A. E. Friedmann to Ilana Shmueli (addressed to “Lyane J. Schindler”), 1953. Papers of Ilana Shmueli (Ilana Shemu’eli), Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Literaturarchiv 401/B8/1 – B8/6.

³³ See A. Edward Friedmann, *A. Edward Friedmann: A Holocaust Memoir* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009).

populate the following chapters transmit, in the “brilliant offness” of their language, the perspectives of those who have been discriminated against and humiliated, of the sick and poor, of women denied education, and of those who have been persecuted and forced to flee.³⁴

Despite their linguistic closeness, German and Yiddish have most often been studied apart. In recent decades, however, scholars have begun to explore alternatives to this history of divergence, reconsidering the medieval and early modern past and its afterlives, turning attention to regions where language contact remained common (e.g., Habsburg Bukovina and Galicia), and utilizing comparative approaches that bring these languages into proximity without effacing their differences and without denying their disparities in power. In 1986, Sander Gilman published an influential study, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, which examines “how a group defined as different by society as well as by itself responds to one very specific stereotype, the image of its language and discourse.”³⁵ Gilman explores “the history of anti-Jewish attitudes in German from this relatively narrow perspective and [autopsies] the resultant acceptance (or rejection) of this perception.”³⁶ In large parts of his study, he considers the relationship between German and Yiddish, albeit in ways that foreground their antagonism and embroilment in stereotypes. In subsequent decades, a number of scholars have considered this linguistic relationship beyond what Gilman himself admits is his “relatively narrow perspective.” Marion Aptroot, Ruth von Bernuth, Aya Elyada, Jerold Frakes, Astrid Lembke, and Erika Timm, among others, have provided nuanced accounts of the interplay between Yiddish and German in the medieval and early

³⁴ McHenry, *To Make Negro Literature*, 5-6.

³⁵ Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), ix.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

modern periods.³⁷ In *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany: From the Enlightenment to the Second Empire* (2000) and, more recently, in a series of important articles, Jeffrey A. Grossman has shed light on what he calls the “Yiddish-German connection.”³⁸ Furthermore, building on the formative work of Steven Aschheim, Michael Brenner, and Paul Mendes-Flohr, a number of scholars, including Delphine Bechtel, Nick Block, Marc Caplan, Allison Schachter, Rachel Seelig, and Samuel Spinner, have highlighted the messy but generative encounter between German- and Yiddish-speaking Jews during World War I and the interwar period.³⁹ Sonia Gollance, Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz, Armin Eindherr, Thomas Soxberger, Efrat Gal-Ed, Lea Schäfer, and Kalman Weiser have further explored topics such as the confluence of Yiddish and German in popular culture, the place of Yiddish culture in Austria-Hungary, the phenomenon of linguistic imitation, and the tainted history of Yiddish linguistics in Germany.⁴⁰ Taken together, these diverse (and not always cohesive) groupings

³⁷ See, for example, Isaak Euchel, *Reb Henoch, oder: Woß tut me damit. Eine jüdische Komödie der Aufklärungszeit*, eds. Marion Aptroot and Roland Gruschka (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 2004); Ruth von Bernuth, *How the Wise Men Got to Chelm: The Life and Times of a Yiddish Folk Tradition* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Aya Elyada, *A Goy Who Speaks Yiddish: Christians and the Jewish Language in Early Modern Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Jerold C. Frakes, *The Politics of Interpretation: Alterity & Ideology in Old Yiddish Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Astrid Lembke, “Aventiuren in Aschkenas. Jüdische Aneignungen nichtjüdischer Texte und Erzählstoffe in vormodernen Europa,” *Aschkenas* 25, no. 1 (2015): 1-10; and Erika Timm, *Historische jiddische Semantik. Die Bibelübersetzungssprache als Faktor der Auseinanderentwicklung des jiddischen und des deutschen Wortschatzes* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005).

³⁸ Jeffrey A. Grossman, *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany: From the Enlightenment to the Second Empire* (Rochester: Camden House, 2000); Grossman, “The Yiddish-German Connection: New Directions,” *Poetics Today* 36, no. 1-2 (2015): 59-110.

³⁹ Steven E. Aschheim, *Brotbers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1982); Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991); Delphine Bechtel, *La Renaissance culturelle juive en Europe centrale et orientale, 1897-1930: Langue, littérature et construction nationale* (Paris: Belin, 2002); Nicholas Block, “In the Eyes of Others: The Dialectics of German-Jewish and Yiddish Modernisms,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2013; Marc Caplan, *Yiddish Writers in Weimar Berlin: A Fugitive Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021); Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Rachel Seelig, *Strangers in Berlin: Modern Jewish Literature between East and West* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016); and Samuel J. Spinner, *Jewish Primitivism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021).

⁴⁰ Sonia Gollance, *It Could Lead to Dancing: Mixed-Sex Dancing and Jewish Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021); Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz, ed., *In a Shtetl woss shtarbt. Jiddische Lyrik aus Wien* (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 1995); Kohlbauer-Fritz, ed., *Zwischen Ost und West. Galizische Juden und Wien* (Vienna: Jüdisches Museum, 2000); Armin Eindherr, *Sonnenuntergang auf eisig-blauen Wegen. Zur Thematisierung von Diaspora und Sprache in der jiddischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: University of Vienna Press, 2012); Thomas Soxberger, *Revolution am Donaukanal: Jiddische Kultur und Politik in Wien 1904 bis 1938* (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2013); Efrat Gal-Ed, “The Local and the European: Itzik Manger and his Autumn Landscape,” trans. Lawrence Rosenwald, *Prooftexts* 31, nos. 1-2 (2011): 31-59; Lea Schäfer, *Sprachliche Imitation. Jiddisch in der deutschsprachigen Literatur (18.-20. Jahrhundert)* (Berlin: Language Science Press, 2017); and Kalman

of scholars have created an open field of interdisciplinary research—what might be termed “German-Yiddish studies”—that participates in a larger multilingual turn pioneered by scholars such as Dan Miron, Benjamin Harshav, and Chana Kronfeld in the academic study of Jewish literature and culture.⁴¹ They have inaugurated “an investigation that takes its cue from an academic environment within which a discrete and isolated conception of single languages and single literary traditions is increasingly discredited and replaced by the global perspective, by world literature and translation studies,” as Amir Eshel and Na’ama Rokem note in their account of the related “field of German-Hebrew studies.”⁴²

In much of the scholarship outlined above, the focus lies on specific encounters between German- and Yiddish-language writers in particular times and places or on the emergence of distinctive ‘subcultures.’⁴³ In contrast, I focus on practices of reading and writing at the intersection of these languages that connect a diverse range of writers across time and space. While I am also interested in—and, on occasion, insist upon—the importance of certain cities (e.g., Czernowitz and Vienna) or of actual and epistolary meetings between writers (e.g., Paul Celan and Fred Weininger), I contend that these local cases ought also to be seen as part of a larger countertradition of writing that has not yet been recognized.

In this dissertation, I begin the project of mapping this countertradition. While the three main chapters are organized around specific writers, each chapter also investigates shared practices of exophonic (or ‘non-native’) writing, translation, transliteration, and commentary that reveal the

Weiser, “‘One of Hitler’s Professors’: Max Weinreich and Solomon Birnbaum confront Franz Beranek,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 108, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 106-124.

⁴¹ Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*; Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); and Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁴² Amir Eshel and Na’ama Rokem, “German and Hebrew: Histories of a Conversation,” *Prooftexts* 33, no. 1 (2013): 5.

⁴³ For the latter, see Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz, “Die jiddische Subkultur in Wien und die jüdische Arbeiterbewegung,” in *Judentum und Arbeiterbewegung. Das Ringen um Emanzipation in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Markus Börner, et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 51-62.

unique forms of bilingual expression that were made possible by the linguistic closeness between German and Yiddish. In the first chapter, I concentrate on the work of Moyshe-Leyb Halpern and, to a lesser degree, on the early notebooks of Malka Lee. While both writers were native speakers of Yiddish, they first began to write in German before switching (back) to Yiddish in their mature work. I narrate how their biographies—marked by migration, violence, and anti-Jewish persecution—shaped their writing and language. I reconstruct, in particular, how Halpern’s early engagement with German-language literature and culture continued to inform his poetry and prose long after he ceased to write in German. In the second chapter, I delineate the complex forms of translation and transliteration that emerged out of the interplay between German and Yiddish and develop a critical account of the notion that it is impossible to translate between these languages, as propagated by Franz Kafka and Gershom Scholem, among others. In turn, I consider writing practices that combined translation and transcription, with a particular focus on Bertha Pappenheim’s renditions of Glikl’s memoirs and of the *Maysse-bukh* and *Tsene-rene*. I show how Pappenheim harnessed the relationship between German and Yiddish in her hybrid translation work, what I call “off-translation,” and in support of a feminist recovery of the cultural history of Jewish women. In the third chapter, I consider how the relationship between German and Yiddish was transformed in the wake of the Holocaust. I reconstruct the Yiddish-language reception of Paul Celan’s life and work, with a particular focus on his poem “Todesfuge” (“Death Fugue”). This extensive and understudied reception history consists of poems, translations, transcriptions, and critical essays—by Shloyme Bikl, Yoysef Bernfeld, Freed Weinger, Avrom Sutzkever, and Chava Rosenfarb, among others—that extend and refashion many of the formal experiments and debates outlined in the previous chapters. Finally, a brief epilogue turns attention to letters between Alfred Döblin and Nathan Birnbaum that point to the contingency and instability of their linguistic trajectories.

CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE CHANGE: MOYSHE-LEYB HALPERN AND THE ARCHIVES OF GERMAN-YIDDISH LITERATURE

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.
--James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

At the turn of the century, while traveling from Poland to Switzerland, the “postclassical” Yiddish writer Avrom Reyzen (1876-1953) decides to explore Vienna during a stopover and, entranced by its beauty, ends up staying in the city for a few days.¹ While walking the wide avenues, he recalls a review of one of his books, published in the Zionist newspaper *Die Welt*, by Abraham Coralnik (1883-1937), which he considers, as he later writes in his memoirs, “a sign that [the reviewer] must know Yiddish” (“a simn, az er ken yidish”).² Reyzen decides to seek out the reviewer as a possible city guide and soon ends up in the editorial offices of the newspaper, where he’s instructed, in German, to wait for Coralnik’s arrival. While waiting, Reyzen discovers “a true treasure” (“an emeser oytser”): a large pile of Yiddish-language newspapers from around the world, including many that he hadn’t yet seen from the United States.³ His discovery suggests, if only fleetingly, that Yiddish culture, in its transnational reach, had found an audience in the imperial capital. Reyzen’s excitement soon tempers, however, when he realizes that the newspapers, while substantial in number, had been largely ignored: “I understood that the Yiddish newspapers here, in the editorial offices of *Die Welt*, had not been read... Apparently they hadn’t found any enthusiasts, nor were there any Yiddish experts here. Many of the pages had arrived via post, or via ship, and they were still bundled in the

¹ Barbara and Benjamin Harshav refer to Reyzen as a “postclassical” writer to index the fact that he began to write in the shadow of Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Y. L. Peretz, the three so-called “klassiker” of Yiddish literature. Barbara and Benjamin Harshav, eds., *Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry: A Historical Anthology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 201.

² Avrom Reyzen, *Epizodn fun mayn lebn: literarische erinerungen* (Vilna: B. Kletskin, 1929), 221.

³ *Ibid.*, 225.

wrappers with which they had been sent on their weekslong journey...⁴ (“Ikh hob farshtanen, az do in der redaktsye fun ‘der velt’ vern di dozike yidishe tsaytungen nit ibergeleynt... Nito, kentik, keyn balonim oyf zey un keyn groyse kener fun yidish iz do mistome oykh nito. Fil fun di bleter zaynen ongekumen fun der post, tsi fun der shif, mit velkher zey hobn durkhgemakht zeyer porvokhike reyze, azoy zaynen zey nokh gelegn ayngviklt in di banderoln...”).⁵ He realizes that, while Yiddish literature had made its way to Vienna, it had found exceedingly few readers there.

Despite this realization, Reyzen is heartened by the heaps of newspapers and later recalls that, while flipping through them, “he had almost forgotten that [he] was in Vienna, thinking that [he] was sitting at home and reading Yiddish” (“hob ikh zikh shir nit fargesn, az ikh gefin zikh in Vin, gemeynt, az ikh zits bay zikh in der heym un leyn yidish”).⁶ The newspapers provide momentary respite from the strangeness of his new surroundings, serving as a kind of “portable homeland” (“ein portatives Vaterland”), as Heinrich Heine once wrote with reference to the Bible in exile.⁷ Born in Koidanov, in what is now Belarus, Reyzen had grown up in the Russian Empire and, as a young writer, made his way to Warsaw, where he participated in an established and dynamic Yiddish cultural scene, contributed to major newspapers, and collaborated with the likes of Y. L. Peretz, Hersh Dovid Nomberg, and Sholem Asch, who had set Yiddish literature on a new path.⁸ In Vienna, in contrast, Reyzen finds himself in a linguistic and cultural context in which he feels “foreign” (“filndik zikh fremd in der groyser shtot vin”). In this regard, in his memoirs, he surmises that he was perhaps drawn to the offices of *Die Welt*—beyond his recollection of Coralnik’s review

⁴ Ibid., 225.

⁵ Ibid., 225.

⁶ Ibid., 227.

⁷ Heinrich Heine, “Geständnisse,” *Sämtliche Werke. Düsseldorfer Ausgabe*, vol. 15, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1982), 44.

⁸ Nathan Cohen, “Reyzen, Avrom,” trans. Carrie Friedman-Cohen, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (online). Under the influence of Peretz, as Kalman Weiser notes, “[Nomberg] and his Warsaw flatmates Avrom Reyzen and Sholem Asch formed the ‘triad’ of leading young Yiddish writers.” Weiser, “Nomberg, Hersh Dovid,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (online).

and despite his own anti-Zionism—because he “did not have any other *svive*” (“[n]it hobndik keyn andere svive biklal”).⁹ In Yiddish, *svive* can mean ‘surroundings,’ ‘environment,’ or ‘milieu,’ but, in this context, it suggests a deeper sense of cultural belonging, a space in which one feels, if not at home, at least more at ease. For despite his initial attraction to the city, Reyzen soon feels alienated from and even incapacitated by it.

Reyzen’s recollection of his brief stay in Vienna provides entrée into a larger history of cultural encounters and mis-encounters. While the unopened and unread newspapers reflect merely a superficial engagement with Yiddish culture, they also index a more complicated story about the faltering efforts of a number of writers, editors, and publishers to establish meaningful connections between Yiddish- and German-language writers and readers. Throughout this dissertation, I highlight some of these efforts, which included, most prominently, translation and transliteration projects. But in the sections that follow, I want to consider some of the other matters that animate the scenes recounted above: the manifold effects of migration on literary production, the problems of cultural alienation and disregard, and the often surprising histories contained in overlooked (and incomplete) archives. I will focus primarily on the poet and writer Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886-1932) and, to a lesser degree, on Malka Lee (1904-1976), both of whom were born to Yiddish-speaking families in Hapsburg Galicia. Under the cultural pull of the metropole, these poets began to write in German before switching back to their mother tongue in their mature work. Like Reyzen, they registered, in their published and unpublished writing, both the attractions and often bruising pressures of cultural life in (or oriented toward) Vienna. Unlike Reyzen, however, they endeavored, at least for a time, to write in German. In this chapter, I thus aim to recover a largely obscured history of writing at the nexus of Yiddish and German, with a particular focus on poets who lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the *fin de siècle*. In what follows, I will outline the linguistic

⁹ Reyzen, *Epizodn*, 233.

trajectories of these poets, in conversation with a host of other writers, and tease out the different reasons they switched between languages in their literary work. I will further consider how their engagement with German, which has been glossed over in most (if not all) literary-historical accounts, shaped their later work and, in turn, the development of Yiddish modernism. In so doing, I will also expound on the fragile relationship between archival and literary-historical knowledge, which is a central preoccupation of this dissertation as a whole.

Before turning to Halpern's life and work in detail, I want first to stay a bit longer with the encounter between Reyzen and Coralnik, which sheds light on the contexts and multilayered 'backgrounds' of multilingual writing in fin-de-siècle Vienna. When Coralnik arrives at the offices of *Die Welt*, he does not speak to Reyzen in Yiddish or German but rather in Russian, resounding his own history of migration. Born in Uman', in what is now Ukraine, Coralnik grew up, like Reyzen, in the Pale of Settlement, where Jews were restricted to live in the Russian Empire. But while Reyzen embraced Yiddish as a language of literary production, Coralnik initially gravitated toward German, the language in which he wrote for *Die Welt* and other newspapers and in which he penned a number of dramatic plays and a dissertation about philosophical skepticism. While Coralnik also contributed to Russian newspapers in the first decades of the twentieth century, he wrote relatively little in Yiddish until he immigrated to New York, where he became a prominent figure in the Yiddish press. His path toward Yiddish, a language that he grew up speaking but that he only came to embrace in middle age, was thus winding and uncertain.

The difficulty of this path is intimated in one of the few articles that Coralnik wrote in Yiddish before immigrating: "Di yudishe froy" ("The Jewish Woman"), which appeared in *Dos yudishe vort*, a Warsaw-based journal edited by Reyzen. Published in 1904, shortly after Reyzen's stay in Vienna, the article makes the dubious but telling claim, in a Yiddish markedly influenced by

modern German vocabulary and orthography, that “the goal of a woman is to be a mother. A mother of new thoughts, new ideas. The goal of a Jewish mother is to be a mother of a new Jewish cultural world” (“[d]os tsiel fun der froy iz a mutter tsu zayn. A mutter fun naye gedanken, naye ideen. Dos tsiel fun der yudisher froy iz a mutter tsu zayn fun a nayer yudisher kultur velt”).¹⁰ While ostensibly focused on questions of gender, Reyzen’s article speaks to a wider movement, however diffuse and multifaceted, aimed at the revitalization of Jewish cultural life, at what Martin Buber called, a few years earlier, “Juedische Renaissance.”¹¹ Coralnik’s work for Zionist publications such as *Die Welt* and his peregrinations between languages point to his own—often contradictory—efforts to fashion “a new Jewish cultural world.” Yet the paratextual apparatus of “Di yudishe froy” also points up the difficulties of such efforts, especially those centered on language as a site of cultural, ideological, and social transformation. In the article, Coralnik bemoans the paucity of depictions of women, of their “kharakteristik,” in Yiddish literature, noting that “the only writer who has offered a characterization of the Jewish woman in *our literature* is Y. L. Peretz” (“[d]er eyntsiger shriftshteler vos hot in *unzer literatur* a tipus fun der yudishen froy gegeben [...] iz Y. L. Peretz”).¹² In a remarkable editorial intervention, Reyzen appends a footnote to this passage, signed “The ed.” (“Di red.”), in which he remarks that “the esteemed journalist seems better acquainted with European literature than with Yiddish, otherwise he would have considered, beyond Peretz’s female characters, those of Sholem Aleichem (Esterke, Rokhele, and others), Spektor, Dinezohn, and yet others” (“[v]i es shaynt iz der geehrter publitsist mit der eyropeisher literatur mehr bekant vi mit der yudisher, zont volt er, oyser fun Peretz’s froyen-geshtaltn oykh gerekhent Sholem-

¹⁰ Abraham Coralnik, “Di yudishe froy,” in *Dos yudishe vort: A zshurnal*, ed. Avrom Reyzen (Warsaw: Ferlag Progress, 1904), 28.

¹¹ Martin Buber, “Juedische Renaissance,” *Ost und West* 1 (1901): 7-10. Asher Biemann has underscored the links between Buber’s rhetoric of renaissance and rebirth and that of early Zionist discourse. Biemann, “The Problem of Tradition and Reform in Jewish Renaissance and Renaissancism,” *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (2001): 61.

¹² Coralnik, “Di yudishe froy,” 28. Emphasis added.

Alechem's (Esterke, Rokhele un andere), Spektor's, Dinezohn's un nokh andere").¹³ In citing these passages, I want to draw attention more to their subtext than to their content. While Reyzen is correct as far as it goes, both writers espouse a patriarchal and exclusionary understanding of Yiddish literary history (one in which there are no women writers). It is worth dwelling, however, on Reyzen's editorial intervention, which seems to dismiss Coralnik's identification with the project of modern Yiddish literature, with, as he phrases it, "unzer literatur." In pointing out the gaps in his reading list, Reyzen intimates the manifold difficulties of moving between languages, including the writer's need to grapple not only with linguistic but also with cultural dysfluency (a 'problem' that is, of course, often productive¹⁴) and with the expectations of a new set of readers and cultural elite. He turns attention, that is, to "matters of ability, personality, identity formation, environment, and imagined readers or listeners," which, as Anita Norich argues, condition and motivate multilingual practice.¹⁵ Reyzen insists, furthermore, on the disjunction between the "Yiddish" (or "Jewish") and the "European," two categories that, as will be seen in the course of this chapter, have been considered both as interlinked and incompatible. At a time of major cultural transformations, shaped, in part, by a burgeoning Jewish nationalist movement, he underscores the challenges rather than the possibilities of language change.

Reyzen's footnote refracts debates about language that gained intensity in the first decades of the twentieth century. In scholarship on Jewish cultural history, these debates have often been subsumed under the notion of a 'language war'—a *shprakhnkampf* in Yiddish or a *riv haleshonot* in Hebrew—which indexes the struggle over the question of whether Hebrew or Yiddish should be

¹³ Ibid., 28.

¹⁴ See, for example, Rachel Seelig, "Stuttering in Verse: Tuvia Rübner and the Art of Self-Translation," in *The German-Hebrew Dialogue*, eds. Amir Eshel and Rachel Seelig (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 77-104.

¹⁵ Anita Norich, "Language Choice," in *Critical Terms in Jewish Language Studies*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore, et al. (Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2011), 16-17.

considered the national language of the Jews.¹⁶ While largely centered in Eastern Europe, the reach of this ‘war’ extended to Central and Western Europe (and beyond), and it left an indelible mark on the literature discussed in this chapter.¹⁷ Yet, in what follows, I want to draw attention to different debates about language—other than the ‘language war’—that shaped literary and cultural production in the early twentieth century. I am interested, that is, in the often convoluted considerations that prompted writers to move between languages—beyond the pairing of Yiddish and Hebrew—in ways that were more ambiguous and less absolute than is usually thought. This entails not only an investigation of the shaping force of nationalism and other ideological movements but also an examination of the manifold demands and difficulties of language change.

Born in 1886 in Zolochiv, Galicia, in what is now Ukraine, Moyshe-Leyb Halpern was raised on the eastern outskirts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. While his father was “a worldly Jew,” as is recounted in various lexicons, Halpern “attended the Polish Baron Hirsch School in his hometown and also went to cheder, where he studied a bit of Gemara [...] and studied Tanakh on his own” (“bazukht di poylishe baron-hirsh-shul in zayn geburtsshtot un oykh gegangen in kheyder, vu gelernt a bisl gemore [...], aleyn gelernt tanakh”).¹⁸ The young poet thus grew up in a thickly multilingual environment, in which, it seems, he spoke mainly Yiddish at home but was exposed, early on, to

¹⁶ See, for example, Ahad Ha'am, “Riv haleshonot,” in *Al parashat baderakhim: qovets ma'amarim* (Berlin: Yidisher Ferlag, 1930).

¹⁷ Avraham Novershtern argues that the ‘language war’ must be understood in the context of “[i]nternal Jewish bilingualism,” which “entailed the simultaneous presence both of Hebrew (and Aramaic) on the one hand and the spoken Jewish vernacular (e.g., Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, etc.) on the other.” In the early modern period, in Western and Central Europe, this “rather stable linguistic situation began to change [...] when Jews gradually adopted the non-Jewish languages around them as their own. In conjunction with sociological pressures, this process of acculturation was spurred, as Novershtern underscores, by the “extremely negative” approach of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment, toward Yiddish, causing the language, with few exceptions, to “rapidly los[e] its vitality in German-speaking areas.” In light of this process, Novershtern concludes that “[i]n such a cultural constellation, there could be no ‘language wars’ of any kind. While I find the broad strokes of this account to be persuasive, I would contend that the categorical nature of the last point is misleading insofar as it reifies the divide between ‘East’ and ‘West,’ ignores processes of migration and cultural exchange, and dismisses the role of other languages (e.g., German) in these debates. See Novershtern, “Language Wars,” in *Critical Terms in Jewish Language Studies*, 21-23.

¹⁸ Zalmen Reyzen, *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologie* (Vilne: B. Kletskin, 1926), 769-770.

multiple languages beyond it. While his family was relatively well off, they were also forced to contend with the uncertainty of Jews' economic and political futures in Eastern Europe. It was in this context that Halpern was sent, when he was only twelve years old, to apprentice as a “sign painter” (“shildnmoler”) in Vienna, where he ended up staying for about ten years. Zalmen Reyzen, the brother of Avrom Reyzen, recounts that he lived “among goyim, became an excellent swimmer, played football, rode motorized bikes” (“tsvishn goyim, zikh oysgelernt oysgetseykhnt shvimen, shpilm in futbol, forn oyf a motor-velosiped”).¹⁹ During this time, as Reyzen further recounts, Halpern fell “under the intellectual influence of the German poets [Friedrich] Nietzsche, [Detlev von] Liliencron, Richard Dehmel and, when he was twenty one years old, began to write himself” (“[g]aystik geven unter der hashpoe fun di daytshe dikhter Nitsshe, Lilienkron, Rikhard Demel un tsu 21 yor aleyn ongehoyn tsu shraybn”).²⁰ Halpern’s “first two poems were,” the lexicographer adds, “in German and published in a German-Jewish journal” (“[d]i ershte tsvey lider in daytsh farefntlekht in a Viner daytsh-yidishn zshurnal”).²¹ Further bibliographical information about these poems is not provided. Nor can such information be found in a later bibliographical essay on the poet²² or in the existing scholarship, which often reiterates the biographical details above (with and without citation of the lexicons from which they derive).²³ When I first became interested in Halpern’s life and work, I was struck by the numerous allusions—in Yiddish-language lexicons and criticism and in (primarily) English-language scholarship—to his time in Vienna and to his early

¹⁹ Ibid., 770.

²⁰ Ibid., 770.

²¹ Ibid., 770.

²² Ephraim Jeshurin, *Moyshe Leyb Halpern bibliografye* (New York: Matones, 1954).

²³ Julian Levinson, for example, writes that Halpern “was, after all, immersed in the European avant-garde before immigrating to New York in 1908, at the age of 22. Ten years earlier he had moved from his native west Galician shtetl of Zlochev to Vienna, where he came under the influence of Yung-wien [*siz*] (Young Vienna), a group of young, mainly Jewish artists and writers. Inspired by literary heroes such as Heinrich Heine and Hugo Von [*siz*] Hofmannsthal, both of whom were Jews who wrote in German, Halpern himself published his first poems in German.” Julian Levinson, “Modernism from Below: Moyshe-Leyb Halpern and the Situation of Yiddish Poetry,” *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 3 (2004): 145. Levinson’s articles on Halpern have deeply informed my own understanding of Halpern’s work, but his brief account here of Halpern’s time in Vienna, while not implausible, is largely speculative, without being marked as such, and simplifies the complex biographies of writers such as Heine and Hofmannsthal.

writings in German. Yet I was also struck by the paucity of the information provided and, in a larger sense, by the ways in which the multilingual practices of Yiddish writers have been variously celebrated, trivialized, and effaced. In my subsequent attempts to learn more about Halpern's early life and work, I quickly realized how difficult such a task would be.

Halpern's time in Vienna can be pieced together in only partial form through the fragmentary accounts, the "mogere yedies," of his friends and contemporaries.²⁴ In these accounts, as in the lexicons cited above, there is often a dual emphasis on the physical and intellectual culture of Vienna. As an adolescent and young man in the city, Halpern apprenticed as a commercial artist and later studied at the university, read different newspapers and books (ranging from aestheticism to naturalism), started to speak and write in a new language, and became involved in socialist politics; at the same time, he transformed and conditioned his body, played sports, and learned to swim.²⁵ This coupling of the intellectual and the physical reflected how, as Alys X. George has argued, "the cultural production of Viennese modernism [...] engaged so unflaggingly with the body—as material, trope, and metaphor."²⁶ In related ways, in Halpern's mature poetry, as will later be discussed, the body of the poet becomes a key figure, marking a physical trajectory from health and athleticism to illness and emaciation. In his poetry, feuilletons, and translation work, Halpern returns, furthermore, to key figures (not always or even primarily Austrian) that he first read in depth during his time in the imperial capital, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Richard Dehmel. In this regard, the literature, politics, and social dynamics of fin-de-siècle Vienna did not

²⁴ Eliezer Greenberg, *Moyshe Leyb Halpern in ram fun zayn dor* (New York: M. L. Halpern Arbeter Ringer, 1942), 37. Zishe Weinper notes that "[v]eynik veys ikh vegn zayne yugntleke yorn in leMBERG un in vin. Ersht itzt khap ikh zikh, az bloyz in zeltene faln flegt er a vorf ton tsu mir a por verter vegn yener tsayt." Weinper, *Moyshe Leyb Halpern* (New York: Oyfkum 1940), 19.

²⁵ Reyzen, *Leksikon*, 770; Greenberg, *Moyshe Leyb Halpern in ram fun zayn dor*, 37. Zishe Weinper notes that he had once asked his friend where his "strong muscles" ("shtarke muskuln") came from. Halpern's reply: "- Fus-boll – hot zikh a ris geton tsu mir fun zayn moyl mit aza impet, vi fun tsvishn zayne tseyen volt a fus-bol a zets geton in der luft arayn. Un dan mit lirisher benkshaft in zayn melodishn bariton-kol: - Viner zumerdike teg oyf a breytfn feld. Fut-bol yungen un ikh tsvishn zey." Weinper, *Moyshe Leyb Halpern*, 19.

²⁶ Alys X. George, *The Naked Truth: Viennese Modernism and the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 4.

merely inform the sensibilities of the young poet but became, as George phrases it, “material, trope, and metaphor” in his later work. The writer and editor David Ignatoff provides one striking example of this when he recalls having asked Halpern for a long poem to publish and, in return, received “translated sections of Hugo von Hofmannsthal sandwiched between two parts of his own work.”²⁷

I have not been able to locate the early poems that Halpern wrote and published in German. Critics, biographers, and scholars seem, in large measure, to have referred to the existence of these poems, without reading or even looking at them, to underline the significance of his later turn toward Yiddish; the poems signal, in their very absence from the bibliographic record, what he left behind and, presumably, what he ‘chose’ to embrace. In a critique of the concept of “language choice,” Anita Norich underscores the pervasive multilingualism of Yiddish writers and arraigns the ways in which their “language use”—the term she prefers to “language choice”—has often been romanticized or instrumentalized for political or ideological aims.²⁸ She puts pressure, in particular, on the popular and nostalgic myth that such writers “continued to write in Yiddish in defiance of history and in memory of a vanishing or vanished world.”²⁹ While I find the concept of “language choice” to be, at times, helpful, insofar as it registers the multilingual possibilities that were open to some writers, I share Norich’s frustration with the assumption that one can simply “choose” between languages, which forecloses “more productive questions and [...] multiple, more nuanced understandings of all of our complex linguistic lives,”³⁰ casting writers, as Na’ama Rokem critically observes, “as liberal subjects in some kind of free market.”³¹ And, indeed, the existing accounts of

²⁷ Ruth Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 43.

²⁸ Norich, “Language Choice,” 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

³¹ Na’ama Rokem, “‘With the changing of horizons comes the broadening of the horizon’: Multilingual Narrative Modes in M. Y. Berdichevsky’s *Miriam*,” in *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Joshua L. Miller and Anita Norich (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 227.

Halpern's ostensible "language choice," his shifts from Yiddish to German and back, are mired in ideological and romanticized narratives that ultimately limit our understanding of his work.³²

In one characteristic account, included in the preface to the posthumous collection *Moyshe Leyb Halpern* (1934), Eliezer Greenberg recalls that, after ten years in Vienna, Halpern returned to his hometown as an assimilated young man, as, in his biographer's words, "a fargoyishter."³³ In Zolochiv, however, "he soon started to meet frequently with the poets S[hmuel] Y[ankev] Imber and Yankev Mestl" ("bald hot er zikh ongehoyn trefn oft mit di dikhter S. I. Imber un Yankev Mestl").³⁴ Both of these poets had already published poetry in Yiddish, and, in lengthy and intensive conversations, "reproached [Halpern] for his 'goyishkayt'" ("im oyfgevorf'n zayn 'goyishkayt').³⁵ Greenberg concludes that "partially under their influence, [Halpern] soon began to write poems in Yiddish" ("[t]eylvayz unter zeyer virkung hot Moyshe Leyb ingikh'n ongehoyn tsu shraybn lider in yidish").³⁶ While there is no reason to doubt that Imber and Mestl played a role in Halpern's coming-of-age as a writer, the narrative promoted in Greenberg's account—one of "dissimilation"³⁷ and, per Norich, a nostalgic embrace of Yiddish against the pressures of acculturation—provides only a partial picture. His account condenses a messy and arguably interminable process of linguistic transformation and, in its place, telegraphs an entrenched and rigid understanding of the relationship between language and identity, in which Yiddish is understood to be Jewish and German to be non-Jewish (or 'goyish'). Greenberg's account simplifies, moreover, the revolutionary and even anarchic nature of Halpern's Yiddish, as is attested in the mixed reviews of Halpern's published poetry in the

³² For example, Ruth Wisse insists on the self-evidence of Halpern's linguistic 'choice,' writing, with reference to Halpern and Mani Leib, that "[o]f course they would write it [a new chapter of Jewish history] in Yiddish, their language and the language of the Jewish immigrant mass that grew denser with each arriving shipload." Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan*, vii.

³³ *Moyshe Leyb Halpern*, vol. 1 (New York: Moyshe Leyb Halpern Komitet, 1934), 18.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See, for example, Shulamit Volkov, "Forces of Dissimilation," in *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256-275.

Yiddish press. Julian Levinson recalls, for example, that while one contemporaneous critic “celebrated Halpern’s sheer energy: ‘He sings from his blood, and his blood is of revolution’ [...], [this critic] also voiced a complaint typical of the time, arguing that much of Halpern’s poetry is simply ‘not Yiddish.’”³⁸

The fact of Halpern’s multilingualism is, within the context of Eastern European Jewish culture and society, hardly atypical, but the particular forms and trajectories it took are deserving of further scrutiny. Max Weinreich notes that “Ashkenazic Jews [...] have always been a minority in a non-Jewish milieu; hence they always had to be bilingual; most members of the Jewish community had to know—some more, some less—besides their Jewish language, the language of the coterritorial majority.”³⁹ Weinreich calls this “external bilingualism (or multilingualism),” which, as he notes, “placed the Yiddish speaker in a specific socio-psychological position and also directly affected his language: its Slavic component, for instance, Yiddish owes to its vicinage with Slavic peoples.”⁴⁰ Indeed, in eastern Galicia, on the outskirts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Halpern found himself in a position in which he always needed to supplement his “native” language with other languages, such as Polish and German, in his interactions with non-Jews. Furthermore, when he was sent to Vienna as a boy, he had no choice but to use German in order to access education and employment. While it would be misleading, in this light, to characterize his youthful multilingualism as a ‘choice,’ it does seem clear that, at least for a time, he came to consider German not only as a language of necessity but also as a language of cultural production and possibility, albeit one that always bore within itself, in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, “the potentiality of [...] antagonistic

³⁸ Levinson, “Modernism from Below: Moyshe-Leyb Halpern and the Situation of Yiddish Poetry,” 143.

³⁹ Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, Vol. 1, ed. Paul Glasser, trans. Shlomo Noble, with the assistance of Joshua A. Fishman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 247.

⁴⁰ Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, Vol. 1, 247.

uses.”⁴¹ In this regard, I want to resist a stark differentiation between “external” and “internal” bilingualism, which is bound up with problematic conceptions about the “nativeness” and “naturalness” of certain languages as opposed to others; at the same time, however, I want to take seriously Weinreich’s insistence on the “specific socio-psychological position” of the minority and migrant speaker, the complexity and contradictoriness of which are effaced in accounts like those of Greenberg.

The position of such a speaker may also be illuminated with recourse to a recent body of scholarship on “exophonic literature,” which refers to the literary practice of writing in a language other than one’s mother tongue. In contradistinction to “anglophone” or “francophone” literature, for example, “[e]xo-phon’ indexes,” as Christine Ivanovic writes, “the positioning of one’s speech outside of [the] guiding principles” that have structured most literary histories (“[e]xo-phon’ indiziert [...] die Positionierung des eigenen Sprechens außerhalb jener Leitgrößen”).⁴² With respect to these “guiding principles,” scholars such as Robert Stockhammer, Susan Arndt, and Dirk Naguschewski have drawn a line from Johann Gottfried Herder’s “one-to-one correlation between language, literature, and nation” (“ein-eindeutige Zuordnung von Sprache, Literatur und Nation”) to entrenched views about the essential interconnection between a person’s first language, their language of literary production, and their (national) identity.⁴³ Yasemin Yildiz calls this “a monolingual paradigm,” which, as she writes, “first emerged in late-eighteenth century Europe” and “functioned to obscure from view the widespread nature of multilingualism, both in the present and

⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1987), 557.

⁴² Christine Ivanovic, “Exophonie, Echophonie: Resonanzkörper und polyphone Räume bei Yoko Tawada,” *Gegenwartsliteratur. Ein germanistisches Jahrbuch* 7 (2008): 223. Ivanovic’s elaboration of exophony also resonates with Chana Kronfeld’s account of “marginal modernism,” which calls “into question standard literary models of nationalism, colonialism, and cultural identity.” Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, 195.

⁴³ Susan Arndt, Dirk Naguschewski, and Robert Stockhammer, eds., *Exophonie. Anders-Sprachigkeit (in) der Literatur* (Berlin, Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2007), 9.

in the past.”⁴⁴ It is this paradigm that produced the still common—if hardly universal—view that a literary writer ought to write in their native language. In contradistinction, Stockhammer, Arndt, and Naguschewski point out that, in many cases and with particular reference to contemporary authors of the African diaspora, it is not self-evident that a writer would consider their second language “as totally foreign” (“als gänzlich fremde”) or that their first language has always served “as an assured shelter” (“als gesicherten Hort”).⁴⁵ They further note that, in the last century, some writers switched languages because they willingly chose to live in another country, while others were pressured to adopt new languages in response to violence and forced migration. Importantly, however, Stockhammer, Arndt, and Naguschewski also suggest that, while “a typology of the reasons and criteria for language choice, [...] in differentiating between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ reasons, can serve heuristic purposes, [...] it cannot hide the fact that there are fluid crossovers between exile, migration, and diaspora and between political persecution, economic need, and cultural curiosity” (“[e]ine Typologie von Gründen und Kriterien der Sprachwahl, [...] kann bei der Unterscheidung von ‘objektiven’ und ‘subjektiven’ Gründen heuristische Dienste leisten, aber nicht darüber hinwegtäuschen, dass es zwischen Exil, Migration und Diaspora, zwischen politischer Verfolgung, ökonomischer Not und kulturelle Neugierde fließende Übergänge gibt”).⁴⁶ In this regard, they problematize their own use of the term “Exophonie” and its implied logic of “exo-” (“outside”) and “endo-” (“within”), which echoes Weinreich’s terminology of “external” and “internal” bilingualism. They insist, in turn, that attention should be paid to the idiosyncrasies of individual cases, which reveal the varied ways in which language use, even in one’s “mother tongue,” can register the perturbations of geographical, social, and cultural displacement.⁴⁷ While acknowledging the

⁴⁴ Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 2.

⁴⁵ Arndt, Naguschewski, and Stockhammer, *Exophonie*, 10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴⁷ Arndt, Naguschewski, and Stockhammer cite Wilhelm von Humboldt’s striking reflection, in *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, that “[d]enn so wundervoll ist in der Sprache die Individualisierung innerhalb der allgemeinen

usefulness of terms like “exophony” in uncovering overlooked phenomena and in drawing connections between diverse texts and actors, they expose the limits of the “conceptual morass” into which, as Clifford Geertz famously observed, “theorizing about culture can lead.”⁴⁸ In similar fashion, in my own oscillation between terms such as language choice, change, shift, and use, I am less interested in landing on a single categorical framework than in analyzing individual cases and engaging in a kind of “thick description” that gets at how the movement between Yiddish and German mattered, in complex and contradictory ways, for particular writers over time. In order to do this, I analyze, in the section that follows, the bibliographic and archival traces of Halpern’s engagement with and reflections on German-language literature and culture. While unfolding the literary-historical implications of these traces, I also want to consider what they reveal about what might be called the ecologies of knowing—the cognitive operations, emotional textures, and social histories—that are embedded in multilingual writing.⁴⁹

In 1907, Halpern left Vienna and returned to Zolochiv, where he seems to have had formative conversations with fellow poets Imber and Mestl, and where he began to write poetry in Yiddish. Shortly after, in 1908, Halpern also attended the “Yiddish Language Conference” (“Di yidishe shprakh-konferents”) in Czernowitz, which was largely conceived by Nathan Birnbaum, who was born and raised in Vienna, and organized, as Joshua Fishman notes, by “members of the University of Vienna’s Yiddish club, Yidishe Kultur, [which] Birnbaum had founded a few years earlier.”⁵⁰ The conference, which is still remembered as a turning point in the history of modern

Übereinstimmung, daß man ebenso richtig sagen kann, daß das ganze Menschengeschlecht nur Eine Sprache, als daß jeder Mensch eine besondere besitze.” Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 311.

⁴⁹ I build here on the concept of the “ecology of knowing” as cited in Evelyne Ender and Deidre Shauna Lynch, “Introduction: Reading Spaces,” *PMLA* 134, no. 1 (2019): 10.

⁵⁰ Joshua Fishman, “Czernowitz Conference,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (online).

Yiddish-language culture, points up the significance of the movement of people and ideas between Vienna and the eastern outskirts of Austria-Hungary in the institutionalization of Yiddish language planning and education and in the construction of an infrastructure for the Yiddish press, theater, and literature. The conference also marked an important shift in the collective understanding of “the status of Yiddish,” which, at the time of the conference, was still widely referred to as *Jargon* (in Yiddish and German). “[This] topic,” as Fishman writes, “immediately came to the fore and practically monopolized the proceedings during the entire conference. The arguments waged in Czernowitz over whether Yiddish was ‘the’ national language or only ‘a’ national language of the Jewish people polarized and split the delegates irrevocably.”⁵¹ In this light, many if not all delegates at the conference advocated for a stronger correlation between “language, literature, and nation” and sought to bring Yiddish into alignment with “a monolingual paradigm.” But the tensions and ostensible failures of the conference—Max Weinreich notes that it “did not have any luck” (“hot ober keyn mazl nit gehat”)—instead revealed the myriad ways in which Yiddish writers and intellectuals continued to operate both within and outside such a paradigm.⁵² Not only was there little agreement about ‘the’ national language of the Jewish people, many of the participants were non-native speakers of Yiddish, and other languages, including German, were frequently spoken at the conference. In one report, S. Ayznshtat recounts that, when he met with Nathan Birnbaum, the principal organizer, “[Birnbaum] spoke to me in German and immediately apologized that he wasn’t speaking in Yiddish, which is dear to him, because he had lived for so long in Austria, where he wasn’t able to acquire enough of the living Yiddish language so that he could express himself freely” (“geredt hot er mit mir oyf daytsh un hot zikh glaykh antshuldikt, vos er redt nisht oyf yidish, vos iz

⁵¹ Fishman, “Czernowitz Conference.”

⁵² Max Weinreich, “Araynfir,” in *Di ershte yidische shprakh-konferents: Barikbtu, dokumentn un opklangen fun der tshernovitsker konferents, 1908* (Vilne: Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut, Filologishe sektsye, 1931), vii.

im tayer, makhmes voynendik lang in Estraykh hot er nisht gekent fareygenen zikh di lebedike yidishe shprakh oyf azoy fil, bikhdey tsu kenen zikh fray oysdrikn”).⁵³

Little is known about Halpern’s involvement in the conference beyond the fact that he participated, as was reported in an article by Avrom Reyzen, with whom I began this chapter.⁵⁴ At the conference, it is likely that Halpern confronted a range of views from “cultural diaspora-nationalism” (“a kultureln goles-natsionalizm”) to Zionism,⁵⁵ and, in line with his conversations with Imber and Mestl, he was brought into proximity with a number of established or emerging Yiddish writers, including Y. L. Peretz, Sholem Ash, and Avrom and Zalmen Reyzen, who contributed to a Yiddish environment or ‘svive’ that had been largely absent in Vienna. Indeed, the subsequent mythologization of the conference rests, in large measure, on the sheer concentration of writers, activists, and intellectuals who traveled to Czernowitz to discuss the possible futures of the Yiddish language. Images of conference participants assembled in groups and around tables, not unlike at a Viennese café, commemorated this sense of a collective endeavor and circulated widely in the Jewish press and as postcards.⁵⁶

While Halpern had grown up with the “living Yiddish language,” he had spent the formative years of his adolescence in a different linguistic and cultural context, which had shaped, as previously noted, both his mind and body. It seems fair to say, as Greenberg and others have claimed, that his encounters with Yiddish writers in Zolochiv and Czernowitz and later in New York—his immersion, as it were, in a different ‘svive’—proved to be just as transformative. But the claim that events like the Czernowitz Conference convinced the young, acculturated writer of the expressive possibilities of Yiddish is, at best, only partially true, not least because of the multilingual

⁵³ S. Ayznshtat, “In ‘razsvet,’” in *Di ershte yidische shprakh-konferents*, 12.

⁵⁴ “Loyt A. Reyzens mitteylung in ‘frayhayt,’” in “Reshima fun di onteylnemer in der tshernovitser shprakh-konferents,” in *Di ershte yidische shprakh-konferents*, 61.

⁵⁵ Nathan Birnbaum, “Amol un atsind,” in *Di ershte yidische shprakh-konferents*, ix.

⁵⁶ Fishman, “Czernowitz Conference.”

contradictions of the conference itself. Halpern's mature writing, as will be elaborated below, neither reflected the nationalist ethos of the conference, nor did it straightforwardly share in its goal of legitimizing or 'raising' the cultural status of Yiddish.

Not long after the Czernowitz Conference, Halpern immigrates to the United States, at least in part, it seems, to avoid being drafted into the military. In some of his early publications in the United States, he reflects, in complex and often contradictory ways, on his time in Vienna, and he begins to elaborate, moreover, the ethical orientation of his writing, which attends to the ramified effects of discrimination and disregard. In 1911, in *Der kibitser*, "a monthly forum for cartoons and satire" based in New York but with a transatlantic readership, Halpern publishes, under the pseudonym "Hel-pen," a feuilleton that recounts his time in Vienna.⁵⁷ Though the feuilleton reads as a form of autobiography, Halpern's use of a pseudonym and the satirical nature of the publication should give us pause as to its autobiographical veracity; with this mind, I will refer to the first-person narrator of the feuilleton as "Hel-pen" instead of "Halpern." Irrespective of its veracity, however, the feuilleton presents an important and multilayered consideration of language and identity. In the form of a letter ("a brief tsu a fraynd"), Hel-pen follows up on a discussion that he had purportedly had with a friend about "nationalism and assimilation" ("natsionalizm un asimilatsion"), which, we might add, were two of the central topics of the Czernowitz Conference.⁵⁸ During this discussion, he was unable to answer a question his friend had posed: how had he become "a national Jew" ("a natsionaler yid")?⁵⁹ Hel-pen's letter is an attempt at a belated answer, for shortly after their

⁵⁷ Edward Portnoy notes that *Der kibitser* was a great success in New York and quickly became well known in Poland for its cartoons, many of which were initially drawn by [Yoysef] Tunkel. In its later incarnation as *Der groyser kundes* ("The Great Prankster") it became the most successful Yiddish satirical journal in any country, renowned for its plethora of original cartoon art." Portnoy, "Cartoons in the Polish Yiddish Press," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Vol. 16, eds. Michael C. Steinlauf & Antony Polonsky (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), 252.

⁵⁸ Moyshe-Leyb Halpern ("Hel-pen"), "A brief tsu a fraynd," *Der kibitser* (30 June 1911): 4. I am grateful to Anne Knafl and Eitan Lev Kensky for helping me to secure a copy of this text.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

discussion, he is overwhelmed by possible responses and recalls “an entire series of facts from my own life, which not only convinced me that I am – they compelled me to be that which I had perhaps never wanted to be” (“hob ikh gehat a gantse reyhe fakten fun mayn eygenem leben, velkhe hoben mikh, nit nor ibertsaygt az ikh bin – nor zey hoben mikh getsvungen tsu zayn dos, vos ikh hob efsher keynmol nit gevolt zayn...”).⁶⁰ In the opening lines of this letter, Hel-pen thus already calls into question his ability to ‘choose’ his national affiliation, to be or to be seen as ‘German’ or ‘Jewish,’ the linguistic consequences of which are elaborated in the multilingual textures of the letter.

⁶⁰ Ibid.



ליעבע פאווירלין



אזוי זיך

עס נעהט ארום א קלאנג, או דער רבנו של עולם האט אנגעקלאנגט פויר ענבוים'ען פאר "לייבעל" פיינעבויים ווארפט ארויף די שולד אויף קאי האל'ען, פיינעבויים קלאנג, אז נעמאסע קאהאן האט איהם גענעבען א פינגער, וויל ער שוין א נאנצער האנד...

מיט דער ליעבע אוי ווי מיט קא- האג'ס, "אוידישקייט", עס פאנגט זיך אן מיט קוצעניו מוצעניו און עס עני דיגט זיך מיט, ווי בערנאָלען מען זיך שוין!...

וואס הייסט אוידישקייט? אה, א שווערע זאך, מיין ליעבע לעוערין! אט למשל בין איך איבערלאזט אריינפונקטען אין א געוועלשאפט פון בליזן בלאנדע מיינלעך. באמת האב איך גלייך געוואלט ארויסגעהן, וואָרום איך בין בטבע א איד און ליעב דערפאר נור די אריישע קאלירע—ברוגעטע, האב איך זיך אבער באלד דערמאנט אן א נמרא אז עס איז א נרויסער הטא יענעם מביש צו זיין, און איך האב אויסגעהאלטען דעם נמיון.

גיב דער ליעבע א רגע, וויל זי א האלבען מעתלעך; גיב דער ליעבע א האלבען מעתלעך, פערשילט זי דיר די ערשטע רגע.

די ווייבליכע אפגעהערציגקייט בע- סומט איהר העכסטען אויסדרוק און- רעקאלטע.

מיאכע מיינלעך מווען נויטווענדיג דרינגענען דריי פערראדען: 1. געליעבט זיין און גיב ליעבע, 2. ליעבען און גיב געליעבט זיין און 3. קאצעניאמער. דערפאר ווען איך הער ביי נאכט א געיאמער פון קעץ, פערשטעה איך אז די מיינלעך, וועלכע שטעהען אויפ'ן סטופ הינטער מיין פענסטער, האלטען שוין ביי דער דריטער פערראדע.

מעפיסמא

צוויי יונגע לייט האבען געהאט א לופט'דיים איבער א מיינעל מיט דער בעדינגונג, אז ווער עס וועט בעסער פליהען וועט קריגען די מיינעל פאר א כלה.

מיר דענקען זיכער אז נאך דער התנה וועט זי אפילו רעם זינענע אונ- יערשטיינדיק די פליגעלען.

א נומער טרוין- מוסער: — לייקען ניט, טאכטער מיינע, איך האב דיר וועדער געזעהען ניט דזשיק'ען אין אייזקרוים פאר- לאך... די ביזט געזעסען און ער האָט דיר אָהן בושה ארוםגענומען און דיר צוגעדריקט צו זיך.

קורצזיכטיג און פארויכטיג- אלטע מויד (צו א יונגען מאן אין בריעף): איהר זייט וואהרשיינליך זעהר קורצזיכטיג, מיסטער רובאכע, שוין דריי מאָהל ווי איהר האָט מיר בענענענט אין סטריט, און קיין איין מאל מיר ניט דערקענט.

ינגער מאן: — קורצזיכטיג דוקא ניט, אבער זעהר און זעהר פארויכטיג.

און איצט טעמל דיר פאר א "שאני" א חויכער, א דארער, מיט א פאר לאנגע פיס און מיט א לענגליכענע פנים, געהט אנגעהן אין די לירידע פון א שוועסטער, וואס איז א קלייניגסטע, כמעט א פארליק... און אט דעם דאווען פארשיין פיהר איך אונטער'ן ארום די טרעפ ארויף צו מיין ציסער, צו פראגען לען הייסט דעם.

פראגעל ווידער דערזעהנדיג מען געהט אויף די טרעפ האט ער געפענט די טהור, (ווער ווייסט נעכאר שוין צום ווייביגעטען סאל) דערזעהנדיג מיך מיט דער דאסע האט ער שווער אפגעפונען און א שייכעל געהאן מיט דער באה, וועלכע איז גיט געווען גע- אריינקומענדיג אין שטוב האט ער אהן לאנג פאררעדט די דאסע תפליסט ערוואס. זי מען זיך אויסהוידען, די דאסע פון איהר ווייס אבער, וועלכע איז געשטאנען מיט אן אראנבענגיגעם אפ האט זיך גע- וואלט אויפגינגען... האט זי אנגעצויגט מיט א האנד אויפ'ן ברענגענדיגען לאפ און מיט א קוויטלעך קינדן קול האט זי געוואלט דערשעהן לען אז זי שעהט זיך, אונט בלייבט אבאר פארט אונט — האט זיך די דאסע, שאני הייסט עס, אזוי נרויס ווי זי איז געווען א ווארף געהאן אויפ'ן בעט און צולאסט זיך מיט א חיליקען געלעכטער... פראגעל האט דער זעהן זיך נאנצע שפיעל האט ער אונט א וויי- לע שווינגענדיג אנגעפוסט, דאן האט ער דעם הוט אנגעטוהן און איז ארויס באלד אבער האט ער נאך אסאל די טהור געפענט און א געשייט געהאן:

זא אויס עס ווען מאן מיט איינע יודען האנדעלט.

דאסאל ליעבער פריינד — און יענעם מאמענט האב איך צום ערשטעם מאל דערפיהלט די נוי'אישע חוצפה... גיט לענגן דו געהסט און דאסע איהר פון אזא שווערע צעהר, קומט ער און שרייבט: זא אויס עס ווען מאן מיט איינע יודען האנדעלט.

אויבען ליגט זי אין דיינע ארעס א פער- חלוסטע, א מאכטלאזע... און דו — פריינד, טרינט דאס גליק פון פולען בעכער — יא מיין פריינד, אזוי האב איך גיט איינ- מעל אין מיין שוהליציים די מאכטמאכטיגע אויפמאכע געמאכט און בעזאנדערס דאסאלס און יענעם אבער — ווען מיין חבר, פראג' ערל' איז אריינגעקומען צו מיר און האט מיר זיי לעשטע קראנע" אוועקגעגעבן איך זאל נעהן ברענגען איינע פון יענע... די ווייסט שוין וואס... פארוואס געהסט אלליין ניט? — האב איך זיך ביי איהם געפונען האט ער מיר אנגעצויגט אויף זיין געוועלעך נער- באט און האט מיר צעוויסען געגעבען אז איך בין א אידוואס, וואס איך פרעג נאך, איז דער אמת'ען איז טאלי וויין באט געשווארען געווען אזוי שטארק, אז אייז אויב איז ביי איהם געווען איז נאנצען צוגעמאכט.

אונטען איז נאם האב איך בענענעט "שאני", האב איך איהם מיטגענומען, גיט זאנענדיג איהם וואהן, און געהן האב איך בערארפט ביז צום "קווי" פון דער דאנא, דארטען וואו זיי געהן ארום... 15 מיינע ווען פון דער האלדאסע, וואו מיר דריי חברים האבען אלע צוזאמען געוואהנט אין איין הויז, איז נומער 12, דאס שרעקליכסטע אבער איז געווען וואס כיהאב געוואוסט אז אט וועל איך פארבייגען, האפענדיגסטער" אונטער "שטאטקאפעהויז" און אפילו מען זאל מיר פערבייגען די אויבען וואלט איך אהן אריינגעטראפען און בעזאנדערס דאסאלס און יענעם אבער, וואס איך בין געווען אזוי אונט צופריעדען מיט מיר אלליין און מיט דער נאנע ערע וועלט... יא עס מוז זיך א טרינט טהאן איין גלאז, מהעט מיט ראש' כאטש... און זי? די וועס געהטען וועניגער מיט 10 גרייצער, עס וועט איהר דער רוח גיט כאי פון —

און ווען דער קאפעןהייז'דיגע האט אויס- געשלאגען ערל, איז פראגעל'ס קראנע גע- גען ביים קאפעןטימער האמייסטער און ער שטען און איך מיט שאני'ן האבען געהאלטען יעדער ביים ענדיגען זיינענעם נלאז טהעט מיט ראש... פארוויכטיג האב איך איהם גע- נוימען אויסצאלען פויסער צו וואס אויפגערירף די קראנע האט בערארפט פערזעהנדיג ווערען און אז פראגעל האט זי מיר געגעבען און אז ער ווארט איצט ביי מיר אין ציסער... און איך האב שטיט מורה אחיים צו געהן... רעהען רענדיג דאס, האט זיך שאני אזוי הויך צע- לאכט, אז אלע מענטשען און קאפערעווי הא- בען זיך אויסגערעדט מיט די פויסער צו אונט און- איך האב זיך שטארק פערשטעמט, ווייל עס האט זיך מיר אויסגעראכט אז אלע שאליען מיט די קעפ און האבען רחמנות מיט אונט, איי, איי, נעכער נאר יונגע חברים נאך און שוין שבורים... און אויב'דיגע האט עס מיר טאקי אויף שאני'ן אלליין פערראדען. וואס לאכט ער? א קונץ צו לאכען? האט זיך אויסגעטרוהען זיינע 5 נעלעלעך מעט מיט ראם און קען זיך איצט רויחן אחיים געהן אבער איך?!

... נאכאמען אבער האב איך אלליין אויף נעמונט לאכען, א קלייניגקייט, ס'וועט א פראגעל מיט א נעשוואלבער באה... און ווארט אויף גליקען... פלוצים אבער שפרינגט שאני אויף, כאפט מיך אז ביים ארבעל, דו א פוסקע אידען, קומ... ביי שאני'ן איז שטוב האבען שוין אלע געשלאפען.

א פריינד צו א פריינד

פון העלפערן

ליעבער פריינד!

איך אונזער דיסטאנטע איבער נאציאנאליזם און אסמילאציען האסטו מיר געבעטען איך זאל דיר איבערנעבען ווי אזוי איך בין גע- ווארען א נאציאנאלער איד אויפ'ן ארט האב איך זיך אויף נאר גיטע נעמאכט דערמאנען. קייט דו ביים אוועק האב איך געהאט א נאנצע ריזער סמאכען פון א מיין אייגענעם לעבען, וועלכע האבען מיר, גיט נאר איבער ציינט אז איך בין — נאר זיי האבען מיר גע- צוואונגען צו זיין דאס, וואס איך האב אפטר קיינסאם גיט געוואלט זיין.

איין פאקט — אויב איך האב קיין טעות גיט — איך עס דער ערשטער און דערפאר און דער דעם איד אז עס איז נויטיג אויך זאל איהם דיר איבערנעבען.

מיט דריי יאהר צוריק איז עס געווען אין ווינע, דעם ווערשא פון א אידען האב איך נאך דאסאלס גיט געפיהלט, דערפאר אבער האט מיר מיין געווינעס כלום געמאכטערט אויפ'ן גרוואסטען אופן... איינצוואונגען יאהר בין איך אלס געווען, און געוואנט האב איך צווישען גיט, מינע פריינד זיינען געווען צוויי גענוגטע נוי'אישע חברים, איינער, שאני, דער צווייטער, פראגעל' און אט דער פראגעל' טאלי איז עס, וואס האט מיר דער ערשטער צו וויסען געהאן ווער און וואס איך בין... און געזעהן איז עס צוליבע א פראגעל' וואס איך האב ביי איהם צוגעגען. געמאכטען האט און עס איך א שעהנעם פארנאכט, און אהרוב פרייהייט איד בין געווען אלליין אין מיין ציסער זיינענדיג, איבער א שווערע ספעסאטישער אויפגא- בע (איך בין דאסאלס שוין געווען אויף דעם מענטשן יאהר אין א ווינע'ען לערער'ע סעמי- נאר), וויסענדיג זאג איך: ווייל עס האט נאך באמת אין דעם אוינעקליק דאס נאנצע לעבען פערדארטען און געווענאנען צום פענסטער, יונגע מיינלעך מיט חברות אין געשלאפענע ארעסן ווישען פארביי און ארע- הען זיך מיטן פרייהייט... אט וועט אראב- קומען די נאכט א סך פון זיי וועלען זיך אויף פראטער אויף די חיליערענע פערלעך, איך די שופלעך און און די קאפערעוויינער ביי דעם מוויק אונטערהאלטען... איינעלעכע פארלעך וועלען אוועקגעהן ווייס ווייס און די פונסטערע אלעען און דארטען — פער- שבורט פון דער פרייהייטנאכט וועט מען זיך אריינפאלען אין די ארעסט... מען וועט זיך אוועקלענען אין נראו און מיט פויכטע אויבען און אנגעזענענע הערצער וועט מען זיך אריינזאנארפען אין דעם יום פון דער ליי- בע... אד! ווי שעהן... האב איך שטיינערהייט געמאכט: די האסט א מיינע- לע... געמאכט זי איך ביי דער האנד... בענען גען זיך דיינע בליקען מיט איהרע — פער- שעכטס זי זיך... לענט זי צו א פינגערל צום טויל און לויט אראפ דאס תעפעלע... געהט סטו זי ארום פורקסט און וועגער ערשער צי- טעט... ציטערט און בויגט זיך אין דיינע ארעסט... ווייסטו איהר א קוש טהון, בויגט זי איהר תעפעלע אוועק פון דיר... ציטערט זיך נאך איהר, ציטערט זיך, ווייסט זיך און אט — א קוש... און נאך א קוש... און מיט פערמאכטע

מיר ווילען איך גיט זאגען א וואו איהר מוזט איין געפיעןן שאפירא כראם. דזשענטספארוישינג סטאר, 187 קלינגטאן סט

Figure 1: Moyshe-Leyb Halpern ("Hel-pen"), "A brief tsu a fraynd," Der kibitzer (30 June 1911): 4. Source: Stanford University Libraries.

Hel-pen zeroes in on one “fact” or episode during his time in Vienna that brought to an end a period of his life when he had not yet known “the suffering of a Jew” (“dem vehtog fun a yidn”), when, as he figures it, he still had “healthy blood” (“mayn gezundem blut”).⁶¹ In this respect, Hel-pen tells an uproarious story that aligns with the satirical function of the journal, but, as is also typical of satire, it is a story that both entertains the reader and confronts them with society’s ills. Hel-pen narrates, that is, an experience of discrimination and his emergence out of a state of innocence into a kind of double consciousness, which, as it’s defined and elaborated by W. E. B. Du Bois, “is at once a deprivation (an inability to see oneself except ‘through the eyes of others’) and a gift (an endowment of ‘second-sight’, that seems to allow a deeper or redoubled comprehension of ‘this [...] world’).”⁶² In the letter, Hel-pen recounts that, when he was twenty-one years old, he “lived among goyim” (“gevoht hob ikh tsvishn goyim”) and had two friends and housemates, named Shani and Franzl (or “Frantsel”), who were “two healthy non-Jewish guys” (“tsvey gezunte goy’ishe bokherim”).⁶³ Hel-pen’s identity, “who and what” (“ver un vos”) he is, as he phrases it, was brought into relief during a fraught encounter with Franzl that began with a missing Austrian *Krone*.⁶⁴

It is springtime, and Hel-pen is taking a class in mathematics at a “Lehrer Seminar” in Vienna. He is struggling over a math problem in his room when he goes to the window and observes young couples walking by. He imagines their plans for the evening in the cafés or in Prater

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Brent Hayes Edwards, “Introduction,” in W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), xiv. Du Bois, as quoted by Edwards, writes with reference to “this American world,” but related, if not identical, scenes also played out in Central Europe. Without eliding the manifold differences between African American and Jewish European social and cultural dynamics, the conceptual tools that were developed, for example, by Black writers and intellectuals may, in certain respects, illuminate the work of Yiddish writers and intellectuals. In similar fashion, in a comparative essay on Semyon An-sky’s *The Dybbuk* and Zora Neale Hurston’s and Langston Hughes’ *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*, Leora Auslander and Thomas C. Holt have argued that such a comparative study “can be instructive about the general problematic” that different minority writers sought to address. Auslander and Holt, “Translating languages, translating cultures: A story of two 20th century Renaissance movements,” *Langages, Politique, Histoire. Avec Jean-Claude Zancarini*, eds. Romain Descendre and Jean-Louis Fournel (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2015).

⁶³ Halpern (“Hel-pen”), “A brief tsu a fraynd,” 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

or in the “dark alleys” (“di finstere aleen”).⁶⁵ He then fantasizes about a sexual encounter of his own, which, for the time, is represented with surprising directness, if still with a number of charged ellipses and dashes: “she feels ashamed... [...] you embrace her and feel a young body trembling [...] and you – drink, drink the happiness from full cups - - -” (“fershehmt zi zikh... [...] nehmtu zi arum fihlstu a yunger kerper tsitert [...] un du – trink, trink dos glik fun fulen bekher - - -”).⁶⁶ The description of the sexual fantasy extends over several lines, and it seems clear that its inclusion is designed to titillate not only the ostensible reader of the letter but also the readers of the feuilleton. But the fantasy is also relevant to the “message” of the letter, which brings questions of nationalism and assimilation into relation with questions of gender and sexuality and with, as Eric Santner writes in a different but related context, “the fin-de-siècle obsession with Jewish effeminacy.”⁶⁷

Franzl approaches Hel-pen, preoccupied with his own frustrations and desires, and asks him to bring him a sex worker (in the coded language of the letter, “brenge eyne fun yene... - du veyst shoyne vos...”).⁶⁸ Franzl gives him his last *Krone* and explains that he can’t go himself because of his swollen cheek, which, adding to the visceral and grotesque imagery of the feuilleton, had become so badly swollen that “one of his eyes was closed shut” (“eyn oyg iz bay ihm geven in gantsen tsugemakht”).⁶⁹ On the way to complete this task, Hel-pen runs into his other housemate Shani, whom he convinces to come along without telling him their mission. They soon become distracted, however, when they walk past Café Hofmeister, their “shtam-kafehoyz,” and decide to go in for some “tee with rum” (“thee mit ram”).⁷⁰ They end up staying for several drinks and spend the *Krone* that was given by Franzl. In his drunken state, Hel-pen tells Shani what the money was intended for

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Eric L. Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 108.

⁶⁸ Halpern (“Hel-pen”), “A brief tsu a fraynd,” 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

and that he's now afraid to go home. Shani finds the situation laughable, but he also has an idea: he will dress up in the clothes of his sister and pretend to be a sex worker. Hel-pen goes along with the plan and escorts the tall and lanky Shani, in the misfitted drag of his short sister, back to their shared house. While the plan is poorly thought through and poorly executed, it briefly tricks Franzl into thinking that he is, in fact, about to have sex. When he inevitably recognizes his housemate, however, he glares silently at both him and Hel-pen and storms out of the room. The scene takes another turn at the end, however, which also marks the moment when Hel-pen first felt, as he phrases it, "di goyishe khutspe": "But soon he [Franzl] opened the door once again and screamed: 'This is how it is when you deal with a Jew'" ("Bald ober hot er nokh amol di thir geefent un a geshray gethun: 'Zo izt es ven man mit eynem yuden handelt").⁷¹

The force of this line, screamed by a non-Jew and quoted twice in the letter, apparently compels the author to become, or to realize that he has always been, "a national Jew." It is a line that prompts him, one can deduce, to abandon a path of acculturation, in which he "lived among goyim," lest he be forced always to measure, as Du Bois writes, "[his] soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."⁷² It forces him to contend with the fact that, regardless of his own ambitions and desires, his life is shaped by and vulnerable to the entrenched views of the outside world, and it captures, in Weinreich's terms, an aspect of the compromised "socio-psychological position" of the minority and migrant subject.⁷³ Tristram Wolff has further elaborated Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" in terms of "the obstructive fixity or refractoriness of socially organized space, in which to be 'several things at once' and to be made aware of it, is often a compulsory, and inevitably an unequal, experience."⁷⁴ While the feuilleton provides both comedic

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 8.

⁷³ Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, Vol. 1, 247.

⁷⁴ Tristram Wolff, "Being Several: Reading Blake with Ed Roberson," *New Literary History* 49, no. 4 (2018): 560.

and sexual fodder for readers, it also conveys “this sense of space infused with power.”⁷⁵ In this regard, Ruth Wisse, one of the few scholars to discuss the feuilleton, notes that “though [...] narrated in a tone of light-hearted mockery appropriate to the humor magazine in which it appeared, it rings with unmistakable resentment.”⁷⁶ In her reading, Wisse thus underscores the shaping force of “antisemitic prejudice, whether casual or institutional,” on the young Halpern—a reading that I build upon in emphasizing the pressurized atmospheres that conditioned his early writing.⁷⁷ Yet, while Wisse interprets the feuilleton autobiographically and as Halpern’s explication of his own “return to Jewishness—and to Yiddish,” I would suggest that, even if it does mark such a “return,” it does so negatively and ironizes its own apparent affirmation of national identity.⁷⁸

In its commingling of antisemitism with ‘illicit’ sexuality and gender trouble, the feuilleton parodies views that were circulating widely at the time. It seems likely that Halpern was thinking, in particular, about Otto Weininger’s *Geschlecht und Charakter*, which “proposes that femininity and Jewishness are profoundly linked.”⁷⁹ When Halpern was writing the feuilleton in 1911, Weininger’s tome had already been reissued twelve times⁸⁰ and had gained, after the author’s suicide, a remarkable number of devotees or, in the ironic phrasing of the later Yiddish translation of this famously “self-hating” book, “a large audience of followers, which revered him as a genius and martyr” (“a groysn oylem khsidim, velkhe hobn im fareert als goen un als kodesh”).⁸¹ By alluding to

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan*, 78.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 78. Wisse does admit, though not always consistently, that Halpern was “deeply suspicious of any nationalist inclinations in himself.”

⁷⁹ Santner, *My Own Private Germany*, 109. Santner further explains that “[f]or Weininger, femininity and Jewishness are in essence the names for the metaphysical guilt man brings upon himself by commingling the purity of his theoretical, moral, and aesthetic callings with the base needs and desires of material, embodied existence.” See also Le Rider, *Der Fall Otto Weininger. Wurzeln des Antifeminismus und Antisemitismus* (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 1985), 191; and Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2013).

⁸⁰ Le Rider, *Der Fall Otto Weininger*, 221. Le Rider further notes that “‘Geschlecht und Charakter’ erlebte zwischen 1903 und 1947 28 Auflagen und schließlich im Jahr 1980 eine Neuauflage (1). Es wurde ins Englische, Italienische, Polnische, Ungarische, Russische, ins Dänische, Norwegische und Schwedische übersetzt.”

⁸¹ A. Gliksman, “Oto Vayninger (A shtudye),” in Otto Weininger, *Geshlekhht un kharakter. Printsipyale ophandlung*, trans. E. Bornshteyn (Warsaw: Iaczkowski Bibliotek, 1929), ii. In this passage, Gliksman opts for several *loshn-koydesh* words

the links between Jewishness and femininity that were in the air at the time, Halpern exposes—and mocks—their groundlessness. While it is the non-Jewish Shani who decides to deceive their housemate and dress as a woman, it is the Jewish narrator who is marginalized and blamed. In this respect, the feuilleton speaks more to the vulnerability of the minority subject than to a nationalist program per se.⁸² Indeed, as will be elaborated in what follows, Halpern often dwells, in sometimes disturbing ways, with the experience of such vulnerability; he writes, with intention, from the perspective of the humiliated and powerless.

In its language, moreover, the feuilleton speaks to the linguistic implications of such vulnerability and, on a stylistic level, marks the difference between Yiddish and German, despite the fact that much of it is written in a kind of *daytshmerish*. The latter refers, with a critical accent, to the excessive use of modern German vocabulary and orthography in Yiddish writing. It was used to disparage, as noted in the introduction, the ‘artificial’ language of many Yiddish writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who drew heavily from German-language sources rather than from idiomatic Yiddish speech. In the feuilleton, this style of writing can be discerned in the spelling of certain words (e.g., געוואהנט, געפיהלט, יאָהר, לייעבער) and the word choice (e.g., “groyzam,” “unterhalten”), which reveal not only the influence of the author’s time in Vienna but also the stylistic conventions of many organs of the Yiddish press in the early twentieth century. In the feuilleton, however, Halpern’s use of *daytshmerizmen* has an ironic edge insofar as he ends the text by transcribing—and repeating—the German of Franzl’s antisemitic accusation: “Zo izt es ven man

with strong religious connotations in place of Germanic alternatives, e.g. “khsidim” (or “Hasidim”) instead of “nokhfolgers” or “nokhgeyers”). “Kodesh,” furthermore, can be used to refer to a Jewish martyr who was killed for being Jewish.

⁸² In the late 1900s and 1910s, Halpern often wrote and published in contexts that were suffused with nationalist views. But, even in these contexts, when Halpern wrote about nationalism, he always did so in complex and even opaque ways. See, for example, his poem “Der novi zogt,” which marks the 50th anniversary of Theodor Herzl’s birth, in *Dos yidische folke* (May 20, 1910): 1.

mit eynem yuden handelt” or “So ist es, wenn man mit einem Juden handelt.” While such acts of transcription are not unusual in the history of Yiddish literature, the irruption of a different language and voice, intensified by the content and repetition of the accusation, are jarring. In the end, the linguistic textures of the feuilleton register the distance between Yiddish and German, rather than their closeness, just as the feuilleton thematizes the differences that separate the narrator from his housemates.

The linguistic textures of the feuilleton thus anticipate Halpern’s own turn away from *daytshmerish* in his writing, the innovations of which, as Julian Levinson notes, “include a shift downward in the register of poetic speech (countering the highly stylized Germanisms of the proletarian poets).”⁸³ Halpern performed this shift in the very language of his poetry, but he also thematized it in various prose pieces. For example, in a later feuilleton, “At a Masquerade Ball” (“Oyf a masken bol”), the title of which recalls the dance culture of Vienna, Halpern parodies the linguistic pretensions of a “renowned anarchist” (“der barimter anarchist”).⁸⁴

⁸³ Julian Levinson, “On Some Motifs in Moyshe-Leyb Halpern: A Benjaminian Meditation on Yiddish Modernism,” *Prooftexts* 32, no. 1 (2012): 66. Levinson further notes that “[a]the center of [Halpern’s] poetry were many of the concerns that occupied Benjamin throughout his career, particularly in his writings on his own poet-hero Charles Baudelaire: like Baudelaire, Halpern might be considered a would-be *flâneur* who has lost his bearings in the modern metropolis, a *poète maudit* who combines nostalgia and rage, a yearning for beauty, and a relentless insistence on the ugliness of modern life” (66). In a project that has inspired this chapter, Levinson thus reads “Halpern through a Benjaminian lens” in order “to draw Halpern out of the exclusive context of Yiddish literary history in which he has generally been read” (67).

⁸⁴ Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, “Oyf a masken bol.” I have not been able to locate the newspaper in which this piece was published, but a clipping of it can be found in the Papers of Moses Leib Halpern, File 748, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

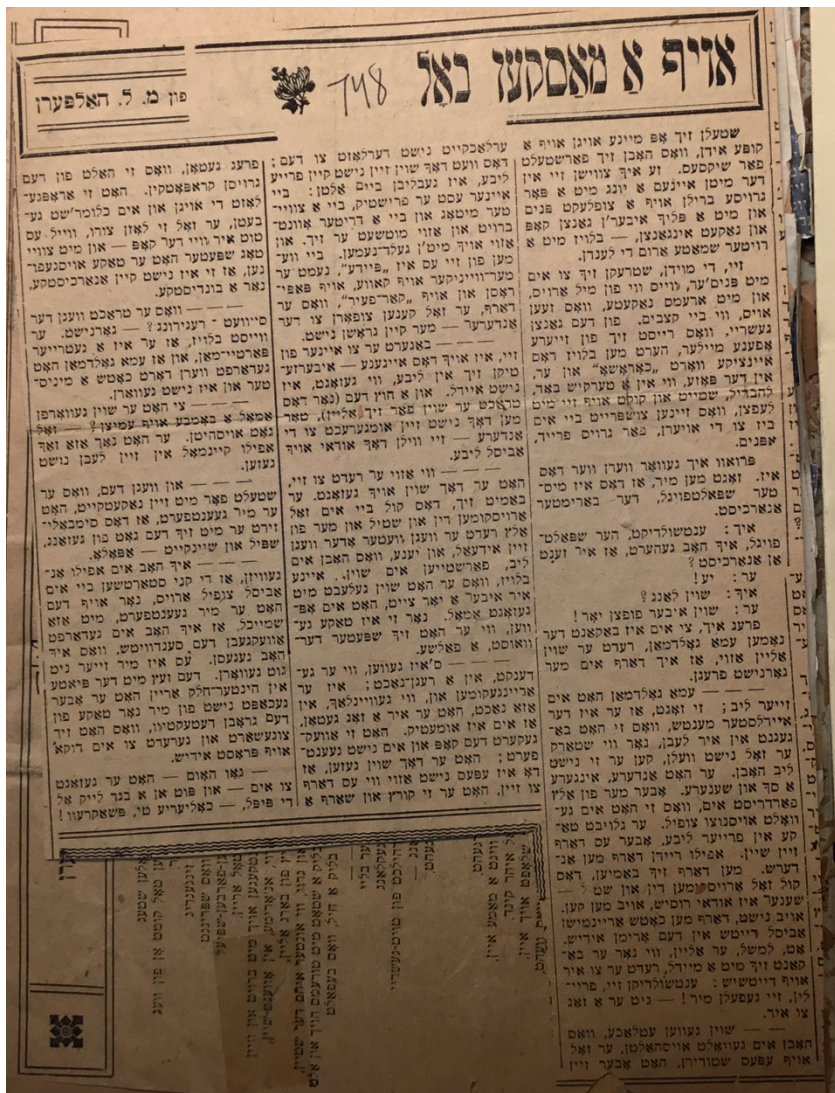


Figure 2: Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, “Oyf a masken bol,” Papers of Moses Leib Halpern, File 748, YIVO Institute, New York.

In a typically exaggerated scene, replete with grotesque imagery, Halpern depicts the “renowned anarchist” sitting, completely naked save for a loincloth, in the middle of “a crowd of Jews made up as shiksas” (“a kupe yidn, vos hobn zikh farshtelt far shiksas”).⁸⁵ In this sardonic representation of Jewish politics and assimilation, the narrator of the scene dwells, in particular, on the role of multilingualism, remarking, for example, that “one can only make out the [Russian] word *khorosho*—all right!—in all the clamor” (“[f]un dem gantsn geshrey [...] hert men bloyz dos eyntsike vort

⁸⁵ Halpern, “Oyf a masken bol.”

‘khorosho’”).⁸⁶ In this welter of voices, the narrator and the anarchist eventually enter into a conversation, which includes a discussion of the latter’s relationship with Emma Goldman. The anarchist states, in a relentlessly misogynistic manner, that Goldman is in love with him, but he boasts that he has other options: women who are younger, more beautiful, and less demanding of his time. He then launches into a brief reflection on one of Goldman’s causes, free love, which, as Jessica Kirzane notes, was an ideological movement that sought to relieve “women from the slavery of subservience to a husband in marriage.”⁸⁷ Goldman “insisted that marriage, like capitalism, is a bourgeois ‘paternal arrangement’ in which women are forced to sell their sexual and economic freedom in exchange for financial security and social position.”⁸⁸ For the nearly-naked anarchist, however, the cause of free love is reduced to aesthetic concerns:

Er gloybt take in frayer libe, ober es darf zayn sheyn, afile reydn darf men andersh. Men darf zikh bamien, dos kol zol aroyskumen din un shtil – shener iz avade rusish, oyb men ken. Oyb nisht, darf men khotsh araynmishn abisl daytsh in dem orimn yidish. Ot, lemoshl, er aley, vi nor er bakant zikh mit a meyd, redt er tsu ir oyf daytshish: entschuldikn zey, freylin, zey gefeln mir! – git er a zog tsu ir. [...] Er bamit zikh, dos kol bay im zol aroyskumen din un shtil un mer fun alts redt er vegn veter oder vegn zayn ideal, un yene, vos hobn im lib, farshteyen im shoy.

Sure, he believes in free love, but it must be beautiful. You even have to speak differently, strive to make your voice soft and fine. Russian is, of course, more beautiful, but if you can’t speak it, then at least mix a bit of German into your poor Yiddish. Here’s an example: as soon as he’s acquainted with a girl, he speaks to her in German: *Fräulein*, pardon, I fancy you! – he says to her out of the blue. [...] He takes pains that his voice should sound soft and fine and, above all, he speaks about the weather or about his ideals, and about those who love him and already understand him.

This passage skewers the superficiality of the purported anarchist, who insists on the elegance of free love, seemingly without concern for the social and economic inequalities that motivated Goldman’s activism. But the passage also suggests a critique of the stylistic tendencies of some

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Jessica Kirzane, “Introduction,” in Miriam Karpilove, *Diary of a Lonely Girl, or The Battle against Free Love* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2020), 8.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

Yiddish writers, who sought to ‘elevate’ their language by imitating the vocabulary and orthography of modern German, by mixing, as it were, “a bit of German into [their] poor Yiddish.” Halpern’s implicit critique of *daytshmerish* does not rest, however, on a notion of language purity or standardization or even, as Max Weinreich once claimed, on the “linguistic impotence” (“shprakhiker impotents”) and lack of “creativity” (“sheferishkayt”) of writers who employ it.⁸⁹ Instead, it stems from the ethical orientation of his writing, which blurs the distinction between literature and life. “In Halpern’s work,” as Levinson notes, “there is no discrete realm of the aesthetic [...] to which the ailing modern self can withdraw. Rather than anchoring his work in some such removed space, Halpern creates a poetic idiom that mirrors his specific, embodied experience as an impoverished, Yiddish-speaking immigrant in America.”⁹⁰ In line with the antisemitic irruption of language in Halpern’s letter, which revealed the hostility simmering below the surface of Viennese society, Halpern’s sardonic representation of the ‘elegant’ and superficial language of the “renowned anarchist” exposes the ways in which such language papers over the destructiveness of one’s surroundings. While Halpern’s feuilletons do not fully elucidate his linguistic choices, they demonstrate how his interrogation of the relationship between Yiddish and German—languages riven by inequality and hierarchies of value—informed his efforts to create poetry that was ‘true,’ as opposed to ‘elegant,’ and to write in ways that were suffused by and resistant to the cultural, social, and material conditions that shaped and damaged his life and literary production.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Max Weinreich, “Daytshmerish toyg nit,” *Yidish far ale* 4 (1938): 106.

⁹⁰ Julian Levinson, “Modernism from below,” 145. Levinson also posits the possible influence of Baudelaire on Halpern’s poetics in “On Some Motifs in Moyshe-Leyb Halpern.”

⁹¹ For Halpern’s reflections on truth and poetry, see, for example, “Der alter un der nayer Moris Rozenfeld,” *Literatur un Leben. Di naye yidische velt* 3 (March 1915): 111. In certain respects, I diverge here from Avraham Novershtern’s reading of Halpern’s oeuvre, which, he suggests, puts enormous pressure on the very idea that “literature has meaning and value” (“harayon shelsifrut yesh mashmaut veerekh”). Novershtern points to Halpern’s simultaneous involvement with and rejection of the aestheticism of *Di yunge* and the ideological demands of publications affiliated with the Communist Party. While I agree with Novershtern’s assessment that Halpern’s work does not accord with the dominant categories and standards of his literary milieu, I do not consider his depiction of an “absurd world” (“olam absurdi”) to be a capitulation to meaninglessness, but rather a kind of realism, in which, through his writing, he grapples with the conditions of the world he lives in. See Novershtern, *Kan gar ba-‘am ba-Yehudi: sifrut Yidish be-Artsot ha-berit* (Jerusalem: Hotsa’at sefarim ‘a. sh. Y. L. Magnes, ha-Universitah ha-‘Ivrit, 2015), 363.

Halpern further elaborates the linguistic implications of alienation and antisemitism in a remarkable document—an unfinished autobiographical sketch—that is held in his archive at the YIVO Institute in New York. While most of the papers included in his archive derive from his time in the United States, providing few details about his adolescence in Vienna, this sketch illumines, however darkly, his early life and work in a fragmentary but dense passage:

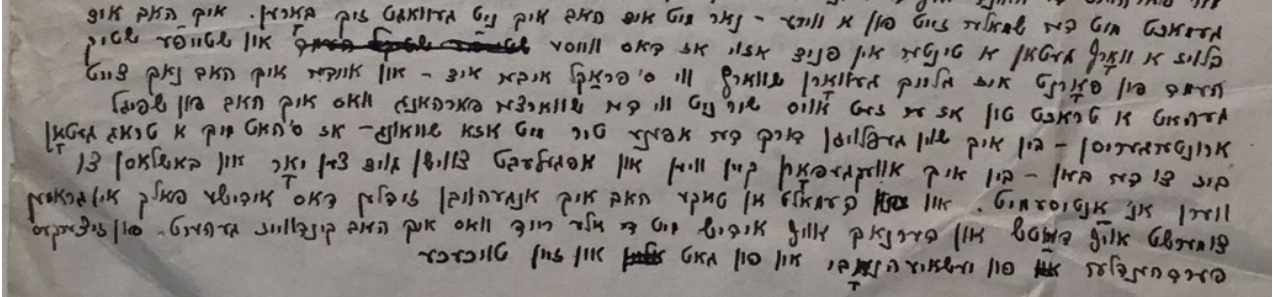


Figure 3: Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, Autobiographical Fragment, Papers of Moses Leib Halpern, File 468, YIVO Institute, New York.

[...] bin ikh avekgeform keyn Vien un opgelebt tsvishn goyim tsen yor un bashlosn tsu vern an' antisemit. Un demolt on take hob ikh ongeheybn zidlen dos yidische folk in gramen tsumersht oyf daytsh un dernokh oyf yidish mit di ale reyde vos ikh hob kindvayz gehert fun zitserkes ferdhendler ~~un~~ fun Yeshaye hanovi un fun got ~~aley~~ un zayn toykhekhe

[...] I left for Vienna and lived among non-Jews [*goyim*] for ten years and decided to become an antisemite. And from then on I began to curse the Jewish people in rhymes first in German and then in Yiddish with all the speech that I had heard as child, the speech of market women, horse merchants, the prophet Isaiah, and of God ~~himself~~ and his curses

In this passage, Halpern only briefly alludes to his time in Vienna, which he recounts, as does Halpern in his letter, as the time in which he “lived among goyim.” It is a phrase that recurs not only in his own writing but also in the critical literature about him. Zalmen Reyzen, for example, uses the phrase “tsvishn goyim” in his later lexicographical entry about Halpern,⁹² and Greenberg uses similar language in his biography of the poet.⁹³ It is perhaps obvious, but important nonetheless, that the phrase indexes the social environment of the writer. It underscores that, when Halpern was in

⁹² Reyzen, *Leksikon*, 770.

⁹³ Greenberg, *Moyshe Leyb Halpern in ram fun zayn dor*, 37.

Vienna, he was immersed in a non-Jewish and German-language milieu, despite the fact that, as dramatized in the feuilleton, he was never fully accepted in that space. In this regard, despite its charged and problematic connotations, the phrase underscores the linguistic and cultural realities that faced a young immigrant interested in literature and the arts in Vienna, for, as Thomas Soxberger notes, a Yiddish literary scene only began to emerge there around 1904, not long before Halpern left the city.⁹⁴ In the charged vocabulary of Dan Miron, it could thus be said that Halpern became a writer in a context in which Yiddish was still not considered to be “a ‘natural’ medium for conscious artistic use.”⁹⁵ In the late nineteenth century, the elite leaders of the Jewish community in Vienna largely consisted of the German-speaking bourgeoisie, which, as Soxberger recounts, “equated the ‘Jewish *Jargon*’ with an Eastern European and especially Galician ‘lack of culture’ and with the language of the ‘medieval ghetto,’ which had fortunately been left behind” (“[...] den »jüdischen Jargon« mit osteuropäischer, insbesondere galizischer, »Kulturlosigkeit« und mit der Sprache des glücklich überwundenen »mittelalterlichen Ghettos« gleichsetzte”).⁹⁶ In this hostile environment, including *within* the Jewish community, Yiddish culture only began to flourish, albeit briefly, in the early 1920s, with the influx of Yiddish-speaking migrants into the city, especially in Leopoldstadt and Brigittenau, and with the establishment of theaters, newspapers, and a publishing house.⁹⁷ In this light, it is unsurprising that Halpern initially turned toward German while in Vienna—for what alternatives, in this context, did he really have?

In the above fragment, however, Halpern puts a darker spin on his time in Vienna: he not only lived “*tsvishn goyim*” but also “decided to become an antisemite.” What are we to make of this phrasing, which rings with ambiguity and opens up a number of discomfiting associations? Does it

⁹⁴ Thomas Soxberger, *Revolution am Donaukanal. Jiddische Kultur und Politik in Wien 1904 bis 1938* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2013), 7.

⁹⁵ Miron, *A Traveler Disguised*, 34.

⁹⁶ Soxberger, *Revolution am Donaukanal*, 8.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, x.

suggest that he had become a kind of “self-hating” or “anti-Jewish Jew,” à la Otto Weininger,⁹⁸ or does it express, in a different key, the critical and even hostile perspectives that animated his writing, in which he did not hold back from ‘cursing’ or ‘berating’ his community, his family, and even himself? The autobiographical fragment does not offer a narrative of acculturation, but rather of vituperation; in it, he marks, at least on one level, the distance he sought to establish between himself and the environment in which he was born and raised—an environment that he briefly returned to but did not embrace, though it remained a major preoccupation of his writing. In a later poem that resonates with this trajectory, Halpern imagines the last surviving fly in a room—the other flies already “hardened” on the windowsill—as it rests on the edge of a glass of water. The speaker of the poem addresses the fly, but when it is asked to “sing something from [its] distant homeland” (“zing [...] epes fun dayn vaytn heymland”), the fly replies that “its right leg should wither/ if it were to pluck a string/ in the foreign water/ and if it were to forget/ the beloved dump/ which was once its homeland - - -” (“az opdarn zol ir dos rekhte fisl,/ oyb zi vet onrirn a strune/ ba di fremde vasern/ un oyb zi vet fargesn/ on dem libn misthoyfn/ vos iz geven amol ir heymland - - -”).⁹⁹ In line with the poet’s reflections on his vindictive rhymes and apparent antisemitism, the fly acknowledges the centrality of its “homeland,” which holds its body together and maintains its creaturely integrity, while figuring that homeland as a “dump.” Furthermore, in refusing “to pluck a string/ in the foreign water,” the fly’s resistance to beautiful speech, to singing, echoes the autobiographical fragment, in which Halpern recounts that he could continue to “curse” in his first language, by drawing, as it were, from the linguistic resources of the “dump.”

Halpern cites, in particular, “the speech of market women, horse merchants, the prophet Isaiah, and of God himself and his curses.” In writing his own curses in Yiddish, as opposed to

⁹⁸ Paul Reitter, *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 28.

⁹⁹ Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, “Di letzte,” *Di goldene pave* (Cleveland: Grupe Yidish, 1924), 136.

German, he thus builds upon a tradition of Jewish self-critique and castigation, including Isaiah’s rebuke of the sins and corruption of the people of Israel and the punishments suffered by them for their violation of God’s will. But in addition to drawing on the condemnatory language of prophets such as Isaiah, whom the poet Miklós Radnóti described, in the face of the Holocaust, as “a scholar of terrible words,”¹⁰⁰ Halpern also mines the everyday language of market women, whose “curses” (“kloles”) became fodder for folklorists,¹⁰¹ and of the horse trade, which, in Central and Eastern Europe, was largely conducted by Jewish merchants.¹⁰² He turns, thereby, to the imposing language of the Hebrew Bible¹⁰³ and to the “low” registers of the marketplace, as opposed to the “high” registers of Viennese culture, in order to carve out his own voice as a poet. Like the singing fly, Halpern finds a way to disparage the environment in which he was born and raised—his “heymland”—while relying upon the linguistic energies and resources of that environment, which

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Geoffrey Hartman, “Holocaust and Hope,” in *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*, eds. Moishe Postone and Eric L. Santner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 242.

¹⁰¹ In an interview as part of the Wexler Oral History Project at the Yiddish Book Center, Benjamin Harshav recalls that, when he was a young student in Vilna (Vilnius), he took a class about folklore literature. His teacher sent him and his fellow students to a fish market, where they encountered “zitserkes” (market women), whom they would provoke into thinking that they were going to steal from them in order to hear the “curses” (“kloles”) of the women and thus to collect “folklore.” See “Benjamin (Binyomen) Harshav’s Oral History,” Yiddish Book Center: <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/oral-histories/interviews/woh-fi-0000401/benjamin-binyomen-harshav-2013>.

¹⁰² The horse trade was an important and fascinating site of encounter between Jews and non-Jews, as is attested in sources such as *Der vollkommene Pferdekennner* (1764), which was edited and likely written, at least in part, by Baron Wolf Ehrenfried von Reitzenstein. In an article about the book’s acquisition by the Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Ulrike Sonnemann notes that, during the early modern period, “[i]n rural areas [...], animal trading, like money lending for the purchase of seeds, was mainly done by Jews.” In this context, *Der vollkommene Pferdekennner* was intended to facilitate interactions between Jews and non-Jews and even included “a language guide providing explanations and translations for over 1,500 words and terms from western Yiddish [...] and from Hebrew. This was intended to enable non-Jewish dealers to conduct sales conversations competently. There was also an appendix that offers five example dialogs of the kind that might have taken place among traders.” See Sonnemann, “A Testament to Trade Relationships between Jews and Non-Jews in the Eighteenth Century. *Der vollkommene Pferdekennner* (The Complete Horse Connoisseur), Uffenheim 1764, Purchase, 2007” (2021): www.jmberlin.de/en/node/8183. For a detailed analysis of this book’s language appendix, see Renate Evers, “‘Der vollkommene Pferdekennner’, 1764: Jewish Horse Traders in the Margraviate of Brandenburg-Ansbach and their Language at the Threshold of Modernity,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 63, no. 1 (2018): 201-228.

¹⁰³ In both his early and late poetry, Halpern also draws on the language of traditional study and of “Jewish discursive language.” See Jordan Finkin, “Jewish Discourse and Modern Yiddish Poetry,” *A Rhetorical Conversation: Jewish Discourse in Modern Yiddish Literature* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 49-80. Already in the early poem, “Di khurve,” for example, published under the pseudonym “Frida Halpern,” he reflects darkly on such study: “Tiefe shtilkayt in der khurve/ vu es flegen zikh tsuviegen/ bleykhe yinglekh iber alte/ sformim mit gemore-nign.” Halpern, “Di khurve,” *Dos yidische folk* (July 2, 1909): 3.

had been widely derided for its “lack of culture” (“Kulturlosigkeit”). In this web of tension and resentment, Halpern ‘chose’ Yiddish as a means to write about experiences of degradation and precarity, for which, it seems, he needed the language of prophecy and the marketplace as opposed to the language of *Kultur*.

Halpern’s autobiographical fragment resonates with one of his most famous poems, “Zlotshov, mayn heym,” which flips nostalgia for the ‘old world’ on its head.¹⁰⁴ The poem was written after Halpern had immigrated to the United States, and it looks back on his hometown of Zolochiv (Zlotshov) with the animosity, one might say, of an antisemite; the poem “rhymes” and “curses,” however, in the language of “zitserkes,” in the language of those it reproaches:

O Zlotshov, du mayn heym, mayn shtot
mit dayn kloyster-shpits un shul un bod.
Un mit dayne zitserkes oyfn mark,
un mit dayne yidlakh vos raysn zikh op
vi hint oyf dem poyer vos kumt arop
mit a koyshl ayer fun Sasover barg –
vi dos lebn in friling vakht oyf in mir
mayn orem bisl benkshaft tsu dir, –
mayn heym, mayn Zlotshov.

Nor az ikh dermon zikh farbenkterhayt
on dem noyed Rapoport, vi er geyst
mit zayn grobn boykh in shul arayn,
un on Shay Hilels, dem frumak,
vos volt vi a khazir in a zak
farkoyft afile di zun mit ir sheyn –
iz dos genug es zol oysgeyn in mir,
azoy vi a likht, mayn benkshaft tsu dir, –
mayn heym, mayn Zlotshov.

Vi dertseyl zikh di mayse fun yenem frant:
er hot eynmol farnakht azoy lang nokhanand
gezen malokhim arum der zun,
biz se hot im a shiker, a goy mit a hak
aza min farfor geton untern frak,
az r’iz nebakh shir nisht geshtorbn derfun –

¹⁰⁴ Halpern, *Di goldene pave*, 16-18. I have cited my own translation; for another translation, see Benjamin Harshav and Barbara Harshav, eds./trans., *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, translations with the participation of Kathryn Hellerstein, Brian McHale, and Anita Norich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 409-411.

der goy mit der hak iz mayn sine in mir
tsu mayn zeydn, un im tsulib oykh tsu dir, –
mayn heym, mayn Zlotshov.

[...]

Nor vunderlekh iz dokh unzer velt
mit a ferd un vogn iber a feld
shlept men zikh aroys tsu der ban,
vos filt vi a shed iber felder avek,
biz zi brengt oyf a shif mit a tsvishndek,
vos firt ariber keyn Nyu-York dauntoun –
iz dos take di eyntsike treyst khotsh far mir,
vos men vet mikh nisht bagrobn in dir, –
mayn heym, mayn Zlotshov.

O Zlotshov, you, my home, my town
with your church spire and synagogue and bath.
And with your women at the market,
with your little Jews, let loose
like dogs at a peasant walking down
with a basket of eggs from the Sassov mountain –
like life in the spring, it awakens in me,
my poor scrap of longing for you –
my home, my Zlotshov.

But when I recall, amid my longing,
how the wealthy Rappaport, with his fat belly,
used to walk to the synagogue,
and Shay Hillel, the zealot,
who, like a pig in a sack, would sell
even the sun and its shine –
that's enough to extinguish,
like a candle, my longing for you, –
my home, my Zlotshov.

How does the story about the dandy go:
one night he watched the angels
around the sun for so long,
until a drunken goy with an axe
struck him under his tailcoat.
But the poor fuck didn't die from it –
the goy with the axe is my hatred in me
for my father, and because of him also you, –
my home, my Zlotshov.

[...]

But our world is full of wonders.
A horse and wagon can drag you
over a field to the train,
which flies like a demon over the fields,
until it arrives at a ship with a lower deck,
which will take you to New York, downtown, –
and this, indeed, is my only consolation,
that they will not bury me in you, –
my home, my Zlotshov.

It is a poem in which the speaker first acknowledges his “scrap of longing” for his hometown, which is a place characterized, already in the second line, by a deep tension between the Jewish and non-Jewish population (“with your church spire and synagogue”). In the first stanza, even as it builds toward the speaker’s acknowledgment, however fleeting, of his homesickness, the language and imagery are negatively charged. For example, in the invocation of a mob of “little Jews [...] like dogs” swarming a peasant carrying eggs, Halpern draws upon a long tradition, beginning with the Gospel of Matthew, of associating Jews with dogs, which persisted throughout the medieval and early modern period and informed the language of Shakespeare, who referred to the “dog Jew” and the “currish Jew,” and which remains an antisemitic trope today.¹⁰⁵ Kenneth Stow argues that “[t]he image of the Jewish dog surfaced especially in the context of ‘the childrens’ bread’ [a reference to Matthew 15:36] and those who endangered it or its recipients: those who might abscond with this food, leaving the children to hunger, or those who might rip it apart, as dogs are wont to do with food. Exegetically, the Jew had become, and would continue to be seen as, the hungry thief, the ‘trampler’ of the true Christian food.”¹⁰⁶ In “Zlotshov, mayn heym,” Halpern thus draws from a well of antisemitic tropes that infuse his writing with the animosities and vulnerabilities that had put enormous pressure on Jewish life in Eastern Europe and that had incentivized mass migration. It is a poem that thus ironizes the “more sentimental images of *shtetlekh* as objects of longing,” which, as

¹⁰⁵ Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 3-6.

¹⁰⁶ Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, 6.

Jeffrey Shandler notes, became increasingly common in American popular culture in later decades, as “exemplified by Alexander Olshanetsky and Jacob Jacobs’ 1932 song “Mayn shtetele Belz” (My Little Town, Bălți), in which nostalgia for this Bessarabian town is articulated as a generalized longing for the family home and childhood innocence.”¹⁰⁷ In contrast, Halpern foregrounds not only the antisemitism that saturated such *shtetlekh* but also the corruption and hypocrisy internal to the Jewish community, as exemplified by the rich (Rappaport) and the religiously fanatic (Shay Hillel). The speaker’s recollection of these figures extinguishes “like a candle, [his] longing” and amplifies the characterization of his hometown as itself a “hungry thief” that leaves one both materially and spiritually bereft; at the same time, however, this disarrayed space lends the speaker—and, in turn, the poet—a frenetic and even violent energy that continues to imprint his voice and style long after he had left for “New York, downtown.”

In the third stanza of “Zlotshov, mayn heym,” Halpern further probes the violence that punctuated life in the *shtetl*. He recounts the story of a “dandy” (“frant”) and, once again, invokes a figure—a kind of aesthete and, echoing the discourse of the feuilleton discussed above, an effeminate man—who would have likely found inspiration in the culture and fashion of fin-de-siècle Vienna. In the poem, in an intensification of the verbal assault recounted in the feuilleton by Halpern, the dandy is met with physical and possibly sexual violence: “a drunken goy with an axe/ struck him under his tailcoat.” While the dandy survives, the attack on him is conveyed in a brutal and visceral manner (which I try to capture, in part, by translating “r’iz nebakh” as the “poor fuck”). Furthermore, in an unsettling inversion that recalls the antisemitism of the autobiographical fragment, the hatred of the “drunken goy” is revealed to be that of the poem’s speaker: “the goy with the axe is my hatred in me.” While the speaker’s internalization of this hatred is unsettling as such, it becomes all the more disturbing when read against the backdrop of the pogroms and ethnic

¹⁰⁷ Jeffrey Shandler, *Shtetl: A Vernacular Intellectual History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 39.

violence that had fractured Jewish life in Eastern Europe, including in Galicia, in the first decades of the twentieth century: mass murder, sexual assault, and property damage, including the destruction of sacred objects, that amounted, as Jeffrey Veidlinger has argued, to a form of genocide that anticipated the Holocaust.¹⁰⁸ In this context, the speaker's identification with the axe-wielding "goy"—with the perpetrator, as it were—troubles any sense of continuity that may be implied in the collection's title, *The Golden Peacock* (*Di goldene pave*), which appropriates a folkloric image that was and remains, as Jordan Finkin notes, "an emblem not only of Jewish tradition but also specifically of Yiddish poetry and lyricism."¹⁰⁹ It is a poem that insistently strips away the varnish of nostalgia and tradition in order to reveal the corruption and violence that pulsate beneath.

Halpern's mature poetry is thus imbued with a profound critical energy that harnesses not only the linguistic resources of prophetic speech and the marketplace, but also the hatred of others and the "hatred in [him]." In this regard, his turn away from German did not accord with the cultural program of nascent nationalist movements, such as diaspora nationalism and Zionism, which motivated the linguistic choices of some writers, but instead demonstrated that he continued, as remarked in the autobiographical fragment, to "curse the Jewish people" in Yiddish. Nevertheless, in his shift toward Yiddish, Halpern began to write for an almost exclusively Jewish audience and, in the thick idiomaticity of his language, made no "translational accommodations to the laws and rules of global literary exchange."¹¹⁰ Indeed, by writing in ways that did not accommodate "imagined readers or listeners" in German (or other 'imperial' languages), it seems that he was able to "curse" without concern for how his words could be appropriated by readers who resembled "the goy with

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The Pogroms of 1918-1921 and the Onset of the Holocaust* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ Finkin, *A Rhetorical Conversation*, 52. David G. Roskies suggests that Halpern transforms "the golden peacock" into "an emblem of loss, a symbol of unrequited longing, or, worse yet, into an icon of all one's debased dreams and idolatrous desires." Roskies, "America in the Yiddish literary imagination," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, eds. Michael P. Kramer and Hana Wirth-Nesher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 81.

¹¹⁰ Saul Zaritt, *Jewish American Writing and World Literature: Maybe to Millions, Maybe to Nobody* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 67.

the axe,” the animosity of whom exceeded the rhetorical.¹¹¹ Halpern’s linguistic shift also meant that his writing was received—as anticipated by Reyzen’s description of the unread piles of Yiddish newspapers—primarily outside the present-day borders of Austria and Germany. The locus of his work moved, in concert with his own migrations, away from Vienna and toward different centers of Yiddish cultural production, such as Czernowitz (Chernivtsi), Lemberg (Lviv), where he published his first poems in Yiddish,¹¹² and, most importantly for his mature work, New York.

Despite this spatial shift, however, Halpern continued to engage with and write about German-language culture, as attested in the feuilletons discussed above and in the translations he completed of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and, in greater quantity, of Heinrich Heine.¹¹³ In 1913, for example, about five years after his immigration to the United States, Halpern published a series of Heine translations (again under the pseudonym Hel-pen), which included renditions of *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen*, itself a sardonic critique German nationalism, and excerpts from *Buch der Lieder*, *Neue Gedichte*, *Atta Troll*, “Das Sklavenschiff,” and “Der Apollogott.”¹¹⁴ Jeffrey Grossman has argued that these translations shaped Halpern’s own “aesthetics of arrangement” and his “practice of ironizing the received image and received tradition.”¹¹⁵ But they also demonstrate, at a more basic level, that Halpern’s literary production continued to be informed by his exploration of the fraught relation between Yiddish and German. In this regard, one might also consider the 1920 essay that he published in commemoration of the death of Richard Dehmel, whom he had first read while living

¹¹¹ Norich, “Language Choice.”

¹¹² Reyzen, *Leksikon*, 770.

¹¹³ Halpern’s translations of Hofmannsthal’s “Balade fun oysern lebn” and “Troyemen” can be found in *Schriften* 3 (1914): 40-41. Zisho Landoy and R. Ayzland published translations of the work of Richard Dehmel, the subject of an important essay by Halpern, in the same issue of *Schriften*.

¹¹⁴ Jeffrey A. Grossman, “The Invention of Love? Or How Moyshe Leyb Halpern Read Heinrich Heine,” *Leket: Yidische sbtudyas haynt/ Jiddistik heute/ Yiddish Studies Today*, eds. Marion Aptroot, Efrat Gal-Ed, Roland Gruschka, and Simon Neuberger, Band 1 (Düsseldorf: Düsseldorf University Press, 2012), 130. Halpern’s translations of Heine were also published in the monumental *Di verk fun Haynrik Hayne in akbt bend mit a biografye fun E. Kalisher un a forwort fun dr. N. Syrkin*, trans. Reuven Ayzland, Chaim Nakhmen Bialik, Zishe Landoy, Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, et al. (New York: Farlag Yiddish, 1918).

¹¹⁵ Grossman, “The Invention of Love?,” 140 and 149.

and studying in Vienna.¹¹⁶ It is an essay that reveals not only how German literature continued to inform his thinking and writing but also, as Sunny Yudkoff writes in a different but related context, how it “opened up a productive space of critique,” which allowed him to re-articulate the difference between Yiddish and German.¹¹⁷

In this essay, Halpern takes aim not just at the work of Dehmel but seemingly at the entirety of the German poetic tradition, which, he avers, centers on one compromised motif: “[o]ne celebrates chivalrous heroism and one adorns it with roses and nightingales” (“[m]en bazingt di ritserlikhe heldishkayt un men batsirt zi mit royzen un nakhtigalen”).¹¹⁸ It is, to be sure, a tendentious and hyperbolic claim, but one that speaks, as discussed earlier, to the ethical thrust of Halpern’s writing and to his concern for “the ailing modern self.”¹¹⁹ In reducing the whole of German literature to a single motif and, indeed, to a cliché, Halpern glosses over an array of counterexamples, but he also spotlights what he considers to be a problematic tendency in this literature: to disregard the reality of contemporary life and, echoing Heine’s critique of August von Platen, to embrace an “aesthetic position [...] entirely and programmatically unengaged with the present.”¹²⁰ In the essay, published in a socialist newspaper based in New York, Halpern sets the ‘high’ language of German in opposition to the ‘low’ language of Yiddish. The relationship between them becomes, in the essay’s subtext, a kind of cipher for thinking about competing claims made of literature: as a space of beauty and refinement, as a tool of critique, and as a means to express the suffering or, as Halpern once phrased it, the “screamingness” (“shrayedikayt”) of the powerless.¹²¹ In

¹¹⁶ Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, “Rikhard Dehmel,” *Di naye velt* (July 16, 1920): 16-19.

¹¹⁷ Sunny Yudkoff uncovers the intertextual network that undergirds David Vogel’s *In the Sanatorium*, the importance of which “was not solely to situate himself in a literary tradition.” She analyzes how Vogel enters this network “with an eye toward difference” and in order “to problematize the possibility of a Hebrew-German conversation.” Yudkoff, *Tubercular Capital: Illness and the Conditions of Modern Jewish Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018): 119-120.

¹¹⁸ Halpern, “Rikhard Dehmel,” 16.

¹¹⁹ Levinson, “Modernism from below,” 145.

¹²⁰ Na’ama Rokem, *Prosaic Conditions: Heinrich Heine and the Spaces of Zionist Literature* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 31.

¹²¹ See Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, 196-202.

the essay, Halpern thus turns attention to the “enormous factories” (“rizige fabriken”) that have been built “on the site where the roses blossomed” (“oyf dem ort vu di royzen hoben gebliht”) and “the suits of armor of the former robber-knights, [which] have already long been found in the museums – exhibited for impotent people, who have time to bore themselves with such past times” (“di pantsers fun di amolige-royb-ritser shtehen shoyng lang in di muzeums – oysgeshtelt far menshen impotente, vos hoben tsayt zikh tsu langvayligen mit azelkhe fargangenhayten”).¹²² While Halpern expresses muted admiration for some of the cultural works that are concerned with such “fargangenhayten,” including for Dehmel’s poetry, which he translates throughout the essay, he relativizes their reach and, in consonance with the work of Bertolt Brecht and other socialist writers, questions the value of “roses – moonlight” (“royzen – levone-shayn”) for those “who do not have anything to eat, or who have been beset with an abscess on the tongue, or who have been hung up with a lock on their mouth like a dog” (“vos hoben nisht vos tsu fresen, oder es hot zikh zey ongezetst a make oyf der tsung, oder men hot zey oyfgehungen a shlos oyfn moyl vi a hunt – zey zolen nisht beysen keyn broyt”).¹²³ The essay thus extends a line of thought that connects Halpern’s scattered reflections on the German language: it is a means to dissemble, a language in which one can dress up, as it were, as a knight in the modern world. This line of thought resonates with critiques of acculturation and of the desire, as Kerry Wallach has delineated, “to ‘pass,’ to remain invisible, hidden, or incognito as Jews.”¹²⁴ But, unlike most critics of acculturation, Halpern does not turn to Yiddish to reclaim or affirm Jewish identity, but rather to write more ‘truthfully’—and, as we’ve seen, more scathingly and even ‘antisemitically’—about life on the margins. In Yiddish, as opposed to German, he can give voice to the starving and sick body and write out of—not merely about—experiences of migration, statelessness, and degradation.

¹²² Halpern, “Rikhard Dehmel,” 16.

¹²³ Ibid., 16.

¹²⁴ Kerry Wallach, *Passing Illusions: Jewish Visibility in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 1.

In teasing out the metalinguistic strands in Halpern’s writings, I do not want to suggest that they constitute ontological claims about Yiddish and German—about what these languages, in essence, are. Instead, they evince a contextual or ‘environmental’ understanding that centers on how these languages register, in different ways, the inequalities that structure the world in which one speaks, reads, and writes. In this regard, in his essay on Dehmel, Halpern highlights the role of German as a language of the state, with the backing, as it were, of an army. He critically recounts the authorial trajectory of Dehmel, who, on occasion, wrote socially-conscious poetry, but who, after hearing the call of the “fatherland” (“foterland”) at the onset of World War I, “exchanged his pen for a sword” (“zayn feder oyf a shverd farbiten”).¹²⁵ For Halpern, this trajectory is all the more damning—and, for him, all the more typical of the German poetic tradition—because Dehmel had become, at the onset of the twentieth century, a paragon of the modern poet, who exhibited in his verse, as Heinz Otto Burger notes, a “strong social sensibility, an eye for the modern environment, [and] the occasional propensity for colloquial language” (“starke soziale Empfinden, den Blick für die moderne Umwelt, die gelegentliche Neigung zum Alltagswort”).¹²⁶ Despite these qualities, however, Dehmel came to adopt a position of power, which, for Halpern, recalls the fact that Goethe became a state minister and was entranced, as in his *West-östlicher Divan*, with “despotism” (“despotism”).¹²⁷ In the course of the essay, it thus becomes apparent that Halpern’s claim that German poetry remains tethered to the motif of chivalry is not only about its romance with the past but, even more fundamentally, about the imbrication of language and power. He repeatedly notes the vertical thrust of this poetry and its desire to adopt the perspective of the despot, the king, and the knight, all of whom look down, in a literal and symbolic sense, on the less powerful. In contrast, in his own writing, there is, to repeat, a pronounced “shift downward in the register of poetic

¹²⁵ Halpern, “Rikhard Dehmel,” 17.

¹²⁶ Heinz Otto Burger, “Dehmel, Richard,” in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 3 (1957): 564-565.

¹²⁷ Halpern, “Rikhard Dehmel,” 17.

speech,” entailing not only a turn away from German and *daytsbmerish* but also the use of coarse and ‘lowly’ language (e.g., curses and the language of the marketplace) and the exploration of the “ugly feelings” that ensue, as Sianne Ngai has shown, from “the situation of restricted agency.”¹²⁸

Halpern further turns attention, in this essay, to Dehmel’s “Ein Heine-Denkmal” (“A Heine Monument”), which was written and published in 1895, and which refracts debates about the construction and placement of a monument to Heinrich Heine that raged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹²⁹ These debates were riven by antisemitic and nationalist perspectives, but they also attracted, as Paul Reitter notes, the attention of “luminaries such as Max Liebermann, Alfred Kerr, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Heinrich Mann, Franz Mehring, Heinrich von Treitschke, and Empress Elisabeth of Austria, to name just a few.”¹³⁰ In his poem, Dehmel intervenes in these debates by imagining a *Fürst* (prince) who wants to erect a monument to Heine “on the square in front of the cathedral” (“auf dem Platze vor der Kathedrale”).¹³¹ While the poem endorses the erection of such a monument and praises the achievements of Heine, it “draws equally on philosemitic and antisemitic discourse,”¹³² as when the prince intones, while looking out at the square, that “there he should sit, as he really was,/ the sick Jew and the great artist,/ who spoke our mother tongue more powerfully/ than any German Müller’s or Schultze’s” (“[d]a soll er sitzen, wie er wirklich war,/ der kranke Jude und der große Künstler,/ der unsre Muttersprache mächtiger sprach/ als alle deutschen Müller’s oder Schultze’s”).¹³³ Despite this compromised rhetoric, the poem seems to understand itself in progressive terms. The prince, for example, states that he intends

¹²⁸ Levinson, “On Some Motifs in Moyshe-Leyb Halpern,” 66; Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2.

¹²⁹ For an overview and analysis of these debates, see Paul Reitter, “Heine in the Bronx,” *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 74, no. 4 (1999): 327-336.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹³¹ Richard Dehmel, “Ein Heine-Denkmal,” *Lebensblätter. Gedichte und Anderes* (Berlin: Verlag der Genossenschaft PAN, 1895), 113.

¹³² Rokem, *Prosaic Conditions*, 124.

¹³³ Dehmel, “Ein Heine-Denkmal,” *Lebensblätter*, 114.

to abdicate his position and to yield his power to the “people” (“Volk”) in the new year, and the poem itself is structured, as Rokem notes, by the gap between the prince’s vision and “the empty space where the monument will stand in the future,” suggesting, with a critical accent, that “this space is irreconcilable with the current political reality.”¹³⁴ It represents, therefore, one of Dehmel’s “social poems” (“sotsyale lieder”), and, according to Halpern, it “bought him a place in the hearts of all the noble people in the world who love Heinrich Heine, the sick Jew” (“mit dem lied hot er zikh ayngeskoyft an ort in dem harts fun ale eydele menshen in velt vos hoben lieb in Haynrikh Hayne dem kranken yid”).¹³⁵ Halpern suggests, however, that the poem’s critical force is tempered both by the perspectives that it foregrounds and those that it overlooks. While Dehmel ostensibly takes the side of “the sick Jew” and recognizes, like the other “noble people,” that Heine had been made sick by “the chivalrous clique of his time” (“di ritserlikhe klike fun zayn tsayt”), the only voice that can be heard in the poem, in tension with its social themes, is that of the prince.¹³⁶ The poem thus anticipates Dehmel’s own turn toward what Halpern describes, in a discomfiting formulation, as “the ‘holy Mecca’ of roses, nightingales, and chivalry” (“dem ‘heyiligen meka’ fun royzen, nakhtigalen un ritserlikhkayt”)—toward, in other words, that which made “the [...] Jew” sick.¹³⁷

Halpern’s essay on Dehmel offers insight into what he resists in his own writing and, moreover, into how he articulates that resistance in terms of the disjunction between German- and Yiddish-language writing. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, in Dehmel’s poem about the Heine monument, the prince instructs the sculptor not to place the poet too high above the ground, “not in the air, for he should remain close/ to the people and to the earth, as is dear to great artists” (“nicht in die Luft, damit ihm Volk und Erde/ nah bleiben, wie es großen Künstlern lieb ist”).¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Rokem, *Prosaic Conditions*, 54.

¹³⁵ Halpern, “Rikhard Dehmel,” 19.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³⁸ Dehmel, “Ein Heine-Denkmal,” *Lebensblätter*, 114.

Halpern casts doubt, however, on the poet's support of this position. In his account of Dehmel's later embrace of "the chivalrous clique," Halpern proposes—in hyperbolic terms that magnify the hierarchies that structure writing across languages—that German-language writers have consistently been seduced by the charms of that "clique" and that, in their work, any horizontal approach has almost always given way to the vertical. German literature is, in this account, never "close/ to the people and to the earth." Halpern further suggests that the expression of chivalric power is aided by the rhetorical cover of roses and nightingales, the beauty of which disguises the suffering of the people 'on the ground.' He thereby extends his critique of the ways in which German-language literature and culture tend to dissemble and to turn attention away from the inequalities that damage the health and lives of the disregarded and less powerful.

Halpern further explores these dynamics in a remarkable poem, "Monument Goethe," that gives voice to the poet below:

Monument Goethe

A dank dir, mayn velt-dikhter do oyfn shteyn,
host dermont, az mayn libe froy hot mir
ongezogt mitbrenge briv-papir –
vayl zi ken undzer kind nit lozn aleyn.
Bist ongeton ze ikh in shteynerne shikh,
un oykh in bgodim azoyne – mir dakht,
mikh art nit di sheynkayt fun zey – nor ikh trakht
tsi men ken in zey geyn, un tsu haltn zey zikh.
Ikh gey a por shikh mit meklinton-zoyln,
mayne hoyzn fabrik-shtempl yozef-ber,
nor zey toygn nit – koym men git zikh a ker
iz men borvis, un men geyt arum mit a hoyln –
mit a hoyln – mayn groyser dikhter.

Kh'hob nekhtn bam ovntbroyt take geredt
mit mayn liber froy vegn mir un dir,
nor zi hot gekukt mit zorg oyf mir:
– ikh es nit, ze oys dar, vi a bret.
Kh'vel ir zogn, az ikh hob dikh haynt gezen.
Ikh muz nor a vayl nokh arumgeyn do.
Ikh muz oyszen ingantsn broyn un blo,
zi zol gloybn, az ikh bin oyf luft geven.

Kh'vel ir oysmoln, vi ikh hob dikh getrofn
mit dem shney do oyf dayne aksl un hent,
un oykh vi du shteyst mit di oymn gevendt
tsum himl ahin, vu di zun leygt zikh shlofn –
leygt zikh shlofn – ot-vos.

Tsulib vos du bist oyfn shteyn do aroyf
vel ikh zogn, az dos iz a retenish.
Ikh aleyn, ikh ken tsumol oyfn tish
nit aroyfkrikhn – oyb men hoybt mikh nit oyf.
Ikh bin eynmol aruntergefaln shoyt
un dafke mit a lomp in di hent,
men hot mikh nokhdem koym derkent.
Mayn farshvolener kop hot geblankt vi a kroyn
un mayn libe froy hot gemakht gvaldn,
a mentsh mit gezunte fis un hent
darf nit krikhn – hot zi gezogt – oyf di vent,
nor an af ken in der hoykh zikh haltn,
hoykh zikh haltn – ot-vos.

Nor mayn libe froy zol nit beyz zayn oyf dir –
Vel ikh zogn, az loyt du host zikh farklert,
hostu bloyz gedarft a shverd mit a ferd
du zolst oyszen sheyn vi an ofitsir.
Oder, vi a prist, ven er rayt durkhn shney
tsu a krankn, vos shtarbt, – zey raytn oykh,
nor zey haltn a tseylem mit hent oyfn boykh.
Dos dermont mikh, vi m'hot amol gehaltn
a hak iber mir. Ikh bin geven
nokh gor a kind, ven dos iz geshen.
Der goy hot gevolt mir dem sharbn shpaltn
sharbn shpaltn – ot-vos.

Kh'hob mayn liber froy shoyt dertseylt funderfun,
s'hot getrofn bam shaptsirngeyn.
Bahm hant fun mayn mamen hob ikh oyf a shteyn
derzen, vi es hengt antkegn der zun
a mensh in gortn, vos se gezt im blut
fun hent un fis un fun zayn kop, –
un vayl er hot geveynt, vi er vil arop,
un kletern hob ikh gekent zeyer gut,
bin ikh aroyfgekletert oybn.
Itst veys ikh shoyt alts. Nor a mensh oyf a shteyn
mayd ikh oys, ven ikh ze im eynem aleyn.
Un veynt er, ken ikh im mer nit gloybn,
mer nit gloybn – ot-vos.

Ikh veys, ven mir vilt zikh veynen amol,

badarf ikh nit zayn in der hoykh – nor farkert,
in a vinkl vu nit iz, oyf der erd,
boyg ikh zikh ayn un ikh veyn oyf a kol –
un di zun iz ingantsn mir ibrik derbay.
a sreyfe fun a derfl banakht
oder gor fun a shtetl vos ikh trakht
iz far mir genug, mit a kop vi bley,
a mes-les a gantsn optsuzitsn.
Un ver ikh krank funderfun – nem ikh ayn
tsum mogn vos es zol nit zayn.
Un amol oykh epes tsu kenen shvitsn,
kenen shvitsn – ot-vos.

Nor oyb es vet ba mir fregn mayn froy,
farvos du lozt nit hern fun zikh,
vel ikh zogn, az ikh hob gerufn dikh,
un gezogt dir afile vi azoy
aruntersugeyn, – nor du host nit gehert,
un ven nit dos ayz arum dir in der hoykh,
un s'iz nit farnakht, volt ikh efsher oykh
aroyfgekrokhn. Nor az ikh hob geklert
tsulib dem di kaloshn mayne di royte
oystsuton – dos farshvayg ikh ir.
Zi ken mayne fis un hot taynes tsu mir.
Es veyet fun zey – zogt zi – a kelt vi fun toyte –
vi fun toyte – ot-vos.

Ikh vel oykh avade farshvaygn far ir
dem foygl, dem roytn, ikh vel ir keyn freyd
nit farshafn mit dem, vos er loyzt zikh un kreyt
oyf dayn oyer – bam zun-fargang iber dir.
Un zikh ayntsushporn umziste shtrof, –
vel ikh oykh nit moln fun noz afir
dayn trer, vos ikh ze – nor fun oyg ba dir.
Ikh vel zogn du veynst, vi a kind fun shlof,
oder vi a kind, vos hot mit a groshn
geshpilt zikh, un im ergets fartrakht –
oder gor vi es shteyt un veynt banakht
mit a kheyder-lamtern, vos hot zikh farloshn –
zikh farloshn – ot-vos.

Un itst – zo-zo – un fargib vos ikh ayl,
es tren mir shoyn di oym fun kelt,
un ikh hob zikh mit tsvey yungelayt bashtelt
in a keler fun danen a dray fir mayl,
un zey zaynen take shvarts vi di erd,
vayl zey esn veynik un troymen a sakh!
Zey arbetn oykh ba undzer fakh,

un mir lozn ale vaksn berd
ba zey vaksn shvartse – ba mir royte.
Zeyere vaksn abisl gikher,
un blozn zikh shoyt ven es geyt a vikher.
Mayne? – kuk on – zi hengt a toyte
hengt a toyte – ot-vos.¹³⁹

Monument Goethe

Thank you, my world-poet, set upon stone,
for reminding me that my beloved wife
asked me to bring back stationery –
since she can't leave our kid all alone.
I notice that your shoes are made of stone
and, it seems, so are your clothes –
I don't care about their beauty –
but I wonder if you can walk in them, if they last.
I have a pair with "McClinton" soles,
trousers with the factory label "Joseph-Ber,"
but they're no good – as soon as you take a step,
you're barefoot, walking around exposed,
exposed – my great poet.

I just spoke with my beloved wife,
yesterday at dinner, about you and me,
she just looked at me with worry:
– I don't eat, I look thin, like a knife.
I'll tell her that I saw you here.
But first I need to walk a bit more.
I have to look bruised and sore,
she needs to believe that I took the air.
I will paint her a picture of how we met
here with the snow on your shoulders and hands,
how you stand with your eyes turned
to the sky, as the sun lies down to rest –
lies down to rest – that's how it is.

Why you're up there, set upon stone –
I'll say that it's a mystery.
There are times when I can't even climb
onto the table without help.
I've already fallen down once,
even while holding a lamp,
and after, I looked hardly like myself,

¹³⁹ *Moyshe Leyb Halpern*, Vol. 1, 123-127.

my swollen head sparkled like a crown,
and my beloved wife broke down:
a person with healthy hands and feet,
she said, should not climb up the walls,
only an ape could last up there,
last up there – that’s how it is.

My beloved wife shouldn’t be upset with you –
just as you’ve been transfigured, I’ll say,
you only need a horse and a sword
to look handsome like an officer.
Or like a priest, when he rides through the snow
to a sick man, who is dying – they ride also,
but they hold a cross in their hands, on their belly.
That reminds me: somebody once held
an axe over me, when I was still a child.
The goy had wanted to split my skull,
to split my skull – that’s how it is.

I’ve already told my beloved wife about this:
It took place during a walk.
While holding my mother’s hand, I caught sight
of a man in the garden, set upon stone,
hanging in the sun,
with blood running
from his hands and feet and head –
and because he cried as if he wanted down,
and because I knew how to climb so well,
I climbed up.
But now I’ve figured it all out. I only avoid
a man set upon stone if I see that he’s alone.
And should he cry, I can believe him no longer,
believe him no longer – that’s how it is.

I know when I feel, at times, like crying,
I don’t need to be up high – quite the opposite,
in a corner with nothing, on the ground,
I bend over, crying out –
and the sun is completely superfluous.
A fire from a little town at night
– or even from a shtetl that I imagine –
is enough for me, with a head like lead,
to survive an entire day and night.
And if I were to become sick from it – I’d swallow
something, whatever it might be.
As well as something to make me sweat,
to make me sweat – that’s how it is.

Only if my wife were to ask me
why I haven't heard from you,
I'd say that I did call you,
and even told you how
to come down – but you didn't hear –
and if not for the ice that's encased you up there,
and because it's not dusk,
I might have climbed up. I did think
to take off my red boots – but I won't tell her that.
She knows my feet, and complains.
She says that they give off a chill, as from the dead,
as from the dead – that's how it is.

I also won't tell her, of course,
about the red bird: it won't give her
any joy, as it rummages and crows
in your ear – as the sun sets above you.
And to save myself unnecessary strife –
I also won't paint your teardrop, which I see,
falling from your nose – but rather from your eyes.
I'll say that you cry like a child awakened from sleep,
or like a child who had played with a penny
and lost track of it somewhere –
or even like a child standing and crying at night,
because the light in their room has gone dark –
gone dark – that's how it is.

And now – all right – and forgive my hurry,
my eyes are brimming with tears from the cold,
and I agreed to meet two young men
in a tavern that's three or four miles away,
and yes, they're black like the earth,
because they eat little and dream a lot!
They work, as well, in our trade,
and we're all letting our beards grow out,
but theirs are black, while mine is red.
Their beards also grow a bit faster,
they already billow in the wind.
But mine? Take a look – it hangs like a dead man,
hangs like a dead man – that's how it is.¹⁴⁰

“Monument Goethe” encapsulates many of the themes that connect Halpern's scattered reflections on German-language literature and culture. The poem's publication history is difficult to reconstruct

¹⁴⁰ A version of this translation was published by the Yiddish Book Center:
<https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/language-literature-culture/yiddish-translation/monument-goethe>.

fully, but a clipping of it, with handwritten revisions, can be found among Halpern's papers at the YIVO Institute.¹⁴¹ The clipping also contains a handwritten note stating that it was published on January 16, 1927, in the Communist newspaper *Frayhayt*; another version of the poem seems to have been published in April 1931 in the journal *Tsushtayer*, and a final version, cited above, was included in the first volume of the posthumous collection *Moyshe Leyb Halpern*, which was published in New York in 1934, two years after the poet's premature death from heart disease. While the poem has attracted almost no critical attention and, to my knowledge, has never before been translated, its multiple print and archival versions attest to the value that Halpern placed on it in the final years of his life.¹⁴² The speaker of the poem is an ailing and impoverished Yiddish poet, whose condition mirrors that of Halpern, who was no longer the athletic young man who swam and played football in Vienna; by the late 1920s, he had already been living for decades in poverty, which contributed to the precipitous decline in his health. In the poem, Goethe, as literal and symbolic monument, towers above the abject speaker. In this regard, the poem recalls a remark by the Yiddish poet Mani Leib, who, after recuperating from tuberculosis at a sanatorium where he had read Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, stated that "[i]n my magic valley, the whole human world comes to life for me in keener miniature.... I am not Goethe, nor even Heine. I am a limited Jewish artist with all the shortcomings of a Jew, with his poor cultural inheritance and closeted jargon of a language."¹⁴³ Sunny Yudkoff notes that "[u]nlike his German colleagues, Mani Leib is a Yiddish writer. He is not the great German *Mann* but rather the minimized Yiddish *Mani Leib*. He describes a poetic life lived

¹⁴¹ Papers of Moses Leib Halpern, File 670, YIVO Institute, New York.

¹⁴² In her reading of the poem "In Central Park," Ruth Wisse remarks that "Khone Shmeruk first pointed out to [her], on the basis of his earlier examination of Halpern's manuscripts and publications, that this poem [In Central Park] is part of a series that also includes the poems 'Monument Goethe,' 'Gey Ikh Azoy' (I Walk Along), 'Shmuel, My Brother,' and 'Der gezetshiter' (The Law Abider)." Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan*, 269, n58. Shmeruk's conclusion requires further investigation, which may shed light on Wisse's strange—and, in my view, incorrect—characterization of the poem: "A reflective poet strolls through the city park in winter, pausing at the statue of Goethe to commune with the noble writer, letting his mind wander from the passers-by to a conversation with his wife over dinner to his youth in a distant land. The poet's voice is remarkably clear and tender." *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Yudkoff, *Tubercular Capital*, 122.

in the flatlands, down below, where every effort proves futile in his attempt to leave a lasting literary legacy.”¹⁴⁴ In “Monument Goethe,” the speaker occupies a position similar to the one described by Mani Leib: he is sick, “thin, like a knife,” and restricted to a space “down below.” It could be argued that, by contrasting the “world-poet” and the speaker, the poem similarly indicates that the Yiddish writer is limited by “his poor cultural inheritance and closeted jargon of a language.” But, as I would argue, it could also be said that the poem privileges the perspective of the minimized writer and bespeaks the limitations of the “world-poet.” It is, in other words, a “social poem” that affirms, however darkly, “a poetic life lived in the flatlands, down below.”

In his direct address to the monument, an act that underscores the impossibility of the conversation between the “world-poet” and the speaker, the latter undercuts the exalted status of the former: “I notice that your shoes are made of stone/ and, it seems, so are your clothes –/ I don’t care about their beauty –/ but I wonder if you can walk in them, if they last.” In the shadow of the imposing statue, the speaker dismisses the beauty of Goethe’s style, of his “shikh” and “bgodim,” and implies that his monumental status has become a liability that diminishes the capacity of his work to speak to those who drudge through the city streets, who are “barefoot, walking around exposed.” In a tone that oscillates between irony, outrage, and despair, the speaker casts suspicion on the desire not only for monumentality but also for beauty and aesthetic perfection. He demands that a poet’s shoes be walkable and, in turn, that the poet inhabit, as André Breton once phrased it, “[t]he street [as] the only valid field of experience.”¹⁴⁵ But the impoverished and exhausted speaker also makes these demands in full awareness that his words will have no demonstrable effect; he is speaking, after all, to stone. The poem thus avers that the relationship between Goethe and the speaker is unequal rather than epigonic, and it graphs their respective

¹⁴⁴ Yudkoff, *Tubercular Capital*, 123.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Walter Benjamin, “Marseilles,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 232.

positions onto vertical and horizontal axes. Goethe is “set upon stone,” with his “eyes turned/ to the sky,” while the speaker “can’t even climb/ onto the table without help.” “I’ve already fallen down once,” he laments, “even while holding a lamp,/ and after, I looked hardly like myself,/ my swollen head sparkled like a crown,/ and my beloved wife broke down.” While the speaker, the pitifully minimized poet, lies on the ground, with a swollen, crown-like head, the monument continues to overshadow him, as it commemorates a poet who had been captivated, as Halpern earlier claimed, by “despotism” and by those who wore actual crowns.¹⁴⁶ The speaker thus questions the exalted status of Goethe, even as he acknowledges the permanence of that status: “Why you’re up there, set upon stone –/ I’ll say that it’s a mystery.”

In conjunction with its meditation on the status of Goethe, the poem exposes the violence that leads the speaker, the Yiddish poet, into “a corner with nothing, on the ground,/ [...] ben[t] over, crying out –.” In a scene that explicitly recalls “Zlotshov, mayn heym,” the speaker dramatizes the profound vulnerability of being “down below” as he recounts that “somebody once held/ an axe over me, when I was still a child./ The goy had wanted to split my skull,/ to split my skull – that’s how it is.” In the scene that follows, which the speaker associates, in a somewhat dizzying manner, with the violence of “[t]he goy,” he further recalls a youthful encounter with what appears to be a crucifix, with the figure of another man “set upon stone,” as he “hang[s] in the sun (“es hengt antkegn der zun”),/ with blood running/ from his hands and feet and head –.” In the closing lines, moreover, the speaker repeats this image, with dark irony, when he remarks that his own beard “hangs like a dead man” (“zi hengt a toyte”). In this insistent turn toward themes of violence and vulnerability, the poem seems to ask if, in the face of suffering, “the art of a Goethe [can] still move

¹⁴⁶ Halpern, “Rikhard Dehmel,” 17.

us;” it anticipates a question that Geoffrey Hartman will later pose, in the wake of the Holocaust, about whether “such art [can] prevail despite the Nazi disaster.”¹⁴⁷

Halpern’s “Monument Goethe” evinces his continued engagement—critical, enraged, and ironic—with German-language literature and culture. It offers the opposite of a harmonious or ‘symbiotic’ vision of the relationship between German- and Yiddish-language writers, but, by limning their persistent inequality, it speaks to the ways in which Halpern’s own linguistic trajectory was determined not merely by his ‘choices’ but by the diverse environments in which he lived, wrote, and struggled. This is important not only for understanding his multilingualism as such but also for understanding how the language of his writing—“the fact,” as Dan Miron once phrased it, “that it was written in Yiddish”—shaped its subject matter, its poetics, and its emotional textures, as well as its audience.¹⁴⁸

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to reconstruct, to the degree possible, the linguistic shifts that characterized Halpern’s early writing and that continued to inform his work throughout his career. In the course of the research that undergirds these pages, I was able to trace Halpern’s decades-long engagement with German-language literature and culture, but I was less successful in locating archival materials that pertain to his early time in Vienna or in identifying specific bibliographic information about his initial publications in German. These publications remain, at least for now, shrouded in mystery; however, we do have access to a range of other texts that reflect similar linguistic trajectories and that deserve further scrutiny. Consider, for example, the work of Malka Lee (1904-1976), who, like Halpern, was born in Habsburg Galicia, lived for a time in Vienna, and began to write in German before switching to Yiddish. While we have access to a more

¹⁴⁷ Hartman, “Holocaust and Hope,” in *Catastrophe and Meaning*, 243.

¹⁴⁸ Miron, *A Traveler Disguised*, 1.

comprehensive archival record of her early writing, including a number of notebooks that provide insight into the role that multilingualism played in her development as a writer, her early texts remain largely neglected. These texts are frequently cited in lexica and literary histories, but they are almost never read or analyzed; as is the case with Halpern's inaugural publications, it is her turn (back) toward Yiddish that has been emphasized and that has commanded the attention of readers and scholars.¹⁴⁹ Lee's early writing has thus been "subsumed," to adopt the terms of Elizabeth McHenry, "into a larger and already written narrative" that obscures the specificities and, just as importantly, the open possibilities of different stages in a writer's career.¹⁵⁰ In her study of African American literary projects in the early twentieth century, which have rarely been "allowed to claim their own independent space," McHenry argues that scholars should reevaluate "those texts, genres, institutions, and forms of authorship that we have dismissed as unsuccessful, unproductive, unconventional, anomalous, or irrelevant."¹⁵¹ While, in the preceding pages, I have delineated how Halpern's 'failed' experiments in German informed and oriented his later work, I want also to suggest, in these concluding pages, that such experiments are deserving of "their own independent space."

Lee's youthful notebooks are held at the YIVO Institute in New York. They contain poems, prose pieces, drafts, lists, scribbles, and exercises in German and Yiddish and, to a lesser degree, in English. These notebooks might be seen as records of her 'failed' writing, of the material that she had to work through in order to become a mature poet, but they might also be read on their own terms. In this regard, the novelist and essayist Maria Stepanova helpfully distinguishes between

¹⁴⁹ See "Malka Lee," *Leksikon fun der nayer literatur*, Volume 5, 35-36. For a more substantive and fascinating account of Lee's language shift, see Malka Lee, *Durkh kindersbe oygn* (Buenos Aires: Yidbukh, 1955); "Through the Eyes of Childhood," trans. Sarah Silberstein Swartz, in *Found Treasures: Stories by Yiddish Women Writers*, ed. Frieda Forman, et al. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1994).

¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth McHenry, *To Make Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African American Authorship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 3.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

notebooks that are “aimed at a readership” and those that are a “working tool [...] of little apparent use to the outsider.”¹⁵² Many of Lee’s notebooks fall under the latter category and contain a mélange of languages, genres, lines, and blots. As Stepanova demonstrates in her own prose, however, even this category of notebook, which is “of little apparent use to the outsider,” may be of historical and aesthetic interest. In Lee’s notebooks, for example, one can find writing exercises, including practice with the Latin alphabet, and frenetic pages that mix and blur languages; they provide a picture of her language learning and experimentation, including at the border of Yiddish and German, and demonstrate the ways in which her writing cannot easily be fit into monolingual or national literary histories. They are, in other words, “working tool[s]” that evince the multiple linguistic pathways that she both chose and was forced to consider.

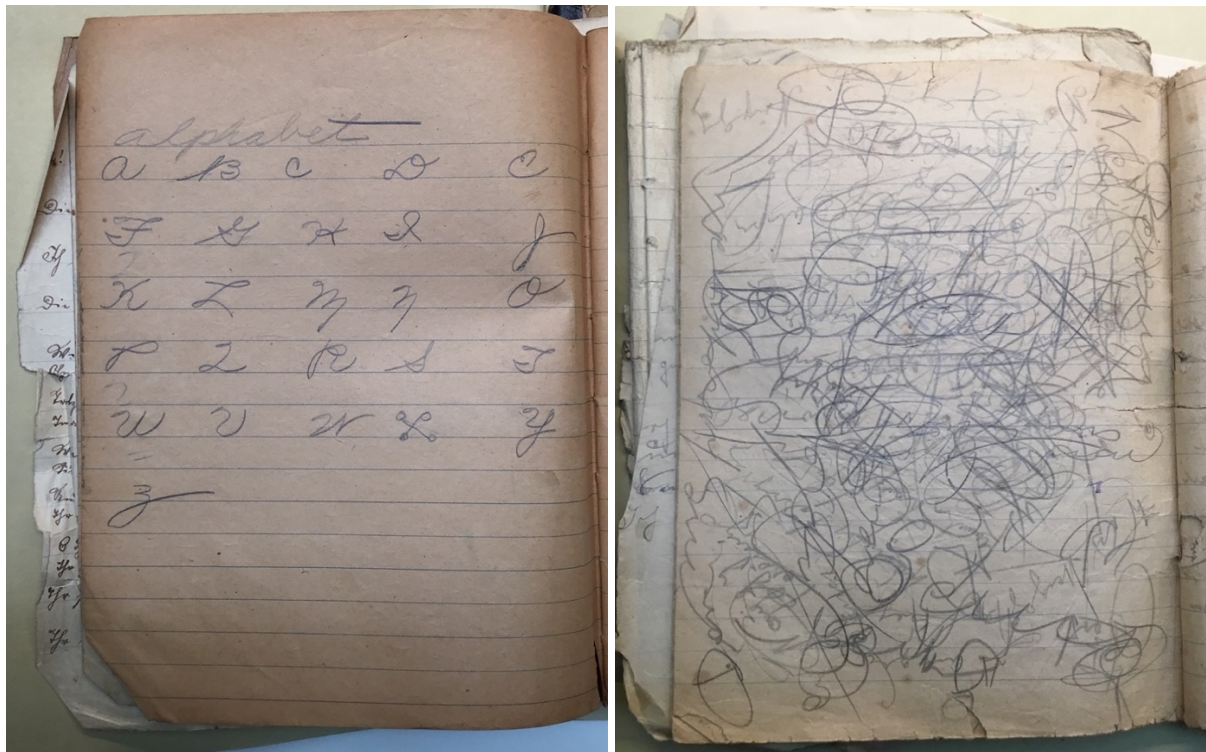


Figure 4: Malka Lee, Pages from Notebook, Papers of Malka Lee, YIVO Institute, New York.

¹⁵² Maria Stepanova, “Someone Else’s Diary,” trans. Sasha Dugdale, *The Paris Review* (February 22, 2021).

At least one of Lee’s poetry notebooks seems, however, to have been “aimed at a readership;” although it remains a draft, with numerous corrections throughout, it is organized as a collection and appears to have been written in preparation for a book that would never be published. In her archive, this notebook is wrapped in a piece of paper with a handwritten note in Yiddish: “My first poems... 1916- written in German” (“Mayne ershte lider... 1916 – geshribn in daytsh”).¹⁵³ A few dozen handwritten poems are included inside. These poems do not accord with the widespread assumption that the decision to write in German, as opposed to an ostensibly Jewish language, constitutes an act of acculturation. Instead, with the exception of a number of poems about nature, her early poems dwell on explicitly Jewish themes, including anti-Jewish violence and the condition of statelessness, and they express explicit support, in contrast to Halpern’s work, for a nationalist program. Even the titles of many of her poems are telling: “Wohin Jude?!!” (“Where to, Jew?!!”), “Dr. Herzl,” and, in her idiosyncratic spelling, “Heimatloss!” (“Homeless”).

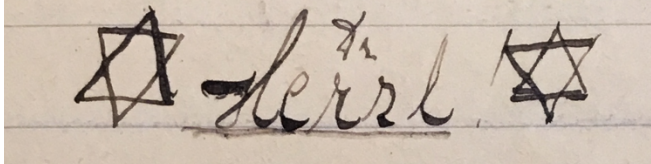


Figure 5: Malka Lee, Detail from Notebook, Papers of Malka Lee, Folder 154, YIVO Institute, New York.

These poems may rightfully be considered juvenilia, written while the author was still a teenager, but they testify to experiences of migration and persecution that indelibly shaped her life and work, as she was forced to move between Galicia, Hungary, and, for a period of time, Vienna, Austria.

“Wohin Jude?!!,” for example, is a moving expression of suffering that echoes the “screamingness” that can be heard in Halpern’s writing:

¹⁵³ Papers of Malka Lee, Folder 154, YIVO Institute, New York.

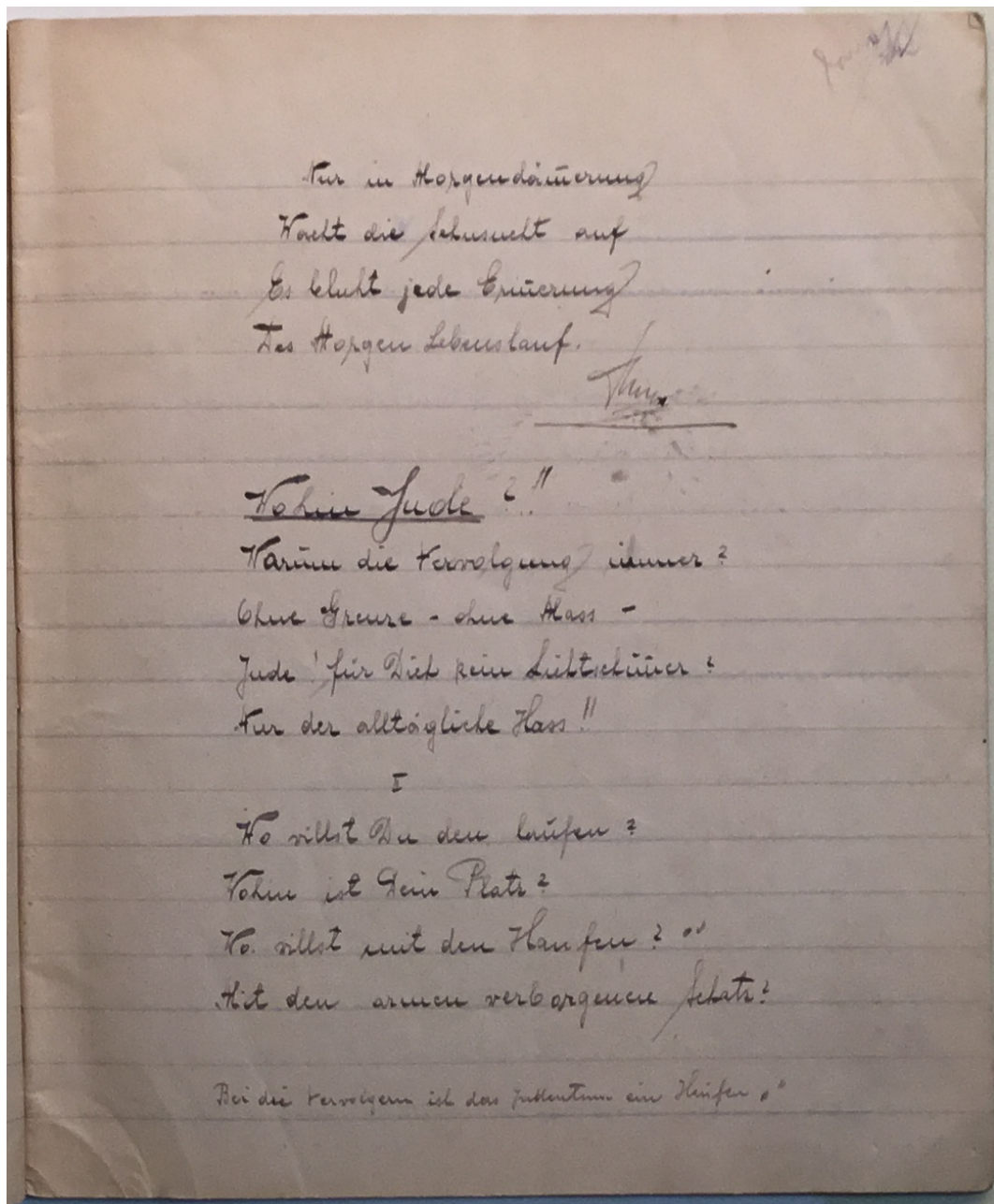


Figure 6: Malka Lee, Page from Notebook, Papers of Malka Lee, Folder 154, YIVO Institute, New York.

I.

Warum die Verfolgung immer?
Ohne Grenze – ohne Mass –
Jude! für Dich kein Lichtschimmer?
Nur der alltägliche Hass!!

II.

Wo willst Du den laufen?
Wohin ist Dein Platz?
Wo willst mit den Haufen?*

Mit den armen verborgenen Schatz?

*Bei die Vervolgern ist das Judentum ein Haufen.

I.

Why this persecution always?
Without limits – without measure –
Jew! for you, no glimmer of light?
Only everyday hatred!

II.

Where then do you want to run?
Where can you find your place?
Where do you want to go with the heap?
With the poorly hidden treasure?

*When persecuted, Judaism is the heap.

It is a poem that expresses the anxiety and pain of a young person as her life is continuously and violently uprooted. It also paints an ambiguous picture of “Judentum,” which it associates both with “hidden treasure” and with the “Haufen” or “heap”—a word that could also be translated, à la Halpern, as “dump.” What I want to highlight, however, is how the poem indexes the uncertainty and openness of the young poet’s future: “Where then do you want to run?/ Where can you find your place?” If granted its “own independent space,” the poem need not be read in anticipation of the author’s later ‘choice’ to write in Yiddish. Instead, it bespeaks the contingency not only of “[her] place” but also of the language of her writing, and, in this way, it may be seen less as an anomaly than as representative of a range of texts that emerged at the intersection of Yiddish and German and that remain to be explored.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ A number of other twentieth-century writers followed linguistic trajectories that were similar to or at least intersected with those of Halpern and Lee, including Itzik Manger and Freed Weininger, both of whom experimented with German in their early work before adopting Yiddish as their primary language of literary production; Abraham Coralnik and Leo Katz, who wrote in both languages, especially for the press; and Mascha Kaléko, a native speaker of Yiddish, who largely wrote in German (including in the Berlin dialect) and, while living in exile in the United States, in English, but who also composed a diary and scattered letters in Yiddish and in a hybrid form of Yiddish and German in Hebrew letters. For the latter, see Gisela Zoch-Westphal, *Aus den sechs Leben der Mascha Kaléko* (Berlin: arani Verlag, 1987), 62; Mascha Kaléko, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Briefe 1932-1962*, ed. Jutta Rosenkranz (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2012), 530-533.

CHAPTER 2

OFF TRANSLATION: BERTHA PAPPENHEIM'S YIDDISH-GERMAN

In 1930, in the preface to her rendition of the *Tsene-rene*, the writer and activist Bertha Pappenheim describes the language of this widely-circulated book—written in Middle Yiddish (or “Old Literary Yiddish”¹) and first published in the seventeenth century—as “essential if the charm of the presentation is not to be destroyed” (“in einer Sprache, die unerlässlich ist, wenn der Reiz der Darstellung nicht zerstört werden soll”).² She argues that the process of translation—which she terms, in a striking word choice and spelling, “verhochteutschen”—would constitute “a sin against the spirit of the *Tsene-rene*” (“eine Versündigung an dem Geiste der Zeenah u-Reenah”). Despite her eschewal of *Hochdeutsch* (or *Hochteutsch*), however, Pappenheim still expresses her desire to make the Yiddish text both accessible and captivating to a German-language readership. In this chapter, I delineate Pappenheim’s evolving approach to Yiddish literature and examine how she mediated the “Reiz der Darstellung”—how she came to translate the “untranslatable,” as it were. I consider not only how her translation work related to her feminist and religious commitments, but also how her work can help us to read and to think otherwise about both the possibilities and impossibilities of translation between Yiddish and German.

First, however, it is necessary to contextualize the translational problem that Pappenheim adumbrates in the above-cited preface. How should we understand her claim that the language of the *Tsene-rene* is “essential”? Why does she single out translation from Yiddish into German, in

¹ Contemporary scholars variously refer to the language of the *Tsene-rene* as “Middle Yiddish,” “Old Literary Yiddish,” or “Western Yiddish.” See, for example, Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, trans. Jerold C. Frakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jerold C. Frakes, *A Guide to Old Literary Yiddish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Lily Kahn and Aaron D. Rubin, eds., *Handbook of Jewish Languages* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to the language as “Middle Yiddish,” following the classification of the linguist Lily Kahn, or simply as “Yiddish.”

² *Zeenah u-Reenah. Frauenbibel*, ed. Bertha Pappenheim (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann Verlag, 1930), xi.

particular, as a problem? Pappenheim's preface continues a long tradition of (often paratextual) writing that elaborates the specific difficulties of translating between Yiddish and German. In large measure, these difficulties were attributed to the simultaneous nearness and distance of the two languages, which were not always considered to be "entirely distinct entities."³ This linguistic or formal closeness enabled a certain degree of mutual understanding between speakers and readers of Yiddish and German, but it also put pressure on regnant understandings of translation as the transfer of content from one language into *another* language. In the first decades of the twentieth century, many Jews and non-Jews would still have described the language of the *Tsene-rene* as a kind of German, rather than as a distinctive tongue. Moreover, the closeness of these languages did not reduce and even intensified their symbolic inequality as "Christian" and "Jewish" languages, as "pure" and "corrupted."⁴ The various translators who worked at the intersection of Yiddish and German—including Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, poets, and activists—were thus forced to contend not only with vexing formal issues that arose between languages with a contested border, but also with questions of prestige and power, as well as with the incommensurability between Jewish and Christian frames of reference.⁵

In the early twentieth century, Franz Kafka and Gershom Scholem theorized the practice of translation from Yiddish into German. They thus participated in a discourse that was formed by

³ Steven Lowenstein writes that "[i]t has become conventional to think of Yiddish and German as two entirely distinct entities, which despite their relationship, can clearly be distinguished from each other. In part this is because the usual concept of these two languages is based on the standard German and Yiddish literary languages of the modern period. [...] This simple and clear dichotomy based on modern standard German and modern eastern Yiddish becomes more and more clouded and complex, however, the more we look at the relationship between the language of Jews and the language of Gentiles in Germany between the late eighteenth and early twentieth century." Lowenstein, "The Complicated Language Situation of German Jewry, 1760-1914," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 36 (2002-2003): 3.

⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of "cultural capital" as "an instrument of domination" in Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

⁵ This chapter builds upon the research of the historian Aya Elyada, who has analyzed the relationship between German and Yiddish, with a particular focus on the engagement of Christian philologists with Yiddish-language sources in the early modern period. See, for example, Elyada, *A Goy Who Speaks Yiddish: Christians and the Jewish Language in Early Modern Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). On translation at the nexus of Jewish and Christian frames of reference, see Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

such disparate voices as the Christian philologist Christoph Helwig in the seventeenth century and the Jewish scholar David Kaufmann in the nineteenth century, both of whom will be discussed later in this chapter. I begin with the theoretical texts of Kafka and Scholem because they have become paradigmatic: they are, by far, the most widely cited texts in recent scholarship about the difficulty—or even the impossibility—of translating at this particular linguistic junction.⁶ Despite the reach of their theoretical reflections, however, they fail to account for many of the more challenging and experimental efforts that were made to translate between these tongues. In my subsequent reading of Pappenheim’s oeuvre, I analyze her translation work on its own terms, but I further propose that her approach to translation may be understood as an indirect response to Kafka’s and Scholem’s claims. In so doing, I aim to expand the range of views that have come to shape current scholarly debates about the relationship between Yiddish and German and to contextualize and complicate the judgment that these languages are “untranslatable,” a judgment that, in some of her theoretical statements, Pappenheim seems to share.⁷

Kafka and Scholem underscore the challenge of translating from Yiddish into German, but they approach this challenge from different directions. In 1912, Kafka wrote and delivered an introduction to a performance of poetry in Yiddish (or what he called *Jargon*) and argued that this poetry could not be translated into German, lest the “delicate and significant” links between the two languages be torn to shreds.⁸ Shortly after, in 1917, Scholem criticized the “coldness” and the

⁶ The influence of Kafka’s speech on translation is a post-World War II phenomenon. While Scholem’s essay engendered a lively set of responses in the Jewish press, Kafka’s speech was not widely disseminated until the 1950s, when it was published by Max Brod.

⁷ In a recent study that has substantially informed this chapter, Abigail Gillman notes that “Pappenheim fundamentally shared the view that the *Tsene-Rene* was an exemplary, untranslatable book, if to translate meant what it did in the first wave of translation, namely, to render a Jewish text in the pure, correct language of the majority culture. Franz Kafka said something similar about Yiddish in his ‘Introductory Lecture on Jargon’ of 1912.” Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 230.

⁸ “Man kann nämlich Jargon nicht in die deutsche Sprache übersetzen. Die Verbindungen zwischen Jargon und Deutsch sind zu zart und bedeutend, als daß sie nicht sofort zerreißen müßten, wenn Jargon ins Deutsche zurückgeführt wird, d.h. es wird kein Jargon mehr zurückgeführt, sondern etwas Wesenloses.” See Franz Kafka, “Einleitungsvortrag über Jargon,” *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande, und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer

“atmosphere of impossibility” in a German translation of Y. L. Peretz by Alexander Eliasberg.⁹ For Kafka, paradoxically, the linguistic entwinement between Yiddish and German—which share a common source in Middle High German—prevents translation: he claims that something essential is lost if *toit* [טויט] is translated into *tot*, or if *bliit* [בלויט] is translated into *Blut*.¹⁰ His examples suggest that translation becomes a process of exsanguination, in which the “life” or “liveliness” of Yiddish—discernible in its apparent grammatical anarchy and even in moments of subtle linguistic divergence, such as a shift in the pronunciation of a vowel—is drained. For Scholem, however, this linguistic entwinement is merely superficial and obscures the “inner form” of Yiddish, its sacred core, which derives from Hebrew. He thus aims his criticism at translations that fracture this “inner form” and reduce its maximal distance from German: for him, it is unacceptable to translate *minjan* [מנין] as *Privatgottesdienst*; *mikvah* [מיקווה] as *Bad*; or *zaddik* [צדיק] as *Wunderrabbi*, because such translations efface the religious specificity of the original and recall anti-Semitic caricatures of Jewish society.¹¹ For Scholem, the form of life that underlies and informs these terms—and that saturates Yiddish more generally—thus becomes distorted beyond recognition in German, or at least in Eliasberg’s German.¹²

Verlag, 1954), 421-426. The English translation is based on “An Introductory Talk on the Yiddish Language,” *Reading Kafka: Prague, Politics, and the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Mark Anderson (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 263-266.

⁹ “Die objektivierende, gleichgültige Kälte dieses Wortes, dessen echt west-europäische Natur seinen Gebrauch in einer Perez-Übersetzung von vornherein ausschließen sollte, verbreitet um sich eine Atmosphäre von Unmöglichkeit.” See Gerschom Scholem, “Zum Problem der Übersetzung aus dem Jidischen. Auch eine Buchbesprechung,” *Poetica. Schriften zur Literatur, Übersetzungen, Gedichte*, ed. Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink, et al. (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019), 217. In this article, Scholem criticizes recent translations by Alexander Eliasberg, including *Jüdische Geschichten* (1916) and *Ostjüdische Erzähler* (1917).

¹⁰ In this chapter, I maintain the spelling of the texts in question, including of transliterated words, such as Kafka’s eccentric spelling of *bliit*.

¹¹ In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German literature, in particular, the representation of Yiddish speech was sometimes used to caricature and humiliate Jewish characters. On the anti-Jewish uses of “Yiddish” in German literature, see Matthias Richter, *Die Sprache jüdischer Figuren in der deutschen Literatur (1750-1933). Studien zu Form und Funktion* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1995).

¹² In a response to Scholem’s critique, Eliasberg argues in favor of both the possibility and value of translation and defends concessions made to reach a non-Jewish readership. In a further response, Scholem claims that he does not deny the possibility of translation as such, but rather focuses on problems in Eliasberg’s translation, in particular. It is not clear, however, what an acceptable translation of Yiddish into German would look like for Scholem. Cf. Scholem, *Poetica. Schriften zur Literatur, Übersetzungen, Gedichte*, 220-224.

While Kafka and Scholem arrive at their conclusions for different reasons, they share certain assumptions about what translation is. In their respective texts, they focus primarily on individual words and criticize the lexical equivalence that is established when a word in Yiddish is substituted with a word in German. Their sense of translation largely accords with what Roman Jakobson would later call “interlingual translation or *translation proper*,” which he defines as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.”¹³ I suggest, however, that this definition has only limited purchase on our understanding of translation between Yiddish and German. Indeed, we can point to numerous texts, often referred to as “translations” between Yiddish and German, that cannot be subsumed under such a definition, including texts that insistently blur the boundary between the two languages, rather than interpret across it. These hybrid texts can variously be categorized as “literal” translation, transliteration, transcription, paraphrastic adaptation, “Judaization,” or commentary, as well as what the scholar Oren Roman has recently termed “dislocation.”¹⁴ These texts mixed languages, transcribed sounds, and made use of calques and parenthetical glosses. They did not accord with the sense of translation presumed in Kafka and Scholem’s critique.

In this chapter, I explore alternatives to an historical discourse that insists upon the impasse or even the “impossibility” of translation from Yiddish into German—a discourse that risks disregarding the linguistic work that does take place even in the face of irresolvable differences. I focus, therefore, on the variegated forms of translation—including those efforts to find alternatives

¹³ Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2000), 114. This chapter is further informed by Haun Saussy’s recent study of “non-translation” as “the Other of translation” and by his consideration of alternatives to Jakobson’s notion of “translation proper.” Saussy, *Translation as Citation: Zhuangzi Inside Out* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Chava Turniansky has demarcated many of these categories, as well as the “[p]rinciples of selection and methodology” within the translational corpus of early modern literature in Yiddish. See Turniansky, “Yiddish and the Transmission of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (2008): 10. Oren Roman introduced the term “dislocation” in a recent lecture on “Dislocation in Translation in Early Modern Yiddish Literature” (6 July 2020), Jewish Translation and Cultural Transfer Project.

to “translation proper”—that proliferated at the intersection of German and Yiddish writing. I explore how translators grappled with the problems diagnosed by Kafka and Scholem—problems that become manifest in seemingly minor linguistic details, but which reflect larger religious and sociocultural concerns and perturbations. In the following, I turn attention to one of these translators, Bertha Pappenheim, whose work can help us to read and to think otherwise about both the possibilities and impossibilities of translation between Yiddish and German. In particular, I examine Pappenheim’s evolving approach to translation in the first decades of the twentieth century, during which time she increasingly turned away from the apparent sins of “verhochteutschen” and experimented with other forms of writing that blurred the difference between Yiddish and German. In my analysis of her work, to account for this blurred or hybrid form, I develop a concept of “off-translation,” which indexes the experimental amalgamation of translation, transcription, and emendation.

Born in Vienna on February 27, 1859, Pappenheim was raised in a bourgeois and orthodox Jewish family. She was adept at learning languages and read widely, but she was denied a university education because of her gender. She was further denied access to certain forms of Jewish education that were typically reserved for male students, such as instruction in Hebrew and Aramaic texts, which constitute the historical core of Jewish religious tradition. She was denied, as the scholar Daniel Boyarin remarks, “the power and symbolic capital that went with a very particular mode of cultural competence.”¹⁵ Pappenheim would later describe such barriers as “the germs of a cultural discrepancy in the life of the Jewish woman,” insofar as women were expected to be observant, but

¹⁵ Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 320.

were not permitted to learn (in both the traditional and secular senses of *lernen*).¹⁶ Importantly, this discrepancy provided an impetus for her later turn toward a textual tradition that had been available to women—a tradition in Yiddish, rather than in Hebrew or Aramaic.¹⁷

Pappenheim remains most well-known today as a young hysteric patient, as “Anna O.,” the subject of Josef Breuer’s landmark case study.¹⁸ Though Freud never analyzed her directly, Anna O. has remained a key point of reference in the history of psychoanalysis, and she is credited with the coinage of the fabled term “talking cure,” which she first articulated in English despite the fact that German was her mother tongue. During her illness, Pappenheim became mute and then began to speak in English and, during “her best and most lucid hours,” in French and Italian—a persistent speaking across languages and in translation. As Breuer notes in his case study, her symptoms further included “a deep-going functional disorganization of her speech” that manifested in the loss or forgetting of words, in the “incorrect” conjugation of verbs, and in language mixing. In this context, it is striking that Breuer refers to Anna O.’s speech patterns as a form of “Jargon,” the common, often pejorative name for Yiddish around 1900, and the name that Kafka uses in his introduction.¹⁹

¹⁶ “[...] die Keime einer Kulturellen Diskrepanz im Leben der jüdischen Frau [...]” Bertha Pappenheim, “Die jüdische Frau,” *Literarische und publizistische Texte*, ed. Lena Kugler and Albrecht Koschorke (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2002), 89. In the short story “Ein Schwächling,” Pappenheim writes, “Ohne dem Rechnung zu tragen, daß der Sinn des Knaben im Augenblick nicht darauf gerichtet sein mochte, begann Reb Mordechai mit lauter Stimme einen Satz der Schrift zu lesen, Fragen einzuschalten, zu kommentieren, zu zitieren, sich selbst zu widerlegen, – kurz jene große, komplizierte Gedankenarbeit vorzunehmen, die von den jüdischen Gelehrten mit »lernen« bezeichnet wird.” Pappenheim, “Ein Schwächling,” *Literarische und publizistische Texte*, 185. On the practice of *lernen* as “talmudic study,” see also Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 318.

¹⁷ For more on Hebrew and Yiddish as a “sexual-linguistic system,” see Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Pappenheim was identified as “Anna O.” by Ernest Jones in a problematic footnote to his biography of Freud: “Since she was the real discoverer of the cathartic method, her name, which was actually Bertha Pappenheim (February 27, 1859-May 28, 1936), deserves to be commemorated.” Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 1, *The Formative Years and the Great Discoveries: 1856-1900* (New York: Basic Books, 1953), 223f.

¹⁹ Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, “Fräulein Anna O. (Breuer),” in *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 25. In the original, Breuer writes, “[...] und dann erwacht, klagte sie [Anna O.], es quäle sie etwas, oder vielmehr sie wiederholte immer den Infinitiv: Quälen, quälen. Denn zugleich mit der Ausbildung der Contracturen war eine tiefe, funktionelle Desorganisation der Sprache eingetreten. Zuerst beobachtete man, dass ihr Worte fehlten, allmählich nahm das zu. Dann verlor ihr Sprechen alle Grammatik, jede Syntax, die ganze Conjugation des Verbums, sie gebrauchte schliesslich nur falsch, meist aus einem schwachen Particip-praeteriti gebildete Infinitive,

It is difficult to say what role the case study should play in a reading of Pappenheim's later translation work, not least because Breuer has proven to be an unreliable source.²⁰ Furthermore, the question of how to account for the transformation of "Anna O." into "Bertha Pappenheim"—in its very power to fascinate—risks the reduction of the whole of her life and work to the ramified effects of her therapeutic treatment.²¹ In this chapter, I thus focus on the question of how to read and contextualize her later writing, rather than on how to explain this biographical transformation. In other words, in what follows, I turn to the case study and to related texts insofar as they help us to understand Pappenheim's later approach to language, as well as to situate her work within a specific historical context and within a larger cultural and discursive field. In one important sense, for example, the case study reveals the continuity between questions of language and questions of

keinen Artikel. In weiterer Entwicklung fehlten ihr auch die Worte fast ganz, sie suchte dieselben mühsam aus 4 oder 5 Sprachen zusammen und war dabei kaum mehr verständlich. Bei Versuchen zu schreiben schrieb sie [...] denselben Jargon." Breuer and Freud, *Studien über Hysterie* (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1895), 18. It seems unlikely that Breuer intended specifically to invoke Yiddish when writing these sentences, but there is a strong affinity between his description of Anna O.'s language and regnant understandings (or caricatures) of Yiddish at the time: e.g., that Yiddish is a "jargon" without grammar and an unintelligible "mixture" of different languages. As Albrecht Hirschmüller and Sander Gilman have shown, Yiddish played an important role in Breuer's family history, but he and his father strove to acculturate into the German-speaking world. Gilman, for instance, describes Breuer's perspective as that of "the provincial Jew as Viennese doctor," and he explicitly (and perhaps too confidently) ascribes Breuer's description of Anna O.'s speech to his hearing "her German collapse into *mauscheln*." Gilman further notes, "This is, of course, a fantastic form of Yiddish [...] Breuer sees this decay of German into Yiddish, labeling it as *Jargon*, the pejorative term that German speakers used when referring to Yiddish. He associates the collapse of language with the loss of a Western Jewish identity and the sexual Otherness of female discourse, but only on a subconscious level." Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 260-261. Hirschmüller recounts the traditional education of Breuer's father, Leopold Breuer, in a yeshiva and his later exposure to secular subjects in Prague, where he began "der Prozeß der Assimilation an die westlich-abendländische Kultur." Hirschmüller, *Physiologie und Psychoanalyse in Leben und Werk Josef Breuers* (Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1978), 19-20.

²⁰ Jonathan Lear, for example, recounts the "spectacular breakdown in the treatment of Anna O," which was largely left out of the case study. Lear, *Freud* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 119. For an even more critical perspective, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Souvenirs d'Anna O.: Une mystification centenaire* (Paris: Aubier, 1996).

²¹ In this regard, I concur with Barbara Honigmann's critique of such tendencies. While noting that she finds "diese Enthüllung natürlich wahnsinnig aufregend," Honigmann writes, "[...] erregte mich jetzt mehr die Reduzierung dieses Lebens auf einen »Fall«, bei der das gesamte weitere Leben der Bertha Pappenheim, ihre Sozialarbeit, ihr feministisches Engagement, ihr Ehelosigkeit und ihr Festhalten an religiösen Werten und an religiöser Praxis quasi nur als Folgesymptome ihrer Krankheit gewertet werden." Honigmann, *Das Gesicht wiederfinden. Über Schreiben, Schriftsteller und Judentum* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2006), 97-98.

gender and embodied experience—a continuity that is further elaborated in Pappenheim’s subsequent commitment to feminist politics.²²

In the decades after her thwarted treatment, Pappenheim became increasingly involved in social work and activism. Despite numerous challenges—a constricted existence, sexism and antisemitism, years of illness and suffering—she set out to re-envision and to expand the forms of life available to Jewish women in the early 20th century. She organized various girls’ homes and educational institutions; advocated for the rights of women and refugees; reported on poverty, sexual abuse, and human trafficking in Jewish communities in eastern Europe; and later supported the Bais Yaakov movement, which established schools for Jewish girls.²³ In 1904, moreover, Pappenheim founded the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* (League of Jewish Women), a pathbreaking organization that “protect[ed] Jewish girls, extend[ed] modern social work techniques, and, most importantly, represent[ed] all Jewish women,” as the historian Marion Kaplan recounts.²⁴ Throughout her life and career, Pappenheim continued to identify as an observant Jew and enacted “orthodox” approaches to communal life. Kaplan remarks, for instance, that she “maintained exacting religious and moral standards in her adult life [and] insisted that all JFP [*Jüdischer Frauenbund*] charitable homes and clubs maintain Jewish dietary laws, despite the fact that most members were not Orthodox.”²⁵ Pappenheim’s feminist activism was thus coupled with an enduring albeit critical commitment to a religious tradition that excluded women from full participation. In line with this tense worldview, she advocated for progressive reforms, especially with regard to women’s access

²² In this regard, Christina von Braun writes, in reference to Anna O., “Ob die Hysterikerin mit ihrem Körper spricht oder den Körper in Sprache verwandelt, immer beweist sie, daß Geist und Körper, Sprache und Sexualität miteinander einhergehen.” von Braun, *Nicht ich: Logik, Lüge, Libido* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1985), 192.

²³ On Pappenheim’s involvement with the Bais Yaakov movement, in particular, see Naomi Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement: A Revolution in the Name of Tradition* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 26-27, 43-44, 174; and Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 336

²⁴ Marion A. Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany: The Campaigns of the Jüdischer Frauenbund, 1904-1938* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), 44. It is perhaps an exaggeration to say “all Jewish women,” but Pappenheim’s efforts certainly extended beyond the borders of Germany and included many immigrants and refugees.

²⁵ Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany*, 37.

to education, but she also held conservative views on many issues, including on abortion, which, as will be discussed in this chapter, surfaces in one of her speeches that draws upon Yiddish literature. Furthermore, despite her appreciation of vernacular culture in Eastern Europe, including the lacework she collected, Pappenheim often adopted the stance of “a fin-de-siècle aesthete” and representative of German *Kultur*, testifying to what the scholar Elizabeth Loentz has identified as her “multifaceted or multiply-hyphenated identity, comprised of sometimes conflicting identities and identifications.”²⁶

In this chapter, I focus on Pappenheim as a writer and translator, but her literary endeavors should not be analyzed apart from her religious views, social work, and activism. Indeed, her translation work can be understood as an effort to negotiate between her various positions and commitments. In this regard, I aim to reveal how the fraught intersection between German and Yiddish—which lies at the heart of this dissertation—became an important site of mediation between tradition (as manifested in literature and in religious practices) and rapidly changing social norms in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the tradition of Middle Yiddish literature, in which women played a pivotal role, Pappenheim found an especially productive resource for her feminist and dissimulatory work from *within* an orthodox framework.²⁷ In her evolving approach to Yiddish—in her shift, as I will show, from translation to “off-translation”—, she crafted a sensuous form that made a largely forgotten tradition both accessible and meaningful in the present. In so doing, she further opened up an alternative to the translational impasse that Kafka and Scholem, among others, had identified.

²⁶ The historian Larry Wolff, for example, describes Pappenheim as “still enough of a fin-de-siècle aesthete.” Wolff is sharply (and even mockingly) critical of Pappenheim’s descriptions of Galicia: “The perceived abyss that separated civilization from Galicia made the province seem like a torture chamber for the visitor of civilized sensibility.” Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 315; 316. Wolff is right to criticize aspects of Pappenheim’s ethnographic writing, though I would argue that he underestimates the ambivalence of her own relationship to *Kultur*. See also Elizabeth Loentz, *Let Me Continue to Speak*, 12.

²⁷ Daniel Boyarin offers a nuanced discussion of Pappenheim’s critique of orthodoxy “from within” in *Unheroic Conduct*.

Pappenheim published texts across multiple genres, including short stories, essays, ethnographies, and prayer books, many of which were printed under the auspices of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund*. In this chapter, I restrict my focus to her voluminous translation work, which is often cited but rarely analyzed in the existing scholarship.²⁸ This translation work extended over about thirty years and reflected an evolving approach to the task of the translator. Pappenheim intimated her approach in suggestive (however brief) forewords to her published translations, but she did not further elaborate her approach in explicit terms. It is thus necessary to engage in a close and comparative reading of the source text and her rendition and to reconstruct the cultural infrastructure that enabled her translations to be written, published, and disseminated. First, however, I will present a brief overview of her translation work over time and consider the significance of her repeated disavowal of “Wissenschaftlichkeit.” Indeed, in her few theoretical statements about translation, she articulates her approach in largely negative terms: it is *not* scholarship, it is *not* philology, at least not in an academic sense.

In 1899, under a pseudonym, Pappenheim published a German translation of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).²⁹ Thereafter, she continued to concentrate on texts written by women or on texts written with a female readership in mind, though she soon turned away from English and toward Yiddish. In 1910, she published—in a private edition in Vienna—*Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*,³⁰ and, two decades later—with the J. Kauffmann Verlag in Frankfurt am Main—she published renditions of the *Mayse-bukh* and *Tsene-rene*,

²⁸ There are at least two important exceptions: Louise Hecht, “Übersetzungen jüdischer Tradition. Bertha Pappenheims religiös-feministische Schriften,” *Hofmannsthal-Jahrbuch. Zur europäischen Moderne* 20 (2012): 288-344; and Abigail Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). I draw upon the work of both Hecht and Gillman in what follows.

²⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary Wollstonecraft – Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*, trans. Bertha Pappenheim (Dresden & Leipzig: E. Pierson’s Verlag, 1899). This translation was published under the pseudonym “P. Berthold.”

³⁰ Bertha Pappenheim, trans., *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln* (Vienna: Verlag von Dr. Stefan Meyer and Dr. Wilhelm Pappenheim, Buchdruckerei Helios, 1910).

which she titled *Allerlei Geschichten. Maasse-Buch* (1929) and *Zeenah u-Reenah. Frauenbibel* (1930).³¹ This turn toward Yiddish coincided with her deepening interest in the tradition of Jewish women’s writing and reading, which she considered to be an important point of reference in navigating the convolution of modernity, which as Naomi Seidman has argued, “can be productively conceived as the arena for Jewish gender transformations, in which traditional sexual, marital, and gender ideals and practices gave way to radically new models.”³² In line with her non-scientific approach, Pappenheim’s interest in this tradition may be described as “passionate,” to draw on the terms of Svetlana Boym, who distinguishes between “non-professional (or passionate)” and “professional thinking.” Boym defines “passionate thinking” as a mode of “yielding to the ‘nearness’ of life, to everyday experience, relying upon one’s curiosity and listening to worldliness”—a definition that builds upon the work of Hannah Arendt, as well as Max Weber’s lecture “Wissenschaft als Beruf.”³³ Boym differentiates “passionate thinking” from “thinking through mastery,” and she identifies its goal as “understanding, not control.” In turn, I suggest that this distinction can help us to unpack Pappenheim’s repeated assertion that her translation work does not accord with the standards of “Wissenschaftlichkeit.” It is an assertion that implies a rejection of—or at least a distancing from—*Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the nineteenth-century movement that promoted the scholarly or scientific analysis (and often “mastery”) of Jewish literature and cultural history and that produced numerous

³¹ Bertha Pappenheim, trans., *Allerlei Geschichten. Maasse-Buch* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann Verlag, 1929); Pappenheim, trans., *Zeenah u-Reenah. Frauenbibel* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann Verlag, 1930). In the following, I use the titles *Mayse-bukh* and *Tsene-rene* when referring to the history of these works more generally and *Allerlei Geschichten* and *Zeenah u-Reenah* when referring to Pappenheim’s versions of them in particular.

³² Naomi Seidman, “Gender and the Re-making of Modern Jewry,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Part IV – Jews in the Modern World, eds. Mitchell B. Hart and Tony Michels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 965.

³³ Svetlana Boym, *Another Freedom: The Alternative History of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25. Eric Santner identifies a similar aversion to *Wissenschaft* in a letter by Franz Rosenzweig, which he reads “as a kind of critical acceptance of many of the claims made by Max Weber in his famous lecture of 1919, ‘Wissenschaft als Beruf’ (‘Scholarship as Profession’).” Santner recounts that “[t]he lecture largely addresses the impotence of scholarship with respect to fundamental decisions about value, meaning, and ethical orientation, an impotence Weber affirms as constitutive of the destiny of modernity. For Weber, this affirmation involves—and here Weber cites the same Goethean phrase that Rosenzweig did in his letter to Meinecke—a turn to the ‘Forderung des Tages’ or ‘demands of the day.’” Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 19.

translations of Hebrew- and Yiddish-language texts into German. While Pappenheim relied upon the efforts of scholars and philologists in her own translation work and actively sought their advice and assistance, it is clear that she did not intend her work to be assessed in terms of its “accuracy” or “objectivity.” As in her correspondence with the rabbi and scholar Ismar Elbogen with regard to her translation of the *Maysse-bukh*, Pappenheim occasionally requested to be taken “under the scientific wings” (“unter [...] wissenschaftliche Fittiche”) of others, but only ever for passing flights.³⁴ Furthermore, Pappenheim did not direct her translations solely at elite and well-educated readers, but also at the (often poor) women she encountered in the context of her social work and activism; in her translation work, that is, she endeavored to respond to what Boym refers to as the “‘nearness’ of life,” as well as to the “neighbor” (*der Nächste*) in a religious and ethical sense. She engaged in a kind of philology not as mastery but as love, though not only for words.

Pappenheim’s engagement in a kind of “passionate thinking” informs all of her translation work, but a clear trajectory can still be discerned in her work over time. I characterize this trajectory as the shift from “translation proper,” in Jakobson’s sense, to “off-translation,” which is intended to index the experimental admixture of translation, transcription, and emendation. I endeavor to develop a sense of “off-translation” because the forms of writing that emerge at the nexus of Yiddish and German exceed the bounds of what is often meant by “translation” and, certainly, by “translation proper.” While a broad definition of translation may be adopted, along the lines, for instance, of André Lefevere’s notion of “rewriting,” I propose that a more differentiated vocabulary will better enable us to account for the diversity of interlingual writing and to identify methodological and stylistic shifts that are often effaced in the existing scholarship.³⁵ I further

³⁴ Letter by Bertha Pappenheim to Ismar Elbogen, February 1929 (AR 705), in “Correspondence; ‘Pappenheim-Posnanski’, 1911-1940,” Ismar Elbogen Collection (AR 64 / MF 515), Leo Baeck Institute, Center for Jewish History, New York.

³⁵ See André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

propose that the particular term “off-translation” better captures the experimental quality of Pappenheim’s translation work, which, over time, came to unsettle the boundaries between Yiddish and German and to engender a form of language that seemed “off”—not always in a negative sense—to many readers. In this regard, I further build upon the work of Svetlana Boym, who, in a series of recent books and artworks, has developed a concept of the “off-modern” to account for the varied and contradictory responses to “the radical breaks in tradition, the gaps of forgetting, losses of common yardsticks, and disorientations that occur in almost every generation.”³⁶ In place of chronological prefixes like “pre-” and “post-,” and in place of adverse terms like “anti-” and “un-,” Boym turns attention to “another option: not to be out, but off—as in off-stage, off-key, off-beat, and occasionally, off-color. Off-modern does not suggest a continuous history from antiquity to modernity to postmodernity.”³⁷ Boym’s vocabulary helps to articulate the overlap and simultaneity of older and newer forms of writing and language in Pappenheim’s translation work.

Pappenheim’s first translation of Mary Wollstonecraft’s seminal book—published as *Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*—differs from her subsequent translations in terms of its source language, genre, and content, but, in its difference, it enables us to better grasp how she later altered her approach when she began to focus on Yiddish texts. Pappenheim signed her first translation with the gender-neutral pseudonym “P. Berthold,” though she signed the preface with a gendered word: “die Übersetzerin” (“the translator”). In retrospect, her use of this word assumes even greater significance because she later used other terms, such as “die Bearbeiterin,” to name her role. I foreground these apparently nominal differences because one of the goals of this chapter is to

³⁶ Svetlana Boym, *Another Freedom*, 7.

³⁷ Svetlana Boym, *Another Freedom*, 7.

provide a more differentiated sense of what it means to be a “translator” and to expand the conceptual vocabulary we use to describe acts of interlingual writing.

In the preface, Pappenheim recounts Wollstonecraft’s biography and introduces her work, especially as it concerns the emancipation of women—a topic that, as Pappenheim underscores, “still has topical significance” (“noch aktuelle Wichtigkeit hat”).³⁸ Despite her general praise, Pappenheim identifies what she considers to be some of the book’s flaws, including “a few nuances” (“wenige Nuancen”) related to public and religious education and hygiene, issues that were at the center of her own incipient social work and activism.³⁹ She further criticizes the book’s stylistic shortcomings: its “length, repetition, and stylistic irregularities, which could not be completely avoided in a translation, if it were not to become an adaptation” (“Längen, Wiederholungen und stilistischen Unebenheiten, die sich in einer Uebersetzung, wenn sie keine Umarbeitung werden sollte, nicht ganz vermeiden ließen”).⁴⁰ While Pappenheim avoids a thorough re-writing or adaptation (“Umarbeitung”) of the book, she does heavily edit and revise it in her translation. The scholars Elisabeth Gibbels and Louise Hecht have noted some of these “infidelities,” including the deletion of footnotes and the insertion of new ones, as well as the simplification of Wollstonecraft’s syntax and use of voice.⁴¹ In the context of this chapter, these revisions are telling because they signal a marked distance from the source text. Indeed, Pappenheim demonstrates that her main interest is in the content (or “the message”) of Wollstonecraft’s book, rather than in the specificity of its language and style. Despite the role that English played in her youthful illness, Pappenheim does not dwell on its significance here; instead, she translates the book into German to make

³⁸ *Mary Wollstonecraft – Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*, trans. Pappenheim, xix.

³⁹ *Mary Wollstonecraft – Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*, trans. Pappenheim, xiv.

⁴⁰ *Mary Wollstonecraft – Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*, trans. Pappenheim, xx.

⁴¹ Hecht, “Übersetzungen jüdischer Tradition,” 224; Elisabeth Gibbels, *Mary Wollstonecraft zwischen Feminismus und Opportunismus. Die diskursiven Strategien in deutschen Übersetzungen von “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman”* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004).

Wollstonecraft's "thoughts" accessible to a new readership and, more specifically, to a readership engaged in active political struggle.

Pappenheim will change her approach when she begins to translate Yiddish literature, but her enduring commitment to the "nearness of life" establishes lines of continuity between her first translation and her later work. In the preface to *Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*, Pappenheim repeatedly emphasizes the contemporary significance of the book, in addition to its status as an historical landmark. That is, she values the book because its analysis of women's rights is still pressing: "the re-publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's work cannot be attributed merely to a sensibility of pious deference, but to the lively wish that the thoughts it expresses will encounter a better, more general understanding today than was possible one hundred years ago" ("[...] ist die Wiederveröffentlichung des Werkes Mary Wollstonecrafts nicht etwa nur einem pietätvollen Rückempfinden zuzuschreiben, sondern dem lebhaften Wunsche, daß die Gedanken, die es ausspricht, heute einem besseren, allgemeineren Verstaendnisse begegnen, als es vor hundert Jahren noch sein konnte").⁴² Pappenheim further accentuates the moral force of the book and characterizes the author's aims as "ideally human" ("ideal menschlich").⁴³ In the bilingual concluding sentences to the preface, Pappenheim quotes Wollstonecraft: "Let us be good to deserve to be happy. Wir wollen gut sein, damit wir es verdienen, glücklich zu sein."⁴⁴ She presents the author and her text as exemplary and instructive for contemporary readers, implying that the book and its translation

⁴² *Mary Wollstonecraft – Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*, trans. Pappenheim, xx.

⁴³ *Mary Wollstonecraft – Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*, trans. Pappenheim, xx.

⁴⁴ *Mary Wollstonecraft – Eine Verteidigung der Rechte der Frau*, trans. Pappenheim, xx. This appears not to be a direct quote, but rather a revision of Wollstonecraft's letter (August 1793) to Gilbert Imlay from August 1793, in which she writes, "Yes, I will be good, that I may deserve to be happy; and whilst you love me, I cannot again fall into the miserable state which rendered life a burthen almost too heavy to be borne." Quoted in *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal, Enlarged* 27 (1798): 327. In the preface, Pappenheim emphasizes the "chasteness" of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Imlay, describing it as the "reine, heilige, treue, ausharrende Liebe eines Weibes" (xvii), which may say more about her own sexual ethics than Wollstonecraft's. Nonetheless, it is suggestive that Pappenheim draws from a letter that also invokes the relief of suffering ("the miserable state"), which resonates with her own therapeutic treatment, as well as with Glikl's attempt to alleviate her melancholy by writing.

should be read as a kind of didactic literature, not unlike the ethical reflections and instructions that permeate Glikl's memoirs and other Yiddish texts. In both her early and late career, Pappenheim thus adopts the stance of a moralist—a stance that links her translation work with her political and social activism, but one that is ambiguously linked with her interest in the “charm” (*Reiz*), pathos, and aesthetic effects of language. In this regard, she underlines the ways in which literature matters in the lives of its readers as both a tool of emancipation and moral instruction, as well as a medium of emotional intensity and complexity. She draws upon historical sources and scholarship, but she refuses to limit the text to its historical context or to constrict it to scientific aims. She distances herself here—and even more emphatically in her later renditions of Yiddish literature—from what Franz Rosenzweig likewise derides as “historical critique or the ‘historical *Weltanschauung*,’” which, as Eric Santner elaborates, “is the demand, understood as the voice of reason itself, to free oneself from the weight of tradition, from the so-called truths of the past which, by virtue of their belonging to a concrete historical context and horizon of experience, can no longer make binding claims upon the present and future.”⁴⁵

In 1910, about a decade after her translation of Wollstonecraft, Pappenheim published her second book-length translation in a private edition (*Privatdruck*) in Vienna: *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*. This was the first full-length translation into any language of Glikl's untitled memoirs, which count among the most significant sources written in Western Yiddish. Glikl (1645-1724) was born in Hamburg and later married Hayyim Hamel. In addition to raising twelve children, she was actively involved in her husband's business affairs, including in the trade of jewelry and precious stones. After her husband's death, Glikl continued to manage the family business and began to write her memoirs, often at night. She wrote stories of a literary character, and she wrote about her family

⁴⁵ Eric L. Santner, “Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbor,” *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, by Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 78.

history and her children, about the history of the Jewish community in Hamburg/Altona, about her business activities, and about political events, as well as about moral and ethical topics in a manner that reflects the conventions of *musar* literature, “a didactic genre intended to teach the unlearned whatever they are supposed to know in order to act, live, and behave as good Jewish men or women should.”⁴⁶ The scholar Chava Turniansky notes that her memoirs articulate nothing less than a “philosophy of life” to be handed down to her children.⁴⁷

In her essay “Die jüdische Frau” (“The Jewish Woman,” 1934), Pappenheim underscores the belatedness of the circulation and reception of Glikl’s writing—a belatedness that imbues Pappenheim’s own work with novelty and urgency. In manuscript form, Glikl’s memoirs did not circulate beyond her own family until the end of the nineteenth century. Pappenheim writes, “She represents the Jewish-German culture of her time, though she did not influence it. Her very individual activity was completely internal, limited to her—admittedly very large—family” (“Sie repräsentiert die jüdische-deutsche Kultur ihrer Zeit, hat sie aber nicht beeinflusst. Ihre sehr eigenartige Aktivität war eine ganz interne, auf ihre – allerdings sehr grosse Familie beschränkt”).⁴⁸ In elliptical fashion, Pappenheim recounts how Glikl’s writings were excavated (“ausgegraben”) by the scholar David Kaufmann, who published a Yiddish-language edition of the memoirs, with a German-language introduction, in Frankfurt am Main in 1896. Pappenheim based her own rendition of the memoirs on this edition, as did Alfred Feilchenfeld, who published an amended (and more widely circulated) German-language translation with the Jüdischer Verlag in Berlin in 1913.

In addition to making Pappenheim’s later work possible, Kaufmann’s edition also served as both a model and counter-model for the translator. In his edition, Kaufmann employed the regnant

⁴⁶ Chava Turniansky, “Introduction,” *Glikl: Memoirs, 1691-1719* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2019), 4.

⁴⁷ Turniansky, “Introduction,” *Glikl: Memoirs, 1691-1719*, 8.

⁴⁸ Bertha Pappenheim, *Literarische und publizistische Texte*, eds. Lena Kugler and Albrecht Koschorke (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2002), 88.

methods of philology and made definite claims to “Wissenschaftlichkeit.”⁴⁹ However, as the historian Mirjam Thulin remarks, Kaufmann’s edition was also motivated by his support for women’s general and religious education and by his interest in Glikl as an “ideal symbol of the Jewish woman” (“ideales Sinnbild der jüdischen Frau”).⁵⁰ Thulin notes that his edition was praised by some scholars, but that it was largely met with “muted criticism” (“verhaltene Kritik”); several of his colleagues believed that the edition did not contribute to a valid field of research and merely reflected his “sense of family” (“Familiensinn”).⁵¹ Their criticism was symptomatic of the gendered limits and blind spots of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, but it also exposed the role that seemingly non-scholarly attitudes played within this diffuse academic movement. Like Pappenheim, Kaufmann was interested in Glikl as a role model for women in the present, even if he presented his research in a more “objective” framework. In different but related ways, Kaufmann and Pappenheim were thus interested in making Glikl’s writing both accessible and *meaningful* to a contemporary readership. In her own rendition of the memoirs, however, Pappenheim refused even the pretense of objectivity. Indeed, the first sentence of her foreword reads: “The present translation of the *Memoirs of Glückel von Hameln*, edited by Prof. Dr. David Kaufmann, does not make any claim to be ‘scientific’ and could not stand up to scholarly criticism” (“Die vorliegende Übertragung der von Professor Dr. David Kaufmann herausgegebenen »Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln«, macht keinen Anspruch auf Wissenschaftlichkeit und wird der gelehrten Kritik nicht Stand halten können”).⁵² This refusal, however, should perhaps be understood as a critique of the restricted sense of scholarship that was propagated by many of Kaufmann’s critics, rather than as a rejection of philology and scholarship *tout court*. Pappenheim’s aversion to “scientificity” may thus be considered as an ironic intensification

⁴⁹ David Kaufmann, ed., *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1896).

⁵⁰ Mirjam Thulin, *Kaufmanns Nachrichtendienst. Ein jüdisches Gelehrtennetzwerk im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 119.

⁵¹ Thulin, *Kaufmanns Nachrichtendienst*, 120.

⁵² Pappenheim, “Vorwort,” *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, n.p.

of some of the impulses that can be found in the scholarship upon which her translation was based. In other words, her emphatic rejection of “Wissenschaftlichkeit” did not entail the repudiation of historical and philological study per se, but rather the repudiation of a mode of scholarship that would undermine the “weight of tradition” and that would, as Gershom Scholem once quipped, “provide the remnants of Judaism with a decent burial.”⁵³

In the preface to her translation of Wollstonecraft, Pappenheim expresses the “lively [*lebhaften*] wish” that the book’s ideas will resonate at the cusp of the twentieth century. She frames her rendition of Glikl’s memoirs in similarly vital and passionate terms: “The translation of the text into a commonly understood language and alphabet is intended to enliven the image of a woman, deeply rooted in her time, who stood apart with her exceptional intellectual gifts, who was faithful to her beliefs, to her people, to her family, and to herself” (“Die Übertragung des Textes in gemeinverständliche Sprache und Schriftzeichen hat den Zweck, das Bild einer Frau neu zu beleben, die, tief in ihrer Zeit wurzelnd, durch ungewöhnliche Geistesgaben hervorragte, die treu war ihrem Glauben, treu ihrem Volke, treu ihrer Familie und treu sich selbst”).⁵⁴ In contrast to Wollstonecraft, however, it is not only Glikl’s “message” that is valued, but also the form of life that she embodies. In her translation, beyond the scholarly “excavation” of a forgotten text, Pappenheim intends to “enliven” an exemplary figure from the past and to make her speak in the present. In part, she is motivated by her own “sense of family,” which developed when she learned that she was distantly related to Glikl.⁵⁵ In this regard, Pappenheim positions herself as a belated addressee of Glikl’s memoirs, which were written so that her children and grandchildren would know “from what kind of people you come” (“von was für Leuten ihr her seid,” in Pappenheim’s rendition). She defines

⁵³ Gershom Scholem, “Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies (1944),” *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time & Other Essays*, ed. Avraham Shapira, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997).

⁵⁴ Pappenheim, “Vorwort,” *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, n.p.

⁵⁵ In *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, Pappenheim reproduces family trees that bear out the connections between Glikl’s and her own genealogy.

her task as, in part, ensuring that this chain of transmission remain unbroken, albeit in mediated form: “to give a form, once again, to her memoirs, which brings them closer to the present day” (“ihren Memoiren wieder eine Form zu geben, die sie der heutigen Zeit näher bringen”).⁵⁶ In this regard, Pappenheim’s preface gives expression to what the scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, with reference to practices of philology and text editing, has called “the desire of embodying the text in question, which can transform itself into the desire of also embodying the author of the text embodied.”⁵⁷ Pappenheim exemplifies this desire for “presence” in a particularly vivid way when she dresses and models as Glikl—and, in particular, Glikl as *writer*—for a portrait by the Polish painter Leopold Pilichowski. It is a portrait that provocatively blurs the identity of the author and the translator and that elides the gulf between the past and the present.

⁵⁶ Pappenheim, “Vorwort,” *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, n.p.

⁵⁷ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 7. In the same vein, there are noteworthy correspondences between Pappenheim’s approach and the hermeneutic principles elaborated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and later Martin Buber, with whom Pappenheim was in frequent contact. In her study of Buber’s representation of Hasidism, the scholar Martina Urban underscores the significance of Dilthey’s views, in particular, to Buber and to the larger project of an “aesthetics of renewal.” She notes that, for Dilthey, “the spirit animating a text is grounded in a particular expression of life (*Lebensäußerung*). The hermeneutical task consists in recovering the original moment of expression by entering the thinking consciousness of another individuality, and to ‘restore its animating spirit to the life of immediate experience’” (16). In a way that resonates with Pappenheim’s self-description of her approach to translation (and with many of Freud’s metaphors for transference), Urban further notes that “[t]his procedure of rendering the lived experience of another person susceptible to one’s own experience—and hence to understanding—demands ‘recreation’ (*Nachbilden*) and ‘reliving’ (*Nacherleben*)” (16-17). Urban argues that Buber elaborated his own distinctive hermeneutic on this basis, with a particular emphasis on how “understanding through reliving can open the individual to conditions which go beyond the determination of his own life” (17). In this light, Urban re-assesses Buber’s widely influential *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman* (1906) as an effort to reanimate “the spiritual core of Hasidism,” which further explains his resistance to the category of translation or to what might be called, following Jakobson, “translation proper” (17). Martina Urban, *Aesthetics of Renewal: Martin Buber’s Early Representation of Hasidism as Kulturkritik* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). In the opening sentence of the preface to *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman*, Buber writes, “Ich habe die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman nicht übersetzt, sondern ihm nacherzählt. Ich habe es getan, weil mein Zweck kein philologischer ist.” Martin Buber, *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1906). Pappenheim’s framing of her rendition of Glikl’s memoirs adopts a similar rhetorical position. Like Buber, she explicitly distances herself from scholarly and philological methods and emphasizes the spiritual and present-day significance of the text in question. Buber’s approach, however, led to a kind of “pneumatic interpretation” (criticized by Gershom Scholem) that freed him from the letter of the text. In contrast, Pappenheim’s approach is more “literal” and retains an intense closeness to the letter, word, and syntax of the source text.



Figure 7: “Bertha Pappenheim as Glikl bas Judah Leib” by Leopold Pilichowski. Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Glikl_Pappenheim.jpg.

In an important qualification, however, Pappenheim also puts some pressure on the sense of family and tradition that underlies her work. It is clear that the translation, while printed in a private edition, was not intended solely for members of her family.⁵⁸ Indeed, despite its apparent hostility to

⁵⁸ In this regard, I would amend Chava Turniansky’s claim that Pappenheim’s rendition was “at the time intended only for the family.” Turniansky, *Glikl: Memoirs, 1691-1719*, 35.

“Wissenschaftlichkeit,” the book circulated among scholars of Jewish history and literature. The scholar N. M. Nathan, for example, reviewed the book in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*; the historian and rabbi Max Freudenthal published an essay on Glikl, with reference to Pappenheim’s rendition, in the same newspaper; and at least one copy of the book was printed for the philologist Alfred Landau.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it seems likely that Pappenheim hoped the memoirs would eventually find an even wider circulation. The most striking evidence for this can be found in the pages of the *Neue jüdische Presse: Frankfurter israelitisches Familienblatt*, which published an excerpt from the memoirs, in Pappenheim’s rendition, about the intensely controversial Sabbatai Zevi in 1909.⁶⁰ In the preface to the purportedly private edition, Pappenheim further addresses these other readers—for whom the book is “not a source of atavistic feelings” (“nicht Quelle atavistischer Empfindungen”)—when she emphasizes the general appeal of such an “image of woman” (“Frauenbilde”) and predicts that all readers will delight in Glikl’s intelligence and strength in the face of both personal and communal adversity.⁶¹

It is Pappenheim’s characterization of those readers *with* “atavistic feelings,” however, that situates her work most strikingly within the contradictions of German-Jewish culture in the first decades of the twentieth century. She underscores, for example, the loss or weakening of Jewish

⁵⁹ N. M. Nathan, “Literarische Mitteilungen: Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 74, no. 41 (1910): 490-491; Max Freudenthal, “Die Denkwürdigkeiten der Glückel von Hameln,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 78, no. 11 (1914): 128-130. Landau’s copy of the book can be found in the M. Pollak Antiquariat in Tel Aviv.

⁶⁰ The editor prefaces the excerpt by noting: “Sie [Pappenheim] hat uns gestattet, ein Kapitel aus den Memoiren zu bringen; dieses Kapitel wird zeigen, welchen Schatz die Literatur und insbesondere die jüdische Literatur in den Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln beherbergt.” “Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln,” *Neue jüdische Presse* 7, no. 17 (1909): “Beilage zu Nr. 17 des Frankfurter Israelitischen Familienblattes.”

⁶¹ The valorization of this particular “Frauenbilde” and of women in Judaism more generally does seem to have had a discernible influence upon a range of writers and scholars in the first decades of the twentieth century. For example, in her critical assessment of the scholar S. A. Horodecky, who overstated the “complete equality” of Jewish women within Beshtian Hasidism, Ada Rapoport-Albert posits that Pappenheim may have shaped Horodecky’s interest in the history of Jewish women. Rapoport-Albert notes that “[o]ne must take into account also Horodecky’s exposure to Western society and culture during those years of university education and intellectual work in Zurich, Berne and particularly Berlin, where German feminism, including Jewish feminism under the leadership of Bertha Pappenheim, was well in evidence.” Ada Rapoport-Albert, “On Women in Hasidism, S. A. Horodecky and The Maid of Ludmir Tradition,” in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, eds. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London: Peter Halban, 1988), 505.

tradition in the German-speaking world when she anticipates readers “who trace the threads back to bygone times in a kind of familial piety—who [...] sense a revival and re-experiencing of feelings in what seem to be half-foreign, half-familiar representations” (“die Fäden zu längst vergangenen Zeiten in einer Art von Familienpietät zurück zu verfolgen – die [...] in halb fremdartig anmutenden, halb anheimelnden Darstellungen ein Wiederbeleben und Wiedererleben von Gefühlen verspüren”).⁶² She describes the sensibility of these readers as “peculiar” (*seltsam*) and implies, in relatively turgid syntax, that their self-understanding has become indistinct or *formless*. Her description recalls Paul Mendes-Flohr’s characterization of the bewilderment of German Jews, who “perhaps despite themselves [...] were still bound to their primordial culture and identity while having yet to find a firm footing in German culture and society.”⁶³ As an example, Mendes-Flohr cites the patrilineal struggle and “the tragedy of the cultured Jew,” which Franz Kafka “pinpointed [...] when he observed that ‘most [...] wanted to leave Jewishness behind them, and their fathers approved of this, but vaguely (this vagueness was what was outrageous to them). But with their hind legs they were still glued to their father’s Jewishness and with their waving front legs they found no new ground.’”⁶⁴ Pappenheim’s rhetoric strikes a similar chord, though she would likely object to the gendered representation of the crisis of identity, which was so often figured as a conflict between fathers and sons, rather than as a conflict between mothers and daughters. Indeed, throughout her writing, Pappenheim insists that even orthodox Jewish women were often relegated to a state of bewilderment because of educational restrictions that prevented them from fully accessing the content of the tradition that structured their lives—the very tradition that was put under enormous strain under conditions of modernity.

⁶² Pappenheim, “Vorwort,” *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, n.p.

⁶³ Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 35.

⁶⁴ Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews*, 35-36.

Pappenheim's own linguistic limitations are symptomatic of such restrictions. In a footnote to the preface, Pappenheim remarks that she made use of "the help of experts for the Hebrew passages" ("[f]ür die hebräischen Textstellen habe ich die Hilfe von Sachverständigen in Anspruch genommen").⁶⁵ Furthermore, she does not suggest that her readers should learn Hebrew—or even learn enough to read, let alone understand, texts written in Hebrew letters. In this regard, despite her religious commitments, her perspective is something other than "orthodox." Pappenheim does not argue for a return to the sources in their original form—a demurral that is perhaps buttressed by the fact that the tradition of Yiddish writing she emphasizes, including the *Mayse-bukh* and the *Tsene-rene*, was never "original" in the sense that Biblical or even Talmudic texts were perceived to be.

Pappenheim's reference to "half-foreign, half-familiar representations" is, furthermore, a description of Glikl's language: Western Yiddish, which had been spoken by German Jews before widespread linguistic acculturation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his 1912 speech, before a similarly acculturated audience, Kafka depicts this language as belonging to an imperfectly forgotten past: "It was, to the say the least of it, not so very long ago that the familiar colloquial language of German Jews, according to whether they lived in town or in the country, more in the East or in the West, seemed to be a remoter or a closer approximation to Yiddish, and many nuances remain to this day."⁶⁶ In Prague and on the outskirts of Frankfurt, Kafka and Pappenheim turn to a forgotten language that yet retains a hint of intimate familiarity—a language that had been rejected by their not-so-distant ancestors, though its traces might still be discerned in their current speech as an even "remoter [...] approximation." This linguistic turn was, furthermore, a

⁶⁵ Pappenheim, "Vorwort," *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, n.p. The footnote in the preface casts doubt on Daniel Boyarin's claim that Pappenheim was "fluent [...] in Hebrew and Yiddish." Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 320. Based on the available evidence, it seems likely that Pappenheim had advanced knowledge of Yiddish (including some loshn-koydesh vocabulary), but that she had only a limited ability to read Hebrew.

⁶⁶ Translation taken from Anderson, ed., *Reading Kafka*, 266. "Noch zumindest vor nicht langer Zeit erschien die vertrauliche Verkehrssprache der deutschen Juden, je nachdem sie in der Stadt oder auf dem Lande lebten, mehr im Osten oder im Westen, wie eine fernere oder nähere Vorstufe des Jargon, und Abtönungen sind noch viele geblieben." Kafka, "Einleitungsvortrag über Jargon," *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande*, 421-426.

dissimilatory and political act. In the wake of the Haskalah and decades of pronounced acculturation, and in contexts in which Yiddish was often perceived to be a source of corruption and humiliation, Kafka and Pappenheim confront their audience members with a repressed world and soundscape that may unsettle their sense of self in the grip of acculturation; they utilize, that is, a “half-foreign, half-familiar” language as “an instrument of disturbance,” which, as Vivian Liska notes, is “a means of perturbing [an] assimilated Jewish environment.”⁶⁷

Kafka’s speech was written to introduce the performance of the actor Jizchak Löwy, who would recite modern poetry *in* Yiddish. In his speech, Kafka paraphrases the poems to be recited, but he declines to translate them—indeed, he claims that translation into German would be impossible. In apparent contrast, in the foreword to her edition of Glikl’s memoirs, Pappenheim describes her task as rendering the source text, as quoted above, into a “commonly understood [*gemeinverständliche*] language and alphabet.” This formulation implies the necessity of translation—despite its apparent impossibility—and further foregrounds the gaps between Glikl and her descendants, many of whom could no longer understand Western Yiddish or the Hebrew alphabet in which it is written. But what else might this terse description—which does not specify the target language—imply? Should we assume that this “commonly understood language” is German or *Hochdeutsch*?

I propose that the formulation signals Pappenheim’s own turn away from “translation proper;” it can be read, that is, as a tacit reference to her fashioning of a hybrid language that draws meaningful connections between the past and present and between Yiddish and German. In large part, this revised approach to translation hinges on her idiosyncratic understanding of Yiddish as an older form of German, which Jewish women had both cultivated and preserved over time. Whatever

⁶⁷ In a reading of Kafka’s speech, Vivian Liska argues that Kafka employs Yiddish as “an instrument of disturbance.” Liska, *When Kafka Says We: Uncommon Communities in German-Jewish Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 29.

one might think of the historical accuracy of this understanding, it suggests a remarkable reworking of standard conceptions of the German-Jewish “symbiosis.” In reference to the historian Enzo Traverso’s work, Marion Kaplan characterizes this “symbiosis” as “the legend in which two cultures met, genuinely encountered each other, and brought out the best in each other.”⁶⁸ Gershom Scholem, Traverso, and other historians have lodged withering critiques of this “legend,” but, as Kaplan notes, many of these critiques accentuate the experience of male intellectuals, politicians, and other public figures without devoting sufficient attention to the experience of women and to “the home and family where [German] Jews retained far more Jewishness than has previously been acknowledged.”⁶⁹ In line with Kaplan’s approach, Pappenheim places women at the center of her analysis, but she does so in a way that not only emphasizes the family or the domestic sphere, but also insists upon the relationship between language and gender.⁷⁰ She foregrounds the linguistic practices of women as a forgotten resource in ongoing debates about the dual identities of German Jews.

In the 1934 essay “Die jüdische Frau” (“The Jewish Woman”), which investigates “the contemporary position of the Jewish woman in Germany” (“[d]ie heutige Stellung der jüdischen Frau in Deutschland”) from an historical perspective, Pappenheim writes:

Die »unbekannte Jüdin«, von der keine Chronik erzählt, die in der sittlichen Ebene der jüdischen Gesetze ohne starke Erhebungen einzelner Persönlichkeiten lebte, war durch die Jahrhunderte Trägerin der ungebrochenen, selbstverständlichen Jüdischkeit und zugleich unbewusst die Hüterin alten deutschen Sprachgutes. Dafür sind die Frauenbibel (Zennorrenoh) und die Maasse-Bücher in ihrem »Weiberdeutsch« (jiddisch-deutsch), und ich

⁶⁸ Marion Kaplan, “Review: The ‘German-Jewish Symbiosis’ Revisited,” *New German Critique* 70 (Winer 1997): 183. See also Enzo Traverso, *The Jews and Germany: From the “Judeo-German Symbiosis” to the Memory of Auschwitz*, trans. Daniel Weissbord (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

⁶⁹ Kaplan, “Review: The ‘German-Jewish Symbiosis’ Revisited,” 185.

⁷⁰ On the gendered dimensions of the relationship between Yiddish and Hebrew, see Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). On the relationship between language and gender, with particular reference to German- and French-language literature and intellectual history, see Sophie A. Salvo, “The Articulation of Difference: Imagining ‘Women’s Language’ between 1650 and the Present,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2017).

möchte fast sagen: in klassischer Form die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln, historische Beweise.⁷¹

The “unknown Jewish woman,” whose history has not been told, who lived according to the ethical precepts of Jewish law without the pronounced elevation of individual personalities, was, through the centuries, the bearer of an unbroken, self-evident Jewishness and, at the same time, though unconsciously, the guardian of the old German language. Historical examples of this can be found in the Women’s Bible (*Zennoh rennoh*) and in the Maasse-Books, written in “Women’s German” (Yiddish-German), and, I would almost like to say, in its classical form, in the memoirs of Glückel von Hameln.

In the above passage, Pappenheim recounts the cultivation of Jewish tradition by largely unknown and untold women, and she identifies the *language* of these women—what most scholars today would refer to as Middle Yiddish or Western Yiddish—as an older form of German. In the early twentieth century, and even today, it was not uncommon to describe Yiddish as a dialect or even as a deformation of German, but it was more unusual to valorize it as such; though, after 1933, when Pappenheim’s essay was written, some writers and philologists began to accentuate the filiations between Middle High German and Yiddish as a form of resistance to the language ideology of National Socialism.⁷² Pappenheim’s remarks are perhaps most striking, however, insofar as they point to the linguistic practices of Jewish women—to their amalgamation of Yiddish and German, their hyphenated and hybrid tongue (*jiddisch-deutsch*)—as an untapped resource in the ongoing negotiation between Jewish and German identities. She further valorizes their language as feminine,

⁷¹ Pappenheim, *Literarische und publizistische Texte*, 89. In Yiddish, “*vaybertaytsh*” can refer to the type of font used to print Yiddish literature. The word, as Max Weinreich notes, “sounds symbolic: women’s letters for women’s books.” Weinreich further recounts that typological differences reflect certain hierarchies of value, so that “[*v*]aybertaytsh is not as sacred as square letters.” Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, Vol. 1, 277.

⁷² In his landmark study *LTI*, for example, the philologist Victor Klemperer describes Nazi efforts to defame Jews. In this context, he writes, “Als Mittel hierfür bot sich ihr der Jargon dar, der den Deutschen seinen Wortformen nach als eine Verzerrung der deutschen Sprache erscheint, und der ihnen rau und häßlich klingt. Daß sich gerade im Jargon die durch Jahrhunderte bewahrte Anhänglichkeit der Juden an Deutschland ausdrückt, und daß ihre Aussprache sich weitgehend mit der eines Walter von der Vogelweide und Wolfram von Eschenbach deckt, das weiß natürlich nur der Germanist von Metier, und ich möchte den Professor der Germanistik kennen, der während der Nazizeit in seinem Seminar darauf aufmerksam gemacht hätte!” Victor Klemperer, *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2010), 94.

rather than dismissing it as such.⁷³ In Pappenheim’s assessment, the language of the “unknown Jewish woman” has largely been forgotten, at least within the borders of early twentieth-century Germany, though it retains its sense of familiarity and, she suggests, its power to enthrall. In both its distinctively Jewish form and in its preservation of an older iteration of German, Pappenheim further contends that the language of these women—and of Glikl, in particular—serves as a model for Jewish women in the present, including “the women to whom she devoted her life,” as the scholar Abigail Gillman writes, the “unwed mothers, prostitutes, victims of white slavery; Jewish women denied education, equality in the *Gemeinde*, and basic welfare support, orphans, *agunot*, immigrants from the East.”⁷⁴ In this regard, Pappenheim explicitly contrasts “Yiddish-German” to the acculturated language of the women intellectuals of German Romanticism—“those famous women of Romanticism” (“jenen berühmten Frauen der Romantik”), such as Rahel Varnhagen and Dorothea von Schlegel (the daughter of Moses Mendelssohn), who had found their place within the history of German literature, but, in Pappenheim’s view, had not contributed to the “development of German, Jewish womanhood” (“die [...] für die Entwicklung des deutschen, jüdischen Frauentums nicht massgebend zu sein scheinen”).⁷⁵ In this light, Pappenheim’s translation work can be seen as an endeavor to assert the significance of an alternative to the legacy of Romanticism, even as, perhaps ironically, she engages in a recovery effort that could be compared to the collections, editions, and re-workings of the Grimm Brothers and Ludwig Tieck, among others.⁷⁶

⁷³ In this regard, Pappenheim revalorizes the (usually pejorative) assessment of Yiddish as a “feminine” language in contradistinction to German as a “masculine” language. See Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven*, 8-9.

⁷⁴ Abigail Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 237.

⁷⁵ Pappenheim, “Die jüdische Frau,” *Literarische und publizistische Texte*, 88.

⁷⁶ I would further suggest that Pappenheim’s translation work bears comparison, in particular, with the form of Ludwig Tieck’s edition of the *Minnelieder aus dem Schwäbischen Zeitalter* (Berlin, 1803). Louise Hecht further notes, “Mit der innovativen Nachbildung des Jiddischen im Deutschen stellte sich Pappenheim bewußt oder unbewußt in die Übersetzertradition der deutschen Romantik, die – von Klopstock über Schlegel bis Hölderlin – in ihren klassischen Übersetzungen das Griechische, Englische oder Lateinische im Deutschen abzubilden suchten.” Hecht, “Übersetzungen jüdischer Tradition,” 324.

The hybrid tongue of Glikl's memoirs and of texts like the *Maysse-bukh* and *Tsene-rene* further embodies the tension between familiarity and strangeness that will shape Pappenheim's approach to translating Yiddish literature and set it apart from her approach to Wollstonecraft's English-language book. However, in the foreword to her rendition of Glikl's memoirs, Pappenheim only hints at the form of her translation; we can get a concrete sense of it by looking at the opening sentences. In Kaufmann's Yiddish edition of the memoirs, Glikl notes the year in the Hebrew calendar (the equivalent of 1691) in which she begins to write, in a kind of "talking cure," prompted by "a surfeit of worries, troubles, and heartache" (מרוב דאגות וצרות ומכאובי לב).⁷⁷ Glikl then alludes to Psalms 90:15: "may God give us joy as long as our afflictions."⁷⁸ In these opening lines, Glikl employs *loshn-koydesh* vocabulary (Hebrew and Aramaic) and integrates intertextual references. Pappenheim renders these lines in the following way: "Im Jahre 1691 beginne ich dieses zu schreiben, aus vielen Sorgen und Nöten und Herzeleid, wie weiter folgen wird. Gott aber erfreue uns so lange Zeit, als er uns plagte, und schicke unseren Messias und Erlöser bald. Amen."⁷⁹ Pappenheim translates the words of the source text into German and, as she notes in the preface, utilizes the knowledge of scholars to decipher the numerous passages in Hebrew. In this regard, her rendition of the text seems to accord with Roman Jakobson's broad definition of "translation proper" as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language." If we compare the source text and its translation, however, we notice that Pappenheim stays remarkably close to the word order and even to the diction of the Yiddish text as it is presented in Kaufmann's edition. In the first sentence, for instance, she only changes the placement of the demonstrative "זעלב" ("dieses" or "this"). The

⁷⁷ David Kaufmann, ed., *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann Verlag, 1896), 1. I cite the English translation by Sara Friedman, based on Chava Turniansky's edition of the source text and translation into Hebrew. Turniansky, ed., *Glikl: Memoirs, 1691-1719*, 41.

⁷⁸ Turniansky, ed., *Glikl: Memoirs, 1691-1719*, 41.

⁷⁹ Pappenheim, "Erstes Buch," *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*.

chart below follows the word order in Yiddish, with the corresponding translation on the left-hand side (italics designate a change in word order):

Im Jahre 1691	שנת תנ"א
beginne ich	אתחיל
<i>zu schreiben</i>	לכתוב
<i>dieses</i>	זה
aus vielen	מרוב
Sorgen	דאגות
und Nöten	וצרות
und Herzeleid	ומכאובי לב
wie	וויא
weiter	ווייטר
folgen	פולגין
wird	ווערט

In this opening salvo, Pappenheim alters the placement of “dieses,” seemingly to standardize the verb position according to modern German grammar, but she otherwise remains tethered to the word order and syntax of the source text, including the repetition of the conjunction “*ו*” as “und,” a Hebrew stylistic feature that is subtly woven into the German. In the pages that follow, Pappenheim occasionally inserts words or alters the syntax in more noticeable ways (especially with regard to the position of verbs), but she mostly stays unusually close to the language of the source text, as when she renders the following line—taken from a story that Glikl recounts about a king’s physician who survives imprisonment and torture with the help of seven types of herbs—: “Das erste Kräutel ist, daß ich meine Zuversicht auf Gott – gelobt sei er und sein Name – habe, daß er mich vor allem Nöten und Schmerzen, wenn sie auch noch so bös wären, beschirmen kann und auch vor der Hand des Königs: denn das Herz des Königs ist in Gottes Hand, was Gott – sein Name sei gepriesen – haben will, muß er tun.”⁸⁰ We might also consider the opening of the second book, in which Pappenheim alters some of the verbs (e.g., “*ver*” becomes “werde,” “*gishubin*” becomes “geschieht

⁸⁰ Pappenheim, trans., *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, 9.

es,” and “tue” is inserted) and occasionally “standardizes” the syntax by adding articles and emending endings (e.g., “*noch op sbterbin fun mayn libn man*” becomes “nach dem Absterben von meinem lieben Mann”); however, she otherwise follows the word order of the source text: “Derweil ich dieses und was schon geschrieben und was ich schreiben werde, aus großem, betrübten Herzen tue, geschieht es nach dem Absterben von meinem lieben Mann – er ruhe in Frieden – welcher ist gewesen unser getreuer Hirt.”⁸¹ Pappenheim neither adopts an unfaithful approach to translation, despite her renunciation of “Wissenschaftlichkeit,” nor does she engage in a kind of “pneumatic exegesis”—a phrase that Scholem once used to disparage the “subjectivity” of Martin Buber’s approach to textual interpretation and translation.⁸² Pappenheim instead maintains, to a large degree, the particular words, turns of phrase, and sentences that can be found in the pages of Kaufmann’s edition. In this sense, her approach to translation can be understood as a mode of close reading par excellence.

The closeness between source text and translation raises the question of whether Pappenheim’s rendition should be considered a “translation” at all; or, to ask it differently, how should we understand her self-description of the work as an “Übertragung”? Around the time of its publication, the scholar N. M. Nathan describes *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln* as an “Uebersetzung” and notes its “carefulness” (“mit Sorgfalt hergestellt”), while the scholar Chava Turniansky, a century later, describes it as a “transcription (*Umschreibung*)” and explicitly contrasts it with “translation.”⁸³ I am less interested in settling upon one of these terms than in dwelling in and reflecting upon the categorical uncertainty of Pappenheim’s rendition, which puts pressure on the conceptual vocabulary that we use to account for the complex intertextual and interlingual dynamics

⁸¹ Pappenheim, trans., *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, 21.

⁸² Martin Buber, *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, intro. Harold Bloom (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), x.

⁸³ Nathan, “Literarische Mitteilungen,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, 491; Turniansky, *Glikl: Memoirs 1691-1719*, 35.

that we often designate “translation,” and which builds upon different traditions—including *taytsh-kehumesb* and other “peculiar translations” (“merkwürdige Übersetzungen”), to adopt the scholar Nechama Leibowitz’s phrase, as well as a range of German- and Yiddish-language ethnographic writings.⁸⁴ It is this categorical uncertainty that I would like to index with the term “off-translation,” not to sharply demarcate a certain method of translation, but rather to register the multidirectional movements between practices that are often subsumed under the terms “translation,” “transcription,” or “emendation.”

If we persist with the opening sentence, cited above, it seems clear that Pappenheim’s work entails more than the mere transcription or transliteration of words that were written in Hebrew letters into Latin letters.⁸⁵ She provides, for example, German equivalents for *loshn-koydesh* words and phrases that significantly alter the style of the source text and that entail a transposition of the frame of reference (e.g., her rendition of the year as “1691”). In a more ambiguous manner, however, her rendition of Germanic words, in particular, calls into question the very distinction between translation and transcription. Pappenheim uses standard spellings of words in modern German—e.g., “wie weiter folgen wird”—but, at the same time, these words closely approximate the spelling and sounds of the source text. It is not easy to decide if “wie” is a transcription or a

⁸⁴ In an important early article, the scholar Nechama Leibowitz notes, “Die jüdisch-deutschen (= jd.) bibelübersetzungen des mittelalters sind in ihrer übersetzungsmethode so eigenartig, in syntax und stil so verzerrt, so viel mehr hebräisch als deutsch und obendrein streckenweise ohne original so unverständlich, daß sie, gemessen an den maßstäben normaler übersetzungen schlecht, ja unsinnig sind.” In a methodological statement that has guided this chapter, Leibowitz continues, “Da dieser ‘unsinn’ so offenkundig ist und bei näherer betrachtung sich als so fein durchdacht und so consequent durchgeführt herausstellt, müssen wir die maßstäbe, nach denen gemessen sie unsinn sind, aufgeben und nach anderen maßstäben suchen, und fragen, ob diese übersetzungen [...] nicht ganz andere ziele als die üblichen übersetzungen verfolgten, und somit auch zu anderen mitteln greifen mußten: ob wir ferner im verlaufe der jüdischen geschichte nicht ähnlich merkwürdige übersetzungen finden, und was deren sinn und begründung ist.” Nechama Leibowitz, “Die übersetzungstechnik der jüdisch-deutschen bibelübersetzungen des 15. und 16. jahrhunderts dargestellt an den Psalmen,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, ed. Eduard Sievers (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1931), 24a.

⁸⁵ Transliteration is “faithful to orthography,” whereas transcription is “faithful to pronunciation.” As Pappenheim shifts between both approaches, I will not make a rigid distinction between them for the purposes of this chapter. On Yiddish transliteration and transcription, see Isaac L. Bleaman, “Guidelines for Yiddish in Bibliographies: A Supplement to YIVO Transliteration,” *In geveb* (July 2019).

translation of “וויא” (“*vay*”), or if “weiter” is “some other language” with regard to “ווייטר” (“*vaytr*”). More noticeable but still subtle shifts—e.g., “wird” for “*verl*” (“ווערט”) and, in the following sentences, “erschaffen” for “*bishafin*” (“בישאפין”)—further wear away at the boundary between transcription and translation and thus at the boundary between German and Yiddish. In this regard, Pappenheim’s rendition is arguably more than the mere “echo of the original,” as Walter Benjamin once figured translation, though her work bears comparison with Friedrich Hölderlin’s translations of Sophocles and with the theoretical views of Rudolf Pannwitz, whom Benjamin cites in an endorsement of his claim that the translator “must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language” (“er muss seine sprache durch die fremde erweitern und vertiefen”).⁸⁶

While Pappenheim’s translation work was supported by the family of David Kaufmann, who produced the Yiddish-language edition of Glikl’s memoirs that she used for her rendition, she must have been aware of Kaufmann’s own suspicion of translation, which he articulates in the German-language introduction to his edition of the memoirs:

Bedarf es auch noch der Rechtfertigung dafür, dass ich das Buch nicht in deutscher Umschrift vorlege, sondern getreu in der Gestalt es belassen zu müssen glaubte, in der es aus der Hand der Verfasserin hervorgegangen ist? So sehr ich im Interesse einer allgemeinen wissenschaftlichen Benutzung dieser Denkwürdigkeiten deren volle Verdeutschung gewünscht hätte, so schien mir gerade das Gebot strenger Wissenschaftlichkeit einen solchen Versuch, so lange nicht das Original vorgelegt war, auszuschliessen. Mit der blossen Umschrift, die überdies den Reif von den Früchten, die Farbe von den Schmetterlingsflügeln wegwischt, war es hier nicht gethan. Die Sprache erscheint von Worten und Wendungen, Entlehnungen und Anspielungen aus dem hebräischen und rabbinischen Schriftthum so durchsetzt, geht oft so unversehens und ungesucht aus der deutschen Rede in das Idiom der Bibel über, dass eine Uebersetzung erforderlich wäre, durch die aber gerade das im Munde

⁸⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), 20; 22. Pannwitz’s formulation of the “falschen grundsatz” of many translators resonates with the rhetoric of Pappenheim’s preface to the *Tsene-rene*, in which she repudiates “verhochteutschen;” Pannwitz writes, as cited by Benjamin, “unsere übertragungen, auch die besten, gehn von einem falschen grundsatz aus, sie wollen das indische, griechische, englische verdeutschen, anstatt das deutsche zu verindischen, vergriechischen, verenglischen. sie haben eine viel bedeutendere ehrfurcht vor den eigenen sprachgebräuchen als vor dem geiste des fremden werks [...]” Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961), 68.

einer Frau so merkwürdige Gepräge, das Charakteristische dieses Stiles einfach aufgehoben würde.⁸⁷

Is there also a need to justify the fact that I am not presenting the book in German transliteration, but rather believed I had to leave it in the form in which it emerged from the author's hand? As much as I would have liked to have fully translated these memoirs in the interests of general scholarly use, it seemed to me that rigorous scholarly standards (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) would preclude such an attempt as long as the original was not presented. Mere transliteration, which further brushes away the ripeness of the fruit, the color of the butterfly's wings, was not done here. The language appears so interspersed with words and phrases, borrowings and allusions from Hebrew and Rabbinic literature, and it often passes so unexpectedly and unsolicited from German speech into the idiom of the Bible that a translation would be necessary, but through which the strange imprint of this woman's language and the characteristics of her style would simply be canceled out.

Kaufmann's statement is remarkable in its oscillation between scientific and aesthetic concerns. He acknowledges that the larger scholarly community—including non-Jewish scholars—would have benefited from a transliteration or even a translation of the text, which he presents, however, in Yiddish and in Hebrew letters. In so doing, he declines to adopt a practice that had become increasingly common among folklorists and literary historians, such as Abraham Tendlaw and Max Grünbaum, who published numerous Yiddish texts in Latin letters, sometimes with and without an accompanying translation into German. Kaufmann resists this practice by insisting on those scholarly standards that demand a reliable edition of the “original” without excessive mediation. In this regard, Kaufmann's decision was praised by scholars like Max Erik, who endorsed the “normal form” of the edition, “without transcription into Latin letters”—“a glik nokh, nokh in zeyer normaler geshtalt, on der transkriptsye in lataynishe oyses.”⁸⁸ Nonetheless, in the above passage, it is Kaufmann's aesthetic considerations that are most striking, for as soon as he insists on the scholarly rigor of his work, he employs a highly figurative description of the language and distinctive style of the source text as “the ripeness of the fruit, the color of the butterfly's wings.” He insists,

⁸⁷ David Kaufmann, ed., *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln: 1645-1719* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann Verlag, 1896), ix-x.

⁸⁸ Max Erik, *Di geschikhte fun der yidisher literatur fun die eltste tsaytn biz der baskole-tkufe* (Warsaw: Farlag Kultur-Lige, 1928), 394.

that is, on the aesthetic power of the source text, akin to what Pappenheim would later describe as the “charm of the presentation” (“Reiz der Darstellung”). In Kaufmann’s account, this aesthetic power derives, at least in part, from the multilingualism of the memoirs and from their fluctuation between religious and everyday registers, between Hebrew and German—stylistic qualities that Glikl employs in distinctive ways but that are also characteristic of Yiddish literature more generally. In light of the memoirs’ multilingualism, Kaufmann thus announces his suspicion of a form of translation that would flatten this linguistic and stylistic texture. He articulates a problem that Jacques Derrida later identifies as “one of the limits of theories of translation: all too often they treat the passing from one language to another and do not sufficiently consider the possibility for languages to be implicated *more than two* in a text. How is a text written in several languages at a time to be translated? How is the effect of plurality to be ‘rendered?’”⁸⁹ In *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, in its pronounced difference from her earlier rendition of Wollstonecraft’s work, one can discern Pappenheim’s struggle with this very problem.

In *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, which signals only the beginning of a shift in approach, Pappenheim decides to translate—rather than transcribe *and* translate, as she will later do—loshn-koydesh words into German, including Biblical and Talmudic citations, which she only

⁸⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 108. In her analysis of the multilingual work of Avot Yeshurun, Adriana Jacobs addresses a different if not unrelated form of translation practice, and her articulation of how this practice challenges “traditional formulations of translation as a movement between one language and another” has informed my reading of Pappenheim’s work. Jacobs remarks that “[i]n his famous 1912 address on the Yiddish language, Franz Kafka noted, ‘[T]he migration of peoples runs through Yiddish from one end to the other.’ This mobility of Yiddish is evident in the acts and forms of translation that Yeshurun engaged to destabilize the Hebrew *bayit* (home) as a material and figurative space, and as formal and prosodic unity (*bayit* as stanza). The plural ‘peoples’ allows for translational movements that are non-linear, open-ended, ongoing, and, to use Harshav’s term, ‘plurisignifying,’ thereby challenging traditional formulations of translation as a movement between one language and another and acknowledging, rather, the Derridean possibility of ‘more than two’ languages on the move within a text.” Cf. Adriana X. Jacobs, *Strange Cocktail: Translation and the Making of Modern Hebrew Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 138. In similar fashion, Naomi Seidman argues that Buber and Rosenzweig’s “view of translation deviates strikingly from the more normative conception of translation as moving in a single direction, either from source to target text or from target to source, as in the Roman ‘plundering’ of Greek literature; Schleiermacher’s model offers translators the choice of bringing the reader to the text or the text to the reader—but not both!” Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 156–157.

occasionally puts into quotation marks to signal their allusiveness. In passages that thematize language contact, moreover, Pappenheim narrates the use of Hebrew and other languages only in an extradiegetic manner, whereas the switch is performed in an intradiegetic manner in the source text. Finally, transitions in word choice that are highly marked in the source text—e.g., a non-Jewish man’s description of a young girl as a *hur* (whore) in contrast to Glikl’s term *bsule* (maiden)⁹⁰—are often effaced in Pappenheim’s rendition, e.g., as *Dirne*.⁹¹ These choices arguably elide the intertextual and multilingual references that Kaufmann claimed were constitutive of the style and aesthetic power of the memoirs. Nonetheless, in its unusually close proximity to the word order of the source text, I have argued that Pappenheim’s *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln* should be considered as an initial experiment in what may be called “off-translation,” which combines and moves between forms of translation, transcription, and emendation, and which complicates and blurs the boundaries between languages. In her later work, however, Pappenheim intensifies this experiment and produces a text that further approximates the multilingual patchwork of Yiddish writing.

As early as the seventeenth century, in the foreword to *Jüdische Historien* (1671), the first German translation of the *Maysse-buch*, the Christian philologist Christoph Helwig refers to the language of this text—as was customary at the time—as “Teutsch” or “German,” though he underscores its distance from “correct German.” In his framing of Yiddish literature, Helwig repeats the common judgment that Yiddish is a deformation of German and claims that the “Hebrew letters” and “numerous rabbinic Talmudic words” (“Ebraischen Buchstaben;” “viel Rabbinischen Thalmudischen Wörtern”) of the source text spoil the pages upon which they are printed, so that his rendition is less a translation than a correction or even a conversion “into a fully German language”

⁹⁰ Turniansky notes this particular example in her recent edition of the memoirs. Turniansky, ed., *Glikl: Memoirs, 1691-1719*, 11.

⁹¹ Pappenheim, *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, 32-33.

(“in ganze Teutsche Sprach”).⁹² In this regard, his approach to translation exemplifies what Pappenheim would later call “verhochteutschen,” which she disavows in the preface to her rendition of the *Tsene-rene*. Helwig’s remarks are replete with antisemitic ideas and phrases, but they also touch upon some of the same translational problems that Kaufmann and, as noted in the introduction, Kafka and Scholem, among others, diagnose centuries later. How, for instance, should the translator grapple with the “intrusion of Rabbinic words” (“die eingemischte Rabbinsche Wörter”), as Helwig phrased it, or with the “mapping of the linguistic spirit of Hebrew in German” (“Abbildung des hebräischen Sprachgeistes im Deutschen”), as Scholem termed it?⁹³ In the pages that follow, I analyze how Pappenheim revised her approach in her rendition of the *Mayse-bukh* and, in so doing, opened up new possibilities of expression at the fraught intersection of Yiddish and German—a revised approach that involved, in particular, a fuller embrace of multilingualism and, in particular, of *loshn-koydesh* vocabulary.

⁹² Christoph Helwig, ed., *Jüdische Historien* (Giessen: Chemlein, 1671), digitized by the Universitätsbibliothek, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main. See also Nathanael Riemer, “The Christian Hebraist Christoph Helwig (1581-1617) and His Rendering of Jewish Stories in (His Work) *Jüdische Historien*,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 2012): 71-104.

⁹³ Scholem, *Poetica*, 215.



Figure 8: Title Page, *Eyn shoyrn maysehb bukh* (Basel 1602), Universitätsbibliothek Basel. Source: e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/titleinfo/10299059/ Public Domain Mark.

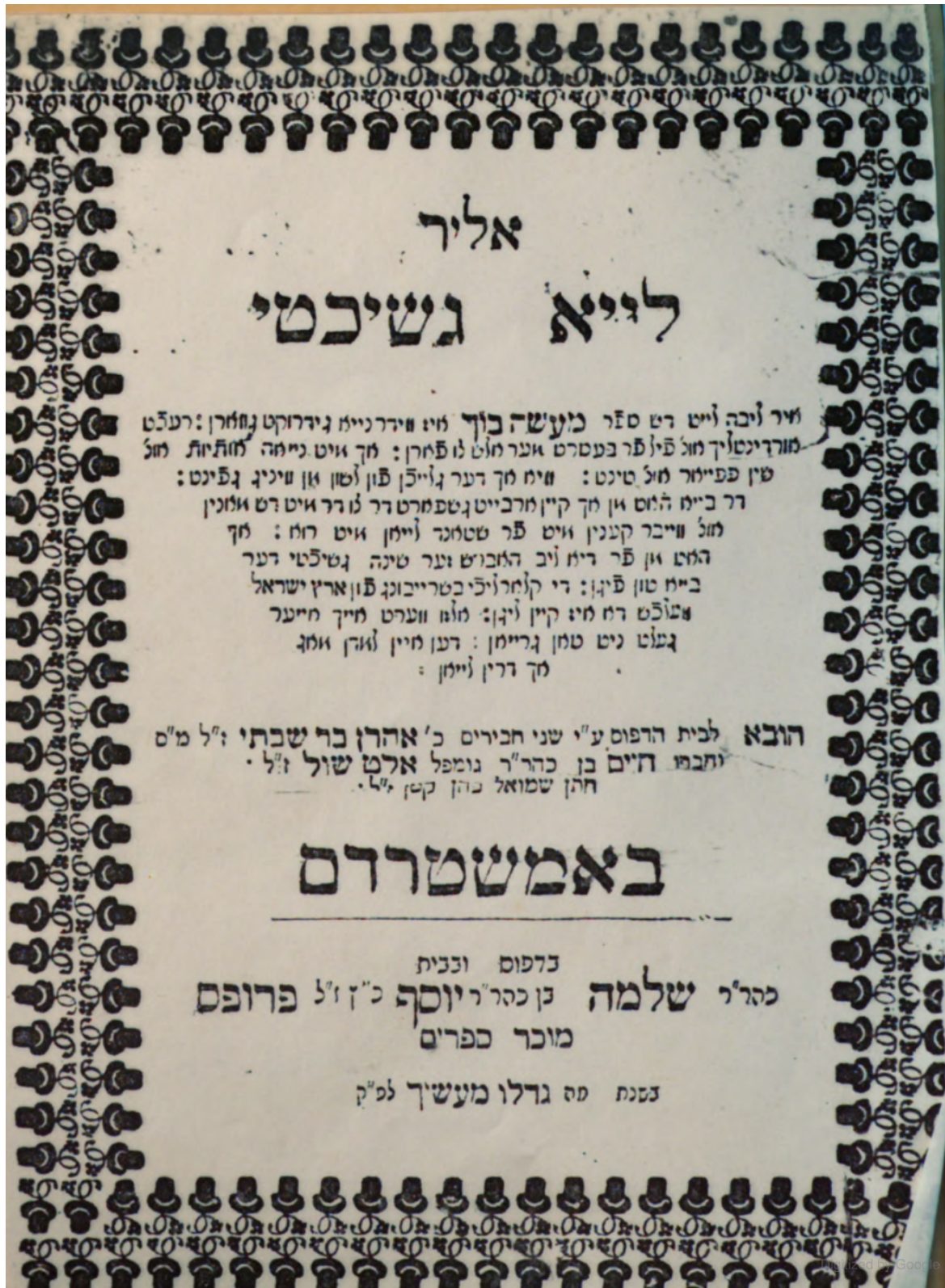


Figure 9: Title Page, *Aler lay geshikhte* (Amsterdam 1723), National Library of the Netherlands, Source: Google Books. Pappenheim based her work on this later edition of the book.

The textual history of the *Maysse-bukh*, an anthology of Talmudic stories and other tales translated and adapted into Middle Yiddish, anticipates many of the tensions—between German and Yiddish, between men and women, between tradition and modernity—that run like a frayed thread through Pappenheim’s translation work. As can be seen above, in the prologue to the editio princeps of the *Maysse-bukh*, edited by the bookseller Yaakov bar Avraham of Mezritsh and published by Konrad Waldkirch in Basel in 1602, the anonymous author invokes and draws in the intended audience of the book: “Come here, you dear men and women” (“kumt her ir liben manen un froyen”).⁹⁴ He then imparts, in rhymed prose, that the book is a compilation of stories (“maysim”) based upon the Gemara and other traditional sources,⁹⁵ before concluding with a second address to only the “dear women” who now have access, with this book, to “the Yiddish Gemara” (“di taytshi gemora”) and thus to the “entire Torah” (“kol hatoyre”). The book is, in this way, presented as a pious alternative to “Yiddish [or German] books” (“di taytshi bikher”), which were designed for entertainment. In this regard, the scholar Jean Baumgarten argues that the publication of the *Maysse-bukh* was aimed “against the influence of secular books [“di taytshi bikher”], adaptations of heroic epics, chapbooks, and stories that were thought harmful and pernicious, all of which were very popular among the Jewish audience.”⁹⁶ Baumgarten further notes that “rabbinical authorities considered these texts, based by and large on non-Jewish literature, as reading material that diverted the reader from the right path of virtue and Jewish ethics.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Yaakov bar Avraham of Mezritsh is the likely author of the prologue. See Claudia Rosenzweig, “*Getlekehe un nisht getlekehe mayses*: The *Maysse-bukh* and Its Readership,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 26 (2019): 207; and Clemens P. Sidorko, *Basel und der jiddische Buchdruck (1557-1612)* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2014), 334-338.

⁹⁵ The prologue notes that there are about three hundred stories (“*dray hundert un etlekehe maysim*”), though only 258 stories are included. Claudia Rosenzweig demonstrates that these tales “are often grouped according to three different types of narrative matter: stories based on Talmudic *aggadot*, the narrative cycle focused on *Haside Ashkenaz*, and a third group of stories taken from a variety of other sources.” Rosenzweig, “*Getlekehe un nisht getlekehe mayses*,” 208.

⁹⁶ Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 300.

⁹⁷ Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 300.

The stated difference between the *Mayse-bukh* and “secular books” was, however, more complex than the rhetoric of the prologue allows. The Basel frontispiece, for example, illustrates the persistent imbrication of Jewish and non-Jewish cultural fields within the *Mayse-bukh*, as the text of the prologue is framed by a vignette of the German painter Hans Holbein the Younger. In the French critical edition of the *Mayse-bukh*, the scholar Astrid Starck remarks that this vignette, first printed in 1516, “introduce[s] us to a universe specific to the Renaissance, populated by cherubs and newts,” and that it was earlier used in non-Jewish publications by the likes of Erasmus von Rotterdam and Thomas More.⁹⁸ Starck further suggests “that [the frontispiece] integrates Yiddish literature into the prestigious era of the Renaissance and Humanism, thus conferring upon it a significant place in European production (*de la production européenne*).”⁹⁹ The reprinting of Holbein’s vignette may have been justified on both aesthetic and commercial grounds, but it stands in uneasy relation with the content of the book’s prefatory remarks. On the following page, for instance, the author further sets the book apart from other popular Yiddish texts of the time, including the *Ku-bukh* and adaptations of legends about Dietrich von Bern and Hildebrand; the author admits the entertainment value of these works, but dismisses them as “nothing but filth” (“verlekh eytl shmits”) and as “ungodly” (“nit getlekh”). These remarks belie, however, the numerous stories in the *Mayse-bukh* that can be traced back to medieval German literature and folktales, rather than to Biblical or Talmudic sources. In fact, as the scholar Claudia Rosenzweig has recently suggested, the publisher of the Basel edition seems “[to feel] free from categories such as *getlekh* and *nisht getlekh*, although he cited them in order to promote his books.”¹⁰⁰ In addition to its promotional value, the stringent

⁹⁸ “il nous introduit dans un univers propre à la Renaissance, peuplé d’angelots et de tritons.” Astrid Starck, ed., *Un beau livre d’histoires. Eyn schön Mayse bukh* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2004), xxxvi.

⁹⁹ “on peut affirmer qu’elle intègre la littérature Yiddish à cette période prestigieuse que sont la Renaissance et l’Humanisme, lui conférant ainsi une place non négligeable au sein de la production européenne.” Starck, ed., *Un beau livre d’histoires*, xxxvi.

¹⁰⁰ Rosenzweig, “*Getleke un nisht getleke mayse*: The *Mayse-bukh* and Its Readership,” 210.

rhetoric of the prologue may thus be understood as an anxious response to the modern and gendered practice of reading for pleasure, which, as the historian Amos Bitzan has shown, eventually led to “a revolution of traditional Jewish culture” in the wake of the Haskalah.¹⁰¹

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Pappenheim’s insistence on the didactic qualities of the *Mayse-bukh* can be seen in a similar light. In the preface to her rendition, Pappenheim states that the tales offer insight into the difficult living conditions and resilience of Ashkenazic Jews in the Middle Ages, and they reflect “the affirmation of life in Jewish teaching: enjoyment, property, joyfulness, and especially the great purity and chastity in the conception of those forms of life that constitute the foundation and continued existence of Judaism” (“[...] sind die Geschichten auch starke Beweise der Lebensbejahung der jüdischen Lehre: Genuß, Besitz, Fröhlichkeit und vor allem die große Reinheit und Keuschheit in der Auffassung jener Lebensäußerungen, die Basis und Bestand des Judentums bilden”).¹⁰² Pappenheim highlights, that is, the moral “instruction” (*Lehre*) that is embedded within the *Mayse-bukh*—instruction that she considers to be relevant in the adjudication of contemporary issues. For example, around the time of the publication of *Allerlei Geschichten*, Pappenheim delivered a lecture in opposition to abortion rights that explicitly cites the so-called *Lebensbejahung* of the tales in support of her view. In 1930, this lecture was published in the *Blätter des jüdischen Frauenbundes*, the official newspaper of the organization that Pappenheim had co-founded, as part of a larger series of lectures about Paragraph 218 of the German penal code, which criminalized abortion—lectures that were previously delivered at the “Durkheimer Sommerschule,” sponsored by

¹⁰¹ See Amos Bitzan, “The Problem of Pleasure: Disciplining the German Jewish Reading Revolution, 1770-1870” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011). Bitzan notes that this reading revolution “began in the early modern period among women rather than elite male intellectuals” (vii). See also Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2004). In this regard, Abigail Gillman notes that “Pappenheim already knew what Iris Parush’s research bears out: the Yiddish women’s Bible became a stepping-stone to enlightenment and culture. The faded Yiddish books found on grandmother’s bookshelf had contributed to the shift in reading habits in the middle of the nineteenth century.” Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation*, 230.

¹⁰² Bertha Pappenheim, “Vorwort,” *Allerlei Geschichten*, vii.

the *Frauenbund*. In the interwar period, the growing movement for abortion rights divided the organization, and Pappenheim came down strongly in opposition to their expansion. In the lecture, she defends her position with reference to “a brief story” (“eine kleine Geschichte”) in the *Maysse-bukh*, which, as she argues, expounds upon the Jewish value of “respecting life and bringing forth life” (“wie wichtig es dem Judentum ist, Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben zu haben und Leben hervorzubringen”).¹⁰³ In particular, Pappenheim cites a story that recounts the death of a young scholar—in her rendition, “geschah an einem Talmidchochom (Schriftgelehrten) [...] Un er sturb so gar jung von Jahren”—who, before his death, was so engrossed in his studies that he did not touch his wife, even when she was “pure” (“weiß angelegt”).¹⁰⁴ In the logic of the story, the failure of the young scholar to have sex and procreate with his wife is sinful and the eventual cause of his death. In Pappenheim’s interpretation, the instructional value of the story extends to the present day and illustrates the “affirmation of life” that undergirds her opposition to abortion.

Pappenheim is direct about her position, but she expresses it in a forum that also gives air to supporters of abortion, such as Dr. Rahel Straus, whose lecture is printed before Pappenheim’s in the *Blätter des jüdischen Frauenbundes*, and who argues that Paragraph 218 does not “express the ethical will of the people” (“den ethischen Willen eines Volkes ausdrücken”) and that “the Jewish religion” and “a Talmudic determination” (“die jüdische Religion;” “eine talmudische Bestimmung”) can be said to endorse the right to an abortion.¹⁰⁵ In Pappenheim’s own lecture, moreover, she states, after recounting the story from the *Maysse-bukh*, that “[i]t is an exceedingly profound and meaningful story, which naturally, in 1930, would be interpreted by only few in such a way, as they ought to do” (“Das ist eine außerordentlich tiefsinnige und bedeutungsvolle Erzählung, die natürlich im Jahre 1930 von

¹⁰³ Bertha Pappenheim, “Aussprache zum §218 auf der Durkheimer Sommerschule des J. F. B.,” *Blätter des jüdischen Frauenbundes* VI, no. 11 (1930): 4.

¹⁰⁴ Pappenheim, trans., *Allerlei Geschichten*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Rahel Straus, “Aussprache zum §218 auf der Durkheimer Sommerschule des J. F. B.,” *Blätter des jüdischen Frauenbundes* VI, no. 11 (1930): 1-2.

wenigen noch so aufgefaßt wird, wie sie müßte”).¹⁰⁶ This sentence suggests that the problem of “interpretation” (*Auffassung*) is crucial to how we should understand the didactic aims of her translation work. In her lecture, Pappenheim laments that most modern readers would not interpret the story in the way that she does, and she underscores that she believes the story *ought to be* interpreted as opposed to abortion, not that it is merely one *possible* interpretation. But this stringent conclusion is not included in her rendition of *Allerlei Geschichten*. Instead, in book form, Pappenheim presents the story without commentary and, as she notes in the lecture, with full knowledge that most of her readers will not interpret the story in the way that she does. In book form, that is, she presents an open text that may be seen, as Bialik famously characterized Aggadah in contrast to Halakhah, as “accommodating, lenient, pliable.”¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, like the prologue to the Basel edition of the *Maysse-Bukh*, Pappenheim’s moralizing rhetoric often belies the *literary* qualities of her work. In fact, in the preface, she repeatedly emphasizes the “old form” (“alte Form”) of the source text, which she notes was written “with refreshing openness” and “with charming naiveté” (“[i]n erquickender Unbefangenheit;” “in lieblicher Naivität”). When she further writes that the book can serve as “a bridge to renewed understanding of the significance of traditional Jewish culture and beliefs” (“eine Brücke zu dem erneuten Verständnis der Bedeutung überlieferten jüdischen Kultur- und Glaubensgutes”),¹⁰⁸ I suggest that we read this not just as a claim about instruction, but also as a claim about the manifold effects of tradition’s form. While it seems Pappenheim did not feel “free from categories such as *getlekh* and *nisht getlekh*,” her pronounced interest in the aesthetic qualities of the work—in “the color of the butterfly’s wings,” as it were—reveal that religious and moral instruction, with a female

¹⁰⁶ Pappenheim, “Aussprache zum §218,” *Blätter des jüdischen Frauenbundes* VI, no. 11 (1930): 4.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Na’ama Rokem, *Prosaic Conditions: Heinrich Heine and the Spaces of Zionist Literature* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 97.

¹⁰⁸ Pappenheim, “Vorwort,” *Allerlei Geschichten*, viii.

readership in mind, was not her exclusive aim. Indeed, the power of writing to entertain, to excite, and to enthrall seemed to be just as important to her as its capacity to explain and to instruct.

Pappenheim's rendition of the *Mayse-bukh*, titled *Allerlei Geschichten. Maasse-Buch. Buch der Sagen und Legenden aus Talmud und Midrasch nebst Volkserzählungen in jüdisch-deutscher Sprache*, was undertaken with the support of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* in 1929 and was published by the J. Kauffmann Verlag, which had also published her version of Glikl's memoirs. *Allerlei Geschichten* marks an intensification of the off-translational approach that Pappenheim had begun to develop nearly two decades earlier. The first sign of this intensification can be discerned in the categorization of Pappenheim's function on the title page of the book. She is not identified as the translator, as the *Übersetzerin*, as she described herself in her translation of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and the text is not classified as an *Übertragung*, as was the case in her rendition of Glikl's memoirs. Instead, the title page here reads "bearbeitet von Bertha Pappenheim." She is the adaptor, the composer, the editor, or the worker of the source text. The distinction between *bearbeiten* and *übersetzen* is often elided in the existing scholarship, but Pappenheim does not use these terms synonymously.¹⁰⁹ Her own sense of what *bearbeiten* means is never made explicit, but she offers a clue when she introduces the volume by writing that "[t]his book of stories is here presented to a German readership in *the closest possible approximation* of its old form" ("[d]as vorliegende Geschichtenbuch ist *unter möglichster Angleichung an seine alte Form* einem deutschen Leserkreis dargeboten").¹¹⁰ In the following, I further develop a concept of "off-translation" to describe this kind of textual work and to account for the

¹⁰⁹ An important exception is Louise Hecht, "Übersetzungen jüdischer Tradition. Bertha Pappenheims religiös-feministische Schriften," *Hofmannsthal-Jahrbuch. Zur europäischen Moderne* 20 (2012): 288-344. In an essay on the reception of the *Tsene-rene*, Chava Turniansky also differentiates between "*iberzetsungen*" and "*baarbetungen*," but she does not use the Yiddish word "*baarbetung*" in the same sense that Pappenheim uses the German "Bearbeitung." She thus categorizes Pappenheim's *Zeenab u-Reenab* as a translation, rather than as an adaptation. Turniansky, "Iberzetsungen un baarbetungen fun der 'tsene urene,'" in *Sefer Dov Sadan*, ed. Chone Shmeruk, et al. (Jerusalem: Hakibutz Hame'uchad, 1977).

¹¹⁰ Pappenheim, "Vorwort," *Allerlei Geschichten*, vii, emphasis added.

curious admixture of translation, transliteration, and emendation—the various forms of “approximation”—that can be found in *Allerlei Geschichten* and later in *Zeenah u-Reenah*.

My sense of off-translation builds, as noted earlier, upon Svetlana Boym’s concept of the “off-modern.” Boym notes that the prefix *off-* “confuses our sense of direction; it makes us explore sideshadows and back alleys rather than the straight road of progress.”¹¹¹ In a series of texts and photographic experiments, Boym posits the non-linear temporality of the “off-modern” and elaborates her investment in the unfinished or unrealized potentials of the past. In an often implicit dialogue with Benjamin, Boym notes that the “off-modern acknowledges the syncope and the off-beat movements of history that were written out from the dominant versions edited by the victors, who cared little about the dignity of the defeated.”¹¹² I propose that Pappenheim, in similar fashion, embraces an “old form” and dives into the muddied waters of a discarded tradition, which, she suggests, may yet make claims upon the present. In so doing, she experiments with a mode of translation that confounds the temporal and linguistic directionality of “translation proper” and that, as Boym writes, “allows us to recapture eccentric aspects of earlier modernities.”¹¹³ To get a better sense of how this works in practice, let us look at the nineteenth story of *Allerlei Geschichten*:

Neunzehnte Geschichte geschah an Einem der nieder aus dem obern Galiläa un er verdingt sich zu einem Baalhabajis (Hausherrn) im Land zu Doraum un blieb drei Jahr bei ihm dienen. Nun es war eben an Erew Jomkipur (Vorabend des Versöhnungstages). Da sprach er wider seinen Baalhabajis: ‚Lieber, gib mir meinen Lohn, ich will einmal heimziehen un will mein Weib un Kind speisen.‘ Da sagt der Baalhabajis zu ihm: ‚Du sagst, ich soll dir Geld geben. Ich hab kein Geld nit.‘ Da sprach der Mann: ‚Weil du ja kein Geld hast, so gib mir Tewue (Korn) für das Geld. Das will ich meinem Weib un Kinder mitbringen, um daß ich sie damit kann speisen.‘ Da sprach der Baalhabajis: ‚Ich hab auch kein Korn nit, daß ich dir kann geben.‘ Da sprach der Mann wider zu ihm: ‚Gib mir den Weingarten oder Acker für meinen Lohn.‘ Da sprach der Baalhabajis: ‚Ich hab auch keinen Weingarten oder Ackers nit, das ich dir kann geben.‘ Da sagt der Mann: ‚So gib mir Vieh.‘ Da sagt der Baalhabajis wieder: ‚Ich hab auch kein Vieh nit.‘ Da sprach er wider: ‚Gib mir Kissen oder Betten für meinen Lohn.‘ Da sagt er auch: ‚Ich hab von keinem niks.‘ Wie der gute Mann das hört, wie sein

¹¹¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xvii. The “zig-zagging” dimension of the “off-modern” bears an affinity with Na’ama Rokem’s recent study of Berdichevsky, which I will discuss further below.

¹¹² Svetlana Boym, *The Off-Modern* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 5.

¹¹³ Svetlana Boym, *The Svetlana Boym Reader*, ed. Cristina Vatulescu, et al. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 390.

Baalhabajis ihm niks geben will, da ging er hin un nahm seine Kleider un band sie auf seinen Rucken un ging mit bitterlichem Herzen hinweg heim zu. Wie nun Jomtof (Feiertag) aus war, da nahm der Baalhabajis den Lohn, den der Meschores (Knecht) verdient hat, un nahm mit sich drei Esels, un ladet sie auf, was sie tragen können. Einem ladet er auf mit Essensspeis, den andern ladet er auf mit gutem Trank. Den dritten ladet er auf mit gut süß Obst. Un zieht damit zu seinem Meschores un essen un trinken miteinander. Wie sie nun wol hatten gessen un getrunken mit einander, da gab er ihm sein Lohn, den er bei ihm verdient hat. Un schenkt ihm, was er hat mit sich gebracht un frägt ihn: ‚Lieber Meschores, was hast du dir gedacht, da du mir hast deinen Lohn angeheischen un ich hab gesagt, ich hab kein Geld nit. Wie hast du mich chausched gewesen (verdächtig)?‘ Da sagt der Meschores: ‚Vielleicht hab ich gedacht, er sei dir eine gute Sechore (Ware) zugekommen, die du hast wolfel (wolfeil) können kaufen, un du hast drüber dein Geld alles ausgegeben.‘ Da sprach der Baalhabajis wieder: ‚Lieber, sag mir, was hast du mich chausched gewesen da du gesagt, ich soll dir Tewue geben un ich sagt, ich hab keine Tewue nit?‘ Da sagt der Meschores: ‚Ich hab gedacht, vielleicht hast du noch kein Maasser (Zehenten) davon gegeben.‘ Da frägt der Baalhabajis wieder: ‚Da du sagst, ich soll dir Weingarten oder Acker geben, un ich sagt: ich hab keinen, was hast du mich zum selbimal chausched gewesen?‘ Da sprach der Meschores wider: ‚Ich hab gedacht, vielleicht sind die Weingarten un Acker nit dein gewesen un die hast sie nit dürfen hinweg geben, sonder Reschus (Erlaubnis).‘ Da sagt der Baalhabajis wieder: ‚In der Zeit, daß du hast wollen haben Kissen un Betten, un ich sagt, ich hab keines nit, was hast du mich zum selbimal chausched gewesen?‘ Da sagt der Meschores: ‚Ich hab mir gedacht vielleicht hast du dein Mammon gar hekdesch gemacht, (zu gutem Zweck verschenkt) un es sei nimmer dein gewesen.‘ Da schwur der Baalhabajis bei der Awaudoh (so wahr ich Gott diene): ‚Es ist alles wahr gewesen, wie du mich chausched gewesen hast, denn ich hab all mein Mammon verschenkt über meinen Sohn Horkenos, der hat nit wollen Thauruh lernen. Un da bin ich kommen zu meinen Chawerim (Gesellen) in Dorem, un da haben sie mir die Schwue wieder matir gewesen (den Schwur gelöst). Un weil daß du mich hast mit all meinen Werken zum Guten chausched gewesen, so soll dir der Heilige, gelobt sei er, auch alle deine Werke zum Guten rechnen un zu Gutem gedenken.‘ So lobt er ihn.¹¹⁴

At first glance, it is clear that, in the nineteenth story, Pappenheim more closely approximates the spelling of the source text (e.g., “un” instead of “und”) and, instead of translating as she had done in the case of Glikl’s memoirs, transcribes *loshn-koydesh* words and glosses them in parentheses, so that the main characters, the landowner and the servant, are designated as “Baalhabajis (Hausherrn)” and as “Meschores (Knecht).” In the story, a man from Upper Galilee travels south to work as a servant for a landowner. The servant works for three years without pay and then decides to return to his wife and child on the eve of Yom Kippur. He confronts the landowner about the wages owed him so that he can feed and support his family. The landowner, however, tells the servant that he

¹¹⁴ Pappenheim, *Allerlei Geschichten*, 17-18.

has no money to pay him. In the rest of the short story, which spans about two pages, the servant requests food, land, animals, and commodities in place of money, but he receives nothing in return for his labor. He travels home with only his clothes and a bitter heart. After the holidays, however, the landowner travels to the servant and gives him the wages he earned, as well as an additional gift. The landowner then asks the servant a series of questions about what he thought when he had earlier refused to pay him. In response, the servant consistently states that he was not “suspicious”—Pappenheim introduces the parenthetical gloss “chausched gewesen (verdächtig)” — and believed there were good reasons for the non-payment; in other words, the servant interprets the actions of the landowner in a positive and trusting way. In the end, this trust turns out to have been warranted: the landowner praises the servant for his lack of suspicion—the landowner says, in Pappenheim’s rendition, “du mich hast mit all meinen Werken zum Guten chausched gewesen”— and reveals, long after his refusal of payment, that he had earlier donated his money because his son refused to study the Torah.

The stories within the *Mayse-buech* often deliver moral instruction, though, as discussed above, they sometimes build upon secular sources, including medieval literature in German, without obvious edification. The story above is one of the translational adaptations of Talmudic Aggadot that are included in the collection. It is based upon a narrative passage in *Tractate Shabbat*, which is explicitly cited in the Amsterdam edition of *Alir lay geshikhte* (as seen in the top line below), though not in Pappenheim’s version.



Figure 10: Detail from *Aler lay geshikhte* (Amsterdam 1723), National Library of the Netherlands, Source: Google Books.

In its Talmudic context, the passage is intended to elaborate the following teaching: “The Sages taught in a *baraita*: One who judges another favorably is himself judged favorably.”¹¹⁵ If we consider the story on its own terms, however, it is difficult to judge the landowner favorably or, as in its later iterations, without suspicion. In a recent article on *Tractate Shabbat*, the scholar Sheldon Kimmel notes that the “worker is shown as going to great lengths to judge the landowner favorably on the monetary issue, but the text challenges readers to see how anyone might judge the landowner’s initial reticence favorably.”¹¹⁶ Kimmel further argues, however, that he can be judged positively if we accept an interpretative tradition that considers the landowner to be R. Eliezer and the servant to be R. Akiva.¹¹⁷ In this light, the dialogue between the landowner and the servant can be read as a dialogue between teacher and student. As Kimmel suggests, the initial reticence of R. Eliezer to explain himself serves as “an exercise in judging others favorably” and allows him “to choose future

¹¹⁵ Shabbat 127b, *The William Davidson Talmud, Sefaria* (online). It is worth noting that this line has entered into Yiddish speech: “*don zayn lekaf-zekhus*” (דן זײן לכפֿֿזכות).

¹¹⁶ Sheldon Kimmel, “What R. Eliezer Taught a Wise Woman,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 35 (Fall 2019): 156.

¹¹⁷ The citation of Hyrcanus (R. Eliezer’s son), also cited in the *Mayse-bukh*, is one foundation for this interpretative tradition. Kimmel notes that “[a]ccording to *She’iltot de Rav Abai Ga’on*, She’ilta 40 for Parashat Shmot, the story’s protagonists were ‘R. Akiva ben Yosef working for R. Elizer ben Hyrcanus.’” Cf. Kimmel, “What R. Eliezer Taught,” 170.

lessons in light of the test's results."¹¹⁸ That is, the landowner's withholding of information has pedagogical value: the teacher holds back so that the student can learn.

While Kimmel provides a convincing account of the Talmudic passage, he relies upon a tradition of interpretation that would likely not be familiar to most (though not all) of Pappenheim's readers. In *Allerlei Geschichten*, it seems, Pappenheim is not interested in situating the story within its textual and interpretative history; rather, she presents the story on its own terms—without the Talmudic citation included in the Amsterdam edition—and in the context of the collection as a whole. The didactic message of the story is thus less clear than it otherwise might have been, though the educational subtext that Kimmel highlights is not absent. In Pappenheim's rendition, as in the Amsterdam edition, the story concludes in a way that implies moral instruction: the servant is praised for his lack of suspicion and is rewarded for his attitude and behavior. But this “message” is not underscored in the same direct way as it is, for example, in Moses Gaster's English translation, in which the story is subsumed under the heading “Trust.”¹¹⁹ Rather, it is embedded within the stylistic signature of the text: its multilingualism.

In Pappenheim's rendition, the didactic content of the nineteenth story is both expressed and arguably overshadowed by the accentuation of certain words, including the word *chausched*, which appears six times in the latter half of the story and only once with a parenthetical gloss. The word stands apart because of its repetition, and the falling away of the gloss may prompt certain readers to falter and to look back for its meaning. In reading the story—in its multiply mediated form, as an admixture of translation, transcription, and emendation—the reader is led to adopt the word *chausched* into her own vocabulary and thinking. In this way, Pappenheim inculcates a kind of

¹¹⁸ Kimmel, “What R. Eliezer Taught,” 156.

¹¹⁹ Moses Gaster, *Ma'aseh Book: Book of Jewish Tales and Legends* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1934).

“multilingual subjectivity”¹²⁰ or “component consciousness” in the reader of her work, even if that reader is monolingual or far removed from the traditional contexts of Jewish speech. “Component consciousness” refers to the ways in which Yiddish writers, readers, and speakers are able to differentiate between the components of their “fusion language.” In this regard, the marked difference between *loshn-koydesh*—literally, the “tongue of holiness”—and Germanic vocabulary is not a unique feature of *Allerlei Geschichten*, but rather an elaboration of an established practice that manifests even in typological differences and in the consistent use of consonantal and unvocalized spelling for the former and phonetic spelling for the latter. In her emphasis, however, on a tradition of “women’s literature” and in her use of Latin letters (or *galkbes*), Pappenheim undermines the traditional hierarchies that obtained between Hebrew, Yiddish, and ostensibly non-Jewish texts. In the story above, for instance, the transcribed *loshn-koydesh* words are not necessarily sacralized or invested with greater value. Some of these words possess obvious religious significance (e.g., *Erew Jomkipur* and *Jomtof*); some seemingly do not (e.g., *Tewue* and *Sechore*); and others appear more ambiguous and require interpretation (e.g., *chausched*).¹²¹ Furthermore, in other stories included in the collection, Pappenheim sometimes translates *loshn-koydesh* words (e.g., *merkbets* as *Bad*) without parentheses.¹²² Her approach is not consistent—it is, to repeat, not *wissenschaftlich*—but it imbues the

¹²⁰ On the notion of “multilingual subjectivity,” see Na’ama Rokem, “‘With the Changing of the Horizons Comes the Broadening of the Horizon:’ Multilingual Narrative Modes in M. Y. Berdichevsky’s *Miriam*,” in *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Joshua L. Miller and Anita Norich (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 228.

¹²¹ Pappenheim’s relatively eccentric spelling of *loshn-koydesh* words can perhaps be understood as an attempt to convey the particular pronunciation of Western Yiddish, though her reasoning is not entirely clear. Abigail Gillman cites an unpublished letter that Pappenheim sent to Martin Buber: “Wissen Sie mir Jemanden zu nennen, der o. die meine *Maase-Buch* auf ‘Einheitlichkeit’ durchsehen könnte? ... - Rabbi, Rabi—Rawa? Tefillah—Thefila, Tanoh—Thanno u.s.w.’ Letter to Buber, 14 May 1929.” Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation*, 292. It is interesting to note that Ludwig Strauss will later criticize her rendition precisely for its lack of “Einheitlichkeit.”

¹²² In the twentieth story, for example, the sentence “*tsu morgens ging er in dos merkbets var zikh toyvl*” becomes, in Pappenheim’s rendition, “Zu morgens ging er in das Bad um sich zu tauweln (reinigen, tauchbaden).” Pappenheim, *Allerlei Geschichten*, 18. In this sentence, we can see how Pappenheim sometimes translates outside of parentheses, as when she translates the Hebrew term “*merkbets*” as “Bad” (without an accompanying transliteration) and revises the syntax of the periphrastic verb “*var zikh toyvl*.” It seems that, in general, Pappenheim is more flexible in her approach to *loshn-koydesh* words that do not have a strong religious association, though her approach is rather inconsistent. The word “*merkbets*,” for example, means “public bath;” it does not have a strong religious association, unlike the word

text with the signs and sounds of difference, which perhaps resonate as vaguely familiar to some readers.

While Pappenheim draws from traditional publishing and translational practices—including “the first and second waves” of German Jewish Bible translations, which often incorporated parenthetical glosses¹²³—her rendition is not restricted to their interpretative norms. In her use of transcription and parentheses, Pappenheim stresses the materiality of the signifier and the differences between languages, though these differences are neither fixed, nor imbued with obvious symbolic meaning. In immersing the reader in this multilingual landscape, Pappenheim rather prompts her to shift her attention back-and-forth between languages and, as the scholar Na’ama Rokem writes in a different context, “[to move] between multiple horizons, a reality that necessitates constant navigation and reorientation.”¹²⁴ Pappenheim thus presents the *Maysse-bukh* in a form that resists clear resolution, but that invites each reader to find her own way through it and to experience, as Rokem writes, “the broadening horizon of a movement between languages.”¹²⁵ This “broadening” does not contradict the didactic aims of the work, but rather implies that it cannot be reduced to them.

Nearly two decades after her rendition of Glikl’s memoirs, Pappenheim returned to translation work and elaborated an approach that she had begun to develop when she first shifted from English to Yiddish. Pappenheim’s *Allerlei Geschichten* was published in 1929 and, one year later, she published *Zennab u-Reenab. Frauenbibel*. In quick succession, these two books marked the

mikvah (a “ritual bath”), which Scholem claimed should not be translated, as Eliasberg had done, as *Bad*. The word *toyvl*, however, can be used in a ritual context, as Pappenheim signals with the word “reinigen” in parentheses. In this instance, Pappenheim revises the syntax, but she does not use translation as a substitute like she does for “*merkhetts*.”

¹²³ Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation*, 239.

¹²⁴ Rokem, “With the Changing of the Horizons Comes the Broadening of the Horizon,” 228.

¹²⁵ Rokem, “With the Changing of the Horizons Comes the Broadening of the Horizon,” 247.

culmination of decades of linguistic work, but they met only a stunted reception due to Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. Nonetheless, in the immediate years after their publication, the books received numerous and sometimes detailed reviews, including a few that praised the style of rendition.¹²⁶ In a review of *Zannah u-Reenah*, for example, the writer and journalist Bertha Badt-Strauss praises the book's "old-new language" ("in altneuer Sprache") with a suggestive allusion to Herzl.¹²⁷ However, the hybrid language that Pappenheim employs was criticized by other reviewers as strange, uneven, and strenuous to read. In an English-language review of *Allerlei Geschichten*, for example, the anonymous reviewer recounts the book's use of "German characters for the benefit of modern women who are not familiar with Hebrew script," which is "its chief *raison d'être*."¹²⁸ The reviewer emphasizes one of the key aims of the book: to make an older text accessible to a new audience. At the same time, however, the reviewer calls attention to the stylistic features of the book that seem to compromise its accessibility: "The *queer style* is kept, but Hebrew and other difficult words are rendered into German in parentheses."¹²⁹ Despite the dismissive tone of the review, I suggest that we take its notion of "queer style" as an accurate and productive description of "off-translation" as exemplified in Pappenheim's later work.

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of texts that disrupt the directionality of translation and that experiment with the simultaneous nearness and distance of German and Yiddish. It is thus not surprising that the "queer" language of these texts has proven difficult to categorize and has been largely obscured in the existing scholarship. In a footnote, for example, Elizabeth Loentz correctly (but briefly) notes that "[a]lthough the language of Pappenheim's translations of the *Tsenerene* and *Maysa bukb* is farther from standard German than the

¹²⁶ Loentz, *Let Me Continue to Speak the Truth*, 50.

¹²⁷ Bath-Hillel (Bertha Badt-Strauss), "Die Welt des Maasse-Buches," *Menorah* 8, nos. 1-2 (1930): 101.

¹²⁸ "Books Received," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 22, no. 2 (October 1931): 237-238, emphasis added.

¹²⁹ "Books Received" (October 1931).

language of her translation of Glikl’s memoirs, it is nonetheless not a mere transcription.”¹³⁰ Loentz further argues that “[i]ronically, Pappenheim’s invented language resembles another invented language, namely the *Mauscheln* attributed to Jews by antisemites.”¹³¹ While this comparison with *Mauscheln* is provocative, it is not elaborated and risks effacing the closeness between the language of the Yiddish source texts and that of Pappenheim’s renditions, which evince practices of close reading and philological care that stand in opposition to the derogatory and imagined language of *Mauscheln* and make any resemblance between the two largely superficial. In addition, Daniel Boyarin mistakenly describes the language of Pappenheim’s translations as “standard German,”¹³² but in so doing, he unwittingly repeats an assessment that was made by the anonymous editor of a pamphlet published by the *Jüdischer Frauenbund*.¹³³ In this pamphlet, published shortly before *Allerlei Geschichten*, an editorial note is appended to a story about Rabbi Amnon, which puzzlingly describes the language of Pappenheim’s rendition as “standard German” (“aus dem Jüdisch-deutschen ins Hochdeutsche”).¹³⁴ I cite these misrepresentations because the confusion that Pappenheim’s language has generated, both in its immediate reception and in more recent scholarship, testifies to the provocation of the form of her work, which cannot be subsumed under the conventional categories of “translation.”

In this regard, the writer and translator Ludwig Strauss further criticizes Pappenheim because “her rendition vacillates between transcription and translation” (“ihre Wiedergabe schwankt zwischen Umschrift und Übersetzung”).¹³⁵ He claims that the fluctuation in her approach produces a

¹³⁰ Loentz, *Let Me Continue to Speak the Truth*, 50.

¹³¹ Loentz, *Let Me Continue to Speak the Truth*, 52.

¹³² Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 332.

¹³³ See the pamphlet “Das Heim des Jüdischen Frauenbundes Isenburg,” DS 124 G4, 1928. Leo Baeck Institute, Center for Jewish History, New York.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Moshé Livni cites an excerpt from Pappenheim’s rendition of the *Tsene-rene*, and notes that “[d]i shprakh iz yidish-daytsh gedrukt mitn lataynishn a’b [aleph-bet].” Livni, *Yidische dialogn: asifes fun yidishn velt-kongres* (New York: Kultur-Departament fun Y.V.K., 1968), 339.

¹³⁵ Ludwig Strauß, “Nachwort,” *Geschichtenbuch aus dem jüdisch-deutschen Maaßebuch* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934), 75.

vertiginous translation that unsettles the reader. In 1934, in a short book published by the Schocken Verlag, Strauss re-translates selections from the *Mayse-bukh* and remarks that his attempt is not “superfluous” (“überflüssig”) because his approach to translation diverges so strongly from Pappenheim’s. In a critical description of her rendition, he writes: “Some errors could be avoided, some textual improvements and clarifications could be achieved by consulting the first edition [of the *Mayse-bukh*], and a more unified linguistic form could be made possible through the clear decision to translate” (“Es konnte mancher Irrtum vermieden, durch Hinzuziehung der Erstausgabe manche Textbesserung und Klärung erreicht und durch die eindeutige Entscheidung zum Übersetzen eine einheitlichere sprachliche Gestalt ermöglicht werden”).¹³⁶ For Strauss, Pappenheim’s oscillation between transcription and translation leads to a text that is inconsistent, error-ridden, and often unclear. Its form is, for him, incoherent. Other reviewers likewise stressed the effort and trouble that were required to read *Allerlei Geschichten*—how it felt somehow “off.” More recently, the scholar Louise Hecht has argued that Pappenheim’s practice led “to a translation that, for the uninitiated, is difficult to access and, despite being published by the *Jüdischer Frauenbund*, was unlikely to have found a larger readership” (“zu einer Übersetzung, die Uneingeweihten nur schwer zugänglich ist und trotz der Herausgabe durch den Jüdischen Frauenbund wohl kaum eine größere Leserschaft gefunden haben dürfte”).¹³⁷ I want to suggest, however, that this difficulty—this irritating quality—is an integral characteristic of the text as off-translation. I understand Pappenheim’s work, that is, as an attempt to broaden and deepen the reader’s perception of language and to elicit a passionate response. She pulls us into a different mode of reading, hearing, and sensing the text. As Abigail Gillman remarks, her ambition “was not to produce an improved

¹³⁶ Strauß, “Nachwort,” *Geschichtenbuch*, 75. Interestingly, despite his involvement in Pappenheim’s own translation work, Martin Buber appears to have given Strauss the opportunity to translate the *Mayse-bukh*. *Briefwechsel. Martin Buber – Ludwig Strauß*, ed. Tuvia Rübner (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 190), 175.

¹³⁷ Hecht, “Übersetzungen jüdischer Tradition,” 343.

translation, but rather to transform the *relationship* between text and reader through translation.”¹³⁸ It is difficult to capture the strange sense of “off-ness” in the brief examples cited in this chapter, but one can perhaps imagine the immersive experience of reading hundreds of pages that are filled with blurred and hybrid language, unfamiliar syntax, and *loshn-koydesh* glosses that often fall away. Indeed, if communicating the didactic message of each tale was Pappenheim’s central aim, then this could have been done more effectively through “translation proper.”

Beyond the difficulties of language, it might be said that the source of the book’s irritation lies in its capacity to remind the German reader of that which she has forgotten, of that which has been lost in the course of modernity, including the tradition of women’s writing in Yiddish. In this way, *Allerlei Geschichten* has at least a dual function: to make that which has been lost accessible, in a highly mediated form, as well as to imbue it with a kind of “liveliness”—what Kafka called “*Lebhaftigkeit*”—for a modern readership. I propose that the book can be productively understood in relation to those Hebrew and Yiddish modernist texts that, as the scholar Naomi Seidman has argued, performed an “erotic recovery of Jewish tradition [...], reversing earlier modernizing critiques of traditional practices.” Seidman thus calls attention to “the seductive power of literature and its production of an enchanted past.”¹³⁹ In the same vein, I have argued that, for Pappenheim, the *literary* dimension of the tales—their sensuous form—was just as important as their didactic content. In other words, in *Allerlei Geschichten* and later in *Zennab u-Reenab*, Pappenheim tarried with the particularities of language and style in order to convey the “seductive power” of the source texts

¹³⁸ Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation*, 231.

¹³⁹ Naomi Seidman, *The Marriage Plot: Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 6. In this regard, Seidman builds upon Talal Asad’s argument “that secularization, so often seen as rationalizing and utilitarian in its drive, is accompanied and tempered by its associated reading practices, by ‘the growing habit of reading imaginative literature—being enclosed within it and by it—so that images of a ‘pre-modern’ past acquire in retrospect a quality of enchantment’” (6).

for a modern and arguably secularized readership that had become estranged from the tradition these texts both embody and reflect.

This “seductive power” is captured in Pappenheim’s use of the word *Reiz* to index the specific effects of Middle Yiddish—a word that was further picked up by several of her readers. In his review of Pappenheim’s rendition of Glikl’s memoirs, for example, the scholar N. M. Nathan uses the word in his observation that “not too much of the *Reiz* of the original has been lost” (“von dem Reiz des Originals nicht allzuviel eingebüßt hat”).¹⁴⁰ In her later assessment of *Allerlei Geschichten*, Bertha Badt-Strauss commends “the *Reiz* and the freshness” (“den Reiz und die Frische”) of the book, and Bernhard Heller, in a defense of what he calls the “hybrid form” (“Zwitterform”) of her work against Ludwig Strauss’ critique, praises the “particular *Reiz*” (“besonderen Reiz”) of the language.¹⁴¹ A word with a complex semantic field, *Reiz* can mean “allure,” “charm,” “irritation,” or “stimulus,” and it is used by Sigmund Freud to mean “the excitation of nerves.”¹⁴² In his reflections on *Gradiva*, Freud also uses the word to refer to the quality of the narrative form that is effaced when only the content of a story is conveyed.¹⁴³ In the preface to her edition of the *Tsene-rene*, Pappenheim utilizes the multiple senses of this word to describe the untimeliness of Middle Yiddish writing. She echoes the discourse of untranslatability with which this chapter begins when she remarks:

¹⁴⁰ Nathan, “Literarische Mitteilungen,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, 491.

¹⁴¹ Berta Badt-Strauß, “Aus der Geschichte der jüdischen Frau,” *Menorah. Jüdisches Familienblatt für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur* 9 (1931): 124; Bernhard Heller, “Besprechungen. Neuere Schriften zum Maasse-Buch,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 80, no. 2 (1936): 132.

¹⁴² Eric L. Santner notes that the “German word for what is charming or enchanting is *reizvoll*, full of *Reize*. *Reiz* also signifies the stimulation or excitation of nerves. Freud defines trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a *Reizüberflutung*, an experience of being flooded over by nervous excitation that is able to breach the *Reizschutz*, or protective shield of the ego. The old seduction theory mutates, in a sense, into a theory of our capacity to become overly or excessively ‘charmed’ or ‘enchanted’ by someone, something, or some experience; when that occurs we might say that we are partially mesmerized.” See Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 99.

¹⁴³ “Denjenigen aber, welche die ‘Gradiva’ bereits gelesen haben, will ich den Inhalt der Erzählung durch einen kurzen Auszug ins Gedächtnis zurückrufen, und rechne darauf, dass ihre Erinnerung allen dabei abgestreiften Reiz aus eigenem wiederherstellen wird.” See Sigmund Freud, *Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensens ‘Gradiva’* (Bremen: dearbooks, 2014), 10.

In mittelalterlicher Gestalt, Denkweise und Auffassung – etwa vergleichbar der bildkünstlerischen Ausdrucksform, jener durch Dürer repräsentierten Zeit – erlebt man kunterbunt die Menschen und Geschehnisse der Bibel in Zitaten, Deutungen und Erzählungen in einer Sprache, die unerlässlich ist, wenn der Reiz der Darstellung nicht zerstört werden soll. Es gibt einzelne Stellen, an denen schon der Versuch, sie zu „verhochteutschen“, eine Versündigung an dem Geiste der Zeenah u-Reenah gewesen wäre!¹⁴⁴

In medieval form, way of thinking, and point of view—somewhat comparable to the visual form of expression of that era represented by Dürer—one variously experiences the people and events of the Bible in citations, interpretations, and narratives in a language that is essential if the charm [*Reiz*] of the presentation is not to be destroyed. There are certain passages for which an attempt to “Germanize” them would be a sin against the spirit of the Zeenah u-Reenah!

In this paragraph, Pappenheim again underlines the sensuous form of the text that resists the stricture of “verhochteutschen.” Her response, however, is not merely to insist upon the impossibility of translation, but rather to do something different with it, something “off.”

Pappenheim’s work does have a didactic function, in line with the aims of the source text, and she teaches the German-speaking reader about the conceptual universe of orthodox Judaism. For example, the glosses of loshn-koydesh words can be considered pedagogical tools to ease the acculturated reader into an expanded lexicon. But these tools are embedded in a material mesh of language that brings the reader into an intimate and charged relation with the forms, rhythms, and cadences of the source text. Off-translation thus invites the reader to access the sensorium of an “old form.” Pappenheim’s implicit claim is that an abstracted language—a more common and communicative mode of translation (“translation proper”) that detaches from the messy materiality of the signifier—would not enable the reader to grip the tradition that is slipping past her in the course of modernity.

¹⁴⁴ *Zeenah u-Reenah. Frauenbibel*, ed. Bertha Pappenheim (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann Verlag, 1930), xi.

CHAPTER 3

ANOTHER LANGUAGE: PAUL CELAN IN YIDDISH

“[...] in their differences, our books meet up./ The same questioning links us, the same wounded word.”
—Edmond Jabès, *La mémoire des mots. Comment je lis Paul Celan*, trans. Pierre Joris¹

On May 1, 1961, while a patient at a psychiatric clinic in Bromma, Sweden, the German-Jewish poet Nelly Sachs writes to Paul Celan in Paris. In the letter, she drafts a poem that begins: “So lonely is man/ searches eastwards/ where melancholy appears in the face of the dusk” (“So einsam ist der Mensch/ sucht gen Osten/ wo die Melancholia im Dämmerungsgesicht erscheint”).² Testifying to Sachs’ psychological distress—to what has been called her “persecution mania” in the ongoing wake of the Holocaust—the poem orients the reader eastwards and thus recalls the directional pull of Celan’s frequent allusions, in his poetry and prose, to Czernowitz, the so-called “Vienna of the East,” where he was born and raised.

A few days later, Celan responds to Sachs’ poem in a letter that thanks her and that acknowledges her voice and vulnerability: “In the loneliest hour,” he writes, “I thank you./ I hear you” (“In einsamster Stunde. Ich danke Dir./ Ich höre Dich”). He reaches out to her in language, *in the German language*, but he also reaches beyond the limits of their shared mother tongue and allows another language to be heard and, perhaps, to console. Following the eastward trajectory of Sachs’ poem, Celan writes:

Bei uns in Czernowitz pflegten die Juden, wenn sie einander Auf Wiedersehen sagten, dies zu wünschen: Sei gesund! Das ist keine deutsche Wendung, es ist eine jiddische, und so laß es mich jetzt noch einmal sagen, auf jiddisch und mit hebräischen Buchstaben: זײַ געזונד!
Dein Paul³

¹ “[...] dans leurs différences, nos livres se rejoignent./ Une même interrogation nous lie, une même parole blessée.” Edmons Jabès, *La Mémoire des mots: comment je lis Paul Celan* (Paris: Fourbis, 1990), 9. For the translation, see Pierre Joris, ed., *Paul Celan: Selections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 217.

² “Brief 77,” *Paul Celan/Nelly Sachs: Briefwechsel*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993), 74; *Paul Celan/Nelly Sachs: Correspondence*, trans. Christopher Clark (New York: Sheep Meadow Press, 1995), 47-48.

³ By spelling *gezund* with a dalet instead of a tet, which is more common in Yiddish, Celan brings the Yiddish expression into closer proximity with the German *gesund*.

In Czernowitz where we lived, the Jews always offered a wish when they said goodbye to each other: Be healthy! [*Sei gesund!*] That is not a German expression, but a Yiddish one, and so now I permit myself to say once more, in Yiddish and with Hebrew letters: [Yiddish: *Zay gezund!*]
Your Paul

In his letter, Celan uses and turns attention to Yiddish, which he recalls hearing in Czernowitz. He situates the language, in the past tense, within a specific context and within the multilingual soundscape of his youth. In his reference to the idiomatic difference of Yiddish, to its other alphabet, and, arguably, to its “heymish” qualities, he harnesses what the scholar Naomi Seidman has called the “metavalue” of language—how certain languages signify in themselves—in order to augment a message of comfort and hope: be healthy!⁴ In so doing, Celan seems to demarcate the consolatory limits of German, the language of National Socialism, in which both he and Sachs write. He foregrounds the distance—or, at least, the difference—between German and Yiddish, even as he draws upon their apparent closeness.

Celan’s letter further recalls the formal experiments with translation and transcription, as examined earlier in this dissertation, in the work of Abraham Tendlau, Itzik Manger, Solomon Birnbaum, and Bertha Pappenheim, among others. In this light, Celan’s citation of “Sei gesund!” raises questions about language that ramify beyond this particular epistolary exchange and that concern the questions of this dissertation as a whole: How might we understand—or at least begin to hear and read—the relationship between German and Yiddish? How did writers experiment with these languages in conjunction? How did they comprehend and make use of their simultaneous nearness and distance? And how did readers sense and experience these languages over time?

⁴ Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4. In the same vein, Lital Levy writes, “If, as the linguist Louis Hjelmslev proposed, ‘metalanguage’ is a ‘language which takes another language as its object,’ then metalinguistic writing is that which takes its own uses of language as a thematic preoccupation.” Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 11.

In this chapter, I explore these questions less with a focus on Celan's work itself than on the Yiddish-language reception of his work. I reconstruct this extensive but largely overlooked reception history, which encompasses critical essays, translations, poems, short stories, and correspondence from around 1965 to the present.⁵ The readers, writers, and critics who contribute to this reception represent a significant cross section of Yiddish culture in the decades after the Holocaust, including Shloyme Bikl, Chaim Ginninger, Mordkhe Litvin, Avrom Rintsler, Chava Rosenfarb, Yoysel Bernfeld, Hersch Segal, Alexander Spiegelblatt, Avrom Sutzkever, and Freed Weininger. Their work—scattered in various libraries and archives, including in Israel, the United States, Canada, and Germany—embodies and reflects upon the multilingual and transnational trajectories of Yiddish literature. Their multi-genre responses to the life and work of Celan, in particular, further demonstrate the persistence of the literary field that emerged at the intersection of Yiddish- and German-language writing, as well as the indelible tensions and inequalities of that field, which were intensified and pushed to a breaking point in the wake of the Holocaust. By examining how Yiddish-language writers understood, translated, and responded (often quite critically) to Celan's poetry and prose in German, I show how their work offers an important perspective on Celan's engagement with language—a perspective that opens up some of the intractable debates about the aesthetic and ethical stakes of writing “after Auschwitz,” about the interconnection between language and identity, and about the establishment and loss of literary traditions and readerships. It is, furthermore, a reception history that reveals how the relationship between Yiddish and German was transformed in the face of catastrophe.

⁵ While a handful of studies have addressed the influence of Yiddish language and culture on Celan's life and writing, the reception of his work by Yiddish-language writers has been largely overlooked. For example, in his recent “biography” of “Todesfuge,” Thomas Sparr explores the complex afterlives of Celan's poem in ways that have informed this chapter, but he goes so far as to deny the existence of the poem's Yiddish reception: “Die Rezeption der »Todesfuge« in anderen Sprachen und Kulturen ist essentiell für ihr Verständnis – im Englischen, Französischen, Ungarischen, Spanischen wie Hebräischen. Für das Italienische gilt das aber nicht. Die »Fuga della morte« blieb seit der ersten Übersetzung 1956 ohne jede Resonanz in Italien. Auch eine Übersetzung der »Todesfuge« ins Jiddische sucht man vergebens.” Thomas Sparr, *Todesfuge. Biographie eines Gedichts* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2020), 281.

Celan's Yiddish readers were particularly attuned to the "bio-graphical" context of his work. In this respect, I draw upon a critical distinction made by Nelson Moe between "biography" and "bio-graphy," in which the latter refers less to "the writing of a life" than to "the life's writing, as the process by which certain historically determined formations of personal experience come to structure the field of possibilities for the practice of writing."⁶ Moe elaborates this distinction in his analysis of the poetry of Amelia Rosselli, who also wrote in the aftermath of the Second World War, and it is likewise helpful in clarifying how Celan's Yiddish readers understood his "linguistic experimentalism and [...] alienation" as structured by his personal experience.⁷ These readers reflected upon the entanglement between Celan's life and poetry and, instead of treating his poems as autonomous objects, insisted upon the significance of biographical and historical context—context that mattered not only in the interpretation of individual poems but also in elucidating how these poems refracted the possibilities of writing *and living* in the face of catastrophe.⁸

Paul Celan was born in 1920 to a German-speaking, Jewish family in Czernowitz, the erstwhile capital of Bukovina, which later fell under the control of Romania, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and, in the present, Ukraine.⁹ His mother exposed him to German-language literature at

⁶ Nelson Moe, "At the Margins of Dominion: The Poetry of Amelia Rosselli," *Italica* 69, no. 2 (1992): 185. Also quoted in Amelia Rosselli, *Loco Motrix: Selected Poetry and Prose of Amelia Rosselli*, ed./trans., Jennifer Scappettone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 2.

⁷ Moe, "At the Margins of Dominion," 185.

⁸ In his *Celan Studies*, Peter Szondi makes a critical distinction between the interpretation of a poem in its autonomy and of a poem in its biographical and historical context, the latter of which, he sardonically notes, "positivism so loved." Even as Szondi puts pressure on biographical or historical reductivism, his own practice of close reading often makes recourse to his personal friendship with the poet and builds upon their private conversations. In an unfinished essay, he poses the questions: "To what extent does understanding the poem depend on a knowledge of the biographical/historical framework? Or, in more general terms, to what extent is the poem determined by things external to it, and this determination from without invalidated by the poem's own internal logic." See Szondi, *Celan Studies*, trans. Susan Bernofsky with Harvey Mendelsohn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 88. Lina Barouch likewise differentiates between "the so-called autonomistic and referential ways of interpreting Celan's writings." Lina Barouch, "Denk dir: On Translating Paul Celan into Hebrew," *Prooftexts* 37 (2019): 277.

⁹ We know much about Celan's biography, largely thanks to Israel Chalfen's *Paul Celan. Eine Biographie seiner Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979) and John Felstiner's *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Celan's extensive archive is preserved in Marbach, and the bulk of his correspondence and unpublished

home, and he studied in Hebrew- and Romanian-language schools. While his primary language was German, at least at home, it was, as Marjorie Perloff has argued, a specific form of Austrian German, which was shaped by the multilingual milieu of Czernowitz and by the cultural pull of Vienna.¹⁰ Perloff quotes Celan's first biographer, Israel Chalfen, who reports that "[e]verywhere in the city one could hear their Bukovinian German, with its Austrian informality and Slavic breadth, [...] interwoven with Yiddish idioms"—idioms, we might add, like *Zay gezunt/ Sei gesund*.¹¹ The poet Ilana Shmueli similarly describes the infamous “nigun” of Czernowitz German—“its distinctive and rather unusual sentence structure,” and the lively, even intense, arguments it engendered.¹² These arguments, as Edith Silbermann recounts, arose from “feelings of linguistic inferiority” (“sprachlichen Minderwertigkeitsgefühlen”), from the real and perceived gap between *Hochdeutsch* (High German) and local dialects that intermingled German with Yiddish and Slavic lexical and grammatical forms.¹³ While Celan would later develop a singular poetic language that cannot be reduced to a regional dialect, the multilingual and multicultural contexts of his youth (as well as his postwar migration and eventual settlement in France) demonstrate that his poetic work should not

manuscripts has been published in critical editions. Furthermore, Jean Daive, Klaus Reichert, Ilana Shmueli, Edith Silbermann, and Petre Solomon, among others, have published personal memoirs of the poet.

¹⁰ Marjorie Perloff, “The Last Habsburg Poet: Paul Celan’s Love Poetry and the Limits of Language,” in *Edge of Irony: Modernism in the Shadow of the Habsburg Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

¹¹ Perloff, “The Last Habsburg Poet,” 130. Israel Chalfen writes, “Man konnte das mit österreichischer Lässigkeit und slawischer Breite gesprochene, von jiddischen Redewendungen durchflochtene Bukowiner Deutsch überall in der Stadt hören. Hier gaben die jiddischen Lehnworte der deutschen Umgangssprache Farbe und Lebensnähe und ließen so etwas wie eine Mundart entstehen, wie sie sich im strengen Sinn sonst in der Bukowina niemals gebildet hat. Lebhaft und laut ging es zu, wo Ost- und Mitteleuropa einander begegneten.” Chalfen, *Paul Celan: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend*, 19.

¹² Ilana Shmueli, *Toward Babel: Poems and a Memoir*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Rhinebeck, NY: The Sheep Meadow Press, 2013), 5.

¹³ Edith Silbermann, *Rose Ausländer: Die Sappho der östlichen Landschaft*, 11. As Silbermann notes, these arguments were often mediated through the writings of Karl Kraus, “unser Sprachlehrer” (“our language teacher”). Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer write, “Czernowitzers still like to debate about whether they spoke Hochdeutsch or ‘Czernowitz Deutsch.’” Hirsch and Spitzer, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 89. The fear of linguistic ‘contamination’ or ‘inferiority’ was not, furthermore, one-sided. The influence of German on ‘pure’ Yiddish likewise provoked anxiety. For example, the Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld, born in Czernowitz, once wrote: “Yiddish was my mother tongue, but in fact, only in a partial way. My Yiddish was marred with a muddle of German and of words that I absorbed during the years of the war. From [Leyb] Rokhman, I heard for the first time a pure and rhythmical Yiddish, that was not only like music to the ear, but caressed the heart with its sweetness [...]” Quoted in Shachar Pinsker, “The Language that was Lost on the Roads: Discovering Hebrew through Yiddish in Aharon Appelfeld’s Fiction,” *Journal of Jewish Identities* 7, no. 1 (2014): 130.

be understood within a monolingual framework. In this regard, Celan's reading and recitation of Eliezer Shteynberg's Yiddish-language *Mesbolim* and his frequent visits to the Yiddish theatre in Czernowitz, where his girlfriend Ruth Kraft performed, speak to the ubiquity of Yiddish within the linguistic and cultural environs of the young poet.¹⁴ They provide an oft-forgotten counterpoint to Celan's transformative reading of Goethe's *Faust* and of French symbolist poetry, and they signal a linguistic and literary tradition that, as Ohad Kohn has recently demonstrated, reverberates in Celan's poetry and prose—in the lexical features, for instance, of *Gespräch im Gebirg* and in poems like "Benedicta," which includes an epigraph from a Yiddish folksong.¹⁵

After completing secondary school, Celan briefly studied medicine in Tours, France, before returning to Czernowitz to study Romance languages and literatures. His relatively comfortable, middle-class life was, however, violently interrupted. After the outbreak of World War II, Celan and his parents were restricted to the ghetto, and his parents were later deported: his father died of typhus, and his mother was shot and murdered. Celan was confined to a forced labor camp near Buzău—where he "dug"¹⁶ and where, according to the poet Jerome Rothenberg, he reported to have learned Yiddish.¹⁷ Celan's "personal tragedy" ("perzenlekhe tragedye"), as one of his later Yiddish translators, Alexander Spiegelblatt, notes, was the "turning point in the life and creation of the Czernowitz poet [...] the effect was not ephemeral" ("vendepunkt in lebn un in shafn fun dem

¹⁴ Chalfen, *Paul Celan: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend*.

¹⁵ Ohad Kohn "suggests a 'hidden relexification' of German through Yiddish" in Celan's work, especially in the prose text *Gespräch im Gebirg*. Kohn, "A German-Yiddish *Maysa*: The Influence of Yiddish on the Poetic Language of Paul Celan," Thesis for Master's degree in German Language and Literature, Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2016).

¹⁶ Petre Solomon writes, "Taciturn, reserved, he used to answer those who asked him what exactly he had been doing in the forced-labor camp near *Buzău* with a single word: "Digging" (*Schaufeln*)." Petre Solomon, *Paul Celan: The Romanian Dimension*, trans. Emanuela Tegla (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2019), 20.

¹⁷ Jerome Rothenberg, "Paul Celan: A Memoir and a Poem," in "Encounters: American Poets on Paul Celan," *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 8, no. 1 (1983): 112. John Felstiner remarks, based on a letter from Hanne Lenz to Ilse Blumenthal-Weiss, "At these camps he met intellectuals, along with Jews from less familiar walks of life. As he later told a friend, he learned much Yiddish in the camps." Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 16. While there are contradictory reports about Celan's youthful views about Yiddish language and culture, it is apparent that his views were transformed in the face of the Holocaust. It is also likely that his early relationship with Ruth Kraft (Lackner), "a young actress in the Yiddish State Theater," shaped his views, though it is not exactly clear how. See Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 12.

Tshernovitser dikhter [...] Di virkung iz nit geven keyn momentale”).¹⁸ After the war, Celan lived in Bucharest and Vienna before immigrating to Paris, where he taught German language and literature as a lecturer at the *École normale supérieure*, and where he cultivated his reputation as a poet and translator. While Celan wrote some of his earliest poems in Romanian, he later wrote primarily in German, with the exception of extensive correspondence in French. He published seven volumes of poetry before his death and several books of translation, including German-language renditions of Emily Dickinson, Osip Mandelstam, David Rokeah, William Shakespeare, and Paul Valéry. His work received enthusiastic and serious reviews, and he was awarded the Bremen Literature Prize in 1958 and the Georg Büchner Prize in 1960. His work also received hostile and antisemitic responses, and he was falsely accused of plagiarism by Claire Goll. In the last years of his life, he was frequently hospitalized in psychiatric clinics. He took his life in 1970.

Celan’s poetic language has been subject to varied and often contradictory descriptions. While it is a necessary starting point to acknowledge that he wrote in German, such an acknowledgement neither accounts for the presence of words and phrases in French, Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Spanish, and Latin, nor for the different regional and historical iterations of German in his writing. Celan’s poetic language further resists straightforward categorization because of its opacity, which bespeaks how, as he notes in his Bremen Prize speech, “it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech” (“sie mußte nun hindurchgehen durch ihre eigenen Antwortlosigkeiten, hindurchgehen durch furchtbares Verstummen, hindurchgehen durch die tausend Finsternisse

¹⁸ Alexander Spiegelblatt, *Bloe vinklen: Itsik Manger – lebn, lid un balade* (Tel Aviv: Y. L. Perets-Farlag, 2002), 193.

todbringender Rede”).¹⁹ In his investigation of how language had been marked by “what happened” (“was geschah”), Celan testifies to the silences, contamination, and wounding of language and, as he once wrote in a letter to Max Rychner, to “how difficult it is as a Jew to write poems in German” (“wie schwer es ist als Jude Gedichte in deutscher Sprache zu schreiben”).²⁰ Yet in his incessant exploration of multiple languages, etymological histories, scientific vocabulary, and other forms of expression, Celan also opened up new possibilities of speech and of self-articulation within and beyond the German language. In this regard, with reference to the work of Derrida, the literary scholar Maya Barzilai notes that “Celan *displaced* his German.”²¹ In similar fashion, Werner Wögerbauer refers to “the constitutive distance of the Celanian idiom, its remoteness from common language” (“la distance constitutive de l’idiome celanien, son éloignement de la langue commune”).²² While this displaced or distanced language gave rise to accusations of excessive difficulty or “hermeticism,” Celan’s poetry found a large and diverse readership, and it has resonated, long after his death, in varied contexts and sites of reception. It has, furthermore, engendered strikingly personal and emotional reactions that belie its “hermeticism.”²³

In the following, I focus on a particular set of readers, who responded to Celan’s language and writing in Yiddish. I am less interested in how these readers interpreted certain poems or prose works, than in how they developed various approaches to reading and writing at the fraught

¹⁹ John Felstiner, ed./trans., *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 395; Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden. Dritter Band*, eds. Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 185-186.

²⁰ Paul Celan, *Microoliths: Posthumous Prose* (New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2020) trans. Pierre Joris, iv; Paul Celan, *»etwas ganz und gar Persönliches« - Briefe 1934-1970*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019), 17.

²¹ Maya Barzilai, “One Should Finally Learn How to Read This Breath: Paul Celan and the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible,” *Comparative Literature* 71, no. 4 (2019): 436, emphasis added.

²² Werner Wögerbauer, “Le pouvoir de lire. Un commentaire du poème « Kermorvan »,” in *Cahier de L’Herne. Paul Celan*, eds. Clément Fradin, Bertrand Badiou, and Werner Wögerbauer (Paris: Éditions de L’Herne, 2020).

²³ The poet Ilya Kaminsky illuminates this apparent tension when he writes, with reference to Celan, that “[a] great poet is not someone who speaks in stadiums to a thousand listeners. A great poet is a very private person. In his privacy, this poet creates a language in which he is able to speak, privately, to many people at the same time.” Ilya Kaminsky, “Of Strangeness That Wakes Us,” *Homage to Paul Celan*, eds. Ilya Kaminsky and G. C. Waldrep (Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan: Marick Press, 2011), 7.

as a literary critic focused, as Moyshe Lemster notes, “on Romanian—and, later, American—Yiddish culture, [though] he also wrote on Petrarch and Friedrich Schiller, as well as Karl Kraus.”²⁸

In December 1965, Bikl published an article as part of his column “Fun noent un vayt” (“From near and far”) in the New York-based journal *Di tsukunft*. Titled “Fremd-shprakhike yidishe dikhter” (“Foreign-language Jewish poets”), the article reflects upon the relationship between language and identity. Bikl begins his article by citing Siegmund Kaznelson’s *Jüdisches Schicksal in deutschen Gedichten*, “a concluding anthology” (“eine abschließende Anthologie”), published in 1959, that marked the apparent end of German-Jewish literature. Bikl then underscores this sense of an ending by provocatively declaring that Jews born in the wake of the Holocaust—what he calls the “Hitler-katastrofe”—will *not* write poetry in German.²⁹ He states, baldly, “what kind of Jew would now begin to sing in German” (“un vos far a yid vet zikh dos nemen zingen oyf daytsh”).³⁰ In the space of his brief but dense article, Bikl examines the work of what he considers to be the last generation of Jews to write in German, including Rose Ausländer, whom he describes as “my fellow townswoman from Czernowitz” (“mayn Tshernovitser bas-ir”), and Paul Celan.³¹ Bikl highlights, in particular, a generation of Jewish writers who grew up in Bukovina in the interwar period, and he sketches the milieu of these writers, who wrote primarily in German or Yiddish, and sometimes in both. He remarks that the “miracle” (“vunder”) or the “new star” (“a nayer shtern”) of this generation is Celan (“סעלאן”), whose significance and success he repeatedly underscores. Bikl’s skeptical reading of Celan’s writing is, however, already evident in his transliteration of the poet’s anagrammatic name. He is one of the few Yiddish writers to transliterate *Celan* as *selan* (סעלאן), and not as *tselan* (צעלאן). This was a conscious choice, as Bikl writes, “*Selan* is the anagram of *ansel* and

²⁸ Lemster, “Bikl, Shloyme,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*.

²⁹ Shloyme Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” *Di tsukunft* 70, no. 12 (December 1965): 489.

³⁰ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 489.

³¹ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 489-490.

ansel is presumably the well-known Jewish name *antsbel*.” (“Selan iz der anagram fun ansel un ansel iz minastam der gut-bavuster yidisher nomen antshel.”)³² The transformation from the Jewish *antsbel* to the French-sounding *selan* is a symptom of the poet’s self-alienation and acculturation into a non-Jewish cultural sphere. Celan’s change of name signals, for Bikl, a change or even an abandonment of identity.

In describing German as a *foreign* language for Jews, including those for whom it was a “mother tongue,” Bikl participates in a larger discourse concerning the demarcation of “Jewish literature,” a discourse structured, as Anita Norich argues, by overdetermined and ideologically fraught questions (e.g. “Is this writer Jewish? Is this text Jewish?”) and by various movements, such as Hebraism, Yiddishism, Zionism, and territorialism.³³ In line with Norich’s own approach, I am interested not in resolving such questions but rather in excavating “the series of conversations around defining Jewish literature,” which, despite their frequent tendentiousness, proved to be remarkably generative for thinking about the stakes of literature at a time of social and cultural upheaval.³⁴ In this regard, in my reading of Bikl’s article and of the other texts addressed in this chapter, I focus less on evaluating the “correctness” of a certain interpretation of Celan’s work, than on the ways in which reading and writing at the intersection of German and Yiddish opened up a space to rethink larger questions about the relationship between language and identity and about living and writing in the wake of catastrophe.

Bikl concentrates on Celan’s first two volumes of poetry—*Mohn und Gedächtnis* (1952) and *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* (1955)—and voices his skepticism of his poetry’s “modernist, often too abstract, images” (“modernistishe, oft tsu abstrakte, imazshn”). He admits, however, the poetry’s

³² Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidische dikhter,” 491.

³³ Anita Norich, “Under Whose Sign? Hebraism and Yiddishism as Paradigms of Modern Jewish Literary History,” *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010): 781-782.

³⁴ Norich, “Under Whose Sign?,” 782.

“music, which makes itself heard and compels us to listen attentively” (“mit an eygener muzik, vos lozt zikh hern un tsvingt zikh in ir ayntsuheren”).³⁵ While Bikl expresses doubt about the future of Jewish writing in German—and even admits his lack of understanding of the decision of poets like Rose Ausländer, who had been immersed in Yiddish culture, to write in German *before* the Holocaust—he acknowledges the aesthetic possibilities of German-language writing, which he repeatedly describes with tropes of musicality and song. Indeed, it seems that the disquieting effects of Celan’s poetry are, for Bikl, intensified by their “true lyrical power, which seizes the entire body and life of the listener” (“di emese lirishe kraft nemt ayn dos gantse layb un lebn funem tsherer”).³⁶ Celan’s poetry engenders an embodied response that immerses the reader in a linguistic environment that is, at once, compelling and contaminated. The *lyrical* qualities of Celan’s early poems—their musicality—raise the question, moreover, of “the problematic status of ‘songful’ verse in German after the Holocaust.”³⁷ In Bikl’s article, and in many of the later texts that constitute the reception history at issue here, the sounds and rhythms of Celan’s poetry are interrogated in ways that recall the longer history of charged and contradictory responses to the linguistic soundscapes of German and Yiddish, which were variously perceived as cold and warm, beautiful and distorted, familiar and strange. Bikl’s article continues to demonstrate the affective and corporeal effects of language—intensified and foregrounded in poetic form—in ways that both accord with and exceed the ideological premises of the reader or listener.

Bikl’s resistance to German, at a discursive level, is thus combined with an immersive and highly ambivalent practice of reading texts written in a language that had become, for him and for many others, an almost unbearable locus of National Socialism. This reading practice seems to have been further motivated by an anxious consideration of the linguistic futures of Jewish literature at a

³⁵ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 492.

³⁶ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 489.

³⁷ Axel Englund, *Still Songs: Music In and Around the Poetry of Paul Celan* (London: Routledge, 2016).

time when processes of language shift—away from Yiddish and toward English and Hebrew—had intensified in the United States, where Bikl was living in the 1960s, and in Israel. In his article, and in other short texts and books, including *Rumenye: gesbikhete, literatur-kritik, zikbroynes* (1961), Bikl recounts the blurred lines between German and Yiddish literature, as embedded in a larger multilingual milieu in interwar Czernowitz, in order to reflect on the apparent obsolescence of such literary and cultural constellations in the wake of the Holocaust. While he insists on the “end” of Jewish writing in German, his remarks are also haunted, in less explicit form, by growing concerns about the “end” of belletristic writing in Yiddish. In the following readings of his translations of Celan’s poetry, I delineate how Bikl negotiates the simultaneous nearness and distance of the poem in the original and in translation and elaborates this relationship in terms of a larger postwar context. Bikl reads and translates, that is, with an incessant focus on the existential stakes and demands of writing in the wake of the Holocaust.

Bikl prefaces his translation (“targem”) with what seems to be a commonplace of poetic translation: he remarks that the “modernist images” of Celan’s verse may come across in his rendition, “but the music – it can only be heard in the original” (“ober di muzik – zi kon men nor hern in original”).³⁸ However, as noted earlier, Bikl interrogates the meaning of this musicality and, in his translation practice, he alternates between a closeness that approximates the sounds and rhythms of the German and a distance that renders the poem askew, as can be seen in his partial translation of “Auge der Zeit” from *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* (1955):

Dies ist das Auge der Zeit:
 es blickt sheel
 unter siebenfarbener Braue.
 Sein Lid wird von Feuern gewaschen,
 seine Träne ist Dampf.

Dos iz dos oyg fun der tsayt;
 es kukt kesoke
 unter a zibenfarbiker brem.
 Di vye vert gevashn fun fayern.
 Zayn trer iz di pare.

³⁸ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 492.

In many respects, this translation is a close one, “faithful” to the original, but it is, to invoke again Roman Jakobson’s category, a “translation proper,” rather than a transcription. In his rendition, Bikl thus draws from standard Yiddish vocabulary and revises the syntax of the poem to accord with Yiddish grammatical rules, e.g., “fun der tsayt” and “gevashn fun fayern.” These may seem like unremarkable changes—merely the addition of a preposition and a shift in verb position—but, as we have seen in previous cases, it was not uncommon to diverge from grammatical rules and stylistic norms when translating literary texts between Yiddish and German. The implications of such changes become all the more remarkable when considered in light of Bikl’s apparent complaint that his translations do not convey the musicality of the original. In this regard, it is also striking that he decides to mine the Slavic component of Yiddish to render “scheel” and “Dampf” as “kesoke” and “pare.” These latter choices are especially noteworthy because Germanic options exist in Yiddish (e.g., “damf” instead of “pare”). While it is not unusual, in general, for translators to harness the multilingual registers of Yiddish in such a way, it is perhaps surprising if the translator wants to maintain, as Bikl often suggests, the particular rhythms and sounds of the original. In using “kesoke” and “pare,” Bikl subtly alters the resonance of the words and transforms the soundscape of the poem. In the second line, for example, the single hard *ck* sound of “blickt” is multiplied and thus intensified in translation: “es *ku*kt *keso*ke.” Bikl’s translation choices further open up semantic fields across languages.³⁹ The Slavic word “pare,” for example, can mean steam, vapor, as well as breath and, colloquially, pluck and courage. In Yiddish, it is further linked with idioms of silence. In their dictionary, Solon Beinfeld and Harry Bochner note the phrase “nit aroyslozn keyn pare,” meaning “not breathe a word, keep mum.”⁴⁰ Bikl’s translation thus amplifies a certain kind of silence that is

³⁹ It can also delimit them. For example, the translation of *Lid* as *vie* is “accurate” but does not convey the self-reflexive character of *Lid*/ *Lied*.

⁴⁰ Solon Beinfeld and Harry Bochner, eds. *Comprehensive Yiddish-English Dictionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

palpable in the poem, which depicts different parts of a face—an eye, a seven-colored brow, a lid, and, in the poem’s untranslated second stanza, an eyelash—but does not depict speech, instead limning the lid’s burning and the evaporation of a teardrop in flames.⁴¹ The word “pare” attunes the reader to the poem’s atmosphere and, by extension, to the etymological layers of the German “Dampf”—“Dunst, Nebel, Rauch”⁴²—which reveal an ethereal lexicon that recurs throughout Celan’s writing in the wake of the Holocaust.

In its figurative sense of “breath,” moreover, the word “pare” extends the respiratory concerns of Bikl’s reading of Celan—a kind of reading that does not generate an interpretation *per se*, but rather a physiological response. In the last two lines of the stanza quoted above, Bikl elides the possessive pronoun in the penultimate line but not in the final line, which arguably accentuates the eye’s “tear” and its transformation into “breath” or even “the breath” (“iz *di* pare,” in contrast to “ist Dampf”). In the context of his article, Bikl’s translation adduces that crying becoming breath—becoming, as it were, mournful speech—is what suffuses and propels Celan’s writing.⁴³ While Bikl seems to lament that his translation does not convey the “music” of the original, many of his choices suggest that, in fact, he deliberately moved away from this “music,” understood as the particular rhythms and sounds of the German-language poem. For, in Bikl’s ambivalent account, it is a “music” that has aesthetic force, but it is also a “music” that can produce an atmosphere in which the reader cannot breathe. This latter sense becomes clearer in his reading and translation of “Todesfuge.”

⁴¹ In the untranslated final lines, the poem’s thematization of death is made more explicit in the floral images of budding and blossoming: “es wird warm in der Welt/ und die Toten/ knospen und blühen.”

⁴² Duden – Wörterbuch (Online).

⁴³ A sense of being propelled or encouraged is likewise implied in both *Dampf* and *pare*.

In his article, Bikl recalls searching within Celan’s poems for the traces of what he calls the “Hitler-katastrophe.” In so doing, he underlines the biographical context in which these poems were written—in the aftermath, that is, of the death of the poet’s parents in Nazi camps in Transnistria. Bikl writes, “I search for poems that recall that there were German murderers and Jewish victims, like his young mother [...]” (“Zukh ikh nokh lider vos zoln dermonen az es zaynen geven dayshts merder un yidishe korbonen [...]).⁴⁴ The poem that Bikl “finds” is Celan’s most famous poem, “Todesfuge.” He then provides what, to my knowledge, is the first translation of the poem into Yiddish, albeit a partial translation:

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts wir trinken und trinken wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng [...] der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken und trinken der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge ist blau er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau [...] er schenkt uns ein Grab in der Luft	Di shvartse milkh fun inderfri mir trinken zi in ovnt mir trinken zi tsu mitog un tsumorgns mir trinken zi baynakht mir trinken un trinken mir grobn a grub in der luft do ligt men nisht eng ... der toyt iz a mayster fun daytshland mir trinken dikh in ovnt un inderfri mir trinken un trinken der toyt iz a mayster fun daytshland zayn oyg iz blo er treft dikh mit der koyl er treft dikh pinktlekh er shenkt undz a grub in der luft
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In his rendition of this poem, Bikl stays closer to the word order and soundscape of the source text than in his translation of “Auge der Zeit.” He utilizes only the Germanic component of Yiddish and, in general, does not make major changes to the syntax or word order. In this closeness, he seems to underscore the importance of the poem’s fraught musicality—its particular sounds and arrangement of words—, even as he marks the loss of its “music” in translation. But, as in “Auge der Zeit,” this loss seems, at least in part, to be a deliberate choice of the translator. In other words, in the subtle details of his rendition, Bikl warps the poem’s sound in order to mark the *distance* between German

⁴⁴ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 492.

and Yiddish. One example of this can be found in the lines, in German, “der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge ist blau/ er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau.” The end rhyme of “blau” and “genau” stands out in a poem that employs frequent repetition and consonance but not rhyme. The coupling of the blueness of the eye of death with the precision of the man’s shooting is especially memorable because of the shock of the rhyme, which is unexpected and comes near the poem’s conclusion. In contrast, Bikl’s rendition of the end words, as “blo” and “pinklekh,” elides the rhyme and disrupts the musicality of the poem—a decision that is all the more remarkable because “bloy” and “genoy” are available in Yiddish. In this regard, the apparent proximity between “blau” and “blo” belies the difference that is actively marked in translation. In the same vein, the translation demonstrates, as Kafka remarked in his speech about *Jargon*, that *Tod* is not identical to *toyt*. While the semantic implications of these phonic differences (e.g., between “au,” “o,” and “oy”) remain enigmatic, just as in Kafka’s prose, they point to the existential stakes of the relationship between German and Yiddish. Bikl was forced to contend, however, not only with the pressures of acculturation and with the asymmetry between living and writing in a major and minor language. Unlike Kafka, he lived and wrote at a time when “der Tod” had become “ein Meister aus Deutschland.”

In the space of his brief article, Bikl further unpacks the desperation of the “music” in “Todesfuge”: “There is no punctuation in the wide lines of the poem [...] The omission of punctuation probably alludes to the out-of-breathness (*onotemdikayt*) with which the words were said and written. Indeed, one can, in general, feel the out-of-breathness of the words. I do not know if it is merely the external trick of omitted punctuation that is responsible.” (“Keyn interpunktsye iz in di breyte shures fun dem lid vi in a teyl andere lider nishto. Der oysloz fun interpunktsye vil min astam meramez zayn oyf der onotemdikayt mit velkhe di verter vern gezogt un geshribn. Bederekh klal shpirt men take di onotemdikayt fun di verter. Ikh veys bloyz nisht tsi iz in dem shuldik dafke der

droyndiker trik fun oysgelozter interpunktsye.”)⁴⁵ In his reading of the poem, Bikl again foregrounds the corporeal or physiological effects of poetic language, rather than meaning or interpretation per se. He posits the out-of-breathness of the poet writing the poem, while registering his own lack of air as a reader. The omission of punctuation contributes to this experience but, he suggests, it is not merely a formal “trick” that causes the reader to lose their breath. Bikl implies, in other words, that the “eygene muzik” of the poem is not exclusively bound to its aesthetic form but also to the suffering of the poet, the singular rhythms of the wounded voice, bearing witness to the dead.

Bikl does not expound on his reading of “Todesfuge,” but its divergence from many contemporaneous responses to the poem is indicative of how his article addresses aspects of Celan’s writing that were, at least during its initial reception, sometimes overlooked. In this regard, unlike many of the poem’s early reviewers in German, who, as John Felstiner writes, “brought a skewed aesthetic to the poem” and “usually stressed [...] the ‘pure play’ of [Celan’s] language,”⁴⁶ Bikl attends to the historical trauma that underlies “Todesfuge,” as both context and subject. He describes, for example, first coming across it in his search for poems that “recall that there were German murderers and Jewish victims.” In his article’s descriptive language and in his translation choices, Bikl suggests, moreover, that the German language had become a poisoned atmosphere, so that his repeated references to the poem’s “eygene muzik”—the untranslatable qualities of “Todesfuge”—should be understood as both a celebration and a critique of its aesthetic achievement. In contrast to many accounts of the poem, Bikl suggests that its propulsive rhythms, even if, at times, harmonious,

⁴⁵ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidische dikhter,” 492. See also Chava Rosenfarb’s description: “the devastating line that begins ‘black milk of morning’ leads us directly into the hell of the concentration camp.” Recalling Bikl’s description of the poem’s manifold “out-of-breathness,” she writes that “[t]he repetitious rhythms and repeated lines have a macabre, hypnotic effect. You can hear the poisonous hisses of snakes. You can feel the snakes coiling around your neck.” See Chava Rosenfarb, “Paul Celan: Jewish Writers and the Savage God,” *Confessions of a Yiddish Writer and Other Essays* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), 113.

⁴⁶ John Felstiner, “Paul Celan’s *Todesfuge*,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1, no. 2 (1986): 253.

exhaust the writer and reader. It is in this way that, in a somewhat incongruous manner, he attests to the interdependence of the poem's content and language of expression, while, at the same time, continuing to voice skepticism about Celan's language choice.

Bikl avers that the question of language choice—in his somewhat tendentious phrasing, “why his poem is German and not in a Jewish language” (“farvos zayn lid iz daytsh un nisht in a yidish loshn”)—is addressed in Celan's poetry itself.⁴⁷ In this regard, Bikl turns to the poem “In Ägypten,” which, despite its use of punctuation, imparts, like “Todesfuge,” “the anguished out-of-breathness of words” (“di paynful farsopetkayt fun di verter”).⁴⁸ It was also published in the volume *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, in the sequence “Gegenlicht,” which immediately follows “Todesfuge.” The poem—in German, in Bikl's Yiddish, and then in John Felstiner's English—reads as follows:

Du sollst zum Aug der Fremden sagen: Sei das Wasser!
Du sollst, die Du im Wasser weißt, im Aug der Fremden suchen
Du sollst sie rufen aus dem Wasser: Ruth! Noemi! Mirjam!
Du sollst sie schmücken, wenn du bei der Fremden liegst.
Du sollst sie schmücken mit dem Wolkenhaar der Fremden.
Du sollst zu Ruth, zu Mirjam und Noemi sagen:
Seht, ich schlaf bei ihr!
Du sollst die Fremde neben dir am schönsten schmücken.
Du sollst sie schmücken mit dem Schmerz um Ruth, um Mirjam und Noemi.
Du sollst zur Fremden sagen:
Sieh, ich schlief bei diesen!⁴⁹

Du zolst tsum oyg fun der fremder zogn:
Zay dos vaser.
Du zolst di, vos du veyst az zi iz vaser, zukhn in oyg fun der fremder.
Du zolst zi rufn funem vaser: Rus, Noemi, Miryam!
Du zolst zi batsirn ven du ligst bay der fremder.
Du zolst zi batsirn mit di volkenhor fun der fremder.
Du zolst tsu Rus, un Miryam un Noemi zogn:
Zet, ikh shlof mit ir!
Du zolst di fremde lebn dir tsum shentstn batsirn.

⁴⁷ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 492.

⁴⁸ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 492.

⁴⁹ Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, *Herzzeit. Ingeborg Bachmann – Paul Celan: Der Briefwechsel*, eds. Bertrand Badiou, Hans Höller, Andrea Stoll and Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 7. There are slight differences between the epistolary version of the poem and the later version published in *Mohn und Gedächtnis*. For the latter, see Paul Celan, *Die Gedichte. Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 42.

Du zolst zi tsirn mit der payn vegn Rus, vegn Miryam un Noemi.
Du zolst tsu der fremder zogn:
Ze, ikh bin mit zey geshlofn.⁵⁰

Thou shalt say to the eye of the woman stranger: Be the water.
Thou shalt seek in the stranger's eye those thou knowest are in the water.
Thou shalt summon them from the water: Ruth! Naomi! Miriam!
Thou shalt adorn them when thou liest with the stranger.
Thou shalt adorn them with the stranger's cloud-hair.
Thou shalt say to Ruth and Miriam and Naomi:
Behold, I sleep with her!
Thou shalt most beautifully adorn the woman stranger near thee.
Thou shalt adorn her with sorrow for Ruth, for Miriam and Naomi.
Thou shalt say to the stranger:
Behold, I slept with them!⁵¹

In June 1948, before its publication, Celan sent this poem, with a dedication, to Ingeborg Bachmann. The poem marks an early turning point in their tumultuous relationship. With likely (though not explicit) reference to the poem, Bachmann writes, in an unsent letter, on Christmas Day in 1948, “I still don’t know what last spring meant. – You know that I always want to know everything exactly. – It was beautiful, – and so were the poems, and the poem that we wrote together” (“Ich weiß noch immer nicht, was der vergangene Frühling bedeutet hat. – Du weißt ja, daß ich immer alles ganz genau wissen will. – Schön war er, - und die Gedichte, und das Gedicht, das wir miteinander gemacht haben”).⁵² Bachmann’s letter underscores the ambiguity of their relationship and the ways in which its “meaning” remains elusive. This meaning operates on both the personal and symbolic levels, which are not easy to disentangle. For the messy, private relationship between Celan and Bachmann has been interpreted—seemingly both by the couple themselves and by later readers of their correspondence—as a cipher for the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

⁵⁰ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 492.

⁵¹ John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): 58.

⁵² Unsent Letter from Ingeborg Bachmann to Paul Celan, Christmas 1948. Bachmann and Celan, *Herzeit*, 8.

“In Ägypten” reflects this ambiguity in its exploration of the strangeness between a “foreign” woman—perhaps the non-Jewish Bachmann—and three women with the Biblical names of Ruth (herself a “foreigner” in the Book of Ruth), Noemi, and Mirjam. The poem’s title and its structure, a series of commandments, further recall the Book of Exodus, while the poem’s content, with its frank (and even shocking) admissions of sexual transgression, reads, as Marjorie Perloff notes, “as an almost blasphemous version of the Decalogue.”⁵³ The poem dramatizes the scandal of the male speaker’s sexual proclivities, as he no longer sleeps, presumably, with Jewish women but rather with a “stranger”: “Seht, ich schlaf bei ihr! [...] Sieh, ich schlief bei diesen!” While “In Ägypten” has often been read as a love poem, it is “difficult and disquieting,” as Perloff remarks, and arrives at “no resolution.”⁵⁴ It is a disquieting poem not least because it alludes, darkly, to “pain” (“Schmerz”) and, perhaps, to crying—for what else might it mean to write, in the wake of the Holocaust, that the other women are “in the water” of the stranger’s eye? Insofar as it arrives at “no resolution,” the poem further dramatizes the ambiguity or, perhaps, the ambivalence of the speaker’s position. His words may be read as a declaration of adoration—however misogynistic—for the “stranger” and, at the same time, as a commitment to remember the past and to “keep his promise to remain loyal to the Jewish dead.”⁵⁵ With respect to the latter, Vivian Liska explains that “[i]n loving the stranger, [the speaker] is unfaithful to the dead, in thinking of them, he betrays her.”⁵⁶ The poem, to repeat, does not provide a way out of this impasse.

In his article, Bikl identifies this impasse with that of the Jewish poet who writes in German and who is, thereby, seduced by the “foreign.” Bikl reads the poem, that is, as a self-reflexive account of language choice. He does not elaborate his reading in detail, but we can infer that he

⁵³ Perloff, “The Last Habsburg Poet,” 139.

⁵⁴ Perloff, “The Last Habsburg Poet,” 139.

⁵⁵ Vivian Liska, *German-Jewish Thought and Its Afterlife: A Tenuous Legacy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 138.

⁵⁶ Liska, *German-Jewish Thought and Its Afterlife*, 138.

understands the poem as an attempt—however ambivalent—at a *defense* of writing in German (for in the poem “pruvt der dikhter zikh farentfern farvos zayn lid iz daytsh un nisht in a yidish loshn”).⁵⁷ In this reading, Celan’s attachment to German is perhaps, like love and erotic attraction, beyond his conscious control. In this sense, if a “choice” is involved, it is the choice to *follow* his attraction and to grapple with the consequences. Celan thus “adorns” the language of the murderers with the memory of the murdered. He can continue his love affair—in and with the German language, “in Egypt,” as it were—so long as he does not forget the dead, so long as he attempts, as he later writes with reference to the 20th of January, “to remain mindful of such dates” (“solcher Daten eingedenk zu bleiben”).⁵⁸ Celan seems to confirm something like this reading when he later writes, enigmatically, to Bachmann: “Think of ‘In Egypt.’ Whenever I read it, I see you enter into this poem: You are the reason for my life, also because you are and remain the justification for my speaking” (“Denk an »In Ägypten«. Sooft ichs lese, seh ich Dich in dieses Gedicht treten: Du bist der Lebensgrund, auch deshalb, weil Du *die Rechtfertigung meines Sprechens* bist und bleibst”).⁵⁹ While Bikl is sensitive to the memorial dimensions of Celan’s poetry, to his “mindful[ness] of such dates,” he remains, in the end, skeptical of this “justification of [...] speech.” In an abrupt conclusion to his reading of “In Ägypten,” Bikl writes, “The ‘terets-lid’ falls short insofar as the union with the stranger is actually seen, while the signs of nearness with Ruth, Miriam, and Noemi can barely be

⁵⁷ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 492.

⁵⁸ Paul Celan, “The Meridian,” in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 409. With reference to this text, Eric Santner writes, “Recalling the opening line of [Büchner’s story ‘Lenz’]—‘On the 20th of January Lenz walked through the mountains’—Celan tentatively asks, ‘Perhaps we may say that every poem has its ‘20th of January’ inscribed? [...]’ Celan is clearly alluding, among other things, to the date of the infamous Wannsee Conference during which the ‘final solution’ of the Jewish question in Europe was administratively resolved, an operation that transpired, as Agamben has rightly emphasized, within the framework of a state of exception declared to be the norm. It is, Celan suggests, only on the basis of attentiveness to the *Neigungswinkel* in oneself and the other—cringes that have contracted around the impact of such ‘dates,’ such historical ‘primal scenes,’ and the multiple layers and structures of experience they stand in for—that poetry can achieve, perhaps, the miracle of what he refers to as a ‘breath’s turn,’ an *Atemwende* [...]” Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 36-37.

⁵⁹ Letter from Paul Celan to Ingeborg Bachmann, 31. October 1957. In his letter, Celan continues, “Aber das allein, das Sprechen, ist ja gar nicht, ich wollte ja auch stumm sein mit Dir.” Bachmann and Celan, *Herzzeit*, 64, emphasis added.

discerned” (“Der mangl fun dem terets-lid bashteyt in dem vos di baheftung mit der fremder zet men take, beys di simonim fun noentkayt mit Rus, Miryam un Noemi zaynen koym tsu bamerkn”).⁶⁰ In Yiddish, “terets” (תירוץ) can mean “pretext, justification, answer to a difficult question, *esp.* in Talmudic study.”⁶¹ It can mean, that is, “Rechtfertigung.” Bikl emphasizes, however, the ways in which this justification falls short. The poem fails to convince him of the necessity of its language of composition. Bikl formulates his terse conclusion with the same sexual metaphors that animate the poem. He suggests that the speaker’s relationship with the “stranger” is consummated, and fully visible, in the poem, as is the poet’s embrace of German, the “foreign” tongue. In contrast, the speaker’s relationship with the Jewish women is stated but not visible. Bikl thus implies that, despite its apparent aims, the poem is bereft of “Yiddishkeit.” It is a fully acculturated artifact that has left Yiddish and Hebrew behind. In this light, though not mentioned by Bikl, it is striking that the full name of Celan’s adolescent girlfriend is *Noemi Ruth Kraft*.⁶² In “In Ägypten,” if one were to extend the logic of Bikl’s distressed reading, Celan chooses the Austrian poet over the Yiddish actress.

Shortly after Bikl’s article appeared, the linguist, literary scholar, and translator Yoysef Bernfeld published a complete Yiddish translation of “Todesfuge” and of the poem “Eспенbaum.” Like Celan, Bernfeld was born in Czernowitz and later settled in Paris. He was a frequent contributor to *Di tsukunft*, which also printed Shloyme Bikl’s column, and published a range of literary and scholarly articles in the Yiddish press. Bernfeld was little known, as Jacob Meitlis once noted, though he was deeply respected by a small group of scholars and cultural activists, including

⁶⁰ Bikl, “Fun noent un vayt: Fremdshprakhike yidishe dikhter,” 492.

⁶¹ Solon Beinfeld and Harry Bochner, eds. *Comprehensive Yiddish-English Dictionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

⁶² See Barbara Wiedemann’s notes to “In Ägypten” in Celan, *Die Gedichte*.

his friend Bikl.⁶³ Bernfeld found somewhat wider recognition for his complete translation into “hayntikn yidish” (“contemporary Yiddish”) of Glikl’s *Memoirs*, which was published in Buenos Aires as part of the postwar series *Musterverke fun der yidisher literatur*. Half a century after Bertha Pappenheim published her rendition of the *Memoirs*, Bernfeld produced the first complete edition of the book for a Yiddish—rather than German-language—audience. In a series of articles and often unfinished translation projects, Bernfeld further explored the history of Old Yiddish literature and of modern European literature. In so doing, he drew surprising connections between the literary past and present and sketched lines of continuity between philology, translation, and poetry. In Meitlis’ account, Bernfeld was a person “saturated with Yiddishkeit and with a broad, comprehensive European culture” (“ongezapt mit a sakh yidishkayt un a breyter, arumnemiker eyropeisher kultur”).⁶⁴ He worked on a Yiddish translation of the *Iliad*, while publishing articles on the *Mayse-bukh*, also translated by Pappenheim, and on the likes of Else Lasker-Schüler.⁶⁵ Bernfeld was, moreover, an acquaintance of Celan in Paris. In 1958, for example, in a letter to Klaus Demus, Celan wrote that “an acquaintance of mine” (“[e]in Bekannter von mir”), namely a “Dr. Joseph Bernfeld, 54 rue des Rosiers, Paris 4^e,” was having difficulties ordering a book published in Vienna and asked Demus to procure it on his behalf.⁶⁶ The book in question: a German study of Yiddish linguistics, Franz Beranek’s *Die jiddische Mundart Ostungarns* (1941).⁶⁷ Celan’s letter to Demus points to

⁶³ “Fun zayne arbetn un visnshaftlekhe oyftuen hobn mestome gor veynik mentshn gevust.” Jacob Meitlis, “Dr. Yoysef Bernfeld – Mentsh un forsher,” *Di tsukunft* 79 (1973): 22.

⁶⁴ Meitlis, “Dr. Yoysef Bernfeld,” 22.

⁶⁵ Yoysef Bernfeld, “Vegn Yankev Maytlises oysgabe fun ‚mayse-bukh,“ *Di tsukunft* 77 (January 1971): 35-38; Yoysef Bernfeld, “Elze Lasker-Shiler – A groysse dikhterin, a yidishe,” *Di goldene keyt* 28 (1957): 134-142.

⁶⁶ Letter from Paul Celan to Klaus Demus, January 4, 1958. *Paul Celan. Briefwechsel mit Klaus und Nani Demus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2009), 256.

⁶⁷ In a recent article, Kalman Weiser notes that, in 1946, Max Weinreich sent a letter to his son Uriel Weinreich requesting that he “acquire Beranek’s 1941 book *Die Jiddische Mundart Nordostungarns*—a study of the phonology of Yiddish in Carpatho-Ruthenia, a region annexed by Hungary in 1939 after the Nazi dismantlement of Czechoslovakia. While he needed the book, Weinreich spurned the book’s author: ‘My demand would be to tell him that the government that paid him murdered the largest part of those people, and to try him for complicity.’” Kalman Weiser, “‘One of Hitler’s Professors’: Max Weinreich and Solomon Birnbaum confront Franz Beranek,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 108, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 106.

a largely forgotten literary milieu in postwar Paris, one in which the encounter between German- and Yiddish-language writers persisted, even if the written record of it only surfaces in the occasional letter or archival scrap.

In 1966, shortly after Bikl's column was released, Bernfeld penned an article titled "Oysleyzn fun di shprakhn-golusn" ("Redeeming the Linguistic Exiles"). The article was published in *Di goldene keyt*, which became, under the editorship of Avrom Sutzkever in Tel Aviv, the leading Yiddish literary journal in the postwar period. In the decades after Bernfeld's inaugural essay, *Di goldene keyt* further became the primary forum for the Yiddish-language reception of Celan's work. In his article, Bernfeld offers a brief meditation on translation, followed by a number of new translations of mostly German-Jewish poems, including work by Richard Beer-Hofmann, Else Lasker-Schüler, Karl Wolfskehl, Karl Kraus, Nelly Sachs, Mascha Kaléko, and, as the final entry, Paul Celan.

In the short reflections that preface his translations, Bernfeld addresses the history of programmatic efforts to translate "world literature" into Yiddish. He begins by citing the 1908 Czernowitz Conference, where delegates famously declared Yiddish to be "*a* national language [rather than *the* language] of the Jewish people."⁶⁸ Bernfeld recalls related debates about translation that occurred at the conference, including through the positions of Khaye Malke Lifshits and Chaim Zhitlowski, who insisted, as Kenneth Moss notes, "that translation was a matter of utmost cultural and literary importance."⁶⁹ In this regard, Bernfeld cites Zhitlowski's striking wager that, if he were offered an alternative between translating great works of "world literature" (he cites, in particular, *Faust*) and producing original writing in Yiddish, he would choose the former. Bernfeld seems to

⁶⁸ Quoted in Roni Gechtman, "Lifshits, Khaye Malke," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (online).

⁶⁹ Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 137. Bernfeld cites Zhitlowski's introduction to Yehoash's translation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha": "[...] oyb mir voltn ongevendt undzer energye oyf gute iberzetsungen anshtot aroystsukvetshn fun undzer oremkayt dos bisl originalitet vos mir farmogn, voltn mir klebn shoy'n gehalten a sakh vayter in dem origineln shafn gufe eyder mir zenen itst." Yoysef Bernfeld, "Oysleyzn fun di shprakhn-golesn," *Di goldene keyt* 56 (1966), 205.

approve of this choice, though he bemoans the poor quality of many existing translations. He notes, for example, that Zhitlowski only translated excerpts from *Faust* and that Leo Kuperman's complete translation of Goethe's work, published in New York in 1920, is replete with errors. He subjects Kuperman's rendition to his philologist's eye and, in a somewhat perplexing manner, harps on the mistakes of a little-known translator who had died in 1949.⁷⁰ Bernfeld's critique of Kuperman makes more sense, however, in light of his apparent commitment to the mission set out by Lifshits and Zhitlowski and in light of his growing anxiety that large-scale translation projects into Yiddish were on the decline. In Bernfeld's view, it seems, the early twentieth-century argument that translation was necessary for the "maturation" of Yiddish literature had not lost any of its purchase. In the wake of the Holocaust, the future growth of Yiddish literature, which was by no means guaranteed, continued to depend on the revitalizing work of translators.

In his article, however, Bernfeld does not offer a new translation of *Faust* but rather of a series of modernist poems by German-Jewish writers (with the exception of a couple older poems originally written in French). He turns, that is, to another cultural argument promoted in Czernowitz: "the demand to translate work in foreign languages into Yiddish, with the slogan: 'Rescue [or redeem] the work of Jewish writers and poets from their linguistic exile'" ("[...] di foderung ibertsuzetsn verk fun fremde shprakhn oyf yidish, mitn lozung: ,oysleyzn fun zeyere shprakhn-golesn di verk fun yidishe shraybers un dikhters!").⁷¹ In this regard, Bernfeld distinguishes

⁷⁰ Bernfeld's negative assessment of the history of Yiddish translation is open to debate. He celebrates only P. Katz's translation of *Don Quixote* and Yehoash's translation of the Tanakh, but there were, I would suggest, other impressive efforts, including the multi-volume translation of the work of Heinrich Heine, discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Bernfeld's apparent pessimism about the future of Yiddish translation is more understandable: "Fun yene iberzetsung-problemen iz bay undz eygnlekh gornit gevorn, di problem iz geblibn. Vorem az me vil, farmogn mir gut yidishe iberzetsungen bloyz tsvey (nit gekukt oyf di tsendlinger pruvn vos zenen oder shtark mitmesik, oder zey zenen geblibn fragmentn): mir farmogn ,fun di yidishe giter' Yehoashes iberzetsungen fun Tanakh, un fun di ,fremde giter' Cervanteses *Don Kikhot* in der gerotener iberzetsung fun P. Kats. Vet es kumen a mol dertsu, mir zoln oykh nokh hobn andere groyse verk fun der velt-literatur in yidish?" Bernfeld, "Oysleyzn fun di shprakhn-golesn," 206. For an important overview of postwar translations into Yiddish, including the work of Franz Kafka and Stefan Zweig, see Amy Blau, "Afterlives: Translations of German *Weltliteratur* into Yiddish" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005).

⁷¹ Bernfeld, "Oysleyzn fun di shprakhn-golesn," 206.

between acculturated writers who were, as Goethe once wrote with reference to Issachar Falkensohn Behr, bereft of “something ‘specifically Jewish’” (“epes ,spetsifish yidishs”) and writers who maintained “their Jewish soulfulness” (“zeyer yidisher neshomedikayt”), even as they wrote in “foreign” languages.⁷² Bernfeld’s argument recalls the tendentiousness of the framing of Bikl’s column, but it likewise points to the motivations of his criticism and translation work.⁷³ In his embrace of the call to “redeem” the work of such writers, Bernfeld signals the existential stakes of bringing Jewish writers back into the fold of a Jewish language. In other words, he understands translation from German into Yiddish as an act that rescues a poem from a linguistic environment that had become inhospitable—where it had become, as Bikl suggests, impossible to breathe. While Bernfeld draws connections between his work and early twentieth-century translation initiatives, the text of his article makes clear that his translations are, at least in part, a response to the recent past. For example, he notes, somewhat euphemistically, that there are obvious explanations for the dearth of quality translations into Yiddish: “We, Jews, subsequently faced other hardships. In Romania, and Poland and in Russia, and, above all, in Germany” (“Mir, yidn, hobn dernokh gehat andere tsores. In Rumenye, un Poyln un in Rusland un der iker in Daytshland”).⁷⁴ He further notes that, after Hitler’s seizure of power, a number of acculturated Jewish writers had rekindled their “Yiddishkeit.” The majority of these writers, he remarks, “were later murdered, though a part of their creations have been preserved. They must be translated!” (“[...] merstnteyl zenen zey gevorn shpeter fartilikt, ober a teyl fun zeyere shafungen hot zikh oyfgehit. Darf men zey faryidishn!”)⁷⁵ In this respect, Bernfeld’s translation work is caught between a desire to revitalize Yiddish culture in the present and to

⁷² Bernfeld, “Oysleyzn fun di shprakhn-golesn,” 207. Bernfeld references Goethe’s critical review of Falkensohn Behr’s volume *Gedichte von einem polnischen Juden* (1772).

⁷³ Bernfeld further cites Bikl as one of the few Czernowitzers to have devoted at least some energy to this kind of translation work: “Fun yenem Tshernovitser parol iz demolt nit aroysgekumen keyn sakh: D”r Shloyme Bikl, D”r Kisman un andere nokh hobn ,oysgeleyzt‘ bloyz etlekhe lider – s’rov fun dayshe dikhters – fun zeyer shprakh-golesn.” Bernfeld, “Oysleyzn fun di shprakhn-golesn,” 207.

⁷⁴ Bernfeld, “Oysleyzn fun di shprakhn-golesn,” 207.

⁷⁵ Bernfeld, “Oysleyzn fun di shprakhn-golesn,” 207.

memorialize the dead. It is telling that, though he begins his article with a rumination on the significance of translating “world literature,” he ends it with a new call to translate—and here he uses the verb “faryidishn”—those writers who had recently been murdered. While Bernfeld would continue to work on his translation of the *Iliad* until his death in 1972, it is not altogether clear that he had faith in the future of the large-scale translation initiatives that were called for in Czernowitz in 1908, even if he continued to believe in their mission.

At the conclusion of his article, Bernfeld offers what, to my knowledge, is the first full-length translation of Celan’s “Todesfuge” into Yiddish. In the biographical note that prefaces his translation, Bernfeld foregrounds the death of Celan’s parents, who were killed by the Germans;⁷⁶ his migration from Czernowitz to Bucharest and then to Paris; and his translation work from Russian (Mandelstam) and from French (Verlaine). In this brief note, Bernfeld thus oscillates between the two poles—memorialization of the dead and revitalization via “world literature”—that structure his introduction. In the space of his article, Bernfeld does not propose an interpretation of “Todesfuge,” though, in a later article to be discussed shortly, he elaborates the ethical and political stakes of Celan’s poetry in Germany. Nonetheless, in his translation, titled “Fuge fun toyt,” Bernfeld provides a sense of what it might mean to “redeem” the work of Celan in Yiddish. As in Bikl’s rendition, the subtle details of Bernfeld’s translation open up new ways to think about the poem and about its language. In other words, in a muted echo of Franz Rosenzweig’s approach to the translation of Hebrew sources, Bernfeld intimates that a “minor difference” can bring about “a new tone”—one that, potentially, bears “the traces of the sacred.”⁷⁷ In this regard, Galili Shahar has further noted that language, in its “moment of *Absonderung*—being rejected, being special, being

⁷⁶ Bernfeld writes that Celan’s parents were both “shot [...] by the Germans,” though this is not quite accurate. Most scholars now believe that, while their deaths were both attributable to their deportation to Transnistria, Fritzi Antschel, his mother, was shot and Leo Antschel, his father, died of typhus.

⁷⁷ Galili Shahar, “A Third Reading: The German, the Hebrew and (the Arab),” *Prooftexts* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 134

unexpected, becoming irregular – is ‘holy.’”⁷⁸ While Bernfeld is concerned with a literary corpus that is, arguably, secularized, his insistence on the concept of “redemption” (“*oysleyzung*”) suggests that the stakes of his translation efforts intersect with those of earlier debates about the re-articulation of scriptural and liturgical texts in the “profane” language of German.

In Bernfeld’s rendition of “Todesfuge,” one can discern some of these minor differences and moments of charged irregularity. While Bernfeld maintains the rhyme of *bloy* and *genoy*, he disrupts the “musicality” of the poem when he breaks the rhythmic progression of lines such as “wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken dich abends,” which he renders as “mir trinken dikh mitogs un morgns mir trinken tsu ovnt dikh.” Bernfeld avoids the symmetry of *morgens*, *mittags*, and *abends* when he chooses, in the final instance, *tsu ovnt*, which further prompts the displacement of the pronoun *dikh* to the end of the line. These translation choices arguably have little effect on the semantic sense of the line, but they considerably alter its flow and sound. Bernfeld thus seems to resist the poem’s sonority, even as he stays close to the original. Indeed, in keeping with his philological training, he produces a painstakingly precise translation, though it is also a translation that subtly marks the difference between German and Yiddish. For example, Bernfeld points to this difference when he translates “schaufeln” with the Slavic-derived “kopen” and when he introduces a single *loshn-koydesh* word near the end of the poem: “Er shpilt zikh mit shleng un er *kholemt* der toyt iz a maynster fun Daytshland.” Bernfeld uses a decidedly non-Germanic word to describe the final act of the “Mann [...] im Haus,” who, throughout the poem, writes to Germany and orders “seine Juden” to dig graves and to sing and dance for him. In so doing, Bernfeld underscores that, in his translation, the language of the poem is emphatically not identical with the language of the “Mann [...] im Haus.”

⁷⁸ Shahar, “A Third Reading,” 134.

Bernfeld’s rendition of this line is furthermore striking because of his decision to translate “Meister” as “maynster” (מײַנסטער). It is another “minor difference” freighted with enormous weight. The addition of the letter *nun* (“n”) does not necessarily alter the meaning of the word. In Yiddish, “maynster” can mean “master.” It can also mean, more idiomatically, “master craftsman, foreman, overseer, mechanic, repairman.”⁷⁹ In this regard, it is possible that Bernfeld chooses the word to signal that, in Germany, death had become manufactured and mechanized. But it is further noteworthy that Bernfeld diverges from Bikl and from later translators, who will consistently render the word as “mayster” (מײַסטער) and thus preserve the homonymy with the German “Meister.” With the addition of a single consonant, Bernfeld thus moves his language *away from* German. It is an approach that contrasts, in revealing ways, with that of a number of influential translators of the poem into English, including Jerome Rothenberg, John Felstiner, and Pierre Joris, who move their language *toward* German. Felstiner, for example, first renders the refrain as “Death is a master from Deutschland” and, through the progression of the poem, teaches the reader to understand it untranslated, as in his rendition of the above quoted line as “he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland.”⁸⁰ Felstiner writes that “[w]hat makes it possible to do this is the logic of ‘Todesfuge’—its musicality, for better or worse. By veering more and more to the original, my version gets a ring of truth, an identity with verse written by Paul Celan. In this gradual reversion, unavailable to German readers, we re-enter the darkness of deathbrining speech.”⁸¹ While Felstiner’s translation strives to *identify* with the language of the original, Bernfeld’s translation—which could, in comparison, more easily match the “ring” of German—is a form of *disidentification*

⁷⁹ Solon Beinfeld and Harry Bochner, eds. *Comprehensive Yiddish-English Dictionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

⁸⁰ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 32. Jerome Rothenberg, in his earlier translation of the poem, renders the line as “he cultivates snakes and he dreams Death is a gang-boss *aus Deutschland*.” Jerome Rothenberg, trans., *New Young German Poets* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1959). Pierre Joris later translates it as “he plays with the snakes and dreams death is a master from Deutschland.” Paul Celan, *Memory Rose into Threshold Speech*, trans. Pierre Joris (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

⁸¹ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 40.

with that “deathbringing speech.” Despite the apparent proximity between Bernfeld’s translation and the source text, the sound of every word in the infamous phrase “der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland” (with the exception of the article “der”) is transformed. To repeat, in Bernfeld’s Yiddish: “der toyt iz a maynster fun Daytshland.”

In a later article titled “German Literature after Auschwitz” (“Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits”), published in the seventy-fifth anniversary edition of *Di tsukunft* in 1968, Bernfeld elaborates the ethical and political stakes of Celan’s writing. The title of his article echoes, of course, the infamous claim made by Theodor Adorno that “[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric [...]” (“[n]ach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben”).⁸² It is a claim that has, with remarkable persistence, been (mis-)quoted, debated, translated, and wrenched out of context and that, as Michael Rothberg notes, “inaugurated the modernist reflection on representation in the wake of the Nazi genocide.”⁸³ Bernfeld’s article contributes to this “modernist reflection,” but it does so in ways that diverge from the terms of the debates about representation that were unfolding, at the same time, in German, English, and other “major” languages. In line with the position of a number of Yiddish writers, many of whom were themselves survivors, Bernfeld takes Adorno’s claim seriously, but he also relativizes it and particularizes it. In the same vein, Chava Rosenfarb—a Yiddish writer and a survivor of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Hamburg-Sasel—once wrote, with reference to her own poetic writing, “I am grateful to destiny for granting me the ability to unburden myself with song. I have no idea that at the same time in another European town Theodore Adorno

⁸² Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 34. *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1963), 26. In Bernfeld’s condensed rendering: “nokh Oyshvits ken nisht zayn keyn poezye.” Yoysef Bernfeld, “Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits,” *Di tsukunft* 75 (1968): 166.

⁸³ Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 25.

[sic] has come out with the sweeping declaration that there is no poetry after Auschwitz. A meaningful, powerful declaration, but it has nothing to do with me.”⁸⁴

In his article, Bernfeld asks, “What can literature in Germany really be after such a breakdown in the world order?” (“Vos-zhe take ken zayn di literatur in Daytshland nokh aza tsuzamenbrokh in velt-mashtab?”)⁸⁵ In his assessment of recent work by German-language writers, Bernfeld describes their approach to the past as if it were “an accursed marriage proposal, a match with the devil, in which the present wants to be rid of the past” (“a min farsholtener shidekh, a ziveg mitn hasotn, vu der haynt vil poter vern funem nekhtn”).⁸⁶ Bernfeld is critical of leading actors in the political, economic, and cultural spheres who have spoken of a *Stunde Null*, who have sought a “new beginning” in the immediate postwar years. He notes that, in *Kahlschlag-* and *Trümmerliteratur*, the past is like an unwanted bride, recalling the gendered and erotically-charged language used by Bikl and by Celan himself. For Bernfeld, as for the others, the issues at stake are not only of a public nature but also intimate. His use of conjugal and sexual metaphors is also not accidental, for he is concerned with the *generation* of culture in the wake of catastrophe. What would a literature that forgets the recent past beget? As Vivian Liska remarks, the notion of a *Stunde Null* has “by now been largely discredited because it has been shown that such slogans were not really put into practice and that continuities of different kinds persisted in Germany’s political, institutional, and aesthetic practices of the period.”⁸⁷ In 1968, however, when Bernfeld wrote his article, the scholarly consensus identified by Liska had not yet emerged—and, it should be added, no such consensus has ever fully emerged in the public sphere. Bernfeld’s article thus offers a contemporaneous perspective on

⁸⁴ Chava Rosenfarb, “My Debut,” *Midstream* 35, no. 3 (April 1989): 29.

⁸⁵ Bernfeld, “Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits,” 166.

⁸⁶ Bernfeld, “Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits,” 165.

⁸⁷ Liska, *When Kafka Says We*, 142.

debates about a postwar literary scene struggling to understand its relationship to the past and to the future.

In this context, Bernfeld turns to the work of the German-Israeli critic and scholar Werner Kraft, who, in contradistinction to Adorno, affirms poetry in the wake of the Holocaust. Kraft, who was born in Braunschweig in 1896, lived in Germany until his immigration to Palestine in 1934. While based in Jerusalem, Kraft contributed to a larger reassessment of German-Jewish culture, during and after World War II, by editing new editions of texts by Heinrich Heine, Else Lasker-Schüler, Karl Kraus, and Ludwig Strauss, all of which were issued by publishing houses in Germany. Bernfeld is especially interested in Kraft's view that poetry—including classical German poetry, represented by Goethe's "An den Mond" ("Tsu der levone" in Yiddish; "To the Moon")—is a fundamental refusal of Hitler. Kraft insists, however, that a postwar poet cannot simply rework classical themes; rather, she or he must contend, even if indirectly, with the reality of the Holocaust. With Kraft in mind, Bernfeld argues that "[o]nly the poets that look back on Auschwitz will we call the true spokespersons ("vortzegers") of contemporary Germany, and not the word artists ("vortkinstlers") who sing little love poems or *Heimat*-songs" ("veln mir nor dikhters vos kukn tsurik oyf 'Oyshvits', onrufn di emesdike vortzegers fun der hayntiker tsayt in Daytshland, un nisht di 'vortkinstlers' vos zingeven libe lidelekh oder 'haymat-gezenge' [...])."⁸⁸ Differentiating "vortzegers" from "vortkinstlers," which seemingly entails a rejection of "kunst" (art), Bernfeld carves out a space in which German-language poets, in the wake of recent catastrophe, can begin to address "Auschwitz." By becoming the true spokespersons ("vortzegers") of Germany, poets assume a public and political role, the purpose of which may even be redemptive: "[...] one must look back," Bernfeld writes, "if one wants to be redeemed" ("[...] me muz kukn oyf tsurik, oyb me vil vern

⁸⁸ Bernfeld, "Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits, 166.

oysgeleyzt”).⁸⁹ In this regard, Bernfeld’s article recalls his own account of translation work as “redemptive.” In his translations, however, Bernfeld “redeems” the work of German-language Jewish writers by bringing them out of their linguistic “exile”; in his later article about literature in Germany, it is not about a redemption from exile, but rather from “the bloody past” (“di blutike fargangenhayt”).⁹⁰

Bernfeld leaves the degree to which Celan fulfills the role of the “vortzoger” somewhat ambiguous. Focused on Celan’s “Todesfuge,” Bernfeld attributes to the poem a “highly artistic concentration” (“hoykh kinstlerisher kontsentriertkayt”) that seems to group Celan with the derided “vortkinstlers.”⁹¹ At the same time, however, he stresses the poem’s “uncanniness” and the ways in which it transmits “with simplicity all the atrocities that were done in the name of the ‘German *Geist*’” (“mit pashtes ale akhzoryesn vos zaynen gevorn gemakht in nomen funem ‘doytshn gayst”).⁹² In contrast to the “vortkinstlers,” who traffic in slogans and clichés, the “artistry” of Celan’s work is a form of singular concentration and witness.⁹³ In this sense, while I earlier translated “vortzoger” as “spokesperson,” which conveys its idiomatic meaning and public function, it is perhaps more fitting, in this context, to translate it in a more literal fashion as “speaker of the word.” Bernfeld, it seems, does not want to deny the poet’s craft but rather to underscore the ways in which the poet who bears witness to the past speaks the truth. It is an account that bears a certain affinity with Celan’s own poetics of remembrance and critique of *Kunst*.⁹⁴ Bernfeld thus affirms that the poet’s particular

⁸⁹ Bernfeld, “Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits,” 166.

⁹⁰ Bernfeld, “Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits,” 165.

⁹¹ Bernfeld, “Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits,” 166.

⁹² Bernfeld, “Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits,” 166.

⁹³ Bernfeld’s critique of “slogans” is, in part, animated by his critical assessment of the cultural field in East Germany. In this regard, he draws a somewhat startling parallel between Nazi Germany and East Germany: “Un azoy vi in der natsi-tekufe hot nisht gekent vern ongeshribn a verk fun a groysn farnem, azoy iz di literatur in mizrekhdoytshland haynt nisht mer vi perzifitsirte partay-sloganen, vos muzn yedes mol vern ibergeandersht, oyb di partay bayt iber ire ‘zakones’.” Bernfeld, “Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits,” 168.

⁹⁴ In this regard, Peter Szondi writes, “[...] the memory of the dead lies at the origin of Celan’s entire poetic oeuvre.” Szondi, “Reading Engführung,” *Celan Studies*, trans. Susan Bernofsky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 32. Differently stated, Celan does not reject the heritage of the poetic word (what he refers to in one poem as “die Kette der

experience of loss and dislocation can and should be heard in the German language. In this regard, his article, while written in Yiddish, is about a different audience than he had in mind when he wrote about translation into Yiddish. His concern here is how Celan's work is perceived *in Germany*, rather than by a Yiddish-language readership. In apparent tension with his earlier article about "linguistic exile," Bernfeld's later essay amounts to an ambivalent defense of the *vortzoger*, who speaks about the traumatic past in German.

As evidence of Celan's public impact, Bernfeld cites the Jewish poet's invitation to the meeting of the Gruppe 47, which served as one of the most influential postwar literary associations in West Germany. In his article, which was published one year after the dissolution of the group, Bernfeld writes that "[w]hen Celan read before the Gruppe 47 [...] his 'Todesfuge,' he captivated the entire audience and subsequently the entirety of literary German" ("[v]en Tselan hot geleynt far der 'grupe 47' [...] zayn 'fuge fun toyt', hot er farkhapt dem gantsn oylem un dernokh dos gantse literarische Daytshland").⁹⁵ This brief aside is telling because it underscores what Helmut Böttiger has called "the social function" ("die gesellschaftliche Funktion") of the group and its self-assumed "moral authority" ("moralischer Instanz"), which, in recent decades, has come under retrospective scrutiny after revelations about the wartime activities of prominent members, including Günter Grass.⁹⁶ In his article, however, Bernfeld does not provide a critical perspective on the group but rather extols its "freedom" in relation to the literary scene in East Germany.

In the brief sentence, quoted above, about the response of the Gruppe 47 to Celan's appearance, Bernfeld echoes Bikl's description of the captivating qualities of Celan's poetry.

Bernfeld extends this sense of captivation, however, beyond an individual experience of reading to

Sprüche"), but this heritage can, for him, only be conceived "in an altered constellation [...] from the viewpoint of the eye that originates from the remains of *remembrance*." Vivian Liska, *When Kafka Says We*, 117.

⁹⁵ Bernfeld, "Daytshe literatur nokh Oyshvits," 166-167.

⁹⁶ Helmut Böttiger, *Die Gruppe 47. Als die deutsche Literatur Geschichte schrieb* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2012).

account for the effects of his poetry on a particular audience and, more generally, to register the *public* success of the poet in West Germany. In this regard, Ingeborg Bachmann's early description of the influence of the Gruppe 47 seems to have been borne out in reality. In November 1951, in a letter encouraging his participation, Bachmann wrote to Celan, "it will be very important for you because the entire German press is invited, the literary types from the German broadcasters, etc., who will immediately buy the best stories, poems, etc. ('[...] wird es sehr wichtig fuer Dich sein, weil die ganze deutsche Presse eingeladen ist, die Literaturleute der deutschen Sender, etc., die sofort die besten Erzaehlungen, Gedichte etc. kaufen')."⁹⁷ Celan's appearance before the Gruppe 47 thus helped to establish his public reputation in Germany and beyond. Nonetheless, while Celan's reading resulted in concrete publishing opportunities, his immediate reception by the group, as Bernfeld likely did not know, was more critical and was shaped by the antisemitism of some members. In subsequent decades, contradictory reports about Celan's reading have appeared in various memoirs and interviews, many of which further underline the captivating qualities—"the nearly hypnotic effect" ("[...] fast hypnotische Wirkung")—of his performance of "Todesfuge."⁹⁸ But some members of the group were critical and even mocking of the poet's "pathos" and style of reading, going so far as to state that "he read very emotionally. We laughed about it, and one person said that 'he reads like Goebbels!'" ("[...] er las sehr pathetisch. Wir haben darueber gelacht, 'Der liest ja wie Goebbels!' sagte einer."⁹⁹ In another account, Milo Dor reports that "Hans Werner, the passionate representative of a different Germany, must have become jealous, otherwise he would not have said, with regard to Paul Celan's reading, that he read in a singsong like in the synagogue" ("Hans Werner, der leidenschaftliche Vertreter eines anderen Deutschlands, muß eifersuechtig geworden sein, sonst

⁹⁷ Bachmann and Celan *Herzzeit*, 40.

⁹⁸ Paul Celan and Gisèle Celan-Lestrange, *Correspondance (1951-1970)*, ed. Bertrand Badiou, Volume II: Commentaires et Illustrations (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001), 62.

⁹⁹ Celan and Celan Lestrange, *Correspondance*, Volume II, 61.

hätte er über den Vortrag von Paul Celan nicht gesagt, er habe in einem Singsang vorgelesen wie in der Synagoge”).¹⁰⁰ As will be seen in the following section, the sounds of Celan’s poetry were also taken up and elaborated, in fundamentally different ways, by his Yiddish readers. But, in the logic of Bernfeld’s article, even the antisemitic responses to Celan’s reading before the Gruppe 47 would speak to the political and ethical significance of his work *in German* and *in Germany*. In this light, Bernfeld seems to affirm Celan’s language choice even as he adumbrates the difference, or even the abyss, between a German- and a Yiddish-language readership.

Bernfeld’s somewhat surprising insistence on situating Celan’s reception in Germany, only a year after he had translated his poetry into Yiddish, prompts us to reconsider how Celan himself addressed and relativized his readership. For in Bremen, during his prize acceptance speech in 1958, Celan recalled “the landscape from which I come to you,” which he further described as “a region in which human beings and books used to live.” In that context, however, he remarked that it “might be unfamiliar to most of you” (“die Landschaft [...] dürfte den meisten von ihnen unbekannt sein”).¹⁰¹ In Germany, that is, he needed to introduce the unknown Bukovina, which he did, in part, by describing it as the “home to a not inconsiderable portion of those Hasidic tales which Martin Buber has retold for us all (*uns allen*) in German”—tales that were largely spoken in Yiddish and transcribed in Hebrew, and which, as Celan once noted in an unsent letter from 1969, came to him in unmediated—and yet mediated—form in his youth.¹⁰² In contrast, Celan’s Yiddish readers raise the question of what it might mean that this multilingual landscape of “human beings and books”

¹⁰⁰ Celan and Celan Lestrangé, *Correspondance*, Volume II, 62.

¹⁰¹ Felstiner, ed./trans., *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 395; Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden. Dritter Band*, 185-186.

¹⁰² See Celan’s unsent letter to James K. Lyon from February 10, 1969: “[...] näher kommen sie den Dingen wohl dort, wo sie parallele Denkstrukturen und geistige Affinitäten zitieren darf, mitlebenden Menschen und Bücher in Erwähnung bringen. Hier muss ich an manches Chassidische denken, das auf mich recht früh unmittelbar aber auch mittelbar – so unter anderem über das Neuhebräische – zukam.” Celan, *»etwas ganz und gar Persönliches« - Briefe 1934-1970*, 836.

was, indeed, familiar (*bekannt*) and recognizable to several of his readers beyond Germany. One answer reveals itself in Celan's correspondence with Freed Weininger, to which I will now turn.

On July 21, 1966, the Yiddish-language poet Freed Weininger writes a letter, in German, to Paul Celan. He sends the letter to Paris from Tel Aviv, where he is on an extended visit (prior to his eventual immigration to Israel). It is a letter of self-introduction: "As a former resident of Czernowitz (*Als ehemaliger Czernowitzer*), who lives in the United States; currently residing in Israel, where my fourth volume of poetry will appear, I greet you from a distance (*grüsse ich Sie aus der Ferne*)."¹⁰³ Weininger writes in the hope that he can meet Celan in person during his upcoming trip to Paris. In this regard, he further remarks that a certain "Dr. Bernfeld" is a mutual acquaintance—seemingly the Yoysef Bernfeld discussed in the previous section. At first glance, Weininger's letter seems to be not much more than an expression of admiration from a reader and fellow poet, but it speaks to an often overlooked dialogue between German- and Yiddish-language writers, which persisted, as an increasingly "desperate conversation," in the aftermath of the Holocaust.¹⁰⁴ It is part of the larger conversation that this chapter reconstructs.

In this section, I present the letters that Weininger sent to Celan, which are held at the German Literature Archive in Marbach, but which have not been included (or even cited) in the numerous published volumes of Celan's correspondence.¹⁰⁵ Born in 1915, Weininger grew up largely in Czernowitz, where he occupied a different but overlapping social milieu as Celan. In his youth, Weininger was politically active, including "in the youth organization of Hashomer Hatsair (Young

¹⁰³ Letter from Freed Weininger to Paul Celan (D 90.1.2526/1), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

¹⁰⁴ In the Meridian speech, Celan writes, "Das Gedicht wird [...] es wird Gespräch – oft ist es verzweifelt Gespräch." Celan, *Der Meridian und andere Prosa* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), 56.

¹⁰⁵ Letters from Freed Weininger to Paul Celan (D 90.1 252611; 25613; and 252614), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

guard) and Yugnt Bund (Youth Bund).”¹⁰⁶ He later served in the Romanian army before escaping to the United States in the early 1940s. While he began writing in German, in exile, Weininger adopted Yiddish as his primary language of composition. He also painted, which brought him into contact with Gisèle Celan-Lestrange, and later worked as a translator. He rendered Rose Ausländer’s poetry into Yiddish, and he translated Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh’s *Di khyatshe* into German under the title *Die Mähre*. In reading his letters with Celan, I focus on the tension between nearness and distance that is already apparent in the first sentence of Weininger’s letter from July 1966, in which he expresses the sense of closeness that results from their shared background, but also the distance—both geographic and symbolic—between Tel Aviv and Paris. In his letters, Weininger further scrutinizes the simultaneous nearness and distance of Yiddish and German.

Weininger’s letters continue a dialogue that took place at the intersection of German- and Yiddish-language literature, but they also register the inequality that structured it. In the postwar years, Celan’s position within the German literary scene was compromised by false accusations of plagiarism and by antisemitic reactions, but he wrote in a major language, was widely translated, and, as Bernfeld underscored, became a public figure.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, with few exceptions, postwar Yiddish writers were forced to contend with a decimated readership, linguistic acculturation in Israel and in the United States, and the collapse of a robust cultural infrastructure.¹⁰⁸ In the latter part of his introductory letter to Celan, Weininger writes, “I do not know if you read Yiddish, but I want to personally deliver my volume of poems to you.” He further underscores the asymmetry between

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in “Frid Vayninger,” trans. Joshua Fogel, <http://yleksikon.blogspot.com/2016/05/frid-vayninger-freed-weininger.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Celan’s “fame” also played a complicated role in his Hebrew-language reception. Lina Barouch, for instance, notes that Nathan Zach did not publish several of his translations of Celan’s work because “he didn’t want to take part in the rush to translate Celan’s poetry following his Israel visit and the awareness of his fame in Germany.” Lina Barouch, “Denk dir’: On Translating Paul Celan into Hebrew,” *Prooftexts* 37 (2019): 283.

¹⁰⁸ The relationship between Celan and Weininger recalls a question that Yankev Glatshteyn once asked: “What does it mean to be a poet of an abandoned culture? [...] It means that I have to be aware of Auden but Auden need never have heard of me.” Sunny Yudkoff, “Auden Can Wait,” *In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies* (August 2015).

them, as well as the ties that bind them, when he writes: “it is my great wish to get to know a great poet, with whom I am connected not only because of the world of art, but also because of the wellspring of home – the Bukovina (*die Quelle der Heimat – die Bukowina*).” While I have not been able to locate Celan’s letters in response, Weininger’s subsequent missives indicate that the two poets were able to meet in Paris in 1966 and later engaged in an active if somewhat brief correspondence.

After their initial meeting, Weininger’s letters turn to the subject of translation. In November 1966, for example, Weininger sends Celan a translation of the poem “Corona” and expresses his hope that he can translate a series of his poems into Yiddish (“eine Serie Ihrer Verse ins Yiddish übertragen kann”).¹⁰⁹ He further notes that he hopes Celan appreciates the translation and welcomes his opinion of it (“Ich würde mich sehr freuen Ihre Meinung zu hören”).¹¹⁰ The poem “Corona” was published in *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, alongside “Todesfuge” and “In Ägypten.” Like Bikl and Bernfeld, Weininger seemed to be primarily interested in this early volume, rather than in Celan’s later work. The poem “Corona” also brings us back to Celan’s relationship with Ingeborg Bachmann. Bachmann called it Celan’s “most beautiful poem” (“schönstes Gedicht”) and further noted that it “it is the perfect anticipation of a moment when all becomes marble and is forever” (“es ist die vollkommene Vorwegnahme eines Augenblicks, wo alles Marmor wird und für immer ist”).¹¹¹ Unlike his later translation of “Todesfuge,” which I will turn to shortly, Weininger’s rendition of “Corona” seems to strive for beauty and perfection, a translation in which, indeed, “all becomes marble.” It demonstrates that his approach to “Todesfuge,” as will be analyzed shortly, differed from his approach to Celan’s other poems, likely because the former assumed paradigmatic significance in postwar German-language literature.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Fried Weininger to Paul Celan (D 90.1.2526/3), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach. For his translation of “Corona,” see “Corona” (D 90.1 252613), Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

¹¹⁰ While I do not know how Celan responded to the translation, the fact that Weininger even asked for his opinion suggests that Celan had earlier indicated his ability and willingness to read Yiddish-language texts.

¹¹¹ Bachmann and Celan, *Herzzeit*, 11-12.

In a striking letter that includes the second version of the poem, Weininger writes, “Here is a new and improved version of the poem ‘Corona.’ I’m working now on ‘Todesfuge.’ This is also complete, but I want to master the idiomatic language, so that it sounds more Jewish than German (“jedoch will ich die Idiomatiche Sprache meistern dass es mehr Judisch als Deutsch klingt”).”¹¹² In what follows, I consider the implications of this act of translation or “mastery” of a poem in which death figures as a “master from Germany.”

Weininger’s translation came after the partial translation by Bikl and the full translation by Bernfeld, who is mentioned in Weininger’s introductory letter. As discussed above, in the commentary to his partial translation, published in 1965, Bikl repeatedly emphasizes the “unique musicality” (“an eygener muzik”) of the German poem. He considers, however, the “musicality” of the poem not only as an expression of literary virtuosity, but also as a desperate enactment of “the out-of-breathness [*onotemdikayt*] with which the words were enunciated and written.” Bernfeld is likewise attuned to the “cruelty” (“akhzoryes”) conveyed by the poem, which seems to be in tension with its “artistic concentration.” Bikl and Bernfeld’s initial translations of “Todesfuge” remain close to the word order and word choice of the original poem, but, as shown above, they interrupt its musicality in ways that create distance from its language of composition.

Weininger’s translation is likewise not a radical deviation from the source text, though it strays further with regard to syntax and diction. For example, in the German poem, Celan repeats the pronoun “sie” (referring to the “black milk”), which Bernfeld renders as “Di shvartse milkh fun inderfri mir trinken *zi* in ovnt/ mir trinken *zi* tsu mitog un tsumorgns mir trinken *zi* baynakht.”

Weininger excises this pronoun in his translation, though he preserves the repetition of the verb “to

¹¹² “Judisch” (instead of “Jüdisch”) reflects my transcription of Weininger’s handwritten letter. In reference to the language, Weininger usually writes “Yiddish” in an Anglicized form (not “Jiddisch”). “Judisch” (with or without an umlaut) can mean “Yiddish” but it can also mean “Jewish.” I do not aim to resolve this ambiguity but rather consider it productive for thinking about the ways in which Weininger’s correspondence with Celan sheds light on the relationship between language and identity.

drink.” This particular translation choice arguably does not change the meaning of the lines, but it does noticeably alter their sound and rhythm. In Weininger’s translation, the soundscape of the poem is further transformed by his use of *loshn-koydesh* vocabulary, including “keyver” (grave) and “klovim” (dogs), whereas the previous translators adhered more closely to the Germanic (and occasionally Slavic) component of Yiddish. Bernfeld, for example, translates “ein Grab in den Lüften” as “a grub in di luftn” and “Rüden” as “shpirhint” (bloodhounds). On one level, at least, Weininger thus attempts to make his translation sound “more Jewish” by distancing his language from German.

It is not clear to me if Weininger ever published his initial translation of “Todesfuge.” In the wake of Celan’s death, however, Weininger revisited his translation of the poem. He published a “fragment” in the Tel Aviv-based journal *Di goldene keyt* in 1981 and then a fully revised version in his book *Erev ayin*, published in 1985. In this later translation, Weininger introduces the pronoun *zi/sie* that he had left out of his earlier rendition, but he shifts its placement. In German, the second line of the poem reads: “wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts.” In this later translation, however, it reads: “mir trinken baytog zi frimorgn mir trinken baynakht zi.” The melodious flow of the original is interrupted by spondaic feet in translation, with the pronoun awkwardly stressed at the end of the line. Weininger’s deletion of the conjunction “und” further prompts the reader to stumble on the word “frimorgn” and to pause. These seemingly minor details transform the rhythmic pattern of the poem and, therefore, the experience of reading it. Weininger’s practice of rhythmic interruption further extends to the layout of his translation on the page, which breaks the lines in key places and accentuates the relationship between certain words, including between “undz a keyver” (“us a grave”) and “mayster fun daytshland” (“master from Germany”) in the final lines. Indeed, on a graphic level, the last page of the translation prompts the reader to consider the tense relation between “shpiln” (“to play [music]”), “Daytshland” (thrice repeated),

“luftn” (“air”), and “keyver” (“grave”). It thus visualizes the contradictions—between music and horror, between the language of the murderers and the language of the murdered—thematized by Bikl and Bernfeld.

In a recent article, Maya Barzilai notes that “[i]n the ‘Todesfuge’ itself, Celan’s line breaks often converge with the end of syntactic units, creating a modern ‘end-stopping (sententious) style,’ reminiscent of the ‘closed and recursive shape of biblical Hebrew poetic rhythm’ that was indebted to oral performance.”¹¹³ Drawing from the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible, Barzilai argues that, in his later work, “Celan found inspiration in the breath-unit, since it undid the end-stopping style;” it further served as “a counterpoint to the poetic musicality and transcendence attributed to his own writing;” and enabled “a pause of remembrance.”¹¹⁴ In distinct but related ways, Weininger’s revised translation also enables pauses of remembrance by causing the reader to alter her breathing and to change her tempo when she reads the poem aloud—a poem whose musicality was earlier described as not only virtuosic, but as causing the reader to lose her breath.

Weininger’s translation choices, over time, provide a concrete sense of what he means when he writes, in his letter from November 22, 1966, that he wants “to master the idiomatic language, so that [the poem] sounds more Jewish than German.” While his rhetoric recalls older practices of Jewish translation, including Old Yiddish renditions of medieval German literature, which frequently “judaized” the source text by introducing Jewish characters and themes and by erasing Christian frames of reference, Weininger, in his translation, stays close to the source text but, in the accumulation of “minor differences,” establishes the distance of his language from German. Weininger’s rhetoric further seems to echo the notes that Celan wrote in preparation for the Meridian speech, especially his inversion of the meaning of the word *verjuden*, which, as Vivian Liska

¹¹³ Maya Barzilai, “‘One Should Finally Learn How to Read This Breath’: Paul Celan and the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible,” *Comparative Literature* 71, no. 4 (2019): 445.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 445; 448.

writes, was linked, for Celan, “to the effect of poetry, its unsettling of common discourse, its power to transform the one it addresses, and its own openness to being transformed by the addressee through his or her experiences, language, situation, and individual reading.”¹¹⁵ For Celan, however, the notion of “verjuden” involves a painful confrontation with the grotesque distortions imposed upon the Jewish dead, as when he writes that “only when you have been with your very own pain with the crooked-nosed and *mauschelnden* and misbegotten dead from Auschwitz and Treblinka and elsewhere do you also encounter the eye and its almond” (“[e]rst wenn du mit deinem allereigensten Schmerz bei den krummnasigen und mauschelnden und kielkröpfigen Toten von Auschwitz und Treblinka und anderswo gewesen bist, dann begegnest du auch dem Aug und seiner Mandel”).¹¹⁶ In this passage, which was only published posthumously, Celan recalls antisemitic tropes—including of “mauscheln,” often understood to be Yiddish-inflected German—in his insistence that the contemporary poet, in German, should engage not only with the beautiful but also with the violence of the recent past. While Weininger would, it seems, agree with this insistence on remembrance, he resists the kind of “internal” critique that Celan lodges *within* the German language and imaginary. Instead, for him, the process of translation involves the “domestication” of the poem into idiomatic Yiddish rather than “mauscheln.” In other words, “verjuden” becomes “faryidishn.”

In this light, Weininger’s translation can be understood as an ethical and political act that transforms the language of the poem by distancing it from itself—an act that, in its distancing, approximates the “agitations” and “pauses” of Celan’s later poetry.¹¹⁷ Weininger’s interest in drawing

¹¹⁵ Liska, “Man kann verjuden,” 207.

¹¹⁶ Celan, *Der Meridian: Endfassung, Vorstufen, Materialien*, 127.

¹¹⁷ In Celan’s notes, his elaboration of “verjuden” is often linked to the sounds of Jewish speech (e.g., “mauscheln”). In this regard, Amir Eshel writes that “[t]he language of the jargon-speaking Jew becomes a desired agitation, an intended counterspeech to the prevailing discourse.” Amir Eshel, “Paul Celan’s Other: History, Poetics, and Ethics,” *New German Critique* 91 (2004): 67. In a later essay, Eshel notes that “[a]ccording to Celan, like the Jew, who with his distinctive language is a constant challenge to those who hold on to standardized language, modern poetry defies all norms and expectations. In other words, one can learn how to perceive modern poetry from the experiences Jews have had with those who claim that their manner of speaking German is ‘related to their ancestry.’ Celan writes: ‘[r]everence for the

the language of “Todesfuge” away from German—in “mastering” the language of the *Meister*—insists on the idiomatic difference between Yiddish and German, but not necessarily on their incommensurability. In this regard, it is worth recalling that, in the Meridian speech, Celan elucidates the “obscurity” of contemporary poetry as an effect of “distance” and “strangeness,” which the poem itself produces “for the sake of an encounter.”¹¹⁸ In similar ways, Celan once described his own translation work, in a letter to Werner Weber, in the following terms: “Yes, the poem, the translated poem, if it wants to exist once again in the second language, it must keep in mind this being other and different, this being separate” (“Ja, das Gedicht, das übertragene Gedicht, muß, wenn es in der zweiten Sprache noch einmal dasein will, dieses Anders- und Verschiedenseins, dieses Geschiedenseins eingedenk bleiben”).¹¹⁹ In contradistinction to those who understand the language of a translation as a kind of “höheres Esperanto,” Celan affirms translation as an act of intensive and intimate reading and re-writing that preserves the difference between languages. “For languages,” he writes, “as much as they seem to correspond to each other, are different – separated by abysses” (“Denn die Sprachen, so sehr sie einander zu entsprechen scheinen, sind verschieden – geschieden durch Abgründe”).¹²⁰ Weininger’s poetics of translation is largely in sympathy with that of Celan, so that the language of his translation retains its otherness and separation as a necessary condition for the possibility of the “desperate conversation” that his letters, across languages, hold open.

secret of the crooked-nose creature – that is a way to the poem.” Eshel, “Paul Celan’s Other Reconsidered,” *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 315.

¹¹⁸ “Das ist, glaube ich, wenn nicht die kongenitale, so doch wohl die der Dichtung um einer Begegnung willen aus einer – vielleicht selbstentworfenen – Ferne oder Fremde zugeordnete Dunkelheit.” Celan, *Der Meridian und andere Prosa*, 51.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Paul Celan to Werner Weber, 26. March 1960, in Celan, *»etwas ganz und gar Persönliches« - Briefe 1934-1970*, 427. Ute Harbusch’s approach to Celan’s translations of French literature is also relevant here, as when she writes: “Die folgenden Analysen und Interpretationen verstehen sich als detaillierter Nachvollzug von Celans Übertragungen, die Gegenübersetzungen in des Wortes doppelter Bedeutung sind: Gegenüber-Setzungen und Gegen-Übersetzungen zugleich. Sie setzen sich in Beziehung zum Gegenüber des Ausgangstextes und setzen diesem in der Übertragung selbst etwas entgegen.” Ute Harbusch, *Gegenübersetzungen. Paul Celans Übertragungen französischer Symbolisten* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 15.

¹²⁰ Celan, *»etwas ganz und gar Persönliches« - Briefe 1934-1970*, 427.

In 1981, in *Di goldene keyt*, Freed Weininger published another piece about Celan. Titled “Rekviem Pol Tselan. A bintl blumen oyf zayn keyver” (“Requiem for Paul Celan. A bouquet of flowers for his grave”), it is a belated meditation on Celan’s death by suicide in 1970. The publication of this “requiem” marks a turning point in the Yiddish-language reception of Celan’s life and work. While his death was covered in the Yiddish press, including in a translation of Manfred Winkler’s “epilogue” in *Di goldene keyt*, the response by Yiddish writers was largely belated.¹²¹ Lengthy critical essays by Alexander Spiegelblatt and Chava Rosenfarb first appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as did further translations, including by Spiegelblatt and Mordkhe Litvin, who, like Bernfeld, was based in Paris. In 1988, moreover Avrom Sutzkever penned a poem about Celan’s death in the Seine, in which the speaker is the river itself: “A tsveyter shpringt in mir arayn fun brik. Vos meynt zayn shpringen?” (“Another jumps into me from the bridge. What does his jumping mean?”).¹²² Recalling Yehuda Amichai’s poem “The Death of Celan” (“Moto shel Celan”), which expresses how “[t]he same rope was tugging lightly at my neck,” the speaker of Sutzkever’s poem identifies with Celan in complex and often disquieting ways.¹²³ In the Yiddish poem, for example, the description of Celan as “[a] tsveyter” suggests that he is a kind of double of the speaker, the river, who recognizes him: “Zayn diner mantel zeglt zikh, nokh blaybt in mayne ringen./ Kapoyerdike politsiantn fayfn vi a ban./ Dervayl veys keyner nit, az yener man iz Pol Tslean” (“His thin coat sails but still remains in my circles./ Topsy-turvy police whistle like a train./ Meanwhile nobody knows that this man is Paul Celan”). The poem establishes an almost intimate link between the speaker and the “tsveyter,” but Sutzkever, as poet, seems to keep his distance.

¹²¹ Manfred Winkler, “Epilog nokh Pol Tselan,” *Di goldene keyt* 71 (1970).

¹²² Avrom Sutzkever, “Pariz 1988,” *Di goldene keyt* 126 (1989): 213.

¹²³ Yehuda Amichai, *The Early Books of Yehuda Amichai*, trans. Assia Gutmann, Harold Schimmel, and Ted Hughes (New York: Sheep Meadow Press, 2007), 53.

Even as he utilizes the first person in ways that suggest a certain kinship between the two writers, he does this by ventriloquizing the water in which Celan drowned.

Sutzkever's poem explicitly raises the question of the meaning of Celan's suicide ("Vos meynt zayn shpringen?"). It is a question that is also picked up by many of Celan's Yiddish readers in the wake of his death, including Chava Rosenfarb, whose critical essay I will turn to shortly. In *Negative Dialektik*, in an apparent reversal of his earlier position, Adorno writes that "perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living [...]." ¹²⁴ Celan's suicide became, however, for many of his Yiddish readers, a "cultural question." For them, the cultural or aesthetic problem of poetry was never separate from the existential question of living on in the face of catastrophe. In his "requiem," for instance, Weininger reflects, once again, on the asymmetry between German- and Yiddish-language literature, but, in the wake of the poet's suicide, he expresses indignation about claims that Celan was a German poet—claims that were (somewhat ambiguously) celebrated by Bernfeld in the 1960s. In the "requiem," which was published over a decade after Celan's death but reads as if it were written in the immediate aftermath, Weininger notes that Celan "could not settle in the territories that flooded his world with the blood of a third of his people. He settled in Paris and not in Germany, where he was exalted as a master of German poetry" ("hot er zikh nit gekont bazetsn in di lender vos hobn farfleytst zayn velt mitn blut fun a dritl fun zayn folk. Er hot zikh bazetst in Pariz un nit in Daytshland, vu er iz derhoybn gevorn vi a mayster fun der daytsher poezye"). ¹²⁵ Weininger further remarks, however tendentially, that "[o]nly the Jewish people can truly feel the sadness of [Celan's] premature death" ("[n]or dos yidishe folk

¹²⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 362-363.

¹²⁵ Weininger, "Rekviem Pol Tselan. A bintl blumen oyf zayn keyver," *Di goldene keyt* 105 (1981): 165-167, here 166.

kon oyf an emes filn dem troyer fun zayn fritsaytik toyt”).¹²⁶ In the subtext of his “requiem,” one can discern an extension of these claims: not only was Celan unable to live in Germany, he was also unable to live *in German*.

In her essay “Pol Tselan un zayne goyrl-brider” (Paul Celan and His Brothers in Fate), Chava Rosenfarb renders the connection between language and suicide explicit. In the essay, she offers a psychoanalytically-inflected account of Celan’s life and work that is prompted by her continued frustration and despair over his suicide. She addresses what she calls the “epidemic of suicides of Jewish writers who were also survivors of the Holocaust,” but who wrote in non-Jewish languages, such as Celan, Primo Levi, and Jean Améry.¹²⁷ In light of this “epidemic,” Rosenfarb makes a number of seemingly tendentious claims, including that “[t]hese writers had in common the fact that they were all Jews who wrote in non-Jewish languages, that is, in languages other than Yiddish or Hebrew.”¹²⁸ She argues that they did not possess the “immunity” provided by Jewish languages—what Bernfeld might call their “redemptive” force. At the same time, however, Rosenfarb also identifies Celan as an “alter-ego,” recalling the haunted double (“a tsveyter”) of Sutzkever’s poem. She begins her essay by writing that “in order to explain myself to myself, I often try to imagine what the lives of other writers have been like, especially writers whom I admire and with whom I feel a connection.”¹²⁹ She focuses on the “unbearable contradictions that [these writers] had been unable to resolve”—contradictions that may appear more personal when we read her essay in conjunction with her short stories “Edgia’s Revenge” and “François,” both of which

¹²⁶ Weinger further writes: “Vi a yid un landsman fun Pol Tselan, fargin ikh nit der daytsher velt aza shtern, aza koved vos der poet hot ir gebrakht. Di gesheenishtn fun di draysiker un fertsiker yorn hobn bay mir ibergelozt dem pakhed, az Pol Tselan kon vider blaybn in keyndemslan fun der daytsher literatur-geshikhte.” Weinger, “Rekviem Pol Tselan,” 165.

¹²⁷ Rosenfarb, “Paul Celan: Jewish Writers and the Savage God,” 101; Rosenfarb, “Pol Tselan un zayne goyrl-brider,” *Di goldene keyt* 138 (1994): 53-70.

¹²⁸ Rosenfarb, “Paul Celan: Jewish Writers and the Savage God,” 104.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

thematize suicidal ideation among survivors.¹³⁰ As in Sutzkever's poem, Rosenfarb intimates a profound closeness with Celan and, at once, an insuperable distance.

In the course of her essay, Rosenfarb recounts her decades-long experience of reading Celan, including her initial frustration with the "hermetic" qualities of his poetry. She recounts, however, how his poems opened up to her over time:

[Celan] denied that his poems were 'hermetic.' He claimed instead that they were his salute to his fellow human beings; that they were like greetings enclosed in a bottle and thrown into the ocean, to be found or not, as fate decreed. He maintained that each one of his poems was his 'I' calling out to a receptive 'you.' To him, poetry was a form of desperate dialogue with the world, his manner of seeking for a way to return home.

And so I took another look at his poems. I read some of them over and over again. And to my surprise, the lack of clarity ceased to annoy me. My incomprehension dissolved before the splendour of metaphors and images. I began to feel myself into the poems' strangeness and to grasp their meaning without really grasping it. Intuitively, I began to understand what Celan wanted to tell me. [...]

I began to see the extent to which the entanglement of broken sentences, combined with the piling up of neologisms, was permeated by angst, by the despair of the poet bleakly wandering through mazes of darkness and premonitions of death. Primo Levi said that in the obscurity of Celan's poems could be heard the death rattle of a dying person.¹³¹

Rosenfarb's multi-decade engagement with this "deathbringing speech" recalls the larger history of reading and reception that this chapter reconstructs. Her approach to Celan's poetry is animated, at once, by her discomfort with his language and by a kind of empathic identification with—and, to recall Sutzkever's poem, a dark recognition of—the "despair of the poet." The stakes of Rosenfarb's reading are thus not merely literary or even hermeneutic; they are also existential. In a striking passage, she thus writes:

Mit koyekh hot er zikh bamit in zayne lider tsu dervaytern dos daytshe loshn fun dem loshn fun zayne fartilikers, vi er volt gepruvt shafn a legamre andere shprakh, vi er volt gepruvt di daytshe shprakh nivelirn, opshafn zi mitn ibershafn zi, ibermakhn zi oyf a loshn fun mentshlekher varem kayt, mitn araynknetn in ir dos idiomatish-kharakteristishe fun dem yidishn loshn – vi er volt dos daytsh gevolt farvandlen in yidish.¹³²

¹³⁰ Rosenfarb, "Edgeh's nekome," *Di goldene keyt* 126 (1989): 38-87; "François," *Di goldene keyt* 135 (1993): 16-47. See also Rosenfarb, *Survivors: Seven Short Stories*, trans. Goldie Morgentaler (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2004).

¹³¹ Rosenfarb, "Paul Celan: Jewish Writers and the Savage God," 117.

¹³² Rosenfarb, "Pol Tselan un zayne goyrl-brider," 67.

With strength, [Celan] sought to distance the German language from the language of his murderers, as if he had attempted to create an entirely different language, as if he had attempted to level the German language, to abrogate it by transforming it, to remake it into a language of human warmth, to knead into it the idiomatic characteristics of the Yiddish language – as if he had wanted to transform German into Yiddish.¹³³

Rosenfarb argues that, in his poems, “[Celan] often broke away from German syntax, or discarded grammatical rules,” but not primarily as an aesthetic exercise. Instead, the torsions and displacements of Celan’s language reflect his effort to speak in a language in which it had become impossible to breathe—to forge, out of this impossibility, a space of encounter and “human warmth.”¹³⁴ Rosenfarb figures this effort in terms of the fraught relation between German and Yiddish: “as if he had wanted to transform German into Yiddish.” This may be difficult to accept as an account of Celan’s work as a whole, but it is phrased as a conditional (“vi er volt”), and it should be understood as a form of thought experiment rather than as a definitive claim. Rosenfarb’s argument provides, that is, a way to think anew about how Celan’s struggle with the German language was taken up across languages and disclosed, as Camilla Miglio remarks, “a greater echoing space in which a net of voices, times and places may resonate.”¹³⁵ Miglio further writes that “in a ‘ricercar’ of words and discourses, Celan’s translations ‘do’ the following ‘to’ their language: they ‘remember’ [...] a different, porous German, again and again reverberant in the dialogic spaces opened up in exchange with their readers, in different places, time frames and languages.”¹³⁶ In this chapter, I have shown how, in similar fashion, different readers and translators of Celan’s poetry held open

¹³³ My translation. For a slightly divergent translation, see Rosenfarb, “Paul Celan: Jewish Writers and the Savage God,” 116.

¹³⁴ In related ways, in his reading of Celan’s “Wolfsbohne,” Peter Waterhouse writes that “Sprache in diesem Gedicht wird aber nicht angesprochen, um sie zu ‘problematisieren’ oder thematisieren, sondern um eine Sprache zu finden und zu sprechen.” Peter Waterhouse, “Un, an, Amen, atmen, Deutschland: Versuch über Paul Celans Gedicht ‘Wolfsbohne,’” *Text+Kritik: Zeitschrift für Literatur* 53/54: Paul Celan (2002): 38.

¹³⁵ Camilla Miglio, “Translating in a ‘Wholly Other’ German. ‘Ricercar,’” *Paul Celan Today: A Companion*, eds. Michael Eskin, Karen Leeder, and Marko Pajevic (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 100.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

the “porosity” between German and Yiddish at a time when the dialogue between these languages had seemed impossible.

EPILOGUE

In this dissertation, I have considered a number of texts that inhabit the fraught intersection between Yiddish and German. I have analyzed different practices of reading and writing across these languages, including exophonic writing, hybrid forms of translation and transliteration, and critical commentary. While the writers who engaged in these practices possessed various degrees of ‘fluency’ in either language, they were all, at the very least, capable of reading and understanding both languages. While conducting research for this dissertation, I considered this minimum level of linguistic knowledge to be an important limit on the kinds of texts that I would include in the project. I was interested in exploring how writers actually used these languages rather than in how they represented them in purely imagined (and often stereotypical) ways.

In the preceding chapters, beyond pointing out the secondary pedagogical function of Bertha Pappenheim’s translation work, I have not focused on language learning in a sustained way. During a research trip to Toronto, however, a series of letters between Nathan Birnbaum and Alfred Döblin caught my eye and have inspired me to think about the ways in which this project might develop and expand in the coming years. Birnbaum, who played a supporting role in the first chapter, was born in Vienna in 1864. As an intellectual and writer, he exerted substantial influence on the development of Jewish culture and politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While he later devoted his energy toward the concerns of Orthodox Judaism, he was, for a number of years, a leading proponent of Yiddishism and of Jewish national autonomy in the Diaspora. He served, for example, as the principal organizer of the Czernowitz Conference, which asserted the national significance of the Yiddish language, even though, as noted in the first chapter, he was not yet a fluent speaker of the language at the time of the conference. Döblin, born in Stettin (in what is now Szczecin, Poland) in 1878, became one of the most important writers of German

modernism. Born into an acculturated Jewish family, he also became increasingly preoccupied by the so-called “Jewish Question.” In the 1920s, for example, in the wake of antisemitic riots in the Scheunenviertel in Berlin, he traveled to Poland “to meet non-assimilated Jews” (“um dort nichtassimilierte Juden kennenzulernen”) and to see “the land of his forefathers” (“das Land [s]einer Väter”).¹ In a book that he wrote about this trip, titled *Reise in Polen (Journey to Poland)*, Döblin recounted his own limited understanding of Yiddish. After an awkward encounter with a rebbe, for example, he left feeling disoriented not least because he had not been able to understand “a single word of this completely peculiar Yiddish” (“kein Wort dieses ganz besonderen Jiddisch”).² In the decades after his trip, Döblin continued to engage with the “Jewish Question,” which had only gained in urgency in the shadow of National Socialism. After immigrating to France, for example, he deepened his involvement in the Jewish Territorialist movement, which “searched for areas outside Palestine in which to create settlements of Jews.”³ It was in this context that Döblin began an epistolary exchange with Birnbaum about pressing questions of Jewish culture and politics.⁴

In one letter, written in 1935, Döblin poses a question to Birnbaum about the language that had earlier left him confused: “I am currently learning Yiddish: I heard that you also first learned Yiddish late in life; did you have some sort of lexicon?” (“Ich lerne jetzt jiddisch; ich höre, Sie haben

¹ Marion Brandt, “*Reise in Polen (1925)*,” in *Döblin Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 2016), 288.

² Alfred Döblin, *Reise in Polen* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1926), 112. Döblin’s encounter with the rebbe is replete with multiple layers of misunderstanding. As Samuel Spinner remarks, “Döblin attributes his lack of comprehension to the rebbe’s Yiddish. But he has not only failed to understand the rebbe’s words; he has also misunderstood the purpose of such a visit. He claims he was interested in the rebbe as an interlocutor, but this imposes a role external to the rebbe’s own conception of himself and bespeaks the deeply primitivizing character of Döblin’s wishes: his ostensible desire to engage the rebbe as a subject transforms him into an object.” Spinner, *Jewish Primitivism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 53.

³ Laura Almagor, “Jewish Territorialism (in Relation to Jewish Studies),” *Oxford Bibliographies* (online).

⁴ See Hans Otto Horsch, “Döblin und das Judentum,” in *Döblin Handbuch*; and Horsch, “Alfred Döblin und der Neo-Territorialismus. Mit bisher unveröffentlichten Auszügen aus Briefen Döblins an Nathan Birnbaum,” in *Internationales Alfred-Döblin-Kolloquium. Paris 1993*, ed. Michel Grunewald (Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1995), 25-36.

auch erst spät jidd. gelernt; hatten Sie irgendein Lexikon?“).⁵ In his abbreviated question, Döblin gestures at the difficulties of learning Yiddish as an adult. Not only did he not grow up with the language, it is not clear how to go about learning it. Unlike German and other ‘major’ languages, he could not simply participate in a class or even easily access a reliable dictionary. While Döblin hints at these challenges, he does not expound upon his reasons for wanting to learn Yiddish, which, in the larger context of his correspondence, seem to have been both pragmatic and deeply felt. In practical terms, knowing the language would have benefited him in working with his numerous Yiddish-speaking colleagues in the Jewish Territorialist movement; during this time, his political essays and journalistic writing were also increasingly being published in translation in Yiddish-language periodicals associated with the movement.⁶ In a more emotional and visceral sense, it may also have been the case that, in the aftermath of Hitler’s seizure of power, he felt increasingly alienated from the German language. He may have found that, as Jing Tsu writes in a different context, “language is not always given to a native speaker to feel at home with or to wear like a layer of skin.”⁷ In this regard, in a letter from the same year to Thomas Mann, Döblin recalls the burning of his books and reports that, in exile, he hears “from travelers: in Germany, something new is palpable that has never existed before, namely true hatred” (“[i]ch höre von Reisenden: in Deutschland sei etwas Neues fühlbar, was es noch nie gab, nämlich veritabler Haß”).⁸

In a follow-up letter, Döblin thanks Birnbaum “for your information regarding learning Yiddish” and notes that he “would be very grateful if you could provide me with the expert advice of your son and the title of his textbook” (“für Ihre Auskunft betr. das Erlernen d. jiddisch. Sprache, ich wäre Ihnen sehr verbunden, wenn Sie mir den fachmänn. Rat Ihres Herrn Sohnes und den Titel

⁵ Letter from Alfred Döblin to Nathan Birnbaum, 3 April 1935. Alfred Döblin, *Briefe II* (Düsseldorf: Walter Verlag, 2001), 99.

⁶ See Alfred Döblin, *Schriften zu jüdischen Fragen* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2015).

⁷ Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1.

⁸ Letter from Alfred Döblin to Thomas Mann, 23 May 1935. Alfred Döblin, *Briefe* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1970), 207.

seines Lehrbuchs verschaffen würden”).⁹ In a footnote to the published edition of Döblin’s correspondence, the editor notes, with reference to “Rat Ihres Sonnes,” that who “is meant is Oskar Birnbaum, the composer of a Yiddish grammar” (“[g]emeint ist Oskar Birnbaum, der Vf. einer jiddischen Grammatik”).¹⁰ This footnote is, however, incorrect. Nathan Birnbaum certainly meant his son Salomo Birnbaum, who, in 1915, published the book *Praktische Grammatik der jiddischen Sprache* as part of the series “Library of Linguistics” (“Bibliothek der Sprachenkunde”).¹¹ The book was billed as a tool for “self-instruction” (“Selbstunterricht”) and, like other titles in the series, its title page bears an Orientalist image that suggests to the reader, however problematically, that learning the language will open up new and ‘exotic’ worlds. In addition to delineating the basic rules of Yiddish grammar, Birnbaum includes a guide to his particular system of transcription, a miniature dictionary, and short literary texts for reading practice, including works by Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Y. L. Peretz.

⁹ Letter from Alfred Döblin to Nathan Birnbaum, 13 April 1935. Döblin, *Briefe II*, 99.

¹⁰ Döblin, *Briefe II*, 495.

¹¹ Salomo Birnbaum later published under the name Solomon and, in Yiddish, Shloyme.



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Druck von Gebrüder Steipel G. m. b. H. in Reichenberg.

Figure 11. Title Page and Table of Contents from Salomo Birnbaum's *Praktische Grammatik der jiddischen Sprache* (Vienna and Leipzig: A. Hartleben's Verlag, 1915).

In the Nathan and Solomon Birnbaum Family Archive in Toronto, one can also find the letters that Nathan Birnbaum sent to Döblin in response to his queries. In his initial response, Birnbaum recommends the textbook of his son, but he also catalogs the manifold difficulties that face a language learner like Döblin:

In Hinsicht auf das Erlernen des Jiddischen ist ein nicht unwesentlicher Unterschied zwischen Ihnen und mir. Auch ich habe zwar erst spät jiddisch sprechen lernen müssen, aber ich hatte das voraus, dass meine Eltern Ostjuden waren und, allerdings nicht mit mir, im Hause viel jiddisch sprachen. So verstand ich die Sprache von Kindheit auf, ohne sie sprechen zu können. ‚Gelernt‘ habe ich das Jiddische eigentlich nie. Ich habe viel gelesen, viel mit jiddisch sprechenden Ostjuden verkehrt, und mich allmählich ans Sprechen gewagt. Geschrieben habe ich die die Sprache viel früher als gesprochen. Im übrigen glaube ich, dass Sie es im Grunde nicht anders werden machen können als ich, nur dass Sie grössere Schwierigkeiten zu überwinden haben werden, besonders wenn Sie kein grösseres Wissen an hebräischen und slawischem Sprachbestand mitbringen. Wenn Sie dies nicht mitbringen, so

wird Ihnen nämlich schon das Lesen grosse Schwierigkeiten bereiten. Es gibt wohl Wörterbücher, aber es wird Ihnen wohl keines genügen. Von Lehrbüchern in deutscher Sprache gibt es, soweit mir bekannt ist, nur eines, und das ist von meinem Sohne, Dr. Salomo Birnbaum. Wenn Sie vielleicht seinen mehr fachmännischen Rathören wollen, so kann ich Sie gern mit ihm in Verbindung bringen.¹²

With regard to learning Yiddish, there is a not inconsiderable difference between you and me. I, too, had to learn to speak Yiddish late in life, but I had the advantage that my parents were Eastern [European] Jews and spoke a lot of Yiddish at home, although not with me. I thus understood the language already as a child, but without being able to speak it. I actually never 'learned' Yiddish. I read a lot, socialized a lot with Eastern [European] Jews who spoke Yiddish, and gradually dared to speak it myself. I wrote the language much earlier than I spoke it. Apart from that, I believe that you will basically be able to do it no differently as me, but that you will have greater difficulties to overcome, especially if you do not already have a great deal of knowledge of the Hebraic and Slavic components. If you do not have this, you will have a lot of trouble with reading. There are dictionaries, but probably none of them are sufficient for your needs. As far as I know, there is only one textbook in German, and that is by my son, Dr. Salomo Birnbaum. If you perhaps wish to hear his more expert advice, I shall be happy to put you in touch with him.

In the face of these difficulties, it is unclear how much energy Döblin dedicated to learning Yiddish. In his letter about the "hatred" in Germany, which he sent to Mann about six weeks after receiving the above letter from Birnbaum, he notes that, during his time in France, he has "not learned French but rather to read and write in Yiddish."¹³ The scholar Klaus Müller-Salget suggests, however, that Döblin "began to learn Yiddish [...] but did not make much more progress with this language than he did with learning French."¹⁴ Müller-Salget does not provide any direct evidence for this claim, though much rests on how one defines "progress with [...] language." In any case, it seems fair to say that Döblin's language learning had little demonstrable impact.¹⁵ In line with many of the texts discussed in this dissertation, it may be thought of as an experiment that ushered in new possibilities

¹² Letter from Nathan Birnbaum to Alfred Döblin, 4 April 1935. In a later letter, dated 26 November 1935, Birnbaum writes, in response to Döblin's admission that he reads the Bible in translation: "Dass Sie die Bibel nicht hebräisch lesen können, weil Sie schwach in Erlernen von Sprachen sind, ist wirklich schlimm. Wer im jüdischen Volke, und zwar in echten jüdischen Volke, wirken will, kann des Hebräischen nicht entraten. Und ich glaube, den Zionisten und Hebraisten entgegen, auch des Jiddischen nicht." Nathan and Solomon Birnbaum Family Archive, Toronto.

¹³ Letter from Alfred Döblin to Thomas Mann, 23 May 1935. Döblin, *Briefe*, 207.

¹⁴ Klaus Müller-Salget, "Döblin and Judaism," in *A Companion to the Works of Alfred Döblin*, eds. Roland Dollinger, et al. (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), 238. See also Marc Caplan, *Yiddish Writers in Weimar Berlin*, 54 and 83.

¹⁵ Indeed, a few years later, Döblin converted to Christianity and took his work in different directions. See Horch, "Döblin und das Judentum," 348.

but that ultimately faltered. Yet, in recording this failed experiment, it could also be said that the letters between Birnbaum and Döblin point to “counterfactuals that history refused to accommodate.”¹⁶ The letters signal, as it were, the contingency and instability of their writers’ linguistic pathways and prompt us, decades later, to imagine alternative histories and genealogies. They might also prompt us, in a more specific sense, to pursue further research into the histories of language learning and to consider how and why some writers immersed themselves in the difficulties of a new language in moments of crisis and flux.

¹⁶ In a recent study of African American literary archives, Jean-Christophe Cloutier builds on Kevin Young’s notion of “shadow books”: the unwritten, the removed, and the lost.” They both consider how poets and scholars “journey to black authors’ special collections to ‘search among the fragments of a life unlived,’ hoping to map out the counterfactuals that history refused to accommodate.” Jean-Christophe Cloutier, *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 2. See also Kevin Young, *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2012).

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