HOME TONGUE EARTHQUAKE:

THE RADICAL AFTERLIVES OF YIDDISHLAND

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A DISSERTATION

in

Comparative Literature and Literary Theory

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2019

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For Rivka

& in Memory of

Ernest Nissan Alexander

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the immense support and guidance of so many people in my life. I must give huge thanks here to Charles Bernstein, my greatest teacher and the director of my dissertation; and to Kathryn Hellerstein and Bob Perelman, my visionary committee members; and to Pierre Joris and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, my brilliant external advisers and confidantes; and to Jerome Rothenberg, Harold Schimmel and Helit Yeshurun, my translingual elders; and to Zali Gurevitch, Gabriel Levin and Yoram Verete, my radical secular "rabbis"; and to Stephen Ross, my brother and closest collaborator; and to Joel and Irene Resnikoff, Moshe and Yocheved Resnikoff, and Ernie and Frances Alexander, the origins of my originlessness; and to Robin Alexander, who not only gave me a fish *but* taught me to fish; and to Kevin Platt, a friend & mentor through it all; and to JoAnne Dubil, the "guardian angel" of Comparative Literature at Penn; and to Ted Rees, Chris Mustazza, Rui Castro, Rachel Zolf, Brandon Brown, Alli Warren, Alan Bernheimer, Jason Mitchell, Kevin Killian, erica kaufman, Rui Castro, Helen Stuhr-Rommereim, Diane Rothenberg, Jennifer Marie Bartlett, Jake Marmer, Yosefa Raz, Jean Day, Steven Seidenberg, Kiki Lipsett, Susan Bee, Al Filreis, Sophia Dahlin, Chana Kronfeld, Nicole Peyrafitte, Katy Schneeman, Julia Bloch, Leora Fridman, Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach, Bill Berkson, Ted Greenwald, Melissa Riley, Syd Staiti, Lilach Lachman, Adam Sax, Yonina Alexander, Trisha Low, Maya Levine and Julie Levitan, for the many rich conversations and occasions for sound-boarding; and to Max Finder, Charlie Engelman, Jonah Liben,

ABSTRACT

HOME TONGUE EARTHQUAKE:

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Ariel Resnikoff

Charles Bernstein

Home Tongue Earthquake presents a case study (or test) of diasporic Ashkenazi translingual poetics in the twentieth- and twenty-first century, which inflects and re-accents Hebrew and English, among other national host languages. The transterritorial civilization of diaspora Ashkenaz spread in the late-nineteenth century from "Ashkenaz II" across disparate geographies—from the Americas to Ottoman Palestine, and beyond, via forced migration—and became, in the twentieth-century, the rhizomatic language space known as "Yiddishland": a modernist shorthand for the prolifically scattered sites of stateless Yiddish culture situated, though never settled, across the globe. This dissertation traces the poetic and aesthetic relations between five diasporic translingual Ashkenazi writers who each in their own mode recognized the terminal widening gap between themselves and the languages they inhabited, and who wrote *into* this chasm, rather than ignoring it, using the very *rejected* accented materials at hand—those cast out by monolingual ideological forces—as sustenance for a resistant poetics of survival. These five translation-facing writers—in English, Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978) and Mina Loy (1882-1966), in Hebrew, Avot Yeshurun (1904-1992) and Harold Schimmel (b. 1935), and in Yiddish, Mikhl Likht (1893-1953)—sensed that the social and political, cultural and economic forces of their times were poised to eradicate once again the

translingual realities of the dispossessed, whether indigenous or migrant, whether in

exile, or hiding, those split between language and land, with one tongue here and one

tongue *nowhere,* as was assumed, or *anywhere*, as we may find. These writers refused to

look away, refused to practice their art in any normative monolingual style, for this

reason, for making forbidden language mixing a primary modality, as a form of cultural

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That language, even at its most dense, most alive at the musical level, is not and can never be a dwelling, a place to rest, an at-home, despite our desire to make it so. Language is the stranger, the other, into which we want to pour ourselves, but which always and irremediably so, remains the outside, our outside, where we build our future dwelling, a dwelling we will never inhabit.
   —Pierre Joris[1]

This composite language is a very living language, it grows as you speak.
   —Mina Loy[2]

So the first letter alef raised a thousand inexistent worlds
Beit a dwelling which caressed worlds after destruction
Gimel garden of peaceful abundance
Fourth letter the human living in four directions
And what can be said?
Wind over water sound over significance
Rabbi Yitzchak said in the name of Rabbi Zrika Green seeping
chaos streaks
Surround abyss
Ascend and descend
Throughout language-time as the other
Who cried out
And was subdued
Letter expanded along four radii upon abyss
Undulating sand rills broken letters heaped up
As we have learned for it is written . . .
   —Norman Fischer[3]

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[1] 2018: 9-10.
[2] From "Modern Poetry" (1996: 159).
[3] From "Prologue" (16).

INTRODUCTION: Framing Expanded-Yiddish

חֹרַבֵּ חֹסֵרֵי אֹבֵּיֵ יֵבֵיֵא גֵאֵל לֹבֵּר בֵּנֵיֵהֹ לֹבֵּעֵ שֹמֵיֹ בֵּאֹהֹבֵּה כֹלֹ עֵיֵר וֹמֵסֵתֹ יֵבֵֹגֵן

פֵֹרֵסֵ

A single Yiddish sentence (in the coloured original in contrasting red ink) written into the hollows of a large Hebrew word in the illuminated Worms prayerbook manuscript of 1272 (with permission of the Department of Manuscripts and Archives, Jewish National Library, Jerusalem).
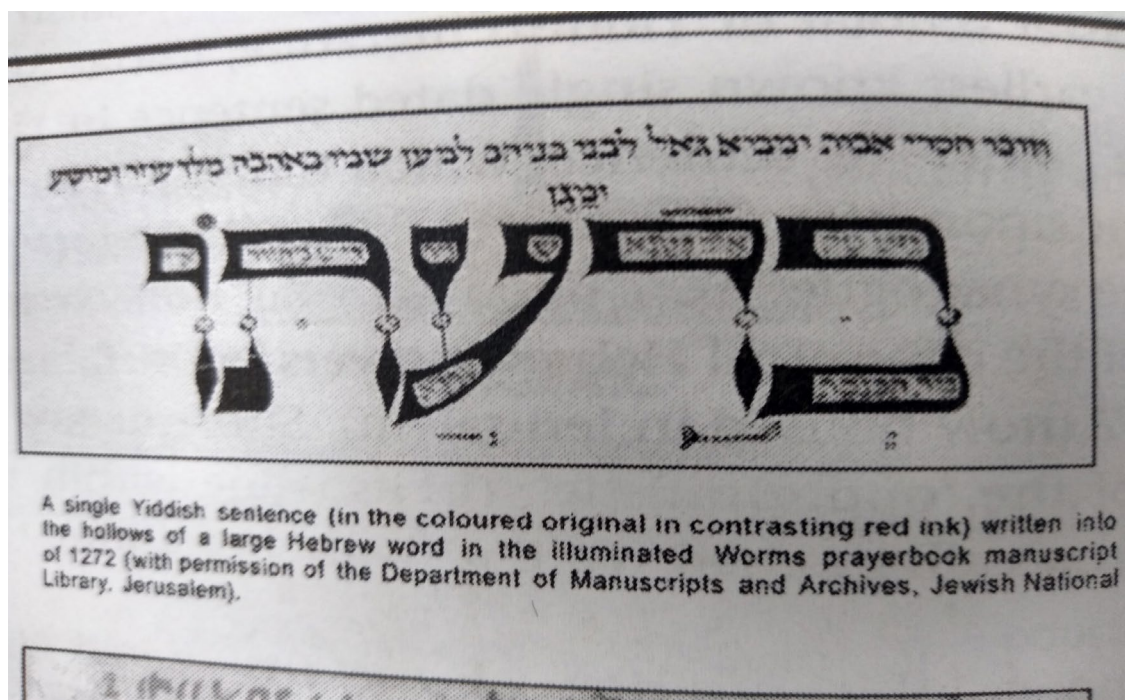
Figure 1: Fragment of the Cambridge Yiddish codex of 1382

Although national labels impute singularity and coherence, poets make and remake their often-interstitial citizenship, as we have seen, through formal and ideological rewritings, through sonic mutations and tropological reinscriptions that can span multiple nationalities and ethnicities . . . a concept of poetic transnationalism—perhaps even poetic citizenship of a kind—allows for the complex tessellations of modern and contemporary writing, poems formed by both unwilled imaginative inheritances and elective identifications across national borders. When living poets face the hard political boundaries of nation-states at airports and checkpoints, it may not count for much that they practice travelling poetries, that they are citizens of imaginative webs formed by cross-national reading and rewriting.
> —Jahan Ramzani[1]

With a changing key
you unlock the house where
the snow of what's silenced drifts.
Just like the blood that bursts from
your eye or mouth or ear,
so your key changes.
> —Paul Celan[2]

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[1] 354.
[2] From "With a Changing Key" (65). Translation is John Felstiner's.

I. Diasporic Ashkenazi Modernisms

The language artists constellating these essays possess little to no place in the nationalist canons and triumphalist histories of our time. They operate specifically through modes of ideolectic *dispossession*, out of diasporic cultural logics, transposed in translation, as non-national and, in some cases, anti-national resistant translingual networks of sense. Resistant in their translationality as much as in their untranslatability—anti-absorptive, unassimilable—they lay claim not to the right of the state but to the right of opacity, as non-state—thinking here explicitly of Glissant; not as Fascist Language Rules, nor Trumpist Fake News, used to control the public—that is, as "impenetrable autocracy"— but as minor tectonic ambience: *an* "irreducible singularity" which remains hidden in its very elementalness, un-subsumed by the voracious monolingualist Empire .[3]

I present in this work a case study (or test) of diasporic Ashkenazi translingual poetics in the twentieth- and twenty-first century—what I am calling here "expanded-Yiddish," which inflects and re-accents Hebrew and English, among other national host languages. The transterritorial civilization of diaspora Ashkenaz spread in the late-nineteenth century from "Ashkenaz II" across disparate geographies—from the Americas to Ottoman Palestine, and beyond, via forced migration—and became, in the twentieth-century the rhizomatic language space known as "Yiddishland": a modernist shorthand for the prolifically scattered sites of stateless Yiddish culture situated, though never

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[3] Édouard Glissant's (1928-2011) *Poetics of Relation* and specifically his essay "For Opacity," quoted in the prose above, present critical precedents for my own diasporic-poetic thinking and writing; I address Glissant's concept of total creolization within the context of diasporic Jewishness at length in Chapter 3.

settled, across the globe. [4] In 1937, the Yiddish modernist Bundist theoretician and travel

writer, Chaim Zhitlovsky (1865-1943) recalled one important crystallization of

Yiddishland as a concept at the first international interdisciplinary Yiddish language and

culture conference in Czernovitz, Romania in 1908. Facilitated and attended by Yiddish

writers/ speakers from across Europe and beyond, the conference signaled

> the creation of an international "spiritual-national home" in which all classes and groups of the dispersed Jewish people could live; a spiritual-national territory—"Yiddish-land" we call it today—whose atmosphere consists of the fresh air of our folk language and where with every breath and every word one helps maintain the national existence of one's people. [5]

The Yiddish playwright Chaim (Henri) Sloves (1905-1988) defines Yiddishland as "a

land which figures on no map of the world, a strange, unknown land of almost unreal

immensity, whose ever changing frontiers traverse oceans and continents"; and the

Yiddish scholar David Roskies calls Yiddishland a "territory" which exists "in the minds

and mouths of its speakers . . . a language kingdom made up only of words" (qtd. In

Bachman 2). Yet, in the course of the twentieth century, we find that Yiddish faced

projected and attempted eradication, first at the hands of the Nazis, and later,

significantly, by Hebraist and Anglo-American monolingualist campaigns. [6] Thus the

question arises: what happens to Yiddishland when Yiddish is prematurely pronounced

dead; or put otherwise, what of radical translingual Yiddishland still remains, now

translated and in disguise, under the surface language-culture of another place and face?

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[4] "Ashkenaz" in this case, refers to the diasporic Jewish population that crystallized in the Holy Roman Empire around the end of the first millennia and whose common language was Yiddish. Ashkenaz II refers to the masses of Jews who were expelled and moved east into the Slavic lands throughout the medieval and early modern period (Katz 84-109).

[5] Translation is Merle Bachman's (1-2).

[6] These highly destructive campaigns continue today, in the form of the English-Only movement in the US and the recent Jewish Nation-State bill in the State of Israel.

My aim in this work is to develop a dynamic mapping of Yiddishland's translational remains, by tracing the poetic relations between five diasporic translingual-Ashkenazi writers who each in their own mode recognize the terminal widening gap between themselves and the languages they inhabit, and who write *into* this chasm, rather than ignoring it, using the very *rejected* accented materials at hand—those cast out by monolingual ideological forces—as sustenance for a resistant poetics of survival. These five translation-facing writers— in English, Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978) and Mina Loy (1882-1966), in Hebrew, Avot Yeshurun (1904-1992) and Harold Schimmel (b. 1935), and in Yiddish, Mikhl Likht (1893-1953)—sensed that the social and political, cultural and economic forces of their times were poised to eradicate once again the translingual realities of the dispossessed, whether indigenous or migrant, whether in exile, or hiding, those split between language and land, with one tongue here and one tongue *nowhere,* as was assumed, or *anywhere*, as we may find. These writers refuse to look away, refuse to practice their art in any normative monolingual style, for this reason, for making forbidden language mixing a primary modality, as a form of cultural and political disruption.

In Part 1 of this study, made up of Chapter 1 and 2, I investigate and expand the terms of a transatlantic Jewish American Modernism across Yiddish and English. Reading the works of Mikhl Likht, Louis Zukofsky and Mina Loy in conversation, I move for an alternate experimental American literary tradition, one that is both Jewish and translingual by inheritance, which stands in staunch contrast to Poundian and Eliotic multilingual-monolingualist affiliations with Fascist and Christian power. In Chapter 1,

I introduce Mikhl Likht and Louis Zukofsky as translingual siblings across languages. Reading Zukofsky and Likht in tandem, I present a test of Jewish American Modernist poetics at the site of the language fence; these writers, I demonstrate, were passing notes across the Anglo-Yiddish threshold, as it were, in the form of translations and adaptations between English and Yiddish. In Chapter 2, I take a highly subversive speculative stance, imagining the missing element of Loy's English, which so marks it as foreign to standard Anglo-American English, as a phantom Yiddish. I read Loy, in these terms, as, what I call, a "crypto-Yiddish writer", who finds in the mongrel-Yiddishist tendencies of a phantom Likht—a means of translating the dreams of her miscegenated past and present into an alternate future of diasporic mixture. And Likht, I argue, found in Loy, finally an English writer whose language was primed to plant seeds of translated Yiddish futurities.

In Part 2, made up of Chapter 3 and 4, I turn from the United States to Israel/Palestine, to examine the life and works of the translingual Hebrew writers, Avot Yeshurun and Harold Schimmel. In Chapter 3, I present a case-study for Avot Yeshurun's spectral-Creole Hebrew, reading Yeshurun's Yiddish-Arabic praxis through Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* in particular. In this chapter I present the full texts of my translations of Yeshurun's *"Mi-mi lakakhti reshut"* (From Whom Did I take Permission) and *"Ha-bayeet"* (The House) as discursive counter weight to my close reading and expository prose. In Chapter 4, I give critical and historical context to Harold Schimmel's translation and transplantation of New York School poetics into Hebrew. I read Schimmel for the first time from the perspective of his specter, in the New American Poetry, and beyond, rather than as an avant-garde Hebrew poet, only. Once again here, I juxtapose my approaches, writing half the chapter as an account of Schimmel's

translation of a distinctly New York School style into Hebrew, and half the chapter as an annotated one-of-a-kind collaboration between the second generation New York School painter, George Schneeman and Schimmel himself.

The dissonant writers whose work I explore cast into relief a highly potent Jewish modernist nexus of translingual praxis. The attention in modern scholarship to this translingualism, however, has mostly been in passing within the context of the assumed (national) language school of this or that writer. Gestures have been made, of course, to account for the implicit and in many cases explicit translingual questions that inevitably arise in diasporic Jewish writing, but with no in depth or sustained treatment that I can find of the powerful translational dynamics at play within these writings themselves— though not necessarily from lack of want.[7] Thus, for example, in the *Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics,* edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, the editors suggest that Louis Zukofsky's "Sincerity and Objectification" was very likely influenced by the so-called Yiddish Introspectivist manifesto, but they don't go any further than this in investigating the issue; likewise, in Ruth Wisse's study on the Yiddish American modernist writers Mani Leib and Moshe Leib Halpern, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan: Two Yiddish Poets*, she mentions in passing the fact that in New York during the first quarter of the twentieth century, there were those American-born Jewish writers who *chose* English over Yiddish (such as Louis Zukofsky or the slightly older Charles Reznikoff), but does not make any further mention of the relations (poetically, socially,

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[7] There are, of course, important exceptions to this, which make up powerful precedents for the translation-facing research presented here. Three particularly significant texts in these terms, are Merle Bachman's *Recovering Yiddishland: Threshold Moments in American Literature*, Chana Kronfeld's *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics,* and Adriana X. Jacobs' recent *Strange Cocktail: Translation and the Making of Modern Hebrew Poetry.*

or otherwise) that might have existed between the Anglo-presenting Jewish modernists and their Yiddish American contemporaries. Likewise, in Zionist literary culture the translingual has often been repressed, even suppressed from the histories and canons.[8] There is a gap then also in the discourse, a gap in the literary historiography and in the contemporary critical thinking around Jewish Ashkenazic language and culture—a gap, which was, in fact, historically bridged by and *with* Yiddish itself, which has, since the mid-twentieth century—since the *projected* death of Yiddish itself—been widening into a seismic abyss, laced in intricate submerged archipelagos of translingual refuse.[9]

Mikhl Likht has emerged in this work as the guardian angel of the Anglo-Yiddish translingual threshold, the gaping border in this case between national and non-national American languages and cultures, where the stakes of legibility and illegibility are the highest imaginable. In Likht we find an artist willing to forego all reception, notoriety, audience, payment, recognition, canonization, prestige—in order to document a translingual reality he knew would soon be erased; *and it was.* Likht recognized from the moment he arrived on the American scene in 1913 that the radical Yiddish modernist networks of the world were dissolving, and would soon be left for dead; but he did not believe they would die. And so he buried the translingual remains of his many cohabiting languages into an unreadable Yiddish text. Infamously "unreadable" to his contemporaries—or "*unfarshtandlekh,*" that is, incomprehensible, as his detractors put it.

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[8] This dissertation finds discursive precedent in the work of scholars who take exception to this monolingual monological agenda, especially, for example, Dan Miron, Benjamin Harshav, Chana Kronfeld and Michael Gluzman.

[9] Thinking here specifically of Édouard Glissant's "Black Beach": "Then, abruptly, at least for those of us attentive to such changes, the water subsides, daily creating a wider and wider grayish strip. Don't get the idea that this is the tide. But, still, it is on the ebb! The beach, as it broadens, is the precursor of a future *carême*" (2010: 124).

Yet the very un-under-stand-ability of Likht's work, its opacity as translingual

illegibility, its commitment to incomprehensibility as a poetics itself, operates towards a

reverse engineering of the Yiddish language as such, a dissolution of the standardized

institution into its fused materials—to reveal the concealed segregations, borders as

junctions prematurely foreclosed.

II. Poetics: *A roaming "g"* [10]

    A roaming "g"

As in *goles*, meaning "diasporics", which infects my national cultural host; a

(g)host constituting a parenthetical supplement to/of the language knowledge I

believe I "possess"—as speculative experiment in polyvalence, as way out—or

perhaps, reverse engineering—of the word as such. Any word uttered (might)

contain therefore a plethora of (g)host words not uttered, though having once

"been" (perhaps), now buried alive in ambient present.[11]

Expanded-Yiddish as a roaming and combing of the translational dimensions of

the (g)host—writing oneself in and out of the host. Édouard Glissant so

powerfully understands this dynamic through his vision of coast and coastal tides,

semi-permeable, highly adaptive breaks in a landscape (2010: 121-7). A limit

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[10] I break from a conventional discursive style here in order to present a poetics (my own) of the expanded-Yiddish at hand.

[11] Thinking, for example of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: "Gaunt grey ghostly gossips growing grubber in the glow" (995).

which is not a limit (for a bird, or even unnatural migrator). A limit which is an

invitation in its limitlessness. An errant relation to land as much as to language.

Breshis tirgum- translation genesis

In many versions. Convergences and divergences. The implacability of the

singular irreducible seed. Not language but languages abound. not places but

faces proceed. The traces of the places facing the sea (we cannot see).

We must start then in translation. The block of gloss is not enough. Spool of

drash [commentary] - not *dvash* [honey] - but like *lo(k)shn* [noodles of language]

hangs on. It is not our *story* therefore that must be told. It is the other story that

cannot not be. it is the nostory not told that *cannot* be. the untellable story none

tells, for as Paul Celan writes: "No one bears witness for the witness" (104-105).

That is, none enunciates, emaciates, is pronounced dead, then buried in

language—as "dead" language or culture—understood as anonymous, anomalous.

Buried in the Word, still breathing though silent. The screams of silenced peoples

(silenced by the *silent*), people forced into silence, people murdered en mass

without a chance to survive—thrown off ships, or starved; slaughtered in oceans,

forests, fields, factories—the screams which end in utter silence rising up from the

catastrophic fallout of the very contemporary air we breathe.

> The real story of the Nazi-constructed hell is desperately needed for the future, not only
> because these facts have changed and poisoned the very air we breathe, not only because

they now inhabit our dreams at night and permeate our thoughts during the day—but also because they have become the basic experience and the basic misery of our times. Only from this foundation, on which a new knowledge of man will rest, can our new insights, our new memories, our new deeds, take their point of departure."
—Hannah Arendt[12]

Ma zeh shir? Avir. (what's a poem? Air.)
—Avot Yeshurun[13]

III. Trilingual Hierarchies and Translingual Subversions

Historically, the ever moving Jewish civilization of diaspora Ashkenaz operated in three internal primary languages: Yiddish (low, vernacular German/Hebrew/Slavic fusion), Hebrew (high, Biblical), and Aramaic (highest, Talmudic).[14] Externally, in almost all cases, these Jewish people also spoke the multiple and ever-changing languages of their neighbors, as they were forced over the centuries, east, then west, and back again.[15] The internal trilingualism of Ashkenazic diasporic life contained a projected hierarchy in traditional Ashkenazi diasporic cultures, with Yiddish as the base, lowly language of the everyday, Hebrew as the holy "middle way" and Aramaic, the language of Yeshiva study, the highest form of literacy. Yiddish was treated—for many centuries, since its debated origins around the turn of the first millennia in the Rhineland, until modern and even

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[12] 1994a: 200.

[13] From an unpublished fragment found in Yeshurun's papers; used here with the permission of Helit Yeshurun.

[14] Aramaic, the language of the Talmud, and Hebrew the language of the Bible, made up the dual languages of the holy sources, and Yiddish was understood as a secondary and translational language in these terms, *ivri-taytsh* (trans-Hebrew), as it was sometimes called, within this traditional Ashkenazic Jewish trilingualism.

[15] Such Ashkenazic Jewish expulsions include: the first expulsion from Upper Bavaria in 1276; from Naples, Italy in 1288; from England in 1290; from Bern, Switzerland in 1392; from Upper Bavaria again in 1442; from Passau, Bavaria in 1478; from Ravenna, Italy in 1492; from Nuremberg, Bavaria in 1499; from Naples again in 1510; from Regensberg, Bavaria in 1519; from all Bavaria in 1551; from the papal states (except Rome and Ancona) in 1569; among many others spanning into the twentieth-century and culminating in Hitler's "Final Solution."

contemporary times—as a primitive language, a mish-mosh pidgin of German and

Hebrew, a servile and dark language, a feminine language, sick language.[16] The

primitivist-sexist-racist stigmatizations of Yiddish from its earliest days could certainly

fill the contents of an entire book, and indeed, Dovid Katz's *Yiddish and Power* addresses

this issue at length. Yet, as Jerome Rothenberg famously suggests at the start of the first

edition of his *Technicians of the Sacred*, as far as ethnopoetics is concerned, "primitive

means complex" (xxi). And this is of course entirely true in the case of Yiddish as well,

which is, I should probably say, Rothenberg's own *mame loshn* (mother-tongue) and an

important conceptual precedent for the development of his ethnopoetics in particular.

"Internal Ashkenazic Jewish trilingualism," writes Katz

> can be interpreted as a progression of sociolinguistic prestige that starts from Yiddish and
> progresses upward through Hebrew and then to Aramaic. That is certainly true, but it's only part
> of the story. Because Yiddish was obviously also the spoken language and the usual sole thinking
> language of the most erudite master of Talmud or Kabbalah — though his variety of Yiddish
> would have been (and in traditional societies, still is) very different; laced, for example with much
> higher concentration and frequency of lexical items deriving from the Semitic (Hebrew and
> Aramaic) component within Yiddish, and a concomitantly lower percentage of Germanically
> derived words.[17]

There are remarkable resonances between Yiddish as *mame loshn* and African-

(American and Caribbean) vernaculars; a good part of this dissertation examines

questions of diasporic translingual relations across languages and geographies, in relation

to assumed structures of racial-sexual-cultural passing, as case studies for a reimagined

future of diasporic language praxes.

What Katz has so rightly termed "Yiddish antisemitism—or what I often think of

simply as the historical hatred of Yiddish, as scapegoat language and perpetual other-

---

[16] In Chapter 2, Section 1, I return this question of hatred of Yiddish as it relates to Sander Gilman's notion
of "Jewish self-hatred" and Daniel Boyarin's sense of a double marginal condition of subjectivity.
[17] Katz 19.

tongue excised from the mother/lover—frames a great deal of discourse around Yiddish language and culture. Indeed, still today, for example, while I was studying Jewish History at the University of Oxford, I met a number of young professors who spoke of Yiddish as a "primitive" German, or else as a folksy nostalgic language of the Jewish kitchen. Of course, there have been great strides taken in Yiddish studies to convince the Academy of Yiddish's legitimacy, but the overarching popular mythology has infiltrated the universities as much as anywhere, and you would be surprised at how many PhDs I have met who were convinced that Yiddish was a dead or at least dying language.
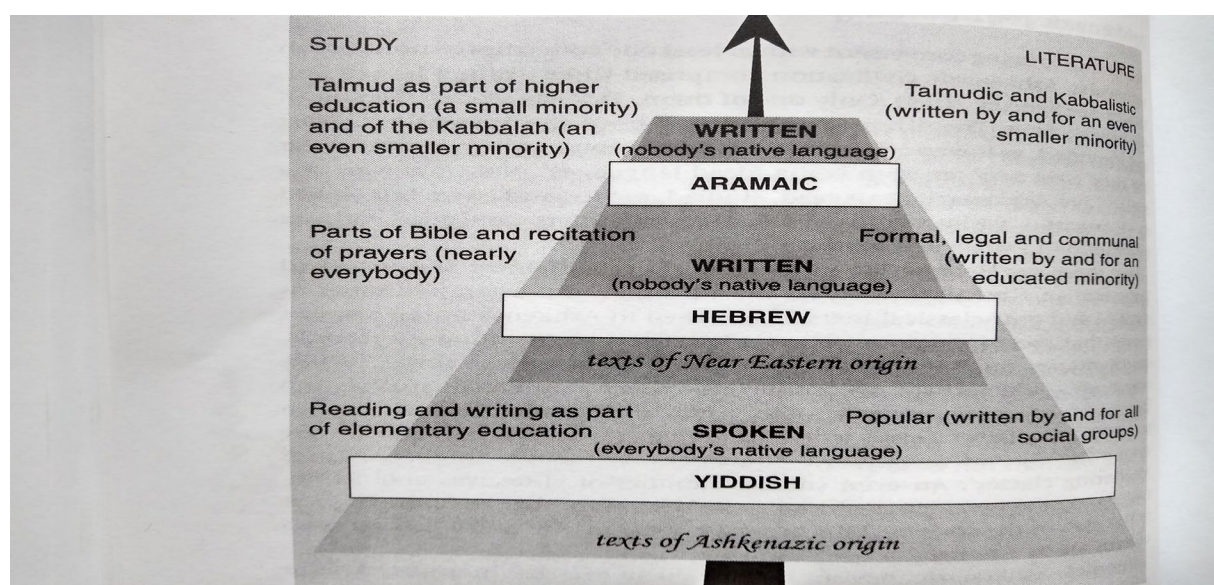
Figure 2: Three Jewish languages in Ashkenaz

Here is the popular mythology as I understand it: *Yiddish was a pidgin of European Jews, and recalls a nostalgia for the old world of Jewish Europe, which was destroyed in the Holocaust.* Now there are, of course, various variations on the myth; many ultra-Orthodox, in fact, believe that *Yiddish became tainted by secular Jewishness during Jewish Enlightenment, and that the Holocaust was a punishment for this impurity, and*

cleansed Yiddish of a secular majority, leaving it to the pious and religious to use within

the traditional holy trilingual structure.[18] The common person today, and non-ultra

Orthodox Jews, especially, I should say, simply thinks that *Yiddish died in the Holocaust*

with the Jews themselves, that it is no longer relevant to our lives except as a token of the

past, or as symbol for the "vale of tears."[19]

Yet these mythologies mystify the powerful sparks of modern and contemporary

Yiddish and do not take into account the fact that Yiddish was and has always been a

language of translation and adaptation, and that therefore it could not and would not die,

but was forced to adapt in many different directions at once. The hatred became too

much, the threat too great. And so Yiddish was buried in the floorboards, in the walls, in

the empty casks of other languages.[20]

The dark irony of the modern mystification of Yiddish is that it is, historically, the

internal trilingual hierarchy itself, which propagates a hatred of Yiddish most fiercely,

since it exploits Yiddish as "coattail," or worse, "foot stool" of Hebrew and Aramaic.[21] In

the twentieth century, however, hatred of Yiddish and hatred of Yiddish-speaking

peoples reached its peak; as the Nazis were building their death factories across Europe,

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[18] I experienced the power of this mythology first-hand during a brief stint I spent writing for the ultra-Orthodox newspaper *Ha-modia*. The editor of the English edition refused to publish my feature on Yiddish history in the United States, because she claimed I did not address the issue of Yiddish being used as a "weapon against Torah" by the "enemies of Torah Judaism"—radical secular Yiddish writers and artists.

[19] A term taken from the sixteenth-century Jewish-Italian chronicler, Joseph Ha-Cohen; thinking here specifically of Salo Baron's critique of the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history" in his *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*.

[20] The "Paper Brigade" of Nazi-Occupied Vilne presents a material historical manifestation of this poetic idea; this was a group of Jewish residents of the Vilne Ghetto—led by the Yiddish poets Abraham Sustkever and Shmerke Kaczerginski—who smuggled a cache of Yiddish cultural objects from the YIVO (the Yiddish Scientific Institute) in order to save them from Nazi biblioclasm.

[21] Thinking here specifically of I.L. Peretz's short story "*Sholem Bayis*" (Domestic Harmony): "If the husband sits on a chair in the Garden of Eden, his wife is his footstool." Translation is mine.

in the United States the English-only movement was on the rise and Jewish immigrant

children were being abused in primary schools on the Lower East Side on a daily basis

for speaking with an accent, or worse, uttering a Yiddish word.[22] In Mandate Palestine—

and later, Israel—gang-style groups arose around a commitment to repressing and

suppressing Yiddish language and culture. A gang calling themselves *Gdud meginei ha-safa* (Battalion of the Defenders of the Language) used tactics of intimidation and even

physical violence to disrupt readings, performances and cultural events taking place in

Israel, their motto: "Jew, speak Hebrew." All this was done in the name of patriotism,

mind you, in order to strengthen the Hebraist cultural, political and linguistic

revolution.[23] And it would seem that it was the Israeli Ministry of Education itself that

propagated the myth that Yiddish was a dead tongue, which had gone "with the sheep to

their slaughter."[24]

Split between English and Hebrew ideological exclusions, and the impossibility

of a European "originlessness," radical Yiddish in the twentieth-century realizes the full

power of its historical powerlessness, and avers the "split" by innovating its various

forms. Thus we find a network of radical practitioners who engage with Yiddish as an

expanded conceptual mode, inscribing/transcribing imagined diasporic afterlives as a

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[22] The permission for such aggressive tactics came from the highest offices of the American government; in 1907, for example, President Theodore Roosevelt writes: We have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house." (554).

[23] See, for example, Harshav 1993: 152.

[24] A phrase deriving from Isaiah 53:7, which grew into a gruesome cliché in Israeli culture about the Yiddish speaking "old country" Jews of Europe; the predominant ideology of hatred and othering embodied by this cliché infected the national pedagogy, which, in turn, identified Hebrew with armed-resistance in the Holocaust, and Yiddish with passive submission; in a Zionist history book from early-statehood then we find that the Hebrew *will* to fight back during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was not merely heroic but also "compensated for the humiliating surrender of those led to the death camps" who went "as sheep to the slaughter" (Porat 622).

poetics, in wide translingual spirals outward. Again, translation here is key, and most importantly, the Yiddish translational concept of *fartaytshn un farbesern* (translating and making better), in which translation necessitates adaptation.[25] We find in this sense a network of practitioners making poetry from the "skins" of Jewish assimilation, from the untranslatable, unadaptable bits, which don't fit, and recall at all times their Yiddishness.

Yiddish is a language then that carries its mixed and mixing origins on its back, and it is a language that makes space for this mixture—rather than expelling the foreign, it accepts the stranger in its midst. Where Hebrew dismisses the gentile, Yiddish faces and even speaks to and through the goy. Where English demands a false purity, Yiddish celebrates and sanctifies the impure. The stakes here are too high simply to rebuild the mythology anew; instead we must outline a modernist poetics for the living ghost of Yiddish's projected death.

IV. Theoretical and Poetic Precedents: Forms and Contexts

This dissertation navigates the tenuous terrains of Yiddish's projected death, in the form of a translingual poetic double exposures—that is, the language that was prematurely pronounced dead transposed or thrown into relief upon the language of the living. I have learned of and from this terrain in great part by reading and translating the translingual Yiddish modernist Mikhl Likht, whose long poem *Processions* serves as one of the first sites of expanded-Yiddish praxis in the twentieth-century. Likht was a poet who wrote in

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[25] A phrase that first came into use in the nineteenth-century as a subtitle to Yiddish translations of Shakespeare. This concept becomes a key poetic mode in in expanded-Yiddish, where adaptation precedes the need for origin.

many languages over the course of his life, and also all at once, and found the possibility to bend, break and eventually *re-fuse* all of his languages into a highly miscegenated Yiddish. Yet the language Likht wrote in was not the language of the Yiddish writers and readers of his time, who were giving up Yiddish at every turn; no, in the face of the projected death of his artifice, Likht shored a new language, not from the ruins of the ancients, but from the projected ruins of the Yiddish tongue itself. Likht, we might say, imagined a world in which Yiddish could not and would not die, and wrote from and for that world—our world. He is not a writer of his time, but a writer of ours; he was not "in advance" but rather advancing *toward*, while most retreated from, while the masses gave up Yiddish for other tongues.

The term "Home Tongue Earthquake" I take from the final stanza of Avot Yeshurun's late-long-poem, "*Ha-bayit*" (The house), as an assertion of the seismic split which Yiddish attempts to reconcile in its powerlessness: the cracks in language within which Yiddish operates, as Pierre Joris writes with regard to his "nomad poetics," between the mother and the absent (m) of the other.[26] The *mame loshn* (mother-tongue) of Yiddish becomes in these terms a mode of generative tectonic slippage between the plates of native and alien relations, which shakes the house of language to its core. By "Radical Afterlives" I mean to suggest that radical Yiddish modernism, in particular, was pushed prematurely into a real but also imagined death; but the immense energy of transnational Yiddish experimentalism in the twentieth-century did not merely fizzle out into the catastrophic ether of post-*khurbn* nationalism. This radical seismic and poetic

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[26] See Joris's "The Case of the Missing M" in *A Nomad Poetics* (63-72).

energy, I argue, continued to shift the discourse of language and culture across the world, until today. Recognizing the extreme stakes of this projected death, however—first in the context of Anglo-white passing, then in the context of the Nazi *khurbn*, and finally in the context of the Hebraist Zionist revolution—Jewish language artists found ways to translate their radical Yiddish impulses into other linguistic forms, though still, in most cases, bearing the trace of their Yiddish in one way or another, if you know where to look. This expanded-Yiddish poetics moves outside Yiddish language proper into/onto other languages, which do indeed, in most cases today have both "an army and a navy."[27] These writers, however, reject the terms of absolute assimilation in every case—and this I would say, becomes the wandering trace of *yidishkayt* (yiddishness or Jewishness) in English, Hebrew, German, and any language. The sign of the wandering, which is in its most elemental sense, the trace of perpetual difference, between the native and the alien, the trace of Ashkenazic diasporic life and the radical poetics and aesthetics of its powerlessness.

Yiddishland, as I have already established, is a term that early-Yiddish modernists themselves developed in order to describe an extranational language terrain, which was, by most accounts, destroyed in the mid-twentieth century. Although some very good scholarship has come out in the last ten years around the question of what actually happened to Yiddishland in the twentieth-century and after—including Merle Bachman's

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[27] The earliest known published source of this phrase comes from the Yiddish philologist Max Weinreich's article "*Der YIVO un di problemen fun undzer tsayt*" (The YIVO and the problems of our time), first presented as a speech on January 5th, 1945 at the annual YIVO conference in New York; writes Weinreich: "*a shprakh is a dialekt mit an armei un a flot*" (A language is a dialect with an army and a navy). Weinreich uses the term as an expression of Yiddish precarity, not only in terms of linguistics, but also with reference to broader notions of diasporic "*yidishkayt.*"

Recovering Yiddishland: Threshold Moments in American Literature and Jeffrey Shandler's *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture*—the present study presents a unique lens into the translational and poetic porousness of Yiddishland, which, I argue, is the key to both its explicit and implicit persistence in global literature.

Merle Bachman's *Recovering Yiddishland*: *Threshold Moments in American Literature* (2008), sets the stage in many ways for my research, in its examination of the "threshold" relationship that Jewish immigrant writers had with Yiddish and American culture in New York in the first quarter of the twentieth-century. Bachman's compelling reading of Likht, in her chapter on "Modernist Visions," as well as her subsequent translation of his "Procession: III," served as my earliest introduction to Likht's work, and remains today, as far as I know, the only serious scholarly treatment of Likht that exists, outside the present work. Bachman also takes a highly personal approach to her research, presenting groundbreaking scholarship interlaced with practices of translation and a radical contemporary poetics of her own.

I find Jeffrey Shandler's discussion of the translational roots of Yiddish in his *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (2006)*,* extremely useful, as well. Shandler's work traces the transformation of Yiddish since the Holocaust, mapping its shift as a vernacular for millions of Jews, to what Shandler calls a "postvernacular language" of diverse and expanding symbolic capability. Yet, I don't think Shandler goes quite far enough in thinking through the radical implications of this translational dynamic within a post-Yiddishland (post)modernist avant-garde landscape. My dissertation posits then that Yiddishland did not truly disappear, was never fully

killed, nor assimilated, but, in fact, translated and adapted itself into the radical literary praxes of variegated tongues.

It is worthwhile here, I think, to discuss the non-normative form of this dissertation, which is a piece of speculative poetics, performing a mongrel and highly miscegenated scholarly approach, a necessity, I believe, in dealing with the radical translingual materials at hand. My form and performativity address the question of how to respond to an anti-absorptive, resistant language-art in a mode that does this language-art justice. Such a response demands poetic and aesthetic oscillations, ebbs and flows, between poetry and prose, historiography and theory, sources and translations—juxtapositions, which seek not to blur the borders between genres, but to draw our attention to these borders, as junctions prematurely foreclosed. In this sense, I take powerful precedent, as much from poet-scholars like David Antin, in his *Radical Coherency: Selected Essays on Art and Literature, 1966-2005*, or Pierre Joris in his *A Nomad Poetics,* as I do from the deformative prose praxes of critics such as Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann in their "Deformance and Interpretation." If, as the poet Robert Creeley, once suggested, "form is never more than an extension of content," I present this dissertation as an extension of my ongoing translation and transplantation of expanded-Yiddish, through and into the American scene.

Pierre Joris's *A Nomad Poetics* is an especially important precedent to this work both formally and conceptually, since Joris's ability to implant his writing with the very nomadic traces it describes—to write *toward*, rather than *about*—presents a necessary aesthetic/poetic permission for my own "diasporics" of expanded-Yiddish. Writes Joris:

> We will write in foreign languages, (real or made-up ones) in order to come to the realization that all languages are foreign. And those that are not are uninteresting in their self-reflecting egoism. All live languages are creolized by what Édouard Glissant has called the chaos world. The first need thus is to have done with the prison-house of the mother tongue, i.e., why should one have to write in the mummy/daddy language why should that oedipal choice be the only possible or legitimate one, why should it not be my own choice, that moment when it is our body/mind that speaks and not that of our progenitors. The mother tongue will become the lover's tongue, the other's tongue.[28]

Rather than assimilate into standard English prose, the works of writers who spent their entire lives resisting this very logic of discursive assimilation, I torque the frame of the standard academic essay, in order to let other forms of meaning-making in; in this sense these essays signal toward an older sense of the word in French, as *attempts* at radical poetic aesthetic and discursive interventions into twentieth and twenty-first century literary histories and canons.

V. Reconstellating Yiddishland[29]

> Jewishness is constitutively "quaked" (forked, bent, rifted) and the great historical lie is the mono narrative.
> —Stephen Ross[30]

The writings translated and collected in this dissertation cast into relief a radical section of Jewish Ashkenazi diasporic modernism, which arose in eastern Europe in the late-nineteenth century, migrating west, as far as the Americas, and east, as far as Ottoman and Mandate Palestine (later Israel/Palestine) during the span of the twentieth century. Although the writers and writings presented in this work traverse numerous geographies, across more than a hundred years, each corresponds across a common diasporic Jewish

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[28] 2003: 6.

[29] I use the term "reconstellate" here to mean *re-gather* or *re-group* the disparate translational remains of Yiddishland's terrain.

[30] From a private correspondence on Jan 8th, 2016; used with permission of the author.

languagescape. Yiddish functions, in these terms, as a powerful interlocutor language, rather than a "native" one in these pages; and indeed, the writings constelled in the following work extend by their very fusion and dialect/ic existence, across expansive translingual tracts.

For the Jewish diasporic Ashkenazi modernists, language functioned primarily in the plural—not potheoretically, as say for Pound's pancultural multilingual English from the ancients—but by basic (and urgent) sociolinguistic need, shaped by the day-to-day realities of diasporic life. Neither were these artists necessarily "global" in any contemporary multinational sense; rather, we might consider their work to enact a non-national or even anti-national politics—rejecting the very categories of national(ist) affiliation, by resisting the national tongue. Against, and in the face of political monolingual ideologies—so often enforced in the twentieth-century nation-state by psychological and physical abuse—these writers and artists cultivated a radical Jewish diasporic rhizome on the threshold, between the cracks of the official state-sanctioned culture.

This imaginary territory spans a vast Jewish aesthetic and prosthetic language space—though, notably, one does not need to identify as a Jew to cohabit it, but merely to cleave to Yiddish. [31] Hovering in place over the non-existent national (home)land— spanning several continents—specifically and particularly addressed to the displaced, who cling to the diasporic tongue, without an "army and navy."

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[31] Take for example, the great Yiddish artist Marek Szwarc (1892-1958) who converted to Catholicism in 1919; or the great Yiddishist Bundist Rhetorician Vladimir Medem (1879-1923) who was raised as a Lutheran.

Yiddishland arises in Eastern Europe in the early-twentieth century as a conceptual frame for and by a specifically Jewish Ashkenazic diasporic civilization in the midst of seismic change. Responding on one side to the new possibilities of Jewish secularization as it spread across Europe following the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) and, on the other, to powerful religious counter-Enlightenment forces, especially Hasidism, Jewish writers and artists began to build semi-autonomous imagined Yiddish territories, burrowed beneath the state.[32]

The advent of modern literary Yiddish is often attributed to the didactic Hebrew prose writer turned Yiddish novelist, Sholem-Yankev Abramovitsh (1835-1917), later known by the pseudonym Mendele Moykher Sforim (Mendele the Bookseller, after his primary protagonist), and to his two most significant successors, Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinowitz; 1859-1916), and Y.L. Peretz (1851-1915). Sholem Aleichem was the first to conceive of (or invent, as it were) a modern Yiddish literary tradition as such, when he declared Abramovitsh the "Grandfather" of Yiddish literature in the dedication to his first novel; and it was Peretz who famously proclaimed Yiddish "a national language of the Jewish people" in 1908 at the first international Yiddish language conference in Czernowitz.[33] These three writers are perhaps the best known early pioneers of a highly potent, if highly compressed, non-national modern Yiddish literary

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[32] "Haskalah" (Jewish Enlightenment) was a Jewish intellectual movement that spread from western to central to Eastern Europe over the course of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. "Hasidism" is a populist Jewish spiritual revival movement that arose in western Ukraine during the eighteenth-century.

[33] There was, in fact, no proper Yiddish literary tradition to speak of in the nineteenth-century, since Yiddish had historically been a Jewish vernacular and not a literary language; Abramovitsh was less than a generation older than Shalom Aleichem and he did not particularly appreciate being deemed "the grandfather" of Yiddish literature. The Czernowitz conference, which was held in Czernowitz, Bukowina, was an international conference on Yiddish language and its role within modern Jewish life and culture.

culture, which flourished for roughly eighty years, from the mid-1860s to the mid-1940s. Although none of these writers ever used the term "Yiddishland," I understand their work to make up a powerful foundation for the concept as it would be employed and understood by twentieth-century Yiddish modernists.

The most prolific spread of Yiddish across the globe begins in one sense with the enactment of the discriminatory May Laws (Temporary Regulations Regarding the Jews) by Tsar Alexander III, on May 15, 1882. These intensely regressive laws, coupled with the ongoing poverty and fierce violence that Jews faced on a day-to-day basis in the Russian Empire, spurred a wave of Jewish mass migration away from the Pale (and later, other regions of eastern Europe) to western Europe and Ottoman Palestine, as well as overseas to the Americas, and above all, to the United States. Yiddish language—which had been the common vernacular of virtually all Ashkenazi Jews within an internal trilingualism for more than half a millennium—now became a powerful vehicle for a modern, soon to be modern*ist,* Jewish literature and culture on the move.[34]

Between the 1880s and 1920s, over two-million Yiddish speaking/reading/writing Ashkenazi Jews came from the Russian Pale of Settlement, as well as Poland, Austria-Hungary and Romania, among other parts of eastern Europe, to the United States. Yiddish newspapers, presses, and publishing houses were established by Jewish immigrants throughout the country, with New York's Lower East Side as the densest hub of American Yiddish culture.[35]

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[34] See David Fishman's "The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture: An Overview" (3-17).
[35] See Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's "Yiddish Poetry in America" (27-44).

At least three discrete, though deeply connected and successive Yiddish literary "schools" appear in the first quarter of the twentieth century in New York. The first, who were active from the mid-1890s until the early-1900s, called themselves "*Di svetshop poetn*" (The Sweatshop Poets) and were populists committed to revolutionary social and political change for the working Jewish masses in the sweatshops of New York.[36] The second, who were active from 1907 until around 1917, called themselves *Di yunge* (The Young Ones), after a literary journal they briefly published by the same name; these writers—who were greatly influenced by Heine, German impressionism, and the Russian symbolists, among others—turned away from the sociopolitical concerns of their immediate New York-school predecessors, championing instead more romantic notions of lyric beauty, subjectivity and free expression in their work.[37] The third and most self-consciously modernist camp of New York-school Yiddish emerged in 1919 under the name "*Introspectivism*" or "*In Zikh*" (In Oneself), for short; the "*Inzikhists*" (Introspectivists) understood themselves to be a part of a distinctly American Yiddish literary avant-garde, within a wider international modernist arena, publishing a manifesto as the introduction to their first collective work. They called for a casting off of European Yiddish literary history, while simultaneously turning away from the romantic aesthetics

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[36] Including Morris Rosenfeld (1962-1923), Morris Winchevsky (1856-1932), Dovid Edelshtat (1866-1892) and Yoysef Bovshover (1873-1915). See Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's "The Major Trends" (32-3)

[37] Including Mani Leib (1883-1953), H. Leivik (1888-1962), Moyshe Leib Halpern (1886-1932), Dovid Ignatoff (1885-1954) and Yitzkhak Raboy (1882-1944). See Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's "The Major Trends" (33-34).

of their American Yiddish forebears, *Di yunge*, in favor of a more "kaleidoscopic"

refraction of the outer world via the prism of the self (*zikh*).[38]

Although New York during the interwar years was an extremely influential center

for modern Yiddish literature and culture, including the high modernism of the

Introspectivist writers, who we will come back to; back across the Atlantic—in the newly

formed republics of Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, and especially Poland—Yiddish

modernism was thriving as well. This was in large part due to the Jewish Labor Bund,

which had aligned itself with Yiddish as the political language of Diaspora Nationalism,

helping to establish Yiddish school systems from kindergarten to university level, as well

as to support Yiddish publishing networks across Europe, and beyond.[39] In Warsaw and

Vilna, Brest, Grodno, Pinsk, and even Moscow (in the early years of the Soviet Union),

as well as smaller centers of Yiddish in western Europe—London, Paris, Berlin and

Vienna, among others—groups of radical writers and artists were producing, publishing

and exhibiting self-consciously modernist work around the shared language-culture of

Yiddish. In each locale (and between each practitioner) the approach to modernism

differed, in relation, most often, to the modernist impulses of the surrounding language-

cultures, as well as, in certain cases, to the language-cultures left behind in migration. Yet

the constant variable between these Jewish diasporic modernists was the Yiddish

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[38] Including Yankev Glatshteyn (1896-1971), Aron Glanz-Leyeles (1889-1966), Nahum Borekh Minkov (1893-1958), and Celia Dropkin (1887-1956). See Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's "The Major Trends" (34).
[39] See, for example, David Fishman's "The Bunds Contribution" in *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (46-48).

language, and the belief that Yiddish was, in fact, the *ideal* language-culture in which a

Jewish modernism might germinate, since it's poetic and aesthetic sense had been born in

and of the pangs of Jewish modernity.[40]

 As early as the early-1930s, however, Yiddish modernist culture worldwide began

to wane. In 1924, the Johnson-Reed act was enacted in the United States, ending a forty-

year wave of Jewish immigration from eastern Europe, and subsequently siphoning off

the Yiddish American modernist writers from new immigrant audiences. And though the

Soviet Union had initially been supportive of Yiddish—making it a government

sponsored language and literature, and financing Yiddish schools, books, magazines and

newspapers—by the late 1920s it began regulating and eventually censoring Yiddish

writing. In the 1930s, Stalinist orders closed most Yiddish institutions in the USSR, and

by 1937 Yiddish modernist writers, artists and intellectuals in the Soviet Union were

being arrested, and later, executed.[41]

 On the eve of WWII there were approximately 13 million Yiddish speakers

across the globe. That number was cut in half during the Nazi Holocaust. Following the

war, the Stalinist repressions in the USSR and the Hebraist language campaigns against

Yiddish in Mandate Palestine and early Israel, as well as large-scale pressures of

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[40] Some of the most important (and also most well-known) Yiddish (literary) artists of these years include Abraham Sutskever (1913-2010), Moyshe Kulbak (1896-1937) and Chaim Grade (1910-1982) from Vilne; Peretz Markish (1895-1952), Dovid Hofshteyn (1889-1952) and Leib Kvitko (1890-1952) from Kiev; Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896-1981), Kadya Molodowsky (1894-1975), Itsik Manger (1901-1969) Melekh Ravitch (1893-1976) and I.J. Singer (1893-1944) from Warsaw, with Rokhl Korn publishing remotely from the nearby city of Przemysl; as well as Moyshe Broderzon (1890-1956) and Dvoyre Fogel (1902-1942), along with the visual artists Yankel Adler (1895-1949) and Marek Szwark (1892-1958) from Lodz, among many others.

[41] The Stalinist campaign against Yiddish culture culminated on August 12th, 1952 with the "Night of the Murdered Poets," in which thirteen Soviet Jews—among them five Yiddish poets—were executed in one night by the Stalinist regime.

language assimilation around the world, eroded the global Yiddish speaking/ reading/ writing demographic, and all but put an end to the far-reaching potentials of radical Yiddish modernism proper. And Yiddish itself was proclaimed dead by the masses, after centuries of projected sickness, though it never truly "died" at all.[42]

A contemporary praxis is thus necessary, I believe, in order to imagine various and variegated radical speculative futurities of Yiddish—as fusion-language and fusion-culture—the hidden pathways of that Ashkenazi mixed tongue so prematurely proclaimed dead in the twentieth-century. And yet it never died, never was *dead*, in any sense, though so many millions who spoke it were murdered; but we know that after the *khurbn* there were still at least a million Yiddish speakers in the world; and the number now rises every year, as the Yiddish-speaking Hasidic families in Brooklyn and Bnei Brak continue to procreate at prolific rates.[43] Yet the pronouncement of the death of Yiddish echoes throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—a silent scream from the depths of "the narrows." It has been my fate, my blessing and my curse, to have have begun to listen to it, and to hear it now in myself, in my own translingual praxis.[44]

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[42] See Benjamin Harshav's "The End of Language" (1990: 187-194).
[43] *Khurbn:* Yiddish, meaning catastrophe. Refers specifically in the twentieth-century context to the Nazi Holocaust.
[44] "From the narrows" I take from Avot Yeshurun's adaptation of Psalm 118:5 in his poem, "*Siftah*": "from the narrows I called out a poem." Translation is mine.

CHAPTER 1, SECTION 1:
Translation: Mikhl Likht, Every New Poet: Proem"[45]
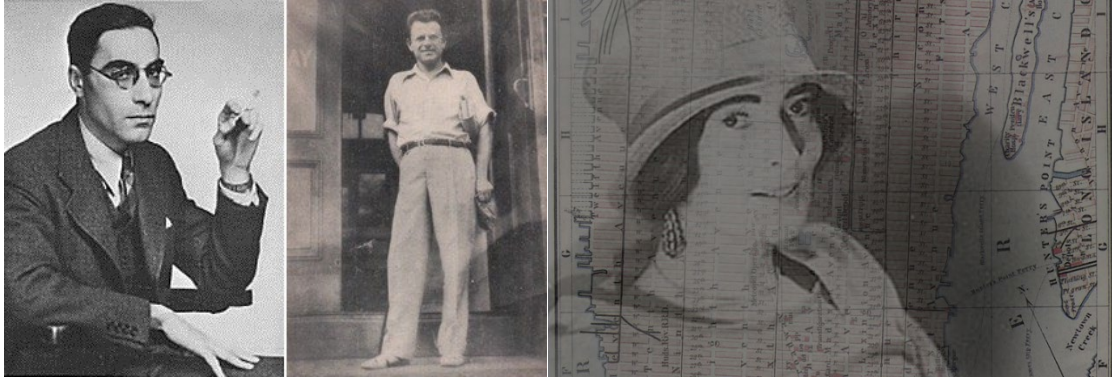
Figures 3-5: Left to right: Louis Zukofsky, Mikhl Likht, Mina Loy.

My luck: I want to find the sublime, stately, sober words and fasten them to my own, imagined, rapt ones -- maybe I will successfully reflect life -- Jewish life,[46] in

particular:
although art has nothing to do with life, against all anachronisms, not respecting Shakespeare's pathetic and bathetic Burshteinisms[47] (by my worthy friends the stamps "talent" and "graphomania" lie half-dusty in little boxes). -- Already from the rips in the web, the contradictions. The first bite, hard to swallow, are the imagined words. Against, they stand -- (with golden *ateyros*[48] and kosherly braided *tsitses*[49]) in old silk

taleysim[50],
wrapped in *retsues*, *shulkhn-orekh'd* [51], *zoyer'd* [52] with *oylem-habe*[53] purposes, the dictionary words. They *shokl*[54] themselves methodically in alphabetically sorted rows over our head-hair like fruit-trees, ripe.

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[45] Translation is Stephen Ross's and mine.

[46] "*Yiddish lebn*" can mean both "Jewish" and "Yiddish" life, and Likht is playing with the ambiguity.

[47] Pesach Burstein (1896 - 1986) - Jewish-American comedian, singer, songwriter, and director of Yiddish Vaudeville Theater.

[48] Yiddish (from Hebrew): pl. "crown."

[49] Yiddish (from Hebrew): "knotted ritual fringes worn by observant Jews."

[50] Yiddish (from Hebrew): pl. "Jewish prayer shawl."

[51] Neologism using the name of the Jewish legal code book, *Shulkhan Arukh.*

[52] Neologism using the name of the mystical Hebrew text, *Zohar*; puns on the Yiddish word for "sour." (*zoyer*).

[53] Yiddish (from Hebrew): "the world to come."

[54] Yiddish: "to shake or tremble," used to describe the traditional Jewish prayer motion.

And I want to be fashioned after nature and create the regimentation of language that would make a new order in human knowledge. How, heaven forbid, is an apple more poetic, though not more meaningful, when rhymed with a *krepl*[55] than that which doesn't rhyme in sound but is only formed in the *nepl*[56] of characteristic order? And how much sin against words that, graphologically, contradict themselves, though they are wholly and thoroughly philological?

"Flesh and stone and gold and fine buildings" are more the motif of enthusiastic growth in human language than sun and moon and stars. A friend, a versifier. A reader of mine (fictive, of course) reads my stuff. I have the last word -- so he assumes: written, he believes, it is lost. He does not know that after publication, black on white, of my own words, the imaginary ones, they haze the native-words away from the places, the highly-esteemed ones, and set up, in a certain sense, in lines (according to human knowledge) they begin to shoot with cannons and artillery from their contents.

My friend, a reader etc., stands from afar and takes great pleasure: his words, the stately, the sublime ones, accompany, run my gauntlet, whip their skin off with an *al-khet*[57] lash. The critique, he says choking himself on rivalrous gall, the critique is an expert, a cousin to that *which is*. The critique, another friend continues with his kind disposition, is a corrupted "that" which doesn't know who pulled the wool over its eyes (the friend -- one who is idiosyncratic, neologistic, wakes up panting).

But, Jewish life? The content of art? Huh? Listen to this curiosity: *once was a people, a land. . .* but is there any value in repeating that which history translated into *goles*,[58] into need, into shameful shudders, into poisonous complaints, into begged bread? *"Nu, there once was in my land, the green land in the hilly corner of the Galilee. . . with thirty silver pieces."*[59] The three-pointed void locks in the story from "alef" to "sof." [60] *"The burglary that already happened"*: Is this the good news that cleaves the people to their children? -- *"I was sent to you by God"*: Does this mean, in a sense, a truth exchanged through a lie? A bare truth through a gilded lie?

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[55] Yiddish: "dumpling"; also, an interlingual pun on "crap."
[56] Yiddish: "fog," continuing the rhyme.
[57] "On the transgression…" is a prayer of confession recited on Yom Kippur while beating one's chest.
[58] Yiddish (from Hebrew) meaning "diaspora."
[59] The amount Judas was paid to betray Jesus, Matthew 27:3-10.
[60] "From A to Z."

Art, says my friend (the former, not the latter) art must defeat one's own words the thoughtful ones.[61] Art, he says, is the *"I won't be late in life,"* but while here I won't play with it, only grab at life's coat-tails,[62] to provoke, to rouse, so it can, for the sake of tone, bend Newton's established laws (with "established" ones my friend makes an error!); Zeno will philosophize out the truths that I desire: my spirit will befriend all those deep, sharp, sublime, and stately words. --

So be it! I will barely succeed at reflecting life -- the *thom[63]* of Jewish life in particular. Art has absolutely nothing to do with life: life means the table on which I am writing now; the fly that buzzes around my head incessantly; through the little window inward-shining sun (fuller than two others**,** according to the tradition of sublime, stately word-mixtures: she really *sets*?[64] what does she see? I doubt it); a man from the other side[65] of the pane who rolls by in an imagined thing; the dust; the trees that *shokl* like a person praying peacefully -- the trees in the church square.

But none of this is true.
No table, sun, person, fly, trees, machinery, no church square; but yes, there exist words stately that lull my friend, -- words sublime way before the music of *"The Burglary that Happened,"* or "*...was once [a] land -- in the Galilee...with thirty silver pieces,"* long long before "*flesh and stone and gold and fine buildings*". Thus my luck improves: I found my way to the dictionary and fastened the sublime, stately words together with my own imagined ones, taboo.
And my friend, a reader etc, will link them hereafter[66] with favorable or unfavorable critique, and consider them in relation to -- with love or gall -- life and art.

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[61] *Farklerte* (slant rhymes with *verter*): perhaps a reference to Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht" (1899). This sentence is notably sing-songy.

[62] *"...raysn s'lebn bay di poles,"* punning on the English "riding by the coat-tails."

[63] Yiddish (from Hebrew): "depths, abyss, chasm"--a word with strong biblical resonances (cf. Genesis I:1)

[64] *Set/Zet*: Likht is punning on the Yiddish for both "full" and "to see," in addition to the English "setting sun."

[65] Double entendre on "the world to come."

[66] "*Lehabe*": a reference to "*oylem hobe,*" the world to come in rabbinic Judaism.

CHAPTER 1, SECTION 2:
Double Exposures: A Test of Jewish American Modernist Poetics

Figure 6: Evelyn Likht's cover art for Mikhl Likht's *Protsesiyes* (Processions)

I. Pound / Zuk / Likht

In a letter to Louis Zukofsky dated Dec. 9, 1929, Ezra Pound writes the following:

Dear Z.

      The Reznikof [*sic*] prose very good as far as I've got at breakfast. BUTT if the blighter has a press and can set type why the hell is it up to me to find a printer fer all the etc…….
      / / / /
Capital in idea that next wave of literature is jewish (obviously) Bloom casting shadow before, prophetic Jim. [Joyce] etc.

also lack of prose in German due to all idiomatic energy being drawn into yiddish.

(not concerned with the "truth" of these suggestions but only with the dynamic.)

      yrs
      EP

Idiotic if there is a press in N.Y/ and a man who can set (hence supervise) that there shdnt. be a movement, a centre. (anybody can compose type; technique is in working press, paper etc.[67]

I've always been fascinated by Pound's evaluation of Charles Reznikoff's "Early History of a Seamstress"—the "prose" he refers to here—which Zukofsky had sent him on Nov. 22, 1929, along with *Rashi, Coral, Meriwether* (plays), "Editing and Glosses" (poems), and some other poems from *5 Groups of Verse* (Ahearn 27). Reznikoff composed "Early History of a Seamstress" by translating and adapting (*fartaytshn un farbesrn*) his mother's Yiddish memoirs into English, and later published the work in two versions— first in *By the Waters of Manhattan (1929),* and then in *Family Chronicle* (1963). Pound's appraisal, it's fair to say, is not *quite* praise. Although he admits Reznikoff's prose is "very good, as far as [he's] got at breakfast," he continues with a backhanded, slightly paranoid antisemitism—typical in his letters to Zukofsky— rating Reznikoff's influence on modernism with an ugly pun on Jewish Capital, and crediting Joyce—a member of Pound's own first-wave modernist hierarchy—with the aesthetic prescience of representing "the modern urban everyman as a Jew" (Fredman 127). What follows is a remarkably dark and ignorant sociolinguistic lament—even then—for the "idiomatic energy" of German prose, which, according to Pound, was being siphoned off by the Jewish "dialect." It is telling, of course (though not surprising) that Pound capitalizes the "G" in German, while leaving the "j" in Jewish and the "y" in Yiddish lowercase; the

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[67] Ahearn 26-7.

"yiddish" Pound is referring to is not the modern Yiddish language, literature, nor culture, but an exotic imagined pidgin—a relic of "medieval Jewish usurers."[68]

This clumsy, and by today's standards, almost grotesque, misreading of Reznikoff—whose name Pound notably misspells—shows just how out of touch Pound was with the American scene by 1929. The Johnson-Reed Act had been in effect for almost six years; and Yiddish language and culture in the U.S. was quite literally being eliminated by severe immigration quotas. Additionally, the hardline monolingual purism that pervaded the U.S. during these years, which employed psychological and physical tactics of violence to enforce standard English, made it wholly undesirable for parents to teach their children the language of the old country; and so, by-and-large, they didn't. Reznikoff, in fact, recalls his mother beating his father over the head with a Yiddish newspaper, scolding him for bringing such trash into the house; this was the last time, Reznikoff tells us, he ever saw a Yiddish newspaper in his parents' home.[69] But was Pound aware (and would he have cared?) that Yiddish was on a fast and steady decline in the United States; and that the next generation—many of whom were first-generation Americans like Reznikoff and Zukofsky—were, in fact, writing on the threshold of the ruins?

Despite Pound's anti-Semitic discomfort at the thought of the "next wave of literature" in the U.S. being Jewish (his own suggestion), he clearly recognizes the potent avant-garde energy moving through Reznikoff's and Zukofsky's praxes, around which he

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[68] Pound's conception of such Jewishness is most evident in his poem "Der Yiddisher Charleston Band," which, significantly and sadly, Zukofsky loved and published in his Objectivist issue of Poetry; Reznikoff, ironically enough, wrote a serious book of history on *The Jews of Charleston* (1950).

[69] See Stephen Fredman's "Call him Charles" in *A Menorah for Athena: Charles Reznikoff and the Dilemmas of Objectivist Poetry* (13-48).

believes "a movement, a centre," might be built. In focusing his attention on "Early

History of a Seamstress"—a text that reveals its translational Yiddish roots, rather than

concealing them—Pound identifies a key "dynamic" at play in the Objectivist trend: a

flickering specter of Yiddish language, which he imagines, it seems, as the primitive

"Jewish" idiom translated into modernist English. And the grand irony, of course, is that

on the other side of the Yiddish-English language divide in the U.S., the last bastions of

the expansive American Yiddish literary culture that had once been, were radical

modernists themselves, avant-garde Jewish artists who were reading and translating

Pound and his first-wave contemporaries into Yiddish.

Indeed, almost exactly one year earlier, Louis Zukofsky had written to William

Carlos Williams to inform him of this "effort": "And you've been not traduced but

translated," writes Zukofsky,

> as something is just translated on a level or even to heaven — you, and Ezra, and Cummings, and Eliot, and Wallace Stevens, and Mina Loy (all these names don't mean the same thing to me of course but I'm trying to outline the effort for you). And the fellow who did it — one Licht [*sic*] — asked me to ask you to forgive him for not asking your permission! If a half dozen read his work and understand it as Yiddish I'll be — but it is Yiddish and literature to boot![70]

Zukofsky's account here flips Pound's reading of the American scene on its head. As

Yiddish literacy was dissolving in the United States ("if half a dozen read his work and

understand it as Yiddish I'll be"), one deeply committed Yiddish modernist practitioner

was translating the English modernists into Yiddish, against all odds. This "one Licht"

was in fact Mikhl Likht (1893-1953)—or Max Licht Sonin, as he was known in

English—a prolific and infamously difficult Yiddish writer and translator who had

arrived at Ellis Island in 1913 from Bilizerke, Ukraine via London. Likht was part of a

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[70] Ahearn 2003: 22.

small but very generative group of American modernist Yiddish poets who had, in fact, established "a centre" in 1919—though certainly not what Pound had imagined—publishing a Yiddish manifesto on the "Introspectivism movement" *or* "*In Zikh*" (in oneself) for short.

And Likht was the most zealous and committed Yiddish (American) modernist of them all: "an individualistic rebel" who knowingly wrote himself out of literary history as a conceptual achievement: "the most forgotten" of Yiddish writers (Glatshteyn 1953; Bachman 188). For in the years that followed, as the Yiddish readership in the United States all but dried-up, and the conditions for Jews in Europe grew worse and worse, the *Introspectivist* writers turned their attention by-and-large away from the United States and back to Europe, in the name of Jewish solidarity, gave up on the innovative poetic agenda of the vanguard and adopted instead a more traditional (populist) Yiddish lyric.

Likht, however, never gave up on his radical modernism, even as most of his contemporaries gave up on him, finally dismissing his work as *umfarshtandlekh* (incomprehensible). "My poem does not seek anyone" he writes in his essay, "*Entfer tsu a kritiker*" (Response to a Critic), "only myself alone, and when it returns to me, it's not functioning as a boomerang, but as a fulfillment. I don't seek the reader, because he is not there" (Likht 1956a: 122; Bachman 198). Likht followed the "incomprehensibility" of his Yiddish poetics into complete obscurity, creeping "all the deeper into the extremes of modernism" without looking back (Fershleyser 102). He left behind him an extremely difficult modernist *oeuvre* that throws into relief a specter of Yiddish in the Poundian century, the likes of which Pound himself could hardly fathom.

II. Who Was Mikhl Likht?

<div align="center">

He called over his shoulder
Standing on one foot
The footless cobbler
A fruitless farmer
Of course he says
The invisibility of it all
The sheer disappearing act
That lingers
When the darkness surrounds
Says the Bedouin Sheikh
Disguised
As Robert Creeley—
No Jerry, it was Jerry
Who stood up
On his chair
All those years ago
And sung: you see
You see Diane!
I dreamt it
I dreamt it
before I even knew
who he was.[71]

</div>

> Out of the welter of this unclassifiable speech, while professors at Harvard and Oxford labored to preserve "God's English," the muse of modern literature arose, and her tongue had been loosened in the melting pot.
> —Mina Loy[72]

The poet Mikhl Likht was born Yekhiel Beri Yoysef Likht on July 30th, 1893 in the village of Plisk, Kremenetz district, Volhynia Gobernia.[73] When he was three years old, Likht was sent to live with his wealthy uncle and aunt, Yeshia Yudel and Chana Peseh Vaynshteyn, in the larger neighboring shtetl of Bilizerke. He attended cheder and later, yeshiva, while simultaneously studying general Russian (Orthodox) sources with private tutors hired by the Vaynshteyns. At seventeen, Likht enrolled in the Bilizerke Russian

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[71] Poem is mine.

[72] From "Modern Poetry" (1996: 159).

[73] Today Ukraine. Likht's family was made up, according to Likht's autobiographical account, of homesteaders, village Jews, taverners, grain and wood handlers, tenant farmers and poor leasees.

Orthodox teachers seminary—an oddity for a Jew of his upbringing in V.G. in those days—but dropped out after only seven months to travel to the United States, (via London) with his mother and seven siblings.

We know very little about Likht's life or writing in Bilizerke, and almost nothing at all about his sojourn in England. What we do know about Likht's time before the United States appears only in flickering glimpses, sparks of luminescence burning in vast forests of opacity. One thing we know, for example, by way of poet's lore, is that Likht began writing Russian poetry in Bilizerke at the age of eight, and that by the age of fourteen he had already sent a poem to Count Tolstoy, who apparently responded favorably to the young Bilizerke Jew. We know also that Likht was a prodigy polymath musician, and that he taught himself to play cello with great skill and art after having taken only one lesson. And finally, we know that Likht and his family had not in fact planned to remain in the US when they came in 1913. Rather, they had had it in mind to return to Europe, where Likht had planned to continue his studies in Vienna. But the onset of WWI changed everything. Europe was no longer a place to which the Likhts could so easily return; the family immigrated, and Likht remained in the United States— between the Bronx and the Catskills—until his death in 1953.

Upon arriving in the United States—a twenty-year old Russian-Jewish poet— Likht turned quickly to Anglo-American English poetry and poetics, reading voraciously, and publishing his own English poems and translations (from Russian French and Yiddish) in the best little magazines of the time, including *The Smart Set, The Pagan, Playboy* and *The Pagan Anthology*, among others, under the pseudonym, Max Licht

Sonin.[74] Likht's early English poetry is dense with imitation, sharp parodic multi-textures

which vibrate outward in infinite translational gestures. Take for example an English

poem of his in *The Pagan* from 1918, dedicated in its title "To the Author of Lustra:"

> Ezra,
> You idle roamer in classical banalities
> And sometimes magical clown
> Of no court:
> Your Leaves—the noontide of my visions;
> Your Book—a Sesame of my reveries.
> I close a pact with you as you
> Did once with the Good Grey Poet,
> For, I too, am mischievously common (22).

Likht responds directly to Pound's "A Pact" here, rotating his poem around Pound's own

poem, in which Pound addresses Whitman as his "Pig Headed Father" declaring that he is

ready to "make friends." However, the final line of Likht's verse, "For I too, am

mischievously common," turns the poem on its edge, suggesting that the pact in fact

might consist of the young Likht standing up to the slightly elder Pound, not quite like

the young Pound turning his nose down at the good grey Whitman. The sheer gall of this

poem, its radical address, is made all the more chutzpadik by the fact that ten years later

Likht published an expanded-Yiddish version of it under the title "E.P"[75]:

> A
> Ezra :
> Calm to no avail in classic banalities
> & offtimes magic clown
> not from breeding:
> Your pages — my out-dated prophecies.
> Your book — sesame for my psychic aventuras.
> I make a pact with you as you
> made a pact with the "Good Grey Poet" :

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[74] He also published in the Anglo-American Socialist magazine *The New York Call* under the pseudonym, Max Lichtsonin.

[75] Likht writes the title of this poem in English alphabetization, though the poem itself is in Yiddish-Hebrew-Aramaic alphabet. Translation is mine.

> I am also a condemned scrap of ordinary dust.
>
> B
> The sun from far-off Idaho
> rises colored ribbons
> from his troubadour-tree.
> The arrogant eyes
> shine on once-sophistic(ated)
> thru gold-dust from a medieval chorale
> with forced shimmer
> from Rihaku's Cathay-creations;
> once —
> with Haman's poisonous blood-evil sickness.
> Idaho-cool air in Arnaut Daniel's rich
> breath subtle with the pronunciation of "La Dolche
>   Lingua Toscana."
> Like everything that's more sinister than intimate.
> The rhetoric of Camões is his Shatzer's rhetoric.
> In Dante-Odess, with a well-wrought burden,
>   Immersed
> an alchemist, a romancer.
> (Naturally, the past attracts in dust piles:
> Today is the day dressed in a well known sun-mode:
> All-known is the address where one receives one's sun-dress).
> It conjured the imported Spanish pavane
> & paired incomprehensible oppositions
> with Haman's public blood-evil (1957: 106).

It is impossible to know in what language this work was "originally" written, and what

exactly transpired that inspired the second section (it is also impossible to determine

when the second section was written, and whether or not it presents an addition or an

elision to the first version). Likht, it seems, understood about Pound then, what it took

their mutual friend, Louis Zukofsky, at least ten more years to learn—namely that

Pound's exoticist pancultural poetics was not to be trusted. Yet, Likht published the

longer more radical censure of Pound only in Yiddish—a language that Zukofsky could

read, and which Pound could not. We must ask ourselves, I think, for whom this longer

version would have been written, in fact, if not for Zukofsky? For what Yiddish writer in

1929 was interested in a censure of Pound? The answer I think is none. By 1929, the Yiddish literary scene in New York had turned its focus far away from Anglo- high modernist "self-exiles" and this poem would have been (and it seems in fact *was*) more or less irrelevant to them. No—this is something else, a call across the language-poetics aisle, from Yiddish (in)to English. I would go so far to suggest that the longer version of this poem (the Yiddish version) was in fact written specifically to a young Zukofsky as a warning of Pound's diabolic "public blood-evil;" though whether Zukofsky read it or not is an entirely different question. And of course, Likht was absolutely right, though Zukofsky would never admit it.

In 1917 Likht published his first two Yiddish poems in Z. Vaynper's *Der onheyb* (The Start) and from that time forward turned the primary focus of his poetic energy (in)to Yiddish, retreating from the English scene, it seems, in order to become unseen. He became an active member of the New York Yiddish modernist nexus—and especially around the In Zikh group— publishing his highly difficult "incomprehensible" verse in Yiddish modernist "little magazines" and books. And though Likht was working in the hidden language of Yiddish, a language his Anglo contemporaries could not and would not read, he began translating their work *into* Yiddish, including the poetry and poetics of Mina Loy, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, E.E. Cummings, Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams, among many others. He also continued to correspond across the language fence, writing letters to the very Anglo-American writers he was translating into Yiddish, as he translated them. So for example we find the following reply to Likht from T.S. Eliot, dated March 11th, 1927:

My dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 12th ultimo, I have not the slightest objection to you translating into Yiddish and printing in your periodical the two essays from "The Sacred Wood" which you mention. In giving my permission it is understood first that this permission is for these two essays only, and for publication in the periodical in question only, and also that you have the full permission of Alfred A. Knopf Incorporated. I shall expect no remuneration.
I shall be very glad to see a copy of the magazine in which the essays appear although, I regret that I shall be unable to read it.
With all the best wishes for your venture,
    T.S. Eliot[76]

Eliot's tone is so dryly condescending, and his comment of regret at not being able to read Yiddish comes as an almost ironic note. Since we know what Eliot does not—that Likht *chooses to write and translate into Yiddish*, *rather* than in Eliot's English. And indeed the translations came out—T.S. Eliot in Yiddish—and Eliot of course could not read them. But Louis Zukofsky could.

We find that Zukofsky was standing just on the other side of the language fence, and in some cases even acting as a cipher between Likht and his Anglo-American contemporaries. In the letter cited earlier, for example, Zukofsky brings the news of Yiddish modernism from Likht to Williams, translating Likht (for they must have spoken in Yiddish...) into English, as Likht translates Williams into Yiddish. This first introduction stuck, and thus we find four years later, a highly idiosyncratic English letter from Williams to Likht, which suggests among other things that perhaps, after all, Williams and Likht truly knew each other and were perhaps even friends:

My dear Mr. Licht:
  Tell those children it gave me a thrill when I saw how they had dressed up my poem. Good for them! And good for me too! And what a surprise, besides. It's what I call a real expression of affection: the tree, the kids and myself all doing ring-a-round-a-rosy. What a pity it is that there isn't time for more of that - everywhere. But not many people are gifted for it after they have passed the terrifically ancient age of, say, fourteen. After that we grow stiff, like the tree in the poem, and only an occasionally loose branch from our shoulders touches the hats of the

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[76] From Likht's unpublished letters, held at the YIVO Institute for Jewish research. Used with permission of Likht's estate.

passerby. We get snooty and stingy and unfriendly - until some kid teaches us humanity and - manners. Anyhow, here's to Elpheatia Klappas, her touch is very firm: and S.R. who sees things big; and Dorothy De Vincentiis, who sees many things at once; and Yolanda Pigmetaro, who must be very small for her tree is very big; and Elise Picciano who likes her flowers as big as plates; and Dorothy Casale who must certainly part her hair in the middle; and Ida F. who has very sharp eyes - give them my best, most far away love - which is all for them and not one bit of it for me - and may they make many more pictures!

     Sincerely yours,

William Carlos Williams

P.S. I'm hanging the pictures on my wall in a studio I have up in my attic. They look fine![77]

III. Reconsidering the Dynamics of Jewish American Modernism

Nothing (in the texture of the occasion) could have had a sharper interest than this demonstration that since, what we most pretend to do with them is thoroughly to school them, the schooling, by our system, cannot begin too soon or pervade them too much. Were they going to rise to it, or rather to fall to it—to *our* instinct, as distinguished from their own, for picturing life?
         —Henry James[78]

America is not a belief, nor a style, not a conception, nor a way in which to think. American is a "thing"…We make that thing that's called America, we are that thing. Without us she is—nothing.
         —N.B. Minkov, "*Nyu Yorker briv*[79]

In the introduction to *Not One of Them in Place: Modern Poetry and Jewish American Identity* (2001), Norman Finkelstein asks: "[w]hat happens to 'Jewishness'—which is to say, what constitutes an expression of Jewish identity—when placed in the context of American poetry?" His book addresses this question in terms of sociohistorical and textual conditions (2) in order to present a tradition for Jewish American poetry. Though compelling in many respects, Finkelstein's schema offers an imprecise reading of the relationship between the works of Yiddish and English Jewish American writers within the framework of what he terms a "Jewish American modernism" (36). This chapter

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[77] From Likht's unpublished letters, held at the YIVO Institute for Jewish research; used here with permission of Likht's estate.
[78] 191.
[79] 1922: 77. Translation is mine.

provides a more textured reading of certain key Jewish American modernist texts in an effort to recover and (re)contextualize the relationship between Yiddish and English American modernisms.

The second chapter of *Not One of Them in Place*, titled "Jewish American Modernism and the Problem of Identity: With Special Reference to the Work of Louis Zukofsky," endeavors to link the modernist poetic "goals" (35) of the Yiddish language *Inzikh* (Introspectivist) poets with those of the English language Objectivists, based on a mutual "ideological concern over Jewish American identity" (35-36). Finkelstein's analysis does not, however, attend to the changes that occurred within the multilingual profile of Jewish American writers in the first half of the twentieth century. An important split took place among Jewish intellectuals in the United States during this period. While Jewish American immigrant writers continued to write primarily in Yiddish, most first-generation American Jews chose instead to write in English (Harshav 1990: 166). Language choice thus became an explicit marker of the divide between immigrant and first-generation Jewish American literary output.[80] In this sense, Finkelstein's interest in the *Inzikhistn* (Introspectivists) and the Objectivists is highly relevant.[81] His emphasis on their common "ideological concern over Jewish American identity," however, elides significant differences in their respective orientations toward this identity. Though the poetics of

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[80] It is important to note that certain immigrant and American-born Jewish writers in the United States chose to write in Hebrew. The question of Jewish American identity in their work is beyond the scope of this article. For an in-depth discussion on American Hebrew literature see Michael Weingrad's *American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States* and Alan Mintz's *Sanctuary in the Wilderness: A Critical Introduction to American Hebrew Poetry.*

[81] The core members of both of these groups were American Jews; yet, while the Yiddish writers of *Inzikh* were, without exception, immigrant-Americans, the English writers of the Objectivist group were predominantly American-born.

Jewish American writers from the Yiddish and English modernist camps correspond in their mutual need to navigate Jewishness within an Anglo-American literary milieu, the divergent language choices of Yiddish and English Jewish American modernist writers reflect different affiliations with both Jewish and Anglo-American culture and afford distinct poetic approaches for negotiating Jewish American identity.

Finkelstein's valuable, though, at times, inaccurate analysis is indicative of a larger scholarly trend. Although a great deal of research has been done on the emergence of twentieth-century Jewish American literature, few scholars have delved deeply enough into the relationship between contemporaneous Jewish American English and Yiddish literary works to ask elemental questions about the role language choice plays within a multilingual Jewish American literary sphere. Lewis Fried's *Handbook of American-Jewish Literature* (1986) approaches the question of English and Yiddish literary dynamics in the United States but avoids any serious comparative analyses of English and Yiddish American literary works. Many scholars of American modernist literature make passing reference to American Yiddish modernism in their work on Jewish American English writers, but they rarely say more than a few words about the movement(s). Likewise, Yiddish literary scholars often cite Charles Reznikoff and Louis Zukofsky as important examples of the first-generation Jewish American turn from Yiddish, but they rarely ask how the work of these writers spoke to an avant-garde American Yiddish culture. Finkelstein's "Jewish American Modernism and the Problem of Identity" offers a rare and admirable approach to a theory of Jewish American modernism across the English/Yiddish language threshold. Finkelstein makes certain broad generalizations, however, which damage the precision of his analysis. The research and analysis presented here seeks to fill a hole in the field of

Jewish American literary studies and open a critical discussion regarding the impact that language choice had on the poetics of Jewish American modernist writers and their works.

This present research explores the complex multilingual dynamic discussed above with reference to particular works of poetry, translation and literary criticism by the Jewish American English writer Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978) and the Jewish American Yiddish writer Mikhl Likht (1893-1953). Specifically, it traces the poetic systems each writer uses both to resist and acculturate to Anglo-American modernist literary norms within their works. Both writers' poetics represent what Merle Bachman has called "a double exposure"—that is, an "identification with and simultaneous difference from, America" (2008: 210). Yet the terms of this "double exposure" differ drastically in Zukofsky's and Likht's respective works. While Zukofsky writes in the Anglo-American majority language of English, his poetry utilizes Yiddish literary allusions and Jewish Brooklynese speech patterns in a celebration of the foreign sounds, "the very forces" that Anglo-American high-modernism "mourns" in its "overt meaning" (Blau DuPlessis 168). And though Likht writes in the Jewish minority language of Yiddish, his poetry translates and adapts Anglo-American high modernist philosophy in an attempt to establish a radically mixed literary tradition for Jewish American Yiddish. Zukofsky thus resists the very aspects of Anglo-American literary culture that Likht adapts.

I begin by examining Zukofsky's participation in the twentieth-century "debate over mongrelization" (Blau Duplessis 166) in the United States and Great Britain, with close attention to Zukofsky's destabilization of Henry James' *The American Scene,* arguing that James' fear of ethnic and cultural mixing helps shape the radical pluralism of Zukofsky's Jewish American modernist poetics. I then turn to Mikhl Likht's relationship

to Anglo-American modernism as a translator and a critic, and his appropriation of T.S.

Eliot's "historical sense" in the formation of his poetics. Finally, I provide a comparative

close reading of Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The,'" and key sections of Likht's

"Protsetsiye dray" (Procession III) to stage a test dialogue between the two Jewish

American modernist works.

IV. Zukofsky's Relief: Translating the Mongrel Jewish Voice

> 252 And once the Faith's askew
> 253 I might as well look Shagetz just as much as Jew.
> 254 I'll read their Donne as mine,
> 255 And leopard in their spots
> 256 I'll do what says their Coleridge,
> 257 Twist red hot pokers into knots.
> 258 The villainy they teach me I will execute
> 259 And it shall go hard with them,
> 260 For I'll better the instruction,
> 261 Having learned, so to speak, in their colleges.
>   —Louis Zukofsky[82]

Louis Zukofsky was born in New York City in 1904, "the [same] year Henry James

returned to the American scene to look at the Lower East Side" (Zukofsky 1970:13). The

correlation between James's visit to the "dense Yiddish quarter" (James 132), and

Zukofsky's birth, in that very same "tenth ward" neighborhood, crucially situates

Zukofsky as a Jewish American modernist writer. Zukofsky himself notes, in his self-

referential poetic text, *Autobiography,* that the "contingency" of James's visit appeals to

him "as a forecast of the first-generation American infusion into twentieth-century

English literature" (Zukofsky and Zukofsky 13). As a first-generation American Jew

writing in English, "the assimilating child of immigrant orthodox parents" (Scroggins,

1998: 124), Zukofsky found himself estranged from multiple spheres of American

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[82] From "Poem Beginning 'The'" (2011: 17).

culture. He was no longer at home in his family's Yiddish speaking/writing east

European Jewish immigrant community; nor was he accepted into the more elite Jewish

American cultural stratum, the literary "Sanhedrin" (Zukofsky 1987: 32) of the *Menorah*

Journal, which repeatedly refused to publish his work. Likewise, he remained self-

consciously alienated throughout his career from the "extended America dynasty"

(Stanley 27) of the Anglo-American high-modernists, referring at times to New York "as

'Egypt'—a land of Exile" (Scroggins 2007: 12). Zukofsky's poetics are invested in

locating an artistic interstice between these contrasting cultural spheres, a liminal space to

"resist cultural and linguistic assimilation [as much] as a place that marked such

assimilation." His search for this interstice is rendered, in part, in his work, through "a

reaccenting of English," a "performed" (Bernstein 134) mongrel "voice [that] swings to

the triple rhythm of its race, its citizenship and its personality" (Loy 159). Zukofsky

achieves this mongrel voice, in part, by utilizing translations and adaptations of Yiddish

lyric and verse as well as Jewish Brooklynese, "itself a foil for Yiddish dialect"

(Bernstein 135), within his English-language literary work. He infuses into twentieth-

century English letters a "decentering" (Shoemaker 30) of James's American scene, a

mongrel Jewish rendition of "the dense Yiddish quarter" (James 132) performed on the

Anglo-American stage.

Henry James's *The American Scene* (1907) frets the great influx of European

immigrants to Manhattan at the turn of the twentieth century. James's impressions of the

Lower East Side, written under section titles such as "The Obsession of the Alien," "The

Ubiquity of the Alien," and "The Eclipse of Manners," make plain his distress. James

pays special attention to the Jewish immigrants of the "tenth ward," describing his

discomfort at the "great swarming" of "a Jewry that had burst all bounds" (131). He expresses his fear of the Jewish infiltration into Anglo-American culture most forcefully from the "curtained corner of a private box" as he takes in a show at the Bowery Theater. He is nostalgic for the "old Bowery" and a time when "[a]udience and 'production' had been…of the same stripe and the same 'tradition'" and the "ancient 'poetic' had been purely a home-grown thing, nursed in the English intellectual cradle." But now, even from his curtained box seat, he finds himself surrounded by "Hebrew faces and Hebrew names…an Oriental public" (140). This fear of the Jewish corruption of Anglo-American purity was not unique to James. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes, "[M]any saw the new Jewish immigrants as 'our Yiddish conquerors,' and our 'Asiatic invaders,' predicting a society 'plagued'…as a result of this 'alien immigration'" (137, quotes from Holmes 66 and 3). James's iconic portrayal of the conflicts "of race against race immutable" (Pound 1973: 298) in his *American Scene* helped pave the way for the publication of works such as Alfred Schultz's *Race or Mongrel* (1908) and Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916). These texts popularized the idea that "the mixing of ethnic groups produced and promoted 'mongrelization' and degeneracy in the 'race' that counted" (DuPlessis 139), and more specifically, that Jewish mongrelization threatened to destabilize "pure" Anglo-American culture.

The London-born modernist writer Mina Loy (1882-1966)[83] presents an alternative view on "mongrelization" in the United States in her 1925 essay, "Modern Poetry." It is no surprise, she asserts, that "the renaissance of [English] poetry should

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[83] Born Mina Gertrude Löwy to a Christian mother and a Jewish father.

proceed out of America" where the English language has been "enriched and variegated with the grammatical structure and voice-inflection of many races" (158). Loy is optimistic about the artistic potentials of the immigrant idioms "on the baser avenues of Manhattan," and makes a powerful case for the "relationship of expression between the high browest [sic] modern poets and an adolescent Slav [selling] mandarines…in a retail market on First Avenue." They have, she argues, both

> become adapted to a country where the mind has to put on its verbal clothes at a terrific speed if it would speak in time; where no one will listen if you attack him twice with the same missile of argument. And, that ear that has listened to the greatest number of sounds will have the most to choose from when it comes to self-expression, each had been liberally educated in the flexibility of phrases.[84]

Loy's belief that English poetry was being revitalized by American cultural mongrelization, and that the keys to a productive and vigorous modern poetry lay in a diversity of "sounds" and a "flexibility of phrases," was atypical among English-language modernists. "The question of purity or purification of language as a modern marker," writes Blau DuPlessis, "is raised, of course, in both Eliot and Pound. Although variegated and heteroglossic diction is characteristic of their poetry in the twenties, still both insist in their criticism on purifying the language of the tribe—and the tribe is singular" (166). Loy's essay sets the stage for a writer like Zukofsky: not a member of Eliot's and Pound's Anglo-American tribe, but instead, as James would have it, a representative "of the races we have nothing 'in common' with" (James 141). Zukofsky's Jewish mongrelization of Anglo-American literary norms does not "reject the ideology of the mix" as Eliot's and Pound's mongrel "textures and rhetorics" (Blau DuPlessis 172);

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[84] 2006: 159.

rather, it embraces cultural and linguistic hybridity in pursuit of "an acceptable and accepting" (Shoemaker 33) artistic arena for a Jewish American modernist poetry.

Zukofsky's "A Foin Lass Bodders," a translation of Guido Cavalcanti's thirteenth-century poem "Donna mi prega" serves as a potent example of his use of mongrel voice. As Charles Bernstein has noted, this translation "begs performance" (135):

> A foin lass bodders me I gotta tell her
> Of a fact surely, so unrurly, often'
> 'r 't comes 'tcan't soften its proud neck's called love mm…
> Even me brudders dead drunk in dare cellar
> Feel it dough poorly n' yrs/ trurly rough 'n
> His way ain't so tough 'n can't speak from above mm…
> 'n' wid proper rational understandin
> Shtill standin' up on simple demonstration
> My inclination ain't all ways so hearty
> Provin' its boith or the responsible party…[85]

Zukofsky's linguistic technique, "or one might even say shtick" (Bernstein 135), is in direct response to Ezra Pound's earlier translation of the same work. Pound was interested in Cavalcanti as a poet "more modern than Dante" (136) and believed that the poet's legacy was important to the enterprise of his modernism. In contrast to Zukofsky's Cavalcanti, Pound's translation reads:

> Because a lady asks me, I would tell
> Of an affect that comes often and is fell
> And is so overweening; Love by name.
> E'en its deniers can now hear the truth,
> I for the nonce to them that know it call,
> Having no hope at all
> that man who is base in heart
> Can bear his part of wit
> into the light of it,
> And save they know't aright from nature's source…[86]

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[85] Zukofsky 1978: 409.
[86] Pound 1983: 171.

Pound's English translation seems deliberately artificial and romantic. It renovates and simultaneously reinforces "historically mediated standards of high lyric sonorousness" (Bernstein 136). Zukofsky's version of Calvalcanti rejects the standards of Pound's English-language lineage. His translation is rendered through a linguistically subversive "Brooklynese" (135), or what might just as easily be construed as the "fluent East-Side New Yorkese" (James 148), which James fearfully mocks in *The American Scene*. Yiddish sound patterns proliferate in this translation, as Zukofsky alphabetically re-accentuates standards of Anglo-American English pronunciation. Most noticeably, his change of the English digraph "th" (which does not exist in Yiddish) to the double "d" consonant in words such as "brudders" (suggesting the Yiddish *bruder)*, and his inclusion of diphthongs (common to modern Yiddish) in words such as "boith" (suggesting the Yiddish *geboyrn)* represent a deliberate mongrelization of English-language norms. Zukofsky's translation filters the classical verse of Cavalcanti through the "baser avenues of Manhattan" and the "retail market on first avenue" (Loy 159). It confronts and exploits James's unambiguous fear of the corruption of the "ancient 'poetic'" (James 140) by performing the culture of the high Western tradition through the mongrel voice of the "Oriental" Jew.

Zukofsky's "A-4", "the little homage to Yehoash" (Schimmel 562), represents an alternative approach to the mongrel Jewish voice. Zukofsky implants English translations of verse by the Jewish American Yiddish writer Yehoash (1872-1927) into this work, in order to incite a metapoetic discussion around the conflicts of first-generation Jewish American identity. "Deafen us, God, deafen us to their music," he writes,

> Our own children have passed over to the ostracized,
> They assail us—
>   'Religious, snarling monsters'—
> And have mouthed a jargon:
>   "Rain blows, light, on quiet water
>   I watch the rings spread and travel
>   Shimaunu-Sān, Samurai,
>   When will you come home? –
>   Shimaunu-Sān, my clear star…[87]

The term "jargon" here is extracted from its traditional context (as a disparaging term for

Yiddish in the nineteenth-century dispute over Hebrew and Yiddish)[88] and applied to the

question of Jewish mongrelization. As DuPlessis writes, "the issue of "racial mixing" or

mongrelization…had some interesting modulations in certain Jewish and philo-Semitic

hands…Some Jews agreed: assimilation meant the loss of particularism, of

'distinctiveness, separation, noble aloofness,' even the loss of the 'Jewish soul'" (139,

quotations from Blau 5 and 12). The "Orthodox elders" (Scroggins 1998: 125) in "A-4"

bemoan their assimilated "children…passed over to the ostracized" and complain of their

"jargon" as it used in Yehoash's poetry. "Jargon" is thus redefined in these lines as a

Yiddish that has been made "impure" by modern Yiddish poetry's assimilation, through

its inclusion of gentile influences.

Yehoash is a prime candidate for Zukofsky's exposition of this "jargon." He was

the translator of hundreds of works from a variety of languages into Yiddish (Harshav

2006: 79), including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Hiawatha,* which Zukofsky's

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[87] 1993: 13. Lines in quotations are translations from Yehoash; all interlinear spacing and punctuation is as it appears in the original.

[88] See Seth L. Wolitz's "Ashkenaz or the Jewish Cultural Presence in East-Central Europe." *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer. Vol. IV. Amsterdam, Netherlands: J. Benjamins Publishers, 2004. 326-27.

brother, incidentally, prompted him to memorize as a child (Scroggins 2007: 18).[89] The

lines from Yehoash that Zukofsky includes in this section of "A-4" are spoken in "a

Japanese voice" (372), addressing the samurai, "Shimaunu-Sān." Yehoash appears in "A-

4" (as well as in other sections of "A" and in "Poem Beginning 'The,'"), as the original

mongrel Jewish poet, since he is able to admit gentile culture (in this case medieval

Japanese) into Yiddish-language poetry. Zukofsky, however, writes in English, and must

perform his Jewish mongrelization from an opposite end, admitting Jewish culture into

English language and literature. His translation of Yehoash in "A-4," executed with a

"quiet beauty" reminiscent of "the orientalism of Pound's *Cathay"* (Scroggins 373),

functions as literary bridge between Jewish and Anglo-American culture, built out of the

refuse of a shared anxiety over Jewish mongrelization.

Zukofsky's Jewish mongrel voice undermines James's depictions of the Lower

East Side in *The American Scene* by performing James's cultural and ethnic anxieties

within an English literary context. The double exposure of his Jewish American

modernist poetics allows him to acculturate to the exterior forms of Anglo-American high

culture, while simultaneously revolting against its interior ideology.

V. On the Fringes of Yiddish-American Modernism

> Pour in symbolism, impressionism, be complex, be subtle, be daring, take risks, break your
> teeth—whatever you do, it still comes out Yiddish. *Mama Loshen* doesn't produce *Wastelands*.
> —Cynthia Ozick[90]

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[89] In fact, Zukofsky's first exposure to English literature was primarily through Yiddish translation
(Zukofsky and Zukofsky 1).
[90] From "Envy or Yiddish in America" (50).

In his 1958 essay *"Leyendik Mikhl Likhtn"* (Reading Mikhl Likht), the Yiddish writer

and literary critic Emmanuel Fershleyser describes Mikhl Likht as an "individualistic

rebel, creeping all the deeper into the extremes of modernism." His extremism,

Fershleyser argues, stems from his inability, or unwillingness, "to take upon himself the

burden of a Jewish writer" (102). Fershleyser's portrayal of Likht is puzzling; after all,

Likht began his career in the United States as a writer of English poetry, publishing in

small Anglo-American avant-garde magazines and journals such as *Pagan, Playboy* and

The Smart Set, under the pseudonym Max Licht Sonin (Minkov 1957: 13). It was only in

1917 (four years after his arrival in the United States) that Likht published his first two

Yiddish poems in Z. Vaynper's journal *Der onheyb* (The Start) (Bikl 63). Likht's shift

from English to Yiddish language poetry seems, at first glance, to represent a self-

conscious acceptance of the "burdens of a Jewish writer." (For why else would he choose

to write in an explicitly Jewish language?) Upon examining Likht's Yiddish poetry and

literary criticism more closely, however, it becomes clear that Fershleyser's assessment

holds true: Likht's decision to write in Yiddish offers him access to a modernist poetic

that is free (at least in theory) of specifically Jewish concerns. As his colleagues, Yankev

Glatshteyn (1896-1971), Aaron Glanz-Leyeles (1889-1966), and N.B. Minkov (1893-

1958)[91] write in the *Inzikh* (Introspectivist) manifesto of 1919: "We are 'Jewish poets'

simply because we are Jews and write in Yiddish…It is not the poet's task to seek and

show his Jewishness." A great deal of Likht's work is involved in justifying and

defending a Jewish American high modernism that "does not need any particular 'Jewish

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[91] These three writers were also fluent in English and self-consciously chose to write in Yiddish.

themes'" but instead engages with Jewish history and tradition intrinsically, through

Yiddish language "as a poetic instrument" (Harshav and Harshav 780)[92] of literary

modernism. Likht bolsters this position by endorsing the artistic values of the Anglo-

American modernist writer T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), whose poem, *The Waste Land*, he

writes, represents one of the most "successful allusion[s]" in modern poetry to "today's

catastrophe" (Likht 1956a: 81). Eliot's famed essay, "Tradition and the Individual

Talent" (1919), is particularly important to Likht's Jewish American modernist vision.

Likht translated this work in 1927—ushering Eliot's poetics into the world of Yiddish

letters—and it became an important source text for Likht's 1929, *"Fragmentn fun an*

esey" (Fragments of an Essay). [93] Likht appropriates Eliot's conception of poetic tradition

and innovation in "*Fragmentn*" in order to devise a historical narrative for Yiddish

literature which is compatible with the high modernist needs of *Inzikhism*

(Introspectivism) within the context of contemporary Anglo-American avant-garde

literary culture.

 Inzikhism emerged out of the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1919, when the

Yiddish-American modernist poets Yankev Glatshteyn, Aaron Glanz-Leyeles, and N.B.

Minkov outlined the principles of the movement and published them as the introduction

to an anthology of Yiddish poetry entitled, *In zikh* (In Oneself). This treatise became the

manifesto for Yiddish Introspectivist poetry. The poetic philosophy of the Introspectivist

poets, as expressed in the manifesto and other works, was "based on several antinomies,"

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[92] Translation is Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's.
[93] Likht's Yiddish translation of Eliot's "Tradition" was published in *Undzer bukh* (Our Book) 2.5 (Nov-Dec. 1927), 415-438.

notes Harshav: "introspection—but reflection of the social and political world; individual

poetic language—but expression of 'modern man'…art for art's sake—but art as an

'authentic' expression of 'life' (1990: 183). Most important to this analysis is the way in

which the *Inzikhstn* positioned their work in relation to American and European literary

traditions. They wrote against the romantic "poeticalness" (Harshav 1990: 172) of "The

Young Generation" that had preceded them in the United States,[94] but admitted that "they

were good in their time," and "only because of their work was a further development of

Yiddish poetry possible, of which the Introspectivist trend is an expression" (782,

translation in text). They utterly rejected, however, the notion that their creative

inclinations were connected to an east European Yiddish literary tradition. "The

Inzikhists came, throwing overboard the tradition of Yiddish poetry," writes an

anonymous *Inzikh* affiliate in 1923:

> We simply ignored it. The impulse was a purely poetic one, the same as all poets the world over. Hence the authenticity of the Inzikhist poems from a purely poetical, artistic point of view, but also—and this is inevitable—the impression of foreignness in the eyes of those who regard Yiddish poetry merely as a part of Jewish culture, who are looking for thread weaving, who emphasize, throughout, the word "Jewish."[95]

The question of Jewishness as an implicit, *not* explicit aspect of Yiddish poetry is

paramount to the poetic practice of the *Inzikhistn*. "No matter what a Yiddish poet writes

in Yiddish," reads the manifesto, "it is ipso facto Jewish" (780, translation in text). Their

conceptualization of Jewishness as "a language rather than a mission" (Harshav 1990:

184), frees them from Zukofsky's sense of multi-cultural exclusion, and permits them to

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[94] "The Young Generation," known in Yiddish as "*Di yunge*," was a group of Jewish American Yiddish poets that included Mani Leyb, Zisho Landoy and Anna Margolin, among others. "In some respects," writes Benjamin Harshav, "their poetry was akin to English Edwardian verse or to the general Romantic trend…" (1990: 171). For an in-depth discussion of *"The Young Generation"* see Ruth Wisse's *A Little Love in Big Manhattan: Two Yiddish Poets.*
[95] Translation is Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's (794).

accept and embrace the urban American landscape, "the relation to the big city, the Woolworths [Tower], the Empire States, the total gigantic rhythm of Metropolis New York or the Metropolis Chicago" (Glanz-Leyeles, *In zikh*, October, 1935; qtd. and translated in Harshav 1990: 184), which Zukofsky claims as the very site of his exile. The *Inzikhstn* reconcile the strain between Jewish and American culture in their poetry by articulating a modernist, often urban American culture, in the language of immigrant American Jews. It is important to note that the *Inzikhistn* were by no means the first Jewish American writers to express their experience of America in Yiddish. It was, rather, their ideological stance toward Yiddish language, as the embodiment of their Jewishness, which so distinguishes their representations of Jewish American identity from those of their predecessors.

Likht, who co-edited the Yiddish journal *Logln* with Yankev Glatshteyn from 1921-1922, swiftly became "a sworn Introspectivist" (Fershleyser 103). In many respects he was, in fact, the most committed *Inzikhist* of all, following the path of Yiddish poetry deeper and "deeper into the extremes of modernism" until he became "an intellectual recluse of Yiddish literature…" (102). Following the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, which restricted immigration to the United States and effectively "drained [the Yiddish-speaking enclave] of its intellectual resources" (Harshav 1990: 166), American Yiddish writers, including many *Inzishistn*, began to reach back to the "old country" for historical Jewish subject matter in an effort to appeal to a Yiddish readership in Europe (Wisse 140). Likht spurned this prospect for an audience, arguing that his modernist poetry "seeks no one, only myself alone, and when it returns to me, it does not function as a boomerang, but as an accomplishment" (Likht 1956a: 122).

Likht was wholly committed to creating a translingual bridge between Yiddish

and English literary modernisms. In 1927, he wrote a series of English letters to

prominent English writers (and their publishers) requesting permission to translate their

works into Yiddish. His letter to Gertrude Stein's publisher, George Platt Lynes, Esq., of

As Stable Publications, reads:

> "Unser Buch," the publication I am associated with presently, was ordered by me to be sent to
> you. I hope that its perusal by you through some intelligent Yiddish channels will render a
> satisfactory literary impression of its contents. However, there is a possibility of a new group-
> alignment. The publication that may thus result will probably be of more exclusive nature. For
> years, we have been aiming at a stricter literary and critical vehicle. Once achieved, the work of
> Miss Stein in such a magazine should have even more heightened effect…Description of
> Literature is in the writer's less dense vein. As a Steinite it gave me pleasure to read and re-read it.
> Meseems that your experimental activity with pamphlets of this kind is very laudable. It is hoped
> that you find no discouragement in your enterprise…[96]

There are several striking features to this letter. Firstly, Likht's assumption that Lynes

will have access to "intelligent Yiddish channels" in order to judge the quality of *Undzer*

bukh (Our Book) is extremely telling: the relation he imagines between himself and the

Anglo-American modernists goes two ways. Indeed, he believes Lynes and Stein will be

as interested in the Yiddish avant-garde as he is in the English. Secondly, his remark

regarding the increased exclusivity of *Undzer bukh* reveals a strange sense of pride for

the declining intellectual Yiddish readership in the United States. Likht writes with the

attitude of a proud martyr, reassuring Lynes (and himself) that "a stricter literary and

critical vehicle" is precisely what American Yiddish poetry needs. Finally, Likht's

diction is worth noting. He writes in a strange, outdated English—using terms like

"meseems" and passive constructions such as "was ordered by me"—reminiscent of

Pound's idiom in his translation of "Donna mi prega."[97] He is eager to express a parallel

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[96] Qtd. in Bachman 218-19.
[97] Although, notably, not in his correspondence.

modernist rhetoric, as if to say: *though I choose to write my poetry in Yiddish, I am still an American modernist, through and through.*

In his, *"Fragmentn fun an esey,"* Likht argues that "success must not be credited to the individual artist alone, but [must] also be understood as a contribution to the accumulated product of artistic trials and experiments of preceding generations, and as enduring material" (1956b: 38). This declaration echoes and extends Eliot's standpoint in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." "No poet," writes Eliot, "no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison among the dead" (38). Likht's appropriation of Eliot's philosophy in this essay is highly polemical and has "particular ideological significance" (Krutikov 219). He uses Eliot's notion of "the historical sense" (Eliot 1975: 38) as a platform for his representation of Yiddish literary evolution. He frames his discourse by asking: "What historic route led the sacred Jewish literature to employ her elapsed Hebrew influence together with the rising European [influence], and in what manner did this route crystallize from the Bove-bukh onwards to the literature of the present Jewish generation?" (1956b: 18). Likht's answer is that this crystallization took place alongside and in correspondence with contemporary emergent Christian European literatures, and that it was, in fact, a metaphysical religious experience that united these divergent cultures. His conception of religious experience as the formation of an aesthetic ideal that is "able to respond to impulses that did not usually belong to the sphere of the conscious" (Krutikov 221) relies upon a theory of mixing-languages. His application of "the historical sense" in his analysis of the development of Yiddish literature functions as a

powerful justification for the Jewish American high modernism of *Inzikh*. The

"crystallization" of Yiddish literature is contained in its entirety in the modern Yiddish

language.

Likht's attempt to establish a mixed and mixing tradition for high modernist

Yiddish literature within an American literary milieu eventually drove him into the realm

of utter obscurity. The deeper he "crawled" into his modernism the more scarce his

audience became. Likht's engagement with Eliot's work represents a strange moment in

twentieth-century American literary history, when Yiddish and English strains of

American modernism became intertwined in a translingual dispute about filiation and the

European past.

VI. Close Reading Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'" and Likht's *"Protsesiye dray"*

> A Modernist idiom…became, not an arbitrary overlay upon some purely Jewish consciousness, but rather the most effective means to explore what happened to that consciousness when it was immersed in the acids of American heterogeneity…
> —Burton Hatlen[98]

Zukofsky and Likht arrived at a Jewish American modernist poetics from opposite ends

of the language spectrum. Their respective choices embody a widespread linguistic

fissure which emerged between immigrant and first-generation American Jews during the

first half of the twentieth century. The sociocultural implications of this fissure greatly

influenced both writers and helped shape the poetry they produced. Zukofsky's "Poem

Beginning 'The'" (1926) and Likht's *"Protsesiye dray"* (Procession Three, 1925)[99]

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[98] 150.
[99] The third in Likht's cycle of nine "*Protsesiye*" (Procession) poems.

represent powerful expressions of each writer's stake in the question of what a Jewish American culture should look like, and how the Jewish American writer should function within it. Both poems respond, in many ways, to Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), which, according to subsequent critics, communicated its author's vision of the modern Anglo-American/European cultural condition. Yet, whereas Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'" satirizes Eliot's "master" modernist poem in an attempt to conceal the "fault line for high culture" (Bernstein 134) which this work established, Likht's *"Protsesiye dray"* echoes *The Waste Land's* bereaved tone by mourning the deterioration of a Jewish literary tradition as pure as that of Anglo-American/European literature. Zukofsky's and Likht's Jewish American modernist poetics clash in these two poems over a basic question of opposing linguistic orientations: while Zukofsky's poetics rally for an English language literature inclusive enough to incorporate a Jewish American cultural experience, Likht's poetics insist on a Yiddish language literature exclusive enough to stand on equal footing with Anglo-American high modernism.

Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The,'" which he published at the age of twenty-two in the literary journal, *Exile*, does more than allude to *The Waste Land*—it openly challenges it. As the young poet writes to Pound in 1930: "'The' was a direct reply to *The Waste Land…*intended to tell him why spiritually speaking, a wimpus was still possible and might even bear fruit of another generation" (1987: 76-77). The poem begins its "direct reply" from the dedication: "Because I have had occasion to remember quote, paraphrase, I dedicate this poem to Anyone and Anything I have unjustifiably forgotten. Also to J.S. Bach—309…" (Zukofsky 2011: 8). Yet, as John Tomas notes, "This is a dedication in name only" (43-44); what follows is an assortment of notes to the

intertextual references included in the body of the poem. These notes are eclectic, ranging from "Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*—248" and "Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*—310" to "Modern Advertising—163," "Mussolini—74" and "Myself—130" (Zukofsky 2011: 8). Zukofsky's glosses take a deliberate and aggressive jab at *The Waste Land*. Where Eliot includes footnotes at the end of his poem, which, beyond any rhetorical significance, appear to be functional and sincere, Zukofsky's notes are impractical and absurd: they are ordered alphabetically (not in the order that they appear in the text), and precede the poem itself. DuPlessis notes that this act of inserting "the end beforehand" begins the poem "in a scandalous formal pun on Jewish 'backwardness' (whether the non-acceptance of Jesus as messiah or the insistence upon Moses seeing only the backside of God, Exodus 33:23)" (167).[100] Additionally, Zukofsky's "end beforehand" is entirely nonhierarchical, noting "Henry James—2nd Movement" next to "Title, Jewish Folk Song—191" (2011: 8) in a gesture that overtly undermines Eliot's brand of high literary tradition.[101]

"Poem Beginning 'The'" is written in six movements in the style of a tone poem.[102] The first movement, subtitled "*And out of olde bokes, in good feith,*"[103] surveys the English modernist literary canon with allusions to various works by D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Norman Douglas, and T.S. Eliot, among others. Zukofsky represents these modernist writers as:

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[100] Or else it might suggest a Yiddish book opening backwards in the English poem.
[101] It is also worth noting that Zukofsky numbers all the lines in his poem, suggesting a burlesque imitation of Eliot's style of numbering (every ten lines) in *The Waste Land*.
[102] For more on the specific characteristics of tone poems see Keith T. John's *The Symphonic Poems of Franz Liszt*. Ed. Michael Saffle. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 1997: 1-5.
[103] A reference to the proem of Chaucer's "Parliament of Fowls."

6 Residue of Oedipus-faced wrecks
7 Creating out of the dead, —
…………………………………
10 Books from the stony heart, flames rapping
                        the stone,
11 Residue of self-exiled men
12 By the Tyrrhenian.
13   Paris. [104]

Citing Canto IX of *The Inferno* in line 10, Zukofsky accuses the English modernists of a heresy comparable to that of Dante's heretics, who are "imprisoned in stony sepulchers and subjected to eternal fire" (Tomas 45). Yet the heretical behavior of these "Oedipus-faced wrecks" is less religious than cultural; while Zukofsky struggles to find traction for his Jewish creative output in New York, these English modernists produce "[r]esidue of self-exiled men" from "the Tyrrenian"[105] and "Paris." They have divorced themselves from the world deliberately, a sin Zukofsky can neither comprehend nor forgive. He is particularly critical of Eliot, asking, "And why if the waste land has been explored, travelled over, circumscribed,/ Are there only wrathless skeletons exhumed new planted in its sacred wood…[?]" (Zukofsky 2011: 10). Eliot's quest for a viable Western culture within "the waste land" of modernity has generated nothing more than a collection of recycled relics to be reburied in his "sacred wood." [106] Zukofsky does not deny the existence of a "waste land" in the first movement of "Poem Beginning 'The,'" but, rather, submits that it is the modernists themselves as self-exiles, who have conjured this modern nightmare: "And the dream ending—Dalloway! Dalloway—/ 53 The blind portals opening, and I awoke!"

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[104] 2011: 9. All line numbering and interlinear spacing is as it appears in the original poem.
[105] The setting of Aldous Huxley's *Those Barren Leaves* (1925).
[106] A reference to Eliot's first volume of essays, *The Sacred Wood* (1920), which includes "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

Zukofsky's "exile," in contrast, is imposed from without, allowing him a

perspective on the potential of modern culture that is much clearer than Eliot's and the

other Anglophone modernists. As "…Spinoza grinding lenses, Rabbaisi" (11) Zukofsky

intends to offer a credible alternative to the "Broken Earth-face" (9) of English

modernism in his poem at any cost.[107]

 The five movements that follow take up this cause, facing its consequences head-

on. In the fourth movement Zukofsky brings his revolt to the gates of Columbia

University, his alma mater (Scroggins 2011: 24). "163 Drop in at Askforaclassic, Inc.,"

he writes,

> 164 Get yourself another century
> 165 A little frost before sundown
> 166 It's the times don'chewknow,
> 167 And if you're a Jewish boy, then be your
>   Plato's Philo.
> 168 Engprof, thy lecture were to me
> 169 Like those roast flitches of red boar…[108]

"Askforaclassic, Inc" refers to "the Great Books method" of instruction at Columbia,

which Professor John Erksine had introduced a few years before Zukofsky's arrival at the

university (Ahearn 161). Zukofsky parodies Erksine's method by using low "Modern

Advertising" lingo;[109] yet he clearly feels strongly about the Great Books ideal at

Columbia, which make "a Jewish boy" into "Plato's Philo."[110] The classics of Latin and

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[107] A reference to Baruch Spinoza, later Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677), who was excommunicated from the Amsterdam Jewish community for his views on the authenticity of the Hebrew Bible as divine writ, and made his living grinding lenses (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*); Rabbaisai (*raboysay*): Yiddish (from Hebrew) meaning "Gentlemen" (*Comprehensive Yiddish-English Dictionary*).
[108] 2011: 14-15
[109] Zukofsky's "dedication" note to line 163 reads: "Modern Advertising."
[110] A reference to Philo Judaeus, a first century Alexandrian Jewish Philosopher who was considered a Jewish traitor for attempting to reconcile Judaism and Hellenism (Tomas 54).

Greek antiquity, he suggests, which Erksine adopted as the standard source texts for

Columbia's English Literature program, leave no room for a Jewish American student's

own literary history. The Jewish American student must give up his distinct cultural

narrative, digesting the standardized English literary tradition "[l]ike those roast flitches

of red boar." [111] Zukofsky rebukes Erksine, the Columbia University "Engprof" and his

"Great Books method," equating his literary philosophy with Eliot's: "Professor," he

writes "from the backseats which/ 182 Are no man's land!" (15) The "waste land"—"the

no man's land"—is not something which high Anglo-American culture has discovered,

Zukofsky suggests, but, rather, something it has created.

The final two movements of "Poem Beginning 'The'" provide a glimpse into a

new English literary tradition which is as Jewish as it is American and opposes the

English modernist "waste land" and the Columbia University English literature

classroom. In these movements Zukofsky "sets out to reclaim his distinctively Jewish

Yiddish heritage," writes Tomas. His aim "is to expand Western tradition by opening it to

another type of epic" (54). This is a mongrelized epic—a Jewish adoption of Anglo-

American/European tradition "but with a difference, of mimicry, deformation" (Blau

DuPlessis 171). Zukofsky constructs this mongrel Jewish epic, in part, by embedding

classic Yiddish and classic English literary allusions alongside each other within his

poem. At the start of the fifth movement he writes:

> 186 Speaking about epics, mother,
> 187 How long ago is it since you gathered
>   mushrooms,
> 188 Gathered mushrooms while you mayed.
> ………………………………………......

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[111] "Flitch" is bacon (Blau DuPlessis 169).

190 A stove burns like a full moon in a desert night.
191 Un in hoyze is kalt…[112]

"Gathered mushrooms while you mayed," parodies Robert Herrick's well known,

"Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May," while the Yiddish, "Un in hoyze is kalt" (and in

the house it is cold), alludes to a "Jewish Folk Song,"[113] which Hannah Wirth-Nesher

identifies as Mark Varshavski's (1848-1907) celebrated *"Oyfn pripetshik"* (19).

Zukofsky's English/Yiddish collage technique gives weight to Jewish American cultural

claims by "speaking about epics" which "fall out of the purview of those like Erksine"

(Tomas 55) and Eliot, and opens English literary tradition to a non Anglo-

American/European majority narrative. He lays out the requisites for this new narrative at

the close of the fifth movement. "Assimilation is not hard," he writes:

252 And once the Faith's askew
253 I might as well look Shagetz just as much as Jew.
254 I'll read their Donne as mine,
255 And leopard in their spots
256 I'll do what says their Coleridge,
257 Twist red hot pokers into knots.
258 The villainy they teach me I will execute
259 And it shall go hard with them,
260 For I'll better the instruction,
261 Having learned, so to speak, in their colleges.[114]

Zukofsky speaks through Shakespeare's Shylock here,[115] ("the villainy they teach me I

will execute, / and it shall go hard with them") proposing an act of vengeance against the

Anglo-American cultural institutions that have prompted him to abandon his Jewish

heritage in order to "pass." He has "learned, so to speak, in their colleges," and now

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[112] 2011: 15.
[113] Zukofsky's "dedication" note to line 191 reads: "Title, Jewish Folk Song."
[114] 2011: 17-18.
[115] Zukofsky's "dedication" note to lines 250-265 reads: "*The Merchant of Venice*"

"look[s] Shagetz just as much as Jew;"[116] but, though he has changed his "spots"[117] through assimilation, his Jewish cultural past remains with him. This cultural past provides him an opportunity as an English-language poet "to better the instruction," that is, to plant new literary flowers, mongrel Jewish flowers, in the "long dry…sacred wood" (10).

Zukofsky ends his poem with an English translation of Yehoash's "*Oyf di khurves*" (On the Ruins).[118] This is not, however, a strict translation. As Harold Schimmel writes: "the late nineteenth century formula which appeared on Yiddish translations and adaptations, 'Translated and Made Better'[119] (this even for Shakespeare), is valid for Zukofsky" (561). The most significant change Zukofsky makes to Yehoash's poem is to shift the first person possessive singular ("*mayn"*/"my") to the first person possessive plural ("*undzer"*/ "our"), making "the poem into a triumphant affirmation of the value of his tradition, and Zukofsky into a representative of a people" (Tomas 62). The final lines of "Poem Beginning 'The'" read:

> 315 I have not forgotten you mother—
> 316 It is a lie—Aus meinen grossen leiden mach ich
>   die kleinen lieder,
> 317 Rather they are joy, against nothingness joy—
> 318 By the wrack we shall sing our Sun-song
> 319 Under our feet will crawl
> 320 The shadows of dead worlds,
> 321 We shall open our arms wide,
> 322 Call out of pure might—
> 323 Sun, you great Sun, our Comrade,
> 324 From eternity to eternity we remain true to you
> 325 A myriad years we have been,
> 326 Myriad upon myriad shall be.

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[116] *Shagetz* is Yiddish (from Hebrew) for "a clever roguish, handsome arrogant male non-Jew" (Blau DuPlessis 171).
[117] A reference to Jeremiah 13:23.
[118] Translations of Yehoash's poetry appear in numerous places throughout "Poem Beginning 'The'".
[119] In Yiddish: "*fartaytsht un farbesert."*

327 How wide our arms are,
328 How strong,
329 A myriad of years we have been,
330 Myriad upon myriad shall be.[120]

In opposition to a poetics of suffering (Heine's *grossen leiden*), Zukofsky's Jewish

American poetics are "against nothingness joy"; they "call out of pure might" and "open

arms wide" to pull the Jewish American experience into English. Zukofsky's translation

and adaptation of Yehoash's "ruins" contradicts the "ruins" of Eliot's *The Waste Land,*

which signal a fractured, irreparable past. Zukofsky's "ruins" of the "myriad years" of

history gesture instead to the "[m]yriad upon myriad [that] shall be." "Poem Beginning

'The'" concludes with an optimistic look to the Jewish American future, a future that will

communicate its Jewishness fluently (and fluidly) in English.

*

Likht's *Protsesiye dray*, in contrast, is a poem that rejects the possibilities of a Jewish

American English-language-only literary culture—yet it reads as if Likht "is thinking in

English and writing in Yiddish" (Bachman 189).[121] Its structure, like "Poem Beginning

'The'" follows a musical form, beginning with a Prelude, followed by three sections, A-

B-C (ג–ב–א), followed by an Interlude, another three sections of A-B-C, and two versions

of a Postlude. As Merle Bachman has suggested "the sense of development and

recapitulation [in *"Protsesiye dray"*] is achieved not by progressing from "A" to "B" to

"C" as much as the linkages and echoes *between* the parallel sections" (250, emphasis is

Bachman's). The "A" sections deal with violent representations of an eastern European

past and the "B" sections describe a move away from eastern Europe to New York; the

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[120] 2011: 20. Lines 318-330 are Zukofsky's translation of Yehoash.
[121] Indeed, we might say then of Zukofsky, that he was thinking in Yiddish and writing in English.

"C" sections introduce a poetic subject, a pensive "I" (*ikh)* who reflects on the impossibility of reconciling the fragmented experiences expressed in the "A" and "B" sections. The "Interlude" is the only section of the poem that commits to a narrative, rendering reminiscences of an eastern European childhood; and the "Postludes" recall the eight previous sections. Likht's poem is an extraordinarily difficult text to read and was censured (as was much of his poetry) by many of his Yiddish intellectual contemporaries for its "incomprehensibility" (*umfarshtandlekhkayt*) (194). This "incomprehensibility," is an important feature of Likht's poetics, since it ensures and promotes an American Yiddish literary culture as exclusive and erudite as Eliot's English modernism.

> The poem begins with a declaration of poetic authority:

Whereas a great world willfulness
fences in dismal lives   infringing on their inclinations
in a skeleton of inflexible bars
I hereby give a signal to the Master
the Overseer: 'Stop tormenting!'[122]

The poet/speaker here asserts himself as a force against those who are fenced "in dismal lives infringing on their inclinations." He is positioned "in early morning East of sunrise-willfullness" (line 11) and uses this moment of emergent dawn to break the "skeleton of inflexible bars" and facilitate a consummation: "so a part of my word-chaos couples/ with the clarity of unambiguous meaning// And: the newborn that is maliciously stamped 'hypermodern'/ is yesterday dressed in the present's bonnet…" (lines 12-17). It is worthwhile here to think of Likht's essay *"Fragmentn fun an esey,"* where he describes the "crystallization" of sacred Hebrew and Christian European influences, which

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[122] Lines 1-5. All quotations from *"Protsesiye dray"* refer to Merle Bachman's translation in Bachman 226-247. All interlinear spacing is as it appears in the original.

produced the Yiddish literary mixed form. Likht regards his Yiddish literary expression

as a gemstone, which, since its "crystallization," has progressed upon a mixed and mixing

linguistic track, arriving inevitably at his own translingual high modern(ist) Yiddish. He

consummates his *"Protsesiye dray"* by reminding the reader that this "newborn" Jewish

American literature is not in fact "hypermodern" but steeped in the tradition, of a

mongrel "yesterday," only "dressed in the present's" garb.

     Likht builds on this notion of Yiddish literary impurity throughout *"Protsesiye*

dray" by developing and deconstructing a series of ideal oppositional binaries into poetic

aporias. In her "Approach to 'Procession Three'" Bachman notes "the poem's recurrent

phrases: 'Jew…where are you going/ *goy*…where' (in the first half of the poem); and

'ben Amram the smart one knows and/ does not want to understand it/ ben Yoysef the

simpleton…the innocent wants to…and cannot grasp it' (in the second half)" (252).

These opposing associations engender a tone in *"Protsesiye dray"* that privileges the

particular over the universal, the mixed individual over the pure nation. The interlinear

spacing in Likht's poem adds to this radical tenor. In the first "A" section (to which

Bachman refers) the sixth and seventh stanzas appear as such:

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stretches out hands
gropes in the dark
Jew          goy
Jew          where are you going
goy          where
```
[123]

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[123] Lines 51-55.

The physical shape of Likht's text helps convey the ideolectical underpinnings of his poem. Hands stretch out and "grope in the dark," but even in the light—that is, the exposed materiality of the work—Jew and *goy*[124] remain divided, though side by side.

In the first "C" section of *"Protsesiye dray"* Likht reveals the catalyst which impels the eventual breakdown of the "pure" distinctions in his poem. "My head lies in a caress," he writes,

> not on the *Shekhine's*   but foolish on my beloved's breast
> a *shatnes* pant-belt   no pretty ritual sash
> divides heavenly from earthly…[125]

Rather than lying his head on "the *Shekhine's*"[126] breast here, the poet/speaker foolishly lies his head on his "beloved's breast." The dichotomy between the "heavenly" and the "earthly" functions as a conceit for a broader problematic. The poet/speaker wears "a *shatnes* pant-belt" suggesting a *mixture* between two forbidden substances.[127] "The sense of opposites or opposing forces held in tension," writes Bachman, and the way in which these "opposite or opposing forces" coalesce through the image of a mixed substance that is explicitly proscribed. The second "C" section, brings to light the repercussions of this mixing: "Look through the partition," Likht writes,

> 'that divides us up from them
> 'see how, struck by misfortune
> 'your brothers   my children   beg for aid
> 'from every fool   from every false leader
> 'who has no more than a good word for them
> 'and nearly drinks up the swamp at times…[128]

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[124] "*Goy*" is Yiddish (from the Hebrew for "nation") meaning non-Jew (Bachman 229, fn. 16).
[125] Lines 99-102.
[126] "*Shekhine* is Hebrew/Yiddish, meaning the divine presence or manifestation of God. Generally associated with a female embodiment of God (Bachman 232, fn. 26).
[127] *"Shatnes"* is Hebrew/Yiddish, meaning material made of mixed linen and wool, which Jews are forbidden to wear by Jewish law (Bachman 232, fn. 27).
[128] Lines 250-257.

The partition (*mkhitse*, in Yiddish and Hebrew), which traditionally separates men from woman during prayer services, takes on a radically different significance in this stanza. Likht's partition divides the poet/speaker and his cohort from his "brothers" who, "struck by misfortune…beg for aid" from "fool[s]" and "false leader[s]." It is important to read these lines within the context of the early twentieth-century Jewish American milieu in which Likht found himself. The "brothers" across the "partition" may be interpreted as Jewish Americans who have given up their distinctiveness (embodied by Yiddish language) in the face of sociocultural "misfortune" and "beg for aid" from the "false" (non-Yiddish) American cultural institution.

The mythic/religious quality of the second "C" section of *"Protsesiye dray,"* cited above (which reads as a hallowed lament for the poet/speaker's lost brethren), is constantly at play in Likht's poem. This is true of the image of the *"shatnes* pants-belt" as well. Likht is deeply concerned with questions of Jewish difference and linguistic-cultural creolizing forces in his Yiddish modernist long poem. His Jewish American modernist poetics seeks a turn toward the moment of Yiddish literary crystallization yet to come, a Jewish mongrel literature of equal stature and with an equivalent tradition to the Christian European literature.

The relationship between Likht's *"Protsesiye dray"* and Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'" is radically chiasmic. Although the works converge along the lines of Jewish American modernisms, they simultaneously diverge as a function of Jewish American language choice. Zukofsky is able to construct an alternative epic, as well as an alternative "ruin" for American literature in "Poem Beginning 'The'" by weaving his Jewish/Yiddish cultural heritage into an English reply to Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Likht's

"Protsesiye dray" replies to Eliot's poem in a language that would have been unintelligible to the Anglo-American modernist writer ("although I regret that I shall be unable to read it"); it translates Eliot's purist "catastrophe" into mixed and mixing Jewish American terms, through a Yiddish modernist medium. And while Zukofsky's translation in "Poem Beginning 'The'" of the early Yiddish modernist, Yehoash, rallies for a twentieth-century American literature modern enough to translate radical secular Jewishness into American English—Likht's translation of Eliot attempts to glean the relics of a once mixed Jewish literary tradition from (and for) a rapidly monolingualizing Jewish American intellectual milieu.

CHAPTER 2, SECTION 1:
Goy Israels and the Speckled Pig Cupid:
Translingual Miscegenated Poetics Across Yiddish and English

Figure 7: Marek Szwarc, The Reconciliation[129]

which inheritance has given you a dual urge towards expression which almost since the cradle has
tom you asunder and these opposite urges have been dually completely thwarted by the
exhortations of your opposed parents—
        —Mina Loy[130]

the ink may be false, every word on the paper false
like the holy-true receipt of our genealogical record.
        —Mikhl Likht[131]

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[129] Used with permission of the artist's estate.
[130] Unpublished, from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American
Literature (YCAL), Mina Loy Papers, M SS 6, box 7, folder 188, undated page fragment. (Hereafter cited
as YCAL).
[131] From "Song of my Black Brother" (1957:219). Translation is mine.

I. Crypto-Yiddish Futurities

> In life nothing disappears without a trace.
> —Kuchyran Yuri (95)[132]

In Mikhl Likht's first collection of Yiddish poetry, *Egoman*, there is a poem titled in English alphabetics, "Baedeker," an homage to the great Anglo-Jewish Modernist, Mina Loy (born Mina Gertrude Löwy, 1882-1966). In Likht's papers at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, in the manuscript proofs for *Egoman*, we find this poem obsessed over by the poet, covered in editorial marks as though until the very last minute he had been unsure whether to include it in the collection at all. The rest of the poems in the proofs have one or two markings, while Likht's "Baedeker" is covered from edge to edge with changes, a poem truly in flux—it seems to me, Likht's first.

Here is the poem in my translation from Likht's Yiddish:

Passing-thru Radon, Bizshu County, Georgia,
full of trash, bugs & leaky estates
beautiful jasmine, siringa & calycanthus gardens
we notice the naked coal-people by a dam
playing w quadrate blacksparkling cubes.
We beg them let us play with them,
they reply w suspicious smiles.
Whether from Regina's palm beach décolletage
on her calcimine bossom,
or her Meyer's gloves on my emaciated hands,
& Hannah's lacquered shoes on my long-chapped feet —
they titter & at once ! the lumps
turn nimbler, nimbler
their skin — bent as Grace's sons & daughters.
Regina & I feel suddenly ill-at-ease
we can't stand the smell of our own presence.

Good people! End in Bizshu Country, Georgia,
take w you quadrate blacksparkling cubes,
just leave behind the putzy-clothes, gloves & shoes.

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[132] Translation is Anders Kreuger's.

> Maybe so clever, you'll widen, successful in a way
> to marry w gracious grandkids
> w Grace's sons & daughters children.[133]

This is one of Likht's stranger early works, and I read it as a landmark poem in what I

believe would become a crypto-Yiddish poetics across the works of Likht and Loy. In the

poem, Likht conjures an imagined town in a country it would seem somewhere between

Georgia of the United States, and Georgia of Eurasia. He calls this place Radon, after the

noble gas of decay—almost speculatively fictitious—and places it in the county of

"Bijou," riffing between Anglo, French and Hungarian dialects, and harkening also, of

course, to Loy's mongrel-Jewish inheritance.[134] What is this imagined world that renders

the reader a sudden foreigner (no wonder we have such a hard time recognizing the

place) in *need* of a poetics as guide; this odd place of "trash, bugs & leaky estates" with

"beautiful jasmine, siringa & calycanthus gardens"? The poem itself functions it would

seem as a highly aversive Baedeker to this imagined territory.[135] But what sort of

Baedeker is this? The crux of the poem arrives as the speaker and his companion intersect

with a group of "naked coal-people by a dam," unadorned, "playing with quadrate

blacksparkling cubes" who refuse to let the speaker and his companion play. The scene

seems simultaneously prehistoric and post-apocalyptic, and the sharp gallows humor of

the poem comes in the form of the juxtaposition between the earthly coal-people and the

waspy urbanite Jews. The naked coal-people, perhaps first, or else last humans on earth,

playing with these loose materials of ancient carbon; and the Jews of course have been

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[133] 1957: 50. Translation is mine.

[134] Bijou, meaning a jewel, ornament or trinket in French, Hungarian and old English.

[135] Baedeker; a guidebook, pamphlet, or the like, containing information for travelers; the term came into use as a shorthand for the prolific nineteenth-century German travel guides published by Karl Baedeker (1801-1859).

wandering as they always have, but are now utterly unprepared "to play," dressed in what seems to be second-hand party attire, passing as standard American "whites," if shabbily. Likht's use of the word calcimine here is significant; this is a word he will come back to in a number of different works throughout his oeuvre: the calcimine bleached skin of white-washed "standard English" *yidn* (Jews). The names of the phantom characters are telling, as well— Regina, the Latinate queen; and "her Meyer," whose gloves the nameless speaker wears: a name crossed between Jewish and Anglo-Saxon linguistic lineages. Hannah and Grace appear as interlingual phantom twins, since Grace is in fact Hannah or Chana in Hebrew. And the discomfort the speaker and Regina feel, the disgust they have for their own smell, as it were, cues a particular pathology of Jewish self-hatred— the hatred a Jew feels for the sign of their very passing, recalled by the encounter with the other. The magic of the coal-people, their quadrate blacksparkling carbon—residues of ancient ecological energy, with which they seem somehow to be casting life into being—is unavailable to the Jewish speaker of the poem and his calcimine compatriot, Regina. They are unable to play, unable to interact, to interconnect. The macabre joke here is on the Jewish parvenus, who dress to go out to a waspy dinner party and end up by a dam in Radon, Bijou county, Georgia—radically out of place, that is, no longer in palm beach—and no longer passing in the least. The guiding directive at the close of Likht's "Baedeker" points toward mixing lineages as a speculative utopic antidote to the doubling anxieties of Jewish white passing, which the nameless speaker and Regina experience, in the form of a somatic self-loathing realization as stench. *Leave*

the putzy disguises behind instructs the poem-guide, *and widen, instead of purifying the tribe, by mixing with Grace's sons and daughters children.*[136]

How though does this highly bizarre poem relate to the great Anglo-mongrel modernist, Mina Loy? To begin with, Loy has an early poem called "Lunar Baedeker," a title which became a way to refer to her work more widely for many, or else as "The Lost Lunar Baedeker" and "Last Lunar Baedeker."[137] Likht writes the title of his Yiddish poem, furthermore, in English alphabetics, a style he took on in his work as an explicit crossing into the world of Anglo-modernisms.[138] This then is a dedication by title itself, a poem written to and for, perhaps even with, the poet Mina Loy. Did she ever read it? Could she read Yiddish (could she read Hebrew?) Did Likht ever read it to (or translate it for) her? These are some of the key initial questions in my research on the relationship between Mikhl Likht and Mina Loy: a poetic/aesthetic relationship steeped in the "nostory" of poetry— as counter-history and counter-futurity.[139] These questions do not have straightforward answers in any sense, since the record, it would seem, has all but been erased; and this relationship no longer exists in literary history, as far as I can tell, except in the present and future, in the poems and translations I shall present here, and specifically, at the manuscript level, in the translingual archive.

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[136] The last line of this poem seems to echo Zukofsky's (mis)translation of Yeshoash, as well, in "Poem Beginning 'The'": A myriad of years we have been, / Myriad upon myriad shall be (2011: 20).

[137] In 1982, Jonathan Williams published a wide selection of Loy's poems with the title *Last Lunar Baedeker;* and in 1996, Roger L. Conover edited a selected Loy entitled *The Last Lunar Baedeker* for Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

[138] Later, he would write Yiddish poems to other Anglo-modernists, including Ezra Pound ("EP") and T.S. Eliot ("TSE"), transcribing the titles of the poems in English alphabetization.

[139] In this sense, a translingual poetics collects the residues left behind by the erasures of monolingual national histories.

The connections between Likht and Loy—the embers that spark up across their works, when activated through the cipher of translation—create a momentum in the speculative imagination that I find impossible to ignore. The question arises amidst the sparks: what would American poetry look like if it weren't just English? If it were, in fact, in many languages at once? Which, of course, it *is*. The nay-sayer might raise the case of Pound or else Eliot here, as an example of a sort of Anglo-fascist multilingual monolingualism that ran the show for however many decades until today. For didn't Pound and Eliot both write in many languages as well? And they are at the center of the literary history of modernism, and are known specifically and particularly for their prolific multilingual poetries, etc. Pound's and Eliot's multilingualisms, however, are fundamentally (or we might even say, in certain cases, forms of fundamenta*list*) English, based in and on principles of Anglo-purity—while the translingual imaginary of Likht and Loy is wholly anti-purist—radically miscegenated to the core.

In this chapter I present a case study for a crypto-Yiddish futurist poetics between Yiddish and English—between Likht and Loy, and their translingual "descendants": *Grace's sons' and daughters' children*—we crypto-Yiddish poets of today.[140] Crypto because the conversion—as translation—is never complete; but the trace must be hidden in order to pass, and thus survive, embedded or buried perhaps, as a time-capsule in Jewish and American culture, latent even, we might say, in Freudian terms: "the appearance of inexplicable manifestations which call for an explanation, and the strict

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[140] A few examples of contemporary crypto-Yiddish poets—that is, Yiddish poets who have no Yiddish to write in today, but write anyway: Jerome Rothenberg, Harold Schimmel, Charles Bernstein, Adeena Karasick, Jake Marmer, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, erica kaufman and myself, among many others.

condition of an early, and subsequently forgotten experience" (1967:90). Crypto because

Yiddish itself contains the changing *shlisl*, the diasporic "key" to surviving eradication: a

changing language, which changes as you speak.[141] Through a careful reading of Likht

and Loy in tandem, across their respective languages, I aim to show the ways in which

their works inflect one another, in echo- and ethno- translational feedback loops. Loy

found in the Yiddish of the Lower East Side, I argue, a way out of the Italian Futurism

she had become enamored with in Florence, but had soon sworn off for its racist and

sexist ideologies; and simultaneously her sense for a crypto-Yiddish praxis gave her a

way back into her ethnic Jewishness, which had been withheld from her on several fronts

for the majority of her life. And in Loy's writing, Likht found an English wide enough to

hold and behold the mixed and remixing visions of a crypto-Yiddish future; and his

writing translates and adapts Loy's work at numerous critical junctures toward a poetic

correspondence across languages.

A particular substrain of Yiddish American Modernism, which I call "mongrel-

Yiddishism," provides an important intersectional discourse here—or middle term—

between Loy's poetics of futurist wandering and her discovery of Likht's Yiddish. This

mongrel-Yiddishist poetics does not align with the "American Africanism" of Herman

Melville or Edgar Allan Poe (Morrison 7), nor the popular Jewish Blackface routines of

Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor.[142] On the contrary, while in tense relation to both these

traditions, it is fundamentally opposed to such exploitative forms of racial representation.

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[141] Thinking here of Paul Celan's "With a Changing Key" and also of Loy's notion of "mongrel" speech as the ever changing future of modernist language.

[142] See Michael Rogin's "Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice." *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992): 417-53.

For mongrel-Yiddishist writers like Likht, Jewish-white passing in the United States—a form of total Anglicization, in Likhtian terms—was a highly troubling and anxiety provoking process that necessitated textual documentation as translingual record. The crypto-knowledge of mixed and mixing lineages remains for Likht, implanted in Yiddish itself, a miscegenating vessel; and in his mongrel-Yiddishist writings we find the conceptual seed for a crypto-Yiddish subjectivity, a form of "impure" Jewishness which reveals the concealment of its American white passing in radical poetic, aesthetic relation to other languages, cultures, races. Mongrel-Yiddishist writing explores the radical intersectionality therefore of Jewishness as a potent diasporic poetics of interlingual trust, against the momentum of a "passing" hegemonic center. Mongrel-Yiddishist writing warns white-passing Jews in the secret mother-tongue, that to become white (racially and linguistically "pure" in Jamesian terms) is to lose your language altogether, to risk everything, for nothing.

Loy discovered mongrel-Yiddishism through Likht and found in it a crypto-Jewishness which allowed for a crossing back and forth—though never passing—between races, sexes and religions as a futurist speculative praxis in her work. Loy must have found much liberatory potential in the powerlessness of Yiddish as a shifting language-identity position—wholly inflectional—which claims no territory anywhere while dwelling everywhere. I think most of all Loy understood that Yiddish's explicit mixedness allowed for a remarkable subversion of racialized and sexualized Modernist tropes—the very tropes she was seeking to overturn, after leaving Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's (1876-1944) circle. Her future would not and could not be "pure" in the proto-fascist racist and sexist terms of Italian Futurism. In Likht's Yiddish she found the

terms for this Jewish-mongrel mixing, while simultaneously resolving never to lay bare the changing key of this future-oriented poetics, lest the crypto-secret of Yiddish-crossing be discovered and eradicated once and for all; therefore, like Likht, she buried this knowledge in her poems for us to find.

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It is the myriad mixture of language "impurity" itself—as radical linguistic concept and poetic praxis—which, for Likht, gives Yiddish its particular avant-force, to survive on the front lines of modernization, as perpetual diasporic alien par excellence. In the thousand years that Yiddish lived and thrived, until its projected extinction in the twentieth century, it did so under extreme conditions of official powerlessness, the result of centuries of violent derision and othering by Jews and gentiles alike.[143] So let us not fool ourselves into an idealized nostalgia for a more utopic Jewish past—the trilingual Yiddish-Aramaic-Hebrew society of traditional Ashkenazic Jewry in eastern Europe was as subject to internal cultural framing, hierarchy, and stigma as our own contemporary national mongolingualisms. Not horizontally expanding (despite the obvious radical potentials) but instead extending continuously upward toward a projected heavens, with Yiddish always at the base, bottom, subjected language, of earth, of birth, the mother tongue and the other.

Likht did not write, in this sense, toward an ideal translingual past; rather, he felt the pressure and violence of the monological past and present ever bearing down, and he attempted to reimagine a radical future in which this would no longer be the case, in

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[143] See Katz's "Yiddishless Yiddish Power or Yiddish Powerlessness" in *Yiddish and Power* (276-304).

which our pasts and subsequent presents would be wholly mixed and remixing in every

way. I am calling this future-oriented remixing impulse "crypto-Yiddish," within the

wider discourse of an ethnopoetics— engaging with the untenable secrets of the past—

vat em I doink here? —in a radical language of the future.[144]

The impulse I am describing, which relies on the concept and praxis of mixture as

its key mode, converges and intertwines with historical questions of shifting Jewish-racial

subjectivities at the turn of the century in the United States. Against hegemonic logics of

white-Anglo passing, we find an American Yiddish poetics steeped in the stakes of

otherness, as a reality of eternal non-passing, which must never be dismissed, at the risk

of forgetting its own alienness. The amnesiac anxiety of Jewish passing and the paired

fear of not passing become the subject matter of mongrel-Yiddish, which has until now

been widely unknown to readers. This is a poetics of identity feedback—a Yiddish made

artificial—exiled in exile, on the margins of the margins.

In this sense, I want to suggest something perhaps rather unheard of, in every

sense: that Mina Loy was (and is) not in fact an Anglo-American writer at all, but a

Yiddish writer who writes in English. With this antinomian midrashic speculation in

mind, I propose to read her writing as translations of a ghost language she never had but

imagined through her poetry: Loy's Anglo-mongrel subjectivity is steeped I argue in this

imagined Yiddish mixture—while Likht's vision for the radical future of crypto-Yiddish

is dialectically Anglo-mongrel by necessity.

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[144] "Vot em I doink here / how vos I lost tzu get here?"—a contemporary crypto-Yiddish call from Jerome
Rothenberg's "Cokboy" (2007:139-150).

In the first half of this section, I investigate the social and aesthetic dynamics of mongrel-Yiddishism as an alternate response to what Daniel Boyarin has called a "double condition," of marginalized subjectivity, which, I argue, almost all east-European Jewish immigrants faced upon arriving in the United States.[145] Instead of reifying the terms of marginalization, however, as so many Jews did and still do, in the name of white-Anglo passing, mongrel-Yiddishist writing makes visible the artifice of passing at the site of language—that is, at the crypt of Yiddish's projected extinction, implanting the knowledge of Jewish mixedness in the "dead" tongue before its death.[146]

In the second half of the section, I turn to Loy's phantom encounter with mongrel-Yiddishism as a discursive counterweight to her initial engagement with Italian Futurism. Loy and Likht, I argue, wrote across languages to one another. In crypto-Yiddish translingual messages, they created a collaborative miscegenated poetics impossible to imagine within the frame of a national monolingual literary history or canon. And yet we find in their poems and translations of one another, a mode of reframing this very discourse of radical modernist futurities.

II. Shifting Jewish Racial Subjectivities in Yiddish

> We may compare them to individuals of mixed race who, taken all round, resemble white men, but who betray their coloured descent by some striking feature or other, and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges of white people.
> —Sigmund Freud[147]

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[145] See Boyarin 171.

[146] Yiddish, of course, never did die, though it was prematurely proclaimed dead in the twentieth-century leading up to and following the Holocaust.

[147] 1915:165.

> to be carried like forgetfulness
> into the long nightmare.
> —Mina Loy[148]

When European Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, they encountered a completely new set of socio-cultural norms, and with them, a radically altered racial hierarchy. "For Jews, who had continually experienced the threat of anti-Semitism in the 'Old Country,'" writes Merle Bachman, "a unique change occurred: in America, Black people—not Jews—were the most oppressed population" ("American Yiddish" 3). I find it useful to modify and extend Bachman's statement here in order to reveal the shifting racial subjectivities that underlie it: in America, *African-American* people—not Jews—were the most oppressed population, *because* in America, *African-American* people—not Jews—were identified as "black."

This may seem like fairly straightforward logic since, in the contemporary moment, we rarely associate Jews with "blackness," except within the mostly reductive, mythologizing discourse of "blackjewishrelations" (Newton 5).[149] Yet in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe this was not the case. "The general consensus," writes Sander Gilman, "in the [European] ethnological literature of the late nineteenth century was that Jews had 'black' skin or were at least 'swarthy'" (1993: 20). Certainly, for nineteenth-century racial pseudo-scientists like Robert Knox, the "African character" of the Jew was un-debatable, "his muzzle-shaped mouth and face removing him from certain other races, and bringing out strongly with age the two grand qualities—

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[148] 1982: 164.
[149] "The discourse of blackjewishrelations," writes Adam Zachary Newton, "itself swells with pregnant often alliterative figures that attempt to fix the exact nature of the phenomenon…'Black' and 'Jew' are converted into allegories of the beings they indicate—shadows in Levinas's sense—which are in turn metamorphosed into linchpins for stories and what the narrative theorists call plot functions" (10).

disproportion, and a display of the anatomy" (134). The physiognomic classification of Jewish blackness was also widely associated with the inherent "mongrel" illness of the Jew, which, according to Houston Stewart Chamberlain and his followers, derived from the interbreeding of "Jews with Africans during the period of the Alexandrian exile" (332). Jewishness then, for fin de siècle racial pseudo-science and anti-Semitism was integrally tied to racial blackness and an imagined Africa.

There are also numerous cases of European Jews representing their own Jewishness in relation to blackness. To cite just two noteworthy examples: the prominent Austrian-Jewish writer, Joseph Roth, describes the central Jewish character in his first novel, *Das Spinnenntz* (*The Spider's Web*) as a "black" man (qtd. in Gilman, *Freud* 19-20); likewise, Karl Rossman, the Jewish émigré protagonist of Franz Kafka's first novel, *Der Verschollene* (commonly published as *Amerika*), goes by the nickname "Negro" (Kafka 286).[150] These types of self-aware reflections on Jewish blackness by Jews themselves can be traced as far back as the staged debates between Jews and Christians in the Spanish High Middle Ages when, as Gilman writes, "Jews accepted that they were 'dark and ugly' while 'most Gentiles [are] fair-skinned and handsome'" (20). We cannot, therefore, underestimate the power that constructions of Jewish blackness had over the identity formation of medieval and modern European Jewry.

Returning in our discussion to the United States, it should be clear now how strange the American racial hierarchy would have been for Jews, who, despite varying levels of American anti-Semitism, were considered (by and large) to be above the

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[150] In 1920, Kafka wrote to his non-Jewish love interest, Milena Jesenská: "there's no doubt about it, to the European we [your Jewish husband and I] both have the same Negro face" (*Letters* 136).

"blackness" of African Americans. Jewish immigrants expressed this strange change in their social-racial position (which was not yet "white" but no longer "black") in a number of ways. In Yiddish, a large body of literature developed around a trope of Jewish/Yiddish empathy for the African American subject. Nakhman Mayzel's renowned Yiddish literary anthology, *Amerike in yidishn vort* (America in the Yiddish Word, 1955) includes more than forty "American Negro" poems; and in his influential essay, "*Der neger in undzer literatur*" (The Negro in Our Literature, 1945), the Yiddish American literary critic, Yitskhok Rontsh, argues,

> [that no other group] occupies as relatively conspicuous a place in Yiddish literature as the Negro. In nearly every poetry collection from poets old and young there's a poem about the Negro and his lot. It's the brothers-in-trouble closeness, the persecution that the Jew has for generations withstood, the discrimination he [the Negro] suffers everywhere in free and democratic America from certain sectors of the population—all this and more [that] brings the Negro to the side of the Yiddish book.[151]

Although Rontsh's perspective speaks to empathy as one important trope in the Yiddish literary treatment of American blackness, it elides in many ways the linguistic self-consciousness of mongrel-Yiddishism, which classified American Yiddish itself as a disenfranchised "other."

The correlation between Jewish language and Jewish blackness is, once again, rooted in nineteenth-century European racial pseudo-science. The physiognomic features of the "Jewish-Negroid," writes Gilman,

> [were] associated with their facile use of language, 'the use of innumerable foreign words and newly created words to enrich the German language'…Language, and therefore thought processes, reflect[ed] the racial origin of the 'black' Jew."[152]

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[151] Translation is Merle Bachman's (4).
[152] 1993: 22.

This notion of Jewish language and "especially the use of an identifiable Jewish accent" (13) became one of the cornerstones of the "double condition" of west European Jews, who projected their own marginalization onto *Ostjuden* (east European Jews) through a mockery and revile of Yiddish *mame loshn* (mother tongue), the predominant language of Jews living on "the Jewish Dark Continent."[153] Gilman's paraphrase of racial pseudo-science stands up here: Yiddish was coded *zhargon* (jargon) and considered low and ugly, "a servant maid to the Lady Hebrew" (Harshav 1990: 85), and a dark *mischling* mongrel to "pure" high German. "This jargon contributed no little to the immorality of the common Jews," writes Moses Mendelssohn,[154] and he demands "pure German or pure Hebrew, but no hodgepodge" (qtd. in Harshav 1990: 85). From the early Jewish Enlightenment on, Yiddish served as a symbol for everything wrong with Jewishness, the "dark-side" of the Jewish map, body and brain, expressed repulsively in a "corrupt melody with no grammar or aesthetic value" (85).

The convergence of sexualized and racialized projections of Yiddish language by west European Jews onto *Ostjuden* is worth some analysis. We might turn here to Boyarin's initial discussion of the "double condition" as it describes Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) psychoanalytic writings on "the castration complex."

> Since for him circumcision is psychically analogous to castration, the sign of racial difference becomes virtually identical to the sign of sexual difference. A look at the circumcised penis is the same as the look at the castrated penis of the female, and race and gender converge in the subjectivity of the Christian (heterosexual), masculine subject, putative possessor of the phallus.[155]

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[153] A common term for the Russian "Pale of Settlement." See Nathaniel Deutsch's "Exploring the Jewish Dark Continent" in *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (19-38).
[154] Major Jewish-German Enlightenment Philosopher (1729-1786)
[155] 171.

For Freud, the castration complex is the deepest unconscious root of anti-Semitism: "for even in the nursery little boys hear that a Jew has something cut off his penis—a piece of his penis, they think—and this gives them the right to despise Jews" (Freud 1909: 198-99). The assimilated Austrian-Jewish Freud is both hearer and teller of the nursery tale, a "'Semite' among 'Aryans' and also the Jew desperately constructing his own whiteness through an othering of colonized blacks" (Boyarin 175). Language is key here, as is physiognomy, which Freud took all too seriously, in his belief and "experience" of (Jewish) male periodicity at the site of the nose, "a displacement upwards, from genitals to face" (Pellegrini 22). Freud "fantasized (unconsciously)" that he was the "uncircumcised and virile Greek Oedipus, son of Laius" rather than the "circumcised Schlomo, son of Jakob, " born Sigismund Schlomo Freud in 1856 to Galician (*Ostjuden)* Yiddish speaking parents in the Moravian town of Příbor. He dreamt of another bodily (biological, physiognomic, aural) tradition than his own and voiced this dream through a fixation on the western masculine *phallus* as opposed to the "dark continent" of the eastern Feminine *jud*. The pun here functions between the Viennese slang for female masturbation "playing with the *jud*" (Gilman 38-39) and the Yiddish idiomatic *pintele yid/yud*, the essential cultural and linguistic character of the Yiddish-speaking/reading/writing Ashkenazi Jew.

Language marks the division here. The German-speaking Jew who projects anti-Semitic stereotypes onto the Yiddish-speaking *Ostjuden*

> forms almost an uncanny analogue to the 'evolved' colonial subject with his contempt for his native place, language and culture. The Ostjude was for the German-speaking Viennese Jew what the 'Unto Whom'— 'the ignorant, illiterate, pagan Africans…unto whom God swore his wrath etc.'[156]

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[156] Boyarin 178.

We can see now the connection to the Yiddish speaking/writing/reading modernists of *In Zikh* who were born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in east Europe, and traveled westward (through Belgium, London, Paris) to New York's Lower East Side. These Yiddish writers were raised amid representations of Yiddish "blackness" and low effeminate servility, which the western (Enlightened) Jews and Christians projected onto east European Jewry. If we doubt the importance of Yiddish language here, we need only turn to the material culture of the time: "for in popular images of Jewish difference, such as picture postcards, one of the most salient markers of Jewish difference remained the innate linguistic incompetence of the Jew in the indigenous language of the state." (Gilman 1993: 13) Upon arriving in New York, however, the Yiddish modernists of *In Zikh* experienced immediate civil emancipation, which raised them, despite their east European Yiddish tongues, above the social-racial status of the African Americans.

The majority of American Jews chose and choose white-passing as a form of total Anglicization. Yet among the most radical Yiddish American modernists, there was a deep sense of counter-assimilation born through hyper-absorbent unabsorptive language tactics.[157] In his 1935 essay, "*Der marsh tsu di goyim*" (The March to the Gentiles), the eminent Introspectivist writer, Yankev Glatshteyn (1896-1971), scorns Yiddish writers who attempt to have their works translated into other languages for the sake of wider cultural recognition. "Scratch any Jew," he writes

> and out leaps a vulgar assimilator. He is ready to give up everything he owns, his book, his newspaper, his language, all for the sake of Tatar, Albanian, Bulgarian, or, with due distinction, holy tongue…he goes over to the Hebraists, to the Communists, to the IKOR [an acronym for

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[157] Perpetually absorbing while remaining unabsorbed.

Jewish Colonization in Russia, a Communist organization that supported settlement in Birobidzan], or else he goes right over to the Gentiles.[158]

Mame loshn is simultaneously uncompromising and uncompromisable in Glateshteyn's essay and functions by its very existence as a form of resistance to social-racial assimilation. Yet, whereas the Viennese Freud speaks in the "white-patriarchal" voice of German, the Yiddish modernists perform inward, in a mongrel tongue, the hidden anxieties of their deepest aesthetic/poetic selves.

III. Two Case Studies in Mongrel-Yiddishism: Aaron Glanz-Leyeles and Mikhl Likht

I want to read now, two mongrel-Yiddishist poems: briefly, Aaron Glanz-Leyeles's (1889-1966), *"Ikh kum fun absyniye"* (I Come from Abyssinia, 1926), and then in more depth, Mikhl Likht's (1893-1953), *"Dos lid fun mayn shvartsn bruder"* (The Song of my Black Brother, 1932).

In Leyeles's "Abyssinia," he writes:

I come from Abyssinia
A white Abyssinian
And am —
an other.
Had I been black,
They would have neatly arranged and unrolled me
And read me like a scroll of black parchment with gold lettering.
But I am pale,
Suspicions sniff about my doorstep.
My blondeness —
Perhaps I skulk by the golden gate at twilight
To bite off a morsel of sun.
My blue eyes —
Perhaps I rub them with turquoise at midnight
When the dead come from the graves,
And the sorcerers have their sway.
Perhaps I myself am of Asmodeus's suite.

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[158] Translation is Ruth Wisse's (1996: 142).

> What a wonder, Oh Edgar,
> That in the nurseries,
> My name has not yet replaced—
> The black cat and the werewolf.[159]

The white Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Yiddish speaker dreams aloud here, the fate of the master-thief masquerader. Leyeles's Yiddish-African "sorcerer" does not perform his drama in "black-face," but instead, admitting the outward appearance of his whiteness, speaks inward in the earnest language of the "African" Jew. The performance takes the form of a horror story a child might hear told in the nursery. It is not, however, the tale of the dark, ominous "black cat and…werewolf" (nor even that of the circumcised/castrated European Jew) but one of the white-skinned Jewish-African mongrel who skulks about in disguise, casting spells to turn the pure, impure.

The invocation of "Edgar" (Poe) in the final stanza satirizes Yiddish modernist anxiety at being wholly unknown in the Anglo literary world. For Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), who, as Toni Morrison has noted, represented black and/or Africanist people as "dead, impotent, or under complete control," (30) was one of the most influential nineteenth-century Anglo-American writers to empty the "black"/African subject and employ it as an elastic (though consistently negative) literary trope throughout his work. Listen closely here to Leyeles's sharp ironic tone (or accent): "What a wonder, O Edgar," straddles the line between English and Yiddish (even in its phonetic voicing: *vos a vunder, O Edger*) and sarcastically turns to Poe on a first name basis (and in Yiddish, no less!) to lament the doubly-marginal fate of the white-passing Yiddish Jew

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[159] Translation is Benjamin and Barbara Harshav's (135).

in the United States. Poe, of course—who was long dead by the writing of this poem—

had he been alive, would certainly not have been able to read Leyeles's work, and

perhaps would not have even known "in what language it was written"!

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Mikhl Likht's little known poem, *"Dos lid fun mayn shvartsn bruder"* (The Song of my

Black Brother, 1932) offers another important vision of the mongrel-Yiddishist trend in

American modernism. "He came to me, my black brother," Likht, writes,

> His "house of god" neighbors
> an Anabaptist-tent
> & upstairs they sell shekels for a hopeful Marcus Garvey.
> All together they sell
> (astoundingly)
> in today's local dearth
> a stingy hundred a month
> on a faraway corner of Lenox Ave.
>
> A spotty license from a fundraiser
> with a false address from a false "organization"
> absolves my heart of skeptical necessity.
> He's revitalized by a bill, a quarter,
> even a nickel ("giving, my white brother, is-not-how-much.
> In our shared Torah every gift
> is a gift, the biggest like the smallest").
> He tried to establish both our Jewishnesses
> with holy quotations. The walls of my house
> resounded with *The Song of Songs*. His lips:
> "My vineyard I have not kept." My nerve:
> "let him kiss me"— but my vile-mouth whipped back
> and purified in union with his tuneful brown lips:
>
> He caught on: with the kisses of his mouth etc.
>
> He came to me, at first a black crow,
> with black sidelocks, black beard, black pupils,
> my dark-skinned brother. But when his blackness
> won back a balance with my whiteness
> (just a symbol, since my skin is wholly speckled)
> he began, in that bassy voice,
> hallelujahing
> to say:
>
> "I want your white skin to contend with my white conscience.
> Envy of the murderous dark
> doesn't lie in wait for you, my white brother, but flows

from the same ethos-lava in our blood:
our future's disturbed by the same deformed-carbuncle,
on both of us burns the lash of hatred's whip.
Since our difference is skin-deep
you haven't yet dealt with me?
The ink may be false, every word on the paper false
like the holy-true receipt of our genealogical record.
I recently came into a house
where everything's speckled — the lifestyle,
look of things—only the concept of their skin is white:
and they treated me with revulsion as tho I were a rat, a louse;
for a moment then (& I'm not lamenting)
I felt death-throes squirming in me.
I'm close to them: clean their toilets,
drive their horse to the barn out back.
My wife's a maid there, makes up the beds,
gets the landlady's rags – souvenirs
to supplement a miserly salary.
They also have
my son as elevator-, train-, & bell-boy; & my daughter
performs their passion for a cigar-smoke-cabaret
with brown excitement for a colored trinket…
…does the reptile-nigger pay enough tax?
Besides which, I'm a Jew, & prefer "voice" to "hand":
Jack Johnson wasn't ever my hero
& Florence Mills "didn't conquer my crossing."
But if ever I receive regards from distant regions
signed by a pioneer faithful to that olive-oil land
I awaken also in *Africa* with her forest-giants, furs & five-grimace-ritual.
I am splintered: my luck amounts to
an instinct for the land where I was born,
orienting itself to hides and elephant bone;
& also calls for "milk & honey" in intuitive turmoil
since I'm a *son-of-Abraham,* according to elder lore,
battling with African eyes, gums, teeth.
Neither are you the same from what came before —
your fate only drains histories of another flow:
we are the same mighty creature with different ruptures;
black my skin—black once was your heart,
& so we don't both lose our ethos-measure
I want your white skin to contend with my white conscience—"

He spoke…& luminous a flame
rose, covering us both
one a fed lamb;
one, a bound sacrifice.[160]

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[160] 1957: 219-21. Translation is mine.

It is not Likht's Yiddish speaker who identifies as African at the start of this poem, but the African American/Caribbean "black brother" who identifies as Jew, through an assumed relation between blackness and Jewishness ("black my skin—black once was your heart"), between Africa and "the olive-oil land" of Zion. Pan-Africanism and the Back to Africa Movement, also known as "Black Zionism," play an important role. On the second floor of the black man's Garveyist church (perhaps even The African Orthodox Church associated with Garvey's UNIA) "they sell shekels for a hopeful Marcus Garvey," and despite the early 1930's "dearth" in Harlem, do "astoundingly" well: a "hundred a month" from "stingy" donors.[161] The conflation of ancient Zion with a contemporary Harlem sets the key here for Likht's Yiddish-Africanist "*Song of Songs.*"[162]

In the second stanza of the poem the black man arrives at the speaker's door, ostensibly fundraising for his church, but with a "spotty license" and a "false address from a false 'organization.'" What follows is a strange duet recitation of lines from the biblical *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs). "My vineyard I have not kept,"[163] sings the black alms-collector, quoting the "beloved" in *Songs*, who is "black and beautiful like the dark tents of Solomon".[164] Likht's speaker replies audaciously: "let him kiss me"[165] in

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[161] See: Stein, Judith. 1986. *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society.* Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP. Print

[162] Ancient Zion and twentieth-century Harlem come together again, in Berysh Vaynshteyn's much later poem, "*Harlem—a negro geto*" (Harlem—A Negro Ghetto). See: *Harshav and Harshav* 669.

[163] *Songs of Songs* 1:6: "Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Translation is King James's).

[164] In the biblical story, the beloved's brothers send her out to guard the vineyards but become angry when they find she has not been guarding her own vineyard; quoting from a private correspondence with Zali Gurevitch on the topic of *Shir HaShirim* and Africa. July 1st, 2015.

[165] *Song of Songs* 1:2: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine" (Translation is King James's).

what appears to be a gesture of physical love ("purified in union with his tuneful, brown lips"). Finally, the black man catches on, returning the speaker's affection "with the kisses of his mouth etc." The allusion here is to the story of King Solomon and the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba, which originates in the fourteenth-century Ge'ez, *Kebra Negast* (Glory of Kings) as an account of the Solomonic lines of the Ethiopian Emperors. The black man's attempt at establishing a sense of shared African *yidishkayt*, through a recitation (in Yiddish translation) of *Shir HaShirim*, succeeds at the site of the mouth, at the start of Likht's poem, both in language and physical (sexual) osculation.

The speaker's invocation in the fourth stanza of a "crow" with "black peyes, black beard, black pupils," draws a line from the aesthetics of an east European Jewish past (peyes, beard) to the African-American/Caribbean present standing before him. [166] But, whereas the black man locates the origin of African-Jewish relations in Biblical text, the Jewish man intuits a more immediate connection: the double condition of the American *Ostjud*. [167] Likht's speaker considers himself as "speckled" as the crow, while still admitting the symbolic "whiteness" his pale skin has taken-on in America.

After the African-Jewish relationship is established and after the black man's "blackness/ [has] won back a balance" with the speaker's Jewish American white passing (by way of shared Biblical lineage), the black man speaks to the Yiddish poet at length. His monologue exposes, among other things, an ugly truth about a household of "speckled" American Jews. The black man's family is employed by these racist Jews,

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[166] The word "crow," incidentally, is *Kavka* (Kafka) in Czech. "Peyes": from Hebrew/Yiddish meaning "side locks"; corresponding to the rabbinical interpretation of a Biblical injunction, which prohibits Jewish men from shaving the "corners" of their heads (Leviticus 19:27).

[167] Likht himself immigrated to the United States from Ukraine in 1913.

who exploit his wife and children and treat him as though he were "a Rat, a Louse" ("…does the reptile-nigger pay enough tax?"). Yet he too is a Jew, he proclaims, quoting the Bible once more (this time from Genesis), and "prefer[s] "voice" to "hand."[168] We might think here of Franz Fanon's biological-intellectual dichotomy between black and Jew (127). Likht's black speaker turns away from corporeality (hand), however, emphasizing instead language (voice) as a site of viable relation. And though his language is not Hebrew (we find him speaking only Yiddish in the poem) the black man returns once more to the biblical ethos-blood bond between African and Jew, between his own legend of origin ("according to much elder-lore") and ancient Zion. His identity is as splintered as the Jews, he explains, between the expectation for a homeland and the oppression of indefinite exile. Yet while the Jew is able to wear a symbolic "whiteness" externally on his/her skin in American diaspora, the black man remains wholly "black," with only a "white conscience."

The close of the poem is terse and explosive. "[A] flame," rises above the two men where they stand and consumes them both. Likht's recognition of the black man's narrative, and of the Jewish role in American racial oppression is unprecedented in (Yiddish) American poetry. His decision to assign more than half the lines in the poem (forty-four of seventy-nine) to the black man's monologue—in contrast to the exploitative treatment of black subjects in much contemporaneous modernist Africanist poetry, which speaks about "blacks" without ever giving them a voice of their own—

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[168] Allusion to Genesis 27:22: "And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (Trans. is King James).

stands out as a rare socio-aesthetic decision.[169] Moreover, the conclusion of the poem

arrives at two biblical allusions, this time spoken in the voice of the Jew, who recognizes

the privileged status American Jews like himself have been handed, as "fed lamb['s]"[170]

among the sacrificial[171] scapegoats of the African American/Caribbean population.

Likht's Jewish speaker does not repress the difficulty that this conclusion implies but

instead balances the entire weight of his poem on its inevitable admission. The

"luminous" fire consumes the African American/Caribbean and Ashkenazi Jew together;

but while the Jew finds an escape in America through his fair skin and English fluency,

the African American/Caribbean is permanently "bound" to his blackness.

IV. With Gentile Zion's Earthly Hands: Excavating Loy's Crypto-Yiddish Poetics

> "BUT the Future is only dark from outside. / *Leap* into it—and it EXPLODES with *Light*."
> —Mina Loy[172]

> We/ are one/ and the same: you and I
> —Mikhl Likht, from "Procession: I" (1957: 68)[173]

1. Mina Loy engages with a discourse of mongrel-Yiddishist writing through a crypto-

Yiddish futurist poetics that necessitate radical and innovative approaches to questions of

race, gender and Jewishness at variegated intersections. Loy writes some of the wildest,

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[169] I'm thinking, in specific, of Pound's "Der Yiddisher Charleston Band" and Eliot's "Sweeney among the Nightingales."

[170] Allusion to Isaiah 40:11: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young" (Translation is King James's).

[171] The Yiddish/Hebrew word Likht uses is *"akeyde,"* meaning "binding"; a clear allusion to the "Binding of Isaac" in Genesis.

[172] From "Aphorisms on Futurism" 1996: 149.

[173] Translation is mine. This line echoes the close of Loy's "Songs to Joannes: IIX": "Me you — you — me" (1996: 58).

most brilliant, and most subversive verse of the twentieth century *in any language,* in an

English re-accented so as to become an Anglo-mongrel "second tongue" (Perloff 193).

Her work for me raises an elemental question of expanded-Yiddish, which is: *what does*

a Yiddish writer do when she has no Yiddish left to write in? I call Loy a Yiddish writer

based on a number of interconnected po/theoretical factors; and though I know this may

appear to many an outrageous claim—since Loy arguably knew no Yiddish *proper*, at

all—I ask that you bear with me and consider the translingual archive and the trace.

There are findings in this study which cast into relief an exchange between Loy and Likht

on the threshold of the public and private spheres of translingual poetic life, via a shared

commitment to radical mixed futures *across* languages.

2.   a lyric elixir of death

       embalms
       the spindle spirits of your hour glass loves
                     on moon spun nights[174]

       a lirishe heylgetrank fun toyt

         aynbalzamirt
         di shpindl-gayster fun dayne zamd-zeyger libes
                  oyf levone-tseshpunene nekht[175]

Born Mina Gertrude Löwy in 1882, in Hampstead, London, the daughter of Sigmund

Felix Löwy, a Hungarian Jewish artist and tailor, and Julia Löwy (formerly Bryan), an

Evangelical Englishwoman, Loy's racial and cultural identity was split during her

upbringing between the warring "inheritances" of her parents. Julia was in all likelihood

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[174] Loy, from "Poe" (1996: 76).
[175] Likht's translation of Loy's lines above, from her poem "Poe" (1954: 24).

an anti-Semite, who had conceived a child with the foreign Jewish tailor, and had then

been forced to marry him out of obligation to social-religious codes. The severity of

Julia's evangelical Victorianist morality manifested in strong part as a loathing

specifically for her first born daughter, Mina, who was a constant sign—or blemish—

reminding Julia of the forbidden mixing and subsequent social shame she and Sigmund

had brought to her family. Julia suppressed Sigmund's Jewish influence on Mina and her

younger sisters, Dora and Hilda, so that they received almost no Jewish education at all,

and knew almost nothing of their Jewish histories and lineages. Rather, Mina was raised

in a violently monological Christian ascensionist environment, in which hatred for the

other was taught as a value of social-political class passing.[176] "To the mother" she

writes,

> the blood-relationship
> is a terrific indictment of the flesh
> under cover
> of clothing and furnishing
> "somebody" has sinned
> and their sin
> —a living witness of the flesh
> swarms with inquisitive eyes.[177]

3. Loy sought a way out of her mother's racist, sexist "voice" of Anglo-evangelical

purism by becoming an artist and poet. She discovered in radical aesthetics the possibility

to reshape the world around her through the words and images of the elsewhere—in

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[176] Much of this information has been gathered with great dedication in Carolyn Burke's *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy.* Burke's main sources, as well as mine, are Loy's extensive accounts of her upbringing throughout her work, and most notably in her prolific, though wholly unfinished autobiography, Goy Israels, and in her long poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose". These works, both of which she started writing in the 1930's, confront the question of the quadrate split in her identity across fault lines of language, culture, gender and race— and respond or echo this split, through an invented imagined mongrel space in the English language itself .
[177] Qtd. In Burke 19.

search of a haven for the alien outcast, the doubly-exiled denizen wandering the earth.

She became a Futurist, I think, initially for this reason, since Marinetti and his group were

committed to overturning the status quo of western civilization toward a revolution in

aesthetics that would redefine the future of human beings. Loy was immensely attracted

to this idea—and immensely attracted to Marinetti himself.[178] It quickly became clear to

her, however, that Marinetti and his Italian Futurist vision did not include a viable place

within it for her, except as object, and that this vision was in fact predicated upon the

colonization of women and racialized "others," including what the fascists who followed

Marinetti would later call *mischlings*.[179] Thus Loy developed her own feminist counter-

futurism, which was based on principles of radical feminine erotic power. "The first

illusion to demolish is the division of women into two classes, she writes, in her

"Feminist Manifesto":

> the mistress and the mother. Every well balanced and developed woman knows that no such
> division exists, that Nature has endowed the Complete Woman with a faculty for expressing
> herself through her functions. These are no restrictions. The woman who is so incompletely
> evolved as to be unselfconscious in sex will prove a restrictive influence on the temperamental
> expression of the next generation; the woman who is a poor mistress will be an incompetent
> mother, an inferior mentality. She will not have the adequate apprehension of LIFE.[180]

Yet, Loy's aesthetics remained bound to Italian Futurist rhetoric for a time, while she

searched for a "new" purity rather than dissolving the notion of purity all together in the

name of a radical "mongrel" counter-future. Much of her writing from this period is quite

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[178] The two had a brief love affair, in fact, and Loy even painted Marinetti's portrait.

[179] *Mischling* was the legal term used in Nazi Germany to denote persons deemed to have both "Aryan" and Jewish ancestry. The root of the word is related to the Latin term from which the Spanish term *mestizo* and French term *métis* originate. In German, the word has the general negative denotation of hybrid, mongrel, or half-breed.

[180] 1996: 154.

problematic around questions of race and Jewishness, as Loy began to trouble the terms

of her own impossible racial identification, and search for a sphere in which she could

practice her art as a white-passing half-Jewish woman, who did not want to pass.

> The point of view of Mrs. Israels is that of the British Colonist often sadistic always disdainful; this mother is a Briton colonizing the alien attributes of her marriage; her marriage the appropriation of an alien property. [...] These so unserviceable rooms are her dominions; just so much of her grandeur. The higgledy piddled[y] contents of the cupboards her national guards it and gloats to herself."[181]

> Jew-dew
> befallen spurious horizons
> to expire
> a musical elixir.[182]

4. For Loy did indeed pass as an Anglo-Christian white, although passing we might say

represented everything she was against—everything her mother had stood for—and

which Loy's writing and art opposed by its very existence. The first way out of this

passing for Loy, she found like many through the avant-garde, where she discovered

formal aesthetic and poetic experimentation as praxis; but as Zukofsky later realized

about the fascist Pound, Loy discovered with the Futurist Marinetti a dead end—quite

literally: a death sentence for her and anyone like her. And unlike Zukofsky—who never

gave up on Pound, and who we might say, wrote in a crypto-English, rather than crypto-

Yiddish—Loy turned her back on Marinetti and the Italian Futurist camp all together

early-on, and left Florence for the United States in 1916.

> THEREFORE, you stand not only in abject servitude to your perceptive consciousnesses— BUT also the mechanical re-actions of the subconsciousness, that rubbish heap of race-tradition—

> AND believing yourself to be free—your least conception is colored by the pigment of retrograde superstitions.[183]

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[181] Loy, from *Goy Israels*. See: 'Goy Israels: Fragments,' YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 30.
[182] Loy, from "Hilarious Israel" (1982: 208).
[183] Loy, from "Aphorisms on Futurism," (1982: 274).

5. Loy's early Futurist poetics transforms in the United States via her encounter with the American-Yiddish language and specifically American-Yiddish modernism in the Lower East Side and East Village. Yiddish, we find, becomes an unnamed "missing element," in her work, to which she is constantly referring. And her use of the word "Slav" in her essay, "Modern Poetry" reveals her own ambivalent relationship to the term Jew as much as to her Jewishness itself.

6. When Loy arrived in the United States for the second time in 1920, she lived for a year in Greenwich Village. There, she encountered a Jewish population unlike anything she had known in Western Europe. Loy found in New York the massive civilization of New York Yiddishland, one of the largest hubs for Yiddish art and culture in the world during the first quarter of the twentieth century.[184] The semi-autonomous semi-permeable language culture Loy discovered in Jewish New York helped her imagine a new genealogy for her poetics. What had disgusted Henry James during his visit in 1904, thrilled and inspired the young Loy, and changed the trajectory of her writing forever. For she was seeking in her poetics/aesthetics a way to reconcile her Jewishness with her Englishness. Yet, "until 1920-21," writes Cristanne Miller, "when Loy lived in Greenwich Village, she appeared not to regard her Jewish Hungarian father or her own

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[184] As Cristanne Miller notes: "In 1910, 31 percent of the population of New York City was Jewish, and Yiddish was the dominant language spoken in a 20-square block area, abutting the Village and occupying the streets from the Bowery to the East River and from Market Street to 14th Street, the areas now known as the East Village and Lower East Side; a 1920 *Automobile Blue Book* map labels this area 'The Ghetto.' These number are particularly striking when one considers that, at its height the Jewish population of Berlin was never more than five or six percent and that of Vienna and Prague never more than eleven percent" (51).

'mongrel' Jewish background as relevant to her writing or artistic life" (Miller 53). Loy's relation to Jewish culture shifted drastically during that year in the Village, and her mongrel poetics was born that year out of the realization of a transatlantic non-national Yiddish civilization that was mixed and mixing, yet which remained wholly particular.

7. Loy was drawn to Yiddish, I think, precisely for its sense of doubly marginalized subjectivity, a sense that mirrored the marginalization she had felt in her parents' home (as neither English enough nor Jewish enough). For Yiddish was neither Hebrew nor German, *nor* English, for that matter, but a radical mixture of those and other languages beyond.[185] In the Village and Lower East Side Loy encountered an immigrant language culture, which was as much in exile as she herself had *felt* in England. Had she been born in the wrong place at the wrong time in the wrong language? What would this "wrongness" dis-en-gender in the context of a modernist poetic/aesthetic praxis in English? With the New York Yiddish modernists, Loy must have felt a strong kinship; here were radical secular Jews resisting Anglo-passing through inflected subversions of the "mother" tongue. The utopic implications of creating a transnational modernist network in a doubly-exiled language, a language that had historically been imagined and projected by Jews and Gentiles alike as simultaneously feminine servile, black and mongrel, and the fact that this marginal modernist culture was in fact a part of Loy's own lineage—the part of her lineage that her mother had attempted to erase from Loy's conscious life, but which she could never erase from Loy's unconscious—must have been a thrilling and uncanny prospect for the young Anglo-mongrel poet. "What esoteric

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[185] Loy's language in these terms, acquires new mongrel influences everywhere she goes.

"tic / transforms / metallic thorns of succorless fosterlands," she writes in "Hilarious Israel,"

> to pastel limbs of chorus-girls in bloom,
> transforms
> the blood of pogrom exits
> to rubies of pomegranates
> on costume?[186]

8. The nay-sayer butts in: yet, why wouldn't Loy have referred to this Yiddish directly in her poetry and poetic memoirs, why do we find no direct address to Yiddish in any of her writings and papers? I have been asking this very question for almost ten years, searching for the repressed Yiddish lineages, not only of Loy, but of Zukofsky, as well, among many others. And what I have come to learn is that there is a long untold history of modernist and postmodernist poets hiding the Yiddish underpinning of the languages they write in; so much so that Rothenberg reports that in two decades of friendship with Louis Zukofsky, Zukofsky never mentioned anything about his Yiddish upbringing, although he and Rothenberg had both been raised in Yiddish-speaking homes in New York. So Loy averted mentioning the Yiddish language proper in her work in any explicit terms, since her relation to this Yiddish was wholly imagined—she referred to it in other terms, as the "Anglo-mongrel" "Goy Israels" of her childhood dreams. Goy Israels, writes Loy, is "a wanderer infinitely more haunted than the eternal jew: a bi-spirited entity; to wander in opposite directions at once."[187]

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[186] 1982: 207.
[187] From *Goy Israels*, YCAL MSS 6, box 2, folder 28, p. 41.

9. Mongrel-Yiddishist writings would have resonated powerfully with Loy's own search for a poetics open enough to trouble traditional sexualizations and racializations of the alien "other." In the tongue of the mother-lover-other, mongrel-Yiddishists were able to confide the questions of their impossible subjectivities, as modernist poetry. The mongrel-Yiddishist admission of ancient racial-sexual mixture as a metaphor for Yiddish itself, seems to me to be what Loy carries with her most powerfully into her autobiographical works, "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" and *Goy Israels*. In this long poem and fragmented memoir, Loy announces the terms of her crypto-Yiddish as a neither-nor identity, where poetry itself becomes the site of reconciliation for projected warring forms." So is the mystic absolute," she writes in "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,"

> the rose
> that grows
> from the red flowing
> from the flank of Christ
> thorned with the computations
> of the old
> Jehova's gender
> Where Jesus of Nazareth
> becomes one-piece
> With Judas Iscariot
> in this composite
> Anglo-Israelite.[188]

10. In "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," (1923-25) and the prolific fragments of *Goy Israels* (1931-35), Loy presents two versions of her mongrel modernist visions almost ten years apart. During that decade, writes Miller, "she developed a conviction that art emerges from the intensities of intersectionalities, and primary among these are the cultural intersections of mixed racial, language, and ethnic populations of the Lower East

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[188] 1982: 132.

Side" (61). As poetic-autobiographies, these works tell the stories which cannot be told, the particular mythologies of Loy's circumstances in England growing up, which had been untellable in England, and which could only be approached in any sense after Loy had discovered New York Yiddish, and in particular, the mongrel-Yiddishist writings of Mikhl Likht. "Spiritual drapers," she writes, in "Anglo Mongrels,"

> Popes and fakirs and shakers
> decked it
> out with oblivion
> and let it
> appear to disappear.[189]

11. Loy engages a translingual register in "Anglo-Mongrels", not by lamenting the repressed/oppressed language, but by speaking through it in variable English tongues. "She infuses the language of the fin de siècle with solecisms, neologisms, foreign phrases," notes Marjorie Perloff, "Jewish inflections, and realistic references to bodily functions that would not have been tolerated by the Rhymers' Club or the Savoy." This is a work in which for the first time, Loy's "curious polyglossia reflects her own "Anglo-mongrel" ancestry as well as the expatriation of her adult life" (206). Loy reframes the discourse of her feminist futurism as a mongrel discourse, through and through; and it would seem that Loy's mongrel reconciliation of racialized and sexualized others in her work, was born of a realization of her own "Jewish mongrelism" through a modernist praxis as mixed in its "origins" as she was: a crypto-Yiddish modernism which she would adapt but could never name as such in her writing , instead, re-defining "all modernist

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[189] 1982: 173.

aesthetics in terms of this mixture," which she had discovered during the first years of the

1920s in the Lower East Side. "Relegated," she writes in "Anglo-Mongrels,"

> this jew-jaw of general invective
> to a hole and corner secretive
> popularity.[190]

12. Recall here, Loy's essay "Modern Poetry," in which she argues for a mongrel poetics

of the future modeled on the immigrant mixtures of lower Manhattan: "This composite

language is a very living language" she writes,

> it grows as you speak. For the true American appears to be ashamed to say anything in the way it
> has been said before. Every moment he ingeniously coins new words for old ideas, to keep good
> humor warm. And on the baser avenues of Manhattan every voice swings to the triple rhythm of
> its race, its citizenship and its personality.[191]

Loy's discovery in New York of Jewish mixedness as a modernist mode, was steeped in

questions of African-American/Caribbean Blackness. For, as Miller suggests, "even

before having visited New York, Loy associated both this American city and modernist

writing with black Americans." Likht's mongrel-Yiddishist writing would have served as

an important medium/median then, as Loy began to construct a poetics based on "a

process of double marginalization, becoming both 'incognito' and mongrel," as means of

responding to the impossibilities of her own racial and sexual subjectivities. (Miller 59).

"The seraph and the ass," she writes in her poem, "The Widow's Jazz,"

> in this unerring esperanto
> of the earth
> converse
> of everlit delight
>
> as my desire
> receded
> to the distance of the dead

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[190] 1982: 173.
[191] 1996: 154.

> searches
> the opaque silence
> Of unpeopled space.[192]

13. In the near decade between beginning "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" (1922) and beginning *Goy Israels* (1931), Loy developed a composite time-defying vision for a mongrel future in which the origins of a poetics, like the origins of her life, are never pure in any sense, are always in contradiction and contradistinction, the aporiatic paradoxical materials of poetry itself. Thus, if "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" suggests a crypto-Yiddish praxis implicitly, *Goy Israels*, demonstrates this translingual praxis explicitly. This translingualism mirrors the translingualism of Likht's "Baedeker" since we find that Loy translates the title of *Goy Israels* from a Slavo-Yiddish neologism, which Likht invents in his "Procession: I." Likht's word in Yiddish is *ivantsiyuniyes*, which Stephen Ross and I have translated as "Gentile-Zion's", and which Loy adapts to *Goy Israels,* her own translation of Likht.

> a nightingale. Hums with little beak
> over a tin pan
> carved
> to shrieking by gentile-zion's
> earthly hands.[193]

14. I imagine Likht learned of Loy before she learned of him, but it is hard to know in which direction the translingual echo between their works originates. In 1922, Likht publishes "Baedeker," and in the same book publishes "Procession: I," a translingual reply to Loy's "Songs to Joannes." Likht would have read Loy's "Songs" in the first issue of Arthur Kreymborg's *Others* magazine, when it came out in 1915; and his adaptations

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[192] 1996: 96-7.
[193] Likht, from "Procession: I" (1957: 63-4). Translation is Stephen Ross's and mine.

of this suite of poems for his first "Procession" reveal an early fascination with Loy's poetics. Again, we must wonder if the two ever met, or spent time together; were they somehow translating one another in tandem? No record of their relationship exists as far as I can find but in the work itself. Though Loy must have read and somehow translated Likht at some point (or read translations *of* Likht?) in order to name her memoir after his crypto-Yiddish "gentile zion's earthly hands". In Likht, this phrase would seem to refer to both Jacob *passing* as Esau, and the subversion of this very myth: Esau passing as Jacob. Loy's interest in the phrase may have come from an identification with the infinite slippage it depicts, in a wor(l)d which names the slippage rather than eliding it, as a negative sign of passing, an impossibility in language itself. What's extraordinary about Loy's translation/adaptation of Likht, is that she translates him from Slavo-Yiddish (*Ivan*: a slang in Slavic Yiddish for a gentile) into a more Anglo-Yiddish idiom: *goy*. And yet Likht's possessive "zion's" she brings across language in the form of a translingual pun, where she keeps the possessive Yiddish "*sameh*" as a plural "s" while doing away with English apostrophe—thus, "Israels."

15. It is in "Procession: I" that Likht invents this term "*ivantsiyuniyes*." So Loy must have somehow read this work, which was written as a response to her "Songs to Joannes."[194] But why did Likht respond? Because he knew from reading her "Songs" that he and Loy were both in their own double-binds? Because he wondered if she might be a poet to carry a crypto-Yiddish future with her into English? Would she? Likht reaches out

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[194] Sometimes called her "Love Songs," I will refer to them henceforth as "Love Songs" or "LS."

to Loy in his "Procession: I" trying to get her attention: We/ are one/ and the same: you and I" (1957: 64). And Loy reaches back toward Likht, responding to the opening of his "poem of a life" in the title of her own "poem of a life", a memoir in poetic fragments and a "long-poem" in its own right.

16. Although Loy writes in English, she addresses, in a bricolage of images throughout her "Love Songs," a concern for raw erotic miscegenating potentials, which would have resonated powerfully with the aesthetic sensibilities of her Yiddish American contemporary, Likht. In "Love Songs: I" we find, an outwardly imposed weeding—this time by a strange "Pig cupid" "rooting erotic garbage" "among wild oats sown in mucous membranes." Loy's "Spawn of fantasies," her erotic seedlings ("Bengal light/ Eternity in a sky-rocket") are torn from the ground in the first section of this poem and recast as "suspect places" in the Anglo-patriarchal imagination. An unstable high/low dualism is outlined from the start of "Love Songs" as the speaker clings to a "Virginal" illusion ("Experience/ Coloured glass") of "subliminal flicker[ing]" in sharp ironic contrast to the perverse "pig cupid['s]" suspicious "rooting":

> Spawn of Fantasies
> Silting the appraisable
> Pig cupid   his rosy snout
> Rooting erotic garbage
> "Once upon a time"
> Pulls a weed   white star-topped
> Among wild oats sown in mucous-membrane
>
> I would an   eye in Bengal light
> Eternity in a sky-rocket
> Constellations in an ocean
> Whose rivers run no fresher
> Than the trickle of saliva
>
> These   are suspect places

> I must live in my lantern
> Trimming subliminal flicker
>
> Virginal to the bellows
> Of Experience
>   Coloured glass.[195]

17. A play between holiness and vulgarity coats the surface of Loy's deeply erotic lyric as a counter-voice produced from the residue of "infructuous impulses" reveals the emptiness of the English contour subject in the "shape of a man." The low and high registers, which were already visible in Loy's "LS: I" become compressed in "LS: II" between interior and exterior modes: "A God's doormat/ On the threshold of your mind."

We might have coupled
In bed-ridden monopoly of a moment
Or broken flesh with one another
At the profane communion table
Where wine is spill'd on promiscuous lips

We might have given birth to a butterfly
With the daily news
Printed in blood on its wings.[196]

18. This Holy/vulgar conflation soon becomes explicit. Instead of breaking bread— "broken flesh…At the profane communion table." A lyric volta follows: after (re)presenting the normative dichotomy of heterosexuality ("bed-ridden monopoly" or "profane" promiscuity), Loy produces a wild and wholly unconventional image: a butterfly "with the daily news / printed in blood on its wings." The "subliminal" circuits of erotic desire, which fuse beneath the "wanton duality" of Anglo-patriarchal discourse, conceive a creaturely erotic poetics that translates physical "birth" into surrealist

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[195] Loy, from "LS: I" (1996: 53).
[196] 1996: 54.

metaphor. The newborn butterfly is a body inscribed with blood, poised at the edge of

creation (or translation) and dissemination.

19. Loy's crypto-Yiddish realization proceeds from her stark opposition to traditional

sexualized and racialized relations between human beings. Her reticence of

heteronormative "alliance[s]" as the source relation of female procreation points to an

empty linguistic subject, in the form of the absence of an erotic receiver. What a woman

needs to sustain and be fruitful, according to Loy, is "a definite period of psychic

development," a period of intense introspection, and through something like a fusing of

linguistic gametes, a process of (re)production performed through mixing languages.

Procreation functions then as a process independent of heterosexual intercourse; the

erotic mixing instinct of language itself creates Loy's mongrel-text creatures, born from

the body of the poet/lover at the consummation of writing.

20. I want to take us back to that moment in 1917 when Likht switched languages from

English to Yiddish. Likht's Yiddish essays on modern American poetry in the 1920s, and

his translations, as well as the companion pieces to his translations, attest to his creative

alignment with Loy. Here are the first 16 lines of Likht's poem in Stephen Ross's and my

translation:

> Signs in space. Glimmer
> of puddles and rain.
> Silhouettes of streams spilling
>
>   over the stone. Over again —
>
> A nightingale. Hums with little beak
> over a tin pan

carved
to shrieking by gentile zion's [1]
earthy hands.

With bellies
and petty-coats the bottomfeeders
          all six
          all twelve
swim
forward spiderlike in erotic garbage. Like
and unlike.[197]

Likht's "*erotishe mist*" is a translation of Loy's "erotic garbage," and Loy's "Goy Israels"

is a translation of Likht's *"ivantsioniyes."* The surreal tableau of "Procession: I" contains

Loy's words, and phrases woven within and throughout it in Yiddish. Some key echoes

include, "Nirvana," "cosmos," "ego," "protoplasm," and "colorless onion". To take

another example: Loy writes in "LS: XI":

Dear one   at your mercy
Our Universe
Is only
 A colourless onion.[198]

In part "vav/F" of "Procession: I" Likht writes:

Dear cosmos
I will not charge you
like someone who once had the nerve
to name you:
                colorless onion.[199]

21. The overlaps, echoes, and allusions go on and on, but rather than keep listing them,

what I'd like to do in the remaining pages is to present a symphonic assemblage or we

might call a "mash-up" of Loy's "Songs to Joannes" and Likht's "Procession: I" in order

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[197] 1957: 63-4.
[198] 1996: 56-7.
[199] 1957: 67.

to give a sense for the full range of echopoetics I am attempting to describe here in prose, and in order to allow the translingual poetic voices of Loy and Likht a space to resonate most fully.

CHAPTER 2, SECTION 2:
Adaptation: Rooting Erotic Trash,
A Translingual Mash-Up of Mina Loy and Mikhl Likht[200]

What would be the use of a procession
. . . if people had all to lie down
on their faces so that they couldn't see it?
                    —"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland"[201]

Twice everything has
already taken place
that our personality our destiny
like a roll of negative film —
already printed but unrevealable
until it has found a camera
to project it — and a
surface to throw it upon"
                    —Mina Loy, from "Islands in the Air"[202]

1/A

Spawn of Fantasies
Silting the appraisable
Pig Cupid   his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage
"Once upon a time"
Pulls a weed   white and star-topped
Among wild oats   **sewn in mucous membrane**

(Taedium Vitae)

Signs in space. Glimmer
of puddles and rain.
Silhouettes of streams spilling
                    over the stone. Over again—

I would   an   eye in a bengal light

Eternity in a sky-rocket
Constellations in an ocean
Whose rivers run no fresher
Than a trickle of saliva

A nightingale. Hums with little beak
over a tin pan
carved
to shrieking by gentile zion's
earthly hands

These are suspect places
With bellies and petty-coats the bottomfeeders
                                    all six
                                    all twelve

Swim
forward spiderlike in **erotic garbage**. *Like*
and unlike.

I must live in my lantern
Trimming subliminal flicker
Virginal   to the bellows
Of Experience
                Coloured glass

Strike the necessary
which elafantn seek & after which
                  like the guests withdrawing
into themselves
one by one over the fence
(like strings that snap
into a cellists knee
flick his nose—)

2/B

Hate
is the bow. *Dress*

him up
on the head

The skin-sack
In which a wanton duality
Packed
All the completions of my infructuous impulses
Something the shape of a man
To the casual vulgarity of the merely observant
More of a clock-work mechanism
Running down against time
To which I am not paced
     My finger-tips are numb from **fretting your hair**
A God's doormat
     On the threshold of your mind

and **laugh**
and leave—
But don't snap for laughter
The vacuo is elastic.

3/C

We might have coupled
In the bed-ridden monopoly of a moment
Or broken flesh with one another
At the profane communion table
Where wine is spill't on promiscuous lips
We might have given birth to a butterfly
With the daily-news
Printed in blood on its wings

How many mountains do you know
that grow
with the pointedness
         of professional prescription?

Once in mezzanino

The starry ceiling
Vaulted an unimaginable family
Bird-liked abortions
With human throats
And Wisdom's eyes
Who wore lamp-shade red dresses
And Woolen hair

Protoplasm relaxes everything: *if only*
the dough ferments
the leaven rises.

One bore a baby
In padded porte-enfant
Tied **with sarsanet ribbon**
To her goose's wings

The cells —
gossamer of nothing —
(yeah, yeah, matter, matter!)
will pay attention to it
the eye should observe
that which lives forever

But for the abominable shadows
I would have lived
Among their fearful furniture
To teach them to tell me their secrets
Before I guess
—Sweeping the brood clean out

and with the first glance
annihilate it —

that which lives forever —

4/D

Midnight empties the street

Of all but us
Three
I am undecided which way back
                To the left a boy
— One wing has been washed in the rain
The other will never be clean any more—

Molten lava flows in-
to where one shouldn't go:

my ego for example *is upright*
an ego with all the flourishes:

a classified index for extremes
(a civilized ego)

senseless days serenade emotionless nights
(a bloodless ego)

Pulling door-bells to remind
Those that are snug
                To the right a haloed ascetic
                Threading houses
Probes wounds for souls
—the poor can't wash in hot water—
And I don't know which turning to take
Since you got home to yourself—first

gathers "beads"
pays debts
parades through the streets
fogs mirrors

is partial
to that which is not
over that which is:

(what is not — is problematic
and provocative to egos —)

5/E

Come to me   **There is something**
I have got to tell you   and I can't tell
Something taking shape
Something that has a new name
As new dimension
A new use
A new Illusion

Do you really understand what I am going to say? **We**
                    are one
                     and the same: you and I —

It is ambient   And it is in your eyes
Something shiny   **Something only for you**
                    Something only for me

Nirvana
Despondent forever
out of the boundaries
impersonated

Let us be very jealous
Very suspicious
Very conservative
Very cruel

with lofty fountains
                from word-waves
comes someone
cover us up
seals us off from everyone
kicks us out
strikes the veil

Or we might have an end of the jostling of aspirations
Disorb inviolate egos

makes a clamor

Where two or three are welded together
They shall become god
———————————————

                              and out it creeps:

Oh that's right
Keep away from me   Please give me a push
Don't let me understand you   Don't realise me

Cosmos.

Or we might tumble together
Depersonalized
Identical
Into the terrific Nirvana
Me you — you — me

6/F

***Cosmos** brother.*

When we lifted
Our eye-lids on Love
A cosmos
Of coloured voices

                    (Analogical — our equal.
                    Pathological — our grandfather.
                    Our child —)

And **laughing** honey
And spermatoza
At the core of Nothing
In the milk of the moon

Dear cosmos
I will not charge you
like someone who once had the nerve

to name you:
> **colorless onion.**

Dear one   at your mercy
Our Universe
Is only
a **colourless onion**
You derobe
Sheath by sheath
> Remaining
A disheartening odour
About your **nervy hands**

You go up the mountain
raise your feet

We might have lived together
In the lights of the Arno
Or gone apple stealing under the sea
Or plays
Hide and seek in love and **cobwebs**
And a lullaby on a tin-pan

like thousand-year old oaks
whose every ring
implies death and structure

And   talked till there were no more tongues
To talk with
And never have known any better

The dust your feet kick up
chokes and blinds —
and stuns:

I don't care
Where the legs of the legs of the furniture are walking to
Or what is hidden in the shadows they stride
Or what would look at me

If the shutters were not shut

(expanded **rose-colored**
mirages
hazy conceptions —)

your return is like this too:
No more is
down-the-mountain
faster

Red   a warm colour on the battle-field
Heavy on my knees **as a counterpane**
Count counter
I counted the fringe of the towel
Till two tassles clinging together
Let the square room fall away
From a round vacuum
Dilating with my breath

Only the Kotsker
was mistaken:

he will not
I will not bring "the little earnings
                              from the fair".

I will rob
even kill without "hammered-silver"
Homo homini . . .

7/G

Nucleus   Nothing
Inconceivable concept
Insentient repose
The hands of races
Drop off from
Unmodifiable plastic

A point of fire presents itself: I
lie helpless
on my back

diagonal
Is the velocity Einsteinian

The contents
of our **ephemeral conjunction**
In aloofness from Much
Flowed to approachment of — — — — — —
NOTHING

(I wanted
                   to trash my "knowledge"
                         to disrupt my ego's canto:
[and what's more it shows
an egotistical ego
I failed to record in its right place.] —)

Fire-point points fires:
Fires points
                 on and on

A bow of fire-points points.

There was a man and a woman
In the way
While the Irresolvable
Rubbed with our daily deaths
Impossible eyes

8/H

And yet, I don't feel the need
                     to self-identify.

The steps go up for ever
And they are white
And the first step is the last white
Forever

I am tied to a sack
of flesh
into which I plunge
my hands
(a link to the sack)
thin things

fat
dry and wet.

Coloured conclusions
Smelt   **to synthetic**
Whiteness
Of my
Emergence
And I am burnt quite white
In the climacteric
Withdrawl of your sun
And wills and words all white
Suffuse
Illimitable monontone

I have a bloody gash
in my face
Which deals with every-
                    thing
like a successful businessman.

White   where there is nothing to see
But a white towel
Wipes the cymophonous sweat
—Mist rise of living—
From your
Etiolate body

The sack and the gash
are doubled—
or better yet:
sacks and gashes:

sacks carry
and gashes swallow
and lock-up
                *as was said — **to define***
                the frames of existence.

And the white dawn
Of your New Day
Shuts down on me

Yet, after all I can't
                do anything

except give or take
name things
lament
cry
laugh

fill up the sack
swallow through the gash

fill up the sack

Unthinkable that white over there
— — — — Is smoke from your house

9/I

Do you love bobe-mayses?
           listen:
listen to how it stirs
breaks
rants
searches
now
in the fourth watch of night.

Evolution fall foul of
Sexual equality
Prettily miscalculate
Similitude
Unnatural selection
Breed such sons and daughters
As shall jibber at each other
Uninterpretable cryptonyms
Under the moon

Cries
(forget "the destruction of the Temple!"

Let meeting be the turning
to the antipodean
And Form   a blurr
Anything
Than seduce them
To the one

As simple satisfaction
For the other

Thunders
(forget your grandfather's "fingernail-water" at "midnight"!)

Let them clash together
From their incognitos
In seismic orgasm
For far further
Differentiation
Rather than watch
Own-self distortion
Wince in the alien ego

A new measurement
heavier.

A new use
more profitable.

In some prenatal plagiarism
Foetal buffoons
Caught tricks
— — — — — — —

("Pragmatist!" sneer the yesterdays.
--Shadows! **Colorless dust!** — *the tomorrows dismiss with their hands)*
something clever in darkness —
listen.

Crucifixion
Of an illegal ego's
Eclosion
On your equilibrium
Caryatid   of an idea

Do you love bobe-mayses?

Crucifixion
Wracked arms
Index extremities
In vacuum
To the unbroken fall

Oh yeah: two? Another step
and the distance between them vanishes.
Another step.
Closer.
Closer.

The moon is cold
Joannes
Where the Mediterranean — — — — — —

"Allegory" you say?
"Night and day"?
"Good and bad"?
  No. No.
Man and wife.
  Man and wife.
The eternal secret. Never
     was a secret.

The prig of passion — — — — — — — —
To your professorial paucity
Proto-plasm was raving mad
Evolving us — — — — — — — — — — —

The *Truth*
    The eternal *Truth.*
The eternal Truth.
     The eternal secret.
Disappeared
As into a river.
Hidden with a veil.

Yesod

Love — — — — — the preeminent literateur

(Do you love bobe-mayses?
so listen:
Listen —)

CHAPTER 3, SECTION 1:
Translation: Avot Yeshurun, *"From Whom Did I Take Permission?"*[203]

Figure 8-10: Left to right: Avot Yeshurun, Ivan Schwebel's Zion Square Jerusalem, Harold Schimmel

I placed my fathers there beneath the chestnut trees, in order that they shall place me here. Since then I've moved from one shack to another shack, from one shack to another shack. I button buttons & pins on parts of bodies of those present & memories & live dreams & live doubly. & suddenly, on January 1st, 1979, in the morning, & here's notice of a prize. I'm entering an ice age, I tell the notifier. It appears I complicate things. They get the Bialik Prize from the hands of Bialik himself.[204] But it's said that Bialik heated the heart of the Hebrew poetry, because he turned the materials of poetry into poetry. He also treaded the carpet before Uri Zvi Greenberg[205], the man who came & arose after Jeremiah, & he's the master of two eternities: eternity of Jewish nation & eternity of Hebrew nation. Until 1948. Was witnessed, since then, to choose the things of poetry — rather than the poetry of things. & until the war of the Holocaust, that since then came a man from the Holocaust & a man from the war, & they weren't able to tell the remains themselves, what had happened, & if they come with their words, & we, we don't have their words -- there was one man that saw in the suffering the language of the Hebrew Eliezer Ben Yehuda.[206] He broke words like sand of the sea. But it wasn't to give them necessary words, only to take from them necessary words. To appoint an absorption minister from ourselves. To build a great tent, & call-out:

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[203] Translation is mine
[204] Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) was one of the foremost pioneers of Modern Hebrew poetry, and is today informally recognized as the State of Israel's national poet.
[205] Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896-1981) was a translingual Yiddish-Hebrew poet and radical modernist.
[206] Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922) was a Zionist lexicographer and one of the driving forces behind the institutional revival of Modern Hebrew.

ahlan wa sahlan[207] unto the tent, all voiced expression, & hints of soul, all speaking & spokesmanship, you are our brothers, are in our language. The numbered days of the voyage to the land of Israel, in October, & here I recall in the migration of the storks in their eastward season, & we the children used to shout at them: "*Bocianie, bocianie, pali sie gniazdo!*" which is to say: "the stork, the stork, the nest goes up in flames!"

& so the days of travel to the land of Israel on the ship were amazingly boring, the people did not recognize, went to waste. The ship with the distances more beautiful than at the port, & more maternal than at home. They didn't hear a sound. But steadfast. From the side emerged a jet of water toward the sea, like toward our Wadi Musrara.[208] Suddenly we see the shore on the horizon. Everyone was compelled to write a poem. So everyone who needs writing, or who doesn't need it, but here, everyone that settles on the establishment & doesn't leave — they should leave. When I dreamt of the land, I was heavy, & the dream light. Here I am light & the dream heavy.

Created the world in six days, like us, when we played in the sand. The animals & the villains & the righteous, they're all in one hall. We went by foot & the hoe[209] upon us. In this land all this happened, the large animals near the creation of the natural world. Here emerges the large camel. Giant lizard. & the land very good & peaceful. No prophecy of protest arose, but after the Amorite & the Perrizite & the Canaanite & the Hittite & the Girgashite the Hivite & the Yebusite.[210] The prophecy comes & the wasp will expel them. Not with your sword & not with your bow. And gave you a land for which you did not labor. Towns you did not build. Oliveyards you did not plant.[211] The prophecy came & was transferred to poetry. Because poetry has words. Why is music without words? So that man keeps poetry close to himself. Perhaps not every person is a prophet. But every

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[207] Arabic: meaning "welcome", a term of familial greeting.

[208] Yeshurun uses the Arabic name for the Ayalon River, which runs in Israel/Palestine from the Judean Hills to the Yarkon in Tel Aviv.

[209] Yeshurun uses the Arabic word for hoe here: "*turiya*".

[210] Glossing Deuteronomy 7:1: "When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou…" (KJB)

[211] Glossing Joshua 24:12-13: "And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you, *even* the two kings of the Amorites; *but* not with thy sword, nor with thy bow. And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat" (KJB).

person is a poet. Because poetry obliges that a person respond to everything. Because she is the *khutspit*.[212]

Niskhizsh — the city in which I was born, she is strength & mystery & cemetery for the righteous. With a shack-house for the Rebbe, my mother's father, who I didn't see.

Krasnystaw — the city in which I grew up, a hilly city, with a church[213], with a farmers' square on Sunday, with a garden of chestnuts that would explode in their shells seven for each limb.

Przedmiescie — village of my childhood, with a water-mill with a forest with a meadow with a river with white grandfather my father's father. War found me & I'm nine years old in the city in which I was born. We returned from the war as refugees in the city in which I grew up. The city was burned. From the pyre rebuilt. Poland in the days of re–establishment elevated the creations of its great writers & poets. A garden of chestnut trees in the city center. The gothic catholic church & the farmers' square. Against such strength. Weakness was to know, if we have a poet. The Hebrew night-course teacher said: we have. Bialik with a scroll of fire. But I didn't recognize. I didn't study the poems of Bialik in school. I absorbed them in the street. From the beauty on every face of the teenage generation. Between *Baba Kama* & *Baba Metsiya*[214] was in the war. On every face I read Bialik. Between my peers something penetrated, according to which I translate from memory: "go to the potter & buy a pot, & say: this is how you shatter, you shall shatter!"[215] I didn't know why. But we returned from the war & our hearts were inclined to believe why. The first time I heard of Bialik it was the Polish sound of his name. This gave me strength. There were fires & there was a battle between Yiddish & Hebrew. I am the elder. I am your maiden sister from the house. There were wreckages & fires in the house. I am a maiden I am your sister in the house. Afterward they began they throw me around on departure from father's home threw upon me on *aliyah*[216] to the land & threw upon me on the meeting with the arabs, who resemble those from the small towns, from home, & threw upon me trains & rails that change, & a train leaves & a train fills up &

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[212] Yiddish: The female embodiment of *khustpa,* lit. "gall".

[213] Yeshurun uses the Yiddish word for church here: "*kloyster*".

[214] Two consecutive Talmudic tractates within the *Nizikin* ("Damages") order, which Yeshurun would have been studying in Yeshiva (traditional Jewish academy) during the onset of WWI.

[215] Glossing various prophetic sources, but especially Isaiah 30:14: And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water *withal* out of the pit" (KJB).

[216] Hebrew: literally "going up"; refers here to the Jewish "right of return" to the Land of Israel.

shakes & quakes mute & muted. My mother outfitted me in materials of clothing & didn't outfit me in materials of poetry. & even if she had had them. I couldn't understand. Answer: from the cemetery they don't take back. I went — I went. I left — I left from their bodies I split. Poetry is a source & a spring is a source. There is no aqueduct to transfer the springs from there to here. They are another family & we are another family. End of days of eternity. Begins a new eternity. The poetry is not to the words & not to the music. The poetry is between God's knees & between mother's knees, who no longer remembers me today. I saw the things of poetry & not the poetry of things. The old Arab village obsolete & the new Jewish kibbutz. As though they jumped ahead of the little towns to the land to foresee man from here with genealogies & genealogies of genealogies & great miracles from Islam even. Israel has never arrived with empty hands. It's worthwhile to recall because they came & said to the land of Canaan: Canaanites "fear of God burns all fears" — said the Rebbe of *Modjetz.* Self-confidence relies on hidden arabic redeemed from the Polish frustration. I felt that they do not speak on this. An absence they do not write on the issue. There was a community center. They delivered speeches. I had a speech. What — I knew not. Was told to me: they heard my mother in some yard. A reject stood alone & abused. If I heard — what did she say? God left her. Her child left her. I saw Bialik travelling in a chariot with Ahad Ha-Am[217] to the seashore in Tel Aviv. Bialik did not witness the Holocaust. If he had witnessed — what he said: "I saw you again in your disability".[218]

& I — from whom did I take permission to place my ancestors on the chestnuts, beneath the wood & the fire?

13 Shvat Tashlat, 10 February 1979

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[217] Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg (1856 -1927), primarily known by his Hebrew pen name, Ahad Ha'am (lit. "one of the people"), was an early Modern Hebrew writer, and one of the foremost pre-state Zionist thinkers.

[218] The title of one Chaim Nachman Bialik's modern lamentations on the Jews of Eastern Europe. Bialik was known in his poetry—and especially in his most famous poem, "On the City of Slaughter"—to represent traditional eastern European Jewish life as backward, barbaric and quite literally *disabled*.

CHAPTER 3, SECTION 2:
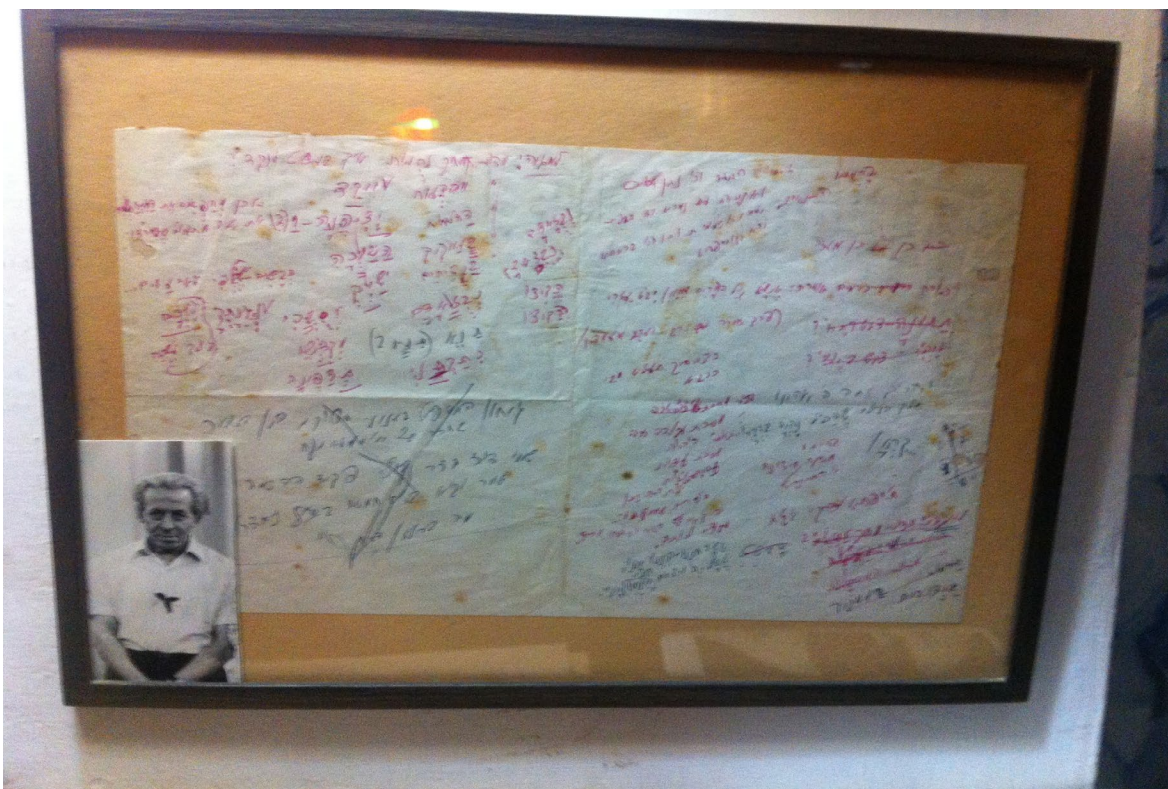
Rudder to Rudder: Toward a Spectral Creole-Hebrew Poetics

Figure 11: A manuscript of Avot Yeshurun's

I thought of the people struggling within this speck of the world against silence and obliteration. And of how they—in the obstinacy of their venture—have consented to being reduced to sectarianism, stereotyped discourse, zeal, to convoy definitive truths, the appetite for power. And also of what Alain Gontrand has described so well as "our masquerades of temperament." I thought about those people throughout the rest of the world (and the rest, moreover, is what is on the move) who have not had the opportunity to take refuge, as this walker has, in absence—having been forced out by raw poverty, extortion, famines, or massacres. It is paradoxical that so many acts of violence everywhere produce language at its most rudimentary, if not the extinction of words. Is there no valid language for Chaos? Or does Chaos only produce a sort of language that reduces and annihilates? Does its echo recede into the sabir of sabirs at the level of a roar?

    —Édouard Glissant[219]

Mouth to

mouth. Rudder

to rudder.

    —Avot Yeshurun[220]

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[219] 2010: 123.

[220] From "*Panekha el-panay"* (Your Face to Mine), 1992: 84.

I. Cracks in a Language

Avot Yeshurun (b. Yekhiel Perlmutter, 1904-1992) bears witness in translingual mongrel Hebrew verse to an "epoch of *khurbn*," which permeates into his and our contemporary future. Yeshurun is a writer committed to radical poetic resistance in the form of writing and speaking across and between languages, hidden in a Hebrew "language of rags", in Yiddish-Arabic iconoclastic interfacing tongues.[221] His poetics enacts a formal opposition to Zionist statist monolingual norms of standardization and totalization, which, he argues, only masquerade as Jewish cultural unity. This is a poetics that dwells in the doubling sights/sites of exclusionary violence, demanding a singular space to dwell, despite the continuous systematic erasure of the very space demanded. Yeshurun's body of work is just that then—a resistant body written and spoken into the systematic cultural and political Hebraization[222] of modern Israel/Palestine: a translingual virus infecting the national Hebrew host, or, better yet, antibody within a corrupted exclusionary nationalist body-politic.[223] Yeshurun bears witness to Hebraist exclusions first of all by refusing to leave Hebrew, while at the same time fusing and infusing his Hebrew with forbidden traces of Yiddish, Polish and Arabic speech. His Hebrew resists nationalist amnesiac agendas, unwilling to forget the languages of the dead: those murdered and displaced by the Europeans in the Reich, and those murdered and displaced by the Ashkenazi Jewish establishment in Israel/Palestine.[224] Yeshurun inscribes this

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[221] A "language of rags" appears in Yeshurun's "*Siftah*", *Kol shirav* (collected poems) vol.2, 170-171, and according to Helit Yeshurun, is a direct quote from the Zionist modernist Natan Alterman.

[222] Re-termed "Judaization" by the contemporary Jewish far-right in Israel/Palestine.

[223] This metaphor reverses the traditional *maskilik* (Jewish Enlightenment) myth, which held that Yiddish was a sick (disabled) bastard of Hebrew and German.

[224] Repression of a diasporic-Jewish language and repression of a Palestinian-Arab language, both justified in the name of national Zionist-Hebraist unification.

very real violence onto the site of the symbolic violence of monolingualist exclusion in

the form of unabashed language mixing: demanding a space for Yiddish (the language of

khurbn[225]) beside Arabic (the language of *nakba*[226]) within the same Hebrew host,[227] a

doubly-exposed poetic ghost, which calls out from the "narrows" of modern Hebrew

culture to anyone who will listen: "your ancestors will be watching you".[228]

The modern Hebrew language itself bears witness for Yeshurun to the paradox of

two holocausts:

> the holocaust of the Jewish people there [in Europe] and the holocaust of the Arab people here [in Palestine]. When one wakes up in the morning to see that a people that had been living in its land yesterday is now gone, and hears from his parents that the Jewish people in Europe had perished in the Holocaust—a contradiction is created within him.[229]

Yeshurun navigates the traumatic aporia of his reality by inhabiting in his poetics the

stigmatized zone of the "other" while simultaneously recognizing and facing that "other,"

now doubly displaced. [230] Against the unified identity of the Zionist "New Jew," this

poetics asserts Yiddish and Arabic difference as dissonance, the disparate sounds of sister

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[225] Yiddish being the common language of the majority of those murdered and displaced in the Nazi Holocaust.

[226] Arabic: catastrophe of 1948.

[227] Glissant uses the word "vehicle" in these terms; I use host, and both in fact translate into Hebrew as *klee*, as in *klee-zemer* (musical vessel).

[228] *"Min ha-metzar / karati shir"* (from the narrows / I called-out a poem) Yeshurun writes in *"Siftah"*, breaking as it were *Psalms 118:5:* "I called upon the LORD in distress (literally, out of the narrow gorge), and the LORD answered me on the open plain."

[229] Yeshurun, qtd. in Bezalel 39.

[230] Writes Hanan Hever, paraphrasing Derrida in *The Gift of Death* (1992): "the paradoxical meaning of the promise of determining one's responsibility is that any decision that is based on stable rules and norms constitutes an abrogation of responsibility toward the other, whose singularity is also authorized by means of alternative rules and norms" (154).

exiled tongues[231] in hiding, speaking in whispers from the farthest margins of the

nationalist cultural vacuum.[232]

Yeshurun is a famously difficult poet to classify in the context of the nation state.

Is he an Israeli poet, despite the fact that his poetry opposes the political and cultural

program which built the State of Israel? Is he a Hebrew poet despite the fact that the

Hebrew literati of the nineteen-forties and fifties claimed he did not in fact write in

Hebrew? Is he a Yiddish poet? An Arabic poet?[233] I use the term translingual to describe

Yeshurun's poetic praxis in several tactics; translingual meaning born in the pangs of

diasporic translation, between several language houses, while settling in none. The term

spectral creole-Hebrew helps us further imagine the speculative possibilities of

Yeshurun's hauntalogical language practice without simply reducing or reifying his work

to standard Hebrew (or English) prose; this is a spectral creole Hebrew since it is the

ancestral ghosts themselves who speak in the mouth of the translingual cipher.

Yeshurun's creolizing of Hebrew functions then as a poetic mode, not merely as an

extended metaphor or conceit, but as an opaque translational witness of creole life across

the ongoing diaspora of Poland-Palestine.[234]

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[231] It is significant, I think, to read Yiddish and Arabic as "sisters" here, since both languages have historically been cast as feminine outliers by the self-identifying "masculine" Hebrew "New Jew."

[232] The violent rejection of Yiddish and Arabic by the early Zionist-Hebraists was so "resolute," writes Michael Gluzman, "that it has come to be described in military terms: the Battalion of the Defenders of the Hebrew Language (*gedud meginey ha-safa ha-ivrit*) was the name of a militant group that supported the use of Hebrew in what has come to be known as the "language wars" (143).

[233] For Yeshurun did write in Yiddish initially, and he learned Arabic before Hebrew, upon arriving in British-Mandate Palestine.

[234] As Glissant writes: "Agree not merely to the right of difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not the nature of its components (2010: 190).

I take as key precedent in this work Edouard Glissant's *Poétique de la Relation* [Poetics of Relation], in both formal and conceptual theorization of an expanded diasporic creolizing language that connects across archipelagic networks of mixing, from the Antilles [*on-tee*] to the Indian Ocean and beyond. Yeshurun, I argue, retains the translingual-diasporic thread Glissant imagines, relating to Hebrew as a vehicle of radical creolizing change, against the normatizing violence of nationalist monological exclusion. Reading Yeshurun's Hebrew as a singular translingual agent within a wider diasporic field of Jewish-creoles—across Yiddish and English, Spanish and Portuguese, German and French, among others—we immediately recognize in his poetics, the potent urgency of impending extinction, as Isaac Bashevis Singer imagined, the single polyglot spirit survived, eating leaves from holy books in synagogue attics.[235] And indeed, we find that the most violent attacks on Yeshurun's work are driven by nationalist fears of mixture, and specifically by fears of Jewish identification with the Arab other in Israel/Palestine. If creolizing is taking place in language all the time, against all odds, as Glissant suggests in his Poetics, Yeshurun recognizes this diasporic dynamic as an outsider within his own Hebrew—as Glissant is an outsider within his own French. For Yeshurun and Glissant both, the translingual axis of a creolizing poetic language is fundamentally ethical; it is not because they *cannot* pass in standard Hebrew or standard French that they do not pass.[236] They do not pass because they refuse to pass. Relating to Yiddish and Arabic as interfacing poetic rudders (interfacing mouths in the form of a *siftah* or opening of a

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[235] Writes Bashevis Singer: "I, a demon, bear witness that there are no more demons left. Why demons, when man himself is a demon? Why persuade to evil someone who is already convinced? I am the last of the persuaders." See: Bashevis Singer, Isaac. 2011. *The Last Demon.* New York, NY: Penguin Books. Print.
[236] Thinking here of Nella Larson's 1929 novel, *Passing*.

conversation)[237] Yeshurun's creolizing Hebrew navigates the translingual portals of

Poland-Palestine, where ethical reconciliation is still a speculative possibility.[238] His

poetics arises from the diasporic rift between Poland and Palestine, from Bełżec to

Silwan, in mixed and mixing tongues: a Yiddish-Arabic-Hebrew *zhargon* which expands

into a creole futurity—open ideolects capable of beholding (supposedly) oppositional

identities in fusion "weave".[239]

On the side of Hebrew studies, my work is in direct conversation with the

translational-Hebrew scholarship of Adriana X. Jacobs, and in particular, with her recent

monograph, *Strange Cocktail: Translation and the Making of Modern Hebrew Poetry*

(University of Michigan Press, 2017). Jacobs' translation-oriented comparatist approach

to reading Modern Hebrew literary history creates a space in Hebrew Studies for my own

research into the question of creolizing Jewish poetics. Additionally, Michael Gluzman's

Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry (Stanford

University Press, 2003), provides a rich context for the stakes of statist Hebrew

literature's xenophobic, "invisible" center, and it's utter fear and subsequent hatred of

Yeshurun's body-poetic. Hanan Hever's essay "The Two Gaze Directly into One

Another's Face: Avot Yeshurun between the Nakba and Shoah—an Israeli Perspective"

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[237] The title of a poem by Avot Yeshurun, which can be found in his *Kol shirav* (collected poems) vol. 2, 170-171. *"Siftah"* in *Arabic* refers literally to the first sale of the day, which is considered lucky in Arab folk culture. Yeshurun translates the word into Hebrew, changing the first letter from *samekh* to *sin*, connoting the Hebrew word *safa* (language) and *sfataim* (lips).

[238] With regard to his relation to Hebrew literature, Yeshurun writes the following: "A strange relationship has settled in between me and Hebrew literature. She did not attract me. I have a major gripe against her: she did not fulfill her fundamental role—to bring us closer to the Arab question and to the Arab people of the land...Hebrew literature brought us to Zion and it had to say the truth about who lived in the land, not to say that it was empty." See: Sh. Shifra, *"Re'ayon im Avot Yeshurun"* (Interview with Avot Yeshurun), *Davar*, April 1, 1975.

[239] To use a term Glissant employs in his discussions of creolizing language.

also provides an important point of view within the contemporary discourse of counter-statist Hebrew writing and art, with which my own work engages, and responds to, from the perspective of global Jewish modernisms.

A space was opened for Jacobs and myself both, as well as for many other scholars and translators, with the publication of Chana Kronfeld's *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (University of California Press, 1996). Kronfeld's response to Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Kafka's "minor" poetics, traces a powerful translingual rhizome between Hebrew and Yiddish. Her work *fartaytsht un farbestert* (translates and makes better)[240], we might say, Deleuze and Guattari's archetypal discourse on diasporic Jewishness, by opening the conversation to the question of the minor and marginal Jewish language itself. Near the close of *On the Margins*, Kronfeld writes the following to a future scholar of "minor" Jewish modernisms: "That these formations crisscross and combine," she writes,

> is perhaps most dramatically illustrated by the example of the Hebrew poet Avot Yeshurun (1904-92). [...]In order to recover Yeshurun's poetics for Hebrew literary history, a project which has only just begun, the marginality of his work needs to be reconstructed in its diverse yet intersecting dimensions.[241]

The present research takes up Kronfeld's invitation to recover Yehurun's poetics in all its complex diversity, through a theory and poetics of creolizing Hebrew, a further tangent and diasporic thread, in its own right, which reimagines once again the radical possibilities of the rhizome.[242]

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[240] A Yiddish technique of radical translational interpretation, which adapts non-Jewish discourses into a specifically Jewish language context.

[241] 229.

[242] Surely enough, Glissant also interprets and adapts Deleuze and Guattari for the purposes of an Afro-Caribbean diaspora poetics.

In this chapter, I will read and respond to Yeshurun's work and its reception

through the "kaleidoscopic" lens of a creole-Hebrew mongrel-Hebrew poetics.[243]

Yeshurun's writing, I argue, witnesses in miscegenated fusion forms, the double-trauma

of *khurbn/nakba*[244], which links the diaspora-Jew to the Palestinian. It is this proposed

linkage that first outraged the Israeli literary establishment and that motivated them to

scorn Yeshurun and omit his work from the official Hebrew literary histories and

anthologies for more than three decades. I read Yeshurun's initiation into creole-Hebrew

therefore within the context of his expulsion from Hebrew letters. Within this context, I

take good care to examine the obsessive purist fears of the mid-century Hebraist literati,

who match figures like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and even Henry James, in the vitriol of

their xenophobic anti-creole rhetoric.[245] Indeed, in mid-century Israel/Palestine, as

Yeshurun suggests again and again, the Hebrew literary elite, played the roles of

gatekeepers no less brutally than Pound or Eliot.[246] Yeshurun's Hebrew, we discover—

not unlike Paul Celan's German—is unable and unwilling to forget the totalizing violence

that underlies the nationalist desire for unification.[247] In order to stand in continuous

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[243] A term I translate and borrow from the expanded-Yiddish modernist poetics of the New York-based Introspectivist poets.

[244] A translingual term I use to illustrate the interfacing Yiddish/Arabic catastrophes in Yeshurun's poetics.

[245] Ezra Pound (1885-1972); T.S. Eliot (1888-1965); Henry James (1843-1916).

[246] Natan Alterman (1910-1970) and Avraham Shlonsky (1900-1973). With regard to the generation of Alterman and Shlonsky, on the occasion of Alterman's death, Yeshurun says the following: "Maybe that generation [of Shlonsky and Alterman] suffocated [me]. Maybe that generation did not understand. [I] got fed up with that generation. You saw the pettiness, the behavior, twisting around with itself and its things and you got sick of it. One saw the pettiness of poetry, the pettiness of the poems, and their dependence on a small public's opinion. The enslavement, the provincialism of Hebrew poetry in my time. Provincialism toward right-wing Zionism, the desire to be liked, how am I, how am I, it ate me alive. Maybe I am hurting someone here, someone who is really precious to me. I mourn his death. Maybe I am risking myself but I have to say it. It suffocated me." (Helit Yeshurun, "'Ani holech el ha-kol'" ("I walk toward everything"), interview with Avot Yeshurun, *Chadarim* 3, 1982-83; 94.)

[247] Indeed, there have been a great number of recent studies on Yeshurun and Celan. See, for example, Shimon Sandbank's essay "The Date: Celan, Derrida, Yeshurun" in *Ekh nikra* (How Shall We Read), ed. Lilach Lachman. (Tel Aviv: *Ha-kibutz ha-me'ukhad,* 2011), 97-106.

unfaltering opposition to the cultural-political domination of statist Hebraist agendas,

Yeshurun invents in iconoclastic "spells" of Jewish creole past-futures—an imagined

present—through speculative experiments in the field of diasporic polyvalence.[248]

II. Against Monolingual-Hebrew Passing

> And placed us on the threshold, an Arab sailor—
> with outstretched arms and ensnared words
> and the hands—from my father's house
>   —Avot Yeshurun[249]

Avot Yeshurun was born Yekhiel Perlmutter in Nezkhish, Poland in 1904, the same year,

I'm often reminded, that Louis Zukofsky was born in the Lower East Side.[250] As a child

he took sick, and so was given the second name, "Alter" meaning in Yiddish older, or

elder, in order—according to Jewish folkloric tradition—to trick the evil eye, and save

his life. And he lived by that name for forty-four years, wrote Yiddish poetry in that

name, Hebrew poetry in that name, and published his first Hebrew book in 1942 in that

name, six years before he changed it.

He spent his childhood in Krasnystaw, Poland (today Ukraine), until the age of

ten, at which point the outbreak of World War I forced his family to flee their home, and

they became refugees, along with thousands of other displaced Jews across Europe. The

family moved around for several years, homeless, penniless, and simultaneously witness

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[248] If creolizing is indeed an "ethnotechnique," as Glissant suggests, translingual blessings, curses and spells all serve as potential sources (and permissions) for the poem.

[249] From "Pass Over on Caves." Translation is Adriana X. Jacobs's (139).

[250] Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978) notes in his "autobiography" that this was the same year Henry James came back to the American scene from England. See: Zukofsky, Celia and Zukofsky, Louis. 1970. *Autobiography*. New York, NY: Grossman Publishers.

to violent pogroms, what Yeshurun would later refer to as one start to the "epoch of

khurbn" which expanded into his (and our) contemporal future.

In 1925, against the express wishes of his parents, he emigrated to British-

Mandate Palestine. He would never see his family again, all of whom perished, along

with two thousand other Jews from Krasnystaw, in the Bełžec extermination camp during

the Holocaust.[251] Yeshurun's poetics is simultaneously subsumed and impelled by the

guilt he bears for his family's death and his own survival, which is marked by and in his

Hebrew. "Those" he writes in his poem, "*Kol mi-she-ba mi-sham*" (all who come from

there), "my father and mother, brothers and sister, stand straight in my eyes / and all

Krasnystaw stands at the windows" (2009: 266).[252]

The young Yiddish-Hebrew poet, Yekhiel Alter, worked as a day laborer during

his first years in Mandatory Palestine—passing much of his time in the company of

Bedouin and Palestinian Arabs—and learned spoken Arabic before spoken Hebrew.[253] In

1942, he published his first book of Hebrew verse, *Al khokhmat ha'drakhim* (on the

wisdom of roads), a work engaged specifically with the linguistic and cultural

polyvalence of Palestine, paying close attention to the cultural and linguistic landscapes

of Bedouin and Palestinian life.

In 1948, on the eve of his conscription into the Israeli army, Yekhiel Alter

Perlmutter legally changed his name to Avot (meaning "fathers" or "ancestors"); and

later that year, to Avot Yeshurun, a strange archaic Hebrew pseudonym, taken to mean:

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[251] All his family perished save one brother.
[252] Translation is mine.
[253] From a correspondence with Helit Yeshurun on Dec 1st, 2015. Used with permission of the author.

"Your fathers [or ancestors] (will be) watching you."[254] Four years later he published the

highly controversial translingual long poem, "*Pesakh al kukhim"* (Pass Over on

Caves)[255], in which he spliced and reconfigured a network of classical and modern texts,

including (explicitly), The Passover Haggadah, The Book of Esther, The Song of Songs,

as well as Avraham Shlonsky's "You Are Hereby" and Natan Alterman's *Poems of the*

Plagues on Egypt. Reverse engineering the accepted order of Hebraist standards,

Yeshurun creates an intensive mash-up of negated narratives in order to cast into relief an

urgent contemporary poetic-ethical link between the catastrophe of the Palestinians in the

Jewish-Arab war of 1948, and the catastrophe of the Jews in the Holocaust. "If

Yeshurun's text is indeed a tissue of negated quotations," writes Michael Gluzman, "it

aims to problematize, critique, and disrupt the 'story grammar' of...the biblical Jewish-

gentile master-narrative" (158). Yeshurun's creole-Hebrew begins with this breaking-up

of the traditional Hebraist order-of-events and operations, in order to implant traces of the

other into his poetic language.

Yeshurun was derided for this poem, and cast out of the Zionist literary

establishment by his contemporaries who were threatened as much by his radical

diasporic politics as they were by his innovative poetics, claiming that he wrote "in a

language of rags." "Prior to the Statehood Generation in Israeli Hebrew literature of the

1950s," writes Gluzman, "Hebrew poetic modernism's leading movement, the

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[254] Helit Yeshurun notes that her father took on the name Avot (fathers) as a translation of a Yiddish diminutive nickname his mother called him as a child in Krasnystaw: *tatelekh*, meaning "little fathers."
[255] Collected in Yeshurun's second book, *Re'em.* 1961. Tel Aviv: *Agudat ha-sofrim ha-ivrim and Hotsa'at d'vir.*

moderna...was intensely committed to Zionism as a nationalist political process and to the weaving of a national narrative" (145).

Yeshurun was so heavily stigmatized by the *moderna* for his subversive politics and radical translingual mode of writing that he was deemed (paradoxically) incomprehensible and simultaneously dangerous to read. But how can Yeshurun's poems be both nonsensical and heretical, meaningless, and yet still a threat to Israeli society?

The writer and politician Ya'akov Gil wrote the following condemnation of "Pass Over on Caves" after it first appeared in *Haaretz in* 1952.

> On May 23, Avot Yeshurun published a lengthy poem of twenty-seven quatrains entitled "Pass Over on Caves," all of which is [about] assimilation (*hitbolelut*) with Arabs, moral slavery, and psychological complexes[...]If *Ha'aretz* will nourish its readers with this heretical literature (*sifrut shel minut*) not only will their national sentiment be in danger but so will their mental health[...]Yekhiel Perlmutter of Poland despises [the pioneer] and replaces him with the Arab farmer[...]Until these lines were printed in *Ha'aretz* we didn't know that there are Jews among us who linked themselves to the Arab...It's a wonder that these guys don't move to the East Bank of the Jordan .[256]

Gil's diatribe against Yeshurun's poem is emblematic of the nationalist party line that the *moderna* towed, which pervaded public discourse in the newly formed Israeli nation state. I am especially taken by Gil's assertion that Yeshurun's writing is in fact heretical, suggesting that Hebrew poetry has replaced scripture in modern Hebrew culture, and that Yeshurun's poem is not only a threat to the State of Israel, but to World Judaism, more broadly. It is noteworthy that Gil calls Yeshurun by his former name, Yekhiel Perlmutter,` a gesture of blatant disrespect; and "of Poland" suggests a metaphoric revocation of Yeshurun's biblical birthright as a Jew, which has become the modern "right of return" to Israel, a one-sided "birthright," according to Yeshurun, which he

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[256] Meaning: the Kingdom of Jordan; from "*Avdut be-tokh ha-medina*" (Slavery within the state) *Cherut*, July 18, 1952.

scrutinizes in "Pass Over on Caves" in the form of a critique of the biblical source itself:

"Surely, Jacob's rose / ask the thorns"[257]

The projected danger (and internalized fear) of Yeshurun's writing during early-statehood years manifested in ugly parodies of his work, in the slapstick style of barbaric sub-human language. The poet and editor L. Livne, for example, wrote and published in his own journal, *Be-terem,* a seething farce of "Pass Over on Caves" entitled "*Purim al-nekhasim*" (Purim on real estate), in which he casts Yeshurun's poetics as, "a porridge of sardines, straw and onions,"[258] an inedible beastly fare. Gluzman notes that Livne's farce of Yeshurun—in replacing Passover with Purim, "a Jewish holiday with an omnipresent carnivalesque essence"—signals not only "an act of mockery or derision, but also, in a Bakhtinian sense...an act of demarcating transgression" (153).[259] Chaim Shorer, the editor in those days of the influential Hebrew newspaper *Davar*, wrote and published a cruel parody of Yeshurun's work, as well, entitled "*Nikhnas ha-ru'akh be-avi Avot Yehsurun*" (The demon enters the father of Avot Yeshurun), a modern Hebrew euphemism for "let Avot Yeshurun go to Hell." And just as the early (conservative) critics claimed of Gertrude Stein,[260] Shorer deems Yeshurun's writing decadent gibberish, "a petty cultural product that springs from the joviality of the cafés" (Gluzman 153). Shorer's parody of Yeshurun focuses on what T.S. Eliot negatively defined as the dislocation of sound from sense[261]: "*parush* (reclusive)," Shorer, writes,

> *chalush* (weak)
> *bakhush* (stirred)

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[257] Translation is Michael Gluzman's (178).
[258] From"*Purim al nekhasim*" (Purim on real estate), *Be-terem,* 1952.
[259] Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975).
[260] Gertrude Stein (1874-1946).
[261] This specifically in response to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

talush (uprooted)
kalush (meager)
ba'ush (a stinking)
par'osh (flea) [262]

The poem speaks for itself, a mean smirk at Yeshurun's poetics, in which Shorer

besmirches the radical translingual modality of Yeshurun's work, in dull bullying

taunts. Shorer's and Livne's "hate poems" for Yeshurun recall Ezra Pound's 1928 "Der

Yiddisher Charleston Band," an anti-Semitic rant he writes in an apparent "bastardized"

English, as a parody of what he imagines will become the new American (and always for

Pound, *Jewish*) literature after he is gone.

One especially paranoid response to "Pass Over on Caves" goes so far as to

accuse Yeshurun of collaborating with Arab propagandists. This response comes in the

form of a letter to the editor of *Aleph*—a literary journal of the "Young Hebrews," that

published Yeshurun—after Yeshurun was praised on Damascus radio for his sensitivity

to the plight of Palestinian refugees. "One day I heard Rabhi Camal in his Hebrew

program on Damascus radio," the letter begins,

> praising the strange poem "Pass Over on Caves," a poem written by the Canaanite poet Avot
> Yeshurun...[The poem was perceived] as an expression of the "honest" feelings and "regrets" of a
> "large number of Jews in Palestine" over the expulsion of the [Arab] refugees. At the end he
> suggested that Avot Yeshurun ..."unconsciously" echoed the feelings of an Arab poet, one of the
> refugees themselves, as expressed in a poem entitled "Afterward," whose main idea reads more or
> less as follows: "My land, my land I shall return to you / my land, land and home / my land, land
> and olive tree... / All the foreigners who came to you, my land / from France unto China / will not
> become rooted in you, my land / because my roots in you are deeper / I shall return to you..." I
> simply want to ask whether the poets of Young Hebrews innocently match the ideas of Arab
> propagandists, and whether it is accidental that Damascus Radio emphasizes their stand and
> compliments them. [263]

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[262] Haim Shorer, from "*Nikhnas ha ruach ba-avi Avot Yeshurun*" (The demon enters the father of Avot
Yeshurun), *Ha-Dor*, Oct 3, 1952. Translation is Michael Gluzman's.
[263] Letter to the editor, *Aleph*, October 1952.

This letter reveals the uses and abuses of Hebrew poetry and poetics in the age of early Zionist statist unification. The writer parodies in this case the Arabic poem of return, in formulaic paraphrase that makes the contemporary reader cringe. The translingual poetic rudder of Yeshurun's "Pass Over on Caves" transforms the poet in the eyes of the mid-century Israeli literary establishment into an enemy collaborator, a poet guilty of high treason.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Yeshurun becomes the outsider poet par excellence in the State of Israel, and from this site of intense double-exile, opens a space in Hebrew letters for radical translingual literary praxes, a syncretic diasporic language that bucks the strictly enforced Hebraist monolingual standards of the day (still today) as a mode of subversive poethics. His poetics takes up the question of doubling as a form of witness—the responsibility of a survivor to respond—through translingual interventions into Hebrew alphabets, as translated and transliterated-homophonic facing sources.[264] "Mouth to mouth" writes Yeshurun, "rudder to rudder."[265] Supposedly opposing streams, which meet at the opening of language. A formally subversive poetics fuses with a radical ethics in Yeshurun's "language of rags" as a doubling gesture in-and-of-itself, a turning toward the other at every step, which is also an opening of the mouth,[266] not only as utterance, but as relation, and later, in writing, as translation.

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[264] What the Hebrew scholar Adriana X. Jacobs calls "multilingual portmanteau"; for an in-depth reading of Yeshurun's highly difficult cycle of poems *Shloshim Amot* (Thirty Pages), see Jacobs's "The Missing Element: Prosthetic Translation in Thirty Pages of Avot Yeshurun," in her recent *Strange Cocktail*: *Translation and the Making of Modern Hebrew Poetry*.

[265] From "*Panekha el-panai*" (Your Face to Mine), 2009: 379.

[266] Thinking again here of Yeshurun's "*Siftah*," and his changing the first letter of this word, from *samech* to *sin*, connoting the Hebrew word *safa* (language) and *sfataim* (lips).

This is poetry written to us from a diasporic Hebrew past-future, in a mongrel

tongue which holds and beholds multitudes of dialects and ideolects, accents and

inflections, sources and translations rattling in broken howls and growling vowels.[267] A

poetics of radical necessity, as the translingual-Anglo poet, Charles Reznikoff once

wrote, "first there is the need."[268] Yeshurun understood this need better than most. Not

the need for fluency or mastery, but the need to see. He stared into catastrophe and would

not look away. Could not look away. Refused the center for the periphery. Refused

clarity for opacity.[269] Refused the state for the stateless. For the statelessness of

catastrophe. His own, and others', in "double-life" and "double-eternity"[270]. As a

counter-past which compels a counter-future, and in this sense, a future which *must*

contain multitudes, against the notion of national-cultural unity. Yeshurun's vision for a

creole-Hebrew futurity therefore functions as an anti-absorptive holdout from the

monolingual assimilationist forces of the modern and contemporary nation state.

This poetics addresses the site of Jewish settlement and renovation in the State of

Israel, and specifically in the "Hebrew city" of Tel Aviv, as a simultaneous—and in

Yeshurun's words, "doubling,"— site of demolition and destruction.[271] In his late long

poem, *"Ha-bayit"* (The House), for example, Yeshurun presents a complex polyglot

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[267] Yeshurun, in fact, was known to growl wordless sounds for long periods of time before reading his work aloud, a sort of "pre-lingual" performativity that underlies his poetics.

[268] See Charles Reznikoff's "First, there is the Need."

[269] As Glissant writes of diasporic poetic existence: "we clamor for the right to opacity for everyone" (2010: 194).

[270] See, for example Yeshurun's 1979 Bilaik Prize speech, *"Mi-mi lakahti reshut"* (From Whom Did I Take Permission), 2009:220.

[271] "I'm buttoned buttons and pins in parts of bodies of those present and memories and living dreams and living double" writes Yeshurun in his 1979 speech, *"mi-mi lakakhti reshut"* (From Whom Did I Take Permission).

response to sites of twentieth-century destruction, which he witnessed throughout his life, both in eastern Europe and in Mandate Palestine (and later, Israel/Palestine), through the polysemic metaphor of the Hebrew "house."[272] The word "*bayit*" in Modern Hebrew means both house and home, and refers also to the poetic unit of the stanza.[273] In Yeshurun's case, it also translates the Yiddish word "*heym*" connoting the "*alter-heym*" or "old home" of eastern Europe. The diasporic house of Yeshurun's verse disrupts nativist myth-making across multiple entwined discursive threads: lamenting what's lost to the violence of renovation, his writing upends the nationalist drive to "settle the land", presenting a linguistic and cultural sub-architecture, "still/ in mourning holes,"[274] to quote Yeshurun, though buried amidst the rubble.

Despite being derided by the center and center-right for most of his career, Yeshurun won every major literary prize the State of Israel awards—rejecting the highest prize, the Israel Prize, on the day of his wife's death.[275] At every prize ceremony in his honor, Yeshurun gave a speech that offended the statist literati to their core, and scandalized the cultural-political arena of the "invisible center". It was the writers and artists of the *Likrat* group that first "rediscovered" Yeshurun in the nineteen-sixties, and claimed his work as a precedent for their own anti-establishment and later "co-existence" politics, a role he felt as ambivalent about as he did the centrist literary prizes he

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[272] From Yeshurun's 1992 *Ein Li Achshav.* Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-me'uchad; The poem begins, "Berdichevy house / four / four / floors // they're coming to renovate," referring to a house on Berdichevsky street in Tel Aviv, just down the street where Yeshurun lived; the street is named after the late-maskilic (Jewish Enlightenment) canonical Hebrew writer, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky (1865-1921).
[273] To further intensify this polysemy, we might note what Chana Kronfeld emphasizes in her reading of *bayit* in the poetry of Yehuda Amichai— that the Hebrew *bayit* "is not only home and metaphorically the author's body but also, in the rhetoric of Hebrew and Arabic Poetry...the first line of the poem."
[274] Translation is mine.
[275] This, according to Helit Yeshurun.

received. It was not that Yeshurun wasn't anti-establishment, he absolutely was; yet he

put no stake in literary nor political institutions nor movements, all of which, following

the Holocaust, and later the establishment of the political State of Israel, he felt had

betrayed the ethics of his diasporism, what he called affectionately *Yahndes*, the

pluralism that his diasporic Jewishness, his *yiddishness*, entailed, as fusion modality, born

in mixture, against statist mythos of tragic filiation.

III. *Yahndeskayt:* Spectral Creole-Hebrew Openings[276]

> My Hebrew is a person who lives here in the land, right now … It's not Hebrew, it's Yiddish,
> Polish, and it's also Hebrew, everything that I accumulated on the way. The Yiddish element is
> missing for me. There is a hole in the soul because of the fact that I don't write in Yiddish because
> I have no Yiddish. This is fulfilled in all sorts of bits of words and expressions, markings, signs, in
> order to relax that demand of the missing expression.
> —Avot Yeshurun[277]

Yeshurun first engages with the rhizomatic *route* of diasporic creolizing in his Hebrew, in

the form of a creolized Jewish neologism: *Yahndes.* He takes this fluid term as the poetic

and ethical sign of his prolonged diasporic existence in the land of Israel/Palestine.

Writes Yeshurun in "Pass Over on Caves":[278]

> And father-mother, from where they were taken,
> In the extraordinary fire, taken—
> commanded us not to forget *Yahndes*
> and not to forget Poyln.[279]

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[276] *P'takh-Ne'ila* is the title of the last poem Yeshurun ever penned; it suggests in Hebrew a conclusion (*Ne'ila* being the concluding service of the Yom Kippur festival) in the form of an outward opening (*P'takh*).
[277] Translation is Adriana X. Jacobs's (90).
[278] From "Pass Over on Caves." Translation is Adriana X. Jacobs's (139).
[279] Note that Yeshurun retains the Yiddish spelling for Poland here.

Yahndes: in Hebrew, *yehudi'ut*; in English, Jewishness; in French, *juive*; and in Yiddish,

yidishkayt. The word *yehadut* becomes *yahndes* through loose movements in Ashkenazic

sonic mixtures, much like the Hebrew term "*seuda-shlishit*" (the third Sabbath-day meal)

in Yiddish become *sha'alshudes*. The commandment which would classically derive

from the male Hebrew God, comes here from the combined Yiddish *tate-mame* (father-

mother), keeper of the *mame loshn* (mother-tongue), in an Ashkenazic re-inflection of the

Hebrew word for "Judaism" proper, *yehadut*. *Yahndes* in Yeshurun's work also carries

the connotation of a diasporic Jewish "common sense," consciousness and conscience,

which, Yeshurun argues, the Zionist statist revolution actively represses. "The

appearance of *yahndes*," writes Adriana X. Jacobs,

> in a poem that redresses the negation of Nakba meant that it would continue to carry this relation
> in much later poems—in other words, the rich etymology and permutations of the Yiddish *yandes*
> and it's relations to ideas of Jewish compassion and conscience become inextricably bound to
> Palestinian Arab memory...By expanding the range of meaning of *yahndes*, Yeshurun creates a
> space where Jewish and Palestinian narratives of displacement can be compared.[280]

Yahndes becomes the textual manifestation in Yeshurun's writing—as remnant—of the

enmeshing multidirectional spoken idioms (whether Yiddish, Polish or Arabic) that he

adapts into variegated Hebrew alphabetics.[281] *Yahndes* as the long lost trace of the Jewish

echo-monde, in Glissant's sense, which reverberates in subterranean networks of

forbidden amalgamation, mixing and remixing in translingual tidal spirals, the ever

looming "pre-lingual" architextures of the *chaos-monde*.[282] "One can imagine language

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[280] 141.

[281] The Modern Hebrew alphabet itself is translated and adapted from ancient Babylonian Aramaic; like
many translingual practitioners, Yeshurun oscillates between various techniques of homophonic
transliteration and transplantation of a foreign alphabet.

[282] See, for example, Glissant's "Dictate, Decree" (2010: 91-103).

diasporas that would change so rapidly within themselves, and with such feedback"

writes Glissant,

> so many turnarounds of norms (deviations and back and forth) that their fixity would lie in that change. Their ability to endure would not be accessible through deepening but through the shimmer of variety. It would be a fluid be a fluid equilibrium. This linguistic sparkle, so far removed from the mechanics of sabirs and codes, is still inconceivable for us, but only because we are paralyzed to this day by monolingual prejudice ("my language is my root") (98)

Yeshurun's *yahndes*—a formal marker of his translingual diasporic Jewishness—operates

on the very creole ethic Glissant describes, disrupting the linguistic and cultural

hierarchies of nationalist exclusion, as a translingual flicker between transparent and

opaque worlds. Yeshurun's language opens the accepted *seder* (order) of Hebrew

language to a new and multiple disorder; as he writes:

> Which I entirely outside watch. In everything multiple-eyes.
> Bits of nickel, chrome, iron,
> I can't tell from what it comes.
> Leftover bones. Leg hair. From whom? [...]
> I bring everything I find.
> Not everything that glitters is gold.
> But I pick up
> everything that glitters.[283]

IV. At the Threshold of *Khurbn/Nakba*

> I was in the environment of Arab villages, of Hebrew towns, of the beautiful, young Tel Aviv . . . All this was graceful and young and I knew it was good here, but I knew, on the other hand, that there was something unclear to me. The Arab village. Look at the coastal plain, you see a certain Arab village. It reminds you of the shtetl, with its shacks and *falaheen*.
> —Avot Yeshurun[284]

Although' Yeshurun's "Pass Over on Caves" is a wholly "opaque" work in Édouard

Glissant's sense, or Louis Zukofsky's, for that matter, there is narrative at play that seems

to refuse the structure of an overarching story, as David Antin puts it: a narrative that

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[283] From Yeshurun's *"Ha-osef"* (The Collection). Translation is Harold Schimmel's.
[284] 1982/3: 94.

needs no story, but instead unfolds itself in uncompromising knots.[285] "One day to the

land," begins Yeshurun's poem,[286]

> To deeper than Phalasteen,
> than "Palestina, *hoch hoch*"
> than Canaan-*fellaheen.*
>
> One day to the land,
> the filling of the urns.
> And hard is she and reddening,
> hot is she and tendons.[287]

While almost all Hebrew poets of Yeshurun's generation were celebrating the recent

Zionist political realization of the State of Israel— by 1952, when he first published his

"Pass Over on Caves" in the pages of *Ha'aretz*, Yeshurun was already deeply troubled by

the supposedly stable foundations of this whole endeavor. [288] His insistence from the start

of his "Pass Over" on addressing the Arab *Phallasteen*, while simultaneously registering

the chants of German Zionists in Poland in the 1920s ("Palestina *hoch hoch*") serves as

fusion gesture; the initial address of the poem goes as far as to greet the ancient Canaanite

farmers—what Yeshurun calls *canaan-fellaheen*—in order to merge the Jewish

forefathers with the modern Palestinians, toward a highly complex intersubjectivity:

"*Fellaheen*- Bedouins, the Patriarchs,"[289] Yeshurun writes later in the poem "like the

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[285] See, for example, Antin's discussion of story and narrative in his talk-poem, "War," performed at SUNY Buffalo on March 26, 2003: https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Antin/Antin-David_War_UB_3-26-03.mp3

[286] Rather than reading this poem piece by piece as a stable narrative, I remix the poem throughout my analysis of Yeshurun's creolizing of Hebrew, utilizing Michael Gluzman's highly sensitive translation of the poem in the form of a de-structured assemblage that I feel better suits Yehsurun's poetic thinking than a straightforward "close- reading."

[287] Translation is Michael Gluzman's (177).

[288] There were, of course, exceptions to this rule, including the older and highly subversive Hebrew poet, Avraham Ben-Yitzhak (1883-1950).

[289] Fellaheen: Arabic, meaning "farmer".

generation of the wilderness to the generation who inherited / have ordered us to bake

pita / we shall put their bread in the fire" (Gluzman 178).

Yeshurun viscerally disrupts Zionist (literature's) claims to ancient political and

linguistic filiation in "Pass Over on Caves" by mistranslating the critical myths of Jewish

nationhood into a miscegnated Yiddish-Arabic Hebrew. "Although there may be some

historical truth in the Haggadah or the Book of Esther," writes Gluzman,

> it may be argued that in transforming the raw materials of history into salvation narratives these
> texts mirror and reproduce the xenophobia and racial or religious intolerance encountered by the
> Jews. Moreover, Yeshurun takes care to allude to antithetical moments in the Bible that
> problematize such a relational construction of identity, thereby juxtaposing—indeed violently
> slapping together—seemingly incompatible biblical sources.[290]

This slapping together that Gluzman describes, I recognize from Glissant as the sound of

Yeshurun's creolizing language at work, a mixing praxis that moves in the sonic motion

of water lapping at the shore, to quote Glissant "as if the sea kept alive some underground

intercourse with the volcano's hidden fire" (2010: 121).[291]

> Buried—until the awakening of the urn filled with coins
> which will ring in due course days, years, centuries . . .[292]

Yeshurun's breaking of the biblical myth creates a momentary opening between the

fissures of Hebrew's shifting plates: "awakening" the language, his poetics pronounces

this immediacy in a breaking (or "broken") Hebrew; breaking and broken within the

context of two bodies of trauma: the body of the survivor from the Holocaust and the

body of survivor from the Nakba. "That since then came a man from the Holocaust and a

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[290] 158.
[291] See for example Glissant's "The Black Beach" (2010: 121-127).
[292] From "Pass Over on Caves." Translation is Michael Gluzman's (179).

man from the war," writes Yeshurun in speech "*Mi-mi lakakhti reshut*" (From Whom Did

I Take Permission),

> & they weren't able to tell the remains themselves, what had happened, & if they come with their words, & we, we don't have their words -- there was one man that saw in the suffering the language of the Hebrew Eliezer Ben Yehuda.[293] He broke words like sand of the sea. But it wasn't to give them necessary words, only to take from them necessary words. To appoint an absorption minister from ourselves. To build a great tent, & call-out: *ahlan wa sahlan*[294] unto the tent, all voiced expression, & hints of soul, all speaking & spokesmanship, you are our brothers, are in our language. [295]

Yeshurun's antinomian approach to the sources allows for previously unimaginable

combinations of translingual sounds, words and phrases to occur within the "vehicle"

language of Hebrew. Terms like "*canaan-fellaheen*" illustrate the sheer range of

Yeshurun's creolizing Hebrew experimentation. By mixing the biblical name for the

Jewish "promised land" with the Arabic word for contemporary farmers, Yeshurun

invents a new term of relation, which engages with transhistorical time, in Levinas's

terms, as a means of facing the other.**[296]**

> Our father's face was here . . .
> Then we were still sons . . .
> Now our father is in hiding
> how shall we receive his face?[297]

The diasporic traces we find left behind in Yeshurun's creole-Hebrew "are always

already subsumed as language in a textual play that leaves out the referent." Their opaque

meaning exceeds their status as "transparent signifying terms" and poses "questions of

who, what and where" (Russell 250-51) that are never answered, but instead create multi-

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[293] Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922) was a Zionist lexicographer and one of the driving forces behind the institutional revival of Modern Hebrew.

[294] Arabic: meaning "welcome", a term of familial greeting.

[295] From Yeshurun's 1979 Bialik Prize speech, *"Mi-mi lakahti reshut"* (From Whom Did I Take Permission), 2009: 220. Translation is mine.

[296] Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995)

[297] From "Pass Over on Caves." Translation is Michael Gluzman's (178).

textured layers of decontextualized unknowns in the fabric of the poem. These unknowns might be understood also as forms of a new catastrophic knowledge—what Mary Anne Doane equates with "catastrophe theory" in the sciences, "a theory about singularities" that "deals with the properties of discontinuities directly, without reference to any specific underlying mechanism" (19). Even as catastrophic trauma becomes a primary mode of interaction in Yeshurun's poetics, his continuous turn toward the other, which manifests in instants of unpredictable mixture—as singular exceptions without context—interrupts the flow of catastrophe between *khurbn and nakba,* and asserts the memory of language caught in the gears of a nationalist modernity.

A radical socio-temporal dialectic plays out in Yeshurun's poetics where the language of the other interjects itself as an instant of decontextualized freedom and distinction, against the mass blur of catastrophic trauma. Yeshurun provides the tools for reconceiving of catastrophic reconciliation by signifying "another order of knowledge in another, parallel universe" (Russell 251). Encrypted in the archival translingual language bank of the poem, the *canaan-fellaheen* of Yeshurun's creole-Hebrew suggest an alternative dialectic of time, one which is neither phenomenological, nor historiographic, but poethical, thinking here specifically of Joan Retallack's poethical wager and Zali Gurevitch's notion of *peh-etica* (ethics of the mouth). Yeshurun's Yiddish-Arabic-Hebrew address frees the Nakba from a zero-sum relation to the Holocaust. Such a language, writes Hanan Hever;

> allows the Jew enmeshed in the trauma of the Holocaust, to recognize the trauma of Nakba. The fusion of localities is simultaneously the fusion of the two peoples and the interlinking of their cruel fate through a process of heterogeneous national identity formation, which might eventually encompass the production of a binational consciousness. Yeshurun demands that we recognize the

other and the alterity of the other, exhorting us to look him "straight in the face" in the Levinasian sense, whereby the face of the other constitutes an appeal for recognition."[298]

I would add to "recognition" also, reconciliation, in the form of interfacing opposing (national) narratives, languages, histories and mass trauma—as Yeshurun writes:

> I requested permission from my father to take leave, which he gave and took his leave. An Arab sailor in Haifa lifted me up onto the land and it allowed him to take his leave.
> The catastrophe of the Jews of Europe and the catastrophe of the Arabs of Eretz Yisrael are one Catastrophe…the two gaze directly at us.[299]

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[298] 162.
[299] 2009: 104. Translation is mine.

CHAPTER 3, SECTION 3:
Translation: Avot Yeshurun, "The House"

berdichevsky house[300]

berdichevsky house
four.
four
floors.

they're coming to renovate.
first off
comes a bulldozer
& smashes

the cornice. that's
the first thing.
they who removed
the cornice, who pulled-off

the facade
of the house, the builders
attached -- as a model
of what had been --

the front
door,
there *davoyraleh* [301]
is seen who hated

the neighbors
"including you"
& her mother whose husband
divorced & wandered

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[300] I use lower-case throughout this translation in stylistic echo of Yeshurun's non-standard Hebrew alphabetization.
[301] Yiddish diminutive of Deborah.

to the ends of America
to become a cantor.
all this
spilled out w/

the mortar & plaster
& the soot into piles
of rubble from the skeleton
house number

four. & the house
remains like a skeleton
of bones, w/out
internal organs.

house w/
gaps that were
once doors.
holes that were

once windows.
the house looks
like a guy w/
long legs

white in underpants.
enjoying the breeze
bare from all
sides supported.

heats & materials

the human sounds
quieter
than the material sounds.
the people pace

bent like walking

on all fours
on the roof
inspecting & groping

in ancient prejudice.
& the material sounds,
in hammer & gravel
a free hand.

when the air is thin
or a blind one
passes. & when thick --
a ribbon of horns.

the shadow that hid
in the cavities of the house
began to look out
from the house to the street.

the human sounds
heart-warming.
the material sounds --
their knowledge tamed.

came took
gravel -- & threw away
came took
binder -- & threw away.

ran bringing
mortar -- & poured out.
ran bringing
sand -- & poured out.

came bringing
water -- & poured out.
the cylinder poured out
a bucket of mixture

one above
one below.
raised up above
threw away below.

filled up above
threw away below.
the workers divided
in equal portions

the mixture
on the roof
w/ no short-changing.
& smoothed-it-out.

the crows in morning
bringing food
from source to source
to the hatchlings.

this one fills
& this one lifts.
this one fills
& this one lifts.

one raises up,
one throws away.
one raises up,
one throws away.

bit by bit
the house is flipped
a factory
in & of itself.

no need
for the street's mercy.
its walls scabbed
silicate brick.

skeletal sounds

til now
the skeletal sounds
bare nude
as before

the start to archeology.
but they raged
cement-mixer mechanisms
w/ the cylinder,

& cast
the roof, & cast
the shadow
to the walls of

the house. beams
& stakes. flat
staves. after
they cast the

roof, they cast
today
the skies' names
of the roof.

today were heard
carpenter hammers'
sounds & blacksmith
hammers' sounds

     blacksmith
detonator
     blacksmith
detonator
     sound
on
     sound

growling
                    sound
on
                    sound
anding
                    to land
a blow
                    on
this.
                    this
on
                    this.

silence of

miracles & wonders.
people on
the roof pace
as shadows. as sounds.

hammer dents
in a verse of
two hard
words & three

short ones. dialogue
of the hammer & the material.
outstretched like a woman
in expectation.

today they banged
w/ carpenter hammers
smooth & vulnerable
w/ secret blows

as on planed
staves in a planer.
not nails

in a big head

& not nails
in a small head,

one beside
the other click-clack.

today begins
forming silence
of the rooms w/
each pleasure

of first brick
begins the veiling
it kept to itself
each room

isolated it
-self from the noise.
but the house
demanded of itself.

blacksmiths banged --
& saw it was
good. carpenters
banged -- & saw

it was good.
every thing
& saw it was
very good.

but the house
demanded of itself.
rose from roof
twd roof,

from wood twd

wood. resurrection
of the road w/
the construction process.

the roof at night

the roof at night
looks like a *boydem*[302]
or cabin
in the vineyards in 1932

like in *bayt-dajan*[303]
in *ayun-kara*[304] in cloudy
skies, just
to dream by them.

clouds to drift-off
by them. to seek
my soul's
love in the vineyard. [305]

the floor

cast floor
wanted to return,
pushed back.
no need.

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[302] Yiddish: attic

[303] *Bayt Dajan* (also known as *Dajūn*) was a Palestinian Arab village 6 km outside of Yaffo. On April 25, 1948, as a part of actions and reactions leading up to the Arab-Israeli War, the village was entirely depopulated. The Israeli town of Beyt Dagan was erected on the same site in 1948.

[304] Refers to the Arab village of *Ayun Kara* (8 km south of Tel Aviv); also the site of the bloody Battle of *Ayun Kara*, fought between Turkish Troops and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade on Nov. 14, 1917.

[305] Echoes Song of Songs 3:1: "…I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not" (KJV).

banged the slant --
sideways. banged
the supports -- sideways.
banged the posts.

when they had
a task, there was
grace, & when not
none. now

one heap
resembles one.
each one,
technical & spiritual.

took uniforms
& went home.
took language,
& voiced sound.

plank floor
brought closer to the edge.
bent back.
wanted to return.

once & twice
wanted to return.
banged outside:
no need.

the wood expelled.
no trees,
& not animals.
but foundations[306].

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[306] Echoes Jeremiah 31:37: "Thus saith the LORD; if heaven above can be measured, and the foundations
of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith
the LORD" (KJV).

acoustics

was perfect.
the acoustics of
berdichevsky street --
like *heychal ha-tarbut*.[307]

sirens -- we hear.
what in the house
between man
& wife -- we hear.

what people
buy at the store --
we hear
on the street.

the house demanded
of itself all
the beams, all
the supports

from the wood below
to the wood above,
bent as a
man bears

a surface of planks
on which they cast
an upper roof.
bent to erect

to pull back
once inside
once ahead
once in midst.

---

[307] Hebrew: "The Culture Palace"; refers to the largest concert hall in Tel Aviv, a close walk from where Yeshurun lived on Berdichevsky St.

straight ahead
erected back.
to support the gravel
roof -- how?

as beams supporting
a curve of sky
so too at a slant
in the universe supports.

as a horse standing
on hindlegs
as hands in a tallis
during priestly prayer.[308]

as a horse stops
insisting on its front
& w/ hind legs
pushing fwd.

bound in grief

all the beams
& supports & plank
floors were bound
& packed & thrown.

like in the vineyards
in 1932, at the end
of harvest, the guards
took a man's

parcel & he went

---

[308] The priestly prayer or priestly blessing, also known in rabbinic sources as the "raising of the hands" is a Hebrew prayer which Jews of the priestly order (*Kohanim*) recite to this day. During the course of the prayer, the *Kohanim* spread their hands out over the congregation with the fingers of both hands separated so as to make five spaces between them. Each Kohen's *tallis* (Hebrew/Yiddish: prayer shawl) is draped over his head and hands so that the congregation cannot see his hands while the blessing is being said.

home on paths
length & width-wise[309]
between vineyards,

between shrubs,
of grape clusters
the guards went & returned
the franks[310]

to their houses in *rishon
l'tzion*[311] w/ one
room & one
bed & frankenia.[312]

all the beams,
all the supports
were packed in a rope
& thrown below.

even w/out
apprehending that one
of them wd evade
returning to the prior

status. discarded
one by one,
voiced in protest.
rose in upheaval.

no help
whatsoever.

---

[309] Echoes Genesis 13:17: "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (KJV).

[310] Derogatory Hebrew term for North African and Middle-Eastern French speaking Jews, generally associated with an East European Jewish prejudice against African and Middle-Eastern Jews.

[311] *Rishon L'Tzion* (Hebrew: literally, "The First to Zion"), the fourth largest city in contemporary Israel, was founded in 1882 by Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire; they purchased the land which had previously been townland of the Arab village of Ayun Kara, in order to found the early-Zionist locality.

[312] A particular shrub genus in the Frankeniaceae family of flowering plants.

no voice
& no answer.

in a moment
a car disappeared
w/ beams
& supports.

the workers sat
to eat. looked like
a day of celebration[313]
for them. their hats

one moment cluster
together one to the other.
drank water
from bottle & corked.

they lowered

the bell's a hammer
& the house a crystal.
the house rings
& the hammer performs.

the hammer's a chatterbox
& house drowned-out.
they've already lowered
the crane.

the wall dweller

finished placing
a line til

---

[313] Yeshurun uses the Aramaic phrase "*yom genusya*" here, a Talmudic term for a birthday or coronation (of a king).

window-sill
settled on

the wall as one sits
on the pot.
this is the beginning of
man in the house.

man in a renovated
house. began
the man to live
in the house.

bit by bit
the house put on
white bricks
like a white nightshirt

as a woman stretching
to uncover a head
of circuit ends
to the consumption of flesh.

he who is merciful cannot give mercy

tonight we see
quadrangle rhythm:
hand head
hand foot.

like the wall
of the catholic
church in krasnystaw[314]
from the XVII-century.

---

[314] Krasnystaw, a town in present-day eastern-Poland, was Yeshurun's hometown and the place he left behind when he moved to Palestine in 1928.

all this
an instance of the re-
novated house, that's still
in mourning holes:

uncovered in the uppers
covered in the lowers
from krasnystaw
til here.

krasnystaw house

in tel-aviv
I loved houses
til they were destroyed
& built anew.

I'm sorry they're destroyed
the old i've forgotten.
if I forget thee
krasnystaw house.

the landlords

lawyers
renovated the house.
they're the landlords[315]
& who opposes them?

the neighbor fears
the lawyers.
they removed the fence
to half the sidewalk.

---

[315] Yeshurun uses the Yiddish term "*balebosim*" here, which might also be translated as "masters" or "overlords" but also "hosts."

public domain!
theft of community!
the law of the land
is the law.[316] *of disturbers'*

it's law -- justice?
the neighbor fears
re-moving back.
to start-up w/ them.

a pensioner's fear
of lawyers.
retiree & bald
worthless asshole.

the law uprooted?

there's a law
wd uproot a tree.
if uprooted
the law's tree

or a tree
the law
it wd uproot
so to say.

there's verdict
of uprooting trees.
if verdict
wd uproot the

tree, or
the tree wd uproot
the verdict,

---

[316] Yeshurun quotes the Talmudic Aramaic phrase "*dina d'malkhuta dina"* here, referring to the Jewish rabbinical law (halakha) that the law of the country is binding and in some cases even overrules Jewish law.

so to say.

stands a tree
in mid-sidewalk.
wd it uproot the verdict
so to say?

today heard

today heard
a bird
pecking a branch
to find a worm.

braver
than water
swifter
than time.

no past
no present
no future
there's time.

tune this
into yr heart.
go home
& rest & don't

talk anymore
of abundant blessings.
& ask
yair hurvitz.[317]

---

[317] Yair Hurvitz (1941-1988) was an active avant-garde poet who worked in the radical Hebrew poetry scene in Tel Aviv from the early 60s-on, until his abrupt death in 1988.

it's the house

the house dressed itself
white from legs
& body's beginning
til the chin.

i started w/ this
that a woman stretching
a nightshirt from the head
at the body's end.

now the nightshirt
til the chin.
b/c the house
it's a woman.

sliced from the stairs & w/ all the stairs

one day a door sliced the second-story
& the whole sand-loam-concrete floor rose & shifted & moved
& spilled & fled & was thrown from the stairs & w/ the stairs.
the room on the second-story remained lit in the sun as before in wood's supports
naked as before.

from whence was this taken?
from where does it derive?
what's it called?
what's it say?[318]

---

[318] Yeshurun performs a code-switching here between Yiddish and Hebrew, writing the 1st and 3rd lines of
the quatrain in Yiddish and the 2nd and 4th in Hebrew. Each Hebrew line appears to roughly translate the
Yiddish line above it, subverting the traditional relationship between the two languages, where Hebrew is
treated as the primary, and Yiddish as secondary.

however much

however much
I do not
pass on
the house it's

still wrecked
as *devoyrale's* image
in holes & in the door
& the hole in the cement-mixer.

the house resembles
a box made of matches
that we hear only
open & close.

the house is quiet.
casting solidifies.
everything dries.
the cement-mixer w/

a frail circumcised
organ erects
wretched w/
a hole in the belly.

the house at the time
of its building appears
all the time
increasingly destroyed.

each patch
they add to it --
an accent of debris.
how wrecked!

4th of Sivan 5749 – 4th of Tishrei *Tashan*, June 7th - October 2nd 1989

home tongue

home tongue
earthquake.
sometimes the voice
it's a

garbage can
& sometimes a
delicate presence.
return from life.

from hot prayer
return twd
the simple things
more ordinary:

the house looks out
still eye-holed
from *devoyrale's*
door spilt

earth floor
outside & the doors
sway in agony
open as extended

hands. in the book
hid a prayer
to god that disclosed
to them the ancients.

the ancients thought
-up god to them
to give
order to what.

22nd of Tevet *Tashan*, January 19th, 1990.

CHAPTER 4, SECTION 1:
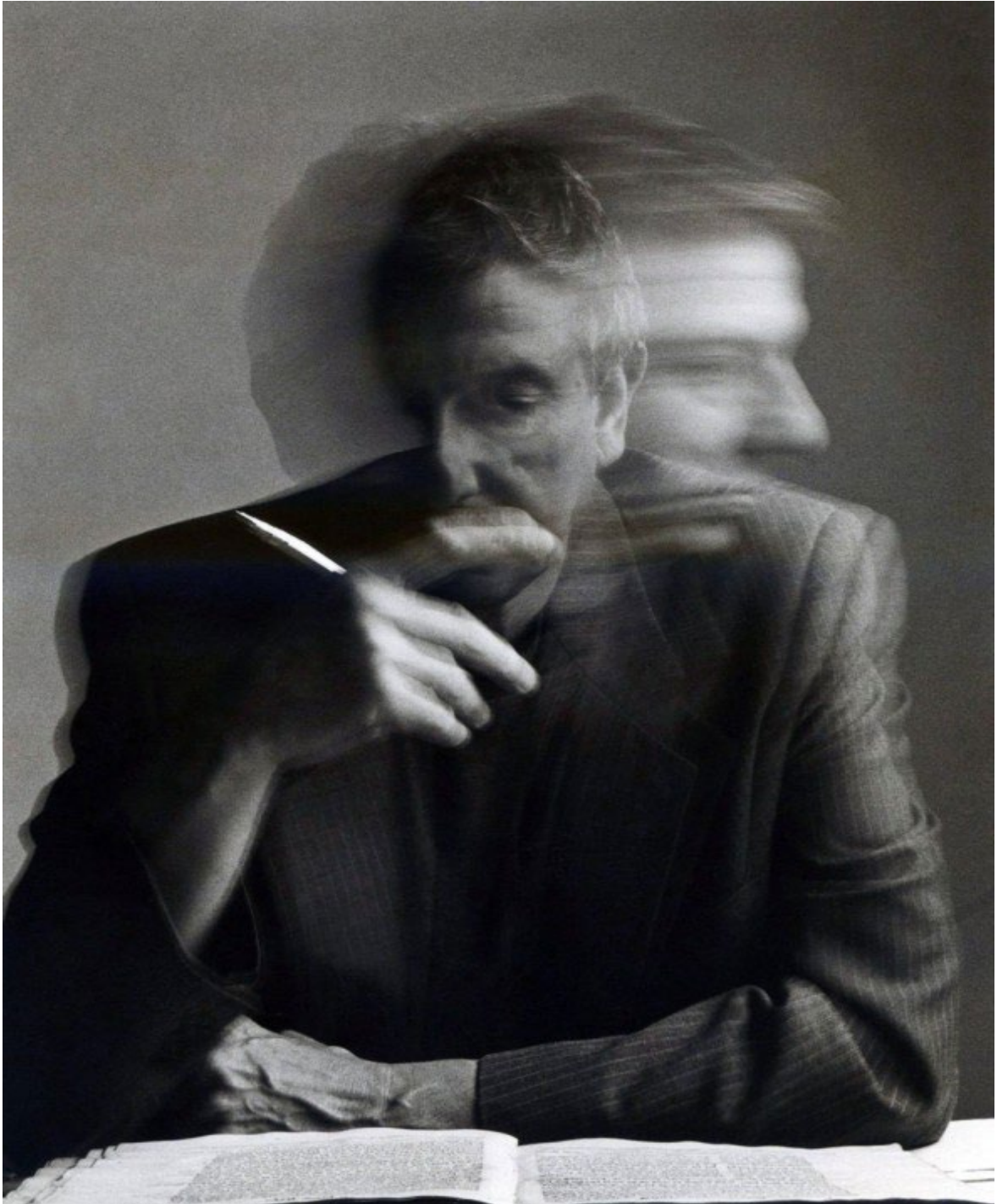New York School-Hebrew: On the Hidden Eminences of Harold Schimmel

Figure 12: Harold Schimmel

I. Midrash Schimmel[319]

When I told the Hebrew-American poet, Harold Schimmel that I was visiting Avot

Yeshurun's papers the following day, he very quietly, in his delicate way, *farschimmelt*

(or made schimmelesque) the task, asking if I could take a photograph for him of

whatever particularly striking manuscript caught my eye. I told Helit, Yeshurun's

daughter: "Schimmel would like me to photograph a piece of Avot's writing." We had

been looking over Yeshurun's elegy for the poet, Abba Kovner, which he wrote first in

Yiddish, and later translated into Hebrew. This is the only manuscript we have which so

explicitly reveals the "source" in Yeshurun's Hebrew poetry, as a translation from

Yiddish. "One minute," Helit said, and she began to sift through various folders on her

desk containing Avot's hand-written papers (she is in the midst of organizing his

archive). "Here," she said, handing me a large page covered in writing. Yeshurun was a

graphomaniac to be sure, and a translingual one at that; indeed, almost every manuscript

in the archive is covered from edge to edge in sprawling multilingual scrawl. It is hard for

me to imagine where a scholar would begin in Yeshurun's papers, without the guidance

of Helit Yeshurun, who moves through these highly prolific translingual manuscripts as

easily as someone would flip through a newspaper. I took out my iPhone to take a

photograph of the page she had passed me. "Take it," she said, "give it to Harold." I

laughed. To take a manuscript from an archive as a gift for another poet—this was

something I had never done before. But Helit of course is the executor of the estate. She

---

[319] I use the term midrash here to connote a form of loose narrative "exposition" or "investigation" as an antinomian echo of the traditional rabbinic midrash, a Jewish oral mode of interpreting, commentating, elaborating on, or introducing on a text.

said something like, "he should have the thing itself not just a photograph of it!" Then

suddenly something came to her mind; "I meant to show you," she said, and pointed to

the bottom corner of another completely scrawl-covered manuscript: this is from an early

draft of an interview, she said, but it was never published; she read the line: *Ma-hi shira?*

Mekor v'tirgum. Ma zeh shir? Avir. I translated: What is poetry? Source and translation.

What's a poem? Air." I took the manuscript Helit had given me and very carefully

delivered it to Harold Schimmel. He was elated. He would frame it, he said, with a glass

back, to reveal the writing on both sides.

II. On the Threshold of Anglo-Hebrew

> I'm in uniform fresh from basic training Frank
> all leanness of thighs moves to a bass-beat with a glass
> of Jim Beam (his partner) on ice Edwin presents me
> (this anonymous soldier) and we speak of a mutual philosopher-
> friend's fairness and decency "And when he wants his boy"
> O'Hara attacks . . . "Wham."   I come-to-after through splintery
> seconds of catching   deer
> like river minnows nipping at my toes   Jane Freilicher
> descending her ladder smiles wily sexy and Frank
> devotes himself to pulling at his absent dinner-tie
> You in all of this are where? In the corner
> in the Whistler's rocker — holding court with both
> your hands heterosexual and learned . . . "ten dollars"
> "car keys" and "thigh" in your poems were arranged with
> Chardin-like precision or the floral exhibitions (set to the
> botanic-calendar) at the Isabella Gardner Museum
> —Harold Schimmel "I'm in Uniform"[320]

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[320] Translation is Peter Cole's.

The contemporary Hebrew-American poet, Harold Schimmel, was born in 1935, a generation and a half after Yeshurun, in Bayonne, New Jersey. Like Yeshurun, he too had Yiddish in his ears from a young age, though his mother-tongue was English. After studying with some of the most prominent American writers of the mid-century, he was poised to become one of the major New York School poets of his generation, but instead left the United States for good, emigrating to Israel in 1962. In 1963, he published his first chapbook of Hebrew poetry, "*Ha-shirim*" (the poems), an event which he describes as the "rebirth of his poetics". Since then he has become one of the most important avant-garde practitioners in Hebrew poetry, having brought "the sounds of American English vernacular into the mouths of Hebrew readers."

Schimmel was the first translator of Yeshurun's poetry into English, publishing a selected volume, entitled *The Syrian African Rift and Other Poems*, with the Jewish Publication Society in 1981. These two poets cast into relief a powerful alternate narrative of modern Hebrew poetry, one which is both translingual and diaspora-facing (against monolingual Hebraist norms) and which chooses to foreground the languages of its past rather than erasing them.

Of Yeshurun's writing, Schimmel writes, "Yeshurun carries over the feel of Yiddish into his Hebrew. He doesn't ask, he takes the new language in his hands. The mouth is pried open as the mouth of a child at the hands of a doctor who knows what's

good for the child more than the child can."[321] Schimmel's idea here is highly interesting

to me, since it reverses the terms of anti-Yiddish rhetoric: Yiddish in Schimmel's sense

of Yeshurun's poetics is not a sickness at all, but becomes a "cure" we might say, for the

sickness of a young nation state already pushed to catastrophe. "[I] felt inclined to take it

whole," Schimmel writes, thinking it seems to me, of translating Yeshurun's intensive

creole-Hebrew opacity, "I have never glossed the odd or excised the difficult. I have tried

to keep the difficulty in (a closeness of thinking, or poetic argument, I have discovered)"

(from Jacobs 168). The nexus of Schimmel's expanded-Yiddish relations span from

Yeshurun's spectral creole-Hebrew to the praxes of four generations of New York school

writers, starting with the Yiddish-born Objectivists. It was the Yiddish inflection of New

York, through the Objectivists, in/to the New American Poetry, that created the

possibility for a volume of Avot Yeshurun in English. "For Schimmel, translation

participates in the expansion of a "poetic map,"' writes Adriana X. Jacobs of Schimmel's

Yeshurun, "that reflects varied, and sometimes incongruous, lines of influence and

affiliation, and this results in a complex and rich reciprocity between target (English) and

source (Hebrew) languages" (Jacobs 168). The expansion Jacobs describes is that of

Schimmel's expanded-Yiddish, the language which taught him the richness of mixture

(with English *and* Hebrew) from early-on, as well as what drew him to Yeshurun, and

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[321] Translation is Adriana X. Jacobs's (167).

compelled him to translate the elder poet's Yiddish-Hebrew-Arabic poems into English.

Schimmel positions himself through the precedent of Yeshurun's translingual poetics, "in

a tradition of poetic translation that is transhistorical, transnational, multicultural, and

fundamentally multilingual and creative." I would add that this translational multilingual

creative impulse was for Schimmel steeped in Yiddish as a "third space" in language, in

which one could live in more than one language at once. Take for example Schimmel's

translation of Yeshurun's "The poem on the Africs":

> Plump a door opens. A soldier pulled a reservist outside.
> Straightened the *tallith* from street to street and listening to the soldier's
>   story.
> Walked with the soldier cat and cat
> and cheek and cheek.
>
> The two reservist guys went to the Syrian-
> African Rift: You came to us to escape the white.
> But you be the villain? Loathsome to me is death
> because an Afric's in your grip.
>
> We have a problem of a sacrifice of Isaac.
> And yours, you're inclined to think, the sacrifice of Isaac.
> For us it comes out as a father has mercy on his children.
> For you it comes out as a father has mercy on himself.[322]

The first thing to note about this expanded-Yiddish translation is its first word: "plump."

Translating Yeshurun's Yiddish *"plutsim,"* Schimmel uses an unlikely term, "plump"

which signals in multiple directions at once in English without suggesting a definitive

definition for Yeshurun's word, though nodding to the suddenness it inducts.[323] There is

a distinctly New York School and Yiddish Modernist style to Schimmel's translations of

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[322] 1980: 32.
[323] *"Plutsim"* in Yiddish means "suddenly."

Yeshurun, invested as much in Yehoash as in Louis Zukofsky, as much in Yankev

Glatshteyn as in Frank O'Hara. In particular I am thinking of "cat and cat // and cheek

and cheek." We might also notice here Schimmel's translation and transformation of the

mongrel-Yiddishist echoes in this work, which call into question Jewish nationalist

exploitation of the ancient myths, and the stakes of reified and misdirected violence. As

Likht's "gentile zion's earthly hands" and Loy's "goy israels," Schimmel's translation of

Yeshurun's version of the ancient myth of the sacrifice of Isaac, raises an elemental

"problem." It is the problem of monolingualism as the heir of monotheism itself, and the

limitations of tribalist imperialisms, projections of the "unity" of language and culture, as

a narrow trap and worse, a falsified map. It "comes out" in multiple tongues at once, so

how can it come out in only one language? The work of the poet, then, in Schimmel's as

much as in Yeshurun's work, is an expansion of the networks of language beyond the

highly regulated sphere of nationalist monolingual canons. I offer this reading and

annotation of Schimmel's singular New York-School poetics therefore as yet another

coordinate upon a constantly expanding "poetic map" of expanded-Yiddish, which

Schimmel and Yeshurun, but also Likht, Zukofsky and Loy, constellate in wide spiraling

relations.

<center>*</center>

> Poetry is not only Hebrew; it is inclusive. When one says "Hebrew" there is also another which stands to its side and also precedes and follows it.
> — Harold Schimmel [324]

I first encountered Harold Schimmel in the pages of *Paideuma*, in a special issue dedicated to the life and work of Louis Zukofsky. Schimmel's essay in that issue, "ZUK. YEHOASH DAVID REX" —later collected in Carroll F. Terrell's "Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet"—addresses in detail the Yiddish modernist tenor of Zukofsky's early verse: "the music is Yiddish," Schimmel writes, "not yet contrapuntal, not yet Bach: Jewish Folk Song despite the typically New York School-Yiddish modernism, 'Plash. Night. Plash. Sky'" (referring to Zukofsky's "Ferry").

When I searched for Schimmel on the web, the most I could find was his ITHL (Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature) bio, which simply said he was an American-born poet and translator living in Jerusalem. The other thing that came up was a Jacket interview with David Shapiro, in which Shapiro casually remarks that Schimmel is "one of the ten best artists of the Hebrew language," and that he should win a Nobel and "share it with a great Palestinian". But what was Schimmel's connection to Zukofsky, I wanted to know—and had he known my cousin, Charles Reznikoff?—or to Yehoash and the Yiddish-American modernists, for that matter? And why was he

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[324] Translation is Adriana X. Jacobs's (167).

included in this special issue of *Paideuma*, alongside so many eminences from the New

American Poetry and after?

The following year I was living in Tel Aviv, writing and translating and studying

multilingual poetry in Israel/Palestine. I had gotten in touch with an old friend of my

parents, Zali Gurevitch (a poet and anthropologist—the sole translator of John Ashbery,

Charles Olson and Jerome Rothenberg into Hebrew), and he and I would often meet for

coffee at a little café near his apartment, on Yehuda HaLevi St. During one of these

meetings, the topic of Zukofsky's *yidishkayt* came up and Gurevitch mentioned

Schimmel's name. I was floored. Schimmel was, according to Gurevitch, both an eminent

American writer, and also a leading figure in the contemporary Hebrew avant-garde, as

well as an important mentor and friend to many of the radical Hebrew writers and artists

of Gurevitch's generation.

A week later, Schimmel and I met. It was at the old Templar home of the

Jerusalem poet, Gabriel Levin. Levin had prepared some light food and drink and he,

Gurevitch, Schimmel and I, spent the afternoon talking across Hebrew, Yiddish and

English, noshing and drinking.

After that, Schimmel and I would meet often, usually in south-Jerusalem

(Arnona) on Yarden street, in the Schimmel's third-story walk-up apartment, covered

wall–to-wall in paintings and sketches and photos and books. We talk of friends and

family, alive and deceased, eat homemade olives carefully, and watch Palestine sunbirds

hop about on the terrace; Bob Dylan plays loud on the Hebrew stereo and we read the

Yiddish American modernists "under the music" as Schimmel likes to say, quoting

Edwin Denby.

Figure 13-14: Left to right, The Schimmels's apartment in southeast Jerusalem

I've become close to Varda Schimmel (b. 1936), as well: a wonderful photographer for

years, she loved to guide me through the hundreds of photographs of loved-ones—many

of them prominent writers and artists themselves—which she has taken over the last half-

century. The three of us spend the better part of the afternoon in the Schimmel's

apartment reading and watching the sunbirds and recounting the lives of our ancestors, in

France and the Americas and drinking arak and eating Riga Gold sprats.

As the conversation flows, the Schimmels reveal bits and pieces of their pasts: the relationships and collaborations that have informed their literary/aesthetic lives. Those stories of friends—the names that come up in that apartment, among the books and the paintings and the arak and the fish—those names (just call them breathing nouns, says Bill Berkson). My friends are never gone, says Schimmel, they've all left things behind, writings and stories and pictures and names.

Schimmel's career spans more than sixty years, and traverses between/across English and Hebrew (and back again) countless times. It transfigures, between its languages, a number of disparate geographies—from the Americas to the Levant—and builds from Hebrew and English (and Greek and Arabic and Italian…) dense language-cartographies: poems as translingual maps. And Schimmel is the great poet-draftsman, radical linguist, "bird-like arranger."

Aside from his many Hebrew books, including his ongoing serial "poem of a life," *Ar'a*, (Aramaic: "Land"), Schimmel has been a prolific translator of Hebrew poetry and an important, though wholly peripheral, nomadic (in Pierre Joris's sense) or outsider (in Jerome Rothenberg's) participant in the New American poetry/poetics, as a writer of many English essays, meditations, poems and translations, and a longtime contributor, first to *Epoch*, and then to *Sagetrieb*, *Paideuma* and *Conjunctions*— if not merely

through his numerous friendships and collaborations in the New American Poetry scenes

and beyond.

What I'd like to do here is to provide a brief history and selected bibliography of

Schimmel's early work, including snapshots of the (mostly early) poetry itself at various

intervals. I do this most of all because when I began to write this essay, I could not find

one in-depth resource on Schimmel's life or work.[325] A PennSound and EPC page are

forthcoming, as is Rivka Weinstock's and my translation of Schimmel's *Shirei Malon*

Tsion (Songs from Hotel Zion).

III. From Harold to Schimmel

> You fall in love with a new language and follow it. It grabs you. At the same time, that which is
> yours—your language—sort of breaks apart. You can't take a step forward without this opposing
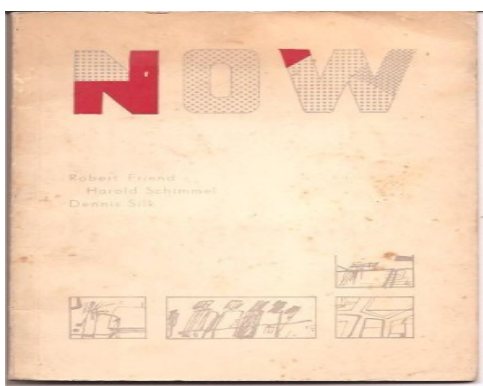> disintegration."
>   —Harold Schimmel[326]

Figure 15: Now magazine

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[325] This has changed in recent years, most significantly with Adriana X. Jacobs's "Like a Centipede,
Multiple Voices: Harold Schimmel and the Poetry of Translation" in *Strange Cocktail: Translation and the
Making of Modern Hebrew Poetry*.
[326] From an interview with Helit Yeshurun entitled "*Kol ha-he'erekh she-ata yode'a la'asot: re'ayon im
Harold Schimel*" (All the Approximately You Know How to Do: An Interview with Harold Schimmel) in
Chadarim 5, 1985/6; 188-131. Translation is Adriana X. Jacobs's.

Harold Schimmel was born in 1935 in Bayonne, New Jersey. He grew up in a religious

Jewish family in Boro Park, Brooklyn, and though his first language was English, he was

surrounded early on by Hebrew and Yiddish. As a boy he studied at a *yeshiva ketone*

(religious primary school).

In the mid-1950s, Schimmel attended Cornell University and participated in a

flourishing undergraduate literary/arts scene there, which included, Steve Katz, Thomas

Pynchon, Susan Brownmiller, Ron Sukenick, Richard Fariña and Steve Reich, among

others. Vladimir Nabokov was on faculty in those days and, according to Katz, "went out

of his way to contact [Schimmel] after reading a couple of his poems in the student

literary magazine," Epoch.

> Like I was telling Katz in the
> bicycle shop—
> the thing's to learn to work in an un-
> settled state . . . "But the Elegies"
> he says, "Rilke spent a lifetime looking
> for the place."
> The Schloss Duino faces the Tito-side
> Of Trieste. [327]

After graduating from Cornell, Schimmel moved to Waltham, MA to pursue a Master's

degree in English at Brandeis University. He worked closely there with the critic-editor

and co-founder of the Partisan Review, Philip Rahv. On weekends he took the train down

to New York to visit his friend and mentor, Edwin Denby. It was Denby who first

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[327] From "Words for Elio" in Schimmel's only published English collection, *First Poems*.

brought Schimmel into the New York School scene of the late-1950s, introducing him to

Frank O'Hara and Jane Freilecher, among others, and inviting him to various parties and

openings around the City. They met on a beach in Provincetown, MA, where Denby had

a "shack" and where Schimmel often visited on his vacations from school. Schimmel was

being attacked by swallows on the beach, so he tells it, and Denby ran over to help him,

exclaiming, "you're standing on their nest!"

> Shatzkin reading to me in Yiddish
> from the new testament
> (blessed be the God who got me this far)
> Not study,
> but sitting under the silvered fig; on the edges
> like the Shem-tov,
> where even the toe-nail pairings
> are carried away in system by the ants.
> Martin Buber meeting the horse's eye
> in the stalla.
> Up on the roof, under the bed-clothes,
> God coming down the chimney,
> Recognizing the mouth under the beard.
> A stubbed-toe for every blasphemy!
> "With broken talk and foreignisms
> I must speak to this people."[328]

In 1958, Schimmel entered the US Army. He was stationed in Verona, Italy for two

years, in the same unit as the New York artist, George Schneeman and the future US

poet-Laureate, Charles Wright. The three men became close friends and were important

early influences on one another.[329] Wright, in fact, attributes his earliest foray into poetry

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[328] From "My Life" in Schimmel's *First Poems*.

[329] Early, especially with regards to Wright; Schimmel and Schneeman collaborated together consistently until Schneeman's early death in 2009.

to his friendship with Schimmel: "It was when I was in the army serving in Italy," he says, in a recent Library of Congress interview…A friend of mine who was already writing poetry, named Harold Schimmel, had given me selected poems of Pound and said, "When you go out there read this poem out on the peninsula." And I did and I was totally taken with it, you know?…but that's when I started when I was 23 years old."[330]

And likewise, as Bill Berkson once recalled, it was Schimmel who convinced Schneeman to become a visual artist instead of a poet. He was also the link between Schneeman and the entire New York School. Schimmel introduced George and Katie Schneeman to Edwin Denby by a telegram from Jerusalem. Denby needed a cat sitter, and George and Katie got the gig. Denby sent Schimmel a telegram to send George and Katie: "Cats need water more than anything." And it was Denby, of course, who brought George and Katie into the wider New York School world and later St. Mark's world.

> George! Quick bring the canvas.
> I am feeling like Toshio Neruda here in the sun,
> an undershirt turned around the head
> like swallows nesting, their purple
> membranes trembling in an evergreen.
> Below them in their blindness,
> THE EYE OF THE ALMOND! A bank of sunlight
> Drops plumb for the heart, but it won't take
> The complement, the old road
> Mounting the river-bed to its plain—
> (a stillness farther than hers)[331]

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[330] See Wright's "On Being the Poet Laureate": https://www.loc.gov/podcasts/ qalcm/transcripts/ chaswright_transcript.pdf.
[331] From "Laughter's a long way off," in Schimmel's *First Poems.*

Schimmel's first (and to date only) full collection of English poetry, *First Poems*, came out in 1962 in Lecce, Italy (Edizioni Milella), and included a landscape drawing by Schneeman on the cover page. Later that year he emigrated to Israel. "That was a loss to the American language," writes Steve Katz, "He was the first to ever show me poems by Frank O'Hara." (37)

> The sun is here.
> All my handkerchiefs have my name
> now in Hebrew.
> I can't even blow my nose
> without feeling jewish. I am even
> complimented by some fellow
> clingers-to-zion with statements
> like : "it sits well on you,
> Harold" ie my jewishness.
> Or the other day. "You know,
> Herbert really likes you.
> He says you're a real
> jew"[332]

In 1965, the editors at *Epoch* described Schimmel in the following way: "Harold Schimmel is, according to our frequent re-assertions, one of the most powerful voices in contemporary poetry in English; his continued residence in Jerusalem removes him from the American scene."

Schimmel, however, was hard at work bringing the "American scene" to Jerusalem. In 1968 he edited *Get That: New York School Special* (Jerusalem, *Motsa*), which included English writing from Steve Katz, Ted Berrigan, Ron Padgett, James Schuyler, Joanna Russ, Michael Brownstein, Peter Schjeldahl, and Schimmel himself. That same year, he published his first chapbook of Hebrew poems, *Ha-shirim* (The Poems):

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[332] From "Two Views of Jerusalem" in *Now* magazine (1964).

> Gerard Malanga eats an apple under a gorgeous hat
> in a film by Andy Warhol
> "the primitive" from the Street of Prophets draws peasants healthier
> than from a more-ancient era   return in darkness, with pushkes (now-empty)
> from JNF
> "Manhattan or Martini?" in a blurry photo . . .[333]

The multilingual group of poets and artists that Schimmel became involved with in Israel/Palestine included his closest friends, Yehuda Amichai (Hebrew) , Dennis Silk (English) and Alexandra Petrova (Russian), Aryeh Sachs (Hebrew), Aharon Shabtai (Hebrew), and the Hebrew-American painter, Ivan Schwebel; and later: Zali Gurevitch (Hebrew), Yoram Verete (Hebrew), Gabi Levin (English) and myself, among others. At the same time, Schimmel kept up correspondence with many of his closest friends in the United States, writing for years to Schneeman, Katz, Denby, and Wright, but also to Guy Davenport, Hugh Kenner, and David Shapiro. He and Varda Schimmel hosted George and Mary Oppen, Bob and Penelope Creeley, Saul Bellow, Jorge Luis Borges, Abraham Sutzkever, and even Robert Lowell (after whom Schimmel titled his 1985 book of New York School-Hebrew sonnets) in their Jerusalem home. Schimmel also continued to publish English essays, poems and translations in American poetry/poetics magazines and journals for many years—even as he led a parallel Hebrew writing life.

Even Schimmel's great book-length poem, *Qasida* (2009)—a (post)modern Hebrew take on the pre-Islamic Arabic ode—arises from a New York School-Hebrew sensibility. After all, in his 1978 *Paideuma* essay on Zukofsky, "ZUK. YEHOASH DAVID REX," Schimmel pays close attention to Zukofsky's use of the Yiddish poet, Yehoash, and his *fartaytshn-un-farbesern* (Yiddish: free translation, lit. translate-and-

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[333] From Schimmel's *Ha-shirim* (the poems). Translation is mine.

make-better) of Bedouin verse into Yiddish. "Not transference from language to language," writes Schimmel, "but regeneration as the materials move…"[334]

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...on interim water
                three butts
          (to be precise,
                the filters)
at odd angles
          of being put out's
agitation a match
          and another

match at minimal distance
                      the empty pack
          predictably
                Marlboro Lights

With several strands of dark
                      Tobacco inside
(American blend)
          and at each stub's end...[335]
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Figure 16: Paideuma special issue

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[334] From Schimmel's "ZUK. YEHOASH DAVID REX." 1978. *Paideuma* 7.3: 563.
[335] From Schimmel's *Qasida.* Translation is Peter Cole's.

What David Roskies has said about Mikhl Likht is valid also for Schimmel: that he is

thinking in one language as he writes in another.[336] Or as Schimmel writes of Avot

Yeshurun: "the lingua franca of the poet is the product of a multiple vision."[337]

Schimmel's vision relies on an aesthetics of the local and nomadic, translational and

untranslatable, singular and polyvocal. His writing enacts a double-language or double-

eternity as Yeshurun called it; or as Schimmel writes (in a long Hebrew poem dedicated

to Louis Zukofsky):

> You do not see me
> In fact I'm not here . . .
> The task bending my neck
> We'll meet sometime[338]

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[336] See Roskies's "New York Jew" in *Yiddishlands*: *A Memoir* (189-196).

[337] See Schimmel's forward to his selected translations of Avot Yeshurun, *The Syrian African Rift and Other Poems* (xii).

[338] From Schimmel's "1880." Translation is Harold Schimmel's and Guy Davenport's in *Conjunctions* no. 4. 1983. 38-50.

Adaptation: BOW NOW (1964), Harold Schimmel and George Schneeman, An
Annotated Collaboration

In 1964, Harold Schimmel sent his friend George Schneeman - who had recently relocated to New York - a copy of *Now* magazine, a special issue of the Hebrew *Akhshav,* edited by Maxim Ghilan, featuring three Anglo-Jerusalem poets, Dennis Silk, Robert Friend, and Schimmel himself. Schneeman took the Hebrew-style English magazine and collaged within it, in interwoven New York School grooves, over all but his friend Schimmel's poems. Schneeman then sent the magazine back to Schimmel in Jerusalem with a new title: *Bow Now.*

The result of this epistolary collaboration became a singular artist book, one of many in fact, between Schimmel and his friends in New York City, and beyond. Within this particular collaboration we find a translingual shared lineage of Italian, for Schimmel and Schneeman had served together in Italy, and had lived there together for a number of years afterward. Between English, Hebrew and Italian, we begin to hear the echos of the Ashkenazic

Figure 17: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 1

Within this work we witness the crystalization of a number of poetic and aesthetic modes between Hebrew, English and Italian that would later become staples of Schimmel's and Schneeman's respective works. We discover a very early example of Schneeman's iconic micro-collages; and Schimmel, we find on the edge of language, bending to Hebrew and Yiddish in his English as he realizes he will need to build New York anew in Jerusalem.

ancestors, those who breathed expanded Yiddish into life. Until today, no-one except Varda Schimmel, Gabriel Levin, Charles Bernstein and myself have had a chance to view this early and brilliant New York School-Hebrew collaboration. I present this work here as a model then for a more interactive web-publication, in which the reader will be able to cue-up multilayered annotations as they read the high-res facimile. This mode of response to Schimmel's and Schneeman's collaboration feels wholly Talmudic and totally New York School at the same time. An essay in annotations -- the shape of a text as a moving center -- commentary as a means of re- and de-centering translingual meanings.

What does it mean to bring New York to Israel/Palestine? What does it sound like? English to Hebrew to Yiddish- Italian accents? What does it mean to doubly-expose a place in aesthetics, a language in poetics, tracing the facing translingual gauges of image and sound.

poems by **Harold** **Schimmel** **I** **WOW**

A woman reclining in a bathing suit recalls a more classical reclining nude in a 1960s idiom: as Schimmel would begin to transform his English poetics into Hebrew, Schneeman would attempt to transform classica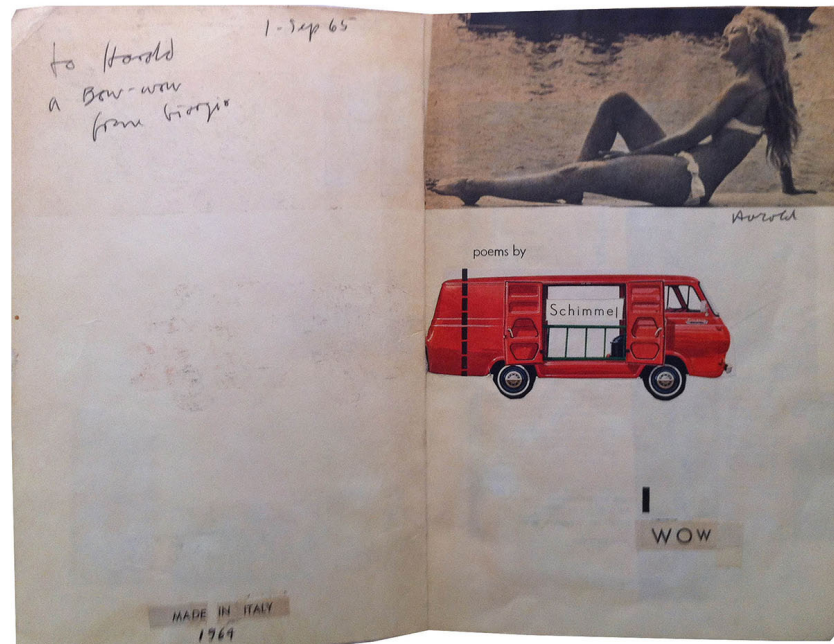l Italian modes of painting in a contemporay New York school style. I see the reclining woman as an homage to Giorgione's "Sleeping Venus," as much as a nod to Schimmel's love for mediterranean sun and beach; I think of Steve Katz's comment that Schimmel's friends always said that they thought he changed countries and languages, in pursuit of a good Mediterranean sun.

Schneeman's decision to collage over the work of the other two poets in the magazine in order to make something wholly his and Schimmel's alone strikes me as New York School to the core. As Ted Greenwald once told me, something Schneeman had said to him, that friendship and collaboration across languages and aesthetics was everything: we read and made work with our friends, Ted told me, quoting Schneeman.

Figure 18: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 2

to Harold
a Bow-wow
from Giorgio
1-Sep 65

Schneeman's assertion that this collaboration was "made in Italy" in 1964 creates a common third spacial term for this book: a shared Italy, which becomes an imagined collaborative territory between Jerusalem and New York. A red minibus carries Schimmel's errant poems from Jerusalem to New York City and back again. I'm reminded here of the pre-Islamic Arabic Qasida form that Schimmel would engage with almost a half-century later, the red minibus suggesting an *atlal* or place of rest, a roaming campsite constantly on the go. Pack the caravan and be ready to depart at a moment's notice; your language, sense of place, soon even your handkerchiefs will be embroidered with a new set of initials in a new alphabet. The utopic is transient in this sense, flux as movemnt intself, the get up and go, the got up and went, the moving "crew" or "company", as Robert Creeley would say, which surrounds every book of poems and every art work.

ADDIO, as in "Farewell" in Italian, at the start of the volume, a play perhaps even on Zukofsky's footnotes before the text, or even a satire it would seem on the radical "back-wardness" of the translingual poem itself. Jewish because it is also not Jewish; Yiddish because it is also Hebrew, English, Italian. We begin at the end in these terms, with ADDIO, the inevitability of beginning in fare-thee-wells, in packing up the caravan, & sending packages of supplies, books and paintings, along with ourselves, across desserts, across oceans and seas. We might recall here Avot Yeshurun's phrasing in "From Whom Did I Take Permission": "What're we waiting for? Since parting that parents-day / I seem a man who doesn't fare well / if to translate to language – I also fared / from Poland Palestine of a thousand years."

*What are you doing in our street among the automobiles,/horse?/How are your cousins, the centaur and the unicorn? —*Charles Resnikoff (2005: 101)

I PAINTED MY BACK YARD / BECAUSE THERE I PLAY / FROM ANOTHER CENTURY / WITH THIS YEAR'S INDIGO COCK / AND COMMUNAL BALLS.
—Harold Schimmel (unpublished, written on an untitled fresco by Ivan Schwebel's).

Figure 19: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 3

Arrows point "onward," as Creeley was known to write at the close of his correspondences; arrows out and down, though not down and out, as say for Orwell, but re-realized in the context of the collage. A woman's legs frame the table of "poesie" -- looks like she's walking -- and the body of the horse a collage itself, pointing out and down.

Schneeman creates a new poem at the start of the chapbook from the raw fodder of the table of contents from the first "version" as it were, of the magazine. Framing Schimmel's titles embedded in collage, Schneeman presents these lines anew, playful as Dada, skillful as a surrealist, but wholly New York School, above all; poems from anything, from everything, poems from a stone, from a "table" even. Titles reaccented against the page anew reactivate a poetics via epistolary collaboration: a newborn version with Schimmel's "ears" and Schneeman's "eyes", so to speak: "Apples / My presence in your house / Amos confesses his matchmaking / Mandolino-ass like a valentine / Two views of Jerusalem / Wedding poem in normal circumstance / End of the fast day / Pomegranates : A Jeruslaem Idyll."

Haroldo Schimmel, or uncle Harry to the Schneeman boys, Paul, Emilio and Elio. Hirsch, which is Harold in Yiddish, or else Zvi but also Aryeh, in Hebrew. Mr. Schimmel, as he is known by some, and Haroldus by others. The many names move over translingual surfaces, almost skating. Haroldo is the Schimmel of Rencine, the Schimmel of George's earliest paintings, and of their earliest friendship -- for they first met in Verona. A re-accenting of New York English via Italian becomes the junction of the worlds between Jerusalem and St. Marks place. There is a reason Schneeman oscillates between listing the collaboration as published in 1964 or else 1965; he splits time in collage against the grain of the poem, and with it re-engages space on the page, in a langage that finds its way across continents with a lag, delay, a pit-stop for the night between Hebrew and English, via Italian. Schneeman and Schimmel split the mediterranean down the middle and play both sides of their temporal experiences in tandem. The result: an alternate dimension, in which American art and poetics take place in three and often more, languages at once. The naming is never singular, in this sense, but suggests at all times the possibilty for many interfacing though disperate subjectivities as names.

Kicking a ball around on a muddy court, what gives!? This photograph I find both highly common - cut perhaps out of a magazine - and extremely comical all at once. The whimsy of the shot, *as* the fumble.

Figure 20: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 4

"Poeta," we might imagine is not exactly the same thing as a poet, just as *dikhter* in Yiddish or *meshorer* in Hebrew is something entirely different. This difference displaces subjectivities "ring" across languages, not "around the rosy," as Zukofsky might have played it, but as a sudden (*plutsim*) reaction to a name which is simultaneously yours and not yours. Here we find Schneeman trying on a number of different aesthetic modes -- especially in this case, translingual interventions combined with minimalist collage -- which would come up again and again throughout his career, mostly in collaboration with second generation New York School poets and artists. But this is one of the earliest collaborations for both artists and it names a place, which is not yet fully in existence, but which will come into being over the next fifty years in the works of these two prolific "poetas." Indeed, Schimmel has long been called in Israel/Palestine the translingual Hebrew poet's poet par excellence, and Schneeman, among his many friends in New York, is still known today, more than ten years after his death, as the painter among poets.

Yet another arrow points, as Larry Eigner writes: "arrowy traffic / on the bigger road"

"Apples" is often the first poem I give students to read of Schimmel's, not only because I love it and consider a great early poem of his, but also because it provides such a rich example of his expanded-Yiddish capabilities early-on. In "Apples" Schimmel is still writing in English, a type of Yiddish, just on the edge of transitioning into Hebrew. And the desire to translate and be translated as a never ending cycle of no-return becomes the turning crux of the poem, as Schimmel invokes through imitation *as* adaptation, multiple cacaphonous accents, to imagine a poetics of translation *into and out of* English.

Schneeman makes his facing collage, using only two pieces, a technique that would become a staple of his New York School aesthetics later in his career. Fueling up at an iconic pit stop gas station in Italy, this is a composite image of a temporary stop in temporality en route to somewhere else -- another language-town. And who is this tall dark handsome man looking on above the station workers? A portrait perhaps of the poet as Italian football player...!
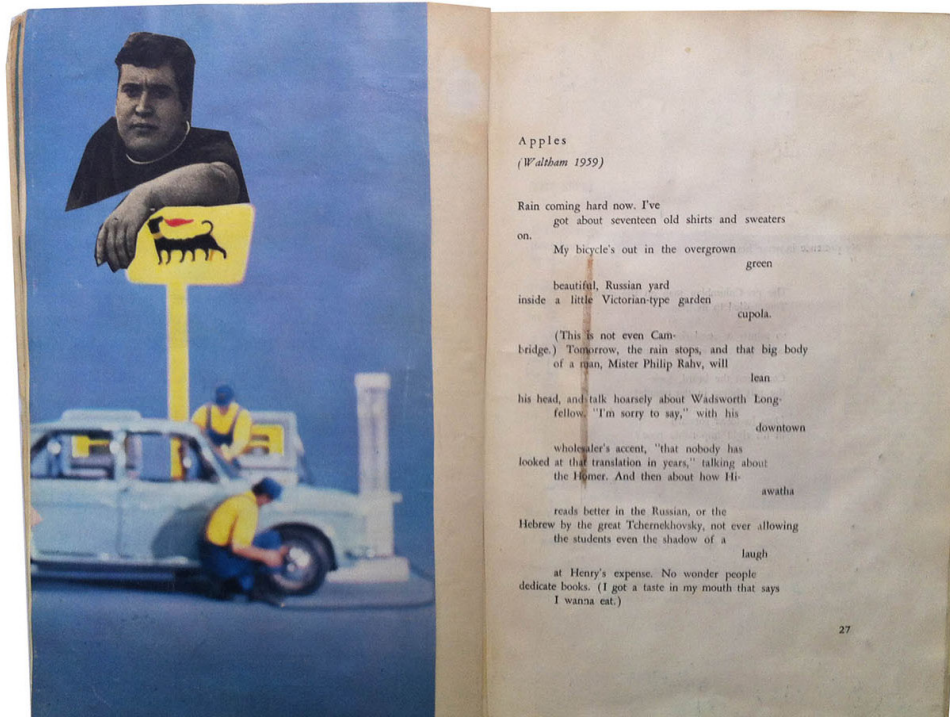

Figure 21: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 5

The parenthetical close to the Schimmel's poem I take as an ars poetica of translingual neccesity, phrased in a quiet thought, in a whisper, even: "(I got a taste in my mouth that says / I wanna eat.)"

And that big body / of a man, Mister Philip Rahv, will / lean / his head, and talk hoarsly about Wadsworth Long-/ fellow. "I'm sorry to say," with his / downtown wholesaler's accent, / "that nobody has / looked at that translation in years," talking about / the Homer. And then about how Hi- / awatha / reads better in the Russian, or the / Hebrew by the great Tchernikhovsky, not ever allowing / the students even the shadow of a / laugh / at Henry's expense." Schimmel imagines here an alternate tradition for his American poetics, not only through Rahv and Tchernekhovsky, but through Louis Zukofsky, as well, who, we might recall, had memorized Longfellow's Hiawatha in Yehoash's Yiddish transaltion by the age of ten, before he had ever read it in the English.

Here Schneeman pastes a poem of Schimmel's, which was published in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, a poem, which is uncollected anywhere, and only resurfaces in this artist chapbook through Schneeman's whimsy. The juxtposing almost cartoonish images are all in motion, an airplane moving out of frame, a woman looks in the opposite dirction, and the red minibus of Schimmel's poetics in Schneeman's minds-eye, that "ford econoline van" drives in the direction of the woman's gaze, carrying a somber John Wayne. And out of the front window a woman exclaims, though we can't hear what she is saying. Perhaps she is reciting Schimmel's poem? "You are almost not in / my present at all -- do you know?"

Schimmel begins in this poem to move into code-switching registers, which would prepare him for the ultimate "switch" from English to Hebrew via an imagined expanded-Yiddish less than a year later.

Figure 22: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 6

Translingual Glossary:

Amatzya is a small town in south-central Israel/Palestine, named for King Amaziah of Judah, from the Book of Kings; *Yoreh* is a Hebrew slang for the first rain of the year in Israel/Palestine.
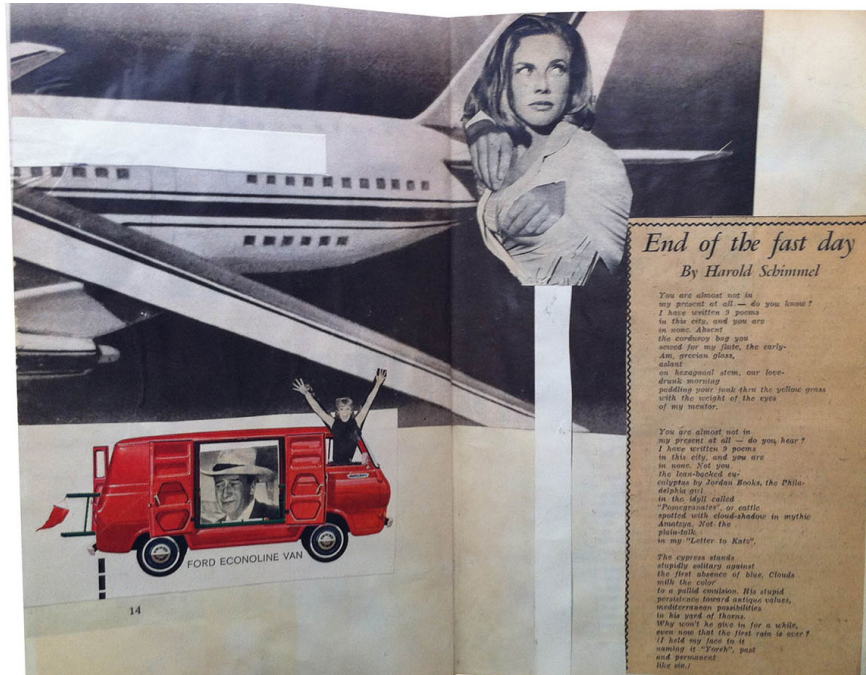
You are almost not in // my present at all — do you know ? / I have written 9 poems / in this city, and you are in none. Absent / the corduroy bag you / sewed for my flute, the early-/ Am. grecian glass, / aslant / on hexagonal stem, our love- / drunk morning / paddling your junk thru the yellow grass / with the weight of the eyes / of my mentor. // You are almost not in / my present at all — do you hear? / I have written 9 poems / in this city, and you are / in none. Not you / the lean-backed ey- / calyptus by Jordan Books, the Phila- / delphia girl / in the idyll called / "Pomegranates", or cattle / spotted with cloud-shadow in mythic / Amatzya. Not the / plain-talk in my "Letter to Katz". // The cypress stands / stupidly solitary against / the first absence of blue, Clouds / milk the color / to a pallid emulsion. His stupid / persistence toward antique values, / mediterranean possibilities / in his yard of thorns. / Why won't he give in for a while, / even now that the first rain is over ? / (I hold my face to it / naming it "Yoreh," past/ and permanent / like a sin.

Schimmel moves here into a reaccented English, testing the waters of Zukofsky's homophonic Brooklynese in his own soon to be New York School-Hebrew inflection. The voice is wholly American, Jewish and also, perhaps, somehow by a common crypto-Yiddish thread, African-American/Carribean. On the edge of re-inventing his poetic language all together, Schimmel plays with materials of a non-standard vernacular English on the page; this poem is a transcription, in this sense, of the New York School sounds Schimmel was synthesizing in his early poetics as he began to translate himself into a Hebrew tongue.

Schneeman chooses a bold image of the accented Italian "è" to match Schimmel's vernacular play; "è" as in the third-person singular present indicative of the Italian, *essere*; as in the well known expression: *Se non è vero, è ben trovato* (If it is not true, it is a good story.)
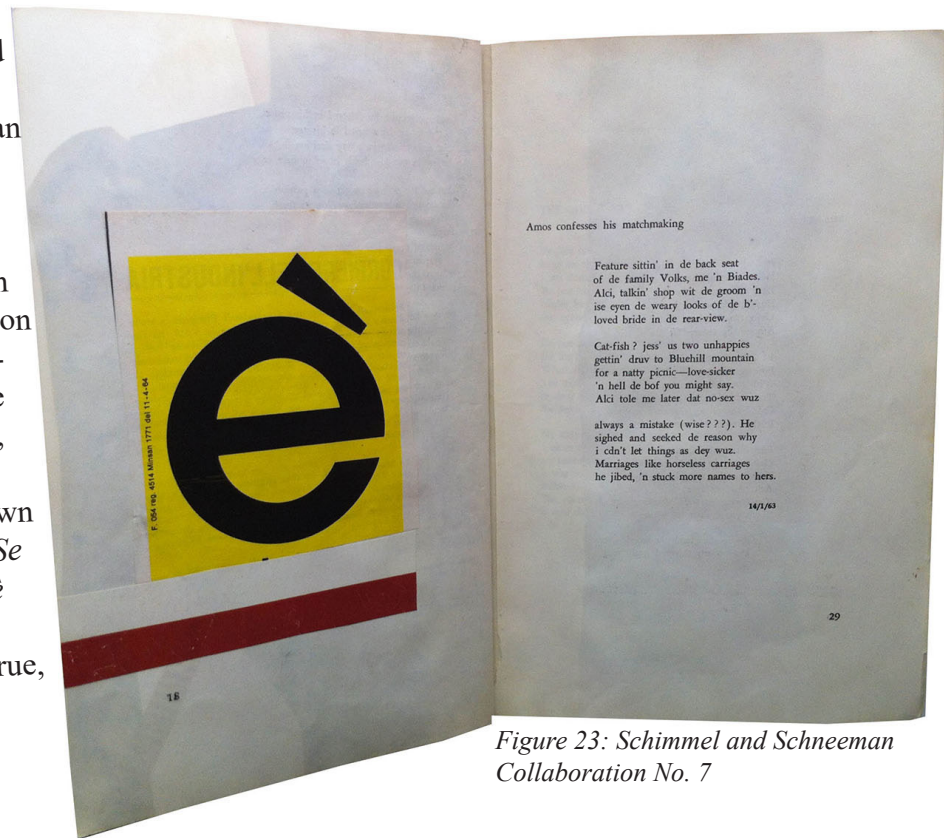

Figure 23: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 7

The motion of language, from language to language, the marriages of languages, as it were, move in unexpected directions: "Marriages, like horseless carriages / he jibed," the poem ends, " 'n stuck more names to hers."

Zukofsky's own foray into a homophonic vernacular re-accenting of Calvacanti's Italian "Donna mi Prega" in an American immigrant English, provides an important precedent for Schimmel's own transliterative experimentation (see my discussion of this in Chapter 2, 50-51).

 In "Two views of Jerusalem", Schimmel presents a dialectic reading of his translingual mongrel experience as an "*oleh-khadash"* that is, recent immigrant to Israel. In the first view, he imagines a hyper-masculine Jerusalem transposed in Italian: "O rocks of Gerusalemme. / Coglion !" -- meaning, of course, in Italian idiom, "what balls!" *this young American teaching English in Italy who thinks he'll simply emigrate to Jerusalem* -- what khutpza! (Yiddish: "gall"). The second view is framed by an uneasy Hebrew assimilation, which turns the poet/speaker from a young Italian teacher into a "real / jew." Schimmel's humor is palpable here, and I can hardly help but laugh out loud when I read this poem, which seems to satirize, by bringing down to earth, the heroic myth of Jewish emigration to Israel/Palestine, and into the Hebrew language, specifically.

"I can't even blow my nose / without feeling jewish": a lower case "j" re-accents Schimmel's jewishness here, as a maleable changing category. The joke then it would seem is on Schimmel's "fellow / clingers-to-zion" who restate the obvious (what Schimmel already knows) which is that his is "a real jew."
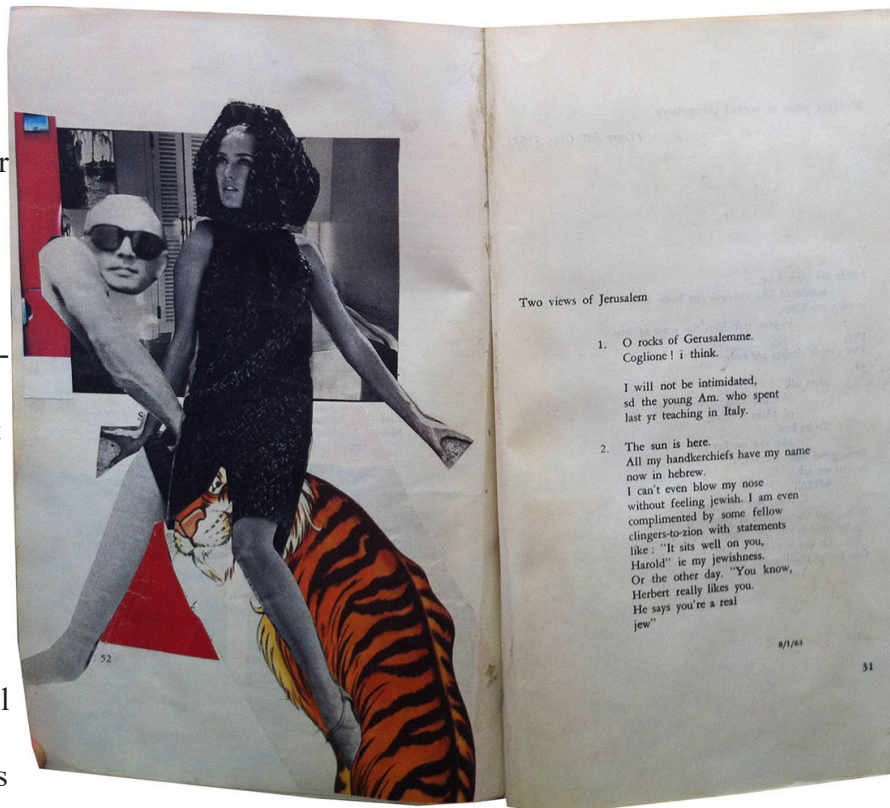

Figure 24: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 8

Faces and limbs, a cartoon tiger hangs about, like a second torso to the cut-out fashionista looking on. Limbs crossing limbs in crisscross, and two faces look out from two possible points of view. Does the man in sunglasses dare pet the tiger? The layers of this facing collage are wildly intricate, suggesting a wholly non-linear space-time aesthetics: opening the space-time of the poem and collage to two or more perspectives at once.

 What is the setting of this collage-poem? The setting sun over the beach is but a poster on the bedroom wall. Is the red sliver at the far left of the page a suggestion of the red minibus out of frame pulling the book of Schimmel's poems through multiple registers and dimensions?

The collaborative chapbook closes with a photograph of a young Schimmel, at age twenty-five, taken by an imagined photographer name Marcus Morroco. This is in fact a pseudonym that Schimmel uses homorously for himself at times in his correspondences with Schneeman. Is this a selfie of the self-made poet? A poet who left his language behind for another? Marcus Morroco is Schimmel and it is not Schimmel, as the transitory name for a poet in the midst of changing languages.

Yet Schimmel would remain Harold in Hebrew for good, the best choice he ever made as a Hebrew poet, as he tells it, since his name set him apart, marked him as a transplant, and gave him permission to translate an expanded-Yiddish American idiom into his New York-School Hebrew.

Figure 25: Schimmel and Schneeman Collaboration No. 9

The bright pink washing tub appears pasted on in haste. This is a part of Schneeman's wider aesthetic, as well, a sense of urgent juxtaposition which comes across as two-parts playful whimsy and one-part serious immediacy.

According to Schimmel, he has in fact dozens of other collaborations with Schneeman and other second-generation New York-school artists and poets that no-one has yet seen. I present this annotated selection from Schimmel's and Schneeman's *Bow-Now* as a model for a longer annotated series of these arist-book collaborations, which I plan to edit, curate, and publish through the Electronic Poetry Center (EPC).

Conclusion: Expanded-Yiddish Poetics Today
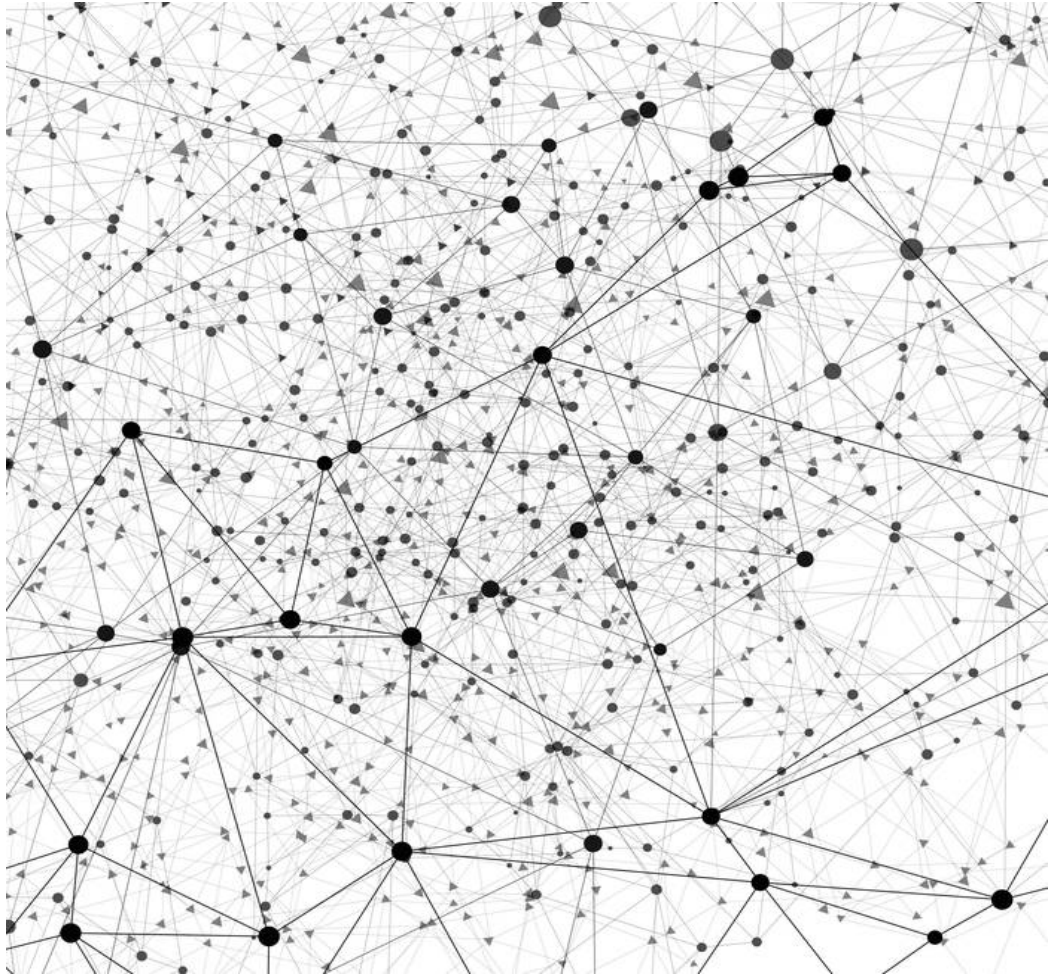
Figure 26: Alex Obed's conceptual homage to the "rhizome"

I'll end with one last Midrash:

In 1967, Jerome Rothenberg and Paul Celan meet at a cafe in Paris to discuss

Rothenberg's translations of Celan's German poems into English. They speak in a

mixture of broken German and broken English, and only at the end of the conversation

realize that they both speak Yiddish, and as Rothenberg tells it, after that there was not

that much more they had to say.

In December 1975, Rothenberg writes the following poem in memory of his

meeting with Celan:

a letter to Paul Celan in memory

of how your poems
arise in me
alive
my eye fixed on
your line
"light was - salvation"
I remember
(in simpler version)
Paris
nineteen sixty seven
in cold light of
our meeting
shivered to dumbness
you said "jew"
& I said "jew"
though neither spoke
the jew words
jew tongue
neither the mother language
loshen
the vestiges of holy speech
but you said "pain"
under your eyebrows
I said "image"
we said "sound"
& turned around to
silence   lost
between two languages
we drank
wine's words
like blood
but didn't drink toward
vision   still
we could not speak
without a scream
a guttural
the tree
out of the shadow of
the white cafe was not

"the tree"
roots of our speech
above us
in the sun
under the sewers
language of moles
"who dig & dig
"do not grow wise
"who make no song
"no language
into the water silence
of your death
the pink pale sky of Paris
in the afternoon
that held no constellations
no knowledge of the sun
as candelabrum
tree   menorah
"light knotted into air
"with table set
"chairs empty
"in sabbath splendor
the old man stood beside
in figure of a woman
raised his arms to reach
axis of the world
would bring
the air down
solidly
& speak no sound
the way you forced
my meaning
to your poem
the words of which still press
into my tongue
"drunk
"blesst
"gebentsht"[1]

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[1] 1980: 42-4. Used with permission of the author.

This poem marks the encounter between the young Rothenberg and elder Celan as a translingual spark from within & outside the vast and violent darkness of Nazi monolingual monologic. The common language lies latent, suddenly active, but only for a moment, a flicker, *likht* "light was - salvation". We might think of this meeting as a radical form of testimony and witness, as well, a spiritual pouring out of the dormant monological trauma via the repressed language, only for a moment—first spoken, later translated into writing.

Rothenberg's meeting with Celan presents a momentary illumination of the new translingual trans-spacial networks being forged across (and *beneath*) the *khurbn* ruins. His old friend Louis Zukofsky would write an ur-version of this dynamic into the final lines of his first major work, "A Poem Beginning 'The'" in the form of free translation from Yehoash's "*oyf di khurves*": "How wide our arms are / and strong / a myriad of years we have been / Myriad upon myriad shall be." Rothenberg and Zukofsky never spoke about their shared Yiddish underpinnings, though their respective works whisper with translingual Yiddish fusedness, Anglo-mongrel (as Loy so rightly put it) shimmering below and behind the English host.

The field of expanded-Yiddish is thus finally an epidermal field, one shed into the ether, as dust, as ash, not reconstructed but re/composed.

*

In 2019, the contemporary German poet-translator Norbert Lange and I met in a cafe in San Francisco to discuss Lange's German translations of Stephen Ross's and my English translations of Likht. Lange spoke in German, while I spoke in Yiddish, inflecting a

friendly *daytchmerish* (German-Yiddish), wholly inter-comprehensible to one another, as all Yiddish is at its outer limits. We related aloud to one another in both languages during the conversation the feeling we had of harnessing a radical translingual echo between ourselves and our elder Rothenberg and ancestors Celan, and Likht. Here is an excerpt from Lange's forthcoming German translation of Likht's "Procession: I":

> Raumzeichen. Glimmer
> auf Pfützen und Regen.
> Stromumrisse, die Stein
>
> >   überspülen. Und wieder –
>
> Eine Nachtigall. Kleinschnäbliges Trillern
> auf blecherner Pfanne
> eingestanzt
>
> zu schrillem Gekreisch
> in den irdischen Händen eines Juden-Missionars[2].

A few days after our meeting with Lange, I received an email from Charles Bernstein:

> between my email and your reply, I've spent some time with Norbert Lange, speaking of Likht and of you. Norbert using your English to create German translations of Likht is the perfect extension of what you're writing about. A kind of wild "bad translation." Worth writing about, if not in the dissertation, then in the book that comes from it. Especially if we understand that Yiddish is a kind of German. So Likht has found his readers — with you as medium — in Norbert and I talking about him on President Street. His work coming into German through your English. there's something very beautiful about that. It's not that it comes full circle but that it's a continuous circuit with no beginning or end. In this sense German is the kind of dialect of Yiddish. And American English a hodgepodge: miscegenation with no return.[3]

Bernstein is one of the first contemporary radical Jewish poets I recognized as an inheritor of an expanded-Yiddish praxis, as I often say to him, his English is a sort of

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[2] Unpublished. Used with permission of Norbert Lange.
[3] From a correspondence on April 15, 2019. Used with permission of Charles Bernstein.

Yiddish itself. And now between myself and Lange, between Rothenberg and Celan, Bernstein affirmed the potency of the translingual echo Lange and I had felt during our meeting, without assuming we understood its origins. Indeed, as Bernstein suggests, it is the originless and continuous circuit that determines the force of an expanded-Yiddish poetics of the present and future.

There is a great deal more work that must be done in tracing the translingual counter-pasts and counter-futures of expanded Yiddish. I chose to present this "section" of the counter-tradition, as it were, due to a confluence of openings in the translingual archives of the writers I engage with in this dissertation. Indeed, over the past six years, I have gained unprecedented access to the collected papers of Mikhl Likht, Avot Yeshurun and Harold Schimmel; and with the recent death of Paul Zukofsky, Zukofsky's manuscripts have also suddenly become once again open to scholarly intervention, in a way that they had not been since his death and Paul's inheritance of the estate.[4] Finally, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University has digitized and made publicly available Mina Loy's collected papers, a marvelous feat, which will no doubt change the face of Loy studies as we know it.[5]

Upon completing my doctorate, I plan to develop my dissertation into a monograph, which will include a third set of expanded-Yiddish case studies. I have chosen to leave this third section out of my dissertation proper, since I discovered it late into the doctoral program, and I want to give this research the space it deserves to develop. This third section takes me to the Southern Hemisphere, where I investigate the

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[4] Paul Zukofsky made it extremely difficult for scholar to work with/on his father's poetry for many years.
[5] See: https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Search/Results?lookfor=YCAL_MSS_6&type=CallNumber

question of Yiddish and Hebrew translational writing within Clarice Lispector's innovative Brazilian-Portuguese prose and Alejandra Pizarnik's trenchant Argentine-Spanish verse. Through careful analysis of key pieces of Hebrew and Yiddish marginalia in Lispector's and Pizarnik's papers (housed, respectively, at the Brazilian National Archive, and at the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University), I will examine the translingual poetic strategies these writers employ in order to translate themselves out of their South American Yiddish-Hebrew environments, into the language of the national-cultural "host". The explicit expanded-Yiddish, which we find in Likht, Zukofsky, Loy, Yeshurun and Schimmel, I argue, is implicit for Lispector and Pizarnik, making their works exemplary limit cases. It is at these outer limits of Jewish translingual writing that my most immediate future research resides, at the site of the multilingual archive, where veiled traces of cultural and linguistic translation so often remain.

In truth, each chapter of this dissertation could in a sense be made into a book in its own right; and thus I present this research only as a preliminary intervention into the field of expanded-Yiddish, which I will surely continue to engage with and research in my scholarship, poetry and translation for many decades to come. Is it cliché to say this is but the tip of the iceberg? But it is—with so much left still to explore.

Returning to Rothenberg and Celan, I can't help but think of Amos Schauss's Yiddish translation of Rothenberg's "The Wedding" from *Poland/1931*:

> *mayn miyakh iz ongeshtopt mit tishtekher*
> *un mit fingerlekh ober mayn miyakh*
> *kholemt fun poyln ongeshtopt mit poyln*
> *in dimiyen gebrakht*
> *tsu a shvartseh khaseneh*

a naketer khosn shvebt iber
zayn naketeh kaleh metirifdikeh poyln
vi shreklekh dayneh yidn oyf khasenehs
dayneh shulen mit kamfer reykhehs un mandlen
dayneh termosen dayneh elektrishe tumanen
dayneh untervesh lebedik mit vurtseln oy poyln
poyln poyln poyln poyln poyln
vi dayneh glocken ayngevikelt mit blumen klingen
vi zey offenen zeyreh tsungen tsu kushen di levoneh
alteh levoneh alteh mameh gebliben shteken in dayn himel du aleyn
an alte glock on ah tsung ah farloyrener eyter
oy poyln dayn bier iz tomid gemakht fun farfoylteh broyt
dayneh zayden iz layvent bloiz dayneh sokherim
tantsen oyf khasenehs vu khasonim kanoyim
fantazieren nokh veygen kalehs shrayendik nokh
durkh zeyereh royteh vontsehs poyln
mir zaynen gebliben vakh in dayneh veykheh arems oyf eybik
dayneh federen zaynen geven far unz balzam
dayneh kishns fangen unz vi krenklikheh trakhten un hiten unz
lomir durkhzegeln dayneh vildeh khasenehs poyln
lomir treten dayneh merkten vu dayneh vurshten vaksen rayf un ful
lomir baysen dayneh feferkorns zol dayn oksenmist zayn tsuker far dayneh gosysesdike yidn
oy poyln oy ziseh umtsukhedikeh unruikeh poyln
oy poyln fun di heylikeh unknepeldikeh poyln iberkhazendik on oyfher di drayikeh nemen fun mariya
poyln poyln poyln poyln poyln
zaynen mir nit mid gevoren fun dir poyln neyn vayl dayneh keyzen
velen unz keynmol nit mid makhen un nit di honik fun dayneh tsigen
dayneh khosens velen arbeten umtsukhedik iber zeyereh shvebedikeh kalehs
velen kindlen mit henker
velen shtenden vi kenigen in dayneh tiren
velen arumnemen dayneh bayshtidlekh poyln
un onheyben kreyen[6]

The first time I heard Rothenberg read this translation in his deep Bronx-Yiddish accent, I was stunned; we were at Bob Holman's Bowery Poetry Club in the Lower East Side—in the exact locale of the former semi-autonomous cultural territory of New York Yiddishland, the same local James visited in fear and disgust, and which Loy visited in

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[6] Used with the permission of Jerome Rothenberg. Note that I keep Rothenberg's non-standard transliteration of Schauss's Yiddish. Published in full on Jacket2 in "Jerome Rothenberg: Five Translations of 'Poland/1931,' 'The Wedding': https://jacket2.org/commentary/jerome-rothenberg-five-translationsversions-poland1931-wedding

delight and excitement. I was stunned: to my ears suddenly (as Ted Greenwald might

say) it sounded as though Rothenberg had conceived of the wedding in Yiddish, but had

written it in *Poland/1931* in English translation. There is no better example of a

contemporary expanded-Yiddish praxis that I can think of than this: "I very well may be

the last Yiddish modernist," said Rothenberg that night, as he has said to me many times

since. "Yes," I thought, "perhaps he is, though he writes in a sort of English translation."

As Bernstein writes in a recent poem, an adaptation "after Reznikoff":

> How difficult, Yiddish, for me;
> even father, the Yiddish for, Hebrew, tongue
> 's foreign. Like home never had
> or ones do.[7]

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[7] Reznikoff's poem appears in *Five Groups of Verse* (1972), #14, 1:72.

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