

**Linguistic Limbo:
Writing and Rewriting in Hebrew and Yiddish**

By

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Abstract

This dissertation offers new modes of understanding Hebrew-Yiddish literary bilingualism by redefining ‘where’, ‘by whom’ and, most importantly, ‘how’ Jewish bilingualism was created. Focusing on three writers who wrote extensively in both Yiddish and Hebrew—Hirsch Dovid Nomberg, Aharon Reuveni, and Zalman Shneour—this project offers an account of bilingual writing in an age of monolingualization, expanding the gallery of bilingual writers, the modalities of Jewish bilingualism and its temporality. In the inclusion of these diverse bilingual practices this dissertation focuses on translation and self-translation as central practices in the ongoing production of Hebrew-Yiddish literature.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of Zionism, the two World Wars, the dismantling of Jewish communities across Europe, and the rapid spread of secularism. My work uncovers the changing bilingualism of these times, in comparing prose by three relatively marginalized writers who shared a proclivity for writing in both Hebrew and Yiddish, but who diverged in terms of geographic location, ideology, and poetics. Each chapter is devoted to a writer and a major work of prose: *Eretz yisroel eindruken un bilder* (The Land of Israel – Impressions and Pictures) by Nomberg, *Ad Yerushalayim* (To Jerusalem) by Reuveni and *Shklover yidn/Anshe Shklov* (The Jews/People of Shklov) by Shneour. Each chapter delineates the bilingual aspects of the work and contextualizes it within the oeuvre of that writer. These three writers worked against cultural trends, changing their bilingual poetics, covertly and

overtly, to offer a complex vision of literature as more translingual, innovative, and more malleable than monolingualism allowed.

My dissertation argues that these bilingualisms lasted much longer than previous scholarship has contended, not ending around the *fin de siècle* as previously thought, but rather decades later, if at all. In this expansion, I find that these texts, despite their variety of form, share the use of bilingualism as a self-conscious theme and not only as an invisible method of composition. Thus, my research pushes back against the notion of the death of bilingualism. The fact that the ideological pressures to conform to a regime of monolingualism were so strong enabled hidden forms of bilingualism to develop, with each writer modifying his poetics idiosyncratically. Thus, the unique cultural circumstances of Jewish modernity recreated bilingual writing.

Introduction

Roast Goose or Barley Stew? – Language as Sustenance

Around the turn of the century Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh led a bustling literary salon in Odessa, attracting a large circle of writers and followers. This salon was one destination Zalman Shneour had in mind when he left his hometown of Shklov at the young age of fourteen. Shneour was unhappy in his hometown, but what drove him away was less powerful than what drew him to the city of Odessa. He came to the city in search of a literary mentor, and he found one in the poet Hayim Nahman Bialik. He also approached Abramovitsh, but the latter never fulfilled the role Shneour hoped for. Although a tale of failed mentorship, this encounter still provided an important and memorable conversation that proved to be fateful for Shneour's career. In a memoir devoted to Bialik's generation, Shneour recounted a discussion he and Abramovitsh had regarding Hebrew and Yiddish. Abramovitsh was upset with language wars and monolingualism:

Did you hear?! They hate Hebrew, they love Hebrew. They love Yiddish, they hate Yiddish. Beggars! What do love and hate have to do with such legacies? Such arguments emit a smell of beggars. All this patriotism reeks of beggars! Take those, for instance, who scream at the top of their lungs that they love *Zhargon*... I'd like them to try and hate *Zhargon*, and see if, without the tongue of their mother, they don't go deaf and mute, mute from birth. Let them hate barley stew, when they don't have a roast goose! [...] If those opposed would try to brave the sea of literature from the Bible on, through the Talmud and the Rabbis, through Ashkenaz and Sephard and make it all the way to our times, and then be dismissive, [...] that I could accept. But I myself, who writes both Hebrew and Yiddish, hear these complainers and moaners and realize: not knowledge, but ignorance screams from their throats. Those disparaging the revival of Hebrew,

dragging it through the mud, those are the simplest minded. They ridicule since they know nothing.¹

Abramovitsh vehemently attacks what he sees as heresy: the idea that one can pick and choose between Hebrew and Yiddish, to dismantle a *necessary* dyad. For Abramovitsh, the notion that one can monolingualize Jewish culture is simply nonsensical. There is no viability for language segregation, and therefore, no place for love and hate. One must live with Hebrew and live with Yiddish, not love them. A brilliant rhetorical moment comes when Abramovitsh exclaims: “Take those, for instance, who scream at the top of their lungs that they love *Zhargon*...”. One would expect here something favorable for those who love a Jewish language.² But on the contrary, this exasperates Abramovitsh further: “I’d like them to try and hate *Zhargon*”, the love turning just as hurtful as hate. Positive or negative *feelings* are not the suitable realm for discussion here, love of Yiddish comes in bad faith, undermining the necessity of bilingualism.

The speech by Abramovitsh left a lasting impression on Shneour. Abramovitsh here is mediated via Shneour, and one cannot emphasize this point enough; this is a belated and hindsighted construction, by a master of prose, of Abramovitsh’s ideas. With Abramovitsh, Shneour is telling a generational story; a generation of his elders, and Shneour constructs this

1 השמעתם? הם שונאים עברית, הם אוהבים עברית. אוהבים אידיש שונאים אידיש. קבצנים! מה שייך שנוא ואהוב בעניין ירושות-דורות 1 כאלו. ריח של קבצנסק עולה לי תמיד מוויכוחים אלה. מכל פטריוטיות עולה ריח של קבצנסק! הנה הללו, למשל, הצועקים בקולי-קולות כי את הז'רגון הם חובבים... ינסו נא לשנוא את הז'רגון, אם בלי לשון אמא זו חרשים ואילמים הם, כאילמים מלידה. ינסו נא לשנוא נזיד גריסים, אם צלי-אווז אין להם! [...] לו ניסה לפחות המתנגד הנלהב לנסות לבקוע ים של ספרות החל מן התנ"ך, תלמוד מדרש ועבור למפרשים, תקופת ספרד ואשכנז ולהגיע עד זמננו זה ואחר כך לבטל... [לכפור בעיקר, להתקומם כאלישע בן אבויה ממין חדש... את זאת עדיין מבין אני. אבל אני הגבר,] הכותב גם עברית וגם אידיש, הסתכלתי במריעים ובתוקעים ואראה: לא התורה אלא הברות צועקת מתוך גרונם. דווקא אלה השולחים זלמן שנוור. *H. Zalman Shneour. Ash and Gypsy: A Story of the Jewish Language* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1958), 282.

² Even though the mere use of the term *Zargon* prefigures the inherent disdain these “lovers” of Yiddish truly hold for the language.

generation as a backdrop to his own work and that of his peers.³ With this narrative enters also the issue of translation; not only does Shneour narrate Abramovitsh, ventriloquizing him as a figurehead of bilingualism, this text itself is an act of bilingualism. Though written by Shneour in Hebrew, it is almost certain that the conversation took place in Yiddish and was translated and adapted for Hebrew readership. At the very least this text is a marker of language ambiguity: time unknown, language of origin unknown. Written and published in 1958 Israel, this anecdote is looking back at Odessa and at a pinnacle of bilingualism. Thus, this conversation spans continents, languages and eras of Jewish literature. It is a text about bilingualism, at once performing and narrating the bilingual.

Abramovitsh is representative of the generation prior to the one this dissertation discusses. For Abramovitsh, bilingualism was structured as a necessity: one needs both Hebrew and Yiddish to construct a literature. Thus, as Benjamin Harshav notes, it was a balance of difference, not the flattening of difference that marked the genius of Abramovitsh: “His forte [...] was making non-Germanic elements – especially Hebrew, Slavic, and colloquial Yiddish words – conspicuous in every paragraph and sentence, thus stressing the counterpoints rather than the linguistic melting pot.”⁴ These counterpoints of language have been celebrated in Abramovitsh’s Hebrew writing as well: the melding of languages to the cusp of seamlessness, but not beyond it, thus creating a multilingual language that does not obliterate the origins of the

3 Shneour having peers is a notion to be taken with a grain of salt. A tumultuous spirit, Shneour fought relentlessly and frequently with fellow writers and publishers. Nonetheless, his contemporaries share more than Shneour would like to admit.

4 Benjamin Harshav. *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 63.

components which allowed complex connectivities and interplay. For Abramovitsh, bilingualism was essential and inevitable.⁵

The creation of this layered language is what earned Abramovitsh the status of an unrivaled innovator of both Hebrew and Yiddish literary language.⁶ Thus, when Bialik celebrated the achievements of Abramovitsh upon the publication of his collected Hebrew works, he inaugurates him as the creator of a template, a *Nusakh*.⁷ But Bialik sees in the invention of the *Nusakh* an endpoint; in his innovation, Abramovitsh both peaked as a bilingual writer and made bilingualism obsolete, unnecessary for the next generations: “Now we have a strong and brave literature, perhaps braver than Mendele himself. But this is only thanks to Mendele submerging himself within this literature. By adding himself, he allowed the literature to overpower him. Mendele and others – are stronger than Mendele himself.”⁸ Bialik uses the term *hevli‘a*, הבליע, to have oneself swallowed up within, engulfed in new monolingual literature, sacrificing the bilingual self to create a literary future, a *Nusakh*, which in itself is rooted in bilingualism, but mainly enables Hebrew monolingualism. The bilingual Abramovitsh was his own worst enemy, rendering his own practice obsolete with the creation of the *Nusakh*. The

5 It should be noted here that the bilingualism of Abramovitsh was in fact (at least) three modes of bilingualism. These different periods of bilingual production and the changing translation practices are methodically explored in Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity, Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 421-98.

6 Yet, as Jeremy Dauber notes, bilingual innovation might have peaked with Abramovitsh, but the roots of his genius lay in the bilingual dynamics of Haskala literature. See: *Jeremy Dauber. Antonio's Devils: Writers of the Jewish Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Jewish Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 3-31. See also: Ken Frieden. *Classic Yiddish Fiction : Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), 1-9.

7 See a definition of this term in: Robert Alter. *Hebrew and Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 54-56.

8 עתה יש לנו ספרות חזקה ואמיצה, אמיצה אולי ממנדלי עצמו. אין זה אלא מפני שהוא, מנדלי, הבליע בה את עצמו. בתוספת עצמו הגביר 8 מנדלי ועוד – הזקים ממנדלי אותה גם על עצמו. Hayim Nahman Bialik. "Yotser Hanusakh." In *Kol kitvey H. N. Bialik*. (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1938), 240-41.

particular use of *hevli'a* summons again the corporal culinary metaphor Abramovitsh uses: he is swallowed up into the Hebrew literature, consumed as sustenance to inform this new creation. Bialik thus turns Mendele into the invisible foundation of any subsequent Hebrew writing, and the final stepping stone in the creation of a national literature.

A similar understanding of the *Nusakh* as a necessary stage to subsequently solidify a monolingual future is promoted by Robert Alter in his *Invention of Hebrew Prose*. Alter views Abramovitsh as the backdrop for a generation of innovators, Brenner, Gnessin and Fogel to name three, the artifice of Hebrew prose coming to them as a counter action to the 'Mendele model'.⁹ This invention of an anti-*Nusakh* is a graduation from a serviceable language of prose born out of bilingual creation, to a Hebrew fit to step farther away from a mimetic past and into individual experience, emulating Dostoyevsky, Chekov and even Nietzsche. Thus, through the use of the Bialik-coined *Nusakh*, Alter fashions Abramovitsh as a forebearer for the monolingual, acknowledging his bilingual genius as a backdrop for the next step in the evolution of Hebrew culture.

Such a view of Abramovitsh as an innovator whose bilingual genius ran its course and made way for a better, i.e., monolingual future, is not limited to the realm of language. As Amir Benbaji shows, there are many readings of Abramovitsh and his Mendele as constructing a narrative of Jewish life in Europe that provides a usable past for the construction of a national future.¹⁰ For Benbaji, Abramovitsh was wrongly perceived as being merely a progressive link

⁹ Alter, Robert. *The Invention of Hebrew Prose: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 20-60. Interestingly, most of the writers Alter discusses at length are bilingual, to some extent, even though Alter does not explore this aspect of their work. Thus for example, the lengthy discussion of Gnessin does not include a reference to the dual versions of his novella בגנים and צווישן גערטנער.

¹⁰ The term 'usable past', coined by Van Wyck Brooks, has been deployed by many scholars to recover counter-histories or create schemes which cohere to the present. In Yiddish studies David Roskies championed this term to create a Jewish history for changed times, see: David Roskies, David G. *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*

between the *Haskala* and the “revival” era, reshaping *Haskala* critique of diaspora life into a usable narrative for the revival.¹¹ Similarly, Abramovitsh was fashioned as the bilingual writer who birthed monolingual options. In line with Benbaji’s dismissal of the reductive national view of Abramovitsh, I too wish to revisit this grandfather figure as a bilingual grandfather who birthed bilingual offspring.

Shneour uses the story of his conversation with Abramovitsh to show how far Jewish literature has come, in no small part thanks to Abramovitsh. For Shneour, bilingualism was alive and well past Abramovitsh, changed and more varied. One must no longer eat barley *and* roast goose out of necessity, but one may choose to do so. One may use either of the two, or, as the writers discussed in this dissertation will show, one may also concoct any manner of fusion between these two components. For Shneour’s generation, Yiddish and Hebrew were no longer necessities, but choices, and the choice to use both, in different variations, exemplifies a poetic shift. In short, the bilingual options became more plentiful in that they were no longer forced practices which transcend love and hate, but rather derived of love, and occasionally hatred, for bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish production.

The plentiful array of bilingual practices discussed in this dissertation uncovers a post-Mendele phenomenon. Three writers stand at the center of this dissertation: Zalman Shneour, Hirsh Dovid Nomberg and Aharon Reuveni. I argue that the bilingualisms these writers created were disregarded at times due to change, concealment and neglect: change, with the times, the historical and literary circumstances, and the writers’ poetic evolution. This last, the writers’

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). Similarly, Abramovitsh has become a usable figure to inform many poetics and ideologies.

11 Amir Banbaji. *Mendele ve-hasipur ha-leumi* (Beer Sheva: Heksherim Institute and Dvir Publishing House, 2009), 19-50.

evolution, was also what led to concealment: to cohere to national and monolingual ideologies, and publishing forces coupled with these, the writers wrote and published differently. As Naomi Brenner notes: “Efforts to eradicate Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism in order to create national literary cultures obscured translanguing dynamics but did not eliminate them.”¹² This obscurity is one which my readings elucidate, by bringing to the fore moments of covert bilingualism, in order to be able to see bilingual prose posing as monolingual. Though the three writers made gestures at monolingual writing and publishing, yet their work seemed to undermine the monolingual impulses. Finally, bilingualism was neglected because of the changing poetics and other circumstances; these three authors write not as bilinguals were expected to, and were thus neglected, or at least neglected *as* bilinguals. These writers used various compositional and translational practices that, at times, masked the bilingual aspect of the texts, but always expanded the spectrum of the bilingual.

My aim is to chart each writer’s individual negotiation of Hebrew and Yiddish in their prose writings and, by that, to reconsider what may constitute bilingual poetics, and the methods through which bilingualism was hidden or neglected. I thereby reconfigure the interwar period on a continuum of bilingual production, into the second half of the twentieth century, staving off monolingualism further. This perspective provides new readings for three writers previously understood as monolinguals or, at the very least, converted to monolingualism, and marginal writers of the respective canons at that. Yet, the three are long-lived bilingual writers, each unique, in style, genre, and language endpoint: Nomberg was perceived as converted to Yiddishism, Reuveni as a stark Hebraist, and Shneour as one or the other, depending on the

12 Naomi Brenner. *Lingering Bilingualism: Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literatures in Contact* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 18.

timeframe. The three are by no means alone in these language predicaments; they are part of a wide array of writers dealing with similar issues in their own unique way; Peretz Hirshbeyn, Dvora Baron, Yaakov Steinberg, Sholem Asch, Y.D. Berkowitz, Dovid Bergelson and others.¹³ Dan Miron states that the “Mendele model” which began around the turn of the century peaked in Abramovitsh’s final years in the 1910’s, was marginalized in the 1920’s, and all but disappeared in the 1930’s.¹⁴ This dissertation takes issue with this assertion, exploring this timeline and the different bilingual modalities made possible in the 20’s and 30’s and on. The aesthetics and poetics of the three models I present are unique and, at the same time, indicative of the times, places and cultures within which they were produced. Unique, in that each author wrote, translated, and crafted their bilingual persona in an idiosyncratic manner. The fact that each writer responded differently to the push and pull of monolingualization, thus creating new modes of writing in two languages, promotes an understanding of *bilingualisms*, with models as plentiful as the writers who wrote in both languages. Each of these writers will serve to elucidate a particular interplay of Hebrew and Yiddish writing, each poses a model of bilingualism which, while unique in some respects, is still inferable to the field of Jewish literary bilingualism. The three are thus anecdotal, each a monad of bilingual production, but, when considered together, reveal some salient features of bilingualism in the age of monolingualization.

Alongside this formulation, this work will try and see how these post-Mendele bilingual writers created art which was not bilingual as previously expected, even masking itself at times

13 On bilingual aspects of Baron’s work see: Seidman, Naomi. *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 62-106. An account of Steinberg’s bilingualism, in poetry, see: Elazar Elhanan. "The Path Leading to the Abyss: Hebrew and Yiddish in Yaakov Steinberg." (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 2014). A look at Berkowitz and self-translation can be found in the introduction to: Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz. *Yidische Dertseylungen 1906-1924* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003). Studies of the bilingualism of Hirshbeyn, Bergelson and Asch are still to come.

14 Miron, *Continuity to Contiguity*, 424.

as monolingual. This malleable bilingualism was achieved by modulating and recrafting bilingualism to adhere to their disparate locales and audiences. In this manner, ideological and political circumstances enter the picture, including geographic movement, changing publishing opportunities, and national movements which demanded language exclusivity.

Not Entirely New

The new and the old are critical forces in the formation of national culture.¹⁵ Both Hebrew and Yiddish culture at the fin de siècle were formed under the mantra that Benjamin Harshav has aptly formulated: “Not here, not like now, not as we were”.¹⁶ Scholarship of Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism has been profoundly shaped by the notion of this break, temporal, spatial, and social. This trend is apparent in works by scholars who championed monolingualism or, at the very least, disregarded Hebrew Yiddish bilingual aspects of Jewish literature, such as Gershon Shaked, Arnold Band and Khone Shmeruk, who considered bilingualism to have disappeared in the 1920’s.¹⁷ We have seen a nuanced version of this argument above in Miron’s narrative of the decline of bilingualism.

15 Gil Anidjar. "Literary History and Hebrew Modernity." *Comparative Literature Studies* 42, no. 4 (2005): 277-96.

16 Harshav, *Meaning of Yiddish*, 130-34.

17 This is apparent in the absence of Yiddish from Shaked’s monumental project, *Ha-siporet ha-‘ivrit 1880-1970*, Vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Keter, 1977), as well as in studies such as Band’s *Studies in Modern Jewish Literature* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003). Both scholars discuss turn of the century Jewish literature as though it is monolingual. Khone Shmeruk is a more complex example in the bilingual aspect; a historian of Yiddish literature, Shmeruk was in fact deeply invested in bilingual research, but not Hebrew-Yiddish. His seminal research on Esterke explored the Polish and Yiddish language development of this myth (*The Esterke Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature: A Case Study in the Mutual Relations of Two Cultural Traditions* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 1985). Shmeruk was also highly invested in anti-separatist ideology, again not between Hebrew and Yiddish, but rather between religious and secular forces within Yiddish literature (*Sifrut yiddish: perakim le-toldoteha* (Tel Aviv: Mif’alim universita’iyim le-hotsa’ah le-or, 1978).

Conversely, the narrative of a dramatic change, of transformation, is met by a narrative of unchanged bilingual practice. A leading scholar of this school is Shmuel Niger, who in 1941 continues a consistent view of the “bilingualism of our literature”, as strong in the 40’s as it was in the 1910’s.¹⁸ This account is the mirror image of the break narrative – a continued unchanged bilingual system. Niger was clearly and overtly inspired by Baal Makshoves who decades earlier asserted that there are two languages, but one literature. The impactful argument Niger makes is to assert this claim some forty years later, unfazed by monolingualism. This idea of a continuous cohesive system was promoted likewise by Dov Sadan who similarly employed the term *sifrutanu* (ספרותנו), our literature, to enhance a link he felt was slipping away.¹⁹ With the term *sifrutanu* marking the literature as ‘ours’, Sadan employs the possessive to establish an enduring and unwavering collective ownership and national connection to literature, one which is equal and unchanged.²⁰ Sadan’s call for the establishment of a nonantagonistic field of scholarship, in which one would seek a joint space of inquiry of Hebrew and Yiddish literature: a field where ownership of one language is not the issue but rather a back and forth, a bilingual game, is what defines the poetics of three generations of writers.²¹ But these formulations, in and of

18 Samuel Niger. *Di Tsveyshprakhikayt Fun Undzer Literatur* (Detroit: Louis Lamed Foundation for the Advancement of Hebrew and Yiddish Literature, 1941).

19 Dov Sadan. *Al Sifrutenu: Masat Mavo* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1950).

20 In a fascinating discrepancy, Sadan purports a unified literary system, *Sifrutenu*, which denotes Jewish literature in Hebrew and Yiddish, and possibly other languages. Yet, Sadan insists time and again on the term *Leshonenu*, our tongue, referring only to Hebrew, whereas Yiddish falls somewhere between the term *Leshonenu* and the term *Laaz*, foreign. This formulation is likewise a de facto a reiteration of Baal Makshoves’ famous saying. Yet, the possessive Sadan employs, *Sifrutenu*, *Leshonenu*, (our literature, our language), breaks from Baal Makshoves in the hierarchical designation of Hebrew versus all other languages employed in Jewish literature. Thus, for Sadan, the literature is ‘ours’, the languages not so much so.

21 החזיון הזה של כפילות-הלשון מחייב חקירה מדוקדקת, ושיטתם של חוקרי הספרות העברית, המשיירת יצירתם האידיית של הסופרים כפולי-הלשון מחוצה לגבולי דיונם הממצה, וכן שיטתם של חוקרי ספרות אידיש המשיירת את יצירתם העברית של הסופרים האלה מחוצה לגבולי דיונם הממצה, לא זו בלבד שהיא פוגמת בהערכה של הסופרים האלה, שאינה יכולה להיות שלמה אם לא נכלל בה דיוקן מלא של הסופר ולא נתבררה הזיקה ההדדית של שתי לשונות יצירתו, וסגולתם בכל אחת ואחת לפי צדדיה השווים וצדדיה השונים. שיטה זו אף גורעת מהבנה נכונה של התפתחות ספרותנו, שכפילות הלשון הזאת, על התנגשותה וציוני התנגשותה היא בה מכלל-ההשפעות החשובות ביותר. והרי חזיון נכבד הוא — סיעות סיעות של סופרים, בני כשלושה דורות, שימשו בשתי הלשונות וכל סופר וסופר נפשו ויכולתו היו כזירה, שעליה נלחם צמד-הלשונות וכל אחת משכתו: כולך שלי, וכל אחת עמדה מלוא זינה בפני יריבתה רומים בדמים נגעו: דאבי מתירים ליטול כל סופר

themselves, are a pushback against a prevalent separatist imagination, which is both descriptive and predictive, leading scholarship astray.

Recent studies of Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism during the interwar period attempt to rethink these impulses of rupture, newness, and continuity, taking up Sadan's call for a joint field. These studies attempt to reconsider the post-Mendele era, balancing this period between decline and continuation of bilingualism. This scholarly trend started with the work of scholars such as Harshav and Chana Kronfeld and continues with studies by Naomi Brenner, Allison Schachter, Shachar Pinsker, Rachel Seelig and others.²² Each of the scholars is angling at the interplay of Yiddish and Hebrew from separate avenues; thus, Brenner focuses on the connectivities through the translingual, the movement across borders both geographically and lingually. Schachter is engaged in paring the diasporic condition and mindset of the writers with the modernist metaliterary framing devices they engage in, expanding the field of Jewish bilingualism to engage with a wider cultural phenomena, not just an internal Jewish matter. And Pinsker examines the multilingual aspect of Jewish literature and culture and explores the movement of writers and writings from enclave to enclave in search of the poetic networks these movements establish. Yet, regardless of the angle, these complementary works all seek to engage with a question formulated by Kronfeld: "What features of modern Hebrew and Yiddish

וסופר ולקיים בו בחינת גזורו ולשסעו לשתי הספרויות, מכלי לקיים את חובתנו המובנת מאליה, ועם זאת לא הובנה עדיין וממילא לא נמצא לה מבצע — לעשות חקר מיוחד. כולל ומפורט כאחת, שימצה את הבעיה הזאת על כל גילויי-התפתחותה והתפתחות-גילוייה *Sadan. Al Sifrutenu*, 34-5.

22 Benjamin Harshav. *Language in Time of Revolution*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Chana Kronfeld. *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Allison Schachter. *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Brenner. *Lingering Bilingualism*. Shachar Pinsker. *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011) and even more so in: *A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture*. (New York: New York University Press, 2018). Rachel Seelig. *Strangers in Berlin: Modern Jewish Literature between East and West, 1919-1933*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

literature become salient – or even are simply rendered visible for the first time – only once we join together the (non-linear, messy) historiographic narratives of the two literatures?”²³ This trend posits bilingualism as both tradition and crisis, as both new and unchanged. Balancing of dyads is what makes such scholarly endeavors, including this dissertation, both necessary and complicated. A major outcome of this dissertation will be a more inclusive understanding of Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism, focused on translation practices, so as to include poetic diversity and expand its temporal scope. The expansion of bilingual modalities will come through an interrogation of the continued recreation of bilingualism, mainly via changing forms of self-translation. In the movement beyond Mendele, the subdued and transformed modes of self-translation mark a moment in which Hebrew and Yiddish are drifting apart, no longer merely *different* Jewish languages, but increasingly foreign.

The reasons to view the post-Mendele/post World War I years as a tectonic shift in bilingual writing are varied and pervasive. As Miron put it, most conditions that constituted European Jewish life were upended:

The war itself, the Russian Revolution that came in its wake, the establishment of the Soviet Union, the quick progress of the Zionist project in mandatory Palestine, the acculturation and Americanization of the immigrant community in the United States as mass immigration from eastern Europe was brought to a halt in 1924, and the many other significant social and political developments of the interbellum period, the relative continuity of the public space that rendered bi-literaturalism possible, was shattered.²⁴

23 Chana Kronfeld, “The Joint Literary Historiography of Hebrew and Yiddish”, in Norich, Anita, and Joshua L. Miller. *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 23.

24 Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 497.

The bilingual emphasis in current scholarship comes to fight this idea of a break, of a newness that comes with these changes and which ends bilingualism.²⁵ The multilingual turn in Jewish literature, much vaster than described above, privileges connectivities and aims to surface issues and readings that would otherwise remain submerged. This dissertation is part of a larger attempt to chart a time of change, perhaps not as pronounced as the shift in bilingualism created by Abramovitsh, but just as impactful to the understanding of Jewish bilingualism.

The interwar period which is the core of my discussion, with excursions to the beginning of the twentieth century as well as into the second half of the century, shows a continuum of bilingual production, at once in flux and constant. As such, this project is crucially dependent on the nuanced comprehension of interbellum bilingualism as old and new, shapeshifting while maintaining, even enhancing, interlingual sensibilities and practices. The constraints that have led to changed bilingual writing have also produced some of the most compelling art of the early twentieth century.

A Monolingualism to Come – On the Elusiveness of the Monolingual

Monolingualism has a redemptive quality to it; Rey Chow states that monolingualism holds: “the promise of the singular, a promise that remains open-ended and thus messianic in character.”²⁶ It

25 To be clear, this is a movement occurring across languages in all of Judaic studies. And while this dissertation focuses on Hebrew-Yiddish dynamics, it is part of a larger movement of German-Hebrew, Arabic Hebrew and other interlingual studies. See a prime example of this in two recent publications which champion bilingualisms: Anita Norich, and Joshua L. Miller. *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016). And an issue of *Prooftexts* devoted to the field: Allison Schachter, Lital Levy [ed.]. *Prooftexts* 36, no. 1 (2017). For a comprehensive survey of the current lay of the land in Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism see: Yaakov Herskovitz and Shachar Pinsker. "Translingualism Today: A Review of Naomi Brenner's Lingering Bilingualism." *In Geveb* (September 2016), <https://ingeveb.org/articles/translingualism-today-a-review-of-naomi-brenners-lingering-bilingualism>.

26 Rey Chow. *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Language as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 29

is not language domination or the restoration of a pre-Babelic past that I wish to highlight in this quote, but rather the idea of an everlasting, and probably unachievable, future. Monolingualism holds much promise, and as such, clearly connected to moments of world upheaval and national hope, where much is at stake and little is set in stone. Monolingualism is not babelic in a globalizing sense (though it may be), but rather a hearkening back to an imagined unified past and, in turn, an aspiration to a monolingual-national future.

What scholars of Jewish literature have contended with, and still do, is a reconciliation of the emergence of a monolingual paradigm in Jewish culture, and the persistence of bilingual modes of production. Yasmin Yildiz posits what she calls a “postmonolingual” mode of reading literature. Such a mode of reading promotes at once awareness of the multilingual practices that produce the texts and the monolingual paradigm that sets the expectations within which and against which writers work.²⁷ This push and pull of the expectations set by the monolingual paradigm, which binds language, nation and territory, and the multilingual practices that persist, is a tension I stress and uncover in this work. The writers discussed are active in a tenuous time in which bilingualism itself is being interrogated and reformulated against the looming specter of a monolingualism to come. The coexistence of these forces yields a changed poetics, and a postmonolingual mode of reading is what allows for these poetics to emerge. The postmonolingual also posits the ongoing bilingual production as a relational process- dependent on a backdrop of shifts and forces of monolingualization. This bilingualism is obscured by monolingualizing forces, but also and at once diversified and complimented by these forces. In the Jewish context the movement from a pre-monolingual moment where languages were treated

²⁷ Yasmin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 5-29.

as *different* to the postmonolingual moment when languages become *foreign*, is a crucial moment in history. This dissertation spans such a watershed moment when foreignness, rather than difference, begins to take hold of the discourse of Hebrew and Yiddish literature, a foreignness which will take decades to solidify, but is at its onset at this time. The post-Mendele literary scene is a moment of dramatic shifts in bilingual dynamics. Thus Yildiz: “‘postmonolingual’ in this study refers to a field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge. This term therefore can bring into sharper focus the back-and-forth movement between these two tendencies that characterizes contemporary linguistic constellations. Focusing on the tension rather than on one or the other pole helps to account for many phenomena that initially appear to be contradictory.”²⁸ Such tension-focused readings emerge, for instance, in the analysis of work by Reuveni who seems to be torn between his Yiddish writing and Hebrew publishing, reconsidered as bilingual through the reemergence of the Hebrew text as multilingual in a reading attuned to these tensions.

This postmonolingual mode of reading highlights the contrived nature of monolingualism; as David Gramling has shown, monolingualism, even merely a strive to the monolingual, entails intrinsic translation, as a mode of solidifying and erecting a monolingual network and corpus.²⁹ This notion of monolingualism as a translation practice is crucial since, as we will see, the Hebrew-Yiddish writers that I study are steeped in translation and the disruption thereof, toying with the gaps and bridges formed in the act of translation. The ideological impulse behind monolingualism is to pose as transparent, thus Gramling: “Monolingualism’s ‘ideology’ is precisely to become transparent and plain, unworthy of comment and critique, and

28 Ibid, 5.

29 David Gramling. *The Invention of Monolingualism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

thus impervious to the ascriptions of [...] nationalism, purism, and elitism often levered at ‘beliefs about language’.”³⁰ Monolingualism turns itself into the new normal, with bilingual aspects blending into the background. For this dissertation to refocus on language, to excavate bilingualisms, foregrounds the history of production of bi- and monolingual texts.

The three writers at the center of my project wrote works that widen the canopy of the umbrella-term bilingualism. Writing in Mendele’s lifetime and after, they are wryly aware of the tensions the theorists above pose: they are writing within internal and external pressures of monolingualization, thus either changing their writing or publishing practices to accommodate the ideologies of Hebraism or Yiddishism. They are acutely aware of their public perception and role as authors and go to great lengths to fashion themselves as members of different literary circles and language communities. Finally, and most importantly, they reach artistic peaks in and through shifting bilingual practice; each writer in his own way recreates and redefines bilingual poetics, at times with bilingualism ‘under erasure’, de facto hidden or submerged.³¹ The three writers produce bilingualisms which are *hidden* since they reflect a change to their previous poetics or due to extraliterary efforts by the authors to downplay these bilingualisms. At the same time, the bilingual aspect is *neglected*, since these texts were bilingual differently, not as bilingualism was before, and thus, were perceived by readership and scholars to be monolingual. These authors were not only marginalized, but marginalized *as* bilingual. Despite all this, or

30 Ibid, 18.

31 The term ‘under erasure’ is employed by Derrida to signify the tension between writing and erasure. In the case of the writers discussed here the tension is that of writing bilingually, self-translating in the process, with only traces of both languages in any single text. For Derrida writing under eraser occurs when language is both essential and inadequate. See: Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 19-32.

perhaps exactly due to these reasons, these writers produced innovative bilingual works, thematizing bilingualism as an intrinsic part of their art, anew.

Three Writers – Three Bilingual Poetics

The idea of language as a monadic, a more or less autonomous system, is at once potent and ill-advised. Each chapter of this dissertation will deal with instances of language solidification, and the fissures in and of national language. This will be seen in three lingual directionalities: an ostensible move from bilingual writing into Yiddish, a move from bilingual writing into Hebrew, and a constant movement between the two. With these three vectors, the chapters show the range of directionality of bilingual production in the age of monolingualization.³² The three chapters deal with the writers as they emerge on the scene of belle letters, mostly around the turn of the century, and how their poetics change from that moment on, until the interwar period summons an altered poetics.

Chapter I focuses on Hirsh Dovid Nomberg and his work *Eretz yisroel eindruken un bilder*, (The Land of Israel - Impressions and Pictures), a depiction of travel to Palestine, published in Warsaw in 1924. My discussion of this work considers its bilingual aspects and the role bilingual poetics play throughout Nomberg's career arc as a whole. In order to fully realize the potential poetic implication of the 1924 travel-narrative, I will discuss it alongside two momentous periods in Nomberg's life – the first decade of his career, overtly bilingual in the

³² Incidentally, this array is not dissimilar to the one Dan Miron offers for a discussion of the birth of the Jewish modern novel. The three writers he discusses – Mapu, Aksenfeld and Abramovitsh – are precursors to the array my study offers. These three wrote in Hebrew, Yiddish and both languages, respectively. My study, post-Mendele, looks at a similar array, albeit with language movement in mind. For more on Miron see: Dan Miron. *Ben hazon le-emet: nitsane ha-roman ha-ivri vaha-yidi be-meah ha-tesha-esreh* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1979).

production and translation of his own work, and the period circa the 1908 Yiddish Language Conference in Czernowitz, where Nomberg played a key role. Together, these pre- and post-Czernowitz bilingual writings will amount to a consideration of Nomberg as a bilingual writer, continually negotiating the Hebrew and Yiddish components of his oeuvre. This is striking in the prose of 1924, since it was written in a time where Nomberg was considered to have fallen poetically silent, and namely silent bilingually. However, this chapter will show how, in his writing of Palestine, Nomberg is attuned to the lingual stakes and the bilingual options which present themselves in the *Yishuv*. The Palestinian travel narrative is unique in that language and language choice are a chief theme, interrogating the feasibility of Yiddish or Hebrew as national languages. In his writing, Nomberg fleshes out the links, and lack thereof, between language and territory, oscillating between the two languages. Thus, the chapter charts an ongoing writing of prose, past 1908 and into the interwar period, bilingual in and of itself. The travel narrative allows for seemingly dichotomized stances regarding Hebrew and Yiddish to be erected and subsequently dismantled.

Chapter II moves from Nomberg, the proponent of Yiddishism, to a proponent of Hebraism, Aharon Reuveni. The chapter focuses on what has become a pivotal moment in his writing, and certainly his most celebrated work, the trilogy *Ad Yerushalayim*, (To Jerusalem). This trilogy, written from 1917 and into 1923, was published for the first time between 1919 and 1925 and many times since, with a new edition of the third part coming out this very year. Writing the trilogy in Yiddish, a fact known to few, Reuveni did not publish it in this language until much later, in 1961. Instead the trilogy was translated by himself and others into Hebrew.³³

³³ This practice differs from his previous writing and self-translation where Reuveni wrote, translated, and published an earlier novel in Yiddish (פּייך) and in Hebrew (עיצבורן).

These elaborate language dynamics were due to necessity, since Reuveni's Hebrew was still lacking. What was produced were two versions of a text, where language difference plays a key role, not only between versions, but within each version. Although the trilogy has been discussed by scholars, this was only as a Hebrew creation, with the bilingual nature of the work not sufficiently recognized to date; the scholarly narrative has it that Reuveni strived to become a monolingual writer of Hebrew from the moment he immigrated to Palestine in 1910. Yet, his Yiddish-Hebrew bilingual practices were to intensify for many more years, and accompany him throughout his writing life. In my discussion of the trilogy, the bilingual poetics are discovered in the translation of the work, the language interplay within the novels and the war of languages within the depiction of World War I. The facade of monolingualism and Hebraism is thus complicated, and a changed bilingual poetics emerges. The break between early career Reuveni, who wrote short stories in Yiddish, in the Russian Empire and in the United States, and published them in both languages, and post-immigration-to-Palestine Reuveni becomes less stark than was previously considered.

The third chapter deals with the writings of an artist who was less interested in monolingual fixations. Zalman Shneour exhibited in his career genre and language malleability similar to those of the two other writers, but he stretched these to an extreme. The chapter focuses on the novel *Shklover Yidn/Anshe Shklov* which marked the most dramatic change of Shneour's oeuvre. For decades, poetry constituted most of his artistic output, but by the late 1920's began the era of *Shklov* in Shneour's life. In a poetic return to his hometown, after years away, the author began to write prose centered on this town, starting with *Shklover Yidn/Anshe Shklov*. This novel was originally serialized in the press, first in the Yiddish *Forverts* and later in the Hebrew *Davar*. The vignettes, initially perceived as quaint shtetl images, grow darker and

more complex over time, demystifying the nostalgic tone they were read in originally. These novels have been read by scholars, not many, as artistic portrayals of the shtetl, but not much more than that.³⁴ My reading incorporates the language element into the reading of Shneour, seeing the bilingualism of the work not only as a fact of publication, but as a fact of composition. As archival research by Lilach Netanel has recently shown, the language shifts of Shneour's *Shklov* prose were multidirectional: previously, it has been believed that these works originated in Yiddish to be serialized in the *Forverts*, solicited by Abe Cahan.³⁵ Then, this narrative continues, there was an intricate movement into the Hebrew publishing world, with precise framing and publishing practices, to appeal to the palates of the Hebrew reader. But, as Netanel discovered, matters were more complicated; Shneour's archives contain drafts of early versions of several of these vignettes, written in Hebrew, prior to the reworking into Yiddish. The intricacies of these translation movements will be elaborated on in the chapter itself, but for now, it is sufficient to note that the movement was Hebrew-Yiddish-Hebrew, with several countermovements interspersed between.³⁶

This fact sheds light on another interlingual aspect of Shneour's work which I focus on, and that is the influence of Bialik on this specific work, aside from his overall influence on Shneour's career. The chapter discusses how Bialik's novella, "Me'achorey ha-gader", "Behind the Fence", influenced and penetrated the second part of *Anshe Shklov/Shklover Yidn*. This

34 With the exception of Lilach Netanel and Naomi Brenner, who recently focused on language aspects of this work. See: Brenner, *Lingering Bilingualism*, and: Lilach Netanel. "Yitzirato ha-mukdemet shel Zalman Shneour: beikvot sefer ha-nedudim." *Mekhkarey yerushalim be-sifrut ivrit*, 29 (2017): 235-58

35 For a comprehensive account of the *Forverts* serialization see: Ellen Kellman. "The Newspaper Novel in the Jewish Daily Forward, 1900-1940: Fiction as Entertainment and Serious Literature." (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2001).

36 Netanel. "Beikvot sefer ha-nedudim," 235-58.

intertextual link adds another layer of interlingual complexity, imbuing the Yiddish publication with an almost explicit Hebrew inspiration, and of the highest order, instilling in the work a relic of the first, already unpublished versions. The chapter thus oscillates between two bilingual readings of the work- a reading of the Hebrew of Bialik integrated into the Yiddish and Hebrew texts, and a reading of the language issues embedded into this novel which was written partially in Hebrew, published in intervals in Yiddish, and then published, quite differently, in Hebrew. This multilayered bilingual creation and the dissemination thereof will be marked by an ever-changing text with discrepancies between versions, and within versions.

The concluding chapter ventures more deeply into the realms of hidden bilingualisms, of façades of monolingualism and the negation thereof. Thus, the conclusion will discuss avenues of bilingualism in current day Jewish literature, and how the understanding garnered from interwar bilingualism pertains to current day language dynamics. The interwar period becomes, in this construct, not merely a paper bridge,³⁷ connecting Mendele's era to contemporary literature, but also yet another iteration of bilingualism, one informed by a time of change. The short discussion of post-World War II bilingualism will be bolstered by reading practices discovered in the chapters. These practices allow for a spectrum to be charted, amongst ruptures and idiosyncrasies, highlighting the throughlines from interwar bilingualism to current day Jewish literature.

The joint discussion of these three writers surfaces a disruption of temporality, of the linear poetic history charted from bilingualism to monolingualism. In the three authors discussed,

³⁷ In this I echo the poem by Kadya Molodowsky, which formulates writing as redemptive, an act which creates connectivities out of words. See: Molodowsky, Kadya, and Kathryn Hellerstein. *Paper Bridges: Selected Poems of Kadya Molodowsky* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 237.

and in many of the peers of these writers, alternative poetics serve as undercurrents, complications of this mainstream movement. The micro look into these diverse poetics, painstakingly charting the problematics of assumed monolingualism, turn into a host of counter-examples. This dissertation is by no means an exhaustive account of poetic historiography of post-Mendele bilingualism, nor does it aim to be. Rather, the three writers discussed are important benchmarks, bearers of models, of bilingualism reimagined. In a future-oriented version of the three negations by Harshav, this dissertation will delineate and discuss bilingualism not as it was, not by the individuals expected, and not in the locations of old. Thus, through an exploration centered on the interwar period, this work at once looks back to the past, but also into the future. The works here expand bilingualism to include more writers, more methods of writing bilingually, and new transnational networks. The who, where and how of bilingualism are reconsidered, resulting in bilingual poetics which include writing, rewriting, translating and bridging the bilingualisms of old with new bilingualisms. This work seeks to chart intersections between Hebrew and Yiddish, where they are hidden, unexpected, and previously understudied.

I tell a story of subdued bilingualisms, since these writers produced bilingual prose throughout the early and mid-twentieth century, but their bilingualism was rarely, if ever, acknowledged as such. The members of this cusp-generation, born in the decade between 1876-1886, were cognizant of the demands to monolingualize Jewish literature, and their reactions to these demands birthed renewed poetics. In reading beyond and through Abramovitsh, bilingualism changes and evolves, posing at times as monolingual, thus compelling us to find bilingualism within monolingualism. This poetics is indicative of the ‘mad’ logic of monolingualism, to quote Jacques Derrida, a monolingualism which can never escape grafting

and interventions of other languages.³⁸ This produces language which is never monadic, always multilingual. For Derrida, this madness is ever-true for all monolingualism, and likewise for members of the cusp-generation in question are all writing in a time of language unrest, pervasive lingual madness. They all began as bilingual writers, and all make gestures at monolingualism. These monolingual advances, effective to various degrees, produced complex and fascinating iterations of bilingual art. These texts do not chart hierarchies between Hebrew and Yiddish, nor essential differences between the two languages, but rather, these texts are the backdrop upon which nationality, monolingualism and bilingualism are negotiated, the constraints producing unrivaled literature. To echo Anita Norich, this work will not ask binary questions, if a work is bilingual or monolingual, but rather in what *manner* are these works monolingual and in what manner are they bilingual, creatively balancing these two forces, privileging connectivities.³⁹ Thus, it will become apparent that the reports of the death of Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism in the early twentieth century were exaggerated, the dynamic is alive and well, albeit changed, in the work of Nomberg, Shneour, Reuveni and others who followed.

38 Jacques Derrida. *Monolingualism of the Other, or, the Prosthesis of Origin* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 65-68.

39 Anita Norich. "Under Whose Sign? Hebraism and Yiddishism as Paradigms of Modern Jewish Literary History," *PMLA*, 125, no. 3 (2010): 774-84.

Chapter One: Travels from Yiddishland to Hebrewland

Erecting a Bilingual Monument

This chapter charts a path in the life and career of Hirsh Dovid Nomberg that has not been discussed before. Nomberg has been heralded as a Yiddish writer and activist who, while starting his career as a bilingual writer of Hebrew and Yiddish, transitioned into Yiddish following the 1908 Czernowitz conference. With this transition, Nomberg abandoned belle letters, and thus, his post-Czernowitz-writings have been all but forgotten, receiving few analyses or scholarly accounts. I wish to remedy this, not only for the sake of these works per se, but for the value these writings hold in understanding Nomberg as an author and his bilingual arc as a whole. This value is three-fold: the works considered below are artistically compelling, tell a story of shifting bilingualism, and allow for a fuller understanding of Nomberg's oeuvre and development as a thinker and a writer. This chapter will devote much of the analysis to a travel narrative by Nomberg, *Eretz yisorel eindruken un bilder*, a work depicting a 1924 expedition to Palestine. Before this tale of the *yishuv* is recounted, I devote attention to pre-Czernowitz prose by Nomberg, as well as to the Czernowitz conference itself and the role Nomberg played in it. Throughout these all, a tale of bilingualism emerges, one which is deceptive, complex and everlasting. Nomberg, I argue, is wrongfully discounted as a writer, and more so as a bilingual writer.

This chapter journeys through three major moments in Nomberg's career: the short story "Fliegelman", indicative of early Nomberg's poetics and the origin of his bilingual sensibilities, then on to the crucial role Nomberg played in the Czernowitz language conference, and finally, a discussion of post-Czernowitz poetics and the shift, and persistence, of Nomberg's bilingualism. But first, a sojourn in 1923 Warsaw, where the role Nomberg played in the commemoration of Y. L. Peretz, his mentor, will provide us insight into Nomberg's language politics in the period of the travel narrative. *Ohel Peretz*, Peretz's grave, is an impressive structure, and yet, even such an immense tombstone should not have taken eleven years to erect. The mausoleum for the great writer stands to this day in the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa street in Warsaw. A remarkable structure, the grave stands out in the cemetery and commemorates Peretz as well as S. Y. Ansky and Yankev Dinezon. The reasons it took over a decade to build this structure are varied and interdependent: funding, artistic difference, who will house the mausoleum, the writing on the plaques, and so on. As the years went by, the problems piled up: with each new artist commissioned for the task, the budget had to change, the style became eclectic, and the functionaries were having a field day trying to influence the design of the structure.



Figure 1 Ohel Peretz Today

Yet in 1923, nine years into the planning of the *Ohel*, a new problem surfaced. A perplexed Nomberg laid out the most recent holdup in a scathing article in *Der moment*: “Yes, it is true, a fact: I sit now by my desk to write an article about ‘*Noyled-nifter*’. I thought this was impossible, that a strange day like this would never come, but Warsaw is a strange city, unique the world-round.”¹ Thus begins the article which carries on in this vexed voice throughout. Nomberg’s anger and amazement were warranted: ‘The Peretz committee’ had not convened for eight months since the ‘*Noyled-nifter kampf*’ broke out: “As if there is no struggle against the enslavement of people to be fought, a struggle which one can take lightly, this is a *Noyled-nifter* struggle, one with serious implications!”² The acerbic tone is directed at two opposing factions

¹ Nomberg, Hirsch Dovid. *Y. L. Perets* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-farband fun poylishe yidn in argentine, 1946), 82.

² *Ibid*, 82-3.

of the committee who have brought the process to a standstill. On the one hand, there was the Hebraist Yitzhak Grinboym, who vetoed any tombstone that would not have the Hebrew words for ‘born’ and ‘died’. On the other hand, there were the Yiddish purists who were not soothed by the eighteen lines of *Di goldene keyt* written on the tomb-plaque, and willing to see it as all for naught if there were even only two Hebrew words on the stone.

Nomberg is troubled by these language purists, surely upset at the setback to construction they are causing, but also perplexed on a more fundamental level. Obviously, Nomberg is more than ready to put these committee meetings behind him and finally give his mentor the commemoration he deserves, long past its due. But Nomberg also seems troubled by language exclusion, by extremists who will not have more than one Jewish language on the tombstone. For those looking for language exclusivity, Nomberg offers two alternatives: they can leave Warsaw for either Tel Aviv or New York; if they wish to erect a purely Yiddish monument, the *Arbeter ring* can go to New York or any other of their locations and do so there. Likewise, if the municipality of Tel-Aviv ever decides to commemorate Peretz, they are more than welcome to do so solely in Hebrew.³ But as far as Nomberg is concerned, Warsaw is not New York nor Tel Aviv. Rather, it is a middle ground. It is not that he is happy to privilege any one language in this matter, but rather that he sees no grounds for ultimatums and narrowing of the Jewish vocabulary.

³ Ibid, 84. Eventually both cities commemorated Peretz: There is a street named after Peretz in Tel Aviv, in the relatively marginalized south of the city. Cornered from all sides by streets such as *Ha-alyia*, *Ha-gdod ha-ivri* and *Har Zion*, he has only one nearby writer-named-street, Lewinsky street, named after the (at times) anti-Yiddish writer Elhanan Leib Lewinsky. This is the monument for Peretz in Tel Aviv. New York commemorated Peretz with a square named after the writer, located on the Lower East Side at the meeting point of Houston Street, First Avenue, and First Street. The dedication of the square came on the centennial of the writer’s birth, in 1952.

The crux of the matter here is Nomberg's opposition to language exclusivity; in this one may think back to the crucial role Nomberg played in the resolution that emerged from the Czernowitz conference to declare Yiddish "A Jewish national language." In the 1908 conference Nomberg was, as he is here in 1923, a stout challenger of two polar opposites: the one side which wanted Yiddish declared "*The Jewish national language*" and the other dismissing Yiddish as a language for the Jewish people altogether. He espoused lingual plurality rather than exclusivity, both in 1908 and in 1923.

It cannot be overstated that what is being discussed here is a grave, and a stone to be put above it. The language drama is due to, and surrounding, a monument of death. This is an apt metaphor for what is being deliberated here: Peretz, a bilingual writer, was more and more invested in Yiddish as his days dwindled. Nomberg, similarly, was a bilingual writer who transitioned more to the Yiddish side of the Jewish language equation. The stone, if so, in the bilingual option which is under attack, is a commemoration, not only of the author but of a bilingual option, an option dismissed by purists on both sides. To be bilingual is an act of resistance, resistance to monolingualization and to the rewriting of the past, the life which is now over. This is a monument of a bilingual life that seems to be a thing of the past.

It is the proximity of the '*Noyled nifter kampf*', a somewhat petty fight that Nomberg cannot believe he must wage, to the depiction of the *yishuv* one year later, in 1924, which is noteworthy. Situated in Warsaw, Nomberg imagines the language politics of other Jewish centers; he argues in his article that if the Tel Aviv municipality ever wished to erect a Peretz monument, it may be in Hebrew alone- but the fact of the matter is that this would probably not be the case. At the very least it is not *inevitably* going to be a monolingual monument. The multilingual reality that Nomberg fashions in his travel-narrative is one which does not cohere to

clear-cut divides, to absolute language borders. These divides, Nomberg knows, might be what many wish for, but are by no means a necessary reality. For this reason, and others stated above, reading this travel narrative is crucial: through its fashioning of language multiplicity and tensions, the work reinvigorates a bilingual Nomberg some sixteen years past the supposed demise of his bilingualism.

From 1903 to 1908, or: The Inception of Nomberg's Layered Language

To fully understand Nomberg's 1924 writing about Palestine, one must first understand Nomberg of the turn of the century and his emergence on the scene of Jewish literature. Nomberg, who was born to a family of Amshinov Hassidim in the town of Mszczonów, moved to Warsaw in 1897 at the age of 21. This move plunged Nomberg into the world of modernist literature, and crucially into the tutelage of Y. L. Peretz. Nomberg wrote in both Yiddish and Hebrew, side by side, debuting in Yiddish in 1900 and in Hebrew in the following year. The first decade of the 20th century was marked by a proliferation of writing in both languages and by self-translation between the two.

Perhaps the most successful and well-known work of this period is the short story "Fliegelman", published in Hebrew in 1903 and in Yiddish in 1905.⁴ This story resonated with audiences in both Hebrew and Yiddish and was praised as trailblazing by major critics in both Hebrew, such as Y. H. Brenner, and Yiddish, Zalman Reyzen. Brenner went as far as proclaiming that "We are all Fliegelmans,"⁵ a notion that denotes the fact that Nomberg captured

⁴ Hirsch Dovid Nomberg, *Men vekt* (Warsaw: Bildung, 1905) (Yiddish), and: Hirsh David Nomberg, *Sipurim*, (Warsaw: Sifrut), 1905 (Hebrew)

⁵ Yosef Haim Brenner. *Ktavim*, Vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat po`alim, ha-kibuts ha-meuhad, 1977), 283.

the voice of a literary generation with this story. Reyzen similarly saw the story as emblematic of a trend and a generation in Yiddish literature, capturing a zeitgeist.⁶

A reading of the story allows at once insight into this hyperbolic statement, *We are all Fliegelmans*, as well as an essential understanding of early career Nomberg and how his writing changed post 1908. “Fliegelman”, as many other stories by Nomberg, depicts a young Jewish intellectual, living in a big European city, Warsaw in this case, searching for love and for a sense of belonging, finding neither. The saying by Brenner turns the story into an emblematic one, one which Brenner is happy to include himself in, as a protagonist, a writer and a young Jew living in a large European city. “Not only he, but *we all*,” writes Brenner, “are Fliegelmans.” Brenner, always the luminary, wishes to create a generation of writers, young Jewish European writers, who are all alone and yet have a spiritual brotherhood manifested in the image of Nomberg’s protagonist.

There is good reason for Brenner to peg this story’s protagonist as a prototype for the young men he and his fellow Hebrew writers were writing about; Fliegelman is a young man living a lonely life in Warsaw, making a living off teaching Hebrew to children and youth, all the time musing of a higher calling, an intellectual existence that will allow the world to recognize him for the prodigy he actually is:

Often, while strolling slowly through the noisy street to his lesson, hands in pocket, he thought that quite a few great men have lived in the world: Buddha, Spinoza, Kant and many more, and he, the son of the Koniver *Shames*, knows all their philosophical systems and can repeat all he has read, word for word.

And sometimes, when the weather is good, and the carriages don’t thump in his ears and when he is in no hurry to get to his lesson, he enjoys thinking, that these philosophers weren’t really all that smart; each one of them was confined to his

⁶ Zalman Reyzen. *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologye*, Vol.3 (Vilne: B. Kletskin, 1928), 525.

own corner, each understood a bit but not much; and he, Fliegelman, knows all they knew, and then some. He knows that above all, the deepest of all, is life, life as it truly is.⁷

This is a look at the young man and his view of the city and the world. This description of Fliegelman in the big city is indicative of the impact the modern cityscape had on these young men; the overwhelming noise and turmoil of the city is almost too much for the young man to take in, at times clouding his mind and ears, a city which for the son of the *shames* was the promise of freedom from traditional life turns out to be more than Fliegelman bargained for. The young man is out of touch with reality, so much so that he thinks he is superior to all the great philosophers of all cultures, a clear misconception that is in tune with the description of the young man's eyes as: "covered with mist. It seems, as all one must do is wipe them clean and they would shine brightly".⁸ This hue which covers this young protagonist's eyes is that which stands between him and the world, stunting his ability to live in the world, an ability obstructed by impaired vision, hearing and thought. He thinks he is better than all the greats of the world, for he is in touch with life, but the introduction of the story undermines that assumption instantaneously.

נישט זעלטען, געיינדיק פעמעלעך איבער דער רוישענדיקער גאס אויף אַ לעקציע איינגעבויגן, האַלטנדיק די הענט אין די טאַשן, טראַכט ער, ⁷ אז אויף דער וועלט האָבן געלעבט אַ סך גרויסע מענטשען: בודהא, שפינאָזא, קאַנט און נאָך אַ סך אנדערע, און ער, דער קוניווער שמש אַ זון, ווייסט זייערע פּילאָזאָפּישע סיסטעמען אויף קלאָר און קאַן נאַכזאָגן אַלץ, וואָס ער האָט געלעזן פּון זיי, וואָרט ביי וואָרט

און אז אויף דער גאס איז אַ שיין וועטער, די דראַזשקעס האָקן גראַד נישט אין די אויערן, און אויף דער לעקציע ברויך מען נישט צו איינלן, טראַכט ער נאָך מיט פאַרגעניגען, אז אין תּוך אַריין זיינען אַלע פּילאָזאָפּן נישט איבעריק קלוג געווען; יעדערער האָט זיך פאַרמאַכט אין זיין וינקעלע, געטראָפּן, דאָך אביסל נאָך געטראָפּן; און ער, פּליגעלמאַן, ווייסט אַלץ, וואָס זיי האָבן אויפגעטאַן, און נאָך ווייסט ער, אז דער עיקר, דער תּוך כל התּוכות איז דאָס לעבן, דאָס לעבן אליין טאַקע

All translations are my own from both the Yiddish and Hebrew versions. Here from the Buenos Aires edition: Hersh Dovid Nomberg, *Oysgeklibene shriftn*, Buenos Aires: Kultur kongres, 1958, 73.

⁸ די אויגען זיינע זעען אויס ווי פאַרלאָפּן מיט פאַרע. עס דוכט זיך, אז מע דאַרפט זיי נאָר מיט אַ טיכל איבערווישן, כדי זיי זאָלן העל גלאַנצן Ibid.

These themes of hope and despair in the modern cityscape are likewise present in an essay that Baal Makshoves dedicated to Nomberg, a piece in which he characterizes Nomberg's protagonists and their state of mind: "On the streets of Warsaw and Odessa one may see strange faces flashing all around. Externally, these seem to be unemployed members of the proletariat; but actually, these are the most intellectual and spiritual of the ghetto world. With tattered and dirty clothes, and pale faces they trudge along the streets, with a book or bundle of papers tucked under their arms, with no plan and no purpose, dreamy eyed."⁹ This account almost seems like an exact description of the fashioning of Fliegelman, depicting the state of the dazed and confused type which the story's opening paragraphs introduce. Overwhelmed by big city life, yet occasionally, when the city of dreams does not interfere too much, the mind clears enough to think, to dream of what these young men have come for – secular intellectual life.

Introduced walking down the street, Fliegelman already encompasses much of the characteristics of the *Talush*; preoccupied with the great philosophers of the past, Fliegelman sees himself as their equal if not their superior. He knows all they knew and then some. He can repeat their teachings verbatim, but knows that while they were cooped up in closed chambers, he is in touch with what is truly important- life in and of itself. What this 'life' is, and how connected Fliegelman actually is to said life, will crumble apart as the story progresses, but for the opening sequence, Fliegelman is at his narcissistic pinnacle, optimistic in his belief that, walking down the sunny Warsaw Street, he is more fortunate than the greatest thinkers in human history.

And a strange blend of thinkers he chooses to compare himself with: an Indian founder of a religion, an outcast Dutch Jew, and a German rationalist. This infatuation with intellectuals while

⁹ Baal Makshoves, *Geklibene shriften* (Warsaw: Bicher, 1929), 181.

at the same time, belittling their teachings is also an epidemic amongst the *Talush* type. As Shmuel Rozhansky sees it, this is what leads to the eventual downfall of Fliegelman: “Fliegelman, Schwartzwald, Felie, Bender are all-knowers, they see too much and too well, they understand too much, and that is their misfortune.”¹⁰ The knowledge of this array of philosophers’ teachings will not save Fliegelman, perhaps on the contrary, this knowledge will be the end of him.

The narrative juxtaposes Fliegelman with his good, and only friend, Levantkovski; they both share a love of writing. Levantkovski is also the only person Fliegelman has any meaningful exchange and substantial dialog with: “Fliegelman is acquainted with many people, but only ever speaks with one.”¹¹ Levantkovski is almost the mirror image of Fliegelman: a poor Jew, married, with six children and a wife whom he dislikes. He writes Hebrew poetry, which Fliegelman finds worthless, compared to that in more cultured languages. This is a crucial moment in the story for its multiple conflicts- between friends and types, between Hebrew and Yiddish, between the intellectual and the layman, and between the options of the *Talush* embodied by Fliegelman to the more traditional existence embodied in Levantkovski:

Fliegelman speaks Russian. Levantkovski doesn’t understand the difficult words, but still is thankful, and reads for Fliegelman a new poem which he wrote, a poem about nature.

‘The poem is good’, answers Fliegelman, ‘you only need a deeper philosophical view. For example, you say: “how beautiful is nature, over every mountain and hill”. A real poet feels that the mountain and the sky and the earth and all of nature are all one, one with man as well... It is so. I, for example, feel this truly. It happens

¹⁰ These other names are those of protagonists in several other short stories by Nomberg. Shmuel Rozansky, introduction in: Nomberg, *Oysgeklibene shriftn*, 29.

¹¹ Yiddish, 20.

often that I feel that the sky, the moon and I are all one, one absolute, you see, only in different forms...'¹²

But Levantkovski does not see, and it seems that, even for Fliegelman, this is mere lip service. The Spinozaist critique Fliegelman applies to a truly simplistic Hebrew poem is telling; Fliegelman berates this Hebrew poem as being philosophically unsound, treating different aspects of nature as separate entities and not as part and parcel of a pantheistic realm, in which Fliegelman imagines himself immersed to the point of harmony. That he cannot even conduct himself through the streets of Warsaw is not an issue for him; he manifests in his literary critique of Levantkovski's poem the detachment between his philosophical fantasies and the unpleasant reality of his existence. Seldom is he at one with all of nature, rather he is overwhelmed by his surroundings, encapsulated behind his foggy eyes. The whole world is not one, but rather he grows more and more detached from the world, more introverted.

One crucial element that stands out in Levantkovski's poem is how it is reproduced in the Yiddish version. Laurence Venuti has claimed that the act of translation often tends to be marginal and "invisible," so as to produce a "fluent" and readable text that does not call attention to itself and to the act of translation.¹³ While the Hebrew version of the story succeeds in this invisibility and fluency, this success is somehow detrimental to the story; in the Yiddish version the childish

¹² פליגעלמאן רעדט רוסיש, לעוואנטקאווסקי פארשטייט נישט די שווערע ווערטער, נאָר מודה איז ער, און לעזט אים פאַר אַ שיר וועגן דער טבע.

א גוטער שיר – ענטפערט פליגעלמאן – איר וואָלט נאָר געברויכט צו האָבן א טיפערן פילאָזאָפישן בליק. אַשטייגער, איר זאָגט: "מה יפה הטבע על כל הר וגבע". אן אמתער פאָעט פילט, אז דער באַרג און דער הימל און די ערד און די גאַנצע נאַטור איז פונקט דאָס אייגענע, וואָס מיר אליין [...] עס איז אזוי. איך צום ביישפיל, פיל עס גאַנץ גוט. עס טרעפט אַ סך מאָל, וואָס איך פיל, אז איך און דער הימל און די לבנה איז Yiddish, 21. The quote from Levantovski's poem appears in Hebrew in both versions.

¹³ Lawrence Venuti. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2018), 7.

poem by Levantkovski stands out like a sore thumb, printed in Hebrew within a Yiddish text, being the only sentence within the story which is not in Yiddish. Yet, in the Hebrew version the text is seamless, no one can know what language the poem is in and it isn't stated that it is in Hebrew. Thus, while the Hebrew poem blends into the Hebrew language version, in the Yiddish version it may be read as a critique in and through Yiddish literature of the novice Hebrew literature existing alongside it. Levantkovski thus is the emblem of the rudimentary Hebrew poetry that the highbrow Fliegelman, with his Russian speech, looks down upon. But only within the Yiddish text – While Russian print is not reproduced within the text, it is Hebrew that is singled out, its foreignness highlighted. The Hebrew version is indifferent to the derided language, while the Yiddish version pegs Hebrew as the deficient language.

What is not invisible in either language, what remains constant, is the pathetic response Fliegelman has to this poem; he uses a philosophy which is too lofty for its subject, one which Levantkovski cannot even understand, patronizing his only friend, further detaching himself from life, and receding into thought, which achieves very little. This too comes through language trouble or translation difficulty: while the Yiddish text does note that Levantkovski writes Hebrew, neither version states what language he uses to speak with Fliegelman. What is noted, quite deliberately, is that Fliegelman speaks with Levantkovski in Russian, and that Levantkovski can barely understand this speech. While the song prompts Fliegelman to declare his will to be one with nature, with no barrier, the roadblock to such unity is language itself and the multiplicity of languages. One cannot be one with nature as a whole, when even simple communication between two friends is impossible. The breakdown in correspondence is repeated, the lofty ideas that Fliegelman floats are left lingering in midair, with no plausible recipient. The written word cannot impress Fliegelman, and the spoken word cannot be communicated.

The end of the story too pivots on language tensions and discrepancies between the Hebrew and the Yiddish versions. *Fliegelman* ends in an episode imbued with a dreamlike quality, harkening back to the mist-filled eyes the story began with; after a violent incident with one of his Hebrew students, Fliegelman goes home and falls asleep, just to wake up sweating fiercely, under the illusion that his bed has spun out of control, swimming and swaying. From here on the sequence intensifies and becomes even more unclear; Fliegelman arrives at Levantkovski's house and falls asleep in a chair, only to be woken up by a mumbling Levantkovski, thereafter he takes his leave to go to the Vistula river. While standing on the bridge over the water, a police officer eyes Fliegelman, which leads him to feel in his pocket for documents and to mumble to himself: "I have a passport."¹⁴ Like his bed, at this moment Fliegelman feels the bridge sway under his feet, and he surmises that he has thrown himself into the Vistula, so much so that he imagines water running over his eyes, once again obstructing and clouding his vision, reality obscured. He hears a voice speak Russian to him, but he doesn't understand what is said and even what the context is. When he regains consciousness, he is in the police station where he finally falls asleep, just to dream again that he is immersed in water. When woken up in the morning, Fliegelman asks one thing of the officer: "I most respectfully and humbly request... bury me! I have a passport! Here!"¹⁵ This instance of failed interpellation ends the dreamy sequence and the whole story.¹⁶

¹⁴ איך האָב אַ פּאַספּאָרט. Nomberg, 92.

¹⁵ איך האָב די ערע אונטערטעניקלעך צו בעטן... באַגראָבט מיך. איך האָב אַ פּאַספּאָרט, אָט. Nomberg, 93. Notice how his internal speech and his external speech about the passport are identical, alluding to a possibility that this is all an internal drama.

¹⁶ This is a failed assertion of the self as subject, much as later on when hailed by an officer himself, Fliegelman will breakdown. Such a construction of a subject is posited by Althusser, where being hailed by the authorities is the prime example of interpellation. See: Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), 172-75.

To end with such ambiguity, with a borderline suicide story, falling off a bridge, and with a request to be buried alive on Fliegelman's own volition leaves the reader with more questions than answers. What is the significance of a passport? What role does water play in this scene? Did Fliegelman in fact attempt suicide? And there are many more. Seemingly, Fliegelman undergoes a nervous breakdown; the eloquent Russian speaker who just recently spoke such high Russian that his friend could not follow turns into a man who cannot understand who or what is being said to him colloquially on the street. To be hailed by an officer in Russian sends Fliegelman spiraling to his demise. The crumbling of the façade begins with language, turning this into a drama triggered and enacted through language; the hegemonic language of the government and the intelligentsia is rendered inaccessible to Fliegelman, turning him back into a small-town boy, sending him back to the *shtetl*. The linguistic drama is intensified by the fact that the breakdown began during a Hebrew lesson, one in which a mistake by his student prompted Fliegelman to strike the student and flee the scene, escalating into an identity crisis through and due to language.

In an attempt to counter this swift crumbling of a carefully constructed self, Fliegelman falls back on his passport. This passport holds real and symbolic powers; in reality a passport would have been proof that Fliegelman has moved to Warsaw legally from the Pale of Settlement and did not evade the army draft. But more importantly, it is symbolic capital that is represented in this document. The passport is the right of passage for the young Jewish intellectual into Europe, a document through which he may cease to be a Jew and join the array of philosophers this young man wishes to be a member of. As Shachar Pinsker has shown in *Literary Passports*, these

documents did not only allow legal status, but turned their holders into part of Europe culture and validated them as members of (intellectual) society.¹⁷

Yet, touching the passport does little to sooth Fliegelman as the bridge begins to sway under his feet, perhaps dropping him into the river. This quasi-suicide leads to a recurrence in the obscuration of vision- Fliegelman sees water running over his eyes, leaving him at the end of the story in the same position with which he started out, impaired vision blocking his access to the world, to Europe. It comes as no surprise that Fliegelman's request upon awakening is to be buried; he might not be physically dead, but the passport proves that, while he has all he could ask for in order to integrate, he has given up on this endeavor, wishing to be buried alive, not having the courage to take his own life.¹⁸ The last sentence leaves Fliegelman in limbo between life and death, but also, and once again, in limbo between languages; in this crucial moment in the narrative, there is again a discrepancy between the Hebrew and the Yiddish versions. The Yiddish version uses a pathetically high register to construct Fliegelman's last request, using Germanized Yiddish to appeal to the officer, to European authority.¹⁹ It is unclear what this highly Germanized Yiddish is trying to recreate. Is it Russian spoken to the police or is it, even more nonsensically, Yiddish which Fliegelman is addressing the officers with. Either way his reasoning is off – that he owns a passport and therefore should be granted his wish to be buried. The absurdity of this request is heightened by language in the Yiddish version, an affect which is absent from the Hebrew version. The Hebrew counters this with a respectful request to be buried, not rendering Fliegelman's request

¹⁷ Shachar Pinsker. *Literary Passports*, 1-6.

¹⁸ While this may be seen negatively, Janet Hadda sees this request in a positive light; this is Fliegelman at his most active, most earnest self, his words and his heart finally corresponding. For more on this see: Janet Hadda, *Passionate Women, Passive Men – Suicide in Yiddish Literature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 149.

¹⁹ "איך האָב די ערע אונטערטעניגליך צו בעטן" p. 93.

any more absurd than it initially is. The request for burial in Yiddish turns ridiculous through language register, while in Hebrew this is more nuanced.

Fliegelman is emblematic not only of the character of the *Talush*, but also of a time in Nomberg's career when he was a crucial part of bilingual Jewish literature and, though it might not seem so, these two are inextricably connected. In the back and forth between Hebrew and Yiddish in this early stage of his career, Nomberg was a cultural force in his introduction and invention of topoi and themes in both Hebrew and Yiddish. One example is the figure of the *Talush*, which became central in both literatures. Also, the fact that language becomes a theme, not only in Nomberg's career, but in narratives such as "Fliegelman", is of the utmost importance – we will see in the coming chapters how translation and language breakdown become, once and again, a thematic part of art. In this case, "Fliegelman" is thematically engaged in questions of language and the sustainability of in-betweenness. The inability to communicate, and demise coming through language failure, become a recurring theme.

But, a change of these bilingual practices was to come; in the next segment, I discuss the role Nomberg played in the 1908 language conference, and how language practices shifted and morphed following this conference. Throughout these changes, something essential and basic stayed the same, Nomberg remained deeply committed to the bilingual option and modality.

Czernowitz and Changing Bilingualism

In 1908 a conference convened in the town of Czernowitz. Today, this conference has achieved a mythical standing in Jewish culture. As Yechiel Szeintuch notes, this mythical standing is in part due to the scarcity of hard evidence we have of the proceedings of the conference, seeing as the

protocols have gone missing.²⁰ The evidence of the proceedings is thus secondhand, emanating from the press of the time. To piece together what actually took place at this conference is a difficult endeavor, and one that will always remain incomplete. Arguably this is what has made this conference all the more meaningful in Yiddish cultural lore- the malleability of the conference, the high hopes it held for many, turn it into a reference point, even more than a century later.²¹

The agenda for the conference was to assess, define and proclaim Yiddish language and its role within Jewish culture. This was to be the first of many Yiddish language conferences, but its tenuous proceedings contributed to it being not only first, but also the most memorable Yiddish language conference. The conference, organized by Nathan Birnbaum, gathered together some seventy writers and activists, out of whom forty were to vote on the final resolutions.²² These resolutions have proven to be most memorable, and what have had lasting cultural reverberation. In some sense Nomberg hijacked the conference's proceedings; while originally

²⁰ Yechiel Szeintuch, "Veidat Czernovitz vetarbut Yiddish", *Hulyot: Dapim Le-Mehkar Sifrut Yidish Ve-Tarbutah*, Vol. 5, (2000), pp. 255-85. This article is the ultimate recreation of the conference's proceedings, which seem to be lost. Szeintuch uses as his primary source a 1931 YIVO publication that attempted to recreate the lost protocols. But Szeintuch does not stop at that, piecing together information from the Jewish press of the time in Yiddish, Russian and Polish, to corroborate the information and cross reference it. This article was meant to be the introductory chapter to a book length publication on the Czernowitz conference, a publication Szeintuch did not end up producing. See also: Max Weinreich, Zalmen Reyzen, Khayim Broyde. *Di Ershthe Yidishe Shprakh-Konferents*. (Vilna: YIVO, 1931).

²¹ As Robert King Notes: "One could argue indefinitely about the importance of the Czernowitz conference. Not much happened in Czernowitz; everything in the world happened at Czernowitz. Czernowitz was a success; Czernowitz was a failure. Czernowitz mattered, no it didn't matter." King, Robert D. "The Czernowitz Conference in Retrospect." In *Politics of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Literature, and Society* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998), 48. To wit, conferences and publications on the centennial of the conference as well as on other anniversaries, including an upcoming 110th anniversary. One of the most recent examples of the lasting cultural power of the Czernowitz conference is the new comprehensive English-Yiddish dictionary. Which features on its cover a map of the town of Czernowitz, and as the editors explain this is due to the conference which is part of the reason the dictionary is even appearing.

²² For more on the role Birnbaum filled in the conference and the assemblage thereof see: Joshua Fishman. *Ideology, Society & Language: The Odyssey of Nathan Birnbaum* (Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, 1987).

the conference had seven topics on the agenda, such as Yiddish theater, translation of the Bible into Yiddish, the young generation, and other issues, Nomberg steered the dealings toward the relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish. This subject was not explicitly on the agenda, only the status of Yiddish regardless of Hebrew was,²³ but Nomberg was interested in having a comparative discussion, discussing not the standing of Yiddish as a standalone, but rather Yiddish vis a vis Hebrew.²⁴

From the moment Nomberg raised this issue in the conference's premeeting until the end of the conference five days later, when his proclamation was voted upon, Nomberg was the key figure of the conference, alongside Peretz. The mentor and the protégé found themselves on different sides of the aisle: Peretz was adamant not to have a comparative discussion of Hebrew vs. Yiddish, and when pushed, he said: "Hebrew is our national language, Yiddish is our folk language", differentiating the two in a way that gave each a separate role.²⁵ But Nomberg was relentless, and his offer for a proclamation was the one to outlast others. The now famous proclamation that is emblematic of the conference, that Yiddish is *a* national language of the Jews, is derived from this original formulation by Nomberg, one of five voted upon: "Yiddish is the Jewish national language, but every member of this conference, and future conferences, is

²³ The final topic of the seven on the agenda was: "Recognition of Yiddish" ״די אָנערקענונג פֿון ייִדיש״. Szeintuch, 273.

²⁴ A subsequent 1913 conference regarding Hebrew language and Literature, was very much inspired by the Czernowitz conference. Yet, the Hebrew conference, held in Vienna, did not have the lasting cultural impact of the Yiddish language conference. See: Kenneth Moss. *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 132-133.

²⁵ As both Marc Caplan and Marie Schumacher-Brunhas note, Peretz' view of Yiddish had changed radically by 1908, in its distance from folk language and towards artistic independence. Thus, his stance here may be tactical, but none the less one which forms a binary with Nomberg's view. See: Keith Ian Weiser, and Joshua A. Fogel, ed. *Czernowitz at 100: The First Yiddish Language Conference in Historical Perspective* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), 41-52, 68-82

free to consider Hebrew per their own beliefs.”²⁶ This exact wording of the declaration was the fifth and final suggestion for a proclamation regarding the standing Yiddish. Put forth by Nomberg, along with Shalom Asch and Chaim Zhitlovsky, this statement differs considerably from the first proclamation on the ballot, offered by Peretz; the statement by Peretz did not mention Hebrew at all, seeing Yiddish as self-sufficient for all aspects of life, including a proclamation on the status of Yiddish, and not part of a binary.

The formulation which was finally accepted was an augmented version of Nomberg’s statement, by all accounts finalized by Nomberg himself. This statement is perhaps the most famous statement regarding Yiddish language, surely the most famous emerging from this conference: “The conference recognizes Yiddish as a national language of the Jewish people, and demands for Yiddish equal political, social and cultural standing. Note: the attitude toward Hebrew remains free.”²⁷ The ‘A’ in this statement, the article, denotes a plurality, a world of lingual multiplicity made explicit by the comment at the end. This final modifier, seldom quoted, entails a temporal belief – that the relationship to Hebrew was free before the conference and remains free after it. But if there is something this conference, and the labored discussion regarding the proclamation on the status of Yiddish, teach us, it is that tensions were very much present in the conference and in life. That regardless if one wanted to focus on the one language for which the conference convened or to discuss Yiddish vis-a-vis Hebrew, this was the context for the discussion. Nomberg championed, and prevailed, with the worldview that the discussion

²⁶ יידיש איז די נאציאנאלע שפראך פונעם יידישן פֿאָלק, אָבער יעדער מיטגליד פון דער קאָנפֿאַרענץ און פון דער צוקונפֿטיקער אָרגאַניזאַציע איז פֿרײַ צו דענקען וועגן העברעיִש ווי אזוי עס דיקטירן אים זיינע פֿערזענלעכע איבערצייגונגן.

²⁷ די קאָנפֿערענץ אָנרעקענט די ייִדישע שפֿראַך פֿאַר אַ נאַציענאַלע שפֿראַך פֿון ייִדישען פֿאָלק און פֿאַדערט פֿאַר איר פֿאַליטישע, Szeintuch, 277. געזעלשאַפטלעכע און קולטורעלע גלייַך-באַרעכטעיקונג; אָנמערקונג – די באַציונג צו העברעיִש בלייבט פֿרײַ. Importantly, Szeintuch notes that this final proclamation is missing from the main source we have for the proceedings of the conference, the 1931 YIVO publication which documented these proceedings, but this proclamation does appear in: Vanvield, *Vegen yidish*, (Warsaw, 1908), which appeared shortly after the conference.

of Yiddish must come vis a vis Hebrew. One can only imagine how taxing such a break from his mentor Peretz could be, and how deep Nomberg's conviction in this language worldview, so as to promote it with such force. Nomberg's significant role in the lasting essence of the conference can be boiled down to this worldview: that Yiddish is a national language and that Hebrew is an important presence alongside it.

The proclamation that emerged from the conference is thus both past and future oriented: the first part, regarding Yiddish language, indicates a pivotal moment in Yiddish culture, from a folk culture to a modernist one, all this in relation to rising national aspirations of the Jewish people. And the final part, regarding Hebrew, comes to transcend a *Sprachenkampf* mentality, allowing a free-flowing Jewish culture, fluctuating freely between the two Jewish languages. This discussion is the segue into the central, and final part of this chapter; following Czernowitz, Nomberg entered a stage in his career which is wildly undervalued in literary terms. Writing in Yiddish, throughout the two decades following Czernowitz, he produced many texts, but only one which was considered 'literature', his 1913 play *Di mishpokhe*, *The Family*.²⁸ Yet, these were years of copious writing by Nomberg; aside from a weekly column in the press, first in *Der fraynd* on to *Haynt* and finally in *Der moment*, alongside copious writing in the Polish language press, Nomberg wrote several travel narratives, accounts from his travels to Jewish communities around the world. To date, the post-Czernowitz writings of Nomberg are understudied, and in this lays the link to the previous stages of his career –these works should not be read as journalistic accounts but rather as part of a bilingual arc, one which negotiates the relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish, a process which imbues Nomberg's career through and through.

²⁸ This play, interesting in its own right, is set in the years surrounding the Czernowitz conference, 1906-1910. In the final act, the ideal character of Eliasch establishes his will to form a new and rejuvenated Jewish culture, based on Yiddish. Hirsch David Nomberg. *Di mishpokhe*. (Vilne: B. Kletskin, 1911).

Rather than reading his post-Czernowitz writings as devoid of Hebrew and as devoid of literary value, the analysis below sees this period as a continual, albeit different, exploration of Jewish bilingualism in belle-lettres.

Travel Languages

Famously, Voltaire ends *Candide* with the statement: “All that is very well [...] but let us cultivate our garden.”²⁹ This statement ends a travel narrative riddled with hardships and tribulations which the protagonists endure, all to return to where they started, and to the stoicism of tending to one’s own property. The movement here is bidirectional; to travel with a return in mind, to explore in order to enrich life at the point of departure. Travel, as heralded by Voltaire and elsewhere, is a reexamination of one’s life through a relief of another life. The positions one holds are negated or reaffirmed in conjunction with a life which is not-one’s-own.³⁰

This applies as well to Nomberg’s travel narrative; written in 1924 following a trip to Palestine, this work is indicative of a creative period in Nomberg’s career, a period in which he produced three book length narratives from his travels throughout the Jewish world. The Palestine-narrative is complex, elusive: it depicts a very real journey by a writer named Hersh Dovid Nomberg, from Poland to Palestine and back. But at the same time, it is also a search for a mythical ‘Hebrewland’, the land where language, ideology and territory are all on the same page, all singing, or speaking, the same tune. This monolingual paradigm is the relief that the narrative is set up against and the examination of this triad is a major theme of the work. The

²⁹ Voltaire. *Candide or Optimism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 169.

³⁰ For more see: Georges Van den Abbeele. *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), xxii-vi.

preconceptions with which the character embarks on the journey, his journey from Poland to Palestine in search of language, will be constantly tested and recalibrated. This creates a text which alludes to conventional genre definition, fluctuating between reportage, fiction and philosophical musings, the throughline is an attempt to best understand and convey this new place. Through travel, a narrative forms, one which toys with translanguaging in the most complex ways. By this I mean not only language border crossing, but more so, the deterritorialization of languages, the fluidity of geography and language, and the decoupling of what poses as naturally paired, the language-place dyad. These displacements set up multiple connectivities and modalities in which language is reshaped and reexamined.

Before the text is unfolded, I wish to offer a few comments on genre and reception. This Yiddish work has received little attention in part due to this genre ambiguity. As Shmuel Niger wrote when discussing Yankev Glatstein's *Yash* novels: "Is this a travel log? A memoir? Fragments of an autobiography? Or maybe this is just a story, fiction?"³¹ All the while referencing novels that have come to be known as a canonical modernist Yiddish works of fiction. Similar confusion and genre complexity might be what has kept scholars from discussing the three travel novels Nomberg wrote.³² The lack of discussion led scholars to end Nomberg's writing career for him in 1908, or 1913 at the latest.³³ This is an unfortunate omission; as travel narratives, these works are at once engaging, aesthetically fashioned and, at the same time, set forth a protagonist who is dispositioned to change and notice change with an acute eye. To think through Niger's questions, one may read the 1924 work on a few levels: as a report home to

³¹ Shmuel Niger, "Freye proze", *Der tog*, January 12, 1941.

³² It should be noted that, compared to Nomberg's travel narratives, Glatstein's *Yash* novels received significant scholarly attention, despite genre ambiguity.

³³ See: Rozshanski, introduction, in: Nomberg, *Oysgeklibene shriftn*.

Poland on another Jewish community in Palestine, as a meditation by Nomberg on the encounter with a place and a community, and finally, as a literary act of fiction. Laced throughout the travel narrative, this work will deal with language, namely the Yiddish which is the language of the text, and the other languages that the journey brings into contact.

As studies of travel novels have shown, the genre is rife with opportunity; the travel novel is an exercise which oscillates between deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The traveler moves spatially to a foreign place, full of estrangements, and has the place from where he traveled as a backdrop. This allows for observations, not only of the nature of the destination, but also on the port of departure and the attributes of the 'home' which are all but transparent until critical distance is achieved. This double take is mutually beneficial and invigorates the narrative which, through the back and forth between the two locales, gains critical understanding of both: "One byproduct of real travel [... is] the travel book as a record of an inquiry and a report of the effect of the inquiry on the mind and imagination of the traveler."³⁴ This byproduct-narrative varies with the kind of travel which is being performed. As Fusel notes, travel is a spectrum, with the poles of the spectrum being exploration – a journey to the unknown and undiscovered – and tourism, a trip to the already discovered and often commodified locale. Travel, the in-between mode, is not as trivial as tourism, and yet not as groundbreaking as exploration. It has a product which is a narrative, a narrative of the encounters of the mind with a place that is to be disambiguated. Close enough to be familiar as to not be threatening, far enough from the norm to not be cliché.

³⁴Alan Wyke. *Abroad: A Miscellany of English Travel Writing, 1700-1914* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1973), 39.

This understanding is especially befitting of Nomberg's travel narrative to Palestine, a journey which oscillates on the spectrum between trailblazing and the uncannily familiar. Visiting from Poland, he is acutely aware of what he will encounter and, at the same time, constantly perplexed and surprised, time and again. This fluctuation is fundamental to the narrative and mirrors the language modalities encountered.

But Nomberg's travel is not only an adventure, it has an exilic quality to it. Another way to consider the spectrum of sensibilities the travel narrative puts forth is posited by Caren Kaplan in *Questions of Travel*. Kaplan too offers a spectrum on which to locate travel-narratives, but this spectrum is somewhat different; instead of exploration as the endpoint of the spectrum, she positions exile and tourism as two ends of a spectrum: "Exile implies coercion; tourism celebrates choice. Exile connotes the estrangement of the individual from an original community; tourism claims community on a global scale. Exile plays a role in western culture's narratives of political formation and cultural identity stretching back to the Hellenic era. Tourism heralds postmodernism; it is a product of consumer culture, leisure, and technological innovation."³⁵ Between these poles lays the difference between the Palestinian travel narrative and previous and subsequent narratives by Nomberg, since to experience the exilic in Palestine is problematic, to say the least. With exile introduced into the discussion of the travel narrative, the question of home and homeland become fraught- the mythic standing of the Land of Israel is an important part of this narrative. Nomberg fashions this narrative so as to complicate the question of what is exilic and what is *hymisch* about Palestine. This is not only a tour of the land, it is also a travel into the mythic, enhanced by bracketing Egypt chapters, a search for a land of historic

³⁵ Kaplan, Caren. *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 27.

implications, almost metaphysical. This is not the same as other travel narratives to other countries.

Thus, the destination of this travel narrative is contextualized within the writing of the Holy Land. As Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi notes, literary depictions of travel to the Holy Land had to negotiate two forces, holding them in check to correlate with ideology and intention. On the one hand, there is a drive to depict the land of Israel as pristine, untouched and new in every way. Such an image allows for a utopian ideal to flourish, a counterforce to the desolation of the diaspora. Yet, on the other hand, there was always the drive to depict the Land of Israel as an age-old place, layered with history and with the bodies of the forefathers and mothers. As such, the land is sacred, one which can be archeologically excavated to provide grounds for an age-old yearning and a current drive for a land, for Zion. The tension between these two forces, which Ezrahi coins forces of discovery and recovery, are at the nexus of most travel narratives to the Land of Israel throughout the years.³⁶ The narrative at hand is no different and the manifestation of this tension come through and due to language. The Land of Israel is a destination that is laden with preconceptions for a traveler steeped in Jewish tradition and text. A clear-eyed view of what a traveler encounters in the land is almost impossible; the view is always tainted by layers of historical and textual expectations, producing in turn a text that is elbowing out a space for its narrative amongst so many others which imagine this space for what it can be, what it is desired to be.

So, the literary depiction of a trip to the Land of Israel binds together language change, ideology, and national allegiances. In Nomberg's trip through Palestine he explores a land, but

³⁶ Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi. *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3-9.

also the commitment of the population to the coupling of land and language, the Hebrew language and the Land of Israel as part of the Zionist national movement. This exploration of the land is set against the backdrop of another national project Nomberg is committed to: the Yiddish folk movement and the widespread solution for Jewish life it espoused to provide. The language problems Nomberg encounters and portrays in Palestine are another manifestation of his bilingual sensibilities and a realization, through travel, of the problematics, even impossibility, of monolingualism.

***Verter farkishefn* – Language Reality and Language Fantasy**

Surprisingly, the travel-narrative *Eretz yisroel eindruken un bilder*³⁷ does not open, and does not end, in Palestine; in a significant move, the visit to the Land of Israel is framed by movement into Palestine and out of Palestine, through Egypt. Quite literally bordered by homecoming and exile. The first chapter, “Bei nacht af midber Sinai”, charts a journey not dissimilar to that of the Israelites escaping serfdom in Egypt- through the Sinai desert ventures a host of pilgrims, towards the promised land. This framing device is crucial in that it places Palestine in the relief of Egypt, which at once calls into mind the biblical exodus, but will also negate this comparison with an ending that takes the narrator back to Egypt and away from the Land of Israel.

But for now, the narrator is on his way in, through the desert with a peculiar assemblage of characters; aside from the narrator, there is a real-estate agent from London, a *Mizrachi* traveling salesman, a writer, and a host of nondescript Jews from Lodz. This array of types is

³⁷ Nomberg, Hirsch Dovid. *Eretz yisroel eindruken un bilder* (Warsaw: T. Yakobson and M. Goldberg, 1925).

supplemented by the Arab guides bringing the host of Jews into the land. The car in which they are traveling is a modern ship of fools sailing across the sands, yet, unlike the platonic idea of the ship, this ship is rife with language tension. After crossing the Suez Canal, the anticipation becomes almost unbearable:

It is still a long ride from Kantara to the political border of Eretz Yisroel, and anticipation and eagerness spread amongst the travelers:

‘Are we in *Eretz Yisroel* yet?’

What difference does it make? It makes a difference! Words aren’t just sounds; words work magic. Words have power.

One can feel how a Jew, when he walks in the Holy Land, his self-worth grows stronger than elsewhere. You would feel that too if you spent some time there. But we felt it instinctively even as we were traveling in the car.”³⁸

In this passage, word takes precedence over territory. Words are in fact powerful, magical, with the phrase *Eretz Yisroel* more real than the Land of Israel, changing the atmosphere in the car even before the border is crossed. The entry into the Land of Israel happens through language since, as the narrator notes: *verter farkishefn*, words perform magic, enchant. Words are not empty sounds, but perform and construct a reality, to the point where they exceed reality, language becoming more real than the ‘real’.

³⁸ פון קאנטארא ביז צו דער פאליטישער גרענעץ פון ארץ-ישראל איז נאך א ווינטער וועג און צווישן אלע פאסאזשירן פילט זיך א ניגערקייט און א נערוועישקייט.

זענען מיר שוין אין ארץ ישראל-

וואָס איז אייגנטלעך די נפקא מינה? ס'איז יאָ אַ נפקא-מינה. ווערטער זענען נישט קיין הוילע קלאַנגן; ווערטער פאַרכישופן. ווערטער האָבן אַ מאַגישן כוח.

ארץ ישראל – דאָס לאַנד פון די יידן! דאָס זעלבסט-געפיל, וואָס אַ ייד האָט, ווען זײַנע פיס באַטרעטן דאָס לאַנד, איז פולער, שטאַרקער ווי ערגעץ-אַנדערש. דאָס ווערט איינך קלאַר, ווען איר זענט אַ צײַט אין דעם לאַנד, אָבער אינסטינקטיוו דערפילט מען עס נאָך אין וואַגאַן p. 6-7.

So, the narrative begins with the power of language, but words and speech, do not come easily; the concoction of languages in the cart becomes mesmerizing; the Sephardic merchant speaks Hebrew, but, when speaking about the price of socks, he turns to Lodz-German to the surprise of all the travelers from Lodz, who in turn switch to Yiddish to discuss their surprise, a foreign-looking man speaking their language, one of their languages. The Arab guide leading the trip speaks English and is not Muslim, as the travelers expect, but rather Christian, a confusing blend for the narrator. Language and appearance are not what they seem, from the outset of the narrative and on. Language malleability and challenges become a nexus of the travel novel, entering the country and the narrative with this ship of lingual fools.

From this fraught entry into the land, the narrative skips into the city of Tel Aviv, on the day of the Purim carnival. The narrator notes blissfully how, befitting a Jewish town, the carnival is celebrated on the Jewish holiday of Purim, the holiday of joy and masquerading.³⁹ And masquerading is much of what the city of Tel Aviv is partaking in; the reality of this Jewish town is posing as different or other than what it is. The first example of this comes when the narrator notes that Tel Aviv with its mere 20,000 inhabitants is in fact a miniature Europe, an enclave of somewhere else. This claim is grounded by two statements that involve language. First, the narrator notes: “To be European and at the same time a Jewish-nationalist - that is the ideal of Tel Aviv.”⁴⁰ This statement includes a conundrum that informs the discussion to come. Nomberg encounters a vocabulary problem that doubles as a problem of demarcation and identity; the assertion above wishes to point out the problematic balance between being European and as

³⁹ This entry through the carnival, with its many languages, calls to mind Bakhtin's concept of the Carnavalesque, and the breakdown of hierarchies found in this mode, manifest in language. For Bakhtin this is a collapse of registers, and here it will be a collapse of the divide between Yiddish and Hebrew. For more see: Bakhtin, M. M. *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

⁴⁰ P. 15. צו זיין אייראָפּעיש און גלייכצייטיק אויך יידיש- (לייען העברעיִש) נאַציאָנאַליסטיש – דאָס איז דער אידעאַל פון תל-אביב.

such, cosmopolitan and, on the other hand, constructing a Jewish national society, which has particularistic aspects that are at odds with Europeanness. Yet the Yiddish text encounters a practical problem, a familiar one: the word for Jewish in Yiddish is *Yiddish*. But to describe a Jewish society in Palestine as one which is Yiddish-nationalistic, collides with an understanding of language in the *yishuv*. Therefore, that narrator must insert a qualifier, in the parenthetical *Hebraish*, a Hebrew society. Yet this too is problematic, since this is not what is being formed in Palestine, and is not exactly what the narrator wishes to convey. This is not a *Hebrew* society but rather a *Jewish* one, and the fact of the matter is that the text has difficulty to convey such a reality. This is not anomalous to this text – many Yiddish texts encounter similar issues – but here, in this specific proclamation, the ambiguity is potent since this is exactly what the text struggles to parse: what is the nature of place, of this new society, and how one may depict this place. This instance of language haziness, the conflation of language and nationalism, only foreshadows what is to come later in the narrative.

Aside from the practical language problem posed here, of monolingual inadequacy, there is the content of coupling Jewish particularism and European cosmopolitanism. Per the narrator this too comes in and through language: “To pair a European form with a national moment and to give this new creation an expression in Hebrew with the Sephardic pronunciation – that is the highest level all Tel-Avivians aspire to.”⁴¹ This is the next level of the coupling of Europe and Palestine, in the creation of a Mini-Europe: to invoke such a concept of national identity, as amorphous as it may be, in a *specific* dialect. It is not enough to form a national entity, but this entity must function in a national language, Hebrew, specifically Sephardic Hebrew which

⁴¹ pp. 15-16. אוואָן עס גלינגט צוזאמן-צופאַרן אַן איראָפּעישע פאַרם מיט אַ נאַציאָנאַלן מאָמענט און אים צו געבן אַן אויסדרוק אויף. העברעיש מיט דער הברה ספרדית – דאָרט איז דער העכסטער ציל דערגרייכט געוואָרן פאַר דעם בירגער פון תל אביב.

differentiates it further from *goles*, “[through the Hebrew speech] they feel that the grand ideal is achieved, that they may look down on the dark and sad ‘goles’, which remains sickly, flickering between life and death.”⁴² This statement fashions Sephardic-Hebrew as a marker of a healthy life, one which towers over a life-option which is on the road to extinction, flickering on the verge of demise. This is all fine in theory, but the reality of languages in Palestine negates much of this.

The hyperbolic description of the role of language in the *Yishuv* must be read as ironic, or, at the very least, exaggerated, given what immediately follows. The next paragraph describes the proud police officers of the Hebrew city who stroll around in cars splayed with Hebrew writing and speak some Hebrew “and even better- Yiddish!”⁴³ That the police officers, agents of the state, the ones who should be forming ideologically correct subjects via interpellation, cannot abide by the lingual project of nation building does not bode well for the project and shines a derisive light on the high hopes the previous statement put forth. The national-language-project seems to have failed even before taking sail. Yet, one must remember that this is failure only within the parameters that the narrator has laid out: the narrator is the one who emphasizes language and dialect as a critical stage in nation building and within the Zionist project. The failures are due to an overemphasis of language and its role within the national project. When all you have is a hammer, every problem seems like a nail, and when you are obsessed with bi- and monolingualism, every issue seems to hinge on language. Nomberg’s depiction of the goals of the national project as hinging on language are due to his projection, his struggle to decipher this place.

⁴² p. 16.

⁴³ p. 16. און נאָך בעסער – יידיש

These two consecutive opening chapters, of Egypt and of Tel Aviv, serve as an opening statement regarding language and a catalyst for the proliferation of the theme from there on; language continues to be pivotal throughout the novel - the chapter titled "In nest fun oremkeit", (In the Nest of Poverty), tells of a visit to a poor neighborhood. These neighborhoods were flash-constructed to house new immigrants and did, in fact, become the emblem of poverty in the *yishuv* and later, the State of Israel. In the neighborhood Nomberg visits, he is initially struck by the cleanliness of poverty:

Barefoot children, barefoot men and women, people who don't see a piece of meat the week round, but there are flowers everywhere.

And of all places, this is where people speak Hebrew.

Unlike nearby *Rishn le-tsien* where the established *balabosim* speak a flavorful Yiddish.

In my memory, these three are tightly bound: Flowers-Hebrew-Festivity.⁴⁴

Poverty remains etched in the narrator's mind as a vision of flowers and Hebrew, not of shoeless hungry children. The fact that the poverty is mentioned is almost nullified by the end of the paragraph. The focus turns to the language and to a dichotomy which is set up: Hebrew=poverty, Yiddish=affluence. This is a reverse opposite of the reality in Europe by the potential readers of the book: the learning of Hebrew in Europe and in the United States demanded a means to cultivate a lingual opposition to the norm, to Yiddish. In fact, historically, as non-liturgical

⁴⁴ באַרוועסע קינדערלעך, באַרוועסע מאַן און ווייב, פלייש זעט מען נישט אָן אין די אויגן אַ קיילעכיקע וואָך, און בלימלעך זענען פאַראַן

און דווקא דאָ רעדט מען העברעיש

נישט ווי אין דערבייאַקן "ראשון לציון" ווי די סאַלידע בעלי-בתים רעדן אַ געשמאַקן יידיש

p. 74. ביי מיר אין זפרון איז עס פאַרבונדן אין איין קנויל: בלימלעך, העברעיש, יום-טובדיקייט

Hebrew was developing in Europe, it was closely related to the bourgeoisie.⁴⁵ The narrator here reverses this reality: in Palestine, those who have means, the *balabosim*, retain Yiddish in opposition to what should be the lingua franca, Hebrew. The language of the bourgeoisie is Yiddish, and the language of the people, which might be the solution for the folk, is Hebrew. The fact remains that the poor are the first whom the novel acknowledges as Hebrew speakers: it seems that, throughout the novel, the Yiddish which presents itself as a simultaneous translation from the Hebrew is in fact not a translation at all. The language set to rule the Land of Israel, the Hebrew, is not yet the language of the land but only an aspiration to such, a future which might come. In the meantime, it is the language of the least fortunate.

Time and again, the narrative goes to great lengths to characterize the *yishuv* as a European enterprise of Yiddish speakers fighting against a mass of Asians, masses which attempt to devour a minority twelve percent cultured Jews, European Yiddish-speaking Jews.⁴⁶ In other words, the Levantine coupled with the Hebrew are a force, one which will undoubtedly overpower the minority of Europeans who are coupled with the Yiddish language. This culture struggle manifests itself in the most emblematic of Zionist endeavors, pioneer agricultural labor. Thus, in a chapter depicting the workforce communes in the Galilee, hordes of young ideologically-driven European youth, Nomberg is troubled by one question: “They speak a flavorful, pure Yiddish, but I don’t know which language they use to flirt with the young dark-eyed girls who flock from the nearby village, who speak only Hebrew.”⁴⁷ Though these seem to

⁴⁵ Benjamin Harshav. *Language in Time of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Liora Halperin. *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920-1948* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁴⁶ p. 129, 133, etc.

⁴⁷ זיי רעדן א געשמאקן, א ריינעם יידיש, און איך ווייס נישט, אויף וואָסער לשון זיי פלירטעווען מיט די שוואַרץ-אויגיקע ספרדקעס. p. 125

be relatively low stakes for the language conflict, there is much to unpack here: the European versus the Mizrahi, the highly motivated Zionist youth able to converse only in Yiddish, and the locals, the young girls drawn to them, with their dark eyes standing in for their origin, their Hebrew speech completing the difference between them and the young *halutzim*, and the implication this has for a joint future and the language which will be spoken in this future.

This dilemma of the future is perhaps most pronounced in the last two chapters set in Palestine, “A fremde un geistike velt” and “Di algemeine un perzenleche Yidishe frage”;⁴⁸ these two chapters seek to finalize the language conflict, a summary of the findings in Palestine. In them the narrator defines the role which Hebrew and Yiddish play in the *Yishuv*, and by proxy, in the lives of Jews the world round. The first of these chapters opens with a sense of alienation as the journey draws to an end: “Being in Tel-Aviv, the city of Zionist ideology, I cannot escape the feeling, even for one minute, that I am stranger, a distant stranger and guest, a ‘*goles Yid*’.”⁴⁹ This feeling of alienation is bound to language, first and foremost, and only as a result of language politics, does the alienation seep into all walks of life. So, in the quote above, the term *goles Yid*, exilic Jew, is in quotation marks, as if to indicate a Yiddish phrase one may encounter on the streets of Tel Aviv, labeling foreignness. The text marks the Yiddish speech within the Yiddish text so as to denote a foreignness within, though as seen above, in the account of the carnival, Yiddish is not only pejorative, not only foreign in the Hebrew city of Tel Aviv.

The prime example of alienation through language follows immediately as the narrator recreates an exchange between Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the proponent of Hebrew language and an

⁴⁸ pp. 137-152

⁴⁹ זענענדיק אין תל-אביב, אין דער שטאָט פון דער ציוניסטישער אידעאָלאָגיע, האָב איך מיך אויף קיין איין מינוט נישט געקאָנט באַפרייען פון "דעם געפיל, אז איך בין דאָ אַ פרעמדער, אַ פרעמדער און אַ ווייטער, אַ גאַסט, אַ "גלות-ייד". p. 137

unnamed interlocutor. This conversation is doubly recreated, since the narrator notes it was conveyed to him by someone who heard about it from someone else, hearsay. As such, the narrator has no problem doubting its authenticity, and, at the same time, treating it as a basis for his argumentation. To bolster the authenticity, the text recreates the dialogue as it originally was, in Hebrew, interweaving a Yiddish translation in between the exchanges. This fractured Hebrew narrative, with no clear recipient, since this is a Yiddish work, may come of course to create the semblance of the 'real'. At the same time, this is a comment on the missing referents: in this exchange on language, on the tension between Hebrew and Yiddish, the narrative recreates this tension – in form and content alike. Thus, the Hebrew on the page stands out like a sore thumb, denoting illegibility and breakdown in communication, all within a dialog. The unauthenticated exchange went as follows- the unnamed interlocuter asks Ben-Yehuda: “– What will happen if the masses come here. Won't they bring the *Zhargon* with them? To that Ben-Yehuda answered: – To our dismay, and happiness, the masses won't be coming so soon.”⁵⁰ This short exchange is such a crucial moment in the narrative, it should be expanded: Nomberg frames this complex exchange as a rabbinic tale, within a Midrashic formula of *Midrash yelamdeinu*, a formula the sages used for their most enigmatic teachings.

The narrator takes this conversation as an emblem of betrayal: The Land of Israel is constructing a place which is by no means inclusive, in no way a place for the Jewish folk. If

⁵⁰: "דער פרעגער האָט געפרעגט "מעשה ילמדנו רבינו

ומה יהיה אם יבואו הנה ההמונים. הלא יביאו אתם את ה'זרגון' (און וואָס וועט זײַן, אויב די מאַסן וועלן אָהער קומען. זיי וועלן דאָך - מיטברענגען דעם "זשאַרגאָן"?)

אויף דערויף האָט בן-יהודה געענטפערט:

לצערנו ולשמחתנו לא כל-כך מהרה יבואו" (צו אונדער באַדויערן או צו אונזער פריינד וועלן זיי אזוי גיך נישט קומען)-

איך גיב איבער דאָס געשפרעך אויטענטיש, וואָרט בײַ וואָרט, אזוי ווי איך האָב געהערט, ווייל דער דערציילער האָט דאָס דערציילט מיט דער אייגנער פֿיעטעט און בעוואונדערונג p. 139.

offered a small Yishuv of Hebrew speakers or a ‘mass-Eretz-Yisroel’ where Yiddish is spoken, most Jews of Palestine would reject the latter, or so the portrayal of Ben Yehuda believes.⁵¹

Rejection of the language becomes a rejection of people, of *the* people. Under this understanding, all the previous instances discussed of Yiddish as a prevalent language of the land, the de facto language of Palestine, become even more charged than previously. From the bourgeoisie in Rishn le-tzien to the pioneers of the Galilee to the police force in Tel-Aviv, Yiddish is used in all walks of life. Throughout the narrative this contrast is heightened, the common languages of the land and, in this penultimate chapter, the ideological aspects of language choice and monolingualization which work in opposition to the lingual reality.

The disconcerting content of this exchange is bolstered by the form in which it is presented. Brackets play here, as before, a crucial role: the Yiddish is bracketed so as to provide translation for the Hebrew Ben Yehuda. The text uses Hebrew as the primary language, the authentic, and sets Yiddish to the confines of the brackets. This happened twice before: the Yiddish that the police officers speak was introduced through brackets – they speak Hebrew (and even better: Yiddish). And the most prominent example from earlier, the disambiguating brackets explaining that at the word “Yiddish” actually denotes “Hebraish,” thus translating an untranslatable word. All this comes to show how Nomberg uses brackets for language doubling, of Hebrew and Yiddish specifically, in the most fraught moments of the narrative. Here, Ben Yehuda chooses Hebrew over Jews, and Nomberg chooses not to choose, to provide both languages, though one is bracketed, limited by and through the words of Ben Yehuda. This is not

⁵¹ p. 140

merely a recreation of authentic speech, but a recreation of an authentic impulse of language separation and exclusion. As before, Nomburg uses brackets to translate.

The final chapter in Palestine, once again titled “Di algemeine un perzenlekhe Yidishe frage”, segues from the previous discussion and deals with the role the Land of Israel may play in the redemption of the individual Jew and the Jewish folk. As a summary of the travel to Israel, the chapter poses questions as to the possibilities this land holds. When it is all said and done, when the travel has been completed and the land scoured, what are the results? With language choice setting the tone, the narrator concludes that there is no hope for Jews in Palestine as a nation, but, at the same time, individuals may find individual redemption in this land, a personal solution for persons detached from the national agenda. Through language, the choice of land becomes a choice of exclusion, rather than inclusion. And still, the novel does not end in this dark state of affairs, but offers to find in Egypt a measure of redemption.

Land of the Dead

Contrary to the name of the novel, *Ertz yisroel eindruken un bilder* does not contain only pictures and impressions of the Land of Israel. As in the opening chapter, when the narrator arrives in Palestine via the Sinai Desert, the departure too is through Egypt. Yet, unlike the opening chapter, which is only a short introduction to the final steps into the Promised Land, echoing the route of the Israelites of old, the exit through Egypt is a prolonged and philosophical journey for the narrator. Three of the longer chapters of the book are devoted to Cairo and Alexandria, and the impressions these cities have on the narrator. And while the entrance through Egypt can be narratively reconciled as a story of redemptive homecoming and entry into a

promised land, the exit cannot be reconciled in the same manner. First, this is because the return to the land has a teleology that does not entail an ensuing exit. But more importantly, dovetailing on the musing of Palestine as a solution to a problem, a question which remains open, the sojourn in Egypt raises issues which are amplified by this context. And finally, ending the novel in Egypt encapsulates the visit to Palestine within an Egyptian frame, forming the Palestinian episode into just that, an episode, a narrative enclave.

In addition, Egypt serves as a framing feature for the novel in ways which allude to two historical periods, two defining experiences in Jewish history, distant and recent. While opening with Egypt and the entrance to the land of Israel is an uplifting narrative, albeit not without problems (as we have seen), the choice to leave the reader with a lasting image of Egypt works in different ways. First, if we imagine the novel's entry into Palestine from the Sinai Desert as marking the Israelites' similar route, a homecoming, then the exit to Egypt can be pegged as the same Israelites' flight to Egypt from the Land of Israel and their subsequent enslavement there. This reference places current day Palestine in an adventitious position, being not only a place of want, but also of freedom from servitude.

The other interpretation for the Egyptian exile is less favorable; during World War I many Jews who immigrated to Palestine from enemy countries were exiled by the Ottomans to Egypt so as to prevent the danger of a fifth pillar.⁵² Thus, by ending his travels to the *Yishuv* with a departure through Egypt, Nomberg calls upon a time of war, less than a decade earlier, when the *yishuv* was in real danger of existence and Jews who had just recently entered the land were

⁵² This historical episode is depicted in the novel: Devorah Baron. *Hagolim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1970).

forced out, exiled to Egypt. Both of these options mark the ending of the novel as linked to war and servitude, impeding Jewish settlement in Palestine/Israel.

Both these historical references noted, the most striking aspect of this ending are the narrator's thoughts during the Egyptian sojourn. The three-chapter trip takes the narrator through Alexandria, via train to Cairo with a trip to the Nile, and culminates with a visit to the National Museum in the capital. The final chapter ends with a long pensive reflection on mummies and Egyptian death culture. While the Palestinian part of the novel ended with a question, "Is the *yishuv* the answer to the problems of the Jews?", the novel itself ends with a brooding consideration of death:

The entire Egyptian culture is a grave culture. It is bound in the cult of the dead. It is a protest and an act against the creed.

[...]

The mummified Pharaoh, the emblem of his struggle against death, remains in Luxor. Only the belongings of the king, his living possessions, are in the Cairo museum. That is why the two rooms feel so airy and light.

It is far less strenuous like this. One can rest from the eternal struggle with death...⁵³

The land of Egypt, in this ending, is a land full of death, obsessed with it, obsessed with escaping it. Thus, even while living, the Egyptians are already dead-like, preparing and working against death. The narrator notes that, from the moment a Pharaoh is anointed, he begins to contemplate

די גאַנצע עגיפטישע קולטור איז אַ גרעבער-קולטור. זי האָט אַ שייכות מיט דעם קולט פאַר די מתים. זי איז אַ פּראָטעסט מיט טאַט קעגן דער ⁵³ פאַרניכטונג. [...]

אַבער טוטאַנקאַמענס מומיע, זיין מלחמה מיטן טויט, זענען געבליבן לעת-עתה אין לוקסאַר; דאָ אין קאַיִראַ ליגן דערווייל זיינע חפצים, זיינע "מענטשלעכע" זאַכן, און דעריבער פילט מען זיך אין די צוויי צימערן אזוי באקוועם און לייכט.

pp. 182-3... עס פּאָדערט ווייניקער אַנשטרענגונג. מען רוט-אויס פון דעם אייביקן קאַמף מיטן טויט

and plan his death, erecting the pyramid which will stave off death, even after it arrives. But, in the museum, surrounded by the belongings of the pharaoh, but without the mummified Tut to bring death into the building, the narrator can exhale for a moment from the death grip Egypt has on him, quite literally. The novel ends with rest, not eternal rest but an ellipsis, a momentary pause in the eternal struggle between life and death, between the weighty questions of home and exile.

And that is exactly the goal of this third Egyptian exile. The light and airy feeling the narrator experiences, the sensation of flotation that ends the novel contrasts the weighed down feeling of both Palestine and Poland. The Egyptian exile is mythic but irrelevant, it is only a third place, neither home nor exile, a place for meditation and silence. Standing amongst the silent remains of the Pharaoh, the narrative falls to silence, to no-language, leaving the struggle of language and territory for other spaces and other times. Egypt is the in-between space, and thus the in-between language space; neither Yiddish nor Hebrew govern it, but silence.

To come full circle, let us think back to the discussion of *Fliegelman*, where language difference was experienced through geographical displacement, travel prompting and accentuating a language breakdown. In that short story, the narrative ended in limbo, in a quasi-death and an uncertain future. But in language lies a key difference: the Yiddish text produced in 1924 remaps the multilingual within a monolingual text, this travel narrative toying with multilingualism. The potency of a writer writing mostly in Yiddish for sixteen years, yet steeped in multilingual sensibilities, cannot be underestimated. In some sense, the recovery of this strand of multilingualism is even more precious than in the bilingual *Fliegelman* due to the counter-intuitive formulation of bilingualism. The silent bilingualism reemerging from within.

Chapter Two: Aharon Reuveni and the Search for Monolingualism

Language, Passport and Borders

Aharon Reuveni (originally: שימשלביץ Shimshelevich) used his passport more than most do. This passport helped Reuveni on his long and tumultuous journey to Palestine, a journey that began in 1904, ranging from Russia through Chicago, Manchuria, China, and finally, to the shores of Jaffa in 1910. After arriving at the end of the journey, Reuveni, an orientalist by his own definition, continued to explore the Orient further, to venture across Africa from Palestine and all the way to the other coast of Africa, through Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. He was intent on taking this journey and reporting back, a crowd-funded anthro-oriental journey.¹ This journey was documented in a personal journal,² a text which tells the difficulty of border crossing. So, as an avid traveler, when Reuveni lost his passport some fifteen years later in 1932, he hurried to get a new one to replace the lost document.

¹ In order to fund this journey, Reuveni and his two companions sold postcards with their portraits and a request for funding in three languages: Hebrew, English and Arabic. Unfortunately, Reuveni did not make it across the continent, since he fell ill in Egypt where his journey ended.

² In Israel State Archive, Reuveni's Archive, Folder 2918, item 160.3/2-365.

This lost passport sparked a lengthy correspondence between Reuveni and British Mandatory officials, a correspondence which outlines a lingual drama that escalated rather quickly. In Reuveni's archive the first request for a new passport is missing, but the letter informing Reuveni that his new passport is ready is present.³ This letter could and *should* have ended the ordeal; Reuveni would take the letter, go to the local government office, and collect his passport, which he was eagerly awaiting. But there was one issue – the letter Reuveni received was in English. This was by no means an issue of language comprehension, for after all Reuveni spent time in the United States from 1904 to 1905, and had perfectly serviceable English. Rather, this was an issue of language politics; Reuveni replied angrily to this standard letter, writing to the head of the Mandatory Immigration Department that he would not accept any correspondence that was not in Hebrew, seeing as he was a *Jewish* citizen of Mandatory Palestine, and he had a right to be serviced in his own language.

The draft of the response letter, in which the writer demands service in Hebrew, demonstrates Reuveni's own lacking Hebrew: full of erasure, of phrasing and rephrasing and of grammatical mistakes and anachronisms, Reuveni is fighting for a language he himself has not (yet) mastered. In the letter Reuveni argues for a Jewish space that has lingual autonomy with *a* Jewish language, Hebrew. This response by Reuveni kicks off a lengthy back and forth, months long exchange, in which official letters in English arrive time and again to inform the author that his passport is ready for pickup to which Reuveni incessantly responds in Hebrew that he expects, no – *demands*, service in his own language, Hebrew. At some point the mandatory official warns Reuveni that the passport will not be available much longer and should be picked

³ In Gnazim, Reuveni's Archive, Folder 2205- letters to others. In the same folder there are many bank checks which Reuveni returns to sender since they were written in English and demands that even checks to him be addressed and made out in Hebrew.

up immediately, to which Reuveni responds, unfazed, that he expects service in Hebrew. Finally, after months, the mandatory clerk writes, under his Majesty's official letterhead, in Hebrew that the passport is ready for pickup.⁴ This ends the lingual showdown, a bureaucratic struggle with seemingly nothing at stake, in a decisive victory for Reuveni and for Hebrew.

29/9/32
משרד-אליה

לכבוד
מנהל משרד העלייה
ירושלים

א.נ.

מכתבך מס. R/6258
~~המכתב מס. R/6258~~

אני רואה מעשה שלטי-אורי ככסיה
שורה כופה את כל היהודים, המכתב מס. R/6258
לכתוב את הקולומביה האמריקאית בקו. ואני
~~כל-כך אני רואה צדו של הצדדים האחרים~~

המכתב מס. R/6258
קשרים לפרדסני ~~המכתב מס. R/6258~~ תצדדתי.

הודעתני כמקרה צדדתי ואני ברע
בשנת 14
משרד-אליה
לכבוד רך
א. ראוני

Figure 2: Draft of Letter by Reuveni to Mandatory Official, 1932 (Israel State archive)

⁴ Most of the correspondence is kept in Gnazim, Reuveni Archive, Folder 2205.

The fact that the writer was willing to go to such great lengths in this seemingly petty matter and even risk forfeiting the coveted passport, foreshadows much of the drama in the chapter to come; Reuveni fashions himself as a staunch Hebraist in a battle which is both internal and external, waging war against mandatory officials and at the same time against his own self, his multilingual self, the writer he once was and which he continues to be.

But this is not all the letter foretells; along with language hardships and, closely linked to them, is the matter of the colonial impulse; in Reuveni we have a writer, a Hebrew writer, appealing to the officer of an empire. The struggle here is multifaceted: Reuveni views the British official as a necessary evil, a placeholder until the rightful owners of the land, the Jews, can take control of it. In the meanwhile, Reuveni will accept the foreign rule, but only on his terms and in his language. As Liora Halperin put it, the relations between Hebrew and English in the *yishuv* when dealing with Mandate officials were complex, with bureaucratic independence and political subordination in balance: “Jewish culture under Mandate rule evolved at the intersection of ideological demands for purity and practical demands for compromise.”⁵ It is clear from the passport saga that Reuveni did not fall on the side of compromise in these negotiations and was solely on the side of lingual purity. Choosing Hebrew as a method, he fought for monolingualism as a site to solidify identity, his identity and that of the state to come. This letter is an act of resistance to a colonial powerhouse through language and writing. Yet, one must keep in mind the Jewish language which was supplanted, the one Reuveni does not mention. Reuveni fights for his right for lingual autonomy, for a sphere of Hebrew *monolingualism*, rejecting the English, but also suppressing the Yiddish, acting towards his own

⁵ Halperin, *Babel in Zion*, 104.

Yiddish as he accuses the English acts towards Hebrew.⁶ This chapter will show how these powerful acts of language domination and suppression subvert themselves and seldom materialize. Through the reading of Reuveni's magnum opus, the war trilogy *Ad Yerushalayim, To Jerusalem*, issues of language exclusivity and suppression will emerge, creating the power relations between Hebrew and Yiddish and the other languages orbiting these two.

A Hebraist, Sans Hebrew – The Life of Reuveni

Self-translation is an understudied field in Hebrew-Yiddish literature. And this is not to disparage the field of Jewish literature, for as Anthony Cordingley writes in the introduction to the only anthology of self-translation studies: “The self-translator has been a relatively neglected species within the menagerie of translators.”⁷ This within a field, translation studies, which has been on the rise for the past several decades. Still the self-translator is the less-discussed “species” in translation studies, and while this may be understandably true in many literatures, due to the rarity of the phenomenon, it seems that the case of Hebrew-Yiddish self-translation should be a more prominent field of study; In world literature the famous examples of self-translators are recycled in scholarship over and over: Samuel Becket, Rabindranath Tagore, Vladimir Nabokov are rightfully prime examples of this dynamic. The realm of self-translation of Hebrew-Yiddish provides us with a wealth of writers unparalleled in any Western literature,

⁶ There were of course many other languages circling in the space of the *yishuv*, amongst which are Arabic, German, French and many others. Yet, the focus here is the bureaucratic language of the colonizer, English, but more so, the struggle between the languages of Reuveni. For more on this see Halperin, *Babel*, as well as: Arie Saposnik. *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and: Yael Chaver. *What Must Be Forgotten: The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

⁷ Anthony Cordingley. *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture* (London: Continuum, 2013), 1.

and the theoretical value of self-translation is immense, for as Cordingley notes, this practice has the potential to upset many strongly held hierarchies: “The term ‘self-translation’ concentrates attention on the presence of the translator, and [...] on the various morphing of the self which occur not only in the act of translation but during the composition of its ‘original’.”⁸ This can explain the analytic difficulty of dealing with self-translation, since translation traditionally assumes two defined entities: author vs. translator, and original vs. translation. In the case of self-translation, the first entity is nonexistent and the second is often frail. But together with the difficulty, the collapse, or the merging, of these categories holds much promise, since it focuses on the murkiness and permeability of works which are produced by the same writer in multiple languages.

Along with the unsettling of the difference between *original* and *translation*, the act of self-translation can reshape the narrative itself: “The author who self translates [...] is inevitably conscious of both the hybridity of the culture(s) s/he is writing within and of her or his own writing. Equipped with expert competence in more than one language, moving freely between cultures.”⁹ The original text, if one can even be singled out as such, is always already hybrid, written and translated almost simultaneously, translation embedded in the act of writing, attaching it to more than one culture or even nation. Moreover, language figures many times as a theme in the narrative, and not only as an extraliterary effect. The subject of the text is often language tension itself.

In a recent study on what she dubs “born-translated” novels, Rebecca Walkowitz allows us to further consider the potential to decouple national culture and literature through a study

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 3

self-translation; in unhinging the hierarchy that seems to be implanted in the act of translation, Walkowitz offers to also rethink national allegiance: “The notion that a book could *begin* in several languages complicates traditional models of literary history and political community. Literary critics have to ask how the multilingualism of a book changes the national singularity of the work.”¹⁰ For a novel to begin in multiple languages unbinds a book from a specific culture and binds it with many, unbinds it from a particularity and gestures towards multiplicity. Even in the case of Hebrew-Yiddish self-translation, a horizontal translation,¹¹ one with much shared cultural assets and history, this decoupling is extremely powerful: in a time of a splintering of Jewish culture into a more segregated Yiddish and Hebrew literature, the notion of a born-translated novel turns back the tide on this seemingly inevitable outcome.

This macro-cultural gain, in somewhat decoupling nation and literature, is tertiary to Walkowitz’ argument. The core of her argument lies in the embeddedness of language-as-theme in the self-translated text: “Born-translated literature approaches translation as medium and origin rather than an afterthought. Translation is not secondary or incidental to these works. It is a condition of their production.”¹² Treating translation and self-translation as a chief factor in the production of the text diffuses makeshift hierarchies. Even more importantly, such an outlook on translation positions this act not only as a work of art unto itself but as an impactful part of the first written version, if one such version can even be delineated. Thus, when a self-translator such as Reuveni writes a first version, the translation is already part of the text. To continue with

¹⁰ Rebecca Walkowitz. *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 25. italics my own.

¹¹ On vertical vs. horizontal translation see: Sara Kippur. *Writing It Twice: Self-Translation and the Making of a World Literature in French* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 17-19.

¹² Walkowitz, *Born Translated*, 4.

Walkowitz: “In born-translated novels, translation functions as a thematic, structural, conceptual and sometimes even typographical device.”¹³ Translatability and the next version are part and parcel of all versions of the text, even the first written one. Translation is essential to the novel, not as a supplement or an add-on. The fabric of the novel is transformed with this concept of translation, the text is not translated – the text *is* translation.

But the instance of self-translation carries an acute danger with it; as Christopher Whyte argues when explaining why he prefers translating into Gaelic rather than from Gaelic, and condemns self-translations altogether, since self-translations “tend to support the assumption that, since we have the poet’s own translations, the originals can be dispensed with.”¹⁴ Therein lies the danger facing self-translators who work from marginal languages: by seeing their second text (chronologically speaking) granted the status of an entirely new creation, a ‘second original’, they run the risk of the original version being marginalized, disqualified or even effaced.¹⁵ In our case, a Hebrew version has taken on exclusivity as *the* original.

As we have seen in Nomborg’s case, his dynamics of self-translation were intricate and complex. But of the writers explored in my work, the concepts and practices of ‘born-translated’ present themselves most readily in the works of Aharon Reuveni and his war trilogy *Ad Yerushalayim*. When looking at Reuveni’s prose, I will not argue that his Hebrew writing is actually Yiddish in disguise, nor vice versa. I will, however, uncover the restlessness and political implications of multilingualism, of dual versions, of a ‘born-translated’ trilogy. *Ad*

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Rainier Grutman. "A Sociological Glance at Self-Translation (and Self-Translators)." In *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, edited by Anthony Cordingley. (London: Continuum, 2013), 70.

¹⁵ Ibid. 75.

Yerushalayim is a trilogy which is produced with reproduction in mind, with another version, perhaps no less original, always beside it, always already there.

Writing Yiddish, Publishing Hebrew

In his choice to translate at the point of literary inception, Reuveni takes a counterintuitive path; as we saw in the letter above, some twenty years after these novels, Reuveni's Hebrew is still full of erasure, revision and uncertainty. Practically, Reuveni had no business writing prose in Hebrew in the years following World War I. His Hebrew was not good enough to translate his own work, and he was assisted and spurred on by an array of translators, first and foremost Yosef Haim Brenner who functioned in the multiple role of booster, translator, editor and publisher, the last in his capacity as editor of *Ha-adama*, (The Soil), where the first part of the Hebrew trilogy was published.¹⁶

On July 2, 1919 Reuveni writes to Brenner that he has just completed *Di letzte shifen* (*The Last Ships* in Yiddish, what would become the second novel of the trilogy), and that he is translating it into Hebrew twice: on his own and in collaboration with Temkin.¹⁷ Reuveni asks Brenner to read the two translations and write back with his preference.¹⁸ This letter is followed by a letter from Brenner to the publisher, Shtibel, that: "Reuveni is writing a novel on life during the war in *Eretz Israel*... with known help he might be able to write it in Hebrew himself, meaning translate it himself, because he is slowly acquiring Hebrew."¹⁹ In his letter, Brenner

¹⁶ *Ha-adama*, vol. 1-2, (Tel Aviv: Ahdut, 1919).

¹⁷ Probably Mordechai Temkin, poet and translator.

¹⁸ In Gnazim, Folder 2204 - Reuveni's letters to others.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

conflates writing and translating. The story of this novel, and translation, become extremely intricate; according to Brenner, this is a novel that was never really meant to be published in Yiddish. A collaboration of writing, rewriting and translation turns the Yiddish novels into Hebrew publications.

Reuveni sent these letters to Brenner as a friend, but also as his first publisher, since Brenner collaborated in the translation, edited and published the first novel, *Be-rayshet ha-mevukhah* (When Confusion Began). Reuveni was thus writing to Brenner as the potential publisher of the next novels, *Ha-oniyot ha-akhronot* (The Last Ships) and *Shamot* (Devastation), a hope which did not materialize. Reuveni ended up publishing the next two parts of the trilogy with the Warsaw based Shtibel Publishing House in 1923 and 1925.²⁰ From the moment these were published and to the day he died, some fifty years later, Reuveni was on a crusade to publish the novels in a single-volume collected trilogy. This happened twice: once in Reuveni's lifetime, in 1953, and once posthumously, in 1987, almost twenty years after his passing. In the interims, the trilogy was published time and again piecemeal, between the first publication in 1919 and the final one just this year. This fact attests not only to the lasting cultural power these novels had, but also to publication hardships from day one; publishers were reluctant to publish the whole trilogy, and Reuveni had to offer time and again to pay part of the publishing costs. Finally, in 1953 he was able to persuade the small Jerusalem based publisher, M. Nyumen, to publish the trilogy, an endeavor Reuveni partially financed.

Even when the parts of the trilogy were published, the reception was scant to non-existent. In Reuveni's archive in Jerusalem there is a newspaper clipping from a Shanghai-based

²⁰ Aharon Reuveni, *Ha-oniyot ha-akhronot* (Warsaw: Shtibel, 1923). Aharon Reuveni, *Shamot* (Warsaw: Shtibel, 1925).

Jewish newspaper. This clipping is of a review of a book by Reuveni, sent to Reuveni by one of his publishers, Reuven Mass. In a note attached to the newspaper clipping, the publisher prods Reuveni to see the absurdity of the fact that his writing is reviewed in Shanghai but not in a local newspaper such as *Ha'arets*.²¹ This letter by a frustrated publisher was important enough for Reuveni to keep in his archive and serves as a reminder of the dismay both the writer and publisher(s) felt with the critical and consumer disregard Reuveni's work received for decades. Also, this letter offers an explanation as to why publishers were reluctant to publish the whole trilogy, some 450 pages long, when the viability of the project was questionable.

So, between 1919 and 1987, the novels which comprise the trilogy were published many times in Hebrew: in 1919-20, the first novel is published in *Ha-adama*. In 1923, 1925, the next two are published in *Shtibel*. In 1932, the first novel is republished with *Amanot* publishers. In 1953, the whole trilogy is published by *M. Nyuman*. In 1968, the first two novels are published under the name *Al Yerushalayim* (Onto Jerusalem) by *Reuven Mass* publishers. 1969 saw the publication of the third part by *Am-oved*, subsequent editions of all three, but still not what Reuveni was hoping for.

Once again, these repeated Hebrew publications are not the obvious choice for the trilogy. This choice, to publish in a language which Reuveni had not yet mastered at the time, and to present the trilogy as one which is Hebrew through and through is a choice which is laden with national implications, as Reuveni is convinced to take part in a project of cultural renewal, in Hebrew, in Palestine. Prima facie, it seems that at least at the time, Reuveni viewed this project as being at odds with Yiddish language writing and publishing.

²¹ The letter is in the National Archive in Jerusalem, canister 2906, dated 2/17/1941.

And then, finally, after some forty years, came the Yiddish. In 1963, the New York-based publisher *Der kval* published a Yiddish novel by Reuveni. *Yerusholayim in shoten fun shverd* (Jerusalem in the Shadow of the Sword) is a version of the third part of the *Ad Yerushalayim* trilogy. This belated Yiddish version, the only non-manuscript Yiddish version, raises serious questions regarding original and translation. In the afterword to this 1963 edition, publisher Israel London provides a short epilogue, *Etlekhe verter*, in which London announces that it is with the greatest of pleasures that *Der kval* publishes this novel, for it will allow the Yiddish reader to be better acquainted with Hebrew literature, thus reviving the saying by the critic Baal Makshoves, albeit in reverse: “To enrich Yiddish literature and make whole once again the important proclamation by Baal Makshoves: one literature – two languages.”²² Of course, this reversal of the very well-known statement by Baal makshoves is no slip of the tongue(s). The world of Jewish literature in 1963 was in no way one, and *Ad Yerushalayim/Yerusholayim in shoten fun shverd* is a prime example of the forces of demarcation. The short afterword commends Reuveni for his beautiful idiomatic Yiddish which tells the story in a way which is relatable to the Yiddish reading public.²³ This last comment comes to reinforce what a New York reader of Hebrew literature in Yiddish translation might feel, hedging against a suspicion towards this translation when much original Yiddish prose is being published daily in New York, the world capital of Yiddish literature. But what this story omits, is that the relationship here to the authentic, idiomatic, original is not that simple, and that this is more than a contemporary translation from Hebrew literature into Yiddish.

²² באַרייַכערן דעם אוצר פון דער יידישער ליטעראַטור און געבן אַ תיקון דער באַרייַמטער לאַזונג פון בעל מחשבותן: איין ליטעראַטור – צוויי באַרייַכערן דעם אוצר פון דער יידישער ליטעראַטור און געבן אַ תיקון דער באַרייַמטער לאַזונג פון בעל מחשבותן: איין ליטעראַטור – צוויי לשונות. *Yerusholayim in shoten fun shverd*. (New-York: Der kval, 1963), 223.

²³ *Ibid*, 225.

There is also the questionable choice to present the Yiddish reader with but one of the three novels that comprise the Hebrew trilogy; this was by no means Reuveni's choice. Contrary to previous accounts, archival work shows that, from as early as 1925, Reuveni asks his brother, the future president of the State of Israel, Yitzchak Ben-Zvi, to help him serialize his novel *Shamot* in the Yiddish press. Reuveni asks Ben-Zvi, who is on a diplomatic journey to the United States, to get in touch with three major Yiddish periodicals, *The Forverts*, *Der Tog* and the *Morgen Zshornal*, and to see if any of these papers would publish the Yiddish version. Earlier that month, Reuveni also sent Ben-Zvi a short Yiddish reportage from Palestine, asking him to apply on his behalf to be the correspondent to Palestine for the *Forverts*.²⁴ All this goes to show that, in 1925, just after the completion of the trilogy with the publication of the third novel in Hebrew, when his façade of Hebraism was at full force, Reuveni was actively pursuing Yiddish publication and not staunchly objecting to it as commonly believed. Alas, the partial Yiddish publication would have to wait for decades, but not for lack of effort by Reuveni.

The Sisyphean struggle for publication in either Jewish language is well documented in Reuveni's archive: only a third of the Yiddish trilogy was ever published, and even the Hebrew version took some time to appear in one collected volume. These trials and tribulations of publishing in both languages have many reasons. In the following reading of the novels, I will deal with what I view as a key factor in this ambivalence: the lingual malleability and tensions the trilogy puts forth. Mastery of language and narrative are the key here, since the trilogy is already fraught with language pressures, always in competition with another version, another original, one which is to come, or one which has been discarded. This unique state of lingual

²⁴ In Gnazim, Letters to Family Members, Folder -א"ב1643.

affairs is what primes Reuveni and *Ad Yerushalayim* to be a stand-out text through which to discuss self-translation in Hebrew-Yiddish literature.

***Ad Yerushalayim* – Language Failure Embodied in a Trilogy**

To contextualize the reading I offer of the trilogy, it helps to look at previous scholarly attention it received and the biases thereof; what is most striking is the fact that all previous scholarship is quite clearly demarcated along language borders between a Hebrew and a Yiddish Reuveni.²⁵ Even the most comprehensive study of Reuveni, a monograph by Yigal Schwartz, states that Reuveni was in fact a bilingual writer, but the discussion ends there: “This is for another research project to discuss.”²⁶ Thus, with a one-liner disclaimer, Schwartz sidetracks what I will argue is not an isolated part of Reuveni’s art, which can be compartmentalized. Rather, the bilingualism and practices of self-translation must be central to the scholarship of Reuveni, not only for the contribution to the scholarship of his own prose, but for what it offers the field of Jewish bilingualism.

Be-rayshet ha-mevukhah (When Confusion Began), *Ha-oniyot ha-akhronot* (The Last Ships), and *Shamot* (Devastation), the three novels comprising *Ad Yerushalayim*, are different in

²⁵ In this the main sources are Yigal Schwartz and Arye Pilowsky, scholars of Hebrew and Yiddish literature respectively, both of whom wrote extensively on Reuveni from their dissertations and on. See: Arye Pilowsky. *Tsvishn yo un neyn: yidish un yidish-liṭeratur in erts-yisroel, 1907-1948* (Tel-Aviv: World Council for Yiddish and Jewish Culture, 1986). Arye Pilowsky. *Aharon Reuveni - gezamlte dertseylungen*. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991). Yigal Schwartz. *Lekhyot kedai lekhyot*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993). Yigal Schwartz. *Aharon Reuveni: mivhar maamre bikoret al yetsirato*. (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meuhad, 1992).

²⁶ Schwartz, *Lekhyot kedai lekhyot*, 7.

form, pace, and protagonists.²⁷ Yet together, the three comprise a sprawling narrative which aims to portray the complexity of Jewish life in Palestine during World War I, producing an ambitious narrative unlike any written before or even after in Hebrew literature. *Be-rayshet ha-mevukhah* focuses on the accountant Aharon Zifrovitz who works for a Hebrew newspaper in Jerusalem, and portrays the collapse of his life in Palestine, ending with him leaving the country. In *Ha-oniyot ha-akhronot*, which opens following Zifrovitz' departure from Palestine, the trilogy shifts to focus on Gedalyah Berenchuk, a writer at the same newspaper, thus maintaining the flow of the narrative, even though Zifrovitz has departed. Berenchuk, like Zifrovitz, attempts to leave Palestine, but ultimately fails, the novel ending with this failed flight. *Shamot*, the final novel in the trilogy, focuses on yet another protagonist, Meir Funk, a young carpenter who fought locust attacks alongside Berenchuk, once again linking characters while shifting focus. This novel too ends in failure, with Funk committing suicide. *Ad Yerushalayim* is a trilogy of failures and hardship, linked by contiguity of characters, place, and time, but also, and more so, by language failure and tension.

From the outset, the novels center on language and lingual pressures. As novels set in a time of war, languages are coupled with national allegiance, pitted against each other, indicative of loyalties and animosity. With the threat of enemy invasion and of collaborators, national fidelity is tested and portrayed through language use, amongst other factors. This historical setting makes lingual pressures which are normally swept under the rug into more overt clashes, a contentious theme within the novels. In the seventh chapter of the first novel, Zifrovitz and a

²⁷ This is also noted by Philip Hollander, who once again treats the trilogy as a work of Hebrew literature through and through. See: Philip Hollander. "Rereading "Decadent" Palestinian Hebrew Literature: The Intersection of Zionism, Masculinity, and Sexuality in Aharon Reuveni's 'Ad Yerushalayim.'" *AJS Review* 39, no. 1 (2015): 3-26.

coworker, Nehemiah, are standing outside their office building when a messenger walks down the street, announcing a lockdown:

‘A herald!’ explained Nehemiah [...] ‘He’s announcing that it is forbidden to go outside after dark, time of war he says, so no one is allowed out from sunset until the break of dawn... here, listen!’

The gruff voice of the herald reached Zifrovitz’ ears, sounding unclear words – a flood of strange screams and guttural sounds. Finally, he noticed a refrain:

“Damo phi raso!.. Damo phi raso!..”

‘You hear?’ a smile came onto Nehemiah’s pale lips. ‘That means: anyone who transgresses the order will be killed... Damo phi raso!’

‘What do the words mean?’

‘As in Hebrew²⁸: His blood is in his head.’

Zifrovitz hurried on before sunset. He lay awake in bed for a while without putting the light on. His gaze wandered around the shadowy air of the dimming room. The words of the herald were still ringing in his ears: ‘Damo phi raso!’ at times the sounds were distant and faint, at times near and threatening to deafen him. In his imagination he saw a flock of savages, ancient cave dwellers, millennia old, with stone axes in hand – cowering around a sinner, swinging their axes. And then, with the blood bursting from the shattered skull, the scream came out of their throats for the first time: ‘his blood is in his head!’²⁹

²⁸ There is a crucial discrepancy here between the first Hebrew version, which appeared in *Ha'adama* in 1920, and the subsequent versions. While the later versions use the word ‘*Ivrit*’ as the parallel to the Arabic, the 1920 version is different. In the first version, Reuveni uses the term ‘*Loshn koydesh*’ or holy tongue, which is the Yiddish language term for Hebrew. This term leaves a stronger residue of Yiddish in the Hebrew text and suggests that the language being spoken by the characters is not Hebrew. This term also reaffirms the non-idiomatic Hebrew 1920-Reuveni had.

²⁹ "כרוז!" הסביר נחמיה, המסדר הראשי, לרואה-החשבונו, "מכריז על איסור להתהלך בלילה בחוצות העיר, זמן מלחמה עתה, הוא אומר, " שמע ולכן אל יעז איש להיראות ברחוב מבוא השמש ועד עלות עמוד השחר.. הנה, שמע

לאוזני ציפוביץ הגיע עוד פעם קולו הניחר של הכרוז, המשמיע מילים לא-מובנות – שטף צלילים גרוניים וצריחות משונות. לסוף הבחין פזמון שהלך וחזר:

"דמו פי ראסו!.. דמו פי ראסו!"

"שמע?" על שפתיו החיוורות של נחמיה ריחף גיחוך. "הווה אומר: כל מי שיעבור על הפקודה חייב מיתה... דמו פי ראסו!"

"מה פירוש המילים?"

"כמו בעברית: דמו בראשו!"

This foray into language is a fascinating gateway into the world of the novel and its preoccupation with language and nativeness. Zifrovitz' atavistic vision is a manifestation of the biblical idiom: "His blood shall be upon his own head."³⁰ Originally, this is a prophetic saying, one which turns the protagonist here into a seer: Zifrovitz imagines a barbaric tribe, killing a man and for the first time realizing that the blood of a human is located in the head, gasping as one at this revelation. Yet as we know, this is an over-literalization of the idiom, which means, as the herald here in the novel intended, that a certain action would leave an individual responsible for their own death. In this case, leaving a residence after dark could result in injury or death with no fault to the shooter.

But Zifrovitz, for all intents and purposes an intelligent person, reverts away from the meaning of the idiom to an imagination of the way this saying came into being. This origin story of an expression, a lingual origin story, is sparked through foreignness, through Arabic. The foreign language, plausibly foreign to both reader and character, awakens within Zifrovitz a dormant vision, one that has to do with the formation of language. Embedded in this vision is a belief that the connection between signifier and signified is not arbitrary but rather essential, stemming from a primal experience, joint and tribal, and seeping through language into society as a whole.

ציפרוביץ מיהר לבוא הביתה לפני שקיעת החמה. שעה ארוכה שכב במיטתו בלי להדליק את המנורה. מבטו תעה בחלל האוויר האפל, ההולך ומחשיך. באוזניו עוד צלצלו קריאותיו המשוונות של הכרוז: "דמו פי ראסו!" פעם התרחקו הלוך והרחק, הלוך ונדום, פעם שבו והתקרבו והחרישו את שתי אוזניו. בדימונו ראה להקת פראים, שוכני מערות קדמונים, מלפני אלפי שנים, בידיהם קרדומי אבן – הם נדחקים מסביב לחוטא, מניפים עליו את קרדומיהם. ואז, עם זרם הדם שפרץ מהגולגולת הנבקעה, פרצה מגרונם בפעם הראשונה הקריאה הנוראה הזאת: דמו לבראשו! Aharon Reuveni. *Ad Yerushalayim*. (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meuhad, 1987), 53-4. All quotes from the Hebrew are from this edition, unless noted otherwise.

³⁰ Ezekiel 33:4.

This misconception is fascinating, since what triggers it is the guttural Arabic speech of the Ottoman herald. The text does not translate the Arabic, leaving both the reader and Zifrovitz in disarray, awaiting the translation that eventually comes from Nehemiah, comforting Zifrovitz that ‘Damo phi raso’ is ‘Just like in Hebrew’. Yet it clearly is not ‘just like’, not only since it is a different language, but also since it subsequently triggers Zifrovitz into the primal vision. This vision tries to make sense of the literality of blood in one’s head, a literal meaning that never occurred to Zifrovitz in all the years he has used this saying in Hebrew. This is an act of translation which aims at being *just like* an original, and failing at that.

The narrative shifts in this moment away from the pragmatic and towards the semantic,³¹ a shift which is not beneficial for the use of language but tells something about the cultural biases of the ‘other’ language. War is, by definition, a time of heightened national tension, where the foreign is ever more uncanny and threatening. Quite literally, the domestic is under attack by the foreign in a time of war. When the herald warns all not to leave home after dark, for their own safety, he awakens in Zifrovitz not a feeling of safety, but of greater fear, a primal fear. Since Zifrovitz cannot understand what is being said, the act of translation is necessary. In turn, this translation awakens in Zifrovitz a primal scene, one which never existed, a return to the origins of language. This is, de facto, an instance of failed translation, of false autochthony.³²

³¹ For a distinction between the pragmatic and semantic level of language see: Borochofsky-Bar Aba, Esther. *Ha-ivrit Ha-meduberet: Peraqim be-mehkara, be-tahbirah u-ve-darkhey haba’atah*. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2010).

³² It is not farfetched to imagine that Reuveni was inspired here by Freud and namely his seminal 1915 paper “Thoughts for Times of War and Death.” In this paper, Freud ties together times of war with primal scenes and urges. The wartime scene with Zifrovitz and the primal killing seems to have been inspired by this text. For more see: Sigmund Freud, “Thoughts for Times of War and Death”, in: Freud, Sigmund, James Strachey, and Anna Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 275-300.

This example of uncanny language and failed interpretation is but one in a trilogy rife with lingual tension, multiplicity and failure. This use of the Arabic is as an emblem of foreignness, depicting a language which is alien and thus, threatening. As such, the Arabic is at once a local indigenous language, but also a stand-in for the other unspoken and erased language, the Yiddish. This claim is further clarified in the next example; Zifrovitz, as mentioned above, will not remain in Palestine. As the first part of the trilogy comes to an end, Zifrovitz is quarantined in the Port of Jaffa, awaiting deportation. This is a blissful deportation for him; a decision by the Ottoman authorities to exile him from the Land of Israel means that Zifrovitz can maintain his passive indecision, allowing failure to come almost despite himself. But Chaim Ram, a Zionist bureaucrat, is determined to free Zifrovitz and fight this failure to settle in the Land of Israel. Upon entering the port Ram sees a strange sight:

By the wall, he saw a row of Arab scribes, writing pleas while seated on rickety stools. A tall supervisor, cloaked in a black and white striped robe which looked like a Jewish prayer shawl, craned over the shoulder of one writer and followed the blunt pen as it whisked across the sheet of paper. Immediately, the expert writer paused, and read what he just wrote, muttering:

“No, not like that...”

And with one swift lick – his tongue swiped all the words off the page, from top to bottom. He then calmly spat on the ground, and resumed writing on the same piece of paper.

Haim Ram chuckled at this sight and moved on.³³

סמוך לקיר, ישבו ערבים כותבי-בקשות על ספסלים נמוכים קלועים מזרדים גסים. פלח גבוה, עטוף עבאיה רחבה, פסיה שחורים ולבנים כפסי טלית, התכופף מעל לכתף הכותב ועקב בעיניו אחרי עטו קהה-החרטום, שרץ במהירות על הנייר המונח על כף ידו השמאלית. המומחה לבקשות עמד פתאום מכתוב, קרא את הכתוב והפליט בקצרה:

"...לא, לא כך"

ובתנועת לשון אחת מהירה – מלמטה למעלה – ליקק מהנייר את כל הכתוב עליו. אחר כך ירק על הרצפה בשיוויון-נפש, ושב וכתב את הבקשה על אותו הגיליון עצמו.

חיים רם הצטחק אגב הליכה ועבר לדרכו p. 113

Once again, we have a moment of language coupled with a peculiar event. The scene here is set in a common Middle Eastern setting: when dealing with the government many people are in need of a scribe due to limitations of literacy, whether in general, or in legal and local language. Here we have scribes writing Arabic for those who are unable to do so. This technical work is supervised so as not to produce mistakes. This is the exact moment, the moment of supervision, where the scene gets interesting: the supervisor reviews the text over the scribe's shoulder, cloaked in what the narrator notes looks like a Jewish prayer shawl. The supervisor need not say a thing, and in fact he does not. The gaze is more than enough to rattle the scribe; he pauses, erases, and begins to write again.

The act of erasure here is perhaps the most peculiar; to have the scribe erase with the tongue, by licking the page, is a very deliberate choice by Reuveni. This near-ingestion by the writer, the momentary internalization of the writing and the subsequent spittle that rejects it, is multifaceted. The visceral act of erasure calls to mind the age-old custom of teaching young Jewish children the alphabet: in traditional Jewish schools, in the *Kheyder*, teachers would write the letters of the alphabet on a piece of paper using honey as ink.³⁴ The young students would then be instructed to lick these letters off the page, reveling in the sweetness of the alphabet. This is an ingestion of the alphabet that is meant to endear it to the students, while also incorporating

³⁴ For a discussion of this ancient custom, which is traced back to the 17th century but has biblical roots see: Goldberg, Harvey, "Torah and children: some symbolic aspects of the reproduction of Jews and Judaism", in: Goldberg, Harvey, *Judaism Viewed from within and from Without: Anthropological Studies*. (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987), 107-130, mainly 114-5.

it into their literal body. The fact that, in the scene before us, the supervisor is wearing a robe which Ram sees as resembling a Jewish prayer shawl only amplifies this connection.³⁵

Yet, and this is crucial, the scribe here does not lick the page for enjoyment and learning, but rather as an attempt to erase and dismiss what he has written. He does not swallow the sweet Hebrew letters, but rather spits out the Arabic. The erasure-by-tongue comes to answer an unspoken demand by the authority to right a wrong, to write better. This whole scene is a moment describing language deficiency and failure; one needs a scribe only when one does not know a language. Moreover, a scribe may also make a mistake, needing to rewrite what he has written. The supervisor does not have to say *a* word, silence is key here. The supervision here turns, in a flash, into self-supervision.³⁶ The gaze is enough to cause erasure. The internal supervision causes the scribe to rewrite, to erase with his mouth. This is a moment where the lingual veers towards the biopolitical, as the word ‘tongue’ in the text is doubled: a language and an organ, a mode of communication and a vehicle thereof, at once both producing language and erasing it. There ensues an internal struggle between the production of text and the curbing thereof.

In some sense, this trilogy is just like this once erased and rewritten plea. *Ad Yerushalayim* as a palimpsest, written and rewritten on the same exact pages, telling the same tale, but in a different language. The first version is, in some senses, ideological and other,

³⁵ This scene too echoes a scene from the book of Ezekiel, once again, in which the prophet swallows a scroll and ingests its language of mourning (Ezekiel Ch. 1-2). After an allusion to the prophet once before it seems that the biblical reference to this specific prophet is quite deliberate.

³⁶ This is the exact same move from punishment to supervision Foucault formulates convincingly in: Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011). Here, the need to rewrite is not even commented on by the supervisor, and surly not punished by him, this is an internalized process, for the scribe and for Reuveni himself.

deficient, and needs to be rewritten, revised. Like these pleas, the rewriting comes to appeal to an authority, to a more or less amorphous authority of Hebraism, internal and external for Reuveni. Again, this struggle is taking place within a scene on the cusp of deportation. The stakes here are none less than the ability to be in the land, to pass a test of language that grants entry, or permission to stay, in Palestine. A test that fails with the deportation of Zifrovitz.³⁷

These two examples from the first of the three novels deal with Arabic as the other language, the language of the indigenous—original language, if you will. I view this use of Arabic as a surrogate for the Yiddish. When writing the original Yiddish novels, Reuveni already had in mind the fact that he would first publish them in Hebrew, and only later, if at all, in Yiddish.³⁸ Thus, Arabic is the trace of the original language that gets usurped by another language. Additionally, in the Yiddish original it would make little sense to have, in the Yiddish text, an opposition between Hebrew and Yiddish, and the language tensions, readily cognizant to the self-translating Reuveni, emerged primarily through the use of the Arabic. This move to Arabic is a displacement of a language conflict, a conflict between his Hebrew and Yiddish writing that directed Reuveni's publishing and translation practices.

That being said, there are many languages and lingual movements that leave traces in the narrative, and naturally Yiddish is one of them. In moving to the second novel, *Ha-oniyot ha-akhronot*, I focus on what becomes a more prominent lingual dichotomy, that of Yiddish and

³⁷ One may see here an allusion to the biblical story of the Ephraimites and the language test they were given. Jacques Derrida, in reading Paul Celan, points to the duplicity of this ultimate language test: The 'no passage' as a roadblock or as a dead end with no escape. For more see: Jacques Derrida. "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan." In *Sovereignities in Question the Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 1-64, mainly pp. 30-43.

³⁸ This is clear from the aforementioned correspondence Reuveni had with various publishers, amongst them Brenner, Shtibel, etc.

Hebrew. This shift in language comes along with the change in characters; *Ha-oniyot ha-akhronot* focuses on Gedalyah Berenchuk, a writer. Now that Zifrovitz is no longer in Palestine, the narrative shifts to a colleague at the newspaper, not an accountant like Zifrovitz, but rather a man of words, whose occupation is the production of language. The newspaper, *Ha-derekh* (The path), is a Zionist newspaper, yet the narrative never attempts to clarify in which language it is written and published, an obfuscation laden with meaning in the context of a bilingual novel. Whichever language it may be, Berenchuk is a staff writer for *Ha-derekh* but also writes for many periodicals outside of Palestine; at one point in the novel Berenchuk goes to the post office to collect a check which arrived for the publication of a short Yiddish story in *Di zukunft*.³⁹ Alongside his writing in different periodicals, Yiddish and possibly Hebrew, he is hard at work on a tetralogy.⁴⁰ This magnum opus is proving to be more than Berenchuk can handle, and becomes the cross he bears for most of the novel, fighting writer's block as well as other, more mundane afflictions, which plague his writing. As the novel progresses, Berenchuk oscillates in his aspirations, turning the novel quartet into a pair, and even a single novel, before reverting to his original lofty intentions.

For most of these literary dilemmas Berenchuk has a close friend as a sounding board: a writer turned bank clerk, named Anselmus Meir. When first introduced to Meir, Berenchuk is told that he is a Viennese friend who: "Once wrote '*Letters from Vienna*' in the '*Yiddisher*

³⁹ p. 132. Unlike *Ha-derekh*, which is a fictional publication, a Yiddish periodical by the name *Di zukunft* (The Future) did in fact exist. The New York based Yiddish monthly, published starting in 1892, was a platform for innovative Yiddish prose alongside socialist political thought.

⁴⁰ As we will see later, this is a clear gesture by Reuveni to his own original goals in writing this trilogy. Up until a certain point in the writing of the trilogy, he intended for it to span six novels. Likewise, this is a motion to Dov Kimkhi, Reuveni's friend and contemporary, who also tried, and failed to write a trilogy at the time.

arbeyter' under the pen-name 'Meir Anshel'.⁴¹ This double-named writer is also, like Berenchuk, a double-language writer, seemingly writing in both Yiddish and German, while Berenchuk writes in both Hebrew and Yiddish. The option of monolingualism in the trilogy is almost nonexistent, or at least quaint, as the trilogy presents a writer who has a lingual alter ego, a writer who pens prose in more than one language.

In fact, Anselmus Meir is a perfect match for Berenchuk, because like him he is a frustrated writer, frustrated both by an inability to write, as well as by language choices. Though he is a bank official, Meir longs for a different life:

In the bank, by his desk, Anselmus Meir felt like a caged bird. He longed for the city streets. He belonged where people spoke, and he *was* there, and even if he wasn't now, he would soon be, one had to hope. In his short time in Jerusalem his Viennese-German has Judaized dramatically. The truth is this was no longer German, but old Galician-Yiddish⁴², the language-his-parents-spoke-in-his-childhood, resurrected in his soul. And into his supple curvy language which he spoke since he could remember himself, were wedged, as spokes into a tree trunk, Litvak sayings and intonations he absorbed here in Jerusalem. The letters and articles he once sent from Vienna to the '*Yiddisher arbyter*' were written in German, and the editors translated them. Now, he thought, he himself could have written them, in Yiddish. At the same time, he studied Hebrew. He couldn't stand to be with people and not understand what they are saying, what they are doing. He could not refrain from reading the daily newspapers.⁴³

⁴¹ p. 126. Two real life writers who seem to have inspired the character of Meir are Melech Ravitch and Zrubavel (pseudonym of Yaakov Vitkin). Both writers share much with the character of Meir. That said, I find that, like many protagonists in the trilogy, Meir too has similarities to Reuveni himself, namely in his lingual malleability and anxiety.

⁴² The Hebrew uses the phrase 'Galician-Jewish', יהודית-גליציאית, a term which is problematic to translate due to the conflation of Yiddish and Jewish. In this context it is quite clear the meaning is the Yiddish language, and that makes Reuveni's choice to use the term 'Yehudit' all the more pointed.

⁴³ בבנק, על-יד שולחן כתיבתו, הרגיש עצמו אנזלמוס מיאר כציפור כלואה בכלוב. נפשו שאפה לרחוב. במקום שהתאספו משוחחים, שם היה גם מקומו, ושם באמת נמצא, ואם לא נמצא באותה שעה, צריך היה לשער, כי עוד מעט ויימצא. בזמן הקצר של ישיבתו בירושלים התייחדה הרבה לשונו הגרמנית הווינאית. לאמיתו של דבר לא הייתה זו עוד גרמנית כי אם יהודית-גליציאית ישנה, שפת הוריו-מימי-ילדותו הנשכחה, שקמה לתחייה בנפשו. ולתוך השפה הרכה והעגולה, בה דיבר בשחר ימיו, נדחקו, כיתדות קשות וחדות לתוך גזע-עץ, פתגמים ומבטאים ליטאיים, שכבר הספיק לקלטם בירושלים. המכתבים והרשימות שהיה שולח לפנים מווינה על ה"ידישער ארבייטער" היו כתובים גרמנית –

This is a fascinatingly dense paragraph; in this passage what become dominant are the numerous languages circulating in the city of Jerusalem and also the languages circulating within Meir. In the description of Meir, the narrator focuses on his language dilemmas and hardships; Meir wishes to be immersed in speech, where people talk, and not in an office, in silence. And what speech is this? Presumably Hebrew, the language of the land, the language Meir is only now acquiring. This acquisition of Hebrew is only the last in a trinity, highlighting the Yiddish-German dialectic. In this pair, a telling dynamic surfaces. We find out that Meir was raised in Germany, and that his parents spoke in his presence a language of their own, Yiddish. This same Yiddish is now invading his German, Judaizing it. This is not an easy transition; the Jerusalem-Yiddish is corrupting two languages Meir loves: his German, as well as his *mama loshn*, turning his soft Galician-Yiddish into a hardened Litvak one. So much so that Meir could write Yiddish now, instead of German; somehow the spoken language of his youth is now turning into a hardened written one, crossing the boundaries of idiomatic speech into a more rigorous written form, if only potentially. In short: Meir wants to learn Hebrew, a spoken language which is not actually spoken. The spoken language of the land, Litvak-Yiddish, somehow seeps into his writing, allowing him the ability to write Yiddish he previously did not have. And his *mame loshn*, a different Yiddish, is all but lost, between the new written and spoken Yiddish he acquires by osmosis in the Land of Israel. Yiddish is acquired naturally, while one must learn Hebrew formally, since it is absent from the public sphere.

במערכת תרגמו אותם. ועתה, נדמה לו, היה יכול לכתבם, הוא עצמו, אידית. בו בזמן שקד על לימוד השפה העברית. אי-אפשר היה לו שלא במערכת תרגמו אותם. p. 129. להיות עם אנשים ולא לדעת מה הם אומרים ועושים. אי-אפשר היה לו שלא לקרוא כל יום עיתוני-היום

The ability to translate from German to Yiddish is an important part of the passage; the reader of the *Yiddisher arbiter*, a left-leaning Polish newspaper, could not have known that the Yiddish writings from Vienna were in fact translations from the German. The seamless translation is one which beckons comparison to the trilogy itself, but one does not have to go that far. The fact that Meir is longing for the outdoors where speech is present, but then laments the Yiddish speech which penetrates and substitutes his German is paramount. He wants to be part of a conversation, of daily life, but daily life is occurring in a language dangerously close to his native German. The Yiddish of Palestine is detrimental to his ability to actually be *in* Palestine. He wants to learn Hebrew which is the perceived language of land, but, at the same time, wants no part of the Litvak-Yiddish which is the actual language of speech in Palestine. And all the time we have the knowledge that Yiddish for him was a written language, overtly, through a covert act of translation from the German. Thus, the practical language of Palestine is once again set on a lower rank than the languages of text, be they German or Hebrew. The written word is becoming a façade, a cover up, for an unwanted native language.

The daily use of Yiddish summons comical incidents for both Berenchuk and Meir; the latter frequents Shneypevski Hotel, which has become the unofficial headquarters of the Zionist Party now that many of the offices have been shut down by Ottoman authorities. One time, upon entering the hotel's lobby, Meir notices the famous Zionist speaker, Khaykes, playing cards:

[Khaykes was] a good-looking Jew, tall, with broad shoulders, a Herzl-beard as black as night and gleaming reddish eyes like those of a bull. He played cards with one of his friends, a bureaucrat. Meir noticed the bulging red lips, meaty cheeks, like those of a Greek priest, and his thick nose. His whole body dispensed an odor of fleshy health. He shuffled the cards:

Vos iz yontef?

Eichel!

Tzhen shel!

A yungel!⁴⁴

The lobby was empty. Meir sat in the corner leafing through a Viennese newspaper. A yellow teacher with sunken cheeks and a voice that sounded like a sawed-off wooden plank stopped by the card-table to reprimand the players for speaking ‘Zhargon’.

“Ha-ha-ha!” the thick juicy laugh of the famous Hebrew lecturer reached the ears of the bank clerk, “I would like to see *you* try and play cards in Hebrew!”⁴⁵

The irony of this scene, and of the Zionist leader/priest, is almost over the top; the fact that the Zionist lecturer, the one whose power is in his mouth, cannot conform to monolingualism, enrages the educator who walks by. The plain fact that one language cannot suffice for all of life’s avenues is one of the core language refrains of the novel. One cannot hold political rallies and play cards in one language. It is important that the Yiddish speaker in this scene is a Herzl doppelgänger. Herzl, whose aversion to Hebrew, and more so Yiddish, were widely known and documented,⁴⁶ was a Germanophile who spoke and wrote in German over his native Hungarian.

⁴⁴ Notice the Yiddish dialog within the Hebrew text: in the 1987 edition these are translated in a footnote, while in previous editions this was not always the case. The Yiddish is a discussion of card game rules, seemingly something a Hebrew reader prior to 1987 could decipher.

⁴⁵ יהודי יפה, רחב-גוף, בעל זקן-הרצל שחור ככופר ועיני פר מבהיקות, אדמדמות. הוא שיחק בקלפים עם ידידו, אחד העסקנים הציבוריים. לעיני מיאר בלטו שפתיו האדומות, לחייו המפוטמות היטב, לחיי-גלח יווני, וחוטמו עב-הבשר. מכל איברי גופו הגדול נדף ריח בריאות בשרנית מולעטת. הוא טרף את הקלפים.

וואָס איז יום טוב

אייכעל!

צעהן שעל

אָ יונגעל

האולם היה שמם. פקיד הבנק ישב בפינה ועלעל בעיתון וינא. מורה צהוב בעל לחיים שקערוריות וקול קרש נסור התעכב על יד טרסקלם של "המשחקים ונזף בהם על דברם "ז'רגון".

"חה-חה-חה!" שמע פתאום פקיד הבנק את צחוקו העבה והעסיסי של הנואם העברי המפורסם. "נסה-נא לשחק בקלפים בעברית." p. 156

⁴⁶ On this issue of Herzl and Jewish languages see: Theodor Herzl. *The Jewish State*. (London: Penguin, 2010), 89.

To place a Zionist speaker, like Herzl, in a hotel lobby playing cards in Yiddish is poking holes in several steadfast notions. The most obvious of these is a disdain for party politics; the physicality of Khaykes/Herzl is off-putting. He is the epitome of the overly satisfied politician, living off the money and status that his advocacy of Zionism has allowed. In contrast, the teacher who rebukes Khaykes' use of Yiddish, is yellow and has sunken cheeks. This is a jab at the two-faced politician who promotes Zionism on stages but speaks Yiddish in more private settings. It is as if the teacher, and the narrative, see Zionism as permissible only in one language.⁴⁷ As we have seen, the novel, and this scene, fall on both sides of this language divide many times. This suggests that perhaps this divide is not as definitive as it poses to be.

Which brings us to consider the notion of monolingualism and its viability.⁴⁸ What are we to take from this multilingual Herzl? This is one of the most explicit mentions of the Hebrew-Yiddish *Sprachenkampf* in the novel. The fact that it is portrayed via a Zionist party functionary, an orator, only exacerbates the issue, but the core remains the same. The hotel, and by synecdoche, the *Yishuv* as a whole, is a multilingual space which is under severe attack to conform to one language. Just in this short passage, there are at least three languages present: Hebrew, Yiddish and the German in the newspaper Meir is reading—and all this in the stronghold of the Zionist political center relocated to a temporary dwelling. Outside the door even more languages circulate, chiefly Arabic. To police this Zionist space so it contains only Hebrew is a demand which encounters a dismissive laugh. And while the hypocritical Zionist

⁴⁷ This is a hint towards the language discussion at the 1913 Zionist Congress, and the decision on the correct official language for the Zionist movement. Of course, this language discussion is due to and linked to the results of the Czernowitz conference, discussed at length in chapter 1.

⁴⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of the historical language reality of the *yishuv* in the interbellum years see: Chaver, Halperin and Saposnik.

speaker is not portrayed kindly, neither is the zealous Hebrew teacher: the humor is a double-edged sword that leaves no one unscathed. This is lingual ambivalence at its best.

Can one play cards in Hebrew? Can one language suffice for all avenues of life?

Khaykes/Herzl replies no. Reuveni too replies no, by writing such an intricate story of language struggle. All four examples discussed so far fashion the trilogy as one of violence; the clearest form of violence is the raging war, a war which affects all paths of life in Palestine and the world. This violence seeps into language, but the discussion of language is coupled with violence not only due to the war: lingual violence comes through a foreign language shaping another language, through erasure and rewriting, through language being altered against its owner's will with the invasion of an unwanted Yiddish dialect, and through the attempt and failure to construct a monolingual space. All these are reflections on the feasibility of borders and language, of autonomy of the self, and on communal definition through language. These struggles are perhaps most apparent, most readily available, in the third part of the trilogy.

Return of the Yiddish

The third novel, *Shamot*, is the only one that exists also in a Yiddish version. While this fact is promising for the exploration of Hebrew-Yiddish dynamics, this comparison is not without problems. The Yiddish version, *Yerusholayim in shotn fun shverd* (Jerusalem in the Shadow of the Sword), appeared only in 1963, in New York.⁴⁹ Since we don't have full Yiddish manuscripts for any of the three novels, it is impossible to determine if the Yiddish version we have is one which came before or after *Shamot*. In other words, is the Yiddish version an adaptation from the

⁴⁹ Aharon Reuveni. *Yerusholayim in shotn fun shverd*. (New York: Der kval, 1963).

Hebrew or is there a sense in which this is an original version that preceded the Hebrew? This will remain an open question.

This caveat noted, there is still great value to the parallel novels. One of the first examples of this is when Meir Funk, a carpenter who appeared in the second novel and is the focus of the third, leaves his room on a Saturday. He is renting a room in the home of a religious family, while secretly dating their daughter Esther. On this Saturday, upon leaving the house the Hebrew version states: “As he left the house he wished the family farewell not with the *Eretz-Israeli* “*Shalom*” but with the old “*Gut shabbes*”, which had the warmth of tradition. The family replied: “*Gut shabbes gut yor!*” as Funk chuckled and left.”⁵⁰ This instance of language choice between the Hebrew and the Yiddish is absent from the Yiddish version: “As he strolled across the front room he smiled and said in a friendly voice: “*Gut shabbes!*” and he was out the door, accompanied by their: ‘*Gut shabbes – gut yor!*’”⁵¹ The difference between the two versions is clear and comes to show the added value of the third novel to the discussion of language; while in the Yiddish version there is a seamless exit scene, where the farewell is natural within the text, the Hebrew version fashions this as a moment of language choice. Instead of using a secular and ‘*Eretz-Israeli*’ word such as ‘*Shalom*’ to exit, Funk chooses the Yiddish term, the term with “the warmth of tradition.” Funk is aware of the choice and sees it as comical, as his chuckle implies. The Hebrew text does not even translate the Yiddish term, assuming that the readers will be well acquainted with this foreign phrase. The literary space of the Hebrew novel is thus explicitly multilingual, pointedly so, with Reuveni emphasizing the role of Yiddish as a vestige of another

⁵⁰ בצאתו נפטר מהמסובים לא ב'שלום' הארצישראלי, כי-אם ב'גוט שבת!' הישן, שחמימות של מסורת בו. אף הם השיבו כנגדו: 'גוט שבת – Heb. 245. גוט יאָהר!' עוד פעם הצטחק בחביבות, הניע ראשו וסגר אחריו את הדלת

ער איז דורכגעגאנגען דעם פאָדערשטן צימער מיט אַ פריינען נאטירלעכן גאנג, האָט מיט אַ פריינדלעכן צושמיכלען געזאָגעט: 'גוט שבת!' " Yid. 24. "און איז אַרויס אין דרויסן, באַגלייט פון זייערע: 'גוט שבת – גוט יאָר

time and place, of the foreign, of tradition. A seemingly tame scene marks the language tension and reinforces the potential of this third novel in the discussion of language, with the Hebrew version intent on dwelling on moments of language plurality.

What starts out as an explicit disruption of the Hebrew text later turns into an implicit ‘Judaizing’ of the Hebrew, to use Anselmus Meir’s term. As noted, Funk’s host family is observant, part of the ‘old *yishuv*’. One evening, when the grandfather enters the home upon returning from the synagogue, he greets the family: “*Erev tov!*” (Good evening, Hebrew), to which they reply: “*Erev tov, shana tova!*” (Good evening, good year).⁵² This, of course, is a literal Hebrew translation of a Yiddish greeting, or more so a Yiddish reply: ‘Good year’ is not a standard reply to ‘Good evening’ in Hebrew, but in Yiddish this is the common response to ‘Good evening’. In the Yiddish version, this is an unremarkable conversation, while once again, the Hebrew version forms a hybrid language, Hebrew-Yiddish, which stands out as strange and stilted, even more so than in the previous example which transliterated Yiddish into Hebrew. The attempt at integration of Yiddish speech into the Hebrew produces a moment of enhanced attention to the lingual borders and the origin of the Hebrew version.⁵³

Shamot/Yerusholayim in shoten fun shverd does not stop here with its foray into language disruption and allows further speculation into the construction of Yiddish in Hebrew and vice versa. Shortly after leaving his house, Funk goes to visit his friend Fania/Bluma⁵⁴ to return a borrowed Russian novel and to borrow a new one. He is accompanied by Leyzer, his landlord’s

⁵² Hebrew, 274.

⁵³ Theoretically, this could have been a translation by the character, within the fictional world. Regardless, the affect on the Hebrew reader would be the same.

⁵⁴ In the Hebrew פניה and in the Yiddish בלומע. The reason for this discrepancy is unclear, since all other names throughout the parts which exist in both languages are unchanged.

son who he met along the way and convinced to come along to meet Fania/Bluma, and her roommate Tzipora. Fania took in Tzipora after the latter was fired from her work as a nurse in the hospital, and, while living together, they become romantically involved. This affair becomes more and more complicated as Tzipora makes advances on Funk as well as on a rich widow, Madam Shnitkrum, who lives nearby. These advances by Tzipora fester in Fania's heart and the confrontations become incessant:

At times, while eating dinner, she would angrily say: I don't understand what *she* talks about over there with Madam Shnitkrum. They used the 'she' form to sidestep their intimacy. Sometimes, in moments of pleasure and forgetfulness, at night before bed, when Bluma would start using the intimate 'you' form, Tzipora would often reply with a 'you'. But in the morning, in the cold gray light of a Jerusalem winter-day, the distancing polite 'you' retook its place."⁵⁵

This quote, which reads as a very clunky text in the English, is quite natural and understandable in the Yiddish: *ir* and *du* are two different forms that denote respect and distance on the one hand, and intimacy and familiarity on the other. Yet, this linguistic aspect is practically nonexistent in the Hebrew language, which renders the Hebrew version of this scene as clunky as the English translation above.⁵⁶ The fact that this is the first version presented to the reading public, four decades before the appearance of the more natural-reading Yiddish, reconfigures, once again, hierarchies of translation and originality. The Hebrew version is Yiddish in disguise:

⁵⁵ א מאָל, ביים עסן, פלעגט זי אַ זאָג טאָן מיט אומצופרידנקייט: 'איך פאַרשטיי נישט וועגן וואָס רעדט איר דאָרטן אַזוי פיל מיט איינער מאַדאַם שניטקרעם.' נישט קוקנדיק אויף דער אינטימער נאַענטקייט צווישן זיי האָבן זיי זיך געאַירצט. עס זענען געווען מינוטן פון אויסגוס און גלעטערייען, ביי נאַכט, פאַרן שלאָף, ווען בלומע פלעגט זי אָנהויבן דוצן, און צפורה פלעגט איר און ענטפערן מיט אַ 'דו'. אָבער אויף מאָרגן אין דער פרי, ביים קאַלטן און טונקעלן ליכט פונעם ירושלימדיקן ווינטער-טאָג, האָט דער דערווייטערנדיקער 'איר' צוריק פאַרנומען זיין אָרט. Yid. 32.

⁵⁶ פניה סבלה מזה. לפעמים בשעת סעודה, היתה אומרת מתוך תרעומת: 'לא אבין, למה תרוץ לשם כל רגע?' על אף קרבתן עדיין דיברו זו אל זו בלשון-נסתר. לעתים, בלילות, ברגעי התמוגגות ושכחה, פניה עוברת ללשון-נוכח, וגם ציפורה היתה משיבה לה כך. ולמחרת בבוקר, לאורו Heb. 252. הכהה של יום-גשם חורפי, שבה למקומה ה'היא' המרחיקה

the underlying Yiddish original is flagrantly apparent in these examples, where the Hebrew incorporates Yiddish grammar to construct the narrative. Hebrew does not possess the same linguistic faculties to describe this conversation, to discuss language of distance and intimacy. Reuveni could have altered the scene in his Hebrew version, could have made it seem more ‘Hebrew’. But, by writing Yiddish in Hebrew, Reuveni allows the Hebrew to speak Yiddish, to include a function which it lacks. This incorporation comes at a price: the language of the text ceases to be Hebrew and introduces Yiddish not only as a lingual-cultural element but also as the almost-explicit language of the characters, narrated in Hebrew but speaking Yiddish amongst themselves, besides themselves. Recapturing something of a version that was to be discarded for the time being, foregrounding ambivalence.

The comparison of the published Yiddish and Hebrew versions allows not only for an understanding of the places where one text ventriloquizes the other, but also conveys the silences and omissions from one text or the other. One such occurrence comes at the end of Chapter Twelve when Funk and his fiancée Esther enter the office of a high-ranking Turkish officer in order to bribe Funk’s way out of the Ottoman draft. Luckily for the two, the Turkish officer has a proclivity for speaking Russian, thinking that the use of a European language makes him seem more sophisticated: “He loved speaking Russian – it was the only European language he knew and speaking it proved him to be educated. He felt that this language knowledge elevated him to the level of his French-speaking peers.”⁵⁷ The Yiddish version also mentions this affinity to Russian speech, but does not clarify the reason for this affinity, the status that comes with speaking a European language, nor does it compare it to French. But a more substantial omission

⁵⁷ Heb. 323

comes several sentences later; Funk endears himself to the officer through their joint Russian speech. But, when talking to Esther, the officer notices she stares at him blankly, which Funk readily clarifies is due to her being “*hi geboyrene*”, born here, Yiddish for ‘native’.

The Yiddish chapter ends promptly with the officer discharging Funk, but the Hebrew goes on for some time, with a lengthy exchange between Funk and the officer about Russian culture. The officer starts by inquiring which are the largest Moscow newspapers, to which Funk replies *The Retch* and *Russkie Vedomosti*. The officer follows up by asking Funk who he considers to be the most famous Russian poet, and Funk names [Konstantin] Balmont and Valery Bryusov. The officer challenges this statement by proclaiming Lomonosov to be the greatest of Russia’s poets.⁵⁸ When Funk agrees with this statement, the officer sees fit to dismiss him, and he is allowed to leave the office and from the menacing draft.

This “literary conversation”, as the narrator calls it, is strange in and of itself, but also in that it does not exist in the Yiddish version. Once again, the Hebrew version relishes in opportunities to foreground multilingualism, language difference, and foreignness. For the Ottoman officer in the Hebrew version, Funk is first and foremost a Russian and, only after that, a Jew, and certainly not local. These are themes that are very much present in the Yiddish version, but the recurrent supplements in the Hebrew amount to a trend, reinforcing language tension.

These exclusions of language difference in the Yiddish version, and the accentuation thereof in the Hebrew version, come up time and again in the third novel, repeatedly stressing the

⁵⁸ Mikhail Lomonosov (1711-1765) is not the most current poet the officer could have chosen. His choice is rendered even more questionable when the officer states that Lomonosov is the greatest poet since Pushkin, a poet who was only born over three decades after Lomonosov’s death.

importance of these dual versions. For example, when Funk walks down the street at night shortly after his escape from the draft, he sees a Peeping Tom looking into windows. Funk confronts him to find it is the *chaj*, the neighborhood's Arab watchman. Funk and the watchman square off, but the watchman sizes Funk up and decides to step down and walk away. This is how the scene ends in the Yiddish version, with physical size being the sole factor that prevents further violence. But in the Hebrew version there is a supplement, once again, another factor that enters the equation:

The African [Arab] watchman was not accustomed to such stern opposition from one of the neighborhood Jews, especially this late at night and on his own; he decided it was better to step away. From his Arabic speech he gathered this Jew was not local, and from his clothes he saw he was not *shkenazi*, so he decided it was not worth it. [...] he retreated into the shadows, growling and cursing the *moskov*, the Russians, a group which he assumed this tall, long-armed young man belonged to.⁵⁹

Not being Ashkenazi, or *shkenazi*, but rather Russian, and speaking Arabic, these are the factors that drive the peeping tom away from confrontation.⁶⁰ Again, this happens only in the Hebrew version. These two attributes are interesting, and worth discussing in their own merit, but what is even more fascinating is the omission of the two from the Yiddish text. Language conflict and difference are minimized in the Yiddish version, and yet again, like in the previous example with the officer, the Hebrew version is far more fascinated with language conflict. Here, language prevents violence, since the watchman sees Funk as both an outsider, not *shkenazi* but *moskov*, and also as an eerily insider, in speaking Arabic. The fact that speaking the indigenous language,

⁵⁹ Heb. 329

⁶⁰ Not for long, as a repeated encounter will lead to the final spiral downward of the narrative and of Funk.

Arabic, marks Funk as foreign is doubly important; not only is this an irony that the local language is not used by locals, it also brings us full circle back to the first novel, to Zifrovitz, who was threatened by Arabic and certainly did not speak it. Funk's hybridity and peculiarity is what fends off the watchman. Multilingualism saves him once again, be it Russian earlier in the story or Arabic here. Again, language multiplicity is absent from the Yiddish version; this is not to say that the Yiddish version portrays a monolingual environment, but rather that Reuveni has a proclivity to reinforce and emphasize language tension in the Hebrew version.

Why would the Hebrew version emphasize multilingualism and multilingual reality more so than the Yiddish version? After all, the Hebrew version is, on some deep level, a cover-up for a Yiddish version of lesser standing, at least for Reuveni at the time of the first publication. At the time, Yiddish was a vehicle for the birth of the Hebrew version, a necessary step towards an ideologically acceptable language version. One would think Reuveni would be inclined to smooth over multilingualism in the Hebrew rather than accentuate it. But Reuveni does choose to stress language multiplicity, conveying his ambivalent self-translation. Feeling that the choice of one Jewish language over another is problematic, he leaves vestiges of his dilemma in the Hebrew, more so than in the Yiddish version.

Where the Jackals Speak

The novel and the trilogy end, as noted before, with Funk taking his own life. This comes after several months in the army, a draft Funk seemed to evade for some time. The intensity of the events that finally lead up to the draft segue into the episode of Funk's suicide, a crescendo of death and demise. As a lead up to the suicide, Funk and his now-wife, Esther scramble to gather

the remainder of the bribe needed to free Funk permanently. In the intensity of this effort, Funk has sex with Tzipora, who promises him the money in return.⁶¹ He is so disgusted with himself that on his walk back home he gives away the money he has just received, and as he walks on, he encounters once again the night watchman and kills him. These two are acts that de-facto force Funk into the army: Funk does not have enough money to redeem himself, and he is also a potential murder suspect. He self-inflicts the draft upon himself, much like Zifrovitz forced himself into deportation.

All this culminates in a penultimate chapter which describes the suicide. This chapter is the most formally innovative in the novel, ending it in a nadir of artistic expression. The chapter is told through the viewpoint of a band of jackals,⁶² who witness the suicide and then devour the body of Funk, leaving behind only one army-boot-clad foot. The turn to the non-human narration is a pivotal moment in the trilogy's voice. The chapter starts as follows:

The four jackals had a good view from the hilltop. This was no small feat – a hill with good footing, no foul smell of corpses, and a good panoramic view, which allowed for a quick withdrawal or chase in case of danger. They were never hungry. The oldest of the four – he remembers days of hunger and want. [...] But the three younger ones – they were born during the war and knew no hunger. Yes, there were dangers, life threatening on every step and turn, but no lack of food. Every day or so the war left behind dead carcasses of animals, and plump human bodies. From meal to meal – that was their life.⁶³

⁶¹ There is an intriguing aspect of sex-labor in the third part which is not explored in this chapter, but which I do intend to discuss elsewhere, in a subsequent publication. For now, it should be noted that interwar Palestine was a hub of sex-labor and trafficking, and that this enters the narrative here through the money earned by Esther's sister, supporting her family via prostitution, and then with Funk prostituting himself to earn money to evade the draft. For more on interwar sex-labor in Palestine see: Liat Kozma, *Global Women, Colonial Ports: Prostitution in the Interwar Middle East* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017), 4-20.

⁶² This seems to be an influence of Frantz Kafka's Short story "Jackals and Arabs", first published by Martin Buber in *Der Jude* in 1917. The short story features talking jackals, and it is conceivable Reuveni read this famous work.

⁶³ די פיר שאַקאַלן האָבן געהאַט אַ גוטן אויסקוק. עס האָט זיך נישט געהאַנדלט וועגן אַ באַשטימטן עסק – נישט וועגן טריט, וואָס זאָלן פאַרלאַנגען אַ פאַרשונג, און נישט וועגן אַ ציענדיקן ריח פון אַ נבלה, וואָס זאָל גלעטן די נאַזלעכער און מאַכן די מיילער גאַווערן – עס איז בלויז געווען די געוויינהייט פון זייער לעבן. פאַרזיכטיק האָט מען געדאַרפט אויף אַן אַרט, פון וואַנען מען זאָל קאַנען ווי מעגעלך ווייטער זען

Times of war may be bad for humans, but not so for animals. This is an apt ending for a trilogy which struggled between languages. In the back and forth of Hebrew and Yiddish, both languages proved to be permeable, insufficient on their own for Reuveni's wants and goals. Whether it was the 'born-translated' status of the Hebrew publication, whether it was Yiddish syntax in the Hebrew version, or the multiple moments of language contention and tension, the trilogy was never stable. In his search for monolingualism, Reuveni opened the door for more diverse and creative modes of bilingualism. There are simply things that could not be done, could not be written in just one language, or to go back to Kheykes: "I'd like to see *you* play cards in Hebrew!"

Thus, this move into the language of the jackals, a post-human move, is also a post-lingual move. After a trilogy rife with language tensions, chiefly between Yiddish and Hebrew, but also Arabic, Russian, French and others thrown into the mix, this array is set aside for a language of howling. The jackals are there to observe Funk as he takes his own life on the sandy hill:

The jackals waited patiently. They saw the man rise again. He stood on his feet and leaned on his rifle. What is he doing? He shoved the metal barrel into his mouth. Does he eat metal? What a strange man! Now he takes the rifle out of his mouth, sits back on the ground and unties his shoe. Now he stands up again. One foot bare, and shoves the tip of the rifle back in his mouth. Then he feels with his bare foot at the paw of the rifle.

און הערן, און ווי מעגלעך גיכער זיין גרייט צו אנטלויפן אָדער צום נאַכלויפן. זיי זענען נישט געווען פאַרהוונגערט. נאָר איינער פון זיי איז געווען גענוג אַלט צו געדאַנקען די מאַגערע צייטן פון זיינע ערשטע דריי לעבנסיאָר. [...] און די אַנדערע דריי – זיי זענען געבוירן געוואָרן אין דער מלחמה, און נישט געוואסט פון קיין הונגער. סכנות זענען געווען, גרויסע און שרעקלעכע, טויט-סכנות, די סכנות האָבן געלירט אויף זיי אויף טריט און שריט – אָבער קיין נויט האָבן זיי נישט געקענט. [...] עס זענען נישט אַריבער קיין פאַר טעג זיי זאָלן נישט אנטרעפן אויף אַ 203-4, Yiddish. נבלה פון אַ בהמה אָדער אויף אַ פּגור פון אַ מענטשן. פון מאַלצייט צו מאַלצייט – אזוי איז געגאַנגען זייער לעבן

Thunder and lighting. The man fell.⁶⁴

The defamiliarization in this passage, “Does he eat metal?”, the entrance into the psyche and the concepts of jackals, “the paw of the rifle”, leaves the reader outside language, deconceptualizing the world through the vocabulary of animals. Through their stream of consciousness, the jackals are humanized for a moment, and then return to the animalistic in devouring Funk’s dead body. By eating the corpse, it is now clear that they are the ones who prevail, Funk all but disappearing, leaving behind only a single foot. The turn away from the plethora of human languages to the language of animals is the final nail in the language-coffin. The trilogy is marred by failures: Zifrovitz fails to remain in the Land of Israel, Berenchuk fails in fleeing the country, and Funk fails to survive altogether. But above all this is a failure in and through language. The translation, the born-translated existence of the trilogy, laces the epic story of World War I with the prevailing pendulum of language which, at last, falls into silence.

Thus, I see the turn to the animal voice, to the jackals, as an act of submission; if not human language, let us turn to the animalistic, give voice to those who speak no language, ventriloquize outsiders to the language debate. Not Yiddish or Hebrew, but a third language. Not one of the previous ‘third languages’ that the novel contains – Arabic, French, Russian – but a

⁶⁴ התנים חיכו באורך רוח. הם ראו את האיש קם שנית. הוא עמד על רגליו ונשען על רובהו. מה כוונתו? הנה תחב את קנה-הברזל שלו לתוך פיו. היאכל ברזל? מוזרים מעשיו! הנה הוציא את הרובה מפיו, ישב על הארץ והתיר שרוך נעלו. הנה קם שנית, רגלו האחת יחפה, ושוב תחב את קצה הרובה לתוך פיו. אחר-כך מישש ברגלו היחפה את כף-הרובה.

ברק ורעם. האיש נפל.

קול-הירייה בקע את דממת-הלילה. הדים התדרדרו והתגלגלו על גבעות-החול. צללים חלפו בעלטה. המדבר התעורר ונהם נהימת בהלה [וחרון.

התנים קפצו ממקומם באימת-מוות וגלשו מהתלולית, שם רבצו במארב. בלי-מחשבה, תפוסי הרגשת כדור-ברזל, השורק ונוקב את חלל האוויר ברדפו אחריהם, נסו התנים בכל מאמצי-כוחם. ריאותיהם פעמו כמפוח ביד הנפח, רגליהם חצו את האוויר, עיניהם הלוהטות בלעו את המרחק להם [האפל, אשר בו בלבד מפלט להם Heb. p. 405.]

third language that veers from the realm of human languages and wars. Funk shoots himself, and the scavengers eat his remains, feast on what is left of a fierce fight to negotiate World War I and the constraints it carried with it. The novel thus ends with a final failure of language.

Conclusion, or: A Yiddish Tree Falls in a Forest of Hebrew

'I'm about to die' – expressions of this nature were all Dr. Ben-Yosef heard each and every day; they were his bread and butter; mostly they were said in a simple and broken language, or not in Hebrew altogether – in Yiddish, Ladino, Arabic, German – any foreign tongue that stuck to his patients' pallet in childhood... but this one speaks impeccable Hebrew as a learned man; maybe he acquired Hebrew as a child... 'But the content is the same content, and the intention is the same intention – that I should prove him wrong. I will... I must! It is my duty!'
(*Gilgul neshamot*, 20)

Aharon Reuveni did not abandon his lingual fixation for a day of his life. The quasi-novel *Gilgul neshamot*, published in Israel in 1965, proves this once again.⁶⁵ This novel, which received little attention at the time, and to date, is experimental in form, content and language. From the start, the novel incorporates many languages in a plethora of techniques: foreign language quotes embedded in the Hebrew text, usually without a translation, transliterations of a foreign utterance into Hebrew characters, syntactically introducing a second language into a text in another language and more. In the quote above, one of these methods is spelled out, when the character discusses the standing of the native tongue and the mother-tongue in the Land of Israel. As the narrator dismissively notes at the end of the quote, the content is always the same. All patients feel they are about to die, and all wish the doctor will prove them wrong, regardless of language.

⁶⁵ Aharon Reuveni. *Gilgul neshamot: roman-lo-roman* (Jerusalem: M. Nyuman, 1965).

But the language that first stuck to one's pallet, the *lingua prima*, is a matter to be reckoned with. This notion of authentic and original language is as good place to conclude the discussion of Reuveni's oeuvre.

As we have seen, *Ad Yerushalayim* may be said to be a bifurcated trilogy, where there are always (at least) two languages at work, blatant and unvoiced to varying degrees; in this I obviously mean the Arabic, as well as German, Russian, and other languages which are present alongside the published Hebrew, but above all, the Yiddish, an original which has many traces, but fewer deliberate marks in the Hebrew version. This chapter presented the commonplace narrative about the Yiddish original: that Reuveni, a deeply committed Zionist and a zealous Hebraist did not wish to publish Yiddish from the moment he set foot in Palestine in 1910. He thus used Yiddish to write prose, almost as scaffolding, but through self- and other-translation, professed a Hebrew originality, if only original by publication.

If so, we have a Yiddish novel rendered into a Hebrew novel. This rendering comes almost despite the abilities and faculties of the author, but with much assistance to overcome the feat so as not to publish the novel in its original language. Or, at least, this has been the narrative so far in scholarship. It seems from the correspondence discovered in the archive, that while Reuveni was not opposed to the publication of the novel in Yiddish, he did not want it to be published in Palestine in any language other than Hebrew and was willing to go to great lengths to ensure that this happened. This is a familiar division of languages by territory: Reuveni sees Palestine as bound solely to Hebrew and Yiddish as the language of the United States, where he first learned this language.⁶⁶ Reuveni sees no problem with lingual plurality in the United

⁶⁶ This stance has parallels to that of Reuveni's contemporary Eliezer Shteynman.

States, where a Jewish minority may by all means live and use English, as well as Hebrew and Yiddish. But, in Palestine, his lingual philosophy is one of angst and exclusion.

Reuveni believes that publishing Yiddish in Palestine could be counterproductive to nation building, and should be banned. In his publication and translation choices, Reuveni exhibits the same primal fear of a tribe cowering around a fire, using language for the first time to convey experience. The fact that this scene from the novel is an imagined scenario is what is crucial; the fantasy of authenticity in the novel is many times removed and mediated: it is a reflection on language, which is only possible in Hebrew through the Yiddish and the other languages- the Yiddish of the original novel and the many languages of the novel. Only through the uncanny can a fabricated authentic emerge, just as only through the Yiddish can the quasi-authentic Hebrew emerge. In Reuveni's trilogy, and in his entire oeuvre, the ethical and the ethnic are conflated. The right language is what he perceives at the time to be the language of the Jews, and it must not be disputed. But in allowing an overdetermined lingual territorialism, Reuveni split his own work, producing a trilogy with a lingual fixation. In his attempt at steadfast monolingualism, Reuveni produced a lingually malleable and troubled narrative.

In an interview with Reuveni published in the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* in 1969, reporter Isaac Rambe goes on a soliloquy to muse on the origins of *Ad Yerushalayim*. This is an interview with a much older Reuveni, a writer who suffered years of neglect all through the 1930's to the 1950's and was just being re-championed as a canonical writer by a young generation of writers, the same generation that adopted David Fogel as their poetic forebearer.⁶⁷ This is also a Reuveni who struggled for years to publish his Yiddish novels in the original, finally succeeding in

⁶⁷ For more on these decades of silence see: Schwartz, *Lekhyot*, Chapter 5.

publishing one of them in 1963. Yet, six years after this Yiddish publication, Rambe muses: “Reuveni began his writing career as a young man. While in America from 1904 to 1906 he began publishing prose. He wrote several books in Yiddish. No trace of these is left. The manuscripts were lost. Aharon Shimshelevitz was shy. He did not dare to offer his work to any Yiddish periodical appearing in New York and other cities across the country. But, he does not attribute any importance to this writing, and he is not sorry for the loss.”⁶⁸ Firstly, if a journalist has a quote, they will use it. This paraphrase of Reuveni’s words of sorrow is exactly what it is, a paraphrase at best. Secondly, this is clearly a false statement, be it by Reuveni or by the journalist. Reuveni did not lose the manuscripts, did not cease to try and publish the original Yiddish and was in fact very frustrated that he was not able to publish the Yiddish novels, despite ongoing attempts from as early as the 1920’s. But, and this is the hedge we must keep in mind, this is [self-]portrayal as an avid Hebraist, a mere six years after Reuveni publishes a Yiddish novel over four decades in the making.

Corresponding with this notion, Dan Miron notes that the interwar period, once again the period during which Reuveni is writing the trilogy, forced a choice. Some bilingual writers became Yiddish writers. “Others, like Aharon Reuveni, an upcoming young Yiddish writer, left his Yiddish past behind him once he made *Aliya* and became a committed Hebraist.”⁶⁹ We can now see that this is an oversimplification, a perpetuation of a narrative of binary language divides imposed on Reuveni in the first decades of his career, a narrative which haunts the scholarship of his writing to date.

⁶⁸ Isaac Remba. "A. Reuveni, Baal Hamelachot Harabot." *Maariv*, August 4, 1969, 20.

⁶⁹ Miron, *Continuity to Contiguity*, 40. Note the ideologically charged term Miron uses for Reuveni’s immigration to Palestine, *Aliyah*, literally ‘ascension’.

I wish to end the chapter with a question- the phrase famously goes: If a tree falls in the forest but nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound? I would now like to ask: if a novel is written in Yiddish but never published, does the Yiddish make a sound? Or, if a writer writes in Yiddish and ceases to publish in it, does that make him a Hebraist? Miron, Schwartz and even Pilowsky answer no and yes, respectively. The novel cannot be read and Reuveni is a Hebraist. I wish to counter, through the reading above, that within the trilogy, the lingual unrest is due not only to the internal conflicts in the narrative, but also to the Yiddish tree that fell in the forest. The heightened anxiety, and at times forceful resistance to bilingualism, is what make the case of Reuveni so exceptional.

In 1969 Reuveni received the prestigious Bialik Prize. This recognition came very late in his life and career: nearly fifty years after his first publications and a mere two years before he died. The prize committee highlights in their unanimous decision that, although Reuveni excelled in many genres and his short stories stood out, most impressive of all was the trilogy *Ad Yerushalayim*.⁷⁰ Reuveni himself, in his acceptance speech, talks *only* of the trilogy and tells of the saga's inception. He tells how originally, he planned for the trilogy to be double that: one trilogy depicting wartime life in Jerusalem and one depicting life in other cities and towns around the country. But this plan was cut short; a riot in April 1920 derailed his creative forces and will to write. Thus, he concluded his comments: "Of the hexalogy, the six books I originally planned, only half were left, this is the visible trilogy: *Be-raishit ha-mevukhah – Ha-oniyot ha-akhronot – Shamot*. The rabbinic saying has come true: 'One dies without achieving even half of

⁷⁰ The comments by the committee were published in: *Davar*, 12.19.1969, 8.

what he desires to achieve.”⁷¹ Reuveni uses a very poignant phrase to describe *Ad Yerushalayim*, the visible trilogy, הטריילוגיה הנמצאת בעין. He is acutely aware of the text and the non-text of this hexalogy. This tragic ending to the speech shows how close Reuveni feels to the end of his days, and how centrally he holds the trilogy and the days of the Great War within his life and oeuvre. But with all that has been uncovered in this chapter, it is safe to say Reuveni misspoke; yes, there is only a trilogy that is visible, but the hexalogy is present. The second trilogy is not the unwritten one, but rather the previously written one, the Yiddish one. Like in that most clichéd of metaphors, the Hebrew trilogy is but the tip of the iceberg, visible, indicative of a much larger story the lays dormant at times, but in no sense nonexistent. This might not have been Reuveni’s *tayve* (desire) but it is none the less an unrivaled six volume Hebrew-Yiddish magnum opus.

⁷¹ מהכסולוגיה, ששת הספרים שהיו בדעתי בראשונה, נותר החצי, זו הטריילוגיה הנמצאת בעין: "בראשית המבוכה" – "האוניות האחרונות" – "שמות".

ibid, 6. The saying Reuveni is referencing here comes from the midrash, Ecclesiastes Rabbah, 1:13.

Chapter Three: The Untranslatable Shtetl – Zalman Shneour's Hebrew-Yiddish

Rewritings

Shneour vs. Asch: In Search of Recognition

Sixty-eight-year-old Zalman Shneour expected to win the Nobel Prize for literature; for three decades, the writer saw himself as a natural nominee for the prize. Shneour's archive is full of letters to and from politicians, editors, writers, and scholars, discussing the prestigious prize, the nomination process and, of course, the rivals who might be nominated over him.¹ Chiefly, Shneour held an ongoing discussion with Yosef Klausner regarding the Germanophile bias of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and its scholars, and the fact that they would never nominate a Russian like himself.² But perhaps the most telling letter is one from Shneour to Joseph Lichtenbaum, a fellow writer who crossed paths with Shneour in Europe and Palestine/Israel. In December of 1955, several decades into his Nobel Prize campaign, Shneour writes to Lichtenbaum:

Everyone is aware of the fact that Shalom Asch knows not one word of Hebrew and that he came here to Israel to have 'a Hebrew address for Stockholm.' The terrible translation of his work was undertaken by his son-in-law, and it was corrected at least ninety-nine times. We have worked day and night for fifty-four

¹ For more on the non-nomination of Shneour see: Doron B. Cohen, "Ha-politika shel pras Nobel be-sifrut", *Kivunim khadashim* 30, (June 2014): 119-120

² Correspondence from Shneour to Klausner, 24 October 1951, Box 788, 96742/1, Shneour Archives, Gnazim, Tel-Aviv, Israel. Also see numerous letter on the topic in boxes: 786-795.

years and these [Yiddish writers] come and want to ‘inherit’ our place also in Hebrew. I will not allow it. I shall soon fight back with the necessary vigor.³

Although only one of many letters in Shneour’s archive referencing the Nobel Prize, this hyperbolic and agitated letter stands out for a variety of reasons. The background for this letter was the immigration of Shalom Asch to Israel in 1955. Asch, the most successful Yiddish writer of the time, had moved from the United States to the city of Bat Yam where he lived until his death two years later. The year 1955 also saw Shneour win the Israel Prize for Literature, the highest literary prize awarded by the State of Israel. This prize came on the heels of Shneour’s own immigration to Israel a mere four years earlier, in 1951. For Shneour, the immigration to Israel prompted the literary award, but the recognition of the Israel Prize was merely a good start, as Shneour saw it, and he still had his sights very much set on the greatest literary prize the world over.⁴ And then came Asch, settling in Israel and returning to Hebrew, seemingly threatening Shneour’s status.⁵

The animosity Shneour exhibits towards Asch in this letter has its roots in the two writers’ bilingual choices. Much like Shneour, Asch began his career as a Hebrew writer, publishing short Hebrew stories in journals and periodicals, and even a collection of short prose.⁶ But, unlike Shneour, Asch did not persist in writing Hebrew alongside Yiddish. His fame and

³ הכל יודעים ששלום אש אינו יודע אף מילה אחת עברית וכי בא הנה לשם 'אדריסה עברית לשטוקהולם'. את התרגום הגרוע עשה לו חותנו בשעתו והתרגום תוקן מאה פעמים חסר אחת. אנחנו עבדנו יום ולילה חמישים וארבע שנים ובאים הללו 'ויורשים' את מקומנו גם בעברית. היה Shneour Archives, 12/27/1955, box 793, 96742/1.

⁴ On the importance of the Nobel Prize as situating literature as world literature see: Jeffrey Meyers. “The Literary Politics of the Nobel Prize.” *The Antioch Review* 65.2, 214–223.

⁵ More on the relationship between the two writers see: Moshe Dluznowsky. "Sholem Asch un Zalman Shneour: a bagegenish in beizen un in guten." *Di tzukunft* 81 (1975): 95-99.

⁶ Sholem Asch. *Sipurim*. (Warsaw: Tushiyah, 1902).

sizable fortune came to him from his Yiddish novels and plays, turning Asch into the highest grossing Yiddish writer of the first half of the twentieth century. The gatekeeping Shneour exhibits in his letter, one which will be exacted in public “with the necessary vigor” is a testament to decades of labor and toil in bilingual production: writing, rewriting, and self-translating. With Asch once again publishing in Hebrew alongside Yiddish and entering the space Shneour had carved out for himself, both in Israel and in the Hebrew language, Shneour felt that his position had been compromised; he saw himself as one of a select few truly bilingual writers, an uncomfortable position at times, and most certainly not a position he wished to share with Asch.

Which brings us to the nexus of the letter, the issue of translation: Shneour takes umbrage with Asch’s Hebrew publications. As a self-translator, for over half a century, his letter is a covert celebration of his own craft, via the critique of Asch. The latter published Hebrew works that he did not translate himself, and Shneour, a dedicated self-translator, denigrates this practice. In contrast to Asch’s son-in-law whose translations supposedly needed to be revised ad absurdum, Shneour’s self-translations bore the stamp of originality and, since they were crafted by the author, required fewer revisions. Self-translation, according to Shneour, is more valuable than translations by others, not only for the authenticity that it conveys, but also for the language proficiency to which it attests.⁷ Thus, when Shneour claims that “Asch knows not one word of Hebrew,” he is commenting on Asch not as a Hebrew writer, but as a translator. Asch clearly knew more than a word of Hebrew; his early career as a Hebrew writer testament to this.⁸ But in

⁷ We will later see how Shneour argues for the originality of both versions of the Shklov novel, due to changes he created between the two in the process of translation.

⁸ Even more so, and this is phenomenologically interesting, Asch definitely knew more than a word in Hebrew, and Shneour knows this, due to the Hebrew element of Yiddish. But once, again this is a truism Shneour is happy to neglect and sidestep.

his letter, Shneour presents himself as more Hebrew, and more bilingual, than Asch due to his translational philosophy and practice.⁹ It is not as though Shneour claims to be a Hebrew writer who has relinquished his Yiddish past. What validates his Hebrew writing is not monolingualism, but rather original writing, via self-translation, in both languages.

What is also at stake in this letter is a sense of language trespass: “We have worked day and night for fifty-four years and these [Yiddish writers] come and want to ‘inherit’ our place also in Hebrew.” The “also” at the end of this quote is telling. Just as Asch has overtaken Shneour in Yiddish fame, he now seeks to surpass him in Hebrew literary fame. Long-lived bilingualism was Shneour’s choice, a choice that he paid dearly for, but one that he stuck by for fifty-four years. And now, with a Nobel Prize supposedly on the line, Asch threatens to swoop in and inherit Shneour’s place and ownership of bilingualism. Shneour was willing to concede Yiddish to Asch, begrudgingly, but Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism was his proclaimed territory.

This letter foregrounds many issues central to this chapter: language choice and the anxieties surrounding such choice, self-translation, immigration and its implications, and literary status. Shneour’s translational practices provide a lens through which we can read the two versions, in Hebrew and Yiddish of the same novel, *Jews/People of Shklov* (*Shklover yidn/Anshei Shklov*). This novel, I argue, is the text in which Shneour negotiates his attachments to Hebrew and Yiddish literature, as both distinct and joint entities, through rewriting and self-translating his novel time and again. The tensions between the versions, and the shakiness of

⁹ Shneour was not the only writer to take umbrage with the “Hebrew” Asch. Most famously it was Berdyczewski who saw in the Hebrew translations of Asch an inappropriate collapse of a language divide, and a falseness of bilingualism: “We will not kill our children, nor suffer the toil of generation for the Hebrew of Sholem Asch.” See: Micha Yosef Berdichevsky. “Bi-dvar lashon ve-sefer.” In *Kitvei M. Y. Berdichevsky*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1960).

monolingualism are a product of a self-translator committed to complex attachments to both Jewish languages.

Self-translating and Re-translating: Six Decades of Bilingualism

Zalman Shneour (1886–1959) was a writer who moved back and forth between languages with great fluidity. Beginning in 1902 at the young age of sixteen with his debut in Hebrew and Yiddish poetry, and up until the day he died in 1959, he wrote poetry and prose, in both Hebrew and Yiddish. Born in the town of Shklov located in eastern Belarus on the Dnieper river, he moved to Odessa at an early age where he came under the mentorship of Hayim Nahman Bialik, a relationship that would influence Shneour’s work, I will show, in meaningful ways. With all the geographical and lingual movement throughout his career, Shneour repeatedly and explicitly protested his branding as one kind of monolingual writer in one of the Jewish languages, all the time maintaining a tenuous balance so not to affirm a version of monolingualism, remaining committed to his long-lived bilingualism. The bilingual background of his writing comes across in the moments where multilingualism becomes the theme of the text, with the other language always present and the translational tension emerging time and again. In a sense, Shneour used these recurrent lingual tensions to undermine his own self-translations.

My chapter takes up this relatively neglected writer in order to show that he should be reconsidered as a paragon of prolonged bilingualism, since he wrote belles-lettres in both Hebrew and Yiddish for the bulk of six decades.¹⁰ However, by and large, Shneour has become

¹⁰ Two scholarly discussions of Shneour have been published recently: Lilach Nethanel wrote an afterword to a new translation of a Yiddish novel by Shneour, *Ha-meshumedet*, as well as an article discussing his turn from poetry to prose (Nethanel, 2015 and Nethanel 2016 and 2017). Additionally, Naomi Brenner discusses Shneour in her book

at best an afterthought, in the minds and bookshelves of the public and scholars alike. If we consider the hardship, even aversion, that Yiddish-Hebrew bilingualism has been plagued with, we might begin to better understand the scholarly dimension of Shneour's neglected status. Shneour's oeuvre has been met with such disregard that, even when Dan Miron wrote in 1999 a powerful call to arms, asking scholars to study Shneour, he did so with regards to Shneour's poetry and not his prose. This sidelining of Shneour's prose, a disregard within a text lamenting exclusion, is even stranger when we consider that this text by Miron was published as the afterword to a new edition of the Hebrew *Anshei Shklov*.¹¹ Miron is so adamant that there must be a critical review of Shneour's oeuvre and, at the same time, he downplays the importance of the work he is meant to celebrate, championing Shneour as a great poet.

This irony puts Miron in good company: from his early debut at the age of fourteen, Shneour was championed first and foremost as a poet. The highest praise was awarded to Shneour by Bialik who, not only took him under his wing and mentored him, but celebrated the young boy as the future of Hebrew poetry. This cemented Shneour in public perception, for decades, as a poet, with his magnificent prose receiving far less critical attention. And yet, it is the prose work that presents meaningful insights into self-translation. Within his prose, Shneour wrestled with the Hebrew-Yiddish literary complex for so long, that the language barriers all but collapsed under the many long-lived positions Shneour held, a one-man countermovement. Shneour was not able or not willing to live a life of lingual segregation, and he self-translated his prose in order to dissolve linguistic and cultural distinctions.

Lingering bilingualism. My own chapter constitutes part of this revival and builds on this scholarship. This being said, these are the first explorations of Shneour's oeuvre in almost three decades.

¹¹ Dan Miron, "Afterword", in: Zalman Shneour. *Anshei Shklov*. (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1999), 370-86.

To understand the model of bilingualism Shneour poses, I explore one novel, *Shklover yidn* [*Jews/People of Shklov*] in the Yiddish version (serialized 1927, book form 1929), and *Anshei Shklov* [*People of Shklov*] in the Hebrew version (serialized 1935, book form 1951). This twin novel is truly sui generis.¹² First, it has structured the career of Shneour himself, occupying him for decades and spawning several series that were inspired by the town of Shklov as it was first conceived in this novel. *Feter zshome* in Yiddish or *Ha-dod zshome*, in Hebrew (*Uncle Zshome*), *Noyekh pandre* in Yiddish or *Pandre ha-gibor* in Hebrew (*Pandre the Great*), and numerous other novels by Shneour that followed suit in style, locale, and mode of publication. *Shklover yidn* was a pivotal phase in Shneour's career, a moment that changed his trajectory for good, earning him popular recognition and financial success. This novel constituted, at the same time, a shift in bilingual practice for the writer. The novel was written and rewritten in both Hebrew and Yiddish, resulting in a dialogue between the repeat translations and interlingual influences. Moreover, with *Shklover yidn* and *Anshei Shklov*, Shneour situates himself in what Sara Blair defined as "the dual cultural identity as son of the *shtetl* and bearer of the avant-garde," fashioning Shklov into the outlet of both *shtetl* writing and modernistic prose, for both Hebrew and Yiddish.¹³

When considering this self-translated novel and its language tensions, I focus on the moments where translation fails, with instances of untranslatability serving as a focal point for my discussion. By untranslatability, I refer to moments within the text that Emily Apter would

¹² Though these are truly two novels, a Yiddish and a Hebrew one, I will occasionally treat them as singular, holding in mind both the duality and the oneness of this work, which is part and parcel of the complexity.

¹³ Sara Blair, "Whose Modernism Is It? Abraham Cahan, Fictions of Yiddish, and the Contest of Modernity," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51:2 (Summer 2005), 258-84.

call “artistic failure.”¹⁴ This phrase posits the untranslatable not as the opposite of the easily translatable, or of that which translates well, but rather as Barbara Cassin puts it: “To speak of untranslatables in no way implies that the terms in question, or the expressions [...] cannot be translated. The untranslatable is rather what one keeps on (not) translating.”¹⁵ In his self-translation of the novel, Shneour inserts, almost against his best interest, such moments of artistic failure, of ongoing translation, moments that stress the differences between the two Jewish languages, but also foreground those elements that bind them together. My reading reveals these moments of artistic ‘failure’, presenting the bilingualism of the work not only as a fact of publication, but as a practice of composition. Shneour self-translated his novel, fashioning multiple originals sprinkled throughout with instances of untranslatability that hinder the seamlessness of the translated text and recall the presence of another language.

But Shneour does not only translate himself, he is also, in a sense, translating and adapting his mentor, Bialik. Parts of Shneour’s novel(s) stands in conversation with Bialik’s Hebrew novella, “Me’ahorei ha-gader” (“Behind the Fence”). This intertextual connection adds another layer of translational complexity, imbuing the Yiddish publication with resonances from a Hebrew source, which is then further translated back into Hebrew. This chapter thus oscillates between two readings of Shneour’s work within bilingual frameworks: on the first level, a reading of the language tensions integral to this novel that was written initially in Hebrew, published in intervals in Yiddish, and then republished in Hebrew; on the second level, an interpretation of how Bialik’s Hebrew novella became integrated into both the Yiddish and

¹⁴ Emily S. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. (New York: Verso, 2013).

¹⁵ Barbara Cassin, Steven Rendall, and Emily S. Apter. *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), xviii.

Hebrew novels. Perhaps these two modes of bilingualism are not so different: Susan Bassnett urges scholars to use the term rewriting instead of self-translation since the latter prompts regression in search of an original.¹⁶ Rewriting, on the other hand, allows for a consideration of a wide range of translational practices which render works whole again, original differently. Shneour's layered bilingual practices, rewriting Bialik and rewriting himself, expose self-translation as an act of revealment and concealment in language, creating dual original versions which are interspersed with moments of language multiplicity, interfering with the creation of either version as monolingual.

Learning How to Read: Shneour's Tasks of Self-Translation

Shklover yidn opens with a statement by the narrator, a self-professed writer, explaining that he is from the town of Shklov, and that he knows it well: "I was born there and had gone to *kheyder* there."¹⁷ This opening declaration gestures to his lineage and education in the town he comes to write about, vouching for authenticity. The statement deals not only with the issue of origin, but also, importantly, with that of upbringing; the narrator knows Shklov well, well enough to write a novel about it, since he was educated there in a traditional *kheyder*, a Jewish school for boys. This opening statement, the first sentence of the framing chapter, sets a tone of atavism.

The opening sentence of the Hebrew version is strikingly different; in the Hebrew, the narrator explains his profound understanding of the town and his origins there as stemming

¹⁶ Susan Bassnett. "The Self-Translator as Rewriter." In *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*. Ed., Anthony Cordingly. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 13-25.

¹⁷ "איך קען אַ שטעטעל אין וויסרוסלאַנד אויפן דניעפּר. שקלאָוו הייסט זי. איך בין דאָרטן געבוירן געוואָרן און אין חדר געגאַנגען, דערפאַר" *Shklover yidn*, 5.

specifically from language: “There I learned *Ivri*.”¹⁸ The first statement of this self-professed writer about his town is that this was the place that gave him language, languages in fact, which will turn out to form the basis for his profession and calling. This statement demands unpacking: the term *Ivri* denotes the Hebrew language in Yiddish. In Hebrew, the Hebrew language is called *Ivrit*, and in Yiddish it may also be called *loshen koydesh* or *Hebreish*. When integrated into a Hebrew-language work, the term *Ivri* stands out as a foreign Yiddishism. It points to Hebrew knowledge but also attests to a Yiddish upbringing, thus positing a hybrid literary language from the outset. Shneour’s text attests to authenticity through an amalgam of Hebrew and Yiddish, an opening that demands of the reader bilingualism from the start. The Hebrew version stresses bilingual proficiency, while the Yiddish refers to a murkier sense of *Bildung*, attending *kheyder*, a word that, in its own right, does not require or assume knowledge of a language other than Yiddish.

Only when we consider these two openings side-by-side can we sense the centrality of language to the act of self-translation: the gaze back at the old home, the landscape of the narrator’s past, is as a look into the well from which his words sprung, a lineage of language that, while written in the present, harkens back to days gone by, and places that are no more. The fact that the bilingual aspect is absent from the Yiddish original is not accidental. Shneour was very deliberate in reworking his oeuvre and he painstakingly wrote and refined his works.¹⁹ His choice to specify his Hebrew language knowledge in the Hebrew version not only attests to the origins of his language skills, but also grounds the language in which he is currently writing, the

¹⁸ "שם למדתי עברי." *Anshei Shklov*, p.7

¹⁹ See his correspondence with Abe Cahan cited in: Ellen Kellman. "The Newspaper Novel in the Jewish Daily Forward, 1900-1940: Fiction as Entertainment and Serious Literature." (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2001).

Hebrew, back in the town of Shklov. Fusing the geographic location with more than the obvious language of Jewish life in Europe, Yiddish, creates a space which is first and foremost multilingual, from the start.

These opening sentences are part of the framing chapter, titled *Shklov*. This introductory chapter was added to the book version in both languages. When first serialized in the Yiddish New York daily newspaper, *Forverts*, in 1927, the narrative began with what would later become the second chapter of the book. But in the subsequent books, Shneour saw necessary to add a chapter. This framing chapter, in both versions, comes as testimony of ‘the real.’ Following the above opening statements, the narrator goes on to glorify his old town throughout the introduction. He discusses the foods of the town, the people, the women who smell like bread, and the strange but special customs one can find only in Shklov: “The women there [with warm shawls covering their thin shoulders] do not use perfume and yet smell wonderfully: of fresh hay, warm caraway/cumin bread, and wild red berries.”²⁰ Yet, with all this familiarity, lest readers might mistakenly think this description comes from a current resident of the town, the end of this first chapter refutes this assumption. The narrator concludes the chapter by informing the reader that this is a tale of distance and recollection: “I came to the idea of erecting a monument, a memorial for all that has been and now is gone. And here it is! I have written, with the help of God, the book before you.”²¹ The catalyst for writing this book, and recording these tales of the

²⁰ בנות ישראל דהתם אינן מתבשמות ואף על פי כן נודפים מהן ריחות משובחים: ריח של הציר רענן, של לחם כמון חם ושל סומקיות-יער Heb. 7.

די אידישע מיידלעך מיט ווארעמע פאטשיילעס אויף די דינע פלייצעס פארפומירען זיך דאָרטען ניט. פונדעסטוועגן שמעקט פון זיי מיט געזונטע ריחות: מיט היי, מיט פריש געבאָקענעם קימעל-ברויט, מיט רויטע יאָגדעס Yid. 5-6.

Heb. 15. באתי לידי רעיון להציג מצבת זכרון לכל זה שהיה ועבר ובטל. והנה!.. כתבתי, בעזרת השם, את הספר הזה הבא להלן ²¹

Yid. 12. באַשלאָסען שטעלען אַ מצבה אויף דעם וואָס איז געווען און אונטערגעגאַנגען. און אָט – אָנגעשריבען אַ בוך

town and of the townspeople, is the fact that this town is no more.²² The people might still be there, but all else has changed—life is hushed, altered, and rushed, and so as not to allow the impression that things were always this way, the narrator writes this book, pseudo-ethnographically venturing into a time gone by, through the only tangible inheritance he has from Shklov: language. The framing chapter opens with language and its acquisition because that is all that is left from the town in this time of world upheaval.

This novel marks the end of an era in Shneour's writing and the beginning of another. *Shklover yidn* was commissioned by Abraham Cahan, the editor of the *Forverts*, and spawned the era of Shklov in Shneour's career.²³ From 1927 and up until the end of his writing career, Shneour wrote volumes upon volumes of past-oriented prose, harkening back to the old town and its surroundings, and even further back, to the origins of Hasidism.²⁴ This new literary direction was aided by the enthusiasm of Cahan, coupled with the allure of the largest circulating Yiddish newspaper in the world.²⁵ Cahan, who met with Shneour in Paris, was enamored by the short stories and vignettes that Shneour showed him and commissioned the writer to produce a series that evolved into many novel length serializations.²⁶ The literary journey sparked by *Shklover*

²² Similar troupes and motivations are present in several other writers of the time, most notably in the stories of Dvora Baron.

²³ This form of novel writing was the prominent form of publication in the Yiddish writing world, all the way into the 1970's. The serialization in newspapers allowed the writers a steady income and provided the newspaper with quality content. For more on the prominence of this process see: Nathen Cohen, "Yiddish press and Yiddish literature", Ellen Kellman, "The Newspaper Novel". Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

²⁴ See: Lilach Netanel, "Poetics of Distance: Zalman Shneour in Berlin During the First World War and Its Aftermath." *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 60.1, (January 2015), 1-12, and her discussion of past oriented prose. The novels to come include the notable five volumes of 'Pandre' alongside numerous volumes of 'Shklov' prose.

²⁵ On Cahan and the dynamics of novel serialization in the *Forverts* see: Kellman, "The Newspaper Novel", 1-25.

²⁶ There is evidence that Shneour was writing these vignettes as early as 1921, long before he met Cahan. This is apparent from Shneour's correspondence with the Hebrew writer Shalom Orlans found in Shneour's archive. See: Gnazim, box 787, 13143/1. Recently, Lilach Netanel has discovered Hebrew fragments of the novel, dated prior to

yidn was a creatively fruitful one, as well as a profitable avenue to pursue, allowing Shneour a comfortable life in France far into the Nazi occupation, and even saving his life by providing a relatively easy transition to the United States. Shneour saved Shklov from oblivion and, in turn, the writings on Shklov saved Shneour.

Shklover yidn is a complex collection of seemingly tame vignettes of small *shtetl* life, which dial up the intensity and darkness as the novel progresses, culminating in murder and rape, a far cry from the school days that set the narrative in motion. The novel also progresses from individualized pictures, short stories loosely bound together by place and character, into a tightly knit narrative in the second part of the novel.²⁷ With the intensification of the narrative, language tension and bilingual aspects intensify as well, leading up to the reappearance of Bialik's work within the novel.

Language issues abound from the very start: the first story is not a tale of traditional town life, as one might expect from the introduction, but rather a tale of modernization and language conflict titled "Reading Newspapers" in Yiddish and "How to Read" in the Hebrew.²⁸ In this chapter, a significant force enters Shklov: the press, with both Jewish and Russian newspapers becoming ubiquitous in the town. The entry of the press marks the beginning of change, with modernity and the outside world encroaching on the previously isolated Shklov. The chapter introduces the family at the center of the novel, telling how news is consumed in the house of Uncle Uri and Aunt Feige, locating the narrative within the house of this couple and their son,

the Yiddish. see: Lilach Netanel. "Yitzirato ha-mukdemet shel Zalman Shneour: beikvot sefer ha-nedudim." *Mekhkarey yerushalim be-sifrut ivrit*, 29 (2017): 235-40.

²⁷ See: Miron, *Anshei Shklov*, on the connection he sees between part 1 and 2.

²⁸ מען לייענט צייטונגען/כיצד קוראים For a complementary reading of this chapter(s) see: Brenner, *Lingering Bilingualism*, 138-142.

Feivke. Every day Aunt Feige purchases a newspaper from Moti, a shoemaker turned newspaper peddler. This transaction always happens with Moti on the doorstep, telling the aunt what news the daily newspaper contains, since it is in Russian, and the aunt presumably reads only Yiddish. As she hears the gripping tales of the news, she buys a copy and lays it on the dresser, where it joins a towering pile of similar newspapers from previous days.

This communication of oral news, which has a print source that is redundant and seldom used, changes when “a blessed day arrives” once upon a blue moon and Uncle Uri asks to be given a paper to read.²⁹ Here the narrator goes to great lengths to satirize the event of reading the paper: Aunt Feige pulls out a random paper from the pile, with disregard to the importance of temporality in news reporting, and gives it to the uncle who starts reading the Russian, with one minor obstacle: his Russian leaves much to be desired. So, he focuses only on the headlines, which is all his feeble Russian can muster. He reads only the headlines and thinks of them as billboards:

Every year when Uncle Uri visits the grand fair in Nizhniy, he reads a good amount of store signs. The ‘heads’ of the articles look to him the same as these billboards in the fair of Nizhniy-Novgorod. There he reads: leather, fish, machinery, sugar. And here: bombs, scandals, death, war. And all that isn’t included in the title he adds from within, surmising with his good logic.³⁰

²⁹ Heb. 24, Yid. 17.

³⁰ מדי שנה בשנה, כשהדוד אורי מבקר את היריד הגדול בניז'ני, הריהו קורא שם כמות הגונה של שלטי-חנויות. "ראשי" המאמרים בעתון נראים לו עכשיו כאותם השלטים של התערוכה בניז'ני-נובגורוד. שם: עורות-שער, דגים, מכונות, סוכר. וכאן – פצצות, שערוריות, הרוגים, מלחמות. וכל מה שלא נאמר בכותרותיהם הריהו מוסיף מנופכו שלו ומפרש בשכל-הישר של עצמו Heb. 25

זייענדיג יעדען יאָהר אין ניזשנע אויפן יריד, לייענט איבער דער פעטער אורי אַ רעכט, ביסעל שילדען אויף די קראָמען. די קעפלעך פון די אַרטיקלען זעהען איהם אויס, ווי די גרויסע שילדען אויף דער אויסשטעלונג אין ניזשני, דאָרטען – רויכווארג, פיש, מאַשינען, צוקער; דאָ – באַמבעס, סקאַנדאַלען, הרוגים, מלחמות. דאָס וואָס איז ניט דערזאָגט אין די קעפלעך דערזאָגט ער שוין אליין, פון זיין אייגענעם שכל Yid. 22-23.

The reading of the paper is not so much an informative act, but, in much the same way as the visit to the fair, is a way of partaking in the larger world. At the fair, Uncle Uri comes in contact with the large city of the region, and in the paper the wide world encroaches on the town. One buys a Russian paper not in order to read it, but in order to become a person, a citizen of the cultured world.

The fact that Uncle Uri's Russian is too shaky to deal with the full contents of the newspaper does not seem to bother him; he stammers the headers syllable by syllable under his breath and, once he has it right, screams them out to Aunt Feige, first in broken Russian and then in Yiddish, alarmed by the tales of Warsaw, Tokyo and St. Petersburg. These excited exclamations by the uncle are received calmly and with a shrug by the aunt, since she already knows all this information and much more from the daily visits by Moti, who, in his sales pitch, recounts all the tales the newspaper contains. In contrast to the title of the chapter in Hebrew, "How to Read" or even in Yiddish "Reading Newspapers," the chapter does not concern itself with the fundamental skill of literacy and the acquisition of the foreign language. The term "reading" is ironically used to suggest that the Russian newspaper can be consumed orally, through Yiddish or through a mere recitation of its titles.

And what about the Hebrew press? The narrator notes early on in the chapter that the town was divided into the poor, who purchased Yiddish newspapers with cash, and the rich, those who purchased Russian newspapers with credit. The narrator also mentions a Hebrew paper, *Ha-melitz*, but it is unclear which group, if any, purchases it.³¹ The fact that Uncle Uri and

³¹ Important to note that the first Yiddish periodical, *Kol Mevasser*, was a supplement to *Ha-melitz*, started in 1862 by Aleksander Tsederboym. Thus, this reference to a Hebrew paper is also a historical reference to the first bilingual periodical, one which might have snuck a Hebrew paper into a Yiddish reading household. As Nathen Cohen notes: "Tsederboym's initiative also had clear didactic and socio-political aims. He hoped to bring the Jewish masses to forsake the use of Yiddish in favor of German or Russian." Cohen, Nathan. "The Yiddish Press and Yiddish

Aunt Feige purchase the Russian paper from Moti is more of a status symbol than anything else; we already know that for the two of them the content of the paper is murky at best, but they also seem not to care about the little information they do garner. The chapter ends with a comment by the narrator that, on the rare occasions on which the uncle asks for a paper, Aunt Feige once again pulls one out of the pile randomly. The irony of the whole chapter is heightened, since it now ends with Uncle Uri unfolding a paper he has already ‘read’ and upon rereading the familiar headlines he exclaims: “Nah! God almighty! Every day the same issues. Nothing to see and nothing to hear.”³² Noticeably, the verb that is missing here is the obvious exclamation ‘nothing to read!’ This is an omission that by now is clear: the function of the Russian paper is not to be read but rather to be displayed on the dresser by the entrance to the house, so all who enter can see it, and also to be recounted by Moti to the aunt. Yiddish is for talking and for the poor readers, those who actually read. Russian is for the rich and serves as a veneer for this gilded life. And Hebrew? Who reads *Ha-melitz*?

Back to the beginning of the chapter, and to Hebrew, the narrator notes that the first newspaper to enter the town was *Ha-melitz*: “Whether they like it or not, all the Jews of Shklov draw water from the same suspect well.”³³ The narrator goes on to conclude that, alas, “when one does not have an *etrog*, even a potato must suffice.”³⁴ The narrator uses a Yiddish proverb to colloquially disparage the Hebrew publication as bland and unholy, just as the potato is the most common and plain ingredient while the *Eetrog*, a lemon-like fruit, serves a religious, sanctified

Literature: A Fertile but Complex Relationship." *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 2 (2008): 149-72. It is no wonder that the narrator of Shklov is wary of *Ha-melitz* and shunned it aside. To complicate the translation dynamics even further, *Ha-melitz* tended to translate articles from Russian and German newspapers.

³² ניטא וואָס צו הערן, ניטאָ וואָס צו זעהן. Yid. 26. Heb., 35

³³ ווילענדיג ניט ווילענדיג פלעגען שקלאָווער אידען טרינעקן פונם דאָזיגען פאַרדעכטיגען קוואַל. Yid., 17

³⁴ אויב מע האָט נישט קיין אתרוג בענטשט מען אויף אַ בולבע. Yid., 17

purpose. The Hebrew newspaper, with its Yiddish supplement, is basic nourishment but not much more. The holy tongue, literally *loshn koydesh*, is branded as mundane, a potato, and the new *loshn koydesh* is Yiddish, or even Russian. This sharp irony speaks to a revolutionary language philosophy, where the once elevated Hebrew language is relegated to the mundane and the mundane is elevated.

While the proverb of the *etrog* and potato integrates seamlessly into the Yiddish text, it is the translation into Hebrew, an exacting and yet unsuccessful translation, which highlights the hybridity of the translated text. Using this Yiddish phrase introduces a narrative hitch within the Hebrew version, since the translated proverb is a marker of the missing language, especially in view of Shneour's choice to translate verbatim rather than find an equivalent Hebrew phrase.³⁵ As Menachem Perry notes when discussing the bilingualism of the S. Y. Abramovitch (Mendele Moykher Sforim), the use of a proverb can alter the text: "The [Hebrew] text makes use of the fact that the idiom is known and forms (ironic) relations between the idiom that hovers in the background and the plot that realizes it. The *Hebrew* reader will have to place a familiar *Yiddish* idiom in the background."³⁶ The Hebrew reader is forced into the role of translator, mediating this text and its origins throughout the reading. The fact that the subject-matter of this proverb is reading and language conflict only further problematizes the linguistic situation. The Hebrew text, being as mundane as a potato, calls for the insertion of a juicy Yiddish proverb, thus implying an alternative language hierarchy that places Yiddish above Hebrew, rather than the other way around.

³⁵ Heb.17. כשאין אתרוג מברכים על הבולבוס.

³⁶ Menachem Perry. "Thematic and Structural Shifts in Autotranslations by Bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish Writers: The Case of Mendele Mokher Sforim." *Poetics Today* 2.4 (1981), 186.

Still, there is a crucial difference between the Abramovitsh example in Perry's essay and Shneour's self-translation. As Perry notes, what is phenomenal and exceptional in the case of Abramovitsh is that he could rest assured that many of his readers, a majority in fact, would read both versions or, at least, recognize the original phrases through the translation. Even if this is a somewhat over-sweeping assertion with regards to Abramovitsh, in Shneour's case, the writer could never have expected this kind of readership. Translation for Shneour was an act of widening his audience, reaching those who could not read his novel in one of the two languages. In this sense, insertion of a Yiddish proverb into a Hebrew text, even a translated one, leaves a mark of foreignness in a text that purports to be an original.

These assumptions about language knowledge of the different audiences and readers enter this chapter again and again. Another example of this language disparity occurs when Moti the salesman comes knocking on the door to sell the Russian newspapers. Both the Hebrew and Yiddish versions note that he peppers his speech with Russian words. This use of Russian, the narrator explains, comes to enhance the sales pitch, to convince Aunt Feige and any other potential buyers that Moti read the newspaper. Although the words he repeats—*govorit on*, *dasvidaniya*—are simple rhetorical flourishes, this tactic works for Aunt Feige and for others. The difference between the Yiddish and the Hebrew versions is relegated to the margins. In both texts, the Russian is transliterated, as it will continue to be throughout the novel. But, in the Hebrew version, the text is bolstered by footnotes that explain the Russian, helping the Hebrew reading public to understand the text. In Maya Barzilai's interpretation of Yoel Hoffman's use of footnotes for translation, such practice leads to a marginalization of the Hebrew. In other words, the primary language of the text, Hebrew, is being pushed to the margins and, as a result, the

issue of language mastery and its shortcomings are embodied in the text via footnotes.³⁷ Whereas Hoffmann's readers are Israelis who are self-assured in their language knowledge, and he calls this mastery into question, Shneour's Hebrew readers in 1935 are not in the same situation vis-à-vis Hebrew. Repeatedly, Shneour's self-translation into Hebrew stresses language tensions more so than the Yiddish version, foregrounding a translational gap within the text, questioning language literacy.

Following the Yiddish proverb that pegs the Hebrew language as mundane, the novel celebrates the arrival of two more "wells" in town, the Yiddish and Russian newspapers that allow Shneour to stratify and diversify the town: high class Russian and lowbrow Yiddish periodicals. And the Hebrew publication is no longer mentioned, seemingly since once one has access to the rare etrog they no longer need the bland potato. Hebrew is relegated from the sphere of reading, even if this is a reading that never really takes place. Additionally, this chapter can also be seen as a comment on the medium through which Shneour is reaching his audience: for the first time in his career, Shneour is entrusting a long-form work, a novel, to the fleeting existence of a periodical. Several years after the publication of *Shklover yidn*, Kadya Molodowsky, a fellow bilingual writer, would comment that the link between literature and newspapers is detrimental to the quality and standing of the former, for literature is eternal and the newspaper is ephemeral, sensational and frivolous by nature.³⁸ Seen through this comment, the chapter on "Reading Newspapers," with which Shneour began the serialization, is also a meta-commentary on the anxiety of paring the literary and the newsworthy. Will his readers be

³⁷ Maya Barzilai, "Translation on the Margins: Hebrew-German-Yiddish Multilingualism in Avraham Ben Yitzhak and Yoel Hoffmann", *Journal of Jewish Identities* 7.1 (2014), pp. 123-4.

³⁸ Kadya Molodovski, "Di teglekhe prese un di literature", *Der fraynd*, April 27, 1934, 4.

willing, be able, to read? Is he choosing wisely to let his precious prose free in this new mode of circulation? The answers to these questions, as far as the first chapter is concerned, are bleak.

Illiterate Literacy: Russian Alphabet in Yiddish Spelling

Some insight into Shneour's internal struggles can be found in the difference between the Yiddish and Hebrew serialized publications. The order of these publications will be dealt with later, but for now, suffice to note that the two parts of the novel, while remarkably divergent, share the theme of language tensions and translingualism. The first part of the novels is an assemblage of tales of the town and of life in Shklov that contains instances of stratification, both lingual and other, similar to the ones discussed above. The second part of the novel(s), *In the House of the Hunchback*, contains a more condensed storyline, and thus allows for a more intricate exploration of issues that are fragmentary in the first part. The second part is centered around Feivke, the son of Uncle Uri and Aunt Feige. In this storyline, the interactions of Feivke and the hunchback Leib are closely and methodically depicted, and offer insight into the life of an outcast, the hunchbacked money lender, through the eyes of a young man, a boy even, who is enamored by the position this outcast holds within the town of Shklov.³⁹

In a sense, the entire first part is only the lay of the land, of the town, so as to build up to the drama of the second part. The piecemeal method of publication in which the audience was exposed to the novel in the *Forverts* could not have foreshadowed the tragedy and darkness of the second part. The story of the hunchback's house turned the weekly wait for the stories from the town to much more suspenseful and dark. The second part begins with the protagonist being

³⁹ The name Leib, Lion in Yiddish, is an ironic stab at the ailment and decrepitness of the hunchback.

caught by the hunchback for stealing apples from his cellar, and ends with a nursery-rhyme-like verse recounting the innocence of this theft, that in retrospect, kicked off a tale of sexuality, murder, incest, gluttony, and death. The first encounter of Feivke and Leib the hunchback engages them in a fatal attraction of sorts that draws the two ever closer with Feivke mesmerized by Leib, then by his wife, and finally by their daughter. The closer Feivke grows to this family, and the more he learns of them, the deeper the tragedy grows.

Following the first chapter of the second part, Feivke, who wishes to get to know more about the hunchback, decides to arrive at his house earlier than usual, for his shared Russian language lesson with Zelda, the hunchback's daughter. Arriving at the house half an hour before class begins allows more time to observe Reb Leib the hunchback and gawk at his grotesque existence. The narrator painstakingly describes the hunchback's eating habits through the eyes of a fixated Feivke, a boy who is more interested in the hunchback than in his Russian language lesson. This gaze, and this whole scene is continuously interrupted, interspersed with comments on language, with Russian, once again, both elevated and deflated, at once. The first language comment is the intertwinement of Russian and broken Hebrew/Yiddish spoken by the young tutor. The second lingual phenomenon is the lisp the hunchback has, that is foregrounded and evoked time and again in the chapter, thematizing language deficiency and abnormalities, that are part and parcel of the gaze at the abnormal, the hunchbacked who must also be speech impaired.

Above all, the chapter sets a language imbalance between Russian and Jewish languages, and serves as a critique of the viability language learning and mastering language; the teacher, a brash young man who is a teacher solely due to the fact he managed to complete five years of a Russian language gymnasium, teaches the language to Feivke and Zelda by two equally

ridiculous methods: one of them copies over and over the word *Yekatrinoslav*, while the other child reads a folk story in Russian about a family that toils together to uproot a turnip.⁴⁰ This Russian class is an important moment in the novel, tying the two distinct parts of the novel together. First, the choice to tutor a child in Russian positions both the child and the family in a certain social stratum, those who will one day be able to purchase the Russian paper and read it with their broken Russian. The children are trained for the same kind of small town petit bourgeois elitism as their parents possess, an elitism that has already been exposed in all its falseness in the newspaper chapter. Feivke is as likely to be able to read the Russian newspaper as his father was. Illiteracy is a new kind of literacy, informing a different modality of language knowledge.

Russian is again both omnipresent and absent, a language as important as it is useless. Shneur calls attention to the fact that there is a language other than the Jewish languages, undermining the fluidity and translucence of the Hebrew or the Yiddish. The narrator goes to great lengths, some four pages, to revive the Russian orthography of what is actually being written, rewritten, over and over: the name of a Russian city, Yekatrinoslav. The letters are resurrected one by one, each assigned an image to tantalize the minds of the readers in Hebrew and Yiddish. What is created here is a translation, from word into image, an embodiment of the alienation the young child felt upon writing these uber-foreign Cyrillic letters: “The long Russian *R* – as a crooked hanging post, upon which a convict hangs with bent knees. The *tzwei-vov* [*V*] – like a pregnant woman, who slipped and fell and extends an arm to be helped up.”⁴¹ And on and

⁴⁰ This turnip that appears here foreshadows the end of the novel, when it will be eaten by Feivke and Zelda.

⁴¹ דער רוסישער לאַנגער "ר" – ווי אַ קרומער סלופ פון אַ תליה, וואָס אַ געהענגענער אַסטראָזשניק הענגט אויף איהם מיט מען אונטערגעקארטשעטע קניע. דער "וו" – ווי אַ מעוברת-דיגע אידענע וואָס האָט זיך אויגעגליטשט און שטערקט אויס אַ הענט אויף הינטען, מען זאָל איהר העלפען אויפשטעהן. *Yid.*, 212

on, every letter with an idiosyncratic equivalent. Language becomes imagery, untranslatable if not through and with pictures. Yet, Signifier and signified could not be farther apart: Shneur inserts the Yiddish letter *tzwei vov*, ן, wedging it between the Russian letter ъ, and the image Feivke produces. But ן looks nothing at all like a fallen pregnant woman, and language is thus fragmented into its most elemental particles, with little to no practical use.

The use of the Russian language, the other language, that is neither of the original languages of the text, and the sprawling spelling upon multiple pages, hammers into the psyche of the reader the fact that, although reading a Hebrew/Yiddish novel, Russian is the language that is not spoken, not written, but aspired to. Russian is posited as decidedly neither Yiddish/Hebrew, but also as a common ground, an unlearnable and untranslatable element in both versions. It is a language that is foreign to both Jewish languages, serving as a common denominator to both reading publics. Shneur's novel thereby problematizes this process of translation through imagery. First comes the Russian word, then the idiosyncratic image each letter produces in the mind of the writing child, a translation of letter into image. In between these two the Yiddish letter is inserted, widening the gap between the Russian letter, and the image. The *tzwei vov* make the image produced by the student all the more foreign, turn this language learning process all the more frail.

This triple mediation that enhances the instability of representation in language, is enhanced further by the choice of the word to be copied, 'Yekatrinoslav'. The city of Yekatrinoslav (currently: Dnipro) is a large city in eastern Ukraine with a substantial Jewish population, up until today. What has changed, several times, is its name; in 1926 the name of the

city was changed to Dnipropetrovs'k, a name it held until 2016.⁴² This is important since even the earliest readers of *Shklover yidn*, in the *Forverts* of 1927, could recognize the datedness of the name Yekatrinoslav, and the fact that this name marks a place that has been renamed, a place that in some sense no longer exists. The long discussion of the now-changed name is a method of embodiment of revolution, one that changed names and language. To change a name of a place is to change the place itself in some essential way. It denotes a very real revolution in reality, and this is enacted here through language. What better word to teach Russian in a Hebrew/Yiddish novel than with a word so shaky it would raise questions of time and place in readers' minds? We are left with a word that is already almost useless in the reality of the contemporary reader. And once again, like in the newspaper chapter, this is language education that fails, here even as it begins. Not only is the word in limbo between Russian and Yiddish-Hebrew, it is also towing the line of existence all together, signifying a place that is no more. This word, fragmented into letters, is an emblem of fissures in a signification system.

The change of tone and in narration between the two parts of *Shklover yidn* is truly astounding, probably glossed over or minimized due to serialization, creating a gap between the parts and even between each chapter, a gap that eased the readers into an affect that with hindsight proves to be dramatic. Thus, the book version created a stronger impact, one that is absent, or at the very least subtler, in the newspaper version. When the novel is read as one continuum, the split between the first and second parts becomes more pronounced. Yet, one strong bind is that of (Russian) language trouble.

⁴² This name was in fact changed multiple times: Pre-1918 it was Екатеринославъ, probably the spelling the young Feivke draws, seeing as the last letter which was later lost most resembles a fallen pregnant woman with an outstretched hand. Between 1918-1926 the spelling was changed to Екатеринослав, and between 1926-2016 the name was altogether changed to Днепропетровск, the name at the time of the first publication of *Shklover yidn*. In 2016 the name was changed once again to Дніпро (Dnipro).

Shneour Rewriting Bialik

As different as the second part of *Shklover yidn* is compared to the first part, it is a similarity to another work of literature that makes this second part even more remarkable. The second part echoes a novella by Bialik, *Me'ahorei ha-gader (Behind the Fence)*.⁴³ In this section, I outline these parallels and the role they play within the interlingual meld that is *Shklover yidn/Anshei Shklov*, and how the iconic Hebrew novella is rewritten by the Yiddish text, that is then transformed into Hebrew. The comparison between these two works sheds light on the cultural work Shneour performs in adapting a canonical Hebrew novella into the Yiddish and then back into the Hebrew, a cross-lingual adaptation that renders the novella by Bialik back into Hebrew via an innovative Yiddish version. Moreover, the comparison allows further insight into the influences that informed and enabled the narrative leap made in the second part of the novel, revealing how the second part came to fruition.

Before discussing the novella and its relation to *Shklover yidn*, some crucial comments on the strong and tenuous bond between Shneour and Bialik are in order; as mentioned earlier, at the early age of fourteen, when Shneour left his hometown of Shklov and ventured to Odessa to become a writer, he was seeking a patron. This quest was successful with Bialik, who helped Shneour enter the literary scene, published his first poems, and wrote one of the more emphatic endorsements of Shneour, touting him as the future of Hebrew literature.⁴⁴ This connection to Bialik remained strong for years and Shneour's poetry was influenced by the style and poetics of

⁴³ This novella, published in Hebrew in 1909, was translated into Yiddish in 1922, titled "Noakh und Marinke", but as far as one can tell did not garner much attention, by readers or critics of Yiddish.

⁴⁴ Hayim Nahman Bialik. "Shiratenu ha-tzeira." In *Kol kitvey H. N. Bialik*, vol. 3. (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1956). Shneour's autobiography is a source for much of the evidence of the strong father-like connection Shneour felt towards Bialik.

the older poet. This background is fascinating when thinking of the second part of *Shklover yidn* as a translational adaptation of “Behind the Fence.”

Behind the Fence is the tale of two young children, Noakh and Marianka, who are neighbors that have no business falling in love or even meeting, but do so nonetheless, with tragic repercussions.⁴⁵ As may be clear from their names, Noakh is a Jew, and Marinka is not. She lives in the house adjacent to Noakh’s, the only house in that part of the town belonging to non-Jews. The novella starts by depicting the siege this house is under; since it remains the last house in the area that is not owned by Jews, Marinka stays cooped up behind the fence and only rarely does her caretaker, Shkorphintchshika, leave the confines of the house to sell her crops at the market. The agricultural element of this household grows increasingly significant as the tale advances since, besides sharing a fence, both households border on the garden where the fruits and vegetables grow and that Noakh and Marinka will use for their rendezvous.

The seclusion of the house with which the story opens is manifested in the physicality of Shkorphintchshika’s house that literally towers higher and higher off the street and is a menacing presence to all who walk by: “Out of the wall of the house poles and bulges protrude, at the exact height of a grown man, and all who walk too closely get a bump on their head, let out some curse words at the wall and run home to tend to the bruise.”⁴⁶ This description of the house and its

⁴⁵ The Hebrew spelling of Noakh is the reversal of the acronym of Bialik’s first names, נח ~ ח"נ, by which he was well known, thus bestowing the story with an autobiographical undertone from the outset.

⁴⁶ לכאורה, מה רעה יכולים לעשות גג ודפנות? אבל מתוך הזוית החיצונה של דירת שקוריפינשטשיכא היה מבצבץ ויוצא לצד המבוי כלונס ארוך כמו זיו, שמרחוק היה דומה כמראה לכלב באצבע גדולה על המבוי: נבה, שקוריפין, יהודים הולכים. הבה, הב-הב! ואותו הזיו, שהיה גבוה מן הארץ ממש כקומת איש – פגיעתו רעה.

כל פעם שיהודי יוצא בלילה מתוך המבוי והופך לימין, מיד – חבט! ותבורה סגלגלה, גדולה כביצה, זורחת במצחו.

Chaim Nachman Bialik. "Me'ahorei ha-gader." In *Kol kitvey H. N. Bialik*, vol. 5 (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1957), 13.

menacing physicality is copied almost verbatim in *Shklover yidn*: “It is unclear what the builder of the house meant, but the hunchback’s house had a protruding circular stone, which caused many bumps and bloody noses to those who walked alongside the wall.”⁴⁷ The fact that the houses adjacent to those of the protagonists in both stories are so similar, menacing not only in their inhabitants, but also in their build, is quite a literalization of the metaphorical and a hyperbolic threat that is due to escalate throughout the two works, culminating in destruction. Shkorphintchshika and the hunchback are both outcasts who, in turn, take to seclusion and to threatening harm to all who approach their house.

So, the two stories begin with a similar motif, the first of many similarities: in both plums are used as the fruit of seduction and temptation, the protagonist of both stories is a young man who skips religious obligations of study and prayer to meet with the girl next door, the object of his affection and desire, and the use of the neighboring houses and the traversing of a fence for a sexual encounter in a barn are compellingly similar. Yet, the greatest similarities between the two works come into play through the dynamics of Eros. In both stories the ultimate transgression is erotic, with a neighbor living behind the fence, in each the young man feels he is rescuing the object of his desire from her caregiver, and in both, the erotic consummation leads to greater downfall.

Behind the Fence exhibits a transgression that at once can be seen as both more severe and more truncated for this exact reason. The ongoing affair between Noakh and Marianka spans almost a decade, a passage of time that is hardly felt in the novella. What is portrayed is the

⁴⁷ שטעקט זי ארויס, פון דער פראָנט- וואַנט [...] דער אינגענויערטער שטיק מילשטיין. אייביג יונג און אייביג מונטער זיצט ער אויף דער דער וואַך. און, אין רעגענדיגע נעכט און אין שנייאִגע פֿארטאָגען, צעביילט ער שטערענס, צעקיילט באַקען-ביינער און צעבלוטִיגט נעזער פֿון די, וועלכע האָבען אַ טבע צו שאַרען זיך ביים וואַנט *Shklover yidn*, 190.

maturation of Noakh from a young boy who is fascinated by and who feels sorry for Marinka, to one who dives into the darkness of night for a sweltering and passionate meeting. This culmination of a long-lived attraction is not described clearly, but rather symbolically through the description of the night on which it happens:

Finally, the town grew silent. Noakh listened attentively. It seemed as if the tree outside the barn was scratching at the wall. Noakh climbed out of the chimney. The tree handed him one scepter, so close by, with two ripe apples, as if saying: take, they are yours.

Noakh extend his arm—but couldn't reach. Finger after finger extended – but the hand could not grasp.

His eyes sparkled. One jump—and down he fell into a lukewarm bath full of ink, into the sweaty darkness of the ground floor. A kick to the door—and he is out. Up again—and he is on top of the barn, another jump—and he enters the garden.

All these tumbles and leaps came in a flurry and lasted but a wink. The bushes started out of their slumber and sprayed sparks in the moonlight. From the shadows of the trees emerged, as from a dream, Marinka and her dog.

Momentarily the hut devoured the two neighbors. Shkorphin stood guard.⁴⁸

This veiled description marks the end of anticipation a decade in the making. The sex scene is drenched with euphemisms: the stalk adorned by two apples, the ups and downs, the spray of sparks and the sweaty inky night, all come to mystify and clean up the ugliness of what is to

⁴⁸ סוף סוף נשתתקה השכונה. נח הטא אזנו. דומה שהאילן הנשען בדיר מבחוץ מסרט בחשאי על הדופן. עמד והוציא ראשו מן הארובה. ⁴⁸ האילן הושיט לו בראש שרביט אחד, קרוב ביותר, שני תפוחים אדומים ובשלים, כמי שאומר: טול, שלך הם.

פשט נח ידו, שרבבה – ולא הגיעה. עוד כאצבע, עוד כאצבע – היד לא הגיעה.

עיניו התיזו ניצוץ. קפיצה אחת – והוא נפל לתוך אמבטי פושרת של דיו, אל האפלה המזיעה שבמדור התחתון. בעיטה בדלת – והוא מבחוץ. שוב עלתה – והוא בראש הגג של הדיר, ושוב קפיצה – והוא בתוך הגן עצמו.

כל העליות והירידות באו פתאם ולא ארכו אלא כהרף עין. השיחים שבגן ננערו פתאם מתנומתם והתיזו ניצוצות לאור הירח. מבין צללי אילנות נגלו כחזיון לילה מארינקא וכלקה.

Bialik, 98. הצרף בלע בעוד רגע את שני בני השכנים. על הפתח עמד שקורפין ושמר

come. The narrator drives this story to an end with a rhetorical question, sordid as it is sad: “Do you think Noakh married Marinka? If you do, you know not the soul of a man from this Jewish suburb.”⁴⁹ Noakh is married off to the daughter of a wealthy Jewish clerk, and when he and his wife come back to visit his childhood home and sit alone in the backyard, it is Marinka who is peeping through the fence clutching a baby, Noakh’s baby. The love was consummated, but its results leave Marinka worse off than she was. What defines the consummation of this love is that we find out of it vicariously, through the result of the sexual act, the baby, and the bitter juxtaposition of this harsh reality to the embellished and steamy sexual act that preceded it.

In comparison, Shneur does not even give us a flowery façade; his story of consummation, desire and catharsis is brutal and unabashed, much like most of the second half of *Shklover yidn*. Yet, even with the differences, similarities abound. To begin with, the object of desire of young Feivke is not his classmate Zelda, but rather her mother Bathsheba, the wife of the hunchback.⁵⁰ Much like in *Behind the Fence*, the impulse is to save this beautiful and fragile being from the claws of a sinister caregiver- in *Shklover yidn* it is from the clutches of the hunchback and in *Behind the Fence* from Shkorphintchshika. Yet, in *Shklover yidn*, the object of desire changes halfway through the novel. After Feivke learns that Bathsheba has been unfaithful, cheating on the hunchback with Alter the watchmaker, he turns his libidinal fervor to Zelda, the daughter, who is most probably the offspring of this infidelity.

This shift in desire halfway through the novel is double edged; on the one hand it stems from an aversion to infidelity and even a sense of pity for the hunchback and the wrongdoing

⁴⁹ Bialik, 101.

⁵⁰ This is a biblical allusion to the story of King David who stole Bathsheba from her husband and was later punished for this transgression. The clutch the hunchback has on Bathsheba and his downfall might be foreshadowed in the name choice.

inflicted upon him. On the other hand, and even more prominent in the text, is a lust sparked in Feivke towards Zelda that is provoked by the fact that she is the child of an illegitimate union, an urge to connect with her in an illegitimate relationship. The desire comes to fruition one afternoon, on the Jewish fast day of *Tisha-beav*, the ninth day of the month of Av, the day the temple was destroyed, a day a household will be destroyed. Feivke creeps into Zelda's yard, picks a turnip to feast on in mid-fast, breaking the fast and transgressing his upbringing and Jewish law.⁵¹ But, from the roof of the barn, he is caught red-handed when Zelda calls out to him and makes him come up and join her in the attic of the barn, a scene suspiciously similar to that in *Behind the Fence* when Noah and Marianka consummate their love.

At the top of the barn, same as in Bialik's novella, Feivke and Zelda begin flirting, chasing each other around the hay and eating the turnip together, biting into it simultaneously from opposite sides until only a slither remains as a barrier. At this point Zelda seems to waiver in her desire, but Feivke nails her to the floor, forcing his kisses and caresses upon her, raping her. This story of sexual violence will not be the only one of the story, even though this in itself was more than enough to set the ending of *Shklover yidn* apart from the circumvented sexuality of *Behind the Fence*. As harrowing as this courtship turned rape is, what is to come is even worse; while this is going on Bathsheba enters the barn and interrupts the two. Zelda escapes the barn and, when Feivke attempts to slip out as well, Bathsheba grabs him, presses him between her breasts and starts inflicting upon him what he had done to her daughter, all the while convincing him that this is what he actually wants. Bathsheba is overrun with lust, which she takes out on the young boy, using him for her violent sexual desires.

⁵¹ Think back to the Russian folk tale of uprooting a turnip and the contrast between the fairy tale quality of the schooldays to the downfall the turnip brings at the end.

This rape too is broken up, again by outside disturbance; Zelda, who raced home, finds the body of her father, who was killed while all these transgressions were taking place in the barn. In fact, when Feivke creeps into the barn, he notices a Roma entering the house of the hunchback, but says nothing, and alerts no one. He does this not only because he is overridden with lust, but also because, exposing the intruder, would also expose himself: on a fast day, away from the synagogue, looking for food and possibly sex. For days after the murder, Feivke keeps silent and to himself. The whole town is on the lookout for the murderer, but Feivke does not want to incriminate himself. The murder of the hunchback, that saved Feivke from rape, is also what torments his conscience. Shneur allows Feivke off the hook; the murderer is caught trying to sell off some of the hunchback's possessions. This allows for the novel to end with some sort of resolution. To heighten the unidyllic idyllic resolution, Shneur chooses to end the novel with a childish poem, a sing-songy rhyming verse "Just as every tale ends in the old town of Shklov."⁵² The four short lines come to end not only the second part of the novel but to bring it back full circle, linking the tragedy and darkness of this second part to the small-town sentiments the first part evokes. In a way, this short verse comes to denote that the novel was not depicting two different towns, but one and the same, where good and evil intertwine, love and rape, nothing is concealed, and yet all is neatly wrapped up in the end. "A stick goes in\and then comes out\the tale of the hunchback\is over and shut."⁵³ This childish rhyme, offered by the narrator\author in the first person, goes back to the opening lines of the novel. As mentioned above, in the framing chapter the narrator laments all that has changed since he left his town and how the world is not as tame and docile as it was when he was growing up in Shklov. But

⁵² א שטעקלע אריין / א שטעקלע ארויס / די מעשה מיט לייבע-הארבן / איז אויס *Shklover yidn*, 338.

⁵³ Ibid.

assuming that the recounting of the tale of the hunchback is also a leftover from those bygone years, what is lost? What was there to miss and lament in the town? Murder and rape? And then comes the Hebrew version; in this the stick goes in but a tree comes out, a story of transformation and bildung.⁵⁴

This final Hebrew nursery rhyme, promising the transformation of a stick into a tree, raises further questions: does this hypersexualized euphemism not promise a coming of age via rape? It seems that the euphemized scepter with two ripe apples that Bialik offers in the twin tale of *Behind the Fence* from 1909 has evolved here into a stick entering and being pulled out a tree. A young boy forever changed when he is forced to be a prop in the climax of a once coveted, now menacing older woman, a woman who is attracted to him for the virility she just saw enacted by him upon her own daughter. This is a far cry from the idyllic first part of the novel, and a more obtuse version than the Yiddish version.

Two Languages, Numerous Versions

The Tale of the Hunchback's House leads us back to the gap between the two parts of the novel. As mentioned, there are striking differences between the first versions of the *Shklover yidn* and *Anshei Shklov*. While both novels were serialized in weekly installments in daily periodicals, the eight years between the two publications flesh out some important differences. The Yiddish version was serialized in the *Forverts* starting May 31st, 1927 and ran for just under a year. The weekly chapter appeared on Tuesdays, on one of the first pages of the newspaper, situating it as one of the highlights of the periodical. This is also apparent from the notice to the reader from

⁵⁴ מקל נכנס / ויצא עץ. / למעשה הגבן / בא הקץ *Anshei Shklov*, 494.

June 24th, titled “Zalman Shneour’s Poetic Portrayal of the Shtetl.”⁵⁵ This short notice thanks the readers for all the admiring letters the newspaper received for its decision to give a stage to these vignettes. The notice goes on to introduce Shneour shortly and promise that a chapter will appear regularly each Tuesday.⁵⁶

The first chapter that was published, on the last day of May, 1927 was titled: “Pictures from my Shtetl, Shklov Before the Revolution,”⁵⁷ and opens with the fairytale-like first sentence: “Once upon a time in Shklov there was a Jew, a shoemaker,”⁵⁸ that as we already know will be the beginning of the chapter that will later be renamed “Reading Newspapers”. Here arises the first significant change between the Yiddish book and the Yiddish serialized version – not only is the first framing chapter nonexistent in the newspaper, also the beginning of the chapter is missing, as well as the very different title.

The first difference, the framing chapter, is the easiest to rationalize, but also brings to the fore the assumptions that guide the Yiddish newspaper edition. Coupled with the promise in the first person of pictures of the old town before the revolution, “Pictures from *my shtetl*”, this move is one of pseudo-ethnography. A sizeable portion of the readers of the Yiddish version, as publisher Abe Cahan and Shneour both knew all too well, immigrated from shtetls like Shklov, likewise before the revolution. Situating these weekly short stories such, without an overarching opening narrative stating the goal of the novel, without talk of demise, tension and loss, allows

⁵⁵ ז. שניאור'ס פאָעטישע שילדרונגען פון דער אידישער שטעדטעל. The topic of the portrayal of the shtetel has been taken up by many scholars, most extensively in: Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

⁵⁶ This should be taken with a grain of salt this needs to be taken with, since Cahan was known to forge fan mail, occasionally. See: Kellman, *The Newspaper Novel*.

⁵⁷ בילדער פון מיין שטעדטעל שקלאָוו פאר דער רעוואָלוציע

⁵⁸ געווען איז אין שקלאָוו אַ אידעל אַ שוסטער

for a more palatable narrative for the American audience, a reading public looking for a memory of home, possibly without the baggage that may accompany such memory.

The third major difference in this opening chapter is the omission of the societal role periodicals occupied in Shklov, and beginning this chapter, the first chapter of a serialization, as one about a Jew, switching trades, from shoe repair to peddling newspapers. No talk of *Hamelitz*, and none of the stratification of the town via Russian and Yiddish language periodicals. The cultural critique that the novelistic version evokes is not a good way to kick off a series of vignettes that is a turn to the emotional. The insertion of language tensions and of Russian as the foil to the Jewish languages is a later addition.

Yet the biggest difference between the versions is between the Yiddish and Hebrew serialized periodical versions. These first versions differ drastically in the order of the narrative, in a way that sheds light on the perception Shneour has of Hebrew readers in Palestine as opposed to the Yiddish readership in the United States. On the 13th of November, 1935 a notice to the readers of the daily *Davar* appeared stating that Zalman Shneour will be a regular participant in the paper.⁵⁹ The notice goes on to give some background on who Shneour is, through the famous praise of Shneour by Bialik, and then to explain, apologetically, why the Hebrew reading public has read so little by this important writer. The editorial reminds the readers that Shneour is a relatively well-known poet in Hebrew, and that he has devoted himself to prose in recent years. The newspaper leaves it up to Shneour to explain why his prose is less known to the Hebrew reader: “The poet [Shneour] writes to us: For ten uninterrupted years I

⁵⁹ The fact that *Davar* was the newspaper that published Shneour likely has roots in the admiration Berl Katznelson had for Shneour and to the fact that Katznelson, the founder of the paper a leader of the Zionist labor movement, was always very protective of Shneour. See: Miron, *Image of the Shtetl*, 324.

have devoted all my energy to Yiddish, publishing sixteen volumes of prose, which all started off as Hebrew creations, but I had no platform to publish them in the original Hebrew, and this is a fact!”⁶⁰ The editorial goes on to explain that it feels a privilege to have “Returned Shneour to the Hebrew literature and to the Hebrew reader” and that, from now on, Shneour’s prose will appear regularly, rewritten by him into Hebrew. Before moving on to the first publication the newspaper offers, it is crucial to take a moment to look at this peculiar and possibly false portrayal and self-portrayal of Shneour as one who is returning to Hebrew after a forced exile in the Yiddish language for a sojourn of a decade, a decade in which he wrote everything in Hebrew but was forced to publish in Yiddish, with no Hebrew outlet. The idea that all these sixteen volumes of Yiddish prose were first written in Hebrew and, only due to technicality, were then translated into and published in Yiddish, is farfetched and most likely false. Still, *Davar*’s editors deemed it a necessary portrayal of Shneour, a device used to publish and promote the work in a Hebrew newspaper in Palestine. To claim that these stories of the old town were authentically Hebrew was a way of achieving Hebrew publication and readership.

This editorial ends by proclaiming that the next day, November 14, will begin the Hebrew era of Shneour’s career, and the first publication will be an 11-episode story named “The Hunchback.” The choice to reverse the order of the two parts in both the Yiddish publications, the novel and the newspaper, is crucial. The stories and vignettes of the town, “Pictures of my Shtetl before the Revolution,” might not have the same resonance and allure in a newspaper published in Palestine in the mid-thirties. The grand return of a poet from his exile in Yiddish, a tour de force of Hebrew renaissance, should begin with a modernist tale that fuses darkness and

⁶⁰ *Davar*, 13.11.1935, 6.

sexuality rather than quaint pictures of newspaper reading and jam making in the old town. When the first part of the novel in Yiddish finally appears in Hebrew, on April 4th 1936, it is once again different from the Yiddish periodical version: on page 9 of *Davar* we find the framing chapter of the first part of Shklover yidn, opening with the aforementioned statement regarding language and authenticity: “I know this town all too well because this is where I learned Hebrew (*Ivri*).” In other words, what used to be an introductory statement in the Yiddish version, follows, in the Hebrew publication order, almost half a year of the Shklov narrative in serial form. This discrepancy is indicative of what Shneour feels a Hebrew reading crowd would need in order to accept and savor shtetl stories, stories from before the revolution. If the narrator promises that this work is one of a past that no longer exists, a bygone place, the hierarchy of diaspora-homeland is upheld, the present life of Zionist revival is clearly demarcated and well defined. Shtetl life is not something of contemporary life, but of a past.

The Hebrew version introduces Shklov in a way that upsets and even undermines the manner in which Shklov was portrayed in the Yiddish press almost a decade earlier; not a set of stories that begins with a depoliticized narrative of a newspaper-reading culture, but a novel of transgression; not a work reminiscent of home, but one that revisits a depleted and deranged past. The 1935 publication in *Davar* does not restore a Hebrew original but rather refashions a Yiddish version to suit the politics of interwar Palestine.

The added layer of ‘Behind the Fence’ muddies the language waters even further; between the Hebrew and Yiddish versions, with their discrepancies and intralingual fissures, lies another outside force, perhaps as strong as these other language issues. In incorporating *Behind the Fence* into the final dramatic moments of the Shklov novel, Shneour pays homage to the great poet and mentor, surely. But more so, he is carving out an interlingual space for himself.

All translators are haunted by complex forces that curb originality.⁶¹ Shneour uses a Hebrew canonical work as a scaffolding for his Yiddish prose, de facto rewriting while adapting. This layered bilingualism becomes even more complex when considering that later a rendition of Bialik returns to the Hebrew, through the translation of *Anshei shklov*.

Conclusion: Two Bilinguals Across the Ocean

On February 7, 1936 Y. D. Berkowitz, a notable translator himself, writes from Tel Aviv to Shneour who was in Paris at the time. Berkowitz's letter provides a perspective on the woes of self-translation, in this case from Yiddish to Hebrew. Berkowitz, who himself is no stranger to translation and self-translation, comments on the episodes of *Anshei Shklov* that are appearing in *Davar*.⁶² From the letter it is clear that Berkowitz has already read the novel in Yiddish, and thus comments on the relationship between the Yiddish and Hebrew versions, comparing them:

The recent chapters are getting better and better. I am confident that the longer you continue this work, the deeper your style will get, and you shall achieve perfection. I know the taste of this hard work—translating your own work (not that of others) from its vibrant, free and agile tongue, that flows and adheres to your every wish, into a language, that is still a language of illusion—this is slave labor, one that has not been inflicted upon any writer in any other nation and language. I am also of the opinion, that the fact that you live in the diaspora, far away from the living (truthfully – about to be living) spoken tongue in the land of Israel, leads you to use, in dire straits, outdated language from the depths of your memory, instead of the exact saying, that is being invented here due to the necessities of life. The language of Tel-Aviv will not be pleasant to you, as it isn't to me, and yet it is invigorating, [...] Nonetheless, it is good that you are doing this hard work, and may the torments of translation be torments of love. In a few short years you will have several beautiful volumes in hand, [...] literature that

⁶¹ Anita Norich, *Writing in Tongues: Translating Yiddish in the Twentieth Century*. (University of Washington Press, 2013), 16-17.

⁶² On the life and translations of Berkowitz see: Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz. *Yidishe Dertseylungen 1906-1924* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003).

will lighten the hearts of a young and growing audience.
And in Yiddish, what is left for us? A weak and elderly public, withering away
before our eyes.⁶³

These woes of self-translation that Berkowitz laments encompass much of what has been discussed above. This letter is one of brotherhood, union in the troubled task of translating one's own work. Berkowitz, like Shneour, translated his own work from Yiddish to Hebrew. With diverse and extensive translating experience, he might be best qualified to comment on the afflictions of self-translation. Although Berkowitz resorts to hyperbole at times, stating that the fate he and Shneour share is unprecedented amongst all nations, he captures in his letter some key issues that defined the time and space of the recreation of Shklov in prose. Spanning Shneour's bilingual career in Berlin, New York, Paris, and Tel Aviv, Shklov is truly a translingual and transnational creation. This work emerged and was shaped in a time of fluctuating lingual politics, capacities, and preferences: as Berkowitz argues, the Hebrew language was moving with the times, while Yiddish was to become obsolete. This assertion makes Shneour's decision to translate from Yiddish to Hebrew self-evident, one that should be the natural choice for any Yiddish writer who wishes longevity for his work.

What Berkowitz does not take into account, and what might be truly exceptional in the case of this novel, is that Shneour is (self-)translating the (self-)translated, retranslating what he

⁶³ הפרקים האחרונים והולכים ומשתכללים יותר ויותר. מובטחני בך כי ככל אשר תרחיק במלאכתך זו, כן יעמק סגנונך ויגיע לתכלית השלמות. יודע אני את טעם העבודה הקשה הזאת – לתרגם את יצירות עצמך (לא של אחרים) מלשון חיותן החפשית והגמישה, השוטפת לרצונך ונשמעת לך לכל הטיה קלה, ללשון, שכל כוחה לעת-עתה אינו אלא באילוסיה – עבודת-פרך היא, שלא נסה בה שום סופר בשום אומה ולשון. סבור אני, כי גם ישיבתך בנכר, הרחק מלשון-הדיבור החיה (יותר נכון – המתחיה) בארץ-ישראל, גורמת לך להסתייע לפעמים, בעת "צרה", בצורת-לשון ארכאית מן המוכן בזכרון, במקום הביטוי המדויק, ההולך ונוצר פה בהכרח החיים. אמנם הלשון התל-אביבית לא תהיה נעימה לך כל עיקר, כשם שאינה נעימה גם לי, ועם כל זאת יש בה משהו חיוני ומחדש ומרענן, שאסור לנו להעלים עין ממנו. אם כה ואם כה, כדאי וכדאי לך לעשות את הדבר הקשה הזה, וחביבים יהיו עליך יסורי התרגום. בעוד שנים אחדות יהיו מוכנים בידך כמה כרכים יפים, מלאים מ טוב יצירתך ומעסיס ההומור שלך, ואשר ישמחו לבב קהל צעיר ורב, ההולך ורב משנה לשנה. ובאידיש מה נשאר לנו? קהל זקנים ונמושות, הפוחתים והולכים לעינינו. Zalman Shneour archive, *Gnazim*, 9714-21.

has already once translated and, in this process, rewriting a Hebrew work. With all the permutations this novel has undergone from the early 1920s and up until the mid-1930s, Berkowitz' conviction that, in the end, Shneour will get it right seems ideologically motivated. No longer is this a letter from one self-translator to another, but from a bilingual writer who believes in a certain directionality, to one who is not committed to such lingual teleology. The endgame for Berkowitz was Hebrew, while the endgame for Shneour was still in flux. Berkowitz was arguing for a living language upon a vibrant land, and against a dwindling public of Yiddish readership. He too had his reservations, namely an uneasiness he felt with the Tel-Avivian language, but these seem as mere apologetics. He has settled, quite literally, for a language and a land. Shneour, in his transience, unearths an "already resolved" question—engendering a deep, perhaps not fully recognized anxiety in Berkowitz for the exact reason that he retranslates; his lingual malleability allows him to transcend borders of land and language.

As Lilach Netanel recently wrote about Shneour, overwhelmingly strong forces were at work in the first decades of the twentieth century, forces that attempted to powerfully focus a diaspora of enclaves of Jewish literature into a single language and a single locale.⁶⁴ Shneour's translated novel(s) is a paradigm of the tensions that such monolingual forces could bring about. As this chapter has showed, the translational poetics of Shklov, the reproduction of Shklov, with tales of rape and murder, are a product of language destabilization. In rewriting Bialik, and rewriting himself, Shneour moves across languages to stress the fallacies of this age of monolingualization.

⁶⁴ In: Zalman Shneour. *Ha-meshumedet*. (Or Yehudah: Dvir, 2015), 324.

Restive Monolingualism – A Conclusion

דער גייסט, וואָס פאַרבינדט יידיש און העברעיש, איז אַ סך שטאַרקער, ווי דער גייסט, וואָס צעשיידט זיי.

The spirit which binds Yiddish and Hebrew is much stronger than the spirit which divides the two.

(Aron Zeitlin, *Di zukunft*, September 1940, p. 537)

Nomberg Past and Future

Before we look into the futures of Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism, one additional brief look to the past. This dissertation opened with an appraisal of Abramovitsh and his language(s) by Shneur and will come full circle with an evaluation by Nomberg. In his discussion of “Mendele and the Yiddish Language” Nomberg muses:

When one considers that between our young generation of writers and the first writings of Mendele Moykher Sforim with his *Kleyne mentshes* and the *Klyatshe* lay almost half a century; that forty-fifty years lay between Czernowitz, which recognized Yiddish as a national language by resolution, and between the first Yiddish phrases written by our great language-artist, in which the Yiddish language was *actually* “recognized”, through the relationship between Mendele and the language, through his matching, shaping and trimming of each and every word and sentence, – we are unconditionally overcome with respect for him, as a spiritual giant, a “seer”, who, even while feeling out his way through the darkness, discovers what is important and right, even better than us with our eyes wide open in the bright daylight.¹

¹ ווען מען דערמאנט זיך, אז צווישן דעם יונגען ליטערארישן דור און דעם ערשטן ארויספאר פון מענדעלע מוכר-ספרים מיט זיין "קליין" מענטשעלע" און די "קליאטשע" ליגט כמעט שוין א האלבער יאהונדערט; אז 40-50 יאר ליגן צווישן טשערנאוויץ, וואס האט אנערקענט יידיש פאר א נאציאנאלע שפראך דורך א רעזאלוציע, און צווישן די ערשטע יידישע שורות, וואס אונזער גרעסטער שפראך-קינסטלער האט אויפגעשריבן, וו די יידישע שפראך איז פאקטיש "אנערקענט" געווארן דורך דער באציונג פון מענדעלען צו איר, דורך זיין צוקלויבן און שליפן

The main issue here is recognition: the de jure recognition of Yiddish as a national language, in Czernowitz, became possible only due to the de facto recognition by Mendele half a century earlier. Nomberg, in his attempt to point to the grandeur of Mendele, ends up highlighting his own language achievements. Mendele is a prophet who laid the ground for Nomberg, his Czernowitz conference resolution and his prose. Mendele was a spiritual giant who figured out (Yiddish) language half a century before Nomberg did, but now the ground is there for the future. Again, an ongoing trope from the introduction, with the myth of Mendele informing any language trajectory one wishes. The recognition of a language, and the exclusivity of language as national or mono, were what have been charted in the three previous chapters. Nomberg, in thinking forward, envisions a progression from the foundations laid by Mendele's prose to the work Nomberg is carrying out and unto the future of Yiddish. This account is fueled by anxiety of recognition and of the future.

This future is what I would like to devote this conclusion to; not a look back but a look forward. Not half a century back from Nomberg, but rather half a century forward, to 1987. As we will see, this look forward will be very much predicated on the past. In this, I wish to chart the influence of Nomberg, and his peers, on current day Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism. This is an expansion of Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism in the post-*khurbn* years, and a consideration of the continuums, rather than the all too discussed breaks, in these practices. Even further removed from Mendele, and from Nomberg, and deep into the Israeli period, the bilingual practices endure, although, again changed. In this the scope of the dissertation is charted onward, with the

און פֿיילן יעדעס ווארט און יעדן זאץ, - באפאלט אונז נישט-ווילנדיק דער רעספעקט צו אים, ווי צו א גייסטיקן ריז, ווי צו א "זעער", וואס אפילו ווען ער טאפט אין דער פינסטערניש, געפינט ער דאס וויכטיקע און ריכטיקע, בעסער ווי מיר מיט אונזערע אפענע אויגן אין דער העלער ליכטיקייט. Hirsch David Nomberg. *Mentshn un verk: yidishe shrayber* (Warsaw: Kultur-lige, 1930), 27.

The 1987 Hebrew novel, *Foygelman*, can be seen to imagine a counterfactual future in which Fliegelman survives his attempted suicide and immigrates to the State of Israel.⁴ This novel by Aharon Megged tells of the relationship between the narrator, Zvi Arbel, a native Israeli, professor of history at Tel-Aviv University, very much a rooted character, and Shmuel Foygelman (literally: birdman), a Yiddish poet who is the manifestation of uprootedness and the transient nature of survivors.⁵ The narrative is constructed as flashbacks, Foygelman is already dead, as is Arbel's wife, Nora, who has committed suicide, due to the relationship between the two men. The two men connect almost by chance and are drawn to each other seemingly due to their differences, an attraction of opposites. Arbel does all he can to help Foygelman, almost obsessively, primarily by helping him find a translator and publisher for his Yiddish poetry. This project becomes the nexus of the novel, turning the theme of translation, and failure to translate, between Yiddish and Hebrew, into the driving force of the narrative.

Even before the poetry, from the outset, the relationship between Arbel and Foygelman is marked by translation: the novel begins with Arbel receiving a book of Yiddish poetry by mail, sent from an unknown address in France. Foygelman sent this after Arbel's book was translated into French, granting the Yiddish poet access to the historian's work. The third language, French, serves as a mediator between Foygelman's Yiddish and Arbel's Hebrew. As the novel progresses, the issue of translation becomes its epicenter; Arbel works tirelessly to help Foygelman find a "nest" in Israel, through the translation and publication of his poetry in Hebrew. As the men grow closer, Nora, Arbel's wife, grows distant, finally committing suicide

⁴ Or so I would like to imagine. The similarity of the names as well as the characters allows for this assumption. Aharon Megged. *Foyglman* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1987). The quotes will be from the English translation: *Foiglmán*. (New Milford, Conn.: Toby, 2003).

⁵ To the extent in which this novel has been read by scholars it is mostly framed as a Holocaust novel see: Gershon Shaked. *Hasiporet Haivrit: 1880-1980*. Vol. 4 (Tel Aviv: Keter, 1993), 290-316. Lillian Kremer. *Holocaust Literature*. Vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2003), 822-823.

after the ill-received publication of the Hebrew translation of Foygelman's work. But prior to that, the novel spins out of control, to end with the death, due to translation hardships. The two men discuss, more than any other topic, the relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish:

What can one do with this Hebrew of yours? Such a conceited, stuck up language... Sometimes I feel like grabbing a Hebrew word by its forelock, bending it a little and saying: 'a little humility, *meydele*, lower yourself to our height, to the size of simple folk...' ⁶

The gendered violence in this passage is striking and disturbing. We are presented with what is by now a classic essentialized hierarchy between Hebrew and Yiddish: Hebrew as the queen and Yiddish as the folksy servant.⁷ But what Foygelman offers to do with this power imbalance is the dramatic shift: the use of the diminutive, מיידעלע, and not as a term of endearment in the least, comes to deflate the self-righteous Hebrew, and cut it down to size, Yiddishize it, by grabbing the word by its head and bending it over. The gender reversal is crucial here: while the images of Hebrew and Yiddish are often gendered, it is mostly as two women, a matron and her handmaid, or even as male and female, with Hebrew being the masculine language and Yiddish the feminine. Here, the image is that of a Yiddish female word bent over forcefully by a (Yiddish) male protagonist is sexually fraught. This is no longer a handmaiden bowing in servitude before her matron, but rather, this is the lofty Hebrew, gendered as a conceited woman, lowered down forcefully to the level of the male Yiddish. To grab her by her hair while hailing her in Yiddish,

⁶ מה עושים עם העברית שלכם! מין לשון גאוותנית, מיוחסת כל-כך... כל מילה לבושה בגלימת ארגמן וכתר על ראשה... אפשר להשתחוות " לה ביראת כבוד, אבל ליפול על צווארה?.. לפעמים יש לי חשק לאחוז בראשה של מלה עברית, לכופף אותה קצת ולומר לה: קצת צניעות... מיידעלע, קצת תנמיכי את עצמך לגובה שלנו, אנשים פשוטים" pp.171-172. The English translation erases the Yiddish here, translating *meydele* as 'young woman'. For obvious reasons I left the very deliberate use of Yiddish as it was in the Hebrew version.

⁷ Perhaps best chronicled in the introduction to: Naomi Seidman. *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

is a violent act of resistance by a Yiddish poet, fighting what he seems to acknowledge is a lost battle. The little that may be salvaged from this power imbalance must be gained by force, exerted by gender reversal and violence.

This sexual drama is ignited by translation and is due to a failed translation; Foygelman is reviewing proofs of the Hebrew translation of his poetry together with Zvi. They go back and forth with the versions, the novel presenting the Yiddish original and the translated Hebrew one after the other, with Foygelman resenting the 'bad' elevated translation which sterilizes the poetry of its spirit and with Arbel, in turn, defending the translation as best he can, defending Hebrew. Foygelman is not persuaded by Arbel's arguments:

Hebrew is so proud and haughty that when one of her prodigal offspring comes back home, she receives him coldly, like a stepson. What should one do, Zvi? No two languages are so far apart as Hebrew and Yiddish! as if spoken by two different peoples!⁸

The image of the return of a prodigal son is two-pronged; *prima facie*, Foygelman is lamenting his own inability to find a 'nest' in Israel, to (re-)integrate into society. He wishes to become Hebrew, but the transplant is rejected. The other option, lingual-centered, is that of a failed translation. Hebrew is unaccommodating of the Yiddish, of the now foreign language. Even with a translation of the Yiddish, the Hebrew immanently dismantles the prodigal language, in practice rejecting the translation by obscuring the original to the point of distortion. The warmth of Yiddish, once again essentialized, becomes the remainder which is ousted. This notion reaches

⁸ זה מה שאני טוען, שהעברית גאה כל כך, שכאשר אחד מצאצאיה שעזב את הבית חוזר אליה, היא מקבלת אותו בקרירות כאילו הוא בן 173. חורג! מה עושים, צבי? אינני מכיר שתי לשונות רחוקות כל כך זו מזו כמו היידיש והעברית! כאילו של שני עמים שונים

a critical impasse the following day, when Foygelman receives the full manuscript of his book in Hebrew. He is shocked by the elevated translation his work received:

Oh, Zvi, Zvi! Sometimes when I reflect upon how Hebrew supplanted Yiddish among those who left Europe, it seems to me that not only their speech was changed but their nature, too! Hebrew has deprived them of the warmth, the heartiness, the folksy simplicity! The transition from language to language is like those sex-change operations they perform these days...”⁹

This is no longer an issue of embodied language, but rather of bodies transformed by language, translation as transgender. The imagination of the Hebrew-Yiddish divide as gender difference, seen earlier, is accentuated now, even reversed: not language imagined as gendered, but gender change via language change. The chasm between languages widens, the split becoming one which may be traversed only via sexual reassignment procedure.¹⁰ While queering Hebrew, Foygelman is also deriding it as unnatural. Language movement is, once again, purging the Hebrew of warmth and *folkeskeit*. The nature of the people is changed, in a way which Foygelman sees as depriving them of crucial attributes, rendering the people fundamentally different. Foygelman wishes for a translation that will push Hebrew to be different than it is, not translation as invisible or as a means for monolingualism, but rather a Hebrew which is also Yiddish, a *hey mish* Hebrew, if you will. But alas, if earlier Foygelman could fantasize that deploying violence would render the Hebrew once again level with the Yiddish, now his

⁹ הוי, צבי צבי! לפעמים כשאני חושב איך העברית תפסה את מקום היידיש אצל העם הזה שיצא מאירופה, נדמה לי שלא רק את הדיבור היא שינתה, אלא את כל הטבע שלו! היא גזלה ממנו את החום, את הלבביות, את הפשטות העממית! המעבר הזה מלשון ללשון היה כמו ניתוח...p. 175.

¹⁰ This holds similarities to Naomi Seidman's discussion of Abramovitsh and his transsexual language movements. See: Seidman, *Marriage*, 40-67.

imagination is seemingly irreversible: the procedure is complete, even violence will not help to reverse it. Hebrew changes the people, their nature, in a manner which is irrevocable.¹¹

To go back to the opening of this conclusion, Foygelman seems to be a novel about recognition, אָנערקענען. Foygelman wishes for a Yiddish future to be available alongside a Hebrew future, that one does not block out or nullify the other. That, in the act of nation building and culture solidification, difference will be possible, that translation will not be erasure of difference. *Foygelman* is a novel about Hebrew-Yiddish translation and relations, post-*khurbn*; the power relations between the two languages manifest in the search for a ‘nest’ for Yiddish in Israel, metonymically through Foygelman and Arbel, and through literary translation. The failure to translate is manifold: the translation is inapt, the subsequent book fails and, worst of all, ends up in the loss of both Nora and Foygelman. The quasi-suicide at the end of the 1903 *Fliegelman* has evolved into a full-fledged suicide in *Foygelman*, leaving Arbel hunted by the image of the Yiddish poet, missing him and his Yiddish, more so than he misses his deceased wife.¹² Melancholy seeps through and through this post-*khurbn* bilingual prose – what is lost cannot return, the process of transformation, irreversible. And still, spurred by this loss, *Foygelman* places Yiddish-Hebrew relations, and translations, front and center. Bilingualism is the theme of this novel, with the power relations between the two Jewish languages controlling not only the translation dynamics, but the ability to live all together.

The writers discussed in this dissertation hold in common a realization that there is a solidifying national culture, one which privileges, even promotes, monolingualism. The

¹¹ This is according to Foygelman’s imagination of gender reassignment surgery as a trendy procedure. A more compassionate understanding of this process would suggest that this movement for Yiddish to Hebrew is not diminishing Yiddish but rather uncovering what has always been the true nature of the people.

¹² *Foyglman*, 240-45.

backdrop for their bilingualism is this impulse to monolingualize. This is the point of intervention which holds the greatest explanatory value of the ways in which two languages used by the same community, two which have a similar standing amongst world languages, negotiate their changing status. How new language realities penetrate, shape, and are shaped by literature, and how literary bilingualism is conceived and constructed as these changes occur.

This dissertation sought to see what translation and bilingualism do to and within a work of art, what resonance these practices have specifically within a monolingual scheme. Not if bilingualism is possible, but how it is possible, and to what effect.¹³ In this process of demystification, a pattern emerged. At first it seems that the works discussed share little: while they all have a crucial bilingual aspect and all share translation and self-translation as method and theme, they diverge in genre and poetics: a war trilogy, a travel narrative and a nostalgic narrative, written in different styles and different countries. Yet now it is clear these texts share a conundrum which they all attempt to negotiate: what can bilingualism be in an age of monolingualism?

In his historical writings, Walter Benjamin famously describes a drawing by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*.¹⁴ Benjamin is enamored by this angel, its eyes, wings, and the historical philosophy the directionalities of the angel promote. For Benjamin, the deity is standing still, with its eyes transfixed backward to the past, to an origin. This past is growing distant due to a calamity which is sending more and more rubble to amass at the feet of the angel and the heavenly creature is whiplashed away from the past, beside itself. Three vectors, at least, are in

¹³ This is predicated on Anita Norich's inquiry into translation that focuses not on the possibility of translation but rather on: "How it is done and what it does". Anita Norich. *Writing in Tongues: Translating Yiddish in the Twentieth Century*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 16.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin. *Selected Writings*. Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 396-397.

action here: the intentional standstill of the angel, the direction of the angel's gaze, and the movement the thrust produces. This is a vision of history that is anti-linear, a staple of Benjamin's philosophy of history; elsewhere, in the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin will hold that linear history privileges the conqueror, through teleology enforcing the seemingly correct outcome.¹⁵ The new angel is anti-linear, overcome by the calamities, acting as a bad subject by standing still and looking back. Focused on a moment, not on progress.

Similarly, all the writers discussed here, and Megged amongst them, are in dialogue with their present language reality and with a lingual past. The bilingualism of old speaks to them, speaks through them. These writers are not in the least part of a faux-linear progression from bilingualism to monolingualism, but reinvigorating their bilingual attachments in innovative ways, all the more so in the post-*khurbn* age. Thus, for Megged, as Julian Levinson put it: "The Yiddish language triggers a past that is at once personal and collective;"¹⁶ an idiosyncratic poetics which is of its time, and in discourse with the bilingualisms of the past. Megged and others are evoking a bilingualism, even in a seemingly monolingual text.

I end with Kafka and the Kafkaesque. Famously, in a 1921 letter to Max Brod, Kafka lamented the three impossibilities, "linguistic impossibilities", he and his peers faced in the first decades of the twentieth century: the impossibility not to write, the impossibility to write in German, the impossibility to write in any other language. "And one can hardly imagine any other form of impossibility."¹⁷ These lingual impossibilities, a catch 22 of the German-Jewish writer of the time, are grounds which lead Kafka to search for an alternative language, one which holds

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA. & London: Belknap Press, 1999), 461-473.

¹⁶ Julian Levinson. "On Some Motifs in Moyshe-Leyb Halpern: A Benjaminian Meditation on Yiddish Modernism." *Prooftexts* 32, no. 1 (2012): 63-88.

¹⁷ Kafka, Franz. *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*. Translated by Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 2016), 289.

less existential duress. As to the writers discussed in this dissertation, they had their own set of impossibilities, not dissimilar to those Kafka outlined for the same times; these writers highlight these three impossibilities: it is impossible not to write, impossible to write bilingually, impossible to write monolingually. And the unthinkable impossibility is the one they were able to overcome: to negotiate these impossibilities and write despite them, anew.

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