

**Global Form and Fantasy in Yiddish Literary Culture:
Visions from Mexico City and Buenos Aires**

by

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Abstract

This study examines the ways that the dispersed migratory life of East European Jews in the first half of the twentieth century informed new discourses and practices of literature on a world scale, advancing a spatial paradigm in the study of Yiddish literature, more usually governed by periodization around major historical events. More specifically, the study marshals neglected literary works, historic periodicals and archival material to show, through close reading and contextual analysis, how writers, editors and critics imagined and enacted the expanding boundaries of Yiddish literary culture as it came to span Eastern Europe and the Americas in the interwar period. The study places particular emphasis on the perspectives of immigrant writers Yankev Glantz and Yankev Botoshansky, whose careers in Mexico City and Buenos Aires respectively help to make visible strategies and processes of cross-regional mediation between new peripheral Yiddish cultural sites at different scales and the established prestige centers of Warsaw and New York City. By tracing cultural circuits that took shape in newspapers and literary journals, and through travel writing, lyric and epic poetry, popular fiction and criticism, the study reveals patterns of circulation and representation occluded by a prevailing focus on Yiddish high modernism, and on this basis advances an understanding of world literature predicated not on enduring circulation and cross-cultural prestige, but on patterns of representation, mediation and connectivity among disparate geo-cultural coordinates.

The introduction considers how influential Yiddish editors and critics in New York and Warsaw conceived of their literature's expanding geography as a world domain, and outlines a conceptual frame that brings facets of this discourse into dialog with contemporary terms in the

study of world literature. **Chapter 1** examines the role of the Buenos Aires daily newspaper *Di prese* and its editors in the consolidation of Argentina as a Yiddish cultural periphery through travel and publication in Warsaw and New York. **Chapter 2** presents a reading of Yankev Botoshansky's newspaper novel *Buenos Ayres* in the context of the errant intercontinental mobility of its characters and of the novel itself in the Yiddish daily press. **Chapter 3** shows how a durable triangulation of Yiddish poetry, Soviet affinity and visual art in Mexico City obtained distinct and contradictory forms of visibility in the work of immigrant poets. **Chapter 4** traces the development of an expansive Hispanic spatial and cultural-historical sensibility in the poetry of Yankev Glantz, culminating in the long poem *Kristoval Kolon* (Christopher Columbus).

Introduction:

THE GLOBAL DIMENSIONS OF YIDDISH LITERARY CULTURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

THE YIDDISH EMPIRE TO COME

In my mind it's a long way from here to South Africa, as is really the case. And yet I receive the journal *Dorem Afrike* (South Africa), so I feel that the country is just at the border of the United States, and then arrives *Di goldene keyt* (The Golden Chain) from the State of Israel, *Davke* (Precisely) from Argentina, *Foroys* (Onward) from Mexico, *Frayland* (Freeland) from France or *Bleter far geshikhte* (Historical Pages) from Poland; all these spheres of Jewish life grow near, as if they were part of North America. This I would dub the cultural collapsing of distance (*kfitses-haderekh*), where there are no longer any oceans, any borders, but *Yiddishland is one great territory*. I surmise that the bond between Babylonia and the Land of Israel some 1800 years ago must have been of this kind.¹

The author of the preceding words, Polish-born, Montreal raised and Harvard minted psychologist Abraham Aaron Roback (1890-1965), counts among the twentieth century's most avid observers of Yiddish print culture. For decades, publications from all corners of the world

¹ "Far mir iz Dorem Afrike mi yodea vi vayt, vi der emes iz. Kumt mir ober on der zhurnal *Dorem Afrike*, azoy fil ikh, vi dos land iz mamesh ba di grenets fun di Fareynikte Shtatn, un vider kumt on *Di goldene keyt* fun Medines-Yisroel, *Davke* fun Argentine, *Foroys* fun Meksike, *Frayland* fun Frankraykh oder *Bleter far geshikhte* fun Poyln, vern ot di yeshoyvim noent, vi zey voltn geven a teyl fun Tsofn Amerike. Ot dos volt ikh ongerufn kultureler kfitses haderekh, vu es zenen mer nisht faran keyn yamen, keyn grenetsn, nor *Yidishland iz eyn groyse teriyorye*. Ikh bin meshaer az der band tsvishn Bovl un E'Y hot gemuzt zayn aza mit a vosere 1800 yor tsurik." A. A. Roback, *Di imperye yidish* (Mexico: Shloyme Mendelson Fond, 1958), 83. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

arrived to his residence in Cambridge, MA, as attested by the countless address labels that populate the Yiddish collection of Harvard's library, built largely by Roback's voluntary effort. Not only a reader of these far-flung publications, at times he also contributed to them, and may also be found showcasing the fruit of his labor in a Spanish-language Jewish journal edited in Buenos Aires, for whose audience he describes fifty years of collected Yiddish material from and about Argentina.² Only in 1958, however, after authoring diverse popular and scholarly English-language tomes on psychology and Jewish culture, did he fulfill a longstanding wish to publish a book in his mother tongue, fittingly subsidized by a Yiddish cultural organization in Mexico City. Its title: *Di imperye yidish* (The Empire of Yiddish).

In this book, comprised of a series of interrelated articles and essays previously published in a New York Yiddish newspaper, Roback advances his vision for Yiddish culture's continuing survival (*kiyem*), a perennial subject of debate and speculation that in the wake of the Holocaust tended to elicit considerable pessimism. In contrast to a prevailing narrative of irrevocable decline (*yeride*), Roback finds cause for optimism in the unabated production of Yiddish newspapers, journals and books on six continents, and highlights the scores of compelling writers active across France, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, England, Germany, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, Holland, South Africa and Australia—to say nothing of those in the United States, Israel and, despite Stalinist repression, the Soviet Union. This vibrant reality, he argues, is occluded not only by the *idée fixe* of Jewish ruination, but also by an entrenched metropolitan provincialism most acute in New York, the numeric and symbolic center of post-war Yiddish culture, a provincialism characterized by allegiance to a given local newspaper or journal on the part of the average reader and relative

² A. A. Roback, "50 años de vida judía argentina en la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Harvard," *Judaica* 11, no. 121-126 (1943): 34-40.

neglect of the wider world on the part of the average cultural critic.³ The figurative empire of the book's title is thus a latent one, the synthetic potential of what the author characterizes as a "global language and a global literature that no other people of a common tongue (*ume veloshn*), not even the hundreds of millions of English speakers, can achieve."⁴

Hyperbolic as this pronouncement appears, globality (*globalkayt*) in Roback's usage is synonymous with omnipresence (*umetumikayt*), understood descriptively as the underlying condition of Yiddish culture starting in the late 1930s, when the geographic distribution of East European Jewish immigrant communities began to obtain the dimensions evoked above.

Although Roback notes the heightened prospect of influencing other cultures as one advantage of globality, his chief interest is in the potential for dynamic interconnection and mutual influence among diverse, basically autonomous nodes of Jewish life and culture, to be achieved through a combination of travel and the "surrogate" mobility afforded by print. This is an expansive but inward looking vision of Jewish space, quite deliberately conceived in a Jewish vernacular, as it were, not only as an analogue to the space of antique Talmudic culture, but also by reference to a kabbalistic concept akin to teleportation (*Kefitsat Haderekh*).⁵

The decades following the publication of *Di imperye yidish* would gradually bring about an intensified sense of connectivity among diverse sites of Yiddish culture, albeit not necessarily

³ "Mir hobn vintsiker yidish reders un leyeners vi frier, ober zikher nisht vintsiker shraybers vi mit 40 yor tsurik, shoy'n nokh di ale umgekumene, to vos halt men in eyn gramofoneven di 'yeride'? Ot di yerideniks kukn zikh nisht arum, leynen bloyz zeyer eygene tsaytung tsi nokh a zhurnal dertsu, un meynen az di gantse yidishe literatur af der velt shtekt in ot der oysgabe vos zey leyenen." (We have fewer Yiddish speakers and readers than before, but surely not fewer writers than forty years ago, even accounting for all those who perished, so why does the 'Decline' continue to be broadcast? These adherents of Decline don't look around, read only their own paper, maybe a journal as well, and think the whole of Yiddish literature in the world is located in the very publication they're reading.) Roback, *Di imperye yidish*, 46.

⁴ "A globale shprakh un a globale literatur vos keyn ume veloshn, nisht afile di hunderter milion english-redndike, konen dos nisht bavayzn." Ibid., 61.

⁵ Roback also references, but casts aside, a more scientific model for the description of dispersed language communities, drawn from Heinz Kloss' 1929 *Nebensprachen: eine sprachpolitische Studie über die Beziehungen eng Verwandter Sprachgemeinschaften* (Proximate Languages: A Language Policy Study of the Relationships Between Closely Connected Language Communities).

along the lines proposed there, less motivated by a grand ideal than occasioned by the dwindling numbers of creators and consumers present in any one place.

In articulating his vision of a synthetic, world-spanning Yiddish cultural space, Roback became the latest exponent, and one of the last, of a future-oriented critical tradition inspired by the ample geography of East European Jewish migration. This tradition, a loose knit one defined more by idiosyncrasy than continuity, first arose in response to the utter reconfiguration of Jewish life wrought by the upheavals of the early twentieth century, namely Russia's 1905 revolution, WWI and the Russian Civil War. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the growing fragmentariness of a cultural life that had already spanned Russia and North America at the turn of the century prompted a profusion of conceptual schemes and pronouncements outlining the contours of a new literary and cultural geography, often couched in territorial metaphors evocative of colonialism—the reigning European model of linguistic-cultural globalization—and in the terms of a multiform Jewish cultural nationalism that had emerged in the late Russian empire.

The exponents of this discourse tended to be editors and literary critics in Warsaw and New York, the leading population and prestige centers of interwar Yiddish culture, who cursorily or meticulously surveyed the emergence of new sites of Yiddish cultural production, and in some cases cultivated an almost exhaustive bibliographic vision—the product of voracious subscribing and browsing, or of wide travel. Most did not so much elaborate theories as lay out suggestive constellations of terms and relationships, as is also true of Roback, who placed greater emphasis on practical issues. Nevertheless, the critical imagination thus cultivated can fruitfully inform the study of a dynamic East European Jewish migratory cultural formation as it came to assume its widest dimensions in the interwar period.

FROM THE MARGINALITY OF YIDDISH LITERATURE TO YIDDISH LITERATURE'S MARGINS

Where the study of Yiddish literature has conventionally been defined by a temporal paradigm, organized around moments of great upheaval in East European Jewish life and the periods between them, guided by a generally developmental logic, this dissertation advances a paradigm chiefly concerned with historical experiences and representational logics of Yiddish literature's spatial extent, marshaling an array of neglected sources to show how Yiddish writers and print media came to navigate ever wider dimensions, and how this expansive scope, in turn, informed new discourses and practices of literature on a world scale. I attend to this variegated and wide-ranging process chiefly in the moment of its greatest intensity, the decade of the 1930s, a focus that is also punctuated by glimpses of the post-war era, when Yiddish culture became decisively but also quietly global, no longer concerned with accounting for a reality that had long ceased to be new, and forward-looking only in a rather reduced or resigned measure. I approach this process through two complementary lenses. Alongside the perspectives of influential editors and critics in New York and Warsaw, evoked above, who conceived of their literature's expanding geography as a world domain according to divergent concepts of cultural nationalism, territorialism, internationalism and aesthetic universalism, I look to the careers of two Yiddish writers who as adults migrated from different points in Eastern Europe to opposite ends of Spanish America in the mid-1920s: one from Bucharest to Buenos Aires and the other from Odessa to Mexico City. In the interplay between these poles of metropolitan theory and peripheral practice, I advance an understanding of Yiddish world literature predicated not on enduring circulation and cross-cultural prestige, but on patterns of representation, mediation and connectivity among disparate geo-cultural coordinates.

Yiddish literary scholarship in recent decades has hardly been indifferent to questions of space, and has occasionally announced diasporic or transnational intentions, generally confined

to a focus on modernism as it was practiced within and between a handful of cities, namely: New York, Warsaw, Moscow, Vilnius, Weimar Berlin and sometimes Tel Aviv. This focus on prestige centers, often foregrounding Yiddish literature's richly coterritorial, cross-cultural nature, has yielded valuable perspectives that illuminate the cosmopolitan, multilingual literary legacies of the cities in question—which is perhaps another way of saying Euro-American modernism. At the same time, such scholarship has tended to deploy the minor, marginal or peripheral status of Yiddish literature itself as a critical comparative posture, an approach first developed by Chana Kronfeld in her deployment of Hebrew and Yiddish literary works as resources for modeling poetic modernism against earlier approaches defined by period and typology. She suggests modernist Yiddish poetry in particular as “perhaps one of the strongest counterexamples to any geographical or chronological model of literary historiography.”⁶ Two scholars working adjacent to Kronfeld's concerns have more recently advanced frames of analysis that appeal to the exterritorial condition of Yiddish literature as a source of critical insight, although in both cases this interest is subordinated to a focus on modernist narrative devices. Allison Schachter in her account of Hebrew and Yiddish “diasporic modernisms” views the dispersed condition of Jewish language writers and audiences as both the source and the object of a particular modernist aesthetic, expressing also the admirable intention, realized in a limited frame, of “carefully examining the diasporic networks of literary production in order to grasp the particularity of Jewish literary culture.”⁷ Marc Caplan's more programmatic account of nineteenth century Yiddish and postcolonial African literatures as sites of a “peripheral modernism” is chiefly concerned with the narrative staging of anticipatory critiques of

⁶ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 232.

⁷ Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

modernity. Though Caplan locates such critiques in a deterritorialized mode of writing that generates imaginative spaces untethered to geographic referents, he usefully calls attention to the “coexistence of territorialized and deterritorialized landscapes” in Yiddish literature, associating the former with the consolidation of a symbolic geography mirroring the space of Jewish Eastern Europe.⁸

Each of these approaches is suggestive, but ultimately mobilizes Yiddish literature in the service of once more extending the purview of modernism, a priority that, however inventively pursued, in the final instance circumscribes the critical potential of Yiddish literature as a term of comparison. In the pursuit of new comparative ground, I look beyond the Yiddish modernist geographies and genres favored by earlier scholarship to examine facets of a much broader cultural field that, despite its relatively fluid composition when compared to the more entrenched core-periphery dynamics of French or English literature, may be productively understood through attention to significant disparities between more central and more marginal sites of Yiddish culture.

As a point of departure, I look to synthetic visions descriptively or prescriptively elaborated in Warsaw and New York, which shed light on how Yiddish literature might have been legible and meaningful, in the abstract, as a self-consciously global practice. These do not reliably disclose the substance of that practice and inevitably flatten a multidimensional world, however. Because writers based in Buenos Aires and Mexico City attentively looked toward the major literary centers of Europe, Anglo-America and Palestine and also maintained ties with more peripheral sites, their writings, travels and correspondences afford a sense of Yiddish literature’s fullest dimensions, at once self-contained and highly permeable, straddling diverse geographic

⁸ Marc Caplan, *How Strange the Change Language, Temporality and Narrative Form in Peripheral Modernisms* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 12.

and linguistic zones. Such a focus also highlights patterns of circulation and modes of representation not to be found in Yiddish high modernism, but rather in the lowbrow newspaper novel, the travel journal, or historical epic poetry. The purpose of such a foray into the “great unread,” untranslated, unmapped of Yiddish literary history is not so much to provincialize the centers as to build a more nuanced account of their positions within sprawling, cross-regional constellations of authors, texts, editors, and critics—and to parse their distinct organizing logics, or horizons.

My approach to this Yiddish cultural formation is informed by recent debates surrounding “world literature” to the extent that these suggest ways of apprehending and coarticulating cross-regional scales of cultural production, human and textual migrancy and the figurative and representational worlds evoked by the work of art. By bringing perspectives from Yiddish criticism into dialog with those of contemporary scholars, I draw the sense of world literature toward that more situated understanding.

YIDDISH LITERARY SPACE

In the service of a descriptive-analytic account of Yiddish literary culture on a global scale, I employ a frame of Yiddish literary space that takes Pascale Casanova’s concept of a “linguistic-cultural area” (or “linguistic territory”) as a point of departure. Although basically homologous with what she terms “worldwide literary space,” the linguistic-cultural area describes a far more bounded set of relationships that need not be subsumed to the national/international distinction that animates and perhaps plagues the more capacious category.⁹ Because Yiddish culture is

⁹ The larger category of “world literary space” is by Casanova’s account effectively the Bourdieusian literary field expanded to accommodate Braudelian proportions and relationships, as outlined in her “Literature as a World,” *New Left Review* 31 (2005): 80. This concept that has been subject to sustained critique for its economic logic and Paris-centricity, but nevertheless remains suggestive for considering core-periphery dynamics. For one such critique, see Christopher Prendergast, “Negotiating World Literature,” *New Left Review* 8 (2001): 100-121.

above all ethnolinguistically constituted, and only ambiguously defined by the premise of a national community conventionally understood, this frame affords a felicitous circumvention of the constraints of the national literature model—rightly eschewed in reference to Yiddish literature by Kronfeld, Schachter and Caplan—as well as international and transnational models almost invariably predicated on it.¹⁰

Casanova defines the linguistic-cultural area as “a homogenous and autonomous sphere in which the legitimacy of its own centralized power of consecration is unchallenged; a world having its own pantheon and prizes, its own favored genres, its own distinctive traditions and internal rivalries.”¹¹ Within this world, according to a basically agonistic, hierarchized core-periphery model of literary domination, one or more centers vie to function as privileged arbiters of literary value for a “shared linguistic hinterland.”¹² In a symbolic space of cultural production populated by sites where literary resources are concentrated—namely cities—the distance between center and periphery is understood in terms of relative status rather than physical proximity. Far from purely ideational, however, the relationships that constitute and govern this space are to varying degrees substantiated in material forms.

In this vein, an account of Yiddish literary space asks after the differential positions that define—whether passively, cooperatively or agonistically—a polycentric linguistic-cultural sphere characterized by a common East European Jewish universe of discourse and by shared patterns of writing, publishing, circulation, association and valorization operative at various scales. If this much is in line with Casanova, a significant departure from her model is also necessary. Whereas the linguistic-cultural areas she identifies (Anglophone, Germanophone,

¹⁰ On the national logic of the transnational, see Mary Hellen McMurrin, “Transnationalism and the Novel: A Call for Periodization,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 42, no. 3 (2009): 531-537.

¹¹ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 116.

¹² *Ibid.*, 117.

Lusophone, etc.) are defined by long-established and relatively stable—not to say immutable—boundaries typically following the contours of former empires, permitting an extension of the logic applied to national contexts, the boundaries of an analogous Yiddish area without any sovereign territorial legacy remain in perpetual flux.

Even during the early development, in the mid-nineteenth century, of a modern Yiddish culture concentrated in contiguous regions of Central, East and Southeastern Europe, the area constituted by it must be understood as the elastic and discontinuous range of an increasingly mobile Jewish minority. Many maskilim, proponents of the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment, studied in German universities and their ambition was to bring the outside world into what they perceived as an insular Jewish society. Avrom Goldfadn, the founder of Yiddish theater, learned and honed his craft in provincial Romania before bringing it to the Russian empire. Urban cultural centers brought writers and intellectuals from varied regions into close contact. Interaction across dialects and sensibilities fostered a degree of cohesion despite the persistence of intra-Jewish regional stereotypes and rivalries.

On the eve of WWI, the antipodes and basic extent of an East European Jewish cultural world appeared self-evident, even as the Revolution of 1905 had shattered any confidence in its stability. The old mass center of Jewish life (Russia) and the new one (North America) had become increasingly interconnected since the 1880s and were effectively bridged by Yiddish print culture in conjunction with new Jewish social movements among other factors. In the decade before WWI, major cultural figures increasingly led intercontinental careers, a path forged by leading writers Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Asch and followed by popular dramaturg, later novelist and travel writer, Perets Hirshbeyn. The Jewish Atlantic corridor they traversed was defined by a handful of urban hubs—Warsaw, Vilna, Odessa, Kiev, Saint

Petersburg, and New York—with varied satellites and established peripheries throughout Russia, Austria-Hungary, Western Europe and North America.

As the range of the Jewish populations of the former Russian and Austrian empires grew yet more elastic and sharply discontinuous in the aftermath of WWI and the Russian Civil War, the extent and cohesion of even a fragile Jewish cultural world ceased to be self-evident and became the subject of a great deal of seeking and speculation on the part of Yiddish writers and intellectuals, intensifying a process initiated in 1905. An effort to find meaning in new migratory and cultural patterns, to discern and envision a future, prompted a critical tendency increasingly to conceive of Yiddish culture in holistic spatial terms in the interwar period, in part inspired by the spatial imaginations of the many shades and textures of Jewish territorialism, including Zionism, that had developed in the early twentieth century and thus described by Dan Miron as a “territorialization of Jewish writing.”¹³

Every facet of Yiddish print culture became saturated with debate, speculation and reportage about real and potential territorial projects—from Palestine to Suriname and Madagascar—which would become increasingly thematized in literary discourse.¹⁴ This tendency finds its most robust development in self-taught critic Borekh Rivkin (1883-1945), who in his major study *Grunt-tendentsn fun der yidisher literatur in Amerike* (Fundamental Tendencies of Yiddish Literature in America) postulated the capacity of Yiddish literature, adopting a function formerly performed by religion, to produce the illusion of an encompassing Jewishly habitable and meaningful domain, or “quasi-territory” (*kmoy-teritorye*), in lieu of a Jewish territorial base on the Herderian nation-state model that he deemed “normal.”¹⁵

¹³ Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 183-184.

¹⁴ These and other bids for a Jewish territory are examined in Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands Before Israel* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Borekh Rivkin, *Di grunt-tendentsn fun der yidisher literatur in Amerike* (New York: IKUF, 1948).

Much like Casanova's theory, Rivkin's is permeated by metaphors of sovereign power and domination, centered on an expansionist conception of Yiddish literature's representational scope, which moves ever outward from Eastern Europe in tandem with migration. Rivkin's own explicitly territorialist language invites the association of "territorialization," not as a precise Deleuzo-Guattarian concept but in the more general sense evoked by Marc Caplan, that of consolidating a symbolic geography. However, in order to distinguish between the normalizing sovereign rhetoric endemic to Yiddish critical discourse and my own standpoint, I prefer to recast the process Rivkin outlines as one of symbolic domestication, whereby the outside world is converted into a Yiddish-centric inner-world. In departure from Rivkin, however, I maintain that far from being a function of literature narrowly conceived, the cohesion of this world depends on a broader set of discursive practices—belletristic, critical, journalistic, editorial and informal—which together with the human and textual mobility informed by them are involved in a continuous negotiation and enactment of geo-cultural boundaries.

Because this definitional work proceeds from an array of central and peripheral positions, it yields differently oriented and differently valued conceptions of the boundaries and symbolic order of what is nevertheless assumed to be an integral Jewish linguistic-cultural sphere. These differential outlooks, to be referred to as horizons of cohesion, are properly situated at the level of the publication, institution or individual, but may provisionally be understood in the broader frame of a core-periphery distinction. The horizons projected from the major centers New York, Warsaw and Moscow are predicated on the assumption of a privileged capacity to survey a shared "hinterland," and are endowed with a normative quality consistent with the centers' wide material and symbolic influence, as a function of which Yiddish editors and critics in New York and Warsaw could act as brokers of prestige and economic power for literary writers and journalists across the world. The horizons projected from the periphery are predicated on a

polycentric orientation as well as a keen awareness of other peripheral positions, an often more capacious perspective that is nevertheless regional or local in influence. Where an alignment of horizons proceeding from center to periphery is almost automatic, the inverse proves far rarer, necessitating a self-conscious and reciprocal effort.

In the context of the composition and circulation of literary works and indeed travelogues, the differential positions schematized above can be significant not only in the external terms of prestige and visibility, but also for the way representational space is experienced and evaluated, in the most basic sense as familiar or unfamiliar, and within or outside a Jewish frame. Among the literary models most celebrated by Rivkin are novels of monumental representational scope, deemed to domesticate vast tracts of Polish, Russian and American space and historical time for the benefit of an idealized Yiddish-speaking Jewish collectivity. When works of comparable or greater scope are elaborated from a marginal position and with a spatial-historical-cultural content proximate to it, the impression of domestication from a central standpoint is all the more striking.

TWO AMERICAN PERIPHERIES

Mexico City and Buenos Aires represented new regional hubs of Yiddish culture and publishing activity in the interwar period, the result of East European Jewish mass migration to Argentina from the 1890s onward and a more modest migration to Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s. Where Buenos Aires by the 1920s would become the largest East European Jewish population center outside of the Soviet Union, Poland and the United States, with around two hundred thousand Yiddish speakers by the outbreak of WWII, less than one tenth of that number would arrive to Mexico City in the same period. After the Holocaust, each city in a different measure would become a significant site for the preservation and promotion of Yiddish culture, through the

publications of both books and periodicals that reached audiences throughout the world, and through the maintenance of Yiddish school systems better organized and more durable than those elsewhere.¹⁶ Attention to the status of these cities in the Yiddish cultural world in an earlier period may help to illuminate those later roles, but the primary interest is in the way that the scale and character of Jewish immigrant life in the two cities fostered utterly different conditions for Yiddish cultural production in general and for the negotiation of linguistic, cultural and geographic boundaries in particular.

To consider the position of Buenos Aires and Mexico City in relation to more central sites of Yiddish culture as opposed to, say, that of Melbourne and Johannesburg, is also to consider the expanding sense and scope of Atlantic and later interamerican mobility on the part of Yiddish writers and texts during the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, these loci of attention situated outside the global Anglo-sphere help to reveal Yiddish literature not only as a space of encounter between Slavic and Spanish American cultural contexts, but also as a medium interlinking a larger Romance geography spanning the Americas and Romania, normally united only indirectly in the shared cultural orientation toward Paris that prevailed among writers and artists in Bucharest no less than those in Mexico City and Buenos Aires for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The vantage afforded by each emergent site of Yiddish culture informs a two-chapter sequence, presented in Part I, “The View from Buenos Aires,” and Part II, “The View from Mexico City.”

Chapters 1 and 3 examine the positions of Yankev Botoshansky (1892-1964) and Yankev Glantz (1902-1982) respectively as mediators between the local, regional and cross-regional scales of Yiddish literary culture. Each writer—Glantz as a poet and Botoshansky as a

¹⁶ For a comparative assessment of these school systems, see Efraim Zadoff, “The Status of Yiddish in Jewish Educational Systems in Argentina and Mexico,” in *Yiddish and the Left*, edited by Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov (Oxford: Legenda, 2001), 280-298.

journalist—gradually became integrated into a highly mobile Yiddish cultural elite who traversed Yiddish literary culture like the geographically fluid medium it was imagined to be, and their histories of travel, correspondence and publication make visible the discrete linguistic, economic and interpersonal mediations that enabled and defined a global literary practice. As they resided in the Americas during WWII, their careers also demonstrate considerable continuity, underscored in the introductions to Parts I and II, which situate each figure in the contexts of his adoptive city, his primary genres of creativity and publication media and his relation to New York, Warsaw and other Yiddish cultural sites.

For influential editors and critics in New York and Warsaw, these Spanish American capitals appeared as the exotic frontiers of an expanding Yiddish cultural domain, and deference to this grand vision presented a clear path to notoriety for both Botoshansky and Glantz. The name of each became synonymous with his adoptive city and country in part through the composition of a work that leveraged the position of Mexico City or Buenos Aires to produce a monumental vision—a sensational newspaper novel shaped by the expansive geography of the Jewish sex trade in the case of Botoshansky (Chapter 2), and a long form poem on Columbus’ voyages in the case of Glantz (Chapter 4). Each work is subjected to a combination of formal and contextual analysis that considers the aesthetic world of the literary work in relation to the history of its composition, publication and circulation. In both cases this supports a reflection on the interplay between the spaces of Yiddish literary culture as practice and the spaces imagined within each work.

Alongside core-periphery dynamics, each writer’s work also permits a description of diffuse, largely invisible cultural circuits that privilege ephemeral cross-regional and cross-cultural connectivity. In the case of Botoshansky, this is the errant circulatory life of his serial novel across three continents in the Yiddish daily press (Ch. 2). In the case of Glantz, it is a cultural

circuit that moves back and forth between Yiddish poetry and the visual arts in Mexico City, as well as between Yiddish and Spanish—a circuit defined by the poet’s long engagement both with Russian poetry and with Mexico City’s creative class (Ch. 3). Both inherently impermanent circuits, perceptible only through effortful reconstruction, call attention to vital processual facets of a global literary culture in motion.

Note on the scope of research: Because scholarship on Yiddish culture in Buenos Aires and Mexico City is scarce, I undertook extensive research in a range of libraries and archives in both cities as well as in New York during the calendar year 2014. In Buenos Aires I reviewed five decades of the Yiddish daily paper *Di prese* (The Press) as well as near-complete runs of various Jewish journals in Yiddish and Spanish from the 1920s to the 1960s, both at the National Library of Argentina and the IWO Foundation. In Mexico City I consulted the Yiddish newspaper *Der veg* (The Path) at the Hemeroteca Nacional and consulted scores of manuscript and typed documents in Yiddish, Spanish and Russian from the personal archive of poet Yankev Glantz at the Center for Documentation and Research on the Jewish Community of Mexico (CDIJUM). The latter included letters, essays, speeches, newspaper clippings and poetic translations between the three languages. In the New York Public Library’s Dorot Division I located Yankev Botoshansky’s novel *Buenos Ayres* in 110 daily newspaper installments, and at the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) consulted the correspondence of several New York Yiddish writers and editors with both Botoshansky and Glantz. Beyond the scope of this field work, I have drawn from diverse historic Yiddish serials, navigated with the aid of the Index to Yiddish Periodicals and the digital Historical Jewish Press collection of the National Library of Israel.

Part I: The View from Buenos Aires

INTRODUCTION: NAVIGATING THE YIDDISH CULTURAL WORLD WITH YANKEV BOTOSHANSKY

Montreal, February 1961. Over the last rumblings of an audience being seated sounds the clear, measured voice of Melekh Ravitsh, a central figure in the Yiddish literary world from his youth in Warsaw to old age in Montreal, with many cities in between. Ravitsh was a fixture of the literary evenings, lectures and receptions held at Montreal's Jewish Public Library, and in diverse recordings of such events can be heard speaking in a mellifluous tone of erudite restraint.¹ Following a brief announcement and a commendation of the audience for having braved unfavorable weather, he proceeds to introduce the evening's guest speaker at length. Juxtaposed with Ravitsh's subdued manner of speech, the guest's first words sound harsh. They immediately adopt the rhythm and intonation not of a disquisition but an anecdote, and seem to creak or croak with each stressed syllable and each emphatic shift in volume. This is the voice of Yankev Botoshansky at the age of sixty-six, two years Ravitsh's junior.

The two writers were distinguished by a great deal more than speech style, but shared in common remarkably peripatetic careers and a related penchant for writing impressions of their

¹ Many audio recordings of events at the Montreal Jewish Public Library from the mid 1950s to the 1980s have been digitized by the Yiddish Book Center and form the Frances Brandt Online Yiddish Audio Library. Ravitsh appears prominently in recordings from the 1950s.

travels for the Yiddish press.² Their paths had significantly intersected in 1938, when Ravitsh traveled from Melbourne to Buenos Aires, to remain for the better part of a year.³ In his introduction Ravitsh casts Botoshansky as a name known across the whole Yiddish world, a “journalist-belletrist par excellence” who has written in every journalistic and literary genre, an enormous influence on the development of Jewish life in Argentina over several decades, and a guiding hand of one of its two major Yiddish dailies.⁴ Ravitsh goes on to recall living as a guest for a time in Botoshansky’s apartment in Buenos Aires, and reports fondly on the extravagance of the daily writing regimen by which his host filled diverse rubrics in *Di prese*.⁵

Throughout his long career, Botoshansky’s written and spoken language elicited scorn for its overabundance and frequent barbs, as well as appreciation for its energy, humor and lyrical flair. In multiple instances commentators describe his language as “zaftik” (juicy), implying a combination of informality, richness and perhaps salaciousness. In the recollection of fellow writer and friend Shloyme Bikl, Botoshansky had been the most popular lecturer on Yiddish literature during his time in Romania, where he resided almost continuously from 1914, when he

² As highly active cultural commentators disposed to polemic, the two figures sparred in print from time to time. In the course of his lecture, Botoshansky refers to a longstanding disagreement between Ravitsh and the disciples of Eliezer Shteynberg, including Botoshansky. Even before meeting in person the two were engaged in a public dispute about the relative value of the journalist and the writer of literature, in which Ravitsh favored the durable potential of literature, and Botoshansky championed the power of journalism to influence and improve the lives of a mass readership.

³ Well before his physical arrival, Ravitsh’s impressions of his travels throughout Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia had been syndicated in *Di prese* since 1931. It is highly likely the two would have crossed paths in Warsaw during Botoshansky’s 1931 visit, though Ravitsh goes unmentioned in the various travel accounts produced by the former.

⁴ Ravitsh compares Botoshansky’s level of activity in Argentina to that of Ab Cahan in the United States, but more advanced in terms of style and with a richer journalistic language.

⁵ Ravitsh’s introduction is, in effect, an oral variation on the profile of Botoshansky included in his multi-volume *Mayn leksikon*—a compendium of recollections and impressions about the Yiddish cultural figures Ravitsh encountered throughout his wide-ranging career.

deserted the imperial Russian army at the age of 19, until 1926, when he relocated permanently to Buenos Aires.⁶

Loquaciousness was one of several traits supposed to typify the Jews of Bessarabia and Romania in the popular East European Jewish imagination, along with humor, emotional volatility, sensuousness and the physical traits of darker skin and thick black hair.⁷ These stereotypical traits were also popularly associated with Romani people, and Botoshansky embraced and promoted them in his self-presentation to the point of attributing his restless movement and productivity to his “Gypsy blood.”⁸ This kind of affected “southern” persona is not explicitly on display on the occasion of his lecture in Montreal, although it is perceptible on the level of oratory stylistics—most conspicuously in a joking commentary on the lecture’s

⁶ “And also Botoshansky the speaker (he was the lecturer with the “heys hayedie” about Yiddish literature in Argentina and also in the countries of South America) in the fifty years since he was the most popular oral interpreter of literature in Romania up until the last time I heard him speak in Buenos Aires and in New York, maintained the same oratorical style. As then, half a century ago and now three years and some months ago, Botoshansky’s speakerly language was gently lyrical and his manner of speech—a broad current, here and there even an inundation. The panorama of Botoshansky’s grandstand speech remained more a colorful movement of thought and word than the architectonic path of premise to conclusions. But in the talks in Buenos Aires and New York you could already enjoy the taste of mature formulation and perhaps even more the flavor of apropos interwoven anecdotes and stories that bring to light the implication of thought and with their surprising pertinence create for the listener moments of artistic experience.” Shloyme Bikl, “Der shrayber, redner un kultur-tuer,” in Yankev Botoshansky, *Ophandlungen un rayze-ayndrukn* (Buenos Aires: Kredit-Kooperative Lavazhekha, 1967), 331-337.

⁷ The enfant terrible of Yiddish literature, poet Itzik Manger was frequently cast in similar terms, known for drunken revelry, emotional outbursts and his eloquent oratory style. This reputation is abundantly documented in Efrat Gal-Ed, *Niemandssprache: Itzik Manger, ein europäischer Dichtert* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016).

⁸ In a short autotext titled “Azoy ze ikh zikh aleyrn” (This is How I See Myself, 1955), later revised as “Vi ikh ze zikh” (How I See Myself, 1962). Here the writer casts himself as a restless wanderer, half-gypsy in appearance and in spirit by merit of his origins at the southern limit of Bessarabia with Romania. Apart from the central role he claims in ridding the Argentine Jewish community of its notorious “pimp infestation,” the accomplishments Botoshansky cites are mainly linked to travel: his presence at the ten-year anniversary of the Jewish Scientific Institute (YIVO) in Vilnius in 1935, the 1939 World’s Fair in New York, the founding of the UN in San Francisco in 1945, and the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. Yankev Botoshansky, “Azoy ze ikh zikh aleyrn,” in *Yankev Botoshansky: Tsu zayne zekhtsik yor*, edited by Yitskhok Yanusovitch and Shloyme Suskovitch (Buenos Aires: 1955), 7-14; “Vi ikh ze zikh,” *Di kenigin fun Dorem Amerike* (Buenos Aires: 1962), 75-83.

excessive length that nevertheless concludes in an appeal for more time.⁹ However, the lecture itself contains a pronounced sub-current of regional identification and advocacy, such that it may productively be seen as the staging of an encounter between different regions of Yiddish culture. The effect is an elevation of Southeastern Europe—in particular, interwar Romania—in the scheme of Yiddish literature, achieved less through reference to a Yiddish literary context than to world literature in a normative sense. Within this larger scheme Botoshansky plays the consummate insider-outsider, projecting a sense of Jewish-Yiddish intimacy and authoritative knowledge while aligning himself with the neglected margin.

It is this circumstance of sustained cross-regional mediation that makes Botoshansky a figure of considerable interest for the study of Yiddish literature's sprawling dimensions in the twentieth century. From the moment the writer first set foot in Argentina, this negotiation was never between only two regions. Apart from bridging his Southeast European and Argentine homes, he consistently worked to bring both of these contexts into the view of audiences and interlocutors situated in the privileged Jewish centers of Poland, North America and eventually Israel. At the same time, he looked from Buenos Aires to every corner of the Yiddish cultural world in an effort to present an encompassing perspective to readers locally and internationally, and indeed attempted to build a career around such a perspective, informed by perpetual reading and travel. Upon Botoshansky's sudden death of a heart attack while on a lecture tour of South Africa, more than a few friends and colleagues paired their public lamentations with the

⁹ "I'm standing here before you, and I've already spoken more than an hour, and I've been told whoever speaks more than an hour in Montreal is a sure failure, and I feel I'm already post-failure. [...] but I wonder what would happen if I talked to you another half hour [...]. [...] I'll never exhaust this topic anyhow, never reach the end. Life is a ballad that never ends, and a lecture is a ballad that never ends." (Ikh shtey do itster far aykh, un ikh hob shoyt opgeredt, ariber a sho, un mir hot men gezogt az ver se redt mer vi a sho in Montreol, do iz er zikher a durkhfal, un ikh fil shoyt az ikh halt shoyt nokhn durkhfal. [...] ober ikh kler ba zikh vo'zhe vet zayn az ikh zol redn nokh a halbe sho [...]. [...] kh'vel af di teme dokh say vi say nisht oysshpeyn, nisht farendikn. Dos lebn iz a balade vos endikt zikh keynmol nisht, un a referat iz a balade vos endikt zikh keynmol nisht.) Yankev Botoshansky, *Der moshl bay yidn: fun di eltste tsaytn durkh dem Dubner magid biz Eliezer Shteynbarg*, recorded by the Jewish Public Library of Montreal on February 19, 1961 and digitized by the Yiddish Book Center, streaming audio, https://archive.org/details/ybc-fbr-92_4092.

observation that this was a fitting end to a life in perpetual motion. Critic Shloyme Bikl observed that the writer had not only attained the status of a figure synonymous with Argentina, but also that of a “supraterritorial” figure in Yiddish letters, so ubiquitous was his presence beyond the confines of his adoptive country.

Botoshansky’s lecture in Montreal, “The Fable and the Jews: From Ancient Times to Eliezer Shteynbarg by Way of the Dubner Maggid)¹⁰,” suggests how this exceptional mobility went hand in hand with a labor of cultural-geographic synthesis. The lecture’s premise is that, contrary to the conventional view of the fable as an ancient Indian and Greek invention conspicuously inherited and developed as a European literary form, Jews have always had a hand in its production and transmission, from the Tanakh and the Talmud on through to modernity—a neglected topic ripe for investigation.¹¹ Though the lecture does in fact sketch a path from ancient to modern, this endeavor proves circular in that its initial and final moments are one and the same: the life and works of Yiddish fabulist Eliezer Shteynbarg (1880-1932), a friend and mentor to Botoshansky as well as a fellow Bessarabian, who is deemed to give the Jewish fable a form both linguistically ingenious and thematically universal, worthy of mention in the same breath as Aesop, Jean de La Fontaine and Ivan Krylov. This gesture is, in one sense, just another assertion of the place of the Jewish fable among the fables of the world and Europe in particular, in keeping with the lecture’s basic premise. However, within the purview of Yiddish literature this elevation of Shteynbarg has a more pointed implication.

The posthumous publication of a collection of Shteynbarg’s fables in 1932 for the first time brought his work notoriety across the Yiddish literary world, but it was a limited notoriety, inconsistent with the status his friends, colleagues and pupils envisioned for him, and thus a

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Botoshansky underscores that his own position departs from that of nineteenth century German-Jewish scholar Julius Landsberger (1819–1890), who advanced the more extreme claim that Jews invented the fable.

perceived injustice, not individual but regional in nature. The status of Shteynbarg in Yiddish letters is to a significant degree, in this view, a function of the vexed status of Romania in relation to a mainstream post-WWI Yiddish literary culture defined by three main spheres of influence: Poland, North America and the Soviet Union. In this light, Botoshansky's lecture doubles as a labor of regional advocacy and a revision of the Yiddish literary canon.¹²

Botoshansky and Shteynbarg alike lived their formative years at opposite ends of Russian Bessarabia, in towns at the edges of the pre-WWI Romanian border—Chilia to the southeast and Lipcani to the north, respectively. Their early engagements with the Jewish literature and press, in Hebrew and Yiddish, were in the context of the wider Jewish cultural sphere that existed in the Russian empire, which had its counterpart in Austria-Hungary. The territorial partitions wrought in the course of WWI and the Russian Civil War significantly reconfigured the organization of the Yiddish cultural field, and Jewish life more broadly, in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. To one side was an emergent Soviet Yiddish culture, and to another the Yiddish culture of the nascent Second Polish Republic. Meanwhile, the adjacent regions of Bessarabia and Bukovina were annexed by Romania and to a significant degree severed from their former imperial cultural networks.¹³

From the perspective of the Jewish social and cultural life of the late Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, Romania was a marginal and exotic Jewish space, partly owing to its proximity to Ottoman territory and status as a former Ottoman vassal. This perception persisted in the interwar period, so that when Bessarabia and Bukovina became Romanian provinces in

¹² Although it is difficult to speak with any precision of a Yiddish literary canon in a conventional, highly institutionalized sense, there is nevertheless an implicit pantheon of Great Writers unambiguously enshrined in Yiddish criticism, commemorative practices and translation. It is in this sense that Botoshansky quite evidently sought to “canonize” Shteynbarg.

¹³ Even so, a degree of interconnection persisted, above all in the context of Yiddish theater, entailing troupes, directors and critics.

1918, their status shifted from hinterlands of empire to merely hinterlands in the wider context of Yiddish literature and print culture. At the same time, Romania's territorial acquisitions represented a significant influx of both seasoned and amateur writers and journalists who turned their attention away from former cultural hubs in Odessa and the cities of Austrian Galicia and towards the vitalization of a distinct Romanian Yiddish cultural field extending from Czernowitz to Bucharest, parallel to and at odds with dominant Romanian-language institutions of Jewish education and culture.¹⁴ Some figures who had crossed over from Russia at the outset of WWI, like Botoshansky, were engaged in such a project of Yiddish advocacy even before the annexation. In this way a cohort of writers for whom Romania had long been a close neighbor shrouded in alterity found themselves at the forefront of a Yiddish cultural movement under the banner of "Romania."

For more than a decade, the intensive Yiddish cultural life that developed in Romania—mainly in the form of periodicals, theatrical endeavors and Jewish political parties—remained largely invisible within the main currents of Yiddish print, such that when this "terra incognita" resurfaced in the early 1930s in the context of the Yiddish book market, Romania appeared as a novel region of Yiddish creativity in a manner similar to Argentina, Mexico, South Africa and Australia.¹⁵ With the exception of the wildly successful poet Itsik Manger, however, and to a lesser extent Yankev Shternberg in the context of Yiddish theater and the already deceased

¹⁴ In a 1930 interview for *Literarische bleter*, the poet, dramaturg and director Yankev Shternberg, who resided in Bucharest for most of the interwar period, discusses the process of reorienting from old centers to the difficult task of uniting extant Yiddish cultural endeavors across the new boundaries of Romania. By his account, several factors contributed to Romania's relative invisibility: a series of crises and challenges internal to Romanian Jewish life; a spirit of independence from other Yiddish centers; and the prioritization of a polemic local periodical culture over the organization of a functional publishing house. The combination of the latter two factors meant a dearth of books—a crucial means of visibility and prestige. Nakhmen Mayzel, "Dos yidishe kultur-lebn in Rumenyne (a shmues mit Yankev Shternberg)," *Literarische bleter* 7, no. 41-42 (1930): 16-17.

¹⁵ The phrase "terra incognita" appears in two separate accounts of Yiddish literary activity in interwar Romania by writers active in that milieu, both printed in *Literarische bleter*. Ibid. and Itsik Shvarts, "Di yidishe dikhtung in Rumenyne," *Literarische bleter* 12, no. 1 (1935): 8-9.

Eliezer Shteynbarg, the leading figures of Yiddish culture in interwar Romania remained largely invisible abroad until scattering in 1939, such that Romania was never fully integrated into the edifice of Yiddish high culture, except perhaps as the old figure of exotic marginality now crystallized in literary form, above all in the poetry of Itsik Manger.¹⁶

By 1961, not much had changed since the underwhelming reception of Yiddish literary Romania in the mid 1930s, and the preservation and appreciation of its achievements remained the province of a diminished post-Holocaust literary circle in Romania, now stripped of Bessarabia and a significant portion of Bukovina, as well as Romanian Jews residing in Israel, the USSR and the Americas.¹⁷ It is in this context that Botoshansky, whose name had long been synonymous with Argentina in the Yiddish world press, delivered a lecture in Montreal that with casual ease installed interwar Romania as the generative matrix of a Yiddish world literature in fabular form—an almost hidden accomplishment. Even as the socio-historical and cultural specificity of Romania is not considered the genetic source of Shteynbarg’s craft, the elevation of this figure and his vision of the Jewish fable is inextricable from a shared Bessarabian–Romanian context, which thus gains a peculiar centrality.

As a popularizer of Yiddish culture from the margin, and a Romanian margin at that, Botoshansky follows a model established in the 1870s by Avrom Goldfadn, who in Iasi learned a model of popular musical theater rather than the German and Italian models he had previously

¹⁶ Even at the height of Romanian Yiddish writers’ visibility due to the appearance of a handful of books, a commentator in New York lamented their meager reception as well as New York Jews’ persistent association of Romanian Jews with wine cellars and gluttony. Itsik Horovits, “Makht plats far dem rumenishn yidishn shrayber,” *Literarische bleter* 12, no. 16 (1935): 1-2.

¹⁷ Regarding Eliezer Shteynbarg’s literary legacy in particular, another lecture is indicative. In 1972, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Shteynbarg’s death, Hersh Segal, who knew the fabulist in Czernowitz, spoke in Rehovot on the virtues of his fables, expressly indicating the intention merely to bring them to the attention of potential readers, rather than provide literary critical elucidation. The posthumous publication of this lecture by Segal’s brother in 1989 is justified, in a brief introduction, by an enduring lack of familiarity with Shteynbarg on the part of Yiddish readers in Israel. Hersh Segal, *Vegn di mesholim fun Eliezer Shteynbarg* (Tel Aviv: Y. L. Peretz, 1989).

imitated, on that basis inaugurating a Yiddish theater tradition. Botoshansky would explicitly inscribe himself in such a genealogy of marginal mediation. And it is in this practice of mediation, reenacted in a new geography and in a new set of relationships, that Botoshansky serves as a valuable guide through Yiddish literary space. The indissociable narratives of the rise of Buenos Aires and the rise of Botoshansky help to illustrate the workings of an intercontinental literary and print culture through mobility, varied regimes of representation and travel itself.

The two chapters that follow center on a period of several years in the middle of Botoshansky's career, not long after he had permanently settled in Buenos Aires as an editorial collaborator at *Di prese*. During the year 1931, the writer traveled in the company of his wife through Europe and North America as a correspondent for his newspaper, and more, as a de facto cultural ambassador from Jewish Argentina to the wider Jewish world. In the course of this tour, he cemented and developed the relationship of Buenos Aires with the longstanding Yiddish cultural centers of Warsaw and New York, and affirmed beyond doubt its status as an ascendant Yiddish center. Botoshansky's own ascent as a significant figure on the global scene of Yiddish culture is intimately tied to the same process. If his outsized personality commands a certain fascination, and indeed cannot be entirely ignored, the critical interest here is in the way that these complementary roles afford insight into the emergent forms, media and currents of global Yiddish literature.

Chapter 1

BUENOS AIRES BETWEEN PERIPHERY AND CENTER

If we had a cultural historian worthy of the name, a cultural historian capable not only of investigating and speculating (this is an easy and unrefined craft) but who had the comprehensive vision to see fate at work, how the thread is spun and the web woven, he would have himself a worthy task, a difficult one but quite interesting. The thread would be drawn by the momentum of our earth, and would touch New York, Warsaw, Moscow and Buenos Aires (I exclude the Land of Israel, for that is a culture capital of its own). A picture drawn against the backdrop of our planet!¹

This planetary vision, articulated by leading Warsaw writer H. D. Nomberg in 1924, belongs to an interwar critical discourse fundamentally concerned with the new geography of Yiddish culture. Nomberg's chiefly descriptive mode is somewhat unconventional, however, standing in contrast to a more prevalent sense of prescriptive urgency, interested not in the recent past but in the immediate future. Leading writers sought a new sense of orientation for a Yiddish culture utterly reconfigured in a series of upheavals extending from the 1905 revolution to the aftermath of WWI and the Russian Civil War, and projected divergent or common roads ahead symbolically invested in Warsaw, Moscow and New York, cities emblematic of larger spheres of Jewish mass life concentrated in Poland, the Soviet Union and North America.² Each of these

¹ H. D. Nomberg, "Literarische proben in Argentine," *Der Moment* (Warsaw) November 7, 1924, 4.

² Debate surrounding the status of these sites reached a memorable crescendo in Dovid Bergelson's programmatic 1926 essay "Dray tsentren" (Three Centers).

three spheres in turn carried a distinct political-economic charge. The Second Polish Republic as home to the largest concentration of East European Jews represented the possibility of a new minority politics in an ostensibly pluralistic state, and from a more cynical secularist standpoint also the hopelessly recalcitrant traditionalism of the Jewish masses. The Soviet Union represented the prospect of state-sponsored minority culture alongside the most optimistic and pessimistic projections of a communist society. The United States represented the virtues or ills of capitalism, and an economic context in which Yiddish culture might flourish with no limit but an entirely foreseeable future assimilation.

In view of this conventional tricentric orientation, it is unusual to find Buenos Aires evoked as a “culture capital” alongside New York, Warsaw and Moscow. The city had no comparable symbolic standing for Jewish life or Yiddish culture, and was most frequently recalled in conjunction with the storied Jewish traffic in women. Its inclusion is explained by the fact that Nomberg counted among the few prominent Jewish cultural figures to have visited the city, where in 1922 he spurred the establishment of a writers’ association on the model of the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Warsaw, itself founded just six years earlier. From Nomberg’s perspective, it was clear that Buenos Aires represented an ascendant sphere of Jewish mass life in the Southern Cone, and the significance of its potential as a Yiddish culture capital was only made more apparent for him by the US Immigration Act of 1924, which seemed it would effectively sever New York from the continuous migratory flow that had fed its own burgeoning Yiddish cultural life.³

³ The deterrent effect of this policy was significant, but as Libby Garland has shown it did not halt the arrival of new East European Jewish migrants, who continued to reach the United States with the aid of robust smuggling operations. See Libby Garland, “Not-Quite-Closed-Gates: Jewish Alien Smuggling in the Post-Quota Years.” *American Jewish History* 94, no. 3 (2008): 197-224.

At least numerically, in the course of the 1920s Buenos Aires did in fact become the second center of Yiddish culture in the Americas, as the largely Yiddish-speaking and mostly urban Jewish population of Argentina increased from approximately 120,000 in 1920 to over 200,000 by 1930. This population supported the same array of Jewish social and cultural institutions—e.g. an education system, mutual aid societies, a daily press, theaters—that existed in other major East European Jewish population centers. From afar, the scale and substance of Jewish life in Argentina, and of the Yiddish literature and press it supported, served to bolster the broad notion of a Jewish future in an America now imaginable in hemispheric terms, but this did not equate to any definitive symbolic status for Buenos Aires in the broader scheme of interwar Yiddish culture.

In significant ways, Yiddish culture in Argentina during this period may be understood as a regional phenomenon defined by its own priorities and dynamics, but a relationship to Yiddish culture at large nevertheless remained integral to its self-conception. Ties to diverse points abroad played a definitive role locally and, with time, helped to shape the wider Yiddish cultural world. This chapter argues that Buenos Aires, as a relatively new peripheral position from and toward which writers conceived of that world in the interwar period, offers a productive vantage from which to understand its dynamic composition. The aim is not to draw a total planetary picture such as the one evoked by H. D. Nomberg—a momentous task indeed—but to bring in to focus a symbolic and material “web” of extent and interrelation.

Since Jewish mass migration from Eastern Europe to Argentina began toward the close of the nineteenth century, migrants had consistently looked beyond their immediate surroundings back toward Eastern Europe as well as toward Jewish North America, engaging in an encompassing print spectatorship afforded by imported Yiddish books and periodicals. By this time, New York as maturing mass center of Jewish life and Yiddish culture had already begun to organize a new

perspective on Jewish Eastern Europe. The fact of distance meant that the region could be viewed and contemplated in holistic terms, while interaction among migrants from all its corners accentuated an extant sense of intra-Jewish cosmopolitanism. The subsequent development of Buenos Aires as a Jewish mass center on a smaller scale by the eve of WWI had much the same effect, one of numerous parallels between the two major American port cities. But it also created a new American vantage from which to regard New York and indeed the whole of the East European Jewish world.

The North-South axis between New York and Buenos Aires to a degree reproduced in the Americas a dynamic already present in Eastern Europe, as the Jewish geocultural marginality of Buenos Aires from the perspective of New York mirrored that of Bucharest or Czernowitz in Romania from the perspective of Warsaw. Warsaw and New York tended to favor a mutual transatlantic gaze over a southward one—or indeed attention to more proximate cities deemed provincial, such as Lodz—so that Buenos Aires, like the Romanian hubs of Yiddish culture, remained a world apart. The crucial difference was that Buenos Aires gradually developed the institutional and economic base of an American center of Jewish mass migration—the first outside of New York’s immediate orbit. When efforts to develop a solid local daily press in Buenos Aires bore fruit with the establishment of one sustainable Yiddish daily in 1914 and a second in 1918, soon joined by a complement of more and less durable periodicals, a peripheral gaze initially defined by the idiosyncratic reading patterns of individuals came increasingly to be shaped by local editors.

The fashioning of new horizons of cohesion in local publications was, to be sure, a matter of the ideological lens through which editors regarded Jewish life and Yiddish culture in the northern hemisphere, but also depended on any given editor’s ability and inclination to navigate a cross-regional network of writers and periodicals. Because this network was significantly

structured both economically and symbolically by the institution of the daily newspaper, those with an editorial role in a daily could act as privileged cultural mediators. The editors of the progressive daily *Di prese* (est. 1918) in Buenos Aires maximally cultivated this potential in order to craft a comprehensive vision of Yiddish culture for their readership. The first half of this chapter traces that development during the 1920s and shows how wide recognition generated by the paper's editorial profile in turn helped the editors to consolidate the status of Argentina as a Yiddish cultural periphery while also contesting the symbolic terms of its apprehension as such. This process culminates in the 1931 Euro-American travels of co-editor Yankev Botoshansky, whose role as an agent of *Di prese* is intertwined with the pursuit of consecration as a major Yiddish writer by Warsaw and New York.

The second half of the chapter examines the way that the mobility afforded to Botoshansky as a Yiddish journalist based in Buenos Aires, both in the context of his 1931 travels and in that of a 1933 Patagonian tour, informs distinct perspectives in writing addressed to the audience of *Di prese* and to that of the Warsaw literary journal *Literarische bleter*. In each case, variants of a single body of writing produced for a South American readership take on a radically different character when deployed for a world-wide Yiddish readership, bringing into focus both the disparity between marginal and central situations of address and the distinctive position of Buenos Aires in relation to the Yiddish cultural world.

PERIODICAL ENTANGLEMENTS

From its founding in 1918, *Di prese* functioned as a national newspaper conceived as advancing the social, political and cultural interests of Argentina's Jewish working masses. Its primary focus was on Jewish and general issues affecting the capital, with gradually expanding coverage of Jewish life in Argentina's other principal cities, in agrarian settlements and in adjacent

countries. These local and regional concerns were balanced with substantial attention to international affairs and in particular to the Jewish affairs of North America, Poland, the Soviet Union and Palestine. A conspicuous element of this broader Jewish focus was the world of Yiddish literature and culture, central to the vision of a culturally elevated Jewish proletariat promoted by co-founder of *Di prese* Pinye Kats (1882-1959), a communist-identified publicist, journalist, translator and cultural activist who resided in Argentina from 1906, when he left his native southern Russia, and served as chief editor from the paper's founding until his death. While the paper functioned as a key forum for local writers, a premium was placed on showcasing the Yiddish culture of the major centers.

The paper's earliest years were characterized by extensive reprinting of cultural criticism from progressive papers in Russia, Poland and the United States. Among these sources, often but not always disclosed, were the communist *Der emes* (Moscow) and *Frayhayt* (New York), the Bundist *Folkstsaytung* and Folkist *Moment* (Warsaw), as well as the nonpartisan *Der tog* and the broadly socialist *Forverts* (New York). In time, the sources of the literary and critical works reprinted in *Di prese* became more varied, and with the addition of Yankev Botoshansky to the editorial staff in 1926, these reprints were increasingly accompanied by critical appraisals or polemics from the journalist writing as himself or as one of various personas. This didactic and dialogic framing of materials from leading writers and critics in New York, Warsaw and Moscow more firmly situated readers of *Di prese* in the midst of Yiddish culture's key developments and debates.⁴ In October, 1928, the literary component of this vision was formalized with the introduction of a weekly full-page rubric edited by Botoshansky, devoted to

⁴ To take just one example, from April 3, 1926, an article by critic Shmuel Niger reprinted from *Der tog* is accompanied by a note that a reply from Simourdain (one of Botoshansky's personas) is to follow the next day. Shmuel Niger, "Der emeser fargnign un emeser nutsn fun bikher," *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) April 3, 1926, 9.

criticism, literary-historical essays and reviews of new Yiddish books published throughout the world.⁵

While the ingathering of the Yiddish cultural world in the pages of *Di prese* was largely virtual, it was also substantiated by the occasional arrival of visiting writers from Eastern Europe. High-profile visits, such as that of H. D. Nomberg in 1922, were rare, but the newspaper treated visits from lesser-known writers no less comprehensively. Even writers known only regionally proved of intense interest foremost to immigrant communities who hailed from the same part of Eastern Europe, and, given the dearth of local literary talent, to a wider Jewish public as well. This was the case of Yankev Botoshansky, little known outside Romania when he first traveled to Argentina in 1923 to visit his sister in Rosario. His arrival from Bucharest corresponded with that of another writer, Shloyme Rayzfeder, from Warsaw, and each was feted in a formal reception organized by the corresponding Jewish hometown association (*landmanshaft*)—Bessarabian and Polish, respectively.⁶ These inaugural events gave way to public readings and lectures held at local theaters, and further events organized for smaller Jewish communities located in other cities and in agrarian settlements, all reported in *Di prese*. The paper also offered itself to each writer as a forum, printing their parallel accounts of the journey from Warsaw and Bucharest to Buenos Aires, their impressions of Argentina and selected literary works. Scarcely a month before the arrival of Botoshansky and Rayzfeder, the writer Zalman Yitshak Aronsohn (Anokhi) had arrived to Buenos Aires from Moscow, and together the three formed a rudimentary microcosm of Yiddish culture in post-WWI Eastern Europe.

⁵ Alongside its primary focus on Yiddish, “*Di literarishe velt*” encompassed treatments of European, American and Spanish American literature and criticism.

⁶ “Unzere gest shriftsteler,” *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) October, 1923.

Unlike the other visiting writers, whose engagement with *Di prese* lasted only as long as their visits—ranging from several months to a year—Botoshansky on his 1925 return to Europe adopted a new role as a roaming correspondent for the paper, sending sporadic dispatches from cities across Western Europe until permanently settling in Buenos Aires the following year. Similarly, Polish Yiddish writer Leib Malakh, after an extended residence in Argentina and a shorter period in Brazil, continued to write for the paper on relocating to New York in 1927. In doing so, both joined a growing network of such contributors who provided another basis, more consistent than that of stray visiting writers, of direct engagement between Buenos Aires and places, publications and tendencies across the Yiddish cultural world.

The newspaper's gradually expanding roster of foreign contributors facilitated its transition from a position of subservience to the Yiddish dailies of Warsaw, Moscow and New York toward relative equality with them. Like other leading dailies, *Di prese* could offer honoraria and a mass audience, albeit in significantly smaller measure on both counts, but unlike them it was more likely to derive prestige from foreign contributors than to bestow it on them. Incentives played a role, but the main draw was the paper's editorial sensibility, which paired a reverence for Yiddish, European and South American literature and culture with progressive social and political analysis, appealing to a broad spectrum of left-aligned writers abroad.⁷

By 1923, the paper's sixth year in print, the presence of these contributors itself had become central to its editorial self-conception. When, in that year, *Di prese* announced the collaboration

⁷ The perspective of Y. H. Radoshitsky, a New York based poet affiliated with the literary journal *Di feder* and a longstanding occasional contributor to *Di prese*, is suggestive in this regard. In a 1931 overture directed squarely at the paper's readership, he emphasizes his own role as an early champion of *Di prese* in New York and recalls passing the first issues he received among the city's Yiddish intelligentsia in Cafe Europa, one of their favored gathering places. It was, he believed, a model newspaper in its unprecedented emphasis on Yiddish culture, especially literature and its creators, a focus balanced with progressive, proletarian ideals. Writers in New York could only dream of such a newspaper edited by proper intellectuals, committed to the elevation of its readership and starkly opposed to the base themes other papers relied on to seduce readers. "Yankev Botoshansky," *Di prese*, July 19, 1931, 8.

of celebrated dramaturg, novelist and globetrotter Peretz Hirschbein, whose already popular travelogues on Africa and Australia and those he would soon write on a planned trip across Central and South America were to appear in the paper, the editors also elected to remind readers of the extant roster of nine contributors based in Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Bucharest and Palestine.⁸ Even as these relationships to varying degrees fostered a sense of interconnection between an Argentine readership and points in the wider Yiddish cultural world, few of them represented substantial bidirectional exchange beyond the contributors' correspondence with the editors. This was especially true of high-profile contributors such as Hirschbein, whose ranks continued to grow throughout the 1920s and 1930s.⁹ However, the mere fact of a writer's voluntary association with the paper was effectively mobilized as evidence of its rising stature.

Much of the content submitted from abroad consisted of material previously printed elsewhere. What distinguished this from the habitual reprinting of content from other periodicals in *Di prese* was, on the one hand, the regularity with which prominent writers' contributions appeared in special weekend rubrics, which made their names indissociable from that of the newspaper, and on the other hand, the very notion of an unmediated relationship. This was established in announcements declaring that a given writer, whose name would appear in large, bold print, had signed on as a regular contributor (*shtendiker mitarbeter*) and was reinforced by

⁸ These contributors included: in Berlin, Alexander Khashin (pseudonym of Tsvi Averbukh, 1886-1939), who was soon to join the editorial team at Moscow's *Der emes*; in Warsaw, literary critic Nakhmen Mayzel and activist-educator Yankev Pat (1890-1966); in Moscow, writer Moyshe Taytsh (1882-1935); in Odessa, editor of the *Komunistishe shtim* Leyb Yakhnovitsh (1887-unknown); in Kiev, journalist and philologist B. Marinsky (pseudonym of Dov Ber Slutsky, 1877-1955). The identities of two contributors writing under pseudonyms—Nayboy in Vienna and Odem in Palestine—are unclear. The Bucharest contributor, designated "Dr. Sh. Royter," was likely Dr. Shloyme Bikl. Botoshansky, writing of the group of friends who saw him to the train in Bucharest, refers to a "Rikl" (perhaps a portmanteau of name and pseudonym, if not a typographical error) and notes that an honorarium of 30 Argentine pesos per month is no mean sum for Romania's *Frayhayt*, a Poalei Zionist publication Bikl edited in Czernowitz for several years before relocating to Bucharest.

⁹ By 1928, Warsaw-based poet and critic Melekh Ravitsh and peripatetic writer Borekh Glazman had been recruited as regular contributors, joined in 1929 by Daniel Charney in Berlin and Avrom Reyzen in New York, and later by Dovid Pinsky (1931), Joseph Opatoshu (1934) and H. Leivick (1936), all based in New York.

the regular use of a parenthetical “(spetsiel far *Di prese*)” (specially for *Di prese*) in the byline—a widespread practice in the Yiddish press that suggested exclusivity without categorically asserting it.¹⁰ In an immediate sense, this was likely meant to distinguish *Di prese* from its chief local competitor *Di yidishe tsaytung* while also leaving open the possibility that any given article, poem, story or travelogue really was destined only for the paper’s readership.

This was in fact the case for a whole category of contributors designated as special city correspondents in Berlin, Paris, New York, Tel Aviv and elsewhere, who tended to explicitly invoke the readership’s Argentine context, accentuating the impression of an exclusive insider view in formats ranging from economic reports to neighborhood profiles and interviews with prominent writers. At least some of these correspondents closely followed the Yiddish cultural life of Buenos Aires as it played out in the pages of *Di prese*, and served as vectors of distribution both for the paper and knowledge of Yiddish literature in Argentina. This is particularly evident in the case of literary critic Arn Bekerman, who served as the Paris correspondent from 1925 until the German occupation.¹¹ While Bekerman contributed to several Parisian Yiddish publications during the same period, the Yiddish-speaking population there, though substantial, was both transient and sharply divided along ideological lines, limiting the potential of any given periodical to reach a large audience. Lacking the prestige required for appreciable access to major publications in New York and Warsaw, he looked to *Di prese*.¹²

¹⁰ The designation “spetsiel far” was also used spuriously by some publications, when in fact no permission had been solicited and no remuneration was offered. *Di prese* habitually emphasized in editorial comments that rights had been secured from authors whose work was reprinted, at least for materials marked “spetsiel.” At a minimum, the paper maintained a posture of ethical conduct in this regard.

¹¹ Bekerman (1897-1943) was raised in Northeastern Poland, lived in Warsaw in the early 1920s and in 1926 settled in Paris, where he remained until being interned at Drancy and Gurs and ultimately deported from Southern France.

¹² While Bekerman’s work occasionally appeared in Warsaw’s *Literarische bleter*, it appeared more consistently in Romania’s *Tshernovitser bleter* (Czernowitz), *Oyfgang* (Sighet) and *Indzl* (Bucharest) and frequently in *Di prese*.

While Bekerman's high degree of investment in the paper is somewhat exceptional, the relationships maintained with contributors both casual and committed helped *Di prese* to be perceived, within its first decade, as a publication on equal footing with the dailies of the major centers. This reputation significantly shaped the reception of two members of the paper's editorial team when each in his turn traveled out of South America for the first time since adopting that role.

Travel on the part of founding editor Pinye Kats to the Soviet Union in 1929 and literary editor Yankev Botoshansky to varied points in Europe as well as New York in 1931 served to intensify extant ties between Yiddish culture in Argentina and abroad. In their respective travels, both editors encountered varied members of their paper's contributor network, in most cases for the first time, and brought new members into its fold. In the pages of *Di prese*, both chronicled their experiences and observations in considerable detail in the service of the paper's already panoramic vision. In lectures and conversations, each adopted what can only be described as an ambassadorial role on the part of Jewish Argentina at large and Argentine Yiddish culture in particular. This latter dimension of advocacy was pivotal in redefining the terms of engagement between Argentina and the wider Yiddish cultural world.

The general awareness of and esteem for the Yiddish press of Buenos Aires that existed in literary, journalistic and academic circles in Europe and North America prior to Kats' and Botoshansky's travels was not accompanied by widespread detailed or accurate knowledge of Jewish life or Yiddish culture in Argentina. Beyond the limited circulation of Argentine Yiddish books and periodicals among those motivated to obtain them, most available information was mediated by rare high-profile travelers from Eastern Europe reporting their observations for newspapers and journals, by those with direct personal or professional ties to Argentina recounting their own anecdotal knowledge or by Warsaw's sensationalist Yiddish evening

papers, which spared no available claim or detail about the Argentine dimensions of the Jewish sex trade. This situation was only modestly changed by founding editor of *Di prese* Pinye Kats when he visited the Soviet Union.

Kats traveled as part of a delegation from PROKOR, an Argentine organization that promoted Soviet Jewish agrarian settlements, with the aim of surveying the much touted revolutionary Jewish life being built in his former homeland. His trip served to amplify the existing Soviet affinities of *Di prese*, but the possibility of a reciprocal Soviet gaze was limited to a narrow communist frame. The land route across France, Germany and Poland, in contrast, presented the opportunity for broader engagement. While Kats' hopes of representing the Jewish life and culture he helped to foster in Argentina were somewhat frustrated in Paris, where he was received primarily on the basis of his paper's leftist credentials, a stop in Warsaw afforded him a central forum in which to discuss the state of Yiddish culture in Argentina.¹³ This came in the form of a concise interview in *Literarische bleter*, the editor of which, Nakhman Mayzel, already counted among the more prominent foreign contributors to *Di prese*.¹⁴ Though the interview itself provided only a glimpse into Argentina's Yiddish cultural life, Kats' visit may have helped to catalyze Mayzel's engagement with Argentina—and thus its profile in his influential journal.

More definitive in this regard was Yankev Botoshansky's extended stay in Warsaw two years later. Whereas Kats had appeared there almost incidentally, en route to and from his primary, Soviet destination, the city was at the center of the European itinerary through France, Germany, Romania and Poland that Botoshansky traversed in the company of his wife, an actress in the

¹³ In an article for *Di prese* that glowingly reported on Kats' one-week stay in the city, Paris correspondent Arn Bekerman discussed the tension that arose when the local Kultur-Lige, which organized a reception for Kats, announced that he would speak on the position of Argentina between American and British imperialism rather than his proposed topic of Jewish life in Argentina. Arn Bekerman, "A vokh mitn khaver P. Kats in Pariz," *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) August 5, 1929, 7.

¹⁴ Nakhmen Mayzel, "Di yidishe literatur un prese in Argentine (a shmues mit Pinye Kats)," *Literarische bleter* 6, no. 43 (1929): 14.

Yiddish theater. At each stage of the journey, he worked both to spread knowledge about Jewish life and Yiddish culture in Argentina and to promote his own work as a journalist, critic, dramaturg and director along with his wife's acting.¹⁵ Though he had resided in Argentina for only five years to Kats' twenty-five, as the literary editor of *Di prese*, the paper's house literary and theater critic and a belletrist himself, he was already viewed as more integrally connected to the country's Yiddish cultural activity. This perception, together with considerable charisma, allowed him to both speak for and embody Jewish Argentina, and thus to produce "Argentina" as a new value for mainstream Yiddish cultural discourse, much as the poet Itzik Manger had recently brought "Romania" to Poland by promoting his work in Warsaw.

This was not simply a matter of Manger's or Botoshansky's presence in the city. Necessary too was the enthusiastic collaboration of its Yiddish literary establishment, which came in the form of Nakhmen Mayzel and his *Literarishe bleter*. By 1931 the journal already stood as the most recognizable symbol of a unified Yiddish literary culture spanning diverse countries and several continents, asserted over and against a mounting sense of disjuncture. From the perspective of Warsaw, both Romania and Argentina had for more than a decade stood as increasingly conspicuous Yiddish cultural peripheries that nevertheless retained an air not only of remoteness but also inscrutability. Even after Kats' 1929 visit and interview, Mayzel continued to regard Yiddish culture in Argentina as an indeterminate and largely inward-looking phenomenon, while also acknowledging its remarkable scale and intimating that its leading

¹⁵ In Paris, and likely elsewhere, Botoshansky found opportunities to stage his own plays as well as others under his direction, featuring his wife.

writers were on the verge of obtaining a wider significance.¹⁶ To bring this blurred region of creativity into focus would mean its incorporation into the journal's vision of a variegated but seamless Yiddish literary world, and Botoshansky's potential to facilitate that process is already suggested in the editorial note prefacing an interview published shortly after his arrival to Warsaw: "We are accustomed to receiving guests from Yiddish New York. In these past years Yiddish artists from Romania, Latvia, the Land of Israel have visited us. For the first time we have a guest from the Yiddish literary outpost (*kibets*) in Argentina."¹⁷

And indeed, while still in Poland Botoshansky made a number of contributions to *Literarische bleter* that brought Argentina into better focus. Among them were a short story about a transgressive Jewish-Italian romance in Buenos Aires—a trope already familiar from New York's Yiddish fiction developed in a new setting—and a review of a short story collection by an Argentine Jewish colonist, contributions that together establish the two basic poles, city and pampa, of a distinctly Argentine Jewish imagination. The fullest fruition of the collaboration thus inaugurated would come two years later, when Botoshansky served as the remote guest-editor of a special issue of *Literarische bleter* dedicated to all facets of Jewish life and culture in Argentina, with emphasis on the country's Yiddish literature, press and theater.¹⁸

If *Literarische bleter* presented a powerful forum capable of converting an occluded periphery into a far more visible one, "Argentina" and "Buenos Aires," much as "Romania," were by no

¹⁶ One article by L. Zhitnitsky on the position of Argentine Yiddish culture with respect to other centers was reprinted from *Di prese* in January 1930 and introduced with the following editorial comment: "After Poland, America and the Soviet Union, in recent years Argentina has distinguished itself in our literary-artistic world. Press, theater, literature, poets, movements, publications, journals. But we still know very little about all this. A too inward process of development is still underway, the literary figures of Yiddish Argentina are just beginning to crystallize such that they may be seen from afar in their full stature." L. Zhitnitsky, "Gerekhte tayne fun der yidisher Argentine," *Literarische bleter* 8, no. 5 (1931): 16.

¹⁷ Nakhmen Mayzel, "Dos yidishe kultur-lebn in Argentine (a shmues mit Yankev Botoshansky)," *Literarische bleter* 8, no. 12 (1931): 13-14.

¹⁸ A planned series of such "country issues" devoted to regions of Yiddish cultural activity unfamiliar to most readers was ultimately limited to two issues, dedicated to Germany and Argentina, both of which drew criticism from readers in those countries who objected to the choice of guest editor.

means neutral terms awaiting definition, but instead longstanding symbols of an exotic Jewish alterity. The extant symbolic investments of these terms could be exploited as a literary resource by peripheral writers disposed to pursue a self-exoticizing engagement with the centers, as was the case with both Manger and Botoshansky. While as a public figure in Argentina invested in the reputation of the country's Jewish cultural and institutional life abroad, Botoshansky regarded the prime symbolic association with Buenos Aires—the Jewish traffic in women—with a certain moral contempt, he also recognized its potential as a means of favorably engaging audiences in Eastern Europe and North America. A conspicuous feature of his 1931 travels was a campaign to neutralize this symbolic charge by means of a performative disavowal, explicitly refuting the assumptions underlying Argentina's Jewish ill repute while furnishing details about the sex trade bound to captivate audiences.

In Paris, Berlin, Warsaw and New York, and likely at other points along the way, Botoshansky's campaign took shape in print and at lecterns as he contested the notions that the sex trade was a defining characteristic of Jewish life in Argentina and that Jews played a more significant role in this economy than other nationalities.¹⁹ Such disavowals were accompanied by clarifications about the true dimensions, character and context of the sex trade and its divisive role in Argentine Jewish life—one part of a wider perspective also encompassing Yiddish language and culture, Jewish education, and the livelihoods of Jews in cities and agrarian settlements. When Botoshansky arrived in New York in June, 1931, this well-rehearsed routine took the form of a “self-interview” for the daily *Der tog*, wherein the question of the Jewish traffic in women appears amid a series of otherwise innocuous questions about Jews and

¹⁹ For example, Botoshansky's first public lecture, delivered in Paris, placed the matter front and center. Arn Bekerman paraphrases the lecture's opening: “Throughout the world Argentina is a synonym of the traffic in women. Furthermore there is a widespread opinion that the largest percent of those who drive this harmful commerce are Jews—but that is false.” Arn Bekerman, “Yankev Botoshansky vegn yidishn lebn in Argentine,” *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) March 17, 1931, 8.

Jewishness in Argentina. The three-plank answer to this question—that the traffickers “have a much smaller place among us than in the... world press”; that the Jewish share of South America’s “white flesh” market is minuscule compared to the French and Italian shares; and that those Jews who are involved, dubbed *tmeim* (impure ones) are roundly excluded from organized Jewish life—concludes by turning to the explicitly symbolic domain of literature. Botoshansky ventures the wishful, humorous and morally charged speculation that, were the revered Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem still alive, he would issue a clarification regarding his well-known story “A mentsh fun Buenos Ayres” (A Person from Buenos Aires). The story relates a conversation on a train in Eastern Europe between the narrator and an interlocutor, a slick businessman, from Buenos Aires, willing only to state his unsavory trade elliptically, by observing that he does not deal in etrogs, citrons employed in the observance of Sukkot. Botoshansky, however, insists that the author would now affirm that the story’s titular character “did indeed deal in etrogs, and he would wash this person clean and return his kosher name to him.”²⁰

This literary appeal signals a concern not only with the general reputation of Argentina in the Jewish world, but also with its position within a Yiddish symbolic geography over which Sholem Aleichem’s story, first published in 1909, could still exert considerable influence. While the story itself originally depended on the reader’s preparedness to grasp that a slick traveling businessman from Buenos Aires coy about the nature of his trade could only be a procurer, this memorable figure nevertheless codified the association between Buenos Aires and the Jewish traffic in women for Yiddish readers everywhere and, given the author’s foundational place in Yiddish letters, in perpetuity. Subsequent literary representations, such as an episode in Sholem Asch’s 1916 novel *Motke ganef* (Motke the Thief) in which the eponymous protagonist begins to

²⁰ Yankev Botoshansky, “A gast fun Argentine makht mit zikh aleyn an intervui farn Tog,” *Der tog* June 10, 1931, 4.

seduce girls in Poland and send them off to Buenos Aires, reinforced this association, as did the Argentine travel impressions of Peretz Hirschbein in 1914 and H. D. Nomberg in 1922.²¹

Through the early 1920s, Argentina also bore the association of the Jewish agrarian settlements there—the chief object of both Hirschbein’s and Nomberg’s attention—which upon their establishment in the 1890s generated interest due to the novelty of the undertaking of the philanthropic Jewish Colonization Association. As Jewish agrarian settlements became more common, notably in Palestine and the Soviet Union where they took on new symbolic import, the Argentine case ceased to be distinctive. The association with sex trafficking remained, and may have even gained currency throughout the 1920s, when Buenos Aires was consistently represented in the Yiddish press of Poland as both a potential destination for Jewish emigrants and a criminal haven where Jewish daughters could be swallowed up by the “white slave” trade²²

Though the dimensions and characteristics of this economy were often exaggerated and sensationalized, the notion that Buenos Aires had been a major hub of the Jewish sex trade from the late nineteenth century up to the historical present was basically accurate. This much was immutable, but the “kosher name” of Sholem Aleichem’s implicit pimp could be regained, Botoshansky wagered, by means of the appropriate intervention: an assertion of the narrative frame of mainstream Jewish life in Argentina. Here was a perspective no less fixated on the Jewish sex trade than the sensational evening papers in Warsaw, and no less colored by anxiety or moral panic, but which was informed by the local experience of a decades-long tension between Jewish procurers and those who opposed them on moral grounds or for the negative

²¹ Hirshbeyn evokes broad associations and notes a war in Buenos Aires between the *tmeim* and the Jewish public. Perets Hirshbeyn, *Fun vayte lender* (New York: 1916). Nomberg discusses the *tmeim* more extensively, implying that their activities are common knowledge among residents of the Polish and Russian cities most tied to trade. H. D. Nomberg, *Amerike: ayndrukn un bilder fun Tsofn- un Dorem-Amerike* (Warsaw: Kulture-Lige, 1928).

²² Mariusz Kałczewiak, “Buenos Aires Seen from Warsaw: Poland’s Yiddish Press Reporting on Jewish Life in Argentina,” *Studia Judaica* 17 (2014): 85-107.

attention they brought to the wider local Jewish population. Already in 1914, Peretz Hirschbein as an outside observer had referred to a “war” between the two factions, which by the 1920s developed wholly distinct institutional lives. In 1930, a major federal case against the mutual aid society that incorporated a majority of Jewish procurers in the Buenos Aires region effectively dissolved that society and scattered its members. While most eluded any form of prosecution due to the impact of the military coup of September, 1930 on the course of the trial, the outcome was nevertheless viewed as a symbolic victory by the many local Jewish social and cultural institutions that had actively supported the federal prosecutors. Thus, by 1931 it was possible to claim not only that a morally upstanding Jewish majority had for decades worked to marginalize the “impure” elements, but that the war had been won.

This was the prevailing narrative of an intensely moralistic Jewish public discourse in Argentina, more eager to efface than retell a recent history regarded as sordid and shameful even today. Against this grain, Botoshansky in his travels was inclined to promote the story of a heroic communal triumph over the cruel exploitation of women. Because in 1926 he had thrown the whole weight of his new editorial post at *Di prese* into a campaign against the influence of Jewish procurers over the Yiddish theaters of Buenos Aires, of which they were a favored clientele, he could easily cast himself as a protagonist in this story, and was in fact fond of calling attention to the role he had played in the establishment of a “pure” popular Yiddish theater. Without a compelling account of what corrupt forces had been faced down by community and individual, such a narrative would hardly satisfy audiences whose curiosity about Jewish life in South America was invariably tinged with a measure of prurience. The degree to which this curiosity was indulged by the “juicy language with poetic images and comparisons” that typified Botoshansky’s lectures even for an audience more erudite than

popular cannot be known.²³ But his literary answer to Sholem Aleichem, the historical novel *Buenos Ayres*, offered readers unprecedented, lurid immersion into the world of the Jewish traffic in women even while emphasizing Jewish Argentina's definitive moral triumph over it.

More than the culmination of Botoshansky's 1931 campaign to redefine the meaning of Buenos Aires for Yiddish symbolic geography, his novel may also be seen as the culmination of a parallel effort to attain prominence as a Yiddish writer through his relationship with the New York daily *Der tog*. This was a natural counterpart to *Di prese* in Buenos Aires insofar as both publications touted a nonpartisan progressive stance that promoted Yiddish culture and positively regarded efforts to establish an autonomous Jewish territory in Palestine or elsewhere, even if the Buenos Aires paper in practice bore a communist influence evident even in its orthography, explicitly modeled on that of the leading Soviet Yiddish daily *Der emes*.²⁴ Following the self-interview for *Der tog* discussed above, Botoshansky placed five feature articles in the paper during his time in New York, mostly corresponding to his niche as an authority on and representative of Jewish South America able to spin it into gripping content. Though confining for the journalist and critic brimming with commentary on the state of Jewish life and Yiddish culture in Poland and Romania, this niche corresponded to his work of Argentine advocacy and was in fact his only reliable point of access to New York's crowded Yiddish publishing field. His *Buenos Ayres* represents a troubled effort to expand and elevate this niche role.

²³ Berlin correspondent for *Di prese* Joseph Sherman uses this phrase to characterize Botoshansky's lecture attended by an assortment of Berlin's leading Jewish intellectuals, organized by supporters of Vilna's Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO). Joseph Sherman, "Yankev Botoshansky in Berlin," *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) March 24, 1931, 6.

²⁴ The most significant feature of this orthography was the presentation of words of Hebrew and Aramaic origin, traditionally spelled without vowels, in the same near-phonetic form as all other Yiddish words, a modification geared toward improved accessibility for readers not literate in Hebrew. A similar orthography was also employed by the New York poetry journal *Inzikh*, but to the aesthetic end of concretizing the relation between sound and the written word. *Di prese*'s change in orthography was announced on April 3, 1926 and commenced the following day.

The novel—to be treated more fully below, in Chapter 3—was contracted by *Der tog* and composed in New York, and published in daily installments after the author’s departure from October, 1931 to February, 1932. Consistently presented with the subheading “Novel of the Life of Jewish White Slave Traders between Europe and America,” the novel is indeed transatlantic in scope, and asserts a South American perspective that, rather than merely supplementing that of New York with local content, stakes an alternative claim to the space “between Europe and America.” The interest of the novel’s ample geography ultimately overshadows its depiction of an Argentine Jewish moral triumph, and neither aspect commands the same attention as its sensational subject matter, frustrating any pretension of harnessing Argentina’s prime Jewish symbolic resource—the sex trade—in order to revise the country’s place in Yiddish symbolic geography or to broaden the author’s South American niche.

From the perspective of the editors of *Der tog*, however, the novel was a success. By uniting titillation and exoticism with moral purpose and a degree of social critique, it satisfied the newspaper’s need for engaging content that would help maintain circulation while plausibly adhering to the commitment to intellectual and aesthetic substance evident in other rubrics. Botoshansky’s correspondence with editors Ben Tsion Goldberg and Samuel Margoshes over the subsequent years shows an attempt to repeat this success in 1936 with a second novel titled *Rio de Zhaneyro*, which may have depicted the erstwhile Brazilian capital in the same light as in earlier feature articles for *Der tog*: that of a contrast between transcendent beauty and abject misery. The new novel together with *Buenos Ayres*, he suggested in a letter, could form a series akin to the massively popular urban novels of famed Yiddish writer Sholem Asch.²⁵ The model of Asch’s novels, which blended an epic historical perspective with melodrama, is palpable in *Buenos Ayres*, but *Rio de Zhaneyro*, deemed too episodic, failed to make a similar impression on

²⁵ Yankev Botoshansky to Samuel Margoshes, July 2, 1932, Box 30, Folder 273, *Der tog* Archive, YIVO.

Der tog's editors.²⁶ While its rejection did not preclude a continuing sporadic niche role in the paper as the voice of Argentina, it did foreclose the more distinguished and sustained presence in New York's daily press envisioned by the author.

This bid to become the "Sholem Asch of South America" by the grace of New York's Yiddish press was not Botoshansky's only strategy for exceeding the supplementary Argentine niche he had come to inhabit in the course of his 1931 travels as an emissary of *Di prese*. Whereas the thematics of *Buenos Ayres* had in fact stood at odds with the writer's position in Argentina, where the still charged Jewish public discourse around the sex trade would make such a novel unpublishable, a subsequent bid for prestige abroad grew directly out of his writing for the newspaper, not fiction this time but travel writing. The capacity of Buenos Aires to organize a striking vision of the Yiddish cultural world would hinge not on its own self-reflection but on its potential as an observatory, the same peripheral vantage that enabled the ascent of *Di prese* and its editors.

THE TRAVELER'S GAZE BETWEEN BUENOS AIRES AND WARSAW

As established in the preceding section, the relationships Yankev Botoshansky forged with periodicals in Warsaw and New York during his 1931 travels not only consolidated extant ties between Buenos Aires and writers and audiences in Europe and North America, but also decisively positioned him as the voice of Jewish Argentina abroad—an advocate for the visibility of an Argentine periphery within Yiddish literary space and the privileged producer of representations of that periphery for consumption by the centers. Whereas *Der tog* did not ultimately facilitate an attempt to exceed this role by novelistic means, the writer's ongoing relationship with *Literarische bleter*, presented another, more felicitous avenue by which to do so.

²⁶ Ben Tsion Golberg to Yankev Botoshansky, December 21, 1936, *Der tog* Archive, YIVO,

A period unusually dense with contributions from Botoshansky to the journal, in 1933, contains both the fullest development of his representative function—the special “Argentina” issue mentioned above—and an equally if not more pronounced debut in a capacious critical role on par with that of more centrally situated contributors. In addition to serving as an arbiter of the Argentine particular in the service of the journal’s universal vision, this latter role entailed other modes of engagement with that vision, both marked and unmarked by a peripheral stance.

The latter, unmarked mode is exemplified by a long essay included in a series of special supplements to *Literarische bleter*, commemorating the life’s work of a major Yiddish poet in New York (M. L. Halpern) after his sudden death in 1932.²⁷ Save for a brief section detailing Botoshansky’s recent interactions with the poet in New York, the fact of the author’s residence in Buenos Aires has no bearing on the essay, except perhaps as a tacit affirmation of the journal’s premise of an integral Yiddish cultural world. This essay stands in contrast to a more peripherally situated mode of writing that did not only affirm the journal’s vision but also embellished it. Two instances of such writing mobilize the periphery not as an object to be rendered visible but rather as a vantage of uncommon scope, evoking the breadth of Yiddish culture’s geography and thus reproducing, within the frame of a single text, an effect normally performed by any given issue of *Literarische bleter*.

The two texts in question, the book *Portretn fun yidishe shrayber* (Portraits of Yiddish Writers) and the travel sketch “Fayerland” (Tierra del Fuego), differ substantially in scope and subject matter, but share a common status as variants of texts Botoshansky composed for *Di*

²⁷ When the journal’s finances permitted, these supplements or *bikher-premyes* (gift books), which took the form of booklets, made works soon to appear through the journal’s press available to readers in advance, normally in a series of installments. This was also the initial form of *Portretn fun yidishe shrayber*, thus distributed in five installments between July and August, 1933. Other works in the 1933 series included: Israel Joshua Singer’s *Yoshe kalb*, L. Treyster’s *In di shtile teg*, M. Birshteyn’s *Iber di khurves fun ployne*, P. Romanov’s *Dray por zaydene zokn*, Joseph Opatoshu’s *Tog in Regensburg*, Peretz Hirschbein’s *Mayne kinder-yorn*, Kadye Molodowski’s *Dzhike gas* and Leib Malakh’s *Yunge yorn*.

prese as components of larger series in conjunction with long-distance travel on the paper's behalf. In each case, a single underlying perspective rooted in travel may be seen to animate both a newspaper series directed at an Argentine audience and a contribution to *Literarische bleter*, and to produce distinct meanings by merit of differences in composition, medium and publication context. While the fact of multiple publication contexts itself is unexceptional, the contrast between peripheral and central situations of address observable in each pair of texts places the differential positions constituting Yiddish literary space into uncommonly sharp relief. Botoshansky's writing adjacent to his travels for the Argentine paper adopts broad geographic frames, but is always invested with the specificity of the position of Buenos Aires in relation to any given point traversed. In the context of the Warsaw journal's concern with a worldwide culture spanning the dozens of countries inhabited by its readership, that specificity is evacuated and the encompassing vision that remains obtains a monumental character as a reflection of Yiddish culture writ large.

The specific quality of this movement between *Di prese* and *Literarische bleter* is further conditioned by the divergent logics of travel in which the Argentine newspaper series are rooted, corresponding to two broader tendencies in interwar Yiddish travel writing. One is travel meaningful chiefly within a Jewish frame, undertaken by writers, journalists, activists, and institutional functionaries whose movement within and across regions helped to define the internal composition of an East European Jewish migratory world still in the making. This logic is most conspicuous in travel writing on Palestine and the Soviet Union, given their status as competing symbolic horizons of Jewish futurity during the interwar period, but is also operative in Botoshansky's 1931 travels, the basis of *Portretn fun yidishe shrabyer*. The other is travel for its own sake, tending to stray well beyond the scope of East European Jewish life, delineating its boundaries in relation to the novel and the exotic, both intra- and extra-Jewish. This logic is

especially characteristic of travel beyond the scope of Europe and North America, and informs Botoshansky's 1933 visit to southern Patagonia, the basis of "Fayerland."

Separate discussions of each pair of variants will show how these logics, in a movement from Buenos Aires to Warsaw and from the specific situation of *Di prese* to the universal posture of *Literarishe bleter* organize capacious visions of the Yiddish cultural world conceived from within and from without.

The bulk of the material that comprises the book *Portretn fun yidishe shrayber* (1933) first appeared under two complementary and concurrent rubrics for *Di prese* in 1931, each consisting of several dozen installments spread across the better part of a year. One was a travel journal featured on the editorial page, the continuous narrative of which stands in contrast to the modular format of the second rubric, a series of profiles on leading Yiddish belletrists, critics and editors that appeared as a component of the weekly literary page. In these distinct journalistic-critical genres, Botoshansky's itinerary through Europe to the United States organizes a panoramic account of East European Jewish social and cultural life. Across both rubrics, this includes fleeting attention to points in Western Europe and a far more sustained engagement with Poland and New York, while the travel journal alone takes a pronounced, autobiographically colored detour through Romania. Poland and New York, in contrast, appear as objects of inquiry apprehended through a peripheral gaze aligned with the position of *Di prese* and its South American audience. In one sense, they stand as models against which to measure and improve Jewish collective life in Argentina in institutional and cultural terms. More immediately, in the context of the ongoing economic crisis, they figure as a landscape in which to discern the future of the East European Jewish cultural world at large.

Recast as a book under the imprint of *Literarishe bleter*, elements of both earlier newspaper rubrics combine to produce a rather different, more cohesive vision, retaining the geographic

scope of Botoshansky's 1931 travels but strictly concerned with the life of Yiddish writers and writing. As its title suggests, *Portretn* consists chiefly of profiles or "portraits" of individual writers, thirty-seven in all. The initial impression of a gallery of notable personalities, including several Romanian writers not featured in the earlier newspaper series, is modified by a second component, interspersed among the profiles, that reinforces a logic of geographic progression also present in the profiles' sequence. This is a series of three essays on the state of Yiddish literature and the Yiddish press in Warsaw, Romania and New York, the book's sole component drawn from the earlier travel journal. On the level of organization, the book thus suggests itself as a geographic survey of Yiddish letters, born out across individual profiles in attention to the urban cultural milieus of varied writers. Buenos Aires remains the underlying vantage, occasionally evoked, from which this wide swathe of the Yiddish cultural world may be apprehended from without, but because it no longer defines the position of an implied reader, the specificity of the core-periphery and periphery-periphery relationships perceptible in *Di prese* is subsumed to a generalized, decentered sense of multilateral relationality.

Closer attention to each publication context will demonstrate how the travel itinerary yields two visions of the internal configuration of the Yiddish cultural world, one in *Di prese* that is overwhelmingly defined by the privileged position of Poland and New York, and one under the aegis of *Literarische bleter* defined by the projection of a single continuous plane of Yiddish culture.

In principle independent from one another, the two rubrics for *Di prese* introduced above are united by the common frame of a round trip originating and terminating in Buenos Aires, explicitly established in letters from Botoshansky to the paper's readership on his departure and return. While a consistent orientation toward this readership is evident in both rubrics, it is the travel journal that decisively positions their shared trajectory as a sustained peripheral

engagement with the normative core of the East European Jewish world, namely Poland and New York.

Because these places would have been hyper-familiar even to readers with no direct experience of them, the effect of a first-hand account is not so much to broaden the paper's perspective as to probe the composition and integrity of East European Jewish culture's most firmly established terrain against a backdrop of economic crisis and mounting social unrest. Botoshansky's own longstanding and intimate familiarity with these places was entirely indirect and largely virtual—founded on wide reading and correspondence—and a process of squaring mental models with reality is evident in his writing, which proceeds in a synthetic mode characterized by three basic forms of attention.²⁸ These include first, an ethnographic interest in the composition and functioning of any given social milieu, above all in urban settings, and the position Jews occupy within it; second, a journalistic engagement with socioeconomic and political issues, including a significant focus on Polish antisemitism and the vexed status of minorities more broadly; and third, an activist concern with the status of Yiddish language, culture and education. These threads serve parallel but divergent efforts to apprehend Poland and New York.

An inclination toward pithy, formally satisfying encapsulation whereby cityscape and denizen are impressionistically read into one another is evident from the journal's initial installments, on Paris and Cologne, which prove marginal in terms of its larger organizing polarity but establish a pattern of urban condensation, explicit efforts to capture the “very essence” (*same iker*) of a city. A similar strategy persists throughout Poland and New York, now across a greater number of installments and more varied perspectival scales, from specific

²⁸ Botoshansky in fact traveled in the company of his wife, who is mentioned only once as a mitigating factor in her spouse's treatment by soldiers after he is arrested upon entering Romania.

neighborhoods and institutions to entire regions. The stakes here are different, however. Where Paris and Cologne could be understood as discrete localities with meanings decipherable through fanciful urban exegesis and easy metonymy, the status of Poland and New York as mass population centers and symbolic capitals of the East European Jewish world inspires greater rigor and fidelity.

“I promise not to be guided by impressions, to seek out facts,” Botoshansky vows on arrival to Poland, also noting the need “to see and hear differently” given the millions of Jews bound to the young state’s future, and the journal’s Polish portion tends to underscore iniquity and economic turmoil experienced in a variety of settings. Warsaw is presented on a first approach in terms of its outward appearance, with emphasis on the contrast between Jewish and Polish streets, the former markedly neglected by sanitation officials, while a second approach turns to competing Polish political parties, anxiety about Jewish influence and the exclusion of Jews from economic development despite inclusive official rhetoric. More extreme variations of the same situation are found to all sides of Warsaw, in the cities of Cracow, Vilna, Lodz and Poznan and in the regions of Volhynia and Galicia.²⁹ Despite the author’s penchant for humor, the only real sense of levity is found in a treatment of Chelm, the town of fools according to Jewish literature and lore, which imagines a conference where writers who have contributed to this legacy will pay their dues by reciting their works for local residents.

The general sense of alarm at the widespread suffering and restiveness of Poland’s Jewish minority that defines this portion of the travel journal is qualified by optimism invested in two institutions that are also upheld as models to be emulated. These are the Medem Sanatorium, a

²⁹ Cracow is the site of illustrious Polish and Jewish pasts, preserved and embellished by Poles, but neglected by Jews. Vilna is a vibrant bastion of Yiddish language and cultural initiatives undercut by dire poverty and decaying infrastructure. In Lodz, “Poland’s Manchester,” the detritus of industrialism gathers in the impoverished Jewish quarter, a scene of filth and desperation. The neighboring regions of Volhynia and Galicia cut a broadly similar impression, with the difference that Jewish poverty is inflected with a widespread Zionist fervor almost messianic in quality.

retreat for tubercular Jewish children located outside Warsaw that promoted a Bundist model of secular, progressive Jewish identity, and the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) in Vilna, concerned with the documentation and investigation of the past and present of East European Jewry. Both institutions are celebrated in terms of the youth that animate them—a new generation of researchers in the case of YIVO—as well as in the terms of their investment in the Yiddish language as a locus of Jewish identification to be cultivated. In contrast, a third institution, the Jewish Writers’ and Journalists’ Association in Warsaw, is presented as a once vibrant unifying presence that has descended into bitter partisanship and waning relevance, reinforcing a broader sense of decline.

While Botoshansky’s assessment of New York bears distinct parallels with that of Poland in broad socio-economic terms, namely in repeated evocations of the gritty reality of poverty and in the sense of an imminent revolt stemming from the subjugation of minorities, greater emphasis is placed on the dynamism and contrast everywhere visible in the city, not least among Jews.³⁰ Attempts to delineate specific neighborhoods give way to blurred amalgamations of spaces in a recursive movement through the city that reflects the consistent draw of the historic Lower East Side for its concentration of Jewish institutions, especially Yiddish newspapers.³¹ This initial strategy is supplemented by a second, thematic approach in installments devoted to lifestyle, the farce of prohibition, the myth of the melting pot and the anatomy of the city’s Yiddish literature and press.

³⁰ Botoshansky writes: “Everything here is in the midst of becoming, I lost my language, catching impressions here, I worried, is no different than pulling a bit of lava out of a volcano and with it illustrating what a volcano is, meanwhile that bit of lava will cool... on top of that everything is so diverse, that any statement is a risk, here it seems things are one way and now come facts showing the opposite.” Yankev Botoshansky, “Nyu-York,” *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) September 11, 1931, 23.

³¹ In this vein, New York is divided into: “Wall Street is Dirty,” “Broadway,” “In the Center of the Jewish Shops” (i.e. the Garment District), “Riverside Drive—A Neighborhood Where Jews Stop Being Jews,” “Greenwich Village—New York’s Montparnasse,” “Coney Island—The Biggest Beach in the World,” “The Bowery—World of the Down and Out (*gevezene*),” “Harlem—the Negro Neighborhood,” and the “East Side.”

Where Poland could be confidently compartmentalized by reference to long-established urban and regional distinctions, the more protracted and energetic effort to comprehend New York reflects its leading Yiddish writers' longstanding concern with the space of the city and the uneasy coexistence of its diverse population across lines of race, class, nationality and language. This months-long scrutiny is guided not only by the observer's desire to form authoritative opinions about New York's Jewish future, but also by a largely implicit comparative intent. Though other North American cities such as Chicago were more comparable to Buenos Aires in the scale of their East European Jewish immigrant populations, New York represented for Botoshanksy the privileged laboratory in which the potential forms of Jewish life in the American metropolis could be discovered, and as such presented the opportunity both to assess instructive failures and to glean potential models—such as that of the cooperative apartment as a solution to the tenement's pathology, akin to that of the comparable Argentine *conventillo*.

In the larger context of the searching, synthetic effort of the travel journal, the writer profiles that appear in parallel may be understood as a more specialized extension of its inquiry, as is suggested both by a common emphasis on Poland and New York and by the gaze of the traveling journalist-critic that is present throughout. When these profiles in their majority are recast as the primary component of the book *Portretn fun yidishe shrayber*, however, the trajectory they describe and the gaze that is their common thread obtain a distinct coherence that is more consistent with the outlook of *Literarische bleter*. In the absence of Buenos Aires as explicit point of departure or return, the book's bounded sequence forms a panorama extending from Eastern Europe to New York, a frame in which the role of the first-hand observer is to bear witness to the breadth of the Yiddish cultural world and also to suggest a high degree of interconnection throughout it. Across individual profiles, the traveler's viewpoint—attuned to writers' physical attributes and mannerisms, and often on the way they inhabit their respective literary and urban

environments—serves to link the varied milieus evoked therein, fostering the impression of a single navigable domain concentrated in New York and Warsaw, but also extending to Paris, Berlin, Vilna, Lodz, Czernowitz, Bucharest and, implicitly, to points beyond the book's purview.

The sense of interconnection developed across individual profiles is not only a function of Botoshansky's movements among urban Jewish population centers, but also of the habits of other writers he portrays. Two of the profiles situated in Europe capture New York based writers affiliated with the daily *Der tog* in transit. Just as Botoshansky was traversing Eastern Europe en route to the United States, in order to retrace a route well-worn by and indeed integral to twentieth-century Yiddish letters, these writers had sailed from New York to Poland to different ends. Critic Shmuel Niger was taking the pulse of Polish Yiddish culture, while writer Joseph Opatoshu had set out to visit the new utopian frontiers of Jewish life and Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union and Palestine, and each intimated to Botoshansky that Argentina was pending on his travel or reading agenda next.³² Another pair of literary figures, Daniel Charney and Nakhmen Mayzel are by contrast presented as firmly situated in their respective cities, Berlin and Warsaw, but actively striving to serve the function of connecting node by keeping abreast of developments across the entire Yiddish cultural world through its diverse periodicals.

In another vein, the book's penultimate portrait, on New York poet Zishe Vaynper, establishes a striking link to one of the first, on Berlin-based writer Dovid Bergelson. Botoshansky writes with wonderment about Vaynper's Coney Island apartment, which takes on the air of an illustrious literary institution. The apartment's atmosphere, defined by a window view of the ocean and access to a rooftop from which the whole beach is visible, is said to have made a favorable impression on Bergelson, who had spent six months in New York in 1929, and,

³² Opatoshu's planned itinerary was evidently frustrated and realized only several years later, as his writing for *Der tog* at this moment is confined to impressions of Poland and Western Europe.

Botoshansky adds, “many other writers have found peace there.” Not confined to an interest in notable guests, the attention afforded to this apartment reflects a more pervasive focus on the urban texture of Yiddish literary culture, present throughout the book but especially pronounced in New York, home to sixteen of the thirty-seven writers profiled. A majority of the New York profiles call attention to the streets, neighborhoods, homes and institutions where Botoshansky spent time in the company of his subjects.

While the profiles are overwhelmingly concentrated in New York, followed by Poland, the inclusion of Romania as a third term on the level of the three contextual essays that divide the profiles into regional sub-series extends the book’s sense of breadth to uncommon proportions. According to an ideal plan imagined in a short preface, *Portretn* would have included more writers, and would have also taken Palestine and the Soviet Union into its purview. Even with that broader scope the inclusion of Romania would have been a pronounced gesture, if also consistent with growing posthumous attention to the writer Eliezer Shteynbarg in the pages of *Literarishe bleter*.³³ The exceptional status of the Romanian section is accentuated by the nature of its four profiles, not included in the earlier series for *Di prese*. While there is considerable variation in the extent to which any given portrait is explicitly grounded in encounters and conversations with its subject, such exchanges provide the collection’s basic premise. This component is virtually absent from three of four Romanian portraits, which instead take the form of biographical-critical profiles informed by Botoshansky’s earlier career in Romania. In two instances, writers deemed to have remained unduly marginal—Eliezer Shteynbarg and Yankev

³³ A preview excerpt of the book included in an April 1933 issue was a profile on Eliezer Shteynbarg, one of a number of treatments on the writer to appear in *Literarishe bleter* in conjunction with the posthumous publication of a volume of his fables. Yankev Botoshansky, “Eliezer Shteynbarg,” *Literarishe bleter* 10, no. 15 (1933): 2, 4.

Shternberg—are championed and rhetorically installed in the Yiddish canon.³⁴ In a third instance, a young poet in the midst of breakout success in Poland, Itzik Manger, is placed in his formative Romanian context. Though Botoshansky mentions encountering him in Warsaw and Vilna, the poet is plucked out of this Polish context in a violation of the book’s prevailing logic of geographic progression.

The contextual essay on Yiddish culture in Romania that accompanies the portraits similarly stands apart from the other two contextual essays that divide the book’s contents. Where the focus of those essays is limited to specific dynamics in the Yiddish literature and press of Warsaw and New York, the essay on Romania presents a more extensive overview of Yiddish culture across multiple cities and regions, consistent both with the decentralized nature of Romania’s Jewish communities and the average reader’s near certain ignorance of this context. Taken together, the essay and the four portraits amount to a clear assertion of Romania as an arena of contemporary Yiddish culture as well as the place of its writers in modern Yiddish literature, an assertion amplified by the complete omission of Argentina.³⁵ In this revised geography of Yiddish literary prestige, Buenos Aires retains its veiled position “in a zayt,” serving as the implicit locus from which Romania can be made visible on equal terms with more prominent spheres of Yiddish literary activity.

“Fayerland,” like *Portretn*, is linked to an Argentine newspaper series, but unlike the book is not obviously derived from that publication context, instead standing in oblique relation to it. The text closely corresponds to a single installment in a Patagonian travel journal for *Di prese*,

³⁴ Botoshansky insists that Shteynbarg should be seen with the likes of Mendele, et al. and in a footnote at the entry’s conclusion remarks that Shteynbarg’s death in 1932 should help him attain proper place in Yiddish letters. For Shternberg, he advocates a place between poets Moyshe Leyb Halpern and Zishe Landau. Yankev Botoshansky, *Portretn fun yidishe shrayber* (Warsaw: Literarishe bleter, 1933).

³⁵ It is evident that the ambition of *Portretn* was to capture the leading personalities of Yiddish literary life, and that in Botoshansky’s estimation no such figure was to be found in Argentina, with the possible exception of himself—and as reviewer Arn Mark observes, the portraitist finds ample room for himself in his compositions.

while also deviating from it in numerous details, not least the fact that it is presented as a stand-alone work. The two variants, published less than two weeks apart in Buenos Aires and Warsaw, present a situation of dual address wherein a common formula is deployed almost simultaneously for distinct audiences, in each case bearing an implicit claim to immediacy.³⁶ Their shared narrative core entails a description of an observation tour through Garibaldi Fjord, located along the Beagle Channel in Tierra del Fuego.³⁷ The traveling writer first evokes his position at the edge of two oceans, amid gulfs, bays, fjords, glaciers, mountains and waterfalls, and proposes to sketch a single indescribable outing. The narration of the approach through Garibaldi Fjord toward its glacial terminal point further dramatizes the terrain—cast as primitive and unforgiving, forged in a primeval struggle between fire and water—and culminates in the traveler’s encounter with the sublime. Both variants conclude on a note of performative expansion, as Garibaldi Fjord is claimed for an implied domain of Yiddish letters. However, the relative weight of this final hyperbolic gesture is distinct in each variant, dependent on textual and contextual differences.

On the textual level, the two variants differ both in style and content. Stylistically, the variant for *Di prese*, “Mayn gezang tsu Fayerland un tsu der bukhte Garibaldi” (My Song to Tierra del Fuego and to Garibaldi Fjord), has a more diffuse quality, with little concern for economy of phrase, whereas “Fayerland” is markedly sparer—a difference on display even in their titles. This corresponds to a tendency toward detailed, contemplative elaboration in the former and toward more cryptic evocation in the latter with respect to features of the landscape as well as the

³⁶ The newspaper audience was made aware of Botoshanky’s departure from and return to Buenos Aires in February, a clear frame of reference for the travel journal published thereafter between March and April. The variant in *Literarische bleter* suggests a direct line between Tierra del Fuego and Warsaw by indicating the date and place of composition, “February 24, 1933 / near Yendegaia Bay,” an element absent in *Di prese*.

³⁷ Although this site is located in the western portion of the archipelago claimed by Chile, neither variant indicates a national context.

precise nature of the party traversing it. It follows that most differences in content are a matter of inclusion in *Di prese* and omission in *Literarische bleter*, with some exceptions. The most suggestive of these appears in the very first sentence of each variant, where each underscores the climactic extremity of Tierra del Fuego but places it within a different geographic frame of reference. For the audience of *Di prese*, the archipelago is presented as “the coldest land in the South American world,” while for the audience of *Literarische bleter* it is simply “one of the coldest lands in the world.” The two frames of reference yield quite similar climactic claims while investing Tierra del Fuego with different orders of significance, regional and global.

Such a distinction is consistent not only with the specificity and abstraction present on a stylistic level, but also with the contextual frame of each variant. The variant in *Di prese*, as the eleventh installment of an ongoing Patagonian travel journal, is the product of a Jewish immigrant journalist’s foray into regional tourism, offering readers a vicarious means of *landkentenish* (knowing the land), in parallel with a major trend among Jews in interwar Poland to encounter the geography of the newly constituted national space.³⁸ The variant in *Literarische bleter* reads instead as an intrepid traveler’s dispatch from the end of the world. In the first instance, Tierra del Fuego is a journalistic resource, a means of educating, entertaining and perhaps dazzling an Argentine Yiddish readership by relating the wonders and curiosities to be found in the distant reaches of their adoptive region. In the second instance, the archipelago becomes a literary resource, a position of sheer extremity that provides the means of figuring an expansive horizon for Yiddish culture.

³⁸ This movement, organized by a society itself called Landkentenish, was established in 1926 and was explicitly modeled on the Polish practice of the same name (Krajoznawstwo). Much as outdoor and regional excursions had allowed Poles to express symbolic ownership of the land in the decades preceding the twentieth century return of Polish sovereignty, Samuel Kassow argues, in the interwar period it provided Polish Jews a means of expressing belonging and equal rights to the land. Samuel Kassow, “Travel and Local History as a National Mission: Polish Jews and the Landkentenish Movement in the 1920s and 1930s,” in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, edited by Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt and Alexandra Nocke (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 241-264.

The series “A Swim and a Step Across Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego,” documents a two-week tour aboard the ship *Monte Pasquale*, which carried several hundred passengers along the Atlantic coast from Buenos Aires to the southern tip of the American continent, with ports of call in Puerto Madryn, Magallanes and Ushuaia.³⁹ The series, consisting of fifteen installments published in the course of March and April, 1933,⁴⁰ appeared at a moment when Argentine national tourism was still relatively novel, if increasingly accessible to an ascendant middle class. The most common tourist destinations in the 1930s were the mountainous regions of the interior accessible by rail or road, which also predominated in new Argentine representational practices surrounding travel, in image and writing, accompanied by the same kind of national injunction to “know the land” evoked with respect to Poland above.⁴¹ And indeed among the fellow passengers described by Botoshansky are “countless female teachers” motivated to “learn geography on location.”⁴² However, the distant south remained a less common destination for national tourism than, by contrast, the Andean lakes region of northern Patagonia, which was notably depicted as such in a 1934 travel series by Argentine writer Roberto Arlt for the Buenos Aires daily *El mundo*.⁴³ Southern Patagonia remained more readily associated with a separate tradition of writing, both European and Argentine, centered on the perspectives of explorers,

³⁹ Puerto Madryn is located in Argentina’s Patagonian Chubut province and is the approximate midpoint on the sea route from Buenos Aires to Tierra del Fuego. Magallanes, now called Punta Arenas, is the capital of Chile’s Magallanes province, situated on the Strait of Magellan. Ushuaia is the capital and principal city of Argentina’s Tierra del Fuego province, which borders the portion of the archipelago claimed by Chile.

⁴⁰ Due to gaps in library holdings I have been unable to consult the eighth, ninth and thirteenth installments, and to determine whether the fifteenth installment—which finds the cruise on a return course toward Buenos Aires—is in fact the last.

⁴¹ Oscar Chamosa, “People as Landscape: The Representation of the Criollo Interior in Early Tourist Literature in Argentina, 1920–30,” in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, edited by Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 53–72.

⁴² Yankev Botoshansky, “A shpan un a shvim iber Patagonye (rayze bilder): I. Fun onfang iz geven...,” *Di prese* March 5, 1931, 6.

⁴³ Arlt’s series was posthumously collected in the book *Aguasfuertes patagónicas*. For a discussion of this work, see Jennifer Valko, “Touristic Gaze and Germanic Immigrants in Roberto Arlt’s *Aguasfuertes patagónicas*,” *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 62, no. 1 (2009): 77–92.

scientists, soldiers and settlers from the 16th century to the 20th, and in which the region appears as a wild and unpopulated expanse that obtains meaning by the aesthetic, intellectual or material will of those who venture there, a fiction aided by the violent subjugation of the region's indigenous population in the late nineteenth century. Botoshansky's treatment of this region consistently employs tropes associated with this tradition even as it definitively belongs to the journalistic mode of Argentine travel writing represented by Arlt.

Apart from a vacation and an opportunity to generate travel impressions, the trip was to be for Botoshansky, according to an editorial note marking his departure, "a study trip (*shtudyum rayze*) which will be worked into a novel on the life of deportees to these still quite wild and unpopulated regions."⁴⁴ The reference is to the infamous Ushuaia Penitentiary, which operated from 1904 to 1947 and which due to its inmate labor system—and surely also to its remoteness and subpolar environs—was commonly referred to as the "Argentine Siberia."⁴⁵ While it is unclear whether Botoshansky's planned penal fiction ever came to fruition, it is easy to imagine a historical plot centered on Russian-Jewish anarchist Simón Radowitzky, who was convicted for the 1909 murder of a Buenos Aires police chief and subsequently escaped from the Ushuaia Penitentiary in 1918. What is unambiguous is that the "still quite wild and unpopulated" Patagonia held the narrative and experiential allure of extremity in more than one sense, as is reflected in the way the travel journal pivots among different modes of representation.

As might be expected, portions of the journal are devoted to sightseeing excursions in various natural settings, but the trip's human dimensions, as manifested in ports of call and on

⁴⁴ This editorial note also specifies that the novel had been in progress for a year and the trip furnished Botoshansky with all he needed to complete it. "Yankev Botoshansky af a nesiye in Fayerland," *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) February 15, 1933.

⁴⁵ Environmental and penal historian Ryan Edwards notes that this designation stood in contrast to that assigned to the Lake District of northern Patagonia, known as the "Switzerland of Argentina" from the 1910s. "Convicts and Conservation: Inmate Labor, Fires and Forestry in Southernmost Argentina," *Journal of Historical Geography* 56 (2017): 14-21.

the ship itself, are even more pronounced. Human sightseeing proceeds through three basic lenses, which find a visual correlate in the captioned photographic reproductions that accompany most installments: that of a “locals as landscape” convention applied to romanticized indigenous and mestizo populations; that of sensational crime journalism applied to the inmates of the Ushuaia Penitentiary; and that of a lighthearted ethnography of tourism applied to other passengers and to the author himself. All these lenses are joined by a common stream of social critical reflection that, although punctuated by appeals to a Eurocentric civilized/primitive dichotomy, produces a relatively complex vision of southern Patagonia as a contact zone governed by the enduring, uneasy interaction of local, national and imperialist interests and imaginations.

Even among the handful of installments that focus chiefly on the natural landscape, only two stand apart from these larger concerns. One centers on the observation of a penguin colony, construed more as an allegorical resource than as wildlife. The other is “My Song to Tierra del Fuego and to Garibaldi Fjord,” the travel journal’s closest approximation of a “wild and unpopulated” vision of Patagonia. While other installments invite a romantic association with the more precarious scientific, commercial and military expeditions of the past century, this one more consistently projects a sense of extremity. Moreover, in its aesthetic contemplation of a landscape construed as beyond the limit of the photographable or describable, it reproduces a discourse of ineffability typical of earlier British travel writing on Patagonia, which as in the British case serves an appropriative rhetoric, as Garibaldi Fjord is claimed for Yiddish letters.⁴⁶ Absent an imperial framework, the Yiddish gesture hardly has the same resonance, however, and

⁴⁶ As Fernanda Peñalosa suggests, such apparently conflicting discourses were not necessarily inimical. “Appropriating the ‘Unattainable’: The British Travel Experience in Patagonia,” in *Informal Empire in Latin America: Culture, Commerce and Capital*, edited by Matthew Brown (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 149-72.

in one of the installment's few references to the world beyond Tierra del Fuego Botoshansky explicitly contrasts his own highly figural interest in the region with that of another traveler—a German detractor of Hitler seeking a new home for millions of his unemployed countrymen in Patagonia.

Although the perspective of “My Song” in significant ways stands apart from that of other installments, its status not only as part of a larger series but as a continuation of a single overarching travel narrative, stylistically consistent but varied in the lenses it adopts, is unambiguous. In this context, the claim to Garibaldi Fjord, the travel journal's sole appeal to a larger frame of Yiddish culture, appears as one more eccentric flourish. When the same basic material stands on its own, however, and is moreover presented in a more concise and elliptical form as in the case of “Fayerland,” its every gesture is accentuated, and its service to Yiddish culture is elevated as its fundamental purpose.

Presented in the context of *Literarische bleter*, a journal whose readership resided overwhelmingly in Europe and North America, the title “Fayerland” most readily signifies unmitigated remoteness, divorced from the larger context of Patagonia and indeed any expectation of a South American frame of reference. This variant of Botoshansky's travel narrative capitalizes on that sense of remoteness to produce a monumental discourse of geographic expansion. The circumstances of the larger journey—its length and scale, the variety of participants and the sphere of lighthearted sociability they enjoy—are wholly opaque to the reader, and the authorial posture of the traveling journalist takes on a new coloration: that of the *antdeker* (discoverer) who presents a singular and authoritative window onto the very edge of the humanly inhabited world. This posture is not wholly devoid of playfulness, but despite a penchant for hyperbole it is more sincere than farcical; decades later Botoshansky would count his visit to Tierra del Fuego as one of his most noteworthy achievements, asserting a status as

“the first Yiddish writer in the entire world to be in Tierra del Fuego, the wonderful island that holds the last settlement on the path to the South Pole.” And indeed, the defining gesture of “Fayerland” rests not only in the representation of a distant and unfamiliar region, but also in the performance of a figure of the Yiddish writer that, through a single possessive act of composition, presumes to expand the boundaries of the Yiddish cultural world.

The thrill and mortal peril of expeditions to the South Pole, as sensationally reported and chronicled in preceding decades in the international press, clearly influence Botoshansky’s narrative, and the expeditions of Magellan and Charles Darwin in earlier centuries are not far from his mind.⁴⁷ However, he stops short of adopting the posture of discoverer qua Man of Science, and instead places the same German mentioned above in this role in order to pit his own folksy observations and poetic wonderment against naturalist reason, an extension of the larger distinction between discursive and material claims to the region. This allows Botoshansky to construct the modestly grandiose position of discoverer qua Yiddish Man of Letters, tasked with discovering the wonders of Tierra del Fuego in and for Yiddish. During his own experience of the sublime in what he dubs the “ensunment” (*tsezunung*) of Garibaldi Glacier—clarified by the German as a crystalline refraction of light—Botoshansky recalls poet David Frishman’s appreciation of the Finnish Imatra Rapids, but finds this model lacking. The text concludes: “One can sing this way at Imatra—in Garibaldi Fjord one needs Walt Whitman’s voice... and even that might be too weak. Here the most powerful song may be the silent one... / Today I mutely voice the first Yiddish song to Tierra del Fuego and to its Garibaldi Fjord...”⁴⁸ Thus, in an emplaced performative utterance, Botoshansky lays claim to the first Yiddish word of and in Tierra del Fuego.

⁴⁷ Botoshansky explicitly refers to these figures in the travel journal for *Di prese*.

⁴⁸ Yankev Botoshansky, “Fayerland (rayze ayndrukn),” *Literarishe bleter* 10, no. 16 (1933): 12.

Beyond this explicit proclamation, “Fayerland” advances a Yiddish claim to Tierra del Fuego in the language used to convey the ineffable quality of Garibaldi Glacier, which entails a striking Judaization of the landscape through a figure of revelation. By the climax of the short narrative, the moment of the dazzling “ensunment,” this appears as a generic evocation of the divine: “It seemed to us we were witnessing a revelation. In such a moment one simply cannot adhere to impiety and begins to believe that there is a God...”⁴⁹ The initial approach to the glacier, however, is more colorfully conceived: “And when our boats reached the edge of Garibaldi Fjord and we saw those two immense glaciers, those two great mountains of snow that looked like hosts of tombstones or even immense tablets—just as if thousands of Moseses gave thousands of new Torahs here—we now distinctly felt that we were not in ice-and-snow land, but in Fire Land. Everything burns here...” This momentary transposition of a novel reality into the language of Jewish lore functions in two registers. On one hand, the discernment of outsized Mosaic tablets in the landscape may be viewed as a folksy stylization that performs intimacy with the Yiddish reader even in the remotest of settings. On the other hand, the absurd excess of an imagined thousand-fold revelation that would dwarf the topography and drama of Exodus appears unironically designed to set a somber tone of awe. Between this first, exuberant revelatory impression of the glacier and the last, more restrained one, the initial twin image of the tablet and the tombstone is twice repeated, and its foreboding quality extended in the play of “toyre” (Torah) and “toyt” (death).

Such a Judaization of the landscape follows a well-established model that may be linked to what David Roskies refers to as “vertical legitimation,” a propensity among Ashkenazic Jews to “[seek] historical Jewish precedents to legitimate new ideas and practices instead of invoking

⁴⁹ “Undz hot zikh gedukht, az mir zeen an antplekung. Un aza moment kon men poshet nisht oyshaltn keyn apikorsishkayt un onhoybn gloybn, az s’iz do a got...” Ibid.

contemporaneous non-Jewish models.”⁵⁰ Taken to an extreme in a satirical 1878 Yiddish quest narrative set in the Jewish Pale of Settlement, *Kitser masoes Binoymin hashlishi* (The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third) by S. Y. Abramovitch, an analogous logic is applied by a Quixotic protagonist not to ideas but to the local landscape, so that a small radius around his hometown takes on the attributes of a mythic Jewish topography. Yet a similar logic is at play in travel accounts of Palestine from the early twentieth century and later, such as that of Sholem Asch from 1908, wherein the biblical landscape the traveler imbibed as a child serves as the template with which he attempts to square the world around him.⁵¹ Incongruously transposed to Tierra del Fuego, this logic of Jewish precedent—wholly absent in Poland and New York, where an abundant and ever-changing Jewish life must be studied and decoded—asserts the limitless portability of the Yiddish word as a means of enacting Jewish space.

⁵⁰ David Roskies, “The Medium and the Message of the Maskilic Chapbook,” *Jewish Social Studies* 41, no. 3/4 (1979): 282.

⁵¹ Asch’s travel impressions first appeared in book form in *Erets-Yisroel: ertseylungen fun der alter heym* (New York: Forverts, 1918).

Chapter 2

BUENOS AYRES, A GLOBAL YIDDISH NOVEL

Yiddish papers from the entire world often take on the same appearance, you find in them the same material, somewhere there's a piquant *shund* story, it's reprinted everywhere, somewhere there's a really fine article, also reprinted in many papers, it's really quite strange with our papers, which have a desire for the best and the worst, it seems our papers either have quite simpleminded readers, or really sophisticated ones.
(Botoshansky in *DP*, 1931)

In September, 1932, Warsaw's weekly *Literarische bleter* offered a fleeting view of Yiddish literature in a world frame rather distinct from the ordered, centralized symbolic geography it typically projected, as examined in the preceding chapter—a frame exceeding the scope of any single editorial logic or readerly expectation.¹ On display was the universe of the Yiddish daily press and its literary mainstay: the serial novel. In an article, the journal's editor Nakhmen Mayzel commemorated one hundred years since the *roman-feuilleton* originated in France and roughly fifty years since its adoption in the Yiddish press, where it came to be known as the *tsaytungs-roman* (newspaper novel). After celebrating the first triumphant steps of this serial literary format in Yiddish at the close of the nineteenth century, he laments its precipitous fall into base, formulaic, sensational reading material produced not by true writers, but "novel-

¹ Despite its influence and far-flung readership, *Literarische bleter* struggled financially as evidenced by repeated appeals for new subscribers as a means of staying in print.

makers."² As evidence of the dismal habits of the average Yiddish reader, Mayzel furnishes his cultivated audience with a list of novels currently in serialization in the Yiddish press.³ Quite apart from this intention, the list, further discussed below, affords a sweeping synchronic glimpse at the ephemeral and highly mobile life of Yiddish literature in its dominant newspaper medium.

In the early 1930s, the Yiddish press was approaching what would be its apogee, anchored by some fifty daily newspapers published mainly in North America, Poland and the Soviet Union, in addition to other points across Europe and to either side of the Río de la Plata, in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Much as in other modern serial cultures, the reprinting of content among Yiddish papers was exceedingly common, and took both authorized and illicit forms—the latter decried but hardly impeded by individual authors and metropolitan writers' associations. All manner of texts thus circulated in multiplicate among cities and continents, describing both predictable and idiosyncratic vectors of transmission throughout a highly decentralized publishing field. Part and parcel of this textual traffic were myriad literary works in various prose genres, including the novel. Because many newspaper novels took a local or regional Jewish milieu as their setting, their circulation within and between newspapers describes a vast representational economy of places familiar and foreign, usually cities, united under the sign of an increasingly globalized East European Jewish cultural interiority.

Yankev Botoshansky's novel *Buenos Ayres* presents a striking means of approximating the entanglement of circulation and representation in this system. This is because the novel itself enacts a global scale not only in its path of circulation—typical for newspaper novels—but also in the fictional world it constructs. More than that, on both the plane of publication and the plane of representation *Buenos Ayres* generates what Alexander Beecroft has dubbed “the plot of

² Nakhmen Mayzel, “Unzer tsaytungs-roman,” *Literarische bleter* 9, no. 38 (1932): 3-5.

³ Nakhmen Mayzel, “Di romanen in der teglekher yidisher prese,” *Literarische bleter* 9, no. 38 (1932): 4.

globalization,” a narrative formula predicated on paranoiac interconnectedness among places and peoples, often centered on drug trafficking and usually deploying the technique of interlacing. This is one component of Beecroft’s provisional systemic typology of “global literature,” easily met by the Yiddish daily press in the criterion of circulation without borders, but not in that of forgetting national origins.⁴ At issue, then, is an East European Jewish globalization plot, defined by the paranoiac interconnectedness within two effervescent, decentralized networks characterized by constant extension and reconfiguration: the Jewish migratory world within the novel itself and the Yiddish publishing field in which the novel circulates.

In its representational practices, wherein pronounced *shund* elements accompany a moralizing edge of historical realism, *Buenos Ayres* bears a tension between a monumentalizing epic-historical impulse in the service of a centric vision of Yiddish literature and a sense of globalizing sprawl that threatens any sense of cohesion—dual potentials of human and textual mobility. Patterns of illicit circulation drive the novel to excess both internally and externally. Internally, the moral-aesthetic ambitions of the novel are overpowered by its sheer scope and titillating excitement—one cannot help but revel in the disparate places and illicit milieus brought into focus by the Jewish underworld that functions as the matrix of its plot. Externally, the novel itself is swept up by the semi-anonymous economy of commonplace piracy in the daily press. Both the novel’s content and its trajectory elicit real-world anxieties and expressions of moral opprobrium akin to those it depicts.

⁴ Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London; New York: Verso, 2015), 283.

CIRCULATION ANXIETIES

The list furnished by Nakhmen Mayzel alongside the article referenced above consists of fifty novels from thirty daily papers in Europe and North America. The name of each newspaper is followed by the city where it is edited, the title of the novel in serialization (often more than one per paper), the editorial subheading appended to the title, and if known, the author. The list is substantial, but not exhaustive; the other twenty-odd Yiddish dailies of the time were not readily at hand. By exclusive reference to the titles and subheadings of this sample, Mayzel easily shows a strong tendency toward the sensational, the criminal and the erotic, leaving so called serious novels as the exception. The titles in Mayzel's list are vexing to him not only because he finds them loathsome, but because he knows that the newspaper—and not the more prestigious literary journal or book forms—is the primary medium by which Yiddish literature, whether base or sophisticated, arrives in the hands of the reader.

Serialized novels were by the early twentieth century a major selling point of virtually all Yiddish newspapers and a central means by which they built and maintained wider circulation.⁵ These novels would remain a prominent component of Yiddish dailies long after the decline of this format in Europe and the United States following WWI.⁶ A strong tendency among Yiddish critics and cultural commentators to apply a binary of distinction between serious or *besere* (better) literature and *shund* (low brow; trash) literature, as does Mayzel on the occasion of his article, obscures the tremendous diversity of narratives printed in daily installments in Yiddish.⁷

⁵ An assessment of the importance of the daily press for Yiddish literature is offered in Nathan Cohen, “The Yiddish Press and Yiddish Literature: A Fertile But Complex Relationship,” *Modern Judaism* 28, no. 2 (2009): 149-172.

⁶ Of the four national cases compared in G. Law and N. Morita’s invitation to an international history of the newspaper novel—French, English, Japanese and American—the Yiddish case is most comparable to the Japanese context, where serial novels began to appear in the late nineteenth century and remain common and well respected today. “The Newspaper Novel: Towards an International History,” *Media History* 6, no. 1 (2000): 5-17.

⁷ For a broader perspective on what Nathan Cohen has termed Mayzel’s “war on *shund*,” see his “*Shund* and the Tabloids: Jewish Popular Reading in Inter-War Poland,” *Polin* 16 (2003): 202-203.

Lumped into the category of *shund* were anonymous and attributed works of diverse quality and genre: memoirs of revolution or life in the theater, historical novels, free adaptations of European romances, urban crime sagas, and novels of contemporary Jewish life in small towns and major cities. This variety reflects the fact that *shund* effectively denotes a loose collection of stylistic and thematic tendencies belonging to a popular register developed in the Yiddish fiction of the latter half of the nineteenth century. This register helped to constitute a Yiddish reading public of appreciable scale, first as a didactic instrument of the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe and later as a more strictly commercial enterprise, and by the early twentieth century it had been thoroughly assimilated, in fact usurped, by the newspaper, where it continued to sustain and extend a wide reading public.

Because the basic editorial expectation of sustained popular interest was normally satisfied by a measure of formulaic melodrama or titillating impropriety, it fostered a broad family resemblance among novels occupying otherwise divergent positions within a conventional hierarchy of literary value. In view of this affinity, the distance between a critically acclaimed novel and a pseudonymously authored potboiler, published simultaneously in the same paper, whether side by side or on pages reflecting their divergent status, may be considered a matter of degree, as serious literature if contracted for serialization was not necessarily exempt from the same requirements of easy, compulsive readability.⁸ Indeed, novels of every caliber fed the Yiddish newspaper industry, and quite often, new works from well-regarded authors debuted in serialization long before reaching book form. Such works could bring status and reinforce a given paper's aesthetic or ideological vision, while "merely" entertaining works could help to

⁸ Ellen Kellman in her study of novels in the New York daily *Forverts* suggests that in this respect the Yiddish novel's prolonged entwinement with the newspaper format significantly affected the development of the genre. *The Newspaper Novel in the Jewish Daily Forward (1900-1940): Fiction as Entertainment and Serious Literature* (Diss. Columbia University, 2000). See especially pp. 411-423.

ensure sales. By gathering together newspapers from dispersed and disjointed sites of Yiddish literary production and circulation—Vilna, Bialystok, Kishinev, Warsaw, Grodno, New York, Paris, Toronto, Kovno, Lodz, Lublin, Riga, Lemberg, Brisk, London, Montreal—Mayzel’s list makes the Yiddish daily press visible as an extensive literary system, a function otherwise perceptible only piecemeal.

Mayzel colorfully quantifies this system in another article from the same week, this one directed to the mass readership of the Warsaw daily *Haynt* (Today): an audience for which the author deemphasizes his scathing critique of newspaper literature. The reader will be surprised, he suggests, to learn that in one year about three hundred Yiddish newspaper novels are printed on more than a hundred thousand pages—a year’s labor for one hundred typesetters or four hundred days of reading at eight hours a day.⁹ This quantitative translation dramatically emphasizes that Yiddish literature, much like literatures in other European languages, has passed well beyond the scale of the individual reader. The works of anonymous plot-pushers, professional low- and middlebrow serial novelists, and critically acclaimed Yiddish authors all flow together within and between papers, and cannot be apprehended in their totality.

Nevertheless, Mayzel’s snapshot of three fifths of the world’s Yiddish dailies in 1932 captures several works traveling through time and space. A novel by Sarah Smith (1888-1968), a prolific and popular staff novelist for the New York *Der tog*, appears in a London daily. A novel by famed writer Sholem Asch (1880-1957) appears in Poland seven years after its publication in book form, which likely followed an original serial version. Three other novels appear simultaneously in two different European dailies, at least one of them originally printed in New York months earlier. The phenomenon of reprinting itself is not at all surprising; piracy and syndication were commonplace as long as newspaper novels existed. What is striking is that the

⁹ Nakhmen Mayzel, “Tsaytungs-roman (100 yor fun zayn oyfgekumen),” *Haynt* (Warsaw) August 19, 1932, 7.

scale and variable temporality of reprinting suddenly become visible. This is equally true for the twenty-first century reader and for Mayzel's contemporaries. The reactions of two readers of Mayzel's list in Buenos Aires permit a more situated view of Yiddish literary diffusion in the daily press.

In October 1932, the editor of the Buenos Aires Yiddish weekly *Der shpigl* (The Mirror) Y. L. Gruzman used his journal to comment on the September 16 issue of *Literarische bleter*.¹⁰ Two items printed therein unnerved him. One was a letter about Jewish cultural life in Argentina by one "Dr. Goldman," whom Gruzman knew to be Yankev Botoshansky, his colleague in the Buenos Aires Yiddish press. The other was the presence, in Mayzel's list, of a novel called *Buenos Ayres* being printed in two provincial Polish Yiddish dailies: *Undzer lebn* (Our Life) in Bialystok and *Grodner moment* (The Grodno Moment). This novel's author was the same Botoshansky, editor of the literary and theater segments of *Di prese* (The Press), a progressive Argentine Yiddish daily.¹¹ In an article titled "How and By Whom Information about Argentine Jewish Cultural Life Is Spread," Gruzman railed against both the letter and the novel.¹² Some personal grudge is clearly at play, but Gruzman's response is nevertheless revealing.

Botoshansky's novel is for Gruzman distant and unknown, except through an article he evidently read in a New York paper.¹³ He partly knows and partly conjectures that the content of *Buenos Ayres* must be scandalous, an affront to the reputation of the Argentine Jewish community, and refers to it as a *shund* novel. This impression could not have been diminished by

¹⁰ Yehuda Leyb Gruzman (1902–1961) was raised in Bessarabia and at the age of twenty migrated to Argentina, where he worked as a Hebrew teacher in Jewish agricultural colonies. *Der shpigl*, founded by Gruzman in 1929 and edited by him until his death, gradually came to be an organ for Yiddish culture across South America.

¹¹ Botoshansky (1895–1964) like Gruzman was raised in Bessarabia. After an initial visit in 1923, he settled permanently in Buenos Aires in 1926 as a critic and journalist for *Di prese*, which began publication in 1918.

¹² Y. L. Gruzman, "Vi azoy un ver se informirt vegn argentinier yidishn kultur-lebn," *Der shpigl* no. 155 (1932): 12.

¹³ Gruzman mentions an article printed in the anarchist *Fraye arbeter shtime* (Free Voice of Labor) by M. Z. Goldshteyn. My efforts to locate this article in records for the months during and after the original printing of Botoshansky's novel have been unsuccessful. *Ibid.*

the tone of Mayzel's article or the fact that one of the papers from his list marked *Buenos Ayres* as a "shpanende roman" (an exciting or suspenseful novel). The most conspicuous evidence for Gruzman, though, is that Botoshansky did not publish the novel in Argentina when he could easily have done so. Through its dislocation, then, by merit of its distance, this ostensibly local literary product elicits both anxiety and summary condemnation. It is as if Buenos Aires itself, or at least Yiddish-speaking Buenos Aires, has been clandestinely unmoored through this serial literary representation. Despite bearing the name of its point of origin, it exists only elsewhere, and cannot be recovered or retracted now that it is adrift in the Yiddish press.

Gruzman was not entirely wrong in his suspicion, but the reputation of Jewish Buenos Aires was already firmly entrenched. For potential readers, the title of Botoshansky's novel alone easily evoked not so much a bounded urban setting as a sprawling criminal network overlapping with, though not identical to, the geography of East European Jewish migration. And indeed the setting of *Buenos Ayres* reaches far beyond the city of its namesake. The novel follows two intertwined familial dramas as they unfold on both sides of the Atlantic, between Argentina, France, Romania and Ottoman territory. Over a span of two decades from the years preceding WWI to around 1930, a series of three characters are *farfirt*, led astray to Buenos Aires. In this configuration the city itself appears as the inevitable destination, at least temporarily, of those ensnared in the Jewish sex trade, a looming vortex of profit and indignity. The particular social and geographic trajectories of each character, before and after succumbing to the pull of Buenos Aires, define an expansive vision of Jewish mobility in the early twentieth century: a contradictory mobility in which, quite easily, migrant and commodity can become indistinguishable.

Around the same time that Gruzman complained bitterly in his October 1932 article, Botoshansky wrote to Nakhmen Mayzel of his shock at learning in *Literarische bleter* that his

novel was being reprinted from *Der tog* without permission in Grodno and Bialystok.¹⁴ In his letter he describes the reprintings as a great material loss, given that a deal was in the works with a Warsaw paper. "I don't know how to stop the actions of these two papers," he writes. "It's simply robbery. I demand that they soon cease printing my novel, otherwise I'll be forced to do it through the Argentine embassy in Warsaw."¹⁵ It is difficult to imagine an Argentine official in Warsaw taking real interest in the provincial Polish piracy of a Yiddish work penned by a recent immigrant to Argentina and published in a New York newspaper.¹⁶ And it is likely that the novel had already finished printing; after all, Botoshansky's letter appeared in a mid-November issue of *Literarishe bleter*, more than a month after he wrote it and two months after Mayzel's original article was published. Of interest is not so much whether the novel's reprinting could have been halted as the simple fact of this protracted bidirectional relay of information between Warsaw and Buenos Aires, which is governed both by the material constraints of international mail and Mayzel's publishing schedule. As discussed further on, this same transatlantic temporal disjuncture is employed to dramatic effect in *Buenos Ayres*.

Botoshansky's dismay—genuine or performative—and his proposed remedy are intriguing foremost as a response to Mayzel's list. Botoshansky knew how to sell his peripheral literary merchandise to the numeric, economic and symbolic centers of Yiddish literary culture: New York and Warsaw. As a traveler, journalist, editor and literary dabbler, he visited these cities, read their Yiddish publications, and corresponded extensively with friends and colleagues who lived there. As demonstrated earlier in Chapter Two, he was fully integrated into the social,

¹⁴ It is unclear whether Botoshansky read Gruzman's article, although this is a distinct possibility.

¹⁵ Yankev Botoshansky, "Briv in redaktsye," *Literarishe bleter* 9, no. 47 (1932): 11. The letter is dated Oct. 14.

¹⁶ The conditions of Yiddish copyright across the many countries where Yiddish print culture existed are nebulous at best, and merit additional attention. The works of writers more prominent than Botoshansky were without doubt subject to more extensive piracy, resulting in controversy. Less clear is what recourse authors could or did resort to in such cases, though it is likely that they would have invoked the good will of local and international Yiddish writers' associations.

cultural and economic fabric of this literature and press. When Mayzel inadvertently captured *Buenos Ayres* in motion, Botoshansky reacted with what amounts to an insistent fantasy of authorial and commercial control implying a national (and international) legal model of authorship. The contrast between this model and the reality of the global Yiddish press of 1932—tireless, decentralized, unregulatable, and still in the throes of expansion—is palpable, and before this powerful agent of literary diffusion the author appears helpless.

The momentary visibility of this system of diffusion in Mayzel's list, and the resulting anxieties of Gruzman and Botoshansky in Buenos Aires, underscore its habitual invisibility as such. A precise awareness of what was being printed, let alone reprinted, in Yiddish papers across the world would have been inconceivable for a casual reader. Even journalists such as Gruzman and Botoshansky, who doubtless received and paged through the major Yiddish dailies of Poland and the United States, sometimes reprinting their contents or summarizing them for readers in digest form, would have been oblivious to the contents of less prestigious publications.

The circulation of Botoshansky's somewhat sensational novel, *Buenos Ayres*, is hardly the same as the forcible circulation of human bodies it depicts. Carried too far, such a comparison might seem obscene. And yet the system of diffusion within the novel and the one that carries the novel from the US to Poland are experienced similarly. In addition to their shared formal qualities of time, space and commerce, they are tinged with mystery and anxieties that support melodramatic plots. The lost daughter or novel can return, but too late, as estrangement.

In truth this shared narrative quality is best reflected not in the all too real phenomenon of human trafficking, but in the sensationalist accounts of the traffic in women that abounded in the interwar European press, echoing the “white slave scare” of late nineteenth century Great Britain, in which newspapers insisted that vulnerable women were at risk of being whisked away and forced into sexual servitude on the other side of the world. As in the case of the Warsaw

Yiddish press, discussed in Chapter 2, the interwar German-language press in the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian empire was rife with fears that European women may wind up as prostitutes in Buenos Aires among other South American and North African destinations, above all at the hands of Jewish traffickers.¹⁷ Such news stories were so pervasive that in the late 1920s the League of Nations devoted significant resources to investigating the true scale of the international traffic in women, concluding that its extent had been wildly exaggerated both by the press and by anti-prostitution activists.¹⁸

Like the extent of this trade itself, the role of Jews as traffickers was less pervasive than was imagined at the time, as historians have shown.¹⁹ But it was far from an outright fiction. What had been most exaggerated was not the extent of prostitution or the presence of Jewish procurers in Europe and South America, but the number of cases where women were forced against their will into migration and prostitution. Botoshansky's *Buenos Ayres* capitalizes on this kind of news fabrication, and redeploys it as a more self-conscious newspaper fiction, designed to play on the sensationalized fear and thrill of a globalized world defined not by an opposition between Europe and its others, but instead between East European Jewish victims and perpetrators.

SCOPE OF THE NOVEL AND ITS YIDDISH MODELS

While the parallels considered above between the circulation history of the serialized newspaper novel *Buenos Ayres* and the narrative contained within it are pronounced, the transatlantic geographies in which the two unfold have quite distinct shapes and characters. Whereas in print

¹⁷ Nancy Wingfield, "Destination: Alexandria, Buenos Aires, Constantinople: 'White Slavers' in Late Imperial Austria," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 2 (2011): 291-311.

¹⁸ An account of this investigation is presented in Paul Knepper, "International Criminals: The League of Nations, the Traffic in Women and the Press," *Media History* 20, no. 4 (2014): 400-415.

¹⁹ See for example Donna Guy's foundational study of sex workers in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Buenos Aires. *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

form the novel traversed a normative migratory and commercial path between New York and Poland, its narrative entirely circumvents these major Jewish centers to depict an alternative, peripheral circuit between the Southern margins of Jewish Eastern Europe and South America. Before elaborating further, an overview of the novel's premise and scope is appropriate.

Protagonist Itsik Bernman is introduced in a moment of destitution in Paris. The backstory leading to this point entails a series of geographic displacements that began when a youthful sexual transgression led Itsik to abandon the social and economic security of his well-to-do family home and business in northeastern Romania. From this point, he had traveled south to Bucharest and continued through Greece to arrive in Constantinople, where he married the daughter of Jewish immigrants from southern Russia. Unable to support his wife and infant daughter, he turned to petty theft and soon traveled to Paris in hopes of earning enough to send back to Constantinople. Instead, he ended up a homeless vagabond roaming Les Halles for scraps and incurring debt at a cafe. It is here that, in the novel's Parisian opening, a waiter presents Itsik to an Argentine pimp as a kind of raw material, a desperate Jewish male body to be reluctantly molded into a seducer and trafficker, maybe even a successful merchant. Thus Itsik's peregrinations cease to be defined by his precarious economic standing, and instead are made possible and demanded by an illicit (though hardly clandestine) Jewish sex trade with hubs in Paris and Buenos Aires.

In this sordid marketplace, Itsik begins to ferry human merchandise from towns in Central and Eastern Europe to the cities and rural interior of the South American continent. Meanwhile, the wife and daughter abandoned by Itsik in Constantinople make their way to Paris, where another Jewish pimp from Buenos Aires lures Itsik's daughter across the ocean with promises of a career in the theater. In addition to the Jewish sex trade, this melodramatic plot depends on elaborate intercontinental travel and communication networks. All this so that Itsik's victim and

then his daughter can disappear without a trace, be searched for, and hope to be found. They are eventually found, but their families have already dissolved.

In its wide representational frame and in its blending of historical epic with elements that are decidedly the province of *shund*, the novel draws upon and exaggerates models established by two enormously popular and influential writers: Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Asch. In his 1907 novel *Der mabl* (The Flood), the former had employed a blend of high and low literary registers, ironically flirting with *shund* elements, to portray the 1905 Revolution to a newspaper audience in the United States.²⁰ Asch pursued a yet grander scale in his urban trilogy *Farn mabl* (Before the Flood), depicting events surrounding the 1917 Revolution as experienced in Saint Petersburg, Warsaw and Moscow, also initially for publication in a newspaper. The first novel in the series, *Peterburg* (1929), centrally features a brothel as the clandestine residence of Jews illegally living in the city, and folds this *shund* element unironically into its epic frame. Both writers pursued a yet wider geographic scope, detached from an epic narrative mode, in novels of immigration to the United States, but it is Sholem Aleichem's *Blondzhende shtern*, (Wandering Stars, 1911), which centers on two roving actors, that establishes the widest representational frame by veering from Bessarabia to Bucharest before proceeding through Poland and Western Europe to the United States.²¹ Already in the nineteenth century, the Yiddish theater had been associated with mobility in addition to being a peripheral and morally questionable Jewish space.

Buenos Ayres in a sense upstages *Blondzhende shtern* by harnessing a new Jewish geography of proportions that exceed the reach of the Yiddish theater—also evoked in the novel. At the same time that the sex trade is repudiated as an association marring the reputation of Buenos Aires and Argentina, it is wholly embraced as a means of world-making, portraying dimensions

²⁰ Mikhail Krutikov, "The Crisis of Revolution," in *Representations of Crisis in the Yiddish Novel, 1905-1914* (Diss. Jewish Theological Seminary, 1998), 137-172.

²¹ Anita Norich, "Portraits of the Artist in Three Novels by Sholem Aleichem," *Prooftexts* 4, no. 3 (1984): 237-251.

otherwise coherent only in the frame of a travel journal. Similarly, at the same time that the sex trade is cast as a malevolent force acting upon already beleaguered Jews, it also appears to soar above the constraints of nationality, passports and antisemitism that shape Jewish mass migration. A condensation of Buenos Aires into the city of the Jewish sex trade—and at its most inclusive, also the city of that trade’s opponents—creates the narrative possibility, if not necessity, of reaching beyond those narrow limits across continents and oceans. As in the case of Asch’s *Peterburg*, the even greater prominence of the sex trade in the novel is presented as an integral facet of an epic urban narrative, in this case defined by the heroic effort on the part of the upright Jews of Buenos Aires to vanquish it.

The following section attends to the novel as a more or less bounded narrative, with the aim of elucidating how it constitutes a particular aesthetic world—a sprawling geography linked by various modes of connectivity, focalized through a set of characters and subsumed to an overarching perspective.

Any attempt to fully differentiate this narrative world from the world in which the novel circulated, however, would prove undesirable and even untenable. This is not only because certain questions of historicity and representation reward a degree of engagement with that wider context, but also because the Yiddish daily press itself appears as an object of no mean consideration within the novel. In *Buenos Ayres*, the newspaper is endowed with an exaggerated capacity to organize the world of its readers, and this provides a suggestive model on which to understand the novel’s own striving toward a sense of (Jewish) globality, here understood as totalizing scope. This effort is rooted in the distinctive features of a Jewish social milieu in Buenos Aires, which in turn organizes a field of activity that spans distinct regions but remains almost entirely within the bounds of the Yiddish language. The nature and integrity of this implicit ethnolinguistic field may be productively understood, I maintain, in the terms of a

slippage between domesticity and domestication that characterizes *Buenos Ayres* and indicates a larger trend in Yiddish literature.

THE WORLD OF *BUENOS AYRES* BETWEEN DOMESTICITY AND GLOBALITY

An integral feature of *Buenos Ayres* is the premise that the diverse occurrences and interactions depicted in the course of its meandering plot, and across all its far-flung settings, take place almost entirely within the purview of the Yiddish language. The ability of the novel's protagonists to inhabit a nearly continuous linguistic sphere constitutes a particular kind of ethnocultural domesticity: the ability to navigate the world quite literally on one's own terms, at least while remaining among one's own kind, in this case East European Jews. This is a feature shared in common with a great deal of Yiddish fiction. What is rather unusual about *Buenos Ayres* is the large swathe of the world taken into its purview, as well as the specific geographies it juxtaposes and the relative frequency of movement between them. Along these lines, the novel's various settings are best viewed not according to an immigrant/native dichotomy as being within or outside Jewish Eastern Europe, but rather along a spectrum of stronger and weaker Jewish social milieus, more and less interconnected. The novel's sphere of Yiddish-Jewish domesticity is pervasive but uneven, and not without its discontents.

Indeed, domesticity in the broad sense invoked here does not imply comfort or security, but rather a basic condition of habitability. However, the more conventional association with the family unit offers a second register that can help to illuminate the first. In a significant measure, the cohesion of *Buenos Ayres* as a more or less traditional novel is a function of two elaborate and protracted familial dramas, both characterized by mounting instability and finally dissolution in the face of considerable stresses. The sense of distance cultivated in the novel is in fact largely predicated on the bilateral presentation of tenuous and disrupted lines of communication as well

as the anxieties of the separated parties surrounding this problem. A focus on the tension between this kind of explicit migratory melodrama and the implicit assertion of a world-spanning ethnocultural milieu will elucidate how the novel's reach beyond Buenos Aires—roughly one third of the narrative—serves both to spin and unravel the threads of Yiddish-Jewish domesticity.

The contours of the world of *Buenos Ayres* are sketched in the itineraries of three central protagonists—antihero Itsik Bernman, his victim and love interest Feygele Shenkaru and his estranged daughter Perele. Itsik shares points of departure with both women: with Feygele, the shared hometown of Kiotre in Northeastern Romania; and with Perele, a residence in Constantinople, site of a brief shared life in her infancy. The narrative arcs centered on these two women share the common thread of victimization, as each in turn is lured to Buenos Aires from Europe under the false pretenses of marriage—the basic formula of Jewish sex trade stories in the news—and following their respective ordeals both are taken uneasily into the fold of mainstream Jewish life in Buenos Aires. Their life-paths leading up to that attempted normalization are the primary means by which the novel develops its far-reaching geographic scope. Under quite different circumstances, both Feygele and Perele inhabit the distant margins of an ascendant Yiddish domestic sphere, and in doing so bring into focus not only its geographic limits, but also its linguistic and ethno-racial boundaries. While such boundaries are necessarily ubiquitous, their presence in much of the novel is subdued, becoming pronounced only in the absence of a robust Yiddish-Jewish social milieu. Whatever impediments such boundaries may present on the plane of novelistic action, on the plane of representation they are the site of a provisional form of domestication, subsumed to an exoticist intelligibility.

Before attending to the ways in which these women's trajectories work both to constitute and curtail the world of *Buenos Ayres*, it is necessary to establish two elements that consistently

organize the relationship between Europe and South America: the Atlantic crossing and the city of Paris.

The plot of *Buenos Ayres* is predicated on nine discrete (one-way) Atlantic crossings, undertaken by six different characters. The space and experience of the voyage by ship from Europe to Buenos Aires serves as a key structuring element for the narrative, and is depicted in four instances. All travel in the opposite direction, in contrast, together with a single Buenos Aires bound trip, is merely noted or left implicit. Those instances in which the voyage is depicted include all cases where any given character makes the crossing for the first time, such that the destination looms as an unknown quantity for them as the narrative proffers intimations of their various, often predictable fates. The basic pattern established in this series of depictions fosters a sense of Buenos Aires as a gravitational force, an effect accentuated by the fact that such instances of sea travel are distributed across the first three parts of the novel. While the ship is a necessarily heterogeneous, multilingual space, and in fact occasions interactions between the protagonists and travelers of various nationalities, East European Jewish migrants are never lacking—although second class is a space distinctly less Jewish than third—and the sense of a continuous Yiddish-Jewish domesticity is thereby maintained. This form of transit is not wholly fluid however, and carries an attendant thematization of economic and regulatory obstacles encountered by individual travelers, which require circumvention (bribery, forgery) or licit intervention (fund-raising, legal advocacy) from a third party, whether Jewish traffickers or Jewish communal institutions. Apart from providing a degree of verisimilitude, such mediations define the world of the novel by a mobility that is not free but highly qualified.

Alongside the space, experience and mediating conditions of the sea voyage from Europe, Paris stands as a second structuring element of central importance. The city functions as a stable point of reference within the novel's relentlessly unfamiliar geography, and also as a satellite and

antechamber to Buenos Aires. Conspicuously, the novel opens and closes in Paris, with Itsik indigent and alone, first sucked in and then spit out by Buenos Aires. If this version of the French capital carries any status as a “world city,” it is as a destination for pre-WWI economic migrants and post-war Ottoman refugees, and perhaps in the reproduction of a symbolic geography consisting of Les Halles, the urban underbelly famously depicted in 19th century novels, and Montmartre, bohemian neighborhood of romance and vice. In its more strictly Jewish dimensions, Paris is also the point where Polish, Romanian and Ottoman Jewish worlds intersect, and in this sense stands as the sole point of contact between the novel’s Southern geography and the normative perspective of Polish Jewry. This interaction is occasioned by the more fanciful construction of Paris as a European hub of the Jewish sex trade, operating through the relatively proximate port of Le Havre, through which East European Jewish migrants to Argentina did indeed tend to pass. In Paris, Jewish pimps and traffickers with ties to Buenos Aires both recruit and seduce other East European Jews into their organization. As in Buenos Aires, they are a conspicuous presence in the local Yiddish theater, the focus of one Paris plot line. However, as a Jewish social milieu Paris lacks the sharp distinction between upright and underworld that is particular to Buenos Aires, and is instead completely porous. Across its various appearances, and along multiple vectors, the city functions as the hinge between Europe and South America and together with Buenos Aires, as a node interlinking the peripheries of both continents.

The distinct peripheries navigated by Feygele and Perele in different ways serve to construct the novel’s sense of an expansive, Jewishly habitable scope even while enacting the deterioration of the integrity of this extended domestic milieu on the level of the family unit.

Feygele’s trajectory extends from Northeastern Romania to Southern Argentina, and more than that of any other character is defined by involuntary movement from place to place. Apart from its geographic specificity, her narrative arc is distinguished by an ongoing epistolary

exchange that sustains a continual if unreliable link between Feygele, variously located, and her parents in Romania. Related to this tenuous connectivity is another field of action; news of Feygele's progressive displacements throughout Argentina mobilizes two separate quests to locate and liberate her, one failed and the other successful. The improbable plot spun around Feygele's travails thus reinforces established narrative patterns and previously traced geographic contours.

The town of Kiotre (Romanian: Piatra Neamț), situated along the Bistrița river in the Eastern Carpathian mountains within the bounds of the Romanian Old Kingdom, would surely be perceived as an exotic setting by most Yiddish readers, for whom even the region of Bessarabia to the north would have constituted a cultural other, albeit a decidedly fathomable one as the initial setting for Sholem Aleichem's *Blondzhende shtern*.²² With the sole exception of a town outside Odessa where Itsik briefly courts another prospective victim before ceding to a crisis of conscience, Kiotre provides the novel's only footing in the space of Jewish Eastern Europe, and serves as the anchor of the novel's distinctively Southern, predominantly Romance geography. This is because the town is the birthplace of both Itsik and Feygele, and the destination chosen by the former when he is first tasked with procuring fresh human merchandise for his new trade. Itsik finds his parents have died, and the undisclosed transgression that once led him to flee their home is forgotten, enabling his courtship with the daughter of the proprietors of the local tavern, whose surname (Shenkaru) combines "tavern" (*shenk*) with a traditional Romanian suffix. The localizing gesture of this surname is compounded when, as part of an idyllic riverside courtship, Itsik and Feygele recite Romanian poems in praise of the purity of the Bistrița.

Even once this outsized courtship has concluded and the newlywed couple is departed, Kiotre persists as the first half of the novel consistently cycles between scenes of Feygele's subsequent

²² For a discussion of these regional perceptions, see the introduction to Part I, above.

confinement in Buenos Aires and the Shenkarus' tavern where her parents await her letters, thus dramatizing the distance between them. This perspective, presented in parallel to Feygele's experiences in Argentina, chronicles a movement from the delight elicited by her first letter, the verbal equivalent of a postcard image of Rio, to the anticipation, concern and then panic provoked when a second fails to materialize—and much later, to the horror of Feygele's ordeals, disclosed in a subsequent letter that she finally manages to sneak through an intermediary.

In addition to waiting and fretting, the Shenkarus in Kiotre pursue their own means of locating their daughter, approaching the local rabbi, who writes to a Bucharest rabbi, who in turn suggests writing to a Warsaw rabbi who, having some experience in the matter, suggests writing to the Jewish immigrant protection association in Buenos Aires. Once the collaboration of this institution is secured, and a special passport is arranged and funds raised, Avrom Shenkaru embarks for Argentina as the narrative rehearses anew the Atlantic crossing, the port, the jarring impression of the city. Shenkaru's presence in Buenos Aires, prompts two further displacements as the pimps seek to avoid the indelible scandal that would result were he to find his daughter or cross paths with his sham son-in-law. Thus Feygele is sent from town to town in the interior, while Itsik is shipped off to Paris to procure another woman.

The dynamic sequence of events surrounding Feygele eventually concludes with a brothel to brothel tour throughout the Argentine interior undertaken by Itsik, approximately retracing a tortuous path already charted once before through Feygele while embellishing the novel's account of the interior from a second perspective. Although in the course of both Itsik and Feygele's tours of the interior reference is made to two specific regions (Pampa and Patagonia), this vast space is only loosely tethered to Argentine geography. The one small town that is named, Santa Elena, is more readily legible as a figure of scarcely imaginable remoteness—the European association with the Saint Helena of Napoleon's south Atlantic exile—than as a

reference to the Argentine town of the same name, which is situated elsewhere. The result is not a coherently mappable space, but a sense of relative proximity to “civilization” indexed by the presence or absence of European immigrants, mestizos and indigenous Argentines, both in and outside the brothels.

Even before Feygele is spirited out of Buenos Aires in the night, her impending encounter with the Argentine interior is foreshadowed. On an outing to Palermo upon her arrival to the city, Yoshke Lyubimtshik had placed marked emphasis on a monument donated by Spain for the centennial of Argentina’s independence, narrating the physical qualities of the four main figures representing four regions of the country. More explicitly, the figure of El Tigre, the indigenous tough tasked with subjecting Feygele to repeated sexual violence in hopes of pacifying her, functions as an organic link between the markedly European (and Jewish) capital and Argentina’s mestizo interior, as constructed by the novel.

The racial logic that organizes this distinction is developed through an attention to landscape that strongly implies a form of geographic determinism. Feygele’s transition by car from urban to rural, Jewish to non-Jewish space is figured by a powerful storm, on the other side of which she catches glimpses of rustic gaucho (cowboy) life ways culminating in the ominous slaughter of a calf. Further south, any veneer of cultural traditions is stripped away to cast the indigenous prostitutes alongside whom Feygele is forced to work as simple creatures not immoral, but dwelling outside morality.

One of the most striking features of *Buenos Ayres* is a parallel plot that unfolds in Constantinople as Itsik is being drawn into the business of human trafficking. For the first half of the novel, it almost seems that his abandoned wife and daughter are located there only so that he can remorsefully fantasize about how two women on their own in the Ottoman capital must invariably fall into prostitution, thus intensifying the moral stakes of his failure to raise them out

of poverty by leaving to seek work in Paris. This fantasy is consistent with the strong link in the East European Jewish imagination between Constantinople and prostitution.²³ Indeed, before Buenos Aires attained the status of metonym for the sex trade, that dubious honor was shared between Odessa and Constantinople, prominent Black Sea ports in the export and distribution of European women. This association is at once underscored and complicated for the reader of *Buenos Ayres* by a striking passage of historical exposition about a Jewish campaign against pimps in Constantinople.²⁴

The meaning of the interpolation of this brief and dubious account of moral triumph into the novel proves somewhat inscrutable in its immediate context as a marked interruption in the narrative, but the inclusion of this perspective more broadly creates a distant echo between the efforts of Jewish morality campaigners in Constantinople and the effort to oust the Jewish pimps of Buenos Aires that progresses over the course of the novel. More immediately, this explicit discussion of prostitution recalls Itsik's longstanding fears, affording a degree of suspense regarding the fates of his wife and young daughter Perele. Ultimately Constantinople does not spell their delivery into prostitution, but instead organizes a plot spanning at least a decade that leads the two women beyond the city into rural Anatolia, a fringe perhaps even more extreme than the Argentine interior with regard to the Yiddish-speaking world, before eventually launching them to Paris amid the chaos of World War I, from which point Perele will unwittingly retrace her father's journey to Buenos Aires. In this way Perele charts a course uniting two distant edges in the grand panorama of East European Jewish migration.

²³ This association is already evident in Yiddish fiction of the late nineteenth century.

²⁴ The story related here claims that a Zionist activist by the name of Sofia Zvenigorodskaya, historical evidence of whose existence is not readily available, successfully convinced the Jewish community of Constantinople to shun the Jewish pimps there. Rifat Bali demonstrates that Jewish prostitution in the city did indeed provoke controversy among Constantinople's Jews, but along ethnic lines—as Sephardic elites associated prostitution with East European Jews. Rifat Bali, *The Jews and Prostitution in Constantinople 1854-1922* (Istanbul; Piscataway: Isis and Gorgias Press, 2010).

Of the novel's urban settings, Constantinople is the least developed in terms of spatial description and orientation. At the outset of Part III of *Buenos Ayres*, when the narrative's Ottoman thread is first introduced, a young Perele and her mother Khane are presented in a situation of poverty, living in a diminutive home on a steep and narrow unpaved street among Ladino-speaking neighbors, details that faintly evoke a real historically Jewish neighborhood. This sparse, understated setting evokes neither a bustling metropolis nor an exoticized East, as might be expected. A single element of local garb, a fez worn by the postman who services this narrow street, bears almost the entire burden of setting. Instead, emphasis is placed on the neighbors, and through them on Constantinople's intra-Jewish relations. As the daughter of Jewish immigrants from the Russian empire, Itsik's wife Khane belongs to a small minority within the city's patchwork of Jewish communities, of which the principal two are on display here: a foreign Ashkenazic minority and a local Sephardic majority.

Constantinople's meager population of Russian and Romanian Jews is conceived as forming a rudimentary social milieu, including a rabbi whose authority would strand Khane as an *agunah* absent evidence of her husband's death—a problem prominent in the social critique of earlier Yiddish literature—an Ezra (aid) society, and a shunned underworld element, evoked in the elaborate digression mentioned above. The relationship between this Ashkenazic minority and the Sephardic majority is cast in terms of sharp linguistic isolation, even sharper institutional boundaries, and a more porous social sphere, at least in the situation of neighborly compassion. Alongside the exclusionary nature of social aid organizations, this tension is evident in the reductive epithet "Polish" said to refer to all East European Jews.²⁵

²⁵ Perhaps unbeknownst to Botoshansky, the Ladino version of this slang term (*lehliá*, derived from Turkish) carried the association of Jewish sex trafficking, as noted by Bali in *The Jews and Prostitution in Constantinople 1854-1922*, 57.

When Itsik's wife seriously injures her ankle, in pursuit of the postman who will never bring word from her estranged husband in Paris, the dramatic sense of isolation surrounding her injury is heightened by an implausibly sharp language divide; the neighbors of different Jewish ethnicities communicate to a degree in rudimentary Turkish but mainly in pantomime. When her Sephardic neighbors seek out communal aid on Khane's behalf, the Sephardic institution to which they first appeal refuses on ethnic grounds. An Ashkenazic institution skeptical of the Sephardic petitioners assents once the language barrier dividing the communities is bridged with some difficulty and Khane's ethnicity is clarified.

Accompanying this communal aid is the persistent affection of a widower who takes extreme measures to convince the still-married Khane to be his wife. No less than fabricating news of Itsik's death in Paris is adequate in pursuit of this goal, and the reluctant "widow" eventually relents. It so happens that her unscrupulous new husband belongs to a community of Romanian Jews corresponding to a real community that, emulating Romanian muslims, appealed to return to the Ottoman fold soon after Romania achieved full independence in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The request was granted, and the returned Ottoman subjects established agricultural colonies some distance to the East of Istanbul, in Anatolia. This perhaps constitutes the single most obscure episode in the larger history of Jewish agrarian colonization. To whatever extent this occurrence registered in Jewish or general discourse, it quickly receded into obscurity, leaving few evident documentary traces.²⁶ By evoking it, Botoshansky's novel recovers, even interpolates, a neglected sphere of Southeast European Jewish life and experience not sought by anyone, let alone the popular reader. At the same time, the obscurity of this episode and its

²⁶ This phenomenon is documented in passing in *Times* reportage about travel along the newly constructed Anatolian railway in 1904. "The Land of the Anatolian Railway," *The Times* (London) Dec. 28, 1904, 8; Dec. 31, 1904, 2. A more extensive account of the genesis of colonies is preserved in Yiddish. See Joseph Kissman, *Shtudyets tsu der geshikhte fun rumenische yidn in 19tn un onyeb 20tn yorhundert* (New York: YIVO, 1944), 101-102.

remoteness from the geographic centers of modern Jewish life endows it with the power to surprise, and accentuates the sweep of the novel's migratory perspective.

A fictionalized version of one of these Anatolian colonies for a time becomes the new home of Perele, still a child, and Khane. As setting, this colony receives far more development than Constantinople, and its depiction falls halfway between realism and Yiddish literature's tradition of shtetl satire, in which Jewish small town life and its institutions were routinely skewered. This is particularly so in the detail of mandatory visits to a putrid, freezing mikva (Jewish ritual bath). This dysfunctional mikva, which pollutes instead of purifying, is just one of various signs that the Anatolian colony exists in a state of inversion. Youth and beauty are reviled by the aging populous. Perele, the sole youth in a colony populated by empty nesters, learns as a boy, receiving instruction in Tanakh from the elderly rabbi. It is a space of death and decay, where youthful optimism has given way to bitter resentment toward the pioneering impulse. The colony is linked to the outside world principally by letters from the children it has produced and who have abandoned it, but is mostly defined negatively by its isolation, as desert-like conditions of sand and sun turn the two mile trip to the nearest Turkish town into a prolonged, miserable journey. In the town, there is a real doctor in contrast to the *feldsher* in the colony, but far from a beacon of modernity this doctor is steeped in superstition, preferring his grandmother's folk remedies to the pharmaceuticals he nevertheless prescribes.

Gender transgression in the colony goes only so far, however. Before arriving at Talmud study, Perele's abnormal course of education is diverted back toward *Tsenurene*—the women's Pentateuch—and Yiddish penmanship. The girl lives in this abnormal setting only until the threshold of adolescence (age eleven), and goes on to adopt a normative femininity in Paris. Nevertheless, this early experience in the Anatolian colony is recalled later in the novel when it finds its inverted mirror image in Argentina. Perele as young woman visits a Jewish agrarian

colony in Argentina, which in stark contrast to the Anatolian colony where she was raised is full of virile youths. The parallel depiction of these Jewish colonies, among the most obscure and the most iconic, to a degree displaces the automatic association between Buenos Aires and Constantinople as hubs of the traffic in women.

Indeed, Paris is made to absorb that onus instead. Khane and Perele arrive there through a highly contrived turn of events in the chaos of WWI. The war precipitates a crisis of nationality for the women, as Khane has no documentary evidence of her Russian parentage, nor evidence of her vanished husband's Romanian citizenship. When Romania enters the war, however, mother and daughter are nevertheless loaded into a cattle car and expelled as Romanian nationals. In this position, they are presented with the narratively convenient option of proceeding with other Ottoman refugees not to Romania but to Paris. Here they first reside in shared refugee housing, then are placed with an old Jewish couple whose top floor apartment must frequently be evacuated at the cue of air raid sirens. Khane and Perele are thus released, albeit precariously, from Ottoman marginality into the midst of a Yiddish-Jewish milieu that is highly developed in comparison. In this new setting, Perele gravitates toward the local Yiddish theater.

This colorful milieu is at first liberating as Perele proceeds from enraptured viewer to backstage habitué to chorus girl, but this new world grows narrower as she perceives the limited opportunities to adopt the roles zealously guarded by established local actresses. However, this involvement in the Yiddish theater informs an expanded world view that allows her to imagine a future career in New York. The still-developing geography of Yiddish theater in the early interwar period also proves a vector of seduction, as a young pimp posing as an aspiring actor convinces Perele that the future of the theater is in Buenos Aires, where he knows the directors. The novel's second sham marriage ensues.

Where the worlds of Itsik and Perele begin to overlap in Paris, they dramatically collide in a nocturnal scene that unfolds in the epicenter of Jewish Buenos Aires, on Corrientes Avenue. A bustling panorama of cafes populated by writers and actors, newspapers printing and street vendors awaiting papers is brought to a halt by a piercing scream. A crowd floods out from these various spaces, and forms around a young woman who has just fled a brothel before being dispersed by police intervention. This successful escape, and Perele's subsequent delivery into the hands of the Jewish immigrant protection association, which in turn places her with a well-to-do Jewish couple, does not represent her unambiguous salvation, however. The attempt to absorb her into the mainstream Jewish life of Buenos Aires is frustrated by a Franco-affinity undiminished by the misadventure of her Parisian romance, as she falls for a non-Jewish French immigrant. This proves a rare instance in which non-Jewish affiliation is foregrounded within the novel's Jewish milieu, and this entirely conventional threat of extra-Jewish romance precipitates a crisis greater than that posed by the radical alterity of the Argentine interior, which in contrast proves a neutral border at the margins of the Yiddish-Jewish domestic sphere. Perele's transgression, on the other hand, places in jeopardy the properly Jewish course of social reproduction required for that sphere's integrity.

The Buenos Aires of the novel is chiefly a Jewish city, a highly developed and sharply bifurcated Jewish social milieu constituted through abundant description as such. To a more limited extent, it is also present as topography, a loose aggregation of spaces brought into more or less sharp relief, and more rarely as Buenos Aires, the Spanish-American, Catholic city of migrants. As symbol, it is at once the prurient fantasy of a city enveloped by the Jewish traffic in women and the moralistic negation of that fantasy—the city that shuns and even vanquishes its pimps. Though with respect to the novel as a whole Buenos Aires exceeds these roles as urban symbol and setting, serving as a narrative motor that sparks and sustains a chain of events that

encompasses a world extending far beyond its limits, beyond the borders of Argentina and the shores of South America, the embedded narrative of its transformation from a Jewish city of sin to a “kosher” Jewish city stands at the heart of the novel. This conflict lends the novel the quality of a historical epic spun out of urban Jewish conflict between the traffic in women and moral reform and, like Rabinovitch’s 1907 *Der mabl* renders quite recent events for a remote audience. The central conflict is portrayed predominantly through the movements and activities, voluntary or involuntary, of Jewish pimps, procurers and sex workers, to a degree counterbalanced by several other perspectives: that of Jewish organizations working against the traffic in women; that of law enforcement and, most significantly, that of Yiddish writers and journalists clearly based on Botoshansky and his colleagues. The latter significantly act as mediators between pimps, prostitutes, the police and Jewish institutions, while their perspectives—variously disclosed through exposition, dialogue and interpolated texts—establish a field of competing socio-economic and moral interpretations. While the writers are far from omnipresent, their conspicuous role allows the novel to subject the basic Jewish conflict surrounding the sex trade to a didactic mediating discourse, to perform a newspaper function as it were. The novel thereby teaches its audience how to read Jewish Buenos Aires, or aspires to do so. The urban space of Buenos Aires is deployed as setting to situate these varied perspectives and is at the same time thrown into relief by them. Itsik, the repentant and self-loathing antihero of *Buenos Ayres*, crosses between these perspectives and in a sense unifies them into a coherent Jewish vision of the city.

Itsik’s perspective too is mediated by the local press, beginning in a sequence of six chapters utterly concerned with newspapers, their contents, and the social context in which they are situated. The sequence begins in Part III of the four-part novel, which finds Itsik carrying out a ten-year prison sentence for his crimes. His initial imprisonment is synchronized with the

florescence of a Yiddish daily press in Buenos Aires, showcased in the novel through the depiction of Itsik as a borderline fanatical consumer of Yiddish print. Initially, his reading material entails *mayse-bikhlekh*, books on natural history and pamphlets about capitalists and proletarians that occasion a naive reckoning of the sex trade and the exploitative role he had played in it. Soon, however, his attention is won over by current events, from WWI raging in Europe to national and local stories.

Unlike the typical reader of the Yiddish daily press in Buenos Aires, Itsik reads the paper in captivity. The periodicals that reach him foster an unusually intense sense of connection with the city and the world on the outside. The conventional role of the newspaper in Jewish social life becomes so distorted, so all-consuming, that it allows the Yiddish periodical to appear to grant total vision, an idealized, outsized version of its habitual functions of informing, educating, entertaining and constituting a reading public. The Yiddish newspaper provides a window most immediately onto life on the outside in Buenos Aires, with all its Jewish and general social turmoil. At the same time, it serves as a window onto the full breadth of the Jewish world, from the Balfour Declaration to Ukrainian pogroms and the Russian revolution. Through this encompassing virtual spectatorship, Itsik's extant remorse and animus around his involvement in the sex trade are channeled into an utter fixation on the newspaper, which is thus peculiarly invested with the moral authority to effect his rehabilitation and perhaps even his redemption.

Within the newspaper, highly reminiscent of *Di prese*, this fixation is centered on a single polarizing journalist closely resembling Yankev Botoshansky. This is Shpitsburg, the journalist behind the story of Miriam and her brother discussed above, and a strident verbal brawler and do-gooder who elicits affinity and scorn in near equal measure with his wide-ranging critiques of society at large and all facets of Argentine Jewish social life. The objects of his critique include the Jewish Colonization Association for its catastrophic mismanagement of the agrarian colonies

it established in Argentina, the social ills of the tenement houses where many immigrants reside, constraints imposed on women by Catholic morality and the sex trade alike, and the corrosive influence of Jewish pimps on the local Yiddish theater. In the latter case Shpitburg, like Botoshansky, uses his position to incite a scandal that gives rise to a wider campaign to oust the pimps from the theater, as if to demonstrate the newspaper's agency in Jewish social life and the impossibility of conceiving of the latter without the former.

The novel's self-reflexive display of medium awareness is one striking facet of its larger concern with the nature of the enterprise of the Yiddish daily press, which in the course of the narrative obtains the status of a secondary but conspicuous theme. Most elaborate development: embedded in novel is a piquant story about sexual politics in Argentina, a critique of the ills of sequestering women in shops and homes under the guise of Catholic morality, is presented as the polemical work of a fictional Jewish journalist, writing in a fictional Yiddish newspaper in Buenos Aires. This newspaper and the story contained within it are in turn embedded within the real novel *Buenos Ayres*, itself embedded in a real Yiddish newspaper. In a manner of periodical *mise en abyme*, the scene of reading is doubled as newspaper fiction begets newspaper fiction: an effect that is only heightened by the fact that the story itself is subject to the same serial spatiotemporal interruption as the novel that contains it, as it is split between two daily installments.

The period of Itsik's imprisonment, together with the extended newspaper montage that defines it, serves as a hinge between two halves of *Buenos Ayres* and two phases of Itsik's life, and consequently between two narrative relationships to Buenos Aires. Before prison, he inhabits the city, however grudgingly, as one of the *tmeim*, the "impure," a category defined in diametrical opposition to those who partake of mainstream organized Jewish social life—the *yoldim*, stiffs or suckers. After prison, he is permitted a marginal existence among the latter as a

penitent, visibly marked by a newly adopted Jewish piety. The moral fault line dividing these two Jewish milieus, which in significant measure are coterminous in space, is frequently emphasized throughout the novel. It is a basic fact that organizes the daily lives of the protagonists and also a matter of considerable preoccupation on both sides. At the same time, it is dynamic, under constant negotiation, occasionally complicated or muddled. In all its variations, this state of social division is what fundamentally defines the Buenos Aires of *Buenos Ayres*, and underwrites most perspectives, experiences, spaces and events within or concerning the city—rarely visible outside its Jewish contours.

The city first appears abruptly, in the novel's eighth installment (Chapter Six of Part I). The previous installment had left Itsik on a boat, and now: "Itsik was sitting in Cafe Japón in Buenos Aires with open mouth and open ears. The cafe consisted of three small, dark and stuffy rooms. Four electric lamps burned day and night and spread a scant light, and it always seemed like evening there. The rooms were always filled with Jewish youths of every appearance." Itsik sits outside of time, in perpetual evening. The cafe's appearance and clientele are unchanging. Cafe Japón is somewhere in Buenos Aires, but its Spanish name evokes the other side of the world, a further displacement albeit somewhat phonetically obscured to readers ("khapon" may not immediately evoke the Yiddish *Yapan*).²⁷ The opening paragraph concludes, referring to the varied Jewish types present in the cafe: "They all spoke at once and sweat streamed from them all. Thousands of fat, overfed flies circled the lamps and more than once the immense buzzing of the fat flies drowned out the many human voices." The scene thus takes on a decidedly grotesque quality as both Itsik and the reader go on to receive a concise introduction to the local conflict around the Jewish sex trade; a young man addresses the sweaty cafe-goers in strident rhetoric

²⁷ The name also reflects the historical preponderance of Japanese-owned cafes in early twentieth century Buenos Aires, but the novel provides no such contextualization.

about the need to defend the Jewish name against the pimps with whom Jews are increasingly associated. Other details of Itsik's visit are related indirectly, but this cafe scene dominates the first appearance of Buenos Aires. The city as urban space is withheld from the reader, while its divisive but not yet quite divided Jewish social milieu is staged, in miniature, in a claustrophobic cafe, and the next chapter finds Itsik back in France.

The second time around Buenos Aires appears in a more sustained fashion, and in a manner that fits the fiction that Itsik has spun for Feygele, who still believes they are to begin a new life together. Chapter Nine of Part I begins: "Itsik descended the ship's steps with heavy feet, it seemed to him at each moment that he was falling. Feygele went with her head raised. She looked on the large crowd that stood below and cried up to the ship, to the passengers in third class..." Itsik is overwhelmed with guilt as Feygele imagines how this joyous scene will soon be repeated for her family, and the divergent thoughts and postures of the protagonists simultaneously evoke a generic scene of migration and its perversion into a scene of human trafficking. Like the cafe scene before it, this port scene contains a microcosm of Jewish Buenos Aires, and is similarly a socially permeable space in which Jewish pimps and communal activists working to obstruct the traffic in women may cross paths, interspersed among the family and friends of travelers. Members of the Jewish immigrant protection society easily recognize the pimp kingpin Mordkhe Gazlen (Morty Thug), who does not hesitate to meet Itsik at port in broad daylight, but their attempt to intervene is futile: the marriage between Itsik and Feygele is legitimate and Gazlen has a real job lined up for him. In this confrontation the oppositional atmosphere earlier established in the cafe obtains its personified thesis and antithesis in Gazlen and the secretary of the Jewish immigrant protection society.

The official spaces of the organized Jewish pimps of Buenos Aires, including this clubhouse as well as a separate cemetery, are uniformly ostentatious, and receive only the minimum of

descriptive attention necessary to convey this. More nuanced attention is afforded to zones of commerce—brothels, cafes, casinos and an entire sordid port neighborhood—with an emphasis on the spatial and social order of each site and its attendant customs that amounts to a manner of ethnographic voyeurism. Because Itsik feels uneasy at the pimps' club and his attempts to approach mainstream Jewish spaces both proletarian and bourgeois are rebuffed on the basis of his evident trade, such marginal zones of commerce figure prominently in his routine, and such descriptions continue to multiply.

Although Itsik's official place of employment during his time as a pimp is a stocking factory in the city center, at the heart of mainstream Jewish Buenos Aires, this neighborhood (Once) is virtually absent from the first half of the novel. After his release from prison, in contrast, Once increasingly defines the city, newly condensed and monotone. The newspaper which had so dominated Itsik's life in prison now becomes his livelihood. As a street vendor the rhythm of his life revolves around the press where he and other sellers gather before dawn to collect their wares. Apart from this concentrated, all-purpose public space, Buenos Aires in the second half of the novel recedes into a series of private dwellings both modest and lavish as the narrative turns to the ultimately frustrated acclimation of its protagonists, free from the clutches of the sex trade, to a modest, unobtrusive life.

Toward the end of the novel, the former mobility of the Jewish pimps of Buenos Aires has vanished. When Itsik is released from prison, his long-time tormentor, the pimp king pin of Jewish Buenos Aires, Mordkhe Gazlen is in hiding, unable to leave his diminutive room in a boarding house, or even to move freely lest the other residents—a group of Yiddish journalists—learn of his presence. At a rare opportunity to converse with his collaborator, the landlord, Gazlen reflects on the good old days at the close of the nineteenth century, when he and others of his trade were among the first Jews in an almost provincial Buenos Aires, urban pioneers in a

country where most Jewish immigrants were destined for agricultural colonies and shunned the pimps who welcomed them upon arrival.²⁸ His recollection stretches even further back, to the yet broader open space of his childhood, when he accompanied his father the horse thief on jobs across the Polish border. Once again, the situation of confinement summons up an inverse sense of expansiveness. Itsik soon murders Gazlen, loses his mind and returns to Paris to die as an anonymous and pious Jew.

This is the Buenos Aires that Botoshansky sold to *Der tog*, and which to his dismay was pirated in Grodno and Bialystok—perhaps revealing readers in those cities, in some ways more peripherally situated than Buenos Aires, as those most prepared to embrace a consumable world extending as wide and far as the novelist’s eye could see. With this novel the Yiddish literary tourist reading in New York or Poland could gratify her appetite for the lurid Jewish criminality that Buenos Aires had always promised—and which *Der tog* promised in the subheading appended to *Buenos Ayres*: “A new novel of the life of slave traders in Argentina and Europe.” Though the novel dramatically and in the final instance violently rejects the famed Jewish underworld of Buenos Aires, it revels in the chaotic, decentralized migratory world that may be spun around it. That the novel’s own circulatory life is subject to the whims of a decentralized Yiddish publishing sphere completes its picture of a still emergent Jewish Atlantic sphere that exceeds its monumental representational order.

²⁸ This nostalgic, confessional recollection inverts a scene from the widely read memoir of an Argentine Jewish agricultural colonist, Mordkhe Alperson, which depicts such an unwanted welcome from the colonists' perspective.

Part II: The View from Mexico City

INTRODUCTION: AMONG POETS: TRIANGULATING CULTURES WITH YANKEV GLANTZ

On April 11, 1959, Yankev Glantz sits before an audience at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal. He is a speaker at a Yiddish literary evening, one of many held at the Jewish Public Library, and a great many more held in cities throughout North America in the post-war era. In particular, the occasion is a *kaboles-ponim*, a reception for a distinguished guest. It is a living scene preserved on tape, now digitized.¹ Beside Glantz are the poets Melekh Ravitsh, I. J. Schwartz and Arn Glantz-Leyeles, as well as the Israeli consul in Montreal and the guest of honor, Tel Aviv-based poet and famed Jewish partisan Avrom Sutzkever. They could be sitting in a row, facing the audience, or in some other configuration; the audio recording discloses only a series of voices, the murmur and laughter of an audience, the rustling of a microphone changing hands or being placed in a stand.

When the emcee passes the word to Glantz, the Mexico City based Yiddish poet states that his presence sums up what he wishes to convey, and praises his friend and colleague Sutzkever to applause. Far from finished, Glantz proceeds to bring tidings from a conference he has just attended in New York where Yiddish cultural figures from across the world debated the future of

¹ *Avrom Sutzkever kaboles ponim*. Recorded on April 11, 1959 by the Jewish Public Library of Montreal and digitized by the Yiddish Book Center, streaming audio, https://archive.org/details/ybc-fbr-81_4081

Yiddish creativity,² and from there launches into an impassioned discourse on the struggles and solitude of a far flung Yiddish culture. The prepared speech must look like others preserved in the poet's archive, typewritten and covered in corrections by hand, but he does not read it so much as propel its contents toward the audience, hardly able to finish each word before enunciating the next at a greater volume than any speaker that precedes or follows him. Glantz emphasizes Sutzkever's fundamental importance for Yiddish creativity everywhere as a symbol of the continuation and rebirth of Yiddish culture after the destruction of European Jewry, borrowing the poet Dovid Hofshsteyn's coinage "veyen-mut" (mournful vitality) to express the power of Sutzkever's poetry to carry Yiddish literary tradition into the future. The phrase aptly captures the tone and pace of Glantz's speech as well.

This inexorable forward momentum of tradition, concludes Glantz, is what unites Yiddish writers and Jews everywhere "from distant Patagonia to distant freezing northern Canada, and nearby elevated Mexico." The Yiddish word is everywhere, and everywhere Yiddish poets are united; with this thought Glantz circles back to the matter of his presence, its urgent and self-evident necessity. This is significant because in fact his presence could seem rather odd to an outside observer. To be sure, by 1959 he had achieved ample recognition as a Yiddish poet, but beside Sutzkever, Leyeles (the leader of a New York-based poetic movement and revered social and cultural commentator, best friend of Sutzkever), Ravitsh (influential poet, co-founder of an influential Warsaw literary journal) and Schwartz (representative of another New York poetic movement, influence on the young Sutzkever) he is an outlier both in terms of geography and literary stature.

² Glantz is doubtless referring to the assembly of the Worldwide Yiddish Culture Congress in New York, held March 26-29, 1959.

Later, before Sutzkever has the opportunity to speak, Glantz reappears to share brief words from poet H. Leivick, whom he had visited several days prior. Leivick's absence due to being bedridden has already been commented by Leyeles, and Sutzkever will soon refer to him as one of "tsvey groye kep" (two gray heads—Leivick and Schwartz). It is almost as if Glantz, acting as a proxy for a revered poet, wishes to redouble his claim to belonging. But the fact is that he is fully integrated into this scene. He has corresponded with Schwartz and Leyeles, met them in New York, brought Schwartz to Mexico in 1936 and published in Leyeles' selective journal. He has worked closely with Ravitsh during the latter's prolonged stay in Mexico City in the late 1930s. He has enjoyed Sutzkever's hospitality in Tel Aviv.

If Glantz is not out of place in Montreal, this owes not only to the various relationships he forged during the previous decades, but also to his exceptional mobility, distilled into a few words by American Yiddish poet and critic Yankev Glatshiteyn in his regular column for New York's *Der tog*, where in 1968 he wrote: "men ken zayn Trotsky-berdl mamesh iber der gantser yidisher velt" (his Trotsky-beard is truly known across the entire Jewish world).³ This passing comment endows Glantz with a certain renown and emphatically locates it within a diffuse and imprecise geography, while also displacing it from Glantz himself onto a perhaps caricature-like, perhaps iconic physical feature. To be sure, the image of a Jewishly ubiquitous Trotsky-beard is humorous. But this Van Dyke with a pronounced goatee also bears consideration as a signifier suspended between cultures, one that is the site of a complex negotiation. It is a coincidence that both Glantz (b. 1902) and Trotsky (b. 1879) were raised, in different generations, in agrarian communities in the Kherson Governorate in the south of the Russian empire, though perhaps their taste in facial hair is linked to a common Russian intellectual milieu. Lenin's iconic image alone would seem indelibly to link the Van Dyke to revolutionary socialism.

³ Yankev Glatshiteyn, "A poet—a barimter moler," *Der tog* (New York) December 20, 1968.

So too is it a coincidence that both Glantz and Trotsky came to live in Mexico City, under rather different circumstances. Whereas Trotsky was drawn to Mexico for its ideological hospitality, Glantz arrived with his wife Elizavet as a failed immigrant to the United States, where the poet had relatives in Philadelphia, after the pair was denied passage at the port of Havana. In Mexico, both Glantz and Trotsky, in radically different capacities, entered the rusophilic circle around Diego Rivera. In a city of clean shaven artists and intellectuals—photographs from the period show mostly workers and statesmen sporting mustaches—these Soviet emigrants must have had a particularly striking appearance, and resemblance. There is a way in which the very appellation “Trotsky-beard” codes Glantz as a Russian cultural transplant to Mexico, indeed his concurrence with Trotsky would seem to be the sole condition of this term.

Glantz himself entertained such a resemblance as a factor in the 1939 attack against him by a gang of Mexican fascist militants (*Camisas Doradas*)—an event that would spur his first visit to New York City and likely his subsequent peregrinations as a representative of various international Jewish organizations: the original context of Glatshteyn’s comment. The attack, swiftly denounced by the Cárdenas regime, was reported, and later remembered, with dramatic variations in the number of assailants and the unfolding of events, and proved a subject of scrutiny and consternation in both Mexican and American newspapers, where it was heralded as marking the arrival of fascism to the Americas. In the Yiddish press of New York could be found proclamations of solidarity, and even a poem for Glantz the near-martyr by poet Alef Kats, like Glantz an employee of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. On the invitation of a group of New York Yiddish writers who helped to arrange an American visa, and with the permission of Mexican authorities, Glantz was able to leave Mexico for the first time since immigrating in 1925.

Don Jacobo, Ya'akov, Yankel, Nucía, Yankev, even Jacob, or simply Glantz. These names—signatures, written and oral forms of address, objects and subjects of reported actions—situate the figure “Y. Glantz” in a ceaseless movement between languages. The letters, essays, articles, poems, migration documents and calling cards that bear these names also attest to a constant movement in space, citing geographic points across the globe. It is only appropriate then that the archive containing these and other materials is not one but three, shared between Mexico City, Jerusalem and New York.

Chapter 3

MEXICO CITY AT THE THRESHOLD OF YIDDISH CULTURE

Campesino de Diego Rivera
en un paisaje de Van Gogh.

El sol vespertino enciende
la revolución en su ojo.

Jacobo Glantz¹

At different moments in 1935, two New York based Yiddish journalists wrote of quite similar experiences abroad in Mexico City, one for Warsaw's daily *Naye folks-tsaytung* (New People's Paper) and the other for New York's daily *Forverts* (Forward). Each journalist, in the company of local Yiddish poet Yitzkhok Berliner, had sought out the chance to see iconic artist Diego Rivera at work and to converse with him. The circumstances varied. One visitor, a pioneering Russian Jewish educator, joined Rivera on a scaffold at Mexico's Palacio Nacional, near the completion of a monumental series of murals there, and interviewed him with Berliner's interpretive aid.² The other, a writer who spent extended periods in the Mexican capital throughout the 1930s, visited the artist's home studio in San Ángel, where Berliner was to sit for an ink portrait, and where, owing to torrential downpour, the pair became guests at an intimate

¹ Translation: Diego Rivera peasant / in a Van Gogh landscape. // The evening sun ignites / the revolution in his eye. Jacobo Glantz, "Poema," *Pájaro Cascabel* no. 10 (1964): 3.

² Kh. Kazhdan, "Mitn groysn revolutsyonern moler af di rutshovanyes," *Der veg* (Mexico City) September 17, 1935, 7. (Reprinted from the *Naye folks-tsaytung*.)

impromptu dinner.³ As is apparent, each encounter between Rivera and a journalist, and by extension readers of the Yiddish press in Warsaw or New York, hinged on the poet's mediation, and this is emblematic of Mexico City's position in the complex of interwar Yiddish literary space.

Far more than was the case for any other site of Yiddish cultural production, Mexico City's visibility as such was conditioned not by its character as an emergent sphere of East European Jewish life but by the city's rising cultural profile in the eyes of Europe and Anglo-America. Long a center for Spanish-language print, in the 1920s Mexico City took on a new symbolic status for the region and the world as a revolutionary regime, following a decade of armed conflict, began to implement its social vision, drawing left-aligned artists and intellectuals from abroad. One outcome of this was that the city drew new attention through the state-sponsored muralist movement centered there, the early life of which was exactly contemporaneous with East European Jewish migration to Mexico—spurred by the newly restrictive US immigration measures imposed in 1921 and 1924, and augmented by the favorable attitude of successive Mexican governments. Part of a larger “open ports” policy that stood at odds with a new post-revolutionary nationalism but was deemed economically advantageous, official encouragement of Jewish immigration was not substantiated with any concrete support, and by 1934 Jews would join a growing list of racial and national groups barred from immigration to Mexico. Nevertheless, six to nine thousand Jews from Eastern Europe arrived by their own means throughout the 1920s, with several thousand more to follow at the start of the next decade.⁴ The two thirds of these immigrants who settled in the capital formed a small but conspicuous

³ L. Forem, “A nokhmitog mit Diego Rivera,” *Der veg* (Mexico City) April 20, 1935, 7. (Reprinted from the *Forverts*.)

⁴ Daniela Gleizer, “De la apertura al cierre de puertas: la inmigración judía en México durante las primeras décadas del siglo XX,” *Historia Mexicana* 60, no. 2 (2010): 1175-1227.

minority in a city that, chiefly due to internal migration, grew by several hundred thousand inhabitants each decade from the 1920s onward, surpassing one million by 1930. Whereas the rapid growth of New York and Buenos Aires in earlier decades, driven by European mass migration, allowed immigrants, however fancifully, to style themselves authors of those cities and their destinies, this was far from the case in Mexico City, where the post-revolutionary national myths of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo*—idealized notions of an already completed European and indigenous miscegenation and of a noble pre-Hispanic past—were ascendant.

Many Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe viewed residence in Mexico as a temporary measure, and initially saw little sense even in a local Yiddish newspaper, let alone gratuitous engagement with Mexican society or culture. For a cohort of young writers who arrived in the first half of the 1920s, however, both pursuits seemed paramount, and while the establishment of a sustainable weekly newspaper was stymied until 1930 by limited interest and logistical issues, the chief impediment to Mexican engagement, language, was more easily overcome. Until the moment of emigration, each writer had been embedded in the bi- or multilingual cultural life of one East European city or another, in Poland or the Soviet Union, well aware of work in the majority language whether or not they composed in it. Upon arrival to Mexico City they found themselves in a triply marginal position, not only at a considerable remove from cultural networks in Eastern Europe and invisible to the burgeoning Anglo-American Yiddish cultural life centered in New York, but most immediately also on the fringe of Mexican culture. Yet these overlapping margins proved complementary. Direct familiarity with cultural trends stemming from the Russian revolution made the immigrants appealing interlocutors for Mexican artists and intellectuals with communist leanings, and direct contact with the Mexican visual arts in turn appealed to remote observers in all corners of the Yiddish cultural world, above all in the United States. There, leading muralists made a distinct impression by the early 1930s, fueling the

international circulation of what Mauricio Tenorio has dubbed “the Brown Atlantis,” an idealized, static image of Mexico, both academic and popular, defined by a number of motifs related to the pre-Hispanic past and contemporary indigenous and rural life.⁵

This chapter traces a cultural circuit defined by contact between Yiddish writers and Mexican visual art, established primarily through the work of two poets—Yankev Glantz and the aforementioned Yitskhok Berliner—who by means of diffuse correspondence and publication throughout the 1930s rose, without ever leaving Mexico, from a position of complete literary obscurity to one of wide recognition and complete integration into the edifice of Yiddish literary culture. While that outcome was ultimately dependent on engagement with editors and critics in the major centers of Warsaw and, even more crucially, New York, the broader scope of the poets’ activity also describes the privileged position of Mexico City within an alternative poetry network defined by periphery-periphery connections. These central and peripheral engagements alike were overwhelmingly defined by the production and diffusion of a poetic image of “Mexico,” not as a sphere of Jewish life but rather as the object of an enduring immigrant gaze, subtly infused—and at times dramatically inflected—with the visual language of Mexican muralism and illustration. A reciprocation of that gaze is apparent in two 1936 Yiddish poetry collections, one bearing illustrations from Diego Rivera and the other a cover designed by a lesser known revolutionary artist. As is apparent in the latter collection, a series of poems in response to the nascent Spanish Civil War, the cultural circuit traced in this chapter was not strictly defined by the diffusion of a Yiddish lyric vision of Mexico, and indeed decades later took on another, inverted life as Yankev Glantz, firmly embedded in Mexico City’s visual arts

⁵ Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, “The Weight of an Image: Mexico,” in *Mexico Illustrated: Books, Periodicals and Posters 1920-1950*, edited by Salvador Albiñana (Mexico City: RM, 2014), 55-59. On the life of Mexican muralism in the United States, see: Anna Indych-López, *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

scene, brought Jewish Eastern Europe into Spanish poetry, both through translation and in original compositions.

EARLY AFFINITIES, 1925-1927

The most remarkable feature of the first organized Yiddish publishing effort in Mexico City is the way it registers a reciprocal attention between immigrant writers and Mexican interlocutors. In mid 1927, the daily *Excélsior* ran an article titled “The Jews of Mexico Have Begun to Publish a Paper,” the text of which is preceded by two large images.⁶ Reproduced under the headline is a photograph of six dapper young men, partly overlaid by the cover of the second issue of their publication in journal format, *Meksikaner yidish lebn: organ fun frayen yidishn gedank* (Mexican Jewish Life: Organ of Free Jewish Thought). Overshadowing its sparse print is an ample, abstract geometric masthead that integrates three unsubtle symbols: a collection of skyscrapers, a sun-like orb and what appears to be the bell of a horn. The modern, revolutionary aesthetic and ideological orientation implied by this iconography would prove the chief vector of engagement between Yiddish and Mexican cultural spheres, and, to judge by the pronounced reproduction of the cover, may have prompted the *Excélsior* article. A second, less conspicuous vector is also on display, however: philosemitism. As favorably noted in *Excélsior*, the first issue of *Meksikaner yidish lebn* had featured a contribution from prominent Mexican linguist Pablo González Casanova, hailed as the first Mexican writer to be published in Yiddish. What the article does not note is the nature of his contribution: an evaluation and appreciation of the development of Yiddish language and literature in the context of Jewish social and political life, matters that had captured his attention decades earlier while in New York.⁷ *Meksikaner yidish lebn* did not

⁶ “Los judíos de México han comenzado a publicar un periódico.” *Excélsior*, Box 19, Glantz Archive, CDIJUM.

⁷ The linguist’s contribution to *Meksikaner yidish lebn* articulates his own evaluation of Yiddish language, literature and culture, accompanied by a contextual editorial note.

survive beyond its second issue, but the creative circuit evidenced by it, guided by revolutionary ideals but also tinged with a cosmopolitan philosemitism, was a durable one.

Shortly before Jewish immigrant writers first crossed paths with members of the Mexican vanguard, their attentions converged on a common object when, in 1925, iconic Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky visited Mexico City as part of a tour through Western Europe and the Americas. Despite considerable enthusiasm for the visit on the part of Mexican writers, artists and intellectuals, virtually none had appreciable knowledge of Russian and therefore access to Mayakovsky's poetry, which had not been translated into Spanish and was rather unlike anything composed in it.⁸ "Russian literature is liked and admired, although largely by hearsay," the poet recalled of his weeks in the Mexican capital.⁹ Apart from Diego Rivera, who had a modest command of Russian and as Mexico's leading communist artist received the Soviet guest on arrival to the city by train from the port of Veracruz, the only audience both eager and comprehending consisted of Russian Jewish immigrants with a literary inclination. Only months before the visit Yankev Glantz had left Odessa with the intention of reaching Philadelphia, ending up instead one of the most recent Jewish arrivals to Mexico City. Though he would soon abandon his own ambitions as a Russian poet, he was uniquely positioned to engage the visitor, with whom he walked one night, reciting Russian poems, until the city limit.¹⁰

Within a year or two, the same Russian-language Soviet cultural affinity that brought Glantz and Rivera, in rather different ways, into contact with Mayakovsky led their paths to cross as well, in a Russian club where Soviet ambassador Alexandra Kollontai was also in regular

⁸ William Richardson, *Mexico through Russian Eyes, 1806-1940* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).

⁹ Vladimir Mayakovsky, *My Discovery of America*, translated by Neil Cornwell (London: Modern Voices, 2005), 21.

¹⁰ Such is Glantz's recollection, as reported by daughter Margo Glantz in *Las genealogías* (Mexico City: Alfaguara, 2013), 92.

attendance.¹¹ Little about this initial period of interaction is documented, but Rivera's well-known philosemitism was surely a significant factor. In the presence of Yiddish journalists in subsequent years, the artist reliably touted the Marrano lineage also reflected in his muralistic self-depictions as a victim of the Inquisition in New Spain. He was also fond of noting the similarly remote Hungarian Jewish ancestry of his wife, Frida Kahlo, and placed it in a longer history of Jewish romantic involvement dating from his years in Paris, where he surely first made contact with the Yiddish cultural world.¹² The performance of this self-conception perhaps found its most exaggerated form in a declaration issued more than once in the course of an interview with a Jewish journalist in New York in 1931, conducted in French and reported in Yiddish: "If I'm something in general—I'm first of all a Jew."¹³ Though Rivera also confessed to the same journalist: "If you ask me what my Jewishness consists of, I'll honestly answer that I do not know."¹⁴ However nebulous its character, this affinity was decisive, and brought Glantz into the loose orbit of Rivera until the artist's death in 1957.

In the short term, in the early 1930s, this engagement launched Glantz and Yitzkhok Berliner alike into the role of privileged mediators between Mexican and Yiddish culture. Even if they did not belong to Mexico City's literary and artistic vanguard in their own limited creative output, their proximity to the Russian revolution and its derivative aesthetic tendencies, and perhaps also their Jewishness, granted them access to the literary cafes and art studios where they reverentially imbibed its every development. If the allure of proximity to significant personalities was a factor in this approximation, so were the shared premises of social critique, anti-

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Rivera's exposure to Jewish culture in Europe and the United States is observed by Raquel Tibol, critic and historian of Mexican art, in *Diego Rivera: Gran ilustrador / Great Illustrator* (Mexico: RM, 2007), 32.

¹³ Yoysef Braynin, "Meksikos grester natsionaler kinstler shtamt fun yidn," *Der tog* (New York) January 3, 1931, 5.

¹⁴ Ibid.

capitalism, the elevation of the marginalized and even, it may be added, revulsion toward the legacy of the Spanish conquest. The latter was indelibly linked to the Inquisition, the spirit of which still dwelled, in the poets' martyrological imagination, in Mexico City's central Metropolitan Cathedral and other colonial churches.

At the same time that the poets defined an orientation toward their adoptive city and country informed by the work of leading Mexican artists and intellectuals, their writing continued to be shaped by East European literary models, as is reflected in the first Yiddish book to be published in Mexico, in 1927, a collaborative effort on the part of Glantz, Berliner and a third poet, Moyshe Glikowsky that went unnoticed outside of Mexico. Whereas Berliner remained under the influence of leading Lodz Yiddish poet Moyshe Broderzon, Glantz looked to Alexander Blok in Russian and to leading Soviet Yiddish poets Perets Markish and Dovid Hofshateyn. A profile on the influential, recently deceased American Yiddish poet Yehoash authored by Glantz for the first issue *Meksikaner yidish lebn* the same year also evidences a nascent concern with Yiddish poetry in New York.

POETIC MEDIATIONS, 1932-1936

Late in 1937, the editor of the prestigious New York poetry journal *Inzikh* (In-the-Self)—the organ of Introspectivism, a key movement in Yiddish poetic modernism—wrote Yankev Glantz to inform him that several of his poems had been accepted for publication, and additionally to invite him to become a regular contributor, noting: “you clearly belong to the group of poets that stand near to us—to the new, modern style. And so you are ipso facto one of our own.”¹⁵ Though the journal would survive only until 1940, and no longer had quite the same cachet as in the first decade after its founding in 1920, such a message from editor Arn Glants-Leyeles, himself a

¹⁵ Arn Glants-Leyeles to Yankev Glantz, 1937, Glantz Archive, CDIJUM.

leading New York poet, suggests a definitive arrival in aesthetic terms. Even as Leyeles in his letter asks Glantz to look past some unspecified “grievances,” however, he attempts to convey diplomatically that should the Mexico City poet become a regular contributor, he would need to rein in an unseemly habit. “If it won’t upset you,” he writes, “I’ll tell you that your dispersal—I mean geographically—your publishing in so many journals, as if indiscriminately, astonishes me. Moreover: something in me—*opposes* it.”

In the span of the seven or eight years prior to the exchange described above, Glantz had published no fewer than sixty poems in at least ten different journals based in seven cities to both sides of the Atlantic, figures likely greater on every count and that exclude any activity in Mexico.¹⁶ Berliner published roughly half as many poems in the same period, in six of the same journals. Such “dispersal,” which for Leyeles appeared a lack of discernment or literary propriety, was from the vantage of Mexico City a vital means of connection to the Yiddish cultural world. Much as either Glantz or Berliner must have hoped to be well regarded by the arbiters of Yiddish poetic prestige, their initial isolation rendered meaningful every means of contact with other sites of Yiddish cultural production, not only in terms of exposure and general conviviality, but also in terms of access to publications new and old. Glantz’s early correspondence with poets and editors in New York and Warsaw contains repeated appeals, sometimes indulged, for books and back issues of journals, the better to grasp recent and ongoing developments perceptible only piecemeal from Mexico, where the market for foreign Yiddish publications remained meager until the late 1930s.¹⁷ The pair did not confine their efforts to forging ties with the two major centers, however. By 1933, they were in contact with writers in

¹⁶ These figures and those pertaining to Berliner below are derived from the Hebrew University’s Index to Yiddish Periodicals, an extensive record but one that remains far from exhaustive.

¹⁷ Glantz’s 1934 communication with Arn Karlin, editor of the New York literary journal *Di feder* (The Pen) highlights continuing difficulty of obtaining publications. Karlin for his part stresses the interest of Mexican themes and imagery that highlight the distinctive position of a poet in a novel place. Glantz Archive, CDIJUM.

Chicago, a city newly asserted as a modest regional hub of Yiddish culture through the publication of an anthology of Yiddish poetry the same year and with the debut of the literary journal *Shikago* several years earlier. It was in this journal that the works of Glantz and Berliner most frequently appeared from 1933 to 1935, during which time they also forged ties with the editors of the journal *Lid* (Poem) in Los Angeles and *Inzl* (Island) in Bucharest. Together a weekly newspaper in Mexico City of which Glantz became literary editor in 1936, the journals in Chicago, Los Angeles and Bucharest conformed a network of reciprocal Yiddish poetry publication entirely independent of New York and Warsaw.

The poems Glantz and Berliner placed in journals abroad were in their vast majority defined by Mexican themes. This was, to be sure, an extension of each poet's immediate concern with his own linguistic, cultural and geographic context, but also reflects an editorial preference for poems that disclosed a reality perceived as exotic, or at the very least novel, previously known to most Yiddish readers only to the extent that they followed international coverage of the decade-long Mexican Revolution—a matter of limited concern given its concurrence with WWI and the Russian Civil War. The lyric vision of Mexico elaborated in the work of Glantz and Berliner is a variegated one, but tends to focus on the country's landscape and tropical climate on the one hand, a source of both fascination and melancholy in its contrast to temperate Poland and Ukraine, and life on the streets of the capital on the other, a space most consistently defined by penury and prostitution. Glantz's 1933 poem "Meksike," which appeared in Warsaw's *Literarische bleter*, negotiates both registers to encapsulate the country. The first of two rhymed quatrains, apparently addressed to God, asks after the contrast between the blessing of a mild climate productive of abundant fruit and the hunger, poverty and filth evident on the streets. The second, particularly evocative in the soft Slavic sound profile of its penultimate line—"Teg tsesmalyete do shlyondern anthoylte" (Singed days ramble exposed here)—casts the

mountainous landscape encircling Mexico City as an agent of bondage and converts day and night into figures of destitution.

Often enough, the dispersed and fragmentary vision of Mexico that circulated in the poems of Glantz and Berliner took a form more evocative than descriptive, as in the case of the poem described above. Just as often, however, that vision took more concrete forms, both culturally specific and racially inflected. Their cityscapes and rural scenes are populated by mestizo and indigenous beggars, prostitutes, street vendors and peasants. If such figures necessarily appear refracted through an immigrant gaze as objects of curiosity, desire and social conscience, they are at the same time components of a pictorial language gleaned from Mexican murals and illustrations. As much as the poets' work pursues a synthesis of their own senses and associations and an iconography virtually normative in Mexico by the 1930s, it also appeals to established tendencies in Yiddish landscape lyric and poetry of urban social critique, and in the case of Glantz also revolutionary poetry on a Soviet model both Russian and Yiddish. Such mediation is most conspicuous in Glantz's work, above all in a series of poems, including those discussed below, destined for a volume to be called *Meksikaner layvntn* (Mexican Canvases).

The earliest of Glantz's poems to explicitly cite the context of Mexican visual art, entitled "A poyer" (A Peasant), was composed in 1932, and likely appeared in the New York literary journal *Di feder* (The Pen). Its first line, "A poyer fun Diego Rivera —" (A peasant by Diego Rivera —), seems to announce a gloss on some visual source, while its second line, "afn payzazh fun Rembrant" (on Rembrandt's landscape), asserts a jarring new composition, and the poem proceeds to complete a somber scene of midday toil with only a hint of latent revolutionary potential.¹⁸ The poem would have been published in the midst of Rivera's much publicized work in the United States in the early 1930s, such that its presumably progressive reader might be

¹⁸ Yankev Glantz, *Trit in di berg*, (Mexico: Khurbn, 1939), 166.

expected to conjure an appropriate image. The rising profile of Rivera as well as painters José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros at precisely this moment, as each continued to secure exhibitions and projects in the United States and to diffuse a highly stylized image of Mexico, may be understood as a basic condition for the intelligibility and currency of Yiddish poetry engaged in a broadly similar and even explicitly related process. If in 1932 Rivera's name and work had not yet reached some corner of the Yiddish cultural world, this may well have changed in 1933 with the scandal surrounding his mural for the Rockefeller Center.¹⁹ A year later, Glantz revisited the peasant theme in a poem published, in Warsaw's *Vokhnshrift far literatur, kunst un kultur* (Weekly for Literature, Art and Culture), with the subheading "to the images of Diego Rivera" and accompanied by a blurb on the artist.

Rather than one peasant, "Poyern" (Peasants) opts for multiplicity, setting forth a composite of the varied rural laborers that populate Rivera's work, extrapolating the topographies in which they appear and the forms of labor in which they engage. Not all of the figures, settings and implements contained in the poem are to be found in the artist's murals, but virtually all appear in his illustrations, which Glantz may have encountered adorning varied Mexican serials. The poem opens in a sculptural key:

Di poyern, kinder un vayber,
mit gegosene layber
fun bronz un fun kuper

The peasants, children and women,
with bodies cast
in bronze and copper²⁰

¹⁹ Rivera famously refused Nelson Rockefeller's request that he remove a portrait of Lenin prominently featured in the mural, resulting in the halting of work on the painting and its subsequent destruction. For a discussion of the life and afterlife of the mural in the context of Rivera's politics, see Dora Apel, "Diego Rivera and the Left: The Destruction and Recreation of the Rockefeller Center Mural," *Left History* 6, no. 1 (1999): 57-75.

²⁰ Yankev Glantz, "Poyern," *Vokhnshrift far literatur, kunst un kultur* 24 (1934), 11.

Following is a sequence of national symbols, snake, eagle and cactus and establishing a palette of crimson, gold and scarlet gray. In wetlands, fields, mines and beside volcanoes a procession of sculptural peasants—with necks of steel, arms of cable, clamp-like hands—labor with axes, sickles, hammers, ploughs and balance pans. The steady amphibrachic rhythm of their work contributes to a heroic quality also suggested by the metallic strength with which the peasants extract the earth’s resources from hard rock and soil, at times also echoed in series of harsh consonants:

dos raysn mit sokhes di hrudike flakhn,
in finstern krikhn in goldene shakhtn

breaking up the clotted plains with swing ploughs,
crawling in the darkness of gold mines.²¹

The poem’s final lines intimate, more explicitly than does Glantz’s earlier peasant poem, that these figures are primed for martyrdom in the service of a “new era.”

Two further poems of the same period gesture more broadly toward Mexican visual art, one opening with the lines:

Dayne berg un zunike toln
hobn getlekhe moler bamoln
mit vunderlekhe farbn

Godly painters have rendered
your mountains and sunny valleys
with wonderful colors.²²

The other, a grotesque lament for a homeless man, contains the lines:

²¹ Ibid.

²² Yankev Glantz, “Meksike,” *Literarishe bleter* 12, no. 8 (1935): 122.

Dayn groylikn ponim burleskn
hot der tsayt-moler in freskn
oysgeshtampt, mit blutike farbn

The painter of the present in frescoes
shaped with bloody colors
your gruesome mocking face.²³

However, those poems most resonant with the pictorial language of muralism do not necessarily announce it. A series of five poems that appeared, like “Poyern,” in Warsaw’s *Vokhnshrift*, just one month earlier in April, 1934, possess a muralistic character in their presentation of a vision of contemporary Mexico refracted through colonial history and destined for a revolutionary reckoning with European imperialism and capitalism. This impression is heightened by the poems’ juxtaposition, and by the fact that they are splayed across a two-page spread in a large-format publication under the heading “Mexican Motifs.” Even the local and regional terminology, nine entries in all, presented in footnotes—Yankee, thatch-roof house (*jacal*), conquistador, Aztec and Mayab, Mexico’s independence day (the 16th of September), mestizos, machetes, fire-crackers (*cuetes*), coyote—almost amount to a legible narrative.

The first poem in the series, “Folk indianer” (Indian People) constructs a male addressee that is not indigenous per se but an indigenized “Mexican,” heir to a ruinous history of Spanish and specifically Christian expropriation—underscored by the rhyme of *shpanyoln* (Spaniards) and *kupoln* (domes) that ominously concludes the final line—and performs a discourse of militant solidarity with this figure. The first stanza construes the addressee strictly in the terms of racial alterity, namely an “Asiatic” appearance and blood mingled with that of African slaves, a combination that at once registers an exoticist European gaze and summons a more encompassing picture of Atlantic colonial violence, the implied premise of the “burning hatred”

²³ Yankev Glants, “Gezang tsum vagabund” *Oyfgang* 16, no. 8 (1934): 12.

that is identified, in the second and third stanzas, as the addressee's weapon against the European enemy. The poem's second half enumerates the injuries visited upon this indigenized figure by the Spaniards, an account that hinges on an opposition between nakedness and "dem ershtn shleyer / fun kultur" (the first veil / of culture), most readily legible in the terms of a conventionally romanticized concept of primitive indigeneity.²⁴ What is in fact idealized by the poem as a whole, however, is not so much a sense of pre-Hispanic purity as the abject figure primed for revolt.

The next two poems in the series, "Vi tsvaygn trukene, dayn tsorn" (Like Dry Branches, Your Fury) and "In dayn shtot moderner" (In Your Modern City), like the first reach from the present to the past, elaborating a perspective that reads the social conditions and cityscape of the contemporary Mexican capital through the legacy of Spanish conquest. The initial stanzas of "Vi tsvaygn trukene," addressed not to an individual but Mexico personified, establish a state of urban inequality, defined by avenues "raykh mit likhtike palatsn, / batey-zoynes, kabaretn, katedraln / un mit azoyfil yenkishe magnatn" (rich in bright palaces, / brothels, cabarets, cathedrals, / and so many Yankee magnates).²⁵ The colonial past is called up aurally, associated with the mournful sound of drums and marimbas emanating from dark thatch-roofed dwellings (jacals), said to lament the era of forced labor, imprisonment and corporal punishment inaugurated by the "zise reyde / fun blonde un vaysse konkistadorn" (sweet talk / of blonde and white conquistadors).²⁶ Such a racial ascription intimates a cyclical conquest renewed by American corporate interests, an impression reinforced toward the end of "In dayn shtot

²⁴ Yankev Glants, "Folk Indianer." *Vokhnshrift far literatur, kunst un kultur* 17 (1934), 6.

²⁵ Yankev Glants, "Vi tsvaygn trukene—dayn tsorn." *Vokhnshrift far literatur, kunst un kultur* 17 (1934), 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

moderner,” in a series of lines that allude to British and French bids to command Mexico’s resources.

The final poem in the series, which follows another that depicts the intermingling of poverty and festivity on the date commemorating Mexico’s independence, returns to the outwardly revolutionary affect of the first. As is already suggested in the title “Oyfshtand” (Revolt), however, this poem does not merely intimate a possible conflagration but seeks to embody one. Save for a general ascription of agency to “frayhayt-dorshtike kinder / fun di alte indianers voglendike shvotim” (freedom-thirsty children / of the old Indians’ roaming tribes), the situation depicted lacks contextual clues, though stylistic features derived from Russian revolutionary poetry, and in particular the futurism most readily associated with Vladimir Mayakovsky, easily evoke Mexico’s contemporaneous revolution.²⁷ The poem opens with a sequence of images, nominal phrases lacking any verb until *platsn* (explode) appears on the tenth line, in reference to grenades deployed by “brown-skinned mestizos” alongside rifles, machetes and even a sword. The “boiling over generational rage” expressed with these implements has no explicit target, but perhaps appearing alongside the preceding poems requires none. A breathless pace is established in a frequent return to lines of one or two syllables, and graphically reinforced with a series of indentations near the poem’s conclusion:

Der horn
 shrayt — :
bafrayt
 di erd!...
Blutikt shverd
 zunik
— royt —
soyne toyt!...

²⁷ Yankev Glants, “Oyfshtand.” *Vokhnshrift far literatur, kunst un kultur* 17 (1934), 7.

The horn
blares — :
free
the land!...
Sword bloodied
sunny-
— red —
enemy dead!...²⁸

Retaining a tenuous connection to the racial and historical specificity of Mexico emphasized in previous poems, “Oyfshtand” in its lack of significant context and eventual devolution into grim and garish slogans appears to reach toward a Socialist universality that may have held particular appeal for the readership of Warsaw’s *Vokhnshrift*, which at the time of publication was a subsidiary of the Bundist daily *Naye folkstsaytung* (New People’s Paper).

Unlike “Poyern,” which for the most part is anchored in a fairly precise peasant iconography that is explicitly tied to Rivera, this series of poems evidences a more diffuse historical and political sensibility, but one that nevertheless defers to the logic and general character of the monumental narrative assemblages that typify Mexican muralism. The series also stands apart from “Poyern” in the comparative abundance of Spanish terms they incorporate, not only in order to simulate cultural and linguistic specificity, but no less importantly as a source of bilingual rhyme. One effect of the absence of such play in “Poyern” is a near Slavicization of Rivera’s figures in linguistic terms. Even as their racial specificity is repeatedly emphasized, their labor and implements, even the poem’s rhythm begins to conjure a Soviet vision.

²⁸ Ibid.

DIVERGENT IMPRESSIONS, 1936

With diverse poems already in circulation across Europe and North America, in 1936 both Glantz and Berliner sought to publish their own debut poetry collections. Both poets had for two years habitually marked individual poems and short cycles they published as components of forthcoming books, under the titles *Shtot fun palatsn* (City of Palaces) in the case of Berliner and *Meksikaner layvntn* (Mexican Canvases) in the case of Glantz. Berliner's book came to fruition as planned, a lyric cycle preoccupied chiefly with social inequality in Mexico City. Glantz's projected book, entailing treatments of both the city and the surrounding landscape, failed to materialize as expected with a press in Chicago. Instead, 1936 saw a rather different kind of debut collection from Glantz, more booklet than book, not explicitly concerned with Mexico but rather Spain, entitled *Fonen in blut—Shpanye 1936* (Banners in Blood—Spain, 1936).

Whereas the joint collection published by the two poets along with Moyshe Glikowsky in 1927 had not garnered appreciable attention outside Mexico, these individual publications arrived at a moment when critics in Warsaw, New York and indeed Buenos Aires had become attuned to the emergence of a new geographic frontier in their literature. All were well aware that East European Jewish migration had come to span six continents, and that Yiddish print production tended to take root anywhere a critical mass of migrants had settled—even trivial developments in this vein were often registered by leading publications in brief notes included in a literary news or cultural chronicle section. New serials from an expanding cultural periphery, even those of limited quality, were received with some interest, but it was local book production that stood as the basic condition of wider visibility and integration into the mainstream of Yiddish literary culture. Such recognition came in two basic forms: first, the critical reception of individual works and second, a more general calculus of Yiddish book production. There could be little guarantee of the former for any given book, due not only to matters of critical

predilection but also the extreme decentralization of the Yiddish book market and the high number of works published outside the framework of organized presses.²⁹ The latter, on the other hand, was a matter of course for many critics, endlessly preoccupied with the status of the Yiddish book. It was along both avenues of recognition that Mexico came into view as a site of Yiddish literary production in 1936.

The two Yiddish titles from Mexico formed but a small fraction of the 121 volumes of Yiddish literature that arrived to the editorial office of *Literarische bleter* in Warsaw the same year, as reported by Nakhmen Mayzel in a regular literary year-in-review essay, and neither work factors into the critic's brisk synthetic discussion of the year's key developments, which substantively looks beyond Poland, New York and the Soviet Union only to acknowledge the debut books of several established writers in Romania.³⁰ An abbreviated list indicating the provenance of the year's books—"Poland, Romania, America, Argentina, Mexico, etc."—is guided by a different logic, however, whereby "Mexico" serves to accentuate the far reach of Yiddish literature already evoked by Romania and Argentina. Such a status is also suggested in a year-in-review essay by Yankev Botoshansky for *Di prese* in Buenos Aires, which in its treatment of the Yiddish book "in all corners of the world" implies a tripartite geography divided into the three major centers, the established minor centers of Argentina and Romania, and a novel frontier defined by Mexico, Cuba, South Africa and Australia.³¹

If the poets' debut collections were significant for Yiddish literature at large foremost in the abstract—the same year saw far more important developments in Yiddish poetry, aesthetic and

²⁹ Self-publication was quite common, as was publication through groups of friends or colleagues, and through more formal "book committees" also including communal leaders and local entrepreneurs. Such endeavors were often but not always organized under the aegis of a given institution.

³⁰ These included Motl Saksier, Moyshe Altman, Eliezer Shteynberg, Yankev Shternberg and Shloyme Bikl. Nakhmen Mayzel, "Di yidishe literatur in yor 1936," *Literarische bleter* 14, no. 1 (1937): 5-7.

³¹ Yankev Botoshansky, "Dos gedrukte yidishe vort in yor 1936," *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) January 1, 1937, 5.

otherwise—each was nevertheless greeted by the attention of critics eager to evaluate the creative potential of the Yiddish world’s radical margin. Because both poets had already gained a degree of recognition abroad, their books were expected to deliver a striking marriage of Mexican thematic novelty and Yiddish lyric refinement. Berliner’s *Shtot fun palatsn* did just that, extending the established aesthetic and thematic qualities of his previously published work into a more encompassing vision. Glantz’s *Fonen in blut*, in contrast, a collection of strident, unpolished revolutionary poems in solidarity with the embattled Second Spanish Republic, was regarded as an incongruous surprise. Consequently, although both books are material and symbolic artifacts of the same post-revolutionary Mexican-Yiddish cultural circuit, in circulation they retain limited and unequal legibility as such.

Berliner’s *Shtot fun palatsn*, which stands as the most conspicuous trace of a Mexican-Yiddish cultural circuit in the sense that it bears a series of illustrations by Diego Rivera and exists in an English translation, for critics abroad successfully conveyed a sense of rootedness and the apparent authenticity of a “Mexican” mode in Yiddish poetry. The book’s title, meaning City of Palaces, ironizes the splendor implied by Alexander von Humboldt’s enduring appellation for Mexico City, deflated in poems of social critique that foreground the penury, hardship, disfigurement and prostitution everywhere observable against a regal colonial architectural landscape.³² The collection’s urban poems, supplemented by a lesser rural focus, are organized around a central opposition between day and night, when the city and its most marginalized inhabitants lead distinct lives. Bridging separate cycles devoted to the light and dark hours is the long poem “Tepito,” named for one of the city’s most impoverished and ill-

³² As Myron Echenberg observes, the extreme economic disparity present in the city did not escape an alarmed Von Humboldt’s attention during his 1804 visit, when in addition to coining the city’s palatial nickname he wrote: “There is no city in Europe where so much misery can be observed in the streets.” *Humboldt’s Mexico: In the Footsteps of the Illustrious German Scientific Traveller* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 76.

famed neighborhoods, from the 1920s also the site of the expansive second-hand street market that is the poem's chief focus.

The volume's hyper-localist orientation toward the landscape, language, culture and social texture of Mexico, virtually absent any clear Jewish resonance save for the sinister echo of the Inquisition and an introductory poem that adopts the gaze of a new immigrant, left critics uncertain about the place for such a work in Yiddish literature. While a precedent for Yiddish poetry divorced from Jewish experience and referents had been firmly established by leading modernist poets even before Berliner or Glantz began to publish their Mexican poems, such a sustained focus on non-Jewish specificity, more concerned to bring the reader toward Mexico than the other way round, was highly unusual

On the more limited scale of individual poems or short cycles, varied Yiddish poets in New York had attempted to write of the African American experience, often in a spirit of solidarity but almost invariably reproducing a biologized racist discourse.³³ Take, for example, a 1932 poem by H. Leivick that registers the poet's temptation, as an object of racist persecution himself, to identify with black Americans. This indulgence is qualified by an attempt also to imagine how he may appear to black eyes—"Mayn oyszen ober iz far aykh nisht veyniker gemeyn / vi der oyszen fun a yedn fun a linsther mase" (But my appearance is for you no less vulgar / than the appearance of any member of a lynch mob)—a measure of nuance that is undercut by an earlier pair of lines opposing the poet's thin lips to the fleshy ones of his

³³ For recent discussions of this phenomenon in both poetry and prose, see Marc Caplan, "Yiddish Exceptionalism: Lynching, Race, and Racism in Opatoshu's *Lintshera*," in *Joseph Opatoshu: A Writer between Europe and America*, edited by Sabine Koller, Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov (Oxford: Legenda, 2013), 184-198; Merle Bachman, "The Strangeness of Translation: Yiddish Poets Writing Black Experience" in *Recovering "Yiddishland": Threshold Moments in American Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008); and Adam Zachary Newton, "Af der shvel un in der fremd: A feuilleton on Yiddish, Race, and the American Literary Imagination," *In geveb*, June 2016: <https://ingeveb.org/articles/af-der-shvel-un-in-der-fremd-a-feuilleton-on-yiddish-race-and-the-american-literary-imagination>.

imagined addressees.³⁴ Whatever the limitations of this and similar efforts to engage with black specificity, they were viewed as organically linked to American Jewish life and thus to the hegemonic American universe of Yiddish literature. There was no such precedent for imagining Mexicans, whose estimated number in New York in 1930, around three thousand, was even smaller than the East European Jewish population of Mexico City, and yet smaller in proportion to each city's total population.³⁵ If Mexican themes and a general proximity to Mexican visual art held appeal in the context of poems and poem cycles presented in literary journals, the same material on the scale of a book demanded more than openness to passing novelty. The principally urban focus of Berliner's book, not readily legible on the terms of the most widely circulated strands of Mexican visual art, likely exacerbated the impression of its remoteness even as it situated the collection in clear dialog with Yiddish urban poetry elsewhere.

Glantz's *Fonen in blut* is a booklet consisting of twenty poems that belongs to the vast international corpus of Spanish Civil War poetry—and stands at the intersection of Jewish, communist and Spanish American perspectives on the conflict. Published on November 7 just several months after the outbreak of the war, it is one of the earliest collections of its kind, and certainly the first of several to appear in Yiddish. The booklet's contents were for the most part produced in the span of a few weeks, including a poem dated just three days before publication, and register a feverish response to media coverage of living events, a compositional circumstance addressed in a postscript that reads as half apology and half revolt against lyrical propriety and refinement. Whereas Berliner produced a more durable symbol of the confluence of Yiddish poetry and Mexican visual art, or as critic Moyshe Glikovsky in Mexico wrote in a

³⁴ This is the first in a series of four poems that appear under the likely neologistic heading "Negershes," a word formed from *negersher*, the adjectival form of *neger* (negro), with the sense of "that proper to or pertaining to negroes." H. Leyvik, *Lider* (New York: Fraynt, 1932), 88-92.

³⁵ David Badillo, "An Urban Historical Portrait of Mexican Migration to New York City," *New York History* 90, no. 1/2 (2009): 107-124.

review, a symbol of “mutual understanding between us and our neighbors, especially with regard to fighting against social injustice,” Glantz’s booklet is in its somewhat crude construction and in its deviation from Mexican content a more revealing, or at least more transparent, document of this political-aesthetic confluence.³⁶

In light of the booklet’s urgent emphasis on the nascent Spanish conflict and its pronounced investment, both visual and poetic, in a propagandistic revolutionary register, its Mexican context may easily be overlooked, and was not deemed of particular significance in its reception. Yet *Fonen in blut* is legible as part and parcel of the larger process of mediation at issue in this chapter, not in the diffusion of a Yiddish image of Mexico, but in a negotiation of Soviet, Yiddish and Mexican cultural contexts. The most conspicuous evidence of this rests on the booklet’s surface. Its cover art was the contribution of Alfredo Zalce, a founding member of LEAR, Mexico’s League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists. Zalce’s name would have been wholly unknown to Yiddish readers abroad, and his images were not designed to project a sense of Mexicanness, but rather solidarity with Spain. The presence of the images points toward the Spanish Civil War’s special resonance for the Spanish American left generally, in the light of a fascist enemy aligned with the same Catholic church that had been integral to the conquest of the Americas, and for post-revolution Mexico in particular, a close ally of the Second Spanish Republic. This latter context is the only possible frame of reference for Glantz’s signature at the conclusion of one poem, “from a brotherly / free / republic.”³⁷ More than a Mexican national orientation toward the conflict, however, *Fonen in blut* is marked by a generalized Hispanic solidarity that intersects with a range of other influences and investments.

³⁶ Moyshe Glikovsky, “A vikhtike kultur-dershaynung,” *Der veg* (Mexico) July 21, 1936, 4.

³⁷ Yankev Glants, “In altn land,” in *Fonen in blut—Shpanye, 1936* (Mexico: GEZBIR, 1936), 23.

Overarching all of these is the booklet's prevailing revolutionary aesthetic, clearly announced in its cover design. The front cover depicts from behind an advancing popular militia, composed of men and women bearing rifles and bandoliers, marching from a light foreground into blackness accented by a horizon of red flames, against which the profile of a city is discernible. From different positions in the marching throng rise three red banners in the same hue as the flames, emblazoned with the booklet's title and the author's name. The illustration on the reverse depicts the front line of a burly all male peasant militia, with arms, sickles, hammers and pitchforks raised high, mouths wide open in chant or song. Visually, the booklet is further situated within an anti-fascist, predominantly communist internationalism by two illustrations reprinted from publications in New York and perhaps Barcelona. One illustration, by Spanish communist Manuela Ballester, depicts the death of Catalan communist militant Lina Ódena, to whose image Glantz also devotes one of his poems. At the time Ballester edited *Pasionaria*, an antifascist women's journal in Valencia, though the provenance of the illustration is unclear. Even so, its presence suggests the role Spanish-language print culture must have played in shaping the poet's concept of the war. The role of Yiddish print is similarly suggested by the second illustration, by American Jewish illustrator William Gropper, a long-time illustrator for New York's communist *Morgn-frayhayt* among other publications of the left.

In addition to these images borrowed from different corners of the communist world press, the booklet uses a phonetic orthography that approximates the conventions of Soviet Yiddish. *Fonen in blut* was typeset and printed with the support of GEZBIR—Mexico City's society for the promotion of the newly established Jewish Autonomous Region in Birobidzhan, near the Soviet border with China's Amur Province. Such local Birobidzhan societies were created by communist leaning activists throughout the Yiddish speaking world to promote the Soviet answer to Zionism and raise funds to support its institutions. Any proceeds from this booklet,

however, were destined for the Republican cause in Spain according to a note on the inside cover.

A Soviet influence is also palpable in the poems themselves, and several critics noted echoes, albeit not convincing ones, of Aleksandr Blok's 1918 poem "Dvenadtsat" (The Twelve), which Glantz may well have known by heart and which depicts the unruly march of twelve Red Army soldiers through the streets of Petrograd. This point of reference is particularly evident in the poem "Royter Kristus" (Red Christ), in which Christ descends from the cross to lead a Republican militia against their unchristian Catholic opponents, evoking Blok's final line: "vperedī—Isus Khristos" (out in front—Jesus Christ). Less exclusive to Blok but also reminiscent of his poem are the repeated symbol of the red flag and the intrusion of profanity along with spoken and written revolutionary slogans.

Unlike the twelve parts of Blok's "Dvenadtsat," the twenty poems of Glantz's booklet do not suggest a unified perspective. If a single revolutionary impulse and a thematic focus on the intensifying Spanish Civil War run through most of the poems, they nevertheless reach toward multiple poetic contexts and construct a rather idiosyncratic revolutionary discourse. Apart from the Russian orientation already noted, several of the poems point to Spanish poetry: one is dedicated to Rafael Alberti, another reflects on the death of Federico Garcia Lorca, and a third takes the form of a *copla*. In tone the collection pivots between eerie indeterminacy, mourning and triumphant taunts as its focus moves from general reflections on violence to individual deaths and significant turning points in the fighting.

One more significant thread that extends across several of the collection's poems, to be treated in greater detail in the frame of Glantz's Jewish Hispanism in Chapter 4, is a Jewish focalization of the Spanish conflict, guided by the notion of a reactivation of the historical Jewish relationship with Spain. This perspective is elaborated at the intersection of two martyrological

imaginings concurrent in space, linking the death of Spanish Jews at the hands of the Inquisition and the reported death of Polish Jewish volunteers for the Republican cause, and builds upon themes already developed in poems concerned with Mexico's colonial history.

Fonen in blut as a whole may be seen as an attempt, in the medium of Yiddish poetry, to span or obliterate not only the distance between Jewish and non-Jewish political destinies, but also between Mexico City, Madrid, Warsaw, Moscow, New York—and between Spanish, Yiddish and Russian poetic idioms. As a result, the booklet's coherence perhaps implodes on the multiplicity of its addressee—who is prompted to see and hear the same bloody horizon that motivates Glantz's urgent poems. This sense of disunity is evident in the reception of *Fonen in blut* by a handful of critics throughout North America, who tended to find value in just one or two poems. At least two individual poems were reprinted in Yiddish newspapers in different corners of the world: Uruguay and Poland. If this wide span is consistent with Glantz's vision, the two poems appealed to distinct audiences: the Uruguayan paper printed "Royte shifn" (Red Ships), a poem celebrating a Soviet naval intervention and appealing to Montevideo's Jewish communist population, while the Polish paper printed "Avrom Fishman from Rinkowa Street," surely motivated by the commemoration of Polish-Jewish heroism.³⁸

Although Glantz's and Berliner's respective 1936 poetry collections themselves were, for quite different reasons, received by critics with some reservation, this process spurred new relationships and dialogs that would increasingly bring both poets toward the most prestigious fora for Yiddish poetry, and also, alongside other factors, prompted leading writers and critics in New York to travel to Mexico City, joining a small number who had already come to regard the city as the newest node in the North American Yiddish lecture circuit, from which many writers

³⁸Yankev Glants, "Royte shifn," *Unzer fraynt* (Montevideo) February, 1937; "Avrom Fishman," *Vilner tog* (Vilna) December 25, 1936, 6.

derived supplementary income or raised funds for cultural organizations and initiatives. The Mexican theme in Yiddish poetry would not survive the decade, however, perhaps due both to its tepid reception and to an atmosphere of mounting turmoil in Europe that led both poets back toward Jewish and Eastern European subjects and themes of isolation and endless wandering. Glantz's 1938 Columbus epic, treated in Chapter 4, momentarily gave new life to a more broadly Hispanic Yiddish poetry, but the publication of his earlier "Mexican Canvases" cycle and a host of new Mexican landscape poems in 1939 generated little notice. The relationships the poets, and particularly Glantz, had forged in Mexico City on the other hand did not evaporate, and would play a defining role in a subsequent phase of Spanish-language poetic activity, considered below.

POST-WAR INVERSION, 1955-1965

Sometime in 1974, in Mexico City, probably in the event hall of a Jewish institution, an audience gathered to celebrate the publication of Yankev Glantz's latest collection of poetry, the first he had published in Yiddish for more than twenty years. The poet's personal archive preserves a speech prepared for that occasion by fellow Yiddish writer Moyshe Glikovsky, who before leaving Mexico City for New York in 1947 had worked with Glantz and others for two decades to lay the foundations of Mexico's Yiddish literature and press. He asks the audience to forgive him if it is only four years after his return that he is moved to honor his colleague and friend, and he specifies: "Yankev Glantz *the poet*." The reason for this, he continues, is that in recent years Glantz had all but thrown out his typewriter in favor of other avenues of creativity. And indeed, starting in the late sixties he had achieved notoriety as a modernist painter and sculptor. Glikovsky speaks of this phase derisively, stating that for him Glantz's only serious artistry has been as a poet, essayist and literary critic in Yiddish. Before finally arriving at a glowing appreciation of his friend's new volume of poetry, the speaker depreciates one more of the poet's

artistic forays, this time into Spanish. He recalls his dismay, during Glantz's visits to New York over the years, at seeing one more writer turn away from Yiddish in disappointment, not content to write for the desk drawer or an audience of close friends: "It was not seldom that Yankev Glantz would come to me with his authentically Yiddish and deeply Jewish themes of wandering turned 'inside-out' into Spanish, such that in mode, language and style they were de-Judaized, but not Hispanized enough for non-Jewish readers to digest them."

Glikovsky was not alone in his suspicion of and even feeling of betrayal toward Yiddish writers who sought recognition in another language. The value of his comments lies elsewhere, however, in identifying a process of poetic Hispanization that took shape during a span of more than a decade, when Glantz not only adapted his own Yiddish lyrics into Spanish but also pursued original exophonic compositions in addition to translating Soviet Yiddish and Russian poetry. While most of these translations remained in manuscripts for unrealized anthologies, several dozen original poems appeared in chapbooks and literary journals edited in Mexico City.³⁹ This development was in large measure a product of Glantz's new status as the proprietor, along with his wife, of a café-restaurant in Mexico City's bohemian Zona Rosa. The couple had cultivated relationships with writers and artists since arriving to Mexico in the 1920s, but beginning in the 1950s Glantz found himself in the constant company of a new generation of Central and South American poets and visual artists, at times acting as a benefactor and patron. In a variety of vanguard literary publications edited in 1960s Mexico City, often with a pan-Latin American focus, Glantz appears both as a contributor and often enough as a sponsor, advertising his restaurant-café turned restaurant-gallery.

³⁹ These journals include *El corno emplumado / The Plumed Horn*, *El rehilete*, *Pájaro cascabel*, *Siglo I poesía*, and *Crononauta*.

The encounter between Yiddish and Spanish American poetry organized by this site is distinct from the wider production of a Yiddish literature in Spanish or English translation, as the poet worked to efface the Yiddish basis of his Spanish poetry while also cultivating a Russian Jewish poetic persona in Spanish—a visual approximation of which may be observed in an ad run in the literary journal *El Rehilete* (Pinwheel, 1961-1971), featuring bilingual and graphic flourishes. Bisected by a horizontal line, the ad consists of an upper and lower element. Below is a playful tagline in Spanish, reading: “Man doesn’t live on bread alone... but also on poetry (books, permanent exhibition, intellectual center) / Come visit.” Above at left is the name “Carmel Art” hand written in cursive with a simple sketch extending downward: eyes, nose, mouth and Glantz’s distinctive goatee. To the right, in another stylized hand, is the additional title “Galerías Glantz” accompanied by the address. Beside this element is the Hebrew letter gimel in duplicate, the equivalent of GG, and printed below in Yiddish are the words “Yankev Glantz’s art galleries—Carmel-Art.”

As in the 1920s and 1930s, Glantz’s lifelong engagement with Russian poetry played a role in this new triangular process of cultural mediation, as Glantz’s self-published translation of Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s 1961 poem “Babi Yar,” which commemorated, in protest of Soviet memorial conventions that forbade such alleged particularization of WWII, the Nazi and Ukrainian massacre of Jews twenty years prior. This was no longer the revolutionary fashion of earlier decades, but rather the new currency of Soviet critique. Rendering this widely celebrated work by a non-Jewish Russian poet on the subject of antisemitic atrocity into Spanish may have helped to foster receptiveness to the Russian Jewish exilic and memorial themes that Glantz would subsequently pursue in Spanish. That the poet did not tire of making biblical and Russian literary analogies, or of recounting his interactions with Marc Chagall during his 1942 visit to Mexico City and later, may have also played a role.

In the journals to which Glantz contributed poems in Spanish, mostly nocturnal landscape lyrics, in the 1960s, it was habitual to note the nationality of contributors, virtually all from Spanish America, one more performance of their general outlook. Glantz, in contrast, by request or by default, is always incongruously designated as a Russian or Ukrainian Jew. The poet had built a reputation as "a good friend to young people bearing palette and pencils" (*un buen amigo de la gente joven de paleta y de lápices*), and his participation in these primarily youth-driven journals, virtually edited in his establishment, was perhaps a gesture of reciprocity and deference to a model of literary erudition belonging at least halfway to another world, but more than that would seem an appeal to cosmopolitanism, a mobilization of a perceived post-Holocaust Jewish universality.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the body of Glantz's Spanish poetry that appeared in these journals may cohere more as an artifact of a collaborative milieu than as a path in Spanish American poetry.

This is best exemplified in the series of four Spanish-language chapbooks he published between 1963 and 1965. The first, *Vaticinios* (Prophecies, 1963) is presented explicitly as a collaboration with little-known Chilean poet Gabriel Carvajal, who assisted Glantz in the process of rendering earlier Yiddish poems in Spanish. The other three, attributed solely to Glantz, present collaborations with young visual artists who had shown their work in the poet's gallery space, which though less iconic than the Galería de Antonio Souza just several blocks away hosted exhibitions of Mexican and foreign artists that received consistently favorable coverage in the art sections of the city's major newspapers. The chapbooks *Silencium* (1964) and *Bloque de llanto* (Bloc of Lament, 1965) bore abstract drawings by Mexican artists, a small series by Irene

⁴⁰ This is the observation of Carmen Rosenzweig, editor of *Rehilete*, in a brief overview of Glantz's recent poetry collections in Spanish. "Jacobó Glantz: Voz sin pasaporte; Bloque de llanto," *El Rehilete* no. 16 (1966): 69-70.

Arias (1936-2017) and a single drawing by Jaun Soriano (1920-2006), respectively.⁴¹ The highest degree of visual collaboration accompanied the bilingual booklet *Voz sin pasaporte / Voice without Passport* (1965), which included a series of eight collages from Colombian-born artist Leonel Góngora (1931-1999), who had his Mexican debut in Carmel-Art in 1961.

The collages featured in *Voz sin pasaporte* stand out from the other visual collaborations not only because they include representations of Glantz himself, which the others do not, but because they are fashioned largely from his Soviet passport. The booklet's bilingual format, standard for the series run by Pan-American journal *El corno emplumado / The Plumed Horn*, only accentuates the presence of the collages, toward which the poems in both languages seem to reach. The collages themselves contain fragments of print and script in various languages, in Roman and Cyrillic letters, and the collection's multilingual visuality finds its fullest expression of the title page, where the title appears hand scrawled in three scripts and five languages—Spanish, English, Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian—accompanied by the name of the poet in Spanish and Yiddish. While four out of five titles are extremely proximate (*Voz sin pasaporte*, *Voice without Passport*, *A kol on a passport*, *Golos bez pasporta*), the Hebrew exchanges “voice” for “name” (*shem*). Because this variation appears immediately beside the Yiddish signature “Yankev Glantz” as opposed to the Spanish “Jacobo,” it appears to call attention to the status of Yiddish as a language inexpressible in passports, but also to the name attached to the poet's most significant corpus, a non-transferable renown (*shem*).⁴²

In their indecipherability for the average reader of English or Spanish, the languages that adorn the booklet amount to a multilingual monologue. This is appropriate in the sense that at

⁴¹ Both artists had exhibited their work in group shows at Carmel-Art in 1961. Folder 31, Box 4, Glantz Archive, CDIJUM.

⁴² Jacobo Glantz, *Voz sin pasaporte / Voice without passport* (Mexico City: Ediciones El Corno Emplumado, 1965), 3.

least seven of its twenty-five poems, unmarked as self-translations, originate to varying degrees in the poet's earlier Russian-inflected Yiddish compositions. Most conspicuous among these is the Spanish poem "Mraglim," the title of which retains the Hebrew-origin word also present in Glantz's "Mraglim in der nakht" (Spies in the Night, dated 1936), and the text of which recasts three rhymed Yiddish quatrains into eight sparer, unrhymed lines. The centrality of Glantz's own Soviet passport suggests an homage to Mayakovsy's popular 1929 "Stikhi o sovetskom pasporte" (Verses about a Soviet Passport). In this context, however, the symbolic power invested in the poet's passport is not, as in Mayakovsky's poem, the transgressive, explosive force of belonging to a communist state, but an appeal to the poet's vanished Jewish life in rural Ukraine, evoked in some of the poems contained in the booklet, and like *Fonen in blut* decades before also suggests the dialog across languages and regions that define Glantz's decades of poetic creation in Mexico City. In the 1960s, poems that once circulated throughout Yiddish print culture reappear, unannounced as such, within a print culture spanning the Spanish-speaking world.

Chapter 4

YIDDISH POETRY BETWEEN SEPHARAD AND THE NEW WORLD

Mancher hat schon viel gegeben,
Aber jener hat der Welt
Eine ganze Welt geschenkt,
Und sie heißt Amerika.¹

Heinrich Heine

That the metrical backbone of Yankev Glantz's long form poem *Kristoval Kolon* (Christopher Columbus, 1937-1939) should be the same trochaic tetrameter that Heinrich Heine, Alexander Pushkin and other nineteenth century European poets used to approximate, however imprecisely, the octosyllabic Spanish *romance*, may be entirely coincidental. After all, by the time of the poem's composition in the latter half of the 1930s, the same meter had been conspicuously employed for decades in Russian narrative poetry without Hispanic pretensions, influenced instead by translations of the Finnish *Kalevala* and of Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*, itself inspired by the Finnish epic. Yiddish poetry for its part freely absorbed forms current in Russian, Polish, English and German from the late nineteenth century forward, precluding any clear ascription of meaning to the dominant meter of Glantz's *Kolon*, which is in any case not neatly regimented. Even absent any demonstrable genetic link, a Spanish theme pursued by Heine in particular almost a century earlier brings the interest of the later poem into relief.

¹ Heinrich Heine, "Vitzliputzli" in *Romanzero und autobiographische Spätschriften* (Könemann: Dortmund, 1995), 65.

Both Heine and Glantz, under quite different circumstances, arrived at an abiding concern, reflected in their oeuvres, with the history and cultural legacy of Sephardic Jews before and after their forced conversion or expulsion from Spain and Portugal on the cusp of the sixteenth century. Neither was exceptional in this regard. From the turn of the nineteenth century, Ashkenazic writers and scholars in Western and somewhat later in Eastern Europe looked to medieval and early modern Iberia and its Jewish diaspora through the lens of a Jewish orientalism already current among Christians.² The Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions and expulsions had long been present in the Ashkenazic imagination as a tragic episode of persecution, and this association took on new life in historiography and historical fiction, now paired with an opposing narrative rooted in earlier centuries, notably the eleventh and twelfth, of secular Jewish creativity and integration into Arabic- and Spanish-speaking majority cultures.³ What links Heine and Glantz more specifically is that through the Sephardic focus each arrived at a broader engagement with the Spanish exploration and colonization of the Americas, in both cases taking the form of a long narrative poem.

Heine's "Vitzliputzli," the title of which is a German approximation and perhaps metrical accommodation of Huitzilopochtli, the Nahuatl name of the Mexica god of war, is the longest of the narrative works included in his 1851 poetry collection *Romanzero*, which Glantz likely encountered in a 1918 Yiddish translation if not an earlier Russian one.⁴ The poem does not exactly coincide in time or place with *Kristoval Kolon*, which depicts Columbus' voyages

² Yael Halevi-Wise, "Introduction: Through the Prism of Sepharad: Modern Nationalism, Literary History, and the Impact of the Sephardic Experience," in *Sephardism: Spanish Jewish History and the Modern Literary Imagination*, edited by Yael Halevi-Wise (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 1-32.

³ Jonathan Skolnik, *Jewish Pasts, German Fictions: History, Memory and Minority Culture in Germany, 1824-1955* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁴ A five-volume collection of Heine translations undertaken by leading Yiddish poets in New York was celebrated on publication. That Glantz, like most Yiddish poets, read and highly regarded Heine is without question, as is evident for example in a casual citation of "unzer Heyne" (our Heine) in a letter to critic Shmuel Niger. Yankev Glantz to Shmuel Niger, January 9, 1937, Item 19, Folder 5, Box 20, Glantz Archive, CDIJUM.

between Spain and the Caribbean. Heine's poem instead treats the subsequent fall of Tenochtitlan to the invading forces of Hernán Cortés. Yet both poems construct a perspective meaningfully askew of the project of Christianizing conquest. Where "Vitzliputzli" favors the non-Spanish perspective of the besieged Aztec capital, *Kristoval Kolon* advances a divided Spanish-centric view that renders not only Columbus' interiority over time but also that of the expedition's designated interpreter Luís de Torres, who is presented as a crypto-Jew in search of refuge for his newly persecuted brethren.

Curiously, though both poems critique the subjugating and expropriative violence of the Spanish expeditions, a heroic aura largely insulates the figure of Columbus from this association. Early in "Vitzliputzli" Heine pits the monstrous agent of ruin Cortés against an idealized Columbus, whose doubling of the world's perceptible extent is deemed a contribution to humanity second only to that of Moses. Glantz's somewhat more culpable and also more complex Columbus is not subordinated to Moses but directly compared to him, as the opening of the world he performs within the space of the poem is cast as a new Exodus. Whatever rebuke to Spain or the Vatican might punctuate each work, both poets seek to harness the Spanish expeditions for their aesthetic and narrative potential to bestow the reader "ein gantze Welt," a whole world, after the model of Heine's Columbus.⁵

Much about the substance and context of these poetic pursuits is distinct. Apart from the more glaring differences of language, period, geography and prestige, there is the matter of the state of Jewish discourse around the figure of Columbus. Just around the time of Heine's death in 1856, German historian and rabbi Meyer Kayserling (1829-1905) had begun to investigate Iberia's Jewish past, a lifelong pursuit that, among many other books, yielded the 1894 study

⁵ For a treatment of the critique mounted in Heine's poem, see John Pettey, "Anticolonialism in Heine's 'Vitzliputzli.'" *Colloquia Germanica*. 26, no. 1 (1993): 37-47.

Christopher Columbus and the Participation of Jews in the Spanish and Portuguese Discoveries, which appeared in English, German and Hebrew editions. The work, which outlines the ways that much of the knowledge and financing necessary for the inaugural voyages had come directly or indirectly from Jews or conversos in addition to the converso presence on various expeditions and in the enterprise of colonization, may not have helped to stem American antisemitism as hoped by the American Jewish merchant who commissioned it, but did durably bring the figure of Columbus into the orbit of the Jewish Sephardist imagination.⁶ In a rather different vein, German Jewish writer Jakob Wassermann (1873-1934) would in 1929 advance a novelistic, psycho-biographical vision of Columbus as a tragic Quixotic hero that, like the author's work generally, was well received in the Yiddish press. Glantz's *Kolon* simultaneously elaborates on both of these perspectives, on the one hand concerned with the voyages of Columbus the deeply pious visionary on the brink of madness, and on the other with an embedded narrative of Jewish participation.

In this bifocal mode, *Kolon* not only further embellishes a longstanding tradition of Columbian research and speculation, but also stands as the final development of a more sustained effort on Glantz's part to mobilize the Sephardic legacy to endow Yiddish poetry with a grand new scope. In a departure from earlier Sephardist models, Glantz's work thematically inhabits distinct iterations of a Hispanic Atlantic, and repurposes them to articulate a heroic, universalized Jewish subjectivity linked to violent conflict and the traversal of vast distances. The result is a distinctive contribution to an emergent epic mode in interwar Yiddish literature, predicated on the author's position, marginal in the frame of Yiddish culture, as an immigrant to the first major Spanish administrative center in the Americas, where the legacy of conquest

⁶ Jonathan Sarna, "Columbus and the Jews," *Commentary* 94, no. 5 (1992): 38-4.

remained on vivid display and abundantly documented in materials preserved in the city's libraries and archives.

KRISTOVAL KOLON AS MODERN JEWISH EPIC

Kristoval Kolon stands as the clearest example of a literary work that leverages a peripheral position in Yiddish literary space in the service of a Yiddish world literature centralized in New York. The epic mode by which the poem pursues a monumental Jewish-universal cultural synthesis may be understood by reference to multiple tendencies, both continuous and discontinuous with its own moment in Yiddish literary history.

Narrative poems of appreciable scope were present from the new beginning of modern Yiddish poetry at the close of the nineteenth century. While the earliest such work—Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh's book-length allegorical poem "Yidl" (*The Little Jew*, 1875)—proved something of an aberration, the 1880s saw the fuller development of verse narrative.⁷ The oeuvre of poet Shimen Frug, who was active in Russian and Hebrew before becoming a major influence on the development of Yiddish poetry, includes satirical treatments of Russian Jewish life as well as fairy tales (*bobe mayeses*) and poetic adaptations of Jewish folklore (*legendes, fantazyes*). Frug's most ambitious poems span around five to six hundred lines, but none are regarded as touchstones of the genre. This scope is shared by another poem authored in the same period, arguably the most iconic in Yiddish literature: Y. L. Peretz's "Monish" (1888). Though less prolific than Frug in poetic genres, Peretz is more often regarded as a progenitor of Yiddish modernism in poetry as well as prose, inaugurating a neo-Romantic tendency more fully developed in verse the early twentieth century by Shmuel Yankev Imber in Galicia and Zusman

⁷ According to Dan Miron, this poem may have been the sole literary work Abramovitsh published under his own name rather than as his immensely popular alter ego Mendele Mocher Sforim. *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 239.

Segalovitsh in Russia, both of whom followed Slavic models to craft formally refined national epics grounded in East European Jewish lore.

World War I all but shattered this model, as poets formerly under its influence in Europe and the United States forged a new kind of modernist long poem preoccupied with violence and ruin, largely rejecting traditional stanzaic forms, a break especially pronounced in M. L. Halpern's long poem "A nakht" (A Night), dedicated as it is in its initial form to the neo-Romantic Imber. In the course of the 1920s, however, a return to orderly epic progression and monumentality is observable in a nascent tendency toward yet longer poems, spanning several thousand lines, in disparate corners of Yiddish literary culture. *Kristoval Kolon* belongs to this wider tendency, especially pronounced by the mid-1930s.

Such a monumental scale had been virtually unprecedented since the early modern period, when a variety of epic poems were composed in Old Yiddish. This earlier literary tradition, composed of chivalric romances adapted from other languages as well as original compositions mainly on themes drawn from the Bible and Midrash, would not inform modern Yiddish literature until well after its twentieth century rediscovery by Jewish philology, however.⁸ The same is true of an early nineteenth century form of Yiddish narrative, epic in subject matter and in representational scope if not stylistically, and like the chivalric romances also the product of adaptation from other languages. This was the trend of Maskilic sea narrative, the context in which the Columbus saga first took shape in Yiddish letters, when in 1824 an adaptation of Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Entdeckung von Amerika*, a late eighteenth century retelling of the deeds of the Spanish conquistadors for young adults, was published in Russia, accompanied

⁸ Jerold Frakes, "Introduction," in *Early Yiddish Epic* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2014), ix-liii.

around the same time by an adaptation of Campe's own adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe*, one of many Jewish versions to appear in the period.⁹

Although Yankev Glantz did not have direct access to either of these earlier traditions, his *Kolon* engages in a form of narrative adaptation habitually performed by them, namely the Judaization or Jewish domestication of narratives that were saturated with Christian doctrinal and cultural referents. In *Kolon*, no form of Jewishness is imputed to the figure of Columbus himself, but the narrative conventionally elaborated around him in both historical and fictional registers is nevertheless recast in the light of its Jewish intelligibility, introduced by a parallel focus on the figure of the interpreter Luis de Torres, whose Jewish origin was first uncovered by Meyer Kayserling in his aforementioned study.

The poem also draws from more proximate tradition in modern Hebrew poetry, which had established an epic mode by the mid-nineteenth century, typically centered on biblical lore and events in Jewish history. Notable for its theme is Judah Leib Gordon's 1865 poem "Bi-mezulot yam" (In the Depths of the Sea), a narrative poem of Sephardic expulsion that concludes with the suicide of a mother and daughter who despair at mistreatment by sailors. The poem belongs to a series of three narrative poems unified by a focus on Jewish martyrdom.¹⁰ The treatment of the Inquisition in *Kolon* adheres to this longstanding tradition, also present in twentieth century Yiddish historical fiction.

⁹ Rebecca Wolpe, "Judaizing *Robinson Crusoe*: Maskilic Translations of *Robinson Crusoe*," *Jewish Culture and History* 13, no. 1 (2012): 42-67.

¹⁰ Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 64-65.

FROM LACHRYMOSE HISTORIOGRAPHY TO REVOLUTIONARY POETRY

With East European Jewish mass migration to Central and South America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came a new phase in the life of Sephardist cultural discourse. Life in Spanish- and Portuguese-language cultural environs, marked by Iberian colonial architecture and the continuing centrality of the Catholic church, easily called up the legacy of the Inquisition for new immigrants, but for some also suggested a cultural bridge to the Sephardic past. The most exuberant development along these lines, dubbed neo-Sephardism by Edna Aizenberg, occurred in the Southern Cone, where the inaugurator of Argentine Jewish letters in Spanish, Alberto Gerchunoff, envisioned a path to self-reinvention for East European Jews by means of a cultural renaissance defined by Hispanic continuity.¹¹ Much as in nineteenth century Germany, the free play of this literary Sephardism stood alongside the more empirical perspective of a new Jewish historiography, descended from the German *Wissenschaft des Judentums* by way of its later East European counterpart, pioneered by Russian Jewish historian Simon Dubnov.¹² Two of its key exponents—Jacob Nachbin in Brazil beginning in the late 1920s and Boleslao Lewin in Argentina from the late 1930s—produced scholarship in Spanish and Portuguese in addition to Yiddish studies submitted to publications abroad, and pursued an area of research that had been largely neglected by scholars of colonial Ibero-America: the presence and influence of Marranos,

¹¹ Edna Aizenberg, “Sephardim and Neo-Sephardim in Latin American Literature,” in *Sephardism: Spanish Jewish History and the Modern Literary Imagination*, edited by Yael Halevi-Wise (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 129-142.

¹² The multivolume Jewish histories of both Graetz and Dubnov soon appeared in Spanish translation.

whenever plausible construed as crypto-Jews.¹³ This was for the most part a lachrymose history punctuated by a martyrological emphasis, but also afforded the narrative of a Jewish role not confined to the colonial period but extending to the region's early nineteenth century independence movements and the shaping of new republics.

All this had begun to be established by the time East European Jewish migration to Mexico began in the 1920s, preceded by the more significant migration to the Southern Cone by fully two decades. The new historiographical trend in a sense arrived in Mexico in 1932, when the aforementioned Jacob Nachbin, who had been residing in the United States, traveled there to consult the national archives. His jailing and deportation from Mexico on suspicion of stealing the diary of Luis de Carvajal, a crypto-Jewish soldier and later a regional governor in sixteenth century New Spain, made headlines in the Yiddish papers of New York, where Nachbin's scholarship on the Jewish presence in Brazil had also recently been featured in the monthly *Di tsukunft* (The Future).¹⁴ Around the same time, writer and journalist Moyshe Glikovsky in Mexico City pursued the topic along two more popular avenues in the local Yiddish paper *Der veg*. After running a historically informed article on Jews in Mexico during the time of the

¹³ Jacob Nachbin (1896-unknown), born and educated in Poland, was a key figure in the development of a Yiddish press in Brazil, where he lived from 1921 until adopting an academic post in the United States at the start of the next decade, later to disappear in Paris in 1938. His research on the history of Jews in Portugal and Brazil appeared principally in serials from 1927 onward, as well as in the 1929 book *Der letster fun di groyse Zakutos: a vikhtik kapitl funem yidishn lebn in mitl-alter* (The Last of the Great Zacutos: An Important Chapter of Jewish Life in the Middle Ages). Boleslao Lewin (1908-1988), who moved from his native Poland to Uruguay in 1931 and to Argentina in 1936, published his first book-length study, *El judío en la época colonial: un aspecto de la historia rioplatense* (The Jew in the Colonial Era: An Aspect of the History of the Río de la Plata) in 1939, on the so-called "Portugueses," colonists who arrived to the Spanish Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata from Brazil and who were generally assumed to be of "impure blood," or Jewish descent. In the fact that some of the most influential families in Argentina's independence movement and the nation's subsequent development were descended from these Portuguese, Lewin found the means with which to critique the antisemitism of Argentina's aristocracy. Lewin continued his investigation of the Jewish presence in colonial Latin America in books such as *Los marranos, un intento de definición: contribución al estudio de los orígenes americanos y argentinos* (The Marranos, an Attempt at a Definition: A Contribution to the Study of American and Argentine Origins, 1946) and *Mártires y conquistadores judíos en la América Hispana* (Jewish Martyrs and Conquistadors in Spanish America, 1954; Yiddish, 1968). Essays on related topics appeared in Yiddish periodicals and in major anthologies organized by the two leading Argentine Yiddish dailies, *Di yidishe tsaytung* (1940) and *Di prese* (1944).

¹⁴ Nachman Falbel, *Jacob Nachbin* (Sao Paulo: Nobel, 1985), 109-110.

Inquisition in April 1933, the paper began to serialize his free adaptation of Justo Sierra O'Reilly's *La hija del judío* (The Jew's Daughter), a popular mid-nineteenth century Mexican historical novel on the same subject, reprinted as recently as 1928.¹⁵

The relationship between this Jewish historical discourse and Yankev Glantz's poetry is made explicit in a 1938 article he wrote for *Der veg*, prompted by the publication of a number of Luis de Carvajal's letters in Yiddish translation.¹⁶ Glantz notes that these translations amount to a drop in the sea of materials documenting the Jewish presence in New Spain held in Mexican archives. At the same time that he celebrates the establishment of a new area of Jewish research that extends the vibrant historiographical movement led by Emmanuel Ringelblum in Poland, Glantz notes with distaste the neglect of the same materials by Mexican historical discourse. His chief interest in Carvajal's writings, which include letters, poetry and memoirs, lies in a psychology of resilience and creativity in the face of persecution, and he is content to draw connections between Carvajal's conception of religiosity and that set forth in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, "that Jewishness is not something one can apprehend through reason, but a thing of feeling and trust in that passed down to us by our ancestors, fathers of our fathers, from generation to generation across thousands of years."¹⁷ Glantz extends the air of Jewish martyrology surrounding Carvajal, who died in prison amid a politically motivated prosecution for his Jewish observance, to include the scarcely documented life of Luis de Torres, imagined in the context of Columbus' first voyage in the poem *Kristoval Kolon*, the first two parts of which had been published earlier in 1938. Though he never depicted Carvajal himself, in this light the

¹⁵ Moyshe Glikovsky, "Yidn in Meksike in tsayt fun der inkvizitsye," *Der veg* (Mexico City) April 27, 1933, 3. On the life of *La hija del judío* in print, see Manuel Sol, "La hija del judío de Justo Sierra O'Reilly: historia de un texto," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*.55, no. 1 (2007): 153-163.

¹⁶ The translations were the work of Mexican Jewish educator Meyer Berger, published in the yearbook of the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) in New York.

¹⁷ Yankev Glantz, "Luis de Karbakh (in likht fun zayne briv un oytobiografye)." *Der Veg* (Mexico City) February 19, 1938, 5.

character of de Torres appears as an extrapolation of the psychology Glantz imputed to him through his writings.

Since the time of the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the poetic and philosophical works of eleventh- and twelfth-century Jewish thinkers in Spain, composed in Hebrew or translated to it from Arabic, were regarded with intense interest, and served as models for the reinvention of East European Jewish society and culture.¹⁸ Like many others who received a traditional Jewish education in Russia at the dawn of the twentieth century, Glantz may well have absorbed some of that orientation in his youth, well before his arrival to Mexico. As a Jewish poet newly situated in Mexico, however, he made a clear statement of his orientation toward the Spanish Hebrew poets, one prominent component within a larger inventory of Sephardic affinities, in the poem “Shpanye,” dated 1934 and included as a prelude to the 1939 poetry collection *Trit in di berg* (Steps in the Mountains), which presented nearly a decade of Glantz’s work.

The poem is divided into two parts, the first evoking the poet’s encounter with the Sephardic past in forms both living and archaic and the second situating him as the aspiring heir of a poetic lineage stemming from Solomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham ibn Ezra and Judah Halevi. The encounter with the Sephardic past is evoked through the sound of overheard Ladino, at that time spoken by several thousand Jewish immigrants to Mexico from the Ottoman empire. Relations between Mexico’s Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities were fraught, and the poem registers not interaction but romanticization, as the melody in which an elderly man reads the weekly Torah portion is said to evoke the sound of the Andalusian *copla*, a widespread form of Spanish popular song and a poetic form in use from the early modern period through the twentieth

¹⁸ Ross Bran and Adam Sutcliffe, editors, *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From al-Andalus to the Haskalah* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

century, notably employed in the 1930s by Andalusian poets Federico García Lorca and Rafael Alberti. Attention to the living is fleeting and gives way to death, a dance of skeletons, the image of forced baptism, as the bloody contents of old folios dominate the poet's vision. In the second part, each of the three aforementioned poets is evoked in the terms of his favored themes and images, and the author of the present poem asserts a continuation of this lineage in a new setting:

Ikh bazing nisht di shpanyoln, —
Naye Shpanye kh'vil bazingen:

Naye Shpanye fun Kortesn, —
meksikaner berg un lanen. — —
Shnaydn zikh, vi sharfe mesers,
geshtaltn alte durkh tumanen...

I sing not of Spaniards, —
I want to sing New Spain:

New Spain of Cortés, —
Mexican mountains and meadows. — —
Like sharp knives cut
old figures through the fog...¹⁹

Unlike the neo-Sephardist tendency in Argentina mentioned above, which entailed a contemporary becoming-Sephardic through the medium of the Spanish language, the continuation imagined here implicitly remains within the confines of a Jewish language and inhabits earlier centuries. Such a historical mode is evident in those of Glantz's poems from the early 1930s that approach the space and social life of contemporary Mexico through the lens of a legacy of Spanish subjugation and plunder also on display in murals throughout the capital and the country. Though this focus does not at all disappear in the later Columbus poem, it undergoes a significant transformation when articulated with the Spanish Civil War.

¹⁹ Yankev Glants, *Trit in di berg (lider un poemes) 1926-1936* (Mexico City: Khurbn, 1939), viii.

As much as the feverish poems of Glantz's 1936 booklet *Fonen in blut* had been a response to the rise of fascism and a performance of solidarity with its opponents, a subset of them may also be read as an attempt to mobilize the Jewish-Spanish interface already at work in his poetry in a form that would be responsive to the contemporary East European Jewish migratory condition. There can be no doubt that the booklet participates in a wider internationalist trend of characterization of Spain's retrograde fanatical Catholic past as the force resisting the emergent new Spain, and also reproduces a generic discourse of revolutionary heroism and the struggle between red and black, good and evil. Yet the Jew appears once and again in various guises, as a victim of inquisition, a fallen martyr for vision of new Spain and as one component of diverse fighting force, and between the internationalist and particularistic emphases a distinctive vision of Jewish revolutionary subjectivity takes shape. This centers on the participation of East European Jewish volunteers in the Spanish conflict. Subsequent stages of the war would see the formation of the largely Yiddish-speaking Naftali Botwin Company and the Lincoln Battalion, composed of volunteers from New York City, many of them Jewish immigrants, but in 1936 there was no discrete framework for Jewish combatants arriving from Poland, and several of Glantz's poems together invent one, both reflecting on the circumstances of individual deaths and on their larger meaning.²⁰

The poem "Avrom Fishman fun Rinkover gas" (Avrom Fishman from Rinkowa street) blends martyrology with a vision of Jewish transnationalism, and in two distinct parts moves from the prosaic experience of the news reader to the monumentalizing effort of the poet. The first part articulates the resonance of a Warsaw Jew's death in Madrid for a consumer of news media with no direct knowledge of either city. The deceased goes unnamed, and serves purely as

²⁰ For a comprehensive treatment of Jewish involvement in the conflict, its coverage in the Yiddish press and its subsequent memorialization, see Gerban Zaagsma, *Jewish Volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

a function of his place of origin and place of death to create the ironic incongruity of Jewish heroism in defense of Spain, seen against the backdrop of the Spanish Inquisition—the mention of which is immediately preceded by the gruesome sound-image of an imperfect ritual knife digging into a wound. The second part of the poem exchanges the irregular iambic lines of the first part for couplets in amphibrachic tetrameter to present a meditation on the distance between Poland and Spain:

Fun Poyln biz Shpanye iz “folg mir a gang!” — —
Nor vos veyst fun vaytkayt der mentshlekher gang?

From Poland to Spain well “it’s quite a ways!” — —
But what does the human path know of distance?²¹

While the first line suggests in a folksy idiom that “it’s quite a ways!” this notion is subjected to revision already in the second line, which proposes distance as a function of “the human path.” A few couplets later an image of the world’s “blut horizont” (blood horizon) obviates any notion of geographic distance and naturalizes the mobilization of a Jew from Rinkowa street in the Spanish conflict. The final couplet’s elemental rhyme of “hero” and “world” (*held* and *velt*) further emphasizes this identity with the horizon rather than any particular place.²²

The poem “Elegye af der toyt fun Leon Boym” [Elegy on the Death of Leon Boym] similarly elaborates a vision of the East European Jew’s world-belonging, this time in the form of a Jewish militant’s epiphany in the moment of death. As Leon Boym accepts that he will die of a bayonet wound on foreign soil, he is inspired to scrawl a message in blood pronouncing that “the world belongs to him,” at least in the final instant as both Boym and the world itself are in their death throes. Even after Boym is dead, the poem plays on his surname (meaning “tree”) to reassert his

²¹ Yankev Glants, “Avrom Fishman fun Rinkover gas,” in *Fonen in Blut—Shpanye, 1936* (Mexico City: GEZBIR, 1936), 42.

²² *Ibid.*

belonging on Spanish soil, describing his new home as “vortslidik”—a word that means authentic, formed from the word *vortsl*, root. Much as the previous poem blurs the distinction between Poland and Spain, this elegy obliterates the dichotomy of home and abroad. Indeed, the poem’s refrain, which repeats twice in slight variations, obviates any notion of foreignness:

Un vos iz heym,
oyb nisht di gore velt
in flamendikn kamf?

And what is home,
if not all the world
in blazing struggle?²³

Even more than the bloody horizon’s negation of distance, this universalization of territorial belonging—in a poem that amply deploys the nationalist symbols of blood and soil—performatively dissolves a fundamental anxiety of Jewish migrants and refugees.

Although the revisions of distance and territorial belonging in these poems play on internationalist formulas consistent with the broadly communist orientation of *Fonen in blut*, in the poems under consideration here internationalism becomes inseparable from the seemingly unrelated ideal of a Jewish return to Spain. A third poem, “In vandervaytkayt fun mayn folk” (In Wanderdistance of My People), more forcefully asserts the intimacy of the Jewish condition and the cause of the Spanish Republic, by imploring the reader to recognize in Spain’s slaughter the reverberation of centuries of violence against Jews, and thereby advocates for a total Jewish identification with Republican Spain. The condition of *vandervaytkayt* is at once an immediate reflection of a world in crisis and a historically diffuse phenomenon capable of folding back to echo and reactivate the past. The poem begins in the past tense, establishing a pivotal moment through what is in effect a seven strophe adverbial clause of time: pervasive bloodshed, fire of

²³ Yankev Glants, “Elegye af der toyt fun Leon Boym,” in *Fonen in Blut—Shpanye, 1936* (Mexico City: GEZBIR, 1936), 36.

hatred, awakening of Hebrew bones, a merging of struggles against Inquisition and fascism, an international call to arms for the Spanish cause, the establishment of Jewish battalions. The poem shifts to the present tense to depict a Warsaw Jew marching alongside proletarians of other nationalities, engulfing flames in the distance, and sets forth the notion of solidarity with Spain as a corrective for a hunched, deformed Jewish nation.

When the figure of the East European Jewish militant in Spain meets fantasies of the Spanish Jewish past in Glantz's poems, the result is a new kind of Jewish universalism predicated on a heroic spanning of geographic and historical distance, linked to specificity of place and descent but not bound to it, and called into being by a sense of apocalyptic crisis. The latter element, attached to strident revolutionary rhetoric and a generally frenetic tone, was soon to be jettisoned, but the others establish a foundation for a larger Hispanist poetic project.

HARNESSING THE HISPANIC ATLANTIC FOR ZAMLBIKHER

Almost immediately after the publication of *Fonen in blut*, Glantz set about reinventing his Spanish engagement in a format better suited to its grand gestures. Rather than a wholesale abandonment of the booklet's poetic vision, the new project would be a recasting of it, as is suggested by the initial title, "Shpanye," that accompanied a small preview excerpt printed in Mexico's *Der veg* in September, 1937.²⁴ Though the title would change, significant traces of the earlier revolutionary booklet remain in the language of *Kristoval Kolon*, not least in the form of varied individual lines that recycled from the earlier poems for Spain. Yet the new project was also tailored to the desires of editors and critics in New York. Leading critic Shmuel Niger had addressed the limitations of *Fonen* at some length in a polemical article in opposition to the widespread phenomenon of *tsayt-lider*, poems of the moment, which he deemed inimical, except

²⁴ Yankev Glants, "Mraglim." *Der veg* (Mexico City) September 5, 1937, Rosh Hashana insert, 1.

in rare instances, to true art.²⁵ The notoriously acerbic critic nevertheless found some lines with potential in the booklet, and mailed a clipping of his review to Mexico City along with a letter of encouragement. This exchange continued by mail and soon in person, when Niger visited Mexico on a lecture tour in 1937. The critic ascribed to a version of Hippolyte Taine's theory of milieu, and considered the potential of Yiddish literature in new countries of East European Jewish immigration to reside in a reflection of local geography, society and culture.²⁶ His approval of Glantz's new focus on the figure of Columbus carried such weight that the poet would dedicate the work in progress to him on its initial publication.

Beyond the influence of Niger, *Kolon* took shape in a context of heightened connectivity between Yiddish writers in Mexico City and in New York. In 1936, poet Y. Y. Shvarts had become the first prominent New York writer to visit Mexico on a reading and lecture tour, presenting his work of recent years. This notably included the first Yiddish American epic poem, "Nayerd" (New Soil), about the taking root of Jewish life in the distinctly non-Jewish environs of Kentucky. The poem consisted of eight chapters of eminently American blank verse and was initially published, in six hefty installments, in the course of 1922 in the journal *Di tsukunft* (The Future). Shvarts' tour coincided with the 1936 reedition of the 1925 book *Kentoki*, which included a related series of Kentucky idylls alongside the epic. A second work that Shvarts presented in Mexico City was his 1931 anthology *Unzer lid fun Shpanye* (Our Poem from Spain), featuring selected eleventh- and twelfth-century Hebrew lyrics from Solomon ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra and Judah Halevi in Yiddish translation. Even if Glantz already had an epic in

²⁵ Shmuel Niger, "Naye tsayt-lider," *Der tog* (New York) December 20, 1936, 5.

²⁶ Such a view is evident in two of Niger's essays on Yiddish literary geography: "Di gegnt-frage in der yidisher literatu," *Di tsukunft* 27, no. 5 (1922): 308-313; and "Di naye geografye fun der yidisher literatur," *Di prese* (Buenos Aires) Nov. 9, 1922, 5. The latter was likely reprinted from *Der tog*.

mind, and had already begun to form his own attachments to the Spanish Jewish past, Shvarts' visit can only have served as further impetus for those pursuits.

Not all New York Yiddish writers who hoped to visit Mexico were immediately able. Apart from the matter of arranging a visa, the scheduling of a lecture series certain to be well-attended was a delicate matter requiring the coordination of several local Jewish organizations with divergent political and cultural commitments, each advocating for the prioritization of a different guest at any given moment. Among those whose prospective lecture tours did not initially materialize were *Inzikh* editor Arn Glants-Leyeles, who had raised the issue in his first letter to Glantz in 1937, and H. Leyvik, another leading New York poet in correspondence with Glantz since 1935. But the same potential audience for Yiddish lectures was also viewed as a new pool of subscribers for New York publication, especially those whose continuing existence was financially uncertain, a situation that by 1937 led Glantz to become the Mexican distributor for a new literary annual edited by Leyvik and writer Yoysef Opatoshu, at the time towering figures in Yiddish poetry and prose respectively.

This publication, *Zambikher* (Anthologies), debuted in 1936 to wide acclaim, and was regarded as assuming the mantle of an earlier Yiddish literary annual in New York to which both editors had once contributed, Dovid Ignatoff's *Shriftn* (Writings), which appeared in eight substantial volumes between 1912 and 1926. The two publications both served as fora for the publication of works of an uncommonly large scale, most conspicuously entire novels and book-length essays. Present too was long form poetry. While a majority of the Yiddish works categorized as poemas (*poemen*) rather than poems (*lider*) that appeared in either publication did not exceed more than a few pages, and normally reached 10-15 pages at most, space was also afforded to more expansive poetic forms either excerpted or printed in their entirety. The overarching aesthetic gesture of *Shriftn* had been a Yiddish literary "Salut au Monde." Like Walt

Whitman's poem of that title, in this publication a new Yiddish literature was poised to absorb the whole of the world into a swelling poetic consciousness. Whitman's poem was but the first of many translations to appear in its pages. The third issue swallowed up whole millennia, with samplings from Homer, Sappho, Horace, Nietzsche, Hesse, Sologub, Kuzmin, and Stevenson, among others. Subsequent issues included Native American poems and excerpts from the Zohar, Rumi and Tagore, as well as the entirety of Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics*. The final issue collected Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, and Arabic poetry, with a portion of the Finnish epic *Kalavala* for good measure. Alongside this gradual accumulation in Yiddish of a Euro-American world canon, the original poems, stories, and novels contained in *Shriftn* drew upon their surroundings in the service of art above all.

While *Zamlbikher* shared the ample book format of the earlier annual as well as an impetus to gather the world in its pages, its editors did not share the same concern with the canonicity of a Euro-American world literature or necessarily with aesthetic innovation, and conceived their publication as a world-forum for Yiddish literature, defined by high quality poetic, narrative, critical and essayistic works from Poland, the Soviet Union, Palestine and Mexico as well as from Anglo-America. A sense of Yiddish literature's far-reaching geography was only one component of the annual's vision, however. Equally important was the sense of gravity or monumentality shared by a majority of the works that appeared in *Zamlbikher*, starting with those written by the editors themselves. The first volume contained Opatoshu's book-length travelogue *Tsvishn yamen un lender* (Amid Oceans and Countries), chronicling recent visits to Palestine and the Soviet Union, as well as Leyvik's long dramatic poem "Abelar un Heloiz" (Abelard and Héloïse), an interpretation of the tragic twelfth-century French monastic romance. The two works present distinct but complementary models, in poetry and prose, of Yiddish

literary amplitude, one defined by the scale of contemporary East European Jewish life and the other by a historical lens and flirtation with Christian universality.

Also suggestive of the publication's profile are several works from other contributors that appeared across its first two volumes in 1936 and 1937. Included in the first volume is a chapter of poet Menakhem Boreysho's long narrative poem "Der geyer" (The Wayfarer), which depicts the life path of a young Jewish man in Poland, whose meandering in geographical terms is dwarfed by his readings of and rumination on roughly a millennium of Jewish theological debates. The poem in its final two-volume form stands as perhaps the most ambitious in scale, scope and formal variation to be composed in Yiddish. A much shorter poem with a yet more encompassing vision appeared in *Zamlbikher's* second volume. This was Melekh Ravitsh's "Velt-folk yidn" (Jews, a World-People) a jarring evocation of Jewish existence in every time and place, in frames spanning violent agency and victimization. At the second volume's conclusion stands the first installment of critic Borekh Rivkin's major study *Grunt-tendentsn fun der yidisher literatur in Amerike*, treated above in Chapter 1, a work outlining the expansive and expansionist unity of Yiddish literature.

Any of the works described might have easily been published in other contexts, as were, for example, earlier chapters of Boreysho's *Der geyer*. Collected in a single frame, however, they amount to the assertion of an encompassing Yiddish literature in possession of the very world. Glantz's Columbus poem, a substantial portion of which appeared in *Zamlbikher's* third volume in January, 1938, responded to and extended this vision. Before proceeding to a discussion of *Kristoval Kolon* as it appeared in this context, a descriptive overview of the work is in order.

The portion of *Kolon* printed in *Zamlbikher* entails the first two parts of what would subsequently become a four-part poem. Part One depicts Columbus's first Atlantic crossing from an initial point at open sea up to the moment that land comes into view. Part Two follows the

Spaniards' activities and encounters on the Bahamian island Guanahani and along the coasts of today's Cuba and Haiti, concluding with the foundation of the settlement of La Navidad as the two of three ships remaining intact prepare to return to Spain. Each section is modular, divided into a series of sequential but lyrically and logically independent numbered sections, eight in the case of Part One and forty-three in the case of Part Two. Stylistically, the poem moves freely between narrative exposition, dramatic dialog, and lyric evocation of specific characters' interiority as well as oceanic and terrestrial landscapes. The forward momentum of the narrative, chiefly concerned with an incessant Spanish search for land and fortune, is driven by trochees, most often in tetrameter. The progression from section to section is accompanied by shifts between freer and more regimented lines of varying lengths, at times adopting amphibrachic meters that seem to signal turmoil, delusion or wonderment, but returns consistently to the trochaic base—on the whole a poly-metric structure that suggests a Russian Symbolist influence.²⁷ End rhymes are frequent but not ubiquitous and similarly vary in pattern, and a majority of thirty terms and proper names presented in a Spanish glossary that precedes the poem are enlisted in bilingual rhymes akin to those observed in Glantz's earlier work, e.g. *kanoes* (canoes) with *toes* (mistake).²⁸

From the outset the blind progression of a ship through uncharted waters is cast in terms of human greed and violence, illustrated by reference to a scene back in Madrid, where a Jew is led to a pyre. Focus quickly shifts to the figure of Columbus, wracked with self-doubt and facing a mutinous crew, and then to his sole confidant, interpreter Luis de Torres, already defined as a Marrano in the glossary, which doubles as an inventory of *dramatis personae*. De Torres initiates

²⁷ On the revival of "traditional (macro-) polymetry" in early twentieth century Russian poetry, see M. L. Gasparov, *Ocherk istorii russkogo stikha* (Moscow: Fortuna Limited, 2000), 222-223.

²⁸ "Zey lodn di lodung / fun shif — in kanoes. — / — Kolon hot fartseykhnt / in togbukh zayn toes." Yankev Glants, "Kristoval Kolon." *Zamlbikher* 3 (1938): 39.

the first of several dialogs in which he functions as wise and calming counsel who curbs Columbus' rashness and arrogance, and in which he speaks openly as a Jew, in this case by reference to the Babylonian exile of his "brothers."²⁹ Columbus echoes this Jewish tone by implying intimacy with astronomer Abraham Zacuto, citing comments the latter made to him about Moses and also observing:

Vi raboynu Moyses tovlén, —

...

halt ikh heylik mayne lukhes
fun mayn rebe fun Lisboa

Like the teacher Moses' tablets, —

...

I hold holy my tablets
from my teacher from Lisbon.³⁰

The reputed fact that Columbus employed Zacuto's astronomical charts is thus fancifully spun into a form of interfaith affinity and mutual understanding, on which his relationship with de Torres is in turn predicated.

Such interactions continue after landfall, as de Torres plays prophetic interpreter to a waking vision Columbus details, claiming to have glimpsed the splendor of the Great Khan's palace. Foretelling the fortune and misery to befall the explorer, and the tenuousness of his relations with the Spanish crown, de Torres is inspired to disclose his own vision:

Vi Moyshe
hot mayn folk gefirt fun Goyshtn
in Erets Knaan,
vestu mayn folk fun flamen
brenge im durkh yamen
in Guhanani

²⁹ Ibid., 15.

³⁰ Ibid., 16.

As Moses
led my people out of Goshen
in the Land of Canaan,
out of flames will you
lead them across oceans
to Guanahani.³¹

Thus the earlier intimation of a new Exodus becomes fully explicit, aided by a form of prophetic paronomasia (Canaan/Guanahani) evocative of both biblical wordplay and indeed the kind of Semitic echoes de Torres was supposed to recognize in his function as interpreter.

As Spanish marauding proceeds under the sign of the cross, a legitimating symbol that is repeatedly emphasized, the poem's narrative becomes dually focalized through Columbus on the one hand and de Torres on the other, the sole Spaniard who "does not carry Christ in his heart," plagued by flashes of the violence also afoot in Spain.³² Even before landfall, a broad opposition between the two is implied in Columbus' lust for fortune and enduring renown and de Torres' mindset, defined by a sense of Jewish collective welfare and generational time. Their paths also become distinct in the last third of Part Two, when a weary Columbus instructs the interpreter to remain on Hispaniola (Haiti) and raise a fort from the materials salvaged from the wrecked "Santa María" as the remaining two ships return to Spain. The return voyage proceeds in the atmosphere of storm and nocturnal vision, set off from the final three sections that return to de Torres on Hispaniola by a reflection on Columbus' famed and cursed name and the ills of a manmade world forged from malice. By a stream in the woods de Torres engages in his own unsettled nocturnal reflection on the Spanish expedition's violence and the mounting hatred stoked by it. Yet he also gives thanks to God for deliverance to a new land, and the poem as it appeared in *Zambikher* concludes with a divine address to de Torres, instructing him to suffer in

³¹ Ibid., 33.

³² Ibid., 35.

the wilderness to the end of his days, intimating that he is to be the first Jew of many to populate every corner of the New World.

As a literary work engaged not only with an Atlantic narrative foundational for European modernity but also with a Jewish consciousness—however fancifully conceived—embedded in it, as a poem of ambitious scale, not wholly innovative but decidedly modernist in construction, *Kristoval Kolon* appears to be designed for *Zamlbikher*. This may in fact have been the case more than it was for other works to appear in the annual, the authors of which tended to be better established than was Glantz in 1938. The poem's most explicit performance of belonging to *Zamlbikher* takes the form of intertextuality. On the return voyage, Columbus dreams of a whole procession of figures, including Petrarch and Dante as well as Peter Abélard and Héloïse. The mere mention of the latter two figures would suffice to allude to H. Leyvik's dramatic poem about them in the inaugural volume of *Zamlbikher*, but Columbus continues to invoke their names in wakefulness, both in comments uttered to himself and to a member of his crew. The names also appear exclusively at the end of any given line, the placement favored for rhythmic and dramatic effect in Leyvik's poem. Like the use of dramatic dialog more generally in *Kolon*, this echo announces an appreciation of Leyvik, and more pointedly suggests a shared effort to render medieval Catholic Europe in Yiddish narrative poetry; in tension with the poem's emphasis on Jewish persecution and the Christian violence of the Spanish expedition is an interest in the devout inner-world of the visionary Columbus.

A more oblique intertext that nevertheless suggests a reading of *Kolon* in the frame of *Zamlbikher* is Borekh Rivkin's *Grunt-tendentsn*. The first installment of the essay had concluded the 1937 volume of the annual, and Glantz's poem was prominently positioned as the opening contribution of the 1938 volume. This volume too concluded with an installment of Rivkin's essay, which becomes increasingly legible as a theoretical complement to *Zamlbikher*'s literary

vision. More than the fact of proximity, what suggests a correspondence between Rivkin and *Kolon*, almost too neatly, is the poem's prophetic epigraph. Accompanying the title and an engraving of the vessels Santa Maria, La Pinta and La Niña on the poem's title page is a citation, in Hebrew, from Isaiah 45:18 that reads: "For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited..." This does not appear to be one of the many citations from Isaiah furnished by Columbus in the various writings attributed to him, but does seem to announce a back-translation of the Christian Isaiah that may have divinely ordained his mission of conquest. The newly Jewish Isaiah anticipates a different mission in Glantz's poem, that of Luis de Torres.

The broad resonance of *Kolon* with a discourse of Jewish territorialism is unmistakable. Most transparently, the circumstance of Jewish persecution in Spain in 1492 suggests the mounting precarity of Jewish life in Europe and the enduring circumstance of a mass migration both economic and political in character. It is in this sense that one reviewer in Mexico City dubbed the poem a "problem piece" (*problemen-verk*).³³ But in view of Rivkin's literary territorialism, it is not so much the divine appointment of Luis de Torres as a Jewish colonist that commands attention as the trajectory of the oceanic voyage, which serves as the setting and object of meditation of much of the poem, especially those substantial portions focused on Columbus' perspective. Evocations of oceanic travel in interwar Yiddish literature were principally concerned with the ship as a dynamic space of sociability among passengers, especially Jews, reproducing tropes already associated with train travel.³⁴ Glantz's poem in contrast claims the agential perspective of seafaring to present the ocean as a habitable, if hostile, domain of indeterminate boundaries, reviving in a more elevated register a characteristic of early nineteenth

³³ L. Baion, "Yankev Glants-'Kristoval Kolon,'" *Der veg* (Mexico City) June 11, 1938, 5.

³⁴ Leah Garrett, *Journeys beyond the Pale: Yiddish Travel Writing in the Modern World* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

century Maskilic sea adventure, discussed above. Accompanying a narrative Judaization of Spanish conquest in the figure of de Torres, then, is the instantiation of a new spatial scale in Yiddish literature, that of what Madeline Cohen in reference to English sea adventure novels has called “the terraqueous globe.”³⁵

CLAIMING THE UNIVERSAL

To the extent that *Kristoval Kolon* generated attention in Yiddish literary circles, this was primarily concentrated around the publication of its first two parts in January 1938. Parts III and IV of the poem would be concluded by 1939 and seem to have appeared in a second New York literary journal, but generated no evident reception; appetite for the Columbus theme may have diminished amid the swift buildup to WWII. The poet soon moved on to a new theme that had long preoccupied him, his childhood in a Jewish agrarian colony in Ukraine, and gave it a treatment that belongs to a wider tendency of long narrative poems commemorating abandoned or ruined East European hometowns. This work, *A kazayes erd* (A Morsel of Earth) also appeared in *Zamlbikher*, in 1948, and then in book form two years later, and in a Hebrew translation in 1960. In the wake of the Holocaust the Columbus poem had been left aside, but the author’s longstanding desire to see the full poem in book form would be realized in 1980, when *Kristoval Kolon* became one of many books to appear under the imprint of Tel Aviv’s Y. L. Perets press in the latter decades of the past century. The poem’s existence as a unified work thus belongs to a moment in Yiddish cultural history utterly distinct from the one in which it was composed. Nevertheless, it is in this form that Glantz’s Yiddish Hispanism finds its fullest articulation.

³⁵ Margaret Cohen, “Literary Studies on the Terraqueous Globe,” *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010): 657-662.

The poem in its final form is more than triple the scale of its earlier instantiation in *Zambikher*, and counts among the longest composed in Yiddish. Part Three, which is as extensive as all the other parts combined, bears a new epigraph from Isaiah 60:9 that appropriately intimates a taking possession of land, resources and humans: "... behold, the coastlands await me, with the ships of Tarshish in the lead, to bring your sons from afar, and their silver and gold as well³⁶ ..." This portion of the poem is effectively its own epic of the New World, portraying the events of Columbus' second, third and fourth voyages, the narrative of which is interlaced with the experiences of Luis de Torres who, as noted earlier, manifests the character of Luis de Carvajal at a moderate remove from his proper time and place.

The poem's fourth and final part opens with a final Atlantic crossing, bound for Spain on malevolent waters. Each of the protagonists, Columbus and de Torres, is a prisoner on course for a reckoning with the royal court and the Inquisition respectively. Subsequent sections depict de Torres in captivity, overhearing the torture of others and then himself subjected to interrogation, before engaging in nocturnal reflections on faith and martyrdom. The dramatic form of his interrogation is highly reminiscent of interrogations conducted by Catholic authorities in H. Leyvik's *Abelar un Heloiz*. The fate of de Torres corresponds to a model of martyrdom, in a specifically Sephardist instantiation, proper to traditional Jewish historical fiction. Juxtaposed with the fate of Columbus, however, it serves a more complex vision.

In the concluding section of the poem, a broken Columbus near death reckons with what has been lost, in status, material terms and prospective legacy. His appeal to the divine and the infinite in the face of ruin and suffering is entirely parallel with that of de Torres, and completes a parallel that extends throughout the entire work, in effect a dual narrative predicated on two models of worldly and ethereal seeking that find distinct forms of ruin. These models are not

³⁶ Yankev Glants, *Kristoval Kolon* (Tel Aviv: Y. L. Peretz, 1980), 83.

finally reconciled or synthesized, but their juxtaposition blurs the boundary between the historical horizons of Jewish persecution and migration and the Christian horizon of the opening of the New World, in all its fraught dimensions. The poem thus stages an encounter not so much between Spain and the Americas as between Yiddish literature and a Hispanic imagination in the service of a Judaized historical unfolding or reconfiguration of the world.

Conclusion

We contend that [Yiddish literature] remains in its deepest essence a world literature unto itself, in miniature. And if the world weren't always leaping over abysses—nearly falling in—the world-character of the Yiddish world literature would be quite evident.¹

In a 1939 essay entitled “Where is the Center of Yiddish Literature Today?—The Stem and the Branches,” Polish Yiddish writer Melekh Ravitsh, recently arrived in New York, wrote that he had traveled the entire span of the Yiddish globe, from Poland to China, from South Africa to Argentina, and found that there was still a single Yiddish literature between them. But this literature had become fragmented, suffered from a failure of communication between its far-flung branches. Yiddish literature, he concluded, did not compare with other literatures in terms of wealth or prestige, but possessed more *world* than any of them: more geographic expanse and represented localities. If only these fragments could be harnessed, it would surely take its rightful place among great literatures.² By 1965, when the now Montreal-based Ravitsh introduced an essay on Yiddish writing in Canada with the words quoted above, his understanding of this literature remained fundamentally unchanged, save for the hope that its fragments might yet undergo the desired synthesis. It would seem the world had leapt over one abyss too many.

¹ “Mir haltn, az [di literatur in yidish] iz nokh alts in tiftstn tokh aleyn un far zikh a velt-literatur bizeyr-anpin. Un volt di velt nisht geshprungen keseyder iber tomen—ot, ot arayntsufaln—volt der velt-karakter fun der yidisher velt-literatur gor shtark boylet geven.” Melekh Ravitsh, “Kanadisher tsvayg fun shtam: velt-literatur in yidish.” *Pinkes far der forshung fun der yidisher literature yn prese* 1 (1965): 230.

² Melekh Ravitsh, “Vu itst iz der tsenter fun der yidisher literature? Der shtam un di tsvaygn,” *Di tsukunft* 44, no. 2 (1939): 109-112.

Indeed, Ravitsh's own most significant creative output from the decades after the Holocaust adheres to the decidedly commemorative mode that reigned in the Yiddish culture of that period. The most robust strand of this memorial work, to which Ravitsh was a major contributor, centered on efforts to document the nearly obliterated cultural universe of Jewish Poland. The collective undertaking born of this painful lack proved the basis of a new model of Yiddish world culture, best exemplified in the 175-volume book series "Dos poylishe yidntum" (Polish Jewry), edited and printed in Buenos Aires between 1944 and 1964.³ If the series did not wholly displace the persistent legacy of the Jewish sex trade with its abundant historical studies and memoirs—including Ravitsh's two volume *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn* (The Storybook of My Life, 1962)—it did much to consolidate the status of Buenos Aires, where the cost of printing was lower than in the United States, as a major hub of post-war Yiddish book production.

Such commemorative work looked forward, or at least laterally, to bridge different regions of Yiddish culture in other ways as well. Ravitsh's second key work in this vein is his *Mayn leksikon* (My Lexicon), a compendium of short narrative sketches of principally Yiddish cultural figures with whom he had come into contact in the course of his long career. The initial scope of the work was limited to interwar Poland, but gradually expanded in the course of five volumes into an immense intercontinental gallery including figures the author had encountered not only in the United States, Canada and Israel, but also Australia, Argentina and Mexico, where he had lived for extended periods in the 1930s. Ravitsh's vision of a Yiddish world literature thus becomes legible as a product of first-hand experience, and indeed he was not simply a witness but everywhere sought to foster forms of Yiddish cultural institutionality and connectivity,

³ For a detailed treatment of the book series, see Jan Schwarz, "Dos poylishe yidntum: A Library of Hope and Destruction" in *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 92-117.

organizing the work of the Buenos Aires branch of Vilna's Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO), cofounding a Yiddish journal with pan American aspirations in Mexico City and later playing a central role in the cultural programming of Montreal's Jewish Public Library.⁴

Except through common ties to figures such as Ravitsh, the Yiddish cultural life of Mexico City and Buenos Aires scarcely made contact during the interwar period, and even after the Holocaust remained more linked by parallel engagements with New York, Tel Aviv, Montreal and even Johannesburg than by direct ones. The persistent distance between these two Spanish American contexts of Yiddish culture allows each to disclose an utterly distinct understanding of the larger Yiddish Atlantic sphere of which both formed an integral part. This may be attributed in a certain measure to the divergent scales and characters of the East European Jewish immigrant communities that formed in each city, but is no less crucially a product of the strategies and indeed the literary and journalistic genres of cross-regional mediation employed by the individual writers that animate the preceding chapters, namely Yankev Glantz and Yankev Botoshansky, who in the 1930s enacted new horizons in Yiddish literary culture.

The small East European Jewish community that formed in Mexico City beginning in the 1920s retained for the duration of the twentieth century a relatively insular character, facilitated by the rapid transition of many from immigrant penury to middle class means. This insularity stood at odds with the enthusiastic embrace of the capital's intellectual and artistic currents on the part of Glantz alongside a rather small cohort of fellow bohemian Yiddish writers, who at least in the first decades of their activity in Mexico looked to audiences abroad for want of local interest. What Glantz together with poet Yitzkhok Berliner delivered to readers chiefly in Europe and North America was not a sense of Jewishly domesticated space in Mexico—this would be

⁴ For a discussion of Ravitsh's cultural activities in Montreal, see Rebecca Margolis, "Remaining Alive in Silence? Melekh Ravitsh as Yiddish Catalyst: Montreal, 1941-1954," *East European Jewish Affairs*, 46, no. 2 (2016): 192-209.

furnished later, by more conservative prose writers—but instead a lyric space of encounter, defined by a Slavic-Jewish-Hispanic cultural triangulation internationalist in its aesthetic and political outlook.

By contrast, the East European Jewish population of Buenos Aires, roughly ten times larger than that in Mexico City, was far more characterized by sustained interaction with the city's diverse immigrant and Argentine populations, in part due to the presence of a mass labor movement that brought Jews into contact with mainly Spanish and Italian workers, broadly parallel to New York at the turn of the twentieth century. This considerably larger and denser Jewish population, unmatched by any other emergent site of Yiddish culture during the interwar period, supported such a scale and variety of Jewish social and religious institutions that already in 1914 the appearance of a Jewish street in Buenos Aires evoked for traveler Perets Hirshbeyn familiar scenes from Warsaw, Odessa or Vilna.⁵ From his editorial post at the progressive *Di prese*, Yankev Botoshansky sought to promote such an impression of continuity between the Jewish immigrant milieu of Buenos Aires and the East European Jewish social and cultural sphere of the Northern hemisphere. To the extent he invited a foreign audience to glimpse an unfamiliar language, culture or geography, this was from the comfort of a robustly domesticated representational world.

The distinct positions and outlooks of Glantz and Botoshansky in a sense converge in the impetus to fashion epic Yiddish narratives on the axis of an Atlantic space divorced from the well-trod Jewish migratory corridor between Eastern Europe and the United States. *Kristoval Kolon* and *Buenos Ayres* on the whole bear out the distinction sketched above. Glantz's poem introduces a Jewish third term into the oft narrated encounter between Catholic Spain and the New World, not laying claim to the space of a conquered American continent so much as the

⁵ Perets Hirshbeyn, *Fun vayte lender* (New York: 1916).

epistemological horizon of discovery. Botoshansky's newspaper novel in contrast brings an array of urban sites across the roughly contemporary globe into the fold of an ambitious Yiddish symbolic geography. Both works, however, whether in the tawdry register of *shund* or the somewhat traditional key of metrical narrative poetry, stretch the representational space of Yiddish literature across transregional and transhistorical dimensions not imagined by high modernism, and in my reading invite an understanding of Yiddish literary culture as a sprawling archive of mobility and mediation.

It is possible to distinguish, as does Marc Caplan, between the "territorialized" and "deterritorialized" landscapes produced by modern Yiddish literature in its early life on the cusp of the twentieth century because of the relative geographic circumscription of its authors and audiences, a common frame of reference that might be reproduced or elided on a representational plane. Yet in the face of the utter reconfiguration of East European Jewish life and geography in the first decades of the twentieth century, such a distinction begins to lose its power outside of any one regional context, as indeed does the premise of a single "Yiddish literature" that might be coherently schematized. With the notion of Yiddish literary space, I have sought a means by which to elucidate the diversity and disparity of positions from which the intrinsic and extrinsic boundaries of such an imagined whole may be projected and negotiated. The objective of attention to these negotiations is not in my view to identify the exterritorial structure that would make Yiddish literature, for Caplan, Kronfeld, Schachter and others, the source of a counter-hegemonic, non-national paradigm, but rather to attend to the shifting and contradictory assemblages occasioned by them.

The works examined in the preceding chapters did not enduringly circulate. Nor did they meaningfully pass into other languages, or otherwise acquire attributes facilitating their incorporation into conventional paradigms of world literature or even Yiddish literary history.

But seen in the light of their fleeting circulation as material artifacts, their modes of geographic representation, their evocations of other languages and literary traditions and their contexts of publication and reception—they begin to disclose the world-character of Yiddish literary culture in the twentieth century.

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