Article

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Yiddish Translation in Canada:
A Litmus Test for Continuity

Rebecca Margolis

Introduction

Yiddish translation in Canada has evolved in two directions: from world languages into Yiddish, and from Yiddish into other languages, specifically English and French. This dual function of Yiddish as a target language and a source language mirrors fundamental changes in twentieth century Jewish cultural literacy and, by extension, Canadian Jewish identity. These translations embody a shift in the status of Yiddish from the primary vehicle of expression for Canada's Eastern European Jewish immigrant community to a heritage language that is increasingly endangered outside of the Ultra-Orthodox milieu. They thus serve as a litmus test for the continuity of Yiddish and its linguistic and cultural heritage in Canada.

The status of Yiddish has undergone profound changes during the twentieth century, a period that coincides with mass immigration of Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews to Canada. The most evident change is demographic: from 1939 to the present day, Yiddish has moved from the most widely spoken Jewish vernacular in the world, with eleven million speakers (75% of the world's Jews), to an estimated 350,000 today (Shandler, 2006, p. 1). In the Canadian context, virtually the entire Jewish community of some 155,000 was Yiddish-speaking in 1931; the 2001 Census Profile lists fewer than 20,000 speakers of the language out of a total Jewish population of over 350,000. The shift of Yiddish–from a lingua franca, to the basis for popular as well as high culture, to a language of heritage–is reflected in translations into and out of Yiddish.

The evolution of Yiddish translation across different spheres as well as over time echoes the changing role of the Yiddish in Canada. During the opening decades of the twentieth century, Yiddish newspapers rendered foreign texts into Yiddish and translated Canada for the Jewish immigrant masses; Yiddish schools translated a variety of texts for pedagogical purposes, and in the process, ideology. Literary journals in the interwar period translated world literature for their readerships and in doing so placed Yiddish on a par with other modern languages. Translations from sacred Hebrew-Aramaic texts served to meet the changing needs of an expanding Yiddish readership both within and outside of Orthodox circles and, in particular in the post-Holocaust era, serve as monuments to a lost tradition of study. Concurrently, translations from Yiddish into English allowed authors to reach a wider readership as their readership began to acculturate and adopt English as their primary language. Most recently, Yiddish translations into both French and English have created access to literary as well as non-literary content for non-Yiddish readers. As this study indicates, translation provides a window onto the changing status of an ethnic language in Canada.

Ideologies of Yiddish Translation

In the words of Jeffrey Shandler, "in Yiddish culture translation plays a foundational role" (2006, pp. 92). Yiddish emerged into a tradition of multilingualism that has been an integral component of Jewish culture since biblical times. As a Diaspora lingua franca that developed in German-speaking lands a millennium ago, Yiddish migrated eastward with the Jewish population until it was concentrated in the tsarist Pale of Settlement and, most recently, Eastern European immigrant centres in North America; this Yiddish territory known by the historical designation of Ashkenaz. As Weinreich (1980) and Harshav (1990) discuss, in Ashkenaz, Yiddish functioned as the vernacular in a symbiotic relationship with *loshn-koydesh* ("the holy tongue," or Hebrew-Aramaic) as the language of the sacred realm of prayer and study. In this system of bilingualism or *diglossia*, vital texts were in *loshn-koydesh*, while early works of Yiddish literature consisted largely of translations from *loshn-koydesh* or European languages: legends, ethical guides, or didactic or homiletic renditions of biblical, liturgical and other sacred texts. In particular after the advent of printing, these popular works created a new Yiddish readership and new avenues for Jewish literacy.

In the Jewish language debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, issues of use and translation became increasingly politicized. With the modernization of European Jewry in the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) in the nineteenth century, Jews gravitated towards non-Jewish languages in a wider process of integration. In their efforts to revitalize the sizable Jewish population of tsarist Russia–most of which lived traditional lives in small towns (*shtetlekh*) and remained Yiddish-speaking–*maskilim* (proponents of the Haskalah) rallied for Jews to adopt German or Russian in place of Yiddish, which they identified as a debased language (Gilman, 1986). Meanwhile, other *maskilim* promoted a Hebraist movement to revive Hebrew as a modern, spoken language (Glinert, 1993; Harshav, 1993). The paradox was that in order to reach the masses, the *maskilim* were forced to employ their lingua franca: Yiddish. These efforts to modernize the Jewish masses ultimately spawned the first works of modern Yiddish literature. Pioneering works by Eastern European *maskilim* such as Mendel Lefin's translations of the Bible into Yiddish or the satirical writing of Joseph Perl, which he translated from the original *maskilic* Hebrew into Yiddish, aroused acrimonious debate while creating the foundations for modern literary Yiddish. Many of the first modern Yiddish writers–including the three "*klasiker,*" or "classic [writers]" of Yiddish literature: Mendele Moykher-sforim (Mendele the Book Peddler, nom de plume of Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh), Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinovitsh) and I. L. Peretz–began their careers in Hebrew or a European language, and later shifted to Yiddish.

With the rise of the Jewish leftwing in the second half of the nineteenth century, growing numbers of activists turned to Yiddish in order to disseminate their ideas to the working class. Russian-speaking socialist intellectuals, who were active in Tsarist Russia and subsequently centered in the Jewish immigrant hub of New York, published in Yiddish and translated seminal revolutionary texts by thinkers such as Karl Marx and Piotr Kropotkin for a proletarian readership. They did so with the underlying belief that the Jews would eventually cast off the linguistic peculiarity that set them apart from their non-Jewish brethren (Michels, 2005). The assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and the escalating anti-Semitic violence in Russia in its wake shattered the widely held cosmopolitan ideal of integration and created ambiguity towards Yiddish: was Yiddish simply a means to an end, or could it have inherent value for the Jewish people in the modern age?

Wider European social and political trends gave impulse to Jewish nationalist movements that included Yiddishism, or modern Jewish identity as expressed through the ongoing and deliberate use of the Yiddish language. In this framework, cultural literacy was understood as key to Jewish identity and, ultimately, Jewish life in the modern world. David Fishman divides Yiddishism into two primary streams: cultural-radical and national-romantic, both of which emphasized translation into Yiddish. In ideologue Chaim Zhitlovsky's culturally radical version of Yiddishism, language rather than religion was understood as forming the basis of Jewish national identity. The underlying goal was the creation of a multifaceted and completely fulfilling modern cultural life in Yiddish that included access to the great works of literature, translated into Yiddish. In contrast, I. L. Peretz's national-romantic Yiddishism emphasized continuity between contemporary Jewish life and the ethical, moral and aesthetic value inherent in the sacred Jewish texts–the Bible and rabbinic literature–and modern Yiddish literature. Peretz thus stressed the need to translate these classical texts from *loshn-koydesh* into Yiddish (Fishman, 2005, pp. 101-102). Both forms of Yiddishism found expression in Yiddish translations produced worldwide, including in Canada.

In the Canadian context, Yiddish served as the common denominator of Jewish immigrant communities in the mass immigration of Eastern European Jewry at the turn of the century. The more than 100,000 Jews who arrived between 1900 and 1920 were virtually entirely Yiddish speaking: in 1931, 96% of a total Jewish population of 156,726 declared Yiddish as mother tongue, in sharp contrast to the largely anglicized Jewish Canadian community of 16,401 in 1901 (Rosenberg, 1939, pp. 12, 257). This population was largely urban–with major centres in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg–working class and traditional in its religious observance, with a prominent Yiddishist component that spanned a diverse community of Orthodox, nationalist, socialist and secular elements. The new settlers created a network of social, religious, cultural and educational institutions to meet their needs, with Yiddish serving as a shared language. Although the process of integration into the English milieu began early, there were marked efforts to preserve and promote Yiddish as an expression of Jewish identity. For this Yiddish-speaking community, translation functioned in two directions simultaneously: material was rendered into Yiddish for utilitarian as well as ideological reasons; material was rendered out of Yiddish into English, and later French, in order to facilitate access for a broad readership that lacked

fluency in Yiddish. As discussed below, the rapid decline of Yiddish–the destruction of the locus of Yiddish life in Eastern Europe in the Holocaust, combined with a global attrition of Yiddish that escalated abruptly in the 1940s and 1950s–lies at the intersection of these two streams, the first into, and the second out, of Yiddish.

Translation in the Yiddish Press and the Yiddish Schools

The Yiddish press and the Yiddish schools formed major sites of translation into Yiddish on two levels: by translating texts from other languages into Yiddish, and by translating ideas and values for the immigrant population. Among the vast web of institutions formed by Eastern European Jewish immigrants in Canada, the Yiddish press and the Yiddish schools exerted extensive and long-term influence on the population. In both, the process of translation and transmission played a pivotal role in wider processes of integration for Canadian Jewry in the twentieth century.

The Yiddish dailies, which grew out of the sudden and far-reaching expansion of Yiddish cultural life in the late nineteenth century, featured translations of texts from other languages in order to educate, edify and entertain their readerships. By the late nineteenth century, a host of American Yiddish newspapers centered in New York featured translations of literature as well as political thought. Their Eastern European counterparts in the Pale of Settlement followed after a series of tsarist restrictions on Yiddish cultural expression were loosened in the failed revolution of 1905, and an explosion of Yiddish creativity ensued (Fishman, 2005, pp. 18-33). By the turn of the twentieth century, Yiddish newspapers in both Eastern Europe and its immigrant colonies were publishing translations in order to render the riches of world culture accessible for readers who were most at ease in Yiddish. These publications played a vital role in the development of modern Jewish identity by transmitting works on politics, modern science, history, philosophy, literature and art. These publications were pivotal: from the end of the nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth "much that was new and important in the creation of [Jewish] culture appeared in journals, newspapers and miscellanies" (Mintz, 1995, p. 1). As part of a global network of Eastern European Jewish culture, Canada was no exception to these wider trends.

The Canadian Yiddish dailies exerted ongoing influence on generations of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. The long-term

dailies–the *Keneder adler/ Jewish Eagle*, (Montreal, founded 1907), *Dos yidishe vort/ The Israelite Press*, (Winnipeg, founded 1910 as *Der kurier*) and *Der yidisher zhurnal/ The Daily Hebrew Journal* (Toronto, founded 1912)–appealed to the broadest possible readership. The relatively limited size of the Yiddish population in Canada, in comparison with its major centres in Eastern Europe (Warsaw, Vilna) and the United States (New York), resulted in a Yiddish press that was community-wide rather than partisan. The newspapers published a wide variety of material, including international and local news, belles-lettres and excerpts from scholarly works. The function of the Yiddish press was primarily to meet the needs of new immigrants who relied on the newspaper to translate their world in terms that they could understand, both linguistically and culturally. As Irving Abella writes:

> The first regular Yiddish dailies that began to be published in Canada were not merely newspapers; for the newcomer they were an introduction to the New World; they were forums of debate, vehicles for self-expression. ... They were, for all intents and purposes, the university of the Jewish common man and woman. (Abella, 1990, p. 124)

Yiddish journalists translated Canada for their readerships, both by providing local and national news and by presenting the history and political system of the country. For example, *Keneder adler* journalists such as Israel Medres and B. G. Sack published regular features on Canadian life that translated key events and issues into familiar Yiddish terms. As a news writer and political affairs columnist with the *Adler* for over 50 years, Medres employed a simple, direct and light style to present current events and legal issues in Canada in columns titled "*Di vokh in kanade* (This Week in Canada)," and "*Bilder in gerikht-zal* (Pictures in a Courtroom)." Medres went on to publish two volumes of memoirs based on his articles in the *Adler*: *Montreal fun nekhtn* (1947), and *Tsvishn tsvey velt milkhomes* (1964). Likewise, B. G. Sack, a longtime journalist and editor for the *Adler*, regularly published scholarly essays on Canadian history and politics. The complete text of his pioneering study, *Geshikhte fun di yidn in kanade* (History of the Jews in Canada), was serialized in the *Adler* in 1925-1926 in both Yiddish and English. This work had been commissioned as the introductory essay in a compendium, *The Jew in Canada: A Complete Record of Canadian Jewry From the Days of the French Régime to the Present Time* (Sack, 1926)*, and translated from the original Yiddish for publication. It formed the basis for Sack's

154

revised and expanded study of Canadian Jewish history before 1900 that subsequently appeared both in English and in Yiddish (Sack, 1948, 1945). The translations of these works out of Yiddish will be discussed below.

Among the cultural institutions founded by Yiddish immigrants, the area of education was arguably the most highly politicized. Yiddish afternoon schools were created to supplement English-language public school education. They spanned the ideological spectrum, from the Old World *kheyder* system where Yiddish was used as the language of instruction of sacred *loshn-koydesh* texts, to modern secular Yiddish schools where Yiddish served as the language of instruction and Yiddish culture and literature formed the core of the curriculum. The purpose of these schools was to instil a particular set of Jewish values in the student body, with Yiddish fulfilling very different functions.

In the *kheyder* system, a traditional system of education based on *loshn-koydesh*-Yiddish bilingualism was transplanted to Canada. Here Yiddish mediated between the student and liturgical, biblical and rabbinic literature in a system where the original text was translated word by word into the vernacular: the Bible began, "*bereyshis: in onheyb* (in the beginning)," and so on. The Canadian *kheyder* system thus embodies continuity with the age-old system of *diglossia* that characterized Ashkenaz.[1] In sharp contrast, a system of modern secular Yiddish schools (*shuln*) founded across Canada in the teens and twenties, identified Yiddish as a vehicle to transmit the essence of the Jewish past in a secular context. In response to Zhitlovsky's 1910 call for a system of schools to educate Jewish children in Yiddish,[2] "National Radical Schools" (later renamed Peretz Schools) were established in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg prior to World War I. Divisions along ideological lines–specifically on the role of Hebrew in the curriculum–soon resulted in the formation of rival schools such as the Folksshuln (People's Schools). Meanwhile, similar schools followed in Calgary, Vancouver and other smaller Jewish centres. These institutions, some of which went on to offer day-school

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[1] For a memoir of *kheyder* in Toronto, see Kayfetz (1989).

[2] This call took place at the fifth international convention of the Poale Zion held in Montreal. Zhitlovsky's motion was ratified over a rival resolution proposed by Nakhman Syrkin for schools based on Hebrew.

education, implemented the Yiddishist ideal of Yiddish as an expression of Jewish identity and created a curriculum based on Yiddish language and literature, Jewish history and folklore, with a variable role assigned to Hebrew.

Unlike the *kheyder* system, the *shuln* produced educational materials that implemented Peretz's vision of a *"goldene keyt* (golden chain)" by linking the Jewish people to its rich past through the medium of Yiddish translation. For example, *Dos vort* (the Word), a three-volume literary anthology produced by pedagogue and Montreal Folksshul principal Shomo Wiseman in 1931, offered excerpts from modern Yiddish belles-lettres alongside Yiddish translations from the Bible and Aggadah (non-legal Rabbinic literature). Wiseman's anthology continued a tradition begun in Vilna in the first teaching chrestomathy of this kind–also titled *Dos yidishe vort*–which features translations from Bible and rabbinic literature (Olgin, 1919). Other texts translated works of Jewish Studies for the students: for example, Montreal Peretz School pedagogues A. S. Zacher and Sh. Dunsky, produced a Yiddish history text based on Russian historian Simon Dubnov's seminal work on the history of the Jewish people (Zacher and Dunsky, 1938).[3] These pedagogical texts served to transmit a Jewish identity with Yiddish at its core to future generations.

Translations of World Literature into Yiddish

Alongside the development of modern Yiddish letters, translations of world literature into Yiddish revolutionized Ashkenazi Jewish literacy. An educated elite, many of them renowned writers and poets, translated belles-lettres as well as works in philosophy, history and the social sciences from both European and non-European languages for the Yiddish-reading masses. The goal of these translations was both utilitarian and ideological. On a practical level, translations of foreign-language works exposed the Yiddish-speaking masses to a wide variety of material for edification. For the Yiddish reader who lacked facility in other languages, these translations facilitated entry into a realm of literature and ideas that would otherwise have been limited to an intellectual elite. On an ideological and symbolic level, the translation

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[3] Dubnow's 10-volume world history of the Jewish people, authored in Russian and first published in German as *Die Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes* (1925–29), offers a social and economic history of the Jews.

of literary classics into Yiddish served to legitimize the language and place it on a par with other modern languages.

As part of this worldwide movement, Canadian Yiddish writers translated a wide range of world literature into Yiddish between the World Wars that appeared primarily in a series of avant-garde Yiddish journals. In contrast to Eastern Europe and the United States, publication of Yiddish translations of novels and other works in book-form was curtailed in Canada by the limited size of the market and corresponding lack of commercial publishing houses. These works were thus generally imported from Europe and the United States, where a mass popular market could sustain Yiddish book publishing.[4]

The series of Canadian Yiddish literary journals of the 1920s and 1930s offered an ideal venue for translation from world literature, in particular poetry and essays on belles-lettres and philosophy. The product of a core group of Canadian writers, twenty-odd journals created venues for a variety of both established and less-established writers to publish their works and express a range of ideologies. The journals, published in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, formed part of an international proliferation of Yiddish journals that both expressed and shaped Jewish consciousness in its many guises. Free from the commercial demands of the daily press or the book market, these publications provided a forum for collective experimentation and a platform for continually evolving developments in literature, ideas and the arts.[5] The Canadian journals divide roughly into two categories: modernist and proletarian, with Yiddish translation serving particular functions in each.

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[4] There is a Canadian connection: L. Benjamin, a Montreal resident in the teens, was among the first writers to translate works of French literature into Yiddish. His Yiddish translation of Romain Rolland's Nobel Prize winning novel, *Jean-Christophe* (1904-1912) was published in New York between 1918-1922. For a discussion of Yiddish translations in book-form, see Shandler (2006).

[5] For discussion on Yiddish periodicals, see *Prooftexts* 15 (Jan. 1995), a special issue dedicated to "The Role of Periodicals in the Formation of Jewish Identity." See also Leonard Prager's *Yiddish Literary and Linguistic Periodicals and Miscellanies: A Selective Annotated Bibliography* (1982).

For the half-dozen modernist journals that appeared in Montreal in the 1920s, Yiddish translations were an expression of cosmopolitanism: Yiddish writers were active participants in the international world of arts and letters, in particular its American trends. The central figure in these journals was poet J. I. Segal, Canada's best-known Yiddish poet and a fellow traveller of New York's modernist *Di Yunge* (The Young Ones) group of writers.[6] The first Canadian Yiddish literary journal, *Nyuansn* (Nuances, 1921), edited by Segal, includes a range of material by local writers: a Yiddish rendition of the Scottish ballad "Bonny George Campbell" authored by Milwaukee Yiddish poet A. Kh. Heller (Heller, 1921); a study of First Nations, English and French literary traditions in Canadian poetry by literary critic H. M. Caiserman (1921); and an essay on French poetry by L. M. Benjamin (1921). These works translate literary trends outside of Yiddish letters as well as convey a keen sense of participation in wider developments in the arts and letters. Likewise, among the essays on new poetics featured in Segal's avant-garde journal *Royerd* (Raw Earth, 1922) is Montreal writer Sholyme Shnayder's translation of James Oppenheim's 1920 essay, "Poetry–Our First National Art," which argues that American national identity is expressed through poetry (Oppenheim, 1922); the *Kanade* literary journal (Canada, 1925), edited by a collective of writers and poets, includes L. M. Benjamin's translation of Edna St. Vincent Millay's sonnet, "To the Lighthouse" (St. Vincent Millay, 1925), and Montreal writer Shlomo Wiseman's translation of "Self-reliance," Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1841 essay on the philosophy of individualism (Emerson, 1925). As Arthur-Tilo Alt writes, such translations "attest to the great interest that the modernist forces in the world of Yiddish letters had in other literatures, especially in Western literature" (1987, p. 45).

By the same token, the journals also forged connections with non-Western thought and writing. An example is found in *Der kval* (The Source, 1922), a journal edited by Warsaw-born folklorist and poet A. Almi (Elye-Haim Sheps) during his residence in Montreal from 1918 to 1922[7]. *Der kval* contains a Yiddish translation of the Zend

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[6] *Di yunge* (1905-1912) emerged with the publication of their literary journal, *Yugend*, in 1907. Segal was influenced by *Di Yunge* and associated with the group, in particular Mani Leib, during a sojourn in New York from 1923 to 1928.

[7] Almi was a regular contributor of poetry and prose to the Warsaw Yiddish daily *Der moment*, and collected folklore, including songs and stories (see

Avesta by Yehuda Zlotnik (also known as Avida and Elzet) (1929, pp. 12-15) that serves to introduce an Eastern European Jewish readership to the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism as well as to demonstrate the elasticity of the Yiddish language. Zlotnik was among the many figures that straddled Jewish Orthodoxy and modern Yiddish culture during the interwar period: he was a rabbi, Jewish scholar and founder and head of the Mizrachi religious-Zionist organization in Poland and subsequently in Canada, while also distinguishing himself as a folklorist, writer and translator. Zlotnik's translations from biblical texts into Yiddish will be discussed below.

Against the backdrop of the Depression, which struck Canadian urban centres with particular severity, the journals published in Montreal and Toronto during the 1930s by editorial collectives reveal a marked shift towards the left. The Yiddish translations in these proletarian journals address issues of social inequality, in particular class and race. *Heftn* (Notebooks, 1929), a joint Montreal-Toronto venture edited by poet Sholem Shtern, is the first of the Canadian Yiddish Depression-era journals. Alongside the writing of a new group of young, proletarian poets, it includes Mid-western poet Alter Esselin's free translation of African-American poet Fenton Johnson' s "Tired" ("*Mid*") under the heading, "*Lider fun neger lebn* (Poems from Negro Life)" (Johnson, 1929). This Yiddish translation forms part of a wider trend among American Yiddish poets to attempt to represent the African-American experience in order to "project the sympathies and sense of shared displacement felt by their audience of Yiddish readers" (Bachman, 2002, p. 3).

Translations likewise reflect the Yiddish Depression-era journals' affiliation with Soviet culture and ideology.[8] *Montreol* (Montreal, 1932-1935), the longest running of the Canadian Yiddish journals at a dozen issues, includes modernist poetry alongside translations of Russian poets such as Sergei Aleksandrovich Esenin into Yiddish by Detroit poet and editor, Ezra Korman (Esenin, 1934a; 1934b). Korman offers further translations of Esenin's poetry in a joint

Gottesman, 2003, pp. 8-11). Almi went on to publish translations of world religion and thought into Yiddish, including a volume on Chinese philosophy and poetry (Almi, 1925).

[8] This affinity for the Soviet Union is due in large part to widespread Soviet support for Yiddish culture in the 1920s and early 1930s. See Shneer (2000).

Montreal-Detroit journal titled *Heftn* (Notebooks, 1936-1937), which was explicitly pro-Soviet in content (Esenin, 1937)[9]. *Heftn* also features Korman's translations of Chicago poet Carl Sandburg into Yiddish (Sandburg, 1936), which reflect the journal's "Midwestern influence" (Prager, 1982, p. 76). Meanwhile, Vancouver's only Yiddish journal, the non-partisan *Di yidishe velt* (The Jewish World, 1928, 1935), features extensive translations of Hebrew, English and Russian poetry by its editor, Mordecai Jaffe.

The translations that appeared in the Yiddish journals promoted cultural literacy in the widest possible sense. These journals actively participated in the broader process of identity building that characterized the Yiddish world in the interwar period. They reflect a Yiddish culture that was vital and open, confident and strong, and intrinsically optimistic about its future as part of the modern world. Through translation, the journals' participants staked their claim in the global development of a Yiddish Canadian identity as part of a wider network of Yiddish life and letters.

Yiddish Translation from Jewish Tradition

Translations from sacred *loshn-koydesh* texts form some of the earliest works of Yiddish literature. Among the most popular is the seventeenth century *Tsenerene* (*Ze'enah U-Re'enahi,* Go Forth and See)*,* which weaves together biblical text, rabbinic commentary and *midrash* (Jewish legends) to provide a homiletic rendition of the weekly Torah portions (Schultz, 1987). These works were implicitly or explicitly produced for the component of the society that lacked literacy in *loshn-koydesh*–women and uneducated men. The Hassidic movement, which emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, placed new emphasis on Yiddish in sacred life, and produced a body of sacred, largely hagiographic, literature in Yiddish alongside *loshn-koydesh*.

In Canada, as in other centres of Yiddish publishing, translation projects expressly designated to provide edification to an observant Jewish readership appeared concurrently with translations from world literature. These works can be categorized under the

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[9] Korman also includes translations of Esenin in an essay on Soviet poetry, (1936). "'Kidesh lovene' in der sovetisher poezye ('*Kidesh levone'* in Soviet Poetry)." (Esenin, *Heftn* 3, pp. 27-29).

heading of *sforim* (holy books) rather than under the rubric of modern Yiddish literature: authored by and for an Ultra-Orthodox community, they consist largely of renditions of tales and legends from Jewish tradition in the Yiddish vernacular, as opposed to literary renditions of sacred texts designated for broad readership. While innovative in form, they mark continuity with the Ashkenazi tradition of Jewish scholarship, both in their authorship and readership. For example, Rabbi Yehuda Yudl Rosenberg, best known for his bestselling Hebrew-language account of the mythical Golem,[10] published Yiddish treatments of traditional *loshn-koydesh* material. These include his *Sefer nifleot ha-zohar* (The Wonders of the Zohar, 1927), which is a bilingual Yiddish-Hebrew volume of popular retellings from the life of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, the alleged author of the thirteenth century Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah known as the Zohar.[11] Among the works of Rabbi Avraham Dovid Shtern (father of poet Sholem Shtern) is *Hutim ha-meshulashim* (The Eternal Triangles, 1953), which features Hassidic stories retold in Yiddish. These works of hagiography fall into a category that Ira Robinson has termed "disguised fiction," a genre that blurs the lines between "secular" and "religious," as well as fiction and non-fiction. Alongside I. L. Peretz's retellings of Hassidic tales in Yiddish, these works represent innovative literary works that emerged in the nineteenth century (Robinson, 1990, pp. 102-103). However, unlike Peretz, writers such as Rosenberg and Shtern were targeting an ultra-observant population that would remain committed to Yiddish as a vernacular rather than a vehicle for modern Jewish cultural creativity. Ultimately, most of the translations into Yiddish have emerged from outside of these Ultra-Orthodox communities in Canada.[12]

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[10] The *golem* is a Jewish Hermunculus brought to life by magic, which entered popular folklore in the fifteenth century; Rosenberg's collection of short stories, *Sefer nifleot ha-maharal im ha-golem* (Warsaw, 1909), tells the story of Rabbi Loew b. Bezalel of Prague (the Maharal) creating a *golem* to protect the Jews against attack in the wake of a ritual murder accusation. See the recent English translation by Curt Leviant (2007).

[11] Rosenberg also rendered the Zohar from Aramaic into Hebrew: *Sefer zohar torah, hu perush ha zohar ha-kadush al ha-torah* (1924-25)**.**

[12] Today, Hassidim a stream of Ultra-Orthodox Jews that maintain distinct communities characterized by strict adherence to Jewish law and separation from the mainstream on multiple levels, including linguistically. On the

In contrast, sacred *loshn-koydesh* texts were rendered into Yiddish as part of the expanding corpus of modern Yiddish literature, and fall in line with Peretz's Yiddishist ideology of the golden chain of tradition. The broader impetus behind these texts was the creation of a comprehensive new canon of Jewish letters in Yiddish. This modern Yiddish canon, which was established over a period of less than a century, spans the spectrum of Jewish literacy, from ancient sacred texts to works of science to modernist poetry. Like earlier Yiddish renditions of the Bible, the twentieth century produced texts that met the changing needs of a popular readership that sought out sacred works in Yiddish. At the same time, like the Yiddish translation of the Hebrew Bible authored by American poet Yehoash (Solomon Bloomgarden) between the World Wars, these works offered translations of biblical texts that were "both literary and scientific" (Orlinsky, 1941, pp. 173-174). These Yiddish renditions served to legitimize modern Yiddish literature by linking it with the sacred Jewish tradition while forming an integral part of the corpus of modern Yiddish literature. As part of this movement, Canadian Yiddish writers published biblical translations intended for a wide readership. For example, Yehuda Zlotnik produced a free translation of the book of Ecclesiastes together with a scholarly commentary in his *Koheles, der mentsh un dos bukh* (Ecclesiastes, the Man and the Book, 1929). Zlotnik also published a translation of the book of Job that appeared in the *Keneder adler's* 25th anniversary volume (Zlotnik, 1932).

Symche Petrushka stands out as a central figure in the use of Yiddish translation in the ongoing chain of Jewish tradition. He employed translation, both in his native Poland and in his adopted home in Canada, to popularize the vast repository of Jewish knowledge for a Yiddish readership. Born into a Hassidic household, educated in the traditional *yeshiva* system[13] and designated an *ile* (talmudic prodigy), Petrushka acquired extensive secular knowledge as an autodidact and became a core contributor to the leading Warsaw Yiddish daily *Haynt* (Today) during the interwar period. As a journalist, he rendered Jewish and secular knowledge accessible to the

Hassidic community of Montreal, see Shaffir, 1995; on Yiddish use within these communities, see Isaacs, 1999.

[13] The *yeshiva*, the continuation of *kheyder*, is an institution for advanced study of Torah, Mishna and Talmud.

Jewish masses by translating it into familiar terms in Yiddish; as a writer, he translated works of Jewish thought, history and prose. Petrushka embarked on an ambitious project to single-handedly author a comprehensive Jewish encyclopaedia in Yiddish with his *Yudishe entsiklopedye* (Jewish Encyclopedia, 1932-1935) left unfinished due to the deteriorating economic and political climate in Poland. The project was resumed after Petrushka's arrival in Montreal in 1939 and culminated in his two-volume *Yidishe folks-entsiklopedye* (Yiddish Folk Encyclopedia, 1942, 1949). The goal of Petrushka's encyclopaedias was to provide a reliable and accessible resource in the language of the Jewish masses: Yiddish.

Petrushka's wide efforts to popularize Jewish scholarship culminated in his Yiddish edition of the Mishna, the recorded "Oral Torah" compiled in the second century that forms the foundation of rabbinic literature. His six-volume *Mishnayes mit iberzetsung un peyrush in yidish* (Mishna with Translation and Interpretation in Yiddish, 1945-1949, 1950, 1955, 1966)–a solo effort on all levels, from authorship to distribution–renders the difficult and terse Hebrew text of the Mishna accessible. Petrushka's choice of Yiddish as the language of the *Mishnayes*, according to poet and essayist Yankev Glatshteyn, was not motivated by a desire to enrich Yiddish literature; his main considerations were clarity and posterity. Glatshteyn surmises that if Petrushka had foreseen that Yiddish would decline as the dominant Jewish lingua franca after the Holocaust, he would have opted for another language (1956, pp. 228-229). In fact, Petrushka was in the midst of authoring an English version of the Mishna at the time of his sudden death in 1950[14]. Ultimately, Petrushka's *mishnayes* encapsulate the age-old tradition of bilingual Jewish learning in Eastern Europe that was lost in the Holocaust. Thus, at the same time as being a popular, scholarly work, Petrushka's *Mishnayes* serve as a monument to a lost world.

Like Petrushka, Sh. Dunsky authored translations of *loshn-koydesh* texts in the language that was most natural to him: Yiddish. His renditions of Midrash Rabbah for the five biblical scrolls[15]–

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[14] The manuscript is housed at the Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Montreal.

[15] The *Midrash Rabbah* is a collection of non-legal rabbinic texts that elucidate the meaning of Biblical text, specifically the Pentateuch and Five Scrolls.

Lamentations (1956), Esther and Ruth (1962), Ecclesiastes (1967), and the Song of Songs (1973)–consist of translations of the Hebrew text into Yiddish, accompanied by explanatory notes and a scholarly introduction. Like Petrushka and much of their generation of Eastern European-born Jews, Dunsky straddled two worlds: educated in the *yeshiva* system in Eastern Europe, he immigrated to Canada as a young adult and became active in Yiddish cultural circles; as a pedagogue, he authored Yiddish works that transmitted Jewish learning generations (Zacher and Dunsky, 1938). In his *Midrash Rabbah*, Dunsky, like Petrushka, set out to capture the centuries-old tradition of Jewish learning that he had known as a youth. As indicated by his introductory remarks to *Midrash Rabbah Ester, Rus*, Dunsky's choice of Yiddish was motivated by the desire to convey the richness of Jewish study in Ashkenaz that had been lost in the Holocaust:

> Of all modern languages, Yiddish is best suited to convey the colour and rhythm of *midrash* language and style. For centuries, the majority and, for a time, most creative element of the Jewish people–the Ashkenazi Jewry so savagely destroyed–studied and interpreted *halakha* (Jewish law) and *agaddah* (legend), *gemore* (Talmud) and Midrash, in Yiddish, both in *kheyder* and in *yeshivas* (1962, p. 15)[16].

According to Dunsky, although translations into modern languages such as German and English are technically correct, they do not fully convey "the generations-old Yiddish *midrash* tradition." Although he was writing during a period where the future of Yiddish was increasingly in jeopardy, Dunsky's language is innovative: he self-consciously employs a Yiddish that is a compromise between the archaic Yiddish of study and the modern Yiddish that developed with contemporary Yiddish literature.

Works such as Petrushka's and Dunsky's embody continuity as well as a break with the chain of tradition. They fall into the age-old tradition of *targum* that reflects the elasticity of Jewish cultural literacy[17]. At the same time, both the *Mishnayes* and *Midrash Rabbah*

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[16] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Yiddish are the author's.

[17] *Targum* refers to translation of sacred texts into the vernacular that originated during the linguistic shift from Hebrew to Aramaic in the Land of Israel during Second Temple period (515 BCE-70 CE).

capture a tradition that is on the verge of being lost, with the authors forming part of the final generation of a direct link to Yiddish Eastern Europe. As such, there is a discernible element of memorialization inherent in their translations.

The Holocaust did not mark the end of translation into Yiddish, but it did mark a change in the means of production that reflects a shift in the status of Yiddish. Rather than appear in the popular press or in journals, the primary forum for these texts became books published with communal support; for example, Dunsky's *Midrash Rabbah* was published by the "*S. Dunsky medresh fond komitet* (S. Dunsky Midrash Book Committee)." The *bukh-komitet*[18] was a provisional organization of supporters from the community-at-large that banded together for the purpose of publishing specific volume; they raised funds, promoted the work, organized literary evenings and facilitated distribution. This *ad hoc* structure became increasingly significant in Yiddish publication as the massive losses of the Holocaust created an increasing sense of urgency behind book production even as the readership was on the wane. Organizational involvement increased as the venture of Yiddish literature became less and less commercially viable, and ensured the publication of Yiddish works as testaments to the vanishing culture that had spawned them.

The Holocaust and its destruction of the locus of Yiddish cultural life in Eastern Europe thus caused an abrupt reorientation in the Yiddish world from dissemination to preservation. While acculturation of Eastern European immigrants in the Americas was accompanied by the attrition of Yiddish, writers remained optimistic about its future prospects into the 1940s. Everything changed when the Yiddish community began to come to terms with the unimaginable losses of the Holocaust after 1945, accompanied by the wholesale liquidation of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union by the early 1950s, and the active exclusion of Yiddish in the creation of the new State of Israel in 1948. As Janet Hadda writes in "*Komponentn visikayt* and the Complexities of Yiddish Translation": "After World War II and the Shoah [Holocaust], the realization dawned on Yiddish writers that they had lost their immortality. They could no longer count on a readership if

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[18] The English translation "committee" is misleading. As Yiddish linguist Mordkhe Schaechter points out (2000) a *komitet* indicates a structure that is informal and temporary.

they were good enough or if a fashion favoured them" (2003, p. 86). The road to continuity increasingly pointed to translation.

Non-Fiction Translation from Yiddish into English

The first translations from Yiddish works by Canadian authors into English filled a utilitarian function: to reach the broadest readership possible during a transitional period where the Jewish community was anglicizing. They consist of works of non-fiction where the primary goal of the translation was to convey content rather than form. The translation of works of Yiddish non-fiction by Canadian authors, which dates back to the 1920s, was motivated by a desire to seek two readerships simultaneously: the Yiddish immigrant community, and the more established English-speaking Jewish community. In all cases, the authors were closely involved in the English translation of their works. Seminal works of Yiddish Canadianna–history, musicology, and memoir–were composed in Yiddish and translated into English for publication at the initiative of their authors. These works were the product of immigrants from Eastern Europe who were closely affiliated with the *Keneder adler*: Israel Rabinovitch was the *Adler's* editor for forty years and its theatre and music critic; B. G. Sack was regular contributor and editor for over half a century; Hirsch Wolofsky was the newspaper's founder and publisher.

Both Sack and Wolofsky published their works in English translation before issuing the original Yiddish texts. As discussed above, Sack composed his comprehensive study of the early history of the Jews in Canada in Yiddish and translated it into English for initial publication (1926). His *Geshikhte fun yidn in kanade,* (History of Jews in Canada, 1948), an expanded version of the 1926 text, appeared in English translation as *History of the Jews in Canada: From the French Régime to the End of the Nineteenth Century* in 1945, three years before the publication of the Yiddish volume. The second volume of Sack's *History of the Jews*, which covered the period from 1900 to 1920, was left unfinished at the time of Sack's death in 1967. It was later published exclusively in English translation by Israel Medres's daughter, Anne Glass (Sack, 1975).

Wolofsky's *Mayn lebns rayze* (My Life's Journey)*,* a memoir that offers an insider's perspective on the development of the Canadian Jewish community, was initially published in 1945 in English and published in Yiddish a year later (Wolofsky, 1945, 1946). The English

166

text, *Journey of My Life: A Book of Memoirs*, was produced by English writer A. M. Klein, one of the founding figures of Canadian modernism in the 1940s whose writing bridged the Yiddish and English literary and cultural words. As editor of the *Keneder adler*'s English sister publication, *the Canadian Jewish Chronicle,* from 1938 to 1955, Klein authored reviews and articles on Yiddish literature, and was a close associate of both Wolofsky and Rabinovitch (Caplan, 1982, p. 81, Klein, 1982, pp. 232-235). Klein did more than translate *Mayn lebnz rayze*; he elevated Wolofsky's simple, folksy language to the poetic while taking artistic liberties with the text: Klein's version omits and alters portions of the original Yiddish to appeal to the broadest possible readership. Its French translation, completed half a century later and truer to the original Yiddish, will be discussed below.

Like Sack, Israel Rabinovitch was involved in Yiddish-English translation projects in the 1920s. During the height of the debate for a separate Jewish school board in Quebec, he collaborated with lawyer Leon Crestohl (Wolofsky's son-in-law) to produce a bilingual monograph called *The Jewish School Problem in the Province of Quebec From its Origin to the Present Day/ Di geshikhte fun yidishn shul-problem in in kvibek* (Rabinovitch and Crestohl, 1926). This slim volume, authored by Rabinovitch and translated by Crestohl, was the first Yiddish work to specifically examine the history and local events of the Montreal Jewish community. Its aim was to elucidate the issues and garner support for the Jewish schools movement, and as such, the audience was two-fold: the Yiddish working class, and the English-speaking Jewish establishment. This necessitated two parallel versions of the same text for two readerships that coexisted within the same ethnic community. Israel Rabinovitch published his *Muzik bay yidn* (Music Among Jews) in 1940 when the lingua franca of a majority of his Jewish audience was Yiddish. The work consists of essays about Jewish music, from ancient Temple times to the more recent impact of jazz on *klezmer*. A trained musician and amateur musicologist, Rabinovitch had initially published many of his scholarly findings in the *Keneder adler* for a broad Yiddish readership. An English rendition appeared twelve years after the original (1952); like *Mayn lebns rayze*, the translator was A. M. Klein. Klein had praised *Muzik bay yidn* soon after its initial publication in 1940 in a review in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, and had highlighted the need for translation: "It is regrettable that as yet the book appears only in Yiddish; an English translation would be a consummation greatly to be desired. For it is a book which ought to be read by all those who have music in them, of

one kind or another" (Klein, 1987, p. 22). True to Klein's assessment, *Of Jewish Music, Ancient and Modern* reached a wider audience (Reider, 1954, p. 64); it was reviewed in the English-language press, although praise was directed at the quality of Klein's language rather than the actual content: "While the English translation, done by the excellent poet A. M. Klein, is a master work and a joy to read, the same cannot be said of the author's ideas and conclusions" (Werner, 1953, p. 277). In his translations of both Rabinovitch and Wolofsky, A. M. Klein bridged the gap between Yiddish and English, and in doing so acted as a harbinger for the linguistic shift that was soon to be the reality of Canadian Jewry.

By the 1940s, the Canadian Jewish readership was transitioning *en masse* away from Yiddish to English due to acculturation and a wider decline of Yiddish worldwide. Members of the Canadian Yiddish intelligentsia recognized the declining role of Yiddish as the language of daily discourse among the Jewish community, despite the fact that Yiddish culture still flourished. The trend within the Jewish community was Anglicization: the percentage of foreign-born Jews that declared Yiddish as mother tongue declined from 99% in 1931 to 84% in 1951, while among the native-born population the percentage was reduced from 96% in 1931 to 38% in 1951 (Rosenberg, 1957, pp. 2-3). In the 1940s and 1950s, the future of the Canadian Jewish community lay in English, as did the readership for works by Jewish authors. Over the next decades, Yiddish would increasingly become a heritage language rather than a vernacular.

Translation of Belles-lettres from Yiddish into English and French

The publication of Yiddish belles-lettres in translation lagged behind the neighbouring United States because of fundamental differences between the two communities. First, the overall linguistic and cultural integration of the Canadian Yiddish community was delayed, owing to its dynamics of immigration combined with relatively greater institutionalization. Unlike the sizable English-speaking Jewish community that preceded Yiddish immigration to the United States, Canada's Eastern European immigration inundated the small anglicized establishment. Thus, in 1941, 76% of Canadian Jews declared Yiddish as their mother tongue, and an influx of Yiddish-speaking survivors of the Holocaust bolstered the Yiddish communities, in particular in Montreal; in 1951, the percentage of Jews in Canada who declared their mother tongue as Yiddish remained 50% (Rosenberg, 1956, p. 3),

which corresponds roughly to the percentage in the United States for 1910[19]. This increased linguistic maintenance of Yiddish delayed the general trend of translation out of Yiddish. Second, with its relatively smaller Yiddish population and later overall development of Canadian literature, Yiddish belles-lettres emerged behind the United States, in particular in the realm of poetry; this, too, ultimately delayed the translation process. The beginnings of American Yiddish poetry was marked by the appearance of the "Sweatshop Poets"– Joseph Bovshover, David Edelstadt, Morris Rosenfeld, Morris Winchesvky– who wrote poetry depicting the experiences of the Jewish immigrant working class in the 1880s (Harshav, 1986, pp. 27-44). Meanwhile, the tiny Jewish immigrant population of Canada did not produce evidence of Yiddish literary life until the late nineteenth century; as late as the 1930s, Caiserman asserts in his *Yidishe dikhter in kanade* (Jewish Poets in Canada) that despite the fact that the works of all the American poets, in particular *Di Yunge* were being read in Canada, most of the Canadian poets publishing during the same time were at the very initial phase of their poetic development (1934, p. 69). In the United States, prominent Yiddish novelists were initiating English translations of their works during and after the Holocaust: Sholem Asch achieved notoriety in English translation and disrepute in Yiddish circles for his trilogy on New Testament themes (1939, 1943, 1949); Isaac Bashevis Singer's translations commenced after 1950 ultimately earned him a Nobel Prize in 1978. These works were rendered by translators that were steeped in Yiddish, and as in the case of Bashevis, increasingly by the author himself. According to Hadda, for these authors, "translation was a key to continuity"(2003, p. 92); with a rapidly shrinking readership in the United States, American Yiddish writers had to rely on translation in order to be heard by the community-at-large. Their language of creative expression, Yiddish, was being lost, and they were faced with two options: to mourn its demise or to reach out to new audiences. A comparable process began to emerge in Canada in the late 1960s and has steadily gained momentum.

Like in the United States, Canadian Yiddish writers have actively participated in the translation of their work, in particular in the genre of the novel. The pioneer in this domain is poet Sholem Shtern,

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[19] According to the estimates of the *American Jewish Yearbook* of 1913-1914, the total Jewish population of the United States in 1910 was 2,043,762 and the number of Jews declaring Yiddish as mother tongue was 990,587 (pp. 425, 428).

who published all four of his Yiddish novels in verse into both English and French in the 1970s and 1980s. These works, which depict the Eastern European Jewish immigrant experience in Canada, form a bridge between the Old World and the New World that was underscored by Shtern's wide efforts to have his work translated into both of Canada's official languages. The best known of these works, *The White House: A Novel in Verse*, was rendered by New York translator Max Rosenfeld (Shtern, 1974). These works, in particular a marathon of translations that appeared in 1984, were motivated by the author's deep desire to reach a wider readership. Shtern sought government funding for the translation and publication of five volumes of his work, with evident sacrifices of quality for quantity (Margolis, 2007).

More recent trends involve the production of Yiddish literary translation in collaboration or close association between author and translator. The short stories of Yiddish writer and longtime principal of Montreal's Peretz Schools, Yaacov Zipper, appeared in posthumous English translation in a collaborative effort between Zipper's daughter Ode Garfinkle and Mervin Butovsky (Zipper, 1985). The award-winning Holocaust-themed novels of Chava Rosenfarb have been translated into English in collaboration with her daughter Goldie Morgentaler: *The Tree of Life* (1985, 2004), *Bociany* (1999a) and *Of Lodz and Love* (1999b). Rosenfarb remains Canada's best-known Yiddish poet; she is the recipient of the LTAC's John Glassco Prize for Literary Translation, marking the first time the award has been awarded for a translation from Yiddish. Most recently, Rosenfarb and Morgentaler have produced a translation of short stories titled *Survivors* (2004), which effect "a synthesis between her primary theme of the holocaust and the Canadian milieu in which she finds herself" (Morgentaler, 2000, p. 169). Yehude Elberg, like Rosenfarb a survivor of the Holocaust, saw two of his novels appear in his own English translations in the same year: *The Empire of Kalman the Cripple* and *Ship of the Hunted* (1997a, b). In 2001, a French translation of the former, *L'empire de Kalman l'infirme*, was produced by Pierre Anctil (2001), who consulted with Elberg on numerous occasions for assistance in deciphering obscure terms. Anctil's numerous translations from Yiddish into French will be discussed below.

Yiddish poetry poses special difficulties for translation. As Hadda points out, the use of linguistic subtleties such as "component awareness" among writers such as New York poet Yankev Glatshteyn,

renders their work "notoriously difficult to translate" (Hadda, 2003, pp. 87-88). The Canadian Yiddish literary corpus, which is dominated by poetry, thus presents formidable challenges that translators in the Canadian context have addressed by collaborating with individuals steeped in Yiddish culture. For example, the works of Rokhl Korn, a poet who settled in Canada after the Holocaust, has been translated by a diverse group of writers who knew Korn personally, including Seymour Levitan, Seymour Mayne and Miriam Waddington. Volumes of Korn's work in translation appeared after her death: *Generations: Selected Poems*, edited by Mayne (Korn, 1982), and Levitan's bilingual volume, *Paper Roses* (Korn, 1985). A bilingual edition of Melech Ravitch's poetry, *Night Prayer and Other Poems* (Ravitch, 1993) was rendered by Mayne and Rivke Augenfeld, a native Yiddish speaker and cultural activist. Anctil, who has also translated and compiled a selection of the poetry of J. I. Segal into French (Segal, 1992) and is currently translating Segal's first volume of poetry, has consulted with members of the Augenfeld family to decipher obscure terms.

Major challenges face the future translation of Yiddish belles-lettres, in particular poetry. Modern Yiddish literature emerged from the vernacular for a popular audience with no prior exposure to Yiddish as a literary language, at the hands of authors who mimicked the spoken Yiddish of the masses. Yiddish literature developed rapidly in the wake of the Haskalah, only to be cut off abruptly in the aftermath of the Holocaust, persecution and acculturation. The entire history of modern Yiddish literature as a widespread phenomenon thus spans less than a century from beginning to end, from its beginnings as a didactic literature, through the development of Modernist and Expressionist poetry. As Mordkhe Schaechter asserts, efforts at standardization in grammar, orthography and vocabulary came late and have never been universally accepted (1999). Much of the language of Yiddish literature relies heavily on spoken idioms and regional peculiarities that are difficult to translate. Hadda summarizes the problems inherent in Yiddish translation:

> We are now at the junction of being too late. In order to translate Yiddish successfully, we need speakers who are familiar with the idioms, the deep cultural substrate of the language of the language, the dialects and special regional vocabularies that are at the heart of Yiddish at its fullest. Barring such speakers, we would need a critical apparatus to fill the gaps. But we lack such tools and I cannot imagine that we will ever have them. We have no comprehensive

dictionary, no etymological dictionary, no dictionaries of regionalisms, no modern thesaurus. (2003, p. 92)

One creative response to this challenge is Martin Green's rendition of *Af fremder erd* (1945), a semi-autobiographical novel by Winnipeg teacher Falk Zolf. Shandler refers to Green's *On Foreign Soil* (2000) as "perhaps the most unusual and semiotically provocative permutation of Yiddish translation in the postvernacular mode" (2006, p. 123): the volume offers a hybrid of English and romanized Yiddish terms, with Yiddish terms presented and glossed in different fonts. Green, a Winnipeg-based performer and translator, has created a work that is billed as "the book that starts in English and turns to Yiddish":

> Each story in this collection is told twice: once in English, and once in a mixture of English and Yiddish. The early sections include ten to twenty percent Yiddish content; this increased gradually throughout the book, until the very last chapter is told entirely in Yiddish. In this way, the reader learns to read Yiddish as he goes along! Each chapter is followed by a detailed summary in English, so the reader can go back and identify words or phrases that he didn't understand the first time through. "On Foreign Soil" … provides the modern reader with an unprecedented opportunity to re-connect in a meaningful way with the disappearing heritage that is the Yiddish language.[20]

Thus, Green's work employs translation as a device to transmit not only the content but to teach the original Yiddish.

Anthologies of Yiddish Translation

The proliferation of anthologies that feature Yiddish poetry and prose in translation coincides with a sharp decline of Yiddish literary life in Canada. Their function extends beyond rendering works of Yiddish belles-lettres accessible to a non-Yiddish readership. Jeffrey Shandler writes:

> Anthologies of modern Yiddish literature rendered into English (the largest corpus of Yiddish belles letters rendered in a non-Jewish language) seek to present the unique achievement of this modern secular literature to new audiences–not only to non-Jews and non-Ashkenazim, but to the growing number of descendants of Yiddish speakers who no longer speak or read Yiddish and who have a very

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[20] An outline of the work is presented at www.onforeignsoil.com/summary.htm

different sense of linguistic and cultural vernacularity than did their recent forbears. (2004, p. 304)

The diminishment of the Yiddish population that identifies Yiddish as its creative language has altered the role of these anthologies: rather than reflect a living organism, they offer windows into a vanishing Yiddish culture that once thrived, through the intermediary of translation. In the Canadian context, most of the post-Holocaust collected works that contain Yiddish literature do so in translation.[21] *Kanader yidisher zamlbukh/ Canadian Jewish Anthology/Anthologie Juive du Canada* (Spilberg and Zipper, 1982) is a trilingual collection of writing and criticism that includes poetry, excerpts of prose and short essays on Yiddish writing in Canada. English-language anthologies of Canadian Jewish writing contain translated poetry, prose and essays by Canadian Yiddish authors: *Canadian Yiddish Writings* (Boyrasky and Sarna 1976), *The Spice Box: An Anthology of Canadian Writing* (Sinclair and Wolfe, 1981), *Essential Words: An Anthology of Jewish Canadian Poetry* (Mayne, 1985), *Mirror of a People: Canadian Jewish Experience in Poetry and Prose* (Oberman and Newton, 1985), *The Canadian Jewish Outlook Anthology* (Rosenthal and Berson, 1988), *Canadian Jewish Short Stories* (Waddington, 1990), and, most recently *Not Quite Mainstream: Canadian Jewish Short Stories* (Ravvin, 2002)*. In addition, two anthologies of Yiddish women writers have been produced in Canada (Forman, 1994; Trebegov, 2007). As Shandler points out, in many of these works, "the mission is ultimately extraliterary, imposing both on the works themselves and on their readers an onus of cultural, even communal survival" (2004, p. 304). These works present a corpus of Jewish Canadian literature that includes Yiddish in accessible translation.

Recent Translation from Yiddish into English and French

The attrition of Yiddish has coincided with increasing interest in Yiddish, in particular as a window onto the Canadian Jewish immigrant experience. While Yiddish as a living language among non-Ultra Orthodox populations is declining steadily and the Yiddish authors of most of the works in question have passed away, their writing is

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[21] An exception to this rule is a Yiddish-language anthology of Canadian Yiddish literature called *Kanadish antologye* (Canadian Anthology). This volume appeared in Argentina as part of a series of compilations of Yiddish writing called the *Musterverk fun der yidisher literatur* (Samples of Yiddish Literature) series (Rozhanski, 1974).

reaching a new reading public through translation. The 1990s brought a new wave of annotated translations of Canadian Yiddish-language non-fiction works into English and French. At the centre of this translation movement is Pierre Anctil, an anthropologist of French Canadian origin who learned Yiddish and has translated numerous volumes by Montreal Yiddish writers–poetry, prose, memoirs, history and a lexicon–into French. As he writes, the origins of these translations lie in a desire to rescue the rich content of Yiddish works from obscurity: "À mesure que j'ai perçu la valeur et l'importance de ces écrits pour une reconstitution de la vie yiddish du début du XXe siècle à Montréal, j'ai entrepris de les traduire en français pour un lectorat plus général" (2001, p. 15).

Anctil initiated a series of translations of volumes that reflect the pivotal role of the Yiddish press in Canadian Jewish life, in particular of the *Keneder adler*. Medres's memoirs, *Montreal fun nekhtn* (1947), appeared in annotated translation in French as *Le Montréal juif d'autrefois* (1997). Vivian Felsen, Medres's granddaughter, was inspired to read the Yiddish for the first time by the appearance of Anctil's French text, and went on to author an English rendition: *Montreal of Yesterday: Jewish Life in Montreal, 1900-1920* (2000). Both Anctil and Felsen went on to translate Medres's *Tsvishn tsvey velt milkhomes* (1964) as *Le Montréal juif entre les deux guerres* (2001) and *Between the Wars: Canadian Jews in Transition* (2003). Anctil has also compiled and edited translations of selections from the early years of the *Keneder adler* by archivist and scholar David Rome in *Through the Eyes of the Eagle: The Early Montreal Yiddish Press 1907-1916* (Rome, 2001).

Like the renditions of works with origins in the Yiddish press, a number of recent translations of historical works and memoirs offer popular access to sources on Jewish life in Canada from the perspective of some of its most active participants. Anctil has translated a significant work of political history in Shimon Belkin's *Di poale-tsien bavegung in kanade*, *1904-1920* (The Poale Zion movement in Canada, 1956), a history of Canada's Labour Zionist movement during its formative years (Anctil, 1999). His rendition of Hirsch Wolofsky's memoir, *Mayn lebns-rayze* (2000) includes annotations to elucidate terms and concepts particular to Yiddish culture and render the work accessible to any reader. Anctil has likewise translated excerpts of the collected writings of Yiddish poet and journalist, Sholem Shtern. *Shrayber vos ikh hob gekent: memuarn un essayn* (Writers I have

174

Known: Memoirs and Essays, 1982), which offer personal insight into the Yiddish literary life of Montreal, notably the activities of the local writers, and visits of authors from the United States and Europe (Shtern, 2007). Along similar lines, the memoirs of Yaacov Zipper have appeared in English translation in further collaborative efforts between Ode Garfinkle and Mervin Butovsky (Zipper, 1990, 2004). In the Western context, *Oksn un motorn*, Michael Usiskin's memoir of the Jewish farming colony of Edenbridge, Saskatchewan (1945) has been rendered in an abridged version into English (1983).

An indispensable reference work for the reader and researcher of Canadian Yiddish literature has recently become available in French translation: a lexicon of Yiddish and Hebrew writers in Canada entitled *Hundert yor yidishe un hebreyishe literatur in kanade* (One Hundred Years of Yiddish and Hebrew Literature in Canada, 1982) by Yiddish writer and cultural activist Haim-Leib Fuks. With hundreds of entries on cultural and literary figures, this work is a key source of biographical and bibliographical data and a crucial starting point on any Yiddish cultural or literary figure in Canada. Pierre Anctil's French edition, *Cent ans de littérature yiddish et hébraïque au Canada* (Fuks, 2005) has remained true to the original text while adding several scholarly appendices.

The English and French translations of Yiddish Canadianna have opened up a wealth of insight into Jewish and Canadian life that are otherwise inaccessible to most contemporary readers. They have made it possible for those without facility in Yiddish to gain entry into the Canadian Jewish ethnic experience between 1900 and 1950. More importantly, they have begun to tear down the linguistic and cultural barriers between Canadian Yiddish Studies and general Canadian Studies and thereby bring new understanding between communities as well as lead to innovative interdisciplinary ventures.

Conclusion

For a half a century, Yiddish lay at the core of a vibrant cultural life and was a viable expression of Jewish identity in Canada. Translation into Yiddish reflects this vitality; translation from Yiddish, in particular in the post-Holocaust period, reflects the shifting role of Yiddish in light of steady attrition. Translation thus mirrors the abrupt shift in the trajectory of Yiddish from vernacular of the masses, to a medium of

sophisticated expression, to a heritage language that is increasingly becoming the purview of Ultra-Orthodox circles.

A broad conception of translation is evidenced in the publication of a broadly themed collection of essays on Yiddish transmission in *New Readings of Yiddish Montreal/ Traduire le Montréal Yiddish/ Taytshn un ibertaytshn yidish in Montreol* (Anctil, Ravvin, Simon, 2007). With translation defined to include broad influence, the legacy of Yiddish continues to resonate in Canadian cultural life, notably in the area of literature. Despite these echoes of continuity, the lineage is indirect; the Canadian Jewish writers that emerged directly out of the Yiddish community in the post-war period wrote in English: A. M. Klein, Mordecai Richler, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen. Norm Ravvin, who is part of this Anglo-Jewish literary tradition, writes in his introduction to *Not Quite Mainstream: Canadian Jewish Short Stories:*

> For a time, leaders in the Canadian Jewish intellectual community, particularly in Montreal, struggled to maintain a Yiddish literary life, viewing such continuity as the best route to a viable New World Jewish culture. One chronicler has called these cultural workers "lay Jewish revolutionaries" and described their dreams for Yiddish in Canada as a utopian project. [22]
> Of course, the Jewish literary tradition that took shape in Canada has little to do with this utopian dream. (2002, pp. 11-12)

Translation marks a point of entry into a rich and multifaceted culture. It is unlikely that translation will lead to a revival of Yiddish: as Hadda states, with the disappearance of a "corps of experts" who have intimate knowledge of Yiddish language and culture, "I fear that Yiddish is fading from all possible renewal, even through translation" (2003, p. 93). Translation serves to render Yiddish texts accessible to the non-Yiddish reader. One can only hope that translation will ignite interest in new generations of readers and inspire them to study the language and culture for themselves. Outside of Ultra-Orthodox communities, the process of Yiddish transmission has shifted to the classroom, perhaps forever. In this new reality, the teacher is simultaneously a translator of language and culture, because there is no

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[22] This chronicler is David Roskies, whose essay, "Yiddish in Montreal: The Utopian experiment," argues that a core group of dedicated Yiddish ideologues sought to transplant Yiddish culture and promote Jewish continuity through a network of institutions, notably the modern secular Yiddish schools (1990).

Yiddishland and likely never will be again. Translation is quite possibly all that remains.

<div align="right">**University of Ottawa**</div>

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ABSTRACT: Yiddish Translation in Canada: A Litmus Test for Continuity ─ Yiddish translation has been a two-way phenomenon in Canada in the twentieth century that mirrors the changing identity of Jews of Eastern European origin. The Yiddish press translated Canada to the Jewish immigrant masses while Yiddish schools translated ideology to their children. Translations from world literature into Yiddish that appeared in a series of literary journals in the 1920s and 1930s introduced art and ideas to their readerships and demonstrate that Yiddish is a language on a par with other modern languages. Translations from sacred Hebrew-Aramaic texts served both to bring these texts to readers in their vernacular, and, in particular in the post-Holocaust era, as monuments to a lost tradition. Conversely, translations from Yiddish into English allowed authors a wider readership as Jews began to acculturate and adopt English as their primary language. Most recently, Yiddish translations into both French and English have created wider access to both literature and non-fiction materials among non-Yiddish readers.

RÉSUMÉ : La traduction yiddish au Canada: une mesure de la transmission ─ La traduction yiddish est un phénomène à double sens au Canada au XXe siècle, reflétant ainsi l'identité changeante des Juifs originaires de l'Europe de l'Est. Les journaux yiddish ont traduit le Canada aux immigrants autant que les écoles yiddish ont traduit l'idéologie à leurs enfants. Les traductions de la littérature mondiale

vers le yiddish qui ont paru dans des revues littéraires dans les années 1920 et 1930 ont introduit l'art et les idées au lectorat et ont prouvé que le yiddish est une langue égale aux autres langues modernes. Les traductions des textes hébreux-araméens sacrés ont servi à présenter ces textes aux lecteurs dans leur langue vernaculaire et, surtout après l'Holocauste, comme monument d'une tradition perdue. Inversement, les traductions du yiddish en anglais ont permis aux auteurs d'atteindre un lectorat plus large au moment où les Juifs ont commencé à s'intégrer et à adopter l'anglais comme leur langue principale. Plus récemment, les traductions du yiddish en français et en anglais ont créé un accès plus large aux textes littéraires et non romanesques aux lecteurs non yiddish.

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