

THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY
OF JERUSALEM

LITERARY STRATEGIES

Jewish Texts and Contexts

STUDIES IN
CONTEMPORARY
JEWRY
AN ANNUAL
XII

1996

Edited by Ezra Mendelsohn

Published for the Institute by
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York • Oxford

Language as Fate: Reflections on Jewish Literature in America

Ruth R. Wisse
(HARVARD UNIVERSITY)

One of the most celebrated poems of American Jewish literature, unpublished by its authors, has survived only in part and in oral tradition. I received the twenty-two lines that are in my possession from the historian Lucy S. Dawidowicz, who had it from the British writer Chaim Raphael, who had heard Daniel Bell recite it from memory. It is called "Der shir hashirim fun Mendl Pumshtok":

Nu-zhe, kum-zhe, ikh un du,
Ven der ovnt shteyt uf kegn dem himl
Vi a leymener goylm af Tisha b'Av

Lomir geyn zikh
Durkh geselakh vos dreyen zikh
Vi di bord fun dem rov

Oy, Bashe, freg nisht keyn kashe,
A dayge dir

Oyf der vant fun dem koshern restorant
Hengt a shmutsiker betgevant
Un vantsn tantsn karahod

In tsimer vu di vayber zenen
Ret men fun Marx un Lenin

Ikh ver alt . . . ikh ver alt . . .
Es vert mir in pupik kalt

Zol ikh oyskemen di hor, meg ikh oyfesn a floyrn?

Ikh vel tskatsheven di hoyzn
un shpatsirn bay dem yam,

Ikh vel hern di yam-moydn
zingen khad gadyo

Ikh vel zey entfernen
borukh-habo.!

Alas, there is no effective way of offering up this Yiddish verse in English, for it a rendition of T.S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "fartaytsht un besert" as they used to say of Shakespeare in the Yiddish theatre—translated and proved. Saul Bellow, who assisted Isaac Rosenfeld in its composition when they're graduate students at the University of Chicago in the 1930s, says that the two young men had also tried their hand at Milton, but did not do as well with the author *Paradise Lost*. In addition to being simpler than Milton, T.S. Eliot, who was bought by at least one of their contemporaries, Delmore Schwartz, to be the finest poet of their generation, was probably the better send-up because of his publicized dislike for the Jews.² How sweet it must have felt to mock the Anglo-American snob the Jewish immigrant vernacular!

A signature poem of twentieth-century modernism, Eliot's poem was itself a parody of the love song, echoing phrases and tag ends from the earlier English and European literary tradition to convey the bloodless condition of modern courtship. Its erotic fire deadened by urban routine, the eponymous hero is no longer able to seek romantic love, let alone sing of it. The fragmented chronicle of his London day suggests the way Prufrock's world is in every way diminished, thinner in passion and powers of expression than the worlds of Dante, Spenser, Shakespeare and other poets of yesteryear. Comes the Yiddish counterparody to puncture Eliot's ungenerous vision by reinflating all that the Anglo-American poet has brought low. As the Yiddish title heralds, Mendl Pumshtok sings the original love song from which all others may be considered derivative, the "Shir hashirim" (Song of Songs). The evening spread against the sky in Eliot's poem "like a patient etherised upon a table" looms in Pumshtok like a "clay golem on Tisha B'Av," the golem being the creature of Jewish folklore who, when animated by magical formula, is capable (in earlier versions of the legend) of physically defending the Jews from their Christian attackers. The Yiddish expression "leymener golem" designates a clod, Man in his capacity of golem, rather than creature made superior Man; and since the ninth day of the midsummer month of Av commemorates the two destructions of the Temple in Jerusalem, by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and by the Romans in 70 CE, "a clay golem on Tisha B'av" is as dust-dried and witty an image of national impotence as one can imagine. Finally, the mermaids singing each to each at the end of the Prufrock poem sing out, in the Bellow-Rosenfeld version, the "Khad Gadyo," the concluding song of the Passover seder about a kid, bought by the father for two cents, that was eaten by the cat, that was then bitten by the dog, that was then eaten by the stick . . . in a chain of crime and punishment that ends with the Almighty slaying the Angel of Death. The pairing of Eliot's mermaids with the cat-song seems a hilarious mismatch—except that the Passover seder recalls the mysterious parting of the waters during the Exodus, a sea legend quite as significant in Western civilization as the song of Odysseus' mermaids. In short (and it is short), the Yiddish parody is packed with enough Jewish national-religious-historical imagery to remind the upstart Christian of what constitutes true cultural sonance.

But cultural inflation accounts for less than half the wit of this parody. As the Jewish allusions pull rank on the English gentleman, pungent Yiddish also pulls the poem downward, into the colloquial vitality of the Jewish everyday. In contrast to

the priggish J. Alfred, Jewish Mendl is lusty and tough. The curly beard of the rabbi, the kosher restaurant where roaches do a circle dance on dirty bed linen, the Jewish *vayber*—married women—talking about Marx and Lenin, breathe vigorous life into Eliot's languor. The Jewish version challenges simultaneously from above and below. As for the most famous image of the poem, "I grow old . . . I grow old . . . / I shall wear the bottom of my trousers rolled," the Yiddish is plainer. It says, "my pupik grows cold"—a low blow to the belly of Eliot's masterpiece.³

More than half a century later another American Jewish writer, Philip Roth, would compose the definitive *shpritz* on the Jewish navel, in his usage, the *pipik*:

the *thing* that for most children was neither here nor there, neither a part nor an orifice, somehow a concavity and a convexity both, something neither upper nor lower, neither lewd nor entirely respectable either, a short enough distance from the genitals to make it suspiciously intriguing and yet, despite this teasing proximity, this conspicuously puzzling centrality, as meaningless as it was without function—the sole archeological evidence of the fairy tale of one's origins, the lasting imprint of the fetus who was somehow oneself without actually being anyone at all, just about the silliest, blindest, stupidest watermark that could have been devised for a species with a brain like ours. It might as well have been the omphalos at Delphi given the enigma the pipik presented. Exactly what was your pipik trying to tell you? Nobody could ever really figure it out. You were left with only the word, the delightful playword itself, the sonic prankishness of the two syllabic pops and the closing click encasing those peepingly meekish, unobtrusively shlemielish twin vowels. . . .⁴

Roth's pipik was no longer the plain Jewish navel of the Rosenfeld-Bellow parody. The hyperbolic madcap runaway quality of his *pipik* routine shows how oddly the word reverberated in Roth's consciousness, the way Jewishness itself was never comfortably part of him but more of an appendage like the thing he speaks of, "meaningless as it was without function," that could be exploited as a result of its accidental quality for dozens of similarly dazzling passages of prose. Yiddish was almost as foreign to Philip Roth as it was to T.S. Eliot, but since he was reflexively associated with its culture whether or not he wanted to assume its "meekish," "shlemielish" properties, he made a literary career of probing these disjunctions. He found the Yiddish term humorous as a holdover from the immigrant past. For their part, the two Chicago Jews were perfectly at home in Yiddish; like Indian braves who still knew all the stages of the hunt, Bellow and Rosenfeld enjoyed a cultural confidence that was already rare among their contemporaries and almost extinct by the next generation. They entered American culture with the language that drew from the cumulative Jewish experience in Europe, and they valued their inheritance highly for the way it increased their cultural options. But no more than Roth would they have thought of translating modernist classics into their native language. Their idea of culture led from a European Yiddish-speaking past to their American English-speaking present. The Yiddish parody of the Anglo-American master was not intended for Yiddish readers, but for aspirants to high English culture like themselves who were proud of transcending the same immigrant background.

The "Shir hashirim" of Mendl Pumshtok marks a rare moment in American Jewish history when writers poised between two languages, representing two cultural communities, could still move in either direction, ahead if they wished into

English high culture, or back into the immigrant culture from which they had just emerged. Not that bilingualism among that generation of American Jews was surprising in itself. When the majority of American Jews still spoke Yiddish, it would have been odd had the children of Yiddish-speaking immigrants failed to know the language of their homes. In the group around *Partisan Review* and *Commentary* with which they were loosely associated, Jews like Lionel Trilling and Delmore Schwartz, who had English-speaking parents, were the exception rather than the rule.

But implicit in the transitional bilingualism of first-generation American Jews, especially of its writers and intellectuals, was unilateral movement away from the European Jewish vernacular. So rapid and powerful was the changeover of Jews from Yiddish to English that failure to make the linguistic adjustment seemed funny in itself. That most popular comic novel of the late 1930s, *The Education of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N*, depends for its humor almost exclusively on the Jewish hero's tenacity and deficiency in trying to master English.⁵ Kaplan encourages his classmates to follow his example—"Don' give up de sheep, Moskovitz!"—and the book rewarded a generation of greenhorns for having outdistanced Mr. Kaplan by at least enough to appreciate his lapses. Allusion to Yiddish was considered humorous quite apart from its semantic intention, as when a cartoon character heads mistakenly in the wrong direction, or perhaps thoughtlessly off the edge of a precipice.⁶

The fate of Yiddish in America points to an essential difference between Jewish experience in the new country and the old. Yiddish was the European Jewish vernacular, created in about the twelfth century to express and safeguard a distinctive Jewish way of life in the midst of surrounding peoples. Max Weinreich, renowned historian of Yiddish, called it the language of *derekh haShas*, the "way of the Talmud," to underscore the religio-national origins and function of the language in expressing and conserving the Jewish way of life; until the modern period, European Jews maintained their own languages as a corollary of distinctiveness, much as did the national groups among whom they settled. Weinreich also demonstrates the degree to which Yiddish continued to incorporate Jewish historical memory. (He might have used the Bellow-Rosenfeld parody as his proof-text.) When Jews in large numbers broke with the Jewish religious tradition toward the end of the nineteenth century, they no longer wished to remain culturally separate from their neighbors, but their adoption of continental languages was slowed by unfriendliness of the surrounding peoples, and occasionally, as in Hungary and Poland, by regenerative Jewish religious and national movements. As late as the 1930s, the critical mass of Yiddish-speakers in Poland and even Soviet Russia still generated a brand-new cohort of modern Yiddish writers.

In contrast, Jews in America created no language of their own, and almost without exception, no Jewish writer born there ever wrote in a Jewish language.⁷ Cynthia Ozick's prediction in 1970 that there would arise a kind of distinctive cultural vocabulary among American Jews that she metaphorically called a "new Yiddish" seemed wildly improbable at the time, and did not prove characteristic of even her own work.⁸ Whereas in Europe many Jews were badly disappointed in their anticipation of civic equality and social toleration, and were provoked, or

creatively inspired, by the exclusive nationalism of their neighbors to make an ideology out of Yiddish and to breathe new life into Hebrew, no parallel disappointment slowed Jewish linguistic integration into American society. Ideological Hebraism may have played a part in American Zionist circles around the time of the emergence of Israel, but children of that movement were simultaneously mastering English culture, determined to prove America compatible with Israel, by playing baseball in Hebrew, by comparing pioneering values of the two countries.

All this is to say that the impulse of two aspiring American writers to aggrise against T.S. Eliot in Yiddish was striking in its exceptionalism. That Isaac Rosenfeld published a number of stories in Yiddish and Saul Bellow continued to speak Yiddish with his siblings testifies to their creative possession of the language their parents had brought over with them from Europe. This possession, in turn, allowed them to give notice, at the point of their penetrating English culture, that they intended to enter it as Jews. The Yiddish parody, however, was to remain a coterie amusement, and possession did not imply perpetuation. If it mocked Eliot's attempt to keep Jews out of his cultural tradition, it made no less fun of bringing modernism into Yiddish. In the same way that so many German Jews of the previous century had proven their adoration of German culture by becoming its foremost critics, writers and purveyors, American Jews who came of age in the 1930s felt a possessive love for English literature, determined to make it their own.

T.S. Eliot's challenge to the emerging American Jewish writers was actually of a different order than they were prepared to realize at the time. Distressing because it emanated from the highest reaches of American culture—not from the undereducated masses who could be expected to reduce their prejudice as they gained in knowledge, but from the elite that claimed to be perpetuating Anglo-American literary tradition—Eliot's exclusiveness seemed like a personal rebuff. Instead of meeting them halfway and overseeing their entry into American public culture (the way Alfred Kazin imagined the principal of his public school, a man named King, in the image of Jehovah), the great American poet threatened to disqualify them from full participation in American letters because they did not share his tradition. His provocative description of himself as "a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion" insulted not only Jews but every democratic American republican. Of course, the matter was wonderfully complicated by the poet's modernism, since this same confessed traditionalist also argued that every true creative artist creatively subverts the canon of great works and holy writ: his own poetry fractured the tradition he purported to uphold. But ideationally, ideologically, Eliot was assumed to be hankering for cultural time past. He did not share liberalism's optimistic view of a rationally improved future. Insofar as he remained hopeful, he believed that the cultural unification of Western civilization would be based on Christian faith and the classical sources that Europeans inherit in common.⁹

If one may be permitted the comparison, Eliot's defense of religion resembled the resistance of Orthodox Jews to the desacralization of modern culture. The difference in their traditionalism had to do with contrasting qualities of Jewish and Christian civilizations, the former tribally inward-looking, the latter seeking universal harmony—including through the eclipse of the Jews. For their part, the native-born American Jewish writers and intellectuals typified by Rosenfeld and Bellow and

Kazin assumed as a matter of course that an altered and desecralized world could only be for the better, because it would no longer require the kinds of divisions that kept Jews and Christians apart. Attracted by the cosmopolitan features of modernism, they were threatened by the notion of an exclusive Christian tradition, just as they would have been by any Jewish "tradition" that tried to claim them in its name.

In a sense, Eliot's antisemitism made it too easy for some of his Jewish critics. His mean-spiritedness let them bridle at the discriminatory features of his beliefs while ignoring the fact that any religious civilization assuredly *did* have something to fear from uprooted cosmopolitans who felt no loyalty to their own traditions and who dismissed religion as a matter of course. Moreover, there were irreducible differences between Christianity and Jewishness that had nothing to do with prejudice. It could be argued even by one wholly sympathetic to Jews that English was the repository of Christian culture, just as America, notwithstanding the judicial separation of church and state, had been founded as a Christian country. In Eliot, the American Jewish intellectuals came up against the unwelcome notion that although they might not want to remain true to their religious traditions, other makers of American culture might want to remain true to theirs.

The cultural attitudes of American Jewish writers at mid-century are discussed in three symposia conducted by the *Contemporary Jewish Record* and its successor *Commentary* in 1944, 1948 and 1961. Typically limited in what they can tell us about the "generation" they presume to represent, these inquiries are nevertheless based on several general assumptions that remain uncontradicted by the participants: that "writers of Jewish descent are no longer spectators in the development of American letters but full participants in the cultural life of the country" (1944); that English is their sole language (there is no mention of Yiddish or Hebrew in any set of questions); that living as they are off the religious and cultural capital of the past, "their kind of Jewishness provides little hope for the survival of even those Jewish traditions which they admire" (1961).¹⁰ Each symposium registers a different social and political climate. The first studies the psychological comfort of its Jewish participants: do they have a conscious attitude toward their heritage or do they merely "reflect" it in an unconscious fashion? How are they affected by their minority status and by their awareness of antisemitism? The second symposium puts the question more bluntly. Leslie Fiedler, like Bellow and Rosenfeld from Chicago, and like them pugnaciously proud of his Jewish background, had published an essay in *Commentary* asking, "What are we going to do about Fagin?" and it was this question that touched off a major debate on the entry of Jews into the English literary tradition. The forum split along the lines of "assimilationists" and "anti-assimilationists," the former prepared to ignore or to minimize anti-Jewishness in the English literary tradition, the latter intent on combating it or creating "alternative myths." Fiedler was convinced that Jews differed from other immigrant groups in the way they remained loyal to the heritage of their fathers:

Certainly, the Jews were the only immigrant group which had brought with them a considerable Old World culture to which they clung, refusing to cast it into the melting pot with the same abandon with which southern European or Scandinavian peasants were willing to toss away their few scraps of spiritual goods.¹¹

His unsubstantiated claim about the cultural tenacity of Jews might have been more convincing had he thought to ask not only "What are we going to do about Fagin?" but also "What are we going to do about Moses?" Yet neither he nor any of the forum's other participants indicated any concern for the future of Jewishness or interest in transmitting it.

Only in the third symposium, thirteen years after the establishment of the state of Israel, did attention begin to shift away from Christian antisemitism to Jewish self-perpetuation. Norman Podhoretz's editorial questions, omitting any reference to antisemitism, asked a new generation of intellectuals "under forty" whether they felt any obligation to extend the values inherent in Jewish tradition to the next generation; how they regarded the possibility of their children's conversion to another religion; and what loyalty, if any, they felt toward the new Jewish polity. This may have been the first time a member of this intellectual cohort assumed the public posture of Jewish parent rather than Jewish child. Tentatively, hedged by qualifiers, Podhoretz registered his conviction that although every person has an absolute moral right to choose his loyalties, Jews do neither themselves nor the world any great service by an indifference to the future of their people: "[One] ought to feel a sense of 'historic reverence' to Jewish tradition even, or perhaps especially, if one is convinced that the curtain is about to drop on the last act of a very long play."

His prompting was hardly heeded. Most members of the younger generation he was addressing shared both their elders' indifference to the Jewish past and their investment in America's secular future. Although they were no longer preoccupied with the hatred directed against them, they remained as a group disdainful of what they considered parochial or chauvinistic limitations. Jason Epstein, who as editor of the *New York Review of Books* would become the most influential member of this group, wrote in from Lagos, the capital of Nigeria:

I have the impression that the traditional human groupings are on the way out. As we hear of new cultures and watch new societies grow, the old ones seem less inevitable. We are all pretty much alone in the world and if we are honest with ourselves, there is little real comfort to be found in the conventional alignments. Perhaps it would be good to feel oneself engaged in a highly auspicious tradition. But I happen not to and don't feel at one with those who do.¹²

A much more thoughtful response was that of Philip Roth, then known only as the author of *Goodbye, Columbus*. Roth understood that Jews could ultimately choose to be Jews solely on the basis of religious commitment, not ancestral piety:

For myself, I cannot find a true and honest place in the history of believers that begins with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on the basis of the heroism of these believers, or of their humiliation and anguish. I can only connect with them, and with their descendants, as I apprehend their God. And until such time as I do apprehend him, there will continue to exist between myself and those others who seek his presence, a question, sometimes spoken, sometimes not, which for all the pain and longing it may engender, for all the disappointment and bewilderment it may produce, cannot be swept away by nostalgia or sentimentality or even by a blind and valiant effort of the will: how are you connected to me as another man is not?¹³

*

On these same religious grounds, Roth was prepared to define what set him apart from the Christian tradition, not on the basis of antisemitism, that is, the Christian's rejection of *him*, but on the basis of his Judaism, that is, *his* rejection of the myth of Jesus Christ. Roth felt that although the ancient and powerful Jewish disbelief in Jesus as the son of God was not enough to hold the Jews together as a people, "for the strength with which Jesus continues to be rejected is not equalled by the passion with which the God who gave the Law to Moses is embraced, or approached," it remained a powerful, if generally unacknowledged, affirmative Jewish bond. Roth's minimalism pointed Jews neither backward nor forward as a people, but recognized that only those who were prepared to follow the Jewish God would perpetuate the Jewish people. In this way, he too faced up to the challenge of T.S. Eliot's religious definition of English culture, not as a Jew being excluded from that tradition, but as a rival in the shaping of new American literary traditions.

Roth's early story "The Conversion of the Jews" imperfectly expressed the other side of the same argument. It railed at liberal Judaism for its lack of real faith. The child hero of the story is so frustrated by the inadequacy of his religious instruction that he makes his rabbi-teacher agree that an omnipotent God would have been able to arrange for a virgin birth. The author wants to destroy at least the smugness of the faithless rabbi, even if he lacks the courage to take on, according to him, the greater falseness of Christianity. There was something puerile, unlettered, in Roth's grasp of the essential contest between Jews and Christians, as he must have intuited when he consigned his anger to a child hero. Over the years, he never struggled as did his beloved Kafka to apprehend the God he did not know. Nonetheless, Roth's art continued to resist "nostalgia or sentimentality" or the will to go along with social Jewishness as a substitute for following God.

Possession of Yiddish still allowed Rosenfeld and Bellow to exploit artistically the richness of the Jewish traditions that the language contained within itself, including its religious resonance and its philosophical complexity. This possession was marvelously demonstrated in the translations they prepared for Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg's 1954 anthology *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories* that became classics in their own right. Philip Roth could not have translated from Yiddish. His third-generation Jewishness, stripped of cultural substantiveness, found its positive content in withstanding Christianity and antisemitism. All significant encounters with Jewishness in Roth's work are confrontations with such "counterselves" as a hasidic survivor of the Holocaust, Anne Frank, or an American Zionist who has moved to Israel. Jewishness is for him an artistic complication, not part of a cultural resolution. When the writer-protagonist of *The Counterlife* thinks of circumcising the son who may be born to him, the rite he imagines resembles less the mark of the Covenant than the mark of Cain.

Across the street, so to speak, from Rosenfeld and Bellow's literary circle of mostly native-born American Jews was the somewhat larger literary community of Yiddish immigrant writers—writers launched between the world wars who had immigrated to America too late to adopt its common language, at least for the purposes of art. In most other respects, the American Yiddish writers initially shared the worldview of Jewish counterparts who wrote in English, including the same appreciation of

English and American literature. Taking for granted that emancipation meant civic equality, and that Enlightenment required them to find secular alternatives to religious laws, the Yiddish writers considered themselves independent and individualistic, immigrant sons and daughters who had left their fathers far behind (in most cases literally far behind in "the Old Country") in a unidirectional passage from tradition to modernity.

If anything, the Yiddish writers were much more radical in their political and literary experimentation than the generation that functioned in English. Most of them, having fled the tsarist empire, accepted the Russian Revolution as the dawn of a new progressive age, and whether or not they trusted the Bolsheviks, they took for granted that an irrevocable change had occurred in human affairs. Their links with Russia were personal and informed. The Yiddish literary community in New York included writers like H. Leivick who had escaped from a tsarist life sentence in Siberia, and the editors of the Communist *Frayheyt* who pretended to be nominally independent of Soviet directives as they spread the Soviet message. Leftist politics dominated Yiddish intellectual circles in America, with the difference that on this side of the ocean the opposition to Bolshevism remained relatively uncoerced and vocal.

So long as immigration from Europe kept replacing the English-speaking children of immigrants with new Yiddish-speaking arrivals, Yiddish writers were surrounded by a vibrant, diversified audience that depended on the native language for anything it wished to know or to read. The avidity with which Jewish writers translated foreign literature into Yiddish shows how determined they were to merge their own culture with others. By the end of the First World War, American Yiddish writers also had two local literary generations to draw upon—the "Sweatshop Poets" of the turn of the century and "The Yunge" of 1907–1919. They felt themselves part of a solid and expanding literature in which they were free to experiment to their heart's content.

About a decade before Rosenfeld and Bellow composed their spoof of T.S. Eliot, the Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein published in *Inzikh* (*Introspection*), the magazine he then edited with Aaron Leyeles, a cutting parody entitled "If Joyce Wrote Yiddish," in which he mocked and celebrated *literatuches*, the assinine local Yiddish literary scene.¹⁴ Although the scope of a work like *Finnegan's Wake* was still beyond the ambitions of Yiddish prose, the fun-filled literary style that James Joyce pioneered in English perfectly suited Yiddish, a European language that had integrated at least as many linguistic strands as English, and could take at least equal delight in showing off its wit. Glatstein and Leyeles' coterie publication was struggling to uphold the standard of literary modernism within the assiduously pragmatic immigrant milieu. The program of *Inzikh*, first articulated in 1919, called for innovation and personalization of language and form as the essential ingredients of modern verse. Unlike Rosenfeld and Bellow, who were amused by the cultural gap between high English and low Yiddish, Glatstein adapted Joyce, endorsing the Joycean technique as a natural option for Yiddish.

It is doubtful whether many readers could have appreciated Glatstein's sophisticated parody of the Yiddish *kritiker* (critic), whom he called *krikgeyter*, backslider, and of the Yiddish literary scene in New York. When Patriciano—the Patrician

defender of aesthetic complexity—declares, “Mir brokhn voynen unter shklorenem umfarshtendakh,” he is conflating combinations of the meanings “we have to (*broykhn*; Germanic) live under [what is] clear [and] comprehensive (*klorenem* farshtendlakh)” and “we brokenly (*tsebrokhn*) howl (*voyen*) under the shekel-clear (connotes also *sheker*, falsely clear) roof (*dakh*) of incomprehension (*umfarshtendlakh*),” alluding to the argument over competing aesthetic criteria of clarity and complexity among Yiddish poets of the time. The puns and word plays going off like firecrackers in this short spoof do not always serve a mature literary purpose, but Glatstein pushes linguistic experimentation about as far as Yiddish ever goes.

The poets of *Inzikh* were uncompromising literary moderns. Mikhl Likht addressed a poem to “T.S.E.” praising *The Wasteland* for its prophetic vision of a life without justice and without judgment. Upbraiding Eliot for his reductionist anti-humanism and antisemitism, Likht also declares him better than any of his Yiddish rivals at catching the modern temper of *khurbnland*. At the same time, Leyeles and Glatstein identified modern Yiddish culture with political progressiveness, and modern poetry with revolutionary change. They tried to find a place for themselves in the Communist paper *Frayheyt* when it began publication in New York in 1922, and Leyeles retained his ties with the political left until the Second World War. Contributors to *Inzikh* maintained the Introspectivist custom, which was also the Communist custom, of dehebraizing the spelling of Yiddish words as a sign that Yiddish had neutralized its religious origins, or at least had subordinated the traditional function of the language to the aesthetic demand of “making it new.”¹⁵ Glatstein regarded the introduction of free verse into Yiddish poetry not merely as a liberating expressive device for himself but as a necessary step forward, so that when certain Yiddish writers continued using or returned to stanzaic rhyme, he hectored them in language worthy of Trotsky: “they have forgotten that there is no way back and that tired steps must fall away and not be permitted to drag back the weaker marchers.”¹⁶

On the whole, the Glatstein-Leyeles circle of the 1920s tried to sustain the same balance between independent Marxism and literary modernism that seemed so attractive to the Jewish intellectuals associated with *Partisan Review* and the *Contemporary Jewish Record* a decade later.¹⁷ However, the young English-speaking New York circles had no knowledge of their Yiddish precedecessors. They knew neither the poetry of the group nor the political arguments that had raged between Glatstein, the outright anti-Communist, and Leyeles, the Trotskyist and fellow traveler. Because they were ignorant of Yiddish except as a language of low culture, they assumed that English represented a cultural advancement over the language of their immigrant homes, and therefore took no interest in its writers.¹⁸

The intellectual crisis that overtook the American Yiddish literary community in the autumn of 1929 anticipated in almost every respect the shock of the Stalin-Hitler pact ten years later. At the very moment when the great stock market crash and the onset of a worldwide economic depression appeared to offer Marxist proof of the demise of American capitalism, the Communists took a political step so dramatically opposed to Jewish interests and Jewish safety that they provoked a conflict of loyalties in all but their strongest Jewish supporters. The Arab attacks in Palestine against defenseless yeshivah students, as devastating and violent as the worst Eu-

ropean pogroms, were called by some “der driter khurbn.”¹⁹ But the Communist response horrified American Jews more than the brutality itself. Stalin hailed the pogroms as the first necessary step of an Arab uprising against British and Zionist imperialists. And whether motivated by a desire to court the Arabs or out of hatred for the Jews, Stalin had to be defended by those within the party. Jews who had sought protection from antisemitism in the Socialist International now had to choose between loyalty to the left and loyalty to their people, creating fatal divisions among Jewish elites at the very point when Hitler was coming to power in Germany and opposition to the Jews was becoming a staple of nationalist politics throughout Central and Eastern Europe. In much the same way, but with little sense of precedent, the younger Jewish intellectuals were affected by the Stalin pact with Hitler in 1939.

The rising danger to the Jews of Europe throughout the 1930s highlighted the contrast between Yiddish-speaking writers of the immigrant generation and native-born American Jews, a contrast so great that it finally turned them in opposite directions. Upon starting out, each new literary cohort had claimed freedom from the kind of communal obligations that traditionally united the Jewish people; certainly, Yiddish as well as English writers felt that in America they could indulge their individuality thanks to guaranteed freedom of expression and the absence of collective reprisal against the Jews. The sense of limits came from another source entirely: since only Jews spoke Yiddish, the fate of the language limited the prospects of the Yiddish writer.

Literary theories of individualism, Introspectivism, futurism and modernism—in English, French, or even in minority languages like Czech—were all predicated on a certain level of stability within the language community as a whole. The case of Yiddish turned out to be different. In Europe, America and Palestine, the Jewish people transformed itself, and was forcibly transformed, more radically than literature could imagine. The degree to which literary experimentation depends on linguistic stability can only be grasped once a language is seriously threatened, and its experimenters turned into conservationists. This trend began to be apparent in Russia and America well before the destruction of European Jewry in the Second World War. Jewishness might or might not matter to the Jew who was writing in English, because with the English market expanding, he had a guaranteed artistic future. Even his occasional Jewish subject did not require an audience of Jews, especially as he was so rarely inclined to align it with specifically Jewish values. But “Jewishness” had to matter to the Yiddish writer, who depended on Jews to keep his language alive.

The conditions of Yiddish publishing had in any event promoted interdependency between American Yiddish writers and their European counterparts in Poland and Russia (many a Soviet writer would later forfeit his life for these routine contacts with colleagues overseas). Yiddish writers got their books published in Warsaw and reviewed in Moscow, sometimes making their reputations on the basis of their European rather than American reception. At the same time, the major institutions of American Yiddish culture, notably the Yiddish press and the Yiddish theater, became more focused on Europe as Jewish immigration to America dwindled and as the American-oriented audiences moved into the English sector. In sum, the more

124 = fate

(24)

Jewish immigrants passed into the American mainstream, the more Yiddish culture felt the strength of its ties to the home community.

Forward and Future (*Foverts and Tsukunft*) were the names of the leading American Yiddish daily and monthly, founded at the turn of the century on socialist principles. Already implicit in the Enlightenment, let alone the Marxist, worldview of these publications was an orientation toward the future, not the past. Just as the need for Yiddish had once arisen from the strong attachment of Jews to their God-inspired way of life, so the need to abandon Yiddish arose when Jews transferred their allegiance to universalist philosophies of progress, and even more so to revolutions that would alter human behavior through force of will. Writers who had once insisted that the connection between Judaism and Yiddish had grown arbitrary, secularized along with its speakers, came to recognize the innate connection between language and the people whose language it is. As one sign of this recognition, American Yiddish writers began to reach back for historical subjects and characters. Sholem Asch, Joseph Opatoshu, H. Leivick, A. Leyeles, Jacob Glatstein, Menahem Boreisho, I.J. Singer, and later Isaac Bashevis Singer not only attempted but specialized in the historical subject. Bashevis Singer went so far as to argue that Yiddish virtually *required* American writers to write about the past, since their language had never successfully taken root in the new soil.

The point was made with startling passion by Jacob Glatstein in what is probably the most famous American Yiddish poem, the only Yiddish poem of the century that approximates Hayim Nahman Bialik's "Be'ir Hahareigah" in its contemporary impact. About the time that Rosenfeld and Bellow were composing their jibe at Eliot, Glatstein's "A gute nakht, velt," dated by the author April 1938, reversed the direction of what had heretofore been considered the inevitable movement from a dim past to a brighter future:

A gute nakht, breyte velt
Groyse, shtinkentike velt.
Nisht du, nor ikh farhak dem toyer.
Mit dem langn khalat,
Mit der fayerdiker, geler lat,
Mit dem shtoltsn trot,
Oyf mayn eygenem gebot—
Gey ikh tsurik in geto.

(Good night, wide world / Big stinking world! / Not you but I slam shut the gate. With my long gaberdine / My fiery, yellow patch / With proud step, / At my sole command / I go back into the ghetto.)²⁰

The opening salvo is aimed at poetry itself. It is not merely rude in the way modern verse uses vulgar diction to sting art back to life. The lines "Good night, wide world / Big stinking world" resist poetry's essential requirement of organizing emotion and thought in a brand-new way. The second stanza, too, opens with coarse invective against the "Swinish German, hateful Polack / Thievish Amalekite—land of swill and guzzle." The poet who a decade earlier had promised to rescue poetry from all that is raw and flat now resorts to the raw, flat vocabulary of a fishmonger. He slams the gate on Western civilization by tearing up his own passport.

This poem is strongly reminiscent of the moment at the Passover seder when the Jew recites the "Shfoyk khamoskho," inviting God to pour out His wrath on gentiles who do not recognize Him. Uncharacteristically aggressive, the Jew opens the door for just long enough to pronounce his curse. God would be perfectly capable of hearing the Jew's prayers from behind closed doors (as He presumably hears the psalms of the Hallel that follows), and were it possible to argue with the neighbors out in the open, the threat of God's vengeance would be quite unnecessary. Thus, the drama of resistance, though directed toward others, is enacted by the Jew for himself alone. In order to experience his moral freedom *for once* at the seder, he attacks his relentless enemies "in public."

Adopting this same ambiguous posture, Glatstein's poet-Jew seizes the initiative from his tormentors to proclaim through the open gate that he is about to shut it. Since he speaks in his language, not theirs, the wit of his barbs cannot smite his enemies (the way David's pebble slew mighty Goliath) but only stir the Jews who are huddled behind him. The poet-Jew resembles his diaspora ancestor in having only words for weapons, but he is different in being already part of the gentile world. Having identified his future with gentile culture, he cannot call upon the God he abandoned. It was he who found the Jewish teachings insufficient, the Jewish street too narrow, the traditional Jewish outlook too slow and too dark; he can hardly blame the gentiles for having darkened his world, when he is the one who hailed them as bearers of the greater light. Whereas his ancestor had spoken out from within an interior of moral radiance, the modern Jew has behind him a denuded Jewish world of his own making. How then can he curse his enemies with both his dignity and honesty intact?

The poem's raw opening lines introduce this great emotional and intellectual complication. To slam the gate on his deniers, the Jew must reverse the categories of modern history. He must set his future course backwards, "tsurik" into the ghetto. "Kheyrem," excommunication, is pronounced not on the Jew who goes to join the world but by the Jew on the world he once went to join. Direct speech must redirect language to its proper course: what once seemed obvious was obviously mistaken. Enlightenment was a journey into night. Progress unleashed barbarism. As in olden days, the Jew alone may escape the Flood—the moral contamination of the world—this time not because he was chosen by God, but because he was singled out for exclusion by the European hordes. Barred now from the civilization he was so desperate to enter, the Jew can quit Sodom by reaffirming his life as Jew. This painful reversal includes the sacrifice of aesthetic refinement. It requires a return from electricity to kerosene, cramped ghetto over continental expanse, dust over cleanliness. It requires the sacrifice of even what the Jews themselves contributed to Western civilization:

A gute nakht. Kh'gib dir, velt, tsusstayer
Ale mayne bafayer.
Nem tsu di yezusmarxes, verg zikh mit zeyer mut.
Krapir iber a tropn fun undzer getoyft blut.

(Good night. I give you in good measure / All my redeemers; / Take your Jesus Marxes; choke on their daring. / Croak on each drop of our baptized blood.)

As in Bialik's poem, the speaker's rage helps to mask the deeper anxiety of his political helplessness and his renunciation—of residual religious faith in Bialik's case, of humanist faith in Glatstein's. As Noah withdrew into the lonely ark, the modern Jew reluctantly returns to "cankered Jewish life." Yet Glatstein's Jew purports to find in his return to the ghetto the ageless hope of regeneration that sustained Noah in his ark and the Jews in their centuries of anticipating the messiah. When he concludes, "S'veynt in mir di freyd fun kumen" ("The joy of homecoming weeps in me"), he is being not ironic but contradictory, yoking the pleasure and relief of his voluntary homecoming to the irremediable pain of denying Western progress.

Glatstein's voyage back to his native Lublin in 1934 to visit his dying mother had exposed him to both the crisis of his declining family and to the desperate straits of local Jews. He concluded that Jewish life in Poland was virtually doomed, and consigned this informed perspective to the protagonist of his autobiographical novels, *Ven Yash iz geforn*, 1938, and *Ven Yash iz gekumen*, 1940, translated into English as *Homeward Bound* and *Homecoming at Twilight*, and to many of the poems of *Gedenklider (Poems of Remembrance)*, published in 1943. Glatstein does not accept Sartre's proposition that the Jew must confront fate in the form of his enemy. He exhorts the Jew to beat a strategic retreat from the Wasteland of modern life, leaving the gentiles to choke on the world they have created.

A year after his return from Poland, Glatstein published what may be considered a prefatory essay to "A gute nakht velt," about the attempt of Yiddish writers to "march to the gentiles" by getting themselves translated into English. He recalled that when the Yiddish novelist David Bergelson visited America in 1928, the first thing he said upon being introduced to Glatstein was: "They tell me you know your way around English books. So how can I get *Midas hadin (By the Letter of the Law)* translated into English?" Bergelson's recent conversion to Communist orthodoxy and his desire for English fame appeared to Glatstein as two sides of the same greedy ambition. Glatstein also accused Sholem Asch (at the opposite end of the political spectrum) of feeding his translator no more than eight hundred Yiddish words so that he could easily be rendered into basic English:

Scratch any Jew and out leaps a vulgar assimilator. He is ready to give up everything he owns, his book, his newspaper, his language, all for the sake of Tatar, Albanian, Bulgarian, or, with due distinction, the Holy Tongue. Apart from being a born assimilator, the Yiddish writer is also a nervous perambulator; he never stops moving. He goes over to the Hebraists, to the Communists, to the IKOR [an acronym for Jewish Colonization in Russia, a Communist organization that supported settlement of Birobidzan], or else he goes right over to the gentiles.²¹

The anger of "Good Night, World" is here directed against Jewish writers for their undignified flight from Jewishness. Glatstein is contemptuous of colleagues who think they can transcend or deny the threatened world of Yiddish. He contrasts these "linguistic hermaphrodites" with artists of another sort, writers who chew their way into the language ("vos fresn zikh ayn direkt in der shprach"), making it difficult for anyone to translate the texts without tearing them straight from their mother's womb:

If you will, this second kind of art is national art. If you will, it is Proust, Joyce, Pushkin, Gogol, Sholem Aleichem, Bialik . . . who sought their freedom in the narrowest discipline of their own language, measuring out words like pharmacists, working within the possibilities or limits of their own tongue. And what difference does it make if Pushkin, Bialik, or Joyce cannot be easily transposed into foreign languages? . . . Who cares if a great Albanian or a great Rumanian poet remains unknown in Alaska? After all, what meaning can one claim for international ideals transmitted through literature in the light of a world literature that kept refining more and more until it produced Hitlerism and Mussolinism?²²

Collapsing aesthetic and political arguments into one, this passage argues 1) that the greatest literature is essentially national, its greatness being that which is least translatable; 2) that this national aspect of literature is benign (when the content of its nationalism is benign); 3) that the idea of literature as an instrument of internationalism is as politically stupid as it is aesthetically misguided; 4) that the drive toward such universalist ideals as a "world literature"—a literature transcending national boundaries—has resulted not in international harmony but in megalomaniacal politics. Glatstein does not dismiss all literature on the grounds of political impotence. He says that while European culture bred German and Italian fascism, Jewish culture did not.²³

The fullest realization of these arguments came in his poetry. By the time he wrote this essay, he had published *Yidishtaytshn* (translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav as *Exegyiddish*), poems that resist translation by seeking out the specificities of language in just the way he explains. Burrowing into Yiddish, Glatstein felt that he was not only closing the door on a potential international public but burying himself in the fate of the most threatened part of the Jewish people. In his immediate circle, where the association of nationalism with "bourgeois" had been as automatic as Russia with revolution, the increasing Jewishness of his work marginalized him even among the writers he knew best. Yet poetry required that he "seek his freedom in the narrowest discipline of his language," like Pushkin, who once flirted with high status French, but then "doomed himself in Russian and became Russia's national poet." The moral responsibility for the Jews followed from artistic responsibility to the Jewish language.

Glatstein never abandoned personal poetry in favor of national poetry, as many of his critics charged. He continued to filter experience through the prism of the self, but his self had changed through the experience of being a Yiddish poet. The more inventively he used the Jewish language, the more Jewish he became. He came to believe that a master craftsman had to experience the fate of his language as his own.

By the Second World War, the internal logic of Yiddish claimed even the most Americanized of Yiddish writers, Abraham Cahan. Less concerned than Glatstein with the aesthetics of language, Cahan was also drawn into Jewishness through association with Yiddish, and although his case is in no way typical, it is important by virtue of his importance. Cahan had begun his career as an apostle of socialism, and in one of his early books, *Di neshome yeseyre*, he attributed to socialism the qualities of the "supplementary soul" that Jews had traditionally associated with the

Sabbath. Prolific in Russian, Yiddish and English, Cahan described (in a five-volume autobiography written in Yiddish in the mid-1920s) how much he had enjoyed his early stint as an English journalist and writer of fiction, before he became permanent editor of the *Forward* in 1902. His first English sketches had won him high praise from William Dean Howells as a chronicler of the Jewish ghetto, and he was indirectly responsible for the classic *Spirit of the Ghetto*, having guided his journalist-colleague Hutchins Hapgood through the Jewish quarter of the Lower East Side. Cahan also enthusiastically promoted Russian literature, cultivating an appreciation for Russian socialism and Russian fiction among American writers much as Philip Rahv was to do in the 1940s. The complete cultural arbiter, Cahan introduced his fellow Americans to what he considered the best of the European spirit, and then taught his fellow Jews all about America, starting with its language.

We await the biography of Abraham Cahan that will tell this story in all its complexity.²⁴ For now, it is enough to know that Cahan mastered English well enough to earn his living in English journalism, that his English fiction included an American classic, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, and that he stepped into American culture with the confidence of a benefactor. Nevertheless, eschewing Levinsky's road to success, Cahan remained within the community of Yiddish-speakers, which meant that as the years passed, he shared more and more of their national perspective. Much as he tried to stay aloof from the political infighting of the immigrant groups, he was exposed to the worsening news that they received about the home communities in Europe, and he was forced to cast about as they did for national solutions. Cahan's visit to Palestine in September 1925, after which he opened the pages of the *Forward* to sympathetic discussions of Zionism, has been called "a decisive moment in the history of American Jewry's support for . . . the Jewish homeland."²⁵ And his intensifying identification with the national cause did not stop with reconciliation to Zionism.

The very last book Cahan wrote, in 1941, opens and ends with this pronouncement:

I am not religious. I am a thoroughgoing freethinker. But I respect the traditions of our people, and the attitude of Jewish freethinkers like myself to Sholem Asch's new road is essentially the attitude of religious Jews.²⁶

Despite the fact that Cahan had championed Sholem Asch and had been publishing his work for almost forty years, he refused to serialize *Der man fun natseret* (*The Nazarene*) when he determined that Asch "accepted the New Testament on faith." According to Cahan, the New Testament was the book that divided the Christian religion from the Jewish; Asch transgressed Jewish boundaries when he suggested that this division (*mekhitse*) be erased, and more, when he placed Jesus above Moses and the Prophets. Cahan's publicized independence of Jewish public opinion makes it clear that he entered the melee over Asch's putative embrace of Christianity not on behalf of his readers, but on his own behalf, because of what he called his "respect for the traditions of our people." He could not accept the publication in Yiddish of a work that challenged Jewish historical memory at its most vulnerable point, and beyond denying its author publication in his newspaper, he found it

necessary to polemicize against him. Asch was Glatstein's example of the aesthetic defector, Cahan's example of the religious defector. It is hard to imagine either of these two confirmed cosmopolitans identifying with the "attitude of religious Jews" had they been in the milieu of the English writer.

America's hospitality is best represented by the hegemony of English that invites all newcomers to participate in civic debate and to help shape the culture. Desacralized English in America tempts the Jew into believing that a neutral language can be possessed and shaped by all its speakers alike. During the interwar period when immigration from Europe fell off to a trickle, the transition from Yiddish to English on the part of American Jews was so quick and thorough that language appeared to present no "problem" in the process of acculturation. Native-born Jews spoke and wrote English as a matter of course, while writers like Isaac Rosenfeld and Saul Bellow who knew Yiddish well enjoyed the added cultural advantage of drawing from Jewish sources and being able to mock the alienating features of English.

The object of their parody, T.S. Eliot, regarded language as something more than an exchangeable vehicle of expression. He regretted and warned against the desacralization of English, seeing language as the repository of tradition in culture. For their part, the Jewish writers were prepared to compete with Eliot for the right to interpret and even to "represent" American culture. They did not appreciate his association of English with Christianity that would have placed them at the same disadvantage Jews were experiencing in Europe. Eliot's retirement to England allowed them to hope that the English "tradition" as he defined it did not relate to America at all. Even those Jewish writers who took Eliot most seriously as a poet and critic, and who considered the implication of becoming writers in an "antisemitic" tradition, did not take up the other side of the question, namely, the cultural and moral impoverishment they would experience with the loss of their own language tradition. They did not perceive the change of language as a necessary shift of loyalties.

Yet it should be noted that some American Yiddish writers who were T.S. Eliot's contemporaries came to understand language just as he did, as the repository of their religious, cultural, and political Jewish values. At the basic level of self-interest, they realized that since the vitality of a language depends on the survival of its speakers, any threat to Yiddish threatened their own future. In crude terms, the use or non-use of Yiddish played a decisive role in determining the attitude of American Jewish writers to the fate of their coreligionists in Europe: American Yiddish writers cared obsessively about the war against the Jews in Europe while American Jewish writers ignored it almost completely.

At a much deeper level, artistic considerations inspired the "resacralization" of Yiddish at its moment of trial. The literary theory of Introspectivism may have given the Yiddish writer leave to experience the world entirely in his own way, but it was precisely this exploration of personal origins and personal experience that led him to acknowledge his connection with Jewish destiny. Jacob Glatstein and T.S. Eliot came to similar conclusions within very different cultural traditions. Although their view of language as the crucible of national identity goes against the American

grain, it still remains to be seen whether American English can become the repository of Jewishness in defiance of their predictions.

Notes

1. Saul Bellow discusses the text in his introduction to Isaac Rosenfeld, *An Age of Enormity: Life and Writing in the Forties and Fifties*, ed. Theodore Solotaroff (Cleveland: 1962), 12–13. See also Chaim Raphael, "Yiddish or Hebrew, a kasheh for Elijah," in the *Jewish Chronicle Literary Supplement*, 6 June 1980; and Gene Bluestein, "Prufrock-Shmufrock," in *Yiddish 7*, no. 1 (1987), 53–56.
2. From *The Letters of Delmore Schwartz*, ed. Robert Phillips (Princeton: 1984), we see that Schwartz intended to write a book about Eliot, and that he defended him against criticism of his "reactionary" views.
3. Chaim Raphael, "Yiddish or Hebrew," compares the Yiddish translation with an unidentified Hebrew translation, and draws some general conclusions about the two Jewish languages: "In Yiddish, even as a joke, the writer carries in his mind a huge frame of reference to an unbroken past, half-remembered and ill-understood for much of the time but always evocative of the centuries of wandering." Raphael believes that as a European tongue, Yiddish can more readily capture the flavor of T.S. Eliot than modern Hebrew, which lacks the amalgam of the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. Raphael's informative comparison does not take into account that the Rosenfeld-Bellow, precisely because it was a joke, felt free to parody rather than reproduce features of the original, without any sense of having to deliver its formal elegance.
4. Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock* (New York: 1993), 116.
5. Leonard Q. Ross [Leo C. Rosten] *The Education of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N* (New York: 1937).
6. I recall that in 1971, at the third annual conference on the Association for Jewish Studies, when a professor of linguistics brought his first learned example in Yiddish, his audience of university professors broke into laughter.
7. When Heershadovid Menkes (Katz) began publishing his Yiddish fiction in Great Britain in 1992, he announced that he was probably the first American-born Yiddish writer.
8. Cynthia Ozick, "America: Toward Yavneh," *Judaism* 19, no. 3 (summer 1970), 264–282. I took issue with this prediction (long since modified by Ozick) in "American Jewish Writing, Act II," *Commentary* 61, no. 6 (June 1976), 40–45.
9. T.S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (London: 1965), 15. With respect to the discussion that follows about modernism of American Yiddish writers, Mikhl Likht translated T.S. Eliot's essay "The Complete Critic" in *Undzer bukh* 2, no. 3 (July–Aug. 1927), 241–251; and "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in *Undzer bukh* 2, no. 5 (Nov.–Dec.), 415–438.
10. "Under Forty: A Symposium on American Literature and the Younger Generation of American Jews," in *Contemporary Jewish Record* (Feb. 1944), 3–36; "The Jewish Writer and the English Literary Tradition," in *Commentary* (Sept. 1949), 209–219; (Oct. 1949), 361–373; "Jewishness and the Younger Intellectuals," in *Commentary* (April 1961), 306–359. I intend to take up this material in greater detail in a subsequent study of American Jewish intellectuals. The quotation is from the introductory comments by editor Norman Podhoretz on p. 310.
11. Leslie Fiedler, "'Partisan Review': Phoenix or Dodo?" *Perspectives USA*, no. 15 (spring 1956), 85.
12. Jason Epstein, "Jewishness and the Younger Intellectuals," 319–320.
13. Philip Roth, "Jewishness and the Younger Intellectuals," 350–351.
14. Jacob Glatstein, "Ven dzoyz volt geshribn yidish," *Inzikh*, no. 5 (July 1928), 68–70.
15. "Make it New" was one of the artistic injunctions of Ezra Pound, the favorite of Mikhl Likht—one of the poets associated with *Inzikh*, who also translated T.S. Eliot's essays.
16. Jacob Glatstein, "Inzikh tsum dritn mol," *Inzikh* 3, no. 1 (March 1928), 4.

17. I treat a related aspect of this subject in "Jewish Writers on the New Diaspora," in *The Americanization of the Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen (New York and London: 1995), 60–78.
18. Through the Labor Zionist publication *Jewish Frontier*, Yiddish intellectuals did make contact with American-born Jewish college students; and *Commentary* published occasional translations from Yiddish. But I believe that Irving Howe's collaboration with Eliezer Greenberg on the *Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, published in 1954, marked the first literary cooperation between members of the two groups as equals.
19. Naomi W. Cohen, *The Year after the Riots: American Responses to the Palestine Crisis of 1929–30* (Detroit: 1988), ii.
20. This passage and the following one are slightly modified versions of the translation by Marie Syrkin in Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg (eds.), *A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry* (New York: 1969), 333–334. Copyright (c) 1969 by Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg; reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Co., Inc.
21. Y.G-n. (Yankev Glatstein), "Der marsh tsu di goyim," *Inzikh* Third series, no. 14 (July 1935), 55–62. The quote here is from p. 57.
22. *Ibid.*, 60.
23. In an article the previous year the writer Chaim Liberman had confessed his despair by saying farewell to literature on the grounds that it had become a handmaiden to tyrants in Russia, Germany and Italy. He was especially devastated by the failure of German literature to oppose Hitler. Taking for his motto the rhyme "Di literatur/iz a hur (whore)," he said that since his American gas oven did not allow him to burn his books, he would cut them up with scissors and throw them out the window. "A briv," in *Oyfkum* 9, no. 1–2 (Jan.–Feb. 1934), 18–24.
24. Moses Rischin, editor of Cahan's collected journalism, *Grandma Never Slept Here*, has made this his life's work.
25. Albert Waldinger, "Abraham Cahan and Palestine," *Jewish Social Studies* 39, no. 1–2 (1977), 75.
26. Abraham Cahan, *Sholem ash's nayer veg* (New York: 1941).