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Journal of Yiddish Research

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Shmuel Werses

Yiddish Language and Literature in Bialik's Worldview

Bialik's 22 poems in Yiddish occupy a place of honor in his poetic oeuvre. The great poet always maintained that his *mame-loshn* had its weight and significance besides his major Hebrew works. He published his Yiddish poems in *Der yud* and maintained that the true creator of both modern literary Hebrew and Yiddish was Mendele Moykher-Sforim. But Bialik was also determined to encourage Yiddish writers to write Hebrew. In his public addresses, he often stressed the natural bond that existed between the two languages, as though they were a match made in Heaven. Signs of Bialik's feeling for the language of his childhood are present in his Hebrew works and Hebrew elements echo through his Yiddish poems.

Nikhama Ross

Scholarly Personality in Perets' "Between Two Mountains"

At the center of Perets' story is a *ga'on* [Yiddish: *go'en*], a great Talmudic scholar who heads the Brisk Yeshiva. His coldness repels people and makes the scholar's calling unattractive. A talented young yeshiva student Reb Noyekhke enters the *go'en's* yeshiva but is disappointed and soon leaves for Biala where in the course of time he becomes a hasidic *Tsadek* [hasidic rabbi

* Edited and translated by Prof. Leonard Prager.

and 'holy man']. The two figures meet. Contrasting the rigid *ga'on* and the bending young *hasid*, Perets explores the opposed ideological bases for both personalities: the severe *go'en* who is distanced from nature and the common folk, and the warmer *hasid* for whom social ties are more important than formal religious ones. The author finds Perets' approach similar to that of the modern Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik.

Avner Holtzman

Bialik's Hidden Eulogy In Memory of M. Y. Berditshevski

In the years 1896 to 1921 Bialik and Berditshevski wrote letters to one another and exchanged ideas. These letters help us to some degree to understand their relationship and their writings. Bialik, though he called the frigid relations between the two "the Berditshevski complex" actually admired Berditshevski's art. He regarded the latter's volume of Hebrew stories "Me'iri Ha-Ketana (min ha'ayara sheli) as a "wonderful work of art." But Berditshevski's unbridled eroticism repelled Bialik. In the eulogy printed here for the first time, Bialik enumerates four qualities that lend distinction to Berditshevski's writings. 1) Berditshevski's creations mirror the thought patterns of his generation; 2) his writing is exploratory and authentic; 3) his style and modes of expression and not his content alone are authentic; 4) Berditshevski is a free spirit who asks questions and regards them as preferable to answers.

David Roskies

Bialik in the Ghettoes

The ghettoes the Nazi built to exterminate the Jewish population teemed with artists, writers, poets and scientists. Here the world of Bialik's poetry

came to life. Once again were heard his poems of grief and rage. Fresh new Yiddish poetic voices thundered in exalted tones. The present essay records some of these new voices and especially identifies their Bialik-like strands. It discusses principally three major poets – Avrom Sutskever, Simkhe-Bunem Shayevitsh and Yitskhok Katsnelson. From a Tower of Babel of tongues and a multitude of troubles arose new creations in Yiddish that quickened the earlier Bialik roar. The essay deals with the effort of Shoa poets to employ Bialik’s pseudo-prophetic form.

Maya Duber Defen

Joshua Perla’s [Yehoyshue Perle’s] Wartime Writings

Joshua Perla’s writings can be divided into two periods: pre-World War Two and World War Two. His prewar style is sentimental, romantic, evoking Polish fields and streams. A prolific author (as we learn from his friends and relatives and as confirmed by Y-Y. Trunk’s essay in the *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur* [7:193-6]), he explores many motifs and a variety of styles. The war transformed Perla’s writings; they now noted human contradictions and paradoxical behaviors. In his essay entitled “4580”, written in December 1942 – two months before the principal mass expulsion from Warsaw and perhaps not long before the author’s death – he feels for his family and for people generally. He portrays a writer who continues to create though on the very precipice of destruction. Perla’s response, concludes this essay, was a feeble one in the light of the horrors of the Shoa [Yiddish: *khurbm*].

Lea Ayalon

On Shalom Asch’s [Sholem Ash’s] Novella “The Death Sentence”

The interpolated story in the novella “The Death Sentence” at first seems simplistic and stereotypic. But Shalom Asch fills his small frame with an

artistically dramatic conflict between two forces that operate on two levels. One level concerns the efforts of Mr. Sloan to prove he is innocent of a charge of murder. On the second level the accused battles against his own conscience, that is to say he contends in the Heavenly Court which is within, and it is there that Mr. Sloan struggles against himself and is sentenced to death. This inner struggle follows a Freudian pattern in which the Ego wrestles to protect itself against the Superego of family tradition in the parental home.

Before his death, there rise before the eyes of the condemned man memories of his past and of the religio-moral upbringing of his childhood. He feels fortunate and refuses to beg for amnesty in the name of mercy. He knows now that the good things of life are the simple ones -- working the soil, enjoying nature and its secrets. Before his execution he imagines himself a child with his head on his mother's breast, and when he is placed on the electric chair he sees her standing by his head.

Zelik Kalmanovitch

Dr. Khayim Zhitlovski's Yiddish

Yiddish borrowed heavily from German, particularly at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. A famous writer of the Haskala period, Ayzik-Meyer Dik (1814-1891), thought that the more German the better the Yiddish. In his books and articles Dr. Khayim Zhitlovski showed that Yiddish was a language in and of itself, with its own grammar, phonology, word stock, rhythm and flavor. This approach to the folk speech attracted young intellectuals who embraced Yiddish. Zhitlovski opened the road for them. He sought and found Old-Yiddish words and terms and softened the style of the old *brivnshtelers* [letter-writing manuals] and of the *besmedresh* [study house]. Yiddish, owing much to the efforts of Dr. Khayim Zhitlovski and his associates, gradually became a modern language.

Khanan Ayalti – A Modern Ahasuerus (1910-1992)

Khanan Ayalti (Khonke Kleynburt) [USA: Klenburt] came to Erets-Yisrael in 1929 as an idealistic young *khaluts*. He disagreed with Zionist politics and crossed over to the Communist camp. There he adopted a violent outlook. The British Mandate authorities were about to arrest him and expel him from the country. From bomb-thrower he became a writer, mainly in a militant communist style. He wrote his first novel, *BeMekholot* ('In Dancing'), in Hebrew, but afterwards wrote only in Yiddish. His restless revolutionary spirit carried him to the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. From there he went to France, then to South America and finally to New York. In his later years he was wholly disillusioned with politics, as is reflected in the titles of his books: *The Hotel That No Longer Exists*, *We Are Yesterday*, *There is Already No Exit from Brooklyn*.

Bilha Rubinstein

Stories and Their Tellers in Isaac Bashevis-Singer's Works

Yitskhok Bashevis-Zinger drew the wealth of his stories from the treasures of Jewish folklore and from the rich and multi-colored tomes of Judaica. The Jewish home also contributed to his storytelling art, especially with tales of the preter-natural – ghosts, spirits, *dybbuks*. The author was much aware of women storytellers – he regarded his Aunt Yentl as “a spiritual treasure.” His monologue stories are of two structural types – those which are interwoven within a larger narrative and those whose teller is not identified. Some of the female narrators are presented in a straightforward realistic manner and others are described as various characters see them, with their personal quirks and modes of expression. It is important to note that the typological description does not erase individual characteristics. The language of the women

narrators is rich in the folk vernacular, suffused with idioms, proverbs and a great variety of tales – of childhood, heroes, miracles, treasures, robbers and romantic dreams and loves. The stories are colorful and various. Here a teller addresses a group and there a series of tellers speak one after the other. A thin coat of irony and humor covers the stories, especially those of childhood.

Leah Garfinkel

A Riddle of Two Worlds

This essay is a study of Isaac Bashevis-Singer's story "Yokhed un Yekhide" ('He and She') in *Mayses fun hintern oyvn* ('Stories from Behind the Stove') (Tel-Aviv: Y.-L. Perets, 1982, pp. 195-207). The story begins in the next world where the soul of an iniquitous woman hovers in search of punishment. A sinful love flames between her and her lover, and her punishment is to be reborn in the mortal world. There she is convinced that all events and whatever arises from them are accidental (including her love for her lover), that all truths are lies and that it is the lie that is actually true. The main motif of this story that is dedicated to the poet Avraham Sutskever is the illusory nature of "facts."

Noga Rubin and Zelda Kahana-Newman

A New Purim Composition About Women

A poem in the Bodleian Library at Oxford – a unicum -- tells a strange story about three women. The poem was composed in Yiddish around the year 1650. The Jewish community surely disapproved of women frequenting taverns to drink, behavior unbecoming Jewish daughters. This poem does not appear to be serious, but rather a seventeenth-century Purim poem. The word *Purim* is not mentioned at all, but the atmosphere points to Purim high spirits.

Mark Chagall's "Cattle Dealer" and Isaac Bashevis-Singer's "A zokn" ('A Old Man') Compared

The author views Chagall and Bashevis-Singer as sharing a common "Eastern-European shtetl culture" and sees the two works compared in this study as basically realistic. However, both works also possess parallel symbolic, archetypal levels. The old man who is the hero of the Bashevis-Singer story is a very real elderly man but subtly placed passages in the text gradually make it clear that he also represents both the wandering diasporan Jew and the Jewish people as a whole. Similarly, Chagall's painting of a cattle-dealer driving a cart – perhaps to market – with a goat in the back is a real-life portrait and at the same time a complex representation of larger and deeper issues of Jewish existence. Both the literary and the plastic works are highly ambiguous and thus given to differing readings. It is by no means accidental that the cart-driver drives forward while his head is turned about facing backwards. This is perhaps one of the most visible signs of an additional level of significance in the painting. Close attention to artfully arranged detail strengthens the viewer's sense of compounded, multifarious meaning in both the story and the painting.

Shalom Luria

Reflections on Menakhem-Mendl's Character and Deeds

The shtetl of Kasrilevke appears in Sholem-Aleykhem's *Menakhem-Mendl* as a secure backdrop, an unchanging yesterday in the exchange of letters between Menakhem-Mendl and his wife Sheyne-Sheyndl, a correspondence that in fact is a strange battle between an uncertain tomorrow and a miserable present. Sholem-Aleykhem himself maintained that Menakhem-Mendl was no fictional invention but a flesh-and-blood acquaintance. To which view of

the author's creation may be added the following: The substance of this work is a legend about a treasure that excites a hero to find riches but the obsessed searcher disappears. Menakhem-Mendl is portrayed in a parodic, grotesque manner as the hero who ceaselessly seeks wealth and always fails. Sheyne-Sheyndl never leaves her shtetl and Menakhem-Mendl never returns from his fantasy wanderings.

Dov Sadan

The Critic Shmuel Niger and His Temple

Niger wrote a great deal but never a word about himself. This was certainly due to his modesty. His works on Jewish authors can serve as models of knowledge and understanding. He was born in the shtetl Dukor and in Minsk was known as "the prodigy of Dukor." At a very young age he joined the Poalei Zion and later the Territorialists [S.S.]. Following the failure of the 1905 Revolution he abandoned politics to devote himself to Yiddish literature. He began with a study of Sholem Ash's drama "Meshiekhs tsaytn" ('Messianic Days') and went on to write for many periodicals, some of which he edited. He wrote hundreds of letters and several monographs of abiding interest. The writer of this essay, Dov Sadan, crowns Niger the greatest of all Yiddish critics.

Haya Bar-Itzhak

Woman in the Blood-Libel Legend of Polish Jewry – the Story of Adil Bat-Moshe Kikinish of Drohobycz

This article deals with a particular Jewish blood-libel legend, an historic legend that centers on Adil Kikinish. The various kinds of blood-libel legends in Jewish folklore are surveyed and the particular character of the Adil

Kikinish story is distinguished. Hebrew and Yiddish variants are analyzed and the latter are found to follow oral legend in their use of dramatization and contrast. The manner in which Adil meets her death is seen in the light of legends of women of high station at the time of the Destruction of the Temple, an association which increases the awe of the legend in Jewish culture.

The legend of Adil Kikinish is also examined in the general context of legends of women in times of persecution of Polish Jewry and the narrative types these legends create, noting the legitimization of female figures who cross conventional gender lines.

Boris Kotlerman

The *Dybbuk* Motif in Yiddish and Hebrew

This comparativist textual study deals with similarities between the Yiddish *Mayse-Bukh* and the Hebrew texts of *Nishmas Khayim* and *Divrey Yoysef*. The marvelous Yiddish story of the *dybbuk* appears in several variants. In the *Mayse-Bukh* the *dybbuk* is an evil spirit; the *Nishmas Khayim* and *Divrey Yoysef* variants simply call him “spirit.” The Yiddish variants tell of a young man into whom a *dybbuk* has entered. In *Sefer-Shivkhey haAri* we read of a woman who has been freed of the *dybbuk* that settled in her body. In the *Mayse-Bukh* the *dybbuk* comes from a Jew who drowned in the sea as a punishment for his debauchery. [For English translation see Story 152 in Moses Gaster’s edition, Philadelphia: JPS, 1934, vol. 1, pp. 301-303]. A similar story is found in Rabbi Khayim Vital’s book *Toldos Yitskhok*. In the Hebrew variants the *dybbuk* is punishment for a serious sin. The *Mayse-bukh*, giving no time and place, writes of a sexual “deviation” (sodomy) that is punished. This story in the *Mayse-bukh* variant may mirror a real event that has not been blown up by a censor and is probably documentary.

“A Story of a Soldier,” or *Megilat Astrakhan*, as Told
by Yitskhak Ben Shmuel Yehuda Kastover

The Jewish soldiers who were conscripted into the Russian Army were customarily stationed in remote areas. Many of them never returned home, which is how small Jewish communities arose far from the Pale of Settlement. The hero of *Megilat Astrakhan*, like most of the conscripted Jews, was from a poor, uneducated family. The narrator describes a long wintry march over frost and snow. He could not cope and lost consciousness. With the help of his companions and what he calls “a miracle”, his life is saved.

Noga Rubin

The Motif of Water Without End (from
Kadya Molodowsky to Yaakov Shavit)

In Kadya Molodowsky’s poem “Der taykh” (‘The River’), a water-carrier carries two buckets of water on his shoulders night and day, a motif that may originate with Yudel Roznberg. Our poetess wishes to portray the water-carrier as a *golem* (‘artificial man’) that strives to save the Jewish community from accusations of a blood libel. Nathan Alterman’s sonorous Hebrew translation circulated widely in two variants in children’s literature. Yaakov Shavit’s version “Noga dimot” (‘Noga With the Tears’) is also well known.

Lea Ayalon

“One of Three Million”: A Neglected Sholem Asch
[Yiddish: Sholem Ash] Manuscript

A Sholem Asch manuscript centered on the character and way of life of his much-loved and deeply respected father was found in an old tattered

cardboard letter-folder in Shalom Asch House in Bat Yam, near Tel-Aviv. Asch details the refinement, generosity and sensitivity of his pious father and gives numerous instances of his material assistance to the poor, the liberality of his anonymous donations to the needy, Jew and gentile alike. As is reflected in many of Asch's stories and novels, his father was most attentive to the needs of his Christian friends and acquaintances, of his employees and neighbors. Asch states in the manuscript that the image of his father always stood before him like a lighthouse when he wrote. He writes movingly of the Welcoming of the Sabbath in his parents' always guest-filled home. The parents had left for America in order to help their children financially, but they soon returned to Kutna. When his father died, a little bundle of coins were found around his neck and, in his own writing, the request that a memorial stone to him be placed in the Kutna cemetery. That cemetery no longer exists....

Adina Bar-El

Maya Zerubavels (1927-?1998) as a 10-Year Old Yiddish Writer in Erets-Yisrael

A former pupil of the Left Poalei-Zion-sponsored Yiddishist Borokhov School in Warsaw, daughter of the Left Poalei-Zion writer and leader Yaakov Zerubavel, Maya Zerubavels published (at age 10!) several stories in Yiddish in the children's journal *Kinderfraynd* after moving to Palestine with her family at age 7 and settling in Tel-Aviv where she attended the Workers' School and Gymnasia Hertsiliya. The Borokhov schools stressed socialist values and Maya Zerubavels' *Kinderfraynd* stories are suffused with socialist content. The second of her Yiddish stories, "Velvele un Royzele," is striking in its tragic resolution – a quality not normally thought appropriate in literature for the young. Maya Zerubavel-Erem, a teacher by profession, continued to write and publish stories and articles in both Yiddish and Hebrew all her life.

Women Write Literary Works for Children in Yiddish

Between the two World Wars a rich Yiddish children's literature sprung up the world over – in Eastern Europe, in North and South America and elsewhere. The network of Yiddish schools and organizations issued periodicals for children, and the women who wrote stories and poems for these publications became known. The distinctive language for young children and youth that they shaped was spread far and wide throughout the Yiddish kindergarten and school system. Many women writers, particularly such figures as Kadye Molodovski [Kadya Molodowsky], Miryam Margolin, and Gitl Mayzil, devoted themselves to cultivating a Yiddish children's literature of distinction.

Dov Levin

The Struggle for Jewish Cultural Institutions in Soviet Lithuania in the Post-Stalin Period (1956-1958)

In Memory of Berl Cezarek / Tsezarek who died in
Jerusalem on the tenth of November 1990.

After World War Two, Jewish cultural institutions in Lithuania could barely stand on their feet. Following Stalin's death, they continued to be slowly eliminated, though things were a bit easier under Khrushchev. Among the able communal activists who fought for a Jewish cultural life, Berl Cezarek stood out. For years, as we learn from Professor Levin's long interview with him, he gave himself unstintingly – despite poverty and loneliness – to such Jewish secular endeavors as a Vilna choir, a drama circle, a dance group and Hebrew-language lessons.