

Yiddish and the Avant-Garde in American Jewish Poetry

Sarah Ponichtera

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2012

©2012
Sarah Ponichtera
All rights reserved

All Louis Zukofsky material Copyright Paul Zukofsky; the material may not be reproduced, quoted, or used in any manner whatsoever without the explicit and specific permission of the copyright holder. A fee will be charged.

ABSTRACT

Yiddish and the Avant-Garde in American Jewish Poetry

Sarah Ponichtera

This dissertation traces the evolution of a formalist literary strategy through the twentieth century in both Yiddish and English, through literary and historical analyses of poets and poetic groups from the turn of the century until the 1980s. It begins by exploring the ways in which the Yiddish poet Yehoash built on the contemporary interest in the primitive as he developed his aesthetics in the 1900s, then turns to the modernist poetic group *In zikh* (the Introspectivists) and their efforts to explore primitive states of consciousness in individual subjectivity. In the third chapter, the project turns to Louis Zukofsky's inclusion of Yehoash's Yiddish translations of Japanese poetry in his own English epic, written in dialogue with Ezra Pound. It concludes with an examination of the Language poets of the 1970s, particularly Charles Bernstein's experimental verse, which explores the way that language shapes consciousness through the use of critical and linguistic discourse. Each of these poets or poetic groups uses experimental poetry as a lens through which to peer at the intersections of language and consciousness, and each explicitly identifies Yiddish (whether as symbol or reality) as an essential component of their poetic technique.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Implications.....	11
Chapter 2: Yehoash: The New World of the Primitive.....	20
I. The Primitive	21
II. Translation.....	31
III. In Geveb	40
Chapter 3: The Fragmented Self: Individualism in Yiddish Introspectivism	48
Introduction.....	48
I: Introspectivism's Fragmented Individual.....	55
II: Introspectivism's Place in American Literary Culture.....	59
III: The Journal Inzikh	65
Chapter 4: Submerged Yiddish Structures in the Poetry of Louis Zukofsky	80
I. Yiddish in "Poem Beginning "The"	80
II. His Despairing Predecessors	93
III. Yehoash in "A".....	103
Chapter 5: The Critical Turn.....	115
I. Yiddish Poetry in the Postvernacular Age	115
II. The Merging of Poetry and Criticism	119
Conclusion	136
Bibliography	138

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the years I was privileged to spend at Columbia University's Yiddish Program, devoting myself to the study of Yiddish literature. It has been an incredible intellectual journey, and I thank Columbia University, the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, and the Atran Foundation for making it possible. I could not have made it to this point without the help of many individuals.

I am grateful to my advisor Jeremy Dauber, a mentor who guided my development as a scholar from the earliest stages with encouragement, inspiration, and humor.

To Michael Golston, who gave generously of his time and expertise to develop and focus my work with poetry.

To the other members of my committee: Anita Norich, Casey Blake, and Burt Kimmelman, for their insightful comments and suggestions for the development of this project.

To those who read early drafts of the work: Jeremy Dauber, Michael Golston, Casey Blake, Alyssa Quint and Rebecca Kobrin. Your suggestions have brought this work to a much higher level.

To the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies and the Institute for Comparative Literature for providing a forum to present and get feedback on early stages of this research.

To my colleagues (and friends!) in the program: Ben Sadock, Chana Masor, Yuri Vendenyapi, Agi Legutko, and Jessica Kirzane. You are an inspiration!

Finally, to my family, for their love and endless patience. I couldn't have done it without you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research identifies a direct link between American Yiddish poetics and modern experimental poetry, illustrating the impact of American literatures in languages other than English. Yiddish poetry, as it developed in America, pioneered a fragmented aesthetic, which expresses the psychological fragmentation felt by recent immigrant intellectuals, living between two languages and cultural perspectives. This aesthetic does not disappear with the decline of Yiddish poetry in America, as one might expect, but resurfaces in the work of the experimental American Jewish poet Louis Zukofsky in the 1930s, and then again in the experimental poetry of the Language school in the 1970s and 80s. Over the course of the twentieth century, an aesthetic that expresses a sense of chaotic personal experience through the inclusion of words and ideas that emerge from jarringly disparate contexts, including different linguistic contexts, transitions from the insular world of Yiddish poetry to the arguably equally insular world of experimental poets in the latter half of the twentieth century. Despite its limited audience, this is an expansive poetics that consistently rejects attempts to limit its topoi or technique.

From the turn of the twentieth century, Yiddish poets in America began to create an aesthetics of fragmentation. The poet Yehoash, who arrived in America in 1890, wrote poetry *in der mode* of Japanese, Native American, and Arabic folktales, shaping verse with a deep consciousness of meter that he learned from translating Byron. Despite his knowledge of poetic form, he was unafraid to leave meter behind in his later works, which described the chaos and excitement of New York City and modern technology in free verse. Yehoash, a poet educated in a European society deeply influenced by German Enlightenment ideas of culture and peoplehood, wrote a body of work that attempted to provide a cultural basis for Yiddish literature, providing the language with an exquisite translation of a key cultural work, the Bible,

as well as innovative verse the proved that the language's resources were equal to the task of participating in world culture. The second chapter identifies his key contributions to initiating a fragmented aesthetics.

The poetic school *In zikh*, or the Introspectivists, think deeply about their practice of poetry, considering the implications of their fragmented poetics, as befits their name. While they share the widespread modernist impulse to reshape the practice of poetry to reflect a modern reality, they cannot subscribe to the American Imagist vision that would entail reducing traditional English verse to a more concise, and concrete, form.¹ That poetic technique assumes that all people will have similar emotional reactions to, for example, the famous red wheelbarrow of William Carlos Williams, so that evoking that image alone will bring to mind associations with the image that were presumed to be universal: in this case, ideas of home, agriculture, childhood innocence, and so on. The Introspectivists cannot make the assumption that their readers will share their cultural background in this way, because they seek an audience among both Yiddish speakers from Eastern Europe and America, and modern intellectuals from every culture. Instead, they attempt to document their thought process for the reader, knowing it to be foreign to them, at least insofar as any individual is a stranger to the thought processes of another.

In their manifesto, they describe their own unique understanding of accuracy in poetic expression. For them, instead of documenting the physical features of, for example, a sunset, they think that including fragments of trains of thought and associations that arise from that sunset is the best way to represent the true experience of that sunset for that individual, at that

¹ Their aesthetic reasons dovetail with political ones: Barbara Mann has discussed the surprising and numerous ways in which calls for a new simplified approach to artistic creation overlap with anti-Semitism, particularly in Ezra Pound's work on Imagism. "Toward an Understanding of Jewish Imagism," *Religion and Literature* 30.3, Jewish Diasporism: The Aesthetics of Ambivalence (Autumn, 1998), 23-45.

moment.² This technique creates a very fragmented type of poetry, with few obvious connections between one concept and the next. In fact, the technique was not practiced strictly by the poets, but merely serves in their manifesto to describe their approach to poetry - one centered on the individual, aware of international aesthetic trends, and determined to reshape them to suit their own experience. Their aesthetics, which formulate the main poetic principles of this trend most clearly, are further detailed in the third chapter.

No less a figure than Max Weinreich, founder of YIVO (the Yiddish Scientific Institute) and pre-eminent scholar of the Yiddish language, argued that individual psychology could be explained in cultural and historical terms, and that the Jewish experience in this period was best characterized as fragmentary. As a social historian, he sought to bring together the fields of psychology and sociology, an idea he pursued at Yale University in 1932-33 on a grant from the Rockefeller foundation.³ Here he developed an autobiography contest to detail the experiences of young Jews in interwar Poland, in conversation with American psychologist John Dollard, who studied the psychological and behavioral aspects of race relations in America.⁴ In 1939 correspondence with John Dollard, he describes the psychological milieu of Eastern European Jews in sociological terms:

...a more than usual degree of *disintegration* can be observed in this milieu. A person might have been brought up in a strictly religious environment. He might have afterwards participated in the Russian revolution or in some educational mass movement where he acquired a net set of ideas and feelings; quite obviously, he is also conditioned by present-day economic and political realities and 'race' feeling. When confronted with an actual difficulty in life, such an individual may emotionally still react according to the traditional Jewish way. Nevertheless, in reasoning he will perhaps

² " Jacob Glatshetyn, A. Leyeles, and N. B. Minkov, Introspectivism", **Trans. Anita Norich**, in *American Yiddish Poetry*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 776.

³ Kamil Kijek, "Max Weinreich, Assimilation, and the Social Politics of Jewish Nation-Bulding," *East European Jewish Affairs*, 41:1-2, 28.

⁴ This project is detailed in Jeffrey Shandler's *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Youth in Poland Before the Holocaust*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

profess the ideas he acquired late in his teens or in his early twenties. Consequently, his behavior will be much less predictable than that of individuals in other environments.

Max Weinreich hoped that the efforts of educational institutions such as YIVO could ameliorate the psychological toll of this social fragmentation. The poets in this dissertation describe their experience in terms strongly marked by a similar sense of internal fragmentation that results from living through a period of rapid historical change.

Although Weinreich's model was meant to apply to Eastern European, rather than American Jews, this fragmented poetic technique, and the subjectivity associated with it, remains startlingly consistent in American Jewish poetry, in English as well as Yiddish. The first English-language poet I consider, Louis Zukofsky, radicalizes the modernist project of Ezra Pound, taking Pound's interest in form to an extreme point of mathematical precision, thereby eliminating the Imagist reliance on shared cultural context in favor of a more abstract interest in appreciating the hidden patterns of everyday life, shared by both reader and poet. Insofar as Zukofsky includes culture, he includes the ephemera of his life in America as well as his memories of the Yiddish poets he loved as a child, particularly Yehoash. Zukofsky uses these materials to construct elaborate, mathematically precise poems that juxtapose aspects of his past and present to create myriad effects. His poetic technique, detailed in the fourth chapter, relies on the reader's interest in deciphering structure, rhythm, and pattern rather than a shared lived experience.

Zukofsky's demands on the reader at first seemed too arduous to gain him much influence in American literature, but his technique found adherents among the generation of poets that writes in the 1970s and 1980s. His fragmented style, composed of the detritus of popular culture and ethnic heritage as well as historically recognized poetic works may have offered an

appealing model for poets that hoped to include a larger slice of human experience than had found its way into poetry in the previous generation. In addition, perhaps the very lack of an attempt to create or assume a shared cultural narrative took on a greater role in an increasingly diverse American society. Regardless of the reason, the Language poets of the 1970s and 1980s saw Zukofsky as a model for their own poetics, which strove to participate in an internationalist vision of poetry, much like Yehoash, and which mustered considerable theoretical sophistication to understand and argue for their own poetic techniques, much like the Introspectivists.

Although the Language poets are not exclusively, or even predominantly Jewish, they unwittingly participate in a trend that first took shape in Yiddish at the turn of the twentieth century. This aesthetic's emphasis on the intersections of language and ethnic identity may have come to appeal to more and more ethnic groups as thinking about ethnicity comes further to the forefront of American literary culture. An examination of ethnic consciousness in the writings of the Language poets concludes the project, in the fifth chapter.

This trend of experimental poetry initially arose from the European Jewish interpretation of the German Enlightenment, which valued cultural authenticity as part of a pluralist vision. The writings of Enlightenment (or counter-Enlightenment, as they are sometimes called, underlining their opposition to French Enlightenment thought) thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Georg Hamann were interpreted as affirming the value of preserving Yiddish culture, although they were originally written to support a burgeoning sense of German national identity. These German philosophers balanced an interest in promoting the value of local culture with an awareness of global cultural trends that was very appealing, not only to partisans for Yiddish, but many emerging nations in Eastern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. This rather local set of intellectual concerns found surprisingly broad currency in

America, a country that also drew on German Enlightenment thought in creating its own national literature. From writers like Emerson and Thoreau, who famously based the first genuinely American literary movement, Transcendentalism, on their reading of Kant, to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who articulates a compelling vision of American national identity formed during his education in Germany, German thought had long played an important role in American culture when the Yiddish poets arrived at the turn of the twentieth century.

Although these wider social and political trends explain why American Yiddish poets encountered German Enlightenment thought in the first place, their interpretation of it was idiosyncratic and tailored to their own experience. These poets focus on the Enlightenment's assertion that poetry expresses a historical moment and sense of social identity, rather than only personal emotional experiences. They key into the perception that the language one uses plays a role in shaping one's consciousness. Finally, they embrace the idea that identity exists in a dialogue with many others, and that dialogue does not weaken, but rather offers an opportunity to strengthen, one's own sense of ethnic or national identity.

German intellectuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, inspired by neo-Pietist work defending the divine status of Biblical texts, became fascinated with points of origin of all sorts. This fascination began with the efforts of Pietists within the Lutheran church to reconcile their doctrines with the rationalist challenges of the Enlightenment. These thinkers found the contention that languages were historically constructed, and thus an unreliable vehicle for the transmission of eternal truths, particularly troubling. Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), a Pietist philosopher close to the emerging Romantic *Sturm und Drang* movement, argues in response that although language may be historically contingent, it nevertheless may contain Divine revelation if approached with the proper perspective, informed by inspiration rather than

reason.⁵ Hamann goes further to say that language's very rootedness in changing human societies gives scholars the ability to search for insight into human nature as a whole in the similarities between one language and another.⁶ This balance between a recognition of language's inherent limitations and specificity within a certain cultural context and an interest in the implications of these contingent factors in finding similarities between disparate cultures can be seen in the aesthetic described in this project, in which poets consistently includes traces of other languages, even as they describe particular experiences. For these American Jewish poets, one language is never enough to describe the entirety of their experience; without denying the importance of their particular linguistic and cultural circumstances, they attempt to move beyond them, perhaps in an attempt to achieve insight into human nature as a whole through the inclusion of other languages.

Hamann's interest in what the cultural context of the Bible had to add to its message led him to become a scholar of ancient Near Eastern languages, mastering Arabic, Hebrew, and Chaldean (or Aramaic), and also learning some Armenian, Turkish, and Tibetan, in order to unravel the divine mysteries he felt were concealed in Biblical texts.⁷ His conviction that rationality alone could not access the truth of these texts led him toward poetry. He called God "the poet at the beginning of days," and said that "poetry is the mother tongue of the human race."⁸ For thinkers such as Hamann, seeking to reconcile reason with revelation, poetry and culture offered ways for individuals to connect with religious truth despite the breakdown of divine authority.

⁵ Robert Edward Norton, "The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68: 4 (October 2007), 640-44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 643.

⁷ Tuska Benes, "Comparative Linguistics as Ethnology: In Search of Indo-Germans in Central Asia, 1770-1830," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24:2, 2004, 119.

⁸ *Ibid.*

This approach likely appealed to American Yiddish writers emerging from a culture closely identified with religious faith and traditionally invested in the divine status of texts. Yehoash, for example, followed Hamann's model closely, becoming himself a scholar of ancient near Eastern languages, writing a *Yiddish Dictionary, Containing All of the Hebrew and Chaldaic Elements of the Yiddish Language, Illustrated with Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions* with Dr. Charles Spivak, after travels to the Middle East where he gained knowledge of the relevant languages and experience in contemporary Middle Eastern cultures.⁹ He also undertook a groundbreaking translation of the Hebrew Bible into Yiddish in 1907, an ambitious project that he pursued until his death. Yehoash also wrote secular poetry, which began in a Romantic vein, and only moved in a modernist direction some years after his arrival in America. These efforts allow Yehoash to justify his commitment to Yiddish in German Enlightenment terms, rather than abandoning the language in favor of a more “developed” alternative, more amenable to rational thought, such as German, which was the approach advocated by classical Jewish Enlightenment thinkers such as Moses Mendelssohn.¹⁰

The Enlightenment philosophers approach language as a source of cultural cohesion and poetic inspiration, and as a secular replacement for divine revelation. Herder develops Hamann's work on this subject in an even more secular direction. In his 1772 treatise *On the Origin of Language*, Herder argues that language does not have a divine source, but arises rather from human nature itself, from the human being's need to understand himself and the world he

⁹ Yehoash and Chaim Spivak, eds. *Idish verterbukh*. Nyu York: Farlag Yehoash, 1911.

¹⁰ Mendelssohn “vilified Yiddish as a linguistic hodgepodge, a jargon that barred Jews from contact with their neighbors and doomed them to isolation from civilization,” according to Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1996, 35-36.

inhabits.¹¹ For Herder, language does not express a pre-existing thought, but rather language and thought arise simultaneously.

Precisely because *human reason* cannot exist without abstraction, and *each abstraction* does not come to be without *language*, it must also be the case that in *every* people language contains *abstractions*, that is, is an *offprint* of *reason*, of which it was a *tool*.” “But as *each language* contains only *as many* abstractions as the people was able to make, and not *a single one* that was made without *the senses*, as is shown by its originally sensuous expression, it follows that divine order is nowhere to be seen except *insofar as language is through and through human*.¹²

This philosophical stance undergirds his enormous respect for the power of cultural – and especially linguistic – differences, for it is not a case of all human beings having similar thoughts which they then express in different languages, but rather of entire modes of thought differing from one linguistic system to the next. This proposition anticipates the modern Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which holds that linguistic categories significantly shape thought and even influence non-linguistic behavior.¹³ Although the idea that speaking a specific language affects cognition remains controversial, for Herder this proposition plays a crucial role in relocating meaning from the divine to the human realm.

In Herder’s efforts to secularize Hamann’s search for a role for the divine in modern life, he turns for answers to the human culture that gave rise to the Bible, a text that still possessed enormous societal authority, despite the challenges posed to it by Enlightenment rationality. As divine authority was no longer sufficient justification, Herder turned to the text’s literary qualities for an explanation as to its persuasive power. In *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, Herder reaffirms the unique and privileged status of religious texts, now based on their literary qualities

¹¹ Robert E. Northon, “Isaiah Berlin’s “Expressionism,” or: ‘Ha! Du bist das Blökende!’” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69:2, April 2008, 347.

¹² Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, Ed. and trans. Michael N. Forster, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004, 167.

¹³ Benjamin Lee Whorf, “The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language,” in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, Eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, 710-724.

which express the best of the human spirit, and searches for societal explanations for this remarkable cultural achievement. In searching for guidance on building the ideal society in ancient Israelite, rather than ancient Greek culture, Herder emphasizes his rejection of rationalism and embrace of the mystical and emotional – in other words, the primitive. He also affirms his emphasis on the origin rather than later elaborations. In his introduction, he lays out a chain of development, encouraging young scholars to focus on the earliest and most ancient texts:

The basis of theology is Bible, and that of the New Testament is the Old. It is impossible to understand the former aright without a previous understanding of the latter; for Christianity proceeded from Judaism, and the genius of the language is in both books the same. And this genius of the language we can no where study better, that is, with more truth, depth, comprehensiveness, and satisfaction, than in its poetry, and indeed, as far as possible, in its most ancient poetry.¹⁴

This illustrates Herder’s search for some essential “genius” that resides in language and gives rise to cultural achievements which continue to unfold gradually over thousands of years. It is just such a “genius” he hopes to offer a German society still politically fragmented and conscious of cultural developments such as the Enlightenment which threaten to leave it behind. It may seem natural then that this text contains not only the philological and literary analysis one would expect from a book on poetry, but also, according to some commentators, some of Herder’s “most radical political views.”¹⁵ A confluence of interest in poetry as access to primal consciousness, an analytical approach to how language operates in society, and an interest in political reform thus characterizes Herder’s intellectual project, as Yehoash and other American Jewish poets adopt – and adapt – it.

¹⁴ Johann Gottfried Herder, “The Author’s Preface,” *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, 22.

¹⁵ Frederick M. Barnard, “Herder and Israel,” *Jewish Social Studies* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Jan., 1966), 26.

The idea of the primitive, outlined above from Herder's perspective, would become particularly compelling to these poets, offering as it does a bridge between counter-Enlightenment and modernist thought. Where Herder describes the new possibilities that a primitive perspective offers German society in its relationships with other nations, modernists will explore what the primitive has to offer the individual in her relationship with society. From Yehoash to the ethnopoetics of Jerome Rothenberg in the 1970s, American Jewish poets seem drawn to the figure of the primitive as a repository of creative ways of envisioning life as an individual and as a part of a community.

Implications

This view of American Jewish poetry overcomes the objections of many critics, both historical and contemporary, that aesthetically ambitious work lacks the kind of historical engagement that makes literature relevant to culturally engaged American Jews. Readers of American Jewish literature have often sought the representation of “the world of our fathers,” a vision of the social and material realities that shaped the past of the Jewish people. This has motivated a focus on prose narratives that purport to describe the historical circumstances of American Jews, relegating more aesthetically challenging works to the sidelines. As Anita Norich writes:

Authentic texts...are considered to be those offering a truthful, recognizable reproduction of a world we can understand as having once existed; those closest to that world speak with the greatest authority. Often, that has meant the adoption of a naïve realist bias in which readers seek those texts that offer some view of the social world.¹⁶

Modernist poetry, in particular, with its experimental, often impenetrable language, and perceived preoccupation with aesthetic issues concerning only a small elite, has seemed ill-suited to these aims.

¹⁶ Anita Norich. “Yiddish Literary Studies.” *Modern Judaism* 10.3, 1990, 297.

Yiddish critics also wrangled with the cultural questions that modernist poetry provoked. Two of the most significant critics of modern Yiddish poetry, Shmuel Niger and Aaron Glantz-Leyeles, conducted a series of exchanges in Yiddish newspapers between 1919-1935, in which they presented quite divergent ideas of what role American modernist poetry ought to play in Yiddish literature more broadly.¹⁷ Niger, a well-known literary critic who just arrived from Europe in 1919, began the tendentious conversation in a December piece in *Der Tog* titled "Lider, lider, lider," (Poems, poems, poems). He connected the prevalence of poetry in America with its democratic spirit, and took a dim view of both. It takes maturity and deep thought to write a novel, he argued, but to write a poem, you only have to *feel* something. And everyone feels things. So in America, where common people lack the European sense of decorum that previously kept them from spilling their guts in public, a "*ferz-shisndik legion*" (a poem-shooting army) has arisen to overtake quality Yiddish literature.¹⁸

Aaron Glantz-Leyeles, who had just published the manifesto of the new poetic movement of Introspectivism, a school that would have enormous impact on Yiddish literature in both Europe and America, responded with equal fervor, expressing his disappointment at Niger's misunderstanding of Yiddish poetry in America. A few months later, Leyeles followed by critiquing Niger's attempt to find a common thread between the Bible and modern American Jewish literature, which Niger felt gave Yiddish literature a sense of mission, and the goal of improving the world. Leyeles responded that Yiddish literature has no mission, and its Jewish element is simply an aspect of its self-expression. Yiddish literature participates in the Jewish literary tradition by virtue of its being written by Jews, nothing more, he argued. No common message for the world has to unite it with the writings of the past.

¹⁷ Eliyahu Shulman, "Der vikuakh tsvishn a. leyeles un sh. niger vegn 'inzikhizm,'" in *Portretn un etyudn*, Ed. Eliyahu Shulman. Tsiko bikher-farlag, 1979, 196-209.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

In their discussions, Niger and Leyeles reflect the anxiety that is still felt by many scholars that individualistic, experimental poetry fails to convey the values of the American Jewish community and its connection with tradition. American Yiddish writers were overwhelmingly drawn to poetry rather than prose, and the reason why remains an open question. This dissertation proposes that the kind of formal experimentation that was newly possible in the poetry of the period appealed to immigrant intellectuals who were not satisfied either with adopting American culture wholly, or recreating a European literature now unsuited to their environment. Rather, they hoped to create a new language and literature that would genuinely represent their experience. And this experience, being so different from "the world of their fathers," demanded recognition on its own terms - not how easily it fit into longstanding Jewish tropes, because it often didn't, but simply because it was Jewish experience, and thus a part of Jewish history.

The English-language poet and critic John Hollander continues this conversation, when he writes of an implicit conflict in American Jewish poetry between what is Jewish about it and what is poetic. For Hollander, Jewish identity seems to rest in a number of relentlessly literal attributes, and poetry, in contrast, works to destabilize and reframe the literal. He states the problem as follows:

It certainly is true that, from the point of view of a naïve notion of *content*, some writer who puts into rhyme sentimental childhood memories of Friday night kiddush, say, ending with a cry of self-rebuke for having lapsed from the old ways, would be expressing Jewish content or whatever. But it wouldn't be poetry, and this is the heart of the problem.¹⁹

¹⁹ Hollander, John. "The Question of American Jewish Poetry." *What is Jewish Literature?* Ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994, 39.

For Hollander, “the essence of true poetry is originality of a mode of expression,” or a focus on form rather than content.²⁰ Hollander privileges form, which he identifies with poetry, over content, which he identifies with Jewish identity. For the Yiddish poets he unwittingly echoes, there was no conflict. Yiddish was both form and content, and there could be no Yiddish poetry that wasn't Jewish, even if there wasn't a word about kiddush or childhood. I argue here that particular formal elements, such as untranslated multilingual texts, juxtaposition of elements from disparate cultural environments, and the use of theoretical language in poetry itself, as well as explicit allusions to influential Yiddish poets, indeed continue to play that role in English for poets committed to both formal excellence and Jewish identity.

This approach also overcomes the tendency to see American Jewish poetry as one of transition from Old World Yiddish to New World English. Rather, this approach sees a consistent set of concerns and expectations for literature in both languages, albeit in quite different cultural contexts. In recent years, scholars have begun to explore ways of seeing the relationship between English and Yiddish as an evolving dialogue rather than a simple replacement of one cultural matrix with another. Anita Norich's recent work *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and American Jewish Culture During the Holocaust*, is one such work.²¹ Although Norich's book focuses on the Holocaust, its definition of American Jewish culture as a “bilingual, multi-valent, untidy array that challenges the more familiar linear view of Yiddish decline and growing English dominance” is embraced by this project, which traces a continuous aesthetic strategy in both Yiddish and English poetry.²²

²⁰ Ibid, 38.

²¹ Anita Norich, *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and American Jewish Culture During the Holocaust* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

²² Ibid., 12.

This project's focus on America, even while engaging in a comparative project, reveals the diversity of experience that exists even within an ostensibly familiar realm. The practice of comparative literature, which is conducted largely in America, tends to focus on the exotic and the European, rather than the cultural diversity that exists closer to home.²³ Within Jewish Studies as well, many scholars focus their efforts on Jewish culture in Israel and Eastern Europe, which is sometimes perceived to possess an inherent authenticity that the hyphenated American Jewish identity lacks.²⁴ However, American Jewish culture is characterized by complex interactions between different visions of what roles Jewish culture should play in literature, and what constitutes Jewish culture itself. This approach also underlines the connections between America and Europe. Yiddish in America does not emerge clearly until considered in the light of the German Enlightenment, and American poetry in English traces some of its roots to Yiddish. The methodology that has guided this work is transnational and multilingual, reflecting those conditions in the works it considers.

The genre of poetry offers a unique set of texts that engage consciously with the interaction between language and culture. Hana Wirth-Nesher's recent work *Call It English* focuses on this very interaction, asking how a variety of texts whose authors have quite divergent writing styles, and conceptions of Jewish identity can be considered part of a single literary tradition, and proposing that the key to identifying which texts belong in the canon of Jewish literature may be traced by these texts' significant interactions with Jewish languages.²⁵

However, Wirth-Nesher's focus on the novel, a move which allowed her to trace this trend in the

²³ This point was made at the 2009 MLA conference by David Damrosch, in the talk "How American is World Literature?" in the panel "Critical Reflections on World Literature," which took place on December 30.

²⁴ The most notable of these may be Gershon Shaked, who compares the American Jewish community to the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt, who created a brilliant hybrid Egyptian Jewish culture but ultimately assimilated and disappeared as a separate culture. Gershon Shaked, "Alexandria: On Jews and Judaism in America," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 49 (1989): 47-84.

²⁵ Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

central texts of the American Jewish literary canon, led me to question what might be revealed by a similar study of poetry. Poetry, as a genre which often pushes writers to interact with language on structural levels beyond that required for prose communication, offered a rich opportunity to discover the nature of the continuities within American Jewish literature in Yiddish and English.

In addition, poetry has been considered by many critics to be the pre-eminent genre of Yiddish literature in America, who each proposed a different theory as to why this might be the case. Isaac Bashevis Singer argues that Yiddish poetry overtakes the novel in America because daily life, the primary subject of the novel, no longer takes place in a Yiddish context.²⁶ As mentioned above, Shmuel Niger proposes that while European Yiddish speakers felt a sense of shame in publicizing their most intimate emotions in poetic form, American Jews are unafraid to be more public, and since everyone experiences emotions, everyone in America considers themselves a poet.²⁷ The most positive of the critics, the Introspectivist poet N. B. Minkov, suggests that poetry has taken such precedence in America because poetry is able to express the multifarious and fragmented nature of American life better than prose.²⁸ Regardless of the reason, Yiddish critics agree that poetry became the primary genre of American Yiddish literature.

It is ironic then, that Yiddish literature has more recently been perceived as consisting primarily of folktales, jokes, and realist literature about the immigrant experience, rather than intellectually and aesthetically sophisticated poetry. In his essay "Ethnic Diversity, Cosmopolitanism, and the Emergence of the American Liberal Intelligentsia," Hollinger suggests

²⁶ Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Problems of Yiddish Prose in America," 1943, Trans. Robert H. Wolf, *Prooftexts* 9:1 (January 1989), 5-12.

²⁷ Eliyahu Shulman, 198.

²⁸ N. B. Minkov, "Refleksie," *In Zikh* 3:1 (1920): 129.

that Yiddish literature has been conceived of as provincial as a result of American Jewish intellectuals' reaction to the Holocaust.²⁹ He argues that after the Holocaust, some of these intellectuals, Norman Podhoretz in particular, began to find it necessary to move away from cosmopolitanism and toward a more explicit affiliation with Jewish culture. For these intellectuals, Yiddish became a symbol of pre-war European Jewish authenticity. "The pleasure of reading Yiddish literature was not, Podhoretz reluctantly concluded, that of reading 'good fiction,' it was rather 'the pleasure of Old World charm and quaintness, titillating but not challenging, and therefore not to be taken too seriously.'³⁰ The development of a defiantly cosmopolitan, sophisticated and ambitious modernist poetics did not fit these intellectuals' vision of Yiddish literature, and they could not find the lost authenticity they were looking for in such a literature. Since this group of intellectuals took it upon themselves to re-introduce Yiddish literature to an American Jewish public that had largely forgotten it, and did so by framing it as a way to access this near-forgotten naïve Jewish culture, much of the American Jewish public has absorbed their vision of this literature. For these reasons, along with the obscurity of the Yiddish language even among American Jews, which limited their opportunities to access the literature on their own, American Jewish modernism has not found the appreciative audience it deserves.

There are notable exceptions to the general trend outlined above. Both Benjamin Harshav and Chana Kronfeld have raised strong arguments in favor of a closer look at American Yiddish modernism. Harshav, an Israeli-American scholar and linguist, has written several works that analyze the unique nature of the Yiddish language, and the ways in which Yiddish modernist poetry has built on those strengths. His 1990 work *The Meaning of Yiddish* examines and celebrates the multivocality inherent to the Yiddish language, consisting as it does of several

²⁹ Ibid, 69.

³⁰ Ibid, 70.

linguistic components which play off one another to create meaning. He devotes the final chapter to the Introspectivist poets, characterizing them as “an outstanding example of the critical ambiance in American Yiddish literature and of the basic tension that permeated it.”³¹

For Harshav, interested as he is in the nature of the Yiddish language itself and how it could be mobilized to create new forms of expression, the American modernist poets created the language’s greatest literary achievement. This dissertation diverges from Harshav’s approach to the extent that Harshav argues that the unique linguistic features of Yiddish predispose it to certain forms of expression.³² Following mainstream linguistic thought, this dissertation assumes that potentially infinite forms of expression are possible in any language. I wish to suggest that American Jewish modernism, in both Yiddish and English, represents a unique and notable contribution to world literature more because of American Jews’ enmeshment in multiple historically contingent cultural communities than any unique features of the languages they spoke.

Chana Kronfeld’s 1996 work, *On the Margins of Modernism*, also argues for the importance of Yiddish and Hebrew modernism, from the perspective that although these manifestations of modernist sensibility arose in what she characterizes as minor languages, they merit the same degree of attention as modernist works in more well-known languages such as French, German, and English. She proposes that we replace the heretofore Eurocentric model of modernist expression with a model drawn from Wittgenstein, in which many strands join together to create a rope, different strands pre-eminent at different points in time, but all joining

³¹ Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish*, Berkeley: U of California P: 1990, 175.

³² Harshav concedes, for example on 91, that a language cannot be said to have particular characteristics. But then after this statement, he goes on to describe the characteristics that Yiddish is thought to possess in “social perception.” He is clearly uneasy with his own approach of ascribing various characteristics to the language, doubtless a consequence of his liminal position between Yiddish-language commentaries, which certainly believed in a close tie, if not identity, between language and culture, and his own more sophisticated approach, which nevertheless does not elude this trap entirely.

together to create a movement that is coherent and identifiable.³³ This project concurs that Yiddish modernism benefits from analysis in the context of other modernist movements. However, because the dissertation spans such a long period of time, in which perceptions of minority languages shift radically, from an independent cultural affiliation among the earliest poets, to a hidden creative resource in the 1930s, to an exotic potential source for renewal following the civil rights movement, it is impossible to make generalizations about how Yiddish is perceived across this period.

This dissertation traces the evolution of a formalist literary strategy through the twentieth century in both Yiddish and English, through literary and historical analyses of poets and poetic groups from the turn of the century until the 1980s. It begins by exploring the ways in which Yehoash built on the contemporary interest in the primitive as he developed his aesthetics in the 1900s, then turn to the modernist poetic group *In zikh* (the Introspectivists) and their efforts to explore primitive states of consciousness in individual subjectivity. In the third chapter, the project turns to Louis Zukofsky's inclusion of Yehoash's Yiddish translations of Japanese poetry in his own English poetry, written in dialogue with Ezra Pound. It concludes with an examination of the Language poets of the 1970s, particularly Charles Bernstein's experimental verse, which explores the way that language shapes consciousness through the use of translation and reconfigured syntax. Each of these poets or poetic groups uses experimental poetry as a lens through which to peer at the intersections of language and consciousness, and each explicitly identifies Yiddish (whether as symbol or reality) as an essential component of their poetic technique.

³³ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, Berkeley: U of California P, 1996, 63.

Chapter 2: Yehoash: The New World of the Primitive

Yehoash, or Solomon Bloomgarten, was born in 1876 in a small town on the border between Russia and Germany, called Vershbolova. Raised in a traditionally observant, but freethinking family, he found it difficult to find his place in Eastern European society. He excelled at Jewish learning, and was admitted to the prestigious yeshiva (rabbinical academy) of Volozhin, but dropped out after one year to read Enlightenment literature, write some Hebrew poetry, and eke out a precarious living as a tutor, like many Yiddish writers of his generation. In 1890, he came to America, visiting the august Yiddish author I.L. Peretz in Warsaw on his way. In America he became one of the most revered figures in a rapidly developing Yiddish literary scene.³⁴ His scholarship, his interest in themes drawn from Biblical narratives as well as Eastern European legends, and the aura he cultivated around himself as a figure midway between poet and prophet, all served to win the sympathies of American Jews, whether they aspired to build a secular literature in their native language, or longed for the familiar cadences of life in Europe.

Yehoash's poetic persona, as a dreamy Romantic aesthete who represented a link to the Biblical tradition, allowed him to rise above the fray in a deeply politicized environment. At a time when most Yiddish newspapers were linked with political parties, and most poets saw their role as drawing attention to their cause as much as expressing their thoughts, he published widely, in many papers, and drew an audience affiliated with many parties. He did have his own political affiliation: he was involved with the Labor Zionist party, Poelai Tsiyoy, or Workers of Zion, also the ideological home of intellectuals such as Ber Borokhov and Chaim Zhitlowsky.³⁵ This party advocated for Jewish self-determination and a state in Palestine, but maintained the

³⁴ This synopsis of Yehoash's life derives from the *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, 4ter band. Fuks, Chaim Leyb, "Yehoyesh," Eds. Shmuel Niger and Joseph Shatsky, Nyu-york: alveltlekhen yidishn kultur-kongres, 1961, 236.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

use of Yiddish as a link to the working class. One can see the influence of his politics in his work if one looks: however, Yehoash put poetry before politics, and this endeared him to later generations of Yiddish poets, who criticized politically-affiliated writers for their instrumental approach to poetry.³⁶

Yehoash's work and life represents a transition between an era in which poets were seen as Romantic souls, striving to express the depth of their commitment to the people's cause, to one in which poets were expected to be modern individuals, expressing their own subjectivities in a complex, fast-moving world. He crosses this divide in his use of the primitive, which reaches back to the past while commenting on the present, and exploring the potential of human nature.

I. The Primitive

The notion of the primitive unites the wide-ranging *oeuvre* of Yehoash, a writer famed for such diverse projects as his early poetic interpretations of Jewish and Native American folktales, his travel writings detailing his journey to the Middle East, his translation of the Bible into Yiddish, and his late-career shift to free verse poetry reminiscent of Imagism. Primitivism played a crucial role in the transition from Romanticism to modernism in European literature, including Hebrew and Yiddish literature. Possessing the Romantic appeal of a life close to nature, the primitive also pointed aesthetically toward the stark, the abstract, and the radical simplicity of modernism. Although primitivism is most frequently encountered in the visual arts, it also plays an important role in Yiddish literature, appearing the ethnography of a writer like Sh. An-sky, author of "The Dybbuk," and the neo-Hasidic tales of I. L. Peretz. Yehoash's work accentuates

³⁶ Later, he was associated with *Di yunge*, the first group of American Yiddish poets to eschew political affiliation and aim for self-expression, but his link with this group was weak and somewhat incidental. This independence allowed his later adoption by the group *In zikh*, the Introspectivists, who bitterly opposed *Di yunge*. Shmuel Rozshanski comments on this aspect of his poetic persona in his profile in his volume *Yehoash: Lider, mayselekh, mesholim*, ed. Shmuel Rozshanski, Buenos Aires: Ateno Literario en el Iwo, 1965, 11-13.

the apparent contradiction of primitivism: its insistence on connection with a pre-modern way of life, and its vision of an art that is original, vital, and rigorous.

Although he writes in Yiddish, Yehoash's choice of pseudonym, his travels to the Near East, brief settlement in Rekhovot, involvement in the political group Poalei Tsiyon, and most significantly for this analysis of his poetry, his fascination with the power of language to remake Jewish culture speaks to the depth of his connection with early Zionism.³⁷ Although Yehoash's literary career takes place during the years of 1890 to 1927, marked by the midpoint of the 1908 Czernowitz conference, which moderated the increasing competition between Hebrew and Yiddish as languages of Jewish creativity, Yehoash draws on the resources of both languages to enrich his poetry. Indeed, at this point in history, both linguistic trajectories were marked by an interest in the primitive: Zionist writings expressed a fascination with the indigenous cultures of the Middle East, such as the Bedouin, and Yiddish literature continually returned to tropes drawn from folktales and superstitions. Yehoash's engagement with the tropes of ancient Israelite history reveals a poetics deeply influenced by Romantic ideas of the primitive, which include deceptively simple rhyme schemes, an attempt to create poetry that functions also as song, and most of all, a stance that rejects rationalism and embraces mystical experience as the heart of human life.

Yehoash's career-long engagement with the primitive initially emerges from a literary tradition that embraced a Romantic view of ancient Israelite culture. George Gordon, Lord Byron, had popularized ornate poetry that described a Romanticized Near Eastern world in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Lord Byron, though writing in an Anglo poetic tradition that

³⁷ Ibid., 238. He had enough perspective on the language question to write a comic piece on the subject for the humorist journal *Kundes* titled "'Yidish oder hebrayish (unzer shprakh fage, nit fun der hitziker zayt, nor fun der vitsiker zayt. Zidlen iz nisht sheltn)" (Yidish or Hebrew - our language question, not from the heated side, but from the witty side. Calling names is not cursing). July 18, p. 9.

may at first seem distant from Yiddish, had become an important figure in Russia during the turn of the twentieth century. In Russia, he represented a Western poet's attempt to move beyond the failures of European culture through a turn to mysticism, an interest that was beginning to capture the imagination of the Russian intelligentsia.³⁸ Adding to his appeal for a Jewish reader such as Yehoash, Byron explicitly engaged with the romance of ancient Jewish history in his *Hebrew Melodies*. This work was a series of poems written in collaboration with the composer Isaac Nathan, who claimed to have discovered the original melodies sung by the Levites before the fall of the First Temple. These poems, which included some of Byron's most acclaimed works, including "She Walks in Beauty" and "The Destruction of Sennacherib," at times expressed a "proto-Zionist" consciousness according to some commentators, emphasizing the connection between the exotically appealing ancient kingdom of Israel and the Jewish nation currently living in exile.³⁹ Byron's work served as a model of how a poet might mobilize the symbols of the past to comment on the present. Yehoash went on to translate many of Byron's poems, particularly from *Hebrew Melodies*, for New York Yiddish newspapers such as *Tsukunft* in the first years of the twentieth century.

The connection between Yehoash and Byron becomes especially clear in the formal aspects of their works, particularly the use of deceptively simple rhyme schemes that create a sense of ancient grandeur. Yehoash's early poems scan easily according to conventional English rhyme schemes, such as the trochaic tetrameter seen in the first lines of the "Bayis Sheyni," one of his first published poems: (at this point I won't translate)

Fártik íz der báiyis shéni
 Nókh der mí fun yórn láng
 Fréylekh zíngen di levíim

³⁸ See Svetlana Klimova, "'Russian Byronism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,'" *The Byron Journal*, Issue 2, 2010 (157-67).

³⁹ Joseph Slater, "Byron's Hebrew Melodies," *Studies in Philology* (49:1), January 1952, 86.

Ún es kvíkt der hárfnkláng.

This rhythm continues through the first three stanzas, and then in the next section it changes to a ballad form including anapestic tetrameter, a meter particularly characteristic of Byron. The paradigmatic example of anapestic tetrameter – a line containing four emphasized syllables, with two unemphasized between each, is Lord Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib:" "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold." Compare these lines from "Bayis sheyni:"

Es klíngen di hárfn, di góldene trompétn,
 Es flíen di zílberne téner
 Di fróyen un kínder – zey véynen fun símkhe,
 Es filn zikh shtóltser di méner...

Yehoash's poem is in ballad meter rather than consistent anapestic tetrameter, alternating four feet with three feet, but uses anapests to compensate for the rather larger numbers of unaccented syllables that appear in Yiddish in comparison with English. These meters, particularly ballad meter, had fallen out of favor in English poetry, excluding children's rhymes.⁴⁰ Lord Byron resurrected these meters to give a timeless, iconic quality to his poetry, enriching them with innovations such as the use of anapests rather than simple iambs. Although Byron's "Hebrew Melodies" had been translated into German and Russian by the 1870s, Yehoash's use of such similar meters suggests that he paid close attention to the sound of the poems in the original language.

These meters, characteristic of ballads and children's rhymes, suggested the kind of simplicity and link to a mythic past that appealed to Romantic primitivists like Byron and Yehoash, at this stage of his career. In these years, Yehoash's interest in the primitive emerges in

⁴⁰ An important exception is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*, which Yehoash translated into Yiddish in 1910, as will be discussed below.

what he writes about, as well as how he writes it. In the first collection of his early poetry, published in 1910, Yehoash's poetry appears grouped by subject, giving us insight into the kinds of ideas that interested him. The first category is titled "Fun altn brunem," (from the old well,) and includes poems about the splitting of the sea (krias yam suf), Biblical kings such as Saul, and religious leaders from the ancient period such as Hyrcanus. Other categories include poems about Israel, nature, loss, belief, characters from history, and translations from other languages. These categories illustrate an imagination caught up in a Romantic vision of the primitive - the natural, the emotional, the mystical - as the location of meaning in human life.

One of Yehoash's first and most widely anthologized poems, "Bayis sheyni," demonstrates an ambiguous attitude toward historical "progress," celebrating its achievements while mourning its shortcomings. The poem describes the celebrations that accompanied the completion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and the builders' pride in their accomplishment, only to conclude with the elders' disappointment at the inadequacy of the recently completed Temple, in contrast to the divinely built structure that they remember. This was one of Yehoash's earliest efforts, and one that he nervously presented to I. L. Peretz, when he stopped in Warsaw in 1889 on his way to America. Peretz responded to Yehoash's work warmly, telling him "you have created a lovely work," and going on to tell the rest of the assembled guests that he would be "another Byron," a carefully chosen accolade, as noted above.⁴¹ Peretz would later publish "Bayis sheyni" as well as two other early poems in his collection *Yudisher Bibliotek*.⁴²

"Bayis Sheyni" represents Yehoash's early conception of the strengths and weaknesses of the primitive impulse in modern poetry. From the beginning of the poem, Yehoash underlines

⁴¹ Minkov, N. B. "Yehoash: tsu zayn 25stn yortsayt." *Kultur un dertseylung*. (February 1952): 9. This apparently incidental comment demonstrates Peretz's insight into Yehoash's work – „Bayis sheyni“ as well as other early works utilize rhyme schemes and imagery very reminiscent of the English Romantic poet.

⁴² I. L. Peretz, *Yudisher Bibliotek*, Vol. 2, Varsha, 1891, 180-183.

poetry's connection with the instinctive, rather than the intellectual, with his equivalence between poetry and music. On one level, Yehoash is simply drawing out a connection already implicit in the language itself: in Yiddish, as in many European languages, the word for song and short poem are the same, and a poet is often called a singer. Yehoash uses a passage describing the music of the *levi'im*, who are traditionally considered to have sung songs and performed music during worship services, as a chorus punctuating the poem. The first stanza begins with this focus on music as an expression of celebration:

Fartik iz der bayis sheni
 Nokh der mi fun yorn lang,
 Freylekh zingen di leviim
 Un es kvikt der harfnklang.⁴³

The Second Temple is completed
 The fruit of so many years,
 The *levi'im* sing happily
 And the harps delight the ears.

Images of music recur as the poem progresses, including the songs of the *levi'im*, and the sounds of trumpets and harps. The word “tones” recurs particularly often, and is often personified. In the last stanza, tones are compared to men by means of rhyme and grammar:

Es veynen di alte un viln nit hern
 Di mutike, lustike tener,
 Un s'kukn mit shtoltz afn prekhtikhn binyan
 Di **boyers**, di krefike mener.

The elders cry and do not want to hear
 The brave, cheerful tones
 And they look with pride at the beautiful building,
 The **builders**, the sturdy men.⁴⁴

⁴³ Yehoash, “Bayis sheyni,” in *Gezamelte lider*, Nyu-york: Farlag Oyfgang, 1927, 28. My translation.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 29.

Here it is grammatically ambiguous whether the “they” of line 68 refers to the tones or the men, until the end of line 69, serving to further personify the tones. Tones are also animated earlier in the poem, “flying” in line 14, and “dancing like slaves that have just broken their chains” in line 31-32, an action which they reprise in the last two lines of the poem, 72-73. Music expresses celebration and liberation, a kind of instinctive self-assertion that requires no intellectual nuance or consciousness of history.

Music also represents sound, a sense that poetry engages with on a physical level, even as it communicates through language, a more intellectual medium. Like many Romantic poets, Yehoash describes the poetic experience as one that transcends any particular sense. In a 1910 article in *Tsukunft* titled “der poet – der zeer,” he writes about the poet that “ale khushim zayne zaynen bloyz tsvaygn fun eyn khush” (all of his senses are branches of a single sense).⁴⁵ He expands, “er hert mitn oyg un zet mitn oyer un filt dem bsamim-reyekh fun di shtern...” (he hears with his eye and sees with his ear and touches the spiced scent of the stars). This is a description of synesthesia, a neurological condition where one sense evokes responses from other senses. Synesthesia is a well-known phenomenon in literature, occurring in every generation, but was particularly valorized during the Romantic period.⁴⁶ It evokes Keats, Shelley, and Byron, and also speaks to a kind of primitive artwork that would incorporate all senses simultaneously: the *gesamtkunstwerk* of German Romanticism. Yehoash’s references to a

⁴⁵ The title itself (The poet - the seer) also evokes the Romantic trope of the poet as prophet. This trope, explored compellingly in Ian Balfour's *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford: Stanford, 2002), attracted significant attention in pre-Revolutionary Russia, where it influenced the development of Yiddish literature, as Benjamin Harshav notes in *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), 156-157.

⁴⁶ Synesthesia in literature, particularly in German Romanticism and French Symbolism, was a popular topic in the mid-twentieth century, and there are dozens of books and articles exploring the topic from that time period, of which perhaps the pinnacle is Paul De Man's "Shelley Disfigured" in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 93-123. It has not attracted as much attention in recent years, where it is more often read as a symptom of economic and historical factors, as in Susan Blood's "The Poetics of Expenditure," *MLN* 117.4 French Issue (September 2002): 836-857.

music that comes alive, and perhaps participates in building the new Temple to some extent, reflects a Romantic primitivist view of poetry.

In “Bayis sheyni,” Yehoash depicts two reactions to the building of the new Temple: celebration and mourning. At the beginning of the poem, Yehoash emphasizes the years of struggle and hardship the builders have had to endure before reaching this day of triumph. The poem opens with the lines “Fartik iz der beys sheni / Nokh der mi fun yorn lang.” Although I translated the second line otherwise above to retain the rhyme scheme, a more literal translation would read: “The Second Temple is completed / After the toil of so many years.” The depiction of the struggle necessary to reach this point quickly follows the depiction of the achievement. The second stanza also emphasizes what the builders have overcome, underlining the triumph of the moment by contrast to the desolation of what preceded it: “Un fargesn iz der golus, / Un farshvunden ale tsores.” “And the exile is forgotten, / And all of the afflictions.”⁴⁷ The builders’ efforts have overcome the agonies of exile and oppression.

Yehoash also emphasizes the builders’ loyalty to the Jewish community, as distinguished from the Jewish religious tradition venerated by the elders later in the poem.

Un ale vos hobn nor trern fargosn
 Af tsiyon, di viste almone,
 Un ale vos hobn fun hant nit gelozn
 Keyn rege di yidishe fone;⁴⁸

And all who have always shed tears
 For Zion, the deserted widow,
 And all who have never, for one second,
 Dropped the Jewish flag from their hands.

These images of the deserted widow of Zion and the “Jewish flag” portray the builders as an army of sorts, devoted to the cause of the lost Jewish homeland. It may be assumed that he is

⁴⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 30.

commenting directly on the young Zionist movement, which was just beginning to gather momentum in Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century.

This parallel becomes even clearer in the following lines, which continue: “un hobn nit oyfgehert keyn mol tsu hofn, un keyn mol – af got tsu fartroyren.” “And have never stopped hoping, and have never – trusted their fate to God’s mercy.” This rather anti-religious line represents an abrupt shift in a poem so dominated by religious imagery, and further serves to specify his discussion of the Zionist movement. As a movement which both relied on ancient history to guide it, and worked for political change in the present, Zionism provides a way for Yehoash to comment on the complex relationship between the present and the past. He portrays the attempt to rebuild ancient glories ambiguously in this poem, contrasting the energy, devotion, and idealism of the builders with the doubts and memories of the elders. Although his allusion to the contemporary political movement at this time may be connected to his political activism in Poalei Tsiyoyon on a simple level, his use of this imagery more strikingly reflects his interest in Romanticism and its fascination with the dawn of human history and consciousness.

After a short interlude which reprises the themes of music and joy, the poem continues to the third section, which depicts the elders who cannot bring themselves to share in the celebration.

Neyn, zey zaynen nit tsufridn
 Vayl durkh lange, lange yorn
 Iz der alter beys ha-mikdash
 Zey geblibn in zikorn

Un di alte lipn krekhtsn:
 - Altsding hobn mir farlorn
 In dem bayis sheni zet men
 Nit keyn lukhos, nit keyn aron.⁴⁹

No, they are not happy

⁴⁹ Ibid., 31.

Because for many long years
 The old holy temple
 Has remained in their memory

And the old lips sigh:
 “We have lost everything
 In this second temple
 You don’t see the tablets, you don’t see the ark.”

Those who remember the original cannot be satisfied with this replacement, knowing that it lacks the holy objects that testified to the Jewish people’s historical connection to God. The holy relics represent an evocative symbol: they can be understood simply as representing the religious faith that the Zionist movement rejects, but their role as physical proof of historical occurrences also suggests that they may be seen as representing a clear connection to the past impossible in the modern age. Modern ideological battles have so distorted our relationship with the past that our relationship with history now relies more on fallible memory than the incontrovertible proof that we once possessed.

The final stanza reprises the celebration, which goes on, the builders oblivious to the flaws in what they have produced. This reprise, which shows that the builders remain ignorant of the perspective of the older generation, shows that the two sides have become so estranged that they cannot communicate. In the absence of a link to those individuals who experienced the past directly, the young builders rely on a physical structure to provide their connection to history, never realizing that it lacks the true connection to the past that they seek. This ending is ambiguous enough that the poem may initially be read as positive towards the builders, but Yehoash's dedication of this poem to his elder sister Sheyne, who died young, in the first publication of the poem in Peretz's *Yudisher Bibliotek* in 1891, puts the emphasis on what was

lost, rather than what was achieved.⁵⁰ This poem may be read as a critique, not only of the Zionist movement's disconnect with the living tradition of recent generations, but of a rationalist perspective that argues that enlightened practicality will provide solutions to contemporary problems. Yehoash maintains that the past cannot be forgotten without losing what is most important, despite its apparent irrelevance and its continued belief in the irrationally miraculous.

II. Translation

"Bayis sheyni" participates in a Romantic view of the primitive that sees human life as impoverished by a rationalism that ignores the appeal of the instinctive, emotional, and mystical. This approach can also be seen in Yehoash's translations, particularly in his 1911 translation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's classic poem, "The Song of Hiawatha." The image of the Native American had long evoked associations with freedom, nature, and political equality in European thought. Philosophers such as Michel de Montaigne, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, and the Earl of Shaftesbury used images of man in a "state of nature" to critique European political arrangements, particularly the amount of liberty individual citizens possessed. Hobbes, arguing famously that man's life in a state of nature was "nasty, brutish, and short," supported strong centralized government, while the Earl of Shaftesbury, holding that in a state of nature, man is essentially good, argued for a more liberalized political system.⁵¹ The very term "noble savage" itself is thought to have come from an attorney-explorer's observation that, like the European nobility, Native Americans possessed the right to hunt game.⁵² The discourse of

⁵⁰ This dedication (gevidmet mayner yungeshtorbenen shvester sheyna, or dedicated to my sister Sheyne, who died young) appears only in the first printing of the poem by Peretz, and was not included in subsequent anthologized reprintings; this may reflect a shift in Yehoash's perspective over time. Peretz., 181.

⁵¹ Gill, Michael B., "Lord Shaftesbury [Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury]", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/shaftesbury/>>.

⁵² Terry Jay Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 21.

the primitive became a way to discuss human potential and to critique political systems that seemed likely to inhibit that potential.

In parts of Europe, particularly Germany, Native Americans were also closely associated with a defense of one's own indigenous culture from the incursions of a homogenizing Enlightenment rationalism, which they saw as emerging from France in particular.⁵³ One strand of German thought saw an equivalence between Native American resistance to European colonization and their own Battle of Teutoberg Forest, fought in 9 CE against the expanding Roman Empire and chronicled by Tacitus.⁵⁴ No less a figure than Herder declared that “Germans are the Indians of the Old World,” demonstrating a widespread perception of Germans as defending their traditional way of life in resisting British, and especially French, political philosophy.⁵⁵ The quintessential German Romantic writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe also identified strongly with the American Indian, going by the nickname “Huron” among his friends, and stating that he would prefer the simplicity of primitive life to European decadence, even writing a poem expressing his desire to emigrate to America to escape the stagnation of life in Europe.⁵⁶ Goethe’s interest in the primitive did not represent a withdrawal from world culture, however; on the contrary, it may be seen as an expression of his conviction that “poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men.”⁵⁷ Longfellow's epic then, as distant as it may seem from the rest of Yehoash's work initially, appealed to Yehoash's longstanding interests in socialist ideals and the preservation of Yiddish culture.

⁵³ Johann J. K. Reusch, “Germans as Noble Savages and Castaways: Alter Egos and Alterity in German Collective Consciousness During the Long Eighteenth Century,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42:1 (Fall 2008), 113-116.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 96 and 117.

⁵⁷ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann (1823-1832)*, Tr. John Oxenford, San Francisco: North Point, 1984, 133.

Recent critics such as Alan Trachtenberg and Rachel Rubenstein have recently devoted attention to Yehoash's translation of *Hiawatha*, seeing it as part of Yiddish-speaking immigrants' attempt to adapt to American culture.⁵⁸ Sarah Phillips Casteel takes this project into the present day, seeing contemporary depictions of Native Americans in books such as Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* and Morecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky was Here* as evidence of an ongoing engagement between notions of Jewish American and Native American identity.⁵⁹ While depictions of Native Americans came to play an important ongoing role in American Jewish culture, in the broader context of Yehoash's work, his translation of *Hiawatha* seems to reflect his interest in Romanticism more generally rather than the Native American specifically. Longfellow himself drew on European Romanticism in his creation of *Hiawatha*, as will be discussed below, and Yehoash's translation seems to reflect a discovery of European intellectual traditions in America. This gave Yehoash an opportunity to incorporate the indigenous inhabitants of the New World into his poetry, while remaining committed to a Romantic aesthetic rooted in the Old World.

Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, an epic modeled on the poetic form of the Finnish *Kalevala* and the mythic structure of a haphazard assortment of Native American cultures, aimed to offer America the type of unifying national epic Longfellow had encountered during his studies in Germany.⁶⁰ In its very form, it embodies a Native American culture interpreted through a European lens. The majority of the names of the characters and the episodes of the story itself come from Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *Algonquin Researches*, while the name of the title character

⁵⁸ Alan Trachtenberg, "Yiddish Hiawatha," *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans 1880-1930*, Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux: New York, 2004, 140-169, and Rachel Rubenstein, "Going Native, Becoming Modern: American Indians, Walt Whitman, and the Yiddish Poet," in *American Quarterly* 58:2 (June 2006), 431-43.

⁵⁹ Sarah Phillips Casteel, "Jews Among Indians: The Fantasy of Indigenization in Mordecai Richler's and Michael Chabon's Northern Narratives," *Contemporary Literature* 50:4 (Winter 2009), 775-810.

⁶⁰ Charles C. Calhoun, *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2004, 83.

was drawn from the Iroquois language, because it sounded more mellifluous. Moreover, the dress and appearance of the Indians are drawn from the culture of the Plains rather than either of the aforementioned tribes; Longfellow's source was a collection of writings and drawings by George Catlin, who lived among the Plains Indians and represented them in a heroic light.⁶¹ The inspiration and structure of the project itself, however, came from further afield: Finland's *Kalevala*. The *Kalevala* was a collection of Finnish folktales set to meter and presented as a composite example of the indigenous Finnish heritage. "The *Kalevala* can be said to have invented Finland," Charles Calhoun notes in his recent biography of Longfellow.⁶² Longfellow discovered the epic on a tour of the Nordic countries undertaken in preparation for taking up a teaching position at Harvard, and the discovery sparked his interest in writing an American national epic. Longfellow's experience in Europe inspires him to participate in the Romantic project of locating and/or creating epics that give a sense of history and pride to nations during a period of change.⁶³

Like the German Romantics that inspired him, Longfellow's vision of national identity fundamentally relies on a cosmopolitan vision. He writes:

much is said now-a-days of a national literature. Does it mean anything? Such a literature is the expression of national character. We have, or shall have, a composite one, embracing French, Spanish, Irish, English, Scotch, and German peculiarities. Whoever has within himself most of these is our truly national writer. In other words, whoever is most universal is also the most national.⁶⁴

⁶¹ A number of works were written in the 1920s debunking Longfellow's claim to have presented a true Native American epic, and identifying the factual inaccuracies in the source material he used, written

⁶² Calhoun, 83.

⁶³ Intellectuals of the Romantic era were obsessed with locating these primitive epics lost in the mists of time, and the demand for them was such that some went so far as to invent them from whole cloth, notably James MacPherson's forgery of Gaelic ballads supposedly written by Ossian. Much has been written about these ballads and their cultural implications: the masterful four volume *Ossian and Ossianism*, ed. Dafydd Moore, London: Routledge, 2004 is a fantastic source. Rene Wellek's *History of Modern Criticism: The Later Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 provides a more general overview of this intellectual current.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Virginia Jackson's "Longfellow's Tradition, or Picture-Writing the Nation," in *Modern Language Quarterly* 1998, 483.

This cosmopolitan vision would be echoed in contemporary Yiddish intellectual Chaim Zhitlowsky's analytical introduction to Yehoash's translation of *Hiawatha*, arguing that translations such as Yehoash's will enrich Yiddish literature, allowing it to develop in dialogue with others.⁶⁵ Chaim Zhitlowsky, a European-educated scholar and renowned speaker who attempted to establish the intellectual underpinnings for Yiddish culture in America, shared a trans-Atlantic perspective with Yehoash.⁶⁶ Yehoash would publish regularly in Zhitlowsky's ambitious literary journal *Dos naye lebn* between 1908-1915.⁶⁷

Chaim Zhitlowsky makes the connection between the cosmopolitan project of *Hiawatha* and Europe clear in his introduction to the work. The introduction to Yehoash's *Hiawatha* merits as much, if not more attention than the translation itself, since in it, Zhitlowsky comments more generally on the place of translation, and particularly translation of works so exotic to most Yiddish readers as *Hiawatha*, within Yiddish literature more generally. In the introduction, Zhitlowsky repeatedly refers to *Hiawatha* as a work of European literature, a somewhat mystifying assertion given that the work was written in America, by an American, about Native Americans. It is only twenty-one pages in that he adds in parenthesis that “the reader understands that we count America spiritually with Europe.”⁶⁸ The essay's argument for cosmopolitanism in Yiddish literature attempts to balance between competing impulses to argue for the value of maintaining Yiddish culture and to find solidarity with members of other nations, reflecting Zhitlowsky's own complicated position as a socialist committed to internationalism who nevertheless fought to build lasting Yiddish cultural institutions, assuring a future for the

⁶⁵ Chaim Zhitlowsky, “Vegn dem vert fun iberzetsung,” in *Dos Lid fun Hiavata*, trans. Yehoash [Solomon Bloomgarden] (New York: Farlag Yehoash, 1910) v.

⁶⁶ Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, 138.

⁶⁷ *Leksikon*, 236.

⁶⁸ Zhitlowsky, Chaim, Introduction, *Dos Lid fun Hiavata*, trans. Yehoash [Solomon Bloomgarden] (New York: Farlag Yehoash, 1910) xxi.

language in America.⁶⁹ Translation of foreign works into Yiddish helped to expand the literary resources of the Yiddish language, as well as establishing it as a participant in European literary more generally, goals shared by many German Romantics a few centuries earlier.⁷⁰

Translation occupies an important place in the works of Yehoash. By all accounts, his translation of the Bible into Yiddish occupied the majority of his focus and energy, and remains his most enduring achievement.⁷¹ This massive undertaking emerged from the nexus of ideas that came together at Czernowitz. At this 1908 conference, which left an indelible mark on the development of Yiddish literature in the twentieth century, the well-known writer Sholem Asch called for the translation of the Bible into Yiddish. Even though Yiddish was becoming more closely associated with mass movements such as the Bund that rejected religious tradition, Asch argued that the Bible represented a cultural treasure that should be translated into the language of the people, so that even those Yiddish speakers who did not know Hebrew could encounter it and incorporate it into their original works.⁷² Yehoash himself expressed a similar position, when he said that he hoped that his translation of the Bible would come to occupy a position in Yiddish culture similar to the one the King James version of the Bible did in Anglo culture.⁷³ Yehoash himself claimed to have had the idea of translating the Bible in 1904, predating the Czernowitz conference, but the first volume, which was published in 1910, certainly benefited from the

⁶⁹ For more on Zhitlowsky, see Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 125-178.

⁷⁰ See especially Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann (1823-1832)*, Tr. John Oxenford, San Francisco: North Point, 1984, in which he writes that , "poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men," 133.

⁷¹ Chaim Leyb Fuks, "Yehoyesh," *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, Ferter band, Nyu-york: alveltlekhen yidishn kultur-kongres, 1961, 238. See also Harry M. Orlinsky, "Yehoash's Yiddish Translation of the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 60:2 (June 1941), 173-177, for an English-language review of the translation that includes biographical information obtained through interviews with Yehoash's daughter.

⁷² Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1997, 184.

⁷³ Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Architects of Yiddishism at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: A Study in Jewish Cultural History*, London-New York: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1976, 176.

increased interest in the project of Biblical translation articulated at Czernowitz.⁷⁴ Yehoash brought a poet's sensitivity to language and a scholar's precision of thought to this task, creating a classic that retains its appeal to this day.⁷⁵

Translation illuminates another aspect of Yehoash's poetics, a scholarly and detached complement to his Romantic emphasis on the mystical. Although some critics such as Shmuel Niger and Jacob Glatshteyn describe his Bible translation in quasi-religious terms, as a work guided by prophecy in which Yehoash rescued endangered Yiddish words from oblivion, others, such as A. Mukdani, see it as evidence of his analytical side.⁷⁶ In a 1957 article in *Di Goldene Keyt*, Mukdani characterizes Yehoash as a "polygamist," who both researches the roots of the Yiddish language with rigorous attention to detail and nuance, and immerses himself in its mystery in his writing of romantic poetry, attitudes Mukdani finds oddly inconsistent.⁷⁷ Yiddish literary criticism often contrasts between emotional and intellectual approaches to poetry; critics frequently attacked Yehoash's successors, the Introspectivist school of poets, as possessing too much "head" and not enough "heart" to attain real influence among the masses.⁷⁸ Yehoash demonstrated immense commitment to precision in his use of the Yiddish language, demonstrated in his travels to the Middle East to research the roots of Yiddish words, as well as in his writing a *Yiddish Dictionary, Containing All of the Hebrew and Chaldaic Elements of the Yiddish Language, Illustrated with Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions* with Dr. Chaim Spivak,

⁷⁴ Yehoash's first Biblical translation, of the book of Yeshiah, appeared in *Yidishes tagblat* on December 9, 1909, and it subsequently appeared in a freestanding volume in 1910. *Leksikon*, 238.

⁷⁵ It is the most frequently downloaded text by Yehoash at the National Yiddish Book Center's website, which makes the majority of his works available digitally, by a significant margin.

⁷⁶ *Leksikon*, 242.

⁷⁷ A. Mukdani, "Yehoash," *Di goldene keyt* 27 (1955), 68.

⁷⁸ Yekhiel Hofer, "N. B. Minkov," *Di goldene keyt* 22 (1955) 90.

of the Denver Sanatorium, where he spent the first 8 years of the twentieth century recovering from tuberculosis, the disease which would ultimately claim his life.⁷⁹

Other critics also noticed and admired the high standards Yehoash set for himself in his writing. Aaron Glantz-Leyeles, a member of the Introspectivists who knew Yehoash relatively well, relates that Yehoash struggled with his tendency towards excessive use of German-derived words in Yiddish (*daytshmerisms*, which were considered poor stylistics), and refused to publish a work until he was satisfied with the language, frequently releasing revised editions, as his knowledge of the Yiddish language improved over his lifetime.⁸⁰ Mukdani cites Yehoash as saying, "men muz zayn opgehit mitn yidishn vort," (one must be careful with the Yiddish language).⁸¹ Contemporary critics found this level of care about language odd in a poet who says elsewhere that the poet's "yardstick and measuring weight is not reality, but *truth*."⁸² His Romantic vision of poetic inspiration seemed to clash with his rigorous practice of writing.

Just as his instantiation of the Romantic poet seemed constructed out of surprisingly stern stuff, his attraction to modernism later in his career incorporates unusual incursions of the mystical. Joseph Opatoshu relates that in the winter of 1922, he, H. Leyvik, and A. Leyeles met with Yehoash to discuss starting a new group of writers that would "ophitn and heybn di khshives fun der yidisher literatur" (protect and raise the status of Yiddish literature).⁸³ Yehoash warmly welcomed this project, and together the writers worked on a piece that argued for the importance of individualism (a hallmark of modernist Yiddish poetics) in Chassidic mystical

⁷⁹ Yehoash and Chaim Spivak, eds. *Idish verterbukh*. Nyu York: Farlag Yehoash, 1911. The writing of the dictionary itself, representing Yehoash's participation in making the kind of inventory Jeffrey Shandler has argued is a pervasive activity in modern Jewish culture, is a fascinating phenomenon, one that unfortunately lies outside the scope of this work. Jeffrey Shandler, *Keepers of Accounts: The Practice of Inventory in Modern Jewish Life*, Volume 17 of the David W. Beilin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2010), 19-20.

⁸⁰ Aaron Glantz-Leyeles, *Velt un vort*, New York: Tsiko bikher-farlag, 1958, 31.

⁸¹ Mukdani, 70.

⁸² Yehoash, "Der dikhter - der zeer," *Di tsukunft* April 1910, 225.

⁸³ Y. Opatoshu, "Leyeles," *Di goldene keyt* (1949): 121.

terms. As Yehoash articulated it, the task of the modern poet was to discover the unity between the Biblical phrases "I am dust and earth" and "For me the world was created."⁸⁴ Yehoash brings a mystical, Biblical dimension to this otherwise secular modernist project.

Yehoash makes no distinction between a rigorous experimental poetics and an affiliation with a Biblically resonant vision of Jewish tradition. He makes this clear in a warm endorsement of the modernist poets that saw him as a mentor, published in:

When I hear all of the new, different voices, which are becoming more powerful in the world of art and literature, it seems to me, that modern poetry is becoming more Hebrew, more Jewish. The wordplay, the ingenuity of rhyme and sound, creates a space for unmediated expression, for raw, healthy words, like pieces of tilled soil. The rhythm is not the conventional there-and-back, dancing, charming itself, like someone adjusting his cravat in the mirror, but the rhythm of cloud and earth, the rhythm of storm and thunder, or the chaos of color at sunset.

In the last analysis, beauty and ethics are one. It was so for the prophets. This is the Jewish outlook on beauty. God is the source and archetype of beauty and righteousness and purity in one. And the worship of beauty is the service of God, and the poet is a priest and a prophet, and every word of his must revel in belief, in a deep belief in God, in a deep striving for purity and cleanliness of body and soul.⁸⁵

The diction of this endorsement itself characterizes abstract poetry, often seen as detached from the everyday experience of life, as rooted in the natural world: "cloud and earth," "storm and thunder," "pieces of tilled earth." It goes on to connect modernist poetry with God and the Biblical tradition, characterizing the modern poet as a prophet, an equivalence frequently seen in more mystically inclined schools of poetry, but rare in the increasingly secular, technical world of modernism. Yehoash ties together formal experiment and ancient Jewish belief with a discourse of unity: a single God, a single literary tradition, a love of beauty and ethics that overcomes the distinctions between different approaches to attaining these ideals.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ In N. B. Minkov *Yidische klasiker poem: eseyen*, Nyu-work: Farlag 'Bodn,' 1937, 144. First printed in "Der Tanakh – Dos mentshlekhe bukh, der bund tsvishn felker."

Many critics saw this striving toward unity as the key to understanding Yehoash's diverse body of works. A. Mukdani writes "er hot gezukht sheymus, er hot moyre gehat far tsheshpaltung un tsebreklung" (he sought wholeness; he feared cracking and shattering).⁸⁶ In an age of rupture, Yehoash created works as diverse as dictionaries, poems, and travel writings, that expressed different paths to unity. Mukdani concludes his article on Yehoash's complex poetics with the statement that "there is no contradiction between the secular poet and the creator of the Yiddish Bible; each aspect completes the other."⁸⁷ This would be echoed by Yehoash's daughter, Chana Yehoash-Dvorkin, who issued a statement after her father's death that his poetry expressed his individual identity, giving him respite from his translation work, in which he attempted to give voice to the identity of a people.⁸⁸ Yehoash's insistence on the unity within the complexity of Jewish culture during his time period and within his own writings reflects Romantic thought even as it anticipates more experimental forms of writing.⁸⁹

III. In Geveb

Yehoash's most renowned work of poetry, *In geveb* (Enwebbed), appeared in two volumes, the first in 1919 and the second in 1921.⁹⁰ In the ten years since the appearance of *Dos lid fun Hiavata*, the first Bible translations, and his early collected works, he had evolved considerably as a poet, publishing several volumes of poems (*Fablen* in 1912, and *In zun un nebl* in 1913), as well as expanding his philological enterprises, publishing his dictionary with Charles Spivak in

⁸⁶ Mukdani 69.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁸ Chana Yehoash-Dvorkin, *Di goldene keyt* (1949): 10.

⁸⁹ See especially the "Athenaeum Fragments" of Friedrich von Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, Trans. Peter Firchow, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971, 161-240. Fragment 116 describes Romantic poetry as that which "mix[es] and fuse[s] poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature," transcending even the division between "the portrayed and the portrayer." Fragment 255 argues that a true poet must also be a scientist and a philologist. Fragment 325 characterizes poetry as "spiritual music."

⁹⁰ *Leksikon*, 238.

1911, and travelling to then-Palestine in 1914, attempting to settle there only to return with the outbreak of World War I in 1916. He published accounts of these travels, first in the newspaper *Tog* in 1916, and then in book form in 1917 (*Fun nyu-york biz rekhovot un tsurik*).⁹¹ Contemporary critics saw the volume as a turning point in his career as a poet, commenting especially on its multilingualism and its optimism; some, such as Baal Makhshoves and Avrom Tabachnik, go so far as to discount his earlier writings and consider his literary contribution to begin only with this book.⁹² *In geveb* demonstrates a development from Yehoash's early enthusiasm for the power of poetry to create unity, to a more specific interest in how connections between disparate individuals take shape.

This can be seen in Yehoash's approach to translation. Yehoash devotes significant space in both volumes of *In geveb* to a remarkable variety of translated materials.⁹³ *In geveb* contains translations of Japanese and Arabic folktales, references exotic figures such as Bhudda and Tamburlaine, and embraces technology, devoting poems to the airplane and the subway (in 1915, only a few years after New York's subway was constructed) as well as traditionally Romantic subjects such as autumn, eternity, and the stranger, and themes from the Bible and Jewish mythology. Yehoash's interest in translation is not a new development; he translated works regularly for the Yiddish press in New York, including such exotic works as the Koran, the fables of La Fontaine, and the Far Eastern folktales brought to America by Lafcadio Hearn,

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Contemporary reviews include P. Viernik, "Unzer fil-shprakhike literatur (tsvey naye bender poezye fun yehoyesh" *Morgn-zhurnal* 1.1 (1922), Sh. D. Zinger, "Freyd motivn by yehoyesh'n (leyenendik zayn ershtn band 'In geveb,'" *Zeglen* January 1925, 27-29, A. Leyeles, "Hekher un hekher," *In zikh* June 1920, 222-238, Sh. Niger "Etlekhe tsitatn (fun yehoyesh's nayem bukh lider 'In geveb,'" *Tog* April 11, 1920. For an overview of the contemporary critical evaluation of the work, see the *Leksikon*, 242.

⁹³ Yehoash, *In geveb*, Vol. 1, New York: Farlag "Oyfgang," 1919.

throughout the 1910s.⁹⁴ However, Yehoash's approach to translation differs from other writers and illuminates his increasingly sophisticated poetics, that reflected the complex world he inhabited.

Yehoash's approach to translated works differs significantly from that of later modernists such as Ezra Pound, or even the Yiddish Introspectivists that would look to him as a model. Where Pound abstracts the cultural specificity of East Asian poetry, creating a spare poetic model that could be imported to Europe free of its original context, and *In zikh* sees Asian culture as a general metonym for all things non-Jewish, as in Leyeles' poem "Tao," Yehoash emphasizes its specificity and difference.⁹⁵ In his poem "an alt lid," Yehoash begins and ends with the words:

Ot azoy iz in yapan
Ergets-vu a lid faran:

Somewhere in Japan
There is a poem like this:⁹⁶

This approach to translation demands that the reader grapple with the unfamiliarity of the source text, so that its very foreignness becomes part of its meaning. In taking this tack, Yehoash follows the example of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who argues in an 1813 essay "On the Different Methods of Translation" that the translator must bring the reader toward the author rather than vice-versa, despite the challenges that creates for the reader. Granted, simply stating the origin of the text as Yehoash does represents a considerably cruder approach than Schleiermacher's proposal of integrating the conceptual world of the original into the translated text; however, in

⁹⁴ The *Leksikon* is the best starting place for tracking Yehoash's considerable publication record in the Yiddish press, particularly p. 236, but Bernard Witt's *Yehoash: a bibliografye fun zayne shriftn* (Cleveland: A Cohen, 1944) is also an invaluable resource.

⁹⁵ Aaron Glantz-Leyeles, "Tao," in *American Yiddish Poetry*, Ed. and Trans. Benjamin and Barbara Harshav, Berkeley: U of California P, 1986, 85.

⁹⁶ Yehoash, "An alt lid," *In geveb*, Vol. 2, New York: Farlag "Oyfgang," 1921, 73.

other places, Yehoash does exactly that, introducing Japanese words such as samurai and nominal forms such as “Shimone-san” into the Yiddish text.⁹⁷ The structure of the two volumes of *In geveb* further reinforces the difference of the translated texts, as the poems originating from the same culture (Japanese, Chinese, or Arabic) are collected in separate sections, which are also separated from other themes such as nature or Jewish folklore or the modern city. Yehoash’s approach to translation introduces the reader to unfamiliar worlds, not adapting them to a Yiddish cultural framework as much as allowing them to speak for themselves, in dialogue with poems that arise from other cultural contexts. The “web” of the series’ title becomes the almost invisible, but resilient material that unites extremely disparate experiences.

The individual’s connection with her environment reaches an even deeper level in the natural world. In his poem “Tsvishn beymer” (Among Trees), Yehoash narrates a process of transformation as the human poet literally becomes one with the object he describes, a tree, growing roots and giving up on the harried possibilities of human life in favor of a transcendent peace that puts him in touch with the divine. The first part reads as follows:

Deep in the woods stands my tent,
 No one will discover me,
 Late at night and at first dawn,
 I hear the revel of the spring
 From the deep roots underneath,
 To the moss-covered trunks,
 From the dark cold ground
 To the sun and its flames...
 Earth and heaven reach accord,
 I do too, together with them...

Deep in the woods stands my tent,
 No one will come to me,
 Like a wave that moves away
 Is the distant, distant world...
 Day by day I hammer further

⁹⁷ Yehoash, “Shimone-san,” *In geveb*, Vol. 1, 63-64.

Deep roots below,
 Day by day my limbs grow heavier
 With the sap of forests –
 Great stars my listeners,
 Green grasses my poems...⁹⁸

The first stanza underlines pairs of opposites: late night and daybreak, root and trunk, dark cold earth and bright hot sun, earth and heaven. Yehoash begins with a list of apparently irreconcilable opposites, attributes that contradict one another and entities that would never normally encounter one another. In the last lines of the first stanza, however these bright lines of demarcation begin to blur, as earth and heaven – and the human observer – reach an understanding, and strike a deal. The nature of this accord remains unclear at this stage – what is being offered, and what given up.

Those details emerge in the second stanza, where the poet reaches a profound indifference to the world, which washes away like a receding wave. This statement reverberates in a book like *In geveb*, so radically cosmopolitan and all-encompassing in terms of subject matter and poetic approach. In nature the poet reaches oneness with his own immediate experience, even as the physical markers of humanity – his limbs – lose energy, becoming leaden and weighing him down. The transformation culminates in his growing literal roots in the earth. The last part of his experience to transform itself is language, or more precisely, the kind of linguistic communion he used to share with his readership as a poet. Now he reaches no one except the stars overhead, and his poems no longer consist of words but of animate objects – green grass, which is vibrant and alive, but conveys no message beyond its own being. Free of the necessity of communication with others, Yehoash begins to embody a primal consciousness, rooted in experience rather than intellect.

⁹⁸ Yehoash, *In geveb*, vol. 1, 84. My translation.

In “Tsvishn beymer,” Yehoash deconstructs the relationship between subject and object, portraying an almost mystical vision of a consciousness in which these divisions have ceased to signify. The next section of this poem hints heavily that the poet’s achievement of this oneness with nature has earned him an encounter with a mystical being of great healing power, perhaps God himself.⁹⁹ Nature, the ultimate primitive, offers Yehoash individual psychological integration. In the American wilderness of Colorado, Yehoash begins to explore individual consciousness.¹⁰⁰ While his poetics has shifted from a concern with social cohesion to individual subjectivity, he remains fascinated by the potential of the primitive to unify and heal. The unselfconscious “revel” of the spring evokes the instinctive joy of the dancing tones in “Bayis sheyni.” A vision of free, joyful instinctive life continues to inspire Yehoash, despite the shift in his cultural context and poetic approach.

Yehoash’s experiments with free verse and subjectivity intrigued his immediate successors, the modernist group “*Inzikh*.” Minkov, one of the three founders of the group, writes an extended treatment of Yehoash’s work in his 1937 volume *Yidishe klasiker poeten* (Classic Yiddish Poets). In it, he argues that Yehoash’s work before *In geveb* “is more characteristic of his time than of him as an individual.”¹⁰¹ Minkov previously described this time period as being given to an “intuitive” approach to art, which he characterizes as vague, over-emotional, theological, and over-generalizing. In *In geveb*, Minkov traces Yehoash’s efforts to free himself from this kind of thought and to reach for self-consciousness. Minkov places Yehoash’s early work in a world of “pre-Romantic rationalism.”¹⁰² This, he says, is emotionalism expressed by means of realism. Though this concept is less than clearly defined, it

⁹⁹ Ibid., 89.

¹⁰⁰ *Leksikon*, 235.

¹⁰¹ Minkov 108.

¹⁰² Ibid., 119.

allows Minkov both to dismiss Yehoash's early work as un-intellectual and critique its simplistic relation to objects.

Minkov goes on to argue that Yehoash develops a sense of individual identity by means of clarifying his relationship with surrounding phenomena, and identifies his travels to the Middle East as a key moment in that process. Significantly, Yehoash returned from those travels immediately before publishing *In geveb*. "Er hot gezukht zayn fuln 'ikh' nit in 'beyrut,' vos iz geven far nitschen 'der sakrament in tog fun shlakht.' Yehoash hot gezukht zayn derfulung in *batsiungen* tsu arumike dershaynungen."¹⁰³ (He sought his complete 'I,' not in 'Beirut,' which was for Nietzsche 'the sacrament in the day of battle.' Yehoash sought his fulfillment in *relationship* to surrounding phenomena.) Minkov describes Yehoash's travels to the Middle East as a search for identity, and notes that one of the results of his travels was a more complex sense of the role of language in mediating his relationship with the world around him.

Minkov goes on to argue that in acquiring this greater self-consciousness, Yehoash developed a more complex understanding of the role of phenomena. He implies that Yehoash anticipated the *Inzikhist* idea that external objects, if one becomes conscious of the role they play in determining one's individual subjectivity, can come to express that subjectivity when used in poetry.¹⁰⁴ In developing this idea, Minkov specifically addresses "Tsvishn beymer," arguing that this poem, more than any others, demonstrates the sophistication of Yehoash's approach to depicting the natural world in poetry.¹⁰⁵ As Minkov sums up, "yehoash hot durkhgemakht dem veg fun romantishn ratsionalizm biz tsu dem tsushtand fun kosmishn bavustzayn"¹⁰⁶ (Yehoash underwent the path from Romantic rationalism to the condition of cosmic consciousness.) This

¹⁰³ 120.

¹⁰⁴ 114.

¹⁰⁵ 114-134.

¹⁰⁶ 129.

investigation demonstrates that the path between those two states may not have been that arduous. Nevertheless, Yehoash's innovations in *In geveb* inspired the next generation of Yiddish modernist poets to develop their conceptions of individuality and perception in increasingly ambitious directions.

Chapter 3: The Fragmented Self: Individualism in Yiddish Introspectivism

Introduction

In 1920, a group of American Yiddish poets developed a bold new poetic doctrine that drew on both Anglo-American and European modernist thought. Building on recent efforts in Yiddish poetry to define a new poetry of the individual, rather than the collective, these poets mounted a critique of the commonly accepted divide between the individual and society and posited that the individual consists of fragments of the different communities in which he takes part. For these poets, who called themselves *Inzikh*, or Introspectivist, the individual's experience, mediated as it is through various incommensurable perspectives, constitutes his reality, rather than any externally observable facts. This complex view of the individual draws on these poets' own position as American Jews in the multicultural environment of New York in the last years before xenophobic restrictions began to stem the tide of immigration. Although their thought did not reach far beyond their immediate circle of intellectuals during their lifetimes, this poetry began to attract an audience among American Jews interested in the Jewish contribution to American culture in the wake of the civil rights movement. Noted authors such as John Hollander and Cynthia Ozick began to translate Introspectivist poetry, bringing these works to a younger generation that was largely unable to access the Yiddish original.

The Introspectivists' thought sheds important light on the development of American modernism during this period. Scholars such as Werner Sollers have argued convincingly that our understanding of American literature is incomplete without those works written in America, often by American citizens, in languages other than English.¹⁰⁷ American modernism did not develop only out of Anglo-Americans' travels to Europe and exposure to modernism abroad, but

¹⁰⁷ Werner Sollers, ed., *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

also from a domestic cultural evolution from the influx of immigrants in the first decades of the twentieth century. Critics such as Michael North and Walter Benn Michaels have shown that American modernism has its roots in Anglo-American modernists' engagement with the increasing influence of minority subcultures, and their interpretations criticize these modernists' continued complicity in racist power structures.¹⁰⁸ The poetics of the Introspectivists presents one minority subculture's attempt to adapt modernist literary techniques for the purposes of their own self-expression and the refashioning of modernist discourse they had to engage in, in order to do so.

This chapter will analyze the Introspectivists' view of the self as an “awesome labyrinth,” in which many beings dwell, a complex entity comprising various impulses, both hidden and revealed, a vision of the self that does not necessarily add up to any kind of unity. First, I will examine the Introspectivists' 1920 manifesto, published in the first issue of their self-titled journal, *Inzikh*. I will go on to analyze the connections between the Introspectivists and their contemporaries, the Young Intellectuals, comparing the two groups' views of the role of the individual in society. Finally, I will provide a detailed overview of the development of their journal. The central Introspectivist poets edited the journal as a conscious statement of their poetics and carefully controlled what appeared in it. The types of poems and essays that appear in the journal, as well as the ways in which these writings shift their emphases over time, show that Introspectivism gradually moved away from its cosmopolitan roots toward a role as a forum for the Yiddish-speaking community more exclusively.

The Introspectivist movement emerged from an American Jewish community that continued to maintain important ties to Europe even while building new lives in America. The

¹⁰⁸ Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) and Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Yiddish language as a whole had experienced a surge of growth that several commentators describe as explosive in the wake of the 1905 Russian revolution.¹⁰⁹ The perceived failure of this revolution, coming on the heels of the wave of Russian pogroms in 1881-1882, led many educated, cosmopolitan Jewish intellectuals in both Russia and America to return to Yiddish culture, in order to create a new social movement that would better reflect their priorities. They produced a culture that attempted to rethink the pressing social and political questions facing Jews in the years leading up to World War I. As I. David Fishman writes, “By 1914, a full-fledged Yiddish culture not only existed but seemed to be the wave of the future in east European Jewish life.”¹¹⁰ Yiddish-speaking immigrants, accompanied by some of the foremost Yiddishist intellectuals, brought this enthusiasm for Yiddish culture to America. Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, whom Fishman calls the most prominent Yiddishist, began to take an active role in New York Yiddish cultural life in 1904 and returned to the city on a regular basis until he settled there permanently in 1930.¹¹¹ Ber Borokhov, an important Yiddish philologist and activist in socialist Zionist politics, also moved to the United States with the outbreak of World War I.¹¹²

World War I provided a catalyst for American Yiddish writers and thinkers to take primary responsibility for advancing Yiddish culture. Before World War I, Yiddish poets had tended to defer to aesthetic trends established in Europe, and American Yiddish publications were dominated by European Yiddish poets. However, with the disruption in travel and communication caused by the war, American Yiddish publishers were forced to depend on

¹⁰⁹ See Harshav, *Meaning of Yiddish*, 119-138, although Harshav actually sets the revolutionary moment somewhat earlier, in 1897; also David E. Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005) 12.

¹¹⁰ Fishman, *Modern Yiddish Culture*, 17.

¹¹¹ Fishman, *Modern Yiddish Culture*, 15. Zhitlowsky’s movements between New York and Europe are chronicled in the *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literature* 3 (New York: Alveltlekhn yidishn kultur-kongres, 1960) 700-701. For more on Zhitlowsky’s influence in American Jewish politics, see Tony Michels, “The Politics of *Yidishe Kultur*,” in *A Fire in Their Hearts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005) 125-178.

¹¹² *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur* 1 (New York: Alveltlekhn yidishn kultur-kongres, 1956) 237.

domestic talents. American Yiddish poets, particularly the poetic group known as “*Di yunge*,” (the youth), rose to the challenge with new innovations and emerged from the war strengthened, while European Yiddish poets faced unprecedented levels of human and economic devastation.¹¹³

Many of *Di yunge*’s innovations were drawn from the first stirrings of modernism, especially Symbolism and Decadence, which they encountered in Russian literature. *Di yunge* argued for aestheticism in a publishing environment which they saw as beholden to political advocacy rather than literary values.¹¹⁴ Their contemporary critics accused them of imitating foreign works rather than drawing on indigenous sources of creativity, and of indifference to the plight of the Jewish people.¹¹⁵ In this environment, the Introspectivists drew on the example of Yehoash, a writer who drew on both Jewish and world literature, and most crucially, put aesthetics above ideology. They mention him specifically in their manifesto, underlining his commitment to continual development as a poet as an inspiration.¹¹⁶ Although the Introspectivists saw their movement as a radical departure in Yiddish poetry, it naturally drew on the work of preceding individuals and groups in American Yiddish literature, particularly Yehoash and *Di yunge*, in developing its aesthetic program.¹¹⁷

The founders of *Inzikh*, who continued to play a central role in its development over the years, were Aaron Glantz-Leyeles, Jacob Glatshteyn, and Nachum Baruch Minkov. They were joined by a cadre of more marginal figures, some of whom were also affiliated with other literary

¹¹³ Ruth Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988) 57-58.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁶ Jacob Glatshteyn, A. Leyeles, and N. B. Minkov, “Introspektivizm,” *Inzikh* 1:1 (1920), 9.

¹¹⁷ Although the Introspectivists would never admit it, there is considerable overlap between the poetic tenets of Introspectivism and that of *Di yunge*. Regrettably, further discussion of the topic lies outside the scope of this chapter.

groups, and some younger poets who developed their talent under their tutelage.¹¹⁸ The three founders not only produced a body of work that demonstrated Introspectivist poetic ideals, they also published an enormous body of criticism over the years, which provided readers with an analytical vocabulary and an understanding of literary history shaped by Introspectivist views.¹¹⁹

Leyeles, born in 1889, played a particularly influential role in the early years of the group's existence. At 30 in 1919, not only was he slightly older than the others, he had also completed more education, studying philosophy at London University from 1905 to 1908 and literature at Columbia University from 1910 to 1913. He was also politically active, having gotten his start in the Socialist Zionist movement in London and transitioned into the Territorialist movement led by Chaim Zhitlowsky that was sweeping New York when he arrived in the United States in 1909. In tandem with his political commitments, he worked to develop Yiddish-language education in America, helping to establish the first Yiddish school on Henry Street in 1910 and working with Yiddish schools as far afield as Chicago, Sioux City, and Montreal, as well as important New York organizations such as the Arbeter Ring (Workman's

¹¹⁸ The question of who was or was not an Introspectivist inevitably generates debate, however, one can find a provisional list of Introspectivists in I. Birnboym's article, "Der zhurnal 'inzikh'," in *Pinkes fun der forschung fun der yidisher literatur un prese*, ed. Khayim Bez (New York: Alveltlekhn yidishn kultur-kongres, 1972) 45-46. Birnboym generates this list of 118 poets from those who published in the journal *Inzikh*, rather than an evaluation of their poetry itself. The most frequent contributors to the journal included B. Alkvit, Shloyme Schwartz, A. Almi, Shloyme Bikl, El Guryeh, Reuven Ludvig, and Naftali Gros, among others.

¹¹⁹ Glatshiteyn and Leyeles published critical works in book form, as well as writing daily columns for newspapers, and critical articles in literary journals. Some of the most important publications include Glatshiteyn's weekly column on literary and social issues "In tokh genumen," published in *Der yidisher kemfer* from 1945-1957, as well as his book of literary essays, *Prost un poshet: literarishe eseyen*, ed. Berl Kohen (New York: F. Glatshiteyn, 1978). His books of poetry are all important, as well, but the most important for exploring his relationship to modernism are those published before the Holocaust, including *Jacob Glatshiteyn* (New York: Kultur, 1921), *Fraye ferzn* (New York: Grohar-Stadolski, 1926), *Kredos* (New York: Yidish lebn, 1929), and *Yidishtaytsh* (Warsaw: Kh. Bzhoza, 1937). Leyeles published an important critical work, *Velt un vort: literarishe un andere eseyen* (New York: Tsiko, 1958), as well as his early books of poetry, including *Labirint: Lider* (New York: M. N. Mayzl, 1918), *Yungharbst* (New York: Kultur lige, 1922), *Rondos un andere lider* (New York: Inzikh, 1926) and *Fabyus Lint* (New York: Inzikh, 1937). Minkov's most important critical work was published later, starting with *Yidische klasiker poem: eseyen* (New York: Bidermanis, 1939). He published two works of poetry during this time period: *Lider* (New York: Inzikh, 1924) and *Unzer piero: fun der emotsiyoneler komedye* (New York: Yidish lebn, 1927). Full bibliographies of these poets can be found in the *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, ed. Shmuel Niger, et al. (New York: Alveltlekhn yidishn kultur-kongres, 1956-1981).

Circle), which dominated Yiddish education in the city. Leyeles' first writings arose from his political involvement: his first book, *Der Territorialismus ist die einsige Lösung der Judenfrage* (Territorialism is the only solution to the Jewish question), espoused Territorialist ideals to a German-speaking audience, and his first poems were published in Chaim Zhitlowsky's journal *Dos naye lebn* in 1909.

Glatshiteyn, the youngest member of the Introspectivists, would later become its central voice on the strength of his poetic talent. As Leyeles later writes, even those critics who opposed the Introspectivist movement as a whole often made an exception for Glatshiteyn's poetry.¹²⁰ He possessed a unique feel for language, erudition in both Yiddish and world literature, and an emotional honesty that demanded acknowledgement. Glatshiteyn wrote Yiddish poetry in his youth in Europe and even garnered some critical acclaim; at the age of 13 he made a pilgrimage to the house of I. L. Peretz in Warsaw. However, once he arrived in America, he ceased writing for a time, immersing himself in English and in making a place for himself in the American economy. Dissatisfied with the level of work he was able to find, he entered New York University's School of Law, where he met Minkov, who reignited his interest in Yiddish literature.

Although Glatshiteyn at first opposed the idea of working in journalism, thinking that it would negatively affect his poetry, he eventually made a career as a columnist for the daily *Morgn Zhurnal*. Some critics argued that this did indeed give his later poetry a prosaic quality.¹²¹ However, it also gave him a public forum in which to discuss new poetic developments in both Yiddish and English American poetry. This did much to cement Introspectivism's centrality in the world of Yiddish American literature, a position which it continues to occupy to this day,

¹²⁰ Aaron Glanz-Leyeles, "Yankev Glatshiteyn tsu 60 yor," in *Velt un vort: literarishe un andere eseyen* (New York: Tsiko, 1958), 150.

¹²¹ I. Rapaport, "Jacob glatshteyns nay liderbukh," *Di goldene keyt* 19 (1954) 211.

confirmed by works such as Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers*.¹²² Glatshiteyn contributed an often prickly sensibility to Introspectivism. He did not shy away from attacking, often harshly, those critics who opposed or simply ignored the Introspectivist movement. At times even the other Introspectivists felt the need to distance themselves from Glatshiteyn's fiery rhetoric.¹²³ All of this conflict added an emotional weight and urgency to what many Yiddish writers felt was the tepid world of American literary discourse.¹²⁴ The passion of Glatshiteyn's intellectual and poetic commitments provided the group with a driving force.

Minkov, a fellow student of Glatshiteyn's at the New York University School of Law who went on to finish his degree, unlike Glatshiteyn, participated in the group more as a critic than a poet. Minkov's poetry garnered rather less attention than Glatshiteyn's and Leyeles' at the time, perhaps due to its difficulty. Minkov gained a reputation as an intellectual, rather than an emotional poet, an approach that the other Introspectivists supported but practiced less strictly. (Glatshiteyn in particular had no compunction about deviating from the Introspectivist tenets laid out in the group's manifesto when it suited his poetic purposes.) Minkov was a great champion of consciousness over intuition, which made him a perceptive critic but gave his poetry a tone many felt to be stilted.¹²⁵ He worked as a critic and professor of Yiddish literature at the New School for Social Research in New York.

¹²² Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Schocken, 1976) 439-440. Howe, like many of the critics of his generation, valued the work of the Introspectivists but focuses more on its reflections on Jewish identity and role in the process of assimilation than its poetic innovations.

¹²³ For example, see Glatshiteyn's attack on Nakhman Mayzl, "Lider ne zhelyayem," *Inzikh* 4:2 (1929) 30, in which Leyeles' letter critiquing Glatshiteyn's language, if not his sentiments, is also printed on the last page, 32.

¹²⁴ Abraham Cahan, for example, points to his early involvement in anarchism as a search for the sense of danger and self-sacrifice involved in Russian politics, but missing in American moderate politics. According to him, a process of assimilation was necessary before he was ready to take part in mainstream progressive politics. For Cahan, as for many Russian immigrants, the worlds of political and literary discourse were closely entwined. See *The Education of Abraham Cahan*, trans. Leon Stein, et al. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969) 227-229.

¹²⁵ For an overview of his critical reception, see Yekhiel Hofer, "N. B. Minkov," *Di goldene keyt* 22 (1955) 90. For his view of intuitive versus conscious poetic technique, see N. B. Minkov, "Yehoash," in *Yidishe klasiker poeten: eseyen* (New York: Bidermanis, 1939).

I: Introspectivism's Fragmented Individual

The Introspectivist poets first articulate their view of the individual in their manifesto, which was published in 1920 in the January issue of the journal *Inzikh* and in the *Inzikh* anthology published in the same year.¹²⁶ In this document, they describe a panoramic view of Yiddish literature, which they saw as evolving in the direction of greater individualism. The Introspectivists extend their conception of the complexity of the individual to their poetics itself, arguing for a type of poetry that includes fragmentation and juxtaposition on the basis that this represents the true nature of modern life.

The Introspectivist manifesto, “*Introspektivizm*,” begins with the definition of the term that serves as its title.¹²⁷ The writers define “introspectivism” as poetry that is “drawn from [the poet’s] own soul, and from the world as reflected in it.”¹²⁸ This interplay between outer and inner worlds is key to their poetics. Introspectivist poetry arises from the internalization of an external reality. This bears a resemblance to T. S. Eliot’s conception of the “objective correlative,” but alters it in important ways. While Eliot defined the objective correlative as “a set of objects, a chain of events which shall be the formula of [a] particular emotion,” the Introspectivists focus on the associations which a particular experience evokes in each individual, a set of associations that vary from person to person.¹²⁹ The Introspectivists focus on the social world in which each individual is embedded, a world which is understood to be culturally and historically contingent, rather than an individual’s emotion.

¹²⁶ Jacob Glatshetyn, A. Leyeles, and N. B. Minkov, “Introspektivizm,” in *Inzikh* 1:1 (1920) 1-10. Also in *Inzikh: A zamlung introspektive lider*, ed. M. Afranel (New York: Max N. Maisel, 1920).

¹²⁷ Glatshetyn, Leyeles, and Minkov, “Introspektivizm,” 1

¹²⁸ Glatshetyn, Leyeles, and Minkov, “Introspectivism,” trans. Bennjamin Harshav, in *American Yiddish Poetry*, 774.

¹²⁹ T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet,” in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, 1956) 48.

The manifesto goes on to establish its philosophical basis. In its most famous statement, the writers claim “the world exists and we are a part of it. But for us, the world exists only as it is mirrored in us, as it touches *us*. The world is a nonexistent category, a lie, if it is not related to us. It becomes an actuality only *in* and *through* us.”¹³⁰ This somewhat ambiguously worded statement has been read, by a public predisposed to classify aesthetic efforts in terms of their degree of political engagement, as a commitment to solipsism.¹³¹ This interpretation casts the Introspectivists not only as proponents of an apolitical poetry, but as being in a state of radical doubt of the existence of a world outside the self.¹³²

This interpretation does not seem to hold up, however, on closer reading. The Introspectivists are indeed concerned with the individual, but they are primarily interested in the individual’s perception of an outside world. They are most interested in how perceptions of the world become channeled into clichéd forms rather than experienced in all their complexity. For example, they criticize the typical poet’s attempt to describe a sunset by “paint[ing] it, search[ing] for colors, describ[ing] the details.”¹³³ For the Introspectivists, this is a response dictated by “stock images and ready-made materials.”¹³⁴ An Introspectivist poet would need to look beyond poetic convention to find his own authentic response to the sunset, which may include “the strangest things which, ostensibly, have perhaps no relation to the sunset. The image reflected in his psyche is rather a series of far-reaching associations moving away from what his eye sees.”¹³⁵ This, they claim, “constitutes *truth*.”¹³⁶ Describing an object’s external details reflects only social convention: truth must be sought in the process of perception. This mistrust

¹³⁰ Glatshyteyn, Leyeles, and Minkov, 774.

¹³¹ Hofer, “N. B. Minkov,” 90.

¹³² This position also may owe a debt to Emerson, a parallel which lies outside the scope of this discussion, but merits further investigation.

¹³³ Glatshyteyn, Leyeles, and Minkov, 776.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

of objectivity and interest in the complexities of perception recalls phenomenology more than solipsism. As phenomenological poets, they use poetry as a tool to investigate their consciousness of the world, in order to get closer to a truth that is unavailable through everyday perception. Indeed, Leyeles writes that “*kunst iz far mir... a veg tsu derkenen zikh un di velt, tsu dergeyn tsum harts fun lebn.*”¹³⁷ (Art is for me ... a way to recognize myself and the world, to reach the heart of life.)

The theme of human consciousness as complex and fragmented recurs repeatedly in the manifesto. The “inner voice” for the Introspectivists is not a singular consciousness, but a “panorama – kaleidoscopic, contradictory, unclear or confused as it may be.”¹³⁸ In a wonderful image, the manifesto later expands on this: “The human psyche is an awesome labyrinth. Thousands of beings dwell there. The inhabitants are the various facets of the individual’s present self on the one hand and fragments of his inherited self on the other.”¹³⁹ These references to a ‘present’ and ‘inherited’ self are telling. The Introspectivists presumed that the Yiddish poet was, like themselves, a “modern” Jew writing in Yiddish: someone with deep roots in traditional Eastern European Jewish culture but possessing a Western education and inhabiting a Western cultural milieu. This would naturally lead to a certain division within the individual’s consciousness, an awareness of radically divergent ways of thinking, and indeed of perceiving the world. This description of the many inhabitants of an internal labyrinth does not reduce this situation to a simple conflict between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity.’ Both the present and the past are seen as having ‘thousands’ of faces, any of which the individual might come across unexpectedly.

¹³⁷ A. Glantz-Leyeles, “A por verter,” *Inzikh* 3:1 (1928) 15.

¹³⁸ Glatshetyn, Leyeles, and Minkov, 774.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 775.

The concept of tradition played an important role for the Introspectivists, as it did for many modernists. The Introspectivists cast themselves as the culmination of a chain of development within Yiddish literature toward greater individualism. In the first issue of *Inzikh*, Glatshsteyn's article "A *shneloyf iber der yidisher poezie*" traces an evolution from a communal voice to an individual one through the history of Yiddish poetry, beginning with the folk poets and tracing it through the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) to *Di yunge*, whom Glatshsteyn identifies as the first to "sense instinctively that their own liberation is not with the liberation of the group."¹⁴⁰ He concludes by indicting *Di yunge* for their failures, even while acknowledging their contributions, and proposing Introspectivist poetics as a solution to their lapses. This view of history reflects the Introspectivists' sense that modernity and individuality were closely aligned, as well as buttressing their claims to literary significance.

The Introspectivists' favored poetic techniques also serve to reinforce their portrayal of a radically diverse inner reality. The cornerstone of their aesthetic program was the use of free verse, an innovation in Yiddish literature. Like Walt Whitman,¹⁴¹ the Introspectivists saw free verse as "best suited to the individuality of the rhythm and of the poem as a whole."¹⁴² They extended their interest in the individuality of the poet to a concern for the individuality of the poem – that it be able to develop freely, without the constraints of tradition. They were not hostile to rhyme: the manifesto declares "rhyme is the mystery of life; art which is no more than an expression of life obviously must also have rhythm."¹⁴³ Many of the Introspectivist poets wrote both rhymed and free verse. What was important to them was that "each poem must have

¹⁴⁰ *Inzikh* 1:1 (1920) 19-32.

¹⁴¹ For more on Walt Whitman's importance in Yiddish poetry, see Julian Levinson, "Walt Whitman Among the Yiddish Poets," *Tikkun* 18:5 (2003) 57-58, 69.

¹⁴² Glatshsteyn, Leyeles, and Minkov, 777.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 776.

its *individual rhythm*.”¹⁴⁴ The rhythm must suit the poem, the poet, and the subject, rather than being imposed from without. Their concern is for individuality and authentic self-expression.

These terms – authenticity, individuality – reflect the poets’ knowledge of contemporary American discourse. However, they understood these terms in a unique way, particularly the term ‘individual.’ For the Introspectivists, being individual did not connote being in touch with one’s unique emotional impulses. Nor did it necessarily imply differing from one’s peers. For them, to be individual was above all to be modern, to be aware of internationally important intellectual currents, and to be located in an urban center. In the manifesto, the Introspectivists express this in terms of opposition to the ideal of the naïve poet: “the modern poet is not, cannot, and should not be that naïve stargazer who knows nothing but his little song, understanding nothing that goes on in the world, who has no attitude to life, its problems and events, who cannot even write a line about anything but his little mood, tapped out in iambs and trochees.”¹⁴⁵ Reconstructing this positively, the Introspectivist poet is modern, is aware of realities outside poetry, understands world affairs, is politically involved, and can write about intellectual as well as emotional experiences, in free verse as well as rhyme. Seen in this way, the Introspectivist ideal of the individual is quite distinctive: far from being lost in solipsism, the Introspectivist poet is both knowledgeable of and critically engaged in social life on an international scale.

II: Introspectivism’s Place in American Literary Culture

Introspectivism drew heavily on contemporary American poetry and poetic theory in formulating its own aesthetic in the years leading up to 1920. Introspectivist writings tend to presume the reader’s familiarity with contemporary American poetry, in contrast to the more

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 777.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 779.

prevalent tendency in Yiddish literature to presume the reader's knowledge of traditional Hebrew texts and Jewish customs. The first scholar to identify this "Yiddish-English bilingualism" was Yael Feldman, who defines it in her 1985 article identifying Introspectivism's close relation to Imagism.¹⁴⁶ Imagism played a significant role in the development of the group's aesthetic, although the group did not adopt all Imagist tenets uncritically. Arthur Tilo Alt notes Introspectivism's tendency to draw on English poetic theory as evidence of the group's regrettable assimilation into American culture, as part of a broader critique of the significance of modernism in Yiddish literature.¹⁴⁷ Following in the footsteps of recent works by critics such as Julian Levinson, Jeffrey Shandler, and Hana Wirth-Nesher, who see the encounter between American and culture more as an evolving dialogue than a process of resisting assimilation, I will look more closely at the ways in which the Introspectivists both adopted and refashioned the American poetic discourse of their period.¹⁴⁸ This interaction can clearly be seen in a comparison of the Introspectivists' view of the individual with that of the Young Intellectuals, a contemporary group of American cultural critics. Both groups argue that the society exerts an important influence over the individual. However, while the Young Intellectual Randolph Bourne argues for a liberal society built on acceptance of individuals from diverse cultures, Introspectivist N. B. Minkov celebrates the diversity within each individual as well as within America as a whole.

The most characteristically American aspect of Introspectivist poetics lies in their interest in the individual. European critics specifically identified American Yiddish poets' interest in the

¹⁴⁶ Yael S. Feldman, "Jewish Literary Modernism and Language Identity: The Case of "Inzikh." *Yiddish* 6.1 (1985) 45.

¹⁴⁷ Alt, Arthur Tilo, "Ambivalence toward modernism: the Yiddish avant-garde and its manifestoes." *Yiddish* 8.1 (1991) 55.

¹⁴⁸ Julian Levinson, *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

individual as something that separated them from an earlier, more “authentic,” European poetics.¹⁴⁹ American individualism struck European visitors to the country as early as Alexis de Tocqueville’s famous visit in the 1830s, and continued to occupy an important place in American political discourse, as demonstrated by Herbert Hoover’s book *American Individualism*, published in 1922, when he was Secretary of Commerce.¹⁵⁰ Individualism became identified with American culture in the minds of both Europeans and Americans. The *Inzikhistn* drew their understanding of individualism from the Young Intellectuals, a group of American modernist artists and critics in New York, in the late 1910s, who published the journal *Seven Arts*, which became one of the most important venues by which Americans encountered modernism.

The Young Intellectuals, a group that included Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Louis Mumford, began a search for a new personal identity that would replace outdated Victorian ideals of character. Critics such as Casey Blake argue that their refashioning of the self possessed an important political resonance: for the Young Intellectuals, the new ideal of personality was “a self forged through a process of assimilating and refashioning one’s cultural environment.”¹⁵¹ Indeed, Randolph Bourne’s “Trans-national America,” an iconic work, “appears to have as much to do with the Young Intellectuals’ quest for personality as it does with their search for a revitalized American culture.”¹⁵² The Young Intellectuals sought to refashion the relationship between the individual and society, ultimately coming to the conclusion that the transformation of the self required the transformation of society. This discussion held great

¹⁴⁹ “Untitled” *Poezye* (September 1919) 124.

¹⁵⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: An annotated Text* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007); Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1922).

¹⁵¹ Casey Blake, “The Young Intellectuals and the Culture of Personality,” *American Literary History* 1:3 (1989) 520.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 519.

appeal for the *Inzikhistn*, coming as they did from a Yiddishist movement which sought to transform the self as a means of creating a more equitable society.

“Trans-national America” particularly speaks to the *Inzikhistn*, as it offers recent immigrants a way to integrate into American culture without losing touch with their European roots.¹⁵³ In this essay, Randolph Bourne responds to an environment which had become increasingly anxious about the cultural impact of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. He refutes the criticism that immigrants fail to adopt American culture, saying, “no more tenacious cultural allegiance to the mother country has been shown by any alien nation than by the ruling class of Anglo-Saxon descendants in these American States. English snobberies, English religion, English literary styles . . . have been the cultural food that we have drunk in from our mothers’ breasts.”¹⁵⁴ Bourne accuses Anglo-Saxons themselves of being derivative, and describes immigrant cultures as authentically intact. “We have needed the new peoples . . . to save us from our own stagnation.”¹⁵⁵ He invokes authenticity, a concept that the Transcendentalists had deployed in their discussions of individualism, to imply that just as the individual must rely on his own perception, so America must rely on its own character in the development of its national identity and discard the European preconception that being a nation entails cultural homogeneity. Along these lines, he argues that immigrants should retain their own cultures to the degree possible while participating fully in American life. “What we emphatically do not want is that these distinctive qualities should be washed out into a tasteless,

¹⁵³ Horace Kallen’s “Democracy vs. the Melting-Pot” also argues for a more inclusive American culture, but does so in a way that reifies cultural differences, many have argued, demonstrating a commitment to cultural pluralism rather than cosmopolitanism. See, for example, Noam Pianko, “‘The True Liberalism of Zion:’ Horace Kallen, Jewish Nationalism, and the Limits of American Pluralism,” *American Jewish History* 90:4 (December 2008) 299-329. For the original essay, see Horace Kallen. “Democracy *versus* the Melting Pot” (1915), in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, ed. Werner Sollers (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 67-92.

¹⁵⁴ Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” (first publication 1916) in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, ed. Werner Sollers (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 96.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

colorless fluid of uniformity.”¹⁵⁶ The immigrant’s home culture is one aspect of individual personality that cannot be suppressed without a loss to one’s integrity. Bourne feels that America must therefore encourage the expression of immigrant particularities in order to live up to its own values, as well as to benefit from immigrants’ knowledge of foreign lands.

This affirms the Introspectivists’ efforts to develop the Yiddish language and culture in America. They would likely have encountered Bourne’s essay when it was originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in April 1916, since we know they read *The Dial* and were probably familiar with equivalent publications. If the Introspectivists missed the essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, they would almost certainly have seen the follow-up article “The Jew and Transnational America” published in *The Menorah Journal* in December 1916. According to Stephen Fredman, *The Menorah Journal* was one of the most significant Jewish publications in English in the years between 1906 and 1931, and we know the Introspectivists read widely in English and were interested in Jewish issues.¹⁵⁷ In Bourne’s “Trans-National America,” the Introspectivists had an eloquent Anglo-American argument for the value of their literary group to the American literary and social scene.

For all the continuities between the Introspectivists and the Young Intellectuals, however, there were also significant differences in their understandings of the individual. Most strikingly, the Introspectivists characterize the individual as complex and deeply divided, while the Young Intellectuals see the personality as having a certain degree of internal unity. Minkov’s review of James Oppenheim’s article, “Poetry – Our First National Art,”¹⁵⁸ which appeared in *The Dial* in February 1920, conveys this difference. Oppenheim’s article proposes poetry as a means of

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵⁷ Stephen Fredman, *A Menorah for Athena: Charles Reznikoff and the Jewish Dilemmas of Objectivist Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 132.

¹⁵⁸ James Oppenheim, “Poetry – Our First National Art,” *The Dial* (Feb 1920) 238-242.

unifying the diverse strands within America. In the art of a poet such as Walt Whitman, he finds something “universal.” “Walt was Dutch, yet Carl Sandberg, who is Swedish, can prance his soul out to the same tune and get a national expression with only a slightly different tinge.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, poetry can unite diverse immigrant groups under its rubric of self-expression.

Minkov reads the article somewhat selectively, interpreting it as promoting poetry as a genre on the basis of its ability to express the diversity within America. “*In der kompleks, in dem gantsn, gibn ober ot di khaotishe, opegerisene un tsevorfene poetishe ekspresyes fort di neshome fun amerike, fort di spetsifishe gaystike amerikanishkeyt.*”¹⁶⁰ (In the complex, in the totality, these chaotic, ragged and scattered poetic expressions express the soul of America, after all, the particular spirit of the American character.) In a novel, Minkov argues, one must have a group of characters that share particular goals: in poetry, a more fragmented reality can be conveyed. He goes on to conclude that the current interest in poetry in both American and Jewish culture springs from both groups’ experience of diversity. While America is one nation comprised of many peoples, the Jews are one people living in a variety of nations. Thus poetry, from Minkov’s perspective, gives the most adequate voice to both national experiences.

While Oppenheim speaks for the American mainstream in attempting to reconcile and unify internal diversity, Minkov reads his acknowledgement of the existence of such diversity as an endorsement of the Introspectivist approach, which is to express the complexity within society and within the individual. This creative misreading allows Minkov to characterize Introspectivism as being on the forefront of American literary expression, as well as affirm the comforting view that America tolerates and even welcomes diversity. In the end, Minkov’s most

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁶⁰ N. B. Minkov, “Refleksie,” *Inzikh* 3:1 (1920), 129.

direct engagement with a contemporary American poet serves to underline his distance from the surrounding culture.

III: The Journal *Inzikh*

Inzikh developed during the heyday of the Yiddish press. In 1920 the most popular Yiddish newspaper, *Forverts*, edited by Abraham Cahan, had a circulation of almost 200,000.¹⁶¹ By 1930 it would reach its height of 275,000. In their dealing with the Yiddish press, both publishing in other literary journals and establishing their own, Introspectivism establishes itself and defines its aesthetics. Yiddish poetry in America had always had a complicated relationship with the Yiddish press.¹⁶² The press provided the primary forum for most Yiddish poets to reach their audience; however, the journals had their own agendas, primarily political ones, that often superseded their desire to publish quality literature. The journals hoped to gain an audience for their political platform, as well as to convey those platforms to readers who lacked the patience or erudition for their prose offerings. The first generation of Yiddish poets consciously answered this need, producing works that often directly promoted their political ideals. However, starting in 1911 with *Di Yunge*, Yiddish poets rebelled against the demand that poetry answer political needs, insisting on personal poetry that represented the individual's experience, rather than communal issues. This was not only an aesthetic stance, but also a decisive rejection of the Yiddish press. Widely respected poets such as H. Leyvik and Moyshe-Leyb Halpern described

¹⁶¹ Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 113.

¹⁶² For more on this complex but important relationship, see Nathan Cohen, "The Yiddish Press and Yiddish Literature: A Fertile but Complex Relationship," *Modern Judaism* 28.2 (2008) 149-172; Jacob Glatstein, et al., eds., *Finfun zibetsik yor yidishe prese in Amerike, 1870-1945* (New York: Shrayber fareyn, 1945); Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 518-522; Eliyahu Shulman, *Geshikhte fun der yiddisher literatur in amerike* (New York: W. Biderman 1943) 84-104); Wisse, *A Little Love*, 65, 98, 217; Milton Doroshkin, "The Yiddish Socialist Press in New York, 1880s-1920s," in *Politics of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Literature and Society*, ed. Dov-Ber Kerler (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998) 77-83; Y. Khaykin, *Yidishe bleter in amerike* (New York: Mekhaber, 1946); Norma Fain-Pratt, "Culture and Radical Politics: Yiddish Women Writers, 1890-1940," *American Jewish History* 70 (1980) 68-90.

the Yiddish press as “the greatest enemy of Yiddish literature” and an “historical catastrophe.”¹⁶³ In this context, the Introspectivists’ choices as to where and how they would publish tell us a great deal about their perception of their place in Yiddish culture.

Before starting their own journal, the Introspectivists published in contemporary publications such as *Der tog*, *Di fraye arbeter shtime*, and *Poezye*. *Der Tog*, published by Morris Weinberg, ran from 1922 to 1953, when it merged with the *Morgen-zhurnal*. *Der Tog* was the one of the few Yiddish newspapers to eschew a political platform, attempting to represent all viewpoints equally, and strove for literary quality.¹⁶⁴ It quickly gained in popularity, attaining the second-largest circulation after *Forverts*. The latter, edited by Abraham Cahan, was widely despised by Yiddish poets for its anti-intellectualism and willingness to print Americanized Yiddish.¹⁶⁵ The Introspectivists, who, along with their predecessors *Di Yunge*, appreciated the journal’s political independence and intellectualism, published frequently in *Der Tog*. The journal served a means of introducing Leyeles, the oldest and at first the most theoretically sophisticated member of the Introspectivists to Yehoash, the group’s most important forebear and supporter among *Di Yunge*.¹⁶⁶ Later, Glatshiteyn published his regular column of literary and social criticism, “*Prost un poshet*,” in the *Tog-Morgen Zhurnal*, though he began the column in the *Morgen Zhurnal*, rather than *Der Tog*, in 1926.¹⁶⁷

Di fraye arbeter shtime, an anarchist daily, also served as an important forum for American Yiddish poets.¹⁶⁸ This journal, which Harshav characterized as “a marvelous abode for Yiddish poetry,” gave important members of *Di Yunge* such as Mani Leyb and Halpern an

¹⁶³ H. Leyvik, “Presse un bukh,” *Tealit* 1 (1923) 40. Halpern is quoted in Wisse, *A Little Love*, 171–172.

¹⁶⁴ Cohen, “Yiddish Press,” 161.

¹⁶⁵ Leyvik, in his customarily bombastic style, stated that he would prefer suicide to publishing in *Forverts*. Y. Lifshits, “Notitsn vegn dem avrom lyessin-tsukunft-arkhiv,” *Di goldene keyt* 103 (1980) 112–113.

¹⁶⁶ Leyeles, *Velt un Vort*, 27.

¹⁶⁷ *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, 259.

¹⁶⁸ Wisse characterizes it as anarchist in *A Little Love*, 30, 46.

opportunity to publish in their early years, as well as Leyeles and Glatshiteyn somewhat later.¹⁶⁹ Glatshiteyn would publish a second regular column of cultural criticism in this journal, titled *In Tokh Genumen*.¹⁷⁰

The journal *Poezye*, though often overlooked due to its small circulation and limited lifespan (it ran only from 1919 through 1920), published many of the Yiddish poets whose works have since been recognized as the most significant of this time period. I will take a closer look at this journal, where Glatshiteyn and Minkov published some of their first poems, to provide a glimpse of the state of Yiddish letters at the cultural moment at which the Yiddish Introspectivist movement took shape. Its title alludes to the English language journal *Poetry* founded in 1912 by Harriet Monroe. Rachel Rubinstein argues convincingly that *Di Yunge* closely followed and thoughtfully responded to Monroe's attempts to foster an American modernist movement.¹⁷¹ The editor of the journal, Hersh Godelman, a poet and sculptor, maintained a presence in both the English and Yiddish modernist presses, advertising the English journal *The Modernist*, edited by James Waldo Fawcett, in the pages of *Poezye*.¹⁷² The journal represented a moment in which Yiddish and English-language modernist literature seemed to be moving in the same direction, both fighting to introduce a challenging, cosmopolitan literary trend to a sometimes resistant public.

Poezye took a confident, distinctly American stance on Yiddish literature. One essay, a response to a Warsaw critic's evaluation of American Yiddish poetry, expresses this particularly clearly. The article was written by an anonymous author, most likely the editor Godelman. The

¹⁶⁹ Cohen, "Yiddish Press," 160.

¹⁷⁰ These columns were later published in book form in three volumes. Jacob Glatstein, *In tokh genumen: eseyen, 1945-1947* (New York: Matones, 1947); Jacob Glatstein, *In tokh genumen: eseyen, 1948-1956* (New York: yidish natsyonaln arbeter farband, 1956); and Jacob Glatstein, *In tokh genumen: eseyen, 1949-1959* (Buenos Aires: Kiyem, 1960).

¹⁷¹ Rachel Rubinstein, "Going Native, Becoming Modern: American Indians, Walt Whitman, and the Yiddish Poet," *American Quarterly* 58.2 (2006) 431-453.

¹⁷² *Poezye* (Oct-Nov 1919) 191.

Warsaw critic, N. Shufrin, writing in *Moment*, evaluates American Yiddish poetry positively; however, the author objects to Shufrin's factual errors and accuses him of plagiarism. Shufrin confuses two authors, Moyshe Nadir and Noah Shteynberg, leading the author to note sharply that "*er shraybt 'gut' vegn unzer literatur un volt mir do, im eygentlekh gedarft zayn dankbar. Iz ober di tsore vos der doziker melitz yoysher fun di hige yunge veys oft nit vos er redt.*"¹⁷³ (He approves of our literature, and so we wish to express here that we are grateful to him for that, as we should be. The problem is, however, that this particular esteemed critic of our local young writers often does not know what he is talking about.) Even worse, the author notes that Shufrin's defense of American Yiddish poetry bears a striking resemblance to Leyeles' discussion of that same topic published some months previously.

Let us look a little more deeply at the content of that defense of American Yiddish poetry. The author summarizes Shufrin's position as follows:

*redndik vegn dem kharakter fun der yunger yidisher literatur un vegn di taynes, az zi iz nisht genug 'yidish,' zogt er azoy: 'iz den di ernste, tife batsiung tsu dem individuums 'ikh' nit a yidisher shtrikh? Di yunge yidishe poezye iz durkh un durkh yidish un universal. Yidish iz zi mit ale ire zukhenishn, problemen, motivn, zelbst-analiz, umtsufridenheyt, mit dem problem fun derlayzung fun dem eynstelnem' un azoy vayter.*¹⁷⁴

Speaking about the character of the young Yiddish literature [in America] and about the complaints that it is not "Yiddish" enough, he says: "Is not the earnest, deep connection to the individual's 'I' a Yiddish trait? Young Yiddish poetry is through and through Yiddish and universal. It is Yiddish in all of its searching, problems, motifs, self-analysis, dissatisfaction, with the problems of the liberation of the individual," and so on.

These words do recall the writings of Leyeles, particularly in their emphasis on the individual. As noted in the previous section, *Inzikh's* concern with the individual tied it to contemporary American debates about the proper relationship between the individual and

¹⁷³ Untitled, *Poezye* (Sept 1919) 124.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

society, as well as helped it distinguish itself from traditional and religious Jewish culture, which tended to speak in the voice of the community. In this context, Shufrin's contention that an interest in the individual places *Inzikh* squarely in the mainstream of Jewish tradition would have played an important legitimizing role to European readers for whom individualistic poetry may have initially seemed contentious, or even heretical. The reviewer's rather ungenerous rejection of Shufrin's attempted defense and explication of American Yiddish poetry for European readers, particularly on the basis of ignorance, emphasizes how important the American context was for American Yiddish modernists.

Although other publications contributed to the initial conception of Introspectivism, *Inzikh* provided the primary platform for the development of the movement and most clearly elaborated its attempt to contribute a Yiddish voice to the international modernist movement. In the early years of the Introspectivist movement, the three founders and their compatriots explored literature from French, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Native American and Anglo-American traditions, while arguing with equal fervor for the further development of Yiddish literature. This dichotomy places the Introspectivist poets solidly in the mainstream of international modernism.

The international nature of modernism remains a contentious subject. Modernism began with an international gesture, the publication of the Italian Filippo Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto in *Le Figaro*, Paris's most distinguished daily newspaper, in 1909--an act which some have interpreted as a critique of the balance of European power in favor of France.¹⁷⁵ Since then, national affiliation has continued to exert important influence on modernist writers, even while

¹⁷⁵ See Thomas Hunkler, "Cultural Hegemony and Avant-Garde Rivalry: The Ambivalent Reception of Futurism in France, England, and Russia," in *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde, 1906-1940*, eds. Sacha Bru and Gunther Martens (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, Avant-Garde Critical Studies 19, 2006) 203-216. Marinetti's critique of the centers of European power on behalf of Italy would culminate in his affiliation with Mussolini.

their international experiences and influences have made it difficult to understand their work outside of an international context. Jahan Ramazani makes a strong case for the internationalism of modernist poetry, arguing that “Although [modernist] poets' cultures of origin can help clarify how, why, and to what effect they assimilate ‘foreign’ materials, such attention should not obscure the interstitial affiliations and ambiguous identifications that shape the sensibilities, techniques, and imaginative topographies of their work.”¹⁷⁶ Ramazani is responding to Robert Crawford’s *Devolving English Literature*¹⁷⁷ among other works. Crawford argues that previous conceptions of modernism’s internationalism have overlooked important distinctions, such as between Scottish and British modernists, that make a material difference to these writers’ work. According to Crawford, this is symptomatic of a wider tendency to elide national distinctions, particularly under the “Anglo-American” umbrella.¹⁷⁸

Chana Kronfeld makes a similar argument with reference to the marginalization of Hebrew and Yiddish modernism in particular, in *On the Margins of Modernism*.¹⁷⁹ In this work, Kronfeld argues that due to the tendency of Western literary critics to focus on major languages such as English, German, and French, minor literature has been narrowly conceived as literature written by minorities in a major language, rather than including literature written by majority-culture speakers of minor languages such as Hebrew and Yiddish. Significantly, she writes that in the case of minor languages, modernism can serve the needs of a national movement. In her discussion of Hebrew modernism, she writes that “a beneficial rapport existed between the aesthetic demands of the external modernist affiliation and the particular needs of the newly

¹⁷⁶ Jahan Ramazani, “A Transnational Poetics,” *American Literary History* 18.2 (2006) 336.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁷⁸ Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, pp. 16-44.

¹⁷⁹ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

revived Hebrew tradition.”¹⁸⁰ The modernists’ experiments with the Hebrew language served to expand the expressive capacities of the language, a desideratum for the Israeli national movement. In this case, modernism served to further, rather than challenge, the needs of the nation.

Although Yiddish was not associated with any national movement, the immigrant poets of *Inzikh* engaged deeply with questions of national identity, ultimately proposing a view of the individual that encompassed a complex sense of enmeshment in multiple national communities. In particular, the Yiddishist movement, torn between socialism and a developing proto-nationalism, strove to encompass both the drive to affiliate with the historically defined Yiddish-speaking community and the emerging sense of class consciousness that transcended national boundaries. The journal *Inzikh* expressed its consciousness of these issues in its editorial decisions, as well as in the poetry itself.

The journal was published intermittently from 1920 to 1940, with many distinct series, or *bender*, and different editors, or editorial boards, in each instance. This investigation will focus on the first three series, published between 1920 and 1928, which illustrate a period in which *Inzikh* struggled to define its own voice, and negotiate between the poets’ initial impetus to participate in the international modernist movement and the increasing demands from Americanizing immigrants to provide them with a sorely missed link to European Jewish culture.

The first series is characterized by a consistent interest in the relationship between Yiddish and world culture. The editor, Bernard Lewis, an enthusiastic translator of world literature, may have shaped this impulse during the journal’s first years. The review section includes several English-language books, among them works of poetry, history, and literary criticism. This series also includes a significant amount of translation from exotic East Asian and

¹⁸⁰ Kronfeld, *On the Margins*, 81.

Native American literatures, as well as original poetry written in the style of those literatures. The poetry that does not overtly draw on foreign cultural milieus often deals with questions of individual and group identity. In 1920, it seems clear that the poets of *Inzikh* enthusiastically embraced the influence of foreign cultures, and saw themselves as part of a vanguard of avant-garde poets who were creating a truly international literature.

The journal's embrace of international poetic trends reveals itself in the review section. In the second issue of *Inzikh* (February 1920), Leyeles reviews several English-language works, including Amy Lowell's *Pictures of the Floating World* and Samuel Roth's *Europe: A Book for America*, a book of Jewish-American poems.¹⁸¹ Leyeles affirms the significance of Lowell's work, admiring its concision, which he ties to Japanese haiku.¹⁸² With this comment, Leyeles establishes himself as a writer conscious of the most recent developments in contemporary Anglo-American literature, in which writers like Ezra Pound drew on the Chinese ideogram to inspire Imagism, a concise poetic style that aspired to an instinctive form of communication unmediated by culture. Leyeles characterizes the Jewish American poet Samuel Roth's work as lovely in English but rather weak in Yiddish, since in Yiddish the work seems overly derivative of Bialik. This description integrates Roth's English-language work into the Jewish literary tradition, breaking down the boundaries between American Jewish literature in English and Yiddish. In this review, Leyeles not only establishes himself as an expert in both Yiddish and English literature, but also expects his reader to be comfortable negotiating this multilingual cultural terrain. Rather than taking the perspective of journalists such as Abraham Cahan, who

¹⁸¹ *Inzikh* 1:2 (Feb 1920) 95-96.

¹⁸² *Inzikh* 1:2 (Feb 1920) 89-90. Incidentally, Leyeles' admiration of Lowell's work underlines his distance from the mainstream of Imagism. Central figures such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot distanced themselves from Amy Lowell and criticized her work harshly.

saw the Yiddish reading public as a proletariat in need of elementary education, Leyeles addresses a culturally sophisticated, multilingual reader.

In the third issue (March 1920), Minkov reviews James Oppenheim's article in *The Dial* about American poetry, interpreting Oppenheim as arguing that poetry occupies a particularly important place in American culture, as discussed above. The fourth issue (May 1920) introduces Yiddish readers to Vachel Lindsay's *The Golden Whales of California*. This review, written by Leyeles, compliments Lindsay's development of a truly American language and his inclusion of American popular culture such as baseball and vaudeville.¹⁸³ These works demonstrate the Introspectivists' interest in and conversance with contemporary Anglo-American literary culture.

They did not restrict themselves only to American culture, however. In the 1920 series there are many translations of foreign-language works, as well as original works inspired by a foreign aesthetic. The first issue includes a work by Reuben Ludvig titled "*Niasowas toyt*" (Niasowa's death), which he characterizes as "*fun di indishe motivin*" (from the Indian motifs).¹⁸⁴ This may well have been inspired by Yehoash's 1910 translation of *Hiawatha* into Yiddish. Ludvig would contribute more poems "from Indian motifs" to the March issue. The January issue also includes a poem from the perspective of a distinctly non-Jewish Pole, Minkov's "*Tadeush pan koshtsiushko*."¹⁸⁵ The March issue includes translations of works from the Chinese poets Lu Yen and Po Tshi-I. These translations are unfortunately unsigned, and the original source is not cited. It is likely the translator worked from a translation from the Chinese into a European language, but which one would be difficult to ascertain. As Shoou-Huey Chang notes, it is often difficult to pinpoint a Yiddish poet's point of access to the original work, since

¹⁸³ *Inzikh* 1:4 (May 1920)183-184.

¹⁸⁴ *Inzikh* 1:1 (Jan 1920) 15.

¹⁸⁵ *Inzikh* 1:1 (Jan 1920) 18.

they were fluent in so many languages.¹⁸⁶ The May issue includes “*Yunger shney: a yapanish no-shpil*” (Young snow: a Japanese Noh play).¹⁸⁷ In this issue Minkov reviews the European Yiddish writers M. Gebirtig, N. Mifelev, and M. Erlikh, whom he praises but also characterizes as “*kleynshtetldik*” (provincial).¹⁸⁸ These translations and reflections on the role of world culture in Yiddish reveal a real cosmopolitanism on the part of the poets of *Inzikh* during this period.

Finally, the poetry that appears in the 1920 series wrangles with issues of individual and group cultural identity. In the first issue is a poem by Reuben Ludvig entitled “*Tsu a kristlekher dame, far ir frayndlekhkayt tsu mir*” (To a Christian woman, for her kindness to me).¹⁸⁹ The poem begins with the words “*iz keyner nit geblibn, af der velt, / nor ikh – un du ...*” (no one is left in the world, just me – and you ...). It proceeds to describe an apocalyptic landscape, in which empty red plains are studded with green cacti, and snakes twine about the woman’s feet. It suggests that despite good intentions, the attempt to bridge cultural divides unleashes a catastrophic internal desolation.

While Ludvig’s poem seems to argue for maintaining one’s cultural identity, Mikhl Likht’s poem “*Traditsiye*” militates against a simple understanding of tradition. This poem depicts the stultifying atmosphere surrounding a relic, which is described in distinctly non-Jewish terms.

*Ikh bin a relikviye in an urne –
Nisht in keyn gold-kastn –
In an urne
Fun groy-shtoybikhn laym.
Mentshn kumen.
Knien mikh in mayn laym-ontsug –
Nay farvundert –*

¹⁸⁶ Shoou-Huey Chang, “China-Rezeption auf Jiddisch : zu den Li-Tai-Po-Übersetzungen,” *Jiddistik Mitteilungen* 18 (1997) 14.

¹⁸⁷ *Inzikh* 1:4 (May 1920) 151.

¹⁸⁸ *Inzikh* 1:4 (May 1920) 186.

¹⁸⁹ *Inzikh* 1:1 (Jan 1920) 16.

In mayn atmosferisher umtsoyberkayt
Aza heyliker empirisher hoykh
Viklt mikh arum
In mayn fulshtendiker shtilkeyt...
In lenglikhn shotn
Fun tifn opgang:
A shpirn
Vi a fetlekhe shvart-gekleydte none
Hit iber mir,
Vakht –
*Iber mir, der kanonirzirter relikvie.*¹⁹⁰

I am a relic in an urn.
 Not in a golden box –
 In an urn
 Made of dusty gray clay.
 People come.
 They bow to me in my clay suit –
 Newly astonished –
 In my atmospheric conventionality
 Such a holy empirical height
 Encircles me
 In my complete stillness ...
 In the long shadows
 Of deep sewage:
 A feeling
 As though a fat, black-clad nun
 Protects me,
 Watches –
 Over me, the canonized relic.

The references to nuns, canonization, and kneeling place this description in a quasi-Catholic cultural sphere, making clear that the “tradition” of the title is not the familiar Jewish one. The repetition in the lines “*in an urne*” in the first three lines and “*iber mir*” in the last three create a sense of tedious reiteration. The diction itself, which includes images of dust and sewage, ensures that the overall impact of the poem is disquieting. Even the potential exotic appeal of the scene is undercut by the description of the urn as a “clay suit,” an image of heavy

¹⁹⁰ *Inzikh* 1:3 (Mar 1920) 122.

conventionality. This poem embodies the negative aspects of tradition that Introspectivism strives to overcome.

In the November issue of the 1920 series, the poets of *Inzikh* announce that the journal can no longer continue due to financial reasons, in a collective “Declaration” that mirrors the manifesto “Introspectivism” that introduced the first issue of the series. The poets emphasize that they remain firm in their belief that poetry is an individual matter and do not hold the community responsible for supporting them.¹⁹¹ They cast the journal’s decision to cease publication as a matter of editorial integrity, saying that they were offered financial support on the condition of giving up artistic control, but refused. The poets write that they remain confident that *Inzikh*’s ideas will triumph, although the journal can no longer continue. These statements, which seem extremely American in their assertion of independence and faith in the marketplace of ideas, sum up the new attitude that Introspectivism introduced to American Yiddish poetry.

The journal was revived in July 1922, with Leyeles acting as editor. This second series seems to see itself in conflict with the rising interest in proletarian poetry in the Yiddish world. The first issue starts with a “Preface” (the word is written in English), that begins with the words “*far vemen? far vemen?*”¹⁹² (For whom? For whom?) In a closing editorial, Glatshiteyn expands on his view of the wrong turn Yiddish poetry is taking and thus the renewed need for an Introspectivist journal. “*Di tsayt iz itst a hekht umginsike far dem “Inzikh” gezindel. Kimat ale praktishe dikhter fun do-hi...hobn zikh tsegarglt af revolutsionere, meshikhiste un pogrom-temes, un zikh dermit ayngokoyft kheyn in di oygn fun di nyu-yorker holts-hekher un vaser-sheper fun der proletarisher diktatn.*” (This moment is highly unfavorable for the Introspectivist household. Almost all of the practical poets from this area ... have choked themselves with revolutionary,

¹⁹¹ *Di grupe Inzikh*, „Erklerung,” *Inzikh* 1:7 (1920) 321-322.

¹⁹² *Inzikh* 2:1 (1922) 1.

messianic, and pogrom themes, and by doing so have bought favor among the New York wood choppers and water carriers.) Glatshetyn criticizes the impact that ideologically beholden poets have had upon Yiddish literary culture in New York and calls for Introspectivism to correct this situation.

The journal now turns its attention to Europe, publishing evaluations of European Yiddish groups such as the *Varshaver grupe* (the Warsaw Group) and the Moscow Art Theater, as well as translations of French and Italian literature into Yiddish and an extended critical work by the professor I. Shatski on Polish poetry. Although the journal is still cosmopolitan in that it includes works translated from other languages, it has narrowed its focus to issues in the Yiddish-speaking world as more traditionally constituted, focusing on European literature and political debates, rather than the Asian and Anglo-American influences that permeated the first series. This second series ceases publication, without explanation, with the August 1923 issue.

Inzikh starts up once again in March 1928, now edited by Glatshetyn,¹⁹³ who writes a forward to the issue in which he characterizes the rejuvenation of the journal as “an historical necessity to save literature from banality.”¹⁹⁴ This seems to be a moment for reflection upon the progress of the movement, and a reevaluation of certain of their tenets. Leyeles writes in an article titled “*A por verter*” (A few words) that poetry has moved towards greater interest in the experience of everyday life, something that Introspectivism has failed to fully incorporate.¹⁹⁵ He argues for greater clarity and concision in Introspectivist poetry, while taking care to make clear that so-called proletarian poetry, which calls for literature to serve transparently political causes, remains far from their ideals.

¹⁹³ “Jacob Glatshetyn,” *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literature*, eds. Shmuel Niger and Jacob Shatski, vol. 2 (1958) 258.

¹⁹⁴ *Inzikh* 3:1 (1928) 1-2.

¹⁹⁵ *Inzikh* 3:1 (1928): 13-15.

This series of issues, the third, begins to show signs of an increasing focus on intra-group dynamics. Translations appear much less frequently, and foreign-language books are no longer reviewed. Critical articles begin to focus on exclusively Yiddish-language issues such as the lack of a large book-buying public for Yiddish literature and conflicts with individuals at the Yiddish newspapers *Literarishe bleter* and *Morgan-frayhayt*. Vicious battles begin between Glatshateyn (supported to some degree by the other Introspectivists) and Yiddish critics such as Nahman Mayzl.¹⁹⁶ The reviews become more negative, and the overall tone more petulant. In April 1929 the editorial board (i.e., Glatshateyn) apologizes for having missed the March 1929 issue and promises subscribers that the series will continue for a full run. The writer notes sourly that readers have not shown much distress so far, to the point that he has not received a single letter regarding the missing issue, and wonders if anyone has even noticed.¹⁹⁷

This change in the editorial voice, formerly so optimistic and creative, underlines an important shift in the journal as its primary authors realize that their attempts to contribute something of importance to the American literary scene have not borne fruit. Their model of the fragmented self, a self which encompasses irreconcilable aspects of many different cultures, could not compete with the political urgency felt by many Americans, both within Yiddish culture and without, to consolidate a singular identity that would serve to unite and define them against external threats. The cosmopolitan, internationalist impulse began to fade in American culture more generally, even while it continued to exert an important influence on American intellectual culture.¹⁹⁸ The Introspectivists, with their commitment to Yiddish, found themselves on the outside of American intellectual circles as well, and, with no receptive audience for their

¹⁹⁶ See "Lider ne zhelyayem" and Leyeles' response in *Inzikh* 4:2 (1929): 29-32.

¹⁹⁷ *Inzikh* 4:3 (1929): 47.

¹⁹⁸ Hollinger, *In the American Province*, 58.

cosmopolitan thought, they turned inward to the audience that they did have, an audience dedicated to the preservation, rather than the evolution, of European Yiddish culture.

For financial reasons as well as intellectual ones, the Introspectivists discovered that they depended on the existence of a Yiddish book-buying public to support their writing. In a 1929 editorial, Glatshiteyn encourages readers to stop bemoaning the dwindling audience for Yiddish writing and begin enthusiastically purchasing books in order to ensure the survival of the industry.¹⁹⁹ Despite their initial impulse to appeal to an audience of both Yiddish and American intellectuals, as a practical matter only the former would purchase their books. Much work remains to be done on the economic underpinnings of Yiddish modernism.

In conclusion, the Introspectivists' conception of the fragmented self significantly complicates our understanding of Jewish American identity during the 1920s. Defying the cultural pluralist vision of a nation comprised of the representatives of many cultures, who consistently live up to their disparate self-definitions, the Introspectivists contend that a single individual can himself be constituted by many cultures. The Introspectivists affirm that American Yiddish poetry looked not only backward to Eastern Europe, but forward to a new evolution of American culture. Their thought supports the contention made by many contemporary scholars that immigrants to America did not passively assimilate into a pre-existing American culture, but took an active role in shaping the way in which American culture developed. The poets of *Inzikh* helped to create a poetic environment that welcomed political awareness, experimental language, and cultural diversity--interests that many would share as the century progressed.

¹⁹⁹ Glatshiteyn, "Refleksies," *Inzikh* 4:2 (Feb 1929) 30-31.

Chapter 4: Submerged Yiddish Structures in the Poetry of Louis Zukofsky

Just as the Introspectivists began to turn away from international modernism, a new generation of American Jewish poets began to take their place in American poetry in English. Educated amid the anxieties raised by the arriving waves of immigrants from Europe, they thought deeply about their place in American society. Louis Zukofsky, a modernist poet raised on the Lower East Side in a Yiddish speaking family, takes on the arguments of contemporary Anglo-American intellectuals like T. S. Eliot and Henry Adams that the arrival of immigrants speaking English as a second language signified the end of the Anglo literary tradition. He creates a new type of poetry that incorporates and builds on aspects of Anglo-American culture using Yiddish as a hidden framework. This Yiddish framework of hybridity and inclusion replaces a narrative of decline and fall with one of energy, vigor, and optimism.

I. Yiddish in "Poem Beginning 'The'"

In 1929, as a twenty-two year old Columbia University graduate, Zukofsky published a poem titled "Poem Beginning 'The'" in the journal *Exile*, edited by Ezra Pound²⁰⁰. "Poem Beginning 'The'" cast itself as a satirical response to T. S. Eliot's influential poem *The Waste Land*, beginning with a page of notes directing the reader to sources from Shakespeare to college cheers to Broadway musicals, implicitly mocking Eliot's attempt to solidify an authoritative high culture in an increasingly diverse age.²⁰¹ The poem goes on to explore the internal fragmentation felt by the immigrant intellectual. Despite the high stakes inherent in satirizing the anxiety of a majority culture that felt itself to be under attack, the poem ultimately presents an optimistic

²⁰⁰ *Exile* 3 (Spring 1928).

²⁰¹ Zukofsky was not the only one to have contrasted Yiddish culture to the high seriousness of Eliot; in the 1930s, Saul Bellow and Isaac Rosenfeld composed an unpublished parody of Eliot's acclaimed "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," titled "Der shir ha-shirim fun Mendl Pumshtok." Ruth Wisse has identified this translation as the moment "American Jewish letters gave notice of its independence from Anglo American modernism." (*The Modern Jewish Canon*, Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 289.) As I will go on to describe, Zukofsky's encounter with Eliot was more complicated than that, but the significance of the encounter with Eliot resonates.

picture. Zukofsky ends the poem with a hymn to the sun that he translates from the Yiddish poet Yehoash: “Under our feet will crawl/ The shadows of dead worlds,/ We shall open our arms wide,/ Call out of pure might -/ Sun, you great Sun, our Comrade,/ From eternity to eternity we remain true to you,/ A myriad of years we have been/ Myriad upon myriad shall be.”²⁰²

“Poem Beginning ‘The’” engages many of the themes that would remain central in Louis Zukofsky’s lengthy poetic career. In his poetry, Zukofsky creates a microcosm of the world as he experiences it, in which the particulars of daily life occupy equal space with all-encompassing theories, and his childhood culture of Yiddish poetry and theater enters into dialogue with the high culture he grew acquainted with at Columbia. A tightly controlled formal structure holds all of these disparate elements together. Zukofsky’s formalist poetics is rooted, I will argue, in the cosmopolitan Yiddish world of his childhood, seen through the lens of American modernism. Critics of Zukofsky overwhelmingly characterize him as a master of form.²⁰³ Like other modernists of his period, Zukofsky was committed to free verse, though his interest in creating rigorous formal structures, as well as his search for a connection to the tradition of Western literature, led him to experiment with older formal structures such as the sonnet. e. e. cumming’s experiments with white space and the appearance of the line on the page inspired him to incorporate these techniques into his own work as well.

Zukofsky’s would refine his sense of form throughout his poetic career. From “Poem Beginning ‘The’s” experiments with pastiche, quotation, and translation, Zukofsky would move to more complicated forms in his epic, “A.” This poem, a life’s work begun in 1928, was ultimately published in its entirety in 1978, shortly after the poet’s death. Although the main body of the poem was completed by 1974, Zukofsky spent his final years composing an index

²⁰² *All: The Collected Short Poems, 1923-1958*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1965, 22.

²⁰³ See Mark Scroggins, *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 312,

for the poem, an effort that may be seen as integral to the writing of the poem, given the author's extensive use of allusion and quotation. "A" comprises twenty-four movements, each with its own structure and theme (though some movements, such as "A"-7 and "A"-24, reprise pieces from earlier movements in a new form). In it, he experiments with older poetic forms such as the sonnet and the canzone, which Pound had made famous in his *Cantos*, as well as musical forms such as the fugue, which Zukofsky understood according to Bach's definition of the form in *The Art of the Fugue* as resembling "reasonable men in an orderly discussion."²⁰⁴ Zukofsky reserves an important place for music and sound, those aspects of language that transcend cultural differences, in his poetry.

Although Yiddish literature has often been characterized as the locus of an authentic Jewish culture, presented in opposition to the adulterations of Anglophone American Jewish life early Yiddish culture in America drew heavily on many European – and to a lesser degree, non-European – cultures.²⁰⁵ Socialism, which advocated the end of national particularities, contributed to this tendency, as well as the European Haskalah, which supported Jews' adoption of European culture in order to aid their assimilation into Enlightenment-era Europe.²⁰⁶ Moreover, during this period there existed an often overlooked but thriving industry of Yiddish translations of both literary and theatrical works, whose popularity far eclipsed that of canonical

²⁰⁴ Louis Zukofsky, "A." 1978. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1993. A-12, 127.

²⁰⁵ See Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 417-459, for the classic presentation of this perspective; Cynthia Ozick mobilizes the idea of Yiddish literature to launch an attack on American Jewish inauthenticity in "Toward a New Yiddish," in *Art and Ardor*, 151-177, and many of the essays of Ruth Wisse present a similar perspective. See David Hollinger, *In the American Province*, 70-71, for a contextualized explanation of this approach to Yiddish literature.

²⁰⁶ See Tony Michaels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, on how New York Yiddish writers often continued to think of themselves in private as Russian intellectuals, 41; Mikhail Krutikov, *Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905-1914*, on the range of influences affecting American Jewish modernists, 122; and Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl*, on the importance of the internal cultural diversity of Yiddish and Hebrew literatures in the modern age, 361-368.

Yiddish literature.²⁰⁷ All of these diverse movements, which had no necessary connection with one another or internal coherence, were held together by the formal structure of the Yiddish language. Similarly, Zukofsky's proceduralism, or emphasis on the writing process, provides a kind of structure that is not dependent on the meaning of the words.

The disparities in American scholarship's characterization of Yiddish literature as sometimes hybrid and sometimes expressive of Jewish cultural authenticity reflect diverging responses to the evolving American discourse on how to integrate immigrant cultures into the American mainstream. The American debate on the topic has evolved over a considerable time period; the most significant moment of the dialogue for this particular project may be the mid 1910s, shortly before Zukofsky's poetic debut. Culture took on a particular significance during this time period, as a conception of American identity as racial and cultural, rooted in family traditions rather than legal forms, began to take hold in the country²⁰⁸. During this decade, Horace Kallen published the essay "Democracy versus the Melting-Pot," which coined the term "cultural pluralism."²⁰⁹ This essay argued that immigrants' attempts to develop and fortify their native countries' cultures rather than adapting to American culture did not necessarily have to undermine the sense of American identity, which just needed to be reconceptualized as a "symphony" of diverse voices, rather than a "unison" consisting of a singular national culture. In Kallen's vision, immigrant cultures would continue to exist separately, with some degree of isolation from mainstream culture and from one another.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ See Jeffery Shandler, "On the frontiers of Ashkenaz: translating into Yiddish, then and now." *Judaism* 54.1-2 (2005): 3-12.

²⁰⁸ For more on this, see Walter Benn Michaels' important book, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

²⁰⁹ Horace Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting-Pot," *The Nation* 100 (1915): 220.

²¹⁰ Hollinger, David. *In The American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, 57.

By contrast, in 1916 Randolph Bourne presented a vision of a “Trans-National America,” in which American culture as a whole would be enriched by means of immigrants’ familiarity with European cultures²¹¹. This vision depends upon exchange between native-born Americans and immigrant intellectuals, and demands an openness to foreign cultures on both their parts. Bourne brings the concept of cosmopolitanism into play in support of this idea, as well, to lasting effect. As David Hollinger notes, although Bourne’s argument against parochialism in American culture had little immediate effect, his advocacy of the cosmopolitan ideal articulated a trend that would be taken up by an emerging multi-ethnic intelligentsia in the following decades²¹².

American Jewish writers demonstrate an awareness of these issues in their work, particularly in the way in which they depict the use of Yiddish. In Henry Roth’s 1934 novel *Call It Sleep*, Yiddish both shapes the consciousness of the protagonist, and underlines the barriers between his inner and outer worlds. *Call It Sleep* tells the story of a young boy, David Schearl, the child of recent immigrants, growing up and creating a new American consciousness for himself on the Lower East Side. In the novel, Yiddish speech is depicted in flowing, almost Shakespearan English, while English speech is presented in a mangled, almost incomprehensible dialect that shows just how far the first-generation immigrants are from mastery of the language. The tone of the narration comes closer to the “Yiddish,” giving the English-speaking reader a sense of estrangement from his own tongue.²¹³ Despite its elevated status, however, Yiddish remains isolated in the novel to the realms of home and family. The Schearl family speaks Yiddish at home, giving the novel’s Oedipal conflicts a particularly dire and fateful tone: at the beginning of the novel, David’s solicitous mother asks him: “Does that dream still hover in your

²¹¹ Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, ed. Werner Sollers, (New York: New York UP, 1996), 96. It was originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in April 1916.

²¹² Hollinger 58.

²¹³ This reading is indebted to Hana Wirth-Nesher’s *Call It English*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 76-99.

mind?”²¹⁴ Toward the end, his violent father threatens in a fit of rage: “A sign of filth! Let me strangle him! Let me rid the world of a sin!”²¹⁵ In *Call It Sleep*, Yiddish serves to underline the developing boy’s poetic sensibility, but also his distance from the seething, unpredictable American life on the street. This reflects Horace Kallen’s view of immigrant cultures maintaining their cultural values through isolation. The novel culminates, appropriately enough, in a symphony of immigrant speech, in which the diverse residents of the Lower East Side gather around the injured David, expressing their concern and advice in various tongues, which merge into a euphoric melange of the myriad possibilities of human expression.²¹⁶

The poetry of Louis Zukofsky takes this state of multiplicity as a starting point, rather than a fleeting epiphany at a moment of crisis. One of Zukofsky’s most insightful interpreters, the poet Charles Bernstein, characterizes his departure from the other high modernists in formal terms: “he rejected the major keys for minor chords, universals for particulars, the grandiose for discreteness.”²¹⁷ Bernstein goes on to establish that, starting from his first successful effort, “Poem Beginning ‘The,’” Zukofsky evinces intense interest in the relation of the part to the whole, emphasizing each individual component’s place in a larger context, while taking care that it not be sublimated into an overarching schema that would efface its unique characteristics. Stephen Fredman, in his work on Zukofsky’s poetic school, Objectivism, characterizes his work as similarly diverse in its diction. “In much of his poetry, Zukofsky writes as an aggressively ‘unidiomatic’ speaker of English, choosing words and expressions from the widest possible registers of the language (and using many non-English words as well).”²¹⁸ Fredman goes on to

²¹⁴ Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep*, 1934, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991, 58.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 402.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 409-431.

²¹⁷ Bernstein, Charles. Introduction. *Selected Poems: Louis Zukofsky*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Library of America, 2006, xiii.

²¹⁸ Fredman, Stephen. *A Menorah for Athena: Charles Reznikoff and the Jewish Dilemmas of Objectivist Poetry*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001, 132.

link this openness to the diversity within the English language to Zukofsky's choice of Yiddish rather than Hebrew as a "linguistic taproot."²¹⁹ Fredman argues that American Jewish poets of this generation shaped their poetic voices in dialogue with a Jewish language, and while the Objectivist poet Charles Reznikoff's choice of Hebrew led him towards a poetics of concreteness and simplicity, Zukofsky's choice of Yiddish interpreted the linguistic hybridity of that language as a poetic strategy. Zukofsky's poetics provides a distinct alternative to Roth's vision of a language hermetically sealed in the apartments of recent immigrants.

Louis Zukofsky's poetics derive, at least in part, from the complexity of his experience as a first-generation American. Born to Russian immigrants on the Lower East Side in 1904, he grew up speaking Yiddish with his family.²²⁰ As the youngest child, and the only one born in America, he grew up enmeshed in a culture far removed from the American mainstream. His older sister, who arrived in America at the age of 16, never bothered to acquire American citizenship, and according to Celia Zukofsky, never learned more than two words of English.²²¹ His older brother Morris, who was interested in literature himself, introduced Louis to the Yiddish theater and the poetry of Yehoash, both of which would come into play in Zukofsky's mature poetry.²²² Had Zukofsky gone to New York University, he might have met the originators of the *In Zikh*, or Introspectivist, movement, and become a Yiddish poet. Instead, he went to Columbia, and his introduction to world culture, and encounter with the modernist techniques of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, led him to the project of creating an English poetics that could encompass the entirety of his experience.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 131.

²²⁰ Louis Zukofsky, *Autobiography*, New York: Grossman, 1970, 13.

²²¹ Carroll F. Terrell, "Louis Zukofsky: An Eccentric Profile," in *Louis Zukofsky, Man and Poet*, Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1979, 51.

²²² Mark Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky*, New York: Shoemaker Hoard, 2007, 17-18.

The first result of these efforts was “Poem Beginning ‘The,’” written in 1926, at the age of 22, just two years after he had earned his master’s degree.²²³ “Poem Beginning ‘The’” anticipates many of the issues that will preoccupy Zukofsky throughout his poetic career. The poem uses techniques of juxtaposition and multilingual borrowing to express the complex internal world of the American immigrant. Moreover, the poem places the immigrant’s subjectivity at the center of American culture, contrasting its vivacity and hope with the sterility and pessimism of the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture.

“Poem Beginning ‘The’” begins by clearly marking its target: T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922). Contemporary readers of *The Waste Land* understood it as a critique of the emptiness of modern culture and the futility of a life bereft of the values of the past.²²⁴ This message had particular resonance in the post-war period, when the violence and destruction of the First World War had dashed many hopes that the technological and social changes of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution would bring about a world of permanent peace and prosperity. However, many in America, distanced as they were from the war’s destruction and in the midst of economic expansion, felt Eliot’s negative view of modernity to be unnecessarily bleak.²²⁵ Zukofsky counts himself among the latter critics, and particularly zeroes in on Eliot’s depiction of modern life as fragmented, and his implication that the metanarratives that had long given meaning to life in the West had been shattered and deprived of coherence by the primordial power of “primitive” interlopers in European culture. In Eliot’s vision, the modern poet’s task is to reconstruct a new Western culture from the fragments which retain meaning for

²²³ Scroggins, 54.

²²⁴ See particularly Edmund Wilson’s review in *The Dial*, “The Poetry of Drouth.” December 1922.

²²⁵ For this perspective, see Louis Untermeyer, “Disillusion vs. Dogma,” in *Freeman*, January 17, 1923.

people in the modern age.²²⁶ He embodies this in *The Waste Land*, which is assiduously footnoted, tracing its sources in the great works of Western culture.

In “Poem Beginning ‘The,’” Zukofsky begins with a page of footnotes, which he introduces with the statement: “Because I have had occasion to remember, quote, paraphrase, I dedicate this poem to Anyone and Anything I have unjustifiably forgotten. Also to J. S. Bach – 309.”²²⁷ He follows this with a list of references, some to authors recognized in the canon of Western literature such as Shakespeare, Dante, and Horace, some to modernist poets such as T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and E. E. Cummings, and some to openly satirical sources such as “Obvious – where the Reference is Obvious,” “Modern Advertising,” and “Myself.” The poem itself then begins with each line numbered, which also satirizes *The Waste Land*, in which every tenth line is numbered, but also perhaps contains a more serious meaning. Charles Bernstein has interpreted this numbering of every line as evidence of Zukofsky’s “concern for the relation of the part to the whole – specifically that the part is neither consumed by the whole nor isolated from it,” which he characterizes as a “key aspect of Zukofsky’s poetics and politics.”²²⁸

The first movement, which is titled with the Chaucerian quote, “And out of olde bokes, in good feith,” begins with an open critique of the “Residue of Oedipus-faced wrecks/ Creating out of the dead, –”²²⁹ With this phrase alone, Zukofsky characterizes modernists like Eliot as perversely infatuated with their predecessors, unable to properly individuate. Zukofsky’s critique demonstrates his deep familiarity both with Eliot’s poetry and with the source material Eliot drew on, buttressing his argument against charges of misunderstanding or ignorance. To take just one example, he follows the question “But why are our finest always dead?” with a

²²⁶ Writings of T. S. Eliot.

²²⁷ Zukofsky, *All*, 11.

²²⁸ Bernstein, xvi.

²²⁹ Zukofsky, 12.

series of questions, including “But why les neiges?”²³⁰ This is a reference to the French poet Francois Villon, author of the famous line “Ou sont les neiges d’antan?” “where are the snows of yesteryear?” This references Eliot, who translated Villon; moreover, the line’s sentiment of nostalgia for the past speaks precisely to the poetic tendency Zukofsky dislikes. His clearest critique of Eliot comes in lines 26-27, “And why if the waste land has been explored,/ traveled over, circumscribed,/ Are there only wrathless skeletons exhumed/ new planted in its sacred wood,/” Here Zukofsky characterizes Eliot’s project as a failure, exhuming only “wrathless skeletons,” unable to produce anything living or new out of its excavations of the past.

The next significant engagement with Yiddish comes in Zukofsky’s meditation on the suicide of his friend Richard Chambers (the brother of Whittaker Chambers). In this section, Zukofsky includes a translation of Yehoash’s poem “Bakhr-Esh-Shaitan,” which Yehoash himself translated from the Arabic.²³¹ Most Zukofsky scholars have not been able to analyze this section in detail, lacking the linguistic skills to read the original source material.²³² This is an unfortunate omission, because Zukofsky alters the poem significantly from the original. The section he includes in “Poem Beginning ‘The’” occurs towards the end of Yehoash’s “Bakhr Esh-Shaytan,” page three of a four-page poem. Zukofsky omits the introductory section, which sets up the scene of a Bedouin crossing the desert with a friend or servant named Saidi, to whom the Bedouin speaker describes the riches of his caravan – ivory from India, silk from Damascus, spice-wood and amber and rosewater – and the mirages in the desert which tempt him. The

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Originally published in In Geveb, vol. 1, New York: Oyfgang, 1919, 79. An English translation of this poem is included in Benjamin and Barbara Harshav’s anthology *Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, 110-112.

²³² The exception is Harold Schimmel’s article “Zuk. Yehoash David Rex.” In *Louis Zukofsky, Man and Poet*, ed. Carol F. Terrell. National Poetry Foundation: Orono, ME, 1979. This short piece does compare Zukofsky’s poem with the original Yehoash pieces, but its approach is impressionistic rather than integrated into a larger argument, and has not been widely cited by other scholars. Schimmel also happens to misread this particular poem, interpreting “Saidi” as the Bedouin speaker rather than his addressee.

imagery of the last section, which Zukofsky translates, grows notably darker: the Bedouin's heart is dry, like a dead camel, and his eyes sparkle like a blind dog's.²³³ From the structure of the first section, which ends each of four sections with a refrain that mentions the threat of the devil lying in wait in the sands, the final section becomes more free form as the scene changes from day to night.

This section demonstrates the way in which Zukofsky draws on the Yiddish sources of his poetry, without the Yiddish nature of the original ever coming to light for the average reader. The Yiddish form of the original is hidden by the cultural content of Yehoash's poem, which is drawn from Bedouin life, and from Arabic. The cultural and linguistic cues present in the English translation, from the images of camels and mirages in the desert, to the name Sa'idi and the Arabic term *asilah*, all point in a misleading direction. Moreover, the cultural assumptions surrounding the Yiddish language and culture do not particularly speak to the meaning of this section of the poem, which describes Zukofsky's reaction to the death of Richard Chambers. Yiddish animates this section of the poem without making its presence known, except to those who recognize Yehoash's poem in translation – surely a small group. This shows that for Zukofsky, Yiddish does not function merely as a symbol of traditional Jewish life, but rather opens up broad sources of cross-cultural poetic meaning.

The fourth movement, "More 'Renaissance,'" which describes Zukofsky's experience of alienation at Columbia, addresses the challenges that elite Western education presents to a first-generation Jewish American. This movement begins by satirizing John Erskine's recent development of the Great Books curriculum, which required every student to acquire a basic grounding in the classics of Western literature, as "Askforaclassic, Inc."²³⁴ Erskine began to

²³³ Yehoash, "Bakhr Esh-Shaytan," in *In Geveb* vol. 1, 91.

²³⁴ Zukofsky, *All*, 17.

develop this curriculum with a series of seminars in 1920, the year Zukofsky entered Columbia.²³⁵ Erskine also served as the faculty advisor for the Boar's Head Society, a student group for young poets in which Zukofsky participated. In this passage, Zukofsky critiques the combination of pretension and intellectual vacuity which he felt characterized Erskine's efforts. His critique may be seen as part of this era's academic conflict between the complacent scions of the Protestant upper class and the ambitious but socially marginalized representatives of Jewish and Catholic immigrant groups, who were beginning to enter American institutions of higher education in significant numbers.²³⁶

While critiquing the shallowness of Columbia's instruction in the classics, he also expresses his frustration at the distance he felt from this tradition in the line, "And if you're a Jewish boy, then be your/ Plato's Philo."²³⁷ In the introductory notes, this line is cited as referring to "Myself." Philo refers to the historical figure also known as Philo of Alexandria, a philosopher who attempted to reconcile Greek philosophy with the tenets of Judaism, gaining few adherents among either Greeks or Jews. With his reference to this figure, Zukofsky seems to be saying that the only place for a Jewish perspective in the Western canon as conveyed by a Columbia education is that of a secondary interpreter, a mediator between the inviolable classics represented by Plato and the Jewish populace, which is ignorant of its truths. Zukofsky rejects this model: he wishes to decenter Western culture by creating a new type of literature in which a dialogic, rather than interpretive, relationship is possible between the two cultures.

This intention comes out most clearly in the final section of the poem. These last lines, lines 318-330, consist of Zukofsky's translation of Yehoash's poem "Af di khurves," or "On the

²³⁵ Scroggins, 28-29.

²³⁶ Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot: Catholics and Jews in American Higher Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

Ruins.”²³⁸ “Af di khurves” is the final poem in the first volume of Yehoash’s book *In geveb*. Yehoash paid careful attention to the construction of his publications, so his decision to end the first volume of his most ambitious book of poetry with this poem speaks to the author’s estimation of its importance. The poem’s message of optimism in the face of destruction could certainly be said to have particular resonance for a poet attempting to revitalize a small and neglected language as well as for a modernist. As in his translation of “Bakhr-Esh-Shaitan,” Zukofsky significantly reworks and reinterprets the original. The most important change is, as Harold Schimmel notes, Zukofsky’s change of the original “I” to the collective “we.” Schimmel ascribes this to Zukofsky’s need to “tone down [the] messianic fervor” of the original, but perhaps the change can also be ascribed to Zukofsky’s message throughout the poem that the multiplicity of the present represents a new flowering of aesthetic and cultural possibility rather than destruction or decay.²³⁹

Far from creating a mood of despair at the loss of individual identity, the diversity both within and around the individual inspires hope. The last lines of the poem, “A myriad of years we have been,/ Myriad upon myriad shall be,” denote a sense of continuity and optimism, in contrast to Eliot’s depiction of degeneration. In presenting this image, Zukofsky also recasts the nature of the endeavor of poetry. Rather than a last remnant of a disappearing tradition, desperately shoring up the ruins of his culture, the poet expresses the sheer joy of existence. In the introduction to the section taken from “Af di khurves,” Zukofsky writes, “It is a lie – Aus meinen grossen leiden makh ikh/ die kleinen lieder,/ Rather they are joy, against nothingness joy -.”²⁴⁰ The German is ascribed in the Notes to Heinrich Heine, and may be translated as, “out of

²³⁸ Yehoash, “Af di khurves,” *In Geveb* vol. 1, 278.

²³⁹ Schimmel, 244.

²⁴⁰ Zukofsky, 22.

my great suffering, I make these small poems.” Zukofsky rejects this idea of the poet as driven to take on an impossible task, and replaces it with a vision of poetry as an expression of elation.

Zukofsky’s choice of Yehoash to represent the possibility of a hopeful future has striking implications for the contemporary American discussion of immigrants’ role in national culture discussed earlier. In the context of contemporary American modernists’ dismissal of Eliot’s pessimism as un-American, Zukofsky seems to be suggesting that the European-born Yehoash’s Yiddish poetry expresses a more genuinely American sensibility than the work of the Missouri native Eliot. While the established American elites mourn the loss of the primacy of their culture, a diverse new generation stands ready to inherit the ruins, seeing them not as cemeteries but as building blocks.

II. *His Despairing Predecessors*

This perspective explains Zukofsky’s idiosyncratic attraction to figures who saw the modern age, and tendency of modern society to include a wider and wider range of peoples and perspectives, as a disaster. This attraction begins with Zukofsky’s master’s thesis on Henry Adams, the scion of the family that produced John Quincy Adams.²⁴¹ Zukofsky’s work on Henry Adams drew heavily on his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, a work which won the 1919 Nobel Prize. In this work, Adams sees his own position, as the scion of a powerful family unable to find his place in a rapidly changing world, as a microcosm of the nation.²⁴² Adams felt that America itself was entering into a radically different age, and recommended an overhaul of the educational system as a means of filling the gap between America’s technological progress and lagging societal norms. This new world, however, would have no

²⁴¹ Louis Zukofsky, “Henry Adams: Detached Mind and the Growth of a Poet,” Master’s Thesis, Columbia University, 1924.

²⁴² Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, in *Novels, Mont Saint Michel, The Education* (New York: Library of America, 1983).

place for individuals such as himself. As Scroggins sums it up, Adams “saw himself as a human fossil, a survival from an earlier era confronted with a bewildering, changing world.”²⁴³ Adams’ despairing view of the present found an audience in T. S. Eliot, among others. Adams’ opposition to modernity entailed some hostility to the immigrants whose arrival coincided with America’s cultural shift away from the norms Henry Adams felt comfortable with. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in her study of race and modernism, goes so far as to identify anti-Semitism in Adams.²⁴⁴ Adams’ sense of feeling left behind by history would be shared by a significant number of the Anglo-American modernists Zukofsky admired.

The first of these figures, who was influential in the development of modernism if not exactly a modernist, was Henry James. In his *Autobiography*, Zukofsky draws a parallel between James’ visit to the Lower East Side and his own birth. He characterizes it as follows: “I was born in Manhattan, January 23, 1904, the year Henry James returned to the American scene to look at the Lower East Side. The contingency appeals to me as a forecast of the first-generation infusion into twentieth-century American literature.”²⁴⁵ This description of himself as the “first generation,” “infusing” his own voice into the vibrant chaos of the Lower East Side, which Zukofsky here implicitly describes as the location of twentieth-century American literature, dovetails strikingly with James’ own account of that visit, in *The American Scene* (1907). In this work, which has been criticized for its hostility to the immigrants it describes, James fears for the future of the English language in which he has built his career.²⁴⁶ He expresses the anxiety that the immigrants would transform the language so completely that

²⁴³ Scroggins, 38.

²⁴⁴ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry 1908-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 142.

²⁴⁵ Louis Zukofsky, *Autobiography*, 13.

²⁴⁶ See Peter Conn, *The Divided Mind: Ideology and Imagination in America, 1898-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 42-44.

current English speakers would not be able to recognize their own tongue.²⁴⁷ As troubling as this could have conceivably been to Zukofsky, in an exchange with Hugh Kenner, he characterizes James' intentions in his 1904 trip as "benevolent," and says, "his historical sense in 1904 was amazing."²⁴⁸ Zukofsky accords with James' perception that American culture is shifting away from established elites and towards the vibrant underclass, and feels himself to be among the beneficiaries of this historical shift.

Ezra Pound would be the most significant of these conflicted modernist figures for Zukofsky. Pound gave Zukofsky the opportunity to begin a significant poetic career, printing his first effort, "Poem Beginning 'The,'" in the journal *Exile*, and promoting his work to Harriet Monroe, editor of the Chicago literary journal *Poetry*. Pound's support played a crucial role in Monroe's decision to allow Zukofsky to edit the February 1931 issue of *Poetry*, in which Zukofsky established Objectivism. Pound gave Zukofsky continuous and detailed feedback on his early poetry, and, perhaps most significantly, encouraged and guided Zukofsky in establishing relationships with other modernist poets in America. Although these efforts never resulted in the kind of cohesive poetic school that Pound envisioned, Zukofsky's poetic career benefited greatly from his friendships with poets such as William Carlos Williams, Basil Bunting, Rene Taupin, and Lorine Niedecker. Zukofsky also introduced poets to Pound, notably Charles Reznikoff and George Oppen. The two poets conducted a voluminous correspondence throughout their lives, never ceasing communications, despite the significant personal and political differences that divided them.²⁴⁹ Pound's fame continued to assist Zukofsky even after Pound's incarceration at St. Elizabeth's; Zukofsky was able to have his theoretical work *Bottom:*

²⁴⁷ Henry James, *The American Scene*, in *Collected Travel Writings: Great Britain and America*, ed. Richard Howard (New York: Library of America, 1993), 471.

²⁴⁸ Quoted in Scroggins, 22.

²⁴⁹ Barry Ahearn, Introduction, *Pound/Zukofsky: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky* (New York: New Directions, 1987) xix.

On Shakespeare published by the University of Texas Press in 1963 in exchange for donating his letters from Pound to the University's archive.²⁵⁰

The two poets' correspondence is extremely rich, containing numerous discussions of their poetics as well as the social and intellectual networks in which they operated. This discussion will necessarily limit itself to those aspects of the correspondence that touch on the writers' exchanges concerning Yiddish and Jewish identity. These subjects occupy a more significant place in the correspondence than one might imagine.²⁵¹ Yiddish in particular comes to symbolize an approach to language that both attracted and disturbed the two poets. I only analyze the correspondence leading up to 1933, when Zukofsky visited Pound in Rapallo, Italy. Shortly before this visit, Pound had become more and more enamored of anti-Semitic economic theories propounded by men such as C. H. Douglas and Willis A. Overholser, and this strained the relationship between Pound and Zukofsky and skewed their later correspondence towards political and economic debate rather than poetics.²⁵²

Zukofsky's first letter to Pound, submitting his "Poem Beginning 'The'" for publication in *Exile*, has not survived, but we have Pound's response, accepting the poem for publication in his characteristically playful and informal style. Dated August 18, 1927, it begins: "My Dear Zukofsky: Thanks. First cheering mss. I have recd. in weeks, or months, or something or other."²⁵³ Zukofsky responds in kind, with a mathematical pun on pie in his first lines and then a

²⁵⁰ Ibid., xviii.

²⁵¹ Zukofsky also touches on these issues early on in his extensive correspondence with William Carlos Williams; however, Williams did not respond to Zukofsky's comments on Yiddish, and the topic did not become a theme of their correspondence in the same way as it did in the Pound/Zukofsky letters. See Barry Ahearn, ed., *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 21-22.

²⁵² For more on Pound and anti-Semitism, see Robert Casillo's canonical work, *The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism, and the Myths of Ezra Pound* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1988) as well as the more recent reconsideration of the topic, Leon Surette's *Pound in Purgatory: From Economic Radicalism to Anti-Semitism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) among others.

²⁵³ In Ahearn, 3.

detailed response to Pound's questions regarding the manuscript. This tone of informal banter interspersed with reference to technical and literary matters would persist throughout this early period of their correspondence.

Zukofsky's first reference to Yiddish comes in his second surviving letter to Pound, dated March 9, 1928. It responds to Pound's letter of March 5, which encourages Zukofsky to visit William Carlos Williams, thus initiating a vibrant friendship between the poets, and brings up the subjects of the renewal of language.²⁵⁴ Pound writes, "Gertie [Stein] and Jimmie [Joyce] both hunting for new langwitch, but hunting, I think, in wrong ash-pile."²⁵⁵ Pound also had apparently, in a letter which did not survive, offered Zukofsky a job translating from Italian. Zukofsky responds, "You are very, very kind. But I don't know Italian...I also know German (and, of course, yiddish, stamm' aus Amerika echt guoy?)."²⁵⁶ This refers to a line from the first stanza of *The Waste Land*, which reads "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch."²⁵⁷ The line, translated from a slightly broken German, would read, "I am no Russian, I come from Lithuania, a true German." The line evokes a recent (probably Jewish) immigrant's affirmation of affiliation with Western (German) culture. Zukofsky subverts the line to imply that as a true American goy, or non-Jew, he would "of course" know Yiddish. This suggests that he concurred with the radical assertion of Adams and James that recent immigrants were now the true Americans.

Zukofsky continues to refer to Yiddish in his correspondence with Pound. In his letter of September 19, 1928, he plays with the shared alterity (from an English perspective) of Yiddish

²⁵⁴ Williams and Zukofsky also conducted an extensive correspondence, but while Zukofsky brings up Yiddish once or twice in the early years of their relationship, Williams never picks up on the topic, and it does not become an important theme in their discussions in the same way.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵⁶ Ezra Pound Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

²⁵⁷ T. S. Eliot, *T. S. Eliot: Selected Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1936), 51

and French, ending a letter in which he refuses Pound's financial help "as my uncle Emmanuel used to say: *Que voulez-vous. C'est la vie,*" following it up on the next line with, "Wos macht a yid?? *Je te crois bien, kinder,*"²⁵⁸ a playful amalgam of Yiddish and French, which almost defies translation, but would be roughly equivalent to, "how is it going (implied Jewish addressee)? I wish you well, children." He tops it off by signing his name "Zookowfsky," underlining its exotic sound.

The most significant, and widely discussed, example of the two poets' consideration of Yiddish comes in 1929, when Zukofsky introduces the poems of Charles Reznikoff to Pound. Pound's response comes on December 9, 1929, evaluating the work as "very good as far as I've got at breakfast." He goes on to add, "capital in idea that next wave of literature is jewish (obviously) Bloom casting shadow before, prophetic Jim [Joyce] etc. also lack of prose in German due to all idiomatic energy being drawn off into yiddish."²⁵⁹ These few lines raise important questions. Pound's assertion that the "next wave of literature is jewish (sp) (obviously)" seems to place him in the Henry Adams tradition of viewing Anglo-Saxon culture as on the wane, and immigrant cultures on the rise. This view could be interpreted as quite negative toward the immigrants, perhaps even an early warning sign of his impending anti-Semitism.²⁶⁰ However, the last statement, that German prose lacks vitality "due to all idiomatic energy being drawn off into yiddish" seems to imply a more positive view of the language and culture, given that we know that Ezra Pound himself wrote in a kind of dialect, and drew on the energy of non-normative forms of English expression frequently, particularly in his

²⁵⁸ Ezra Pound Papers.

²⁵⁹ Ahearn, 26.

²⁶⁰ In fact, as Charles Bernstein interprets Pound, it was. "For Pound, Jews 'as falsification incarnate' [aim] to distort, misrepresent, and conceal language, to 'castrate' literature, origins, and tradition, [and] are largely responsible for introducing abstraction, obscurity, verbiage, and allegory into language." "Pounding Fascism (Appropriating Ideologies – Mystification, Aestheticization, and Authority in Pound's Poetic Practice)," p. 123.

correspondence.²⁶¹ If Pound felt himself to be marginalized by the changes in American culture, he also drew on minority cultures' resources to motivate his own creation of new poetic forms.

Zukofsky's response to this letter reveals his own complex negotiations of cultural identity. In his reply of December 19, 1929, Zukofsky asks to quote the lines characterizing the next wave of literature as Jewish, saying, "it wouldn't have been the likes of an antisemite like myself to disseminate suzh malinformation: however, with your kosher label on it...I hope you don't feel the Jews are roping you in."²⁶² Inner conflict jumps out of these lines, in their reversal of roles between the "antisemite" Zukofsky and Pound as certifying rabbi, only to undercut the whole proposal at the end with the apologetic caveat. Pound responded with a guarded rewording of his statement and the warning that, "I DON'T think the public shd. be taken so far into one's confidence. After all it is a dangerous animal to be guided, and can only be guided by the toe of the book applied with vigour."²⁶³ In the end, Zukofsky never quoted the lines. However, Zukofsky's evident interest in the idea of a Jewish evolution in Western literature, as well as his solicitousness of Pound's feelings on the matter, speak to the delicate negotiations necessary in his attempt to bring a new mode of poetry, rooted in the Western tradition but moving in a more diverse, inclusive direction, into existence.

There are further discussions of Yiddish and Jewish culture in the Pound-Zukofsky correspondence, but these examples illustrate the tendency of these references to grapple with the changing nature of language in an evolving American culture.²⁶⁴ Accent, and the non-normative use of English, begins in 1931 to occupy an increasingly important role in the works

²⁶¹ Michael North has written extensively on the subject in *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), particularly Chapter 5, "Old Possum and Brer Rabbit: Pound and Eliot's Racial Masquerade," 77-99.

²⁶² Ahearn, 28.

²⁶³ Ezra Pound, letter of December 31, 1929, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

²⁶⁴ Particularly in Zukofsky's letters of February 14, 1931, , May 25, 1931, October 15, 1931 (in which Zukofsky structures the letter like a Jewish prayer, beginning with the Sh'ma, and ending with Ein Keloheinu), and December 15, 1932.

of both poets. Their interest reflects an American preoccupation in this era with issues of accent and linguistic norms, not only for representatives of traditional American culture such as Pound and James, who worried about the changes in their means of self-expression, but also for the Jewish community, which sought to maintain continuities with its own ancestral culture, even while adapting to American life. For many American Jewish writers writing in English, accent served to express their sense of affiliation with, or distance from, Jewish culture.²⁶⁵ Moreover, for a speaker of a second language, mastery of accent and idiom, and the knowledge of when to break, as well as when to observe, linguistic norms, presents a special challenge, and denotes a superior level of achievement. Ezra Pound's correspondence with Louis Zukofsky allowed Pound to consider these issues more deeply, and as an acknowledgement of their discussions, he wrote a poem, called "Der Yiddisher Charleston Band," dedicated to Zukofsky, in 1930.

Critics have characterized this poem as deeply problematic in terms of its depiction of racial and religious minorities, in a dialect that many have taken to be an offensive caricature of Jewish and African-American speech.²⁶⁶ It describes a band comprised of Jews, Italians, and African Americans, who perform a bawdy routine that defies religious and social strictures, in a rhythm created by dialect, line breaks and capitalization. As an example, the third stanza appears below:

Red hot Mary of Magdala

Had nine jews and a Roman fellow

Nah she'z gotta chob much swellah

Mit der yiddisher Charleston Band.

²⁶⁵ See Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English*, particularly her discussions of Abraham Cahan, Mary Antin, and Henry Roth.

²⁶⁶ See Rachel DuPlessis, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry*, 172-174, which characterizes the poem as "infamous" and "flimsy doggerel," while Stephen Fredman calls it a "scurrilous ditty" in *A Menorah for Athena*, 129.

Mit der YIDDISHER

Charleston BAND.²⁶⁷

Stephen Fredman argues that this poem “features anti-Semitism as the umbrella under which a collection of anti-Christian, racist, and misogynist views are gathered.”²⁶⁸ This view stems from the poem’s potentially defamatory depiction of racial and religious minorities engaged in morally dubious activities that challenge the norms and standards of civilized society.

Although this aspect of the poem jumps out for any contemporary reader of the poem, Pound and Zukofsky concentrate on a completely different aspect in their correspondence, namely its musical nature. Indeed, it seems from their letters as though the poem was originally written with a specific musical accompaniment, which was not printed in *An “Objectivists” Anthology* for practical reasons.²⁶⁹ In Zukofsky’s response upon receipt of the poem, on December 9, 1930, he writes “didn’t mean to write you before the issue [the 1931 Objectivist issue of *Poetry*] was off my hands, but your Yiddisher Charleston(own) Band has swept me off – arf – muh – tootsies!!!”²⁷⁰ He continues that “A-7 [is] the assertion of a positive of same theme above – Yiddisher Chaston Band which is the negative of?” Zukofsky sees a connection between this poem and his own work, a section of his epic “A” which excerpts lines from the previous six movements to create a medley, in sonnet form, of the poem thus far. The tone, structure, and diction of “A-7” are so different from “Der Yiddisher Charleston Band” that the only conceivable similarity could be that both poems create a unity out of diversity by means of

²⁶⁷ Ezra Pound, “Der Yiddisher Charleston Band,” in *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, ed. Louis Zukofsky (Le Beausset, France: TO, Publishers, 1932), 45.

²⁶⁸ Fredman, 130.

²⁶⁹ See Zukofsky’s letter of December 9, 1930, Ahearn’s discussion in “Ezra Pound & Louis Zukofsky: Letters, 1928-1930” *Montemora* 8 (1981). 173-174, and in DuPlessis, 173.

²⁷⁰ Yale University.

musical form. Zukofsky ends this letter with the post-script “But everyone can sing his own tune to your Y. C. B. – the typography makes it so obvious: tonband – I’ll never get over it!” The poem’s ability to create a sense of rhythm and music from words printed on the page, while remaining in free verse, inspired Zukofsky’s enthusiasm.

Pound’s emphasis on the musicality of this poem, which depicts the energy of a subversive culture he identifies as Yiddish, underlines these modernists’ sense that expressing the diversity within America required a new form of poetry, one that draws on the sound, rather than the sense, of language. Zukofsky finds this sense of musicality in Bach’s fugue, and its discursive nature, while Pound finds it in the rhythms of a jazz band. Their views on Yiddish parallel their views on musicality in poetry: Zukofsky associates it with the elevated tones of Yehoash, while for Pound, it represents the din of the end of Western civilization as he knows it. But both poets identify a new approach to poetry, rooted in sound and comfortable in an ethnically diverse America, with Yiddish.

Both Fredman and DuPlessis express shock that Pound continued to take an interest in this piece years later, during his incarceration in St. Elizabeth’s.²⁷¹ They both cite a memoir by Charles Olson, who witnessed Pound performing this piece, complete with a dance routine, in 1946.²⁷² Surely after the Holocaust, they argue, Pound would find it difficult to continue this expression of blatant anti-Semitism? Indeed, this kind of discourse would grow less and less acceptable in America over the years. However, if the poem was, for Pound, an experiment with the resources of the English language to express increasingly diverse voices, that imperative had only gained in relevance with the end of the war. This is not to say that those who find the poem

²⁷¹ Fredman, 130, and DuPlessis, 174.

²⁷² Charles Olson, 1991, *Charles Olson & Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeth’s*, ed. Catherine Seelye (New York: Grossman, 1975), 66.

offensive are incorrect, only that its use of a caricatured dialect was part of a larger project to explore the role of non-normative English in an increasingly diverse America.

One might go so far as to characterize modernism itself as rooted in this project. Many commentators have noticed American modernist writers' tendency to draw on non-normative forms of English expression in their efforts to distinguish themselves from previous generations of writers. The poet Mina Loy famously takes the perspective that modernism owes its innovations to the American "mongrel" in her ca. 1925 essay "Modern Poetry."²⁷³ Modern critics such as Michael North and Walter Benn Michaels also argue that American modernism has its roots in modernists' engagement with the increasingly problematic reality of minority subcultures, although their interpretations criticize American modernists' continued complicity in racist power structures.²⁷⁴ Louis Zukofsky's approach was unique both for its formal complexity and for its author's personal engagement with, and ultimate ambivalence toward, affiliation with a minority subculture.

III. *Yehoash in "A"*

Zukofsky's primary interactions with the Jewish community would take place in the early part of his career, particularly in his attempts to place his first major critical work, "Sincerity and Objectification: With Special Reference to the Works of Charles Reznikof" (1929) in the *Menorah Journal*. Zukofsky's admiration for the work of Charles Reznikoff recurs in many of his attempts to engage with the American Jewish community, as we have seen in the Pound correspondence; the older poet's work seems to have given Zukofsky hope that there could be a vibrant stream of American Jewish modernism in English. Moreover, the *Menorah Journal* represented the only American Jewish publication that engaged deeply with the cultural and

²⁷³ *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1996), 158-159.

²⁷⁴ Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) and Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism*.

literary questions of the day.²⁷⁵ Publishing in this journal must have seemed to offer Zukofsky the opportunity to join an ambitious, educated group of Jewish American cultural critics.

The process began in 1929, shortly after Zukofsky had begun his correspondence with Ezra Pound, and his friendships with Charles Reznikoff and William Carlos Williams. Zukofsky's attempt to submit his work to the *Menorah Journal* was no doubt at least partially motivated by the example of Reznikoff, who was a regular contributor. However, the editor, Elliot Cohen, apparently did not think much of Zukofsky's work. In a 1930 letter to Marie Syrkin, Reznikoff writes, "Sunday night I met Zukofsky...and read his essay on me called 'Objectivity and Sincerity'...Well, I am sure *The Menorah* will not take it; for on Saturday Elliot told me that Zukofsky could not write, that he had done a poor piece of translation."²⁷⁶ When Zukofsky received the rejection notice, he wrote to Pound that this confirmed his view of the group. "I'd hate to be wrong about my notice of these people in A-4...I've always avoided them, wished to avoid them, and things seem to be turning out the way I wanted them to."²⁷⁷ Although one may doubt whether this is entirely true, it does express a sense of the *Menorah Journal's* role in Zukofsky's subsequent turn away from organizational affiliation with the Jewish community.

A-4, which conveys Zukofsky's initial reservations regarding engagement with an established Jewish community, depicts a generational struggle between a complacent older generation that is both authoritarian and strangely vulnerable, and a younger generation, which strives to express its own hybrid sensibility. A short movement of only four pages, it nevertheless engages in many of Zukofsky's characteristic techniques: a dialogue implicit in the

²⁷⁵ Fredman, 8-9.

²⁷⁶ Charles Reznikoff, *Selected Letters of Charles Reznikoff 1917-1976*, ed. Milton Hindus (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1997), 78.

²⁷⁷ *Pound/Zukofsky*, 32.

presentation of differing perspectives, extremely selective quotation that demands an intimate knowledge of the original works, and the depiction of a deeply personal experience by means of apparently external voices and images. It begins with the image of a carousel, depicted in pairs of brief phrases that evoke the feel of a moving carousel on the page:

Giant sparkler,
Lights of the river,

(Horses turning)
Tide,²⁷⁸

The carousel evokes cyclical movement, and the following poem seems to describe a cycle of time, where an older generation tries, but fails, to stop the inexorable movement away from their own traditions and truths. However, the cyclical nature of this movement ensures a type of continuity, albeit not the type the elder generation would have preferred.

Zukofsky's sense of the cyclical nature of time sets him apart both from Jewish tradition, which envisions time as moving forward toward the coming of the Messiah, and the modernist movement, which famously marks a radical break between traditional ways of life and that of its own age. Zukofsky's search for continuity initially confused Ezra Pound, who repeatedly refers to his consciousness of being of another generation in their correspondence. In his third surviving letter, of March 5, 1928, he mentions that he has met e. e. cummings, but "believe[s] he regards me as gentle bore and relique...I find it healthy to meet his conviction on this point."

²⁷⁹ He expresses some surprise that a younger poet like Zukofsky would seek him out as a teacher, when he himself had broken so radically with the elders of his own generation. Pound reinforces Zukofsky's sense of being of another generation, bracketing some early criticisms of

²⁷⁸ Zukofsky, "A" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 12. The image of the carousel is clearer in the first version of the poem, printed in *An "Objectivists' Anthology*, ed. Louis Zukofsky (Le Beausset, France and NY: To, Publishers, 1932).

²⁷⁹ Ahearn, *Pound/Zukofsky*, 8.

“A” in a letter of December 25, 1930, saying “your problem coming after T.S.E[liot], me an’ Bill [Williams] is very dif. from what ours was coming after Yeats and Bliss Carman.”²⁸⁰ Although Zukofsky certainly seemed to believe in shifts in generational perspective, as we will see in “A”-4, he seeks forms of continuity rather than rupture.

After the initial carousel section, Zukofsky describes an older generation, characterizing them as rootless, lacking a steady sense of place. His description suggests that this generation finds refuge from the dislocations of their environment in their tradition, which they carry in their “aged heads.” This characterization not only underlines the tradition’s imminent obsolescence, but also its fragility. Lacking any outward affirmation of their beliefs, as a Christian might find in the “feast lights of Venice or The Last Supper,” they take refuge in the distant “Stars of Deuteronomy,” finding what comfort there they can. This sets us up for the main conflict of the poem, which begins in the last lines of this stanza: “We had a Speech, our children have/ evolved a jargon.” In Zukofsky’s rendering, the older generation has come to rely so heavily on their tradition for their sense of rootedness in the world that they cannot but take it as a betrayal when their children adapt that tradition for their own purposes.

The terms “Speech” and “jargon” have particular resonance in the context of Jewish language politics in this era. Most Yiddish speakers, including such prominent writers as I. L. Peretz and Sholem Aleichem, referred to the language as “*zhargon*” up to the Czernowitz language conference of 1908, which cemented the status of Yiddish as a literary language, at least among its supporters.²⁸¹ Yiddish occupied the lower rung of a diglossic culture in Eastern Europe, serving only utilitarian communicative functions, while Hebrew was reserved for

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 85.

²⁸¹ David Fishman’s *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh Press, 2005) explores its topic partially in terms of the shift from *zhargon* to Yiddish. See the Introduction for an overview, and the entire book for more detail.

activities involving religion or culture.²⁸² In Yiddish, Hebrew was called *loshn-koydesh*, the holy tongue, while Yiddish was known as *mame-loshn*, the mother's language, with its connotations of intimacy as well as informality.²⁸³ A jargon, in the English usage, particularly connotes a hybrid language, without internal coherence, usually ascribed to its speakers' incompetence in the proper use of language.²⁸⁴ Zukofsky draws on both the English and Jewish connotations of the word to characterize the younger generation's language as both hybrid and transgressive of the standards of high culture, whether English or Jewish.

Yiddish itself is a hybrid language, composed of linguistic borrowings from a wide variety of sources held together by a grammatical structure rooted in Middle High German.²⁸⁵ Some commentators, such as Benjamin Harshav, have extrapolated great meaning from the language's semantic structure, ascribing particular qualities of openness and cultural hybridity to the language and the culture that surrounded it.²⁸⁶ Although writers could and did write works in Yiddish that did not express these qualities, one may imagine that the language's structure would have appealed to Louis Zukofsky in his development of a poetic method that would express his awareness of the interplay between cultures.

The next few stanzas of "A"-4 continue to describe the older generation's perspective, detailing their longing for transcendence and despair of the present. The following stanza begins, "We prayed, Open, God of Psalmody,/ That our Psalms may reach but/ One shadow of

²⁸² Max Weinreich's article "Internal Bilingualism in Ashkenaz," is the classic source on this. Trans. Lucy Dawidowicz, in *Voices from the Yiddish*, eds. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1972), 279-288. See also Joshua Fishman, 15-16, for an historical, rather than linguistic, interpretation of the phenomenon.

²⁸³ Naomi Seidman presents an extensive argument on these matters in her book *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1997)..

²⁸⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, definition 5.

²⁸⁵ See Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁸⁶ *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Your light.”²⁸⁷ Two more stanza follow, evoking images from the Psalms, of the Ark, the sun, the Temple. The fourth stanza ends on a darker note: “Even the Death has gone out of us – we are void.”²⁸⁸ A short, centered stanza follows, expressing the imperatives of art, or perhaps the voice of the young generation, beginning: “Hear - .” The next stanza consists of their rejection of the younger generation, phrased in the form of a prayer. “Deafen us, God, deafen us to their music, / Our own children have passed over to the ostracized.”²⁸⁹ Sound and language play an important role in this conflict, with proper speech and degraded jargon characterizing the difference between the generation, and the elders, keepers of the true tradition, expressing their rejection of the younger in terms of a refusal to hear, the very action which the young request from them. This image takes on all the more specificity because, of course, one cannot voluntarily become deaf; as much as one dislikes what one hears, one cannot avoid hearing it without leaving the environment entirely. Similarly, as much as the older generation condemns the transgressions of the younger, they cannot entirely escape them.

This stanza, which begins with the older generation’s plea to “deafen us,” initiates a long series of quotations from Yehoash and others. Zukofsky begins with a few lines that establish the conflict between the generations: “They assail us / ‘Religious, snarling monsters’ –.”²⁹⁰ Next, he continues with the first inclusion of Yehoash’s work:

And have mouthed a jargon:
 “Rain blows, light, on quiet water
 I watch the rings spread and travel
 Shimaunu-San, Samurai,
 When will you come home? –
 Shimaunu-San, my clear star.”²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ Zukofsky, “A,” 12-13.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 13.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ These lines do not come from Yehoash; Zukofsky makes a clear distinction in his use of single rather than double quotation marks.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

These lines come from Yehoash's poem "Shimone-san," in the first volume of *In Geveb*.²⁹²

Yehoash does not cite a source in the original volume; nevertheless, the poem may be a translation from the Japanese.²⁹³ With this quotation, Zukofsky creates a dissonance between the elders' dismissal of the younger generation's language implicit in the words "mouthed a jargon," and the delicate simplicity of Yehoash's poem. Zukofsky intensifies that simplicity in his translation, eliminating a number of words from the original. A literal translation of the Yiddish would read:

The rain bubbles on quiet water
I watch the rings spread away from one another
Shimone-san, you pale samurai,
When will you return from your distant travels?
Shimone-san, my bright star.²⁹⁴

Zukofsky retains important parts of the original, including the mood, meaning, and even the placement of the lines on the page, but he streamlines the language, dropping modifiers such as the Romantic "pale," and redundant phrases such as "from your distant travels." In re-interpreting the poem in his translation, Zukofsky enacts the confluence he is proposing between Yiddish poetry and the new generation of modernist American poetry in English.

Zukofsky quotes the poem in its entirety, ending by attributing the poem to "– *Yehoash*." He underlines his sense of affiliation with the Yiddish poet in the next lines, "Song's kinship, / The roots we strike."²⁹⁵ In the following lines, Zukofsky includes a more diverse pastiche of lines from several different Yehoash poems. The three lines immediately following the

²⁹² Yehoash, *In Geveb*, vol. 1, 69.

²⁹³ Yiddish translators of this period often did not cite their sources carefully, as Rachel Rubenstein discusses in her excellent essay, "Going Native, Becoming Modern: American Indians, Walt Whitman, and the Yiddish Poet," in *American Quarterly* (58:2), June 2006, 431-453.

²⁹⁴ Yehoash, *In Geveb*, vol. 1, 69, my translation.

²⁹⁵ Zukofsky, "A," 14.

declaration of Yehoash's significance are drawn from Yehoash's poem "Tsvishn beymer" (Among the trees).²⁹⁶ He draws his source material from the second and last stanza of this section of the poem, which follows in my translation:

Deep in the woods stands my tent,
 No one will come to me,
 Like a whale that has swum away
 Is the distant, distant world...
 Day by day I hammer further
 Deep roots below,
 Day by day my limbs grow heavier
 With the sap of forests –
 Great stars my listeners
 Green grasses my poems...²⁹⁷

This poem excited interest among other Yiddish poets for its attention to the relationship between the poet and the outside world, a subject of considerable interest to the Introspectivist group, which sought to express internal fragmentation by means of fragmented poetic imagery.²⁹⁸ Zukofsky, who went much further than the Introspectivists in his explorations of the relationships between external objects and subjective experience, doubtless also responded to this aspect of the poem.

In "A"-4, Zukofsky reverses the original order of the quoted lines in the poem, as follows:

"Heavier from day to day
 Grow my limbs with sap of forests"
 "Deep roots hammer lower"²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Yehoash, *In geveb*, vol. 1, 84-85.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ Minkoff, N. B., "Yehoash," *Idishe klasiker poetn: esseyen*, (Nyu-York :Farlag "Bodn", 1937), 105.

²⁹⁹ Zukofsky, "A," 14.

This creates a sense of momentum downwards, echoing his earlier characterization of Yehoash as “the roots we strike,” and continuing the image of the tree.³⁰⁰ In his translation, Zukofsky displays a nuanced understanding of the original as well as a skillful mobilization of the poem for his own purposes.

The next lines quoted from Yehoash continue Zukofsky’s association of the Yiddish poet with the image of the sun, which appeared for the first time in “Poem Beginning ‘The,’” as discussed above. Here he draws on Yehoash’s poem “Tsu der zun,” (To the sun), which appears in the second volume of *In geveb*.³⁰¹ Zukofsky also shortens and streamlines this poem in his translation. The original reads:

I bow to the sun:
 On the gray backs
 Of the mountains; if you follow
 Along the edges of the rocks
 You will find my prayer.
 You great, quiet
 Bestower of man and tree and sand,
 If your face flames
 In the last redness, give me of
 Your light
 A spark, against every demon who laughs
 In the darkness, and against every snake
 Which crawls
 On me in the grave of night.³⁰²

Zukofsky’s translation eliminates many of the specific details of the original poem, rendering it more abstract. He also cuts the last four lines, which significantly alters the poem’s meaning, from a despairing speaker’s longing for transcendence to a more generalized, more primal paen to light.

“And to the Sun, I bow.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Yehoash, *In geveb*, vol. 2, 35.

³⁰² Ibid., my translation.

On the gray mountains,
 Where multiply
 The stairs of crags, my prayer
 Will follow you, still Heir –
 Bestower –
 Of man and tree and sand,

When your face upon the land
 Flames in last redness, allow me of your
 light-³⁰³

This translation once again makes use of Yehoash's poetry to summon a sense of hope and optimism, which contrasts here with the older generation's embittered clinging to the authority of their traditions.

The next lines of "A"-4 recall that generation once again: "My father's precursors / Set masts in dinghies, chanted the Speech."³⁰⁴ Here Zukofsky establishes his ties to the older generation more clearly with his characterization of them as "my father's precursors." He muddies the waters of affiliation somewhat in the later lines, "*Yehoash* - / the courses we tide from."³⁰⁵ Both the older generation, possessors of the Speech, and Yehoash, who "mouthed a jargon," are his predecessors, and in this poem both play a role in creating Zukofsky's poetry. Although he critiques the older generation for their intolerance, and displays his loyalty to Yehoash in his translations of his poetry, what comes out most clearly in the poem is Zukofsky's attempt to trace a poetic genealogy for himself within the Jewish tradition, or at least, the tradition of Jewish language.

More traditional symbols of Jewish tradition, such as religious artifacts and customs do make an appearance in an earlier version of the movement, that which appears in the 1931 *An*

³⁰³ Zukofsky, "A," 14-15.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 15.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

“*Objectivists*” *Anthology*. In this version, Zukofsky makes it clear that the older generation refers specifically to the editorial staff of the *Menorah Journal* in the lines:

The Editor.
 Perhaps he might repeat:
 “I shall skip a pale and
 Subtle poet who was not in fact
 Lazy, but the meaning of whose
 Painfully inarticulate soul forbids
 Me to use him for any purpose, however,
 Respectful.”-The Editor, (in a journal –
 Associations: we had a menorah, and
 It is, indeed, an honor to be circumcised)
 June 1927³⁰⁶

These lines express Zukofsky’s bitterness at the characterization of him in the quoted lines by Mark Van Doren in his article “Jewish Students I Have Known,” published in the *Menorah Journal* of June 1927.³⁰⁷ That relatively negative characterization of him was enough to elicit Zukofsky’s ire, even before the rejection of his submissions in 1929, which cemented his negative opinion of the group. The last lines of the section above mock the editors’ attachment to the ceremonial, Hebraic past, and their earnestness in arguing for the prestige of Jewish culture. In his 1929 letter to Pound informing him of the *Journal*’s rejection, he characterizes the editors as the “sanhedrin,” referring to the rabbinical high court that existed during the Second Temple period, once again characterizing them as arrogating to themselves a position of quasi-religious authority. This high seriousness repelled Zukofsky, who was drawn to the modern and the popular.

³⁰⁶ Zukofsky, *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, ed. Louis Zukofsky, (Le Beausset, France and New York: To, Publishers, 1932),

³⁰⁷ Mark Van Doren, “Jewish Students I Have Known,” *Menorah Journal* 13 (1927), 264-68.

Some have read Zukofsky's comments about the *Journal* editors as evidence of his distance from Jewish culture, and perhaps even a degree of Jewish self-hatred.³⁰⁸ However, Zukofsky's affiliation with a particular vision of Jewish culture: one rooted in the popular, cosmopolitan world of the Yiddish theater, rather than the august spaces of the Hebraic synagogue tradition, emerges from his explicit treatment of Jewish themes in his poetry, as well as his poetic method more generally. We may understand his position on Jewish affiliation better by placing it in the context of contemporary debates on the role of immigrant culture in America, particular the divergence between Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne mentioned at the beginning of this essay. If the *Menorah Journal* editors concurred with Kallen in presenting a culturally elevated, and isolated, vision of Jewish culture to the American public, Zukofsky presented a vision closer to that of Bourne's, of a hybrid culture that draws both on Jewish and Anglo-American sources, to create new sources of inspiration and strength.

³⁰⁸ Fredman, 128.

Chapter 5: The Critical Turn

I. *Yiddish Poetry in the Postvernacular Age*

Following the second World War, Yiddish declined as a language of daily communication among American Jews. However, it retained significance in American Jewish cultural life. Although many have mourned the “death of Yiddish” as fluency in the language declined, the scholar Jeffrey Shandler has argued that the language’s rise as a postvernacular “can be understood as enriching rather than impoverishing Yiddish culture by opening up its linguistic boundaries, thereby enabling a variety of engagements with the language other than conventional fluency.”³⁰⁹ Avant-garde poetry, particularly that of the Language school, represents a postvernacular development of modernist Yiddish poetry which retains many of the concerns and literary techniques that previous generations of Yiddish poets shared, even as few traces of the Yiddish language remain perceptible in the poetry itself. The influence of Yiddish in postwar avant-garde poetry goes beyond the kind of translation and mediation between Yiddish and English that a poet such as Irena Klepfisz does; Yiddish is present for these poets not on the level of language, but is implicit in their very approach to language and to poetry.³¹⁰

Louis Zukofsky's influence was critical in shaping the approach of the Language school.

Unlike those before him, who persisted in seeking to convey unified ideas, albeit through

³⁰⁹ Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*. 194. Yiddish was not the only Jewish language to make this shift; Hebrew actually made a similar shift in America, although it became the national language of Israel and avoided becoming *solely* a postvernacular language, like Yiddish. Alan Mintz states in the introduction to *Hebrew in America*: “The eclipse of Tarbut Ivrit did not mean – it is important to point out – the demise of Hebrew in America. Hebrew reemerged as an important presence (from the 1960s on) in other contexts and for different constituencies, especially in the Jewish day school and the secular university. Yet in these new settings the rationale for Hebrew had little to do with the Tarbut Ivrit movement or with its ideological underpinnings. The source of enthusiasm and prestige was now clearly the state of Israel, and this gave a whole new tone to Hebrew in America...it should be noted that despite the contingent fortunes of its institutions, the Tarbut Ivrit outlook contributed to American Jewish life a crucial idea whose force is likely to exert itself again in the future; the meaning of Jewish civilization cannot be reduced to either religion or politics, but inheres within the literary and linguistic creations of the people, with Hebrew being its chief expression.” 19.

³¹⁰ Irena Klepfisz, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue: Poems Selected and New (1971-1990)*, Portland: The Eighth Mountain Press, 1993.

fragmented or disjunctive techniques, for Zukofsky, the technique of writing itself provides a unity that makes other forms of unity - for example, on the level of meaning - unnecessary and even distracting from the significance of the poem. It is this emphasis on technique - on language, specifically - that inspires the Language school to develop a poetics that depends on the process of composition and its attention to its constitutive material for unity, rather than a particular theme or set of ideas.

This generation of American Jewish poets, like those before it, seeks to express a sensibility that finds itself inherently between definitions and between cultures. Mobilizing alternate discourses – sometimes personal and sometimes critical – speaks to an essential condition of the American Jewish experience, namely the sense of inhabiting a fractured reality, that cannot be completely accounted for in any one language or discourse. Earlier, bilingual generations used the disparities between languages to achieve an objective stance on language in general; this generation uses linguistic and literary theory to achieve the same end.

As fluency in Yiddish declined in America, Yiddish remained present in the culture more as a word here and there, an accent, or an emphasis, more than an independent language. As Shandler argues, “postvernacular performances tend to separate the semantic value of Yiddish from its other semiotic registers. The primacy of its form over its content in many of these presentations renders Yiddish as something more akin to music than a language, to be appreciated as a signifier of affect or as an aesthetic experience of sound play.”³¹¹ This suited the aims of experimental poets particularly well. It is just this aural aspect of language that avant-garde poetic groups such as the Black Mountain School foreground, hoping to create an immediate, interactive linguistic experience, in contrast to older, New Critical thinking that aimed to create a perfect poetic object, a well-wrought urn to be admired in a reverent hush.

³¹¹ Ibid., 139.

In a culturally homogenizing America which consolidated itself against fears of Eastern communism during the McCarthy era, avant-garde poets marshaled a consciousness of other languages as a way of gaining a critical distance from the overwhelming influence of English. Anglo-American literature emphasized English so strongly that even the consciousness of one's own language as being merely one of a myriad of choices, has been suppressed, according to scholar Marc Shell.³¹² By contrast, American Jewish literature is consistently marked by the effort to depict traces of other languages in English, scholars such as Hana Wirth-Nesher and Jeffrey Shandler have argued.³¹³ In this context, writing poetry that calls attention to its own linguistic construction represents a significant departure from the mainstream, and an implicit indication of Jewish identity.

These poets inherited a choice of postvernacular Jewish languages that might serve as inspiration: Hebrew and Yiddish. In the 1930s, poets made use of both languages as poetic inspiration. Stephen Fredman has argued convincingly that while the Objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky used the fragmented, hybrid sensibility of Yiddish as his inspiration, his fellow Jewish Objectivist Charles Reznikoff abstracted a concision and purity from Hebrew in his poetic work.³¹⁴ Hebrew offered advantages that Yiddish could not: a link to religious practice, which was respected in America, and to the discourse of Hebraism and Hellenism then current in American intellectual circles.³¹⁵ Fredman has argued that Reznikoff utilized Hebrew as a way of reconciling an identity divided between American and Jewish aspects.

³¹² In Shandler, 191.

³¹³ Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call it English*; Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland*, 112.

³¹⁴ "The hallmarks of Hebrew - biblical Hebrew, in particular - are condensation and terseness, qualities that Reznikoff values highly and dedicates himself to achieving. Coincidentally, these qualities were also promoted by the Imagists, especially Ezra Pound, so that Reznikoff implicitly finds the Hebraic reinforcing the Hellenic at the level of style," Stephen Fredman, *A Menorah for Athena*, University of Chicago Press, 2001, 30.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 3, "Hebraism and Hellenism," pp. 81-116.

However, Hebrew – and the prospect of using a Biblically-inspired poetry to find a place in American culture – did not inspire later generations of poets the way that Yiddish and Louis Zukofsky did. That did not result from a dramatic difference in quality between the two poets' work, but rather the different cultural valences of Hebrew and Yiddish in American culture after World War II. In this era, Hebrew moved to a central place in Jewish education, even as Yiddish schools shut their doors.³¹⁶ Hebrew became central to a vision of Jewish education located in the suburbs, focused on synagogue attendance and parents' desires for their children's commitment to Jewish practices that they themselves were moving away from. Sometimes called "pediatric Judaism," this model of Jewish education focused on serving assimilating parents' needs and desires, rather than maintaining European Jewish traditions in the face of a homogenizing American culture.³¹⁷ As families grew disenchanted by this state of affairs, Hebrew schools suffered from declining retention and reputation during the postwar period.³¹⁸

One of the central problems with this type of Jewish education for many students was precisely the centrality of the Hebrew language, which was often emphasized at the expense of the cultural content that students preferred.³¹⁹ This emphasis on Hebrew originated with the culture of *Tarbut Ivrit*, which sought to create a refined literary cultural life in America in Hebrew, much as Yiddishists in the same period hoped to create in Yiddish.³²⁰ This movement's decision to focus on Jewish education earned it an ongoing place in American Jewish culture, but it came at a cost: the divorce of the Hebrew language from Jewish culture and history.³²¹ Forced to learn a difficult foreign language by parents with an inconsistent agenda, which did not offer a

³¹⁶ Melissa R. Klapper, "The History of Jewish Education in America, 1700-2000," Chapter 8 in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, pp. 189-216. 206.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 199.

³²⁰ Mintz, 14-15.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

rich sense of cultural belonging, many students lost interest in the form of Jewish identity offered in the Hebrew school setting.

By contrast, students of this generation often encountered Yiddish for the first time in college, in Jewish Studies programs. Rather than being forced on them by parents, Jewish Studies programs attempted to engage students as individuals, offering them the opportunity to explore Jewish history and culture freely, and engage more deeply with what was personally meaningful to them.³²² In these programs, students could focus on either Hebrew or Yiddish, but given their early negative experiences with Hebrew, some preferred to focus on Yiddish. Jeffrey Shandler writes, “Students are now often drawn to Yiddish as a Jewish signifier of the diasporic, politically progressive, culturally avant-garde, feminist, or queer, the language emblematic of what one observer has described as a new, Jewish 'twenty-something in-your-face radicalism.’”³²³ The type of student who would be drawn to write avant-garde poetry likely would also be drawn to, or at the least comfortable with, these other forms of progressive thought.

II. *The Merging of Poetry and Criticism*

The generation of poets I examine here have lost access to traditional Jewish languages such as Hebrew or Yiddish in the process of acculturation, and yet they continue to seek a perspective outside their native language and culture. Rather than incorporating other languages into their poetry, this generation uses literary theory, and especially those approaches that derive from linguistics, in order to take a critical stance on culture and language itself. In works such as Charles Bernstein’s “Artifice of Absorption” and Merle Bachman's *Recovering Yiddishland*, the line between personal self-expression and apparently objective criticism of literary trends begins

³²² Shandler, 86.

³²³ Shandler, 87.

to blur. Although their critical work possesses independent value as part of the critical landscape, here I am interested in how their criticism dovetails with their poetry itself, and indeed, how it becomes impossible to distinguish these two projects. After examining the way that this approach to poetry developed, I will turn to Charles Bernstein's poem "Artifice of Absorption," which demonstrates the way in which the discourses of theory and criticism can operate in poetic form.

Given their distance from traditional Jewish culture and the use of Jewish languages, it becomes significantly more challenging to identify this generation of poets as American Jewish poets. Indeed, the poets themselves struggle to define Jewishness and their relationship to it, often challenging traditional metrics of affiliation such as observance of Jewish law or purely biological definitions of Jewish identity. In a recent anthology, titled *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, many poets, including the poets I focus on in this paper, see a correspondence between their unwillingness to accept prescribed forms of self-expression in poetry and their desire to explore new definitions of Jewishness. Some of these definitions are vague: in the introduction, for example, Daniel Morris defines the type of Jewish identity the work will explore as characterized by "ambiguity," "hybridity," and "an absence of explicit Jewish themes."³²⁴ This definition, or rather, the designation of a refusal to define oneself as a mark of identity, while unlikely to be embraced by the majority of American Jews, nevertheless serves for these poets as a tie, however fragile, to the Jewish community and Jewish history. While these poets participate in movements, such as the Language movement, that are not exclusively Jewish, their writing – both theoretical and poetic – intends to comment on their complex sense of identity as Jews as well as writers. For these poets, culture, language, and

³²⁴ Daniel Morris, "Introduction," *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*.

identity cannot easily be disentangled, and while they may focus on one aspect or the other at any given time, the others are never far behind.

The Language poets, members of an avant-garde poetic movement that explores in poetry the ways in which consciousness is affected by linguistic structures, did not affiliate themselves explicitly with any one ethnic consciousness. However, the movement took shape at a moment when ethnic consciousness in general was enjoying a rebirth in America, due to the achievements of the civil rights movement. Many Language poets demonstrate an interest in exploring the literature of pre-industrial and tribal societies in order to explore alternative ways of being and communicating to those prevalent in the society in which they were raised. The journal of ethnopoetics *Alcheringa* developed this interest in the early 1970s, and this happens to be the very venue in which the Language movement first took shape.

The approach of ethnopoetics, which arose after the civil rights movement in the 1960s, built further along these lines, embracing poets' particular ethnic backgrounds and seeking to build on them to create new forms of poetic expression. According to Jerome Rothenberg, editor of this journal and coiner of the term ethnopoetics, the approach "was premised on the perception that western definitions of poetry & art were no longer, indeed had never been, sufficient, & that our continued reliance on them was distorting our view both of the larger human experience & of our own possibilities within it."³²⁵ In line with the liberal politics of the time, Rothenberg rejects "imperialism, racism, chauvinism, etc.," in favor of a proto-multiculturalist approach that would respectfully incorporate the artistic efforts of creative individuals from a wide range of cultures.³²⁶ Rothenberg's radicalism becomes evident in the second part of the above-quoted statement, where he emphasizes not Western culture's injustice to non-Western cultures, but the

³²⁵ Rothenberg, Jerome. "Ethnopoetics & Politics / The Politics of Ethnopoetics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof, 1990, 5.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

ways it limits himself and his self-expression, “distorting our view both of the larger human experience & of our own possibilities within it.” What seems to attract Rothenberg to this new, more expansive view of culture is the way that it opens up types of self-expression that had previously been seen as inadmissible in the realms of avant-garde poetry. This goes much further than attempts to broaden the canon to include non-Western writers, for example, looking instead to the transformation of Rothenberg’s own poetic efforts and sense of identity. This possibility would have particular appeal, naturally, for a poet who had previously felt that Western literary conventions did not allow him to express his perspective fully. Indeed, later in the essay he goes on to reflect on “the dream of a total art - & of a life made whole.”³²⁷ For Rothenberg, incorporating non-Western literary techniques allows him personal self-expression for the first time. In an essay notable for its erudition, full of references to literary figures as diverse as William Blake, Walt Whitman, Blaise Cendrars, and Langston Hughes, it is striking that only the inclusion of the avowedly primitive makes this cultural world complete for Rothenberg.

The titles and moods of Rothenberg’s published works bear a striking resemblance to that of Yehoash, another American Jewish writer fascinated by the primitive. Like Yehoash, Rothenberg published works evoking Native American, Far Eastern, Jewish, and mystical themes.³²⁸ The experience of an Eastern European Jew arriving in America and encountering new ethnic groups for the first time may well have borne significant parallels to that of an American living through the liberalization of the 1960s. Although people of many ethnic backgrounds had long lived in America, their new visibility during the civil rights era seems to have inspired a very similar poetic response: bringing other cultures’ languages and forms of

³²⁷ Ibid., 10.

³²⁸ To name just a few examples, see *White Sun Black Sun*, *The Seven Hells of Jigoku Zoshi*, *Poland/1931*, and *A Vision of the Chariot in Heaven*.

poetic expression into conversation with one's own poetics. As for Yehoash, the figure of the primitive offered Rothenberg the opportunity to conceptualize a common culture that links even quite disparate poetic techniques.

Later in his career, Rothenberg would turn from world cultures to Jewish culture, bringing his negotiation between individual identity and internationalism into focus, particularly in his volume *A Big Jewish Book*.³²⁹ In *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, Rothenberg notes that his first language was Yiddish, and comments that "'Jewish American' was of far less concern to me than 'Jewish' which in itself was international in scope."³³⁰ His concept of Jewish identity gives him a bilingual consciousness, despite the fact that this doesn't make its way into his poetry, and a link to people around the world. This allows him to characterize modernist poetic techniques as Jewish: in *A Big Jewish Book*, he links Ezra Pound's fascination with sources to the rabbis who wrote the Talmud.³³¹

The issue of the individual and how much the figure of the individual could be relied upon to unify a messy, multilingual and multicultural linguistic field lies at the center of the breakage between Olson's Black Mountain School and the Language poets. Interestingly, this issue came to a head in the form of a dispute over the nature of the legacy of Louis Zukofsky, whom both Black Mountain and Language poets saw as an important predecessor. At a screening of a documentary about Zukofsky at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1978, Barrett Watten, who edited one of the first Language journals, *This*, along with Robert Grenier, gave a talk on Zukofsky, which was challenged by Robert Duncan. Watten had argued that Zukofsky's epic *A* was primarily a linguistic construction, and Duncan objected that language cannot be

³²⁹ Ref.

³³⁰ Jerome Rothenberg, "House of Jews: Experimental Modernism and Traditional Jewish Practice", *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, Eds. Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris, Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2010, 36.

³³¹ Bob Perelman, "Addendum: On 'The Jewish Question:' Three Perspectives," *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, Eds. Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris, Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2010, 52.

separated from human life.³³² The Language poets, following French structuralism, objected to the Black Mountain School's belief in an individual who stands outside language and society and is capable of ordering it to suit his or her purposes.

In the 1960s, French theory began to gain popularity in United States literature departments, an event which François Cusset dates to a conference at Johns Hopkins in 1966.³³³ Although they never gained as much attention at home, French philosophers and cultural critics such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Julia Kristeva began to exert significant influence in American literary studies, gaining ground throughout the 1970s and reaching the height of their influence in the 80s and 90s. These theorists argue that “culture functions like a language,” and that individual consciousness is indelibly shaped by the strictures of the culture in which it develops.

As language itself came to occupy a central and rather oppressive role, some of these thinkers began to consider poetic experimentation as an act with more social and cultural significance than previously thought. Julia Kristeva wrote not long after the heady days of the student revolts in Paris in 1968 that writing avant-garde poetry was a revolutionary act equivalent to political protest.³³⁴ Indeed, if society functions according to rules taken from language, it follows that a culture making room for innovative forms of aesthetic expression might also permit the new forms of social relations sought by so many during that time.

This stream of thought may have had particular resonance in the United States in the 1960s not only due to the wave of revolutionary fervor that was felt in many locations but also

³³² Foster, 14.

³³³ François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, Trans. Jeff Fort, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008, 18

³³⁴ Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique: L'Avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (1974), “Revolution in Poetic Language,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, Ed. Toril Moi, Trans. Margaret Waller, New York : Columbia University Press, 1986, 89-136.

due to the revelations of corrupt and deceptive actions on the part of elected officials during the Vietnam War. Skeptical of official rhetoric whose deceptive quality became increasingly apparent, many people sought more trustworthy ways of communicating, even as they sought to reform the political system. The French structuralists' explication of the power of invisible forms of social control rang true for people disenchanted with the conformity of contemporary American culture, and the call to radical forms of poetic practice as a means of protest must have been compelling.

The Language movement took shape out of this environment: a poetic movement that advocated the rejection of cultural and linguistic hierarchies, the arrival of French structuralism, which argued for the centrality of language, and a historical moment of distrust of official language and policy. The writings and theoretical positions of Charles Bernstein, to whom I shall now turn, proceed naturally out of this context, even as they reflect concerns which repeatedly emerge in American Jewish poetry in many different time periods. Bernstein is a poet and scholar who edited the journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* at the very outset of the movement, as well as many anthologies and critical works since then.³³⁵ He remains an active poet to this day, as well as holding the Donald T. Regan chair in English at the University of Pennsylvania. I will begin with an analysis of his poem "Artifice of Absorption," an 80-page critical work in verse that illustrates Bernstein's poetics by means of both form and content. I will then turn to some of his critical works to examine his sense of the political significance of poetry, and conclude with an examination of his recent thinking on the role of avant-garde poetry in Jewish culture. Although he should not be taken as the definitive voice of the Language school, Bernstein's central role in the movement from its inception as well as his reflections on the

335

American Jewish experience specifically make his writings particularly relevant to this investigation of avant-garde American Jewish poetry.

The first thing a reader notices about the poem “Artifice of Absorption” is the apparent contrast between its form and content, which resolves itself as the reader follows it and begins to see the ways in which they actually work together to convey Bernstein’s meaning. It is a poem in free verse, with irregular line breaks, yet from the beginning it conveys the look and feel of a work of literary criticism, rather than self-expression as commonly understood. It begins with the main heading, “The Artifice of Absorption,” a sub-heading, “Meaning and Artifice,” and an epigraph taken from the French Jewish poet Edmond Jabés. The poem opens with a cool, precise, reflective tone that is sustained throughout most of the piece.

The reason it is difficult to talk about
the meaning of a poem – in a way that doesn’t seem
frustratingly superficial or partial – is that by
designating a text a poem, one suggests that its
meanings are bound to be located in some “complex” be-
yond an accumulation of devices and subject matters.³³⁶

The poem postulates the existence of a debate concerning the interpretation of poetry, and contributes to that discussion, properly introducing in the first lines the subject of the debate and the central question the writer will address.

How to categorize this type of writing? Is it criticism or poetry? The work goes on to develop a sustained argument about the way meaning is conveyed in poetic form, drawing on a wide array of critics, just as an academic article would. Yet it also undercuts the seriousness of its critical endeavor almost from the outset. That first passage quoted above ends with the aphorism, “Facts in poetry are primarily / factitious.”³³⁷ One might take that at face value were it

³³⁶ Charles Bernstein, “Artifice of Absorption,” in *A Poetics*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, UP (1992), 9.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

not presented in poetic form itself, with the line break emphasizing the final word to further comedic effect. Is this an intellectual exercise in which a critic adopts the literary form he critiques, even as he critiques it, in order to demonstrate, à la Derrida, that there is no way to achieve a true critical stance, nowhere outside the linguistic system of which avant-poetry is a part? Or is it fundamentally a work of self-expression after all, in which poetic consciousness analyzes itself even as it operates, unable to escape from critical detachment even as it strives for true self-awareness? The poem responds powerfully to both types of reading.

I will begin by approaching the poem as a theoretical proposition, analyzing its arguments about the ways in which poetry communicates, and then proceed to explore the more personal dimensions of the work. This first short section of the poem, separated under the heading “Meaning and Artifice,” devotes itself to countering the stance that formal devices convey no direct semantic meaning, by means of both logical argument and immediate demonstration. One notable example of this occurs during his discussion of the literary critic Veronica Forrest-Thomson’s work *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth Century Poetry*.³³⁸ Bernstein writes,

There is something, however, I find
problematic about Forrest-Thomson’s account. It
seems to me she is wrong to designate the nonlexical,
or more accurately, extralexical
strata of the poem as ‘nonsemantic’: I would say
that such patterns as line breaks, acoustic
patterns, syntax, etc., *are* meaningful rather than,
as she has it, that they *contribute* to the meaning of the poem.³³⁹

This passage stands up perfectly well as a statement without any consideration of the formal elements, here reduced to the bare minimum: the irregular line breaks that separate poetry from

³³⁸ Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth Century Poetry* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978).

³³⁹ Charles Bernstein, “Artifice of Absorption,” 12.

prose. However, consideration of the lines breaks, and the way one would speak the lines aloud shows that the breaks are constructed to emphasize the conversational tone and particular words for ironic effect. Each line breaks roughly in the place in the sentence where a reader would stop and pause for breath and emphasis: before the word problematic, which emphasizes the meaning of the first sentence, before the word seems, which would likely also be emphasized in spoken language, and humorously, breaking the phrase “acoustic patterns,” highlighting the fact that the acoustic pattern here being mentioned is doing just the work that Bernstein is arguing that acoustic patterns are capable of more generally. This use of enjambment brings attention to the written nature of the text, causing the reader to reflect on the mediated nature of the ideas Bernstein conveys. Bernstein makes his point here through the way the poem is written even as he argues that this is a factor of poetry that a literary critic must take into account on the conceptual level of the poem.

Later in this section, Bernstein goes on to write an analysis of another poem, namely P. Inman’s “Waver,” a poem written in the shape of a wave, never breaking from verse form himself. Bernstein argues that in this poem, formal elements are not only essential to understanding the poem, but they actually take precedence over the meaning of the words themselves; not that the meaning of the words is not important, but that it is only after understanding the intent and significance of the poem’s formal structure that the choice of words makes sense and contributes to the reader’s understanding. He concludes this section by criticizing the very process of doing a close reading: “The obvious problem,” Bernstein says, “is that the poem said in any / other way is not the poem.”³⁴⁰ If the formal elements are essential to understanding what the poem is doing, explicating a poem, which necessarily strips away those

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

formal elements, replacing them with the normative language of the scholar, inevitably distorts the meaning.

The aspects of this work discussed above emphasize the intellectual project of the poem: to critique poetry from the subject position of a poet, and consequently to incorporate formalist strategies into the critical discourse. However, the poem cannot be reduced only to its intellectual, intertextual strategies: it is also reflecting on communication from a personal perspective. The closing lines of the poem express this most clearly. The poem concludes:

As writers –
 & everyone inscribes
 in the sense
 I mean here –
 we can
 try to intensify
 our relationships by considering
 how they work: are we putting
 each other to sleep
 or waking each other up;
 & what do we wake to?
 Does our writing stun
 or sting? Do we cling to
 what we've grasped
 too well, or find tunes
 in each new
 departure.³⁴¹

In these lines, Bernstein frames the theoretical poems that preoccupy him throughout the poem as a personal, urgent concern. Are we – those who inhabit this world together – getting through to one another? This conclusion seeks connection – to “intensify our relationships” with one another – by means of intellectual investigation of the means by which we understand each other, namely language. “We can try to intensify our relationships by considering how they work.” The intellectual projects of the poem serve as a means to an end that may be common to most

³⁴¹ Ibid., 88.

poetic efforts, even those that do not use such rarified techniques – reaching true understanding with another.

There is a dread underlying this search for communication as well, expressed in that bleak question “are we putting each other to sleep or waking each other up; & what do we wake to?” There is a fear that in this history we have of misunderstanding each other’s words, we have somehow missed an opportunity to create a better reality. Should we finally be able to understand each other, and see what the world looks like from another’s perspective, we may realize that the true nature of the place we inhabit is far less appealing than the story we were telling ourselves.

The personal dimension of this poem can be seen more clearly in the second section, “Absorption and Impermeability,” than in the first, which maintains its academic tone more consistently. The second section also cites sources and interprets poems, as the first section does, but includes more of the contingent circumstances of the poem – such as where it was first read,³⁴² and the time constraints that limited its composition.³⁴³ This section of the poem’s major departure from normative academic discourse is its use of the word I, frequently to underline the author’s interpretation of a particular word or to clarify his focus. It’s not a particularly personal I; the I takes on more of an intellectual than an emotional identity, but its presence is still remarkable in this kind of discourse. One particularly striking use of the personal pronoun comes toward the end of the poem, in a section reflecting on what the use of the primary terms of this section, namely absorption and impermeability, identified in the title, mean to the author as a poet. He has just been discussing Lyn Hejinian’s work *The Guard*, in particular her view of language as a type of capture, a violent seizure.

³⁴² Ibid., 20.

³⁴³ Ibid., 28.

Such considerations as these
do not resolve my fascination with absorption
& impermeability, which seem to cut to the heart
of my most intimate relations with language.
I find I
enact in my work an oscillating pull
in both directions, cutting into & out of –
en(w)rapment/resistence, enactment/delay, surfeit/
lack, but my suspicion of such polarized terms
introduces a third element of skepticism
about these binary divisions.³⁴⁴

On a visual level, the two larger sections of the poem, which outline his intellectual stance, are divided by the small phrase “I find I,” which mirrors in visual terms the mediation between the binary divisions he discusses. Just as he says his work oscillates between these binaries, the sentence itself represents “find,” an active verb of searching, mediating between two apparently distant “I”s, which are nonetheless identical. Neither absorption nor impermeability is more I than the other.

The terms absorption and impermeability may be understood as options for the individual relating to society as well as poetic strategies. Bernstein points the reader toward that interpretation at the beginning of the section, when he writes

Identity seems to involve the refusal to be absorbed
in a larger identity, yet the identity formed as
a result of an antiabsorptive autonomism
threatens to absorb differential groupings
within it.³⁴⁵

Reflecting on the possibilities for the very process of declaring a separate identity to then suppress further internal division, he concludes that no hierarchy or even clear division can be made between the strategies of absorption and anti-absorption. It is difficult to read these lines

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 71.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 20.

without thinking of the rise of identity politics in America, with its anxieties about individual authenticity and societal cohesion. Bernstein's use of these extremely abstract terms allows him to flit back and forth between the different contexts, whether political, psychological, or poetic, in which these words have meaning, and allow the reader to keep each of these contexts in the back of the mind even while focusing on one specific interpretation.

Bernstein reflects on these issues further with an investigation of *zaum* poetry created by the Russian Futurists Velimir Khlebnikov and Alexei Kruchenykh. These poets intended to create a new language that, through bypassing rational thought, would speak to any human being from any culture on a purely instinctive level. In service of the goal of creating a universal language, they created a poetry that no one from any culture can read. Bernstein comments that this technique, while profoundly antiabsorptive in the sense that it transformed language to the point of incomprehensibility, nevertheless served absorptive ends, namely to include absolutely everyone in the world in a single form of communication. For him, this illustrates the tension, not only within modernist poetry as it strives to communicate even as it critiques conventional forms of communication, but also the tension inherent to American Jewish life, where the consciousness of otherness separates one from the mainstream, even as the nature of that otherness remains a topic open to interpretation.

Bernstein elaborates on this complex sense of Jewish identity further in his critical work. In his essay "State of the Art," which opens the same book – *A Poetics* – in which "Artifice of Absorption" appears, he cites Kafka's famously ambivalent aphorism, "What do I have in common with the Jews? I don't even have anything in common with myself." Here Bernstein draws on the archetypal modernist suspicion of all essentializing identities, only to undercut it in the next sentence, where he comments, "this can itself be understood as a Jewish attitude, but

only if Jewishness is taken as multiplicitous and expressed indirectly.”³⁴⁶ As in his discussion of absorption, Bernstein is drawn to the open space of *zaum*, a universal realm of pure understanding, but remains rooted in the particular and specific. He feels affinity for Kafka’s statement of profound estrangement, yet in the next breath reclaims Jewish identity, casting estrangement itself as a manifestation thereof.

Bernstein is not the only avant garde poet or critic to assume this uneasy posture with regard to Jewish identity. In the recent critical anthology *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, edited by Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris, poets and critics including Charles Bernstein, Jerome Rothenberg, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Marjorie Perloff and Paul Auster reflect on the relationship between innovative literary techniques and a definition of Jewish culture that goes beyond the biological or the religious. These writers see a parallel between pushing the boundaries of communicative language and elaborating a complex and shifting definition of Jewish identity. Several of these writers seek predecessors among the Yiddish poets; notably, Merle Bachman contributes a scholarly essay on Mikhl Likht, who wrote highly ambitious modernist poetry in the mode of Williams and Pound, but was largely unappreciated in Yiddish-speaking circles.

Bachman’s work merits additional comment, since although the look and feel of it could not be farther from Bernstein’s work, it demonstrates many of the same goals and interests. Her essay in the *Radical Poetics* anthology, an investigation and overview of the poetic career of Mikhl Likht, gives scholarly weight and grounding to the inchoate sense shared by many of the contributors to the volume that Yiddish modernist poetry could be seen as a tradition of sorts which pursued avant garde poetics within a Jewish cultural context. Bachman’s essay shows that indeed, generations of American Jews as far back as the 1920s built their own poetic movements

³⁴⁶ Bernstein, “State of the Art,” in *A Poetics*, 7.

considering Anglo-American modernists their predecessors just as much as Yiddish writers such as Nakhman of Bratslav and Sholem Aleichem. Bachman also explores the poet's isolation, from Yiddish readers who found his poetic experiments perplexing and irritating, and from his cohorts in English, to whom his work was incomprehensible on a linguistic level. This theme of isolation speaks to the concerns of many of the contributors to the volume, whose avant-garde work necessarily limits the size of their reading public.

Although it appears traditionally scholarly in tone in the anthology, Bachman's essay first appeared in a book that straddles the line between poetry and criticism, her 2007 work *Recovering Yiddishland: Threshold Moments in American Literature*.³⁴⁷ This critical work treats a number of works of Yiddish and American Jewish literature, including familiar texts such as Abraham Cahan's *Yekl* and Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers*. Yet it begins with an attempt to recreate the experience of one of the Yiddish literary cafes on the Lower East Side, and a personal reflection on what it means to learn Yiddish at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A poet herself, Bachman does not merely report on the history of Yiddish writing in America, but explores what this history means for this generation of American Jews. Although she engages the critical discourse of literary history rather than literary theory, like Charles Bernstein, Bachman does not seem to find either purely aesthetic or purely critical discourse sufficient to express her sensibility.

This demonstrates the continuation of a Yiddish approach to literature on both the level of form and content, in Bachman's case, and just form in Bernstein's case. In the absence of a community of Yiddish speakers and readers, these poets write works that nod to Yiddish literary history. The connection is clearer when the writer writes knowledgably about Yiddish literature,

³⁴⁷ Merle Bachman, *Recovering Yiddishland: Threshold Moments in American Literature*, (Syracuse: Syracuse UP), 2007.

as Bachman does, but Bernstein's work can also be seen as extending the Yiddish poetic tradition into modern American life. In its interest in the function of language, and in the ways in which linguistic questions intersect with those of identity, Bernstein's work reveals continuities with Yiddish writers such as Yehoash and Yankev Glatshteyn.

These poets' creation of a new discourse between criticism and poetry represents the continuation of generations of American Yiddish poets' attempts to create a new type of poetry that represents a divided consciousness completely. Although the type of poetry created appears different in each generation, the impulse to bring fragmentation and multiplicity into full expression remains the same. Despite changing social conditions and linguistic realities, some in each generation find that the complexity inherent in living a Jewish life in America demands a new type of poetic language.

American Jewish poets' focus on formal structures, whether linguistic or poetic, rather than particular subjects or ideologies, reflects the significant changes in the nature of American Jewish life over the past century. Rather than choosing a central set of images or ideas, ones that certainly would have become outdated rather rapidly, identifying form as a central locus of poetic practice allowed these poets to participate fully in a tradition that they could fill out with the sometimes messy reality of their lives. Rather than being bound to certain tropes, formalism has allowed a freedom in American Jewish poetry that reflects the evolving nature of ethnic identity in the twentieth century. Just as American Jewish life in this period reflected considerable diversity and at times, fragmentation, American Jewish poetry finds its unity in the nature of its self-expression, rather than an internal organization.

Conclusion

As this dissertation has shown, American Jewish poets, in both Yiddish and English, have consistently turned to avant-garde poetic techniques to express their inherently complex relationship with language. These strategies remain appealing, from 1890 to 1980, because one aspect of the American Jewish experience did not fundamentally change during this long period: the way in which consciousness of belonging to more than one ethnic group allows for a nuanced and critical engagement with the language of everyday life. Rather than attempting to silence those aspects of themselves that are not easily expressed in the majority language (Yiddish or English), these poets work actively to transform the language in which they live their lives.

In doing this, they draw selectively but knowledgeably on sources in both Anglo-American and Yiddish literature. From Yehoash's ties to Byron to the Introspectivists' engagement with the Young Intellectuals, and from Zukofsky's adaptations of Yehoash to Charles Bernstein, Merle Bachman, and Jerome Rothenberg's references to a talismanic, postvernacular Yiddish, these poets seek to enrich their own work through the inclusion of texts that seem quite foreign, and yet somehow speak directly and immediately to their own concerns. In the very texture of the language itself, this strand of poetry announces its mixed heritage as American and Jewish, a product of both literary traditions and sets of historical conditions.

These poets reveal an aspect of the American Jewish experience unavailable in historical documents, and more difficult to find in prose works. Their refusal to act as mere chroniclers of their age, and experiments with social change, although varied in their levels of influence, illuminate American Jews' active role in shaping history. Far from merely adapting to a new type of literature in a new language upon their arrival in America, or simply tracing the social changes they lived through, these poets participate in shaping a new type of discourse, one that

went on to have a distinct impact on modern American literature. Indeed, their experience, although specific, is hardly unique. As American literature comes to include works written in many languages, across cultures, perhaps these works will come to seem essential to telling the story of the American Jewish experience.

Bibliography

- Adams, Henry. "The Education of Henry Adams." *Novels, Mont Saint Michel, The Education*. New York: Library of America, 1983.
- Ahearn, Barry. "The Aesthetics of 'A.'" Diss. Johns Hopkins, 1978.
- . *Zukofsky's "A": An Introduction*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1983.
- , ed. "Ezra Pound & Louis Zukofsky: Letters, 1928-1930." *Montemora* 8 (1981): 149-83.
- , ed. *Pound/Zukofsky: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky*. New York: New Directions, 1987.
- Allen, Donald, ed. *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*. New York: Grove Press, 1960.
- Alt, Arthur Tilo. "Ambivalence toward modernism: the Yiddish avant-garde and its manifestoes." *Yiddish* 8.1 (1991): 52-62.
- Alter, Robert. "Charles Reznikoff: Between Present and Past." *Defenses of the Imagination: Jewish Writers and Modern Historical Crisis*. By Alter. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977. 119-35.
- . *Necessary Modernity: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Andrews, Bruce, and Charles Bernstein, eds. *The "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" Book*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.
- Bachman, Merle. *Recovering Yiddishland: Threshold Moments in American Literature*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2007.
- Balfour, Ian. *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan, ed. *Reconstructing American Literary History*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986.
- . "America as Canon and Context: Literary History in a Time of Dissensus." *American Literature* 58 (1986): 99-108.
- Benes, Tuska. "Comparative Linguistics as Ethnology: In Search of Indo-Germans in Central Asia, 1770-1830," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 24:4 (2004) 119.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator," In *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn

- New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. 1968. 71-86.
- Bernstein, Charles. Introduction. *Selected Poems: Louis Zukofsky*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Library of America, 2006.
- , ed. *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. New York: Roof, 1990.
- . *A Poetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- . *My Way; Speeches and Poems*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Birnboym, I. "Der zhurnal 'inzikh'." *Pinkes fun der forshung fun der yidisher literatur un prese*. ed. Khayim Bez. New York: Alveltlekhn yidishn kultur-kongres, 1972. 45-46.
- Blake, Casey. "The Young Intellectuals and the Culture of Personality." *American Literary History* 1:3 (1989) 520.
- Blood, Susan. "The Poetics of Expenditure." *MLN* 117.4 French Issue (September 2002) 836-857.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- . "The Sorrows of American Jewish Poetry." *Figures of Capable Imagination*. By Bloom. New York: Seabury, 1976. 247-62.
- Borokhov, Ber. *Shprakh-forshung un literatur-geshikhte*. Ed. Nahman Mayzl. Tel Aviv: Farlag L. Perets, 1966.
- Bourne, Randolph. "The Jew and Trans-National America." *The Menorah Journal* December 1916: 277-84.
- . "Trans-National America." *The Radical Will: Selected Writings, 1911-1918*. New York: Urizen Books, 1977.
- Boyarin, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, eds. *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- . *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Boyarin, Jonathan. *Thinking in Jewish*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- . *Storm From Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992.

- Bradbury, Malcolm & James McFarlane. "Movements, Magazines and Manifestos: The Succession from Naturalism." In: Malcolm Bradbury & James McFarlane, eds. *Modernism 1890-1930*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976. 192-205.
- Calhoun, Charles C. *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004
- Casteel, Sarah Phillips. "Jews Among Indians: The Fantasy of Indigenization in Mordecai Richler's and Michael Chabon's Northern Narratives." *Contemporary Literature* 50:4 (Winter 2009), 775-810.
- Chang, Shoou-Huey. "China-Rezeption auf Jiddisch : zu den Li-Tai-Po-Übersetzungen." *Jiddistik Mitteilungen* 18 (1997): 1-16.
- Cohen, Nathan. "The Yiddish Press and Yiddish Literature: A Fertile but Complex Relationship." *Modern Judaism* 28.2 (2008) 149-172.
- Conn, Peter. *The Divided Mind: Ideology and Imagination in America, 1898-1917*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Crawford, Robert. *Devolving English Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Cusset, François. *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, Trans. Jeff Fort, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry 1908-1934*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- and Peter Quartermain, eds. *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999.
- de Man, Paul. "Shelley Disfigured." *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.
- Diner, Hasia. *The Jews of the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Douglas, Ann. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996.
- Eliot, T.S. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*. Ed. Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt, 1956.
- Ellingson, Terry Jay. *The Myth of the Noble Savage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Estraikh, Gennady. "Has the 'golden chain' ended? Problems of continuity in Yiddish writing." *Yiddish in the Contemporary World* (1999): 119-132.

- Fein, Richard J. "Glatshiteyn's critical motive." *Yiddish* 9.2 (1994): 5-11.
- Feldman, Yael S. *Modernism and Cultural Transfer: Gabriel Preil and the tradition of Jewish literary bilingualism*. Cincinnati : Hebrew Union College Press ; Hoboken, N.J. : Distributed by KTAV Pub. House, 1986.
- . "Jewish Literary Modernism and Language Identity: The Case of "In Zikh." *Yiddish* 6.1 (1985): 45-54.
- Finkelstein, Norman. "Jewish-American Modernism and the Problem of Identity: With Special Reference to the Work of Louis Zukofsky." *Scroggins* 65-79.
- Fishman, David. *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005.
- Fishman, Joshua A. "Mother Tongue Claiming in the United States Since 1960," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. 50 (1984): 21-99.
- . "Vos vet vayter zayn? Vos vet undz noch blaybn?" *Afn shvel* April-June (1983): 2-4.
- Foster, Edward Halsey. *Understanding the Black Mountain Poets*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.
- Fredman, Stephen. *A Menorah for Athena: Charles Reznikoff and the Jewish Dilemmas of Objectivist Poetry*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001.
- Fuks, Chaim Leyb, "Yehoyesh," *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, 4ter band, Eds. Shmuel Niger and Joseph Shatsky, Nyu-york: alveltlekhen yidishn kultur-kongres, 1961, 237-242.
- Glantz-Leyeles, Arn. *Introspektivizm bi-Nyu York : kolel mivhar shire A. Leyeles*. Ed. Benjamin Harshav. Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibuts ha-meuhad, 1997.
- Glatshiteyn, Yankev. *Di freyd fun yidishn vort*. Nyu-York: Der Kval, 1961.
- . *Fun mayn gantser mi 1919-1956*. Nyu-York: Martin Press, 1956.
- . *Prost un poshet: literarishe eseyen*. Ed. Berl Kohen. Nyu York: F. Glatshiteyn, 1978.
- . "A short review of Yiddish poetry." *Yiddish* 1 (1973): 30-39.
- , A. Leyeles, and N. B. Minkov, "Introspectivism", Trans. Anita Norich, in *American Yiddish Poetry*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 776.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Conversations with Eckermann (1823-1832)*. Tr. John Oxenford, San Francisco: North Point, 1984.

Goldsmith, Emanuel S. *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997.

---. *Architects of Yiddishism at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: A Study in Jewish Cultural History*. London-New York: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1976.

Harshav, Benjamin, ed. *Explorations in poetics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007.

---. *The polyphony of Jewish culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007.

---. *Ha-Tarbut ha-aḥeret : Yidish yeha-siaḥ ha-Yehudi*. Trans. Zivah Ben-Porat. Yerushalayim; Karmel; Ramat-Aviv: ha-Makhon ha-Yisreeli le-poetikah yese-myotikah a. sh. Porter, Universitat Tel-Aviv, 2006.

---. *Manifestim shel modernizm*. Yerushalayim : Karmel, 2001.

---. *Meaning of Yiddish*. Berkeley : U of California P, 1990.

---, and Barbara, eds. *American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

---, and Barbara, eds. and trans. *Sing, Stranger: A Century of American Yiddish Poetry*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Hellerstein, Kathryn. "From "ikh" to "zikh": a journey from "I" to "self" in Yiddish poems by women." *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature* (1992): 113-143.

Herder, Johann Gottfried von. *Philosophical Writings*. Ed. and trans. Michael N. Forster, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

---. *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. Toronto: University of Toronto Libraries, 2011.

Hindus, Milton, ed. *Charles Reznikoff: Man and Poet*. Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation: 1984.

---. ed. *Selected Letters of Charles Reznikoff 1917-1976*. Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1997.

Hofer, Yekhiel. "N. B. Minkov," *Di goldene keyt* 22 (1955) 90.

Hollander, John. "The Question of American Jewish Poetry." *What is Jewish Literature?* Ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994, 39.

Hollinger, David. *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Howe, Irving. "The Culture of Modernism." *The Decline of the New*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971.

---, Ruth R. Wise, and Khone Shmeruk. *Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*. New York, NY : Viking, 1987.

---. *World of Our Fathers*. New York: Schocken, 1976.

--- and Eliezer Greenberg, eds. *Voices from the Yiddish*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1972.

Hunkler, Thomas. "'Cultural Hegemony and Avant-Garde Rivalry: The Ambivalent Reception of Futurism in France, England, and Russia.'" *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde, 1906-1940*. Eds. Sacha Bru and Gunther Martens. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, Avant-Garde Critical Studies 19, 2006. 203-216.

Jackson, Virginia. "Longfellow's Tradition, or Picture-Writing the Nation," in *Modern Language Quarterly* 1998, 483.

Jakobson, Roman. "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." In *Language in Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987.

James, Henry. *The American Scene*, in *Collected Travel Writings: Great Britain and America*. Ed. Richard Howard. New York: Library of America, 1993.

Jeshurin, Ephim H. *Yehoash bibliografye*. In *Yehoash: der dikhter-filosof fun zayt, fun vert, un fun verde*. Ed. Shmuel Rozshanski. Buenos-Ayres: Yoysef Lifshits fond fun der literatur-gezelschaft baym Yivo, 1965. Vol. 25 of *Musterverk fun der yidisher literatur*. 100 vols. 1956-1985. 301-316.

Kallen, Horace. "Nationality and the Hyphenated American." *Menorah Journal* 1.2 (1915): 79-86.

---. "Democracy versus the Melting Pot" (1915), in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, ed. Werner Sollers (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 67-92.

Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

Kijek, Kamil. "Max Weinreich, Assimilation, and the Social Politics of Jewish Nation-Building," *East European Jewish Affairs*, 41:1-2, 28.

Klapper, Melissa R. "The History of Jewish Education in America, 1700-2000," Chapter 8, *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008. 189-

216.

Klepfisz, Irena. *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue: Poems Selected and New (1971-1990)*. Portland: The Eighth Mountain Press, 1993.

Klimova, Svetlana. "Russian Byronism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *The Byron Journal*, Issue 2, 2010 (157-67).

Kristeva, Julia. *The Kristeva Reader*, Ed. Toril Moi, Trans. Margaret Waller, New York : Columbia University Press, 1986.

Kronfeld, Chana. *On the Margins of Modernism*, Berkeley: U of California P, 1996.

Krutikov, Mikhail. *Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905-1914*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001.

Levinson, Julian. "Walt Whitman among the Yiddish poets." *Tikkun* 18.5 (2003): 57-58, 69.

---. *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

Leyeles, Aaron Glantz. *Velt un vort*. New York: Tsiko bikher-farlag, 1958.

---. "A por verter." *Inzikh* 3:1 (1928) 15.

Longfellow, Henry David. *Dos lid for Hayavata*. Trans. Yehoash. Nyu York: Farlag Yehoash, 1910.

Loy, Mina. *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*. Roger L. Conover, ed. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1996.

---. "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose." In *Anthology of Twentieth-Century British & Irish Poetry*. Ed. Keith Tuma. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. 85-91.

Mann, Barbara. "Jewish imagism and the "Mosaic negative." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 11.3 (2004): 282-291.

---. "Toward an Understanding of Jewish Imagism," *Religion and Literature* 30.3, Jewish Diasporism: The Aesthetics of Ambivalence (Autumn, 1998), 23-45.

Messerli, Douglas, ed. *Language Poetries*. New York: New Directions, 1987.

Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

- Tony Michels. *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Miller, Stephen Paul and Daniel Morris. *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2010.
- Minkoff, N. B. *Idishe klasiker poetr: esseyen*. Nyu-York : Farlag "Bodn", 1937.
- . "Refleksie." *In Zikh* 3:1 (1920) 129.
- . "Yehoash: tsu zayn 25stn yortsayt." *Kultur un dertseylung*. (February 1952): 9.
- Mintz, Alan. Introduction. *Hebrew in America*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993. 17-27.
- Miron, Dan. *Image of the shtetl and other studies of modern Jewish literary imagination*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse UP, 2000.
- . *A Traveler Disguised: A Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Schocken Books, 1973.
- Moore, Dafydd. *Ossian and Ossianism*. 4 vols. Ed. Dafydd Moore. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Moore, Deborah Dash. *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews*. New York: Columbia UP, 1981.
- Mukdani, A. "Yehoash," *Di goldene keyt* 27 (1955), 68.
- Nelson, Cary. *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989.
- Niger, Samuel. *Yidishe shrayber fun tsvantsikstn yorhundert*. Nyu York: Aroysgegebn fun Alveltlekhn Yidishn kultur-kongres, 1972.
- . Kritik un kritiker. Buenos Ayres: Argentinert optayl fun Alveltlekhn Yidishn kultur-kongres, 1959.
- . *Di tsveyshprakhikayt fun undzer literatur*. Detroyt: Luis Lamed fond, 1941.
- Norich, Anita. "Yiddish Literary Studies." *Modern Judaism* 10.3 (1990): 297-309.
- . *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and American Jewish Culture During the Holocaust* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- North, Michael. *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century*

Literature. NY: Oxford UP, 1994.

Norton, Robert Edward. "The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 68:4 (October 2007) 640-44.

---. "Isaiah Berlin's "Expressionism," or: 'Ha! Du bist das Blökende!'" *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 69:2 (April 2008) 347.

Nowersztern, Abraham. "Yiddish poetry in a new context." *Prooftexts* 8.3 (1988) 355-363.

Opatoshu, Y. "Leyeles." *Di goldene keyt* (1949): 121.

Oppenheim, James. "Poetry – Our First National Art." *The Dial* (Feb 1920) 238-242.

Ozick, Cynthia. *Art and Ardor*. New York : Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1983.

---. *Metaphor and Memory*. New York : Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1989.

---. "Envy; or, Yiddish in America." *A Cynthia Ozick Reader*. Ed. Elaine M. Kauvar. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996. 20-63.

Perelman, Bob. *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996.

---. "Addendum: On 'The Jewish Question:' Three Perspectives," *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, Eds. Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris, Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2010. 49-59.

Perloff, Marjorie. *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.

---. "The Contemporary of Our Grandchildren: Pound's Influence." In *Ezra Pound among the Poets*. Ed. George Bornstein. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985. 195-229.

---. "English As a 'Second' Language: Mina Loy's 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose.'" In *Mina Loy: Essays on the Poetry*. Keith Tuma and Maera Schreiber, eds. Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1998.

---. "Charles Olson and the "Inferior Predecessors": "Projective Verse" Revisited," *ELH*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Summer, 1973), 285.

Pianko, Noam. "'The True Liberalism of Zion:' Horace Kallen, Jewish Nationalism, and the Limits of American Pluralism," *American Jewish History* 90:4 (December 2008) 299-329.

- Pound, Ezra. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. T. S. Eliot, ed. London: Faber & Faber, 1954.
- Quartermain, Peter. *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Ramazani, Jahan. "A Transnational Poetics." *American Literary History* 18.2 (2006) 336.
- Reisman, Jerry. "On Some Conversations with Celia Zukofsky." *Sagetrieb: A Journal Devoted to Poets in the Imagist/Objectivist Tradition* 10.3 (1991): 139-50.
- Reusch, Johann J. K. "Germans as Noble Savages and Castaways: Alter Egos and Alterity in German Collective Consciousness During the Long Eighteenth Century." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42:1 (Fall 2008), 113-116.
- Reznikoff, Charles. *Poems 1918-1975. The Complete Poems of Charles Reznikoff*. Ed. Seamus Cooney. 2 vols. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1976-77.
- Rischin, Moses. *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Roskies, David. *Bridge of longing : the lost art of Yiddish storytelling*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Roth, Henry. *Call It Sleep*. 1934. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991.
- Rothenberg, Jerome. "Ethnopoetics & Politics / The Politics of Ethnopoetics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof, 1990.
- . "House of Jews: Experimental Modernism and Traditional Jewish Practice", *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture*, Eds. Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris, Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2010, 32-9.
- Rachel Rubenstein, "Going Native, Becoming Modern: American Indians, Walt Whitman, and the Yiddish Poet," in *American Quarterly* 58:2 (June 2006), 431-43.
- Sadan, Dov. *Ha-oreg: al shirat yehoash*. Yerushalayim: Mosad Byalik, 1957.
- Schimmel, Harold. "Zuk. Yehoash David Rex." *Terrell* 235-45.
- Scroggins, Mark. *Upper Limit Music: The Writing of Louis Zukofsky*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1997.
- . *The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky*. Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2007.

- . *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998.
- Schlegel, Friedrich von. "Athenaeum Fragments." *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, Trans. Peter Firchow, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971, 161-240.
- Seidman, Naomi. *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1997.
- Shaked, Gershon. "Alexandria: On Jews and Judaism in America," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 49 (1989): 47-84.
- Shandler, Jeffrey. *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Youth in Poland Before the Holocaust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- . *Keepers of Accounts: The Practice of Inventory in Modern Jewish Life*, Volume 17 of the David W. Beilin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2010), 19-20.
- . *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- . "On the frontiers of Ashkenaz: translating into Yiddish, then and now." *Judaism* 54.1-2 (2005): 3-12.
- Shreiber, Maera Y. "The End of Exile: Jewish Identity and Its Diasporic Poetics." *PMLA* 113.2 (1998) 273-287.
- Shulman, Eliyahu. "Der vikuakh tsvishn a. leyeles un sh. niger vegn 'inzikhizm.'" *Portretn un etyudn*, Ed. Eliyahu Shulman. Tsiko bikher-farlag, 1979, 196-209.
- . *Geshikhte fun der yiddisher literatur in amerike*. New York: W. Biderman 1943.
- Silliman, Ron. Introduction. *In the American Tree*. Ed. Ron Silliman. Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986.
- Singer, Isaac Bashevis. Nobel lecture, given in Stockholm, December 8, 1978.
- . "Problems of Yiddish Prose in America." 1943, Trans. Robert H. Wolf. *Prooftexts* 9:1 (January 1989), 5-12.
- Sollers, Werner, ed. *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Stanley, Sandra Kunamoto. *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of a Modern*

- American Poetics*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994.
- Steinberg, Stephen. *The Academic Melting Pot: Catholics and Jews in American Higher Education*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.
- Steiner, George. "Our Homeland, The Text." In *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1996*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996. 307-324.
- Terrell, Carroll F. *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet*. Nat. Poetry Foundation, Orono, ME, 1979.
- . "A Bibliography of Works about Louis Zukofsky with Extended Commentary." In Terrell, 401-38.
- Tomas, John. "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Jew: Zukofsky's Poem Beginning 'The' in Context." *Sagetrieb: A Journal Devoted to Poets in the Imagist/Objectivist Tradition* 9.1-2 (1990): 43-64.
- Torah, Nevi'im u-Ketuvim*. Trans. Yehoash. New York: Congress for Jewish Culture, 1982-1985.
- Trachtenberg, Alan. "Babe in the Yiddish woods: 'Dos Lied fun Hiavat'a.'" *Judaism*, 50.3 (2001): 331-340.
- . *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans 1880-1930*. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux: New York, 2004.
- Untermeyer, Louis. "The Jewish Spirit in Modern American Poetry." *Menorah Journal* 7.3 (1921): 121-32.
- Vitkevits, Bertshi. *Yehoash: a bibliografye fun zayne shriftn*. Klivland: A. Kohen, 1944.
- Weinreich, Max. *History of the Yiddish Language*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Wellek, Rene. *History of Modern Criticism: The Later Eighteenth Century*. vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Whorf, Benjamin Lee. "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language." *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: Florida State P, 1986, 710-724.
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana, ed. *What is Jewish Literature?* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994.
- . *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

- Wisse, Ruth. *A Little Love in Big Manhattan*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988.
- . "Language as Fate: Reflections on Jewish Literature in America." *Studies in Contemporary Jewry: An Annual*. Vol. 12. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. 129-47.
- Yehoash. *Gezamelte lider*, Nyu-york: Farlag Oyfgang, 1927.
- . *Yehoash: der dikhter-filosof fun zayt, fun vert, un fun verde*. Ed. Shmuel Rozshanski. Buenos-Ayres: Yoysef Lifshits fond fun der literatur-gezelschaft baym Yivo, 1965. Vol. 25 of *Musterverk fun der yidisher literatur*. 100 vols. 1956-1985.
- . *A bintl Yehoash briv*. New York: Farlag badn, 1937.
- . *The Feet of the Messenger*. Trans. Isaac Goldberg. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1923.
- . *In geveb*. Nyu York: Farlag oyfgang, 1919-1921.
- . *Fun nyu-york biz rehovot un tsurik*. Nyu York: Farlag oyfgang, 1917.
- . "Der dikhter - der zeer." *Di tsukunft* April 1910, 225.
- Yehoash and Chaim Spivak, eds. *Idish verterbukh*. Nyu York: Farlag Yehoash, 1911.
- . *Idish verterbukh*. New York: Veker, 1926.
- Yehoash-Dvorkin, Chana. Untitled. *Di goldene keyt* (1949): 10.
- Zhitlowsky, Chaim. *Geklibene verk*. Ed. Yudl Mark. New York: Tsiko, 1955.
- . *Ale verk*. Nyu York: Ikuf, 1951-1957.
- . "Vegn dem vert fun iberzetsung." Introduction. *Dos Lid fun Hiavata*, trans. Yehoash [Solomon Bloomgarden]. New York: Farlag Yehoash, 1910, v-xxvi.
- Zukofsky, Celia. *A bibliography of Louis Zukofsky*. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1969.
- Zukofsky, Louis.. "Sincerity and Objectification: With Special Reference to the Works of Charles Reznikoff." *Poetry*. 37 (1931): 272-85.
- . "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931." *Poetry*. 37 (1931): 268-72.
- , ed. *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* 37.5 (February 1931).

---, ed. *An "Objectivists" Anthology.* Le Beausset, France: TO, Publishers, 1932.

---. "A." 1978. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1993.

---. *Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays of Louis Zukofsky.* Expanded Ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 1981.

---. *Complete Short Poetry.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991.

---. *All: The Collected Short Poems, 1923-1958.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1965.

---. *Autobiography.* New York: Grossman, 1970.

Zukofsky, Paul. "Louis Zukofsky's Marginalia" *Chicago Review* 50.2-4 (2004-2005): 100-03.