

# Transnational Ashkenaz

## Yiddish culture after the Holocaust

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After the Holocaust's near complete destruction of European Yiddish cultural centres, the Yiddish language was largely viewed as a remnant of the past, tragically eradicated in its prime. This article reveals that, on the contrary, for two and a half decades following the Holocaust Yiddish culture was in dynamic flux. Yiddish writers and cultural organisations maintained a staggering level of activity in fostering publications and performances, collecting archival and historical materials, and launching young literary talents. This article provides a cultural historical map of a Yiddish transnational network that derived its unity from the common purpose of commemorating and bearing witness to the destruction of the Jewish heartland in Central and Eastern Europe.

Yiddish culture after the Holocaust is an exemplar of the inherent ability of Ashkenaz – the Hebrew name for the thousand year old Yiddish speaking civilization in Europe – to regenerate and renew itself in response to destruction. The myth of 'the Holocaust as the end of Yiddish' has, in many ways, been more resilient than 'the myth of silence'. Recently, this 'myth of silence' and the absence of Jewish public responses to the Holocaust until the 1961 Eichman trial, has been rejected as being contrary to historical evidence (Diner 2009, Cesarani and Sundquist 2012). As I argue in my recently published *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* (Schwarz 2015), Yiddish writers' activities, initiatives, and forward-looking cultural work in response to the Holocaust demonstrate the exact opposite of 'the myth of silence'. The masses of Yiddish-speaking Jewry in Eastern Europe, along with their cultural infrastructures had indeed been annihilated by 1945. However, a transnational cadre of Yiddish cultural activists and survivors ensured that the 'golden chain' continued. *Di goldene keyt* ('The Golden Chain') was the title of a 1907 modernist drama in which 'the father' of Yiddish literature I. L. Peretz (1859–1915) depicted the decline of a multi-generational Hasidic dynasty. Avrom Sutzkever, the poet, partisan and survivor of the Vilna ghetto, used *Di goldene keyt* as the name for the Yiddish literary journal which he edited in 146 volumes between 1949–95 in Tel Aviv. In this way the poet highlighted the transmission of Peretz's vision for a modern Yiddish culture to the newly founded Jewish State.

The myth of ‘the end of Yiddish after the Holocaust’ is based on the expectation that the Yiddish cultural world map of 1939, with its almost eleven million Yiddish speakers on three continents, would remain the measure against which the post-1945 period would necessarily fall short (Wasserstein 2012). In fact, there was an actual increase in Yiddish cultural activity in the 1940s and 1950s, due to Yiddish writers’ urgent sense of mission to commemorate and memorialize the people and places that had been destroyed. In many cases, this collective sense of duty overcame the political fragmentation and balkanization of post-Holocaust Yiddish culture.

Recent studies of the main post-1945 Yiddish cultural centres – Moscow, Montreal, New York, Buenos Aires, Paris, and Tel Aviv – have enhanced our understanding of the dynamic interchange between the local and the global that has sustained Yiddish culture throughout its modern existence.<sup>1</sup> The transnational network enabled Yiddish writers to maintain their creativity, readership, and financial support after the Holocaust. Ultimately this multi-centred network provided the surviving Yiddish writers with escape routes to new locations overseas. After the Holocaust, the far-flung *ashkenazi* dispersion made it possible for Yiddish culture to recover some of its previous scope.

As they migrated from the Ashkenaz territories in Europe to the New World, Yiddish writers brought with them an inner cultural map of local, geographically dispersed Yiddish centres: a transnational Ashkenaz. In the post-1945 period, this map of the world became increasingly virtual. It became an ‘imagined community’ or ‘quasi-territory’ (*kemoy-teritorye*) consisting of Yiddish literary, musical, theatrical, and other artistic works that filled the void left behind after the destruction of Ashkenaz in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> This rich cultural outpouring articulated the collective, ‘phantom pain’ they experienced after the bodies of the Jewish nation had been burned to ashes in Europe. The ghostly presence of characters inhabiting a world that had ceased to exist resulted in the creation of Yiddish magical realism or supernaturalism in the stories and novels of Leib Rochman, Avrom Sutzkever, and Yitskhok Bashevis (Isaac Bashevis Singer in English). Similarly, the novelists Chaim

1 On Yiddish culture in Paris post-1945, e.g. Perego 2016, Paris de Bollardi re 2016 in Poland and the Soviet Union, Estraykh 2008, Murav 2011, Shneer 2011, and Gr zinger and Ruta 2008. About Yiddish in Israel, e.g., Chaver 2004, Pilowsky 1991, Pinsker 2007 and 2013, Bar-Am 2014. On post-1945 Yiddish culture in Montreal see Margolis 2010/11.

2 The Yiddish literary critic Borekh Rivkin coined the term *kemoy-teritorye* (‘quasi-territory’) to describe the deterritorialized Jewish diaspora as the paradigm for Yiddish cultural production and distribution (Rivkin 1948: 145–91).

Grade, Chava Rosenfarb, and Mordechai Strigler erected mimetic replicas in their search for lost worlds.

A transnational network gave a cadre of major Yiddish writers, and hundreds of minor ones, the support and impetus to create works at the highest artistic level, even as vernacular Yiddish was undergoing a rapid decline. The 'silver age' of the Yiddish book after 1945 represents the culmination of the great achievements of a group of literary artists who brought to fruition the cultural agendas, the visions, and the potential that originated in the golden age of Yiddish culture prior to and during World War II.<sup>3</sup> The artistic achievements of these writers are independent of the decline of vernacular Yiddish. In fact, the increasingly post-vernacular character of Yiddish, the result of a major decline in Yiddish-language proficiency among second- and third-generation Israeli, American, European and Russian Jews, has been detrimental to the ability of scholars to access Yiddish source material. In the words of the late historian David Cesarani:

Millions of Jews around the world spoke Yiddish as their first language [post-1945]. The existence of the Yiddish-speaking Jewish Diaspora facilitated the rapid translation and distribution of key texts. Scholarship in Yiddish flourished. However, the precipitous decline of Yiddish and the contraction of language competency closed off much of this source material, finally creating the illusion that it had never even existed. Sheer ignorance and linguistic ineptitude, from the 1970s to the 1990s, was more important than prejudice in the 1940s and 1950s. (Cesarani and Sundquist 2012: 11)

The artistic treasures of Yiddish culture after 1945 will have a long afterlife, and almost all of them are available only in Yiddish. A small proportion of Yiddish sources have been published in English translation (estimated by the National Yiddish Book Center at less than 2 per cent of the total of published Yiddish books), but many of these are highly questionable in terms of quality and selection. There has been a tendency to translate a relatively small body of canonical works multiple times. As the historian Cecile Kuznitz points out: 'If, as some maintain, the future of Yiddish is in translation, this will be a much diminished version of a rich culture; it is the responsibility of Yiddish scholars to insist on presenting that culture in all its depth and variety' (Kuznitz 2002: 560). As a result, the role of the Yiddish scholar has increasingly become that of

3 Usage of the term 'Silver Age' to refer to the Yiddish works produced during the quarter century following the end of World War II was suggested by Zachary Baker (2004: iii).

guide, translator, and purveyor of certain culturally specific quality standards to a readership with almost no prior knowledge of Jewish languages and cultures. Similarly, *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* is an interpretative act of cultural transmission that includes many translated excerpts of Yiddish poems, prose, and critical writing. It contributes to post-vernacular Yiddish culture, while seeking to draw some readers to Yiddish primary and secondary sources.

According to the Jewish bibliographer Zachary Baker, Yiddish publishing after 1945 ‘continued to exert an incontrovertible force and vitality’; however, the irreversible demographic trend of aging writers and readers, and the lack of replenishment by a new generation, led to the creation of several Yiddish publication centres, ‘that functioned on a far more limited scale compared to what came before, centers that emerged suddenly, flourished for a decade or two, and then rapidly declined’ (Baker 2004: 60, 62). The Argentine book series *Dos poylishe yidntum* (‘Polish Jewry’) was a typical example of Yiddish publishing after the Holocaust, both in terms of its prolific output of 175 volumes over twenty years (1946–66), and in the way it was implemented by its main editor Mark Turkov, who took full advantage of the cultural and economic circumstances that benefitted Yiddish book publishing in Buenos Aires.

Contemporaneously, the Communist sponsored and controlled Yidishbukh (‘Yiddish Book’) publishing house in Warsaw issued over 300 volumes of new and classic works in Yiddish during the 1950s and 1960s, until the antisemitic purges in 1968 put an end to Jewish culture in Poland (Nalewajko-Kulikow 2008: 111–45). In a 1947 article Abraham Mitlberg, secretary and co-editor of *Dos poylishe yidntum*, delineated the close co-operation between *Dos poylishe yidntum* and the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland. This led to the shipment of hundreds of books to survivors in Poland and the DP camps. In some cases, titles were published simultaneously in Yiddish and in Polish. The transnational scope of the book series was a significant departure from pre-Holocaust Yiddish publishing in Argentina, which had an almost entirely local character. The ascendance of Buenos Aires as an international centre for Yiddish publishing was made possible by a convergence of circumstances: the strong leadership of Mark Turkov and Abraham Mitlberg; the existence of a worldwide readership for Yiddish books about the literature, history, and destruction of Polish Jewry; and, most importantly, sufficient funds raised locally to support the endeavour. Mitlberg summarized the situation:

We feel deeply that we are implementing a historical mission in the Yiddish publishing industry, by elevating the importance of the Yiddish book;

by creating an address for Yiddish writers and familiarizing a worldwide Yiddish readership with the tragically terminated chapter of the martyr-logical history of Polish Jewry (Turkov 1947: 12).

Approximately 80 per cent of the 175 books in *Dos poylishe yidntum* can be more or less evenly divided into three categories: Holocaust memoirs and scholarship, life-writing and fiction. Most of the Holocaust books are memoirs and personal accounts and many of them are based on original documents (diaries and testimonies). Life-writing consists mostly of Jewish writers' recollections of Polish Jewish life including accounts of the writer's family background. Holocaust and life-writing are evenly distributed from the beginning to the end of the series. Some works of fiction overlap with the Holocaust category such as works by young surviving writers including Mordechai Strigler, Yehuda Elberg, and Eliezer (Elie) Wiesel, whose literary memoirs were based on their Holocaust experiences.

The discussion of novels and short stories began in earnest with Y. Y. Trunk's *Di yidishe proze in poyln* ('Yiddish Prose in Poland', 1949, vol. 52) after which fiction regularly appeared in the series in the form of reprinted Yiddish classics that had originally been published before the Holocaust. Folklore consisted chiefly of Hasidic customs and stories; historical works included *yizker*-style books (commemorative volumes about the destroyed Jewish communities) as well as scholarly writing by historians such as Philip Friedman, Yankev Shatski, Bernard Mark and Emanuel Ringelblum. Three collections of first-rate poetry featured Chaim Grade and Rokhl Korn, who had survived in the Soviet Union.

In a brief introduction, Leibush Lehrer summarized the contents of the *Bibliography of Yiddish Books About Destruction and Heroism*, published by Yad Vashem in 1962. Of the 1,900 titles included in the bibliography, 83 per cent of them consisted of, in equal parts, documents and descriptions, fiction and other art forms. Only 274 of the titles examine the Holocaust in an analytical and scholarly manner. As is the case with the *Dos poylishe yidntum* series, it was the 'emotional history' of these books that made them a unique and authentic Jewish response to the catastrophe. In Y. Robinson's introduction to the bibliography: 'The importance of Holocaust literature in Yiddish is not predicated on its literary qualities, but on its unmediated depiction of personal experiences' (*Bibliography of Yiddish Books* 1962: xii).

As demonstrated in *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust*, the history of post-war Yiddish culture is largely the history of a small cadre of surviving writers whose works, performances, and cultural leadership as editors of and contributors to the Yiddish press decisively shaped the Yiddish cultural

shifts after 1945, both in the original Yiddish and in translation. The individual came to stand in for the collective in the overseas Yiddish centres. Regardless of the surviving Yiddish writers' original institutional and political affiliations, however – be it YIVO in Vilna, the Yiddish Writer's Union on Tlomatske 13 in Warsaw, or Communist state culture in the Soviet Union – the memory of a transnational Yiddish cultural network remained dominant in the Cold War period. The term 'a culture of retrieval', coined by the Jewish historian Eli Lederhendler, characterizes Yiddish transnational culture as a paradigmatic memory site (Lederhendler 2001). Yiddish writers and cultural workers retrieved old ideological divisions, and re-figured them so that they would serve radically different ideological and commemorative functions in the post-war world. The surviving Yiddish writers became the primary bearers of the traumatic war experiences, embodying and articulating the 'phantom pains' which were all that remained in the absence of a living and breathing Ashkenazi civilization in Central and Eastern Europe.

*Dos poylishe yidntum* book series includes several memoirs about Tlomatske 13, the address of the Union of Yiddish Writers and Journalists in Warsaw between 1916–38. These memoirs indicate the importance of Tlomatske 13 in preserving the memory of a Yiddish transnational centre. Penning his memoirs of Tlomatske 13 as a refugee in Shanghai in June 1946, Ber Rozen begins:

Nisht New York un avade nisht – Moskve, nor Varshe mit ire beerekh fir hundert registirte feder-mentshn, mit ire bikher un tsaytungs-farlagn in Varshe vi oyf der provints, mit ir yerlekhn normal nokhvuks fun naye un yunge talantirte shrayber-koykhes un afile mit di hunderter grafomanen, vos hobn dem nokhvuks keseyder bagleyt; Varshe iz geven der velt-tsenter fun yidishn gaystikn shafn un Tlomatske 13 iz geven der nomen fun der firme.

Not New York and obviously not Moscow, but Warsaw with its approximately four hundred registered writers, with their books and newspaper-publishers in Warsaw and in the provinces; with its annual regular renewal of new and young talented writer forces and even with the hundreds of scribblers which constantly accompanied the renewal; Warsaw was the world center of Yiddish intellectual creation and Tlomatske 13 was the name of the company. (Rozen 1950: 9)<sup>4</sup>

4 Similarly a slew of memoirs in *Dos poylishe yidntum* and other publications recreate Tlomatske 13 as the world centre of Yiddish culture between the two world wars. They include Zusman Segalovitsh, *Tlomatske 13. Fun farbretn nekhtn* (1946, vol.

Tlomatske 13 secretary Melech Ravitch reproduces in his memoir *Dos Mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn* ('The Book of Stories of my Life', 1975) a membership list and a record of the *shtetlekh* (towns in Central and Eastern Europe with a significant Jewish population) he visited on lecture tours of inter-war Poland. The former is an alphabetical list of 254 names of members of Tlomatske 13 compiled on March 20, 1928. Melech Ravitch gave lectures during the inter-war period in Polish towns and cities that are listed and marked on a map of Poland in his memoirs. Like the world map of YIVO branches that greeted the American Jewish historian Lucy Davidowicz during her visit to the YIVO headquarters in Vilna in 1938–9,<sup>5</sup> Ravitch's dotted map of Jewish towns in Poland clustering around Warsaw's Tlomatske 13 graphically delineates the idea of Yiddish culture as a transnational centre, with a centre and a periphery:

In Rusland farfestikt zikh take di yidishe literatur vi a kestkind fun der melukhe. Ober in Poyln farfestikt zikh di yidishe literatur vi a kestkind fun der proletarisher yidisher gezelschaftlekhkayt. Bund, Poale-Tsien, Fareynikte, Folkistn un stam folk. Oykh di groyse tsienistishe masn leynen a sakh yidishe literatur. Do in Poyln zenen do gezelschaftleke yidishe farlagn, un es iz do a tsentrale yidishe shul-organisatsye Tsisho, un es iz do oykh a komertsiel yidish farlag-vezn. Men ken do lebn. Un es iz do stam pereferye. Un tsu di referatn, vos vern organizirt durkh dem Fareyn fun yidishn literatn un zshurnalistn oyf Tlomatske 13, kumen hunderter yunge mentshn un shlingn, shlingn dorshtike di naye yidishe literatur in zeyer loshn un zey orientirn zikh in ir problematik. Un zey vartn oyf dem nayem, dem derleyzndikn vort.

9), Nakhmen Mayzel, *Geven amol a lebn: dos yidishe kultur-lebn in Poyln tvishn beyde velt-milkhomes* (1951, vol. 71) and Ravitch's *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn* (vol. 161 and 171, 1962 and 1964), Y. Y. Trunk's memoir *Poyln. Zikhbroynes un bilder* (1944–53) and memoirs by Yitskhok Bashevis including his 1943 article in the journal *Tsukunft*, 'Arum der yidisher literatur in Poyln', and 'Figurn un epizodn fun literatn fareyn', (serialized in *Forverts*, 28.7.1979–10.1.1980) and 'Der shrayber klub' (serialized in *Forverts*, 13.1.–28.12.1956).

- 5 'On the first landing, which we faced as we came into the vestibule, hung a huge colored map of the world, with markers indicating the location of YIVO's farflung branches'. 'The YIVO was no seedy relic of the past; it belonged to the future', Dawidowicz 1989: 78, 79. Aaron Zeitlin and Yitskhok Bashevis edited the literary journal *Globus* in Warsaw in 1932–4, the name indicating their transnational vision for Yiddish literature.

In Russia, Yiddish literature is essentially consolidated as a ward of the state. But in Poland, Yiddish literature is consolidated as a ward of the proletarian Jewish social body: Bund, Poale-Zion, The United, Folkists and regular people. Also, the great Zionist masses read a lot of Yiddish literature. Here in Poland, there are Yiddish publishers, and there is a Yiddish school movement, Tsisho, and there is also a commercial Yiddish publishing business. One can live here. And there is also a periphery. And for the lectures which are organized through the Organization of Yiddish writers and journalists at Tlomatske 13, hundreds of young people drink thirstily of the new Yiddish literature in their own language and they familiarize themselves with its issues. And they wait for the new redeeming word. (Ravitch 1975: 95)

Ravitch delineates the key elements of Yiddish transnational memory: anti-Communist, non-partisan, center-periphery, generational continuity, and the ideal of the artist as prophetic visionary. Like other memoirists of Tlomatske 13, Ravitch has a particular ideological axe to grind, continuing the inter-war Jewish *kultur-kampf* between Communists and anti-Communists, nationalists and assimilationists, modernism and *shund* (serialized pot-boilers). Retrospectively, Ravitch is summoning echoes and ghosts from the past, or as in the title of Aaron Zeitlin's poem, the *nokhklang* ('echo') of a great generation's cultural experiments in creating a modern Yiddish world culture.<sup>6</sup> The American Yiddish poet Yankev Glatshteyn articulated poignantly this sentiment in his 1953 poem 'Yidishkayt':

בענקשאַפֿט-יידישקייט איז אַ וויג-ליד פֿאַר זקנים,  
וואָס צעקניען אינגעווייקטע חלה.  
זאָלן מיר צושטעלן די ווייכע קרישקעס,  
די ווערטער אויסגעלעבטע און הוילע,  
מיר וואָס האָבן געחלומט  
פֿון אַ נייער אנשי פנסת הגדולה?

6 Zeitlin 1947: 128–32. The poem is dated February 1945. The full title of the poem: 'Nokhklang tsu "bay nakht afn altn mark"' ('Echo of "A Night in the Old Marketplace"'). The latter is the title of Y. L. Peretz's play from 1907.

*Longingkayt–yidishkayt* is merely a lullaby for old men  
 whose gums knead soaked challah.  
 Should we provide the soft shreds,  
 the bare, the outlived words,  
 we who dreamed  
 of a new Great Convocation?<sup>7</sup>

*Dos poylishe yidntum* served a specific purpose for a well-defined readership in the quarter century following the Holocaust. Originating in the *Ashkenazi* homelands of Europe, its readers were intimately familiar with a unifying set of multilingual, geo-political, historical and antisemitic quandaries required for accessing the book series. For two generations of Yiddish writers and readers born between the 1880s and the 1930s, including survivors of the Holocaust and the Gulag, Holocaust memoirs and the ‘world of yesterday’ genre resonated deeply. Peretz’s ideals of Yiddish as an indispensable vehicle for a transformation of the world based on humanist, socialist and aesthetic categories remained those of this historically particular readership. With its decline and inevitable departure, *Dos poylishe yidntum* and the rest of the Yiddish publishing industry faced a cultural wasteland, and eventually declined.

Although Yiddish writers were tremendously successful in creating ‘a culture of retrieval’ after the Holocaust, they were unable to bridge the generational gap and pass on their Yiddish cultural legacy to a younger generation. Only 13 works out of the 175 volumes in *Dos poylishe yidntum* were translated into other languages (mostly English, French, Polish, Russian and Hebrew). This would actually be a relatively high number were it not for the fact that many translations were done decades after the book series’ reprint of Yiddish classical works (such as Scholem Asch, Yankev Glatshiteyn and Yehoshua Perle). Only the translation of volume 117 in the book series Eliezer (Elie) Wiesel’s *Un di velt hot geshvign* into *La Nuit* and then *Night* in respectively 1958 and 1960 succeeded in reaching an international readership.

In remaking *Un di velt* as *La Nuit*, Wiesel’s work became a book with almost no Jewish references, stripped of most of its original *cum ira et cum studio* (‘with anger and with bias’), the main characteristic of the Jewish Holocaust memoir

7 Glatshiteyn 1987: 139–41. I changed Fein’s translation of the word *ansbe-kneses bagdoyle* to ‘convocation’. The Hebrew words refer to the ruling body of religious leaders during the Second Temple Period. The poem was published in the volume *Dem tatns shotn* (1953).

according to the Jewish historian Yankev Shatski.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the artistic and ideological gains were considerable. By rewriting the Yiddish memoir for a non-Jewish readership *Night* has become a seminal text of Holocaust literature. This was primarily due to its aesthetic qualities of condensed storytelling and Wiesel's powerful indictment of the passivity of God and the world. This great achievement, however, would not have been possible without the Yiddish cultural revival after World War II when Wiesel was starting out as a Yiddish writer. Writers generally unknown outside the Yiddish and Hebrew literary world such as Mordechai Shtrigler, Yehiel Dinur, Chaim Grade and Avrom Sutzkever influenced and empowered Wiesel in his quest to discover his literary voice and response to his Holocaust experiences. Moreover, the book series editor Mark Turkov's interest in Wiesel in 1954 during the latter's visit to Montevideo and the subsequent publication of *Un di velt in Dos poylishe yidntum* provided the young writer with a Jewish readership. This happened at a time in the mid 1950s when 'Holocaust literature' in non-Jewish languages was still a rather marginal phenomenon.

Like I. B. Singer, Wiesel's bilingual *oeuvre* exemplifies the fact that only by engaging in translation, which often resulted in universalizing and muting the distinct Jewishness of their work, did they succeed in breaking out of the Yiddish cultural circuit to become writers of world literature (Damrosch 2013, Norich 2014). Of the more than 150 writers whose books are included in *Dos poylishe yidntum*, only Wiesel managed to reach an international readership in translation. Wiesel's success notwithstanding, the original Yiddish version *Un di velt hot geshvign* remained invisible outside of the Yiddish world until the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Until then, the English version of *Night* was universally perceived as a translation of work that had originally been written in French.

*Dos poylishe yidntum* is emblematic of Yiddish culture after the Holocaust, both in its diversity and prolific output over twenty years as well as in its

- 8 Yankev Shatski, 'Problemen fun yidisher historiografye' (lecture held at a YIVO conference, 15 January 1955; Shatski and Lifshits 1958: 248). The expression is derived from the final section of the lecture: 'What has happened to Jews is for a Jew not an objective material that exists outside him. The history of his people is his history. A piece of his own existence. The Jew responds to history as a personal matter. As a result, the contemporary Jew is against scholarship. Therefore he is either a believer in apologetics or an anti-scholar. The Jew is scientifically anti-historical. A Jew can only write history "with anger and with bias".' (p. 248)
- 9 See Roskies 1984: 263–4 and 301–2. It was Naomi Seidman's 1996 article that initiated a wide-ranging debate about the various versions of Wiesel's Holocaust memoir (1956) including the first Yiddish version (Seidman 2006).

almost complete invisibility outside the boundaries of its own linguistic and cultural parameters. The titles in the series were carefully selected as a result of a Herculean effort to collect key works from and about the Polish Jewish past informed by the *zamlar-gayst* (the spirit of collection); the ingathering of the cultural heritage (*kines*) that originated with the folklorist and playwright Sh. An-Sky and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in Vilna in the inter-war period. In contrast to the previous cycle of modern Yiddish culture that was future-oriented and primarily spanning the period from the 1880s until World War II – *di klasikers* (the three classical Yiddish writers Scholem-Aleichem, I. I. Peretz and Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh), modernism, theatre and mass media (particularly in the forms of journalism, serialized novels, and life-writing published in newspapers) – post-Holocaust Yiddish culture retrieved the past and mourned its tragic demise. Elie Wiesel and I. B. Singer, in contrast, broke with ‘the culture of retrieval’ through the act of translating and universalizing their literary personas and *oeuvre*, thereby reaching a worldwide readership. This would have been impossible without the Yiddish cultural infrastructure that initially enabled them to give literary voice to their experiences as survivors and exiles originating in Ashkenaz in Central and Eastern Europe. Post-Holocaust Yiddish culture encouraged these writers to utilize and develop distinctly Jewish genres and styles that responded to the post-war Yiddish readership’s ‘horizon of expectation’.

Yiddish culture after the Holocaust provides a case study of the re-figuration and post-vernacular transformation of a transnational network into a seminal memory site. The shift from a future-oriented culture with a steady influx of a younger generation to a past-oriented one, sustained by retrieval and memory, took place during the post-war period’s dramatic geo-political changes. These included the creation of the State of Israel, the expansion of the American Jewish community, and the division of Europe by the Iron Curtain. Particularly the two former contexts enabled Yiddish to flourish in a combination of its vernacular setting, translation, academia, and post-vernacular forms.

As mentioned, ‘the unmediated depiction of personal experiences’ is a primary characteristic of *Dos poylishe yidntum*. The distinctive Yiddish literary voices continued to exert a strong influence on literary works by Hebrew and American Jewish writers after 1945. Singer’s *oeuvre* in English, Cynthia Ozick’s novella *Envy; or, Yiddish in America* (1969) and the Israeli writer Aharon Megged’s novel *Foiglmán* (1989) exemplify the post-vernacular channeling of post-war Yiddish cultural concerns into Jewish American and Hebrew literature. Ozick and Megged transformed Yiddish vernacular content, figures and settings – respectively the Yiddish poetry readings at the 92 Street Y and the

Yiddish writer colony in Paris in the 1960s – into a drama of Yiddish culture’s impending demise, with the tragi-comic ramifications of this for the survivors and their native-born American and Israeli descendants. These works imagine and re-enact the post-Holocaust period’s re-figuration, and post-vernacular transformation of Yiddish culture, in literary works in Hebrew and English.

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