

Ber Borokhov, Pioneer of Yiddish Linguistics

by DOVID KATZ

LITTLE KNOWN TO MANY of Ber Borokhov's political adherents, the small but phenomenally lively and productive field of modern Yiddish linguistics is the product of Borokhov's genius. Singlehandedly, Borokhov forged this unique discipline of human inquiry from an array of scattered odds and ends.

The notion of a "founder" in the humanities and the social sciences may require a word of explanation. Many branches of natural science look back at a founding figure, a Newton or an Einstein, who is most frequently associated with a particular revolutionizing discovery. In the social sciences, the singular discovery is secondary. Of primary significance is the creation of a paradigm, a model comprising in a structural whole the principles, goals, tasks and methods of a field of research. If the paradigm flops, the field is dead. If it proves academically viable and fertile, leading to more and more new and interesting discoveries, it sustains a perpetual scholarly discipline. Even the talented investigator can do his work only when he is given a paradigm within which to work, apprising him at the outset of his training what the objectives and resources of his field entail.

Until 1913, Yiddish, the thousand year old language of Ashkenazic Jewry, was of marginal interest to workers in many fields. Academically, Yiddish was studied for its relevance to knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic, to criminological studies of underworld languages which borrowed heavily from Yiddish, and to the comparative genetic history of the Germanic languages. Non-academically, Yiddish captured the imagination of centuries of missionaries who saw in the daily language of European Jewry a tool to convert the Jewish masses, and of anti-Semites who sought to blow the cover of the Jewish "secret language." Out of such bits and pieces, from these disconnected corners of peripheral activity, the young Borokhov founded the new and exciting branch of linguistic science known today as Yiddish linguistics — not the study of Yiddish for the benefit of scholars of other languages, historians and literary comparativists, but the study

of Yiddish as a self-contained field for its own sake.

The origin of Borokhov's passion for Yiddish linguistics has been the object of a number of speculations. His political admirers will point to his love for his people and his wish to benefit them culturally. From this they derive his esteem for the language of the people and the resulting necessity to use science to elevate it and to research it and to raise it to the status of a national Jewish language. A forceful argument against this explanation was put forward by the late Y. Zrubovl. Respect for the folk language from a political theorist is a far cry from becoming the pioneer of its linguistics! Instead, postulated Zrubovl, "Borokhov was thrilled to confront a field at its genesis."

Most of East European Yiddish intelligentsia of the time had no idea that Borokhov was engaged in research on the history of Yiddish. They were astonished when his brilliant and authoritative works on Yiddish linguistics appeared out of the blue, in *Der Pīnkes* (Vilna, 1913), a volume dedicated to research in Yiddish language and literature edited by the great Yiddish literary historian, critic and editor, Shmuel Niger (Tsharni). *Der Pīnkes* began with Borokhov's *Di Ufgabn fun der Yidisher Filolōgye* (The Aims of Yiddish Philology) — an abridged translation follows — and was concluded with his stunning *Di Biblyoték funem Yidishn Filológ* (The Library of the Yiddish Philologist), a critical research bibliography comprising 501 items and spanning four centuries. The intimate history of Borokhov's growing love of Yiddish, his determined efforts to master the language in his middle 20s and his subsequent quest to pioneer its research are topics deserving monographic treatment by Borokhov specialists.

History of Yiddish Studies

There could hardly be a new autonomous field of Yiddish without a systematic survey of existing writings on Yiddish language, literature and culture. Working in Vienna and establishing contacts with the great libraries of Central and Western Europe, Borokhov painstakingly searched out every available scrap written about Yiddish through the centuries. The oldest item included in the *Biblyoték* is Johann

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Boeschstein's 1514 grammar of Hebrew, containing the earliest known explicit rules of Yiddish spelling. Among the more esoteric works included are Wolf Ehrenfried von Reizenstein's manual on horses (Uffenheim, 1764) which has a chapter on Yiddish for the benefit of non-Jewish horsedealers, and the copious description of Yiddish contained in Friedrich Christian Benedict Avé-Lallemant's four-volume masterpiece on the German underworld languages (Leipzig, 1858-62).

The *Biblyoték* is organized on a historical and topical basis and is prefaced with a brief account of the history of Yiddish studies. Borokhov established the



Ber Borokhov

existence of at least six categories of scholars who have delved into Yiddish: (1) Christian Semitic scholars (some with missionary motivations) of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries who studied Yiddish as an adjunct to Hebrew studies; (2) Jewish scholars of the same period who employed Yiddish dictionaries and glossaries as an aid to the study of Bible and Talmud; (3) anti-Semites (born Christians as well as apostate Jews) who compiled dozens of Yiddish grammars and dictionaries in eighteenth-century Germany for a wide audience of paranoid readers; (4) liberal Christian scholars of the nineteenth century who were interested in Yiddish from the standpoint of Germanic linguistics; and finally, (6) nationally conscious authors of the new generation who understood the educational value and the cultural significance of the Yiddish language. The *Biblyoték* is a masterpiece of historical research and critical linguistic evaluation which laid the foundation for the history of the study of Yiddish. The field was later explored in greater detail by Max Weinreich (1894-1969) in his Marburg University doctoral dissertation of 1923. The definitive history of the study of Yiddish, a study nearing its five hundredth birthday, remains to be written, but its major trends were delineated by Ber Borokhov.

Yiddish Philology

By demonstrating the volume of intellectual interest Yiddish had generated for centuries, Borokhov sought to show that these writings had become primary sources which his new field, *Yidishe Filológye* (Yiddish philology), could draw upon. Borokhov contrasted general linguistics with national philology. This distinction did not take root and both fields are today included in the term Yiddish linguistics. Amongst some Yiddish linguists, however, it remains common to speak of "philology in the sense of Borokhov."

By linking the notion that Yiddish needed to be studied linguistically from its own perspective, with the national and cultural role Borokhov wished the language to play in Jewish life, he in effect established the Yiddishist school of Yiddish studies. The word "Yiddishist" has a double meaning here. Firstly, it implies a school of scholars ideologically dedicated to the importance, the preservation and the growth of the Yiddish language. Secondly, in the stricter academic sense, it implies a school of scholars who view Yiddish scholarship as a universe of studies (comprising linguistics, literary history, folklore, bibliography and other branches) rather than a satellite of Germanic studies. Borokhov's *Úfgabn fun der Yidisher Filológye* was the academic declaration of independence of Yiddish linguistics. With it, Borokhov broke ranks with the Germanist school of Yiddish studies, a productive branch whose leading exponents were the Austrian Alfred Landau (1850-1935) and the Rumanian Lazare Sainéan (1859-1934). It wasn't long before a group of young scholars, including such giants as Max Weinreich, Solomon A. Birnbaum and Zalmen Reyzen produced weighty works on the Yiddish language in the Borokhovian framework.

Borokhov stressed again and again the need for societal institutions dedicated to Yiddish philology, institutions that would coordinate scientific research, serve as a language academy to standardize Yiddish and provide a central library of Yiddish books, manuscripts and archives. His dream was fulfilled after his untimely death in 1917 at the age of thirty-six with the establishment in the 1920s of three pivotal Yiddish research institutions. Two of these, the Chair for Yiddish Culture in Kiev, attached to the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, and the Jewish section of the Bielorrussian Academy of Sciences in Minsk, were doomed to eventual liquidation at the hands of the Soviets.

The third and most important institute, the *Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut* (Yiddish Scientific Institute), known as the YIVO, was founded in Vilna in 1925 by Max Weinreich, Zelig Kalmanovitch, Nokhem Shtif, Zalmen Reyzen and other Yiddish

scholars. The YIVO began work on the orthographic and grammatical standardization of Yiddish, fulfilling the role of an authoritative language academy. In the field of research, the YIVO published prodigious numbers of massive academic volumes in the areas of Yiddish philology, Jewish history and economics, and Ashkenazic Jewish folklore. The majority of YIVO's staff, including Reyzen and Kalmanovitsh, perished during the Holocaust. Max Weinreich escaped to New York where he assumed leadership of the former American section of the YIVO, which became its new world center after the Second World War. The YIVO today, housed on Fifth Avenue in New York City, continues to fulfill Borokhov's vision of a world center for Yiddish scholarship.

The Nature of Yiddish

The prejudices and misconceptions about Yiddish plaguing otherwise well-informed persons were rampant in the early twentieth century. Where anti-Semites and assimilationist Jews alike saw in Yiddish the degeneration of German, Borokhov recognized the internal Jewish creativeness and expressive genius of the Yiddish language. Nearly all the pseudoscientific attacks on Yiddish focused on the fusion character of the language. Borokhov demonstrated that the unique joining of Germanic, Semitic and Slavic was not at all a fault but a source of the boundless linguistic richness of Yiddish. Borokhov described Yiddish in 1913 using an approach that was to become classic in the field of general linguistics only a few years later with the posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (Lausanne, 1916). Saussure introduced the dichotomy of "synchrony" versus "diachrony" into general linguistics. The diachrony of a language implies its evolution from one language state to another on the axis of time. Diachronically speaking, there are for example Germanic, Celtic and Romance words in English. That is to say, English words usually have their sources in Germanic, Celtic or Romance. Synchronically, however — on the plane of the language as an empirically real, living system, at any single point in time — there is no Celtic, no Germanic and no Romance in English. There is only English in English.

The conceptual disentanglement of synchrony and diachrony remains one of Saussure's most enduring principles of the then-nascent field of general linguistics. The far sighted Borokhov implicitly introduced this distinction vis-a-vis Yiddish when he daringly proclaimed that "as soon as German, Hebrew and Slavic elements enter the folk language, they cease to be German, Hebrew and Slavic. They shed

their erstwhile status and assume a new one. They become Yiddish." The synchronic approach, perhaps more than any other single conceptual contribution, signaled the birth of modern Yiddish linguistics.

History of Yiddish

Here too, Borokhov was the first to establish a structurally conceived edifice. Once again, he had nearly no predecessors upon whom he could build. Jacob Gerzon had compared the sounds of Lithuanian Yiddish with Middle High German in his Heidelberg dissertation of 1902, and the great Alfred Landau around the turn of the century had studied the historical development of the diminutive forms in Yiddish grammar and produced admirable analyses of the language of various older Yiddish literary monuments. Borokhov's notion of the history of Yiddish used the synchronic approach as a starting point for the leap into the past. From the fusion character of modern Yiddish, he deduced that Yiddish arose many centuries ago when Jews speaking Romance languages akin to Old French and Old Italian migrated to the Germanic-speaking territories of Central Europe where these language elements, along with Hebrew and Aramaic, were fused in the creation that was and is Yiddish. This theory was profoundly elaborated by the late Max Weinreich and is today the standard theory of the history of Yiddish in the field. While recent advances continue to raise new doubts and provide new questions and solutions, the Borokhovian framework remains the point of departure.

Borokhov was invited by his Vilna publishers to write a book on the history of Yiddish. He did not at the time feel ready to do so but offered to collaborate with Sh. Niger. Niger, however, did not feel ready himself and nothing became of the plan. Borokhov did send Niger an outline for a history of Yiddish which to this day is a monument of concise depth and conceptual precision unrivaled by any other such attempt. The outline was published a decade after Borokhov's death in the second volume of *Filológische Shriftn* (Philological Writings) published by the YIVO in 1928 and dedicated to Borokhov's memory. When one measures Borokhov's ambitious outline against some of the most recent great works in the field — such as Max Weinreich's four volume *Geshikhte fun der Yidisher Shprákh* (History of the Yiddish Language) published in New York in 1973, or Solomon A. Birnbaum's *Yiddish: A Survey and a Grammar* (Toronto & Manchester, 1979) — one sees on the one hand how much the direction of twentieth century Yiddish historical linguistics was set by Borokhov, and on the other how much still remains to be done to achieve a full fruition of Borokhov's

plans for explorations into the bygone centuries of the Yiddish language.

Yiddishism

The modern ideological movement on behalf of Yiddish is generally traced to the late nineteenth century. Its most memorable event was the Tshernovits Language Conference of 1908, held in Tshernovits (Chernowitz), Bukovina (now Chernovtsy, USSR) where Yiddish was declared a national language of the Jewish nation.

Borokhov's Yiddish philology is the scientific component of Yiddishism. His insistence on the difference between general linguistics and national philology was a manifestation of his belief that plans for research into Yiddish language and culture could not be construed separately from the national role he saw for Yiddish in modern Jewish life. Borokhov's *Biblyoték*, a strictly academic nonpartisan endeavor, nevertheless concludes with the words:

If the Jewish reader will come to appreciate that Yiddish is a broad field for work and research, not

for random concoctions and excursions on phraseological abysses, that Yiddish is not a free-for-all open to dilettantes, then the key goal of this project will have been achieved — that we might have respect for our language.

Borokhov did not elevate himself to the peaceful pedestal of academic sanctimony. He did not hesitate to enter the rancorous brawl of the Jewish language controversy which raged mercilessly in the years of Borokhov's Yiddish activities. After the eleventh Zionist Congress in Vienna in late summer 1913, Borokhov engaged in a heated debate with J. Klausner and Jacob Cohen over the plan, which he fervently advocated, to form an organization to which both Yiddish and Hebrew writers could belong. Borokhov told the anti-Yiddish antagonists: "Woe is to the nation whose cultural workers are all of one side. . . . I consider Yiddish and Hebrew to be as Siamese twins. One cannot be beheaded with the other surviving. Hebrew and Yiddish are like a body and a soul. Do not demand that I tell you this

A Wandering Jew and his Languages

The question of language followed Ber Borokhov throughout his life. Although he grew up in the Ukrainian town of Poltava, he was born in June 1881 in Zolotnoshi where his father, a Hebrew teacher, had gone in an unsuccessful attempt to start a Jewish school. His parents were both *maskilim*, highly educated and active in the early Zionist movement. For the first two or three years of his life, Yiddish was spoken at home. Hearing that Yiddish accents caused problems for gymnasium students, his parents began speaking only Russian and young "Borya," as he was called, came to speak Russian flawlessly. When he returned to Yiddish years later, he was already the central leader and theoretician of the Russian Poale Zion ("Workers of Zion") movement. In school, however, he learned Latin, Greek, and interestingly enough, Sanskrit. Borokhov's sister Nadia recalls asking him at age 12 why he was interested in Sanskrit and the precocious youngster informed her that "most of the languages" were based on it.

Borokhov is best known for his essays of 1905 and 1906 which presented a theoretical synthesis of Marxism and Zionism. He was arrested by the tsarist police and sent to prison in 1906, but was freed by friends and went into exile in

Western Europe. There he travelled, did Poale Zion party work and immersed himself in the study of Yiddish (he spent time at the British Museum among other places doing his research), the Jewish labor movement, and the national question among other things. The outbreak of World War I forced him to flee to the U.S. where he spent three unhappy years bickering with his comrades in the American Poale Zion, writing for several Yiddish publications, and continuing various types of research.

As an ardent socialist and former guest of the Tsar's prisons, Borokhov was thrilled when the Romanovs were overthrown. He set out to return to Russia, where he arrived in late summer 1917 for the third congress of the Russian Poale Zion. In the next months he was particularly involved in support of Ukrainian self-determination. In December 1917 the great Labor Zionist theorist and pioneering Yiddish linguist died, apparently of pneumonia, in Kiev. In 1963, through the personal intervention of his close boyhood friend Yitzhak Shimshelvitsh (then Yitzhak Ben Zvi, second president of Israel) his remains were reburied in a cemetery next to the Kinneret.

— Mitchell Cohen

minute which is the body and which the soul. This is something each of us has the right to decide as he wishes. . . ."

Borokhov's essay *Hebreismus militáns* is a classic document of protest against the anti-Yiddish abuses heaped on the language since the days of Moses Mendelssohn's Berlin Enlightenment. It can readily be discerned that the factor underlying both the national philology and the ideological Yiddishism of Ber Borokhov is his deep love for the Yiddish language. In the autobiography he submitted in 1912 for the first edition of Zalmen Reyzen's classic encyclopedic *Leksikón fun der Yidisher Literatúr un Prése* (Warsaw, 1914), Borokhov took exceptional pride in having "first begun to learn to read and write Yiddish at the age of twenty-six."

Zrubovl reminisced decades later that when editing a Poale Zion periodical in 1907 in Vilna, he had been astonished to receive from Borokhov (then in Minsk) an article written in Yiddish in Borokhov's hand for the first time. And in a letter of 1912, Borokhov proudly wrote Niger of his joy that his daughter "will probably speak and write Yiddish better than her father."

Other Achievements

It is not easy to exhaust the branches of Yiddish scholarship developed and enriched by Borokhov. In Yiddish literary criticism, he is most remembered for his controversial stance regarding the poetry of the Yiddish literary school known as *Di Yúnge* in New York. In the history of Yiddish literature, he began the first synthetic history of Yiddish literary creativity in the New York periodical *Literatúr un Lébn* in 1915.

On his Kiev deathbed in 1917, Borokhov accepted the invitation of Nakhmen Meyzl to write a short book on the history of Yiddish literature. Yiddish spelling at the turn of the century was laden with Germanisms, unnecessary silent letters and rampant inconsistencies. A number of Yiddish scholars, including Chaim Zhitlovski and Judah A. Joffe helped reform the spelling, but more influential in its eventual reform than any other factor was Borokhov's project for revised Yiddish orthography. At his insistence, Borokhov's works in Niger's *Pinkes* appeared in the system of spelling he advocated. In other words, it was Borokhov who dared actually use the new spelling he devised, and it was he who bore

the brunt of numerous polemic attacks and satires in the linguistically conservative Yiddish press of the time, most notably in the Warsaw Yiddish daily *Der Fráynd*. Borokhov's Yiddish orthography was adopted with minor modifications in 1920 and in its essentials remains the standard Yiddish spelling of today.

In New York, Borokhov established the first committee of Yiddish linguists along with lexicographer Alexander Harkavy and folklorist Y. L. Cahan. It was he who introduced the Yiddish-reading world to bibliography as an exact science. In addition to his *Biblyoték*, Borokhov compiled extensive bibliographies of the works of and about Sholem Aleichem and I. L. Peretz shortly after the death of each.

During Borokhov's last days in Kiev, while he lay gravely ill in a furnished room in Great Vladimir Street in December of 1917, he was in great agony over the loss of his suitcases filled with his unpublished writings on the history of Yiddish language and literature. The suitcases were seized by the authorities in Petrograd upon his return to Russia from New York (via Stockholm). They were subsequently lost. Some of these writings were later recovered years after his death but to this day none of them have appeared in print. Borokhov's early death and the loss of a substantial portion of his writings constitute one of the great tragedies of Yiddish linguistics in the twentieth century.

In the years since the appearance of Ber Borokhov's seminal works on Yiddish, many of his far-reaching plans have been realized. Institutions for the study and research of Yiddish have arisen, authoritative volumes on the history of Yiddish language and literature have been published, and a widely accepted Standard Yiddish has been established.

In Oxford, England, one of the world's great storehouses of Old Yiddish books and manuscripts, an International Conference on Research in Yiddish Language and Literature was convened in August, 1979. Among the current ongoing projects presented before the conference were the Great Dictionary of the Yiddish Language (of which four massive volumes have appeared to date), and the Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry, founded by the late Uriel Weinreich and currently directed by Professor Marvin I. Herzog. Yiddish scholarship continues to expand in America, Israel and Europe at more and more centers of higher learning.

The master plan for all of this was the design of the *Poltáver Góen* (the Genius of Poltava), Ber Borokhov. ■

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The Aims of Yiddish Philology

by BER BOROKHOV

Dedicated to the luminous memory of the noble Yiddish scholar, the prematurely deceased and unjustly forgotten Dr. Philip Mansch of Lemberg (1838-1890).

OF ALL THE SCIENCES, philology plays the greatest role in the national revival of oppressed peoples. Philology is not a hollow theory for scholars and sedentary academics, but indeed a practical guide for the people. It does encompass certain theoretical and historical components such as the history of the language and culture with which it is concerned and the general principles of language development. Its purpose and its educational importance, however, lie with the practical life of the people. The first objective of every awakening people is the mastery of its own language, in order that it be used all the more productively in its national creativity. As long as a people remains illiterate in its own language there can be no national culture. National culture comprises not only the poetic works of literary masters but first and foremost the skill correctly to speak and write the mother tongue.

At the beginning of a national and cultural renaissance, during the genesis of national culture, there is chaos. The folk language is divided into countless dialects. People of different localities speak differently and everybody writes as he pleases, each writer fashioning his own words according to his own understanding. Only philology can bring an end to this havoc. Philology ascertains the root of each word and traces its history and the development of its meaning. Science thus allows general and clear principles to replace personal whims and inventions. A general dictionary and a general grammar are established and the folk school, literature and the press see to it that they become obligatory. As long as a nation lacks a national philology, it remains far from modern national culture.

Unlike general linguistics, which is a general science, philology is a national science. It presupposes

that its object language entails cultural and historical value at least with respect to the past. Usually, however, philology transcends this limitation and operates on the premise that its object language has a national significance for the future. Whoever does not believe in the survival of the Yiddish language can be a Yiddish linguist, but not a Yiddish philologist. Linguistics is concerned only with the forms of the language while philology extends to its cultural productivity.

These are not all the tasks of Yiddish philology. At present, however, we are concerned with elementaries; and the elementaries of national culture entail correctness of speech and writing. It is therefore no surprise that national philology is so highly prized amongst oppressed peoples. Each nation counts amongst its national heroes not only political freedom fighters and great poets and thinkers, but also those philologists who laid the first stones in the foundation of a national linguistic science. Almost universally, cultural revivals begin with the establishment of literary, philological and ethnographic institutions. One need only take note of the esteem in which literary and philological societies are held by the Finns, Latvians, Estonians, Slovenes, Czechs, Slovaks, Flemings, Catalans, Ukrainians and other awakening peoples. The few exceptions consist of the Jews and several other small and luckless nations. It is one of the signs of our national impoverishment that amongst us Jews there are still no institutions dedicated to national philology.

In point of fact, it cannot be said that Yiddish philology is poor or that there is no Yiddish philology at all. On the contrary, there is an entire body of books and brochures, articles and notices on Yiddish language, literature and folklore. But this corpus of research has almost no national significance. The people know nothing of it and it is useless to our intelligentsia. Why? Firstly, it is almost entirely written in foreign languages. Secondly, it has neither order nor central theme, dealing as it does scatteredly and chaotically with isolated problems and details, such as the question of the diminutive forms in Yiddish grammar or the history of this or that book. Thirdly, nearly all the existing works on Yiddish are purely academic. They are remote from life and do not strive toward practical educational

The present condensed and edited English version omits the specialized linguistic portions of the original essay in Yiddish, *Di Úfgabn fun der Yidisher Filológíe*, published in Sh. Niger (ed.), *Der Pinkes. Yórbukh far der Geshikhte fun der Yidisher Literatúr un Shprákh, far Folklor, Kritik un Bibliyográfíe*. B. A. Kletskin, Vilna 1913, pp. 1-22; reprinted in Nakhmen Meyzl (ed.), *Ber Borokhov, Shprákh-Forschung un Literatúr-Geshikhte*, I. L. Peretz Publishing House, Tel Aviv 1966, pp. 53-75.

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goals. The field of cultural education is handled for us by the daily press which ponders over the question whether Yiddish is a folk language, a national language, an ugly "jargon" or a cultural medium worthy of our use. The majority of the authors who deal with Yiddish are assimilationists alien to the Jewish nation. In their scientific writings they continually seek to demonstrate that Yiddish is a bona fide German dialect and that the Jews are the bearers of German culture in the Slavic lands.

We don't know for certain the age of the Yiddish language. But in this respect Yiddish is no exception as it is not possible to determine with assuredness when any language was born. In any event Yiddish is probably no younger than six or seven hundred years. It is older than the period (13th-14th century) during which German Jews began to settle in Galicia under the Galician King Daniel and in Poland under Duke Boleslav. Moreover, the Old Yiddish manuscripts which survive date to the thirteenth century. Avé-Lallemant, comparing Yiddish with the German thieves' language of the Middle Ages, concludes that Yiddish is eight hundred years old. Our language and our literature are far from young. The study of Yiddish is itself four hundred years old. Martin Luther, Johann Agricola and other early fifteenth century theologians made occasional remarks regarding Yiddish. The well-known Hebrew scholar and founder of Aramaic science, Sebastian Muens-ter, afforded Yiddish a prominent position in his Hebrew dictionary of 1523. In 1609 the brilliant Christian linguist Johann Buxtorf the Elder published an explicit description of Yiddish. When we take into account that the philology of many nations (for example, the Estonians, the Latvians, the Ukrainians and the Serbs) is no older than seventy or eighty years, and that of other nations younger still, we have all the more reason to be ashamed that our national science has not yet acquired a respectable appearance.

The scientific investigation of our language suffers considerably from the deep-rooted prejudices of our intelligentsia against Yiddish. To this very day there are many who consider the very idea of Yiddish philology to be funny. Just such ignorant claims as "Yiddish is a dirty jargon" or "Yiddish is a corrupted German dialect without a grammar and without any cultural importance" were voiced eighty or a hundred years ago by the reactionary people-hating pseudointellectuals amongst the Greeks, the Serbs and to some extent even today amongst the Ukrainians, the Catalans and others. But life has undone the endeavors of the folk-hating zealots. Modern Greek, Serbian and other folk languages are liberating themselves more and more from cultural enslavement and are progressing with rapid paces

on the road toward national creativity. It is beneath the dignity of a scientifically trained philologist to engage in dispute with the anti-Yiddish arguments enumerated above. Whoever has the vaguest notion of linguistic science knows very well that any language that is spoken and understood by millions of people must have an internal order and a systematic structure. Otherwise, quite simply, nobody would understand it. What is called "grammar" may be written down or not, but the language nevertheless has its rules, its philological law. The cultural value of a language is wholly independent of whether its grammar has yet been written. Every living language of a living people is a living organism, a free individuality with its own laws and its own caprices. Simple and lucid as the structure of a language may be, it is at the same time inexhaustible. No scientifically trained person will boast that he knows the entirety of a language. Yiddish has a straightforward structure; and still the task of Yiddish philology is infinitely broad and endlessly deep because Yiddish too is a unique living organism, unbound in its creative freedom.

The Yiddish philologist encounters great difficulty in consequence of Yiddish belonging to the category of mixed languages. A truly "pure" language does not exist. Hebrew has many Aramaic, Greek and Persian elements and Russian includes numerous Turkish and Finnish words. There are, however, languages whose mixed structure is immediately conspicuous such as English — a mixture of Celtic, Germanic and Romance elements, or Japanese — a mixture of native and Chinese elements, or Persian — a mixture of native and Arabic elements. An extreme example of a language mixture is provided by Turkish (Osmanli). Turkish, inherently an agglutinative language without inflections of the Ural-Altai group, combined with completely alien inflecting languages — the Indo-European Persian and the Semitic Arabic. Yet this union is harmonious throughout and highly organic and productive. There are many beautiful and powerful languages with a more mixed character than our Yiddish, yet nobody will call them "jargon" on account of it.

Yiddish consists mostly of Germanic words and forms. In addition, Yiddish has many Semitic (Hebrew and Aramaic) words, an especially Semitic syntax and style, as well as Slavic (Polish and Ukrainian) elements. Finally, one finds in Yiddish a small but fascinating element — the handful of Old French, Italian and Portuguese words, such as *tsholnt* (baked Jewish dish served on the Sabbath), *fatshéyle* (kerchief) and *bentshn* (to bless). It is evident from Old Yiddish writings that the Romance element was once far more extensive in Yiddish than it is today. There is almost no doubt that these words are a

remnant of the Romance languages our grandfathers spoke before turning to Yiddish.

Just as in other mixed languages, the several elements emerge in Yiddish as an autonomous organic compound. It is not a language mixture or a hodge-podge, but a language, albeit a mixed one. As soon as German, Hebrew and Slavic elements enter the folk language, they cease to be German, Hebrew and Slavic. They lose their erstwhile status and assume a new one. They become Yiddish. Their pronunciation is fitted to Yiddish phonetics, their declination to Yiddish morphology and their position in the sentence to Yiddish syntax. Yiddish frequently fuses elements of diverse origins, as from Hebrew and German (e.g. *bagázlen* 'to rob' *únterkhasmenen* 'to sign') or Hebrew and Slavic (e.g. *tsvuák* 'hypocrite,' *kolbóynik* 'jack-of-all-trades, wicked fellow').

The elements of multiple linguistic origin within Yiddish are by no means mutually contradictory. They perform complementary functions in the language and combine with each other as organically as the functions of a living organism. One of the goals of Yiddish philology is the determination of the functions performed by the Hebrew, German and Slavic elements in Yiddish. The usual view, that Hebrew words express more lofty and abstract concepts, and Germanic words everyday matters, is incorrect. We have *got* 'God' and *gedánk* 'idea,' Germanic words for higher concepts, and *mekhútn* 'in-law' and *mish-pókhe* 'family,' Hebraic words for everyday matters. In addition, many erotic terms originate in Hebrew. It seems to me that the difference might be thus formulated: The ideas and relations of life generally are expressed Germanically. Those phenomena which arose in the realm of intimate Jewish existence are for the most part expressed Hebraically while the forms and feelings of daily life in the narrow family environment, as well as many uncouth personal characterizations, are expressed Slavically. A single concept may acquire divergent nuances depending on the genetic descent of the word used to express it. Let us take, as an example, three of the words for 'God' in Yiddish. *Got* 'God' is a universal concept and is expressed by a Germanic word. *Re-bóyne shelóylem* 'master of the universe,' of Hebraic descent, conveys only the relationship between God and the people of Israel. Finally, *gótenyu-tátenyu* 'dear little God, dear little father,' expressed Slavically, discloses an intimate, almost childish relationship with the Almighty Power. There are, of course, numerous important exceptions to the stated rule. In general, however, the Germanic words stem from the contact of Jews with the European world; the Hebrew and Aramaic words from Jewish communal life, the *khéyder* (traditional Jewish primary school) and the yeshiva; Slavic words from intimate contacts

with peasants, housekeepers and gentiles employed to perform tasks on the Sabbath. Inasmuch as the three elements, Germanic, Hebraic and Slavic, provide different functions in the language, the mixed nature of Yiddish is no hindrance to its development. On the contrary, our language is thereby enriched with words and with potential for expressive power.

Most of the words and forms that are used in Yiddish are Germanic. As a result, every high school student thinks that "Yiddish is corrupt German." Whoever makes this claim is unfortunately ignorant of what German is. Yiddish does not derive from the German that is studied in school for examinations. That German, the language of Schiller and Goethe, is not the stepfather of Yiddish but its stepbrother, and indeed its younger stepbrother. Yiddish is older than the German our "intellectual" deems acceptable, and in fact three or four hundred years older. Both derive from Middle High German and both are "corrupt." Yiddish was "corrupted" by Hebrew and Slavic impact, modern German by Latin and French. Yiddish was "corrupted" in the marketplace and the yeshiva, German in the universities and the bureaucratic chancelleries. Modern Yiddish contains many old Germanic words which have long been lost in literary German. It is frequently the case that a word or grammatical form which our ignorant "intellectual" considers corrupt German is in fact an old Germanic form preserved from extinction in Yiddish.

A sweeping task of our philology entails the enrichment of the Yiddish language. The problem is not that Yiddish is poor. On the contrary, Yiddish is a language which must be very rich in expressive capability, because it is fused from three exceedingly rich language families — Semitic, Germanic and Slavic. This wealth, increased by the liveliness of Jewish temperament, is continually manifest in Yiddish. The poverty from which Yiddish suffers results from social and psychological causes. Wandering about on the streets for generations, dragging along at fairs, Yiddish was not privileged to be bred in chancelleries and refined in universities. For this reason, Yiddish is poor in scientific ideas and lacks a developed legal and political terminology. Most significantly, Yiddish was severed from nature, as were the people; hence the dearth in names of minerals, plants and animals.

The paramount tasks of Yiddish philology can alternatively be formulated as the nationalization and humanization of the Yiddish language. Nationalizing Yiddish entails purifying the language thoroughly and enriching it extensively, to the point where Yiddish can express all aspects of Jewish creativity. Humanizing Yiddish entails turning Yiddish into a

means for incorporating into the Jewish nation all the cultural values of modern panhuman development.

Our great writers saw the need to enrich and to cultivate the common folk language, without even having recourse to the methods of scientific philology. Mendele Moykher Sforim is the Columbus of the Yiddish language and Yitskhok Leybush Peretz is its Napoleon. Mendele discovered Yiddish and Peretz conquered European worlds on its behalf. The unexpected blossoming of Yiddish poetry and literary criticism unearthed innumerable paths of expressive possibility, demonstrating to us that Yiddish can become a rich and powerful cultural and educational means of our people. Scientific philology must contribute with its methodology by introducing order into the chaotic process of creativity. Mendele nationalized Yiddish. His first literary grandchild, Sholem Aleichem, wondrously popularized our language and Peretz humanized it. The three great writers divided among themselves the historical task. Let science too have a part in the heritage. Mendele discovered the language, so let us explore it, Peretz brought to it new nations, so let us create an order among them. Philology must

excavate the homeless layers of folk creativity by searching out the treasures of our national creativeness which are scattered across the libraries of Western Europe. Old Yiddish literature had its classical works, such as the *Shmúel-bukh*, the *Máyse-bukh* and the *Séyfer Mides* which served as models for long generations and were even translated into other languages. The people possess masses of witticisms, jokes, songs, stories and riddles, a folklore that philology must research and cultivate. The methods of philology will enrich the language by enabling the nation to become acquainted with its literary past and to learn to benefit from its latent wealth. But this is a task which individuals cannot take upon themselves. Individuals can work on single branches as it is they who have the initiative. Only a societal institution, however, can organize the work of philology in its entire breadth. Only when we will have united our people's strengths, when there will be an authoritative national organization for philological purposes, will Yiddish philology be able to befittingly fulfill its aims. ■

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Translated by DOVID KATZ

Cruelty as Childishness: The Tin Drum

(a review)

by MORDECAI NEWMAN

IT IS NATURAL for Jews to shy away from empathy with Germans of the Nazi period. Empathizing comes too close to condoning and, in the case of Nazism, would seem to be irrelevant, even impertinent. The fact of the perpetrated horror is all. To explain the common German's compliance with the horror as a function of understandable human weakness is, in the eyes of many, to make trivial a crime that lies outside the boundary of comprehensible cruelty.

It is equally natural that the Germans who were children during the Third Reich or born afterwards should need to understand their parents in precisely the terms that so many Jews find unacceptable. The passive accomplices to Nazi atrocities included mil-

lions of ordinary citizens, devoted and loving to their families and generous to their friends. It is a paradox that their children must probe. For their own sanity, and to find their moral bearings, the offspring must understand the parents as human beings, not as monsters. What kind of values can they have, if they see themselves as heirs to nothing but a legacy of unadulterated ghoulishness?

Between the current crop of talented German film-makers and many Jewish viewers there exists, then, a troublesome gap in emotional imperatives. German films may condemn the past, but they also empathize with it, clinging to a vision of normal, even likable people blinded by a vicious historical process. Meanwhile, Jews scarred by the Holocaust grope for reassurance that the catastrophe will never recur. For them, the three-dimensional German is